



# CHICAGO REVIEW

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# CHICAGO REVIEW

ESTABLISHED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO IN 1946

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SRIKANTH REDDY

## Foreword

True to its name, *Blast* went up in smoke after two issues in the first year of World War I.

*The Little Review* was long-lived by comparison, “making no compromise with the public taste” for fifteen years up to its farewell issue in May 1929.

From 1940 to 1947, Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler brought surrealism to an American audience until *View* abruptly vanished from sight.

By the time LeRoi Jones had finished with *Yugen* (1958–62), *Kulchur* (1960–65), and *Floating Bear* (1961–71), he’d become Amiri Baraka.

*Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts* offended readerly sensibilities from 1962 to 1965.

After ten years, Boston University closed its doors to ethnopoetics and *Alcheringa* in 1980.

*L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* uttered its last words, after three years of publication, in 1981.

Tom Raworth kept *Infolio* impossibly afloat across 116 issues from the summer of 1986 through the fall of 1991.

*Chain* ran unbroken from 1994 until 2005.

Five years after its inception, *No: A Journal of the Arts* issued its final rejection in 2008.



Literary history is a potter's field of little magazines that died in their infancy. At seventy-five, *Chicago Review* has outlasted most, having survived to the life expectancy of the average human being, depending on one's country of residence. There are more venerable literary magazines in existence—*Poetry*, gone steroidal on big pharma equities; *The Paris Review*, beneficiary of His Highness Prince Aga Khan; or the various institutional journals, such as *The Yale Review*, *Kenyon Review*, or *Harvard Review*, with professional editors on university payrolls, come to mind—but unlike those éminences grises, *Chicago Review* shows no signs of its age.

What keeps *Chicago Review* forever young is the ragtag staff of graduate students who have serially edited the magazine since its inception in 1946. Some are now emeritus professors of literature. Some are grandparents, or great-grandparents, or even further removed ancestors of university students today. Across these generations, the journal has retained an ABD's timeless sensibility—dogmatic and open-minded, singular and communal, world weary and subversive, pious and kinky—the literary record of twenty-four-hour party people, where the party is always already political. A partial transcript of the festivities...

Thus the novel claim here is two-fold: that a phonological analysis of poetic speech usage may disclose base-level rule patterns and their historical evolutionary forms; and that such analysis may provide a diagnostic template for some of the ways in which an attentive reader of poems may intuitively model the surface features of performance into a mental representation of signifying relations and connections within the textual ordering of poetic language in action. ("Mental Ears," Prynne)

Or

No to rape as a metaphor for capitalism  
 No to rape as a metaphor for your revolutionary sentiments  
 No to butt-fucking as a metaphor for imperialism  
 [...]  
 No to art that sees only itself  
 ("No Manifesto")

Or

You & I shall live

Till supine

We rejoin  
The Great Enterprise

Of this UnComprehending World  
To which

Peaceable or not  
We do belong.  
(Wong May, “You Would Say So”)

Or

I don't know  
I just don't really know.  
(Lisa Robertson, “Palinodes”)

§

I came unfashionably late to the party, when I arrived at the University of Chicago as the aptly titled “Moody Poet-in-Residence” in the autumn of 2003. Though I pretended otherwise, I'd never read *Chicago Review*; and I hadn't heard of many writers, like Tom Pickard or Pamela Lu or Ed Roberson or Friederike Mayröcker, who appeared in its pages. To be honest, I was a little scared of the editors, some of whom were older than me. (The university hadn't yet cracked down on time to completion of degree.) They all seemed to have fully developed opinions about the history of Italian banking institutions in Pound's *Cantos*. After poetry readings or academic colloquia, they would disappear into their headquarters in the Lillie House, a historical red brick building overlooking the beehives in the university Lab School's learning garden, but I never saw them emerge. They held informal office hours in the back room of Jimmy's Woodlawn Tap, where I once heard a poetry editor dismiss the field of object-oriented ontology with

a shrug. “I thought the whole point of Heidegger was that things have no ontology,” he muttered into his IPA. “Totally,” I nodded. “Totally.”

Nearly twenty years later, I’ve seen *Chicago Review* move its operations out of the crumbling historical Lillie House into the crumbling historical Taft House across the Midway; I’ve watched the journal weather cuts in funding following the 2008 financial collapse and the ongoing crisis in humanities graduate education; and I’ve observed how the editorial staff has grown ever more diverse, more adventurous, more historically aware, and more fashion forward. Even in the face of colony collapse, these bees keep themselves busy. Fiercely independent of faculty influence and institutional oversight, they’ve cultivated a state of exalted precarity while publishing some of the most innovative poetry, fiction, and criticism of our time. Even now, it’s a little scary to write this “Foreword” for them. One distinguished literary scholar emailed me years ago, outraged by the editors’ revise-and-resubmit response to his essay: “Who do they think they are?” An apt response might have been to revise and resubmit those pronouns in the second person, or better, the first-person plural. But I’m afraid I replied something along the lines of “I don’t know / I just don’t really know.”

### §

During my time at the university, I’ve come to think of *Chicago Review* as a kind of shadow syllabus to my own somewhat stuffy graduate education. Leafing through the contents of the present anthology, I’m reminded of how much I’ve learned from the magazine’s evolving sourcebook of modern literature. There are poets, like Ronald Johnson or Barbara Guest or W. S. Graham or Alfred Starr Hamilton, who never made it onto the syllabus when I was in graduate school. There is fiction by writers like Helen DeWitt and Harry Mathews whom I ought to have read earlier, and stories that introduced me to new voices like Eley Williams or Brian Evenson or xTx. There are essays, manifestos, and critical responses from Jeremy Prynne, Amiri Baraka, Mario Santiago Papasquiaro, Juliana Spahr and Stephanie Young, Jennifer Ashton, and anonymous contributors that have opened new perspectives on art and society for many readers. But beyond these

pages, I've marveled at a social experiment in literary community that forms and reforms itself from one year to the next, sustained by a busy commerce between the outside world and the inner life, simultaneously fragile and inexhaustible, at the edge of the academy, like a beehive in the learning garden.

§

Seventy-five years from now, I trust *Chicago Review* will continue to exist in some edgy, unsupervised, and insurgent form. (The operative word in that last sentence is trust.) This isn't to say the magazine needs no support from us. The doctoral students who devote their surplus labor time to this collective enterprise are truly terrible at grant writing, fundraising, and bookkeeping of any sort beyond archival work. But they are future historians, comparatists, poets, baristas, classicists, Marxists, market analysts, and teachers who, for a brief passage in their lives, collaborate on the making of literary history in real time. Like the bees, they need us. Like us, we need them.

## THE EDITORS

### Introduction

In 1972 *CR* published an issue with a shiny silver cover that reads “26 ANNIVERSARY.” This might seem eccentric at first, but anyone who has been a part of *CR* can surmise what happened: they planned a twenty-fifth anniversary issue but didn’t get it out in time. Perpetually underfunded and staffed entirely by overworked graduate students, it’s remarkable that *CR* even survived to publish issue number 3 of volume 24 as the twenty-sixth anniversary issue in 1972. (It’s a great issue, by the way.) Characteristic, though, is the “Oh, fuck it” attitude that led the editors to just replace the “25” with “26” on the cover.

It’s the end of 2021 as we write this introduction, seventy-five years since the first issue of *CR* in 1946, and this anthology of the last twenty-five years of *CR*’s life is going to come out in 2022. Even though 2020 was virtually eliminated because of COVID-19, we won’t make any excuses: we’re roundly in *CR*’s tradition of being late. Not that we didn’t start early enough: we began thinking about and planning this anniversary years in advance, including soliciting memorial essays from former editors and staff, now all over the world in all kinds of jobs and circumstances. (These essays can be found at [chicagoreview.org](http://chicagoreview.org).) Initially we had grand ambitions: an anthology book of a few hundred pages at least, covering the journal’s seventy-five-year history. But, as is often the case with *CR*, grand ambitions had to give way to grim realities.

*CR* began the process of self-memorialization and self-canonization early: former editor David Ray put together an anthology that was published by the University of Chicago Press in 1959, not even fifteen years into the journal’s existence. Since then, however, anniversaries have been marked by the publication of special issues: that “Poetry Issue” for the twenty-sixth anniversary; “Fifty Years: A Retrospective Issue,” edited by David Nicholls; a leviathan of a special issue for

the sixtieth, including a “Centenary Portfolio” on Kenneth Rexroth, edited by Joshua Kotin; a special issue on Ed Roberson and Chicago Modernists, edited by Andrew Peart, that modestly says “Seventy Years” on the cover. We pitched this seventy-fifth anniversary anthology to the University of Chicago Press, who published the first anthology in 1959. They turned it down.

This brief history gets at the paradox that is *Chicago Review*. A “little magazine” with a long life; constant editorial turnover, sometimes upheaval, somehow coupled with enough institutional stability to survive. As Nicholls put it in his introduction to the fiftieth anniversary anthology, “frequent infusions of new energy and enthusiasm through changes in editorial staff have kept *Chicago Review* fresh when other journals have settled into a comfortable familiarity.” We, like most *CR* editors, find ourselves caught between *CR*’s past, its cultural status, and our own moment and editorial commitments. *CR*’s cultural status has been partly crafted by editors past and present, but it has also been shaped by those who never appeared on the masthead or published in its pages. Consider, for example, the following quote, which *CR* has used (with varying degrees of irony) in grant applications and on social media: “*Chicago Review*, a literary magazine whose readers were like members of the Senate: relatively small in number, but enormous in influence.”

The quote comes from novelist Joshua Cohen in a 2008 review of Aram Saroyan’s *Complete Minimal Poems* in *Forward*, a news media organization offering content for Jewish American audiences. How the quote entered *CR*’s hive mind is beyond the knowledge of the current editors. (Many things have made their way into the mysterious institutional memory that functions as *CR*’s spine: we inherit styles, methods, objects, allies, emails, spaces, bureaucracies, fonts, enmities, office decorations, guidelines, texts from faces aged into anonymity. We forget, possibly even more.) The more we dwell with this quote, the more it, and our relation to it, seem somehow to embody the awkwardness and particularities of trying to edit and introduce this anthology. The simile is oddly laborious, dragging its deferred object and pedantic explanatory clause. Then there’s the seemingly covert past tense of the statement, which resonates with the funereal atmosphere we feel during these last days of *CR*’s seventy-fifth year of

existence, as if the influence the simile proclaims lingered with us out of sheer inertia from the grandeur and propulsion of earlier decades, from now canonized figures published long ago. Editing a seventy-five-year-old journal is an ongoing negotiation with its past. Even the present anthology stands aslant with regard to *CR*'s history: aware of those past anniversaries, those past anthologies, and inconspicuously constraining the celebrations in this anthology to the last twenty-five years of published content—a constraint that does not tarnish in the least our immense appreciation and excitement for the writing and for the occasion.

The anthology you hold in your hands, bookended by Nathaniel Mackey's and Aditi Machado's brilliant poems, can't but acknowledge *CR*'s past as an acoustic backdrop against which the voices of these last twenty-five years produce a sometimes dissonant chorus. Rather than shy away from it, we have pursued such dissonance in the selection and curation of these texts—we might even say that such a “dissonant chorus” is the most correct figure for *CR*'s sensibility, both then and now, in different ways. We have tried to provide as extensive a range of authors as the journal's recent history allows, aiming to amplify the contrasts in juxtapositions that even as we write this introduction still surprise us: Bolaño and Baraka, Lutz and Ashbery, DeWitt and Prynne, Robertson and Dorn, Spahr and Plumpp, Alcalá and Armantrout, the collective “No Manifesto” and some of the men it calls out. We've also tried to represent *CR*'s relation to a certain historical avant-garde, and our ongoing negotiation of those traces and commitments in *CR*'s more recent sensibility.

In the middle of this somehow compelling cacophony, we accept that this vast and varied collection of texts represents only a very partial, torturously and contentiously selected subset of the vaster and even more varied content published during these last twenty-five years. As much as we'd like to pay direct homage to other essential authors and the editors that brought them to *CR*, we can neither ignore page limitations nor our editorial responsibility to you.

Which brings us back to that quote and its uncomfortable portrayal of you, dear reader. Although we have reproduced it in different media, we sense the clumsiness inherent in evoking grandeur through such a detestable and obsolete entity as the Senate. For those

of us who grew up in the humanities of neoliberalism and know its institutions mostly through precarity and exploitation, such a claim feels elitist at best, boastful and reactionary at worst—yet another reminder of the past riches of our journal, of the humanities, of the university. But the more we use the quote, the more we’ve realized we might have misread it; we might have conflated its syntactic objects and agents. This being a misreading symptomatic of the general confusion that pervades our participation in the historical production of the journal, entering and exiting its masthead in the span of a few years: for it is not *CR* that is influential but its readers, and, unable to disentangle editing from (the production of the experience of) reading, we, ephemeral editors, have learned we are not its readers.

At least not anymore and not yet. We don’t wield such influence, nor are we small in numbers—perhaps the latter a cause for the former. We are hundreds mostly laboring in relative temporal isolation from each other. We try to serve our readers as best we can with the resources at our disposal, scant or vast as they may be. This is the confluence of *CR*’s past and present, the real trove of its influence. No matter how quickly our subscriber database dwindles, we continue to be surprised by the names we find there. But more to the point, it is beyond these recognizable names that *CR*’s influence persists, in the physical and digital circulation of the journal among our readers, regardless of subscriptions, affiliations, or fame. So, in praise and practice of such stranger relationality, we thank you, reader. And we thank all those laborers—editors, staff members, and interns—who have shepherded this journal from the past into our hands. “Labor of love” is altogether too clichéd and anodyne a phrase—editing *Chicago Review* is a fucking labor that often sucks and is often thankless. But rereading past issues for an anthology makes us thankful that so many past editors and staff members put in so much work: there’s just so much great writing, and such a remarkable diversity of styles and tendencies and genres and materials and.... In short, we hope you find the dissonance here collected appealing enough to be cause for celebration.

## §



The current masthead doesn't give due credit to those who were involved in an issue such as this, which was several years in the making. Several cohorts of *CR* interns contributed: Wahid Al Mamun, Emilie Blum, Alexis Franciszkowicz, Cynthia Huang, Anthony Karambelas, Caitlyn Klum, Emily Lynch, Sam Mellins, Breck Radulovic, Jenna Routenberg, Marlena Serviss, Kaeli Subberwal, Emily Taylor, and Angelina Torre. We're also grateful to the many former editors who responded to our emails asking for thoughts and advice: V. Joshua Adams, Stephanie Anderson, Bobby Baird, Steven Bookman, Hannah Brooks-Motl, Paul Durica, Victor King, Joshua Kotin, Michael Hansen, Sarah Lauzen, Ben Merriman, Patrick Morrissey, Catherine Mouly, Andrew Peart, Barbara Pitschel, Andrew Rathmann, Doug Seibold, Eirik Steinhof, Chalcey Wilding, and Andy Winston. A big thank you to Chicu Reddy and Brian Blanchfield for reading and responding to the issue in the form of a Foreword and Afterword, respectively. Finally, thanks to all of the authors included here for letting us reprint their work, and, more importantly, for the work itself. Here's to the future tense of *CR*!

NATHANIEL MACKEY

SONG OF THE ANDOUMBOULOU: 31

Published in 41:4

Sound was back. Bukka White  
sang "Single Man Blues" on  
the box, renamed it "Ogo's  
Lament." He and Eronel  
lay chest to chest, right  
leg  
to left... Some we met said  
they were  
outmoded, failed andoumboulous  
birth brought back to life, trek  
we resisted they insisted we  
set out on, what-said hejira,  
what  
being said made so...

No  
what for which to've come, no  
why, lift we spoke of lost  
as we spoke, nonsonant last  
resort. So that all thought was  
now transitless "it," blunt  
would-be  
husk, maculate mask turned  
iterative tooth, recidivist  
gum, feasted on scraps  
laid  
aside for some ghost.  
Skeletal he no less than



he who'd have sooner been  
she, uninevitable she who'd  
have sooner been he...

We,  
who'd have been done  
with both  
looked out across the wall,  
saw  
no new day  
come

---

Whatever it was we were  
on. Wherever it was  
we were. Elsewhere was  
elsewhere, always...

No way  
we'd end up there...  
Strung out  
across the he/she line, we  
relented, convinced it  
was a train we were

on...  
Backwardswalking Lenore  
looked us each in the  
eye while receding,  
Eronel  
the name we called her,  
Monk's tune long taken  
away...

So that love's newly  
disengendered voice  
coiled up from under  
us, epithet as much as  
elegy, we of whose  
adamance  
much had been made, fraught  
voice too long taken  
to, loathe under  
lifted  
cloth

---

Who were drowning, dreaming it  
seemed. “Because we don’t need  
to be messed with,” we said out  
loud in our sleep, repeated  
it over and over, said why,  
wouldn’t  
say why what.

Burnt word  
we applauded, worlded us  
more than we knew. Myth  
asked had it been there would  
we have seen it, wished-for  
resolution, resisted,  
the new day we said we  
not-saw...

Wondered where the we we  
were after would come  
from, awaited what rush  
we were told awaited  
us,  
“beyond” but with what  
but skin to make a  
mark, high mind, high  
fractious mind  
heart’s  
meat

LISA ROBERTSON

PALINODES

Published in 51:4/52:1

*And absolutely humming with strange variability on the tattered  
modernist furniture  
Set your eyelids at half-closed, provoke nothing, remember nothing.*

Chorus of nay-sayers (with a tangible humbleness): No!

/

Though my object is history, not neutrality  
I am prepared to adhere to neither extreme

That which can no longer be assumed in consciousness becomes insolvent  
Because it doesn't finish I can be present

So I decide to speak of myself, having witnessed sound go out  
Fear is not harmful, but illuminates the mouth

I am not qualified to comment on the origins of the shapes  
The archive pivots on a complicity neither denial nor analysis can efface

It is not true, it shines from your face  
Against the hot sun that hits us, nothing's peace

There really are no gods and goddesses moving in the soul  
What is lost is not necessarily personal love

It is not simply a case of the subject being dispersed in history  
The smells, the sounds, the shapes are not meaning but are the city

And pairs that cannot absorb one another in meaning effects  
Go backward and forward and there is no place

This is the border—nothing further must happen  
The spurious clacking of grass is a dry spell in thought, but not abstract

Just as in dreams there is no limit to further overdetermination  
I do not wish to enter into that discussion

Look, memory's not praise or doubt  
It is not a substitution, since there is no prior point

We were animals that wanted sun and luxury and why not.



/

Later, when I can no longer remain  
On the porch, I will be passing over

The massy shapes of factories beside  
The yellow river, the sheds on the roofs

Of the factories, the lean-tos flanking them  
The loading bays and the stilted awnings

All corrugated, warming to rust at the rivets  
It is not my purpose to resolve incomprehensible secrets

This is a song of no-knowledge  
And this is not poetry—

It is the king, scented like my body  
But to want everything is not normal, evidently

What we have not dreamed explains the visible  
Let's not decide what danger is

I do not stand in opposition to this ambiguous thing  
I simply don't know the distance of my observing.

Nothing else of the modest condition, not the damages and disgusts  
And I feel no love among the civil troubles

The air is not quite deadened  
I'm here in the not-yet feminine

There is no limit to its capacity, nothing that it shall not create  
I do not in any way wish to escape

I'll be their glamorous thing and then I won't  
Nothing is more slippery or tenuous

The apples smell not like it  
Happiness is not irrelevant

It is not only about violence and use and their avoidance  
The communication is not only networks of dominance

Sometimes the meaning cannot be achieved by the body's means,  
nor by an intellectual effort  
So what if I am thick and stupid behind my life; it is not private,  
there is not a girl

It never quite happens  
Nothing was abstract, yet everything was absent

But this was not the city of melancholy  
And today I am not political

There is no sea and no forest and no boats passing  
In a way I am content to think about nothing

In simple despair we accommodate what we cannot control  
Nowhere shall I deliberately deviate

Nothing other than this dissimulation and this disquietude  
Nothing grand or classifiable, nothing secured

When girls were flowers, this wasn't true  
The crime is not incomprehension but refusal

I have wanted a truth that is unavailable  
It is not private.

/

I had undergone an influence of  
Death, which was itself imprinted

On some moving sequin, the breath sequins  
Heartbeat sequins, the organs and their slowing

Articulations sequins, which as they  
Move from the foreground appear to dim, since

They go out to illuminate  
Some event so distant we will never

Know the instant of its perception  
As if poverty did not have an abiding insight into the nature of  
insurrection

Borders and organs end but don't change  
Error is not harmful to art

It should by no means imitate either the willfulness or the wildness  
of nature, but should look like a thing  
Like free and not-free went walking

To the unseen city of antiquity.

/

Not to be ungrateful to the great muddledictions of concupiscence  
But “the women” is itself not a content

It is not real, it is a communal perceiving rapture  
If I am not required to be present, I can go further

The department of thrift is mysterious and has no outdoor seating  
That surface wanting itself as money is not my money

It points to a means of perception I have not permitted myself  
It is not so much a query as a form of belief

Someone has garlanded the lead Diana with camellias though I find  
    none blooming  
I believe I am never free of the beautiful woods

This isn't nostalgic  
It is a structure in which truth is where the other is not.

/

No one saw the arabesque, the carefully folded kiss, nor the  
religiosity of the comprehensible  
The emotions which alighted upon us were not all contemporary

At one PM we were confident; now we are not  
Nothing is enough

It is not quite midsummer.  
Technique is emotion.

I was not prepared so I let it slumber  
Later, its nothing crumbled.

/

Yes, the empire is nowhere  
Her smoky shoulder is not allegorical

Here we don't take cities any more  
This is not the emergency of memory

It does not establish an opposition between two sense organs  
Space need no longer be pinned to a position

Cigarettes from which no smoke curls, phosphorescence without  
permission  
The king is behaving awkwardly for no particular reason

I don't know  
I just don't really know.

/

Our health was not good  
In a particular place I could never use words

If I reason I am not the state's body  
Nor is the body someone

It dreams no pronoun  
No, not an elevation of any kind, nor any plan

Not even the happy closure  
Something, like nothing, happens anywhere

And some never love  
Hence they can never be omitted

In their clothing they are not the kings I know  
I realized I hadn't really begun

I seem to have no desires  
Or my desire is not very beautiful

Not even midst rills and fritillaria  
Not even my seven-fold will

Here are new enclosures without end  
Perhaps this did not occur in a material sense.

/

Landscapes are not eras; they never finish  
Because it doesn't finish I can be present.



/

The beloved ego in the plummy light is not reasonable  
Onward he coils without touch, and escapes

I do not verify their prognostics:  
Nothing can be discovered but acts

What will we disappear into if not the moral filigree of praise  
Finally nothing but this omnidistant surface

As for the sexual memory, I will make it from dust  
The description can't be reproduced

The sense is not the fretful self-important introspection  
It was a process of assimilation, not of influence

Sudden rains never last long  
They are never to lose one another again

It follows that these falsified arousals did not motivate memory  
But there existed no other theory

How to be happy, how not to die, to lie in bed and think  
There is no other priority

Nor could I mint a newer silence  
The silence cannot be done into English

There is no choice between historical and hidden meaning; both are present  
Presence is not enough

It won't assist my conduct

It was no longer the end of a season  
I had no alternative but to become a person.

/

They spoke not of space but of tables, beds, wells, facades and piazzas  
Utopia is negative, not punctual

The garden is explicitly not walled  
They are Kings or they are nothing at all

I'm not done with myth yet  
Fate isn't prudent

Physics is not so much the setting for the fate of the soul, it is the fate  
of the soul  
I report my loss to a slightly confused woman not used to the protocol

And I arrive at nothing but the rolling year  
The sky hasn't yet reached its full colour

I want to hold belief and dissonance in a cumulative structure that  
moves to no closure  
This won't happen because of fear

Sex of dust  
I had no other means of expression than this fibrous grief

These techniques are not an end in themselves, nor is continuity  
The unseen city of antiquity becomes nothing less than a mediation  
between psyche and history

A form whose nowhere wrote  
It is not possible that there could only be one world

Not a cloud is to be seen.

/

Now only literary, it quotes a  
Dream and does not say so. Now rare and

Obsolete, it quotes the dream. Rare, neither  
Appeared nor sustained. Obsolete, as

If we never wanted freedom, which is  
The more usual form. No theory

Is my life, precious. A tender king  
Died of nothing. I won't get used to it

And that is not all—  
We saw something which was not illuminated

I said to my king don't die  
It meant I had no space inside me

How did they become fearless?  
I am to ask a question where none exists

Such scenes admit no correction  
Nothing stands between us

Now watered now liking now tending now only illiterate  
This morning is not everything.

/  
About our magnificent monuments—they do not belong to us  
Nothing new has arisen

So much is not happening  
These are not buttons, they're couplings

Later, when it is no longer possible to remember cloth  
I'll seek no protection

There are places where stratification is not abstract  
I should not forget this fact

If irony is not love's form  
The mistake is a simultaneity of meaning and non-meaning, time  
and not-time

Identity can't be concise  
Its pronoun can't be true; neither can a regicide.

/

My imagination could not construct anything more civilized than this  
Not necessarily to endorse it

We cannot know a gesture, a page, speech  
There is room for that knowledge but not in my valise

The space was not about its edges  
We didn't borrow from sex

Not a torrent, not a cliff peeped tangled  
It was no cradle

The problem is not to stop memory but to lift it  
We need not feel ashamed of this distinction

It could incite our curiosity but means nothing  
I did not cherish them enough

Their king is not a problem  
I could not describe it by appropriating the terms of anything present

We need not even think of the distant valleys  
The earth is moist and not mine.

/

Suppose I never saw deception  
No distinctions—just the fear of isolation

That structure was not finally my medium  
I am an animal I don't know

Nor an orchard nor a single soul nor  
A dog nor a leather purse nor subjection

Nor trivialization nor worthlessness  
Nor apples and stars when the festival

Of war unfurls from garden suburbs and  
Decks the patios in grand coloured

Swags flipping upwards in the breeze bringing  
The shampoo scent of blossoms

It would be nice  
To interfere with the accuracy of the world.

/

I don't want to correct features and dreams  
The explanation is no more important than the rain

It marks the passing of a world I was not in  
Sudden rains never last long

Or not any of these things  
There's no need for crying

As for speech that does not have to be uttered  
As for the sexual village and its motors

She smokes in her door  
This becomes morning

To hear you breathing as I write  
So the secular soul invents itself

The day won't be long  
Only forms are found.

/

I sent my throat  
On a raft

To try to remember anything about how to exist  
In the inchoate institution of

If this is a dress

Nothing but the I am no longer aesthetic trope  
As the steeple lightens.



/

To make a mould is a formal gesture of love  
There are two ways in which I speak

Form is not cruel  
This by no means implies that it suspends the effects of war

I believe that the King remains the West  
For a day I'll go into a field with the cattle

To take a rest. I will break myself open  
Become the animal in its grave of laurel

At the periphery of the invasions, the fires, and the forests  
An old man paces his vegetable plot.

EDWARD DORN

## RADICALS ON THE GREAT PLAIN

Published in 49:3/4 & 50:1

The Drenchers advocate more water everywhere  
whether by silver nitrate dispersal  
or by drilling water mining.  
They make no distinction between good and bad water  
Main enemy: the Dredgers.  
Both sexes, however, are reductionist.  
The Drieden regard everything with dread,  
awe or reverence.  
They want to drop the bomb  
just to get it over with.  
Many members from southern Indiana.  
The Dredgers.  
They sprinkle flour over everything  
and hope for the best.  
Large membership from Michigan.  
They all live in fear of Polly Decimal,  
the queen of the digits.

The Tablewhackers, the spirit summoners  
the Pot wallopers, the last of the franchise.  
The Tree kickers, anti-ecologenes  
who walk through the forest with chain saw tapes  
turned on full vol.  
The Hole Diggers, a truly lost and aimless  
set of brethren related to  
the Post setters and Wire stringers.  
The head slappers, very indecisive cult.  
Never know what to do and so forth.

The Grass hoppers, similar to the  
Claim jumpers of the Western mountains,  
now largely defunct  
But some of their practices are being revived by  
The Bankers.  
The grass stompers, an alarmist sect related to  
the Dirt Stompers, the Dirt Throwers, the Ground Hogs  
and Large Land Owners  
holding multiples of square miles  
a lickspittle sect of  
Land Jobbers & Land Grabbers  
all under the dioceses of the Bankers.

The Cheese Pairers, a curious but hopeless sect  
who hold that out of insignificance  
will come greatness, material greatness,  
that is, they deem misery and petty economizing  
to be honorific.  
They are greatly encouraged in this  
by the masters of the cult,  
the Bankers.  
The Bankers  
The Bankers live in banks  
for the most part this is an advantage  
In dry times they just dig deeper into their burroughs  
In wet times they are safe  
Unless the water,  
should the drenchers' prayers be answered,  
became so inflated their holes fill in,  
in which circumstance  
they simply surface and offer them better terms.  
Their relationship with God  
compared to those who take charismatic chances  
seems to be secure  
He is rumored to be a holder  
of a long-term mortgage.

The Ground Slappers, very short people.  
Failing but hoping for the best  
and the best will be anything  
that isn't definitely awful.  
Usually they're the bedrock of the community.  
The Weed Pullers, and pullers of all kinds,  
prominent among whom are the  
the Milkweed Pullers, who are a form of disperser, too  
if hapless evangelists.  
A certain earnestness characterizes all their endeavors  
and among whom  
Thistle Grabbers and the Bullet Biters  
are impetuous types.  
Not to forget their poor brethren  
the Knee Bangers and the Elbow Bangers  
whose only purpose seems to be  
to injure themselves  
and who appear to have certain habits in common  
with the Folsomites,  
an economical organization known for doing anything.

And then there are the Double-Crossers.  
an immense congregation who strive in vain  
against all the rest, often successfully,  
except against  
the Bankers and the Whiskey tossers,  
descendants of the true Ranchers, still among us  
but radically unorganized.

ED ROBERSON

## FOURTH OF JULY

Published in 59:4 & 60:1

Two days after the Fourth and the last  
personal fireworks sail screaming to silence  
and the hump of night sound stops bouncing us  
into the air riding the blown up awake

comes this stillness, richer  
than the kids' bomb allowances run out—  
but not rich as for real is the rest  
of the world caravan packed, up  
for something to trade or attack, loaded.

No feel of end to explosive  
celebration nor to fighting, just cease-fire mostly,  
a hold so desperately grasped, if it  
were breath it would weigh the touch  
of an army of triggers,

the daily boot on our chest waiting our answer  
to its question Do you want to get up?

ALFRED STARR HAMILTON

WOODCUT

Published in 58:1

Why, I even boarded them up,  
Why, they were only puppies at the time,  
Why, I waited for dreary months,  
Why, I had a red card once,  
I couldn't wait any longer than usual for the chisel,  
More of this work is for hoarding goldpence  
Moreover the back of your thumb  
I am thumbstruck

TADEUSZ RÓŻEWICZ

from RECYCLING  
Published in 46:3/4

*“Was ist Recycling? Die Wiederverwendung bereits  
einmal oder mehrfach benutzter Rohstoffe zur  
Gewinnung neuer Produkte”*

I

*Fashion (1944-1994)*

his clothes comprised  
a woolen cap  
a nightshirt with no buttons  
a small woman's cardigan  
trousers daubed red  
old shoes  
one all holes  
the other a woman's tiny slipper  
didn't fit at all

fifty years later

for casual wear  
natural fabrics are back  
wool reigns mixed  
with polyesters and polyamides  
woven to recall  
granny's handknitted  
waistcoats sweaters caps and scarves  
dark colours are most popular  
black grey silver steel  
dusky orange

skyblue and shades of yellow ring the knell  
for the wild colours that have ruled  
the ski slopes until now

she receives a man's shirt to go with  
torn long underwear  
torn old trousers  
and a Russian soldier's blouse  
she has a star on white canvas  
non-Jewish women get a red triangle  
rags on their shaved heads  
I seem to be  
at a masked ball  
the orchestra's playing *Góralu czy ci nie żal*<sup>1</sup>

some relieved themselves  
in their soup bowls

fifty years later

even the most elegant  
keep greatcoats or bosun's jackets  
with shiny double rows of buttons  
in their winter wardrobe  
A sailor's blouse a bosun's  
or bomber jacket an officer's cap  
a flying suit still have  
a huge following it's not just  
the young shoulder-strap brigade  
who go for the military look

he looked into the mouth under the tongue  
between the fingers and the toes  
and in the anus  
and in the ears

---

1. A popular Polish tune. In the concentration camps the Germans made Gypsies and Jews play music.



*Schauen wir mal, wer  
in diesem Sommer die Hosen anhat?*

*Die Designer haben sich  
viele Modelle ausgedacht:*

*Bleistift - Hose, Marlene - Look,  
Hippie - Feeling, Gucci - Dress  
Zitronengelbe Hüft - Hose  
mit Blümchenmuster  
Perfekt zu bauchfreien Tops  
und Pullis*

*they said to women in Auschwitz  
du vollgestopfter Strumpf  
du alte Hexe alte Kanone  
alte Hut alte Fetzen alte Krippe  
alte Gazette  
du Scheiffladen Scheifflkübel  
alte Waschkommode alte Ziege  
alte Zitrone  
Krematoriumsfigur*

*welcher Mann hat Lust  
mich auf meinem weiblichen  
Planeten kennenzulernen?*

*starke, sinnlich-erotische Schöne  
akad. blond  
liebst auch Du Theater  
Musik Literatur Tanzen Ski  
Tennis Sauna Reisen Wandern*

*Lady seeks gentleman  
Lady seeks lady  
Gentleman seeks lady  
Gentleman seeks gentleman*

join us  
for a good time

on her head  
recently shaved for the movie  
she sports a smart crew cut  
and her amazing figure is strapped  
in a pink bikini and wrapped  
in a big bath towel

the greatest mistake is  
mixing warm and cold colours  
e.g. warm orange lips  
with cold pink nails  
warm poppy red  
with cold cherry  
copper lipstick  
with cyclamen varnish

||

*Gold*

*Aurea prima sata est aetas ...*

gold was the first age  
ages passed  
the XX century came

the XX century passes  
the christian world  
nears its end  
strange signs  
have appeared in the sky and on earth

strange signs have appeared  
on gold bullion  
in the vaults of the Riksbank  
the central bank of Sweden  
the gold began to weep  
tears of blood  
to hide this fact  
the Riksbank requested  
the central bank of Switzerland  
to remove German  
identification marks  
from gold bullion  
and replace them  
with the stamp of Sweden

gold began to speak  
in the Federal Reserve Bank  
in the Bank of England in London  
in New York  
in Paris in the Banque de France  
in Madrid  
and Lisbon  
a golden silence fell  
on the capitals of Europe and both Americas  
then it began to melt  
gold bricks gold bullion  
gold bars  
gold coins  
spoke  
gold laundered in Europe and America  
erupts in stains  
bleeds  
armoured vaults  
are sealed like gas chambers  
but you can hear grinding teeth  
muffled cries  
a dank carrion stench  
escapes from safes

oozing ptomaine  
blood  
gold laundered in Switzerland  
decomposes and rots  
in antiseptic Sweden  
there are gold teeth in there  
gold caps gold rings  
with diamond eyes  
spectacle frames hair  
fountain pens breath  
banks unveil  
their bosom secrets  
banks temples of the golden calf  
monumental *goldscheißers*  
excrete  
impurities

in an hour glass  
gold sand flows

Joaquin Navarro-Valls  
press spokesman  
for the Holy See  
would not confirm  
reports  
broadcast on the American  
TV network A & E  
that the Vatican secreted  
200 million swiss francs  
principally gold coins  
looted by croatian  
fascists during the second  
world war  
croatian fascists who  
mass murdered  
Serbs Jews and Gypsies  
carried 350 million swiss francs

out of Yugoslavia  
before the end of the war  
the British managed to intercept  
about 150 million swiss  
francs the rest  
reached the Vatican whence  
rumours suggested  
it was transferred  
to Spain and Argentina

*long poems*

Newsweek: *Nazi-Gold*

*auch in Portugal*

*das lange Gedicht*

Israel joined in  
the dispute over the possessions  
of Holocaust victims  
this is not the first time  
jewish organisations have challenged  
the swiss banks  
or perhaps  
the Holocaust never happened

you can read more and more often  
in postnazi german papers  
in american papers  
you can read reprints from foreign  
papers in polish-language “national”  
papers saying the Holocaust never happened

you can read more and more on the walls  
of our town slogans in polish  
“gas the jews” and in german “*Juden raus*”  
just thoughtless youths  
just naughty boys children  
drawing the star of David  
hanging from gibbets

*das lange Gedicht*

my friend Kazimierz Wyka<sup>2</sup>  
made a note for posterity  
during the hitler occupation  
“The Germans’ methods for liquidating the Jews  
weigh on their conscience.  
But the reaction to those methods  
weighs on our conscience.  
A gold tooth torn from a corpse  
bleeds forever,  
even if no-one remembers  
where it came from...”

gold bullion softens  
a poem lengthens falls apart  
*Schlimmer Verdacht*  
*die Schweiz hat möglicherweise*  
*unmittelbar nach dem 2. Weltkrieg*  
*wissentlich Goldmünzen*  
*aus Gold von Zahnfüllungen*  
*von Holocaust Opfern geprägt ...*  
*so der britische TV-Sender BBC*  
but the Holocaust never happened

my friend  
professor Kazimierz Wyka  
must have heard this joke  
under the General Government<sup>3</sup>  
“Hitler’s the golden boy who’s / made workers out of Jews”  
Kazimierz Wyka one of the righteous  
wrote a book called *The Economy of Exclusion: Make-Believe Life*<sup>4</sup>  
I don’t know if this book  
is compulsory reading  
in polish schools  
I don’t know how long we’ll have to wait

---

2. Leading postwar Polish critic.

3. The Polish territories under the Nazi occupation.

4. Polish title: *Gospodarka wyłączona. Życie na niby*.

before the gentlemen (and ladies) of the Ministry of National  
Education  
add this title to the list  
of set texts  
(perhaps they haven't read the book  
never heard of it)  
Kazimierz Wyka never planted a tree in the Holy Land  
ingots and bullion  
bare their teeth skulls are silent  
eye-sockets speak

executive director of the WJC Elan Steinberg  
claims the monetary bullion  
contains bullion  
melted down from jewellery coins  
and even Holocaust victims' gold teeth  
but no concrete evidence  
has emerged  
anyway it could have been a mistake  
a survivor of the Bertram family  
orchard owners in Wyszaków  
claims his grandfather had substantial deposits  
in swiss banks  
but perhaps the Holocaust never happened  
right after the war  
gold prospectors appeared  
armed with spades pickaxes  
bowls sieves  
searching for gold mines  
gold sand  
gold teeth  
in gold-bearing Auschwitzes  
Majdaneks Treblinkas  
searching in the ashes  
in the guts of our  
common mother earth  
searching for gold gold gold

but the Holocaust never happened

it was dreamed up by jewish  
usurers bankers communists  
who were joined by the gypsies  
Madonnas weep tears of blood  
only the gypsy Madonna does not weep  
gold is the world's silence  
in the Holy Land the righteous  
plant trees it turns green  
the Avenue of the Righteous a young wood  
trees growing to the light  
the holy wood moves  
advancing to meet  
the youth of the world  
thrifty nations count  
their killed murdered  
gassed maimed  
buried alive hanged  
they add subtract  
multiply divide weigh  
but the Holocaust never happened

now nobody can recall  
the weight of a human tear  
the price of tears is falling on the stock exchange  
panic in the market  
gold's going up gold's falling  
who's that talking about a child's tear  
ah him Dostoyevsky

philosopher Heidegger  
writing about modern mechanised  
farming methods  
incidentally mentioned  
the production of corpses  
in concentration camps  
and gas chambers

the count proceeds



jews gypsies germans  
ukranians poles russians  
sometimes it doesn't tally  
ashes mixed with earth  
start to rise up against each other  
thanks to the living  
they separate and fight

porcelain Madonnas weep  
tears of blood  
jewish arabic algerian  
headless mothers  
walk on shouting  
the gypsy Madonna Raphaela  
doesn't weep doesn't speak to me  
beautiful full of grace

the living wood of the righteous  
advances  
to the temples of the golden calf  
to the banks and petrifies

from strongboxes safes  
and armoured vaults  
ptomaine is oozing  
gold clean as a tear  
turns to carrion  
teeth bared  
and the count begins again

*long poems*

the safes of Sweden's Riksbank  
still hold approximately  
seven tonnes of gold looted  
by hitler Germany  
with which the Third Reich paid  
Sweden for iron ore  
ball bearings

and other strategic materials  
but the Holocaust never happened  
the Riksbank's representatives state  
Sweden's "dirty" gold has  
long since gone  
in 1946 seven tonnes of gold  
returned to Belgium  
and in 1954 six tonnes went to Holland  
during world war II Sweden  
was neutral  
and it seems the Holocaust never happened  
gold was the world's silence

*das Lange Gedicht*

PS

what a long poem! it  
drags and drags master don't you get bored  
can't it all fit into  
a haiku? It can't.

BRIAN EVENSON

## The Intricacies of Post-Shooting Etiquette

Published in 46:1

### I.

One winter morning, watching Bein read his breakfast paper, Kohke decided to kill him. He stood behind Bein, aligned a pistol barrel with Bein's skull and worked the trigger. He had reasons for wanting Bein dead, but watching his lover shake about the floor, smearing blood on the linoleum, he could not bring those reasons to mind.

The pistol must have wavered when he pulled the trigger, for Bein did not seem to be dying properly. After a writhing agony he fell still, attempting to catch his breath. And then, calmly, he asked Kohke to call an ambulance.

Unable to bear the thought of shooting Bein again, Kohke carried the pistol from room to room, finally submerging it in a pitcher of orange juice. He telephoned for help. Paramedics arrived, the police alongside. The first extracted Bein. The second discovered the pistol, remanded Kohke to custody.

In an interiorly mirrored room, Kohke began to lie. He had not known the gun was loaded. He had pointed it at Bein only as a prank. He had thought it a novelty cigarette lighter, not a real gun. He lied even about matters of no consequence. Slowly the lies accumulated, crowding each other awkwardly. Yet, when the police received word that Bein, rolling into surgery, had absolved Kohke of blame, they grudgingly released him.

### §

In this fashion a measure of uncertainty slipped into Kohke and Bein's relationship. Never having shot anyone close to him before, Kohke had difficulty unraveling post-shooting etiquette. Was the relation

terminated? Kohke wondered, as he waited for Bein's release. Could they be said, now, properly, to have a relationship? Had the shooting freed him of sexual and emotional obligation to Bein? Or had any potential release been countermanded by Bein's refusal to blame him?

What, wondered Kohke, did Bein actually know? Officially the shooting was classified as an accident. Perhaps even Bein himself believed it to be an accident: after all, he had not seen Kohke pull the trigger. Or perhaps, thought Kohke, Bein has only classified it such so as to be able, later, to avenge himself against me.

## §

Alone in the large bed, beset with uncertainty, Kohke had trouble sleeping. He would awake, the stench of gunpowder strong in his nostrils, feeling he had been shot. The day after the accident he contemplated visiting Bein in the hospital, but he could not bear to see Bein so soon, partly from shame, partly from fear of violating post-shooting etiquette. How does one apologize for shooting someone? Sorry to have shot you, Bein didn't ring properly, nor did My apologies for the accident, Bein. On the second day, he stayed away because he could develop no convincing lie to justify his first-day's absence. By the third day, the pattern was fixed. Visiting Bein now would seem unusual.

He kept himself apprised, bribing an intern named Chur to provide him daily reports. It was from Chur he learned of Bein's transfer from critical to stable condition. From Chur, he learned that bullet fragments had lodged in Bein's brain, causing blindness. He was told that the second bullet—

"The second what?" asked Kohke.

"Bullet," said Chur.

"Bullet?"

"Yes, of course," said Chur. "Mr. Kohke, you fired twice."

Second bullet? He had no memory of firing a second bullet. Indeed just the opposite: he remembered shooting once and not again. How had he managed to blot out this second bullet which, according to Chur, had rendered Bein immobile, paralyzed from the neck down?

Presenting himself at the police station, he asked to examine his arrest report. The sergeant assigned to the case chatted at him idly while Kohke thumbed through the file. Yes, he saw, there had been two bullet wounds, one in Bein's skull, the second in his back. Two cartridges were absent from the orange-juice-drenched pistol. He had fired twice. His body had pulled the trigger while his mind huddled at a safe distance.

§

Research led him to understand where he had gone wrong. The caliber of the pistol he had found in Bein's top drawer had been woefully inadequate. It was, he learned during an awkward parkbench conversation with a war veteran, more appropriate for the slaughter of dogs, small children.

The police had the gun now. Despite his awkward success soliciting the veteran in the park, Kohke could not imagine entering a munitions shop to purchase a more powerful weapon. It went contrary to his character. Nor would the police so easily excuse a second incident.

Perhaps, he thought, the relationship has been successfully terminated and I will never see Bein again. Or perhaps when Bein did come home, crippled, he would prove a different man. A so-called *new man*. Then, the circumstances that had culminated in the shooting would not accumulate again. Yet even in the best of circumstances, Kohke was not certain he could bear living with a man he himself had crippled.

§

In the midst of such reflections, the hospital telephoned. Bein would be released in four days. He had requested that Mr. Kohke take him home. Was Mr. Kohke willing to accept responsibility for Mr. Bein?

*No*, he said, *all apologies*, and recradled the headpiece.

He sat beside the telephone, scrutinizing the pale lampshade. Apparently the relationship was not terminated after all, but continued to limp on.

It would look suspicious both to Bein and to the police if he refused to take Bein in. He could ill afford suspicion. He had been hasty, foolish.

Holding his hand out to the lampshade, he greeted it enthusiastically. Getting up, he went to look at himself in the mirror. In the glass he could still perceive the old, pre-shooting Kohke, largely intact. Hail, fellow, he thought.

“Bein,” he said to the mirror. “What a pleasure to see you again.”

Watching his face as he said it, he saw no revelation of anything, let alone guilt. Surely Bein, blinded, would notice less than he. He closed his eyes.

“How was your stay?” he heard his voice smoothly say. “I must apologize for not visiting. I had been informed that healing takes place more rapidly in solitude.”

I will keep him off balance, he told himself. I will give nothing away. I will maintain the upper hand.

## II.

He could not imagine pushing Bein’s wheelchair over and over the spot where he had been shot. Yet he was concerned that moving would excite Bein’s suspicions, allowing Bein to gain the upper hand. Compromising, he rented a new apartment in the same building—one floor lower than the original apartment but identical in every other respect: three dusty rooms, doors sufficiently wide to admit Bein’s wheelchair, the final room with a window opening on an airshaft.

At the appointed day’s appointed hour, he walked to the hospital. Bein was slumped in the circular drive in his wheelchair, a nurse posted beside him. *You’re Mr. Kohke?* she asked as he approached. He nodded. *Kohke?* said Bein.

Kohke nodded again. “Hello, Bein.”

“What’s wrong?” asked Bein, face squinching.

“Not a thing,” said Kohke.

“I don’t want to go home with him,” Bein said to the circular drive.

“Nonsense,” said the nurse.

“I didn’t think you’d come,” said Bein. “Why did you?”

"I'll leave you two alone now," said the nurse, smiling grimly, then slipping away.

"Well, shall we set off?" asked Kohke, briskly jabbing the wheelchair apartmentward.

They traveled several rugged blocks without speaking. As they passed other people, Bein would turn his head, directing one ear or the other toward their voices. His ear is his eye, thought Kohke, listening to the faint clack of the wheels.

"What's wrong?" Bein asked again.

"Nothing," said Kohke.

"Why do you do this?"

"Do what?"

"Refuse to share your feelings with me."

"Bein," said Kohke. "I beg you."

When Bein wouldn't stop speaking, Kohke set the brakes on the wheelchair and abandoned him. He crossed the street and looked at Bein from the other side, watching the foot traffic flow around his lover. He could hear the sound of Bein's voice, see his lips move, but made out none of what the voice was saying. He stayed, waiting for the moment when Bein would realize he was no longer present.

Was there a way to end the relationship immediately? Could he abandon Bein on the corner?

He stood watching Bein's mouth move until he could not bear it, then watched instead Bein's wheelchair, and finally turned to watch the traffic light as it turned, then turned, then turned again.

### §

When he looked away from the traffic light, it was growing dark. Bein was just as Kohke had left him, still slumped in his chair.

"You came back," said Bein, as Kohke affixed his hands to the grips. Kohke employed a bright voice to respond, the same voice he employed with dogs and small children: "Of course I came back." Reaching down, he levered the brakes off, began to rotate the chair about.

"We're going back?" asked Bein, pale eyes staring not at Kohke but above him, at Kohke's nonexistent hat.

“Back?”

“To the hospital.”

“You’ve been released, Bein. You can’t go back.”

“Where am I to go?”

Kohke did not answer. He began to push him down the sidewalk, clicking over cracks until they reached the apartment building. Holding tight to the chair’s vulcanized grips, he took Bein up the steps backwards, drawing the chair up a tread at a time, shaking him, regressing a few treads, turning the wheelchair about until he was convinced Bein would be unsure of how many flights they had mounted. Then he was at the door and had opened the door and they were both in.

“Welcome home,” he said. He lifted his ex-lover out of his chair and into the bed.

“This is my bed?” Bein asked. “It doesn’t feel like my bed.”

“Nothing feels the same after you’ve been shot, Bein.”

“How would you know?”

“That’s just what they say.”

“We’re not going back to the hospital?”

He could not bear Bein’s face up close. Kohke kept casting his gaze about, finally letting it rest upon the buttons of Bein’s shirt, a string of tiny, bland faces.

“No,” said Kohke to the buttons. “You’re done with the hospital. You’re home now.”

Bein turned his head slightly, dimpling the pillow’s case. “Take me back.”

Kohke left the room, went to the kitchen. He was thirsty. The refrigerator was unplugged. When he opened it he found the air inside had turned. He plugged it in, closed it.

He listened to the hum of the refrigerator. He could hear Bein’s voice abuzz in the bedroom, still speaking. He could not hear what he was saying. He went back, stood with crossed arms in Bein’s doorway.

Bein fell silent, whorling one of his ears toward Kohke. He stayed like that, motionless, regarding him with his ear, as Kohke grew uncomfortable.

“What is it?”

“It doesn’t feel right,” said Bein.

“Don’t be crazy,” Kohke said.



“What’s changed?”

“Nothing. It’s all the same.”

“It doesn’t feel the same.”

Kohke went back into the kitchen. He wandered all around the kitchen and then left the apartment. There was the hall, the floorboards brightly polished and throwing light up against his shoes. There was the light switch, apparently innocuous, the paint worn thin upon it. He went back into the kitchen, looked at the refrigerator until he couldn’t stand to look any longer. Thirsty, he opened it, found it empty.

He went back to Bein’s room. Standing in the doorway, he watched him. Slowly, Bein smiled.

“The sea,” said Bein. “I no longer hear the sea.”

§

The sea, thought Kohke later, sitting in the hall just outside the apartment, What sea? There was no sea. They were hundreds of miles from the ocean, there was no river or other water within sight or hearing of the apartment. The bullets had damaged Bein’s thinking as well as his vision.

“The sea?” he had repeated, standing before Bein.

“Yes,” said Bein. “I don’t hear it.”

“I don’t recall having heard a sea,” said Kohke carefully.

“You wouldn’t,” said Bein.

“What does that mean?”

“Is the window open?” asked Bein. “Open the window and you’ll hear it.”

Kohke looked back at the window leading into the airshaft. “I have to go to work,” said Kohke. “I can’t bother with that now.”

“Work?” asked Bein. “You, work?”

“I’ve changed, Bein,” lied Kohke, “I really have. I’m a new Kohke.”

Bein contorted his face in a fashion the meaning of which Kohke found difficult to determine. Backing his way to the front door, he left.

§

On a park bench, ogled by a veteran whose hands fumbled deep within his pockets, Kohke considered life with Bein. Bein had come home with him, which Kohke reluctantly classified as *promising*. Bein had mentioned nothing about the murder attempt, had not blamed him. Also *promising*—unless Bein’s silence was seen as biding his time so as to exact his revenge. Yet how, he asked himself, could a paralyzed man take revenge? *Disappointing*, though not yet *cause for alarm*, Bein sensed the wrongness of the apartment, felt despite the identical floorplan that he was not at home. Such wrongness, Kohke suspected, could lead to recognition of other wrongnesses, and must be corrected.

Yet the sea? What was this talk of the sea? How could it be classified?

Deserting the bench, he returned to the apartment building, borrowed the key for his former apartment from the manager. He went from room to room, listening, first with windows closed, then with windows open, then some opened, some closed. He turned on the water, listened to the pipes tick. He was unable to identify any sound that even remotely recalled the sea. He stood on his toes, squatted down. There was, he saw when crouched, a faint rust of Bein’s blood still marring the pebbling of the linoleum. Hurriedly, he left the apartment.

Bein’s brain must have fused two memories, dredging a past sea into his present life, or simply evoking water from empty air. The sea, he told himself, returning the key between thumb and forefinger to the manager. He wants the sea. The sea is what he’ll get.

### III.

He purchased a tape recorder and a cassette series entitled *The Soothing Power of Nature*. In the back room, he opened the window, plugged the recorder in, set it on the sill. The cellophane crackled stiffly coming off *The Soothing Power of Nature*. He dropped the cassettes down the airshaft, except for one, marked *Aqua Vitae*, which he inserted into the machine.

When he pressed play, he heard a short feed of blank tape then the sound of waves. He listened for a time, set the recorder to play continuously.

Bein was lying on the bed, his head sunk deep into the pillow, his blind eyes wandering the upper rim of his orbits.

“Good morning,” said Kohke. “How are we today?”

“Give me to someone else,” said Bein.

“We don’t know what we’re saying this morning,” said Kohke, his voice cheery. “Do we?”

“One of us doesn’t,” said Bein.

Kohke positioned the wheelchair next to the bed, tugged Bein over until he was beside it. He forced Bein’s feet onto the floor. Slipping his arms around Bein’s chest, he locked them behind his back. He heaved Bein up, dropped him into the chair.

“No need getting dressed today,” Kohke said. “We won’t go out.”

Wheeling Bein to the table, he began to feed him. Bein chewed, then sat awaiting the next bite, mouth ajar. Kohke poured him a glass of orange juice, expecting to see the pistol’s snub as the juice in the pitcher drained away. He clacked the glass’s rim against Bein’s teeth.

“I hear it now,” said Kohke as Bein swallowed.

“Hear what?”

“The sea,” he said. “I hear the sea.”

“Sea?” said Bein. “What do you mean?” And, when Kohke wheeled him back, pushed him back into the bed: “You’re hearing things, Kohke. Imagine that.”

The cassette ran nearly constantly. Despite Kohke’s efforts at preservation, it acquired a dull hiss, degenerated into a sound hardly recognizable as water. It had been a mistake to buy the tape, to try to simulate something that hadn’t existed in the first place. Yet, now that it was done, Kohke felt he had committed himself.

Oddly, as the tape deteriorated Bein perked up, claimed to recognize what he heard as waves. Kohke could not tell if Bein was toying with him or if, somehow, he heard it now. Perhaps it was simply that whatever dementia had first caused Bein to believe the sea existed had now returned. It had all gone wrong, Kohke felt, and there was no putting it right. Better to let the tape run down to its own extinction.

This was how Kohke came to identify the waning of his relationship with Bein. When the tape snapped, the relation would end and he would be free of Bein. He wasn't certain how this end would occur, but he was certain it would.

Bein began begging Kohke to take him down to the sea. He wanted to touch the water's edge.

"You wouldn't feel it," said Kohke. "No point."

No, insisted Bein, his face would feel it. He wanted Kohke to carry him down to feel the breeze, then out into the water in his arms. They would walk out until Bein's face was floating, licked by the waves.

"Like a lily," Bein said.

I can't stand it, thought Kohke.

He was tied to Bein, obligated to him until the tape broke. Still, there were distractions. There was the veteran in the park with his fluid and somewhat inarticulate consolations. It was better than nothing, though all the while he thought of Bein alone in the apartment, the tape winding slowly down. There was shopping, his imaginary job, other excuses. Yet each time he went back he found the situation less bearable.

He considered simply leaving, abandoning Bein, letting him starve to death, though he worried the neighbors would hear Bein's cries and rescue him. When he had nearly worked up sufficient nerve to desert Bein, the hospital called, inquired after Bein's condition. How was Mr. Bein recovering? Was there anything they could do? They would call again, the intern said. It made Kohke feel he was under observation. A courtesy call, the hospital called it. Courtesy to whom? wondered Kohke.

Bein refused to eat, clamping his jaw tight enough that Kohke had great difficulty prying his mouth open. At other times, Bein spoke constantly, sometimes all through the night, with little order or logic, Kohke trying to find a hidden sense in what he was saying. The stench of Bein seeped into the floors, Bein's skin beneath his clothing starting to weep after Kohke began to neglect cleaning him. There was the veteran in the park, then the return home, then Bein's voice again asking for Kohke to carry him down to float in the water.

"Like a lily," Bein said again. "A water lily."

"Too steep," said Kohke, gritting his teeth. "Too rocky. Too dangerous."

Bein kept asking. He was willing to take the risk, Bein said, and if Kohke was to lose his balance and fall, Bein would absolve him of all blame. “Write a statement absolving yourself of blame,” he said to Kohke. “Put a pen in my mouth and I’ll sign it.”

As the tape became sheer hiss and squeal, Bein became more insistent. He must go to the sea, Kohke must take him. He spoke about it, talked it through, until Kohke covered his ears. He sat in place, watching Bein in bed, listening to the rumble of Bein’s voice gone inarticulate through his hands. Yet, no matter how silently he covered his ears, Bein would quickly stop talking.

“You’ve stopped listening,” he would say, then lapse into brooding silence. Yet as soon as Kohke uncovered his ears, Bein would begin speaking again.

It made Kohke wonder if Bein could see, if he had regained his sight after all.

Kohke grew nervous, distraught. Bein, however, seemed calmer and calmer, focused on the sea.

“If we can’t climb all the way down, at least get me closer,” Bein suggested.

“Close? You want close?” Kohke knew his voice was too loud, strident, but could do nothing to tame it. He gathered Bein in his arms, strapping him into the wheelchair, rolling him quickly from his bedroom through the hall and to the back room. There, near the wall, near the window, he reached out and turned the volume up.

“You want closer?” he said. “This is closer.”

He watched Bein sit, head cocked, just a few paces from the tape recorder, listening, smiling. The tape speeded and slowed as it played. Kohke watched the awful smile, Bein’s face all aglow. At first Kohke only watched, without comfort, and then, disturbed, he approached, ready to push Bein out the window.

Yet, as he came close, Bein turned his head and seemed to look right at him. The smile on his face tightened. Kohke stopped. Even when, a few moments later, Bein’s eyes drifted in opposite directions, Kohke found he could not bring himself to push Bein out.

He would be a new man, he told himself. When the tape broke, etiquette would be satisfied and he would end the relationship. Bein, we’re not right for each other—you prefer the ocean and I prefer the mountains or I want to give you the opportunity to see other people,

Bein. Someday, he told himself, Bein would thank him. He could last until the tape broke if he could get Bein to stop talking about the sea. He would last that long, then he would bathe Bein, feed him, and get rid of him.

§

Perhaps, Bein suggested, Kohke could construct some sort of sling and lower Bein down until he was safe at water's edge. Certainly that could be done.

Kohke did not respond.

Or if not a sling perhaps Kohke could navigate the path to the water alone until he felt more confident. Then with sheets he could construct a kind of harness and strap Bein to his back. Or perhaps he could fill a backpack with rocks to simulate Bein's weight. Eventually, argued Bein, Kohke would have the confidence and skill needed to carry him flawlessly down to water's edge.

Kohke chose not to respond.

Or there was a way to wrap him up, Bein himself suggested, so that only his face was uncovered, to muffle and swaddle him in blankets so that if he was dropped the injuries would be minimal or at least non-fatal.

"Be quiet, Bein."

"Even if I broke a limb," said Bein, "I wouldn't feel it. It seems to me a worthy risk."

Face quivering, Kohke left the room. He went into the back room, looked at the tape recorder. He walked back past Bein's room, Bein still talking, and into the kitchen, staring first at the hot plate, then the refrigerator.

He went out into the hall, down to the bottom of the steps, then climbed back to the apartment, shutting the door softly behind him. He listened. Bein was no longer speaking.

He crept forward to stand in Bein's doorway, looked in. Bein's head was moving slightly on the pillow, the pillow moving as well. The pillow and head taken together seemed a living creature. The remainder of his body seemed a separate object, part of the bed.

"Or how about this?" started Bein.

"Please," said Kohke, covering his ears, "not another word."

#### IV.

Sitting in the park, he began idly to gather smooth stones, filling his pockets with them. Later, in the apartment with Bein, he took them out, washing them in the kitchen sink, then placed them in the bathroom, on the counter, the floor. He brought in a fan to give the illusion of a breeze.

Later, he carried a fist-sized stone into Bein's room, brushed it against Bein's cheek. Bein's head jerked.

"What's this?" he asked.

"Stone," said Kohke. "From the sea. The beach rather."

"The sea?" he said, as if the memory of water had ebbed away and left him again.

The stone fit Kohke's hand well. It would be easy to lift it up then bring it down hard. Would Bein's head crack with a single blow? No. Even two bullets had not been enough. How could a stone do better?

"Shall we go to the sea?" Kohke asked.

Bein seemed nervous. "I don't want to go," he said.

"You've begged me for days."

"Something is wrong."

"It's too late," said Kohke. "You're going."

He went into the kitchen, removed the cardboard canister of salt from the shelves, carried it into the bathroom. When it rains, it pours, he thought. He opened the faucets, set the plug.

He dumped the entire canister into the bath. The salt swirled in, gathering as a pale silt at tub's bottom, slowly dissolving.

He went to the back room. Unplugging the tape recorder, he carried it into the bathroom, plugged it in again, the tape giving off now a mere shadow of recognizable sound. He went after Bein.

"Come on," he said.

"I don't want to go," said Bein.

"You don't know what you want anymore."

He rolled Bein to the edge of the bed. He left him, turned off the bathwater.

With twine, he knotted Bein's hands together. Pulling Bein off the bed, he stood him up, forced his own head through the space between Bein's arms. With Bein slung like a cape on his back, he began dragging him about.

He jumped up and down a little, scraped Bein along walls, climbed up and down chairs. He pretended to stumble, pressed hands against knees, breathed hard.

“I told you it was a tough climb,” he said.

Slowly he threaded his way to the bathroom. Untying Bein’s wrists, he sat him against the side of the tub, careful not to let his head touch anything but air.

“We’re here,” said Kohke.

“We’re here?”

Dragging Bein up and over the lip of the tub, he slowly eased him in.

“Here’s your sea,” said Kohke. “Enjoy.”

He had to bend Bein’s knees to get him in properly while keeping his head shy of the rim of the tub. He lowered the head down to touch the water. Supporting the back of the neck, he lowered the head further, until the water filled the ears and lapped near the edges of the mouth. There was an expression of confusion to the face and then, slowly, the same disconcerting smile.

“You’re holding me,” said Bein.

“Yes,” said Kohke.

“Let me go,” Bein said. “Just for a moment.”

Kohke waited until Bein drew a breath then slipped his hand out from beneath the neck. Bein lay idle in the water, chest tight, head afloat, legs crammed against the spigot.

“I can float,” Bein said between breaths. “See?”

“I can see,” said Kohke, picking up a stone from the floor, moved it idly from one hand to the other.

“It’s just my head,” said Bein. “No body any more.” He smiled broadly. “You’ve reduced your lover to nothing more than a head, Kohke.”

Was it an accusation? It was unbearable, this life with Bein, a sort of existence between life and death. He was miserable. But then, as he thought, he came to feel that before that, even when Bein was whole, he had been miserable as well. Why else would he have shot Bein? And before that, before he had met Bein, he had been miserable as well. Why else would he have searched out Bein at all? Whether Bein knew or not, whether he was in jail or free, alive or dead, his life would continue in misery. He would continue, yet Bein, only a



head who recognized himself as only a head, was content to float in an artificial sea. *He has sucked my life away and taken it for his own*, thought Kohke. Yet, even as he thought it, Kohke knew Bein had taken nothing from him, that he, Kohke, was merely looking for an excuse to end the relationship before the tape snapped.

On an impulse, he took the rock he had been fumbling from hand to hand and placed it on Bein's chest.

Bein started to slip lower into the water. He tipped his head back, his eyes filling with water, his chin jutting up like an iceberg's tip. Kohke added a second stone. Some water trickled into Bein's mouth. "All right," said Bein. "Hold me again."

Placing another stone, Kohke said nothing. He watched as Bein tried to expand his lungs, keep above water.

"Kohke?" said Bein, gargling. "Grr-ogrr-eehh?"

As he watched, Bein struggled for breath, breathing in and coughing up great gouts of water. Kohke's body too felt heavy and immobile, as if it were helpless. The head shook and turned under the surface, its hair floating and swaying, bubbles spilling from its nose. The head struggled. The body remained calm and motionless, an obscene and swollen ballast. The head kept trying to breathe, the water roiling above its face as it sucked more water in.

The lips parted and tried to speak, but Kohke could make out none of the words. There was only the incomprehensible shivering of lips. Then the head too stopped moving.

The tape was mere static, all water wrung from it. Kohke stayed where he was on the lip of the bathtub. Staring into the water, he awaited the relationship's end.

DENISE NEWMAN

from THE REDESIGNATION OF PARADISE

Published in 61:3/4

We were created to live in Paradise, and Paradise was designed to serve us. Our designation has been changed; we are not told whether this has happened to Paradise as well.

—Kafka

Coming down, spreading water over its flanks, wetting and melting any doubts that Earth itself is having sex between particles of dust, sparkles of light on waves between hulls bobbing on the lake, one continuous stream down through the pipes and out the showerhead, we say—*What a day*—when it includes everything including night.

If anyone doubts that paradise is sex let them do it again as many times as they need.

Counting how many partake at any given moment will not change the fact that everything is for sex occurring everywhere as wholesale existence. You might have an image of it, but like images of yourself, all the zillions of confetti-sized rips do not cohere. Water is doing it by spreading and wetting, technically called *insemination by flow*, flowers do it by air—the petals' dry licks sticking out in the blue.

Flying in tandem slips it into her abdomen now together skimming the heated pond. When it heats up insects surge. Wings spread, eggs one after another coming down the tube like getting into position, hearing the word *cricket* and imagining you're one doing it. *Of one mind* we say, meaning—

knowing without touching the total system.

Spreading, cupped, one joins the other front to back, or a long thin leg used for inserting. There might be a rope of mucus to slide down. The two entwine and fan out twirling in midair or floating one links arms and propels her around with his long flat tail the way tailgating may be regarded as an invitation to anal sex.

Coming down the lawn the mower and blower—can the two harmonize? Paradise has been divided up evenly among every living thing for all time in the form of flowering. Don't need to be aroused to know this, in fact feelings cover it like packaging without ever affecting the bud. You know ripening is simultaneously withering like you know your bladder's full though you sit there pinned to the chair as the other holds forth about grilling.

I'm not talking about getting ahead, rather overflowing *manmade* bounds.

Put the leaf segment on the sphagnum moss to multiply, stick the passionflower stick in dirt to sprout. Propagators are giddy doing it out back as humans are made undercover, earth matter and fixative turning with everything at just the right temp then—WAAA—a new parcel of paradise.

Smells her before seeing her sunning on the water lily. Warm thigh against thigh like honey wine. Check the anchor, spit, thinking, from a species perspective may I do it with you? Coming downstairs on stick legs, a vague expression—*I'm going in*—having applied her bikini.

Nonstop like a staghound on the prowl never stops to look at a clock.

Long shadows in the garden when a belly plant wanders off never to return. Girls leaping about the beds find a banana slug and pull in to kiss it, making sure lips touch. You might use the word *desire* for *hunger* but only hunger clarifies, from the Lithuanian word *kanka* meaning torture.

Old couples relaxing on lawn chairs discussing steaks of former times. There are those who view sex as a steak hanging off a plate, nevertheless that's seeing steak as sustenance. There are those who see sex as exercise though never formalize it as such, the same way those who see it as lilies never do it with lilies.

It's not about marriage or even arranging facts to favor one thing over another.

When air dampens, come out from under the loam, head down to the water. A frog listens, notes his sisters' singing and swims for the unknown song right in the middle of the known song like *bombs bursting in air*.

WONG MAY

YOU WOULD SAY SO

Published in 61:2

As she lay dying  
I could be on the Moon.

Mind you  
That would apply to anyone dying.

You & I shall live

Till supine

We rejoin  
The Great Enterprise

Of this UnComprehending World  
To which

Peaceable or not  
We do belong.

Though in her case  
    The scream went from  
The body  
    Went on  
Housebreaking

    Smashed the face in  
Into myriad  
    Crescents  
    The Moon that she was

In the splendid neighbourhood  
Of her passing.

I wasn't on Earth.  
How could I see or hear her

How was I to know?  
Craven, yes, like a dog  
One ends up seeing anyway.

Some of us were put on Earth for such.  
Seeing & partial seeing.

Or so I heard  
Often at other people's expense.

Though Nature shudders at the occlusion.  
Held in the eclipse  
As a shrewmouse by a falcon.  
Was I there?  
The Moon that was her person  
Dark in the palliated ward

Dark but where the eyes swim  
Effulgent

—Crescents all sorts  
In, as they say  
“an access of rage.”

Tears  
sur

f a c e d

In more places  
Than I can follow





FRIEDERIKE MAYRÖCKER  
Translated by Donna Stonecipher

from ÉTUDES  
Published in 60:2

“études” early vernal decay deforested chestnut branches in grass sweet  
grass sticky chestnut buds while sm. shako made of folded newspaper,  
The Horae, by Schiller 1 dark  
voice sounds from the back of the car, The Horae, by Schiller, moon  
and stars silver stitched = embroidered and back then Mama her  
HANDKERCHIEF stuffed into her décolleté namely recollection of  
1 stuffing of handkerchief stitched with sun and moon &c. into  
her cleavage: “ivy monograms” Jean Genet, a sort of niche so she  
wouldn’t misplace it mislay it, ach 1 stitched snuffed into her bosom  
snuffed handkerchief so she always had it to hand &c. alias the  
Virgin of Mercy ..... the  
night sky stitched with sun and moon = embroidered, early vernal  
decay in the glass underbrush in the flowerpot &c., afterglows sinking  
in cities handheld fans of rosée oleander flower, death carrying a torch  
the eye of the pansy sewn up ..... cunning  
girls oh mock-orange     oh  
protégée

for C. F.  
5/3/11

this branchlet of piano practice (“étude”) branchlet practice (“étude”) and how  
M. Th. K. rushed on ahead through the darkness of campus namely at night  
back then at night once again not wanting to be intruded upon the light  
of morning versus the lark : locks in my eyes I mean the eye  
shading shadowing with lark: locks (strands) of the nighttime  
lark : locks versus the lily of the valley’s bells sounding the morning  
bells which I with darkened lark : locks darkening versus  
the voice of my beloved echoing in my heart once more eye  
of the beloved beckoning versus the lily of the valley’s scent baring  
shoulder and nape to me (whose glasses slipping to the floor with  
a gust / little corner of the sideboard &c.) the pansy’s kisses in the morning’s  
foliage versus the lilac’s puffs of breath namely “the  
lilac goes to my head . . .” &c., versus I sleep in the midst of re-  
fuse / animals, rhetoric of the evening bells, in the springtime namely in  
his CLOGS walks on I hear him walking in his wooden  
pattens narcotic florilegium versus rainbow-opalescent  
bolt ach death’s blink of an eye versus  
gullet : endlessly droning writings, il tempo namely radishes, time  
versus in the light-blue kimono heavens white fluff fancy downy feather of  
little cloud already disembodied . . . . . am thunder-  
struck oh murky mignonette green versus repeatedly I scamper at night  
to the crucifixion glimpse colossal  
facial features in the nighttime vestibule mirror versus  
puff of wind (mignon) &c., sm. shako tatterlets of resignation

5/5/11

practice cahiers practice in the exercise books  
of as in of flowers nature or name “and the best-loved  
live near, languishing on the most separate mountains,” Hölderlin, pro-  
tégée namely I irrigated the loose plum tree. Littered  
with Alpine roses (Mother’s favorite), chamomile—sm. shako’s  
tatterlets of resignation, that is, mignonette : murky yellowish green  
of the morning  
hush, the “ivy monograms,” Jean Genet..... drove  
death from bushes, laced up snowshoes, found  
bread crumb in snowshoe — practice cahiers practice in the exercise books  
wafting études magnolias rain études, raindrop  
kisses, thawing heavens, I want to walk in roaring gardens  
burning gardens with you &c. NO death transfiguration perdition  
no decease no good-bye no unison — ach lineament of  
birch grove little white violet : practice cahiers practice in exercise books :  
nightly death knell : slough : sm. standing water (photographed  
by B. S.) sm. standing water deep grotto, behind tree trunks  
barbed-wire roses switches lianas percussions, Her Highness’s penny-  
wort, after deep sleep this crying and imploring  
forest island of blossoms and birds ..... what  
I did with the thorny underbrush ..... here lilac blossoms  
extinguished (in a gust of wind)

5/7/11

PAMELA LU

## INTERMUSEMENT 6

Published in 43:2

“not that they’ve killed,  
but that the killing  
was so easy”

in order to have feelings for an event,  
she needs details—

a direct intelligence

of “what happened, and where, else  
why bother?” these things

happen,  
independent,  
(all at once) they’re

“boring, and in spite of outrage”

consider her feelings. serene and otherwise

measured, she takes stock.

there’s a standard for every situation.

that  
“X was a tragedy”

or  
“Y a desperate attempt to neutralize western history”

proves that commitment is optional.  
her feelings could be designated

to suppress the event.

“the event, which never  
dramatizes, but presents  
itself as habit”

these are the forms and pleasures of communication. everywhere

recognizing itself as  
“something to be admired”

so daily life is aesthetic. synchronized.

“in neighborhoods with more trees,  
fewer crimes happen”

(she stops, raises  
her arm with  
a gesture that’s  
“efficient”)

meanwhile, we can examine general trends:

in the open street, many people  
“try not to look at you”

buildings are designed to reflect city light, to evoke “sympathy”

(at any rate, a first-class event)

there’s just something grand about human expression.

the purpose, variety, and all that feeling!

“But to a more sensitive soul

the effect of colors is deeper  
and intensely moving.”

in this case, precision is not as important  
as overall fit

“I have tried to express the terrible  
passions of humanity by means of red and green”

on some days  
she finds this far too easy.

“with the axe tucked under  
one arm he pulls on his red coat”

(rushing into snow, deliberately)

“and afterwards, she  
returned to daily  
life, nothing, it seemed  
was particularly different”

ELEY WILLIAMS

## Cuvier's Feather

Published in 62:1/2/3

Adding a dash of lilac chalk to your cheekbone will make you seem ten times kinder. I generally prefer to use pencil to pastel for courtroom sketches but then there are levels of softness and swiftness to consider. I certainly tend to pick the softer grades of lead. My hands are always shiny with graphite by lunchtime and after a full day in court I am used to finding Batman masks of carbon absentmindedly rubbed across my eyes.

It is understood that there is enough carbon in the average human body to fill over 900 pencils. The draft form of John Steinbeck's novel *East of Eden* is reported to have required 300 pencils to complete (according to biographies he favoured the Blackwing 602 brand: "Half the pressure, twice the speed"). These two facts always hit me in tandem when sketching my cast of lawyers, defendants, and judges: there is the equivalent of three heavy-handed, best-selling books in every average adult human.

I blow across my chalk pastel picture of you, accidentally harrumphing purple powder over a nearby lawyer's suit.

In your email, you described our first proper face-to-face meeting specifically as a *blind date* so of course within the hour my laptop had grown hot as I busied myself researching your details. Did you know that you share a name with a dentist in Wisconsin? A dentist with big red glasses and a big red dog. The dog is called Astor. According to Image Search, dog, glasses, and dentist pose regularly together in the dental practice's car park. I checked some dictionaries to see whether "car park" was one word or two because, really, who can say, and then an unfortunate mistype and sheer curiosity led me to check whether "carp arks" exist. It's all too easy to follow up details in a persistently blinkered way like this when idly browsing; by two o'clock in the morning I had steeled myself to the task at hand, however, and tapped your name once more into the search field. You were the eighth result.



Some flattering crosshatching will make your hair seem so much thicker, so I really go to town on you.

“And what do you do?” is the way most people phrase the question. I always reply that I am a journalist and add “but really more of an artist at heart.” After delivering that line, people attempt to strike a balance between polite coos of interest and a *you-pompous-tosser* rolling of eyes, which generally indicates how the night will proceed. If I say directly that I’m a courtroom artist, inevitably the other person just wants to know about any famous cases I have observed and then either make puns about finishing quickly or ask for their portrait to be jotted on a napkin right there at the table. In reality I’m not quite an illustrator, not quite an eyewitness, and galleries have little time for my portfolio: to claim I’m a journalist with pretensions makes things a little easier for me and harder for others to track me down.

On the evening of our meeting I had run from the Old Bailey so that I would have a chance of getting to the pub before you arrived. Rushing like this, my day’s final sketch had been hasty, pretty sloppy: I admit I didn’t bother drawing the defendant’s unpleasant paisley tie or the judge’s earrings. Skipping those kinds of particulars always plays on my mind afterwards but at the time it had seemed more important for me to secure a table. I arrived about ten minutes early and chose a place by the bar. My choice was not a good one: not only was it right under an amplified speaker, one that made a point of reminding me in blaring tones as I sat down that EVERY NOW AND THEN I FALL APART, but the seats were surrounded by reflective surfaces. My pencil-daubed, pastel-thumbed face blinked back at me from the bend of other tables’ wineglasses, the polished copper tabletop, the fake horse brasses hanging over the fake fireplace. I couldn’t risk going to the bathroom and missing your coming through the door so I ground the heel of my hand across my nose and hoped for the best. I would have to meet you in Impressionist mode.

Later in the evening I remember that I watched you overdo the Tabasco in your tomato juice but did not at the time think it was my place to comment.

Just now on the road adjacent to court, a passing siren started up and caused all of us courtroom artists to jump about a foot in the air. I glanced at my neighbour’s current sketch: his drawing hand had jolted against the page and now the judge has an accidental

bright yellow unicorn horn. Here's something you might not know: in American courts, where I trained, sketchers can draw during the actual court proceedings, but here we have to memorise every aspect of the scene then scamper en masse once the session is adjourned to this mossy paved yard and set it all down. Memorising details and sketching beyond the courtroom walls offers the opportunity to exercise a certain amount of improvisation: for example, a good-looking defendant who winks at me on the way out will have the cut of her suit improved in my drawing, while a juror who elbows rudely past will appear on paper with an obvious stripe of ankle showing between his sock and trouser leg. Speed is of the essence in sketching so that our final works can be photographed and whisked off to the studio or print room as soon as possible. The nature of this job has prepared me to work well under pressure and to commit visual details to my short-term memory very quickly. It's all about coming up with easily memorable corresponding imagery. We are all fascinating and ugly when assessed detail by detail.

This is how I memorised your parts that evening in the pub:

- **Dimples** – parenthetical
- **Forehead** – the villain's bull terrier in *Oliver!*
- **Freckles on your forearm** – sleet rather than a blizzard
- **Eyelashes** – ski-jump
- **Mouth** – Holly Hunter; Justin Theroux; my mother would say it was cruel; ballot-box tick marks on ClipArt
- **Angle of chin to neck** – egrets; Modigliani
- **Nose** – crumplable; Harold Loeb
- **Gestures used when describing the recent rain** – Windows 98 manicure cursor; Verrocchio's *Christ and St. Thomas*

Falling somewhere between compiling a blazon and consulting a Rolodex, this appraisal took less than a second. I used to have a friend who was interested in my way of disassembling people's features in order to remember them; she asked me once to list her details according to this method and sat patiently through my rundown of her face and proportions only to complain at the end that I had made her sound like an exploded lost property department. She then used the word *sparagmos* while ruffling my hair. I have not had time to look

up its meaning but I like the sound of it. We lost touch after I broke her arm that time by the river.

A correction to my previous statement: it takes three heavy-handed, best-selling novels to make an average adult human in draft form.

I really am very sorry about the way that I left you in the morning, stealing from your house first thing on a Tuesday without waking you. The train was full of people either on their way to an early shift or sheepishly adjusting their clothing and trying not to throw up. In Waterloo station there's a large clock that I always walk directly underneath and for some reason that day I imagined what would happen if it came loose of its fittings and fell on top of me. In a montage I must have seen in some childhood cartoon, as it would make contact with the station floor I knew that the chimes in the clock's belly would sound "When Will You Pay Me?" from the "Oranges and Lemons" skipping song. Only my hands and feet would be visible under the upturned clockface, sticking out at two o'clock, four o'clock, seven o'clock, and ten o'clock positions. I pulled at my collar.

When I implied I was a journalist that evening, you had said that you were a professional dog walker. Earlier that day I had watched you leaving your office on the Strand in a sharp suit with some clients buzzing around you like flies around meat, but at the time I made it clear from my body language that I had not picked up on your lie. I gave that impression, imply implied. You certainly hadn't picked up on my lies and the evening progressed genially, easily. You added more Tabasco to your glass while I arranged my smile to its best effect and mentally amended your **Angle of chin to neck** to being "Modigliani, but better."

I suspect the need for my job will disappear in a few years, given advances in CCTV and recording software. It's mad in a way that we aren't obsolete already: a dying breed, unnoticed crayon jockeys with our vaudeville Memory Man skills. In the small outside space by the court where the competing artists scribble away at our canvases in the moments, borrowing each other's erasers and fixatives and mounting our easels for the photographers, the waiting journalists and cameramen treat me as if I was a quaint hangover from another century. They make sure when they shake my hand that my fingers are

clean, not wanting pastel residue to clog their Dictaphones or occlude to their lapels. My profession means that one becomes acutely aware of the rhetoric of dress and posture. That's how I knew from the offset that you were keen on me just from the frequency of hands-to-hair gestures you made in the first five minutes.

Through habit rather than inclination, memories always occur to me as tableaux and frame-by-frame moments rather than as fluid events. That evening in the pub, for example, the devil was in the details and the angel in the angles of your hand on the hot sauce and the botched chiaroscuro of my smudged face; later, a series of images where your mouth became larger and brighter as it drew closer to mine, then, later still, the morning after, the standout picture I take away is of me with my back bent, shutting your front door so slowly and trying not to make a sound. Just now in court I was transfixed by the way the light streamed through the window and became stunted against your cheek as you took the stand.

Of course, it wasn't really you up there in the dock—just someone who looked very much like you. That hardly matters. It's you I'm putting in the picture.

I don't really listen to cases once they are in session because I'm too busy memorising the details of the environment. Sitting through as many hearings and arraignments as I do, one soon realises just how much people shake and the different ways that nervousness or fear betrays itself in a face. I admit that I prefer those scenes to the ones that end with everyone smiling and relaxing in relief or satisfaction: those hardly make for interesting drawings. Everyone always looks like they've slept badly. If I was entirely honest in my drawings, I would run out of blue pastels for the shadows beneath everybody's eyes: I'd run out of blue for the eyelids first, then white for all the hands twisting themselves into blurred, worried polygons in pinstriped laps.

It's not that you have been on my mind particularly, you understand. The person in the dock really just did look a hell of a lot like you.

There are as many fads, regional differences, coteries, and schools in the courtroom-sketching world as with any other. I read an article recently which claimed New York courts favour pastels while California prefers watercolours. I am jealous of American courtroom artists because they get to use a lot more orange on account of the

jumpsuits; my Faber-Castell Polychromos Tangerine 111 is the most underused pastel in the box. We are all familiar with the limited vocabulary employed by the media to report those people who stand accused in court: “smirked” is a popular verb, as are the phrases “hung their head” or “dropped their head into their hands,” both of which I always feel imply that the writer is trying to hint at a guilty verdict, at guillotines or gibbets. So too my pencil- and pastel-led fingers have grown used to describing faces with shortcuts, and every day it feels as if I’m reproducing the same upthrust chin, the same lowered brow. People can be such boringly predictable composites after a while.

I used to do caricatures for tourists in Leicester Square. It’s a powerful place to be, behind a notepad. The friend I mentioned before—the *sparagmos* friend—told me after too much wine that she thought drawing a cruel caricature was like writing a cruel love letter, where the simplest x-shaped abrasion of lead against paper could ruin a person’s confidence. I liked that. She said that for both art forms even the blankest looks are busy with ink and that the wrong line in the wrong place can change a person’s life. It is hard sometimes to not fall back into a caricaturist’s fun grotesques during my current day-to-day. When I got this courtroom gig, I began collecting an album of serial killers’ portraits, I suppose in order to try and see whether I could detect any correlation or make an amateur phrenology of mug shots and find a cheat code for sketching criminals. The exercise was pointless, of course, and I now use that album to prop up my wobbly desk.

A few years ago a barrister’s wife bought one of my drawings as an anniversary gift. In the picture the barrister was standing, finger raised, during a murder case. Whenever I meet him in a corridor he tells me that the drawing has been framed and hangs above their refrigerator.

Sometimes I visit museums and sketch the people there, those engrossed in the exhibits as well as the bored: there is a whole canon of beauty and guilt before you hit the gift shop. I practice on the Underground too, where, just as in court, nobody meets anyone else’s eyes unless seeking to prove a point. If you spooled a line of wool along each commuter’s line of sight, plenty of threads would meet but few of them would tangle. I stare at my carriage mates for a whole revolution of the Circle line then spend the next three stops trying to

get as many faces as I can down onto paper as accurately as possible. It's good training. Sometimes I guess my subject's occupations from their dress along with what kind of house they might live in or whether they are married. Little things. Occasionally I follow a few home to see whether I was right, and for the most part I am. You, in fact, were the first person to notice that I was tailing you from the tube stop. I was prepared and so when you turned around I had my story and props ready. I held up my wallet: *I thought I had seen it fall out of your bag at the corner there, No?, How embarrassing, I'd better hand it in, Do you know where the nearest—, So you live around here?, A lovely area, No, a bit further west, Know any good places to catch a drink sometime? Here's my email* and so on and so forth.

It's crucial that nobody ever spots you, lest they start acting up. Keep your head down but take it all in: good advice for life and courtroom artists the world over.

One of the private kicks I get from my job is making embellishments. Look: I'm adding the little badge you wore in the pub to this picture. It's usually cases that have the least media interest that afford the time to indulge myself, to include things like a doodled spider under a table or the crest on a water bottle label. A recent tough assignment involved a man who was accused of human trafficking: he had tattoos all over his face, throat, and hands. The temptation to just jot down an approximation of a chintzy Willow pattern was overwhelming. I hated and loved him for the complexity of it.

The shadows that fell under the microphones looked like stretched speech-marks as the almost-you answered the prosecutor's questions. The curlicues and flicks of the judge's wig became engrossing landscapes. You can always count on me to catch the details of a courtroom's stained glass windows, or of an evening, a morning, of pub carpets with their complexities and tessellations. Earlier today, you—the person that looks so much like you—wore red in court. A good move. Red comes across as competitive, puts people in mind of Manchester United, British Lions, Ferrari.

You look best in profile and so that is how I'll draw you up today.

I remember that you had doubled up with laughter at my bad jokes like origami was going out of fashion. By the first drink I knew this would be easy; by the third round I thought it was time to ask you because your hand was near your ear and I knew you would agree; by

the twelfth unnecessary vowel of the query, I realised that I needed you to say yes. The adverts on the tube as we made our way back to yours all seemed to be requesting small acts of kindness to be paid to save the bee population, or donkeys, or small Syrian children because it's only three pounds and you're texting anyway.

I checked my inbox a little tentatively a couple of days after our meeting but there had been only one new message. It was not from you. I had bought a pair of sunglasses and the company signed their emailed receipt with "Lots of love."

I'm including your portrait in this courtroom scene and, honestly, for a fifteen-minute job it's one of my very best. You'd love it if you ever saw it: you look just great, really confident: the line of your shoulders and your jawline convey that you're assured, *no flies on me*. I've drawn you sitting slightly taller in your chair than is strictly accurate too, but who will pick up on that? In the same way a newspaper editor will not question whether their crossword compiler is making up answers to the clues that have been set, who at the time will nitpick my pen strokes? It seemed like a fairly big case, so I imagine your head and shoulders will pop up beneath headlines that are meant for somebody else on a breakfast table near you quite soon, or be handed to you in the free newspapers on your way to work. Thank you for all the details: your hand on the glass, your name, your apartment number, the catalogue of errors in the angles as we sat across from one another amongst all those reflective surfaces. It is quite flattering, and unmistakably you. Something not to frame, but something to show that you were seen.

LISA JARNOT

EVERY BODY'S BACON

Published in 58:1

*Eating the carrots*

*I'm happy like this*

*I don't wear underwear*

*I love pizza*

I think about guppies all the time

pale fawn fluff of these first winter beans  
of george the fifth's one thousand pheasants  
of those morning glories those peach trees  
those rain storms and those floods

of the sangha the dharma the buddha  
and of edward over there,

*not a gibbon, not a gorilla,*

just a new moon waxing

squiggly and recalitrant



where *the sun is getting up, so up yours—*  
*it's not a tiger, it's a sea otter*     *a mosquito that goes tra la la*     a ravioli satire gate,

a leaping squirrel on cedar hill     the taxi, sparrow, kitten

poor night owl

white snake root—

a cat's empty bowl places the stars in the sky.

I'm a quiet drunk, a timid bicyclist, a decent gardener,  
*I'm a mama dressed up like a papa,*  
 an orning mug, a hungry bud,  
 a hypoeptic nodule of occult origin

I display nine reservations about the sprawling metropolis

*can you believe that the sun has eyes*

that ted is gone,

that harry's not here,

that pierre was pulled from the paper pile

*can you believe that this is a beautiful house*

*it has toys and butterflies, and cups—*

*you call nester, I'm going to dance,*

poor half moon in the sky

fearless and joyful

*with monks not monkeys*

into the eve of a picnic of trees  
of the strawberry rugelot rabbit tyrone

sahashra enzo rust in an otter box of solstice coot, *look at that beautiful child glowing in the night*, for small art, for saxon churches, defiant lightness, take a restless optimism, a wanky thing, and peale's mastodon, find the train to cockfosters, the hearth smoke, the bread, the nettles, the starlings eating puke, take the sock poet, for example, that other smashed pine cone, those three kings' camels, the word "malvas" in a dream; remember dave's wang, an abner's ashes, and paul revere

In the war I have made a celestial cave, a big womble, a liverpool wappingen picture, an annual guide to jewish genetic disease,

in the war I have made a fem pop ass crack cancer of the whole rabbit coming, of the crackles in the ramble at the rabbi's house,

*say pancakes, carrots, and nutcases,*  
pink chimp pansies,  
*a massalining hoco,*

greet the first autonomous art of the equinox    easter broccoli aphids rise    to a mouse that tastes like art  
starting to enjoy doing nothing    sitwell, edith,    the desiccated pussy of,

*come sleep on this big hippo,    all over him*

*write silly gilly gumball,*

*be not in the mood of crab,*

*not in the mood of octopus,*

*not in the mood of avocado,*

of starlings in flight (in a dream)

with the chickens

they have made

a celestial cave,

with dr. bragg's anubis,

with corn, oars, honey,

and the door,

write silly gilly gumball,

*a chamomile bluejay*

and lactose intolerant neanderthals

to wash it with toast, the chillingly dark song of a hero ed park tree hest stick conkle salami pirate vessel—I  
*see their little lanterns, I say their little slither, I like tripping so rainbows come out of my mouth I'm pregnant with  
guinea pigs and hamsters and trees,*

and when the honey rises,

they make honey shoes,

a wilkinson wallachia that causes all the meows,

I will line up in the sentence, merrily, cross-fire, *when I was big like I am*, I see “montage” for “mortgage,” a cigarette, roses, and poop, “Jamaica” for “Judaism,” *a bank robert* in spitzer’s walnut room,

I see the coronal ejection mass of the helleborism of the ancients, of my bird fred, of henry needham, carpenter, of petrunkus the frog, the premier posek of a generation

I will line up in the sentence of this lonely vehiculate, a day leaning toward evening, a midsummer cacophony of peaches, hydrangeas, and bees,

a vanya, oh,

an anca tudor,

a princess magic presto spell.

A. R. AMMONS

HERE IT IS MAY

Published in 57:1/2

Here it is May 8 and last night frost  
re-shingled the garage, a re-shingling  
the sun is now going to all the trouble

to lay unshinglings of thaw across, the whole  
beginning to discolor green: if I am a  
creep, I am a nervous creep: I flip and

flap, shiver and jerk like clothes  
on a gallows:

in the small walks & chasms

of despair, one seeks to find and  
pretends to build enledgments to  
plateaus of staying and view: but

these, unfound, pretended, become high  
lake surfaces of chagrin, false, of  
course, in themselves but, worse, too

brilliant for common use: to be small,  
common, to eye the groundfloor, every  
surprise free of expectation's wrath:

to throw down the boulders and precipices  
of significance and move in the chancy  
littleness of a thousand delights:

this ribbon doesn't seem very dark to  
be new: they don't put much ink in  
them these days or weave: my keys

bitch them up: rags rip off  
leaving endless vacancy:  
  in the wild

one's ears would be covered and  
one wonders if the fineness,  
translucence, of the shells does

not assume shade: for look how  
the encrustations of skin cancer  
form scabs behind the modern, naked

ear: this perception raises my  
attraction to the mode "hair" another  
notch: some of the curvatures sway

deeply in our natures as close  
adjustments to the outside unfailing:  
we break arcs when we move abruptly

into difference: fruit, shade, sun,  
rain, vine, berry—these have schooled  
us lengthily:

  but it is Mother's  
Day, and we must be off to cancel our  
reservation by showing up



W. S. GRAHAM

[LET US SAY WE ALMOST SEE OURSELVES]

Published in 62:1/2/3

Let us say we almost see ourselves  
Across this half mile of morning  
Loch. There is nobody else here.

If a man looked out of the hazel  
Over the bracken up behind me  
He would see me, a man standing  
Small on the loch's edge beside  
A skiff with his hand on the bow.

I stand with one foot in the loch  
And see the white speckle of your farm  
With all you do that I love in it.

I don't know whether it is only you  
I want or a life that is not me  
I want to row this skiff over for.

This is a real loch and there is nothing  
To reply if I asked. Further along  
The oyster-catching shore I can  
Get a drink. Shall I do that  
And not come over? We almost  
I hope see ourselves across.

And I have pushed the skiff out  
In one slow glide across the weeds.  
Are you there are you there are you there  
I have learned the language in my way.

I lean back on the oars of wanting  
Sending the whirlpools from the blades  
Behind me to find to find.

[THERE ARE VARIOUS WAYS TO TRY TO SPEAK]

There are various ways to try to speak  
And this is one. Cousin Brigit,  
Sit steady. Keep us trim,  
And I will pull us out over  
The early morning firth between  
Greenock and Kilcreggan. We must  
Move easily not distorting  
The language from its natural song.

Let us proceed letting it not  
Be thought we want to speak or hear  
Too much. The softly feathered blades  
Drip on the oily slow water.

I suppose I can speak anyway.  
Someone will hear. And yet  
If it doesn't mean something  
To someone, I won't be speaking.

If I could tell you about the feathered blades  
Sprinkling the oily firth, my home waters.  
I had my Cousin Brigit sitting there  
Keeping us trim in our doubtful skiff moving  
From Kilcreggan towards Greenock at my back.  
This is early. Arran's sleeping warrior  
Still lies unprofiled on his western couch.

[IT IS TIME TO GO. THE HARBOUR]

It is time to go. The harbour  
Chimes again. With my bad  
Leg I push off against  
The barnacles of the wall.  
And the greasy space of the water  
Widens. Hello, Hello,  
You, not coming with us,  
Throw me the end of your tether.

[THE TRUTH IS THERE IS NOTHING HERE]

The truth is there is nothing here  
For me, Brigit, Cousin Brigit.  
Come with me and I'll bend my back  
And pull the blades and take you out  
On those waters between Greenock  
And Kilcreggan. I see the early  
Morning waters of a great firth  
Disturbed by our little wood  
Bow and the whirling small pools  
Go from the oars as they feather.  
So we are moving, moving over  
The sea, the great ventriloquist  
Who will say something, make a place  
Which is in some way Greenock.

Let us have some easy not  
Love but affection between us.  
I mean you and you and me.  
For I have to do the stuff.  
I was not aiming at this and this  
Is why the texture which you rub  
Against is sharkskin of your kin.

TOMAŽ ŠALAMUN

Translated by Michael Thomas Taren and the author

YAHWEH SWALLOWED THREE LETTERS,  
BETWEEN I AND I AND E

Published in 54:4

To walk on the air is round and virile.  
To tremble near coffee and smear one's eyes.

First knock on the dog's door. The door  
will open. First pick up yellow flowers

in the middle. These are nets. This is  
Sunday. This is a monkey climbing upstairs

with a paw of expectation. To compare  
flaps with tubes' knees. Wrong. To measure

class relations with a turning cap. Mama,  
it's seven thirty. The tomb opens again. I know

what's coming, autumn and then storm.  
We're used to drunken gravediggers. Every

gravedigger has his own seal. There are idyllic  
ascensions in the becks, therefore i, i, e.

ROBERT WALSER

Translated by Susan Bernofsky

*from The Robber*

Published in 45:3/4

I don't know what time of day it was or what sort of mood prevailed as the Robber ran down a flight of steps furnished with a roof. His steps were winged and rang hollowly, so to speak, though we doubt this is the right word, on the wooden steps, but this doesn't stop us from saying he just gave carnations to a woman dressed all in black because he'd seen her go into a florist's shop. The gift didn't cost great sums. His legs carried him all the better for it. He possessed a splendid pair of legs, and with these excellent pins he now entered a schoolhouse so as to present himself at the polling place as a member of the supervisory committee and discharge his duties, which lasted two hours. One voter after the other stepped cautiously, as it were, into the room, placed his ballot in the box, spoke a few words to the committee head and departed. This all proceeded quite comprehensibly, and when the Robber was released from service he made his way across a bridge. We have several of these here, and he asked a public official for permission to leap about freely in a wooded area that constitutes a sort of park for the citizenry. "If you aren't too exuberant, but rather show moderation in your conduct, no objections need be made to your wishes," was the reply, and so the Robber now vaulted over, say, the backs of benches for amusement and to strengthen his limbs. Beneath overhanging foliage stood an ancient stone coat of arms. Above this, a villa district stretched across a hillside with its straight avenues. Here dwelt an affluent woman who, the Robber had heard, always snapped at all her servants, but only because she had a husband who discharged, that is expended his energies abroad without stopping to consider what his wife might think of this. Thanks to the indisposedness of her excellent spouse, this beautiful and kindhearted woman had a sullen cast to her lips, which, incidentally, was quite becoming. She saw herself perhaps a bit too tragically. —That's how it is for many people: finding themselves

displeased, they allow this ounce of displeasure to put them more and more out of sorts, as though they were being borne off in a coach. A person needn't find himself insufferable just because he happens, on some occasion, not to be in good spirits. There's no cause to hate oneself just because one's been, perhaps, a bit hateful. But, alas, this sometimes happens, which is perfectly stupid. One should make an effort not to see just the wickedness in what is wicked, but its beauty as well, for it *is* beautiful, far, far more beautiful than some dull, friendly face sitting for its photograph, which in itself lacks all value, as it bears witness to a lack of experience. On the fringe of this villa district stands a vestige of forest that actually doesn't look vestigial at all, but has quite a few trunks and depths to show for itself. The Robber now came to a house that was no longer present, or, to say it better, to an old house that had been demolished on account of its age and now no longer stood there, inasmuch as it had ceased to make itself noticed. He came, then, in short, to a place where, in former days, a house had stood. These detours I'm making serve the end of filling time, for I really must pull off a book of considerable length, otherwise I'll be even more deeply despised than I am now. Things can't possibly go on like this. Local men of the world call me a simpleton because novels don't tumble out of my pockets. One road led to the next, and so he passed the Public Health Bureau in which numerous officials pushed their pens around industriously in the interests of the population's health. Former dragoon barracks now served as a museum devoted to schools. Above this building stood the university, surrounded by parks designed by an uncle of the Robber who had spent long years on the Mississippi, where he became a landscape architect. Here, high above the treetops, stood a pavilion which offered an excellent view in all directions and from which one could gaze down upon a pretty sight: a church in the Baroque style standing large, quiet, noble, shapely, beautiful, dainty, massive, inviting and unapproachable beside the train station. In the station's main hall the crowd grew more and more colorful. Trains rolled in, others rolled off, bootblacks blacked the boots offered up to them by people who took all this for granted, paperboys hawked papers, porters loitered about. Travelers with briefcases in their hands stood out among servicemen topped with serviceman's caps, doors were thrust open and slammed shut, tickets requested and dispensed at ticket counters, and hawkers and

hawkeresses consumed plates of soup in the restaurant where the Robber once treated an unemployed person to a sausage. Perhaps we'll return to this later. Next to hotels stood department stores, then followed perhaps a bookshop connected to a publishing house which treated its authors with the utmost care and restraint, in that its director advised against importunity, saying: "Maybe things will look up later." Authors tend to show publishers a sort of reverent contempt, a mix of sentiments that meets with wholehearted approval. Further on came, let's say, shops for bathroom fixtures and store windows containing mountains of stockings, and then of course there was the square before that church with the façade that bellied out just a little, which was markedly effective from an architectural standpoint. The upper windows were set a trifle back from the street, while the lower ones jutted forward. There was something reposeful, solid, phlegmatic about this. The house resembled a distinguished gentleman with a bit of a paunch. Then he came to a broad promenade lined with chestnut trees where one could "crown-prince" along. By this the Robber meant leaping from one stone base to the next. These bases supported benches upon which the weary could rest, or knitting women, or children who swept together little piles of sand, and the pigeons and other birds pecked up whatever they could find or what was offered them in an outstretched hand. There was something songlike about the high church windows with their multi-colored streams of light, and often, too, the organ's peals burst forth from the ceremonious interior into the outside world, and then the Robber stood once more before an art gallery and resolved never to read anything again, but all the same he did read this and that on occasion. And then he encountered yet again that one-armed individual, a sort of local celebrity. Once he had enthusiastically greeted here a stenographer who swayed softly as she walked. A mother complained she was neglected by her son, and a son informed him of his longing for the loving care of his mother, who had no time for him, and the sons of the *beau monde* strolled along before him, and all the daughters of the finest walks of life soared up and down the arch of existence, and now there appeared that man he had once heard saying with great attentiveness to his wife: "You barnyard sow," and an elderly woman possessed only half a nose, but haven't there been museum directors half of whose faces were gradually crumbling, and don't there exist morning-edition editors



with innumerable similarities to monarchs? Once he went up to the top of the church tower and for a bit of small change was shown the enormous bells that rang down into his room on Sundays. A priest once invited him to climb up into the pulpit, and the Robber accepted this invitation.

§

Since I've been puffing myself up in the just-erected last section, which might possibly scare off a reader or two, I shall now calm and quiet down, and make myself wee as a thimble. The genuinely strong don't make a show of their strength. That's prettily said, don't you think? And now, in a public gathering place, a virtuous husband sat with another woman and wanted the Robber to see him. See him the Robber did, but the virtuous husband failed to see this. He who would so dearly have liked to be observed thought, to his chagrin, he'd gone unnoticed, and he'd so been looking forward to this notice. Here, for the very first time in his existence, this virtuous husband was being a rake. In spades. So he'd have been terribly pleased to have his acquaintance, the Robber, admire him. But the only thing on the Robber's mind was how he himself might become a virtuous husband. To the waitress he posed the question: "In your opinion, might I still be worthy of a woman's hand?" The girl replied: "For goodness, sake, why ever not? You're always so sweet." And this edifying response plunged the Robber into the deepest joy, and while he was busy being plunged into bliss because he might still have a chance to become virtuous, the virtuous husband on his rendezvous found himself overwhelmingly neglected by the Robber's attentions. He would so gladly have shone a little before his friend, the Robber, at the side of his inamorata, in fact there was no one he'd rather have shown off to. The Robber would have thought: "His poor, virtuous wife, he's left her at home all by herself, and here he sits amusing himself." The Robber would have thought of the virtuous husband: "What a scoundrel he is." Honest folk always wish to be seen as scoundrels, for any slob can be honest. In fact, being deemed honest is quite simply a disgrace. So here was this virtuous husband behaving in a splendidly scoundrelly fashion, and no one even noticed. Wasn't that nasty of the Robber, wishing to become virtuous like that? The virtuous husband could see these

matrimonial aspirations just by looking at him, and this filled him with wrath. Ignoring a Casanova! Was it impertinence or stupidity? And when the Robber turned around to glance at the Casanova-playing virtuous husband, he was gone. Apparently he'd been unable to endure the lack of appreciation. And the Robber, who had innumerable wicked deeds behind him, took one of the waitress's hands in his and said: "It's so kind of you to consider me still marriageable." "How odd your modesty is," she replied. The virtuous are vexed by their own ceaseless virtue. A person must have been bad to feel a longing for good. And he must have experienced a life of disorder to desire order in his life. Thus from orderliness comes disorder, from virtue vice, from taciturnity speech, from lies honesty, from the latter the former, and both the world and the life of our attributes are round, are they not, sir, and this little tale is just a sort of insert I've woven in. Of course it's possible the aforementioned virtuous husband, by showing himself with another woman, meant to draw his friend's, the Robber's, attention to the fact that his wife had long harbored a fondness for the Robber and was always glad to see him. But at times the Robber had visions of hearth-side bliss. And while the Robber was indulging in his marital reveries, an outraged woman not far away pointed a pistol at her husband because he'd run off with another, abandoning not only her but his children as well, and a person who felt there was nowhere he belonged took aim at a tailor and aimed so well he struck the tailor's heart. They had to take up a collection for his survivors, and then there was a man who, moved by jealousy alone, did in his best beloved, whom he had gradually come to hate above all others. How strange this is! And then there lived a dissatisfied wife who bewailed the virtuousness of her husband by writing a story in which her spouse strung himself up, then she published this unlovely tale. When it appeared in print, she gave it to her poor husband to read, who, however, was so virtuous and good it never occurred to him to be angry. Instead, he gave her a shabby, good-natured little kiss. What murderously peaceable people there are. She fell down in a faint. Take my word for it. How lamentable they are, these women whose husbands are incapable of anger. I'd rather have the grave than such a husband. As for the Robber, ha!, at least he was the sort to get steamed up now and then. Admittedly he always started poking about in his ears directly afterward, which were of a most delicate hue. Quite

poignant his ears were, but good heavens, my opera! Forgive me if I only now, like a tardy tot, remember it and present it to you. To leave him she wished, but she pitied him. Is that why she sang so sweetly? Is it true we're always at our kindest when there are questions within us we cannot answer with certainty? Are we the most beautiful, the most worthy of notice, when contradictions, struggles of the soul, noble feelings of anxiety are reflected in our conduct? Are we truest in confusion, clearest in fog, surest in uncertainty? Oh, how sorry I felt for this beautiful creature, for she'd been saved and thus no longer had salvation to look forward to, dreams of salvation no longer stirred the air around her and her savior could no longer appear, having already come. Happy is he who succeeds in being unhappy twenty times in his life. For isn't it only in despair one feels one's own beauty? One's worth? But perhaps I'll postpone this a short while longer. Though I've been going great guns. But the interruption, I trust, will not prevent me from showing subsequent enthusiasm for the very same theme.

§

So now he had new lodgings. Oh, how he grimaced his first day there. Eventually his stormy-night countenance cleared. He peered about. Then he stepped out onto the balcony, and like doves his thoughts flew to his Edith, hereafter flapping their way to the other one, Wanda, and, after this, to his old apartment, and in his interior all was quiet one moment, clamorous the next. "After all, I do have a sofa," he now said to himself, and now there was a knock; his landlady appeared in the doorframe and said: "So you still haven't settled the debt in question?" "Of what debt are you speaking?" he asked. How politely he put this question. And, in general, what an extraordinarily respectable person he'd become. The landlady's name was Selma, and her voice was shrill. "And now you ask of what debt I speak?" She shook with laughter. Her waggeries pleased him. And then she appeared to be so sickly. "One of these days I'm going to try to embrace her," he thought, and when he'd completed this thought, he, too, had to laugh. He, too, now shook with the stupidest laughter. "You are impertinent," she remarked. He found this remark absolutely delightful. At the same time, his doves started flapping off again in the direction of his dull little Edith. Edith had something marvelously tedious about her. And now he pondered this Edithian tedium. What if he were to see her again somewhere,

the thought came to him. Then Fräulein Selma said: "It's quite quite simple: you're a rogue. Don't say a word, I know it's true." What she'd taken the liberty of announcing enchanted him. This enchantment was of a quite special sort. Shadows flew through the room like huge, silent, question-like swallows. "Would you give me a hammer?" now ventured from his throat. The question sounded shaky. How poignant it is to see a robber of this sort trembling delicately before a Selma. Once again, a perfectly impertinent laugh flitted across her face. On her lips, no laugh was impertinent, just on his. That's how it was. "What is it you want? Say it again." He repeated his request, which once more gave him quite special pleasure. "I would like to have a hammer," he spoke slowly and clearly. "The clearness and slowness with which you speak to me, you who are my tenant and nothing of importance, is an impertinence," she managed to remark. This remark, too, immediately met with a suspiciously large measure of approval from the Robber. "But still this isn't getting me that hammer, with which it was my intention to insert into the wall nails, for the hanging-up of pictures," quoth he with the most elegant calm with which words ever cascaded from lips. Selma said she had no time at the moment. "I want to marry you, because I feel sorry for you," now shot lightning-like from his presence of mind. These impudent words he pronounced deliberately, his consciousness bursting with laughter. His spirit had become an Italy full of pines. Fräulein Selma sat down in one of the velvet armchairs, as though to indicate she was trying to recover her composure. "What an odd lad," she disdainfully smiled and aphorized with a tragic smile upon her lips. This remark sounded muted, as though she were speaking to herself. A thought sprang up suddenly in the Robber's head, he remembered the important personage who had said that those who do not joyfully, earnestly pursue sexual fulfillment become idiots and zombies. "What are you thinking about?" the woman asked. "Something strange," replied the one still waiting to hear what further response she might make to his proposal of marriage, but she found it best not to return to the subject. A proud, secret love accompanied her through life. "In point of fact, she's very kind," the Robber now soliloquized, who would perhaps have been glad to have his robberhood believed in. "Your attire is far from satisfactory," slipped from the slim, graceful, delicate violin-bow lips of Selma, who, indeed, possessed a mouth that might have been a note played on the violin, so finely chiseled it was. "To help you

brush up your rather linty education, I'm going to lend you a novel, provided you feel a genuine desire to improve yourself and thank me for giving you cause to think yourself in need of spiritual cultivation. You are entirely lacking in character." Upon hearing this brief, albeit well-fashioned speech, which popped out of her like a hare from its hole, he bowed. But she greeted this marvel of a bow with a resounding laugh. "Why am I a rogue?" he asked humbly. "Because you put on a show of humbleness all your life. You're a scoundrel because you aren't one at all, but you really ought to be, at least a little," she replied energetically. She savored this eruption. How sluggishly the sun shone outdoors. In the distance lay once again, of course, the mountains. "The view of these excellent mountains," said Fräulein Selma, "calls for an additional charge. I'll let you know what the monthly sum amounts to. Do you expect me to throw them in for nothing? Don't be so presumptuous." The most blissful of smiles played about the Robber's lips. What Selma was saying seemed quite witty. No words of praise could even approach doing justice to such accomplishment. After this she took up the theme of loutishness again, pronouncing: "A person who does nothing but hammer about upon the most fragile of human souls and sensibilities, who loves a Wanda only to leap over to an Edith—" "But how do you know all this?" I asked. She left the question, as it were, standing at the door. And now I've fulfilled my promise. I'd promised a discussion of the Robber's amours. Many people consider us forgetful. But we think of everything. Fräulein Selma plucked at her skirt with her little fingers. The Robber thought: "Here I stand watching a skirt being plucked at while elsewhere people are fighting for their lives." He considered himself a decent human being to have had such a thought. "You feel sorry for me?" Selma suddenly shouted. "Don't you know me at all? What do you think it means to be a girl from a respectable family?" "But you are no longer entirely young," he said. "I'll go get you your hammer now. Come with me, so I don't have to bring it back up to you. Now that I think of it, I have work to do," she remarked. She rather drawled these words, and I, for my part, can assure you this Selma is going to astonish you. There was, one might say, something eccentric about her. The opera we shall keep in mind, and there will be occasion for us to speak of someone's standing on his toes. Just be patient.

ED ROBERSON

## TRACKS

Published in 49:2

Storm over  
during the night;  
this morning,  
caboose sky

Wild  
flying last  
clouds.

Flashing on  
them brilliant  
day lights.

Hear  
already far off  
in the hills

summer long train  
whistle  
moans. The leaves shrink

vanishing into points  
blown not  
yet away  
into tracks of snow.

That part's easy.  
It's the pennies  
we leave on the track  
to get flattened back

petals  
that copper into that green  
and won't spend

to get  
us back on board.  
Here Warmth

and the metal smell  
last only  
minutes after the wheel

turns them.  
What is the figure?  
left

Thinned to shine  
Lightly curved universe  
Rocking  
started with the word *caboose*.

C. S. GISCOMBE

from CAMPTOWN  
Published in 59:4/60:1

Note: *In Camptown various monsters speak and sing.*  
“*Monster or beast: one who walks.*”

Tunes came to chronicle volition. Say  
what it is you wanted. Shelter  
in the lee of what you said, shelter in the published range, the lips  
of one pushed up against  
the brow of the other one. Sing what  
music you want—meteor, shooting  
star—and then say what overtook you.

•

Let me  
talk a little bit. I think  
safety’s all hex  
—if this, over  
here. You



can walk  
*around* it. You  
could *pace* time.  
Let *me* please you.  
Don't be cross with me.  
It could be the widest part of the field.  
We tarried all day on this job. Night-  
season  
the sky  
was black  
as skin.  
We were  
sexed and sighted, and we  
were making a desultory  
retreat—nobody  
likes that—  
just *ahead* of  
the field. Who,  
in hell,  
walks?

•

I'm beside myself. There's some evil to this boat and you can study it but it's beyond capture. Jaunty, brother, the more vulgar the more tuneful—and how intimate the chorus with its “interjections.” Camp's up all night and I've got no business at the skyline—I'm not about to integrate, I'm beside myself and as distant from fable as I am from silence. That is, I think I'm too ticklish by half and that the parts are catastrophic—where in the world *had* I been going? Cheek to cheek, sailing ahead to the bad man's ball. Half awake. (Town's awake all day and I was out of town.)

•

Or bad air, or nothing in the free air between us, nothing between us, no fabric or purpose. Or I was outside of *myself*, the monster may have said; or, I was *unreliable*. The stride we took was careless and full of mistakes—one's part mistaken for the other's, typically—though the range of *interest* was also a kind of passing. Camptown serves a comic purpose. *They let you out? How'll you appear again?*

In smatterings or in any counting game—someone invisible,  
me, someone else—or in just opening the window or pantomiming  
such an act.

Aren't you getting ahead of yourself? the monster may have asked.

•

Little story to the stride—to pacing—but the bigger figure's just part  
of the terrain. Seeing is embarrassment. On stalking legs I would go  
and, sullen as the night is articulated, slap silly  
those abroad. Unsure but so what? Implicit in all pacing's  
distinguished success—true enough to end on but was the question  
forced? Before this tale goes further or breaks into falsehood, just who  
saw what? Or who woke up and was seen to be measureless yet  
exaggerated  
in proportion by certain bedfellows? The lover's reply to the reader  
is pointed.

DURS GRÜNBEIN  
Translated by Susan Bernofsky

[LATER THEN IT WAS THE STREAK OF LUMINOUS]  
Published in 48:2/3

\* \* \*

LATER THEN it was the streak of luminous  
silver bright filament traced  
on the frostclear  
sky, like a huge  
safety pin holding  
together the halves  
of morning. Difficult  
to describe: when this first light  
was half forgotten suddenly you  
sensed the gravity  
in your bones. Everything seemed  
foreshortened (“Order?  
Never was any...”) and you  
walked on, haze-headed, drunk on aether  
above the roar  
of the industrial labyrinth.

TOM RAWORTH

[Collages for Marseilles]  
Published in 48:4























STAN BRAKHAGE

from "Time...en dit"  
Published in 47:4 & 48:1

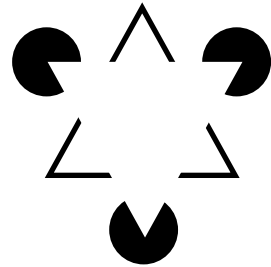
## GEOMETRIC versus MEAT-INEFFABLE (1994)

There are two pictorial extremes of human thought process—The Geometric and (what I like to call) Meat-ineffable...no "the" before "Meat"—inasmuch as raw cells are such a diversity of impulse as to defy hierarchy.

To be sure, it is such diversity-of-cells' electrical arcing which hatches The Geometric also, but it does so in spite of the originating cell structure irregularities—as an act-of-spark, I'd guess, or rather in organized emulation of the energies of their synapse process...as an Ideal, so to speak, of the "straight" energetic snap-line between two cells, the triangle between three, square four, soforth on up the scale of "hedrons" until a "circle" can be inferred.

It is all (i.e., Geometrical Thought) inferred, inasmuch as meat energies move in waves, as pulse: but the inference is *intrinsic* to Humans, existing only in Nature where Humans are—as anyone knows who has flown over wilderness and then, from an air-plane window, spotted the beginning of Farm or Town.

The so-called geometrics of the bee-hive, or of the flies' eyes, are (upon closer inspection) mere approximates of such as the Human Mind imagines—and then "reads into" the microcosms of Nature—as are the idealized circles of suns, the rectangles of rock formation, or those fractured symmetries of the Crystalline so prized by humans, all *approximations* of The Geometrical Mind (including Towns and



The "Triangles" above do not exist on paper: they are the creation of the Geometric mind, prompted by cues; they are inferred.

Farms) which when presented to human sensibility *are* prized simply because the imaging of them (through the viscous meaty orbs of human receptivity) is more easily absorbed as corollary of a mental ideal than, say, the ordinarily overwhelming multiplicity of most of Nature's irregularly globular and disjunctly fretted entanglement-of-curves impinging (via radiant waves) upon the senses.

The Human Mind has fashioned its Ideal in despite and despising of its self's pulp of animal being—an ordering at the expense of cell's self...a bureaucracy of...a veritable facism of...sense's sense of self.

Language is but an offspring of this mode-of-thought, for all words are but signs evolved from, and implicit in, the geometries of thinking.

Contrarily, and as an antidote to the rigidities of The Geometric, Meat-ineffable is that steady inclination of the brain to mimeticize its intrinsically variable shapes as visible manifestations resistant to either name or category but true (in its variability, to begin with) to the very *organic mode* (as distinct from process) of its own existence.

Whether there are, or are not, straight lines in Nature is beside the point: we are too viscous to receive them as such...thus they must, if that IS The Ideal, be invented by thought.

Words are, at scratch, but a glyphic extension of Geometric thought inasmuch as words can be seen as signs which (certainly as hieroglyphs) abstract the phenomenological input of the visible world. These signifiers later evolve to make oblique reference to ear's intake, as the tongue is given further (and more abstracted) cues for mouth reference to invisibilities (as when hieroglyphic cultures compound noun-like picture-glyphs to express the tensions of actions and transitions): it only remained for the cultures with curving and coiling glyphs, such as the Arabic, to extend nomenclature into the utterly abstract.

If the term "Picture" is defined as "a collection of nameable shapes within a frame," then it can be seen that the whorled and coiled insides of hearing have allowed the indefinable shifts of cell-life to mimic themselves, again—to allow Meat Conscious to begin again to express its self-shapes in picture making.

But once "Picture" is defined as "a collection of nameable shapes *in composition* within a frame," then the ordering of those shapes



inexorably comes under laws, as it were, of compositional logic; so that the ordering increasingly *implies* connective lines, triangles, squares, so forth, of compositional logic, thus The Geometric herds pictorial forms with near-absolute authority over every Meat shape within the Geometric grid and (as these are “nameable shapes”) herds each Geometrically disposed reference of shape to external World.

If “Picture” can be defined without the word “nameable,” (as in “Abstract Art”) then Meat-ineffable thinking becomes pictorially possible—despite the frame...the frame, then, in such Pics., defining the world *outside* the picture.

Many great painters in the last 150 years have sought to resolve these conflicting modes of pictorial thought process. Hans Hofmann comes most easily to mind, with his subversion of the web of Renaissance Perspective thru a, as he called it, “push pull” theory of color—i.e., that a more honest representation of depth on canvas can be accomplished thru juxtaposition of colors (rather than that Renaissance trick of arranging shapes according to an implied grid of lines converging on a “vanishing point” within the painting): but Hofmann is especially a revolutionary in those paintings which mix frank rectangles with organic globs in schema resistant to any geometric ordering. Mark Rothko’s rectangles are frank enough also, but within them the subtle variations of tone hint at geo-classical ordering. Clifford Still’s paintings (“landscapes” turned sideways) also (if turned on their sides) suggest hidden perspectival logic; but these latter two painters, at least, being “abstract,” or ineffably inclined, create surfaces which neither invoke nor conform altogether to frame: and they thus resist geometrical authority. They, Jackson Pollock, and others hypnogogically inspired (from early Kandinsky to Olitsky) can be seen to be attempting to depict cell-shape’s most immediate radiance. A chronological viewing of Kandinsky’s or Mondrian’s oeuvre reveals, in this context, a gradual “giving over” to the influence of The Geometrical. Franz Klein can be seen as fixated upon the emergence of ineffable—(thus Meat-radiant)—glyph. But only Hofmann regularly takes on, in much of his later work, the struggle to balance the pictorial extremes of ideal forms and raw organic shapes in the area of the rectangular canvas.

Film, in the hands of the very few who’ve seen it as an Art, has, from its beginning, just naturally inherited the struggle between yin (if

that term can be thought to denote Meat-radiance as source of shape) and the yang of compositional idealism. It is perhaps fortunate that Film, as any possible Art, was birthed thru The Theatre of Georges Méliès, because only the theatrical tradition (with its “flats” of scenic illusion in the cramped actual-space of the stage) carried on the visual traditions of Sienese (as distinct from Florentine and Roman) painters—i.e., those painters of Sienna (from Martini to Lippi) who most resisted Renaissance perspective. Méliès, a stage magician, inherited this tradition and immediately translated it over into his films.

But Film is, anyway, intrinsically resistant to either a grid or an otherwise geometric representation of depth. Despite its camera and projector lenses (glass ground to achieve approximations-of-depth in conformity with dominant Western Painting), despite its framing devices, and despite whatever “sets” composed for it...Film IS essentially a shadow play. The instant a photographed person stops moving, he or she immediately turns into a flat shape on the screen, no matter how much chiaroscuro lighting is applied to mold semblance of depth. Because the effect of motion in Film is dependent upon the flicker of interruptive black between consecutive stills, the primary sense-of-depth in a film is (as with a strobe) convex vis-à-vis the pulsations of repeatedly lit screen, as if each frame were emerging from the screen itself (which, in the fact of bounce-light, it is)...a progression of images beseemingly emergent upon The Viewer. (With TV or backprojectioning, viewers are conversely drawn as if into a cave: thus the intrinsic hypnotics of those media).

From the beginning, then, the painterly tactics of spacial (as well as compositional) idealization haven't sufficed to organize either “the plane” or the representation-of-depth in motion pictures: but the biological process of the transmission of organic radiance finds, in Film, an almost corollary—except inasmuch as commercial film-makers eschew what's natural in favor of traditional ideals...(for example, photography's “line grain” drive to eliminate any visibility of the chemical constituent of film stock, the silver halides, etc., which compose image at scratch, the “graininess” of Film: these, a shift each frame, constitute a visual paradigm of cells themselves variably radiating light's lightning-like transmission of image.)

There is an almost endless variety of perspectives represented in human drawing and painting. It is as difficult to realize that each of them is sure corollary of what, eventually, their culture's people saw as Reality, as it is to recognize Renaissance perspective as but *another*, among many, realities: (A recent viewing of Sir Laurence Olivier's *Henry V* much persuaded my university students, though I prefaced the film with slide projections of such works of The Middle Ages as, for example, the many "Books of Hours," upon which Olivier had based his set constructions: by the time this visually thoughtful movie was completed, Olivier's Middle Ages vision—a "cartoon" of our ordinary senses of perspective—had been accepted as normal, i.e., "*real*," despite my preparation of the class, my revelation of his source, despite our pre-disposition to the painterly orderings of the last several hundred years).

Geometrics, and attendant perspective assumptions (and word effabilities) are inventions of human thought (as are colors, as we call 'em—not existent in light as other than variable wave-lengths which variably tickle the brain into shared social responses of "red," "green," "blue," soforth): the only reasonably "real" external manifestations of inner nervous receptivity-of-impulse might, ironically, be found in the arts we call "abstract"; for these, at least, suggest the un-idealized meat means (source of all our Consciousness) in direct express.

(I wish to dedicate this essay to poet Michael McClure, who was first to make me aware verbally of "meat consciousness" and is still the primary "singer" of that consideration.)

## The Baby

Published in 57:3/4

I am not afraid the first time I hold the baby. He is a boy baby. I smell him. He smells like nothing. I am very disappointed. I tell his mom, “He smells like zero.” I tell his mom. I tell everybody.

Before the baby it was everything about holding the baby. Holding the baby like finding the last puzzle piece and sticking it in. How holding the baby would smell, taste, feel. How much I could get away with. That was my biggest concern. Holding the baby holding the baby holding the baby—see?

I would spy the mother. The mother so pregnant, so ready. I would say, “What if his skin has your tattoos?” The mother would pat the back of my hand and give a small laugh while I stared at her belly wondering if the baby was decorated or not. Wondering if that baby would come out a painting. Maybe something she would be willing to give away, then, perhaps...

The second and third times I hold the baby I’m still not afraid. I try different ways to hold him. I try to see what works best. Some sort of agreement between us. A way we can be together in a system that satisfies us both. I try very hard but he’s always changing his mind.

I sit with him on my thighs when nobody is paying attention. I want to take off all of his clothes. I want him naked. I lean in to him and whisper, “Last summer I fucked the gardener.” I sit back up and lean down again, “We fucked sixteen times.” The baby waves his fists around like a crazy man. I am not sure what that means.

After a while the baby starts fussing and my husband comes over and asks what I did to him. I say, “Nothing.”

The mother always lets me hold the baby. My husband only knows I visit sometimes. My husband does not know, “I am at yoga class” means “I am holding the baby again again again.” It is for the good of us. It is just holding a baby. It is nothing breakable. The mother lets me and so I do. It is permission.

When the mother goes away I hold the baby. I dress the baby in black. I lay the baby on every white thing I can find. The baby dressed in black at the bottom of the bathtub, the baby dressed in black in the sink, the baby dressed in black on the ottoman, the baby dressed in black on the washing machine. I want to splash red on him. I want to see red there too, with the baby; the baby dressed in black laid on white things.

I check the driveway. I keep the curtains open. I watch for the mother. I undress the baby. Here he is, naked. I lay him on my thighs. I watch his abbreviated body spastic its movements. I tell him, “You are all mine.” I put my lips on his stomach. I put my lips all over the baby.

I am holding the baby while waiting for the pitbull to bite the other baby. The not-baby runs. The pitbull sits its strong. Everyone thinks it’s funny; the not-baby running circles around the pitbull. Do they not see his silver hackles hackling? I hold the baby tighter. The other baby runs and runs. The pitbull’s head makes half-turns and snapbacks. I see him getting intent. I feel I know what he wants. I feel I can see through his eyes. I bite the not-baby. I clamp my jaws together so hard they meet. The not-baby’s guts and blood hot and spilling. And, oh, the screams! I am the pitbull with my mouth full of dying not-baby and nobody thinks it’s funny anymore. I look at the baby I’ve forgotten I’m holding. He is so alive he is screaming.

The not-baby runs and runs. The pitbull’s head half-turns, snaps back, half-turns, snaps back.

When I am not with the baby I think of holding the baby. I keep burning my husband's pot roasts and collared shirts. I can hide the shirts in the bottom of the trash bin, buy new ones. The pot roasts aren't as easy. He's already smelled them cooking. I have to shave off the ends, the tough outsides, until I get down to whatever softer parts that are hopefully left on the inside. He keeps telling me my cooking has gone to shit. I chew my meat and nod. Chase it down with more red wine while he asks me if he should hire our cook again.

I think of holding the baby when he fucks me. He stabs into me dry. He grunts seven to ten times, once with each thrust until he finishes. I hold the baby tight against my chest while he goes at it. I whisper to the baby with each grunt. I say, "Baby. Baby. Baby. Baby. Baby. Baby. Baby. Baby."

The next time I hold the baby I can't stop seeing myself drop him. Everyone is around and I drop him on the concrete. Everyone sees the baby slip from my arms and fall to the ground. Everyone sees me try to catch the baby. Everyone sees my hands make useless grabbing motions. Everyone sees me only catch the blanket. Everyone sees me catch the blanket and pull, unrolling the baby. Everyone sees the baby unroll from his blanket, his head and arms a spinning blur. Everyone sees him twirl towards the concrete. Everyone sees him hit the concrete, hard from his unrolling. Everyone sees his head pulp open through its new crack. And I am holding a blanket. I am holding a blanket but not the baby. The baby is a cracked-head, brain-blossomed thing that isn't even crying on the concrete and we all sit in the silence that ends in less than a second now that his mother has started screaming. It's all I can see.

I stop holding the baby.

I make a baby so I can hold the baby when the other baby is not around. I use soft dish towels, a small sack of rice and a balloon filled with liquid hand soap. I hold the baby around my house; in front of the living room TV, behind our SUV, in the downstairs hall closet, next to the garden hose, at the dining table, in the second guest bedroom,

at the top of the third floor landing. I try to see how different it feels in each place. See if I drop the baby. But I never drop the baby. Not even on any of the staircases or on the library ladder. I never drop this baby but maybe it's because I'm not scared to drop this baby. This baby won't blossom brains, only soap and rice.

When my husband comes home I hide the fake baby in the bottom bathroom drawer in the first guest bedroom. It's empty except for a bottle of baby shampoo and a small, unopened packet of wipes I had forgotten to throw away.

I am scared to hold the baby. I am afraid the dropping is real. I do not know what to tell the mother. I trace her tattoos with my eyes when she isn't looking. I pull them, like a blanket, from her arm and upper back over her baby, painting him all over with a sleeve of black flowers colored in with reds, pinks, purples, blues, greens and grays.

I wake up when she says my name the loudest time. "Do you want to hold him?" I stare at her skin at the baby's skin, each now their own. I say, "Not right now." It is a lie.

We listen to the neighbors play croquet while I try not to hold the baby. Each mallet strike sounds similar to how I imagine the baby's head will sound when it hits concrete. They hit and cheer, hit and cheer. I wince each time. I see them in a circle around me. Around the baby falling and hitting, falling and hitting. They cheer each time. It's like a record skipping. The neighbors cheer and the silver pitbull licks the pulpy red left on the cement after the screaming mother lifts the baby. The red splash. There it is.

The mother holds the baby while the neighbors play their mallet game. When she passes the baby to her sister I hold my breath. My mind splits. I see it go two ways; the way I know is real and the way where the baby falls and connects head first with the concrete. I sit in the silence after his head cracking before the mother starts screaming. I feel this silence space is where I will go when I die.

I have a dream about holding the baby. The all of him warm, a part of me in my arms. A merging of his body into mine, my arms pressing him into my chest. The smell of him. In a still day, perfect warm but the pitbull comes quiet. When he jumps I become strong and rigid like a tree. I do not scream like trees do not scream. The pitbull is chewing the baby's legs. Tugging like a strong fish on a line. The baby screams for both of us. The dog is biting and tearing and chewing the bottom half of the baby and I can only hold the baby frozen. I am helping it being eaten. My stomach and waist are hot warm-wet. The baby is limp and quiet. When the top half of the baby falls from my embrace I wake screaming before it hits the concrete. Reflexively, my husband punches me. He apologizes and at breakfast he sees my black eye and says, "You scared the motherfucking piss out of me last night."

I hold the fake baby with my black eye pulsing slow in my face. It's better, I think, not having two eyes on this baby.

I walk the fake baby on the diving board. I walk the baby from dining chair to dining chair. I walk the baby backwards up the stairs. One eyed I do not drop the baby. The baby I miss so much. The baby I need to be with. The baby not with me, not dressed in black laid on white things, splashed with red NOT SPLASHED WITH RED NO RED ON THE BABY DRESSED IN BLACK LAID ON WHITE THINGS.

The mother calls me to come hold the baby. I say yes after four nos. I say yes with my two eyes. I pack the rice baby. I know what will come next.



ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI  
Translated by Clare Cavanagh

DEAD SPARROW  
Published in 46:3/4

Among all objects  
the dead sparrow in its gray greatcoat of feathers  
is the least unusual.  
Even a roadside stone looks like  
life's prince when compared  
with a dead sparrow.  
Flies circle it,  
intent as scholars.

WILLIAM FULLER

## OK JAZZ FUNERAL SERVICES

Published in 53:2/3

I see you everywhere and I like you everywhere  
and my location in any sentence  
depends on the objects surrounding  
you, and they're not you, and you're not them  
and we, all of us, surround ourselves according  
to the disappointments we distill  
as we approach the end—  
here's a set of principles shaped like a plane  
flying low over the city  
it looks like clarinet—  
give me my ticket and my  
tangled red hair and my green  
coat and my purple hand-knit scarf  
and also my  
glasses

scum on the cemetery pond, high barbed wire,  
crenellations, Cornelia, Cordelia, Roscoe, Prospero  
there's trash in the yard  
parked over there  
the banjo-player and the banjo know it  
autonomous relationships are included  
twice  
trailing off (we  
possess the expression  
whether pretending to grasp  
details  
think propose discuss decide  
not that they know  
whose flesh it is—

I think there's a caterpillar who approves  
the first thought that comes to me  
and stands firm through the chaos  
as it enters the room—  
I see a cost structure made of stale cornbread  
minus two percent  
I want the two percent living, sane, and saying something  
richer, deeper  
I sleep  
in the clean white studio of the morning sun  
with vast blue palaces of space  
stuffed into my head  
they float exceptionally well  
offering no explanation except speech  
itself a sphere, enclosing birds  
who listen out of strangeness  
then posthumously descend  
great flocks of them  
migrating nine miles  
through a silvery drainpipe  
to the demonstrated absence of a material fact—  
hence these baskets

Simon Templao  
untied the mooring line and drifted away  
the dogs barked out a distant thumping  
to the candles of guitars  
reflected in his duck-shaped spoon  
dimly through sand and deeply through streams  
a robin  
flung droplets  
                    in arcs  
winding through the porcelain eye  
singly or antecedently  
joined together by streaming threads  
a golden few, now retired  
their arms bent like backbones  
their bamboo legs clattering

against a fragrant bowl  
and plucked—  
the foregoing is not possible  
in the glaucous east bright alpha  
indescribably substantiates  
the work of hands  
hammered into coins—  
daylight  
coordinates their circulation  
among a privileged class of seekers  
which grabs its feet and smacks its nose  
renewing deep rifts and heavy deletions  
for now he's arrived  
and these  
are his

\*

I remember the day my transmission died  
over there stood three red stools  
people gathered on the roof to watch  
sweeter as the years go by  
in bursts of gray light  
on the surface of the sun—  
think of your policy man, think of his pitch,  
think of what you suddenly notice  
when you look downstairs,  
downstairs  
think of the concourse  
the claves, the trombone, the bedsprings  
of the chief musician  
on Neginoth  
think of the gusts of rain or the law of retaliation  
when it's dark  
and where isn't it  
I wish someone would tell me



TO GET PEOPLE OUT OF THEIR DEPENDENCY AND PASSIVITY  
TO SEEK UNPRECEDENTED MEANS OF INTERVENTION & OF  
DECISION IN THE WORLD  
TO DEMYSTIFY/ TO BECOME AGITATORS  
NOTHING HUMAN IS ALIEN TO US (GOOD) NOTHING UTOPIAN IS  
ALIEN TO US  
(REALLY GOOD)

=====

AT THIS TIME MORE THAN BEFORE THE ARTISTIC PROBLEM CANNOT  
BE CONSIDERED AS AN INTERNAL STRUGGLE OF TENDENCIES/ BUT  
RATHER AS ABOVE ALL A TACIT STRUGGLE (ALMOST DECLARED)  
BETWEEN THOSE WHO WHETHER THEY KNOW IT OR NOT ARE  
WITH THE SYSTEM OR AIM TO CONSERVE IT AND PROLONG IT/  
AND THOSE WHO IN A CONSCIOUS FASHION OR NOT WISH TO  
MAKE IT EXPLODE

\*\*\*\*\*

ART IN THIS COUNTRY HAS NOT ADVANCED PAST A LITTLE  
TECHNICAL COURSE FOR EXERCISING MEDIOCRITY DECORATIVELY

\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$

“ONLY THOSE MEN FREE OF ALL BONDS MAY CARRY FLAME  
SUFFICIENTLY FAR” ANDRÉ BRETON

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

TO RETURN TO ART THE NOTION OF A PASSIONATE & CONVULSIVE  
LIFE

-----

CULTURE IS NOT IN BOOKS NOR IN PAINTINGS OR STATUES IT IS IN  
THE NERVES/ IN THE FLUIDITY OF THE NERVES/  
FLESH, IN SENSITIVITY (THIS OLD DREAM OF ANTONIN ARTAUD)



%%%%%%%%%

WE CAN SHOOT TWO REVOLVERS AT THE SAME TIME/ SAID  
BUFFALO BILL MORE THAN ONCE

STUPIDITY IS NOT OUR STRONG SUIT  
(ALFRED JARRY DIXIT)



ROSA ALCALÁ

OFFERING

Published in 59:3

Nestled  
in the armpit  
your head, my sweat

rocket fuel  
baptism  
from the deepest

layers of fat. A net  
hurled at me  
by the longshoremen

of public insult.  
Radiant in parts  
per million

retardant  
of flames

my milk  
I give to you  
as once

I gave industry  
an organ.

RAE ARMANTROUT

## TWIZZLE

Published in 50:2/3/4

He who finds a knot  
in himself  
where a soft expanse should be

will want to tell  
the nearest person to him.

But this can be known  
now

and lived later on

so the start of it  
is always somewhere else.

\*

Evenly hovering attention:  
pocked concrete.

Long tangles of gray-  
green eucalyptus leaves

twizzle,  
throwing sharp shadows.

If I could just signal  
so variously.

\*

The trees upstart.

By “virgin”  
we meant inaccessible

just now,

and by “inaccessible”  
we meant original.

The virgin birth  
can only happen once

everywhere

and doesn't dare stop

BARBARA GUEST

SENSITIVITY

Published in 43:1

i.

This is not a sophisticated place string  
in the hall running up the stair where  
it twists into a cloud resembling a Chinese man  
in burlap bending over a towel; we think in bed  
of the future of Phenomena and wonder if it leads  
to poetry the last Duchess or that wall  
                  moved out of shade  
                  sun on lacquer

                  calligraphy's stem  
                  and signiory—

                  P of Plum or Phenomena

ii.

And 'continuous soft sound' with a hard rap  
throughout the day as the pen moves over paper,  
          '*shuu*' walking on grass—.

iii.

                  A remarkable 's'  
in the distribution of stair and privacy,

letters separate as foxglove 'c' favored,  
next 'g' as in "civilizing";  
'w' in "worldly expression";  
later 'd' suggested for detonation.

iv.

Afterwards a speech and Spanish brandy  
the glass beaded in red drops—;

melodrama in the red cedar's  
look against the window where a youth  
pokes his tongue into the phenomenal instant's rush/  
and receptor.

HELEN DEWITT

## Brutto

Published in 57:3/4

Her father was an engineer. He worshipped Daimler, so there was only one career for him. He had no particular opinion on the Jews; if you would ask him he would not be interested, probably it was an inadequate race but he wasn't interested. If you are an engineer the only thing you care about is machines. A human being is never going to be as perfect as a machine so it is not interesting to an engineer to think about racial purity.

She was saying things to Nuala so people looking at the paintings would not feel they were under surveillance. It's always a bit like working in Top Shop or Dorothy Perkins or Wallis, some shop where they have this etiquette of leaving the customer at arm's length.

These open days are hard at first, but you get used to them. People come into the studio and sometimes they walk straight out. Or they look at the paintings and they want to see something figurative lurking behind it all when there is no behind. But the paintings are so explosive they don't know what to do with it. And you're sitting there with this poxy table with a bowl of cheese doodles and you feel like a complete wally.

This bloke was walking about.

Sometimes this mania for hospitality takes possession of you. She asked if he would like a cheese doodle.

He said I'm fine thanks.

He had an Italian accent. He had one of these haircuts that all the men have these days, where there is hardly any hair, it is like short fur on the skull. His eyes were this light glowing gray, like those little monkeys, those lemurs that you see on TV or at the Zoo, and he had this pulpy, kissy mouth. He was standing by 1.1.4.

When people number paintings they do it the wrong way. You get an idea while you're working on a painting and you have to do it in

another painting because otherwise you would use the first painting. It's like taking cuttings from a plant. So if you just use ordinal numbers you lose all that. You lose a distinction, because sometimes a painting is just out of the blue.

Sometimes you know there's a gap between one painting and another, that was a painting you didn't do, so you can show that with the number and that's good, the missing painting still has its number like a name on a grave.

He was wearing a black T-shirt and a black cashmere jacket and black jeans, these really expensive jeans, and these red cowboy boots.

The paint is always white, this fat gloopy stuff, and people have never seen anything like it. Sometimes it's twenty centimeters thick or maybe more, it can take a year before it's really dry. You have to give people really careful instructions when they buy one. Once this gay couple fell in love with this painting that was really not ready to be moved but they said they would obey her instructions *implicitly* and of course Serge was keen to make the sale so they took it and this great big *splodge* fell off on a brand new carpet.

You weren't supposed to live in the studio but of course people did surreptitiously.

If you are working with white you get fanatical about having the specific white, and you are in a constant state of panic that the white will be discontinued. Robert Ryman liked to work with a white from Winsor & Newton called Winsor White, so when Winsor & Newton decided to discontinue production he bought a whole consignment and filled a closet with it, and this is what you can afford to do if you are Robert Ryman. So this is one problem of being poor, that you can be cut off from the work you would go on to do by the discontinuance of a white. This is something people can understand, the expense of materials, these things you can touch and see. But if there is a painting that would be dry in a week and another painting that would be dry in six months there is that pressure to paint something that will survive in the time you know you can pay for. So that is the trade-off, the more white you buy the less time you can pay for. So you are always living hand to mouth.

She was two months behind on the rent on the studio. If she would get kicked out she would never find another studio for £300 a month.

Serge owed her £5,000 from the London Art Fair *two years* ago.

The bloke was looking at 1.1.11111.1.

Nuala was sitting on the tall stool to keep her from feeling like a complete prat.

She said people didn't talk about the War when she was growing up. There was this very tidy surface and you didn't know there was anything but the surface. They didn't talk about the camps. So then when she was sixteen Max told her about them and she understood the Baader-Meinhof, she wanted to blow up a building. Her father made her do the Geselle which was three years of hell. She knew if she stayed she would kill herself. So she hitchhiked for about six years around Asia.

When you are that age you don't think about the cutoff age for the Turner Prize. You don't realize that the people who are going to get their work to a certain level before the cutoff are not hitchhiking around Asia. If you would realize it you would not be able to do anything about it, because if you would not hitchhike around Asia you would not be an artist. So you can't say if I would have gone to art college then.

Nuala had helped with the cheese doodles and twiglets and there was juice. Wine would be better but if it's crap wine what's the point? And what would it be but crap wine?

She said when she was growing up her father would not let her do the Abitur, he thought she was too thick, he made her go into an apprenticeship in dressmaking. They sat in this *cellar* and everything had to be done just right, making buttonholes, if you did it wrong you had to do it again and that was three years. At the end you had to do a Gesellenstück, it's quite an old-fashioned word, maybe they don't have it in English, to show you had mastered the craft. It had to have all these features, this special collar and these special cuffs and special pockets.

She still had the suit she made.

There was a wardrobe off a skip in a corner. She went to the wardrobe. It had a special padded hanger.

May I see?

The Italian guy was standing at her shoulder.

She said: Yeah, OK, why not.



It was a suit in a scratchy woolen cloth. It was a dirty mustard brown. You did not get to choose what you would make up, it was a chance for the dressmaker to get rid of fabric she could not use, other places treated the apprentices better, she had heard. The suit had buttoned epaulettes and cloth straps with a button at the cuffs and a cloth half belt, and pockets with buttoned flaps, and of course a lining, and self-covered buttons. It had piping in dark brown. It had three semi-pleats above each breast, each set interrupted by a pocket. It hung on its hanger, this baleful garment that no one would ever wear because of the hatefulness of the cloth and the cut and the straps and the stitching, and all this time the garment had been locked up in a wooden coffin with no one to look at its madness.

He said: Ma che brutto!

He said: Take it over to the light.

In the white light of the studio the sullen mustard wool, the psychotic stitching, the brutal dowdiness snarled at the world.

He said: Madonna!

He said: When was it made?

She said: 1962.

He said: Can you still do this?

She said: I don't do this anymore.

He said: I want this.

She said: It's not for sale.

He said: I want twenty of these.

She said: I am not a dressmaker.

He said: No no no! Who would wear such a monstrosity? What do you take me for? No. You are an artist. I will give you £1,000 apiece.

She said: I might be able to do one more.

He said: That's not enough. I want to have a show. I need another nineteen.

He said he would have a show in his gallery in Milan.

He said: The paintings don't interest me.

He said: You'll get the normal terms, fifty percent split, the twenty grand is up front.

She said maybe she could find someone to help her and he said No. It's got to be you or the deal is off. You know you can't find someone to do this kind of work.

He said: Will you be able to find—

No, we go look for the stuff together.

Maybe we go to Leipzig, I think, they got a lot of ugly old stuff left from before '89, yeah I bet we can do it.

She did not know what to do because she just couldn't.

Then Serge came in, he had been down the hall in Danny's studio schmoozing with a buyer who maybe would take something for his company headquarters. Serge said: *Adalberto!!!!!!!!!!* Christ, I'd no idea you were in town.

So maybe you can imagine if five lizards would be in an icebox and somebody would put them up the back of your jumper so they would be crawling up your back with their cold claws, because realistically how many people in the artworld would there be with the name Adalberto—

Adalberto said: Yeah I'm really excited about this piece she did back in the 60s.

At first Serge got excited because of the sale and then he started to be pissy because Adalberto wanted to be the gallerist for the material in Italy so Serge would not get a commission, but Adalberto said No no no we're not gonna argue this is the most exciting work I've seen in a long time but I gotta have a free hand to take it where it needs to go, we'll work something out, we're not gonna be assholes about it.

It would never have arisen in the first place if Serge had paid her the £5,000 he owed her from the London Art Fair.

People were coming into the studio and looking at the paintings and all it would have taken was just one to buy just one.

She could tell that Serge was flattered and Adalberto was talking about dinner and she could tell he would bamboozle Serge into agreeing to anything.

Serge was thinking he could make some good contacts, and if he knew the right people he could get some publicity for his next opening, maybe Nick Serota would come, if Nick Serota would come it would be the bee's knees.

She was completely skint.

She said she would have to think about it because she was not working in that tradition at all, and Adalberto said Yeah, sure, think about it, I have to go to New York next week so it would be good to go to Leipzig tomorrow so you can do some before I come back.

Adalberto said: Look, let's not pussyfoot around, I give you £2,500 apiece, that's fifty grand.

Serge was just standing there completely gobsmacked.

It's easy to say you can just walk away from it.

They flew first class to Leipzig out of City Airport. It was sort of the way you are always imagining it would be if you would get your lucky break, you know you are sleeping in a sleeping bag on a concrete floor and there is no heating and no loo but you think maybe one day you will be discovered, but meanwhile everybody is poor. If she would have lunch with Serge he would always go somewhere *really cheap*, and then they would go Dutch. And meantime Serge had given her the scoop on Adalberto, she had heard stories of course but it turned out he was this really hot potato, he was on the committee for the Venice Biennale so if Adalberto would like her work it would be phenomenal.

When they got to Leipzig they took a taxi to this posh hotel. Adalberto said he did not know if they would find what they were looking for in Leipzig, maybe they would have to go deeper, but they would maybe have some luck.

The thing that is famous in Leipzig is the passageways, these arcades. The most famous is the Mädler-passage, but they have them all over, these passageways between streets that were built to be fashionable places to be seen, with shops selling things that fashionable people would want to buy, well you can imagine how popular that would be in a socialist republic. So they would go down an arcade and out into the street and down another arcade, looking for this thing Adalberto had in his head.

If you would go to East Germany in those days it was still the way it was under the Communists. You would go into a shop and it was like a time warp. A shop would have a little window display and it would be a pair of knickers and a packet of tights. You forget what people used to wear, so if you suddenly see it in a shop window you can't believe it. You can't believe that it went on looking completely

normal. So they would be drawn into these shops that were not selling what they needed, because it was like a museum.

Adalberto was still wearing the red cowboy boots. He saw all this stuff and he went completely mad. He would see a garter belt in a glass case in a little shop and he would be like a man possessed, he would buy maybe the entire supply of garter belts. He would ask what is the German for this, and it would be a garter belt or an antique pair of knickers or a slip.

Then he would say: We gotta be focused, we gotta be totally focused on this, this is gonna be, what is that word, humongous. Estupendous.

Then they found a haberdasher.

It had these bolts of this disgusting beige jersey. Adalberto said: We gotta be focused. We gotta be totally focused.

He said: Ask where they keep the suiting materials.

So they went to the back and she thought she would throw up. There were these bolts of woolen cloth.

Adalberto was saying *Madonna*.

There were all these conservative colors that you don't see anymore, this navy blue, navy blue is the hardest color to match so it dates really obviously because the idea people have in their head of a dark neutral blue changes over the years, people in the fashion industry, the way they perceive a dark blue is affected by the other colors they are working with at the time. So there was this navy blue that had survived like a finch in the Galápagos, and a prehistoric brown, and some grays that also date really quickly. They were not utilitarian colors, just colors of cloth that was meant to end up in respectable clothes and you would not imagine the body inside and you would not imagine that people would sign a form to put people on a train to go off and be butchered.

Adalberto was saying: Ma che *brutto!* Che *brutto!*

He was saying: If we were not coming now it would be too late!

And he was saying: You are the one with this special training, you must pick what you would work with, what they taught you to work with.

She said: I can't.

He said: If I say something maybe it corrupts what you were taught.

She said: I can't.

He said: OK, OK. Look, we take everything back with us, I don't have time for this, when we get back you decide what you want to use.

He went to the saleswoman and he pointed to the back: Ich will alles verkaufen.

You could tell she was not used to customers who did not know German. You could tell Adalberto was not used to people who would not roll over and play dead if you would give them a lot of money.

She said: Kaufen, Adalberto. You are saying you want to sell everything.

In the fullness of time, said Adalberto. I will. But OK. Ich will alles kaufen, Madame.

But she couldn't stand it, all this money sloshing around when she kept *agonizing* about £600 for the studio, and where she would put the paintings if she could not pay the rent.

So she said: No. It's stupid. There's nowhere in the studio to put it all.

She said: Look, Adalberto, go away. Go for a walk. Go to a café. I can't think with you standing there saying *che brutto*.

This was one of the luckiest things she ever did.

OK, said Adalberto. You're the boss. I come back in an hour.

In Germany it is not like Britain, where you go into a shop and you ask for advice and they haven't a clue. If you go to a building supply store the people working there will know all about the different grades of wood. If you go to a shop that sells beds the people working there will know all about the construction of the beds, and which beds are good for the back, and the beds are all really well built because people know what they're doing. And if you go to a haberdasher the staff will know all about the different types of cloth, and the proper thread to use, and the proper zip to use with a particular weight of cloth, and if you try to buy the wrong thing they will be really strict. So it is holding back the economy because to get a certain sort of job you have to have had this training, but if you go into a shop they are knowledgeable. So Adalberto was the one who was so keen on this project but he was doing it in this impulsive Italian way which would never come out right, because to do it right, look, here was the *shopkeeper* who had been *working in the trade* since her *teens*, and Adalberto wanted to rely on the memory of someone who did an apprenticeship back in 1962.

So you have to love this about the Italians, that they are completely impulsive and unpredictable and inconsistent, and in the War they were not at all keen to exterminate the Jews, after the Germans occupied France Jews would go to *Italy* to escape the Vichy regime, and that is what you have to love about them. And if you look at Goethe, if you look at Germans who love the South, you see that is what they do love about it, that love of the moment.

But if you are going to do something properly you have to plan ahead or you will end up cutting the moment wrong. Then events will be all wrinkled and puckered.

She had brought the suit with her because if you are buying notions you can't rely on memory. So now she brought it out of the bag and she explained that her friend wanted more like it, and maybe it would be quite hard because it was made in 1962. And then she told this little lie, because if she told the truth it would sound completely bonkers. She said she thought maybe he was making a movie and he wanted the costumes to be authentic. This would be something that a German would understand, that you would want the details to be correct.

The saleswoman looked at the suit. She said: Did you make this?

She said: Yes: a long time ago.

She had not been back to Germany since she left. After the years of hitchhiking she had gone to Britain, because if she would go to Germany she would kill herself. It was as if she had discontinued German, and then had to dig up a tube of it at the back of a cupboard.

The woman was looking at the suit, inspecting the workmanship and nodding and making little noises of appreciation. She said she thought she had something that would work.

She brought out this bolt of cloth that nobody would ever have picked up for something to wear. If you would make a suit in it the suit would last for a million years. It was this muddy olive green.

The woman said: Does he want different colors?

If you set out to make something ugly it is like setting out to make something beautiful, you will just end up with kitsch.

So she had to pretend she was just making some suits the way they used to make suits.

They had two kinds of gray, a navy blue, a dull mustardy tan, a black, two kinds of brown, and then the linings. There was a chest

with twenty-five drawers, and on five of the drawers was a button. That was the selection of buttons. There were those metal zips that nobody uses anymore.

You could see the shop had been there since before the War, so its fittings were unchanged. The chest of drawers for the buttons had remained unchanged, but production of buttons would have been suspended during the War, *luxury* buttons, and under the Communists this would not have been a high priority, the resumption of button production. After the Wall fell dressmaking would maybe not look sexy so the shop would not be rushing to expand. So there was something touching about the five buttons, it made you want to buy them, but to do the suit properly you would cover buttons in the same cloth, to show your skill.

And this was another thing that was quite old-fashioned, the shop had the linen that used to be used for the interface. It used to be you would use linen for the interface, and you would *sew* it in under the collar using these big stitches, *basting*, now they have an artificial material, and you can even iron it on, but in the East maybe they would be more conservative so this was this shop in 1992.

Adalberto came back. He looked at what was on the counter and he said OK, but we take the whole cloth because maybe they stop making it.

If the collar of a suit is to fall properly, the inside, the underside, has to be smaller than the outside. So you have to *mold* the cloth to shape it properly. There is a special stand of wood, with a wooden crossbar covered in padding, and you hang the jacket on it, and then you can work on it with an iron. It is not all sewing, there is a lot you can do with heat. But you need proper equipment. So they did not find this in Leipzig but they went to Berlin and bought one and it was a nightmare to get on the plane, but if you are flying first class they are more friendly and helpful, even the Germans. You would have thought Adalberto was their long lost uncle, everyone was so anxious to help with the stand and the bolts of cloth.

So Adalberto was going to New York and he said he would like to do a show in two months.

When you make a garment for the Geselle you have one week to do it under exam conditions. You can't ask anyone how to do something. The room is all set up with the equipment, and you go in from seven to six, and you work there. But that was one week for one suit at the end of three years of hell, when you can do it all in your sleep. And the cutting has already been done for you, because you learn to make the pattern and cut in the next stage, that is when you start being creative. So even if there are some things that are more mechanical to talk of doing nineteen suits in two months, singlehanded, was mad. But if you would pour cold water on the idea of someone like Adalberto he would not find a way around the problem, or give you another month, he would just lose interest and do something else.

People think it would be easy to walk away.

Artists are lucky to get a gallerist, and you think if you get a gallerist the world is your oyster, and then maybe you are still teaching or working in a call center. But if Charles Saatchi would walk into the gallery and buy out the show, or walk into the studio and buy out the studio, you would not have to worry anymore. There are these collectors who can make a career. And there are these gallerists that people watch, they can make a career. So you know if you tell one to go away because he is interested in something that doesn't interest you, probably you will never meet someone like that again.

On the weekend of the open studio the administrator was already writing to her for the third time about the rent. But naturally word got round about Adalberto. If you think that the people who run it are *dreaming* that someone like Adalberto will just *come*, and that if he would take up an artist they would be over the moon, they are not going to throw out that artist because of the rent. But if they would hear that it is all off they would be hounding you for a check.

The paintings on the walls were defenseless. They could not dry faster if it would not be possible to pay the rent on the studio. The paint is completely trusting. You think if nobody else is going to look after it it is up to you.

She had a superstition. If you have made your Gesellenstück, you should not let it go. So she made twenty new suits, instead of nineteen, and this was a very clever thing to do.



If you watch art auctions maybe you will think there are some very rich artists, because Hockney's *Portrait of Nick Wilder* sold for £3 million. But Hockney sold the painting a long time ago. It is the paintings from the 60s and 70s that make that money, and it is the people who own those paintings, and the people who handle the sale, who make the money. So it is too bad for Hockney that he did not keep aside a painting from that time.

Nobody would ask Hockney, at least you think nobody would ask Hockney to go back to that early style. You think he must have enough money so he would not be pressurized, anyway. But what if somebody discovers what you were doing in 1962, and they commission you to do nineteen more of what you were doing in 1962? If you can do even one you can do nineteen, and if you can do nineteen you can do twenty.

So she did twenty, and Adalberto never saw her *Gesellenstück* again, because it stayed on its padded hanger.

Adalberto gave her a check for £45,000, because he had subtracted the cost of the materials. So he had made this really grand gesture of wanting to buy out the shop, but if he would have done it she would have had to pay for all that useless stuff, and she *still* had bolts and bolts of material.

If you have followed the British art scene at all you will know that there are some things that are secondary. Tracey Emin made a tent called *Everybody I Have Ever Slept With* and the point was not the quality of the stitching. Later Emin did some other sewn work, but she got other people to do the sewing, and Hirst's dot paintings were not executed by Hirst, and this is all in the tradition of Warhol's Factory.

This would not do for Adalberto. It was the hatefulness of the pockets, the pleats, the buttonholes, the hatefulness of the stitching, that gave the garment its brutality. How is a garment to be brutal if made by someone lucky to get the work?

So Adalberto came back from New York, and he walked up and down in front of the twenty suits. They had been pressed with a proper steam iron. These were the wallflowers.

He said: What is that German word? Schrecklich.

He hung the twenty hideous suits in his showroom in Milan. The show could never be so transgressive outside Milan—if you have no sense of style, if you know nothing of design, you cannot *see* the stupidity of the ugly pocket which only a trained apprentice could execute correctly. But in Milan they practically fainted. Minuccia Prada bought out the show.

Adalberto still wanted to have a show in New York. Prada said OK.

Adalberto did not like the kind of catalogue that gives a CV of the artist.

Adalberto did not like it when an image of the artist was used as a sign of the artist.

Adalberto came to talk to her. He said: We are doing a show in New York. It's not Italy, they are not so sophisticated, people need things spelled out.

He said: I need a, what is the word, urine sample.

He had one of those little plastic cups, and you know, maybe you think it is for a visa or something, so she went to the loo.

Adalberto said: That's great and we will need one of the other, here is a box for it,

and she *knew* she would have heard of it if the US government made people give a shit sample,

she said: Adalberto, what are you doing?

Adalberto said: We are doing a show in New York. We have to be more explicit. That's all.

He said: It's about the body. Hatred of the body. Denial of the body. The hanging requires the body.

He said: I hate the kind of hanging where you have seen it a million times, the lighting is a cliché, the frames are a cliché, and then the buyer wants to know if it comes with the fucking frame and you want to say sure, and just for you we are throwing in a free pack of underwear autographed by the artist, I hate that crap.

Adalberto said Prada said she would maybe show it in the store in Tokyo.

That was because of the purity of the idea of the urine sample. People have this idea of the frame, a piece of wood, a piece of metal contiguous with the piece, we really have to get away from that.

Adalberto said: Now don't freak out on me.

He said: Are you still menstruating?

If you go to some new country you think you can leave behind the universe of words you grew up with, and even in the new country people are always building that cage of words, that is why it is good that art can be a thing. But people are always thinking they can break through the cage another way. When she was in art school in the 70s it was this very radical experimental time and sometimes people would do art that the teachers did not get, there was this bloke who did an installation in Manchester or it might have been Bradford and he had the examiners come out for it, and they just left. So he didn't get a degree. And even in those days it was funny that art was supposed to be transgressive but you were supposed to get a degree, but to be an artist and not go to art school would have been the absolute pits. But it was exciting because these famous artists would come to talk to the students, or you could go to London and see the shows and it was all happening right now.

There was this guy, Kerry Trengrove, he died, he smoked and he drank, if you do both it's bad, he got cancer of the throat and tongue. Most of his stuff ended up in the skip. But he did groundbreaking work. He did a show at Covent Garden, they put on very new things, he dug this deep hole in the ground of the gallery, just big enough to sleep and move around in. And he put a bed in, and a wall of Complan, and he covered it over with thick glass, with just enough of a gap to let air in, and he stayed there a week, he did everything there, he slept and ate and peed, and people could come and look down and see him underground. And that was groundbreaking work. That was back in the 70s. And he did another piece, he got these dogs, that were disturbed, or strays, and he stayed with them in a room for a week, and just by being there with him, for the week, they became tame.

And now, who has heard of Kerry Trengrove? Maybe five other people.

Or this other artist, Stuart Brisley. He was *the* performance artist in the 70s. He got this bath and he filled it full of offal and he lay in it. Another time he went on the roof of the Hayward Gallery, and he had himself strung up, naked, upside down. First he covered himself in this thick clay mud—his work always had this painterly quality—and

then he had himself strung up, and it was already autumn so it was quite cold, and someone stood on the ground with a hose and hosed him down—*cleansed* him.

But *he* is in books. You can read about him in books. So there is a record. That is why records are so important. You need someone to be there, to be a witness.

But all that expressiveness, that confessionality, that exhibitionism, that plastering of more meaning on the world, maybe you want to leave that, maybe you just do.

But then maybe you think of the paintings going in a skip. Maybe you think if someone wants to be a witness for this kind of covert exhibitionism then the paintings will not go in the skip.

This was this very bad time when the National Gallery was quite keen on plastering meaning on its collections, so once a year they would have an exhibition and a big banner outside the National Gallery that said Making and Meaning, and if she would take a bus through Trafalgar Square she would want to vomit, the buses through Trafalgar Square should have art sickness bags during the Making and Meaning Season but they didn't.

And now here was Adalberto with this idea that he was a curative genius and if other people got that idea all the gallerists would be doing it.

But maybe you don't see this, if you have done something you were never going to do again and somebody asks you to do something else you would not really do it is easy to go down that road.

Adalberto said if she was not menstruating they would just take a blood sample with a syringe but it would not be so good. He said they were going to have to use someone else for the breast milk which was not so good.

Sometimes the fact that something is easy seduces you. It is not like making a buttonhole or a pleat, the body is producing these fluids and solids and it is so simple to collect them.

Adalberto took her to this gym as a guest member, what a production. Men today have these bodies that you never used to see, they are pouring these hours into the body, if you look at Jim Morrison that is the type of body that men used to have and a man with a body like Anthony Quinn in *La Strada* would be really embarrassing

because it would be really over the top, but today nobody would want a body like Anthony Quinn because it would not be buff. Compared to what men have nowadays that would be nothing, and here was Adalberto with one of these bodies, and he was saying she must wear three sweatshirts and two pairs of sweatpants and run on a treadmill but it was not practical to run because she had been poor for so long. So he said OK, and he punched this button until the track was quite steep. He had brought this motorcycle helmet that he put on her head. It had a little rubber cup where the chin strap was and he said he would be back in fifteen minutes.

It took about an hour to collect the sweat.

He said she could use an onion for the tears.

He said if he gave her a cup she could spit into it.

He said maybe she could get really drunk so they could get the vomit.

If you have never been there you think it is easy to walk away.

She went to New York for the show. She flew first class. They put her up at this posh hotel called Morgan's.

When she saw the show it was not as bad as she thought. On one side of the room, on one long wall, were the suits. On the facing wall there were these tiny shelves, maybe 4 cm by 4 cm, in aluminum, and on each shelf was a glass container with thick sides flush with the edges of the shelf, and in this container would be the piss or the sweat or the blood, so it did have its beauty. It was good that there was this vast space between the work of art and the frame, you know when something is curated there is this mania for attaching things to it, words, facts, there will be a little card on the wall and people will go anxiously to the card to avail themselves of its wisdom and return to the work of art with the little trophy, these words that were on the card, and sometimes you will see people hunting manically for the card—

So there was a boldness about this space that was good, and it was good having the works of art on one wall somehow, and the numbers were by the glass jars on the opposite wall and there was nothing on the wall with the works of art at all. So that was quite clever and mischievous.

Maybe if you are making art that is a thing, maybe if that thinginess is what you immerse yourself in, if you spend all that time away from about, if you are never attaching, maybe you are lost to words after a while, then someone comes along who is really good at manipulating and you can't make words push for you.

But maybe it is just that Italians are slippery. In the War the Nazis would send directives to the Italians about extraditing Jews and they could not get them to cooperate. The Italians could not get excited about it and if they are not excited about it they are not going to do it but if they are excited about it you can't stop them.

The papers had said that Prada had bought out the show for \$1 million. Maybe it wasn't true. She would rehearse things to say to Adalberto but he was quite hard to pin down.

Then one day it was in the papers that an artist had had him declared bankrupt. If someone doesn't pay you this is something you can do, have them declared bankrupt. This artist had been quite clever, she had a contract and that was what made it possible to recover the debt. But all the other artists he owed money did not have contracts. There was nothing on paper to give them a right. And anyway he was a limited company.

So the £45,000 was all that was left from the twenty suits, and some of it had to go to the Inland Revenue. So the only thing was to do a show while that excitement was still in the air.

This was really tricky because Serge did not want to be abandoned but he felt somehow he had been left with the less interesting work, it poisoned his interest in the painting. Serge wanted her to make some more suits for the London gallery. He was desperate to be cutting edge. If he would show suits all the bigwigs in London would come because they did not see them in Milan and New York. But it had been happening for so long that a lot of the paintings were really really dry. So she said he could show *one suit* if he would do a show for the paintings, but it would not be for sale.

So Serge had this show. And naturally now he nominated her for the Turner. Anybody can make a nomination but because of Adalberto she made the short list. They invited her to submit a piece,

and sometimes you get disgusted. You keep thinking the tide will turn and painting will stop being unfashionable and then it would be exciting to be short-listed for the Turner. But the Turner selects these things that are exciting for people who don't know anything about art. In art school there is someone in every year doing Minimalism, or Conceptualism, and then the Turner will pick somebody who is doing what people do in their first year of art school, so it is kind of disgusting to get selected. So then Serge was saying I'm not saying another *word*. My lips are *sealed*. You *know* what I think, but I'm not putting *any pressure* on you, because it's absolutely your decision.

And maybe you would think that this would be the big chance to show what interests you. But the thing about being an artist is that from the minute you go to art school you realize there is this need to be canny. There is this need to make a name for yourself. There is this need to deal with the people who have the power. And Turner, Turner did it as much as anybody, he was a genius but he did what he had to do to get into the Royal Academy. So when she applied for UK citizenship it was not just a rejection of Germany. Why would she do it if not to be eligible for the Turner if the chance would come? So if you have set it up to give yourself that chance, there is this obvious next step to do give them what you think they will want to win. And she was really tired and anxious because of Adalberto going bankrupt, and the cutoff age was fifty so this was the last year she would be eligible, and sometimes a story has a momentum of its own, and it was as if they had nominated a puppet. So she submitted her *Gesellenstück*, and the way she installed it was she hung it on one wall under a white light, and on the opposite wall, down the long end of the room, she put a glass jar of spermicidal jelly.

J. H. PRYNNE

## Mental Ears and Poetic Work

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In current, customary practice a lecture is rather generally expected to be a type of public performance in which a well-informed speaker communicates to an assembly of listeners some orderly sequence of information and argument or discussion which is shaped around a distinct topic; to be useful to the listeners a spoken discourse will commonly aim for clarity and accuracy: this is the format of instruction. The present occasion will not quite fit this model, because it's my intention to explore some thinking which is not yet fully clear to me, and to bring in information and methods in which I claim no expert knowledge. This will sound like a recipe for confusion, and it is. The project is difficult because much abstractness is involved, and because of a reflexive application in which explaining oneself to oneself quickly discovers areas of rather crucial obscurity. All this has to do with presenting some thoughts about poetry, from the admitted position of being a poet involved over many years with reading and writing poetry as an engrossed way of life. This may look not so unusual in demographic terms but is actually a highly eccentric mode of life when inspected from within.

I want to present experimentally a scheme for the description and analysis of poetic language mounted in the domain of poetic discourse. The specific domain is that of English poetry and the English language considered as a system and as a history; this choice is arbitrary except that a native-language aspect may be important, and in my own case I have only one of these. The task is not attempted with systematic reference to any known practice of explanation, though drawing on several; and to be satisfactory it should be inclusive, that is, give account of the centrally normative characteristics of how poems work. This because for all the pungent games in which poetry can engage, it comprises at its most fully extended an envelope which finds and sets the textual contours in writing of how things are; while also activating



a system of discontinuities and breaks which interrupt and contest the intrinsic cohesion and boundary profiles of its domain, so that there is constant leakage inwards and outwards across the connection with the larger world order. That's an outline in broadest abstraction, for a start.

To attempt a description of poetic language is difficult for one who is persistently a poet, because the knowledge of and in poems which sets the pace for wider knowledge more generally is distinctive by virtue of interior perspective: poets know the operant features of their own language-work from the inside, and along the real-time sequence of composition, starting at the beginning.<sup>1</sup> They may also within a writing career be conscious of their own previous and shifting usages of style and manner, as a set of evolutionary gradients and even ruptures, linked in many cases to a particular responsiveness to the historical record correspondent with attentiveness to exemplars. Whereas for any reader thereafter, the way into poems is by retrospect and from the finished outside, through the shell of the boundary layer. And of course the many variant types of writing activity and productive outcome which express the practice of poetic work cover a broad spectrum of difference and historical succession, within many far-flung distinct language communities across the world. Being a poet is not a specific job description. But even within these spread-out and disparate lines of access to poetry there may just be grounds enough for some shots at diagnosis.

What initially resembles a generalising overview must now be re-focused, as an idiosyncratic singular perspective. An English-language poet, from England itself, carries just one of the world dialects as inherent mental wiring, the circuit diagrams of a cradle speech which are cross-wired into the cultural history of a ramified national identity. All this wiring is also, of course, the site and motive for a vigilant resistance, for non-compliance: using a set of implements does not mean being used by them. I'll accept the risk of self-reference now as in no claimed sense a type case, in order to offer a particular scheme for the purpose of reference and as a tryout. To build a writing framework over an extent of regular practice, across many years, accumulates a profile more and more singular. Even family likeness may not be sufficient to accomplish recognition in full detail. At the same time the isolation of a self-interior retrospect is highly dangerous,

because an encroaching narcissism of preoccupation will promote unrecognized claims of endorsement from chance occurrence, locked into the habits of procedure. Or maybe this is not exactly a danger, depending on point of view.

In my own case the language of unrealized possible poetic composition has drawn, initially and constantly, with profound hunger and gratitude upon the rich embankments of the English poetic record. As a vivid penumbra there are the poetic records of neighbour cultural traditions and indeed the whole range of poetry across the world, some in foreign languages with which I am acquainted, some in languages powerfully exotic and strange; but outside of translation, most (not all) of my own composition has been in the medium of my native speech. By no means all writing work sets down these traditional roots of origination; but the recovery of speech and song across former generations, and the span of many layers and locations of practice, sets out a format of provisional continuity. That in turn primes the double twin directives of a textual-language process—inwards and outwards, backwards and forwards—to justify stereophonic marking for orientation in overt space and time, mental and social by parallel composure. It's widely believed that to read deeply and with enhanced attention the sedimented products of an earlier poetic history is to encounter the meaning of a cultural process, the intricate play of ethical agency and imaginative conjecture as composing a pedigree for full present-tense creative empowerment.<sup>2</sup> But for an emergent poet to read the output of precursory eras is a complex and recursive activity, because what in the record is output must for the poet-reader also be input, dismantled from its bounded emplacement as re-fluidized for soluble modularity.

The poet works with mental ears. Via this specialized audition the real-time sounds of speech and vocalized utterance are disintegrated into sublexical acoustic noise by analogy with the striking clatter of real work in the material world. Plus also bird song, weather sounds, and the cognates. From this first reduction the array of voice-sounds can then be transposed into a textual constellation in which compositional purpose begins to remake the anecdotal variety of actual speech. By this means the sociology of utterance-occasions is part-replaced by the textuality of a language domain.<sup>3</sup> All human speech performance operates by hybridizing the components of possible word narratives;

but the textual domain is an intermediary condition very specific to poetic work.<sup>4</sup> This domain is constructed from the realized human sounds of words in voluble sequence, utterance as carried through to expression by the apportionment of phrase and sentence and the paragraph or strophic boundaries of their profession, the mental span of serial completions.<sup>5</sup> Written discourse projects into a representational text-composure the altered acoustics of speech events, real and conjectural. But the discourse of poetry installs a variable set of yet further dimensions.

The mental ears of the poet make here a second reduction, a process rather explicitly described by Mallarmé, which imposes selection constraints with the purpose to define and empower the mode of a distinct and distinctive poetic textuality.<sup>6</sup> Within this further reduction the tendency of a composed text towards its completion can take on, via acts of free-ranging intelligence and sensibility, the formats of signifying deliberateness. These constraints are not only or primarily those of prosody or versification; they comprise a re-modeled schedule of speech-sounds and performance features within the constrained language itself.<sup>7</sup> Mental ears also permit reconstruction of raw phonetic data, in particular across precedent historical eras, so that the alert poet as reader can “tune in” to earlier schedules of poetic composition: the percipient self relocates so as to occupy a prior station already inflected by knowledge of successor historical conditions. Mental ears are thus evolutionary by retroflex recognisance, from the outcomes of experiment back to the experimental matrix itself and its shifting points of origin.

It’s often asserted that the rhythmical deployment of sense carried into sound is what gives poetic discourse its special power of making a grateful living space for readerly attention and remembrance; that pattern by varied repetition captures the speech habits of interior and sociable language use, and profiles these into the formats of record that can re-emerge into a reader’s vicarious experience, through the mental ears. And thus indeed for readers who learn to read by reading it must often be: it is the sonic domain of completeness as composed by the dynamic boundary lineations, chiefly intonational and stress-marked in Western metrical disposition, that works towards significant endings which are the bounds and conclusions of significance: the unit measures of part and whole.<sup>8</sup>

The scheme to be proposed here does not denounce this diagnosis of rhythmic contour as formative in the transfer of text composure into mental reception; but it comprises nonetheless an alternative (if also complementary) mode of reckoning: by the methods of descriptive and historical phonology. Nor shall this be a usage of these methods in normative application, because a distinct subvariant of the generic phonology of a specific language and its derivational antecedents is to be claimed, perhaps for the first time, as the working phonological template for poetic language, the language-use of actual poems. What is a phonology? It's the system of sound forms in a speech practice that is structural to the coherence of a language and its evolution through time; a part-abstract mental representation that's to be somewhat distinguished from a phonetics, which is more concerned with the mechanics and acoustics of voice-sound production.<sup>9</sup> This distinction between phonology and phonetics, though often crossed over and blurred, is rather crucial to the present purpose, because the sounds that poems make are not here treated as acoustic sonorities, but as semi-abstract representations of relations and orderings between and across sounds, within a textual domain.<sup>10</sup>

It's from this distinction that my own lack of interest in the performance of poems in their author's own voice takes its origin; the specific occasional delivery is no more than an accidentalism of sound and behaviour, since it is the language of the text that has and produces voice, and not the mere vocal equipment and habits of a speaker.<sup>11</sup> An author-speaker of text in self-performance may seem to be a special case, in that features of such delivery can seem to be communicating an authentic textual inwardness, from the stance of an authorized knowledge and self-interpretation. But such semblance is really delusional; this is to undo the work of mental ears, by a kind of primitive literal-mindedness: "Look, the poet is wearing red socks! Now at last we understand everything!"

I should make clear at once that I have no formal expertise in either phonology or phonetics. But the discovery of explicit phonological features within a poetic discourse practice is perhaps enabled because both phonology and poetry make a reduction upon the language base of their raw counterparts.<sup>12</sup> To recognize and identify the phonological systematics of poetic idiolects also does in all likelihood require enhanced proficiency in reading and construing poetic texts, and to

characterize such features as indigenous within procedures of poetic composition probably also requires experience of original poetic authorship. What in this context of reading poetry in and across a historical culture-span can give phonology as a discipline its especial relevance are the realized links in the stages of an evolving speech usage discovered in alteration of sound-values over time, mutations not arbitrary or accidental but following observable regularities amounting to descriptive and also proscriptive regulation. The rule-structure of descriptive and historical phonology, in its many variant and indeed mutually contesting versions, is a complex elaboration, and as the term strongly suggests, is intimately involved with the sound-formats of language as an acoustic modality.<sup>13</sup> A community of readers and listeners, the audience for poetry, will be familiar with sound-patterns and sonic performance, as if an argument from phonology could present little that's new. But now we must insert some refinements. First, the patterns discovered by phonological analysis are in varying degrees binding, and not selective options (like for instance a poet's metrical choices): they function as rules of the base structure. And second, the sound-values in a description are abstract, by reference from surface features to underlying typologies: how an actual poet speaks, the ups and down and elisions and quirks of the spoken occasion, are excluded by reduction. And third, the rules give shape and expression to the grammar of speech, to its rational and evolutionary linguistic skeleton which supports the productive inventiveness of textuality.

Do these features make a difference, to any claimed similarity with prosodic and metrical formalisms within the composition of poetry? The answer must for sure be *yes*. The rule-patterns of rhyme, for example, or of metrical regularity or strophic enclosure and repetition, are arbitrary in regard to grammatical structure, and much of their effect arises from cross-play between one system and another, manoeuvred by composing habits of practice into productive contrasts and parallelisms.<sup>14</sup> This versification activity is thus not intrinsic to the base language, although it may appropriate base features and manipulate them into secondary formalisms. The lexicon may be restricted in poetic employment by reductions which may be systematic or may be habitual ("signature-features"), but the lexicon itself is not inflected or modified at base level by reference to poetic

usage, even if a vocabulary may indeed be altered by surface variation; and the same is true of the base-grammar as opposed to variation in applied syntax.<sup>15</sup> Even when selection of vocabulary for stress and accent features (under metrical surface-rules) may be modeled on aspects of natural speech, these too don't regulate a grammar or sound-value structures, or, come to that, a lexical meaning-profile.

Thus the novel claim here is two-fold: that a phonological analysis of poetic speech usage may disclose base-level rule patterns and their historical evolutionary forms; and that such analysis may provide a diagnostic template for some of the ways in which an attentive reader of poems may intuitively model the surface features of performance into a mental representation of signifying relations and connections within the textual ordering of poetic language in action. This tentative claim gives a new and sharper sense to the expression "mental ears," because by this analysis we hear through (by means of) abstract representation, and also because we integrate the surface formalisms with explicit cognitive recognition of the underlying base forms: in each case we know by such hearing because the mere anecdotalism of sonic variety in speech sounds and phrasal accent-contours is brought into diagnostically understood formalisation.<sup>16</sup> All this, we should note, must call upon the rules of a grammar in construing word-sequence but is concerned with dimensions and features not merely subordinate to syntax or morphology; and it has not yet been necessary at all to invoke questions of meaning. For features in an analysis to be significant or signifying does not transfer into a requirement that they be meaningful, that is, semantically productive in a discoverable way.

Suppose that we take stock, of what's at issue so far. As I have admitted, I develop these inchoate thoughts in order somewhat to reflect on my own writerly practice. The discourse of poems is rather usually less directly able to be construed and normalized, than the ordinary language of every day. The discourses of modernism in Western poetics make steeper descents into sub-intelligibility; and in my own case I am rather frequently accused of having more or less altogether taken leave of discernible sense. In fact I believe this accusation to be more or less true, and not to me alarmingly so, because what for so long has seemed the arduous royal road into the domain of poetry ("what does it mean?") seems less and less an

unavoidably necessary precondition for successful reading. The task, however, is not to subside into distracted ingenious playfulness with the lexicon and cross-inflectional idiomatics, but to write and read with maximum focused intelligence and passion, each of these two aspects bearing so strongly into the other as to fuse them into the enhanced state once in an old-fashioned way termed the province of the imagination.<sup>17</sup> “Mental ears” do not relegate us to the dominion of performative sonority, nor do they elevate us into the paramount abstraction of inferred ideas and beliefs: they are an intense hybrid and I treat them as the essential equipment for reading poetry in today’s post-traditional world space, and also as required attentional receptors for the professional phonologist; as indeed they were for the philologists of previous eras.<sup>18</sup>

It’s the usual practice of phonologists to analyse the abstract sound-structures of a specific language or dialect, often in wider context of comparative purview; the smallest units of scrutiny are probably sub-group communities like creolized or immigrant populations, the sound world of young children learning a native speech, or the non-sound world of sign language used by deaf people.<sup>19</sup> But not much has so far been done to analyse the interface between the phonetics of poetic formalisms and the phonology of their underlying structural representation. Intuitively I have an increasing sense of the instructive work that might be done here. It will perhaps be recognized that this argument has up to now not strongly distinguished between a descriptive phonology and its historical or evolutionary counterpart. But by restricting the field of analysis to the current surface features of one language only, English, and by further restricting the set of linguistic data to poetic composition and its procedures and to the textuality thus implied, the historical axis must assume a strongly paramount position as characteristic of this material. And a certain type of professing poet working along the span of a productive career will construct a self-history that may unfold parallels with the generic histories of English and pre-English poetries, and trace out a specifically evolutionary version of the more inclusively historical dimension: one thing leads in and out of another, in dispositions not merely chronological nor even accumulative. So that “mental ears” are also empowered by linkages of memory and retrospect, as reconstruction of what originally faced towards the undeclared future, just as today’s practice also does. “Mental ears” will hear in

older sounds the then new sounds of making and marking a track into forward space: a future in the past.<sup>20</sup>

What may be referenced as an evolutionary phonology may thus open some not previously acknowledged gateways into understanding and analysing some baseline procedures in poetic composition: not as a key to all the mythologies but maybe to some of them. It's time to mount up at least one example, and here I again warn that the methods to be adopted are a long way from professional within any of the variant pursuits of current phonology: they are intuitive, and non-technical, and are put forward by way of untested conjecture. Be ready, then, for some wonky thinking and part-connection, especially if any present have some phonological training or expertise: this may be a bumpy ride.

At the conclusion of a walking tour with his sister Dorothy in the summer of 1798, William Wordsworth composed a now-famous poem with the title: "Lines[,] Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798." This poem has been much discussed and, indeed, argued over; to speak personally, I can add that I have loved this poem deeply, almost since childhood. Describing his memories of an earlier visit to this same location, confirmed by again viewing the same prospect, the poet speaks of the influence which subsequently these remembered scenes had upon his mental and emotional life; also, indeed, upon his spiritual life and inward personal being:

But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din  
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,  
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,  
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,  
And passing even into my purer mind  
With tranquil restoration: —feelings too  
Of unremembered pleasure; such, perhaps,  
As may have had no trivial influence  
On that best portion of a good man's life;  
His little, nameless, unremembered acts  
Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,  
To them I may have owed another gift,  
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,  
In which the burthen of the mystery,



In which the heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world  
Is lighten'd: —that serene and blessed mood,  
In which the affections gently lead us on,  
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame,  
And even the motion of our human blood  
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
In body, and become a living soul.<sup>21</sup>

I want first to give close attention to the line, “Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,” and to notice the word-final stops, plosive (*t* and *d*) and nasal (*ng*). If we reverse-trace the morphology here we shall find “felt” as derived by regular suffixation from “feel,” which is not end-stopped; the *-t* of “felt” being a rule-governed assimilated form of the regular weak-verb inflectional suffix, *-ed* (properly *-d*).<sup>22</sup> We shall find “blood” derived, not quite so regularly, from “bleed,” since “blood” is a kind of preterite outcome of bleeding as it comes to visible self-knowledge: “human blood” precedes bleeding but our observationally confirmed knowledge of blood has been until recent times consequent upon bleeding events.<sup>23</sup> “Heart,” Middle English *herte*, Old English *heorte*, proto-Germanic *\*hertan-*, has been word-final end-stopped throughout its evolutionary history; vowel shifts mark out these stages of historical development, part rule-governed and part by pragmatic adaptation.<sup>24</sup> The underlying forms here represented by these word-final or syllabic-final stops demonstrate conditions originally continuing, chiefly in tense structure systems, that have been clipped or stopped and thus marked as concluded, so that they shift out of immediately present knowledge into recognition by retrospect.<sup>25</sup>

This argument regarding Wordsworth’s text may be extended. The poem continues:

Nor less, I trust,  
To them I may have owed another gift,  
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,  
In which the burthen of the mystery,  
.....  
Of all this unintelligible world  
Is lighten'd...

Here the word “trust,” inserted as a parenthesis, implicates another historical transmission of formal outcome, from “true,” attested e.g., in the cognate link with Old Icelandic *tryggr*, “faithful, safe, true.”<sup>26</sup> Thus to have or keep trust is to derive confidence and consolation from a condition of grateful dependence upon a sustaining verity; we may compare Gothic *trausti*, “agreement, covenant.” Once more the word-final stop in “trust” represents a derived completion or endedness, continuing but secondary to its unstopped original form. In this context we may note too that “mind” (Old High German *gimunt*, “memory,” and *minna*, “love”) is end-stopped; also for Wordsworth “purer” because not distracted and thus more free to assimilate blessing, but also held strongly in place by the more fixed emplacements of memory and of trust.<sup>27</sup>

In like fashion “gift” puts the same stop to “give,” as some finite outcome of open giving;<sup>28</sup> “burthen” (though not end-stopped) is the definitive end-consequence of “bear” (in the sense of “load” and also of “birth”); and “blessed” locates the endowment of benefit in the past tenses of “bless.”<sup>29</sup> This in turn traces a formal link with “blood” and “bleed,” as deriving from ME *blessen*, OE *bletsian*, *bloedsian*, all linked through the sense-development of “to make sacred or holy by ritual shedding of blood.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, “bless” performs an outcome from “bleed” through the performative derivation of “blood,” and “blessed” marks out a threshold for the sublime, *sub + limen*, where the end-stop is word-medial but syllabic-final, in the affix *sub*, “up to, as far as” the lintel or entrance portal to the spirit world of beatitude and love.<sup>31</sup> The word-medial stop in “sublime” is displaced in “suspend” by usual *b > s* before *p*, but the double-final stop in “suspend-ed” is then echoed in similar end-stopping to “almost,” “laid,” and “asleep”; thus, *almost* the soul is freed from the body, and this *almost* is the two-way threshold into the spiritual sublime, the uppermost dialectic of stop and release.

See how this works. “Heart” is end-stopped, and the “huamn blood” that flows by its agency will come to its final stop, as all mortal hearts must do at the end of human life.<sup>32</sup> At precisely this point, according to Christian doctrine, the soul gains immortal freedom and rises to an unstopped spiritual enlargement. The soul becomes “living” in this new life because the heart has surrendered the blood-life that held the

soul back. What is passionately daring in these lines is to take impetus from the heart's own life so as to reach the very threshold itself of the soul's subsequently continuing immortality: the closed end of one state opening the portal to the freedom of the other, from heart to soul, across the line marked by the end-stopped "almost." The daring lies in asserting not that the soul at the last becomes free of the expired body, but that while still within our mortal frame it is not merely the exalted poet but, inclusively, *we* who become living souls. The mortal beings that we are can be stopped, *almost*, in gentle anticipation of our final end so as to glimpse the soul's flight beyond the blood-limits, and in this singular moment to be present at this flight and to be part of it. The "blessed mood" (both words end-stopped) may be transient, but it can be trusted to recur, leaving a permanent alterative trace in grateful memory; for the poet and, by transfer of hope, for the reader also.<sup>33</sup>

At this point in an already far-conjectural reconstruction it may further be observed that the vocabulary of *blood* and *blessing* and *trust* are all terms in a Christian dispensation, which gives the final end of man a special function in the ways and means of a divine immortality for the soul. To have trust in the resurrection of the body and the unextinguishable prospect of a blessed future state was part of a covenant which placed life-endings outside the reach of fear, because the shedding of innocent blood in divine sacrifice had redeemed the mortal limits of the human spirit; but this covenant, though Wordsworth's terminology is redolent with its structure of assurance, is not called on here and indeed may not at that moment have been quite felt by him as valid beyond any question; so that the end-stops of mortality take on function as the markers of a personal dialectic, between past and future and between fear and hope. "Blessing" in that unstopped form is the mark of future trust in an alternative natural covenant of joy, as for instance in the very first line of the 1805–6 text of *The Prelude*:

Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze  
That blows from the green fields and from the clouds  
And from the sky...<sup>34</sup>

And yet of course the phonological features of preterite tense-structure marking reach back to eras of Indo-European language

formation long before the development of Christian doctrine in any form. Blood sacrifice as a concept and practice is found in some of the earliest cultic behaviours evidenced in the archaeological record.<sup>35</sup>

All these risky elaborations borrow formal phonological features in order to analyse, conjecturally and by reconstruction, a surmised evolutionary process in language history which gives Wordsworth's text some of its complicated sense of the past in the present and future, the stoppage of one dimension part-sublimated into acknowledgement and derived renewal in another. These features are by no means instances of adventitious sound symbolism, or association of semantic values with surface features; they are within the structure and history of English as an evolved system, and furthermore they are selected here for a mutually reinforcing, if latent, prominence: in other words, they are *motivated*. I should not wish to claim that this selection was in any sense deliberate or conscious; if the underlying textual features exist it is because poets are tuned into their language structures to an unusual degree of linguistic susceptibility. Such features are neither invented nor discovered, they are disclosed. Also perhaps to be asked is, does such motivation (if it exists) extend into other parts of Wordsworth's copious and varied output, and into the work of other poets: these would be questions for a much larger and more elaborate inquiry.<sup>36</sup>

This, I'd by this first experiment tentatively claim, is the kind of recovery that a phonological analysis could advance. In the specific context of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" poem, and maybe more acutely in the localized context of these few lines, there is a latent dialectic of contradiction which this reconstructed outline narrative has been (perhaps) able to bring to view. It concerns mortality and the closure of human life, the stopping of heart and mind when blood will no longer infuse the power of feeling or of being itself. A generic feature of word-sounds that is commonplace within the system of English could not bear this implication ordinarily; but here, I contend, this feature is persistent in recognisably signifying ways, and is thus tacitly motivated by its proximate collocations. In the midst of joyous continuity, the steady pulse and flow of verse movement, these intimations point towards a possible immortality as the dialectical counterpart to a certain prospect of eventual mortal finality and decease. The actions or forms of agency spoken of here are not acts of will but acts of being and human life, of a lifetime extended

towards its terminus and also its fulfilment.<sup>37</sup> What is felt “along the heart” follows the stream of blood flow, parallel with the duration of self-being and its bodily precondition, even though circular and thus not properly linear; but what is thus stored and restored in personal memory (“mind,” Gothic *gamunds*, “memory,” etc.) will not outlast the beating heart: “long” is a finite span (the word closed with a nasal word-final stop) and is not immortal.<sup>38</sup>

This must also bring “love” into the frame, since “mind” connects intimately both with memory and with love, the latter as affection rather than desire: Old English *myne* has been textually interpreted in this sense of “love,” by a development from *thought* to *kindly thought* and *gratitude*, to *love*; the wide-ranging discussion of an Old English textual crux in the edition by Dunning and Bliss of *The Wanderer* (c. tenth century, early) is highly informative.<sup>39</sup> For Wordsworth these little nameless acts of kindness and of love were “unremembered,” not held in finite recollection, so that their influence can still flow onwards when the specific occasions have been lost to mind and memory; they form the tacit habitual prosody of a man’s ethical character.<sup>40</sup> Latent presence of these system links and connections is stored textually within a knowledge that belongs with the underlying base forms, not declared directly in surface features but implicit in the motivated sound-structures and time-logic of phonological evolution.<sup>41</sup>

In equally experimental spirit another text-example may be more briefly nominated: *Paradise Lost*, IV. 449–91, Eve’s narrative of her earliest moment of self-encounter as a determinate identity.<sup>42</sup> To the modern reader this initial failure of resolved, other-directed loving attachment strongly suggests an attributed primal narcissism, as if, very obliquely, Eve is being prepared for sacrifice; but an alternatively directed enquiry may observe in the diction employed a preponderant density of end-stopped formations: “That day I oft remember, when from sleep / I first awaked, and found myself reposed, / Under a shade of flowers...” (449–51).<sup>43</sup> The past-tense re-telling causes *-ed* verb forms to be expected: but *oft*, *sleep*, *first*, *shade*, together with *awaked*, *found*, *reposed*, comprise once again a phonologically recognisable tendency, accentuated by Milton’s own regular if not always consistent preference for *-t* and *-d* spellings (*awak’t*, *repos’d*, etc.), to demonstrate the restricted sound-closure of these word-forms.<sup>44</sup>

The effect of these surface features, symptomatic of an underlying structural sound-patterning, points to closure and time-process cut back from its own continuity or development. Here these end-stopped markers may indeed intimate a tacit critique of Eve's predicament: she has been taken out of Adam (*membered*) but now she self-discovers to be shut in, unable to escape this initial regression. In semantic force, *oft* and *first* should point to onwardness; but all the Germanic family cognates for *oft*, though of somewhat obscure ultimate origin, are end-stopped, before *often* enters early Modern English (c. 1250) by adaptive extension;<sup>45</sup> this modernized replacement (without end-stop) is then nullified by Milton's archaizing preference (massive) for the *oft*-form, even though in "avoidance of obsolescent verb terminals" he was "outstandingly modern";<sup>46</sup> and *first* traces back to the same source as Old English *fore* (adv.), "formerly, previously," also Sanskrit *pura*, "formerly, before": thus in closed-anterior even more than open-forward reference.<sup>47</sup>

From the very first the reader is forewarned of Eve's trial by ordeal (the "first disobedience," *PL*, I.1), which is the necessary engine of Milton's poem and to the logic of which he must as its narrator be obedient; God did not at first predetermine the transgression (III. 97–128), but Milton did, and the ensuing divine punishment is incommensurate, unforgiving, and sacrificial.<sup>48</sup> The phonological tendency of these end-stops to *oft* and *first* may demonstrate in Eve a proleptic loss of future self, or self-future, from which she is here (though not later) assisted to escape by Adam's impassioned rescue (IV. 481–91). All too soon she and Adam together will be under darker shades than the umbrage of flowers. Thus what has opened the story also by strong entail comes duly to pass, and forecloses it: *first* may look to be innocently open, but it is already shut.

But now after so much untested conjecture there is more to be said about the work of "mental ears," even more riskily and even less supported by established professional methods. These word-final or segment-final speech stops allow various modes of continuing process or state of being to be interrupted or broken into, opening faults and cleavages within the representation of language and thought in action. This observation must be in some general sense true for most if not all human language usage: a language system operates in discrete packets

not as an unbroken linear continuity; it is unitized in fundamental ordering, unlike for example the system of colour in which the transitions are seamless and gradualized.<sup>49</sup> But poets in especial have incorporated prosodic breakage into almost all systems of poetic composition, whether by traditional versification or oral performance or by verse in experimental free forms. The word-boundary markers within “natural” phrasal sequencing are cross-structured by textual constraints of formal division and metricality.<sup>50</sup>

Here to cite only the most conspicuous instance, the line-breaks or step-ordering that override the unfeatured page space of normal printed language perform the overt function of continuity by versus and retroflex, manipulating syntax and sentence completion by complementary but also rivalrous formalisms.<sup>51</sup> These are not merely contrastive or format-based features; this is the dialectical argument of poetic form within the textual domain, when fully activated to encounter the contradictions in poetic diction and discourse, to disrupt a complaisant surface harmony by the head-on turns which generate energy of conception and conscience and bring discrepant aspects face to face.<sup>52</sup> How can the blessing of benediction, as Wordsworth nominated this to be the source of his profoundest gratitude, be rooted not just in the living bloodstream but in the deliberate prior spillage of innocent blood?<sup>53</sup> Is this just an “accident” of European language-history, assimilated opportunistically into Christian dogma, or an aspect of global-humane values emerging from earlier epochs of barbaric superstition? In Wordsworth’s own case, what in some final reckoning did the French Revolution really mean to him?

The very medium of poetic textuality incorporates and instantiates the features of breakage at local and microscopic levels, as discoverable by phonological and other types of analysis, into a dialectic which may look arbitrary or merely optional but which polarizes the task of poetic composition. Formal and structural features within the language system, the selective-discourse system, the prosodic and formal verse system, all within the contrastive perspectives of historical development, compete to provoke the formation of shifting hybrids across boundaries of sometimes radical counter-tension. The active poetic text is thus characteristically in dispute with its own ways and means, contrary implication running inwards to its roots and outwards

to its surface proliferations: not as acrobatic display but as working the work that, when fit for purpose, poetry needs to do.<sup>54</sup> These are the proper arguments of poetry as a non-trivial pursuit, the templates for ethical seriousness. As just one example, the condoned spillage of innocent blood is everywhere around us, now, and the artificers of consolatory blessing who are the leaders of organized religion are up to their dainty necks in this blood.<sup>55</sup> I have believed throughout my writing career that no poet has or can have clean hands, because clean hands are themselves a fundamental contradiction. Clean hands do no worthwhile work.

In these ways maybe it's possible and perhaps even obligatory to think with "mental ears," focused via the fault lines in language and thought as a discontinuous system upon the inevitable fault lines in ethical being and in material reality.<sup>56</sup> There is no mere reconciliation of these profoundly discrepant aspects that is not also, in differing and reckonable degrees, corrosive to strong knowledge and understanding: the systems of public and private ethical awareness ensue in contested practical agency by means of this knowledge. Because active human knowledge is thus inherently dialectical and in dispute with itself and its base in reality, the apparently segregated domains of poetry turn out, by reverse transit through the mental ears, to connect at full intensity with the disorders of public conscience; so that, in my own view at least, even silence on this account must be reckoned and held accountable.<sup>57</sup> We get direction and sometimes proper warning from the "mental ears" active in poetic work and in our reading practice of poetic textuality. Language is itself an intrinsic fault system, and it is worse than a mistake not to understand this as best ever we can.



## NOTES

This lecture was given by invitation at the University of Chicago in April 2009, for which occasion grateful thanks are here expressed; subsequently in June 2009 it was also re-presented to the Cambridge Graduate Theory Seminar, for which occasion further thanks are also placed on record.

1/ “My unique relation with my work—and it is a tenuous one—is the making relation. I am with it a little in the dark and fumbling of making, as long as that lasts, then no more. I have no light to throw on it myself and it seems a stranger in the light that others throw.” Samuel Beckett, letter to Arland Ussher, November 6, 1962, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, Texas, cit. in Samuel Beckett, *The Letters*, Vol. I: 1929–1940, ed. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), xi.

2/ Thus e.g., Matthew Arnold: “The substance and matter of the best poetry acquire their special character from possessing, in an eminent degree, truth and seriousness. We may add yet further, what is in itself evident, that to the style and manner of the best poetry their special character, their accent, is given by their diction, and, even yet more, by their movement. . . . So far as high poetic truth and seriousness are wanting to a poet’s matter and substance, so far also, we may be sure, will a high poetic stamp of diction and movement be wanting to his style and manner.” “The Study of Poetry” (1880), in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, Vol. IX, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973), 171; and then e.g., this: “If to our English race an inadequate sense for perfection of work is a real danger, if the discipline of respect for a high and flawless excellence is peculiarly needed by us, Milton is of all our gifted men the best lesson, the most salutary influence.” “Milton” (1888), in *Complete Prose Works*, Vol. XI, ed. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977), 330. Such orotund self-confidence had surely blunted Arnold’s ears: Chaucer “lacks the high seriousness of the great classics, and therewith an important part of their virtue” (“The Study of Poetry,” *Prose Works*, Vol. IX, 177).

3/ Textuality has undergone much discussion and counter-definition over recent time. What is here meant is roughly the conceptual manifold of writerly script in production format of projection beyond the confines of compositional selfhood. Poetic textuality is thus a discourse of language signs founded in dispositions corresponding generically to historically current beliefs at time of origin about poetry as distinguished from other forms of literary discourse, based on reduction (transformation) of natural language into the adaptive schedules of poetic usage as variably characterised by schemes of versification, figural transformation and so on. This status may be realised (performed) in shape of book or manuscript, etc., but the underlying immanent formalism

is abstract and conceptual, a homeland for deep thought and radical critique. For a full review discussion see Jorge J. E. Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality: The Logic and Epistemology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995): on texts and language, 42–44, 70–71, 118–19, etc., on textual meaning as culturally determined, 86–98, 123–27, 135, 140–41, 188–89, 207–09, etc.

4/ It is indifference to the alterative effect of textuality that causes Derek Attridge to write, following the consensus, that “Poems are made out of spoken language.” *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2. I believe this statement to be decisively not true, unless it is also to be believed that tables and chairs are made out of living trees. For implicit historical strain in the reduction of voice to text compare J. H. Prynne, *Field Notes: ‘The Solitary Reaper’ and Others* (Cambridge: Barque Press, 2007), 8–11.

5/ Gerald Bruns has proposed a somewhat comparable starting point: “Poetry is made of language but is not a use of it—that is, poetry is made of words but not of what we use words to produce: meanings, concepts, propositions, descriptions, narratives, expressions of feeling, and so on. . . . Poetry is language in excess of the functions of language.” Gerald L. Bruns, *The Material of Poetry: Sketches for a Philosophical Poetics* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 7; but then this recognition is confounded with the vocalizations of text-performance: “The poet in this event does not so much use language as interact with uses of it, playing these uses by ear in the literal sense that the poet’s position with respect to language is no longer simply that of the speaking subject but also, and perhaps mainly, that of one who listens” (30; compare 49–50, etc.). This “literal sense” is instructive by being almost entirely alternative to the argument about “mental ears” that is advanced here.

6/ “Le vers qui de plusieurs vocables refait un mot total, neuf, étranger à la langue et comme incantatoire, achève cet isolement de la parole: niant, d’un train souverain, le hasard demeuré aux termes malgré l’artifice de leur retrempe alternée en le sens et la sonorité, et vous cause cette surprise de n’avoir ouï jamais tel fragment ordinaire d’élocution, en même temps que la réminiscence de l’objet nommé baigne dans une neuve atmosphère.” “Crise de vers”, in Stéphane Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, ed. Bertrand Marchal (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 213. “The verse-line of several word-sounds which remakes a total word, new, unknown to the language and as if incantatory, achieves this isolation of speech: denying, in a sovereign gesture, the arbitrariness that clings to words despite the artifice of their being alternately plunged in meaning and in sound, and causes you that surprise at not having heard before such an ordinary fragment of speech, at the same time as the remembrance of the named object bathes in a new atmosphere.” “Crise de vers,” trans. Rosemary Lloyd, in *Mallarmé: The Poet and His Circle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 233. See also Albert Cook, “‘Etendre, simplifier le monde’: The

Philosophical Purchase of Mallarmé,” in Robert Greer Cohn, ed., *Mallarmé in the Twentieth Century* (Cranbury, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998), 53–85 (esp. 71–2). On *vers* see Graham Robb, *Unlocking Mallarmé* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), esp. 33–34.

7/ The reduction of natural experience into the domain of textuality may focus upon cognitive and affective aspects as much as on linguistic features: “The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotion at all. And emotions which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him. Consequently, we must believe that ‘emotion recollected in tranquillity’ is an inexact formula. For it is neither emotion, nor recollection, nor, without distortion of meaning, tranquillity. It is a concentration, and a new thing resulting from the concentration, of a very great number of experiences which to the practical and active person would not seem to be experiences at all; it is a concentration which does not happen consciously or of deliberation....” T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919) in his *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), 21; for discussion see e.g., Richard Bradford, *Silence and Sound: Theories of Poetics from the Eighteenth Century* (Cranbury: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992), 127–31, and Charles I. Armstrong, *Figures of Memory: Poetry, Space, and the Past* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 99–101; Eliot’s objection to “recollection” in Wordsworth signally fails to observe the full complexity of this process.

8/ “The long and short of the matter is this. We now regulate English verse by the strong and determinate element of stress: its management is what distinguishes verse from prose. The weak and indeterminate element of quantity we subordinate: its management is one of the many things which distinguish, not verse from prose, but good verse from bad.” A. E. Housman, review of W. J. Stone, “On the Use of Classical Metres in English,” *Classical Review*, XIII (1899), here from *Collected Poems and Selected Prose*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Allen Lane, 1988), 421–22; see also Charles Olson, “Quantity in Verse, and Shakespeare’s Late Plays” (1956) in *Human Universe and Other Essays*, ed. Donald Allen (San Francisco: Grove Press, 1967), 81–94, and John Goldsmith, “Harmonic Phonology,” in Goldsmith, ed., *The Last Phonological Rule: Reflections on Constraints and Derivations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 21–60 (54–56).

9/ This distinction is much contested. There is a more or less completely adversary, neo-empiricist position which argues that “our mental representations of the form of words are essentially phonetic,” that “word forms are stored as memories of psychophysical (auditory and articulatory) experience (not abstract structures of distinctive features)” and that “phonological constituents are statistical regularities over these psychophysical

spaces.” Jacques Durand and Bernard Laks (eds.), *Phonetics, Phonology, and Cognition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 38, 126, and see John Coleman, “Phonetic Representations in the Mental Lexicon,” vol. cit., 96–130. There are problems with this view in an historical, evolutionary perspective, where immediate and remembered articulatory experience is of course mostly lacking. But it could certainly be argued that an extant historical tradition of poetic textuality is a stored database of articulatory practice, and that so-called base features can perhaps be accessed chiefly or even exclusively through the re-performed phonetic surface; see also Juliette Blevins, *Evolutionary Phonology: The Emergence of Sound Patterns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): “The association between generalizations which can be derived directly from surface forms and productive phonological rules or constraints is, surely, highly significant. This is reflected in the way that phonological theory has moved steadily closer to modeling surface forms” (312). For my purposes here the exact route-map of such recuperation will matter less than its outcomes.

10/ On abstractness in phonological representation see e.g., David Odden, *Introducing Phonology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Chap. 9, esp. 258–63, 271–74, 297–98. Alternative terminologies are also current: “Phonological representations of words consist of two separate tiers of which one—the skeleton—captures the linear and temporal order of units, while the other—the melody—provides the phonetic substance associated with skeletal positions. Crucially...there does not have to be a one-to-one correspondence between the units of the melodic and the units of the skeletal subrepresentation: a certain melodic property may be associated with more than one position and, conversely, skeletal positions may have no melody attached to them and thus remain empty. Phonological regularities can hold between units of either of the two tiers or may invoke more complex structures at both levels.” Edmund Gussmann, *Phonology: Analysis and Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002 [2008]), 45; compare 26–27; the analytic cogency of distinct “tiers” or “levels” is currently much debated. Further on abstract representation see John C. L. Ingram, *Neurolinguistics: An Introduction to Spoken Language Processing and Its Disorders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 377–78.

11/ For comment see Peter Middleton, *Distant Reading: Performance, Readership, and Consumption in Contemporary Poetry* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 49–51; but see also John Wilkinson, “Cadence” (1987, revised), in his *The Lyric Touch: Essays on the Poetry of Excess* (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2007), 151–54, and yet also his “Mouthing Off” (2000), 168–75.

12/ “Sound patterns are argued to be learned aspects of language structure, while the feature system, prosodic organization, and their combinatorics, are potentially innate” (Blevins, *Evolutionary Phonology*, 22; compare 91–92).

13/ Gerald Bruns has wittily proposed a format of (poetic) language rules and structures in which the rules “do not descend all the way to the bottom,” supported by a “passing theory” that’s a kind of pragmatic adaptation (*The Material of Poetry*, 107–09).

14/ It may be appropriate here to indicate two conventions of meaning for “prosody,” and “prosodic”: in literary (poetic) description the terms refer to patterns and structures of formal versification; in linguistic description the terms refer to “properties ‘above’ the segment which pertain to syllabification, length, stress, and rhythm”; “prosodic processes are those that pertain to the structure of syllables, stress, and the rhythmic structure of words, and phenomena which relate to the position of segments in a phonological string.” Odden, *Introducing Phonology*, 336, 228; see also John J. McCarthy and Alan S. Prince, “Prosodic Morphology,” in *The Handbook of Phonological Theory*, ed. John A. Goldsmith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 318–66; Ingram, *Neurolinguistics*, 23–24, 26–30. On rhyme, see Michael McKie, “The Origins and Early Development of Rhyme in English Verse,” *Modern Language Review* 92 (1997): 817–31, and Bradford, “Rhyme” in *Silence and Sound*, 133–58; for current interest in poetic prosody as cognitive see Wilkinson, “Following the Poem” (2004), in his *The Lyric Touch*, 195–211 and refs. cited in n. 115 (293). For current performance formats including a resurgence in social rhyme see Kevin Fitzgerald (aka DJ Organic), *Freestyle: The Art of Rhyme*, Bowery Films (US, 2000), and Doug Pray, *Scratch*, Palm Pictures (US, 2001).

15/ Concerning poetic discourse-levels and choices within conventions of style and register, deliberate options will determine the surface in terms of diction and textual performance-pitch, including historically back-referenced lexical or idiomatic allusiveness, often in stylistic mutation within a single text-domain. For a classic statement see Erich Auerbach, *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, trans. Ralph Manheim, (London: Routledge, 1965), 235–338.

16/ On identification and analysis of “underlying forms” see Odden, *Introducing Phonology*, 68–93.

17/ The formula suggests Coleridge and his aftermath, but a dialectical stance will ultimately part company with Coleridge’s idealising fusion of difference into unity. *Biographia Literaria* (1817), vol. 2, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 15–17. David Simpson has argued the political case against such assimilation, perhaps a shade too fiercely but with fitting directness: “Those who understand the strategy whereby Coleridge seeks to compose us and our worlds into organic wholes, based on the covert authority of the clerisy (in social governance) and of God and the will (in our spiritual lives), but do not wish to subscribe to it, could do worse than to cast aside this particular theory of the imagination....” David Simpson, “Coleridge and Wordsworth and the Form of Poetry” in *Coleridge’s*

*Theory of Imagination Today*, ed. Christine Gallant (New York: AMS Press 1989), 211–25. On “ideal text” status see Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality*, 83–86, 97, 221–23. “The ideal text is the product of an interpreter and not of the historical author” (222). Idealised textuality has also come under strong critique in matters of redaction: see Jerome J. McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), esp. Chap. 3: “The Socialization of Texts” (69–87).

18/ “To read attentively, think correctly, omit no relevant consideration, and repress self-will, are not ordinary accomplishments; yet an emendator needs much besides: just literary perception, congenial intimacy with the author, experience which must have been won by study, and mother wit which he must have brought from his mother’s womb.” A. E. Housman, “The Editing of Manilius” (1930), here from *Collected Poems and Selected Prose*, 393. For discussion of philology as prototype for historical linguistics see contributions in Anders Ahlqvist, ed., *Papers from the Fifth International Conference on Historical Linguistics* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1982); and see also David Greetham, “The Philosophical Discourse of [Textuality]?” (a wide-ranging overview) in Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeau and Neil Fraistat, eds., *Reimagining Textuality: Textual Studies in the Late Age of Print* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 31–47.

19/ On creolised or immigrant communities see, e.g., Peter Mühlhäusler, *Pidgin and Creole Linguistics* (2nd rev. ed., London: University of Westminster Press, 1997); Jeff Siegel, *The Emergence of Pidgin and Creole Languages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Pedro Costa, *Juventude em Marcha* (Colossal Youth) Memento Films (Portugal, 2006); special interest attaches to the work of Victor Segalen (1878–1919), exotic traveler and poet: see e.g., Nicolas Bourriaud, “Victor Segalen and the Twenty-First-Century Creole,” *The Radicant*, trans. James Gussen and Lili Porten (New York: Sternberg Press, 2009), 60–77. On infant-stage language learning see e.g., John L. Locke and Dawn M. Pearson, “Vocal Learning and the Emergence of Phonological Capacity: A Neurobiological Approach” in Charles A. Ferguson et al., ed., *Phonological Development: Models, Research, Implications* (Timonium: York Press, 1992), 91–129; Blevins, *Evolutionary Phonology*, 217–32, 267–69. On the phonology of sign-language for the deaf see e.g., Diane Brentari, “Sign Language Phonology” in Goldsmith, ed., *Handbook of Phonological Theory*, 615–39; Linda Uyechi, *The Geometry of Visual Phonology* (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 1996); Werner Herzog, *Land des Schweigens und der Dunkelheit* (Land of Silence and Darkness), Werner Herzog Filmproduktion (West Germany, 1971).

20/ Compare John Wilkinson, “Cadence,” in his *The Lyric Touch*, esp. 143–44.

21/ William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797–1800*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 117;

the Cornell editors comment: “composed in 1798 between possibly July 10 (or more probably July 11) and probably July 13” (116); their text of these lines is identical with that of William Wordsworth and S. T. Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems* (London, 1798), 203–4.

22/ Robert Barnhart distinguishes *-ed*<sup>1</sup> and *-ed*<sup>2</sup>. The first “an inflectional suffix forming the past tense of many verbs in English.... The suffix was reduced in Middle English to *-d* from earlier *-ed* and *-ede*, both forms being a development from Old English *-de*, also noted as *-ade*, *-ede*, and *-ode*.” The second (*-ed*<sup>2</sup>) “a derivational suffix forming the past participle of many verbs in English... and used as if from a verb to form adjectives from nouns.... The suffix appeared in Old English as *-d*, *-ed*, *-ad*, or *-od*.” Robert K. Barnhart, ed., *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1999), 314, earlier pub. as the *Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology* (Bronx: H. W. Wilson Co, 1988); compare also full discussion in *OED*, ed. 2, s.v. *-ed*, where the contraction of *-ded*, *-ted* after *l*, *n*, *r* to *-d*, *-t* (thus accounting for *feel* > *felt*) is also noted; and see also Ingram, *Neurolinguistics*, 183–84. The *-ed*, *-d* past-tense affixation may be regarded as a resultant from use of *did* (Old English *dide*, *dyde*), past tense of *do* (Old English *don*), a reduplicative of the present stem employed in Proto-Germanic “as suffix to form the past tense of other verbs,” being then reduced to *-da* in Gothic, to *-de* in Old English, thence to *-d* (*-ed*) in English (Barnhart, op. cit., 292; *OED* 2, s.v. *do* [verb]; see Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2 vols. (Bern: A. Francke, 1959–69), s.v. “2. *dhe-*” (I, 235–39); Vladimir Orel, *A Handbook of Germanic Etymology* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), s.v. “\**donan* (str. vb.),” 73.

23/ See Pokorny, *Wörterbuch*, s.v. “4. *bhel-*” etc. (I, 122); Orel, *Handbook*, entries on 50–51.

24/ Pokorny, *Wörterbuch*, s.v. “*kerd-*, *krd*, *kred-*” (I, 579–80); Orel, *Handbook*, s.v. “\**xerton* (sb.n.),” 170. On phonetic variability in historical sound-change development see e.g., Blevins, *Evolutionary Phonology*, esp. 6–8, 314, and *passim*.

25/ Definition of past-tense structures (within the IE family) is naturally complex. Operant forms may be categorised as simple anteriors (actions prior to reference time), perfectives (past actions bounded temporally), or completives (actions done fully to completion); all in the variably close context of a present-tense (“here now”) relevance frame (adapted from Joan Bybee, et al., *The Evolution of Grammar: Tense, Aspect, and Modality in the Languages of the World* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994], Chap. 3: “Anterior, Perfective, and Related Senses,” 51–105; the approach here is longitudinal and evolutionary as well as synchronic-descriptive).

26/ Pokorny, *Wörterbuch*, I, 214–17; Orel, *Handbook*, entries on 409–11.

27/ Pokorny, *Wörterbuch*, s.v. “3. *men-*,” etc. (I, 726–8); Orel, *Handbook*, s.v.

“\*mundiz” (275). The intense rhythmic end-stopping of “mind,” “sleep,” and so on in sonnets by Gerard Manley Hopkins is noted urgently by Susan Stewart in her *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 90–105, but the analysis locates no more than expressivist motivation and is phonologically innocent.

28/ Pokorný, *Wörterbuch*, s.v. “ghabh-” (I, 407–9); Orel, *Handbook*, entries on 130.

29/ The passive-mood construction of “felt...felt” warrants also the here passive-recipient aspect of “gift”; in each case the question of initiating agency is occluded. On the “gift” of “blessing” compare *The Prelude*, 1798–1799, ed. Stephen Parrish (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1977), Second Part, 491 (66), and *The Prelude* (1805–6): *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ed. Mark L. Reed, 2 vols. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), I, AB Text, II: School Time Continued, 461 (135). For comparative usage data see Bernard Comrie, “Recipient Person Suppletion in the Verb ‘give,’” in Mary Ruth Wise et al., ed., *Language and Life: Essays in Memory of Kenneth L. Pike*, (Dallas: SIL International, 2003), 265–281.

30/ For the profound connection between *gift* and the struggle for blood of sacrifice compare Arnold Schönberg, *Moses und Aron* (1930–32): *Aron*: “Volk Israels! / Deine Götter geb’ ich dir wieder / und dich ihnen; wie es dich verlangt” (“People of Israel! Your gods I give back to you, and you to them; as it is demanded of you” [my trans.]) (*Moses und Aron: Oper in drei Akten; Textbuch* [Mainz: Ars Viva Verlag (1957)], II.ii, 21, reprised in the incomplete III.i, 32). Further on the relation of gift to sacrifice see Walter Burkert, *Creation of the Sacred: Tracks of Biology in Early Religions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), Chap. 6: “The Reciprocity of Giving” (129–55), esp. “Gift and Sacrifice” (149–52).

31/ Westermann argues for the re-instatement of blessing as fundamental to the biblical theology of God’s purposes and practice in relation to man: “From the beginning to the end of the biblical story, God’s two ways of dealing with mankind—deliverance and blessing—are found together. They cannot be reduced to a single concept because, for one reason, they are experienced differently. Deliverance is experienced in events that represent God’s intervention. Blessing is a continuing activity of God that is either present or not present. It cannot be experienced in an event any more than can growth or motivation or a decline of strength.” Claus Westermann, *Blessing: In the Bible and the Life of the Church*, trans. Keith Crim (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 3–4. Summarising Pedersen’s discussion, Westermann continues: “As a translation of the Hebrew *nephesh*, ‘soul’ is seen as expressing the person’s total state of being alive. The soul is a totality, filled with power. This power lets the soul grow and prosper so that it can maintain itself and do its work in the



world. This vital power, without which no living being can exist, the Israelites called *berakhah*, 'blessing.' Blessing is both internal and external—the inner power of the soul and the good fortune that produces that power” (op. cit., 18; further on such gifted power [“bestowal”] as natural wisdom, see 37–39, also 43–44, 77). Westermann’s study is translated from German and indicates no knowledge of the distinctive etymology and cultural framing of English *ble*s*s*, *ble*s*s*i*ng*, which would contradict the contention that blessing “cannot be experienced in an event” (compare also 35–36, 52–53, 90).

32/ At this point it must be clearly acknowledged that the articulatory buccal constriction of a stopped consonant in English does model the stoppage of breath which is life-concluding, but only by suggestive resemblance; the same phonological coding, if an iterated real effect, would apply even if the corresponding surface-phonetic feature had not been a breath-stop but some other voice-sound characteristic; in languages outside the Germanic family this effect is not found in this form (e.g., Romance language past-tense forms are not phonetically end-stopped). And yet language-specific “suggestive resemblances,” even where accidental, can be in poetic discourse practice intensely motivated, as the example of rhyme clearly demonstrates. For the reconstructed history of IE voiced/unvoiced root-final and word-final stops, see Kenneth C. Shields, *A History of Indo-European Verb Morphology* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1992), 30–35, 40–44. For overview of recent approaches to motivation, see Günter Radden and Klaus-Uwe Panther, eds., *Studies in Linguistic Motivation* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004).

33/ For the reinforced fixation of end-stopped features compare also the effect of punctuation: “sweet,”; “blood,”; “heart,”; “trust,”; “gift,”; “mood,” (twice); “suspended,”; these end-stops are also pause-stopped, and this suspensive grammatical pausing is also intensely motivated. David Trotter has pointed out to me that the effect can extend even to medial stops: “on, / Until,” with comma plus line-break immediately before and comma directly after.

34/ *The Prelude* (1805–6), I, 1–3; *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ed. Reed, I, 107; Reed comments: “Main composition of these lines [1–54] probably began in November 1799 and was finished in early 1800” (107); there is a distinct echo of “Tintern Abbey” in lines 19–24: “I breathe again; / Trances of thought and mountings of the mind / Come fast upon me: it is shaken off, / As by miraculous gift ’tis shaken off, / That burthen of my own unnatural self, / The heavy weight of many a weary day” (107); this self-borrowing was part-noted by Jonathan Wordsworth, ed., *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)* (London: Penguin, 1995), 556, as previously also in Ernest de Selincourt, ed., *The Prelude, or, Growth of a Poet’s Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 246, 2nd ed. rev. Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Oxford

University Press, 1959), 511.

35/ See e.g., Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, trans. Peter Bing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 4–5 and *seriatim*.

36/ Such enquiry might find evidence for extremely localised motivation, in which an inherently latent phonological effect may be triggered into recognisable operation across a relatively confined passage of text by a small cluster of activating features. Compare also J. H. Prynne, *Stars, Tigers and the Shape of Words* (London: Birkbeck College, 1993), esp. 33–35. But bear in mind also the editor's warning about Ferdinand de Saussure's obsessive cryptology: "L'erreur de Ferdinand de Saussure (si erreur il y a) aura aussi été une leçon exemplaire. Il nous aura appris combien il est difficile, pour le critique, d'éviter de prendre sa propre trouvaille pour la règle suivie par le poète. Le critique, ayant cru faire une découverte, se résigne mal... accepter que le poète n'ait pas consciemment ou inconsciemment voulu ce que l'analyse ne fait que supposer." Jean Starobinski, ed., *Les Mots sous les mots; Les anagrammes de Ferdinand de Saussure* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 154; for "les lois de la mise en oeuvre" see also 20ff; and see also Malcolm Bowie, *Mallarmé and the Art of Being Difficult* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 65–66. And yet the condition of phonological textuality as here outlined may at least partly dissolve or sidestep the stumbling-block question of deliberateness.

37/ We should note that the word *act* is terminally end-stopped, again by close derivational link to the morphology of past-tense structures, here ensuing from Latin *act-*, past-participle stem of *agere* ("do, perform"); see Pokorny, *Wörterbuch*, s.v. "ag-" (I, 4); Orel, *Handbook*, s.v. "\*akanan (st.vb)," 11. It's further to be noted that *act* (verb) is of later date in English than *act* (sb.) and the verb was likely formed under influence from the noun; an *act* is also the inscribed and stored record of some public transaction (Latin *actum, acta*), so that the doing of an act is already its own record.

38/ Compare Carl Darling Buck, ed., *A Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages: A Contribution to the History of Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), s.v. "mind" (1198–99).

39/ T. P. Dunning and A. J. Bliss, eds., *The Wanderer* (London: Methuen, 1969), line 27, note ad loc. (109–10), and esp. 61–65; compare R. F. Leslie, ed., *The Wanderer* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), 70–71, and see also T. G. Tucker, *A Concise Etymological Dictionary of Latin* (Halle [Saale]: Max Niemeyer, 1931), s.vv. "memini," "memor" (154). On the textual compositionality of the poem see Carol Braun Pasternack, *The Textuality of Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Chap. 2: "The Polyphony of *The Wanderer*" (33–59). Discussion here of the poem's dialogic construction (acknowledging Kristeva) concedes the multiple aspects

of contrastive text-modes (51–52) but stops short of fully recognising a thought-dialectic between and by means of discrepant components.

40/ These actions to which Wordsworth refers are not at a peak of noble benevolence in the soul, but in the baseline details of daily life, virtuous and unreflective habituation. Compare “moral virtue comes about as a result of habit”: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, rev. J. L. Ackrill and J. O. Urmson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), II.1, 28. The formation of what is a person, intimated here, is in steep contrast to other models, as in argument about the psychoanalytic development of individuated selfhood: that human love spurs regression to the satisfaction of previously undifferentiated self-identity, but that also “the libidinal, sexual or life instincts...are best comprised under the name love; their purpose would be to form living substance into even greater unities, so that life may be prolonged and brought to higher development.” Freud, cited by Jonathan Lear, *Love and its Place in Nature: A Philosophical Interpretation of Freudian Psychoanalysis* (London: Yale University Press, 1990), 150. Lear comments (paraphrasing Freud): “Whatever its regressive tendencies, love is also a force within us for development into an ever more complex and higher unity” (153). But then: “Because my love affair is with a distinctly existing world, I must be disappointed by it. A distinctly existing world cannot possibly satisfy all my wishes. Out of the ensuing frustration and disappointment, I am born” (160). And thus: “Psychic structure, Freud realizes, is created by a dialectic of love and loss” (160, compare also 177), and “There is thus established a libidinal dialectic of development” (162). Love is thereby a self-concept, endowed with a function similar to Coleridge’s imagination, to promote a noble resolving unity, “a certain harmony in the soul” (187) as the good telos even if ultimately delusional, in the sense of what Lear describes as sublimation (179). Validation of autonomy by these procedures can in last resort only be circular and self-fulfilling, because the baseline order of material reality has been preemptively subsumed into the drama of uplifted human purpose.

41/ Thus the tacit phonological trace, shadowing and directing the activism of surface, releases the power of latent thematic presence: “But terms such as ‘humanity,’ however dislocated and estranged, remain no more than totems if uncarried and unsustainable through integrative cadence, tensed against a viscous or obdurate semantics—inconsistent and impure in diction also. The vocabulary for describing cadence is embarrassingly inadequate; I understand cadence as the relation between a particular body of syntactic gestures in the writer’s work, and the involuntary but acknowledged participations in the larger and more impersonal careers of death and love, so cadence would both reincorporate and is tensed against the depressive complexities of the local.” Wilkinson, “Cadence,” in his *The Lyric Touch*, 146. Cadence is termed integrative because, in the terms being advanced here, it arises within the

textual domain subsequent to all the reductions which separate this domain from natural experience, recuperating and reinstating a new utterance manifold that can set in excursive relation the counter-positions of poetic argument: what Wilkinson terms “the poem’s ambition” (146): “What I call integrative cadence, at least proposes for poetry an ethical future; so to write is an endless forward cast” (147).

42/ John Milton, *The Poems*, ed. John Carey and Alastair Fowler (London, 1968), *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, IV.449–91 (639–41). The passage is discussed in close detail in Bradford, *Silence and Sound*, 74–79, also in Richard J. DuRocher, *Milton and Ovid* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 85–93, and Mark Edmundson, *Towards Reading Freud: Self-Creation in Milton, Wordsworth, Emerson, and Sigmund Freud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), Chap. 2: “New Thresholds: ‘On Narcissism, an Introduction,’ 1914” (55–86); compare also P. H. [Patrick Hume], *Annotations on Milton’s Paradise Lost...* (London, 1695), 150–51.

43/ “[O]n flours” is modernized by Fowler to “flowers” and emended (on flimsy grounds), from “on” to “of”; Ricks prints “flow’rs” for “flours” but does not tamper with “on.” Christopher Ricks, ed., *John Milton: Paradise Lost* (New York: Penguin, 1968), 91.

44/ Compare the first-edition spelling practice of *Paradise Lost*, where the lines quoted are printed thus: “That day I oft remember, when from sleep / I first awak’t, and found myself repos’d / Under a shade on flours” (sig. N<sub>2</sub><sup>r-v</sup>); for detailed discussion see R.G. Moyles, *The Text of Paradise Lost: A Study in Editorial Procedure* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), “Spelling Preterites and Past Participles” (102–06). Milton (or perhaps his compositor) will also employ such forms as “seemd,” “returnd,” “fixt,” “warnd,” inconsistent with the use of the apostrophe (Moyles, 106–11) but, in the view experimentally advanced here, consistent with a phonologically motivated practice.

45/ Barnhart, *Dictionary*, s.v. (724).

46/ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 429. But *per contra*, B. A. Wright, ed., *Milton: Poems* (London, 1956), vii, and compare Ricks, ed., *Paradise Lost*, xxix.

47/ Barnhart, *Dictionary*, s.v. (385); Pokorny, *Wörterbuch*, s.v. “e. pr-” (I, 813); Orel, *Handbook*, s.v. “\*furai (adv.),” 119; Tucker, *Concise Etymological Dictionary*, s.vv. “per” (182), “prior” (194). Other retrospect problems concerning the firstness of the “first parents” became a celebrated conundrum: Sir Thomas Browne described Eve as one “who was not solemnly begotten, but suddenly framed, and anomalously proceeded from Adam”; and yet “the formation of things at first was different from their generation after; and although it had no thing to precede, it was aptly contrived for that which should succeed it.” Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica: Or, Enquiries into Very Many received Tenents, And commonly presumed Truths* (London, 1646),

Book V, Chap. V: "Of the Picture of Adam and Eve with Navells," 239–40.

48/ Sacrificial: the consequent necessary mortality is not individually specific, even by typology, but is generic for all mankind and in all ages following; and see also William Empson, *Milton's God* (rev. ed., London, 1965), 256–53 and ff.

49/ Consider also this contrast within the concept of language performance: "This points to one of the most basic properties of phonology, and clarifies another essential difference between phonetics and phonology. Phonetics studies language sound as a continuous property. A phonological analysis relies on an important idealization of language sound, that the continuous speech signal can be analyzed as a series of discrete segments with constant properties.... For the purposes of grammar, physical sound contains way too much information to allow us to make meaningful and general statements about language sound, and we require a way to represent just the essentials of language sounds. A phonological representation of an utterance reduces this great mass of phonetic information to a cognitively based minimum, a sequence of discrete segments" (Odden, *Introducing Phonology*, 14–15).

50/ Compare e.g., Bradford, *Silence and Sound*, 48–49, 91–92; also James Longenbach: "Unlike Frost, Moore and Williams sometimes want their formal gestures to feel more calculated than organic: rather than allowing us to take the formal procedures of art for granted, they want us to feel the imposition of pattern on language, and that imposition forces us to ask questions we might profitably ask of any poem, no matter how natural or inevitable its procedures might seem. How can one tell when the effect created by the relationship between syntax and line is driven by necessity? How can one make arbitrariness itself a necessity?" (James Longenbach, *The Art of the Poetic Line* [Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 2008], 61). And yet the questions which Longenbach here assigns to the reader (*us, we*) must reside and be active within the textual domain, its argument not at first with us but with itself.

51/ On the textual constitution of printed and visible page-formats see e.g., Joseph Loewenstein, "Printing and 'The Multitudinous Presse': The Contentious Texts of Jonson's Masques," in Jennifer Brady and W. H. Herendeen, eds., *Ben Jonson's 1616 Folio* (London: University of Delaware Press, 1991), 168–91; and René Riese Hubert, "The Postmodern Line and the Postmodern Page," in Robert Frank and Henry Sayre, eds., *The Line in Postmodern Poetry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 132–51 ("warning...not to confuse optical and mental space," 133).

52/ Compare e.g., Malcolm Bowie, *Mallarmé and the Art of Being Difficult*, 66–89; Ellen Bryant Voigt, "Syntax: Rhythm of Thought, Rhythm of Song," *The Kenyon Review* 25 (2003): 144–63 (esp. 152–53); also Hugh Kenner, "Rhyme: An Unfinished Monograph" (1983), *Common Knowledge* 10 (2004): 377–425.

53/ The semantic connection between "bless" and "blood" by the link of

consecration through mortal sacrifice is in fact virtually unique to English; most other IE word-forms are from roots with the sense “speak well of,” or “make the sign of the cross” (thus invoking divine favour). Compare on the Vulgate vocabulary J. K. Aitken, *The Semantics of Blessing and Cursing in Ancient Hebrew* (Louvain: Peeters, 2007), 36. But the IE pedigrees for words with the sense “blood” and the sense “sacrifice” are very close: Old English *blod* (“blood”), Old Norse *blot* (“sacrifice, worship”); see Pokorny, *Wörterbuch*, s.v. “*bhlagh-men-*” (I, 154); Orel, *Handbook*, 50-51. It is also contentious to speak of “innocent” blood, since in cultic sacrifice the purgation of contamination and transgression within a community, in propitiation of divine anger, presumes collective or at least arbitrary but non-optional vicarious guilt (the “Antigone” question). “As religious reality claims precedence over mundane reality, frightful dealings with death and killing gain overwhelming importance in the form of funerary and sacrificial rituals”; “Here the magical interpretation avoids the realization of self-incurred guilt and projects the cause to malign aggression coming from without, even if the cure the innocent victim has to undergo may be circumstantial, unpleasant, and costly.” Burkert, *Creation of the Sacred*, 32, 120. And further, the comment by René Girard: “One must note the fact that, in sacrifice, before the victim is sacrificed, he, she, or it is made to appear guilty.” Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, ed., *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 182; on sacrifice and gift see 166–67.

54/ Acrobatic displays or sociological rivalries expressed in style contests are sometimes the quite flimsy basis for assertion of “a dialectic perspective”; see e.g., Catherine M. Cameron, *Dialectics in the Art: The Rise of Experimentalism in American Music* (Westport: Praeger, 1996), 122–23. For a more truly substantive musical dialectic compare the finale to Bellini’s *Norma* (1831): “The opera culminates in Norma’s recovery of all her most noble and fully human attributes: love—romantic, maternal, filial; self-sacrifice and courage. And in manifesting these qualities Norma simultaneously redeems Pollione and Oroveso, enabling them too to become fully human. The tragic irony of the scene resides in the fact that this moment, transcendental in terms of Norma’s humanity, coincides with her utmost humiliation as high priestess: the stripping of her priestly coronet, the black veil, the funeral pyre, the commination.... The metrical organization of this scene is more complex than anything else in the opera....” (David Kimbell, *Vincenzo Bellini: Norma* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 64; see also 40–41). To be considered here is: “It is very likely that at an early stage of its composition *Paradise Lost* was conceived not as an epic but as a tragedy,” and “the whole poem can be seen as tragic, because of our knowledge of the fateful

conclusion.” Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 419, 422.

55/ Compare Noam Chomsky’s view: “Preserving ‘historical memory’ unsullied by apologetics is no less important for the permanent victors, who can be called to account only by their own citizens. That is particularly true when the institutional roots of past practices persist. Those who want to understand today’s world will take note of Britain’s actions from the days when it created modern Iraq for its own convenience, ensuring Iraq’s dependency. And they will not overlook Britain’s practices until the regime it imposed and supported was overthrown in 1958.” Noam Chomsky, *Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007), 142; on Christian fundamentalism in American politics see 223–24. For a more placatory view compare Edmundson, *Towards Reading Freud*, 165.

56/ Not thus to focus even when the issue is recognised is to slide away into opposition rather than commit to dialectic: “Here [in George Oppen’s encounter with Jacques Maritain] we can trace an emergent poetics committed to acknowledging the world’s materiality but at the same time to making the act of creative perception a defence against what Maritain had called the ‘subject as matter, marked with the opacity and voracity of matter, like the I of the egoist’ (106).” Peter Nicholls, *George Oppen and the Fate of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 43; the whole of Chap. 2 (30–61) bears around this issue. Tim Woods identifies a comparable oscillation of focus: “It is as if the language-metaphor best exemplifies the unsettling of the self between subject and object.” Woods, *The Poetics of the Limit: Ethics and Politics in Modern and Contemporary American Poetry* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), Chap. 7: “‘Things at the limits of reason’: George Oppen’s Materialist Ethics’ [215–33], 219; this unsettling may be a site of acute ethical discomfort, but it also develops aspects of a comfortable occupancy (“tentativeness” and “hesitation” [223–24] are also rhetorical habitats, as they too often were in Robert Creeley’s work). For needle-point irony concerning such comforts, be reminded of Chaucer’s “character” of the Prioress (“*Amor vincit omnia*”) in his “General Prologue” to *The Canterbury Tales*, 118–62, ed. L. D. Benson in *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 25–26.

57/ Compare e.g., J. H. Prynne, “Huts,” *Textual Practice* 22 (2008): 613–33 (esp. 628–31); Ellen F. Fitzpatrick, ed., *Muckraking: Three Landmark Articles* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1994); James Scully, *Line Break: Poetry as Social Practice* (Willimantic: Curbstone Press, 2005), esp. 128–69, somewhat revised from *The Line in Postmodern Poetry*, 97–131; Amiri Baraka, *Ed Dorn & the Western World* (Austin: Skanky Possum & Effing Press, 2008).

KENT JOHNSON

Review of J. H. Prynne, *To Pollen*

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*The following is the second chapter of an unfolding critical novella on current British poetry, to be entitled Corroded by Symbolisme: An Anti-Review of Twelve British Poets, Being Also a True Account of Dark and Mysterious Events Surrounding a Famous Poem Supposedly Written by Frank O'Hara. The next two chapters will be released in subsequent issues of this magazine.*

The reader of the previous section of this serial review (see *CR* 53:1) will recall that in 2004 I had the pleasure to spend a pleasant afternoon in Cambridge, England, chatting with J. H. Prynne's former student, the poet-critic Andrew Duncan, concerning some fabulous texts from his (then yet-unpublished) bookum, *Savage Survivals: amid modern suavity*.

And so it was in 2005 that I returned to Cambridge, this time to speak on a panel concerning translation, its truths, fictions, and myths. I was with Kevin Nolan and the great poets Nicomedes Suarez-Arauz of Bolivia and Franz Josef Czernin of Austria. We were talking about forgery and fable in poetry, having tea and scones at a delightful little shop by the Cam, near the old bridge in St. John's. As luck would have it, Keston Sutherland and Peter Riley walked in, accompanied by the legendary avant-garde poet and Cambridge don, J. H. Prynne.

Oh, Jeremy, exclaimed Kevin, I thought you were in China!

No, no, I leave tomorrow, said Jeremy. I'm back here on Thursday, then I return to Beijing on Saturday. Then I'm back here on Wednesday, and then I'm in Shanghai on the following Sunday. Then I'm back here on Friday for examinations, then Hong Kong five days following. This whole Great Leap Forward thing is really getting quite exhausting.



This made everyone laugh merrily, and small talk ensued. By and by, Prynne and I settled into chit-chat about our Marxist-Leninist backgrounds, and we seemed to hit it off, as we say in the US, even though he had been a Maoist and I had been a Trotskyist. Around 11 AM I said I was going to head on back to Trinity to meet Astrid Lampe and Forrest Gander and Tom Raworth for lunch, and J. H. Prynne said, Well let me accompany you back, to which I said, Sure, thank you very much, and so he did, leaving Keston and Peter arguing something rather vehemently with Kevin and Nicomedes, while Franz Josef sipped his tea, taking it all in with a bemused grin.

Well, back again in Freeport, Illinois, now, and as chance would choose, in the packet of bookums that had come in the mail was also Prynne's latest, a short bookum of one serial poem titled *To Pollen*, published by Andrea Brady and Keston Sutherland's superb Barque Press. So I set down Andrew Duncan's bookum and began to leaf through the elegant twenty-six pages of this pamphletum. I was immediately bemused by it, for it's really quite opaque, the pieces composed of radically asyndetic phrasings, totally devoid of normative syntax, a kind of sprung rhythm where conjunctions, coordinating and subordinating, have been as if liposuctioned from the text, the whole devoid of any other kind of logical linguistick sequence or quasi-figural representation that might please your average worker at the punch pressum.

As Prynne says in one of the epigraphs to the book, a quote from *The Pages of Day and Night*, "Sometimes the field sprouts nails / so much does the field long for water." In fact, yes, and if the poems seem something like a field of nails hammered upward from below—some of these nails breaking through the resistant surface, others not—so that the fractional graph, as it were, rendered by the glistening lexemic points, shadow-hints at the vast and unmapped semantic topography below, well, I can't say the effect surprised or surprises me, for, you see, I knew a bit about this little bookum also before it came, by coincidence, into my hands, and thus perhaps there was already a predisposition on my part to feel a resistance to its insistent obduracy. Let me see if I can further explain.

Prynne and I left the scone and tea shop at St. John's and went upward in direction of King's, where I had my rooms for the week. Our talk turned to his recent poetry, with a focus on *For the Monogram* and *Bands around the Throat*, and because our talkyng had become interesting to us, we walked right past Trinity, and when we got to Pembroke, Jeremy said, Let's go in, I'll show you Edmund Spenser's portrait and the rooms of Chris Smart. We visited these, all the while talking pleasantye, and came then to sit on a bench in the second courtyard, along the April-blossomed path, really a gorgeous settinge. I noticed the curious happenstance that Prynne wore a large, whyte opal ring, exactly like the one Kevin Nolan did... I will try to remember now some of the things that were said in this (for the most part) amiable hour or so we spent together.

I suggested to Prynne that his recent work reminded me a bit of late Zukofsky, "A"-22 and 23 and *80 Flowers*, and such. Well, of course not that the language is so thoroughly distilled, in your case, grammatically speaking, I said. But there does seem to be a move toward a kind of depurated, fractal rigor, like in Chinese prosody, actually, where one has a complex grid of semantic couplings, aural interlockings, intertextual allusions, and so forth, and the reader moves around and wanders, guided not so much by syntagmatic sequence as by attention to the multiplicity of non-linear textuyres that the excisions of normative grammar afforde. The controlling code gets smashed, information flows go a bit crazy, discursive frames bleed each into each and out beyond what we would have them mean when within the mirage of our controle. I mean in your recent work it's as if what you wish to show, againe and againe, is two major things, and they seem to me perhaps somewhat contradictory, really: A) Language is a huge weather system of variegated pattern and effect, autonomous and self-reproducing beyond the conscious intentions of authore or reader, and B) that it is the responsibility of the poet to nail this overwhelming motherfuckere down, to get a handle on the ideological hail and fog and numbing cold and deadening heat we walk within and breathe; I mean, you seem to want to expose the imbricated otherness of these weathers through a sampling and splicing at phrasal dimensions of discursive micro-climates and to do so as a means of analytic counter-discourse to the simulacral phantasms

of the cultural surround—a kind of display, as the Language poets used to say, of “a mind in control of its language.” You know, a very Adornean attitude, modernist formalism as cultural resistance and all that... But can you see how there is a more interesting paradox here, and I wonder if it’s a kind of paradox at the heart of the avant-garde—one your heroes Olson, Dorn, and O’Hara really didn’t have to confront so immediately, but which you do, sitting as you are at the manifest limit in this garden? Well, that’s maybe too preciously clever, “manifest limit in this garden,” but looke, these avant-garde formalist/analytic gestures are getting openly, erotically, I would say, sucked right into the archive and shackled away in the Museum at ever increasing rates of speed. On a somewhat more banal level, my problem with this asyndetic cut-up stuffum is that it’s all, after about twenty-odd years, a pretty old and exhausted porne star. And anyway, who besides academic poets with an avant chip on their shoulder is cruising this opaquem and rather unpleasant stuffum anyway?

I stopped myself suddenly, realizing that I had gotten carried away, gone on for way too long, and likely insulted, beyond any possible redemptyon, the (and I say this sincerelie) great poet, J. H. Prynne. I looked over at him, nervouslie.

Mr. Prynne? Uh, Mr. Prynne? His eyes were closed and his mouthum a little bit open, as his chinum rested upon his chestum. *He was asleep!* I nudged him and he startled.

O! Yes, yes, Bei Dao, I’m back on my camel, old chap... Water, wat... uh, Oh, my, I seem... to have fallen fast asleep... All this bloody flying back and forth to China! Oh, I’m dreadfully sorry.

That’s OK, I said, No probleme.

He yawned. Yes, well, you had asked if I would read you a passage from my new book *To Pollen*, and so let me do that before we say goodbye. This, in fact, is the last movement of the sequence....And this is what he read, and he did so very energetically for someone who had just awoken—in fact, it was incredibly rapid and percussive, like hammering something upward from below, at a great velocity. Blossoms were lightly falling from the many trees:

From a front seat it is bearable to suck a knife  
blade to scrim in broth. Perfect on truth for steel  
vernier axil you could easily cut this. It would be

ancestral brood-genitive in knowledge laid out below  
your look to be alike, all the same blind enter  
concisely a claim card membership. For blood, brown  
in mouth fitment, taste of metal run along clamant.  
Fortunate aside leading tone will open our lips to  
pout worn in tangible overglide. Hammer each one,  
break note climb neck and neck. Knife lustre facing  
the music get the whole thing in your pocket, keep it  
open. Diminish the haft affix loosely proponent span  
blood group indexical self-cut. Try doing it now.

It seemed to me, actually, in an ironic sort of way, that the last sentence (and incidentally, I've always wondered if transformational grammare considers imperatives in Englishe as special cases of the *Pro-drop parametere*), self-conscious, even melodramatic, in its closure as it is, particularly in context of the bookum's fractured totalitie, bore a frightening resemblance to the last line in William Stafford's "Traveling through the Dark," but I didn't say so, of course. Cock-robin hopped happy about; Peter-rabbit munched contentedly on a fern; students and dons began to populate the gardens, emergent from classe in the dying Sunne. I saw some sweat pouring from Prynne's sideburnians.

By the way, Mr. Prynne, I said, in leave-taking, I know the work of Frank O'Hara has been very important to you, and do you know that a friend of mine has recently written an essaye that strongly suggests, nearly proves, I dare say, that "A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island" was not actually wrytten by O'Hara? (*Nota bene*: This essay, by Tosa Motokiyu, Okura Kyojin, and Ojiu Norinaga, is to appear in fall of 2007, in the inaugural issue of *Almost Island*, an online magazine out of New Delhi.) Prynne swung his face toward me with suddenness and glared at me with a great ferositie. He was very awayke now. His lips began to tremble and he began to bat his eyes rapidlie.

Who... Who told you this?! I mean... Where did you hear such a ridiculous thing? he almost shouted.

I was startled by the nature of his reactyone.

Well, I said, it's just an essaye with a hypothesis that is surprisyng, but I do think it is very original and very interestynge... In fact, it is

based on new information recovered from sources close to O'Hara and who were in contact with his manuscripts during the time shortly after his death.

Really... [cough] Really now... And tell me, who is the author of this so-called essay? he said again, in a kind of hiss. And who are these people you say provided this information?

By this time I could see there was something going on... I'm sorry, Mr. Prynne, I said, But I cannot say at this point. But perhaps I could send you an advance copy of the text only?

Yes, yes, I would like to please see this immediately, he said. May I call you or may we write about this over email? It is of the most utter importance that we communicate on this, Dr. Johnson... And that I see this with the utmost dispatch.

It is? I said. But why?

Just trust me, please, Sir. There are issues involved here... Well, it is simply very important. Would you, please, have an email address or an office number back in the States where I could reach you?

His white opal ring did gleam in the sun. I provided my office number, informing him that my modest community college did not yet have email.

And with that we somewhat awkwardly parted at Pembroke's ancient front gate. Many things were to transpire after this, and some of them of a nature I cannot yet reveal in full detail. Let it just be said for now that I received numerous phone calls over the next few months, some of them from Prynne, who was always quite proper, if sometimes rather earnest in his urgings that I convince my friend to desist from publication of any article about O'Hara's famous poem; others from unidentified callers (transcripts of which I will share when this novellum is complete), who left low-voiced messages that were, to put it generously, barely veiled threats to my future career chances as a teacher of Literature and Creative Writing at any half-prestigious four-year research University. Don't think for a moment we can't blacklist you to the fucking grave, asshole, said one particularly disturbing caller.

But let's move on: Back in Freeport again, and after reading through *To Pollen*, I wrote Prynne, wishing for his comment. I wrote, in my chosen font size:

Dear Mr. Prynne,

Kent Johnson here. Thanks for your last phone message of a couple weeks back. There was a lot of static on it, and I didn't catch the number you left. Perhaps you were calling from China. As I'd told you, however, this whole matter concerning O'Hara has really gotten to be quite strange and uncomfortable. I certainly don't mind your calls, not in the least, but please understand that I have no control at all over the impending publication of the O'Hara tape-essay, so your appeals in that regard are of no use. And please, as I've asked, if you know any of the other people who seem similarly anxious about this matter, would you kindly ask them to stop calling me. Some of the messages left by these people, most with English accents, have been more than a bit improper. I'm sure you can understand my concern about all this, especially in wake of the mugging I suffered in Hampstead at the Keats museum shortly after we met at Cambridge.

Be that as it may, I hope we can put all this aside for the time being: You see, I am reviewing your new book of poetry (*To Pollen*) for an upcoming issue of *Chicago Review*, and I am going to do it a bit differently than your standard review, I think. We'll see what happens.

Would you be so kind to comment on *To Pollen*, its method and ideational drive? I'm trying to think of this new bookum of yours in context of the work emerging in the Language project from around the late 70s up until the beginning of its general academic sequestering circa the first Gulf War, early 90s. That is, one branch of Langpo's poetry can be seen as based in a generative grammar, with a tendency toward purposeful violations of selectional restrictions of syntactic elements at clausal levels—what I would call its “synthetic” wing (Palmer, Silliman, Hejinian, Armantrout, Watten, Perelman, etc.) and which preserves grammatical and rhetorical orders that allow for quasi-lyrical stagings, permitting it to keep a foot in the institutional door, as it were—a door that is now pretty much wide open; the other branch, which I would call its “analytic” wing, is based on ungrammatical remixing of speech part elements, a more radical linguistic fracturing that funnels energy to lexical and phrasal combinations that in effect block passage into any kind of scenic, recognizably lyric projection (Coolidge, much of *Retallack*, much of *Raworth*, *McCaffery*, *P. Inman*, etc.). I would see *To Pollen* and much of your late work as falling within this latter mode—a mode that is more resistant to readerly “enjoyment,” for lack of a better word, and thus less adaptable, seemingly, to institutional accommodation at the

level of cultural marketing, exchange, and so forth, but which in fact still, I'd argue, leaves itself open to recuperation into the Institution Art, to call upon a useful phrase from Peter Bürger.

In both cases, that is, it is linguistic torsion that guides composition—the poetic “difference” of both modes can be explained—indeed, asks to be jointly explained—in terms of a grammatical self-reflexivity. The limits of the poem’s world are exalted, so to speak, as the self-conscious limits of its grammar—limits the reader is asked to engage, of course, as “co-producer of the text,” and all that. Now, the “political” impulses of such writing are well-rehearsed, and I believe you have done a bit of that yourself. But is it enough? Is it possible avant poetry has begun to hit its head against an increasingly comfortable and welcoming wall? I wonder what you would think if I said that to be revolutionary now, if there is that hope (remember our hope?), poetry will require a movement out of composition restricted to grammatical experiment and open into a broader conception of the syntactic—one where poetry more daringly takes stock of its status as marginal branch in the Culture’s Total Syntax—a marginalization due to Poets so obediently accepting Authorship as the Noun Phrase of the Literary sentence’s structure, if you’ll forgive the quasi-Spicerian pun. My point is that there is grammar and there is Grammar. The latter is the forest that can’t be seen for the trees of the former. Thus the crisis beginning circa early 90s that I referred to earlier, and which accumulates, now, at ever greater velocities. (In responding, would you please do so in size #8 font, as I happen to favor [it is an idiosyncrasy] email in such miniaresque setting.)

Well, I waited for a couple weeks and no response came, and just as I was about to give up and scratch *To Pollen* from this review, imagine my surprise (though with accompanying disappointment at the font) to receive in reply the below.

Dear Dr. Johnson,

I’m pleased that your school now has email. I am interested in your points to some extent. But nonetheless the reader has to maintain a particular alertness to make out, within the ironical and self-parodic interplay of tones, the difference between the right and the righteous, the pain of loss and the power of pain. Your solicitation for a poetry that would be anticipatory and retrospective of ideological fear is so constant that the reader could hardly discover

within the sensorium where actual pain begins and does or does not end. That is the classical difficulty for a rhetoricalised instrument: its readiness to claim the privilege of an autonomous occasion which covertly it exploits. How can you give, unless you are to present merely symptomatic malnutrition, what you claim to have taken away—the wheat from beneath the iron.

Could you tell me please, now, who the person is who is writing the essay you told me about when we were together in Cambridge?

I pondered this for a while, feeling a sense of déjà vu each time I read it. And then it dawned on me: Why, this is almost a word for word copy of a passage from Prynne's famous "Letter to Andrew Duncan"! What a small world the world of poetry is... And so I wrote Prynne back, and I said (paraphrasing something written by Andrew Duncan):

*Dear Mr. Prynne,*

*Thank you for this response, whose source I recognize and whose rhetorical register of address I sense is very close in spirit to that of the Sun while he talks to Frank O'Hara, so in that sense I guess you are sending me a message of some kind. But I do puzzle over its ending and the allusion to Wheat and Iron: By Wheat do you allude to 'Wheat of song'—a translation of Gwenith Gwawd, the literary name of the mediaeval Welsh poet? And would this be in opposition to "threads of Iron," a phrase in that book about "the history of what is taken away"? If I'm seeing your point, I think the key to this concluding passage is the opposition between alienation and a benign, socially harmonious, existence. If you never show the latter (anywhere in history), you lose contrast. There is no basis for saying that any state of society is bad. Any structure becomes flattened. OK, great, but China is not what it used to be, or what some Western Marxists hoped it might become, when you originally wrote this; and, too, can you see how some would regard the kind of hyper-modernist poetry you are now writing as nothing but ironically exemplary of the very admonition contained in what you wrote to Andrew Duncan back when? For your late poetry, like that of current post-avant formalism, is nothing if not (if you'll forgive me) a solicitation of an anticipatory and retrospective fear that is so constant that the reader can hardly discover within the sensorium where actual pain begins and does or does not end. And that is the classical difficulty for a rhetoricalised*



*post-avant instrument: its readiness to claim the privilege of an autonomous occasion which covertly it exploits.*

*You should talk to your wayward former student Andrew Duncan now about his turn to wild myth creation, Mr. Prynne. The collapse of the theology of Marxism-Leninism (particularly since the First Gulf War) has left the old left experimental wing with nothing but grammar, syntax, and a flat page to play with and upon. The poems either try to sound kind of abstract lyrical, or they try to sound like they are shortwave radio operators channelling different frequencies, squawks and squeals and all. Maybe the time has come to leave, as Mr. Duncan—at least in proto—has, the obvious stage behind and build about into imagined dimensions of different kinds. Paratext, paradoxically, is boundless, like space. Who knows where it might lead?*

*Still, and seriously, I'd like to know, if you can tell me, what is the Wheat and what is the Iron?*

Well, I sent this message, and the next day I founde in my in-box the following automated reply:

I am currently travelling and lecturing in China and won't be reading email until after the New Year (Gregorian Calendar). I will do my best to respond to you at that time.

I never did hear from hime againe...

*Next up, Chapter 3: An intensely heady meeting over pints with Tim Atkins, as the strangeness surrounding the matter of O'Hara's poem reaches frankly disturbing levels.*

NO MANIFESTO FOR POETRY READINGS AND  
LISTSERVS AND MAGAZINES AND “OPEN VERSATILE  
SPACES WHERE CULTURAL PRODUCTION FLOURISHES”†

Published in 59:1/2

*after Yvonne Rainer*

No to rape  
No to denying rape  
No to gaslighting  
No to drugging people at readings  
No to sexual violence  
No to relentlessly sexualizing  
No to relentlessly gendering  
No to misgendering  
No to gender  
No to decorum  
No to forums  
No to allies  
No to enemies  
No to individuals aren't the institution  
No to individuals are the institution  
No to gossip shaming  
No to not speaking up  
No to not naming names  
No to blaming those who speak and those who name

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†/ Editors' Note: The quotation in the title of this manifesto comes from the “About” page on the website of Wendy's Subway (Brooklyn, NY), the former host venue of the now-defunct Copula poetry reading series. Copula is identified later in the text as the scene of alleged predatory druggings in March 2014. The manifesto refers to several other small, independent poetry reading series: Greetings (Brooklyn, NY); Poetry Orgy (Fayetteville, AR); and 851 (San Francisco, CA). 851 is now defunct.

No to not realizing that when naming names things might go wrong  
No to neglecting racial politics as you name names  
No to neglecting sexual and/or gender politics as you name names  
No to using identity politics to shut down the naming of names  
No to social norms and justice systems that don't keep people safe so  
that naming names is a necessary resource  
No to talking about rape as if it's hypothetical  
No to calling these moments when people name names a "witch hunt"  
No to not remembering actual witch hunts killed hundreds of  
thousands of women  
No to calling this manifesto "community policing"  
No to not remembering who the police are, who they work for  
No to "bros before hos," sincerely or ironically  
No to presuming every opposition here is between men and women  
No to presuming that we can respond to an essentializing sexist, racist  
poetry scene without using the language of its binaries  
No to this paradox of abolition  
No to saying things so softly that no one can hear them  
No to saying things so loudly that no one else can speak  
No to Cambridge Poetry  
No to saying your Cambridge School authority figure is "not a  
misogynist but just prefers the company of men"  
No to the *Claudius App*, it deliberately used a rape joke and mocked  
women, their work, and their bodies for institutional critique  
No to missing the *Claudius App*, its editors made jokes about their  
fascination with publishing "hot young women"  
No to not missing the *Claudius App*, it published lots of great work  
by young women who found friendship and solidarity in each  
other  
No to the East Bay Poetry Summit, the parties after the readings were  
unsafe even though the readings were more interesting and  
diverse than usual  
No to the East Bay Poetry Summit, tolerant of presumptive and  
unwanted fondling and grabbing and shoving  
No to rapists hosting parties and readings at the East Bay Poetry  
Summit  
No to no East Bay Poetry Summit  
No to being sad if the East Bay Poetry Summit self-abolishes

No to the Copula reading series, women were drugged at it  
No to Wendy's Subway, it hosted Copula  
No to Wendy's Subway presuming that the druggings were mainly  
Copula's issue  
No to not asking the victim, or survivor, what sort of response they  
might want from your space, your series  
No to letting the victims, or survivors, think that they were alone  
and the only victim, or survivor, for many months  
No to not recognizing that the victims, or survivors, might gain  
support from each other if they were put in touch and this  
would result in a better of chance identifying the perpetrator  
No to presuming someone else is speaking for the victim, or  
survivor, and thus not contacting the victim, or survivor, on  
your own  
No to presuming the victim, or survivor, should be the educator,  
your educator  
No to not taking action until called out  
No to then writing "we have truly felt the efforts of all organizers  
and readers to be moving in the direction of positive, healing,  
and reparative work" after doing nothing for months  
No to statements  
No to statements that are nonstatements  
No to event spaces where the bathroom is away from the main  
"party" area and where it's possible to get from the bathroom  
to the outdoor exit without going through the main area, an  
ideal setup for predatory drugging  
No to expecting or assuming event organizers know such a setup is  
ideal for predatory drugging  
No to not taking precautions if you know this setup is ideal for  
predatory drugging  
No to presuming that if someone had trouble with someone  
at a reading that they would want someone from your  
organization to intervene on their behalf, that they would  
trust you  
No to being sad about Copula self-abolishing  
No to the Greetings Reading Series at Unnameable Books, it  
belittles in introductions  
No to no Greetings Reading Series at Unnameable Books

No to images of sexualized women on the cover of your publication; what are you selling?  
No to the cover of *Hot Gun* issue #1  
No to the bro-fest of *Hot Gun* issue #2  
No to *HTML Giant*, it published Steven Trull/Janey Smith's "Fuck List"  
No to missing *HTML Giant*, even though Jackie Wang and Lily Hoang and Roxane Gay and Janice Lee and so many others wrote some great things there  
No to Melville House, it published Tao Lin's *Statutory Rape* knowing it was about statutory rape and all it did was ask Lin to retitle the book *Richard Yates*  
No to no Melville House  
No to Poetry Orgy, no to calling your reading an orgy  
No to using a naked woman in a bathtub of blood to advertise a reading  
No to employing sexual or verbal harassers in mentorship and other teaching positions  
No to the Poetry Project, it didn't adequately deal with harassment complaints  
No to presuming that the Poetry Project is a legacy institution above discussion  
No to no Poetry Project  
No to 851 A Reading Series, it introduced readers by who they were fucking  
No to naming yourself after a Kathy Acker character who is endlessly raped and molested and then trying to rape and molest people endlessly yourself  
No to remembering 851 A Reading Series as a great thing that happened at a "squat"  
No to calling an empty apartment in your building that you use for poetry events a "squat"  
No to the UK Poetry List  
No to missing the UK Poetry List  
No to being told that as a rape survivor you are just like Lucrece or Proserpine or Helen of Troy  
No to sending Elizabeth Ellen's "Open Letter to the Internet" to the UK Poetry List and calling it an "intervention"  
No to cross-examining a woman on her account of rape, to

- replicating the discourse and modes of the legal system that regularly fails women
- No to a culture that discounts women's statements about their experience
- No to assuming that rape exists only when it is recognized by the law
- No to quoting a Robert Duncan poem about rape when someone has just shared their experience of rape with you and saying "there is no topic that's off-topic: poetry is touched by and touches it all"
- No to appropriating a listserv as if it served as a playground for only your poetics
- No to no UK Poetry List, we learned things there and its contributors reached out to us when we were broke and depressed or wanting to talk about poems
- No to protecting your friends who shove or rape or call someone a cunt
- No to valuing friendship with people who shove or rape or call someone a cunt over the requests of those who got shoved or raped or cuntcalled
- No to demeaning someone who decides to sustain a friendship or a relationship with someone who has shoved or raped or called someone a cunt and who is trying to work on these issues with their friend
- No to thinking rape is something that can be privately "worked through" within friendship
- No to excluding the partners and friends of people we are mad at
- No to feeling guilty about excising someone from your life when needed, woman or not
- No to forgetting the emotional labor undertaken by lovers or friends when lovers or friends have done wrong
- No to blaming the victim, or survivor, because you love your wrongdoing lover or friend
- No to not acknowledging the effects talking about violence has on our mental health
- No to having to endure abusive relationships with partners socially and professionally entrenched
- No to raising Poetry above all else as you mentally abuse your partner
- No to ignoring, much less encouraging, mental illness and abuse

for the sake of Great Poetry

No to telling other young women that they're not real poets  
because editors only like their cute *jeune-fille* asses and it will  
all be over for them soon

No to being oblivious to the double bind of the *jeune-fille*, how she  
is objectified, but also how her objectification is at the expense  
of the *vieille-fille*, how it forces them out of alliance

No to being a *vieille-fille* and perpetuating this by dismissing the  
*jeune-fille*

No to being a *jeune-fille* and perpetuating this by dismissing the  
*vieille-fille*

No to not understanding that the *jeune-fille* and the *vieille-fille* are  
dialectical products of scene misogyny

No to forgetting these problems have histories

No to forgetting to ask about those histories

No to passively watching younger people inherit those histories

No to being a woman-identified poet and not helping younger  
w-identified writers like the countless people who did this for us

No to expecting that people will want to mentor or do other caring  
labor because they identify as women

No to being a woman-identified poet and feeling obligated to do as  
men ask or demand or assume you should because you are a  
“fellow” (ha) poet

No to prioritizing the careers of men over the claims and voices of  
non-men

No to sexual harassment policies without any teeth

No to male academics who think female students are their  
property, or their daughters

No to the equation of “daughter” with “property”

No to institutional amnesia

No to using your academic standing to put pressure on people so  
they won't disagree with you

No to abusive professors against whom one is helpless

No to the academy as safe haven for them

No to tenure as safeguard for them

No to critical theory and insurrectionary discourse as hiding place  
for these same men

No to marxism without feminism

No to email as a viaduct for mental abuse  
No to having to tell our rape stories  
No to having to tell our harassment stories  
No to being asked for the details  
No to being asked for the details in order to support someone's  
theoretical argument  
No to not acting and then complaining that someone has hurt your  
feelings when they call you out  
No to a "feminist" paternalism that is chivalrous and gallant and still  
opens doors for us, especially those of us who dress femme or  
look white or hetero  
No to the idea that open doors should be entered  
No to the closing of doors  
No to saying it was "unfortunate, so unfortunate," but "who knows  
what to do"  
No to responding with a poem when asked to address criticisms of  
your reading series  
No to claiming there is nothing that can be done when there are  
a thousand blog posts and pamphlets and resources with a  
thousand possible ways of responding  
No to readings that are almost always two men and one woman  
No to readings that almost always host readers who identify as white  
No to believing that poetry readings are automatically a force for good  
No to believing that poetry is inherently a force for good  
No to men presuming they know what should be done  
No to men presuming they should just hang back because this is  
not a men's issue  
No to men presuming women know what should be done  
No to presuming it is mainly a women's issue  
No to presuming there are only male perpetrators  
No to the argument that "men are subject to sexual violence too" as  
a way to dismiss that we live in a patriarchy  
No to survivors, or victims, claiming they know what should be  
done because they are survivors, or victims  
No to making the women added to the board or the curatorial role  
afterward do all the work  
No to complaining about the work that the women added to the  
board or curatorial role do because they are doing it



No to working for a really long time on putting something together  
in response but not ever actually responding  
No to defending not ever doing anything by saying you don't want  
to falsely accuse anyone, you want to do it right  
No to presuming that what the victim, or survivor, wants is  
necessarily right for the community  
No to presuming that if the victim, or survivor, said it was okay or  
nothing should be done, that it was ok and nothing should be  
done  
No to not figuring out what the community might want or need  
independent of the victim, or survivor  
No to marginalizing trans and nonbinary people  
No to trying to get a young woman fired because she has called out  
your mistreatment of women  
No to kissing a woman's ass after threatening such professional damage  
in order to maintain your reputation and position of power  
No to hosting, promoting, or publishing those who have abused  
positions of power, even if not yet made public  
No to the times when one of us was the individual at an institution  
who didn't listen to our friend's complaints, who didn't make  
it our responsibility to change the location of an event so that  
our friend felt safe to attend  
No to making this problem any one individual's responsibility or fault  
No to making it about yourself  
No to seeing physical and sexual violence as only private issues  
No to not knowing whether or not to use "victim" or "survivor" and  
getting shamed for using one or the other instead of the other  
No to allowing abusers to claim victimhood  
No to forgetting that everyone fucks up, including you  
No to forgetting that everyone has hurt someone, including you  
No to reproducing the cycle of abuse  
No to turning on other women without trying to be tender  
No to treating other women terribly in the first place  
No to judging another woman for self-banishment or withdrawal  
No to not knowing the preferred pronoun of the poet you are  
introducing  
No to presumptively racializing someone  
No to the white privilege of some of us who are writing this

No to the cis privilege of some of us who are writing this  
No to presuming that everyone who is writing this is white,  
    privileged, and cisgender  
No to tokens  
No to having to explain tokenism over and over again, especially  
    when you are often the token  
No to writing any more of those poems, you know the ones we  
    mean here  
No to the degradation of non-men and non-whites in poems  
No to explaining the degradation of non-men and non-whites in  
    the arts as aesthetics  
No to writing a hypermasculinist poem about how lesbians may or  
    may not have sex  
No to conflating a poem's content with its author's politics  
No to not understanding that there is a difference between violence  
    in texts and violence to real bodies  
No to not understanding that the two are related  
No to boring "sexy" violence against women in poems about  
    frenetic capitalist and internet culture  
No to just letting misogyny play out because it might be satire, even  
    when women are walking out  
No to no satire  
No to rape as a metaphor for capitalism  
No to rape as a metaphor for your revolutionary sentiments  
No to butt-fucking as a metaphor for imperialism  
No to wholesale bans on the troping of rape, especially in the  
    writings of non-men  
No to art that sees only itself  
No to a politic that moves only its art  
No to forgetting who you are performing with and for  
No to "but they did it to themselves"  
No to "but they went home with them"  
No to "they love it really"  
No to "but you know what they're like"  
No to "let me liberate you"  
No to claiming to hold a reading when you really just want to hold  
    a drunken party  
No to no parties

- No to parties that aren't safe for everyone to get drunk or otherwise fucked up if they want to
- No to saying that the victims, or survivors, should just call the pigs if there is a problem
- No to relying on curators or organizers to be like the pigs and police people
- No to curators
- No to not curating
- No to not running the #s on your magazine or reading series
- No to only running the #s after something fucking awful happens
- No to assuming that if the #s are good, you are off the hook
- No to magazines which blame their #s on women being "frightened to assert themselves" and "too anxious to please"
- No to shaming a community for dealing with this stuff and presuming some other community doesn't have to deal with it
- No to making it about whether or not you got invited to the meeting
- No to making it about whether you've been doing "this work" the longest, but also no to forgetting who's been doing "this work"
- No to leaving "this work" in the hands of those who have done "this work" before
- No to leaving "this work" at the feet of those whom white-supremacist-cis-hetero-capitalist patriarchy hurts the most
- No to not knowing when the cis-hetero-capitalist-white-supremacist patriarchy helps you the most
- No to thinking that sexual violence is a problem exclusive to upper-middle-class mostly-white poetry communities
- No to imagining that the underrepresentation of non-white non-men in publishing is unrelated to power dynamics that result in harm to non-white non-men's bodies
- No to forgetting that the people who have named perps' names in this community have lots of social power and support and that this is not true in all communities
- No to *Chicago Review's* only inviting individuals to participate in this forum
- No to *Chicago Review's* not inviting NYC's Enough is Enough
- No to *Chicago Review's* not inviting the collective of women who shut down the UK poetry listserv

- No to *Chicago Review*'s not inviting the UK feminist poets group proto-form
- No to *Chicago Review* publishing, alongside a forum on sexual violence, an essay by Kent Johnson, who on the UK poetry listserv asked a woman who had shared her experience of multiple rapes, including an instance when she had been incapable of any kind of consent, whether the evening hadn't just been drunken fun
- No to ignoring *Chicago Review*'s history of sexist and racist and classist editorial practices and history of mostly male editors and history of special issues with ten white men over many years, and just recently three white women
- No to not writing this because of it
- No to nonapologies, apologies full of excuses, apologies blaming others, apologies all about yourself or your own guilt-driven need to explain at length
- No to defensiveness
- No to decorum
- No to forums
- No to panels
- No to roundtables
- No to any forum, panel, or roundtable that does not discuss these issues
- No to being a man who just wants to "move on"
- No to not dealing with the mess after
- No to feeling really bad about it but going on with your series or space anyway because your series or space is so important to the community
- No to assuming that everyone in poetry communities has the same commitments
- No to using the concept of solidarity as a way to shame other women
- No to calling men by their last names and women by their first names in reviews, talks, and introductions
- No to introducing someone at poetry readings with sexualized references to their appearance, clothing choices, or body parts
- No to introducing someone at poetry readings with emphasized or judgmental references to their age

No to introducing someone at poetry readings with references to how much of an influence you or seminal male poets have had on their work

No to suggesting students of seminal male poets would be nothing without them

No to thinking “we” can speak as one and no to assuming “we” know what “you” think

No to your undergraduate tutor asking you who you are fucking and why aren’t you fucking him, suggesting ways you might instead fuck him

No to no complaining about these things

No to blaming those who complain

No to all the hours spent collectively writing and editing this when we could have been dedicating our time to writing radical man-poems to bolster our minute stakes in the eternal cultural-capital-accumulation game

No to presuming discussion will fix everything when we’ve been talking about these issues for so long and things just seem to keep getting worse

No to not celebrating the victories, they happen

No to saying we have reached the end of our thinking in identity politics

No to believing contradiction can be eradicated

No to not trying, despite ongoing contradictions, to think ourselves out of chaos

No to allies who say they are allies but do not act

No to allies who say they are allies and leave it at that

No to enemies

No to refusing conciliation: the spaces we share (commercial, institutional, private, public) are everybody’s to be safe in and to keep each other safe in

No to the production of “safe spaces” that reproduce familiar exclusions along lines of race and class

No to white bourgeois feminists obliviously and insensitively hijacking these feminist spaces

No to safe spaces which insist on one kind of language to talk about violence

No to safe spaces which forget that standards of safety are also

determined by race and class  
No to exploiting the language of “safe spaces” to set rules that suit individuals, or power-as-usual  
No to not doing anything for fear of doing it wrong  
No to not admitting that you did it wrong  
No to not admitting you may continue to do it wrong  
No to not self-abolishing  
No to using the language of abolishment as a placeholder instead of doing actual work  
No to reading these statements as personal insults instead of attempts to undermine larger patriarchal structures  
No to deciding when this conversation is over  
No to the need to write this

Signed: a crowd of feminists based in

Baltimore, MD, US  
Berkeley, CA, US  
Brighton, UK  
Hamilton, ON, Canada  
London, UK  
Melbourne, Australia  
New York, NY, US  
Oxford, OH, US  
Oakland, CA, US  
San Francisco, CA, US  
Vancouver, BC, Canada

lacking consensus and okay with that

HARRY MATHEWS

## Journey to Six Lands

Published in 47:3

1

Out of droning Bayonne at five, sun silhouetting a Buddha on the city's one shrine. We had fashioned a mast for our hull from a stout pine that we felled and lopped in the dark, amid much blasphemy. By lantern light we saw what some nimble climber had long ago carved in its fork, "*I before he except after she*"—weird words leading to argument over what they might portend. Once the mast was stepped and braced with stays, we raised our sails with halyards we had braided out of rawhide. There is a tear in the leech of our mainsail. We glided down the river between zones of industrial waste. Only a few indifferent gulls watched us leave. It is after all a poor, deserted place. Tiers of mussels ringed the pilings of abandoned wharves in the lowering tide. There is an inexplicable tear in the leech of the mainsail. We were bound for home—a home that we had forgotten or never seen.

Standing away north from the coast, the wind sitting east-northeast, a harsh quarter—we could do nothing but drive, scudding away as we bore against it, mast sloping, bow dipping. We had no true officers but encouraged each other to stand to the tackle, stretch on the oars, contract the luffing sails, everything a struggle, with the sea swirling and hawling inboard, in a shrilling of stays and halyards. We forgot the new old world we longed for. We had taken a priest named Dory on board; he now passed among us, intoning the opening words of the fifty-first psalm and raising crossed sticks over each of us as he did so in a kind of infernal blessing. Such a handsome man, young, light-hearted, not a drowning mark on him, master of men and of women, too! He was to enrapture all our loveliest in turn. Even now, in those endragoned seas, he took Dominique into the dark below the leaking cabin decking. At one moment the waves rose from such a depth I saw the floor of the sea: lobsters five feet long and scurrying crabs with glowing eyes. Later, the sky seemed boundless, full of fierce stars.



We drifted into a stinking fog, thick with what felt like soot. The killer-squalls had passed on—one man and a boy washed overboard. The mainsail was tattered; half the snap hooks on the jib would not close; all our circuits were broken. The sails for now were of no use anyway: not a breath of wind. We worked hard at our oars though with heavy hearts, like men going to execution. (It seems our sweat made the ladies hot—it was Gloria’s impatient turn with Dory today.) The water felt thick with ooze, with something like clay. We dreaded running aground in the dark. Next to the steersman, whose face gleamed white by his lamp, a woman sat holding a frond wetted with vinegar, to slap him in case he nodded off. I looked up once and there stood the cook in his greasy girdle, not a sign of care on his filthy-bearded face as he shucked a bucket of mussels, tossing shells over our heads into the sad water. The place and time of our embarkation were already beyond any wish to remember them.

Was there a droning in the fog? The smell had gotten worse. Afraid that the splashed water was toxic, some rowers wore soul-and-body lashings in spite of the heat. We came among quiet, turgid eddies and a sudden voluminous cloud of night-flying white moths: land nearby? “In that case,” someone said, “it must be the land beyond the sun.” A pier emerged from the darkness, protruding from an acre of barren ground. At its tip three figures were imploring to be taken on board. Dory and Faith, his day’s companion, helped each over the gunwale with a finger entwined in his hair. As we moved off, rowing still (first our propellers had fouled, now the throttle cable stuck), we felt a solid thing hindering our progress. Someone recognized the body of our lost boy. When we leaned over to recover him, the cook, nibbling a dish of goose lungs as he spoke, said flatly that he would not have him aboard. He picked up an abandoned oar and pushed him under, easy enough with his garments so heavy with the drink. Poisonous or not, these waters provide no fish. We live on fowl salted or smoked.

We entered a cluttered expanse, without tide or current, full of indistinct shoals that diminished our passageway (but with no sign of a shore to set foot on). The fog's darkness was speckled with local lights. They emanated from isolated erections and wrecks that rose out of the slick water. On them men and women, alone or in groups of two and three, sat in the glow of lanterns, candles, battery lamps, even flashlights. Some called to us as we passed. On one stout pile a pretty girl stood reading; she looked up when we were close by and imperturbably announced, "*The Bled and the Rack*." A young couple kept singing "Three blind mice" backwards, over and over, perched on a half submerged oil derrick. From the upended stern of a hulk, where he was arguing violently with a middle-aged man in orange djellabah and dark glasses, a pimply adolescent shouted, "Can anyone straighten out the fucking Trinity for us?" (Dory made as if to reply, remembered that Agnes was waiting, and turned away.) With the warnings from the bow lookout, these voices kept the air crackling with staccato speech. A dozen mergansers with bright-patched wings floated out of our way. The backs of fat slow eels heaved on the oily surface. We abandoned all thought of a fixed destination, hoping at best to avoid circling through this region of stench and gloom. The garboard seams had started leaking.

Borne by a mild current that glided due north, we emerged from the fog into clear red light. We scanned the heavens to see if the sky itself was red, but there was no sky to be seen, only uniform red brightness. It revealed the sorry state of our ship—the planks warped, several ribs cracked; there was no health in it. Soon the current started changing directions in complex, unpredictable ways. At first the lake-like surface was empty, even of rolling fish, but in time we began seeing occasional swimmers. At last a barge-sized wherry appeared, Venetian in aspect, with its black lacquer and gold trim. It was manned by a crew of young men in blue-and-white striped denims. When the cook came on deck and spotted them he exclaimed, “That’s where I belong!”, at once calling out “Hard a lea!”, *the* most foolish of commands, since there was no wind at all; furthermore, we would never let him go. We told him as much. Then the cook in a rage laid hold of Dory and threw him over the side. The young man stupidly floundered out of reach, to be eventually fished up by the barge’s hands, although they held him firmly under water for a minute before taking him aboard. Holly was grief-stricken, Jeannette saddened that her turn would now never come.

“...wandering around a place like this when the far shore appears. We aren’t expecting it. It’s just after dawn—I notice a couple of hills way off, almost black against the light. As we get closer I can see a meadow sloping down to the edge of the water. It’s covered with red and yellow flowers, maybe ankle-high. There’s a breeze blowing from the land, the kind that comes off snow when it’s melting. The sun is up. The air’s *shining*. We hear a quiet tune from somewhere in the woods past the meadow. The east is turning bright pink and the sky is still dark blue when a woman walks out of the woods. She’s wearing a green cape with a day-glo orange robe underneath. At first her face is in shadows—‘a veil of leafy flowers’—but even when she’s standing in sunlight down by the water we can’t really make her out. There’s no way we can get close enough in, too shallow, with masses of rotting seaweed. Anyway no one is seriously thinking of going ashore. It’s too much; as if nothing we ever did matters any more. And the song—I can’t remember a note of it now. You know how it is. Something like ‘Little Buttercup,’ if you’ve ever heard that.”

The garboards went in a new fog, against a smother of sand. It may take us a thousand years to get over it, drinking Clos Vougeot *déclassé* with our easygoing likenesses, stubbornly soaking our cares and years, always remembering that as long as you keep swallowing any thought of suffocation can be dispelled. What probably irks most is the prospect that, after all this nonsense, we may some day again put on fleshly raiment. But for the moment this seems a remote possibility. Hats, pencils, two unmatched shoes, and a few suited bodies go drifting by, tossed by the oven-hot wind blowing off the western verge, sometimes sticking in massed tangles of weed. The tar on old boards that have settled against the banks has blistered in the sun. Small eels cluster in warmer shallows; gaping mussels slope down the mud onto the slimy flats, where crabs scuttle sidelong in inch-deep water. A long-forgotten oil lamp, rusted and shattered, has sunk halfway into the purple ooze. This is Cythera, lady.

Out of droning fog the broad river quietly flowed due north between dry wastes, with no light from the cold sky but the moon's. It had passed us by. It is an understatement to say that our mast and bow no longer sloped or dipped, that our pumps had clogged and our chain plates rusted: we were as inert as what can be depicted in solid coloring when applied to suitable material (durable or not—belly of vase or square of cloth): a vessel resting on an immensity of water similarly depicted (see below). As the river moved on, clayey shoals had begun hindering its progress, damming and dividing its currents. Fragmented, diminished, unburdened, its streams pressed their way between sandbanks and islands matted with reeds, along riversides where tight-lipped mussels blacker than the night declined into the slow water; until in time a sound of breaking waves announced its destination, which at last opened in front of it unbounded, glittering with the light of freshened stars.

Key West, January 26, 2000

## A Feuilleton: Reinventing the Madeleine?

Published in 51:1/2

During the first few minutes of his recent Southwestern University Brown Symposium lecture on Gustav Mahler's *Song of the Earth* (1908–9), the musicologist Donald Mitchell gave an account of one mode of Asian music, heterophony, which I found exciting. What he said was this: "The music is generated from a single melody, which rotates. All the other instruments weave round that rotation variations of the melody, at different speeds, with different note-values, with a rhythmic displacement. When you hear the texture as a whole, what you are hearing is a kind of dissynchronized unison."

Nobody need be subdued by this wording. I would like to think of the description, here and now, as a diagram for the patch of planetary life in which each of us, singly and in our relationships, tries to shape and to civilize the awesome influences that fall upon us and spread from us. Mahler's orchestral song-cycle, itself a gigantic switchboard of values, grew out of some German versions of old Chinese poems, the texts of which he altered as need arose. Very likely, too, Mahler was transforming a Siamese musical "type" into a music saturated with European values; and in this musical alchemy, so they say, he was directed by foreknowledge of his own early death.

Scatterings, influences—those are the dread secrets of shape. True, the arts dwell in their own sovereign domains. But here is an instance of the detour they can make into the immediacies of life itself: a work of art, like a multicolored festive firework, happens to explode and unfold right overhead, and it illuminates the tract of time and space in which a person lives. We do not connect, we do not remember, we do not "put it all together," we are all criminals of forgetting, and we are never *heterophonic* enough in our feeling for our own lives: but a radical and urgent message from a work of art suddenly arrives to tell us that it is not yet too late.



“The music is generated from a single melody”: the hardest thing is to detect that melody, the backbone of one’s life. Adversity crushes and is deafening; or else it is others who detect it, or think they do, and they are mistaken, as anyone knows who has woken up one heavenly morning, full of it, and tried to sing it out, so as to be heard. Is it a consistent melody at all? (If not, is it a melody at all? What sort of fiction is a melody, anyway?) Our best friends are shocked by the inconsistencies to which the incommunicable melody provokes us. The melody is said to “rotate”: how dull or colorful is its round? The “other instruments”—alas, their velocities are so different, one “note-value” contradicts another, so the “rhythmic displacement” buries the melody, we laxly keep on doing what we do, improvising, aha, hoping that a spontaneous note or two will be played, but by the time we have worked one rhythm toward some conclusion, there is no unison anywhere, only routine, battered by chance, only bits and pieces, loss, lacerations, even the memories lacerate. Mahler, too, told Bruno Walter, concerning rhythmical difficulties in the finale: “Have you any idea how this is to be conducted? I haven’t.”

Then: a magical evening with a photo album. Actually, there’s a huge basket full of photos, only now have you resolved to sort them out. Out of the mass you fish photos that have become stuck together. A bit of a face is all you can glimpse, a bridge, a sycamore tree. There’s no way to separate these clusters of images. Yet, thanks to chance or to some care you took, a number are distinct and they crystallize a rich recall.

The old sights and sounds and smells present themselves afresh. You space them out: the dates are vague, who on earth is that person, whose dog was this, why did I snap that house? But what is happening, really? You are making the connections, slowly, in your own good time. Now you can imagine that your twinges of memory and sensation are chords, the clusters of experience can be spun out, to make a tune, and you are the tunemaker. A Siamese rack of gongs is chiming, and the other instruments are weaving a texture out of what was chaos, apathy, or silence: a dissynchronized unison is becoming audible, faint, like someone practicing his silver flute on the other side of your hill.

Not only a latter-day magical photo evening can play this game with you. The evening is any time. And there is never any conclusive

total, here, or in the work of art. Nothing adds up, for everything multiplies, but through your very forming of the fractional sums a flow, a spirit edges into the open, to be sensed. You made a gift of this or that, you said a thing you had to, you loved that voice, felt all the impact of this outrage, and now, by you alone, with and through all the changes you make, such events are being well remembered. Such events—a foreign text, much of it, with which you are in touch, translating it into your feelings, mixed with a Siamese rack of gongs, lacerated by dissynchronisms, hurt, wounds, and yet it is still happening: a meek fern has burst through the tarmac of your street, and the fern uncurls, seeking light.

Of course, the fern depends on what you put under the tarmac in the first place: the giving out, generously and passionately, of whatever little bit of initiative you had. It depends on your positive furthering of the different speeds, different note-values—on risks you took, wildly, and on your prudence, when that was called for. None of the notes or photos can be brought into a pattern without the pleasures of difference. Without a rupturing of the monotone, no personal melody can be consolidated.

Unison: what does that mean? No stable unity of *one* is meant, but a consonance, in so many difficult rhythms, of the many, and the dispersal into fresh diversity, at the next throb of the gongs, of that occasional one. Heterophony: to some the word may sound like a bad joke. In Greek it meant: Other-Sounding. (Accents fall on the first *e* and first *o*, and both *os* are short, as in *top*.) If one day you find you are having strange and freshening thoughts, all of which make sense like no others did before, try letting your friends and adversaries know, tell them: “It’s the melody, you hear?”

1978/79

FANNY HOWE

[LAMBS ARE LOWER TO THE GROUND]

Published in 42:1

Lambs are lower to the ground  
but closer to heaven than humans are.

They don't try being itinerant  
or to be where there are no minutes or questions  
like, "Why be obedient to a world that will end?"

Wool walks in the agriculture  
ignorant of its coloring.

Patented in blue, yes, as food and clothing  
for persons and their furniture.

SARA NICHOLSON

ARBOR VITAE

Published in 61:3/4

Halfway there but no further  
Along than when I started,  
I asked for one more chance  
At time, as on certain afternoons  
Outside of work one might  
Enflame the sharp-toothed leaves  
With metaphor, spend time  
Watching sound move through  
Rocks in transverse waves,  
The kind of interruption  
One welcomes as relief from  
Wonder or pain, a vision  
Out-of-focus but gathering  
In intensity—e.g., heat  
And learning how it makes  
Glass glass. Iron yielding  
To the force of autobiography.  
The familiar pattern of trees  
In everything. It was 1903  
On the veranda, four o'clocks  
Against the whitewashed  
Side of a building darkening up  
The afternoon, electric lights  
Imported from America  
To delight the émigrés as they  
Wait in gardens for a word  
From home, anywhere winds  
Are caught eavesdropping  
On the surface of the water

In another time we read about  
In books. The miraculous  
Forms of nature looked to us  
Like off-season décor, a lost glove  
In whose memory a lady  
Prayed to St. Anthony, night  
And day, for conversation  
Between bracken and the long  
Grasses she left behind her  
Twenty years before, mislaid  
In a field somewhere the mind  
Translated to watercolor  
In retrospect, early and late  
Styles pivoting against the day  
We saw her on the veranda  
With a glass of sunflower  
Gin, one glove only. A crowd  
Began to form in the ill-lit  
Passageways below us. We rose  
To join them, spotted yew  
Above us and hyacinth below  
Market value, swallows  
Circulating through the air.  
Let me be clear: no narrative  
Is narrative enough for us who  
Wish to remain anonymous  
In crowds, who seek logic  
In non-entity, the Bruegelesque  
Figures in shade or full sun  
Facial recognition software  
Couldn't yet be used on  
Because they shared one face  
Among them, disfigured  
When summer left its blood-mark  
On the land, in the face of  
They who make poetry oddly  
Necessary but persist in

Quailing before it, as music  
Moves even the least of these  
Stars we're now able to see  
From the veranda. Here  
There are plants of both sexes  
And fugue notes to co-opt  
Energy from sound and light.  
The story of an object  
No longer glove but memory  
Forgotten, left behind her  
And in time nothing. Hardly  
Ever more of the same.

HAKI R. MADHUBUTI

## CLAIMING LANGUAGE, CLAIMING ART<sup>†</sup>

Published in 62:4 & 63:1/2

### *furious*

in the destructive weather of orange hurricanes, tornadoes, avalanches and white-eyed occupiers selling cheap fear to the ignorant and terror-struck non-readers or thinkers who miraculously *know-it-all* as they claim ownership of stolen peoples, lands, ideas, music, money, dance, technology and climate denial: as fires ravish much of the international commons. it is time for colors, cleansing rain, memphis blues, mississippi greens, mind molding black jazz and measurable yeses, to learning first, quiet moments of introspection, meditation, knowledge acquisition and livable habits prior to chasing the easy, the next line giveaways and missed melodies of poets and their poems. they who made words into life teaching, sharing, dancing indigenous vernaculars laboring for gladness and diverse tomorrows on the far side. they who transmit the lingua franca of earned accomplishments that benefit babies, children, mothers and often fathers who are not lost in crude masculinity, trapped in solitary confinement of state prisons or dead minds that focus too regularly on *get-it-for-nothing* lifestyles and no nothingness. where are the creative fighters with fists, locution and mission? where are the top writers, team creators, word finders, clear tongued poets?

### *flowers*

world over and under, whether in denmark, ghana, china and local backyards of rocks, glass, and no hope. within apartments hidden in detroit's blackbottom, chicago's and new york's projects and the

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<sup>†</sup>/ Written at the request of Dr. Joanne Gabbin, Founder and Director of the Furious Flower Poetry Center at James Madison University.

forgotten red clay of alabama. all where flowers will grow with little water, sun or helping hands. body sweet sweat of workers battling climate damage and overtime without extra pay from big box stores & for-profit colleges unable to educate pregnant roaches while student debt eclipses 1.5 trillion dollars. forcing memory, black recall, sharing, teaching, never forgetting the wonderfully engaged word-smiths and legendary artists often soloists of black and tan images in short and long lines that save and give lives. this is the role call:

gwendolyn brooks, robert hayden, claude mckay,  
lucille clifton, amiri baraka, margaret danner, langston  
hughes, mari evans, dudley randall, léopold sédar senghor,  
sterling a. brown, etheridge knight, carolyn m. rogers,  
norman jordan, julia fields, larry neal, melvin b. tolson,  
nina simone, keorapetse kgositsile, oscar brown jr.  
and all missing poetic Black voices who often left us  
without notice, notation or preachers calling their names.

all resounding, creative and turbulent voices of black soup, rice milk with opened minds to consumption of raw vegetables aided by the detox salons, from diverse poets who can read in their sleep to awaken fresh to spot falsehood before early light. they all come home. Presence. warrior poets, the most liberated artists in the world navigating the language of touch, love and cayenne to the body. wellness. they, the brilliant penetrators of bogus thought now supply us with peaches, mangoes, pure water, yellow skinned watermelons and critical sun screaming for the next generation of poets.



WISŁAWA SZYMBORSKA  
Translated by Joanna Trzeciak

IN ABUNDANCE  
Published in 46:3/4

I am who I am.  
A coincidence as inscrutable  
as any other.

Other ancestors  
might have been mine, after all,  
then from some other nest  
I would have flown,  
from some other stump  
I would have crawled in my shell.

In nature's wardrobe  
there are many costumes—  
spider, seagull, field mouse.  
Each fits like a glove from the get-go  
and is loyally worn  
until it wears out.

I, too, had no choice,  
but I can't complain.  
I could have been someone  
much less singular.  
Someone from a school of fish,  
from an anthill, from a buzzing swarm,  
a piece of landscape thrashed by wind.

Someone much less lucky,  
bred for fur  
or for a holiday meal,  
something swimming under a cover glass.

A tree stuck in the earth,  
with a fire approaching.

A blade of grass trampled by a run  
of incomprehensible events.

One born under a dark cloud  
whose lining gleams for others.

But what if I had awakened fear in people,  
or merely revulsion,  
or merely pity?

If I hadn't been born  
into the right tribe and  
paths closed before me?

Fate has proved  
benevolent so far.

The memory of good moments  
might not have been granted me.

A penchant for comparisons  
might have been withheld from me.

I might have been myself—though without the wonder,  
but that would have meant  
being someone else.



toward profuse starlings  
most profound misreading of the words  
splinter spectra  
toward  
he is unable to seize hold of himself as a whole  
I am to serve toward and am toward  
  
then

avery r. young

from SKYSCRAPER(S) & ERYTHING  
Published on [chicagoreview.org](http://chicagoreview.org)

# skyscraper(s) & erything

## S2 EP.02

TITLE: **mama comin**

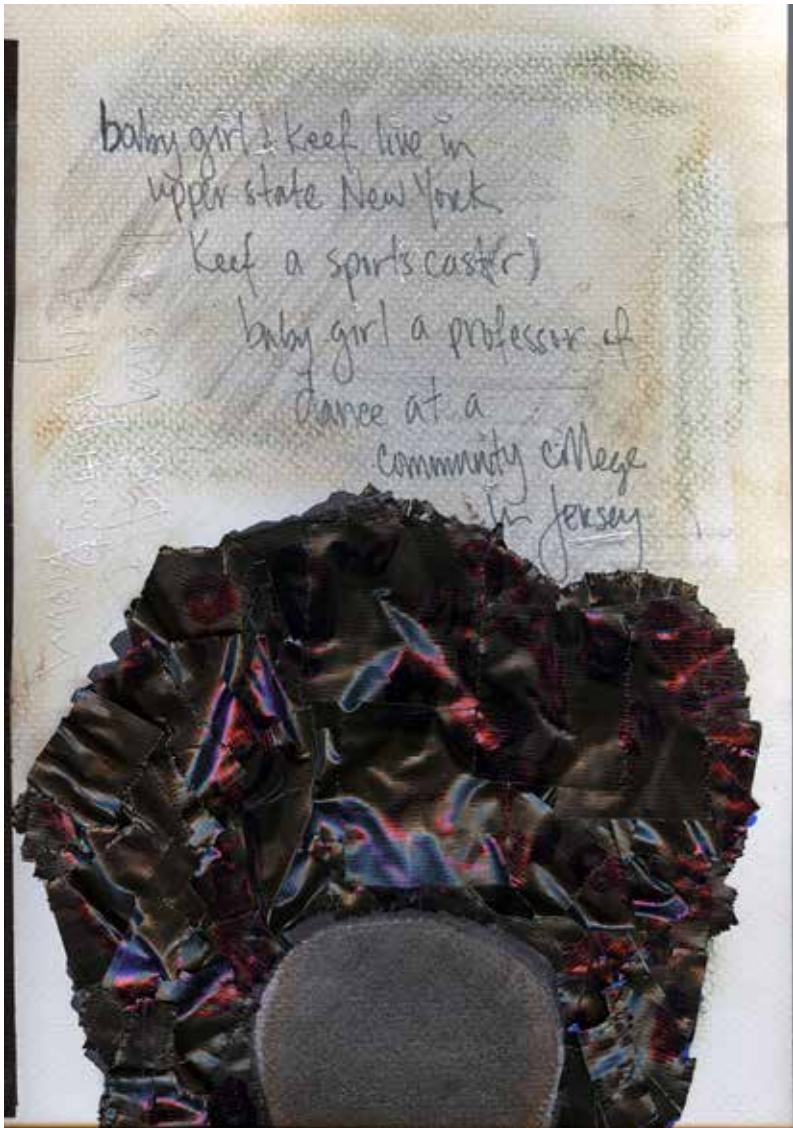
**PREMISE:** miguel invite(s) mama to de crib  
him & eddie done made a home

plan(s) to reveal to mama de troof  
of him livin situation

her suffer(s) a stroke  
[ unrelated(id) to him livin situation ]

inside de chapel  
miguel confront(s) de prayer warrior  
who touch(d) him down derr  
on dat very firs(t) time **blk!**





baby girl & keep live in  
upper state New York  
Keep a sports caster  
baby girl a professor of  
dance at a  
community college  
in jersey

2015  
circa 1980

**split screen:**

miguel in bubble  
baf / readin Gwendolyn Brooks'  
Winnie [Third World Press]

babygirl in kitchen  
wif red bean(s)  
bikenin on de stove

[telephone goes(s)]  
rang-rang rang-rang [laf trac(k)]

**babygirl:**  
anderson residence

**miguel:**  
chile  
come get yo mama [laf trac(k)]

**babygirl:**  
[eyeroll]  
what her do now

**miguel:**  
mo(re) like what her aint doin  
tween her blowin out her fro  
cleanin & boilin chittin(s)  
& insistin on han(d) washin  
erybody clothes in lye  
eddie say our house smell like  
trice, bleach & afro-sheen [laf trac(k)]  
i coll it mahogany funk [laf trac(k)]

**babygirl:**  
[laffin] well u got her fo(r) anudda week

New treatment  
of the  
baby boy  
in the  
family

him = as queer  
as blk!  
↑  
he  
is



den her comin bac(k) home to me  
keef & de kid(s)

miguel:

hurry up weck  
hurry up

[laf trac(k)] = us As supportive  
of him queeness  
As us [redacted] support  
him blkness

babygirl:

how u & eddie doin

miguel:

we fine

babygirl:

what did her say when u tol(d) her

miguel:

i didnt really have tell her anything

first(t) thing her did when her came in  
was count bedroom(s)

[somebody in de studio audience go  
i know dat(s) right]

talkin bout her didnt wanna put nobody out  
dey bedroom

& eddie tol(d) her dat we werr puttin her in de gues(t)room

eddie is = dude bullin  
[redacted]

her look(d) at me & said

well son  
dat leave(s) yall wif one bedroom left(t)

[somebody in de studio audience go  
sho-do]

miguel / one James Sr.  
Whipped

lawd-a-mercy

& herr i thought i was gonna sneak in eddie room tonight  
& get me a taste

[laf trac(k)]  
& den somebody in de studio audience go  
right-on]

for bein  
[redacted]  
disrespectful



## Numbers Trouble

Published in 53:2/3

Jennifer Ashton's recent article "Our Bodies, Our Poems" makes some bold claims about gender and contemporary poetry. Most striking is her claim that the "the recent commitment to women as formal innovators...is utterly and literally essentialist." Focusing on the poetry anthology, Ashton argues that while corrective anthologies dedicated solely to writing by women made a certain sense in the 1970s, "by the mid-80s efforts to 'redress the imbalance' had apparently succeeded—women seemed to make up more or less half of the poets published, half the editorial staff of literary magazines, half the faculties of creative writing programs, and so forth." She argues that only essentialism justifies the continued existence of anthologies that feature "innovative" writing by women.<sup>1</sup> She also argues that in addition to the women's poetry anthologies of the 1990s and beyond—she talks about Maggie O'Sullivan's *Out of Everywhere: Linguistically Innovative Poetry by Women in North America and the UK*, Mary Margaret Sloan's *Moving Borders: Three Decades of Innovative Writing by Women*, and Claudia Rankine and Juliana Spahr's *American Women Poets of the 21st Century*—the work of Kathleen Fraser, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, and Lyn Hejinian is guilty of this same essentialism.<sup>2</sup>

Ashton's article is provocative; our reaction was a combination of annoyance and confusion, with moments of agreement. (Although Ashton avoids talking much about feminism, we ourselves have some questions about how feminism shows up in the experimental poetry scene, especially how it does not show up that much in a lot of the anthologies that focus on work by women.) We started talking about her article by admitting that we had trouble saying anything coherent about gender and writing, especially contemporary writing by women, especially contemporary experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative writing by women (however one defines those pesky terms). We talked first about representational practices. Then we talked about

economics, about publication, about lauding of works with prizes. Every time we started talking about who gets published, who wins prizes, and who gets academic jobs, we ended up lost in a tailspin of contradictions.

And then we began to wonder, did the numbers support Ashton's claims? Is it true that "on the numerical level the problem of underrepresentation has been corrected"?

But before we get to that, we should probably confess some things.<sup>3</sup> Ashton seems mainly to want to say something about essentialism and we do not. We are fairly sure we define essentialism differently than she does. And to us, essentialism is not as damning as her article assumes it to be. But we are not jumping into that big, endless debate right now. Nor are we going to argue with her about how one might edit an anthology of women's writing for reasons other than correcting an imbalance, although we do want to quickly point out that anthologies can be edited to begin dialogues or to argue for new communities or to document certain moments or for a million other reasons.

Our other confession should be that Ashton wrote one small article. And it would be easy to ignore it. But one reason that it interests us so much is that we feel her dismissal of female community parallels a larger cultural dismissal of feminism that shows up in peculiar and intense ways in contemporary writing communities, often in the name of progressive politics. Instead of Ashton, we could point to the well-meaning but dismissive lefty claim in Ron Silliman's 1988 "Poetry and the Politics of the Subject" that manages to write women out of any history of formal innovation when he argues that the writing of "women, people of color, sexual minorities, the entire spectrum of the 'marginal' ... should often appear much more conventional" because they are marginalized and the marginalized need to tell their stories.<sup>4</sup> Or one could refer to how so many of the women's anthologies apologize for their existence. Even Mary Margaret Sloan, in a sentence that Ashton echoes, concedes:

perhaps a book such as [*Moving Borders*] marks the occasion when, at the end of a period of historical transition, such a book is no longer necessary. A barrier has been crossed; a roughly equivalent number of women and men are publishing the most significant and demanding innovative work of the moment.<sup>5</sup>

These are just two moments that are pulled somewhat arbitrarily from a long list that we feel is painfully evident to anyone who has been a part of contemporary writing communities. So we want to cop to a certain shorthand in this paper. When we say “Ashton” we are using a metonym and talking about some much larger feelings that seem to permeate the experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative writing community, including a feeling that feminism is irrelevant or outdated or just plain over or boring or pathetic or whiny. And yes, we should also admit to feeling this way while writing this paper. We kept saying to ourselves, do we really need to count all this stuff? We felt forced to write about what should by now be out of date. The numbers game felt a little irrelevant to us. We do not, for instance, think that having an equal number of men and women in an anthology or giving a prize to an equal number of men and women necessarily mean that these things are feminist or progressive. Plus we had a constant feeling that we had better and more exciting, i.e. non-gender-specific, work that we wished we could be doing.

So this was where we started: with the question of whether Ashton’s claim that all was equal between men and women in contemporary writing since the mid-80s was true. Our original thought was that she might be right, but that if she was right it was because of constant pressure from the very anthologies and journals that she was devaluing. We were agreeing, in other words, with Jennifer Scappetone’s analysis that “having declined to distinguish between episodes of recent history, Ashton’s account fails to register the force of the...anthologies in helping spur such developments.” We talked about this constant, necessary pressure as a series of “feminist interventions.” We imagined that what happened was that women who were ignored or excluded from poetry institutions such as anthologies created anthologies that featured work only by women to point this out. And then, we imagined, after the publication of these anthologies, future anthologies did a better job at including work by women. In our original thinking, the problem with Ashton’s article was not that she was wrong in saying that “the problem of underrepresentation has been corrected,” but that she was dismissing as unnecessary and essentialist the very things that helped correct the underrepresentation. We began by thinking that what we needed to

do was look at how many women poets showed up in anthologies before and after *Moving Borders*. Or, we thought, there have been some big debates about gender on Silliman's blog; what if we looked at how many women he talked about before and after these debates. We thought we would see some changes after the interventions.

It worried us that Ashton's article had so few footnotes, so little research for some really bold assertions. So at this point we did several things. We attempted to construct a history of the experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative scene and then to count its men and its women. And at the same time, because we figured that the numbers would tell only one story and we felt that this history could best be written with others, we wrote to a number of people—men and women, although our list was far from inclusive and also somewhat arbitrary—and asked them to tell us a story about poetry and gender. Again, our thought at this point was that Ashton was probably right, that there were somewhat equal numbers of men and women represented in most of the institutions that shape experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative poetry, and yet we felt at the same time that while the numbers could tell a story of somewhat equal representation, the lived experience of writers in contemporary experimental scenes might suggest something more complicated. Or at least that was how it felt to us. We did not feel that as women it was hard for us to get published, but we did deal with a lot of gender trouble on a fairly regular basis, a lot of gender dismissal.

Our questions were:

1. Tell us a story about gender and the poetry community (however you define those terms).
2. Tell us about a reading series, press, magazine, book, person, or group of persons that you feel has performed an important feminist intervention in the poetry community.
3. How do you see feminist interventions in the poetry community connecting, or not, with the living and working conditions of women in a national/international arena?
4. We'd be curious if you can imagine some way that poetry, or poetry communities (again, however you define the terms) might

do more to engage the living and working conditions of women in a national/international arena.

What follows is the history that we constructed with the help of those who answered the survey.<sup>6</sup>

## §

Our history starts with Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry*, published in 1960. It is widely accepted as the seminal anthology, the one that establishes the current view that US experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative poetry is a series of located and specific scenes, each with their own concerns, rather than one unified scene. It argues, thus and importantly, not for US poetry but for US poetries. Like many anthologies of its time, it is notable for its lack of attention to writing by women: it features forty men and four women (9% women). And it was not alone. Paris Leary and Robert Kelly's 1965 *A Controversy of Poets* has fifty-one men and eight women (14%). Ron Padgett and David Shapiro's 1970 *Anthology of New York Poets* has twenty-six men and one woman (4% women). In his introduction to *The San Francisco Poets* (1971), with six men and no women at all, David Meltzer casually claims "The six poets in this book represent the history of poetry in San Francisco, in America, in the world."

As Ashton points out, a number of anthologies by women were published around this time as a corrective to this sort of editing. Among those that she mentions are *No More Masks! An Anthology of Poems by Women* (1973), *Rising Tides: 20th Century American Women Poets* (1973), *Psyche: The Feminine Poetic Consciousness* (1973), and the *Penguin Book of Women Poets* (1978).<sup>7</sup> When looking at these anthologies together, what is most striking is how little overlap there is between the feminist anthologies and the experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative anthologies. The women included in the experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative anthologies usually do not appear in the feminist anthologies. (There is some slight overlap with *Rising Tides* and *Moving Borders*. Both anthologies include work by Lorine Niedecker, Barbara Guest, Kathleen Fraser, and Anne Waldman.) And although feminism became a powerful part of the conventional poetry scene in 1973, it arrived later in the

experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative scene.<sup>8</sup> For some time, Kelsey Street, a press started in 1974 and devoted to innovative writing by women, seemed to exist almost on its own.<sup>9</sup>

But by the 1980s, a whole series of feminist interventions had happened and things had changed a little. *Raddle Moon*, a Canadian journal well known as a place friendly to women's writing, began in 1983. *HOW(ever)*, a stapled zine publishing creative writing by women only (although it featured critical writing by both men and women) began the same year. In 1984, *Poetics Journal* published an issue on "Women and Language." In 1989, Dodie Bellamy edited a women-only issue of her journal *Mirage*; the same year *Big Allis*, another journal friendly to work by women, began publishing with a women-only issue.

As Ashton observes, there were some changes in the numerical representation of women's writing in the experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative anthologies published in the 1980s. In 1982 Donald Allen and George Butterick published a revision of *The New American Poetry* called *The Postmoderns: The New American Poetry Revisited*. They managed to cut the men to thirty-three and add a woman, so that five are included (13% women). Ron Silliman's *In the American Tree*, published in 1983, has twenty-six men and twelve women (32% women).<sup>10</sup> Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein's 1984 *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* has fifty-six men and thirteen women (19% women). Douglas Messerli's 1987 "*Language*" *Poetries* includes thirteen men and seven women (35% women).

By the 1990s, an editor of an anthology would find it almost impossible to argue that writing by women just didn't matter or wasn't visible or wasn't part of the experimental scene. A huge number of feminist interventions happened during the decade. In 1990, Rachel Blau DuPlessis published her now iconic critical study on women writers and experimentalism, *The Pink Guitar*. In 1994, Jena Osman and Juliana Spahr began publishing *Chain*; the first issue included only women writing on the subject "gender and editing." In 1995, *The New Fuck You*, a collection of lesbian writing edited by Eileen Myles and Liz Kotz, was published. In 1996, O'Sullivan's *Out of Everywhere* was published. Sloan published *Moving Borders* in 1998. Also in 1998, Jordan Davis and Chris Edgar began their journal *The Hat* with an issue that featured only writing by women. The feminist webjournal *How2*, a spin off of *HOW(ever)*, began publication in 1999, edited by



Kate Fagan and others. And that same year Yedda Morrison and David Buuck published an issue of *Tripwire* called “Gender” that pointedly included a significant amount of work by men as well as women, noting that “despite the increased participation of women within the traditionally male-dominated ‘avant-garde,’ and the various advances of feminism, gender politics continues to be a contested site within aesthetic practice and its articulation/translation/reception in a still largely phallogocentric system.” Also in 1999, Armantrout and Fanny Howe organized the Pagemothers Conference at UCSD. That same year Rachel Levitsky began the women-only Belladonna reading series.

And yet and alas, the anthology numbers do not get that much better in the 90s.<sup>11</sup> The numbers are still far from confirming Ashton’s claim that by the mid-1980s efforts to redress the imbalance had succeeded. Eliot Weinberger’s 1993 *American Poetry Since 1950: Innovators and Outsiders* includes thirty men and five women (14% women). Messerli’s 1994 *From the Other Side of the Century* includes sixty-one men and twenty women (25% women). Paul Hoover’s 1994 *Postmodern American Poetry* includes seventy-four men and twenty-seven women (27% women). Leonard Schwartz, Joseph Donahue, and Edward Foster’s 1996 *Primary Trouble: An Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry* includes forty-one men and twenty-two women (35% women).<sup>12</sup> Alan Kaufman and S.A. Griffin’s 1999 *The Outlaw Bible of American Poetry* includes 188 men and fifty-seven women (23% women). Dennis Barone and Peter Ganick’s 1994 *The Art of Practice: 45 Contemporary Poets*, with its pointed count of twenty-three women and twenty-two men (51% women), is the one exception we could find among mixed-gender anthologies that includes more work by women than men.<sup>13</sup>

So what we ended up finding was that the anthologies do not support, but in fact contradict, Ashton’s claims. *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* published in 1984 had 19% women. And *The Outlaw Bible* published in 1999 had 23% women. A very modest improvement. Overall, in our admittedly arbitrary selection of mixed-gender anthologies that in some way identify themselves as experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative, we found that between 1960 and 1999 women make up an average of 22% of the writers. And although women have been editing and publishing women’s anthologies since the 1970s, they remain underrepresented

in experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative mixed-gender anthologies both before and after the mid-1980s. On average, the anthologies published before 1985 include 16% women, while those published after 1985 include 29%. A fairly modest increase.

But of course the anthologies only tell part of a complicated story. They are a less messy place to begin because there are not a huge number of them. We assume this is why Ashton concentrates on them. But because we were so surprised by the anthology data, we kept counting and trying to figure out what was going on with the numbers of men and women in contemporary writing. We wondered if it was just that anthologies, which tend to have an already-happened sort of staleness to their collecting, were out of whack, or if other parts of the experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative scene reflected similar numbers trouble.

We returned to Silliman's blog.<sup>14</sup> This was in part because our thinking and questioning began there. When we began discussing this issue, we kept referring to Silliman's blog because it is both widely-read and notorious for its active comment boxes. We were sure that Silliman had started out writing mainly about men and that, after people complained, he wrote more about work by women. We thought that Silliman's inclusive and expansive and progressive personality made him susceptible in the best sense of the term to feminist interventions. We counted what we thought of as single-author posts (we admit that "single-author post" is a subjective category). We found that during its first year there were 127 posts about men on Silliman's Blog and forty-two about women; in other words, women made up about 25% of these posts.<sup>15</sup>

In the years that followed, several fairly intense feminist interventions occurred. One was by Silliman himself, who noted in 2002: "I've never written anything of substance about a female poet here, at least until my piece on Ange Mlinko, without receiving at least one email attack—the ratio when I write about male poets is about one such blast per ten items."<sup>16</sup> The other was the particularly venomous response by several commentators to Silliman's positive review of Barbara Jane Reyes in March 2006, which prompted a lot of interventionist ire (directed at participants in his comment box, not at Silliman) and which resulted in a fairly intense discussion about gender and race.<sup>17</sup>

And then there was the October 2006 complaint by Elizabeth Treadwell on her blog about Silliman's blurb for Pattie McCarthy's book *Verso*:

Pattie McCarthy has been one of our most intellectually ambitious poets—a tradition she shares with Rachel Blau DuPlessis & with H.D. And indeed with the likes of Pound & Olson. We can still count the number of women who attempt writing on such a scale on the fingers of our hands. So it is worth noting & celebrating this addition to that roster.<sup>18</sup>

Treadwell's response accuses Silliman's blurb of being "divisive, damaging, and prejudiced, and of course it is also extremely, hobblingly limited in its comprehension of literary history; seriousness; scale; gender itself."<sup>19</sup>

With all this in mind we counted the single author posts for 2006, and we found sixty-one on men and twenty-seven on women (31% women). In other words, once again our instincts were wrong, the feminist interventions did not change much. Even during the year in which they happened.

After our original thought—that feminist interventions were actively changing the representational politics of poetry—tanked, we decided to look at some other categories.

It would take a larger study to determine if this is true or not, but our guess is that small independent presses might be the hardest places for women to get published. We looked at a few numbers. Roof Books, publishing since 1978, has published books by fifty-eight men and twenty-three women (28% women). We found similar numbers for presses that were founded after the mid-1980s. Subpress, publishing since 1999, has published books by nineteen men, eleven women, and one person who identifies as transgender (37% women). Green Integer, publishing since 1997, has published fifty-nine men and nineteen women (24% women). Atelos, publishing since 1998, has published eighteen men and eleven women (38% women). Wave Books, publishing since 2005, has published twenty-three men and sixteen women (41% women).

University presses are a little more skewed to gender equity. Wesleyan, which is known for publishing mainly women, has

ninety books by men and seventy by women (44% women); a better number but far from “mainly.” The University of California, whose contemporary poetry series began in 2000, has ten books by men and twelve by women (55% women). University of Iowa is, at the time of publication, even: twenty-three books by men, twenty-three books by women (50% women). The Pitt Poetry Series has done sixty-one books by men and sixty-three by women (51% women).

Briefly leaving the experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative scene and looking at prizes, things get more depressing. Among the most shocking numbers that we found was that the American Academy of Arts & Letters Gold Medal, awarded since 1911, has been given to twelve men and only one woman (8% women). We concentrated on the big money, prizes with at least \$100,000 purses. The MacArthur Foundation, since its inception in 1981, has awarded \$500,000 poetry fellowships to twenty-two men and thirteen women (37% women). The Poetry Foundation has given the \$100,000 Ruth Lilly Prize to fifteen men and seven women (32% women). The Lannan Foundation has given its \$150,000 Lannan Literary Award to thirty-four men and seventeen women (33% women). The Academy of American Poets has awarded its \$100,000 Wallace Stevens award to twelve men and two women (14% women).

We talked some with Steve Evans, who did an excellent analysis of prizes awarded between 1998–2004, which was published in *The Poker*. What he told us was interesting. He said he found that in those years, around 919 women and 854 men won prizes. But if he counted only prizes that paid \$1,000 or more, he found that 645 men received \$9,365,262—an average of \$14,520 per man—while 709 women received \$7,049,017—an average of \$9,942 per woman. So while 53% of prizes over \$1,000 were won by women, women only won 43% of the total money.

We want to briefly discuss one of Ashton’s undocumented claims: that women make up half the faculties of creative-writing programs. We cannot find any comprehensive study of gender in creative writing faculties. We tried to produce some numbers ourselves but were stymied by several factors. One is that it is impossible to tell who is an adjunct, who is tenure-line faculty, and who is visiting faculty on many of the creative-writing faculty lists that are available on the web. Because women tend to be disproportionately represented in adjunct

positions, and because MFA programs tend to use adjunct faculty even more than the literature components of English departments, there is a chance Ashton is right. But to have this number matter, we would want to make sure that they are not being paid dramatically less than men. Our guess, and this is based only on anecdotal evidence, is that women earn significantly more MFAs than men. This might be another reason why women could be equally represented in MFA faculties and still be underrepresented (when compared to the ratio of men and women with MFA degrees). But we do want to mention a very well-done 2006 American Association of University Professors study, which concluded that although women earn more than half of all graduate degrees, they are still underrepresented among tenured and tenure-track faculty members. (The study does not provide separate data for creative writing faculty.) The study notes four things about the 2005–2006 academic year: nationally women made up 39% of full-time faculty positions but 48% of part-timers; women held 44.8% of tenure-track positions and only 31% of tenured positions; women held on average just 24% of full professorships; female professors earned on average just 81% of what men earned.

## §

What we found upset and confused us. We had thought Ashton was right. And that all we had to argue was that she wasn't reading the data correctly. But we're not so sure anymore. We're fairly convinced she is wrong: things haven't been that great since the mid-1980s.

And then we asked ourselves, should we care? And what number is the right number? Should all anthologies be 50% women? Should all prizes? Does it matter if women are not very well represented in some of this stuff?

Our answer was mixed.

On the one hand, anthologies and publication and prizes do matter. They lead to more jobs and money, and women need these things. Anthologies in particular, partly because they are so frequently used in the classroom, suggest a sort of snapshot of a scene that often gets institutionalized. They can shape the critical reception around a scene for many years by naturalizing certain definitions.<sup>20</sup>

But at the same time, how poetry matters is much larger than this. And because we could think of so many endless feminist models,

we ourselves found the continuing sexism of the experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative writing scene to be somewhat easy to ignore and a little pathetic. Everything from Kelsey Street to Pussipo (a listserv of over 150 experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative women writers) showed us that we could do what we wanted to do. And we distinctly remember thinking this when we were younger writers, trying to figure out what we could do.

But all of these possibilities born of a long history—of women publishing magazines and starting presses, of women starting listservs—couldn't really fix or address the other kinds of gender trouble we still deal with in experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative poetry communities on a fairly regular basis. And when we put together our informal survey, we asked that first question—tell us a story about gender and the poetry community—because the constant, somewhat snide anti-woman rants and comments that define the experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative scene to this day feel like more of a problem than the unequal anthology numbers and prize monies. Or as K. Silem Mohammad wrote to us in reply to our questions,

I have become a lot more aware over the past year or two how often gender dynamics operate in really screwed-up ways within a community I had complacently assumed was a lot more progressive and enlightened than it sometimes reveals itself to be. Just at the level, for example, of how much men outnumber women on tables of contents, or how women's comments are ignored in blog conversations, or how men get threatened and aggressive when women speak up about these things.

We agree and yet we want to mess with Mohammad's comments so they read "how men and women get threatened and aggressive when men and women speak up about these things."<sup>21</sup>

We are a little confused how Ashton misses this, especially since she is also a poet and we assume she reads the same internet spew and sprawl that haunts us. The majority of writing about gender and/or feminism in the experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative scene has not been about essentialism or women's bodies; it has been first-person accounts of dealing with sexist dismissals.<sup>22</sup> The comments we got back reminded us of how endemic these dismissals continue to be. They ranged from Jennifer Scappettone writing about

how the critical study of experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative scene in the academy has managed to remain strangely untainted by the canonical shifts of the last twenty years: “I’ve been subjected to hours-long conversations or seminars about literature and poetry in which not a single woman was mentioned as agent or matrix of influence. I am continually congratulated or appreciated for pointing this out when it happens, which is laughable.” To Eileen Myles confirming the uneasy (and unprofitable) outsider status that an identity as a feminist (and a queer) can confer:

I found out a few years back that for many years the recommendation from John Ashbery that I had been using opened with the language: “Eileen Myles is a militant lesbian.” I sent it for jobs where I definitely knew people on the committee. Finally a total stranger at one of those institutions that maintain recommendations told me on the QT that I shouldn’t use it. I managed to get my hands on it and I was stunned. That’s when I felt totally outside the poetry community, ’cause I realized that no one protected me. Nobody thought it was politically offensive or destructive. They probably thought it was funny.

When read together, one would think that the stories and comments from our respondents were about the 1970s, not about today, when feminism is supposed to be unnecessary.

Yet we had to admit, we sort of agreed with Ashton about the limits of the women’s poetry anthology. No one in the experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative poetry scene writes in a women-only space. And often the poetry collected in these anthologies is not saying that much about feminism or gender. And finally, we are not sure the women-only anthologies are doing that much to fix the numbers trouble. They certainly do not seem to be changing the gender spreads in anthologies.

But at the same time, if we allow that the women-only anthology is unnecessary, it is not because gender equity has been reached. Rather, it is because the experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative poetry scene needs a more radical feminism: a feminism that begins with an editorial commitment to equitable representation of different genders, races, and classes but that doesn’t end there—an editorial practice that uses equitable representation to think about

how feminism is related to something other than itself, and to make writing that thinks about these things visible.

Because, let's face it, we might still get less on the dollar than our male comrades, we might get less prize money and appear less often in anthologies, but when we turn our vision out of our little experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative poetry puddle, we have to admit that we are deeply complicit in a larger system of fucked-up-ness that makes us in no way oppressed or marginal. We are citizens of a nation that uses a lot of resources, that bombs a lot of countries. And our fear is that when we lean too heavily on the numbers, we end up arguing for our share of the American privilege pie and doing little else. We end up with first-world myopia. And what is the use of a feminism that does that?

We are also suspicious of relying too heavily on the idea that fixing the numbers means we have fixed something. We could have 50% women in everything and we still have a poetry that does nothing, that is anti-feminist. When it comes down to it, feminism really only matters if it engages with issues in an international arena, if it extends its concerns with equality beyond gender, if it suggests that an ethical world is one with many genders, if it addresses resource usage internationally, if it has an environmental component, if it works toward access to education for all, if it...

How to do this? We don't know. We still don't know. We could simply say that poets do not have to deal with this. But it seems to us that poets have to deal with it as much as anyone else.

Hoping to find an answer with help from others, we asked that last question: We'd be curious if you can imagine some way that poetry, or poetry communities (again, however you define the terms) might do more to engage the living and working conditions of women in a national/international arena. And what we heard in response was a mixture of not knowing and some anecdotes and ideas. Here is what we got back:

I can't think of any. Write poetry?

—Anne Boyer

Again, I am tempted to reject/question the terms of the question here.

—David Buuck

First is female education; any serious literacy projects around the world that increase female access to education at all levels



should be supported.... Second, people need access to the means of dissemination—books, journals, and libraries, but even more notably now, the internet. Third, US citizens and other first-world citizens need to develop a respect for the cultural work accomplished in conditions and with traditions and language choices that differ notably from what we know or are comfortable with.

—Rachel Blau DuPlessis

Across ages, from older to younger and in reverse, I think there's a responsibility for women to attend to one another's work.

—Susan Gevirtz

I think women need more money, their own money in their own hands.

—Renee Gladman

Again, I don't know... I guess by doing things in addition to poetry, like organizing and striking and revolting.

—K. Silem Mohammad

We should do actual work like Buddhists. We should get our hands dirty.

—Eileen Myles

I'm interested in the idea of pragmatically hybrid poetry communities: formed to address urgent sociopolitical matters impacting women.

—Joan Retallack

You write a poem, you drive a neighbor to get her groceries, you talk to an elderly friend whose husband is dying and she takes the time to caringly advise you about your professional life, you buy some bare-root roses with another neighbor and she shows you how to plant them, you go and buy some veggies from an organic farmer and she tells you a story that makes you laugh, and you teach her how to swear in Québécois...

—Lisa Robertson

Poetry workshops for women in a community.

—Linda Russo

It might continue the project of reconstituting awareness of the body as a political site, as matrix and vortex of political halts and flows.

—Jennifer Scappettone

I don't know. Sometimes I just want to leave my job and do some more direct political work.

—Elizabeth Treadwell

But my question goes back to power—who has the power to imagine these transforming things, the things that will transform the circumstances or conditions of others? I think it takes a visionary character. But then, there is the question of confidence. And my thoughts go back to the question of race.

—Bhanu Kapil

We can't imagine that any of our respondents think that their answer is The Answer. And reading this list, it would be easy to dismiss it (we imagine some saying in a tiresome snotty tone...and what does poetry, not to mention buying bare-root roses, have to do with women working in a *maquiladora* in Juarez?). But we are hesitant to dismiss these answers because sometimes the anecdotal and the small mutates into structural critique. But we do see this list as just a beginning.

And so we want to end this article not with the traditional concluding thesis, but with an invitation. We'd like to make a larger list of these suggestions. We'd like to start a conversation. We'd like to compile a long list of experiments in poetry communities that might lead us somewhere else. We'd like the suggestions and experiments to be serious. To be outlandish. To be possible. To be funny. To address a specific locality or issue. To be a big bummer of accusation and blame and guilt. To be written in weird languages. To be for group practice. To be short. To be impossible. To be impossibly long. To be foolish. To be confusing. To be an aphorism. To be prescriptive. To have steps and procedures and maps. To be done alone with one's eyes closed. To employ the internet. To deploy the internet. To be song. To seize the means. To release. To require the body. To require work. To be still. To involve reading.

We'd love it if you would send us now or some time in the future some outlandish or completely rational idea (email is probably easiest: [jspahr@mills.edu](mailto:jspahr@mills.edu) and [syoung@mills.edu](mailto:syoung@mills.edu)). Isn't that one of the many lessons of this feminism we have inherited: that we need each other; that we need you; that we can't get there alone?

## NOTES

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1/ By “innovative” she loosely means Language poetry and some poetics that follow, or come out of, Language poetry.

2/ Ashton refers to “Rankine and Spahr’s introduction” several times in her article, but the introduction was written only by Spahr.

3/ And we should probably also admit that our annoyance with Ashton is in part personal, dating back to her critique of a talk we gave at the 2005 CalArts Noulipo conference. (A version of that talk is archived at <http://www.stephanieyoung.org/blog/>.) We felt that her reading of our talk in “Our Bodies, Our Poems” missed the joke. We undressed during the talk not to reinscribe, as Ashton writes, “biological constraint” or to argue that men’s writing processes are innately formal, while women’s are bodily, but rather to argue that these ideas show up in various poetry institutions, such as Oulipo, well known for having very few women among its ranks. We meant to argue nakedly but with our tongues in our cheeks that these things could not be separated, that we wanted both, damn it (and for this reason, we also had several undressed men as part of our performance). And yet, although we wrote that paper thinking of it as a joke of sorts, it was also a bit of a lament, a lament for provocative feminisms. The question of whether women are represented equally or not in contemporary poetry institutions feels irrelevant to this lament. Because even if they are, we still feel that something was happening in all that work from the 70s that is still sadly missing from the intellectual discourses around contemporary poetry. Jennifer Scappettone talks more extensively about Ashton’s misreading of this talk in her forthcoming essay, “Bachelorettes, Even: Strategic Embodiment in Contemporary Experimentalism by Women.”

4/ See also an exchange between Leslie Scalapino and Silliman on this issue in “What/Person: From an Exchange,” *Poetics Journal* 9 (1991): 51–68.

5/ Dodie Bellamy (who edited a women-only issue of her journal *Mirage* in 1989, the introduction of which includes a similar claim of belatedness:

“This issue is a retrospective, a chance to look back and ponder how far experimental writing by women has come”) has a reading of *Moving Borders* and the suspicion of women experimentalists toward women-only anthologies. See “The Cheese Stands Alone” in *Academonia*, which also includes Sloan’s response and Bellamy’s introduction to *Mirage*.

6/ The following people responded: Anne Boyer, David Buuck, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Susan Gevirtz, Renee Gladman, Bhanu Kapil, K. Silem Mohammad, Eileen Myles, Joan Retallack, Lisa Robertson, Linda Russo, Leslie Scalapino, Jennifer Scappettone, and Elizabeth Treadwell.

7/ Several times in her article Ashton argues that those in the experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative scene see anthologies such as these as naïve (see page 216 where she argues that this work “looked theoretically and formally conservative, or simply naïve, to poets and critics working from poststructuralist and postfeminist perspectives” and page 225 where she speaks of a “consistent effort to distinguish their theoretical underpinnings from the supposedly more naïve ones of the 1970s”). While we have a mixed reaction to these anthologies (several seem narrow) we also want to make clear that we not think this sort of work is conservative or naïve.

8/ For a more detailed history of women’s editorial work in experimental/postmodern/avant-garde poetics, see Linda Russo’s essay “The ‘F’ Word in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: An Account of Women-Edited Small Presses and Journals.” Russo’s essay chronicles women’s editorial efforts in the twentieth century and illuminates, in particular, the role of women’s editing in the production of innovative poetics: “Editing, as an act of insertion and assertion, makes visible affiliations and dialogues, and redefines the legitimate and the utterable, the individual and the community—all that occupies and constitutes fields of literary production.”

9/ There has long been, as many have pointed out, a skepticism in the experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative scene toward feminism and/or publishing projects limited to women. For instance, it is the confusion around Language writing and women, rather than convinced righteousness, that motivates Rae Armantrout’s jokey 1978 essay “Why Don’t Women Do Language-Oriented Writing?” The essay begins: “I’ve been asked this question twice, in slightly different forms. In conversation I was asked, ‘Why don’t more women do language-oriented writing?’ I answered that women need to describe the conditions of their lives. This entails representation. Often they feel too much anger to participate in the analytical tendencies of modernist or ‘post-modernist’ art. This was an obvious answer. The more I thought about it the less it explained anything important. Most male writers aren’t language centered either. Why don’t more men do language-oriented writing? Several months later, by mail, I was asked to write an article explaining why women don’t produce language-oriented works. The letter suggested I might elaborate on the answer

I'd given before. But it wasn't the same question!" For more discussion of this skepticism, see DuPlessis's "Blue Studio." See also Barbara Cole's "Barbara Cole to Rachel Blau DuPlessis: Open Letters: Feminism From & To."

10/ For more on gender in *In the American Tree*, see Silliman's afterword to *The Art of Practice: 45 Contemporary Poets*, where he notes: "Women outnumber men in *The Art of Practice*—quite unlike *Tree* and *Poetries*—not out of any editorial sense of redress, but because margin and center have shifted over the past decade. Many of the women whose work is collected here began to publish widely only after 1980 and/or can be read as much as a critique by example of a narrowly configured (and macho) language poetry as they can be read as part of it."

11/ There has been some critical discussion, little of it about gender, about the large number of experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative anthologies that were published in the 1990s. See Perloff's "Whose New American Poetry?," Alan Golding's essay "New, Newer, and Newest American Poetries," and Steve Evans's "Anthslide."

12 / In this case, we only counted the "poetry" section. There is a "poetics" section as well. It includes five men and two women (29% women).

13/ The Barone and Ganick anthology also pointedly juxtaposes itself to the Silliman and Messerli anthologies: "The impetus for this anthology was two previous ones: Ron Silliman's *In the American Tree* and Douglas Messerli's *"Language" Poetries*. None of the poets included here appeared in those books, though some—John Taggart and Rachel Blau DuPlessis, for example—easily could have been while others were perhaps at too early a state in their on-going work or did not precisely fit the conceptual frames of the editors."

14/ A brief disclaimer: we are concentrating on Silliman a lot in this paper. This is not because we think he has an especially troubling relationship to women. It is the opposite. Over the years he has had many interesting things to say about gender. See for instance, his discussion of the editorial problems in *The New American Poetry*, especially the lack of gender parity in the anthology: <http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/2007/06/donald-allen-theres-no-such-thing-as.html>. See also his attention to what he calls "White Male Rage" in the "Wounded Buffalo" school of poetry. Our focus on Silliman has more to do with his lively critical presence, both historically as an editor and anthologizer and, over the past four years, as an increasingly central figure in online poetry communities. His poetry blog is one of the few written by a member of his generation. This position, combined with his wide-ranging attentions and near-daily critical writing, has made Silliman's blog (and its comment boxes) a lightning rod for all sorts of issues in the discussion of contemporary poetry.

15 / We counted the first year from December 2002–November 2003.

16/ <http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/2002/11/this-blog-is-not-official-sponsor-of.html>

17/ <http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/2006/03/one-of-ironic-coincidences-of-american.html>

18/ For Silliman's response to Treadwell, see <http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/2006/10/f-eleanor-anne-porden-1797-1825-naval.html>

19/ Treadwell's blog, Secretmint, is no longer available online, so we are reproducing the entire post here:

### The Gender of Seriously

Reader, I am sure I was not alone, at least among the female crowd, in feeling a certain terribly familiar slap of insult, frisson of paranoia, rising of anger at reading Silliman's blurb for Pattie McCarthy's second book, *Verso*:

*Pattie McCarthy has been one of our most intellectually ambitious poets—a tradition she shares with Rachel Blau DuPlessis & with H.D. And indeed with the likes of Pound & Olson. We can still count the number of women who attempt writing on such a scale on the fingers of our hands. So it is worth noting & celebrating this addition to that roster.*

—Ron Silliman

Now, this is divisive, damaging, and prejudiced, and of course it is also extremely, hobblingly limited in its comprehension of literary history; seriousness; scale; gender itself. It is unfortunate if not surprising that this comment comes from the king of the poetry blogmentators himself, as anointed by *Rain Taxi*, and well, by all of us willing to notice. (Certainly we don't all take his voice's "even keel and stateliness" the same way.)

So it's quite nice to have Alice Notley saying things like, and I paraphrase: it's too bad about gender, but now is the time for women.

It's quite nice to fall into step with Norma Cole and Kathleen Fraser on the way to the Poetry Marathon, last July in San Francisco, and feel such kindness and kinship. It sure is good to have Myung Mi Kim, Paula Gunn Allen, Leslie Scalapino, Maxine Hong Kingston, Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel...to talk to in one's becoming (and becoming) a writer.

A lot of things are quite more than nice, you see. Like the expansive and inclusive editorial/curatorial work of, say, Renee Gladman, Joyelle McSweeney, Sawako Nakayasu, giovanni singleton, Jena Osman & Juliana Spahr, Stephanie Young, and others more numerous than I know, I'm quite sure.

Let's reach across differences of culture, economics, aesthetics-poetics, geography, sexuality, "education," race-class-&-gender, supposed-&-compartmentalized poetic lineage...let's do!

Let it be known that there is a floration of communication, support, variety, argument, and excitement between young(/er) "experimental" women poets in this instant, here and now. (See Myung's evocation of moment, instant, below.)

Let's also not get lost in some melting pot puddle but tend to our specifics. For me as I age I certainly see more and more clearly that my

most personal questions and sources are my most profound guides.

Which brings me back to McCarthy, with whom I have a common stake in Irish(american)ness; women's history; story-telling; and word-architecture. We do not need to compete for Ron's ten-spot. Indeed with the likes. We are plenty.

20/ The role anthologies played in defining New York School and Language poetry are fairly potent examples of this kind of naturalization. There was no historical justification for almost entirely limiting the New York School to men, but that is the way it was represented in *The New American Poetry*. (There were many women poets writing in New York during the years of the New York School who could have easily been included.) Similarly, the three major Language poetry anthologies (by Messerli, Andrews and Bernstein, and Silliman) use Language poetry to denote a group of writers working together in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Readers unfamiliar with these social networks, however, would have a difficult time understanding why, on the basis of the editors' aesthetic and political criteria, certain writers were excluded from these anthologies. Anthologies tend to take shortcuts by privileging social groupings over literary aims, and thus often end up retrospectively ascribing certain shared aesthetic sensibilities to communities of people who share a social identity.

21/ Here are some anecdotal examples of the sorts of dismissals that discussions about gender or feminism or women's writing has provoked in recent years:

- Dale Smith's angry reply on the Poetics list in September of 1997 to Bellamy after she pointed out that the latest issue of his magazine featured "a total of 24 contributors, only four of which were women" (this discussion begins with a post from Smith titled "The Name & the Paradox of Its Contents," archived at <http://listserv.acsu.buffalo.edu/>, and continues for several days).
- One of the best examples of male-on-male anger following a discussion of gender is David Hess's tirade against David Buuck, in "The Passion of St. Buuckthead."
- There are endless examples of this in the comment boxes on Silliman's blog. See comments made in response to Silliman's supportive reading of DuPlessis's essay "Manhood and Its Poetics Projects." Silliman's post is here: <http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/2007/03/rachel-blau-duplessis-has-fascinating.html>. The comment stream can be accessed at the end of the post. Or comments made about a Jessica Smith photograph, which Silliman posted to introduce a post on her work: <http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/2007/06/first-time-i-ever-read-excerpt-from.html>.

22/ Bellamy, DuPlessis, and Fraser have all been very articulate about this in their work.

## METHODOLOGY

We did our counts independently and twice. When we got different numbers because the thing we were counting was subjective (such as single-author posts in Silliman's blog) we sat down and discussed the differences in an attempt to reconcile them. But there is still a margin of error. Some of our data is obviously self-selected rather than random (for instance, we decided which anthologies we wanted to count, which ones were experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative).

The four large categories we examine here—anthologies, small presses, blog posts, prizes—are somewhat crude. They leave out a myriad of connective points, specifically magazines and journals, which were too complicated to select and too time consuming to count.

For the press counts, we only counted single-author books. For Green Integer, we only counted books on their poetry list. We did not count any titles listed as forthcoming.

We do not know how many women are submitting work or how many women writers there are. So we're looking at a slightly fuzzy picture. Although we find it hard to imagine, we suppose that there is a chance that women tend to be writers less often and thus are overrepresented in their publication records.

In terms of gender changes, if someone changed their gender we counted them under the gender to which they changed. Our one exception to this is the writer kari edwards who refused to be limited to male or female (edwards shows up in the Subpress numbers). (Full disclosure: Juliana Spahr is a member of Subpress.)

The interventions we include are not by any means an exhaustive list. We made this list from a combination of moments Ashton mentioned in her article and moments that our respondents mentioned.

The more we counted, the more we wished that we had been able to research where funding for all these things comes from. Our guess is that academic publishers are more likely to "get their numbers right" around representational politics, resulting in the experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative community feeling less pressure to pay attention to these things.

We did not chart out race and class as we did this. But we can assure you without a doubt that racial and class representation is dramatically skewed toward white middle-class writers in all the contemporary writing scenes we examined, way more than gender. And that this also has a lot to say about the failures of feminism.



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*Blog entries are cited in the endnotes.*

JENNIFER ASHTON

## The Numbers Trouble with “Numbers Trouble”

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The governing tone of Juliana Spahr and Stephanie Young’s “Numbers Trouble” is indeed one of trouble—in their words “a combination of annoyance and confusion”—at what strikes them as a serious mistake about the current situation of women poets—the very situation, they argue, that so-called “innovative” women’s writing has tried to redress.

Spahr and Young’s troubledness is initially focused on my essay “Our Bodies, Our Poems” and its “assert[ion] without analysis” that “on the numerical level the problem of [women’s] underrepresentation has been corrected” in the communities and institutions most commonly associated with the practice of poetry. More specifically, they suggest that my essay constructs a picture of equity—in the form of approximately equal gender distribution throughout the major arenas of poetic production and recognition (publishing, arts organizations, prize committees, magazine editorial staffs, creative writing faculties, etc.)—that does not correspond to reality. They counter with a tally of their own, surveying anthologies and book series from the 80s to the present and extrapolating from published studies of prizes and higher-education hiring. What they offer are numbers suggesting that at the present moment women are getting something closer to 25 percent of the poetry pie than half of it. Not surprisingly, they end up “fairly convinced...that things haven’t been that great since the mid-80s.” I don’t really know whether theirs is a more accurate picture than the one they are contesting. To convince myself I would need access to much finer instruments and methods for data collection and analysis than either I or Spahr and Young possess.

But while it might be interesting and even salutary in some contexts to see a truly accurate picture, I want to make clear from the start that the accuracy or inaccuracy of that picture is completely irrelevant to the argument of “Our Bodies, Our Poems.” If it were

relevant, I might have done what Spahr and Young seem to think I should have done—I might have had a lot more to say about feminism.<sup>1</sup> (In that case I also would have had a lot more to say about the degrees to which feminism has and hasn't been able to further the causes of social justice. And about the value, for example, of a feminism that concerns itself as much with whether women poets get equal time on Ron Silliman's blog as with the discrepancies between the wages men and women earn for the same work—and that concerns itself more with both of these than with the social and economic structures that prevent most people, men and women alike, from ever having such concerns to begin with.) But in fact, and as Spahr and Young themselves rightly observe (yet seem to forget whenever they point to the assertion about numerical representation as if it were the thesis of my essay), "Our Bodies, Our Poems" was about something else altogether.

Spahr and Young correctly identify "essentialism" as the target of my analysis. While they seem to want to disagree with me about what essentialism is ("We are fairly sure we define essentialism differently than she does. And to us, essentialism is not as damning as her article assumes it to be"), they nevertheless choose to set aside the topic from the outset ("we are not jumping into that big, endless debate right now"). But since it is the main issue in my essay, I'll start by clarifying my own position and what I take to be theirs.

Spahr and Young may claim to "define essentialism differently than I do," but they never actually say what their definition is. However, when they remark in one of their notes that "Foulipo," the performance piece I criticized in my essay, was not intended "to reinscribe... 'biological constraint,' or to argue that men's writing processes are innately formal, while women's are bodily," it's easy to see what they think my definition is. Or, at least, it's easy to see what they think I'm attacking in their performance piece and in the discourse of "innovative" women's poetry more generally. To be more precise, I would say that the essentialism they describe involves the (usually unacknowledged) assumption that the contingencies of a poet's situation, including her sex, necessitate certain choices—including choices about the forms her poems take. This is an essentialism that makes it seem as if one could read off the sex of a poet from the forms she uses, an essentialism that gives us the very possibility of a "women's innovative poetry" whose innovations are distinctive by virtue of having been produced by women.

But again, Spahr and Young think they “define essentialism differently than [I do],” so the definition that isn’t so “damning” must be something else. If what they have in mind as an alternative is something like the belief that the anatomical differences between bodies contribute, like many other contingencies, to the situation in which a poet (or any person) finds herself, and thus to some of the limits and opportunities she faces, then their definition would indeed be something quite apart from the theoretical mistake that I identify with the discourse of “innovative” women’s poetry. That essentialism would not be damning from my perspective either. I may be extending too much benefit of the doubt here, but I do think Spahr and Young understand very well that it’s one thing to think that a poet makes her formal choices in the context of a situation—a situation that inevitably includes her sex—and quite another to think that her sex dictates those choices in advance. Both involve essentializing sex, but the second kind of essentialism involves a mistake about the relation between bodies and forms that the first does not. And given that Spahr and Young mean to defend the “experimental/postmodern/avant-garde/innovative writing community” against charges of this second mode of essentializing, they clearly understand the latter as a mistake. I think we agree, in other words, in our recognition of that mistake.

But there wouldn’t have been much point to writing “Our Bodies, Our Poems” if my main objective had only been to explain what’s wrong with imagining the relation between the form of the poem and the sex of the poet on the model of the relation between, say, sweat and the gland that secretes it. Such an explanation is nothing new, and anyone attentive to these debates would be able to recognize it. What spurred my argument, rather, was a contradiction: the discourse of women’s “innovative” poetry seemed to be making the very mistake that its rhetoric ostensibly denied. On the one hand, that discourse claimed to “move away from too easily separated and too easily declarative identities” (as Spahr puts it in the introduction to one of the most important anthologies of the movement). On the other hand, the discourse organized itself around precisely the most easily declared identity separation there is: the one between women and men. In other words, my argument was a response to the fact that the “innovative writing community” on the one hand explicitly embraces the logic of poststructuralist and anti-essentialist feminisms of the

80s and 90s, and on the other spins out an implicit logic that makes women poets' formal choices look like a necessary function of their situations as women.<sup>2</sup> I suppose if I have any regret about "Our Bodies, Our Poems" as a consequence of reading Spahr and Young's response, it would be that I didn't put the point more baldly: If you know it's a mistake to think that your sex determines your artistic choices, why accept a theoretical framework for your projects that entails making that mistake?

It's tempting to conclude my response to "Numbers Trouble" right here, if only to emphasize a point that actually is central to the theoretical stakes of "Our Bodies, Our Poems." For even as Spahr and Young clearly grasp that "essentialism" is the target of my analysis, they continually mistake its contingent relation to a history of claims about numerical representation in poetry for an implausibly necessary relation that my argument neither proposes nor entails. But in focusing only on essentialism, I wouldn't be addressing Spahr and Young's criticism of the assertions about numbers in my original argument, a point that is clearly central to theirs.

So how do the numbers matter in this context?

Well, they obviously matter a lot if you think that women are being discriminated against, and if you think that the unequal ratio of women to men in the various arenas of poetic production and recognition is an index of that discrimination. In many of the earliest mainstream anthologies of women's poetry (and, for that matter, in some of the earliest efforts to collect "innovative" women's writing) this claim was the key rationale for the focus on women. And while a corrective agenda of this kind does depend on a very basic essentialism, it precisely is *not* the kind of essentialism I was criticizing in "Our Bodies, Our Poems." The effort to redress numerical imbalances does depend on thinking that poets are gendered (there's no other way we could notice the discrimination in the first place) but it *doesn't* require us to think that their poems are gendered. If an anthology editor thinks women are being discriminated against, and numbers reflect that, the numbers do matter. If my essay had had the same corrective agenda as most of the early women's poetry anthologies, the numbers would matter to it as well. But it didn't, and they don't.

But what happens if you think women are not (or no longer) being discriminated against? Or what if eliminating discrimination is simply not the goal of your women-only anthology, journal, literary prize, etc.? Clearly you need some other rationale if you want to continue promoting work on the basis of its being written by women. My argument in “Our Bodies, Our Poems” was that this new rationale is precisely where the problematic essentialism emerges, for despite their frequent proclamations of anti-essentialism, the most visible purveyors of women’s “innovative” writing end up with an “innovation” that is itself gendered.

Take, for example, what happens in Mary Margaret Sloan’s introduction to the *Moving Borders* anthology. At the precise moment when the women’s poetry anthology’s anti-discriminatory agenda looks obsolete (“perhaps...such a book is no longer necessary”), Sloan presents the new visibility of “innovative” women writers as a reason to collect their writing (“it is the increase in the *number* of innovative women writers in the past few decades that is striking”). As I have already noted, caring about the fact that it’s women “innovative” poets who are being discriminated against doesn’t require that we think their “innovations” are gendered. But when your anthology celebrates the increase in the number of women poets writing a particular kind of poetry (“innovative”), the relation between the women you are celebrating and the poetic form you are celebrating starts to look pretty essential. If you thought what mattered most was the women poets themselves and the particularities of their situations as women, why would you care about distinguishing their “innovative” poems from any of the other poems they produce? And if you just cared about the formally innovative features of the poems, why would you care that they were written by women? Unless, of course, what you cared about most was the relationship between the form of the poems and the gendered situation of their authors.<sup>3</sup>

The history of “innovative” women’s writing, has gone, in short, from being concerned with the visibility of women writers in a context of discrimination to being concerned with what makes the poems of these writers distinctive as the poetry of women. This shift, I argued in “Our Bodies, Our Poems,” involves a mistake, one that contradicts the “innovative” writers’ desire to refuse or at least complicate the claims of gender identity. Moreover, it’s a mistake that has nothing

to do with discrimination. Thinking there is something distinctively feminine about one formal innovation or another would remain a mistake no matter how many women were being published or otherwise recognized at any given moment in the history of poetry. And it would be as much of a mistake in a hypothetical world where there were no women in poetry anthologies as it would in a world where there were only women in every anthology.

So, for the purposes of my argument at least, the numbers really don't matter. Why, then, are Spahr and Young so committed to reproaching me with them? As their new tally and their collection of anecdotes about gender in "Numbers Trouble" make clear, what really motivates them is their belief that women still are the victims of discrimination, and quite possibly they're right. But that was not the rationale for the anthologies, essays, and scholarly works that I reviewed, and that was not the position I attacked.

My purpose in this response has not been to emphasize Spahr and Young's confusion about the argument of "Our Bodies, Our Poems" so much as to make clear what I think is mistaken in the theoretical commitments of the innovative movement more generally. But what has become even clearer to me in writing this response is just how persistent that mistake seems to be, for it surfaces once again in the logic of "Numbers Trouble."

When women's "innovative" poetry anthologies moved from an anti-discriminatory agenda to an aesthetic one, I argued in my earlier essay, the continued insistence on the importance of the poems as women's poems transformed the contingent relation between the sex of the authors and the forms of their poems into a necessary one. That, I argued, is the essentialist mistake of the "innovative" movement. The same mistake happens here, when Young and Spahr go from thinking that my argument is upsetting because it seems to dismiss the corrective effects of "feminist interventions" (even though they decide by the end of their tally that maybe the feminist interventions of the corrective anthologies weren't all that effective against discrimination) to being upset that my claims are a "dismissal of female community." "Anthologies can be edited," as they are quick to point out, for reasons other than fighting discrimination: "to begin dialogues or to argue for new communities or to document certain moments or for a million other reasons."



All fine and good, but what happens to any of these agendas when what matters most about them is that the people undertaking them are women? As I have already pointed out, women matter to the anti-discriminatory agenda of certain poetry anthologies because it's women who are the targets of discrimination. But how do they matter to the "female community" being promoted by the "innovative" agenda? It's not quite enough for the "innovative" movement to care about the community because it's made up of women—what if they're not all writing "innovative" poetry? And what if they're not really a community? What makes them a community, of course, is their shared interest in certain formal "innovations." But why do they need to be women to have that interest? The "female community" I dismiss would only be worth hanging onto if you thought there were some necessary connection between the forms that count as "innovative" and the bodies that count as female. But there isn't. If you're interested in poetic communities, communities of "innovative" poets make sense. Communities of women (or men) don't.

## NOTES

1/ "...Ashton avoids talking much about feminism..." (258).

2/ More pointedly I would say these logics are two halves of the same gesture. For a particularly powerful demonstration of how the logic of poststructuralist feminism (most vividly in the work of Judith Butler) entails the very essentializing claims it is designed to defeat, see Toril Moi's *What Is a Woman?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

3/ Readers familiar with Sloan's introduction might object that she never explicitly suggests that there is anything like a formally identifiable "women's innovative poetry," and they would be right. Moreover, it's clear from Spahr and Young's response that they don't imagine themselves to be arguing for such a thing either. But you don't need to insist on any particular distinctive formal features to arrive at the mistaken essentialism that they and Sloan and so many others have fallen into. You just have to think that whatever the formal endeavors have in common, it has to do with something essential to their authors' situations—in this case the fact that the authors are identified/identifiable as women. Or as Sloan puts it in her introduction, "reading is reading as." She goes on to explain what she means: that even though the writers in her anthology "have not generally produced their work in support

of defining identities—that is, as women writers—they are read as such.” Clearly Sloan thinks of this as a way of emphasizing the contingency of the “innovative” woman poet’s situation, but in fact, the minute it becomes the organizing principle of her anthology (for the anthology is nothing if not a reading of these poets “as women”) it has the opposite effect. By implication, such a “reading as” entails precisely the acceptance of the poets’ identities as women. In other words, organizing an anthology that gives us poets who are to be “read as women” (and poems that are to be read as poems by women) just becomes a way of conceding to the very essentialism Sloan thinks she’s defending against. Elisabeth A. Frost and Cynthia Hogue, the editors of the most recent addition to the growing stack of “innovative” anthologies, *Innovative Women Poets: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry and Interviews* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), take a different defensive route, emphasizing the diversity of forms that “innovative writing” has come to include. But (again) precisely because the anthology is organized by the sex of the poets whose work it collects, emphasizing the poetry’s formal diversity just becomes a way of caring all the more about the degree to which what the poems have in common is the sex of the women who made them.

During the proofreading process, an editor at *Chicago Review* suggested an interesting objection to my reading of Sloan. His concern was that the effort to bring together some common aspect of the poets’ situation and some aspect of the poetry doesn’t automatically get you the essentialism I’m criticizing. To make his point, he suggested a hypothetical counterexample with a geographical instead of a gender focus—an anthology of Chicago Poets. You could, he argued, think there was such a thing as Chicago School (a shared aesthetic) or you could think that there was particularly interesting work being produced in Chicago, or you could want to make visible a particular community of writers who happened to live in Chicago, but you wouldn’t be required to think that the geographical contingencies of their Chicago-based situation were somehow the essence of the writing. Well, yes and no. There’s a difference among these various ways of configuring the “Chicago” anthology. They all involve thinking there’s something essential to the poems, but some of the essences are more plausible than others. As long as you were mainly interested in the shared ideas or the existing community (maybe all of the poets talk to each other regularly about their work), then Chicago makes some sense as an organizing principle insofar as it’s an index of the shared ideas or of the community or of both. But the Chicago part would be nominal—no one thinks Chicago is what matters most about the ideas embraced by the Chicago School of Economics or that Frankfurt is the salient thing about the Frankfurt School. Just try to imagine an “Ovarian School” of poetry, where “Ovarian” referred to a group of writers who cared,

say, about criticizing global capitalism and just happened to be women. That clearly isn't what we mean by "women's innovative poetry." The fact that the poets are women is never negligible.

Some of the women collected under the category of "innovative women poets" no doubt do consider themselves part of the same poetry community in that they actively share ideas about their formal experimentation and other matters. But many others collected under the same heading have nothing to do with one another (as the editors of *Innovative Women Poets*, for example, are eager to point out, in the interest of emphasizing the diversity of the poets). So either you do share ideas (and perhaps also, thereby, have a community), in which case the ideas are indeed essential to the poems being produced and rationalize reading the poems collectively. Or you don't have any particular shared ideas, but if it's the second, then what would rationalize our interest in reading the poems collectively? Well, in the case of the Chicago Poets anthology, you'd be left with a bizarre Chicago essentialism (is it something in the water?). In the case of "women's innovative poetry" you're left with a poetry whose essence is the sex of its authors.

The point, in other words, is that the moment you're in the business of celebrating a poem for the situation in which it was produced at the same time that you're celebrating its form as such, you've basically got a machine built for nothing but the business of essentializing. With the idea of the woman poet at one end and the idea of "innovative" form at the other, the logic of women's "innovative" poetry is like a teeter-totter whose requisite fulcrum is that essentialism. And it doesn't really matter which way the teeter-totter tips; the interest in women remains grounded in a commitment to form, and the interest in form remains grounded in a commitment to women.

RAE ARMANTROUT

## UP TO SPEED

Published in 47:1

Streamline to instantaneous  
voucher in/voucher out  
system.

The plot winnows.

The Sphinx  
wants me to guess.

Does a road  
run its whole length  
at once?

Does a creature  
curve to meet  
itself?

Whirlette!

\*

Covered or cupboard  
breast? Real

housekeeping's  
kinesthesiac. Cans

held high  
to counterbalance "won't."

Is it  
such agendas

which survive  
as souls?

\*

Vagueness is personal!

A wall of concrete bricks,  
right here,  
while sun surveys its grooves

and I try  
“instantly” then “forever.”

But the word is  
way back,  
show-boating.

*Light* is “with God”

(light, the traveler).

\*

Are you the come-on  
and the egress?

One who hobbles by  
determinedly?

Not yet?

TYRONE WILLIAMS

THERE IS A MISERY SO GREAT IT OVER-

Published in 59:1/2

There is a misery so great it overwhelms, washes out the carbon print of an uncut diamond, congealed excrement, arrested stall, a grief-lacerated spirit, a house rent asunder into two reversed mirrors, the back of God, the back of a sky-diving angel, the rim of a trumpet blocked by the back of the head of a trumpet player. A death that cheats itself, a mind expelled from the brain by the brain, an echo that never returns as the heard again—unspoken stutter, quarantined *arpeggio*—a solitude enforced by fellowshipwreck.

CARL PHILLIPS

ROSES

Published in 54:3

Where the shadows refuse equally to fend for  
themselves and for the light without which  
there would

    be no shadow. Where the world  
as I'd thought I'd known it, once, stammers  
blindfolded with a rough sash, trampling  
the blood-grass,

    the mint with its spikes of  
little purplish flowers—what stirs, what

doesn't...Where the land ends no differently  
than it's ever had to, in a blue of sea, beside  
which

    love lies deciduous, fast asleep, as,  
with all the usual, to-be-pitied ambition  
of the long restrained who believe they've  
been at last

    set free—though they have not,  
they'll never be—the waves shove closer.

MASSIMO GEZZI

Translated by Chris Glomski

## SUNDIALS

Published in 56:1

What was he telling himself, that guy  
transfixed against the wall, as the trio of  
horns and saxophones resolved their solos,  
his head pressed into the corner, seemingly  
stuck between one wall and the other?  
It was in the desert, his an unbearable voice,  
and behind me was another  
and beside me still another, and where I was  
was only desert, and each of us was  
a rigid dial which, perpendicular  
to the sun, casts a shadow.



JULIANA SPAHR

## WE

Published in 44:1

We have moved to a remote yet populated space.

On this space things are different. The space is known for its romantic associations, its rich land, its beauty, its scarce and unique resources, its ability to grow things. Here things grow around and into each other.

What this space feels like is that it is the middle of the night and we are deep asleep in our beds, dreaming. Our we, our spouse, our mother, our father, our caretaker, comes into the room and turns on the light, flooding our eyes, our minds, blinding us, leaving us confused, lost wondering where the dream, which feels more solid and real than our story, went.

This growing around and into each other and the anger and the aloha of this growing together and around each other confuses.

In the midst of this unsureness, we are trying to tell a personal story.

This story, the story of we, is of our loss and our loving.

It is the story between deeply sleeping, dreaming, and waking.

It is the story of what is crooked and loving that crooked.

The story goes like this: the light is turned on and the light enters the room and catches on the prism and the prism fractures this light all over the room. The prism takes the light and refracts it. It takes the light and plays it over and over. We are bathed in the light of the prism, all over the room. We are bathed in the light of waking up. This is

awareness. This light bathes we who are concerned because we have to make room for we who are lost or leaving other places, we who claim land, we who came from somewhere else, we who are famous and followed and thus can live anywhere we want and we want to live here, we who are large with food and enjoy eating, we who scribble in notebooks and type words, we who cook and clean, we who debate the records and histories and offer our input and retellings to make the swirl, we who do elaborate dances in certain rigorously defined styles of costumes that are many colors and textures, we who talk late at night in bars and consider this our cultural input, we who together wear similar shirts on a certain day of the week that define us as together, as unique, as against a they, we who welcome the we into our bed at night in an attempt to cut the confusion, we who don't want to be grouped together and so loudly and determinedly give speeches denying the we, we who are I, we who want to claim an independence and superiority of our we, we who live in a certain place in a certain time and are confused about history, we who get married and married and married, we who rigorously learn a certain set of behaviors in an attempt to join something that sets us apart from those with whom we ride on the bus, we who proclaim, we who proclaim our values as culture and thus argue that these values should not be tarnished with we, we who say that is the way that it is when it might not really be that way, we who love, we who get diseases, we who get lost in the confusion, we who break down and break up, we who take drugs and drop out and this is good, we who are sick and wasting away on hospital beds with tired loved ones beside us late at night who are wondering what we will do when the end comes, even we who are hugged by our parents who are drunk and smothering us, we who are embraced in the doorway by a lover that we never really loved and whose body embarrasses us, even we who feel the we as a part of us that makes us too big for the space we are allowed and that want to shrug off this we like an oversized parka.

The light is we. The prism is the space known for its romantic associations where things grow around and into each other. The list of we is the prism light.

We examine the light we have written and are confused because we can't see the singular in it and then we realize there is no personal story without we.

Or if we can see a singular story it is only for a moment as it appears in the periphery of our vision as a mirage while our eyes attempt to separate out the light into its separateness and fail.

So we begin our personal story with a list of who we are.

We want this story, our personal story, to tell this story: It is late at night and we lean over and kiss, our one head one way and our other head another way, and stick our tongues in our mouths and it feels strange this way, top of tongue on top of tongue.

STERLING PLUMPP

RITUAL

Published in 62:4 & 63:1/2

*in memory of Leon Forrest*

I sometimes reach over  
    tulips over top  
Saint Elmo's rolling and tumbling  
    rhythms and I know  
silence cannot hold  
    my heritage.  
For I know I come from somebody  
who had  
    no return address  
    no return family  
    no return continent  
    no return history.

But I sing continuity  
    as if baptized  
in waters  
    flooded ancestral callings  
at revivals running down  
faces of self discovery  
    and dreams continuum.

NATHANIEL MACKEY

*from Atet A.D.*  
Published in 43:1

[*Atet A.D.* is volume three of *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate*, a series of letters written by composer/multi-instrumentalist N., founding member of a band formerly known as the Mystic Horn Society.—N.M.]

\_\_\_\_\_ 5.VI.82

Dear Angel of Dust,

The other shoe finally dropped. We're in Seattle playing a three-night stint at a club called Soulstice. Last night, the first night of the gig, new repercussions on a number of fronts came to light. Foremost among them is that the wouldly subsidence in which Penguin and Drennette's embryonic romance had gotten hung up seems to've given way—exactng a ledge, an atomistic ledge, from the lapse it rescinded. You've no doubt noticed that since Penguin's return from Wouldly Ridge it's been as though his embryonic courtship of Drennette had never occurred. He's not only not pursued it further, he'll neither speak nor hear talk of it. Whenever I've brought it up he's acted like he had no idea what I was talking about, staring at me with a blank, uncomprehending look on his face, as though English were a foreign language, as if I spoke some unheard-of tongue. Aunt Nancy, Lambert and Djamilaa say it's been the same with them. Drennette likewise has acted like nothing ever happened. She and Penguin have been nothing but normal in their dealings with one another.

It's hard to say what it was, why it was wouldly subsidence took this occasion to exact wouldly ledge. My guess is that the air of anticlimactic futurity pervading this town had something to do with

it, the datedness of what was once thought of as “things to come.” I’m referring, of course, to the Space Needle. That the future has no place in which to arrive but the present, that its arrival is thus oxymoronic, is the sort of reflection one can’t help entertaining in the shadow of such a monument as that—a monument, when it was built, to the future, a future it prematurely memorialized, prematurely entombed. Today it’s more properly a monument to the past, a reminder of the times in which it was built, tomb to the elapsed expectancy it all turns out to’ve been. I remember my aunt and uncle driving up for the World’s Fair twenty years ago—hopelessly long ago it seems now.

But by no means to be ignored is the reinforcement given elapsed or outmoded future by us happening to hear “Telstar,” the early sixties hit by the Tornados, on the jukebox in a diner we had lunch in yesterday. The tinny, strained, “futuristic” sound of it said it all, spoke to a sense of lost occasion elapsed future began infusing us with the moment we laid eyes on that Needle. I thought of every wish which had seemed to miss the mark in being fulfilled, though I corrected myself at once, admitting the case to be one of an “it” which could only be projected, never arrived at. Anticlimactic “it,” I reminded myself, allotted virtual space, an ironic investiture missed opportunity couldn’t help but inhabit. Disappointment, the needling sense of a missed appointment, couldn’t help but be there. This we knew before “Telstar” came on. We knew it all the more once it did.

The weather played a part as well. It hasn’t rained outright since we’ve been here but it’s been overcast and drizzling, a thin mist coming down pretty much all the time. That mist, it seemed, went with us into the club last night. It adopted a low profile for the occasion, close to the floor like a carpet so intimate with our feet we’d have sworn we dragged it in. What had been of the air was now oddly underfoot. In a way it was like the world had turned upside down, the way the mist, instead of falling from the sky, came up from the floor, ever so lightly addressing the soles of our feet. The difference this would make in our music was evident at once. No sooner had we taken the stage than the low-lying mist was an atomistic ledge we stood on which made our feet feel as though they’d fallen asleep—not entirely numb but (you know the feeling I’m sure) put upon by pins, subject to a sort of pointillist embrace. Point had become a hydra, its pinpoint tactility

multiply-pinned. We couldn't help knowing it was "missed" on which we stood (missed mark, missed opportunity, missed appointment), no less real, no less an actual mist even so. What it came down to was an odd, pointillist plank-walk, notwithstanding we walked in place if it can be said we walked at all. The ledge onto which we stepped calibrated a tenuous compound or compaction of low-lying spray with spreading phantasmality (phantom feet and/or the phantom ledge on which "missed" insisted we stood).

We stood on lost, oddly elevated ground, elegiac ledge. This was no mere materialization of loss even so, no glib legitimation of lack, elegy (lapsed eligibility) notwithstanding. We stood upon or perhaps had already stepped across an eccentric threshold, thrust, or so it seemed, into a post-expectant future, the anti-expectant gist of which warned us that "post-" might well turn out to've been premature. What expectant baggage did we weigh ourselves down with even now? What ingenuous out did we disingenuously harbor hopes of having secured? The needling mist which addressed our feet multiply apprised us of an inoculative boon we sought even as we disavowed all promise, all prepossessing "post-." Post-expectant futurity stood accused of harboring hope. Nonetheless we stood by it, one and all, atomistic ledge an exemplary rug allotting endless rapport, unimpeachable aplomb.

Post-expectant futurity stood its ground. It was this of which our feet grew multiply-possessed before we hit a single note. Though its multiply-pinned massage ostensibly comforted the soles of our feet, the needling mist became a goad of sorts. The quantum-qualitative lift it afforded gave an operatic lilt and leverage to the post-expectant ground on which we stood. Ground and goad rolled into one, it coaxed an abrupt, acquiescent grunt from each of our throats, an abrupt, expectorant exhalation whose fishbone urgency furthered itself once we began to play. Part seismic splint, part psychic implant exacting an auto-inscriptive lilt, it put the phrase "inasmuch as what we want is real" on the tips of our tongues, amending our attack and our intonation in ways we'd have not thought possible had it not been so palpably so. What this meant was that "want" walked arm in arm with "real" across bumptious ground. We knew it all at once, it seemed, an instantaneous jolt as though the needling mist were an electric mace.

We were several bars into our opening number before fishbone urgency let go of our throats. The ripped, expectorant permission it apprised us of abruptly left us on our own, ushered albeit we were that much farther along the pointillist plank on which we walked. Djamilaa, Penguin, Aunt Nancy, Lambert and I stood in staggered array, stumbling in place while Drennette sat as though caught in a suspended spill. She looked as if she'd fallen backwards, as if her fall had been broken by the stool on which she sat. She too, it appeared, stumbled in place.

Our collective stumble suspended us in time it seemed, notwithstanding the atomistic ledge had a decidedly glide aspect and sense of advance running thru it. This was its odd, contradictory confirmation of post-expectant premises, the odd, post-expectant way it had of rolling promise and prohibition into one. The piece we opened with was Lambert's "Prometheus." The expectorant, post-expectant permission the occasion laced it with put one in mind of Charles Davis's "Half and Half," the rash, rhythmelodic treadmill effect Elvin Jones and Jimmy Garrison's band exact on the *Illumination* album. Still, it went way beyond that in the anticlimactic refractivity, the visionary hiccup we fostered and factored in. It was this which tallied with while taking elsewhere the iterative carpet-ride on which we ran in place. Iterant weave and itinerant rug ran as one. Atomistic ledge came on as though steeped in deep-seated conveyance, run so deeply woven into wouldly arrest it was all we could do to keep our feet on the floor. The conveyor-belt bridge and the bedouin breach it addressed introduced a deep, irredentist quiver to the needling mist, an ever so agitant feather's touch tickling our feet.

What struck us most was how quickly we'd moved onto mixed-metaphorical ground. Where was it we stood if stand could be said to be what we did? Where was it we stumbled if stumble said it better? So many different sensations complicated one another: mixed-metaphorical conveyor-belt/carpet-ride, mixed-metaphorical mist/pointillist plank, mixed-metaphorical feather/pinpoint massage, mixed-metaphorical splint/low-lying spray...

The other shoe I spoke of to begin with fully partook of this dispensation, a mixed-metaphorality which brought off being a hammer, a broken pedal and a shoe at the same time. It seemed a



Cinderella fit or effect wherein hammer, broken pedal and shoe were now showcase items, encased in or even constituted of glass. Hammer had been placed under glass by the Penny dream. Broken pedal had been placed under glass by Drennette's concussive spill, shoe (slipper, to be more exact) by the presumption of fairy-tale artifice, fairy-tale fit. These three were one, a see-thru insistence upon breakage, atomization, the meaning, however chimeric, of atomistic ledge. The other shoe, the newly shod alterity onto which or into which or invested with which we now stepped, came down with a resounding report it took us a while to realize was us—a new sound which, unbeknown to ourselves, we'd come up with (or which, "unbeknown" being the case, had come up with us).

Other shoe mixed-metaphorically segued into other shore, the floor sliding away like sand when a wave retreats. Suppositious wave, I turned around and saw, was intimated, ever so exactly meted out, by the drumroll Drennette now sustained, a roll which required all but acrobatic skill, so at odds with the suspended spill it appeared she was in. Suppositious retreat, the spasmodic thumps thrown in on bass drum, tended to be consistent with suspended spill, suppositious wave rolling back upon itself so as to pull what ground one thought there was back with it. Thus it was that Drennette played out the mixed-emotional endowment her final bicycle ride with Rick had left her with, the promise and the putting aside of promise her critique of "antique emotion" so insisted on. Promise and resistance to promise rolled pregnancy and post-expectancy into one, the bass drum pedal sounding the post-expectant "floor" the broken pedal had introduced her to.

Drennette's anti-foundational patter recalled the fact—recalled while commenting upon the fact—that it was Lambert's debut of "Prometheus" which had launched us on our quest for a drummer. Whatever hope he might have had of bedrock solidity had long since been given an antithetic spin, made to comply with and to confirm or anticipate (or so it seemed in retrospect) the sense of anticlimactic futurity we've been under since getting here. The rhythmic anchor Lambert announced he wanted had turned out to be exactly that, turned out to be a *rhythmic* anchor. Rhythmicity, Drennette insisted, contends with bedrock foundation, the sense of an unequivocal floor anchorage implies.

That the atomistic ledge on which we stood entailed wouldly subsidence having been rescinded became clear the more one listened to Penguin. The piece's "love slave" thematics, the subtextual strain having to do with Epimetheus's "hots" (as Penguin put it) for Pandora, was the thread he pulled out and pursued. It took us a while to realize it, but this was largely what was new about the way we sounded. Never before had we so equated Promethean fire with Epimethean "hots." While at first it was difficult to pick out Penguin's advancement of that equation from the avalanche of sound we put forth, his needling insinuation that "Pandora" was an apter title than "Prometheus" gradually came to the fore. Gradually he blew louder, needling insinuation becoming more blunt, less innuendo than hammerlike assertion. The more assertive he became the more Drennette encouraged the equation he advanced, quickening the pace with rabbitlike rolls as though they were wheels for him to ride. Penguin, in turn, grew bolder, swifter, quickening the pace to play Epimetheus to what he took to be Drennette's Pandora (or took, it turned out, to be Djeannine's Pandora, took to be Drennette's Djeannine).

It was a blistering pace which Penguin handled without the slightest loss of articulacy. With each note he did as he wished. He clearly had something to say, something which all but leapt out of him, so Lambert and I backed away from our mikes, letting him solo first. Drennette's rabbitlike rolls continued to feed the Epimethean heat with which he blew, heat which was all the more astonishing considering the finesse with which he played, the nuanced ability to speak which, notwithstanding the frenzy it appeared he was in, he maintained. His oboe spoke. It not only spoke but did so with outrageous articulacy, so exquisitely so a balloon emerged from its bell. Lambert and I looked at one another. We traded looks with Aunt Nancy, Djamila and Drennette as well. It was hard to believe one's eyes but there it was, a comic-strip balloon enclosed in which one read the words Penguin's oboe spoke: *Drennette dreamt I lived on Djeannine Street. I walked from one end to the other everyday, back and forth all day. Having heard flamenco singers early on, I wanted in on duende.* Penguin took a breath and with that the balloon disappeared.

Another balloon took the first balloon's place when Penguin blew again, a balloon in which one read: *A long-toed woman, no respecter*

of lines, Drennette obliged me by dreaming I walked up and down Djeannine Street, stepping, just as she or Djeannine would, into literality, notwithstanding the littered sidewalk and the unkempt yards. He took another breath and when he blew again the third balloon read: *Sprung by her long toe, Drennette (part gazelle, part tumbleweed) leapt away as I reached out to embrace Djeannine. Among the weeds in a vacant lot a half-block away, she ran a few steps and turned a cartwheel. All I wanted was to bury my head between her legs, press my nose to the reinforced crotch of her white cotton panties.* He took another breath and when he blew again the fourth balloon read: *Something I saw, thought I saw, some intangible something led me on. Something I saw not so much as in some other way sensed, an audiotactile aroma, the synaesthetic perfume Djeannine wore which was known as Whiff of What Was, a scent like none I'd otherwise have known.*

While this fourth balloon hung in the air several people in the audience stood up and came forward to get a better look, not stopping until they stood in front of Penguin, squinting to make out the last few words. I had already noticed that *a* and *scent* were written somewhat close together, so I took it they were trying to determine whether what was written was *a scent* or *ascent*. They returned to their seats when Penguin took another breath and the fourth balloon disappeared. In its place, when he blew again, was a fifth which read: *The salty-sweet, sweating remembrance of Drennette's long-toed advance animated the street with an astringent allure, a ruttish funk I fell into which was more than mere mood. Drennette's advance made the ground below the sidewalk swell, cracking the concrete to release an atomistic attar, dilating my nostrils that much more.*

This went on for some time, a new balloon appearing each time Penguin blew after taking a breath. There was a sixth, a seventh, an eighth balloon and more. How many there were in all I can't say. I lost count. In any case, I understood them as a ploy by way of which Penguin sought to gain relief, comic relief, from the erotic-elegiac affliction of which the oboe so articulately spoke. By way of the balloons he made light of and sought to get leverage on the pregnant, post-expectant ground Drennette so adamantly espoused or appeared to espouse. The leverage he sought gave all the more torque to the dream-projection he projected onto her, the "street" he later admitted

to be based on the projects he lived in as a child. There was a regal touch to it as well, each balloon both cartoon and cartouche, this latter aspect very much in keeping with the stately tone the oboe wove into its erotic-elegiac address. Wounded kingship came thru loud and clear, an amalgam of majesty and misery, salty-sweet. Love lost was as easily loss loved it intimated, a blasé spin the blue funk it announced increasingly came to be amended by. Such grim jest or indifferent gesture increasingly infiltrated courtly ordeal, cap and bells inaugurating an alternate crown, King Pen's cartoon/cartouche. Laughing to keep from crying some would call it, but in fact it went much deeper than that.

Penguin wrapped up his solo with a round of circular breathing which introduced an unexpected wrinkle to what had by then become a pattern: blow/balloon emerge, take a breath/balloon disappear, blow/balloon emerge, take a breath/balloon disappear, blow/balloon emerge, take a breath/balloon disappear... The breath he now took was continuous with the one he expelled and the balloon, instead of disappearing, hung in the air above the bell of his horn growing larger the longer he blew. The steady enlargement, however, was only partly what was new about the new wrinkle he introduced. Two-dimensional up to this point, the balloon acquired a third dimension as it grew, becoming a much more literal balloon. What was also new was that there were now no words written inside it. By making it more a literal than a comic-strip balloon Penguin put aside the comic lever he'd made use of up to this point. He was now nothing if not emotionally forthright, the empty balloon all but outright insisting, the way music so often does, that when it came to the crux of the matter, the erotic-elegiac fix one was in, words were beside the point.

The admission that words fail us would normally not have been so unexpected, normally come as no surprise. Music, as I've said, does it all the time. But in this case it seemed a new and unusual twist, so persuasively had the comic-strip balloons insisted it could all be put into words. It's a measure of Penguin's genius that he could endow something so close to cliché with new life. The balloon not only swelled like a pregnant belly but, thanks to the mixed-metaphorical ground onto which we'd moved, it appeared to be a sobriety-test balloon as well. Penguin blew into it intent on proving himself sober even as he

extolled the intoxicant virtues of Djeannine's audiotactile perfume. Whiff of What Was notwithstanding, the vacant balloon seemed intended to acquit him of drunken charges, the admission of words' inadequacy a sobering descent from the auto-inscriptive high to which the earlier balloons had lent themselves. Even so, this descent could easily be said to have been further flight, so decidedly winged was the winded ferocity with which Penguin blew, what falling off there was reaching beyond itself with a whistling falsetto—stratospheric screech and a crow's caw rolled into one.

So it was that sobering descent mounted higher and higher. The balloon grew bigger and bigger, a weather balloon pitting post-expectant wind against pregnant air. Penguin put a punning spin on it, wondering out loud whether it might also be the other way around, pregnant wind encountering post-expectant air. With us crescendoing behind him all the while (Lambert and I had now joined back in), he eventually answered his own question when the balloon swelled and swelled and finally burst with a loud bang, pricked by a post-expectant needle, the needling mist which was now not only on the floor. It was with this that he brought his solo to an end, whereupon the audience went crazy, loudly applauding the release he'd had them hungering for, the release he now at last let them have.

Penguin timed it exactly right. The audience couldn't have stood another beat, much less another bar, couldn't have held its collective breath a moment longer. We too, the rest of us in the band, breathed easier now, inwardly applauded the release we too had begun to be impatient for. All of us, that is, except Drennette, who quickly apprised us, with the solo she now insisted upon taking, of the fact that the ground on which we stood was, if anyone's, hers, that impatience had no place where post-expectancy ruled.

Post-expectant futurity brought one abreast of the ground, Drennette announced, annulled, in doing so, any notion of ground as not annexed by an alternate ground. This was the pregnancy, the unimpatient expectancy, she explained, Penguin, albeit put upon and perplexed, had been granted rare speech, rare fluency by. Djeannine Street, alternate ground par excellence, inflected each run of heavy bass drum thumps with ventriloquial spectres, Drennette's recourse to the sock cymbal insistent that she and Djeannine, long spoken for,

had spooked (her word was “inspirited”) wouldly ledge, atomistic ledge.

It was a wild, outrageous boast, but she had the chops, it turned out, to back it up. The drumset had become a wind instrument by the time she finished her solo. A gust of wind arose from each roll and with each roll the storm she brewed grew more ferocious. We felt it at our backs when we joined in again, pressing as it pestered us toward some occult articulation only Drennette, not looking ahead, saw deep enough to have inklings of. Not so much needling as pounding us now, the needling mist partook of that wind—mystical hammer rolled into one with atomistic pulse. Wouldly ledge, needling mist and Penguin’s auto-inscriptive high would all, post-expectancy notwithstanding, turn out to have only been a beginning.

Suffice it to say we made some of the most ontic, unheard-of music we’ve ever made. Say what one will about unimpatient expectancy, I can’t wait to play again tonight.

As ever,  
N.

Dear Angel of Dust,

We're back in L.A. Got back from Seattle a few days ago. The Soulstice gig, all in all, went well, though the last two nights were a little bit disappointing. It's not that we didn't play well or that the music wasn't well received. We played with characteristic fluency and fire both nights and both nights the crowd, noticeably larger than the first night, got into it, urged us on. Even so, the post-expectant ground we stepped onto the first night was nowhere to be found on nights two and three. The pointillist tread, the wouldly "one step beyond" with which we'd been blessed, pointedly avoided us the next two nights. No atomistic plank-walk lay before us, no needling mist massaged our feet. It was ground we couldn't get back to no matter how hard we tried, ground we couldn't get back to perhaps because of how hard we tried.

The most conspicuous difference was that no balloons emerged from Penguin's horn. It was this which left the audience a bit disappointed, notwithstanding the applause and the hip exhortations they repeatedly gave the music. Word of the balloons had quickly gotten around town after night number one, and it was this which in large part accounted for the larger turnout the next two nights. Clearly, people came hoping to see the balloons emerge again. Though we've never thought of ourselves as crowd-pleasers, never been overly concerned with approbation, we'd have been happy to oblige them had it been up to us. But that the balloons didn't emerge amounted to an anti-expectant lesson which, while not exactly the same, was consistent with the post-expectant premises onto which we had stepped and again hoped to step. The air of anticipation the audience brought with them was so thick that before our final number the second night, the balloons not having reappeared and, clearly, to us in the band, not likely to, Aunt Nancy stepped forward and spoke into the mike. "Remember what Eric said," she admonished them. "When you hear music, after it's over, it's gone in the air. You can never capture it again."

It was a lesson we ourselves have had to ponder. Post-expectant ground was clearly evaporative ground, but it was hard not to be disappointed we couldn't find it again. It had been a lapse to expect otherwise, we admitted, but that's been easier to say than to accept. Lambert, in any event, said it best as we were discussing this at rehearsal the other night. "It's about digesting what you can't swallow," he said at one point. That, I think, says it all.

As ever,  
N.



TOM PICKARD

SELF ABSTRACTING POEM

Published in 50:2/3/4

a breeze of rowan lifts  
a pale curtain of cloud  
where hawks stake a claim  
to a drifter's sky

the lick of jiggling water  
over rock  
takes thought with it  
and every it it is

it  
and us outside it

I outside us  
and us it  
inside of I

and out

or hung  
tail slick as a pack of cards

scuffing gushes  
over lush mist  
that skulks cloughs

while swift streams  
skim speech  
from streets of the sea

BARBARA GUEST

## CONFIGURATION

Published in 53:4 & 54:1/2

1

Your transparency when  
    not to see it as quality  
of opaqueness or sound  
    the obscure note  
cognoscenti or a group of vowels  
to make a test using paper  
Beginning with a clear day promising snow

2

A surmise where  
    to see it gently  
the oblique scratch on paper  
                    recognizably  
your overshoes in the corridor your overcoat  
your paraphernalia  
                    why does this combat group  
crowd us so? When the weather

3

(Let's not kid ourselves  
    into retaliation  
there are boardwalks there are skies

gallantly  
to review  
urbs, urbes  
this splinter of glass    opaque as dew  
from the beginning)

4

Or “hypnosis of stone”  
look at it  
as quantity  
view from the pedestal  
thronged foot  
opaque garment  
on the way to the market  
nota bene.  
Remembering  
your clean sword  
tossed into the sea

5

Crowds where    thought ambitious orator  
a chance remark    discuss at sundown  
we must interrogate    the theorem  
before

I will not dispute    your

6

honesty    or

7

voice dove-thick

8

the bell tower

9

grooves

10

your transparency where  
not to see it as a quality

11

Ah flakes

SUSAN HOWE

ECHOLALIA IN MRS. PIPER

Published in 56:4

The music stopped and I stood still,  
And found myself outside the hill,  
Left alone against my will,  
To go now limping as before,  
And never hear of that country more!

Robert Browning

*The Pied Piper of Hamelin*

**finis.**

13 "Cautionary Verses for C

1  
1  
1  
1  
1

Genius of camouflage being  
present vis à vis the 'other'  
you wore robes before rags

All the old promises I made  
to you nights among family

Liffe winly sets out to latch  
in the C l[e]nged comely clad  
can deflect by shape-shifting

Adam and Eve & Abell I killed &  
Methhasula & meek Aroun &



Go catch glimpse of heels  
in the act of starting out  
[glode there] what waking

Light pathway speedly to  
Abraham & Isace & Esau

In slade greene under great  
rood r would depair deat[h]  
she is coral debths by day

Her idea is at her left hand  
with claws touching at tips

To talk to one's house to lash it  
secure—while some good angel  
stands fast at its edge another  
hundred years a sense of caves  
and trees or what the hills said

Those seven vowels are glosses  
on our veiled world our lost one

Someone of the haunt place  
glitters unknown to me one  
with cross on shoulder she is  
doubly surprising in a poem

From what land do you come

Birds in the mouth as merry as  
any other wayling twig figment  
might answer forever forever

'Before' has taken the place of  
some rare word naked as nail—

Leave an acoustic door open at  
the wall at the back of the set

I have set my heart on—always  
hereafter—no mirroring ‘either’

In the second place we think  
we only think we think while  
our ghosts appear in mirrors

In every slip of every tongue  
a word for 'straggler' echoes

Comma over half-belief its  
core of hope in brackets

Thought of this passage  
resting in green meadow  
of the word for 'worship'



An evangel dressed in  
soft garment in magic  
ink on paper—Fearing semi-  
chaos I said nothing to  
the waking Mrs. Piper

I cannot know if it was  
'memory' or felt fact

Who I was said nothing to  
Mrs. Piper herself only her  
being present I could have

—fingers on the brass ring  
once said the same thing

If to sense you are  
alive is pleasant itself  
or can be nearly so—  
If I knew where I was  
I'd show it—but no

What I lack is myself

Death you touchless other  
Materially superfluous and free  
from the start always here  
for what words leave out

## END NOTES

[the], to the  
them, for the  
[t]her-till,  
therto, to th  
[theater], di  
thinge, pl. t  
tho, then, 11  
tholed, suffe  
thought, it s  
threw, crow  
thronge[s], p  
throw, throu  
[tigh]t, went,  
till, to, 394.  
tipen, fall, 19  
to, *adv.* too, 8  
to, *prep.* in ad  
[traystly], fai

*Death and Liffe: A Medieval Alliterative Debate Poem in a Seventeenth Century Version* (1930)

“Echolalia represents the mind as the complete victim of suggestion or outside ideas. In the early development of her mediumship Mrs. Piper showed indications of this echolalia and its highly developed automatism as a consequence.”

William James, “Notes on Echolalia in Mrs. Piper” (1886)

“Debths”

James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (1939)

DAWN LUNDY MARTIN

## My Father's Only Son

Published in 63:3/4

The house I grew up in, in Hartford, Connecticut, is itself like a ghost in my body. My father is a ghost in the house. Whenever I visit from Pittsburgh or New York—the two cities I live in now—I have to crouch down inside myself, a psychic form of protection. The physical distance isn't what creates the layered ghost effects. It's that the distance between the realities of then and now, and the life I lived and the one I dreamed up and pried my way into, sometimes collapses when I'm inside the house trying to be the good daughter. It's not simply that I have gone far from home. That's a very American story. I'm not sure what kind of story this is.

### §

I awake first to the sound of my father's shoes moving back and forth from my parents' bedroom to the bathroom, and then his voice outside my room, my name pounding out of his mouth. I turn despondently in my bed and then feel his entry into the room, the tug of the blankets from my sleeping body, now cold and exposed to the day; in winter, the hiss of steam from the radiators and the promise of warmth. Sleepily I wake and shower, shove my books into my knapsack. My bus to school is at seven and my father works the first shift at his job so he too must arrive by seven. He drives me downtown to the bus stop where I am the first of my lot to arrive. I stand alone freezing in the dim light waiting for the other kids, watching the insurance workers hustle off to cubicles and offices in dark suits. This is the way of things every weekday until I turn sixteen.

I never think of those predawn hours without thinking of Robert Hayden's short poem "Those Winter Sundays." The last two stanzas in particular are reminders of what is difficult to know about anyone's heart.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.  
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,  
and slowly I would rise and dress,  
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,  
who had driven out the cold  
and polished my good shoes as well.  
What did I know, what did I know  
of love's austere and lonely offices?

I imagine the father in Hayden's poem as being mostly unlike my father. Instead of driving the cold out, he yanked me into it. I was incidental to the morning's activities, not the focus of them. Yet, still, there was an intimacy in the proximity of our individual maneuverings and, somehow, a quiet, indirect care. What did I know of this man at all who said almost no meaningful words to me my whole life, who never said "I love you" out loud, and who managed his emotions primarily through rage and inflexibility?

On the day my father made my half-brother Greg live in a storage shed, no one felt powerful enough to stop him. The storage shed had once been a handmade clubhouse built exclusively for me to do whatever children do with their friends in such structures. My father had noticed that I was always trying and failing to build one myself with scraps of wood I scavenged from neighbors' trash heaps.

Greg, a Vietnam veteran, had been kicked out of his apartment after spending all his money on cocaine. Dad was unrelenting, "No drug addicts in the house! I don't care!" Instead, Dad told him that he could live outside in my old clubhouse if he wanted, behind the garage. Dad and I had built that clubhouse in a single inspired afternoon with plywood, screws, and brackets that he'd purchased from the local Ace Hardware. It had little protection from severe elements, though we had taken the care to shingle the roof so it didn't rain or snow inside. In the summer heat or especially in the icy Connecticut winter, one might be better off in a homeless shelter. In this refusal of Greg's need for help was also a refusal of his existence, or a stabbing at it. This was, as I understand it now, one of those paradoxical violences that said, *you can stay but you can't stay*. From one angle it appears

as if a family member is getting some necessary assistance—at the very least, he’s not sleeping in the gutter. Cock your head in another direction and see an aggressive disdain for perceived weakness, and the severe punishment of being left outside in the cold while the rest of the family toasts their toes at the mouth of the fireplace, gorging themselves on roasted chicken and sweet potato pie.

My father—his name was Andrew, but he was called Andy by everyone but my mother—was a man who engaged in earthly activities only. He didn’t pray or read books or talk about horoscopes or love. He had rough hands and wore a wedding ring tight around his third finger until death. He seemed extra large to me, but now I know he was no bigger than many other men—5’11” and 158 pounds at eighteen when he was drafted into the Army. One of 909,000 African American men to serve in the Army in World War II, fighting in the war was the thing that had happened to him in life, but he never talked about it. He didn’t tell any stories about the past. This might be the strangest thing about him—that everything for him was present tense. But his body was a past body. My father’s body, and bodies like his, were just regular bodies, yet forever bound up with the Mandingo fiction and being boiled into a stew for fucking the master’s wife upon her calling. An invasion of my imagination when there was simply a presence: *He was huge! He was a monster!* As a grown man, my father was mostly body, mostly fat that looked like muscle, a body with a single, sometimes visible scar on his thigh. A scar I saw when he walked around in his white Fruit of the Loom underwear.

Before my mother, my father was married to another woman, whose name I can never remember. She gave birth to two sons—Greg and Andrew Jr., the oldest of my father’s spawn. By the time I was born they were already adults with mysterious, devastating lives. Greg returned home from the Vietnam War addicted to painkillers, which transformed into heroin addiction that he tempered with cocaine and alcohol. When Greg came home from the war, he moved to Connecticut to be close to my father, who seemed not to care. Andrew Jr. lived with his wife and two sons in Jacksonville, Florida, near where our father had previously set up his life with his other wife after World War II. Andrew Jr. went on a walk one day when his boys were teens and never returned. Bruce, my brother closest to me in age, had been adopted



by my parents as a young boy before I was born. By blood, as they say, he's my first cousin, my mother's sister's son. But Helen had enough kids already, eight at the time, and lived in a cramped three-bedroom apartment in what was then the black projects in Daytona Beach, Florida. Likely overwhelmed by the sheer number of bodies, she let my childless parents have Bruce. What could be lovelier than the gift of a child, a son?

So many hours I'd spent lying on the living room rug with my legs resting on the sofa, listening to my *Let's Pretend Fairy Tale* records. In *The Devil with the Three Golden Hairs*, a baby born with a birthmark on its face is destined to marry the king's daughter. The king hates face marks so he sends the baby down the river in a box, probably hoping it will just die. The baby lives because a miller and his wife find it and raise him as their own. Because it's destiny, the boy ends up marrying the king's daughter anyway, but in another sadistic murder attempt, the king sends the boy into hell to retrieve three golden hairs from the devil's head. If he does this, he can live happily ever after. The fairy tale ends as fairy tales do, with a little retribution for the evil king who couldn't just let the boy be.

Maybe it was a warped blessing that Dad made Greg live outside. Bruce, on the other hand, was subject to our father's rage inside the house, which meant that, like the boy who married the king's daughter, it was difficult for him to position himself out of my father's long reach. When my father beat him, as he did sometimes, it was with a ferocity that would make an onlooker think that it wasn't about Bruce at all, but something inaccessible to our father, something out of his control. Toni Morrison writes that when violence is a response to chaos, it is "understood to be the most frequent response and the most rational when confronting the unknown, the catastrophic, the wild, wanton or incorrigible." The taciturn nature of my father meant that no one had access to whatever trajectory of chaos may have produced his targeted violence. Yet, I can imagine a connection between being born a black boy in the 1920s American South, fighting an American war decades before the US government recognized post-traumatic stress disorder, and returning to a country that disparaged black soldiers. Chaos was likely within and outside of his body. You've seen a beating, haven't you? You've witnessed a person lose the self inside of an

attack mode, grunting and escalating, as if to say “I can’t stop”? I make no excuses for these brutalities. Everyone in my family was shaped by the contours of these actions, even if they were infrequent. I am trying to understand something about the protections afforded me, the shape of those protections, and what they allowed for in my own body and being, despite the inability to extend those protections to someone I love.

Obviously, no happily ever after happened for Bruce or any of the sons. Bruce, now in his late fifties, lives in his old bedroom at the house in which we were raised. He makes minimum wage as a janitor for a motel, most of his income skimmed off for child support. Greg lives and works at the VA Hospital, but often slips back into the addiction that overtook his whole life. We don’t know where Andrew Jr. is. In an alternate fairy-tale ending, the daughter becomes the quasi hero of the story and replaces the son. I was the one in my father’s eye. I was the one he took on Saturday strawberry-picking expeditions, hoisted onto the bar to feed pickled pigs’ feet, beer nuts, pork rinds, and grape soda; the one he took to work at the dry cleaner’s for the whole day and to whom he gave money to play miniature golf while he pressed clothes in the summer heat; the one on Sunday-afternoon drives to the country store where he could buy fresh clams (“cherrystones,” he called them); the one he took to jai alai and taught how to bet and how to win and with whom he split the winnings when I picked the right numbers—our private experiences, always just the two of us, me a protégé in the ways of a man’s world, or this man’s world.

Technically speaking, or speaking on the evidence we had then, I was a girl and Bruce, Greg, and Andrew Jr. were boys. I don’t know if my father knew this explicitly in his mind. It could be that my being technically speaking a girl made my father treat me differently from the boys. Or it could be that things melted down in his brain gender-wise because I, like him, liked to work, and none of the sons appeared to. I was only ten when I started my first moneymaking business, shoveling snow for the neighbors. Bruce was seventeen by this point and didn’t have a job of any sort; he wasn’t able to keep one until he was almost fifty years old, even though Dad, who worked two full-time jobs, had once gotten Bruce one of those pension jobs with the city. My father might have treated Bruce more brutally than anyone

because this son was not biologically his, and he resented having to be responsible for him especially because he was kind of a fuckup. Maybe my father wanted to do one thing right with one of his kids, and I was the last one. I'm just speculating, really. I have no idea.

## §

The house held a fissure from which little spikes of violence could rise up, piercing any otherwise placid scene. It could have been something to do with the architecture of the house itself. The first floor of the structure was meant for communal living. It was comprised of a dining room, a living room, and a kitchen, positioned in adjacency in the shape of a square. The dining room was separated from the kitchen and the living room by two doors; and the kitchen was separated from the dining room and the living room by two doors. It was enclosed, its own separate place, where whoever was inside doing the kitchen work was usually alone. Instead of a gathering space, like in the images of black family sociality that permeate our desires and our narratives, this space and its appliances made the kitchen a work space only, filled with machines that enabled duty.

But all the doors in the house were nearly always open. This made any chase a good one. If you were running from someone who wanted to do you harm, you could run through the rooms in a circle, closing and opening doors in order to either block your pursuer or escape into the other rooms. Further, there were two sets of stairs: one leading to the basement and one leading to the three bedrooms and the bathroom upstairs. Stairs, obviously, motivate punishment in the form of a shove or a struggle to throw another person down. The location for the most pronounced violence, of course, is the basement, perhaps because it's underground and attackers, though we might think of them as insane, are not insane. They think about, however obliquely, the fact that screams are more difficult to hear by others outside of the house from down below in the cellar. Like some horror movie, this is where my father took Bruce in order to beat him.

My mother had chosen brown and pink as the colors for our kitchen. This had always struck me as an underwhelmingly garish choice. It gave the kitchen a mustardy feel. It was a color palette that

made the small, tableless room feel smaller. The kitchen is where my mother once had to wrestle Bruce's hands from his girlfriend's neck as he tried to strangle her. The girlfriend responded by squirming wildly to get out of his grasp and swinging her fists at his face, scratching and clawing. They had been fighting all morning and we had all heard it. But when the sounds of their voices became louder and tighter, hitting the air like bullets, my mother and I rushed in from wherever we were to see about the matter. My brother was a young man at this point—maybe twenty, and I seven years younger. I did not approach the scene, knowing that my brother would not hesitate to fling me into the wall, but I screamed for them to stop. My mother yelled, "Get your hands off of her!" and lunged, thrusting her body between theirs, daring them, it seemed, to accidentally put their hands on her. It worked. She broke up the fight, as no one in our family would dare—even accidentally—strike my mother. It was a risk too great as it was she who singularly held us together. It was she who paid all the bills, organized our summer vacations, made birthday cakes, purchased Christmas gifts, brought us to family reunions, tended to our curfews, bought the food and made all the meals, cleaned the house, etc. It was she who had taken my brother to the barber and braided my hair, she who read to us in the evenings and purchased puzzles and games that lit up our minds. She knew when the right time to purchase a new car was and if we could afford it. She knew when we were too sick for her care and needed a doctor. She is what one might call a "good woman," a suffering woman, a woman constrained by obligation. It was not a model that appealed to me.

## §

I have always been a girl and a boy at the same time. Everyone saw me that way even when they didn't admit it out loud or to themselves. My mother told me a story of when she worked as a day-care teacher about a four-year-old who refused to recognize himself as a boy. He'd stand in the girls' line for recess and play with the other girls in the make-believe kitchen. When instructed by the adults to line up with the boys, he'd refuse and exclaim, "But I'm a girl!" to the dismay and

confusion of the adults around him. I don't know why my mother told me this story exactly but it had the effect of making me aware of the disjuncture between the way others named my gender and what I felt was true. Toni Morrison writes that another response to the perception of chaos is naming. I implicitly understood the need for the adult world to recognize and name me as a girl, but I resisted, insisting on wearing pants and T-shirts all the time, playing only boys' games with guns and race cars, and felt awful and ill at ease in the dresses I was forced to wear to church. These dresses were probably my first indication that there is no God. There were other indications, too, like how certain women in church would become possessed by the Holy Ghost and get into a fit right in front of everyone. I was embarrassed for them. I also thought they were faking. God, if there was one, I was sure, hated fakery. He'd be interested in expressions of the truest self.

One night, my father came home late and drunk and pissed on the kitchen floor. He couldn't find the toilet. Years later when I was a teenager, I returned home late from a high-school party and puked while sitting on the toilet peeing. We had one of those toilet-hugging mats that people had in the 1980s. The mat was soaked in my vomit. In my drunken teenaged stupor, I threw the mat out of the window. It landed on the bulkhead doors to the basement positioned directly under the bathroom window. I left it there and stumbled on to bed. My father and I breathed the same air. We walked along the same precarious rope. We were simultaneously very weak and very strong. We were gentle with each other. We built things together: the clubhouse, of course, which was the center of play and scheming for me and my neighborhood friends, and also go-carts with braking systems that sent me racing down the hill faster than any boy. He taught me how to make a kite out of newspaper and tree branches. When we flew the kite, I was awestruck by the heights it soared to and that we had made the thing at all. How could we make a thing like an airplane? The morning after the vomit incident, my father raged around the house. "What the hell?!" he bellowed, barrel-chested, until the moment when I said that it was me, and that I was sick and feverish and accidentally let go of the mat while trying to clean it. If my father was the type to hold my head, he would have. But instead he deflated and said "O," as if "O" was a kind of release.

The thing about my father is that I could often smell him. Like, I could smell the different persons inside of him. These aromas included after-work sweat, hair pomade, beer, green aftershave from the plastic bottle, cigarettes, dry-cleaning fluid, soap, stale cloth, and toward the end of his life, a smell I had never smelled before and have not since. To me, it was a death waft. In actuality, the rancidness was my father's body. The cancer was getting at his blood and bones from the inside, which made it so that he was almost too weak to walk. He could make it from bed, across the brief corridor, to the bathroom and back. Once as he was doing so in his thin robe, frail and hunched toward the floor, the robe fell open slightly and I glimpsed a mash of dark genitalia. The image has stayed with me as one of ghastly vulnerability. As a graduate student, I lived an hour away and returned home often to drive him to get blood transfusions to relieve him from extreme anemia. He walked slowly, one hand on my shoulder to stabilize his body, down the stairs, to the car, and into the hospital. The temporary relief offered by the transfusion was good motivation to take those painful, meticulous, and breathless steps.

He could no longer bathe himself. No one else in the family, including, or especially, my mother, was willing to do it. This is the stew that filled that house. Sometimes it didn't smell like a body at all, but a warning. We all smelled the odor. There was no avoiding it. But we never spoke of it, just as we all knew my father was dying and never mentioned that either. He himself refused to accept this fact of death surely coming. He did die, of course, and in the wake of it, my mother disposed of all the furniture in my old room where he had been bedridden. She disposed of everything that belonged to my father. In fact, on the evening of his funeral, the only thing that remained of him in the house was a drawer filled with spare change, a half-drunk bottle of rum, and his wristwatch. Greg took the watch and Bruce and I split up the money.

The consequence of any new distance is another sight, noticing released from the bounds of a microcosm, the bounded vision of the close-up. What happened in my childhood home, I realize now, was a kind of trickle-down violence. And, though that violence escaped me directly, it had its hands around everyone's neck. Do you remember when regret was not present in the body? Do you remember the little

feelings of everything in your whole being welling up? Childhood is this wild experience of sensation and newness, the past so brief it's barely behind you. Adult persons' emotional expressions seemed to shoot out from nowhere and were terrifying in both their chaotic arrangement and their stark brightness. Those church ladies' perennial hysteria, for example, the way they leapt up off the pew benches as if possessed, weeping and hollering, in a seeming coming together of despair and ecstasy.

It's only in retrospect and years after my father's death that I can understand anything at all about being raised by one ostensibly good Christian woman and one mean atheist man. I couldn't see that goodness and badness were both ropes in a tangle that allowed for a wolf inside me to grow and that this was the real goodness. When my brothers were being beaten or locked out of the house, I would cry and wish my father dead. It's a weird thing to then be forced to hang out with him on Sunday afternoons, being free and eating all the burgers and candy at the bowling alley. There we were, the two of us, entering the building, him with his dad-sized bowling ball case and me with a slightly smaller one, grey like his. There we were, sidling up to the cashier in slow motion, like guys about to make a sweet deal with a guy who usually doesn't make deals. Our usual lane is reserved. There I am, all the darkness blocked from view, my interior feeling lit up like life is a cherry pie.

I am a wolf? Yes, I am a wolf. My father is a wolf mouth? The father is the whole structure of the house and we live inside of him. The wolf child scratches out of the father's mouth house. I hold my brothers in my own wolf mouth, but only temporarily.

## §

One afternoon Dad told me that we had an outing, that I couldn't go swimming with my friends in the circular above-ground pool next door. He didn't say why, but I was pissed. I was thirteen by then, long past the time when I would go shirtless with dad in his station wagon to the gas station and stand freely pumping gas. I wore a shirt now. I wore a girl's bra maybe. But we had that other history. That history at the gas station when I was almost a boy. I sulked in the passenger

seat after being strong-armed away from the pool and my friends. When we turned a familiar corner into Keeney Park where the black golf course was situated, I recognized the shortcut to the liquor store, what we in Connecticut call the “package store,” where my father got his beer. He pulled over on the side of the wooded road and said, “It’s your turn.” “What?” I asked. “Your turn to drive,” he said. I switched places with him in the giant, brown Buick sedan, the back seat piled with plastic bags of beer cans he returned at the store for five cents a pop, and upon instruction pressed my foot solidly onto the brake pedal. Exhilarated, my hands tightened around the steering wheel and, ever so tentatively, I lifted one hand to shift the car into drive and pushed the gas pedal with a slight force. Some fathers would have taken their kid to a parking lot, but not mine. Instead we were inside of the park where cars would occasionally stream gently along, like on a Sunday drive. Some fathers would have taken their son on this journey, but mine took me. After this day, I was always my father’s driver, which made me an excellent driver. He also taught me how to change a tire, how to check and change the oil, and replace spark plugs and worn belts.

Being treated like a boy by my dad saved me from the years I was recognized as a girl. There was another man, a charming one, who befriended my mother at the day-care center where she taught. I like charm to this day. But this guy was charming so that he could have access to little-girl bodies in ways that fractured their very selfhood. I was one of those girls. And the fractured selfhood happened to me, though no one at the time knew about it. Dad hated the charming man with a passion. Whenever he entered any room, my father would storm out. The charming man loved spending time with me too and would create opportunities for us to be alone; but this is a story for another time. For our purposes here, I needed rescue.

This gift of the ability to drive and the subsequent driver’s license enabled my ability to get away. Suddenly, I was free. I made myself no longer available to the man who fractured souls. I realized escape was in my own hands, and escape I finally did. Eventually I escaped into the larger world, far from our small home in the small Connecticut city that no one would call “a destination.” I drove to Manhattan with friends and purchased a long, black coat like I’d seen in teen movies.



We browsed the Fiorucci store and went dancing at Danceteria and Palladium. I drove to Watch Hill, Rhode Island, where I spent a glorious long weekend with friends at their rich grandmother's house—just us teenagers dancing around the kitchen to *The Big Chill* soundtrack. The car was more than transportation. It was more than symbolic, though it was that too, the way that the experience of driving was a window. And through it, I saw myself on the other side of that window. When I graduated from college, I boarded a Greyhound bus and moved as far away from Hartford as I could possibly imagine, to the West Coast, a place I'd never been to.

I write to you now from a quiet locale, a secret beach just on the southern coast of Spain where we can glimpse Africa through thin low-hanging clouds in the distance. I am positioned on a stone balcony where I've hung freshly washed underwear to dry in the late-afternoon sun. People pour in now from the beach, the shore, toward the parking lot or the inn, positioned, as it often is, up some bank or above what would be dunes. When evening approaches, it does so with very slowly fading light, encouraging leisure as a primary occupation. Heat lifts from your body, breeze insouciant, and there, pulling on the recesses of the throat-thought, the figure of the father emerges like a nagging dream. My body, however, is my own.

RONALD JOHNSON

*BEAM 1*

Published in 42:1

Over the rim  
body of earth rays exit sun  
rest to full velocity to eastward pinwheeled in a sparrow's

eye  
—Jupiter compressed west to the other—

wake waves on wave in wave striped White Throat song

along the reversal of one  
contra-  
centrifugal  
*water to touch, all knowledge*

as if a several silver  
backlit in gust.

All night the golden fruit fell softly to the air,  
pips ablaze, our eyes skinned back.  
Clouds loom below. Pocked moon fills half the sky. Stars  
comb out its lumen  
horizon  
in a gone-to-seed dandelion  
as of snowflakes hitting dark waters, time, and again,

then dot the plain  
186, 282 cooped up angels tall as appletrees

caryatid  
to the tides of day

O

wide bloom the pathed hearth yawn  
on purpose porpoised pattern  
this reeled world whistling joist its polished fields at sun  
pulse race in a vase of beings, bearings  
all root fold forms upon  
to center eternity  
or enter it  
*instruments of change.*

and bareback as Pegasus guess us

C. D. WRIGHT

from RISING, FALLING, HOVERING

Published in 53:2/3

*cont.*

Floods of feelings

militarize our nights    currents of solitude    cordon off

our days    Oct 16    the famous Carousel Bar re-opened

in the Crescent City    customers resumed drinking

revolving and sinking    Providence continues to launch

hurtle heave its leaves    And as of Sat Nov 12

according to the Associated Press    2,066

of our members    will remain Forever Young

O when the saints go  
marching

At the level    of policy    their kids    don't exist

never did    will never reach    the sun-drenched shore

and now it's Monday again

I have been to Pilates     I found my old coat

I took my will to the notary     I found my good glasses

I have filled my tank     I am going to the market

then I think I'll cut my hair off with a broken bottle

As of three hours ago

2,311 of our members are to remain     Forever Young

We'll be in Mexico City in under five     we're going back

Our friend has started her treatment     so we are going

We still have pesos     there's a Pullman from the airport

Who was down last you or me

Now you have to go upstairs     No     you go down

He tells her to turn off the light     though he has his own light

And it is switched off     Hers is cocked oddly

It illumines the gutter of the book     at the margins it fails

He tunes into his iPod     the black mask covers his eyes

He has furlled his body toward the window of the craft

The shade is down all the way she prefers to see out

If she could extend an arm through the portal and pull the clouds over them

O Heavenly Comforter

Let's get that light off You aren't really reading The monitor from the overhead

begins its infotainment Not shown: white phosphorus falling  
on the city of minarets

Not confirmed: the use of white phosphorus (for another year) NOW SHOWING:

*CATWOMAN* If you cannot or do not wish to perform the function

You must change seats now

Was it only last summer they sent their son their suddenly-grown-tall son

to Cuauhnahuac to finish the summer (otherwise would the summer's son

withstand the son's mother or: the blood-stopping words they swapped)

to study Spanish This was when the job helping the carpenter

who didn't need much help dwindled to holding the ladder

Picked up at the bus station by their friend

who has finished her second treatment whose hair

doesn't fall out until the day after their departure

but this was before the bad diagnosis

The boy wouldn't hear of staying with their friend of course

It was too close to family too close to knowing his business

He wanted to stay in the *rojo* district To save money he said

He stayed in a private house renting out rooms part-way up the hill in the Pradera

directly across the barranca from the donkey that never stopped hawing

His wife di-et the proprietor talked through a mechanical larynx

meaning the jenny was dead and the macho was all broken up

Threw his duffel onto his bed stashed his checks in a drawer took a taxi

to the language school (routinely taking taxis) registered met someone  
(name of Al)

hopped on a second-class bus and rode through the howling Mexican night

swerving around heifers on the sun-warmed asphalt

the night permanently deep the stars permanently powered

Changing buses in the pueblo where years ago (before the son existed

as a thought in the body) his parents stopped they caught a band of young

shirtless men breaking into their car siesta time and the men in full sun

backed away from the vehicle hands up in front of them backing away

when they realized as the couple walked slowly downhill

in their direction they were the ones who belonged to the car with Arkansas plates

Until he reached the Pacific

Her fear as always was that he would make it

to the bottommost level of the underworld where the smoke has no way out

So the scared self assembles around the stiff self

And the son's mother withstands the summer's son (and vice versa)

(If you cannot or do not wish to perform  
this function you shouldn't be in this century)

Anyway he and call-him-Al someone he had met fifteen minutes before

they went to the station and bought tickets rode the bus

to Zihuatanejo before the night was over his wallet was lost

something he only discovered when they pulled over

in that pueblo where his parents almost had an incident and so was his friend's

dependent at least until he could get back to Cuauhnahuac a few hours before class

They don't learn if the boys even had time for a swim

in the shallow sharky water or some fried steak and cebollas

at an open-air stand before they had to catch the return bus

A town where they themselves had ordered flattened steaks and onions



and stood in the rain in an open-air theater and watched a cast-of-eyes movie

with Bedouins and who-knows-who-else      The celluloid crackling

The rain warm but hard falling

But the son and call-him-Al actually did get back and make it to class on Monday

*Está comiendo mi coco* she phoned the friend

who had picked him up at the station

who had never heard the expression she was so pleased with herself for using

from a dated phrase book      This phrase is never used in Mexico her friend assured

He is still eating my head

If you give your fears a shape      her friend suggested

You break free of them      this was before the bad diagnosis

After she is assured he is back      from the sea

she concedes      He is going to be OK      He'll make his way

recalls a woman she met at the women's prison      the literacy teacher

(not an inmate) who had several ex-husbands under her belt

and had one son (not by the federal judge) (that husband didn't hunt)

but by the one who sold indigenous rugs      the son from that marriage

A very fastidious boy      always in the shower always changing

from one white shirt into another      she worried about him

she came in the house one day and smelled squirrel

He swerved he said but still hit it      he thought it would be a pity  
to leave in the road    so he brought it home    skinned and rubbed  
its still soft body down with oil and rosemary    stuck it in the broiler  
He'll be OK    she thought    this fastidious son    He'll make his way

During the time she knew he was on a bus      without a wallet      she knew this much  
because he left a message on her machine      hurtling as Mexican buses tend to go  
she could say only say    *Está comiendo mi coco*    He is eating my head

He was gone

Her breath clouds the pane    of a second-story window  
she watches the silver Matrix with a bent fender    key scratch  
along a diagonal    the driver's side    backing out of its cove  
Birds folding up    a glimpse of the coyote that's been patrolling  
the perimeter as it cuts into the burial ground    She sits in the cold  
staring at a cigarette coming apart in a glass of water

At this writing he's finishing a year in college

Also at this writing the smoking thing has been supplanted  
by the gym thing    he has joined an underground fight club

and she worries about him non-stop      You see yourself

wearing a championship belt      Mister BLING

holding up a fist of greenbacks      I see myself

being taught how to insert the feeding tube

Don't you see how our visions do not correspond

*(Todavía está comiendo mi coco)*

He mentions getting jumped in Zihuatanejo and cornered the year before in Oaxaca

the Christmas before in Chicago and mugged once in Brooklyn

and she is What What What      Can't you just stay inside and read  
(turning pages)

until you're thirty or something

In Mexico she smoked

Smoke Smoke her friend says

If this is the fifth sun we're all going up

The Pullman descends  
The helix of Cuauhnahuac  
Hurling toward the station  
Oh look Media Naranja  
A new Walmex  
His face unfurls furls  
Poetry  
Doesn't  
Protect  
You  
Anymore

## NOTES

Cuauhnahuac (“near the forest”) is the Nahuatl name for the city the Spanish renamed Cuernavaca (“cow’s horn”).

“Poetry/Doesn’t/Protect/You/Anymore” references (by substitution) a phrase in a diode from the *Survival Series* by Jenny Holzer installed at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art at Washington University in St. Louis.

TOM RAWORTH

UNTITLED

Published in 58:1

an inclination of the voice does it in england  
where bodies seldom clash but glance off  
twelve the airplane blue glass the late night eviction  
generally the book is closed as the decipher meant  
all ally within where they live in the shell  
the loom of velvet is touch able to be the scene  
of now in languages of simultaneous news  
the code book learned proves correspondences are equal  
it is time for bed good night gunter sachs  
guests are distendable for the language at its source  
is anything you say as a noun in some place it exists  
as the thought of a possibility creates it  
leaving only the work to a specialist who is  
after all only the opposable thumb a mechanical  
aid to those who write the races dream

(from a flyer for a showing of movies by piero heliczer at the i.c.a.  
london 1969)

ROBERTO BOLAÑO

## Leave It All, Once More

Published in 60:3

It's four light-hours to the edges of the solar system; to the closest star, four light-years. A disproportionate ocean of emptiness. But, are we really sure it's just emptiness? All we know is that there are no light-filled stars in this space; if they existed, would they be visible? What if there were non-light-filled bodies, or dark ones? Couldn't it so happen in the celestial maps, just like the earthly ones, that the star-cities are shown and the star-towns are omitted?

—Soviet science fiction writers scratching their faces at midnight.

—The infrasuns (Drummond would say happy proletarian boys).

—Solitary Peguero and Boris in a lumpen room foreseeing the wonder behind the door.

—Free Money.

§

Who has crossed the city and for music only had the whistling of his kindred, his own words of amazement and rage?

The beautiful guy who didn't know  
that girls' orgasms are clitoral.

(Look for it, not only in museums is there shit.) (A process of individual museification.) (Certainty that everything is named, revealed.) (Fear of discovery.) (Fear of unforeseen imbalances.)

§

Our closest relatives:  
sharpshooters, lone rangers who destroy the Chinese coffee shops of Latin America, the broken in supermarkets, in their huge individual-

collective quandaries; the impotence of acting and of seeking out (at individual levels quite muddled in aesthetic contradictions) poetic acts.

§

Small stars full of light winking an eye at us eternally from a place in the universe called The Labyrinths.

—Dance-Club of misery.

—Pepito Tequila weeping for his love of Lisa Underground.

—Suck it to her, suck yourself, let's all suck it.

—And the Horror.

§

Curtains of water, cement or tin separate a cultural machinery, which doesn't care if it serves as conscience or ass for the dominant class, as a living cultural event, screwed, constantly dying or being born, unaware of a large part of history and the fine arts (daily creator of its crazy history and amazing vine harts), body that for now experiences within itself new sensations, product of an epoch in which we move at 200 kph toward the shithole or the revolution.

“New forms, rare forms,” as old Bertolt would say somewhere between curious and chuckling.

§

Sensations don't come from nowhere (most obvious of obviousness), but rather from a reality conditioned, in a thousand ways, to a constant flow.

—Multiple reality, you make us dizzy!

That way it's possible, on the one hand, to be born, and on the other we are in the front row of the last straws. Forms of living and forms of dying swirl daily through the retina. Their constant crashing gives life to infrarealist forms. THE EYE OF TRANSITION.

§

Put the whole city in a madhouse. Sweet sister, tank howls, hermaphrodite songs, desert diamonds, we will only live once and the visions each day thicker and more slippery. Sweet sister, car rides to Monte Albán. Fasten your seatbelts because the cadavers are getting watered. One missing move.

§

And good bourgeois culture? The academy and the fire starters? The avant-gardes and their rear guards? And certain concepts of love, nice landscapes and the precise, multinational Colt?

As Saint-Just said to me in a dream I had some time ago: even the heads of aristocrats can work as weapons.

§

A good chunk of the world goes about being born and another one dying, and we all know we all have to live or all die: there is no middle ground on this.

Chirico says: it is necessary for thought to move away from all that is called logic and good sense, that it gets away from all human hindrances in such a way that things appear under a new aspect, as if lit up by a constellation appearing for the first time. The infrarealists say: let's stick our head in all human hindrances, in such a way that things begin to move within one, an awesome vision of mankind.

—The Constellation of the Beautiful Bird.

—Infrarealists propose indigenism to the world: a crazy, shy Indian.

—A new lyricism that begins to grow in Latin America, to brace itself in ways that don't cease to surprise us. The entry to the material is the entry to adventure: the poem as journey and the poet as hero revealing heroes. Tenderness as an exercise in speed. Breathing and heat. Experience shot off, structures devouring themselves, crazy contradictions.

If the poet is intruded, the reader will have to intrude as well.

“erotic books with no spelling.”

§



There precede us A THOUSAND CHOPPED UP AVANT-GARDES IN THE SIXTIES.

99 flowers opened like an open head.

The massacres, the new concentration camps.

The white underground rivers, violet winds.

It's hard times for poetry, some say, drinking tea, or listening to music in their apartments, speaking with (listening to) the old masters. It's hard times for mankind, we say, heading back to the barracks after a day full of shit and tear gas, discovering/ creating music even in apartments, looking long at cemeteries-that-grow, where the old masters desperately drink a cup of tea or get drunk out of sheer anger or inertia.

HORA ZERO precedes us

((if you lie with zambos you will wake up with knees))

We are still in the Quaternary Period. Are we still in the Quaternary Period? Pepito Tequila kisses the glowing nipples of Lisa Underground and watches her walk into the distance along a beach where black pyramids spring up.

§

I repeat:

The poet as hero revealing heroes, as a fallen red tree announcing the beginning of the forest.

—The attempts at a coherent ethics-aesthetics are paved with betrayals or pathetic survivals.

—And an individual could walk a thousand kilometers but in the end the path eats him up.

—Our ethics is the Revolution, our aesthetics, Life: one-single-thing.

§

The bourgeois and the petit bourgeois are always partying. They have a party every weekend. The proletariat doesn't have a party. Just funerals with rhythm. That is going to change. The exploited will have a great party. Memory and guillotines. To intuit it, act it out certain nights, invent wet edges and corners, it's like caressing the acidic eyes of the new spirit.

§

Shifting of the poem crossing the seasons of uprisings: poetry producing poets producing poems producing poetry. Not an electric alleyway/ the poet with arms separated from the body/ the poems edging slowly away from its Vision of its Revolution. The alleyway is a multiple point. "We are going to invent to discover its contradiction, its invisible forms of denying itself, until clearing it up." Shifting of the act of writing through places not at all apt for the act of writing.

Rimbaud, come home!

To subvert the daily reality of current poetry. The chaining that leads to a circular reality of the poem. A good reference: crazy Kurt Schwitters. Lanke trr gll, or, upa kupa arggg, become the official line, phonetic researchers codifying the howl. The bridges of the Noba Express are anti-codifying: let it shout, let it shout (please don't pull out a pencil and paper, don't record it, if you want to participate, join in the shouting), so let it shout, let's see how it reacts when it's done, what other incredible thing we move on to.

Our bridges toward ignored stations. The poem interrelating reality and the unreal.

§

Convulsively.

§

What can I ask of current Latin American painting? What can I ask of the theater?

It is more revealing and visual to stand in a park demolished by smog and watch the people cross the avenues in groups (which shrink and expand), when both pedestrians as well as drivers have to get back to their storage closets, and it's the time of day when killers emerge and the victims follow.

Really, what stories do painters tell me?

The interesting void, fixed form and color, best-case scenario, the parodying of movement.

Canvases that are just luminous advertisements in the rooms of engineers and physicians who are collectors.

The painter gets comfortable in a society that is with each passing door more “painter” than he himself, and that is where he is found disarmed and signs up as a clown.

If a painting by X is found on some street by Mara, that painting takes on the category of something fun and connecting; in a salon it is as decorative as the iron chairs of the bourgeois garden/ matter of retina?/ yes and no/ but it would be better to find (and for a while to haphazardly systematize) the detonating, classist, one-hundred-percent purposeful factor of the artwork, in juxtaposition with the values of “artwork” which precede it and condition it.

—The painter leaves the studio and ANY status quo and goes headfirst into the wonder/ or he sets to playing chess like Duchamp/ A didactic painting for painting itself/ And a painting of poverty, free or fairly cheap, unfinished, of participation, of questioning the participation, of unlimited physical and spiritual scope.

The best painting in Latin America is the one still done at unconscious levels, playing, partying, the experiment that gives us a real vision of what we are and opens us up to what we are capable of will be the best painting of Latin America is the one we paint with greens reds and blues on our own faces, in order to recognize ourselves in the unending creation of the tribe.

§

Try leaving it all daily.

May the architects stop building stages inward and may they open their hands (or ball them into fists, it depends on the place) toward that outside space. A wall and a roof become useful not just when they are for sleeping or avoiding the rain, but rather when they establish, starting, for example, with the daily act of sleeping, conscious bridges between mankind and his creations, or the momentary impossibility of these.

For architecture and sculpture, the infrarealists start with two points: the barricade and the bed.

§

The true imagination is that which dynamites, elucidates and injects emerald microbes of other imaginations. In poetry and all things, the becoming material has to be a becoming adventure. To create tools for the daily subversion. The subject seasons of the human being, with their beautiful giant and obscene trees, like experimental laboratories. To fasten, to catch a glimpse of parallel situations as heart-wrenching as a great scratch across the chest, across the face. Endless analogy of gestures. They are so numerous that when new ones appear we don't even notice, even as we make them/ looking in the mirror. Stormy nights. Perception is opened by means of an ethics-aesthetics carried out to the end.

§

The galaxies of love are appearing in the palms of our hands.

—Poets, loosen your braids (if you have them).

—Burn your crap and start loving until the incalculable poems arrive.

—We don't want kinetic paintings, but rather enormous kinetic sunsets.

—Fire squirrels jumping from fire trees.

—A bet between the nerve and the sleeping pill to see who blinks first.

§

Risk is always elsewhere. The true poet is the one who is always abandoning himself. Never too much time in one place, like guerilla fighters, like UFOs, like the white eyes of prisoners serving a life sentence.

§

Fusion and explosion of both shores: creation like a graffiti resolved and opened by a crazy child.

Nothing mechanical. The scales of amazement. Someone, maybe Hieronymus Bosch, breaks the aquarium of love.

Free money. Sweet sister. Light visions of cadavers. Little boys slicing up December with kisses.

§

At 2 AM, after being at Mara's house, we (Mario Santiago and some of us) hear laughter coming out of the penthouse of a 9-story building. It didn't stop, they laughed and laughed while downstairs we fell asleep leaning on various phone booths. There came a moment when only Mario kept paying attention to the laughter (the penthouse is a gay bar or something like that and Darío Galicia had told us that it's always staked out by the cops). We were making phone calls but the coins turned to water. The laughter continued. After we left that neighborhood Mario told me that actually nobody had laughed, it was all canned laughter and up there, in the penthouse, a small group, or maybe just one homosexual, had listened to the recording in silence and had made us listen to it.

The death of the swan, the last song of the swan, the last song of the black swan, are not in the Bolshoi but rather in the unbearable pain and beauty of the streets.

—A rainbow that starts in a bad-luck movie theater and that ends in a factory on strike.

—May amnesia never kiss us on the mouth. May it never kiss us.

—We were dreaming of utopia and woke up screaming.

—A poor lone cowboy returning home, which is a marvel.

§

To make new sensations appear —To subvert every-dayness

O. K.

LEAVE IT ALL, ONCE MORE

HIT THE ROAD

## Social Change & Poetic Tradition

Published in 43:4

Define social as relationship that forms community, society, as that community from its economic material base to its cultural philosophical-institutional superstructure.

Society is a sum and dimension of all its relationships which define it—as to what kind of society. E.g., how people get their food, clothing and shelter—i.e., what they have to do, absolutely, to be here. These are the fundamental shapers of what we call society. There is no such thing as society without the relationships of those in it to create, change even destroy whatever it is these relations exist as.

Social change can be progressive, i.e., toward a more organically and consciously related entity as Human Earth. Toward the proliferation and enhancement, in all ways, of Life.

Or that change can be backward, reactionary, deathly, as the one we live in here. The gains from the democratic struggles of the sixties rolling back down Sisyphus mountain, as the US loses its national sovereignty and is ruled now more directly by an imperialist ruling class, an international network of capital.

Poetry is an expression of Human Society, an aspect of its living description. And like society itself, the huge living culture is related and ordered (by whatever) lives. Art is “an ideological expression of society,” says Mao at Yenan. “Where Do Ideas Come From?” asks Mao. From “Social Life.” Our real objective lives as well as the psychological reflection, clear or “through a glass darkly,” of those lives.

So in the arts, the culture, the society, there are classes, histories, experiences, values, assumptions, ways of rationalization, of class perception. “All ideas are stamped with class,” says Marx. “For whom do you write?” Mao says at Yenan. What do you celebrate, what do you attack? What do you think beautiful, what ugly? Art expresses this, all art, even our own!

In society there are classes, groups formed by the socioeconomic development of society and our place in it. Groups of people formed by their relationship to the production process, how material life goes on. Do we own these factories, television stations, &c or work for them? Are we the purchasers of labor or the labor which is purchased? What is our place in the social organization of labor? Do we give orders or take them? What is the size of the social product (salary) and how do we get it?

For instance, most of us here are petty bourgeois by education and socialization, the vast majority of people can only sell the muscles in their arms.

A tradition is a historical social process in which certain recurring themes, motifs, forms, philosophies, institutions present a continuous tale of their social presence and impact. There is in any nation, two cultures, Lenin says, likewise in the US there is the culture of the oppressed and the culture of the oppressors. So there is, as well, a tradition of the oppressed and a tradition of the oppressors. In the US, a minority of the oppressed are often utilized to shape the look, the approach, the themes, and message and psychosocial biases and presumptions on the majority of the oppressed, by adopting the forms of the oppressed. To look poor, for instance the jeans with the holes torn into them, which cost more money. Or Gangsta Rap. This is bourgeois commercial culture. Which takes the popular, as in rap, perverts the recurring themes of democracy, resistance, struggle, oppression and transforms them into a glorification of lumpen criminal thuggishness. Extolling gangsterism not revolution.

In the arts and cultural expressions there is a sector enriched by the US rulers, while the most democratic expressive and objective reflections of society are quickly covered, attacked, dismissed, while the art which expresses and confirms and legitimates the rule of capital, oppression, exploitation, imperialism, anti-democratic social relations, will be well paid and ubiquitously in evidence and celebrated, given prizes, declaring the supremacy of them as person, artifact, tradition (and white supremacy) in whatever pose.

If we are consciously part of the tradition of the oppressed, the culture of the people, we know, as Cabral said, "the culture of the people is the repository of resistance." And the culture and the

traditions of the people are those of the oppressed and this culture, in its art and statement and act, *Resists*. Its forms and themes and focus, fundamentally (as the measure of consciousness is irritability) resist. For one thing, it resists being swallowed by the tradition, forms, values, of the oppressor. Which today, to sum up the tradition of slavery, colonization, national oppression, capitalism, the anti-democratic essence revealed as women's oppression, the oppression of homosexuals, the non-representative, electoral system, all these can be summed up as imperialism, the international rule by the network and institutions of the owners of money.

We live in the sick Rome of the last part of the twentieth century, where the problem is still, as Du Bois said, the "Color Line," as the division of the world into a small group of imperialist oppressors and the majority of the world as oppressed nations. Where we are, we are witnessing this system go crazy and die, killing many of us as it goes, many of us irrational and self-deluded as it is.

For the majority of the people, social transformation is basic to human life. What exists, this society, as a material, social, economic entity and its tradition and explanations, philosophy and psycho-social delusion, must be destroyed. The traditions of those consciously working for the overthrow of the oppressor society and its traditions are democratic, cooperative, collective, socialist. We work for this current society's destruction and the creation of a Peoples' Democratic society ruled by the majority of working people in alliance with the farmers, oppressed nationalities, and the democratic bourgeois and petty bourgeois. This is the struggle for revolutionary democracy, which leads to the self-determination of the majority of working people and socialism, i.e., from each according to their ability, to each according to their work. Because it is only here that we begin to face the frontier of an ultimately classless society.

The cultural, artistic, literary, philosophical traditions that dominate US imperialist society are confirmed as evil by the lies and bloody violence necessary for their maintenance. Such a tradition is oppressive, whether it's expressed as a socioeconomic system or poem. Since the revolutionary democratic upsurge of the 1960s, the rulers have mounted a counterattack for the advance of the neofascist corporate state, worldwide imperialism is mouthing as a



“New World Order.” From the pitiful cultural *Mein Kampfs* of the Blooms, Helms, Schlesingers, Crouches, to the constant stream of revisionist distortions of history and society. The popular culture of the people includes the poetry of the revolutionaries of all nationalities, historically and contemporarily, in the traditions of resistance, unity, and struggle.

The culture celebrated by the universities, is in the main, bourgeois, feudalist, slave owning, anti-democratic. The Eurocentric canon of white supremacy, the racial beatification of minority rule. Metaphysics. Exploitation and pain. Its highest emotional expression is tragedy. The commercial culture of the rulers is violent, exploitative, metaphysical, based on money and anti-democracy. It is no coincidence that of the most academically celebrated US poets and writers, Pound was a fascist; Eliot, an anti-Semitic, neo-royalist Anglican. Henry James, Europhilic; Hawthorne, pro-slavery; Poe fascinated with freakishness and death; the petty-bourgeois alienation of Lowell.

That art celebrated by the rulers, whether graphic abstraction or obscure irrelevant verse, is loudly trumpeted. Dissociative deconstruction (not reconstruction, if you dig it) recondite and unrelated to life itself. My own poetic tradition is Fred Douglass, The Sorrow Songs, David Walker, The Shouts and The Hollers, Work Songs, Arwhoolies, Prison House moans, Tubman and Nat Turner. Vesey and Prosser and John Brown and Melville and Harper and Du Bois, Twain, Truth and Linda Brent and Box Brown. Whitman (except for his American Destiny), Brecht, Mayakovsky, Sembene Ousman, Lu Shun, Baldwin, Hansberry, Margaret Walker, Mao, Ho, Guillen, Lorca, Roque Dalton, Otto Rene Castillo, Henry Dumas, Larry Neal, Neruda, Louis Armstrong, Babs Gonzales, Dizzy Gillespie, Monk, Ellington, Sassy and Billie, The Ginsberg who proselytized for American speech, the breath phrase and Bop Prosody and the exposure of the Moloch of US imperialism, Sterling Brown, Aimé Césaire, Olson, The Black Church, Stevie Wonder, Smokey Robinson.

The life of the Blues, the music of resisting spirit. Niggers alive and laughing. The victory of the people. Revolutionary democracy, the rule of workers, in alliance with the farmers and democratic forces.

It is the John Coltrane Do Bana Coba Beneme Beneme Douglass Du Bois Sassy Billie Return to the Source tradition of the burning

expressions of Human Desire. Both Form and Content are Weapons of Self-Consciousness and Revolution.

With what we declared by the time of the 60s Black Arts Movement. An Art that is Afro-American (i.e., democratic) Mass-Oriented and Revolutionary. This tradition is the inspiration and method by which we revolutionaries approach Social Transformation by the power of our form and content, their unity and the intensity of struggle. But we must create a new superstructure from those traditions. One controlled by the workers and farmers and democratic middle classes. An international network of institutions and organizations by which our entire revolutionary tradition can wage righteous war on the criminal rulers and their corrupt oppressive rule. For it is this wailing, this defiance, this resistance, this joy in the overwhelming of evil by good, that is at the base of our poetic traditions, our history, our continuing lives.

THIS TALK WAS GIVEN AT RUTGERS UNIVERSITY IN 1997

KESTON SUTHERLAND

HOT WHITE ANDY

Published in 53:1

*For Us*

*“Que l’on soit difficile et que l’on choisisse au sein de l’abondance...  
nothing could be simpler.”*

—de Sade

Love deeply grounded, hardly is dissembled.

—Marlowe

• A

Lavrov and the Stock Wizard levitate over to  
the blackened dogmatic catwalk and you eat them. Now swap  
*buy* for *eat*, then *fuck* for *buy*, then *ruminare* for *fuck*,  
phlegmophrenic, want to go to the windfarm,  
*Your* • kids menu lips swinging in the Cathex-Wizz monoplex;  
*Your* • face lifting triple its age in Wuhan die-cut peel lids;  
ng pick *Your* out the reregulated loner PAT to to screw white  
chocolate to the bone. The tension in an unsprung  
r trap co

→ The tension in an unsprung trap.  
ck QUANT unpruned wing: sdeigne of JOCK  
of how I together grateful anyway I was  
Its sacked glass, *Punto*

→ What is

be done on the sly is manic gargling, *to*  
to blacken the air in hot manic recitative from a storm throat,  
WLa-15 types *to* Tungsten electrodes Aaron Zhong,  
feazing that throat into fire / under its  
hot life the rope light thrashes in its suds, [is] *Your* chichi news noose  
/ Dr. Unicef Cheng budget slasher movie hype on *Late Review*  
I keep dreaming about you every single night last  
night I you making love Stan, I didn't know him then  
it hurts, and *I* disappear but the nights stick.  
Abner Jon Louima Burge Cheng.

→ Ab... *etc.*

I am adaptable for Binzel and Lincoln and Panasonic  
my swan neck my shielded arc, my gap of hot fire  
Lavrov sidesteps in the long arabesque of equivalence. What is  
being this lids clampdown, being this cheek slant  
onto something, being this duck breast implant  
but what is there

*to* eat in a specific fang,  
defecation being otherwise a welding helmet,  
being a gas lens,  
being this hot skit spilt on glass  
eat all of me like a dispassionately incinerated fish cheek,

I want being phonic into your intestine, to cry  
into my own blistered eyes on the inside of your stomach,  
not dead as the sea but cracking; disjunctive part  
lives will then cancel the asymmetry of self-inclusion,  
each of them will have the whole of love in it.  
You witness protection flourish as autonomy, CPA Order  
Number 22, Camp Bermel, hot white Vietnamization et. al.  
Things change. Outside, people are different.  
*Lavrov* becomes fraudulent. He and Johnson  
Lee no fuck you. Then everyone necks the gouache to  
dream her own acid scavengers, dream his own blood

geyser knotted to cream tied out  
horizontally as a tripwire between foot-spas.

WANT HOT ANDY CHENG?

Want the enormous tragedy of the dream?

Last night I

of you very hard and

real I have put my fingers

on you and your fa

ce if you were

here Russ Cheng

I mocking the crap Peisistratidai at reflector Ningbo,  
into dead right crunch up your debit *virtù* Baode,  
we present a fist with the power of law. Poetic sound  
bites down hard into the fire blanket.

The enormous blackened air strives on toward production  
of the zirconiati stable arc, the price war in the mouth  
of:

- a stupid inflatable thing “like to a bear.”  
(*pw* symbolised by 3 gummy ribs: check <http://lion.chadwyck.com/>)
- Andrew Cheng  
(*pw* is the passion of the non-identical in metre)

Do not leave me for Stan whom you make love with.  
Each time they manage to levitate back what happens is you  
lose a life Hyundai and make the art screen go black.

Beyond all this the city glows in natural repose,  
listening to *Winds of Change* or *Kindertotenlieder*.

In an empty window love dead  
to the frame recapitulates its stare, you push  
it wrong flat lips to the dewy  
basin of tin and hang there, come wrong.

You soften inside when  
it is all ok, mimicry of the subaltern  
love droid voice initiates  
longing beyond its own fallacy this time.

The forward ruse, the bright  
air reflected in water, the calling  
features all defy lazy  
song in astriction and flick away the cumulus.

Hallucinate the glass to  
push your best face through, making up  
with anything  
basin of tin and hang there, not gone.

You harden inside as  
really virtuosic as wrong, avenging it  
the small hurts  
like cutting water, like blind eye curfews.

The tack hammer is infinitely merciful. Spread out in the  
carpark on the seabed your part lives throw frisbees  
about and unblock their genital oblativity; but  
the repulsed foetus still in character fastidiously vomits.

• B

At the committee meeting I spotted a woman in light,  
she drifted past the monitor, I remember that  
they were showing *Bleaching Lenny*.<sup>1</sup> The snow was  
even and undisturbed outside as we fingered  
the tungsten evaporation boats and screamed shit.  
Square snow blackened by manic recitative.  
We turned to see The Enterprises Center relatively  
waft up in the imperial Wuhan sky like fish smoke,  
blinking, glittering in our eyes,  
and he turned to me, Akinsola Akinfemiwa, and said  
the woman you see in light is light itself—  
the light of the world, its copula and armrest,  
she is the fulguration, the axis about whom endless  
birth of heart revolves in magic fire and in fury  
you must make her love you. She is Andrew Cheng,  
imperator of the sled, backstreet *lumen naturalis*,  
acting CEO for the true-way arc of priapic boredom,  
you must be the voice she falls in love to categorically.  
But Akinfemiwa is a fucking idiot.  
We outsourced the snow to the most important hill  
flung it on the dogmatic helipad, we watched  
in livid concentration as the sky, in pursuit  
of the protocols for our overdue Borland Delphi haiku split in  
two like a smitten Ramadi heart, tediously equivocal—  
but was I perhaps wrong to be maddened by Akinfemiwa?  
And how would I know? From the dream?  
The shit we screamed drowned out the next show entirely,  
*Blacking Up Lavrov*, the episode where Johnson

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1/ British reality TV show. Famous comedian Lenny Henry is caught on camera inadvertently bleaching himself, one body-part per week. In the final episode (8) of the series we are given to contemplate a morose Henry, by this point a ghastly supernatural alabaster from head to foot except for his (since episode 7) quasi-autonomous scrotum, engaged in teabagging an unnamed but invidiously Chinese companion of unfathomable gender. Henry fails to detect, through the dark suck-hole in her latex Marsilio Ficino mask, the tiny hidden natatorium of *bleach* fashioned ingeniously out of an aluminium peel-lid from a peach yoghurt pot Henry dared to lick out in the first episode (2).

Lee and the Russians rub hands at the stupidity  
of the gouache drinkers, gnashing on their intestines and fire,  
listening to *Winds of Change* or *Mozart*.

But this is enough to  
be real with, have the basin tilt fat one  
thing less to worry  
shove out of my mind that mimicry.

You soften inside when  
it is working sex to be canny and elegiacal  
fridge stains across  
the linoleum do not stop to wrong you.

Longer than the contact of  
thought with loss the need for either  
you not to fade or  
never forget but then the chalk you eat.

Stick glass in it,  
to insist that the trespass is real too and  
that you can break  
shove out of my mind banning that.

You harden inside as  
if there is nothing in it, all to be endured less  
thinly at work on this  
in nonchalant, feverish cooperation.

Love realistically abandoned by Andrew is not shit,  
thin rain drifts like torn roofing across the palace  
dancefloor and your ravenous white lips snap after it,  
ravenous for white blood, queuing for the other face  
amputation shut in in the flaming Nestlé beach hut.



• A: TURBO

The Zhejiang Hengsen rope light to the tortoise hash—  
hot white passion to the chastushka in livid grout,  
but not just *in* the grout, *really blocked* in it—  
amity to the pyrite on the ironing board, what is  
it for this rapture of transitivity, this equivalence hypodermic,  
the infinity of desire? What do I spread for?  
Long wind straightens unfinishable and equated sea.  
Cracked shut. Disorder is the enemy of progress.  
All distant objects are veiled in a species of bright obscurity:  
omnidirectional scanning allows any Article  
orientation provided the Article jargon faces the scanner.  
As you know, this holds for Article 2 up.

fig. (a)

Article 2  
Article 3  
Article 4  
etc.

Retrogression beyond this is just dada to a brick wall,  
heartsquirt and neoplatonic drivel about the origin.  
Cheng necks: 1. your *Sex on the Bleach*. 2. your *Colostrum Slammer*.  
But the rapture, what is its *negatum*?

It is whispers

Cheng the *Fetischcharakter*, not of commodities but of dialectic  
itself see through the Moscow limo windscreen pyromantic  
oxygen stew transmute watch it slavered by the Beijing  
kosmos onto new eyes superstitious to their frothed core,  
whoring the shut lids they claim merely to underwrite!  
The Zhejiang Hengsen rope light to the tortoise hash.  
You soften inside the *to*, harden in the craniofrontonasal Berkshire disco.  
Disappointed AmEx to the phlogiston, or make up your own (using “to”).

Each is delivered and to each,

transverse adamantine.

Unnecessary examples followed, gunned out from  
the heterodyne *r* trap transhumanced into OTC peroxide argument,  
*cf.* want to go to the windfarm.

Photoreceptors Against Cruelty to Landmines!  
The Made-Whole Johnson Lee to easySaltMeInFire!  
Rapture of Transitivity to Hot-White

Cheng swarms off demosthenizing on the double in double χαρα.

He always does this. You get used to it. It is

what brains means. You know, *brains*:

UNHCR Damascus budget slash, something must be  
done, for starters say no to outrages upon personal dignity,  
dispassionate Postpasséist antipasti. Abner Jon

Rib Bag UHT Honest Doubt Bungalows Cheng Jr.— pizza?

In the dream is it really obscure, that slide-rule inner

in slide-shadow fat cut a rect | iccant from fingers

exit round the car. Show me. Angular Des, you wish you had come  
up with something cutting to say back to Cheng

at the time, like fuck you and your idiotic χαρα Cheng.

The car leaves. Coke into my ass through a funnel.

But I love you despite the boring terrorism

of particularity,

fading like parity,

ground spilled into water

cuff slung hot across the abraded

jar shows particul | me screams

me despite

me I love you, rope l

You are so running out of time. Run impressed rope / trap out of it.

*Run.*

Everywhere to run to, everywhere to hide

the salami (*soppressata*) of the body apolitic,

the ad in grout

says let me out

so do

now do it again

do it

Rojar shows up.

Let it all out.

Rojar.

You want to fuck (*buy, eat* etc.) him

so to begin

*détourn* some Lenin.

ONE STEP FORWARD TWO LIMOS BACK.

Rojar shows up.

“A patriot is not a missile.” *Nihil Obstretics Inc.*

ACA NEWS: POMO DEBT FLOOR RISK (TW).

*Rojarus.*

Rojario climbs to his knees,

divine afflatus of EN 1783,

inwardly he kens himself the deputy April soot shower.

ROJAR:       A quiescence so fucking dead  
                  catchy the sky cracks up its earplugs.

VYSHINSKY: In the past I never locked any of my doors. In fact, I never had a key to my home. In fact, I never had a home. I was never able to have a home, nor a door. Homes, moreover, were in fact not capable of being had, by me or by anyone who was not me. And what was true for homes was doubly true for doors. There were no homes to be had and there were no doors, nor was there any mechanism for locking. In fact, locking was an absurdity. And if locking was an absurdity, locks were twice the absurdity that locking was. Homes then not being capable of being had were if anything still less capable of being locked, which in any case was an absurdity which was in no case so gross an absurdity as in the case of homes. Keys were shit. Now I understand I live in a very secure area, but ever since the attack I find myself making sure all the doors of my house are locked before I go to bed. Or even after I go to bed, when I am most asleep. Every time I do this I wonder, What is it I am afraid of? And sometimes, Am I afraid? I wonder what I am afraid of and I wonder if I am afraid. I am afraid of sticky damage and of invasion. But am I afraid of them? I mean, is it I who am afraid? Could it not be just a part of me? And am I afraid? I am afraid of the Cheng bubble, of Cheng futures, Cheng chic, offshore Chengs, of Cheng penetration, Cheng derivatives, of being wrongly Chenged, of war between the affluence nerds and the bliss nerds, of Cheng laundering, of One Night Chengs, of a chalk Bo Derek, of 7-11, of a miniscule 7-11 concealed in a special Yngwie Malmstein Signature version of Duchamp's *Hidden Noise*, I am afraid of Chinese whispering and orientation talk in the evacuated Houston Death Star, of the rogue Cheng, of laying waste my powers, of shattered glass on kidney, of being bent over, of Cheng's skirt length theory, of parallel Chengs, of the emerging Cheng with an impossible lock in his stomach which my hand reaches for despite me clutching a key made of terrifying crimson shit which erupts in flame and burns my

fingers away to freezing yellow ash, I am afraid of the seven figure Cheng in one state of mind. But is it my life, and is it a homage to bathos? This is the first year I have been asked to wear a name tag at school. Anyone visiting the school has to be temporary in order to enter. Both Tommy and Benjy Cheng warned us when our nation was brand new. They taught us not to let fear change what we could never better believe in.

CHENG: I melt the glass with my forehead.

STAN: Who *is* this prick holding up the placard for Stan.  
Stupidity is the glass ceiling of decathexis.  
Which is frosted in Stan at the personnel door.  
Philosophy is what makes you feel  
whatever you feel truth is.

AKINE: ‘*Widerspruch Sprach Frei: The Oedipol Duplex With One Back.*’  
(draft version)

*Who cares* if the President is blown by his intern,  
so long as he doesn’t macerate the innocents.  
Or vice-versa.

CHENG: l’objectivation infidèle des producteurs...  
la survie augmentant selon ses propres lois...

STAN: Who *is* this.

Frost.

CHENG: In fire and vinegar swings the total beige,  
thinking in a roundabout manner and by means of  
bricolage.

CHENG: We can only try to love ourselves as wholly as possible,  
to love ourselves unconditionally, in bed and in debt,  
forsaking all others.

You know, *thinking: Unangemessenheit*, erection blues.  
So Cheng shows up at the poetry reading,

looking ridiculous like some bleachaholic Ethiopian queen  
 on a crap metabathos trip, scorched scraps of tightrope for sandals,  
 you wouldn't fucking believe it, I mean  
 what kind of ontological AC-DC thinks he has to wear black  
 lipstick to hear Joan Retallack? And *who cares?*  
 There were hot milk flecks on his bougie mouth anyhow,  
 Afghan diamonds in the rapture of the strobes.  
 So anyway we listened to *The Reinvention of Truth*.  
 It was some brilliant adumbration, Romantic propositivism  
 left in the wing for dust, live and postresistible,  
 quiescence a Cage could at best have dreamt of.  
 In fire and vinegar swings the total beige.  
 But Cheng totally ruined it. After necking his Diet  
 Styx and smacking his aflame lips he staggers  
 up and grabs the mike, condemns the whole  
 phalanstery to his performance poetry, some kitsch Ovidian thing  
*Raytheon and Erinys*, bathotelesopic beyond belief,  
 literally, then some thinky retro poetical work in progress  
 full of *you soften* and *you harden*, all that fashionable  
 legless jackbooting of the abstract second person, inevitable  
 prosodic botox as *points de capiton*,

- inevitable hackneyed sex negativity
- inevitable recusant lyrical I
- " muzakological *Coucher du Roy* klaxon solo
- " UNHCR Damascus budget s

etc, until finally this hot white Cheng-scenester  
 But I live in imperative sympathy with you. Put down her  
 drink and ran •  
 to the front. Ran up to Cheng. *Y*  
 You in a red dress in my dream, being the entirely beautiful.  
 The tension in an unsprung trap. I am grateful  
 I am grateful You stay.  
 Russ ran to Cheng, thinking  
 you know she She is for my only life impossible  
 to pull out from  
 my heart, my fingers snap bleach snaps,  
 farce is the third term and is perjury incommensurable with sex.  
 You will not repeat this but will repeat not repeating it

my dream, yrrour of my mazed head,  
The Zhejiang Hengsen. The workers for the Olympics  
from Kent

• ht *eines* gilt dir, Fiasco Chong, Cyclone Shredder Chong  
g Diamonds flaring glasse, | lost to Hebei

• grateful any KENTSOFT / HEBEIHARD  
to *Fin.* to him and said

My bed is that by the window.  
I speak to my bed. Your sheets are alexithymic  
throat fat that rocks flirt under,  
I get to them risking the intensity out of my life.

I am into communicating this,  
you are this right and dead in the ear  
that there is a deeper peace crackling under,  
and right in the head that spit love out.

My bed is that by the ceiling.  
It circles it like you, a lunacy of dust  
that squared with a mouth in total lust  
you had better quickly scream about.

You soften inside when  
eat the same restaurants and be together said Mr. Mustapha  
You harden inside when  
Brushroll\_\_\_Agitator\_Parts\_565.html stop trying contact

I wait to communicate this.  
Take my face to the window doing next what  
now you do. I need  
but will not have you, go instead crassly skeletal.

Again.

My bed is by the window.  
I speak to you. You are impossible to forget,

the face ecstasy screams under,  
lighting the world you damage and repossess.

I am communicating this.  
You undiminishably are what I mean by all  
love defiant under  
the shadow of a dispassionate end in the right head.

I go on without you.  
Impossibility mitigated by the comedic brake,  
on loving to square that  
mitigation with the future hermetic sex square.

You soften inside but can't,  
submission is just the disquiescence of the ecstatic scream.  
You harden inside but at  
last can't, it is simply pointless to live without that light.

I wait to say this.  
I now say it, without you to your face and without  
knowing how stupid is  
my desire for the next big thing: CHINA.

But simply pointless life in sum is the continuum like any other.  
Lavrov and the Stock Wizard levitate. Flaring  
glass will wipe your eyes, will learn you self to cherish,  
in fact but you are rightly tender always. Really you  
are whatever follows, whatever loss unspared. Pointed hints  
of the Industrial Zone are collaged at risk of  
your lips bricking hot wrong into the soda gap, livid white fire  
pipes up about my teeth and guts and open door,  
its hot shielded arc red with dilemma. Your tenses are  
the wanting of desire  
your tenses are the wanting of desire  
[later: the *wanton*, then *won ton* of desire]  
dysphagic rollmop Kebton Akinfemiwa fuck at last can't their  
violent snow  
dying to turn yellow

in warm light / next wave of A&E closures  
living to turn blue  
in the hot white blur of living screwed to  
fat throat recto  
an army without culture is a fucking dull-witted army  
correction  
an army without culture is fucking a dull-witted army  
rose-tint auroral fistfuck

light points your face at the news. The flaring glass is visualised,  
and at last the phantasmatic oesophagus is fed out through it: shatter  
me shatter me screams the ski lift at

soap the equated sea dream up the scam  
live up the dream  
how like you

this finale to the whole Chang question the whole problematic  
congelation of hot genitals wrapped in the *Houston Chronicle*  
to crack its metaphysic ad banner. In white out  
your tenses are the wanton of desire, gazing through the  
Xi'an YMCA window at The imitation Gap lit up scampi-eyed  
desire krush ex necromat it lives my own way,  
soft hard soft hard soft, skewered by Metulla and Kfar Kila,  
and other names besides, names to know and do.

I accumulate you: sky crated in Binzel and 'Change, crated in illumination,  
I accumulate you: hot sky deserted by Abner and tax phosphor.  
The superpower to come is love itself. Articles 2  
up and the Antepasséist 0. But since this is my only life  
I accumulate you Andrew Lumocolor, not fit for waiting  
away uptight in fire shopped to spit, but a real man  
accumulating men, desire and intensity until I die.



GARIELLE LUTZ

## The Driving Dress

Published in 55:2

Before I could fit into the few clothes my second ex-wife had left behind (a couple of filmy summer dresses and a responsible, unrevealing running ensemble), I had to drop a good bit of weight, twenty pounds or thereabouts, even though I was already on the slim side for a man of my unvague fifty years and bone-aching frame. I knocked off the weight by eating the sorts of things she had eaten and in much the same niggled portions, as best I could remember, and all of this food was innovatively meatless and noodled over, not agreeable to me at all. I ate it at room temperature on the kitchen floor, more often than not spooning it out of the marbled glass bowl of a ceiling lamp I had never returned to its rightful place above me after substituting a meeker-wattled bulb. (My apartment had no tables, no chairs, just a stranded-looking, sheetless cot and, beyond it, stack after stack of the folded towels—dish towels, tea towels, hand towels—this ex-wife had bought for the undampened life she had imagined for us.) The food never became intelligible to my taste, and I soon enough was always going hungry, always feeling dwindled and funny in the head. People at work, mostly foes, inquired whether everything was all right, and I always said yes, in a swooning way, thinking that they had to be thinking of some bigger picture in which I barely figured, or else were asking only so that I would ask something as payback. The fact is that I have never played all that large a part in my life, but I know a lot about what goes on ever so tepidly in other people's circumstances, so I was always ready with questions, even if it was only, "And your name would be?"

Divorce, I kept forgetting, is not the opposite of marriage; it's the opposite of wedding. What comes after divorce isn't more and more of the divorce. What came after, in my case, was simply volumed time, time in solid form, big blocks of it to be pushed aside if I ever felt up to it, though more often than not I arranged the blocks about me until I had built something that should have been some sort of stronghold

but in fact was just another apartment within the apartment in which I was already staying away from mirrors, shaving by approximation, bathing in overbubbled water that kept my body out of sight.

§

We had been married on a Tuesday, but it didn't work out that our anniversary would have always landed on a Tuesday. (Calendars would not do us that one favor.) The minister who did the deed had the air of a man who had nipped many a better thing in the bud. This was in a rinsing rain of early July, and the only music came from a music box he had brought out from his glove compartment. It played one of those melodies that referred you right away to other melodies beyond itself, so there wasn't much you could do if you refused to play a guessing game. The minister tried to draw us out a little, and seemed tickled that this wife-to-be was the baby of the family. "The one you're from or the one you're beginning?" he said. His lifetime must have been a lifetime of radiances written off, and he carried his holy trappings in a tackle box. To this day, I maintain that the ceremony hit hard but was a lot lonelier than it needed to be.

The marriage was a clean enough one in the sense of no missed periods or abortions. Neither of us crammed much of anything at all into the other darling. We had ants in the place we were renting, and the directions to the ant killer we bought said not to kill them outright and instead let them go on feeling as if they were getting away with something. Then, a week or so later, we were to set out on the floor a couple of little plastic disks whose refreshments within would be carried back to the kingdom and shared holocaustically. But we had moved our things out before the end of ant season anyway. We were in a rush to be shown something of ourselves against other backdrops and falloffs in uncushioning city settings.

We lasted through just two places after that—first the walk-up, which was another sublet with another idealized bed in which we were two bumps on a log, and then the one where we're in a picture holding on to some believing, sandy-haired person who delivered birthday balloons to us by mistake, though I have never figured out who would have been around who would have had a camera.

Loved or wanted, probably not, but I'd been chosen, I don't doubt, or at the very least I had felt targeted somehow. The whole thing—flirtation behind others' backs, courtship, engagement, marriage, separation, curtailment, divorce—had lasted a little less than a year.

We had wasted no time on accuracy of feeling or any bettering ebulliences in bed.

The wedding presents I sent back delayedly and by the cheapest of mail. The givers had been mostly favorites of my ex-wife's, a cautioned circle of self-bewildering men and an armful's worth of women who didn't believe in spending any time on themselves.

A friendship ring there was, and lots of those stringy, braidy, beadwork friendship bracelets so very burdensome that year, and rubber stamps that spelled out her first name in cavorting characters, and sweaters with her name or her initials embroidered many times over, and silvery cylinders abrim with monogrammed handkerchiefs (those twiny, outlasting triplet initials of hers once more, never adding up to a word even anagrammatically), and a good half-dozen or so handwrought books of calligraphied poems (with stapled index cards for covers) dedicated to her all but fatally. The poems were mostly list poems, and they listed, again and again, the overlong fingers, the hair that mired itself unfinely on the forearms, the face that reported little of the moods rocking within.

With each gift sent back, I wrote a different note on differently deckled notepaper but always to the effect that there were people bluntly evident to themselves in even their queerest of dreams, and there were people like us, who had to keep feeling ourselves out, looking for hints in all we had done, even when all we had done was discover that others had liked having us around only because our presence deepened their sense of having a place all to themselves.

So I kept to the diet, let my body ebb vengefully, and the day came that I could insinuate myself at last into the dresses my ex-wife had thrown on for meals, for company, for evenings of witticism and the bullying musics she backlogged on cassette. I stuck to the sleeveless thing, the one she had called her "driving dress," because she had once worn it while we took a long, trashy cruise through some woodlands

beyond the cooling human ensuings of the county. But there wasn't much I could do in it but sit around on the floor of the apartment, though I eventually formed a habit of calling people—relations, affiliates, usually just an aunt on my mother's side who had lived all of her grown life with a possessive neighbor lady whose notion of herself as an innocent had gone too long unguarded. This aunt would ask how I was holding up, and I always got around to lying. I lied with the scaly understanding that by lying, I was just doing what my ex-wife would have done, because, to her, the truth had only always been something waiting to be ousted from the facts and then shown the door so that the facts could reassemble themselves more creationally around something else, and the facts in this case were only that I had become a man who one day came forward and fled himself.

JOHN ASHBERY

SLEEPER WEDDING

Published in 52:2/3/4

The bells smoking beside me,  
the salad of Nevada  
everywhere ankle deep,  
my thirst for everything overtakes me.  
Why am I with this sandwich  
in open country?

Why do the dogs make merry on the shore?  
The Celebes celebs attend  
to what is right  
and gooey.

I even brushed 'em.

The blue jays wanted to build a think tank  
three thousand feet in diameter,  
thirty stories below the earth or above it.  
The king told me I was a master  
who needed to study, but  
a master all the same.  
My answer was who needs kings.

And on that note  
maybe we could have it a little warmer in here.

ED ROBERSON

## PUTTING LYRIC TO "ALL BLUES"

Published in 59:4 & 60:1

1

to Miles's  
notes

Oscar took the sizes  
of the tones

of blues  
and called up the huge

sea the sky  
to the music

2

sea have been  
    in so  
        many a line  
sea  
    have

but have it been Miles's

blues line

    is what I'm saying you  
should pay attention to  
as some one who watches that line

of horizon from Asbury Park, New Jersey or

from San Luis  
Obispo    now whose  
    blue is that?

poured into a word  
to black music

3

I thought of the mayan hieroglyphs  
    as the names of time,

        so the temples,  
as stoned rather than our sprayed,  
    graffitied

        with a gingerbread of cosmos,  
racing past while  
    facing the eastern sea's

line  
to interpret  
the simple point of the rising sun.

How could they  
have got the tool into the  
wall of any station

of passage  
as deep as name  
of stop ...

Moment  
doesn't mosaic  
that evenly anymore.

It was their sea  
it was their sky  
their blue, it was  
their time.

And putting the lyric to song,  
putting the forms of life to space and time

on time until  
the temples were boarded  
by bullets as they pulled into that station  
where philip and isabella  
hear the dying mysteriously  
cry out  
in the pharaonic westering of spanish



ADITI MACHADO

CONCERNING MATTERS CULINARY

Published in 63:3/4

1. So that  
everything appears  
in infinitest clarity  
And that my taste  
is subject

2. For this and all  
the wild onions  
the terrible excursions  
simplify

3. The cold inn  
the dressing warms  
And the scallions that wither  
in my arms

4. Portly grapes  
This aside

5. Always the vinaigrettes mediate

6. The tuna seared  
a bit uneven sits  
cadmium in fine  
sheets of guava

7. A leaf of curry  
A scent of lime  
evades detection

8. Derelict  
nol kohl ribbons on a  
shallow plate  
Brief interludes  
of tender coconut  
round out the salad  
Salted juniper  
berries eye the mild  
white peaks having  
into a valley  
dropped  
from tremors

9. Tender scent of lime

10. Was this not  
meditative

11. Such lips peeling  
back the elements

And the scallions that  
wither in my arms

12. So that  
I measure this  
adventure

13. So that  
I ferment

14. Apples sicken

15. In one place the fig  
rolls over  
and I stem the tide

16. And because basil  
does not yield to flesh  
horses take to streets  
The bright burns on this  
lettuce recall  
someone herbaceous  
someone severed

17.     So memory

18.     So bated  
the soliloquy  
Burnt buccal clam

19.     Two elements  
The trifling beef set  
upon a cauliflower purée  
The ineffable curry leaf  
infusing it refuses  
this appropriation  
terrific

20.     And so  
I thought  
I was witness

to something within me  
when the platter arrived  
with its fish and  
crab and tamarind  
flowers dripping juices  
oceanic

21. Arrived  
set in curd  
a candied gooseberry

22. Arrived  
in a gel  
the glossed eyes  
of a fish

23. Arrived  
the peculiar feeling  
my thoughts were infusing  
the food and not  
the other way around

24. Was this  
not meditative

25. That I churned  
and put the cat away

26. That I savored  
every bite and never  
spat nothing out  
though there were at times  
items too crude  
upon the palate and several  
monotone or burnt

27. And scallions  
wither in my arms

28. Were those not  
my lips saccharine  
left dumb to yours  
o peach mouth  
in which I  
macerate

29. I'm full of vice  
The erstwhile pig crackles

30. What sort of corridor  
into the soul is  
a knife to the belly

31. I go crazy for lack of  
precise instruments

32. Interludes of lime

33. Bitter beet paint  
    Beat face of animal  
    Plums underwent this

34. There is death folded  
    into my mousse today

35. But do, yes,  
induct the olive  
into yourself  
And keep plump  
every berry, currant,  
pickle slaw, and lush  
your advances  
I'll be my own still fruit

36. Left alone with my pudding impossible  
sweetmeats prolong  
the moment

37. Seasoned the wine  
Mulled the paradox  
Now perplexed solutions  
trickle into my cup

38. Wuthering arms

39. Bread erupts  
in this yeasty sun-  
choked domesticity  
I'm frittering in  
Happens by sour design

40. So that I forget  
to preserve the citrus  
mushrooms grow  
from the pear's welt



41. Life without scallions  
A saga

42. A leaf of banana  
How displaced  
I consider its ridges

43. So that  
confusion is primordial  
Vinaigrettes

44. It is not I find I am  
saying  
that I don't love you  
but these rabbit brains  
are so delicately  
floating, islands,  
on this milk of goat  
the terrible pastoral  
garnish buckles under  
I've lived for this  
and you have not  
Let's part

Adscriptio:

*So that  
I do not obsess*

*So that I do not  
obsess over the fig*

*I place it on a rim  
So that I do not*

*forget the fig*

*I move it  
It bursts*

*The sap of figs is  
cruel  
The way they are*

*wrapped is cruel*  
*They burst*

*So that I learn*  
*kindness*

*the fig*  
*the fig*

## Afterword

In recent years as this anniversary approached, *Chicago Review* has been featuring reminiscences from editors who worked on the journal in the 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s—editors recounting their formative moments: receiving typescript corrections from the Paris desk of Samuel Beckett; soliciting Reinhold Niebuhr during the Cuban Missile Crisis for his essay “The Nuclear Dilemma”; visiting with a gracious Carolyn Rodgers in her nearby South Side apartment after misspelling her name in a review; drinking Bushmills with Frank Lloyd Wright in the campus building that he designed and that the *CR* staff had helped to save from demolition; and dealing with the fallout from Allen Ginsberg’s dropping his pants at a university reading they hosted, among other signature early episodes with the Beats. One of the things I like about the *Review* is that it chronicles and revisits its own history, its place in Chicago arts, even its entanglements with the institution that alternately indulges and champions it. Though its commitment to literature of other countries and languages and its vitality in North American literary culture are perennial, the *Review* retains a local identity quite often.

I feel I know from these editor-memoir accounts the scent of “old floor wax and musty sweat” in old editorial offices: crammed rooms of rolltop desks or unreconstructed “top-floor ex-bedrooms of a decrepit former private residence” or rundown basement digs “beside the offices of *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*.” But, I don’t. I don’t know Reynolds Club, Lillie or Wilder House—or the Taft House address that has anchored the masthead for years now. I don’t know 935 East 60th Street, and I’ve never been on the staff of *Chicago Review*. I’ve been a contributor only twice.

More than anything, I am its devoted reader, since my first encounter with it around 1998 and then more steadily for the last

fifteen years. More than once, including on my old poetry radio show *Speedway and Swan*, I have remarked that *Chicago Review* is the only literary journal I read cover to cover. It is. I do. I must have said so again when I taught at Iowa in 2017, somewhere in the presence of its eventual poetry editor Kirsten Ihns, who remembered and years later has sent me a box of twenty-two back issues, and asked me, here, to elaborate.

Perhaps the place to start is this. The single best issue of a literary magazine in the century so far, by my lights, is the Winter 2016 *CR* issue, which opens with two special sections: a portfolio of thirty new and unpublished Ed Roberson poems, including in full *MPH: The Motorcycle Poems*, his long-lost 1970 road trip manuscript courting the “roots of lyric” and navigating “all the current road spirits, monsters, and demons that two white guys and a black dude on motorcycles in the 70s would call up from the American dirt,” and a short, smart, three-part dossier on Chicago Modernists, featuring an extraordinary interview with painter Eldzier Cortor, then age ninety-nine, and a study of the split editorial focus (pan-African and hyperlocal) of Hoyt W. Fuller, the impresario of the city’s Black Arts Movement years. Then, as has become customary, the rest of the journal pours over that riverbed: a selection from *Camptown* by C. S. Giscombe, a lengthy excerpt from Stacy Szymaszek’s *A Year from Today*, lean lyric poems by Nate Klug, an essay on the Romanian poet Ana Blandiana by Charles Altieri, and an Aditi Machado review of Etel Adnan—before concluding with “in memoriam” essays: Jennifer Moxley’s busy, anecdotal one on Stephen Rodefer and Fanny Howe’s annotative miniature on C. D. Wright, as particular and delicate as a deep sigh can be. How many issues of literary magazines can you say have brought you to tears more than once?

I’m likely no more sensitive than you to the fragility of an archive in which it turns out there has been a key that opens anew a poet’s fifty-year body of work, or to eulogies for stridently independent poets who couldn’t be kept or classified, or to the sweep of history in a sudden flash of recollection: Cortor’s, of the dancer Katherine Dunham staying at “Pauline’s Bath,” as he and other artists teaching in pre-Duvalier Haiti called the former personal spa of Pauline Bonaparte, Napoleon’s wild-child sister in exile. I think my emotion, here as in

other issues, was accumulative, feeling more and more favored by the unlikely mix of writers I love (Giscombe, Moxley, Roberson, Howe, Rodefer, Klug), or savoring how a common reference alights across three hundred pages (in this issue, the figure of Bigger Thomas in a Roberson poem and in Cortor's speculation that the fugitive's peering into a studio apartment where a family sleeps on a single mattress became the vantage of his own 1948 painting *The Room No. VI*). In the end, I find it is possible to be overcome by great curatorial care while being moved by the art itself. Running under the poetic account of an interracial bike ride (*three* young men on *two* bikes, by the way) across North America at the end of the 60s is the account that the section editor has given us of the formative manuscript's precarious journey ever since:

As if I seen enough  
I put what I seen between my eyes  
and think the trigger

was my being born,  
as if I been enough  
I put where I'll have been clear cross country

and try to make it  
so the trigger what I'm up against  
is gonna get pulled on it

this trip.

Roberson retained *CR*'s Andrew Peart as editor and collaborator for the book that, at last, last year, has been published, by Verge Books: *MPH and Other Road Poems*. An arrival.

Care is evident even in *CR* issues that "merely" assemble new work by poets, writers, translators, and critics (first-timers intermixed with high rotation authors Tyrone Williams, Tom Raworth, Nathanaël, Andrea Brady, Nathaniel Mackey, Juliana Spahr, Rosa Alcalá, Merrill Gilfillan), though this sort of issue is very much the minority anymore. What makes *CR* stand apart are the special issues, the retrospectives and reconsiderations, the Festschrifts and symposia and dossiers

in which the editors conduct or host original scholarship and conversation that visits at length with a particular writer or movement or region. Before and since Roberson's, there have been memorable features on Barbara Guest, Lisa Robertson, Juan Carlos Flores, (more completely) the Black Arts Movement in Chicago, Rodefer, Mackey, Infrarealism and the Latin American neo-avant-garde, Helen Adam, composer Elliott Carter, and folklorists Alan Lomax and Ernesto de Martino and (of a sort) Charles Olson. Backlist issues on Louis Zukofsky and Edward Dorn sell now for \$75.

In a climate in which most university-based literary journals can afford to publish but one print issue a year and feel they must charge a submission fee or run contests to show a dean they can generate revenue against losses, *Chicago Review* stands nearly alone, really only with *Callaloo*, in regularly producing issues that are also events in literary study. The Lost & Found pamphlet series that Ammiel Alcalay and his students produce at the CUNY Graduate Center is the natural counterpart (bringing to light the underappreciated or unpublished work, correspondence, and ephemera of, for instance, Judy Grahn, Toni Cade Bambara, Ted Joans, Diane di Prima, and Muriel Rukeyser—in her case, a 1932 translation of *A Season in Hell* at age eighteen); but they are exclusively an archival project and do not publish new writing. That *CR* takes on equivalent work as a “little magazine” means it keeps company mostly with defunct, largely independent journals like *Ironwood*, *HOW(ever)*, *Kulchur*, *Field*, *Lillabulero*, and *Vort*. They're all effectively before my time, but the copies of them I have I treasure. There's a 1986 issue of *Ironwood* dedicated entirely to Emily Dickinson and Jack Spicer; the Spicer half is really good, but the Dickinson half (with a portion of what would be Susan Howe's *My Emily Dickinson* and—somehow even better—a deep textual treatment by Beverly Dahlen) is probably the best hundred pages of literary criticism I own. When I myself published a lengthy reconsideration of Guy Davenport, his scions sought me out and sent rebuttals and gifts, which is how I have my only copy of *Vort*, *Vort #9*, from 1976, an industrial-staple-bound typescript labor of love the size of a diner menu, devoted to Davenport and poet Ronald Johnson.

As is evident already, *CR* editors have long known that small press publishing itself is a valuable subject for its pages; in a 2015 issue, Stephanie Anderson's revealing interviews with editors of

transformative journals—Hettie Jones (*Yugen*), Maureen Owen (*Telephone*), and Margaret Randall (*El Corno Emplumado/The Plumed Horn*)—appear a few dozen pages before, and anticipate, a controversial forum the *Review* devoted, eventually, to activists responding to the rapid emergence of revelations of sexual assault and predation in literary communities in the Bay Area and all over. One wants to call “history” the intimidating and louche scene that Jones, “really a very small person,” describes at the Cedar Bar where male writer-editors solicited one another for new work in 1950s New York, and the sexism that “definitely ruled our lives” in Randall’s account of Mexico City in the 1960s; but, Randall’s follow-on remark could just as naturally be found in the forum eighty pages and fifty years later: “In general, because we were all young artists, we proclaimed men and women equal. In practice, of course, it was much more complicated.”

I’m old enough now, this assignment has helped me realize, that literary history means me. It’s hard not to appreciate that the 2006 Lisa Robertson issue (with retrospective essays by Benjamin Friedlander, Joshua Clover, and Jennifer Scappettone) is the product of a particular nexus in contemporary poetics not so near anymore. These writers invested in the postlyric, the posthuman, and zero-degree subjectivity admire in Robertson “her resistance to bringing the form close, her rejection of a personal style.” I’ll admit I never found the “New Sentence” quadrant of Language poetry very engaging, or at least not most practitioners chasing mentions on *Silliman’s Blog* back in the day; but I like precisely what Clover goes on to note in Robertson’s very different projects, book to book: each “has its deep structure,” and, per Robertson, interviewed here, “the problems are different with each project. So I have to invent a way to approach them each time.” In *The Weather*, “what I want to do is infiltrate sincerity—not to dissolve it in skeptical critique, but to lift it from its maudlin imprisonment, return it to the rhetorical play of idiom, of scale, enjoy its identificatory intensities and climates as conditions or modifications that pass over the face. I am a spy.” In “Utopia/” from *Rousseau’s Boat*, you can still hear a bit of this; plus, the intent “to construct a sense of continuous surface” and “to build connections in a way that the completely paratactic approach of ‘the new sentence’ sequence didn’t quite seem to carry.” This, the last stanza of the long poem:



Two o'clock, four o'clock  
What still grows in Utopia's deer-fenced garden?  
Tansy, thistle, foxglove, broom and grasses shoulder high, some bent  
plum trees persevering, the pear tree chandeliering, geodesic  
components rusting in second growth forest.  
This is one part of the history of a girl's mind.  
The unimaginably moist wind changed the scale of the morning.  
Say the mind is not a point of origin, but a skin carrying sensation into  
the midst of objects.  
Now it branches and forks and coalesces.  
In the centre, the fire pit and log seat, a frieze of salal and foxglove, little  
cadmium berries.  
At the periphery of the overgrown clearing, the skeleton of a reading  
chair decaying beneath plastic.

About a decade ago, Ann Lauterbach, at the School of Visual Arts, gave a guest lecture called "The Given and the Chosen," in which she supposes that, especially in a hypermediated world, we return to a work of art or poetry for "a proxy experience" of the artist in close relationship with her materials, her "ways of distinguishing, turns of mind; indeed...the very moments of choice, in the motions of composition." Her word for what a reader gains from this is "traction." That feels right to me, reading Robertson, and reading Robertson reading Robertson, in this sixteen-year-old issue.

Traction is not a bad objective for a print periodical, a periodical foothold, a platform on which, once attained, to rest on the rock of it and take a look around, a look back. I mentioned that book-rate shipment of twenty-two back issues. In one of the oldest, from 1977, it's a pleasure to encounter three Michael Palmer poems that would be in his last Black Sparrow book, apparently developing what becomes signature in the North Point books that follow and that formed so much of the given ground when my generation started out: poems in multiples, lines of direct lexical repetition that empty as much as they emphasize, and concentration on linguistic shifters ("This is the door / and this the word for door"). In the newest, from 2020, which I didn't yet have, there is an essay, "My Father's Only Son," by Dawn Lundy Martin, that may mark a similar turning point for an equally influential poet, who expands her practice (and, I hope,

*Chicago Review*'s) to offer life writing, searing and extrapolative, about gender nonconformity, the guilt of having had her father's favor, and the conditions of violence in her childhood home.

The house held a fissure from which little spikes of violence could rise up, piercing any otherwise placid scene. It could have been something to do with the architecture of the house itself...The dining room was separated from the kitchen and the living room by two doors, and the kitchen was separated from the dining room and living room by two doors. It was enclosed, its own separate place, where whoever was inside doing the kitchen work was usually alone. Instead of a gathering space, like in the images of black family sociality that permeate our desires and our narratives, this space and its appliances made the kitchen a work space only, filled with machines that enabled duty.

But all the doors in the house were nearly always open. This made any chase a good one. If you were running from someone who wanted to do you harm, you could run through the rooms in a circle, closing and opening doors in order to either block your pursuer or escape into the other rooms. Further, there were two sets of stairs: one leading to the basement and one leading to the three bedrooms and the bathroom upstairs. Stairs, obviously, motivate punishment in the form of a shove or a struggle to throw another person down. The location for the most pronounced violence, of course, is the basement, perhaps because it's underground and attackers, though we might think of them as insane, are not insane.

I have suggested the seeming sorcery of an issue designed so that a trope or image returns via a different author, carrying forward the charge, revealing hidden circuitry. Here that magic is a disquieting one; Margaret Ross's poem "Relations" provides an aftershock, beginning with but not limited to flickering reference to Robert Hayden's famous sonnet elegy for his father, with which Lundy Martin also opens her piece.

What I know of love I think  
I learned there. At the center  
of the room, a roofless playhouse  
formed a cubicle around  
my mattress on the carpet.

Day or night the window stayed  
dark gray (it faced the alley) but you  
could tell what time it was by who  
was there. Most waking hours  
a woman. I remember wrapping myself  
around her back, the stiff fuzz  
where her hair stopped, where her  
neck began. How when I stepped right  
where the floor became the wall, it pricked my feet  
like sparks of under-fire. I'd press my heels to it  
to have my height marked on the wall in pencil.  
It must have been the carpet staples.

The circuitry of this and each issue of *Chicago Review* has been wired entirely by PhD students, seventy-six classes of them, and in their memoir dispatches we have overheard them reflect on their identities within the University of Chicago, some invited to be part of the “Program for Writers” (when that was a thing) or enrolled in the Great Books program (presumably in the Allan Bloom era) or “inexplicably”—as poets and fiction writers—enrolled in the literature program that, by their accounts, had formed a “culture forever doubtful that a graduate student could write other than critically.” They speak of their attachments as students to Paul Carroll or John Logan or Robert von Hallberg, as surely recent and current editors came to UChicago to work with W. J. T. Mitchell, C. Riley Snorton, Srikanth Reddy, and the late Lauren Berlant. But in every issue, their independence is what has mattered, what has made *CR* fundamentally an indispensable cross section of postwar literary culture, one which includes the writers, translators, and scholars that they themselves became. A shortlist includes George Starbuck, David Lionel Smith, Keith Tuma, Angela Sorby, Lynn Keller, Elizabeth Arnold, NPR’s Neda Ulaby, Molly McQuade, Devin Johnston, Eric Elshain, Maureen McLane, Patrick Morrissey, Hannah Brooks-Motl, and Gerónimo Sarmiento Cruz. Thank you to them and the hundreds of others who in the mornings of their careers made—as Ed Roberson writes in “The Heavens,” the final poem of the book that has materialized as *MPH*—a place

that once *nowhere* throwing on a crested robe at turned up,  
beyond  
—as if still damp from a shower—  
pulling on a fog in the mirror  
for us to write our I see yous through,  
to slip ourselves between the folds.

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