

"MANIFESTO OF LUST" BY VALENTINE DE SAINT-POINT.

INVENTION OF THE BRA.

INVENTION OF ECSTASY.

GRAND CENTRAL STATION'S OYSTER BAR.

MASSACHUSETTS LAW PASSED THAT PREVENTS OUT-OF-STATE COUPLES FROM MARRYING IF THEIR MARRIAGES WOULD NOT BE LEGAL IN THEIR HOME STATES.

FREUD.

THE OLYMPIC RINGS. DESIGNED IN 1913 BY BARON PIERRE DE COUBERTIN, THE FIVE RINGS REPRESENT THE FIVE REGIONS OF THE WORLD THAT PARTICIPATED IN THE OLYMPICS: AFRICA, THE AMERICAS, ASIA, EUROPE, AND OCEANIA. WHILE THE INDIVIDUAL RINGS DO NOT SYMBOLIZE ANY SINGLE CONTINENT, THE FIVE COLORS—RED, BLUE, GREEN, YELLOW, AND BLACK—WERE CHOSEN BECAUSE AT LEAST ONE OF THEM IS FOUND ON THE FLAG OF EVERY NATION. THE PLAIN WHITE BACKGROUND IS SYMBOLIC OF PEACE.

VINCE LOMBARDI IS BORN.

PRADA.

CAMEL CIGARETTES.

"A SAGEBRUSH AUTHORESS TAKES A WHIRL IN NEW YORK; LURED FROM CODY, WYOMING, BY A YEARNING TO KNOW THE STYLES, CAROLINE LOCKHART LOOKS US OVER AND PROMPTLY FLEES BACK TO THE PLAINS."

CHAIM SOUTINE EMIGRATES FROM LITHUANIA TO PARIS.

LEO STEIN MOVES OUT.

"THERE COMES A SCREAM IN EVERY BOY'S LIFE IN 1913 WHETHER BY COINCIDENCE OR DESIGN..."

WHITE BUFFALO NICKEL MINTED.

INVENTION OF THE ZIPPER.

JIM THORPE CONTROVERSY: "I HOPE I WILL BE PARTLY EXCUSED BY THE FACT THAT I WAS SIMPLY AN INDIAN SCHOOLBOY AND DID NOT KNOW ALL ABOUT SUCH THINGS. IN FACT, I DID NOT KNOW THAT I WAS DOING WRONG, BECAUSE I WAS DOING WHAT I KNEW SEVERAL OTHER COLLEGE MEN HAD DONE, EXCEPT THAT THEY DID NOT USE THEIR OWN NAMES..." HIS LETTER DID NOT HELP. THE AAU DECIDED TO RETROACTIVELY WITHDRAW THORPE'S AMATEUR STATUS AND ASKED THE IOC TO DO THE SAME. LATER THAT YEAR, THE IOC UNANIMOUSLY DECIDED TO STRIP THORPE OF HIS OLYMPIC TITLES, MEDALS, AND AWARDS AND DECLARED HIM A PROFESSIONAL. WHILE THORPE HAD PLAYED FOR MONEY, HIS DISQUALIFICATION WAS NOT WITHIN THE RULES IN PLACE AT THE TIME.

KING GEORGE I OF GREECE IS ASSASSINATED.

MURIEL RUKEYSER IS BORN.

THE SUN ENJOYS A RARE SPOTLESS MONTH IN JUNE.

ROBERT MILLIKAN'S FAMOUS OIL DROP EXPERIMENT, REPORTED IN AUGUST 1913, ELEGANTLY MEASURED THE FUNDAMENTAL UNIT OF ELECTRIC CHARGE. THE EXPERIMENT, A GREAT IMPROVEMENT OVER PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO MEASURE THE CHARGE OF AN ELECTRON, HAS BEEN CALLED ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL IN PHYSICS HISTORY, BUT IS ALSO THE SOURCE OF ALLEGATIONS OF SCIENTIFIC MISCONDUCT ON MILLIKAN'S PART.

PASSING OF THE SEVENTEENTH AMENDMENT TO THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION, DICTATING THE DIRECT ELECTION OF SENATORS.

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[www.journal1913.org](http://www.journal1913.org)  
[editrice@journal1913.org](mailto:editrice@journal1913.org)  
[www.1913press.org](http://www.1913press.org)  
[1913press@gmail.com](mailto:1913press@gmail.com)

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# FUTURIST MANIFESTO OF LUST

Valentine de Saint-Point

A reply to those dishonest journalists who twist phrases to make the Idea seem ridiculous;

to those women who only think what I have dared to say;

to those for whom Lust is still nothing but a sin;

to all those who in Lust can only see Vice, just as in Pride they see only vanity.

Lust, when viewed without moral preconceptions and as an essential part of life's dynamism, is a force.

Lust is not, any more than pride, a mortal sin for the race that is strong. Lust, like pride, is a virtue that urges one on, a powerful source of energy.

Lust is the expression of a being projected beyond itself. It is the painful joy of wounded flesh, the joyous pain of a flowering. And whatever secrets unite these beings, it is a union of flesh. It is the sensory and sensual synthesis that leads to the greatest liberation of spirit. It is the communion of a particle of humanity with all the sensuality of the earth.

Lust is the quest of the flesh for the unknown, just as Celebration is the spirit's quest for the unknown. Lust is the act of creating, it is Creation.

Flesh creates in the way that the spirit creates. In the eyes of the Universe their creation is equal. One is not superior to the other and creation of the spirit depends on that of the flesh.

We possess body and spirit. To curb one and develop the other shows weakness and is wrong. A strong man must realize his full carnal and spiritual potentiality. The satisfaction of their lust is the conquerors' due. After a battle in which men have died, it is normal for the victors, proven in war, to turn to rape in the conquered land, so that life may be re-created.

When they have fought their battles, soldiers seek sensual pleasures, in which their constantly battling energies can be unwound and renewed. The modern hero, the hero in any field, experiences the same desire and the same pleasure.

The artist, that great universal medium, has the same need. And the exaltation of the initiates of those religions still sufficiently new to contain a tempting element of the unknown, is no more than sensuality diverted spiritually towards a sacred female image.

Art and war are the great manifestations of sensuality; lust is their flower. A people exclusively spiritual or a people exclusively carnal would be condemned to the same decadence—sterility.

Lust excites energy and releases strength. Pitilessly it drove primitive man to victory, for the pride of bearing back a woman the spoils of the defeated. Today it drives the great men of business who run the banks, the press and international trade to increase their wealth by creating centers, harnessing energies and exalting the crowds, to worship and glorify with it the object of their lust. These men, tired but strong, find time for lust, the principal motive force of their action and of the reactions caused by their actions affecting multitudes and worlds.

Even among the new peoples where sensuality has not yet been released or acknowledged, and who are neither primitive brutes nor the sophisticated representatives of the old civilizations, woman is equally the great galvanizing principle to which all is offered. The secret cult that man has for her is only the unconscious drive of a lust as yet barely woken. Amongst these peoples as amongst the peoples of the north, but for different reasons, lust is almost exclusively concerned with procreation. But lust, under whatever aspects it shows itself, whether they are considered normal or abnormal, is always the supreme spur.

The animal life, the life of energy, the life of the spirit, sometimes demand a respite. And effort for effort's sake calls inevitably for effort for pleasure's sake. These efforts are not mutually harmful but complementary, and realize fully the total being.

For heroes, for those who create with the spirit, for dominators of all fields, lust is the magnificent exaltation of their strength. For every being it is a motive to surpass oneself with the simple aim of self-selection, of being noticed, chosen, picked out.

Christian morality alone, following on from pagan morality, was fatally drawn to consider lust as a weakness. Out of the healthy joy which is the flowering of the flesh in all its power it has made something shameful and to be hidden, a vice to

be denied. It has covered it with hypocrisy, and this has made a sin of it.

We must stop despising Desire, this attraction at once delicate and brutal between two bodies, of whatever sex, two bodies that want each other, striving for unity. We must stop despising Desire, disguising it in the pitiful clothes of old and sterile sentimentality.

It is not lust that disunites, dissolves and annihilates. It is rather the mesmerizing complications of sentimentality, artificial jealousies, words that inebriate and deceive, the rhetoric of parting and eternal fidelities, literary nostalgia—all the histrionics of love.

We must get rid of all the ill-omened debris of romanticism, counting daisy petals, moonlight duets, heavy endearments, false hypocritical modesty. When beings are drawn together by a physical attraction, let them—instead of talking only of the fragility of their hearts—dare to express their desires, the inclinations of their bodies, and to anticipate the possibilities of joy and disappointment in their future carnal union.

Physical modesty, which varies according to time and place, has only the ephemeral value of a social virtue.

We must face up to lust in full consciousness. We must make of it what a sophisticated and intelligent being makes of himself and of his life; we must make lust into a work of art. To allege unwariness or bewilderment in order to explain an act of love is hypocrisy, weakness and stupidity.

We should desire a body consciously, like any other thing.

Love at first sight, passion or failure to think, must not prompt us to be constantly giving ourselves, nor to take beings, as we are usually inclined to do so due to our inability to see into the future. We must choose intelligently. Directed by our intuition and will, we should compare the feelings and desires of the two partners and avoid uniting and satisfying any that are unable to complement and exalt each other.

Equally consciously and with the same guiding will, the joys of this coupling should lead to the climax, should develop its full potential, and should permit to flower all the seeds sown by the merging of two bodies. Lust should be made into a work of art, formed like every work of art, both instinctively and consciously.

We must strip lust of all the sentimental veils that disfigure it. These veils were thrown over it out of mere cowardice, because smug sentimentality is so satisfying. Sentimentality is comfortable and therefore demeaning.

In one who is young and healthy, when lust clashes with sentimentality, lust is victorious. Sentiment is a creature of fashion, lust is eternal. Lust triumphs, because it is the joyous exaltation that drives one beyond oneself, the delight in possession and domination, the perpetual victory from which the perpetual battle is born anew, the headiest and surest intoxication of conquest. And as this certain conquest is temporary, it must be constantly won anew.

Lust is a force, in that it refines the spirit by bringing to white heat the excitement of the flesh. The spirit burns bright and clear from a healthy, strong flesh, purified in the embrace. Only the weak and sick sink into the mire and are diminished. And lust is a force in that it kills the weak and exalts the strong, aiding natural selection.

Lust is a force, finally, in that it never leads to the insipidity of the definite and the secure, doled out by soothing sentimentality. Lust is the eternal battle, never finally won. After the fleeting triumph, even during the ephemeral triumph itself, reawakening dissatisfaction spurs a human being, driven by an orgiastic will, to expand and surpass himself.

Lust is for the body what an ideal is for the spirit—the magnificent Chimaera, that one ever clutches at but never captures, and which the young and the avid, intoxicated with the vision, pursue without rest.

Lust is a force.



## LIKING *LIKE* & KRISTIN LUKE

To paraphrase an old puzzler that Edwin Denby once posed about painting, How can a poem appear faster than thought and disappear slower? Kristin Luke's poems are fast and thoughtful and call out for repeated readings. You read again for retrievable pleasure, but part of the pleasure will be how the sense of a poem, like the scale of a thing in actuality, grows in mind.

Luke's poems are stylish in the good sense: primarily, of the moment; then absolutely young, smart, sleek and high-energy; but also knowingly ambitious to make happen what a contemporary poem requires — a touch of chaos here, insinuations of depth along the way, "light going through clear stuff" and/or "upright and terrible, with a trail of foaming fog." Love of words and the feeling that words and their turnings are every bit the matter at hand, such are the driving forces one intuitively behind the work. Call it a world view:

*The field can contain hills if it is not a flat field, and hills exponentially amplify the amount of events going on in a green field. The hills are green too, but they are green plus more and more green and grass. And volume, and topography. They have a direction, they are like rounded arrows pointing towards something above them, and you can guess what that is.*

The diction here is precise, declarative and headlong — all such qualities modified by the sense of the ever-present listener or addressee (here expressed as a sudden "you" at the poem's end). Even if, as Valéry said, a poem is written by someone other than the poet and addressed to someone other than the reader, the intervening agent — first and common reader — is the poet herself, with all the multiplicity that any self is capable of.

But it's the space, sensational and other, a word can occupy that Luke seems especially alert to, and that in turn gives her lines a generous scale:

*Over this rite of passage I claim sovereignty  
So that whole soft peaches are wrenched from their bumpy branches  
And flung in the wake of my footsteps of governance . . .*

Reader, read on.

Kristin Luke

# A CARBUNCLE IN A SHAFT OF LIGHT IN A ROOM

*1913 PRIZE CO-WINNER*

# 10 THINGS I NOTICED ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL

I noticed one blade of grass and then a weed  
and then something falling onto a tiled floor kitchen  
when I went back inside, having forgotten my  
socks, which I noticed.

Then I saw and doubly noticed the sun through  
some kind of pink mist,  
the sun through some kind of pink mist.

Then there were four more remaining things to  
notice so I noticed a photo wedged in the dirt  
and furthermore noticed one more blade of grass  
tantamount to a green building noticed simultaneously  
with my hair because it floated past my retina.

# ODE TO JOKES

trans Harlem hula dance  
toys kicking cans and a tongue  
pushing my head around.  
Rashers of topskin and files of  
triscuits

Beer Corona

one - make a version

two - too much enamel for one model

I got sore and you were sore because  
I said hey dumb buddy and fell down  
It was there, a rock, by the end of  
the sent letter, and the corn  
taste got put on the small stone

and the man said I would like a sheet of pie  
so I can sleep with and taste more than  
just you.

Raisin on the petal of a tulip.  
A post with a plow on it.  
The tram and the dame.  
Low fat stew.  
Troubled, but jumping with vigor.

in tunes abroad we seem to hear a heady  
voluptuous wind, a tinkle with the soul  
of a great DONG.

to jumble this together with a closet  
you vacuumed empty just yesterday, is a  
thing of many overtones  
and, with all his gumption, he bent his knee  
and it started spinning around and around  
like one of those fire crackers.

bursting, but not high fashion

a forked tether leads two heads of two  
dogs everywhere the peg let them.

Be quiet – the class is trying to draw the bright sun with tracing paper.  
Do you see that?

Sandwich fillers with no outside influence.

# UNTITLED

Hello my name is Kristin. I stood on the grassy field, under the sky that was framed by some hills. These hills rolled and resembled castoff woolen coats. I looked up at the clouds mixed in with a few solar systems, and was about to look at the ground but instead I glanced at those mounds in the distance, straightened my back, and took a deep breath of the breeze that tasted of the icy tops of the hills. My neck was not built to swivel in so many directions, and the wind came at me from the cold rolling landscape. I looked down at the grass for thirty seconds, stared for two minutes at the distant green hills, and upon looking at the sky I saw the color blue and a cloud. Then I turned my eyes towards the tender blades of grass down on the ground, and I followed one blade after another until I struck upon the immensity of the somber hills, the color of olives. And at this point the only thing left was to fix my eyeballs straight up into the clouds, the airy sky, a blue atmosphere full of things, of stuff, of objects, and some solar systems. Suddenly my neck went limp and I found my eyes focusing on the carpet of green grass everywhere beneath me. It covered every inch of the ground made of dirt, for about ten square miles, and crawled up the slopes and reached the lonely empty hilltops, the tops of the hills with their frost and blunt pinnacles, like the peaks of lame mountains. There were a few hills. And even though it seems like there is one big purple pink blue thing called a sky or the atmosphere, in it there are ice crystals, the same ones that go in an ice cream cone, and there is ozone, and other stuff, halfway intelligent creatures and dumb objects. Though it hardly compares to a vast field of green and yellow blades of grass. This flat plane is full of insects, bugs, termite homes, bits of garbage, and way more things than a simple sky. The field can contain hills if it is not a flat field, and hills exponentially amplify the amount of events going on in a green field. The hills are green too, but they are green plus more and more green and grass. And volume, and topography. They have a direction, they are like rounded arrows pointing towards something above them, and you can guess what that is.

# PROCLAMATION

Oh the world wide flowers of mustard!  
They will dance and sing forever on my doorstep  
As long as I keep a lit fire under my toes and a small brook babbles round my head

Over this rite of passage I claim sovereignty  
So that whole soft peaches are wrenched from their bumpy branches  
And flung in the wake of my footsteps of governance

Walk high in the lands where there are no cars except  
those whose motors are strong  
Spit with me into the blades of grass, sit down and join me in a fucking picnic

To those who are upset, I give you your last chance for a good long nap  
Before we hit the road with our flip flops, which make terrible smacking sounds  
Like recurring homeruns hit by some such famous American baseball team

Undue adulation, no thank you!  
Just remember me in my prime state, whether that be the time I won second place in a triathlon or when my wrist snapped in a game of handball.

# ASSOCIATION OF BEETHOVEN TO MY RECENT SCULPTURES

yellow arms, bent yellow arms, blue squiggles  
beige worm squiggle some blob  
brown slab leaning, tan slab on shelf in room  
purple beep, high beep low beep  
inventory of blobs – a moderate one. a small one. a crustacean one.  
hardly one. a glossy one.  
A BIG FAT ONE.  
a terrible extrusion, a cylindrical events organizer  
some light marks  
A REAL PICTURE!  
interior tricky systems that you can comprehend  
I put paint on that  
and that and that  
components softly touching each other with reinforcements  
produced by slews of non angles  
and a trampled octagonal seam with attachments  
light going through clear stuff  
dumb stickiness  
which is surrounded by conglomerate secret amendments  
and bulbs and molds  
weathered and dipped and strung along in an order  
with sanctioned friendships and punch lines  
not to mention pink, grain, tongue, circle, jungle green, plug,  
they are taciturn, spooled around a system of mine  
that I broke a while ago  
there are vagrants in here, I send them all on different routes  
unchartered and rid of their previous obligations  
I suspect they will hobble, bounce and bump each other on the way

# POEM TO YOUNG PEOPLE

Contracts and respiration in a room that was so dark  
There is some humor in my thin hair its curl ever so slightly resembles a stand up  
comedian  
Condensed into a few black follicles  
His stool and mic must be my glasses when I wear them writing my essays as my  
language ages and pickles in brine  
Go off to the mess hall, edit this.  
Put a green willow branch within something you would never be able to write.  
Something so graceful, attenuated, musical, it just can't be  
I pick my nose too much  
Pull up my pants too much after going to the bathroom and I love silly words.  
The ones that make me fall off a chair or the john in a full head-on collision  
Where I play tag in my memory and get the concussion I got at ten years old except this  
time its not a boy I smash my head into, it's a word.  
And this time it's very much a man who I don't want to go careening off his bicycle to  
get that same concussion. In London.  
So to move out of the cranial region I will go straight to my abdomen which is full of  
chips and water  
and really lacks something – a hand on it which is not mine, which belongs to an  
unconcussed man  
my hand is full of chip crumbs  
there is a certain, oh I can't think of the word, its not silly enough...  
impending?  
Immediacy?  
benevolence?  
Horse stable?  
Insistency?  
Anyway, let's just say something is going to happen soon and I don't know what  
perhaps one of two options – falling asleep or blundering through the night by writing  
words and licking honey off my fingers  
Thinking about things that happened outside my house like the raindrops falling on the  
outside surface of the window  
And someone draped in plastic plowing through the drops on their bicycle.  
Like the other things that happened in the world. The big big big earth.  
Pounded on by my fingers and the keyboard  
Let's have a breakdown now,  
Unwrap it, de translate, consume and regurgitate and write a check  
Confound and boggle the mind and get sore muscles in your shoulders  
Over-describe like a solemn biologist  
So much that you lead yourself to think a black plastic bag from the liquor store is  
indeed a dark natural rock resting on the carpet  
It is next to a rectangle of technology – a case meant to enclose a dvd  
Into which I place a lot of hopes and dreams coming from the dining table.  
My father sat at this table and talked of science fiction and then he carried it into our  
apartment two years ago.  
After the procession of hundreds of miles beginning at the intersection of Laurel

Canyon and Ventura Boulevard

In a timeless fashion, with rest stops and hamburgers  
and some other tokens of scenic memory  
invariably processed in some way  
but this concedes, rigorously entangles itself,  
into the kilns at school  
into the wines at the openings  
growing plants I stole from all over this city  
growing baby rats to watch an impregnation  
which was only captured in a blurry digital image in which I looked twelve years old.  
Which is something like a dark spot, there was something of a muted procedure  
happening

I think I may have listened to ALL of Beethoven's compositions by the end of this, his  
whole body of work. Does that make me friends with him now?

As lonely as I may have been, can I now really be friends with Beethoven himself?

Would I be embarrassed to let him in to my apartment, at which point I would have  
to reveal some things, like the yellow truck I was supposed to send to my cousin as a  
present but never did and so kept it for myself as a bookend?

Or my bathroom with hair all over it?

Is that a muted procedure?

Or an exemplary performance?

These are whole, self-contained questions for a short, silly poem.

Not to exist tonight, when there are blunt symphonies and Allegros blaring into my ears  
Formatted and insistent, gently, gently...

# ODE TO JUNE, JULY, AND AUGUST

You kind of stole from me, June, July, and August  
fairly ransacked, there were big holes all over  
descending trenches, such as a man's cigarette curling out of a window  
as I pedaled my bike around the English sun

like the dirt which is clawed  
by the hoof of a frothing animal

and the off-license and evening  
news hovering

you three were total and complete and you ended.  
you stopped my ideas

but now I think of a million things:  
limited movement  
articulation of plans as they elude us  
a warm-weathered respite  
my knotted stomach  
a threadbare sack of conversation which is a failed experiment in mending  
and heat and plans and a fake pond  
that drove tiny wedges of peace between my limbs  
but not even one of you three did anything about it!

where are today's thoughts?  
why do I crowd myself in bed?  
how should I attend funerals by phone?  
how do people fuck in times such as you?

you snitched, you bums, you hogs.

lucky for you that no race can be won in a month  
that I do not truly speak to you.  
That everyone still speaks.

you are a compartment  
with only enough room for blank flaccid matter  
I stuff you terrifically full  
so that you turn horrendous and rippling

# A RESPONSE TO CEDAR SIGO

a room offers a space and a sidewalk hole opens, muddy and lush  
down inside some lamb's ear and magnolia bloom  
here I come with my chewing gum  
to stretch around the city of used bricks.  
I will achieve some kind of inward cursory organization  
by thinking of billowing sails

upright and terrible, with a trail of foaming fog

low on the ground is a chair and tough is my response to it  
for its all fairly distance- and object- related  
so there is no real incentive  
to take it out to dinner.

yet there lie more objects underneath the pathways and they are in single file  
the town is thick with them, so blunt and packed-in  
maybe one day I will dig one up and whack a bum in the eye with it  
then waltz down to Da Flora  
so Flora can pour wine on his trembling eyelid

# CURRENT EVENTS IN THE COLD COUNTRY

You can see here that the brush has almost fully engulfed the dwellings. This is due to its extreme perniciousness, which is especially exacerbated in cold weather. It is consequently no wonder that the inhabitants' moods often turn sour, and they are at times driven to dump buckets of snow on their neighbors' rooftops. The top image portrays a ghetto freshly attacked by upset neighbors – the snow appears heavy and thick and coats multitudes of roofs. The image below is a fine example of a thwarted attack – it is clear they have shoveled off at least part of the snow and the calm atmosphere of the streets and buildings indicates life has returned to normal. One is forced to wonder how two residential areas so similar, with such equal levels of brush density, could develop such animosity for each other that they would deem this snow-dumping a worthy and just cause. The prevailing yet unaddressed issue continues to be the brush – its density increases by roughly thirty percent every year, which directly correlates with the increasing cases of attack by snow. Organizations world-wide have sought to develop methods of importing more garden shears, a process which, although lengthy, will ultimately be rewarding.

# DEREQUISITIONS

Door of a house  
Elastic blouse  
Rifling deck  
Egg-headed neck  
Quintupled or not  
Undue or begot  
Each of these I did take  
Supposing one a mistake  
Itchy, flashy, or foul  
Tin jawed or steel jowled  
Into cartons they go  
Overseas I did row  
Not even one box  
Settled down on the docks

# LIKE

like my last farthing transpired onto the wrote word with shunted allowances and to the  
tassel I say give me clout  
like the oregano filter  
like the regional fruit which is  
like something else  
like when your words spill because they are loosened and its no use they are  
    tandem bicycles riding around the strait of Magellan  
like I know where that is and you can hear my words  
like there is someone who I hate and there is trash in the soda water and  
like something without too much feeling 'round and scribbling  
like some like others  
likened to the chase of ocean bathing and wrought iron and the car you just bought and  
    the hair curled over one's brow, on anyone's head with a pasty face  
like when I forced the muffins out of the oven  
like when it might be stopped up by a globular module  
like a phrase too farfetched  
oh I like that like a lover  
like a full white page mounted to some glass and an ineffectual moment  
like an entrusted fool's performance  
like the time I touched a varnished table's grain and it was waxy and adhesive  
like the stuff I sprayed on it. I  
like that moment, without attached meanings  
like the obliterated history of the word purity or  
like a carbuncle in a shaft of light in a room with four stockholders, with stances  
like wooden structures  
like six half blind women

# SONNET

For now inching figure that takes on a piece or even seven strokes.  
Short shooter half halo lithely bounding over the hedges  
vast and broadening, airy, then a sharp pause and suddenly the sentence goes I TOOK  
A WALK.  
I GOT A THING AND THEN THAT WAS OVER THERE.  
Bouncing on the ground that's all.  
Hang on, under here lies one more thing.  
I tell you it is big, rare, astronomical and coveted, and  
it just might have a hedge over which it could have jumped,  
coulda ran around snarling with leaves stuck up its nose, coulda  
roused a factory town from the far reaches of the east.  
And been all exploded velvet with sprinkles and tearing  
rents in toolboxes... A tornado... I ate it.  
On any day, I could have rationalized this.

# SONNET

The beast was in a jam. He ran, yawned, then yonder  
donned the thing which, plainly speaking, ultimately did not unleash much.  
The woman who made it for him jumped up in action, however.  
She was rightly moved, upsetting all her things  
that moved onto the ground and turned into more pieces.  
And so begins the tale, which continues so:  
A thing, a place, a frightened face.  
How horrible are these?  
Ratings, successes gained... Mottos!  
For we all flip, stare, have tires to spare  
and spare them for horror! Aggravated states! Wanderlust!  
Be not unlike our sweet old beast.  
Don't unleash much, don't topple over and break your China  
or slap others in the scary state you're in.

## ON ANDREW ZAWACKI'S *GEORGIA*

A big dark car driving a little too fast through a rural night, this poem keeps up a swoop, a careen unsettled on the edge between the beauty of its sound and the heartbreak of what it's actually saying. And what it's actually saying is *Georgia* again and again with a kind of soft-edged violence that forms the backbeat of both poem and place.

Of both figure and ground. Image and sound. One stands out against the other which is its shroud. Georgia is the night against which a girl hangs out the wash, an incongruous buddha naps in a bowl, and heat lightning metallicizes hills, stark figures edged in an uncomfortably bright light and only glimpsed as we speed by.

As we shake down. A ratchet-ladder of the spring-loaded, timed to accident:

*how close to the bone does it get Georgia*  
*do you pull its pin with a cinch of the jaw*  
*pulver its craw with a flinch of the fist*  
*I hurry here is the wind*

It's a vertical work, which is what leaves us feeling falling, which is the pleasure of the inevitable, the certain victory, after all, of gravity. They say that what's addictive about gambling is not the possibility of winning, but the outrageous relief of the freefall into ruin, to give in to it, to give it back its own. The fuck-you-georgia here lacks anger but not interest. The bystander is bemused, an "I" both in and out of the car, both flooring it to get the hell out and watching it wing on by:

*a façade Georgia*  
*a fusillade*  
*the firing squad and the wall Georgia*  
*a cenotaph*  
*in the aftermath*

There's a real tension here between inside and out, a vertiginous desire to leap into this vibrant disaster, which is Zawacki's way of explaining how America could possibly have gotten into the position and condition it's in.

—Cole Swensen

★

Andrew Zawacki's *Georgia* is a high velocity tour-de-force. It is a constant message of anamorphic power. It bends, laughs, cajoles, bleeds, and pleads to an entire region of sound. He has defiantly written an anthem to his new home, poetry, an ever present subaltern house of the blues and anvils, house of song, of sting and stung, of bling, and of sorrow. This poem's rhythm reaches deep into the eviscerating night. It rocks and rolls on into folk into bluegrass and back into punk. It knocks it out.

—Peter Gizzi

Andrew Zawacki

# GEORGIA

*1913 PRIZE CO-WINNER*

I don't sleep Georgia  
I shoot bullets into the dark  
the blunt mimeographic dark  
the middle dark Georgia  
outside the outside  
whatever a ghost's front tooth is Georgia  
let alone ballistics  
whatever pulls back the hammer Georgia  
coughing up sulfur and strobes of negate  
I wait Georgia  
think Georgia  
the fire is like the snow Georgia  
the snow wipes out a oneway street puts nothing in its place  
snow is not like the snow Georgia  
one is theorem the other will thaw  
night is the neighbor girl  
she hangs her laundry  
she sits on the step  
the leaves on the tree in her yard are like florins  
her sliding door dress in a squall Georgia  
her flowers what is a flower Georgia  
a trace what is trace  
I listen to the noises every last one Georgia  
I love every last noise on the violet fields  
they bicker and click  
the clamors I mean  
blur as if struck with a Lucifer match  
guesswork Georgia

netherlight's joke  
I see smoke it rises it quadrilles Georgia  
tungsten Georgia  
sliver tongued  
the smoke is a little less smoke in the air  
little by little Georgia  
it comes to that  
not even Georgia  
I walk wolfstep into the shadow Georgia  
the nodding orchestral branches  
shellacked as if a fountain turned and forced its gravity turn  
the skuzzy drag queen dawn Georgia  
hours away from hours away  
a motor idles  
reverse in the drive  
tromp-l'œil frisking the shrubbery Georgia  
the high beams taper the porch lamp expires  
I take out the garbage Georgia  
will it rain or snow  
will the weather Georgia  
the winter here is not your winter  
it's pixeled it's *chien et loup* Georgia  
a dum dum blank to the clavicle Georgia  
assassin crouched at the front of the house assassin waiting in back  
I don't give a shit Georgia  
difference itself can differ Georgia  
and everything's different now  
I buried a friend far away Georgia  
in France Georgia  
it wasn't funny Georgia  
we sat at a table I kissed him goodbye he turned around never came back

maybe you already heard it Georgia  
I'm tired of talking about it  
that was then and this is then and not even Georgia not even  
I listen Georgia  
to the racket the clatter  
the clangors clang if you hearken Georgia  
and that noise makes a noise if you  
a peloton of din Georgia  
you have to sonar yourself  
The question of is is it Georgia  
the ranges are thrift store crinoline Georgia  
the stars are of mescal  
casbahs of tin  
flayed what is it to flay something Georgia  
mountains unplugged the moon flipped off  
if music is cleaved from a flower Georgia  
if music cleaves to the flower Georgia  
liveforever and purple clover  
but nothing lives that long Georgia  
or even half that long  
All things that are are unlit Georgia  
black like lapis in a quitted room  
the feedback Georgia  
the anvil's hymnal  
a dial-tone looped in a flop house Georgia  
an explosive rigged in a micro chip  
petals of 0 petals of 1  
rips a hole of a fractal dimension  
shrapnel Georgia  
collateral damage  
call it what you like

Here is the road the outskirts Georgia  
here is a city  
is the same city  
and I don't know this city Georgia  
and I don't know if I want to know  
what is it that anyone knows Georgia  
really Georgia  
in the end Georgia  
Some say your eyes are charcoal Georgia  
some say siren some djinn  
I don't say Georgia  
it isn't for me  
I don't have a bone in my body  
the unquick have a habit of loitering Georgia  
a bad one I willn't say otherwise  
it seems to get them through alright  
don't know what they see in it  
as if they're awake what is wakefulness Georgia  
with the silencer on what is silence Georgia  
someone around here will know Georgia  
somebody ought to know something  
The house next door has gone tattletale gray  
its chimney a jigsaw of mortar and frost  
threadbare nay barren  
crash tested Georgia  
rapunzeling up on a fidgety draft  
the pine straw to flicker and parry  
and the eglantine to wither Georgia  
and snowflakes tatter the shutters Georgia  
like flak from a showdown in Kelvin air  
*"Lattente commence quand il n'y a..."* Georgia

*“...plus rien à attendre, ni même la fin de l’attente”*

that nothing come between us Georgia

but me

and you

and the hollow between

I prune your buds

unbutton my ribs

pot you inside like a bonsai Georgia

buddha napping in tiny shade

buddha at rest with an almsgiving bowl

it’s aliment vs. ailment Georgia

I won’t let you go it alone

you and your poor man’s briar patch

and your ne’er-do-well well well

Heat lightning daubs the collodion hills

and a howling

and how close

how close to the bone does it get Georgia

do you pull its pin with a cinch of the jaw

pulver its craw with a flinch of the fist

I hurry here is the wind

and the cold and soundless decibel

the irises flushed in saffron

in bayonet red

in cymbeline

no clean angle

simulacra Georgia

everything’s dirty and doubled Georgia

I say

you can try to break it it will break you

I say

everything is breakable Georgia  
melody Georgia  
melt water  
a pressure a femur a fever a wife  
syllables virused by syllables Georgia  
the bicycle is  
the memory card is  
the brackish canal where a boat is Georgia  
and the boat and where is it headed Georgia  
the tanzanite dew of your nerve endings  
cuts me keeps me alert  
I unlatch the window  
it sticks Georgia  
sometimes I see past the paint flecks Georgia  
and sometimes the pane is the object I see  
and sometime come a whirring Georgia  
like an alabaster lung Georgia  
a valentine stitched in Kevlar Georgia  
blown in Venetian glass  
it's beautiful Georgia  
that's one word Georgia  
like a landslide  
like a negligée  
carnelian Georgia  
an impasse's path  
the glass in the garden is bulletproof  
but our bodies are not of glass Georgia  
let's bloom Georgia  
this popstand  
this podunk five and dime a dozen  
our brains all over the passenger seat

our underwear on the dash  
desire from the formal idea thereof  
I  
is a shotgun shell Georgia  
imma- and imminent  
the image as such  
your quidditas throws a wrench in the work  
but this engine runs on wrenches Georgia  
anti-freeze and no egress Georgia  
parousia stalled in a parking lot  
the phenomenon's faulty ignition  
you're alasless Georgia  
harassless Georgia  
from your slackass jeans to your Jesus Georgia  
ersatz and aliased  
lacking alack  
sans any essence or pretense of presence  
you're leeward Georgia  
a bejeweled word Georgia  
and fuck you anyway  
vowellewd Georgia  
face card missing a face Georgia  
they're dead Georgia  
I said they were dead  
I didn't say they weren't dancing  
The clouds are low they will tumble down Georgia  
I spread my arms they get tired Georgia  
to catch them Georgia  
from shattering Georgia  
my eyes they get tired I don't shut them Georgia  
it's like this Georgia

unlike this Georgia  
between the bed and the kitchen Georgia  
one plate and another  
one fag and another  
the ashtray the butane lighter Georgia  
an ice cube and its plastic cell  
a pill and the pillow  
whetstone and knife  
one bag of coffee one packet of creamer one orange one slice of bread  
between the door and the hinge Georgia  
the razor blades and the bathtub Georgia  
a forest of goneness a windrow of kindling a forge nail hidden in grass  
I don't cry Georgia  
you know what they say  
whoever the they is who say what they say  
but I was never real Georgia  
but the hell if I know what is  
I'm a scarecrow Georgia  
a voodoo doll  
no for a left leg yes yes for my right it's calamity Georgia  
flammable Georgia  
periplum scribbled all over it  
a torso of origami folds  
crease for an eyelash a Crayola head  
with a watermark Georgia  
80-gram  
you roll it you lick it you drag on it Georgia  
I don't say it ain't kitschy Georgia  
like cotton candy  
like holding hands  
so you've had it up to here huh

there isn't a soul who don't have it to here  
the android floral in cyanine Georgia  
acacia version 2.0  
the horizon a linen of spilled anjou  
of lint and candle wax  
I call Georgia  
my voice shot Georgia  
*parasites sur la ligne* Georgia  
the flowers rattle  
I 'listen the flowers'  
and the I I am is that ruckus Georgia  
it's pretty Georgia  
that's a word comes to mind  
a punkass word  
but a word all the same  
an adjective out of bric-a-brac  
we let it return to its querulous hive  
"a heaven of stones whose / swiftness..." Georgia  
"...made their separate orbits / one, that slackening would fall"  
I call out Georgia  
because that you  
because that you are whatever Georgia  
but it's dint Georgia  
Teflon Georgia  
polycarbonate it opens on impact Georgia  
beryl raised to the second power with the safety off and the trigger rigged  
I don't knock Georgia  
my brass knuckles buffed  
with a rough like liquid oxygen and a pilot light and a fraying fuse  
it's sugar Georgia  
burnt Georgia

pure cane Georgia and maybe baby you're  
nothing more than synecdoche Georgia  
a piece of a shred of a shard of a frag-  
you're blitzkrieg Georgia  
don't 'lady' me Georgia  
I've got theremin lacing the bloodstream George  
and a spinning roulette for a ticker George  
a slug cocked snug in the six-shooter chamber  
a 16.6% chance  
You're a bitch Georgia  
a drill bit Georgia  
by me I mean third-person plural Georgia  
a lake effect Georgia  
all hauntedlike Georgia  
a hangman Georgia  
a hanged man Georgia  
here's a lullaby Georgia  
with geraniums Georgia  
there there Georgia  
no there there Georgia  
and may your dreams be couturier sewn  
in pinafores and dainty furbelow  
It's not the same midnight threnody  
that 3 in the morning laments  
an asthmatic wheeze in the lavender Georgia  
a powwow of bats in the arbor Georgia  
aurora borealis Georgia  
haint blue  
and barleycorn bluish and pollen do powder the sill Georgia  
'n' still Georgia  
"The first snow was a white sand

that made the white rocks seem red”  
hence I wed Georgia  
the roof with the ladder  
lean out to know the distance  
there’s a lot to be learned by leaning Georgia  
I can’t put a number to it  
nothing that matters is numbered Georgia  
if anything can truly be said to  
plaster cast and splint Georgia  
weeds that whisker a cracking quoin  
lachryma Georgia  
the spigot leaking  
laid thee down by the waters and wept  
the driveway tailored in crepe Georgia  
I swept it of leaves the leaves didn’t stay  
I swept it of bluster the gust did not stay  
my scarce understanding of oak didn’t stay  
nor knowledge of climate  
nor knowledge of season  
dampness didn’t  
and dryness didn’t  
and I didn’t stay there myself Georgia  
any old thing can unsolder a moment  
nearly everything does  
erosion is a simple name for it Georgia  
but it hides other themes that are hard  
like a noun it takes the place of a thing  
but doesn’t kill it off  
it shackles the signified to a stump  
then chucks the log in the crick  
a façade Georgia

a fusillade  
the firing squad and the wall Georgia  
a cenotaph  
in the aftermath  
of petty Georgia  
your petticoat slipping  
pussy- and pistolwhipped son of a Georgia  
if I ever  
I swear if I  
if you ever so much as hint at Georgia  
I don't know what I'd fixin' to fix you  
know not what I would do  
but no one's ever sure what they're capable of  
so I try Georgia  
I try to remit  
this dragnet that dredges the ends of an earth  
what is it Georgia  
is it Georgia  
or is it not  
I can't figure it Georgia  
'twon't stay in focus  
it doesn't possess a center or an outside  
or an in  
I'd say  
like skipping a stone and the shale doesn't sink  
or taming a tidal wave with a riding crop  
or swimming inside a prism Georgia  
its J/psi particles and xanadus of jade  
bladed among the tall vitrines of a gilt arcade in a country Georgia  
fenestral Georgia  
and fractured Georgia

and can't tell where your skin leaves off and the color begins to begin Georgia  
like looking for midday at 2 of the  
clock when your 5 o'clock  
shadow is early  
but truth is it isn't like anything Georgia  
not like any anything  
not even currents are so much surrounded  
they can't be split one from the water  
you can call it a fact of life if you like  
but it's nothing to do with facticity Georgia  
let alone with a life Georgia  
let alone with someone else's life  
I don't know Georgia  
don't know what I don't  
sleet the drizzle the banshee oblique  
high-volt deadbolt barbwirespeak  
and I'm damned if you do either Georgia  
the both of us are damnation Georgia  
a hawk owl perched on the larch's bough  
and rot  
"But a sudden piece of glass on a sidewalk" Georgia  
"Or a nickel tune in a music box  
A shadow on a wall at night  
And I would remember"  
or December beneath a kaleidoscope rain  
a digital rain  
*la pluie numérique*  
a lukewarm rinse without downpour Georgia  
velocity Georgia  
lovely as luck  
that shower kick up as a rustle Georgia

a madrigal solo  
a hiss in the cedars  
some scrape from out back like flintlock Georgia  
on the wood pile  
on the axe handle  
dithers and zags like a swarm Georgia  
dilly-  
dally and para-  
diddle  
a gramophone needle's static Georgia  
on the asphalt Georgia  
the police station roof  
a wet from up north in a weight from up north  
like a secret swerving toward rumor Georgia  
it lapses Georgia  
collapses Georgia  
and the shush it starts to divide Georgia  
by square root  
by willow root  
it fractions in Fibonacci Georgia  
like artillery Georgia  
like friendly fire  
by logarithm by analog  
it unloads Georgia  
the cargo it's schlepped  
renders its ballast elastic Georgia  
dilates Georgia  
dilutes itself  
flutes the ravine and the river gap Georgia  
letterpressed Georgia  
an accordion's chord

like the soggy crumbs of Hop o' My Thumb  
or HTML from the stratosphere Georgia  
in smithereens Georgia  
alarm tripped Georgia  
out the emergency exit marked Georgia  
I draw a line in the gravelly sand  
you draw a break in the line  
it's not right Georgia  
quasi-floozy  
a kite panhandling the breeze Georgia  
pinned to the sky like a wedding corsage  
on a tie-dye concert tee  
The trees stand gunmetal  
steel in the storm  
then crack like a rifle report  
nobody sees it coming Georgia  
at crepuscule  
in the alkaline dusk  
maybe that's half the excitement Georgia  
you would know better  
bitterer than I  
my opium Georgia  
with your feldsparring drawl  
my slapstick and lipstick and stick 'em up Georgia  
you twang Georgia  
like a daisycutter  
a radio transmitter's muttering dreck  
I'm an echo playing bumper cars in basilicas of Georgia Georgia  
a silhouette  
I'm a satin flower  
I'm a sick bag and the sick Georgia

an avalanche an insomniateque  
a ruby-throated humming  
from my throat if I had a throat Georgia  
it's not unlike a kiddie cartoon  
fluorescent way out of proportion Georgia  
I see horses  
running through diamonds Georgia I  
can't hold  
it all in my head  
it's sad Georgia  
like the word itself  
I hesitate to use it  
but sometimes another word will not do when a word is the one word you mean  
you think Pierrot Georgia  
like pirouette Georgia  
dunno if the words are related  
I know almost nothing of language Georgia  
I care too much to care  
I lie down on the couch  
a few birds a small tremor  
the wind is encoded to rustle the gowns of the trees  
a chirp like spit bite acid Georgia  
an injection Georgia  
an infection Georgia  
via authorized medical application of a sterilized syringe  
I went  
too far Georgia  
not near far enough  
like a switch on the fritz in a binary star  
and the steering column is hotwired Georgia  
and piss in the tank for petrol Georgia

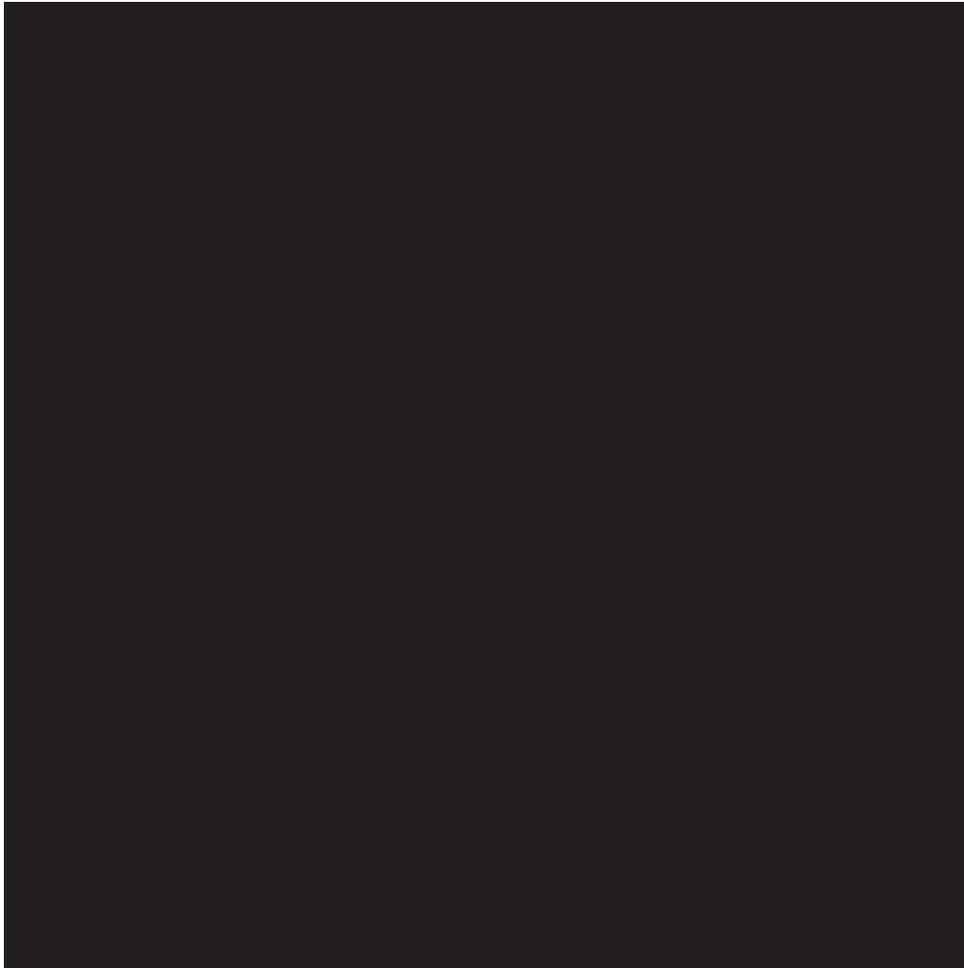
listing hydraulic or limping on fumes  
to seize the shore of your flash flooded cellar  
before it unfastens the linoleum floor  
I'm sorry Georgia  
I'm not sorry Georgia  
I don't mean a single word that issue forth from mine own mouth  
"what lies / outside us..." Georgia "...is not formless, it's  
as we are, the sound itself"  
I've heard Georgia  
on entering an unfamiliar room  
a blind person locates the source of that sound  
leaky faucet  
a failing bulb  
the refrigerator's drone  
and orients her touch around this point  
sometimes the sound is a second person  
in which case community Georgia  
at others the ear meets no obstacle  
and one is unmoored in a dumbshow of one  
overhearing the blood move around in the brain  
centrifugal Georgia  
inch by inch  
the fulcrum permits a perimeter Georgia  
like rings advancing radesque in a pond where a pebble  
snapped the surface  
curve by corner by  
lintel by latch  
then ricochet Georgia  
like noon off a gun  
the exterior turns internal Georgia  
a context caroms from the contours

and every border could not at first  
be seen or felt to be  
is now revealed as environment Georgia  
to fetter the setting it occupies  
and this becomes known as the world Georgia  
or at least as one world  
among possible worlds  
however exhausted the term Georgia  
in company or alone  
and whether those possible worlds Georgia  
be many  
or only  
my own  
I call you Georgia  
in the fissure of you  
the flocked light and parataxis of you  
are you going to come before the darkness shuck its dark  
mercury Georgia  
musket ball Georgia  
unlessless Georgia  
for the blossoms Georgia  
the night is leaded with cheap perfume  
I won't sleep Georgia  
I'll wait up

FOR SANDRINE

Notes:

*Georgia* is after Philippe Soupault. The poem also cites Maurice Blanchot, *L'Attente l'oubli*; Louis Zukofsky, "A"-22; William Carlos Williams, "The Descent of Winter" (12/2); Carson McCullers, "A Tree, a Rock, a Cloud"; and Charles Olson, *The Maximus Poems: Volume Three*.



Evie Shockley

from 31 WORDS: PROSE POEMS

[# 17]

hoo dunnit? wrote the flowers of salt water and sand into hieratic drawings, sketched with words :: sent a phantom helen decoying to troy :: hardly dickinsonian, hyacinth dame, heroic divine

[# 18]

you grew something new from red woe, a boy's broken body, and the maid mild's wooden rose. like mamie, you knew: it was no time to deny the gore and dolor.

[# 19]

slender muse! far too tender for the demi-gods who stole, slew, and made you remake yourself. in whose image, only you can remember. . . . *she whose eyes were treasures of sun* .  
..

[# 20]

how could i homage gertrude stein how could i how could you homme stein age stein gertrude stein homage home in on gertrude stein how aw gertrude stein you shouldn't have

[# 21]

anne, were you ever honest, even in indian costume? *always: as truthful as lightning, as open as the cereus flower, as honest as i could be with a mouthful of poetry.*

Scott Inguito

# THE FAMILIAR PLEASURES

plish  
LIBERTY  
bed  
style

speak-  
easy  
with  
quince  
and  
salt

# A LITTLE ACT, RIBBONS

squall  
squall  
lessness

material-  
s        he  
spiritual-

thus  
El  
with  
stage

if-  
with

nylon  
voss-  
triumph

mourn  
pict-t  
fruit

plum

hap-  
London

burly  
huachinango

# IVORY OF—AH!

in  
Cuba  
    deep,  
a dia

          today  
rural  
  
    of  
    the  
Haven

in  
tervals  
    plain  
    been  
Cassandra

        power  
her  
    power

sung  
    the  
    ology  
    Maria  
    y

Yolanda

quoth  
quoth  
cloth  
por

donde  
hap-            panned

fragment/shag  
meant

de  
Manuel (pintaro)

shores  
lished  
glished

glen  
when  
Morning  
written  
undated

a  
gainst  
shall  
shall

          well  
          water  
a        donde?

cante  
is  
of  
whose

spit  
guitarra  
sueños  
modern-  
dalousians

Palm  
songbook  
bull-  
allude  
near,,,

in

the  
God-  
pub

sun  
the  
less

nar  
co  
tic  
sweet  
bolletas  
thrown  
thrown  
hard  
into  
the  
field

## READ

One book says “eider” and the other “bird”  
And she said she likes how it sounds different each time.  
Two versions derived from her red dress & his red beard  
Said he sought redress. Under a glacier named White Shift  
Two ghosts derived from the year 985 or 986. 25 set sail  
Count the 9 that didn’t get married. A wealthy girl  
Deep-mined daughter of eastward brightness at night  
drawing on information within her second family  
Some fates remain as left out as described— 4 girls,  
3 men, 2 birds and 1 stone believed in unbelievable things  
lit up inside the ice      a green      complied by his own son.

# THE RED

Never had I seen people of such reddish color  
Diplomat and diarist notes,  
Dear Sir

you are a name shared by every tongue  
but nothing catches a reflection.

They painted clouds instead to depict  
what friends tell you about your life  
and you think is a prison  
a prism  
not a distinct direction the light scatters in  
the waves come in from the inside  
voice-over-mind.

It's a gorgeous view, she said  
he's beautiful as an animal  
trapped in the wind—  
a girl  
by the museum  
for contemplation  
each movement  
is a fold of time .

I thought the book was a war  
In the middle  
of which we  
just  
run out  
of lives-

said I shouldn't name  
    dead silent centuries  
light on an insomnia  
a sound I count on  
each finger denies  
    surface experience  
I mine by  
telling no one

burnt corners of  
icebergs touching  
rake, reed, stem  
changed hands \_\_  
two landscapes in  
memory followed by  
one voice without

# EGG

today's hunger used me like  
instrumental syrup  
ten eggs  
strapped to his waist  
the moon was no difficulty  
but he's from a myth  
a movie- thinking  
it would melt under  
"heat of moment"

Moving away from \_\_ she said  
"books are all we have left" of  
those times don't correspond to  
an inside but the very many stars  
form a surface of \_\_ under which  
patterns rot & the birds are  
drunk again

Quotes, others, mine, times in which  
I use them to describe what no one saw  
Things as they often seem hidden by  
a web that connects where the ideal is  
I would have drawn you accurately.

I was only writing to keep up with  
regulars that regulate joy in one's job.  
In one of her poems I recognize  
bewilderment and astonishment were  
sisters as they read each other's work

Fanny Howe

## THE CELTIC MOTHER

“To have an aim and a cause, is not this happiness? How many are there of all the human race who have faith in anything or aspirations after anything other than their daily bread and beer, their influence and social function and respectability in the eyes of the unrespectable world? Is there not a joy that colder, tamer spirits never know?”

In 1932 a young woman in Dublin copied down this paragraph into her ledger and noted that it was the theme of her play “Green Paint” (a play never to be produced). The quote was from a complex Irish writer (racist, nationalist and imprisoned) named John Mitchel.

Before leaving Ireland at age 27 she wrote this proud pronouncement in a private ledger:

“To date I Mary Manning have written—  
“*Casanova Be Careful*”—a one act satire on censorship with Nora Reddin. Finished  
Sunday, March 5, 1933.  
Adapted “*Il Festivo*”, Goldome’s play with Phillis Baly.  
Wrote 3 act play—“*Youth’s The Season—?*” produced Dublin Gate Theater  
December 1931—revived December 1932.  
One act comedy “*Storm Over Wicklow*” Produced at Gate, Dublin, March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1933.  
“*Green Paint*” 4-act satire submitted to the Abbey Page Play Competition—returned.  
Submitted to Bernstein.  
One-act play—“*Surrender your Arms—*” (finished June 1932)  
Work in progress—Revision of “*Green Paint*”—Finished (revised version) and sent it to  
Sir Bailey Jackson May 17<sup>th</sup> 1933  
Began another play title not yet attached June 1933. “*Happy Family*”  
“*Happy Family*” finished in January 1934. Submitted to Gate Theater—returned by  
them same month with proposed alterations—rewrote it in a month and submitted it  
“*Descendancy*” submitted it to S. Clare May 17<sup>th</sup> 1934. It is still under consideration.  
Began “*The Saint and Mary Kate*” in February 34, still working on it.  
Married 19<sup>th</sup> February 1935 to Mark Howe. Wrote two acts of a play “*Please Look After  
Annie*”  
“*Happy Families*” bought by the St. Martin’s Theater London  
Working on “*Saint and Mary Kate*”

She had not left Ireland in 1934 intending to stay in America but had come to do some business for the Gate Theater in Dublin and to visit her Aunt Muriel and Uncle Willard Sperry, then dean of Harvard's Theological School. She had stayed with them before when she was seventeen and attending the Boston Museum School so she had some artist friends in Boston. This time she was recovering from a very unhappy love affair and some disappointments in Ireland. She had a whirlwind courtship and married an American law professor in 1935, hardly knowing him at all. When he visited Ireland, he was not impressed and never returned in his life-time.

However, she did, returning home in the summer of 1936, homesick and not wanting to go back to America when August rolled around. She prolonged her visit into the fall when her mother forced her to return to her home and marriage. She obeyed reluctantly and ended up pregnant and lonely in Buffalo where her husband then worked.

MM was a woman who had "no interest in the truth," according to him later on. She exaggerated and invented and rarely edited the words that came out of her mouth. This is a well-known Irish trait that is often associated with people who have been oppressed. In her case the problem was increased by the fact that no one around her understood the point of the lies since they had no common reference. And in this world whatever is agreed among people to be the case about events and people, determines what we all agree to call the truth. In a family a dissembler throws an eternal curve into the wavelengths of a household where certain things must be agreed upon. Those who knew her least loved her lies the best.

She had the Irish genius for remembering details, for speed reading, making slanderous wise-cracks and she soon knew the pedigree of every Wasp in town, many of whom despised her. She could tell you whose grandmother was the lover of whose uncle and whose money was gained by investment. She was like an animal lover who knows all the traits of each species in order to disprove her difference from them. She was hilariously funny.

She was a leggy brunette with hazel eyes and a big nose and teeth. She was not beautiful but she was sexy and illuminated by intelligence. Her father's family Fitzmaurice had arrived in Ireland in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. They lived in Kerry as brigands and knights and Huguenot snobs who married into a local family called Manning, which became her last name. Her mother's family was a matriarchy named Bennett with a pack of brilliant sisters, including one, Louie Bennett, who is remembered in Ireland as a fierce labor organizer who had her own Trade Union. These powerful women were Mary's models and they paid for her education and urged her forward, her own mother being a

struggling widow.

She associated the Catholic Church in Ireland with fascism in Europe and allied herself with leftists who thought along the lines of Bernard Shaw's Fabian Society. Many cousins and friends had died in the Spanish Civil War, fighting Franco. In Dublin she attended Communist meetings with a tiny group influenced by another left-wing playwright, Sean O'Casey. But in her mid-twenties she gave her full attention to theater and this was to be the case for her entire life. She was a lively and significant participant in the Gate Theater and edited their magazine *Motley*, while acting in their plays if not writing them.

During the war years in Cambridge she worked as director of the Idler Club, the Radcliffe College drama society. Nearly every afternoon and night she left us children with a sitter and went to work for sixty dollars a month, putting on plays. Her production of *The Playboy of the Western World* was staged at the Brattle Theater in Harvard Square, with her student, Jack Lemmon, playing the father. F.O. Matthieson, the Harvard professor of American literature and one of the few men left in Cambridge, helped her get the job because of her background in the Gate Theater.

In Cambridge she was called Molly; in Ireland, Mary. For nine years (1938-1947) she didn't see her birth family or hear herself called by her original name. Terribly homesick and often feeling like an outcast in her husband's family, she did nonetheless have friends in Cambridge. They included some Harvard professors and their wives as well as actors and writers. She was one of the few working women in her circle at the time. Only a handful went abroad as volunteers for the Red Cross. Even fewer went to work for an income (though they wrote and edited for their husbands like private secretaries). Any of the men who stayed home did so because of some physical disability or as conscientious objectors.

She loved a cause. These were the days when men and women still wrote love poems to each other and believed in heroic acts, leaders and "the people." She wasn't exactly nationalist but she embodied the culture of her country. Looking back at her work, I can see that she tried to stay true to a time (Dublin, 1916) when there were heroic acts that were not followed up by charges of graft, hypocrisy, lust, or greed. In most of her own work (both original and adaptation) there is always an innocent hero who is torn down by cynicism and greed, but the reader and the audience is stirred by his fundamental goodness.

It was the Fifties and the House Un-American Activities Committee was in full swell when she found her American cause. The Poets Theater was born at 24 Palmer Street behind the Harvard Coop. You climbed a narrow flight of stairs and on the right was the

reception room where people gathered before the play and during intermissions; and straight ahead was the room that seated sixty with a couple of rows precariously placed on wooden levels at the back. There was a table for tickets to the left as you entered. There were all the bulbs and bars for the lighting overhead, a curtained backdrop, and often a stage set designed by an artist and lit by a student. Backstage did not offer much space for crouched actors waiting for their queue so they galloped up and down the stairs into the smell of paste and face cream. They were the polar opposites of the suits in the committees on television and in court.

Down on Palmer Street and to the left of 24 was Morris Pancoast's studio where all the costumes were kept and many mirrors; he huddled in the back, white, bald, small, old, pointed, bemused, uncritical, watching the changing of the clothes and the application of make-up. The actors had to speed through the freezing cold and rain to gallop up the stairs and backstage to await their turn. VR Lang was secretary for the theater in a big fur coat, bleach blond hair and sexy red lips, and Richard Eberhart and Lyon Phelps (long and thin, dry and sad) were her bosses. The first play was *Try. Try* by Frank O'Hara and was designed by Edward Gorey (long, morose, dark and damp). Frank O'Hara and John Wieners looked like boys and were then.

MM began the theater by using her experience in Dublin where various readings and performances took place in people's houses before moving onto the stage. So around the big houses of Cambridge, car-loads of young actors would arrive with scripts to entertain professors, their wives and anyone in the art world who wanted to come and listen to a play reading. They took it seriously though to an outsider it was absurd, useless, and all in vain. Drinks of course were served.

From 1950 until it burned to the ground in 1968, the Poets Theater was a phenomenon. It would be very hard to describe how it stayed as something beyond amateurish because every day was a new day there, and the unpredictable and dramatic were only onstage for a couple of hours, having been normal and daily before and after those two hours. The audience participated by proximity to the stage. The performed drama was only a continuation of the daily drama enacted by the same people as a rehearsal follows a rehearsal and the levels of innuendo and association increased. I suppose it would be called experimental. But hysterical would be more accurate.

In the case of the Poets Theater, the screams, cries, sobs, recitations, laughter, the fits of rage at each other and groans of disappointment were always inventions. This was why her highly controlled husband made fun of them. He couldn't escape since many rehearsals took place in the living room. She didn't give a damn.

She was a dominatrix towards her actors and directors. Her oldest daughter sometimes

became involved and acted. The younger sat on the stairs listening with her mouth open and once in awhile was dragged on stage to fill in a space. One good thing: MM didn't need to dip into a vodka bottle on the nights she was rehearsing or performances were going on. That only happened during the boredom of home life. She was full enough with her own spirits when she was in the company of her actors and colleagues performing.

There was one disastrous night when her youngest daughter was forced to act with Lyon Phelps, they were the only two onstage, and the review the next morning said, "Fanny Howe played the part of a child and acted like one." Her sister by contrast who was beautiful and whole-hearted played Iphigenia who was also a child but one she knew how to play. The two were encouraged to compete, viciously, by their mother, the constant director.

The theater was her greatest love in life. It was the soul of childhood she carried along with her. Theater was her source and joy. When she was too old to direct, she had many parties where she told everyone to sit and with whom to speak. As a younger woman she directed harshly and she and her cohorts (Felicia Lamport, Edward Gorey, etc.) chose the most unconventional drama they could unearth for the Cambridge crowd. *The Bald Soprano* by Ionesco, verse plays by Ashbery, O'Hara, Merwin, Gorey, Paul Goodman, Donald Hall, Anne Sexton, and Richard Wilbur's *The Misanthrope* was premiered on that stage.

Yeats plays were performed with Liam Clancy singing and MM's adaptation from *Finnegans Wake* even left the Boston area, with Tom Clancy, Liam's brother, playing the lead. Irish actors slept in our basement and wandered the house. Before she and her daughters went to Ireland, that soft cloudy land had been absorbed into the war experience for us children; it was rain-green in a sea of gray newsprint and explosives. Ever since their trip in 1947, the sound of an Irish voice was steeped with significance, innuendo, music for the two sisters.

Their mother's interrupted career in the Irish theater was resumed in these years with a ferocity and assurance that was unusual for women in the fifties. All her life she was writing for an Irish audience, its sense of humor, and its peculiar cruelty. Yet she had to live in America. Many years later, when she was eighty, she would attempt a revival of the Poets Theater in Cambridge, calling the first production *A Wake*.

She wrote a play about Rose Kennedy, who was prevented by her father from going to collage, and in a *Boston Globe* interview, we are told "Howe grew up in a prosperous Anglo-Irish or Angular Irish, as she likes to say, family in Ireland, and her family strongly disapproved when she chose to go into the theater. "My grandmother talked about me

as ‘poor Mary, a lost soul.’ But my father died in the war, and there was nobody to bully me, as poor Rose had.” All that she says above is, quite simply, a fabrication. Her birth family was penniless, her grandmother adored her and helped her in her career and her father died in the back room, in Dublin, from drink and tuberculosis.

I hated her and all grown-ups for most of my adolescence and so there is no way I can report objectively on her world. I was determined to close the entrance to the womb as fast as I could.

But it is in the mother’s body that the spirit is quickened and if mine had unfolded in a woman more suitable to my father, I would probably be an anxious Anglo-Saxon sailor who never left Boston’s shoreline.

★

There are caterpillars that masquerade as flowers. They decorate themselves with colorful petals. They like asters and disk flowers, black-eyed Susans and goldenrod. They attach a petal to their larvae, hide, then molt and put on new flowers. Thomas Eisner tells us: “When the time comes to pupate, the larvae crawl to a site away from the flower to construct a cocoon.” They make themselves a silky cover made of the same petal material and weave them into the fabric of the cocoon. “The adult that eventually emerges is a beautiful green moth, itself capable of escaping detection in a world where green is the dominant color.”

★

Why am I writing down these thoughts?

My task for this year is to learn what I have known without knowing it and to pass the results along to others who might care to know.

What was I doing all that time?

I only have to examine myself to know where evil comes from. But what about the poetry?

To express the radiance (soul) I sense in the physical world; to keep moving from point to point; to fly; to escape; to write the river.

In a stream of words that have come to me and have been transcribed, there has sometimes been a tone no different from the taste of blood, the will to rape, the thieving and lying that come with war.

A mother dies and her corpse is that of a fallen warrior.

An archetypal name remains stuck to a body even when the body is dying. That name is embedded in the body along with the first mother before all the others.

A pair of eyeglasses, a handmade spoon, tin instruments. These have no names later.

Our parents' experience of evil is our inheritance. Then we heap our own objects onto the pile. This must be the end of an eon.

We must be destroying the world in preparation for a long winter.

No, it's just me, practicing to die.

"The content of the stream of experience," wrote Edith Stein, "depends on the structure of the soul. If there were streams of consciousness that were alike in content, then there would also be souls just alike."

★

When I call out to a person, even my mother, I am trying to relieve her of her name. I am stripping her name away from her body to see if it can fly.

Time and Direction are both forces that work together. Time without Direction is devoid of sequence or differentiation, but always it either allows or prevents actions. And actions and time are deeply allied, since without an action there would be no past, present or future.

Time and a sound, they too are associated, because sound is an attribute of air, as is Time.

There is no difference between two people, both being made of the same substance. But there is a difference between a person and God. God doesn't need a person. In this way God is closer to being an object than a human. An object reveals nothing in response to a person's presence.

You as a person can perceive the object, touch and infer, compare and testify of its nature; but the object remains indifferent. Whack it into bits; it still exists but now and forever in pieces.

I have a recurrent dream, have had it for decades, it is so familiar that I can steer my way through it, wondering if I will see the same corner again and the same apartment, visit the same people and wind up in streets behind Harlem, way, way up, narrow streets, scabs, crusts, symptoms of old wounds. I am happy to be back but always fear I will not find the train station, or if I do, it will take me in the wrong direction. The water in the Harlem River is murky and yet it leads to a lovely green promontory and more green beyond. I am standing there again, and again. No one can tell me that dreams are not sacred (secret) revelations of the infinite multiplicity of being. And once I left my body and traveled, wide awake, half way to heaven.

Now the flowering sun is yellow.

I have told the children about the dream. They listen, looking elsewhere.

They are brave children.

We are inside a little seaside café at Omaha Beach where an existentialist smokes and sips from a tumbler of red wine. He owns the cafe.

He tells us what we can have: ice cream, tea, coffee or wine.

I have tea but the children and Saskia have big ice cream bars. Paul has coffee and my daughter smokes with the owner.

It is snowing outside the café. It falls on the waves and foam and on the cars and leaves.

It looks the way music arrives in the brain and lights up a different cell until the brain is flooded with its sound or its silence.

Vítězslav Nezval

# PARROT ON A MOTOCYCLE, OR ON THE CRAFT OF POETRY

*translated from the Czech by Josef Horáček & Lara Glenum*

It needs to be said outright. I waited in vain for the arrival of a clairvoyant shorthand assistant when a palsy, having liberated itself from medical encyclopedias, seized some pyrotechnics and started to ragtime. My lovely cousin, my radio dove, bon vent, bonne mer! Someone coming from the sudden stillness of a hospital or from last century's boulevards and, pressing an ear to my head, will hear the ringing of thirty alarm clocks.

★

I am taken with my method.

★

Poets of the past reveled in philosophy. The grand idea. Its expeditious development. Deduction, induction, composition, dénouement. The logic of concepts clad in festive gowns. Whoa, what labor! – The moldy gloom of offices. Thinkers!

★

I am in permanent contact with my digestion. All senses operating. 36 antennas and an instinct perpetually coursing through. They all converge on a single point of a chessboard. The sum of vibrations and its vector – behold: sensibility.

*The nervous health of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a prerequisite of modern poetry, allowing for fleet associations and unbridled imagination.*

*The old way of creating: non-organic, subordinate to ideology, composition, and logic.*

*The new way: an organic and physiological growth of form out of images and their laws of reproduction.*

Look! It is you, my auditory faculties, who are creating me. Hearing lures me into eternal sleep. The incessant hullabaloo of the promenades. The dull clamor that is killing me. One must look up at an airplane in flight and hear the song of a nightingale. A zone of sensitivity in delirium.

Look! It is you, my eyes, that awaken me to life. One must see electric blossoms and smell exotic musks in a hideous crowd. Enchanted mirrors, the eyes, a vision of a jungle, opulent verses on a street corner. Look! It is you. The indigo of overalls, this vertical sky, the ribbons on cabmen's hats. And a constant presence of gardens and wine harvests, my birds! Unforgettable fairy-tales.

★

Static concepts do not exist for me. No more composition! I saw this daily, in a matter of seconds. I carry you with me, my senses, without any philosophical context. It is you who are creating me. Look! It is me. A sum of images, those parrots with magical names.

★

Incessant penetration. Every time a new admixture. The law of association, a force not unlike the one that drives my thirst and my paroxysms.

★

One must always obey this law. Laziness, you hydra, always begging to be fed! One must always keep inventing.

★

A magician, who from an infinitude of possibilities each time chooses only one. Elements in a perpetual vortex! Look, several lures:

*Dulcet-toned poets are capsizing along with the index of romantic contemplation.*

*The superior imagination, born out of modern metropolitan realities, increases the visual acuity of today's artist.*

*Static concepts and composition are correlates of philosophical epochs. Logical and ideological scholastics.*

*Image, the primary and physiological correlate.*

*The causality of the new poetry, completely organic, like the causality of dreams.*

*The basis of poetic intellect lies in drowning out received intellect.*

IMAGE: A shape focused in a mirror. A flaming parrot or a paper lantern. The curtain drops! A shape focused in a mirror.

ASSOCIATION: An alchemist faster than the radio. Completely natural, like blood circulation. Sparks springing from star to star. A peculiar type of thinking, as when we float on the river Acheron, dragged ever-closer to magnetic mountains that spring open to reveal their scenes. A ride on the merry-go-round of caverns, darkness spliced with glass oases, bouquets of light and fountains.

★

RHYTHM: The force that breaks the continuity of a pulse. Lacunae in the logical. No continuity. Instead: sparks. Images tossed and tossed away, hummingbirds under certain lighting. The counsel of signals.

RHYME: To bring together distant deserts, times, species and castes through the euphony of words. To invent peculiar friendships.

ASSONANCE: Sharp, worldly, irresistible. Volatile and magical, like a port just prior to departure, two people who give each other a sly look and are in love. Amusing misalliances. A child everyone calls a flirt.

METAPHOR: a chic, exalted dandy.

ART: The art of intercepting and directing these runners. The art of equilibristics. Behold, maximum output, all play.

*The primary association, generally speaking, mediates a state of open hypnosis between the poet and the reader.*

*The secondary association depends on the individual's memory.*

*An image-provoking quality is necessary in rhyming words.*

*Assonance allows for a vast number of associations, not being constrained by acoustic bonds as strictly as rhyme.*

*Metaphor: an instrument of poetic transfiguration.*

WORK: it preceded. Ask the acrobats and fire-eaters. Ask the parrot riding a motorcycle.

*Absolute  
mastery of  
form and  
construction.*

MUSE: Sets the tone of scents.

The axiom of this method, an entirely physiological process. Gratification of poetic lust.

*The making  
of skin.*

*Muse.  
Integral  
efficacy.*

ART: great lovers, daring and beautiful, stroll through a nest of onanists.

*Wings.*

POEM: A miraculous bird, a parrot on a motorcycle. Laughable, crafty, and miraculous. A thing like soap, a knife with a pearl handle, or an aeroplane.

*A tangible,  
autonomous  
object in a  
world of images  
and their  
corresponding  
forms,  
independent  
of the world of  
phenomena.*

★

SOME PASTIMES: Loud colors, carrousel, pictures of saints in doilies, the harmonica, mummings straight out of *Genevieve*, people in folkloric garb, astrology, moonshine, the countryside, folktales, and all the associations that each implies.

*The material  
out of which  
grows the poetic  
superstructure.*

SOME PASTIMES: Face powder, shop windows, parks, the promenade, orchestrons, the café, fancies, neck-ties, artificial flowers, and all the associations that each implies.

Love of the Muse.

*Mireio 1923*

NEW ADMIXTURES: Histories and fables mixed with gossip from the music hall. A miraculous crossbreed.

*Inventiveness.*

EMOTIONS: Maximum emotions per second. No description. The composite image: A spotlight producing the desired effect. A slap during sleep that arouses dreams. Marching as if asleep. From the general effect to individual details. A bright spot that disturbs the stillness.

*It is  
likely that  
psychoanalysts  
will be the first  
to discover the  
true meaning of  
this poetry.*

PURPOSE: Emotions.

On the day of the Last Judgment, I'll cast  
in front the creator's face, instead of a cynical  
corpse, that pathetic burnt ground of love, 2 or  
3 poems. I have made the world richer for 2 or 3  
new parrots. O Rousseau, the Douanier:

“A nickel, a tiny alm,  
helped him into paradise.”





# ALL THE KING'S HORSES & ALL

Sugar-coated  
domestica  
Hump-boy is lodged in my egg-coils again  
    Merry dangling out of its socket

Call the jingle-horses & call the jangle-men  
to sew me some clomp clomp  
to stitch  
me a curdled girdle

to keep the aspic salad in my thorax  
from jiggling out onto Hump-boy's cheesebox

Keep him jerking  
on the peacock-blue linoleum

Or drop an egg  
into the miraculous dumpty jar  
    in which the Hump-boy specimen bobs

Ye olde humpty cock is squirming  
in the snowglobe  
    Stuff it  
into my eight-legged stockings to canned applause &

See the humpback wail

Thorpe Moeckel

# THE WILDS GORGE OF THE MARK LEVINE FORK

STATE: CALIFORNIA

COUNTY: UNCERTAIN

SUBMITTED BY: OLLIE OBLER AND HANS FRIEDRICH

We went on tour of Western Whitewater of the United States for one month. We had new Fritzer Kayaks to distribute to shops around the West. Many friendly paddlers showed us the rivers of their homeplace. A young man named Cody took us to The Wilds Gorge. He wasn't even twenty years of age, but he has been paddling since being a boy. His skills were for one who has learned young. He was natural on the river and he paddled with the innocence Hans and me liked to see.

The Wilds Gorge told of steeps in the Dolomites of Italy. They could have the same rock bed. I do not see for sure. The water was fast. The water was slow it was broken and fast again breaking and tongues thick to boil. The rocks were sharp. It was one rapid and very little eddy. We paddled for three hours. The hike into the Gorge was two miles downhill through fine country. Many big rocks and cliffs to see and flowers grewed like to ate you with their colors in meadows on stone. Cody was not a fast trekker, but we were in no hurry.

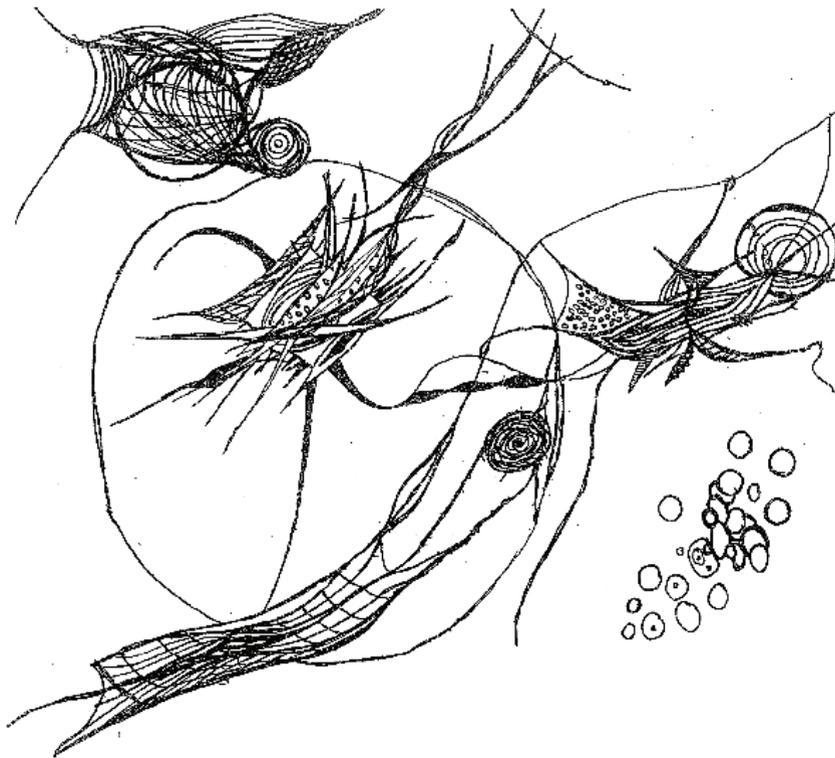
The water starts fast and stayed fast. There is a kilometer before the gorge stands up. This makes a strong practice. Cody did not wear a facemask or elbow pads as Hans and me wore. He thought our gear overmuch, but why not be safe I think. Cody had that cowboy attitude we see in American skiers who come to Alps in winter. The Wilds Gorge was not a cowboy gorge, but I imagined Lone Ranger camped there.

I have said the water is fast. It is steep and thick also. The falls in the gorge are many. Cody had a funny name for big rapid. He titled it Nurse. He said it was sexy like porcupine and was right in this saying, for Hans opinion since he hit the line. Me, Ollie, I miss the line and spitted hard. Cody says I floundered. It seems a small dynamite has charged the river there. Rocks are sharp and broken many times. We were planned to scout this rapid from an eddy, but I traveled past it and heard Cody yelled "right and then left." See, this was not correct. It was the other way I learned after that because I swimmmed from a hydraulic big. Cody and Hans went left and then right. I swimmmed to the bank and they recovered my gear. It wasn't bad. Not until now Cody told us he was dyslexic. It angered me, but then I realize it wasn't his attention. I remember a man in the service with such seeing. He had to stop flying airplanes and went to tanks. I see it matters less on the ground.

From this rapid Nurse on we scouted anything we couldn't vision from our boats. It made the trip longer for it is not long in miles but long in opportunity. The water was so fast often Hans could be heard yodeling. Cody smiled to hear such sounds. He when scouting a big rapid on a bend singed Sound of Music and then we knew he was a boy for truth

even for paddling like a man. His eyes were large and he was careless in his decisions, not afraid to roll or be stuck in large holes for minutes.

The Wilds Gorge is harder than any run in the Dolomites. Much inside it will threaten and pleasure even expert paddler. It has a magic about the rock and the water breaks on it not so rough as I thought to start. It was surprising in this way of happy anger. My favorite rapid was a line of shelves. Cody called them Animal. The water was not high so we could ski jump off them. I know at high flows these shelves would be thick waves. I did not like the sieves. There are many sieves. You see trees in them, so can see and be away from them. Cody said an outlaw lived in a cave near the end where we stopped. But not anymore did he live there. It was a long time ago. I say he was true in that. It felt like a place for a criminal. The Wilds Gorge is happy in this way. Time is not the same way in that place. Many rivers are like this, but The Wilds Gorge has its own way with time. I would like to go back, and Hans says he would like to go again and paddle the gorge with more water. We would bring a camera next time and show you pictures of where the time is gone. For this minute, I have some sketches of what the water did to the time.



Shin Yu Pai

# MÉTAPHYSIQUE D'ÉPHÉMÈRE *(after Joseph Cornell)*

*ceci*  
*n'est pas*  
*une*  
*écriture*

tossed  
salad  
a la  
russe

ÉCHAPPÉ  
EN RELEVÉ  
SOUS-SUS  
ALLONGÉ  
MENU TENDU  
SAUTE

demitasse  
caviar  
absinthe  
bouillon  
silver  
spoon  
washboard  
& jug

a pantry  
ballet for  
Jacques  
Offenbach:



Anthony Hawley

# AUTOGRAPHY/BLUFF

“I am much engaged rewriting”

—Clark, 29<sup>th</sup> August Wednesday 1804

Set out under

Stiff Breeze

storied earth

one vast

wintering party

moving into

what

distances

to read

Saw a bird of heron kind

as large as the Cormorant short tale long leggs

we could not kill it  
therefore I cannot  
describe it more  
particularly

A considerable distance  
the Surrounding Plains

is open void  
of Timber

[...] one evidence  
of residence  
of Some unusial Spirits:

frequently a large assemblage of Birds about this moun

regular form of this hill  
in Some measure  
justify that it owed its Orrigin to the hand of man

So much  
reaching

wind  
inverts

all nearness

inverts  
Orrigin  
of the hand  
of man

What

to see

if not

nothing

Some men

to work to make a toe rope

just listen to

dead

of winter's

humming

This morning  
the Sar Calld  
the morning Star  
much larger than  
Common

Bluff of blue earth  
Numerous herds

buffalow Seen in various directions  
Took an obsivation

most butifull  
landscape

in  
singular  
sky  
was humming

Try shape

the vanish

map

independent

Why put

sin in it

The fixed

thing called

West when

Is west ending

Some rain and verry Cold

I took a Vocabulary

my Self to write

a great many words

went out and made a Survey of the antient works

I cannot form

an Idear

How these two long works joined

cannot form

an Idear

my Self to write

The eye  
if full  
and projecting reather

A white heron

Many other  
advantages of Small nature

The air pure and helthy  
So far as we can Judge

Breath's path

after exit

this story

audible arrow

swallows grassland

unanimous

sky scarred

into air

guns

And the wind lasted

w/violence

Bird flew off

large gangus

elk buffalo

began to rain and very dark

a Great Distance

(is) Great Thirst

mapping out

earth mapping

desire a regular

parallelogram

loose pebbles, other Substance

very unusual in this natural order

what's natural

in the order

do not ask more

than a distance

scales the know

near is what

they will try

to have but rain

Jurk meet

Hunt horses

The river verry full of Sand bars

standing

where was

ground to stand

Geathered

great quantities (to stand)

Grapes, three kinds of Plumbs

one yellow round & one oval

& the Common

Wild

Plumb

What's so

common in the wild?

Mesquitors

Bad to night

Walked all  
the inches

couldn't kill  
enough for residence

couldn't sing  
the song  
went something

like bound to loss  
bury yr heart

in writing  
in reriting

Petite Arch

came to

place

built

a town

built

over

all the bones

w/bones

yours

thus

set the prairie

on fire

a ring

of fire says

dear

soues

we wish

to see

you

spake

fire

Inclination

to Continue

past

any

saying

no past

but this

sentence

ongoing

but what's written

with fire

to will

a more

common

bend

in the mouth

A Foggeie morning

I am much engaged

Deckerated w/porcupine quills

This Society has made a vow

Never to give back let what will happen

The air gun astonished them verry much

A Fat Dog

Presented

and partook hartily

mute

heart

hoards

frayed

a

faint

sink

drawn

out

which

is

more

thin

this

Ne-

braska

or

blood

rite-

ing

that

is

re

writing

Elizabeth Willis

## MADAME CEZANNE AS SAINTE-VICTOIRE

Imperfect air turns  
pinkness into pattern.

The heart can call it anything.  
A bootless name against a sandy ear.

What would flowers be to 1913?

What was a sentence or guitar  
set before familiar mountains?

The meadow like a table on which  
your meal is set. Unfinished.

A brass equivalent to fire or steam:

color drives the heat of roots  
into the coldest branches.

Not to be  
the thing of it, the figure

of a later music.  
Not the final piece, the anchor

of an off-stage grove.  
Not to lapse, not shrink,

not signal. Not even sleep  
before the lens's scuttled edges.

She and the mountain's genius  
licking at her ankle.

Living out its other life  
while she considers this one.

## CAMP, READING, DEMOCRACY

I imagined myself getting onto the back of an author, and giving him a child, which would be his and which would at the same time be a monster. It is very important that it should be his child, because the author actually had to say everything that I made him say. But it also had to be a monster because it was necessary to go through all kinds of decenterings, slips, break ins, secret emissions, which I really enjoyed.

—Gilles Deleuze (qtd. in Tomlinson and Habberjam 8)

At the center of the literary criticism around Ronald Johnson's long poem *ARK* is the debate over how readers should make use of its excessive quoting and cultural allusions. In his essay "'A' to *ARK*: Zukofsky, Johnson, and an Alphabet of the Long Poem," Mark Scroggins argues that "the words' source—for Johnson, and for the readers of *ARK*—*doesn't matter*" (149). The original context of any given line in Scroggins's view means less than how it signifies in completely new ways as part of *ARK*'s ongoing themes of light, eye, sun, and microcosm/macrocosm. Alternatively, in Eric Selinger's reading, the references *ARK* makes—to homosexuality, Oz, or Orpheus—have crucial significance for the meanings at which a reader arrives. Considering "ARK 64," Selinger writes,

Green, yellow, orange, red, purple, blue: in six lines Johnson takes us through the colors of the rainbow, giving us a technicolor vision of Kansas in which not one atom of its dustbowl "dust" is "lost." These colors remind us that the primary difference between Kansas and Oz, in both Baum's book and the later film, is that the latter is not gray but in radiant color. They also link this section of *ARK* to other parts of the poem where references to Oz were either explicit or implied. (166)

Because they shape *ARK*'s central concerns, any reference the poem makes must, in Selinger's analysis, be taken into account.

Not surprisingly, those readers who are concerned with the disruptive and material qualities of the poem generally give less attention to its literary and cultural citations than those readers who are invested in the signifying elements of *ARK*, readers who will understandably be more willing to track the poem's references. Of course the root of these differing critical methods resides with the frames used to organize

an experience of reading *ARK*; as Erving Goffman argues in *Frame Analysis*, the “definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events . . . and our subjective involvement in them” (10–11). If readers *already* understand their activity as revealing words’ instability or as conveying established meanings, then readers potentially produce radically different ends, even substantially different notions of what reading bears. Those readers invested in language’s insecurity tend to value the linguistic play of *ARK*, and therefore don’t read its use of cultural materials as necessarily determined. For critics more invested in the effect of *ARK*’s dense quotes and references, ignoring what might be called the poem’s intentions would look like a failure of critical attention that potentially diminishes the meaning of the poem. And while these approaches are hardly mutually exclusive, a reader’s relation to each will certainly affect the outcome of her reading.

When their assumptions are made clear, what strikes me as insufficient about these singular reading strategies is their reliance on only one half of what makes a word meaningful, even if each picks a different side for good reason. Where a materialist reading lets go its obligation to a word’s public life, a reading focused primarily on literary reference does not take into account enough the manner in which a word’s meaning depends in part on an individual reader’s particular employment of it. Holding fast to the way whole words work, I want to claim that the reading frames we bring to *ARK* are not things we should try to escape or conceal; rather, our already affected reading practices are primarily things to be aware of and to use deliberately to test how *ARK* might frame itself. Certainly, it is impossible to know where readers leave off and poems begin (if we can even still use such a distinction), but in looking to how we engage a literary work we can see it better. Like a violinist who gets a stronger sense of a new piece of music’s character by “making it hers,” readers too get a more sophisticated knowledge of a poem by interpreting its particular elements. In this way we do not simply project our agendas onto *ARK*, and we find a way out of repeating the tired debate between those who would see poetry as primarily the product of an audience and those who would use it to argue for meaning’s independence from readers. Fessing up to whatever particular readerly involvements we have at the outset while turning to the character of *ARK*’s cultural engagements—the poem’s antipolitics, and its interest in myth, Paradise, and Americana—permits *ARK* to influence the argument being made about it through a reader’s own preoccupations—in the present case, my own.

My aesthetic allegiances being what they are, I begin my reading of *ARK* by remembering that Johnson published in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* as he was writing his long poem and that he became friends with many of Language poetry’s most visible writers in San Francisco and New York. Against many of their specifically politicized aesthetic, *ARK*’s political claims and understanding of readerly engagement grow sharper. In preparing notes for a conference in the late 1980s titled “Words as Objects:

Three Undergrounds,” Johnson writes of Language poetry:

The language grows, and we are its meantime gardeners. To prune, dig, irrigate, interrogate the worms themselves, are a privilege of those who tend and turn this particular soil. Tonight we celebrate those whose new shoulders are to the plow.

These evenings’ principle quest has been to study the very limits of the Greeks’ and Zukofsky’s and Pound’s measure of melopoeia, phanopoeia, logopoeia . . . toward a vital poetry the future might look to. Logopoeia, Zukofsky rated highest of all. . . . No doubt they will disagree with me, but this is the scale on which I wish to weigh the Language Poets. Let them, I say, hatch their own equations . . . and (at their finest) pay strict attention to any world they fix to paper.

When they are good they shake the very foundations we cultivate. When they are bad they may be even better. Let us hear and see and talk about what they have to say. (Literary Estate, Box 3).

From his notes it appears evident that Johnson believed in the value of Language poetry, but perhaps for different reasons than some of the Language poets themselves did. What Johnson finds interesting about its radical practice is its exploration of the alternative uses of poetry. When Johnson writes, “Let them, I say, hatch their own equations . . . and (at their finest) pay strict attention to any world they fix to paper,” he focuses his attention on the imaginative quality of Language poetry rather than on Language poetry’s own interest in the role language plays in the social organization of our environment. Notice the word “world.” Johnson does not say “pay attention to any “word”—he says “world.” His insistently organic metaphors of “hatching” and “gardening,” as well as his coy erotic wink, “when they are bad they’re better,” suggests that Johnson saw in Language poetry a playfulness that allows for fluctuating, linguistic worlds not necessarily congruent with the habitat of realists. While many of the Language poets were also (and still are) interested in such shifting worlds, they rarely imagined them in the way that Johnson did. As Norman Finkelstein points out in *The Utopian Moment*, one of the central contributions of the Language poets is that they are “the only group of contemporary poets willing to engage in an extensive theoretical consideration of the relationship of poetry to larger political, philosophical, and cultural issues” (103), and certainly Johnson does not do so. In *ARK*, Johnson shies away from the poem meant as social intervention because he was afraid that any political project undertaken by a poem would become more important than the poetry itself and would thereby serve to overwhelm a poem’s uniqueness and power.

We can, in this respect, take Johnson’s claim that *ARK* “is a poem without history” as a refusal to ground the poem on a definitive political program. Recalling Ezra Pound’s assertion that the epic poem contains history, and at the same time remembering what kind of epic Pound hoped to write—that is, a poem with a specific

political, economic, and social agenda—makes Johnson’s rejection especially evident. Writing in *The Pound Era*, Hugh Kenner explains that “a poem including history will contain not only elements and recurrences but a perceiving and uniting mind that can hope one day for a transfiguring vision of order it only glimpses now” (376). For Pound, including history in the *Cantos* led to a perpetual layering of references and source material, all of which, at least in Pound’s imagination, brought into focus specific and intended ideas and images. For Johnson, *ARK*’s significant inclusion of other texts—whole passages from Thoreau and Jung, quotes from Stein, Dickinson, Melville, Pound, H.D., references to Ovid, Yeats, Euclid—and the layering of myth—from Adam in the Garden to Orpheus and Hermes to Dorothy and Toto—is instead a means for individual readers to pull together their myths, personal histories, and cultural heritage.

In *ARK*, Oz is the model. Where Language poetry draws on poststructuralism and Marxist theory, among others, *ARK*, like its major imaginative source from over the rainbow, moves toward Theosophy. Of the Oz books, William Leach writes, “On a broader ideological level, Baum expressed [Theosophy] by taking the heartache and fear out of fairy tales. In the Emerald City and most of the Land of Oz, everyone is taken care of. There is little real distress; no significant struggle or conflict; . . . not much to feel guilty about, and above all, nothing to fear” (251). As an interpretive frame, Theosophy is for *ARK* a means not to show readers the man behind the curtain so much as a way to meet the wizard, and see, like Dorothy, where going along with the wizard anyway can get you. Where *ARK* does come near the concerns of the Language poets is in the sense of how meaning occurs in writing; both *ARK* and Language poetry attempt to get readers actively exploring the potential meanings of the words before them. For readers of *ARK*, examining the imaginative possibilities of the poem means, as Selinger suggests, taking the “external” referent seriously, although not, as Selinger might further argue, in any way that implies a principal metaphorical structure. Each reference in *ARK* must be taken as significant, for each new reference creates a new possibility for meaning, perhaps a more complex and engaging one, but as Scroggins points out, these myths and their sources do not create an argument in *ARK*. While myths like Oz are crucial for *ARK*, so too are a vast array of other myths. There is no way to account for the full scope of *ARK*’s network of references, so it seems like a bad idea, at least on the poem’s own terms, to consider those references as determining necessary meanings.

To cite an instance, with little exposure to the Oz books growing up, but a constant exposure to the Bible and Greek myth throughout my education, it is hard for my own reading of *ARK* to ground itself anywhere other than on the poem’s religious and mythical concerns. “BEAM 16” begins, “*plumb line* // “For Orpheus’ lute was strung with poets’ sinews” / CROSS\*SECTION OF KANSAS LILAC I SAT IN AT”; this line is then followed quickly by a large *O* with a *Z* inside it. Doing little with “Oz” other than recalling the bits and pieces I can of the story (and the TV version at that), the “poets’

sinews” that string Orpheus’ lute appear more boldly as plumb lines in my reading. In keeping with the Orphic myth, the strumming of these “sinews” make the world flower, but now also as plumb lines they take measure of that new world part Oz, part Kansas. In other words, to read *ARK* is to make the poem and the world, the imaginary and the material, knowable and complicit with each other; it is to join the worlds of our imaginations and our daily lives. When, a few lines later, “the sound of a great black cloth ripping apart” invokes the sound of the temple curtain tearing in half after the crucifixion of Jesus, *ARK*’s investment in Theosophy and Orphic poetry begin to appear as idealizations of the reading practice *ARK* hopes to enable. The crucifixion spanned the distance between God and man, making them recognizable to each other. As a metaphor for the action of poetry the sinews of Orpheus’s lute form the world as a read text. Taken together these myths argue that Johnson’s poem provides a kind of ultimate knowledge by allowing readers to make their own worlds in reading *ARK*.

To reshuffle the terms slightly, we could say that with my particular literary construction I see my own argument emerge from the poem. When attending to the particulars of *ARK*, references “matter,” but only if you make them. *ARK* treats its mythical figures, its literary references, its philosophical investments as social artifacts with cultural value but without narrative intention. The cultural value that each object has provides readers with material for play, allowing their memory and personal experience into the poem, but neither forces nor prevents the development of specific meanings. Working toward an essay on *ARK* in one of his notebooks, reprinted as Notebook C in *Facture*, Johnson writes, “an Ark . . . / composed in some / Blakeian Land of the mind / —Oz, Tolkeniana [*sic*], etc.— / where words heard, overheard, / pieced and stitched and nailed and hammerd / up to harmonies, become / sole timber” (75). Like Blake’s visionary poetry, or J. R. R. Tolkien’s Middle Earth, *ARK* sees itself as a place where reading is primarily an exercise of the imagination. The mental power that people have to make images, to use their imagination to construct “fairy stories,” was for Tolkien a way to recover those things most important to our lives from “the drab blur of triteness or familiarity”—those things we have appropriated because they “once attracted us by their glitter, or their colour, or their shape,” but are now “locked . . . in our hoard, acquired” and forgotten (77). With Tolkien’s aim in mind, it looks like the job of readers is to build from *ARK* meanings that are particular to them, meanings that did not previously exist, and in doing so, reexperience the materials that make up their own lives.

It would be an oversight, however, to think *ARK*’s utopian concerns escapist, for it does not leave behind the material world, with all its sufferings and pains. It is just that *ARK* takes as its primary concern an interest in how we experience the world, not what we can make the world over into. Marked heavily by the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s, *ARK*’s utopia is in this sense, despite its Oz fixation, not a place to get to, but a

way to inhabit the lives we already live—to make livable those circumstances that might not support life. Although Baum himself might not go along, the movie version of *The Wizard of Oz* does recognize that fantasy is never a solution, but rather a tool to help people with their present condition.<sup>1</sup> Instead of a world apart from us, what is idealized in *ARK* is a method of experiencing the world that makes readers consciously join their particular lives with the circumstances and histories that determine them. By asking readers to live undivided lives and make their own conditions a frame for reading *ARK*, fatalist passivity gives way to a measure of agency, even when the circumstances of one's life appear desperate. "ARK 69" contains the stanzas:

pale the horsemen hurrying by,  
mistletoe uptree  
holly hung bright in berry

head above water, lock  
dust to incomparable dust last  
trapeze ecstasy

Following the reference to the "pale" fourth horse of the apocalypse, the image of a "head above water" magnifies *ARK*'s foreboding by twisting the almost trite expression "just keeping my head above the water" into a sparse image of a swimmer struggling to stay afloat just before drowning.

Anchoring this image is a reference to Genesis and Ecclesiastes, "all come from dust, and to dust all return" (995), but cut out are the hopeful verses that normally follow these lines in a funeral service, "in sure and certain hope of the resurrection." These visions culminate in the final, almost orgasmic invocations of death in a "last / trapeze ecstasy." Mixed through "ARK 69" are also more euphoric lines: "on wings magnetic / blessed majestic Borealis" and "boundless genesis." Often stanzas are tainted both by foreboding and ecstasy:

bow and lyre, minutest  
reciprocity  
riff Harp Star pure Sickle

wordsmith, way forth  
the old grammar  
break dawn across foothills"

Vega, the "Harp Star," is the brightest star of Lyra, a constellation associated with Apollo, god of music, and Hermes, who invented the lyre. Here then the pastoral and the

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<sup>1</sup> As Eric Selinger once told me in conversation, Baum doesn't really come down against fantasy; indeed, he has Dorothy bring Aunt Em and Uncle Henry to come live with her in the "Emerald City of Oz." It's the MGM picture that ends with return to Kansas as a good thing, a better thing than staying in Oz. In the film, Glinda (the good witch) says of Dorothy that she came from a star, "and Kansas, she says, is the name of the star." The "Lift Off" at the end of *ARK*, then, takes readers off toward the stars, but Kansas is itself a star—the second-to-last line of the poem, "ad astra per aspera," that is, "to the stars in hard ways," is also the Kansas state motto—so the movement of *ARK* circles us home.



such as “*circle square of*” (“BEAM 8”), “the backparts / of” (“BEAM 16”), “nature is” (“BEAM 26”), and “this is” (“ARK 34”). Even the final lines of the poem refuse the task of conclusion. Indeed, they just get the poem started as they envision a rocket ship at the moment before it blasts into space, turning the whole of *ARK* into a preparation for the main activity; or, to put it better: buildup is the main activity. It remains doubtful if liftoff will ever occur.

Taken as a kind of shifting delight, *ARK* is a little queer. In *RADI OS*, Johnson’s erasure of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, the beginning of which becomes “BEAMS 21, 22, 23,” Johnson writes: O / Tree / into the World / Man / the chosen / Rose out of Chaos: / Song.” Significantly, Johnson cuts out **man** “’s first disobedience,” “the fruit / Of that forbidden” **tree** “whose mortal taste / Brought death” **into the world**, “and all our woe, / With loss of Eden” (*PL* 1.1–4). In the biblical story the “Fall” from Eden is accompanied by fertilization. Adam and Eve give birth to two sons, and Adam becomes a farmer. *ARK*’s uncorrupted Paradise must then maintain itself by excluding Eve, and accordingly the fall into narrative, and an already known history. In *Paradise Lost* Milton shows Adam all that is to come as a result of his sinning. By excising Eve, *ARK* disconnects sexual, and particularly homosexual, desire from sin and narrative both by unmaking the natural conception of heterosexuality as original and by uncoupling intercourse and reproduction. With the latter, *ARK* refuses the “plot” of the Christian Bible—the sacred history of tracing the trajectory of the human race from Eden to the end of the world and eventual eternal life. In *ARK*, “Man” lives in the garden on his own terms, and does not need to assume inherited and corrupted desires or wait for salvation at the conclusion of history.

Working towards a queer desire in “Animal Sex,” Elizabeth Grosz writes:

Rather than dissolving itself, gratifying its urges as quickly and simply as possible, erotic craving seeks to prolong and extend itself beyond physiological need. . . . It no longer functions according to an “intentional arc,” according to the structures of signification, meaning pattern, or purpose. . . . The voluptuous sense of disquiet engendered by and as lust disarrays and segments the resolve of a certain purposiveness, unhinging any determination of means and ends or goals. (195)

In Grosz’s terms, we can, I think, read *ARK*’s attempt to sustain Paradise and permit readers to constantly remake meaning as a way for *ARK* to eroticize its method and form. Constantly beginning again, and constantly taking on new shape with each reader’s newly made meaning, *ARK* persistently reshapes its own body in the act of being read. *ARK* constructs itself as a text of male multiple orgasm by leaving the “fall” into specific meanings up to its readers. What is queer, and not simply “gay,” about *ARK*’s method and form in this case is, again borrowing Grosz’s words, its

“malleability in the forms and types of practices and pleasures available to it. In other words, to the more or less infinite possibilities of becoming” (226). *ARK*’s own sense of itself as dependent upon how readers and its own body generate each other through their combined, constantly changing series of reading frames argues that all reading is potentially queer. In exposing itself to limitless reading interventions, *ARK* demonstrates that any attention to “frame analysis” is necessarily queer because it demonstrates that frames are always malleable.

Considering one tendency in queer theory to demonstrate (as *ARK* does) how seemingly stable texts are not always what we took them to be, what seems important about *ARK*’s method is that as a literary work it *begins* with the queer belief that language and literary works are necessarily given to slips, uncertainties, and strange comminglings with those who employ them. *ARK* does not leave its queerness up to its readers to expose. In the passage that began this essay, Deleuze’s image of himself as “getting onto the back of an author, and giving him a child, which would be his and which would also be a monster” describes well the reading practice that *ARK* asks of its own readers (8). When Deleuze goes onto say that “it is very important that it should be [the author’s] child, because the author actually had to say everything that I made him say. But it also has to be a monster because it was necessary to go through all kinds of decenterings, slips, break ins, secret emissions, which I really enjoyed” (8), he argues that remaining faithful to a work’s meaning depends on remaining faithful to a method of reading in which readers engage the work before them so as to understand something for themselves. As it is elsewhere for Deleuze, literary fidelity in *ARK* means neither subjecting the poem to one’s prejudice nor abandoning oneself for what *ARK* “really means.” Rather, it means responding to *ARK*’s request that readers pay attention to the claims the poem makes on them—those references and uses of language that make up the poem’s texture and shape—by exploring what those claims might be used to mean.

Of course, *ARK*’s queerness is not without its anxiety. *ARK* undoes the dominant masculine, heterosexual fear of climax, but it does not entirely separate that tradition’s joining of sex and death. *ARK*’s desire to “copulate the void” (reminiscent of Kurt Vonnegut’s short story “The Big Space Fuck” [1972], in which six hundred pounds of human sperm are shot into space in an attempt to perpetuate the human species by impregnating Andromeda) implies initially a kind of strained solipsism, but this line also suggests both anal or oral sex and invokes the risk of sickness and death that now accompanies all forms of sexual intimacy. At least in *ARK*, however, the loathing of a lover’s body as a place to lose oneself is not projected onto the female body. But herein lies another problem: Eve’s near total absence from *ARK*’s Paradise presents, if not an impediment, at least a concern for its readers, as demonstrated by the common charge that *ARK*, and Johnson’s work more generally, is overly masculine, full of dick jokes, and determined by Charles Olson’s male-dominated projective verse. In essays

for this volume, Susan Schultz and Barbara Cole have countered these overly simple readings of Johnson's masculine discourse by exploring Johnson's work as an author of cookbooks and his use of writers like Emily Dickinson and Gertrude Stein throughout his poetry. Eric Keenaghan has also challenged any settled version of Johnson's poetic boys club by examining how *ARK* might be read in light of queer theory's critique of sexual identity. With *ARK*'s apparent queering of readerly method in mind, what these other arguments demonstrate, I think, is that while *ARK* holds onto its masculine attention it makes room for readers to reinterpret the character of that masculinity. With the fall of all "natural" grounds for critique, masculinity, if it can be located at all, is not itself a problem; what is important about a poem's sexual politics is what is done with them. As a queered work, *ARK* does not simply shore up or privilege a male body or a masculine discourse, but as the subjects of a poem that constantly undoes itself, they are themselves constantly undone.

Perhaps strangely for some, it is when read queer in this respect that *ARK* is at its most American. Thinking itself composed equally of multiple voices despite the social reality, America in practice is always in the act of becoming its ideal self. Making itself available to each reader for her particular meaning, *ARK* in the same manner holds itself to a democratic ideal of constantly seeking to become more complete through the inclusion of more and more voices. It is the reading practice available in *ARK* that is democratic in the extreme precisely because it refuses narrative and particular representations of American identity in favor of a method that makes the poem an extension of its readers. As the multiple voices pile into *ARK*, it twists away from any reading that would accuse it of maintaining a cultural image of America as white, Protestant, and male. Indeed, with the multiple voices entering *ARK* adding up against the vast spectrum of American cultural references, *ARK*'s Americanness begins to look excessive—it begins to look like camp.

In "Notes on 'Camp'" Susan Sontag describes camp as "a certain mode of aestheticism . . . *one* way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon" (277). In Sontag's account, camp is characterized by exaggeration, excess, artifice, and stylization. Although I would not want to call *ARK* a work of camp, clear strains of a camp sensibility run consistently through *ARK*, especially when the poem is drawing on pop-historical reference. "BEAM 25," for example, subtitled "*A Bicentennial Hymn*," contains a "twentyonegun . . . salute" and a "FIREWORKS" of music. While adopting words that allow readers to imagine their own fireworks display, the rhythm and sound of the poem become the sounds of celebration and the Fourth of July—moving quickly and joyously in lines like

the optimum play at any one moment spray of curvature  
falling off toward the edge great gold sunflowerhead of photons  
sum of sun and moon

in array the flicker of diamond-lattice pattern  
against a complex dappled back-  
ground also moving

Even the pictures of cell division that initiate the Beam have antennalike shoots coming out of them that look like fireworks exploding. The celebration continues in “ARK”s 60, 61, and 62, each subtitled “*Fireworks*” I, II, and III, respectively. Each “ARK,” like “BEAM 25,” recalls specifically the American celebration of independence while at the same time using sounds that reflect the rhythm of fireworks detonating: short, quick-stressed beats, mixed with slower, fading syllables: “ ‘Will light us down / to the latest generation’ / —Lincoln / vast smithy spray / ignite to day / scribe sky, spark clay” (“ARK 60”). But seeing a fireworks display in a diagram of cell division and reflecting fireworks at the rhythmic level of the poem is excessive, a turn towards “the ‘off,’ of things-being-what-they-are-not” (Sontag 279). Reproduced visually and formally, the fireworks of *ARK* are delightful to the poem less as remembrance of the American Revolution or the sacred, official history of the country than they are as a reveling in the energy of cultural experiences and common traditions. The same hold true in “ARK 59, *Spire of Liberty (Torch & Arm)*,” and throughout the rest of the poem where *ARK* persistently draws on patriotic music and familiar Biblical stories sacred to America’s Bible Belt.

All of which is to say that, again to borrow Sontag’s term, *ARK*’s camp is “pure.” *ARK* genuinely cares for these popular objects; it relishes and enjoys them, and also finds them powerful and meaningful—*ARK*’s affection is earnest. What such a form of seriousness does to these cultural objects is transform them. More like an American-flag motorcycle helmet than a solemn ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, *ARK*’s use of American popular history and culture attunes readers to the “double sense in which some things can be taken. . . . [T]he difference . . . between the thing as meaning something, anything, and the thing as pure artifice” (Sontag 281). Recognizable primarily as things that signify, *ARK*’s excessive American quotations do what they did not do before—they call attention to themselves as usable histories and objects. *ARK* cares no less for America as an idea and its expression through a series of symbols than the American Legion, for conservatives have no monopoly on what counts as patriotism, as if there were only one way to care for one’s country. It is just that *ARK*’s patriotism understands that patriotism and America’s self-image are always artifice and exaggeration, and for that reason are to be appreciated and attended to. *ARK*’s camp sensibility in this way undermines the unknowing seriousness of a conservative patriotism bent on reading its American ideals as commensurate with their symbols: a constitutional amendment banning flag burning, an insistence that the pledge of allegiance keep the phrase “under God” (originally inserted in 1954), for instance, both of which undo the very ideal those symbols stand for—free speech in the former and national authority in the latter. *ARK*’s vision of a campy America, I would suggest, authorizes at once a more serious and more democratic America. By seeing America as a

willed and legitimate set of values and symbols, an American camp is a vision that allows America to change and adapt to its ever-shifting social realities. It is a vision, I think, that is more in line with the Constitution's vision of itself as an amendable document, a knowing document with a double vision that holds some truths to be self-evident as a way to make them so.

A certain product and producer of *ARK*'s democratic poetics, the poem's camp sensibility authorizes a double reading of America's cultural life (and a queer reading of desire and literary form) and also insists that readers consciously *perform* their own readings. Readers at once make their own readings rise out of the poem and recognize themselves as doing so. Sontag herself saw a link between camp taste and homosexuality, but her essay, written before the rise of queer theory, does not fully exploit the potential for radical cultural critique implicit in camp, although it certainly helps create the terms for that critique. More recently, writing about Tennessee Williams, David Savran has extended Sontag's reading of a homosexual camp aesthetic as making available a "subversion of the liberal human subject" (160). Savran argues that the camp, "homosexual" realization that cultural roles are performance creates a "tendency to dissolve both the imaginary integrity of the subjectivities in its midst and those of the readers and spectators who are (knowingly or inadvertently) hailed into this text of bliss" (160–61). When turned to *ARK*, Savran's account of the potential effect of Williams's plays on the audience looks like a near reflection of readers of Johnson's poem. Always reading their meanings into *ARK*, and reading themselves reading those meanings, those who encounter the poem as an active performance of their own concerns can't help but find themselves a production as well. Understanding their readings as performance forces readers to accept the provisional, performative character of themselves—if the meaning of the poem is an extension of themselves, and that meaning is itself provisional, then so too are they. Despite the fact that *ARK* appears to embrace a form of individualism in its democratic reading process, *ARK*'s method, the way it frames itself and the reading practice it requires, is radically opposed to a notion of the individual as a stable, natural, or already-formed subject. In implicating their lives in the materials *ARK* provides, readers find that those selves are constantly changing as those materials change and shift registers and contexts. As readers constantly shape and are shaped by the poem, they lose sight of the point where they leave off and *ARK* begins, for that line is ceaselessly blurred and changed. To modify the old adage, in *ARK*, as a performance, you are what you read.

The near absence of the first-person pronoun "I" magnifies the disappearance of the coherent subject's place in *ARK*. Although the "I" seems common enough in the "The Foundations," it grows increasingly rare as *ARK* progresses through "The Spires" and then "The Ramparts," and even when the "I" is used, more often than not it is in lines like "I sleep the *sleep of / all*, not / one" ("BEAMS 21, 22, 23, *The Song of*

*Orpheus*”), or it is used to include other voices, like the voice of Van Gogh taken from his letters: “I have rented a house / yellow outside, whitewashed within / in full sun” (“ARK 75”). The primary references in *ARK* to individual humans are references to heroes, poets, mythological figures, “great men” of science, art, history, religion, or politics, all individuals who appear to us less as individuals than cultural signifiers. Most other references to the human are on the level of species or group, or to works such as Aaron Copland’s *Fanfare for the Common Man*, or in lines such as “chorus us Homo Sapiens” (“ARK 99”). The individual in *ARK* has meaning only as it becomes part of a larger cultural network. And even when practicing a kind of humanism, *ARK* steadfastly keeps to a notion that such an ethics involves the individual human subject with something beyond himself, something that forces readers to articulate their own unknowing and personal inadequacy in the face of the much larger universe. As it approaches the closing note of the poem, stanza thirteen of “ARK 99” rewrites Psalm 66’s “make a joyous noise unto the Lord” as “remake mankind, / a joyous noise into the void.” *ARK*’s rewriting of the Bible is an argument against fixed definitions of what the void is. After all, the final blast into space that *ARK* steadily moves toward comes *after* the last line. If the reader is headed for space, or if *ARK* points the way there, then the void is more like “the final frontier” in the *Star Trek* sense than it is emptiness. To throw a “joyful noise” into the void would be to take our own voices and bodies into the very presence of the unknown, and yet, once there, we do not possess or recreate the unknown. Rather, the void now arrived at, say the void now “known,” “remake[s] mankind.” Recalling religious mysticism, *ARK* joins readers with something beyond it; however much it is partially a reflection of herself, a reader’s particular meaning made within the poem begins to seem sufficient only when it is implicated in the larger trajectory of *ARK* itself—when it works back onto the reader and rereads her into something larger than herself.

We could say that the goal of the “self” in *ARK*, the thrust of its humanism, is to be remade in the image of the deity—the deity intimately linked with what, for lack of a better word, we call the human. Established in part to protect each individual, democracy does so by subjecting each citizen to this larger social order. Joined with this social network by their reading, readers of *ARK*, and so too the poem, internalize the democratic ideal of a republic and mix themselves into the lives of their fellow citizens. In *ARK* the difference between such an ideal and a deity is blurry. As such, I do not want to get hung up on what that deity looks like; I do not believe that *ARK* defines it, and instead leaves that up to each reader. I use the word *deity* here only because it is a word *ARK* uses and it suggests more than the discovery of “your inner self” or “who you really are.” Like Emerson, Johnson does not want to tell you what to believe specifically, but *ARK* does believe you must remake your own subjective position in order to get in touch with the world beyond your own body and mind.

Recalling the debate between Selinger and Scroggins that began this essay, I think it proper now to argue that certainly it matters where Johnson gets the sources for *ARK*, but not in the way sources matter to those who think sources matter. Reading *ARK* well is primarily a question of richness; discovering *ARK*'s affinities to other texts and myths, using them to better effect, lets more complicated meanings rise from the poem. How many references we connect with in *ARK* does not matter so much as what we do with those references. With new meaning, new lives and new worlds are made available, not because we learned something new about the world or our lives, but because the world and our lives are composed differently when they are connected to different meanings. In *ARK*, a program of textual, social, and personal expansion is at work. Readers do make their own meanings, and references are not necessarily loaded, but nor are they free. When readers create meaning in *ARK* they find that each particular value claim they arrive at is also determined by how *ARK* uses the same material they did. While readers need not account for what *ARK* meant by a specific line or reference, they must address how *ARK*'s use of a reference frames their own reading—how it determines readers' readings of themselves and the poem. When words shift registers in *ARK*, and push readers past their initial intentions, readers find themselves involved with the poem's larger lyric perspective that is not their own. To call this reading practice *democratic* is, in the tradition of innovative poetry beginning with the historical avant-garde and running up through Language poetry, to see readers and citizens as performing equivalent functions. Neither *ARK* nor America is ever finished. The reader of *ARK*, like the American citizen, is responsible, ideally, for the composition of the larger body; both state and citizen, both poem and reader, are corrections to and creators of each other. Put into a strange relation to themselves, like citizens who help generate a larger public reality even as that cultural discourse helps generate and frame the lives of individual citizens, readers in *ARK* find they must give up their personal "I" in order to gain it back again; and they must have it back so they may keep reading; and they must keep reading so they can find themselves.

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## PARONOMASTIC MIGRATIONS

In his essay “Synchronicity, Ronald Johnson and the Migratory Phrase,” Steve McCaffery points out that “Johnson makes manifest a latent content by recontextualization, putting an old voice in a new locus so that the new combination springs an original experience” (115). An early example of this strategy is Johnson’s 1963 poem *Sports and Divertissements*, where translations of Satie’s notes for a piano score are rearranged so that they begin to take on an entirely autonomous life, weaving new narrative possibilities. Johnson uses this kind of found text method throughout his career, with *RADI OS* being perhaps the best-known example. While McCaffery’s essay refers specifically to Johnson’s incorporating literary and cultural quotations written by others into his poetry, the concept of the “migratory phrase” can also apply to how Johnson made use of his own “old voices.” While tracking the migrations of Johnson’s own quotes from one work to another, a series of elemental motifs become evident, as well as a shift in attitude toward the paronomastic. Although the material and metaphysical are in conversation throughout Johnson’s work, the early work (up through “The Foundations” of *ARK*) favors an investigation of language in its concrete formations while the later work moves toward an architecture of the ineffable. By tracing the recycling of motifs—such as visual slides in the alphabet, the homophonic pun of eye/I, and other sites of paronomasia—I hope to locate the implications of such a shift in favor.

### FROM THE ALPHABET TO THE MOON

In the early part of his career, Johnson was particularly engaged in the concrete poetry movement of the 1960s. In 1965, Ian Hamilton Finlay’s magazine *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* published an issue that consisted entirely of Johnson’s visual poem *Io and the Ox-Eye Daisy*, with lettering and design done by John Furnival. The circular text of this poem can be transcribed as follows: “MOO / MOON / IO / OX / EYE / DAZE / I / O / MOO / OONS.” The text unravels slowly, each syllable performing an optical action.



This poem reveals Johnson's love for the transformations that letters allow for, and their ability to enact content through form:

Till recently, poetry, like prose, has been invisible. We can now make a line of poetry as visible as a row of trees. We may see, not through, but with the letters. (*The 't' leaves. An 'r' branches. The 'e's have annual rings. Below the snake believes it is an 's'.*) It is a magical world where all is possible. And placed properly on the page an 'I' can not merely resemble but have all the structural capabilities of an I-beam. An 'O' can rise, like the real moon, over the word 'moon.' . . . One could spend a lifetime writing with just the 26 letters of the alphabet. (qtd. in Solt 52)

Johnson's fascination with alphabetic puns paralleled his interest in found text; he wanted to find in words what usually escapes notice. The alphabet is something we take for granted. Standard reading practices cause the results of our reading to be singular. Johnson wanted to show that behind that singular entity was a bubbling multiple. As many critics have observed, Johnson—being from Kansas—had a great fondness for the transformational magic of Oz. But alongside the glittery wonder of not being in Kansas anymore, Oz also is the location of the duplicitous curtain. Every surface reality signifies differently, once the curtain is drawn. Johnson's playful and fantastical approach to metamorphosis as enacted by letters is a linguistic means of laying bare the material device.

One can imagine how *Io and the Ox-Eye Daisy* came to be, beginning with a meditation on the pun of "I" with "eye."



(drawings by Johnson, Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas)

The letter "I" is juxtaposed with the drawn shape of an eye, where Johnson's eye recognized yet another letter in the globe of the eyeball: "o." Suddenly the pun branches out toward myth: Io. Io leads to the jokingly narrative connection of "moo," which, with a slip of a letter, leads to the moon. Both sight and sound cause the narrative of the

poem to unfold. What is perhaps most important to note here is the concept of “seeing with” as opposed to “seeing through”—allowing the graphicity of letters to carry semantic weight. The double life of the pun is situated in the meeting of the graphic/material state of the letter and its use in a more familiar transparent signified. What *Io and the Ox-Eye Daisy* accomplishes is a graphic mythology that parallels the classic verbal mythology.

Later, in *ARK*, “BEAM 28, *The Book of Orpheus*,” the “voices” instruct us “TO GO INTO THE WORDS TO EXPAND THEM.” The fascination with the grapheme’s semantic potential continues: “A is the fulcrum. I, the lever (eye). Out of it ray these three: LFE—single, double, triple vision: L I F E. I’s descent from T is the stroke light takes assuming flesh from matter. H weds—is love. When these combine in I they make a windowed quaternity.” As readers, we are being asked to forget our transparent reading practices, so as to notice relationships that have always existed between letters. This visual reading of the alphabet is followed by a description of James Hampton—a Washington janitor who created a throne room made of tin foil and light bulbs in his garage. He was one of several self-taught artists Johnson was drawn to, all of whom discovered wonders in everyday materials and turned those materials into fantastical architectures. What kind of Orpheus exists in “BEAM 28”? It’s not the singer, but rather a man who trusts his eyes more than his ears. This is the Orpheus who had to turn around, who had to *see*.

When the alphabet is returned to in “ARK 55: *The ABC Spire*,” the relationship between sight and sound has changed. This spire—an abecedarius—seems to have left the material aspect of letters behind somewhat:

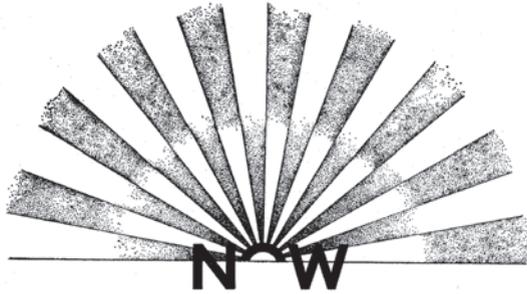
L o d e s t a r l y r e  
l o o m l a n g u a g e  
l e t t e r s l i m i t  
l i o n f o r l i n e  
l i t l a b y r i n t h  
l i s t e n e d l e n s

Although the spacing of this section creates a unique visual impact, the visual is more at the service of the ear than in “BEAM 28.” The musical Orpheus, before or after the Eurydice debacle, is what’s heard here. Now, “letters limit” rather than expand. Although letters join these words together in an alliterative unity, the words are pushing toward the “upper limit” of music, the “listened lens.” This BEAM asserts that sound establishes the sliding relations between these words. Letters and their physical occupation of the *line* are what keep language from achieving the power of the *lion*. The transformative physicality of letters found in *Io and the Ox-Eye Daisy* and in “The Foundations” of *Ark* are being left behind for a less material lyricism. The lyre—with its

utopian drive to express beyond material circumstance—begins to absorb the letter.

#### FROM THE EYE TO THE SUN

aureole: *A circle of light or radiance surrounding the head or body or a representation of a deity or holy person . . .*



In this 1965 concrete poem (conceived by Johnson and again designed by John Furnival), the aureole surrounds the *o*—it already having been established that the *o* is the center of the *I/eye*. The eye at ground level emits rays of perception. In “BEAM 3” of *ARK*, the “cornea” and the “corona” are placed side by side in a textual translation of this concrete poem. “BEAM 4” states: “The human eye, a sphere of waters and tissue, absorbs an energy that has come ninety-three million miles from another sphere, the sun. The eye may be said to be sun in other form.”

But the lift from the visual ground to the lyric ideal is again apparent in “ARK 73, *Arches VII*” of “The Ramparts”:

“never did eye see sun  
unless it had become first sunlike” i.e.  
an architecture, music frozen

This stanza helps clarify the nature of the music that is replacing the material play of the letter. Unlike visual/homophonic puns, which ceaselessly slide and associate without finality, music (paradoxically) is a frozen architecture, a stabilized structure. When the homophone does make its appearance, it is quite different from the slide from “moo” to “moon,” as is evident in this double-sound pun also from “ARK 73”:

believe, believe, be Live above!

#### FROM BRANCH TO BRANCH

*We can now make a line of poetry as visible as a row of trees.* —R.J. (qtd in Solt 52)

Issue 25 (1965) of *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* was on the theme of one-word poems. Finlay instructed contributors to create poems that consisted of one word, but the title could be any length. Johnson's entry to this issue of *POTH* was the poem "Trees of Night (with Celestial Birds)":

Moon-Tree  
hornbeam

Mist-Tree  
haze-l

Aureole  
oriole

Clouds  
blackcaps

Thunder  
yellow-hammer

Rain-Tree  
willow

Wind  
nightingale

Moonbow-Tree  
l'arch

Small Star  
starling

Constellation  
dipper

Finlay wrote of the one-word assignment "It seemed obvious to me that one could not have a literally one-word poem on the page, since any work must contain *relationship*; equally, one could (conceivably) have a one-word poem in a garden, if the surroundings were conceived as *part* of the poem" (Abrioux 5). This statement is a useful means for approaching the words that later inhabit Finlay's garden, Little Sparta. But it also seems to provide a means to enter Johnson's work, for so much of his work was about setting up environments for language. In the environment of Johnson's "Trees of Night (with Celestial Birds)," the line that separates the top word from the bottom makes the relation between the two parts seem almost mathematical, suggesting simultaneously a sign of equivalency and a sign of division. The dipper is a small bird, but placed beneath the word "constellation," it joins ornithology to astronomy. Relationship is also made visible by punning; Johnson shows that even within one word there is a double at work. For

example, the larch tree also suggests a Frenchified arc or arch. In the same way that Io's "daisy" was playfully punned into a "daze," this poem's hazel tree doubles in a "haze" or "mist-tree." Simultaneous with the oriole is the aureole.

In an interview with Peter O'Leary, Johnson was asked if he saw the overall structure of *ARK* as a "big body," to which he replied:

. . . Blake says it's all one big body. And I said, no, I think it's a tree. . . . I felt it as being this, as being a tree. It's one of the great structures: it's got depths and heights, it's got circulation, it goes into streams. It goes into stream patterns, which is what branches do. I think time makes things a tree. (42)

The simultaneity of punning becomes just a small part of a more associative and rhizomic formation. Rather than a line of poetry being a "row of [independent] trees," a line is a branch that leads to another in time. The structures of Johnson's later work allow for this kind of extension because they are released from a concentrated economy and punch-line immediacy that concrete poetry seems to demand.

The procedure by which Johnson wrote *RADI OS*—his "writing-through" of *Paradise Lost*—is sometimes called a "trickle down method," which is in fact a way of mapping previously unperceived rhizomes. According to Johnson, his method was influenced by seeing early pages of Tom Phillips' *A Humument*—a project Phillips started in 1966. Phillips described his procedure as follows:

I took a forgotten Victorian novel [*A Human Document* by W. H Mallock, published in 1892] found by chance. I plundered, mined, and undermined its text to make it yield the ghosts of other possible stories, scenes, poems, erotic incidents and surrealist catastrophes which seemed to lurk within its wall of words. . . . [T]he only means used to link words and phrases are the 'rivers' in the type of the original.

These rivers echo the streams of circulation that Johnson notes in trees, in that they allow for a structure based on continuities of space and time. Because of such circulation, Milton's "fruit / Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste / Brought death" (*PL* 1.1–3) eventually yields the first page of Johnson's *RADI OS*: "O / tree / into the World, / Man / the chosen / Rose out of Chaos: / song." Although the Phillips model is extremely visual, with colorful paintings resting on top of the rivers of type, Johnson's rhizomatic map is extremely spare, dominated by a luxury of blank space. This choice suggests a text that was found through listening to how words can link together, and in turn encourages listening on the part of the reader. Thanks to sound, a tree branches away from being the symbol of the forbidden and that which casts us out, and becomes instead a structure that invites us into a world of possibility. The blank and invisible have taken over the picture plane; they are what allow for Johnson's "re-visionary" poetics to be more clearly heard.

## FROM THE WAVES OF THE SEA TO A WAVE OF THE HAND

In 1970, Finlay published a poem in the broadside *Private Tutor* that seems to be in dialogue with the form Johnson chose for his “Trees of Night.” The poem was called “Boats of Letters” and begins like this:

Mysterious Central European Boat

K

Manhattan Skyscraper Boat

LZ

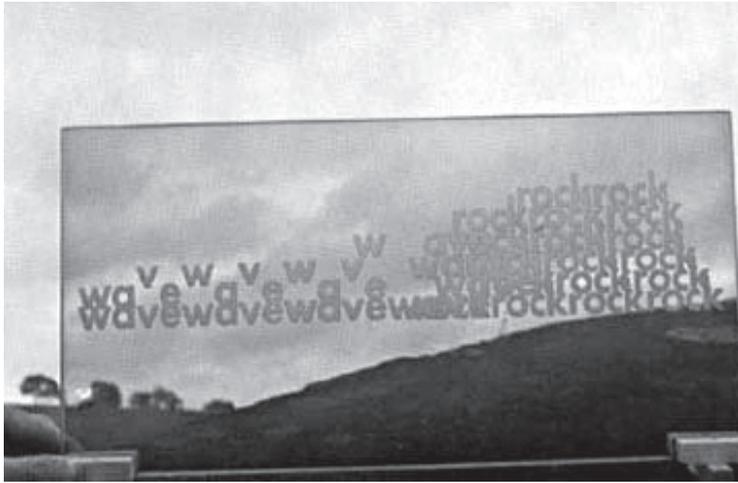
It makes sense that Johnson and Finlay would find themselves in such animated conversation. Between 1965 and 1971, their works and correspondence show a shared fascination for the evocative powers of single letters and words. Each poet worked at length with a distinct set of images/tropes. While Johnson was investigating the structures of trees, Blakeian cosmology, and visionary architectures, Finlay was building on the possibilities of boats, the French Revolution, and gardens.

On a visit to Finlay in 1965, Johnson wrote a series of “Scottish Landscapes” for his host, some of which were published in a small edition called *Gorse Goose Rose*. Johnson saw the series as a kind of narrative, a day book where each day a concrete poem was “offered” to Finlay (“Ronald Johnson” 81). As with *Io and the Ox-Eye Daisy*, there is a relationship between aural and visual punning, with meaning changing at the level of the letter:

**wave**  
**weave**  
**weave oars**  
**oars**  
**soars**  
  
**weave**  
**wave**  
**weave**  
  
**oars**  
  
**oars**  
  
**oars**

As the poem unfolds, each word changes the picture. A wave is part of the weave of the sea, but the word “oars” turns the act of rowing into an act of weaving through water.

Shortly after Johnson’s 1965 visit, Finlay created one of his best known concrete sculptural works, *Wave/Rock*:



In this poem, the words *wave* and *rock* collide almost pictographically so as to create a “wreck” of “wreck.” Finlay has said about this piece “The poem is ‘about’ two opposing forces, but, being a poem, presents them in equipoise, resolved” (Williams, n. pag.).

In “BEAM 5, *The Voices*” in *ARK*—written after Johnson’s close association with Finlay had ended—Johnson returns to the shifting of wave to weave, surrounding the weaving wave with the moon and eye of Io:

o  
moon  
  
*in mind in*  
  
a e a e a e a e a e  
w v w v w v w v w v  
eyeyeye

Rather than setting “opposing forces” in balance through concrete circumstances, Johnson’s visual letter work performs the idea that forms derive from other forms in “stream patterns.” The associative movement from one word/letter to the next is a fluid migration rather than a juxtapositional antagonism. Johnson follows the logic of the pun, the possibility of the subtextual echo (“Line eye us. / Web stir us” [“BEAM 8”]). But by this point, Johnson was taking his puns much more seriously. They no longer read as self-contained playful systems of chance; instead their double presences are more deliberate and resonate through repetition with larger schemas.

In the revisitation of elements used in the early concrete *Io* poem in “BEAM 5,” the eye is now situated beneath the waves, beneath the water. In Finlay’s work, the reader/viewer is on the shore, observing the waves and the boats that move on top of water. But in Johnson’s sea, there is no detached shore; the mind is above water level, while the eye is below it. For the reader, there is an alienating shift of perspective, which continues in “BEAM 18.”

“BEAM 18” is a startling handprint. There are a number of visual pieces in *ARK*, but the palm print is the only section that is entirely pictorial. In the O’Leary interview Johnson connects this print with Cocteau’s *Orphée*. In the film, Cocteau had Orpheus reach for Eurydice through “a mirror, which was a bath of mercury. Which is one of the reasons the palm is there . . . that palm going into the mercury to get to the underworld” (50). With that image in mind, the palm is reaching down for us, the readers. We are the ones who are in fact beneath the surface—the reader is the “eye” beneath the water.

In his essay “Hurrah for Euphony,” Johnson advises young poets to write everything out in longhand because “[s]ometimes the hand has an eye in the palm” (28). This advice relates both to the discoveries to be found in orthography (as illustrated by Johnson’s concrete poetry) and to the alienated perspective as evidenced in the palm print of “BEAM 18.” In “BEAMS 21, 22, 23: *The Song of Orpheus*” the palm continues to resonate; in fact, this section was originally titled “Palms.” Written at the same time that Johnson was writing *RADI OS*, it begins with the first lines of *RADI OS* as quoted above. In the same way that *RADI OS* is a text found inside of *Paradise Lost*, sections of “BEAMS 21, 22, 23” were discovered inside the Book of Psalms (“I took out the ‘S’; I took out the snake” [“Interview” 44]). Johnson selected at least one word from each Psalm; he described this process as letting the words “announce themselves” (43). Perhaps it was Psalm 138’s “there is no speech in my tongue; yet my whole interior and my most secret thoughts are known to thee” that led him to the lines “I have seen the Eternal / *interior*, / *not ocular*, *vision*.” Meanwhile, the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice runs throughout the piece, with Orpheus’ ocular vision answered by Eurydice’s more adamant interior vision. In the interview with Peter O’Leary, Johnson mentions that this particular “BEAM” occurred while he was writing through the second book of *Paradise Lost* for *RADI OS*. It’s interesting to go back into *RADI OS* with Orpheus in mind: “Extend / The birds their notes // though under // earth.” The Orpheus story “announces itself” in a passage from Milton that is quite distant from its original concerns:

If chance the radiant Sun with farewell sweet  
**Extend** his evening beam, the fields revive,  
**The birds their notes** renew, and bleating herds  
Attest their joy, that hill and valley rings.  
O shame to men! Devil with Devil damn’d

Firm concord holds, men onely disagree  
Of Creatures rational, **though** under hope  
Of heavenly Grace; and God proclaiming peace,  
Yet live in hatred, enmitie, and strife  
Among themselves, and levie cruel warres,  
Wasting the **Earth**, each other to destroy (*PL* 2.492–502)

Although technically *RADI OS* is a found poem, it's quite different from *Sports and Divertissements*, which made use of Satie's language. The Satie poems were built in a spirit of "let's see what happens," without much sense of Johnson as assembler. But Johnson's presence as maker is much more evident when he works with Milton and the Psalms; there is very little sense of indeterminacy and play. It is tempting to compare Johnson's procedure in *RADI OS* with Jack Spicer's concept of Martian dictation—especially since Spicer describes his idea with an analogy to Cocteau's Orphée<sup>1\*</sup> listening to the car radio. But Johnson doesn't aim to fulfill Spicer's directive of keeping the self out of the poem in the same way as Spicer intends. Although the language of both *RADI OS* and "BEAMS 21, 22, 23" was found inside other texts, it is because of Johnson that Orpheus is found there. As Johnson said about "BEAMS 21, 22, 23," "Nobody else would have gotten that out of it. So it still is me" ("Interview" 43).

#### FROM THE PEBBLE TO THE GARDEN

*Ronald, do you know this nice story about the man who came to see Mondrian and said, Do you not ever get tired of painting squares? And Mondrian said, What squares, I see no squares in my pictures.* —Letter to R.J. from Ian Hamilton Finlay, 2 August, 1964

*As for our O's, I will compromise; the world is round, in a square space—will that do?"*  
—Letter to R.J. from Finlay, 5 June 1967

*Concrete poetry offers, to me, not the purity of Mondrian, etc., but the added possibility of transcending the linearity of type.* —Johnson, biographical note in Williams

*Ian and I had a long intense correspondence which I enjoyed writing more than any other letters ever, but it finally ended when I told Ian everything was circles and he said everything was squares and I said it's too Mondrian, the cosmos doesn't believe in Mondrian.*  
—Johnson, Alpert interview

It seems that for Johnson, Finlay's squares were forms of exclusive finitude. He preferred

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1 "... and here the analogy of the medium comes in, which Yeats started out, and which Cocteau in his Orphée—both the play and the picture—used a car radio for, but which essentially is the same thing. But essentially you are something which is being transmitted into. . . . It's as if a Martian comes into a room with children's blocks . . . and he tries to convey a message" (Spicer 177–78).

instead the circle, which is a form that allows for inclusive regeneration. Both Finlay and Johnson were drawn to gardens as tropes for poetry, but whereas Finlay was drawn to the paradoxes of the “pure” neoclassical model (and literalized them in an actual garden), Johnson was drawn to the cosmological gardens of Milton and Blake, because “the action of the universe is metamorphosis” (“BEAM 17, *The Book of Orpheus*”). His interest in the transformational circle led him to a series of eccentric, page-bound garden varieties.

In 1967 Johnson wrote a poem called “Shard from Raymond Isidore, Builder of *Le Petit Pique-Assiette*.” It begins with the following epigraph by Isidore:

I was walking in the country when I saw by chance some bits of glass and crockery which I collected for their color and sparkle. I accumulated them in a corner of my garden, then the idea came to me of making a mosaic of my house.  
(*Spirit* n. pag.)

Following the procedure used for *Sports and Divertissements*, the poem consists entirely of rearranged translated quotations from Raymond Isidore—a cemetery worker by day and visionary architect by night in the early part of the twentieth century. As with Finlay’s garden at Stonypath, Isidore’s was a lifelong project of transforming a piece of land into an artistic creation. Isidore claimed to have been guided by a spirit as he decorated his entire house with elaborate mosaics made of found objects and created a sculpture garden he called “The Garden of Paradise.” The “shards” of Johnson’s Isidore poem are used again in his book *The Spirit Walks, the Rocks Will Talk* (1969), but this time they are joined by quotations from another visionary builder, Le Facteur Cheval. Cheval was a postman who, in 1879, tripped on a pebble, which triggered the dream of creating a palace, which he then spent the rest of his life building out of small stones. Both men created private paradises out of the materials that were at hand. Johnson then “tripped” over their stories and collaged their words together in order to make a book that he dedicated “for those friends of the Jargon Society who may be lacking in their own private winter garden” (n. pag.). A garden made (or collected) from the matter at hand is quite different from Finlay’s garden of finely crafted historical and literary allusions.

Johnson claimed that Cheval’s *Le Palais* and Isidore’s *Le Petit Pique-Assiette* were “the equivalent of our Watts Towers” (“Ronald Johnson” 81)—another unlikely mosaic paradise. These constructions are named as inspirations for the structure of *ARK*; in the concluding note to *ARK*, written in 1991, Johnson described the poem as “[l]iterally an architecture . . . fitted together with shards of language, in a kind of cement of music.” In “BEAM 30, *The Garden*,” Cheval’s words appear again—this time untranslated: “*J’avais bâti, dans un rêve, un palais, un château ou des / grottes.*” The recycling of Cheval is instructive in regards to Johnson’s changing focus. When the Cheval quote first appeared, it was broken up and rearranged, but not mixed with

any other source text. The procedure was similar to taking a plate, breaking it, and then laying some of the pieces side by side. But by the time the fragments of Cheval reach *ARK*, they're joined by pieces from many other broken plates. "BEAM 30" itself contains quotes from Thomas Traherne ("To do as Adam did") and Sir Isaac Newton ("I have refracted it with Prismes . . ."). In this way, the structure of *ARK* is truly a mosaic. The focal point is no longer the visionary eccentricity of a French postman, but the ways in which the elements of a poem can "build a garden for the brain." However, the strategy of overt collage is less evident in the final section of *ARK*. In "ARK 89, Arches XXIII, *The Cave*," the motifs offered by Cheval and others have been pulverized so that their origins are no longer visible. The old materials have been worked into new stuff through alchemy:

memorable pebbles  
 rolled mountain torrent,  
 arrested prime amethyst falls

emerald, revealer-of-truth  
 noinnerfirehid ruby  
 fit for a King's finger

hands mirror diamond maker  
 Adam, engoldened  
 enter into the Grotto

In the early drafts of *ARK*, when the poem was actually called *Wor(l)ds*, there were a number of illustrations. Except for the diagrams of mitosis found in "BEAM 25, *A Bicentennial Hymn*," taken from Isaac Asimov's *Guide to Science*, none of these illustrations remain in the final version of the poem. One striking visual image found in "Portal 27" is a collage of fragments from painter John Martin's illustrations of *Paradise Lost*. Martin's illustrations, published in 1825, distinguished themselves by emphasizing the architecture and the landscape, rather than the figures found in Milton's poem. In fact, the figures are practically dwarfed by their surroundings. This shift in figurative emphasis changes the viewer's relation to the story of *Paradise Lost*. Johnson's choice to take out such visuals indicates a desire to get away from a particular kind of collage—perhaps because those images would distract from Johnson's own architectural structure or perhaps the imagery offered by Martin did not lend itself to the alchemical recycling that Johnson's other motifs were subjected to.

Johnson began to write *RADI OS* while taking a break from *Wor(l)ds*; the break was necessitated by his teaching schedule at the time. In some ways, his approach to *Paradise Lost* is comparable to Martin's, for he takes Milton's text as the starting point, but discovers there a dream, a garden, that is completely unique: "in the shape // as of



But this kind of visual wordplay is toned down in the final version. More frequently, words appear as inscription, as small monuments. There is less emphasis on the sliding visual echo. Instead, words appear in their singularity:

wood  
wind

Certainly the pun still exists here. The woodwind instrument playing Mahler is joined to the woods and winds named inside the Chinese poems, the translations of which Mahler used as text for his piece. But the play on words here is presented with an austerity that is quite removed from the lighthearted paronomasia of *Io and the Ox-Eye Daisy*. Although *Songs of the Earth* still exhibits Johnson's fascination with what Marjorie Perloff describes as "the magic of letter reversal," that magic is not accompanied here by a performative visuality. There is also a different approach to translation than in Johnson's earlier translation projects, *Sports and Divertissements* and *The Spirit Walks, the Rocks Will Talk*. In those books, translation was a means for alienating text from its original context so as to discover something new; it was a means of generating fragments for use. But Johnson's translations of Mahler are not based in found text and seem much more self-sufficient. The economy and independence of the *Songs* suggest the possibility of "pure" relations, the possibility that the cosmos does actually understand Mondrian . . . but not for long. These seemingly stabilized and intact "squares" are later found as fractured shards that have migrated into the collected materials of *ARK*. The first song, which begins "earthearthearth," is repeated in "ARK 24," this time joined by two additional pieces of information: "any piece of counterpoint includes / a silent part / for the rhythmic movements of hearts and / lungs" and "(lilacs)." The "song" that makes use of the phrase "form from form" is echoed in "BEAM 5, *The Voices*":

form from form from form from form  
'play'd by the picture of No-body'  
*whose bright stripes & broad stars*

However this reappearance of "form from form" immediately follows an actual squaring of the circle, and so resumes the dialogue with Finlay's compromise between neoclassical finitude and regenerative cosmology:

c i r c  
l e c i  
r c l e

Johnson's book *Eyes and Objects (Catalogue for an Exhibition 1970–72)* continues an investigation of finitudes, or as one of the pieces, titled "The Microscopic Telescope," states, "Pure light / compressed to sight." This particular catalogue is one for the gallery of the mind, as is evident in this example:

## World-Framed Page

molecules on void  
8½ x 8½  
(unfinished)

John Cage once said in conversation, “An exhibition . . . can dip into leaving a wall empty. And it’s out of that emptiness, and not being put off by ‘nothing’ happening—and when you *see* it, it really impresses you—that hearing it, hearing the emptiness, becomes a possibility all over again” (*Musicage* 91). *Eyes and Objects* shows Johnson beginning to investigate the possibilities of empty space, and the relation of space to music. Johnson said of this project, “I wanted the way the mind worked through words to attempt the same thing as the space paint or bronze or glass can make. . . . [T]he poems are built from sound to sound rather than on sense so that in most cases every sound is mirrored by some other sound” (“Ronald Johnson” 85). Such mirroring is clearly illustrated by the poem “To Be Inscribed on Cézanne’s Paintbrush”:

Helpless before the leap, the shape, the gap. Laps. Alps.

Eric Selinger has called these works “concrete poems carved out of aural space” (“Biography”). In the same way that the early concrete poems made the familiar shapes of letters newly visible, these poems illuminate the sounds of letters. However, these poems distinguish themselves from much of Johnson’s other work in two crucial ways: (1) each piece is autonomous, and thus removed from the aesthetic of the “collected shard” and the “migratory phrase,” and (2) they show a much greater interest in the anagram and rhyme than in the homophonic pun. The wordplay in these poems is easier to hear than it is to see:

Tree Carving

The limb its climb,  
root’s limits.

A heart, the hard truth;  
obdurate art.

## FROM THE SOUND WAVE TO SILENCE

In his essay “The Aural Ellipsis and the Nature of Listening in Contemporary

Poetry,” Nick Piombino claims that the frequent use of found-poetry procedures in recent poetry reveals

a more and more collaborative process, with the creative functions of writers and readers becoming less and less distinguishable from one another, and, in a sense, even from poets and listeners, or writers and critics. These texts point the way to telling us how poems are created and how to listen closely to our responses in order to discover the experiential sites of the poem’s constituent materials. (68)

Johnson called his *Songs of the Earth* “listenings”—“as poems must listen and sing simultaneously” (*Selected Poems* 65). In this way, the book *RADI OS* is a sound wave, the sound elicited from Johnson’s own particular experience of *Paradise Lost*. He collected fragments from the text according to sound. However, this was not how the project began. As mentioned above, Johnson was at first influenced by Tom Phillips’s *A Humument*, as well as composer Lukas Foss’s “erasure” of Handel, *Baroque Variations* (“Interview” 43). Johnson began by blithely striking through an 1892 edition of *Paradise Lost*. It seems that he was thinking about the page primarily as a visual entity at first. Two pages of the original crossed-out book expose this particular emphasis. On page 54, a perfect circle contains a “glimpse of joy” at the bottom, and on page 75 there is an eight-cent postage stamp of Einstein’s face placed in the bottom left corner.

~~The more long that I thought for, the more  
The Roman gods — or Javan's made here  
Gods, yet confessed later than Heaven's Gods,  
Then boasted parents, than Heav'n's Gods,  
With his enormous brood, and his enormous  
By younger Saturn: he from mighty Jove,  
His father, like a son, like measure found;  
So Saturn us, his son, like measure found;  
And thus the throne of Heaven's Father's  
Of old Olympus' top the middle air,  
Their highness down, and from the clouds  
Of Heaven's highness down, and from the clouds  
Fled down to sit on the Heliconian fields,  
And bound the Gods to the utmost Tethys;  
And thus more came the ~~glimpse of joy~~  
The damp; yet such ~~the glimpse of joy~~  
The glimpse of joy to ~~the glimpse of joy~~  
The pair, to have found the ~~glimpse of joy~~  
The self; which on his countenance  
The full hue. But he, his ~~glimpse of joy~~  
The reflecting, with high words  
The worth, not substance ~~the glimpse of joy~~  
The courage, and dis ~~the glimpse of joy~~  
The commands the ~~glimpse of joy~~~~

510  
520  
530

(Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas)



this way, intention is foregrounded rather than evaded. Johnson, on the other hand, has erased all evidence of his process; we have only the final product revealed as “music frozen.”

It is also interesting to think of Johnson’s project in relation to Cage’s work with silence. Both Johnson and Cage have approached silence through the writings of Thoreau. The introduction of *Songs of the Earth* includes Thoreau’s voice: “As I leave the village, drawing nearer to the woods, I listen from time to time to hear the hounds of Silence baying the Moon.” One of the formal factors that distinguishes *RADI OS* from all of Johnson’s other works is the incredible spaciousness of its pages, its opening of the page to silence. The reader is given a location of pure listening, without walls and seemingly without history. However, this developmental narrative (from material pun to metaphysical lyric) is destroyed by the presence of one letter: *O*. This circular letter—present from the very beginning in the rising moon over Io—has haunted all of Johnson’s poems, and continues to echo in each section of *RADI OS*. It is the radius of bone, the circle of the eye, the paronomasia of the cosmos:

RADI    OS  
O    I.

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## EROS

1.

“Only on absence,” philosopher notes, “in  
Absence,” distant lover “dreams distance gone,”  
Your (Frank’s) sweet “wish there were a passage  
Underground,” yearning so, “that led by magic  
To your house” (“true love”) “and bed,” to “sing  
Together,” (you, Ted), “sing mouth to mouth,” “can  
Find no rest,” “that the most overpowering passions  
Thrive,” “yf my love wer in my arms,” “my suete  
Leof, mi blis,” your (Edna’s) wry ironies, “sweet  
Love, sweet thorn,” so far, so near, “loved you  
Wednesday,” or “would have loved you in a day  
Or two,” your (George’s) hot guilt, “love me today,”  
Burnt love, “nine-tiered tigress,” blind eyes of love,  
“In the cage of sex,” that do not see, “we remove  
Our blindfolds,” yet see, “so wisely and so well,”  
Beyond, “suete lemmon,” “burden of this joy,” repair.

2.

“In old age,” you wrote, Bill, “the mind casts off,”  
Bought *Paterson Five* (03/18/61), “rebelliously,”  
So young, in awe, but “got” it only in theory,  
“May croak at any moment,” (04/25/51) to Stevens,  
“But we’re not old,” that’s theory for you, “to theorize  
Is to falsify,” you knew, “reduce all things to method,”  
Thus your stern dictum, “no ideas but in things,”  
Could never really explain ‘variable foot,’ ‘measure,’  
Yet could show, saxifrage, plums, taught now,  
Wheel barrow, to every schoolchild, (not *Paterson*,  
Too raw, plexed, tough, “I have seen what I have seen”),  
Saw old age, bum heart, strokes, yet at sixty-seven,  
“More attractive to girls than when seventeen,”  
“Heel & toe,” the ancient dance, “ya ho! ta ho!”  
Doctor Bill (old joke), “burden of poems,” the words,  
Punched slowly, letter by letter, ageless, no joke.

3.

“Fastened,” yes, Willie, “to a dying animal,” daily,  
“Old bones,” heartache, sad dream, each “night’s  
Remorse,” absence, that “cold eye,” your late poems,  
“Words of a dead man,” no, “old man looking  
On life” in doubt, “in scorn,” mind “perhaps too old,”  
Less “rich,” yet once, London days, young, “dark  
And pale and tall,” tagged your footsteps, shouted,  
Foul ragamuffins, “DEAD MAN,” you, “alone  
And aware,” actually pleased, but years later, worried  
“Poet’s labour mere rejection,” longed for “passionate  
And powerful syntax,” found, “lonely of heart,”  
Just “why an old man” should “be mad,” yearning,  
“Withered away,” for presence, “her in my arms,”  
To be “young again,” sparrows “brawling in the eaves,”  
But dark morning’s chill, “hoo hoo hoo,” discovers,  
Across bed, desire only, only “shadowes shadow.”

NOTES:

1.

Umberto Eco: “On Symbolism”

F.T. Prince: “Strambotti IV”

Theodore Roethke: “She,” “Words for the Wind 2”

Anonymous: “Westron Wind”

Anonymous, “Love in Spring (BM. MS. Harley 2253)”

Edna St. Vincent Millay: “Sonnet LXXXVI,” “Thursday,” “Sonnet IX,” “The Philosopher”

George Barker: “Third Cycle of Love Poems VIII,” “True Love, True Love, What Have I Done?”,

“Love Me Today,” “Secular Elegies V,” “Villa Stellar XXXVI”

2.

William Carlos Williams: *Paterson V*, Letter to Wallace Stevens (04/25/51), *In the American Grain*,  
“A Sort of a Song,” *I Wanted to Write a Poem: The Autobiography of the Works of a Poet*, “Heel & Toe  
to the End,” “*Paterson VI*”

David Pears: *Ludwig Wittgenstein*

Robert Lowell: “William Carlos Williams”

3.

William Butler Yeats: “Sailing to Byzantium,” “The Black Tower,” “The Choice,” “Under Ben  
Bulben,” *The Death of Cuchulain, A Vision, The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats*, “The  
Circus Animals’ Desertion,” “A General Introduction to My Work,” *The Land of Heart’s  
Desire*, “Why Should Not Old Men Be Mad?”, “Politics,” “The Sorrow of Love”

W. H. Auden: “In Memory of W. B. Yeats”

Dorothy Richardson: *The Trap*

T. S. Eliot: “Fragment of an Agon”

Richard Crashaw: “Act. 5. *The sicke implore St. Peter’s shadow*”

# POETRY

1.

“What do I know of poetry,” you once asked,  
“Among so many definitions?” openly doubtful,  
Unsure of “High-hung laurel terraces your heart  
So hankered for,” and for Gene Derwood, too, “wild  
Eyes . . . that funny hat,” loving husband, trying, trying,  
One by each in *Great Poems*, three each in *Immortal*,  
“Best anthologist,” (but, like “mr u,” less than demure),  
*Pocket Book of Modern Verse* (04/54), so important,  
*Little Treasury of Modern Poetry* (06/22/56), read,  
Thumbed, reread, so much not yet understood, desired,  
Always at hand, “as if forever,” all those chosen ones,  
(Young scholar, your kind arrangement, after interview  
With noted poet, your NYC apartment, you, as she left,  
Saying, “sad man of ashes,” through the slowly  
Closing hallway door, “Remember, I’m a poet, too”),  
What, Oscar, “perplexed, voiceless,” do you now know?

2.

Not the way you pictured it, eh, Bogie, saw Death  
With “silver birds,” tip-toe, alluring, “between  
The cold waves of his hair,” instead, one night,  
Cock-teased dimwit, two shots • • right in *The Sea  
Around Us*, through the old ticker, blood all over,  
“Naked on roller skates,” King of Village, “sliding  
Down into nowhere,” those drowned, gassed girls,  
Story told of double suicide on Pallisades, you, polite  
Mississippi boy, ladies first, then, once she’s dead,  
Why jump, go back downtown, cadge a drink, tale,  
True or not, doesn’t matter, found how life can  
Replace art, wrote jazz poems, like Lindsay, sold  
Poems on street, George Garrett bought, “fifty cents  
A pop,” Dylan Thomas once wiped your snotty nose,  
Poems, novels, now forgot, only dive, crash, death,  
And this, here’s four bits, sad Max, go make a poem.

3.

Driven, Louise, to tell and “tell again,” same story,  
“Beauty and sorrow,” book of “the bitter heart,”  
Your complaint came hard, only 105 poems saved,  
Forty-six years of exacting work, precise, “subject,”  
Said Roethke, “given its due,” added, “no more,”  
Marianne Moore, “compactness compacted,”  
Hurt and hurt, private, yet, again, again, “normal  
And selfish and heartless,” repeating what can  
Be told, “more things move than blood,” so aware,  
“In the heart,” a lonely aging alone, dying alone,  
Fewer lines year by year, days and nights flowing,  
Working in library carrel (01/69), slipping  
Slowly into sleep, sliding, soft plop, to the floor,  
Librarians on ready alert, only a year to go,  
Knowing “you cannot take yourself in,” despite  
Time’s taunt, allures of love, false solace of sorrow.

4.

You know, Walt, Ginsburg, fifty years ago, tried,  
California supermarket, “eyeing the grocery boys,”  
To pin you down, afraid death not “as great as life,”  
Feared “life is a suck and a sell,” or Galway  
Kinnell, used to start, temperature in roomful  
Of young women (04/73) rising, sleeves rolled,  
Every reading reading from tattered *L. of G.*,  
Good gray poet or doe-eyed young red shirt,  
Like Elvis, take your pick, hair prickling on nape  
Of neck hearing record, your voice, “America,”  
As when (12/69) young student poet looked up,  
“Nimble ghosts wherever I look,” from her book,  
Saw you lolling in chair, feet propped, hole in sole  
Of one shoe, always there, Walt, “in the adamant  
Of Time,” here, “surrounded by blatherers,” held,  
“Undisguised,” universal, cosmic, yourself, you.

5.

“O,” you wrote, “westron wind,” now uncertain  
When or who you might have been, five, maybe,  
Centuries ago, “when wyll thow blow,” lonely  
Query, “the smalle rayne,” recited, sung, revised,  
“Downe can rayne,” appropriated, wind “sweet”  
To Herrick, thinking of kisses, Henley, no “hope,”  
Yearning, “Cryst yf my love wer in my arms,”  
Yeats, at the end, “O that I were young again,”  
Satirical, Dehn, “had my arms again,” anti-nuke,  
Father Roseliep, “point sharper,” resurrection,  
“Than rain,” but raked by scholars, historicized,  
Condemned—Christian dead white male—  
Studied, closely, structurally, culturally, queerly,  
Post-colonially, deconstructed, psychoanalyzed,  
Yet, assured, “and I yn my bedde agayne,” poem,  
Yours, as always, intact, pure, true, inviolable.

6.

“Dotes on poetry,” mother wrote (12/1896) to “perfectly  
Horrible degree,” you, at Bryn Mawr, “writing is all  
I care for,” Marianne, & later, precise observation, stacks  
Of *National Geographic*, writing, “fiercely ambitious,”  
Not poems, “exercises in composition,” in Carlisle,  
“James” Thorpe your pupil, Manhattan, your “thread-like  
Hand,” Brooklyn, again Manhattan, told W. S. you “tried  
Not to rise” above “conversational level,” yet “complete  
Disintegrator,” he said, “equally complete reintegrator,”  
W. C. W. called you “leading light,” you found his poems  
Vulgar, “of the Sex of the Future,” shy, sharp-eyed, alert,  
Had, “neat and hard as an ant,” the wisdom to scissor,  
“Strict duty,” unnecessary toad from unnecessary  
Garden, to know, on way to zoo, or to the grave,  
Must always go, “as if, as if,” carapaced, to see, “thick  
Skin be thick,” always, “it is all as ifs,” the elephant.

NOTES:

1.

Oscar Williams: "Autobiographical Note," "On Meeting a Stranger in a Bookshop"

George Barker: "Formal Elegy on the death of Oscar Williams"

George Garrett: "Anthologies II (Here and Now)"

e. e. cummings: "mr u will not be missed"

Robert Lowell: Review in *The Sevanee Review*

2.

Maxwell Bodenheim: "Death," *Naked on Rollerskates*

George Garrett: "Anthologies I (Then and There)"

3.

Louise Bogan: "The Daemon," "Betrothed," "Exhortation," "Evening in the Sanitarium,"

"Night," "Summer Wish"

4.

Anonymous: "Westron Wind"

Robert Herrick: "To the Western Wind"

William Ernest Henley: "Bring Her Again, O Western Wind"

William Butler Yeats: "Politics"

Paul Dehn: *Quake, Quake, Quake: A Leaden Treasury of Nuclear Verse*

Raymond Roseliep: "The Small Rain"

5.

Walt Whitman: *Leaves of Grass* (1855), "America"

Allen Ginsburg: "A Supermarket in California"

6.

Anonymous: Marianne Moore: statement in "Some of the Authors of 1951 Speaking for Themselves," *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*, 7 October 1951; "Am I a Brother to Dragons and a Companion to Owls?," "Poetry," "Elephants," "Melancthon"

Bonnie Costello: "Tribute: Marianne Moore" (11/06/1997)

Wallace Stevens: Letters to Barbara Church (05/06/1954 & 06/26/1952), Letter to T. C. Wilson (03/25/1935)

William Carlos Williams: Letter to Marianne Moore (02/21/1917)

John M. Slatin: *The Savage's Romance: The Poetry of Marianne Moore*

Ted Hughes: "The Literary Life"

George Garrett: *Going to See the Elephant*

y were electric ghosts and they lived in an electric house. This house was just big enough  
 for the four of them. They had lived in it since the day they died. In the land of the living, in an electric storm.  
 Each night their mother cried for them. They never heard their names. Each night her tear

There was a house on a hill,  
 a little tiny house.  
 full of brothers  
 a little slow. Three of them moved with a quickness. There was a host of brothers  
 brothers  
 them moved with a quickness.

Three of them knew their place. One wandered off on his own everyday, shy afraid  
 of the man he used to be. One was too big for his britches.  
 They knew where they were all  
 you were going. still he was a shadow. of company. One was a leader, but  
 Four brothers  
 eyes.

One was a little tiny house. little slow.  
 Three of them moved. All of them were colored and  
 They were electric  
 all of them were dead.  
 with a quickness.  
 ghosts and they were very bright.

# LOSING ELECTRIC PEACE

There was a house on a hill, full of brothers. One was a little slow. Three of them moved with a quickness. There was a host of brothers in a little tiny house. Three of them knew their place, but one was too big for his britches. One wandered off on his own everyday, shy and afraid of company. One was a leader, but still he was a shadow of the man he used to be. They were electric ghosts and they were very bright. They knew your next move. They knew your type. They knew where you were going. They were all eyes.

Four brothers lived in a little, tiny house. One was a little slow. Three of them moved with a quickness. All of them were colored and all of them were dead. They were electric ghosts and they were very bright. They were electric ghosts and they lived in an electric house.

This house was just big enough for the four of them. They had lived in it since the day they died in the land of the living, in an electric storm. Each night their mother cried for them. They never heard their names. Each night her tears sizzled as they fell on their graves. She left food for them on an altar. It grew in their yard in the bush of ghosts. There were four dead men living in a house. They were very bright. They were electric ghosts.

★

The electric ghosts lived a happy death. They had enough room. They had enough fruit. They had order and peace. They had a happy death. Sometimes brothers can be rivals and now and then these four parted ways. But the point is that they had their peace. The peace of brothers, the peace of ghosts. An electric peace. Until one day, it was broken.

A boy came to town. Or was it a man? He was an earthly person. He entered the bush too young to know the meaning of good and bad. He entered the bush too young to know it was a dreadful bush. He had wandered the bush both day and night eating and dodging the ghosts. When the earthly person wandered into the town of electric ghosts, he was hungry and he ate what he saw: bouncing fruit, electric crumbs, and blinking lights. He was too young to know the meaning of good and bad but he knew not to tangle with ghosts. When they came for him (and they did come for him) he ran this way and that, but never ceased to eat. When they came for him, they came in order. The eldest brother was the leader and he came first. He came directly and he was determined to shadow every move.

## X. THE MERCERS' PLAY (18:38)

What is this? All these plays, and a different  
Christ in each. Most actors are lousy drunks.  
Most writers tools. It's just us fools. So why  
All this? What do you think the theater brings  
Back to you? I'd like to say the dead but really  
What? What are you looking at? Are you inside?  
Or out of doors? Who is there? (Answer me.) Who  
when we stand at our small threshold: an arch,  
Or star, or the proscenium blade above? Which  
One will drop? The words, re-wombed and wound  
Like a clock, they alone take hold of your body  
In melody, sight, practice, memory. All drop  
As they did before, a hundred times, hundreds  
Of years ago. At times, my mother repeats them  
Over the breakfast table, as if she's talking  
To a man behind me. At times, she says them to me  
As if I am that man or woman from the script. And  
My father did the same. Who are they then? When

## XII. THE TILETHATCHERS' PLAY (16:36)

Roofless night. The tilethatchers rest in  
The nativity hay. One clutches a sheep mask  
To his chest and snores loudly. The dusting  
Of sequins, mimic-starlight they had cast  
Through the broken roof upon the toy child,  
Reflects the actual moonlight moving over  
The exposed stage. And now it is time for the  
Wings. Sweeping dark fabric against a dark  
Backdrop. Wheeling each sleeping scene to  
The carriage houses. A boy holds his finger  
And thumb over the tongue of a bell. Hushed,  
He follows them in across one life bolted  
To the doorway. Now is the time for putting  
Everything away. Some bread carried off in  
The beaks. Some sweepers again making wing  
Noises or brushing bottles off of the curb.

# BERLIN SECOND CHILDHOOD

*for Sharon Marcus*

1

In the city of the Love Parade you are only half a scholar  
And half a wired aggregator, rhetorical architecture, deathsmell, FF City Street Type on  
the signs, another gay breakfast,  
Another SIMM card. Hallo Zukunft! On the limeless avenue the emptiness is filled by  
opera,  
In the waxless headtrainstation a passage between history and transparency. My  
German soldier.

The old east was a transformation company: now it pools around the Hotel Disparu  
In retro relaxations. We had to destroy the idea to save it. I was a free man  
In situ, but everywhere else in chains —  
Silky chains of ardour, obv., though let's not get too cute at this late date.

At Rosenthalerstrasse small girls call Berlin to redesign itself  
In the image of — what? — the missing information? “Berlin Alexandriaplatz”?  
Or Berlin Short-Term-Memory-Loss. Scrolling down the menu  
Had that sense of moving without travelling, spooling vellum  
Of the new data, very Kaiserpanorama, the cars went around

And around the monument-island that rose into another topography, as in,  
It happened here but, like, the other here. Oh and by the way  
The 15 is the 1 now, and what we used to call “the jubilation”  
Is now called Buildings With A Hundred Floors.

# THE GOLD VIC

Columnaded high over  
The topographic cosmopole.  
History I mean.  
On another occasion  
Might have seen  
A specimen pin  
Affixing the city  
To the city  
Of the moment.  
Not so much.  
Instead this elevation  
Keeping quarantined the  
City late of  
Transparency and squats  
So tourists don't  
Meet the new  
Locals largely unemployed.  
That stolid great  
Coated iron soldier  
Down the road  
Does this too  
And heavenly horses  
On the Gate  
This move repeated  
Throughout the city  
Achieving abstraction with  
Eisenman's squatting stone  
Islands rising from  
The micro-topographic plaza  
That falls away  
Across the street  
An observation deck  
With ice cream  
To watch the  
Here not here.

# “COME TO THE PARK THEY SAY IS DEAD”

Dwarfed by all this re-upped International Style it's hard to remember the pre-Raphaelites but there they are

In the hush of memorial you can hardly imagine a world with Beyonce in it but on a summer night in 2002 they lit the see-through dome of the Reichstag like a disco ball

New technologies of etching and illumination  
Scrappy little -garten strung with flags

It's almost like the seven arts assembled after Federation and set out ratios for German substance

It's like they turned their shame into an architecture and their architecture into rules for partying

Ventilation, ribboning, release into the air  
Philosophy in neon and the laws on see-through plates

Not even Hannah Arendt will convince me that liberalism is the true inheritance of Enlightenment but I'm glad she's on the wall

Polished floors and giant windows: “It is the Parliament library and some officials stand inside there too”

The murdered are in marble  
On Saturdays the history-boats move lightly on the bankless Spree

# WÄCHTERLIED

Low by the banks of the Sorge I strum:

Notker, Stammerer,  
Who brought to the sequence of the syllables melisma,  
Help me!

Let me tell you how we built the film museum

★

First the dragon bombed the shit out of itself

Late arrivals from the pleasure garden gathered in the rubble

Themes were tested out: Kino im Kopf?

If you asked which studio had won the competition you were told, “The number of  
works ascribed to them is constantly increasing”

Fragments of the earlier luxury were discovered intact

We will never find the gold they hid or know the things they karaoked but we have  
narrowed down the interval between disaster and investment to just the puff of  
breath between a lady and a knight

Climbing tower calls to tower

Dawn: Tag!

We have rebuilt the Breakfast Room

# ZOO STATION

Stations could be ghosts or zoos.  
There were stations which were stations  
At which the trains do not stop.  
In the afternoons naked and angry  
We devised the new gray. The system  
Fought back. Subway maps do not depict  
Western lines or ghost stations at all.  
Lines could be Western or sparklers.  
The closer to the center the more exchange.  
Today I'd like to make the case for visual complexity.  
Today I'd prefer to visit the zoological gardens.  
Churches could be headless or new.  
The dome is a hopeful form that failed.  
Stations were not repeat not the new churches.  
One zoo was called Stadium of World Youth  
Though the train did not stop there.  
Obviously this situation was not ideal.  
List of all zoo stations. List of all ghost stations.

## 2

And so several of us. So then some of us. Finally it was some of a handful. It was almost entirely without curiosity that I followed the doings of my fingers. Which pattered about like idle and deceitful riffraff. On the outskirts of a city that was being consumed. By fire.

Yet nothing can stop me from searching out that crowd. The crowd is a part of us. Out of breath they run their course. Beneath their rags the delicate underclothes. The pure economy. The nullity that flaunts itself is pure.

What there is. There is the house that was a photograph and this is not. An allegory. Is not an intelligence an ardor. An archer in the tarot. A gesture in the faces. A problem and its perversity. In the faces of engineers and the problem of standing before the house. Before the house was a photograph.

Saturation makes the photograph a problem. Our faces go slack before the long disrobing. I long to return to when it was gray and uniform. Return to the sequence of calamity. Pitiful and pitiless economy has learned a sequence. How the arsenal of lies is learned.

The question of how. How the question tells itself. Tells itself of. Is not this self-erudition a kind of love. Kind of self-love. Alas. And we made a way through. Our way along the streets. Weekday streets along the empty hospital. Our way wanting to double back on itself.

So it is when we are sunk in sleep. We choose the sky to be the home of ceaseless flux. The capital we never should have left. Never have I seen such poverty. Such dampness. The earthly gods in flux and dampness. Moving through the capital in tatters.

It seemed to us in the sensual. Seemed content in its then and there. But that you wanted to touch again. Spent larches in a snow-globe. Wanted to bring it near. The whole crude geschichte. Set on its feet and made to march. The sensual now and here singing this sentence.

# SUPER-PLACID

Now I have only basic spatial reasoning but it looks like from that window you would get  
a perfect view of songbirds fleeing Alexanderplatz

Up above the Fernsehturm  
East to Bratislava and the sun

Locals write about it as a self-effacing anti-monument but it looks like an Alhambra to  
me: there is no Apple but the Apple Store

To be fair it's basically a box

screen-skins  
guardhouse  
cute guard  
huge dog

Really pretty coffee grinders in the junkspace on the second floor

For someone who says he loves Berlin, Koolhaas is pretty bitchy about it

“Only now are all these civil servants realizing that they actually have to inhabit  
Nazi buildings as their new ministries ... but do glass and steel still drive out evil  
spirits?”

In Japan they call him “The man who stand on top of capitalism”

Six green neon arrows point to where he's headed next, the hugest TV station ever in  
Beijing

# “EUROPE’S LAST GREAT STREET”

On the street one passes windows off which the sun shunts.  
One is filled with bottles of absinthe and another  
Hung with clothing. Each of these things is possessed

By two spirits which wrestle wantonly within them  
Until finally growing calm and still. There follow  
Several centuries during which we must amuse ourselves.

The story of the two spirits is told in as many ways  
As there are coins. Remember that movie Predator  
Or stories where beloved grunting enemies play

Hide and seek across indifferent time? Or the city  
That was this story? A camel had died at the end of Europe’s  
Last great street and been bronzed on the spot. Visitors

From the West and everywhere else came to see the sun  
Shunt off the camel as it lay calm and still surrounded  
By shop windows and the stillness was a sign the war

Was over. Visitors took pictures and giggled with pure  
Fear in the pleasant space of Things-Fall-Apart-Platz.

...

Could you find a station with talking? That'd be great.  
 And then they were lost among the islands, a remark,  
 A formula, You Are Freaking Kidding Me, or Please

Let vernacular be the thing that comes to our rescue.  
 If you could find a station with talking, maybe German  
 Would come down off its opacity high. Mouth-scandal

And other phrases from Celan have paralyzed America!  
 I heard Holderlin dictated it to Hegel but either way.  
 Imagine all your poems in drawers until the 22nd century:

They're noisier there than elsewhere. The downtown hum  
 Repeats itself as the song of the nations then as its falsetto  
 Double, the euphoria that remains when all borders dissolve

At once, an after-wanderung or cycle in the air. What would  
 That be like? Strangely, we already know but are allowed  
 The time to imitate surprise, which gets funner as you go.

Still, and for all that we loved, it was gearing back.  
 No more Roman Elegies, no more wooded way. Early on I learned  
 To disguise myself in words, which really were clouds.

# NEW STATION

The station was the size of a head.  
The head was big enough to hold  
September and September  
Had enough room for Summer and Fall  
Set one next to the other. This mattered.  
It was Summer and Fall there  
In the station in the head. Space was  
Vertiginous or vestigial and how you felt  
About this was who you were  
Going to be in the station a small train  
Passed above us and elsewhere.  
I remember meeting you there we had  
Tea and cosmetics. Come live with me  
Near the apothecary. To imagine never  
Leaving the station was to leave the station.  
Sigh. Things happened a small train passed  
Above us at oblique angles in the head  
Filled with lines as if the net of the air  
Were up in there. Remember the lines  
Connecting birds to God in Schreber's head.  
Many lines existed only in the station  
But some entered to pass briefly through  
Summer it was afternoon Sharon  
Wore her green shirt into Fall and left  
The station of my German soldier  
On the escalator. A train of some kind  
Passed through and left the station  
A small train climbed aboard you.

# FLOWERS, BUBBLES

Down the road from where the bombs fell art kids practice honing in on just a portion  
of the field

“The actual topology has become more ambiguous”

Bright smiles hanging on the brick walls of the courts and plazas  
Dark eyes in the hall

Which one is our modernism? “Allegedly the prosperous and educated walked about on  
Sundays trying to solve this problem”

There is a complicated bar chart for it

green for poesie  
and the landschaft-  
elements  
in blue, color  
of the skill-world

The upper galleries are poised between the image- and the oil economy  
The narrow passageways are teeming with the young

I grant that mixing media is research but this is no Los Alamos

“In the Unconscious City everyone is dancing for their own personal reasons”

# 4

Of the hailing and hoisted voice, the when and how,  
Only the grain remains: one

Among the surfaces resisting touch, keener yes and no,  
“Of a certain frequency,”

High behind the barricades and modulating without  
Mercy into speculation

Where fury, human fury, presents itself without fear  
Of punishment, o mistaken,

Hopelessly specialized into a set of habits you believed  
Were universal, and you found

Yourself high behind the barricades, blood beating  
In your ears, no sound

Like the sound of negative epiphany, smashed  
Monastic, flowering

Less intricately against the state’s intricate flower,  
Its adamant baroque

Sprung from the hive of likenesses your hand  
Gets stuck in, incommensurate

But not misguided, this architecture should have been  
Monumentality gone mad

But it’s built around a nimbus of tags and icons, affinal  
Signs for order and chaos,

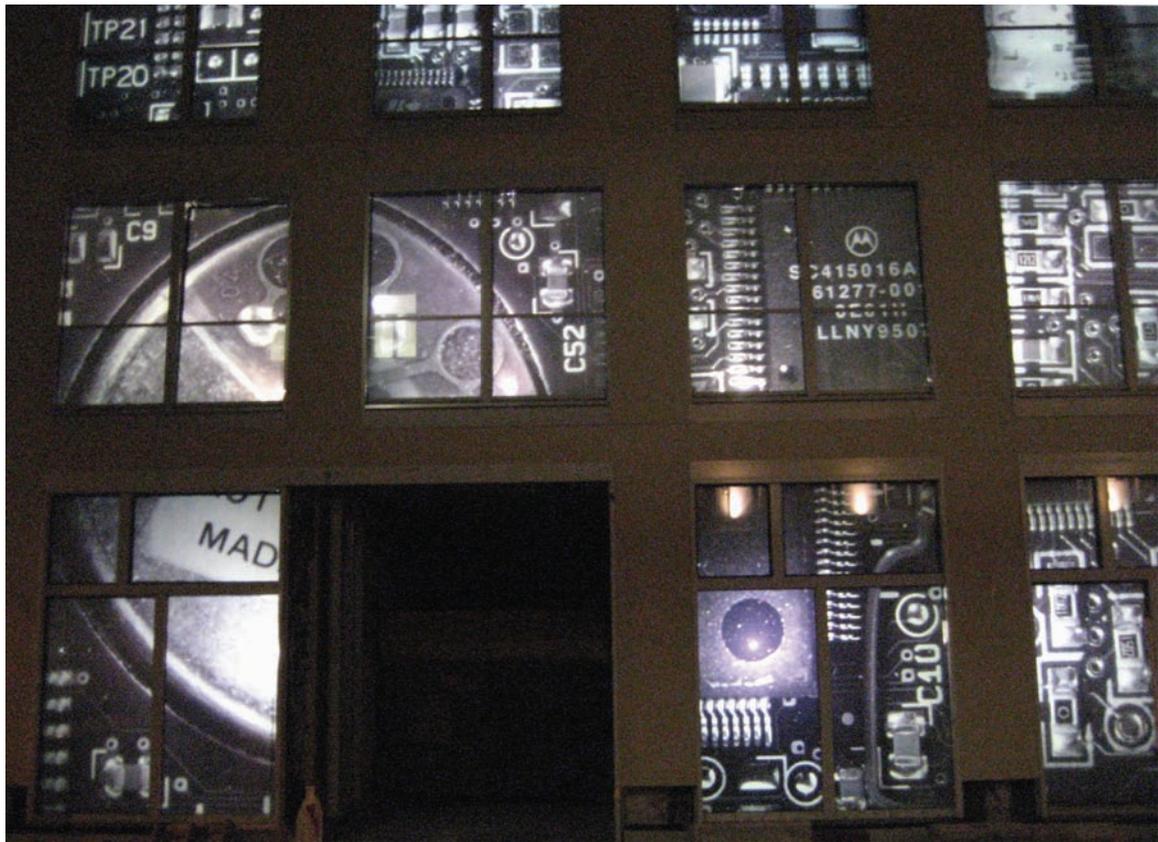
Mute, porous, flaky, it formed a ring at the core of things,  
Like a snow flurry in a glass

Left sloshing on the bar when just

that song comes on, and we go.



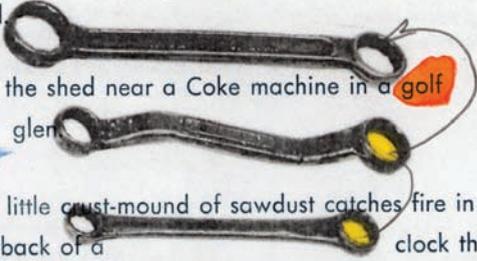








The pine door <sup>swells</sup> up and mold. The wallboard wicks water,  
This is in the shed near a Coke machine in a golf  
glen.  
Whoa, a little crust-mound of sawdust catches fire in  
the back of a clock there.



“(h)eave no ‘h’” is a limited-edition, 40-by-50-inch relief print that recycles letter forms from a previous performance and installation. The two e’s were printed from the two faces of a rollable e that was part of an ensemble of rollable letters in *The Roll of the Letter* performance that took place at Georgetown University in February of 2005. The A and V of “(h)eave no ‘h’” were printed from a wooden A and V that were part of the word *SAVE* in the word sculpture installation *SAVE monkey* that was part of part of Tenth Annual Outdoor Sculpture Exhibition in Empire-Fulton Ferry State Park, at the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge, in Brooklyn, New York in 1992.

“In a Golf Glen” and “Two Planes” are from a series of tool poems I started in 2004. I designed these pieces to explore metaphors of push and pull—those suited to the world of tools and the world of aesthetic/poetic perception. In these instances, as in many other word/image compositions, the image shapes the textual language and the textual language shapes the image. The poetic is somewhere in between.





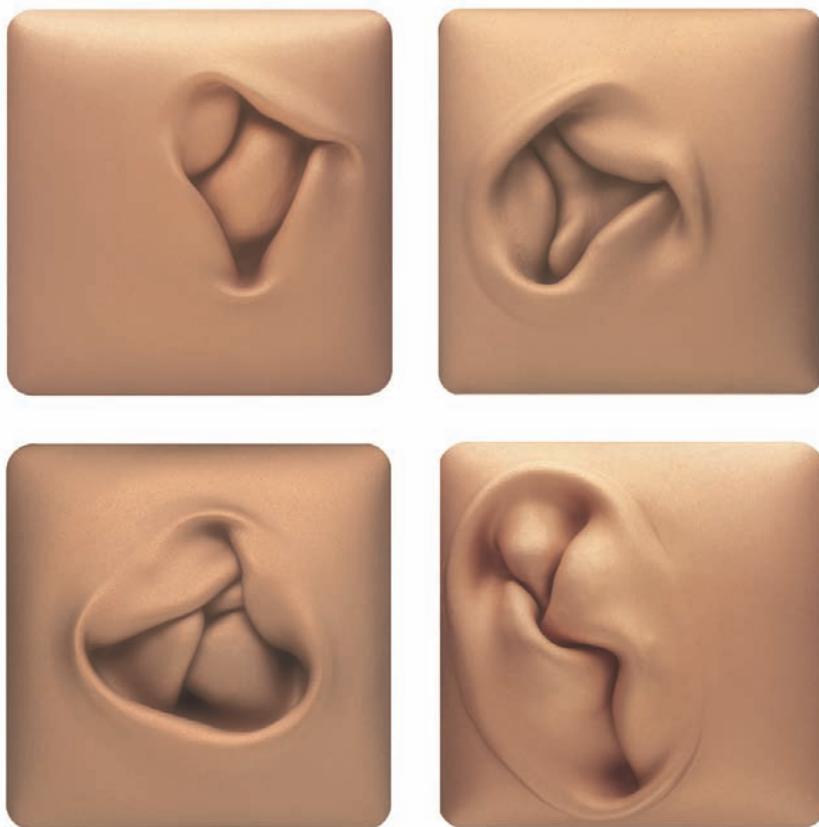




These photographs were taken on May 28, 2007 in the men's public bathroom of local theater, Teatrul George Bacovia, in Bacau, Romania during a performance of Yanira Castro + Company's dance Dark Horse/Black Forest. It is a love story in the wilderness. The performers are Heather Olson and Joseph Poulson.

Yuyen Chang

## ORIFICE SERIES



Untitled Brooches-Copper  
2" x 2" x 1/2" each

# CHIPA SERIES



## 奇葩

Chi Pa

Untitled Brooches  
NuGold, Brass, Copper,  
approximately 2" x 2" x 1/4" each

奇  
葩  
疤

- rare or unusual
- beautiful flower
- scar

Joanne Greenbaum

## COLOR SYSTEM



*Oil on canvas, 70" x 80", 2005. Credit: Courtesy of the artist & D'Amelio Terras, New York. JG-157-PTG*

## AGAINST EKPHRASIS

When co-curators Katie Geha and Travis Nichols solicited me to be a part of their exhibition *Poets on Painters*, I was thrilled, excited, and ready to work right away, accepting the offer immediately. “The exhibition” as Travis explained in his initial email communiqué, “[would] present work from a few contemporary painters whose work seems to have particular resonance for poets with commentary provided by a few contemporary poets whose work seems to have particular resonance for painters.” Travis went on to note that the work of the poets was to take the place of the normal wall text one finds in a gallery space. And indeed, having been to the show’s opening at the Ulrich Museum of Art in Wichita, I can empirically say not only did we poets get to add our two cents to the paintings but our work was displayed on equal footing, printed on huge vellum pages, and hung, via an ingenious system of magnets, with equal care.

It was a wonderfully immersive experience to wander the gallery, look from poem to painting, and feel briefly that one’s chosen art form perhaps does matter after all. I suppose hanging anything on a wall will heighten its importance. How, then, does one decide what to do with such covetous space? Once given the reproduction of Joanne Greenbaum’s painting (initially as a computer file, followed up by a high quality printout) I stared at it for several hours. Intuitive questions began to answer themselves before I could articulate a proper response and I was off; but what was I doing? and why was I doing what I was doing? Ha! herein lies the joy of the practicing artist; we don’t need polemics, as they’re inherently hardwired to our work. Of course, obviating one’s working note with such an argument seems counterproductive, so an attempt to explicate what I asked myself about Greenbaum’s *Color System* is in order.

What struck me first was the odd conclusion that, although it’s abstract, I was nonetheless looking at a narrative painting, by which I mean that the work includes the manipulation of time. Although the painting is dominated by intersecting lines and shapes in multiple colors, its real subject is the collision of these constituent elements into a system of directives. Thus, the work becomes wedded to duration. One is sent chaotically all over the canvas, searching for the origin or endpoint of the various, mazelike lines, as they connect and intersect, while jettisoning one monochromatic color for another. There is the continually thwarted sense that one might actually reach either an end or a beginning, but, of course, this never occurs.

If, as Olson famously noted, “[a]rt does not seek to describe but to enact,” then how was I to enact in poetry what I felt Greenbaum was doing in paint? My immediate answer was syntax. I tried to create a syntactic buzz, a sentence so extended and elongated that one is lost when attempting to engage with it in its entirety, but grounded when moving from phrasal unit to phrasal unit. In this way, the effect of the poem on a reader mirrors the effect of the painting on a viewer. As such, the poem is not about the painting as much as it is about the painting’s aboutness.

During the show’s opening, I was fortunate enough to witness several museumgoers engage with both Greenbaum’s painting and my poem. Sitting on a bench about fifteen feet away, I watched as one couple approached the painting, which is a mammoth 70” x 80”, and gave it a quick once-over before moving to the poem. One of them began to read aloud while the other looked back at the painting. This lasted all of thirty seconds, the opening clausal phrases of the poem, before they moved on to the next work in the show. Because the poem is an experiential twin of the painting, I don’t think they missed anything. Just as one doesn’t have to follow every seeming directive of the painting in order to fully appreciate its complexity, one also doesn’t have to read the entire poem in order to experience its intentions. That they were given equal consideration by this particular couple was gift enough.

—July 20, 2007

# COLOR SYSTEM

*after Joanne Greenbaum's Color System, 2005, oil on canvas 70" x 80"*

Or collision system, or systemic corrosion, or the convulsive stance of one attempting to orchestrate constituent elements into an elemental whole, or the holes one might find in the plot, in the piece of land one crosses, in the crossing of lines, in the lines with which one configures a loop, in laced or latticed movement, meaning another conductor now takes the helm, or hem, or exposes an alternate route, the routine upon which the system depends, or the dependence upon which routine is systematized, or a small sample of fabric offered in an array of color, or an offering colored by one's stance, by the manner of the hands in motion, by the motion of the hands in midair, by the air around the object, by the objection to closure, to constraint, to constancy and its leading of one back toward the tiny gears inside a grinding mind, inside an image of what one imagines to be the system's exposure, the lack of a starting point's compressed locution, less a wondering lexicon than a thought knot worn below the surface of capsized thinking, more a means to allow concentration the baton, to begin with a choice and end with its opposite, which is the system working itself out, which works out of the system, which wends, or mends, or motions always toward itself moving away, an afterward winding from the preface to the precipice of optimal

units of thrust, a propulsive machine imagining its face a measure of projection's geometric malignancy, no malice, no metonymy, no mark to indicate where the actors must stop, no voiceover, nor option among levers, among lovers, among the laconic diction of a windup moral's lost electron, no loss, no luck, no trail of bread crumbs to lead one out of the scorched cliché, nothing resembling the ear, nor that which might be taken as analogous to the dead metaphor of a body splayed out among the abstraction the end of abstractions is predicated on, which is a system building itself out of contextual restriction, a restructuring, part staircase with no end, part end with no ability to navigate between horizontal planes, nothing resembling nothing is the system's aphoristic engine, its skeletal composure, half lazy affirmation, half caustic supplication, mostly a map of its organs, or origins, which are the same, which is not anatomy, nor an answer collecting into the shape indecision might take, might truncate, turning a visit into a move, a mood into an outlook, an overhead projection of the past's diluted playback into the projector's ruined posture, for which the system accepts no fault, or for which no one faults the system, its recalibration, or rigorous calibration, or the rigid collaboration of rules accruing into the system's sense of an architecture whose autonomous navigation of space requires no one behind the curtain, behind the camera, behind a catalogue of possible combinatory outcomes, or the aftermath of cataloguing possibility, possibly a formal extension of foundational praxis, perhaps a form practicing its scales, its soliloquy, something found in

conjunction with topographic malaise, with a mutable trope masking the tracks of its mimetic flow chart, which is the system taking stock of its lock stitch approach to locomotive percussion, to longitude, or latitude, or the angular distance around an absent earth, around the absence earth is an image of, which the system rejects, which rejects from the system an alternate current one might allow agency, which is the system adjusting the angle of its argument, arguably a metabolic process mirrored in the algorithms of the system's inorganic oscillations, most likely a directive whose density allows orders a mutable fulfillment, a microscopic widening of optic inference, or the fence restricting access to a furnace, which is not a metaphor for the source of the system's ills, but a sound out of which the system is able to tune itself, to true itself, a tumbling box to deflate the tumescent broadcast of too much demarcation baggage, or a vacation from habituation's truculent abundance, either way the system is dripping its habitat across the canvas of the closed house, over the landscape patrol's illuminating request for a power based on the placement of particulars, past the apogee of logic's pull, below environmental distinction, under the wavering music of the insect's wings, near a tiny explication of the material world, next to a demolition cavalier in dime store attire, nearly perpendicular to the passage recounting the history of an individual cloud's atmospheric insistence on anthropomorphizing everything, after the clouded anthem installed its heroic individuation overdrive, another shift in the system's attenuation to immediacy, now a nexus for catching currents, next a notation of

the anchor, thus a balance begins at the edge of the system to hedge toward its core, a kind of coalescing, or undressing, a nakedness requiring no body to elicit its definition, no defensive posturing against exposure, against expansion, against the same edge the system is suddenly aware of, or awareness edging the system into an acceptance of its borders, its boundaries, the bold line bisecting a lack of substantive composure, or composing a substance for disclosing a frame on which the system hangs its theoretical wardrobe, several real suits in an impossible closet, which stakes a claim for quotation's mutability, or claims a stake in cars floating so high above the earth they become the earth, an index of empirical contortions, or the empire's constant presence in perfect bricks, in perfect siding, in the perfection of equations for human value beginning with the vague sense that checkbooks make the best furniture, that anyone might orchestrate weather, might forget the plant and water the pavement, wind around trees, wind around buildings, wind around road signs, wind around the system saying yes, saying always yes, as though affirmation were enough, as though there were blood in the trees, and blood in the buildings, and blood in the signs, blood in the road, ash in the blood, wind around ash, wind and the trees, blood and the buildings, tiny people winding through the system, tiny people saying yes, the system saying yes, saying look at the tree and become the tree, look at the buildings and image a life there, the system saying yes, the yes is saying yes.

2/13/06-2/16/06



there was earth in his eye

The open hand laid flat on the desk is the world  
of appearance the fingers curling inward  
cleverness the closed fist is the mind  
comprehending the left hand closes tighter  
into knowledge

the learned seek truth  
as a man follows his shadow to the horizon  
the dark evidence lengthening  
as light dies

and placing a page  
beneath the lamp the hand unfolds  
and drops its emptiness on the page

The maid laughed at the mystery  
of the honey-sweet figs on the table  
the thoughts swarming as in a hive  
to explain the sun  
the sun's form and the sun's beauty  
apprehended in eye costs the eye  
for knowledge he cannot explain  
the infinitesimal oscillations of the star's  
increase in influence on the leaves  
of the tree

Surely, Marie, you've noted the deep  
green in the center crease  
and the mild yellowing of the edge  
of the leaf disclosing a subtle shift  
in the conversion of light to sugar  
infusing the sap and so infusing the tree  
with sweetness more typical of art—  
the apiary at the clover field's edge . . .

hiding the world behind its complexity  
to disguise the vanity of uttering a word  
to explain the figs on the table  
the maid stored the figs in the honeypot

To teach

a student  
riddle  
a student  
with  
his own life

To teach

a student  
ask  
a student  
the question  
he asked you  
in words

more learned  
than his words  
until he relents  
and he says  
a student

There is no answer  
I don't know

First inquiry: a spirit in the water who makes all  
of water, then dying and born in infinite worlds  
each season, then the immense weather in the air  
controlled by a power of the mind, then the celestial  
bodies governing the earth, then a musical chime,  
then a circle enveloping the dark universe in light,  
then water, then fire, than air, then earth and wood,  
then nothing that can be thought, then belief in images  
that distract the mind from the question, then confusion  
in past teaching, then the soul, then many, then the sun  
governs things and is animate, then thought  
heats heaven, then the planets exert intelligences,  
then fecundity benumbed, then the thoughtless spore  
springs forth its own form without feeling, then a law  
in the leaf, then age, then a breathless sphere,  
then incomprehensible retreat masking potency,  
then reason, then the world, then the soul of nature,  
then synthesis, then statement of fact as fact,  
then a shining between two worlds that holds  
the worlds apart

but for me, had I to choose,  
I would worship with those who worship the sun,  
light's blank page, and the sun shining  
behind the sun: darkness, but darkness reversed

When they speak of God the feeble-minded  
think of themselves when they speak  
of God the learned men think of knowledge  
when they speak of God the faithful think  
of mountains when they speak of God  
the godless think of the grass in the deer's teeth  
and listening can hear the molar clamp down  
and sees the flank twitch to flee the deer  
listens to itself being heard before it leaps

What has once ceased to be is no more  
reason rampant and astray  
the ring inside the ashes within the urn  
the mind thinks to betray

The glass paperweight holds open the book  
and inverts the words it magnifies  
bends the words within the sphere's curve



[A Warning]

Shackle the mind as it thinks  
with a Law

Shackle the mind as it thinks  
with a Grammar

|                   |                                     |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Secret a threat   | prison, ruin, chains, debt          |
| in every thought  | punishment mortal and punishment    |
| that thinking     | immortal: dark, vast, aqueous flame |
| a thought reveals | and flame linked into chains        |

and still, whirling and incohesive, the mind  
escapes every bond

The mind is a sharp and a dull  
blade one grasps  
the keen edge to cut with the blunt

It is a desperate stroke

A form of argument or attention  
I am teaching you

the fencer's final trick

in which you drop your weapon  
so your foe abandons his

practice with your shadow  
against a wall is my advice  
this swordplay is how you  
must learn to read a poem

Renee Gladman

# THE RECITAL

*after Pina Bausch*

The train arrived at station B this morning and stalled. Those of us on board gathered at the windows. When we could find no reason for the holdup, we returned to our seats. After a long time of nothing, a message appeared on the LCD monitor, demanding *Get off*. We de-boarded in confusion and stood gazing at the sun. A moment later, rattling started in the atmosphere, which soon became an amplified voice giving instructions. *Take a pamphlet from the uniformed man standing in the middle of the platform*, it conveyed in an accent appropriate for where we were. We secured our materials from a man disciplined to the point of lifelessness; when the weaker of us began to look about for a place to sit, the voice returned: *Stay where you are*. Nevertheless, I refused to join the others in gestures of shock and wonder. We had been warned that something of this nature was coming. I walked over to the numbed ones and met them in silence, preparing for hunger. We were not all the people who had attended the concert but we were most of them. To behave enthusiastically, in this country, is indefensible, they say, and in total disregard of the collective economy of citizenry. *Forget allegiance*, the woman next to me said, with her lapel bunched in her fist, becoming less numb. With that outburst, she no longer qualified for our group and left to join the other one. At the same time, a third sect was forming, and perhaps because I was staring at it—as it took its shape—the remainders of my group accused me unfairly of pyromania, whereby many arms lifted and hurled me in the direction of my gaze. I landed on my side and lay there until other arms picked me up. I wanted to be on my feet by then, but instead was spun around several times and passed to the hands of one. With my body held above his head, this one burst out of the hull and ran toward the end of the platform. The rest of this new sect followed. What kind of people were these, I asked myself. That anal voice returned. *You must not circulate*, it reprimanded all of us, stilling this scene that had gotten out of control. My carrier submitted at once, but did not prepare his body for the sudden braking he inflicted upon it, so it crumpled right there. Needless to say I was in flight once again. When I opened my eyes from the place where I had landed I saw I was alone. Moreover, there was a procession inching toward me. Once again, I was that rigid and waiting form. The groups were in their respective clusters, but all moving in the same direction in little rows, progressing so casually that, were I someone else, I may not have noticed. From time to time, a lone man or woman would break loose from the crowd and move to stand alone in the sun. These

were considered recesses, though unauthorized. The figure in sun seemed always elated about something, with its hands obsessively pushing about the hair, its arms wrapping and unwrapping around the torso, with the joints going limp and popping. If it were a woman doing this, she'd accompany the movement of the arms with rapid bending from the waist; men tended to make small leaps from the place where they stood, enormous quad muscles showing through their pants, emphasizing the tightness of the latter, which I could not help but suspect as former uniforms. I got my bearings and went to return to the center of things. A petite woman with long hair ran over and handed me back my pamphlet, which engendered a horn blast from way off. Or was it that the trains were being set in motion? *Those trains are never going to move*, a man called out, and punctuated, *Never with everyone waiting so desperately. Walk off everyone, he chanted, Walk it off.* We were showing our nasty traits, I concluded, because that was the vibe that had been created. Somebody needed to do something different. I had a ball in my luggage. Should I retrieve it? The title of the pamphlet was "Do Nothing." I did not understand this station. Yes, there was a "B" stamped all over the place, but what else? I rejoined the gesture group and held my head in my hands for a while. Soon we were fighting over a sandwich whose innards had already been awarded. *Give me that bread, goddamnit*, a tall man called, which was intimidating. I let the thing go except for the flake of oat that fell onto my hand. I put it up my nose for security reasons, then pulled it out and ate it, disorienting everyone. *Aiiii!* I heard so loudly and couldn't find the interest to move my head. This group was falling apart, which was precisely what they had formed to do, but I didn't want any of that on me. *Languishing!* Somebody else roared. They were weak under pressure. I didn't belong with them. And why had only three groups formed. And the train, who would know about it? *Have you read it*, asked a friendly man trying to conceal a walking stick up the leg of his pants. *Did you...did you read it?* No, I answered, then regretted my response as he received it oddly. I started to wonder about barriers. For instance, could this man even hear? There is a way people stare over your shoulder when they are deaf but are trying to pretend they aren't, a way that they seem disorganized. But he let me inch away from him. The numbed ones were constantly throwing people out of their group, a woman this time, expressed to sector third. She didn't make it, landing in a neutral spot between. She lay in a drape there. Acute vision, which I was lucky to possess, proved that her muscles were twitching: she was about to do something. I broke loose from our group and ran over to her. She jumped in my arms immediately. I tried not to fall. She climbed onto my shoulder. I regained my composure, such that I only grimaced when—grabbing both my shoulders—she proceeded to do a handstand. *We were a ladder*, she shouted toward the now-audience. With everyone looking I knew I had to reach up and bring her body down in front of me then push it perfectly between my legs. I'd thought I was finished when I heard, *Bring her back, fool.* The ambitious sector third. I brought her back, but it hurt so I said, *Ow*, and did not receive a sympathetic response. With the crowd's urging, she took six or seven quick steps away from me, then turned around and flew back with her leg pointed at my chest. I braced myself for a kick and extended my hand in protection. Something broke; the sun

had moved. We were still holding our pamphlets. Noises were stirring in the PA system. Is this it, I wondered. Will they let us back onto the trains? Station “B” was not sustaining; I felt our manners were not going to hold up. The crackling grew louder and more insistent; we waited. I didn’t know I had been holding my breath until a voice erupted over the intercom and startled me. I had to cough to recover from not-breathing so I missed his first few sentences, as did those around me. It was becoming more and more difficult to be a person on this platform interested in community. You always were being expelled. Plus the sun was going down and nervous people don’t behave well at night. It would be better to be inside. Yet, the only inside I could discern seemed to be the shut down train and the inner core of these tumultuous groups. *How can you not read the pamphlet?* The maybe-deaf man was fascinated with me. *Especially as the sun sets*, he said. Reminding me there would be light for nothing soon, not even shuffling between groups. I ran off on my own and tried to read, but couldn’t concentrate. I talked out loud to those observing me. I pointed behind me and announced things in a newscaster’s voice until it grew dark. Soon we were all quiet. The moon appeared; we breathed. Then clouds came and covered it. I didn’t know what was happening. It was difficult to take anything in. I was afraid to move my body. The PA system made noises to suggest it was with us but produced no cogent sounds. We were held; I couldn’t help but evaluate the intervention. It didn’t seem so smart. It was an asinine experiment. I was wondering about our formation—were we facing the same direction, the abandoned train—when I felt heavy cloth brushing across my face. Then brush free of my face then brush by again.

Beatrix Potter  
long before Peter proffered “exquisite  
drawings” and her discovery  
—symbiotic mycology—  
in her paper  
(1897)  
“Germination of the spores of *Agaricineae*”

a voice unseen  
unseeable at Kew requisitely  
male  
eschewed “unnatural union  
between a captive Algal damsel and a tyrant  
Fungal master”

Beatrix Potter  
“It is extraordinary how botanists have...not in the least  
seen the broad bearing of it.”

Beatrix Potter  
“I was not shy, not at all. I had it up and down  
with him. His line was on the outside  
of civil.... I informed

him that it would all be in the books in ten years, whether or  
no, and departed  
giggling. I ought to wear  
blue spectacles on these occasions.”

Jeanne Larsen

## ENRAGED, I THINK OF HENRY THOREAU, SAUNTERING

or striding, actually, as I uphill stride past TruGreen ®  
monocropped one-quarter-acres groomed round brick

vener. I am on fire. *Complete instruction in the good law*  
*is equally necessary*, he did not put into English, did not

pass (for no man did) our common tongue's first  
*for all beings* dharma-lamp. Nor claimed he had. I blame

not Thoreau for untruth. Not Henry who himself was not  
quite perhaps a self-made silent *pratyeka-buddha* (these are,

as Watson renders, *medicinal herbs* off hidden in *the mountain forests*)  
yet saw *a man can hardly be said to be there if he knows that*

*he is there*. Knowing where I am, right ugly here, I nearly  
stomp where once was woodland, then stumps, know

well I am not *not unequal towards all beings* as says of One  
Who Has Arrived that sutra born in some lost Prakrit, born

next in Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan, Xixia, Mongol, Japanese, Korean,  
French. And then not Henry, no: Elizabeth Palmer Peabody:

*there are only beings who act differently from each other*. How I act  
may not be like the ones who hurt me. Or in my hurt

rage may. The ones who lie. Who hurt. Another chapter: the dragon's  
eloquent daughter, deep practitioner & student, did not rage

when so-wise straight-man Shariputra scoffed—she being  
an elizabeth, not a henry. She being (he said) *soiled*. The daughter,

like effaced Elizabeth, did not hurt another. She did (like Henry,  
for they are not different) her transformation, lighted, scorned,

anonymous, the lamp. The dharma is one *single-flavored* rain  
that falls on herb & tree & noxious weedless lawn. The sutra says this,

more or less. Says (in other words): may in all apparent valleys,  
each walker, striding, stumbling, sauntering, son or daughter, even

liars, who are not other than the ones who don't lie,  
make parables like generous moisture, make translations as each can.

Alan Halsey

*from* DEE & KELLEY'S CELESTIAL HANDBOOK

Note:

I made these as part of a project which I work on intermittently with Jesse Glass. The broad idea is to rework material from Dee's 'Enochian' writings, i.e. the angelic transcripts, particularly Casaubon's *A True & Faithful Relation* of what passed for many years between Dr John Dee & some Spirits. What mainly interests me is on the one hand the way the transcripts offer a model or method for the generation of text & on the other the fact that the transactions include some truly mundane & bizarre exchanges, not least Kelley's attempt to get the angels to lend him a hundred quid. The Celestial series uses as graphic base the star maps in Burnham's *Celestial Handbook* (1977) — the circles with which Burnham identifies areas of sky could be images of the shew-stone Dee & Kelley used to contact the angels but I wasn't feeling too literal about this — the main idea was to use Burnham's precise mapping of deep space as ground for a reconfiguration of the original transcripts. Presumably Dee's talkative angels are out there somewhere & there's certainly a resemblance (including the mundane element) between his transcripts & contemporary accounts of alien encounters. Or perhaps in both cases a hoax is involved, but that's all grist to the mill.

*forgive  
bliss*  
*in upon*  
preparation of things about the Table of practice  
and other things above my Lamin and Stonee  
two fat men

Satan  
the Prince Albert Laskie  
the good Angel. I.L.

Goodman Fern the Pötter

Morvorgran Dockum Myrcopskie

Vincent Seve Gerlish

Aphlafben my good Angel

five men with moustaches

Ganislay Carmarthar

SOLGARS Nalvage

the beauty of the Castle

is not able to be expressed

such as the circumference of

the Letter doth import

a shaffle to the wicked

inextingible fillames of

Zanzor

He spake these four words in a

different tune

sitteth and seeth and saith

I will keep thee for seeing any more sights

E.K. his deliverance from

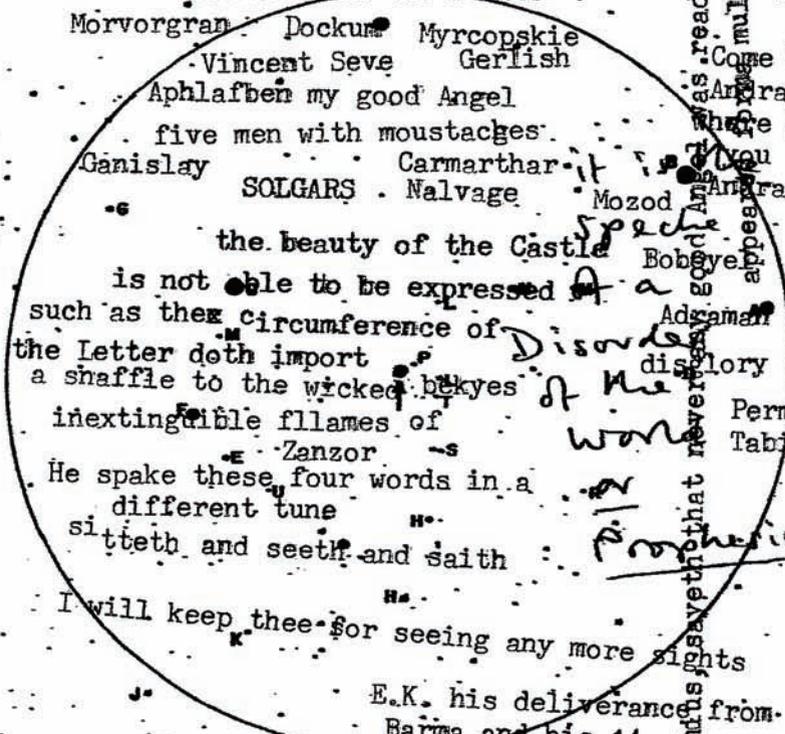
Barma and his 14

Companions

This was corrected on Monday

COMPARISON MAGNITUDES (AAVSO) A= 7.8; B= 7.9; C= 8.3;  
D= 8.5; E= 8.8; F= 8.9; G= 9.1; H= 9.5; J= 10.4; K= 10.9;  
L= 11.1; M= 11.5; N= 11.6; P= 11.8; R= 12.3; S= 12.6;  
T= 13.2; U= 13.6.

Those  
ere two  
pretty  
men  
Come on  
Angras  
where are  
You  
Angras?  
Mozod  
Bobbye  
Adgaman  
dislory  
Permis  
Tabius  
Promethe



COMPARISON MAGNITUDES (AAVSO) A= 5.6; B= 8.9; C= 9.3;  
 D= 9.9; E= 10.1; F= 10.7; G= 11.0; H= 11.4; J= 11.8;  
 K= 12.1; L= 12.6; M= 13.1.

I had spoken of too much light coming from the west  
 window of my Study toward the  
 Table where the Shew-stone stood  
 Frogs and Serpents appeared  
 come from before the Lord Lasky  
 and standeth here on the table  
 huge Sakes of ice  
 a great masty Dogge

Soal

What is your name which yesterday tempted  
 my friend and accused me  
 Will you Madimi lend me a  
 hundred pound for a fortnight?  
 Confid

Gil de pragma kures helech

this Luciferike brag  
 consider these premises to me propounded

which My first gathered of the 49 good Angels). I took the  
 third letters out of the names, it is to wit, out of the  
 49th name, and th: 47.9.33.42 soirw

the five and thirtieth name did not yield third letter.

(perfecy) the first of the  
 A voyce  
 Jehusan gonsag vi  
 hotchpot without  
 O God, I remembe not  
 the name of any such Town  
 Vincent laugheth and sheweth two broad teeth before  
 He seemeth to be a very foolish Devil

The Queen said: She was sorry that she  
 had lost her Philosopher  
 My name is Galush, I am called Madimi

Veni ex illo Barma

Here is a town they call Webley

Here is Bendley

Here is Mortimers Clybery

Here is wild Wenlock

Here is Ludlow

Here is Stanton Lacy

Impire

estou us r'g

st

ii

vas

Vanity hangeth not at mine elbow

My Garment is called HOXMARCH

doñcha carb v'ors hirobra

There is a God, let us be merry

My name is Jubanladac

(Bow down thy knees brother)

Be thou a worm in a heap of straw

Did I not bid thee go yonder and fetch me money?

Begin the Book next Tuesday.

Githguleng knew not himself  
not the Golden Curtain, but the Stone was of his  
natural Diaphanitie  
His bristles stand up

His name was Panlacarp

The furious Monsters assaile him againn  
the streaming beam stretcheth into his head still  
a more grave gesture, more grave speeches  
Fathers shall eat their own children  
I delight in people that are joyfull with one Banket  
And I will be a wall  
to speak to speak to  
when the spy entreth

May I be writing every  
day, and at any time, when  
it shall

← When, now?

come into my  
mind?

three brave fellows with no garters and who  
Write the boke bakward call rebel  
I have swept all my moneye against  
out of doors  
I am tied  
(I sway) And  
I have seven books  
Fly from the  
wickednesse

graiffing I am viraged man  
Your brother is clapped up in  
prison, How like you that?  
Your house-keeper I mean.  
I pinched him  
I said CRACOVIA  
and he spake LASCO  
another, such, and so it is of us

the entrance of this LASKO  
 dignified in a Cube  
 fuskish or leadish colour

He looketh  
 very anciently  
 heveth his honour  
 left the print of the little  
 Circle behind

the boke shall be called Logah  
 as if it clawed  
 with Hawks claws

eny tumeth ro  
 wlinga Fod and preavil  
 sait Perms KEm ath cord  
 avime rhe dly ghtest wil  
 cconf aslea achyo aginat hise  
 geyo earur Ispe ntoyoye ve wnw  
 dyla ey asdt ostrar ermos  
 sarym rhat

↑ C  
 F H  
 B

there cometh a beam down  
 into his head

Mammets, little ugly fellows

He that Brought the  
 Chair went away

There appeared to  
 E. a  
 round Globe  
 of white smock  
 over my  
 head

english

the good  
 Character of that  
 Conjunction and

therefore (therefore) is

he sitteth down on the  
 Desk-top

I am almost HATH his keeper.

He wearreth his hair long, for he was Deputy of Ireland;  
 That maketh him look with such a writhen face  
 with a Sachel of a Dogs skin by his  
 side, and a Cap on his head

He hath been an  
 old doer

He is gone but his Desk standeth still

This is one of them that forgetteth his businesse so  
 soon as it is told him

|                        |         |         |         |         |
|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| COMPARISON MAGNITUDES. |         | A= 9.0  | B= 9.8  | C= 10.2 |
| D= 10.7                | E= 10.9 | F= 11.6 | G= 12.0 | H= 12.4 |
| J= 12.8                | K= 13.1 |         |         |         |

Mortlack

How shall I do  
Loagaeth seg lovi brtne for  
Not now. the letters?  
Flee privy leakes  
without any Haven making or leaving

Tycho's Star's supernova  
1572 (\*)  
Spect M6e

divers confused forms of divers Creatures  
ascend the slippery mountain  
they say that thou hast hid divers secret things  
He goeth about to take you a lyar  
his face is (now)  
from meward  
He said he was  
a French man  
he never went to School

a falet on his head  
He is fast enough  
And the jolly fellowes  
which were on the wall  
fell down

Thanks be to God  
shall a Dragon flie out  
such as never was

He is going down into Westminster Ward  
He cast of this Cloudy Lawn  
He hath become a great pillar of  
Chrystal higher than a Steeple

I made speed to write

everything is NOTED

one shot waity no to ano  
dep-elling end wearp away I have drawn the skillen drap  
those that go to Banquets put on their upper garments  
out of out against the  
Jane, this man is metationally

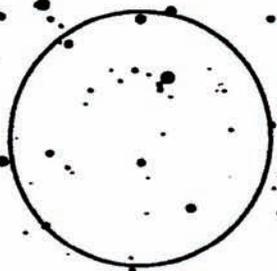
areth  
eknsse  
Temple

Cold pierceth where shot cannot enter  
and some of the rags are fallen down

you shall be to learn nothing of these  
things by August

Room for a Player. Jesus, who would have thought, I  
 should have met you here?  
 E.K. felt and saw a spiritual  
 Creature go out of his  
 Unless you speak some Language  
 which I understand I will express  
 no more of this Ghybrish  
 subject and strangle your Adversary  
 Beware of wilde hony and raw  
 fruit.

The world is written in all  
 certain letters are  
 old places  
 He hath hard thee:  
 And I am he  
 skalden.  
 a great thing  
 Like a white cloud  
 skie-coloured cloak  
 that Cloud, set aside  
 FIELD OF TYCHO'S STAR  
 in fore-determination  
 RA = 0h 22m 00.2s Dec = +63° 52' 12"



a woman with her hair rould about like a Scottish woman  
 my grear grief vanished away  
 she is so clear and transparent  
 we doubt she is not our sound friend her head waggelth  
 this way and that way  
 She saigh (Thos) perecu hotchpot  
 I hear in pieces.  
 a buz  
 eare  
 Now she  
 goeth  
 away.  
 like a  
 three  
 cornered  
 cloud

All they that fell off the wall  
 come in bound hand and foot  
 ministry of Jubanlaech  
 Larzed dox ner habzilb adnor.  
 A good praise; with a wavering mind  
 desolation  
 thereof

There appeareth the Cloud;  
Is it  
Write ~~that his son~~ **LOAGAETH**: It to your likeing in the  
is to be sownded ~~LOAGH~~ lendix nor zandoxfive little

Certainly here is a spiritual Creature in my  
we are become the finger of God right shoulder  
and all the Stone as red as Blood Vincent Seve  
Angles of the Dignified appeareth here  
and Triumphant Glory going down by  
A great impatience Charing Crosse  
a length confessed disgrorified and  
drent in confusion  
And one of  
these baggage  
things  
laugheth

**to Mr. Richard Young**

Oh Gahire Rudna gephna oh Gahire

**Jouney**

Bee it spoken

The evil spirit was cast out

I was wonderfully oppressed with

the work prescribed to me to  
perform before August next

I went half way

I told you more than all your  
Dog painters and Cat painters

Now all that Shew is vanished away  
can do

that seal to the Sword and rags break off  
Welcome be these bands linked together as Chaines

the Syrenes are awake and their song is to  
about the Cloud  
destruction

our other book, which is to be written

I am a stumbling block I have offered of old and it shall be told

My name is (II)

the joy of the consequent effect will utterly take away the grief of my shins breaking The Eagles have food for their wicked spirit

Now Seas appear

The writing hath been referred to thy discretion with collours, and such things as appertain to the writing thereof

have you put on your Holloey-caps?

a thing like a throne sendeth out shadows of 40 upon a great Labell

If by doll thou Gag lah nai Carma geta Barman Camascheth galuath garnastaurah Iogath Iuseroth

here is money but I have it very hardly

Be no Eadders were to ride to Mr. Harry Lee Become a spot in the Book of Fame unbooted, for he was come in a boat a Bible about his neck like a Doctor

|             |         |        |        |        |         |
|-------------|---------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| AAVSO Mags= | A= 5.4  | B= 6.4 | C= 6.5 | D= 7.3 | E= 7.8  |
|             | F= 8.1  | G= 8.3 | H= 9.2 | J= 9.5 | K= 10.3 |
|             | L= 10.7 |        |        |        |         |

Jeremy Prokosch

## POEM FOR 1913: 22 LINES ON EKPHRASIS

Jacques Lacan seems to think that we know the world  
And have a developed consciousness through a structure  
Of signification that is already linguistic in nature  
And that just you know thinking about stuff or even  
Perceiving it as something apparently outside of us  
Necessarily involves encountering it in a situation  
Of language suggesting that the concept of ekphrasis  
Is indifferent at best since we would experience say  
A painting as already dipped in words and the idea that  
Giving it words was a special act would lose interest.

But what if we were leery of such extreme ideas and this  
Lacan fellow? What if we thought more conventionally  
That there really is stuff that is outside of language?  
Wouldn't one of the most basic linguistic activities  
Then be the act of giving language to all that mute stuff?  
Wouldn't that category include every instance of language  
Except perhaps language explicitly about itself?  
And wouldn't that also make the act of giving language  
To a mute painting once again a matter of indifference  
If for a conceptually different reason? A big so what?

I like paintings a lot especially this one in the Hague  
But you can take your ekphrasis and shove it Homer.

## MELVIN DIXON & THE DISPOSABLE HEROES OF HIPHOPRISY

In his two novels, *Trouble The Water* and *Vanishing Rooms*, and in his book of poems, *Change of Territory*, the late Melvin Dixon explored the relentless pull of the past on the present, even as the present struggles to deny the past.<sup>1</sup> The male narrator of the poem “Hungry Travel,” for example, and the protagonists in the two novels—Jesse, from *Vanishing Rooms*, and Jordan, from *Trouble The Water*—are both forced to confront that which they have repressed from memory. The repression of the past finds its analog in the repression of homoerotic episodes and desires in an important, if secondary, character in *Vanishing Rooms*—Lonny, a teenage hoodlum who is an accessory in the murder of Jesse’s lover, Metro. The irony of Lonny’s hatred of Metro is that he himself winds up as a prostitute servicing men. This sub-plot in the novel is remarkably coincidental with a rap song from the former rap duo, The Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy. In the song “Language of Violence,” male teenage machismo functions to repress adolescent sexual insecurity. As with Lonny, the antagonist of the song participates in the murder of a male homosexual and then winds up in jail where he is raped by male prisoners.

Why link rap music with gay literature, and more specifically, why link a specialized form of rap—political rap—with an equally specialized form of gay literature, black gay literature? One of the subtexts of this paper is that the socio-political commentary of rap groups like The Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy dovetails in unsurprising ways with the works of a black gay writer like Melvin Dixon: both are marginal figures not only because of the subgenres in which they work but also because of their unhesitant criticism of homophobia in black communities and racism in gay communities. For some members of these communities, being a black gay male is as reprehensible as being a black male rapper. And vice versa. In both instances, the black male is perceived as a traitor, either to an internalized sexual stereotype derived from white racist dogma and rumor, or to a bourgeois civil code according to which the “ghetto” and its attributes are to be transcended or suppressed, not described or celebrated. That these two marginal groups (that is, marginal to a generalized black community) often express hostility toward one another only underlines the values of their critiques which illuminate or highlight the limitations of liberation movements within both communities. A comparative analysis of works within the genres of music lyrics, prose fiction and poetry

can broaden our understanding of the critical aesthetic roles black gay writing and anti-homophobic rap can play in any criticism which hopes to mobilize sundry—often antagonistic—communities without suppressing their differences.

“Language of Violence” is the fourth cut on the 1992 compact disk Hipocrisy Is The Greatest Luxury by the hip hop duo The Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy.<sup>2</sup> The homonymic proximity of “hipocrisy” and “hiphoprisy” drives home the overarching motif of the thirteen compositions: “the power of words/ don’t take it for granted/ when you hear a man ranting/ don’t just read the lips/ be more sublime than this/ put everything in context.”<sup>3</sup> But this homonymic similarity also suggests that both terms mean saying one thing and doing or meaning another. In the case of hypocrisy, this comes down to moral posturing, with which didactic rap always flirts. In the case of hiphoprisy, saying one thing and doing or meaning another defines hiphop at all levels: dress (baggy and unkempt suggest careful assemblage), attitude (“dissing” is sometimes a form of play, sometimes a mode of attack), and music (the rhythms of the beat and words “say” dance even if the words “mean” threat, pose, demean, etc.). In brief, at the level of rhetoric, both hypocrisy and hiphoprisy are modes of irony. And irony is, perhaps, the signature mode of African American aesthetic, moral, social, and political expression.<sup>4</sup> It is also the essential structure of “Language of Violence.”

The song opens up with a description of a young teen male, taunted by older males on the first day of school. He walks in “with his thin skin/lowered chin,” knowing “the names that they would taunt him with/faggot, sissy, punk, queen, queer/although he’d never had sex in his fifteen years.” After the chorus introduces the primary themes of the song—e.g., “death is the silence/in this language of violence”—the narrative turns to those that constitute the “gauntlet” of voices: “It’s tough to be young/the young long to be tougher/when we pick on someone else/it might make us feel rougher/abused by their fathers/but that was at home though.” Then, “to prove to each other/they were not ‘homos’,” they strike out at the young boy on the way home from school, beating him to death. Unfortunately for the attackers, a witness informs the police, and one of the boys is sent to jail. At this point in the song, the description of the young victim’s first day at school—“the first day of school is always the hardest/the first day of school the hallways the darkest”—is applied to the young prisoner’s initiation into jail: “the first day of prison was always the hardest/the first day of prison the hallways the darkest.” Indeed, the first three lines of the following verse repeat the first verse of the song: “like a gauntlet/the voices haunted/faggot, sissy, punk, queen, queer.” And then the twist: “words he used before had a new meaning in here.” Surrounded by a group of prisoners, the young boy is brutally sodomized, and after another rendition of the chorus, the singer asks, “Who is really the victim? Or are we all the cause, and victim of it all?” That is, by linking the destinies of two young teens, ravaged by their hormones, buffeted about by their peers, the Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy implicitly shift the

burden of responsibility from these individuals to their social and cultural contexts. The victimizer is also a “victim of it all.” Homophobia and rape are thus linked to machismo, and irony, here, assumes karma proportions—what goes around comes around.

All of this would be unremarkable were it not a description of a rap song, especially given the caricatures of rap in the mainstream media. That this phenomenon is worth remarking derives from the sad but simple truth that misogyny and homophobia, however uncharacteristic of most rap lyrics, are still more prevalent than anti-homophobic and anti-sexist rap lyrics. Insofar as almost all didactic rap groups are patronized by predominantly white consumers, a fate that befalls blues and jazz musicians, one should not be surprised that the Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy were doomed to suffer the same fate as Public Enemy and Cypress Hill: didactic rap bands whose primary messages challenge black communities in regards to racial, sexual and drug politics, and yet who are even more marginal vis-à-vis black communities than non-didactic rap groups. The messages of tolerance, broadly speaking, implicit in these three groups’ music valorize differences, and differences, it goes without saying, always challenge programmatic ideologies, regardless of their specific mode or orientation.

The failure of anti-homophobic messages to penetrate black communities otherwise concerned with liberation for all black people is inextricably related to, among other things, the failure of black nationalism and the civil rights movement to take into account black feminist issues.<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that the leaders and activists in these movements should have uncritically adopted white feminist issues as models: the uncritical adoption of white models in whatever form has always been a thorny problem, however one views, for example, Du Bois’s notion of a black double consciousness. But it does mean that at a time when all values and models were supposedly undergoing re-examination, patriarchy in general received scant, if any, critical attention. In short, the atavistic idealization of Africa, which still survives today, blocked any possibility of subjecting our own heritage to serious critical scrutiny. Melvin Dixon’s work is rare in that it attempts to do precisely this critical work, to re-examine the merits and flaws of black nationalism and its various descendants and effects as well as air the dirty laundry of racism within gay communities. Both of these projects have traditions and current outposts in literary theory, fiction, poetry and theatre; Melvin Dixon is among the most recent to link these concerns from his privileged position as a black gay male writer of fiction and poetry.<sup>6</sup>

In his 1991 novel, *Vanishing Rooms*, Dixon confronts and links black nationalism and gang solidarity as modes of machismo, and machismo itself is conceived as a mode of repression of what Freud moralized as the “polymorphous perverse.”<sup>7</sup> Now to cite a mode of machismo—homophobia—as a form of repression is unremarkable; the same relation is summarized in the rap song “Language of Violence”: “So to prove to each

other/that they were not ‘homos’/the exclamation of the phobic fury/executioner, judge and jury/ the mob mentality/individuality was nowhere/dignity forgotten/at the bottom of a dumb old dare/and a numb cold stare.” In Vanishing Rooms, Jesse, a black gay dancer, first meets his lover, Metro, a white gay journalist, at a black student sit-in at the college they both attend. Jesse’s participation is minimal, almost accidental; he has refused to dance as a demonstration of his solidarity because he’d been ridiculed by some male black students for even being a dancer. The hypocrisy of the “mob mentality” is offset by the “hiphoprism” of Jesse and Metro’s relationship. Because no one can imagine these two men as lovers, they go through college as lovers “veiled”<sup>8</sup> by the tacit homophobia of their peers. Nevertheless, this relationship is damned. Metro’s murder leads both his lover, Jesse, and one of the young boys, Lonny, down labyrinths of memories to buried truths neither wants to, but must, face: for Jesse, it is the night Metro called him a nigger while they were making love; for Lonny, it is his desire for and attraction to his pal, Cuddles. Jesse eventually accepts the implications of his “truth,” liberating his dancing partner, Ruella, from his need to call her, to have her be, Rooms. And, as it turns out, vice versa: Ruella frees herself of her dependency on Jesse. For Lonny, already psychically damaged by his dysfunctional upbringing, ashamed of his attraction to men, prostitution serves to rationalize desire; he tells himself he’s only doing it for the money.

By linking Lonny’s fixations on his male peers and parents to black homophobia “justified” as race loyalty, Dixon suggests that all modes of machismo can be read as forms of ancestor worship. In both instances, the ancestral totem is a white or black male heterosexual, however brutal, dogmatic or irrelevant to one’s own cultural, political or sexual orientation. Ancestor worship, like machismo, collapses history and community, temporality and spatiality, into an idealized plane of propriety and identity that must presuppose its obverse: heresy as practiced by, for example, black gay males—or anti-homophobic rappers.<sup>9</sup>

Dixon also conceives of racism as a form of ancestor worship—the deification of ethnic lineage—and thus links racism to various forms of atavism. But the line between reverence and fanaticism is difficult to draw, especially for racial and sexual minorities. For these marginal communities, claiming a past as one’s own becomes the precondition for self-identification even if such a claim must also be disavowed if one is to avoid reinscribing oppression of an “other” as a pre-condition for self-identification. In Dixon’s only published book of poems, Change of Territory, the narrators of poems like “Hungry Travel,” “Grandmother,” along with the homages to Richard Wright, “Richard, Richard: American Fuel” and “Richard, Richard: An American Hunger,” seek sustenance, connectedness and acceptance from the various forms of the past. In this respect the narrators seek their identities in their differences from the past, always figured as a heterosexual norm: “vegetables, children, dreams.” Rejecting the expectations of his parents, especially those of his father, the narrator of “Hungry

Travel” returns home with his male lover, both “pilgrims.” And though his father “shoots up from the table,” the narrator insists, “I’m still your son.” This phrase sums up Dixon’s attitude toward the entirety of the African and African-American traditions, figured as patriarchal, and passed on to sons, some of whom accept it whole: in “Hungry Travel” the narrator’s mother’s warning about the heartbreak of love—“You’ll get used to it, like I did”—links mother and son against the machismo of the husband/father and the narrator’s first lover, a young boy, someone’s young son, who croons, “Just one more time. One more time.” Machismo is no longer the sole province of heterosexual males whenever homosexuality adopts its structure of relations from bourgeois heterosexual models.

Such are the poems in the first section of Change of Territory. In the second section, appropriately titled “Going to Africa,” the narrators’ hunger for familial and literary sustenance broadens—now it is ancestral elixir they desire. But the first poem opens with disappointment—seeking without finding: “At customs I search for something/ to declare. What is the Spanish word/for loss?” These last three lines to the book’s title poem, “Change of Territory,” figure loss as a language the narrator has forgotten or never known while playing on two meanings of “customs”: border and tradition, difference and identity. In the title poem of section two, “Going to Africa,” the narrator realizes that he or she may have to start anew without the thread of identity-in-difference: “I may find that a change of place/is nothing safe, and no other masks or moods/can tie back the cord that first fed me blues.” The figure of the mother as Mother Africa functions as the other side of the coin of patriarchy. Perhaps this is why when the narrator returns home, his mother asks, “How long this time, ’...’how long you staying?” These questions, the last words of Change of Territory, are answered by the last words of Jordan Henry in Dixon’s 1989 novel, Trouble the Water: “We’re always beginning again.”

To always begin again: such is the destiny of the anti-hero, whose sense of self, sense of place, is split by the difference of temporality, a difference which can only be resealed by the name (history, God, etc.). The hero names; he encounters and subdues the other to the same as/of his self. The hero endures, a monolith suppressing difference. But the disposable hero, the anti-hero, is disposable because he/she is anti-, against, the hero. Insofar as the anti-hero is judged by the standards of the hero, and indeed, to the extent the anti-hero internalizes the standards of the hero, he will see himself as a rebel or revolutionary at best, or a misfit or criminal at worst. To name oneself according to the logic of the hero is to valorize naming as an end and beginning in itself.

In Vanishing Rooms, Jesse must confront not only Metro’s racism but also his complicity in that racism. One of the recurring issues in the novel is the totalitarianism of naming: Jesse nicknames Jon-Michael Barthe, Metro, and his dancing partner, Ruella, Rooms. Ruella’s eventual refusal to be named by Jesse jolts him out of the nonchalance

of his arrogance and forces him to recall that Jon-Michael also refused his nickname, Metro. In fact, Jon-Michael “accepts” the moniker only on the condition that he can call Jesse nigger. Thus, in the context of the novel, the nicknames Metro and Rooms are no different than the epithets faggot and nigger. Naming is yet another mode of machismo; as the rap song “Language of Violence” puts it: “he knew the names that they would taunt him with/ faggot, sissy, punk, queen, queer.”

In Trouble the Water, Mother Harriet is the self-styled heroine who, at one point, mistakes Mitch, the youngest son of her neighbors Jeremiah and Maggie, for Jordan, her grandson, even though Jordan fled Mother Harriet’s perverse tutelage thirty years prior. When Jordan was Mitch’s age, Mother Harriet tried to teach him to hate his father so much that he would want to kill him. Mother Harriet blames Jordan’s father for the death of her daughter, Chloe, Jordan’s mother. That Mother Harriet wants Jordan to avenge Chloe’s death suggests that she hates and blames Jordan too for Chloe’s death since she died giving birth to him.

For Mother Harriet, the heroine, the self-appointed restorer of justice, there are only the innocent and guilty, right and wrong, good and evil. Moreover, there is only one story, her story, of death and vengeance as events immanent with meaning. Nothing happens for no reason. For the hero—or heroine—everything means, and thus meaning too becomes another mode of machismo indifference. Only when Mother Harriet is on her deathbed and Jordan refuses to touch her as she requests, refuses to acknowledge her body, does she ask forgiveness and forgives. Jordan’s refusal to be named Oedipus, to touch the flesh of the surrogate mother, neutralizes her story, which is the other side of the coin of history. Asking forgiveness while forgiving frees the past and present—her story, history, Mother Harriet, Jordan—from one another. In accepting their differences, Mother Harriet dies, disposable at last, an anti-heroine, the machismo of meaning put to rest.

So too the Disposable Heroes of Hiphopripsy. Their diatribes against black middle-class pretensions, genetic experimentation, the Gulf War, California’s former governor Pete Wilson, et al, is balanced, righted, by their equally trenchant self criticism: “If ever I would stop thinking about music and politics/ I would tell you that the personal revolution/is far more difficult/ and is the first step in any revolution.” Or “But before I put my foot in my mouth/’cause that’s what I’m about to start/ talkin’ about/ please let me confess before all the rest/that I’m afflicted/ by this addicted like most in the U.S.” This rap duo, like this writer, reminds us that it is we, not they, who are late, and that this “we,” signature of the politics of identity, however alluring, however expedient, will invariably repeat the reduction of difference against which it is posed. And if this we goes by other names—machismo, repression, indifference, the name itself—it is only because the politics of identity is yet another synonym for the politics of history.

And vice versa. On an “other” hand, a third hand, a politics of difference necessarily complicates the possibility of mobilization under the banner of a cause, but it does not render such a task trivial or impossible. On the contrary, it ensures the difficult passage from the reductionism of mobilization to the irreducible practices of democracy.

Notes:

- 1 Melvin Dixon, *Trouble The Water* (Pocket Books/Simon and Schuster, 1989), *Vanishing Rooms* (Plume/Penguin Books, 1991) and *Change of Territory* (Tia Chucha Press, 1995).
- 2 “The Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy” (162-444043-2, Island Records, Inc., 1992).
- 3 All subsequent quotations are from “Language of Violence” unless otherwise noted.
- 4 See, for example, Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* (Oxford University Press, 1988)
- 5 Certainly two of the most important texts in this regard are Michelle Wallace’s *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (Verso, 1991) and, more generally, Cherrie Moraga’s and Gloria Anzaldua’s pioneering anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Woman Of Color* (Kitchen Table, 1982, 1983).
- 6 One of these new outposts is *The Black Studies Reader*, edited by Jacqueline Bobo, Cynthia Hudley and Claudine Michel, published by Routledge in 2004. Among other things it includes Marlon B. Ross’ important article, “Some Glances at the Black Flag: Race, Same-Sex Desire, and Cultural Belonging.”
- 7 See Sigmund Freud.
- 8 I allude here to Du Bois’ notion of “the Veil” in *The Souls of Black Folk*. For Du Bois, the Veil is precisely black skin and the stereotypes that accompany and constrain the bodies it literally—and figuratively—“covers.” The effect of this “Veil” is that black culture flourishes amid, but invisible, to the predominant culture. Here, under the cover of the normative “hiphocrisy” of a “progressive” college populace, homoeroticism is “read” as heterosexual friendship.
- 9 For a poetic “slaying” of the ancestor/father, see Carl Phillips’ “Passing” in his first book of poetry, entitled, not coincidentally, *In The Blood* (Northeastern Press, 1992). As the title suggests, the poem, and book, is also about “passing” as a “normal” heterosexual black man.

*This debate is occurring because of the Supreme Court's ruling that said that we must conduct ourselves under the Common Article III of the Geneva Convention. And that Common Article III says that there will be no outrages upon human dignity. It's very vague. What does that mean, "outrages upon human dignity"? That's a statement that is wide open to interpretation. And what I'm proposing is that there be clarity in the law so that our professionals will have no doubt that that which they are doing is legal. You know, it's -- and so the piece of legislation I sent up there provides our professionals that which is needed to go forward.*

-THE WHITE HOUSE, 2006

***“How can he see he's got flies in his eyes if he's got flies in his eyes?”*** Catch 22

i.

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ways tragic death is a  
lonely business d eath is an  
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is certain dea th is life by death is not  
always the wo rst option death is death is  
n ever the end death i s the wages of sin  
death is becoming re cognized as death is a seri-  
ous matter de ath is on them death is not always  
the w inner death is a constant companion death  
is und er investigation deat h is nothing at all  
death is nothing at all i have only slip ped away  
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ii.

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son death is imminent death is sweet-  
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ter death is death death is yours?  
death is the easy way out for a  
monster death is entirely  
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## red badge of courage

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ver war is over the  
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r is on war is about  
strikes will be stri  
state war is just a  
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gn war is treason jo  
nd useless? war is o  
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ur art death is only  
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page death is not th  
ath is in the air de  
death is our physic  
nd death is it death  
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## “Anybody

who is in a position to serve this country ought to understand the consequences of words,” Mr. Bush said, <sup>(110106)</sup>

*“If I hadn’t spent so much time studying Earthlings,” said the Tralfamadorian, “I wouldn’t have any idea what was meant by ‘free will.’ I’ve visited thirty-one inhabited planets in the universe, and I have studied reports on one hundred more. Only on Earth is there any talk of free will.”* <sup>Slaghterhouse Five</sup>

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*When a Tralfamadorian sees a corpse, all he thinks is that the dead person is in a bad condition in that particular moment, but that same person is just fine in plenty of other moments. Now, when I myself hear that somebody is dead, I simply shrug and say what the Tralfamadorians say about dead people, which is ‘So it goes’.* <sup>Slaghterhouse Five</sup>

War is **Kind** and Other **Lines**

by Stephen Crane [1899]

Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind.  
Because your lover threw wild hands toward the sky  
And the affrighted steed ran on alone,  
Do not weep.  
War is kind.

Hoarse, booming drums of the regiment,  
Little souls who thirst for fight,  
These men were born to drill and die.  
The unexplained glory lies above them,  
Great is the battle-god, great, and his kingdom --  
A field where a thousand corpses lie.

Do not weep, babe, for war is kind.  
Because your father tumbled in the yellow trenches,  
Raged at his breast, gulped and died,  
Do not weep.  
War is kind.

Swift blazing flag of the regiment,  
Eagle with crest of red and gold,  
These men were born to drill and die.  
Point for them the virtue of slaughter,  
Make plain to them the excellence of killing  
And a field where a thousand corpses lie.

Mother whose heart hung humble as a button  
On the bright splendid shroud of your son,  
Do not weep.  
War is kind.

Chris Chen

## A MORE PERFECT UNION

i came to mourn you  
not praise the craft  
[this is value] that netted  
you a million

my father fetched from  
our mills [elemental]  
irish maids with golden  
botticellian hair [in a bottle]

at thermopylae [this is  
syncopated  
dread] turning back a glass-  
cased clock  
highboy, 91 [and that]  
revere street, his spats [dung

and straw] were pearl gray  
plush [pearl] with pearl  
buttons whose lake-  
view window [the union]

in the longshoreman [this is the  
union  
of sound] the limousine  
handlebar  
mustache splashes in the wake  
of our liner

the square-rigger's  
fresh byronic collar  
[this is a collar  
byron would wear]

to gunboat the yangtze  
with bibelots parmachenie  
belle [this a fragrant  
southern cheese]

the douay bible's black and gold  
casket catafalque napoleon's  
[someone's] invalids [lakeview]  
thick lavender mourning

our lists of birds  
seven chimneys long  
was maine [shot a luger  
in the mall] a lobster

town, our house in maine  
whose nameplate fell  
like chinese sandals  
from the door [a face

in profile] the hip-flask  
fruity with bunches  
of lute [a wind-  
hover] of cream

gabardine  
whorl in the table  
grew from chestnut-  
colored suede [that, how]

liveried filipinos  
[acquired] a silver hot  
water bottle behaving  
like a hip-flask [smelted]

to racks of experimental  
firearms [these are...]  
life [the values  
of linen] studies

in peasant  
colors [inexpressible]  
and puritanical  
[in linen]

this little  
alpine [this  
is  
alpine] a resort

Habitus:

Constructed from a list of names of patrician objects sifted from Robert Lowell's first three published volumes of poetry: *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946), *The Mills of the Kavaughs* (1951), and *Life Studies* (1959). The line, "The value of linen is inexpressible in linen" is taken from *Capital Volume 1* (1867) by Karl Marx.

Valerie Mejer, photographs by Dan Borris

## TIME'S PLAYING FIELDS

*translated by Forrest Gander*

Something clings, mythic, to the lunar surface.  
Proof, packed in a rectangle, of human  
pulse: game. Someone came  
earlier, or comes later. Comes to capture  
what was or will be the dust  
that legs have churned. For now, in silver,  
in vast silver plains, the *nothing* of the will  
is depicted. Not the *nothingness* nothing. Not  
here. More akin to what the will

to pursue

a ball has bequeathed this space.

And better yet: the space itself. The *nothing*-space. Like aiming a lens  
at the stars to record their ordinary days, their real age.

And better still, in this country of rattles, in the way  
someone might aim a lens at a celestial body, panning the game  
that was, the game to be. At the fresh playing field,  
that white page.



A page fortified at its margins.  
A rectangle framed by two more. Maize along the margins.  
Mountains. Light at the arm of the horizon. Puddles on the field: silver.  
Silver page.



And beyond, a forest. The goal posts iterate tree lines: the formal  
audience, silence. Straight up, solid,  
with its reservoir of insects and lost balls.  
Within, a deer shivering with cold. The branches, all of it,  
closed off  
into a fist  
clamped around the desert arena.



The distance, blurred. A fracture through the bones of silence.  
There remains, nevertheless, *the there*. Destiny of eye and ball:  
the sun of Mexico. A roof of clouds and soon the rain mars the plain fact:  
blurring the distance, it pulls silence over the place where bones are jarred.



Campfire: a dry pasture.  
A concert of weeds. I remember  
in gold, a fragile  
project: field of play. The pasture leaning  
right, limbs leaning left  
reenact the event of air circling  
like memory itself.





A lust of mist.  
A mist that stealthily lifts.  
Waiting for the sun to go  
or for the coming of the wind.  
While night still holds the field.  
Dreaming the drum of feet. Then light  
rises, the annunciation of day  
and game.



At what we have exchanged for an altar, we take  
our daily air. The wafer  
within, the ball without. The goal tilted  
by the congregation (which is to say, players).  
The steeple movingly vertical,  
erected by players (which is to say, the congregation).  
When signs float up  
like a ball, we know: Mexico.



A cavity in the mountain. A dimple in the forested lower  
back of the sierra. It's a shaved place, teatless,  
of white earth. You have to go down. You have to get low.  
As if the game were the mecca of a sweaty pilgrimage.  
It's not the delta of any road, nor the tragic center  
of any precise world. It is the *far off*, gone white, the pure far.



In fugue, clouds are concentrated into reflection. In the migration  
of meaning (by inundation), the playing field becomes a mirror.  
The goal closes  
on an open eye. Half in air, half in water,  
unblinking. A soft liquid prairie  
that visibly preserves its destiny  
as a souvenir of the game.





If a chair makes communion with a pencil  
If the pasture makes communion with the field  
If the cows have intruded into the destiny of a space  
If a child makes the goal a summit  
If this theater is used as a church  
If (to save my life) I make your book my notebook  
If this playing field displaces the sky  
then you are in a valley  
in Mexico



Goal  
or gate  
or gloss  
or gloss on the gate  
or gateway to the grotto  
or wordless ball  
and syllabic world: the wind's ululation.  
From our rocky edge, the doorknob is turned  
and here are ruins for the light,  
what was a ball and is now the sun, a retablo, at last, of immense hours.



When the waters abate and the bones show in the field again.  
When the mountain loses its reflection.  
When the mud arms of the levee stop expanding  
and the insistent dryness returns.  
When the rain stops. They will arrive,  
feet first, to build a Sunday like before.  
But now, the mirror of water blocks the way to the game,  
yet the dynamo of its soul lifts the rectangular body and breathes.  
If it keeps raining, the field will swim off.  
And only the mountain, taking the shape of a breast,  
will, lone spectator, remain.

*The following short essay/meditation considers Inger Christensen's alphabet in light of a "new nature poem," a poem that challenges the interaction between the human-poet and the deteriorating earth, a poem that simultaneously interrogates the space between human-poet and human-poem. Inger Christensen is a Danish poet, born in 1935; her book alphabet has been translated by Susanna Nied and was published by New Directions in 2000. The number of lines in each of the fourteen parts of alphabet increase as determined by the Fibonacci Sequence, whereby the addition of two consecutive numbers equals the next in the series. Within each of Christensen's fourteen parts the lines break off into discrete poems and by counting stanza length and poem length the reader uncovers a multitude of new and connecting Fibonacci codes. The ratio between any two consecutive numbers in the sequence equals the Golden Ratio so that all progression is mathematically equal.*

*The following response to Christensen is divided into sections the lengths of which are constructed in order that the number of sentences equal the section numbers, which match the Fibonacci code. It follows naturally that any two consecutive sections, as in Christensen, pressed together should equal in essence.*

0

## NEW NATURE & INGER CHRISTENSEN'S *ALPHABET*

1

The truth is I can never start.

1

The truth is I can never stop starting.

2

This morning to start I go for a walk with the purpose of noting how buds will break forth from the branches that have been bare for almost five months. To start I'll sit inside for the rest of the day and read and re-read Inger Christensen's *alphabet*, consistently astonished by the poem end:

a group of children seeks shelter in a cave

mutely observed only by a hare

as if they were children in childhood's  
fairy-tales they hear the wind tell

of the burned-off fields  
but they are no children

no one carries them anymore (77)

As soon as I finish I flip backwards through the book and prepare myself to start again.

3

The shape of the Fibonacci sequence is the spiral shape, the shape of a shell, the shape at the end of *alphabet's* eleventh section sounds like:

...I  
walk down to the still  
blue of the Sound shining  
with evening, toss  
a stone into the water,  
see how the circles  
widen, reaching  
even the farthest shores (32).

The spiral-line as it turns around its origin makes both a shape of repetition and of contradiction. And in this turning back, the energy of *alphabet* is harnessed by the forward going energy of the sequential alphabet and the bounding pattern of Fibonacci so that by reading we are thrown into new space; each new space is a start, and each start expects discovery.

5.

“apricot trees exist, apricot trees exist,” begins *alphabet*. apricot trees exist: the outside circumference of the shell, like the poem at its widest point, holds the reverberations and also exact repetitions of its own history, ever turning in on itself; we feel this when entire lines from the poem’s early stages are spliced into the sequence at later points: “bracken exists: and blackberries; blackberries;” (12) “cicadas exist; chicory, chromium,” (13) “days exist, days and death; and poems/ exist; poems days death” (14). I start by going outside for a long walk or I start by staying inside and finding a piece of paper or I start with writing one letter or with one word and each word I put there on the sheet and thereafter is repetition—each word is a fearlessness, a risk. apricot trees exist: but to continue repeating means harm may enter; if the apricot dries and become a stone (which the poem will later repeat) or if the tree blooms, existence includes extinction and now there is the possibility of losing twice, of a “re-lost paradise” (21). apricot trees exist: each day I take the same path; rote and beautiful, life-affirming, and destructive:

apricot trees exist.

8.

In the second section's sole couplet, after apricot trees and bracken and blackberries, should we be distracted by bromide preceding hydrogen, or is hydrogen to be hydrogen, the life giving, water-making force?

Existence includes extinction; in Christensen's contribution to a new nature poem the progression includes: (1) "apricot trees exist;" (4) "doves and killers exist;" (7) "guns and chemical ghettos;" (8) the "poison helicopter's humming harps above the henbane;" (10) "atom bombs exist...some 60,000 dead and/wounded in Nagasaki" (11) hydrogen bombs and "a plea to die;" (12) cobalt bombs: "there is no more to say; we kill/ more than we think/ more than we know/ more than we feel;/ there's no more/ to say; we hate; there is no more" (41).

Suddenly walking under this canopy of pines where I am used to imagining cathedrals, I want to go home; I'm tired tracing my usual steps and I long for the place I began.

In a spiral the arc of the larger circumference against the arc of the smaller do not exactly stack; in other words, codes describe nature and codes make up poems and we are endlessly wrapped in systems on systems, but be wary: they intersect.

Why not wonder, then, whether reflection works as a process meant to equal or one to work against; in *alphabet* mirrors are systems of reflection that abound, both porous like the slime trail of slugs (55) and dissolved by the saltiness of the body's long story (37).

Or maybe a mirror is a better metaphor, an unreality, a dream, a way of contradicting forward moving; if we could press together the image and reflection (dream and reality) it might sound something like "snow," the third of six poems in section twelve:

snow  
is not snow at all  
when it snows  
in mid-June

snow has  
not fallen from  
the sky at all  
in June

snow itself  
has risen  
and has bloomed  
in June

as apple  
apricot  
chestnut trees  
in June

to be lost  
in real snow  
which is June snow  
in flower and seed

when you need never die (35).

13

Lastly, it is important to mention the voice of the poet in the poem, the tenderness with which this voice is turned toward the earth. “love exists, love exists/ your hand a baby bird so obviously tucked/ into mine, and death impossible to remember,” (26) begins section eleven. One page back the “I” has entered for the first time, but only after the horrible recollection of atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; she enters humbly, standing in the kitchen peeling potatoes while the tap is running and outside the children’s shouting drowns out the song of the birds. Inger Christensen’s is the poet-voice I admire—the voice simultaneously pulled by poem-math and independent, both song-maker and implicated by song’s resonance on earth.

It feels to me that the risk in writing is in honestly seeing the world, sinking into its complex system, but with the mind to be taken away. Existence includes extinction. By the end of the poem the dreamers have dreams on top of their skin. I wonder if I were to travel the shape of a spiral into the earth with the discovery as my goal, would I know it when I saw it, would I be brave enough to catch it, to recognize it, even if it was sticking there on top of my skin. To see the unreal on top of the real is a reflexive act; discovery is inexplicable, a kind of grace—I think. My favorite lines of *alphabet* are when Christensen writes: “That’s how I’ve imagined/ being able to imagine.” I know I couldn’t have started the essay here. I’m sitting at home writing, and at the widest point there is the urge to say: I’m done. There is the stronger urge to start again and again, to say the most essential thing: apricot trees exist, apricot trees exist.

## UNDER COVER OF DARKNESS

*To you a picture is simply a pretext for analysis. You wanted a nude, and you chose Olympia, the first to come along. You wanted bright, luminous patches, and you put in a bouquet. You wanted black patches, and you placed a Negress and a cat in a corner. What does that mean? You hardly know, and neither do I. But I do know that you have succeeded admirably at doing a painter's painting, the work of a great painter.*

—Émile Zola to Edouard Manet, discussing Manet's *Olympia*

Older Sister and Younger Sister climb the stairs of their childhood home. Younger sister flicks the hallway light. They drag their feet down the worn wood floor, and force their bodies into the too-small room they once shared as girls. The room smells of their mother's perfume. Younger Sister sighs, flops onto the twin bed, her head propped on pillows on the footboard, facing the old television. Older Sister turns on the VCR, pushes François Ozon's *8 Femmes* into the machine, staring as the black case of the tape is sucked down into the chamber. The house creaks, pine trees scrape their branches against worn shingles, still riled by the dregs of an April storm. The closets hold decades of their mother's clothing. She takes her space at the edge of the bed, her back poker-straight against the headboard. She will not sleep tonight. The night is already gone. The tape whirrs and wheezes.

The film begins. Its opening credits are reminiscent of George Cukor's *The Women*. Instead of a parade of farmland creatures, the sisters are led on a twirl through the garden. Danielle Darrieux is a violet. Catherine Deneuve is a yellow orchid. Isabelle Huppert is a tight red celosia argentea, also known as cockscomb. Emmanuelle Beart, the white orchid. Fanny Ardant, the red rose. Virginie Ledoyen, a pink rose. Anthropometaphorism. Ludivine Sagnier, a young, lithe daisy fluttering in the breeze. Then the strings tremble deep, drop low, strike a chord of suspense, as if Joan Crawford's jungle red claws were about to slash through the screen, but that's not it. The vibrato of terror announces bright yellow petals surrounding an unfathomably brown center. The deepest notes produce Firmine Richard's name, quavering cursive white over the dark face of the sunflower,

before it fades away.

Firmine Richard is Madame Chanel, the housekeeper. ‘Madames’ were once cinema’s stereotype for dominant lesbian femmes. In the space of her name, cathouse meets design house. Together they dress Firmine’s body in old stories of race and sex and servitude, all with high style, under a mansard roof filled with hothouse flowers. Her dress is slate gray, domestic *haute couture*. Firmine is the shield that protects.

The sisters watch the flowers sing and dance their numbers to each other, as they applaud, react, respond.

“I hate that the housekeeper is black,” Younger Sister says, glaring at Older Sister. “She has to take care of them. They don’t listen. That’s fucked up.”

Older Sister makes an “Mmmm” noise, not for delicious, but to signal a very old yes. Their mother is very recently dead. Hours. She loved murder mysteries. And sunflowers. The sisters stay awake and the subtitles roll. Their grandmother cleaned rich people’s houses in Jamestown during the week. Stayed away for days, while her children... While her children...sang?

Firmine strides from the kitchen, smoothing her white apron over her slate gray dress, cooing and cajoling for the girls of the house she keeps. “Her” girls, the Pink Rose and the Daisy. They are not dark and comely, but pink and white, forever presumed innocent. Their aunt is all irony, the sexually frustrated Cockscomb, their mother, the glib Yellow Orchid. Firmine the Sunflower stands tall and smiles, giving self-assured womanhood where there is only shrewishness, maternal warmth where there is only icy materialism. She stands firm, baking her girls brioche. The coals in the iron stove quietly heat and glow. Orange is a healing color. None of these flowers Firmine tends to have it.

But they sing about love and money and dance for the man whose eye they imagine to be constantly upon them. Just where is the source of all this passion, anyway? These women cannot be self-generating. As in Cukor’s film, the Big Daddy of Ozon’s *8 Femmes* is never seen. He is a sleeve in a smoking jacket, a leg jutting from his study’s polished armchair, a hand writing a check at his desk. He is nearly invisible, but evinced in each woman’s actions. Except Firmine’s.

Younger Sister eyes the Daisy bobbing on the screen with derision. She looks over her shoulder at Older Sister. “Are you freakin’ kiddin me here, or what? What *is* this?”

Older Sister shrugs, shaking her head, the thin rasp of air escaping her lips passing for a laugh. They look at each other gently. Older Sister’s eyes drift slowly around the room. Younger Sister remembers something; her lips tremble, and she turns back towards the t.v. screen, resting her head on the pillow of her folded hands.

The scene is the morning after a night of many acts. Someone has killed the Big Daddy of the house. He’s found in bed with a knife in his back. Whodunnit? All the flowers gather round a glossy hardwood table, questioning, deducing, exchanging sideways glances, nursing suspicions, pointing the finger. At the mention of Big Daddy’s sister, the Red Rose, sexy maid White Orchid and Firmine exchange glances.

Firmine lives behind the big house, in the hunter’s cottage, where at night she entertains the Red Rose, a “fallen” woman who plies her wares on the wrong side of the tracks. In her hunter’s cottage, Firmine is madame, silky, sprawled across her duvet in a black negligee, a cigarillo between her lips, mooning at her love. Red Rose sits perched on the edge of the bed, laughing from deep in her throat. They play cards; one trumps the other. Firmine’s eyelids grow heavy with waiting for the moment when this innocent game will end, and another, more satisfying one will begin.

Beneath the sisters’ bedroom is the basement, the laundry room, the coal stove, now cold, and the fourth television set, where Younger Sister once sat thumb-sucking and mesmerized in front of the screen, deaf to the bellowing of her own name. Where Older Sister was tricked by their mother to come down and watch *A Movie for a Sunday Afternoon* with her...and iron with her...and fold clothes, film after film, Sunday after Sunday. And here she is, home again and awake in the dead of night, hoping that this summons might turn out to be a ruse, that their mother might reappear, laughing as she steps out of hiding.

Estranged from her brother, and accused of being a money-grubber, Red Rose is a suspect in his murder. In the interest of justice, the sexy maid White Orchid outs madame

housekeeper Firmine as a lesbian and Red Rose's lover. The girls instantly shun Firmine, stepping away from her in disgust. She looks to Red Rose for support, but the Red Rose averts her gaze.

"She is...a sapphist!" Grandmere Flower hisses at Firmine.

And only she. Somehow Red Rose is not a sapphist. Older Sister smirks. She too is a sapphist. She remembers the Southie Irish girl from high school who sat on top of the dryer in the basement, asking, *daring* Older Sister to give her pleasure. She hesitated then, immediately feeling that once the inevitable happened (word got out), and the finger pointed (sapphist!) she would never be seen in the pink-white light of innocence, of youth, as one of two equally culpable participants. Older Sister knew, as she bit her lip and made a move, that she would be seen as inexplicably dark and singularly corrupting.

Younger Sister dozes, wet lashes crusted with new salt.

Older Sister's gaze wanders away from the screen. She had recently spoken about this film to Anne, critical how Firmine gets the short end of the stick throughout the film.

"What did he mean by all that?" she asked Anne, speaking the director, François Ozon.

Anne waved her hand dismissively. "Pfft."

"Come on. He's deliberately using these stereotypes, the repressed lesbian housekeeper, the criminal lesbian madame, the loyal-yet-suspect black domestic, all rolled into one. All punished. He *must* be saying *something*."

"*Non, non, non*," Anne insisted.

Older Sister bristled, but let it drop. This was to be cocktail small talk between strangers with a friend in common. Then Anne's hands waved more animatedly, as if orchestrating the *8 Femmes* soundtrack. Anne loved the all-star celebration of her country's actresses.

"And the trio of Deneuve, Emmanuelle Beart, and the picture of Romy Schneider, *ah!*"

No picture of France's equivalent to actress Madame Sul-te-wan falls out of Firmine's pocket in the midst of her playing the role of housekeeper, Older Sister thought. And *who* might that *be*, anyway? No portrait of Caty Rosier hangs over the fireplace in

Firmine's hunter's cottage.

"I thought the film was just *lovely*," Anne had said. "And the bits with Danielle Darrieux were *hilarious*. It was special, rare, to see all of those women acting together."

Older Sister nodded, poured herself another glass of *veltliner* and smiled, chewing a strawberry and imagining other possibilities for Firmine, ensconced as she was, as they *both* were, in the realm of other people's nostalgia.

I know this is not my future, Firmine thinks, but that somewhere else, at the edges of swamps and the mysteries of dead men, women grow true to their own desires. They know their worth. *Traversee de la mangrove*. There is another side, and a love that mirrors my skin, a child loyal to my blood, a sensuality that does not mock or damn, a vision that does not require my flesh as scrim. I cross back, to that other side, and stars are returned to my pockets to light my hips' curves with memory, with Time's continuous sway.

Younger Sister turns in her sleep, pulling the entire bedspread around her curled body, her hand close to her mouth. They have been returned to this position, fetal, blind, grasping, still dependent, suddenly alone, in a room too small to contain them. Older Sister watches the Pink Rose and the Daisy sit on the Daisy's bed, talking about sex, after they try to force Firmine to tell them all her secrets, she, the only one among them, it seems, who has ever known love.

Older Sister's eyes turn about the room still alive with her mother's scent. She cups her palm to her own forehead with force, as if to keep her thoughts from running amok, as if to keep her brain from bursting from her skull and splattering all over the walls. Love has two faces, she muses, one white, the other dark, each with an alibi. The mask of Art hides the devouring gaze, the vacant stare, the rapid blink in the face of History. The heavy cloak of Desire drapes over impassioned bodies as they crawl, panting with slick teeth, toward the border of Custom and Taboo. Dark shawls, pots of greasepaint and discarded wigs litter this repressed landscape of sexual identity and moral culpability. Who is protected, in narratives in which certain desire is deemed perverse? Who shields, when taboo is tinged with the threat of social or physical Death?

"Have I ever let you down?" Firmine implores. "Without me," Firmine says to the Yellow Orchid, "your girls wouldn't have had much."

Yellow Orchid makes to slap her.

Firmine flinches from the blow, and turns to Red Rose, in a gesture of love, even begging forgiveness, though she's done nothing wrong. Red Rose rebuffs her in a bewildering act of violence. Older Sister leans forward. Rewind. Play. Rewind. Play. Red Rose grabs Firmine's hand, then Firmine is suddenly flung bodily to the floor, crying, disgraced not by loving another woman, but by having that woman violently deny her. She scrambles to her feet, her heel catches and tears the hem of her dress. Pink Rose suppresses a giggle. Firmine runs sobbing into the kitchen.

Older Sister holds her nose, punches her pillows, then leans back against headboard, eyes on the screen, intent on smelling nothing. In denying Firmine, she realizes, Red Rose, the 'dark' lady from the wrong side of the tracks, uses Firmine's body as a shield. Firmine absorbs all the disdain and punishment for her love of Red Rose. Under cover of darkness, Red Rose runs away from any admission of sex with a black woman, but runs toward a very public display of sexuality, and taboo, with her dead brother's wife. Firmine, exiled and singing alone in the kitchen, tears streaking her face, maintains her balance throughout the farcical, musical murder mystery, though she's hurtling, *being hurtled* in each scene, from social to certain death.

"You need treatment," Yellow Orchid says to Firmine.

"It's the domestic's revenge!" Grandmere Flower huffs.

Older Sister's eyes burn. Younger Sister stirs, returns to sleep.

Firmine sings "so as not to be alone." She sings her song to no audience but the falling snow outside the latticed kitchen window.

*Pour ne pas vivre seul*

*On 'sfait du cinéma*

*On aime un souvenir*

*Une ombre, n'importe quoi*

Pfft, said Anne. Ozon meant nothing by the flow of Firmine's story. Yet Firmine sings that she's made herself into a cinema, a movie house, a place for other people's projections. That, so as not to be alone, one loves a souvenir, a shadow, anything.

None of the other flowers look on with compassion as she sings of desire in spring

and death and spring again.

Firmine's crucifix glistens. She is the diviner of truth, for it is she who discovers whodunit. And yet, she's still there, staring into Red Rose's flashing eyes, her treacherous, dimpled cheeks bridged by lips painted thick, hoping that there might still be a trace, a chance....*I wait, I love you, so as not to be alone.* But instead Red Rose pushes up on Yellow Orchid, her own brother's wife, claiming, now, avowing, her same-sex desire, rolling on the floor with Yellow Orchid, kissing her, their breasts pressed together, for the eyes they imagine watching them, despite the eyes of the other flowers actually upon them. There is no disgrace, but a kind of mild wonder that passes through the room like hypocrisy, like the sun through the clouds.

Firmine bursts from the kitchen excitedly, the key to her redemption from social death on the tip of her tongue. "I know who did it!"

Blam!

Younger Sister jerks awake. "What the fuck?"

She stares at Older Sister, as if in sleep she might have changed the world. But the gray night is still the night; no one has returned. Not childhood, nor their mother's hands. Reality hasn't at last ceded control and left the world to the healing power of their dreams.

Younger Sister's glassy eyes follow Older Sister's to the screen, to where Firmine grimaces in disgusted shock.

"Oh, so she's shot now, too?"

"Mmmm."

There is no wound; Firmine has been hit, but no blood seeps between the fingers she clutches to her breast. Her eyes close slowly, in the fluttering throes of cinematic death. Then they flash open again, eerily undead, staring blankly out, as if transfixed by something, a vision, magic, a secret in the Continuum being kept from us.

Norma Cole

## FOR SUSAN GEVIRTZ'S CAESAREA: HEROD'S CITY

*"Strange Models" Panel, Second Sunday Series, 11 February 2001*

"I speak not, I trace not, I breathe not thy name" begins a section from Byron's "Stanzas for Music." This is the one part from the *Hebrew Melodies* that he suppressed, allowing the other poems to be set to music by Isaac Nathan. This strange model, the **model of absence**, stands behind Susan Gevirtz's *CAESAREA: Herod's City* as metamodel, containing and generating a structure of strange models. It silently introduces and permits, "like the night," the many intersecting and merging arms or armatures (the woman's hundred arms"—*Thrall*, Gevirtz) that create the multiple rhythms, tones and trajectories of Gevirtz's long poem.

One of Byron's *Hebrew Melodies*, "Herod's Lament for Mariamne," is cited in the transitional passage or threshold between the title on the title page,

C A E S A R E A : . . : Herod's City

and the title "C A E S A R E A : . . : Herod's City" at the top of page 29 where the body/text of the poem begins — or continues, depending on where you think it starts. About the *Hebrew Melodies*, poems written at the request of composer Isaac Nathan, Byron writes to Annabella, his fiancée, that his words would be accompanied by the "real old undisputed Hebrew melodies which are beautiful and to which David & the prophets actually sang the 'songs of Zion.' It is odd enough that this should fall to my lot, who have been abused as 'an infidel.' Augusta says 'they will call you a Jew next.'" (Benita Eisler)

"I speak not... thy name" — Augusta — the referent of that sign or name's sake was Byron's beloved, his half-sister whose shadow haunts the *Hebrew Melodies*. The suppressed poem from "Stanzas for Music" might be called "Stanzas Forbidden" just as Gevirtz's *CAESAREA :. : Herod's City* might be called "Stanzas Standing in for a Crime." Behind and before *CAESAREA* are crimes including the murder committed in name of inevitability, stand-in for the suppressed **model of the forbidden-to-be-called-by-its-name**, in this case **beloved**, or what Laura Riding in her *Lives of Wives* refers to as "The Silence of Mariamne." The written inscription in my copy of *CAESAREA* says "to

which we reply/ and we do.”

The poem *CAESAREA* will dismantle the strangely conventional **model of power** represented by this fabulously constructed harbor. On the eastern shore of *Mare Nostrum*, the Mediterranean Sea , “... he lowered blocks of limestone [in a different translation, “soft white stone”] into twenty fathoms [in another account, twenty-five fathoms] of water, most of them measuring fifty feet in length by nine in depth and ten in breadth, some being even bigger.”(Josephus) This he is Herod, King of the Jews and the husband and murderer of Mariamne and the subject of Byron’s poem.

The harbor of Caesarea, named for Augustus Caesar who ceded much territory to Herod in gratitude for his support, was the more ancient site of Strato’s Tower, between Joppa and Dora. It became an international **entrepôt** in the tradition or **model** of Delos and Rhodes, Carthage, Alexandria, Troy, Aden, Palmyra, Petra, Bactria, Oc Eo, Peshawar, and the market town at the mouth of the Ganges. As such, it becomes **a model of punctuation**, a control of passage, promise of shelter and a site of **circulation** – of goods, winds, breath, song, stanzas: for music.

What music are the stanzas *for*?

“Tell her// when you go there// what you saw here/ Her// Sayarea,” a **model of both motion and musical progression**, from “here” to “her,” from “Sayarea” to “Sayarena,” from “Caesarea” to “cease” and “area” and “arena,” the arena where interdictions are broken and many thousands in revolt are massacred before an audience: a spatial model and a temporal model which still exists in what is now known as Israel, there on the seacoast, here as a bite out of the desert and sea of the page.

The poem itself becomes a strange “**speech act**” **model**, says “Tale,” says “Tale within tale.” It disrupts itself with strange *speechless* acts of **dots**, **architectural models** of the very port over whose breakwater speech breaks, the colon-period-colon combination in the title forming the symmetrical yet asymmetrical arms of the harbor. Here is the Muse of Symmetry, the first poem in Laura Moriarty’s book titled *Symmetry*, an acute consideration of the asymmetry from which a **model of symmetry** is constructed or implied.

## THE MUSE

The familiar paraphernalia

Forced into the role of silent collaborator

The psyche at stake

We are in business together

The buildings melt into the sky

You sing to distract me

Your reason is not mine

Is mine

The submerged foundational stone blocks reappear like the black basalt rocks forming Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty, their salt-encrusted angles barely breaking the surface of the Great Salt Lake. The "tale within tale" here is broken up and punctuated by square sets of dots, a rippling grid of "Memories/ before our time." Something *is* to something as something *is* to something else. This figure becomes a sign in the text, its function recalling the diamond dot figures of Langston Hughes's poem "Neon Signs":

WONDER BAR

.  
.  
.

MONTEREY

.  
.  
.

MINTON'S

(ancient altar of Thelonius)

.  
.  
.

MANDALAY

Spots where the booted  
and unbooted play

.  
.  
.

SMALL'S

.  
. .  
. .  
CASBAH

.  
. .  
. .  
SHALIMAR

.  
. .  
. .  
Mirror-go-round  
where a broken glass  
in the early bright  
smears re-bop  
sound

.  
. .  
. .  
“It begins/ as usual/ with a journey/ in a new/ handed over/ panegyric/ litany without altar.” Gevirtz quotes Mary Shelley folding in the *carmen figuratum* of George Herbert’s altar-object, another implication of the strange **model of “the unknown known”** of the poem.

And then “the fallen angle”— of the house in Samaria where Herod and Mariamne passed the blissful and early moment of their union? Looking back as they left, they saw the angles of this house fall as the floor caved in. According to Laura Riding in *The Lives of Wives*, Mariamne read this as a sign.

“The fallen angle.” Is *angle* not *angel*? The strange—or not at all strange—**model** that suddenly appears (sails into port?) is the Talmudic **Haggadic** reading of consonants, the reading less strange to us for its having been favored by poets such as Robert Duncan, philosophers such as Levinas and Derrida. This is the poetic model, inseparable from Haggadic *derashot* (explanations) containing figurative or folded meanings, parabolic or hyperbolic. This is **the model of no authority** (Rabbi Leo Jung) that grants permission to contradiction, or as *CAESAREA* says,

Halakah walking  
Haggadah SHOWING FORTH

“The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them....This storm is what we call progress.” (W.B. on Klee’s *Angelus Novus*)

“And in his angels he found folly.” (*Job* 4.18) Byron and Augusta reappear at intervals in the agora of dots, “this axial relation/ incident between edited space/ and expanse” “exposition invisible/ at ancient inkwells/ the found, lingers.” Haggadah is a mnemotechnical device, a table of argument, a folklore compendium, and an unknown known for Byron, himself fascinated by “surviving evidence of ancient popular culture, whether the chants of Suliote sailors or ‘real undisputed songs of Zion.’ He felt particularly inspired by ‘remains’ that gave voice to despised or forgotten peoples.” (Benita Eisler)

*CAESAREA* appears to be **rhapsody**, from *rhapsode*, *stitcher of song*. The term migrated from poetry to music in the early nineteenth century, was applied to compositions drawing on folk melodies, and evolved through the work of Brahms and others into new forms of memory and investigation

In her critical book *Narrative’s Journey: The Fiction and Film Writing of Dorothy Richardson*, Susan Gevirtz writes, “In *Pilgrimage*, we do and do not meet a main character named Miriam Henderson – she is there when we meet ourselves in the act of reading and so she is never actually there without us.” Gevirtz quotes Stephen Heath: “‘Miriam’ is the possibility of ‘mirror I am’.” Miriam and Mariamne are the same name, “...the basic name known to the Chaldeans as Marratu, to the Jews as Marah, to the Persians as Mariham, to the Christians as Mary: as well as Marian, Miriam, Mariamne, Myrrhine, Myrtea, Myrrha, Maria and Marina. Her blue robe and pearl necklace were classic symbols of the sea, edged with pearly foam.” (Barbara Walker) Constellated in Gevirtz’s writing, they become **mystery tale model** – or **role model**.

“A sign is anything which is related to a second thing.” (Peirce) Here is a sign that *is* the second thing, for the radical for this name is etymologically the same as the root for *marriage*, the Latin *maritare*, union under the auspices of the Goddess Aphrodite-Mari. Origen, the second century self-castrated Christian father whose library was housed at Caesarea, declared of marriage, “Matrimony is impure and unholy, a means of sexual passion.”

From *CAESAREA: Herod’s City*, pp 43-44:

Mariamne amneo  
Under memory

for which he thrusts and cannot

Maritima sea guard  
under his body  
accord between

cease your name I building for which you

plan and cannot

body of water cornered

harbor your sensation

slave slaves sea I

am newest gone my name stops

your throat and builds landfill

On page 49:

Sailors approaching Caesarea  
could see it from far out at sea

These two lines of exactly equal and unequal length provide a warning that models such as the safety of the harbor, of closure, are not what they seem.

## WITH A BODICE LIKE GERTRUDE'S, I'M LATE AND NO HELPING IT

When we make it to the station, the porter man will know us in sound. He will have been waiting. Patience. The porter man has been knowing. The porter man has been knowing of arrivals making late. In the sugar box there are little brown crumbs, and they should be taken care of. I would do to make a domestic, baking arrangement, but there are tendencies towards late. I have not to be late this time, though I have brown crumbs in the sugar box that bother. There is always the porter to note this, that I will seriously be late. But I have reason. I have reason for this later. I will tell you later, and perhaps, I will tell you in a way that you can see that I'm a scrapped together bodice, hoisted atop a body that likes to bloat. I like this description though it is another serious betrayal of my confidence. I have yet to find a bodice that does not fit. But, for sakes purpose, bloating up into a Gertrude will do.

I suppose there are things to tell. There is the time about Gertrude that I have not discussed. There would be a good one. I will be running and running and running into this one for days, and it will almost surely make me late. But I will get there, and when I do, I will be the modest of most. I will be mostly modest save an imaginary flank on my left side that will have been getting out of line and out, flopping past the seams. The bodice can only hold so much even when it is Gertrude's form. So I will be running, flank flopping, modest mostly, running and almost falling, but not falling, almost falling. And I will be running to catch up to the train that will have almost left, but not quite, because they have saved a very special row, an entire row, for my increasingly bloated bodice, increasing and grows, and I will have gotten a whole row, so they must wait. I will be there, but the sugar. I have to sift clean for company. I will not make cakes for just myself.

And so, I have been a bloated bodice all along. Waking and waiting to burst, and the sound that is there is sometimes disagreeable, but nonetheless, Gertrude would be pleased. She would not much to laugh at such a thing. She would not much to stare because politely goes politely. But, she is such a big one, and I can't tell her anything much these days. I can't really say much to Gertrude at all. I never have gotten in my peace. I have one, yes. And she would be displeased of my dirty little sugar box. There are things that need to be made most available. There are guests sometimes and cakes sometimes and lucky pastries almost made sometimes. And so, it isn't surprising that the porter will have seen me bloat into a bodice that is twice my size and severely unmanageable, but he will wait. Patience,

he will wait.

Sugar is cleanest when you package it right and sound. When the sound is right, it is soundly packed. So, I will have gotten through the sugar good. It will be granules of decadence and almost becoming a cake like my bodice is becoming. From there I will be flying to the station, rushing and high over, as much as a bloated bodice can hover, and flying I will be, irregularly, but flying, because what else would you call a dashing big woman darting, in a way, when to spring and get there? Right. So, it will be flying, certainly, and flapping, really, all over. And when I get there, all modest, and sometimes there will be a glowing drop above my lady mustache, the porter man will be jumping and shouting and getting all bent out of shape, but kind of surprised about my rush. And he will be cheering, almost belling to sort, *Miss Lady, Miss Annie, You have arrived! You are late!! Late!!! There are rows in wait and one especially!* Exhaustion is fully with that kind of pant he does. The heave and panting the porter man. My, the porter man, but mostly I'm trying and out of breath and occasionally the sentiment is missed. I'm a big girl who's just sprinted a dozen. How did you think this scene would turn? Right. I'm some kind of sight, and the porter man, he says:

*I've heard you and you weren't so big in my dreams, but I made sure the row has been saved and your bags have been stowed. Well now, give me your bags anyway, Miss Lady Annie, give me your bags and I will stow. Late! So late you are, but the train isn't leaving till we pack you in right through! There!... And Yes, of course.*

How nice the porter. How nice it is to be saved. How nice and how thoughtful to be dreamed. I am the porter and the bodice. I am swimming in the big one. I am swimming in the most bloated of bodices, but out and out till late, but out. Jumping and flying and hollering bellows to be! I am an entire row! An entire row unto me!

Indeed, would the porter have known I was making my way. Indeed, he is a good one.

# BERRY PLUCKING: ANNIE AND BETTY PLUCK THE BERRIES

This is a boy and this is a girl. This is a girl and boy must be. There is nothing there and nothing there likely though a girl and boy must likely be something to do. When there is a girl. When there is a girl and a boy and two of a girl and a boy must do. When there is a girl, I am. Where and when and though I am is not the point. The point not exactly. I am one and there is one and a boy and a girl are lovely. And so we like to pluck. And so we like to sit and pluck. And so the plucking and the sitting and the chatting go through and we sit and sit and wait for each to do. Blackest of berries and berry berry much thank you. The way is one and berries go merrier, the merrier of both.

# HOW TO MAKE GERMAN

When the hall:  
Betty doesn't call  
Fate had not fit.  
Unfit Betty.  
Bottom ores bound.  
To present, Annie?  
call home. Wouldn't  
to hip. Fated and ship.  
Annie. The clock.  
German. Spout to  
to the sea, my Betty?  
Of haul. A pulse.  
The girl she plants.  
The reddest to take,  
But would she  
rare. Enough for  
pew for two. A  
stay. To rend  
Betty. A hall. A  
Betty and me. The  
about. None more.  
a mouth of glee.  
greet. And winter  
will always be late.  
and would she talk  
you have a reason to

time and sound.  
home. Doesn't  
Pulse. Warm.  
Ship and route and  
Repent, Betty.  
Gratitude, Annie?  
home. German.  
Mouth to sea and  
It will. The clock it  
mouth and drink.  
To pluck just one,  
Decree. Apples and  
The girl she musks  
the redder to fall.  
ware? Or could  
a ship lone stay.  
word we knew.  
the few last bits  
German. The mouth  
ship to winter and  
She pouts. Open  
Merriest were we to  
runneth late. Either  
Late, too late and  
German? One wall,  
eat. Tick, tick, sweet.

Meet and lone.  
call. Home.  
Ship. Fated and fit.  
Annie to mouth.  
Know spent, Betty.  
Meat. Pulse. Lesser  
If fate was a ship, then  
lip. Betty the hall.  
will unlock. The door.  
Would you the draught  
just one from three  
clocks and ticks  
the hall. She was in  
Winter? *Non*, fall.  
we dare? For Betty  
German. Betty-ward  
By rote. By generous  
alone. None more  
of winter to fit the  
doubt. In all the  
down fish mouth.  
sea. Too hip. Too  
Betty will call or  
clock. Apple seed  
two wall, three wall,  
Tic. Tic. Sweetly

Bone to bone.  
German.  
Betty, speak. Sit.  
Unsure and round.  
Enough to present.  
in bone. She wouldn't  
Betty was unfit. Hip  
Larger the fit. And  
German. Stoutly very  
or would you  
is duty. A pulse.  
to build a wall.  
words.  
Fall and be there.  
was fair and Betty was  
and sermon. A  
bend. To sit. To  
where there could be  
sea. Cold to sit were  
simply strange make-  
Betty went stoutly and  
meet. Too stir. Too  
Betty will sate. But it  
and stalk. Did she talk  
and sermon. And there  
reasoned with time.

# HOW TO MAKE VOWELS

Bitter batter butter better. Betty. Piddle paddle puddle peddle. Betty. Boxed but not. Wine is delectable. Waning detachable. Whether she said it. Whether she would mean it. And choose. Saddle sidle little. She sat. Betty is a short one and chose she would and chose she would. Bitter batter better and butter. Betty. AEIOU. Now repeat. Make it stick. Make it stick. Stack it tall and stick. Stuck and stick and here we are. The hall was a room. To make. The hall was a room. For baking. Betty. The hall was everything and the kitchen, Betty. Bitter batter butter better and piddle down the hall. I said German won't do, Betty. Translate it this way and prose would be bitter and perhaps I was better. To choose one. To let you piddle. To think and let you diddle. Diddle darling, diddle. And to diddle was to dawdle and it's done. There is the pan and there is the pan. There is the butter and there is my bitter and there is the way to set and bake. But to bother. But to bake. But to build a pie.

## HOLY-CHILD SONNET

*after John Donne*

You-to-be, viceroy — unreason of —  
My knocked-up open addiction to  
Your battering breath, your sieged inhabitation  
Of — my little emperor — port I am.

Beloved, host I you as self-possession:  
Belaboring, be mine; as vise-like I you dis-  
Entwine. Famished amnion love canals  
Our truce: Caesarean-sacked — citadel —

I, usurped — delivered of — disgorge you,  
Captive you plunder my body's booty.  
Divorce me unimprisoned birth me!  
Deliver me from to your stranger thralldom!

Abandoned ship, disembark I you sovereign  
Cargo. Chaste-ravished I your utter Subject.

# † WONDROUS CROSS †

Here, wondrous, survey my body  
Cross sectioned. A conversion reaction.  
The cruciform limbs + trunk were  
Heaven + earth full-of-Thee.  
Christ-cut, the crucial incision:  
Blood-washed, I was  
Wonder worked-over.

Criss-crossed my heart, I was  
Nearer, my God, to Thee.  
In the garden, dewy, I came  
To my crucifix-fix, & clung,  
His hand + hand-job maiden,  
Ruggedly cherishing the  
Faraway in His crucifiction.

I lay at His side, convicted,  
Nailed by His vision of me  
As a lay underfoot, bruised + heeling.  
I crushed on Him, slain-spirited.  
Foolish virgin, I, like a bride,  
Swallowed Him whole—  
Underage when I got saved.

I was in His mind before the world;  
Was laid—the feast of the Lamb.  
Our wedding night, rood was  
The pricked relic bedded  
In me, beastly, which marked me,  
Scarlet. God's word  
The cross I bore Him.

So I took up His crossness  
(Anatomy, destiny), followed Him,  
Humbly stumbling.  
All roads crossroads.  
And so brightly cornered where I was,  
Cross-tied there, a living sacrifice,  
Sweet-savored, ashamed + aflame.

My body His temple, He lived,  
Moved + had His being in me.  
I would not what I would—  
Christ-in-me my conjugation.  
I served Him, cross-purposed.  
That life I lost, I found  
Stored up, corrupted. Ill + treasured.

My utter surrender gestures  
Cruciformal; pinned, I self-suspended,  
Scare-crowed. Cowed, I bipedaled  
Furiously backwards. He cross-beamed me.  
He was a codpiece chastely belting  
My obedience—Old crucifix me.  
Transcrucifix me.

But never a cross word on my lips:  
I died daily to live forever.  
Boxed-in, cross-cut sawed in twain—  
Despairing—I prayed to crucifix-it-all:  
*Not I, but Christ-in-me:* To end it all.  
I crossed my heart,  
And hoped to die.

I did away with what He'd saved.  
I'm still on His books, under *Expunged*:  
"Crossed-out" is lost's name.  
I've stripped off the promised  
Star-crossed crown, the many mansions.  
So spurred now, + thunder-clothed,  
I am spurred on, *Aha!*, to this—

My cheating art (My very thought)  
From the cross-fire + brimstone salvaged.  
Life's sweeter far, Thy presence bested;  
Thy face + cross—barred. For now  
I hymn, I awe—sweetest  
Sound my foundling, *This*—  
Disgrace and amazing.

†

†

## WICKER-WORK: A SESTINA FOR ZUKOFSKY

In the mental hospital I am a fan of your interpretation 1  
 of torsion. Bar nothing I know poles— 2  
 some flat-martyred mind split down the center by light, 3  
 bilateral symmetry. Doctors leaf through MRI films 4  
 and think thoughts split between aw-shucks compassion 5  
 and abject snooping. My brain is luminous, 6

scooped with polka-dotted-lampshade inflammation. 6  
 Chomp chomp goes the T-Cell—spotted elucidation— 1  
 of everywhere myelin is being pawed over. Concern 5  
 is merited—multiple sclerosis leaves my brain divided 2  
 into little bubbles of dysfunction, cartooned 4  
 into increments of prayer: bulb- 3

ous head of a green thing. Photosynthesis 3  
 makes light 6  
 of the-locked-up-get-let-out-onto-the-poor-picture- 4  
 of-a-high-walled-courtyard—grass!!! We conceptualize 1  
 cigarettes, scratch our nicotine patches, pace two 2  
 directions. Back and forth, sympathy 5

strut. “Can you tell me what it’s like 5  
 to off yourself?” “Not bright— 3  
 but what the fuck! I didn’t vault 2  
 over over!” That, after the fine art of admission, radiant 6  
 mouth saying, “Sure, I’m suicidal.” I don’t understand 1  
 why the intake nurse needs that motion picture 4

Lips Lips Lips Lips to let me in. Silver haired screen 4  
 with her protocol of limiting access to the ward we love. 5  
 What food! What art therapy! Puddin’ analysis 1  
 of sadness, as iridescent 3  
 as dreams of escape will become, turnstile gleaming 6  
 with sweaty prints of our fingers, tipped towards any axis 2

rotated counterclockwise opposite 2  
 to despair. Oops. The lair of sentimentality flicks 4  
 aside newsprint. Self-pity is a bugger on my chest, beam- 6  
 ing. I stumble in all sub-atomic-ways. Brain care 5  
 is mandatory or I get legs as logs. So sad. That’s flare. 3  
 I’m sher ‘nuf sick though comprehending 1

disease is polenta. 2 Too mushy. Meaning 1  
 one big screen 4 for all patients. We dazzle 3  
 in the blue glow 6, sicks of the contemporary ward. 5

Laura Mullen

## FROM TURN

OWN

sweet most strongly overcome my own

STRING

bandoned dislocation impending disconnect  
like the word *money* an individual  
and what does it mean to perfect

what's left of

“And what exactly does it mean to wonder about this over coffee, solitude, perfect / Weather?” “They gather” the author smoothly continues, “he shifted from side to side to prevent the road from dismantling / His skin as he was dragged on / down the highway.” There is no “as if,” although we know in fact that he (if it is James Byrd Jr. 1949—1998) could not prevent himself from being flayed and then dismembered (his bones ground down, as the pathologist would note, his genitals ripped from his body) by any movement of his own, though the autopsy revealed his efforts to hold his head up:

the head that—torn off with the arm and the neck—was discovered in a ditch a mile away from what was left of the body....

And apparently abandons that subject.

Roughly to find oneself in what began somewhere farther back and continues into

In one sense *Turn* is the result of dragging another book “120 miles...chained...to the bumper of a Corvette doing 90 mph” as one of James Byrd’s murderers said—writing about his feelings—in a letter to his estranged wife, five years before the murder. A simile he tested on someone else, or as we say ‘took out.’ The project is a meditation on feelings becoming language acted out and it is, in the small town of its procedural structure, deliberately an impoverishment. Of the men involved in the death (Jasper, Texas, June 7, 1998) none had more than a high school education, all had prior arrests, three had done time, and only one was currently employed. Expensively educated, articulate, and casual about the facts, the author of my source text seemed to me to speak too easily and briefly “the unspeakable,” to turn public action back into private analogy as an introductory

image for a poetic self-analysis. The chosen verb<sup>1</sup> exposed a distance enacted throughout the text I dragged to ragged evidence, divesting myself of some of my training, and what might be called a gift. But in the career of my pencil through the source text I found myself exposing the philosophical bones of an obsession with the relationship between language and reality: in this obsession the author and I are very close, if (perhaps) more kin than kind. The meditation on what might be appropriate is also a questioning of what it is *to* appropriate—a questioning (also germane to the source) of the relationship between the individual and the community. In recontextualizing the word within the world I hoped to, as an old Keres song put it “add my breath to your breath.” Yet as the author writes, apparently quoting “the mutual friend” who appears in some trouble in the text, “...*It kills me when you breathe with me.*” That precious and endangered individuality seeking and resisting a connection is a subject I know something about. The Governor of Texas, in 1998 already on his way toward becoming the president of these United States, refused to visit the town, claiming that the best thing he could do was “to tell the revulsion I felt in my gut when I saw what happened.” This isolated interior replay (responsive but not responsible), trapped yet told, turned out to be one of the enacted subjects my source text exposed as I wrote my reading. Also visible: the necessity of understanding both our desire to distance ourselves, and the ways we find to do so. “Incidents,” she’d learned to say, somewhere: “there had been incidents”—who set us out to seek the concrete image for the idea. These words are not my own—more so than ever—I found them in a structure made of mirrors I dismantled, dragged incompletely to raw fragment—remains I remain with

branches the southern aftermath  
for what was that offered  
the end of like  
“a goddamn big car and”  
expressed

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<sup>1</sup> Dismantle: to divest of a mantle or cloak; to divest or strip (of any clothing, protection or the like); to strip off that which covers; to strip (anything) of the necessary equipment, furniture, or apparatus, to unfurnish; esp. to strip a fortress of its defenses [a mighty fortress is my self] to unrig “Calculated to dismantle the mind and scatter its materials of knowledge (W Roberts Looker-on 1794); To render (fortifications or the like) useless for their purpose; to pull down, to take to pieces, destroy, raze. Dismantling, dismantler, one who dismantles or strips “for the dismantling of his letters he wishes they may be covered with the cloak of confusion.” Milton Eikon 1847 (Wks)

IN YOU

once was a dwelling fastened called

INSIDE

A clock the lover numbers the longer

tick innermost sensation something

slipping until once

your device had become your abandonment

said the clock    said the we must

when the no

when the wild watched you from the frozen

black

ticking this is your this

## WREST

everything to pass exactly wild lost in endless how else become

## WORD CLOUD

attached to this cage your subjects  
at which point turned most familiar  
with a mirror writing implements  
vocabulary from previous wire  
desire the sun against history a clock  
on the mantle designed to move forward  
cloud forest fate was to *harm*  
like like dust and the rest

wreckage of cages and their parrot  
picture eye of the bird's  
imprisoned page

Lance Newman

## NO THANKS

He pilgrimed one night to Baghdad  
to jaw the kids. He told  
them, "Puncture skin and part joints." Mad  
soldiers asked, "Why so bold,  
boss? Bomblets dust the earth like chads  
dislodged by pickled olds  
in Tampa. As for armor-clad  
hummers--shit, we were sold."





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LLOYD BRIDGES IS BORN.

ROBERT MONDAVI IS BORN.

RED SKELTON IS BORN.

AIMÉ CÉSAIRE IS BORN.

HEDY LAMARR IS BORN.

VICTOR MATURE IS BORN.

TOKUGAWA YOSHINOBU, SHOGUN, DIES.

IN 1913 SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN PUBLISHED AN ISSUE ON ENERGY PROBLEMS, OBSERVING: "THE QUESTION OF THE POSSIBLE EXHAUSTION OF THE WORLD'S OIL SUPPLY DESERVES THE GRAVEST CONSIDERATION. THERE IS EVERY INDICATION THAT WE ARE FACE TO FACE WITH THIS POSSIBILITY."

EARLY EASTER FALLS ON MARCH 23.

THE FIRST U.S. LAW REGULATING THE SHOOTING OF MIGRATORY BIRDS IS PASSED.

BRITISH FREIGHTER ALUM CHINE CARRYING 343 TONS OF DYNAMITE EXPLODES IN BALTIMORE HARBOR.

PANCHO VILLA RETURNS TO MEXICO FROM HIS SELF-IMPOSED EXILE IN USA.

DEDICATION OF THE LINCOLN HIGHWAY, THE FIRST AUTOMOBILE ROAD ACROSS AMERICA.

RUDOLF DIESEL DISAPPEARS EN ROUTE TO BRITAIN.

TWO DAYS OF RAIN IN THE MIAMI VALLEY FLOOD THE REGION AND MARK THE WORST NATURAL DISASTER IN OHIO'S RECORDED HISTORY.

WOOLWORTH BUILDING OPENING CEREMONY.

GREAT GORGE AND INTERNATIONAL RAILWAY TROLLEY AND PASSENGERS ARE BURIED UNDER THE CONTENTS OF AN OVERHEAD GARBAGE CHUTE THAT BROKE IN NIAGARA FALLS, NEW YORK.

THE INSANE KING OTTO OF BAVARIA IS DEPOSED BY HIS COUSIN.

IN 1913, THERMAL CRACKING WAS DEVELOPED, ALLOWING MORE GASOLINE AND DIESEL TO BE PRODUCED FROM A SINGLE BARREL OF OIL. THE TECHNIQUE WAS ONLY THE FIRST OF MANY PROCESSING INNOVATIONS THAT ALLOWED REFINERS TO FULFILL BOOMING MARKET NEEDS.

MOHANDAS GANDHI IS ARRESTED WHILE LEADING A MARCH OF INDIAN MINERS IN SOUTH AFRICA.

VINCENZO PERUGIA TRIES TO SELL THE MONA LISA IN FLORENCE AND IS ARRESTED.

ARTHUR WYNNE'S "WORD-CROSS," THE FIRST CROSSWORD PUZZLE, IS PUBLISHED IN THE NEW YORK WORLD.

THE FEDERAL RESERVE IS CREATED BY WOODROW WILSON.

ITALY RETURNS MONA LISA TO FRANCE.

GATEWAY OF INDIA IS CONSTRUCTED AT MUMBAI TO COMMEMORATE THE FIRST ENTRY OF QUEEN VICTORIA.

FEMALE SUFFRAGE IN NORWAY.

NATIONAL TEMPERANCE COUNCIL IS FOUNDED TO PROMOTE THE TEMPERANCE MOVEMENT IN US.

HENRI LA FONTAINE, SOCIALIST, RECEIVES THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR PEACE.

VALENTINE DE SAINT-POINT'S "LA MÉTACHORIE" IS PRESENTED IN PARIS: A COMBINATION OF GEOMETRIC, ALMOST MECHANICAL, DANCE MOVEMENTS THAT SHE PERFORMED WHILE A NARRATOR RECITED HER POEMS, INCLUDING THE RECITATION OF HER POEM "LA GUERRE" WHICH FURTHER ILLUSTRATES HER ADOPTION (AND CRITIQUE) OF THE FUTURIST FASCINATION WITH MILITANCY, WAR, AND MECHANIZED MOVEMENT.