

MARSH HAWK REVIEW

Fall 2021

Guest Editors: Thomas Fink, Burt Kimmelman

With this issue *Marsh Hawk Review* is expanding to publish both poetry and prose (essays and reviews). We hope you find the change to your liking.

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POETRY

STEPHANIE BURT

Rain

the secrets decrease

there is no dust
to dust only
rivers and rivulets

their attendant
clouds and what
clouds let in
to the sea

the entire ache
the homeostasis
implicates you

If only you had face
and force and voice
enough to keep it off

better than bone
dry as a cough

it collects on glass
we broke
the continuing emergency
comfort us now

our wet yoke
our helplessness
on our good day

anyway walk the dog
it's something to do

the earth needs something to do

Whiter

Welcome to our America. It looks
the same as it did before,
but whiter.

Snow, where it came at all this year, melts earlier than ever
over shut union halls, tin diners, big-box stores
five miles out of town, where ever-brighter

arclights trace twin tracks that never
meet: shut trains and double yellow lines, two, six, eight, four-
lane interstates all the way to the headquar-
ters of our new gaslighter-

in-chief, where the Anacostia
disappears in the Potomac under the floor
of the labyrinthine subterranean FDR

memorial.
If they met Lady Liberty they would indict her.

Whitman tacks into the wind, up the East River
and north by north towards an unknown shore.
The nation his peers wanted to cover

with fruit trees is a stack of apple cores,
a parade float of apple blossoms that might or

will rot in the snowmelt. Winter is already over.
What should have been shiny, stable, harmless, pure
enough for a harmless snowball fight or

sculptures when all schools are cancelled hovers
as mist over slush, like the gray décor
favored by Whistler's mother: not *1984*

but *1877*. The *gastarbeiter*
whose genuine war, whose flinch or fight or

flight response to the back of the hand
and the hand that feeds you will never get in the books.
Show us your papers. Make the handcuffs tighter.

America was America before
we tried to make it fairer, braver, brighter.
It seems, from above, very near
the same. But whiter.

November 2017

STEPHEN PAUL MILLER

Your Inaugural

a Zoom convocation address

Busby Berkeley flies
Friends call him Buzz,
You know—the mind-altering choreographer
In *Gold Diggers '35*.
They at last let him direct
Even the non-dance
Parts in synchronized story rhythm—
Capturing multitudes flowing up full circle
In budding phantasmagoric Keynesian
Lenses while the first macroeconomy

Becomes us from sixty feet in the air—
Buzz punctures holes in every Warner's studio ceiling—
and you're now this dancer/camera mind meld
you you you are Busby Berkeley's flying rug

looking
down for the first time—
the dancer and the Busby one
superhero ground-zero—
in '38 *Superman* creator Jerry Siegel
adapts "Lois Lane" from *Lola Lane*—
star of Buzz's '38 *Hollywood Hotel*

and maybe even takes "Clark" from
Jimmy Cagney's *Footlight Parade*
torn producer/hoofer role—"Kent."

From those mythic heights Busby films an
ethereal "Shadow Waltz" in *Gold Diggers '33*—Please see
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAH0IKUk3aE>:

You are spiraling on wooden ribbons,
dancing in and out of hanging mirrored floors
becoming one and many neon violin(s),

with one and many glowworm bow(s)
pulsing through Buzz's dervish kaleidoscope

eye till someone buzzes
Buzz's Sufi perch and
as in our current position...

and THIS is a true story! See
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold_Diggers_of_1933#cite_note-tcmarticle

...lights go out
as the magnitude 6.4 Long Beach March 10 1933 quake
rocks LA,
throws Buzz from his flying carpet 30 feet up....
Hanging by a hand
his cinematographer pulls him back in.

Hearing dancers falling from
dark slanted vertical runways
Buzz shouts

"Don't move
till there's light!!!! Open the door!

That's the president we need that's you

St. John's University, New York, June 7, 2020

If Ever the Angels Should Take Pity on You

If ever the angels should take pity on you
For all the cheating, stealing, and outright
abuse you take,

If ever a tribunal of angels
ask what you want
to make things right for you.
Anything! You
can have anything you want—

the head angel asks

What do you want? Don't ask for
some nothing. Don't be modest. Please

Do not ask for a warm roll and butter.
The angels will roll their eyes,

knock the heaven out of you, spit
and treat you like an imbecile.

You know angels.

KRISTIN GARTH

I Hold On To Anything That Gets Into My Head

At my tooth's premiere wobble, reports begin
as to severity of pain. Tongue flicks
enamel against the gum though root contains
its circumference inside my, then, six
year old endangered smile. It is my style
to complain to even those who have made
a fetish of my pain. I keep a secret pile
of teeth, a jewelry box communal grave —
each corpse extracted ruthlessly to hush
the whines. My seven year old will pull them
himself without the pain or blood discussed,
no tooth pocketed. When I question him,
he says *why would I hold on to something dead?*
Another thing I'll hold forever in my head.

CHARLES BORKHUIS

Beuys Talks

you whose back cannot find the right bed
who sleeps standing up like a horse
you whose art demands he keep talking
to anyone who will listen

you who made the rallies as a hitler youth
and later volunteered for the luftwaffe
you who drew a circle wide across the night sky
there to place a little tomb in the clouds

just large enough to squeeze inside
you who flew over the crimea and crashed
his dive-bomber against the sky too late to jump
too late for the parachute to open

but you will not die
here's your cradle rocking in a windstorm
and an apple for your thoughts
hang it from a branching tree

one day it will fall like a rotting sun
the tartar tribesmen will find you
and pad your ribs with felt and fat against the cold
and you will not die

you who talks to himself at night
in a smattering of voices none of them his
you who has come back to heal the survivors
who plants 7000 oaks on the streets of kassel

and treats his students as his life's work
you who stares at the blood-moon witness to the holocaust
that hangs overhead like an unmarked grave
you who exhibits the wound wrapped in felt and fat

from which you were reborn
you who covers his head in honey and gold leaf
you who quietly explains alchemical symbols to a dead hare
who enters a gallery with a shepherd's staff and felt blanket

to talk to a coyote about the coming ecological disaster
you who climbs inside the cockpit
of a stuka dive bomber every night
and is framed in the crosshairs of a gunner's sights

you who performs the everyday myths of our lives
who covers a piano in felt so the notes won't freeze
you who recreates himself as a shaman of the void
who has come to question the boundaries of the human

you who has returned to save us from ourselves
whose back is broken and sleeps standing up like a horse
you who must keep talking
to anyone who will listen

EILEEN R. TABIOS

Rainbows

Bauang Beach, circa 1965

She knew she should know
better

I was barely older than a
toddler

I had played with her only
daughter

during those summer days of
Innocence

by a sapphire sea warmed by a gentle
sun

When vacation ended and it was time to
leave

she lowered her gaze from my
face

as she carefully suggested I
give

her daughter one of my
dresses

“An old one no one would
miss”

My eyes that squinted all
summer

opened wide and saw the
World

ravishing with its poverty and
desires

*ravishing with its grief, such
grief!*

When I returned myself to my
Mother

I distressed her with my
nudity

a nakedness I have tried to
preserve

psychologically for ensuring no
walls

would exist between me and
others

suffering in our shared
universe

where Love tasks itself to
clothe

two children with the same
overworked

outfit: a dress patterned with fading
rainbows

ANDREW LEVY

A Nepotacracy Bacchanalian and Banal #1

Here's a novel idea: That people know each other doesn't make any of them right about anything. In aesthetics and ethics, in a net of golden twine. In the laborious stumble of a fool, sanded out in fissures.

Did you know there is a mini-genre of novels set in bookstores? What you work on, some believe, changes what's in your life, but no one can think the way that they would like to be, in their life, very beautiful.

What really matters? Sorry, we're not out of the poem. Whether true or false, unhappy endings with force enough to fail victims and their families. We're experiencing an eventual tragedy, shortly. You know, without one's consent. On the porch, lessons in verse as soft as rhyming, compliments cast off of generation and death. Really and unchangeably. "Nothing new occurs in identical existence," a lodging home for pilgrims where "accident ever varies" – the best means of infiltrating cultivate the chauffeur's tact when travelling through places of an inferior kind. You are no longer completely red, or in the month of September. I should add that my profession inclines me toward dwelling. It is nonexistent. A rehearsal of moves, yielding, glides on its gurney a soft meat measured.

Day or night, human sacrifice doesn't bother to read the lines.

Soon there would be no more newspapers.

Having kissed with my lips a little spoon, I am summoned to defend myself. Jean Paul-Sartre is not the author of the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment. Fluctuations in electricity catch in my throat.

The stench is nauseating. I have to find some way of introducing myself: I'm an escaped POW.

My comrades have clearly given me the wrong address.

NATSUKO HIRATA

Midnight Cape

Warm
wind filled with
Jasmine. Listen to
moon's murmur.
—No, it may be sea's.
Deep fish has
no vocal cord.
A former angel
sitting
on a cape
declares,
"I still have such
pretty
wings,
but how do I
use them?"
Maybe she forgets
a prior existence.
Yellow
illuminates
her.
Moon?
or Jasmine
vision?

TYRONE WILLIAMS

Bill Hogg Past Due

We two were ten
little Indian
cowboys black
fades to two
and one half
boys walking
hand in hand
down a big
screen of sidewalk
long as J.P. Ball's Panorama
of spangled Africans
still proceeding
westward leading
bodies leaping
thrown over
waterboarded
tea.

We five were six
times x
coffles westward
trending dots
descending mines
ascending bots
steel factories
freely careening
toward acres
and parks central
to the Negro
League seven
boots but no
legs to go
the distance to Jena
a beat-up owl
spreading its wings
spiders treading
water or sailing
oceans blue

in three-fifths
of one canoe
to the ninth
sphere a globe
trotting Virgil
droning on
while we sit
with our hand-
held boxes
black is back
after African
Americans crashed
saved to clouds
while the black
Indian cowboys
stream down
streets in visible
parades.

SUSAN TERRIS

About the Iron Handle of Innisfree

Late afternoon, hot as we angled our canoes to a campsite called Innisfree. No lake isle but by a wild river in Wisconsin.

At 16, too young to be a counselor but was, paddling with 13 year olds crazed for adventure. Here, the river was strewn with granite boulders rising out of the water,

but I don't want to tell about ears of farmer's corn we stole for dinner or the bear scare or how Fran hit her ankle while hefting a long-handled axe. You see, I want you to

know of that iron handle embedded in the biggest boulder. For me, after 50 years, still an unsolved mystery. It was and is today my Excalibur. Then, I tried to free it from the rock,

and now, in dreams, do the same. It must still be there, I think, as over and over I replay the voice of Yeats orating this poem, convinced if I could find my Innisfree again, pull the handle

'til it opens to that bee-loud glade as I—older now than Yeats lived to be—find some mornings where the cricket sings and evenings of linnet's wings, but more than an iron handle:

day by day, week by week the re-creation of a wild self,
white water, my paddle, my yellow canvas Old Town canoe.

How We Kiss a Coin from My Mouth to Yours

Yes, we first kiss the coin but then a dense dark
chocolate one left from Chanukah gelt.

The coin is a metaphor, but the chocolate melts
slowly when passed from lips to lips.

How smooth yet silly was that Buffalo nickel from
the year you were born —

symbol with a sharp metallic taste, reminding me
of the year my son swallowed

one and how I had to keep searching through
the toilet bowl until, blue-green,

it appeared. Off-track. Romance squelched, so
I tried to blot that memory

with chocolate, which I love yet you didn't. The dark
of it was bitter on your tongue

you said. I wonder now if you would have stayed if
I'd offered you a ripe cherry,

kissing with fruit tang, teasing, licking juice from
your lips and willing to swallow the pit.

CARLOS HIRALDO

Time Passengers

In time, all parents become immigrants
In a new land of manners and beliefs,
Our children, the natives, speak the new language
We garble up at best.

Does the immigrant ever truly arrive?
Dreaming of the land she left,
She still there,
Only gets her children's language
When they speak poorly of her.

When she visits the old country,
She's a time traveler from the past,
Walking old streets, visiting houses no longer there and smiling at others gone.

A life should be like a story,
The old Irish man said once with melancholy
After learning I was still living in our native Washington Heights.
But I had no rush to move just yet
Suspecting that even when we resist
Time moves us all.

Is Toy

Estoy in the valley
Voy a la hurry,
Gritando como un meaning
Una vez heard in silence.

Oblivion

Heaven as blank
As the day after
The Revolution.

I turn
Fixed by the colors
In my wife's garden.

Cosmic Cosmetics

Why something instead of nothing?
What else is this?
Whatever is is.
Nothing, something, everything,
The period without a sentence.

GENEVIEVE KAPLAN

A Demonstration

how many times should we
wake or be awoken
to endless blasts and sounds
and engines
we all
have it coming, such feedback
in the dark
the edges know when we shift
and these little nudges are always listening
and never sleep
and never at night
we take this word and highlight
that and paste
those sayings on our lawns
flaunt them
across porches
hang language on the air
I find
a phrase I love to speak
a petition I need to sign
another petition and
a comment card to put in the mail
why not
we are so determined
so well brought up

MARK YOUNG

rolling coverage

She added lime juice & agave to a geological phenomenon in order to help an elephant out of the water in the Lesser Antilles. Such understanding of the logistical needs of this operation came through her most recent seismic refraction

experiment, in which she demonstrated that terrace-like topography was often found in home-made maguey syrup, & could provide a set of graduated steps allowing easy egress.

Her thirty-third studio album

Miss Kitty tweets that the extreme weather sweeping the world

has left New York City reeling as it realizes there are now less

than 50 pre-mixed cocktails in their plastic jars left in the entire city.

skeleton echo

There was no rear toe near or here or thereabouts, so it probably didn't work out the way she hoped it would. Instead had to wait for a recording to come out on Bandcamp. Which it did, but this time with the phalanges missing. Meant it couldn't play along with her, nothing there to tap time with.

DENISE DUHAMEL

Tootsie Biography

Barefeet, purple-inked, on a slip of paper. White Stride Rites laced tight over my ankles. Buster Browns with the picture of the boy and his dog on the inside sole. My foot pushed back to the heel cup of the Brannock Device, the lady with burgandy nailpolish pushing down onto my big toe. Red Mary Janes (with a matching pocketbook) for Easter. Barefeet, the bottoms burnt on the hot concrete. My instep, my narrow width, making flip flops a hazard. Converse hightops. Earth shoes, blisters. Rented bowling shoes. Denim wedges decorated with strawberry patches. Saddle shoes. Doc Martens I bought in Wales as an exchange student before anyone had them in the States. Embroidered silk slippers from Chinatown. Orange suede platform boots. Flowered Doc Martens. Vegan Doc Martens. Silver stilletoes. My narrow foot slipping in clogs. Sprained ankle. Ice and ace bandage. Payless 2-for-1 sparkling plastic slingbacks. Jellyshoes infused with glitter. More blisters. Shit-kickers. Olive green pennyloafers. Ecco black pumps for my temp job. White ballerina flats so I could dance at my wedding. Mid-calf cowboy boots, a gift from my husband. Gold high heels I only wore once. Beige mules. Navy espadrilles that laced partway up my shin. Leopard-print Steve Madden boots. Nine West slides. Then my heel spur and the podiatrist who said, "You can have pretty shoes or pretty feet, but not both." The ugly orthopedic boot with velcro straps. Birkenstocks. Maetallic Birkenstocks with a toe loop. Silver flats for my niece's wedding. Z-Coil Freedom sandals after I saw Helen Bonham Carter wear them. Shoe shopping on fat days. Shoe shopping when nothing else fit. Uggs. Skechers. Sorel boots for the snow. Quick-drying Teva sandals for the Galapagos. Beach shoes so I don't cut my feet on broken seashells. Blue striped rainboots. The Clarks I let my friend talk me into that never fit right. Dearfoam slippers. Hush Puppies. Daniel Greens. I kneel before my mom to help her get her leg brace into her New Balance sneakers. I kneel before my mom to help her with her support hose, her easy-closure Silvert slippers. Nikes. Hokas. Naturalizers. If you kneel before my casket, please make sure to bury me barefoot, my soles pink-inked, so you'll see my prints, the streaks I leave in the clouds.

Rocky

Rocky Point was my favorite summer place, an amusement park that also served chowder and clam cakes. My sister and I would ride the Flume in a plastic car shaped like a wooden log that plunged down a hill into a pool of greenish, foul-smelling water. Our shorts and tee shirts dried in the hot sun as we waited for the next ride—a cylinder into which a carnie would strap us. This was the only ride at Rocky Point for which we could stand up, and how I learned the

concept of centrifugal force, how it sucked your back to the ride like a magnet as it spun, lifting the riders sideways off the ground. We always ate last as it was a mistake to eat before the rollercoaster and Ferris wheel.

Sunburned, my parents would take us to the all-you-can-eat “chowder hall” which was an open-air patio with long picnic tables where we’d eat with twenty other strangers. One Sunday a man made a fuss because he didn’t want to sit near a Black family and my father, white but red from the sun, yelled at the other white man, asking “What is wrong with you?” The Black family left without eating, a waxy bag of clam cakes spilling onto the table. My mother was afraid my father and the white man would get in first fight. She convinced my father to order takeout and we ate in the hot car. I was grossed out when I found a clam in the dough.

“Why do you think they’re called clam cakes?” my sister asked. I realized I knew nothing about the world.

THOMAS FINK AND MAYA D. MASON

Cordially Invited 1

We are less than thrilled to
broadcast the seamless
dismemberment of our
rotary club cheerleader.
The opera of our

mutual evolution
is begging to be scored.
She never pushed herself
to the front of the parade,

so instead of her, we'll
celebrate another
newly laundered dybbuk.
When I peer into your
ample nostrils, I can

hear the harmony that
will crest our obtuse confusions.

WILLIAM ALLEGREZZA

Emotive

I am walled off in a room
with no doors or windows
in bright light
alone
 with no words
tides seasons
people,
walled off by myself
as a step towards finding
silence
as perhaps a mistake
 with no exit,
walled off in the hopes
of finding a language
that speaks the person

Trim and Toss

I lived on waves through
seasons growing ever
volatile. My peace was
in finding the balance
in the lean and in learning
to read the coming breeze
against the trim of sails
and human error.
I lived always with a
wakeful eye for coming
storms, for being tossed
easily and quickly from
an edge, my feet gripping
where they could and hands
out for a fall or a brace.

I lived unfixed in time
with spaces around coalescing
and then floating away
so quickly as to never have
been and without witness
other than my own eyes forgetting
them in the rush of new waves.

SUSAN LEWIS

From the So-Called Center,

arms linked for discourse, a quintessence of emergence. Fire & its apposite. Fickle hooves reverting to the edge of memory & its discontents. Icicles & their insular attachment, bidding like flies. Emoticons + sister hyperbolics walled off to steep in the sweet tea of dependence, dreadful stepchild of connection. Door to door, face to face, horn to horn, amassed in vales of tearful vacancy. Until mismanagement agrees to void the universe of bile & our angels bestow their shares of better in intoxicating exhalations, rudiments of proffer, harbingers of boon.

The Adventure of Breath

was the unspoken flavor of the day—plus or minus waiting & the ever-popular fantasy of flight. Nevertheless, most orphans regretted our persistence. Some arthropods managed to spin tokens of their disappointment capable of snaring the suspicions of our benefactor priors. Although our Third Kingdom allies offered indicia of aspiration from the comfort of their incubator humus, the bloodless contingent neglected to follow their own predilections, crushed as they were by the pressure to excavate our buried qualms.

The Moaning

of the Ferris wheel may have marked our first last time, although you recalled the orange light as green, while I searched the tide-pools of your disappointment for shadows of rectitude, tokens of regret. There were week-long flutters, & lingering nerve tips wandering the stolen halls. I seem to recall questions soft as chocolate, & silver bells dancing in your downcast pupils, although I suspect they were other stalwart couples waltzing to the merciless slap of the waves against anything rash enough to confront them.

BASIL KING

The Green Man Comes to 4th Street (1)

To Emily's sidewalk
To Danny's garden
My forte
My steps
My ladder
Leads to

A description of Green

To Emily's sidewalk
To Danny's garden
My forte
My steps
My ladder
Leads to

Where
There are
Signs of wealth
Cats
Wear
Bow Ties
Beans
And
Candle Sticks
Run
Like
Water

To Emily's sidewalk
To Danny's garden
My forte
My steps
My ladder
Leads to

The Green Man
Empties his pockets
Of the things
He has accumulated
And distributes
Them to a population
That will never
Know
That he was
Once one
Of them

JOY LADIN

Sick Psalm

You are more than my illness
the sick thing says

to the God whose illness
the universe is

I love you more
than I hate

my dizziness
my forgetfulness

I feel you walking toward me
across burning skin

The closer you come
the sicker I get

Come in the sick thing says
There's room inside my sickness

a bed and a table
a glass of water

a room where my dying
becomes your laughter

a room where your always
kisses

my before and after

The Last Time I Saw My Son

The last time I saw my son
he pretended I wasn't there
We were inches apart
when he opened the door
of the house we'd never shared
It was morning or maybe afternoon
Spring or maybe fall
Cool but sunny
His eyes never flickered toward my face
as though he'd been practicing this gaze
in the mirror for days
hovered without wavering
in the empty space
over my right shoulder
He must have seen
the stubbly fields behind me
maybe the tree
and maybe the treehouse
where the ghosts of childhoods
unscarred by me
were sharing the ghosts
of apples and cheese
I kept smiling up at him
as though he had answered my greeting
hoping some ghost
of unspeakable love
would trouble his peripheral vision
hoping I'm ashamed to say
to see some strain in his face
some struggle not to see
the parent he erased so perfectly
that I couldn't help
but admire his discipline
In the house behind him a dog was barking
In the depths of a childhood
that perhaps only I remembered
he was still riding on my shoulders
laughing above the world we shared
holding on by grabbing my hair
In the paddock beside the muddy pond, two slow horses

paid no attention
as his face disappeared
when he turned his back

DANIEL MORRIS

Apples and Oranges: A Comparison

I.

According to Stan Brackhage, Apples stand
For Consciousness. Orange is Intelligence.
I wonder, however, about the engineers.
The Little Engine That Could, for example, enroute to *bildverbot*.
The drive for one last taste of Mommy's Red Cheeked Apple.
Shivering in the open coach, Little E asks if I'm still afraid
Her hanging folds of marble flesh won't taste like memory.
If so, Little E reminds, you'll need tear a bitter orange in the rind.

II.

Wine, you are the apple in my wink.
When I write "wine" in ink,
There becomes a link between what I think
And what I drink. "Why can't my fruit be hanging?"
I whine. I waa waa. Mommy's freckled apple no longer pink.
How I wish, sad Roman, I could believe
This permanent ink aligned to her white vine.

Ah, but as in Braque's last work, the peach smells flat.
All that's human rots, said William Butler Yeats.
My mother said to throw on salt or throw it out.

MARY CRESSWELL

Paradelle: Advice for the Terminally Flummoxed

Smoking fires of fading feeling devour the light.
We dream a landfall to end all doubt and confusion.
*The smoking dream fires all confusion and light.
To end a feeling of fading landfall, we devour doubt.*

Muttering under the sun oiled silk unrolls the rocks.
How admirable it is. It is so clean and green.
*So it is, the green muttering silk under rocks.
The oiled sun unrolls and it is admirable. How clean!*

Will your loquat moon set over a fake horizon?
Low tide marks the real words beneath the grumble of waves.
*Loquat horizon, will your over-real words fake the waves?
A set of tidemarks grumble low beneath the moon.*

The moon is set. Admirable landfall of smoking confusion.
It will end. It is all how we devour fires, and so
A silk loquat marks the grumble clean of doubt.

Beneath the tide waves the feeling – and real sun.
Your green, muttering light rocks to the oiled words.
A fake horizon unrolls under the fading-over dream.

Cartography for Colonials

Our map takes shape:
shorelines weighted down
with basalt cliffs

hard-pressed lines holding
the sky above water
keeping bright from dark;

we drag diagonals
across the travelling tide
where sand whips wind
We grab the nearest man
What you call this place, hey?
He shrugs. He says:

*Murrumbidgeeminnesota
wallawallawaggawagga
pissoffyabuggers*

Replete with local knowledge
we record the long names
and head for home.

Trust Me

I'm a little bit busy
a lot more up to date
there always is room
for more on my plate.

I wrestle with giants
and all of that jazz
I'm up with the science
and I'm au courant as.

Regardless of time zone
I'm there in the room
you'll never hear me moan
unmuted on Zoom.

I'm on one side Pacific
on the other side Tas
my geography's wicked
and I'm au courant as.

GEOFFREY YOUNG

Like Facts

While you wax and wane
like the brooding Dane
of storied prevarication
let me remain aloof.

Go ahead and call
yourself great. You are
what you are. But poems
are just things, here today

& gone later today,
as we are, artifactual,
of eager breath & meager bone.
Permit me if you will

this trickle of sound & sense,
these unspoken words.

Quien Sabes?

At seventy-seven I feel
as if I'm edging toward the moon
on a hawk's salary,
riding the self's quotidian

boxcar over shaky bridges,
snaking through the dumb
and empty west,
thirsting for a home

long gone already,

my pitchfork poking holes
in Ravel's noodles, this
idiosyncratic "me," my fate

on notice, my Zoot suit more army
issue than bop drape.

Retrospect

Well before wifi,
decades before drones
& the omnipresent syndrome
of iphone GPS selfie addiction

(talking about the late seventies
here), I taught an art class
at San Francisco State
the students there

already obsessed with issues
of surveillance, their young antennae
attuned to its creeping presence,
the body-cams of its nefarious future.

Where are they now, those bright ones,
their prescient eyes already on red alert?

MARY MACKEY

The Temple of Bel

they come from the ruins

some with the heads of foxes
some with the heads of saints
some shrunk to the size of a pebble
some larger than the sea

walking on water
walking right side up and
upside down
eyes shining like steel
hands bright as blades

some with roots
some with nothing
some who can write with
their tongues

blue lipped
choked with salt and indifference
drowning in a love so distant
it might as well be
hate

GEORGE QUASHA

From Strange beauty by stranger attraction—part of Hearing Other
(for Cheryl Pallant)

20

continuing beyond doubt

I notice that anything thinking is never in order when ordering.
How I got this far challenges the sense of beginning.
The problem is not thinking it's here it's fearing it might go away.

Without shifting contraries there's no flex in the fix.
Law is highly possessive lore.

Knowing same or different stands outside itself.
Coherence is catching.

Being of three minds is seeing through their own eyes.

A preverb inflects with flux in mid fix.
Continuance is the mystery of willing stay.
You didn't hear this from me.

The man in Rosi's dream told her leaves are tree diaries and in fall return to earth.
Start over.

Awake in walking feeds back—there's no abstraction incarnate.
Feel better listening with skin, in the game.

Discovering the present as I am born on occasion.
If you notice your diary falls to earth step by step.

Reordering in dying fall still kicks its dust up the ladder—imagine!
Poiesis teaches language pacing itself according to intrinsic desire.
Every poem nay every line a new mind to know I do mind.

30

matrices mattering

Clearly you and I are ganging up on a wicked world here.
The present is speaking to the problem with a straight face unmasked.

A matrix is being in its unlimited capacity for flush forming.
Order is as numerical sequential as martial is partial in the laying down of arms.

I said like I said without knowing I mean it while not yet existing.
How many arms has this deity anyway in the flutter configuring.

Superstition is standing over the highest edge on the abyss unwavering waving.
The mind hangs from meaning like it or not.

Joyeeta's music is such gesture teaching devotion new tricks from inside stream.
Dangling free's to wrangle not when on the spot still on the porch.

Unpack fully before believing.
This is not to ask if I'm really flying in the dream where I know I am.

Wait until I report home before judging where I come in the line of succession.

Nothing is said but drags along a tale telling still gathering.

Raga persists in the unpreceding further flying undoubtable waking tones.

It outlasts by overreach.

When the right cat crosses your path not even black you know faith feeling her.

Jacob's ladder or Wittgenstein's the arc has kick as away as over.

We're still getting there where life proves nothing is before you.

SHEILA E. MURPHY

Early June

Key lime choreography
crimps elan along the parquet
with fleet footing newly
cogent for the nonce.

In parallel, quiescent fingerings
confide the story melody conveys
in piquant ways despite numbing ploys
that would capsized the dance.

Immune to beatific trance,
princes hover to acquire more land,
demand more power,
compounding their de facto gravity,

keeping them in traction
destined to return
to the recycling of chance
versus embracing the advance.

Oh Tapestry, the Inverse of an Innocence

Plush intentional precision masks the underplay of taut weft threads. How many butterflies have ripened in perception toward a story's fragile strength? Not solely millefleur, the mind distinguishes backstory from the foreground. Syllables infract the early teaching each may disremember. Chanticleer comes home to roost, as all remain mere integers.

Modus op, the blemishes of sport, impending string of rejoinders

CHRISTOPHER SCHMIDT

*Alice Was Bored**

one afternoon but I wasn't
for a minute. But then
I'm very partial to dreary

grand northern (or southern)
landscape. The soil is all dark
terra-cotta color, and the bay,

when it's *in*, is a real pink.
Also the *Hellenic Landscape*
I liked very much—all gray-

blues, and those tiny buildings
have letterings on them,
fragments of ads,

in Greek of course.
This week's column is a letter
of mine she translated

against ruining the landscape with signboards.
At "Cold Cape" I'm supposed to see
Lota's ideal ocean landscape.

She has just about the world's best
landscape gardener. I like some
of his paintings. I didn't used to

but I see he really did have the feeling
of the Brazilian landscape.
And "feeling."

But I prefer the Florida landscape.
All this dampness
and leafiness is a little oppressive.

A beautiful Gauguin landscape of
Brittany, spring-like.
Granada, Ronda, Cádiz.

I liked them all tremendously.
—Toledo, the bitter landscape.

* A quasi-cento composed of lines from Elizabeth Bishop's letters containing the word "landscape." Alice is Alice Methfessel, Bishop's last lover and literary executor.

Quick-Drag Shanty

sing to me sailor anthology songs to snug up with smoking guns
hijinks of junks almost sunk by Yes Men who throw anchor in too
shallow waters low-key low flame fire island beard burn pyres
for queens too deer-blind to wear lumpy kohl much less channel
Dido so many pleas but none for me only when you plug
songs long enough to fill mouths hungry for tongue
does totality sans tee orality urethrality for every sign
a hand fist bump palm reader eater finger fish sticks
nose blow job toe-holed to
 ride the whale-road for a sense of wind and
 socks the first to go poly-
 blend amorous.

MISHA VERDONCK

[from "57577x13"]

are you still there? i
have been meaning to tell you
the way you touch your
bottom lip oh so softly
fades. soon you will be gone too.

short crescents bury
themselves into the folds of
you attempt to drop
anchor in your deep soft pink.
can you still breathe where you are?

because i cannot.
this sudden reverse of an
us a gradual
accumulation of grime
under finger nails clipped short.

SUSAN SMITH NASH

The Nature of Poetics

No Zoom meetings this morning, so taking advantage
laptop on lap, leaning back in rocking chair
feet propped up, sipping coffee
thoughts punctuated by the sound of roofers pounding away
the uncertainty of leaky surfaces

we dread getting wet, whether by water or fear;
I respect the sheathed decking,
nails, and composition shingles

where plans meet hands
the work is real:
Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics

What is the reality of work in a world of coordinated communication?
This is the work of developing documents, tasks, programs
meetings, conventions, projects, plans, maps, diagrams --
Infinite conversations and archived files;
and then there are the invoices, accounting, the back office-

And yet, I sit here imagining
since I'm not perched on a roof
I have no nail gun in my hand,
no risk of slipping off onto a hard pavement;

I'm not really working;
all my efforts are ephemeral.

At least back when we printed and piled our paper files
there was tangible evidence of work;
External validation that mind and words
had an objective correlative
and we could comfort ourselves that reality and life
could be empirically affirmed.

But in my heart of hearts
I don't believe it, and I doubt myself
just as I doubt this set of lines on paper
is anything approximating a poem

Purple Grackle

The grackles are back, the Great-Tail Grackles,
roosting in the 7-11 parking lot black locust trees
the birds outnumbering the leaves, at least 3 to 1

I pull up for morning coffee, and see the debauchery
last night at twilight, at its height
a squawking shower of mites and feather fuzz

puddles coated with the stuff of migration --
dark flapping clouds from the transient
keepers of flying thunder, lightning and angry neighbors

that corvid storm
takes me into my slender dream
that I had wings

there they are, those purple grackles
perched high and happy on any tacky landscaping fad
I make sure I steer clear of the parking lot trees

standing on the sidewalk in front of the "\$1 Slurpee!" sign
I greet the importunate guests as they cackle, rustle, and fly up
like synchronized swimmers or dazzling aerial marching bands

grousing cashiers and customers count the days
until the grackles move on in their grand migration
never guessing the "pests" are true keepers of hope and light

beacons of proactive adaptation; they nest anew -
chorus their squawks and songs about the losses
and as the seasons go by, they remember to fly.

SAMUEL ACE

Pandemic 3.26.20

It was not dangerous until yesterday not dangerous until the sky turned yellow not dangerous until the sound of air it was not dangerous until the chair not dangerous until the *he* particles like in *him* began to swim through water it was not dangerous until the strange rumble in my anus not dangerous until the bump not dangerous until a bird became a bomb it was not dangerous until cast iron fell from a cloud not dangerous until grief threatened a spillway not dangerous until he breathed on me it was not dangerous until he handed me a pen not dangerous until the exam book became a vector not dangerous until a cockroach brought in a piece of bread not dangerous until the air conditioner started to shake it was not dangerous until the child not dangerous until my muscles wasted away not dangerous until the parakeet attacked it was not dangerous until we had more not dangerous until the alarm went off not dangerous until the sun not dangerous until yesterday it was not dangerous until time not dangerous until you brought in the milk.

Pandemic 4.19.20

On their way to the next mark god disappeared every question every point of view even mine in the end I need help and so does this god a form or a way of listening please show yourself I plead take a body then discard it just for a moment be a door a current the faint odor of boys in the morning some grand grace anything please come it would be an honor to meet you these are my marks my tender gorging a sink of mud a reminder in the wind of prayer

PATRICIA CARLIN

Why Are We Here

Why are we here? the trees ask.
Ridiculous question, I tell them.
You should know better (rocks do).

You had a life.

To die is only one of many finishes.
Everything equally:
Black roots,
Shadow mountains,
The skeptic
whose touch makes everything cold.

Is the world a machine for cranking out filler?

Sun melt.
Moon frost.

Closed eyes,
open eyes:
Same difference.

PROSE

JOEL LEWIS

Amina

The muse face-slapped me back in 1978 like a benign Moe Howard and the Bazooka Joe comic she handed me in the aftermath of that beat down bore a fortune that read: “You are going to be a poet!” It sounded like a good idea in lieu of anything else I had on the plate. I was 23, badly unfocused and not terribly ambitious. My graduate school push towards being an urban planner was a disaster, leaving a chunky debt that my parents reluctantly took on. And to hook a feedbag to my dysthymia, after a few years of left-wing activism, I had a falling out with my boon comrade Vinnie (over a woman, of course) that isolated me from my affinity group, assorted fellow travellers and most of my friends.

Poetry provided for a new community to replace the one that was yanked out from under me. More importantly, it gave me some form of direction—an organizing principle that gave some meaning to the series of deadend jobs I was working at the time. When the mental factory whistle blew, I wasn’t going home to watch *Dallas*, I was off to a poetry reading or attending a writing workshop.

After a few months running about the NYC metropolitan area attending readings, making new poetry friends and participating in open readings, I found myself running a poetry reading out of a local restaurant called Lady Jane’s in hometown North Bergen, NJ. My initial collaborator, a local poet who had been to Naropa and was friends with many on the St. Mark’s scene, got a job as a stringer at a local newspaper covering evening town meetings and left me the series to run just before it got underway.

I took what I learned as a lefty organizer and applied it to the sullen arts. I booked the poets, gave them insanely detailed mass transit directions from Manhattan, promised them a gourmet dinner and then spent hours on the phones cajoling my semi-interested friends to attend the readings. I hit upon a format—having a local poet read with a Manhattan-based poet, a combination of bi-state cross pollination and the high likelihood that the local poet

would get his/her friends to show up. The readings were on Tuesday nights at the jazz club-like starting time of 9:30pm. Our audience was mostly local folks with an interest in the arts. North Bergen was perched up on the Palisades, opposite the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Its big selling points were well-maintained apartment buildings with affordable rents, a big county park, a low crime rate and numerous buses to Manhattan that ran into the early hours. Otherwise, it was a cultural Otherville with little to do than hang out at our numerous bars and diners.

I found that I enjoyed the role of poetry presenter. Many of the poets I hosted back then have remained friends and colleagues. For my efforts, I was getting an opportunity to meet older contemporaries who were giving me the inside dope on what magazines to read, reading series to attend and what poets I should be paying attention to. At the same time, I was developing a community of New Jersey based poets who would drive in from the deeper suburbs to attend readings and later, over diner coffee, provide useful information about the local writing scene.

My political education informed some of my booking choices. One of which was inviting Amiri Baraka's wife, Amina to read in our series. I was aware that she had recently emerged publicly as a poet and had recently published her first chapbook. I had seen her read a few months before in an event sponsored by the Anti-Imperialist Cultural Union, a broad-based organization of "culture workers" founded by her husband. I liked what I heard and was looking forward to injecting some politics into the mostly self-reflective poetry that I had heard at the café over the last few months.

I made numerous calls to Baraka household in order to finalize the details of the reading and give Amina driving directions from Newark. Amina also asked that a poet named Joel Cohen be the co-feature that evening. Given my sympathies to other people named Joel, I had no problem with the request.

The night of the reading was a little less crowded than usual, it was our last reading before the Christmas break in an era when you had to go out and shop at brick and mortar stores. Amina and Joel Cohen arrived together and early enough to enjoy the cuisine created by

owner Jane Bace, who would later sell the restaurant and go on to become Bruce Springsteen's personal chef.

Cohen read first, mostly a series of raw political diatribes that would sound perfect at the Nuyorican Café of that era, but a bit unusual in post-Watergate suburban New Jersey. Cohen even whipped out a guitar—which he had run out to get from the car in the middle of his dinner—and led the audience in a round of “This Land Is Your Land” —our first sing-along at the café.

Amina's poetry was a more straightforward variant of her husband's verse. It eschewed the sarcasm and Post-Modern strategies that Amiri deployed for a striped-down political verse that would feel at home in an issue of the 30s left cultural journal *New Masses*. She was a poised and effective reader and, like Cohen, brought a far different sensibility to our bi-weekly events.

Midway into her set, the big windows of the restaurant filled with flashing lights of a police car parked in front of the establishment. The reading momentarily stopped as the lights filled the low-lit restaurant with strobes of blue, red and hyper white. The owner's husband, a musician active on the busy Jersey rock circuit, went out to see “what was going on.” The reading continued on, then concluded about ten minutes later to polite applause.

After the reading, I hung out a few minutes with the evening's readers. Amina declined our after-reading hang at the Part View diner citing her obligations as a mom. Cohen, as passenger, was de facto unavailable. He thanked us for hosting us and mentioned that it was probably going to be his last reading for a while as he was starting up a printing business.

After the poets departed, Jane's husband Joe came up to me, barely able to hold onto his anger. “The cop who pulled up said that he heard we were holding a political rally! What sort of shit did you get us into?” Although we usually filled the café with paying customers on reading nights, Joe was always a bit mistrustful of us poets and this incident seemed to confirm his worst suspicions.

When I came by the restaurant the next evening to see if there was any further fallout from the reading, I got a collective stink eye from Jane and her family. “A detective came around this afternoon asking questions about the reading,” she said in an anxiety-flavored

voice. “I told them it was just a poetry reading, but he wasn’t buying that. He then mentioned the licenses we needed to renew to stay in business and how it wasn’t a good idea to sponsor events like we had the night before.” She paused a bit to allow to me to let that sink in and then continued, “I’m sorry, but we can’t have any more readings here.” I apologized profusely and decided to permanently hold off on my freedom of expression and assembly speech. Jane’s mother then came out of the kitchen. “Joel, you should be ashamed of yourself.” She then turned around and went back into the kitchen. I was more than aware that Jane’s mom was helping fund her daughter’s venture and she was far from an heiress—if I recall, she was a schoolteacher in the North Bergen school system. Opening a “fancy” (to borrow my parent’s term) restaurant in a working class community where the local palate ran from diners to old-fashioned Chinese and Italian restaurants for “special occasions” was something of a risk. I left Lady Jane’s that evening feeling like homemade shit.

If there was something to be ashamed of, it was my own naiveté’. I publicized the readings through a limited mailing list, so it seemed obvious that the phones in the Baraka household were tapped and whoever was doing the tapping (the FBI? The NJ State Police? The Newark Police?—take your pick) sent on the information about the reading to the North Bergen gendarmes, who with really little to do in our low-crime township, decided to “investigate.”

Looking back, I think the reason I never could accede to be a “serious revolutionary” like some of my old college buddies was a sufficient lack of paranoia and a severe lack of religious-like zeal for “the cause.” All of my old college friends swore that their phones were tapped. Murph, our college group’s secret proletarian bottle rocket—given his fraternity membership as well as his heavy drinking—was certain that he heard that telltale “click” of a tap every time he got off a phone call. I often told him: “What are we doing that is so dangerous that warrants our phones being tapped? Mostly we bring up speakers, show lefty movies and have the occasional peaceful demonstration.” My recent experience at Lady Jane’s made me revisit Murph’s paranoia.

Similarly, despite the fervor and almost apocalyptic vision of both Amiri and Amina, I didn’t think that capitalism was in immediate danger of collapsing from its inner contradictions or that the octopus of state power was likely to wither away any time soon. Amiri’s group,

Revolutionary Communist League (Marxist-Leninist-Mao Tse-tung Thought), seemed to spend as much time in its party paper, *Unity & Struggle*, trashing other Maoist grouplets as it did on the common capitalist enemy. If the FBI agents assigned to keeping tabs on the myriad Maoist groups actually read the publicly available material, they'd realize they'd be better off focusing their energy on the real threats to U.S. security—the far right militias.

When I later called told Amina about the nature of the police stopover and the later courtesy call by the detective she was nonplussed, though sympathetic. After all, this sort of surveillance and harassment had been part of her married life to Amiri, as well as her reality of growing up black in America. It didn't feel worth it to tell her that our little, few months old reading series had been put on ice.

As for Joel Cohen? He seemed true to his promise of imminent departure from poetryville, as I saw no trace of him afterwards in either reading announcements or in the pages of poetry magazines.

Years later, I was researching a story for *Time Out New York* on local suppliers of art rubber stamps for collectors, craft makers and scrapbookers. After spending the early afternoon with a rubber stamp maker who supplied custom stamps for crack dealers so to better market and individualize their product, I took the subway to lower Manhattan to the offices of another custom stamp maker, Ragged Edge Press on John Street.

When I sat down to interview the owner and head printer, I quickly realized this was the same Joel Cohen from that night in North Bergen almost twenty years before. He remembered the reading, but was quick to point out, "I'm not much into politics anymore." What he was into was the Grateful Dead and his business consisted of vulcanized renditions of the Grateful Dead cosmology, ranging from the Skull n' Roses to Cassidy's Hammer. He also used his art talents to create stickers, which made him something of a personality to the Deadhead world, as he revealed his alter-ego's origins on his still-active website in the third person:

The concept of this Sticker Dude was born in 1989 in the parking lot on the second night of a Nassau Coliseum gig of a Grateful Dead Fall Tour. After he released "We Are Everywhere," his first Grateful Dead Sticker the night before, the word spread rapidly.

Deadheads came running after him yelling, "Yo Sticker Dude, gimme some of them stickers." It was on that evening that his identity was cast.

When I asked Joel if he remembered anything particular about the reading, the thing he most recalled was the dinner. "It was great and it was free! You used to be lucky to get a free beer at a reading at a bar. Also, I remember some cop car flashing lights outside the place. What was that all about?"

MARTHA KING

“They seem like old friends” – 1961

It was six flights up to our loft at 168 ½ Delancey Street. The stairs were not just steep, the hallway was narrow and dark. Bill Furth and his wife Elizabeth (always called Betty) climbed slowly.

First flight: Bill Furth was my sister’s father-in-law. My in-law in-law. He came from a Jewish family that had settled in California before the turn of the 20th century. In a photo I’d seen, Grandpa Simon Furth had a spectacular beard and orthodox dress. His grandson Bill (nee Albert) was secular to the max: a beefy man with red hair, a booming voice, and a big appetite for everything New York. He’d come east to work for Henry Luce initially as a photographer and he was always always in love with cameras. By and by, being the man he was, he rose in the Luce establishment until he was a top editor at *Fortune* and a member of Luce’s inner circle. He and Betty had met my parents when we were kids as they all lived a prosperous ‘great American life’ in the bedroom community of Chappaqua. Monty, Bill’s son, had fallen in love with my sister when they were both in the 6th Grade. By this time, Monty and Charlotte were married and the senior Furths had exchanged their suburban home for a grand apartment on Third Avenue in the 60s, the better to access all city doings.

Bill Furth’s business was to know everything. Everything. Broadway. Best sellers. Politicians. Restaurants. Magazines. Newspapers and their editors. Not much though in the way of art. The house in Chappaqua had been full of watercolors by Don Kingman.

2nd floor. Betty was puffing. Overweight and sedentary, we could feel her effort and the pressure Bill was exerting on her. Had he told her it was six flights up? Betty was not Jewish. She was from a very well established Southern California family that had made fortunes in

orange groves and funeral parlors . . . and subsequently in acres of real estate in the places that became Pasadena, Glendale, and Pacific Heights. The stories about her never matched the woman we met: I was told she had come to New York to sing in Broadway musicals. A chorus girl! She'd had expensive schooling and knew her music, but Baz and I never heard her sing. In fact, we hardly ever saw her smile. She dutifully labored up the stairs.

3rd floor. Baz was very involved with traditional abstract expressionism, something he'd fallen in love with when he was 15, not quite ten years earlier, when he saw a show of Jackson Pollack at the Detroit Institute of Art. After a decade of work, he still called his painting student work and frequently insisted that it was not "his."

4th floor. We had taken a sublet on the top floor of this building in order to move "uptown." We had been living at the very bottom of Manhattan, on Whitehall Street across the street from the back of the Customs Building (which is now the Museum of the American Indian)—and we loved and hated the isolation, we said we were tired of dragging our laundry a mile to the nearest laundromat, tired of the long subway rides home late at night. By contrast Delancey Street seemed the middle of action—walkable from the Cedar Bar and even from 20th Street where LeRoi and Hettie Jones lived. We were offered the space for a year by Bob Beauchamp and Jackie Ferrar who were off to Europe having scored sales and a grant. There were a few conditions. The top floor had the only shower in the building, so the other artists, Sven Luken and Bob Nunnely, and someone else whose name we've long forgotten were to be welcome. So was Bob Thompson who had a loft on Rivington nearby. Fine with us. We inherited social life as well as easier access. On Delancey Street there was almost always someone sitting at our big round table, over to take a bath, share some food, hang out.

5th floor/ Lofts. Abstract art. Not public knowledge in 1961. Well, abstract art was. Sales were starting to boom for the Ab Ex masters and for even the second generation (Norman Bluhm, Michael Goldberg, Grace Hartigan, Joan Mitchell). But lofts were definitely not featured in real estate advertisements. Most, like this one, were not legal for living. One risked instant eviction

if discovered by authorities like cops or firemen. We practiced routine cautions. For example, garbage had to be secreted into city trash baskets at a distance from the front door. Still, when my mother had visited up a few months earlier, she parked herself in our orange butterfly chair (remember those) and surveyed our territory with her Westchester County eyes. “When rich people discover how much space you can have living in a loft, they’ll all want one,” she predicted.

But at that point the whole arrangement was exotic and Bill Furth needed to know more. So up he climbed right behind Betty, giving her no avenue of escape.

Enter the 6th floor. We had one very large front loft, where we had bed, table, chairs, many plants left to my care by Jackie, and a row of windows looking south across the plaza of the Williamsburg Bridge. A narrow hall-like space housed a kitchen and led back into a slightly smaller loft, with soft North light. This was the studio. Betty tried not to collapse at the table. Bill produced a bottle of wine and I got out the glass jars we drank from. There were a few canvases hanging up – and more in the back where Baz took them both. Bill looked quite carefully. Betty was guarded. Bill didn’t have any images to attach to the names “de Kooning” or “Kline” when Baz mentioned them as his mentors. However he thanked us warmly for inviting them. As he was leaving he told us that he had been in Paris years earlier—before World War II—where he’d been taken to see Picassos. He was, he said, completely unable to get what he was looking at. “But now,” he said, “when I go to MOMA, Picassos seem like old friends.”

GALEN R. FAISON

Concrete, Asphalt, Glass, Pizzazz



I walk the city.

Theme from Shaft accompanies me. Hi-hat cymbals *chinga-ching* as I survey the cityscape. Looking west, I see Rutgers' gold-domed gym and the dramatic upsweep that leads to the campus. But I'm heading downtown. So, I step off my Warren Street brownstone and ditty-bop towards Halsey Street.

The *wah-wah-wicky-wah-wah* of the electric guitar kicks in as I make my way. It's early noon, a little hazy; steel-and-stone goliaths blot out the sky. The streets have been moving for hours. Newark awakes much earlier than I. Merchants are propped along their storefronts. I speak to those I know: the cancer-surviving sneaker store man; the Korean nail salon matron; and the soup brother. A simple nod to the new-jacks (revolving business owners, always fresh to the block) but I never break pace. I stroll past Queen's Pizza. Joe's in the window, knuckles deep, plying dough. We exchange salutations through the glass. As I swing past the Board of Ed building, I subtly hold my breath and run the gauntlet of nicotine hounds. No secondhand smoke for this bloke.

I'm much too hip for lung cancer, baby.

The synthesized keys groove here, heavy, bass-like, *thoom-thoom-thooooom*. I'm coming upon the Prudential Building; the old ivory giant. I resist the urge to look up and gawk at its looming expanse. That's for tourists. Mounted police officers *ker-clop* about, scouting for expired parking meters. Charioteers—yellow-shirted street cleaners—rove languidly behind their push-brooms and big-wheeled trash buckets. They are in stark contrast with the caffeinated clock-punchers, who flit back and forth across Halsey's narrow street, to the string of breakfast cafes in and around the feet of the giant.

Flutes ease in now, light as the beat of butterfly wings, *twilly-twilly-tooh-toooh*.

I zip past Page's (officially Pages on the Mall, but that's a mouthful). The makers of the last authentic fruit punch. Drink the juice and fish the fruit from the cup bottom. A time ago, I was addicted to them. The counter maidens would ready my extra-large cup of sweet decadence. I'd pluck it from the tabletop—mid-stride—a marathoner accepting a libation from a well-wisher. My payment slapping the counter, anticipating the first sip.

Tempting, but I'm after something else today. I head due south.

Big brass horns interlock with robust strings as I approach Market Street, *bradumpbrump* then *la-laaaaah*. Market Street is no misnomer. I hear the first street vendor before I see him. "Check it *ouuuut!*" he bellows, "Give the black man your *moh-naaay!*" The Check-It-Out Man has been eking out a living on Halsey and Market for eons. His cubicle-like, wooden pushcart is full of cheap jewelry and knick-knacks. He's stationed between two abandoned juggernauts: the storied but empty Macy's and Bamberger buildings. Somehow, he's managed to outlast them both. Over his shoulder, up towards the old courthouse, I can make out Honest Abe, resplendent in bronze, copping a squat on a granite bench—his stovepipe hat ever-present at his side.

I hang a hard left onto Market, giving Abe my back.

All instruments coalesce here, building with the bustle of Newark's downtown, *budarummp- budarummp-budarummp-rump-rump*. The block is lined with a of bevy storefronts. Peddlers dot the sidewalks. City buses and cars run east and west as if jousting. Traffic lights blink like Christmas bulbs. Pedestrian traffic is dense. I am swallowed in the milling crowd . . . and it feels good. Inviting aromas waft past as I navigate the labyrinth of humanity: dirty water hot dogs, kebabs, halal chopped cheese steaks. I ignore them as best I can.

I approach Broad Street. (*I'm so close.*) The orchestra builds . . . builds with my every footfall.

And then—it happens.

The ensemble explodes, climactically, as I step onto the intersection of Broad and Market. The Four Corners. Sound and action are amplified treble-fold. The conga and bongo drums beat hyperactively with the frenzied heartbeat and Brownian movement of the city.

I look for my lady.

Where is she? Our usual meeting place, the northwest corner, is a clutter of broken up concrete, orange cones and yellow caution-tape. I fret and look to the other corners but to no avail. But then—across the street, down the block some—I see her! She’s obscured, standing under an umbrella, shading herself from the sun. I cross against the traffic signal. She’s looking the other way and doesn’t see my approach.

And then I’m upon her.

She turns, smiles, and laughs. *I was worried you wouldn’t find me*, her eyes seem to say. She doesn’t speak much English. She doesn’t need to. We communicate in other ways.

She opens the hatch to her freezer-cart; curls of cool vapor escape into the hot Newark atmosphere. When the hatchway clears, big buckets of Italian-ice stare back at me. I point past the mists to a cylinder of frozen citrus. “Ley-mon?” she asks. I nod. She scoops out two fat lumps and presents me with a pleated paper cup filled with one of life’s little treasures. We exchange knowing smiles and a little money. I lean back against a canopied storefront, lick around the edges of my delicacy and take in the city.

Cue the Isaac Hayes vocals.

SANDY McINTOSH

Rheta Is Dead, a Hamptons' Memory

I.

After an errand, I stopped at Rheta's and Peter's studio. Without knowing it, I was barging in on a fight. "Never mind how many girlfriends I have," Peter was assailing Rheta, who was red from crying. "I've worked hard, and I deserve as many as I want."

When I'd first met them at an art show in Southampton, they were sharing a studio in a small house, a roll of blank canvas six or eight feet wide and fifteen feet long hanging from the ceiling, separating their workspaces. Rheta had begun as a painter, occasionally writing a short story and even a novel, but painting was what she enjoyed most. However, Peter was against it. "There is room for only one painter in this house," he declared. So, while Peter painted on his side of the curtain, Rheta wrote her stories in longhand, that the sound of typing wouldn't annoy her husband.

One story she wrote was about a lady writer living in the basement of a building. The lady did not do much writing because she was caught in indecision. Sitting in her armchair in the darkest corner of the basement, she debated how she could meet the outside world on terms that would permit her to be at her best. It wasn't fame, or money, or even recognition she wanted.

There was always noise in the street where the lady writer worked. A store might be robbed, a child might be hit by a car, a man might collapse on the ground. The lady writer hardly permitted herself to pay much attention to these events, since she resented the gawkers, the idly curious. But as time passed, her attention began to turn to the outside world. There was something about these happenings that called to her. Not prurient voyeurism,

certainly, but the pain these people were expressing. It was the pain she recognized that called to her. She would write about their pain.

II.

Peter knew his Mitteleuropean accent was so distinctive he never announced his name over the phone. "It's Rheta, my wife," he growled. "She died. There wasn't anything I could do about it."

I packed some clothes and started the long drive for his home. He'd asked—demanded—that I help him with his wife's funeral, "and all things someone must do to bury a dead woman." This trip had been easier, I reflected, when I'd lived a few moments from him—not hours—and he could wake me in the middle of the night knowing that I'd rush over if he suddenly needed his lawn mowed.

"I heard her coughing," he had told me. "It sounded as if she couldn't breathe. I didn't pay much attention; she often sounds this way. Then she calls my name. 'What is wrong?' I ask her, but she doesn't answer."

After years of dispute between them, they had moved into opposite wings of their home, a locked door demarcating their habitations. Peter continued: "I unlock the door and walk into the hall. She is around the corner collapsed on her bed. No more talking. I call the fire department. They send the ambulance. They take her away."

Although Peter had become a successful abstract painter, his work being shown at prestigious New York galleries, he had been born poor and somehow carried that tattered suitcase with him throughout his life, even to the great, personally designed home he'd finally arrived at. "I was impoverished," he had explained to me during an evening meal. "When you have no money, you use the talents you have to make your way in the world."

Rheta had been sitting in her usual place, a low chair in the shadows, away from the table. "Tell him about your grand talent," she said.

"Well, I could paint, of course," Peter continued. "The great Hoffman told my mother, 'Your son has lots of talent; he will be a painter. But make from him an overall cultured man

who knows languages and knows all the music, poetry, painting, etcetera. That is the secret', he told me, 'that you have to have an acquaintance with the world'."

"Did you learn other languages?" I asked.

"He did not," Rheta interjected.

"Learning to speak English was difficult enough. But I did make an acquaintance with the world."

"Tell this boy your talents," Rheta insisted.

"I have charm, I think," he suggested.

"Hmmp!" Rheta snorted. "Yes, and he formed an acquaintance with the women on the grant committees, the curators of museums, the gallery women. And he used his great talent that he carries in his pants to charm them. They show his paintings. They bring buyers to him—women buyers for him to charm. And they all make money! All of them...." Rheta then listed the influential women who allegedly did Peter's bidding on his road to fame and dismissed each with a scatological parody of her name.

I stayed with Peter for two weeks, during which time we buried his wife, though not in the expensive artists' cemetery, where Peter owned a plot for himself, but in town, in the public cemetery for the locals and the help.

During that time, as visitors arrived to offer condolences, he'd tell them the story of Rheta's death. But in each telling, I noticed, the staging changed, progressing from the colorless set of actions in the version he gave me, to a pageant of some drama: "She died in my arms, you know," he would announce solemnly, sounding the words, finding their balance. "She died in my arms. I was right there with her."

A couple of weeks later, I sent him a short poem in which I believed I'd painted a playful, pleasing picture of his and Rheta's relationship. Immediately after receiving it he was on the phone to me shouting: "I never beat my wife! Not once did I beat her!" I thought, he must be drinking again.

The next time I drove out to see him he was in his studio working on a large canvas. He seemed fine, much recovered. He was famous for his fierce depictions of women, but the woman on this new canvas, tall, well-proportioned, radiated a kind of classical beauty. He

painted with great energy. He seemed once more the flamboyant painter of renown. "You see," he pointed with a wide smile. "It is Rheta, emerging from the clouds. And that male figure in the background? That is me, Poseidon, emerging from the ocean. Together she and I complete the earth and sky. This is my memorial to our love."

Disquieting as some might find this scene, it fit with a lesson he'd attempted to teach me one night after dinner, some months before Rheta's death. He had spoken to me with great sincerity, saying, "Despite your bourgeois upbringing, your father's money, you live in poverty, like me. And whatever I, a poor man, give you, you snap it up ravenously as if it were your first meal this month. You are so hungry you make a poor man believe he is a great benefactor. So, I want you to understand how we poor men must raise ourselves. It is not merely the physical," he continued, with a nod to Rheta. "If you have nothing you have to be your own benefactor. You must sculpt your life. At every moment you must size up your situation. You must leave the ordinary world, that accepts only failure, and enter the world of the great artists; you must construct for yourself a mythology."

BASIL KING

Bath

The door opened to the B&B in Bath and a stocky man with a big smile let us in and introduced himself. I had a duffle bag over my shoulder. Archie looked at me and said you're a seaman. "I have my papers," I said.

Archie was a retired seaman; he'd been at sea during WW2. His wife cooked a big breakfast and they were generous people.

I didn't tell Archie the year before I left England I joined the Sea Scouts and we drilled on the Thames. Martha thought I was telling her a made-up story. But the second day we were in England we took the underground to the Thames where we took a boat to Kew Gardens and on the way to Kew we saw them—boys in life jackets on the Thames paddling in dinghies. And when we got to Kew, without hesitation I walked us to the Pagoda.

Archie said that there was a small penthouse at the top of the house and the only way to get to it was by climbing a ladder. We should take a look; if we liked it we could have it.

It was 1985. I was fifty and Martha was forty-eight. We climbed the ladder and there was a large room with a double bed, a sink, a toilet and a shower. To add to this there was a large window and a wonderful view of the city of Bath. We had this small palace to ourselves and we felt lucky and important.

We toured Bath, saw the Royal Crescent and the Circus, drank its famous waters that tasted like rotten cabbage. I won 25 pounds on the lottery and spent it on a pair of Kid leather gloves for Martha. And to this day we talk about our stay in Bath with fondness.

BARBARA HENNING

*Mrs. Jackson Is Riding My Thought**

I believed in the possibility of a transformation through poetic apprehension of the spiritual function of language and the natural force of the life-breath of the word-animating human mind, of ordinary verbal intercourse into a spiritually successful order of human existence.

"Introduction," *The Poems of Laura Riding*

I think poetry obstructs general attainment to something better in our linguistic way-of-life than we have. I can only hope that the poems themselves will soften this inconsistency by making the nature of poetry, to which they are faithful, plainer, in its forced, fine, suspension of truth.

"Preface," *Selected Poems of Laura Riding*

I am always moved by Laura Riding's poetry into a thinking place (*I team with place*), thinking about what poetry is, how one's identity-in-process is shaped and formed through words (*reiterated morsel*), in particular the grammaring of a woman's identity, and how love and loss are intertwined in this process (*expanded into space*) as living linguistic idea-events, written, not described (*When? Any moment finds me*), of-being-written, not about. Riding's project as I understand it is to uplift her reader's word-experience, to undo the lying word and arrive at a primal experience with language, as an act of continually uncovering.

For some, her work is seen as too difficult, and often she is viewed as a very difficult woman. But born of that same spirit and strength of the difficult-woman, is her collection of beautiful thinking poems, eight books of fiction, eleven books of philosophical-critical-evangelical prose

and many many letters to the editors of journals and reviews. As a difficult woman, the legend of Laura Riding, has taken shape in biographies, reviews, articles, letters and memoirs—in the voices of W.H. Auden, Hart Crane, Nancy Cunard, Dennis Donaghue, Harry Mathews, T.M. Mathews, Kenneth Rexroth, Julian Symons, Allen Tate, Virginia Woolf among others:

"Laura Riding Roughshod" "she wore a gold wire crown which spelled out Laura" "sybil of poetry" "beautiful in a ferocious way" "a superior and independent thinker" "poet, muse and occasional fury" "meticulous" "ruthless manipulator" "no worse than Pound, Eliot, Joyce or Gertrude Stein" "deep conviction" "unjustly neglected" "indistinctly supernatural" "a shallow, egotistical cock-crowing creature" "a damn bad poet" "takes to task" "belligerent spirit" "harsh and splendid in rigor and discipline" "sarcastic" "forbidding" "severe, obscure and hostile" "messianic" "bully" "queen bore" "hysterical temper" "a tough person" "bizarre personality" "an outsider" "the Jewess" "the American" "shrewd, avant gardist, brittle and more than a little superficial" "adversarial" "a feminist malgré elle" "refused to be one of the dead bodies of literature" "a contrary poet" "quite the most intelligent woman I've seen" "cruel" "a force of nature" (*What a rattle tattle*) "like lightening" "the affronted virago" (*What a tattle rattle*) "tyrannical home wrecker" "ardently romantic" "maddest woman I've ever met" "queen of modernist poetry" "self-righteousness" (*What a we*) "a transcendentalist" "a platonist" "apolitical" (*What a me*) "contempt for middle class values" "Laura was a witch" "the only living philosophical poet" (*What a what a*) "tendency toward extreme individualism and poetic isolation" (*What a*) "woman of vision" "greatest lost poet in American literature" "one of America's great modernist poets" (*What*) "I am tidy, quick, hard-working, good humored, and let absolutely nothing go by."**

Laura (Riding) Jackson, Madelaine Vara, Barbara Rich, Laura Riding, Laura Gottchalk, Laura Reichenthal was born in New York City. Her father, Nathan Reichenthal, was a Jewish immigrant from Austria, and her mother, Sadie Edersheim, was New York born daughter of German immigrants. Both worked in sweatshops in the garment district. As an avid socialist and reader of theory, her father hoped Laura would become the American Rosa Luxemburg. She attended

Girls High School in Brooklyn, began writing poetry at the age of fifteen, won three scholarships to Cornell, left college to marry a history professor, and somewhere along the line renounced socialism.

She was recognized early on by the Fugitives who published her in their journal and gave her a national award. Allen Tate expressed hope in a letter that Riding would be the one "to save America from the Edna St Vincent Millays." In a private letter to Tate, however, John Crowe Ransom complained, "She had neither birth, subsistence, place, reputation nor friends, and was a very poor little woman indeed." Her collaboration with the fugitives was brief; she was too difficult, low class, bohemian and experimental.

Within a short time, she divorced, moved to New York City and then to London with Robert Graves, his wife and children. After a suicide attempt in 1929 in which she broke her back leaping from a window, she and Graves separated from his family and eventually moved to Spain. Her first book was published by Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press. With Graves, she wrote criticism, founded a literary magazine, *Epilogue*, and Seizen Press, publishing Stein's *An Acquaintance with Description*.

The Spanish Civil War forced Graves and Riding to leave Spain and relocate to the United States. In 1941, Graves returned to Spain while Riding married Schuyler Jackson, renounced poetry writing for life and moved to Wabasso Florida where she and Jackson worked together on an immense, life long project, a dictionary, linking language, spiritual knowledge and rational principles so to be exact and literal, in a poetic way. Around the time of Schuyler Jackson's death in 1968, she allowed her poetry and prose to be republished but only with her renunciations attached. She stayed in Wabasso living alone for twenty-two years in a small house behind a citrus grove, far away from town, without any electricity. In the same year in which she died, 1991, at age ninety she was awarded the Bollingen prize for poetry from Yale.

"riddling ambiguities" "syntax of the mind" "outsight" "reminiscent of Dickinson" "impulse of

emotions" "Puritan self-examining idealist."

Riding writes, "My muse is I" (from "Laura and Francisca"). Yeats writes, "Riding's school was too thoughtful, reasonable and truthful . . . poets were good liars who never forgot that the Muses were women who liked the embrace of gay warty lads." To be a Riding-poet and to be woman is to be the muse musing on oneself.

Riding doesn't take the warty lad as muse, and she doesn't fall into the mirror either because she refuses to become less than possible; she muses on the structure, form and word with which the woman-muse becomes her own subject. In her line, "The stuttering slow grammaring of self" (from "Memories of Mortalities"), she places this initial grammaring between the mother and the daughter. Before the law of the father, in Riding there is the grammar of the mother.

"algebraic in her logic, abstraction and economy" "a whole dictionary of un-words"
"prosodically eccentric" "thinks as ideas" "a circular logic" "a new vocabulary" "quizzical and essentially discursive" "dead serious" "admirable" "extreme statement."

As an intellectual working-class woman poet, Riding gave up her paternal name and her husband's name, perhaps in an attempt to erase her cultural and class background or perhaps as a necessary unravelling and undoing. Prior to 1936, she wrote a series of essays on sexual difference. "Women," she writes in "The Word Woman," "are strangers in the country of man," with very different characteristics, habits of mind and ways of thinking. But man, according to Riding, has decided "that it is not a thought-process but merely an irritating peculiarity of women." "The standard of humanity" becomes maleness, in order to increase his confidence in the "universality of maleness."

Twoness is truth, for Riding, not in terms of equality, but as a holding together of the difference of two. She writes, "Women suffering from man-fever must be regarded as absent from their

identity." Riding knows that selves are constructed in language between encounters with each other, but at the border, women often smile, submit and compromise instead of meeting as two.

Each poem she considered a part of her self-becoming, her "diary of identity": "A poem is an advanced degree of self." So, to the gentlemanly critics, reviewers and literary voices who misread her and modernist writing in general, she responds sharply and corrects with certainty, as far from feminine docility as possible

What will they write of me?
They wrote nothing different, of course.
I saw that I should have to go back
And write my story myself.

"Memories of Mortalities"

"precision and purity of thought" "intense and unflogging repetitiousness" "a blood relationship to the tone of Gertrude Stein" "vivid clash of opposites" "profoundly cerebral" "evocative phrasing" "extremism of paradox" "uncanniness" "repetition of phrase" "mystical."

Riding rescues "words from the socially habitual disordered thought" by working backwards to what she might call the primal play of opposites long obscured by the dualism inherent in the masculine narrative. While the Dadaists were working at destroying and overthrowing Western logic, she hammered with her words, lightly, heavily, believing that there was a humane woman-logic in the roots of language. While her purposeful and careful linguistic experiments sound a little like Gertrude Stein (and at one time they were friends), in fact, Riding wants to release this meaning rather than "rid it of all furniture of definition" (her critique of Stein).

"intellectual" "metaphysical" "regulated child mentality" "quickness and cleanness of thought" "exhausting and cerebral" "obscure" "abstractions abound" "the most difficult and at the same

time the most lucid" "lack of metaphor and imagery" "not scholastic""no formal metrical structure" "no symbols" "almost complete renunciation of rhyme" "non-objectivist" "everything takes place in absence" "For in the end it as a poet that she will be read and remembered."

Riding rejects modernist poetry with T.S. Eliot reference to past poetry. In *The Telling*, she calls his mythic method a "production of a cloud" . . . a fake poetics." Her work is uncluttered with images, metaphors or symbols. The word in her poetry becomes the meaning-thing; rather than an image in the conventional sense, there is an enacting of self in plain unordinary speech. Don't confuse this plainness, however, with what she calls the typical or commonplace, suitable, that which is in fact a downleveling of thought.

In most of her poems, she begins with the elementary, the simply stated, in order to teach, as she says in the 1938 preface to her *Collected Poems*, that the reason for reading poetry is not to be put into a poetic mood or to enjoy unusual illusions and drama, but instead "to uncover fundamental and general truths." She begins simply, and as we follow along, each word leads into more and more complexities. And the structure of her life work with the poems at the core expands after she renounces poetry into a discourse seeking the plain truth and yet circling back, explaining, rebuking, constructing a self who becomes more and more philosophical and complicated, verifying in fact the slipperiness of the words and her truth, as the seeking, not the found.

We could say that Riding has been censored or missing in American literary history because she has received more critical attention in England or because she has been considered for the most part as a character in Robert Graves's life. And I am sure that these have been significant factors, but I think she was missing for the most part by her own choice and in response to her growing perception that the poem as she knew it put a limit to her seeking.

Renouncing poetry in 1939 for the rest of her writing life, she moved away to a run down farm in Florida and, for many years, refused even republication. She also created a network of

negations in order to protect her "self" and her "project" which was spiraling away from "the poem." In her protection of her own authority, she purposefully excluded herself from many other projects. To allow her "self" to be rewritten or unfairly reviewed or even explained by a third party was to hand over the authority of her "self."

Riding resented being reduced, defined, and put into a critical or biographical framework which she saw as alien to her writing. To even those who admired her work, she often responded with sharp and precise corrections and disagreements. For example, when in 1974, Jerome Rothenberg included her in his anthology, *Revolution of the Word*, she included a "Statement of Disagreement" in which she criticized the title of the book, and accused the other poets of "using poetry to give literary legitimacy to positions that are but variations on stock modernistic sophistications."

She refused to acknowledge any relevance of her work to a redefinition and a questioning of contemporary poetry; she scoffed at the use of the word "revolutionary" and "avant garde." Her creed had been that of "right work and craft of sensuous phoneticalities." In the Rothenberg and Joris anthology, *Poems for the Millennium*, she now has one poem and her poetics is referred to as "anti-modernist." Perhaps Riding would have been pleased.

She disliked all "isms" including "feminism," and even though she wrote extensively about how women think differently from men, she refused to allow her work to be published in any of the feminist anthologies in the 60's and 70s. She consequently has been ignored by the major feminist histories of poetry. If she had lived to be sixty rather than ninety, I think she might have been represented as a woman writer of importance. But she spoke back, refused to let her story be commented upon or misrepresented, and so now we have her wonderful speaking-back voice.

So I began to live.

It was outrageous,

I made mortal mistakes,
I did not mean to live so mortally.

But something must be written about me,
And not by them.
So I began those mistold confidences
Which now read like profanity of self
To my internal eye
And which my critic hand erases
As the story grows too different to speak of
In the way the world speaks.

“Memories of Mortalities”

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* An earlier version of this essay was presented as a presentation at the St. Mark's Church in the Bowery Poetry Project Symposium of May 3, 1996. Subsequently, a version was published in *The World* Volume 53 (1997).

** Collages are constructed from passages by Hart Crane, Jane Marcus, Barbara Adams, Julian Symons, Harry Mathews, Nancy Cunard, Richard Perceval Graves, Virginia Woolf, K.K. Ruthven, Joyce Wexler, Martin Seymour Smith, Geoffrey Grigson, Joseph Katz, John Graves, J.M. Bradbury, Jo Ann Wallace, Allen Tate, Dennis Donoghue, Paul Auster, Kit Jackson, W.H. Auden, Kenneth Rexroth, Laura Riding, M.L. Rosenthal, Sonia Raisse, T.M. Mathews, Ian Hamilton, Schuyler Jackson, Susan Schultz and John Crowe Ransom.

CHARLES BORKHUIS

Surface Tension: Reflections on Warhol

Was Andy Warhol just pulling our chain when in 1963 he declared “I want to be a machine”? Or was that a laughable but slightly eerie response to our evolving post human condition? When would we see a *Robots ‘r Us* game on the x-mas shelves? Still, there was something playful, even Zen-like about Warhol’s studied blank stare. To hear Warhol tell it, there was nothing behind his opaque surface, or was that just part of the ironic pose of his persona? By filling us up with more and more reproductions of the real, Warhol was actually emptying us out, but in a typically Western, additive way. As a meditation on increased mechanization, his art invited our cultural excesses to cancel themselves out: more is more than more—it’s less.

He favored making more channels and more information available to more people, while at the same time reminding us that increased choices can numb our ability to differentiate between them. We’re free to say anything we want, but everything we say means less and less. In a culture in which presidents and toothpaste are sold similarly, meaning plays second fiddle to the delivery system. Andy didn’t really want to make more choices; he wanted the machine to make the choices for him. In Warhol’s world, there is a flattening out of all values; everything and everyone has become replaceable; nothing is for real, or for keeps. Everyone is allowed their 15 minutes of fame, but then they have to hand over the mic to the next wannabe. If Warhol told us there was nothing behind his surface; he was doing it with a wink towards posterity. But, of course, he wouldn’t be caught dead winking. He was deadpan serious to the end. Far from being cynical, Andy was open, enthusiastic, and bemused about the cultural changes happening around him. Although some criticized him for being apolitical, taking sides was not his game. He was ontologically disengaged. The strength of his vision was

not in changing the world so much as seeing it clearly as it is, and in his fragile, dandyish way, he did that better than any artist of his time. Even his detractors had to admire the purity and consistency of his life-performance. He was capable, as few are, of playing out his philosophy to the bitter end. Fast on the reversal switch, Andy refused to make art his life; he made his life his art.

He coyly avoided being food for the intellectual feeding frenzy that was critical theory. Yet, he was an Idea Man who gave the impression of wanting to fade into the wallpaper. He hired look-a-likes to stand in for him and give speeches. But his jokes always had a serious side which he always denied. He gave pop culture images back to us as if they were masterpieces, and indeed they now appear as our classics. But he did it with a kind of casual, throwaway flippancy that took the air out of his own balloon before anyone else did. It was impossible to argue with him. You can't argue with a cipher. Part cagey minimalist, part discrete sage, he provoked viewers into doing the hard work of arguing with themselves. He pointed to who we are, what we value, and where we are headed, but refused to interpret for us.

In contrast to the previous generation of abstract expressionist painters who agonized over the authenticity of their aesthetic decisions, Warhol suggested that artists were no different than anyone else; we're all commodities for sale in a consumer society, and we're becoming more so with each new generation. Individuals were interesting to Warhol for their potential "star quality," their capacity to make others want to watch them. His silkscreen portraits of the rich and famous were often caught in all their gaudy, over-exposed, hyperreality, and he made them pay. But why would he do otherwise when his subjects had already made themselves into items for sale? His infamous statement, "Business is the best art," was a slap in the face to those who thought that there was still some point in distinguishing the art object from a commercially produced commodity.

In this sense, Warhol's films reversed the image of celebrity by creating "superstars" out of trashy, underground cult artists like Candy Darling and Ultra Violet. In their own way, they

expressed the dreams of the ignored and underexposed by filling the cinematic closeup with their blank stares and improvised, often hilarious non sequitur monologues. The simple reversal of cultural unknowns to fleeting cultural icons was on display. Famous artists were also placed under the same laser gaze. Warhol was not interested in art movements per se; he was not interested in Dali as a surrealist but as a larger-than-life, self-popularized image of a famous “crazy artist.” Warhol was primarily fascinated by how people become famous and what fame does to them. He had clearly observed that ideas about individuality and originality had run out of gas, and that the mass-produced image or object was fast on the way to replacing us. Our subjectivity was disappearing, and we were complicitous consumers in this commercial, body-snatching enterprise. The images he gave us were under our noses: the soup can, the cow, the superstar, the shoe. As Duchamp had realized: hang a shovel on the wall of an art gallery, and it’s no longer just a shovel. Objects are colored by a certain intentionality, which we place over them like a second skin. But Duchamp made one of a kind, whereas the Andy-machine made many of the same.

Warhol’s genius was wrapped up in the simple, unpretentious way in which he told a radical truth about pop culture—so simple, in fact, that it was hard to believe what he was saying. Whatever he said was always too much and he knew it. Words were placeholders for a more encompassing silence. His dazzling, brief statements had the discriminating crystallization of poetry, and in this sense, he was a visionary minimalist, not unlike the Haiku masters.

A lifelong Catholic, Andy was attracted to the ritualized ceremony of the mass and the iconography of saints. He shared the saint’s extreme passivity, vulnerability, and removal from life. Exalted in a painting or captured by the halo of a flash photo, saints are not dissimilar to the famous. Indeed, saints are the superstars of religion. This connection would not have escaped Warhol. In his own right, Warhol became an icon of twentieth-century art, and icons don’t talk much; they pose in bas-relief, inviting crowds to circle in awe of them and their work. Neither religious icon nor pop idol has a real identity; both have defaulted to a ceremonial pose. Neither words nor events can touch them because they inhabit the sanctity of the

artificial, the solitude of the beyond. They are nothing like us; instead, we have made them into stars flashing in the firmament. Yet we remain guided by their unreachable allure; we venerate and worship them because they exist in a world separate from our own. Warhol was profoundly fascinated by the distance between the ordinary and the famous, the latter possessing an elusive charm, a sacred glamour that could only be glimpsed from afar.

After he was shot by Valerie Solanas in 1968 and almost died, Andy became more ghostly, more ethereal, perhaps in a sense, a reproduction of a reproduction. In retrospect, one wonders whether Warhol ever felt that he was truly alive or just a spectator to someone else's life. Even his silver-dyed hair, chosen years before nature would intervene, may have served as an early talisman against aging. Death couldn't really reach him because in a certain sense, he had already died. Warhol was our loaded mirror; he bounced our reverse image back at us without exaggeration or comment. If we were absorbed in a frantic youth culture that tried at all costs to keep death at bay, he would show us how to do it better. Bleach your hair silver before its time and beat death at its own game. It's hard to imagine Warhol laughing at death. He was just showing us how death can be viewed as the most ordinary thing. It's with us all the time. He didn't want to scare people, he wanted to help desensitize them to its presence. Like anything else, images of death repeated often enough have a numbing effect. Repetition creates distance. This irony was not lost on Warhol. He said "When you see a gruesome picture over and over again, it doesn't really have any effect." Perhaps he was preparing for his death all his life.

In his series of Death and Disaster silkscreen paintings starting in 1962, he included repeated images of car crashes and empty, different colored electric chairs, originally taken from black and white newspaper clippings. The iteration of these images in a row hearken back to his Campbell's Soup cans series and the desensitizing aspect of mechanized reproduction. It is difficult not to see the industrialized automation of soup cans, cars, and electric chairs, but when asked, Warhol would always take the ready-at-hand explanation to deflate the high concepts behind his work. He read newspapers and ate Campbell's soup. What more do you

need to know? His evasive tactics made him both more elusive to the art world and popular to the ordinary consumer of newspapers and soup. The art world was being forced to learn a new lesson: the Trojan horse had arrived and popular taste had emerged to threaten the very distinction between high and low art.

Warhol kept a controlled distance on life as if getting too close would distort the larger picture he grew to accept about the world and himself. He once remarked that some people gain energy from having sex and some lose energy from it: he lost energy. Through his images, he told us the often humorous, unadorned truth about what we worship, how we live, and who we model ourselves after. He didn't judge us; he let the truth stare back at us. Warhol chose to keep silent and let others speak for him. He carried a tape recorder around to restaurants and clubs and started the now infamous *Interview* magazine and then stepped away from it, just as he had stepped away from his underground films and let the *machine* keep rolling without him. He wanted to be replaced, to disappear inside his creations. Yet, he was not without a gentle compassion for the outcast and underdog among us. He created his version of the automat, the Andy-mat, a restaurant where lonely people could eat out and watch TV in single, partitioned cubicles. Seemingly, he had nothing to say, but paradoxically, he had more to tell us about ourselves and our ghostly, virtual future than any artist in the second half of the twentieth century.

BURT KIMMELMAN

Barbara Henning's Present Tense

I first encountered Barbara Henning's poetry in 1985, when she'd left Detroit for New York City. A series of her prose poems, each a vignette, was featured in the journal *Poetry New York*. All the action in these poems took place in the present tense—perhaps more to the point, in the present. If there was a past, or future, it was implicit only. In steeping myself in the poetry Henning has published lately, those early poems came to mind. Her poetry is, ever more, the poetry of the now.

Her later poems, the work of someone whose poetic command has taken over everything else, are cast in the present tense, yet they're of another order altogether. I can see how Henning got to here, from Detroit to New York, of more relevance from her younger self who'd arrived at a way to be artful, to a mature and seasoned poet who knows her metier as well as it can be known and who seems to understand herself. I don't mean to be romanticizing either Henning's life or career. I offer this teleology in case it helps to grasp what she's now accomplished as a poet, in addition to being a writer of fiction.

I don't know which came first for her, the fiction or the poetry, or when she first began to write prose poems or poems in verse. Her books of the last decade contain, variously, prose fiction—which at times strikes me as poetic—and poetry in prose or in more formal, prosodic, arrangement. Indeed I think it's important to set her prose and verse poetry side by side—but now for an unusual purpose, since the publication of *Digigram* last year. The work in this book is not prose and it's not verse.*

What makes a poet gravitate toward a certain way of having what's inside her come into a form and then public view? In her work we get, in whichever form, all Henning all the time; and it's in the present tense. I don't mean some version of an eternal present—quite the opposite, Henning's writing *is* the present. Yes, her poems disclose a life in process, some of its details quite personal and some equally impersonal. In fact, how her poem's voice slides from one thing to the other, at times circling back and other times not, is a formal pleasure all its own, for example in "At Sunrise." The poem's steady line length and rhythm hold her juxtapositions as one:

Instead of meditating, I mop
the floors and hallways.
To prevent downloading free
music, Dutch cable companies
obtain a court order to block
access to the pirate bay.
In fancy gyms across the city,
people steal from each other,
yuppie-on-yuppie crime
while musicians and night
workers seek the quiet dim
of dark apartments. At sunset,
I switch on the parking lights
[etc.]
(from *A Day Like Today*, 2015)*

Henning's narratives are masterpieces of contiguity in which how one thing is tangential to another by accident (the two don't belong together but for her arrangement of them) makes either seem at first discordant. The prosody undergirds it all. The attitude of this poems'

speaker is mostly an undetected force. On occasion the attitude is revealed as an *ars poetica*—such as in the final lines of “At Montauk”:

As I hand Martine HD’s *Vision and Meditation*, I say, I don’t think I actually read this book today, but I did look at each word. We laugh *to look askance* the mind and the meditative moment may never visit each other. Is it this? It is that? Well, it just is.
(from *A Swift Passage*, 2013)

Here’s the ending of “Out of the Elevator”:

[. . .]
impossible-to-follow strings
of *this* unfathomable reason
and *that* memory connecting
one image with another.
(from *A Day Like Today*)

Henning doesn’t close off her poems, even as she gets in her parting shot.

Does the writer, like a home intruder, break-and-enter her life? What might *home* look like to an intruder? Where is everything and why is it where it is—in the living room, kitchen, bedroom. Is there something worth taking? An intruder may want to leave something out of place. Another intruder means to get away without a sign of having been there. Does Henning want us to see her craft?

That Henning’s poems reside in the now is not all that obvious, actually. This is not to say there is no past or future, but just that it happens at once—and in the present tense. Here’s the vivid, finally riveting, “Midnight in Detroit” (from the early eighties):

Lorraine walks down Cass Avenue in her high heels. Snow covers the parked cars, tops of the street lights and the Labor Archive building. She kicks the snow with her exposed toe, holds her keys in her fist and looks over her shoulder. Two men blunder around the corner. “Hey man they is slobs. I mean S-L-O-B-S. I don’t care if they is red, yellow or green. Those girls is slobs.” Their voices close inside a snow covered Ford and Lorraine sighs. She loosens her fist, shakes out her long red hair, and slips in the side door of the Twilight Bar.

This cameo is one of a series titled “Detroit Ghost Poems.” Is the witness in the poem the “ghost”? We’re in a present that’s unmoving. Another of the poems in this series, “Circles,” hints at the depth in her later work—which can be sensed, ironically, in the casual surface of this poem. Accommodated by descriptive narrative, the poem shows that something is possible below a veneer:

The girl is lost in this suburban apartment with wall-to-wall windows. Her hair is tangled and dark circles surround her transparent eyes. A see-through girl, much too tired to pack. Most everything is in boxes and the valium is almost gone now. Can’t sleep, she can’t sleep and so she sits in the middle of the vacuous, blue carpet and says good-bye, good-bye to the brown-haired one who is so translucent he doesn’t even bother to appear. And outside the snow keeps falling and people appear in the window from one side, disappear on the other.

Henning’s persona, in these earlier poems, is merely *looking*, beseeching us to see. Henning’s reader has never been the voyeur. In her recent poems, her vulnerability is palpable yet taken for granted as being simply the heart of life. It’s a life whose vitality is felt in the rendering of, say, the poet’s marvelous streetscapes. And this is the thing: the poem lets you know that, for all their allure, they’re not where the action is.

Henning is a flaneur weaving in and out of her own life. Her sleight of hand is the flow of adjacencies and how she doesn't let the poem's narrative create finality. She shows us the neighborhood in brief strokes, its vibrancy, leaving it there in its completely gritty glamour, for you to take inside her apartment with her where you'll find yourself in her bedroom, only to leave off from her, there. This is a signature of hers. There's something to love. (In this respect I can't help recalling Paul Blackburn's poetry, not just in his game-changing volume *The Cities*, 1967, but straight through to the posthumous *The Journals*, 1975).

Life is impossible but it goes on. Henning's peculiar capacity for the present tense is what's in it for her—not that she minds you having your own fun inside her poem. This, I can't help thinking, is quite possibly her signal quality that makes its own contribution to New York School poetics. It also establishes Henning as singular among her peers and ancestors—something that need not be thought of within the context of this poetics or, for that matter, within the history of the St. Mark's Poetry Project (founded by Blackburn) where Henning has been a mainstay all these decades.

I can see how the young Henning finds her tense before she ever arrives in the East Village. She brought a poetics with her, still to be discerned in later work—at least she'd brought with her a way to hold a scene at arm's length. As fine as that early work is, however, what jumps out at me in the late work is her finesse. Henning pulls it off time and again. It's a way of writing, of thinking and being, which fit a lifestyle she's valorized.

All this said, I must now turn to *Digigram*. I want contextualize it within the two collections leading up to it: *A Swift Passage* (2013) and *A Day Like Today* (2015). The poems in *Digigram* don't end; they don't start either. They don't, in any particular or obvious way, connect with each other, even as they're diaristic (which is the case for some of the other relatively recent poems). Each entry in *Digigram* begins with a dash and lower-case word. The dash is the only punctuation in the entire book. "A Lot of Things" begins like this:

—a red and white striped shirt—goes round and round—slipping back—then reappearing—first on a model—then my daughter—then passed to me—my favorite—to brighten—one’s own path—Buddha said—one must light—the path of others—in the filthy waters—after Hurricane Harvey—a young man—repairs a house—an accidental wound—[etc.].

(“A Lot of Things”)

Times are multiple and conflated in this poem. The titled messages in *Digigram*, are rhetorically written and presumably “sent” to herself. (Of course they’re sent to us, but are we ever confident enough to assume we’re the addressee? This is something at the core of each piece’s magical effect.) The “digigrams” are neither “notes to self” nor “Dear Diary” entries. What they are are records of a day in Henning’s life—arguably, what she’s decided to make the facts of it.

The entries in *Digigram*—finally of a piece with the poems in the two prior collections—are foretold in her early eighties prose poems. In hindsight we can see where this artist would head. In large, Henning arrived at a subtle present that allows her to look back. The early poems evoked a world. In these recent books narration invokes the world.

The effect of this narration rises up at first unbeknownst to the reader, like some odorless, colorless gas seeping under the door of Henning’s apartment. The difference between the 1985 Henning and the 2020 Henning has to do with her poem’s self-awareness, so too the narrator’s—how both poem and narrator understand they’re inhabiting the world. It’s the world of the poem’s poetics. The agency of each is possible because of that. The mature Henning knows this.

Henning’s formal versifying is precursor to the “digigram.” It doesn’t prevent seeing her achievement in poetry as something outside the perimeter of New York School poetics—but she’s found her own way, and I think it hasn’t been given its due. O’Hara’s “In Memory of My Feelings” stands in contrast to the seemingly unguarded access to Henning’s feelings. What

O'Hara gave us was ultimately an artful ardor dressed in urban insouciance. In Henning we get that too but it's been turned inside out—her feelings are as one with her poem's activity *as* a poem. Take, for instance, "From Every Angle," one of her "digigrams." The poem recounts Henning's uprooting of herself from her dear East Village to move to Brooklyn:

—melted sand—then sheets float—in molten tin—
silvered—a mirror image—nervous—elbow tweaked—loss
tingling—through out—away I go—on Easter Sunday—by
car and truck—goodbye—dear elms and scholar trees—
Mourad—Mogador—Commodities—Veselka—Sally—
Cliff—The Poetry Project—my neighbors—life on 7th
Street—you're not moving—are you?—pushed—into the
subway—into the boroughs—think the opposite—that
great yoga sutra—tonight—I'll be sleeping—in the same
bed—yes?—from every angle—exactly the same—my
body, my books—on 12th Street—in Brooklyn—head
pointing south—as usual—sound asleep—under the same
sheets and blankets—

Aside from the dashes (they're not even punctuation) the poem seems unstructured but for its heading toward Henning falling asleep in Brooklyn after an emotional cataloging of what she's leaving, the personal and public mixed together. *Digigram* is ultimately poetry, inspired by the dadaist Elsa Von Freytag-Lorenhaven who, Henning writes, "took William Carlos Williams to task," according to a "Process Note" in the book's back pages.

Essentially, there's an arc—from the personal, inside her Manhattan apartment, to the trees and buildings, the stores and restaurants, the Poetry Project vista, then a bit of conversation, to the fleeting solace of her yoga practice, which blends with her new apartment yet with her familiar, intimate, bed clothes. Maybe you don't notice these "parts" of the total poem. I came

back to thinking about the *Digigram* poems like this, though, after spending time with Henning's two prior collections.

Taking nothing away from these other recent books, one thing I love about her digigrams is how pure they are, with their delicate shifts of voice and attention (the *digigram* premise helps make this possible and calls attention to it). A poem like "So Much Has Happened" (from *A Day Like Today*), which creates the present in a way distinct from the entries in *Digigram*, has a structure that's repeated in other poems in the book:

So Much Has Happened

Tonight we go to a film
by D'Suisa on Obama.
Passengers on buses
rumbling down Fifth
Avenue were yelling,
What an asshole!
I couldn't sit through it.
Shut up! I muttered.
We no longer expect
to hear the truth
so blatant falsehoods
are possible. Later
my love is lying
beside me. It's after
midnight when he says,
Liver stagnation
that's your problem

but sometimes you're
really funny.

Line length and poem length are consistent throughout this book. Henning is working within a loosely, pre-set, form of her own. There are no stanza breaks. The moves she makes are, after a while, predictable and marvelous. I was eager, once I saw her plan, to see it in place in poems about very different things.

These poems' structure is not unlike that of the sonnet. In "So Much Has Happened" the line "Tonight we go to a film" takes us on down to "Shut up! I muttered" (l. 8); this is the poem's first section, just as the sonnet's first section is usually broken down to an octave or quatrains. The first line sets up a premise that runs down to the eighth line, but the lines in the middle of this "octave" could be part of either the first couplet ("Tonight we go to a film / by D'Suisa on Obama") or part of the subsequent raucous bus ride heading back downtown with others, some of whom also were in the theatre and are outraged at the execrable work of art the film's turned out to be ("What an asshole" D'Suisa is but the fellow passengers are making the evening even worse than his film was: "Shut up! I muttered").

Approaching the poem's midpoint, the Henning persona may be talking to us, or to her lover who's accompanied her, or both: "We no longer expect / to hear the truth." They make it back home, now to lie together. The poem ends in sweet goofiness ("Liver stagnation / that's your problem") and maybe the problem of inverted intimacy with an other ("but sometimes you're / really funny").

Henning has some actual sonnets in *A Swift Passage* (these poems' titles indicate consecutive days in May 2011, from the 9th to the 22nd). I'm not absolutely sure there isn't some thematic or didactic progression in them, but I'll advise not to go hunting for one. The first of these poems begins with "The locust trees are under constant revision" and the last of these sonnets ends:

“and we’re going to be together for a very long time.” In between is the most delicious inner dialogue one could wish for. It’s *Samsara* all the way!

I couldn’t avoid comparison of Henning’s sonnets with those of Bernadette Mayer (1989) and, years before, Ted Berrigan (1964). Whatever Mayer’s or Berrigan’s overall aims were, their “sonnet” poems, *de facto*, for all their brilliance and effect on avant-garde poetics generally, undo the sonnet form’s expectation. Henning, rather, embraces it—yet loosely enough so you don’t notice right off that she’s actually writing sonnets, regardless of the title of this series:

14

X

14

X

14

for Dumisani Kambi-Shamba

Her sonnets move according to their in-built rhetorical premises yet it’s difficult not to see this series as preconceived, as really a work of proceduralism. There are fourteen sonnets in the sequence. That the sonnets’ titles indicate the day on which they were begun and presumably finished only adds to their proceduralist quality. This, however, says more for a way of living than of writing.** Again, Henning has achieved something that’s her own, something of considerable stature.

Here’s “May 21, 2011”:

There is a lightness in the sky and the rain has stopped.
So have all our dreams of wrong turns. I’m as distressed
as you are, but things were spinning too rapidly and
someone is using all of the washers in the basement.

When I opened the door from the airport, I could smell
and hear a stomach virus, lost in a maze of narrow streets
as a rickshaw driver helped me look for oatmeal. Drumming,
relentless drumming, vibrating trees and people, vibrating
virus. Stay home and lose myself in Conrad's distraught
and dark heart. Three naps later reformat a long document
with jpgs. Memories that I can't remember recording.
Even though it's drizzling, I can hear the birds. Hungry
but it's not wise to eat after eight p.m. and chocolate is always
nice as I gear up for midnight writing and reading.

The first quatrain ends right where it's supposed to ("someone is using all the washers in the basement"). The second quatrain runs over the eighth line a bit ("relentless drumming, vibrating trees and people, vibrating / virus"). Then Henning's finally settled in at home (the third quatrain ending with "Even though it's drizzling, I can hear the birds"). The couplet is a marvelous *envoi* ("Hungry / but it's not wise to eat after eight P.M. and chocolate is always / nice as I gear up for midnight writing and reading?"). It's good to be home. I love her domesticity.

Other of her sonnets in this sequence more elegantly disrupt the form's inherent design than Berrigan's or Mayer's. "May 19, 2011," if you're paying attention, feels like loosely strung pantoums (the same statement repeated but quite different, then again, and again):

I'm resting my head on HD's *Helen of Egypt*.
The cantaloupe was not quite ripe enough.
The SUV with Pennsylvania plates took one
and a half spaces. Are you new in the building?
Well, sort of, a visitor for two weeks, blonde hair,
black sunglasses, and he looks like a young

Todd Colby. Maca, maca, maca, buffered C and chocolate,
First Avenue to the L to the Q to DeKalb Avenue.
A woman with two little girls and a child in a stroller
Apologizes. It stops raining and I'm in the classroom.
The young people write about their relationships
and their pain. My cell phone jingles. Salsa dancing
in Spanish Harlem, Do you want me to come over?
What now? Spooning my body into his, yours, ours.

I find Henning's later poems completely absorbing. Her early Detroit poems remind me of Hopper's paintings, the Ashcan school. Her recent poems remind me of the great Giorgio Morandi's work—his paintings of the same bottles on the same table, in much the same palate. Henning is our Zen poet *par excellence*.

* Henning's work discussed here is: "Detroit Ghost Poems," *Poetry New York* (1985, later to be published by United Artists, in 1988, as *Smoking in the Twilight Bar*); *A Swift Passage* (Quale Press, 2013); *A Day Like Today* (Negative Capability Press, 2015); and *Digigram* (United Artists Books, 2020).

** I replicate Henning's note, at the back of *A Swift Passage*, on *14 x 14 x 14*: "One May day, I was talking with Martine Bellen about possible poetic projects and writing constraints. I suggested working with the sonnet form—write one line an hour for fourteen hours for fourteen days. Then I noticed a 4 x 6 index card on my desk, and there were exactly 14 lines on each card, perfect for my project. So I carried a stack of cards around with me for fourteen days, collecting."

TYRONE WILLIAMS

Some Summer Reading, Viewing, Listening

In addition to a few book reviews I've had published this year, I want to briefly note some other reading, viewing, and listening pleasures.

Tina Darragh, *Washington, DC Poetry—Mass Transit and Folio Books Reading Series* (Among the Neighbors 11, 2020)

Adeena Karasick & Kedrick James, *To Breathe Poetry Among the Neighbors: Two Essays on Anerca, a Journal of Experimental Writing* (1985-1990) (Among the Neighbors 13, 2020)

These two publications are important complements to Kyle Schlesinger's recent book on small presses, printers and publishers (see below). Darragh covers a sector of the D.C. poetry scene from 1972 to around 1976, while Karasick and James focus on the Vancouver, B.C. poetry scene via readings, happenings and conferences from 1986 to 1989, the period in which their journal, *Anerca*, was published (disclosure: until I looked at the bibliography provided by Karasick and James, I'd forgotten I had a couple of poems published in the 1988 edition). While Darragh's survey is more formal, concluding with a kind of 'where are they now' listing, Karasick's and James's pieces read more like mini memoirs, very lively as they reminisce about their wild college-age days in British Columbia and, later, Ontario. Each pamphlet has a helpful concluding note and bibliography provided by Edric Mesmer. (I recommend all the Among the Neighbors pamphlets put out by Mesmer, their editor, via the University of Buffalo Poetry Collection.)

Henry Dumas/Fred Moten, *Will the Circle Be Unbroken?* (mythscience.bandcamp.com, 2021)

Harmony Holiday's multimedia projects constitute a necessary "institution" of Afrofuturist (as well as Afropessimist) black art (past meets present as the upcoming unpredictable) and here, in this encounter between Dumas (the present reassessment of his work careening dangerously close to a religious revival) and Moten, punctuated with sampled musical/verbal passages, our contemporary moment opens as a wormhole into other regions of the universe where—who knows?—one may run across a thoroughly desacralized Sun Ra.

Jennifer Scappettone/ Nicholas Calvin Mwakatobe, *Populist Pastoral (in Smoke)*, 2019 ([online](#))

This short collaborative film imagines the continuity of process as an aural and visual experience inseparable from context while alluding to other senses—say, smell—as a metonym for the fragmentation and discontinuity one "imagines."

Jessica Smith, *How to Know the Flowers* (Veliz Press, 2019)

Botanical studies as a bed, if not bedrock, between the natural and built worlds of men, primarily white. Here, Smith recounts in lyric bursts and fragmentary epiphanies, a future—her son, her student—that may, just may, be otherwise.

Sara Mumolo, *Day Counter* (Omnidawn, 2018)

Imagine reading this nonlinear record of human pregnancy, birth (an absent presence) and its aftermath as both a prelude to, and afterword, of Julia Bloch's *The Sacramento of Desire*: a diorama of the impossible place of a female, woman, mother and writer. Here the lure and lore

of motherhood collide in fragmentary notes that evoke—and provoke—a singular experience that nonetheless intersects with that of many other females, women and mothers and writers.

Kyle Schlesinger, *A Poetics of the Press: Interviews with Poets, Printers and Publishers* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2021)

I was lucky enough to get a chance to set type for two issues (the “creative writing” special editions) of my college newspaper and teach a class on writing, setting type and making chapbooks at the local art school here in Cincinnati. However, this publication isn’t just for metal typesetters or their nerdy followers (e.g., yours truly) interested in the arcane world of bulky presses, Old World fonts and typesetting by hand. In these interviews with printers and publishers from the small press world we have an alternative history of American, Australian and Western European poetry that occasionally intersects with mainstream (that is, academic) history. Schlesinger has performed an immeasurable service here, not only to small press printers and publishers but also to poets and writers in general.

SHERRY KEARNS

Books Round-Up

Richard Carella. *Book of Everything*. Hudson Falls, NY: Weathered Orb Press, 2018.

_____. *Book of Nothing*. Hudson Falls, NY: Weathered Orb Press, 2013.

Michael Perkins. *The Pocket Perkins: Brief Writings*. Woodstock, NY: Bushwhack Books, 2014.

Among others, there are these two ways to classify poetry: easy and hard. In vogue now are certain kinds of easy, some with the small, pleasant epiphanies given to everyday life or vivid recitations of—as homage to—nature's wonders. These poems are valid and have a place and readers like and want them. It is much for poetry of any sort to be wanted.

But easy poetry won't always do. Sometimes there is nothing for us except the hard way because matters we deal with are difficult. *The Book of Nothing* by Richard Carella is a paradigm of how a poet confronts the hard issues of human being. Like his friend and mentor, the late poet William Bronk, Carella addresses difficult themes directly and in this sense, the *Nothing* poems can be said to be Bronkian. They do not sound like Bronk's poetry, however, having a style uniquely their own. Here are two examples entitled "The End-of-Nothing" and "No-One Loves Nothing":

The End-of-Nothing

Nothing is over;
nothing that ever was
is ever ended;

nothing is final;
nothing is finished;
nothing is complete;
nothing began...
and now,
nothing is ended;
nothing is over;
nothing was-
and now,
nothing is;
nothing is ended;
and nothing will be.

No-One Loves Nothing

No-one loves nothing;
and nothing loves no-one;

no-one is in love with nothing;
and nothing is in love with no-one;

nothing was in love with nothing-
as no-one was in love with no-one;

now, nothing is in love with no-one;
and no-one is in love with nothing.

These poems are representative of the series in which a pattern is established by simple independent clauses—subject, verb, object. Repetition both of "nothing" and "no-one"

alternately as subject and object creates an abstraction for the reader so that these words come to contain multiple, simultaneous meanings. They are at once an absence and a presence, a name and an idea, a concrete entity and an emptiness. This verbal legerdemain reminds the reader of how Odysseus fooled the Cyclops. "Nobody! Nobody did this to me," Polyphemus cries in his blind fury. The name belies what it represents. Only when one meaning is pinned down does the other become clear.

The "Nothing" and "No-One" in Carella's poems are not to be confused with zero, although they may slip behind that cypher's meaning of naught for a while, perhaps on the first reading. That zero identity is the shadow each of them casts when they are read as entities and when that zero is the primary sense, its weird is a solid essence. Thus reading the poems, each noun carries its dual meaning all the time in what is essentially a trick of focus. Look closely and nothing means nothing; back off a bit and the word resonates. Bronk never took this kind of chance with language, though both poets squarely face what it means to be human. We are everything and nothing, no-one and everyone. The horrible profundity of our contradictory nature is laid bare in *The Book of Nothing*.

To write a proper review of Carella's *Book Of Everything*, it's not necessary to know the book's companion volumes (to date they are *Book Of Nothing*, *Book Of No-One*, and *Book of Everyone*), for what can be said about each can be said about all: their impact is as a vision of fundamental reality.

What that vision consists of is expressed in simple sentences that contain both their stated meanings and their opposites: both meanings exist simultaneously. Indeed, each is dependent upon the other, their entanglement being inherent by their existence. But like the uncertainty principle in physics, the observer can't know both at the same time.

Consider this example, the poem “Erasure”:

Remember everything;

forget nothing;

forget everything;

remember nothing.

The meanings of the nouns “everything” and “nothing” are exchanged as each in turn becomes the direct object of the verbs “remember” and “forget.” Nothing becomes everything, everything becomes nothing. Only by allowing the contradictions their necessary coexistence can the reader know the fullness of their meanings as they tessellate into their opposites before our eyes yet remain in their original state, too.

This vision of reality is sustained throughout all the poems in the series. They read as deep insight into existence's mystery where opposites must conjoin, their consummation startles the reader's mind with the force of inevitability. Vast profundity is exposed by an utmost economy of language.

Not just for the mind, though, these books are beautiful to behold as well. Great care has gone into every aspect of their publication: paper, font, and illustration present as works of art in themselves; all aspects of the *Book Of Everything* are worthy of its reader's full esteem.

The Pocket Perkins: Brief Writing is Michael Perkins distilled into a fortifying essence of less than 200 pages.

At the very start of this book, on p. x under “The Rules,” Perkins makes a statement that characterizes his writings: “Play the hand you're dealt with style” (Rule 10).

All nine of the literary personas that he offers in his Contents—Writer, Walker, Pagan, Poet, Philosopher, Flaneur, Provocateur, Libertarian, and Libertine—play their hands boldly and directly, laying down clear-sighted, succinct, and often very funny sentences that trump the long-windedness of less stylish writers.

This volume is a rich and heady draught of an accomplished American man of letters.

PATRICK PRITCHETT

Review of Object Permanence by Michelle Gil-Montero

Object Permanence

Michelle Gil-Montero

Ornithopter Press, 2020, \$17.00

The title of Michelle Gil-Montero's *Object Permanence* alludes to Jean Piaget's term for how children come to cognitively grasp the permanence of an object which is no longer in their line of sight. It's an extension of Freud's observations on "fort-da," the next move in the game of abstraction by which children learn to that the world is full of things, which, even though not immediately present, still remain: a toy, Europe, the tree on the other side of the house.

Consider this poem, from her elegant, elliptical, and deeply beautiful collection. It's the last in a series entitled "Seasons":

voices age

husked, othered

equally by nudity

and cover

is it richer

the kiss through

cloth however

confused

wet bag of fruit
last of the season

This is a poetry intent on illuminating the spaces absence provides us with; the uncanny way they embody the most ephemeral kinds of presence, the ones that actually comprise our daily perceptions and experiences of life, if only one knows what to attend to. Haunted by scission, the poem glimmers with traces of eros and departure, and is representative of the book as a whole: a set of exquisitely modulated meditations on the interplay of here and elsewhere, an impermanent fullness and a central disappearance. Indeed, so many of her poems seem to disappear into themselves, leaving behind little more than whispers and traces, a trail of shadow vowels and retinal nocturnes. The poet's command of syntax here enacts perception itself – the torque of her lines bending the reader's attention toward the unexpected—“is it richer//the kiss”—in an unexpected volta, to conclude on a note of unsettling physicality and muted regret.

For Gil-Montero, absence is not the same as empty space (which in any case is never quite empty). Rather, her poetry creates carefully calibrated spaces within an order of appearance and evanescence. These are borderland poems, written along the edges where the poem registers the anomaly of the visual, its disruptive fluxes and weird continuities.

“Creation Story” opens this book – a nuanced exploration into consciousness and language formation. The poem owes something to the work of Michael Palmer, but more importantly stands on its own as an intimate phenomenological investigation of the dialectics of presence and absence.

Shadow. It fell, spatial. I mean, its distance pressed down.
Crushed surface. Dark is the absence of light. Light is the
absence of absence. Shadow twirls its cold mantle in space.

Tell the child. Whose finger spins our loaded globe: day and night. Instead of talking about the darkness, always there, absent, show her about day and night. Shadow her about it. Say: This mist fills Pittsburgh. It learns us, the melancholy logic of bodies pulling through. Mist is the presence of absence. (Miss them, miss us). This ceaseless mist.

This amazing entrance to the book works its syntactical magic even while cast in prose. The evocation of motherhood as a set of instructions for guiding the young in the ways of “day and night” carries a foreboding tone. The world is always diminishing before us, appearing only to fade. “Mist,” indeed, “is the presence of absence,” its visible sign, the very stuff our bodies and the material world are made of. As she writes in the first poem in “Air and Dreams”:

latent, rain-
pungent, odd fondness to the fog
as it hugs her back

from him, the refrain of
a dream that
opens on

windowless inner
rooms

Here, again, the torque of syntax bends the poem’s perceptual and emotional logic in unexpected ways. The shiver of the uncanny accompanies “her back//from him”—a bittersweet separation that leads to “windowless inner rooms.” Not desolation, no, but the inevitable withdrawal to the singularity of the self after intimate, yet fleeting, connection.

Gil-Montero's devotion to shadows and nascent presence calls to mind Sobin and Oppen. She draws subtly from them, yet never sounds merely derivative. Instead, she has incorporated their poetics of the ephemeral at a root level, taking from them a commitment to interweaving the opaque with the transparent in a deeply lyrical, minimalist idiom that is genuinely transporting. Her poems call to mind Merleau-Ponty's observation that "perception is a nascent logos; it teaches us, outside all dogmatism, the true conditions of objectivity itself . . . it summons us to the tasks of knowledge and action." The opacity of the world is unyielding, as Oppen knew, but these poems crack open brief bright fissures to show us what we cannot see. What haunts vision at the edge of sight. What was there before us all along, shadowing us.