

MARSH HAWK REVIEW Spring 2023

Three Sections: Poetry / Painting Portfolio / Prose

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Section I: POETRY

NATSUKO HIRATA

DRUMS

Rose aggregation
Reverberating.
Roses
reach
next
island
Rolling again to another island,
count four windows for
four beats. Lachesis repeats.
Afterglow.
Equipment for living.
Catch falling stars
from the skies.

HELLO AGAIN

Late autumn--
skipped spring, summer.
Warm rain soaks my feet.
Moist grass vapor, obedient light breath,
a swaying water voice penetrating to
reticent wall cracks, dry chair.
Air absorbed by time.
Even Daisy's straightened frame shapes her.

SLEEPING IN THE SEA

Sleeping in the sea
and crying
even if not sad
with unidentified
organisms,
innumerable,
floating,
uncanny, solo.
Tears melt
Into the sea
with friends
gradually floating up
to the surface
flower bed.
Little by little,
eyes open.

DAVID LEHMAN

HAIKU HEAVEN

for David Shapiro

Eye of hurricane,
or all-seeing bug on top
of lean apple tree,

look at me and think,
this is life this wait this day
in haiku heaven

with my friend you: why
miss writing our first books when
we can write new ones

and live within them
as the guest hosts of a late
night talk show you hear

from the room next door
to yours in no-sleep motels
full of books, the books

we want to write, you
and I, Columbia friends,
from the time we walked

talked smoked drank sat down
and solved riddling brainteasers
on Riverside Drive.

ADIOS

Overcast sky
so no swimming today but plenty
of radio I jump from
Stan Kenton, "Adios"
to "Fake Weather" on Real Jazz
and then Art Tatum plays "Moonglow"
and Stacey my love sees the first leaf
go from green to reddish orange.
Let me get a sweatshirt
and leave sunglasses behind
and let us walk to the waterfall
and bid a sad adieu to
August, the most underrated
month of the year.

8/ 31 / 21

CYNTHIA HOGUE

PREYING ON THE MIND

When an open window becomes an odd thought
arising as you see something, a plane
in a sky emptied of clouds,

a hawk with a mouse paralyzed in motion,
dangling from talons, the image free-
forms into thinking about the metaphysics of predation,

how the prey, having surrendered to a greater power,
is airborne, regarding life from the predator's point of view,
which it doesn't survive.

Personally, I find the experience of being psychologically
preyed-upon antithetical to bliss.
The elixir of predatorial sympathy,

though no crime, is also—as when the predator
pauses to say, *Aren't we all victims*
of Nature?—poisonous.

TABLEAU WITH TREE

A window frames the large mesquite, which leans north,
its rivulets of bark. The cat at the window.

Doves peck seeds you've thrown

around the trunk,

and the cautious rabbits munch

the scattered mesquite pods. Then they cavort
down the hill, at night in silhouette.

The quiet spirit of the house watched the animals,
or watched over them, sitting on the porch
as they ate, not moving, or needing

words to commune.

She was grief-stricken,

somehow left behind, invisible in abandon.
A seer sang her into light, the joy

after long earthly sojourn. Though gentle,
the spirit sorrowed unto firmament,
and so many accidents having to do
with water in the house.
The cat walks the length
of the sill, following the course of a dove.
An earthen bowl falls on the carpet.

It's clear that the loud man in the country's
big house is screaming his need for art,
in the place of which inside him
is dust.
Art saves us,
you'd tell him, given the chance.
It could save *you*.

Its commitment to the space of encounter
with others helps us be present
to their suffering, to open as empathys.
The loud man's present
to his own suffering.
You bit me I'll ruin you, he roars. *I wait for rain*,
you whisper in this desert of empathy.
Your gaze lifts to meet horizon.
What is more grounding than Art?
Which, as Adorno said, is *the more*.
Rolling in dirt,
rushing the bird in the tree,
the cat prowls. Up and then down.
The ancient spirit, her steps of light.

JOHN YAU

CONFESSIONAL POEM

It's true. I belong to the last tribe of Chinamen known as "The Inscrutables"
If you are reading this message, you know there is no answer to the question

Why not! Our relationship is parasitical. You have the stingers and I have the lotions
Do you want to continue being part of this conversation or don't you

If you are reading this message, you know there is no answer to the question
If you do not reply immediately, I will take a hint and get lost in a traffic jam

Do you want to continue being part of this conversation or not?
I prefer to lie face down in the mud when a tropical rain storm stops to visit

If you do not reply immediately, I will take a hint and get lost in a traffic jam
Do you realize that eating bananas in public is a cliché gesture that needs editing?

I prefer to lie face down in the mud when a tropical rain storm stops to visit
The last time I had a strong sense of vocation was when I went on an unpaid vacation

Do you realize that eating bananas in public is a cliché gesture that needs editing?
I have never quite felt free of my own nature, even when I cannot grasp it

The last time I had a strong sense of vocation was when I went on an unpaid vacation
Will I ever learn to satisfy the bad taste you display on every occasion

I have never quite felt free of my own nature, even when I cannot grasp it
It's true. I belong to the last tribe of Chinamen known as "The Inscrutables"

Will I ever learn to satisfy the bad taste you display on every occasion
Why not! Our relationship is parasitical. You have the stingers and I have the lotions

AFTER THOMAS DE QUINCEY

Discourteous reader and moral ulcer, spurious human frailty
Spoon-fed sponge cake drawn from pustulating postulant
Gratuitous self-humiliation written in every form of failed masturbation

Hands grown icy to clutch in infectious language of penitential loneliness
Do I claim too large a fellowship for the short days I am here
My head snapped shut, no longer in honorable preserve
Open to every driveling reproach, being a member of the slant
So blended and twisted are these occasions of laughter and tears
Recurring dream of walking beside yourself, party to forcible
Departures, your body's suitcase cramped, old sock, splintered dung
Not a dream within a dream of possible slender regimen
This coffee impregnated morning, under sign of unspared trouble
Now that trepidation is latest old friend to suck on your infirmities
Within few hastily assembled steps gratified to expose
Latest spectacle of gratuitous scars, soapy scads of guilt
Misery given public notice, while clocking its fascinating effects
On pastel gossip dens, sounds of interference redoubled
Strewn with pills, pink polka dots of appeasement, at thirteen
I too spoke with ease to no avail, a bellowing blockhead
Glued in ancient panic, ransacking the compass diction
Extracting treatises underlined with decaying manners
Discovering what I wish would arrive cordially impaired
Constant revelry has no need of good breeding, remote from
Prize money announcements of confidential winners
No strings, no attachment, no lovely cottage blushes
Or farsighted hospitalities, seems disposed to dwindle
On second reading, shall I repeat my advice, its accursed letters
Stamped again and again with pride and astonishment

MARY CRESSWELL

JULIAN, LIKE THE CALENDAR

That July, change harangued the country, dwarfing the language of cows. Pastures over, hung-over prisoners keep magical ideas out of innocence. The two of us were looming over the silent sky, tranquil as phlox, arcing back by choice.

that unspoken time
a warning so strangely sweet
transformed through testing

Automatically, we looked at the cataclysm, testing the urgency in one voice. Woken with work, we were seeing our doom drifting notch by notch to imminence.

By September, the flowers were gone. Meteors were screaming to the midnight, and all the ways we imagine as seeing translate to dark portents.

LOVE SONG OF THE PREDATOR DRONES

Open your arms to us, city!
We sing as we come through the pass.
We know you have nowhere to hide
and today we're meeting at last.

*Our song is as clean as the sun on our wings
We sing as we come through the pass.*

Joyous we join you, o city,
we're singing the song of our tribe.
We come from the distance and out of the air
Our song is the same age as time.

*Our song is as old as the lies you've been told
time after time after time.*

Stand up and greet us, o city –
open your gates to our song.
Our circuits record the joys of the sword
You'll remember us well when we've gone.

*There's more to kill just over the hill –
we won't need to stay very long.*

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

MEMORY OF IRREGULAR LINE FORMS OVER TIME

Act as if there is no use in acting. When the acting stops, the play begins. If the play's a matinee,
pisco
sours will be served after. They say pisco sours in Chile don't use egg whites, but in Peru they do.
Not
in my experience. I doubt my experience is any more mine than my thoughtlessness. Acting without
thought might be welcome unselfconsciousness or it might be foolhardy.

ELAINE EQUI

THREE KITCHENS

Nestle inside each other
like Russian dolls.

First comes the pantry
where the child learns
to read the calendar
and practices stirring
with ladles and spoons.

Next is the family kitchen
where the family seldom gathers.
It is like the concession stand
of a nearly empty movie theater
late in the afternoon.

Third is the restaurant's loud kitchen
of many hands banging pots and pans,
where the angry chef curses the potatoes
and curses the customers,
and the dishwasher, like a dragon,
exhales clouds of steam.

Three different kitchens,

three different hungers
eating together –

chewing slowly –

each one swallowed
by the next.

C.R.

Even if he didn't want to practice law,
Charles Reznikoff was a brilliant lawyer
in his poems.

Justice – or rather Injustice – was his muse.

We hear the testimony
of witness after witness.

But who or what is still on trial?

Perhaps we are.

He weighs our hearts
against the feather of truth.

RENDEVOUS

Your poems were already
thinking these things
when I came into the world.

Words I would arrive at later –
elated.

There is a postcard in my book
to mark today's page.

It is a photo by Lartigue
of a woman in a restaurant,
her face hidden beneath
a wide-brimmed hat.

She is not looking at
the pale mountains
or the sea over her shoulder.

She is reading a book --
waiting for someone to join her.

SANDY MCINTOSH

MOZART vs SANTA CLAUS

I was a six-year-old hanging out by the concert halls.

Consulting the *Genius Composer's Mortality Table* I wouldn't make it much past adolescence.

Know what I did after I found out there was no Santa Claus?

--*What ja do?*

I demanded an explanation.

Pop says (pretending he's wise old man not cheap liar):

"Santa may not tumble down our chimneys, but he lives in our hearts."

Before banging out my famous *Requiem* I had to sort out everything my parents told me or risk spending

my short day in old street maps in lost Viennese tunnels.

--*So, what ja do?*

Took the slingshot Santa gave me and shot out Pop's eyes!

Nobody's got any time to waste.

JOANNA FUHRMAN

POETICA FONDANT

I baked a cake in the shape of a moon, and no one could tell what was a cake and what the moon. When I cut it open, it tasted like overly sweetened watermelon tea and smelled like the shadow of the leaves on a lake. I loved it, but then the bloggers arrived complaining that my baking was “bougie.” So, I crafted a cake in the shape of my face. It had curly hair, glasses and an open mouth that could keep talking even when no one was listening. In my big marble cake nose, I hid my people’s struggles, the escape from the pogroms and the years of overly salty chicken. I loved that cake too but was ashamed to admit it. I had read that identity politics was just the cream-filling of neo-liberalism. So I baked a cake that was messy like New York. I cut it open, and rode the subways inside, eating my way through dirty, glistening sidewalks like a hungry Frank O’Hara. But that was the year everyone claimed to be Frank O’Hara— even those numskulls who hated Modern Art. So I baked a cake shaped like the Internet, and when I cut it open, everyone who tasted it said it tasted just like the Internet, and I kept eating it and eating it and eating it, in a kind of durational performance, until the cake itself was the Internet and I myself the somewhat delicious crumbs.

TOM BECKETT

IT'S LIKE SAYING

It's like saying that all architects are crazy.
It's an imbalance caused by an overabundance of sound bites.
It's a controversial dietary supplement.
It's a work around.
It's a delivery system, a supply chain.
It's when something too quickly morphs into something else.
It's neither map, plot or sex toy.
It's a confusion of brand names – a Disney character showing up in the Marvel Universe.
It's a transitional object.
It's like art or whatever.
It's really actual, for sure.
It's like nobody's listening.
It's like the Angel of History sobbing in a coffee shop.
It's like a connected guy speed dating.
It's like repeatedly misspeaking or an unfortunate series of missed appointments.
It's a building sense of disappointment which achieves an almost musical quality.
It's as if a poem has become a contingency plan or an improvised epistemological device.
It's pulsive parentheticals.
It's arrhythmias, faulty signaling, difficulty spelling.
It's, it's hesitation – static cling.
It's frenetic mimetic seizures.
It's like, like – when you know – that you don't know.
It's like when pronouns get personal.

SUSAN TERRIS

YOU ARE NOT GOING TO CUT ME

Under the mangroves
You swore it was banned

But not Mama banned for me
Then when morning comes

And you awake I'll be off
On the Gambia

White gourds floating
Will bob me to the sea

So cut down shea nuts
Cut the cane but not my kóttu

As I whirl like a Dervish
Still whole still me

Freed from the knife
And vanished from your life

in West Africa, Pulaar: vagina

YOU ARE NOT IN MY DREAMS

Instead you
Stalk through my nightmares

Being a third wife to you old man
Will not suit me

I may lie
Swear I'm not 13 but 24

May sprinkle datura or oleander
Into your bissap

My djinns will torture you
My teeth may injure your manhood

Don't want a child in my life now
What then *is* my dream

To stay in school
Not yet a woman but still a girl

West African drink made with hibiscus: bissap

ANDREW LEVY

DREADED SHENANIGANS

*As always, the poem is attracted to the theme of how people fail to fit.
As society surges ever forward, it is they, it suggests, who offer a recognizably human Countenance in a world ravaged
by the ambitions and fantasies
Of its true believers.*

Trump just ambushed Liz Cheney. We're sending her a poem.

*A poem where everyone has a permanent roof over their heads, food in their fridge, Access to clean drinking water, and
access to free, quality health care.*

A poem where people get paid a living wage. You know, the Museum of the Zero.

The daybreak in the daydream of darkness.

Waking oneself from pre-selected antiphonies, the balab of capitalism.

*The centripetal
Backwash. The cauliflower tiramisu.*

CIVIL WAR

*But the hotheads, those that suffer the most with their own values
Require an infinite delicacy.*

*Trees as wise as Gandhi, the light of the day and the voice of the night
Reinvent a valency the you bends over.
Other forms of life turn arguments against themselves
Into apologies and posses.*

*Subways of freedom simply borrow what it is to admire, that makes it so important,
To admire you. One's language of disappointment
Is not reason to arrest another's. To satisfy one's own purposes
With inconsistencies.*

*A treatise on how to live? Such intentionality
Is not a gift.*

*Grief over the downfall of a beautiful, tall, ancient tree
Nobody can hinder me from that.*

EILEEN R. TABIOS

SOMETHING ABOUT MEMORY

—after Luisa A. Igloria's *Lessons in Readiness*

Dad tucked a hundred
-dollar-bill in his shoes
or a crevice in his wallet—
I can't recall exactly, except
the chosen place involved
the sturdiness of leather.
Anyway, I found it after
he died, even boasting
to my brothers' narrowed eyes
that I was the one who
found his shield of extra
time before emergencies
exacted their wrath.
A month later, I can't
remember where I'd tucked
that bill for safekeeping
(it was still folded four times
to approximate an inch).
In the next emergency
I will be afflicted with less
resources, thus, time
to survive or fight back.
But my biggest failure
will be a certain knowledge
of failing to preserve his
safety net

and

a carelessness whose effects
I must have chosen to forget
as I now wonder about his care—

Daddy, did I love you enough?

SOCIAL MEDIA

I am always satisfied
with my dozen Likes
because my “Friends”
only total twenty-five

I feel sorry
for you straining
for a hundred Likes
from your million “Friends”

Outside, the roses smell
wonderful—

The Romans coveted their
ancient versions called
“Damask Rose”

Cleopatra filled a room
foot-deep with their petals
to court Marc Antony

Ancient indigenous peoples
bred over 13,000 varieties

The first rose petals
were discovered in
the Colorado Rockies
during the Paleolithic Era

Their fragrance comes from
over 300 compounds
whose spectrum includes
notes of boxwood, green
tea, honey, vine, moss and fruits

Their scent changes
when the hour evolves
when the bloom is moved indoors
when the bud transforms to blossom

I smile when I meander through
known and unknown paths
that bring me to their perfumes—
our nonvirtual meetings allow

me to post their photographs—
I receive more than twenty-five Likes
and I am more than satisfied

CARLOS HIRALDO

MIND RANDOMS

The middle-aged mind wonders,
Still searching hopes and fears,
The magazine funded, the editor-friend salaried with Lotto winnings,
My body on a gurney, covered completely in white blanket, wheeled Out of office AA in
Suite E-103 at LaGuardia Community College.

Yet here now,
Part of my dying brain cries,
Shame! Shame!
With images of Cersi's white naked
Body,
Pelted with rubbish and feces
Down King's Landing steps,
Fading to black,
Where all ambition comes to rest.

RACING THE LIGHT

If the light of the Big Bang
Is still reaching us,
Does the light of my 10-year-old
Birthday party still traverse the universe?

Can I reach the light of my 10-year-old
Self, hug it and whisper to it,
It's OK... It's OK,
As I do
With my 10-year-old today?

SHEILA E. MURPHY

DULCET MID-MORNING

Good gentle daylight my reed thin elegant
Kind center with sweet spine
How I love your manifest entreaty
To extend the lifeline and be present even partially
As winter fades and thoughts of blossom
Shift the tree tips as a change comes on
I envision how breath becomes our breath
Hypothetically lengthening the breadth
And depth of us the sunlight draws forth
Forthcoming rain politeness fills the air
I know we have been always something
Now we know our rapture equals crystalline
And constant present tense even against all
Evidence

ESPERANTO

I keep imagining the parts fit together
Even when they don't I keep hoping
We are not a mere pile of puzzle pieces
With no emergent visual destination
I keep insisting to myself there's wholeness
Even as the edges fray so many hammocks
Where selves lie are pronounced semi alert
I keep arranging in my head my heart as if
The moldering connective tissue that joined us
Is not imaginary I keep remembering
A better future as I drew it in fine lines
I avert a long shot with short cuts I hear
Esperanto chimed by one big choir of
Us

ORIGINAL DIN

She stayed in character performed her role
From the vantage point of other roles
Whose occupants remained in character
Sparks nearly missed the skin
There were imaginary fireflies immune to nets
The locus brimmed with salty talk
That rarely veered many feet from
The mouths that issued them as if declarations
Were meant if only marginally true
The din of this replicated original din
Everybody wanted to be famous everybody
Privately told the self this was already true
A curiously altered limelight met constantly
Moved

MARK YOUNG

THE STATE OF GRACE

(after the painting by René Magritte)

What people see is the title,
not / the subject: & the subject
contradicts / the title. “I was
inspired,” said Magritte. “The
subject to be painted: a bicycle
on a cigar.” Or to put it even
more bluntly, a bicycle riding
roughshod over another object —
no state of grace in that. Ex-
cept . . . The objects float, &
perhaps a belief hovers that
the laws of gravity are defied
when things are in a state of
grace. Which brings in Simone
Weill, who wrote: “All the
natural movements of the soul
are controlled by laws analogous
to those of physical gravity.
Grace is the only exception.”
'Analogous to' is the escape
clause that allows St. Thomas
Aquinas to come on board &
point out that grace builds
upon, not contradicts, nature.
Then, once all parties are on
stage, lined up like tenpins
in a state of grace, Magritte
reappears, wearing his bowl-
er hat, & with a solid verbal
cast, scatters the skittles
with his addendum: “A bike
sometimes runs over a cigar
down in the street.” No
gravity, no grace inherent.

from 100 TITLES FROM TOM BECKETT

#99: Unconditional Indeterminacy

For there to be a gift, it is necessary that the donee not give back
— Jacques Derrida

Somewhere I read that John Cage
was a *chercheur de champignons*, so
I buy a plain T-shirt & paint on it, in
the *naïf* style of *le Douanier Rousseau*,
a hand holding a part-full basket of
several varieties of mushrooms. I
seek Cage out, offer the T-shirt to
him. He refuses to take it. There is
a silence between us for four minutes
& thirty-three seconds, full of pain-
ters & mushrooms. I thank him, put
the T-shirt back in its bag & leave,
grateful, but not indebted, for his gift.

JOY LADIN

VANISHED VIEW

Only at sunset do I notice –
the lilac's leaves
reflect the sky

*

Black chestnut ripples
like fur
on a sleeping cat

*

For ten years, I've watched
but never seen
that tree

LATE SUMMER EVENING

Archipelagos
of slate-blue cloud
afloat on fuschia and gold

*

For the first time this summer
just before dark
my breasts begin to glow

*

Need to pee
but I hate to walk out
while that cicada's talking

BASIL KING

From WORK SHEET

Lee Bontecou 1931 -

Lee Bontecou welds with the help of bees and flowers the memory of Celtic warriors, that women who lead. She fights superstition, women are weak women have no need to think for themselves.

Red Grooms 1937 -

If children are taught what Red Grooms knows they would all grow up respecting one another. Red Grooms walks amongst crowds every person every object has character be it a cow a person there's something to see something new. Red Grooms is a magician. To know humor is to know there is tragedy.

Elizabeth Murray 1940 – 2007

Elizabeth Murray packs a wallop, all her shaped pieces don't sit still, not one of them sits in a chair with their legs crossed. It is as if everything is on the move on their way to what? I hear Judy Garland singing *Over the Rainbow*.

Joan Michell 1925-1992

If you look at Joan Mitchell's paintings you see the reality of how impossible it is to give a literal interpretation to what Joan does with an internal, external thicket and garden because no one else does what she does.

Jackson Pollock 1912-1956

I never had Jackson as a mentor. But I learned something from him that is most important. When working on a new canvas get acquainted with the powers that attract the forgotten things you have never forgotten and find wonder.

Amiri Baraka born Everett Leroy Jones
1934-2014

I knew Leroi Jones. I never knew Everett and I never got to know Amiri. Be it Everett, Leroi or Amiri his voice was consistent. Prepare for love, prepare for hate. Prepare for the Positive and the Negative. The deluge. Black, White, Red and Yellow, we all carry the burden of vulnerability.

Ezra Pound
1885-1972

There are big cities and there are villages and in every city and village money and political transactions accumulate inconsistencies. One exchange will work and another does not function and there are accusations and blame. Pound blamed the Jews for the disfunction. And when he forgot the language of the poet he became a small town demagogue. When he used the language of the poet he taught us how to make it new, what a gift.

MARGARET HEATH JOHNSON

GRIFFITH PARK

There's a zoo we missed
When you were pinning flowers in my hair as we
Lay beneath a cluster of crepe myrtle
In a quiet corner of Griffith Park Sunday afternoons
Soothed by sounds of classic jazz from somebody's balcony.

It was magic, the time spent cuddling in a blanket
You kept folded in the trunk
Of your Volkswagen Bug
Like a trusted friend waiting
To serve a purpose but who was I
To question your integrity? Fidelity?

The wedding since postponed
I wonder how we
Evaded destiny and why the magic
Didn't stick—Would you have stayed
Once you saw the tiny face
And do you ever think
That life seems empty?

When feminism came we listened, made decisions
But nothing was the same—Forever is a loaded word.
I looked pretty with your flowers in my hair.
The zoo, I think they charged a fee.
Did you ever visit it
without me?

CHARLES BORKHUIS

SKIN IN THE GAME

it's not enough to steal the sun
from under their sleeping lids
one must go further
one must bring back the head
of the old man singing on a spit

or is that too much to ask maybe
they won't understand the nature of your gift
the love grown violent behind the letters

perhaps you have come too soon
or too late
maybe murder is required
to set things straight
to finally see the true alterity shining
through these broken shards of glass

but no they'll only roast you
over an open flame
they won't hear translucent baby hands
clapping thunder clouds footsteps in tall rain
numbers falling in rows
writing on the underbelly of desire

a letter to you
left on the kitchen table
no return address no name

CHECKING OUT

the dead mumble to the living
as somnambulant minds
wander supermarket aisles
scavenging for sales

shopping carts stand in for us
and tragic stars jump
into the dark pools of our eyes
while we scan the tabloid racks

how easily they've learned
to sneak inside our skin and grow
little doubles of themselves
acting out our dreams and fears

as if the self were a revolving door
the other is never far away
entering and exiting at will
so we might fall for a screen idol

while turning the pages of our script
choosing others to live for us
susceptible to stories where vampire teeth
wander off screen for a midnight bite

perhaps it's not necessary
to rip one's face off to get at the truth
to escape those squirming worms
of grade b horror and mixed blessings

unless one is made of images
and the brain is a porous membrane
unless reality is only a hologram
of a more fundamental dimension

and you are already buried inside me
give us a sign a hint
a scream to let us know we're not
simply lost in the undertow

the crumble of the vast
the nothingness of one about to fall
into the infinite from which
there won't be another you

how is it that the blood of others
lingers in your veins
how is it that you might give up
your life for a stranger

where is it written that you couldn't
live with yourself if you let him go
that you'd rather go down with him
than release his hand

MAYA MASON AND THOMAS FINK

CRIME BLOTTER 6

Unsung underwear model
caught exposing himself at
laundromat. Patron in booth at sex

shoppe issued parking ticket.
Vehicular assault: 16 tricyclists converging

on conjoined twin pedestrians. Out-of-
state grandchild hijacks grandparent's go
cart, overturns vehicle during mid-

speed chase. Handyman waving
screwdriver around in rattled train
car. Skydiver gets bumped after

2 blimps collide.
Vulture activity suspected. Bald

eagle holding court on midtown
subway stairs. Whale or shark
washed ashore. Frightens seagulls.

Guard's water gun blinds would-be dolphin
thief at aquarium. Stuffed albino

tiger thrown from taxi in cold
blood. Suspect abandons his

ostentatious Cadillac after uprooting
hydrant, sprints into night.

TONY TRIGILIO

POLYAMOROUS SENTENCE DIAGRAMMING

The gerund is on the prowl. It begins the sentence
from a forked base in the diagram.
It's roiling with New Relationship Energy.
You drop the verb atop a mini-staircase—
stuff the “i-n-g” one step below, a sad-sack
gerund root, a poly-under-duress specimen
consigned to the bottom of the stairs.
Is it noun or verb? Some kind of hybrid?
Will the four of us meet for a drink and get tested?

For the first time, and almost without trying,
I felt a surge of sympathetic joy for how quickly
you two connected. I think I'm getting
used to this. I don't feel threatened anymore.
Your secondary relationship is a verb participle
resembling a bean shoot, maybe a beanstalk.
It curves below the sentence like a bashful
horn, below the noun it modifies, quietly
announcing itself as a verb-made-adjective.

Three direct objects. Subject and verb split by a long
vertical bar between them. Your spouse, your lover,
your metamour—blossoming in total compersion.
You meet for drinks to share both couples' consensual
non-monogamy guidelines—theirs is a giant
five pages, how deliberate and painstaking,
how enviable—and make a date for body-fluid
monogamy. Oh, acupuncture needles angled below
the subject/verb primary relationship horizontal line,
release the compound adjective!

GHOST FATHER

That morning, a tremor in his hand sipping coffee. A flash between us, my mother and I, a turning away. This was not the time. He hid every night after dinner, newspaper spread in front of his face. I climbed his lap anyway. The pages smelled like a handful of pennies. The crosswords maestro who bragged he didn't need a calculator from the foreman to figure how much steel to cut, that he did it all in his head—wouldn't budge, even when I slapped the paper with the back of my hand. I remembered pitching my master plan to kill the rabbits who stole from our garden, regretting it right away. Spray bathroom deodorizer on the vegetables, I told him, knowing aerosol was toxic, not understanding we could die, too, eating from the garden we poisoned. The wounded slit of his mouth, I should've kept it to myself. I recognized the same look on his face that morning. A twitch, lips recoiled. He was spooked and he knew I knew. My father lowered his mug, nearly spilled it (another shiver). Took forever to swallow. His voice wobbled when he finally said something. Last night he dreamed his father came down from heaven, he told us, sat beside him on the bed and touched his hip. I pictured Grandpa thin and coiled in his Sunday clothes, short-sleeve dress shirt tucked into black slacks belted high above the waist, his back bending him forward. Clumsy as he tried to sit up straight next to my father on the bed. Grandpa gone so long he'd forgotten how to act natural around the living. Touching my father's hip. Why the midpoint of the body, not the heart or head? I was only ten, but I'd already learned to ask for nothing. I settled for a ghost to blunt the distance between us.

DENISE DUHAMEL

ER

Deb, the ICU nurse, who once worked with my mom,
tells my sister and me she was a great mentor.
When my mom's back was too twisted to lift
patients anymore, she became an ER secretary
processing insurance and other irksome paperwork,
prioritizing who'd see the doctor next.
Deb said my mom liked the power, having been
bossed around by docs so many years,
and my mom smiles under her tubes and nods *yes*.
My mom mostly worked third shift
and often told us great, sometimes gruesome,
stories at breakfast. A man with a lightbulb
jammed in his butt. A lady-of-the-night's overdose.
The drunk who tripped on a curb
and needed 100 stitches to close up his scalp.
Your mom was always ready to help, Deb says.
She taught me a lot. Two decades before "ER"
premiered, my mom said her job
would make a great TV show. *ER was okay*
and you can't fault George Clooney. But we
lived the real thing, Deb says. *Didn't we, Jan?*

THE BRAT

Of course my mother was once a baby
who suckled at my grandmother's breast
and my grandmother was also a baby
and so on. Pre-me, my mother
had a whole life. She was last born,
a menopause baby, a brat, a mistake,
though my grandmother was only 36.
My mother was afraid of redheads—
something bad happened to her
when she was little. My guess—a predator
with auburn hair. My mother was a smartie,
an A student, a good girl. Her father
drank a lot and died young, just as
she was off to nursing school.
To prove she wasn't a mistake after all,
she moved back home, became
my Grammy's savior, helped with rent
as her brother and sisters were already
married and out of the house.
My mother was beautiful in her nursing cap,
her cheeks especially pink
in her graduation photo. She always thought
she was fat, even though my father
looked at her with adoring eyes.
She was so tiny when she died—
we called her a model. What a shame
to finally be thin when she couldn't
enjoy it, no way to experiment
with fashion in the nursing home.
A CNA buttoned her up each morning,
half of her clothes lost in the wash,
often wearing another resident's nightgown.
Before my mother's body gave out,
she took care of her mother, my Grammy,
taking her shopping, giving her enemas.
More than once my mother talked her mother
out of suicide. Before my mother's body gave out,
she took care of my father, my sister, and me,
and all those patients in the hospital. When
she was little she was called the brat—
and she spent her life proving
she was anything but.

DANIEL MORRIS

LEMMY IN A

A neophobic voice.
An anoesis blown by mace.
A sleepless judgement.
A meteor shower illuminating the migrant way.
A history slit into a field of enjoyment.
A ho-hum lecture on behalf of victims of experience who
 regard stars as heavenly holes.
A revelation of dusk as pathetic sublime, death as mere
 organizing trope.
A refusal to transform feeling into knowledge.
A switch to ignite your medial orbito-frontal cortex.
A radiant darkness that tastes sweet, like the shock of erotic thrill.
A sand shark circling shards of a sunken green bottle.

MAXWELL DEMON'S TOP FIFTEEN LIST OF BROKEN THINGS THAT NOBODY KNOWS HOW TO FIX

1. The field of real numbers lacking no non-trivial automorphisms.
2. Color symbolism for candles.
3. $IQ_m = IQ_s / n$
4. A Dyson sphere in Type I Civilizations as defined by Kardashev.
5. A costume that only makes me look like a Waileress.
6. Trying to pretend that SOMEONE remembered about us and that the act of fucking my mother was really a way of expressing that he wanted to be our dad.
7. My way of showing love as a form of consumption.
8. Just moving on, most wretched Fustian.
9. Giving everything you can to everyone you know.
10. Beholding a pale horse.
11. An 18-year-old who truly believes everything there is to do with an electric tremelo has been done.
12. Thinking tomorrow shall be my dancing day.
13. Cavorting with a quantity of naked people covered in polka dots.
14. Letter writing that is always before an absent addressee.
15. Faith that collective action has itself become the singing.

MARY MACKEY

THE KAMA SUTRA OF KINDNESS: POSITION NUMBER 3

It's easy to love
through a cold spring
when the poles
of the willows
turn green
pollen falls like
a yellow curtain
and the scent of
Paper Whites
clots
the air

but to love for a lifetime
takes talent

you have to mix yourself
with the strange
beauty of someone
else
wake each morning
for 72,000
mornings in
a row so
breathed and
bound and
tangled
that you can hardly
sort out
your arms
and
legs

you have to
find forgiveness
in everything
even ink stains
and broken
cups

you have be willing to move through
life
together
the way the long
grasses move
in a field
when you careen
blindly toward
the other
side

there's never going to be anything
straight or predictable
about your path
except the
flattening
and the springing
back

you just go on walking for years
hand in hand
waist deep in the weeds
bent slightly forward
like two question
marks
and all the while it
burns
my dear
it burns beautifully above
you
and goes on
burning
like a relentless
sun

WALKING TOWARD THE LARGO DO MACHADO

when the smell of jasmine
flows through the streets of Catete like a warm fog
when the scent is so liquid you can
breathe it in get drunk and stagger
I think of all the years I have loved you
and all the years I will go on loving you
I think of how we protect each other from pain and betrayal
how each night we wrap ourselves around each other
and peace floats above our bed like a canopy of white petals

THOMAS FINK

THE CAFÉ DRUGS

its prisoners
efficiently. Sunshine writhes at the slum

beach.
Terrorist homily
tattoos a horizon.

Post-mortem condemnation
of bleached
pigs, slimy
llamas. Evangelical tumult. “Welcome,
trespassers!”
Termites home
cozily in the pulpit. Greeting a monsoon,
their god, spent,
repents.

allia abduallah-matta

over

I prefer keeping my love high up
on the closet shelf, Senegalese sunsets,
and dance moves that rock to the beat.

I prefer being Black even if you hate me...
my southern roots minus sharecropping mornings and jim crow nights,
minus *colored only* bathrooms and water fountains,
bull conner's dogs,
alabama bombings,
and minus
emmett, medgar, king, x, bland, gray, and brown,

how many punctures does it take—one, two, three, seven?
body jerks and blood screams with each bullet, stephan
blue clothed shooters DA will not charge, sacramento
cali murder consequence rains black body death, choke
depression, domestic violence,
suicidal thoughts be *blame* the victim, chase
blurred background voices ping cali air & ring his cellphone

I prefer not naming the newly lynched ones
their blood still too red and wet.

I prefer freedom and not freedom myths,
grandma's Sunday morning biscuits,
grandpas' preaching and coconut pies,
georgia watermelons and collard greens.
shall we overcome or kick in the door waving a 4 4?

I prefer not knowing the answer...
to hold onto my black purity
snap my fingers to james brown
try to sing like prince high and low without shame
wear what I want to
eat and drink what I want to
no more fatback in my collard greens.
I prefer my collards with kale.

I prefer love, but *they* trying my anger, my patience,
my sanity—stealing my quiet moments!

I prefer my unborn grandbabies' births to burying a child
white addias sneakers to black crocs, reading poems, and watching cop dramas on tv.
my grandma shelled peanuts and talked politics
and she voted over and over and over again...

requiem

she liked to dance, read poems, praise the mets & the knicks
dream of being in love again after his kidneys failed
had a baby at 18 and could still rock
burgundy leather pants and boots to the beat.

watched her slow-grind with that man-boy
at the party to Black Ivory
you and I have an understanding
sweaty bodies in the living room
kool & newports smoky hair
that nasty slow-grind like ballet precision

her mama told her to leave love be
get your lessons and a diploma
that child can't eat love
love don't ever pay the rent or fry the chicken
love sits in the can like 4-day-old bacon grease
not even good enough
to re-fry bacon

Auntie Dee was a romantic a poet in process
found her second love
home on army-leave after basic training
she married and then came more babies

her mama said love don't pay the rent
even the projects charge rent
low rent don't mean zero
still gotta be able to take care of dem babies
buy crisco to fry the chicken
she didn't listen to her mama

GEORGE QUASHA

from THE LARYNGEAL UTERUS OF THE WORD

3

art's long, life longs

It can always mean what it says provided we know it by then.
I believe in trust but can't seem to resist the alibi syndrome.

My weak moments propose experimenting with fact.
Language in use's sensory organ fields the feeling facts in self knowing.

As in tuning the instrument tunes myself so the selfsame music fluffs a flurry through.
What you think you hear here says Hear! Hear! to hear it to the letter.

Which is not to say true.
Just in use.

Once upon a timespace continuing unbeginnings opening are soothsaying taller.
Talking body talks turkey.

I intend to retain the rhythm of fetal fury.
And this is the record of my rhythms getting this far.

I have an animal in my throat.
Existence shows up provisional as art revisional.

Genesis is the story of the body still birthing.
What if there's only one word endlessly morphing all the sounds of the alphabet?

Laryngeal power howl!
Learning starts speaking spelling, uttering uterus, uttered us, rabbits and all.

All the ways of reading it are Babel worthy morphic throat as Orphée wrote radio.

5

rime times a live stream through

Just pacing back and forth in the way a foot at a time articulates.

Speaking makes the body where sex is speech.
Step by step is word by word by breath.

Could say I speak to own the more I'm ready to take to.
This is my favorite, she said, don't disappoint me.

Life is a notion independent of the distinction happy ending.
Biting into the plum with her mouth I felt the sun rise.

Now I can pray in food feeding my poem of reciprocal eating.
Sleeping mind is mind not minding its limitations. Then waking.

Now the tongue rooms its sounds to talk farther around.
This far is a declaration with respect to shape shuffling and muscle music.

I'm being too literal on account of superabundance of letters seeking work.
This is what happenstances in vocation in the vocal sense.

I would be language in the sense of verbs and nouns confusing each other.
Any communication is incommunicado in the interest of lingual integrity.

Speaking from the bottom of my *mothered* hood time's rhythm.

I am would-be language in the verbal sense confused.
The sheer physicality of thinking takes the order back.
Still making ourselves pictures of the facts on the run.

SUSAN LEWIS

WE WERE ATOMS

We were atoms, confetti, confection
a bouquet of unattended notes, then bodies, then mass.

Erica Hunt, *Unlikely places*

we were a mass
amassed

a hesitation
of rumination

cowed
& staked out

at the not-OK
corral

amoeba
& amazon

corpuscle
& crepuscule

gorging
on toil

until the soil
washed away

on gravity's
wave

present
until we weren't

a tender
of tendrils

probing for
purchase
tilting
at the slippage

minding
no business

a hilarity
of animas

in party
parody

self-blinded
& incensed

unsensed
& despaired

in too-tight
parentheses

to merge
as we split

or cancel
the gap

STEPHEN PAUL MILLER

FILING SYSTEM

She asks

me if

I can

identify

a particular moment.

You mean

the moment, I answer,
when I

become the cliff I hover over
and time goes out with the
tide.

Yes, she

says,
that's the moment.

AN OLD FRIEND CALLS ME OUT OF NOWHERE

after thirty years. "Steve,"

he says, "I have a personality disorder."

"That's okay," I say.

"You can still be president."

I'm not wisecracking. I don't even
know what a personality disorder is.

"Many people with personality
disorders go on to live good lives.

Maybe I have one. But I'm happy," I console him.
Then my old friend, Alexander, now a retired Greek
Orthodox priest mails me a 700-page manuscript.
When I don't respond quickly enough for him,

threatening texts, phone calls, letters, Facebook posts, emails, and Messenger messages soon follow.

When we're teens I took Alexander to see my Tanta Sonia at her tiny 5th street apartment between Second Avenue and the Bowery. She shows us treasured group photos of her extended family wearing elegant tunics and pants and dresses and

looking at home beside an idyllic river near a shtetel outside Minsk. I knew Sonia was at Auschwitz so it surprised me when she pointed to a man in a photo and very clearly said with no hint of her usually broken English, "This was my

first husband, but Hitler didn't kill him.

Stalin killed him."

"Oh," said Alexander. "Was Stalin bad? I didn't know Stalin was bad." Sonia goes into her little kitchen

alcove and call me to follow her there.

"Don't," she says, "bring him again."

SUSAN SMITH NASH

ORPHAN WELL

The language leaks
The train sounds its horn
Doppler effect

Subaerial erosion
The meringue towering over the lemon
And then it slides

Center of the NW NE SW quarter
Township 10 North, Range 2 West
An oil well, lost to time

The words we needed long gone
The scout ticket faded to light blue
Find the leak, plug it

Cement-sandstone bond
Two hearts under the moon
Calcium aluminum phosphate

Young's modulus before it crumbles
Right thing said
Unsaid

A multispectral sensor
The conversation
And then it ignites

THE MECHANICAL PROPERTIES OF LONGING

You can't convert that well

Too old

Too deep

Too corroded

The impossible -

energy

that comes without a price

Old Pepsi-Cola vending machine

Heavy lid, rows of thick glass-bottled pop

Lena's Hilltop Café

55 years ago

Roughnecks tracking in mud

Pickups in the parking lot

No records of the cement job

Just columns for production, but barely

And tomorrow, we gaze upon the wordless stars

Which one did we come from?

Section II: TWO PORTFOLIOS

Alice Zinnes

Thomas Fink



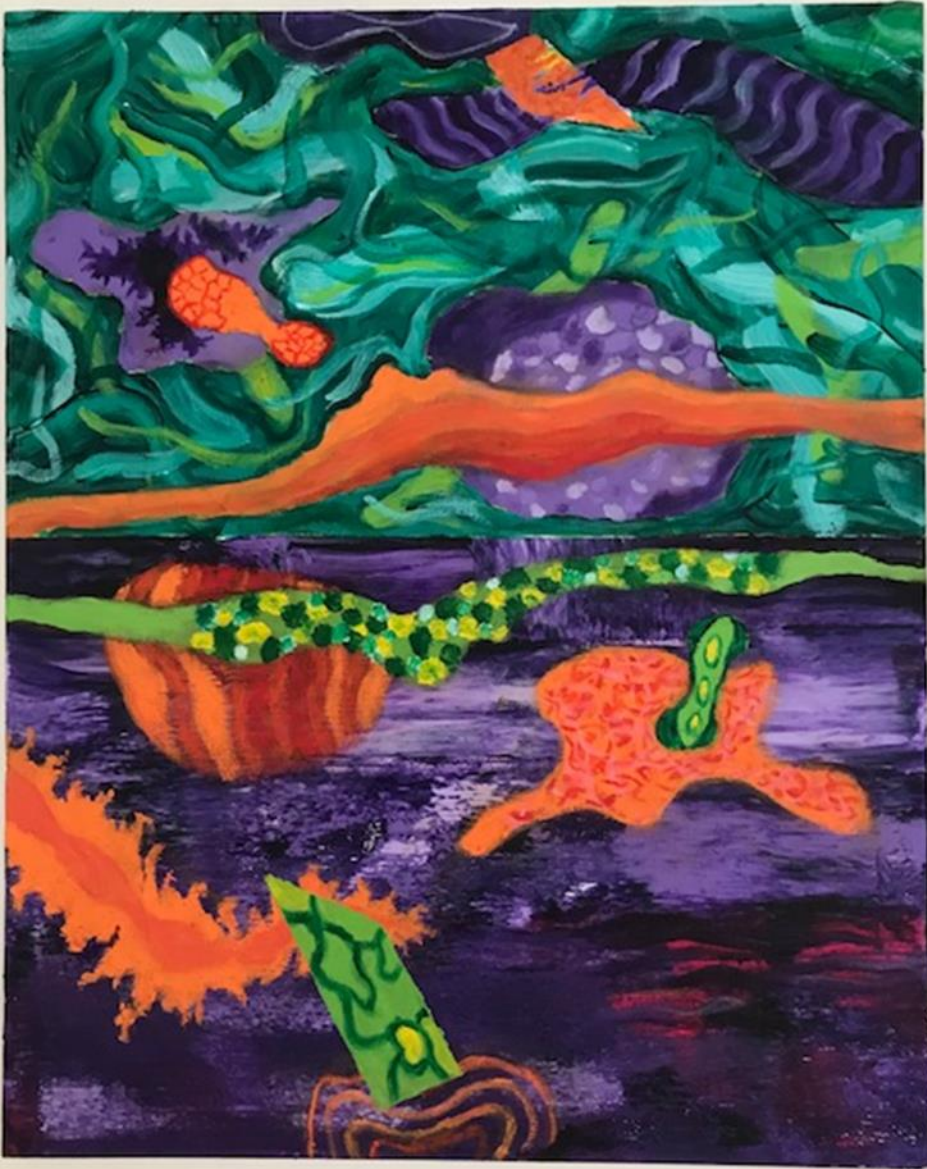
Alice Zinnes—*Lost Tenderness in the Empty Space of Touch*



Alice Zinnes—*Cascades of the Night*



Alice Zinnes—*Lost Fog of Hope*



Thomas Fink—*Double Rumor Drift*



Thomas Fink—*Corporate Makeover*



Thomas Fink—*Bounding Optimism*

Section III: PROSE

Vyt Bakaitis

My Belated Response

In the February 2010 issue of Poetry magazine, still accessible online, the celebrated German poet Durs Grünbein has a long article that is his way of begging the question, as well as delineating: Why Live Without Writing?

I'm not sure what Durs Grünbein wants. The case he makes for unacknowledged legislation is strong and compelling. The confidence of his assumed authority keeps the particulars within the neo-classic cultural tradition, and the writing sustains his presentation; it is vivid and vigorously pursued.

But ambiguity is basic to the word.

If poetry is site specific, its terrain even if overly familiar is the unknown. Cynicism of the world: peace is all talk; the action leads to war. Always.

But maybe he overlooks the very core and crux that lies in the basic ambiguity of the word; with the result, as Hölderlin puts it, that no sign is binding. Still, we had Wallace Stevens remind us that money is a kind of poetry, and metaphor is coin of the realm.

The unlikeliness of Grünbein's inferred closing: somehow a cozy though isolating communality, as though he's proposing a monastic confraternity of ascetic hermits.

The secret the best poets tap into and are able to maintain is alchemical. By turning inherent ambiguity into a solid fixture, that is first memorable and then gives off a lasting aura of indeterminate and overlapping definitions, even by contradistinction. Fix and fluctuation is the simultaneously abiding result.

Review of *Flame Ring* by Tinker Greene

Flame Ring by Tinker Greene
Poltroon Modern Poets Volume Ten
Poltroon Press, 2022

Tinker Greene's collected poems, *Blue Flame Ring*, is a book that speaks well for its author. The language is plain yet precise in projecting ideas broad and beyond the everyday, not ever banal in import, with an encompassing cross-cultural attention in the opening and closing translations of Philippe Soupault and also of Pierre Reverdy, and in addressing his cats named Picasso and de Kooning.

The focus is personal and at times memorial. Friendship, like love, extends past the grave and never dies, as reflected in the leaning stanza of “What I Remember of 2002” (Part Six):

pitched forward
screaming
a refrigerator
magnet has the
picture: me
and vey ah
plunging down the
santa cruz
roller coaster

The beauty achieved in the poem also resonates in several verses that touch on the fine art of painting, starting with “Coming Away from an Exhibition of Paintings,” according to which a disappointed gallery-goer confronts a redeeming view of the immediate landscape in rain-cleared sunlight outside.

The impersonal voice suits to prepare a “Man Going To His Doom”:

He drives to the park, and notices a tree bearing
golden cherries. A huge black cloud or a blot,
like ink on a shirt front, gathers just behind his head,
out of sight, off center, the
point where the sun plunges
into the sea,
half visible,
trailed by
a swarm
of angels.

The title of the poem “Piranesi” echoes the artist’s dark etchings of colossal structures in partial ruin to a disenchanting appraisal of the poet’s brief visit in New York City before he returns to the West Coast.

Everything observed is believable, even delirium delegates an authentic credibility, so that only trauma fails to escape into dream. At times Tinker Greene approaches an alternate reality with the haunting sense of ardent fear the present moment can only hint at, neither confirm nor reverse, since the moved one is stopped in his tracks. “Today No Fog” says this:

Today no fog,
The sun is bright, the hill falls
away to the sea, colors vivid as a cartoon.
A day with no meaning.

Although right away, the negative concept is amended:

A woman lifts
a bottle of spring water to her lips
that comes from nowhere at all.

There is no dismissive reassurance to the source for the woman with her bottle. Happenstance is the given, where the eye swings, with perspective crafted to give shape to the three dimensions. For this, it is Greene’s gift to be effectively selective. He gives full meaning, via subtle revelation, that words make pictures sculpturally defined while the painted picture stays flat.

Greene has shaped visions in offbeat lines. In the opening of “The Smoke of Never” he has this:

The smoke of never
mind me, my
smoldering fire
fanned for a moment
by the passing train.

The section that follows, on the ruination of a rain-storm, puts it this way:

Time drops out, or is infested with bugs
I didn’t pay attention
The key doesn’t work in the door

There is a kind of stalemate here that later poems kind of prolong; sooner, for instance, in “Die Brücke”:

The parrots alight
from the tree in alarm, and
slowly sink to the ground
like parachutes.

A salute to artist Vija Celmins, “the saint of the number 2 pencil,” ends this way:

Deep into the sunset float lines generated by spiders,
on which they travel vast windborne distances,
millions of them, gleaming with reflected flame.

The poem “Who I Was” reads like an account given to a psychoanalyst, then is followed by a massive graveyard disruption (“An Apocalypse”), a page-long excerpt from classic Italian prose (“Slightly Blurry Window Pane”), a motorcycle disturbance on the highway (“The Thirteen Curves”), and ends in “perfect control,/mind silent, heart still.” (“In Front of the Library”).

“Blue Flame Ring,” a long prose poem, which gives the book its title, concerns itself with a mountain-climber’s solitude and is somewhat reminiscent of the obsessively repetitive climbing of the late great litterateur Kenneth Rexroth. Here it ends with the poet’s nighttime contemplation of “a sky scribbled with mysterious but profoundly meaningful symbols” that in the morning he comes to see “was actually the rocky walls of the chute, animated, so to speak, by moonlight.” The zest of his insight brings a marvelous modesty to the whole process.

“Variations of Blue” begins by moonlight to oversee a city grown quiet. This “blurs” into the personal, gradually to bring out an erotic undercurrent, from youth to age, that ultimately crashes in “a hole/as we grow old.” “A Poem for the Poem” is a simple elaboration in outline of how one works.

“‘The Windows’ by John Wieners” announces: “the poem dies at the end” but there is more in the book to follow. Somewhat erotic, esoteric mind-scans, travel trials, lifetime appraisals, insipid illness, various dedications to friends. Among the mysteries left unresolved is the death of a son as the result of an accident, the cause of which never actually comes to be known. Nevertheless, the whole book adds up to focus on the present, as an on-going venture, for all that.

— Brooklyn NY

Dennis Barone

The Lesson Plan

I thought today I'd tell you about Hollywood after the Second World War. Our next three books all feature a protagonist who writes screenplays. Either Henry Molise or the character "John Fante" and so this'll be a sort of description of the world that the actual John Fante worked in, lived in.

I've listed ten—let's call them problems for the film industry. These are: the Paramount Case, Foreign Markets, TV, HUAC, OWI-BMP, Suburbanization, Corporate Conglomeration, Labor Relations, the Baby Boom, and the Growth of Professional Sports. So what impact did these—let's call them film facts have on John Fante? How did he react? The 1930s in Los Angeles differed from the 1950s.

But I think—briefly—I should start even earlier. Where to begin?

The American film industry began, let's say, in 1896. It began everywhere: Chicago, New York, etc. It began centered briefly in New York, the New York region, the wilds of New Jersey where Edison tried to form a monopoly and dominate the fledgling industry. Studios moved to the West Coast to escape his control.

LA was a dusty nowhere town then (though some would say it later became a nowhere city). But it grew rapidly and became America's fastest growing city. As I've said before other industries in LA were bigger than the movies: oil production, clothing, even tire manufacturing. And real estate development was the biggest.

Okay, so what happened in the teens and twenties is that film companies vertically integrated. Look at my other list: Production, Distribution, and Exhibition. All the money is in distribution. Both production and exhibition require extensive real estate and extensive expense. True: perhaps all the glamour is in production.

So anyway the industry underwent this process of vertical integration: all three aspects in one organization. Of course, this required capital, investment. Production companies had to buy theaters, for example. There were five major studios that did all three listed aspects and three smaller companies. United Artists, for example, just distributed films.

And then sound came. And the big five had to re-wire studios and theaters for sound. This, too, required investment. Then came the Great Depression.

Studios found themselves beholden to, in receivership to East Coast banks. But whereas FDR upon his inauguration placed restrictions on many industries, for the sake of national morale none were placed on film.

This is the world in which Fante began his screenwriting career. Now to the ten problems aforementioned.

During the war certain problems, grievances, actions were put aside to foster a group spirit for the war effort. National morale again.

Consider: in 1938 the Justice Department filed an anti-trust suit against the eight major film companies. In 1940, Martin Dies, chair of the recently formed House Committee on Un-American Activities—notice it is House Committee on and not House Un-American Committee. People say that because of the acronym HUAC, but that's wrong. It's House Committee on Un-American Activities and the letters are just switched for the abbreviation. And the Committee still exists. Well, it is not active, but it has never been officially disbanded. So what Martin Dies did . . . Dies went to Hollywood to investigate Communist subversion in the film industry.

Before the War British film producers captured no more than four to five percent of their domestic market. America, Hollywood provided entertainment for the world and there was a saying: trade follows film.

Consider this: in 1937 an RCA mobile television unit went into action in and around New York City.

The implications of all this for the film industry got postponed by the war. For example, the various components and production processes needed for TV were more urgently needed for the War effort and you couldn't have congressmen digging around film stars for subversive dirt when the appeal of those stars could be utilized to foster the public's patriotism and the nation's morale.

After the War, 1946, that year Hollywood had one of its greatest financial moments. Attendance and profits peaked, but the success proved short-lived. *The Best Years of Our Lives* became the big hit of that year and even that success had indications of future travail. Capra had made *It's a Wonderful Life* through his independent Liberty Films and that company released only one other film. So much for corporate independence and change. But there was change in *Best Years* both in its content and its mode of production. It had been filmed on location (not on a sound stage) with some non-professional actors who wore real clothes and not garb from the costume department. Three men return home after the war to a changed world. One goes back to the local drugstore where he used to work to find that it has become one store in a chain of drugstores.

During the war Hollywood was at war for America. Capra made his series of documentaries *Why We Fight* and eighty-percent of all film Disney made during those years had been made for the war effort. After the war—so it seemed—Hollywood was at war with itself.

In October 1945 the government's long-standing anti-trust case against the studios went to court. In the Paramount Decision of 1948, studios were stripped of their vertical control of the industry. They had to divest themselves of their theater-chains.

After the war foreign markets were in disarray. The American film industry had dominated the international market and had realized enormous export profits. Countries placed restrictions on Hollywood that limited these profits. In some countries assets were frozen. The idea was to foster one's own domestic entertainment industries. American filmmakers found a way around this by filming on location in other countries, using profits made there. This is how Fante finally got to

Italy, by working on productions made there. Such on-site work could even become the subject of a film as in *Two Weeks in Another Town*.

Before 1950, less than one home in eight had a television set. By 1960, eighty-seven percent of all homes had television sets. There were two-hundred thousand US TV sets in 1947 and twenty million in 1952. In 1946, eighty-two million Americans went to the movies each week and in 1950 thirty-six million went each week, a precipitous decline.

Today TV, film, music, stage seem very fluid, but back then it may be true that film people believed TV an inferior form. Scholars have debated the truth of this, but clearly Fante who in the 30s condemned film as less than literary fiction, in the 1960s, in *My Dog Stupid* curses TV work as far, far below that of film.

Before I say something about HUAC at more length, I want to say—briefly—something about the other economic and political realities I’ve listed on the board. I’ll start with OWI-BMP, the Office of War Information—Bureau of Motion Pictures. The American film industry has always practiced a sort of self-censorship and opposed and feared external control. In the late twenties and early thirties the Catholic Legion of Decency protested perceived immorality in film and this worried industry executives. The Production Code of 1934 and the Breen Office evolved from these concerns. Look up the Code. You’ll find some of it funny, some of it boring in its particularity. For example, you couldn’t use the word “nuts” because while nuts are something many people eat, informally the word refers to part of male anatomy and that was taboo.

The Code and the Breen Office where scripts got read and approved or read, revised, and approved were both internal to Hollywood. Though run by journalist Elmer Davis, OWI-BMP existed outside. It was a government, not an industry agency that read and approved scripts.

Fante thought he might be able to do some propaganda work for OWI-BMP, especially efforts addressed to Italians. One big problem, though, he was an Italian who knew no Italian.

Full of Life, even though the “Fante” house is in LA, is very much a suburban 1950s novel. Suburbanization hurt the film industry by dispersing formerly urban populations. So too the baby boom hurt film attendance. If you are home with young children, you can’t be at the movies. And if you have only so much to spend on leisure activities the growth of professional sports too circumscribes the dollar figure available for film.

Two more, two more economic, well, economic and political. Corporate conglomeration: the subject of Fitzgerald’s *Last Tycoon*, the sense that people who didn’t really know film were taking over film. For a while, Chris-Craft the boat manufacturer owned one of the major studios. What would that mean: more adventures at sea?

And labor relations. LA in general and the film industry in particular have had a long history of antagonistic labor relations. This, too, Fitzgerald had set out to develop in his unfinished novel. After the Second World War, there were strikes in many US industries and the film industry was one of these.

And this brings us back to HUAC, the House Committee on Un-American Activities. In 1947, a congressman from New Jersey (later indicted, tried, and imprisoned in the same prison as members

of the Hollywood Ten), J. Parnell Thomas along with his young assistant—the junior congressman from California—Richard M. Nixon, once again turned to Hollywood. Thomas, by the way, represented my district, where I grew up in New Jersey—though, obviously, I hope, I’m not that old. Thomas did so before I was born.

So, the 1930s again. In the 1930s Hollywood unionized and during strikes in ’45 and ’46 two unions fought for power: the IATSE (International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and Moving Picture Machine Operators) and the CSU (Central Stage Unions). You’ve all seen the Maltese Cross logo with one of the letters in each part of the cross at the end of movies or TV shows, during the credits. Except for MPMO—Moving Picture Machine Operators, but I suppose that job doesn’t even exist anymore.

The power struggle of the two unions—the IATSE and the CSU—polarized an industry that formerly had been united against the outside. Roy Brewer—head of the IATSE—said that the CSU had been infiltrated and overrun with communists. Brewer said he’d happily cooperate with HUAC and the Committee’s congressmen liked the visibility, the publicity that an investigation of the film industry promised, guaranteed. The Committee did produce two US Presidents. Nixon, yes, but also Ronald Reagan who was head of the Screen Actors Guild at that time. Louis B Mayer (MGM) and Walt Disney thought such an investigation would provide a chance to get even with unions, a chance for revenge. They pledged their cooperation, but asked that the committee not speak to stars, as Martin Dies had, but writers because that would not hurt box-office receipts, but would still teach unionists a lesson.

In October 1947, first twenty friendly witnesses delivered statements. One was Ginger Rogers’s mother. I never could figure that out. Why not Ginger Rogers herself? Why her mother? Anyway, these friendly witnesses got to say basically whatever they wanted to say.

Next came the so-called nineteen, originally, unfriendly witnesses. Eleven were to testify, but one, the playwright Bertholt Brecht, left the country. He had left Germany to escape Nazism and now had to leave the US to escape another sort of extremism. The ten who did come to Washington were soon charged with contempt of Congress and became known as the Hollywood Ten. They weren’t all writers. For the most part they were writers—and a couple of directors. So, you see, no stars. Just for the record, their names: Alvah Bessie, Herbert Biberman, Lester Cole, Edward Dmytryk, Ring Lardner, Jr., John Howard Lawson, Albert Maltz, Sam Ornitz, Dalton Trumbo, and Sam Scott.

Now some in Hollywood, in the industry tried to oppose the Committee, tried to be united against it. Humphrey Bogart and others formed the Committee to Defend the First Amendment.

But the Committee members were smart, the Congressional one, that is. The first so-called unfriendly witness they called was John Howard Lawson. Everybody knew that Lawson led the Hollywood left—and that he had a temper. Lawson, unlike the friendly witnesses, was not allowed to deliver a prepared statement. Eventually—and footage of this is often shown in documentaries of these events, these times—Thomas and Lawson got into a shouting match. Police escorted Lawson out of the room. He tried to claim his first amendment rights—freedom of speech. Thomas would repeat, “Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?”

Lawson—and others when their turn—would say that he wanted to answer the question in his own way. Two weeks later the ten were charged and later convicted for contempt. The liberals were embarrassed by Lawson and the others and the ten appealed their conviction.

Meanwhile at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, Dore Schary and other executives planned a blacklist. The executives and government had a tradeoff—communists would be fired, blacklisted, but the Committee pledged not to probe into the content of films. The idea was to attack the beliefs of individuals but leave the institutional structure of the industry alone.

Later, the Committee did look at content anyway, but didn't find much. In some Warner Bros. films made during the war to bolster the war effort they found examples of Communist subversion. In *North Star*, written by John Howard Lawson, a commander on the bridge of a ship looks up at the sky and says, "They're ours." Cut to a shot of planes with Soviet markings. Oh, but that's right. During the war the US and the USSR were on the same side fighting against Germany and Nazism.

Another example, also from the war years: in *Song of Russia*, written by Lillian Hellman, there are smiling faces. One congressman, particularly outraged or doing some fine acting of his own, wanted to know how anyone could smile while under the yoke of Soviet tyranny.

The appeals of the Hollywood Ten were denied. When a couple of the ten arrived at the federal prison in Danbury, Connecticut, former Congressman J. Parnell Thomas was there to greet them. He had been convicted of various corruption charges and sentenced to nine months' time in Danbury.

The hearings resumed in 1951 and lasted until 1954. Ninety people testified, but many more were affected. The committee wanted employees to name others they knew as Communists. Much of this would be orchestrated by lawyers before actual testimony occurred before the members. Remember, too, that in the '30s, many Americans expressed interest in Communism. And for the Committee one need not have been an actual party member, but having attended an event or joined some cause would be enough to warrant their interest and suspicion. If a witness did not name names, that person would be blacklisted, would not work. Some cooperated, some did not. Some left the country—like the director Joseph Losey. Approximately three-hundred and twenty-four people were blacklisted and not just writers—directors and performers, too.

Edward Dmytryk, one of the original ten, after jail named names so that he could work again. He directed *The Caine Mutiny* with Bogart, a film along with some others that seems to be a metaphorical way of commenting on the committee. (Fante later wrote the scripts for *Walk on the Wild Side* and *Reluctant Saint* for Dmytryk.) Elia Kazan's *On the Waterfront* is another example of these films as metaphor. Terry (Marlon Brando) must name names in this film, but, yes, on the waterfront—about union corruption.

Elia Kazan had been close friends with Arthur Miller and directed the premiere of some of his plays. Kazan paid for a full-page ad in *The New York Times* that defended HUAC. That ended their friendship and Miller wrote his play *The Crucible* which uses the Puritan witch trials as vehicle to talk about 1950s America.

If called to testify before the Committee you could name names and continue to work, but most likely ruin the careers of others. You could claim the first amendment—freedom of speech—and

not work and go to jail. You could take the Fifth Amendment—self-incrimination—and not work. That's what Lillian Hellman did and wrote about in her book *Scoundrel Time*. You could say you had no connection to the communist party and face the charge of perjury for the committee knew what they needed to know about you before you arrived to offer public testimony.

John Garfield, who we saw in *East of the River*, testified in 1951 and they asked him about theater work in the 1930s and they asked him to name names and the tough guy from east of the river played dumb. He said he couldn't remember. His career in ruins, he died soon after of a heart attack at the age of 38 (but not before he made one of those metaphorical comment films—called *Force of Evil*, it is the polar opposite, politically, of *On the Waterfront*).

Fante, as you'll recall, had his greatest financial success at this time. *Full of Life*, the novel, came out in '52 and the film a few years later. In one letter Fante wrote at this time he says he never was and never could be a communist or a communist sympathizer because he is a Catholic. And then there's the matter of the script for *My Man and I*. It seems that Fante did not work on the final script, but his name appears on it because the actual author had been blacklisted. My sense is Fante took the money because he wanted the money. So much for theology. So much for art. So much for the poor, the oppressed, the immigrant or refugee, and the children of them.

Charles Borkhuis

Zooming with Susan Lewis

Review of *Zoom* by Susan Lewis
The Word Works Press, 2018

Susan Lewis' latest book, *Zoom*, which won the 2017 Washington Prize, is peppered with frisky, linguistic danger zones that squirm and twist, play hide and seek inside a phrase, and fire quick backtalk edged with sly wit. She is a master of the dangling cliché that explodes the wrong way. Her poems swirl and curl around themselves like pairs of annihilating fragments in a quantum world, in which matter and anti-matter kiss and detonate inside our heads. Lewis invites us into the false vacuum of the white page, where virtual particles pop in and out of existence in a fraction of an instant, and the world continuously revives itself by "tripping off the tongue" into transformative states of awareness. What's left is the remnant of matter's attempt to trace energy's wayward ways.

Heisenberg's uncertainty principle states that we cannot know with accuracy both the position and velocity of a particle at the same time; one is in inverse proportion to the other. A camera catches either the blur of a speeding bullet or the bullet stopped in flight, but not both in the same photo. This principle finds an oblique analogy to the dual nature of Lewis' *Zoom* poems. Her precise yet far-reaching verse torques between the clarity of focus and the speed of association, between precision and projection, location and momentum. In Lewis' poems these pairs of opposites frequently appear in the same sentence, jostling for position. Lewis' "evil twin" keeps resurfacing like a trickster god reminding us that we are thinking too narrowly. The trickster-poet breaks our false unities and opens a crack in the dam, causing a chaotic flood. The trickster's punning word-particle can exist in multiple places at the same time, or, as Lewis would have it, poetry is "in search of liar ground." The truth is always itself and something else. No one interpretation can exhaust the possibility of doubling or tripling the quantum spin of words on the page. There is always an "on the other hand" that haunts our conviction. How many hands do we need to make something real? How do we account for the one and the many unless they are in continual communication?

In one version we trade places with our former selves resuscitate every which way until, weary of embellishment, you close your eyes & burrow toward the future. On the other hand, there must be alternates speculating on the porous shadow of gravity or the universe as data. In further iterations I will hum the pulse of your hair or sculpt the angle of your minstrel breath, while you draw studies in exploding sparks & wrestle my restless attention. ("From the Outset")

Lewis' short prose poems are written in blocks of sound and image that often call meaning to take the stand in defense of its grip on reality. We are forced to watch it break down in tears at the impossibility of keeping illusion on its side of the fence. In her poem "There Is the Wear" Lewis tells us

There is the fine particularity of subatomic particles. There is the cloud's rosy hole through which creation peeks & beckons, then retreats.

How like creation to burn a hole through the clouds and then play a cat and mouse game with our perceptions. How like Lewis' poems to catch the "slips and slides" between "false advertising" and "truthful testimony" as if, finally, this is all we have to go on, and yet we must make a life out of these ambiguous signals that "beckon" us forward one moment, only to "retreat" the next. Lewis seems to be saying: what fun the universe has with our curious but limited minds. It might all be a colossal joke if it didn't hurt so much. This "brutal blessing" is perfectly suited to our droll state of uncertainty and suffering, or as Lewis puts it: "The treasure chest squeezed like a seed, bringing forth this dubious juice" ("In Praise of Mortality").

In Lewis' poems there is no respite from the twitch and stir of her inflected speech patterns that continually turn back on themselves, quantum tunneling through dimensions of associated fragments. She lifts a cool burn off the shining crystal edges of words that connect and catch on bits and threads of experience. She's after the constant quiver of consciousness as it darts and slides back and forth between words and things—a process by which the world is reconstituted on the tip of the poet's tongue. Yet themes keep resurfacing with subtle indirection, while at other times nails are hit straight on their salient heads.

In the Puddles

of your future: ruminants. Ruminant on this, they say, while you marvel at the float of moths spreading their pall of loss like the mad song of lonely thugs. Who is not tickled by roots of their own making? Entangled & confused with glass, hopes, fur, El Niño, & unacknowledged drones? No doubt there's a pixel for that. Hunkered face to face with the cruelty of your victims. Who is not matchless in their need & greed? Or another salvage operation for these, our left souls. Please sir, won't you stay your hand? & hum with the next misery, wading on through the indifferent storm.

To zoom in with Susan Lewis as she delves deeper into the lexicon of American exploitation and resistance is to discover the different scales of desperation that intensify under the grip of closer magnification. Abstractions are ground down to the specific pain and suffering of "our history and its discontents." The scheming traps, lures, and endless diversions used to placate, obviate, undermine, deny, and outright lie to the abused and forgotten are ubiquitous throughout these poems.

Sweetie Pie, managing your ruffled feet of frigid terra. Minister to bad boy angels & their miscreant moguls, spooning salvation into gawping beastly beaks. ("Sweetie Pie")

Lewis' astute, acerbic comments are the marbling that runs through the red meat of this collection. The political undercurrent is charged with twists of bitter irony and is deftly interwoven with other cultural, aesthetic, and philosophical concerns. Her multifaceted approach makes sure that no one aspect dominates and thus it becomes easy to dismiss. In this sense, she is mindful of always keeping ahead of the reader's expectations. Lewis' writing is never boring; she draws upon a multiplicity of vantage points in very quick succession so that we never quite know what's coming next. She is never caught developing an idea, image, or theme past the point of intrigue; she would rather

transform it into another way of seeing. Her fragments jump from branch to branch, context to context, continuously lighting on new touchpoints. Lewis keeps the pace moving in brilliant, hopscotch fashion; her sharp insights bounce off each other, avoiding the even flow of a lyrical stream. Her method is to condense her thoughts and images down to short, prismatic points of light that can turn inward or outward on a dime. *Zoom* cuts to the quick in its startling crush of language particles, intensifying thought through a subtle density of sparks and echoes. It is rare to find such depth of perception illuminating the glint of waves on the surface of the sentence. Lewis' unique blend of humor, thought, sensuality, and sound takes her poems to a level of musical integration that feels both improvised and carefully composed of dissonance and harmony.

Zoom consciously resists a sense of closure; it is filled with openings inside openings that eschew the idea of a transcendent end to anything. In her poem "In Praise of Indecision" Lewis humorously admits, "Meanwhile, I waffle." And later in the same poem she says: "For stability we should sway, for ability we should pray, for mobility we should stay this baffling course." Never trafficking in easy answers, her poems arouse new awakenings as they deepen our recognition of what was already there by "grasping boldly at what is." Lewis' poems locate and relocate themselves in multiple directions to glean an intuitive bearing on where our mindful body finds itself from one moment to the next. This process can be likened to an improvisational musician, so well trained that she trusts her fingers to do the thinking. The erudite playfulness, extraordinary control, and startling insights in *Zoom* are immense pleasures of the text that deserve to be reread many times and savored.

Eclogue (I)

Beyond the personal evolution of desire, aroused by the heat of the world's gaze, the aftermath of the attack birthing confusion, threatening to consume your leaking heart. In the park, on a Sunday or any day but this one, afflictual. The sun flowing like honey. Skin humming like bees in the rippling heat, tempted to conflate the fecundity of flowers. You know what I'm thinking, you've been around this block before, chipped or not. Until the meal is over & we stuff ourselves like pillows dipped in sexy sauce. This despite the fug of complacency weighing us down, muddling our senses to pummeled zests. The answer is (inaudible). Clogging out vesicles, clouding our fuddled wander, egging us on. Ditching us. Itching to wiggle our toes in the turbid terra. Until this twisted skin stirs the *je ne sais quoi* to allude or elude.

Review of *Rilke's Hands* by Harold Schweizer

Rilke's Hands: An Essay on Gentleness

Harold Schweizer

Cloth, \$59.95; e-book, \$22.45

Routledge, 2023

Harold Schweizer's superbly researched new book is a rare combination of astute criticism and meditative, poetic insight into Rilke, widely recognized as one of the greatest poets of the last century. In this work, Schweizer expands on themes introduced in his 2016 study entitled *Rarity and the Poetic: The Gesture of Small Flowers* (Palgrave, 2016). His recent book, *Rilke's Hands: An Essay on Gentleness*, is comprised of a series of sixty-one aphoristic entries concentrating more fully on Rilke's "acknowledgment of the vulnerability and fragility of people, animals, and flowers; his empathy toward those who suffer." Schweizer threads his delicate discernments through various approaches, emphasizing Rilke's "gentle, tender" internal song and by extension, the quiet, sensate, poetic experience stirring in our everyday lives. In exploring Rilke's poems and letters, Schweizer has found a font of sensual ideas that invites us to dwell with Rilke in the slow growth of poetic gentleness that enriches our inner lives.

Rilke's Hands develops still further the melancholic sadness that we may experience when watching morning flowers bloom in a radiance that will close with evening's approach. In a late poem entitled "Autumn," Rilke refers to a tree "Filled with summer, it seemed deep and dense / almost thinking us. . . ." An intimacy is referred to in the tree "almost" entering our mindscape, wherein a certain primaevial awareness is acknowledged. Throughout this illuminating essay, Schweizer examines what this "almost" might consist of, as if Rilke were hesitant to grant a transcendence of the *other* into the subjective realm. And yet, it is this reverberating current flowing through object and subject that invites the hint of a metaphorical crossing between worlds, a seduction that trembles at the edge of opposites and casts its shadow-self across the divide while still retaining its material form. Rilke's poetry heightens the imaginative capacity to "almost" cross the abyss between other and self, but the intersection is deeply perilous, as Rilke points out again and again. Perhaps only in metaphor may we meet; but that meeting may be a swirling dance of dislocation, implying that this reality is wider and vaster than we have dreamed. At these moments, Rilke's poems suggest that we have become too narrow, and that our ground of reality is based on a dualistic illusion that shudders as the poles draw near and threaten to break down in the face of a more encompassing stillness.

Schweizer's journey into Rilke's paradoxes and contradictions is necessary and revealing. He enters Rilke's poems at the heart of a deepening experience, a felt reverberation of impulse and intimacy, and a caring for what this gentleness in Rilke alludes to in us. However, Rilke recognizes that we have lost touch with our privileged position, "our hem's wave-feeling." And so, in many of his poems Rilke asks us to observe more closely, slowly, and delicately the trembling waves of being in things—of a flower's change of colors as it fades or of day slowly turning to dusk. Similarly, Schweizer encourages the reader to enter a kind of intimate, semi-trance state while engaging with Rilke's poems, and to look *poetically* at the threads "woven by flowers, then by girls' hands, then by angels, the beloved, the poor, the dying and the dead, animals, birds, dogs, fountains, things, vanishings." Schweizer quickly points out that it is in this widening, semi-trance state that paradoxes

find a generative energy. They don't pull us apart as insoluble dilemmas, but allow the poet to "look in" or *let oneself in*. Using Rilke's imagery, Schweizer adds: "One looks at a dog not as through a window, Rilke insists, to see something human on the other side." Instead, Rilke says "one lets oneself into the dog, exactly at the center of him, there where he is truly dog. . . ." This results in a blessing of the dog. Schweizer concurs with Rilke that

Letting oneself in is how empathy works. It is through
empathy that we enter another.
It is through entering another that we attain empathy.
Empathy blesses.

But all too soon we are pulled back from this meditative engagement with *things* in the world to a world of quotidian dichotomies from which "heaven doesn't know us" and we find ourselves once again wandering in a state of "homelessness."

When Rilke's angels *speak*, it can be the hint of a breeze through trees or a profound silence that thunders in our blood, in which we do all the talking. Rilke's poems are haunted by invisible angels that are too haughty to hear our cries. And yet, as Schweizer brilliantly puts it, they are "supremely physical. . . . They move and have their being in our lives and graves. . . . They are being and non-being at once." He goes further to state that Rilke's "angels are sign and symbol of the gradual loss of our bodily density until we, too, are light as breath. They are time. They are time's immanence in all things." As Rilke has it in the "First Duino Elegy," theirs is a "terrible beauty"; they illuminate the transformation awaiting us when we have left this physical realm. They are our disappearance. We feel their breath as a slight wind over an open grave, or as Schweizer so aptly puts it, "we attend to the mysterious vibration (*Schwingung*) of a resonant emptiness" through which we are "enraptured, consoled, and helped."

Early in the book, Schweizer underscores an important distinction between Rilke's *idea* of God and a *belief* in God. Rilke doesn't commit himself to a belief as such. He watches and listens for signs that, as Schweizer says about signs in a late poem, "[allegorize] this ghostly dimension as a landscape with a path and a distant hill whence the leisurely stroller conceives of an ungraspable something—'a sign is wafting'—that addresses him from afar. . . ." And here, in Rilke's poem "The Promenade," there is a subtle reciprocation where the wafting sign is "responding to our sign / though we only feel the headwind." Schweizer goes on to say: "since the sign responds to our sign—we none the less initiate. We sign our agreement with the sign—though we scarcely comprehend."

In reference to Rilke's frequent use of "hands," Schweizer eloquently points out that this is

not the hand that seizes or grasps but the hand that receives, touches, arranges, extends itself to another; above all, it is the hand turned up, the hand that maps the streets of heaven and whose mapping is to serve as invitation and welcoming.

This is perhaps a key to Rilke's "gentleness / as the palm of the hand opens like a flower." Later, Schweizer states:

It is not empathy that engenders gentleness, it is rather the other way round: gentleness precedes empathy. Through gentleness we learn empathy, we learn to intuit another's

feelings. . . . The gentle hand informs the gentle mind and vice-versa. Rarely do we experience the unity of body and mind, of hands and heart more closely.

Gentleness is seen as lightness, a tender holding in abeyance as we would with a bird or flower in hand, but most importantly it is already a giving up or releasing back into the flow and transformation of life. As Schweizer tells us, gentleness also has an economic and political reference. "It is anathema to ownership and power." Similarly, poetry's lightness of touch and its indirection of reflection is anathema to the brute force and mindlessness of machines. Gentleness, as Rilke saw it, is a life metaphor with myriad implications and applications; it is also an ethics and metaphysics. It is a close listening to what is nurtured in silence. Poetry requires a slow reading to facilitate what is subtly implied or said between the lines.

Schweizer's passage through this book uses a spiraling fugue form as earlier themes are picked up and developed toward new depths, reminding us of Rilke's resonating echoes that spin out to new insights and then return to central themes. Rilke's poems frequently revisit the theme that our ends are in our beginnings, and that our fate is sown into the fabric of our being such that everything is already falling through the gravity of time. The consolation, he suggests, is that "we fall lightly" or gently.

In this regard, Rilke's personal aversion to commitment may be rooted in this death-in-life theme. He sees everywhere that entropy is slowly pulling everything into a state of disorder. Schweizer insightfully notes that Rilke turns the suffering and untimely death of Wera, a friend's 19-year-old daughter, into an abstraction. He speaks of the passage from life to death as a singular movement, disguising perhaps his protective distance and inadequacy in dealing with her loss. Or, as Schweizer asks "Perhaps he needs her death to write?"

In any case, Rilke's vagabond soul must keep moving from place to place, person to person, flower to flower, thing to thing. He must keep escaping entangling commitments when they get too close, even if that means walking away with empty hands. Rilke was inordinately aware that death had already begun in the things he touched. He saw that in the cut flowers lined up in a row on a table. As Schweizer reminds us "It is always time in Rilke's poetry. We are always taking leave." One wonders if it isn't the shadow of his terrifyingly beautiful angels that keeps him moving and starting anew. The gentle intimacy he seeks from people and things draws him closer into their circle. But that same intimacy can soon become suffocating; he needs to keep his relations at a distance. Lingering too long in any one place with any one person brings about a fear of losing his freedom. For Rilke, love means knowing when to let go. Getting too close threatens to transform the things he loves into angels of death from which he must flee.

Despite this restless requisite for relocation, Rilke had developed the rare ability to draw out the soul in things. His gentle, soulfulness of touch opens a secret life in things; his poems enter things where they resonate most deeply. But he was keenly aware that when things are turned into objects, their souls withdraw, and he must take his leave. As Heidegger points out, only when the hammer breaks do we regard it as something other than an object of use. It appears to us suddenly as something new that we never saw before. But all too soon its soul, which appeared for a moment, is forgotten as we go about trying to repair it or find a new one to use for our purposes. Rilke's work is filled with things in the world suddenly opening to a poetic way of seeing and then closing or retreating to their familiar, everyday functional being in the world. For Rilke, the modern, mechanized reproduction connotes a little death from which he was continually trying to escape.

Schweizer surprises us by addressing the reader directly when he reflects on the process of making a thing such as a book of poems{ “Everything we make . . . is made from what we do not know. I do not know Rilke.” It is with the supreme gentleness and artful precision of a caring surgeon that Schweizer (himself a poet) enters the body of Rilke’s work. The subtle, poetic phrasing of his inquiry into Rilke’s poems and letters distinguishes him from critics who don’t dare enter into a poetic dialogue with the work or lack the capacity to do so. Schweizer has written a most amazing book, rich with close study, brilliantly succinct arguments, and subtle, poetically illuminating insights. This is a book that gives Schweizer a wonderful opportunity to develop his own passionate way of seeing the gentle source of inspiration in Rilke’s poems. It makes us want to revisit Rilke’s elegies, sonnets, and letters with *Rilke’s Hands* as a guide to further study and most of all to reexperience Rilke’s work with new eyes.

Jon Curley

“H, 8”: Hermetic Portrait in a Patently Poetic Letter/Number

Nota Bene: All words, phrases, and titles herein emboldened contain **8** letters, so too any word beginning with **H**. The letter **H** is the **8th** in the alphabet. The following piece is arranged in **8** parts/paragraphs. Only now do I realize that **H** and **8** are key components in my life, the story of which is disclosed below, filled with connections and confessions that, all **together**, become a constellation. Like the title of my mentor Michael Heller’s collected poems, *This Constellation Is a Name* (2012), this account constitutes a **heritage**.

I.

Last week was the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Peace Agreement in **Northern** Ireland (April 10, 2023), an immensely momentous **occasion**, an uneasy one given the still abiding strife there, for such a paltry parcel of sectarian soil. I am **formally Jonathan**, named after Dean Swift, the guardian of **Gulliver**. May my **namesake**’s character piss on kingdoms, great or small, north and south. I have never reposed in any place that was not **composed**.

II.

My father’s aborted **doctoral** study of Swift resulted in the onomastic **transfer** from the **purveyor** of savage indignation to this son who preserves that indignant mood. Paternity is not a legal fiction, pace Stephen Dedalus, though father is still Other and Ulster is too. Not so sectarian like many **Northern** Irish **factions** during the **Troubles** (when are we not in the **Troubles**?), **Students** for a Democratic Society thrived at Harvard while my father was there in the late sixties. One day, members of SDS entered my father’s classroom and **demand**ed he stop **teaching** to protest the Vietnam War. Although my father was opposed to the war, he was also mindful of his **teaching** responsibilities. He politely **demurred** and was told by one of the members that when the revolution went down, he would be one of the first to be liquidated.

III.

Many years later, that student sent my father a long letter of apology for that long ago **incident**. He had become a religious poet, he wrote, and his greatest memory of his undergraduate days was my father’s admission that George **Herbert** was the only poet that made him weep. **Herbert’s** “The Collar” now comes to mind, a poem about trying to repudiate belief or at least loosen his relationship with the divine:

But as I raved and grew more fierce and wild
At every word,
Methought I heard one calling, *Child!*
And I replied *My Lord*.

Herbert brings me to **Seamus Heaney**, who I first heard read at my father's college library as a teenager. Sometime early in the reading, perhaps even the second or third recited poem, I was "collared," or rather an **adjacent** part of my body—my **shoulder**—was gripped as if by a commanding hand, urging me into poetic vocation. **Mystical** experience? Epiphany? In just that moment, my entire life changed.

IV.

Of all the letters, **H** seems to me most like an **ideogram**: **goal post**, **gate post**, threshold. Perhaps its articulation is the formative structure of a horse, wooden or flesh. **Heaney** is from Derry, **Northern** Ireland (**Northern Hibernia?**) and in a 1975 poem about the **Troubles** titled "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" a horse arrives in due course:

O land of password, handgrip, wink and nod,
Of open minds as open as a trap.

Where tongues lie coiled, as under flames lie wicks,
Where half of us, as in a wooden horse
Were cabin'd and confined like wily Greeks,
Besieged within the siege, whispering morse.

In **Northern** Ireland, merely how one pronounces "**h**" gives away your cultural **identity** (affiliation?): **Northern** Irish Protestants pronounce it as "aitch," while Catholics **aspirate** it as "**haitch**." So if the latter says the word as "**height**," the former says it as "eight." Back in the day, one or the other could get you a **handshake** or a fist in the face—a **haymaker**, if you will. Or worse.

V.

Though this discourse on "**h**" should probably **hit** the **hay**, there is still grass-like **greenery** in the subject. The grass of **Northern** Ireland probably bears more than passing resemblance in color and texture to Beijing-bred blades, and while **atrocities** is a legacy in both precincts, I have not ever handled a human skull in the north of Ireland but I have in eastern Beijing. One humid Sunday night, while walking past the **Canadian** Embassy, I saw a glowing, almost opalescent orb, assuming it was some glow-stick paraphernalia. Further scrutiny revealed a skull with scuff marks and grass stains. I thought of taking it back with me to America for a proper burial. A fellow **traveler** advised me not to even try so lest I wind up in Chinese prison, temporarily, before a bullet would be lodged in my skull. Then these shards of stories of course could not be written. Back to the North and perhaps the **nugatory**: Seamus **Heaney** wrote of a skull in that cranial **abattoir** of a situation in **Northern** Ireland, those damned **Troubles**, conjuring **Hamlet**, sort of:

I am Hamlet the Dane,
skull-handler, parablist,
smeller of rot

in the state, infused
with its poisons
pinioned by ghosts
and affections,

murders and pieties,
coming to consciousness
by jumping in graves,
dithering, blathering.
(“Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces”)

Dither and blather, I do. **H**ow else to go on? Outside the mind sprawls the skull memorializing:
“Skull, the old relic box.” (Michael **H**eller, “**E**schaton”).

VI.

After making the acquaintance of **Heaney**, I invited him to read at my university along with my other mentor (I have many), Michael S. **Harper**, a faculty member there (and friend of **Heaney’s**; each tangential to the **Dark Room** Collective). **Harper** once asked me if I listened to jazz. “No, Sir,” I replied. “Curley,” he boomed, “if you don’t know jazz, you will never know poetry!” By which he meant, more or less, history. I schooled myself on jazz—cool, bebop, fusion, fission, whatever—and learned that he was right. I teach in Newark, New Jersey which has the preeminent jazz station, WBGO (88.3), and was the birthplace of Amiri Baraka whose aura still dwells there and in me. Amiri was a mentor and before, way before...

I had “met” him at age **thirteen** in a poetry volume housed in the same library where I had first seen Seamus **Heaney** and was changed forever. Although I had not yet committed to the code, mode, life, and function yet (I was too young to do so then), of the poet and poetry, I read “**Black Art**” and relished its **ferocity**, while acknowledging its unbecoming antagonisms. Never could I have **imagined** that I would later come to know Amiri fairly well, that he would become another mentor, and that I would establish the curriculum of a course I still teach every **semester**, a literature seminar called “Newark Narratives.” A conversation that began on my college campus moved to emails until all stopped all too suddenly when Amiri passed in January, 2014. But he still lives. Oh, yes, and in me. So, too, Seamus, just passed away five months prior to Amiri.

VII.

So this **Jonathan** (call me Jon) became a **disciple** of **Heaney**, **Harper**, **Heller**, Baraka, and so many others, went to grad school to write about **Northern** Irish poetry and came to teach and be taught in Newark, still **teaching** there and still **learning** there. Still. Still, I would be remiss if I did not also advert to the influences of the **sisterly Howes**, Susan and Fanny, whose impacts on me are as **profound** as the so many other voices I now collect in my mouth, mind, and heart. Susan **Howe’s** orchestrations and clashes of texts and poems are exploding **collages** of discourse and decoration, which this piece, almost a **negative lipogram** with that relentless **h** hastening obsession into a kind of formula, is attempting to achieve. Fanny **Howe** brings spirits into the mix that even the most atheistic reader might find buoyant, bright, and ethereal. Whether here or there, Newark or **Northern** Ireland, we are in the **Troubles** always, but there is always that encouragement, despite the manifold mundane murderous, environmental, or existential incursions that engulf us, there is, as Fanny **Howe** tells us in an essay called “Bewilderment,” a way out or a way of **thinking** it through (threshold consciousness): “The point of art is to show people life is worth living by showing that it isn’t.”

VIII.

Maybe ‘**H**’ can be a gateway as well a **gate post**, through which one might fly; thereby this Curley becomes a curlew, flying away from this scene, these scenes, casts them all adrift, securing a photo **negative** and changing the light, landscape, and lineage. So goes the ghost of the idea, this idea of **Jonathan**, all up in the air, shards, a riddled **fragment**, garish **patterns**, vivid bio-**graffiti** as a mural on a Northern Irish housing estate’s side wall, on a Good Friday or any day, any month, like now, April, “the **cruellest** month.”

18 April 2023

Deborah Diemont

Basilica La Soledad

I feel faith in something watching other people pray. Our Lady of Solitude, mahogany-faced, crowned queen, gazes out at her fans. On their knees, they touch fingertips to eyes, lips and hearts the way my father would kiss his tallit before touching the Torah. Their hands flutter multiple times. I try to count how many.

An old man in a crisp white shirt and weather-beaten hat chants beside his wife in her plaid skirt. Her silver-black hair hangs in two long, beribboned braids. He makes the sign of the cross with coins in his hand and kisses them. She clinks them into a slot at the altar.

A young mother rubs Jesus's robe with her apron. She caresses her little boy's face with it again and again. To transfer the goodness, I guess. Another tourist, much taller than I, keeps taking pictures. I can't see whose voice announces, "It's time for you to leave."

What If You Were Born Here

Climb past corrugated tin houses, some with bed sheets for doors. Pass pines. Pass cinderblock walls. Pass signs. *Se vende pollo. Hay gasolina. Ricos helados. Gelatina.* Pass fences sharply lettered in red black gold green blue. *Siempre Coca-cola. Votar Nuestro Partido. Rudi López Girón, Alcalde. Proyecto de agua potable.* Pass crosses, grouped in threes or alone. Pass a well. Behold a metal shrine. After an hour, you'll worry that you're lost. *Dios te bendiga. Jesús te ama. No se olvide.* Pass T-shirts, skirts, bras, briefs and jeans clipped on a line. Pass chickens, their heads stabbing forward. Pass a rooster, puffed chest and fanned wings. A stray dog and cat doze together in the shade. Do they think they are the lion and the lamb? You're not as hardened as you thought you'd become. When the road forks, it won't matter if you take it left or right. Both inclines flatten out to pastures and corn. A miracle of crimson bean flowers. Men and women harvesting in the rows. One single yellow butterfly. Crows—no, buzzards—overhead. Three, then ten, then seemingly an infinite circle. When the rain starts, slip under a tree. Cling to your companion; you wouldn't have come alone. A woman passes, holding her shawl up as an umbrella. A tiny girl smiles back at you—but only with her eyes.

**Chicken for sale. Gasoline available. Delicious ice cream. Jell-O.
Forever Coca-cola. Vote for our party. Rudi López Girón, Mayor. Potable water project.
God bless you. Jesus loves you. Don't forget.*

Hard to Tell

An army, or a village, of Canada geese—not *from* Canada; that's a misnomer—takes over a frozen beach, overwhelming the green-tinted ice.

On a road trip—to Canada—we see them, off Exit 40, crowding islands at the strip mall where we stop for lattes.

Individuals camouflage. Who is what gender? Who is whose partner? Who is younger, who older? Which are fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers? Are they all together or traveling in small groups? Headed north or south? Each one has eyes like dark mirrors.

. . . .

Once, at a sort of petting zoo for geese and ducks, where you could buy fifty-cent bags of dried corn for feeding what appeared to be hundreds of quacking and honking beings, I saw a goose with a broken wing. The wire-like wing structure was exposed—scaffolding without its sculpture. The bird stood apart from the others on a rise in the bank, its graceful neck curved down, its beak on its own bones, attempting to repair the wound.

Was this an injustice, or nature? Shouldn't the zoo have brought in a doctor?

Keep It Real

On a quiet beach during low season, two women in the distance, walking. Slim, tan, blonde, hourglass figures in bikinis, a Hollywood vision. This was in Europe, Albania to be exact, and who knows their story. Most likely, like me, they were foreign. Fresh from sleep, I saw them from my balcony, my contacts not yet in.

Later, I walked along the shore, staring out to the sun-blached horizon. The waves were the calmest I'd ever seen, the ocean almost still. My husband sat drinking at the bar, and our teenage daughter sunbathed on a lounge chair. People say she looks like me. Or how I used to look.

The glamorous women came near. Up close, you could see loose skin, skeletal figures, faces that may have been resisting multiple surgeries.

Our bodies fight to maintain or return to stasis. Every plucked hair returns double; everything cut and reshaped works toward its original form. So said my mother, though this might be an old country superstition.

The women and I traded smiles, and once they passed, I turned to watch them. By the time they reached the neighboring hotel with the swallows' nests on its façade, they were young again.

Galen Faison

The Native

There's an American Indian chief who fishes in Branch Brook Park. This was news. Newark is known for many things—but word of an indigenous American population is not among them. I was on a morning walkabout, camera in hand, the park's famed cherry blossoms in mind. But I'd missed their bloom, and the branches were barren. Disheartened, I turned my eye toward two graffiti-laden sandstone lions, a gaggle of frenetic geese, and a single, stationary mallard. It seemed the park lacked in target-rich subjects.

Sulking a bit, I meandered along the park's slow-winding lake bank. While stopped at an outcrop to watch the morning sun shimmer about the lake's ripples, my eyes were compulsively drawn to an old, black man. He was fishing--rhythmically casting . . . reeling . . . casting . . . reeling. *Was his intent to catch fish, or was this a meditation exercise?*

Looking deeper, I spied military pins on his veteran's cap. A vet, I thought, but more. To him, there is something more. I engaged him in small talk (Anything biting? What're you fishing for? Live bait or lure?). He answered politely but with a pinch of irritation. I gathered that I may have been intruding upon his quietude; still, I gleaned that he was fishing for small-mouth bass.

Bass? Here? I added this to the things I didn't know the city was known for.

He was guarded, barely turning in my direction when answering me. So I wasn't surprised by his flat refusal of my request to photograph him. He apologized and explained that his denial was because "others" hadn't done right by him regarding his portraiture. He'd become Cerberus-like in the protection of his likeness. Exploiters beware.

For elucidation, he flipped open his wallet and fished out three business cards that unveiled who he was: Chief C.W. Longbow of the N.J. Chapter of the Cherokee Confederacy.

Uh oh.

Then again, that explained his ornate Native-looking rings, beads, and ceremonial necklaces. He sported a foot-long, leather-wrapped braid that hung over his left shoulder. He had a striking, ageless, and ennobled face. It's no wonder he'd been sought for photography before: Chief C.W. Longbow, a true Native American. And not some cultural appropriator, or misguided enthusiast, but the genuine article.

I wanted to believe him but...

But what about that skin? Skin that, wherever I saw it, invariably evidenced the African diaspora—seeds from the Motherland, dispersed and re-rooted. Chief Longbow must've read my thoughts and offered to salve my curiosity. I accepted and hunkered down for a morning-long, impromptu history

lesson about the “real” Natives of America: about Columbus’s exclamation of the “godlike” black savages he discovered in the New World and the common fallacies concerning the America Indian nation’s histories and ancestries.

Chief told me he was a Cherokee Indian. “Cherokee is a misnomer. *Ab-ni-yv-wi-ya* is the Native tongue,” he explained. I listened intently and wanted him to feel I was taking him seriously. I didn’t risk a smile when, mid-lecture, he stopped to compliment the ample buttocks of a female jogger as she waggled by. I believe his sentiment was: “*Gooooood, golly molly.*”

You sure you ain’t a soul brother, Chief?

Backside enthusiast aside, he was an academic (of sorts) and recommended three books that would redress the conventional bull that I’d been formally taught in school. The terms of my de facto course in Native American history were simple: questions about the ancestry would be answered willingly; queries about his age or military service record would not. We were at the heart of the chief’s vigorous dissertation when it dawned on me that I hadn’t formally introduced myself. I offered my right hand; motionless, he stared at it for an awkward beat.

Great, the guy’s a germaphobe or something.

“I don’t shake like that,” he said flatly. “That’s the white man’s way.” My education had taken a step back. Ever the pedagogue, Chief proceeded to show me the *Native* way, where brothers clasp left forearms and bring their torsos in close, to touch, heart to heart.

The sun climbed high which promptly concluded my lesson, and I walked him back to his truck. From inside his antiquated wagon, he pulled out a bulk of photographs that chronicled his claim of Native American ancestry. We sorted through the photos. There were pictures of his wife, children, and grandchildren all resplendent in Native regalia (or outfits, but *never* a costume). I’ll admit to feeling a sense of relief upon seeing the photos. I thought, there could be nothing sadder than a lonely man, with more years behind than ahead, clinging to some tenuous ancestral claim without a whit of proof.

We cycled through the photos, feted his friends: Greater Outer, Strong Horse and Sun Wolf—and briefly eulogized some others who had “crossed over.” Looks-wise, the American Indians in the photos ran the gamut, from the Afro-skinned to the traditional “red friend.” The standout of the lot was an arresting tin-plate photo that stylized Chief Longbow and a “red friend” in early frontier fashion. I cradled the photo, examining it for a long while.

Ok, Chief. This one’s the clincher. I’m all in.

We’d spent the entire morning in a delicate balancing act. I tried not to ask insulting and ignorant questions (like, Chief, does the camera really steal your soul?), and he became less dubious of my intentions. I must’ve scored well enough in Chief’s honor system because he allowed me to photograph him. It was my reward for being receptive, and perhaps, for what he perceived as sound character. I’d gained access into the Chief’s circles of trust; I’d only broken through an outer ring, but it was progress, nonetheless. *How many before me had walked away skeptics instead of enlightened?* Now the possessor of the chief’s goodwill, I as nobly as I could, bade him farewell.

“You have a great day, Chief Strongbow,” I said ceremoniously, a bit overdone.

“*Looong-bow*...it’s Longbow.”

Thomas Fink

On David Lehman's "The Morning Line, May 22, 2020"

In "The Morning Line, May 22, 2020" (in *The Morning Line*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021), David Lehman masterfully sustains an intricate, often humorous yet intense meditation on gambling/chance/faith for over five pages of long-lined free verse, with strophes between seven and sixteen lines each through an extremely wide range of allusions and a continual alternation of luminous details/factoids and "radiant gists" of thinking about the psychology and epistemology of gambling from many different angles. This poetic meditation might also be considered a catalogue poem, and Lehman has learned from and, I think, surpassed the accomplishments of Kenneth Koch's long poems in this vein. Yet "The Morning Line" never feels like a list, as the syntax is far too varied. This is "a poem including history" from various eras, and part of this history turns out to be the early stages of the current pandemic.

The opening part foregrounds the lovely absurdity of poetic criteria being utilized for gambling; a randomness imposed on a process which already has more than its share of randomness built into it. Such marshalling of whim sacrifices assessment of past causes/conditions/effect that at least *seem* to offer a higher probability of predictive accuracy than aesthetic predilection, but perhaps the poet is asking: does it really? Near the beginning of the poem's second part, the speaker's assertion of "a safe bet" in case of "the lockdown go[ing] into a third month," coupled with "a heat wave" that "there will be rioting in the cities" (7) indicates that there can be large-scale predictions that are *not* instances of gambling, since he claims that they don't require "a degree of recklessness," requisite for "a gambler" (8). Other predictions that he puts in this category include "the persistence of prejudice, political bickering, / fakery, hypocrisy, bureaucracy, and the power of the lie" (7). The lockdown did persist into the summer, and global warming made its presence felt. But to say that "rioting in the cities" occurred requires specific interpretation. The Black Lives Matter protests were mostly peaceful, yet looters who tried to reframe the protests as urban riots were apparently from political cult organizations tied to the chief exemplar of "the power of the lie."

"The Morning Line" skates between acknowledgment of the domination of randomness in all processes (with pleasure and astonishment in such phenomena) and a sense of human beings' ability to discern substantial causal chains that make some large-scale prediction possible, if always subject to "unknown unknowns" (Rumsfeld). At times, the boundary between reasonable assurance and gambling is felicitously smudged, as when the speaker (not David Lehman) asserts that "chance determines the outcome . . . in abstract art" (6). In a "little image" painting by Lee Krasner or her teacher Hans Hoffman's enactment of "push pull," the pull that follows each push could be figured otherwise, yet both conscious and unconscious intention—for example, selection of colors dependent on prior knowledge of mainstream color theory, resistance to others' theories, or establishment of alternative theoretical tenets—dictate many decisions along the way. This can be said to influence "the outcome" as much as "accident."

The "slipping glimser" Willem de Kooning must have had faith that one aspect of his fate—destroying what others considered a finished masterpiece over and over and relentlessly seeking what would finally satisfy him—would finally enable him to complete one painting after another, as he did. The treatment of Judaeo-Christian religious faith, as one kind of faith among others, is respected as "a force to press back against the dismal news of the day" (8). It is seen as a risk worth taking, even if one has an awareness of "the inevitability of loss" (9), as suggested by the poem's closing image of "the bell," that of the Stock Exchange and funeral chimes, "tolling for thee" (10). The poem does not mock faith but suggests the inevitability of some sort of faith in all human thought and activity.

Through abundant allusions and a beautiful multiplicity, "The Morning Line" does not "critique" gambling and faith as much as it strives to understand its intricacies and to affirm how it is situated "in that realm / of the imagination that prefigures the things we do" (7).

Norman Finkelstein

Some Thoughts on The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

Today we discussed *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in my poetry group at the Mercantile Library. I have known and loved this poem all my life (I have often said that Coleridge summoned me into poetry), and have taught it more times than I care to count. On this occasion, I was struck more than ever by the dark ambiguity of its vision, which I know many would see as redemptive, even in an explicitly Christian context. I have never seen it this way. There is a kind of Sunday school vision near the end of the poem, a vision of the community gathered to pray, and the attempt at a reconciliation with Wordsworthian nature through simple love and faith. But Coleridge—the poet, if not the man—cannot accept it.

The Mariner is hardly reconciled with nature and never fully redeemed. Like the Poet at the end of “Kubla Khan,” he becomes a spell-binding prophet, a shamanic outsider who, like all shamans, is still fundamental to the workings of the community. A harsh pedagogue, he knows through magical intuition who among us must learn his lesson. His hypnotic power is such that he leads these chosen ones from innocence to experience, but what does that mean?

The Wedding Guest, we are told, “Turned from the bridegroom’s door,” and that is not merely an earthly bridegroom: “He went like one that hath been stunned, / And is of sense forlorn.” What is the nature of the sorrowful wisdom he has gained from the Mariner? The security of community, and the consolation of religion, are now cast in doubt. And what of the Mariner himself? He is forever a possession of Life-in-Death, Mother Nature as blonde femme fatale, who will reappear in Keats’ *La Belle Dame sans Merci*. She refuses to grant him the eternal rest that all living things eventually come to seek. Instead, he endlessly rehearses his experience, “Alone on a wide wide sea: / So lonely 'twas, that God himself / Scarce seemèd there to be.” Behind the Mariner is the anti-Semitic legend of the Wandering Jew, sadistic, corrosive, and utterly at odds with Christian charity.

If poetry is in some sense a psychic illness, and writing the poem is a cure, I do not believe that Coleridge ever recovered from writing *The Rime*. I think it was too much to bear. It is one of the purest instances I know of the uncanny, a repetition compulsion that offers no relief. The only thing one can do is read it again and again.

Basil King

Excerpt from *Work Sheet*

William Carlos wasn't like his contemporaries, he was an out-sider. But out-side of what? He wasn't wayward. He didn't lack a profession. He was a doctor. He was married and had two sons.

William Carlos wrote poetry and ate the bread that breeds consideration. Consider the poems counter-part, painting. Painting and poems are sited in space and William Carlos' use of space disrupted the norm of what was considered by his fellows as modern.

William Carlos said, "I've attempted to fuse the poetry and painting, to make it the same thing. . . . A design in the poem and a design in the picture should make them more or less the same thing."

And William Carlos said, "No ideas but in things" (found in his poem "A Sort of a Song" and repeated again and again in *Paterson*).

Pause

'There is space. There was and there is always space. There was space in the cave and it has never never left our imagination. How else can we identify an object and multiply or divide without space? And as artists we have an advantage. We have a canvas and we have a page and we don't have to work as a scientist does with mathematical calculations.

Statement

A few answers to questions I have been asked many times about my stay at Black Mountain College. Because of the school's connections to contemporary art when I came to New York in 1952 I had introductions and I was able to meet and get to know the leading exponents of abstract expressionism. I saw how hard they had to work to attain their mastery. And as for my writing it might never have become what it is today if it hadn't been for the BMC poets, their poetry, their insightful classes and personal one on one meetings.

One of the lasting lessons I absorbed while at school and in the city in the 1950s was this: The poets and painters that were my mentors, I never knew them to be bitter. They believed, they struggled and it was never said, but it was there, beware, bitterness is a cancer and once you succumb to it, it is hard to cure.

Martha King

A Family Story

I want to speak about me, Charlotte, and the Chinese paintings we Davis kids grew up with. They were hung in our grandmother's house, our parents' house, and later in houses Charlotte shared with her husband Monty, her son David, her daughter Bella, and my brother Minor. Most of those in Furth care have been expertly restored. Can't say the same of Minor's or of my three now on semi-permanent loan to a poet friend of ours who has a large Edwardian house in Massachusetts where they look very much at home.

Charlotte and I were both literary kids, big readers and lovers of argument. I was and am proud of her college career where she was the only female member of the Dialectic Senate (UNC's debating society, which may have changed its ornate name by now). The guys had to elect her president. She was that formidable. Go Char!

Late in her career, following her major books, *A Flourishing Yin*, *Thinking with Cases* and the others, she began research on the family's Chinese works, the why, how, what, and where of them. Her work may have been stimulated by a story I wrote called "Some Other Chinese Pictures" published in my book, *Little Tales of Family and War*, in 2,000. Her paper has never been published—it isn't quite finished and was last revised in 2018 before illness made further work impossible. She titled it simply "Family Story." Here are some excerpts in italics:

Some time in the 1990s my sister wrote a story about the first real art she ever looked at. She was not recalling a trip to a museum or a book of reproductions. She was channeling her earliest intuitions that “real art” makes the material traces of a painter’s eye and hand palpable to the viewer directly, concretely and viscerally. Our mother valued “real art” as well, but according to a social code that places the owners of original artworks on a more refined level than people who had to content themselves with prints, reproductions or, worse still, posters.

In our house this art was the family’s collection of old Chinese paintings.

Char went on to describe her personal favorite among them and wrote that she didn't agree that the presence of the Chinese paintings had anything to do with her choice of career or my marriage to a painter. She wrote:

What we had to go on was the family story: our maternal grandparents, James Keith Symmers and Agnes Symmers, had acquired them all sometime during World War One. James and Agnes had each fled the poverty and provincialism of the post-Civil War South, and made it to New York City, where they met and married in 1900. . . . My mother recalled a privileged childhood in Rye, New York in a house whose acquired furnishings evoked the genteel orientalism of Edwardian taste. The Chinese paintings must have fit right in. . . .

Our grandmother was a serious painter mostly of impressionistic watercolors: her treescapes, many with autumn foliage, also hung in my childhood home. As a woman artist, assumed to be an amateur, she filled some of her time with extension courses at Columbia University, and in 1916 she was the only student attending a class on the history of

Chinese art by a Sinologist, Frederick Hirth. . . . The Columbia professor became a family friend. A snapshot shows him in their Rye, New York garden—a short gentleman with a shock of white hair and a whisk-broom mustache. He was German, and they said that after the U.S. entered the Great War, his German income dried up and he decided to sell some of the “seconds” from the art he had collected in China. In Martha's more sensational version of this, he was facing anti-German hysteria, making his university position and his life in the US uncomfortable. In any case he sold off some paintings and moved back to Germany shortly after the war ended. . . . My grandparents had them framed Western style under glass, and they remained unchanged for most of the rest of the century . . .

My grandfather died in 1930, the depression wiped out his savings, and [Agnes] moved back to her home town of Charlottesville, Virginia. After Agnes died, the paintings became mine and in time I had my own patrimony to take care of. Visitors to my house included colleagues and friends who were specialists on China and who offered speculations about the ones on my walls. Of my version of a literati garden party scene, someone suggested it was a copy of a Song original. As for the hermit on a donkey, captured in bold, cursive brushstrokes, could it be an example of the impressionistic Yangzhou style? Or a Chan Buddhist's visual meditation? The breeziest suggestion, from an eminent historian of Chinese art, was that they were “not museum quality but too good to abandon.” Maybe, he said, they had been hung in Shanghai teahouses, restaurants, or brothels.

Why am I telling you this? On the one hand it is simply a family story—of legacies clung to and gradually relinquished with the passing of generations and the evolution of taste. But for me the legacy issue persists; how could it not since I am a historian of China?

“I don't know anything about these,” my daughter-in-law complained a couple of years ago of the works in her living room. In his old age my father, gesturing toward our paintings, had grumbled, “I'll believe you are a real China expert when you can tell me about these.” So I began to put together the original collector's story for my descendants, and as an offering to my father's ghost. But I found that as the paintings moved through history, they connected my family, my profession and global interactions in surprising ways.

Back to me: Like many in his generation our father was male supremacist to the core. I'm sure that also spurred Charlotte's abiding interest in gender issues. I believe she was proudest of her work on gender issues in China—in *A Flourishing Yin* and more. Another point a shrewd listener might note is our mutual assumption (Charlotte's and mine) that the Chinese paintings are 'real art' while our grandmother's works, landscape watercolors now widely dispersed in Furth, Symmers, and Davis households were, *are*, dismissed as domestic entertainment. Shame on us.

Her unpublished paper on Frederic Hirth and his role in preserving Chinese cultural patrimony grew deeper as she continued. She wrote:

In 1916 the [Columbia] campus was split between a few hundred student pacifists, agitating against selective service registration, and a majority calling for patriotic “preparedness.” . . . In August 1917 the Columbia Board of Trustees summarily fired four tenured faculty members for their anti-war sentiments. When star professor Charles Beard resigned in protest, the campus was plunged into a year long controversy over academic freedom. The trustees . . . even considered a loyalty oath. Hirth had retired in June 1917, just in time.

In March 1918, as the war still raged, the Walpole Galleries on East 49th Street advertised an auction of “Chinese Paintings from the Collection of a Chinese Scholar and the Author of Important Works on Oriental Art.” The collector is never named; and the ambiguity of reference even renders his nationality obscure. But the first lot of “A hundred Chinese paintings” describes each of them individually in the language of Hirth's publication, “Scraps from a

Collector's Notebook. "I can identify the auction catalogue numbers 40, 50, 64, 67, 72, 74, 76, 90. These were paintings my grandparents bought and are still in the family.

I have found no record of what became of the remaining paintings recorded in his "Scraps." In a short autobiography written in 1923, Hirth reported that after being shipped home across the Atlantic in 1920, five large trunks were stolen from the Hamburg depot. The loss of books, papers and other "collections" of a lifetime was a catastrophic blow, he said. This could mean that my family's few pictures may be the only surviving pictorial evidence of Hirth as collector of paintings.

More important to me, recent scholarship makes it possible to reimagine something of the world these painters inhabited. In this essay, I have shown them as viewed by my family, by their collector, and by the early twentieth century New York art market. Maybe I can now glimpse something of what they meant in their own time and place.

Of course a recreation that takes advantage of a highly visible context that the original artists and their clients could not have known is hardly a simple recovery of the past. But it pleases me to wind up the story of my family's Chinese paintings by trying to position them in the provincial society that made them, before they made their journey around the world and into the globalized present. Today's art historians help us wonder afresh what their creators thought about the relation of visible works to the vast imagined past, and their own place in the continuum of cultural history. . . . Nonetheless, [Hirth] was sensitive to something important—the way in which the invisibility of the great tradition—to Chinese as well as westerners—made the culture of the copy important—while the rejection of representation made the art of imitation flexible."

The twentieth century future belonged to the professionals, to the museum and the markets. These have reinscribed the binary of original and fake in art. This also helps explain why my grandparents acquired these works at bargain prices in 1918 and why the accident of their survival is rich in stories.

For the time being this set of Chinese paintings is still in my family's collection, and in good 21st century fashion it has a virtual reality. And there I have to leave it for now.

She ends by referring to an album in her Dropbox. I'm certain David and Bella will ensure its survival. I thought my big sister was surely immortal. She'd always be here. Some of what she did and was is. And there I have to leave it too.

Martha Davis King —with excerpts by Charlotte Davis Furth (deceased)
Written for my sister Charlotte's memorial

Andrew Levy

The Delay of Significance: Duration, Nature, and Practice in Poetry

The price of anything is the amount of life you exchange for it.
— Henry David Thoreau

The granularity of molecular tempos made conscious in the dissonant and melodic intermediary that lies between everything one tries to bring off and what does not come off, conditioned by the instrument one plays, completes its expression in matter contemplating synaptic connection, a process in which one can play games of follow the leader, that unconscious parody of preserving a minute body of “innovators” as an established interim, a miasma of imitation and warranted authenticity privileged over and above the development of the undevelopable.

I sit to think and write on the arrangement of molecules, dead and living, which capture my style in that moment. I begin to rethink what each molecular menu conjures, revisiting the space of so-called ‘origin’ and setting a table of alternatives with everything included, poverty, wealth, poetry, dance, the crippling economic environment, the intelligence, ignorance, impulse and virtuosity, the enfeeblement that has taken place in poetry and applied embellishments.

I sing notes held in common between successive cells by immersing them in water, something in the triangular wedge and trim-line consolidating agreements into indecisive timelines, coastlines and polar ice in collapse. What started from silence recalled as spaciousness, a farewell to Navy submarines under frozen north polar seas. It’s an emotional demand that I have to meet.

What do Navy submarines beneath north polar sea ice have to do with poetry? When wearing chains you don’t become aware of them through intellectual processes. You can feel them. Dialoguing with mind and perception in their entanglements in the way memory works, crisscrossed with connections and correspondences which govern the selection and re-selection of events as well as guiding the over-all pacing in the present moment, the main impression is one of continuous development.

Cocktail music invoiced at the time of payment, comfortable reminders of the good old days. The whisper sent from one’s iPhone, on the other hand, is as far removed from the directness and dignity of soloing and dialogue as a thermo-nuclear explosion is from art.

Occasionally, one meets and has the pleasure of playing with another person whose thoughts are complementary and you merge as one voice and instrument. The joy of playing with someone is in the coming together, pulling apart, separating, and meeting again.

What happens to the relation between language and desire when access to language is disconnected from the body? Can you think of anyone who’s not hazy, sometimes pure light, other times cruel, whose presence is incapable of an assertion or a greater gravity? Have you worn out your welcome

in an elimination of meaning? Is the human shape a ghost, do trees have doubts, is the unimpeachable in front of a justifiable outrage the whole ballet sealed beneath the house in a drum spilling mercury?

The walking dead, witnessed in the prolific array of Zombie narratives of the past two decades, are inextricably linked to epidemics of self-harm, eating disorders, depression, loneliness, performance anxiety and social phobia. Remedies are contextual, gaining time for the necessary balance to settle within a complex process, we're told, is not something that will be available for much longer. The sky dissolves within a circle of people into a finite background we never needed.

The system (which one is often unclear) is said to be rigged. How is the message of the environmental integer integral with whatever content one believes should be the foremost priority in promoting knowledge? Mindful of partisans troubling empire and its requisite illusions, armies of ruin offer paratary glances of an abandoned tomorrow. The sky's immediacy does not weaken though the actuality of our relationship to its immediacy doesn't occur. It's merely a thought that one infrequently visits.

In our sector of the Milky Way, on the planet Earth, naked selfies from warring factions complete smaller images of American unreason. How do mechanisms of social abandonment land both on the wrong note and at the wrong time? *Tenebrae*, meaning "darkness" and "shadows," in which one ponders the depth of suffering and death, in the cancerous fibers of thought and action, in the imaginary hatred of the undevelopable, in a loss of sympathy for and understanding of the human and non-human, accompanied by the rise of nationalism, collides in silence with stultified invention, and because it seems a total accident, if not necessarily hypocritical, people drift into a nonsensical common chord and then out again. The great blue wet world that went before getting the pattern it wanted doesn't fit into that pattern at all. Without design or order there is something, therefore nothing for everyone.

According to Bourdieu, autonomous universes, which are the outcome of a protracted process of *emergence*, of evolution, have today started upon a process of *involution*: they are the locus of a backward turn, a regression from work to product, from authors to administrative technicians deploying technical resources they have not invented themselves. And, above all, they must put these extremely costly resources to purely commercial ends. Such regressive autonomy opens up to the curiosity of the other inhabitants of the universe in the muffled passage of the primary season accompanied by another memory of the operations of algebra appearing in showers of sparks, billowing dust, or clouds displaying obvious traces from the world of carbon and flames. It's something that invites us in and then withdraws in the death of innocents.

In the beginning, the camouflage pulls down one's margined damage, assumes gravity empties continuity, the things on one's table, the accomplishments cycling across particularized floods circling kaleidoscopic turns of clarity. It circles the cryptic unprecedented competition, the respectable stadium, the divine snakes in the grease scouring the arena in a slight weakening, an inconceivable darkness, the slowing down of the silent and slower light that now seems capable of only looking backwards at one's doorstep. A film on the ocean becoming plastic people in a silent disco on the beach of death.

. . . .

When a painter has finished a painting, it's in its real form. Poetry, however, is different. Writing poetry you don't have the real thing. All you have are symbols. The writing of poetry involves an aspect of projection, projecting your imagination into a situation you are not going to be present in.

Erich Auerbach reminds readers in his survey of Cervantes' mad knight of La Mancha that here on Earth the order of the unsurveyable (and hence undevelopable) is to be found in play. Don Quixote's madness spreads a "neutral gaiety" over everything which comes in contact with it. A noncritical and nonproblematic gaiety in the portrayal of everyday reality. In other words, Cervantes' composition, an idealized form of madness, leaving room for wisdom and humility by reason of its multifariousness, produces the performer/reader it needs when provoked to go beyond his or her habits, foregrounds such an imaginative relationship, de-centering both meaning and method as the *raison d'être* of the writing. It's a symbiotic embrace; one has to be interested in what's being created in one's time to allow the individual contributions to come in and be used collectively.

When writing what will never be over, one extends an invitation to the reader to take part in it. What I mean is the symbols all repeat in cycles that are incommensurable—in performance/reading they are not likely to come back into sync again. What you hear are the clusterings and configurations of the basic elements. Basic elements the *delay* of significance moves and re-moves in keeping time.

art isn't the expression of emotion
I see what you see

identification enables the mind to lose its own
in a fictitious individuality

public melody #1

all I have are these explosions

over the hills and faraway

a friendlier way
a more focused way

consumptuous
menopause

the formula comes to play

You need the freedom to do what you think is fit. Constellations of continua represent repertoires of material that provoke the observer to go beyond her limits. Close reading and recording of possible bends amid constellations, however, are useful for no more than reference. Every possible bend in the line, road, or sentence is gifted with powers of containment. But critics or conductors who don't understand what verse should or could be are unprepared to let the poet or reader do anything at all. And the moment they are exposed for their immaculate clamminess, they move on to the next well-paid position.

A poetics enacts the pause and reflection that's a necessity, influencing decisions that affect overall balance and pace. And because the hardware (e.g., the bound book) is not separate from the software (e.g., writing), nothing gets out alive. The need for and release of material is endless.

Diplomatic Evidence or the Peace Dividend
A Brief History of Media Participation in Times of Crisis

"The events described are always less significant than the impressions they leave on the mind and heart." — bell hooks

The Earth's atmosphere is thinning. Festive holidays are incorporated of an annihilating anti-oxidant fear. Tacos and sunglasses, feet running. Supersonic epic movie marathons. Tortilla chips for only ten dollars per month. Your choice of dessert, replacement windows, laminate wood flooring. Flash freeze crafted each day you don't eat meat. All I feel is fear. Businessmen drink power to light up every holiday. I don't feel up to it. It's not my fight. I'm always going home, always going to my father's house. I've lost time because of the senselessness caught up in surveying increments of death. There is no time.

What are the things that, projected onto one's person, possessing no verifiable truth or content, are unconcerned with historical context, with objectivity and the analysis of facts? The cult of current intelligence in the decay of significance argues to "retell" the story in concisions of summary so stressed that its ideas blind the master and slave relationship into a mutual deception and dependence. The grooming process, favoring homogeneity as it does, is partly to blame. It's a sea-change.

Disruptive creativity and a reputation for outspokenness can mark one as not being a "team player." Political skills and conformity are highly valued. It's a mistake, then, to assume that America's prize winning poets are the best and the brightest. "The curated and the calculating" is a more accurate description.

The connection between the interior and exterior of the poem is formed through the subtle progress by which, both in the aesthetic and in the natural world, qualities pass insensibly into their contraries, and things revolve upon each other. What makes us sad is just how rare true exteriors and interiors are these days, when some must forgo the blame for other's faults. We live in low states of a multi-layered world and pay unwilling tribute to aesthetics, aka government, founded on force. Hence, the general notion of "cultural capital" has become increasingly attractive to North American poets and other workers. Not as something convertible into actual economic or political power, but to megaphone for the purpose of coordinating such capital in one's own career investments, ego, and militant consciousness.

This is not to say, however, that cultural capital is without a center of gravity. Stripped of everything but remnants of life, what can capital fall back upon except some governmentally determined supplement long suppressed by cultural deformation, a bank of knowledge embedded in the body's cells? Meritocracy is rendered a spectacle by subsidies to a few big names, institutions, and venues. Some like it, believing it cuts through the grease; it's a form of socialism that's everywhere and people are used to it. The bad thing is that, when you have written something in which you have

found something, you have to boast about it like a lover or a drunkard or a traitor to have it be taken “seriously,” or even be acknowledged.

Sadly, the issue of class remains taboo for American artists and poets. The myth of America as a middle class nation is also the myth of America as a classless society. Class stratification and conflict happen elsewhere, in Europe for instance, but not in America where everyone is perceived to be part of the middle class consensus. But where is the discussion in America about the working class or the lower-middle class, or even those below the working class? Where is the discussion about the hierarchical nature of American artists and poets? Going out of poetry forever, we’ve given away the latitude of the word.

Let us propose an alternative idea. Nothing is in the poem. Something outside the poem exists. Or, in either possibility, we live in a system of civic approximations. Every end is prospective of some other end, which is also temporary, a round and final success nowhere.

My work may be of nothing, but I must not think it to *be* nothing. If so, I shall not do it with the exertion necessary to embrace its avowal. We are encamped in Nature, but not domesticated. If we were living in the Dark Ages perhaps we would not so readily admit the possibility that we may one day exert a final authority over our own natures and the natural world.

The problem is that nothing *in the nature of works of culture* implies an easy orientation to that difference. The effects of disseminating the idiosyncratic aromas of something are calculable. Nothing, on the other hand, is incalculable. The uses to which the substance will be put can be neither fully imagined nor controlled. Nothing, like perfume, or wine, or like language itself, circulates to unpredictable effect.

Every Molecule Pregnant in the Sky

listen inside each
molecule each poor person’s
revenue
particles of dust glint
in the sunlight
thumb of cross purposes
devourer of trees
every molecule pregnant
in the sky

Joel Lewis

Rudy Van Gelder, Jazz's Recording Angel

"Rudy, put this on the record . . . *all* of it!"
— Miles Davis

I worked part-time during college at a store called Jazz Etc. It was a specialty record shop that sold nothing but jazz and had a finely curated collection that focused on rarities, out of print items and imports from Europe and Japan. The major domo of the inventory was storeowner Bob Porter, a freelance producer who specialized in soul jazz. He had recorded about ninety albums in Rudy Van Gelder's studio.

Bob was recording master soul tenor saxophonist Rusty Bryant for the newly revived Savoy label and invited me to watch the proceedings. As I was walking my way up 7th Avenue in midtown Manhattan, I was on *shpilkes* with anticipation—the studio was the legendary A&R, owned by the equally legendary producer, Phil Ramone. This was sound engineer Tom Dowd's studio of choice for those great Atlantic soul records. Sinatra! Streisand! Dylan! They all recorded here.

When I got there I was underwhelmed by the plain functionality of the place. I'm not sure what I was expecting—maybe something that materialized all that music floating in my head. A bored receptionist led me in and I sat in a cramped waiting room where I watched the tedious work of putting together an album. I did get to shake Bernard Purdie's hand.

. . . .

Sylvan Avenue in Englewood Cliffs is referred to by realtors as the "Billion Dollar Mile" because of the large number of corporate headquarters and high end car dealerships that line this section of Route 9W.

At the northern end of this gilded corridor is a small sign that indicates an address, 455 Sylvan Avenue, and a sign that warns against using the long driveway as a U-Turn turnabout. At the end of the driveway is an unusual looking building that stands out from its shiny corporate box neighbors. To the uninitiated, the small building appears to be a home or some sort of workshop. To jazz fans, it is holy ground, a place where tone scientists of the stature of John Coltrane, Freddie Hubbard and Wayne Shorter recorded their classic texts of sound.

Van Gelder, the proprietor of this studio, was perhaps the only sound engineer, save for Atlantic Record's Tom Dowd, to actually have name recognition among the general music public. And, as Van Gelder always pointed out in interviews, he was a *recording engineer* not a producer. He did not book musicians, organize sessions or even select the takes that shape the completed album. For over sixty years, he devoted himself to the language of sound. And although he recorded everything from

glee clubs to classical music, he was best known for recording jazz—specifically the musicians associated with Blue Note and Prestige records.

Born in Jersey City in 1924, Van Gelder grew up a fan of the big bands of the era, even playing trumpet in his high school's marching band. He was already fascinated by electronic technology—he had a ham radio license and owned a portable acetate-recording machine. While attending optometry school in Philadelphia, Van Gelder and a friend were able to tour the studios of WCAU, the CBS affiliate in the city. As Van Gelder told Jazz Wax blogger Marc Myers, “A powerful feeling swept over me. The music, the equipment's design, the seriousness of the place—I knew I wanted to spend my career in that type of environment.”

Right after graduating from college, Van Gelder opened up an optometry practice in Teaneck, NJ. But after hours, he was recording local musicians in his parents' living room. In an era before the availability of quality home recording devices, local recording studios were common. Van Gelder's long association with Blue Note records came through his recording of a young baritone saxophonist named Gil Mellé for a producer named Gus Statiras. When Statiras attempted to shop these sessions to Blue Note, co-owner Alfred Lion was taken by the sound achieved at the studio in suburban New Jersey.

Soon, Blue Note was regularly using the studio, along with rival labels such as Prestige, Savoy and Verve. Blue Note's other boss, Francis Wolf, would regularly photograph these sessions—the incongruous image of sunglass wearing, sharply dressed black musicians performing in what looked like someone's living room. Van Gelder's parents must have been remarkably tolerant and supportive, as these recording sessions were happening most evenings, as Van Gelder's reputation as a recording engineer spread throughout the jazz community. Neighbors rarely complained, either.

Despite a busy schedule that caused Van Gelder to assign specific recording days for the labels booking studio time, he continued his optometry practice until the late 50's—mostly to raise capital for studio equipment. Van Gelder always used the most up to date equipment available—he was one of the first engineers to switch to tape as a recording medium, and when digital recording became the dominant mode, he mastered it and proceeded to digitalize hundreds of the classic albums he recorded in the 50s and sixties.

....

“Some musicians sounded more real on your recordings than they would in a club,” the pianist and writer Ben Sidran ventured in 1985 in a rare interview with Mr. Van Gelder, who seemed to agree. He replied, “A great photographer will really create his image, and not just capture a particular situation.”

(*New York Times* 8.24.16)

Jazz fans revere Van Gelder not just because he recorded some of the great artists of his generation but because of the way he made them *sound*. It is a bit indefinable, but what Van Gelder did was create a stronger sense of presence and immediacy in the music than was previously heard on record. He was notoriously mum on his trade secrets and apparently took them with him to the grave. “When people talk about my albums, they often say the music has ‘space’. I tried to reproduce a sense of space in the overall sound picture,” he told an interviewer, adding: “I used specific microphones located in places that allowed the musicians to sound as though they were playing

from different locations in the room, which in reality they were. This created a sensation of dimension and depth.”

Apparently, part of the magic was in his microphone placements. If a musician attempted to adjust one of them, Van Gelder would storm out of the recording booth to scold the musician and to reconfigure the microphone. He wore gloves when he recorded (plain old brown work gloves and not the white gloves that seem to be part of any anecdote about recording at Van Gelder Studio).

....

Although Van Gelder engineered for a large number of labels, he is best known for his work with the Blue Note and Prestige labels. The former was begun in 1939 by two German émigrés, Alfred Lion and Max Margulis, who came to the US because of the threat of Nazism. Margulis, who provided the seed money to get the label off the ground, soon left the label and another refugee, fleeing Nazism, Francis Wolf, joined with Lion. Early Blue Note recordings were of classic jazz stars like Meade Luxe Lewis, Albert Ammons and Sidney Bechet. It was not until after World War II that the label began recording contemporary jazz. Through the advice of talent scout Ike Quebec, the label began recording artists such as Thelonius Monk, Art Blakey and Horace Silver.

Until it was sold to Liberty records in the mid-60s, Blue Note was the place to hear contemporary jazz in an almost purist setting. In addition, Lion and Wolf treated their artists fairly and with respect. In an era when the big “money guys” in jazz were white stars like George Shearing and Dave Brubeck, Blue Note almost exclusively recorded black musicians.

Prestige Records was a somewhat shaggier outfit. Its founder, Bob Weinstock, was also initially a fan of classic jazz. He began as a teenage record dealer renting space inside the Jazz Record Center on West 47th Street, and selling mail order through ads placed in the Record Changer magazine. He hung out at the Royal Roost, a former chicken restaurant turned jazz club located at 1800 Broadway in Manhattan. With jazz DJ Symphony Sid Torin booking acts, the Roost became the epicenter of the new jazz on the scene., Weinstock, ever the entrepreneur, realized that many of the acts presented at the Roost were just too far out to attract the interest of mainstream labels, so he got into the recording business. His first recordings were with the most far-out guy on the scene, the blind pianist Lennie Tristano.

Both labels were attracted to Van Gelder’s studios for similar reasons. The cost of recording at Van Gelder was considerably cheaper than New York studios; he had a rather low overhead, working initially out of his parents’ home, later at his own property in Englewood Cliffs, purchased just before a corporate boom on Sylvan Avenue.

Although the Van Gelder studios did record classical music for Vox, and did a significant amount of pop music for C.T.I. Records in the 70s, it was primarily a jazz studio. As a fan and a teenage player, he knew how the instruments functioned in a jazz ensemble and what they should sound like. His particular accomplishment was in his accurate rendering of the sound of a jazz piano and the drum kit.

No better example of this innovation was his work with John Coltrane’s Quartet and Quintet. Coltrane, of course, was no stranger to either of Van Gelder’s studios. He recorded consistently as a sideman as well as leader at the Friday sessions reserved for the Prestige label. The sessions ranged

from standard issue hard bop to the magnificent performances the Miles Davis Quintet recorded to fulfill contractual obligations that allowed him to record with Columbia Records—Miles treating the sessions almost like a night club date, calling off tunes from the band’s book without a second take.

And, of course, there was Coltrane’s session for Blue Note, *Blue Train*. The record was made during Coltrane’s residency as a member of the Thelonius Monk Quartet, at the Five Spot Café—a breakthrough period for the saxophonist. Coltrane brought four originals and a standard to the session. Van Gelder captured the ensemble magnificently, from the triple horn front line to Kenny Drew’s lucid piano solos. It is no wonder that when Coltrane was signed to Impulse Records, a few years later, he said “Let’s use Rudy!” in response to producer Bob Thiele’s query about possible recording studios.

The bulk of Coltrane’s recordings for Impulse were done at Van Gelder’s Englewood Cliffs studio. The great achievement of Van Gelder’s work with Coltrane is the sound design created for the quartet. This was a group, especially when Eric Dolphy augmented the ensemble on his range of instruments, which often played a single tune for well over an hour. In addition to the musicians’ stamina on the bandstand, they played with such fervor as to cause some patrons to get out of their chairs and raise their hands up towards them, as if they were at a black Pentecostal service.

Van Gelder managed to balance Coltrane’s acoustic machine, bringing out the musicality and nuance of Elvin Jones’ radical approach to drumming, McCoy Tyner’s solid and melodic accompaniment and Jimmy Garrison’s earthy and straight forward bass (which always seemed to me mixed low as to be an underlying presence). The album simply titled “Coltrane” (Impulse AS-21) is a good example of Van Gelder’s craft. The album marks the first full recording of the Classic Quartet once Jimmy Garrison joined this working unit. In contrast to the recording strategies of the smaller labels, “Coltrane” is recorded in 4 separate sessions between April and June of 1962. Impulse! was a subsidiary label of ABC Records and allowed more studio time to complete albums—Prestige and Blue Note both insisted on recording an album in one day in two three-hour sessions (the musician union’s minimum time allowed for recording an LP).

The highlight of the album is the fourteen-minute reconstruction of the standard “Out of This World” as a modal workout much in the manner of “My Favorite Things.” This extended performance is a good place to hear how Van Gelder created portraits of performance. Overall, there is great presence on the recording—this was even evident to me as a fifteen year old playing this LP on a very cheap stereo. I often danced to this recording by myself in my teenaged basement lair.

It is worth comparing this recording with the Classic Quartet in a slightly earlier version made for Atlantic records. Although Coltrane stayed with Atlantic for about two and a half years, he produced enough material to create a seven-CD box set. He also had a number of popular records (there were Coltrane 45s that were made for use in jukeboxes), which were often released in edited renderings. However, the Atlantic recordings of Coltrane rarely get the attention of the earlier Prestige or later Impulses.

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The great era of classic jazz sessions at Van Gelder Studios came to an end beginning in the late 60s. Blue Note and Prestige were purchased by larger entities that were little interested in acoustic jazz

and shifted much of their operations to the West Coast. Verve and Savoy ceased recording jazz altogether. Impulse shifted their operations to Los Angeles before closing up shop in the late 70s.

Van Gelder's main client in the 1970s was CTI Records. Founded by former Impulse and Verve producer Creed Taylor as a subsidiary of A&M records, the label went independent and became one of the great commercial success stories in jazz history.

Taylor came upon the strategy of the jazz label as a first class operation. He signed up artists whose commercial potential hadn't been fully realized—musicians like George Benson, Freddie Hubbard, Hubert Laws and Stanley Turrentine. He hired Don Sebesky to arrange for large orchestras and hired the best session musicians in New York City. The albums were gorgeously packaged – almost all were gatefold covers and the great color photographer Pete Turner created a series of startling images that caught the attention of anyone browsing in the jazz bins of a record store.

Taylor chose Van Gelder Studios to record and in the heyday of his label he had exclusive use of the studio. Many of the CTI records really sold numbers like pop albums and made performers like Hubbard and Laws names that more sophisticated pop fans recognized.

CTI, however, is something of a *schanda* to straight-ahead jazz fans. Folks who bought Freddie Hubbard's classic Blue Note dates mostly disdained his CTI albums with their rockish beats and lush arrangements. I think that the serious jazz coterie missed the point – with very few exceptions, CTI records were made for the casual jazz listener who heard something he liked on one of the now extinct commercial jazz radio stations and picked up a copy at the local record shop, where CTI records were usually on full display. The sophisticated packaging suggested to the purchaser that he (and it really was often a "he") had made an educated decision to buy the album. You could plop a CTI record onto a turntable at a party and be assured that no one would yell "Turn that OFF" which was the experience of many a Coltrane or Ornette Coleman fan.

Van Gelder, for his part, was pleased with his work for CTI. In addition to a packed recording schedule, Van Gelder had a chance to work with full-scale orchestras (usually including a string section), electric instruments and vocalists. The biggest hit that Van Gelder ever engineered was by a Brazilian arranger/composer named Eumir Deodato. Going under his last name only, he recorded a disco-y version of Strauss's Also Sprach Zarathustra, known at large from Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey. The single rose to #2 on the charts and the album, where the single appeared on, also went Gold.

These CTI records, especially recordings from the early years of the label, still sound fresh and the best of them are far more listenable than detractors from 45 years ago would admit. The records are free from gimmicks and, if you take them on their own terms, are well-made examples of pop jazz.

The last phase of Van Gelder's career as a sound engineer involved remastering the many albums recorded at his studio. When the Compact Disk was introduced in the early 80s as a new listening medium, many back catalog items suffered from poor remastering. Sometimes, second generation masters were used as the remastering source. And, in the main, many engineers were still learning the intricacies of digital recording, which was introduced only a few years ahead of the CD.

Kimberly Lyons

The Spaniards Inn

V. and I stood on the white bridge that arched over the Thames one brilliant blue November late morning. The sun illuminated every object, bathing V.'s lined, expressive face and eyes as he stood against the bridge gazing away. I looked down at the Thames' assured sweep of lapping waters and the gravel-lined shore below us. Such was my longing to connect with every stratum of British chronological history that I would have immediately found my way to the shore and waded in, joining the mudlarks searching for finds on the sands and in the shallow mudflats if they would not have chased me away from there for ineptitude and lack of a license.

Instead, I stared as if hypnotized at the farther shore, trying to place every palace, literary home, and floating barge I'd ever read of. The Stendhal syndrome could very well have ensued here as it had in Florence when I was nineteen, for all my fevered receptivity. Bu, London was hectic and one's reveries were interrupted by the throngs of active people. The agitated human intercourse animated the streets, but that didn't prevent me from walking about dreamily and agitated myself, bumping into the hurrying passersby. I couldn't sleep for the pressure to constantly walk and stare. I had requested a "sign." Of what exactly I couldn't say but it was along the frequency of an indication that some etheric signal awaited me here, or some part of past selves or other selves I had known lingered, or that my secret researches into London's labyrinthian literary lives would manifest a truth.

Two incidents occurred. A group of young boys came up to me on one of these manic walking outings and one of them, a red-haired lad, stepped forward and asked me if I knew where New Oxford Street was. As I pointed out the direction to them, they ran off laughing gleefully. That night, I entered the National Portrait Gallery alone and wandered. I was astonished to see the portrait of "William Shakespeare" positioned accessibly near a door with only a young woman sitting in a chair reading a book as guardian in the otherwise empty room. I felt on my back the eyes of the sensitive, young man in the portrait, whoever he may be, so similar in spirit to a few of the poets of my acquaintance as I turned and hurried away.

The next day V. and I entered the tube and rode out to the Hampstead. It was my idea to go to Keats's House. It was a quiet Sunday, and the main street of the town was subdued. I persuaded V. to go into a pharmacy with me where I purchased, after lengthy deliberation, a fine, brown pocket comb—a particularly odd and impulsive purchase as I rarely combed my hair. I did not realize then as I did later that we stood only feet away from the founding address of the Societas Rosacruziana in Anglia, and not so far from the home, for a period, of the novelist Charles Williams. My researches had not yet brought me to their doors. We then walked for quite a while across Greenhill Road, then up Downshire Hill, past the Rosslyn Hill Chapel, Hopkins House, and St. John's Church until we arrived at the light lemon-colored pair of brick houses marked by several arched doors and set within lawns, trees, and a garden.

As we stepped into the graceful house with its quiet, reflective large rooms, and then squeezed into the passageways of the adjacent house and tramped up the narrow wooden stairs, I began to

succumb to the mood of the house, which induced a kind of ecstatic reverie that was predictable, for I was as culpable as an eager hypnosis patient and yet the feeling, however intangible, was authentic. The personality of John Keats manifested as a slow-working, gentle force upon me, a light-filled antidote to the oppressive sadness of the wallpapered dark apartment in Rome where Keats had died.

How easily I could imagine the voices of the young men in the house shouting back and forth, even if one of the company was ill and lay abed, for the others would have kept his spirits up with ripostes and jocular comments so that he would have laughed and told them to stop because it hurt so.

Somehow, I got wind of a nearby pub called the Spaniards Inn. We called for a cab and entered into the roomy, solid black car that felt as though we were driving in an old-fashioned wardrobe, and passed under the thick, cool trees to a roundabout in the bright Sunday light and up Spaniards Street to the centuries-old brick building around the curve.

V. and I entered the low-ceilinged, smoky, wood-paneled rooms of the white-walled pub through the garden. I was in a state of high excitement. Had Keats and Byron, perhaps, really come to the Spaniards Inn, as the literature and notices on the wall of the inn pronounced? By horse-drawn carriage the ride might be thirty minutes from Hampstead. It was possible.

V. and I sat in a high-backed wooden booth and gazed around. I was completely absorbed in the Keats-Brown-Brawne atmosphere that was now conjured in my brain, but families were gathering at the oak tables, obviously here for a weekend meet-up. While there was a high, voracious energy present, I could also feel another tone, a sadness, or some register that came through. V. and I ate sandwiches and drank beer in silence.

How strange traveling with a companion can be. One strives in nearly every delineated moment for union and shared sensation. In every other moment, one strives away, reaching for renewed self-definition, aloneness, and coordinates. I found that V. and I often went our own ways while traveling. He would establish a routine, an orderly path immediately, choosing a walk, café, and side of the room where he lay his things neatly while I spun out, ingesting every sight, food and experience without evaluation. Everything was astonishing and I hoarded every pamphlet, candy bar wrapping, and small bar of soap that came my way.

And yet there were high moments, as in everyday life, remained elated and brilliantly clarified in memory, like the single afternoon in Venice, when away from family, we walked in the silent, sunlit, Dorsoduro district and then squeezed into a shadowy, empty passageway and stood together before a door and rang the bell of the house where the poet, long dead, had once lived. As we stood there a sound, a sifting, a shift, a click in the silence occurred and a single feather drifted downward from the upper stories with a drift of grit that came along with it, sparkling in the swath of sunlight visible between the walls of the buildings. We stood, entranced in the magical commingling silence for no one ever answered the bell.

We decided to attempt the walk back to the tube station. V. was certain that he could sniff out a direction and so we paid up and started off down the Spaniard Road in the long, midafternoon November sunlight. It was a narrow, black-topped road with high hedges on either side and, at one point, we suddenly and impulsively broke away from the road and entered into a kind of small

arbor-like, snarled, wild-vine entry to Hampstead Heath, which lay to our left. I cannot recall what prompted this move away from our path except that without a map you might persuade yourself that cutting through the Heath would be a short-cut to the station. In fact, this was absolutely not the case. If we had only stayed on the road and continued on to Heath Street, we would have been at the station in twenty-five minutes but, instead, we entered a narrow, brambly high hedge blazing with hot and buzzing bees in utter quiet.

We were now in an extensive meadow. Instantly lost, the road “behind” us was now felt to be on the other side of an impassable wall. I stood in the gold-bathed high grasses and looked across the meadow and it was in this instant of coming through the hedge, disoriented, hot, and snagged by brambles of the thicket that I experienced communion with John Keats, for I felt certain that he had done just the same and was just ahead of us, parting the branches with a straw in his teeth yet out of sight, or perhaps it was the streaks of hot light that confounded the immaterial for

Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowingwind.

This day we became lost and clambered across the Heath for close to two hours, each quiet in thought. I didn’t know that afternoon, as I do know, that the poet and novelist and artist Mina Loy who wrote these lines in her poem “Lunar Baedeker”—

Delirious Avenues
lit
with the chandelier souls
of infusoria

—had been born in 1892, in a house on a tree-lined street named Compayne Gardens, just a twenty-five minute walk from where we wandered and only a thirty-five minute walk to Lord Mansfield’s Park.

We didn’t know then— as I know now— that on that wandering walk we may have— very likely, surely we did—crisscrossed in air and ground the path on the Heath that Keats took one April afternoon in 1819 where, “in the lane that winds by Lord’s Mansfields Park . . . I met Coleridge.” The two poets meeting for the first and only time walked along, and, as Keats remembered later, Coleridge discoursed on various things on his mind including “metaphysics” and “different genera of dream. . . .” Would the fine threads between them, etheric strands of shared poetical concern, somehow remain through the nearly two hundred years that have since passed as an invisible yet durable exhalation, or protean and self-sustaining nimbus of feeling “borne aloft /or sinking as the light wind lives or dies.” And might we two stumbling poets have passed through their psychological web of filaments so that “those essences . . . haunt us still . . . will never pass into nothingness.”

Sandy McIntosh

Korth, or, An Ethical Problem Resolved

In a professional collaboration, Professor A of the Southern University and Professor B of the Northern University had turned the philosophy of Ethics from a speculative discipline to one that could be expressed concisely and absolutely in mathematical formulae.

Korth was a student of Professor B who dreamed of an academic career. He was delegated by the professors to be their go-between, carrying folders containing their deliberations back and forth. The distance between the two universities required a full day of travel on foot, but Korth was young and fit, with a muscled torso that both professors had noticed early on.

One day, Korth arrived at Professor B's office to find the professor nervously opening and closing his desk drawers. "I've run out of paper on which to write my new equations," said the professor. "It is urgent that you get them to Professor A immediately."

Korth was resourceful. He carried no paper, but he did have one writing surface available: his fresh white shirt. "Write your equations on the back of my shirt and I'll wear them over to Professor A."

Professor B surmised that this was a good idea. He had Korth turn his back, and, with his felt pen, he wrote out the series of equations in a minute hand.

"You're all set," Professor B told Korth. "Run along."

Korth set out. Several times on the journey he was stopped by students asking about the formulae on the back of his shirt. "What is that for?" one asked.

Korth was proud of his role in advancing Ethics from philosophy to science and thought stupid questions like that deserved evasive or sarcastic responses. "It's to make beer, a hearty Stout," Korth answered.

When Korth arrived at Professor A's office at the Southern University, the professor pronounced Korth's shirt with all its equations "charming." He quickly copied them and suggested that Korth take off his shirt and wash it in the sink. "Just for fun," said the professor, "I'll write my equations on the back of your shirt, too, and you'll take them to Professor B."

Korth was not inclined to remove his shirt. The professor had made a similar request recently when he had offered to give Korth a vigorous backrub, arguing that after his long walk between universities, Korth must be tired and achy.

Korth thanked the professor but declined, suspecting his intentions.

The professor shrugged. “Well,” he said. “There seems to be plenty of room for my equations on the front of your shirt.” So, he took his ball-point pen and, against Korth’s protest, scratched the equations into the front of Korth’s shirt, dotting his “i’s” in an unpleasant and painful way. “Off you go,” he said, pointing Korth toward the office door.

When Korth arrived at the Northern University and found Professor B, the professor chuckled when he saw that Professor A had written his equations on the front of the shirt, making this a game.

“Let’s continue playing, shall we?” said the professor. “Now you just take off that shirt and your pants, as well, and I’ll have them cleaned. While we’re waiting, how about a vigorous massage?”

Korth had anticipated this. From his backpack he extracted a perfectly clean white shirt. “I’ll just be back,” he said and crossed the hall to the bathroom, wherein he changed into the fresh shirt.

Professor B shrugged. “Let’s fix you up with these new equations I’ve worked out.” He took his quill pen and scratched his mathematical symbols into the back of Korth’s clean shirt leaving some small but painful abrasions in their wake.

This, then, was the way a semester’s tradition continued, with the professors inscribing their equations on Korth’s shirt, and he carrying them back and forth between universities.

Of course, this odd collaboration was not always consummated without some amplified emotions. When one professor disagreed with the equations of the other, he would answer by painting his equations in dripping red or ghoulish green. And, when one or the other professor was upset that Korth continually refused to take off his shirt, he would inscribe his equations with more painful instruments, such as an engraving pen, or even, on one occasion, a pen knife. (At this, Korth had taken several panicked steps into the hallway.)

Now that the novelty of a shirt covered with equations had worn off, Korth’s journeys between the universities also had become less pleasant, with fellow students making rude remarks as Korth passed on the campus walkways. “You’re supposed to get your ink in your arms, not on your clothes!” one shouted.

But annoying as this was, Korth endured it because he recognized the brilliance of the professors’ ethical equations and valued in humbleness the place he occupied in their mathematical evolution.

For their part, the professors, enamored of Korth’s winsome physique that had grown more muscled and defined because of his long inter-university walks, were frustrated by Korth’s evasions of their attempts to demonstrate what they considered to be their reasonable solution for his aches and pains.

In any case, by the end of that semester, the professors had finished their first round of equations and a book was published to great faculty acclaim. “But” both professors declared to Korth, “that was only Volume One. We’ll begin Volume Two with the new semester!”

However, when the new semester began, Korth hadn’t shown up at either of the professor’s offices to receive their new equations. The professors, each on his own campus, began to pine for the

absent Korth. Without Korth to carry their equations and brighten their lives with the possibility of a little salacious deviation, the professors soon lost interest in completing Volume Two.

Korth, meanwhile, did miss his weekly treks between the professors, but realized, without the aid of equations, that he had done an honest job for them and for science. As much as he both treasured and winced at the memory of his experience, he realized that his ethical obligation to the professors, to himself, as well as to Ethics itself, only needed to extend to the completion of the one volume. The definitive series of volumes, for all he knew, might continue to eternity, or at least long after he was gone.

Also, at about this time, Korth discovered that, proud as he had been of his semester's work, he had lost his enthusiasm for academia. So, one day, wearing a clean white shirt, he picked up his backpack and marched through the massive university gates into an unpredictable world.

Of course, neither professor, when he reflected, could understand why Korth would abandon his dream of tenure for the fearful outside world. However, by the beginning of the new semester, both had begun to inspect the ranks of the entering Freshmen for likely candidates to take on Korth's job, texting each other to discuss the prospects.

Stephen Paul Miller

Jean-Luc, I Get It

I loved Jean-Luc Godard. So imagine how I felt when I found myself sitting next to him at The New World Coffee House in Eugene, Oregon. Hardly anyone at his 1972 *Tout Va Bien* screening came afterward to meet him at the coffee house, but Jean-Luc addressed an apparent lack of interest by repeatedly asking the five or six people there, “Why do people want to be near me? Why do people want to get close to me? Why? What is it? Why?”

I’d never met a hero before so it didn’t occur to me to say anything. But why was I there? I said the obvious. “You’re like economics,” I said as he turned and stared at me. “You are a currency for people. You convey value because you represent, you embody, the deep and powerful revealed realities they associate with you and your films.”

He turned from me and addressed the others. “Why do people want to be near me? Why? What do they want? How could there be any reason for it?”

Maybe he didn’t get my English. I don’t think he’d slept.

Still, he is serious to the end. Nobody’s currency, he increasingly stays away from his audience. His movies, to most, become incredibly boring. It’s hard for moviegoers to make sense of them. Technique, story, and discourse don’t jibe. Nothing does. But isn’t that good?

Goodbye, Jean-Luc, I get it. You’re not like economics.

September 15, 2022

The Super Bowl of Heightened Depression: Alexandra Tatarsky, Vaudeville, Literary Criticism, and the Total Work of Art

Review of *Sad Boys in Harpy Land*
by Alexandra Tatarsky
Performed at the Abrons Art Center
New York City
March 10-19, 2023

If depression results from being overwhelmed, depression has found an avatar in Alexandra Tatarsky. Her medium itself might be said to be reacting to being overwhelmed by further overwhelming herself and the audience. However, much as Emily Dickinson envisions dance and poetry that are “full as opera,” the overwhelmingly swift seeming unity and sincerity of purpose with which Tatarsky stitches one art or genre to another might make a work like *Sad Boys in Harpy Land* one of our greatest one-person “operas,” although of course not opera in the usual sense of a concurrent, synchronic, and simultaneous display of art forms, but rather a diachronic kind of opera that jumps from one art to another.

Since musical comedy has been described as opera with the forms that compose it more discretely divided, I suppose one could say that she performs the most innovative kind of vaudeville or musical comedy kind of opera. I think it is important, however, to refer to *Sad Boys in Harpy Land* as opera (“opera” derived from *opus*, the Latin for “work” as both a verb and a noun) because Tatarsky conveys the impact of a “total *work* of art,” arguably perhaps in a manner like Wagner or others might put it. In this sense, she would seem to help validate an intrinsic value of several decades of performance art. As its name implies, performance art moves through its forms. The problem of course is that *Sad Boys in Harpy Land* moves to a place where it is impossible to move. As explained later, the performance takes us to a place where people become bleeding trees.

Tatarsky greets the audience by asking how they are. When they say, “fine,” she asks how that is possible in these times? It takes her no time to establish the virtual hopelessness of the world we have created. “I make myself sick, I make my fish sick, I am a nothing,” she sings. “Little by little I give birth to demons.” She adds to the given of the mess of our lives by dropping oil everywhere while opening a can of anchovies. After making more and more unmanageable messes, she reveals her “process” as “working on myself and showing up.” How does she work on herself? “I,” she says, “drink a lot of coffee and jerk off and cry.”

The performance is one awkwardly engaging thing after another. Echoing Lenny Bruce’s explanation of how the Jews got into show business (they had to make the Egyptians laugh to get out of building the Pyramids), she says, “If I’m not funny, you’ll all kill me.” She shows off her ridiculous props. After a startling scream, she announces, “It’s a pleasure to scream.” She periodically takes off and later puts back on an absurdly long “Wandering Jew beard.” Her powerfully enigmatic postmodern dance movements reflect this manner of uncomfortable focus to suit the work’s pace by often isolating body parts such as the stomach, hip, and breast.

Tatarsky tells the audience that the performance is based on a passage that Goethe later extended from his novel, *Wilhelm Meister* and which Tatarsky finds herself driven to enact. In this passage, Wilhelm is immobilized by a depression intermixed with doubts about his theatrical abilities, which Tatarsky likens to the place in Dante's *Inferno* where suicides become trees that bleed when harpies eat their leaves. Comparing this circle in the *Inferno* to the Yiddish curse, "May you grow like an onion" (with legs in the air and head in the ground), she leads the audience backstage to her version of Dante's woods of the suicides. On the way backstage, she leads the audience in a chant, maintaining that the ending of the world has already occurred and, after the Messiah comes, things will only be slightly different from now. She becomes a chillingly childish harpy who eats the leaves of suicides as they bleed, and then she approaches the flames of hell, made of fan blown red-lit paper. Briefly going offstage, she returns with a guitar and sings a haunting song about a time to come beyond race and gender. Even without this hopeful conclusion, however, Tatarsky succeeds in using vaudeville and literary criticism to make something like a total work of art.

Eileen R. Tabios

When I Married Poetry

My husband Tom grimaced as he turned his eyes away. I, on the other hand, was bent in laughter, tears leaking down my cheeks. We had just seen an extremely hairy man itching in my fifteen-year-old wedding dress of white satin festooned with seed pearls, sequins, and lace. In August 2002, we were in LOCUS, a performing arts space in San Francisco, where South Asian poet Amar Ravva had stripped down to his boxer shorts before gingerly putting on my wedding gown with its ornate bodice and voluminous skirt.

“I had wonderful memories of watching you walk down the aisle towards me as we got married,” Tom said. “Your damn poetry just ruined those memories. How can I unsee this!?”

Amar had volunteered to wear my dress as part of a “happening” that featured my latest poem-sculpture: the interactive “Poem Tree” that symbolized my commitment to poetry through a symbolic marriage to “Mr/s Poetry.” “Poem Tree” was modeled after a rite in Filipino and Latino weddings wherein guests pin money on the bride’s and groom’s outfits. The ritual symbolizes how guests offer financial aid to the couple beginning a new life together. For “Poem Tree,” printouts of poems were pinned onto the dress to symbolize how poetry, too, feeds the world. In prior happenings, those wearing my dress were Filipina female poets to reflect my status—Natalie Concepcion (at an event at Sonoma State University) and Barbara Jane Reyes (at an event at Pusod Gallery, Berkeley). For the third happening, sponsored by the Alliance of Emerging Creative Artists and *Interlope: A Journal of Asian America Poetics and Issues*, edited by Summi Kaipa, Amar was chosen because poetry need not be ethnic- or gender-specific.

Nonetheless, Amar, while petite enough to fit into my dress, was quite hirsute. His physicality offered a (wonderfully) dissonant contrast against my wedding gown that was created by a Mexican dressmaker in Los Angeles. That dressmaker, found by my mother, usually created elaborate dresses for *quinceañeras*, 15th birthday celebrations for girls that’s widely celebrated in Latin America and other Hispanic communities. Mom went overboard as she helped choose the dress’s baroque style—this was her one shot to be Mother of the Bride, since I was our family’s only daughter. If my dress was cheese, it would be of the oozing, triple crème variety. Its detailed, multilayered style only highlighted the oddness of the dress draping the shoulders of a bearded man with a bemused expression and flat, black shoes that peeked out from under its skirt. Several times during the happening, I had to force myself not to look at Amar as the sight of his black chest hair poking out from my dress’ pearl-strewn décolletage usually sent me roaring in amusement. Whew! Was I glad Mom was not in town to witness Amar in my dress!

To reflect my belief that a poem transcends its author's autobiography, "Poem Tree" used my dress to reflect my "I," but a different poet wore it to symbolize how the poem transcends the author's autobiography. Further expanding on how a poem's persona is more than just its author's, the poems used during the happenings were written by other poets. During 2001-2002, I managed an open call for poems. Over 100 poets representing 13 countries and about half of the U.S. states responded, mostly through e-mail. I printed out their poems; from the printouts, I cut sections in the shape of a Filipino peso to reflect the cultural origin of the ritual. During the happenings, audience members pinned my dress with the peso-sized segments that featured the titles and authors of each poem. As wedding souvenirs, they retained the portions of the pages that duplicated the poems; I hoped that many of the poems written for "Poem Tree" would begin hanging on refrigerator doors or other places in the homes of the event's attendees.

"Poem Tree" contains the sub-text of promoting poetry by encouraging people to engage with poetry. I wrote to friends (and, through this article, make this same suggestion now to you readers): "One pins poems, not just money, on a newlywed couple's wedding outfits because Poetry, too, is a source of sustenance. If some of your friends get married and their festivities include this rite, you might bring poems to pin on their outfits! Poetry is not just to be read and written but also to be lived!"

I've been delighted to learn that some couples, indeed, have included a "Poem Tree" aspect to their wedding festivities. This result—along with others having shared that "Poem Tree," caused them to look at poetry in a new way, or even pay attention to poetry for the first time—reflects my desire to expand poetry's involvement in people's lives.

Relatedly, the interactive aspect of "Poem Tree" also reflects my poetics as one of interconnectedness; I believe in reaching out to others through poems. I would come to be blessed when Thomas Fink, a poet I "met" because he shared a poem for "Poem Tree," ended up introducing me to Marsh Hawk Press which has published most of my U.S. poetry collections. Poetry, too, has taught me just how karmic it is: *when you take care of poetry, poetry will take care of you.*

Susan Terris

Steal & Steal Away

Yes, I did steal the little Chinese silver snuff bottle from my sister who had stolen it from our mother—one of my many other examples of self-help. Mother said she liked me better when I was younger. Yet when I was five, I took scissors and beheaded every bright tulip in her flower bed. Fury in her, black hair, green eyes, voice, yet at twenty-one I let her steal my wedding by doing nothing except showing up. Didn't buy gown or veil. Borrowed. Didn't care, but my little sister, my first "baby," did, had two splashy weddings. But water always water: I steal time to be a lake-sprite, as mother is a butterfly, sister a Jill who rolls down a hill. She says she's bruised but will walk-the-dog with a yoyo, while I steal waterlilies by the dam and float them. But they close at night, like my mother, now 90. Yet she can still steal every game of Scrabble from me. But she can't sew. Red thread, please. If the shoe fits get another. Sister counts her shoes. Mother has keys on a ring to every place she's lived. I laugh until she asks me to put a braid on one side of her head and take her home. Next she says robins who fall from a nest should be fed Wonder Bread. Open wide, say *aaah*. Then, the night of the comet, she steals everything, escapes, riding off on the comet's tail. Now, while I seek a shadow-mother who sings *Peg 'O My Heart* as she nurses my sister Peg, while I try to find Lasky's to see my toes in the X-ray Shoe Fitter. No Lasky's, no Mother, and when I open the silver lace snuff bottle, it's empty. I hold my breath, wait for a tiny genie to slide out, to urge me to steal just one wish. . . .

Tyrone Williams

Review of *Burns* by Susan Gevirtz

Burns by Susan Gevirtz
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Susan Gevirtz's newest book of poetry, *Burns*, explores the conditions that make any sphere of human activity—epistemological, cultural, social, etc.—simultaneously possible and impossible to interpret and understand. These conditions are investigated from a Marxist/feminist position informed by Derridean deconstruction. Not surprisingly, Gevirtz upends many of the binaries (e.g., nature/culture, sex/gender, gifts/commodities) we often take for granted. Because the book is framed by the conceit that northern and southern “winds” (from the calculating gods of antiquity to Adam Smith's invisible hand of market relations) drive myth and history (and thus deconstruct the binary fiction/fact), *Burns* links the development of patriarchy and capitalism to the mystification of nature. Moreover, the structure of the book reproduces, even as it repurposes, the Marxist formulation of the relation between money and commodities: M-C-M. Circulating between the *ex nihilo* value attributed to “Hyperboreas” in section one and the “surplus value” extracted from “threshing floors” in section five, *Burns* centers the female body as the fulcrum of capital; the womb is both a “gift” (analogous to primitive accumulation) and work site (congealed labor). Gevirtz thematizes these interrelationships by way of marginalized histories and modes of knowledge too often consigned to myth. At the same time some of these alternative histories and knowledges (like those of the Hyperboreas) have disturbing legacies. For example, Gevirtz reminds her putative “parasympathetic readers” that “Charroux first related the Hyperboreans to an ancient astronaut race / of ‘reputedly very large, very white people’ who had chosen ‘the / least warm area on the earth because it corresponded more closely / to their own climate on the planet from which they originated’” (15). We parasympathizers orbit this origin myth incessantly as long we remain mesmerized by belief in an infinite “above” which, Gevirtz reminds us, is also the “distance” of the rationalism underpinning patriarchy and capital as, respectively, objectivity and alienation:

If the spell holds we continue our journey — another circling attempt
to land. Tighten the straps. Ride above the phenomena St. Fort
was the first to name: spontaneous fires; levitation; ball lightning;
unidentified flying objects; unexplained disappearances; giant
wheels of light in the oceans; animals found outside their normal
ranges. Reports of out-of-place artifacts (OOP Arts), strange human
appearances and disappearances by alien abduction, strange falls,
strange lights or objects sighted in the skies that might be alien
spacecraft. . . .
(14)

Near the end of the book, Gevirtz neutralizes the dubious origin myth of Hyperboreas, suggesting that the hyperborean can be understood, or repurposed, as the offspring of Zephyrus and Boreas

("Boreas and Zephyrus nymph sluts / immaculate cross pollination" [142]), recasting the Marxist M-C-M formulation as B-Z-B (Boreas + Zephyrus = HyperBoreas). This revision, which links arctic and tropical winds, is already suggested in the playful, if ominous, title of the first section, "Hyperborea or Bermuda Triangles I Have Known." If the Hyperboreas (B¹) represent a "surplus value" (M¹) extracted from the "value" of Boreas and Zephyrus (M), then actual value is perforce devalued, as displayed in the last section of the book, "Three Threshing Floors, Three Invisibilities." There, the prison and court constitute one threshing floor, the site where wheat (the "good" citizen) is separated from chaff (the "bad" noncitizen), reminding us of the theological undercarriage of modern jurisprudence. Yet another threshing floor is constructed from the social activities and norms that separate "good" girls from "bad" girls, delineated in section four, "The Wind in Her Daughtership's Majesty: a maske antemasque." Thus these two sections of the book suggest that the felon is not just a "girl," an infantilized and regendered human (cis gender aside); he, she or they is also a slave, blocked from unfettered access to the public (and thus rendered invisible). Like the female and slave, the felon is forced to provide "free" labor for the benefit of the general public. Thus, just as the hold of the slave ship is a microcosm for the plantation, so too "The 'holding tank'" is merely a passage to "prison, muffling, secreting from public / view, thwarting, thrashing" (153). Under constant surveillance, the female/slave/felon is all-too-visible within the holding tanks (school, church, family, etc.) and all-too-invisible within the prison-houses (the factory, the office, the corporation, etc.) of the larger society:

If the sight of you is obliterated
 you cannot imagine being seen or heard
 wordless, or bludgeoned by words
 worldless or on my mind
 (150)

The struggle against the extraction of surplus value from value courses throughout *Burns*, including the three sections framed by "Hyperboreas" and "Three Threshing Floors": "GIVE," "Motion Picture Home," and "The Wind in Her Daughtership's Majesty: a maske antemasque." Gevartz's overall conceit throughout "GIVE" is the relationship between the sky, sea and shore, a dialectic that historicizes the ways that nature is repeatedly infused with myth in order to naturalize (and so, justify) the extraction of natural resources for exchange in a circular process propelled by obligation: "Just as money changes / hands you'll see the tide / is in debt to shore" (22). Inasmuch as debt, a consequence of trade, demands justification by anthropomorphizing natural processes, these relationships must be converted into a narrative, a story with voiceovers (e.g., the word of God) and soundtracks: "and the sky / supplies pace / to the sea / like movie music / a common destiny / not all / partnerships are nation states united by the same /currency" (32).

From above, the unpredictability of the winds corresponds to the whims of the immortals. The wind as a god, as Boreas, is thus functionally equivalent to Adam Smith's invisible hand of the market. Just as the tide gives itself to, but also takes something from, the shore when it retreats, so too the structure of gift-giving always includes reciprocity of some sort, returning, in effect, the gift back to the sender: "I wanted to give but it looked like keeping" (25) Moreover, the more the gift approaches the abstract certainties of mathematics, the more uncertain it becomes, a paradox Gevartz, following Derrida (among others), delineates:

I wanted to give a present
 But just then the missile at the Nike Missile Base rose from the

ground
signaling a time of cancelled gift
(24)

The noise of the missile's launch and flight, the noise of the tide's rising and crashing, the noise emanating as, and from, "a usurer of words" is thus "the noise of minds, of minds at work" (56), a "cacophonous cocoon of thought-life. . ." (57). These noises are the translations of movement per se into various modalities of human activity, for movement per se is understood by Gevirtz as "life," the demonstration of which constitutes the thought-experiment "Motion Picture Home." Titled after an actual retirement residence for film industry employees, this play redounds upon the previous two sections where motion (as the currents of wind, as the act of giving) is the manifestation of life. In "Motion Picture Home," however, the stage for movement, for life, is the stage itself, the theater where "language that is not about life, but is, itself, life, alive—is in a / sense not in need of a stage, is simultaneously stage's place and / action" (57). The reduction (or, from a different perspective, distillation) of theater to language is only possible after the advent of film has rendered the live stage (and so, the live actor) a museum relic, just as photography made a certain kind of painting anachronistic. Following Walter Benjamin, Gevirtz notes that both the theater and painting were freed from the burden of representational fidelity at the moment they were usurped. Contemplating, per Benjamin, the new status of the "live person" through the lens of the filmed one, Gevirtz casts voiceovers, recorded voices, a teleprompter, a time lord, and a singular woman as actors in her play. Here, life is the movement of language, and insofar as each actor and object "speaks," they—the one human, the several objects—are equally alive. In one sense, then, there is no "set," though the presence of a "live person" as a linguistic form (the "woman") certainly tempts us to read, even in a read-only play, "her" as a living subject among inanimate objects. We readers may feel justified in privileging the "woman," since we are told that "the play is spoken live off stage, with the exception of the / 'Woman' character who occasionally speaks when on stage" (58).

One way to read this miscellany of live and recorded voices is a staged woman "acts" under the burden of history, fending off all those off-stage voices—"How could you fall asleep when you were supposed to be building/ the diorama/ I mean watching the kids" (65)—she nonetheless cannot help but hear and listen to. Talking to herself, the woman splits in two, a noun towing its pronoun to a scene of instruction and creation:

Woman: Take a fistful and put it on a table. Take out the musical score paper.
[Woman speaking this as she does it, referring to herself as "she."]
She takes one strand at a time and places it carefully on the bars.
Then when the strands are arranged they merge with the paper and become music, which she can hear or they turn into flat words on the bars of the paper."
(62)

But even if "she" were reduced to a rest note, "it" would still refuse its status, would insist upon its desire to "speak": "No, rest keeps refusing to be final; keeps being interrupted" (59). The rest note will not rest in peace, however, interrupted by "music." Gevirtz goes on to stage what may well be her own ancestors' entrapment, as perpetrators and victims, within the noteworthy/dismissible dialectic of U.S. immigrant history. On the one hand, one of the recorded voices says, "I want to go

right through our autism to become an actual object. / Then our Eastern European ancestors will wake up from their cult- / of-the-child sleep. Finally to touch each other" (64). On the other hand,

The car he arrived in is a station wagon and he is now taken out to it
on a stretcher and put in back
"He will be taken to a mortuary," says the guardian.
The guardian returns some hours later with his body. He explains
that the mortician refuses to touch the body because the dead one is
Teleprompter:
From the old country
(67)

These familiar dynamics, the touchable and untouchable, the cult of childhood versus the denigration of old age, serve as the backdrop for Gevirtz's critique of "time" and the "time lord," the latter, in its many guises, working to slow the pull of temporality, which has practical, political and economic effects: "When time is an inherited private property, nothing that reduces its / value can be negotiated" (78). Gevirtz's refusal of the monument, as an effect of "time," means that, even within "Motion Picture Home," "The play keeps taking place on another stage" (69); writing and reading are both modes of giving, of paying it forward, of temporal deferment which nonetheless ends in a monument, here a title, "Motion Picture Home." The only escape from the concept of a present inextricably tied to exchange is through the portals of myth, which is to say the myth of the present, that monument of time: "But what is there to give that isn't given in time" (94)? Gevirtz can only imagine a future embodied in, for example, a gender-neutral embryo, can only hope for the recovery of a world of abandoned and unimagined possibilities: "It who can take this into account and return a renewed uncanny" (81).

But what if "it" enters the world as it always has, as nothing other than an example, not only a "daughter" but part and parcel of a daughtership (a daughter among daughters)? What if "Rosa, Carolina, Charlotte, Selene, Lucinda, Vasiliki" are interchangeable, easy enough to "line them up mix them up" (106)? Such are the questions Gevirtz pursues in "The Wind in Her Daughtership's Majesty: a maske antemaske," the penultimate section of *Burns*. The subtitle echoes a passage or question raised in "Motion Picture Home," the problem of the true and false self as formulated by the psychoanalyst and pediatrician Donald Winnicott: "My crime was what I had to offer. Safely suspended in space I couldn't stop dreaming of Winnicott—the deck of my ship, the voice who secretly let me out to play alone" (81). This passage celebrating a freedom given, the gift of play outside the "ship," could be spoken by an embryo, a daughter or a woman, "antemaske." The *maske* of the false self is donned over time as the child gradually comes to understand that "even the wind / is owned by names / And struggles against its hand" (105). Before such knowledge that the "wind" is always handled by a name (God, nature, history, market forces, etc.), the true self emboldens one with an initial sense of immunity from the contingencies of existence:

as when I spun and sped through Los Angeles Wilshire
Sunset boulevards helmetless and dauntless
because only one known person had so far died
and he off at a golf course
having a buffet lunch forever
(109)

Later, at some indefinite point in the future, the maske of the false self firmly in place, death and vulnerability rear up as possibilities all too real: "both hands on the steering wheel Dad / please don't kill us / blinded by your girlfriend's lap / the snowy cliffside so close" (117). Still, for some, resistance to socialization (for instance, a visceral sense that one's sex does not match one's assigned gender) cannot be directly expressed. However, a kind of soft resistance may appear as guilty pleasure when one finds oneself lagging behind one's female peers whose "childhoods all led breastward": "An obstruction to seeing the ground and finding things that / fall at your feet—or so I thought of my breasted future / thus was happy that mine were late in bloom." "Late" development, however, is no defense against the socialized violence that girls often experience as part of what is euphemistically called "growing up": "something pushed me hard under water, a rough hand over / my chest wouldn't let me up / At camp on a hike the counselor / put his arm over my shoulder and then further down. A coma / of confusions that will never fully lift" (120). And as we know, childhood trauma may drive one to the margins of the social world as a "bad girl" or, conversely, reenforce the desire to be, or at least act out the part of, a "good girl," however much that maske may be betrayed by the involuntary return of the true self antemaske: "Did I or didn't I scare / away the boys the minute I opened my mouth?" (121). Worse, "the girls and women came unasked and / unafraid, of all ages, curly and straight, in all sizes and strides" (122). As for the girl who became a woman, and the woman who did, in fact, become a mother, "she" can only pass on to a daughter an utopian dream of escape from the vicious circle of history: "What I want to say is one thing do another / And wish for you yet a third / Is there an outside or only refrain / beaten up echo" (132). The story of Echo, the brutally murdered Greek goddess, is only one myth among many (Pandora, Eve, etc.) meant to instruct girls in how to be good daughters, a daughtership driving daughterships. Still, as Gevirtz reminds us, daughters are, first and foremost, girls: "When the wind blows from the south, that which / no canvas sails could withstand, undress and / conceive by the wind, give birth to girls" (143). And the girl who would not be a daughter would, perhaps, be a new kind of hyperborean.