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Special Thanks to...

Kristen Gallagher for her suggestions regarding contributors; to my wife Susanna and John Parker for all their advice; to the Fund for Poetry and the Young Poets Publishing Initiative for their financial assistance; and to the whole crew at the Kelly Writers House for their continued encouragement and support.

COMBO SPRING 1999 VOLUME 3

Published by Michael Magee with support from the Kelly Writers House, 3805 Locust Walk, Philadelphia, PA 19104-6150 (e-mail: wh@english.upenn.edu), http://www.english.upenn.edu/~wh. Subscriptions should be sent to Michael Magee, 31 Perrin Ave., Pawtucket, RI 02861, or e-mailed to mmagee@english.upenn.edu. Web address: http://dept.english.upenn.edu/~wh/combo/index.html. Subscription rates: $10.00 per year, single copies $3.00.

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A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

You take what you like and you like for twenty different reasons in thirty different ways. The same goes for reading. Objectivity is necessarily in the street with the bathwater. Hopefully penurious “taste” doesn’t take over. In the spirit of an issue which includes Berkson, Coolidge and Notley, I thought I’d include this anecdote from Larry Rivers. Rivers, responding to Clement Greenberg’s claim that “As far as art is concerned I just prefer good art to bad art—if I can tell the difference,” offered the following:

Leon Trotsky, exiled in Siberia as a young man and in Mexico as an old one, before he ended up with an axe in his skull, was seated on his porch talking to some visiting admirers when his dog snouted his way through the screen door. As Trotsky was answering questions about his revolutionary philosophy, his leadership of the Soviet army, his signing of the Brest-Litovsk truce to get the Germans off the Bolshevik back, etc., his dog ambled up to him wagging its tail, exquisitely happy to be licking its master’s beard. Trotsky stopped his commentary, pointed to the dog, and with a wide grin told the waiting assembly of budding revolutionaries, “Behold, man’s best friend.”

What did it avail Trotsky to go so far in politics and philosophy, and to deal with such brutal vicissitudes of life and death as the shelling of his own sailors at Kronstadt, only to end up sounding like my uncle Yonkel Bloom?

What did it avail Clem Greenberg to spend a lifetime looking at new art, thinking and writing about new art, curating art shows, visiting artists’ studios, talking to the latest hotshot artists, only to end up with the ancient conclusion that he prefers good art to bad art...if he can tell the difference!

I think the poets featured here are ambitious as hell—from what I can gather, they treat their work as a kind of symbolic activism that damn well better do something (good) to someone or for someone at some point if it is to be considered a success, which, it seems to me, it is. How’s that?

i. a future like that right dancing

dear england,

i think it is ultimately better to write to you of ventriloquist. precedent bereft of a dummy, say that i represent the future and myself.

what when you hear a voice like my own: education the old way? untainted comprehensive ideals? perhaps a hint of the plantation? (disgusting equivocation

readers even that voice a repository where decisions are made of fantasies, nuts, authenticity considered—the history of a people allowed entry into privilege

and, um, tendencies evaluated. i am elaborating quite wildly here!

england, that one’s idiom is a password; that the password leads nowhere else.

secrets and silence experienced as candour and noise. i wanted to say something about dancing, but now i haven’t the space.
ii. the subject

Queen Elizabeth, put me  
in perspective, in perspex,  
in plastic, a latter-day aspic,  
an amber for the future:

It is necessary to  
be absolutely  
English.

Your subject’s refracted, / my best is this last-ditch / attempt on some class-witch:

iii. “song for elizabeth”

Three visions of a long red drive (stopping  
traffic for the five minute commute  
to the Admiralty—

the yearly grinding of birthdays and mourning,—  
an un-citizenry anticipating  
new obituaries

Three visions at once. Imagining someone living  
outside this gerund-grinding  
historicity

Well fuck it Elizabeth, I am sick of present participles.  
It is frightening, skiing, mountainside-

a long red admiral, mourning citizens three at once  
Imagining someone living,  
sick—frightening

Fuck citizenry, admiral, let’s settle for yearly traffic in  
participles and birthdays with  
change to spare

Three visions yearly grinding three visions.  
Outside historicity I am skiing  
for red Elizabeth

How Closure Got Its Groove Back

in storage, in the dictionary  
“bone, ear, and behind”  
significantly not mastoid

but the definition for nipple brings  
the nomina sint numina position  
structure, not individual words!

JEN HOFER

from the series “scar theory”

don’t

make the “would” won’t  
or whirl as does this  
world, in difficult ease  
not east but stuck or  
slitted, as a manner of  
allowance, mock wake  
in the heartless lake of  
sharp betrayal which also  
bureaucracy is, & baby  
what’d you expect. i’ve  
five fingers in each  
hand on a good day, and  
to speak of no memory  
though asked actually none  
and footsteps in silence  
as train squints up the  
air, puckers roseless & close-

lidded shattering alongside  
a track now rusted beyond  
recognition but the river’s  
The same, if you can call  
that a river.
amateur remedy

for w. chris baer

my heart in the
stitched together to
there is no formula
or, when I saw it
rupture being
(there’s the rub)
unstitched suspended
a rip crickets
silvery silver
blind incarnation
not quite the right
scar theory
sockets merciless
because we should
pulled taut against
nylon blue hatched
as if any extra
heart for lack of any
mercy laid flat on
surreptitious shirk
irons bludgeon position
through the haze
or skinned and placed
(there is no formula)
bottled in, tiny bones
following, being followed
irradiate rigid
burn to stop blood
you can’t suddenly
or try

NATE CHINEN

Lucky Stars (Thursday Night Express Poems)

# 1

In the red trees everybody
sings and circumscribing.
Don’t tell me. Okay, tell me.
The rage I’ve been saving
for the rainy season is
all used up. By whom.

#2

If I had a toolshed
I’d fill it with flowers
I’d grill up the flounders
I’d steal off to Flanders
And then, in my toolshed
I’d polish the fenders
I’d sift through the cinders
and cry

#3

Oh fall is coming oh!
The buckets cling to the roosters
and whisper the streets
and grates and kites!
Cannily yours, the ribbon
enamels the trees and I
can’t stop crossing my eyes
and dotting your tease.

#4

honking the brightly cars I’m
almost ready plunking down
a nickel for raisins blinking
because its hot outside why
the terrible reasons I’m thinking
of moving to Yonkers I’m thanking
you for the time
lights are burning softly the
hoochie-mamas sleeping rats
are kissing other rats
softly porcelain is shining
weeds are growing you
are aging planet spinning so
are you

Eighteen kilometers and how far
is that. French fries for two
and change it's what happens
to a place. Murmur is a funny
one, mollusks in the living room,
Michael is a fireman he fights.

tell me a secret tell
me a secret tell me
a secret tell me a
secret tell me a secret
tell me a secret tell
me a secret tell me
a secret and I'll tell

buckle up for beanbags!
people are a-knockin
children are a-rummin
and seagulls are a flockin
there's a zebra in my stockin
and a cobra in my pocket
just a hairs length from a big lickin

Hollering taxicabs!
All I ever wanted
was a spit-shined loafer
a little bag of peanuts
a candle and a cricket
Damn! maybe for Christmas

sing-song cigarettes in a
snowball only gets bigger.
he is the glove of my rice,
the rib of my skin, the tear
in my pajamas. said there
would be, like this.

Glory Hallelujah on a
postcard giving off an order
then the raincoat weasel
of the details. what
do you know about it.

easygoing flapjacks,
understated poodles and a
ringworm in a fair shake.
crumbs on the carpet
who does the dishes
I do darling, I do
SHEILA MURPHY

Three Poems

Bath

If I have accomplished anything it is repetitive completion often. Matters of routine sift glibly through the suffocation of broad headphones. Steeped in transposed moods, leash passively is worn. Although procedures ask that I wear nothing. *Cleanse* was my physician’s favorite word. *Hypothyroid* her stock diagnosis. Everyone who lifted foot across her doorstep veiled him-, herself with a kind of pallor that prescribed medical doggerel as slowly as the perfect cup of tea attains rest points amid the frequencies of severance.

Desk

Optimize, categorize, resort to promptness. Every day exacts the cost of drawstring. Evanescence is the goal of gradual removal from a foreground meant to be productive. I chose the color blue to tantalize a setting echoing my bounty. Each workaround leaves evidence of a moments breath. A kind of precipice that will mince trickles of completion. Name an animal that does not need to pilfer and resume what you were doing on the high wire. Braying wish worlds cauterize the lively texture of self worth. I thought the sole prerequisite for rodeo was to be of certain mind. Ink disturbs worlds in the way a polished cleaver frames catastrophe as sequential acts of will.

Book

Fed water, dried to pulp. Minus vibrato, obviously. Word shelter. See colors nearly be the rain endemic to a quarter. Rations pass recipients and leave capable, unethical hands. Commitment to defending flaws becomes an occupation that becomes increasingly delinquent. In submitting dues, wives spoke their anxiety in percussive songs as homophonic translations of a drum. Affection never left the objects of defection. Even so, the string of them was documented on quite stained sheets held still by natural gum from trees tucked under the equator.

PATRICK DURGIN

from Color Music

position. with themes. motives .posit condition. conditioning there here is it his test . to look and touch and list without taking : which is so inscrutable and articulate so .as nothing residual nothing resides. but intonation is three . trochaically

position. with themes. motives .posit condition. conditioning . someone must write the scenarios. power's been cut to several counties . authorities are advising you remain . off the streets. authorities you remain as the saying goes: once a bachelor
gold black white. fire loves milk . you remain as the saying goes . power's been cut to several countries . bastard phraseology mottling himher copious annotations for love it behooves . kindness verse is with culture killing kindness .positing. the tall eyes of priority . the stumped nominal of cognition is the apologetics. of light with tall eyes. sardonically counting from one: out the big plaid window . on the lawn:which is pre-paid . and the paths paved with a bullhorn sardonically counting from one
comes with libretto. rites:position

. the mouths of the magnolia tree

the light condition : verse
worlds: each certain contradistinct and
contagious: states
. light stakes
. with tall

. the bastard scare
. the choleric nominal
. solid state.

it's a go
. this is the return of the erotic

\[ \textit{a circuit of influence might have everything to do with} \]
\[ \textit{material privilege} \]

That value inhere is a matter of craft.
Craft learns from practice.
Practice is crafted behavior.

I think my own thoughts
of the sounds
they make me light
headed .and eventually
: a warm chamber
of breath cools and
resists
even the approach
of fools.

but. if a light
head is a symptom
of suffocation
: and suffocation is equally
a surfeit of foreign matter
as extinguishing.
. or
. something just
the size

less.
. a consensus to
content us
. ice floes than
:ambience

.listing brings
.what carrying
takes
tremor to thought
love abhorrence milk
and all sorts : of what
makes amongness
and scores things.

so now
. it is disappointment
as against travel
or figures as landscape
and stunning a while like so

. a phantom derives its subtending verity solemnly
. fear of sobriety
. makes us hasten
. we are here and I
have just arrived

\[ \textit{locke} \]
\[ \textit{Whence comes it by} \]
\[ \textit{that vast store, which} \]
\[ \textit{the busy and boundless fancy of} \]
\[ \textit{man has painted on it with} \]
\[ \textit{an almost endless variety?} \]

colors can and won't waltz
but it has duration
position :themes motives
and Burger King belongs to England
and everything durable sways
and history colors or
motivates not cause
observes the good
repercussions
what follows is
and
is follows what
results from admixture
which is cold on
the nose
dualisms in praxis come to
a sheer flammiform techna
theory of a go:
defered : of course
trees grow
dark quickly around these
parts
along the striated
surface
hallowed ground is
something audible.
and we. walk
cause of something
call it bad infinity
learned amnesia
or slim chance
counting from one
I get both : counting
brings both. call it bad
learned badly audible
learnedness or largesse
something or slim chance
for any one from both
bad
volition or
anti-go
lemon soil lard
this is hardly catastrophic
but the lines distend any
how
position. thieves. motives. cuts
part parts : parts cleave
makes space anotherness
among ticks swatches durable
etymologically we
are congregating

**JENNIFER McCREARY**

*Three Poems*

**Invisible object.**
a young girl with knees
halfbent offers herself
to the beholder. we
should note: the forward
jut of the head; the flat
plate against the shins;
the articulation of
the breasts, the peculiar
scaffolding. we should
note: the head,
particularly, had resisted
integration with the rest
of the piece. we should
note: the intervention
of a mask — sharply
angled, Oceanic, bird-
or warrior-like.
an objective chance:
the claiming of
by an object, the
subsequent clearing of
an obstacle. we should
note: the utilization of
an object as mediation
rather than mimicry.
the phenomenology of
perception: the
inherent resistance
between the head &
the rest of the work

**COMBO**
Eve of Saint Agnes

*she need be a stainless maiden*

no vestal virgins here.
still, I have breathed
the doxology of *lares et penates*, tended home
and hearth fires. I know
the price for neglect.

*she shall fast before bedtime*

it's not much to sleep
an empty vessel,
vespertinal; wind whistling
through bones thrown
in bas-relief; count
ribs as *aves*
and finger glorias.

*she will keep her eyes averted only heavenward,*
*and be blessed with a vision*

did I dream this
then, rain on rosary
beads, bachelor's button
blue? what girl doesn't
forsee ribbon bindings,
saracen and tulle *(tuille)*?

it seems enough
to recline supine, prostrate,
and await occupation,
possession, and the
subsequent seizure.

-----

Pigs Alley Glory Alice

— so when the story turns
out to be different than we
had imagined, there are things
we choose to reinvent, to hose
down or plow over — remake
the beds, pulling up pansies, their wide-open faces furry & stupid — replant
geraniums, preferring their peppery heads —

(I could tell you its because we pronounce
these & all things esoteric)

— likewise, there are things
we cotton to & collect, cork tight, press
between pages, stow away in hope
chests or medicine cabinets — there
are vinegar baths to wash out
smoke, lemons to kill a fishy
smell, balms & salves to take
away the sting —

(I could tell you its because I think
more clearly when my hair is clean)

— we tend to dwell
on the romantic side of familiar
things, err on the familiar side of
romantic things — we name our
grievous angels, one for each bed
post but none to petition — count on
fingers the number of things we've been
made to swallow whole —

(I could tell you its because I'm
a sucker for bagpipes)

— line-items we
list & cross out, tangled as kite
string — the pandora's box or bag
of tricks we draw from — draw
curtains tight & and turn cartwheels/car
BILLY BERKSON

An Atlantic Door

Sunsets in grid patterns
Whitewater saws
NASA checks
Eggshell junkies
Nasal focus clash
Blue Miami trace
Ms. Tut
Glass car rides
Twin bronze dimes
Mandatory brainsweat
Dune burner
Plumbers in their finery
Vying for the white tubs of Saturn

RACHEL RAFFLER

A Hylax on Her Shoulder

Digustibus does as Porky knows
Blue Terpsichore, a laugh riot:
Fated radiance, a soundtrack pending, holds
What takes one away to logic from your arms
In foregonest night
Neither thimble of death nor congealing old-age creeps.

repeat: rimbaud in
whispers (follow nodding) synthetic
as forced a
distant last week
like play-unicorns
to be nothing but
a poet yourself – it
is easy in a lawnchair
as it is easy in guise
of basic mathematician/
logician counting hours
from 4 to midnight:
repeat classification
to project
manipulation of brain/afternoon
(i don’t read junkie)
i count well hours/
books-yellow-covered, i
mean, repeat: what
tailored judiciousness likes
it much proved; dismissing
of course, necessity
of a still pulsing
continuing
on the first) for
set muses waking

as promiscuous
thinkers/ in circulation
like

runners by dusk
whisper not
of destinations or

bastard passages
lacking northern mud
-not thereof

like spoken silence
is reputation
insert mentality

or antiseptic
thoughts
dissolved to float

in mirrors as
letters piling
upon pages

are indeed simple
corrugations
if not marauders

in the night (it
is that
simple sometimes
thinking

On meeting a poem hater and thinking of Sartre

once opened letter
shapes (closed)
which you did a
backward portrait like
pages:

- tedium redeem
- ignorance (inflamed)
- as hating came from

swimming in ( )
propose
prompt calculation
despiring evenly
dissonant
dribbles
down your
chin
to in empty rooms (know)
such mud
circumnented
for organized jaws
locking hollow
can easily (will) speak of in
heavish
tones for the dubbed
seekers not seeing

space for a
reversed exile

wicked whispering but what is that in the
end that since last

night is freedom
translation

when they're words
they're caprichosas
but not risen forced in
yours do you
eat theories from my
mouth— they never

fall a logician
ponders in secret is
it my fancy or
yours— perversion
is born under trees

whispering too grimly
the conception cannot—
will loose— if awoken
restrain the baby
is crying— no
it hears me crying

because translation to
division will tell will
(not) tell the space
between us then:

I was sorry I had no
jagged cuts to show you

LOSS PEQUEÑO GLAZIER

Olé / Imbedded Object

Mayakofsky said
occupy their zonas rosas
locomotive passing
overhead on heavy
trellis. See the mesa— i.e.,
Take it to the bridge.

"Any given content any given person" stands against the
bayou on its "hunt for shells"—EMACS live and on stage!
Can you find its home page? At Perseus "Homerlic"
as a qualifier in that what does it hold, haw, which vessel
is full now? Monday's new millennium can always wait!
So here are the important questions: What is OLE and
what does it do to a matador? I'll take milk in mine. As you
read on México salt cans, when it's Tláloc, it pours.

And may Tlazolteotl NOT follow you on your date. The
chafed hills rise, scrub succulents, precise blue above baked
passes. Agayucan to La Venta, venison at Monte Albán.

Tapped out for quick cash in Izapa, you call in your col-
lateral with Teotihuacán. A childhood clarinet. Some coins.
The quarter moon is scratch & dent. Color & density cor-
rections for negatives. Child emerging between knees of
goddess like a bloated clay penis. Wherever you go, there's
an icon waiting for you. Most people will just wanna
throw up their yams. These are behavioral versus statu-
tory conventions: zip drives, self-extracting files, &
among their pages the relative values of recent versus
"original" annotations. That is, if you can prove you
were thinking about this a long time ago, whammmee,
you're consistent sonny! Intercalated lettersine, CL, LC, LG, and the final thematic frustration with it as letterism.
Decided to pull one of those cinematic formulae: man picks city for final drawn out stanzas call it “Leaving Loss Glazier”.
Ever think how your life would have been different if in 1989 you’d stuck to WordStar instead of switching to WordPerfect?

Direct Contact

I haven’t heard a history of meaning for the terms that calling the mechanics of poetry tricks was punctuation.
Scrolling nomenclature did you say? It’s not so much an editor as design software? Then why does the sound of flan mowers seem to redline you from all three sides? And where are the crows of yesteryear? The whole book has vignettes laced with blank lines for insertions. Ever consider that ‘DOS’ rhymes with ‘loss’? What about an operating system built by Baba Ram Dass? (Such a system could not allow multi-tasking since all tasks would be one.) The computer user? This is narrative itself: the replication of structures as you add your own details. (Where it says “My brother said” please insert “his real name.”) If you follow instructions, the coma that comes out will be all your own! Call it “social text” or metamorphosanarrative ... say, there were times I felt on the “outside” though I was in the story line on day one. I so much prefer the term “direct contact” or “one-to-one correspondence,” Charles A. writes to back channel which sounds ... subversive or gossipy or even mechanical I add, always staging clear from it percussive or syrupy—even the manual’s in short supply. Which may be why

Charles B. has no fear of Windows 95. For me it seems the windows work against each other—as if it occurs by littoral miscegenation. Pay attention to what winnows between the windows. Trying to catch multiple leaks with a single sprocket. The toads come out after it rains—but try to find one on demand! Paste it to another application to evade its canny undo which enables a user to edit/modify graphic images and sound. I will look and see what might be yuppy by then! In studying what literary critics have said about its quality of pusillanimity. (To safeguard this, they suggest, make sure poems elevate consumption and its cohorts, individuality, romantic attraction, the afterlife, & the viability of magnetic storage media.) This brought me to a misapprehension of the phrase I thought. The whole idea of representation is quite asynchronous with its theoretical position; its relevance to a text editor is socially apt even to the point of observing you do not actually write to a file.
Think of “social text” in this manner. What you write to is a copy of the file which exists only in the buffer. Therefore what you write is not written until you choose to “save” it and any changes you may make are provisional. Imagine what that would do to speech. You could say the social is material—inside of it. You could then look at it and manipulate how it sounds. It will not be spoken until you “save” it or actually “send” it. Projection then among them an instance of extension of projection. Public would not exist until privates were swabbed then saved.
RACHEL DALEY

oneway a cinema

if she rode with the green shirt and
grey hat on the back of a horse reverse
goes crouch in slow motion
under the hat on the horse
and sometimes the bull
and so
when the horse and bull were
to come forward
to let her the bull too slow a veer
you go off to jump the fence to a slow rock
one which ended when it was smashed
by a truck which flew over its
skin and opened to its ribs and rolled
with a last exhale it didnt know about
without skin or muscles and she
threw up a red in slow motion
and pieces of book art which won
over and all over and I didnt

if you werent nearly so full

like the mistreated ones like god or feathers know to say hey big buoy
like one other older one knows so oh she went out with a black boy
like little ones, pull up your sock or brush tables
like a medium sized animal back seated just like a daffodil the next day
like little wicked one lighting along the meter
don't you have a fat and squishy self to come nearer with

if you ask so full - cell ballast - and with people moving these dogs
that unreasonable sympathy to them brings rock and bull
to wore true rye! and glide device

cabulary carry cadmium
chocolate hookup exposure
through gross internal media highly

That reportedly a lot lot lot lot

her New York mistakenly for a gay
accented - that measurement addiction - sells she cylinders on
an eighth - and hold - we dont know how much full this
fullmoon blows since bluffs quote happier - leftovers
so wheres the lovin the lovin the lovin

these things will go on all at once

and rock starz, diminutive friends
steely once futures dance toward note of
lower rates - over the tips of head is lightest - past head stages
or pace in the crowds - overdetermination as in
strike if scratch
if you know how communism works thats working for astonishment
this being privately primary discovery via neuroses, not sadly

that want not space travels but morsels - these or these habits

cellularly

the marks front row madam movie goes

revolutionary pause pause

and its not competition for hurts so sweet but a might

this morning as

drivers can be ruthless and are unnecessary chances

KRISTEN GALLAGHER

Three Poems

some his story

once upon her I found hers. Flipflops we call them. And dust. Flesh, as its own but for a small difference slams of most threat. She was not lined up with the girls, not child bearing. Got the food, water, gun-deep, seeped. Seeping silenced siren, seep seeping seeped. Bone growl of nite creeps. Niter than nite as nite. Washed up all she could daily and the first to hold them on the last day. Though a wake, never to sleep. Nor to sleep. Dead ago, she lives in all our wreckage.

rushing toward what

in our new language we wager germinating terminal endpoints to begin beginning in wing. angrily fright full fitfully speaking you is not available to me in the way young faith permits one to fool oneself. a clasped hand opening on the short end of a long lessons learning. begging patience blunders me rumbling toward and against. yet who. did this to make things believable in the night.

message from Jacques

am I alone in too reductive a sense?

where ‘light’ is that ‘material’ is

something almost imaginary forward and backward in time

subatomic particles the body of language

the very suggestive divide gets played

and essays kick rounds in my head

scale determining the body not

something that could embrace chart a seemingly unlimited

relevant vista of constantly shifting

doubtful seeing, hearing, touching not remembering, conceiving, dreaming
CLARK COOLIDGE

Lothario Sorts

A bandaid
Oblomov knows not
sling the headbolt shear this shut
let us hope this hooks the
halfway light
(obstinate twig in the wind)
civilians are nothing but trackers
overhosts of the toil
(hoist me blunt give me Mick)
break of threaten
a theater of globe wing fret
Oblomov avoids the orange balloon
he wants to dance the clot
like blood the brains
coughing like an officer
burning like an icicle
a star on the dick
and red like mad

16XII98

Tale of a Shipman

Gadgets of a hodgepodge
wicker as a carrier
and you know the knob
taking the air in Severance
I read those magazines on Cake Hill
Tumbler Verde
ever visit an iced-in cockpit?
testament svaha!
not permit such a scragging
see bunnies hop you like inner lamps
buckle on and parody
screw the ice to your faceplate
suffer little building

6XII98

Pierrot the Duck

All kinds of war boats
and after that
the gorgeous finish
windows in hangings and swallow
a balloon in ink
frittering towering plans
Fu Manchu calling all haberdashers
build me a closed loop on piano
a pain rope in stitches we
are up late in the yards
(Robinson Crusoe Line)
and bubbles attach to one’s chest
“I’m about to have Anubis visit you”
but watch the hero jump all boards
fob off a history of artlike tumbles
Hello, Belmondo?
feel that savage crank behind glasses?
I have seen your director
rub the curse

7XII98

Overduct Neighborhoods

Where Siapan conducts clinics
every click of the flow
what they put out nightly for
the alley monsters
fenced along the lines of stall
it’s rheumatoid dilaudid
fluted to the hinges in blow
I’d rather live on scrap pages
from the sun
all quartz pap
and jiggling mother’s weight
or silicon push
do you believe in just height?
but the snow was fuel and
the bulbs were not
then they brought it to a stop
the Nietzsche hoverers in buffalo pants
or, I dunno, parts?

18XII98

Right about the Running Woman

Vienna’s tits are made of
slats from wood casks
and the colored stratigraphy is a set
people don’t believe in anything when
they’re lit
when they shrink
and there are thin rods in the way
the street is for dogs
and for amplified visible harmers
so be it
close tongues at the skyblue bank
and the clay hero is always “Johnny”
put your dough behind green doors
and claim savvy
too much dust in the pursuit of knobbyness
and red pumpkins written on by orange pens
are you fragile? basta
habit the enemy of story
nothing left in these chromium mines
but steps up to the mike and skips
and slips and slaps himself
the passle rides out under cambric skies
“I’ll be first”
a basket sandstone of all inverted echos

and rootlessness in dusty blasts
this is itchy men with big
fingers and toilets on their saddlehorns
“these woods are gonna be full in a minute”
they say I opened up on myself
on the rise by every stream
brace yourselves
there’s nothing like prime American ugliness

19XII98

I am a Number

We have boot links on board
down among the slugs near the
screw brass
and topside the bubble posts?
whither arhythmia? a cart
and before its purposes a lad
he’s mechanical and spells
the leap to a bed of smashed tackle
the sky’s the limitation
the pipes the pipes are lengthening
and we got in here to find the balls
all turned to oranges now
I bore beyond all ultimacy
grains and lean on Egypt

19XII98
If I am the asking voice, the Interlocutor—how then will your desire provoke its response?

If I am a speaking part, the one called Andy....

I had annointed the ferry at a river the moment prior to which our long narrative began.

The cross on the wall improves with each viewing.

Sometimes I thought about the bomb, but then it spilled, & I was back at the ranch with my archenemy’s girl, the one called “Dusty.”

How I loved her—for she was under twenty nine & wouldn’t speak to me.

Have a cracker, another piece of dried vegetable.

The aggressive houseguest proved more large as one got used to him. A tangled agency whose wires & experts weakened the beneficent posturing.

Having the genders of concerned salesmen & Appearing then to have the genders of birds or contortionists. & Not needing to speak about it anymore, for fear enough already had been said in these moments of deftness when heat will still not bloom.

That is also why & how she looks into the glassine purses without worrying about them. Salt is administered as a palliative. Yet even I, or my peers, would seem to hunger. This exciting wind spilled over into the parlor without hailing me. It was an addage I’d been permitted to suborn. Her sourcing had become so crucial it was admitted in the lesser cities. She’d worn them out, the blue creek, an embodiment spattered with paisley.

The landlord doubled in the shock of canceling amalgams & peek-throughs. We admired his boyish good looks, the way he stuttered or would grow dark with awe. & He himself allowed us to continue in this opinion, although we cried, & would grow wanton. Thus it was mostly an issue of revenue, & the pale years which added up next to the souvenirs we hoped would fill them in the coming weeks, after the children began to arrive.

The indiscriminate shareholders pummeled us to confirm our restless sense we should have ended there, among the convenience stores & thrift institutions.

Partially fruitful—yet her primitive expanse demanded the same few heightened tarmacs.

To exemplify or signal the resinous filmstock.

(Awakened in her drear, evasive nerve).

Yet these hampers were delightful—you really should soak them! & The remnants—envied, deeply etched in jade. It was sundown: we must all head to galleries & factory outlet stores to discuss the day’s advances. Frangible as a piece of old metal left out in the yard, whose use or purpose had since been lost to weathering ancienity.

Jaunty train signals viewer. Viewer responds, but in a restless way, one not adjacent to its social causes.

At one point, an exclamation, or something slightly poetic, needed to be put there. But no rain was expected for weeks, & then someone had the joi de guerre to report on it after the riots.

Especially with the level of flopping that distinguished our preceding toast—one grew too weak to hear from them, & new guests had to be called to take their place.

“The stand-in guests are better,” exclaimed one, a Mrs. Cook.
Immediate scansion pries me from the winery. Yet I droop—for I am a
calloused individual—in due course fleeing.

Copy into flames if the world is not cured. Board them up in the absense of a
discreet, winning retinue.

Now, I long to hear your opinion on these matters—why don’t you forward it
to me! The exhaustion level logically contradicted all that had hung there
beforehand—but still she took that as a sign of trade & signaled the appropriate
taxies to dash off, just to dash.

That having been said, let’s move on to the next topic which sounds even more
promising. Your acute sense of needles always filmed me.

But I wanted to let you know the endorsement wasn’t actually a sign of any
positive opinion whatsoever. Let’s chalk it up to a new sense of wander & spill
coffee on the documents.

There are certain sensations which can only be linked to retyping. One
example—the prizes in your sensational mattress.

Apparently then things got to be repeated in the crop circles.

“...Said to me he wouldn’t burn them, but has strayed.”

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALICE NOTLEY


SW: It seems that in your latest book, Mysteries of Small Houses, you’re
somewhat narratively going back through the personal, formal, and
political history in your life’s work so far. What was it like for you to
write that?

AN: Well, writing Mysteries wasn’t an autobiographical project at all—it wasn’t supposed to be autobiography. I originally wrote it out of
sequence. At a certain point, Doug [Oliver] pointed out to me that it
would be a lot easier to read if it were in chronological order. But what
I was really trying to do was re-center the self because I was tired of
hearing about the de-centered self. And when you hear a phrase too many
times, if you’re me, you think, “Ha ha, I think I’ll do the opposite.”
You know, I always want to do the opposite of what everyone’s doing. I
thought, “What does it mean to re-center the self? Should I try it out?
What about the first person pronoun?”—because I hadn’t used it in a
really personal way in a long time. And then I got interested in seeing
how close to the truth I could get, how close to the pronoun, how close to
the life-and-death, being alive situation. And I scared the shit out of
myself, actually, when I was writing those poems. Existentially it was,
“I’m here. There’s no bullshit allowed. I have to tell the truth. What
is it? Where am I? I’m going to die. What does that mean?” But there
was also a trance process involved. I got involved in self-hypnotism.
And I don’t know what that has to do with politics, except the whole book
has a political shape as well, doesn’t it? Because my life’s been
involved with feminist problems, and my generation was involved with the
Vietnam War, and now that I’ve left the United States, I feel entirely
involved with international problems. And I find the United States to be
a very narcissistic place with too much power over the outside world. I
mean, a narcissist should not have that much power.

SW: It’s interesting to hear you say that’s a concern for you politically
because your work with self-hypnotism seems an inverse of such extensive
national power. You’re retreating into or taking power over yourself.
Could you talk more about how those personal procedures affect your work?

AN: I sort of stumbled into it, but I think writing poetry is very close
to a trance process anyway. There doesn’t seem to me to be very much of a
difference between the state of writing poetry and meditation, writing
poetry and some sense of soul. It’s drawing on soul, and soul is an
utterly repressed element in this century. This century is all about the material, outside proliferation of everything and a fear and denunciation of the soul.

HS: How did you learn about the method of self-hypnosis?

AN: I was exploring self. I was trying to see if I had been the same person all along. So I would try to remember certain times in my life and remember what I was like then, and I would relax according to some very simple yoga techniques I learned a thousand years ago in exercise class at Barnard. I just started having these sensations after a while. My legs would tingle, my limbs would tingle. I would have the sense of something very fluid coursing through me. It’s like there’s another element inside us or something. It’s hard to describe. It’s like the substance of relaxation, but it’s also the substance of something else. I just started feeling it. The sensations were really concrete. I asked Doug what he thought they were, and he said, “You’re hypnotizing yourself. Go get a book.” And I went and got a book, so I could study self-hypnosis techniques. Then I started playing with very simple techniques, like counting backwards, letting my arms go heavy, and things like that. And I could trance out just a little bit further, but it was always in order to pull back and then write things, and that’s why the book is so consistently in the present tense.

HS: Which poems did that process particularly influence?

AN: All of them. I don’t think there are any poems in [Mysteries of Small Houses] where I didn’t at some point use the technique. It seemed to me I was my best self, my clearest, most soulful self when I was four years old, because I was fully formed, and I wasn’t warped yet - you know, the way they get you and they warp you. I was really kindly and brave and things like that. I had the virtues when I was four, and then I slowly lost them because people made me afraid of saying the wrong thing, making mistakes. I went around with gangs of girls who were bullies, and got involved with all the bad things. But when I was four, I was really good. We lived in this particular house, which was a very poor house on an alley. It was later torn down; it was a rickety, wooden house. So I associated all of that with that house, and the house keeps appearing in the book. I would put myself into a trance, and then I would enter the house, and then when I would enter the house, I could enter any of the other times along my timeline. But first I would have to see the house. Actually, that’s part of self-hypnosis, too, or hypnosis, to find a setting or a place or an image that you’re comfortable with, and I didn’t know that either. So all of that was really strange, accidental but purposeful in some way.

SW: You aren’t the only one drawn in. You write: “Oh kids life is feelings like these it’s the talk of it drawing / the others outside to your house: the news is throughout us / the mondial flames of hell, the funniness, we are / unironized.” The House becomes this place of creation energy which draws you, first, into it, and then others.

AN: Oh, that’s a different house.

SW: Yes, but it’s

AN: It’s the same house, yes. They’re all small houses, and there are four or five different houses involved in the book. There’s that house, the four-year-old house. The other probably principal house is the house which we lived in in New York, which was an apartment on St. Mark’s Place, a very small railroad apartment, where I lived for sixteen years. It was just tiny, I brought my kids up there. And then there’s my grandparents’ house, which was another tiny house that had a big yard but no shower or anything. They used to take sponge baths at the sink every day, and they used to wash me in a wash tub outside. There are some other houses - there are a couple of houses in Chicago, but they were larger and kind of spookier. I didn’t like them as much as the smaller ones.

SW: Always these small houses and small amounts of money, too.

AN: Yes, but also the sense is that if more people chose smaller houses and small amounts of money, the world would be a lot better. We wouldn’t be taking up so much of the world’s substance, we Americans and industrialized nations and so forth. There’s a very real sense in which we all need to cut our incomes. That’s how you deal with poverty. You don’t make the poor rich. You sort of meet them half-way, don’t you. It’s not sensible to think that you can lift them up to some middle-class place. And anyway, who wants to be middle-class? It’s more fun to be poor.

SW: You write a lot about how this relates to writing, too, “the proliferation of pages” and so forth, weighing down the earth. What redeems that?

AN: I don’t know, I don’t know, because I keep producing more pages. There was a point in the 80’s when there just seemed to me to be too many books, and they all looked alike. I had lost sense of the individual shape and look and texture of books. It had to do with desktop publishing, which is also a good thing because we can all make books and anyone can publish some books. It’s something that’s available to any poet, but on the other hand, I would just get so nauseous walking into a
bookstore, and there would be all these more poetry books. There's really a lot of bad poetry around. There's also an extremely exciting younger generation right now, but I didn't know that then, and they weren't quite around. Now, I know they're there, and I know who they are.

SW: Oh. Who are they?

AN: They're these people between about 23 and 36 in all different cities. They're very chaotic and eclectic, and I think they've survived the factionalism of my generation. They've survived Language Poetry. They've survived New York School. They just sort of take whatever they can. They're not very political, and I wish they were more political. Then there's all that multi-culturalism, which is also very healthy, and I haven't worked out how that fits in. The new thing they're doing, which I don't think they know they're doing, is redefining personal relationships, and it makes their poetry different. They're redefining personal relationships and racial relationships and things like that because they're different; their attitudes are different. What you do new isn't always what you know you're doing new. Like I didn't know that what I was doing new had to do with being a woman. And it took me a while to figure that out because it was the struggle I was caught up with. You can't come in with an overview and say, "This is what I'm doing," when it's part of your whole process in life.

HS: What do you think about the pervasive suggestion that young poets need to find their own voice before they can really start writing or start sharing their work?

AN: Well, it takes a very long time to find that, but they already have it, is the thing. Anyone already has it who's any good. But it comes out of your body; it doesn't come out of words on the page. It's like your literal voice. It's like making contact with literally the way you sound and the way you make words. It's not style.

HS: Do you feel that voice is one united, consistent entity?

AN: Yes, but it's various. I write in a lot of different styles and supposedly a lot of different voices, but they all come out of my throat. They don't come out of my head; they come out of my throat. It's physical. I think there's been a lot of denial of the physicality of poetry in the last ten or fifteen years. The body has got to be put back into poetry because poetry comes out of the body. All that philosophical shit about writing is prior to speaking — there have been all these crackpot theories, but they're just philosophical theories - they're just theories. But I know what it feels like to write a poem. It's my body in process. It's my soul and my voice and the me interacting with the world and my friends and all of that. Theories don't have anything to do with that.

SW: One word I'm drawn to in your poetry and in your more critical writing is "tenderness," as a quality of poetry which is bound up with ideas of harmlessness and such.

AN: Well, a lot of my poetry is violent, too.

SW: It is.

AN: Tenderness is a really underestimated quality, and I think about it, but I don't really know how to get it. It seems to me I've only ever gotten it when I was really very wounded, and you don't go after being wounded. It comes to you, unfortunately. Probably some of my best poetry is in that book, At Night the States, those little, tiny poems I wrote after Ted died. People never know what to do with them when I read them aloud.

SW: They are very vulnerable poems.

AN: They're very vulnerable. The audience can't clap. They can't show appreciation for them. It's not a crowd-pleasing emotion; it's something else. Tenderness is a very difficult quality to work with, and people don't always respond to it, although they should. They prefer rabble-rousing. Anyone wants to be lead. It's terrible, everyone wants to be lead.

SW: Also, you said in your Naropa talk on "Wild Form" that sometimes you find your forms embarrassing.

AN: Almost always.

SW: That embarrassment seems crucial to me because it seems like a missing link between a confessional poetry which now seems outdated and overdone and some more "experimental poetry" which may lose its grip on the heart of the matter.

AN: Well, I was embarrassed when I was writing Alette because of the quotation marks. They were embarrassing, and it was embarrassing to be writing a narrative poem. Nobody wanted me to; they really didn't. A lot of people reacted negatively to both those qualities. I think all the narrative poems I've written since then have produced a certain amount of embarrassment. It was embarrassing to write Mysteries, obviously, because
I cut so close to the bone. Everything I've done since then has been embarrassing, too. It's almost always embarrassing.

HS: You said in your interview with Ed Foster (1988, Talisman) that you don't really think of yourself as a story-writer, yet it was around that time that you started thinking about writing The Descent of Alette, which seems so much like a story to me.

AN: Yes, well, I think I'm obsessed with story in some way, and sometimes it comes out as a negativity towards story. Because it seems to me that we're all constructing narratives about our lives and our friends, and that we get stuck in them, and in that sense, I am against story. Also, when I was talking to Ed, I meant that I was a very poor teller of stories. I can't tell jokes. I would always leave the middle out. I get so bored with the middle, and the middle is the part that makes the joke work. So my favorite joke is a joke that goes, "A skeleton walks into a bar and says, 'Give me a beer and a mop.'" That's the joke. I've always had trouble telling, constructing a story in that way, and I admire people who can. I became obsessed with the idea of writing an epic in the traditional way, although it happened gradually in the process of writing Alette. I always figure out what I'm writing while I'm writing it, and so Alette is sort of fragmentary at first and then becomes more and more narrative. As I taught myself how to make the narrative, the first thing I needed was the measure. I had spent years and years reading long poems, and I knew that what I really needed was the measure. At this point (although not totally), I felt entirely uninterested in what people like Olson and Williams had done. I didn't want that. I didn't want it in pieces. I didn't want a broken surface of that kind. I wanted a continuous surface. I wanted it to sound like it came out of the culture and not out of a single person's very, very interesting head. That's what Olson is about - that interesting mind of his. Williams, too. I wanted something else; I just wanted to see if you could do the traditional thing. Obviously, you can't, but that was what I was trying to do. I was trying to make a poem for other people.

HS: What are other responses that you've had to The Descent of Alette?

AN: I've started to get a very good response, and I don't know about it. It's happening behind my back because I'm in Paris. I thought nobody was paying any attention to it and that I was going to have to do all the writing about it. That's why I started writing about it so much. But I've recently discovered two reviews, one in the Antioch Review (Summer 1998) and one in the Denver Quarterly.

SW: I want to get back to your wish that younger generations of poets be more political. How would you like to see that happen?

AN: Well, there are just overwhelming problems, and it's possible the planet as we know it is coming to a close in the next few hundred years. I think the future really has to be addressed very seriously, and also the question of what America is doing to the planet. America is just taking over the planet, and Americans act as if that's great. And a lot of it is. But the part that has to do with companies and culture, isn't. The part that has to do with things like personal freedom and individuality is good. I mean it's great to be an American in France. I'm always so glad I'm not French. Because I sit like this - with my legs open and sprawled around and dress like a man. All of that part is really comfortable, but we're killing their culture. We're doing it all the time.

HS: What issues do you think are critical and tangible enough to capture the attention of the American young population?

AN: The environmental question should be capturing everyone's attention, and I don't know how it can't. Once you start thinking about your grandchildren, then your attention is probably captured. What does a planet mean? What does it mean to have a planet? What is a universal ecology? I don't know. I've just started thinking like that. If this planet is really ruined, what does that mean in the universe? Does it mean something? It's a question that just gets bigger and bigger. What are our responsibilities to all of these disappearing species? I was just sent by Jack Collom, who teaches eco-poetics at Naropa, this essay from Harper's Magazine about how many species are disappearing. Scientists say it's the same as at the end of the age when the dinosaurs died. It's that drastic a changeover. And it's all because of us. It's not an accident; it's not coming from the outside. We're killing off all of these forms of life. It's a very huge killing off, and I don't know if the planet can take care of us after a few hundred years. There are going to be so many people. And we're so dependent on science, and science is so horrible.

SW: How do you feel about cars, Alice?

AN: I hate cars. I don't have a car. I've always been phobic about them. I used to think it was just me being phobic. It probably is, but now I get to say that I'm virtuous. I had to learn how to drive a car when I was a teenager, and I couldn't handle the car. I've never been able to understand them. They go so close to each other. It's so dangerous. It's an annual offering up of a holocaust of bodies. The first thing I was made to learn was how many people died in car accidents. That was supposed to make us be safe drivers. But it just made me think
that cars were irrational. It was 148,000 people a year at that point. That was in 1962. I don’t know how many it is now. We all have friends that have died in car accidents. It’s just an irrational way to live.

HS: How have spirituality and mythology influenced your work?

AN: That’s the most embarrassing thing of all. I guess I’ve always been religious in some sense, but I don’t know if I believe in God, exactly, or anything like that. I just want to make contact with whatever the essential It is, which I assume I am. You know, it’s in me, and in all other people, and in rocks and air and everything.

SW: You like rocks.

AN: Yes, I love rocks because I grew up in the desert. I don’t know - I wrote Alette, and I was taking the journey with Alette as it was happening. There’s the point in Book 3 when the owl tears her apart, where she has to enter the black lake. When I finished the book, I realized I didn’t know what was on the other side of the black lake, and the poem was therefore unfinished in some way. And probably the rest of my life would deal with really understanding the black lake. I’ve been thinking about that ever since then. But it’s impossible, and nobody wants you to do it. And if you do do it, then you sound like a crackpot. It’s very difficult.

HS: Nobody wants you to ask those questions?

AN: No one wants you to ask those questions. No one wants you to discuss spirituality. No one wants you to discuss God, or whatever it is. The ground of the universe - no one wants you to discuss it. No one wants you to discuss the experiences you have when someone dies, which are very profound and cut through our sense of these concrete dimensions we’re caught in. I’ve had these experiences, and I know these other things happen when someone dies, that you’re in touch with something else. It’s there. How could it not be? I’m not a person who has psychic experiences, but we all know people who do, and nobody talks about it. Science has outlawed it as something that can be investigated. But William James was interested in it and had statistical information about it. It’s there. And if twelve percent of the population is willing to admit to these experiences, that’s statistically significant, isn’t it?

HS: What role have those thoughts played in your poetry?

AN: Well, I just want to talk to the dead all the time, so I’m always trying to get in touch with them. You know, I’m not a crackpot, and I

don’t have that kind of experience. I have poetry experiences. All of my spirituality is attached to poetry, and the way I feel while I write and while I read. In between, I’m just caught in concrete life like everybody else, and I don’t know how to do it. I have all these responsibilities. I have all these people I have to take care of and think about, and so forth. It’s in my poetry. My poetry makes me really high, and it puts me in touch with all sorts of things. And the rest of the time, not so much. No, because there are too many people to be responsible to, and other people are always trying to keep you from being in touch with those things. And then if you get in touch with them with other people, you instantly form a cult, and then you have a power structure, and everything’s fucked at that point, right?

SW: One of my favorite moments in Alette is when the Tyrant has just been shot, and he announces that on his deathbed he has seen the white light and come back to life. And Alette says, “‘That’s when I knew that ‘the Light’ ‘was a lie.’” I think that’s when I most felt your expression of spirituality to be really important. You seem to be going beyond the myth of pure Light to a place that contains both light and darkness.

AN: Well, Alette was about inverting the traditional spiritual symbols and inverting Dante. So instead of going up I went down; instead of going into the light, I went into the darkness. There is a tradition for that in mysticism as well, but I wasn’t thinking about it at the time. I thought about it later.

HS: But what confused me about that was when at the very end when you wrote, “‘all the lost creatures’ ‘Came to light’.” When I read that, I immediately thought about the section where Alette says that she knew the light was a lie.

AN: Yes, but what I’m also saying is that it’s been repressed. The light’s been repressed, that’s why it’s in the dark. All of those people and those beliefs and the poor and everybody, are just pushed down into the darkness. I think what we want is for that to be integrated into daily life, really, so there isn’t this dichotomy between the way you live and where your spirituality is. It’s the dichotomy between conscious and unconscious as well - Why should there be a dichotomy? Why can’t they be more mixed up together? Why does everything have to be structured with walls in between all the parts? That’s an invitation for the dark to come into the light, rather than the other way around. The poor get to come live above the ground as well. All the other kinds of beings, a being that everyone has forgotten about gets to come back up to the surface.

HS: That’s beautiful.
AN: But can it ever happen? It can only happen individually. It's a one-by-one experience. But that's why poetry is good - because it is done by one person with a piece of paper. Prose can't do it the same way.

HS: In the Ed Foster review, you end it by saying, "[Art is] a total commodity, and poetry is neither a commodity nor instant satisfaction of any kind." Do you feel like that's changed at all? Do you feel like since that time (1988), your poetry is being received differently or having a different impact?

AN: No.

HS: I mean you're on this tour from San Francisco to L.A. to...

AN: Yeah, but I could have been on that tour then because I put it together myself. I knew the same people, just about, then. I'm not making any money. I'm making $150-200 at most of these places. Penguin has taken me on. My editor has told me - All the poetry books sell the same amount. Whether you're from the academic, the mainstream, the avant-garde, or you're an old beatnik. You sell between two and three thousand copies of books. That's how far it goes.

HS: That's the reach?

AN: Yeah, nothing ever changes, except that inside the very tiny poetry world, more people get to know about you after a while. There are the effects that poetry has on the world, and they're very slow. They're just so slow. I do think poetry matters. I have to think that.

HS: Well, I agree with you, but how do you convey that feeling to somebody who doesn't think that it matters?

AN: People aren't properly educated about poetry. My mother was better educated about poetry than people are now, even people who go to universities. She has poems committed to memory. She never went to college, but she has these sound structures in her head. Because she was taught poetry as something you read aloud and something you respond to both intellectually and sensually. She doesn't know a lot of poems, but she likes it. My kids, who are now poets, were very badly educated as to how to read poetry. People now seem to find the most boring poems to teach people in school. And then college - when you go to college, you're never taught that the sound matters. You're never taught that it's a word-by-word, sound-by-sound relation between you and the poem, and that you have to read it slowly, sound it either silently or aloud in order to get it. That you have to slow down for it. No one's taught that.

My husband has this whole theory about how to educate people. He puts electrodes on people's throats, and he gets them all to read, passages from Pope. And you can see how people read the poems in almost the same way, and that is the shape of the poem. You can see it on these graphs of raw sound. And he thinks that those pictures should be used to educate people about poetry.

HS: What do you think?

AN: Well, I think that's probably a good idea because people like to look at the graphs, they really like to. Have you ever seen a raw sound record? It's like claws scratching all across the line. It goes up and then down and then wiggles a little, the way the voice does. And then down here, it will do something that mirrors that because we all unconsciously are involved in change but balance at the same time. You can see what makes free verse different from traditional verse because what's left after you take away the consistent meter and the rhyme is that, those balancing sound patterns. That's what we use.

HS: In what ways do you feel like you've influenced the people close to you in your life, in terms of poetry?

AN: In terms of poetry?

SW: Yes - How did you influence Ted, and how do you influence Doug?

AN: Let's see, how did I influence Ted? He stole a lot of words from me. I used to give him failed poems. I think I extended his vocabulary and language in some way that would be very hard to describe to you. But I also just made there be a talking woman in his life, of a certain kind. We were a poetry conspiracy together, but it's hard for me to remember it now. We were just always thinking and talking about poetry. He taught me a lot because he was eleven years older than I, and he was my primary poetry teacher as a beginning poet. And then I brought him all of this new consciousness, which he was very open to.

HS: About what sort of things?

AN: Just about the fact that a woman was a poet. He hadn't known any really good women poets before our generation, and then he became friends with Anne [Waldman], friends with Bernadette [Mayer], and then he married me. It seems to me he saw it probably before I did. He saw that that was there, and he had a very pure love of poetry, and no sexism kept him from appreciating that because poetry was much more important to him than being a man. So he was very good that way. But then when I married Doug, he and I
both had this big interest in the narrative poem. I was just trying to figure out what to do about it, and he had already written a very important narrative poem, which is called The Infant and the Pearl, which has been very influential in England. It's about the rise of Thatcherism in the 80's and what it did, how it just sort of demolished socialism, and demolished the care for other people involved with socialism. It's written in the pearl stanza - Do you know the pearl poem, with all of its 1,000 rules? He thought that if he used that stanza, he could dignify the form of the political poem. Because there's always this question as to whether or not you can write a political poem, or there used to be. Something people talked about when I was young was that, "You can't write political poems. They're too boring, and too cut and dry," and stuff. He thought if he used that stanza, which is very formal, and very beautiful and very intricate, that he could make a particular kind of poem. And the poem is a real knockout. And then he came to New York to live with me, and while I was writing Alette, he was writing a poem called "Penniless Politics," which is about a Haitian immigrant getting elected President of the United States for about five minutes in Prospect Park in Brooklyn. Just for a minute, as a kind of a spiritual position. Because real politics is different, and it's always in process and performance. But we feed each other that way. He's very political. And I've forgotten what I give him, but probably something. I just give him constant non-stop poetry. Because he's always believed in living a practical as well as a poetic life, and I just do poetry all the time.

HS: You remind him.

AN: I never let him stop thinking about poetry for more than about five minutes.

HS: What do you see yourself doing next?

AN: I'm in the process of writing a trilogy. You may have seen pieces of this thing called "Disobedience."

HS: Yeah, it was on the Buffalo list.

AN: I finished that - these are all very long. And then I wrote this second part called, "Reason and Other Women," and I've just finished it. And I'm trying to write a third one. "Disobedience" is very aggressive. This is all like Alette naturalized; it's like Alette, but it's me. Me just trying to cope with everything, and trying to do it for my life, rather than as a formal thing in a poem. So "Disobedience" is aggression and everyday hell, sort of getting it out of the way. And "Reason and Other Women" is about how the mind works, really. It's got all these mental patterns in it. It's me trying to keep up with my thoughts, but
NEW & RECOMMENDED

Chris Stroffolino, Stealer's Wheel (Hard Press, 1998)

Hanging out in the DMZ between mind and body, Stroffolino's refusal to distinguish between the physical, the idiomatic and the conceptual is endlessly fascinating, as in the following: "I grasp at the straw that broke the camel's back / The short straw which is the needle in the haystack / Of the mind one tries to drive the camel through / For surely, the mind is a place one can only get to by car." As a critic Stroffolino is anxious to prove the O'Hara/Ashbery distinction false, a job he accomplishes in the poems. James Tate: "The poems spin and jump and dance before finally telling you you have won the lottery. Stroffolino is an original" - true - "and he's brilliant" - true.


His own anxieties aside ("I / seem to have lost my avant-garde / card in the laundry") Perelman doesn't need to carry papers (Do you know me?...), or rather, the papers on which the poems are printed will suffice, reminding us as they do that he's still the once and future forerunner. The long poem, "The Manchurian Candidate: A Remake," well, I'll only hyperbolize if I tell you, so go read it for yourself. Michael Gizzi: "An unsedated, highly educated wiseguy — wise in the biblical sense — Bob knows we've been had...I for one am glad he's out there pitching word strikes for the future state of our condition."


DiPalma's ear is a near miracle, his eye(s) that of a trickster printer. Every book seems to defy our previous understanding of "DiPalma." — and is there anyone more influential, just now, on younger experimental writers? For Creeley, his poems are "light in an old time window," for Perloff they're like "Wallace Stevens...under the sign of Dada," for Codrescu they're "just like Heraclitus," for MacLow they're "gnomic and aphoristic" and bring to mind Laura Riding. And if there's not enough of an endorsement among those bright lights, see Jacques Debrot's review of Letters in Rhizome 3: "The constantly mutating poetic forms DiPalma innovates are alternately the site of language's resistance and the place of its transformation."

Ange Mlinko, Matinées (Zoland Books, 1999)

Mlinko's poems will make whatever preconceived notions you have about the "experimental" and the -what? - "normative" feel embarrassingly clichéd. She's often narrative, always ornamental, sweet sounding, and, at the same time, schizophrenically imaginative with a head for measure like Williams or Creeley. "Even the stem of my wine glass fills with wine / with a ball in my hand to knock the clock off the wall / while shooting for the net or hoop or hole / I was told to go / walk on wild ornaments for something knew to do." She did it. The result, in August Kleinzahler's words, "thrilling as a jai alai match between two phenomenologists on a windy spring night."

Kit Robinson, Democracy Boulevard (Roof Books, 1998)

Regarding the two poems which appeared in COMBO 2, Robison advised, "allow plenty of space between the lines...in order to allow each line to pop." It's impossible to explain this popping but it happens in the experience of reading these poems. There's an attention to effect born of the conviction that the poem is "doing something." The ten cover photos - a series of the statue of liberty on a tilt - remind us of what's at stake, and of what we got: a world, as Emerson says, that's "not fixed but sliding." Steve Evans: "Democracy Boulevard is the accident-strewn one-way street studded with industrial parks and hospitality suites that dead-ends just in front of the fortress of Consolidated Capital...You will never be a person — that is, a 'cliche-ridden isomorph, a creature of habit' — again."

Nathaniel Mackey, Whatsaid Serif (City Lights Books, 1998)

When I introduced Mackey's reading at the Writers House, I compared the experience of reading his work to traveling to a series of border zones, places which, in Paul Jay's words, "simultaneously organize and disorganize space, identities, and cultures...a fluid and improvisational space in which languages and identities hybridize and evolve." Though it's true of all his work, Whatsaid Serif may be the best place to start the trip: smack in the middle of the Song of the Andoumboulou, where Mackey breaks the news to us: "we're the rough draft." (from song # 20: "We knew there was / a world somewhere / How to get / there no, would we get / there no..." ) Robin Blaser: "Nathaniel Mackey's poem is a brilliant renewal of and experiment with the language of our spiritual condition and a measure of what poetry gives in trust — 'heart's / meat' and the rush of language to bear it."
CONTRIBUTORS’ NOTES

MATT HART has crossed to the other side of the pond, where he lives in Philadelphia. He would like to dedicate these poems to the memory of his father.

JEN HOFER is a poet and translator originally from the San Francisco Bay Area. She is currently editing and translating an anthology of contemporary poetry by Mexican women. Her poems and translations can be found in recent or forthcoming issues of Chain, Expulsion, Rhizome, and XCP.

NATE CHINEN hails from Honolulu, studied poetry at the University of Pennsylvania and worked at the Kelly Writers House before moving to New York. A jazz drummer as well as a poet, he is currently working on a biographical project with jazz impresario George Wein.

SHEILA MURPHY has work scheduled to appear from Wild Honey Press and from Sun & Moon Press. Her home is in Phoenix, where she founded and coordinates with Beverly Carver the Scottsdale Center for the Arts Poetry Series, now in its 12th season.

PATRICK DURBIN edits and publishes Kennng. Work is forthcoming in The Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies, Proliferation and Outlet. A serial poem, “And so on” will be published by Texture Press this year.

JENN MCEVERY is co-editor of incen press. Recent work in Lampblack and Schoolhill and a chapbook due this spring from Poes & Poets press. Another chapbook, as yet untitled, will be published by Beautiful Swimmer Press.

BILL BERKSON is a poet, art critic and professor at the San Francisco Art Institute. Two new books of his poetry, Serenade (Poems & Prose 1975-1989) and Fugue State (Poems 1990-99), are forthcoming from Zoland Books.

RACHEL RAFFLER is a student at Haverford College where she organizes a poetry reading/open mic/poetry slam series and co-edits The Haverford Review. New poems due to appear in Camelia.


RACHEL DALEY’s work has recently appeared in Lampblack, Explosive and Aporia, as well as in a collaboration with Peter Ganick, Today It Starts Into Light (Notes and Poets). She lives in San Francisco.

KRISTEN GALLAGHER is a community health educator who likes sunny weather. She has a record label, hand written records, and a press, handwritten press.

CLARK COOLIDGE’s recent books include This Time We’re Bath/City in regard (Sun & Moon, 1998), For Kurt Cobain (The Figures, 1995), The Crystal Text (Sun & Moon, 1995), The Rove Improvisations (Sun & Moon, 1993), and the forthcoming New It’s Jazz, Kerosene and the Sounds (Living Batch Press).

MARK DUCHARMÉ is the author of Contracting Scale (Standing Stones) and the forthcoming Near To (MEB / PNY) and D affine Series (Dead Metaphor). Work out or forthcoming in American Letters & Commentary, First Intensity, lower limit speech, Mix Prep and Poetry New York. He lives in Boulder, CO.

SHAWN WALKER lives in West Philadelphia. The first Writers House Resident Coordinator (1996-97), she returned to Philly after spending a year in England and now works as a staff member at Penn. Her first book, "The Purchase of a Day", is due out from Handwritten Press in the fall.

HEATHER STARR is a poet, an Oregonian, and the Resident Coordinator of the Kelly Writers House.

ALICE NOTLEY’s most recent books are Mysteries Of Small Houses and The Desert Of Alette, both from Penguin. She lives in Paris with the British poet Douglas Oliver, with whom she co-edits the magazine Gare du Nord.
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