
TEMBLOR

CONTEMPORARY POETS

ISSUE NUMBER 6

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Susan Howe *Thorow*
David C.D. Ganz *Sin Tactics*
Barbara Guest *The Screen of Distance*
Clark Coolidge from *Literal Landscapes*
Denis Mahoney from *Black Pig*
Ronald Johnson *The Fireworks Spires*
with musical compositions by William Hibbard
Keith Waldrop from *Transcendental Studies*
Fanny Howe *Torn Parts: A Novel*
Dennis Phillips from *A World*
Mei-meï Berssenbrugge *Recitatif*
Six Writers On Eshleman
Paul Christensen • Rachel Blau DuPlessis • Jed Rasula
Gerald Burns • Karin Lessing • James Hillman
Clayton Eshleman *Golub The Axolotl*
Georges Bataille from *Guilty* translated by Bruce Boone
Bruce Andrews *Be Careful Now & other texts*
Bob Perelman from *Face Value*
Diane Ward from *Concept Lyrics*
Stephen Ratcliffe *Two Hejinian Talks*
Marjorie Perloff *On Steve McCaffery*
George Hartley *On "In The American Tree"*
Michael Blitz *On Jed Rasula* Linda Reinfeld *On Susan Howe*
Pasquale Verdicchio *Winter Insect, Summer Grass*
a novella Rosmarie Waldrop *A Form/ Of Taking/ It All*

EDITED BY LELAND HICKMAN

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Issue Number Six · 1987

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North Hollywood, California

A reading edition

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About this Edition

Temblor ran to ten issues between 1985 and 1989, edited by Leland Hickman from an apartment on Cahuenga Boulevard in North Hollywood. This is the sixth, published in 1987: twenty-eight contributions over 178 pages, opening with Susan Howe's *Thorow* and closing with Rosmarie Waldrop's *A Form / Of Taking / It All*, which runs to twenty-seven pages. Half the issue is criticism — Perloff on McCaffery, Christensen on Eshleman, Hartley on *In the American Tree* — which is what the magazine had become by its sixth number.

This edition is set from the scans of a single copy. Every page has been read and transcribed by eye against the page image. The magazine is a small portrait book, roughly 6¼ by 8¼ inches, and this edition enlarges it to 8½ by 11 with a single wide measure, so that long lines do not have to wrap. Each contributor opens on a fresh page.

Susan Howe's *Thorow* turns spatial at its close. Its last pages scatter words across the field and print some of them upside down or on a curve; those are reproduced as pictures, with each unit set at its printed horizontal position in reading order. Fourteen pages in the issue are set that way.

Denis Mahoney's *Ceremony and Celebration of the Flying Pigfish* is printed sideways, three pages turned ninety degrees to the rest of the issue. Those pages reached this edition damaged: the scan had split them into strips, and rejoining the strips costs one or two characters down the middle of each. Where the reading was obvious from what remained it has been completed silently; one place could not be settled honestly and is marked [?].

Ronald Johnson's *The Fireworks Spires* is printed with musical compositions by William Hibbard. Engraved music cannot be set as text; the three scores are described where they fall and not reproduced.

One page carries unverified text. Printed page 109, the opening of Clayton Eshleman on Leon Golub, could not be transcribed by the process used for the rest of the issue and is set from the machine reading of the scan, its two columns unpicked and its broken words rejoined. The words are reliable; the italics are not.

Printed typos and eccentric spellings are kept as they were set — *Nutral*, *Agreseror*, *gether together*, *Beseiged*, *deparmentalization*, *PeelingHead* closed up as printed. No editorial matter of mine appears once the text begins. Set in TeX Gyre Pagella, with display type in Termes after the magazine's own masthead; the colour is the cover stock, sampled from the scan.

Susan Howe

Thorow

1.

Go on the Scout they say
They will go near Swegachey

I have snow shoes and Indian shoes

Idea of my present
not my silence

Surprise is not so much
Hurried and tossed about
that I have not had time

From the Fort but the snow
falling very deep
remained a fortnight
Two to view the Fort & get a scalp
Domain of transcendental subjectivity
Etymology the this

present in the past now
So many thread

Fence blown down in a winter storm
darkened by outstripped possession
Field stretching out of the world
this book is as old as the people
There are traces of blood in a fairy tale

The track of Desire
Must see and not see
Must not see nothing
Burrow and so burrow
Measuring mastering

When ice breaks up
at the farthest north
of Adirondack peaks
So empty and so empty
Go back for your body
Hindge

Dear Seem dear cast out
Sun shall go down and set

Distant monarchs of Europe
European grid on the Forest

So many gether together
were invisible alway Love

The true Zeno
the immutable morality

Irruptives

thorow out all
the Five Nations

To cut our wete
of the Jentelmen

Fort the same
Nutral

Revealing traces

Regulating traces

at Fort Stanwix the Charrokey
paice

only from that Alarm
all those Guards

Constant parties of guards
up & down

Agreseror

Bearer law my fathers

Revealing traces

Regulating traces

To Lake Superior to view
that time the Shannas & Dallaways
Home and I hope passage
Begun about the middle next
to Kittaning

Eating nothing but hominey
Scribbling the ineffable
See only the tracks of rabbit
A mouse-nest of grass

The German Flatts
Their women old men & children
Numerous than I imagined
Singing their War song
I am
Part of their encroachment

Speed & Bleave me &
a good Globe to hang in a hall
with light

To be sent in slays
if we are not careful
To a slightly place
no shelter

Let us gether and bury
limbs and leves
Is a great Loast
Cant say for us now
Stillest the storm world
Thought

The snow
is still hear

Wood and feld
all covered with ise

seem world anew
Only step

as surveyor of the Wood
only Step

2.

Walked on Mount Vision

New life after the Fall
So many true things

which are not truth itself
We are too finite

Barefooted and bareheaded
extended in space

sure of reaching support

Knowledge and foresight
Noah's landing at Ararat

Mind itself or life

quicker than thought

slipping back to primordial
We go through the word Forest

Trance of an encampment
not a foot of land cleared

The literature of savagism
under a spell of savagism

Nature isolates the Adirondacks

In the machinery of injustice
my whole being is Vision

The Source of Snow
the nearness of Poetry

The Captain of Indians
the cause of Liberty

Mortal particulars
whose shatter we are

A sort of border life
A single group of trees

Sun on our back
Unappropriated land
all the works and redoubts
Young pine in a stand of oak
young oak in a stand of pine
Expectation of Epiphany
Not to look off from it
but to look at it
Original of the Otherside
understory of anotherword
Thaw has washed away snow
covering the old ice
the Lake a dull crust
Force made desire wander
Jumping from one subject
to another
Beseiged and beseiged
in a chain of Cause
The eternal First Cause
I stretch out my arms
to the author
Oh the bare ground
My thick coat and my tent
and the black of clouds
Squadrons of clouds
No end of their numbers
Armagedden at Fort William Henry
Sunset at Independence Point
Author the real author
acting the part of a scout
The origin of property
that leads here Depth

Indian names lead here
Bars of a social system
Starting for Lost Pond
psychology of the lost
First precarious Eden
a scandal of materialism
My ancestors tore off
the first leaves
picked out the best stars
Cries accompany laughter
Winter of the great Snow
Life surrounded by snows
The usual loggers camp
the usual bark shelter
Fir floor and log benches
Pines seem giant phenomena
Child of the Adirondacks
taking notes like a spy
Most mysterious river
On the confined brink
Poor storm
all hallows
and palings around cabin
Spring-suggesting light
Bustle of embarkation
Guides bewildered
Hunt and not the capture
Underthought draws home
Archaism
Here is dammed water
First trails were blazed
lines

Little known place names
tossed away as little grave
pivot bravura
Long walk on Erebus
The hell latch Poetry
Ragged rock beside hemlock
Mist in deep gulfs
Maps give us some idea
Apprehension as representation
Stood on Shelving Rock
The cold Friday
as cold as that was
Flood of light on water
Day went out in storms
Well structure could fall
Preys troop free
I have imagined a center
Wilder than this region
The figment of a book
Scarce broken letters
Cold leaden sky
Laurentian system of Canada
Tuesday the instant May
Elegaic western Imagination
Mysterious confined enigma
a possible field of work
The expanse of unconcealment
so different from all maps
Spiritual typography of elegy
Nature in us as a Nature
the actual one the ideal Self
tent tree sere leaf spectre

Unconscious demarkations range

I pick my compass to pieces

Dark here in the driftings
in the spaces of drifting

Complicity battling redemption

3.

Cannot be

every

where I

Parted with the Otterware

entreat

snap

at the three Rivers, & are

Re s o l u t i o n Gone to have a Treaty

picked up arrowhead

hieroglyph batteau

with the French at Oswego

islet

At this end of the carry

& singing their war song

neck

The French Hatchet

sheen

drisk

Their Plenipo squall Messages

disc

splint

coin

chip

lily root

cus

a very deep Rabbit

swamp

wavelet

of which will not per[mit] of

shrub

fitted to the paper, the Margins

mud

Fires

Encampt

by Frames should be exactly

waterbug

wood

Cove

night

canoes

c o v e r y

Places to walk out to

Tranquility of a garrison

Escalade

Traverse canon night seige Constant firing

Traverse canon night seige Constant firing

Gabion

Parapet

Cove
canoes
waterbug The Frames should be exactly wood Encampment
Fires by night
mud fitted to the paper, the Margins

shrub of which will not per[mit] of
swamp
wavelet a very deep Rabbit
lily root
cusk grease chip coin
disc
cedar splint Their Plenipo
sheen
Messages
drisk
The French Hatchet At this end of the carry
neck
& singing their war song
islet
hieroglyph
Picked up arrowhead
The War Belt
batteau
Messengers say

over the lakes

Of the far nations

You are of me & I of you, I cannot tell

Where you leave off and I begin

selving

forfending

Immedeat Settlem

but wandering

Shenks Ferry people

unhoused

at or naer Mohaxt

elect

Sacandaga vläie

vision

Battoes are return

thereafter

They say

resurgent

"Where is the path"

laughter

ankledeep

answerable

PASSACAGLIA

Moon wading through cloud Strict counterpoint last

reassemble

Stress Union

distant mighty

day

helter No nd

war

breasted

Premis

Awake! top hill demon daunt defiant lenght

a

on

ce

it

first

anthen uplispth enend

adamap blue wov thefthe

folled floted keen

Themis

thou sculling me
Thiefth

David C. D. Gansz

Sin Tactics

Part II of Millennial Scriptions

(rex quondam rexque futurus)

I. *Animadversions*

(spiritus contra spiritum)

Jesus said, "When you make the two one . . . and when you make the male and the female one and the same, so that the male not be male nor the female female . . . then you will enter the Kingdom."

— *The Gospel of Thomas*, c. 120

II. *Sin Tactics*

(animarum venator)

"Thus the maids are sent out openly from the Grail and the men in secret . . ."

— Wolfram, *Parzival*, c. 1210

"This is why your coming must be compared to the coming of Jesus Christ, in semblance only, not in sublimity."

— 'Map', *La Queste del Saint Graal*, c. 1220

III. *The Sentencing*

(anima christi; anima mundi)

"Nay", said the voice, "but there shall come a man which shall be a maid, and the last of your blood . . ."

— Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, 1485

IV. *Per Missions*

(esse in anima)

". . . the Second Coming of the Union, of the twy-natured single Person."

— Williams, *The Region of the Summer Stars*, 1944

"Or is he covertly presenting Jesus as an incarnation of Arthur? . . . So at his prophesied Second Coming we reserve the right to call him . . . King Arthur."

— Graves, *The White Goddess*, 1946

V. *Affirmations*

(*anima naturaliter christiana*)

"... Christ, whose mystical androgyny is established ..."

— Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, 1955

I

from the dead-blooms echoes silence'nsatiable
ofttimes slain by nearly sleet-turns alltoosoon's
a year the shadow comes betw'n' it's light'er
images on-air focus to canyon prayerlike there
the shrine of stone-lights ascend the comeliest
guarded precip'tous judges meant th'endless knots be
token's fell'd their tree-such leaves to do wont'she

*

we'd'four hopesour empires put-upon
the sceptres wellnigh ravage greensw'rd
stave-dolor's promenade tapers transcept
perilous dirges sinanimus namesinterregal
verify per advent ures visage'n' rapt
yr hyacinth same bethings tenebrific
recoil'd never-the-wrd's mistaken risk

*

in the third stage stung betw pride'n' shame'nough
wellsleave alone dice-eyes speechly-thrones garnet
jaunt'ly lathe downy tenderfullsinter cept embers
willowsweep tawdries rend thru virgin'ty's cryst'l
bridge the tree offire'nto perm'nent waterransom
w/ triad diction stun'd're the leprous metals
replete for's't we utter'd prayers's it

*

loved so we'n' the wrld of demands
w/ questions hall'd the riddl'd-lord
w/ guilt unanswer'd hearts geode sic
hoarfrost'd ghostly-breath out-bows the
graceful hurtling'n' doleful ex cruciate

swatcht'n' durstn't reposes sacro
sanct tablatures stun deign'd semblances

*

blush-arts study'n' practice she's of
method quest'onable will a stranger
since-to ashes reduced the cities-grind
blissstone sinsyne th'air'n the laughing
flower find'n to borne-itself sorrow's
presence wherefore the night rather'n the
day pur sued noble-love whoevertherewisht

*

thrasht'n' bedew'd the merciless ultramarine
love-philtres breathink unsullied accolades
forge be dazzl'd oriflammes pain stake
lightshod gainsaids stark'n' multi ply
haunts the sev'nth the first-follows lyric
unknowns wonderly tincture anti thetical
lumens nimbly-rend'er 'round the table

*

blazon hardihood's glaive-terrene
durancesin the crucible rubied w/
grace full green the poet crownshe where
fore we'n' cause forwhat chasten priv'ly
cleave sumptuous pen chants banish certain't'd
onslaughts harrow craven docilities tarry'n
mischief bent-shadowsilv'r adult the lady

II

hasten to secrete of rapturous time's
fullofpain-dalliance wrds's shone-flew
darkness the hawk for'slong the moisture of
fire reward that the journey brings allthewhile
silhouette cliffwhite cornwalls tin-trav'l
gravesores quayside at wrld'sedge hope

de struction's pre text destinies manifest

*

unadorn'd to hear love lies're must
depart'n order you the path the dance
to fondle thoughts're dwelt of yr fire
traces the measure proudly once lives
spoken the flesh-quest women's shadows heat
a heart's-gnarly grasp motivals diff'culties
pre-grave mem'ries of blood found dumb dawn

*

in to place the stars're bending
fixt you the demons at yr apartness
twice laugh howsay the hunt'r once
you're pert hedons unfulfill'd flay
precipice-deep affectations distress yr
companion's ashade mantle'n substantial
windows pickt-yr spirits bloody meet

*

close re action di-stances de part
from you apart from you a part of
you re serv'd undone ex animates dally
time thru-yr-hands bleeds yr names
pro noun ce you per plex hello's
dark-toned chromatic ventures fall
a wake to this dream-love courier she

*

'twixt lig'tures stalwart reticent scansions
cellules spurt'n elastic unseens retro grade
images ex tra verse-prophecy credulously'n
the navigable path of decorum walkshe of'er
sorrow freed the quick'nto bright con fusion
pass things so of their own'n the valley-stones
moved we yr death-in vent'd the year's that

*

be so to green'n' dear'n sist the pure
imprint's primly const'nt feebly'n' nit
w/ rutilic strove th'abrasions staunch'n'
unencumb'r'd gritt'ly smooth she
sings the bird-rare morrow punctually
sentient love-gold'n wrds're marks
purportion'lsay to-mean yr past screams

*

when-to-feel we still the vessel
come the holy pain'll face of
light-charr'd fight th'unit cities
for brilliance their banners dawn
space-verdured eyes efface meant twink
ling a tone nippl'd animage nightmare
lev'ties quart'r the lady's life unsperm'd

III

blesst w/ out-price the treasure-long
clangswords cum'brance smitt'n ends
set both know-up disastrous flowerspeak
paltry'n' hacking mis'ries furl'd land'send
stinginess joy'd a broad umbres quitted
the land'n mazy proxim'ties find'n we senti
mental'ties the quest's to find the quest

*

keepshe who'r hearts we seek that
find we not'll-to phantom-turn'd go
compete w/ woman the mem'ries quiv'ring
contactual sev'ral'ties winterred there
betw joy'n' pain inorder-of-signs place
we'rselfs forthwent end'r repose'r what
we've want-we can't swagg'ring promises

*

athirst she for'll to-the-truth lilt ridd'n
we may't who've sheaves of fire-bright
senses benumbing en dear ing ly pierced by
hand'n unknown thru-the-dark clothing clouds
valesce'n'ntangle id entities con character
sumed by passing strange furl sufficiently
bright'r'n beryllight green-suff'rings gleam

*

aff'rwch love-vassals gat curtailments
gard'nthink rasc'lly admixtures wretcht
the stag a-scribed to obligat'ry life'n
cliv'ties dealing'n ev'ryside death-clatt'r
do more'f done-to-be more's careen'll
throve're no love's replace love-flaw
less'll wise-fled the house of flesh souls

*

hideousin of mis fortune mort'l the hour-heart cleft
w/ pain the clouds the sun-watery torment'll gustful
bend of'r hearts the knees un shut enchantment's
window where're god's love thisin un stable
wrld's tells're we visaged inwhite see'er'n' whole
be shone red w/ gold ex-orb't'nt strick'n'n' laden
w/ winter etern'l shutt'rings ensky the miscreature

*

heart the fire tind'r kist the semblable
centring torn'n season'd houselled we
astonied ladily broke'n' riv'n renovate
the flesh-splay'd death's result'nt token's
conquer'd thy self-hast thou smould'r'din
this wrld changed we'r not lives away taken'n
humations shrinal erections enfeeble romanity

*

know'f life that earthly this love'r the

wrld irredeemables other recumbent beware
whites virgin ex cruciate hang'rs gain'st'r
own'r en'my ex toll animadvers'ry worst
th'unconceiv'd burdenslight scourge clatt'r'd
aforeset stonied visages hight'r hard
heartednessinter positions emasculate bedlam

IV

from the tree's the fruit far-from the
table's declension rises yr teach'r's
ambiguously dreary'n' drab'n hues
stolen be hold what cldn't a way from
the wrld pass for love exist a tension's
mis-takes what doesn't to need'n th'air
a drop she's been'nfor let-we-what'rselves

*

the pages snow-blank pre scribed
brave-el'ments hang periodic's gard'ns
be silv'r'n unspent virulence rev'l'n
decipherably code-smiles wait yrs
distinct we's one thru too-life-much who
loved to trouble the naked she'll mourn
of the north wind's needle there's enough

*

pluckt th'equation's a ripe'n' sembl'd nuisance
of th'art-aeries torn'n' of the designation
first to blood less light-shed th'illusion
forest scraped'n saffron canons mirror
churlish the laden yowlpish wintries wrest'n'
share'd we slim of joysin peril direst hers
solemnities are'n' yrs's the hour undeserv'd

*

drunk from the cymb'ls from the tymp'num
eat'n've we hereso pop'lar par lance assured the

terrors'n' marv'ls begin w/ out wrds reflects'n'
named she silence's vanquisht it's you've bar
sin'ster yr quick-self t'ang'r the din'n clamour
of'n temper ate rev'ries feel purple courage'us'n
eradicable blood springs drop whites headlance

*

sallow thraldoms smirch-fallow pendance
daintieswoon gelid fealties'nthrall behind
the hiding laur'l-self presence the battle it
half's perish able improvisions green-watcht
the grant'd taken shadow less'n's from the five
wounds rain'd sweat bloody down of'er eyes the
light's reseed ir reducible cryst'ls figure you

*

of sweat'n the bold un ear thing'sour
attachments giveshe for'n the known's pelting
babble it's unknow able'n' lives th'indiff'rent
gazes mettlesome lustres de mean saxifrage
clusive gyresin descent composures gleam from
solitude's grasp twice-saved the fading regalia
of yr star-crosst'ndulgence mercy regulates

*

in maybe april lambent candlemas
tol'rances wax for parch meant crumbs're
what wears the day there's hope there's
breath where therew/ dayslong rest'n
sin'ster plastersincin'rate wellworn-faith
loquets burgeon'n dignance soft fall'cies idle
stead fast th'icons howl splint'r'd jewels

V

ang'r't morning a way we put of sighs the
barter timidities gather the wind from
antiquity silence to missay doubtsshadow

be yond shent-darklings the starveling non
titular prism'd'n' blent flush red greet th'eye
swevensin be coming to be focus suff'rings
heartsease'r fatigue banisht life love short'ns

*

mournful'f mem'ry crimson-stain'd
hawthorne white-hawk may'nterlacement
fleshly fingers tip the fire-tongues
penetr'nt quickly comeshe sure-stand's
orb'd of flowersin fruit barren'nflamation's
loss unspeakable summ'r'sexalt'd'nto love
pangs well't the table yr mem'ries serve you

*

dead'n the month suff'r dol'rous the stroke'n'
fallsinsensible there be fore to attain the
treasure-hard ruin of sorrow heart's'r white the
phantom you're sembl'nt tray'n' tene at-one-meant
el'mental secrets whiten'd w/ may beseen according
to sight the blood-flower woman horizont'l'd'n
floriations those-fall'n re call a sleep

*

on sorrow'dvance'nto life th'attack to
silent of thisin the strength rode-we-passt
foll'wing the country firesumm'r wand'ring'n
likeness trifling spectres gallant of stone
con centric ruins crookt'n' clear the starseven
women's phantoms're oakish the ruler there
we'fer heart found fled their bodies souls

*

bare-you for's if love's caresses maid'n
of'er body clipping'n' halsing it's noised'n'
smelt the wish-liquid rove'n all to shiv'r'n'
dindle she sore be-bled w/ sev'r'l foin'll

thrull'd're lost be fore w/ draw you thought
so-take yr end for'll beseen'n ecstasy
hover achiev'd'n destroy'd love by

*

time'n that the speak'll stones pall sorcer'd
first'll death us take'r woodnesscant
hurtl'd'n' goddriv'n bound'n the citiesin
scribblt'n' quick t'answer the page's spellt
overlong blesst the quizzling asp'rant vext
the hale'n' hearty limn'd for love'sake
sorrow's for giv'n the thornelickt logrian wound

*

lord the roses among w/ poetry's dallied'r
radiant brow learnt she'd've knelt'n
shacklt'n' linkt the table's rent'll heart
felt the sentencing complisht wholer shrewd
the white-bright wand'rer wrothe'n avarice'll
silence grave-we came love-to feeling no
feeling be tend'd'n fortune no male issue'd

VI

or deal the firewall'f rondures grisliest
specklt clarions e-strange no fable the
writing'slay's gives'r journey to wooden's
the blesst-she who'self impenetrable adjectivals
diminish the stars pale unborn's yet a-test
yrself've mercy enshroud'd cities the defectson
waste-raundon mendicants outshone providentialove

*

sithen meand'r'n rove'n sund'r the form'dable
terce'n-versions co-here the bafflements linkt
for'n'er rumor bruited'n love-thought ruinous
time-toucht raiments to stone turn'd woman the
seaborn eaves drop lakes no bounds knew gnasht'n

laticlaves head waters rhymedemand wielden
dure clasht low-be the destinies fill here full

*

ecstasy suff'red w/ eve'n th'adamant maculate
phrases coin the wrld'n mort'l change
abasht the self'nflict'd-wrd outset where
yrself to hunt you saw th'extr'ord'nary myriad
appall'd'n' apparell'd'n' dresst'n dendony
evening the faces the wind from blooddrawn
diadem'd seething embrasures'll sleep you

*

hair-hersin the fire-heart lie w/'n' to
yr de cline the streets're tribal cascades
call'd so vaguer the tongue wags the chemical
gods in justice ripe'n' the crescent-scent
splurge the spoils so plund'r'd the queath be
strung by'n' by touch less hand lings fell'f
the cloak-flowers amongst'n visibil'ties maim'd

*

if'll be it thy to quieten brooding'n'
full-sore sighed love caused by dark
th'abstraction stupefied el'ments marv'llous
release their body souls offlesh-wounds fresh
from grisly corruption mis carry moved we to
com passion're unsmircht needs must let deflower
tranced the dewdrunk sun cries from the ground blood

*

flusht the sundry measures half-dissev'r
shiv'ring denizens magnify senses illustrious
danger'n' dole't the wrld of wealth unfrays
by life offear'r death of hope-moved to the
quick cut mode'r man'r of coming know not
we'fair from walls per suasions afterwrds

cast of figure'n' face'r wide graves gaped

*

wrldward whipt of sand'n' thorns the blood
mover shrilling winterslow splasht'n bury
glass means gold'n diminutives waft den
drites scathed 'hind'ndivis'bles urn
fields fract yr peneplanar th'inconspicuous
stone'ngrail'd sorrow'pon sorrow overbled
darknessin'r throats to name the name

VII

cld they giv'n the foremost press
no-counsel well w/ lett'rs devised
forw/ all'n'er to them'd come gain'n'
joy-sick to-be-whole for love pro vocations
succulent the swept deign'n diff'rences
furbish'n' wheedle parlous combesin'smuch
assume crosstations lacerate logres

*

wist they're'n' therew/ all ware
re formations aside esteem cloaks
green-to don unable to-mercy a
stranger the death stalker's w/ it
can they live'r desire'f the just
the coming await'sin regen'racy she
supreme'fall-flesh the way they went

*

the day's fine'n' brightly cov'r'd'nsteel
left they the cities go up'n'er principal
wheel'n' yr great-grief rais'd'n falt'rs
th'all ready book-gold'n name yr't hand
wch wrote at the door-silence loveshe who'f
the too-great gone the light-slit's arrow
they'd night'n' day the same'n all's changed

*

forbal'ncing light-scales impartial
the stone-sund'r'd they're from en
chant meant escape seeking from of
the cost know ledges form'd self-some
from their suture images part'd senses
heart-scythe cleft unforeseens quiv'r tard
phrases catch yr heat-death time-kill'r

*

the meek refrain't wond'rs some thing
by the light-drawn peril yr palace to blossom
the purple defect'n' flourish dis solution's
final-eyes the haughty strolling commands
meant clay to glory reduce the garm'nts
of giv'n that one of great-ecstasy granting
wear-so light that no end's need they

*

from yr drip-city-eye there god's
exact percipient fancies whispered
yr blood-names bespattered the kisses
betray candles sev'n'n' all aflaming
nomensland jangling a version's
hands illuminate dol'rous wond'rings
be spell'd'er stand'rd becomes you

*

yestere'en balms resplend'nt garlands
extra dices crenellate dross retinues
numberless spoils dint-so thurl'd'n'
blancht the radiant smatt'rings nodule'n'
rankle con secutions clencht'n' ravaged
th'amaranth stalks thru path less wood'n
cutting frost'n to yr heart to come wantshe

Barbara Guest

The Screen of Distance & other poems

In Medieval Hollow

Smother
floating in air headgear lit
"Light,
splendour, beauty, form, rule of the world"
Alan of Lille.

Dwarfs assemble with hook and thong,
tracing rivulets, plane trees, tidying rooks,
passing papers, muddling Thomistic drafts
while monks shift their garments and a thud
says fallen dwarf "ach" cries the priest
over the ink blot he has ruined November and
the plowing . . .

Aflutter with pagan tales the Mong Chieftain
spreads his rug the acrobat turns milk weeps,

From turf and dugget
hospice in a wafer
evensong alone in swaddled clothes she holds

No more trees
building on top of building
the archbishop fetched by a donkey.

Medieval surrenders by tallow light
labbed and lobbled into cellars
strew garters tightening the gyre

Simples sail in light hosen
their glides make a run for the moat
before it closes for the bridge crowd
in dank and fuses,

Plunging into a hollow
a hoard limits profits on sibilant limbs

and gaited throbbors braiding hair
look at the vision sitting on mud.

Under the bowed blue
in rhythmic joust pattern shadewise
gauntlets toss lances the moon
rises edging green Mundis,
gentle equerry the plague killed him.

Shut off that inner sound,
a fierce place needed douce
more than amethyst
dealt a rat lust,

Living in a medieval hollow
went into tatters

Mute tambour mute viol
thrown out of the welkin.

The Screen of Distance

1

On a wall shadowed by lights from the distance
is the screen. Icons come to it dressed in capes
and their eyes reflect the journeys their nomadic
eyes reach from level earth. Narratives are in
the room where the screen waits suspended like
the frame of a girder the worker will place upon
an axis and thus make a frame which he fills with
a plot or a quarter inch of poetry to encourage
nature into his building and the tree leaning
against it, the tree casting language upon the screen.

2

The telephone is Flaubert's parrot and it flitters
from perch to perch across the city. Or someone
is holding the dead thing in her hand in a remote
hotel. A sensitive person with a disability who
speaks to the inanimate. She may even resemble
Louise Colet or the helpful niece. She hasn't sent
her meaning and I am absent in these reminiscences

of her. The telephone is the guignol of
messages.

It may have been cold moving down from roofs,
a continental wind caught between buildings.
Leaves and pollen blowing onto fire escapes.
Windstruck hambones lying in a gutter. Equinoc-
tial changes the body knows, the hand feels, the
truck passes without notice and buildings con-
tinue their nervous commitments. The earth may
have been moaning underneath this junk. I am
caught in the wind's draft.

3

At night viewing the screen of distance
with shadowy icons framed by light
I understood the rasping interior
was rearing other icons,

No longer gentle they flashed ripened clauses,
or images raised formidable projections of ice,
the wall was placed in a temporary position
where words glittered from a dark cover,
Narcissism lived in a silver hut.

4

In the lighter time of year words arrived
concealed in branches. Flaubert exchanged
himself for words, night became a night of
words and a journey a journey of words, and
so on.

Words became "a superior joke," I trembled
under a revolutionary weight, a coward fleeing
from a cloud. The ego of words stretched to
the room's borders assuming the sonorous
movement of a poem.

5

I entice this novice poem with a mineral, *Beryl*.

The dictionary bestows on Beryl a skittish description,

like a sequence in which a car
moves over ruptured roads and slices
into ghost veins of color —
a camera follows each turn,
examines the exits where rock protects
a visionary tool that prods it: —

*"A light greenish blue that is bluer
and deeper than average aqua,
greener than robin's eggs blue,
bluer and paler than turquoise
blue and greener and deeper than beryl
blue — a light greenish blue that is bluer
and paler than beryl or average turquoise blue —
bluer and slightly paler than aqua."*

.

The speculative use of mineral prevents an
attachment to words from overflowing, inserts
a vein of jazz, emblems of color and overcomes
the persecuting stretch of racetrack where words
race their mounts

6

Beryl became a distraction as one speaks of color
field or someone as a colorist or of color pre-
dominant, so the paper on which the poem would
rest was grainy with color flashing lights
and the depth, the deepness of the country lane
on which shadows found repose was a wilderness of
color, ditches and trees lost their contours. I
created a planned randomness in which color
behaved like a star.

7

To introduce color to form
I must darken the window where shrubs

grazed the delicate words
the room would behave
like everything else in nature,

Experience and emotion performed
as they did within the zone of distance
words ending in fluid passages
created a phenomenal flush
dispersing illusion . . .

8

A difficult poem intrudes like hardware
decorating a quiet building, a tic taking
over the facade, a shrug exaggerated by a
column——

Shelley sailing into the loose wind,
the storm of neurosis hindering the formal plan,
a suggested dwelling left on the drawing board
with clumps of shrubs indicating hysteria or,

Daylight gleams on the rough street where a
blameless career sighs, the poet beak dips
in air, his little wings cause a mild stir,
as someone comes down the stair
he pleads with infancy,

A woman speaks to a dish, old forks, amid her
preparations she smiles touched by history.
Chipped, sundry evidences of temporal life
hiding in a bush. In formal dress domestic
remarks reel into a corpus known as stanzas.

.

9

The Bride raised the cloud settled on her
aspen head and stepping away from her bachelors
she seized like wands the poem I handed her:

"A life glitters under leaves
piled for anonymity . . ."

She would lead us through glass to view the
enigmatic hill where a castle slung a shadow.

10

There was a dream within a dream and inside
the outer dream lay a rounded piece of white
marble of perfect circular dimension.

The dreamer called this marble that resembled
a grain of grecian marble, "Eva Knachte,"
who was blown into the dream by the considerate
rage of night.

Her name evoking night became a marble pebble,
the land on which she rested was the shore
of the sea that washed over her and changed
her lineaments into classic marble, a miniature
being, yet perfect in this dream, her size
determined by the summer storm with which
I struggled and seized the marble.

The marble was a relic, as were the movements
of nature on the poem. The sea had lent
a frieze, waves a shoulder when the investitures
of a symbolic life feuded. In that dimness
with bristles, straw, armor plate, grotty
Alexandrines there appeared a mobile fiction

11

A man who calls himself a Baron yet strays from
his estate into the cadmium yellow
of a bewildering sunset rendered by apprehension
where a broad approach to a narrow tunnel
is fanned by leaves is faced with a decision ——
at the stylized ominous entrance he wonders
if reality will maintain him or empathic snow
subdue his quest

12

I sifted through these fictive ambiguities
until there was a plain moment

something like a black table where

Dialogue set in motion urged a search
in memory for that tonal light
illuminating the screen,

The Baron faded as distance gleamed
a clear jar multiplied by frost.

Ropes Sway

And chevettes like geese. The rumors. More
porridge says Sinful opening the case of twilight
soup, onions and small grains with an oysterish hue,
memos.

I have promised a greater catch, something off
the tide in yellow enveloped with whisper discs
rolling between lobster shrills,

This brings click clack into the morning,
the planets Jove and Juno cross the Tiber bridge
arranging larger waves while

We sit in the air as if Italian crossings spun
sugar ropes in air blistered with cornice storms
chipped into recognition,

Ropes sway molluscs.

These endeavors in their immense whirl pass one
another police filled with spit for the smell
of audacious miniatures,

Chevettes like geese.

Country Cousins

Country cousins possess different rhythms joined
to irascible lightning. Madam is stung by a cloud,
the nomad bee drowned in it. You are in the parlor,
the buttermilk curdles properly, my share grips its
haunches becoming violet, evening purl where Ceres
seeks the Persephone dark it has been mannered
exists under single waves, they toss shells like

Xerxes raising his temple, tales you recount.

Winter month you are a mouthful, the first course,
seas tumble, tides raise values then a serial
of watches and generator of rulers who twitch
on thrones as dignified frost, or russet roof carriers
there is much destination in your marrow, hidden
in a godlike silhouette that glows, a Roman
beginning, the two faced lullaby dog.

Laura and Phillip, Robert and Lucia
all they can think about Athina and Paul,
Victor and Ida pine for chemises,
cloth of white, ribbons towelly,
Recca and Richard, Claire and Noel recollect
spring in their larking, struts commence
windfuss, rabbits surrender dustbinned
with minor fledgling bulb
these singular aches a promise of jumbo
stitches in rain.

Goose girl leads chevettes to the pond
where she reds down the rumor of hiss
in the dry season of quack, the shorn sink
at her pout the distance runner and the holder
of metal times, the white kind
saluting mellowed feathers.

Clark Coolidge

20 poems from Literal Landscapes

Cave In The Great Glacier

Longer it takes you, the longer it takes
you hide in there under, the weld life stores.
Living under ice there at the street. Side
of a mass scale. And do you clip such
drawing to your walls? These pick smooth.
Caress the velvet quilt, high with crystals
enclose what follows. These without guide
get drawn in again, proof holds sure.
It's a violet day, hard with sun holds
water and the other states back. Will
they fold back in? I came home by
this means once, twice, many frames
traversed, encased before my birth.

Sitka Bay

Going away. Leaving it for somewhere. A velocity knock
or wobble. Side boards tremble. And
indeed it did, it slant, it make.
Next to it a pile, and next to it a pile.
Board sides vent with fog, vast and the way
is Orient, felt in tongs and the roaring
glass weights mesh. A house, a hog, a
wheel besides. Biscuits. Roof facet angle flown
and the plank ridge to lap around. From
the damage of waters the pestles come light.
Walk this flattening, the peaks to pin out flare
and everything else sink. Geologically, a handle on
its make, perimeter day.

Missouri River, Along the Great Northern Railroad

Apparently a plotting of the blocks that border everything.
But why have to hold down such with dog and box and axe?
A dark thing no doubt for scale. Shrub would do
as well, any bore. Nearer mutts too large
of the stone. And the waters exposed to a sheet
of wax, of a coating, of further stone. Believe
those edges, such cuts as car starts. But
there were no cars, none. But teams of carts
unseen for all this hide. And monument no one.
And who cares names? The sides lit out in
telegraph violet and nothing to be said of such pose
such light and its blocks. I say no house.

Pulpit Terrace, Mammoth Hot Springs

It's licensed. Nudes. And with a hook.
Belt down over the velvet drape. Small things behind.
But it has great measurable patches and gulfs.
And strands. Nothing near it. On a hillside
is now a hillside, was then. Still is.
Possibly signed by now. Throat home tubes.
In calcimine emplacement, vertical emollient.
Did they stage brands here? When here was
over there. When the whole, when the clattering
came down on it, cane passage. Could have
a wooden upbringing, a case of wicket hidden.
These things contain. Water may suit their tables,
seal them. Flash and go away. This was a brighter one.
Or a grey all over. No boiler suit for scale.
That it's all scale. That there were no escapades.
That this is stone no movement to be caught.
Took a look, this look, thought of maws and lit out.
Thought of the foods never to be taken.

The Limestone Hoodoos

This in the backyard of the uprooted clams.
Ghost of the shore dinner meringues.

Where pines had roots shut by deposition.
Blasted vision behind the invisible fence.
Frames, will give up something poured.
All the things to last the sky, lock up.
Pencil in bananas, the scarf of cast address.
Nobody stand to rest on these filled hoods.
Solid whobody and no further tales.
A carted out and left feeling, damp once
in woods, once. Something to have left then.
Askanced to own device. You saw them dump
then forgot in haste to the winter wicket.

The Golden Gate, Yellowstone

Stop by the stone. Stops by the stonefull.
The stone is stop itself and you go on.
A place to wait, replace then regain.
Did they set it there, in whose head?
It must have lasted, firmed by the bridge.
It would tell you how to go, how not.
For a moment of a ridge, sawn planks, dim trees.
Following off, determining slant, slight
dip and trance and further what did you hope to see?
Then the humans all want noise and clatter past the stone.
A separate, unlight and lower the cake, shunt.
Border crossing where no one is, seen from
nowhere else, even an inch. Nothing
you remember. A book about what is felt
entering at any point, any room, any stature.
And mark, one stone over, the ones never carved.

Excelsior Geyser In Action

It blew up. And the plane of dust
surrounds it forever treasured. Place each
shard. Affecting nothing but itself, away for all
but someone took it, picture of a final.
How many days did the end go on?
Punctured water, steam. A drier
and its laundry go up, come down, follow

around, sand the stones. The stars. An active plain
and now nothing of itself but a single spring.
Gone to the extent of a hole. Big event
missed by nearly all of us. Collapsed in a book
bound to be thought up. The barrage kept.

Old Faithful

Well there it stands, a casual drape that
stood for it forever. Nice. Perfectly random.
Such as a sign should be, undefinitive, open.
Formal. On the hour, and shed for a time. Reflexive
pulse and diamond vein. Then you see it
's in parts, jet and nimbus, stand and frame.
How can it stand for anything and doesn't mostly.
In the main, someone had decided for the rest.
It came, it's gone. It comes again. First
seen on a stamp, commemorative series, faded orange.
You want to stroke lines in aid to hold it solid.
No way, no slope. It's a flag of the day.
One piece of the day in the whole history.
Which is history. Nobody waited for it.

Fishing Cone

Are you waiting for the hole in something.
Dowsing for the thing to place in that hole.
Place it on the water and melt back. Strict.
Process of poles, horizon and crust. Dump.
The shallow and crystal. The hat, the mumbling
of a melody shard. It's getting his feet wet.
It's all on the surface. What would live
in such a flat and tremble. Floating solids
of gullible world. Treats, then shallower dreams.
Brought in just below the gaze, no sound.
Would have to get on past it, have to brink.
Focus, and then a juggling of lines, prod from below.
Stump, before it has you crane and then go off.

The Norris Basin Geysers

It keep smoking on in these groves. Wastes.
Hollows the tree shadows on road and shoulder.
Could drive straight into an ash pit alive.
Field of the whispering smoulder. What at night?
Smoke, not as if after something, a few bursts,
but always. Still as the few trees grow
scattered, woven into crust land. Rest
at own risk. Thin sights, hollow steps.
And no signs. It is not remnant, it
is not pointed out. Lost but on most maps.
As souvenir as a tendril of air. Smoke
keeps it up.

Biscuit Basin

A bit of a meringue
day at the edge. And he steps
around them, doesn't it really?
Enough it's a quieting place among remnants.
Casts. Enough lung to calm the tree line.
Pout. Nobody takes these home.
A post and a pack behind him standing.
Timeless for a pure smoke. No ledges.
No answers yet to how this was done.
The sky seems missing. None for the eating.
The footprints of something.

Grotto Geyser

What happened to the planetarium.
But where scale disappears, in a meadow.
Remove the clothes. Aim. Sink.
Patched and calcimine gesture. Lump sum
forms there in steam. No pattern.
Unique at any rate. Took his whole head.
Then presented as random exhibit. White lead
or antimony but no. Calcareous basics
whelm to hand. Remains of the show

once sighted too much. Too many for
the glad aisles. Is it still there.
Now, is it singed with hair. What held
strong breath at the strange attractor.

Harvest Scene On Dalrymple's Farm

They are going away, but did they pick it up.
All long in a direction, vector lost.
And what, from a ground, a plowed load.
Water lost, mounts certain, men to follow.
Light out loud land, framed on, sun and back.
Take a scouring ride, down below Groat Bulge
on verso. You'd stand and watch it all by.
Perspect to a corner oddness, plainness.
As if gold were seen but far from this farm.
And no life more than the scoring motion.
Vehicle sunday, low and in the light of
mechanics to come. Kingdom for an awning.

Lone Star Geyser Cone

A smart thing to sit and weep on. Miles of
cogs and washers hidden in velvet bank.
And he leans. Throat on elbow gazing into
the thing's throat. The stick he came by
will be absorbed. Is this also, stone
stuck to empty lots, absorbing? I looked
too long, so deep I drew on it.
Then erased, you can see the stripey trails,
what emerged from it. He spent
the rest of his years trying to remove
his mind from it.

The Black Growler

It pisses up the weeds but is just something
down by a bank. Better haul your books away
from the shadow sourceless by the foot.
A living. A nod in the direction of

fleet foot face full of black soot, arrangers
have left it away vast. But it's
found again small, mind-small. Kindergarten
cherry pickers in a raft of tongue whales.
We made up our aid papers there, useless later.
Corrected in the foul of old under earth.
I wouldn't pick it now, just wander on by,
might release a can of it.

Blackfeet Indian Camp

Lots of field things, they lived.
Close together animals darken, dream of lids.
And the tent smarts glow within. A mark
simply would weight it all differently.
Smoke mothers in a whole of hauls, drift speak,
remnant no-names for the days. Point is
lots of space left. Sky bore. Bone
to weed on out. No really people visible,
sound of vanilla. And got the treatment
and thus were pictured. Old beveled living
only committing flock on the world. Hand over
soak stiff limb. Marking out days in
the edgy differences, smokes and their fires.

Lover's Leap, Dells Of The Sioux

The ledge a horizontal
door to windward. The man sits
down, then thinks
it is what, is a stone.
Beneath this honeycomb
idea is nothing, for a while
a bench. Notorious
an opening for hung support.
Leg with hat. They
didn't tell, it pictured.
Laziness notion of extension
a frame for the other way
out, of doors of summers

held to be. Set on lean.
To a hunch extend and over more.
Recline of the hazard stone.

Wedge Rock, Near Custer

Let's get all the group up there in
ladies and pinafore, drop the height on the whole.
Nobody's better picker, the shoved other.
Akimbo in Reliable Canyon sixteen
thumbs to the entrance upward, style
comes in blows, and it better had lodge.
Eye on disaster, but where are you
looking from, waiting to happen? Boys told
the truth on this minor geological,
forced to face and left in cheek.
The other habits were harder to break.

A Chamber In Crystal Cave, Black Hills

Wine Spodiodi, but what is it,
stuff it in this, made out of?
Pricked in? Where nothing is centered
in any sorts matter. Couldn't be
the overflow of light from salts, pecunious
arranged battery lavatory emplacement
saddle sore flaskings of fraught and Kuwait?
Notch that you dream through, needles over
pudding flows? They got gnarled to the
pending a sifter? Back of the bench room
it got through at the crust of, stitching insisters?
Glow at each fork. Then the puddle mater dwindled.
Force in which equals the vegetative stone?
A chiming all wide of prophetic hangnails
the soap lies short of a sun. Eager as black
to your clocked off mandible where axial
the sewage stopped.

The Devil's Chair

Church bag of soy at carom clicks
the gesso said, it says. Rock throne
at halfway average mirror file, the waters
loot the ledge of prime stock pencil ore.
So is not the common image you could buy.
But line and pass. Songs were written
that out of nothing sag. Prop in
a few more straightly pines. And
shine catch the cleavage jam. Boatloads
witnessed whispering and went. Nothing but
over the natural we savage to hold it
scribe it still to a one-shot stare.
The hidings littered all over.

Denis Mahoney

3 sections from Black Pig

Salt Lip Strain

October's
dead sun combustion
pig skull's natural sullen crash

as when in a puddle
red oceans foamed

water and water and water and water and water

. . . now the green that swims is vegetable is
landscapes patterned by itself is sun sun sucking
sun delirium sweet golden yellow fireballs is cozy
cannibal pork you eat blood beating colorless is
ancestral parade chop chop is rabid machine kill

electricity thump

numb yet?
squiggly warm moist
claw thumb machine gun great waters
and autumn here

I would hold you up pig to the sun and turn you black
energy released

neon lights
towards the sky
burnt flags

In white in black in sound in move in spirit
face you slide along as my own city street
blue garbage beneath snout's edge

tongue giggle and body covered warm mud bake
with sweaty hand and sweet smell of pig milk for revelation

from all angle sun make skin so dark in sleep dreaming avocado and ice-cream cone

or precisely what is pig?

static call
which animal accurately acted quite frankly in disgust
and acted quickly without thinking

a banquet

so shrink congo mula pig rooted in blue sun festivals and scattered bones

cannot go carry nothing
we sculpted the eclipse by ritual in the form of history
didn't know where to begin so we sprung our own

sleep gently

we go sucking we go sleeping

salt

bone

gggrrrrrrrrr cut pig head gggrrrraaaaaa ka gggrrrraaaaaa
kada kada ka ka ka ka ka
kee kee

here we go slightly
boiling feet fat and hollowed head for soup and sausage
villages cities homes pens
I thought I could have swallowed the sun I was so content

waves of brilliant orgasm
the exact temperature

following of the ingrained migratory path up and over smoothround egg hills
following the steady flow of generations soft purrrring and loving oink-oinks

'I saw the best pigs of my generation . . .'

communal scenes
the ones to heat the stones and cook the meat
vegetables or cannibal or heart or animal
catching the last fading rays of light

and the moon at night rocked us to sleep while the mud hardened and we
waited for the bright warmth of morning

enchanted
pig shit

the measure if not value?

or recognized dragging rotten bones in procession up and down the
streets

or how it felt fucking?

or a music dream or passages into empty places?

as the pig flies

and you smile yourself thinking your majestic sperm the world over
grunts and pathetic groans television rites hot rockets to laser beam
the ho-ho systems reincarnated in stinking schools fat-assed

professors

animals in warm skins

bully the human machine the chambers of urine the stone the mystic skull
whatever happens cum cum cum cum

bye bye

drip pus open sore

home is where the car takes you

smack

so it was said 'I don't give a shit.'
whatever that means

and they built a camp on the tailend of the golden scholar's ass
and they said a prayer and toasted this beautiful continent

and meanwhile sent someone else

to slit those
fucking
pig throats

blood pour

A heavy freehand double spiral drawn in black ink, enclosing a human head in profile, set at the left of the page beside the lines from "I am a pagan by necessity" down to "and the hunter and his knife".

PeelingHead

Speed pig is mystery — Nothing but reflex

Animal throbbing mouth
return to solid ground

You intimately embracing
smells of this world carried on in brown mud and decorative violets, faces painted
and swollen heads on sticks, goodbye dreams in groaning needles
in wall cave dancing figures and animals animals animals

I am a pagan by necessity

chop chop

sssswwaaaaakkkk—————

there is head cut

and the hunter and his knife
and the hunter and his knife

DRUM DRUM DRUM DRUM

Shoot straight

A question in crisis, machines grind out recurring dreams
Directly. No. Indirectly. By way of animation open up a dialogue
Erotic meat sound pause couple with a shock sent into living air
volcano meat a state of seige
when at other times you felt the gentle hand of winged heads
You will speak in other tongues

what sun?

what tongue?

whether real or not you were always there sculpting something
pig and fish and bull and dove and deer and squirrel

arrows and weeping a carnival comes up instead of sun
dead lakes and lonely trees skies filled acid
sweet subjects like kissing the dead
marching in a row you stalk marijuana smoke stacks

No cannibal teeth grips yellow mornings and giant planets
no meat is pig meat

I am quite serious

and you at last you are weary of this world

so what?

heads are going to roll

It is called evolution

There is a generation in question.

Ceremony and Celebration of the Flying Pigfish

[for Ken Irby, by way of pig]

in feasts and festivals
we're all here everywhere we are

stood in remaining sunlight but left with shadow only and it is here we lose ourselves or what we thought to
be ourselves

as in red eclipse

'To agree to burn as I have burned all my life and as I burn now is also to acquire the power to burn . . .'

a wet possibility of expansion to that exact womb within Them Selves
spaces dark burial pockets black blood burning to absorb these hallowed limbs
to actually become (a) part of this mystery

dead faith twist
we *must* all join hands

and at dusk the emergence of the physical animal that geography of flesh lacerating useless temples as they
came to *feel* boundless
and know that power

may cherish darkness
soft paw milk reflections came to them knowing these times to be not nation but earth

'That he wore the god head and did not worship he should have been the first to know . . .'

may cherish darkness
pray pig as head as heart as landscape on fire may cherish darkness

following now measure me colors and a role to wear

we are all terrified here

does pig reveal itself in the fresh slit of wrist poured on the page or was it here all along?

'dont tell no white man. Pig was on ground, pig just like cloud. Every bodys alive again, I dont know when they here, may be this fall or spring'

lunar eyes, scrawls and barely recognizable forms of figures passing, the dream of pure heat, phantom gestures, swift intoxication
magician consciousness dissolved in single moments of ecstatic sp[?]l with dancing body sway and simplest of song singing vibration

know pig as black as flame heart or pig is nothing

'There are those in time moving in a great circle that the figure of circling round comes into time.'

around warm flame they danced shedding their fleshy pink pork, dance of moon, dance of sun, abracadabra, doe da bra, doe da skull recover all vegetable in magic spring, *'the corn-spirit as pig'*, hogs unraveling in jungles of dream round and round

they danced, they danced, deep into the Light of the Moon

head back and eyes closed
they found themselves drawn within the picture of the circle

'to put ceremony where it also belongs, in the most elementary pig acts.'

leg and hoof together oink oink oink

and with the heart ripped out and placed upon the altar all that feeling becomes possible of being
without skin

oink again
they found themselves wrapped in warm woven blankets of blue wool trading secrets of the
body

a gentle scent of fresh pork

this in the beginning is what they had come for
the *need* of love the *need* of community

and he to she and she to he: I Love You
and purred under gestures of Moonlight

Ronald Johnson

The Fireworks Spires

with musical compositions by William Hibbard

ARK 60, Fireworks I for William Hibbard

"Will light us down
to the latest generation"
—Lincoln
vast smithy spray
ignite to day
scribe sky, spark clay

*

years past
ladle fire forth
last air
all earth before
above belief
beyond compare

*

manifold!
behind shut eyelid
a luminous continuum
banner any mind
aloft again
goal anew

embracing swarm
face onto sun
circular and reciprocal

I name you the One

resplendent core

utmost of man

*

arose a battleground:

rows on rows of roses

wound round and round

*

doors of the letters

ring foundry

of this word turn opened

heights within

reveal world

however you hammer it

smelt afternoon

stair sight

as radiant hierarchy

midday pulled crown of stars

in full essay

apse dawn

*

fire whistle ice,

"luminary of the mind"

Ultima Thule

as-if-believed

honeycomb, threshold, hive:

streams bee realm

*

behold

a hairsbreadth

up the sky

exploded sod

plowed to
cornstalk plume—
win own soul
who tend
soil rocketry!

*

lead us on
inexhaustible dust
as if doubt not
belfry men
kick trace
O mote immortal

*

let up the blinds!
spilt galaxy
as bullet shears gnats' swarm:
every angel on the lawn
an avalanche
yet trigger apogee

*

of
goal
consumed

led
animal
hoof

up
cobbled
orbit

be
lit
proof

A full-page engraved score by William Hibbard, three systems of three treble staves each in dense chromatic writing with 3-, 5- and 7-tuplet brackets, closing at the final double bar with the handwritten signature "W. H. XII-'86" at lower right.

A full-page engraved score by William Hibbard, three systems of three treble staves each, opening at the top left with the tempo mark quarter-note = 75 and running through 3-, 5- and 7-tuplet figures to a final double bar.

ARK 61, Fireworks II

of pyramids, a
myriad afire
set out to a swallow dark
in a nutshell,
back in the Garden
no Fall before
self left
asway fate's work
"sun cut off
at the neck"
Apollinaire!
Apollinaire!

*

gear aerie
the real article
heaven fled to ledge
limb unsealed from limb
for wings'
alert machinery
& wield a torch
as sphere
held arch of time
transfigured moat
grasp ear
in chalice host

*

rhyme twine
mirror rim mirror
to remind mired any mortal
stiles arrayed,
choir
prise air

A single engraved system of three treble staves by William Hibbard, filling the foot of the page below the last line of verse and ending in a double bar at the right.

ARK 62, Fireworks III

as quicksand
snowball in Hell
ethereal,

hail an
all hinterland
equal quest

*

nested cycles
receding as apple blossom
to the head of a pin
inkling windfall
curve of wave, cave of air
asunder unto Rubicon

off and running
wind in arms, rove forever
target galaxy
swan above lilypond
atelier
man, the dreamed by God

*

fanfare
gyroscope elms

rolled down
from rooftops

sewing East
and West together

the heart
at crossroads

kindle
tissue lark

clandestine
knit antipodes

*

older than aire
Astarte
who walks! the world
amid spied blazon of sparrows
pray hold flourish
lyre & voice:
one dusk's sped fireflies
caught ajar
jardin d'hiver

*

bedrock
lone furrower
soul, soil
deep tried earth,
cell tackle
creed
—Thistle Electric—
bled raiment
enfold
knockout summons
jeu d'esprit
unveil
new window
cavern

oldest brain
 ricochet
 sill, portal
'who seize be mortal'

 great
 white stars
of hemlock flower

*

from on high
far and wide
tide of fire

*

 thus spoke
threefold arranged
 treed angels
(vow wood viols)

larynx, in phalanx
 laurel prove

 whirlpool
woodwind grove

 O bow!
 clear-of-net
and drums, above
 pave way

*

shook timelessnow
 (as if)
 of crystal ball
we satyrs: spectre came
 ride to dawn
down, star by stair

*

light! light! light!
summit, cradle
in ecstasy of palimpsest
font acup core,
peel back dark the more
and knock every door forth time

*

seat
chasms
pinnacle
ever
raindrop
candle
domain
afan
empyrean

Keith Waldrop

from Transcendental Studies

At the back of the house, in bright
impermanence—conscious of being
not, but nearly, everything.

o

Barriers of green. When you have
all, why torment the depths? I'll
go. Sunburnt crater.

o

Before the laughter was heard, night
with its varied lights. Steal
out. Drink the cooling night.

o

Do not copy this wall, down
to the garden. I was faint. The lights
blinded me. I wanted the night.

o

First questions, signs not
from which quarter,
coming.

o

For a moment: empty. Abridging all
questions, until we reach all questions
cease. New tempo.

o

Immediately, eating it O in this
world, or one other—will you
(spins like fine gold) clamber over?

o

Into caressing shadows.
High walls, making possible high
wall, so precisely unrepeated.

o

Ivy-hung sculptured colonnade and
beyond. "As before a sepulchre."
Leap. Flesh-tones like deity.

o

Not to be repeated. Near but un-
seen. Trickle and dances off.
Shadows of a shadowy pool.

o

Once again, endlessly, not
to be repeated. Unvanishing if
substance. Into the voice.

o

Passion, breaking the orders it
so resembles. Darkness, like familiar
darkness, my lamented desert.

o

Poplars. Sycamores. Turpentine trees.
Circular benches of marble supported by
fabulous monsters. Imitation of a wood.

o

Sad at supper. Laughter always from
within. Here. Here. Hurry! Do
not be seen.

o

Soft strains enclose the garden.
Each sings through to the end.
Does not want us to yield blindly.

o

Stone floor in silver light, moon

playing also on the dancing rill. Stolen
sweets. Near the temple, overladen.

o

Stroll out upon the portico.
The very good we find or achieve seems
guilt towards some other world.

o

Such silence. Wind-driven
clouds. We collide with already
us. My life is full.

o

Summon the stranger. Silence of
apprehension. High wall, in constant
alteration, under the sun.

o

The voice you would prefer to
hear, where objects
disappear, as in a little window.

o

Thousands stand about the door, souls
walking in light, singing hymns of
night. Inconceivable unity.

o

Threads gathered up. Soaring towards
you or falling from you. Who
can begin again? Unravel.

o

To pass unrecognized towards your
hiding place, not sure what news
yawns in the same past.

o

Under a sense of sunlight about
to grant your desire.

You hear this madness?

o

Variations. Except, of
course, for slight—now
failing—reflections.

o

Whispered words, unspoken
thought. Loss of stern
ornament. In sleep, your heart:

o

You have not moved.

Fanny Howe

Torn Parts: A Novel

Was the discovery of a brother walking in a storm
Made one winter hot and sheets all sweat, lip and twist

This was the true love which you guys give up
For home, as if beggars want to turn into candy

Awake was how we sat in arms, impermanent on a black floor
Fear wormed into the rear of a room

It was not pink now but POWER AND LIGHT
Looked too near, you know

Three children hung up their coats on hooks
And skimmed the stuff off their boots
My fingers worried over rice as appetite
Entered—eat, eating, ate

I stayed outside for years
Of the forest, next to a penitentiary and highway heading blue

A thunderous slum of snow, over spruce and shoes

Between five and seven . . .
And as for good fortune . . .
The desire for enlightenment
And then children, judging my face—
I have to wait

Lace babies dot the glass above the stove
Who fell into this grace: powerless without cause

Only by his silence knew his send-out
His face looked as if it had been visioned
In the sleep of a missus rushing with hairpins off her head
He ran into a little bit of—machine, a yawn.
Made a cash withdrawal
Bought linen and ivory for the excitement of his sex

Every perception's an affirmative want
A memory? Or let's call it time. I'm pretty sure it is

Some word
When time and memory
Are the same, then I think I have a brain

Lace imitates snow on the nine panes
I wonder at all the winters
I survived without a human thought

"Imagination" sets off a glitter as hard as bitten sand

Relatives to numbers, trial and error
Unpossessable as pebbles
Children hold everything in, a secret between them
Who does not exist and
Who is the you, he asked
She:
There are lots of you

Madame Abandon hid herself among surprises
I was going to mention
Until I saw him standing by
The wrong-way water

Hiss of wind, ice in glass
Hits those who wouldn't exist without their perceptions

She is the way. It's always been
Dry until the railroad is a riverbed

What I mean is: establish ground from which we can continue calling

You (we) guys got drunk from the fearful one
Chasing snowflakes into a face on the glass
Hate-water swelled into ice
All questions had a whiteness to them
The Cross. One moment. Or meant. Meaningless

A he or a she. A he AND a she.
The little boy across my knees
Leaned back to sleep in his mystery

They graved out a way to dig deep holes from punches
It was fucking

At dusk a man called Criminal was calling to kill:
"You kidnapped the owner of this heart,
Brother."

Better it be a paper boy
You hang in a tree
Than a feeling boy
I wonder if he felt sorry
Later, now, leaving
Us here (in the storm, outside, poor)

Can we quit the quiet imposed by sevens, a longer Lent
And penance when I don't know if I can ever feel
The same tale twice

Do you own land now but didn't suffer
Like a master never home from the forest, Mister

. . . but to forgive him for breaking his promise, I've found no way since
But to never forget him

Impeccable as a north white house
I am the world, he said and left

Dennis Phillips

7 pieces from A World

*Master Mariner, Unequalled In Strategy,
Son of Laertes & Gods of Old*

1.

(Scherzo)

The names of grammar came in.
Their rules disguised
great violence around them.

Each hat was a day and many hats many days.

Great books spilled from the names
the door to the cabinet Onan
closed in their honor.

Any bell whatsoever threw them into a rumble.
Whose side are *you* on Mo-fo, asked they of thou.

"Hast heard my name aforesaid?" You
from a fantasy of an orgy of reading
answered not.

Mutations commenced:

"When two vowels go walking
the first one wears the stockings"

or

"I before E except when you pee
but never in harbors and never on me."

The hats of their clothes fell dead
but the hunt among them was cancelled.

Great violence flared, their red, orange, filings of blue
smacked, washed up, exploded, faceless merging,
hats falling, color spilling from their great books.

A bell split them then stopped them

a history measured in billions receded, heads and hats
pooled in a butter sillier and sillier.

Yellow is a primary and red
and blue. When two vowels
are E one must be dead.
Nothing in its life became it like the leaving it.
Henceforth be earls.

2.

The plain of Elpenor
at the pit of Tiresias

a hat for each day
a quivering jugular of black ewe
for each hat.

Plates and plates of volcanic slab
smooth, terraced layers
down to the shore in slag
to dark hellcurrents or name the river.

Enter.

What any of the ghosts
prove by their entrance
otherwise a waste that speaks
future perfect.

Black hull departing
no mark in these waters.

3.

Plates, dull wood, thin
strata to the pit

Sword hewn, black woodsoil

those who have led us here
but not been here

Nell mezzo

pity of error
pumped black blood
to voice the prophet

Find them deep sleeping
whose voices
call up, arch over
for someone
to take down

4.

His book merely cold to visits

This society of monument or absence
this cold snowbound eastern.

But whose context? A trajectory
again and again

over a wooden continent.

Waiting all day to free a word chain.

To know face as typeface
a silence, a high voice.

Directions.

Fragmatics of the daywish

5.

Mercy of traveling it stops
moving the voice stops the scenes
inside stand aside for views outside

movement, painless, movement

Slept in bushes, woke to a ball
naked servant girls,
most virginal leader,
your salt-caked shoulders

An emporium of passage
say the right thing
(part of the plan)
the plot no more complex than
people will do as they must
then find salvation (what relief).

Who took you home?

A rock remains once rowers and racers
an unrecorded oar
somewhere inland, noted, unidentified
at the foot of the temple of some god
of some thing called the sea.

And fog soft night harbinger summer soft
soft lips bare skin soft
season of fog precedes season of temperate nights
vernal to estival, specific
to the city of the ocean's plain

Worship at which shrine believing in none
but adoring the buildings and masks, ceremonial axes,
sharp ceremonial chairs

Came in a wave of sleepspeech
the body walking the brain heavy
in an ecstasy of sounds. Was the temple the goal
where only a wall remains
at midnight driven through the labyrinth
the ancient city in deep shadows, in sleep
to roll a tongue of paper
in a chink of stone wall.

Request? demand? curse?
then rushing back through internal alleys and stepways

Plain awash, acid droplets and base
young white fog
to arrive at a bastion
unlikely yet craved
and at the fences
drink in the fog
cool and quenching

Found your island play
in time to be occupied elsewhere
in time for fogs that prove
new weather

We said you were someone otherwise distracted
and held up a number of models to compare you to

none worked which left us staggered in a desert
near a long runway we had built hoping you could fly.

You know the players
your pawns your rocky elements and barren
a place to seek vengeance
for a lifespark you claimed to taste
in this indelible fog.

Then wind came and time
shellshocked silence a wide stare
words as icons
fire blown out on altars.

Then from the east
an opaque weather sandy and obsessive
each layer a theme in a long repetition
where no vampire can light its buzz
too feeble in the currents.

Time shelled to powder applied to blank
but sweating faces, crushed powder
laden with residue
heavy metals, half-life thousands, pulverized
calcium just a fraction of the wind
opaque and whining,
season imposed.

Sacrifice (1)

Gave your sacred element to the air and wilted
or your fluids to an ether and dried quietly away.

not used to this aggressive tone

A voice a single line, spawned from a word
a sound a quiet; looked for a category.

Eyes through a veil
circled a voice not used

eyes suddenly averted to sunlight.

Circled in frost a comment we didn't expect

Who shouted: Come down little sir
come down. The pitch is too steep
shock).

not in this context
unrelenting self-promotion (what a

you don't have the balance.

The gauze in a calm night light

And you stayed put the sea breeze

a sodden, petrified sleep

the view, your veins opened

covered over in wet cloth

passing the gift eventually to ground

and shocked to see

in thanks

you were once so dry, once compliant.

bleeding pale tribute

Bright the blue hand shadows

But foresaw your footing and made it, sutured tight.
from summer

we expected so much else

and only fog came, grey that gauzed us

Water in great square reserves
lighthouse

our holiday not fine, no trip to the

returned your loss but bluer

no eyes to take us

and cooler than you had given it.

Fuck the boat! No eyes to take us.

Sacrifice (3)

We were asleep and a specter knocked
hands of purest adrenalin and a voice

Hundreds of forms filled us
but the contents spilled

Step, step, step, outside the stranger's footfalls vanished. His
face at the door had been embarrassed, hiding behind a
rounded jocular screen. Now he was gone, his silly conceits
of blindness and poverty were gravel swept from the
walkway.

At a time when neighbors ignore upkeep
and sirens continue deep in the background
Hoarfrost grip thy tent, thankful night spent
and gripped in a cold edge, a metal papercut
these few things.

There's a place and it's a crater
malignant beyond chemicals and radium.

There's no incision to excise it.

And it's not just one side of an argument

Because the place breeds explosions
and murder and the home of the destroyed
breeds the next destruction.

Only a boat on a sea safe
steel waters, perpetual pacific

touch land, take water, set off

Adrift, lightless on black ocean.

You call and the fabric collapses.

Faint expectation, please cheer me,
then plain, flat

missiles were shot again today
at first toward rumors then
the body of their leader was found.

Some deadly genetic construct is released
message from dying organ
to kill as much and more
win a bright spot

Then silence, call dispatched
to plain tone, howls
dismissed, too weak, too strong.

It may be true that it's all about
amassing an audience that thinking beyond

that

is only a decoy

or it may be that some fluid
chokes us off so sharply
only a decoy would save us.

They hold up dead daughters
then everyone hangs out their dead

Nothing is solved.
Only the arena enlarges.

Mei-mei Berssenbrugge

Recitatif

Her voice on the telephone, while she is out of town performing the activities she is describing,
but with a poignant elevation of mood, is quantifiably precise, insistently formal,
as stripped down as a Palladian animation of form. Her beauty is identified with
order,

liveliness, serenity, a courtly arrangement of platforms or painted stars.
Half their conversation is in shadow, so they speak in and out of a diagonal wedge
of light.

The possibility of static or a gap on a starry electric night gives the impression of
her body
constantly engaged in transition, but she desires to enter a body of material by
talking.

In Sumer and in Egypt in the 3rd millennium B.C., speech was spoken like an
arrangement of stars,

an orderly procession of luminous beings, who counted poetry with sound,
until speaking gave way to a duration that would not reconstitute, so she may
appear

as a large masklike close-up, and as an immobile figure in white on the bed,
who actually absorbs space.

One can paint the stars on a black lead background,
equivocal stars casting carpets of desire here and there in the middle of an errand,
which up to then had proceeded in the state of non-imploring urgency of a body in
diagonal,

an image of outreach or hailing. For me, it seemed that love was a spiritual exercise
in physical form,

and the diagonal was glints of an inferred line of sun lingering, as spring
synchronized with the double space of her desire and her desire for their presence
to be hieratic, not wholly expressive, a standard of grace in the corridor of a day,
laden with narcissus. If it is through counting that speech is connected to time,
then crossing an inferred estuary of this conversation is a rest in music.

Paul Christensen

Plumbing the Abyss with Eshleman

"Thank god hell is not dead in me."

Indiana, p. 36

THE FIFTY-ODD BOOKS of poetry and prose of Clayton Eshleman add up to a set of highly organized assumptions, judgments, positions, and strategies thought out by a writer set against a particular force in his life, an encroaching order that took strength from its denial of nature. Something rule-bound and purely mental had drifted out over life and drained the world of its physical pleasures, converting them into the rigidified structures and routines of the modern city. These are the "frozen contraries" Eshleman talks about in his tribute to the jazz pianist Bud Powell in *Indiana* (1969), the polarities between the organism and a codified self and all the attendant opposites that accumulate around this division of person, but which Powell thawed and ran together when he plunged into one of his extemporized solos at the keyboard. "Bud Powell important, and beautiful, to jazz in somewhat the same way [Chaim] Soutine is central to art, Crane [Hart] to poetry: wild flowing spirit, a fire-thief, possessed, beyond questionable technique. . . ." (82-83) Soutine, he writes later in *Indiana*, was "attached to nature," as one might be attached to a military unit, an armed force in the battle raging across the 20th century.

The figures with whom Eshleman is in league throughout his career, painters, poets, the psychologist James Hillman, the critic Mikhail Bakhtin, continue a Romantic debate begun in the previous century, most notably with Blake. In the 20th century, the debate spread beyond the arts into other disciplines, fanning out like a dye running through the veins of a leaf, in which the only coherence traceable among its complex dispersions is an inherent, persistent distrust of the shrinking notion of self as a reasoning will, an ego composed of thought. The accommodation of humanity was linked to the state of that definition, and as selfhood became more finely focused, the human habitat became more abstract, social dynamics more reductive, nature more alien to the artificial cosmos building up within it. "At the moment I feel that spring may have gone out of the world," wrote Eshleman in 1983; we now "find ourselves at an odd bend in the amplitude and awfulness of life," with an "adult value system that is opposed to sex, growth, primitives and change," an "atrophy of the already severely constricted Renaissance

ideals, finished and isolated bodies now pressed into the service of maintaining the status quo." [Introduction, *Fracture*]

One would expect to find this kind of resistance and fury in a writer whose consciousness was gaining strength against a faltering regime, as if an empire had collapsed and he realized he could now free himself of its authority. Eshleman's arguments all turn on the notion of a recoverable force opposite to an official order of things. Is it possible that postmodernism collectively was a celebration of the same recognition? Eshleman is an offshoot of its principal ferment, and his intellectual trajectory follows the path of almost all its other major writers. One may find any amount of criticism to suggest the cause of postmodernism as war, or the emergence of America as a world power, the Cold War, the Atomic Age, a generation rising to adulthood in a new mid-century prosperity. And yet the reactions within the artistic ferment do not form a unified response to any one of these factors, but to all of them at once, as if another, more powerful but diffuse attraction encompassed them from beneath, concealing itself in a pervading vagueness which nonetheless informed the actions, ideas, and ambitions of all the major figures of the period, including, perhaps especially, the career of Clayton Eshleman.

An empire did fall at mid-century, quietly and unobtrusively, but with enormous psychological impact upon a front line of writers and artists keenly aware of the potential consequences on their own culture in North America: the fall of the British Empire. As Geoffrey Bolton puts it, "It survived no longer than the Roman or the Spanish Empires, but its impact was greater than that of either, because it involved a greater number and variety of peoples." [*Britain's Legacy Overseas*, 1973] The empire had spread English culture across the entire planet; no other empire had ever penetrated so thoroughly into the diverse cultures of the world or reorganized so many institutions and ways of life as did the British in Africa, the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, the South Pacific nations, the scattered colonies and clients of the Mediterranean, Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans. "In 1921," Bolton notes, "the year of its greatest extent, the British Empire covered about one-quarter of the world's land surface and included about one-quarter of the world's population. Sea power, early industrialization, and adaptable political institutions were the main bases of this empire." To these one must add the global influences of Protestantism itself, the theological force that formed the values of most of its colonies and their politics as nations, particularly the U.S. Its span was from Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II, a four-hundred-year reign in which the modern sensibility was formulated and its dynamics and relations tested and refined. Nearly all the major ideas of the last several centuries took their final form at the epicenter of this planetary linguistic network, London, and were then

communicated through the global channels of the English language to the far corners of Earth. Modernism's anchoring location was London in 1920, the year Pound departed for Paris and bade farewell to the etiolated culture of British supremacy. But in 1983, Eshleman summarized the aftershocks of the empire's demise thus:

as a white Anglo-Saxon heterosexual male, I must confront the fact that what I represent as a social identity is the

great boulder that must be rolled away from the entrance to the cave in which the energies of the minorities throughout the world have been sealed. [*Fracture*, 17]

Imperial expansion in the late 19th century was justified by what Kipling once called "the white man's burden," or as Bolton puts it, "that the British had a special civilizing mission to less favoured parts of the world":

Belief in British superiority was sometimes grounded in a theory of race which misapplied Darwin's view of evolution by supposing the world's peoples to be graded in a hierarchy, with the Anglo-Saxons at the top, farthest from the ape and closest to the superman. More creditably, the British sense of mission fed also on the two ancient European traditions of Christianity and the classics. Not all the Victorians were evangelists, but most felt the advantages of living in a Christianized culture; and most knew enough Latin to compare themselves with, and if possible to improve upon, the record of the Roman Empire, whose mission had been defined by Virgil as mercy to their subjects and war to the arrogant ones of the world. (Bolton, 22-23)

Eliot's stated affinity with Kipling associated him, an American, with British imperial ideology at a time of intense criticism and rejection of its major premises. These deepening loyalties to the British way reduced his role in the Postmodern resurgence; but his example reassured and guided the U.S. academic establishment, whose loyalties were still with the British tradition in the 1950s. Pound, Stevens, Williams and Stein formed the other axis, the nativist one on which a postmodern esthetic would be constructed. The magazine wars that followed made clear distinctions between a loyalist phalanx of New Criticism and traditionalism under the banner of Eliot, and the new journals and reviews that rallied behind Whitman, Pound, and then Olson and the materials of the non-English world. Olson's analysis of *Moby-Dick* as the overthrow of an autocratic regime jibed perfectly with the issues of Pound's *Pisan Cantos* and "the enormous tragedy of the dream in the peasant's bent shoulders." Williams' *Paterson* also signalled that the "descent beckons" into American life, whose content had suddenly unthawed for use in the American long poem.

Postmodernism celebrated the renaissance of America's local and native cultures, and was thus tied in subtle and unwitting ways to the self-determination

movements in Africa, India, and Southeast Asia. The collapse of the British empire was a slow, gradual process of weakening ties to colonial possessions, an evolution from empire to commonwealth, in which the steady pressure of British cultural influence abated. At some point, the faltering bonds of England could be sensed throughout the spectrum of diverse cultures still held nominally in check by a strict code of Western ideals. The independence movements sprang up as an international force, which in the U.S. expressed itself as a widespread effort by suppressed minorities and subcultures to revive their distinct identities apart from the mainstream Protestant Anglo-Saxon tradition. Racial, religious and ethnic diversity were revived after a decade and a half of depression and war, and the regimentation and uniformity they imposed. Diversity and localism were principal modalities of early postmodern writing; abstraction, centralization, uniformity were viewed as obstacles to the expression of mid-century experience. Poetics formed as assaults upon authority; the breaking down of conventions and closed forms was an effort to release suppressed content, unacknowledged differences, unique forms of energy heretofore restricted or forcibly altered into conventional codes. Postmodern innovation worked against the spectrum of English-engendered conventions which were now perceived as a rhetoric of racial and cultural domination, a system of ideals and perspectives holding in check the spontaneous and myriad forms of American consciousness. Ideals of order shifted from centered, symmetrical structures to mosaics, force-fields, dynamic interactions of particles of equal and distinct identity. Postmodern literature staged intellectual battles against empire which Britain's emancipated territories fought politically, but with the same end in mind: to recapture native identity, either one's personal awareness or the collective wisdom of the group, which had been diluted by an oppressive foreign will. Anywhere along the spectrum of British imperial control, one could pick up on a displaced or withering folk identity where "the British [had once] moved as an elite of temporary sojourners," a "settler 'aristocracy' dominating a large majority of indigenes [through] anglicization, or the deliberate and coercive eradication of local forms and customs in favour of British practice." (Bolton, 32)

This was the cultural ferment in which Eshleman began writing his first poems. In 1958, Eshleman enrolled in the graduate literature program at Indiana University, where he began a friendship with Jack Hirschman, a poet and student in comparative literature who had organized a reading series of European and Latin American poetry he called the "Babel" readings. From the start of his career, Eshleman pursued literature from sources outside the realm of English, along its peripheries in France, Spain, in hispanic Central and South America. In the summers of 1957 and 1958, he made his pilgrimage to Mexico, where he labored

over preliminary translations of Pablo Neruda's poems, later drafts of which appeared as *Residence on Earth*, and wrote some of the poems of his first book, *Mexico & North*, both published in Kyoto in 1962. Mexico and Japan constituted two of the important "centers" of postmodern activity in the non-English world, strongholds of Catholicism and Buddhism.

At Indiana, Eshleman offered to edit the English Department's tri-quarterly literary review, *Folio*. In three issues, Eshleman filled its pages with a gallery of foreign poets in translation and some of the leading figures of American post-modernism: William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, Cid Corman, Creeley, Ginsberg, and Robert Duncan. A pattern was already self-conscious and editorially sophisticated: Eshleman was outlining the resistance to English culture abroad and at home, deftly forming a body of diverse writings into an orchestrated alternative cultural push. His cues were coming directly from *Black Mountain Review*, *Kulchur*, *Origin*, *Contact*, *Yugen*, *Trobar*, and other organs of the avant garde. After three issues, Eshleman was forced off the masthead and the magazine closed. America's English Departments were under the control of an Anglophile regime, an orthodoxy whose bread and butter came from English literature surveys and histories, in which American literature was relegated to a secondary curriculum, if taught at all. As late as

the 1940s, Ginsberg could find no interest in Whitman or American literature at Columbia University; Harvard established the nation's first American Studies program only in 1936, the year Olson enrolled for its doctoral degree.

1960 was a beginning of change in the American midlands; though *Folio* was finished, Eshleman had made important contacts with writers in New York through his friend Hirschman, and Mary Ellen Solt, whose contact with Williams led Eshleman to Cid Corman. New York was a frenzy of movements in the late 1950s, with every genre and medium of the arts claiming a discovery of native materials or identity. But there were two fronts: the one advancing on pre-war European surrealism, through its legion of emigrés residing in New York during the hostilities, the other experimenting with mixed or deconstructed genres using American subjects as their focus. On the peripheries of the second a small group of poets began congregating at the East Village bookstore, the "Blue Yak," which was cooperatively managed by several writers, among them Jerome Rothenberg, and exchanged views on poetics in such little journals as the *Chelsea Review* and *Trobar* (founded by George Economou and Robert Kelly), and announced new positions in the prefaces of a compulsive new form of literary tribalism, the selective anthologies proliferating in the era. In the second issue of the magazine *Poems from the Floating World* (1960), Rothenberg appended a brief prose poem credited with having started the "deep image" movement. "From deep within us," he wrote,

"there is a sea of connection that floats between men: a place where speech is touch and the welcoming hand/ restores its silence." Rothenberg had hit upon a connection between the Jungian archetype, a universal language, and the modern poem. The archetypal image "from deep within us" countered the racial and cultural separations which empire had built up:

Only then does the floating
world sink again into its darkness, leaving a white
shadow, and the joy of our having been here, together.

A *white* shadow, a paradoxical image, unless one interprets the terms as inversions of each other, a shadow of a former whiteness, a negation of the imperial model of the English-speaking white poet. Through archetypal communication, the cultural specificity of one mind dissolved into universal human mentality. Rothenberg's first book, *White Sun Black Sun* (1960), incorporates the same leading inversion of racial polarity. Writing in *Trobar* shortly after, Kelly called the "powers of the deep image" a "cogent movement in a new direction." The direction was *away* from the explicit cultural distinctness of one racial and linguistic phenotype. His "Notes on a Poetry of Deep Image" drew directly from Olson's "Projective Verse" essay of ten years before, using its terminology, arguments, emphases to introduce the deep image as the "maximal communicative force" of new poetry. Kelly wanted to write the addendum to Olson, to extend his argument into racial and ethnic dimensions. Jung, Whitehead, Blake were the spiritual mentors of this line of poetics, in which the mental framework of literature was expanding to include the Kantian imagination, religion, mysticism, primitive myths, arcana, and magic. It was a poetic formulated by an Irish Catholic and a Jew in a city of resident alien writers and adamantly nativist painters, and their collaborations were defining ranges of art and experience beyond the English Pale. It was to them that Eshleman began sending his Neruda translations and some of his first attempts at surrealism. He was accepted into the brief covenant of "deep image" poetics, but a year later the group dispersed, and Eshleman went off to Kyoto to pursue another line of postmodern strategy through Corman.

Though the movement vanished, its ideas persisted; both Rothenberg and Kelly went on to explore dream content and racial identity in their mature work. In the late 1960s, Rothenberg began exploring Jewish experience in his poetry, and started editing a long line of distinguished anthologies of non-Western poetry. Eshleman's poetry concentrated on autobiographical events, which seemed at first to violate the major tenets of "deep image" poetics—a point of contention between him and the editors in the group. But the analysis of his own life deconstructed a type of the midlands sensitive youth victimized by a cultural regime formed in the British mold: a mixture of Presbyterianism, bourgeois morality, and provincial cautions.

The undoing of this model became his central drama, but his argument extended to a generation in North America wishing to test the limits of Anglo-American heritage. Eshleman had the genius to perceive in his own rearing the heart of the issues in Postmodernism: the struggle to reorient the self to a new tradition. His rebellion against Indianapolis, recorded in *Indiana* (1969), typified the national ferment of the arts, as a generation looked for the native voice, the roots of American identity.

After Eshleman arrived in Kyoto in 1962, he applied himself to the rigorous stylistic austerity of Corman's poetry; the Objectivist tradition had preserved a number of elements of Modernist immediacy throughout the grim Depression years and the retrenchment to British prosody, which a new generation of writers began reworking into extended lyric forms notable for their precision, fluidity, and close attention to sound. But Eshleman wanted to construct a lyrical model of interrupted, sidetracked thought, a lyricism that would disrupt its own narrative or thematic development with troubled memories or sudden passion and resentment. Poetry should capture the mind in the coils of its emotional debates, as reasoning gave in to rage, or grief, or fragments of recollection. Corman's poetry built models of a sustained, flawless attention of mind to its own musings; but Eshleman wanted to create the structure of a volatile mental drama in which impacted or suppressed emotional content would sweep across the lyric surface and change the flow of thought. Eshleman wanted to write a poem whose edges were recognizable as lyric discourse, but whose middle dropped away and revealed a honeycomb of chaotic and rejected events, feelings, traumas, and resentments seething behind the appearance of a logical structure of thought. At the center of the poem, the psyche should transform itself by adding to its awareness from what lay underneath, in the hidden recesses of the unconscious: "In the heart of the poem there was/ no longer a hesitation before/ power," he wrote in his best early poem of the Kyoto years, "The Book of Yorunomado." In "The White Tiger," also from *Indiana*, he copies this central tenet: "the imagination rejects even

the most/ filthy matter to its peril." Everyone possessed his own hell of suppressed mental events, a depth of psyche which selfhood excluded. It was over that mental abyss that Eshleman wanted to expose the ego, to subject it to the most abhorrent thought and experience. Anything less than a direct confrontation of one's own rejected depths triggered an artificiality of response in art; and already Eshleman had begun to feel that the American tradition was fraught with compromises and evasions of the truth of human nature. The crux of his position was that the Anglo-American esthetic tradition had ruled out the possibility of a descent into one's interiors to discover the areas walled up and rejected as the non-self, the Other.

In a review of William Bronk's *Life Supports: New and Selected Poems*, written in 1981, Eshleman praised the poetry as "utterly compelling, harrowing, and masterfully written," calling Bronk "the first American poet to fully engage a sense of art that is shadowed by a pervasive sense of invalidness, of inadequacy, and even failure": "His poetry is all about those things of which we have concepts but which we find non-existent or unapproachable." Bronk's prose (*The New World*) and poetry recognized the irreality of human awareness, its codified and arbitrary structure of the world, beyond which extends a nameless and undefined actuality of things ignored by a philosophically abstract self. Bronk had located the opaque membrane between a conceptual set of bearings and the unarticulated expanse of nature, inner and outer, which has no participation in thought. Bronk measured the problem in art, even if he didn't solve it. At the other extreme were those academic poets who, like Elizabeth Bishop, made a virtue of ignoring the life unformulated by culture. Her poetry, he noted, "is on the scrupulous, completed thing, cleansed, as it were, of all the *scoriae* of birth and development. . . . and while very well written, reflects the absence of the 'other,' in any credible personal, historical or political sense." Behind the inhibitions of poetry lay deeper, more pervasive inhibitions of the American psyche, restraints and fears first imposed on its sensibility in the theological upheavals of the European Reformation, when the self was reshaped as a secular, demystified function of Protestant theology.

In Kyoto, the study of American poetry gave way to an absorption with the Peruvian poet César Vallejo, whose anguished lyricism bore all the volatility and distortion Eshleman wished to master in his own poetry. Here was a torment and disruption of thought that addressed the existence of violent undercurrents of psyche, a content struggling to break into thought. The Protestant mind had sealed up the passageways of this mental abyss, perhaps by channeling all dread and anxiety into humanist aspirations, fulfillments in the social sphere. The Catholic world of Romance language cultures preserved a sense of the horrific past which made both damnation and the presence of spirit palpable realities in the world. Vallejo was the gateway to a tradition of poetry which the preeminence of English literature and culture had long ago eclipsed. Once queried of his interest in French and Spanish-language literature, Eshleman responded in theological terms:

Many major European and Latin American poets come out of Catholic backgrounds; very few major North American poets do. . . . Most of us have a Protestant unconscious, and since Protestantism eliminated purgatory, or limbo, a long time ago, this suggests that we have less access to the pagan world, or to a polytheism, than European and Latin American poets with their possibly more rich *and* resistant religious backgrounds. Religiously speaking, they meet more

prohibitions than we do, and this in turn stimulates a more aggressive form of transgression.

Though it would take sixteen years to master a translation of Vallejo into a personal, American lyricism, a major part of his own lyrical canon accompanied the protracted revisions and recasting of the final translated text, *César Vallejo: The Complete Posthumous Poetry*. Translating Vallejo's poetry had proved an essential preparation for his own writing; in 1979, when Eshleman received the National Book Award for his Vallejo book, it was a recognition of one stage of an extensive, interrelated body of work that directed its arguments at a core of human nature which had not been adequately presented in American poetry before.

In producing a body of work rooted in psychological concerns, Eshleman was at the front lines of a widely scattered advance to Latin American and European poetry which contained hints and glimmers of an opposite epistemological perspective. This was the attraction of French and Spanish surrealism, in whose linguistic distortions one could perceive the psychological consequences of recent European history. Though the American political process had remained stable throughout the Depression and war years, American writers suffered from a narrowly provincial literary tradition, which Pound had frequently denounced as sterile from his vantage point in Europe. American victory at the close of war had unleashed an unexpected reaction of sympathy, compassion, immersion in the literature of defeated powers, or of rejected cultures in Central and South America. Defeat and rejection seemed to confer a purity of exile from the Anglo-American vortex. But an even more systemic "otherness" could be found among the cultures once belonging to the Holy Roman Empire or to the Spanish Empire, with their cultural traditions deriving from Catholic theology. The roots of epistemological difference between English and Romance cultures lay amid the Catholic emphases on iconography, vision, apparitions, visitations, miracles, the ritual of transubstantiation and other elements constituting an anti-Lockean model of thought.

Pound's departure from England began a series of residences in Catholic nations; though he rejected Catholicism as a faith, he was profoundly attracted to the religion as a focus of centuries of esthetic elaboration, from Cavalcanti to Provençal literature, and to the presence of Greek and Roman paganism in its most sacred conceptions. The writers of England and the U.S. who migrated to Catholic cultures in the 20th century represent a significant diaspora of Protestant artists turned against the values and attitudes of their own religion; the migrations to Mexico included numerous figures of the London-Paris Modernist ferment, as Taxco and Mexico City became salon-cultures in the 1920s, fueled in part by the revolution of 1910. After World War II, Mexico was again a focal point of American

writing, for Williams and Stevens, then for Olson, Ginsberg, Kerouac, and Eshleman. Southern France and Mallorca had attracted Creeley, Blackburn, and the briefer visits of Robert Duncan, and a host of

other postmodern poets. For a time in the 1950s, the publication of important journals to the movement were appearing from Mexico City to Palma de Mallorca, Paris to the Buddhist temple city of Kyoto.

Eshleman left Kyoto in 1964 and proceeded to Lima, Peru shortly after, where he observed first-hand the extent to which Catholicism penetrated Peruvian life and customs. In his introduction to *On Mules Sent from Chavin* (1979), he seems almost baffled by the weight of theology pressing down upon the landscape. The journal he wrote on his sojourn in Peru is a parallel commentary on native Indian culture and his own thoughts on poetry and poetics. Like Olson's *Mayan Letters* and the notebooks Ginsberg kept during his stay at Palenque in the early 1950s, Eshleman's journal combs the intricacies of an unfamiliar culture for hints of its opposite awareness. A suspicious and half-mad widow resisting Eshleman's efforts to gain permission both to inspect Vallejo's worksheets and to publish his translations of the Peruvian poet, the hypocrisy of government officials and cultural bureaucrats, and finally, the paradox of Catholicism itself, its crushing injunctions against sexual freedom, its absorption of local myth and ritual in its own translucent ceremonies—these factors combined to make Eshleman's Peruvian experience one of confrontation with intractable mystery.

One of his journal entries records the sacrifice of a sheep to honor his visit to a village. After bleeding the animal, the stomach was removed from the carcass because a sac within "it contains poisons & should it burst while in the stomach the meat would be ruined." After dreaming of the slaughter several days later, the image of the stomach as a bladder or gray flabby sac suggested a portion of brain tissue, as if the removal of the stomach were, in the dream's imagery, equivalent to a font of instinctual wisdom or memory which religion and civil order denied, and thus cut out of awareness. "Without its stomach," he noted, "the sheep's body seemed vacant—barren—almost weightless." "I think Blake locates the stomach as 'hell,' " and by such equivalents, Eshleman clarifies the dream's meaning: that the sheep was a metaphor of the contemporary self, a figure eviscerated of its instinctual faculties, which might otherwise burst and "spoil" thought. Eshleman then wrote in his journal,

Why must I give up hell to live within love? Does Yorunomado [his mentor in *Indiana* and *Coils*] mean that my sense of love is narrow and thus will not include hell? Now if I think of hell as a place, symbolic as well as terrestrial, I can understand that—but Blake has so redefined hell as a positive force in creation that

I have to take that meaning into consideration too. Must I kill my own energy—my furnaces—to be able to love?

Catholicism acted as a membrane stretched around a core of dark thought forcing a civilization to deny half its ballast of wisdom and experience. Vallejo's energy came from the vigor of his penetration downward under the Catholic burden of guilt and rejection to the Incan substrate of psyche, the buried, impacted truth of Peruvian imagination. The tearing into a kind of sac of powers within the self drove language into distorted, animistic structures, grotesque and deformed tropes. The poem was thus a kind of bursting of a sac of forbidden thinking, in which actuality suddenly ruptured and a grotesque inner world leapt into language.

On Mules Sent from Chavin records Eshleman's attempt to "crawl out of the middlewestern bottleneck" of his childhood rearing, while following Vallejo through layers of Catholic colonial experience to a substrate of primitive origins, the Incan native world. In his introduction, Eshleman defines the world he had come from when he entered Peru:

. . . I was brought up in the 40's in an anesthetically-clean Presbyterian home where smoking, drinking, swearing and gambling were not permitted, where I was an only child who was not allowed to play with Catholics, Jews, Negroes, children younger or older than I was, children whose parents smoked, drank etc., or whose mothers wore slacks away from home. In a way, I was only permitted to be with those who were my "doubles"—children whose backgrounds, church and home lives were carbon copies of my own. A peculiar kind of Narcissism, in other words, based not upon looking into or at oneself but at others whose souls and potential human identities had been masked, mirroring my own masked identity. (12)

The making of a poet is dramatized in "The Book of Yorunomado" as the slashing, hara-kiri style, into the poet's own belly, to release a force at the core of being, the ghost of Vallejo, whom he calls "Yorunomado" after the Japanese coffee house, "The Nightwindow," where the drama is set. This is the "torn caul," a trope that appears frequently in the poetry of the early 1970s. The livingroom window at 4705 Boulevard Place, his parents' home in Indianapolis, was an early image of the membrane holding thought from actuality; it overlooked the Butler Woods, and many of his lyric reminiscences call up the image of himself as a boy staring out from the interiors of his "anesthetically-clean Presbyterian" cell. Almost from the beginning his poetry turned on the central motif of a wall of exclusions whose perimeters he examined, looking for a door, windows, or opening; hell was the truth hidden, separated, negated by enclosures. The trope runs throughout his work, and figures centrally in his best book with its strategic title, *Fracture*.

It was inevitable that Eshleman should then proceed from Lima to New York and undergo Reichian therapy for two years; it was a therapy of excavations through layers of trauma and sexual restraint to the self beneath. Eshleman had discovered a medical equivalent of Vallejo's inward journeys, and the therapy sessions were acts of psychological translation between adult and hidden, inner self, a descent of awareness from the inert, codified outer person to an interior, trapped psyche. Like the Vallejo translations, these events and trials on Dr. Sidney Handleman's couch are striking emblems of postmodern activity: the naked Eshleman reduced to thumb-sucking and cooing, flexing his legs up and down and breathing under the parental gaze of his doctor—burrowing in, in other words, to one's inaccessibly rooted and distant beginnings. The transformation he experienced these two years, a mixture of effects from Reichian treatments, new lovers, his continuing efforts at translation, called to mind the pupatory stages of a butterfly. When Eshleman began his own journal in 1967, he called it *Caterpillar*, and subtitled it, "A Gathering of the Tribes." The descent to one's interiors reversed the evolution of an aloof, abstract, racially

defined ego; instead, one rediscovered the pooling of thought in the collective imagination. *Caterpillar* set out to prove Rothenberg's original thesis of the "deep image," that beneath the long cultural tradition of Western thought lay a wealth of discarded imagery depicting a unified species. "The gathering of the tribes" was possible only through psychological descents.

The arrival of *Caterpillar* on the New York scene in 1967 picked up postmodern writing in a period of flagging energies; many of the original reviews had already died, marking a point at which the literary energies of the movement had ebbed as generational tribalism took a new form in the more popular arts of rock music, open theater, mass rallies, demonstrations, festivals, happenings, cult movies, and the like. The commercial exploitation of the movement had transformed the original renaissance into a media event for television, Hollywood treatments, fashion designers, magazine features; major figures like Ginsberg, Kerouac, and Ken Kesey were now idols of an undefined "youth culture," and what had originally been a post-war celebration of local and native cultures now became a highly channeled, outwardly-directed political movement against the war in Vietnam. Though the movement itself had not died, it had obliquely transformed itself from a celebration of national diversity into a protest against American imperialism in Asia. The mantle of empire had shifted from England to the U.S. as the artistic ferment slowly changed pitch and direction; but shifting currents were detectable, and Eshleman now headed a revival or refocusing of postmodernism from the late 1960s on.

Caterpillar sifted out a new mood in the second stage of the literary movement; much recessed behind the louder public phase of the Sixties, this other mood was dark and full of foreboding, a Cassandra voice of dire prophecies and painful, anguished self-analyses. Olson's optimism at the start of the period, in 1945, had diminished to misgivings:

Call the Mouth the Place of Suffering
Toothache's only a part of it.
I mean the bite,
muscles that clamp down & shape the lips,
show where the passionate endure their energies
& the passive put up with what happens.

So wrote Robert Kelly in "FIRE, FAMINE," the opening poem in *Caterpillar* 14 (1971). Later in the same issue, Theodore Enslin's long sequence, "Synthesis, Part III," reads in part:

To establish the link
of an unbroken continuum
becomes the guiding passion,
or by its principle a man lives
when all other ways of living
have become impossible.
Whatever it was he wanted,
he wants in other ways—now—
wants it out.
To test the iconography of
his going there—
to touch
on many symbols, looking for the key
which will unlock it—
or
what is it that remains to be done?
It was in dreams at the first of it,
and it ends—
in dreams.

Throughout the issues, Eshleman as editor and as poet recorded a darkening vision and a diminished idealism among the avant garde; the poetry expressed a paralysis or weight of emotion that could not be articulated without painful difficulty.

Eshleman was finding voices that confirmed the mood of the whole nation: registered in bewildered analyses of its war motives in Asia, or in the blind fury of

the Chicago Convention demonstrations and police brutality. The troubled, baffled conscience of poets tapped a malaise of spirit focused in the tedious interrogations of the Senate Watergate hearings, as federal agents and bureaucrats were grilled by ranks of impanelled lawyers and congressmen trying to expose the crimes of a suspicious president. In literature, a core of longings and desires was subjected to a lyrical probing of parallel intensity, as both forums of interrogation seemed incapable of penetrating actual motives or emotions. Eshleman's *The Gull Wall* (1975), published two years after the close of *Caterpillar*, forms its theme out of a sense of inaccessibly remote psychological realities. The title piece, a prose meditation that ends in a lyrical strophe, dwells on Paul Blackburn as a figure of the age, the segmented man whose instinctuality and self-knowledge were blunted into vicariousness, the suffering lover and voyeur of women he had abstractly deified and misconstrued. His notational verses add up to a self-portrait of a captive spirit scrutinizing the emotional life outside himself, a perceptive but uninvolved presence in the throng. Eshleman's lyric close imagines a sort of rescue for Blackburn, who has become a "gull-man" now, a Thoth-like spirit whom Eshleman escorts to the "Cavern of Self," where the contraries within him will thaw and presumably reconstruct him as a liberated soul: "he entered it, his back lost in the echoing struggle."

A year after *Caterpillar*'s close, Eshleman had come to the end of certain themes in his poetry. The autobiographical materials had been organized into a Romantic narrative of self-recovery, a transformation from conventional midwesterner to an artist in the currents of international thought. The theme was central to American postmodernism, but in four major books and a dozen minor ones, the structure of the narrative had been fully fleshed. *The Gull Wall*, though brimming with possibilities, is thematically diffuse and segmental: a collection of poems mixing autobiography with portraits of a variety of artists whose collective energy is a pervasive, liberating force moving through the age, including Van Gogh, Rimbaud, Artaud, Vallejo, Charlie Parker, Bud Powell, Leon Golub, Francis Bacon, and Blackburn—who had helped to generate Eshleman's esthetic perspective. In "The Ronin Cock," the closing poem, he tells us "I was not merely a passage/ through which life flowed,/ I began to feel I was attached/ to some being which sent its life/ through me."

The poems of *The Gull Wall* represent a transpersonal development in Eshleman's central narrative; the biographical materials were becoming more figurative, forming an archetypal account of modern consciousness. Eshleman was casting about for a new way to treat personal experience, to push the conventional memory be-

yond its narrow range of egocentric data to the final reserves of evolutionary memory. "I contain/ a surreal grotesque," he wrote in "Portrait of Francis Bacon," but

can I make it stick
against the wind-
tunnel of our great
abstract age?

A shallow memory, like the impoverished modern consciousness, is a product of the accumulated denials of a core of human experience relating to animal origins; dreams and intuitions are relics of that older memory, but such content is devalued in all other social activities except the arts. The expanded consciousness can arise only through the liberation of the deeper memory; and even though its content is encoded in riddlesome archetypes, they are the only keys to interpreting one's experience. Without the fully active memory, one is cast adrift among shards of life, and only the ego's existence is confirmed. The archetypal memory grasps the cyclical unfolding of events out of elemental sources, in which the whole of life is a single expressive force:

I know that bone
cave where Ulysses
lies face down in body
sludge, his arm
around his drunken
comrade Elpenor,
I have felt them crawled
by diamond-backed
maggots, and I have heard
the hags laugh
who crouch
about them, senile
and pregnant,
the *grotesca* who link

Rabelais Goya and Artaud [98-99]

The deep memory of the past is actually what is meant by the term "hell" in Christian dogma: and the great range of archetypal experience collected in this fund of imagery is the realm of damnation. According to the proscriptions of Christian dogma, to sin is to drop back psychologically into earlier modes of relation, in which the isolated consciousness begins merging again with the natural forms it had sloughed off. Hell was thus a core of life forms, the churn at the stem of memory, where identity dissolved back into the animal continuum. Virtue and

grace were Christian ideals of increasingly abstract and remote human perfection, a lifting out of the stews of nature into a realm of idea, reflection, disembodied intellection. Eshleman now set out to reverse the meaning of damnation—to argue that hell was the long corridor of human history whose experience could deliver contemporary life from its delusions and tragedies.

The seeds of Eshleman's new strategy lay in various Romantic texts, in particular Blake's "Marriage of Heaven and Hell." But Goethe's *Faust* was also part of the moral background of his revisionism: Faust was the flower of European Enlightenment thought, the pride of Germany, but a forlorn, dutiful, isolated man without social graces or relationships beyond that of an admiring apprentice. His life was devoid of sensual experience, and only Mephistopheles' powers over physical life could rescue him from anomie. Goethe's play was an indictment of the half-man 18th century European ideology had encouraged to take form. The devil alone could provide the missing embodiment of flesh and sensuality to the blighted ideal who would, by century's end, become the hapless and corrupted figure of Conrad's Mr. Kurtz. Faust bartered his intellectual life, his "soul," for the chance of a sexual encounter, and later, for marriage to Helen of Troy, the pagan feminine ideal. Eshleman's own thesis goes even farther, that hell itself was the abyss in which consciousness could be healed, reintegrated to its lost impulses, desires, instinctuality, given back its affinity to other life.

Hell was the memory of human evolution; Darwin had not so much disproved or invalidated the Christian cosmology as explained it, providing in *The Origin of Species* and a host of monographs and notes the grounds for a psychological reinterpretation of its system of ideas as a response to environment and the background of human history. Indeed, that is precisely the argument Eshleman wished to develop as the basis of new poetry—a view of Christian belief that would explain its fears and dreads as a shrinking from the human past, in which the concept of hell became the central metaphor: hell as the abyss of natural forms from which the human spirit had evolved. Hell was the codification of all the fears of nature Western experience had thus far accumulated. White Anglo-Saxon identity depended upon racial and cultural distinctions from other humanity, and from the rest of the animal hierarchy. The fiercely negative valuation of "hell" functioned as a sort of "plug" against the past, preventing any form of devolution from making its appeals to a highly fabricated sense of self as a thing apart. Thus, Western civilization had defined itself through a process of disengagements from the environment, with hell as the metaphor of degraded nature. Hence, the destruction of the eco-system and the aggressions against primitive cultures of the Third World had as their primary motivation the strengthening of identity through annihilation of natural and human otherness. By pulling the "plug," and thus

reversing the valuation of hell, one could oppose the fatal momentum of Western thought and expose its threat of nuclear holocaust as a form of racial paranoia threatening the world.

It remained for Eshleman to ground these and other speculative readings on the formation and biases of Western thought. Eshleman needed the evidence of specific cultural contexts in which the psychological function of hell could be shown at work. In 1974, he came across the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin's study, *Rabelais and His World*, which discovers a relationship between the grotesque humor and exaggeration of Rabelais' satire and the erotic mayhem of medieval carnival *fêtes*, the seasonal and feast-day rituals of European village life. In such rites, the celebrants wore masks and affected disfiguring appearances or disguised themselves in animal costumes and fell into a state of lawless abandon, which even the civil authorities tolerated. It is Bakhtin's argument that such behavior was a throwing off of the burdens of civil life, of social hierarchy, religious restraint, the impositions of a complex mode

of rational conduct. Rabelais marks the end of the era of such carnival purgations, but Eshleman saw at once a powerful instance of a ritual surrender to the abyss, a plunging of villagers into the dissolutions of primordial freedom. Their costumes and sexual humors were a revel in lower states of mind, an ephemeral devolution to vent the pressures of city life. Rabelais' own satiric humors were assaults upon the musty, narrow theology of Catholicism in the High Renaissance, of which the Abbé de Thelème is a corrective ideal. But already a paler, more subdued form of satire was replacing Rabelais' barbarous hyperbole and low comedy, in which the excretory functions of the "lower body" formed a central motif. Bakhtin's study gave Eshleman a necessary perception into hell's therapeutic powers for a society staggering under its moral and ethical restraints.

The imagery of entangled life forms, the "grotesque archetype," was present among such *carnivalistes*, as human beings sprouted antlers, horns, tails, fur, elongated limbs, a spectacle of human deformities which bore all the evolutionary chaos of Christian fears of hell. The carnival mood, according to Bakhtin, was an episode in the "history of laughter," in which the primordial spirit in human life found its voice and ridiculed the pressures of civilization. One of the latent assumptions of Bakhtin's study is that a side of consciousness resents and insults the forces willfully molding human nature outside the flux of other life. Laughter had its own archetypal springs, its link to pre-conscious existence. But the question remained what was the basis of such archetypes? Was hell a fund of memory or a mental projection of lost experience, or was it an actual physical event now codified in archetypal form?

In 1974, Eshleman made his first trip to the caves of the Dordogne region in southwestern France, where Upper Paleolithic human cultures had resided among the honeycomb passages of the limestone outcroppings. Many of the caves followed the course of the Vézère River and formed the perimeters of a cultural enclave distinguished for its prolific wall painting and bas-relief designs. The most elaborate works were found in the "Hall of Bulls" at Lascaux, known as the "Sistine Chapel" of cave art, discovered in 1940. It ranks with the paintings discovered at Altamira a half-century before; but Lascaux seemed reserved for postmodernist treatment, and Eshleman quickly perceived that here, in primordial figures and scrawls, were acts of mind in which the underworld was first taking form.

By striking coincidence, the caves very nearly formed the basements and undercrofts of the Catholic churches above them. The bold, bright figures of animals, rendered in manganese, vegetable dyes, even feces, possessed the crude, emphatic profiles found in stained-glass windows. Even the use of the caves as burial sites and temple rooms made them the first cathedrals of Europe, an anticipation by thirty-five thousand years or more of the cultural patterns of the Christian era. As Eshleman became familiar with the paintings, he realized he had discovered a lode of archetypal figures at their inception. The entangled life forms and the tentative emergence of a first human portrait in the "dancing sorcerer" established this art as the human nursery of thought, the record kept of the dawning of consciousness. Eshleman disputed the scholarly interpretations of cave art as reflections on hunting life; in his prefaces to *Hades in Manganese* (1981) and *Fracture* (1983), he argues persuasively that cave art formed the human diary of primordial awareness. The dark caverns, the "lithouterine" coils and canals which primal humanity squeezed through to construct its murals, imprinted themselves on human memory as the landscape of a Hadean underworld. The trip to the Dordogne has proven that the Christian fabrication of hell was not merely a conceptual framework vaguely hinting of origins, but disguised the memory of an underworld vivid to human experience at about 35,000 B.C. in which the actual events, surprise encounters with bears, clashes with other tribes, fires and smokey caverns, flickering light and the echoing of voices, settled into mythic and archetypal recollections that later civilizations distilled as the dread fate of backsliders to social evolution. The dungeon is a form of that dread, an earthly punishment to the miscreants who had surrendered to retrograde desires. But even the cathedral is a form of the cave, in its echoing chambers, weak lights, vaulted ceilings and incense-laden rituals. The caves were central to the making of the European, i.e., Western psyche, and both its spiritual aspirations and worst fears were fitted into thought by the long sojourn in the limestone underworld of Paleolithic culture.

Under the cathedral pediments of Catholic France, Spain, and Italy ranged the beginnings of human awareness and the actual mazes of hell. In 1978, Eshleman came upon another crucial text for his thesis, James Hillman's *The Dream and the Underworld*, in which literary references to hell are closely compared to processes and structures of mind, thus arguing a connection between sets of metaphoric description pointing back to lived experience. Hillman's thesis suggested that the conception of mind itself was modelled upon a particular set of circumstances—the events by which a groping, inchoate sensibility was seized by a new and disorienting power—the ability to transfer immediate sensation into likenesses, a passing of the quick of nature into the inertness of rock walls. For Eshleman, the moment posed as many threats as it promised triumphs of human will. The capacity to represent the natural world pried apart the continuum that held humanity in paradisaical relation. The separation between a thinking power and the muteness of nature could only result in enmity and spiritual warfare thereafter. The caves birthed a spirit of revenge which wreaked its havoc the more the chasm widened between nature and the human being. The function of religion was to keep open the breach in life, to seal the wound on either side and goad the spirit upward out of the organic world. The function of grotesque art was to preserve what connections it could between the old continuum and the withering sensibilities of modern life.

The artists and writers Eshleman found useful represent the force of reconciliation with the natural world; these are the heretics whose works argued for a transvaluation of cultural history; the past was not the negative gradients marking the progress of mankind, but a winding maze of confused attempts to escape from reality, the web of living things. By the mid-1970s, Eshleman's interest had shifted to the example of Antonin Artaud, a martyr to the cause, whose years of incarceration and shock-therapy

were efforts to silence France's boldest adversary of modern culture. Artaud was at the front lines of the oldest battle of history: resisting the final assault of rationalism against what remained of human nature. Artaud's "mature poetry (1945-48)," Eshleman wrote in the introduction to his translations of *Artaud: 4 Texts* (1982), "is a multifoliate binding of attraction/repulsion for virtually all the materials and sensations that the poet is conscious of. The friction created by Artaud's unceasing induction and cursing of the physical world is in the service of opening up an underworld out of which a 'dark parturition of principles' can be summoned." Artaud's persona, the Mōmo, functions as a kind of primal psyche, the activated memory of ancient life:

If the enemy is the anchored mind (and by extension, in this poem, the sexually degraded body and ego), the victor, to the extent that there is one, is the Mōmo

itself, . . . a monstrous presence, but its monstrosity is not simply that of deformity and pain . . . but a delirious inherence as well as a sophisticated critic of all reductions of the whirling dervish of the soul.

Though poetry specifically dealing with the caves abounds by 1977, in *Grotesca*, and *Core Meander*, and in the major collection of 1978, *What She Means*, a unified argument of their significance to the modern self is first formulated in *Hades in Manganese*, which narrates a modern descent into the Dordogne's underworld. In the opening poem, "Lich Gate," Eshleman buries his former self in the churchyard, "the outer hominid limit." This burial is a kind of reversal: in putting his former life into the ground, it will sprout its true vitalities in the other realm. The modern self is the dead one, a figure born of stifled natural affinities; ego or person are ghostly fictions, and in burying them, one replanted a seed. In "Hades in Manganese," the long, anchoring poem of the text, "self" is identified as the "apex of pain." "Why," he asks, "do we treat the hero/ better than he treated the material/ he severed to feed the sun?" Eshleman's visionary quest is

. . . not another bringing of the dark
up into the light, but a dark
delivered dark paleolithic imagination. (41)

"If there must be clarity," he notes in "Winding Windows," "Let it be opaque, let the word be/ as translucent as night starred." [69]

Poetry is redefined as "racemose," that is, as roots of thought going into nature, not as discriminations brought to finer and finer focus of thought.

Take this intercourse and let it wind
back to previous being,
suffering landed dryness,
eating its way back to
brine in the body of another.
To be born is to bear being enclosed,
to eat into a hearing, less a being
heard than ear tripping seeing,
so that sight falls here and finds
its limit. The image of an outline
vibrates back to its first
disappearance, fanged hand notched
bone. (75)

In "The Aurignacians Have the Floor," dedicated to Gary Snyder, Eshleman begins, "Now I subtract myself from the industrial/ white hive," the end-product of Western civilization, and concludes by declaring:

I will accept the Aurignacian motion

that the abyss is engravable
and terminates in caves manifesting
hominid separation. (91)

The abyss leads to a reorganization of values, a deconstructed selfhood that partly meets up with its opposites, and in which the awareness of the historic dimension is keenly heightened for the poet:

Each word, then, is a shaft,
a jumbled midden, in which most of the bones
are red deer.

Read dear. (113)

Two years later, in the poem "Manticore Vortex" from *Fracture*, the image of the abyss as a recombinant chamber of the soul grows even bolder:

In the vortex of the whirlpool below,
animals are separating and recombining with men—
the archetypal grotesque is constant
from Lascaux to Disneyland, intersected by Rabelais,
by Belsen, by gargoyles
poised for eternity on the periphery of the holy
that periphery is the furrow in which
the crossbreeding of the marvelous takes place (143)

In *Fracture's* central poem, "Visions of the Fathers of Lascaux," Eshleman puts together his entire perspective to describe the birth of the human soul in the stone womb of Lascaux. The poem is a *tour de force* of lyrical syntheses; the Christian version of genesis is the foil to his cave thesis as Eshleman constructs a commentary on the fate of the soul wrenched from the "caul" of nature. This forced birth out of darkness and natural innocence was an act of malevolent will, a rude awakening of dream-entangled beings, in which the sequence of evolutionary steps leading up to contemporary life produced only a deformed, fragmentary being. The half-soul that emerged turned against the natural world around it, bent upon its destruction. Eshleman views the whole of human history as a Gothic tale of some ghoulish being wreaking its havoc upon unconscious life. His narrative evokes a cartoon version of high fantasy in plotting his allegory, as here, in his treatment of the history of human hierarchical society:

At the base of this pyramid
the King of Cracked Morning slept
lifting his loaded sleeve occasionally
to direct the ant-like orchestration of slaves
mounting peak after peak thinking
as they struggle across solar plains they are building cities.

Evil increases relative to the steepness of the pyramid,
 its latest peak is now at our throats
 as we gaze down the steps of any ruin
 it is only Kashkanirraqmi who casts an archeological veil
 across the steps
 to hide the bloody chewed out teeth
 the stains of dark blue amputated limbs
 mossed with gangrene that cover each ascent (68)

The deepest past is not a pastoral Eden, a romantic illusion of "some far-fetched
 purity or chaos," but

the heaving nucleus of femur set in bear eye socket burials
 words inserted through the openings of a resistance
 strong enough to hold this poem in place
 even though the prisoner within the prisoner is the colonial
 target of ring
 upon narrowing ring to
 the strong central suck of a pupil
 frosted, still alive
 which I float into,
 more into cooked marrow than in the language rubble
 of a bison staring (69)

The close of this extraordinary poem involves a final subplot, the installation in
 the mind of "Lascaux," the Adamic exile, of a dream residue of life before the "fall."
 The three magi who created him break Lascaux's beak, "using it as an engraving
 tool/ to slash their roan colorings in the tunnel seams,/ with manganese and ochre
 dioxide/ they drilled language deposits into these seams" lest all trace of their act
 be forgotten. So the poem is that memory revived, gleaned from the walls of
 Lascaux.

One may find here all of Eshleman's influences brought to bear upon his central
 text: the allegorical narrative mode of Blake, the twisted, distorted image clusters
 of Vallejo, the dream patterning Hillman explored, the two-way currents of
 memory between the abyss and modern consciousness traced by Bakhtin, Olson's
 use of myth to pattern and interpret modern experience, and Eshleman's own
 elaborate sexual perspective on the nature of modern alienation, together with
 Reich, even Blackburn, who appears heavily disguised here as Lascaux, the beaked
 human. The poem completes a narrative of human genesis and evolution that
 distinguishes it as among the first to attempt to merge the perspective of the
 Romantic tradition with the long view of the biological revolution; it converges the

arguments and positions of many disciplines that have sprung up since Darwin set in motion his thesis on human descent.

But its foremost purpose was to dramatize the causal events that sent Western tradition down through history with a destructive assignment and a set of isolating tendencies culminating in the Atomic Age. The main thrust of postmodernism was to celebrate native cultures suppressed and displaced by the monolithic authority of the British tradition; but Eshleman went beyond his predecessors in fixing human genesis more deeply in history, and of arguing the position that whatever lay at the surface of historical time had as its formal cause the formation of consciousness through rupture from the natural continuum. Consciousness was the re-collective organ of a creature whose unmediated contact was severed; the fictile and fantasizing powers of that recollection allowed for a recreation of nature as a tissue of images, counterfeit replicas, whose idealization in thought walled subjectivity into its own linguistic tower. The consequence was the powerful attractions of a narcissistic human culture which soon came to loathe the reality that contradicted its aloof imagination. The flower of human artificiality was the white Anglo-Saxon idealization of self. The ultimate isolation of human thought lay in the formation of the ethnocentric world of British imperial tradition, shored up by the secular bearings of Protestant faith, a mechanistic philosophy, and the attritions of human nature that accelerated the growth of ego as the pinnacle of Western creativity. Hell was the spiral stairs which humanity had climbed to arrive at catastrophic alienation; Eshleman sifted the range of modern dissent to arrive at the thesis that the way up could be reversed.

Eshleman was responsible for a second wave of postmodern activity, a darker, more brooding and questioning phase in its celebration of cultural diversity; in sifting the bases of contemporary thought, he seized its fundamental premise in his drama in the Dordogne. In 1981, Eshleman began a new journal, *Sulfur*, a sequel to *Caterpillar*, with a focus reflecting his preoccupations with Paleolithic art. "Sulfur," he wrote in a recent brochure for the magazine, stands for "initiation, combustion, fumes from the underworld," but also "denotes the butterfly." The magazine now seeks to gather the voices of reintegration, those writers responsible "for bringing self and human knowledge into the greatest amplex that the language can accommodate."

A Check List of Clayton Eshleman's

Books In Print & other matters

Poetry:

What She Means (1978), *Hades In Manganese* (1981), *Fracture* (1983), and *The Name Encanyoned River: Selected Poetry 1960-1985*, are available from Black Sparrow

Press, Santa Rosa, California. *Visions of the Fathers of Lascaux* is available from Panjandrum Press, Los Angeles.

Translations:

César Vallejo: The Complete Posthumous Poetry (cotranslated with José Rubia Barcia), *Aimé Césaire: The Collected Poetry* (cotranslated with Annette Smith), and *Given Giving: Selected Poems of Michel Deguy* are available from University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles. *Antonin Artaud: Four Texts* (cotranslated with Norman Glass), and *Sea-Urchin Harakiri* (Selected Poems of Bernard Bador) are available from Panjandrum Press, Los Angeles.

Bibliography:

Martha Sattler's definitive bibliography of the works of Clayton Eshleman will be published in 1988 by University of New Mexico Press.

Autobiographical:

In the fall of 1987, a 20,000-word autobiography of Clayton Eshleman was published by Gale Research in their Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series (for information on this title, contact Ms. Adele Sarkissian, Gale Research, Book Tower, Detroit, MI 48226).

Current Interview:

In *Talus* magazine, #1, there is a long interview with Eshleman, by the Hungarian poet/translator Gyula Kodolanyi. *Talus*, c/o English Department, King's College, The Strand, London WC2R 2LS.

Magazines:

Back issues of Clayton Eshleman's earlier magazine, *Caterpillar*, can be purchased from Michael Sherrick, Bookseller, in Santa Barbara, California. Back issues and subscriptions to Eshleman's current magazine, *Sulfur*, can be obtained c/o English Department, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI 48197.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis

The Sisters' secret [interfering] child

The intense yearning, the desire for something else, of which we too have only a dark and doubtful presentiment, remains, but our arete, our ideal of vital being, rises not in our identification in a hierarchy of higher forms but in our identification with the universe. To compose such a symposium of the whole, such a totality, all the old excluded orders must be included. The female, the proletariat, the foreign; the animal and vegetative; the unconscious and the unknown; the criminal and failure—all that has been outcast and vagabond must return to be admitted in the creation of what we consider we are.

— Robert Duncan, "Rites of Participation,"

*The H.D. Book*¹

ODES ARE, AS AN 18TH CENTURY CRITIC SAID, hymns in honor of Dionysus, "a bold, free, enthusiastical kind of poetry, as of man inspired by Bacchus—half-drunk."² It is peculiar how definition verges on suspicion. The insulting, or squeamish "half-drunk" is a revelation of the rhetoric of revulsion toward this provocative ancient mode: this long poem, of "irregular stanzas" "in three units" "with abrupt transitions" "un- and even dis-unified" "obeying no particular norm." "For most men their own heart is the most / precious food. The man to become the wine / places his heart in the damp nest / of the Sisters' knotted towel."³

Ode is the genre which symbolizes poetry. When ordinary people resist poetry, it is ode-like qualities which they are resisting: the apparent overvaluing of transcendence; the ecstatic, inexplicable events; the poetic diction of apostrophe and abstraction: excessive, embarrassing, overblown, portentous, mellifluous: "As they strum on his entrails, / he is blended, the harp of their reciprocal pit." [NER, 229] Odes entail the very notion of, not to speak about dangers of, the sublime; the likelihood, not to speak of the temptations and necessity, of dissolution; the febrile outcries; the feminine encodings implicit in this genre, of "hysteria," emotionalism, self-importance, exaggeration, double and irreducible messages, even duplicity, are all so contemptible from a tight-lipped prose/informational/direct word "no slither" norm.

And yet, a little like straight Pentheus not believing the seductive long-hair avatar of Dionysus—who is, as it falls out, Dionysus—such a respondent to the ode finds it is both a seductive genre and one that will tear the unbeliever to shreds: Pound (of the anti-slither statement), Williams, all would return to the ode-like

expanses in their major works. (And *The Cantos*, that struggle, it could be said, did tear Pound to shreds.)

The ode is the genre in which your ecstatic, orgasmic mother tears you, the unbeliever, to shreds. (The comparative rarity of odes then limited first to whomever can imagine such a mother?) The gender narratives in such a formulation leave some striking questions of poetics at large, charged. The ode as the site of the acceptance of the ecstatic mother—the ode as site of the breaching of ultimate taboo, the celebration of the repressed, the dance conducted with taboo—bring to a head the oedipal/preoedipal transgressions (to pleasure, to incest, to the chora) which the ode ultimately entails.⁴

This Bacchic genre, variously deployed, is, arguably, the genre of choice for such notable contemporary writers as Robert Duncan, Susan Howe, Gustaf Sobin and Clayton Eshleman, among others, most of whom are, in Eshleman's words, "Expressionistic *and* Objective."⁵ And among these, the work of Eshleman has a special resonance as investigating the necessary anti-sublimity of the sublime, as forging a chthonic apotheosis out of the materials of despal, the "Hadean," darkness.⁶

Transcendence, in the best of these modern odes (or ode-like gestures), has been critically restated in antiauthoritarian ways; transcendence being no longer possible, although the dispersal into the sublime is. It is a difficult line; I myself remain suspicious of the stance of priest-shaman-poet (despite my defense of the ode into which this figure of the poet is often projected⁷), suspicious even when it is inflected with pariah, as in this stunning homage to one of Eshleman's masters, which I cite in part, and whose syntactic awkwardness and verbal impaction or impasto are for me sympathetic and redeeming.

Pariah in silence, coprophilially
 squatting in the corner of your cell for years,
 sealed open, who only came when called by your
 mother's name—
 3 dead men, licking your electroshock-induced Bardo,
 have found
 your atomic glue, the Kundalini compost they must eat to speak.
 O shaman, from having been so masterfully plundered!
 O priest, from having been fixed in antithesis!
 O pariah, from having been so desired by the dead!

[NER, 216]

Odes undertake thinking within the work. They are issue-oriented, sometimes even brilliantly expository in intent. Which might mean—an exploration of the

laden multiplicity of our interactive situation: the way in "Junk Mail" [NER, 196-198] the ludicrous heterogeneity of an

ersatz arts conference on "Creativity and Madness" gets treated with a bitter, loving, hilarious negative respect as symptomatic not only of the "North American psyche" but of little boy "Me" of an innocence so total that Nothingness can colonize it.⁸ Tonally or rhetorically, such interactive analysis can call forth all levels (such a word is *jejeune*) and types of discourses, all ranges and combinations of allusions and images, such as might be summed up in the terse "<u>Everything material</u>." of a recent poem.⁹ In "Junk Mail," Eshleman stands forth with the following essayistic lines, in context perfectly suited to the stress-shifting, the coming at this phenomenon analytically, imagistically, psychologically, politically.

what *can* we say
 to those who would season their Royal Waikoloa
 Singles Luncheon with
 "George Orwell and Rudyard Kipling: Abandoning
 Parents and Abusing Children?"
 There is a repression in North American psyche so
 tough, so uncontactable because of the depth, now,
 of the suffering midden of humanity creating goods for us,
 that it is no longer disturbable—it can *enjoy* ANYTHING!
 Can enjoin any grief and discuss it
 over pineapple—but I cannot fully believe this or I
 too would be consumed. That the shirts of these people
 are being made somewhere in the world where the workers
 live less well than our pets
 can turn the vise of the creative mind into itself to
 the point that not madness
 but a simpering, descriptive, situation comedy runs out,
 a pseudo-art the equivalent of the lectures to be
 delivered there.

[NER, 197]

At best, Eshleman releases us into a sense of thought's process and its teeming, a non-exclusionary sense of connection which is politically and personally enlivening, even aggressive. The swing from ironic, bitter, desirous, outraged, grieving, hysteric, restrained, the purposeful (and not decorative or only controlling), the appeal to a range and multiplicity of discourses—the heteroglossia which Mikhail Bakhtin has theorized, are (by virtue of the prevalent notions of the sublime) generally not available in more regular ode-gestures. Heteroglossia is the political possibility which Eshleman gives to the genre.

Eshleman's ode-poems are politicized by virtue of their heteroglossia, and his shaman-priest guise is therefore realistically inflected with our collective Amer-poet dialectic of political power/powerlessness, and the shame of our late-capitalist engorgement, our drinking of others' blood.

The language of odes has traditionally been intense, and one favored rhetorical mode, the apostrophe (o wild West wind; o ma douleur; o Attic shape; o you solitary singer / o solitary me) is not so much (as Jonathan Culler has argued) a figure of address to the object but "the pure embodiment of poetic pretension, of the subject's [the writer's] claim that in his [Culler's word] verse he is not merely an empirical poet, a writer of verse, but the embodiment of poetic tradition and of the spirit of poetry."¹⁰ In a memorable phrase: "Invocation is a figure of vocation." It would be typical of Eshleman that in poem after poem, the sublime reach ("O my white, white father, you were the / bell dong clapper and tower of a construction arisen . . .") would be rooted in "O yellow po-ca dickada of an owl yet to be conceived / even before the egg" and would end as an invocation to Donald Duck as a major symbol/symptom of our cultural deadness which lives on the torture of others, invocation a figure of vocation. ["Tomb of Donald Duck," *NER*, 180-186] "And the howl of this wound is so wide that it is the sound of the very day itself, the solar day like an opened heart packed with siphons and drains, feast parked in the heart of an Indian mother whose breasts are no more than ripped lips. . . ."

The paradigmatic apostrophe (says Culler) would then be Shelley's "Be thou, Spirit Fierce, / My Spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one"; words that desire self-effacing, yet self-aggrandizing exchanges with ultimate forces, words that are proudly saturated with boundlessness. For the lack of boundary is the crucial element of the ode as genre. Eshleman, in *Sulfur* 13: "Apotheosis, in an autophagic sense, might be a state of writerly awareness in which there is nothing to repress." (p. 156) (Hence odes are the poems of the end of the lyric, the end of the manageable epiphany, the end of book's unity (but not its form), and even of the Book as ideal, and the beginning of drastic apocalyptic continuous writing.) But because its dionysiac basis opens it to limitlessness, the ode enters intellectually into major debate between limitlessness and limit. If an ode evokes limitlessness as a dream of bliss, pleasure, totality of fullness or of emptiness, still that ode will be marked by a rocking between limitlessness and boundary. (Let me note here only that boundary is never barrier.) As in Whitman, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" in which this rocking between limitlessness and boundary shows itself in the context of "so much / too much" and then the subsequent search for one word, one "clew" which can hold and contain the contradictions of boundary and ecstasy.

But limitlessness (as Mary Jacobus argues) gives rise to the "orphyic fantasy"—threats of possession, of never coming back; fears of dismemberment and

dispersal; it is here that the Virgilian female functions in Eshleman's work. The insistent acknowledgements of Caryl Eshleman in several of Eshleman's recent works are one sign of the necessity of a boundary mark, of an Isisian figure who remembers the scattered parts, of a figure who, just at the void, can offer a steadying, humane dialogue.

The intrusive (and everyone is going to find at least some part of Clayton Eshleman's work immoderately intrusive, unpalatable) is a deliberate response to that cultural condition of late capitalism analyzed by Edward Said as (in Hal Foster's words) "a 'doctrine of noninterference' " in which it "is tacitly assumed" and then unconditionally maintained that the humanities and politics are

aloof.¹¹ It is this assumption that Eshleman heatedly and repeatedly denies. Thus Eshleman may be said to embody the critical postmodern intrusion: "a counterpractice of interference"—defined by Said as at least including: a breaking of academic field boundaries (cf. "the symposium of the whole" in Robert Duncan's words); an insistence on the political meaning of all acts and choices within the humanities; a denial of the "subjective and powerless" role of literature; "a crossing of borders and obstacles, a determined attempt to generalize exactly at those points where generalizations seem impossible to make"; a use of representation to "tell other stories than the official sequential or ideological ones produced by institutions of power." The praxis of interference is, as Foster pinpoints, more than a subversive gesture; it is a "practice of resistance."

How to arrange oneself permanently into the arena of risk, without the lavish extremes of self-destruction and/or self-indulgence—

How to write in, at, by the edge, trace the long topographic contours of the extreme—

How to stay with and in the extreme with analytic powers intact, inside the Hadean sublime, and conduct oneself with dignity therein, given the extensive challenges to fabrication (of language, tone, structure) when the extreme is one's hope—

In such works as "The Name Encanyoned River," "Our Lady of the Three-Pronged Devil," "Notes on a Visit to Le Tuc d'Audoubert"—in fact in many of the poems from *Hades in Manganese*, *Fracture*, and recent work, the reader has the sense of being caught inside of being, embodying at core a dangerous and enriching place, and being made aware, through the impastos of image laden language, of the vibrant contours of this site: the social geography of the psyche, the psychic geography of society.

How? what is this how—this is what is provocative and helpful in an ethical or moral way about Eshleman's work: he is the centaur of the extreme. I was going to say he rides the bronco of the extreme, but this is not right, for he does not seek to

tame or to domesticate the forces and materials with which he is engaged. As otherness, as the man-who-rides-the-horse-he-is, as the horse-who-is-the-man-it-gallops, he is more like the imagined monstrous fusions (monstrous functioning as tropes for necessary, unconscionable, paradigm-breaking combinations): the borderline between man/other, human and beast, personhood incorporating the rejected aspects of person. The plea, the tirade, the constant argument in Eshleman's work is born from the tracing of the fissure or fault line (fracture) that separates and joins the animal otherside (in its clarity and purity, in its inarticulate need) to humankind the destroyer and the maker of image and language. And in a thoroughly convincing analysis of the meaning of prehistoric cave art, Eshleman points to the crisis of human consciousness as the separation of human from the animal, and his activity as a writer to gain access to "prehistoric psychic activity" (*Fracture*, p. 12).

This oeuvre has over decades been devoted to the insight that the extreme is a necessary, complex, and manifold *place or site* (not a quick incident of access in time). This space is chthonic (not Olympian), and therefore can be intimate, homely, filled with the pebbles of gods, the dailiness of encounters with forces; but it is also exacting, vengeful, devoted to a complex of rights and knowledge, steeped in blood, tribe, code and allegiances, representing the law prior to *The Law* of city, Father, patriarchy, judge.

The evocation of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (part of the trilogy, *The Oresteia*) is deliberate, for the *Oresteia* is a work which performs a cultural resolution regarding these chthonic/female powers, making a cultural compact of their subordination which is, apparently, at the end of its hegemony. The female god who was born from the head of her father (and one might allude to Athene as a class traitor) casts the deciding vote in this allegory of the establishment of state over tribe, Law over custom, light over darkness, reason over incantation, Father over mother, rape over incest (as the allowable crime, cf. Greek mythology *passim* for the rapes), abstract, impersonal justice over forms of situational, personal punishment (called vengeance). The female furies (Erinyes, the chthonic forces) are now sited in their recuperated niche under the City. It is Eshleman's passion to pry open and re-examine this solidified Olympian compact, this alliance of reasonableness and repression against Otherness, and to release the Erinyes from the repressive tolerance and pacification which has been their cultural fate, and Orestes from the fate of being automaton of the law.

The renegotiation involves a denial of male-based initiation rites whose "implication is always of rebirth from the male" instead of first birth from the mother.¹² If many of Eshleman's poems are like rituals, it is the initiation ritual that is both overtly and covertly invoked, and, connected to its gender issues, there is a

concomitant quest for ways that do not "anchor the initiate's mind to established and frozen imagination."¹³ Instead, a third birth as from the mother, the cave, the space of the extreme is readied and executed.

Since the order established in the *Oresteia* ends a cycle of blood with "purification," the counterpractice to this Western order recommences a cycle of blood (menstrual, fertile, wounding, murderous, the blood in Tiresias' Hadean fosse, the ochre of the cave wall) and re-examines, critically re-engages with so-called pollutions: the lower body ("The lower booty"), navel, genitals, materials fecal, menstrual, fetal, grotesque, delirious, monstrous—materials opening Eshleman to various personal allegations, based upon the importance to his world view of the challenging of all taboos.

The career of Eshleman may be loosely described as an anti-Oresteia (I mean by this no comment on his life, nor any scenic allegory made of the Aeschylus). That is, it is the undoing of years of liberal cultural hegemony by the

dialectical engagement with the terms of exclusion, the control of others and of Otherness. "I have no desire / to live in a world of nature conditioned by patriarchy. / I kick off my head and live in the light / bounding in from my mother" (*NER*, p. 230). What the culture has repressed ("the flesh vale," *NER*, p. 116) is not only returned to but engaged with a space of struggle, in part to end Orestean acquiescence and complicity with the final dispositions of power commandingly sanctified in Aeschylus' trilogy. Like Orestes, Eshleman—and it is part of his fascination—accepts his Apollonian duty to engage with the Hadean, the Bacchic; unlike Orestes, he does so not to be judged and praised by Apollo and Athene, but to confront his peers and be consumed by them.

Notes

1. I cite this epigram from Duncan because of its intrinsic importance and as well because of Eshleman's attention to this argument. Duncan's "Rites of Participation" was originally published in two parts, in *Caterpillar* 1 and 2. The paragraph I have cited was originally published in *Caterpillar* 2 (January 1968) and reprinted in *A Caterpillar Anthology*, ed. Clayton Eshleman (Anchor Books, 1971), p. 24. Eshleman calls attention to elements of "Rites of Participation" as the basis for a poetics in *Sulfur* 13 (1985), p. 155. Contemplating the Duncan statement for me now it is especially important to bracket the elegiac, the nostalgia for the whole or, as Duncan says, for "the coming of all men into one fate" (p. 23), and the unexamined "we." Bracket, I mean, not to deny, but to consider at another time.

2. Statement on the Pindaric cited from Mary Jacobus, "Apostrophe and Lyric Voice in *The Prelude*," in *Lyric Poetry—Beyond New Criticism*, ed. Hošek and Parker,

Cornell University Press, 1985.

3. This poem in *The Name Encanyoned River: Selected Poems (1960-1985)*, Black Sparrow Press, 1986, is also the source for the title; p. 228. Cited as *NER*.

4. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Gora, Jardine and Roudiez, Columbia University Press, 1980, and *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller, Columbia University Press, 1984. Without any help from ancient examples (like Sappho?) which cannot be examined by virtue of their loss, one might tentatively posit the possibility of difference in the female use of the ode in our historical time, which allows for a certain generic duplicity or indirection in examining the site of female ecstasy from the peculiar perspective of a female writer who could place herself (dangerously) both as the orgasmic mother and as the incestuous writer. Susan Howe's most ode-like work is a Shakespearean masque of lyric fragments and bursts (*The Liberties*); Beverly Dahlen's "ode" is in prose (*A Reading*).

5. In *Sulfur* 13, p. 155. This statement is a spirited defense of the Rhapsodic as the quintessential and vital mode of poetry.

6. It hardly seems necessary to remind ourselves that odes are in every way resistant and inimical to both the well-made poem of New Critical fame (when Duncan and then later Eshleman faced their vocation) and to its flaccid epigone, the contemporary nice-guy exemplum of Dullness, whose moral and intellectual limitations have been more and more (in critical works of wit, force, and despair) called into question: by Geoff O'Brien, by Rae Armantrout, by Charles Bernstein, by Hank Lazer, by Marjorie Perloff, by Clayton Eshleman, by Michael Davidson.

7. Odes displace and recuperate the religious and spiritual fervor away from the hymns of institutionalized religion into numinous otherness. Paul Fry has noted "the priestly role [which the speaker of an ode assumed] is not pastoral but hermetic." But an authoritarian function is a possible concomitant. *The Poet's Calling in the English Ode*, Yale University Press, 1980, p. 7.

8. In his excellent introduction to Eshleman's *The Name Encanyoned River*, Eliot Weinberger points to the interactive political and social relations of our historical moment which have necessitated the tracing of networks of relations: "one can see the world in a grain of sand only if one simultaneously sees the thousands of undressed oiled bodies baking on the beach, the web of their social interactions, the raw sewage pumped into the sea and the contaminated lives of the marine animals, the kiosks with their pink bunnies and rubber ducks. . . ." p. 9. This has called forth in Eshleman and others an interactive, multidimensional writing in no way the pretty monotone of institutional "Poetry."

9. "Impotence Still-Life," *Temblor* 5 (1987), p. 38. This remarkable poem continues with the argument "But if everything is material, then everything (mentally) / is

edible" and goes on to propose the opening at least, and the plausible consuming of secretly nurtured and hidden impotence: "the male secret of despair."

10. Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, Cornell University Press, 1981, p. 143.

11. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed., Hal Foster, Bay Press, 1983; Edward Said, "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community," in the Foster. Citations are from pp. xiv, 155, 157, xv-xvi.

12. For illuminating discussions of the social functions performed by *The Oresteia*, see Froma Zeitlin, "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in The Oresteia of Aeschylus" (do not have publication data).

13. Eshleman, "Introduction," to *Antonin Artaud: 4 Texts*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Norman Glass, Panjandrum Books, Inc., 1982. p. 1.

Gerald Burns

Magic in Verse — Some Distinctions

I'M READING LONGFELLOW'S "The Jewish Cemetery at Newport" in Rodman's collection and see (how easily the first stanzas go down) that Poe's calling him a plagiarist made sense, had a deep resonance to it. His quondam gothic may be in an odd relation to time, as Watson argues Coleridge was—hobnobbing with the pastness of the past without the work of history, what we've come to think of as its Blue Book, slum statistic quality. History floats free in their poems. But Longfellow is familiar with history, it's his, like friends at a costume party so we don't mind modern plaster tinted, in him. Poe reminds you that the Funhouse has depths. It will never get out of hand in Longfellow and at the end of his poem he buries the dead. Everything is what you thought it was. This is the plaster statue on the mantel, Greece recaptured. A raven on one is a risk. Jeffers's "Hellenistics" in the same volume pretends we could have had Greek perceptions all along—it's just stuff, little cakes, Hebraistics. That's why the line about having wasted his life, in that Wright poem.

The foam-heads, the exultant dawn light going
west, the pelicans, their huge wings
half folded, plunging like stones.
And these sepulchral stones, so old and brown,
That pave with level flags their burial-place,
Seem like the tablets of the Law, thrown down
And broken by Moses at the mountain's base.

Plagiarism pits inherit against earn or appropriate, and how to say this unsmarmily is a problem. There's the generosity of Poe, picking through a book of verse for good lines, anything to raise a tremor even in the intellect. Just today I'm told there's a *chance* the sixteen-year-old deserter was walled up (in his uniform) while Edgar A. Perry was enlisted, on the island off Boston. The sudden jolt, to think he *might* have collaborated (at least by silence) in an action we'd bracketed as invention is like seeing one's wife in a new aspect. The possibility of new relations of life and art is there in Poe. A jeweler's window I pass weeks apart just down from the Parker House where Dickens stayed has on display a large plain gold ring surmounted by an ivory skull facing forward rather than out (as it does in potmetal ones with ruby eyes), the sutures well indicated in brown not wholly stain. It would be a good command charm; Yeats might have used it with a dagger

to cut air, stamping his foot for punctuation. The ring reminds you of lore as preliminary to action. The imagination of it involves will. I don't approve of will in spells and have thought of it as bracketed (or thought of spells as a choice neither involving nor not involving will). Usually it's fuzzed; will somehow enters heavy picturing as doggedness, the clenching of one's picturemaking teeth. Or it's a sending (spatial, spatial) of a mental gesture analogous to urging the golf or croquet ball on its way, corrective intent as vector. Part of my trouble with this is its wanting to play ball with causal description, inserting the thin edge of wish into physics. Yesterday I wondered a second whether an arcane connection could be demonstrated between imagination and will, by pointing to the frequency of will, concentration, focus metaphors in nearly any description of contemporary magic.

Today I'm considering stone in Longfellow and Jeffers, whose stones are bits of cliffs and I think not very carvable. Probably both find it natural that stones will crack, not a very classical viewpoint (Williams's saxifrage, "my flower that splits / the rocks.") Stone is a victim of cold. In Poe, however crumbled the mortar, stone inhabits a literary space, and this is what the discovery of the body walled in invades. Longfellow leaves everything as he found it, the assemblage pleasant, a Cotton Club (revived here the 31st in Copley Square). The Athenaeum guard said Eve's despondent because she looked under Adam's figleaf and found nothing. From this it's not so far to the vulgarity of the Pygmalion statue half gray half rosy, the sculptor kissing it like Sarasate bent backwards.

There's nothing, not even a glacier, you couldn't put in your living room. Tissot is proof that everything is domestic. By contrast I would say that magic occurs between leaves in a forest where no one sees, that lichen mutter, unthinkably woody, and the cabochon gem is proof that nature is unwitting. The veins when a leaf rots are not really like a screen door, nor are they pretty. A record, history is not pretty. So nothing that is read is—even De Quincey's prose is not like our first view of Strawberry Hill.

"Notes on a Visit to Le Tuc d'Audoubert" impressed me (read by Eshleman in Dallas after slides) as enactment, the sections (verse, prose—and *drawings*, how do you read drawings) discovery, travels with a bison, dense, believable. I think he'll prefer in a way, as an act of mind, "Visions of the Fathers of Lascaux," though the trappings of this are to me like Williams's ovum and sperm book cover, things surprised to find themselves design.

There is a Romantic question here, whether the license to preach is an issue in this verse, whether we need find Eshleman believable to believe him. He suffers an expansion of "the so-called Whore / on her severely un-

derfed Dragon" (I suppose a medieval representation in stone) and it's believable that having seen it he votes for the concept *of* it. He finds, or observes, a

deliberate confusion of these in him almost constituting vision, "that fresh rain air is a clear indication / that here is not entirely here." Usually I prefer his here poems, even if here is memory ("Still-Life with Fraternity") or straight dream-vision ("Fathers of Lascaux"), but a virtue of his poetry is reconciling me to a mixture, the slug in "Name Encanyoned River"

which finding itself at the bottom of the kitchen sink,
late at night, disappeared back down the drain,
worked its way through the maze of the Cross to
the roots of the fig tree to climb its trunk and be seen,
in morning sunlight, motionless on the stump
of a hacked off branch.

Reportage, you'll say and he denies in the poem a temptation to make this mean. Still, in the writing it has meant, in a different way from (say) Snyder's market particulars, flounder and noodles, people on bicycles, begging bowl.

The fetus in the parlor includes himself, *Baby's Book of Events* (named in the Lascaux poem, quoted as a Joycean list in "Deeds Done and Suffered by Light") the prime physicalizing (textualizing) instance of the Romantic interest in origins, generating instances, that make it a wonder Olson didn't worship prime numbers. It's easy to read Eshleman as imaginative etymology, our cave Fathers as first words, and is this adequate as a response—is response what the poems ask? "I write," Lamb says, "for antiquity." He wants us antlered. Anyway, some books you leaf through (maybe even a *Baby's Book*) make leafing an imposition. What I *meant* to say before the distracting trappings distracted, was how important, in "River," is his not jacking with that slug the way Longfellow must with gravestones. It does mean, as all of "Visit to Le Tuc" means, that his visioning isn't self-indulgent.

His poems do ask me to adopt his attitude toward his interests, and this shows in his adjectives:

an increasingly tendrilled fissure,
a massive vulva incised before the gate,
it would be relegated by gradually peaking individuality
to the lower body,
awesome, infinite, coiled in hypnosis.

He thinks of adjectives as coiled snakes, perhaps too coarsely imagined as significantly dreaming (that last line ends a poem.) It is like the fairytale poison as opposed to poisoned in poison apple, adjective denoting class.

I write the rest of this in red ink because so many of these poems employ blood in its stringiness and ability to tint, the blood as basic because inner,

straining the walls
priming them with menstrual effluvia

All hominids share a scarlet where the dark is

any iron in him implicitly going to platelets. The American sculptors in Rome used drills to make holes, depths in ringlets and those mouths split to glimpsed tongue and teeth. What in Bernini is mannerist live space seeping into stone becomes, for the people Hawthorne met, a fingering of stone with the eye and exercise of techne. It's hard from Lawrence on for blood and thinking snakes, any hysterine red darknesses, not to be this in us. I don't think Jeffers gets out of it. Even late-Greek, you had to *learn* to say Medea. They aren't just there for us, as Jeffers says sunlight on the Pacific is like, so like, Greek islands predating their names.

So, in verse is there a presumption that blood and bile are, as preverbal facts, *in* the poem by owning it, the document in the coffer, *deed* (even) of gift, as Hillman might ask? The assumption that prime substances are interesting *is* the Medusa in these poems, frequent in them, and rightly imagined as in a way stopping language (see Patricia Berry's fine essay on "Stopping" in *Echo's Subtle Body*.) Aside from the arrest as at an accident it affects me as if I'd come on a Folly, one of those in the National Trust guidebook. When I try to address or come up to the globality of Eshleman's concern, not in one poem or book in particular but his life as writer-traveler, the question not for him but for me is is this picturesque, a taste for what crumbles from intelligibility, no matter that we've ruins in us to which these speak. Do we paddle in Gothic? Here it's not his vaudeville, dead father and mother speaking from coffins (frightfully Hammer, a detective story says), which I find pious and moving, as Liza Doolittle's dustman father is a Figure) that guarantees as if by humor a cleanliness of concern, but the sobriety of his frontal attacks on what you'd think permanently lost even to Frazerian analogizing that convinces me the significances aren't to be proved by my assenting to their effect. It's hard to see this because Eshleman would see their effect *on* me as validation. I mailed him a picture of the Boston Museum's miniature goddess. He wrote back:

Your marvelous postcard is on my desk. Breastbared snake lady of the ovarian lab. Who taught the Minotaur to dance by kissing his charred animal muzzle and adopting his pizzle on red Saturdays 12 times a year. His eyes still have a bit of sorrow and diamond-glint in Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast*. By the time we get to Theseus, possession is the thing, and that which does not add up something to be squashed instead of inducted.

This in passing in a note. So it's not as if he's putting a mask on in the poems. He exploits neither of our curiosities (so Alice-like in "Le Tuc") about origins, and is not—as so much Tennyson and Arnold seem to be—replacing the father as a project. That's Joyce again, Hamlet as ghost, and I can't but think Berry's essay on Hamlet and words, which in its attack on repetition leads into stopping, applicable

though I can't say how. What I lack as a shekinah around Longfellow's gravestones, and as admission in Jeffers that we *do* owe the Greeks, clarté, is repaired in Eshleman's going back and back to the caves; it's not as if he's *done* Les Eyzies. I'm old-fashioned enough to like poems to be Works, definitive. Eshleman's help me see them not as stages on life's way, essays, tries (who would want that, the fruit tree each time inventing the apple) but

James Hillman

Behind the Iron Grillwork

something else abandoned to print but not to care. He's not a better poet for caring for cave art as such. I do think his plastic interests perfectly served by the bison in Le Tuc *modeled* in wet clay. The limestone walls with superimposed drawings, sometimes glazed from later dripping, are wonderful to me but not palimpsests of memory because they can't be that. For that his Cave Fathers would have to be in my mind like Dickens characters and they're not. He likes them most when they are nearly goblins, shadows of dactyloi.

What impresses about them is their imagined rituals are absolutes. Frazer would class nearly all Haitian rituals as sympathetic magic—blue meal in bowls or poured in figures as food for the departed. Yet the decorating aspect dominates and they float free of the classification. So here, beings between shamans and Quatermass and the Pit are like slugs so much what they announce that Will, like Occupation, thins because coagulable to a thing to trace two veins without metaphors of telegraph, the nerve-nets that infected twenties verse to death. His anatomy, thank goodness, is not Gray's. I do wish he'd do a book of poems to be illustrated with line drawings of the skulls, including Piltdown. During his slide lecture the pointing arm and sleeve would invade the screen space, bits of figured animal on his lapel, himself a kind of cave. He said it was like the consciousness of man and so, lumens behind it, dioptrics, it may have been. It would be wrong to talk of Eshleman's poems as renderings of his notions, as if the image were all on the screen, when it's the bit of tweed, sartorial inadvertence, that humanizes them so. It's hard to know always, for these sorts of poems, what one is supposed to ignore, a surety which as built into Longfellow's and Jeffers's poems destroys them utterly.

HOW DOES A PERSON outside the playground go in there without getting beaten up? You guys behind the iron grillwork are so tough and always fighting, and you push the swings and turn the merry-go-round. I can't even get on. You know all about poetry and I don't even know what I like. (I feel ashamed when I like a piece, feeling it must have been too easy.) But I do know some poets, and whom I like.

What I get from Clayton is the sincerity of power or the power of sincerity. A virtue, sincerity, that I have come to value after sitting through hours and hours of analysis. Not the confession, not the oppression in personal agony makes the 'good

patient'; but the sincerity of the engagement with the material: life, dreams, symptoms, desires. Not shying away even in the midst of shyness: sincerity.

Intelligence too. But then all poets seem to me intelligent. Clayton's is the kind that takes in and sorts out. It pursues: maybe this is psychoanalytic intelligence. He is in pursuit of uncovering; ambitious, relentless tracking. And it's *him*: not the work as independent icon, or his line or rhythm and the accounts in terms of terms, language. I don't get just language from Clayton, poems about writing about poems. I get pursuit; words at work trying thought, tearing thought out of obdurate stuff. Psychoanalytic.

I suppose it is psychoanalytic in another way: the recovery of the repressed, flesh as equivalent of the repressed, flesh in its interiority always at the edge, lapsing into, emerging from, offal. What could be more Incarnational?

When he pursues depth and origins, I don't take him literally, that is, deep into literal pre-history or into literal inseminating and birthing bodies. Maybe he does, at one level. But Clayton isn't writing at one level, though it feels strongly so. (That's a special talent that his metaphors don't seem such.) I read depth and origins as the rejected and abhorred, the organic coil as an alchemical *putrefactio*, matters releasing spirits under torture, his torturing words and his being tortured in them, matters that confident bourgeois like myself throw over the shoulder without a backward glance. Clayton takes "The backward look behind the assurance / Of recorded history, the backward half-look / Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror." (Eliot, *The Dry Salvages*, II)

Besides all this, he has invited me into the playground and come visited mine, and never once beaten me up.

[Feb. 22, 1987]

Karin Lessing

The Bill

"The poem is the cry of its occasion, . . ."

Wallace Stevens

*I have run full length The Name Encanyoned
River flow and swirl, torrent turning into
torrent unlike fire that consumes unlike
light that diamonds air the air I have run
through another/another's descent and climb/rite
 of passage river underneath river
surfacing at the last bend within the smooth
silver of eucalyptus bark the shining body
the Reader amazed, afloat*

*After the last splendid poems of Antiphonal Swing,
after the brutal world had died among almost serene
petals A pause What gust of wind to shift
the pattern, what further transformations, what
new and incandescent stains, horny eruptions, what
unheard-of medley of alizarin metals and furs to
tincture this Geryon's hide*

"L'art du tisserand serre de très

près la notion de qualité."

Osip Mandelstam

THE BILL came.

The Bill is a five-and-a-quarter-page-length poem in *Sulfur* 17. It was written within six days. It commemorates an event: the poet dining with his wife. The place: a restaurant in Lan Kerellac, France. The time: the recent past. No more, no less. The tiny nucleus of the real. A piano strikes up the theme: "Dearly Beloved . . ." and the fabric of the poem begins to wind and unwind, dipping into pools of dye, surging with a multiplicity of selves: babbling polyphony out of which memory reconstructs the scene, turning the act of eating, of talking into a

complex ritual, into a banquet ceremony presided over by the silent presence of the Beloved.

"A mythological form, a festival sphere, . . ."

Wallace Stevens

The nucleus, the heart. The theme of the banquet. Conversation. Diotima and Beatrice; the fabulous bridge anchored in wheat and silence in Carpaccio's painting. . . . The art of conversation. Pleasure and warmth. Eyes feeding in the other's eyes. The only food, the only drink.

Emmanuel Lévinas: "Le fait banal de la conversation quitte, par un côté, l'ordre de la violence. Ce fait banal, merveille des merveilles."

Or George Oppen's injunction from the "Daybook," the plea, the cry

OUR LAST CHANCE IS THIS: HIDE NOTHING

HIDE NOTHING : OUR LAST CHANCE

Our last chance. The key words in this comedy—our human comedy—that orchestrates itself against an ominous backdrop. Ominous, *The Bill*, the pay-up. Shadows flit over the great Western portals where the killer, the man-devouring lion, the toothed leviathan yawn in their mineral sleep. Where the separating-out occurs, the wheat from the chaff. Occident, ominous entrance, end.

"It was already beginning to get dark."

A voice from *Shoah*

But the news, the poem arrive from the East. Sun-rise, cradle, infant origin. They arrive, they never cease to arrive. They come as offerings—as the poem offers itself—out of past hierarchies, past and present. To us who are eternally waiting to be served.

The gold, the color, tessera flush to tessera, the dormant fabric over which the light plays, reveals itself, reveals and moves along with the solemn procession of the visible.

The invisible made visible as in the poem.

Sometimes the visible enters disguised: camouflage, smoke-screen, trap. When it conceals, when it comes as armed/armored metaphor, moving forest, tank, turret. When it signals danger, fears or menaces attack, when it threatens to garrot, to stop what Artaud called the blood mucus, "le mucus du sang" madness, despair, death or betrayal.

Or another disguise to parry, to challenge the mechanism of the horrible, to pry it open, to transgress and to transform what blinds us, maintains us in a shroud of fear and guilt: The comic mask. Unleashed, untamed, protean, it catapults the

obstinate ceremony, the book of rituals—the whole weight of the world—into a public celebration, into feast, into a comic apotheosis where the one is multiple, where each being, each word is intrinsically, immediately another, where the tragic attends on the comic, pain on pleasure.

The poets asks: is poetry the vehicle? can it be poetry? what is poetry? is poetry a meat-wagon, can it bear the weight of the discursive? can 'it' be "opened and played with" in this manner?

Questions behind the question. The multiple in one, wedged between "I want poetry" and "I will lose". . .

". . . dans toute poésie authentique la pensée imagée se réalise grâce à une propriété de la matière poétique que je propose d'appeler convertibilité ou mutabilité."

Osip Mandelstam

For the poet whose marrow, whose "very scent, is social, . . ." whose intent struggle with his undelivered selves never cuts him off from his fellow creatures, who "will say anything" as long as that 'anything' will contribute to build up the living fabric or to break it down when it dulls, breathes no longer, who can step aside, even in the face of death, and ask: "—but what would remain if I were to become pure?", the world is teeming, alive. There is Dionysian laughter, food and drink. They will continue to arrive. Not simple fruit culled nor country wine but surprising dishes, heavy, exhilarating vintages. . . .

And the reader—*conviva*: fellow feaster—is invited to join in, to contemplate, to revere

. . . in motion, in pleasure
 scythed and harvested, a beautiful creature eating
 a beautiful creature."
 through delight,
 the world reconstructed, made whole.

An oral and a literate art! Language contains its own challenge, success and failure. And when it fails, it still reveals. It is from that glimmering remainder—irreducible, incommensurable—that the poet draws his breath, a new beginning.

[The Osip Mandelstam quotations are from *Conversations on Dante*.]

Jed Rasula

To Moisten the Atmosphere

THESE NOTES MAKE LOCAL POINTS about the work. My strategy was to consciously avoid being swept along in the mode of commentary, exegesis, hermeneutic probing, because I sensed that Eshleman's poetry compels, lava-like, an inevitable duplication if one tries to stay with it, reporting on it as it goes by. Mentioning this tactic to others, I was taken aback at the eager enthusiasm of their support; I sensed that many readers find themselves confused by Eshleman's work. I have always found it the opposite of confusing, in the sense of being able to discern motives; but the work is congested, thick, tactile. It requires not so much reading as digestion. *Gerere*: Indo-European root supporting CONGEST, DIGEST, INGEST, SUGGEST, REGISTER, GESTURE, and JEST. Like Walter Benjamin's unfinished *Passagenwerk* on the arcades of Baudelaire's Paris, I feel as though my process of gesturing toward, digesting, and registering Eshleman's suggestive congestions and jests, is an interminable project. What follows are episodes.

*

In 1976 I identified Jack Spicer's Hades in terms of his Orphic emancipation of pronouns. The way in which I, you, he, she, it, we and they in Spicer's book-cycles get activated as phonemic particles became the sign of what in Eshleman's Hades is displayed in insistently granular ways—extending not only to pronouns (spearpoints of identity) but to quantitative sections of language as biopsy, contorsion, secretion, no longer even "speech act" in the

dear unframed minds of poets each
clutching their pieces of hemispheric
erection with its crocodile basis, the fear of
drying verb, of doors whose nouns will not turn,
of wee wee tethered kneenuts, alleyoops of traceyfire,
of nail notwiches mouthed by Gertrude, of garbage.

["Hermes Butts In," *HM*]

It's possible to read Eshleman's work in terms of its periodic swings between the manifest, embodied "garbage" (the pure menacing play of language), and its opposite—most evident in the earnest diagrammatic expositions of what such play *means*. This latter pole is represented by those poems that pursue such concepts as "therio-expulsion" and "the separation continuum" and which are dominated by a

rhetoric of the image ("Visions of the Fathers of Lascaux" and "Hades in Manganese"). The former mode, a supple embodiment of language play (not only in the ludic sense, but as in the slack of a rope, excess 'give,' Derridean supplement in his account of Plato's *pharmacy*) is most evident throughout *Hades in Manganese*, especially in "Sound Grottos," "Dot," "Hermes Butts In," and "Silence Raving." Although *Hades* and *Fracture* overlap, both temporally and thematically, they are clearly distinguishable in terms of the former's playfulness (and seriality: note the many pieces sectioned by asterisks, pauses, and punning perturbations) and of the latter's relative sobriety of purpose. In the selected poems, *The Name Encanyoned River*, there's a bias for the organizational retrospection of *Fracture*, for its expository mode, but in the final section (suitably titled "Antiphonal Swing") there's a return to infant burbling, multiphasic identities rising up through the textured voicings of the poems like so much laughing gas. In "Deeds Done and Suffered by Light" a further degree of hilarious solemnity is attained when the poet's dead parents start sputtering in their adjacent coffins, trying to get Clayton Jr. (now 50) to stop staying out late at night, while the father's "GLADYS WHAT DO YOU WANT?" lurches through the text over and over until it blurs to "GRADDISROTRURURUNT."

Eshleman's "antiphonal swing" is literally what makes the poetry work. If it's serious it must, somehow, get silly; if it's overcome with levity, it must submit to a sobering scene of instruction. This rhetorical drift of the text keeps the language in view as event and obstacle, both; it sustains Caryl, Gladys, Clayton Sr. and many others as active eruptions rather than references; and most significantly, it gives the reader a place apart, a momentary sanctuary from the poem's inevitable compulsions, because there's always another mood, another place just around the corner. When the air of the explanatory sarcophagus gets stale, there's bound to be some refreshment like "Eunice Wilson, over in Plot #52541." Eshleman's is a work in which "mature transformations / intermingled with the immature."

Words were walls worth boring through, worth
 turning into combs, words were livable
 hives whose centers, or voids,
 sounded the honey of emptiness dense
 with the greyish yellow light nature becomes
 to the soul for whom every thing is a cave
 ["The Man With a Beard of Roses," *NER*]

*

The first grotto of the Eshleman grotesque is the cave of being bound by birth to Indianapolis (which Kurt Vonnegut, as I recall, dubbed the asshole of the

universe) in a characteristically middle-American family romance, epitomized in the image of 12-year-old Clayton stuck in the laundry chute, chatting with his mother, who prefers this arrangement that puts the lower-body out of sight [NER p. 231]. The second grotto is pledge-week in Bloomington, 10th and Morton Streets, Phi Delta Theta, where "What is virgin or just beginning to be

[HM—*Hades in Manganese*. NER—*The Name Encanyoned River*. WSM—*What She Means*.]

experienced / is destroyed before it is fully there." [WSM p. 63]. This is followed by the recuperative grotesquerie of Reichian therapy, lying naked in foetal position "under the searching eye of a clothed adult" [HM p. 107]. Subsequent postures in the grotto involve flipping over and being on all fours, either sexually or gastronomically—as with Bud Powell sipping "lunch on all fours" in a "rudimentary turning, crawling / chorus after chorus" [NER p. 139]. The enduring image of this position is Blake's engraving of Nebuchadnezzar with clawed hands and feet, his dripping torso breaking out in spots of animal pelt. Possibly the theme of therio-expulsion originates here; it recurs continually in images that duplicate Nebuchadnezzar "crawling in place on a leash" (see "Sound Grottos" and "Tartaros" in *Hades*, for a start). Face-down in carnal-bondedness in this posture, here is the *eruptive* zone in which the animal body contaminates the human and vice versa, in which the separation of one from the other is truly a *continuum*. A singular fifth eidolon of this apparition is that of the doppelgänger in "The Dragon Rat Tail" who turns out to be Robert Kelly blurting instructions for dealing with the parents ("Find them in the grass!" [NER p. 99]). The moment that Kelly speaks here we know, in a fixation of horror, that Eshleman is in the grotto of *The Loom*, sliding through another man's entrails, vomiting prophetic axioms of a helpless parasitology.

*

Paul Blackburn enters Eshleman's work as the guardian angel of his own rebirth as a poet (the first birth being not as a poet at all, but as an Indianapolis WASP who, as the saying goes, "elected" a literary career). Blackburn died in September 1971; in October Kelly began writing *The Loom* while living in the L.A. area. The Kelly/Eshleman companionship during this time was integral to both men. The knot of fused intelligibility, then, is a "covering cherub" of Paul impacting Clayton and Robert into co-authors of a *Nachlass*, an afterbirth of *his* death in their work.

Much like Pound midwiving *The Waste Land* out of "He Do the Police in Different Voices," Eshleman's maturation as a poet can be precisely dated from his role in guiding *The Loom* through inception, revision, to final publication. *The Gull Wall* is saturated with the reward, the privilege of the transference: stirrings of third-

person narration, a gained purity and directness of first-person immediacy, and the downward-spiraling, convulsive tug of the shorter line ("Realignment," "Creation," "Portrait of Francis Bacon") that tightens the focus and speeds the delivery. It's intriguing to note how much it's been Eshleman, rather than Kelly, who's lived on in fulfillment of the promise of *The Loom*.

Eshleman's focus as a poet is deeply indebted to others, in ways so explicit as to make a mockery of Harold Bloom's "family romance" of traumatic lineage and the psychic distress of stylistic appropriation. (On the other hand, Bloom's psychodynamic model is exactly to the point regarding Eshleman's literal family romance.) It's because of this indebtedness/imbeddedness that the 1971-72 shepherding of Kelly's *Loom* becomes Eshleman's own polar maelstrom, through which the spirit of Blackburn descends, circles around, and makes the rounds as it were, as a cherubic physician attending the legion of damaged souls in a personal-history clinic, patching them up so Eshleman can ventriloquize his own recovery through the animated puppets. It sounds like a hideous process and it is. But I would suggest that it's just this grotesque commitment, unflinchingly faced at the time, that provided Eshleman with a mountain of useful debris to burrow through. (Contrasted to which, his poetry of the 1960s appears as just so much flailing, trying to attract attention, kick up some dust, get something to happen, *make* it cohere or else disappear altogether.) And further: because he was so assiduously burrowing, on all fours, subjected to the intertextual harrowing of Kelly/Blackburn/Vallejo, he was in the *right position* to feel the full impact of Paleolithic cave art during his first exposure to it in 1974.

This particular history I toss out as a challenge to anybody who would read Eshleman's work in conventional, humdrum, ontogenetic fashion, seeing a slow rise to maturity followed by a plateau of "major work." Such a canon-haunted perspective can never recognize what is most frightening about *Indiana*, *Altars* or *Coils*: this is the work of a man so desperate to become a poet that if left unguided he will ruin his own life just to have suitable material (i.e., the conventional bourgeois romance of self-destruction for art's sake). The work of the 1970s-80s is the result of listening to the guides, and the luck or fate of listening to them when they came along.

*

Imagine Blake's image of Nebuchadnezzar as a portrait of Eshleman: those pelt-like drips off his flank are due to the adhesiveness of his skin. Having carried so much of other people's writing on his back (trans/lated), some of it stuck and has come off in chunks. The Vallejo phrase "the name encanyoned river"—swollen with 16 years' translation—became a dense six-page poem. The "Elegy" for Holan in

Fracture is uncannily given over to the Czech poet's voice. Comparable but smaller tatters of others' works and voices swirl about in eddies at the margins of poems, but they're generally submerged in the sheer vertical torrent. Eshleman's style is monolithic in its onward surge, so that others' work glimpsed in the flood appears as bits of human flesh borne downstream after a catastrophe. The force of the flow is emblematic of the larger, overriding disaster man has made of the world; compulsion is not strictly individualized, and in fact the sense of personal identity is always clotted with others. At its most distressing, otherness is laminated as if a mask, directly onto the face—too close to see, too restricting even to properly breathe through. "The Dragon Rat Tail" thus becomes a most peculiar flare, an *ars poetica* (*ars* to rhyme with *arse*), the poet given from within a poem the plasmic interiority of his poetics, accidentally revealed. In the presence of this disclosed procedural turbulence, he can only be

. . . hideously embarrassed by
the closeness of the thing,
whatever it was, to my
own organs, that I was pulling
myself inside out, that the poem
I sought was my own menstrual
lining . . .

[*NER* p. 99]

Eshleman has not simply translated but has in his choice of originals managed to constellate a pantheon of uncannily related figures in Césaire, Vallejo, Artaud and Holan. The French, Spanish and Czech texts are gnarled, full of glottal impediment, ungainly, chunky, even hard to pronounce—which is to say, much like the English of Eshleman's own poems. It can't be overemphasized that the material intractability of the man's idiom is intimately related to the process of translating seemingly "untranslatable" figures. It has enabled him to forge a personal language that speaks to virtually inaccessible sensations of private agony, and which in turn enables him to make acute registrations of (to him unexperienced) tortures and deprivations going on around the world, entering his work (most notably "The Tomb of Donald Duck") as part of an ongoing texture of privacy where the public can begin to hurt in a familiar voice. Just as, in reading an Eshleman translation, Césaire or Artaud sound desperately immediate and at hand, despite the "secondariness" of hearing them in English.

*

The scale of Eshleman's process of revision is stupefying. *Hades in Manganese*, we read on the copyright page of that book, is the result of "2000 pages of worksheets."

I take this to be normal, not exceptional. Reframing 25 years of his work for the selected poems, the integrity of Eshleman's process is registered by the intactness of the texts chosen. But I have two complaints. Both have to do with a suppression or slighting of Eshleman the miniaturist.

"Tartaros" is one of the axial poems in *Hades*, consisting of 12 sections, mostly prose, meditations on the flossed-up cloud of Hadic dots which the book has worked up to the surface by treading over the field repeatedly. "A dot goes into meander when it can no longer contain its own space, when it seeks release in image" [*HM* p. 79]. Image is the consistent mode of release in Eshleman's work, but "Tartaros" is particularly valuable for the way it makes the compositional dots visible. Rather than reprint this text intact in *The Name Encanyoned River*, he plundered it for its two most rhetorically thorough sections which he then inserted into "Placements." But neither was "Placements" immune from tampering: two of its sections were dropped. The resulting text is a professionalized hybrid of two earlier pieces that did more than the poet credited. His desire for a complete and thoroughly considered argument overwhelms the actual materials under hand. Fragments can speak most eloquently in certain contexts, as he clearly knew when assembling *Hades in Manganese*. Why should the context of a selected poems force a man to betray—in however minor a way—his own work, to disavow the credibility of his own hunches?

The more damaging betrayal is to a one-line poem from *What She Means*. The text originally read: "Here for the breath of erasure, that's why." [*WSM* p. 108]. This graceful homage to the endless series of revisions—in both the poetry and the ongoing process of personal identity—is deflated, mutilated, press-ganged into service as the last line of "The American Sublime" in *The Name Encanyoned River*. It brings nothing to that poem, and it loses its singularity, its eloquence. Worse, this little poem about erasure is itself erased, subordinated to an afterthought. Its breath is gone, vanished into the grapholatry of what remains, dubiously sublimated into the all-too aptly titled "American Sublime."

*

Everybody wants to be a poet; nobody wants to own up to being a reader. This malady has severely curtailed an adequate public reception of Eshleman, more perhaps than that of his contemporaries. Is it because most poets offer some readymade cue, some starter-kit for generating more poems, idiomatic plugs or electrical sockets that can be tapped into, for current? It's surely the case that Eshleman's work doesn't yield itself to this kind of poaching. His poetry provokes reflection, engagement, eliciting a bodily compulsion to either keep reading or else go on to something altogether different. It's exhausting to read, because it doesn't

accommodate browsing. Its joys and humors are prodigious, but this is due to the accidental, random distribution of the moments in which they appear. The work is not "lifelike," it is rather *his life* in all its specificity. There is no pretence that it is habitable, in its concreteness, by anybody else than its author, its survivor.

*

Nothing could be more foreign to Eshleman's practice than the reigning ethos of postmodern irony as "a reality principle unto itself" [Charles Newman, *The Post-Modern Aura*, p. 54]. Eshleman's sense of political anguish is too acute to permit him the domestic comfort of transposing injustice into that far too common, urban American fumigation of discomfort by multiplying the levels of ironized pastiche. (Irony, in the postmodern dressing room, is etymologically closer to *ironing*: a means of pressing unsightly wrinkles out of garments too costly to be casually treated.)

*

Bob Perelman's taproot to Vallejo in "The Unruly Child" [*To the Reader*] provides a link with Eshleman as translator and, if followed out, affords one of the few glimpses of something like an Eshleman "influence" in a younger (and non-allied) poet. Where have we seen the mode of the political grotesque of Perelman's *The First World* before?

Let language, that sports page of being
mystify its appearance in all speech writing thought tonight
so that the thing, that object of burnished flirtation
can smuggle out of the self, that drill bit . . .

[*The First World* p. 46]

Having taken off our corsets and 19th century
headgear, how perplexing it is, to feel media
slipping the power out of language as one might debone
a chicken before the remaining flesh is roasted, eaten,
done with . . .

[*What She Means* p. 68]

This is not an isolated example, but a demonstrable precedent. Which is not to deny Perelman's particular skills, his unique acrobatic contorsions, but to breathe a sigh of relief that somewhere, somehow, the cauterizing precisions of the Eshleman *grotesca politica* have acquired a life of their own, a functionality not indebted to the quirks of his own biography.

*

The *New York Times Book Review* assertion that Eshleman is a poet who "will not cooperate with taste, judgment, aesthetic standards" is possibly the most useful statement on his work to have appeared thus far. What it unwittingly says is that Eshleman is not of that breed proliferating throughout the land who *do* cooperate in every way they can, whose work settles benignly into a workmanlike poise, a determined professionalism. These "cooperative" poets resemble the legion of German artists who carried on during the Third Reich as if all those "others" who had fled the homeland were shirkers, misfits, degenerates. In the *Times* formulation, "taste" is the watchdog of political hegemony. In the present scene, "aesthetic standards" are to the practice of poetry exactly as bipartisan squabbles are to politics: both are masquerades, prosthetic devices, compensations for something lacking. Eshleman's non-cooperation is exemplary, a much needed sensation of alarm on the phantom limb of the body politic.

*

Two books have appeared recently—too recently to have been of use to any of Eshleman's own work—which help immeasurably to broaden the scope of the "grotesque" as an idiom. Too recently published for me to have read is Ewa Kuryluk's *Salome and Judas in the Cave of Sex* (Northwestern University Press, 1987). On the other hand, Geoffrey Harpham's *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton, 1982) has been of considerable use in enlarging the "grotesque realism" of Bakhtin (important to Eshleman since the early 1970s), with its riotous intrusions of the "lower body stratum" into the patrolled estate of Apollonian clarity. The following citations from Harpham have immediate relevance for reading Eshleman.

1) ". . . the grotesque, and those who indulge in it, frequently encounter a backlash that takes the form of genealogical abuse, with accusations of illegitimacy, bastardy, or hybridization, terms that indicate structural confusion, reproductive irregularity, or typological incoherence. *Genre*, *genus* and *genitals* are linked in language as in our subconscious" [p. 5]. Not only does the *Times* critic reproach Eshleman for his uncooperative untidiness, blurring of the categorical certainties of aesthetics and the well-made poem (like a well-made bed, which is best learned in the military). I recall a comparably wild claim by another critic who accused Eshleman of printing his own photo on the cover of the 1968 Grove Press translation of Vallejo. A patent absurdity (the visage was recognizably Vallejo's, to anybody who knew), this could only happen to someone like Eshleman whose immersion in the grotesque incites a boundary-delirium in others.

2) "These figures can best be described as images of instantaneous process, time rendered into space, narrative compressed into image" [p. 11]. Think of "Tiresias

Drinking" with its "mouths forever frozen / at the roller coaster's summit in wild hello" [NER p. 155]. The poem collapses successive images of the underworld until it hits this freeze-frame greeting. In *Hades* and *Fracture* the continual brooding on the underworld is an attempt to spatialize the Paleolithic, make it visible *now*. Or to make the cavewall images—all that *is* visible now—a potent compression of the natural history of early man, the narration of origins told in a glance.

3) "The grotesque is a naive experience, largely contained within the context of representational art, art in which, however temporarily and provisionally, we believe" [p. 18]. Eshleman's work is abidingly representational, but its means of representation are constantly destabilized by the provisional matrix of the grotesque. Eshleman's representational naivete: the endurance, development, and coherence of "the self"; love and marriage as functional resolutions of two selves; reasonable statement and cultivated, nurtured images as being in themselves sufficient for communication and social bonding. Such notions, we could say now, nearing a very testy fin-de-siècle, are not so much naive: they are grotesque. "The Color Rake of Time" is their anthem.

4) "... the grotesque consists of the manifest, visible, or unmediated presence of mythic or primitive elements *in* a nonmythic or modern context. It is a formula capable of nearly infinite variation, and one which, rightly understood, illuminates the entire vast field of grotesquerie" [p. 51]. Eshleman's heraldic figures, like Tiresias or Ariadne, are not incidental sightings from a freeway rapid-flow panorama, a mytho-scape. They are calculated incubations, "unmediated" presences because they so saturate the poems with their insistently primitive nature. They are grotesque harbingers who reach up, pawing and fingering the contemporary figures like Vallejo, Artaud or Blackburn, contaminating *them* with the glow of grottesca as well. The mythic elements in Eshleman are diffused, not figurally specific so much as auras of an unfocusable *aurora borealis* of the imaginal. Despite the references to spiders and insect life, Eshleman's is really a bovine, ruminating imagination, feeding perennially on the same stuff. Maybe he sees the spiders so clearly because, bending over (always on all fours)—pursuing the fact that, as Harpham says, "meaning, which must go somewhere, migrates to the low or marginal" [p. 74]—they happen to be the local centaurs in the bovine gaze, up to its ears in sacred nutritive filth.

5) Harpham, like Eshleman, is drawn to Blake's rendering of the shaggy Nebuchadnezzar. Such emblematic figures of the grotesque, he says, "are in a state of anarchy, producing an impression of atrocious and inappropriate vitality" [p. 6]. This is a useful description of Eshleman's poems, in which all forms of life are raffishly prolific and uncontainable: the dead parents won't stay dead, the frat-rats' escapades from decades ago keep

bubbling up to the present with their "aborted ooze," the daily count of animals going extinct vigorously asserts itself in the desperate cycle of food-to-fecality and desire-to-seminized-menses. Anything organic, in fact, if given a suitably grotesque space—a tunnel, an intestine, a cave—blurts out indelicate promptings from the deep carnal appetite, the implacable gargoyle that howls, over and over, the permeability of any water-based form of life.

*

Eshleman's fraternity scenes are as graphic as Robert Capa's war photos. But as language, they are more thoroughly self-portraits than a photo can ever be. The grotesquerie is thus comparable to the work of Diane Arbus, *all* of whose compositions seem self-portraits, hideously parasitical on the visages of others. What is most shocking in Arbus, as in Eshleman, is the uncanny saturation of the whole world with the specificity of personal experience and idiosyncratic taste, as though everything—every extraneous detail, any disaster however distant, and the most abhorrent urges—were *all in the family*. The outer limit of this mode might be marked by the photos of Joel Peter Witkin, whose cadaverous scenarios exceed any notion of family yet developed.

*

It is a scholarly poetry, improbably tethered to a churning language and a "fecality that wants to be born" (see "The Seeds of Narrative" in *Fracture*). *Fracture* and *Hades in Manganese* contain between them two dozen pages of self-exegesis, prose contextualization. This is not a testy, self-important claim to seriousness, but a manifest *care* that the text be a worksite, a research center, not a performance space where the gladiatorial poetic ego struts. A ground of seriousness is provided *for the reader* at the poet's expense.

*

Many of Eshleman's poems are sanctuaries. That is, they function as safe-houses for eyewitnesses on the lam, on the run, forced to change name and residence and even identity, simply to stay alive after giving testimony. But the poems are sanctuaries also in the religious sense of the confessional, a place to be at ease, to rest, during the compulsive recounting of transgressions. To consider the integrity of this space, this sanctuary, note how many Eshleman poems undergo a healing toward the end, a sobering up after the Bacchanal of unmonitored speech, a suturing of exposed parts. The act of closure is rarely elegant in Eshleman; this is not because (as it may seem) he's a poet of middles—which, after all, would be

entirely appropriate to his gastric poetics—but because the spatial organization of a sanctuary is strict: there are only *in* and *out*, and the transition is abrupt, instantaneous and in the lines that end "The Loaded Sleeve of Hades"

. . . you are closed and opened
in the multiple ambivalences of your fracture,
and no resolution is sincere.

[*NER* p. 151]

*

In the preface to *Hades in Manganese* Eshleman confesses to an urge to divide the book into sections, "one for poems dealing more or less directly with paleolithic imagery and one for poems which do not. Then I realized that such a division would be against the way I try to write. I have no interest whatsoever in writing poems 'about' the caves, or even doing poems that can be identified as 'poems with the paleolithic as the subject.' It is the present itself, with all its loop backs and deadend meanders, that is precious to establish." However, this has not kept Eshleman from aligning himself with a procedural method all too easily mistaken for the genre poem of tourism, set-theme, direct treatment of the "thing itself," etc. Some of his most eloquent poems are textbook-topical in just this way, from "Hearing Betty Carter" in *What She Means* to "Permanent Shadow" and "The Lich Gate" in *Hades in Manganese*, "Magdalenian" and "The Inn of the Empty Egg" in *Fracture*, and "The Man With a Beard of Roses" in *The Name Encanyoned River*—to cite a few. Not to mention the ongoing series of "portraits," "still-life" framings, or the travel poems (location given, date attached). What I'm suggesting is that, for a reader inclined to the Brooks and Warren or Ciardi version of the poem as self-regulating cultural artifact, Eshleman's work glitters with many exemplary pieces that could be lifted out of context, slapped together into a book that the *New York Times* might find cooperative with the standards of taste and judgment. Impeccably crafted and envisioned pieces like "Ira," "The Crone," and "The Color Rake of Time" come to mind as candidates. But these are really sleights of hand within the larger panorama of the man's inclinations, which are processual, imagistically rhetorical, and stepwise. I trust the tangible, marked progressions most in *Hades in Manganese*, its many poems in sections like oranges, opening out on the hinges of their asterisks concentric, sweet, segmented, partial. By contrast, a monstrosity like "Visions of the Fathers of Lascaux" abandons this formal integrity and simply gushes, on and on, almost to no purpose. Or rather, to claim a place in its author's imagination, which is a legitimate end, if an unrewarding one for a reader.

*

How can you tell whether an Eshleman poem is "uncooperative"? Take "Junk Mail": to all conventional purposes, the poem is in the tourism mode—Poet as Tourist of Experience—where a suitable occasion provides a wash-and-wear, but somehow vexing, goad or stimulus. Like any APR poet, Eshleman sports with the provocation, spoofs it, takes it seriously, agonizes over it, but then—flagrantly *uncooperative*—turns himself into both spectator and spectacle. He schizzes. The poem bifurcates, and we're left with a self-diddling creature called Me unzipping his pants on the basement floor.

Nothing, charmed from its nickel dungeon,
 eyes this little fellow like we frat rats used to eye
 a frightened, unsure, slightly ugly, clearly needy girl.

[NER p. 198]

Nothing, I might add, can compare with the abrupt and

utter rudeness of this *change of face*, the slipperiness of aspect in which the convention of a unifying perspective is abandoned and (what is worse, for self-congratulatory postmodernist sensibilities) a hideously partial aspect ("we frat rats") is taken on without irony. Or if it is, it's catachresis, a "mis-use" (uncooperativeness) of image or figure by being a *full use* of it. In the fullness of the time of "Junk Mail" we frat rats are all eyeing an unsure, frightened, needy girl. The rest is up to the reader, that newfound *she*, that oasis of migratory pronouns.

*

One of the signals of a new level of rigor in Eshleman's work of the early 1970s is a commitment to personal integrity (rather than aesthetic constraint) within the poems. "The Cogollo" is a prime example. The poem sustains an acute vision of orgasm commercialized as the Big O, as the self-help industry Stephen Heath exposes in *The Sexual Fix*. Eshleman's "orgasm as gargoyle" is profusely illuminated with grotesqueries, but rather than rising summationally to a final, overpowering image, there is instead an ebbing of the disturbance, the poem ending:

... love, made, keeps me living in the poem and the poem,
 to remain pregnant in birth, tumbles me out on the shore
 to illuminate, with Caryl again, antiphonal.

[NER p. 107]

—not, poetically, an attractive or even cogent ending, this doesn't begin to fulfill any of the literary establishment criteria for closure. But the personal integrity it abides by is a singular model for a renewed "esthetic" attention, where the old saw of the separation of life and work is broken down, overcome, cast aside. Caryl's presence here is as necessary as the many dedicatory prose notes explaining her role as auditor, mate, companion, insistent ever on "what she means."

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Is *What She Means* the most forthright title of a book of recent poetry? Not so elusive as *Notes for Echo Lake*, arresting as *Solution Passage*, or layered as *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time*, it is in a unique way responsible to its ground, background, fact and act, motives and motifs. For Eshleman has, in every book since *The Gull Wall*, done more than dedicate the work to his wife Caryl; he has pointed insistently to the work as consecration of the marriage. In his poetry, as in no other I know of, the nature of what is said in the text is conditioned by, seasoned by, someone besides the author. This is properly "what she means": what she, Caryl, means is crucially imbricated into Clayton's writing.

As a title, *What She Means* can itself fold back into a heredity of male poetry, exposing the unclaimed veil of companionship that is most assuredly there, but too often mystified by talk of the muse. There is much to be gained by looking beyond the traditional spectre of literary continuity as a coterie of male bonding—and not only to discover the obvious neglected resource of the female writer. *What She Means* is a surefooted contribution here, opening the male poet to an order altogether different from Phi Delta Theta. The antiphonal engagement with Caryl makes of the marriage a literary event, and makes the poet a pledge of something worthier than brotherhood.

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Sometimes I have the lonely sensation that I'm the only *earnest* reader of Clayton Eshleman that I know. I've repeatedly been told, by people who should know better, that regarding the Paleolithic "he's got it all wrong." Wrong? How is anybody to assert the veracity of what went on 20,000 years ago? That's not the point; Eshleman is not producing book reports for a history or an art class. I find the work imaginably engaging, true to its own purposes, which are everywhere made legible. Of course, by "the work" I mean the writing of the past 15 years; I won't hide my disdain for the early Eshleman. But of the poets of his generation, he is one of a handful whose work I return to, gladly—a poet whose probity insures no exhaustion of the textual resilience on rereading. Who are the others of Eshleman's generation that I reread with comparable reward? Irby, Ronald Johnson, Coolidge, Rothenberg, Kelly, and in England Raworth, Redgrove, and Roy Fisher—all born, like Eshleman, in the 1930s. Reflecting on the situation, I can't say I feel any less lonely as a reader of these exemplary figures either. Two words, long overdue to all of the above, are the only adequate close: *Thank you*.

[July 1987]

Clayton Eshleman

Golub The Axolotl

Donald Kuspit Leon Golub, *Existential/ Activist Painter* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1985) VER THE YEARS LEONGOLUBhas been an important example to me of the necessity to do exactly what you want to do as an artist, to take your knocks for it, but at the same time not to become bitter or confuse the reception of your work with its ultimate worth. It is tough to practice one's vision and to remain receptive to a world that for the most part rejects not only the vision

but the life behind it. Golub's armored tenacity, his resistance to any easy assimilation, his insistence on the artist as one who does not filter out the mire of society in his work-these aspects of what I would think of as integrity and solidarity with the genuine human condition, inevitably in our society result in a peripheral location. Most artists and writers who take a peripheral position, or are peripheralized by the art world, seal over at a certain point and begin to cannibalize themselves. There are a couple of points in Golub's artistic evolution where I can feel the work stammering in place, starting to wear a cowl of despair and confusion-but in both cases, stasis became gestation, and he moved ahead. Golub's entire body of work to date has a peristaltic reflexivity of contracted in-search and expressive outreach. In the early 80s, Golub's paintings of mercenaries, interrogation and torture, became a subject of great interest in the art world, and the Rutgers University Press monograph, with a substantial, intelligent text by Donald Kuspit, is to a certain extent the result of such attention. The optimistic part of me takes the art world attention and the monograph as a moving and reassuring sign that one can paint like Leon Golub has for 35 years and, during one's lifetime, be treated with respect and genuine acclaim. Another part of me believes that only when I can walk into a Bank of America and confront Interrogation II hanging over the bent heads of the tellers, will Golub's art have been truly received. And I don't expect that to happen in either of our lifetimes. In fact, if it did, a whole set of a staggering synchronicity, and the pairing of the first paranoid speculations would be set in motion, like: has North American society now assimilated (co-opted) even Golub? The pessimistic part of me says that seeming acceptance by one's enemies is much more undermining than their rejection. Paradoxically, one needs, is even nurtured by, rejection on the part of a society that in its actual daily performance denies the self a sense of worth and imaginative fulfillment. So, except for a few

people like Donald Kuspit, whose affirmative response to Golub's art is unquestionable, the warring parts of me wonder what the art world's current interest in Golub is about. Nevertheless, I would like to think that there are at least several

thousand North Americans on earth today who can receive and respond intelligently to an impassioned, harsh and confrontational art that does not, for a moment, release them from their complicity in their country's imperialistic role in domestic and world politics.

* At the beginning, in the mid 1940s, Leon Golub finds himself, with a paint brush in hand, standing before a "liberated" Buchenwald. Unlike most artists of his generation, he did not whitewash this backdrop and begin to work out schematic, abstract diagrams on it or cover it with a landscape that would make the viewer feel that he was still in a 19th century relationship to nature. The core of Golub's career is in its complex response to annihilation. It is to some extent sounded by two lines of Charles Olson in a poem called La Preface: "My name is NO RACE" address Buchenwald new Altamira cave

Olson's poem was written in 1946, the same year that Golub's Charnel House and Evisceration Chamber-based on concentration camps-were painted. Olson's presentation of Buchenwald and Altamira, with space rather than a verb between the two nouns, presents the reader with an overwhelming question: what do these nouns have in common? The meaning that I draw from them is that the astonishing ancientness of man's creative impulse, which was discovered in this most inhuman century, may somehow offset total despair. Olson's choice of Altamira is slightly inaccurate for my meaning, as it was discovered in the 19th century. However, the bulk of Upper Paleolithic cave art which we are now aware of was discovered between 1900 and 1940, and thus comes back into time as mankind nearly passed out of time. This seems to represent

imaginative constructions with the most recent inhuman destructions argues contra Adorno that there can be poetry and art after Auschwitz and, most importantly, for both Olson and Golub, it did not have to jettison the mammalian image. Olson went ahead to write a body of poetry that attempted to be responsible for human culture for the past 3000 years. Golub, while not going back as far as Olson, made use of Primitive and Classical art to construct an ontogenetic vision that is at the same time his own artistic birth and evolution. He was not crushed by man's inhumanity nor-as his career magnificently bears out-has he evaded it. 109

After his initial recognition of the Holocaust, Golub himself seems to have disappeared. He slipped into the water-filled wreckage-laden basement of Western culture and transformed it into a primordial bath, or fetus world. The murky

paintings of the early 50s, with their grotesque quasi-human forms, are entangled with the Birth series in such a way that they prefigure the emergent child. In Golub's uterine world, amputated members have a curious fin-like appearance; i.e., end-man is beginning-man. And while such creatures seem to be struggling against a "primitive" dissolution, they also seem to be fighting the wind tunnel of Abstract Art. They are thus "edged" with contemporary time as well as being evocations of the artist's immemorial struggle to give birth to himself in his art. Without wanting to push it too far, I would suggest that at every stage of Golub's career there is an active resistance to Abstract "dissolution." For example, the fleck-like burn-rubbed interiors of the Burnt Man paintings of the early 1960s are in themselves "abstract" and are only restrained from spreading out across the canvas in a particle flow by their bounding Classical outlines.

At the point that an artist is on the verge of creating an image that is uniquely personal and universal, there may be an unbearable tension. Psychologically, it can feel as if one is at the same time engendering oneself and opening a conduit through which the new engendered self can emerge—as image. In the work of the majority of artists and writers, the effort of bringing oneself forth is not represented as subject. Golub's paintings are unique in their time for the extent to which they openly parallel emergent artistic consciousness with a recapitulation of mammalian birth.

I say "mammalian" here, instead of "human," because the images of emergence are hybrid: the amoebic tension of parturition is emphasized by the Sphinx series, several paintings of which depict "fabulous" two (or five) headed beasts that seem to be on the point of division. In Siamese Sphinx I (1954), the head placed over the animal's rump seems to be excrementally twisting its way out, while the frontal head grimaces at the viewer as if it were giving birth. In all the paintings of the early and mid 50s, I feel the struggle of unborn man in a Holocaustal/primordial limbo, which, on an aesthetic level, reads out as a tug-of-war between Nihilism and a yet-to-be-resolved sense of how the human figure might become a vehicle sturdy enough to support a life-long meditation on man's destiny. The great Damaged Man (1955) reveals a furious, gagged, adult foetus in the strait-jacket of a spiky caterpillar body.

This vision of the figure-to-be-born as already possessing a mature body, or to put it another way: the figure in larval state already possessing adult characteristics—is mirrored by Golub's Philosopher series of the late 1950s, where massive quiescent adults, the first Golubians clearly out in the world, seem to be mainly reflecting on having just been born. Like the baby's face in Birth VIII, the Philosophers have utterly innocent "infant" eyes. The expression on the baby's face in Birth VII seems as old as the expression on Philosopher I's face seems young. As

I glance back and forth between the two reproductions of these paintings, the faces momentarily fuse, each the mask, or stone hood, of the other, out of which Leon Golub's just-emerged soul gazes with a pristine, undirected stare.

To reflect on figures in a larval state that already possess adult characteristics is to evoke the Mexican axolotl, a curious amphibian which keeps its gills throughout life, and breeds in this larval state. And to think of certain artists, like Golub, as axoltols, brings up the matter of the advantages and disadvantages of prolonged immaturity or, in a phrase that has almost become archaic today, artistic apprenticeship.

Because we cannot imagine our grandchildren living the same kind of life as we do today, old-fashioned apprenticeship has given way to an obsession with immediate "arrival." Originality, which in the past, especially in the East, meant a slight modification on the style of one's master, now means a quick sizing up of the "art situation" and flicking a twist into current trends. In short, the artist today is under pressure to be immediately mature, to not allow his art a childhood.

The most obvious example I know of a prolonged 20th century painter apprenticeship is that of Arshile Gorky. Golub's apprenticeship (which might more accurately be described as an artistic neoteny) is less obvious than Gorky's, and more complex, because the ontogenetic element is so pronounced, and because it constantly seems to be shaping stylistic influence for its own purposes. On one hand, Golub is "in time" from the very beginning, from the point at which he paints *Charnel House* in 1946, and there is no time in his body of work when he appears to forget that he is a conflict-ridden 20th century man. On the other hand, Golub's paintings do not address historical time until 1969 when in *Napalm I* the rash of red paint smeared across one of the fallen, naked combatants suddenly links the painting to the Vietnam era. This is to argue that from the early 50s, when the first axolotl-like forms began to breed on his canvases, to the *Gigantomachies* of the late 60s, Golub was working on an image of man (from foetus to adult-in-action) in a frame that resisted man in historical time. It is as if for nearly 20 years (the time it takes a human male to go from birth to manhood) Golub allowed himself to remain immature, to very slowly amass a concentrated biological sense of becoming a man, of approaching manhood as it engages, and is worked over by, post WW II North American society.

The risk in allowing himself an almost molecular development was considerable. While I think there are a handful of paintings from the 50s and the 60s that now can be recognized as masterpieces, I am not sure that they would look the way they do today if they lacked the encompassing context of Golub's advances in the 70s and the 80s. His insistence on taking his time in a world in which the present seems to be whirling electrically into the future is courageous, for if an artist does

take his time and does not "jump on the bandwagon," it may look to the world as if he is not meeting the nuclear reality of today's pace.

Indeed, if the devil is loose in the world, and if the sky

is already cracking its pillars, why scurry about for years at the shadow edge of the spectacle, trying to figure out how to make monsters more viscerally real? I am sure there are many responses to such a question. In Golub's case, I would propose that while he was painting to his maximum at each stage of his career, he was also calculating the amount of density necessary to solidify his figures in historical time once he de-eternalized (or deprimordialized) them. Furthermore, it seems to me to be more affirmative to paint man as an ugly brute than to not paint him at all, more humanly responsible to show North American mercenaries torturing Third World people than to make a painting that can be hung in a restaurant and blend into the decor and music—a painting which affirms the status quo by refusing explicit political content. The predicament that Golub had to work through in the 70s seems to go like this: how eliminate the anonymous Classical aspects of the figure (which in the early paintings inevitably look backward, and may be dismissed as too concentrated on the past) and yet anchor historical figures in a context that will not be sucked into the velocity of our age and become a computer chip in the millrace of the instant?

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In the mid 60s, when Golub's Philosophers sprang into action they discovered what they wanted to do: physically fight. The 120 x 288" canvas of *Gigantomachy I* is a web of striking, thwarted gods and Titans who cannot be distinguished from each other. The body textures—chalk-white with rust and charcoal colored sketched-in muscle suggestions—hint that because they have not been burnished forth into social identity such figures are ghosts. The background, without specificity or setting, like nearly all of Golub's backgrounds, is a neither here nor there murky mustard color.

In *Gigantomachy III*, the background darkens and at one point seems to soak with blood, as if history is approaching through the back of the canvas (such "blood," in the paintings of the 80s, becomes a solid brick-like background). While the painting virtually sweats with desire to express and contain male violence, the figures remain phantasmagoric. Their anatomy does not add up—certain feet are like massive, brush-like clubs—and the cause/effect timing seems oddly "off." Here the central kicker is swinging a gigantic foot over a figure who appears to have fallen before the kick. It is hard to tell if this "out of sync" quality is intentional or not. It tends to emphasize the anti-natural mood of the scene and make it more dream-like than imitative of its source, the Greek Pergamon altar.

By the end of the 60s, the blood-splashed background of Gigantomachy III has been localized as napalm gore in the chest of a fallen combatant who is otherwise as ahistorical as the ambiguous gods/Titans. By 1972, Golub must have realized that his "murals of conflict" were as problematic, relative to the 20th century, as Picasso's Guernica with its old-fashioned weapons and mythological beasts. In Vietnam I (1972), the combatants are given black pants and guns, and their ruddy hatch-marked torsos consequently feel flayed. They are firing across a tank-shaped rupture cut out of the canvas itself at a man and a woman. The "gods" are now starting to look like soldiers and the "Titans" like embattled peasants. Golub's art has become a kind of zoom camera depositing fragments of the war "over there" at the viewer's feet, insisting that any aesthetic contemplation be accompanied by confronting America's role in global terror. As Golub moved toward the 80s, the challenge increasingly became to paint well (not beautifully, but with verve, precision and abrasive particularity) *and* to confront the viewer with the fact that the inspiration behind such work is humanity suffering *now*.

In the 80s, the groups of soldiers and peasants have metamorphosed into mercenaries and victims. Golub has moved these figures forward, as if on wide-screen TV, with the feet of both interrogators and the tortured eliminated, thus by implication standing, or hanging, in our own space. Because the mercs are dressed as we are, in fact smiling at us as they go about their "work," the "DMZ" between an Asiatic "there" and a North American "here" has been eliminated. The mercs are grinning at us because they know the "news" is part of our daily entertainment, and because they believe that we can be entertained by the pain they are inflicting on others.

*

Viewed as a whole, Golub's work to date, as Kuspit's monograph makes evident, seems to be built on phases that increase in tension before recycling into a new phase. To put it in one sentence: it is as if the propeller-foeti amoebically divide and birth themselves into large block-wall-like "philosophical" babies, who slump and pose as burnt or destroyed men and then, discovering that they can act, begin to smash their way into history, creating a route into our awareness that leads from Rome via Vietnam to El Salvador. Golub's most difficult and crucial advance seems to me to be the move from Vietnam I (1973) to Mercenaries I (1979). I know that this was a very difficult period for him. He mentions in one interview that he nearly stopped painting at this time.

On a superficial level, it appears that the breakthrough into the Mercenaries and White Squads was contingent on having allowed newspaper photos to become naturalistically dominant in the "heads of state" portraits (1976-77). However, I

think this move was dependent upon a more complicated one which meant cutting himself off from the Classical and Primitive "compost" that had nurtured his work up to this time. Such compost was permeated not only with the affirmative elements in Golub's long apprenticeship, but with that vague sense of timelessness, or primordial connection, that many artists yearn to maintain as an active component in their work. If Golub's shaping of the Mercenaries series had failed, he would have been exchanging an art that through its resonance at least connected him to great art of the past, for an illustrational, message-oriented, political one. Most artists and writers are put in this position at least once or twice in their careers, and most opt for ambiguity because, for one reason, it is just too frightening to stake one's neck on a single theme or subject in an age without a central story or myth.

For every great or unique artist there are thousands of intelligent, highly sensitive artists who merely, as Blake put it, "keep the divine vision in a time of trouble," and are thus part of the evolving poem/painting of the world that involves the imagination and fate of each of us in each other, including those of the past and those of the future. There is an eternal pathos in creative activity because the vast majority of artworks quickly become fertilizer which, in turn, stimulates new shoots which, in turn, also join that earth. While every artist in some way desires his art to outlive him, most stay very close to the image compost that enabled a seed to take root in the first place and, in that way, predetermine their development. Great art may be a demonstration in a single shoot, as it were, of the depth and the complexity of the compost itself. Unique art, on the other hand, may add to the stalk a bloom of a peculiar color or tinge that had not been seen or grasped before, stating in effect that the compost is lacking in something that this art is *adding on its own*. Such art almost inevitably appears to be incoherent or ugly until, in time, enough of it is absorbed by the compost to become part of artistic nurture. One of the unending ironies of art is that the more an individual artist desires immortality the more he will be magnetized by the imaginations of those who have come before him, and probably co-opted by their awesome quicksand. The move toward uniqueness on the part of an artist can appear to involve jettisoning art itself in an attempt to show life without artifice, psychology, established and occult religions, the initiations of others, etc., that is, without all the filter systems humanity has for eons employed to keep itself from remembering itself and exercising its imaginative faculties at large. Were these filter systems to totally disappear, would it be the end of art, or would art truly become the mental gymnastics of paradise?

In the paintings of the 80s, Golub has eliminated the combat frenzy of the paintings done in the 60s and the 70s and by matching his own peripherality with peripheral subjects has come to terms with his own position in today's art world. I believe that one of the things that he had to confront was that the "heads of state" portraits were an instructive deadend. In this respect, I think that W. H. Auden was on to something when he wrote in an essay entitled "The Poet and the City": "It is extremely difficult today [1962] to use public figures as themes for poetry because the good or evil they do depends less upon their characters and intentions than upon the quantity of impersonal force at their disposal." While the "heads" enabled Golub to focus on media images, they seemed to be too far removed from his own social "situation" as an artist at the periphery of both the art scene and North American power to advance the energy of his complex vision.

To move from Pinochet to a tacky merc (forgetting the head of state and concentrating on the guy who does his dirty work) was an acute and astonishing adjustment. Mercenaries, like Golub himself, may be seen as peripheral figures, a kind of Hermitic trash, scuttling back and forth between military elitism and civilian desperation for work. If the figure of the peripheral artist evokes the Dostoevsky "creature between the floorboards," the mercenary intensifies the connotations of such a figure into a livid focus: the mercenary is not only marginal man, but marginal man without politics, willing to kill or torture anyone for a price. He is like the medieval masterless Japanese samurai, known as the "ronin," or "wave-man," a warrior tramp with day to day allegiances who goes with the flow.

At the same time, far from being a TV dot pattern who can snuff thousands by signing an order, the merc, like most North Americans, makes a few hundred dollars a week, can be fired at whim, and has no real significance. While he is "over there," he is very close to most of us here, if for no other reason than like most American workers, his is a lifetime of meaningless labor. In the technological world, workers are laborers, for they feel no personal pride in what they do, and are not responsible for what they make. This, of course, does not make them killers—but if one thinks about American society today, from the level of consciousness Saturday at midnight in the typical local bar, to wife, child, and animal abuse, and all the land mines of violence to others and to self millions move across on a nightly, daily basis—if one looks unromantically and unflinchingly at how people actually treat one another in our "great society," the mercs not only blend in and are absorbed as part of the machinery of violence, but they typify a certain kind of cruel pointlessness which every North American soul bears as a scummy watermark.

Golub's mercs often stop work for a moment and turn to acknowledge our fascination with what they do, as if they were chefs in a see-into kitchen, and we

were the well-heeled clientele, eager to not only dine but to watch our cuisine prepared. For these mercs *are* making something for us, are they not? They are whipping the out-of-line into line, crushing the testicles of a rebel who has refused to make his daily contribution to the "American dream." In Golub's corrosive clarity, it is one Satanic ball, from interrogation and torture in the afternoon to horsing around with whores and booze at night. Work and play, torture inciting sex, sex inciting torture. In these paintings, Golub has once and for all boiled the fat and anonymity out of his Gigantomachies. There are no gods—only these lordless henchmen. As for the Titans, they have become unidentified suffering flesh, the power of the earth as manifested in a human being strung up and pummeled because he lacks the correct identification card.

Baudelaire wrote that "Caricature is a double thing; it is both drawing and idea—the drawing violent, the idea caustic and veiled." Leon Golub's mercenaries, the violent carriers of caustic and veiled North American hostility toward "the other," would seem to meet Baudelaire's definition, but they extend the ground of caricature too. They fuse the grotesque with the documentary (we sense the verisimilitude of the news photo moving like a Procrustean frame behind them), and Satanic laughter with winks and friendly fuck-yous. In Mercenary V, the squat-

ting white holding his revolver to the forehead of a black in raised push-up position turns to look at us, as if posing for us, and raises his left hand in a kind of pointless open salute and wave. I am not sure if he has just waved or is about to give me the finger—and his leer and half-mast eyes are so out of focus that I cannot tell if he is making a face at me or anticipating my applause when and if he "blows that nigger's brains out."

While the Mercenaries have social identity, like the Classically inspired warriors, they are anonymous. By placing them in a limbo between caricature and representation, Golub has contained the nature of the mercenary, a being whose identity is clear yet unrevealed. The ambiguous gesture of Mercenary V's left hand is repeated by body as well as hand gestures in groups of figures in other paintings. The "out of sync" aspects of Gigantomachy III have become orchestrated into a functional motif to not let these paintings slip into cartoon-like caricature or photographic representation.

In this regard, the masterpiece of the series is Interrogation II where three mercenaries are involved in torturing a naked, tied-up and seated, hooded victim. Golub has painted the torturers so that they appear to be more interested, for the moment, in our response to them than in their "work" itself. The two mercs to the right of the tortured man are grinning at us (one is black, the other white: Golub is careful to leave no single social stratum unimplicated)—in fact, they look as if we

had just yelled at them—Hi Benny! Hi Will!—what are you guys *up to*? The third merc, let's call him Frenchie (he has plastered back hair, a pencil moustache, and a neck scarf tucked inside his blue short-sleeved workshirt) is a little suspicious of Benny and Will. Are they getting too much attention from us? He holds up in a slightly effeminate pose his left hand with cigarette (one can smoke *and* torture at the same time), and with his right hand, in a rather wooden, puzzling gesture, seems to be on the verge of grabbing the front of the hooded man's face—but the gesture is more baffling than it is precise, as are Benny's hand gestures, for while he is turned toward us, grinning, he is also slightly advancing toward the tortured man, with his hands held forward, thumbs raised—but the gesture, like Frenchie's, is baffling—and curiously *still*. In contrast to the slashing action of the Gigantomachies, these mercs seem as if they were rehearsing a play, or as if they are at play, like big kids on stage, where they just happen (by unavoidable implication) to be torturing someone. All six hands of the three torturers are as much involved in a mudric sign language as in manhandling the hooded victim.

To see the mercs as actors turning to us, a composite director, for a confirmation that they are accurately portraying the roles to which they have been assigned (or as in my previous example, to see the action as that of merc/chefs and viewer/clientele), is to emphasize the interplay that Golub establishes between image and audience, an interplay that is rich with psychological entrances and exits—lubricious, intransigent, and condemnational. This space between caricature and representation is one we all share. All of us move in an unfathomable and unclosable gap between our image of ourselves and the way we fear we appear to others. We are definitely real, we think, but we are never sure that our appearance to others is what we see in the mirror. It is as if we wander around in a peristaltic aura, which shakes with the grey jelly of father and Dagwood as well as of soul and man. Golub's mercs are like worms slithering around in the interstices of our baffling and pathetic self-regard. Their smiles go into our eyes with the same subtle and voracious glee with which they offer their zippered fly-covered hardon to a whore or their boot tip to the forehead of a crawling man.

November 1985, Los Angeles

Georges Bataille

“Incomplete” from Guilty

translation: Bruce Boone

THOUGHT REFLECTS THE UNIVERSE, and it's the most changing thing—it isn't any less the reality of the universe. And since there's no small or large in it and since the tiniest part has no less meaning than the whole (no more meaning and no less), "what is" differs as a function of time. To conceive of a gathering together at the end of time (Hegel) or outside time (Plato) most likely is a mental necessity. This necessity is real. It's the condition of meaning, above and without which thought can't conceive anything—yet it's subject to change. But why limit these perspectives to a subjective reality which would be opposed to an unchanging objective one? One possibility is given if you look at the world as a fusion of subject and object, a possibility in which subject, object and fusion wouldn't stop changing, so that there would then be several types of identity. This would mean—not that thought necessarily attains the real—but that it attains it maybe? This would mean that only fragments come into play—reality wouldn't be unified, but composed of successive or coexistent fragments (fragments with changing limits).

Constant human errors would betray the incomplete character of reality—and so of truth. Knowledge proportionate to its object—if that object's in its very being incomplete—would develop in every sense. This knowledge would be, as a totality, a huge architecture in a state of construction and deconstruction, both at once, uncoordinated or barely so, never from one end to the other. Looking at things this way, it's not so bad being human. And if not, isn't it idiotic picturing the degradation that'd result in our dull minds and our foolishness? Unless of course God—the being who's complete—were corroded with the desire for an incompleteness, for a minuteness, you could say, that's bigger by far than God's absence of true greatness! (There wouldn't be *greatness* in God—there's no difference or comparison in him.)

This amounts to seeing mankind and its errors as a mirror which isn't perfect nor is it deforming—nature being only a fragment reflected in the mirror we are.

This proposition isn't grounded (there aren't answers to the decisive questions). We can only attribute the questions—the fact of there being no answer to them—to the portion of reality which is our lot. But what if I admit there's no general rule capable of subordinating parts (making them dependent on what's greater than

they are)? The questions, the answers that aren't forthcoming, are limits—in some way to be found in different possibilities.

These propositions and presuppositions aren't in any case grounded, nor could they be—nothing is grounded but on some necessity that excludes other possibilities. They constitute only the remnants of a wholeness that belongs to those who speak long after the construction of the foundations, when the destruction's complete.

It's difficult to think otherwise—"two and two are four" is a truth that applies to every reality, every possibility! If you insist. . . . Nothing can be discovered in the empty vastness of the universe other than this obvious, if empty formula.

If someone wants to establish himself on this unique but empty certainty, making it the basis of his stubborn dignity—can I laugh any less than at the other idea, "two and two are five"? When in a spirit of disruptiveness I tell myself "two and two are five . . . and why not?" I'm really not thinking of anything. Everything escapes from me at that moment. But *as every object escapes from me inside me* I certainly don't approach less closely to whatever it is that comes under the heading of knowledge than if—understanding "two and two are four" as an eternal truth—I believed I could attain the secret of things.

As I write a ladybug flies under my lamp and has just lighted on my hand—I lift it off and put it on a sheet of paper. A while ago I copied a diagram of Hegel's on the paper, a diagram that shows the various forms he has from one end to the other—from *Allgemeinheit* to *Einzelheit*.* The bug stopped in the *Geist* column, where you proceed from *allegemines Geist* to *sinnliches Bewusstsein (Einzelheit**)* by way of *Volk, Staat* and *Weltgeschichte****). Moving right along on its confused way the bug drops into the column marked *Leben***** (its home territory) before getting to the center column's "unhappy consciousness," which is only nominally relevant to it.*****

I'm diminished by this pretty little bug, lessened by it. Compared with its consciousness, my own isn't happy. With a great effort I escape the malaise other people's misery brings me. Jerks and creeps take advantage of this. I feel like I'm one of them when I experience this.

Depressed philosophers need their liquor just like working with dirt, you'll need a bath. Working with dirt you get dirty though—just like doing philosophy makes you sober.

Is there a conclusion? If I stand my thinking to a little glass of wine, my consciousness isn't unhappy anymore, it's happy again. There's a brighter day.

* From universality to individuality.

** From universal mind to sensible consciousness (individuality).

*** People, State and World History.

**** Life.

***** (a ladybug's consciousness is "nominally" related to God, presumably because the name for the bug in French contains the word God in it—*la bête à bon Dieu*. A Bataille joke? Tr.)

The tenor of my thinking is less a philosophical disaster than a happy horror before the—obvious—bankruptcy of this thinking and any thinking: if I need alcohol it's so a little of the dirt other people have on them will rub off on me.

Should a person be humble reading Lautréamont or Rimbaud? That'd be another kind of unhappy consciousness. As many creeps and jerks adopt *it* as the earlier one.

Read two "talks" written by a Hindu monk I know and had seen for an hour or so—his elegance and handsomeness in his pink robe and the friendly energy of the way he laughed pleased me. I'm depressed by writing that sticks with Western standards.

Here's something to be expressed forcefully and kept clearly in mind—when people look at each other as if they're separate individuals there's no truth. Truth starts with conversations, laughter that's shared, being friends, sex. It happens *going from one person to another*. I despise the image of being when it's related to isolation. The recluse who's under the impression that he's reflecting the world—is ridiculous to my mind. He can't reflect it and—since he's himself the center of reflection—he stops having a relation to what doesn't have a center. I don't imagine the world as being what's separate or enclosed but as *what goes from one person to another* when we laugh or make love. As I imagine this—immensity opens and I'm lost.

How little the *I* matters! And reciprocally—how unimportant's a human presence that's *not* me.

I don't believe in God—out of sheer inability to believe in self.

Belief in God is a belief in self. God's only a guarantee that's been given me. If we hadn't projected a *self* on the absolute, we'd be convulsed with laughter.

If I give my life to life itself and I'm lived by this life to the point of being ruined (I don't want to say—to mystical experience), I open up eyes on a world where I'm meaningless—unless wounded and torn and *sacrificed*. In this world divinity too's a tearing, execution, sacrifice.

God's as requisite if you practice meditation, they say, as one electrical pole is to the other when you want sparks arcing across. The arcing across of ecstasy has to have an object proposed. If it's reduced to a point, this object'd be possessed of so much destructive power it'd be a pleasantness, and convenience even, to name it. But there's a danger that can't be denied, they add—the limit-post (heaviness) to which the name God's given would be counted for more than the arcing out. To be

honest—the object, or point, towards which ecstasy's directed and which is in front of me is exactly what other people have seen and described when speaking of God. We're reassured by what's clearly stated—defining unchanging SELF as our being's and our nature's principle offers the temptation to make the object of meditation something clear. Defining things that way projects what we are into infinity, into eternity. The idea of individual existence favors positioning an object towards which ecstasy will be directed. This positioning remains a hateful limit though: in ecstasy's arcing forth, subject and object poles necessarily have to be consumed, they have to be annihilated. And this means, just as the subject begins to destroy him- or herself in meditation, the object, a god or God, will start becoming a victim too—of the same process. (Otherwise the situation of life as we know it, subjects constituting useful objects separate from them as they intend those objects, would maintain the slavishness inherent in action, the standard of which is utility.)

I haven't chosen God as an object, I've chosen humanly—the young Chinese, the condemned felon whom these photos show as being covered with blood while the executioner tortures him (the blade's already gone into his knee-bone). I'm linked to this unhappy being by ties of horror and friendship. But when I looked at this image *till I consented to it* it suppressed in me my necessity of being just me—and at the same time the object I'd selected was released into a vastness and in a storm of pain was destroyed.

Each of us is a stranger to the universe, belonging to objects, meals, newspapers that, sealing us off by creating our individuality, leave us ignorant of anything else. What links up existence with *everything else there is*—is death. To look at death is to stop belonging to your own room, to those near and dear to you, to become part of the free play that's what sky is.

To better grasp this, think of the opposition from physics—wave systems against particle physics. The first one accounts for phenomena by assuming there're waves (light, vibrations in air, ocean waves). The second sees the world as composed of corpuscles—neutrons, photons, electrons—the minimal combinations of which are atoms or molecules. Is the leap from lovemaking to light waves, from personal being to corpuscles, forced or arbitrary? Still the problems of physics allow seeing more clearly the way two images of life are opposed—one is erotic or religious and the other profane, just matter of fact. One's open, the other's closed. Physical love is such a complete negation of isolated being that we find it natural and even in a sense wonderful that an insect can die in the sexual throes it sought out. But this excess has a counterpart in the urge a person might have to possess someone else. It's not just a tainting of the expression of *erotic* emotions—it also governs the reciprocal, proprietary relations of worshiper and the dark presence that's a divinity you worship. (God becomes the property of the believer and the believer

belongs to God in the same way.) This happens of necessity. But to know it isn't to submit to it. The "point" I've spoken of (with its tears and shrieks) so pervades life (although, no, *since* it's the same as death), that, once exposed, the object of dreams or desire confused with dreams is *quickened*—set on fire even—becomes intensely *present*. From the moment of his alleged "visit" the divinity becomes available to you like a beloved, like a woman giving you her nakedness in the raptures of love. The god torn by his wounds, the woman at pleasure's edge, "copy" the "scream" of ecstasy. The copy's as simple as it is inevitable—we have to establish objects for ourselves. But coming into the object in my "scream" haven't I destroyed whatever deserves the name object? Just as now nothing can keep me from my death (I love it as I discover a drowning pleasure that calls for its coming) I still have to link together signs of my destruction and annihilation with figures of my need to love.

Human destiny's put us in contact with pity, morality and somewhat divergent attitudes (an asphyxiating anguish and more often than not horror) but it can scarcely be said of us that we've encountered friendship. Until Nietzsche. . . .

Writing's always only a game played with a reality that constantly eludes you. No one's ever been able to enclose the world with satisfactory propositions so why should I try? What I wanted to make possible for those who are *alive*, for non-believers who get their happiness from the pleasures of this world, was a rapture—one that (with the hideous asceticism that up to now's been jealously guarding us) often enough has been considered to be remote. If there wasn't ever a desire to go looking for pleasure (or joy), if the only thing that counted was rest (satisfaction) or equilibrium, the gift I'm offering would be meaningless. This gift, this play of lightning, this ecstasy. . . .

These days I sleep fitfully, my dreams are heavy, violent—a match for my intense weariness. . . .

The day before yesterday I discovered I was on the slopes of a vast volcano like Etna but stretching outwards like the Sahara. Its lava was dark-colored sand. I got up close to the crater and it wasn't day and wasn't night, but some time in between. Even before I could make out the crater's outline, I knew it was an active volcano. Distinctly above the place I found I was in (it seemed like I was near the summit) a huge wall reared up, of the color and consistency of the sand, but smooth and vertical. The image of approaching catastrophe, a fiery flow of lava streamed slowly down the wall and into dark. I turned and saw the deserted countryside, with banded smoke trails hugging the ground. I started down the mountainside understanding I wouldn't escape the danger, that I was doomed. I felt the limit of my anxiety. I wanted to gamble, but the game turned against me now. Through smoke wisps I quickly came to the foot of the mountain—but where I hoped for an

exit, I saw only slopes going upwards in every direction. I was at the bottom of an irregular funnel—long white trails of oppressive volcanic fumes drifted out from cracked walls. The certainty of death overtook me but I went on—the way got more and more difficult. I came to the entrance of a cave, the rocks of which were laid out geometrically, and were entrancingly brilliant in raw yellows, blues and blacks—the colors of butterfly wings. I continued to go inside the refuge, entering an immense room as beautiful and geometrical as the entrance. There were several figures there much more lost in the gloom than even statues on a cathedral front—their huge dimensions and serenity struck me with fear. I'd never seen or imagined beings this perfect and powerful—and lucidly ironic. There was one seated in front of me on a prominence, majestic and frigid in his proportions but casual, as if the ornamenting forces shaping him were waves, of clear and purified laughter as measureless and violent as storm waves. Lunar light streamed from the stone being and intoxicated him. Confronting the being and in a desperate certainty that I shared the source of deadly hilarity that moved him, I found, trembling, the power to *realize what I was* and laugh. In spite of confusion I faced him and with deceptive ease expressed what I felt: that I was like him and like those others akin to him still further back in the dark recesses, engaged now in calm frigid lacerating laughter directed at my extreme fear and inconceivable boldness. Then the tension I felt was such I woke up.

A day or two earlier I'd dreamed the time was coming for me to stop relying on anything and give myself up without always wondering when I'd be able to get my breath. What I was longing for possessed me. The resulting movements of my eloquence, in their release, lifted me. As was the case with the volcano death but more obscurely, it was always death—death feared and desired at the same time and consisting essentially in the empty grandeur and unbearable laughter dreams permit—it was always death that proposed the leap, the power to bind you up to a perfectly unknown blackness, one that honestly won't ever be known, and one whose appeal, in no way inferior to even the most iridescent colors, consists in what it won't ever have, not the smallest speck of knowledge, since it's the annihilation of the system which has the power of knowing.

[September 1939/March 1940]

[Bruce Boone's translation of Georges Bataille's *La Coupable* is forthcoming from Lapis Press, Los Angeles.]

Bob Perelman

5 poems from Face Value

The Freeze

I remember my thighs.
It was in a movie. I was asleep,
but voting, trying to remain inconspicuous.
I saw what I saw, and I felt what I felt.
At the time I thought nothing of it,
but as the policewoman started to remove her blue blouse it was my mother and I
was Stendhal
and the mercury was starting to wear off and I was sick, sick with desire, but
also just plain
sick, damaged, an exception, the only one in the non-named bourgeois world
who was separated
from desire. I had no job except to be witty entering salons, profound later in
the evening, and
rhapsodically convinced of my doubt in private, when I would throw my wig in
a corner and
write of the dangers of satisfaction, running with the pack in the pre-dawn

A body is a whole thing.
A life is parts.
There's no way to verify these statements.
No one *has* a body. Skin, smell, or aura is the line
below the bottom line, where private property stops

Do I get to say
what it means? Only
if Vietnam was an allegory.

The king is still in his counting house,
his index finger pointing at
the first gold piece, his mouth
pronouncing the number one.

Though we don't have a king any more.
We have a complex system of networks,

advertizers dangling from writers dangling from cameramen dangling from
stockholders.

But what is the subject under discussion?
now that we live in an ever expanding political movie,
where an Uzi is a dick or a calculator,
cheaper every year, but it's confusing,
even for the lifestyles of the rich and famous,
to have bodyguards but, again, no body.
So the famous face freezes, contemplative, while the voiceover says, I remember
my thighs, feet,
the sidewalk, standing outside, red sky, watching ants, but the frame only stays
frozen
for the credits.

Sex

Ed Meese is not relentless necessity.
I'd rather study bugs than gloat or whine
over differences in biography.

History puts on its hanging cap
and looks for all the world like it's about to
pronounce sentence. The desire to rhyme, to master
rules, the ruler, the ruler's uncontrollable urges,
to be the one who speaks, who says anything,
how does the old song go? "The State is a person
who never shits or fucks
but manually defends its property
from sexual attack by a display of pomp
that puts use to shame and shame to use."
All it needs is enough music.

Meanwhile it was midnight. The sentence groped hurriedly for some flimsy
rhetoric, but things
were too clear. The camera was rolling, the grammar grinding, moans and
groans filled the
soundtrack precisely, like food in airline trays, far away but in theory edible.

I too read the comics and see the gods
wolfing down lasagna. Now that the calendar is an endangered species, I directly
perceive, by
intuition

single things, brown wrappers on magazines at all night stores,
see-through wrappers on the Bounty, isolate commercial songs
to be picked up one at a time, crossed off the list,
paratactically, the shopping list like Homer, epic shopping,
but Odysseus never had to stand in line in his life.

So, yes, critique the three-gun ship of state
that shoots out a bright yellow Big Bird talking gently but stupidly about how hard
it is to share,
critique the Contra snuff films they show in the dark pouch diplomacy dangles
before the

White House regulars who dutifully shout out, "Take it off!"
to the counterrhythm of "I'm going to edit
my shopping list, down by the river side."

With this VCR I thee watch take off your clothes and make love into
a speech about democracy, making the world safe for,
take seventeen, then what I actually want
is democracy, and for busses to be as well made as the bombs now are.

Sorry, but when I woke up this morning my aura
was all over the front page. The cropduster
nose down in the field of sunflowers,
did you see that one too? I in theory rule
exactly one five billionth of the world, up above the paper.
The subject is separated from the object, its verb
hundreds of thousands of times as powerful as Milton's God.
The space in between fills with explicit images of Adam and Eve, acting as if they
had no names,
and here we are.

The Drunken Vote

Relentless—as they say—for I am they and I say what they say
(relent, repent, for your or my attention span grows short,
even as the faces and accents on tv accumulate around the ever more tired hero,
leaping under the
car to avoid the gunfire, while high over the street the brains of the outfit has
another sex-like
meeting, above the stresses of reference and committee striation, where the soft
rock words

conglomerate, take on the interminable appearance of fate—one second is
forever in this
language—threshed out beneath the starry but socialized billboards)
relentless, I say, just because I want to and
woke up today, because it was in
my interminable head, cargo cult of consciousness,
I, the broken tribal unity,
worship what goes on above, product
of so many enjambed hands and hours,
relentless witness,
wetness. I want to say
vs. I do say. And today's my day
in court. Holding out the carrot
to the little dog who writes something like a monkey with a human
word habit, a bag of pictures,
each word worth a thousand more words
that the reader, cast in the role of detective or rabbi or no-nonsense consumer,
has to puzzle out to make a social whole.
Little time remains for saying what you want, which isn't in words,
plus there's the physical weight of the problem.

So, what? a relentlessly
sentimental vocabulary of animal parts?
Playing Lassie or the Terminator for the last time?
A picture of a satisfied human being
is worth a couple of thousand animal years
of farmlike worship of pure urban presence at sea on the open market drinking salt
water to keep
from drowning down where the products stop feeling for you as a private unit
of consumption

Hey the rennetless witness has fallen asleep again.
Nor are the tv shows in the tv chairs at the Greyhound station jelling.

Here, by my garage door, in the dispersing scenery,
by the consommeed images of Homer, Tonto, and the nameless face on the dollar,
by the triumph of George Will,
smoky light shining down on the torch of freedom held up by the tones of solemn
curiosity in
Barbara Walters' leading questions,
I solemnly swear to inhabit my body,

and having sworn, in league with fate to the terms of my oath,
on the way back to the store,
for I have forgotten something,
I drink the blood of the world, by accident

Justice

The world has always been waiting for today's storkload of babies.
Maybe the terms are a little unbelievable,
the runway might be under a bit of water,
there're not that many places set at the table,
but one day, the song says, my ship will come in

in a hundred places up and down the coast, with lights on all night to attract the
late-blooming
Odysseuses, who have let themselves be turned into cars in order to enjoy the
beauties of these
lit-up sirens, who, though they had promised interminable knowledge of the
past, now just shine
determinedly onto the parking lots in the punchline-like present thus proving
the theorem that
all's well

Complete determinism, at all points,
at all times, no paid time off,
the numbers are precise, but they never stop,
computer minutes grow into computer years.
No matter how long a number is, Ann Landers says, it can be personalized.
In the hundredth place a single digit holds itself aloft
and stares silently into the camera.

I've got plenty of nothin',
and am nowhere, nothing but a song,
not quite in the head, on the radio instead,
determined divisions of armed and dangerous
positions of power stepping around the dogshit, tax forms,
the machine runs itself if you
just play the song again and don't talk about the untoward parts.
The motor sings, grinds, the particular motor doesn't matter,
just the number of the part, the country of origin, the old country, Ithaca, Penelope,
birthplace,
home,

the twilight of mommy and daddy who've spent the entire past
building this scattering of parking spaces as a national sacrifice area,
or is this the older old country where the monsters don't count and can't die.

Music is so emotional, and in songs you end up saying things that aren't terribly
real. And yet to
haunt those caves, to be in your arms—
How do we say? To actually exist
you have to have all the time in the world.

Language changes color, like blood, when it touches the air.
Dollars stay green, the flag waves, time capsules bursting on schedule.
Some things have to be sung by twenty thousand voices before they make any
sense, and then it's
too late.

O blood-red language, o ship of state, the voices roar,
tossing people overboard with their unclaimed luggage, unnameable parts,
how can we tell the elect from the electorate?
Studiously the buoy moos, clangs.

Psycho

If there's no plot, no description, no significant tension of grammar, no sex
—but I did just see the primal scene enacted by two flies—
then what's in it for my other?
Lived experience is the only answer,
mother I carry around dead in my basement in the greatest most inward movie of
all time, all space.

I'm about to lay bare the soul of my device. So flat?
I'm about to globe my thoughts in commodities
soaking up the future making it mine all mine.
Then I'll have lunch, then I'll swat flies.

Now we are awake, he would say,
but she would already have made breakfast, done the dishes, and left the house.
Now we change the world, it would say, in Old Slavonic
or, now we change our minds, in the vernacular, in Valleytalk,
but I would already have closed the book and gone shopping.

In the 20s telephones and cars were adjuncts to the self.
In the 30s they were taken away in sufficient number to revive fears of commodity-
castration.

In the 40s they were used for war.

In the 50s they were given back again, but only to Cary Grant

States of mind enter history naked

but I would already be thinking of something else, other.

It started as a play on words, a casual dalliance with memory,

but ended with a private mind frantically deciphering messages from the

environment, racing past in

an ambulance with mother's ghost solemnly reminding you to put up your

sword and *use words*.

But it's too late: Cary Grant is dead.

So put away your notepad and hang up your private mind.

Final image: "With the abrupt appearance of Odysseus, the eternal husband, the

false suitors

disappear. *Exeunt simulacra*,"

leaving a lot of blood to wash off the floors and walls,

which are just a screen memory

shown to convince the viewers of the truth of their suit

and to absolve the spectacle of hiding

a criminal past, primal matter.

Bruce Andrews

Be Careful Now & other texts

Be Careful Now You Know Sugar Melts In Water

sexuality in my writing;
three terrains or horizons,
each characteristic of a different period in my work

(Quoted passages are from *Language of the Puerto Rican Street: a slang dictionary*.)

ONE. *Come to Think of It*

. . . a materialized explosiveness of the subject and of *meaning*, in something like a 'general economy' of bodily excitability . . .

"*ESCURRIDIZO*—elusive, slippery, dextrously evasive."

a sexed politics, in which: a formally adventurous, & somatic or erotic, play among signifiers predominates, one which is unharnessed by signification, which can't be transposed into the hard work of the sign. leisured, unemployable. anti-semantic, it eludes presence, refrains even to seek false presence. continuous linkages of meaning find themselves bracketed, suspended; a semantic apparatus dethroned, fellated. ('meaningful' as claustrophobic). hardening certainties (of conventional subjecthood and of conventional reference) swallowed up by sacrifice, by a de-privileging or demotion of purpose, of results, of conservation, of value. meaning, like flesh, slides. it is *deferred* to *confer* enjoyment, bodily thrill.

"*loquillo*—disrespectful of law and convention."

"*como palo de goleta*—like the mast of a schooner; hard-on, erection."

to live around in (to comprehend) experience—in a *flash*, all closure suspended. an unbracketed mobility without resolve & without resolution, without conclusive climax; aimlessly profitless, undeferred material (bodily) spread. nothing to save, invest, accumulate, secure or amortize. not knowing where it comes from or where it's going. to no longer subordinate this present to some future project or classically meaningful *telos*. nor to assimilate value to itself by assimilating the Past, delayed into monuments, to the Present. an intoxicated futurism (as presentism). avarice gone, a sweating & burning up of mastery.

"*izquierda*—mistress to a married man; on the side, around the law or convention."

precarious, risk-prone: a squandering & displacing & disassociative unglueing. at the moment of an expression of structure—a *shattering*, an infinity. vertiginous

superfluity, a festivalizing of experience. verbs of movement, desire—*process* (if totality = structure + process; like 'restricted' + 'general' writing). something sharply assertive of its jeopardy—with edges enough, & playful violation: instigating a crisis. catalyzing circulation; unreasonable precipitation; fractures & waste. this underlies a frenzied & swooning, or delicately agitational, play of bodily drives—nonidiomatic, as sound, rhythm, movement. somatic drives unstitched by the semantic (sewing) machine of representation. uncertainty, tingling, wobbling, nomadic, merely circumstantial, ravishing enthusiasm. a cresting wave of possibilities crashing over our bodies—emptying into a near infinite, contentless affirmation of rupture & divestiture.

"*rajar(se)*—to quit one's job; to wear (oneself) out fornicating."

"*bañar el caballo*—to bathe the horse; to fuck."

shapes blasted—outside self, same, reason. headless & heedless, involuntary, absolutely put at stake. an incessant pluralizing of experience which *exceeds* the subject. incisive differences marking, tissueless; *losing* meaning voluptuously—& losing its operator, the subject; a semantic undressing. subject forgets itself—forgets any accumulation of the meaningful. on & beyond Myself, or any determinately exclusive person or legible position of a person in these texts. boundaries dissolving, a collapsing of Inside/Outside—by removal or erasure of an identity fixed enough to be readily (or already) subordinated. sovereign differentials without any mechanical reciprocity.

"*agitando*—inciting a guy to ejaculation."

can go unrecognized. disinterested, unselfconscious, a place less near myself. beyond self-scrutiny, self-conservation (or self-conversation)—shattered profiles, abrupt or abandoned contours; as if: no conceivable perimeter. not a person's choices, as first read, but in thrall to intensities & drives circulating over the fleshtext.

"*candela*—a candle; a pistol; a very active or sexually hot person."

always motion, anti-stasis. a deregulatory pitched absence of rules; blind spots, broken promises. a heightening of process & a demotion of structure. system expires, to evaporate in movement—in *escapes* from social control, a forfeit which dispels the veil of the normal. like clouds, a gradual burning away of government. toward an anarcho- de-governing, a refusal to integrate into larger wholes which are machines of control. bliss, demystifying. not natural, not edifying—INSUBORDINATION. explode yes grasp no. risking any prior system of social control as conceptual control, as protocol of translation. here, in this textual bed, rather than the creation of the uncategorizable, the detonating of the category system itself. (conventional verse comes on as sexually

listless, or prim, or determined or mechanical or conceited or instrumentalized.) too hetero(geneity)? the expository is hideous.

"*correrse*—to reach a sexual climax, to come."

a flowing rhetoricity of the libido. capturing some of language's *swoon* with disseminatory (& extravagantly differential) effects of signifiers in motion. a perilous linguistic wettening—capture's yearning; unceasing seductiveness, *powers* of seduction, excitation & discharge. sometimes, a pre-ejaculatory bliss exhausting itself, liquidating as liquefying—or downward flood or non-engendering, non-narrative internal secretionability, a *volatility*. near-toxic heat—silent secret's night.

TWO. *Have Regard for a Face, the Face, itself*

. . . the search, inside writing's own medium, for *value* in an erotic mutuality (and passionate constitution) of self and other . . .

"*ababacharse*—to blush, to be embarrassed."

"*guillar(se)*—to play a secret role; to neck or fondle."

a *reproduction*. to lay stress beyond any figure of an anti-production, moving towards an active contextualizing of Production, in the Other, in *you*, in the Constitution of Identity—self-folding & unfolding & enfolding. a rematerializing of language, with an eliding/eluding of anyone's, or my, privatized grasp, through erotic *interplay*, through implicatings of an other. possible escape from 'the pursuit of loneliness'—or any enclosed & self-identifying solitude of rapture—by a jointly interior trembling; sound quivers, corporeal resounding. an unknown *con carne*: mutual flesh incarnated.

"*matadero*—slaughterhouse; a bad hospital; area used for making love in parked cars, lover's lane."

monolog isn't always the big danger; instead, it may involve a self-aggrandizingly emptied soliloquy, a paen to meaningless isolation on the verge of being homogenized. so: how to get beyond a subject-object relation from *within* the realm of (& by recourse to) experience? to reach out beyond a theatricalizing (& recuperation) of non-meaning or a levelling down to the *same*, to *me* (or even to a theatricalized resumé of the absence of me). perhaps in writing a jointly somatic consent to share (and consult) in the lived-in body; a jointly unencompassable, yet no longer empty, force. still unlit—as unengendered by myself—we find passion's provisional suturing; draping the covers of interiority over *two*. and thus a corporeal rebuke to self-subsistence—or even to a full (present) autonomy of desires or intensities. this impossibility, this corporeal (textual) blaze (through you) makes the isolated subject impossible within the space of the subject itself. a reconstructing of a useful semantic possibility—a value—by reestablishing, or recognizing, *time*: by recognition of you. reavowals, therefore, in a creativity of the *you*: creating a polity a bit at a time, a *courting* of human appeal.

"*pestillo*—the bolt of a lock; someone in love."

"*envoltura*—wrapping, envelope, a relationship."

the unforeseen: an instant is stolen (steals away) *into* a bodily reflexivity (of self/other) modelled by an electrically-charged scaffolding of difference in language. momentary disarming epiphany—a moment's completedness in *joint* action by means of solicitude. instantaneously furtively clandestine, with naked care as provisional comprehension. we can be. not me *with* you—as if side-by-side—but *facing* you, addressed by you from outside of this experience to foster another.

"*amasar*—to knead dough before baking; to test by touching someone the nature or depth of a relationship."

I'll never be the same. writing absents itself before you, but also: writing expresses itself as other, as you. to keep the words from keeping or seizing or claiming rights over, or claiming to know you—for the objectifying glance too often remains in place even without the trappings of the Ego to situate it. not a ritual extinction of flesh into Same—for it's always different, 'personal skin,' belying category. a recognition without servility in an auratic other: eyes of all your excitable flesh (FACE) looked at & looking back at me—not intently, but to forge a mutual intent & regard. in words, to imagine your presence sexually so that I do not remain the same. to make differences visible enough to *withstand* homogenization, *your* glance must be present & distinct from my glance. I cannot, after all is said & done, find your face, which is unified, inside myself. associated, facing: something rubs off, something is reformed: not I-thou, but you-you. and *hearing* you.

"*arrimao*—a tenant farmer; someone under the shelter of someone else, or referring to that situation."

a *live* heterology coming together as discontinuous distance, as ensemble separation, as recognition without reduction, where separateness is made possible by avoiding a fetishizing of the private, self-sufficient couple. presence palms itself off as continuity—& appropriation, but, brought together with *you*, heartbeat transcends division of labor to make a mutually endistancing steaming together. a dislocation of our identity—not as distinct, but as separate—where our separateness makes us indistinct. yet for ethics, your speech—the literacy of your body—will not be freed unless your distinction is embraced: to preserve a secretiveness, a separateness, a sovereign otherness. desire *effects* separation—contrives it—in a laboratory for exteriority, for loves' semi-autonomous instances—even in its beings-together. and our distinctiveness gives us something to come together around: respect the meaning of you, charge & discharge.

"*guayarse*—to scratch oneself; to dance very very closely with someone."

"*brillo*—shoeshine; two people standing glued together to excite themselves sexually."

beyond seeing & seizing to make it the same: yes, a touching, caressing, to *withhold* you. with vibration unsettling any appropriative contact—more grateful, more sympathetic: testing those limits. a dimming of the analytic violence of the light in a passional underground passageway for freed former Slaves & Masters. not overlooking, in either sense of that term (ignoring, or assimilating & monitoring). less an *apprehension* than a crystallization—a generosity, or reconciliation, or mutuality celebration: a mutually empowering seductiveness, in the dark, without overpowering you. a pacified incarnated respect which ceases, or cedes, all harshness toward a lived-in habituated infinity.

"*arrano*—from *rana*, meaning frog, hence close to the ground, crouching, crawling, diffident, low in profile; settled down or stabilized in a relationship."

less in thrall to concept or intention; less enslaved to a prior meaning nor to Power as Sameness, as reductivism. a redistribution of values *within* the space of value, for even a memory of this passion inscribes a difference into the text. the freedom of speech—*yours*—as the ground of the ethical. to let the question (the difference) remain a question & give us, in moments together, something sturdier to withstand a malevolent social milieu, the wholesale deformation (or eclipse) of human capacities in the administered universe. a subjunctive mode—articulating new values, new longings, new satisfactions.

THREE. *Allegory—Nothing Escapes*

... a mapping and contesting of *sense* in a particular present (of 'late capitalism') where sexuality figures so prominently in a near-totalizing machine of social discourse ...

"*dar del ala para comer de la pechuga*—to build someone's confidence with an ulterior motive."

"*relajo*—conversation with a double meaning, especially pertaining to sex; passive obstructionism."

pleasure is at stake. but there is still another Beyond, another context or Outside, this time a social & discursive one—beyond the nominational dualism of loved & loving duet, and of which these couplings may be too forgetful. sexuality—intimacies of exploring, heightening, quick thawing, drastic clutches—is more obviously *up against* the wall of context, & it can, in writing, be allowed to reveal its attachment to an addictive falseness enshrined in Ideology, to show—by the particulars of wording—its recognition of its increasingly powerful role today as a cog in a wheel of social management. to take issue with the glorious claims of coupling: maintaining distance (short-sightedly) through passion does not

interrupt all totalities. it becomes harder to find the totally other in duet form—since all points of comparison have already become socially engineered, since any 'I' has less & less control over 'what I myself am not' (which would be the ideal pedagogical space of the other). That space is enfolded in a social discourse & cannot be so easily located as an interpersonal or 'post-personal' 'treat.'

"*chuleta*—pork chop; an exaggerated, improbable story, bullshit."

"*paquete*—a lie, an exaggeration; the male pubic bulge, or 'box.' "

the closures at stake here (which sexuality might open or represent) suggest much broader, & often less visible, more taken-for-granted patterns of social relations. language as discourse & ideology must serve as a model—virtually a rubber sheet geometry or Moebius strip—for it gives us: not a signifiatory play of absence, compensation and deferral, but of fakery, hypnotism and suspended *disbelief*. discourse, to the extent that we live under its regime, makes us always already non-sovereign. subjects are fixed by name, by image, by idea in such a suprapersonal system, such interpellation by a social body.

"*caliente*—sexually hot; legally hot, guilty, under surveillance."

sex figures more & more as discursive within a social world increasingly out of our grasp which sexual writing must still grasp. a more generalized lack of control appears as the problem, rather than the classical motifs of economic exploitation or the repression of drives. this factually congealed matter, this fixing as refrigerating within imagery captivity, this anonymous universality of a massively institutionalized illusion. can this societal statementalization be resisted? can there be an elusion of illusion, a rupture of this fetishizing of uninterrupted reification? the criteria & functions of a social whole are floodlighting these privacies—leaving us with no haven in an artificial heart-filled world, for sexual cues & imposed patternings *in discourse* are set on top of any explosions of signification or any mysteries of sharing the heat of otherness. privatized sexuality offers itself up now less as a site of *production* (modernism's worthy wrestling partner & helpmate) but of *consumption*—as a mystification & injunction. a language of sexual pressures becomes one of new consumer demands (which compete for relative status among our memory images or anticipatory images). penetrated—& seeded—by codes of language, it functions more & more as social command, as an order (regulated by score-cards), as boast, regret, evaluator, as commodity love & love as commodity, with the obsessively detailed walls of Fantasy World facing us: (within which we find a retailing of sex 'coming out on top,' or 'at the head,' of the list). within such a domination by discourse, concretely in the guise of a culture industry trying to pass for a culture, our deepest layers of erotic existence, & fragrant secret, lolling leisure, wildness-privacy—get thrown back at us figured as disfigured. with eros as a pointed contact with this social machine, we wonder how to *name the system*

which more than ever operates by invasion, by wrenching of person, by a sexually-soliciting system: a need-creator, a readier, a fix.

"*coger de picua*—to take for a sucker."

"*crica*—cunt; *crical*—mass turmoil or disorder."

a less & less private sphere we still find enlisted in the service of a privatized *activation*: the shape of a hegemony, training the ground out from under you. technology may be an extension of the body. here, it suggests an interior technologizing of bodily desires which extend, or rivet, them right back inside. so escapes from social fixity by means of precipitation look more & more inadequate as a response to this near-inclusive net tossed over our wants & needs. to assume that we face a model of repression could encourage us simply to loosen the bonds of constraint. but if we face a mode of activation of sex, of harnessed desublimation, of privatized socialization, what is left but to recognize (to rewrite) the rules, the roles, & the stereotypes.

"*manilo*—a coward; a cock that won't fight; a guy who is afraid to go out on a date."

a *sociable* here-and-now could be framed against this hegemony, by the defiant *social* self-knowledge of writing. framing & staging: eros as explanation, as social stripping, as *disillusionment* of the smorgasbord of free choice,

as a de-padding of the unconscious. an *exposé* to be staged by *implication*—to demystify both the fetishized autonomy of sex & its saddened usefulness—or by creating a 'pre-commentary' within the space of theme & thought themselves. to explain—by doing—how sense makes sense.

"*jabita*—a small piece of soap; clitoris of a young girl."

praxis as *refiguration* & redistribution of eros with transgressive feelers out at the meta-level. to raise the possibility of a *socially* sovereign moment—built up out of these previously discussed effervescences. as a counter-hegemonizing with a social reconstruction of identity which could readdress (re-interpellate) those envelopes. where *adequation* becomes an active material craft, a utopian gathering & not just an interpretation which balances the books or settles the accounts. an unsettling account.

"*tuco*—a person with an amputated finger, hand or arm; a guy with a very small penis."

these 3 levels now form a triple-decker in an allegorical recasting: a constant rewriting/rereading of the social body—with pauses & interruptions but without end. a contesting of closure with a bodily movement *through* a series of these horizons (or envelopes) which takes the form of disruption: first, of meaning (sign/general economy); second, of value (self/other); and third, of sense (discourse). the last discursive mapping (& thematizing of sexuality) will be

infused with or body forth what is *inside* of it at the level (or within the concentric circles) of the previous two challenges: an exploding of any center or division, and then a probing (or 'psyching out') of reconciliation—of a passion, joining, coming together. any encompassing of a social Outside must embody these effervescences or else it threatens a negativism which is vacuating—instead of vacationing, & transforming.

"*The Distancing Device Is The Staff of Life*" (Hugo Ball)

Politics & art are two different things.

People act as if nothing had happened—like

a breed of beetles that fake death when touched so as to avoid
being destroyed.

The word should be left alone. In fact,

the destruction of the speech organs can be a means of self-discipline.

The false structure is collapsing,

the word has become commodity,

the word *and* the image are crucified, yet

everyone wanted to be his own exorcist for his own body.

Most of these rebels are really heretical *preachers*,

and I find the socialist theories rather romantic and tasteless since
they count on the *enthusiasm* of the masses.

Nietzsche attacked the church & left the state alone. That was a
big mistake: the state is only a commodity.

The citizen is a commodity too—for the State. But

the center is still made of skins and

form wants to penetrate mass.

Can a whole *nation* become romantic?

It is necessary to drop all respect for tradition, opinion and
judgement—

a puffed-up nothing,

the whole arrangement seems to be a disastrous discharge of optical
illusions,

dandyism,

Dadaland.

I was much too involved in nationalism.

We are going to Germany—

you are (still) the mummy among nations.

"*In this charming little room . . .* "

IN THIS CHARMING LITTLE ROOM, I WOULD LIKE to draw your attention to
the chandelier. On the wall opposite the fireplace hangs a portrait of the homelier

daughter of Louis XV, Madame Adelaide. The commode on the right is similar to one used in Buckingham Palace. One can almost visualize the marble statue of Eros in the circular forecourt. Unique in this continent is the group of German and Flemish tankards in ivory mounted in silver—removing the tarnish we found they were in silver gilt decorated with crude miniatures. The yellow storm out of a paltry heaven, the archangels of death—also in the vitrine are two emptied plates; above these cases is a travelling iconostasis of the seventeenth century and to the left a pair of King's Mother Doors. It was most difficult to find a white marble mantel, for during the Louis XVI period, turquin, or bluish grey marble, was more popular; this is still a problem. The chipped plate with the double-headed eagle in a blue and pink medallion is from the yacht service of Tsar Nicholas I. Near the column stands a Louis XVI travelling jewel cabinet decorated with ormolu representing dolphins which suggests that it was ordered by a dauphiness. The material is not satin as it appears but is embroidered in long and short stitch with red silk floss. The iron chests in this room painted with mating scenes are unusual. Unfortunately the floor is often covered with a fine Aubusson rug, for the delicate marquetry will not stand up under hard usage. One of the nielloed charkas or wine tasters in the back of the case with a coat of arms was stolen for Tchicherin. In fact, the Russians sent craftsmen to China to learn this art of enamelling which partly explains the oriental features of the faces in some of the enamelled pictures. Also on the ormolu and malachite table in front of the window sits a large vanity box in walrus ivory made in the region of Archangelansk, an industry started there in the early eighteenth century to give employment to recent widows during long winter nights. Looking closely, one can see the amethyst drops around the skirt and the amethyst beehive in the center of the stretcher. The plate concealing the lattice and rose pattern almost like a watermark is the earliest. The icon hanging alongside the vitrine has all the regular saints; its top is also lapis-lazuli and tiger's eye (mica turned into chalcedony). Of importance in the room also is the large suite of furniture consisting of the two monstrous sofas and twelve chairs. Inside the cabinet, on the other hand, is an original grant of title of nobility to Captain Anikieu by the Tsarina Elizabeth in 1743, very complete, even including the red seal and silver gilt seal box as well as the swallowed letter. It's time to ascend into heaven, sonny. . . hair soft down on the skin. . . jumping bejesus. . . no attention. . . long legs scarcely touched. . . she's not inviting us. . . all the history to a halt. . . buried in my lunch box. . . cream froth little red grapes. . . cut out the tongue, burn off the stitches, all this gold toasting all the burn your soil backs and forth, backs and forth, dragging the intestines out through the belly button. . . let the nozzle play. . . on knees to it. . . metamorphosis of the circle. . . tattooed buttocks. . . hand on the hip shoot from the head. . . the plowers are constricted. . . Entrance of the

Chameleons. . . lure, lure. . . Mrs. Blah, ex-Miss Blah. . . fur master. . . sink presses on the skull. . . quoits stand it, what's beneath a quick perk? . . . don't bend down on your peevies, rebuff rebus. . . fill in, re-clap. . . tongues blooded with Mixmaster widows. . . whoosh foot paste. . . egg in a hole, cats in my head. . . lizard—a well wrung hand, rigor mortis tattles. . . my favorite saliva. . . pinch and tell. . . like a beached whale. . . heaven is the doghound. . . tracks of my Tories. . . now it's sucrets. . . acidity of head shield. . . The turquoise color, or bleu celeste, as the French call it. There are some eggs but mostly they are seals. And this exquisite representation of Venus and the little Bovine God of Love is of such quality. The pieces with the ermine canopy are in rare rare technique. For use on the occasions of her dining once each year with the knights of her attraction of each of the imperial orders. One is soft paste with the rare yellow color and painted with birds after Buffon in 1793 or 1794. Forty-eight plates were presented to each Field Marshal's mistress. Jungle Jim is capsizing. Grand Duchess was taken Alapaïsk in Perm along with other members of the imperial family, all of whom were carefully thrown alive into a mine pit. The desk has extraordinary mechanical features. The Departure (with falcons), The Chase (Stag Hunt), The Kill (a Boar Hunt)—to the left Christ is breaking the bread but not dividing it. A marble medallion with the unattached head of the last tsar, Nicholas II. More icons with silver rizas. Niello is a mixture of silver and sulphur which when fired on silver apes black. Soft necks juiced for a stocking. . . the blood, seminal fluid of the soul, pea-sized with the tiny lint of day. . . O impressed in my

lobe. . . sooner shot plump. . . brain cancer. . . he would even swallow or eat worms out of the drainage. . . How beautiful the colors look on the soft paste. Palsy-poppers. . . squeeze me, please me. . . the sculptured trash, fee-figh balloon, corpse under glass. . . I mean a bundle of dirt would taste fresher and more appealing. . . kiss my ass—friends trying to move in her legs. . . my restless for these culture-bare arrays of support hose and hair net. . . apprehension! . . . flick the door knob off with his head. . . dolce far niente and *worse*. . . why me, blam. . . o lordie lordie be my valentine, puncture one and dislodge the rest. . . slat-brained rubbish, cock my fist, fist my clock. . . for dessert we shall have the abbot. . . me my, hawks? . . . a square knot with the extra half hitch, strangler's knot. . . shafts upon me, most don't—o hygiene, get it on. . . the monogram egg, little bumps out of the elbow. . . com, com never stops. . . the two heart-shaped boxes. . . and form discolorings. . . Beyond the doors and concealed when they are open are various diplomas of honorary degrees and orders that have been conferred on me. 'Il roost me out, the body united. . . the apes have forgotten. . . thrives on knives, fish in a shooting barrel. . . "Virgin with Three Hands"—the forest of doodles. . . the famous pink egg of 19??, the primacy is the skewed world order, the intervening corpse,

idiot spoonings. . . the skewering spit, all kinds of traps. . . leg on it, baby. . . can explode the stairs. . . a version of the ticket—you have to import the suction. . . what is "actively" about hallucinating, huh? . . . climb the fat, S3 4th Brigade PFC Andrews, Sir! . . . ribald plumage, red from juice. . . twilight zone. . . shake those snakes. . . metal visors, my brain pan hardly legible. . . the authentic prancing Hun. . . lips at tongue tip. . . less is more unless it's my scalp, they're going to crack my spine. . . another yellow ant invasion. . . huzzah. . . an array of spears all in a breath. . . butcher the pinheads, well, now, suh. . . a feather boa slows it down. . . our hopeless souls and yet you may take as hypothetical and the black keys preeminent. . . she's off, water the wounds, boys. . . delights, unpremeditated—in this way I avoid the State budget decap recap. . . and the blue color that followed, the As and Bs, small children in aisles like fetuses. . . spreading forefinger substance. . . tickets to the badlands, the forest of no cavities. . . about a teenager whose parents can't face the facts of her dental illness. . . why we, and how. . . peeked, iron foam. . . nub, "come again," surface gnome. . . a clear it. . . black slip slipped out of like a hat box. . . the pole, that I could make out at least was held by big hammocks, one with a person nestled and I was long to mix drinks but others more watched dance sweetly something just simply a bird telegrams in gunny sacks, hood-winks. . . spongy helmet, misshapen. . . gas. . . jiggled. . .

Alexis	1629	1676
Peter the Great	1682	1725
Catherine I	1725	1727
Peter II	1727	1730
Anna Ivanovna	1730	1740
Ivan IV	1740	1741
Elizabeth I	1741	1761
Peter III	1761	1762
Catherine the Great	1761	1796
Paul I	1796	1801
Alexander I	1801	1825
Nicholas I	1825	1855
Alexander II	1855	1881
Alexander III	1881	1894
Nicholas II	1894	1917
Take, eat, this is my body.		

Diane Ward

4 poems from Concept Lyrics

Limit

at the end of delight, one
who or that which revolves

more than chests have
to heave ". . . where gold,

dirt, and blood flow
together"! : margins

the family, not personal
fallibility leads

to instrumentality
in self-restraint

the scale of dignity
has no tears, and yet

I have no elevated
language for the moving

staircase, its components
denying *to begin* and *to end*

relentless and no language
for my body that jerks short

every floor submits ardently
physicality is me

Mind

violence came to speak
in behalf of non-

leaving weekdays to wait
a gray matter, mistrust

submission in intervals

can't be guaranteed
I wouldn't bow to the main
section made of memory
in a half-heart notified
immediately by notices
time now to take charge of our bodies
and the mind's intention to separate
the marbles this requires
the no-service to branches or extremities
we have an aversion at all times
to the rarest urge to land hold
my own hand is held by none other
this not a precise schedule
you recall being attractive
conscious of each one's particular need
the manner in which submission occurs,
troops recalled, the brain aloof

Order

the imperative being offered
states: all reality is *process*
I was unable to identify your stripe
to call for the body's voice restored
when it seemed my interest in you was
in inverse proportion to your interest in me
when we groped for the quality that fingered
our progression's enemy, it was we
we now enter, in addition to other remedies,
and remove ourselves, our persons or property
we have no right to security, no desire
to reap where we haven't sown
we no longer need domination, ourselves over
ourselves, as an alien power, as we

we comply now with our own demand at our own
cost, ourselves requested to take place

we allow the following: as us enjoining ourselves
to lay together, joining life first, beginning silence

there's no instruction to command no moment
patterns may break in the sensuous exercise of routine

we agree to a grouping excluding no borders
and leave status folded away

we agree to be, not to be distinguished from

Qualify

a phone call's gaze is bodyless
and "no one's meaner than you"

or, who says the soft hello is
the first shape to strike the visitor

modified by two ones gone together
into the narrative's void

a critique of posture, one
body's discreet diversion

you were so and so alone
iridescent narrow skin

the ease of ineligible emotion
tampered into burden and gravity again

to mitigate the reproach drawn on
the heels of each wish's voice

if I'm undefined by preconception
then I'm no longer here

but circumscribed to time-specific
humanity, my frustrated orality

or, it's no failure, reduced to
speechlessness, you won't diminish

the other roads to follow have tracks,
and mine, fly over your shoulder and behind

Marjorie Perloff

On Steve McCaffery

Steve McCaffery:

North of Intention. Critical Essays: 1973-85

(New York: Roof Books, 1986)

Panopticon

(Toronto: blewointment press, 1984)

"PANOPTICON" WAS THE NAME GIVEN by Jeremy Bentham in 1791 to a proposed form of prison "of circular shape having cells built round and fully exposed toward a central 'well', whence the warders could at all times observe the prisoners" (*OED*). "In a Panopticon prison," wrote Bentham, "there ought not any where be a single foot square, on which man or boy shall be able to plant himself . . . under any assurance of not being observed." Further: the inmate is not only visible to the supervisor, he is *only* visible to the supervisor, cut off as he is by the prison design from any contact with those in adjoining cells. This frightening image—and real prisons, for example the Penitentiary at Millbank, London, were originally constructed according to Bentham's plan—furnished Michel Foucault with one of his central paradigms for the operation of power in post-Enlightenment society. "The Panopticon," observed Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), is "a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men. . . . It is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form. . . . It is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use."¹

Powerful as is this paradigm of "enlightened" surveillance, its applicability to our postmodern media age may be questionable. The "ideology of power," Jean Baudrillard suggests in *Simulations* (1983), has itself been replaced by the "scenario of power," there being no "reality" *behind* the *simulacra* that confront us. "The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory."² In the case, for instance, of a "TV-verité" spectacle like the much-publicized saga of the Loud family of California, watched by 20 million Americans in 1971, "the eye of TV is no longer the source of an absolute gaze, and the ideal of control is no longer that of transparency. The latter still presupposes an objective space (that of the Renaissance) and the omnipotence of a despotic gaze,"

whereas the TV model abolishes any imperative to submit to that gaze or model since, as Baudrillard puts it, “ ‘YOU are the model! . . . the event is you” (53). Thus, “No more violence or surveillance: only ‘information’,” which is to say, “The End of the Panopticon” (49).

It is this “generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (2), that provides the context for the astonishing verbal works—sound poems, fictions, manifestos, essays—of the Canadian writer Steve McCaffery. McCaffery’s own *Panopticon* turns the Benthamite model inside out: the “place where everything is visible” (*OED*) becomes, on the contrary, the place where nothing is. The very layout of this unpaginated book, with its paste-up cancels and overprints, its mixed type fonts, horizontal black and white bands of “simultaneous” verbal material, its partial and equivocal replicas of Vesalius’s anatomical drawings and its titles that do little to shed light on the material they introduce, suggests that the time of central “wells,” from which all “individuals” are to be “observed,” has long since passed.

The first long prose section of *Panopticon* opens with the sentence, “The focus moves to a woman writing.” But we soon come to see that there is no focus. Is this middle-aged “woman writing” the same as the woman of the frontispiece who “EMERGES FROM HER BATH TOWELS HERSELF DRY AND COMMENCES DRESSING”? Is she the “woman reading” who is next introduced? As McCaffery puts it, in the account of the film script, which this first narrative purports to represent, “The reception is weak and the conversation frequently fades. There is a pause in the reading. Some words get lost.”

In a 1976 essay called “The Death of the Subject” (heavily revised and reprinted in *North of Intention* under the title “Diminished Reference and the Model Reader”), McCaffery refers to the poet’s task as that of “demystify[ing] the referential fallacy of language,” and he adds, “Reference, I take it, is that kind of blindness a window makes of the pane it is.”³ Blindness, in the sense that a window pane, being transparent, is not “seen” at all by the viewer who looks through it at the “reality” on the other side. It is this view of language as mere transom that McCaffery, like the Language poets of the U.S. with whom he has been closely associated, wants to explode. The aim is “To let the words receive your sight. . . . To let

the direct, empirical experience of a grapheme replace what the signifier in a word will always try to discharge: its signified and referent.”

Which is by no means to argue that signification doesn’t matter. The phrase “referential fallacy” has been so widely misunderstood by detractors of the Language movement that in the revised version of “The Death of the Subject” McCaffery has avoided it altogether, the point being that, however inevitably

“reference enters the flow of language to become immanent within the very thing it structures” (NI 17), it is possible to produce a discourse that does not merely “reproduce a world according to the *logic* of the referent”—the window theory—but that foregrounds the materiality of the signifier, thus preventing the word from becoming primarily a “textual commodity to be ideally consumed by a ‘comprehending’ reader” (NI 21). The writing, that is to say, “is less the exclusive code of the author, theologically transmitted *down* to a reader recipient than a productive field which a reader can enter to mobilize significations” (NI 14). A useful analogy for this “shift from sign consumption to sign production” is the biotopological form known as the Klein worm, “a form which differs from conventional geometric forms in its characteristic absence of both inner and outer surfaces” (NI 20). Like the Klein worm, the new literary text “is without ‘walls’ with milieu and constellation replacing syntax.” Such a text “demands a reading ‘on’ rather than a reading ‘through’ ” (NI 21).

What this means, in the case of McCaffery’s own *Panopticon*, is that the familiar narrative elements of pop fiction or film—a woman towelling herself dry in front of a mirror, a woman reaching for a silver (or gold) object, the image of a typewriter carriage with a note in it, the appearance of a man with a gun who reads the note—are subjected to a kind of metaphoric “typeover,” to use the term found on the word-processor keyboard. The narrative bits, that is to say, remain intact, the text returning to them at specific points, but “complication” is introduced, not at the level of plot but at the level of language event:

Again and again. And so on. And so forth. And back again. And once more. And one more time. Again and again and through and through. Over and over again and again. Moments anticipatory of. Then cancelled. And then again. And again and again. And over and over. . . . And even more. And yet again. And still further. And further to that. And that. And more than that. And even more and nonetheless. . . .

Modulating such temporal and spatial markers, McCaffery gradually turns his “Klein worm” into what might more accurately be called a (Gertrude) Stein worm, for example:

Supposing that. Then again. Supposing that. But then again. Then a why. Then a meanwhile. Then a during. Supposing that. Then a there. Supposing that. And as well. Supposing that. Then as well. Supposing that. And as well. Supposing that. Then as well. Supposing that. Then again and then and why and where they go and why truth and why woman. Supposing that.

And this prose unit ends with two pages of “and on and on and on,” the two words forming a kind of concrete poem made of successive columns.

“A TEXTUAL SYSTEM,” as McCaffery puts it in the section called “Summer Alibi,” “UNDERLIES EVERY TEXTUAL EVENT THAT CONSTITUTES ‘THIS STORY.’” In “Summer Alibi,” a first-person narrator recounts his stay in a psychiatric hospital, whose mindless regimentation is, so to speak, reinscribed in the series of inserted sentence fragments (printed in caps) that refer to the comparable regimentation syntax imposes upon language: “THE MEANING OF THE MARK RESIDES IN LANGUAGE AS AN INSTITUTION.” But, neither at the level of story nor within the capitalized word blocks, is such institutionalization allowed full sway: at every turn, *Panopticon* shifts registers, alternates viewing “channels,” and disrupts whatever linear mechanisms we might expect.

The high point, at least for me, comes in the section near the end which splices two “plots,” the first, again in caps, written in the style of what we might call, to paraphrase an Ashbery title, the Deconstruction Manual, the second a harlequin romance-cum-morality-play plot in which all the proper names refer to ethical or philosophical abstractions:

THE TEXTUAL INTENTION PRESUPPOSES READERS WHO KNOW THE
 It was a very hot day and her name was Ambiguity. She
 LANGUAGE CONSPIRACY IN OPERATION. THE MARK IS NOT IN-
 never did know anyone else. When she got on the boat to go
 ITSELF BUT IN-RELATION-TO-OTHER MARKS. THE MARK SEEKS
 to Clarity her elder brother stayed at home. This is his
 THE SEEKER OF THE SYSTEM BEHIND THE EVENTS. THE MARK
 story. Sitting in a darkroom in Potential with the bottle
 INSCRIBES THE I WHICH IS THE HER IN THE IT WHICH MEANING
 always open by his bed side. When I get older i’m going to
 MOVES THROUGH. A TEXTUAL SYSTEM UNDERLIES EVERY TEXTUAL
 write and what i’m going to write is the story of my sister.
 EVENT THAT CONSTITUTES “THIS STORY.” HOWEVER THE TEXTUAL
 Everyone coughed. The day was hot. As she moved towards
 HERMENEUSIS OF “THIS STORY” DOES NOT NECESSARILY COMPRISE A
 the river the sheets fell from her hands. Someone picked
 TOTAL TEXTUAL READING. THE TELEOLOGY OF “THIS PHRASE BEFORE
 them up. After she thanked him she decided that was the
 YOU” DOES NOT SIGNIFY PER SE BUT RATHER MOVES TOWARD A
 time to change her name. After she changed her name she

and so on. Most readers, I suspect, will read the two print bands separately rather than following the text consecutively from line to line. But interestingly “theory” (the A band) and “praxis” (B) don’t quite travel on parallel tracks: five

pages into the section, the former begins to borrow plot elements and linguistic analogues from the latter:

she had six months at the most to live. They talked a
 ONE SHOW THE SKELETAL FORM OF A YOUNG WOMAN. THE WOMAN
 lot about sincerity. She really liked his shoes. Every
 PREVIOUS TO THIS HAD RETIRED TO HER STUDY AFTER A BRIEF
 christmas she bought him new ones. He always got her
 VISIT TO THE BATHROOM WHERE SHE REPLACED A CAKE OF PALE
 chocolates. Sometimes she felt hurt. It grew to be a
 AND MENTHOL FLAVOURED SOAP UPON THE BATH EDGE. THE FIGURE

Here indeed is “THE LANGUAGE CONSPIRACY IN OPERATION,” the text implying that the pure banality of the dislocated “story,” with its muffled and illogical references to love, sex, family trauma, alcoholism, and death, exerts so strong a pull on conceptual statement that the latter becomes a parasite of the former. But then again the “theory” line also exerts a counter-pull on the original story, the A and B threads finally coming together in the reference to “A SEQUENCE OF WORDS TO FORM AS MISSIVE LOOPS AND SPOOLS WITH A CURIOUS ANALOGY TO A WIRED CIRCUIT OR A GATHERING OF PUBIC HAIR.”

By this time, the reader has been made aware that in McCaffery’s anti-Panopticon, the traditional distance between subject and object has undergone a curious implosion. Where, that is to say, do we locate the central gaze of surveillance, the authorial voice? Is it the narrator of the horizontal gray band of the final section, that relates such items as “HER BODY REMAINED MOTIONLESS AND A COLD LUMP CAME INTO HIS THROAT”? Or is it the voice of the caption underneath that band that reads, “The word. The word read. The writing of the word read. The quotation of the writing of the word write. The removal of the word word”? In this “multi-panel language environment,”⁴ the reader may choose whether to foreground the “readerly” or the “writerly,” the discourse of the signified or that of the signifier. “WHEREVER A BOOK CLOSES,” as McCaffery puts it, “A WRITING BEGINS.”

North of Intention takes up the same questions from a more overtly discursive perspective. Like Charles Bernstein’s *Content’s Dream*, McCaffery’s book is not adequately described as a collection of critical essays, including, as it does, lineated texts like “(Immanent) (Critique)” and “Lyric’s Larynx,” collage writings (“Anti-Phonics: Fred Wah’s *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.*”), mock-catalogue (“Blood. Rust. Capital. Bloodstream.”), and interview (“Nothing is Forgotten but the Talk of How to Talk”). Again like *Content’s Dream*, *North of Intention* must be understood as

a set of *working papers*, that is to say, as an exploratory text in which the poet tries to solve the problems that haunt his own practice.

The notion of working paper is closely related to the question of style. Like many of the poets loosely associated with the Language movement (here Susan Howe is the great exception), McCaffery writes a critical prose that seems, on a first reading, irritatingly jargon-ridden—indeed, downright ugly:

The cipheral text involves the replacement of a traditionally “readerly” function . . . by a first order experience of graphemes, their material tension and relationships and their *sign potentiality* as substance, hypo-verbal units simultaneously pushing towards, yet resisting, contextual significations. The cipher thus offers a strategic method for motivating non-commodital productivities that cast both writer and reader into an identical work process. (NI 19-20).

A “first order experience of graphemes,” “hypo-verbal units,” “non-commodital productivities”—is this way of putting things, one wonders, the way to reform the debased and cliché-ridden language of the dominant culture? Or is, as the vociferous detractors of the Language movement would have it, one jargon merely being replaced by another?

These are not easy questions to answer but I think contextualization may help. The “ugliness,” the intentional ungainliness of much of the prose written by McCaffery, as by Charles Bernstein or Bruce Andrews or Lynne Dreyer or Rae Armantrout, must be understood as a reaction against two currents. The first is the “genteel,” gentlemanly (or ladylike), graciously tactful and elegant style of what is still called “the man of letters,” as that style—British Oxbridge in origin—has come down to us in, say, the pages of the *Sewanee Review* or in Hilton Kramer’s *New Criterion*. Laymen and women, which is to say predominantly well-educated Ivy League men and women who are not “narrow specialists” in English literature or Philosophy, can read Edmund Wilson or Randall Jarrell or Mary McCarthy or, more recently, Joseph Epstein or Annie Dillard with pleasure and relative ease. At the same time, or so it seems to a writer like McCaffery, to privilege such prose is equivalent to paying homage to a world in which “style” remains largely a function of class.

The second and less overt object of attack is the casual speech-based, notebook or diary-style poetics of the Beats and New York poets: “First thought, best thought” (Allen Ginsberg), or “I don’t even like rhythm, assonance, all that stuff” (Frank O’Hara). The casual approach to poetry (“Nobody,” remarks a tongue-in-cheek O’Hara in *Personism*, “should experience anything they don’t need to, if they don’t need poetry bully for them. I like the movies too”) of the upbeat “hot” sixties is oddly out of step with the ethos of our own cool and analytic fin-de-siècle. The renewed Marxist emphasis on poetry as material production, circulation, and

distribution, implies that the text should exhibit signs of the *work* that produced it, a work that has less to do with individual intention than with the general economy within which it functions. "If they don't like poetry bully for them. I like the movies too" is thus replaced by questions like, "What is 'poetry' that 'they' should or should not like it?" What conditions "liking"? Who are "they"? Why do "they" prefer "movies," or, for that matter, TV? And what do all these sign systems have in common?

I don't, however, mean to imply that McCaffery's essays (or Bernstein's or Ron Silliman's) are dry, intellectual, philosophical or political tracts. On the contrary: despite the proliferation of Marxist and post-Structuralist buzz words, the constant references to French theory (Derrida, Barthes, Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari, Kristeva, Baudrillard) and to the Frankfurt School (Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer, Habermas), *North of Intention* comes across primarily—and paradoxically—as a work of the imagination. Indeed, what McCaffery has in common with such precursors as O'Hara or Ginsberg, Creeley or Rothenberg, is best defined as *passion*—a rhetorical and verbal energy that won't let its subject go, a determination

to use every available resource—pun, metaphor, epigraph, pictogram, aphorism, and especially example—to keep the reader on the edge of his or her seat.

Take, for example, "*The Martyrology as Paragram*," McCaffery's reading of his fellow-poet, b. p. nichol's ongoing long poem by that name. The "normal" way for McCaffery to proceed would be to relate Nichol's work to that of other avant-garde poets, to the Olson tradition, and so on. But McCaffery does no such thing: he begins with three epigraphs from "classical" writers: Dryden, Addison, and Novalis. The Dryden epigraph comes from *Mac Flecknoe*:

Chuse for thy command
Some peaceful province in Acrostic land
There may'st thou *Wings* display, and *Altars* raise,
And torture one poor word a thousand ways. (NI 58)

For Dryden, banishment to Acrostic land is, of course, the deserved fate of dunces like Shadwell, to whom the words above are addressed by the "high priest" of bogus poets, Flecknoe. But McCaffery inverts Dryden's mock heroic, artfully making the belittled "torture [of] one poor word a thousand ways" the linchpin of his analysis. "We will," he begins matter-of-factly, "focus on the ludic features of *The Martyrology*, those varieties of wordplay (pun, homophony, palindrome, anagram, paragram, charade) which relate writing to the limits of intentionality and the Subject's own relation to meaning" (58). Note that these "ludic features" are precisely those Dryden so blithely relegated to the likes of Shadwell. And indeed, in the next paragraph, McCaffery proposes a "rather perverse genealogy" for

Nichol's poem, "a genealogy to carry us not through *The Martyrology's* 'natural and obvious' antecedents (Olson, Zukofsky, the Utaniki or Japanese poetic journal and Gertrude Stein) but through the Plato of the *Cratylus*, Peter Ramus, Edmund Spenser, the German Romanticism and *witz* theoreticians of the Jena School (the Schlegels, Novalis, J. P. Richter), Freud, Lacan and M. M. Bakhtin" (59)

Having set this pseudo-scholastic scene, McCaffery pulls out all stops, conducting his tour through "The Scene of Witz" (the German Romantic version of *wit*), "The Paragram" ("A text is paragrammatic . . . in the sense that its organization of words . . . grammar, and syntax is challenged by the infinite possibilities provided by letters or phonemes combining to form networks of signification not accessible through conventional reading habits"), "The Unconscious As A Lettered Production," "Cratylean Linguistics Through Ramus," and "Michael Bakhtin: The Dialogic Utterance." Along the way, Nichol's poetry is presented and re-presented as a kind of encyclopedia of *witz*, paragram, charade, etymology, and heteroglossia. Here, for example, is McCaffery's reading of the following Nichol charade:

vision
 riddle we are all well rid of
 the dull pass of wisdom
 w is d
 o ma
 i'n h and
 the me's restated
 at the pen's tip's ink
 at the tongue's noise
 w in d

In line 2 "riddle" announces its own homophonic split: "rid" "dull" which, thus motivated as a duality, generate a phrasing around themselves ("we are well rid of / the dull pass of wisdom"). The homophonic play results in "wisdom" which is then submitted to a charade: "wisdom / w is d / o ma". At the same time meanings coagulate through a sort of back-formation or reverse charade. In line 7, for instance, "the me's restated" suggests a centripetal motivation that would draw the letters into a space that would generate "themes restated". . . . the paragrammatic function in *The Martyrology* is clearly that of remotivation of the single letter as an agent of semantic distribution. (65-66)

Here McCaffery's analysis is reminiscent of Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh's famous manifesto, *Bukva kak takovya* (*The Letter as Such*) of 1913. And the link is not just coincidental. Just as Khlebnikov used *zaum* (transrational or "beyondsense" language) to bypass the "ideological Realism" (NI 39) of the late nineteenth

century, so McCaffery's focus on the letter (or phoneme) *itself*, far from being motivated by a narrow formalism, has a political thrust. "The paragram," he writes, "as the 'other' region of sign economy, forms part of language's *unconscious* dimension where meanings exist as lettered proliferations and escape the closure of an aggregate intention" (66).

It is this "eruption through fissures," this "casting off of compression," this "abrupt emergence of plurality through ruptures in the transmissions of the poem's semantic order" (69), that is, for McCaffery, the key to poetic innovation in our time. In the interview with Andrew Payne ("Nothing is Forgotten but the Talk of How to Talk"), McCaffery argues that it is naively Romantic to think of *sound poetry* as the Dadaesque "privileging of the pre-linguistic, child-sound, the Rousseauist dream of immediate-intuitive communication, all of which tended to a reinscription of a supposed pre-symbolic order in a present, self-authenticating instant" (111-12). On the contrary, he suggests, sound poetry must be understood "through the economic notion of outlay," which is to say "particular lines of obliteration in an economy in which 'profit' necessarily entails 'loss'." Sound devices, anagrams, paragrams—these, far from constituting a textual recuperation and self-presence, work toward the "utter dismantling of the notion of TRUTH as anything exterior to the signifying practice" (125). The pronoun, for example, can be treated as "a locus for a simultaneous breakdown and recomposition (without prediction) of the Subject" (112). Or again, the pun can be—and here McCaffery paraphrases Marshall McLuhan—"the most disarming fusion of language and music, the chordal resonance of a contradiction, a linguistic push beyond choice and the logic of exclusion towards the polyphony of indecision" (87).

The polyphony of indecision—again and again, McCaffery stresses the need of freeing poetic language from the cooption by what he calls the "media model" (42), the model of "linguistic transparency" and grammatical rule:

Grammar is a repressive mechanism designed to regulate the free flow of language. Imposing its constraints upon non-gravitational circulation, it realizes a centred (and centralized) meaning through a specific mode of temporalization. Grammatically realized meaning is a postponed reward attained by arrival at the end of a horizontal, linearized sequence of words. Grammar precludes the possibility of meaning being an active, local agent functioning within a polymorphous, polysemous space of parts and sub-particles; it commands hierarchy, subordination, and postponement. (97-98).

This is the core of McCaffery's poetics and it needs, I think, to be taken very seriously at a time when the Anglo-American poetry establishment seems once again to be working on the philistine assumption (an assumption one would think I. A. Richards and the New Criticism had dispelled half a century ago) that

"subject matter" is something evidently separable from "formal" concerns. In a recent essay called "The Confinement of Free Verse" (*New Criterion*, 5 [May 1987]), for example, the poet Brad Leithauser writes:

Whether the formal poet chooses to uphold the prosodic contract, or to break it, or initially to conceal its terms, his or her poem addresses the reader on two levels. The underlying reassurances and occasional trickeries that the poem's prosody engineers are related to, but ultimately detachable from, the poem's content. Prosody is a game played with the reader's legitimate expectations, and the more firmly these are established, the more fruitfully can the game's designer meet or upset them. (p. 6)

The implication of Leithauser's statement is that the poet first chooses *what to say* and only then determines what form might be the appropriate vehicle. The container and the thing contained—bifurcation theories, it seems, are once again with us, partly, no doubt, in keeping with the nostalgia for a lost "gentility" (oh, for the good old days of sonnets and blank verse!) that characterizes the late eighties, but also perhaps because the new wave of "protest poetry," whether written by women or blacks or Chicanos or Asian-Americans, is judged, in the middlebrow press and in special-interest journals, by its message rather than its medium. X's poem "about" rape, Y's "about" Nicaragua—to thus characterize poems trivializes the whole poetic process.

Indeed, this is one of the lessons *North of Intention* teaches us. Language, as McCaffery argues so passionately, is itself always already politically and ideologically motivated. The positioning of the subject as panoptic and controlling "I," for example, is itself a political statement that calls into question whatever professedly "radical" content is expressed in that "I's monologue. Grammar, after all, is not just some sort of outer shell, protecting and embellishing an inner core of "meaning"; on the contrary, as McCaffery puts it, "it commands hierarchy, subordination, and postponement"—the delayed gratification incumbent upon the completion of meaning.

In articulating his "new poetics," McCaffery draws not only on Baudrillard's theory of the *simulacrum* and the Lacanian view of the unconscious as itself a structured language, but, closer to home, on the work of John Cage and especially on the writings of his fellow Canadian, Marshall McLuhan. Both, McCaffery suggests, are often misrepresented as Optimists, as technocrats suspiciously enthusiastic about our electronic age. But, as McLuhan once put it:

The new environment shaped by electronic technology is a cannibalistic one that eats people. To survive one must study the habits of cannibals. (NI 87)

Precisely. It is McCaffery's great merit that he takes the issues of mediaspeak head on, that he has studied "the habits of the cannibals" and made "Writing

Degree Xerox" his own. His is a prolegomena for the dispersal of the Panopticon's inmates, the release of the "imprisoned" words and letters from their cells. I conclude with a brief example of such release: here is the opening of the poetic charade called "(Immanent) (Critique)," written in 1983:

It should even then have still appeared
 where this is. Not by means of an a-
 ppropriation but as a sample question
 -ing which space this was. if one choo-
 se to eliminate suspicion or suspen-
 sion (not by a thread but in aliquid) a
 certain break implicit in the sign. Th-
 en what marks are these?

What marks are these? The investigation has just begun.

Footnotes

1. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1979), 205.

2. *Simulations*. Trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beichtman (New York: Semiotext(e), Inc., 1983), p. 2.

3. "The Death of the Subject: The Implications of Counter-Communication in Recent Language-Centered Writing," *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* (June 1980): Supplement Number One: Symposium on "The Politics of the Referent." Unpaginated. For the revised version, see *North of Intention*, pp. 13-29; in a footnote on p. 13, McCaffery explains the process of revision.

North of Intention is subsequently cited in the text as NI.

4. See McCaffery, "Carnival," *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, February 1978, unpaginated.

Michael Blitz

On Jed Rasula

Tabula Rasula
and Revised Standard Edition
being a book of audible
visual matters com-
posed by Jed Rasula
with certain prospects over the
grounds of *The Dictionary Kingdom*
including transcripts of broadcasts
from *The Dictionary Pavilion*
in AM, FM & PM
also featuring a
Geognostic Side-View of Wreading
& a Diagram of a
Thinking Cap

(Barrytown, New York: Station Hill Press, 1986)

WITTGENSTEIN SAID, "The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose." *Tabula Rasula* assembles a series of "broadcasts" which serve to re-mind us of our spatial orientation in the tableau of thought. When Wittgenstein claims that we do not "command a clear view of the use of our words," he is referring to our grammar's inability to perceive the totality of our language field. But Rasula's *Tabula* proposes a vision of mind in the perspicuous act of making knowledge from "audible visual matters" which oscillate within the measures of an immeasurable language. Reading through *Tabula* I found myself accumulating piles of books *into* which I felt I had been sent to look for the echoes of texts at once familiar and, as yet, unwritten. In particular, the dictionary began to reveal, as Hugh Kenner has observed of the *OED*, its epic poesis. Rasula has drawn not only from definition and connotation to produce a fascinating set of linguistic interference patterns, he has constructed a semiotic geometry which describes a shapeless universe. Each page *literally* pulses with distortions of a language which amounts to an index-tantrum in which meaning occurs as much in a burst of laughter as it does in the prevailing Logos. The often startling appearances in *Tabula* arrange themselves as typographic, lexigraphic and pictographic *beats* whose overall effect is, as the poem "Exasperating the Text"

suggests, "pages whose waves amount to matter." As the work slides in and out of graph and glyph, of visibility and a strangely literal invisibility, we are drawn (in at least four senses of the term) into a flow of the kind of information Dretske must have meant when he said, "In the beginning there was information. The word came later." The gauntlet of *Tabula Rasula* is an unembarrassed performance of thinking, a thinking which begins to acquire a dense logic as the work eludes too cursory a gloss. We must pronounce the work ourselves, to use our speech to say what even the intricate line drawings and diagrams depict. In his "Note on Pronunciation," Rasula tells us:

Finally, of course, it's your own mouth you'll want to hold responsible for these words. (2)

Rasula has assembled a typographically complex array of what he calls "Edible pods." The mouth, as both an interior and exterior space, commits us to an act of "wreading." *Tabula Rasula*, "a book of audible visual matters," comes to us from outside us, comes into us from inside our own mouths, and emerges from us as a new interior from which we are excluded. Our invitation, then, is—as one poem title suggests—to enter by "Walking Backwards into the Inscription":

Walking Backwards into the Inscription

& the Suction Inscribed Therein

("I rose & went among the apparitions . . .")

it is separable from you

because you can pass out of it

it is invented on language an appetite

a vacuum the other world the constancy

Rasula's text invokes the gravity of laughter—a tensile logic—by which we are able to debride the worn flesh from bodies whose movements have become mere gestures in an arcane language. To Julia Kristeva's observation that "the practice of the text is a kind of laughter

whose only explosions are those of language," *Tabula Rasula* permits us to add that the text "exasperates" knowledge in its *scoring* of an orchestrated laughter-as-a-means of knowing. *Tabula*'s investment in the domain of knowledge is of a mind which undergoes the ardor of poiesis—or "(P)Oasis":

dissolution of generic category

concepted in the play of terms

("lengths") in the Vocabulariat

who has peeled back the language

from the passive dimension of a speaker

the trackless blackened smudge

inducting hollows of the mind

submerging it in thought not a thing and a name
but a concept in an acoustical reservoir

Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela write, in *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, "... sequential transformations in a unity without change of identity constitute its ontogeny, that is, its individual history if it is an autopoietic unity." Rasula has invoked the possibility of mind as an autopoietic unity; *Tabula Rasula* is a fit of laughter in the face of the phallacious "causa sui": the autopoietic mind not only causes itself, it is able to recognize the effects as a transformed-yet-identical, *ongoing*, ecology ("The reader is always arriving at an ecological recognition"). The audible voice in *Tabula Rasula* bears witness to the dialectic of interiority/exteriority by acknowledging that "incomprehensibility/encompasses/all/else." Just as physicist David Bohm offers us a continuous universe in which living and non-living things are permutations of the same topological unity, Rasula casts us both in and as a "pluralitereality":

a man
at an anvil
pounding out in a comprehensive apparatus
the shape of the ground he stands on
whose life is itself the garment
of what he understands

Rasula's own "blackened smudges" are the language as it becomes even a typographically dense mass which seems to compel us to squint our way through its labyrinth . . . until we realize that it is the mass itself, perhaps the cancer in the text, which swells and contracts. There is the sense, then, that what knowledge lurks in such an aggregate body is a graph, as defined by one of Rasula's "wreadings" of "Graph": "a diagram that represents the variation of a variable in comparison with that of one or more other variables."

It is clear from a careful reading of *Tabula* that it contains none of the kind of concrete poetry which clamors for a visual grunt of transient satisfaction. Rasula's *Tabula* poses a most serious and difficult critique of knowledge which threatens to evade us under the gaze of a merely consumptive attention. In *Tabula Rasula*, the language to which we are the heirs becomes the matrix in which we find ourselves, literally growing ourselves, autopoietically, as in a culture. Ed Dorn, in *Hello La Jolla*, warns that in the present culture-medium, "they're going to grow you. / Not all of you though. For instance / They're not going to grow your head. / And they're not going to grow your body." But Rasula suggests that knowledge itself is the recombinant factor which re-sounds in the gene pool:

the Logos
does not speak

men and women with ears
invite the Logos
into their conditions
air conditions
filters, traps, fact & flow

These are not artifactual poems but a set of possibilities for knowing. Recall Wittgenstein's observation that

The results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and of bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language. These bumps make us see the value of discovery.

Perhaps following this phrenological conception of understanding, Rasula proposes a diagram of a "thinking cap," complete with its "paratactical buckle" and the "cubo-futurist-vorticist-expressionist-suprematist-constructivist-rayonist-pataphysical blow hole for the thought-pontoon." As the mind continually attempts to erase itself into the conveniences of everyday phatic occasions, Rasula reminds us that "the brain is a species of uphill traffic" the vehicles of which are typographic maps which get us from there to here, where we are.

A large freehand pen drawing filling the lower right of the page, captioned in hand lettering "Diagram of a Thinking Cap": a tall pointed cap or bulb form annotated with handwritten labels — "paratactical buckle," "lexicon," "silly-con," "Signifier Amplifier Stupefier," "graphic regulator of the tongue's volumes," "epi radius of the pluperfect," "phonopenitentiary zone," "ideometric nymphatic ear tissue," "cubo-futurist-vorticist-expressionist-suprematist-constructivist-rayonist-pataphysical blowhole for the thought pontoon," "expository orgone tan," and a row of small circles marked "buckle holes magnetizing the stringency of appetite."

George Hartley

On "In the American Tree"

In the American Tree

Ron Silliman, Editor

(Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 1986)

IN THE AMERICAN TREE: a metaphor (organic).

"you notice a curious warp in the sequence/ Of events suggesting a time loop/ . . . it simply spreads out before you, a field" (xiii-xiv).

A field composed, as opposed to the inherited line, stanza, over-all form: ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION, but as a verse that "might offer readers the same opacity, density, otherness, challenge and relevance persons find in the 'real' world" (xvi).

Olson 1950: What we have suffered from, is manuscript, press, the removal of verse from its producer and its reproducer, the voice, a removal by one, by two removes from its place of origin *and* its destination. VOICE = ONE REMOVE FROM THE ORIGIN, already. If I HATE SPEECH then I'm stuck with manuscript, that twice-removed hairy palm. Twice-removed from here *and* there; thus standing in an open field, nowhere. "But . . . the simple, seemingly obvious concept that words should derive from speech and refer to things, was inscribed within all of the assumptions behind normative writing" (xvi).

1971, then:

"the challenge posed by *This* was to open a broad territory of possibility where very different kinds of poets might explore and execute a wide range of projects. If nothing in the poem could be taken for granted, then anything might be possible" (xvi).

SUCH AS: the doghouse
 of the summer
 before
 the doghouse
 of the following
 summer
 don't
 give it a
 second
 thought like

where's
the dog (19)

What speech? What breath? More like a visual ecstasy, sort of I LOVE TYPE. Yet still in the American tree—perhaps a branch from Eigner:

there was nothing
buildings stand for years
thought back on
stars
flash the wind
down the rain
thunder cry arrives
one minute
dogs
bark

IN THE AMERICAN GRAIN: a precursor (organic?).

Williams on Stein: Let it be granted that whatever is new in literature the germ of it will be found somewhere in the writings of other times; only the modern emphasis gives work a present distinction. . . . The feeling is of words themselves, a curious immediate quality quite apart from their meaning, much as in music different notes are dropped, so to speak, into repeated chords one at a time, one after another—for themselves alone.

One at a time, serially, yet falling together through time, in the mind, as a chord. "Only fragments are accurate. Break it up into single words, charge them to combination. Thinking about time in the book, it is really the time of your life" (52).

For themselves, alone:

laurel ratio sharp or hard
instruments triple to or fro
granule in award
one to whom is made
nave
bean
shin
spectacle
as the near wheel (243)

Zukofsky 1970-1973: Spittle-spawn/ (not laurel) nameless we name/ it, and sorrows dissolve—human:/ behind terrace boat plant under/ back wall pear tree hugged,/ its twigs paired axile thorns/ crossways opposite leaves through quincunx.

And New York, Ashbery, 1965:

19

Life pursued down these cliffs.
the omened birds
intrusion; skated, at night
clear waves of weather
fur you bring genius
over hell's curiosity
the librarian shabbily books on
You cannot illusion; the dust.
abstract vermin the garden worn smiles.

If I rest for a moment near The Equestrian/ pausing for a liver sausage sandwich
in the Mayflower Shoppe,/ that angel seems to be leading the horse into
Bergdorf's/ and I am naked as a table cloth, my nerves humming; from east to west
in discrete city images, flashes of life like a Dublin day, a landscape of language:
"Heads in the cell flicker & go out. In that sandal I saw countless toes. Zoo sky of
caw. A transmitter, like radar, atop each tall building. Transbay transit. The word is
more & less. The history of the foot. The fogbank heavy on the beach like a slug"
(140-1).

Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face!

The apparition of these faces in a crowd;/ Petals on a wet, black bough "which in
a dry season might/ begin or might precede its/ beginning with a list/ of truths
self-evident: these/ clouds (these crowds) you/ now see are permanent/ and fixed"
(107).

But not all roots are recent. "When first I read Susan Howe's work, I had no idea
what she was trying to do. She was using the vocabulary of the 'Old World' (terms
from the classics, mythology, the Bible, Latin liturgy, and so on) and combining it
with experimental techniques such as the fragmentation of words and the isolation
of individual letters. With this mix, who would be her readers? I took her work to
heart with this puzzle in mind" (547).

TO HEART:

Shadows only shadows
mey my gaze Mediator
I lay down and conceived Love
(my dear Imaginary) Maze-believer
I remember you were called
sure-footed
and yet off the path (Where
are you) warmed and warming Body

turned and turning Soul (360)

Mimic presentation stained with mortality. Or "Poetry is like a swoon, with this difference:/ it brings you to your senses" (285). Emotion packed into absence, silence, space—this heart puzzle in mind.

The vocabulary of the 'Old World' again:

thru drees, load dickening, keith
all occliffed, plinther, intos thaggle, instance
ilm deodr, mudxeast, paeon ximv, 's
another handsome attack, gline leverage, bsidb,
tuned full simple (339)

Jackson Mac Low 1965: The poet creates a *situation* wherein he invites other persons & the world in general to be co-creators with him! He does not wish to be a dictator but a loyal co-initiator of action within the free society of equals which he hopes his work will help bring about.

So 1980: "12. Some connectives. An order as clarity. Clarity as transparency. Transparency as authority. Formal order, and civil order, & the taboo against transgression, and isn't this a taboo against the person?" (526)

So there's a need, a social need, to rid ourselves of taboo (i.e., connectives, clarity, transparency, authority, formal order). A poetics of participation, reader as construction worker rather than TV viewer. Fill in the blanks. "Surprised by his use of words, the moral presence swelled to veracity plunging the social salad into the contemporary fork. She looked deep into the merchandiser's past. 'Yes,' she said, 'but you enjoy suffering' " (160).

And Leaves fritter.

Teased edges.
It's vacillation that pleases.
Who answers for
the 'whole being?'
This is
only the firing (155)

"The writer is a mirror, the writing is a crack" (125).

"Words are the axis, rather than the work of art; Coolidge's disciplined, extensive writings extend art into language rather than narrow language to art" (485).

THE RESULT: "Having integrated the impact of the post-World-War-II protest movements both as critiques of authority and as arguments for rights and prizing an awkwardly marginal status in the corporate hegemony, these writers have developed strategies that test more markedly than they indoctrinate, resist rather than seduce or assure; apparent units within their works often function by apparently nonprogrammatic and yet highly intentional juxtapositions such that

principles of opposition and analysis are integrated and face off against circumstances including the reader, who is offered no code to break nor transparently methodical procedure to appreciate" (486).

IN THE AMERICAN TREE: a metaphor (organic) for the face in concrete (inorganic) we recognize as our own.

Linda Reinfeld

On Susan Howe

Articulation of Sound Forms in Time

(Windsor, Vermont: Awede, 1987)

WRITING BEST LOCATES HOME when it questions its own location. Susan Howe, in her most recent book, *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* (Awede, 1987), demonstrates with almost allegorical clarity the process by which poetry can emerge from marginal experience. Her burden is the "nimbus of extinction" haunting American history. Fracture and refusal, indeterminate frontiers: our literature has always had to question the question of belonging (when it fails to do that it falls short: whose land was ours before we were the land's?). Every single claim has been ambiguous. "Collisions or collusion with history" writes Howe: dislocation or mislocation. Lone self, lone language, both break at the borders, refuse the customary definition. Here "Perception crumbles under character / Present past of immanent future"—and whatever hope one may have entertained for a more articulate vision survives only in the exploration of a damaged past.

Hope's way wanders, contradicts itself, proceeds by indirection:

Shear against easternmost
eternal Ideal sequence
Out among haphazard children
sunny investigations of Permanence

The straight logic of the apparently "eternal" or "Ideal" leads to an abyss; the random question is innocent, more likely to enlighten, when the only "Permanence" in view is an ever-changing sea. And over against the "Far flung North Atlantic littorals" (read here literally the shifts and shorelines of Melville and Olson, the chancy expansive scene of a writing always open to possibility), Howe sets the eroded stones of literary authority, monuments to scenes conceived as fixed and finished—where, in the final lines of the poem, even water loses its generative force and serves as a cover-up agent:

Rubble couple on pedestal
Rubble couple Rhythm and Pedestal
Room of dim portraits here there
Wade waist deep maidsworn men
Crumbled masonry windswept hickory

Reminders of witches, New England decadence, sexual repression—the new world back in the western box. At the end of writing, then, a wasteland, and an elegy.

Howe is no newcomer to writing at the boundaries: turning as if at one remove, taking nothing for granted, she works consistently at the all-but-forgotten edges of our common ground. Her scholarly reading of Dickinson (*My Emily Dickinson*, North Atlantic Books, 1985) attempts to rescue a great poet from the damage of critical negligence and decontextualization, and her striking re-creation of the captivity narrative, as in "The Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson" (*Temblor* 2, 1985), suggests a new mode for feminist criticism. "Speeches at the Barriers" (*Defenestration of Prague*, Kulchur, 1983), a lyrical questioning of language and linguistic alienation at the origin of western culture, registers a protest against modern structuralist rigidity and laments the scientific fragmentation and deparmentalization of knowledge. *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* moves back along a more primitive frontier—from 17th century New England into the ancient mystery of time before speech—once again at water's edge.

Estrangement: this we have grown to expect, learning the simplest things last. But who speaks here? At the outset, what threat? what sibillant revelation?

from seaweed said nor reposess rest
scape esaid

Not quite Ishmael, certainly not the blustering Maximus, but a Joycean provocation (borderline silly), a bit of wet text to begin with, immediately followed by the matter-of-fact and by no means fictional "EXTRACT from a LETTER (dated June 8th, 1781)"—how boldly the very capitals send us back. Howe mines libraries. For this composition she cites the writing of a Stephen Williams as he reports having found "a copy of a paper left by the Rev. Hope Atherton, the first minister of Hatfield." (Already we have to read at three removes.) This Mr. Atherton

went out with the forces . . . against the Indians at the falls above Deerfield, in May, 1676. In the fight, upon their retreat, Mr. Atherton was unhorsed and separated from the company, wandered in the woods some days and then got into Hadley, which is on the east side of the Connecticut River. But the fight was on the west side. Mr. Atherton gave account that he offered to surrender himself to the enemy, but they would not receive him. Many people were not willing to give credit to this account, suggesting he was beside himself. This occasioned him to publish to his congregation and leave in writing the account I enclose to you."

Thus the stage is set for aspiration, part one: "Hope Atherton's Wanderings."

We can't help but be attracted to this fellow, no matter if he is quite nearly mad. The "little man with a black coat and without any hat" returns to Hatfield doubly crossed and blessed: his speech is part white, part wilderness—himself almost a

mode of transition. Even his sexual identity is put into question: Hope is most often a woman's name. In the play of this poem, then, both reader and

writer are drawn, with an errant Hope, into the tension between letter and memory, Minister and Indian—where slaughter and laughter derange the progression of discourse. The sixteen sections of the "wanderings"—each two to fifteen lines long and each centered on its own page—can be read as sixteen consecutive (in time) and prosodically various articulations (sound forms) in the manner of a miniature *Ulysses* (James Joyce is one writer from whom Susan Howe has learned much about method), each section a scene in a drama of loss and restitution which is at the same time both Christian and pagan, old world and new. Thus, Hope moves from an only slightly disturbed language of narration at the beginning of part one

Prest try to set after grandmother
revived by and laid down left ly
little distant each other and fro
Saw digression hobbling driftwood
forage two rotted beans & etc.
Redy to faint slaughter story so
Gone and signal through deep water
Mr. Atherton's story Hope Atherton

into a world of militant accents more and more rigid and threatening:

Rash catastrophe deaf evening
Bonds loosed catcht sedge environ
Extinct ordr set tableaux
hay and insolent army

and from here into a weirdly Irish-Indian music:

scow aback din
flicker skaeg ne
barge quagg peat
sieve catacomb
stint chisel sect

after which the text appears to comment on itself as if in a whispered aside:

Otherworld light into fable
Best plays are secret plays

—a brief moment of reflection preceding the mysterious descent and blue refrain:

Posit gaze level diminish lamp and asleep(selv)cannot see
MoheganToForceImmanenceShotStepSeeShowerFiftyTree
UpConcatenationLessonLittleAKantianEmpiricalMaoris

[. . .]

blue glare(essence)cow bed leg extinct draw scribe sideup
even blue(A)ash-tree fleece comfort(B)draw scribe upside

Finally, in the formal language of this dazed but grateful man of god, the end of wandering and renewed return (I cite the final section of part one in full):

Loving Friends and Kindred:—

When I look back

So short in charity and good works

We are a small remnant

of signal escapes wonderful in themselves

We march from our camp a little

and come home

Lost the beaten track and so

River section dark all this time

We must not worry

how few we are and fall from each other

More than language can express

Hope for the artist in America & etc.

This is my birthday

These are the old home trees

The preservation of the most ancient mystery hinges on kindness: "'Deep water' he *must* have crossed over"—but how? Howe attends the sounds, the Indian echoes. Hope comes home.

Part two, "Taking the Forest"—formally, 26 linked (not logically sequential) meditations arranged mostly in couplets with some single lines, again each meditation printed on its own page—takes back the first promise of regeneration: whatever is said is contradicted, everything named is stolen away. Naming is refraction. "INDIANS is wicked," Olson noted in his *Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn*: minds all made up in opposition betray the living wilderness. "Sharpshooters in history's apple-dark"—reasonable men—are all too likely to fall for a false music, romantic resolution. Territorial war, man against man, father putting the life of son at stake: a William Tell Overture. Order demands sacrifice. Susan Howe listens for another music, a crossing of Irish and Indian in "Cries open to the words inside them / Cries linked through the woods" and would restore to native Americans a genuine nativity:

Threadbare evergreen season

Mother and maiden

Singing into the draft

Keen woes centuries slacken

woe long wars endurance bear
In forest splinter companion
essential simplicity of Thought
wedged back playmate of Remote
Hares call on Pan
To rhyme with reason revels run

Language Poetry turns to lyric, and laughs.

If the Christmas play is as much an occasion for the reproduction of rabbits as it is a celebration of spiritual engendering, if the modes mix and implicate opposites, then ceremony itself is no longer a gesture of stability. Even this drama resolves nothing, determines nothing, ends nothing. What does survive, however, at these "Outskirts of the ordinary" is a sense of life at its most intense, with "Vision closing over vision" and poetry as history putting itself at risk.

The objections to Howe's work are generally predictable: too sentimental, too radical, too cold, too difficult. Too political, not political enough. Readers would do well to move past these initial (and, I think, mistaken) objections: such "Weather in history and heaven" is news. The crossing may appear impossible, the poetry rough in translation, but Howe's articulation of these American forms makes new room for hope in American writing.

Stephen Ratcliffe

Two Hejinian Talks

Writing/ One's Life

YOU WILL FORGIVE ME, I TRUST, for reading these notes, and bear with me as I read as best you can. As Elizabeth Hardwick said the other night at U.C. Berkeley, in her charming but otherwise undistinguished lecture on Gertrude Stein, to read what one has written is a little like someone on horseback speaking to someone on foot. So I hope you can keep up. And I would rather remember Stein, by way of apology for what I am about to do here, for what she wrote at the start of her essay "The Gradual Making of *The Making of Americans*":

I am going to read what I have written to read, because in a general way it is easier even if it is not better and in a general way it is better even if it is not easier to read what has been written than to say what has not been written. Any way that is one way to feel about it.

The poet Lyn Hejinian, about whose work I will talk today under a sign that reads "What's new in American poetry?" was born in San Francisco in 1941. She is the author of seven books, including *Writing Is An Aid To Memory* (1978), *My Life* (1980), and *The Guard* (1984), each of which I will be looking at in some detail. She is editor and publisher of Tuumba Press, which between 1978 and 1984 put out a series of fifty letterpress editions of poems by some 43 poets, most of them all but unknown outside of the experimental tradition they variously found themselves working in. She is also co-editor of *Poetics Journal*, whose six issues to date have focused on questions such as close reading, poetry and philosophy, women and language, non/narrative, and marginality: public and private language.

The first of the books I want to talk about, *My Life*, is divided into 37 unnumbered sections, each one containing 37 sentences. Hejinian wrote the book in 1978, her 37th year, as a kind of autobiography the title suggests, though not the one readers of that genre might expect. I [. . .] propose to talk generally about the sorts of things that go on in [sections 19, 20 and 21], and then in closer detail about one of these sections, number 21.

Each section in *My Life* begins with an epigraph which, we realize as we read the book though not for a while, reappears verbatim elsewhere in the text. "*Such displacements alter illusion, which is all-to-the-good,*" for instance, at the start of section 19, recurs in the body of both sections 20 and 21; similarly, the epigraph to section

20, "*The coffee drinkers answered ecstatically*," resurfaces again in the middle of section 21. So the epigraphs serve to tie the whole work together in several ways at once—as chapter "titles," as a sort of running commentary which in effect leaps out from memory—the reader's memory—and/or anticipates what's to come. In a sense the reiteration of known (but not necessarily noticed) quantities, i.e. sentences or parts of sentences which crop up unexpectedly along the way of our reading, presents in language that sort of seemingly random recurrence of events we encounter in everyday life, as when someone you hadn't thought of for two years suddenly calls on the phone, picking up the conversation as if from yesterday:

As for we who "love to be astonished," each new bit of knowledge is merely indicative of a wider ignorance.

—which starts out to duplicate a sentence which not long before had gone drastically in another, equally true, direction:

As for we who "love to be astonished," McDonalds is the world's largest purchaser of beef eyeballs.

Repetition, indeed, is all to the point in Hejinian's sense of autobiography. Writing one's life is a present act, contingent upon the particular circumstance of one's writing, which necessarily interposes itself upon whatever "view" of one's past the writer at a given moment can summon. Thus in *My Life* we find instances of straightforward autobiography—

When I was a child, the mailman, Tommy, let us walk his route with him until we reached the busy streets, and then he sent us home, dragging the dog.

If I was left unmarried after college, I would be single all my life and lonely in old age.

I wrote my name in every one of his books.

interspersed by statements of direct, present tense perception—

The small green shadows make the red jump out.

An airplane passes over the baseball game and one hears it in the air and over the air, amplified by the transistor radios belonging to the fans.

You must water the ivy that is creeping up to the bird bell.

The act of writing Hejinian's life includes, in other words, the words of "now" as much as of "then":

Now cars not cows on the brown hills, and a stasis of mobile homes have taken their names from what grew in the valleys of Santa Clara.

I'll just keep myself from picking up the telephone, in order to get some work done.

Within the fabric of the text of this life, then, the bits and pieces of past and present in lapidary imbrication, one upon the other in what order the words themselves would find, interweave. "Only fragments are accurate," we read,

followed by "Break it up into single words, charge them to combination." Which points up another thread

concurrent in *My Life* to the autobiography: namely, that set of proposals directed toward mapping an aesthetics of perception. For just as Hejinian questions the "accuracy" of writing the past as if the present didn't count—yesterday disembodied so to speak from today, history as if it could exist without someone to remember it—she feeds us *passim* an assortment of speculations focused upon both how a writing such as hers might be practiced and what its effects might be:

Such displacements alter illusion, which is all to the good.

Thinking about time in the book, it is really the time of your life.

What memory is not a "gripping" thought.

In order better to see the dynamics of *My Life* in action, let me ask you to follow with me in a reading of section 21, simply proposed as demonstration of how the work works, both itself and upon us.

The epigraph to this section,

*We are not
forgetting the
patience of the
mad, their love of
detail.*

acts as a kind of floating voice part, which strikes us from some as yet unidentified region outside the frame of present discourse, here as elsewhere a retelling of the text, one aim of whose patience and love of detail is not to forget (a practice of writing hardly mad, it would seem, even if they too be included).

The summer countryside with the round hills patchy and dry, reminding one of a yellow mongrel dog, was what one could call a dirty landscape, the hills colored by the dusty bare ground rather than by grass, and yet this is what seemed like real country to me.

Straightforward, conventional in its prose rhythms, at least, the reference sharply focused as the dog ("love of detail") perceived as dusty ground seems unqualified, direct as the arrow about to hit the target affixed in section 20 to the just baled hay. It is summer in a landscape one finds familiar whether or not one "knows" it in fact.

I had idealized the pioneer's life, sinking roots.

Familiar then as the idea of landscape those preceding us in time and space had crossed, recalling as well by echo the closing line of section 20: "Could the prairie be this sea—for love." The reader knows it—the landscape, that is—in the mind the words conjure, into the poet's life the life of those before her "sinking roots," arriving in that place

Known for its fleas.

—known at most now from books or from the movies.

One could touch the flesh of their secrets, the roses of their behavior.

Perhaps, if one had way sufficient enough to bring the fact of flesh to bear here, or touch the flower the young wife would nurture in the yard. It will bloom this spring, and the grass will turn green, and she will grow big with child.

One didn't know what to give a young woman.

As usual, there in Kansas or here in Oakland, what to give to whom in this case a reader's guess, the woman suddenly as much Hejinian at some point in her own life as any other one she might imagine. But not only is the question posed by this syntax Who receives the unsaid gift but Who gives it, which "one"? Likely as not a man, hers perhaps, what follows leading us to such a fact:

Watermen are such as row in boats.

Whereupon we leave the prairie for the sea, rose buds for row boats bound for we don't know which port. Who's in charge here, one asks legitimately across the space between "woman" period "Watermen" whose hands and backs to the oars propel us, as readers, as if backward. But

They don't hear a word of all this, floating like plump birds along the shore.

—out of earshot over the water, these words able nonetheless to picture them, or remember—"a 'gripped' thought."

In extending, then entangling their concerns, they are given a thousand new names.

Each one as if a net cast out over the landscape language gains access to, opening territory the pioneers first thought best was theirs, enables the other to be named. From which social ills, small mind crowded, bent upon history repeats itself,

The lace curtain Irish hate neighborhood Blacks.

Called to by name on the street between buildings, one turned around a split second.

The coffee drinkers answered ecstatically.

—caffeine intensive or not at once the issue the words spell, stepping literally out of station. Given their reply, content of which unknown to us rejoins the as yet unposed question, or question posed in the movie next door, which runs concurrently to this one, wherein one might see, had one access, an alternate text of *My Life*:

We looked at the apartment and took it.

The phonetic alignment of verbs, each of which establishes fixed relation between perceiver and object perceived (as "SEE" in Chinese is represented by an

eye above legs, running through space), here places us squarely at home. Like the ones before us we move in, unpack, hang pictures, walk streets to find how

Space has small neighborhoods.

Everything is new here, in this place and this book, around each corner the new sentence disclosing its complete surprise.

As for we who "love to be astonished," each new bit of knowledge is merely indicative of a wider ignorance.

So what we think we know and/or remember may lead, does and will always take us, just to the edge of a circle of perceptions whose center I am, you are, converging. What we do with that fact of moments juxtaposed one to another in place of time, "the concept," is almost to be able to know where we are just as it passes into the forthcoming present. To write her life truly Hejinian believes, indeed proves, will be done. Other means considered but no.

One might cultivate a charming defect, say a romantic limp or a little squint.

As indeed one does, once in a while, or did, whatever the terms of endearment. (Think of Byron and the nearsighted ones whose "charms" have persuaded us, rightly enough, these many years.) Now the terms though have changed, girl grown older, moved in with a man to a place below one window of which the printed sign reads "Apartment for Rent."

I made curtains out of colored burlap from Sears, hung them at the four windows of the green apartment.

As simply as the event it remembers, language encoding for the reader who would take it up, SEE that room, eyes running on legs to be there, the words say what she saw, sewing, moving on.

Down manholes, through pipes, to the mysterious sea.

The water then flowing from kitchen tap to where watermen, once again, could row through it. Confined spaces here, however, inside pipes laid under the street, where plumbing goes from all the houses on it; and in one of those she finds herself, the story goes, inhaling:

Though the pantry smelled more strongly of spices than of herbs and was dominated by nutmeg, the kitchen itself tended to smell of everything that had ever been cooked, but only because it was dark.

Here then another "sinking roots," the person herself for one thing moving in, thinking plants from a field dried and stored in jars or plucked fresh from the garden.

If you cut your nails they will grow back thick, blunt, like a man's.

So what then to be done with so much time on her hands, so little space, to say it say in 37 sentences.

In a little while, he said, we should be thumbing home.

His thumb, no doubt, blunt as a man's, apartment now become the word we name the place we live in we hope by choice, arriving there by whatever means accessible. Hitch in this case hiking, thumb asking a ride the 20th sentence,

There were five little kittens under the car.

suggests was forthcoming, though this one could like as not be any Ford or Chevrolet beneath whose chassis she once glimpsed them. Perhaps the time one drove for hours, far out into the country, the night one learned

They had put curves in the highway to keep drivers awake.

At other times the levels mix, surface charged as if to retain for itself the shifting of language into a realm we do and don't both keep up with:

The obvious analogy is with music, which extends beyond the space the figure occupies.

Which figure, though, one asks, wondering is it the theme or phrase returning to the root or the person who plays same:

She was pumping her violin over the piano.

And where then is that—living room? concert hall?—and when—last night? years ago or more? And does the next sentence, following as if in a context we know we follow as well, offer answer?

Each evening before dinner my parents sat for a while in the "study," to talk, while my mother knit decoratively designed French sweaters called Jacquard.

Domestic, then, tranquility, a life at home full of what one hears, indeed dreams, of being all that any of us might in a certain life want—in a sense at least, connections to follow, order at home reflecting order in the world beyond "study" walls:

The house sparrow is a weaver finch.

Therefore, thus as it were, that nature "herself" does what one's mother does, first in fact and second here, in words aligned to bring about perception of combined shifting planes the person beholds. Inside this house, outside the sparrow,

The front door key is hidden under the aloe.

So standing, as if on a porch, one picks up the plant and prepares to enter through this door, into that room, where those people talk and knit, the writer tells us, moving us in and out of the picture:

How did the artist think to put that on the outside.

—she asks, becoming herself both that one and the questioner, moving us about by making attention, click, then shift.

Such displacements alter illusions, which is all-to-the-good.

Which we have heard before in different context, chapter and verse; insistence, reiteration, the point then to draw out—educate—by example and demonstration

how this mixing of past with continuous present writing the life writes *My Life*.

Now I too could find a perfect cantaloupe, not by poking at the flesh around the stem of the melon but by sniffing at it.

Something one's mother, perhaps, teaches that one learns, yet almost mystic coordination of senses in which one hands back along the line the information each perceives. This one is ripe, let me cut it, you see what I mean. . . . Until,

At some point hunger becomes sensuous, then lascivious.

—then so to eat will it quench thirst, satisfy desire, or shall we continue in this mode, call it foreplay,

Not a fuck but a hug.

—which precedes, and will prolong, intimate pleasure. This being not the sense one talks of in the "study," this being performed in other rooms of her house, or other house across the land at later time; or before—before, or after love had cooled.

My mother threw away all those little objects of sentiment, billed foolishness.

Think of the walls of pictures, mementoes, the scrap- & yearbook junior year, the girl then full of feeling. In that memory—"a 'gripping' thought"—she does an instant reside. But

The reference is a distraction, a name trimmed with colored ribbons.

Pretty, perhaps, indeed pretty, but one is here now and that is in the mind, they being elsewhere far away and long ago.

It was Father's Day, a holiday that no one could take seriously, yet someone admitted that he was planning to telephone his parents that evening and another said she might do the same.

Long distance as a bridge I cross, calling your name in a room of people each of whom would on such occasion honor sentiment, elders, Father, as offspring having at this point flown so to speak the nest, remembered—"a 'gripping' thought." So we too are there, and dial, and those in the room continue their present talk, which in altered form goes on as well outside the room's walls.

What can those birds be saying.

—out and over there, cooing I love you, father/mate, this one asks, fully present, That day there was wind but no air, because we were inland.

Displaced, yet again, in time as well, when and because we move the world moves with us. And what I think at present depends on what I think, thought, will think hinged upon this, too. So Hejinian in this writing *can* go back—

Is pretty pink.

—to such time as memory will carry her far, her life as much a sum of parts as this part, this sentence, and that one.

Writing/ Re: Memory

IN *WRITING IS AN AID TO MEMORY* Lyn Hejinian's target, the mark her lines keep aiming to hit, and do hit, and do miss, is what she calls in the book's lovely preface "the disquieting runs of life": "I am always conscious of the disquieting runs of life slipping by, that the message remains undelivered." Hers is an attention precisely tuned to the fact of the present moment, *quid est*. With the information of each instant arriving and getting by as soon as, indeed before, one knows it, the task she sets herself in this, her most difficult work, is no less than to recreate in words her/our experience of the world. Her premise is that writing, if it can be made to bear intently enough upon the data perceived in the passing moment, can grasp and make present that moment as an equivalence, a shaped form, in language—language whose parts, dissociated from parts, give off an energy comparable to the one fission explodes.

The endeavor here has nothing whatever to do with description. For Hejinian's work, continuing the groundbreaking experiments Stein set forth in *Tender Buttons*, grows out of Stein's discovery that "the words that made whatever I looked at look like itself were not the words that had in them any quality of description." But whereas Stein in 1911-12 focused her perceptions upon things—objects, food, rooms—which she found easier as it were to get hold of in words than people, because umbrellas and feathers and teacups and red hats and roastbeef do not move, whereas people do, Hejinian's intention here is to catch in language, *to make be*, whatever in her life arrives, slips by. So the point isn't to describe what happens, say that one had lunch Sunday with good friends in a field full of spring flowers, because to reconstitute that scene and experience as description mixed with narrative necessarily interposes language and its structures—the denotations and connotations of words set together in a syntax which by convention we agree to as a means of operating in the world ("please pass the salt" gets us that shaker out of reach across the table)—between Hejinian, and thence her readers, and her life. Rather, the point is, as it was first for Stein working alone in Paris nearly 80 years ago, to find ways to make language be, actually *be*, the experience the writer finds herself engaged in. Again Stein:

And the thing that excited me so very much at that time and still does is that the word or words that make what I looked at *be* itself were always words that to me very exactly *related themselves* to that thing at which I was looking, but as often as not had as I say nothing whatever to do with what any words would do that described that thing." (*Portraits and Repetition*, italics mine)

Following Stein, whose practice attempted to give words the power to make world be itself, some how, by means of an exact relation between themselves and

the object/events of Stein's immediate attention, Hejinian points her title directly toward its target: writing is indeed an aid to memory precisely because it can be made to create in language an analogue—a new experience—of the experience out of which it grows.

Let's examine in some detail what takes place in a reader's moment-by-moment experience of this representative passage of *Writing Is An Aid To Memory*:

apple is shot nod
 ness seen know it around saying
 think for a hundred years
 but and perhaps utter errors direct the point to a meadow
 rank fissure up on the pit
 arts are several branches of life
 little more science is brought where great
 need is required
 out becomes a bridge of that name
 in the painting is a great improvement
 bit ink up on the human race
 and return if the foot goes back
 in the trunks of trees behoove a living thing
 wedge war common saw
 hard by that length of time the great demand is
 very dear
 ashes in water
 that might be a slip of architecture
 think was reduced to an improper size
 blocks to interest who can visit
 variations on ideas are now full
 problems
 from a point of increasing
 at only as to four or we who nine
 a little grace familiar with simple limbs and the sudden
 reverse

Line 1, "apple is shot nod," opens as if in the middle of a sentence whose beginning we have not been witness to. That Hejinian begins her poem *in medias res*, so to speak, places it in a tradition running from Homer to Shakespeare ("I thought the King had more affected the Duke of Albany than of Cornwall") to Pound ("And then went down to the ship"); at the same time, the abruptness of this opening is, for a split second at least, radically disorienting: which apple? where? why? how? Then a sudden gleam of sense: the words "apple is shot" may

suggest a context we do know, can remember: William Tell and his son; or does "shot" mean what it means on the street, "finished," "done for." In other words, our experience of the poem's first three words enact in a fraction of an instant something quite like what it is to be faced with the incremental detail of our experience in the world: at any given moment we simultaneously take in new information, connect it to what we already know, anticipate where it's going. What comes next here, "nod," produces immediate vertigo. Whatever frame of reference "apple is shot" may have started to fit into suddenly begins to slip away. "nod" is related to "shot" by sound, of course, and by suggesting a motion of the head may also continue to suggest William Tell's son's head—as the arrow flies toward it? immediately as the apple is struck? just after, as sign of, yes, a good shot?

That my attempt here to "make sense" of the dynamics of this line, pushing the words toward a context which may in fact be only my own projection, may though it makes a kind of sense have nothing whatever to do with what their author had in mind, suggests something important about Hejinian's writing practice throughout *Writing Is An Aid To Memory*. She puts words together into contiguous relationships which, like the "disquieting runs of life," keep "slipping by." She makes present the raw material of life as it were, in language, the data of the world in words which, as we read them, we attempt to make coherent sense of, find the "message" in. But as in one's experience of everyday reality, that message is oblique, "opposed" to us, open to revaluation as one's point in time or position in the landscape changes. So that every answer, conclusion, observation, judgment, insight is at best provisional, subject to change at a moment's notice, indeed without notice.

The precipitous shift from line 1 to line 2, "nod/ ness seen know it around saying," upsets whatever temporary equilibrium a reader may have determined for herself to this point. Whereas line 1 opened with a recognizable, albeit incomplete, syntax ("apple is shot" = subject/verb/complement), the grouping of words which has now begun to unfold ("shot nod/ ness seen know") seems to take part in no familiar grammatical structure or pattern of meaning. "ness" by itself at the start of the line appears perhaps to be the suffix of a previously known but by chance now missing word at the end of line 1 ("holi-," "blind-," etc.), and the physical spacing of the line on the page suggests to the eye the possibility that the entire poem is itself a fragment, a ruin, part of what had been in some prior, more perfect state a completed thing, the whole poem. So as readers we find ourselves faced with what amounts to a portion of that whole, which now no longer exists, this being only what can be at this time remembered of it. In a sense, then, our experience of Hejinian's poem is not unlike our experience of the Parthenon, the Venus de Milo, or the tapestries which hang in the Cloisters in New York—works the absence of

whose former state (which we can only imagine, and which in our imagination must be more nearly perfect, more ideal, than the fraction which remains) challenges us to recreate the whole from its part, invites us to become artists as audience.

In any case, given that what we see on the page is all there is, "nod/ ness seen" makes no clear sense. At the same time, hints of possible links of connection ([Loch] ness [monster] seen? seen nodding? "ness" an orthographic near-scrambling of "seen"?) persuade us that there is a sense to be found here, a message to be determined, meaning to be created in the mind of the reader who engages this text fully as far as Hejinian herself did in writing it. And quite apart from serpents swimming in Scottish lakes, the verbal sequence mapped out in "seen know it around saying" puts before us, as if compressed in a small hard shell, just that series of operations Hejinian as poet, and all of us as humans, undertake as we take in and attempt to articulate any given aspect of our experience. Words here engage present tense immediately, without syntactic cement; the effect is one of wonderfully bright, clear, sudden freedom, the full range of mind's potential grasped and held an instant, or more, all that can be known around saying.

Line 3, "think for a hundred years," goes both forward and backward in at least two ways at once. It moves the poem forward literally, as the verse line proceeds, and ideationally, as one person's saying becomes another's (a listener's) thinking about what has been said, now and perhaps into the future, for a hundred years to come. ("think for a hundred years" may also stand grammatically as the objects of "saying," i.e., as if in quotation marks, what is to be said.) But it also moves the poem back, the idea of "thinking" an echo of "know" in the line before, and the time span "a hundred years" as equally past as yet to come, in any event a far larger frame than the see/know/say which precedes it.

If one takes line 3 as the object of that all but instantaneous cluster, the conjunction which opens the next line, "but and perhaps utter errors direct the point to a meadow," starts at least to continue that direction of thought: "think for a hundred years/ but . . ." What follows at once interrupts the about-to-be-made contrary statement suggested by "but" (notice, though, that "and" is linked grammatically to "but": both are conjunctions) and, with a telling shift in perspective introduced—almost as if an afterthought—by the suggestion of pure uncertainty in "perhaps," carries forward a number of verbal threads: "utter" and "direct" as imperative verbs aligned with "think"; "utter" an echo of "saying"; "the point" perhaps the one that shot the apple, which grows on a tree in a meadow. Nor in this poem is this reading exhaustive, for it makes equally good sense to take "utter" as an adjective modifying those "errors" which themselves "direct" some "point" (intellectual rather than physical, as the point of that story) to a place in the

landscape, or, from another perspective, to take "point" as a verb ideationally akin to "saying," "utter," and "direct," which in effect cuts off the object about to be named in the statement "direct the/ point."

The potential vertigo induced in a reader by the simultaneous operation of a multiplicity of plausible, mutually exclusive, competing grammatical, syntactic, and semantic frames of reference which I am attempting to describe here as efficiently as possible (but oh so ineffectually! since it all takes place in only the time it takes to print these words on the brain's screen) is the kind of feeling one might have every day, faced with the even greater multiplicity of detail one takes in from moment to moment, were it not for the mind's ability to focus and select. Life's data, what Hejinian in her Preface calls "raw confusions," being incessant, continuous in at least four dimensions until (one's) life ends, this writer's challenge is to demonstrate, by reenactment, the simple truth "that truth cannot end." "Continuous quantities, like continuous qualities, are endless like the truth, for it is impossible to carry them. It is impossible to carry light and darkness, proximity, chance, movement, restlessness, and thought. From all of these, something spills."

What "spills" out of the meadow at the end of line 4, "rank fissure up on the pit," condenses the oppositions inherent in paradox into several nodes. To begin with "rank," whose sense as noun (a row, line, an orderly arrangement) absolutely contradicts its sense as adjective (overly luxuriant, grown to excess), and whose sense as transitive verb (to place in a rank or ranks) collapses as soon as it is coupled to the idea contained in "fissure" (a division along a line). The linearity suggested in "fissure" is itself collapsed, or rather, as perspective shifts, closes down from line to the single, round, open hollow placed suddenly before us in "pit," which just as suddenly reverses the literal climb begun in the line's prepositional construction, "up on." (Notice the echo of an identical construction in the same position in line 11, "bit ink up on the human race," a line which, despite an array of grammatical possibilities—"bit" as noun or verb, "ink" as noun or verb—similar to the ones outlined here, has nothing else whatever to do with line 5. But that is, as they say, another story.)

Not to make molehills out of prepositions, but the idea of height nonetheless suggested in "up on" (and simultaneously, and more insistently, contradicted in "fissure" and "pit") is carried over into the next line, "arts are several branches of life," where the word "branches" invites us to think not only of branches high up in a tree—the tree of life, other of whose features appear in lines 13 ("trunks of trees") and 25 ("limbs")—but of lines, divisions in a system of classification, therefore of "rank" and, from another point of view, "fissure." And while it is indeed true that "[the] arts are several branches of life"—along with other human endeavors such as, say, the sciences or economics—the verbal information we pick up as the line

unfolds demonstrates in little, by coincidental echoes of and allusions to information from before, that this art, poetry, can be made to *be* life. "arts are," for example, a thought complete with intransitive verb, repeats with variation the sound pattern heard in "shot nod" and, in a different way, "utter errors," and the also momentarily complete statement "arts are several" (verb now transitive, message changed into tautology) echoes the syntax, sound, and sense of "apple is shot" in line 1. The root of the word "several" (to separate) in front of "branches," of course, contains the seed running through a whole series of words, from "rank" to "fissure" to "branches," and itself counteracts the root meaning of "arts" (to join, fit together).

The upshot here is that what Hejinian has joined, as fragments of perception, insight, and sudden awareness of events operating in several systems of logic at once, challenges her reader to meet and engage the text completely, head on, giving it as much as Hejinian herself gave, of herself, in the creation of its meaning.

Anyone with the patience to sit through analysis such as this is capable of doing just what I have been doing here: i.e., pointing out and describing how little effects of language—effects which take place to a degree whenever language is used but which are here multiplied, foreshortened, split apart, crowded together—detonate as it were whenever we read the poem. Every reader has as well the ability to enter into this conversation with the text, to realize its pleasures by listening and talking so to speak back: the physics of the reaction set off when one picks up the poem, starts to read, approaches its full potential to the extent that the reader turns herself loose upon the text, gives herself over to it, allowing it (by helping it along, seeing the idea in what Hejinian in her Preface calls the "sinews and bones" of a language she's given "the power to say different things at one time with or without different parts, of view," "exploring what has been a mind, unknown") to take her where it, and she, will.

What goes on as the poem goes forward is more of the same, each point alive with multiple possibilities, each charged particle set to go off as soon as we, as readers, release it. See now, for yourselves, what I mean:

arts are several branches of life
 little more science is brought where great
 need is required
 out becomes a bridge of that name
 in the painting is a great improvement
bit ink up on the human race
and return if the foot goes back
 in the trunks of trees behoove a living thing
 wedge war common saw

hard by that length of time the great demand is
very dear
ashes in water
that might be a slip of architecture
think was reduced to an improper size
blocks to interest who can visit
variations on ideas are now full
problems
from a point of increasing
at only as to four or we who nine
a little grace familiar with simple limbs and the sudden
reverse

And so on, and on, through 42 such sections, writing is an aid to memory. Hejinian's memory, for one thing, of her life as it takes place, "a little grace familiar with simple limbs and the sudden/ reverse." And my memory and yours as well, whose thought wakes to the alarm clock the words sound, calling us forward to the "incessant knowledge"—certain, uncertain, but wholly generous in its endeavor to make present all that might be found out of this time and place—we give to the poem the poet gives to us:

The trees of the street are laid down. A bedroom is cut where I went. Where I mean to will have to come to me. Though we keep company with cats and dogs, all thoughtful people are impatient, with a restlessness made inevitable by language.

[Stephen Ratcliffe's *Two Hejinian Talks* were originally presented by him as part of the Faculty Lecture Series at Mills College, Oakland, California, in February, 1987.]

Pasquale Verdicchio

Winter Insect, Summer Grass

*"sure explorers of the unconscious we but mostly
form-givers & conscious-makers for the description remains
suspended in itself and makes nothing clearer than what is
suspended under the words in which it gets described (or the
material) but language has a forked tongue (luckily)
and more dragon than any dragon. . . cut off its head and*

watch it grow another. . . a beast with an infinite

ability to multiply and an endless number

of perfect colourings. . .

given this description we'll continue"

(Bert Schierbeek, *A Great Thirst*)

An access to operation handed down;
possession of master and apprentice:
quest enquiring within a dwelling place

Recluse countenance, visage of persuasion
and in hand repose advances

Who might speak in his own land
approaching equality an affection
with language long sought

The legacy of proper names in parables
keeps its meaning And resource
would be able to uncover The maxims
to understand: nor any may draw back

Were it not for the persistent faith
Sparing the well spoken: the matter

accomplished by a single principle

Memory attested by Authorities of study
authorities of subject and materiality

Calor, humiditas, frigiditas et siccitas
and all things that come of and return

Never here the indifferent act
causes upheaval

Placing one's trust in relativity

Blind movement, decanted fragments
from the lives of those
who were able to foster
counter currents

disperse and register The memory
of something of its own construction
Lesson learned: the name it cannot give
itself left up to others:

misnomer

Substance joined collected given
concern a different way from its root and
multiplies Degrees and likewise

The seer renounces what is brought form
Consider the nature, one who knows the terms
From one to another to another from one:
the stages are many and single

Composition declared unattainable
but turned into shining fish scales

First, the removing of colour
then, the washing of impurity

Odour, touch, substance
prepared and accomplished: the mystery
of different natures

Something supposes deviation
and is explained of elements

Union is appointed to the revealed:

generation of what is contained
in the vessel
where completion emerges The lament
of the concealed Quicksilver and fire
venomous tincture

A washed and prepared body; moist
fermentation of what is not as yet

praised by the mortified matter,
concordance of bodies and their words

Talking about the image
must be thanked the portal
Still have to wait: the air makes it
imperative, the contours of it
invisible form of recent acquisition

This figure, a style
enshrined, waiting to be
desecrated. Indifference of stones
in the way they stroke the land

Vision panics in such articulation:

a telescope glass celebrates confines
signatures of travelled ground
with the specificity of mourning

Only scars
what is left to remind
between bodies
Irreversible progression
and what to summon

In measured touching
exists the evocation of anterior body,
and blood collaborates

Reasons for distance will never touch
the calling of this place
the scent of lake

Not a game, the idea
of liberty through excess,
carefully retained step and stare
of violated virgin

Evening goes the pain
without its mirage no restitution
in the intimacy of forms

The pursuit to build full blood
or milk to the same degree
or resisting water Vitreous parts
of silver hang in possession

 dissolve blind
 conflict distribution

Whether absorption has found its beginning
or the putrified earth its level
it is accomplished

to the ground and named
et sua tota correctio: winter insect
 summer grass

what exists prior to
the division of meaning

what will sing
evening
to be eaten
during long
less patient days
winter season
insect cold
joins the world
in change
becomes
not what now is
but rising equinox
temperature
falling snow

and rain
will grow green
new form
animal
vegetable winter
spring summer
fall again
blades
from spiracles
from slight fissure
of carapace
winter insect
summer grass

Rosmarie Waldrop

A Form / Of Taking / It All

*It's one thing to have
a beautiful voice. It is
another to
say yes, Montezuma
— Cole Swensen
mind is a form
of taking
it all*

— Robert Creeley

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PART I

A Form of Vertigo

THE BLIND IS DRAWN, dark rectangle in a luminous frame. Amy is glad of the clean lines: whenever her eyes do not encounter, her head spins, or is it her stomach, a garden gone to seed, odd costumes among the trees, has she invited Napoleon to shake hands with Montezuma in his feather coat while Columbus throws his coin? Alexander von Humboldt talks twice as fast, and in mixed German, French, Spanish and English. He defends the succession of night and day, but Amy is too dizzy to follow his drift toward the mountains. How long has this been going on?

Any motion once started. The coast clear, abridged version, the plane, Puerta Central Aereo de Mexico, Victoria with the car. Victoria Alvarez Russell. A solemn

name for a whirlwind, and curious meter. She remembers trying to joke:

"What a relief, solid ground again. It's not just that I am afraid, which I am, but on the ground you at least see the holes. Those in the air take you unawares. Somebody should paint a ceiling on it."

"You wouldn't be so confident about the ground if you lived here. Remember the earthquake. Volcano country."

Now rumbles inside her, vast subterranean fissures heaving to blast off part of the mountain. The action of a muscle is to contract, and what is to come will come swiftly, glazed volcanic sand and lava stops Cortés's advance.

Victoria slowed down for a bottleneck. "Over there, you can catch a glimpse of Chapultépec Castle, our White House."

Into the cloud of red haze. Traffic, lines knotting and thinning, late complications, lame smile, mopped her forehead as she does now, a voluntary contraction of the fibers in the biceps, not like what has been going on inside her. "I feel queasy."

"It's the *idea* of jet lag," Victoria joked, "even if the flight does not cross any time meridians. People also get diarrhoea on arrival. Before they had a chance to eat an amoeba."

The road bent and straightened just out of phase with the sideways motion in her stomach. Devious. All landmarks disappeared, overexposed. Legs open, head to the left, arms akimbo, "Why did we ever invent planes," she groaned. "Or cars. Too much motion, when already the earth moves."

"How else could we get you here?"

Here. Hot, unfamiliar, trying to squeeze through the four slits around the blind, the slit between the lids. She can of course close her eyes, but the light goes on spiraling inside her head, billowing over the barriers, dimmer, northern sights, fogbound city, smoke stacks, the colder grey, restless, typewriters and schedules, tea water, raincoats, boots. And Ada. Ada watching the smoke coil upward from the tip of her cigarette, her profile sharp against her feathery hair, a bluejay rocks in the tree. Season subtracted, whirled out of reason. The dancing mistress

hitches up her plumed skirt so that Columbus sees her legs far above the knees. A telescope on a cliff. She shows him how to walk, how to lift a knee and let the foot touch the ground with the tip of the toes which form a straight line with the shinbone. Only then does she slowly lower her heel. She wears white slippers laced up to her mid-calves and is completely surrounded by a gaseous medium called the atmosphere. A bad omen. Beethoven takes fate by the throat. The messengers leave in great haste for Mexico City where they are painted with chalk and locked up in Cuauhtlaco prison. This requires delicate instruments and metrical stress.

She hears water running and music. John's voice from the other side of the wall. Her old friend. And Henry's. More Henry's. Victoria's husband. Twenty years contracted and canceled, muscle over time. She listens, head turned sideways, emphasis demanded by language, lying quite still as if afraid of succumbing to the exertion. Now the voice pauses. She wishes it would continue its rope of pressed plants, volcanic ash, sextants and telescopes, the desire to climb, classify, compare, connect, von Humboldt, no part of his body felt altogether comfortable, and Reinhard, Reinhard. Words to mingle with, a crowd, to feel her body, and when she does.

How long has she been in this room? This house? Victoria's and Henry's, 21 calle Juarez, Mexico City, D.F. The staircase in her head, used by everybody, the wide open air, at great speed, flocks of parrots. And steady syllables, John's: Alexander von Humboldt, his love for Reinhard, how he lifts his field glasses, his desire to climb mountains, his passion for measurement, mapping the cosmos, foghorns and physical description of the universe. But memories along with Humboldt, fever, *lunettes d'épreuves*, including lean into the past like a drunk? A fork in the road. Henry. What a disaster if they had married. Curing stingray bites by having a prostitute urinate into the wound. It leads to a particularly virulent form of syphilis. Does forgetting count as forgiveness or just being forty, holding her face up to the sun? Now that John's voice has revived the amputated nerve she feels a remote fury in her muscles, things that had not been said, standing alone in front of the door. Stings without landing, it had not only been windy, but raining intermittently. Acrid lies. The track opens onto a black surface of glazed volcanic sand which rises to the perpendicular height of 160 feet, compelling the Conquistadors to take a wide circuit. Cortés sweats in his velvet cloak. At 4:12, two violent tremors knock Alexander von Humboldt's porters to the ground. Nevertheless Humboldt takes out his watch. False move? Has her impatience betrayed her, a muscle, a gland? A dare, as if opposites could not fail to explain, or letters cross without attracting agreement and intimacy. Ada. Her walk. Ada practicing *pliés*, pushing her hair back like ruffled feathers. Ada sitting as if she could spend her whole life in one position. Ada opening her eyes wide in fits of eager to know, then growing absent, off into a sky of her own, exotic.

Sulfur precipitates on the sides of the crater. Alexander von Humboldt wades through birdlime. With effort he unsticks his sole, lifts his knee and lets his toe touch the viscous mass. The Indians look with fear at the deformed subterranean plants. Columbus sets foot on the Bahamas. Ada in her blue tutu at the first whisper of possibility, when Amy first talked to her, first felt helpless, first caught in a current, too fast, and rocking with fright.

"It isn't just when you dance," she said to Ada whose eyes focused on a thin distance in the mirror, far beyond Amy's reflection, while she tissueed the cold cream off her face. "You understand movement in a way that goes beyond muscle, let alone elegant clothes. Whereas I walk too fast."

"Traveling is exhausting," said Ada. Remotely. "I've tired myself out in my blue shoes before even breaking into the spot. Soon I'll only teach."

"If you don't like to travel . . ." The sycamore out the window had a single leaf left on it, which fluttered against the street light. Sharp smell of brine, thin smile.

"All the landmarks disappear, the sky heaves all around your eyes. While I was married I dreamed of drowning. A bad omen."

"We all lose ourselves," she replied, then grew afraid, veered off in a rush: "In writing there are no signs for navigation either, not even stars. I throw my coin, a mere adventuress, though with a plan. But words. Mere words."

Went over and over this conversation as if learning a new language, one nearer the bone, a muscle whose action is to contract and thus to bring together the two structures to which it is attached. On her way backstage she stopped at every mailbox. Why had she never noticed their lovely blue? Was it possible? Could a woman whose arms fluttered like wings settle into a house in Boston? She nervously passed the salt. Saw choice slipping out of her hand, into the noise of a machine whose inexorable motion would only stop when it had run full course. "I know how you feel. Though the geological structure of New England is quite simple."

"The weight of the body must be distributed equally over the entire surface of the foot," Ada said. "Only this way can it support the music."

Felt lost, or perhaps only high, looking through a telescope mounted on a cliff, which brings the horizon terribly close.

"Good wine." Ada had looked harassed, which gave Amy hope.

"You've got the deep rhythm," she came out with her excitement. "When you walk even more than when you dance. It must come directly, through the entire surface of the foot, as you say, from the rotation of the earth, this precise, even motion we are part of, which breath and pulse play against. Succession of seasons, of night and day. Even in our sleep, we travel a measurable distance. But I move too fast, the boundaries slide, clouds blow across the sky, the flag moves up and down the mast, and my head spins."

Ada lit a cigarette, her hand darted in short, swift strokes away from her mouth.

Amy's hands are moist. The sheets feel good, fresh and cool against her tiredness. She runs her finger along the fabric, its wrinkles and sharp creases. A fat little girl sits on a chair, buttoned into her coat. Laces her shoes, says thank you, says please, says how do you do. Says 'I.'

Fact in her fist, and says it again. Amy points her finger at the child: I know you. I know why you stare at the ceiling. You are waiting for them to fall. The stuccoed fruit, we don't have to say it because we know. She used to think her memory was a cave, but perhaps it is a muscle connected to this child, contracting now, bringing her terribly close. And other shadows, black, white, or taking on color from rubbing her eyes. Moving. Everything's moving. Even the shadows. She can't hold on, can't depend on them. Or words. Words least of all, they blow across the Atlantic or back twenty years, forty, four hundred, through the air, through keyholes like witches. Move with the wind, the rotation of the earth, with heat, with earthquakes, with motor or muscle, with malice.

Never mind Amy, the child. A woman of a certain age, Amy, a certain armor, all cotton turtlenecks. The morning gone, the fire more mineral. And the stillness, the hidden beat she tries to approach with the help of words, mining the intervals between. Fits of effort, finger to the bone, scratching at stone. And afraid of being scattered, matter of worries, jobs, projects, desires, whirling out of control till no place. Keeps at it, obliquely, as if she believed it could only be approached through the maelstrom, the markets, the crowded buses, stores with clerks behind counters, rooms full of children, cats, flowerpots, washing strung up in the yard. Dark center.

The blind would be invisible without the light framing it. She is tired of looking at it, tired of closing her eyes and getting its after-image with the light values reversed, bright center in a dark frame.

The window. The cold room, her breath misting the pane. She had stepped close and written on it: Ada. In triumph. Her finger rested on the pane as if to write more, but the mist had cleared, the word faded.

"This room has the best view," she said. "Not only does it look out on the garden, but the sky is inked to the finest shade pollution can offer."

Ada did not laugh. Stood by the window, her finger tapping against the glass as if preparing to say: a dancer's life is short. Wishing to be alone, perhaps, to think about muscles contracting, sudden dips in the landscape.

A motorcycle had gunned around the corner. They both jumped. It brought them back inside. Ada's face small.

She left her reluctantly. Brim of words in the quick of the throat, wanted to talk all night, drink, smoke, walk in her sleep.

She gets up now and walks the few paces to the armchair. Sees a child peer through the door, disappear. Slick parquet. Strenuous. Breaks out in a sweat. The temperature drooping. Grateful that the chair is cool, a loose rattan weave, its back to the window. No spirit or starch. The past a chemical injected into her body. Infectious.

It is Ada walks in her sleep. Even awake, walks blindly, pulled, as if she saw with her feet. The heel up as if beginning the movement, the toe hardly lifting off the floor. Four viceroys came and went in rapid succession. Columbus traversed every region which up to that time had been navigated. Before daylight, feels her way along walls, doors, leans a long time at the window, runs her fingers along the mullions. Or appears in Amy's room, right foot forward, but can't be touched, stares right back into the air, stares at Amy as at a thing. No way to gauge degrees of awareness, intensity of feeling, possibility of understanding, as she moves her elbows with the odd, fluttering movement she has, or pushes back her hair like a tangle of feathers.

Even now Amy gets sullen, what is Ada looking for, what island with mangroves lining the shore and very great rivers? Something she can't ever know except by its fissures, unintentional vibrations, a sound against the window, trees rocking in the wind, or was it raining?

At least Ada never climbed the roof in the traditional manner, stretching her arms before her to push back the air, keep her balance and a good look-out for land. Carried by a cool wind, the movement begun by the whole extended foot.

"At a certain speed the wheel barely touches the ground," Ada said one night. Was it then the outlines began to blur, and found the earth pear-shaped, did Columbus, round except where it has a nipple, skin moving in every shadowy twist of Ada's blue robe, legs open, sharp expectancy, as when the first thrill of summer heat turns to thirst, an ache to press against, to fight like sleep, suffocating fatigue.

But enjoyed buttering toast for breakfast, at table with Ada, and voices fused. Squinted into the sun without telescope and asked timidly: your children? your husband? Ada watched the cat chase his tail.

Sits on a cane chair in a house she does not know. Hears steps, voices, a piano stuttering, a child screams, she imagines the rooms bright and sunny, tries to remember John's face, so much less distinct than the voice, her companion. Imagines him at a desk like her own, piled with books and papers, cigars, ashtrays, ashes strewn even so. Bent over his machine, metal movement, magnetic, von Humboldt's sudden desires to describe the universe, climb a volcano, measure the time between earthquakes, wade through birdlime in caves. No part of his body felt altogether comfortable, his face and neck burned, the skin flaking off, every exposed part of his body bitten by insects. She leans forward a little, as if she could stare through the wall and see John's expression as he stops, clicks, lets the rewind purr, listens: "no part of his body felt altogether comfortable," clicks, continues: "but he did not die of yellow fever in Acapulco as had been reported." Her own body feels weak, heavy. Pump creaking. She will lie down again. She knows that

the window, should she raise the blind, would open onto a garden of agavas, a hum in the trees, not onto Mount Chimborazo where, high up, a tiny Alexander von Humboldt has trouble breathing, his eyes bloodshot, blood oozing from his gums. Nor onto Pinckney Street where she had stood waiting for Henry and walked, forgetting Henry, in the rain, where Ada is walking now, pulled by the moon or the tides of a piano or simply her feet, but won't talk with the radio on. Makes her edgy, the shadow of noise. Was the lack of answers a beginning of infirmity rather than distraction or closing the lid? Put her arm around Ada who fluttered off to look at a photo on the wall. A small, fat Amy sits buttoned into her coat, stuck into ever larger

frames against wallpaper splotted with a steady downpour of wallpaper roses. Works hard at fitting inside the photo, inside her coat, but her legs dangle, a touch of defiance. Between their legs, the young birds had a thick lump of edible fat.

"Speaking of Napoleon: what a battlefield this would make." Paul stuck his hand inside his blazer. "How long have you known my mother?"

Ada made no effort to hide her annoyance. Her knuckles white.

Paul winked at Amy: "Whose fault is it if my manners are as uncouth as Beethoven's? With Ada off to rehearsals, practicing *pliés*, *battements*, or letting her foot touch the ground with the tip of her toes which must form a straight line with her shinbone. Only then she lowers her heel, slowly, so slowly, and stretches her full, round, delicate knee. Yes, I have another question: is there anything to eat?"

So big to have come out of Ada, how much closer to her own shape, a bear, dancing the *minuet à la reine*, a wealth of body to surprise.

Ada's eyes were on the wreaths of smoke swirling up from the cigarette burned down to her fingers. Amy stubbed out her cigar, went over to Ada's chair and began to knead her shoulders, gently digging at the tense muscles to make them untie, knot after knot relaxing and dropping to the floor in big loops.

She felt light, suddenly, as if walking at great speed through the underbrush of thoughts, voices, breaths, conversations, shouts, screams, certain of the clearing. Later, as she showed Paul upstairs, the temptation to set something in motion, even an explosion, some brutal clear violence.

"Napoleon surveyed the locality with a profound air," said Paul dragging his suitcase, then tested the bed. "Nice room, though a bit chilly. You think a lot of my mother, don't you."

She turned the radiator on, surprised to feel her heart beating, the little hollow in her stomach, this desire to make a declaration, dare a lie, simple, unpretentious, to which she could abandon herself with a sudden comfort and nearly call it happy. If she once said: yes, we're lovers, wouldn't it already be closer to true?

She wants to think about Ada. Ada talking of omens. Even though she smiles, and in plain sun, she keeps the halflight of an interior around her. As if standing in a doorway. In an extra layer of clothes. Ada under the same ceiling as Amy the child: why did those fruit never fall? But already she wears a feather coat and fears the Spaniards whose horses carry them on their backs wherever they wish. They come in battle array as conquerors, and the dust rises in whirlwinds on the road. Columbus sets foot on the Bahamas, and the two hemispheres become alike. On top of the Great Pyramid, a captive's heart is torn from his body. She wants to vomit, but the Cabildos depose the Spanish authorities and create provincial juntas. Alexander von Humboldt, using some of his voluntary muscles, parallel striated fibers bound together by connective tissue, puts his arm around Aimé Bonpland who does not look up from his book. Linnaeus: *Species Plantarum*. Napoleon rides over the plain as if carried by a cool wind, the dancer's heels never touch the ground, precarious posture threatened by suffocating sleepiness, the boom of waves relentless, breaking over sand, surf, chique-chiques, spindrift, saliva, which explains why gravitation elongates the watery envelope of the earth very slightly in two opposite directions.

"Maria hasn't called by any chance," she heard Paul ask Ada.

"No. What's going on?"

"You may picture me, like Beethoven, in a turbulent emotional condition: She wants to do some thinking. My guess is that thinking plus distance will overcome cohesion. So, in spite of my age and wisdom, I've run back to my old insecurity blanket—who also keeps suggesting I get out."

"This isn't my house."

"Your Amy doesn't seem to mind. Or don't you like my flirting with her in the style of, well, the depression years?"

"You're too lazy for even that."

"In spite of his successful Egyptian campaign, Napoleon knew he couldn't take the fortress of Akkon."

An added presence. Rhetorical with embarrassment. Wrong to expect it would be a catalyst and help her with yellow fever, rainy blues and black ice. As unable as ever to break through Ada's reserve. Tied up in desires, surprising, half-admitted, knots twisted over and over, the twine too strong, too new. What if silence was already an answer? The moon unusually large and near. At times the sea rises into the light and becomes incomprehensible. Did she only imagine a new stiffness in Ada's shoulders? Discrepancies in latitudes? Did her eyes come to rest miles behind Amy's from habit, or fearing too intimate, too demanding?

Too difficult. If the voice continued to throw Alexander von Humboldt's shadow over his microscope while Columbus heads south for the gold, while the Creoles

want a share in the government, while Hidalgo's revolutionary army begins its zigzag march on Mexico City, it would slow the dissolves. She would wander again in the garden where Montezuma's biceps shortens and bulges as he lifts his hand in greeting, where she must walk so slowly she could circle the house for every single lifting of the knee, her toe on the curve of the earth must form a straight line with her shinbone. Only then may she lower hers henceforward. But the voice had stopped. The foot hovers above the shoe. Her thoughts turn on their own axis without finding an end or edge. Ada's eyes twinkle with turmoil in the atmosphere, currents and strata of different temperatures.

"My slob of a son," she said, "doesn't seem to take job hunting very seriously. He hasn't been out of the house in three days."

"He would say: like Beethoven, I work very slowly." Amy was happy. The chore of the *Poetic Terms* was turning to chuckles and charlotte russe. Ada was helping. "There are no jobs."

Ada had one leg propped on the chair. "He hasn't changed since he was two years old: eats and sleeps, eats and sleeps. And you encourage him."

Amy reached for the encyclopedia to check a date, check her stare. "Well, with a bird like you at dinner. It's like being on the scales all the time. And he's still here when you dwindle into remoteness."

A draft swept a sheaf of papers to the floor.

"Damn," said Ada with unusual vehemence, "that damn latch again. Now they're out of order." Started for the window and stopped, suddenly attentive, till the cat gave up chasing his tail.

"He doesn't even do his share of the house work. He counts on my being embarrassed enough to take them over."

"Don't."

Ada slammed the pages down. "You are as thick-skinned as he is."

Started to speak, hoist the flag, and stopped short. Not the moment. Heat, but in excess, of the wrong sort. Too much ballast to abolish slavery and launch full speed into the water. No ropes in case of need. Another meaning of elegy.

She is grateful for the blind. Light has always been her enemy, casting a huge, distressing shadow at her feet. A shadow even larger than her body, which absorbs her smaller gestures and gives back what it can: extravagance, exaggeration. An alternate, bleary body waiting to be assumed, if she only knew how, as by an angel. A little girl in the half-open door. Or Montezuma distraught and bewildered. He did not know what would happen.

And saw Ada move down the stairs, as if pulled, her shadow in the shaft of light, Paul's shadow in his door.

"Don't worry," she whispered to him, "Ada sees with her feet. But these nights can last years."

"I was on my way to the fridge," he admitted. "Even young Napoleon skipped class to sneak eggs and milk from Mère Marguérite. Later he preferred Château Lafite. Why don't we all snack, drink, pretend we know each other, have a party, get married?"

Stalked Ada who was leaning her cheek against the window, her right arm cradling her head. The parrots fly to the top of the trees where no one can see them. Paul touched his palm to her other cheek, as he must have done as a child, begging her to admit the touch of skin, the support of a chair, a glass of wine.

Ada's lips trembled as if ruffled by a breeze. The cat came up and rubbed against her. "Your father," she said after a while, "had a thing about muscles. The leg muscles in particular. He liked to sit and finger my calves."

Muffled sounds, incomprehensible, from all directions. A rolling, a rattle, a crack across the American voice. *Terracaliente*, she makes out, *adios* and *tiempodelagarua*. They are not words because she has no meaning for them, instead, glistening objects in the middle of a page, jewels on Cortés's velvet cloak, adding incalculable weight in the heat. Or else buzzing insects, covering Alexander von Humboldt's body till no part of it feels altogether comfortable, getting inside his clothes, their sting causing swellings which last for several weeks.

"Do you miss the stage?" it had occurred to her to ask Ada who was again watching the cat.

"It's amazing how he can keep it up," Ada pointed at the cat, "or a dervish."

It made Amy dizzy, "like going up in a balloon or climbing a mountain. Just looking at it, I have trouble breathing, my eyes must be getting bloodshot. But *your* eyes are in your feet. Distributed equally over their entire surface, if you like. That's why you have no sense of time or distance, delve into disappearance, a surface of hard work beyond all solids."

Stolid light. White, such a white wind, Victoria, the whirl, took both of Amy's hands that first time, as if she needed a rudder to navigate the eddies of her own words. Eyes unnaturally bright, she had thought, was it a sign of fever or of being Mexican? and looked around the room for rescue, a joke, a drink.

It was raining hard when they drove home. Watched the windshield wipers go back and forth, Ada's foot on the pedal, her black heel, her hands on the steering wheel.

"This trip to Mexico sounds attractive," she said, "I'd like to stretch my legs, let out a few seams, you know, thread the needle, get new ideas in the old head. God knows I could stand it. I've been looking at Tremont, Boylston, Pinckney so long I don't even see them anymore. Time to change the movie."

"There are omens."

"OK, pull my leg. Don't you think it would be exciting to see a country so different? Like a dream playing on the outside, deserts with cactuses, burros dying of thirst in the implacable sun?"

"If that's what you want, the *National Geographic* should do nicely," Ada said a bit drily.

"That would not be in the spirit of adventure," she replied. "And this was a red light you just went through."

"The spirit of adventure is quite used to getting along without you."

"One would think you don't like the idea of this trip," she tried hard not to sound pleased. Was Ada jealous? A crack in her shell?

Alexander von Humboldt's main contribution to geology was his attentive study of the volcanoes of the New World. In spite of the distance, way up on the treacherous ice of Mt. Chimborazo, she can see blood oozing from his gums and lips. His eyes are red and bloodshot against the perpetual snow. Every breath is attended with sharp pains in the head and chest, the sharpening of doubt. He pauses, braced against the brush of the wind and fear of falling, looks up, beyond the peak, into the glacial light: What does my body want? Whereas in his personal life, the voice continues, his inner turmoil and frustration were carefully kept from erupting. We only have one single letter in which . . .

Such volumes of smoke, sparks and cinders were belched forth from its burning entrails and driven down the sides of the mountain as nearly suffocated Cortés's men. Sulfur was precipitated on the slopes of the crater. Volumes piled on her table, still all she knows of Mexico. The education of Aztec women. Nothing but dance and music. Hence they walked "as if carried by a cool wind," feeling their genitals with every step, with each swing of the arms, walked as if every move gave birth. Not like her

hesitations which take back her steps before they can even take shape, bare intervals, itchy, hitched-up skirt. But perhaps she worried too much? Why not a coke instead, or coffee.

Ada showed no interest. She was typing.

"How about this for your travel brochure," said Paul: "Montezuma had the magicians locked up in the Cuauhcalco prison and their wives and children killed. The chiefs killed the women by hanging them with ropes, and the children by dashing them to pieces against the walls."

"Even violence," she said, "to jolt me out of my rut."

There was a pause in the typing. Ada bent over the sheet, inserting the correcting paper.

Paul continued: "The body of the sacrificed captive was delivered to the warrior who had taken him in battle, and by him, after being dressed, was served up in an entertainment to his friends. This was not the coarse repast of famished cannibals, but a banquet teeming with delicious beverages and delicate viands, prepared with art, and attended by both sexes. At another feast, the dedication of the great temple of Huitzilopochtli, prisoners who for some years had been reserved for the purpose, were drawn from all quarters to the capital. They were ranged in files, forming a procession nearly two miles long."

"Not just prisoners," she added. "Foreign tongues are not fit food for the Gods. The most beautiful of their own young men and women, the most accomplished dancers, the most intrepid young warriors were annually sacrificed. Nice to know I wouldn't have made the grade. You not either, Paul. Ada, however . . . Maybe that's why she has an aversion to that country."

Ada was still typing when Victoria appeared.

"You," she turned to Ada, "must be Amy's companion. How I envy you. You will help me persuade her to come? Perhaps you come too?"

"I don't think Amy needs persuading," said Ada. "She is already studying the conquest of Mexico. So is my son, Paul."

"Would you like a sample?" said Paul, shaking hands. "In 1519, Patlahuatzin touched his hands to the ground and to his forehead in greeting. A few minutes later the Cholutecas had flayed his arms to the elbows and cut his hands at the wrists so that they dangled."

"How wonderful," said Victoria, taking her hand back. "I mean, that you are so thorough."

"Easier than leading a strenuous dream life," was all Amy could think.

"You'll get sick," said Ada. "I know you'll get sick as soon as the wind starts pushing at your plane."

The involuntary muscles in her viscera no longer go into spasms. She feels safer now and tired. She thinks of the stuccoed fruit on the ceiling. But her safety is hollow, a crowd of figures pressing in. Josephine Bonaparte smiles, skillfully hiding her bad teeth, Henry sniggers, and Beethoven wants his socks mended. She swallows centuries, continents, armies, wave after wave, Columbus, Cortés, Humboldt, their desire beating against the coast of America rising up inside her, incomprehensible. Don't drown me, they say, I want you. I want you because you are unlike me. Or did they say: like me? Boats setting out, day after day, for different waves, different shore lines in the distance, different air and sun. Or the same wave, the same air and sun, an island named Reinhard von Haeften, its interior unpenetrated, unexplored. She finds it nearly consoling to think of Humboldt training his telescope toward the blue officer's coat across the ocean. But

returning from the distance, a little giddy still, he records with precision what he measured against the impossible blue: movement of planets, intensity of magnetic force, atmospheric disturbances, volcanoes in rows indicating vast subterranean fissures.

Paul was chilly and complained. "How long before the floors will be iced over and I'll have to skate to the phone to cut this ear-splitting ring."

The house was cold, the call not for him. He refused extra sweaters.

"Too many layers would cancel my features which are already blurred by bulk. For instance just now, taking Coleman off the turntable, the cold sharpening my bones, I had a sudden intimation of my true character without spelling lessons: I'll always stay a child skipping now on this foot and now on the other—because of the cold, you know—all through Massachusetts and the astonished neighboring states."

"You change your stance as fast as the record," she stole a look at Ada who was practicing her dervish whirl in the hall, round and round, and didn't seem to have noticed that the music had stopped and changed. "I suppose that has its excitement, like a ferris wheel or, rather, getting lost in the back yard, since the point seems to be surprise."

He stood beside her now, watching Ada. She was turning counterclockwise, as you must do in the northern hemisphere to be in accordance with the rotation of the earth.

"A vast twilight zone, nearly 1500 miles wide, is slipping around the earth," he said, "and if you get close it wheels you three subway stops past sanity and won't let you get off for dinner."

"You've never missed one. So all is not lost."

"You underestimate," he sulked. "My depression, like Beethoven's, is terrible and complete."

Alexander von Humboldt describes the Universe: a synthesis, bringing together, the danger of getting lost in the mountains of detail he keeps accumulating, oh, so patiently. The importance of connecting it all into a cosmos which opens out like the splendid white flower from the red disk of that fall-blooming annual.

Metaphor, she mumbles. Half my life I've spent connecting perceptions this way, by analogy. But the flower I'd have skipped. Only a scientist can afford such hackneyed comparisons.

She accepts, though, that without our connecting them into a picture the dots are not even visible, that being real means having form. Metaphor, muscles, telescopes, travelers. Columbus, the first to connect with the NEW WORLD: and the two hemispheres which God had cast asunder were united, how sexual, and began to become alike. Could Ada and she ever, could she wish it on her? This

edge on her desire, leaning into aggression, violent games to play with Freud and sleepiness, like a relentless wind to continue the conversation.

Was Ada getting thinner? Was her silence a flutter or wary of thin ice between the lines of talk, loaded dice? Fits of cleaning. A sudden compulsion to wash windows, wipe the ribs of radiators, why not let them stay dirty? An impression that she wanted to make a speech, utter warnings, or at least cough at regular intervals. Yet eluded questions. Faulty reading of stars, a level look at the backs of books. At least Amy had removed her childhood photo, the desperate, fat girl pushing out of her clothes. The quadrant decalibrated, a silk doublet and 10000 maravedis to him who should first see land. Follow the great flocks of birds which scatter, musicians tuning up, notes that do not lead into, disconnected, mosquito bites on Amy's skin, impossible in Boston, in mid-December, but an edgy feel of discomfort. She looked into the mirror to see if her skin was flaking off, saw the usual wrinkles and the back of Ada's left shoulder slipping into her coat, then getting covered by a silk scarf which she wore on top in the French manner, then moving out of the field.

She must be getting well. She can concentrate much better. A short time ago her head went so fast down the freeway. Its interior still has a population unmatched by other environments: dancers walking as if carried by a cool wind, Cortés takes off his helmet, the Creoles demand participation in the government, an eruption of the Chimborazo, the fleet proceeds with a strong breeze until sunset, the procession slowly mounts the temple steps up to the *piedra di sacrificios*, led by the Empress Josephine, waves crash through the wall. But now, if she thinks of Ada, she can hold still long enough to ask herself if this is the same figure as the dancing mistress of her dream. And when the whirl starts up again, it is not Ada who begins to move away, but something on the periphery: insurgents on the run as the vice-regal forces take the offensive, an Acapulco louse scurrying away from Alexander von Humboldt's microscope.

It always begins on the south side of the room which, being nearer the equator, travels the faster. So that Napoleon's army advancing into the *terra fria* actually marches in circles and is easily captured by Montezuma's men in their feather armor. Napoleon sticks his hand into his coat. Whether or not the gesture is of an amatory nature, the offense is capital. The tribunal pronounces unity in diversity. Alexander von Humboldt listens in profound silence. Tears stream down his face.

Ada stared at the dripping, watched each drop round itself, hang in precarious perfection, then give in to excess, oblong, and fall. The taps didn't quite close anymore. But she listened as if trying to trap what? The point between stillness and motion? The birth of gravity? Degrees of tension and attention? Then she pushed

her hair back with the fluttering motion of her arm and turned again, slowly, round and round, counterclockwise, like water swirling, turns and more turns.

We do not often think of the movement of the earth which seems so solid and immovable, we simply submit to the succession of night and day. Only in her sleep can Amy feel its astonishing speed whirling her relentlessly eastward, undoing all research and exploration toward the west. Nothing will bite the bait of words here, no fishing between the lines though hundreds of girls are taking off their clothes. As long as it is only the rotation of the earth's axis, she can still hold on with hands and knees as in a strong wind. But if she suddenly experiences the other, much faster movement around the sun, then she is truly lost, bits of naked flesh spinning off into vast spaces, swallowed whole and instantly forgotten, at best caught in the large twilight zone that slips continually round the globe and abolishes all outsides.

Had she pushed too hard when she spoke again to Ada of her restlessness, her sudden desire to roam, a strange country, strange cities, a language she didn't know. She thought it would sound like bunches of spring, field flowers in the ear. No way of seeing dry cracks in the sentences.

Had Ada felt pushed on stage in a part she hadn't rehearsed? "Go to your bloody Mexico. But do you have to be at me? Do I have to like it too?"

Amy felt the blow to her head. Sat there, stunned.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to hit you," Paul came from the dining room, "I just thought I'd create a diversion."

Ada's face above hers, forehead beaded with sweat. "Are you hurt? Let me get you a compress." Left the room with a sureness in her bearing that comes out of having answered a difficult question.

Amy bent down and picked up *The Conquest of Mexico*.

She opens her eyes again to the reassuring square of the shade, its outlines dimmer, reddish, pretending to be straight lines, to coordinate her field of vision, but green now. Strange, this moving in and out of the spin, as if it were a matter of breathing, a constant chemical transformation of vertigo into vertical, the deceptive solidity of lungs.

Walked slowly toward the Common, making her way as through dense underbrush. Thick clouds between the roofs. The air cold and hard as marble. Beyond, in the trees, the souls of ancestors. If only Ada had thrown the book. It would have meant punctuation, a new departure, crossing oceans, visiting castles, train rides, watching bullfights even, and writing postcards back to Paul. But Paul, just one more silliness, like the silly swan boats she used to watch here in summer, and the ducks. But now scum had dried to a greyish brown which covered the

bottom and the stones around the edge, stones which had looked polished, like duck eggs.

With effort she unstuck her sole. Slow afternoon. In spite of the season, the drained lake, the brown squalor of the dry lawn, the narrow sun, there were people. Brushed against sullen teenagers horsing around, eyes full of watery sky-grey, old men, purposeful women with shopping bags. Slow afternoon. So hard to understand. Ada, she thought, how she draws me and keeps just, just barely out of my reach. Why would her nails keep growing after her death, after their world had slipped away? Pushed her face upward into the fine drizzle.

She would go to Mexico. Not just for the translations and readings. In the harsher light, the space between them would have to change, the landscape come out of the fog, forced into definition.

Now the light around the shade has grown so pale she wonders if it is there at all, if her eyes are not simply projecting this faint frame, a thin line to stop her eyes, a momentary *terra firma* the color of sleep or a silk doublet.

Desires, the voice says, to look at the stars, to climb a mountain, to describe the universe. The ocean bulges between them and the pain has been dulled to the point of disappearing. Life seems exciting and full of other caves to be explored. Not many of them, it is true, will yield an unknown species like the *guacharo* or oil bird with its enormous wingspan and edible fat between its legs, but all promise encounters beyond the tickle of fear, hoarse bird cries and clanging as of castanets.

Amy wades through the birdlime, next to Alexander von Humboldt. With effort, they unstick their soles, lift their knees and again let their feet touch the viscous mass with their toes. They duck to avoid the stalactites. She would like to discover a garden here, in this cave. But the prosody allows no liberties, the plants that spring up in this subterranean dark are pale and ghostly, deformed varieties without scent, and the Indians cannot be persuaded to go any farther.

The room has become invisible. It is only through her body touching the sheets, cool, clean, constantly changed, that she can hold on to her body as it sinks under its own weight into shadows that exceed comprehension. Here, birds are singing. Birds flutter from tree to tree as if drunk on air. Or is it the dancing mistress, slim as a thread, the way she stretches, the way she seems to breathe with her arms, her hair like ruffled feathers. Her slightest move as if carried by a cool wind. And over it all the ceiling with its stuccoed fruit. Why did they never fall?

"Mere contact with the free air," says Alexander von Humboldt indifferently, "exercises a soothing influence on the wary spirit and calms the storm of passions." He is lying in a hammock, scratching with his left hand, while the telescope in his right is trained on a black surface of glazed volcanic sand and lava, the fragments

of which, its boiling arrested in fantastic forms, impede the advance of Cortés's men.

"They too are going in circles," says Amy, as smoke, sparks and cinders belch forth from the crater. "They too will be captured by time."

"I'll show you the cosmos," says Alexander von Humboldt and draws lines isodynamic, isoclinal, isothermal stretching between all the petals of the fall-blooming annual, then follows them hand in hand with Amy. If only Napoleon were not invading her body. They walk on the surface heavy with grief where the height of the barometer reduced to sea level is always the same. Here the rock beds have the same dip and the magnetic needle the same inclination to the plumb line. Alexander von Humboldt's head is a ring composed of atoms of only one element relating to zones of force, having equal angles, equal tension, equal value, all edges equally foreshortened.

Love, she said, into the rain, and pictured Ada showing a student how to keep her heel turned out while her foot glides forward without lifting the toe from the floor. The two bodies moved in parallel with the teasing lag of imitation, like two waves following one another with the same diminishing speed. The gilded roof of the State House glistening in the drizzle. The dancers' faces empty inside their frames of feathery hair. Unknown species. A wingspan of 1.13 meters. The rain was against Ada. Or Amy's desire?

Amy opens her eyes. Though it is dark and she can see absolutely nothing, it makes a great difference to her movement. For a moment she thinks she has reached the polar regions. Everything is much slower, if not standing still. Her body is so vast now, nothing can surprise her. But as her lids go shut again, a flock of birds, is it geese? parrots? lifts off, beating the air with a thunder of cries, and here is again the ceiling under which childhood waits to be left behind. This is why she must learn to walk on her hands. Two older girls take hold of her legs. Her hair is hanging down to the floor, her skirt falls over her belt down over her neck. Thus, legs high in the air, she walks across the stone floor, a moving island surfacing from the music that has spread all over the ground. Again and again, till the teachers turn away: "Her thighs are too fat," she hears, "and she already has pubic hair."

Found Ada in the study, reading the passage where the sacrificial procession moved through the orderly streets, girls in long white gowns seeming to glide above the ground. Crowds of people were cheering, showering them with flowers. A procession of boys, also in white gowns, approached from the other side as they mounted the temple steps toward the priest in the white robe, toward the great black stone, toward the flaming sun. Again tried to measure the degree of feeling admitted.

"Is it so different?" Ada's eyes focused some distance behind Amy. "Music and dance was the bulk of my schooling also. The body. I remember all-day lessons about the hips. The hips as the center from which all walking was willed and directed. We must not feel the ground under our feet, we must not feel our feet. The hips, only the hips. We must think with the hips. And as for being prepared for sacrifice . . . "

"How you exaggerate," she said instead of: you know I couldn't bear not to see you tilting your head in this way you have, or your eyes focusing just a little behind me. She would say it some other time. Your walk, she would say, as if you were pulled. And sexual. Fusing with space and giving birth to movement. Or at tea, at table and voices mingle, hovering in the morning when first stretching your mind into the fissures of air.

She would like to hear more of Alexander von Humboldt's physical description of the universe, of connecting the million details, of bringing together, activity shared by muscle and mind, by explorer, scientist, poet, mechanic. She wants to ask him about sex, straight out, connecting body with body.

"I am not hungry," he replies, walking away. "The icy pole or point of the greatest cold no more corresponds with the terrestrial pole than the word promise. Aberration is by no means confined to the sun."

She can no longer hear him now, though she still sees his figure in the distance, waving his arms and slapping his body. The only effective defense against insects, he has told her earlier.

Why is she unable to hold all that is happening to her? Parts of her body are orbiting now around her head, or is it another sun, her thoughts scattering into the atmosphere. She would like to partition them all off in order to study them with distance, with objectivity, lined up on a sheet of paper large enough to encompass the revolving elements and, as under a magnifying glass, she sees pores or, rather, specks of dust in the snow crystals packed tight. She walks across on her hands.

Birds have to eat all the time, somebody says, but now she is bored, she has heard it before.

PART II

A Form of Memory

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF MOTION

Alexander von Humboldt shipped out on the mail boat "Pizarro" with sextants, quadrants, scales, compasses, telescopes, microscopes, hygrometer, barometer,

eudimeter, thermometer, chronometer, magnetometer, a Leiden bottle, *lunettes d'épreuves* and a botanist, Aimé Bonpland.

Before him, using the newly improved astrolabe to determine the ship's position, Columbus had thrown his coin not as a mere adventurer, but with a plan.

The mistress drew the switch through her left hand and smiled at each of us in turn.

"Stress" is used for metrical stress whereas "accent" is reserved for the emphasis demanded by language.

The mistress showed us how to walk, hitching up her skirts so that we could see her legs far above the knees.

All landmarks disappeared, and the sea horizon extended all the way round the sky.

A bad omen. Like a flaming ear of corn in the sky, bleeding fire, drop by drop. Like a wound in the sky. The magicians told Montezuma that what was to come would come swiftly.

Even before Columbus, the earth turned on its axis to divide the day from night and afford a convenient means of measuring time.

Alexander von Humboldt knew that Columbus' inspiration "from the heart" had been a flock of parrots flying toward the southwest, a word with level stress where the accent falls with equal emphasis on both syllables. Birds, said Alexander von Humboldt. All land is discovered by birds. He lifted his field glasses, but could see nothing but an expanse of water apparently boundless.

The mistress slightly lifted a knee and let her foot touch the ground with the tip of her toes which formed a straight line with the shinbone. Only then did she slowly lower her heel. Her full, round, delicate knee stretched at the moment the heel came down.

In spite of the successful Egyptian campaign, Napoleon could not take the fortress of Akkon or reduce the bulge of the equatorial regions.

Alexander von Humboldt talked twice as fast as Napoleon, and in mixed German, French, Spanish and English. He reserved Hebrew for intimate letters. No wonder there were rumors. (See Henriette Herz.)

Montezuma had the magicians locked up in the Cuauhcalco prison and their wives and children killed. The chiefs killed the women by hanging them with ropes, and the children by dashing them to pieces against the walls.

REFERENCE

Humboldt, Alexander, Baron von (1769-1859), German naturalist and scientific explorer.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF MOTION, CONTINUED

The action of a muscle is to contract, or shorten in length, and thus the two structures to which it is attached are brought closer together.

We had to hitch up our skirts to the hips and walk so slowly that I could have run around the whole house for every single step. If we put down a foot too quickly the mistress' switch was on our calves.

Enter Beethoven: I shall take fate by the throat.

Alexander von Humboldt had fallen in love with a young officer, Reinhard von Haeften, notwithstanding the rumors about Henriette Herz.

Metaphor implies a relationship between two terms which are thus brought together in the muscle.

The hips were the center from which all walking was willed and directed. We must not feel the ground under our feet. We must not feel our feet. We must feel nothing but our hips. We must think with our hips.

As Alexander von Humboldt's boat approached the Antilles typhoid immobilized most of the passengers. The Spanish flag moved up and down the mast.

Montezuma received the messengers in the House of the Serpent and ordered two captives to be painted with chalk. Like metaphor, this required an eye for resemblance and clear skies. The two captives were then sacrificed before the messengers' eyes: their breasts torn open, and the messengers sprinkled with their blood. This was done because the messengers had seen the gods.

REFERENCE

1799-1804, Alexander von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland undertook their famous expedition to South America which led them to Teneriffe, Venezuela (the Orinoco-Casiquiare region), Colombia, Ecuador (ascent of Mt. Chimborazo up to 5760 m) and Mexico.

ILLUSTRATION

Alexander von Humboldt wears a yellow coat. Yellow is the color of envy, fever, and the hair of Reinhard von Haeften's fiancée.

The sky and mountains in the distance are blue and match Alexander von Humboldt's pants. Aimé Bonpland wears

black the better to merge into the background. He is confident that his coat will not absorb enough light quanta to hinder his examination of an orchid.

The natives, painted toward the upper right, wear loincloths to cover their *verguenzas* or "shames."

The magnitude of these areas exercises a powerful influence on the quantity of humidity contained in the atmosphere.

CONNECTIONS

When Columbus set foot on the new world, the two hemispheres which God had cast asunder were reunited and began to become alike.

La Malinche translated the Nahuatl of the messengers into Mayan for Jeronimo de Aguilar, who then translated it into Spanish for the conquistadors.

Our running had to be as if we were carried by a cool wind. Our heels were not to touch the ground. This was to give us beautiful legs.

Montezuma sent captives to the Spaniards because they might be gods and wish to drink blood.

It was not the tidal wave that advanced westerly, only its form.
FROM KOSMOS,

OR PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE UNIVERSE

There is, perhaps, some truth in the accusation advanced against many German scientific works, that they lessen the value of their investigations by an accumulation of detail and do not sufficiently connect the latter into general laws. (See muscle.)

EYEWITNESS REPORT

Cortés took off his helmet and stroked his beard.

A vast twilight zone, nearly 1500 miles wide, was slipping around the earth as the latter turned on its axis.

Aimé Bonpland sat under a tree. His hands were resting a book on his knees. He was memorizing Linneaus' *Species Plantarum*.

The Creoles aspired to a larger participation in the government, whereas the incumbent viceroy hoped that patriotism would supersede the desire for social reform.

The Aztec harlots bathed frequently, a heathenish idiosyncrasy to Father Sahagún.

No part of Alexander von Humboldt's body felt altogether comfortable. His face and neck were burned. The skin was flaking off. He was unable to shave. Every exposed part of his body was bitten by insects. Some had even found their way inside his clothes.

A small river ran through the middle of the garden, and on the banks hundreds of girls were taking off their clothes. We swam as far as the sluice gate which joins the park wall. When we dressed again, the whole river was already in the shade and a fine mist rising from the ground.

Priests introduced *Paradise Lost*.

VOLCANOES

Alexander von Humboldt was seized by a sudden desire to climb the Teneriffe. Increasing cold seeped through his light tropical clothing even though the steep mountain side caught the rays of the sun at a less oblique angle. Alexander von Humboldt paused to examine the stones and catch his breath. Sulphurous fumes burned holes into his jacket and his hands got stiff at 2° Celsius.

EYEWITNESS REPORT, CONTINUED

After the alexandrine had become the accepted meter for French tragedy, four viceroys came and went in rapid succession.

The Empress Josephine skillfully hid her bad teeth.

Gravitation, Bonpland explained to her, elongates the watery envelope of the earth very slightly in two opposite directions.

ELEGY

The term elegy was at one time applied to work on any subject, composed in the elegiac meter.

When Alexander von Humboldt returned to Europe on August 1, 1804, he learned that the French and German newspapers had regretfully announced his death, by yellow fever, in Acapulco.

Years earlier, Montezuma's eldest son had entered into a poetical correspondence with one of his father's concubines, a woman who wrote verses with ease and discussed matters of state with the king and his ministers.

The only ugly people I had ever seen were the two old women who cooked and cleaned. Their faces were like bark. The thought that they might take off their clothes made me gag.

A later meaning of elegy was a poem in whatever meter in which a twilight zone slips around the globe.

Whether or not the correspondence was of an amorous nature, the offense was capital. The tribunal pronounced sentence of death on the unfortunate prince, and the king, steeling his heart against all entreaties and the voice of nature, suffered the cruel judgment to be carried into execution. Then he shut himself up in his palace for many weeks and had the doors and windows of his son's residence walled up, so that it might never again be occupied.

EXERCISE

The foot should not rest on the big toe, but the weight of the body should be distributed equally over the entire surface of the foot.

ELEGY, CONTINUED

The two ecclesiastics recited the Lord's prayer to the idolatrous Indians. The natives listened in profound silence. Tears streamed down their cheeks.

The Empress Josephine declared to the assembled court that, no longer having any hope of bearing children who would satisfy the Emperor's political needs and the interest of France, she, with the permission of her august spouse, was pleased to give him a divorce.

The viceregal forces took the offensive. The insurgents were soon captured and executed. Their heads were hung in cages at the four corners of the city.

As a considerable portion of the qualitative properties of matter is still unknown to man, the attempt to describe the universe must prove unsuccessful. Thus, there

lurked in Alexander von Humboldt's mind an unsatisfied longing, tinged with sadness.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF MOTION, CONTINUED

The Indians had never entered the cave of the *guacharos*, or "oil birds," farther than the first chamber. Beyond, in the dark, lived the souls of ancestors along with the birds.

Alexander von Humboldt insisted on wading on through the birdlime and the biting smoke of their torches. With effort he unstuck his sole, lifted his knee and let his foot touch the viscous mass with his toe. He did not always lower his heel, but simply straightened his knee and lifted the other foot.

Three girls and three boys we were in our room and shy with one another. One night, the mistress pulled my covers off and carried me naked out of the house. In the garden, she put me into a small box which exactly fitted my size, and closed the lid.

Alexander von Humboldt found strange formations of subterranean plants which grew, pale and ghostly, in the dark cave. The Indians looked at the deformed plants with fear and could not be persuaded to penetrate any farther into the cave. Napoleon asked: "What is the matter?"

The prosody allowed for liberties, but Alexander von Humboldt ducked to avoid the stalactites.

Now and then, when one of the Indian guides raised his torch, Alexander von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland could get a glimpse of a momentarily blinded bird. They fired into the dark vault, in the direction of the loudest screams.

I remember nothing further until I saw daylight come through the holes in my box. Then my little coffin was put upright and opened. I felt dizzy as I stepped out into the light.

The two specimens Aimé Bonpland killed proved the guacharo to be indeed an unknown species. It was the size of a crow, with a wingspan of 1.13 meters and an enormous beak. Between their legs the young birds had a thick lump of edible fat. "What a battlefield this would make," said Napoleon.

REFERENCE

Bonpland, Aimé (1773-1858), French botanist and Alexander von Humboldt's companion on their famous expedition to South America (1799-1804).

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

The explorer travels over the beloved body, but nowhere does he find an end or edge.

When Columbus set foot on the Bahamas, the two worlds which God had cast asunder were reunited and began to become alike.

The laying on of a gold ring cures excessive lucidity.

The moon unusually large and near. At times, the sea rises into the light and becomes incomprehensible.

The contract is definite when the man steps into the woman's shoe. As long as the foot still hovers above the shoe, his body may still turn on its own axis, which takes about twenty-four hours.

REFERENCE

Haeften, Reinhard von (1773-?)

VOLCANOES, CONTINUED

Alexander von Humboldt was seized by a sudden desire to climb a volcano, mountain or at least staircase.

Toward autumn I got into strange states at night. I would be awakened by a deafening noise, a roar and thundering. The first few times I screamed out loud. The other girls jumped out of their beds and then got angry when all they could hear was the splash of the fountain in the courtyard. Xada would sit with me till I calmed down. But as soon as I put my head on the pillow I heard thunder and storms or wild music, loud as if my ear were the soundboard.

Three years later, representatives of aspiring emancipators in both New Spain and New Granada arrived in London to solicit arms and munitions in exchange for discrepancies of longitude.

Beethoven's overbearing manners were not those of an uncouth provincial misbehaving himself in all innocence.

The track opened onto a black surface of glazed volcanic sand and lava, the broken fragments of which, arrested in its boiling progress in a thousand fantastic forms, opposed continual impediments to Cortés's advance. Amidst these, one huge rock, the *Pico del Fraile*, rose to the perpendicular height of 160 feet, compelling the conquistadors to take a wide circuit. They soon came to the limits of perpetual snow where new difficulties presented themselves, as the treacherous ice gave imperfect footing, and a false step might precipitate them into the frozen chasms that yawned around. To increase their distress, respiration in these aerial regions became so difficult, that every effort was attended with sharp pains in the head and limbs. Still they pressed on, till, drawing nearer the crater, such volumes of smoke, sparks and cinders were belched forth from its burning entrails, and driven down the sides of the mountain, as nearly suffocated and blinded them. Sulphur was precipitated on the sides of the crater.

FOOTNOTE

If the object is to obtain sulphur for gunpowder, it is on the whole less inconvenient to import it from Spain.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF SEXUAL INTERCOURSE, CONTINUED

"Aimé," said Alexander von Humboldt.

Aimé Bonpland recited the *Species Plantarum* by Linnaeus.

ETIQUETTE

Knowing that the alexandrine takes its name from the Old French romance on Alexander the Great, Alexander von Humboldt learned to dance the samba, the animalito and the congo-minuet.

The mistress always smiled as she switched us.

The body of the sacrificed captive was delivered to the warrior who had taken him in battle, and by him, after being dressed, was served up in an entertainment to his friends. This was not the coarse repast of famished cannibals, but a banquet teeming with delicious beverages and delicate viands, prepared with art, and attended by both sexes. At another feast, the dedication of the great temple of Huitzilopochtli, in 1486, prisoners who for some years had been reserved for the purpose, were drawn from all quarters to the capital. They were ranged in files, forming a procession nearly two miles long.

EXERCISE

The right foot glides forward, without lifting the toe from the floor. The heel is kept as much turned out as possible, which makes it feel as if the movement were begun by the heel.

REFERENCE

Humboldt's services to geology were mainly based on his attentive study of the volcanoes of the New World. He showed that they fell into linear groups, presumably corresponding with vast subterranean fissures.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT AS KOSMOS-MACHINE

1) The Platform:

the tropics, painted in oil, very blue, the distant mountains, palm trees and, under the microscope, cactus, orchids, parrots, maps and oilbirds

2) The Scaffolding:

- a) yellow coat
- b) gold buttons
- c) striped shirt
- d) blue-striped trousers
- e) worn straw hat
- f) Wellington boots

3) The Circuits:

gathering, measuring, sorting, classifying, coding, comparing, filing, abstracting, connecting, connecting, connecting

4) The Knife:

had loved young men, Reinhardt von Haeften, Bougainville's son, age 15, not Aimé Bonpland who is off with a native woman, spends nights writing

5) The Basket:

Scattered Remarks on Basalt

On the Original Inhabitants of America and the Monuments

They Left Behind

Memoir on Sea Currents

Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain

Essay on the Geography of Plants

Views of the Cordilleras

Critical Examination of the Discovery of America

*Historical Account of the Voyage to the Equinoctial Regions
of the New Continent*

Kosmos, or Physical Description of the Universe

6) The Waste:

vain, famous, an excellent dancer, talkative in many languages

ELEGY, CONTINUED

At last they came. At last they began to march toward us. Their horses carried them on their backs wherever they wished. They came in battle array, as conquerors, and the dust rose in whirlwinds on the road.

I looked at the horse and saw my first teacher, Yamada. The position of the feet was her. The proud bearing was her, the fiery eyes and the way of shaking its mane. A girl held the reins. When she saw me stop and gape she clicked her tongue and led the horse in a circle. I ran alongside. The horse's rump was overwhelming, so huge, so inhuman. Frightening. And yet, the rump most of all reminded me of Yamada. The same calm movement, the same sure strength, and the way the thighs moved against each other. I suddenly felt faint.

No part of Alexander von Humboldt's body felt altogether comfortable. His face and neck were burned. The skin was flaking off. He was unable to shave. Every exposed part of his body was bitten by insects. Some had even found their way inside his clothes.

A line from which unstressed syllables have been dropped is called truncated.

Then the slaughter began: knife strokes and sword strokes and death. The people of Cholula had not foreseen it, had not suspected it. They faced the Spaniards without weapons, without their swords or their shields.

Alexander von Humboldt examined the Great Cholulan Pyramid with leisure and his usual care.

Even before his hearing deteriorated, Beethoven was downcast and distressed.

In 1519, Patlahuatzin touched his hands to the ground and to his forehead. A few minutes later the Cholultecas had flayed his arms to the elbows and cut his hands at the wrists so that they dangled.

Among the attempts to refer all that is unstable in the sensuous world to a single principle, the theory of gravitation is the most comprehensive and the richest in

cosmic results.

HYPOTHESIS

If the colonials had not vacillated and fumbled, if Aloysio Galvani had first stimulated the nervous fiber by spherical form, if Pythagoras had thought the earth was an Aztec calendar, if Montezuma had explained the accidental contact of two heterogeneous metals.

POETRY

Alexander von Humboldt wanted to write an epithalamium for Reinhard von Haeften's wedding.

His voluntary muscles included many parallel striated fibers, bound together by connective tissue. Their opposite ends were fastened to the separate bones by extensions

of the connective tissue.

Alexander von Humboldt could not find any feminine rhymes. He returned to the study of volcanoes, arranging them in linear groups indicating vast subterranean fissures.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF MOTION, CONTINUED

Alexander von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland were walking back from the beach, peeling their soles off the ground, when Alexander von Humboldt sensed somebody behind them.

I shall never forget the entrance of Cempada, the new dancing mistress, as long as I live. The outline of her body was sharp against the light, her hair like ruffled feathers. Slim as a thread, the way she stretched, the way she seemed to breathe with her arms, the luxurious drop of her shoulders. Her every slightest movement showed the pleasure she took in her body.

Alexander von Humboldt, whose muscles had a density of 1.055, turned and saw a tall mestizo, almost naked, about to bring a club down on his head. He ducked, but Bonpland caught the blow on his temple.

For weeks I saw her before my eyes and nearly expected that her image would take on flesh. She wore a tight netting of blue glass pearls as a corsage which left her breasts bare, circling them with two rings of larger and darker pearls. I had never seen naked breasts and wondered if my chest would grow to look like hers.

The mestizo paid no more attention to Humboldt, but went to pick up Bonpland's hat which lay in the sand, a few feet off.

Her feet were bare.

Meanwhile Bonpland had come to, lunged at his aggressor and chased him into a thicket which, Alexander von Humboldt did not fail to notice, consisted mostly of torch thistles or *cactus cereus*.

I was most surprised when she lifted her arms and I saw dense tufts of black hair in her armpits.

FOOD

The incumbent viceroy hoped to profit by catering to the Creoles.

The man from the Rio Negro declared that the meat of the manimodas monkey was only slightly inferior to human flesh.

I am not hungry, said Alexander von Humboldt.

REFERENCE

Humboldt's inquiries into the origin of tropical storms afforded the earliest clue to the laws governing atmospheric disturbances.

VOLCANOES, CONTINUED

Comparing local times all the way round the globe, the Cabildos deposed the Spanish authorities and created provincial juntas.

Beethoven proposed marriage to Therese von Malfatti.

I am still not hungry, said Alexander von Humboldt.

At this moment, when the dance was loveliest, when song was linked to song and the meridians converged downward, the Spaniards killed the celebrants.

EYEWITNESS REPORT, CONTINUED

The whole air reeked with smoke. The soldiers' faces were blackened with it. Some were using their ramrods, others putting powder on the touch-pans or taking charges from their pouches. Others again were firing into the smoke. A pleasant humming and whistling of bullets was heard. A soldier with a bleeding head and no cap was being dragged back by two men who supported him under the arms. Another was still standing, swinging his arm which had just been hurt while blood was streaming over his greatcoat as from a bottle.

Napoleon sat on his camp stool.

Montezuma bowed his head without speaking a word. For a long time he remained thus, with his head bent down. And when he spoke at last, it was only to say: What help is there now? Is there a mountain for us to climb?

HYPOTHESIS

It is by subjecting isolated observations to the process of combination and comparison that we discover the climatic distribution of erections.

Rhyme, or repetition of the same or similar sounds, also serves to establish a connection between words and fear of flying (blue).

At sea, latitude is usually found by observing the altitude of some celestial body when crossing the meridian of the opposite sex.

EYEWITNESS REPORT, CONTINUED

On the day Alexander von Humboldt climbed the Chimborazo, the atmospheric pressure sank as he got higher. He developed trouble breathing. Blood started to

seep from his gums and lips. His eyes were red and bloodshot.

Columbus promised a silk doublet to the first man to see land.

Involuntary muscle could be found in the internal organs or viscera of Alexander von Humboldt's body, as in the walls of the digestive tract, blood vessels, respiratory passages and urinary and genital organs. It was capable of slow but protracted contraction.

REFERENCE

After nine years as Josephine Bonaparte's gardener at Malmaison, Aimé Bonpland returned, in 1816, to South America where he was caught in a border quarrel between Argentina and Paraguay, and arrested by Dr. Francia's henchmen. Released after nine years' imprisonment, he settled in Borja, near the Brazilian border with an Indian wife and grew oranges peaches figs and roses. Though showered with medals and honorary diplomas, he never returned to Europe.

ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT'S DREAM

At daybreak, the Chimborazo showed a second peak, high above the first. Alexander von Humboldt was seized by the desire to climb both and thus explain the alternation of actuality and illusion by the rotation of the mind on its axis.

HYPOTHESIS

Reinhard von Haeften

VOLCANOES, CONTINUED

While New Spain, like Venezuela, New Granada and Chile, was the scene of bloody combat, we must picture Beethoven in a turbulent emotional condition.

A volcano, properly so called, exists only where a permanent connection is established between the interior of the earth and the atmosphere, and the orgasm continues for long periods of time.

News from the mother country bent the motion of light rays out of their course which caused the Creoles to aspire to larger participation in the government.

When one of us said "I," she meant her body. Her body from head to toe. We felt ourselves more in our calves than in our eyes. I don't remember what anyone said. I remember how each girl walked.

This involves the action of muscle, which is to contract, or shorten in length. Thus the two structures to which it is attached are brought closer together.

The insurgents were unconcerned with the eccentricity of the earth's orbit. They desired immediate freedom from oppression.

TIME

It is now clear that the turning of the earth on its axis is of very great service, not only to the astronomer, but to mankind in general, as affording a very convenient means of measuring time.

VOLCANOES, CONTINUED

A desperate conflict ensued, in which the patriots managed to avoid defeat until an ill-timed earthquake destroyed their morale. The settlements in control of the rebels were almost annihilated, while those remaining faithful to the king escaped unharmed. The clergy drew the expected conclusion.

Alexander von Humboldt was seized by a sudden desire to be a bird.
"Well," said Napoleon.

Nothing ever seemed to happen to us. All we did was dance and play music and grow, dance and play music and grow, dance and

EXERCISE (LES BALLETS RUSSES)

Anna Pavlova forced Serge Lifar's knees wide open in a plié. His heels stayed on the floor until he could not stretch his tendons farther. Tamara Karsavina lowered and raised Nijinsky's arm, while Agrippina Vaganova pointed Serge Lifar's toes in a dégagé, and Nijinsky relaxed Ida Rubinstein's instep. Galina Ulanova felt every muscle along Karsavina's back. Since Pavlova's battement penetrated into the very substance of the various ligaments of Michel Fokine's leg, Ida Rubinstein's heel remained turned out with the movement of Michel Fokine's toe so that Tamara Karsavina's leg was thrown through the first position forward to the angle of 90°, and Vera Trefilova's body bent backwards to repeat the same with somebody else's leg.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF SEXUAL INTERCOURSE,
CONTINUED

A virgin had best be offered to a passing stranger whose centrifugal force lessens his attraction everywhere except at the poles. If there are no strangers, the husband must wrap his finger in a white cloth which is torn into bloody bits and distributed to the priests. This does not cause pain to the husband.

On Friday afternoon, at 3:45, Beethoven requested that Frau Nanette Streicher mend his socks.

A refrain is not unusual.

Napoleon surveyed the locality with a profound air.

The interior remained unfamiliar to Alexander von Humboldt.

INTERPOLATION

Columbus observed that the world was not round but pear-shaped, round except where it has a nipple.

HISTORICAL MOMENT

The leaders of the people were confused and divided.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF MOTION, CONTINUED

In my new class I was made to walk on my hands. Two older girls took hold of my legs. My hair hung down to the floor, my skirt fell over my belt down over my neck. Thus, legs high in the air I walked across the stone floor.

In 1794, Antonio Narino had published a Spanish translation of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man. He was first imprisoned, then sent into exile.

Columbus sent out parties to the gold region of Cibao as soon as loss by radiation exceeded the daily quantity of heat received.

The simultaneous contraction of many fibers caused Montezuma's biceps to shorten and bulge, as he lifted his hand in greeting. Since his striated muscles were under conscious control this gesture was considered voluntary.

The women's shadows grew longer.

That same year the equinoxes traveled westward about fifty and one quarter inches.

Hidalgo began a zigzag advance toward the viceregal capital. Town after town, San Miguel, Celaya, Guanajuato, Guadalajara, Valladolid, fell at the onslaught of his ever increasing hordes. Near the end of October 1810, he encamped with an undisciplined multitude within eighteen miles of Mexico City. He might have taken the capital if he had pressed on.

Beethoven worked very slowly while the prime meridian passed through the Royal Observatory of Greenwich.

The delay proved fatal. It gave the commander of the viceregal forces time to assemble his troops and take the offensive. The insurgents and the royalists confronted each other on the banks of the Lerma river, forty miles from Guadalajara.

EXPLANATION

Montezuma arrayed himself in his finery, preparing to go out and meet the Spaniards.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF MOTION, CONTINUED

The royalists were all but defeated when an explosion set fire to a grass field occupied by the main body of Hidalgo's army. Stampeded by the smoke and flames, the rebels broke rank and fled.

FROM KOSMOS,

OR PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE UNIVERSE

While we consider volcanoes as intermittent springs emitting a fluid mixture of oxydized metals, alkalines and earths, we also remember with pleasure that Plato traced vaginal lubrication to eruptions of the Pyriphlegethon.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

That in which the literal meaning of words is disregarded in order to show diverse things as connected in a relationship, usually of resemblance. For instance: "Alexander von Humboldt did not care a fig," an expression derived from the ancient talisman in the shape of a clenched fist with the tip of the thumb emerging

between the joints of the middle fingers. A symbolic representation of coitus. Alexander von Humboldt did not care for it.

EXERCISE

The leg is forcefully thrown forward, describing a circle backward on the height of 90° by rotating the hip joint.

FOOT

See meter.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF SEXUAL INTERCOURSE, CONTINUED

As the explorer approaches the beloved he recites a poem, preferably using frequent enjambment. The beloved prepares herself for the encounter by having the explorer's coat of arms tattooed on her belly. Ropes are to be kept near in case of need. The couple now throw off ballast, hoist the flag and launch full speed ahead into the water.

VARIANT

The beloved prepares himself for the encounter by having the explorer's coat of arms tattooed on his belly.

REPEAT

Ropes are to be kept near in case of need.

EXPLANATION

The insurgent colonies failed to wrest their independence from the force of gravity.

Alexander von Humboldt's muscle cells were cylindrical, scarcely 50μ in diameter, but some measured an inch or more in length. Each cell was surrounded by a delicate sarcolemma and contained several long nuclei.

The revolutionary armies were untrained, inexperienced, poorly equipped. No assistance was received from outside the solar system.

ETIQUETTE, CONTINUED

Alexander von Humboldt held his fork in his left hand while explaining that the quantity of heat received by a body from another depends on the relative position of the two bodies.

Two women in long white gowns came in. We had to strip naked and walk slowly in front of them. When it was my turn I felt dizzy.

FROM KOSMOS,

OR PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE UNIVERSE

Alexander von Humboldt drew lines isodynamic, isoclinal, isothermal, then followed them hand in hand with Aimé Bonpland. If only Napoleon were not invading Russia. He walked on the surface heavy with grief where the barometer reduced to sea level read the same. Here the rock beds had the same dip and the

magnetic needle the same inclination to the plumb line. His head related to zones of force having equal angles, equal pressure, equal tension, all edges equally foreshortened.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF SEXUAL INTERCOURSE, CONTINUED

Alexander von Humboldt did not trust the soundings of navigators who had voyaged there before him and with such apparent ease.

THIS IS TO SAY

The only effective defense against the insects was to wave one's arms and slap one's body.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF SEXUAL INTERCOURSE, CONTINUED

To cure injuries caused by the sting-ray, you must find a woman willing to strip and urinate into the wound. For the sake of completeness it must be stated that, as there are hardly any women here except peasant prostitutes, this cure more often than not leads to a particularly virulent kind of syphilis.

The ballad presents a romantic or heroic theme in impersonal form. Beethoven's loneliness was terrible and complete.

EXPLANATION

Muscular fatigue has been ascribed to the irritating effects on the nerve plates of an excess of sarcolactic acid and extractives.

POSTHUMOUS WRITINGS

Blue trousers are cooler than white. If the Aztecs had only

known that their omens were comets, harmless wanderers in space. O to be on top of a mountain. Someone might again ask: why do you run across the world? To compare your grass with other grass? The icy pole or point of the greatest cold no more corresponds with the terrestrial pole than does the word "promise." Everything dissolves in menstrual blood.

VOLCANOES, CONCLUDED

"Alexander von Humboldt is a spy," said Napoleon.

Pretending to attack the insurgents, Iturbide secretly cultivated their friendship and, in 1821, entered into an agreement, the Plan of Iguala or of the Three Guaranties: unity among Mexicans of all classes, the sun's powers limited by a constitution, and protection of the aberration constant.

REFERENCE

Aimé Bonpland died in 1858, in Borja, near the Brazilian border. On the way to the graveyard, a drunken peasant took offense that the corpse would not return his greeting and ran a dagger through it.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF MOTION, CONCLUDED

They hanged Macuilxochitl in Coyoacan. They also hanged Pizotzin, the King of Culhuacan. And they fed the Keeper of the Black House to their dogs. And three wise men of Ehecatl were devoured by their dogs. They had come to surrender. They arrived bearing their painted sheets of paper. There were four of them, and only one escaped. The other three were overtaken, there in Coyoacan.

Alexander von Humboldt felt weak and feverish. He remained flat in bed, and his horizon, meridian and prime vertical stayed in a constant and definite position. His thought was in the last fraction of its diurnal arc, preparing to leave the horizon.

Slowly, slowly we walked through the streets, seeming to glide above the ground. A procession of girls in long white gowns. Slowly we lifted our knees and let our feet touch the ground with the tip of our toes. We walked as if carried by a cool wind. On both sides of the street, crowds of people were cheering, showering us with flowers. I saw a procession of boys, also in white gowns, approach from the other side as we mounted the temple steps toward the priest in the white robe, toward the great black stone, toward the flaming sun.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF SEXUAL INTERCOURSE,
CONCLUDED

When the explorer does not encounter any object, his mind spirals off into space. Flesh which is object for no subject becomes disturbing and uncommunicable.

Rigor mortis is due to coagulation of myosinogen and paramyosinogen by fibrin ferment, forming a cloth of myosin. Sarcoplactic acid and acid potassium phosphate are also generated in considerable quantity after death, and probably aid in the process of coagulation.

PART III

A Form of Doubt

A SENTENCE HAS TO DO WITH. Most problems occur in part III, I say, perhaps I should try to avoid it. The cat on the sill. The sun lighting up the tips of his fur. The imperatives of narration, you say, your back against the window. One thing to get Amy sick in bed, thick smell of camomile, defenseless smile, eddy and swirl without turn signals or traffic cops, a mile a mismatch. This morning even the egg in its cup self-sufficient, waiting to be spoken to, the napkin blue. I like to balance my chair on its hind legs. Amy might say that once, seeing Ada asleep, she was suddenly frightened of the passage of time across our bodies, frightened to touch Ada's feathery hair, shifting cloud beds, fingers adrift.

I am old enough to like a landscape gone to weeds. Notched yardstick. Like Amy, a woman of a certain age, a certain armor, all cotton turtlenecks. The

mornings less promising now, reefs surface and shallows, a pain in the stomach, a fluttering like a flock of birds, of course I'm anxious, these scattered notes, scribblings in margins, scraps of paper. It is November, still warm. The radiator on regardless. The reason I don't know. Columbus sent out parties to the gold regions of Cibao. The sun's heat made solid. If you turned around you could perhaps see the dog I hear barking. If you turned around you could see the glare on the window. If you turned around you could at least see the window. A character on my hands, you say. Another body, solid. This room perfect except for your cautious look, expecting rain before proximity, I realize the color blue does not mean extremes of heat and cold to everyone. Eyes can be too bright, can, like too precise a set of circumstances, fade the subject back into the negative. Not mine, of course, which are rather getting weaker, blurring distinctions out of perception. So I run upstairs, downstairs, from room to room, look for things on my desk, on the floor, out of breath, and the days go by.

A frame, you say. Of action. Amy could slap her body against insects, hold her fork in her left hand while she explains to her friends Victoria and John that the quantity of heat received by a body from another depends on their relative position. On the page. No, you say. And why Mexico? Though you know my obsession with the Conquest. The use of sentences in. My immigrant fixation, you concede. More, I say. The great encounter with the unpredicted. Extremes of otherness. Who—or which—won't fit our frame. Of reference, you say. Yes, or window. I could still have Amy tense and relax her leg muscles in such a way that they take her to the Zocalo or Alameda, you say. Let her look at the ahuehuatl trees, the Old Market, at women sitting on crates next to baskets of fruit, the folds of their skirts, flies, mounds of crumpled paper and rotten produce, colored awnings, men leaning against walls, eyes hidden under hat-brims, sour smell of pulque. The Cathedral. The Palacio Nacional.

But I am walking in a different city. Without purpose, stop and look up at the statues for lasting visions and, always eccentric, walk on. Federal Triangle and Judiciary

Square. Roar of traffic. Island. Cross on red. The White House in a white fog. An eye on Southern neighbors. In the family, as it were: he wants them to cry uncle. A sidewalk is a narrow location in history. A sentence. Bracketed choice, and what did I expect. Pennsylvania Avenue before the rain, the pigeons under the eaves of the Archives scream their heads off, the succession of night and day, cardboard Presidents along the street, I can have my picture taken with him, now also with Prince Charles and Princess Di, all of Washington discussing the right way to curtsy, the price of her jewels not important, only that of Ortega's eye-glasses, Daniel Ortega Saavedra, president of Nicaragua, exorbitant. Figures scurry toward

the subway, the force of gravity or habit, bluish shadows before rain, the stripes of my blouse have run out in the wash, blue like Amy's dream of Ada, turbulent winds, subterranean fissures, the blue plumage prized by the Aztecs for funeral attire. I wanted to keep a log of my steps, downbeat of the body, weight rolling from heel to toes, as they carry me outward from the centers of powers, to where the buildings size down to warmer brick, a foghorn from the river, a dog lifts its leg against a parking meter, a boy on a bicycle, women with shopping bags, and how tired I am by the time I get there, no part of my body comfortable, certainly not the feet.

The weather is changing. Loss by radiation in excess of. I scrutinize the form and color of clouds, the trace of wind in the sycamores, flock of sparrows, the depth of shadows for clues of tomorrow's verbs. The delay is fatal. What has happened to today? The color grey, not blue.

Now then, you say. Amy could hold a teacup. "Why is she not in bed?" asks little Isabel, leaning against her mother's chair the way she had leaned in the half-open door to the sickroom. Amy puts her roll down on her plate, her teeth marks in the butter. Even when they were classmates John never minded that she listens without tilting her head to the side, without pretending to enjoy being instructed when the market calls for even exchange. Victoria pours tea, steaming, into the cups. "Why is she not dead?" asks little Isabel. Amy leans back in her chair. As long as she skirts certain areas, pulls a skirt over, yes, that one, which exercises a powerful influence on the quantity of humidity in the atmosphere. Jilted is an old-fashioned word. Another sugar, she says, sure.

John talks of his Humboldt biography. A mirror to discover things about himself. Amy wants to ask which, the sex, the urge to connect, but prefers to think of a window, opposite direction, lean out, not thrown back on herself. A window, a lens gathering language, a focus to burn. Conjunctions and connotations. She touches John's arm as if to apologize for these disagreements and remembers Ada's hair with her fingertips, how many more people in every scene.

Words get thinner, my hair, and slower, out of breath climbing the stairs. Leaden legs. I take longer to think, sudden starts, headaches, harder to talk to people, out of it, always. Resistance. Inkstains. Bottom of the page. The sun invades, a blinding glare, my Jade Garden, my room in green and black, including the cat, as designed as the city surrounds, and lacking my anchor, Keith's breath in the room, the next room, somewhere in the house, all landmarks disappear, the sun horizon extends all the way around my aching eyes. Adrift on a table, triangular, black, bare no more, mine for a 3-week shift, bags of groceries, time on my own. Sleeves rolled up to indicate hard work, avert suspicions of imposture. Not a real writer, it would have to come easier, not this despair as I suck the pen, the pencil, words on loan,

charged, not enough, too many, too used. Can I use them over again? Ideas in the air. Nouns by the hour. Churchbells. Cackling bluejay. The cat not interested.

Isogrammatical lines connecting the mean incidence of comparable parts of speech map the discourse of the world, I say. Against their average, extremes of sense and absence create the pleasure of fragments. Break the silence and pick up the pieces to find a cluster of shards which catches light on the cut and the next day too.

But the claims, you say, the enormous claims of continuity. Of course, I'm scared, and raised the way I was, the way women of my age were, I try to oblige, glue the shards, spread my legs, this time for balance, chemical, but also rebel, assemble my forces and start a zigzag march on the rules of grammar. Lightning speed. Fire truck heading North. A sentence that allows for confusion. Centrifugal. The troops inexperienced, poorly equipped, no auxiliaries from outside the solar system, but the momentum now pushes the sentence beyond what should be its end, and I don't give a damn even though I know that, if there is advance, it's only because the earth is pulled in the opposite direction under my pen.

Can you see me, the explorer, rebel, aggressive stranger, tottering, uncertain, the would-be conqueror come after the others across the sea, wave after wave beating against the naked shore, naked page, naked alphabet. And into. Obscene desire. Understood as treachery, the rivers run through the land in cahoots with invaders, like the heart, like women, allowing penetration, Potomac and Pocahontas swell with the tide. Captain John Smith explored the river in 1608, you say, possibly as far as it falls, past the villages of Tauxemont and Acoughtant, the first to reach the river's navigable head, and later canal plans as far inland as the Ohio.

Reminders of an older power, the presence of the river in the soil, the elevation on which the Capitol is built, terraces carved out by the Potomac in a prehistoric age when, you say, augmented by glaciers in the north, it rushed with great force and volume through the widening channels. It is not the past I mean, but the water, even underground, its instability and challenge, or running through the pipes. Finding substantial footing is a difficult engineering problem for any government. More so here in Washington. Crass roots. The marshy ground makes huge subfoundations necessary for public buildings, to distribute their weight over the entire population, crass struggle, the logic of rubbers, immense piles driven deep below Pennsylvania Avenue. Beneath the Archives, you say, huge pumps must operate to safeguard the national memory from old Tiber Creek, its surreptitious seepage through the concrete.

In the course of paving the streets of Mexico City, John could tell his old pal Amy, on August 13, 1790, the construction crew dug up an enormous statue of the

Great Goddess Coatlicue with her skirt of serpents. There is a legend that the Viceroy afterwards tried to hug his

knees in his sleep, approaching a circle as much as aging closes in on childhood until the serpent strikes the fault in the curve. But had the statue carried to the Royal and Pontifical University of Mexico as a monument of American antiquity. The Viceroy Revillagigedo.

Setting, you say. The sun fuzzy and shapeless, doesn't apply. Too early. Out the window, red haze. Already hot. Sedative. Filtered light. Fierce, rippling heat. Amy could hold on to her empty teacup, you say, although the few leaves at the bottom do not promise much future, a dancer's life is short, some other reason then, also for wrapping her legs around those of her chair. Dazed. Drops of sweat on her upper lip. Salty. Swarms of butterflies lift off the eucalyptus, the poppies and bromelias bright as pain. She has trouble breathing. Does a big body, the weight not evenly distributed, need more air, stash it up for another swirling flight, muscles contracting to bring her close to Alexander von Humboldt and other spare parts? Or words start up, perpetual motion, a multitude of impulses, faint, elusive, a twittering inside her skull, then sweating it out in a million small adjustments to the plumb line.

A descent into the body, seven caves, seven canyons, and can she come back the same, you ask. A foreign country, increase of heat and motion. Her foot falters on unfamiliar ground, not aloof, not in a car or on horseback, the feel of displacement. Plums drop from the trees, the pulse in her left wrist racing, the roar of traffic, how do you explain it? The Spanish for plain is *llanura*. She would stretch her expectations over the lake, but it is not there. No longer lacustrine, Mexico City, memory seeped out of reach along with the lake, salt marshes all that is revealed to the sleepless. Coming up for air. Ada's dreams of drowning. A catalogue of wind conditions. Work. The dorsal ridge of the Sierra Madre, the grain of experience. To bring forth. Travail, the hard work of travel, the equinox westward. Goes out expecting trouble, goes out prepared. A Spanish translation of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man by Antonio Narino. 1794. Red stones. She walks too fast. The rest is easy. I draw lines to Amy's body and follow them into the skin of an Aztec girl. She knows what is going to happen. Scissors cut paper. Her place fixed, while language, however afterward, has no limits, I am Cortés, the ruthless, I am everything I've ever read or written or thought, without substance or solar constant, without even gravity. I misplace words as well as things. On your desk, you say. No, I say, in the sentence. And missed opportunities, you say. With abandon. Mesa means table as well as plateau. The longer the movement grows collision.

A disturbed equilibrium, you say, that requires development and complications, resolution. John's role in Amy's broken engagement. The messengers were painted with chalk. Years earlier, John might go on, Charles III had given the university a collection of plaster casts of Greek and Roman antiquities. The Coatlicue was placed among them. But not for long. A goddess without a head. Two jets of blood rise from her neck in the form of snakes, rise from a ghastly necklace of severed heads and hands. Nothing human about her except breasts and those only partly visible. The *doctores* of the university had bad dreams. Some held the statue would encourage idolatry among the Indians, others, that its presence among the classical ideals was an affront to the idea of beauty. It had to be reburied.

Beauty, Amy might think. How it webs its feathery hair over the nothingness, how crucial not to get tangled, the blue of Victoria's blouse, how it blew northward, intense misunderstandings like toothmarks on the apple so it seems harmless, not a foam of knowledge and death on her tongue, startled off balance, everything large, suddenly, the mole on John's earlobe huge and mocking in its unimportance, only Ada in place, distributes the weight of her body over the entire surface of her absent look.

Amy's self as precarious as my own in spite of her great archetypal mass of body and cigar. Volatile alter egotism. I've smoked too many successful Egyptian campaigns. Stuck in my craw. Alternate spells of coughing. Where did I put the dictionary? Big body and bad habits: being elsewhere in her head, the clouds, warmer climates, Montezuma's biceps shortens and bulges with caution as he lifts his cup, an ill-timed earthquake, or Filene's bargain basement, too far North, not where she now walks, you say, across the large entrance hall of the Museum, the Patio, round like a sea horizon, she can nearly scan the slow turning again, stress versus emphasis, the planetary spin, herself a marker which the Foucault pendulum is bearing down on. This rhythm that the earth imprints on our bodies, a force beyond control, sweeps her off while she tries to track it in words. She breaks out in a sweat, you say. Victoria beside her, pulls her to a bench, an oasis of succulents, shade, Shakespeare sonnets, caesura. If there are no strangers, the husband must wrap his finger in a white cloth which is torn into bloody bits and distributed to the priests. This does not cause pain. Only poverty. Average US household income rose 1.7% in 1982, but fell 3.8% for households headed by women. In 1984, women working full time earned 64% of what men earned. They are expected to earn 75% by the year 2000. The weakness passes out of her legs, splash of the fountain cool, she burps, connotations clear, the intensity of the earth's magnetic force decreases from pole to equator. At least not Alexander von Humboldt's symptoms. Not all of them.

Old friend John, you say, with tickets and smile, no sense of pause and effect, he is so excited that Antonio de León y Gama had had time to write down a description of the Coatlicue before she was reburied. A description, he says, which wasn't published until 1804 in Rome, in an Italian translation, and imagine: Alexander von Humboldt read it. He asked to be allowed to examine the statue as soon as he arrived in Mexico. The authorities granted permission, dug up the statue, let Humboldt look at it and, when he was satisfied, buried it again.

No Great Goddess under the White House. Dense packs. Not the season for cherry blossoms. Though remains of three layers of Indian settlements two miles off. Numerous artefacts, you say, 2000 skeletons, including two of the largest skulls ever found. Growing skill changes ideas of simplicity. What if we move the metaphor not across a stable field of resemblances, but across an area itself shifting, discontinuous? I underestimated. At the time of Captain Smith's visit, about 100 warriors lived on this spot. A wide variety of wahoo, arrowwood, also called burning bush. Charred post holes show that the village later, you say. When the dance was loveliest, when song

was linked to song, when the meridians converged toward the pole. Adolescent sex. Sudden desires. The Spaniards killed the celebrants, the Iroquois harried the tribes in the lower Bay. Manifest destiny. A soap stone quarry with vessels on Connecticut Avenue. Down in the valley was strangely beautiful. Rows of new apartments.

Only last year the United States honored and buried an unknown soldier of the Vietnam War in Arlington National Cemetery. Since advanced medical technology has made possible identification of the dead from even small fragments of bodies, it took the government over 10 years to find an unknown Vietnam War soldier to represent the 58,012 servicemen killed.

The pottery of the tidewater Indians was almost entirely utilitarian, you say, with rudimentary decoration, usually geometric patterns, confined to the neck and rim. Hard work as a substitute for dread. A theory of rhyme, of dressing the reasons. Less aggressive than the neighboring Iroquois. Often the pot was shaped within a net, and the impression left on the clay or partially smoothed off. So that this net of streets stretches not only horizontally, intending the infinite, but also in vertical repetition, a treatise on optics heads back to cords stretched over fingertips and pressed into the clay in Anacostia, then called Nacothtant or Acoughtank and not safe from strangers. Clean bones. Phonemes Algonquian. All gone now. Need for balance. Geometric compulsion pushing outward and inward, forward and backward like any sentence, cheerful self-sufficiency until small-pox, spirituous liquors and abridgement of territory.

The year of digressions, you say, setting the house in order, sorting perspectives from interpretation from fabrication from craving for truth. But I have already taken off my shoes. Moving closer to the impossible object, feel against the cat's flank, soundboard for his purr. Pick up a plot where I never left it? The Goddess is huge. Amy was forewarned, I could say. But nearly square. Stands there. It is not the gruesome details, the serpent skirt, the serpent squirts of blood where the face should be, the necklace of severed heads and hands. But stands there. Huge. As if always. Absence of face, staring. Too large. Menacing. Listen to her silence. Here, the still center, not in Amy's patterns, perfect pitch black, precise curve thither, precise shade of color the world habitable. The *doctores* had been right. This figure does not speak to our desolation, anguish, glands or secret wishes, not with the breath of this language or that. An absent eye. Plumed blood, blue serpent, gave birth to the moon and her four hundred brothers, hearts torn from the chest, terror of the sun.

Forewarned, not forearmed, I could say. Amy's mysteries gravity and movement. A walk as if carried by a cool wind. Space between words. Not divine voids grafted on human intersections. Though tracing the between extends the beat of silence behind. She has not even seen an absent scapegod bleed in a golden chalice, has not eaten His body while young boys murmured in Latin. Mercurochrome and antihistamines. Mailboxes, their lovely blue. But only in the dark can one see the speed of light. Ticket windward, a kite, color of alarm in her cheeks, out of kilter, the script gone up in smoke. Hazardous to your health to let a statue hit you. Pre-emptive first strike lucky. The iron hot.

Victoria has moved off, clacking heels, the weight of the body resting on the ball of the toes, not distributed equally over the entire sole, uncertain rhythm, the pauses dominant as in writing. But John's impatience tugs at Amy, shuffles his weight from foot to fetish, image of eagerness, words dammed up, pressure mounting, wanting to pour out.

The cars stop and start, towards Pennsylvania Avenue, the light changes to yellow to red to green, light drizzle, waves of traffic, eddies around columns and cornices. Disoriented as in any sea, dizzy is not the question, vague terms, waves, wind chill, mail truck still on the mall, mass of papers, stares behind glass, Capitol Hill, a good place to think about power and small print. Drift from calamity to calamity, phantom whip and backlash, flying Dutchmen, illegal aliens, adjective based on fugitive, smells fishy, eyes full of alarm, shifting fears, I spear a squint at territory to the south, eyes cocked for conquest, not, this time, of Mexico.

A boy sails by on a skateboard, hoard of red berries on a tree whose name I don't know, already farther south, a mild November day, moon in the afternoon, hazy. "Life has become too complex." Not only the leaders of the people are confused. No

simple binary fun, no grid of letters and numbers, meridians converge, cluster of motives, lines curl, names, pressure points, tangle of clues which allow perhaps to deduce, but remain guesses, shadowy, inflation inward, the compass needle turns from North to South, approaching graspable as a stroke of light tears open a building, on Edgar Chamorra and two other Contrás, rehearsing a press conference with CIA advisors:

"Wrong. Your aim is *not* to overthrow the Sandinistas. It is to create conditions for democracy."

"Next question: where have you been getting money?"

Three helpless Nicaraguans.

"Say your sources want to remain confidential."

Dissolves as I try to be sure. Windows bang shut, brain capacity limited, bad memory, leaking pen that blots out my notes. Advanced not-understanding. Semiofficial spermicides. Political hay. Silence on silence, piles of plates in the sink, truth-tables and easy-chairs, records in libraries and contradictory genealogies. Not all responsibilities can be shirked. Or make our flashes of desire reach beyond the clothesline. Real body, its short . . . and the dirty dishes.

The reader's expectations, you say. Think of the weather, I say, its changes, a form free of forecast in spite of. And if it resembles is why we find it.

That's the way you are, John breaks out with unexpected vehemence, always held in, even with friends, why don't you say something.

He's not exactly Latin himself. Held in. Of course. Amy has had to be. Flood warnings become second nature. Ropes to be kept near in case of need. Still, her terror that all vegetation might get stifled, nothing but glazed volcanic sand up to the limits of perpetual snow.

She would like to talk about Ada, her crossing the equator, Egyptian campaign, flags moving up and down the mast. At the same time annoyed that she still wants

John's approval as in their college days. Why was she so eager to seize on his wife's projects, texts into Spanish, body to Mexico, wasn't it all ranklings from twenty years back? Hard to wrest one's independence from the force of gravity or gender patterns. O John, she knows she ought to be just a good sport, intimate, but not too, especially no claims, a well-behaved guest.

But Victoria, you say. Easy confidences, soft couch to sink into, her hair feathery like Ada's, ruffled black. Though her enthusiasm, when anything would seem too precise a label, too heavily inked. Sudden grass fire, quick flames, the sentences break rank and flee right into the smoke. No, Amy was not proving a point, outlines blur, an ache to press against, at one time John perhaps if it hadn't been Henry. Had she said that?

Now Victoria comes back toward the Coatlicue, toward Amy and John, then hesitates, veers off, does she sense the tension between them? Amy listens to the definite clacks, foreshortened weight of the body, more high heels here than in a New York museum. But John hasn't changed from the old days, has again taken up the thread of his lecture.

Her career has run its gamut: Goddess, demon, monster, masterpiece. She has changed her nature on the way from temple to museum, is, as it were, in a foreign climate here, no longer a crystallization of power, but an episode in the history of religion. But is she really? He is nearly triumphant. Is it not impossible to pass her by?

Yes, Amy admits, I can see her smeared with blood, and the dogs barking. In the Great Temple of Tenochtitlan. Stone mass scented with Copal. Copulation? False cognate. I don't know if I'm attracted or repelled, she says. Afraid, I think.

Now John is pleased: I knew you'd feel her power. Don't you think it is at best equivocal to call this a work of art, to call any work of ancient civilizations that? A goddess, a mystery that paralyzes.

The serpent's eye, says Amy. Ceaseless. Does he expect some special reaction from her, news from the mother country, a test of sexuality? She remembers his old "what-does-this-remind-you-of?" tease of her ignorance before he would reveal his discoveries. Involuntary muscles. Slow, but protracted contraction in the viscera. The serpents writhing over the void, writing to cover up lack of identity, of substance. Or with speed. Henry racing his car, and she dying in gear beside him. Another photo she had removed, much earlier, her hair blown, wings in the air, filling it up, excitement bending the light rays out of their course, still assuming participation in government rather than abridged desire, her mind rotating on its axis no milky way or wet garden. Pull back from reality, but pull it down with her as she falls into the sentence. Suspended, she thinks better of it, and the highway, at eighty, look out where you in the long run. And how did that work out? you ask. In the open. Desperate conflict in which both parties managed to avoid defeat in spite of an ill-timed earthquake. Not your usual baby carriage, shopping cart and divorce court, but, in the soberness of morning, she hears a door close and draws back the curtains on couplets, common measure and the garbage can. Sits on the page, legible, and has learned the art of questioning. Finger to the bone for an always new form and discontent. Or throws birdseed between the word for word, red fire truck, a walk to the post office, and how about a bicycle.

Close, too closely connected the linked arms and events on the make, in the place of empathy and identification where you walk up the steps into your own open and welcome. I've never liked mirrors, I say, and why don't you want to look at the cracks between shards?

Amy sees lines of force go out from the goddess, link Victoria and John and their child, link Ada and Paul, and the way their hair is braided together and toward her with the warm illusion of friendship, yet breaks off, link fence, leaving a white area around her, snow crystals packed tight. Can she walk across on her hands?

She takes herself too seriously, if hard, her coffee black. Victoria's smallness makes her all bulk, fat baby again, shift it from foot to other measures, her bag from shoulder to hold on to the museum floor plan as if it were the key to the scriptures.

She has to be square, says Victoria:

The four corners of the sky
four sides of the earth
four stakes driven into the ground
to mark the cornfield for cultivation

America is the fourth dimension. The fourth continent, its culture ruled by the figure 4: Every god had four aspects, every space four directions, every reality four faces. But the Europeans did not accept the challenge. They insisted on conquest, imposed their triad: 3 times, 3 ages, 3 persons in one god. So the Goddess must be a demon, and woman, man's negative mirror.

What a speech, John puts his arm around his wife, warmly masking his need to hold on as words come loose, an unfastened woman, panic of separation, the station empty as the train pulls out and smokes the mirror. Climatic distribution of erections and brain capacity. Amy thinks of a taunt, jokingly, so as not to hurt them both, or would she like to? Dart a bit of poison, twist the penknife under their touching toenails? As she would like to hurt Ada. How many times has she dreamed the dream of the big blue bird? The bird at the bus stop, the beach, the bank, the Mexican border, the breach of promise. Alternation of flight and perching. Blue feathers like a deep sky. She stands stunned. Alliteration reinforces fear of flying. Legs open, a sharp thrill of thirst. Runs, runs, till feathers brush fingertips, wings spread, beat out of her reach. Then, suddenly, the gun.

Everything in life happens in the past, though not always as far back as Freud would have us believe, and what has not happened between John and her stretches between them. Impulses, muffled like voices in the museum, don't travel half the distance between statues. There are no windows. Nothing has grown but hair and fingernails and words, words, color bleached by paper except for the black fur of the cat. Panic of cut-off from the environment, edges, vague, into fiction and fantasy, a sea inviting voyage, discovery and even commerce, barges of spice and fruit.

The heater fan fills my sleep with a noise as white as traffic, as the ocean, as crowds with cameras. The props of the city askew, the diagonals have risen out of

the horizontal plane, buildings lean at dangerous angles, held up only by the Reflecting Pool. What if the water is diverted? The people are where my body doesn't reach, where are they, I

cry, strange time, before sunrise, and in this storm, I cry, that sweeps a flood of red leaves from the trees, or is it blood, let it be a dream that stars are at war and the full moon falls on Sunday.

Justice is so precise an impossibility, says the President, that we can only step up surveillance of the border between ideas and action. He has never set foot on the land, all his life on horseback or inside his purring car, a couple of feet above the ground, now wings to fly to the summit, flight of ideas where there are none, spotlights in many colors, corolla, *ex machina*.

A promise of suspended sentences and questions. Language will let us off, every time, lenient, or will it when we advocate "use of violence (to) neutralize carefully selected targets, such as court judges, police and state security officials." A training manual for Nicaraguan rebels. Made in USA.

Not a nightmare, not just an outcrop of fear. Verb to disturb and vertigo. A court judge's face blackened with smoke. Another still standing with blood streaming over his coat as from a bottle. Harbor this for me. Edgar Chamorro was not happy, an ex-Contra now, not happy to take credit for the mining. "Why did the CIA not give us the money and let us actually do the job?" I don't know the half of it, the long and short, or the answer. Open the windows. A yellow dog lopes sideways along the sidewalk. Creases on my skin from the net of sleep, of the past, does it shape me like a clay pot, dense matter for practical tasks, and the pattern no grid, no boxed-in squares, too many subordinate clauses, threads unforeseen, Montezuma, the Reichstag fire, Napoleon's retreat, adjectives receptive to mother's death. The vast twilight zone slips around the earth as the latter turns on its axis. Mind a participle by stretches across distant dust, now part of my body till I die or lose all memory.

You say, if this is narrative. Of prepare, I say. What? you ask. A quote, I say. Why don't you just lean out the window and look at the maples, red, battling with fall, that same yellow dog, the government employees hurrying to the Archives. Never mind the yellow dog, you say. Look straight across the vacant lot: The future is female like most allegories. There she sits with her open book, pulling the next sentence down into her marble weight. And I'm lucky it's her. A bit farther West I'd be facing the closed book of the Past, layers of sediment, irrevocable residue, piled up in periods, not just in the Archives, concrete on top of the marshland, the shifting, soggy land we've tried so hard to tame we forget it is there. And is it? Haven't we got the better of it? Trapped in soliloquies we cannot transcend, Morton

Salt Girls, in nets of interpretations spread like the city in quadrants and grids, centrifugal, centripetal, cheerfully schizophrenic.

No tear in the flesh, kids misplaced among the virtualities, and that even language might desert me, might scatter into the night while I still sit at my table, my place under the lamp without being able to call the words into its cone of light. Oh, I can grab my ass and throw my body backward, I've made sure no child will swim out of my howl, not this kind of blank page, mind to decipher and colonize, not even the passing illusion of plenitude and perfect communication, the baby at the breast.

And set out early when it was still morning and foggy though, as you know, I'm more at home with the night, and walked by the Memorial of the Grand Army of the Republic, by the dolphins of the Temperance Fountain—and why does Temperance carry it over Faith, Hope, Charity on the other three sides?—by General Hancock on his horse, by the Archives, by Past and Future in search of the present. Which must be tangible here, concentrated in this city, not just by dint of size. But, on the contrary, every instant operates with a view to consequence, plans and annals, conferences, even the air conditioned toward results, the future progresses on schedule. Without the aid of watches, the troop photo would be jeopardized. The government industry produces cold feet in cold war heads, on toward the promise of being in explosive charge. The frontiers to the south will be crossed ideologically. An image of success, unspoiled by bums who are kept from sleeping on the sidewalk heating grates by metal sheds built over them.

I've never seen so many representations of birth, Amy might say. Not "Virgins with Child," so much more decorous, the child at the breast, but birth itself, its blood and horror and power.

You should write about the Great Goddess.

When Amy turns her head she can smell Victoria's hair, feathery tangle, Ada would push it back with so fluttering a motion, fresh smell of shampoo.

Can't carry this tune, this Texcoco blue, she says. And no kids have tumbled out of my skirt.

Victoria clicks her tongue. You write to fill up the emptiness. Whereas once you let children run through your body you follow the umbilical cord never to return.

She had said that. Conditions of exchange: the wonders of a language game, splices of life, blue feathers and yellow beak against loss by radiation exceeding the daily quantity of heat received. And maybe barren, narrow, carriage return stuck. But there is no escape. Words. Lines. Sentences send it about most. Push against borders, keep walls at a distance, if only by an inch. Language its own obstacle. Not just the body. But the meridians continue to encircle the earth.

Some decisions were made for me by my big body, says Amy, to the clink of icecubes. A shortcut. A habit of weight. In touch with the planet by sheer gravity. Moving with it, even too fast. Not the lightness of distance, objectivity. Connected. Weigh your words, heft, lift, live them. Writing and talking, the form already there, in the space, a matter of finding rather than making. No parking. Not transparent. Not making the words disappear into their reference.

And the sting of the incomplete in each word, insufficient, the work never done, finger to the bone, not enough. Pointing beyond, leaning into between, each word a vector, versification of estrange. Sometimes a sentence in wishes she could knit sweaters, build furniture, bake bread, have a child.

With the earth overpopulated, says John, children are an indulgence as much as writing poems.

Amy doesn't rise to the dig, no case of bristle, still thinks arrangement of gaps, a sentence and sewn, two words at just the right distance that the spark flies. Or two bodies. A matter of betweenes.

You don't think collision is necessary?

As much as collusion. Like between you and old Henry.

A wink, a sudden laugh, relief. Now John can ask:

I wonder what would have happened if Henry hadn't walked out on you?

What does it matter what would? Combinations infinite. A sentence knows—shows—its own errors, space to go astray, and the cat amazed. Any person is opposite. Ada's blue not like my own Monday. Sometimes not certain that the sun will rise in the east, red, a red letter I wrote her today because it's Sunday though it parades with a more resonant name here.

I was thinking, interjects Victoria, that the only times I have felt really at home in my body were when I was nursing. The child is indeed my indulgence. In the religious sense. Otherwise, you know, I'm even shy about being naked.

Your Catholic upbringing, says John.

His protestantism hasn't served him any better. The way he used to hold on to his clothes before experimenting inside. Careful, Amy, before the equinox travels farther to the west, a crisis of brazen and no one there at all.

Still, laughs Victoria, in spite of the nuns, I was a happy little girl whereas I am not sure John had any childhood at all.

John's early screams, reading what traumas and terrors, Amy can't shed any light on them, not even reflected, a moon with distortions, call it clouds or stopping to puzzle. We talked future, she says, not everybody's unhappy childhood, comparing local times all around the globe.

Do you remember, says John, and Amy apprehensive. Ingrained time loop. Do you remember how I used to tell my recurrent dream that Emily Dickinson was dead, and how mad you got? You claimed I tried to kill her again and again?

How do you like Washington, you ask, and I say too clean, too stinking rich, too much marble, granite, limestone, too many domes, columns and porticos, spare parts, too vertical, too strenuously erect, too visible the presence of government. I am doing my best just to walk through it though already I think of the way you happen to open a book and are slowly, step by step, drawn into its make-belief world. Until, at the end, you suddenly fall, like Lionel Johnson off the barstool or what's-his-name out of the window because St. Paul's sermon went on and on, no way to get out except by falling, asleep and thence to his death.

Maybe it isn't good for you to look at an allegorical statue day after day, you say. What happened to the yellow dog? Did you not claim you were good at measuring distances?

A matter of friction, I say, between me and the outside, between me and the words, that keeps it interesting, throws off sparks like the sexual researches of a child, and here, as in political life, it is the lacunae in the answers that censor the inquiry, deflect it into questions of protocol, the "order of things," too many mirrors. The granite shiny on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, reflects my body as I look, the names cover it, make believe I'm one of them, will be, no injuries natural, no way to back off for a long view. Held to it, to the cry of I died, black gash, hearts torn from the chest, blood spilled to feed the sun.

Did I need to let you take me up the Washington Monument to know that it's a vertical world, power in the hands of men, a constant masturbation? At least it does not pretend to be in honor of *God on high* like the church towers I used to climb, step by worn step up spiral staircases which, turn by turn, screwed the roofs into a dizzy depth I felt in my knees, in every muscle, striated fiber and connective tissue, in the wind gone out of my lungs, centrifugal force. Here, of course, elevators, lack of effort as if to demonstrate that the intensity of the earth's magnetic force decreases with height.

Dizzy? you mock. There is no insight without height and fear of, no perspective or overview.

I lean into it, city pushed into its map. November sun, colors muted by exhaust, except for the glistening ribbon of the Potomac. Edges hedged with haze, gray-green. There, to the East, I can nearly imagine I see the sea I came across, pushing against the wind, late particle of the waves of explorers and conquistadors, can nearly imagine I see the will to conquer turn and veer south with that low plane passing overhead, southward, slow it seems from here.

The important distance, I say, may be down rather than up. Orpheus, Odysseus, Faust—

OK, you say, go live in the subway.

But you know that erections don't last, except in rigor mortis, the ground a problem, the water underneath. Cracks and fissures in the psychology of standing tall and hanging tough. Crisis brought about by decrease in temperature. 1° Celsius for every 160 meters. After 3200 meters the souls freeze, stiff with superiority, bewailing the hard fate of having to be hard. And the dreams of conquest topple or, given the proximity of water, wobble, wilt, viscous, white, spilling over the ground.

You admit the water's surreptitious presence under the concrete, the remains of the cypress swamp from M Street to 17th and K, the marshy ground. It was the 1854 resurvey, you say, that revealed the necessity of introducing a subfoundation of concrete under the Washington Monument to distribute the weight over a much larger area than originally planned. Something to be "dealt with." All that does not take place between the vertical and horizontal.

Water in any form, swelling the sponge in the sink, lapping into a poem, the river's abrupt narrowing at Key Bridge, the violence of its torrents and gorges, precipitous banks towards the Falls. And bridges. I like to feel the vectors of river and traffic at right angles, the pull of forces, and the reflections wave and ruffle across the grid scheme just as my sleep takes pleasure in what I censor and sew into the dream egg and, thus masked, allow to come up again, suitable for daylight, for the time of habit, of scales over the eyes. Three weeks in this city, not enough to develop the common blindness, still excited by the slug on the sidewalk, a little girl runs for the bus, scarf streaming behind her, and not used to my new glasses either which I need for reading now, but I look up from the book and all is blurred and dizzy, the plane passing overhead, low, ready to land, more blurred than its reflection in the Potomac, and right below me now a barge, sluggishly moving upstream, rusty-looking, nearly the color of sand, its cargo, even the white of the wake rusty in the muddy brown, taste of blood in my mouth, gums flooding the teeth or tunnels of the subway.

Friction, I say, not a moment without it, or fiction either. The window needs wiping. The hot water pipes clang. Even writing can't always envelop, can't sustain me with its order and disorder, and how is women's different from men's —"ifferent" I had typed, if it is. Slicing it this way. Mining seven different caves and canyons. Letting this city drift through polymorphous sentences, rather than follow the plots of invasions and invaders in a straight line, the female mere body, mere site of the proceedings? Like the young Indian woman Alonso de Avila

seized during the Conquest. She had promised her husband, who feared he would die in battle, that she would never belong to another, and nothing could induce her to let a man near her. So she was thrown to the dogs. But if the female is also the invader, part of the power which tries to control the rest of America? The distance foreshortened with grief, not a simple ratio of two whole numbers. Grammatical revolt, syntactical subversion, a verb is a change, and the fear it will stay there, in grammar and syntax, while I sit at the edge of the Reflecting Pool, no tax on sun, the grass still so green here in November, and a little leaf of clover. Better join the next march. Or sooner. Dreams and illusions, the Pool controls the water, forcing it to be geometrical like everything else here, and why not admit it, I too hold on to the clarity of shape, the jar, the net, how else to navigate the welter, the too-much from all sides. To be open, as a book is only a book when open, naked to what cuts, open like a grid, like the streets of this city stretching outward in all directions and yet bounded at every intersection, centers unlimited, an orange in every word.

Writing is impossible, I say. The uncharted sea. A postscript to the Oedipus complex, you say. The child's repressed sexual urges sublimated in the body of the letter, a way to explore the forbidden anatomies, incestuous morphology, the white page of the mother's body, though you don't mean to denigrate my thoughts.

I don't even have thoughts, I say, I have methods that make language think, take over and me by the hand. Into sense or offense, syntax stretched across rules, relations of force, fluid the dip of the plumb line, the pull of eyes. What if the mother didn't censor the child's looking? Didn't wipe the slate clean? Would the child know from the start that there are no white pages, that we always write over a text already there? No beginnings. All unrepentant middle.

John brings up Alexander von Humboldt. It's clear his writing was compensation, obsessed with connecting, with what he couldn't do with people.

With me it's revenge, says Amy. They can laugh at this now. But also uncertainty, need to understand, to connect like your Humboldt and see what happens at the seams, the synapses. And maybe just compulsion. But, I suppose, compensation too. A sentence is made by coupling. I chew my pencil down to the lead, and Emily Dickinson must sleep in a straight line. But Victoria cuts through the archetypes, the accumulated absurdities, birth from both head and womb.

Victoria looks serious: Never mind head, heart or vagina. Think of the ground we stand on, what goes on between us and it, the subterranean turbulence. Impulses perpendicular to daylight, in any field, magnetic. Ferment. Something in motion likely to shake loose.

Your first words to me here, in your country, says Amy, were about volcanoes. The deepest rhythm, up through the sole of the foot—and may destroy you. She looks over at the heaps of rubble. Earthquakes.

Yes, says Victoria. The worst since 1973. A thousand injured in the city alone. Which is also sinking. Down, through its Spanish layers, to the teocalli and the old lake underground. You saw the Loreto Church. Santissima Trinidad leans even worse. Nothing is solid.

Behind Amy, the Venetian looking Post Office, the massive marble of the National Theater. Spared. Come through, to the other side of the quake. But two streets over, the tents, the children begging, the rows of unemployed men leaning against the fence with signs listing their skills:

Albanil Azulejo Mosaico y Pintura

Is it only by the fissures that we can know? Each smile its swirling hollow. But caught in circumstance, in costumes, we have to go on talking, even if we're breathless with fear, even if we know nobody is listening, words like dust whirled by the wind, and we hope they will open into the slowness of the day, the luxury of air and yet pull the contour inward.

Unsure of the ground. A hesitation and going slower. Doubts.

Hard to get lost in this city, East-West succession of numbers, total prediction. Only toward the periphery the streets start curving, intending landscape, if feebly, and the thread of letters gives out. Names, opposed to tame, scuttle the sequence, each claims unique identity, our entire attention.

The sun suddenly floods the street, the moment wonderful, luminous, I want to sing, skip along the sidewalk in spite of my age, the brick warm yellow, the baywindows glinting with all their eight sides. Daily delighted. How can a sentence make a meadow? Curled. The cat. What has happened to the black granite, the Aztec calendar? No gryphons to guard my archives. Scratchings on paper—when I should cry out as my friend Blossom does: I am indignant, she cries. Seventy years from the first rallies for women's suffrage to the 19th Amendment. Fifty years of the Equal Rights Amendment in Congress until sent to the States for ratification in 1972. What is a sentence at seventy? In seventy-two? A document in the Museum of American History. Silence about: it was not ratified. A railing keeps the stream of visitors at a carefully planned distance from the exhibits, pace and pausing subtly regulated. A sentence for thought. Blossom cries out, her umbrella purple like her clothes, the howl of the dog in the subway as he touched the rail and rolled over in pain, later, was it the same dog, snow on his fur, separate feathery flakes, like balls of mimosa.

If I stand at a window am I waiting? For my failures to make a space between them where I can stand? Shadows give shape to the light. A sentence is not why I am worried. The empty lot between my window and the Archives conforms to the dominant pattern, parallel tire marks—or are they the rakings of an excavator—and arcs of circles where the machine turned. Now that it is raining the ruts

stretch shinily to the subway entrance. Some of the puddles too reflecting to show me the little circles the raindrops make. Points. In sequence. Fragments and sentences breathing sideways, in addition to forward and backward. Falling off at the end.

They hanged Macuixochitl in Coyoacan. They also hanged Pizotzin, the king of Culhuacan. And they fed the Keeper of the Black House to the dogs. The landscape of conquest. Aberration is by no means confined to the sun. The icy pole or point of greatest power no more corresponds with the terrestrial paradise than does the word "promise." If only the President were not so hungry. Great gulfs that I try to plumb with a line, but can neither fathom nor bridge. It's done with guns now.

PART IV

Unpredicted Particles

1

laid down the equations
and expected obedience
or felt gradual
but all the same expected

At the wharf. The gulls were crying. And the sun going down behind the masts. Then the gulls stopped crying. It was evening, and she wore red stockings. Such little things.

"the grammar of the word 'knows'
is closely related to that of
'mastery' "
the difference
in a window
in Genoa

the window
holds my breath
the window
the breath of possibility
there where October
once we let go
of the frame
the images wave after wave

The assumptions about space and time in Maxwell's theory could not be traced back to the Newtonian laws. It seemed to follow that either Newtonian mechanics

or Maxwell's theory must be false.
for all he knew in Genoa
 unsteady atoms
 with fissures toward
the ocean might end
and fall

2

imagined an encounter
that couldn't be imagined

We must distinguish at least three axes in our relation to the other. There is, first
of all, a value judgment: the other is good or bad, my equal or inferior.

 reading Marco Polo
Columbus' body started toward October
water
poured into the gap
 the push out of the frame
 out the window
 who are you now we're all at sea it's
 raining
 fine
 particles of
traffic of past and
incommunicable
speed
swung out from the bowsprit
 distance contracting
 in the curve of
 a look
 blue pulse of sleep lapped into
 the word water
the globe
wasn't it more like
 water leaping
 a quantum nipple toward the sky
a breast
an early world

3

squints at the sun
a sailor's life
farther than
expands with words

Instead, we now say "Classical mechanics is a strictly 'correct' description of nature wherever its concepts can be applied."

still the pull still of resistance
or gravity: his eye
fell (on)

:fine *specimen*

A wind sprang up from the south-east. With a laugh he said, I wouldn't at all mind having an affair with a girl like that.

the images break on the shore
images and expectations
the window
and the frame of understanding
whatever
swims out of view
you
do not match my interpretations

felt the horizon
contract
with tiredness

"the sirens are not as beautiful
as claimed"

4

in October there began
the breakdown of structures

where the word for prophecy
means also law
time
becomes tangible as trouble
"they waved their lives goodbye
as the facts washed on shore"

Secondly, there is a movement toward or away from the other: I embrace the other's values or I impose my own culture on him (assimilation). It is also possible to remain indifferent.

three easy toward undressing
to see
the past
lost as new parts of speech
question
your whole
different
body

How silent he was. She would neither talk nor weep. What was he to make of such
a being that leaves no more trace than a snowflake in the middle of summer?

the high speed of
smashed to probability

in love and how raw
taking captives
or naked surrender

5

putting on his boots he had expected
to walk into the mirror
one of the and oldest

The window was part of it too, the window where he first saw her. But had it been
at the window? Or was this just the way he remembered it later?

constant of desire
and distances that don't contract to
energy
mass
religion gold or Spanish
there where he spun his coin
so fast it left behind
the resonance
of transfer

In quantum theory the formal mathematical apparatus cannot be directly
patterned on an objective occurrence in space and time. What we establish
mathematically is only to a small extent an "objective fact," and largely a survey
of possibilities.

transparency of glass and eyes

deceptive
but kin to water
and that I can't conceive of
outside my images
such very small
such very different

his heart lightly
a relation described
by the word 'between'

tomorrow closed over
repetition
of water

6

amazement slung to the mast
the pronouns
billowed with outlandish reference
a rabbit out of a Genoese hat
mapped
on the infinite

the window and desire
the constant of desire
the rain runs down the
pane between experience
some fish
slip through the mesh
others have not been imagined

Thirdly, I know or do not know the identity of the other: here we obviously have an infinite gradation.

from mispronouncing fell to
hypotheses
of possession
the why and wherefore rigged
to mathematics

What was the use of these doubts? It must have been on the wharf. She was wearing laced boots, red stockings and a full, red skirt, and looked out toward the horizon as she talked.

the anchor of symmetry
way back
unable to stop
into the mirror

7

"the Cuban natives are like beasts they
do not know they live
on terra firma"

real space suddenly behind his back
three caravels aborted off
the region of smallest length

At the same time the theory must, in a certain fashion, "depict" experiences, must
"mean" something in the world of phenomena.

tongue of the tide
the one tongue one
of Spanish purpose

discovery's
inevitable
there where
a window

come October
the body falls apart when looked at
measurements
spin their own memories

She did not say yes or no. She did not thank him. Back in his room he was
suddenly aghast thinking that she had accepted his offer so promptly.

that he might see
hangs by a hair
he brushed aside

dense bodies without clothes
"they know no pleasure but in women"

8

led us
a flying jib

and westward happened

But this had been at a different time. What now seemed his memory of it was really something else, part of the tangle of suspicions that had later sprung up in his head.

the window
and it's raining
I cannot see you now
the sound
against the window
no safe resemblance

would light quanta
reconcile unheard-of continents
with scripture
or a certain and cold loss
when the electron jumps an orbit

the world is
between opening our eyes

9

in October
put his foot
on a flaw in geometry

nakedness
another opaque

The limits of this field can never be exactly known. Only the discovery that certain phenomena can no longer be ordered by means of the old concepts tells us that we have reached the limit.

the spies drew a precise map
of the binary mutations
the distance
between memory
but the king remained mute
the information too steep too

like you
at the window
not moving or

moving only as required
between encounter and
transparency
exacerbates
the gap

10

the king of Spain too craved
jealously
the isospin
dilated saints lodged in
high wind through the pinholes

I had to
at the risk of the expected
look
into the mirror

that men can be so different
"they will die who do not understand"

To conquer, to love, and to know are autonomous, unconnected, and in some way
elementary kinds of behavior.

Then too there are wedding nights when one cannot be entirely sure. There are, so
to speak, physiological ambiguities.

washed past communication
broad plow into indefinite metric

there were the waves and particles
as if expecting the intruder
at the same time
uncertain
the mirror
the window

net me
silence

11

in the breakdown
the right-hand spiral

whereas October came straight
at the foremast

their name means "they who explain
themselves clearly"
a nakedness
we changed to
centuries of nostalgia

These were all very slight experiences, of course, but they happened over and over
again. And later they meant the opposite of what they had meant in the
beginning.

the window as a boundary
the window onto
no more than swerves
remote
where are you now

curved out of the still air
yesterday
curved out of the usable air
and has no parallel where we've heaved it
the window
no more image

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WPA Guide to Washington, D.C.

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BRUCE ANDREWS writes: "Now out from Xeroxia are *Fractura* & music tape, *Every All Which Is Not Us!* After *Give Em Enough Rope*, forthcoming in a year from Sun & Moon is *I Don't Have Any Paper So Shut Up (or, Social Romanticism)*. The piece from the multi-media collaboration with Sally Silvers on the American soldier of fortune William Walker (*Don't Tread On Me While We Tread On You*) is forthcoming; also *Moebius* (Post-Neo) & a collaboration with Bob Cobbing." . . . Bruce Boone writes that the influence of GEORGES BATAILLE (1897-1962), who was by profession an archivist at the Bibliothèque National in Paris, has grown since his death and "post-structuralism" in general looked to him as a forebear. *Guilty* is one of the volumes in Bataille's trilogy *Summa Atheologica*, which is based mostly on his intimate, philosophical wartime diaries . . . MEI-MEI BERSSENBRUGGE's *The Heat Bird* is available from Burning Deck . . . Works by MICHAEL BLITZ include two books of poetry, *Partitions* (Volaphon Books, 1982) and *The Spacialist* (Woodbine Press, 1986). He co-edits OOVRAH with Stephen Gilson, with whom he has co-written an interview-essay on poet Don Byrd in *Groundswell* (Albany, New York, Summer 1987) . . . BRUCE BOONE is author of *My Walk With Bob* and *Century of Clouds* and, with Robert Glück, *LaFontaine*. He's at work on *Carmen*, a sex novel, and he has a book of criticism which is seeking a publisher . . . GERALD BURNS's *A Book of Spells II* (Temblor 1) is about magic and charmed things. He has also written a long poem ("Punch in a Nutshell") on puppets, and a prose investigation of magic ("A Hermetic Journal") in *Towards a Phenomenology of Written Art*. He is writing another prose investigation, of meaning as expectation, entitled *Thewson and Pragmatic Utterance*, and a long poem on friendship and love, Book VII of *The Myth of Accidence*. His most recent poem is *Socrates Dying in Widener*, which will appear in Temblor 7 . . . PAUL CHRISTENSEN is the author of *Charles Olson: Call Him Ishmael* (University of Texas Press, 1975), *Signs of the Whelming* (poetry, Latitudes Press, 1983), and *Weights and Measures* (poetry, University Editions, 1985). He also edited the Olson/Edward Dahlberg correspondence (*Sulfurs* #1-3), and is currently completing a book on Clayton Eshleman to be published by Black Sparrow Press . . . CLARK COOLIDGE writes: "Probably best list *The Crystal Text* and *Solution Passage* (both 1986) as presently available books. Also a small collection of sex poems (spin-offs from *Book of During*) will be out this Fall or Winter from In Camera (Detroit), called *Mesh*. Oh, and the most recently printed book is *Melencholia* (The Figures, 1987). The Egypt poem (*At Egypt*) and *The Rova Improvisations* are both finished. Also two collections: *Sound As Thought* (*Poems 1982-1984*), and *Odes of Roba* (*Poems Written in Rome 1984-1985*). Still working on *The Book of During*." . . . RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS is the author of two books of feminist criticism: *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women's Writing* (Indiana University Press, 1985) and *H.D.: The Career of That Struggle* (Harvester and Indiana, 1986). Her poetry is collected in *Wells* (Montemora, 1980) and in her new book, *Tabula Rosa*, forthcoming this year from Potes & Poets Press . . . In the spring of 1988, McPherson & Co. will publish CLAYTON ESHLEMAN's *Antiphonal Swing: Selected Prose, 1962-1986*, with an introduction by Paul

Christensen, and Paragon House Publishers will bring out *Conductors of the Pit: Major Works by Vallejo, Césaire, Artaud and Holan*, edited, introduced and cotranslated by Eshleman, who continues to edit *Sulfur* magazine while teaching creative writing at Eastern Michigan University at Ypsilanti . . . DAVID C.D. GANSZ is contributing editor of *Notus*, where *Animadversions* is appearing as a serial in the first four issues. *Animadversions* is also available as a limited edition chapbook from the Gotham Book Mart . . . Among BARBARA GUEST's published books of poetry are *Moscow Mansions* and *The Countess from Minneapolis*. Author of a novel, *Seeking Air*, her most recent publication is a biography of H.D., *Herself Defined, The Poet H.D. and Her World*. A new book of poems is forthcoming early next year . . . Chapters from GEORGE HARTLEY's *Praxis Syntaxis: The Textual Politics of Some "Language Poets"* have been or soon will be published in *American Poetry*, *Poetics Journal*, and *Poetics Today* . . . WILLIAM HIBBARD make his home both in San Francisco and Iowa City, Iowa, where he is a Professor of Composition at the University of Iowa. He has been Music Director of the Center for New Music since it was established, jointly by the University of Iowa and the Rockefeller Foundation, 22 years ago. He is also a former Director of a Rockefeller/University of Iowa Interdisciplinary Art Project, the Center for New Performing Arts . . . JAMES HILLMAN is a Jungian psychoanalyst in private practice in Connecticut after living much of his life in Zürich. He is the author of some ten books including *The Dream and the Underworld*, *Re-Visioning Psychology*, *Suicide and the Soul*, *Anima*, and (with Charles Boer) *Freud's Own Cookbook*. He is publisher and editor of Spring Publications . . . FANNY HOWE's latest publication is *The Lives of a Spirit* from Sun & Moon. *The Deep North* is forthcoming . . . SUSAN HOWE's most recent book of poems is *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* (Awede, 1987), reviewed in this issue. A collection of four earlier works will be published sometime this winter by Sun & Moon. She wrote *Therow* during 1987 while on a writers-in-residency fellowship from the New York State Council of the Arts at Lake George in the Adirondacks . . . For the last ten years, RONALD JOHNSON has been at work on "an architecture of words," the first section of which was published in 1980 by North Point as *ARK: The Foundations*. Part of the second section, *The Spires*, was printed by Dutton in 1984, titled *ARK 50*. "A part of what will finally be *ARK 100*, or a roof over it all, punching a lot of light through the text of Milton's *Paradise Lost*," was published by Sand Dollar Press as *RADI OS I-IV* . . . KARIN LESSING lives in France and has published two books, *The Spaces of Sleep in Midsummer* (Pentagram, 1982) and *The Fountain* (Montemora, 1982) . . . DENIS MAHONEY lives in Boston but consider himself "a part of a Kaatskill Mountain Folk Poetry school which does not yet exist (but is well underway towards the restoration of earth & magic)." This is his first publication . . . BOB PERELMAN's poems in this issue are part of his new book *Face Value*, due out from Roof this fall . . . MARJORIE PERLOFF's most recent books are *The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1986; paper 1987) and *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago, 1986). She is a Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Stanford University . . . DENNIS PHILLIPS's *A World* will be published by Sun & Moon in 1988. His previous book, *The Hero Is Nothing*, was published by Kajun Press and is distributed by Sun & Moon . . . JED

RASULA's *Tabula Rasula* is reviewed in this issue. He is review editor for *Sulfur* . . . STEPHEN RATCLIFFE's book, *Mobile/Mobile*, has been published by Echo Park Press (Los Angeles), and *Distance* was published by Avenue B. Other essays on contemporary poetics appear in the current issues of *American Poetry*, *Poetics Journal* and *The Difficulties*. . . . LINDA REINFELD's poetry currently appears in *Sulfur* 19 and *Black Mountain II Review* . . . PASQUALE VERDICCHIO is editor-at-large for *The Middle Moon*. Among his recent poetry and translations are *Ipsissima verba* (Los Angeles: Parentheses Writing Series, 1986), *Passenger: Poems by Antonio Porta* (Guernica Editions, 1986), and *Invasions and other poems by Antonio Porta*, with Paul Vangelisti (Red Hill Press, 1985) . . . KEITH WALDROP's most recent books are *The Ruins of Providence* (Copper Beech), *The Space of Half an Hour* (Burning Deck), *A Ceremony Somewhere Else* (Awede), and *The Quest for Mount Misery* (Turkey). He has translated books by Claude Royet-Journoud and Anne-Marie Albiach . . . ROSMARIE WALDROP's recent books are *Streets Enough to Welcome Snow* and *The Hanky of Pippin's Daughter* (both from Station Hill Press). *The Reproduction of Profiles* is forthcoming from New Directions . . . DIANE WARD moved this year to Los Angeles from New York City. She co-edited *Pessimistic Labor 2*, which has recently been published. She has a new book of poems due out from Roof Books in 1988.

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