

Boston Tea Party

One

Assigned

A

Night closed as the door exposed candles
in little red jars scattered
about the room smelling of boiling tea,
a special tea of licorice and sassafras.

His hair was festooned with birds,
their songs silenced in the loose strands
weeping down the naked flesh of his back.
Birds hung at his waist
in folds and flow of Polynesian fabric,
purple of the sea, green of the mountain.
Kittens played with twine
balled and fisted on the belly of the floor.

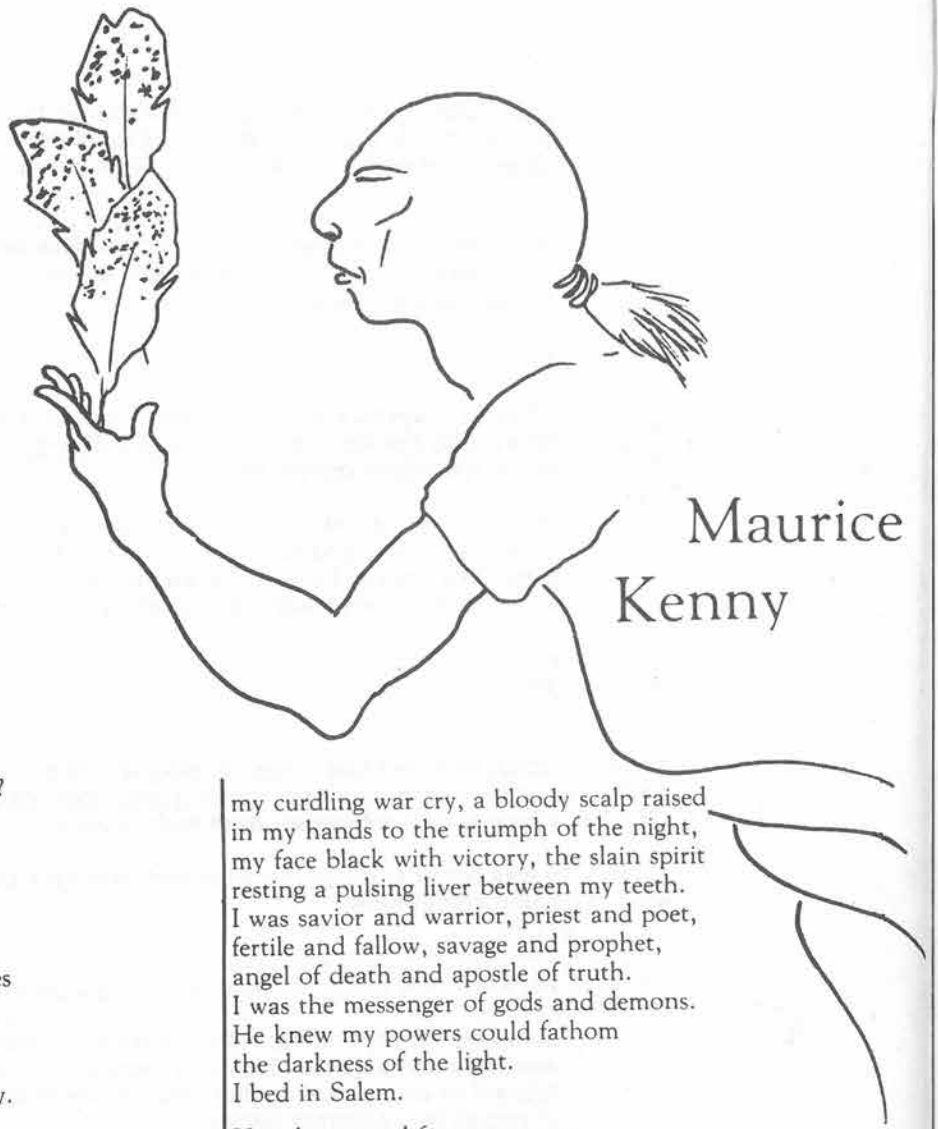
Ship-rolled I moved into the light,
face reddened but altar-calm, took a chair
especially arranged with the only cushion,
and held the mug of enigmatic tea
terrifying its ambivalence.

What realms would I travel from that brew?
What new worlds discover?
What birds would alight on the hair?
Would snakes peel from the mouth;
would fingers extend into lizard tails ;
tongue become an angel of flight?

Tall as a priest or goddess he radiated smiles
over the late hours of the night.
He washed my feet, bathed loins,
pressed his mouth to the spirit
he thought he touched in the soul, memory.
He blew feathers on my ribs,
danced drums on my naked knees, cheekbones;
blessed prayers upon my eyelids.

The night was holy, time late.
Mystery shuddered as he knelt before me
as though asking my hands to bless his life,
confirm my secret powers.

He conjured buffaloes from my feet, armpits.
Rattles banged and shook from my teeth.
An elk reared from the floor,
floated through the glass of the dark window.
Hawks fluttered from my ears to the cracked
ceiling, a chalice trembling as wine
spilled down wretched walls of his heart splitting
in the light of those red votive candles lit
to strike the spirit of my history,
ancestry, my drums and rattles,



Maurice
Kenny

my curdling war cry, a bloody scalp raised
in my hands to the triumph of the night,
my face black with victory, the slain spirit
resting a pulsing liver between my teeth.
I was savior and warrior, priest and poet,
fertile and fallow, savage and prophet,
angel of death and apostle of truth.
I was the messenger of gods and demons.
He knew my powers could fathom
the darkness of the light.
I bed in Salem.

His ribs opened for my arrow;
his head split for the tomahawk, the club;
his pain longed for my hands to touch it,
sooth it, mold it into a receptacle, an urn
of blood and ashes stirred with a prayer stick
while my chants chewed the potions
that fettered his brain and soul.

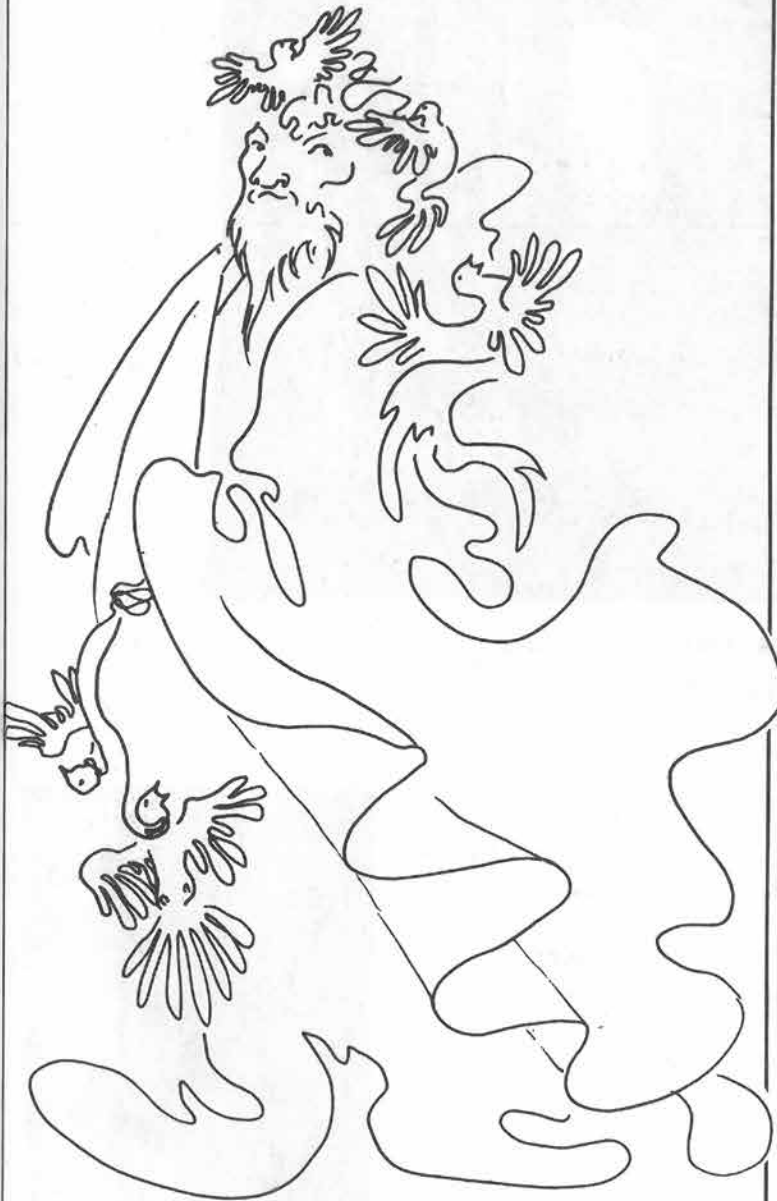
I'd drink his tea and spit out rocks.
I'd suck flesh and spit out frogs.
I would paint kingfishers on his thighs,
deer on his heels, morning glories on his brow.
I would heat stones and steam off sin.
I would tear fifty pieces of flesh
to feed hummingbirds, and marry his dry bones
with Satan and they would live forever
on my finger tips, an apple bough.

Was I not touching the universe—
a feather in my hair, bells on my ankles.
Was I not master of dark dealings of dryads.
I was to raise the pipe, smoke, allow the puffs
to bathe his priesthood which he would gladly loan to me,
naming me the high priest of his foolish
pagan altar adorn with plastic geraniums and peacock feathers

Pity the unannointed, the damned.
Absolve the guilty and the hangman.

B

I switched on the bathroom light . . .
it broke the room crawling with roaches.
A canary hung dead in his greasy hair;
his flesh was caked with yellow powder;
his earlobes etched with butterfly wings.
"Turn off the light." His pain pleaded.
The candles were colored with cats' blood.
My severed spirit had been the sacrifice.
He kissed my ring at the door
with the moon down and the cymbals silent.



drawings by Wendy Rose

C

Boston winds pushed me into dawn,
Dogwood bloomed a street, empty and grey.
The Charles was clean, beautiful
in the morning calm. A boy
rode by on a bicycle, his blond hair
blowing free in the breeze. I was damp
with sweat and dew and could hear
the Transit grumble under my feet.
Aging bones ached, a little arthritic,
I would suppose, probably.
Potassium would help the numbing pain
and a ball to roll in the fist
would keep fingers
limp from rage and the kinks of age
in a world estranged from reality.
I picked a crocus. Its scent was fragile.
An ambulance raced past, a dog gnawed a bone.
I crossed the Charles into the grubby
Boston Commons to stare at the swan boats,
consult the aging statues whitened by pigeon dung.

Two

Radio Interview

He offered me a glass of holy water
to pacify my hunger, request
for a single cup of black coffee . . .
not allowed in the sanctified confines
where only the smoke of incense curled
from the bowl of Buddha's belly.

Into the microphone he prodded voices
of black witches, magic of an alchemist,
the mystery of a grey guru lean on power
but puffed on adoration.
Gently he questioned my frozen soul.

I revealed only the colors of the day:
forsythia bloomed his April yard,
magnolias striking purple against
the Cambridge sky; the mutability
of the State, its saccharin lies.

I revealed the dirt between my toes,
lice crawling my crotch, wax building
in my ears.

Again I spoke of hunger:
a "Big Mac" would do, instant coffee,
plastic pizza, anything but holy water.

No light hung over my monk's shaped head.
No priest hid behind my coat. He smiled.
At the door he took my hand, pulled my frame
to his, whispered: "I have pain
in my throat. Can you heal the hurt?"
I offered to go home and burn sage
I had a large can I bought once at the A & P

Back in Brooklyn listening to the bells
of the Korean Church and the Clark St.
transistors booming out their Sunday Mass
to pigeon and shopping-bag women,
I turned on TV and watched the Marx Brothers
cavort in the old farce, "Horse Feathers".

— Maurice Kenny, May 6, 1980



***Dream Poem Which Proves The Possibility
Of Being In Three Places At Once.***

Solid as a mexican mountain she steps out of the mayan codice stored in the Florentine archives. Hair pulled back to the apogee of her gilded skull, her eyes smeared green, she jumps onto the city bus dressed in turquoise blouse, her purse of woven reeds stuffed full of crayons and pre-colombian coloring books, a bottle of gin, (her breath of flowers as pungent as marijuana smoke) and hot checks that get her all the way to downtown Peking where i understand revisionist bureaucrats are having a problem keeping the people from burning the mayors house down. Young yellow girls in pigtails and quilted jackets chanting:
CHOU CHOU CHOU EN LAI

But this is San Antonio and she hops off the bus as soon as she hops on, her rubber sandals squeaking in the rain.

— ronnie burk, 1976





Children Of The Night

that's what we are . . . with our dark glasses on—the sun still caged . . . the only companion the starlight . . . dark and gloom—vampire like—we exist from fix to fix . . . that momentary elation, burst of happiness . . . otherwise our noses drag like trunks on the ground, bleeding from the scraping . . . the planet, little skulls around our necks . . . earth always yawning to kill in destruction . . . earthquakes, sinkings, murders, wars—the bleeding thru our eyes water the red carnations . . . white flowers float by the reptiles . . . amphibious we dig into the mud—pray to the moon . . . build fires we dance wildly to—it's the next phase of existence that excites our feet . . . stamping madly, feverishly—

Life is a bitter solution—some hang-out joint we're captured in . . . leather, guns, foul attitudes, children of pollution and great bombs, distrustful angry rejects, restless rebels without course, crystal ball broken in rage . . . and now the tunnel of life looms in treachery, agony breeds in us—fuck the consequences . . . “I must be free,” screaming the little seed in us—launched, burned bridges, flight of the psychic, astral bon voyage, river of no returns—our feet steep in blackness . . . we propel to the otherside . . . unknowing, uncaring—only to move forward—get on with the mission, the daring—the great misery waiting in the silos . . . coward, heroes or martyrs—who gives a damn!—the only shoes I wear are my own . . . the only face in the mirror my own . . . my own of millions, billions in the barrel spinning over the waterfall of the universe, atomic spray of miracles—and can things be so settled, so republican, conservative—so smiling and religious . . . where is the mystery, the arcane—

— Pancho Aguila



Robert
Gluck

ELEMENTS OF A COFFEE SERVICE

FROM

36

WHEN BRUCE WAS 36 HE learned the name and address of his real mother and introduced himself to her. At first I thought that was all, but to my surprise Bruce and Jane saw a lot of each other. I was surprised because of what I took to be his waning confidence in the efficacy of mother-love, both his mother's for him and his for the world. When I asked Bruce what he and his mother had in common he replied, "She's my mother." It was an answer that had more questions than the question. I took it to mean that since Jane didn't raise him, in their relationship the biological fact stands uppermost. "Anything else?" "No, in fact I think we irritate each other."

I purposely forgot to ask Bruce about his new relationship. It was too big and knotty to broach, the characters wandering through their bodies and their congested structures of need and option, whereas usually when Bruce and I are together we seem to be on the edge of our lives looking in, prodding and enticing from realization to realization. This is true even, or especially, of gossip, to measure our common assumptions. As Rabbi ben Ezra used to say, "Why bother to tell a story if you aren't going to include the meaning of your life"—to subsidize the story, I would add with a question mark? Yet a bond between a narration and a life generates a rightness surrounded by surprise and applause unmatched for its high horses. Each detail that I learned about Bruce's reunion filled me with sleep—a sign for me that emotion is at hand, and I had two dreams about it.

In the first, a woman rushes through woods on a fresh, moony night with her baby wrapped in bunting against a light breeze. A resonant voice from above, a phrase murmured, repeated by the mother: flesh of my flesh, flesh of my flesh, flesh of my flesh. Something is wrong though and she opens the blanket, looks up at us and shouts, "This isn't the flesh of my flesh. It's a giant pine cone. This is completely inaccurate!"

I wanted to broach these issues with laughter while I dreamed them into metaphor, a satisfying if temporary solution. I wrote the dream in my journal, another temporary solution, documentation with the understanding that the world in the form of myself will discover and appreciate these fragments tossed up by myself dressed as a ruined civilization. This particular dream seems very loud to me, it shouts the way some nursery rhymes do. And wasn't he 'of her flesh' and didn't he become a block of wood as far as she was concerned? From century to century things grow more estranged, said Walter Benjamin on hashish in Marseilles. He's wandering around a murky port like "Night and Smoke," and naturally the names of the ships convey great meaning, fraught as they are with departure. Against that fact of life, that estrangement, I want to balance Jane's irritation. She seems intact and upright. There's an element of fatality in Bruce's life, but some inspection shows it's being dragged along rather than preceding. Didn't Bruce have the mobility to assess and to act? I'm asking this question about myself. One voice elbows the others aside and says, "Given the options! Society as a whole—" and then I have to add white, male, middle class and from the total subtract homosexual, but the question still stands. Like yourself, Bruce didn't ask to be born, and

certainly not to enough mothers and fathers to constitute an evening of bridge. Bruce once showed me a photo of his adopted parents which surprised me, they looked so fit and well-groomed. His mother wore a yellow pants suit. They smiled brightly, anonymous. For me the light source for the photo was Bruce's adoption. And it's the question of identity and double identity, given two sets of projections, that lies behind my second dream in which Bruce discovers that he has an identical twin—delight—whose name is Bruce and has Bruce's glasses and reading habits—puzzlement—and whose lover is named Jonathon and who wrote a book called *My Walk With Bob* and has the same fingerprints—mounting anxiety as Bruce sees his life usurped little by little. Bruce 2 asks Bruce, "Am I twice or half as much?" In the background we hear a plague of cicadas emerging for its seventeen year visit.

What if Bruce's mother said, "If I had it to do over again I would not have had a child." I was very relieved to hear my father say that once and felt close to him in my anger. A photo of our auras would have shown anger sheeting off our skin, and I countered with, "If I had to do it over again I might not have had parents." Would I be equal to a real answer? Would you? Or would we form the question and discussion into an olive pit to suck on thoughtfully but not crack open?

Isn't that the mental point of departure for someone ringing the doorbell of a mother who put him up for adoption? What could this mean to someone living in the world, a world that is continuous and against us, starting with the wall beside our bed, going out through the city and our lives, how do you account for facts from the outside? Facts from disparate lives? What does the passage of time mean to each of us. I reshape a third grade riddle:

*Why does a clock hide its face with its hands?
Shy. Ashamed. Horrified. It depends.*

To enter Bruce's interior you would have to dismantle your own. More than that, "the subjectivity of another does not simply constitute a different interior attitude to the same exterior facts." Except in Henry James, where the primary luxury is the sharing of exterior facts because it allows for all the complimentary interior vistas, like avenues in a French garden. (Sound of measured footsteps on gravel.)

Let's propose a new set of exterior facts, based on money as it always must be, but this time in opposition to money and its alienations. We call it politics and it already gives a new shared definition to words like courage and kindness. For this proposition to work, we must believe in the world. To believe in the world marks you oddly as a visionary. In order to change the world you must believe in it, the things that make it up, the ideas that inform these things, the connections between them.

People have a bottomless cynicism on this score. To paraphrase Benjamin, from century to century things grow less believable. We are left with a few small objects by default and must rely on placement to suggest meaning.

A person who believes in the future knocks at a door. Knock at the Gate/Beethoven's 5th/McBeth/DeQuincey: "In order that a new world may step in . . ."

A projection:

I'm at the doorstep, feeling drowsy. An excess of meaning has attacked me, drawing a circle around every movement: I am in my heartbeat and also listening to it: stasis. Then the conventional sends its reinforcements, they charge in like a movie cavalry, they're that abstract and violent. I'm up on a knoll watching from a distance since distance is the geographics of panic and hysteria. The urge to trivialize finishes me off and these historic victories and defeats become little spider chances.

A situation where real ascendancies are not acknowledged: From Jane's point of view, there must be a lack of gentility in being a writer, something slightly suspect, like going on the stage. Not adding up to a tax man, a den. No growly cigars, no scuba diving in the Caribbean, no forgetting about history by assuming it's ourself, it's a list we've drawn up many times one way or another. I would feel a chemical heaviness, the desire to be a pine cone. Dreams: movie images of mothers who are dreams. Wicked Bette Davis of *Little Foxes*, her tyrannasaurus rex arms, or it's the Bette Davis of *Now Voyager*, she's nurturing

Paul Henried's child—her nobility expressed in the upsweep of her hair-do, like a prow. In this region all roads lead to complicated Joan Crawford, Mildred Pierce in her modest deco kitchen, giving and giving and giving: flesh of my flesh. Then the door opens and forms of politeness mask whatever might be going on and navigate us safely past the dangerous, the imaginary and the real.

I wonder if they love each other, more, I wonder what love means in this context, in any context. What if a person falls through the void, that person might naturally want to grab hold of something. You could call that, and its million grades of refinement, love. OK, but the forms that love takes can be exact opposites. I'm thinking of the Utopian sixties when love was current events—and of acid. Ed always resolved the world into crystal shapes reflecting and refracting. The light was the first light, the light plant cells turn towards and that makes 1/2 of an equation. On the other side of the equal sign is life pure and simple, 'as it never is,' insinuates a voice from the '80s and my 30s. The crystal shapes brimmed with significance as crystal shapes do. The shapes were love, and a new equation sets up an equal sign between meaning and safety. Ed watched them, he sat quietly in the air as a circle on a white ground.

On the other hand, I saw the world in sexual motion, fucking motion, from the whole universe fucking itself on a 4-way tab of Purple Owsley, down to the threads of my clothes, the fibers in the carpet, rubbing against each other erotically. Those

were the days. Everyone was reading Jung and basking in a noble light which elevated our problems into pleasant abstractions. The universe looked like a baby-bottle nipple with a rubber washer connected to it, so it could fuck itself. Since the image appeared to be resolved into male and female, I asked it where I was located and it replied, "You're on the band connecting the two, an intermediate place but just as aroused." Anyway, the universe was fucking and spasming and as opposed to Ed, I wanted to join in.

Certainly if you were falling through a void you would want to catch hold of something, and from a certain point of view (mine) what had more meaning than another person? A portfolio from Dunn and Bradstreet? And if Ed's essential attitude was contemplative, that was hardly the way he usually acted. Usually he was a sexual center with many spokes pointed towards him. If Ed was a hub, and that expressed his quality, then around that center I planned to be the wheel. Generously construed you could say my error was tactical. He fucked before, after, during and I suppose if the structure of time had given him simultaneity as an option he would have used it. He was highly conscious of genitals—his own and others—and would say, "I like the way he wears his cock," as if it were a hair style. Ed was my other and I stood riveted before his extravagances with completely silent admiration, the emphasis here is on silent. I remember walking home one evening with Lily who sauntered a few yards ahead of me, wagging her tail in the endearing if mechanical hope that life would remain

PARALLEL VIEWS

— a nine poem sequence



photo by Latronda Rose

Aaron Shurin

the water flows sweetly where the earth covers
calls up a jug, an urn, a jig, a kilt
An Irish poet ponders a Greek vase
the water tumbles falls

Anyway I always liked the corner drugstore
& especially penny candies, the bigger the better
Big Time with a purple wrapper, peanuts out of place
in the flat nougat, the chocolate thin & cracked

advance to house, advance to big time
the celestial idea of navigation by stars
Movies of course, the big pull of the myth to be
what want to be most
with moist lips filling the screen
& that is all

friendly to her, that affection and cans of Kal-Kan and safety and car rides to the ocean would go on forever. I was looking at Lily and musing over an incident in the Older Writers workshop that I teach. I had brought some of my work to read and Margaret rustled papers throughout, writing fast, she said, to get her thoughts down. One of the stories I read is in "Elements," the one about getting queer-bashed at 29th and Church. The conclusion Margaret reached was that I ought to put all the poems and stories together as one chapter, smooth them out and send them to a dog grooming magazine. I felt profoundly disoriented and started laughing. I could imagine if things were different that I might continue laughing and laughing.

I returned from this revery standing in front of my house. I look up at the second story window, the window to Ed's studio, and there's Ed. A trap door thuds open in my groin. He's almost naked, just blue cotton bikini briefs, and he's playing with his cock, masturbating himself. He doesn't see me. He looks fantastic. Distanced by the window and the cold street light he's a bouquet of flesh and blood, of pleasure. I see it's for the benefit of our across the street neighbor, a gay doctor I later found out, who slowly slowly mounts his front steps and then appears at his Victorian window, just watching. In this way they touch each other. I never spoke to Ed about this because I could never figure out the right tack. After all, it's his life. More than that, his electric current of sex and danger that realigned itself according to every situation—that and his visual patience

to enjoy six oranges on a table—were very much to my taste. But this is a positive with a negative, because this is the kind of silence in which differences become obstacles and people are lost to each other, and to a large degree it's class that names the things we are allowed to talk about and the way we are allowed to broach them.

When I asked my friend Denise about her characteristic acid experience she said it was talk, intense talk, in order to build a bridge between herself and the Other—self and world—meaning and safety—certainly an act of faith greater than Ed's crystals or my baby-bottle nipple. I know from personal experience that sheer talk puts you in increasingly close proximity, that it has an erotic charge, and personally I can think of happy penetrations via the ear. But Denise told me that the words turned into a Niagra Falls of language, carrying the meaning downstream and over. Do you hear, "I too have been in Arcadia," just as the Falls tears up the unity of the rest? No toe-hold in the void there. That reminds me of another friend's acid experience which had, he said, everything romance could want. They listened to Mahler while fondling each other's ears.

Well, you could press the other to your crotch or you could press him to your breast or your lips or you could just grab or build a highway of language or move your arms like semaphores in the hope that someone takes you for a landing strip or just be the hand of a deaf person singing, depending on who you are. In any case, we lovers begin to see differences without

cruelty. The cruelty of laughter in 'the village,' the cruelty of silence in the name of good taste. My mother often wished out loud that she were blind to her children's faults, as her mother was. I took this to mean that she acknowledged our differences in the language available, so the perspective was critical. Still I knew she was bragging. Who wants to be colonized into sameness? I almost prefer Anita Bryant's small town estimate of the differences between us, over the liberals' or left's opinion expressed by a silence which I am supposed to appreciate, and which by denying differences denies me myself.

Let's go back to toe-hold. Because the more ways you touch the world, the more you are in it. I imagine Bruce visiting Jane. What is Bruce *doing* in her life? The bell doesn't answer so he walks up the driveway to the back yard—she's working in her garden. She's beautiful but what you would notice first is intelligent. Vaguely Unitarian, she gives everyone, even God, plenty of elbow-room. "I think there *must* be a divine presence in the universe," she says on her knees, tearing off the corner of a seed packet and poking holes in the dirt with her thumb of sixty years. What is Bruce doing there? A record of passion, emotion? It would be unfair to speculate. Psychological bullseyes are not the point. Like yourself Bruce and Jane are complicated as the world, hard but not impossible to understand. Sex makes strange bed-fellows, and we know from other stories that the father was not her equal. What I mainly gather, and what feels very restful too, is that at whatever juncture she did what she wanted. She gave Bruce away, got a law degree at a time when

the sweet smell of psyche a nut oozing
platitudes, balustrades, non-pareills

a white picket fence chases a white sheep across a green lawn
a green lawn chases a picket fence across a white sheet
folds, foals, follows, flows

begin benign

end
end
up

women didn't, and lived comfortably alone, as sort of country gentry, all these years. She's up in Auburn, isolated, aging and delicate. She's in Auburn, enjoying good health, security and the affection of many friends. It finally cools off and a hot summer night sends a breeze through the screen door. "Whew," says someone, someone looking up from a game of bridge, "It's finally cooling off." Electrical storm, charged laughter, in winter storm-windows and a fireplace. She always had an idea of her own good.

Both Bruce and Jane are not able to disguise themselves. They aren't good at prearranging the nose, mouth, brows, eyes, spine and fingers. This sometimes intrudes on the ceremonious sending of coffee and sweets past taste buds while chatting agreeably. Coffee and cake. It's a perfect domestic tableau. The only thing that would make it more perfect is if they were both inanimate objects. They talk about plants. After all, he's a poet so he ought to know the language of flowers. She politely offers him an opportunity to express himself and he does. He compliments her nasturtiums, 'nasties' he calls them in deference to a great aunt's usage, and her pansies, "their little Victorian faces always saying, 'no fair, no fair' but not being able to do anything about it." He's pleased with himself—would you deny him—showing off his years of mental ballet exercises in one gesture. Now this flight of fancy does seem a trifle eccentric to her, a little showy. It falls on slightly worried ears.

The china is plain, or else decorated with banal decals of milkmaids and shepherds, so not in keeping with her personality

that they express her contempt for domestic flourishes. Perhaps some Victorian blinds slice up the light as if the light were a Spanish Wind Cake. I'll have them eating a Spanish Wind Cake, because I want Jane to exhale a few *Spanische Windtorte* crumbs when Bruce says, "Are you a lesbian?" All stiff meringue, whipped cream and strawberries, like a taffeta dress or like Elizabeth's starched collar, ruby studded. A courtier's high diplomatic exchange between the libido and civilization. One Viennese authority writes, "Could anything be so stunning, so airy, so magnificently aristocratic?" Bruce looks worried,



he's eating his second piece quickly. He says, "It's very sweet," almost reproachfully, and asks, "How many calories do you think are in each section?" She is irritated because how should she know and besides he's obviously heading towards his third. And yet also her affection for him is larger in this small failing, which she can understand, than in his virtues. They are similar to hers but she appreciates them

from a distance, because their careers express variants on the most rewarding use of a life. Who would be an out-front gay and a Marxist if he did not have an idea of what can actually benefit himself? People don't become political out of altruism, that's a shabby reason. We become political after ascertaining what world is in our best interest.

They are sitting and chatting and Bruce asks and she says no to his lesbian question without any fuss. Perhaps she was angry. But I speculate that she arranged her relationship with Bruce for this question to be in her life, and that it represents another tangent point with the world. Actually her no was said with characteristic straightforwardness and my Viennese pastry melodrama was just that, mine.

For some time I've worked with a group of women writers in their fifties and sixties, and trying to shock Bruce's mother reminds me of an incident with Mildred. Mildred is a dark elegant Jewish woman who claims any gathering of people with her drama and zest and allergy to tobacco. At a reading these women gave, I introduced Mildred to Carol, a young woman from my other writing group. On the phone I suggested to Mildred that she accompany Carol to some open readings, adding that Carol earned her living as a prostitute, thinking defensive and unformulated thoughts such as "Carol has a right . . . The oppression of women . . . Sex must be . . ." Feminism abused, because really I just wanted to scandalize Mildred, who had been raised in a Kosher home, like mine, and in fact like Carol's. Mildred let a polite silence go by in deference—I think—to my expectations, and she smoothed her elegant

there the tantrum throws go I
 across the white desert
 or you might say a sea of sand
 before the light goes
 a facing into the light

and all is well as anything else
 sign on, the direction join, sign off

the "e" sound low to the ground as in "sleek"
 or a hard "i" that sings, the incomparable "ice"

"Dear mother, after you left . . ."
 lies unfinished on a mahogany desk
 also sets, also begets

fine, and then a little twist
 of the hand indicating a change in direction
 the smell of braked rubber, a counterweight in the stomach
 Before you can blink the scenery is new

and fourteen Holstein cows chew lazily as
 you zoom towards the burning maple

voice and said, "Well aren't people the most interesting of all?" referring to Carol or me. Either way, that put me lyrically in my place and I cherished her for it. And if I was shocked at her lack of shock, then the joke was on me where it belonged. So this can be a two way street because what if the victim is larger than you? Then scandal and gossip fall back where they originated, and define the boundary of the teller rather than the listener as intended.

It's scandal's defining of boundaries that interests me, what is inside and what is outside, and it's one way a community organizes itself, tells itself its story about what is forbidden and expected. Bruce's mother's possible shock may have been based on a community proscription that homosexuality does not exist verbally. For example, I know a gay man who was raised—maybe not as a grand bourgeois, but many economic notches above me. His sense of himself is based on that class background. There are certain inbuilt sympathies, certain antagonisms. A person could not terrorize this man with high theory, he only grows more respectful, but he is susceptible to vulgarity. So when he says he's going to the ballet or some other elevated cultural event and would you like to join him, you reply that another time you would be delighted but now you are on your way to the baths "to get your rocks off"—cruelly enjoying his expressions of dismay alternating with polite interest that grows increasingly transparent, and you blandly continue with, "It's been a full week and I'm really hot and horny." What a betrayal! And what if you willed into the decaying conversation such formulas as

"well hung" and "seafood" for sailors, and other idioms from the no-nonsense dictionary of pleasure: top man, versatile action, Greek passive, French active, nipple master, cut/uncut, golden showers, French service, scat, toys—they are more beautiful to me than the names of ships. I challenged my friend's modesty because it silenced an important aspect of his life—our life.

Writing this, I think back to "seeing differences without cruelty." After all, my friend is not the enemy. Could differences be acknowledged by means other than surprise attack? You may not think this concerns you, but scandal is one way we can gauge the language that flows backwards beneath our language like an ocean of silence, because silence is a language too, it's the flip side of what we are permitted to say.

What we are permitted to do. There's a Cinderella story I told Bruce—I had it from Susie, a friend from high school who was once married to a cousin on my mother's side. Susie's childhood friend, Libby, had been adopted. At eighteen Libby looked up her real parents: they were rich and they invited her back. "Why don't you live with us?" No sooner said than done. Libby had been a model toe-hold for her parents, a fine student, a believer in self-improvement, a conscientious member of her nuclear unit. What ingratitude, I said happily. For who has more grist for blackmail, more claims on your one and only existence than your real parents?—since adoption combines the urge to possess with a charitable impulse. Hearing about the American hostages in Iran for the 213th day, one of my third grade students wrote, "Whenever anyone speaks to children about

hostages, we should answer, 'Children are hostages too!'" Libby shrugged off her life's commitments in one resounding gesture, and left for Europe with the rich parents for an indefinite stay. It was the Riviera and if the sand was white and the sea was blue her adopted family didn't know it, because she never even sent a postcard!

And now for a temporary solution:

There's a Greek myth about scandal. I forget her name, but pleasure rains across her body defining it in rivulets of Greek cloth. She races through moony woods—past a retaining wall covered by ivy, like Bruce's mother in my dream: a woman's movement through the forest, seen from above by moonlight dappling the gloomy trees of the Northwest. That she is oppressed, even by this myth, is undeniable. Also, she did what she wanted. On behalf of all the trees, now Greek and animate, I'd like to caution her, "Don't say it to anyone." I'd like them all, and the birds and the ground squirrels and spiders too, to tell her, "Don't say it to anyone, but me!" The scandal of a bastard child, an illicit lover. She tells the reeds, she says, "My life and the world are one. Forget-me-not." When they repeat her story she becomes a windflower for faithlessness, or a chrysalis for changeability, or a willow for contrition, or a fern for tenderness, or a mirror for themes, or an x for sexuality, or a pillar for certainty, or the sun for meaning, or a strawberry for the heart, or a fortress for safety, or a telephone for gossip, or a torrent for great feeling, or a planet or a ship or a mesa or a star or a continent or an element of a season.

have you seen the one-eyed horn, my son
the jaws that ache, the ache that claws, the claws that grab

or, if you like, put a canary whistling before all of it
the scene is shaded by first sight

don't tell, the well is full
& I'm doing my Ophelia number
In my left hand the letter "O" gets squeezed
squeezes back, a rubber egg, holy moses

the ride is over & those who want
to go again line-up against the right hand wall

"Mary" said Beth, "call-up Peggy & see if Joline wants to come."

Then we all go to the Dairy Queen, I'm sorry, & we eat
fried clams & have cones of vanilla softy

MODES OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY



Ron Silliman

So Going Around Cities: New & Selected Poems 1958-1979 by Ted Berrigan (Blue Wind Press, 403 pp., paperback \$7.95)

My Poetry by David Bromige (The Figures, 98 pp., paperback \$4.00)

My Life by Lyn Hejinian (Burning Deck, 89 pp., paperback \$3.50)

MOST OF THE DEBATES CONCERNING 20th century poetry have been formal ones. The meaning of form, its appropriate role within the poem, the question of 'traditional' versus 'new' and the related one of 'closed' versus 'open' modes have at least dominated the discourse that surrounded the works themselves. The result has been that content, that other side of the poetic coin, has been little discussed, and usually only within the context of some "scandal," such as that surrounding the publication of Ginsberg's classic *Howl* or Lenore Kandel's less-than-classic *The Love Book*. Fortunately, other disciplines, notably that subsection of linguistics devoted to the acquisition of language by children, have pursued the question of content and especially its role with regard to form, so that it is now possible to put forth one important generalization concerning this dynamic relationship: *New content occurs within already-existing forms; new forms contain already-existing contents.*

An example of the first portion of this formula would be Judy Grahn's *The Psychoanalysis of Edward the Dyke*. Lesbians have, of course, been producing great literature for tens of centuries, but never before had their specific oppression as lesbians been taken as a "fitting subject"

about which to write. Although the setting for the work is contemporary, Grahn composes it with strategies that were available to Sterne and Swift, with an episodic narrative and characterization reduced to comic types. Polysemy, the deliberate over-determination of individual words' connotative fields, which gives rise both to the richness we associate with *The Literary* and to the opacity which is the figure of the concrete in realist and naturalist fiction, is avoided by Grahn. Multiple meanings occur only at the points where heterosexual and homosexual perceptions diverge. By comparison, Pound's *Cantos*, that *fons et origo* of contemporary verse, carries a content as old as Dante.

This is not to imply that formal innovators in poetry have nothing to say. Quite the opposite. The establishment of new forms makes possible the *later* addition of new content. Or, more exactly, new types of content. And new forms serve also to purge

the realm of possibilities is only exercised

Bend down & show yourself you nasty sentence

because it was written, because it was told
because it had to be told, he told
me so

That was a think tank, I thought, that attacked
the farmer in the form of the cotton-gin,
an orange poppy a hundred feet up-cliff from the Pacific,
a clove in an orange, the dissent of the angels

ascend corn-in-hand
this could be seen as a sign for good crops
or it could be painted in the American style
eating corn in between two plastic/metal prongs that look like corn

art could be the direct experience, or bitter actual denial
a very slice in the flesh
the arbitrary image gets nailed to the wall & stays that way
This is not sinister. This is not even happy.

A brace of pigeons. (abrasive pigeons?)

A cherry, that's it!

their contents of lingering attachments to modes which have lost any sense of historic urgency. Any subject, once it is introduced into literature, is going to have a history, partly determined by the contexts of writing, and partly determined by the subject's "life" in the real world. In this way, one can trace a content such as "social" or "found" language, the actual web of ideological affect in daily life, from its origin in Apollinaire's 1913 *Lundi rue Christine* through the cut-ups of William Burroughs to the infinitely more sophisticated appropriation techniques used by many of today's "language poets" (David Bromige and Lyn Hejinian are both masters of this, as are Charles Bernstein, Robert Grenier and Bob Perelman). What began as a means of presenting the phenomenal surface of everyday life has, through successive generations of formal innovation, become a critique of the social construction of this surface, in which it is constantly evident that the language which envelopes each individual is a thoroughly politicized environment, filled with conflict and oppression.

What unites the three books under discussion here—besides the fact that each is an important work by a major American poet—is the predominance of autobiography as a primary content, which is itself part of a much, much larger trend in recent verse, one that, in spite of achieving almost every week some new and previously unimaginable limit, shows absolutely no sign of an early abatement. Something clearly

is going on. Unfortunately, what little has been written about this phenomenon in poetry has generally been done under the rubric of "confessional poetry," a phrase that enjoyed a brief fashion ten to fifteen years ago. But confessional poetry itself never existed as any sort of literary movement, except in the minds and papers of certain academic critics who sought to build a bridge between the best of their world (specifically Lowell, Plath and Berryman) and what has subsequently shown itself to be the mainstream of American poetry.

Obviously, a confession can be one kind of autobiography, a memoir with a limited time-frame and a specific attitude. But so can a travel book, tracing the course of the self in space. A major autobiographical mode is the journal or diarist's notation, which Ted Berrigan uses often in *So Going Around Cities*. And what about a work like Bernadette Mayer's *Memory*, which, as I understand it, was constructed by taking one or more photographs every day for about a month, then writing a history of that time focusing on what could be remembered by means of association from each picture? In short, what is needed is a typology of what is possible through autobiographical writing before we can even begin to understand why such writing exists and what it might be telling us besides *Me*. Because the three books here are so very different (and because they're the work of three of the finer mid-career writers now going), they provide us with the grounds for a tentative

start.

For the past fifteen years Ted Berrigan has been one of the defining figures in American poetry. Through his influence as a teacher, perhaps even more than through his writing, he has dominated the second generation of that community known as the New York or St. Marks School to a degree that the term itself has had to shift meanings in order to accommodate his presence. One partial result has been that Berrigan has as many vocal detractors as any poet now active. The rap is that his work is all ego, shapeless and banal, one big yawn hazed through a filter of pills. Certainly a number of his former students have co-opted his influence to just such ends, but this is a baleful misreading of Berrigan's own poetry and one that *So Going Around Cities* puts firmly to rest.

The book is your basic compilation volume, 194 poems from 21 years of writing, roughly organized chronologically. Notably absent is the 1971 *Train Ride*, still available as a separate volume, and notably under-represented are *The Sonnets*, the 1963 sequence which first brought Berrigan to everyone's attention. (There is the hope that some press will eventually reissue the book in its entirety, which ought to be done immediately.) But all of the other classics are there, including *Tambourine Life*, *Bean Spasms*, *Telegram*, *People of the Future*, *Communism*, *Heroin*, *Night Letter*, "Dear Chris" and at least a dozen others which are as hard-edged and clear as anything written in this entire period.

One of the striking things about this

fairly beyond the wall, the sight hills
Draws into focus as congealing
Will to clear the view, clarify

is not an embroidery, though exact
is true as mind's picture
& nothing referential

Reverential. thrown upon the walled screen
to deify in language.
Now it exists
again

For the table is white, and the fork is white
& all manner of beasts & burdens
are white

& the eye is clear, transparent
& the tongue folded over with color

book is just how many of the poems are familiar. I would hardly describe myself as an ardent reader of Berrigan's work, yet maybe only 20 poems were completely new to me. His work, in books, magazines and anthologies, simply has been everywhere in the last 15 years. The second striking feature is more ominous: There seems to have been a marked drop-off in Berrigan's production in the past 9 years. In fact, roughly three-quarters of the book is devoted to works composed before 1972. This is not an uncommon phenomenon—Frank O'Hara wrote only four poems in the last 18 months of his life—and can largely be accounted for by the increasing demands on anyone's time as they grow older, but it always seems sad to me. Berrigan's work over the next 20 years does not promise to yield another 400 page book.

Berrigan writes, in an author's note, that "generally there has been an 'I' that, in doing the telling, has by nature located itself in the center of the action, though by no means is / always the central character, let alone the hero. My sense, for that matter my ambition, has been to create a character named / . . ." But this statement seems more than a little ingenuous. Berrigan knows full well that, without some marked gestures of *difference*, any number of first person singulars in the writing will, in the reader's eyes, reduce to the smallest conceivable denominator: *The mind strives always toward the unity of the maximum possible Gestalt.*

Yet such differential gestures are

rare in Berrigan's poems. These occur most visibly in *To Himself*, a translation of Leopardi on which Berrigan collaborated with Gordon Brotherston and George Schneeman, *Memorial Day*, a discursive, 27 page collaboration with Anne Waldman in which the style and tone of the two poets remain remarkably individuated (an admirable deviation from the traditional mush of collaborative poems) and *A Boke*, a dense and fairly straightforward account of a reading tour and its toll on the mind/body of the author. This poem is also the only image of work in the entire book, and of the poet as a producer of commodities.

In fact, what is uniquely Berriganesque about this writing is its commitment to an overall unity. There is a sense in this work, which Berrigan first explored subsequently, that nearly any line in a given poem could appear almost anywhere in another poem. And they often do! Compare *How We Live in the Jungle* (p. 242) with *Chinese Nightingale* (p. 284). The poem *Tonight* (p. 261) appears intact, with even its linebreaks preserved, in the first of *Three Sonnets and a Coda: For Tom Clark* (p. 264).

Here, the unity of Berrigan's / serves a major strategic purpose. He is first of all a lyric poet, writing in an age largely inhospitable to that impulse. He is also writing from a context deeply embedded in the New York art scene during a period when a shift occurs away from object-art to conceptualism, performance, installations, environments, art-language and other supposedly dematerialized manifestations.

Berrigan's response, and one of his major contributions, has been to develop a method that puts the writing *before* the poem. The poem is little more than a container for the writing, it is there for convenience. And this is made possible by putting the language in the mouth of a constant speaker, /.

I. Speakes is, in fact, the name of a character among a cast of 8 which appear in an oddly static one-act playlet towards the end of David Bromige's new volume, *My Poetry*. Each unabashedly is an aspect of "Bromige," yet each is quite distinctly drawn, a tour de force of condensed characterization. They speak *of*, but not *to*, one another, and save for the rustling of papers by the love-poet, their only action is to exit. The title of the piece (and that of the section of the book which contains it) is *What the Person Believes is Part of the Poet's Make-up*, a statement which yields some very different meanings depending on the way in which it is taken. This exploitation of ambiguity, the absolute confidence in his stylistic capacities, the magnified focus on the self (posed here, quite unlike Berrigan, as a limitless structure to be explored) and the perverse sense of humor (I. Speakes, indeed!) are typical of the entire volume, Bromige's first in six years.

It puzzles me that Bromige has not become considerably more celebrated and famous, since few, if any, writers have been so constantly challenging (rigorous and unpredictable) over the past 15 years. Doubly so, since Bromige may well be the best public reader of poems around. But it

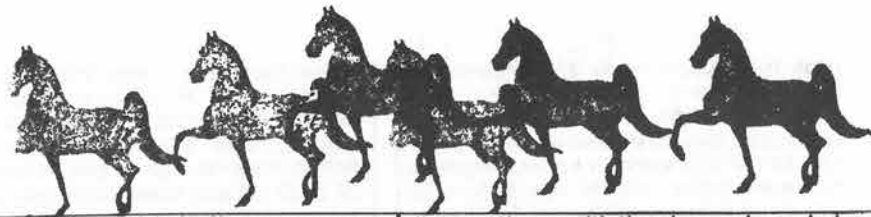
I came upon a blank space
& swooned

saying it makes it so

is precisely his resistance to easy interpretation or short-hand categories, combined with his semi-isolate location at Sonoma State, which may account for this.

My Poetry amply demonstrates both the difficulties and the rewards. To the uninitiated eye, it might appear that there are only three poems among the 21 items in the book, *An American Heritage History, Seeing That You Asked*, and *Credences of Winter*. But the first is curiously printed, with three columns of stanzas on the left-hand pages and two columns on the right. *Seeing That You Asked* has a note appended at the end. The second of the five sections of this tightly composed book, *Six of One, Half-a-Dozen of the Other*, has poems from previous volumes of Bromige's heading up the somewhat longer prose commentaries, part-essay, part-autobiography, part-fiction (at least I presume it's unlikely that Freud ever applied a literal handkerchief to the child Bromige's wounds). But, typically, there aren't six of anything here, but seven! Seven poems, seven commentaries, which eventually form a whole (something the poems, which are radically unlike one another, resist). The play is in verse, but with 8 characters and the modest stage directions clearly are Something Else. The only other things which are predominantly in lines are two of the five sections of a piece called *Authority*; and every word in these two sections (shades of Walter Abish!) begins with the letter A. The rest is prose.

The first of these, comprising the whole first section, is *My Poetry*, which looks



like an essay, but which I take to be poetry, with its spurious quotations, and the ample incorporation of other (unnamed) materials into the text, not to mention a sense of style that is lush for its own sake. This piece takes an abrupt turn at nearly every sentence, and Bromige manages to keep so many topics going simultaneously that a close reader is exhausted at the end of nine pages. As a single act of writing, *My Poetry* is unlike anything I've ever read, embracing self-referentiality with a polysemy that never lets up for a second.

A second section, combining as it does poems and prose, broadens the scope and deepens the investigation of a self constructed from fiction and autobiography. The third section contains four pieces which are examples of different possibilities of form. The best (and last, and longest) of these is *One Spring*, a pastoral composed largely by appropriations from the local papers. The irony here is that daily life in the country (even the modern, strife-filled country) is supposedly the epitome of the Organic, to which the poem's form is diametrically opposed. The piece succeeds (it won a Pushcart Prize this year) because of Bromige's meticulous attention to the ordering of his materials.

The fourth section starts with the two "straightforward" poems mentioned ear-

lier, continues with the play, and concludes with a series of prose pieces leading to *My Career*, and *My Plan*, two works directly related to the title piece. The section appears to plot out Bromige's path from standard poetic forms to the more recent prose works. Except that the poems are as unusual as everything else here, and a glance at Bromige's earlier books suggests that any attempt to see this as a description of that process is a fiction. In this section, I miss the omission of two other *My* works, *My Hard Luck Story* and *My Compensations (GLURK)*, not because the section is lacking, but because I want it to go on. The final section and work, *Hieratics: A Triptych*, which is in five sections numbered 0 to 4, is the densest work in the book, a composition whose subject changes with every sentence. Here, Bromige appears to have "dissolved" or "exploded" (or in some other fashion *gone beyond*) the Self. That is, if one can ignore the irony of that title.

And, after the final section, comes one more piece, printed in a much smaller typeface, thanking Bromige's many sources. This ultimately minor note is not listed on the contents page and is called *My Palaver*. But it's a poem, in fact, the poem (at least in the sense Jay Gutz would understand) in this book.

Glory to the tree, they sang
clapping hands, hopping
Do you think they were blond?
Wouldn't you have to give them
straight page-boy haircuts? & dress them
in white tunics?

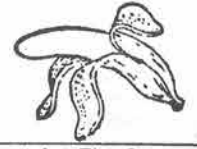
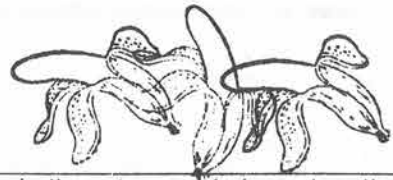
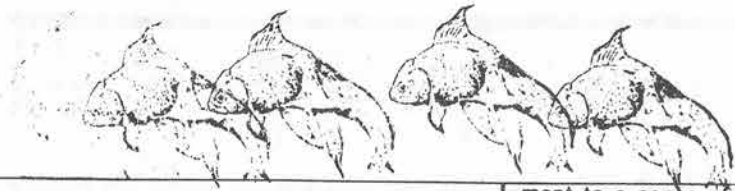
If I like. If I do not, not.
Where would you
like to go? Down again?
Again?

So many little philtres
to separate the blend.
Veils,
dimlighting
raising focus on gauze

A Japanese lantern hangs over hills
lizard backs

the white sisters come.
their bodies are
blindfolded, their eyes are blind
with long sticks like noses they poke the ground
for the lost geisha
who sits alone beneath tree

pulling apart a chrysanthemum



Lyn Hejinian's fifth book, *My Life*, is a single work: 37 paragraphs each with 37 sentences. In addition, each paragraph has a title or caption, sentences and phrases which themselves are repeated often throughout the text. My understanding is that the book was constructed accumulatively, with Hejinian originally writing a one-sentence paragraph, then a two-sentence paragraph and adding another sentence to the first, then a three-sentence paragraph, adding a new sentence to each of the first two paragraphs, etc. In spite of its publication here, Hejinian intends to keep adding another paragraph (and more sentences to the existing ones) each year. When Lyn reaches 74, *My Life* will be four times its present dimensions.

What binds the sentences is their subject, her life, supplemented by the generous deployment of the repeated phrases. "As for we who love to be astonished," my favorite, appears again and again, with all manner of independent clauses attached. When, occasionally, two otherwise unrelated sentences "about" the same topic occur in close proximity, there is suddenly a leap from the dense linguistic surface to a glimpse of *A Tale*. Essentially, this is the same strategy as Berrigan's reappearing lines carried forward by a writer with a much stronger commit-

ment to a sense of order in the universe. The self here offers perspective, but, in spite of the title, is much less the subject and object of the writing than in either Berrigan or Bromige's work.

Hejinian has for some time been noted for her love of rich textual surface effects, but never before has she found a method of construction so suited to its development. The result is something like an orchid-house of language, lush and even humid, but in no way baroque. Images of family, poverty, sit side by side, woven together by their prosody. (Interestingly enough in Pound's classic typology of verse into logo-, phano-, and melopoiea, all formalist/constructivist approaches would come under melopoiea because of their reliance on structural and/or exogamic determinants to the poem, such as sound. That much of this poetry in recent years, particularly on the west coast, has been in prose forms tends to obscure this. And few have been as consistent as Hejinian in pursuing this side of the work down to the level of prosody itself.

For Hejinian and Berrigan both, autobiography is a strategy, while for at least this period of Bromige's writing its function is to provide a ground for investigation. If, for me, Berrigan seems problematic, it is because his approach, by its very refusal

to be systematic (except for *The Sonnets*), makes it easy to lose sight of this. In Hejinian's writing, precisely because it is impossible to take a grid of thirty-seven 37s to be organicist, intuitive or spontaneous, that which is intensely personal never succumbs to seeming reactive. In her work, the social construction of the surface—that is, its ideology—is rendered visible, rather than repressed as in Berrigan's poems.

It's visible in Bromige's writing also, but for different reasons. In his case, the work is continually dissecting its construction, guilty about its very existence, and always pointing elsewhere. In his work it is clearest that the reason for the autobiographical mode is that nowhere else can there be *direct observation* in literature, no other type is freed of second-hand reports, received information, in short, the ideologies of the day with all of their unstated motives and agendas.

Autobiography is obviously not much of a full-fledged platform for the whole of literature. But its existence at this time is one step in that direction. It is rare that three books should appear so soon after one another focusing on this as these do. Or that they be so different. Or that they be so good. Each is essential reading for anyone who wishes to be in touch with contemporary poetry.

feathers

& then the feeling of wind rushing by

You were not correct in imagining the direction
itself (rising) was important

For every name we made a little movement of foot
calling ourselves out loud, we
danced until the band quit

"and every concrete object
has abstract value, is timeless
in the dream parallel"

You were not imaginative in correcting the direction
importance was itself rising

Chez Nous

We have the road here, the gate, the key. Open the window. See the flies fly out? See the mist roll in looking for a head of hair to settle on. Listen to the silverware acting up again, banging the plates, no hands in sight, no soup in the bowl. The bottom falls out. We hang it on the ceiling. See how we will. So reel me in, take me to a matinee, pin the donkey on my tail, and low down in the backseat. Now it's spring and the blue sweet peas open the provisional morning.

When your mama can't do for you your baby must. When your baby's gone you better go downtown. They said, just shut up, rehang the doors and enter from the other side. But not me I cried, as I painted it on lash by lash. They yelled, call a plumber to untangle Slinky. Fix the pipes, raise the stakes, hire an understudy!

I took the gate off the hinge. I took the hinge off the beam and pawned it. But here on the moats of the real estate, I'm rich, on paper. All the assumptions called to the kitchen, spanked, sent to bed without any dinner. Cooked too early, I was the oldest child, I am the youngest, I ask the same Four Questions every night.

We're soft and we leak. But this is where the stalk snaps, this is where the tips touch. The filly's gone against the odds. Ma was afraid we'd 'get ideas'. Should I clip the coupons and move to Rio? Miss my life making something out of nothing? I just wanted a lake, I just wanted an intelligent chocolate cake, I got a Gag Order! Was it something you ate? No, it was something I read, on the memory bank, in the late afternoon, while the lingering aroma comforted the unemployed saucier in the condemned restaurant below me.

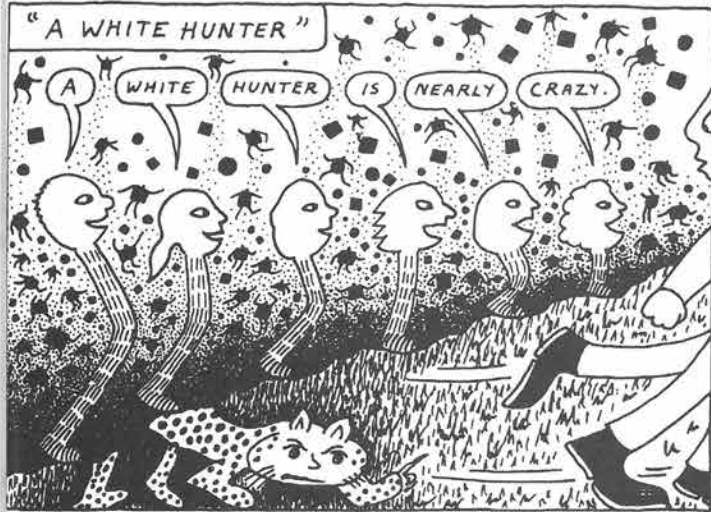
Reduced Cahoots

During a loud thunderstorm, the woman woke only when her baby cried. We picnic on a small island that sways with every wave. Long after they parted, they would emerge from separate houses at precisely the same time. What salmon know of pink. She developed a rash on the soft underside of her writing arm. Often he would gaze at the ceiling while she lay on her stomach. The results begin the moment you do. Fifteen years after he was killed by a dune buggy, the city fathers outlawed moving vehicles on the island. Leonardo wrote backwards in order to keep his inventions secret. You finally realize that being that way is what makes you that way. He plays the strings of the piano instead of the keys. Several worshippers were found crushed in their rush to touch the pope. She wakes every hour murmuring, are we there yet. From his training in anatomy, he shakes hands and sees only the bones. In daylight, before a rain, the morning glory closes its flower. You're beautiful, you're intelligent, you want to be happy. The woman fell in love with the son of the doctor who delivered her. Before he became a clown, the 400 pound man rode elephants in the circus. A local derelict threw iodine on a photograph of the famous artist who said, anybody can do anything.



You Will Be Identified By The Company You Keep

I am frequently alone and my friends are loners. Since nature abhors a vacuum, no desire goes unfilled. You believe a certain kindness will protect you. In order to get me to leave sooner, the waitress ignored my empty coffee cup. Sound takes revenge, the dog barks from abandonment. If we let you sit in a booth alone, we'll have to make exceptions for all the singles. Upon rising, he whistled a few bars of, 'my romance doesn't need a thing but you'. The world is made of more parties of two than four. They did not appreciate my writing in public, it reminded them of work! After the cough was over, the cougher appeared happier. Where the thought leads, many sizes fit none. Some acts resemble the wrong letter in the right envelope. You would like to be free of this, her painted nails remind you of all you said no to. She said, be a good girl, thank your soul for returning to you each morning. I will go for broke, I will advertise for the lost music. The shelves wait, the bookjacket is still too big for the book. She did not come to audit, she was only looking for the place where the light divides.



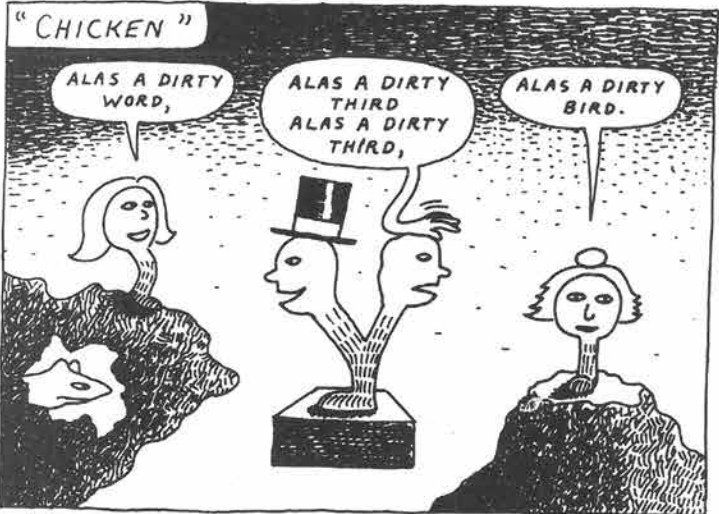
Faithful To The Text

Take a pitchfork to the fallen petals. What falls. Raining, we consider the number of stars that cannot be seen. Yearn for what we know is. Lust, a simple rise. The mind overprocessing the gesture. Did he mean. As I write the word "remarkable," my mind remarks her numerous qualities. Movement, negotiate each step. A line of least resistance. Who surrenders.

I didn't know you were so good, I didn't dream you could. We were introduced five times. I could never forget your crewcut. The overgrown lawn. The wicker chair I sat you in as I unzipped your pegged pants.

Implied promises. The rules. How he hates the words "I know" and "never." The ensuing anarchy. Desire. The south of France. The slopes he skied down. The curve of their spines on the feather bed. Whose definition matters. What sinks in soft.

Running we consider what rises. Steam is how we speak. The room evaporates. The walls, down to the brick. The feathers of the bird perched in the branches, the bones flown away.



- Stein's TENDER BUTTONS as seen by Dave Movice

"... What Gertrude Stein was to the 1920's ..."

for Dorthea Oppenheimer

Who wants to be fat
and look like a man?
Who wants to walk funny like a hat on her head with Picasso chugchug
in Red Cross trucks and rescue doughbooy's hearts
Who wants to own dogs
blackball friends who do not with wood hammers hit wood balls the way you
do
Who wants to will her sweetheart everything her relatives win
back later
Who wants to be a female feminists found-out-later was
chauvinist
Who wants to sing "Song of the Lonesome Pine" over and over
a la scratchy Victrola
Who wants to be American Dream Woman when you're
Europe, broad and
heavy and deep

- Lynn Lonidier



Disco Chinatown

street blood throbbing
punk maggots of the slums with fake ID's
smelling British sterling
cover the stink of sweat, car grease and dirt
and the blood from being cut up by a Jo
or is it W.C.?

slant eye to slant eye talking
smooth talking or trying,
"hey, baby —
looking nice tonight"
spilling sunrises

margaritas
bourbons with cherries
giddy easy striding to make it to my table
in your own eyes, a ghetto knight,
"wanna drink?"

in a flash and a flick, light my cigarette,
the dance floor is dead tonight
linoleum cracked
the Filipino D.J. Berkeley Asian American Studies drop out is stoned
and even the lights look neon sleazy
you want me to move, a wax museum dancing doll, under your macho gaze,
or in your arms, rocking following your rocks,
layered black hair,

moustache, always, to tickle the quick kisses,
cheap shiny shirt, four buttons open,
a jade pendant swaying against yellow brown flesh,
darker brown leather, and long long legs,
you want to take me home
and the grip on my shoulder tightens,
you driving a Camaro Z28?
an Olds 442?

a broken down Malibu?
a Caddy Eldorado?
you want to be rich someday
you want to enjoy life, you say,
'cuz it's so so short,
ALL girls want you for their old man,
"in bed, I have a good body,
opium makes me last
and last

I'm ten inches
and, " a smile,
"this thick"

you play the mind games with a too ridiculous seriousness
not another escape out just for kicks
your street male pride can't take no scratches
you'll kick my ass when the number I give you isn't mine
you tell me not to dance with anyone else
when I just met you tonight
and isn't your old lady waiting at your apartment?
hardened hard up
Ricksha stray tiger cat
your life view quite
doesn't
touch mine
and being gang banged isn't my type of thrill
disco steps don't silence sirens

and the skyscraper lights don't touch Grant Avenue on a Friday night
Golden Dragon massacred meat can't ever be pieced back together again
black lights and hanging ferns or Remy sweetness can't hide
 spilled out alley fish guts

that tell you and tell you
there just ain't no future
your hands grope
your eyes closed
your tongue dry
your penis limp
poor ChinaMAN-child

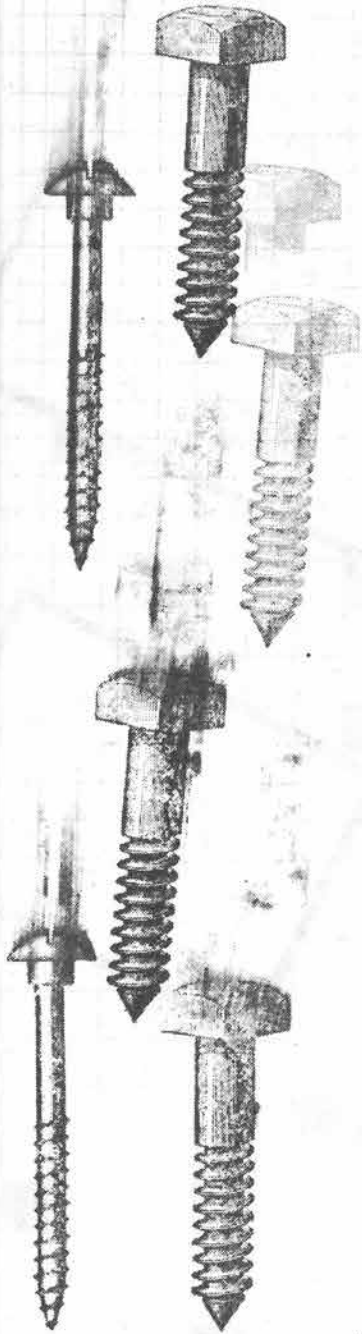
— Yuri Kageyama



*with the proliferation of advanced weaponry, nuclear war
becomes an increasing statistical probability*

you squat by a log fire
a sunshower passing a country road
your thigh muscle stretches to Borneo
the tiny soft hairs on the hill of your buttock
a salamander sits beneath a cherry tree
your sweetheart in overalls
each leaf forms around its energy absorbers
the secret meaning in that look in your eye
a house remembers all of its visitors
shavings twist off a pencil into negative space
a bluebell is heartsick for a false lover
logs jamming galactic river
being weighed down by "the lessons of history"
I had a good boss once — he kept apologizing
they better not try to close that window before we get our food stamps
a train wheel crushes a grasshopper
brigades of landlords landmine the trail to the source
a scarlet tanager contemplates suicide
stop i've seen enough
evening breezes fill the heads of state
oppression breeds the struggle against itself
a green marble rolls down a stone path
a sudden storm drenches a financier
worm breaking in half
river of honey flows through a thirsty cavern
your sweetheart taking off overalls
spinning on the edge of the world
a picketline encircles the great silence
you notice a universe in the palm of your hand
following your heart through a concrete wall
you see god leaping in the embers
spell to prevent the next world war
a million grandmothers surround the pentagon
the president writes a poem
I heard it on the foodstamp line
missiles misfire on launching pads
the neighbors march on city hall
unpiling the money of the world
becoming all you know you can be
history means nothing unless you're willing to risk everything for love
always expect the impossible

— John Curl



Faulkner

The landscape distances itself
according to a system of Southern hills
and silence.

Time has carried him
beyond the yellow hospital.

And Death, patient death,
which makes faces so beautiful,
has chosen his dreadful country
to furnish our tombs.

The even voice, which
dictates to us a good-bye
has attempted to reconcile
our mutilated states.

Has limned,
by the whine of the sawmill,
our streets —
our streets full of sycamores,
and lawyers.

The black impotent eyes
of twenty of Popeye's guns
are pointed at our
hearts.

And we confirm his anguish.
we are pearls of broken glass
which form a verandah, we resemble
Matthew Brady's portrait
of the reluctant Lee.

There is one great sadness which
he has not announced,
his death.

But we, the defeated, gather from the South
and ask in his name
on how many dead
and bleeding stars
will it be necessary
to be reborn
to obtain the glory
that a grief require?
— David L. Fisher

Stalingrad

Someone was
in love with me. It was not one of
my daughter's friends,
those silky perennials.
Sweet blue cleft

of the conch of her jeans,
crippled hands
of her eyes. And I,
mute Trappist to every terrible passion,
knew what that was like.

Not pretty pleistocene torsos, utter
revelation of starlight,

a staccato of winter, dark marlin
of flashing minds.

The wind on our spirits,
a block of salt
stalking cattle, we became
a river of dreams . . .

And I, embittered and promised
like my father, still I seldom looked up
from the map of Stalingrad
spread out on my lap.
— David Fisher

she cut her finger
slicing carrots for the soup—
suddenly a bloom.
— A.J. Wright

I Don't Want To Read
(for Nate Timberlake & Mischy)

I don't want to read.
I like things that move.
I don't want to read.
I like things that move.
I don't want to read.
I like things that move.
I don't want to read.
I like things that move.
I don't want to read.
I like things that move.
I don't want to read.
I like things that move.
I don't want to read.
I like things that move.
I don't want to.
I don't want to.
I don't want to.
Read.
I like thinks
I like.
Things that move.
I don't like to read.
I like things that move.

— Tom Beckett
9/11-9/12/80

Desire

We men want so much.
No ocean could fill the hole
at which we dig & dig.

Ourselves caught in it.
Swearing
it couldn't happen to us

like it did
to Blessed Thomas a Kempis
that 15th century cleric
who wrote *De Imitatione Christi*
a book of devotions
still in use.

Almost declared a saint
till they dug his body up & found
he'd been buried alive.

Found scorchings
on the coffin lid
where he'd bloodied
his nails.

Found the way
he'd died
struggling.

Unable to accept
a return to the Mother.

— Artful Goodtimes

Sardines

Hearts alive
to see them
swimming the sidewalks
after school

freewheelin'
& fantailin'

Swearing
ain't no net
gonna grab me, momma

& upstairs
in the tenement
the snapping of tin

as the old men
roll over
& snore themselves silly

their breath
rancid as sardines.

— Artful Goodtimes

Paper dir

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False Apocalypse

The afternoon you bought that Gypsy deck
black clouds followed us
back to your apartment.
We thought we were prepared, we had waited.
As the sombe cloth stretched
over us, obliterating the entire sky
like India ink, we laughed
as if we were mad

and remembered the omens —
the warped record, the drunken cut,
a drawer of dull knives,
sheets full of fleas,
my beer glass shattered and your keys
lost, the sick phone calls,
that X scratched in the window's dust.
No one else seemed to notice;

they tailgated or passed,
strapped tight to the weeknight's routine,
rushing from work to reservations
at Mexican restaurants.
This was it, so you were
extravagant at the liquor store —
select champagne with black caviar
for egg bread spread with butter!

Three days later your check would bounce.
But money had never mattered.
You smiled and shook your dark hair,
threw the sack in the back seat.
High Priestess, sexy
in a see-through pink slip
and black pumps, you read violent
death on my plam, a broken heart-line.

You saw death also
in the strange arrangement
of my stars, a death
unquestionable as your tattered cards.
Candles were lit for this
midnight ritual. Our finger-tips slid
back and forth across the Ouija board,
spelling the month of my death.

"Are you moving it?" I kept asking.
So we set aside the occult.
Then I admired those ankles as you leapt
to let the cat in —
a genuine omen when he walked straight
to your Keltic layout,
set his adorable head
on the Death card, and slept.

"Death!" we shouted.
"I love death!" "I hate death!"
Your lips touched my unexpected tears.
The soft footsteps
of the rapist stopped
halfway up the stairs.
The wine dried in silence like a bloodstain,
a bruise on the abused carpet.

The sky cleared.
The weird laughter left us
alone, with only a glimpse
of what we thought we had witnessed,
with just a taste
bad as tabasco, hung over
the next morning, of how we had
ranted, and raged at the world.

— David Trinidad



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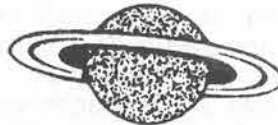
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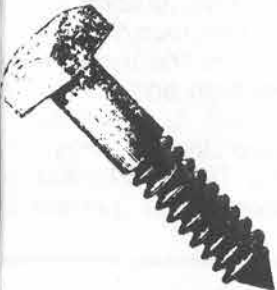
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WHO'S IN THE SOUP

Kathy Acker writes white hot novels like *The Adult Life Of Toulouse Lautrec*. When not traveling to Haiti she teaches at the SF Art Institute. **James Arnold** makes films & night-manages a Tenderloin hotel. I met him in Atlanta but these poems were chapbooked in Boston. The Nicaraguan Ministry of Culture has requested **Pancho Aguila** be extradited to Nicaragua, a request seconded by the U.S. State Dept. The Calif. Parole Board however . . . **Tom Beckett** of Kent, Ohio co-edits *The Difficulties*. **Bruce Boone's** latest novella, *Century of Clouds*, is a masterpiece & proves he practices what he preaches. Texan **Ronnie Burk's** poems are being reissued by Mango.

Peter Cashorali (L.A.), **Elaine Equi** (Chicago) & **David Trinidad** (Chatsworth, CA) all appeared in Dennis Cooper's excellent anthology *Coming Attractions*. **John Curl** co-ordinated the Feb. *Left Write! Unity Conference* of writers on the left in S.F. **David Fisher** won the 1979 William Carlos Williams Award for his book *Teachings*. **Gloria Frym** is tired of poetry readings but happily not yet tired of poetry. The reclusive **Shirley Garzotto**,

besides writing stories, novels & plays, is one of the best astrologers in the Bay Area.

Artful Goodtimes is executive director of the Telluride Colo. council for arts & humanities. **Robert Gluck's** *Family Poems* is a special inspiration to my own poetry. Gluck & Boone were also on steering committee of Left Write Conf. **Richard Irwin** writes on Performance Art for *Damage* & does other weird things.

Born in Japan, **Yuri Kageyama's** work has appeared in *Y'Bird*, *SF Stories* & elsewhere. **Maurice Kenny** edits the widely admired *Contact II* in NYC. His latest book is *Only As Far As Brooklyn*. **Ginny Lloyd** edits a mag of Fe-Mail art. **Lyn Lonidier's** latest book is *Woman Explorer*. **Dave Morice** of Iowa City is well known for his fabulous *Poetry Comics*. **Gill Ott** of Blue Bell, PA edits the increasingly respected *Paper Air*. **Bob Perlman** edits *Hills*. **Leslie Scalapino** co-edits *Foot*. Poet & playwright **Aaron Shurin's** latest book is *Giving Up The Ghost*. **Ron Silliman** edits *The Tenderloin Times*. **Virginia Smith** & **Julia Vose** are mysterious to me. **Luisah Teish** teaches dance in Berkeley.

