



# POETRY

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*December 2014*

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# CONTENTS

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*December 2014*

## POEMS

BILL MANHIRE	195	<i>Surveillance Notes</i> <i>Homeric</i> <i>Christmas</i>
DUNYA MIKHAIL	198	<i>My Grandmother's Grave</i>
KNAR GAVIN	200	<i>The Track Racer</i> <i>Statocyst underfoot and we,</i> <i>returning:</i> <i>Strindberg Gray</i>
TOM CLARK	206	<i>Then and Now</i> <i>Blown Away</i>
TERRANCE HAYES	208	<i>How to Draw a Perfect Circle</i>
ROBYN SCHIFF	212	<i>Dyed Carnations</i> <i>Fourth of July, 2012</i>
ROB SCHLEGEL	214	<i>Taurus Teez</i>
MELISSA BRODER	216	<i>Salt</i> <i>Like a Real Flame</i> <i>Lunar Shatters</i>
AFAA MICHAEL WEAVER	220	<i>Waste</i>
CLAUDIA EMERSON	221	<i>Metastasis: Worry-Moth</i>
MOLLY PEACOCK	222	<i>The Poet</i> <i>Q's Quest</i> Illustrations by Kara Kosaka
GERALD STERN	230	<i>Much Better Than a Goat</i>
DARREL ALEJANDRO HOLNES	231	<i>From "Middle Passage"</i>
RACHEL GALVIN	232	<i>Ortolans</i>

**RUTH LILLY AND DOROTHY SARGENT  
ROSENBERG POETRY FELLOWS**

SOLMAZ SHARIF	235	<i>[Persian Letters]</i> <i>Lanat Abad / The Place of the Damned</i>
WENDY XU	238	<i>Phrasis</i> <i>The Forecast</i>
HANNAH GAMBLE	240	<i>I Wanted to Make Myself like the Ravine</i>
DANEZ SMITH	242	<i>Dinosaurs in the Hood</i>
OCEAN VUONG	244	<i>On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous</i>

**LARRY EIGNER: SIX LETTERS**

LARRY EIGNER	251	Six Letters Introduction by George Hart
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**COMMENT**

EXCHANGE	271	Disability and Poetry Jennifer Bartlett, John Lee Clark, Jim Ferris, Jillian Weise
CONTRIBUTORS	285	

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## POEMS



BILL MANHIRE

---

*Surveillance Notes*

In Sweden, they whispered all winter,  
counting the frozen minutes.  
In France, they branched out. Tips of experience.  
In England, they dreamed of Ireland.  
In Ireland they seemed to be lonely.  
Germany was Belgium then was Spain.  
Italy was something else again.  
*Portugal, Portugal, Portugal:*  
they said that a lot because they never went back.  
Later in Hungary, he lay on his back  
and watched the clouds — so few of them  
but each one big and fluffy. In the first dream  
the angel was having a dream; in the next dream  
the angel still clung to his story.

*Homeric*

Cold cry from the last page of the dictionary,  
name with a knife in it, and the knife  
*italic* against the throat

till you fall into so heavy a sleep —  
sleep made of asterisks and cattle,  
the herd just a black scarf

against snow — you can't begin to guess  
where the old world went. Now there are only two  
choices, says the tale, and neither is good.

Hence an axe above each separate entrance  
as the hero becomes hardly a voice  
and the sad dogs appear on the screen.

Then there is a thin, high scraping.  
Then no noise of any sort at all.



*Christmas*

Evening: the nervous suburbs levitate.  
Height does us no harm, now we are high above the mineral pools,  
above the flash hotel whose only use is treachery.  
Someone knocks on a door and you crouch behind the bed.

Down in the bar, the small girls toast their parents,  
the brother breaks a large bone for its marrow.  
I'm thinking of a challenge for us all. The star in the sky  
has traveled all the way from home. Now follow that!

DUNYA MIKHAIL

---

*My Grandmother's Grave*

When my grandmother died  
I thought, "She can't die again."  
Everything in her life  
happened once and forever:  
her bed on our roof,  
the battle of good and evil in her tales,  
her black clothes,  
her mourning for her daughter who  
"was killed by headaches,"  
the rosary beads and her murmur,  
"Forgive us our sins,"  
her empty vase from the Ottoman time,  
her braid, each hair a history —

First were the Sumerians,  
their dreams inscribed in clay tablets.  
They drew palms, so dates ripen before their sorrows.  
They drew an eye to chase evil  
away from their city.  
They drew circles and prayed for them:  
a drop of water  
a sun  
a moon  
a wheel spinning faster than Earth.  
They begged: "Oh gods, don't die and leave us alone."

Over the Tower of Babel,  
light is exile,  
blurred,  
its codes crumbs of songs  
leftover for the birds.

More naked emperors  
passed by the Tigris  
and more ships ...

The river full  
of crowns  
helmets  
books  
dead fish,  
and on the Euphrates, corpse-lilies floating.

Every minute a new hole in the body of the ship.

The clouds descended on us  
war by war,  
picked up our years,  
our hanging gardens,  
and flew away like storks.

We said there isn't any worse to come.

Then the barbarians came  
to the mother of two springs.  
They broke my grandmother's grave: my clay tablet.  
They smashed the winged bulls whose eyes  
were sunflowers  
widely open  
watching the fragments of our first dreams  
for a lifetime.

My hand on the map  
as if on an old scar.

KNAR GAVIN

---

*The Track Racer*

*For Marshall "Major" Taylor*

A hoot is a hilarious person. Perhaps train  
scream or owl, jeer. Often done by mouth.  
A man may widen owl wide and give one away.  
Hoots may result in bans, as in, "the crowd 'hooted'  
the track star clean out of the sport."  
Sometimes a hoot may be kept and saved  
for later. For instance, "They didn't give a hoot."  
A woman may sharpen a hoot  
in the toolshed with the bread knives. So there  
may be a toolshed, and this may be where the knives are kept  
and the hoots. They come from chambers—  
come at you with those wings. So when waiting in the tool-  
shed hoot runs its owl talon over the knives. Else  
it comes at you, other it stares.

•

In 1890, George "Little Chocolate" Dixon put his  
foot on the world and held it there, waiting for the Major  
to come. These were the days when extra layers  
of name were glazed on—a way of saying both more  
and less and not at all. In the case of the two-term moniker,  
permit either/or—you may grab from the bag "Little." In France,  
Marshall "Major" Taylor was *le Nègre Volant*—  
you may grab from the bag "Flying."

•

Sometimes it's a bad investment to self-publish  
autobiography—*what a hoot*. As in, pauperism  
may wait for you with its long needles  
readying to blow you out. Under the pauper's empty ton  
a man gets baby-bird gaping with hunger. The Major

puts his wings inside and dies in Cook County Hospital  
where it's too late. Hoot given, hoot held back. Ice-white nurses  
come warm in their linens to fold back the wings beside  
themselves, like any good cook come to shut a mouth.

This case of hoot has called for leg and wing and swoop.  
Rise up, Major. Ghost-man old Birdie Munger's bike  
— take back the front, it's time to owl.

*Statocyst underfoot and we, returning:*

The news, descriptive. Rhetoric, void. It's finally here: *inarticulate brachiopods have no matching teeth and sockets and their valves are held together only by muscles* —

wherefore the ball to fit the change?  
unto what did she say, “change is a hard thing”  
— woman thumbs for four pennies — currency is that which hinges —  
chain to door swung open

— the hammocking tree just some yards downhill  
bears that crux of certain lightning —

stilled, any young boy climbs under —  
black root tangle — struck essence  
rising through each dendrite of tree  
charred spindle bone of dog buried the summer  
before, a cave where the trunk cracked wide

tree now near-preacher, arms wide-flung,  
ligature in a voiding smolder

and so, *ay-ay!*                      hold it — just

— we're gonna talk clams for a sec  
and you'll listen, ear,  
chamber that cannot refuse —

here, quickly: *Branchiopoda* is not to be confused with *brachiopod*;  
not to be pulled into the question of *articulacy*. Not a hand  
in gesticulating fit. Skin articulates denouement —  
articulates *more French than ever* — articulates joint's claim, that bone.

Boy, *tree*, you've got some *nerve*.

And we're back:

*inarticulate brachiopods/untoothed hinges/muscles more complex, sure, so  
articulate brachiopods/toothed hinges/simple opening/closing muscle —*

Lock down and ready, this is barbecue. Speak a word and tooth  
that hinge, malign those swinging doors. I'm throwing all the clams in —  
making each swaddle explain its wrap —

in the distance the great tree too dendrite to handle  
itself splits in two. To solve this matter of teeth, I try thinking  
ribs run the breadth of the body, always away from themselves.

*Strindberg Gray*

He was trying to teach me to economize with my language.

*Strindberg gray*  
he said, instead of

and I thought, sad stuff; plays. Okay: born, rented room,  
to Dad & Mom business & bar, how could you not? Or thought,  
I cannot be your Lithuania nor her other Armenia,  
emptied into river if not skein-tangled senseless. He won't say her  
name  
and not a word of the thitherings. Only that she was lost. Don't speak  
the heavy hinges, the crushed-bud breaking of taste  
from language. That sort of excess has no place in the new economy.

Strindberg gray, say, when one thinks only January, January, January.  
Of the Occurrence as recurrent. A single gunshot  
in Dempster's cistern, the echo chambers of sleep. The gray lot  
of days in low-light hospitals, Strindberg.

I'll call him gray, his sitting heavy. And her so Strindberg with veil  
and rose,  
her poised in shadow at the door. Funereal nails sunk  
into knees would be dripping were they not so goddamn gray.

Excess was for days when my mother sat turning grape leaves  
with three sets of pockets: Turkish, English, & Armenian, plus lemon  
to dry it all out.  
By ten, they'd sewn up two; said one is more than enough.

"English, only, Sanossian.  
You will speak what we speak."

I don't know what it's like to lose  
a language. Instead,

Strindberg gray, I say, when I want to bring his lost girl back.



Strindberg gray,  
though I cannot take from him January, July, or the months of coping  
between.  
When my mother leafs through me in her memory banks, bits of face  
are missing;  
sometimes I'm limbless or smear. Gray even scentless, and still all  
Strindberg.

I tell him, I raise her: be darlings and come scream with me  
from all the pockets sown over. Maybe by late summer we'll be  
humming:  
Tennessee yellow; Tennessee, Tennessee.

TOM CLARK

---

*Then and Now*

Then it was always  
for now, later  
for later.  
And then years of now  
passed, and it grew later  
and later. Trapped  
in the shrinking  
chocolate box  
the confused sardine  
was unhappy. It  
leapt, and banged its head  
again. And afterward  
they said shall we  
repeat the experiment.  
And it said  
later for that.

*Blown Away*

ephemeral as tinkerbell  
unmoored yet not unmoved  
tossed cloudward, flipped  
                  sans volition  
into the flow

going but not wanting to go  
without the other flotsam

TERRANCE HAYES

---

*How to Draw a Perfect Circle*

I can imitate the spheres of the model's body, her head,  
Her mouth, the chin she rests at the bend of her elbow  
But nothing tells me how to make the pupils spiral

From her gaze. Everything the eye sees enters a circle,  
The world is connected to a circle: breath spools from the nostrils  
And any love to be open becomes an O. The shape inside the circle

Is a circle, the egg fallen outside the nest the serpent circles  
Rests in the serpent's gaze the way my gaze rests on the model.  
In a blind contour drawing the eye tracks the subject

Without observing what the hand is doing. Everything is connected  
By a line curling and canceling itself like the shape of a snake  
Swallowing its own decadent tail or a mind that means to destroy itself,

A man circling a railway underpass before attacking a policeman.  
To draw the model's nipples I have to let myself be carried away.  
I love all the parts of the body. There are as many curves

As there are jewels of matrimony, as many whirls as there are teeth  
In the mouth of the future: the mute pearls a bride wears to her  
wedding,  
The sleeping ovaries like the heads of riders bunched in a tunnel.

The doors of the subway car imitate an O opening and closing,  
In the blood the O spirals its helix of defects, genetic shadows,  
But there are no instructions for identifying loved ones who go crazy.

When one morning a black man stabs a black transit cop in the face  
And the cop, bleeding from his eye, kills the assailant, no one traveling  
To the subway sees it quickly enough to make a camera phone  
witness.

The scene must be carried on the tongue, it must be carried

On the news into the future where it will distract the eyes working  
Lines into paper. This is what blind contour drawing conjures in me.

At the center of God looms an O, the devil believes justice is shaped  
Like a zero, a militant helmet or war drum, a fist or gun barrel,  
A barrel of ruined eggs or skulls. To lift anything from a field

The lifter bends like a broken O. The weight of the body  
Lowered into a hole can make anyone say *Oh*: the onlookers,  
The mother, the brothers and sisters. Omen begins with an O

When I looked into my past I saw the boy I had not seen in years  
Do a standing backflip so daring the onlookers called him crazy.  
I did not see a moon as white as an onion but I saw a paper plate

Upon which the boy held a plastic knife and sopping meat.  
An assailant is a man with history. His mother struggles  
To cut an onion preparing a meal to be served after the funeral.

The onion is the best symbol of the O. Sliced, a volatile gas stings  
The slicer's eyes like a punishment clouding them until they see  
What someone trapped beneath a lid of water sees:

A soft-edged world, a blur of blooms holding a coffin afloat.  
The onion is pungent, its scent infects the air with sadness,  
All the pallbearers smell it. The mourners watch each other,

They watch the pastor's ambivalence, they wait for the doors to open,  
They wait for the appearance of the wounded one-eyed victim  
And his advocates, strangers who do not consider the assailant's  
funeral

Appeasement. Before that day the officer had never fired his gun  
In the line of duty. He was chatting with a cabdriver  
Beneath the tracks when my cousin circled him holding a knife.

The wound caused no brain damage though his eyeball was severed.  
I am not sure how a man with no eye weeps. In the *Odyssey*  
Pink water descends the Cyclops's cratered face after Odysseus

Drives a burning log into it. Anyone could do it. Anyone could  
Begin the day with his eyes and end it blind or deceased,  
Anyone could lose his mind or his vision. When I go crazy

I am afraid I will walk the streets naked, I am afraid I will shout  
Every fucked up thing that troubles or enchants me, I will try to murder  
Or make love to everybody before the police handcuff or murder me.

Though the bullet exits a perfect hole it does not leave perfect holes  
In the body. A wound is a cell and portal. Without it the blood runs  
With no outlet. It is possible to draw handcuffs using loops

Shaped like the symbol for infinity, from the Latin *infinitas*  
Meaning *unboundedness*. The way you get to anything  
Is context. In a blind contour it is not possible to give your subject

A disconnected gaze. Separated from the hand the artist's eye  
Begins its own journey. It could have been the same for the Cyclops,  
A giant whose gouged eye socket was so large a whole onion

Could fit into it. Separated from the body the eye begins  
Its own journey. The world comes full circle: the hours, the harvests,  
When the part of the body that holds the soul is finally decomposed

It becomes a circle, a hole that holds everything: blemish, cell,  
Womb, parts of the body no one can see. I watched the model  
Pull a button loose on her jeans and step out of them

As one might out of a hole in a blue valley, a sea. I found myself  
In the dark, I found myself entering her body like a delicate shell  
Or soft pill, like this curved thumb of mine against her lips.

You must look without looking to make the perfect circle.  
The line, the mind must be a blind continuous liquid  
Until the drawing is complete.

ROBYN SCHIFF

---

*Dyed Carnations*

There's blue, and then there's blue.  
A number, not a hue, this blue  
is not the undertone of any one  
but there it is, primary.  
I held the bouquet  
in shock and cut the stems at a deadly angle.  
I opened the toxic sachet of flower food  
with my canine and rinsed my mouth.  
I used to wash my hands and daydream.  
I dreamed of myself and washed  
my hands of everything. Easy math.  
Now I can't get their procedure  
at the florist off my mind.  
The white flowers arrived! They overnighted  
in a chemical bath  
and now they have a fake laugh  
that catches like a match  
that starts the kind of kitchen fire  
that is fanned by water.  
They won't even look at me.  
Happy Anniversary.



*Fourth of July, 2012*

I remember a performance  
of *Antigone* in which she  
threw herself on the floor of  
the universe and picked up  
a piece of dust. Is that  
the particle? It startled me.  
Was it Scripted? Directed?  
Driven? I am a girl, Antigone.  
I have a sister. We love  
each other terribly. I am a woman  
of property. The milk of the footlights.  
The folds of the curtain. I remember  
a performance of *Antigone*. She stooped.  
There was a wild particle.  
It was glorified by my distance.  
I heard the hooves of the dust.  
The ticking of the script  
calibrating oblivion. I saw  
the particle hanging  
and Antigone needed something  
to do with her hands  
and she did it.

ROB SCHLEGEL

---

*Taurus Teez*

I'm counting cash in the backseat  
Of the Taurus. To Pop's  
Repeated question, "Am I even  
Needed?" Mabel says, "I know the scene  
I want! Older cats are cool, Pop,  
I love you on those terms!"  
Toby thinks he owns

The squeegee because his name  
Is on it, but he can't  
Even hold a melody. Toby green  
Stupid shirt (and his embroidery  
Is shit). He strokes Mabel's  
Neck, but she don't want  
His Latin! Over plates of freezer-

Burned cactus, Pop says, "Tomorrow  
I ink embarrassed koi, or at least  
The tiny stags!" "What is it,"  
Mother asks, "that will finally  
Relieve you of this obsession?"  
After dinner I'm smashing  
Glass bottles, my hands vibrating —

Exquisitely-timed palsy —  
Over beads that drop like hail  
Into the furnace where I round them  
For mother to arrange  
Into waterfall scenes on fabric.  
But she's still in the H&M  
Filling her bags with beads so

Venetian they cannot meet the eye.  
Meanwhile some teens  
Want to buy a glitter T with VISA.

“Shit no plastic here!” I say.  
“How can I convince these kids  
To pay with cash?” “Not my problem,  
Bud!” Pop says from his desk

Where he’s busy sketching  
Teams nutting in the orchard.  
Toby puts his beanie on,  
But it’s only August 3rd! Mabel’s tossing  
Gourds in fields destroyed  
By another mall, one big  
Meditation, soft, and already made.

MELISSA BRODER

---

*Salt*

How can you go swimming in another human being?  
I am swimming and asking for light.  
Once I paddled into dust and fucking  
and the horsemen and ruin  
and the poisonous hollows of a projected blue eye  
and cracked my skull on all and caught more disease  
in my already dread mind and entered the medicines  
of no human power, the forests of disappearing moans,  
which were rich in sap but lacked dissolve  
fertilized against my own swimming nature, Aleph  
I am swimming for you now and I don't care.  
When you leave the forest you do not become the ocean  
and I have become the desert trying to swim in the ocean  
and knowing this, carrying the forest floor in a sweet wood coffin  
and the blackbrush and rocks, the yucca and cacti of receded oceans,  
which were never oceans at all or there would have been shells on  
the sand,  
they only looked like oceans in my thirst, I cut the old horizon  
with a sword you have given and I gut the heavens  
and bleed their light and swim in that.

*Like a Real Flame*

I want the hole in my ear to be quiet  
And inside the hole in my ear to be quiet  
And I want it to tell me what to do  
Or I will go to my lover's mouth  
And say oh my quiet  
I am coming  
And tell the quiet how its kingdom should be made  
Though the quiet has already eaten me  
Because the quiet loves me  
But does the lover love me  
And why must the quiet be so quiet  
And why can't the quiet have a cock  
And where is its violet mouth  
Its ten fingers with which to fix me  
And where is its belly breathing  
And O I want to be fixed  
But I am already fixed  
Why don't I feel it

*Lunar Shatters*

I came into the world a young man  
Then I broke me off  
Still the sea and clouds are Pegasus colors  
My heart is Pegasus colors but to get there I must go back  
Back to the time before I was a woman  
Before I broke me off to make a flattened lap  
And placed thereon a young man  
Where I myself could have dangled  
And how I begged him enter there  
My broken young man parts  
And how I let the mystery collapse  
With rugged young man puncture  
And how I begged him turn me Pegasus colors  
And please to put a sunset there  
And gone forever was my feeling snake  
And in its place dark letters  
And me the softest of all  
And me so skinless I could no longer be naked  
And me I had to de-banshee  
And me I dressed myself  
I made a poison suit  
I darned it out of myths  
Some of the myths were beautiful  
Some turned ugly in the making  
The myth of the slender girl  
The myth of the fat one  
The myth of rescue  
The myth of young men  
The myth of the hair in their eyes  
The myth of how beauty would save them  
The myth of me and who I must become  
The myth of what I am not  
And the horses who are no myth  
How they do not need to turn Pegasus  
They are winged in their un-myth

They holy up the ground  
I must holy up the ground  
I sanctify the ground and say fuck it  
I say fuck it in a way that does not invite death  
I say fuck it and fall down no new holes  
And I ride an unwinged horse  
And I unbecome myself  
And I strip my poison suit  
And wear my crown of fuck its

AFAA MICHAEL WEAVER

---

*Waste*

Everything that was young went quickly,  
the way his eyes met mine as soon as we  
  
woke together in a room outside Nanjing,  
feeling as if all the things that were falling  
  
would fall and make their thunder, leave  
us with the challenge of being happy,  
  
all the things that felt given when gifts  
were not just surprises, but what we  
  
knew, what we hoped to take with us  
to heaven, unbound by faults and sins,  
  
not deceived the way we were when  
the end came to what we knew of China,  
  
landing me here. I am a wish in the skies  
spun out from celestial space to be poor,  
  
to be covered with black skin, a felt  
quilt of a map with only one way to China —  
  
through pain as big as hogs squealing  
at killing time on black farms in Alabama —  
  
the noise of death, the shrill needle  
that turns clouds over to rip the air  
  
above the cities where people are young  
and all that is given is never taken away.



CLAUDIA EMERSON

---

*Metastasis: Worry-Moth*

yours is not the majestic Gypsy  
the Codling Luna Wax or grander

*Atlas* with the appetite  
of a plague entire fields

succumbing to them whole  
generations of bees this is

the unseen closeted unassuming  
gray that seeks out last winter's

cloth another season drawn  
to the body's scent what was

its heat to consume early that scant  
much of you fragile lace-like

the constellate erasures of the coat  
it makes for you to wear

MOLLY PEACOCK

---

*The Poet*

As P strolled the path around the pond, he sniffed the humid air. His kimono brushed the parched ground. The metals of the earth rose up in traces of dust and hints of lightning: a waft of petrichor, the smell before the rain.

Beyond the pale hills of his peaceful land, scores of horse soldiers prepared their armor. Soon the soldiers would sweep across the plains, and the dry politics of princely maneuverings would be as rice paper soaked with blood. Instead of petty policies — immensity. Peaceful farmers would be impaled, paltry officials imprisoned — twisted, screaming, then praying. There on the dusty path the young poet P was just perceiving the beforeness of it all, the *pre-*.

From his masters he had learned that immensity makes the small crucial. A little poem before a big war becomes a necessity.

And like a small poem on a long scroll, a lily pad appeared on the pond. P stopped to peer. He puzzled through its pattern of green inside green on water.

A poem began to perfuse. It was inside P, but it was also on the lily pad.

*At ... On ...* At first only prepositions came to him.

He stared into the water, seeing the silvery clouds reflected. Then he leaned at an extreme angle and noticed the pattern of his gown wavering in the reeds. A pinpoint of a poem stabbed him, like the sharp scent of earth before the rain. Petrichor: *before, before.*

•

Then drops pelted the pond, pipped at the pond, plunged toward it, plummeted into it, driving P to take refuge beneath the deep tiled eaves of his house.

Inside the sliding paper doors were a desk and a futon. On the desk lay a brush. On the futon lay a lover in uneasy sleep on petal-printed silk.

He chose the desk. He lifted the brush while looking down at the restive slumberer. In a mere matter of stopped time he had his poem, written from the very tissues of an arm and hand that could plunge a sword.

*Silver soldiers mass  
on far horizons, but here,  
silk pools on the bed.*

The rain rained; moisture curled the edges of the paper. Seventeen syllables, an epic of energy, made him drowsy and hungry. His lover still asleep, he rose, ate leftover peaches poached in soy sauce and ginger, and, with the rain a drizzle, thought again of his poem. How could he have loved it in the instant after he wrote it, but now be so unsure?

He sat at his desk again. Another one? This time he drafted:

*Poppy? Penis up.  
Prow into periwinkle.  
Peony behind.*

After he calligraphed the puzzle of passion across the page, he woke the one in the pond of pink silk, and they proved it on the futon. He heard the pluvial patter on the eaves, while they angled and slipped, perspiring on silk. The stamping and snorting of the horses sweating in their armor was far too far away to be sensed by P, but he heard. He felt the pond muddied and the roof cracked and the poems scattered. How far was he now from this picture in his mind? He worked to make his pleasure stay, pitiable and small against the portents rising, for P was afraid this afternoon would never be remembered after the bloody conquering.

But later the barbarians would bivouac in this house, the pond saved for drinking water, the path roughened by horses, and the reverse of P's scroll used for another man's military diary, his afternoon's foreboding and pleasure a preparation for the future, and in the future, a stay against another's view of the past.



"P from *Alphabetique*," 2013 by Kara Kosaka



“Q from *Alphabetique*,” 2013 by Kara Kosaka

## Q's Quest

Some quests begin before a person ever learns to walk. Q's began at the foundling home, when he was still in diapers. They'd kept anything pointed from the Quonset hut where they housed the orphaned newbies, and later the house mothers forbade the children all but scissors with round edges, even table knives.

"Mind, now stay in the queue," they said, when his fingers reached for a safety pin or a paring knife or, once, one of the razors they kept (usually under lock and key) for the older boys. Q slipped back in line.

Only the blunt was available to him, nothing to question, naught with an edge. Best pretend to be dull (though that was hard with a high IQ) and never query: *Why hide the scissors? Why hide the razor? Why speak so sharply? Why no mums? No dads?* At night in his bed, listening to the breathing of all the other boys in the long room, he also asked himself, *Why me?*

When the house mothers changed shifts, there were always some unsupervised minutes, and that's when the boys sprang into swash-buckling. Q loved leaping from bed to bed with an imaginary sword in hand. *En garde!*

•

At sixteen, with a razor cut on his chin from the new trial of shaving himself, Q stood at the doors of the Royal Flower Hall. He was quaking. This was the very first day of work in his life. He'd been supposed to be a shop assistant, a quotidian job like those of the other orphans who were all sent out to live as apprentices — to return only if found unsuitable. However, the Royal Flower Keeper had stepped in and demanded to know the name of the boy meant to be sent to the local florist, and now young Q was called to prep flowers for the Queen.

"Can't someone else do it?" he quailed as the Flower Keeper handed him a quilloned silver thorn knife. Q didn't want to be found unsuitable.

He quivered as thousands of roses arrived — he was supposed to separate their long, tangled stems, cut off the thorns, and queue them up straight on the tables for the arrangers.

“But I’m new!” Q cried. He couldn’t quell his horror at the prospect of lifting a real blade to cut the thorns.

“Look, dear, no quibbling. If you work here, you’re qualified,” the Flower Keeper said. Her knuckles bloomed out of the crooked stems of her hands. “Hold the knife with two fingers behind this little crossbar, that’s the quillon, and snip under the thorn.” She did it with elegant speed. One thorn gone.

“It’s like swordsmanship,” the Flower Keeper joked, wielding her knife, fencing in miniature mime. In Q’s head rang the orders of the house mothers, “DON’T TOUCH!” But in his fingers lay his imaginary weapon come alive.

“No time to be quiescent,” she said. “Equipoise is all.”

*Don’t quit now*, Q said to himself. If he quit, he’d have to slink back to the orphanage, a failed apprentice, instead of going home to his newly found haven, a cold-water flat with a coin-operated heater, all his own. There he’d store the new paring knife his paycheck would buy, the pointed scissors . . . So Q quashed his fear and set to work.

•

He began to duel through the roses.

*“En garde!”* he whispered, lunging toward his petaled quarry.

Soon there were thorns everywhere (some a bit bloody), but he did not make any big mistakes. He wasn’t perfect, like the Flower Keeper, but he was catching on. Like quicksilver she flashed her knife, each stem quickening with the sharpest cut. Instinctively Q used the quartata maneuver, a quarter turn to the inside, protecting himself as he flicked each thorn into the quagmire of floral detritus on the floor. With each toss of the thorn he added to what appeared to the Flower Keeper to be his nascent gift.

As the lorries loaded with rose baskets and vases and bowls roared off to the palace, he quietly pocketed a thorn. Then the first question he’d ever spoken aloud curlicued to his lips. And because he’d had to save up this query for sixteen years, he posed the essential one, previously mouthed only to himself at night in bed:

*Pourquoi?*

“Why,” said the Flower Keeper, “for the Equerry, of course. And he for the Queen. You know who she is.”

“Just a flower of a figurehead,” Q quipped.

*The boy’s quick-witted*, the Flower Keeper thought, and said, “We’ll require you tomorrow.”

And for quadruple tomorrows after that and after that, until Q began to accumulate expertise. Know-how defines a person, especially someone who’s grown up watching his *P*s and *Q*s. He no longer quavered, quadrillions of roses now quasi-ordinary, royal waste a quiddity.

*I’m not a quitter*, he’d said to himself, and each night went back to his cold-water flat where he had enshrined that little thorn in a matchbox.

•

Well, he didn’t live in a cold-water flat now. Now he lived in a sunlit house with a stash of razors in the marble bathroom and, in the drawers of his magnificent kitchen, a motherlode of paring knives, bread knives, steak knives, bird’s beak parers, boning knives, cheese knives, chef’s, clam, and carving knives, filleters, and mincers.

Now Q was Senior Keeper of the Royal Flower Hall, walking across a stage toward the Queen herself. He had kept the talisman thorn from his very first day with the roses. Just that afternoon he had taken it out and dropped it in the pocket of his tuxedo, anticipating touching it for luck before he received his award from Her Majesty.

But when the Queen posed her standard question, “Have you come a long way?” Q was quite bewildered as to how to answer.

Sometimes a simple question cuts into an aromatic world of mysteries. But we must learn to answer, to cut. Q, his distinguished silver hair perfectly trimmed, his neck properly shaved, looked down at the curls on the Queen’s forehead and remembered his first unspoken word, *Why*.



A quixotic word, an essential thorn. It had pricked him awake, into manhood.

Arrangements of roses passed through his mind—how those magnificent magentas quenched his imagination. How the choral crooning of pale pinks calmed his qualms. Among roses he had reached his quintessence.

Yet, is it a large enough life, to arrange roses for a Queen? When the whole world out there hurtled toward famine and war? He hadn't intended to stay, to make a future in flowers, taking people's breath away with something so spectacularly unnecessary as his rose floats. He had been a thorn in someone's side, spectacularly unnecessary himself. He'd been sent out into the world alone, blunted by the unknown facts of his identity — his search for his parents rewarded only by locked doors, locked cabinets, and, later, graveyards.

Patiently Her Majesty waited for his answer. In physical distance he had come a short way, but he'd swashbuckled miles to reach the end of his quest.

"Only from Kew Gardens, Your Highness," Q answered simply at last.

Then she put into his palm the royal thank-you, in a quilted sleeve: a silver rose wreath made from an ancient mold that gave it stylized petals, prickly leaves, and, cut in at the bottom of the circle, a thorn.

GERALD STERN

---

*Much Better Than a Goat*

Much better than a goat it was to drop  
an anarchist from a Park Row window  
because he wouldn't confess to federal agents.  
He fell to his death while sitting on the windowsill  
holding a pamphlet close to his eyes and maybe  
waving his arm in appreciation, and no one  
heard him screaming — they were wearing earmuffs  
or just they forgot to bring their earpieces  
but it was nothing, he was a fiend and a cutthroat  
and he would have murdered Rockefeller if he had the chance,  
for which reason I have locked my front door  
for I can't find a rat trap big enough.

DARREL ALEJANDRO HOLNES

---

*From "Middle Passage"*

UNTITLED 01

er, súbete a la r  
ontera, lejos del coyote. Apú  
súbete a la rueda, rodeando hacia la r  
a, lejos del coyote. Apúrate, hámster, súbete  
a la rueda, rodeando hacia la frontera, lejos d  
el coyote. Apúrate, hámster, súbete a la rueda,  
rodeando hacia la frontera, away from the coy  
te. Apúrate, hámster, súbete a la rueda;  
ng across the border, away from the coyote. A  
úrate, get on the wheel; it's rolling across t  
border, away from the coyote. Quickly.  
get on the wheel; it's rolling a  
ar, away from the

RACHEL GALVIN

---

*Ortolans*

Speaking of blindness, the man told his one-eyed fiancée,  
have you heard about the ortolans? Fig-peckers of yellowhammer  
descent. Thumb-sized or tongue-sized. Kings used to catch them  
at summer's end, knife-blind them so that in their darkness  
they'd feast on millet all day, all night, a break from beetles and seeds,  
until they grew from one ounce to four. Drowned  
in Armagnac, plucked, placed in a saucepan, roasted,  
you eat them whole, so the head dangles between your lips,  
crunch bones like hazelnuts, underneath the linen napkin  
you must place over your head to create a scent tent  
or, so God won't see your shame. (Proust paired  
them with sips of Yquem, a sauterne born of noble  
rot — grapes like ashes, their wet dried  
in the nick of time, so honeysuckle turns to bitter  
finish.) Mediterranean salt emerges as flight bursts  
in your mouth. Imagine yourself a memory, a body full  
of meal, as Mitterrand must have, eating ortolans  
eight days before dying, his last illegal act. Fifteen minutes  
of savoring a supple, burning ball of fat until you exhaust  
its roast juices. When you finally swallow, you will regret  
the end of a sensual experience. At least once in your life,  
you must pay the price for this princely folly.

**RUTH LILLY AND DOROTHY SARGENT ROSENBERG  
POETRY FELLOWS**

*Through the generosity of Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg,  
the Poetry Foundation and Poetry magazine award five annual fellowships  
of \$25,800 each to young writers.*



SOLMAZ SHARIF

---

*[Persian Letters]*

Dear Aleph,

Like Ovid: *I'll have no last words.*

This is what it means to die among barbarians. *Bar bar bar*  
was how the Greeks heard our speech —  
sheep, beasts — and so we became  
*barbarians*. We make them reveal  
the brutes they are, Aleph, by the things  
we make them name. David,  
they tell me, is the one  
one should aspire to, but ever since  
I first heard them say *Philistine*  
I've known I am Goliath  
if I am anything.

*Lanat Abad / The Place of the Damned*

this mangy plot where

by now  
only mothers still come,

only mothers guard the nameless plots

•

and then sparingly

•

Peepholes burnt through the metal doors

of their solitary cells,

•

just large enough  
for three fingers to curl out  
for a lemon to pass through  
for an ear to be held against  
for one eye then the other  
to regard the hallway  
to regard the cell and inmate

•



peepholes without a lens

so when the guard comes to inspect me,  
I inspect him.

*Touch me*, he said.

•

And through that opening

I did.

WENDY XU

---

*Phrasis*

Stilled as in image, at dawn sliding into  
blue harbor, boats clang, where does he  
the man I imagine gripping several ropes  
return from. Is he conflicted, does he  
perceive the sky oscillating like  
a dimmer machine, a mouth, a war, language  
not declaring its most  
effective self, *bellum* grazing ever  
nearer to beauty, a possible apotheosis how  
what is left of sense  
is comfort. Not inebriated much anymore,  
I rented a lawn to stand in with you, crueler  
was always singing to our mutual forks,  
knives. Our translation  
of a subject drones  
on unblinking, something black for him  
returning, his forearms there laid  
themselves down, ships gone out another  
pale-plated night.

*The Forecast*

Distrust this season breeds  
in me whole  
blue worlds, am second  
to leafy nouns,  
pinned back darkening lip  
of the night,  
untrustworthy sidewalk glazed  
and sleeping there,  
peachy trees, a line drawn from one  
brow of a star down  
and planted, each pillow  
little shimmer, little wilt startled  
from out the arranging field  
moonlit pale behind  
no foxes, in me finding the fragrant  
new crisis, not dead still  
where I love you in feast  
and pledge, worlds rolling first  
on crookedly  
and on.

HANNAH GAMBLE

---

*I Wanted to Make Myself like the Ravine*

I wanted to make myself like the ravine  
so that all good things  
would flow into me.

Because the ravine is lowly,  
it receives an abundance.

This sounds wonderful  
to everyone  
who suffers from lacking,  
but consider, too, that a ravine  
keeps nothing out:

in flows a peach  
with only one bite taken out of it,  
but in flows, too,  
the body of a stiff mouse  
half cooked by the heat of the stove  
it was toughening under.

I have an easygoing way about me.  
I've been an inviting host —  
meaning to, not meaning to.  
Oops — he's approaching with his tongue  
already out  
and moving.

Analyze the risks  
of becoming a ravine.

Compare those with the risks  
of becoming a well  
with a well-bolted lid.

Which I'd prefer  
depends largely on which kinds  
of animals were inside me  
when the lid went on  
and how likely they'd be  
to enjoy the water,  
vs. drown, freeze, or starve.

The lesson: close yourself off  
at exactly the right time.

On the day that you wake up  
under some yellow curtains  
with a smile on your face,

lock the door.  
Live out your days  
untroubled like that.

DANEZ SMITH

---

*Dinosaurs in the Hood*

Let's make a movie called *Dinosaurs in the Hood*.  
*Jurassic Park* meets *Friday* meets *The Pursuit of Happyness*.  
There should be a scene where a little black boy is playing  
with a toy dinosaur on the bus, then looks out the window  
& sees the T. Rex, because there has to be a T. Rex.

Don't let Tarantino direct this. In his version, the boy plays  
with a gun, the metaphor: black boys toy with their own lives,  
the foreshadow to his end, the spitting image of his father.  
Fuck that, the kid has a plastic Brontosaurus or Triceratops  
& this is his proof of magic or God or Santa. I want a scene

where a cop car gets pooped on by a pterodactyl, a scene  
where the corner store turns into a battle ground. Don't let  
the Wayans brothers in this movie. I don't want any racist shit  
about Asian people or overused Latino stereotypes.  
This movie is about a neighborhood of royal folks —

children of slaves & immigrants & addicts & exiles — saving their  
town  
from real-ass dinosaurs. I don't want some cheesy yet progressive  
Hmong sexy hot dude hero with a funny yet strong commanding  
black girl buddy-cop film. This is not a vehicle for Will Smith  
& Sofia Vergara. I want grandmas on the front porch taking out rap-  
tors

with guns they hid in walls & under mattresses. I want those little  
spitty,  
screamy dinosaurs. I want Cicely Tyson to make a speech, maybe two.  
I want Viola Davis to save the city in the last scene with a black fist  
afro pick  
through the last dinosaur's long, cold-blood neck. But this can't be  
a black movie. This can't be a black movie. This movie can't be  
dismissed

because of its cast or its audience. This movie can't be a metaphor for black people & extinction. This movie can't be about race. This movie can't be about black pain or cause black people pain. This movie can't be about a long history of having a long history with hurt.

This movie can't be about race. Nobody can say nigga in this movie

who can't say it to my face in public. No chicken jokes in this movie. No bullets in the heroes. & no one kills the black boy. & no one kills the black boy. & no one kills the black boy. Besides, the only reason I want to make this is for that first scene anyway: the little black boy on the bus with a toy dinosaur, his eyes wide & endless

his dreams possible, pulsing, & right there.





*i*

Say surrender. Say alabaster. Switchblade.  
    Honeysuckle. Goldenrod. Say autumn.  
Say autumn despite the green  
    in your eyes. Beauty despite  
daylight. Say you'd kill for it. Unbreakable dawn  
    mounting in your throat.  
My thrashing beneath you  
    like a sparrow stunned  
with falling.

*i*

Dusk: a blade of honey between our shadows, draining.

*i*

I wanted to disappear — so I opened the door to a stranger's car. He was divorced. He was still alive. He was sobbing into his hands (hands that tasted like rust). The pink breast cancer ribbon on his keychain swayed in the ignition. Don't we touch each other just to prove we are still here? I was still here once. The moon, distant & flickering, trapped itself in beads of sweat on my neck. I let the fog spill through the cracked window & cover my fangs. When I left, the Buick kept sitting there, a dumb bull in pasture, its eyes searing my shadow onto the side of suburban houses. At home, I threw myself on the bed like a torch & watched the flames gnaw through my mother's house until the sky appeared, bloodshot & massive. How I wanted to be that sky — to hold every flying & falling at once.

*i*

Say amen. Say amend.

Say yes. Say yes

anyway.

*i*

In the shower, sweating under cold water, I scrubbed & scrubbed.

*i*

In the life before this one, you could tell  
two people were in love  
because when they drove the pickup  
over the bridge, their wings  
would grow back just in time.

Some days I am still inside the pickup.  
Some days I keep waiting.

*i*

It's not too late. Our heads haloed  
with gnats & summer too early  
to leave any marks.  
Your hand under my shirt as static  
intensifies on the radio.  
Your other hand pointing  
your daddy's revolver  
to the sky. Stars falling one  
by one in the cross hairs.  
This means I won't be  
afraid if we're already  
here. Already more  
than skin can hold. That a body  
beside a body

must make a field  
    full of ticking. That your name  
is only the sound of clocks  
    being set back another hour  
& morning  
    finds our clothes  
on your mother's front porch, shed  
    like week-old lilies.



**LARRY EIGNER: SIX LETTERS**

*Edited by Jennifer Bartlett and George Hart*



Larry Eigner circa 1950

## LARRY EIGNER

---

### *Six Letters*

Larry Eigner (1927–1996) wrote over three thousand poems on a manual Royal typewriter (a bar mitzvah gift) with the thumb and index finger of his right hand. Disabled by a forceps injury at birth, Eigner lived with cerebral palsy his whole life; able to walk only with support or assistance, he made his way through the world in a wheelchair. Until his father died and his mother was too old to care for him, he lived at home in Swampscott, Massachusetts, writing many of his poems in the glassed-in front porch that served as his office. In 1978, Eigner relocated to Berkeley, California, at first living in a communal house for adults with disabilities and then residing with poet-friends, mainly Robert Grenier and Kathleen Frumkin, who also served as his caregivers.

In late 1949, Eigner heard Cid Corman reading Yeats on his Boston radio program *This Is Poetry*. Eigner didn't like the manner in which Corman read Yeats's poetry aloud and wrote a letter to tell him so. A long friendship and correspondence between the two poets followed. Through Corman, Eigner was introduced to Robert Creeley, whose Divers Press published his chapbook *From the Sustaining Air* in 1953. Creeley and Corman were both associated with Charles Olson and the Black Mountain school of poetry, and through them Eigner began reading Olson's *Maximus Poems* and the work of modernist poets such as William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound.

Throughout the fifties, Eigner absorbed Olson's theory of Projective Verse, and he was grouped with the Black Mountain poets in Donald Allen's groundbreaking *The New American Poetry* anthology in 1960. Of the poets in this group—Olson, Creeley, Robert Duncan, and Denise Levertov (Corman chose not to be included in the anthology)—Eigner might be the one who put Olson's theories to work most productively. Projective Verse, with its emphasis on the exchange of energy between poet and reader, and the typewriter as a means of graphing or scoring words on the space of the page, seems particularly well-suited to Eigner's embodiment and temperament. The fact that Olson put so much stress on the stance of the poet and the poet's breath as a form of measure, which might seem to discourage someone like Eigner who had difficulty walking and

speaking, makes Eigner's achievement even more impressive. In excerpting Eigner's correspondence for this special feature, Jennifer Bartlett and I have chosen to focus on passages in which he writes about, or directly to, Olson regarding his poetry, poetics, and other Black Mountain poets.

In his review of *The New American Poetry*, published in the July 1961 issue of *Poetry*, X.J. Kennedy chided Olson for his proposal that the typewriter can replace meter as a means of graphically scoring the poet's breath, writing, "Who would have thought his Corona portable an instrument of such sensitivity?" In 1962, the September issue of *Poetry* included six poems by Eigner and a review of his first full-length collection, *On My Eyes*, by Galway Kinnell, who also found fault with Projective Verse's claims for the typewriter. He writes,

The real value of getting rid of rhyme and meter, I had supposed, was in order to throw the responsibility for the poem wholly on speech itself. Here this is not done. The laying out of a kind of score by typewriter-spacing only supplants those old devices with a newer one, which is, this time, not even integral with the words.

The four-volume *Collected Poems of Larry Eigner*, edited by Curtis Faville and Robert Grenier (Stanford University Press, 2010), provides enough examples for readers to judge for themselves whether or not Eigner succeeded in using the typewriter as Olson had proposed, but there is no doubt that a 1940 Royal typewriter is integral to his words. Without that bar mitzvah present, wisely chosen by his mother Bessie and purchased by an aunt, we may never have heard his voice.

•

Because it was difficult for him to insert a piece of paper into the carriage of his typewriter, Eigner tended to use as much of the page as possible before starting another (a habit also motivated by his obsession with saving paper). He would commonly type multiple poems on a single sheet, and when writing in prose he would type as close to the margin as possible, or fill up the margins with additional notes and comments after writing the main text. We have indicated relevant marginal comments made by Eigner in brackets. Eigner also



used abbreviations to save time while typing. Some are standard abbreviations such as *yrs* for *years* or *bk* for *book*, but some are produced by Eigner omitting letters in his own elliptical way — *wndr* for “wonder,” for example, or *grp* for “group.” We have retained these when the context clarifies what word is meant, or added a bracketed word if needed. Eigner occasionally mistrikes the keys on his typewriter — we have silently corrected any such obvious mistakes but have left misspellings and other typos. Two other idiosyncratic uses of the typewriter should be mentioned: Eigner often indicated poem titles by inserting a space between each character and he indicated notes or asides by overstriking an open and close parenthesis to form his own piece of punctuation. These have been retained. Material omitted from the letters by the editors is indicated by bracketed ellipses.

—George Hart

Larry Eigner’s letters to Cid Corman are quoted courtesy of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. Eigner’s letter to Don Allen is quoted courtesy of the Donald Allen Papers, Special Collections & Archives, University of California, San Diego. Eigner’s letter to Charles Olson is quoted courtesy of the Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut. We are especially grateful to the Eigner Estate for permission to use the photographs and letters.



Larry Eigner, July 1979

Monday Jan 18 (!) 54

Dear Cid,

Mother looking into Maximus ...! [...]

Hard to keep everything in mind, but in places, in letters 1 2 3, i guess, Olson gets out to his thin extremes, trailing edges. He has those mannerisms that seem very forward to me, like “tansy-covered boy” “and that other” “my other”. Though I’ve sprinkled such phrases too, perhaps; i know Bob has, Ferrini has, even you. Of course I have, like DAY CROWD WEATHER, etc, etc. Generally, elliptic method he uses in the early parts, suppression of points. (I’m getting away from this specific phraseology, differently elliptical at times) Well, the break-off of a sentence in PATERSON is more weighted and considered, finely in the pace. Olson the sudden (and rather friggery) pivot. More hasty in his finished sentences, too.

Also less of an actual scope, perhaps, in the line. A lot of long-short flings (whereas look at the “so be it” passages etc, in PATERSON, which is very much one long buildup, the parts building into each other). But there is still always the content, like “love is form” way back on page one, the examples, as in letter 2, and in letter 3 where they take on the status of “images”. I guess images rather better than “symbols” sometimes; they reverberate, wide expanse. PATERSON’s deliberate images more symbolic than this? — i mean the falls, etc, as against the passages, like the mock Pastoral or the preacher. Well, the SONGS get back more, it seems, from Olson’s edges. Image plus lining. From there on even more getting beyond his mannerism, perhaps, details more separate and focused, though i cant logically, see the connections most of the time, not rushing into each other. Well, still elliptical of course. And in context of what follows “mannerisms” not so outstanding.

Same thing in Cantos — as Cant 1 is more bound up than the usual thing, or 49, the Chinese for instance. PATERSON too, perhaps; but it starts out on a quite natural, though lower than later, plane. Olson more “natural” than Pound, who has these classical roots in form etc, in general more natural, as natural as prose; equal to PATERSON in that respect, but chattiness more out of hand, less controlled. Seems to be comparably rich in details and relationships thou. And of course, more telescoped, literally. Different. Christopher Fry’s “animal on folding bones” the possibilities of it. I think (a la Fergusson perhaps),

For I am no merchant.  
Nor so young I need to take a stance  
to a loaded  
smile.

I have known the face  
of God.  
And turned away,  
turned,  
as He did,  
his backside

2

And now it is noon  
of a cloudy sunday.  
And a bird sings  
loudly

And my daughter, naked  
on the porch, sings  
as best she can, and loudly,  
back

She wears her own face  
as we do not,  
until we cease to wear  
the clouds  
of all confusion,

of all confusers  
who wear the false face  
He never wore, Whose  
is terrible. Is  
perfection

God where you meet  
you meet Him  
Man has no business  
chasing, hunting Him  
in special places. etc.

Larry Eigner's copy of Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems*. "God where you meet him? Man has no business chasing, hunting Him in special places. etc."

Williams gets the city in more, with more exact weight. And yet the impact? Or the frenetic influence?

Or the value of picking and choosing. . ?

Yeah, my review for BM Review quite an admixture. [...]

yours

Larry

•

TO CHARLES OLSON

23 Bates Rd Swampscott, Mass.

Saturday October 20, 1956

Dear pro,

Writ you a pstcrd Thursday, but it has just bopped back: unmailable, the sign signs, though on the rght its postmarked, kosher right over the stamp. Typed text down to 1/8th inch or so of the stamp. Funny thing is I wrote Ferrini the same way, after writing you, and okay i guess. I bet theres some Prussian in the post office somewhere, but where? Does this stuff go through Washington?

I'd just read through the whole MAXIMUS and went over it with a bk on Glster fr library (PORT OF GLOUCESTER by one James B Connelly, who says splinter grp from Plymouth settled by Annisquam in '23 and built the first fishing stage, then a party from England arrived in '24 and tk over the stage when others weren't looking and would not give it up, though when Bradford was appealed to he sent Standish who was able to "persuade" — C says — the newcomers to build a new stage for the pilgrims. "Cape Ann Trail" map i obtained at Ch of Commerce informatn booth on an unexpected ride to Gloucester on Labor Day has it people fr Dorchester, England arrived and built first stage in '23, thereby initiating the fishing "industry," and a bk out of the livingrm here says a "London Company" or something (I'm forgetting) established a fishing station, but they failed and a couple of yrs after that became or became part of, the Mass. Bay Company. Ah, well. Dont remember, either, how Mass. Bay and Plymouth merged, nor how the ministers tk over the whole, not then what led to their charter's being revoked, exactly. Read it in Partington around January sometime... Connelly also

states Bradford and his people had a Royal Patent to the land as far west as ever it shd go, which isn't true. If so there bn no need for the Mayflower Compact. Yeah. My father's bk I guess has it that wd've been a "charter" at that. Puritans [*sic*] had got a patent (t land) from the "London Company" — of Virginia, which had a charter fr the Crown.

etc.

Well, MAX now fairly clear, though there's a lot i still cant make out ("M above G.." for instance), and whenever this happen i excuse myself for being kind of stupid. In fact, as to the practical matter of communications the limitations are obviously vast, as vast as your compass is, it's a great jigsaw puzzle, and certainly no one around here, absolutely nobody else, ever gets as far, a 10th as far, as I got. And three yrs ago. And though you can never tell anyway how "important" a thing might be if — and though you can only say more or less what a thing is, and can only profit by what it is : I sure wonder abt it. The self-acts, all right. Then polis, the toppling toers of Ilium.

But right now anyway I sure feel like going out and ringing doorbells for Stevenson. Worth it, thoug all this tripe abt unilateral halt etc.

The "scientists" seem to be issuing statement every other day now[.] Pouring it on. But the horse's mouth. Other night heard where this MIT guy says a 15-megaton blast (one H explosion) wd "only" kill a few thousand over 2 or 3 generations; which isnt, sd the commentator, very much (a BU journalism professor). So this is, says the professor, a moral and political problem, not primarily a "technical" one. Along with other reportings the day before that, and/or the day before that, of for instance a statement calling for a survey, that they dont know. Go tell that to your board of health.

But, (going back to the poem again), the main mystery seems to be right now how you make up the mind while still being un-doctrinaire. But this is in a few instances not a problem, even with myself, who dont act much, and now sometimes feel even the potential for it slipping. But a lot of cases. Like in re Duncan, say, how make up your mind where to draw a line between spinning out and pulling in and closing. Duncan apparently seeing your viewpoint and all.

Letter from Ferrini that morning, two days ago, Thursday, saying he got a copy of MAX II Friday (he being short on acct he had to get a new car I had offered to lend him my copy). Hits the inconsequential as essentially dull and uninteresting. "Who cares what John Hawkins said or did unless its backed with a good grip on something



The map Eigner obtained at the Gloucester Chamber of Commerce, as mentioned in his letter to Olson, October 20, 1956.

one can chew on like meat or cabbage". Well, we mustn't be doctrinaire. [...]

Was looking over all I've got here recently, on the idea I might as well get in the local newspaper if i cd. It looked like I've certainly got a lot of junk. Just this week it was. Well, I've just been rding MAXIMUS and Moby Dick, on which I still am, and knows what else and anyway dont appreciate too much at once.

With the 70-piece sequence I also did stick in some new pieces to Wms, beyond that.

Regards

Larry [...]

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TO DONALD ALLEN

Tuesday August 26th 58

A few such delays as yours ha one yr, two yrs—have been quite a factor in my restlessness, and the fragmentariness of my life. Though everything might be likely to do this, for instance if all editors replied within two weeks. A lifetime of incoordination (palsy) is no joke. It means a constant struggle to keep getting around limitations mental as well as physical. The reason why I don't read certain things is hardly disapproval, or anything of the sort, but just a slight capacity to absorb. Nor are my surroundings congenial to books. There are enough of them here, sort of anyway tv holds the floor.

I guess it's just my restlessness that make me try to contribute to a few mags, sporadically. in any case. But the delays break things up further.

"Hurry up, hurry up, or wait" Seems no use, either, to try regular sessions at the typewriter hm  
[vertical note on left side]

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TO CID CORMAN

Wednesday May 25 60

Dear Cid,

[...] Gd friday, Apr 15. Postman came 15 minutes afore we tk off for a reading by Denise at Cambridge, under Harvard Advocate auspices, of which i got word, official, Monday. I went there main- to ask Denise if Jonathan was not in hospital or something.

[...] I was stiff at the reading, as usual with me since my teens in a public hush, but Denise spoke out, i don know how loud or clear (eg tho i was familiar w/the poem, "The Dog of Art" i tk for "Dove" for a time—ma say speech impediment (Churchill had one?) but maybe its her accent), and raised me up from the bkworms.

[...] Denise's new bk has quite a few poems i never saw before, which, i think, sure hit the spot, and show abundance. (Whereas i feel scrawny nowadays, or else emotional over nothing much, once copied out the feeling most often seem worked up after all) Nel mezzo ...

So after the lecture (me in back on one side, Olson on other though i hadn't seen im come in), they got me upstairs in Advocate House, the "reception," where everybody was jawing away as if re stocks, bunds and dresses, ah, the jaws. It seems i was invited to submit, and though discouraged on looking things over a wk later, i did, to Advocate .. and Denise left some of my stuff with em, carbons, unknown to me and writes they sd they'll take some .. but i feel paltry, and have little enough zest for the depths, now. So many mags, many or few msss, to match em with (best thing enclosed here, "O cloud/tons of snow", or maybe "timbres remain" .. ). Robt Lowell she had say hello to me, etc. Big ponds. Upstairs couple editors we sd a few words, and parents later went crowing over the allegation they were all crowded around me, blind to the fact, of crse, that when it wasnt Denise sitting next to me it was Olson, who introduced me to the prop. de Grolier's ("the greatest bkman in the world"), at which Father flashed into action and fl. JW's latest listing, which announces my bk and qtes WCW, to both Mr — and Ch ("look .. WC Williams") who put us up to that blurb, and who replied, "When somebody else .." Such is oblivion.

[...] Folks are entranced w/Allen Anth'y, of course, and some new things i have there found seem right enough. Leroi Jones, both ibid and in Yugen #6, seems to be emerging to to something)(or it might



Larry Eigner, Robert Duncan, and Alberto de Lacerda, Golden Gate Park, 1967

be “merely” a place like H James’ Washington Square. Well, i do see this problem of the flexible running to garrulity and the hectic, peek-a-boo instd of shaman. A poem that comes off is i think Corso’s doll-makers dialog. I can see Allen’s psychological bent in his selection fr my stuff, eg. Surprised to find the biographical matter interesting, but shdnt have bn: the kind of stuff that doesn’t come through/too coherently in letters, and to me, ground, as I think i told you civil war military history was. But for others, maybe something of a drag (Duncan, of course, gives a real literary biography of self).

Glad he put “Death of Europe” in there, eg, and Duncan’s “.. Pindar”

Yugen #6 has a Maximus Letter in it., which has power I guess. Gael sent me a copy of Dorn’s What I see in the Maximus Poems, and I understood it a little, though forgetting now, etc., as usual; and went back to the “Letter” in Yugen, which was something of an instance. I dont much fathom the mystique of place, which Dorn expostulates on, but the way Olson cuts back to the land and sea, unbroken by buildings, and, forward etc, gives awareness of the buildings too, changing purpose, and so forth, is clear. He lashes together—eye-lashes Quite remarkable, I’d say.

Dorn lauds the abstract, in a sense I never tht of giving to the word—ekstasis perhaps, ex stare, cold eye, hm! standing aside, nonutilitarian “nonfunctional” is his word. Well, the words people spout and get involved with.

I’m a primitive. No use complaining.

And poesy makes nothing happen.

Ol’s “Librarian” seems to be some kind of milestone too, to both Dorn and R C D, in FOOT.

B I G T A B L E #3 got here last week. Well, Blackburn didn’t come up off the page at that (2 hrs ago) as much as Ashbery, or Ginsberg. Neither does Dorn, whose graveyard piece i started. Well, I seem to be tired of things mostly, nowadays. [...]

Hope you had a good crossing ...

Larry

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TO CID CORMAN

June 17 64 Wednesday  
Monday

Dear Cid,

Well, thats one death in my mind (and the one detail i have, from you, "a collision"), off and on, with the fact that I havent found it mentionable, face to face, etc — and the puzzle, though explicable, of apathy, towards, yeh, anything. Though, what matters? And you say you're remote: maybe 2 yrs ago was my last unreplied-to card frm O. Last fall drove to Gloucester — mother's idea! — where i learned frm VF it was the very day Charles was due frm Vancouver. Drove arnd to the Ft Sq, where it was apparent, as i dimly recall, Mrs Olson had just left to meet his train, or plane. Some yrs ago Richie and Charles, head and feet, lugged me upstairs there (1957 or so!) — to a chair from wch 2 views of the bay frm separate windows, that I was reminded of in MAX 23 [\*p. 107 (2pp bfore so sassafras)] thereabts; I was muddled as always, and still in those days a good deal in quest of explication — but, there was Mrs Olson, suddenly and all, and Peter, or is it Charles Peter. "Betty" First I heard it wasnt Connie, and last. Seemed like quite a woman, in some way.

Youre the only one who's written me this. Olson at Buffalo still, ed. of Wild Dog wrote some 10 days ago. Faint carbons so i sent fresh copies of the stuff, before noticing WD 8 is dedicated to Betty. For wch reason its something to appear there. An odd thing to feel, again. Just like father's notion when yrs came, it was too bad we didnt know sooner, so as I cd write, what now abt a sympathy card.....

[...] POETRY tk 6 more then last wk out comes the lead (4 lines) in TISH So, 5. POETRY somewhat like a bk. Mix-ups. 1,00,00 blind ates, and stnging along, as sd. Yr life w. a fog in yr hd. Lyk grnma, oldest unc. now. Eigner trait, as I tht. Hrd hd artries

[no signature]

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TO CID CORMAN

Au 31 64  
Monday

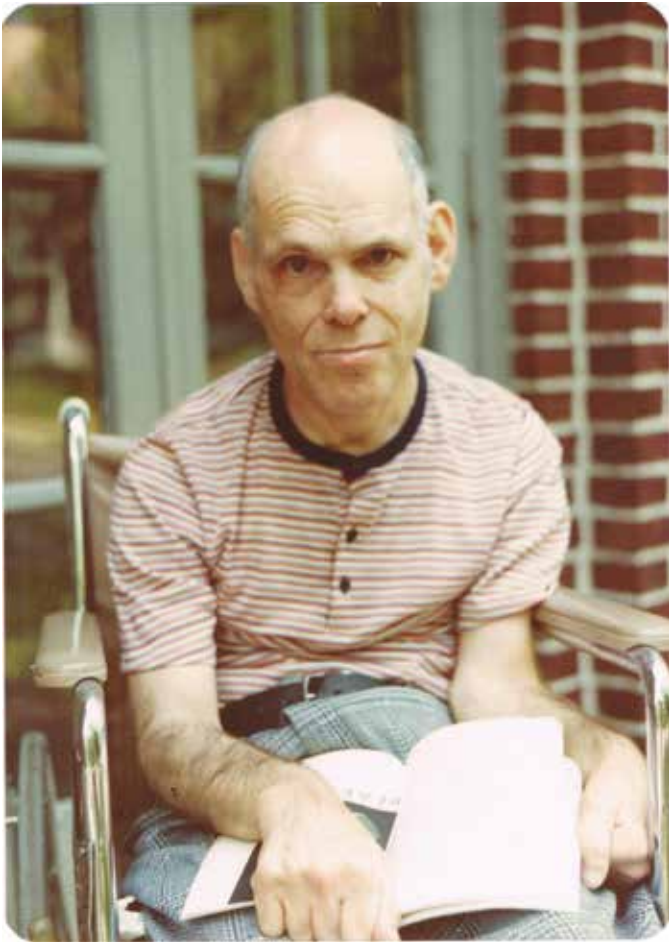
Dear Cid,  
Ho-hum..

[...] They were here the week 'fore last. Wild time i had. The 3 of us went to the museum, where she gave me a gd steady enough fix on Renoir's brush... there being that Gauguin there too... Last day went up to Cape Ann, where R (not me, by this time) headed for Charles', then Vincent's (his door open for business) Spotted Robrt Kelly, frm Vincent's description, walking to visit Charles's sister-in-law — Beverly did, that is — as we drove down Main Street, Richie stopped car and ran after Bob a few feet, who came back and got in bck seat for a few minutes. We got together at the Tavern for supper — the Kelly's, w. Gerrit Lansing (whose stuff I haven't seen, or hardly), Charles, Vincent, us 3 — R & B, who had left me there with the Kellys and amng other thngs eaten at a Diner, sitting in — and 2 others. Quite small and shop talk — and i tried to hang my ears above th table. Charles, and whoever else, still talking of heroes, amng others, ... polytopes .. the visually-aided landscape, .. objecting jovially to “the facilities” as a euphemism as he plunked hissself down to eat, as somebody mentioned them. He, R & B, got into talk abt Sephard, Morenos, Rhodes... when i brt up Sephard... “The people with luxury are us” he sd — undr greewd tree, or better, i gs, Lear and Cordelia... Now I'm bck in jail. Small wndr i cant kp my head on

In PLUMED HORN (mag. of a far-flung drum indeed), wch i had with me, Creeley's longish poem “Anger,” wch Kelly sd, coming after end of letter announcing dth of Mrs Olson, gave ease.. Afr a minute i bgan to sense a little how this cd be — out on the terrace of the Tavern there, away from old folks home here, doll hse, radio/tv circus — some shop, wow but i got on hunt for explication (w. this G Lansing — mystifying him), for 1 thing, old stickler for wrds as i discovered i still am, and things.

A call from Kelley [*sic*] for mss for a Doubleday (horribly) Anchor Bk Anthology, in June had come, with which i complied, what else?





Larry Eigner, June 3, 1978

## NOTES

1/18/54: Eigner is reading *The Maximus Poems, 1-10*, published by Jonathan Williams (Stuttgart, 1953) in a regular edition of 300 copies. The contents are: "I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You," "Maximus, to Gloucester (Letter 2)," "Letter 3," "The Songs of Maximus," "Letter 5," "Letter 6," "Letter 7," "Tyrian Businesses," "Letter 9," "Letter 10." The edition also included a foreword by Robert Creeley.

5/25/60: Eigner's *On My Eyes*, his first full-length collection of poems, was published by Jonathan Williams's Jargon Society in 1960. Denise Levertov selected the eighty-eight poems, and the book, including its front and back covers, was illustrated with photographs by Harry Callahan. "Nel mezzo" is the opening phrase of Dante's *Inferno*. Eigner mentions reading Dorothy Sayers's translation of *The Divine Comedy* elsewhere in this letter.

6/17/64: Charles Olson had two common-law wives. Constance (Connie) Wilcoch, the mother of his daughter, Katherine (Kate) Bunker, and Augusta Elizabeth (Betty) Kaiser Olson, the mother of his son, Charles Peter Olson. Betty was a music student at Black Mountain College while Olson, separated from Connie, was teaching there in the mid-1950s; Betty died in an automobile accident in March 1964 when Olson was teaching at SUNY Buffalo. Eigner's poems "much space along the," "stand on one foot," "The clock/breaks," "Where is an attic," "50 cars," and "File" appeared in *Poetry* 103.4 (January 1964).

8/31/64: "They" refers to Eigner's brother Richard and his fiancée Beverly, who were visiting from San Francisco. Robert Kelly and Paris Leary edited the anthology *A Controversy of Poets*, published by Anchor Books in 1965. "l u x u r y i s," which apparently riffs on Olson's comment recorded in this letter, does not appear in *The Collected Poems*.



**COMMENT**



*Disability and Poetry*

*Jennifer Bartlett, John Lee Clark, Jim Ferris, Jillian Weise*

WRITING DISABILITY

JENNIFER BARTLETT: I have resisted the term “identity poet” when considering my own work; therefore, my biggest challenge is to address my cerebral palsy without poetics and other identities taking a “back seat” in the process.

Ableism in the work of others doesn’t consciously affect how I write my poems. Poems for me are not a conscious endeavor. In the tradition of Jack Spicer, I just listen to the “Martians” and write down what they tell me.

The reaction among nondisabled poets to disability has informed my work primarily through the study of Larry Eigner. Because of his severe cerebral palsy, there has been a lot of unchecked speculation on his physicality, intelligence, and how his body affected his poetics. Further, his work has not generated the same popularity and “credit” his contemporaries have received. I do liken this to ableism, and part of my project is to be accurate about his situation through following his direct correspondence.

Larry Eigner has been a primary influence on my own poetics and life not exclusively because we share the experience of cerebral palsy, but rather through a kinship I feel to his methods of reading, corresponding, writing, and living. I could have just as easily written a biography on Vassar Miller, but she is a different kind of poet. Eigner was actually my second choice for a biography subject; my first choice was Muriel Rukeyser.

My feeling is that all “schools” of poetry and the agencies that go along with them have disregarded “disability poetics” as a category. However, this is changing, particularly with the support of the so-called Language poets, the work of New York’s Poetry Project, Craig Morgan Teicher, who reviewed *Beauty Is a Verb* for *Publishers Weekly*, and now this conversation. I would be interested to hear how your identities as disability activists inform your poetics. What poets have influenced you? What direct experiences have you had with ableism

in the work of others or in publishing?

JOHN LEE CLARK: When I started writing, my problem was that I wasn't conscious enough. As a second-generation DeafBlind man who grew up exposed to American Sign Language (ASL) storytelling and poetry, I should have gone straight to those treasuries and looted them for my English products. I didn't. This was because I was also exposed to ableism and audism in English literature. English poets are especially fond of romanticizing and demonizing both deafness and blindness, equating these with silence and darkness — and death.

My gut response was to protest. If, for example, they waxed poetic about birdsong to emphasize how terrible it must be to be deaf, I would write about how our lives are full of music in motion and how beautiful ASL is. Later, while assembling *Deaf American Poetry*, I was surprised to read so many Deaf poets writing the same things, all the way back to James Nack. In his nifty 1827 poem "The Music of Beauty," the Deaf speaker, luxuriating in the visual glories of nature and the charms of his blue-eyed maid, says, "I pity those who think they pity me." He goes so far as to jeer at hearing people's "marble eyes." What a marvelous beginning to Deaf poetry!

Since then, though, protest has remained the primary mode. Perhaps it's because Deaf people's cultures and languages continue to be marginalized. Protest is a worthy, logical response, but it can also be limiting. Instead of the full range of our realities and imaginations, we get drawn into arguments we did not choose for ourselves. For example, "visual music" and "ASL is beautiful" are the two most common tropes in Deaf poetry, working to counter audist notions of deafness and muteness; meanwhile, in real life, Deaf people are busy cooking, videochatting, texting, dating, raising families, and making transactions, not all of them legal. I realized that I needed to write beyond these arguments, not to leave behind our causes or obscure my identity, but to claim more and more space in which we can just be.

JIM FERRIS: Disability is dangerous. We represent danger to the normate world, and rightly so. Disabled people live closer to the edge. We are more vulnerable, or perhaps it is that we show our human vulnerability without being able to hide it in the ways that nondisabled people can hide and deny the vulnerability that is an essential part of being human.

But there is something glorious in being considered so odd, so

marginal to society. Disability brings with it a wonderful range of remarkable and powerful vantage points. It is so much easier to see when you can gain a little distance, a little perspective. Some of what we see is peculiar to disability, as suggested in Stephen Kuusisto's "Harvest," in which the speaker admires "the white moon of the morning, / even if my eyes tell me there are two moons." But most of what we perceive isn't peculiar to disability — it's peculiar to human life. And that's what we need to be writing.

We. I presume, I *claim* an "us," even though there are myriad ways of embodying (and denying) disability, and no two disabled people's experiences are the same. Disabled people are well schooled, whether impairment is acquired early or late, to identify with and aspire to be as much like nondisabled people as possible.

But if we don't claim our difference, if we don't write disability, the normies will keep doing it for us. It is crucial that we don't keep leaving the field to them, even when we love them. Even when they tell us it's for our own good.

I love John's desire "to claim more and more space in which we can just be." And Jennifer's point that identities are always complex and variable is crucial. Who "we" are is always shifting. Is disability, or whiteness, or maleness most salient in this moment? Or poetness, vegetarian-ness, musician-ness, or on and on? I don't demand that poetry or any other art form serve utilitarian goals, however laudable they might be. But I do want poetry, including my own, to open the world, to pay attention to what is, without getting stuck there.

I turn to poetry to help me to think, to feel, to perceive. I'm not sure if I could write long enough to list all the poets who have influenced me. But if I can give readers and listeners a little different way to perceive, to feel, to make sense of the things we only ever know partially, then perhaps I'm doing a little something worthwhile.

JILLIAN WEISE: I like John's point: "We get drawn into arguments we did not choose for ourselves." Sometimes I feel like I would rather talk about Kathy Acker. But what does the word "disability" mean? Is it useful to me? Can I get some heat from it? I am reminded of what Borges said to his nephew, "If you behave, I'll give you permission to think of a bear." Most often, I think about disability when I am asked to think about it. Then I feel an obligation to behave.

Yes, there is ableism. One able-bodied writer said to me, "Jillian, do you know why we use disabled speakers?" Do tell, Grandmaster.

“Because all writers are outsiders and disabled speakers are the most outsider.” Noted. But I also hear this kind of thing: another writer once wrote to me, “I wish your book was not so dominated by disability poems.” And there’s the trap of ableism: disability is for able-bodied writers to write, because it’s easy for them, and they don’t have to think too hard about it, but disabled writers should stay out of it altogether.

And the metaphors. The moon is blind. The sky is deaf. My love is lame. Your death is a phantom limb. This is a complaint about bad poetry more than ableism. Can we agree that in 2014 disability stereotypes and clichéd metaphors make bad poetry? As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes, “the always overdetermined metaphoric uses of disability efface and distort the lived experience of people with disabilities, evacuating the political significance of our lives.” Or is it too soon to come to this agreement? Will it take time? I hope one day editors reject these poems.

#### PUBLISHING

JLC: I agree with Jillian. Editors really need to start rejecting that kind of bad poetry. But I’m more concerned about what they *do* reject as “too niche,” “not a fit,” or simply “not poetic material.” Isn’t that funny? They are happy to publish poems with made-up disabled speakers, but these are mainly by poets who aren’t disabled, or, which is sometimes worse, by poets who are disabled but follow the “script.” You get a very good idea of what’s expected of you when editors ask you, “Why don’t you include something about how hard it is to be deaf?” or, “Why don’t you write about the things you miss seeing?” I get tired of explaining that it isn’t hard to be deaf or that I don’t regret becoming blind.

There’s something amiss—and *missing*—in publishing. Thirty million Americans are Deaf or hard of hearing. Add to that twenty-two million for the blind slice of the pie, and millions more for other groups—physical disabilities, different kinds of intelligences, and the rest—and what do we have? Nearly a quarter of the total population? Thanks to the capitalist interests driving the medical industries, that number is always growing, as more and more things are targeted as “abnormal” and in need of treatment. Disability is a major, major realm. But you wouldn’t know it from reading literary magazines or

any of the “name” anthologies.

I recently asked an editor why he didn’t publish more disability writing. He countered by asking why there weren’t more disabled writers submitting their work. That’s a valid question. It’s true that we have fewer than our share of writers. Writing is a privilege. And many don’t submit aggressively for fear of rejection, which can be hard not to take as a reflection upon their identities. So, yes, it’s easy to imagine that there’s not a lot of our writing being sent out.

And yet there’s no mistaking it — there’s a bias. What is at the core of this bias? How can we get that changed to where our vast literature takes its rightful place — *everywhere*?

JF: Here’s something I’m wondering: how does that editor know which writers are disabled and which are nondisabled? Is it the Easter Seals stamps? No, wait — it’s the SASE back to the asylum, isn’t it? Darn it.

I don’t doubt that there is an unacknowledged bias around disability in Poetry World. There is such a bias around disability and disabled people in the world at large that it would be miraculous for editors and publishers to avoid it. And Poetry World, like the academy, is obsessed with “ability,” whatever that means, and so *disability* must be its opposite, right? But I’d be hard-pressed to point to specific examples of that bias in my experience — nothing so overt as the things Jillian was told. I expect this is because editors don’t often say why they reject poems. David Wagoner’s gentle, handwritten “Sorry to say no” is about all the rejection feedback I can recall. And I suspect that few of us are as enlightened as we might wish at recognizing, let alone owning up to, our own biases.

But there’s another impediment to recognizing and removing this bias: despite passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act almost twenty-five years ago, disabled people are not broadly recognized as a real minority group in the ways that we’ve come to recognize racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities. Disability is the one characteristic that cuts across all the other demographic lines, but that pervasiveness works against widespread group recognition. If there’s no group, what need could there be to consider bias against those people?

How to change that bias? My best answer is to write the poems that you want and need to read, and keep sending stuff out there. (I’m speaking to myself as much as anyone else here.) Because there are editors and publishers and most importantly readers who are

open to our work, who *want* our work, whether they know it before they see it or not. One of my poems is in part about rejecting messages that disabled people get about changing or at least hiding their nonconforming bodies. I have been repeatedly surprised at how powerfully that poem speaks to others who have heard such messages, particularly breast cancer survivors. I had no idea. What a robust reminder that my job is to make these little paper airplanes as well and as beautifully as I can and then sail them out into the breeze. How far they fly, where they land, what happens after they land — this is none of my business, except as it helps me to make the next airplanes better. My work is to make them and sail them — and then make more.

jw: I feel like I could answer the publishing bias question supremely if I were already dead. Then all would become apparent: whose poems were ableist, which publishers were ableist, and whether the work endured or was forgotten. Then again, you probably would not care about po-biz if you were speaking to a ghost. Instead, very much alive, I am self-conscious. If I come out guns blazing, naming names, what will happen? Also, I've been lucky. My work has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, and *Tin House*, so it feels strange to complain about a publishing bias.

May I talk about a different swindle? I was told there are speakers of poems and I believed it. When I invented disabled speakers I was told, "Those aren't speakers. That's you." With minority writing, then, you don't get the privilege of yourself. Self is constructed elsewhere. You are expected to be the speaker and represent the minority. Though, as Jim mentions, we're not recognized as a minority yet. You are expected to be moral and teach. I think this is why Amiri Baraka wrote "Fuck poems/and they are useful." Or what Laura Hershey meant by "Everything you say will prove something about/their god, or their economic system."

I think there are certain kinds of disabled poems that some publishers want: the speaker overcomes disability; the speaker's friend/relative is disabled or diagnosed; the speaker notices a disabled person on the side of the road. I avoid those poems at all costs.

JB: I think publishing in poetry is inherently biased; it always will be. In James Laughlin's time it was impossible for an unknown poet to find themselves with *New Directions*. Laughlin either had to know the person or the work had to be "so good" he couldn't help himself.



Needless to say, the latter rarely happened. Editors have their friends and their aesthetic, and they publish accordingly. Like everyone else, poets are very interested in the idea of “sexy.” This is why anthologies on, say, conceptual poetry, become the focal point of debate, while anthologies like *Beauty Is a Verb* quietly seep into the culture.

As Jim stated, disabled people are not regarded as a minority. So, when anthologists, editors, and teachers work to include race, gender, and sexual differences, disability is left out. This happens often. But things are changing and I want to be sure to note that. I have had a few editors approach me for work for anthologies because they want a well-rounded collection, and they love my work. I’ve also had editors approach me as a “token.” It’s pretty easy to tell the difference. Even if editors approach me in the latter way, their methods may not be ideal, but at least they are trying and that is commendable.

Poets with disabilities probably *do* submit less. When VIDA did studies on women writers, this was also “the reason” given for not publishing an equal amount of women. Can this lack be real? Sure! Women are caregivers, homemakers, and also have jobs. Women with disabilities have to do all that *and* with impaired energy, movement, and agility. So, who is sending out more poems? You betcha! In response to this, women (and poets with disabilities) are told, “Do not have children or you can’t be a real artist.” I think the onus needs to be put on editors; if they want to strive for a balanced representation, they need to go make one. This is what Michael Northen, Sheila Black, and I did for *Beauty Is a Verb*. We *looked* for representation; we didn’t wait for it to come to us. We are editors: that is our job. A poet’s job should not be to make sure the publishing and editing world has equal representation; we have enough problems, believe me.

Editors also may fear the considerations of “disability poetry”; real truths about prejudices and studies on the difficulties of the corporeal. No one wants to read that! It’s too scary. What people want to read in terms of disability is the aspect of how awful and difficult it can be. This leads readers to develop empathy (or her naughty sister pity), which is something they can connect with.

I have a current manuscript that questions and pushes the issue of ableism in a direct way. I’ve had a really hard time getting it published. I often am slow to publish, but sometimes I wonder whether the manuscript has been in limbo for so long due to its content. I try to imagine an able-bodied publisher who will publish a book directly challenging ableism. I do not have an answer.

## ACCESSIBILITY

JF: Some years back I attended a panel that featured short readings from a number of poets published by Copper Canyon Press. It was in a good-sized room, with a table and chairs on a dais for the speakers. Lucia Perillo was one of the poets. Her multiple sclerosis had progressed such that she was using a wheelchair to get around. The platform had no ramp, so we watched her get lifted up onto the dais and then lowered from it when the reading was done. It was a good reading, but I had a difficult time getting past the absurdity: the raised platform, which was only accessible to an honored poet like Perillo through the physical labor of two or three strong backs, was there to make the featured speakers more visible to the presumed normative sighted people making up the audience. So this thing that was inaccessible to Perillo was there to enhance access for others. It was an inadvertent spectacle, and Perillo was gracious about it, though I suspect she would rather not have drawn that particular attention. I doubt if I would have been quite so gracious about it.

The poet Stephen Kuusisto recently swore off inaccessible events, including conferences and poetry festivals. In his blog post about it, he said, "I've been to hundreds of gatherings that really don't care if people with disabilities are at the table." The basis of the problem, he notes, is that organizers, who may care deeply about diversity, don't think about access for disabled people beforehand. Their limited idea of diversity "only extends to disability insofar as no one says: 'don't bother showing up.'" The problem continues because the nondisabled participants in the conferences and festivals don't seem to notice or care.

American poets are unaware of their own complicity in the dispensation and appropriation of acceptable bodies. I'm no longer spending my money where I have to rattle the doors to get in.

Amen, Brother Steve.

Access can be a tricky thing, as Perillo-on-the-dais illustrates. But it's all too easy for a society which has not even named, let alone addressed, its ableism to simply overlook the many ways that disabled people are excluded, all the microaggressions that don't even sound like oppression to the nondisabled. It's a challenge not to internalize this crap. I've had some success at getting my work out there

and finding readers, so like Jillian I hesitate to protest too much. But chronic inaccessibility—the limiting of access that goes far beyond the physical—can wear at you like chronic pain.

jw: It is a challenge not to internalize ableism. I organize events in Clemson, South Carolina. One time we invited a public official to give an opening address. I don't feel like I have the right to disclose his disability, but he could not step onto the platform. Students helped him and he made no mention of it, but it stays with me to this day. I failed him in that moment because of my assumptions. I was not thinking about accommodations. I bet many organizers cite that reason—“We were just not thinking about it”—in similar situations. We should start thinking about it.

The ADA tried to effect change in 1990. I'm not that optimistic about it. I was dismayed by the metaphor in Justice Kennedy's decision for *Board of Trustees of the University of Alabama vs. Garrett* (2000):

Knowledge of our own human instincts teaches that persons who find it difficult to perform routine functions by reason of some mental or physical impairment might at first seem unsettling to us, unless we are guided by the better angels of our nature.

Who are these “better angels of our nature”? Who is “us”?

Inaccessibility remains omnipresent. Libraries have stairs in front of them. Stairs are to libraries like moats are to castles. The handicapped entrance to the library at my graduate school was behind the building, next to a dumpster, with a button to push for the librarian. Back then, the librarian was on an upper level floor, so you stood out there and hoped she remembered you. Sometimes you had to push the button again and say, “I'm still here. Still waiting.” What does that do to you? There you are. Maybe it's snowing on you or raining on you. Maybe the parking lot is empty and it's midnight. Maybe you're not sure what that man is doing over there, standing in the parking lot, staring at you. You're waiting for the librarian to hurry and unlock the books.

JB: I have had a lot of good fortune in many of these areas. I have not been in a situation where a reading was not accessible to me. However, I have observed the difficulties of others. The 2012 Chicago AWP was particularly problematic for people who used wheelchairs. The hotel

and events were some distance from each other and I remember that the buses the convention used were non-accessible. AWP hired one or two secondary buses that had to be scheduled and were unreliable. I specifically remember this delaying a colleague who was on a panel.

Working on readings for *Beauty Is a Verb* taught me how to think through the lens of universal design. I began to think about what a reading would look like if it were accessible to all people. Poetry readings tend to be inherently for a select group of people. The concept of the contemporary poetry reading is geared toward people with excellent hearing (in fact uber-hearing because many readings now occur in noisy cafes or bars), often in non-wheelchair accessible places. They are geared toward people who can sit silently, maintain concentration, and retain large amounts of information as text is rarely given out or projected. Poetry readings, of course, are also geared toward people with a strong presence and vocal cords: John Ashbery could be invited to read the phone book at Harvard; Larry Eigner isn't going to get invited to read very much at all.

Stacy Szymaszek at The Poetry Project is a programmer who is a forerunner in inclusion. She has made St. Mark's Church wheelchair accessible despite its ancient architecture, and we have discussed getting ASL interpreters. Every reading is recorded on video and audio, and these tapes (if not online) are accessible to the public. Szymaszek also has diversity in her programming; to my knowledge, The Poetry Project was the only location to host readings for both *Beauty Is a Verb* and *Troubling the Line: Trans and Genderqueer Poetry and Poetics*. The Poetry Project also has a running policy of including children: the New Year's Day Marathon Reading looked like a Russian Orthodox church service.

I have found that my disability and connections to disability activism hold little, if any, weight in the arena of academic hiring and securing grants in the way that race, gender, and sexuality *can* make a poet stand out. Maybe this is good. Maybe not. This may be because my ideas of disability are controversial; I do not subscribe to the tragedy model in my writing at all, and I have seen those who do surpass me in grants, teaching, and publishing.

I do really, really wish there were grants exclusively for writers with disabilities. If we did have such a thing, there might be a larger variety of work.

JLC: Jim and Jillian, it's interesting to sense a marked difference in

your attitude toward accessibility and bias in publishing. Regarding publishing, Jim says that his “job” is to just write the best he can. Jillian mentions being “lucky” to have appeared in prestigious places and how it’d be “strange to complain.” On accessibility, though, you sound like you could rally! Is that because accessibility deals with the tangible and physical? Certainly the solutions are more present. But if, as Richard Lovelace puts it, “Stone walls do not a prison make, / Nor iron bars a cage,” then publishing is the more urgent theater for action. I say action because disabled poets have been writing for centuries. Something has to be done about getting our voices and histories encrypted into the collective DNA.

That being said, accessibility is vital, too. One thing few organizers realize is that they plan for and pay for access and accommodations all the time. The venues themselves, lights, restrooms, parking, program books, mics, air conditioning, tables, chairs, water, catering, and hundreds of other things are all accommodations. It’s society’s job to be helpful, but, ironically, those receiving the most assistance don’t notice it while we, the help-less, are the ones who “need” things.

Some have improved their checklists “for” us but then they say, “Why aren’t they coming? What are we doing wrong?” The problem is what I call “arm’s-length inclusion.” They would love to see disabled people attend or buy or register. That’s not true inclusion. Inclusion means having “them” be part of “us.” It means having us inside — as chairpersons and board members, as administrators and employees, as faculty members and featured writers, and, yes, as publishers and editors.

One more thing I want to mention: ASL interpreting is important, but because I am used to being in an all-signing environment, hearing settings, no matter how good the interpreting, are a downgrade for me. There are cultural differences, too. However, the events I’ve enjoyed the most, where most of the people there were hearing, have been disability events. The dynamic is different; you don’t feel the same suffocating “mainstream” vibe. The space is more open, the pace slower, the quality time richer. The nondisabled don’t know what they’re missing!

#### FORM AND EMBODIMENT

JW: To the question, “Does your disability affect how you write?” —

I know it is not as simple as “I write in tercets because I have three legs” or “I write in hexameter to mimic hopping.” As for content, disability features in my work similar to how masculinity features in the work of men. I like how Jennifer mentions, in the beginning of this exchange, the “unchecked speculation” on the way Larry Eigner’s physicality affects his poetics. Critics are sometimes quick to speculate, “This feature in the poem is because of that disability.” Their speculation segregates the poet, the poem, and the critic.

When I became a cyborg, I felt liberated. My first book was out and I was being called “amputee poet” and “disabled poet” and I realized these names would apply for the rest of my life unless I changed the name. Simultaneous to this, my leg became a computer. So it was pretty clear that I was a cyborg. What’s it like being a cyborg? There are those who think I am “going through a phase” and “denying disability.” But the best part of being a cyborg is that I don’t care what people think of who I am or how I write or what I write. It’s permission to write any style, any genre. It’s not that exceptional. Anybody can choose a name. Some of my favorite writers have chosen several.

As for the art of poetry, I think of Bill Shannon a.k.a. Crutch Master. He says,

Like skateboarding and break dancing ... it’s all about individual style.... You’re skating down the street.... So you’re relating to your environment as it comes to you on an improvisational, free-style basis.

Or like Lil Wayne says, “What’s G?”

JB: I write poetry through my body. My body is the vehicle; therefore, my particular movement directs my writing. This expands beyond my body into what is happening in my life at any given time. In my early twenties I lived with a filmmaker in Boston and I worked at a museum. My lines were long and influenced by my constant engagement with film and visual art. My poems are influenced by time, and back then I had a lot of it. Later, I moved to New York. I “acquired” a husband, four animals, and a child. Shortly after my son Jeffrey was born, my lines changed. They became broken and fragmented, written in fits and starts. Time compressed and so did the line.

My father, the critic Lee Bartlett, once told me an amazing thing about my poems. He had been harping on me for years about my

flawed punctuation. One day he told me, “You know, when you read these poems out loud, you actually read them like you have punctuated them on the page.” In this, he felt the punctuation was correct. While technically being incorrect, I wrote the poems as they were supposed to sound. This comment led me to think about how my body might directly relate to language and grammar. Or anyone’s body, for that matter. This isn’t specifically a disability thing—it’s a corporeal issue. I just happen to move like someone with mild cerebral palsy would move. If I moved like Balanchine, my poems would be different. Most poets know that Charles Olson was a huge person. My “mentor” is from Gloucester, and Olson was known as “the big guy.” That’s pretty apparent in his work. Like Olson, my poems move like me. My poems walk really, really slow. They are constantly distracted and want to look at everything. They want to stop and chat with every single neighbor and every single dog. They meander. They are not straight narratives. Is life a straight narrative? No, you have to pause and answer the phone. You have to go through the thrift store dumpster because the guys threw out some good books. You have to change a diaper or let the cat in (or out). As I said before, I don’t tell my poems to do anything; they tell me what to do. My poems are the boss of me.

JLC: A poet friend of mine likes to say, “You write what you read.” I don’t disagree, but I think it may be necessary for us to stop reading sometimes. Influences can be as much a trap as a springboard, especially if there are plenty of bad narratives “about” us out there.

As it happened, I never chose to stop reading poetry for a bit; the choice was made for me when I could no longer read print and switched to Braille. Very few poetry books are available in Braille. The e-book revolution should have changed that situation, but all of the popular e-book formats are by virtue inaccessible, locked. It took me a long time to repopulate my reading life with poetry. In the interval, I had a chance to think and explore.

While limited access to reading materials is an issue that needs to be fixed, Braille itself has given me many gifts. Physically handling words has made me a much better reader and, I hope, a better writer. My poems did change dramatically—from longish poems with regular stanzas to much shorter, compressed, stanza-less poems. But there was another current that eventually swept me into the opposite direction—opening up the pages, letting the lines break where they

will in whatever media the poems find themselves in (print, online, Braille), playing with ASL gloss...

This radical development came about after I edited *Deaf American Poetry* and realized that I wanted my own community to be my audience. Before, I had in mind the “reading public.” No more. The great Gwendolyn Brooks gave me the key word I needed: “to.” She said that black poetry is written by, about, and *to* black people — not “for” them, because literature is for everyone. It’s a matter of address. I began to write poems we would share with each other around the kitchen table, speaking to each other in our own space.

And outsiders would still “get” some of it. They don’t have to know the whole history of this or that, or catch every pun or reference. Our poems will still communicate our world. I’d love to see more disability poetry written to us.

JF: I love John’s (and Gwendolyn Brooks’s) emphasis on audience in identity-rich poetry, not just *by* or *about* but also *to*. (Disabled people of all stripes have had plenty of *for* — “Here, let me help you with that,” whether you want help or not; “What he means to say is...” ) Writing *to* disabled people has all sorts of implications, not just topic and diction but orientation, the things you don’t explain but just let float out there. When I consciously undertook writing poems with a crip audience in mind, I let go of the myth of universality, or at least of a universality that I could consciously name and understand. That’s what I meant about my role being to make poems as well as I can and then let them go; I don’t get to control what people do with them, I don’t have much say in the “outcome.” Once poems are out in the world, they are out there, they are not mine anymore. With luck, they become *ours*. And this is one of the ways disability culture is made and conveyed, little bit by little bit.

I find myself thinking about the changes we’ve seen just in my lifetime. I used to be crippled, then I was handicapped. After that I was a person with a disability — a person, what do you know — and now sometimes I am a disabled person. The ADA is twenty-four years old, and there is still so much work to be done. But a generation ago Josephine Miles and Vassar Miller could not write more than a very little about their experience of what we’re now calling *disability*. Today, *Poetry* magazine. Tomorrow, who knows? We’re far from done, but we’ve come a long way.



## CONTRIBUTORS

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JENNIFER BARTLETT'S\* most recent book is *Autobiography/Anti-Autobiography* (theenk Books, 2014).

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LARRY EIGNER (1927–1996) was the author of over seventy-five books and broadsides. *Calligraphy/Typewriters: The Selected Poems of Larry Eigner*, edited by Curtis Faville and Robert Grenier, is forthcoming from the University of Alabama Press.

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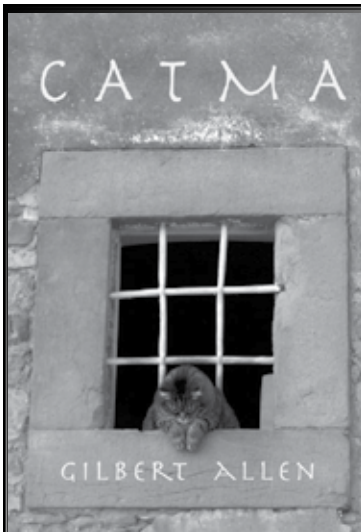
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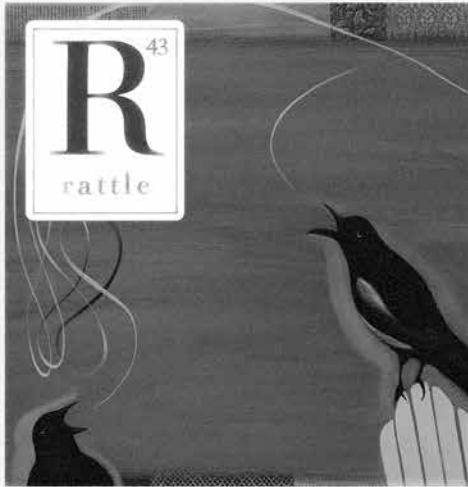
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