NEW WORK: A PROSIMETRUM

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This work consists of new poems and commentary in the tradition of Dante's prosimetric self-commentary. It aims to explore the shared ground of poetry and commentary, and the potential symbiotic and generative relationships between the two modes. The work proposes the elaboration of at least three particular formal poetic structures–which it names the 'riddle,' the 'missive,' and the 'miniature romance'–, cites moments from a broad range of medieval, modern, and contemporary literary history, and attempts to provoke a poetics of both poem and commentary that might help generate a more politically salient concept of literary community.

> *. . . what should be the primary insight of all historically aware, destructive criticism*: *poems do violence to their interpreters and potentially destroy methods of criticism which are used to "illuminate" them.*–Paul A. Bové, *Destructive Poetics*: *Heidegger and Modern American Poetry*[1]

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> *In the first part I encountered Love and how he looked; in the second I relate what he told me–only in part, however, for fear of revealing my secret*–Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, IX[2]

These verses could not have been written until I wrote ***here begins a book of the poets*** on a sheet of a paper originally intended to be a page in a book manuscript. Only then could I find these poems beginning. Of course, I could not be sure this work was indeed beginning until I found another sheet and then wrote on it ***incipit***. The commentary on these poems will begin the work of writing these poems, and undoing them as a book of poems. But, before any poem or comment on any poem, I would ask what *new work* could be set in motion by such poems which, though I could not find them beginning until I wrote the word *book*, form in fact no book and do not begin their work without their commentary? And how can one comment on the work that cannot begin until its commentary begins to work? I would not, for instance, attempt to *account for* the beginnings of the works with a narrative, or explain away the anticipated work with such a narrative as explaining (away). Nor can I in my comments tell the truth about the poems, or provide *information* concerning them beyond what is necessary to set them to work. Yet, I would not render the work of these poems as such a secret that they would demand an informative commentary.

Does the new work begin with poem or commentary? The American nineteenth-century writer of fiction Nathaniel Hawthorne described, with all that cagey tone proper to the voice of a fictional narrator, his poetics and their workings in his fictional preface to *The Blithedale Romance* in such a way as to make wonderfully

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With a project of this size, I owe great thanks to *Glossator*'s editors and anonymous readers, whose commitment to the project of this new work has been sustained and immense. Additionally this project could not have been completed without those whose lives and work have become increasingly necessary for me to think and write, and whose specific projects, instruction, or commitment has explicitly enabled this project. I list them here: the Pittsburgh poets (Sten Carlson, Emily Gropp, Robin Clarke, Joshua Zelesnick, Sarah Bagley, Blaire Zeiders), the BABEL working group, my collaborator in another (to my mind related) project Anna Kłosowska, and those who commented on early drafts of this material on my blog including Eileen A. Joy.

[1] Paul A. Bové, *Destructive Poetics*: *Heidegger and Modern American Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 221-222.

[2] Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, in *The Portable Dante*, ed. and trans. by Mark Musa (New York: Penguin, 1995), 598-599.

problematic the reading of his fictional 'Romance' as a commentary on a particular experience which readers may be tempted to invoke to explain away the genesis of the work. He writes anticipating that "In the 'Blithedale' of this volume many readers will probably suspect a faint and not very faithful shadowing of Brook Farm," that, as Hawthorne puts it, failed "Socialist Community" of which he took part.[3] And the relation of the poetics to this occasion of the work of the book is indeed 'shadowy,' but not, I would argue, for purposes of what we now call 'escapism,' or what might be denounced as a religious flight from the world; but, rather, to allow a certain effect of the poetics of the book to come to the fore, having seen rightly the time at Brook Farm as "essentially"[4] a day dream and yet a fact–and thus offering an available foothold between fiction and reality. The poems of a *new work* would have function as such a foothold between their commentary and the world. The proper effect of a commentary's romance appears in an entry into the world by means of a thinning of what stands between the regions of poem and commentary, production of and accounting for the poem–of a strange and hard to picture fading away of the solidity of this foothold. For, this foothold, even if it is the point of commerce between the two, being solid enough to act as a foothold, is also solid enough to provide an excuse for the kind of interpretation that would use its very solidity to deploy it as a barrier to keep separate, or as an arbitrary barrier to hermeneutically penetrate so as to produce (bogus) meaning. I do not mean a negation of everything or a negative-theological or skeptical denial of the real either (or, again, that flight from responsibility to dream) but the thinning away of the very *opaqueness* or *interpretability* of this foothold as a block, a veil to be eliminated (as well as the possibility of a 'real' history or a psychologizing *narrative* that would explain (away) the commentary and its poems) as the act of interpretation common to the history of what remains a bad-faith enemy of the literary in the practice of interpretation as the production of distinction, of returning dream to dream and reality to reality, of putting poem and commentary in their (proper) places as the very production of the proper. Here we are, after all, in a problem not dissimilar to Jacques Derrida's temporalization of representation and the sign, where the sign as always already a *re*-ference, a *re*-pointing in which "one must think of writing as a game within language . . . This *play* . . . is not a play *in the world*, as it has been defined, for purposes of *containing* it."[5] How to get in the world without containing the play of writing, from within the writing itself? Thus in Derrida's chapter on Rousseau in the same volume as the above quote we read that "what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presences."[6] How to find, or to produce, or to wear through the structures of the foothold so as to leave behind what Derrida calls the "hinge [*brisure*]"[7]–here between poem and gloss? Admit first that we are in language, and then consider how to get into the world without unproductively explaining (away) its relation to language. What will begin this work of perversely cultivating–I am not sure poets or commentators have begun or recognized that they have begun this work yet, even though some of their texts are already *at work* on it–the "*dead time* within the presence of the living present,"[8] while all the time rigorously affirming a *joyous* or *wonderful* worldliness: the modernist abysmal as optimism par excellence at the beginning of the work between a poem and its

[3] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*, Preface (New York: Penguin, 1986), 1.

[4] Ibid., 2

[5] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, corrected edition 1997), 50.

[6] Ibid., 158.

[7] Ibid., 69.

[8] Ibid., 68.

commentary.[9] The foothold between poem and commentary, reality and dream (all the terms can here be moved around) stands to be worn down so there is an incalculable commerce and indeed substantial mixing between the two regions of writing. The foothold will have to remain as a ruin of itself, to be a marvel even in what must become its wispy state.

Thus this text *is beginning* a new work that will work to wear down its secrecy in a manner secret even to itself so that the secret of the work of a poem or a commentary be entirely apparent without either ceasing to function as a site of wonder. So I would address critics, even against their wills, as poets; and, I would address poets, against their wills as critics–and I would offer this work not for a tiny public, however tiny its public may inevitably be. Also, I should note that while the nature of this writing works to confound that foothold that would allow a narrative of 'lived experience' to explain (away) the poems, and that while this work does not attempt either to work as a chronicle of 'the times,it would still work at being a work of history (at least for itself) in the spirit of the vocal commentary during the final flourish of Jean-Luc Godard's *Tout Va Bien* ('All Is Well'), which wishes, "May each be his own historian" [*Puis chacun être son propre historien*].[10]

So, as to the question of when this work will begin to work, with the poems or with the commentary, we remember of Derrida's 'writing' that "We must begin *wherever we are* and the thought of the trace . . . has already taught that it was impossible to justify a point of departure absolutely."[11] Already these words are the text of the poems and the work of their commentary.

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And, *what* work does this begin? *The commentary on these poems will begin the work of writing these poems, and undoing them as a book of poems.* How should we name the form of this work, this 'prosimetrum' in such unregulated meters of 'free verse'? Jacques Derrida opened a book in 1972 with a similar question, writing: "La question s'y agite précisément de la présentation. Si la forme du livre est désormais soumise, comme on sait, à une turbulence générale, si elle paraît moins naturelle, et son histoire moins transparente que jamais, si l'on ne peut y toucher sans toucher à tout, elle ne saurait plus régler–ici par exemple–tels procès d'écriture qui, l'interroget *pratiquement*, doivent aussi la démonter" [The question which stirs itself here, precisely, is presentation. If the form of the book henceforth must submit to a period of general upheaval, and that form appears less natural, and its history less transparent than ever, if one cannot touch on it/disturb it with it without touching on

[9] That Derrida is commonly called *postmodern* does not trouble here. The movements of his readings in *Of Grammatology* remain devoted to literary and philosophical modernism (Malarmé, Heidegger, Lévi Strauss) or more generally 'modern' humanism (Rousseau) and his deconstruction of these discourses is not a break from them as a moving on, a leaving behind, but an exhaustion of them as a result of a commentarial devotion to them from the inside, cf. p. 24, "The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, not can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them *in a certain way*, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it."

[10] Voiceover in final moments of Jean-Luc Godard's *Tout Va Bien* (1972, Gaumont; Criterion Collection DVD reissue 2005) circa 1:33:48 and 1:35:24.

[11] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 162.

everything, then it alone can no longer determine–here for example–such processes of writing which, in *practically* interrogating that form, must also dismantle it].[12] To touch on everything would require that "pluri-dimensional" thought around which Derrida earlier announced "The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing"[13] along with the end of "linear writing" as the end of the book.[14] Additionally, since when "beginning to write without the line, one begins also to reread past writing according to a different organization of space," my commentary will place certain pasts and certain histories in the same space, leaving certain gaps and folding the shape of the page across centuries and continents. What is needed is a textural arrangement–writing which is fixed in its written-ness and historicity, but already suggesting a certain unaccountable movement–as Eve Kofosky Sedgwick wrote analogously of texture that "Texture, in short, comprises an array of perceptual data that includes repetition [and thus paradoxically, movement in stasis], but whose degree of organization hovers just below the level of shape or structure."[15] So the forms of these poems and their commentary are like various revolutions around nothing like a sphere brought forth in the possibility of work that works: work quick enough to be working so as to be equidistant from all points in an area nothing like a circle, flitting and folding back through time when necessary. What I work into this little work is but the rhythm of what I hope will become a provocative texture, which being bound even to a digital page would always already be at work towards the movements of such folds.

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Plato famously asserted that poetry is only a copy of a copy. It was thus of rather low rank within his cosmology, banned from his *Republic*.[16] According to Erich Auerbach, Plato's demeaning of poetry

[12] Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), 9. translation, mine. Quotation in French here serves, I hope, to outline the syntactic dismantling (or as Rimbaud would say, the *dérèglement*) of form in Derrida's prose, as well as its effect when allowed to effect English, hence my own particular translation.

[13] Cf. Chapter one of Part One of *Of Grammatology*, 6-26.

[14] Ibid., 86-87. "The end of linear writing is indeed the end of the book, even if, even today, it is within the form of a book that new writings–literary or theoretical–allow themselves to be, for better or for worse, encased. It is less a question of confiding new writings to the envelope of a book than of finally reading what wrote itself between the lines in the volumes. That is why, beginning to write without the lines, one begins also to reread past writing according to a different organization of space. If today the problem of reading occupies the forefront of science, it is because of this suspense between two ages of writing. Because we are beginning to write, to write differently, we must reread differently." It is worth noting that *today* not all new writings, literary or theoretical, confine themselves to the traditional book and this piece in particular is already being written for a so-called 'online' journal. One could still print out pages and construct a codex with which to read this, but one could just as easily read non-linearly with the help of the basic scrolling function of 'today's' internet 'browsers.' As well I should note the short, the aphoristic form of these poems, as sympathetic with such a resistance to the linear book of poems, the *short form* as a raid on the linear model as the long "*epic model*" (Ibid., 87).

[15] Eve Kofosky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 16.

[16] See Most especially Book X of Plato's *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, rev. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992).

inadvertently "bridged the gap between poetry and philosophy" because it "set poets the task of writing philosophically."[17] That is, poets, finding their discourse denied the seriousness of philosophy (the ability, colloquially, *to matter*) were, contrary to Plato's will, making sure that they took on this very task—and this is not to say that before Plato what was philosophy was not, by appearances, in meter and thus 'poetry' as in Parmenides, or Heracleitus;[18] or, that after Plato the same did not happen, as in Boethius.[19] What I mean to assert here, even if Auerbach's observation is limited in a certain way, is simply a very old capacity of a *poetics* to do the work of philosophy (beyond the sense of simply regularly metered writing). Poets taking this seriously may fear that while such poems labor among friends, they rarely do so for a larger public? For such a circumstance I would suggest that poems be written in the form of a missive like the one below that begins *as far as counting*. Perfect as a practice of philosophy so nourished by aphoristic care for 'the good life,'[20] a missive is abrupt and productive to chain together into a longer work in between other poems of the same or of diverse forms, not unlike the 'lustrum' of Ezra Pound in length and meter. The missive moves along a deictic vector: a tactile index of cosmos, a line of flight from one friend to many other unknown ones.

as far as counting,
these days we only
count what we believe:

a lampshade stained
with the juice

of a peach
at lunchtime,

a chair my father gave you.

This poem appears to be a single sentence reading smoothly but somehow elegaically over its line-breaks. After the first stanza, the poem consists primarily of a list. As far as the referents that constitute this list (*a lampshade stained* . . . and *a chair my father gave you*) as well as the *you* of the last line—not to mention the *we* of the third line—

[17] Erich Auerbach, *Dante*: *Poet of the Secular World*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001), 5.

[18] See *A Presocratics Reader*: *Selected Fragments and Testimonia*, trans. Richard D. McKirahan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995).

[19] See Anicius Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Victor Watts (London: Penguin, 1966, revised 1999).

[20] Theodore Adorno advocated for the return of philosophy to the 'good life' in his *Minima Moralia*: *Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005); Adorno writes, in his Dedication to Max Horkheimer, "The melancholy science from which I make this offering to my friend relates to a region that from time immemorial was regarded as the true field of philosophy, but which, since the latter's conversion into method, has lapsed into intellectual neglect, sententious whimsy and finally oblivion: the teaching of the good life," 15.

all these must remain vague for the reader, who must invent first the *we* and then the subsequent crib-guide for the rest of what these referents refer to, hopefully putting herself in that *we* as well and inventing an I who is another to be the *you* who received a chair from the father of the poem's speaker, who is not *me*. Or, this *we* can be understood as the public to whom these poems are addressed, and thus as a missive *to* the public which as of yet is *not* but, in receiving a missive, might perhaps *appear*.

as far as counting: this missive is pluri-directional; this poem has antlers which sprout so quickly and bountifully that they are unaccountable. ***what we believe***: perhaps what we believe is counted "these days," but it too is unaccountable. What we believe amounts to the list which follows the colon. ***a lampshade stained***: "Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand? For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light"[21] The stain of the lampshade by juice as the *waste* product of poetry and consuming the (transgressive, edenic) primordial poem enhances the translucency of the shade, the hinge between mediated and unmediated radiance. This antler of the poem grows out and up in radiance. ***a peach / at lunchtime***: as with one of Pound's *lustrum* poems "Coitus," of sex as failed redemption, where "The gilded phalloi of the crocuses are thrusting at the spring air," here too, in this Poundian image "there is naught of dead gods / But a procession of festival."[22] ***a chair***: "My eighteen-inch deep study of you / is like a chair carried out into the garden,/ And back again because the grass is wet,"[23] as far as this chair relates to the *you*. But also, if the *you* is so ontologically separate from the speaker, "In a day or two the chairs will fall to pieces: / Those who were once lovers need the minimum / Of furniture."[24] This one is a three-legged chair, of difficult balance, and a tepee-shaped back. It was made well and painted quietly. The father of the speaker once sat in the chair for a long time while listening to a friend discourse on a garden whose discourse of sleep was so public that the gardeners were referred to as court poets and philosophers.

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There is no hidden knowledge to be gained, by cunning guesswork, in the poems I will write. They are working at something else. Close friends are at no advantage. Yet, too often, it is only among friends that such a poem can circulate. I phoned one of these good friends. She said, "when a black man is running for president we need to keep him from getting shot." In the spirit of this phone call I composed the following hymn which begins *only in romance*: a song that is not about any politician or election, but the radiant circuitries of wonder.

only in romance
is the state glued,
each thread
of fish is added to your hair

[21] Mark 4:21-22 (NRSV)

[22] Ezra Pound, "Coitus" from *Lustra* in *Personae*: *The Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound*, Revised by Lea Baechler and A. Walton Litz (New York: New Directions, 1990), 113.

[23] Medbh McGuckian, "What Does 'Early' Mean?" in *On Ballycastle Beach* (Winston-Salem: Wake Forest University Press, 2003), 12.

[24] Ibid., "Little House, Big House," 33.

just before the last one
dissolves: a fortunate

arrangement for the president.

beatrice will swallow
no more

wrath drives
a little

a deer, a cell-phone,
a marvel.

The poem is punctuated as if it consists of two sentences, but what would be the second sentence seems to break apart, or allow for the possibility that something was not properly transposed from the initial typescript (or perhaps maliciously, carelessly, or for some strange design, omitted from that same typescript), so that one cannot tell how closely to attempt to relate the grammar of each couplet, beginning with the reference to the object of Dante Alighieri's Love and Poetry, *beatrice*.

thread / of fish: the image evokes the great cords of braided animals that will be used to hoist the Washington Monument after the next raid by the Centaurs. Chiron can no longer stop them, and they carry the teeth they lose in battle braided into their hair just like those remaining in the capital will braid themselves amidst any other remaining living mortal animal as a sign of their devotion to romance and fiction over and against that of their adversaries' mythologizing. ***arrangement***: "The hand, fastidious and bold, which selected and placed–it was that which made the difference. In Nature there is not selection."[25] It is, whether the case of a poem or a comment on a poem, or a political ruse about one who was or was not successfully elected president, the selection and arrangement that matters in the effort to dim or wear away any natural presence (see above, quotation from Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158). ***beatrice will swallow no more***: beatrice refuses to swallow not only wrath, as once might surmise, despite punctuation or clear grammatical relation, from the next stanza. She also refuses to swallow *more* itself, as a substantive noun. *More* here of course refers to the very condition of making harder and firmer, making more 'real' each and every thing and thus reinforcing it as proper. See Leo Bersani's argument that "Lessness is the condition of allness."[26] This is Beatrice's secret rebellion even while within her proper sphere and her Aristotelian-Thomist lessons to Dante about 'everything in its right place': that she knows that every other orbit, even if entirely *other*, also secretly mixes with each other–by riding hard through the turn long enough you can wear through the One's foothold needed to keep the gravitational pulls in place. ***wrath***: wrath here is what can consume while remaining consumable, which moves anger into the

[25] Willa Cather, *The Professor's House* (First Published New York: Knopf, 1925, New York: Vintage, 1990), 61.

[26] Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutiot, *Forms of Being*: *Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity* (London: British Film Insititute, 2004), 165.

realm of an impossible by moving it into a just-ness beyond ethics that becomes murderous and can destroy friendship. See Anne Carson's "Book of Isaiah." For example, "Isaiah awoke angry. / Lapping at Isaiah's ears black birdsong no it was anger. / God had filled Isaiah's ears with stingers. / Once God an Isaiah were friends."[27] ***a cell-phone, / a marvel***: like the display of wonder in the intricacies of medieval poetic accounts of courtly carvings of deer, the cell phone might shine brightly in the modern poem. Cell-phones, for good or for ill, whether intentional on any level of their production or not, represent the fruition of the flip-open shaped device for wireless voice communication—often relying literarily on 'space/space-age' technology—which once was the sole province of the "communicator" props in the original *Star Trek* television series. May a hymn to wonder, or a radiant poetic missive, shine as a cell-phone with an alluring curve, glowing in the night.

Apart from these notably specific references, the poem contains no arguments or dilemmas and it is otherwise very clear.

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It has been determined by certain experts that there is a ghost at work in this new work—in the poems or in the commentary? W.H. Auden's poem "Family Ghosts" ends with the lines "and all emotions to expression come, / Recovering the archaic imagery: / This longing for assurance takes the form / Of a hawk's vertical stooping from the sky."[28] In each movement to recover the work to come, to imagine the recovery of it, one who is on the ground might feel a gravitational pull from elsewhere arriving at, or emitting from, the writing body. A text may likewise be haunted.[29] Such moments turn us again to the origin of these poems and when they work as

[27] Anne Carson, "Book of Isaiah" in *Glass, Irony, and God* (New York: New Directions, 1995), 107.

[28] W.H. Auden, "Family Ghosts," in *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Modern Library, 2007), 41.

[29] I am referring here to Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routeledge, 1994), yet (re?)focusing the possibility of a hauntology not only on 'the times' or a particular individual and his relation to a past or a tradition (such as Derrida and the inheritance of 'Marxism'), but additionally as a secular way to talk about the multiple non-human agencies and relations between texts—further obliterating the role of the poet in actually writing the poem—or the responsibility of the single mind (as genius) for a given work—as what *works* in the space that disarticulates the opposition between all oppositions, past/present, literary-history/literary-present, and for this, writer/reader, poem/commentary. What is working here is the work and what is haunted is the work by work. From this point we can begin to try to think about how the work will get us into the world, rather than beginning with assumptions of facile relations between work and world (including that of work and poet or work and reader). For Derrida, the ghosts related to the anachrony of our readings and our inheritances of readings is exactly one path into the world, as "If it—learning to live—remains to be done, it can happen only between life and death. Neither in life nor in death *alone*. What happens between the two, and between all the 'two's' one likes, such as between life and death, can only *maintain itself* with some ghost, can only *talk with or about* some ghost. So it would be necessary to learn spirits. Even and especially if this, the spectral, is *not* . . . to learn to live *with* ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts. To learn to live otherwise, and better. no, not better, but more justly. But *with them*" (xvii-xviii).

either lacking agency in time and space, or as multiple in their agencies. Nevertheless, some attendance to or cultivation of the text might better invite the ghosts to, felicitously, further compromise the agencies of these texts that are already not mine.[30] There must be a work of conjuring, some ritual (and yet one proper to the writing of poems and commentaries and not to religions!) Thus, Auden would later write of Iceland: "Europe is absent: this is an island and should be a refuge, where the affections of its dead can be bought / by those whose dreams accuse them of being spitefully alive."[31] Here the practice of spectral relation would seem to consist of accusations put to those who are dead. This is particularly a notable line, because it appears in this 'final' form perhaps for the first time in Auden's typescript of the poem in preparing his *Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957*, as it will appear in that volume and later in the *Collected Poems* edited by Edward Mendelson.[32] Initially, the line appears in 1937 in *Letters from Iceland* (the book co-written with Louis MacNiece, as "Islands are places apart where Europe is absent. / Are they? The World still is, the present, the lie, / And the narrow bridge over a torrent . . . "[33] Here, the lines seem only concerned debunking the desire to have *place* apart from Europe with the clumsy "Are They?" But, more was at work in these lines on the absence of Europe and condition of Island, as it relates to the production of poems (the poem ends with "again some writer runs howling to his art").[34] Already the tone of the poem more confidently drives Europe from Iceland (perhaps a growing political stance of Auden in desiring to fend off British hegemony from a place he saw in a creatively productive relation to European literature and history—right on the edge) in the 1938 *Collected Poems*: "For Europe is absent. This is an island and therefore / Unreal. And the steadfast affections of its dead may be bought / By those whose dreams accuse them of being spitefully alive."[35] Moreover, this major revision brings into the poem what is truly distinctive about the place apart from Europe: the economy of spectral relations—its market for the affections of the dead. The version of the poem in the 1945 Random House *Collected Poetry of W.H. Auden* thus marks a transition to the 'final' form from the *Collected Shorter Poems* quoted above, as "This is

[30] For Derrida, the relation to the ghost as inheritance "is never a given. It is always a task. It remains before us just as unquestionably as we are heirs of Marxism, even before wanting or refusing to be, and, like all inheritors, we are in mourning. In mourning in particular for what is called Marxism" (*Specters of Marx*, 67).

[31] W. H. Auden, "Journey to Iceland," cited from the typescript of the poem for the *Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957*, New York, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Special MS Collection Auden.

[32] See W.H. Auden, "Journey to Iceland," in *Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 100; and the same poem in *Collected* Poems, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1976, revised 1991, 2007), 150. The current edition has the poem on page 150, and Mendelson's preserves Auden's 'final' revision for the *Collected Shorter Poems* in all revisions.

[33] W.H. Auden and Louis MacNiece, "Journey to Iceland," *Letters from Iceland* (New York: Random House, 1969), 24.

[34] Auden, "Journey to Iceland," *Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957*, 101.

[35] W.H. Auden, "Journey to Iceland," in *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1938), 123. This Revision is preserved in Edward Mendelson's *The English Auden*: *Poems, Essays, and Dramatic Writings 1927-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), 203—perhaps as a record of the poem's original appearance from the 'English period'; and also, to this day, as if the final version of the poem, in Mendelson's *Selected Poems*: *Expanded Edition* (New York: Vintage, 2007) 49.

an Island and therefore / A refuge."[36] What is important about these revisions is the move first to the concern with the economy of spectral relations, and then towards the idea that such relations are proper not so much to unreality, but rather, to the refuge from Europe of the Island or the poem. Finally, Auden tempers the hope of this sense by revising the logical and complete force of the *therefore* to the uncertain modal *should be*, emphasizing that even if the affections of the dead are to be bought, that they are in fact dead, and that the practice of accusing them of being spitefully alive is only possible, perversely, in dreams—thus the unreality from the 1937 version. The revisions suggest the line is not only of great importance to the poem, but that, given the desire it suggests for spectral relations, that the agency at work on this poem is multiple and temporally heterogeneous. Moreover the modal 'should be' is ambiguous enough to allow us to wonder if the Island *should be a refuge* but in fact is not, if it has the capacity to be so and is prevented by something beyond control, or if in fact there is some practice which would allow it to function as it should. Friends arrive to work on a book from various times. We hide nothing from each other. We un-hide each other. We resolve to write a series of warnings. This poem, which begins *all 500 breastplates*, is a riddle caught up in the work of spectral un-hidings.

all 500 breastplates
off-kilter and combat

distillery run amock
no help my netizen,

a passbook of
free greetings

no levers left anymore.

The various fragments appear to consist of at least five different utterances, perhaps from difference speakers. Or, there is no need to construct a narrative or a speaker, and the words are not spoken, but just jumble themselves on the page or the screen. The poem is in four stanzas. Consider this the best way to divide the utterances, or don't.

breastplates: the radiant armor of a minor hope when all of the bloodlines are cut and a language is dulled by an infusion of combat readiness. Such was the trouble of a young Perceval in Chrétien de Troye's poem by the same name, when the young boy mistakes *Chevaliers* for Angels.[37] ***distillery***: see Samuel Beckett on Dante: "His conclusion is that the corruption common to all the dialects makes it impossible to select one rather than another as an adequate literary form, and that he who would write in the vulgar must assemble the purest

[36] W.H. Auden, "Journal to Iceland," in *The Collected Poetry of W.H. Auden* (New York: Random House, 1945), 8.

[37] See *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal,* Ed. Charles Méla, in *Chrétien de Troyes*: *Romans* (Paris: La Pochotèque, 1994), lines 121-169; or, in translation, see *Perceval*: *the Story of the Grail*, in *Chrétien de Troyes*: *Arthurian Romances*, trans. D. D. R. Owen (London: Everyman, 1993), lines 111-185.

elements from each dialect and construct a synthetic language that would at least possess more than a circumscribed local interest."[38] But is a distillation necessary to get to the message of a missive as the solution to the riddle? Or, if it is "distillery run amock," then is the problem of distillation one which cannot help eliminate the need for breastplates? Such distillery would need to occur in a transparent caldron, of a flame pleasurably bright. The help for the netizen (see next comment) in language must burn just as brightly as the radiant screens plotting drone attacks on Afghanis from Nevada, while where we still find ourselves in terms of purgatorial distillation is that peculiar modern condition which Beckett found in Joyce: "neither prize nor penalty, simply a series of stimulants to enable the kitten to catch its tail. And the partially purgatorial agent? The partially purged."[39] Distillation as purgative in the modern world, as refining and purifying heat, is thus akin to the failed attempts of alchemy. And even there, so often the search for the stone is more important than the transmutation it would produce. ***netizen***: this word is advertised on the back of the dust jacket of the *Merriam-Websters Collegiate Dictionary* 10th Edition, in 1999, along with *netiquette*, *spammer, face time, echinacea, fusion cuisine, feng sui,* and *velociraptor*.[40] Thus the word registers as among a group which, when taken together, collect the bright hive of the internet as the radiantly new along with–among others–a notably ancient reptile so that what is caught in between are the mundane practices of human communication and food as their own luminousities. This is important to the study of the work of this poem if one is to present the proper passbook and take her place among the shinning radiant breastplates of the first stanza. These breastplates are hanging from the sprouting antlers of this poem and most of the others in this work. ***free greetings***: do not mistake greetings for transparent communication. The greeting of this poem is only the entrance into its commentary, which, though 'below' the poem as you now read it, might be just as well taking place into the unhinging between the paratactic syntax of *free greetings* with all its plenitude and the assertion(?) *no levers left anymore* with is announcement of privation. This is the roomy dwelling space for our friendship in this poem–the space in which you or a literary ghost may be invited to take up an abode, such as a speechmaking *Beowulf* beginning to send a missive to his own friend, Hrothgar, in wearing perhaps not a breastplate but a *byrne* (mail-coat) such that it is well-displayed as a smith's work.[41] Such a space, like Beowulf's missive, is in this riddle itself and the room bounded off by its syntactic turns and gaps, radiant as the armor of its speaker, fearful or courageous. ***no levers***: here the lever is not a phallus, nor is it to be related to the phallic elevator lever about which the elevator operator has to complain in *The Great Gatsby* to Mr. McKee to "keep your hands off the lever"–to which McKee replies, "I didn't know I was touching it."[42] We lament, with the rise of the digital, the loss of the mechanical in our dwelling spaces, and would attempt to re-insert the mechanical into the secret of a poem's radiance so as to not lose its memory. Without a lever to pull, how can we unlock the mechanics of any riddle? Even if a digital inscription on the passbook of free greetings implores you *say what I am called.*

§

[38] Samuel Beckett, "Dante . . . Bruno . . . Vico . . . Joyce," in *Samuel Beckett*: *The Grove Centenary Edition Vol. 4*: *Poems, Short Fiction, Critcism* (New York: Grove Press, 2006), 507.

[39] Ibid., 510.

[40] *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed., (Springfield, Mass: Merriam-Webster, 1999).

[41] See *Beowulf* in *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburgh,* Ed. Fr. Klaeber 3rd ed. (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1950), lines 405-406.

[42] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Collier, 1992), 42.

These systems of sublimating the riddles and absurd elements of linguistic happenings into the intricate flowers of textual kissing–the dreaming up of the vain *eidos* to enrich the texture of *cosmos*–these things are strange reversals of what our masters taught us in the Occitane masterpieces. So we poets now should guard no new style. The short-lived colony of some poets should run itself into a whirring hive of production, a burning festal collective. Being so festal, we would refute all confessions and embrace riddles as the vector for our missives. Here is another riddle, beginning *output is.*

output is
they elect

a terrorist
the antlered

wall won't hold
any more foetuses

holy or otherwise.

There are three couplets, and a final line, forming a single sentence–though one enforcing a strange punctuation.

output: the term is not used with reference to the operations of a computer, though the word is certainly taken from there. More as the mechanization of the movements of Walt Whitman's grass, as "the beautiful uncut hair of graves."[43] I saw a strange beard with great output. It moved in time with the foot of the line Emily Dickinson breathed when dying. Say what I am called. ***they elect***: the idea of a *they* electing must either refer to a republic, democratic, or semi-democratic body (perhaps of a state), or, alternately, as an insistence on a heterodox revision of John Calvin's immutably sovereign God who elects the saved and damned as a plurality and thus a *they*. Of course, the Christian doctrine of the trinity has always had to attempt to disambiguate its orthodox stance of three in one and one in three from a polytheism.[44] ***a terrorist***: to solve the riddle, one must

[43] Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" in *Leave of Grass*: *The First (1855) Edition*, Ed. Malcom Cowley (New York: Viking, 1959), line 101.

[44] See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*: *A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 1 The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971). Even more than the apologetic disambiguation of orthodox from gnostic dotrine, Pelikan refers to the dogma of the Trinity as "The climax of the doctrinal development of the early church" (172). Thus the Arian practice of "baptizing in the name not only of the Father, but also of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"–which would eventually become orthodox (Pelikan indeed suggests that the Arians, in the long term, made a significant contribution for the good to Christian doctrine, despite their heretical status, cf. 200)–attracted accusations of polytheism that may confuse students now because it was part of a process of strange disambiguation: "It was an acknowledgement of this relation between what was believed, taught, and confessed when the opponents of Ariaism, from Athanasius

ask perhaps not only why *they* would elect a terrorist, but as well, to what position? If there is to be a festal collective of poets, would such a hive of riddles allow for the possibility of an 'election?' ***the antlered***: a plea, really—for this and other poems indeed to sprout such multiplying outgrowths. That the 'wall' might be what is antlered presents little trouble to this, beyond the mistake of imagining a set of mounted hunting trophies. What is meant are poems. ***wall won't hold***: because it is either already the wall of an old crypt or the wall attempting to hold off invading death. Such is the possibility of a wall of fetuses which may even be hanging by the poems, unless all of this takes place either a) impossibly within a womb or other incubator, or b) as an image suggesting the entry of death into the governing position of the economy of 'life' already from before birth. This returns us again to the problem of *wearing out* or dimming to get back into the world, and all such activities bring along:

> The flower dies down
> and rots away .
> But there is a hole
> in the bottom of the bag.
> It is the imagination
> which cannot be fathomed.
> It is through this hole we escape.[45]

The solution to the riddle is *cryptology*, or *biopolitical mystery religions.*

§

The poem beginning *you will understand* is—oddly enough—at once a missive to both T. S. Eliot and Walter Benjamin.

> you will understand
> *ashes* when the firewall
> slips your skin

---

and Hilary through Marcellus of Ancyra and Boethius, accused it of being polytheistic despite its rigid monotheism; for by worshipping as divine one whom they refused to call divine, they would 'certainly be going on to more god' and would 'lead into a plurality' of divine beings" (199-100). Pelikan's claim is that by continuing to use the name of Christ as divine even when the Arian's theologically questioned his divinity was to set one's self up for a slippery slope of objects of worship, and that thus the Arians understood the Trinitarian debate better than anyone else in making their contribution: "As the official doctrine of the church proceeded to settle the question of the relation of Christ to God by means of the formula 'homoousios,' it was Arianism that helped, through its demand for precision, to rescue that formula from the heretical, Gnostic incubus that afflicted it" (200). Especially in the language of Baptism there was an anxiety about reflecting that "to be Christian meant to be set free from worship of creatures and to be baptized into the one Godhead of the Trinity, 'not into a polytheistic plurality'" (217).

[45] William Carlos Williams, *Patterson* (New York: New Directions, 1992), 210.

like lobsters &
gin unlinks

did you learn
to remember is

an acrylic growth
in the chapel

i don't have claws

The missive begins explaining the manner of an understanding's projection onto a *there* of meaning proper to certain Beings and then shifts at *did you learn* to a chain of words both asking of and explaining to the receivers of the missive the ontology of *to remember*, which, with *an acrylic growth*, begins to be explained.

you will understand /* ashes *when: that is, you will *begin* to understand at some point which will arrive in the future. Here, what one is to understand, is the secret to the riddle of this and every missive. And yet, if this is the case, if the understanding must begin then it must be that you already understand, or perhaps that you cannot begin to understand. To return to the discussion of beginning, recall Derrida's assertion that "Everything begins by referring back [*par le renvoi*], that is to say, does not begin; and once this breaking open or this partition divides, from the very start, every *renvoi*, there is not a single *renvoi* but from then on, always, a multiplicity of *renvois*, so many different traces referring back to other traces, and to traces of others."[46] Thus the comparison of a certain motion in this poem to the manner in which lobsters and gin *unlink* should unlink for you (as Dante might say *untie the knot*) the path the un-original unlinking of the missive as a riddle. ***did you learn / to remember***: the question without the punctuation of the question mark asks whether or not it is in fact a question, especially since subordinated to the copula *is*. To ask about a learning 'to remember' in this way is to ask about the impossibility of beginning to unlock the riddle of the missive, which you must, at the same time, have always already begun to unlock. Here, unlike the learning proper to the Platonic soul,

Memory is a kind
of accomplishment
a sort of renewal
even
an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new
places
inhabited by hordes
heretofore unrealized.[47]

[46] Jacques Derrida, "On Representation," trans. Peter and Mary Ann Caws in *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context,* ed. Gayle L Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 136.

[47] William Carlos Williams, *Patterson*, 78.

The riddle, though language on a page or a screen, glows in your hands like the radiance of ***an acrylic growth***: this growth is without question the sprouting of unnatural antlers which will scratch at and wear down the veils in the windows of the chapel so as to let more light into the poem to the extent that it can capture that light (like a black hole) and hold within its missive-nature an unseen radiance as a riddle. ***i don't have claws***: the assertion might additionally be read as an admission that the poem gives itself over to the growth of multiple unnatural antlers as and from its (un)original space of division between the time of its beginning and its assertions of what you will do (remember, etc.) again, even if you have not already begun. Alternately, the poem might be attempting to ask an overwhelming question, swelling, with its non-claw outward growths, or flashes in an empty chapel–a small creature trying to speak over the voice of the thunder and being told to "make up yr. mind you Tiresias if yo know damn well or else you dont."[48]

§

some hagiography is
glued & additive. beatrice
was forged.

an eyelid dips
a fish into a pool. this is the real
part. belief has substance
when heated. an elect lends
a helping hand.

families link
this or the next &
a synthetic bone is
placed gently into
each child's hairshirt

to remind us, watch the video
with only the greatest
of care.

This poem is a missive, divided into four sections.

glued and additive: such a hagiography would be in the mode of *bricolage*, from parts of the saint's life and parts of what is available at a given time as holy. Yet, such *bricolage*, however attractive to the contemporary

[48] Ezra Pound, comment in pen on the typescript of "The Waste Land" by T.S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*: *A Facsimile and Transcript of the Orignal Drafts Including The Annotations of Ezra Pound*, Ed. Valerie Eliot (San Diego: Harcourt, 1971), 47.

poet, theorist, or historian, would maintain the boundaries of the edges of each moment or part. There would be no flash of brilliance, no anachronistic simultaneity as with the forging of the next line. However, a certain distinction must be made here, between the sort of flash of heat and radiance proper to the purgatory of the abysmal painful threshold (alchemical transformation or the transformation of metal at the hands of the more conventional blacksmith as purgatorial 'refining by fire') as spiritual purgatorial process and the flash of a worldly radiance that while remaining finite, can disarticulate certain temporal or semantic (holy vs. profane) distinctions in the life of the saint as an alluring moment of poetic luminosity. Thus we must look not–however alluringly it rolls off the tongue–to Eliot's

> The dove descending breaks the air
> With flame of incandescent terror
> Of which the tongues declare
> The one discharge from sin and error
> The only hope, or else despair
> Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre–
> To be redeemed from fire by fire[49]

nor can we look to Yeats's "O sages standing in God's holy fire/ As in the gold mosaic of a wall,/ Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,/ And be the singing-masters of my soul."[50] Instead here is the trouble of how to think the exhilaration of the fire and the intensity of its radiance without either the need for purgation or redemption in the first place, or redemption as the result–and to think the exhilaration without the terror–the radiant allure without the flame. Yeats's Magi, "In their stiff, painted clothes, the pale unsatisfied ones," these perhaps, with "all their eyes still fixed, hoping to find once more,/ being by calvary's turbulence unsatisfied, / The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor," offer an alternative.[51] Though Whitman's "I sing the body electric" is easier.[52] ***an eyelid dips / a fish into a pool. this is the real / part***: This idea of dipping into the real should be considered in relation to Pier Paola Pasolini's *Heretical Empiricism*–and in terms of a debate with Jean-Luc Godard about realism, cinema, and revolution.[53] Pasolini postulated that *"reality is, in the final analysis, nothing*

[49] T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," in *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (New York: Harcourt, 1968), 207.

[50] W.B. Yeats, 'Sailing to Byzantium," from *The Tower*, in *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), 191.

[51] Yeats, "The Magi," from *Responsibilities*, in *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, 124.

[52] Walt Whitman, "I Sing the Body Electric," in *Leaves of Grass*: *The First (1855) Edition* Ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: Viking, 1969), 116-123.)

[53] Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988). As will be hinted, Pasolini found that the world was already audio-visual technique, in the form of action–thus, "*Human action in reality*, in other words, as first and foremost language of mankind" (198)–and that film only needed to take it up into itself. For Godard, one might generalize that the world was constructed by our filming ourselves–the concern would have been more for history than the world and language [Godard for instance suggests in an interview that a 'political film' occurs when a worker takes an instamatic movie camera on vacation with him (in an interview on the *Tout Va Bien* Criterion DVD)]. Thus Pasolini points out "how much such a philosophy, produced by a semiological description, would have in common with phenomenology: with Husserl's method,

more than cinema in nature"[54] and that as one result "the graph of the grammatical modes of film language could be a *vertical line*: a line, that is, that *fishes* in the Significando, continuously takes it upon itself, incorporating it in itself through its immanence in the mechanical audiovisual reproduction."[55] Perhaps it is time for a poem to be a film. But additionally, such a *fishing* would imply contact that is fluid. So no real here would be distinct from the unreal, but would freely and unnaturally mix. What if Beatice is so happy because in the moment she is forged, she dips into the real? ***an elect***: does an antler elect to grow or is it instead *elected*? And who would be the elector? Us, me, you? ***this or the next***: meaning, either this poem or the next the dwelling of the commentary, while in discontinuous units, will sprout some metamorphosing antler to enable travel; but this will be unintelligible to the families because, very simply, of the strangeness of feeling and knowing a pluridirectional plurality of agencies, or, alternately a secret agency, as in:

> The back-swell now smooth in the rudder-chains,
> Black snout of a porpoise
> where Lycabs had been,
> Fish scales on the oarsman.
> And I worship.
> I have seen what I have seen.
> When they brought the boy I said:
> 'he has a god in him,
> though I do not know which god.'[56]

synthetic bone: how is the bright bone grown? How does it spout from the living? Is this a question of the relic produced in advance of death, of the circulation of one's own body for the holiness of others? This is the reverse operation from Eliot's shirt of flame, or alternately, ***a child's harishirt***: the hairshirt being threaded with disappearing fish in the poem *only in romance*. To continue with the problems of purgatorial processes above, recall the devasting "Who then devised the torment? Love. / Love is the unfamiliar Name / Behind the hands that wove / The intolerable shirt of flame / Which human power cannot remove. / We only live, only suspire / by either fire or fire."[57] ***watch the video***: a viewing of bright carefulness possible only in a commentarial space of dream and reality mixing in language to wear language out and into the world. This video must be watched because it is a film/dream/poem transcript, having nothing to do with childhood or a screen memory (though I would not exclude all of semiotic analysis–I leave this up to you if you ever make

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perhaps following Sartre's existential approach" (199). It would seem to me that the desire if both approaches has to do with the intersection of language and historicity with the concept of reality in cinema, but that Godard would insist no human action as audiovisual technique could be naturally taken into the *Significando* so naturally as by dipping in a fishing line, would be necessarily contingent and arbitrary, and interesting only to the extent it was historical. I am attracted to both approaches, and would like to believe they can be demonstrated to be working at the same thing, but fear this is not the case.

[54] Ibid., 198.

[55] Ibid., 206.

[56] Ezra Pound, *Canto II,* in *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1996), 9.

[57] Eliot, "Little Gidding," 207.

and see this video!) I dreamed we were kissing: the one reading this and the one writing this, even knowing that "l'agencement de ces textes est un autre" [the agency of these texts is an other].[58] More and more that dream is work. I would have shared a poem about this dream with a colleague in the hopes of provoking the same dream, but we forgot to wear the bright clothing, so there would be no kissing. We forgot to pack the list and the manuals when we flew to the conference in the hopes of getting interrogated. We couldn't even get exiled. It becomes so difficult if everyone's already been touched. ***the greatest / of care***: such care is necessary because of the sensitive nature of any coded information in a missive which aims at a vector of importance in the world. The tradition of poetry written in a code, or, rather, a dialect or an allegorical system full of specialized forms and complexities among a group of elites or a specific intellectual circle, came perhaps to its fullest fruition in the work of the troubadours. Auerbach, whose writings so consistently register as a chronicle of the human in literature, teaches of the troubadours: "Here again we have allegory; but the riddles are not interpreted, and perhaps they do not even contain any intelligible general idea that can be interpreted for all. In a defensive, esoteric form, as though behind high walls, they hold the endangered secret of the soul . . . "[59] Let missives be sent regularly to certain friends who have been co-conspirators in the drafting of riddles to confound not our readers but ourselves, in the hope that both us and the work will open to our readers whatever might shelter that which carries the excitement of the secret in its movement, but without the mistrust proper to the secret itself.

2

> *This sonnet was answered by many, who offered a variety of interpretations; among those who answered was the one I call my best friend, who responded with a sonnet beginning*: Think that you beheld all worth. *This exchange of sonnets marked the beginning of our friendship. The true meaning of the dream I described was not perceived by anyone then, but now it is completely clear even to the least sophisticated.*–Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova,* III[60]

§

Someday, one of my dear friends will ask me if writing or reading a poem is anything like friendship. I think I will want to say yes. But I fear that, by then, I will only have wit enough to offer a warning. Occupying, as they so often do, the foothold between dream and reality, like a friend, a poem exerts a gravitational pull on any given set of relations within a World, and allows a new potential beginning to arise in front of where a reader finds herself thrown, altering in turn all the relations within the totality of that World. Is the space of this set of alterations within some 'real' world, or the world of the poem's commentary? How can the commentary wear down the poem while the poem wears down the commentary? I constructed a reader for myself, imagining myself having a dream-vision of my dear friend who will ask me the above question, and wrote the missive that begins *remember your*.

[58] Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, 9.
[59] Erich Auerbach, *Dante*: *Poet of the Secular World,* 22-23.
[60] Dante, *Vita Nuova*, 592.

remember your
abruptness,

it sings out
help, anecdote

of belief,
a sleep-offering.

I am still awaiting a reply to this missive. Perhaps one of my good friends will reply, or perhaps some reader that I have not yet met will reply. This poem is in three couplets. The poem begins with an exhortation to the reader to remember a certain quality of herself, and proceeds to explain what that quality does.

remember your / abruptness: "write carelessly so that nothing that is not green will survive."[61] This is an important practice when considering the future of a poem in a friendship, especially if the poem is a particularly riddling missive. ***anecdote***: one needing help. An anecdote, inherently narrative, might need help for this reason alone, thus the difficulty of writing about friends in poems. Thus the *sleep-offering* (see final note) becomes important as well as the form of the riddle itself, to confound the troubling ways of narrative. And still, this particular anecdote as an anecdote *of belief* renders it perhaps even more troubling (as a question of religion?), and leads us to wonder if the anecdote concerns a belief in the yet uncertain or unarrived (perhaps thus pertaining to the future, to the secret and the very substance of the riddle), and thus perhaps must function as an anecdote in a riddling manner, one which accommodates not the narrative tendency of anecdotes, but rather that spectral capacity of the future's (or the past's) secrets. So, if a missive is to reference an anecdote of belief that might in fact constitute a *sleep-offering* (again, see below), it should heed the reminder to

Look at
what passes for the new.
You will not find it there but in
despised poems.
It is difficult
to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack
of what is found there.[62]

sleep-offering: "I never loved you more / Than when I let you sleep another hour, / As if you intended to make such a gate of time / your home. Speechless as night animals, / The breeze and I breakfasted / With the pure

[61] William Carlos Williams, *Patterson*, 129.

[62] William Carlos Williams, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower, Book I," in *The William Carlos Williams Reader*, Ed. M.L. Rosenthal (New York: New Directions, 1965), 73-74.

desire of speech."[63] Additionally, and as long as this missive insists on speaking in riddles (do we accuse all those who speak in riddles as speaking as the Christ himself?), "Sleep for you is a trick / of the front, a light green room in a French house." So finally, one must offer for sleep a cover, a blanket (here, you will see, of snow), to cover what is hidden just as a riddle too dissimulates–so if sleep is itself a riddle, and an offering of sleep a double riddle, one also needs paradoxically to first produce the riddle for its secret sleep to arise: "Sky of blue water, blue-water sky, / I sleep with the dubious kiss / of my sky-blue portfolio. / Under or over the wind, / In soft and independent clothes, / I begin each dawn-coloured picture / Deep in your snow."

§

I should like to invent a new form which would function like a well-set trap: the mode of Romance, but *miniaturized*. We might take *Romance* as poetry written in *romanz* as opposed to Latin, and coming to be known as poetry of a certain perfection in long poems with opaque characters of unknowable motivations and narratives which turn and break off by some unknowable generative device. And yet, this literary epithet also found a more recent application in the work of American fiction writers, as that which offers a convincing confounding of mimetic reading strategies.[64] How, when I write these poems, I will wish to cathect at least two moments of literary theory and composition not my own! When I succeed at writing a poem theorizing historiographies pertaining to Dante Alighieri and Snorri Sturluson, I will so name poems *miniature romances*. This poem, beginning, *bring your flute*, was written in the hope of provoking such a miniaturized Romance. I should say it owes a debt to Nathaniel Hawthorne's novels, which teach a most difficult and excellent poetics of disarticulating mimetic reading.

bring your flute, young
& come to me st.
edmund your head
between my

wolf teeth

space in the unclasped
head gear helps only so

flight attendant
forgot tribute

safe between my teeth
speaking but write it down and

[63] This and all other quotations in this note on *sleep-offering* from Medbh McGuckian, "Minus 18 Street," in *On Ballycastle Beech*, 19.

[64] See Jonathan Arac, "Reading the Letter" (Review), *Diacritics* 9:2 (1979): 42-52. "Hawthorne's special virtue for criticism is that he frustrates mimetic reading" (42).

write it down and don't

is this a translation
or a warning?

This poem is longer than some of the others in this new work.

bring your flute: the flute here is the flute of a sylvan creature designed to intoxicate or call away with the strains of a music that, being metrical and poetic, exemplifies a certain deadly art of technique and unnaturalness. In Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*, the Tuscan Donatello who goes amongst a group of English-speaking expatriates, "is not supernatural, but just on the verge of nature, and yet within it. What is the nameless charm of this idea . . . ?"[65] Such is the nature of the call as a call, calling into nearness, drawing or alluring near with a music that, being so unnatural, convinces us deceitfully that there is such a thing as *physis* and draws us towards what we think is a source but will prove nothing other than a gap and an always already unnatural technique (the space of the flute through which the wind blows is not the flute's presence of course but its absence, just as the meter of the poem is determined by spacing that marks the limit of breath and non-presence).[66] Further then, the call to *bring your flute* is actually a call to begin calling, to begin the technique of bringing near, always necessarily by some economy of allure (which is or must be a sort of deceit, or no?)—a call to begin the work of Romances. And, this holds true equally, I should think, for Romance as medieval genre (discussed briefly above), romance as Hawthorne deploys it in an act of (knowing or unknowing) medievalism, and even poems today which might thwart mimetic reading because they, rather than represent to the reader, seek to directly effect the reader and reality as such. Thus, I do not think that Hawthorne's narrator is correct in claiming, in the preface to *The Marble Faun* (which defends Italy as a setting for 'his' book in the third person), that: "Italy, as the site of his Romance, was chiefly valuable to him as affording a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon, as they are, and must needs be, in America. No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a Romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery . . . It will be very long, I trust, before romance-writers may find congenial and easily handled themes either in the annals of our stalwart Republic, or in any characteristic and probable events of our individual lives. Romance and poetry, like ivy, lichens, and wall-

[65] Nathaniel Hawthone, *The Marble Faun or the Romance of Monte Beni*, The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne Vol. IV (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971), 13.

[66] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, "*Spacing* (notice that this word speaks the articulation of space and time, the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space) is always the unpercieved, the nonpresent, and the nonconscious . . . Arche-writing as spacing cannot occur *as such* within the phenomenological experience of a *presence*. It marks the *dead time* within the presence of the living present, within the general form of all presence. The dead time is at work" (68); "What writing itself, in its nonphonetic moment, betrays, is life. It menaces at once the breath, the spirit, and history as the spirit's relationship with itself. It is their end, their finitude, their paralysis. Cutting breath short, sterilizing or immobilizing spiritual creation in the repetition of the letter, in the commentary or the *exegesis*, confined in a narrow space, reserved for a minority, it is the principle of death and of difference in the becoming of being" (25).

flowers, need Ruin to make them grow."[67] At the risk of an imbalance I would then keep on with this note, because it would seem that rather that Romance *requiring* ruin, it is rather perhaps an alluring *practice of ruin.* Hawthorne's comment, after all, can only be tongue in cheek on the heels of his success of having applied the epithet of *Romance* to both *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables* as particularly *American* stories which relied perhaps more on the poetics of the text to *produce* New England as *always already* an alluring if dangerous ruin than having found it so in the first place (Hawthorne is thus subtly congratulating himself for doing the impossible, knowing full well that he has been asking us to bring our flutes all along). Romance here thus sings a contagious practice of ruin-izing reality, of rendering reality quite *improbable* rather than assuming with realism that novels should first assume reality as probable and set out to the task of reliably representing it. See the discussion above of the dimming of the foothold between dream and reality. The call to bring your flute is then equally an attempt to realize the theoretically and politically anarchic latencies within that strain of 18th-century writing traditionally forsaken by the left for the representation of social relations in Balzac et al., as well as an attempt to produce a non-escapist poetics of Romance as temporally durable genre–while at the same time, connecting a modern poetics more intimately with the Middle Ages. More on this in relation to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* below. ***st. edmund***: St. Edmund was killed by Vikings on 20 November, 869. According to hagiography on the subject, after the killing, his body proceeded to produce miracles and signs of sanctity, before and after burial. I number among the most striking yet still conventional elements of the hagiography that a wolf protects Edmund's severed dead head from all the other beasts while the head calls out to be found. My own source is the Old English version, from Aelfric, who identifies his source as a Latin text, by Abbo of Fleury. Thus, from English through Latin and back to English, and now in Modern English, an English King's dead head, from whatever impossibility moves it to speech, calls, just like a romance, to *bring your flute* and attend on it, calling "Here, here, here." The severed head (see also below on *the unclasped/ head*) thus also forms the figure not of the miracle in a hagiography, but of a more multi-temporal poetics of Romance, calling us to attend to the making dim of, or the ruin-izing of, or the dimming of (the difference between dream and) reality–but only because cradled by the jaws and paws of the reader, alone or in a pack, as with the reference to ***wolf teeth***: *A wolf attacks, a wolf travels in packs*. Yet this is the lone single wolf of the reader who now must tend to the romance tucked within this historiography.[68] The wolf teeth that hold the head of St. Edmund can thus only be you, dear reader, since the original wolf is long gone. You must be, in reading this poem, a friend to the head of the dead saint, a friend to the technique of allure which calls you to bring your flute and join the festal collective cited above in part 1. ***space in the unclasped / head***: this could of course refer to the unclasped head of St. Edmund, and the strange space inside which animated the mouth and voice without a body, proving that the head still functions just as it did before the beheading, except now as recognized as a head and not just an appendage. Now is it not the saint who speaks, but the saint's head. Yet the unclasping of a head, and its miraculous continuation of speech should not be considered a trope of hagiography so much as of

[67] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, 3.

[68] For this thinking about the link between Old English Haigiography and later vernacular Romance in England, I owe a debt to recent thought and speculation in the line of literary history by Haruko Momma, who reads the conventions of Old English hagiography as not so much as an old style 'source' as the trope of English romance itself–as its genealogical prehistory–with its own thinking of wondrous deeds, sexual conducts, and relations to an Other World (here, of course, heaven). Momma's work relies on a revision of Bakhtin's thought on romance. From private correspondence and unpublished work.

Romance (and here I reference the above note on Hawthorne, and would gesture towards linking the medievalism of Hawthorne's genre anachronistically as part of if not prior to the medieval genre itself, finding romance a category available through a deeper sense of literary-historical time—not in a particular narrative convention but a poetic-philosophical effect on reality itself). Because my notes here speak so much of Romance, whether or not it is in the poem at all, the commentary produces this point of the poem as possibly also alluding to (at least in the similarity of images if not explicitly) the head of Bertilak as the Green Knight in the medieval romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, written in alliterative Middle English verse. Compared to the Old English King Edmund and its language, the poem is of a much later Middle Ages, and thus depends on producing England as the ruin of an Old Arthurian splendor just as Hawthorne would produce certain of his settings as ruins as a condition of operation of the genre. Thus, in the splendid but decadent Arthurian court, Gawain, for the King, cuts off the head of an intruder at New Years who is entirely green, the head of which subsequently demands that Gawain find him at the same time the next year to receive his own blow in return before being picked up by the body which rides off: "For the hede in his honde he haldez up even, / Toward the derrest on the dece he dressez the face, / And his lyfte up the yye-lyddez and loked ful brode, / And meled thus much with his muthe, as ye may now here: / 'Loke, Gawan, thou be graythe to go as thou hettez, / And layete as lelly til thou me, lude, fynde.'"[69] Thus, the poet uses, like Hawthorne, a certain anachronism (of England's ruined Arthurian—though here Christian—past) to cite a speaking beheaded head held up not as an escape from a present into a fairy land, but to produce England now as a fairy land (since the alliterative meter of the poem produces a certain allure to the language, making it an object of desire for the present itself not as escapism but as transformative in its poetic pull, a linguistically ornamented jewel) and to produce reality as the space in the unclasped head of the Green Knight, to steal it back, call it back, from the clutches of reality as the metaphysical ordering of the proper (everything in its place where nothing mixes or is fluid, the closed circle)[70] where the world is outside the head and the head must rest on the body to seal off what is clasped inside of it. Reality inside the space of the unclasped head calls us to go find it: this is the work of commentary on Romance and Romance as a commentary. ***write it down and / write it down and don't***: each imperative verb is a sprouting antler of the poem's desire to rend reality as improbable, to render dim what keeps the proper in its place. Thus there are here multiple kinds of writing which are all equally literary

[69] *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Ed. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon, 2nd Ed. Edited by Norman Davis (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), lines 444-449. I have altered the orthography of the Tolkien-Gordon-Davis edition to modern conventions for the sake of a hopefully diverse readership.

[70] On this subject, see Luce Irigaray's *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* trans. Mary Beth Mader (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997). Irigaray sees the production of space and the circle as requiring the assimilation of the female one (in which there is air, fluid movement and mixing, no distinctions of the *proper* which belong to the metaphysics of the male one) as a way of producing the limits and boundaries of thought and language, to ensure that man can think *as* the returning of everything to the same. The assimilation of the female one produces the space between things to make them distinct and proper to themselves and their places. Irigary of course sees this process as undesirable. I should note the affinity between Irigray's distaste for the proper and return to the Same with Kierkegaard's preference of the radical risk of repetition to 'recollection' as returning to the Same, and its more contemporary treatment by John D. Caputo in *Radical Hermeneutics*: *Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). This entire work owes a debt to Irigaray's book as a pervasive undercurrent, but in such a way as to evade direct citation.

writing. The impulse here is the same as that of Jonathan Arac, writing in search of a new literary history in the late nineteen-eighties with the notion that for this search to succeed, both history-writing and criticism must admit the extent to which they function as literary writing (thus, 'theory' forms a genre with its own conventions just like 'poetry' or 'short fiction'), for Derrida or Matthew Arnold have been read and can be read as literature (as in, like Hawthorne), only "literary writing that begins from previous literary writing."[71] This can be seen to put criticism in a supplementary relation to literature, or we can take such a possibility as a way of understanding the shared ground of literary and critical writing. Such is the romance of commentary.

§

Occasionally poems by me or one of my colleagues appear like a single sorrowing animal; exposed, a little confident, but left alone and never found, layered under so many other vibrations and seductions, hidden in their format of weblog or little online literary journal. Such labor has its own economies of fame, which do not necessarily threaten gifts of friendship, but strangely, unlike the difficult and always hegemonic exchanges of other economic systems, allows its own investment patterns to be deconstructed to make way for such a gift. I am still trying to invent the secrets of this text so that they might be taken as a gift to the kiss of a reader's understanding. There is nothing to guess, there are only more guesses to make. The poems that begin *your news-ticker*, and *your haircut is like*, both missives, are, neither of them, enigmas.

your news-ticker
finger, unravels

points out
the antlers,

odor of sanctity,

don't wash his clothes,

key in the final codes
for inscription.

For fear that antlers will spring up in books let this not be part of a book—a form already sufficiently sharp and multi-pronged.

your news-ticker / finger, unravels: This is the death of barriers in air, "Or as if a writ sputtered white noise in a blackout and slammed wiring / into a sink to sink a sink in a blackout bitter white: the text that was one the

[71] Jonathan Arac, *Critical Genealogies*: *Historical Situations for Postmodern Literary Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 7.

writ / might have been vapor."[72] ***antlers***: here the antlers, sprouting forth from the poems, are pointed out by the agency which is of the poems themselves—the one of the unraveling deictic manicule above. Thus, the new work of the poems must also consist of their commentary, cannot indeed begin until their commentary begins to work—to point back to them or ahead to them while expending itself and its secrets at the same time of its exhaustion of the poems, and exposure of itself as the secret of the poem's ***odor of sanctity***: not the scent of the saint at death but the radiant jewel of the poem which, shinning, proclaims the joyous disarticulation of the two in the same moment that its shine disarticulates the possibility of marking off what is proper to the gleaming of the jewel and the polishing of its commentary. The nimbus of the poem's burning mixes with any in proximity, also concerning the proper as such. That it is the fragrance of a poem as a jewel is demonstrated in the following account by the poet H. D.: "'What is the jewel colour?' / greenwhite, opalescent, / with under-lyer of changing blue, / with rose-vein; a white agate / with a pule uncooled that beats yet, / faint blue-violet; / it lives, it breathes, / it gives off—fragrance? / I do not know what it gives, / a vibration that we can not name / for there is no name for it; my patron said, 'name it'; / I said, I can not name it, / there is no name; / he said, / 'invent it.'"[73] We must ask, is the patron here a friend? and will s/he be able to un-code the name, and who will make it known to anyone else? ***the final codes / for inscription***: that is, the etching of the name, or at least a single verse, by the poet, into some rock or plaque so as to commemorate, paradoxically, the moment of the unraveling of a barrier. There must be some means by which to convey the missive to a friend and await the friend's response. Must I receive this response for it to 'count,' and how could such responses be accounted for? How could the code of such an inscription ever be *final*? And, would it not have to unravel itself along with the deictic finger that opened the poem? Antlers, which are poems, sprout. Fingers, which are codes, unravel. This is why atomic weapons have codes, and one pushes 'the button' with a finger. Antlers sprout up in romance of the commentary radiating, not in the code of a so-called poem inscribing itself as the frozen hagiography. A hagiography must point at the correct thing, must endlessly refine itself as holy and assure the holiness of that to which it points, must never wash the clothes. In criticizing a particular strand of poststructuralist critique that ran into a dead-end, Jonathan Arac (who otherwise prizes this tradition) points out how certain of the Yale school became "less modest, no longer so historical, but even more rigorous" as a way of legitimizing their work, fearing any concession against rigour that would be perceived as a romantic flight of 'unmanly' weakness. But Arac rightly points out as well that the very term *rigor* (by which, here, the pointing finger in the romance of a commentary must unravel itself as it shares in the poem's radiance (to which it is of course always already a part of, as a Derridean supplement) must not fear pointing to the wrong thing, must not be so concerned with being correct or incorrect and fall into the fears of the hagiography) "in Latin means 'numbness, stiffness,' and its OED senses include 'harshness', 'hardness of heart', 'puritanic severity', as well as 'propriety' and 'severe exactitude'."[74] For Arac this is simply too bad, since criticism has an inherent capacity to be much more expansive than a literally dead exercise in being correct about the text as an exercise. Rather, according to the romantic poet Shelley, "For poetry itself proves secondary and thus crosses over to the side of life: it is an 'expression of the imagination' [qtd. from Shelley]. The defense of poetry,

[72] Marjorie Welish, "Clans, Moieties, and Other," *Word Group*: *Poems* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2004), 63.

[73] H. D., *Tribute to the Angels* no. 13, in *H.D.*: *Collected Poems, 1912-1944* (New York: New Directions, 1986), 554-555.

[74] Jonathan Arac, *Critical Genealogies*, 104.

therefore, necessitates praise of the secondary."[75] So Arac would recognize the need to retain the fragments of the Arnoldian impulse which would maintain an expansive sense of criticism against the kind of criticism which Arac [With Said and Gerald Graff] saw in 1987 as having "lost its social bearing in pursuit of endless refinement."[76] One would have to oppose criticism—expansive in its commentary on poetry, unafraid to unravel into the world—to the endless refinement of "scholarship."[77] The comment must not worry too much about getting its final codes right if it is going to participate in the poem, if it is going to always already be the radiance that is the romance of the poem—the sprouting antler sprouting more in the shape of an infinity of codes. To merely point at the right thing at the right time is to hold it dumbly holy and render the text as hagiography and not as romance. Here, with this gem fertile for antler-growth, the inscription is the poem and the radiant jewel in which it is inscribed was its commentary from the start.

> your haircut is like
> a story i hear election night
>
> before beatrice's ¼ revolution.
> musn't have any
> at all if to win.
> & for belief
>
> only if without
> to know

It can be important for poems like these, attempting to confound the mechanism of narrative, to also confound the mechanism of knowing. To this end, in addition to the hint in the last stanza, *only if without / to know*, this poem also *seems* to break down syntactically, but only after a rather clear simile, and reference to a way of referring artfully to the passing of time used often by Dante in accordance with his cosmology.

your haircut is like / a story: alternately, "her Hitler hairdo / is making me feel ill."[78] Such is the simile of a fashion element to a narrative, a static bit of humanly sculpted material to all the inhumanity of the narrative, the inevitable arc and its politics. It will break in clumps and gaps and only a particular sort of randomness of the commentator intoxicated by his own radiance can break up the clumps, burst the arc, ruffle the hair or the feathers and strip off that moustache. The trouble is the status of the simile as part of the missive. To whom? If to the reader as a friend, such an indictment might not seem so friendly. ***musn't have any / at all if to win***: *any* here operated as a substantive, the dangerous pluridirectional space-time of a nothing as a positively defined *thing*. This is the logic of the romance or the poem set against that of the narrative, and indeed the logic of the friendship and the space of the friendship that would open in a commentary. Not in a plenitude of the words themselves, but in the more than ample opportunities for gaps between the comment and the poem. This is, of

[75] Ibid., 103.
[76] Ibid., 122.
[77] Ibid., 82.
[78] Radiohead, "Karma Police," on *OK Computer* (Capitol Records, 1997).

course, that same spot of the foothold between dream and reality, poem and commentary, friend and friend, the space the poem and the commentary must wear out by wearing out their own secrets, expending until only their *any* is left. ***to win***: the English word comes from its earlier English and Germanic source of *win* for *struggle* and the verbal form of *winnan* (infinitive) for *to struggle, to fight.*[79] Winning in its modern sense only emerges as the end result or culmination of a struggle, and thus was indicated verbally by the common (intensifier) prefix *ge-* in *ge-winnan.* Thus the struggle inherent to having an *any* is revealed simply by the possibility of its leading to a situation in which one might *win.* Of what would this struggle consist? Since the poem's reference to time is that of the orbit of the spheres as blessed souls, as Dante's *Commedia* would have it—and specifically a reference to *before* a particular span of time so-measured elapses—perhaps it is the struggle of turning within the bounds of time at all, and actually, the very ease of this. The struggle is in the ease and repose of circling around according to one's proper place, in accordance with how much one is moved by the holy gravitons of the cosmos. The struggle is then the limit of time set on its missive itself: how long the missive has to reach its receiver, as well as the limited currency of its secret idiom. ***only***: as in, the diction of street-signs; trucks only, caravans only, convoys only. No envoys. The missive, from Latin *mitteo, mitere* (to send), is sent, but from whom and to whom, and along what lines? A single sorrowing animal sniffs out its track, leaves little or no trace, and follows—not the secret scent like insects—but the open paths of ease, even in the hastiest of moments. Belief demanded without the inflected infinitive *to know* is an anti-gnostic demand for any poem, a desire that a missive or a riddle have nothing to do with knowledge and yet maintain themselves as missives and riddles.

§

I hope, eventually, to avoid entirely the construction of a narrative around, before, or behind my poems. The commentary will grow up, an apparatus around them, well before the poems themselves are written, spreading like a system always equidistant from every point in the writing, but shaped nothing like a sphere or a circle [much like the expansion of the cosmos/universe]; accompanied by and producing theories connecting writing to everything. Tomorrow I *will have written* the poem beginning *a secret most marvelous*, a riddle.

a secret most marvelous:
candidate reports

teeth and claws
most humane mode

of being drawn towards
un-rest. & as for

counting the faces

[79] See Bosworth and Toller, *A Dictionary of Old English*, s.vv. *winnan* and *gewinnan.* In Old English, in its most pedestrian senses, the word only means to labor, toil, work, or fight (it is used as a verb for combat) (Bosworth-Toller *A Dictionary of Old English*, s.v. *winnan*); in Old High German the word meant 'to suffer, to struggle', see Joseph Wright, *Grammar of the Gothic Language* (1910), s.v. *winnan.*

of the screened . . .

The poem is in four stanzas, with a good deal of enjambment. There are two sentences, the second of which does not complete its course before an ellipsis. The first sentence is an announcement of a most marvelous secret, and the second consists of a digression.

secret: "What is the interpreter to make of secrecy considered as a property of all narrative, provided it is suitably attended to?"[80] What are we to make of secrecy or the secret as something which *is* not but rather is generated. What indeed if secrecy appears not in narrative, but in a radiance which resists narrativization? Or, rather, is there any hope for such resistance? For, "there has to be trickery."[81] Frank Kermode may speak of the "radiant obscurity of narratives,"[82] but is there not some hope not only in the seeking of the "divined glimmer" that one *perceives* as 'behind' the fabric of the text, but rather in the manufacturing of a secret which radiates as it undoes itself as a secret? Then, even if "Hot for secrets, our only conversation may be with guardians who know less and see less than we can, and our sole hope and pleasure is in the perception of a momentary radiance, before the door of disappointment is finally shut on us,"[83] and even if that the momentary radiance is a fiction anyway—none of this threatens the optimism of the riddle. ***most marvelous***: the marvelous here radiates as the expenditure of its secret, not as the intentional concealment thereof so as to effect a flight from the world. The marvel of the riddle is to pull one into the text in such a way that the text wears a hole in itself and one winds up back in the world *because* of following a marvelous radiance. And the marvel? There was nothing there to begin with. ***teeth and claws/ most humane mode***: perhaps an addendum to Frye's *modes* as an (Aristotelian) category of literature. The teeth and claws of the riddle that bites back, of the claws scuttling at the bottom of silent seas which occasionally beat out a rhythm that churns into a maelstrom without intending any such thing. These are the teeth and claws of the 'creatures' of high modernism with a certain "image-breaking enterprise,"[84] associated with a lineage of certain of Eliot's poems, Samuel Beckett, Dostoevsky, Kafka, the late Pound and the late H. D., and even certain of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets and others usually seen as so serious and abysmal, as provoking primordial anxieties. But, equally, these teeth and claws are for pleasure and delight. And such a modernist poetics, in tune with the radiantly medieval texture of the work by the poet and theorist Dante (whose quotations provide epigraphs for this new work), also, and first, could be re-understood as turning to expose the human to a more intense and radiant pleasure: scratching nether-regions and biting exquisitely—clawing away at the image not just to pull back and expose an abyss, but also to kindle the ruin of the image into a burning radiance. ***drawn towards / un-rest***: "Our time calls for an existence-Art, one which, by refusing to resolve discords into the satisfying concordances of a *telos*, constitutes an assault against an *art*-ificialized Nature in behalf of the recovery of its primordial terrors. The most immediate task, therefore, in which the contemporary writer must engage himself—it is, to borrow a

[80] Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*: *On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 144.

[81] Ibid., 145.

[82] Ibid., 47.

[83] Ibid., 144.

[84] William V. Spanos, "The Detective and the Boundary," in *Early Postmodernism*: *Foundational Essays*, ed. Paul A. Bové (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 39.

phrase ungratefully from Yeats, the most difficult task not impossible–is that of undermining the detective-like expectation of the positivistic mind, of unhoming Western man, by evoking rather than purging pity and terror–anxiety . . . to drive him out of the fictitious well-made world, not to be gathered into the 'artifice of eternity,' but to be exposed to the existential real of history, where Nothing is certain."[85] Such is the riddle for which the only solution is its own burning-up. The addition of *pleasure* and radiance to this formulation of William Spanos is perhaps necessary after the years in the interim between when this work appeared as a beginning of the moment which would assess and praise a disruptive modernism following the rationale that "The Western structure of consciousness is bent, however inadvertently, on unleashing chaos in the name of the order of a well-made world"[86] (suggesting that the cost of a resolving well made anything is simply too high). Because, crudely put, a well-made thing and things done in the name of the well-made, the resolved, the solvable, comfort the western positivistic mind, Spanos calls for the anxiety-evoking.[87] The riddle is, the wonder would be, to take pleasure in and make pleasurable the production and experience of an art that un-homes the human with ease–that infinitely frustrates the detective without losing a certain radiance. The trouble with being entirely 'post'-abysmal is that the "*Urgrund*, the primordial not-at-home" is "where dread, as Kierkegaard and Heidegger and Sartre and Tillich tell us, becomes not just the agency of despair but also and simultaneously of hope, that is, of freedom and infinite possibility."[88] And the problem of being purely negative and abysmal: the pleasure of falling, the ability of some to experience the riddle whose answer is at once everything and yet does not exist as a radiance all its own. ***the faces of the screened***: me, us, you, we, them, she, he, us, you, me, we. Totally unaccountable, various answers to the riddle. Various subjects on which any *candidate* as solution to the riddle *reports*.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid., 38.

[87] For Spanos, in the moment of his work on this essay, the modern mind produces certain expectations and "these expectations demand the kind of fiction and drama that achieves its absolute fulfillment in the utterly formularized clockwork certainties of plot in the innumerable detective drama series–*Perry Mason, The FBI, Hawaii 5-0, Mannix, Mission Impossible,* etc.–which use up, or rather, 'kill,' prime television time [that these shows are dated at the drafting of this essay is not a problem–the situation has changed little beyond expanding the 'stakes' and the terms of the detective show from Cold War conflicts to that of 'global terror' in shows like *24, The Fringe, CSI, and The Wire*, while perhaps adding a new element of biopolitics in shows where the solution is medical but no less detective-style detectable in *House* or *Bones*–the point is that there is a resurgence of shows where there are resolved detectable answers, rendered unsecret by positivistic science and technology, for the sake of a well-made capitalist state]. Ultimately they also demand the kind of social and political organization that finds its fulfillment in the imposed certainties of the well-made world of the totalitarian state, where investigation or inquisition on behalf of the achievement of a total, that is, preordained or teleologically determined structure–'a final solution'–is the defining activity. It is therefore no accident that the paradigmatic archetype of the postmodern literary imagination is the anti-detective story . . . the formal purpose of which is to evoke the impulse to 'detect' and/or psychoanalyze in order to violently frustrate it by refusing the solve the crime . . . I am referring, for example, to works like Kafka's *The Trial*, T.S. Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes* . . . Beckett's *Watt* and *Molloy* . . . Robbe-Grillet's *The Erasers* . . . " (25).

[88] Ibid., 27.

§

Paths to the radiant abyss: Tomaž Šalamun almost ends one of his poems with the simple line "My hands shine."[89] Another such jewel arises from a poem which, being very brief, is easily quoted in full: "A book of photographs: / A tale of the perfect lover. / Learn from the eye of others. / God is my reader."[90] Thus the poet makes friends with readers of his poems. I would offer this next poem, beginning *but if i offer you*, a missive, in the spirit of such work which would allow a re-thinking of the ground of connection and time:

> but if i offer you
> any
> make for the little seam
>
> & it's true,
> if only because
> a flag of your blood
> on your palm
>
> says,
> i heed you
>
> famously, beatrice,
>
> with a feather, on
> the hunt.

any: *any* is a queer creature of two-syllables and the substantizing again of *any* is commensurate with a certain evasion of description proper to the transfer of energy that the missive must entail, and the particular efficiency of this two-syllable word, bright as a small flag of blood itself and pluridirectional in its potential travel down the lip of the poet. As something *offerable*, the energy of two tiny syllables is potentially immense, for "It would do no harm, as an act of correction to both prose and verse as now written, if both rime and mater, and, in the quantity of words, both sense and sound, were less in the forefront of the mind than the syllable, if the syllable, that fine creature, were more allowed to lead the harmony on. With this warning, to those who would try: to step back here to this place of the elements of and minims of language, is to engage speech where it is least careless—and least logical."[91] For Charles Olson, the syllable is the product of the incest of the brother mind and sister ear.[92] *any, any, any;* brother or sister; breath listening *any* as offered; the thing itself issues from ***the***

[89] Tomaž Šalamun, "a ballad for metka krašovec," in *A Ballad for Metka Krašovec*, trans. Michael Biggins (Prague: Twisted Spoon Press, 2001), 65.

[90] Ibid., 66.

[91] Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," in *Postmodern American Poetry*: *a Norton Anthology*, ed. Paul Hoover (New York: Norton, 1994), 615.

[92] Ibid.

little seam: as the very tiniest beginnings of the abyss–the seam or split in the fabric–perhaps here even still stitched together so close, so there it is. The little seam a little leverage here for the horns growing in the breast of the human, ready to take on the cosmos as unmixing with h/er/is *proper* person, as confined into the correct syntactic slot and the slip where those creatures–yes, even creatures consigned to hell in Dante's *Commedia*–appear and verify urgency of the missive: "How uncertain when I said unwind the winding, Chiron, / Cross of Two Orders! Grammarian! from your side the never / healing! / Undo the bindings of immutable syntax! / The eyes that are horns of the moon feast on the leaves of trampled sentences."[93] ***& it's true***: "The process of definition is the intent of the poem" and yet "A poetry denies its end in any *descriptive* act."[94] As a result, "One breaks the line of aesthetics, or that outcrop of a general division of knowledge. A sense of the KINETIC impels recognition of force. Force is, and therefore stays."[95] So the poem appears a place, or place appears as a *practice* of poetics, a tekné ("to build out of sound/ the wall of a city")[96] and marks itself in its force with ***a flag of your blood***: "It's that when I see you / I bleed a little, / into the teacup and into the wren's nest."[97] This is what you might say when the energy of the syllable bursts up through the tiniest seam, when a tiny bit of a medieval poem bursts into your own present through the cracks in the surface of the syntax. It is thus as this flag-blood that famously, Beatrice can speak as her own missive or signal within the poem such that the speaker might heed her famously. ***beatrice***: as for Dante, a warning as if a storm warning indicator flag, poking up through the seam through the centuries. A little flag of a syllable beats out its queer warning. Olson teaches:

> I say the syllable, king, and that it is spontaneous, this way: the ear, the ear which has collected, which has listened, the ear, which is so close to the mind that it is the mind's, that it has the mind's speed . . .
>
> it is close, another way: the mind is brother to this sister and it, because it is so close, is the drying force, the incest, the sharpener . . .
>
> it is from the union of the mind and the ear that the syllable is born.[98]

Thus, *be-a-tri-ce,* four syllables, compacted by the mind and pushed out from the heart into the breath of the projecting line, at just the right moment, from the past, makes for the queer warning to any Dante of the 21st century, flagging down the ear with the single syllable *blood*, and then the single syllable *heed*. The mind, getting medieval, becoming syllabic, hearing its own incest with the past to crack the surface of a syntax and allow the *effects* of the line to arise, wherein "the descriptive functions generally have to be watched, every second . . . because of their easiness, and thus their drain on the energy which composition by field allows into the poem. *Any* [and there is that word again] slackness takes off attention, that crucial thing, from the job in hand, from

[93] Robert Duncan, "The Structure of Rime VIII," in *The Opening of the Field* (New York: New Directions, 1960), 70.

[94] Robert Creeley, "To Define," in *A Quick Graph*, ed. Donald Allen (San Francisco: Four Seasons, 1970), 23.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Charles Olson, *Maximus Poems*, qtd. in *Causal Mythology* [Transcript of a Lecture] (San Francisco: Four Seasons, 1969), 3

[97] Thomas Kane, "Suppose What Is Left Behind," *McSweeney's* 22, Book 3 *The Poetry chains of Cominic Luxford*, 48.

[98] Olson, "Projective Verse," 615.

the *push* of the line under hand at the moment."[99] ***On / the hunt***: beatrice is on the hunt after the boar, like Bertilak in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Beatrice here is unlike Bertilak's lady, who hunts the knight Gawain. The push of Beatrice's line follows with the energy of Bertilak's dog's, pushing up enough air for breath that in her wake (for, consider the syllables at play in such a line as this: "The howndez that it herde hastid thider swythe" [the hounds that heard it hurried there forcefully])[100] that here, now, we might, we, alternately, in the space of the commentary on her bright and forceful flag, "much speche" here "expoun/ of druyes greme and grace."[101]

§

The moment of transition from one temporality to the next in poems, whether between the medieval and the modern, or one moment to the next. How does a poem move between two moments, two syllables? On what grounds? Such a dilemma can be likened to a certain dilemma common to the thought of the so-called Pre-Socratic philosophers. To simplify the problem a little bit too much: *is everything the same or is everything different?* Similarly*, is change possible? How can we tell where things, be they 'objects' or 'phenomena,' begin or end?* An epigram is attributed to Heraclitus consists of simply "changing, it rests,"[102] while Parmenides claimed that "For if it came into being, it is not, nor if it is ever going to be."[103] The Pluralists, such as Anaxagoras and Empedocles on the other hand, took a different tact, suggesting that "The Greeks are wrong to accept coming to be and perishing, for no thing comes to be, nor does it perish, but they are mixed together from things that are and they are separated apart."[104] These dilemmas illustrate a problem taken up again by Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time*, who suggests giving into the circular structure of interpretation, following the claim that "Interpretation is not the acknowledgement of what has been understood, but rather the development of possibilities projected in understanding."[105] For interpretation of a thing to happen there must already be an understanding projected onto that thing. For Heidegger, "In interpretation understanding does not become something different, but rather itself."[106] All of this can be understood in part as a problem of the sameness and difference of All, or, alternately, a problem of starting and stopping. For two modernists, from differing temporal ends of a radical literary modernism (Gertrude Stein and Samuel Beckett) the beginning and ending of moments of consciousness presented itself as a question. Both writers write the texture of what such questions feel like. Stein puts these sentences near the end of her *Three Lives,* about a main character's fatal pregnancy: "When the baby was come out at last, it was like its mother lifeless. While it was coming, Lena had grown very pale and sicker. When it was all over Lena had died, too, and nobody knew just how it had happened to her."[107] Such is

[99] Ibid., 616.
[100] *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* line 1424.
[101] Ibid., lines 1506-1507.
[102] *A Presocratics Reader*, 37.
[103] Ibid., 47.
[104] Ibid., 58.
[105] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 139.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives* (New York: Vintage, 1936), 279.

the riddle of how to move from one moment to the next, from one syllable to the next, held within the field of a poem that is open and would remain so even when crowded by commentary, as if it could open further by being surrounded, extend what syllables it holds in its sway far beyond where it begins and ends as a 'poem' because of its tiny economy and the strength of each syllable–a poem which would admit its commentary even unto its own The riddle which begins *few friends left,* in its sorrowful thinking of the problem of where moments in space-time start and stop, would want exactly this.

few friends left
to stray past

the silt beds.
but the shield

was justified
if only to allegorize

and shelter out
peaceful inclinations.

few friends left: as Robert Duncan introduced his friend Charles Olson as a Lecture of Olson's: "There were–now that Williams is dead, and H. D. dead, there *are* five poets left that I study. I know I must study them because at every turn I am back at those texts in order to get at the information I need, to find something that is not a matter of literature but of my own inner reality of life. These five were very clearly, three I feel superiors, for I find in their mastery of the craft and their depth of thought and feeling challenge beyond my own craft and depths: Ezra Pound, Louis Zukofky, Charles Olson; and then two I feel are peers and companions, for in their craft and their depth they have increased my share: Robert Creeley and Denise Levertov."[108] And how to move a poem between them? "As Aristotle is the exemplary structuralist, the great critic of the moment is Longinus on the sublime. Against structural unity, we have noted that the sublime is a 'flash of lightening' that 'scatters all before it.' Longinus' discontinuous theory of influence–as the agonistic relation between two literary consciousnesses across a wide span of time, like that of Plato to Homer–offers the nearest precedent to Harold Bloom's 'revisionary' theory of poetry."[109] The sublimity of a feathery poem. The possibility that all with a single feather have many, of discontinuous strips velcro-ing to each other and that in a moment of feathery bliss, one can leap from one to another, held within the same field of sublimity. So, friends can also be taken as syllables. ***silt***: fertile death, held in the sway of a river, a discontinuous sludge made up, upon close inspection, of discontinuous moments of matter. Each particle falls in its bed and ready to sprout new poems, filtering in to fill up the gaps between the tiny poems and the shoreline of commentary. Silt is small but still it punctuates! Careful near the river, it is easy to cut your feet! But get the adjectives out of it anyway! ***the shield / was justified***: "Encounter *is* separation. Such a proposition, which contradicts 'logic,' breaks the unity of being–which resides in the fragile link of the 'is'–by welcoming the other and difference into the

[108] Robert Duncan, qtd. in Charles Olson, *Causal Mythology*, 1.
[109] Jonathan Arac, *Critical Genealogies*, 172.

source of meaning."[110] The justification of a shield as the principle of separation is a principle of shelter as much as a principle of filtration, and thus, in a reverse sense, purgation. The same problems as above in terms of how to effect a connection between two moments of poësis, or between two beings in time. If encounter separates, can the inverse operate as well–separation fostering encounters?–in which case, the question of the impossibility of removing the syllable from the hold of the line once it has been uttered will perhaps arise. ***if only***: and yet no antler will sprout alone and not sprout further again from itself, stretching into the heavens from this edge of the poem's commentary. What work would *only* do *if only* only was alone. But *only*, unlike *any* is left here without form or substance, only the sap and not the wood. ***allegorize***: essential work of bucking the divisions of mimesis. Where does the allegorical figure begin and the actual figure end? The virtuous allegory will dim this distinction, not in the fantastic flights of an escapist book, but in a work it sets to work on the very realities of the reader. For, "The word 'dream' is technical and means nothing / so we can use it whenever we want."[111] So I have left nothing to vagueness, and made all plain so that the reader will be given to allegorize. ***shelter out***: the poem insists on this even with few friends left. The riddle of what is implied by these 'few friends' comes to better light when held together within the concept of 'sheltering out,' as exposure to the sorrow of the poem whose riddle begins to work only when the riddle can exhaust itself as riddle, can be a riddle and make its solution both impossible and superfluous–not by sheltering, concealing, its solution, but by exposing it, wearing it out for all to see, an invitation for friends, for commentary. ***inclinations***: here, like phenomena: mine, ours, yours, his, hers, mine yours ours; "All phenomena are [ultimately] selfless, empty, and free from conceptual elaboration. / In their dynamic they resemble an illusion, mirage, dream, or reflected image, / A celestial city, and echo, a reflection of the moon in water, a bubble, an optical illusion, or an intangible emanation. / You should know that all things of cyclical existence and nirvana / Accord [in nature] with these ten similes of illusory phenomena."[112]

The opening sentences of Samuel Beckett's novel *Molloy*–"I am in my mother's room. It's I who live here now. I don't know how I got there"[113]–serve as introduction to the riddle beginning *few lamps left*.

few lamps left
and seams

left to blame.
without a courier

[110] Jacques Derrida, "Edmund Jabès and the Question of the Book," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 74.

[111] Michael Palmer, "View from an Apartment" from *First Figure* in *Codes Appearing*: *poems 1979-1988* (New York: New Directions, 1988), 154.

[112] "Natural Liberation of Nature of Mind: The Four-Session Yoga of the Preliminary Practice," in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead First Complete Translation [English Title]*: *The Great Liberation by Hearing in the Intermediate States [Tibettan Title]*, trans. Gyurme Dorje (New York: Penguin, 2005), 9.

[113] Samuel Beckett, *Molloy,* in *Samuel Beckett*: *The Grove Centenary Edition*, ed. Paul Auster (New York: Grove, 2006), 3.

no visions until
so resolve to keep quiet.

the squint
of your hair

explains this
particular arrangement

of bones.

The poem is in six stanzas. The person to whom the statement about *the squint of your hair* is addressed, is unknown. Perhaps she or he does not yet exist. The third stanza is quite important, and in fact this entire work could have ended with the line *so resolve to keep quiet.* Other poets end new labors on a resolution to cease until a more suitable form or more refined skill has been obtained with respect to their topic. But, when the work of this poem has begun I will immediately write another comment in the hopes of generating another poem that will itself begin seeking a more suitable form for itself.

few lamps left: the fewer the lamps the more radiant the poem and so only hope for the future forms of the riddle. Thus, in a poem, Michael Palmer writes: "Truth to tell the inventor of the code weeps and lays the text aside. Here and there calendars and walls remind him that it's night, a sleeping lion is curled up in one corner, a voice can be heard behind a door, and Plato told us of the law, Plato warned us about the poem. The dead mayor wonders if the king of France is bald," and that "Plato warned us of the shadows of the poem, of the words cast against the wall, and Plato warns against the song. / The tree's green explains what a name means apart from memory, flickers of light in the darkened room, our eyes fixed on the screen on the figures of nothing. / The inventor of the code hears each note and swallows his tongue, frightened by shadows. The lion red as a lobster is green sleeps in one corner dreaming of the hours' numbers and names, a river flowing at his feet. 'Shuffle Montgomery' was the song."[114] Here is the reader, in the dark, few friends and few lamps, who has already written this riddle by the time the riddle is read, has already re-written it in beginning the work of commentary on it. Here is the riddler who will keep quiet and invent the newer codes for riddles. ***without a courier***: you, me, them, us, we. Taken by glowing owls last night, specially directed hearing and a line of green missives chained one to the other to link mountain and syntax and knit them into the shoreline of the riddle. With friends, the riddle will maneuver the missive and the code will appear held by the in-suck of silence between each breath. I would explain further, but the instructions were not explicit. We dry them like silt which cakes into dust and opens the seams of the earth, the portal to the world. With the owl-feathers bursting from each antler as needles we stitch together the festal parts of beaches to which we call new couriers. ***no visions until / so resolve to keep quiet***: unlike Dante, who claims at the end of his *Vita Nuova*: "After I wrote this sonnet there came to me a miraculous vision in which I saw things that it made me resolve to say no more about this blessèd one until I would be capable of writing about her in a nobler way."[115] This new work, as it

[114] Michael Palmer, "Notes for Echo Lake 5," from *Notes for Echo Lake,* in *Codes Appearing,* 27-28.
[115] Dante, "Vita Nuova," in *The Portable Dante*, XLII, p. 649.

draws to one of its material ends, cannot afford to cease at working until a new style is developed or a better vision is to be had. If the poem, or the romance, or the lyric, or the necessary missive, is impossible, the new work must work, like a mourning Egil, from the Icelandic Sagas, who makes verses even when all the techniques of verse seem unavailable or impossible: "My tongue is sluggish / for me to move, / my poem's scales / ponderous to raise. / The god's prize / is beyond my grasp, / tough to drag out / from my mind's haunts. / Since heavy sobbing / is the cause– / how hard to pour forth from the mind's root the prize that Frigg's progeny found / borne of old / from the world of giants."[116] Egil, whose verses may or may not have been entirely fictionally attributed to a living person other than the writer of his prose Saga (attributed to the medieval Icelandic historial, prose-writer, poet, and theorist of poetics Snorri Sturluson), thus sprouts multiple antlers of missives with which these missives would entangle themselves at least partially (for Egil's violence is another story): "My stock / stands on the brink, / pounded as plane-trees / on the forest's rim, / no man is glad / who carries the bones / of his dead kinsman / out of the bed. / Yet I will first recount my father's death / and mother's loss, / carry from my word-shrine / the timber that I build / my poem from, / leafed with language."[117] The figure of Egil and Snorri perhaps provides an alternative–with his short riddles and missives–to Dante as a literary history–as a beginning–of the work at work in this prosimetrum. And, "we believe that when politics is inescapable, the alternatives of imagination are necessary. In this arena, too, literary history may do some slow good."[118] This would result from an unresolved juxtaposition of Snorri/Egil with the new work's obvious debt to and reliance upon Dante's forms of visionary prosimetrum and visionary philosophical poem that also acts as dimming the boundary between the medieval and the modern. ***this particular arrangement***: a loose skein to cover the knees of the dead, the particular arrangement of which is selected by the hand of a weak and slowing Mercury. As Olson puts it, "what I there call history. And I'm happy to use the word [history] to stand for city."[119]

§

The mechanism of *immoderation,* so important to understand writing and friendship, comes to this work from a pedagogical text on spiritual contemplation from the Middle Ages, *The Cloud of Unknowing*. This text teaches, with respect to the approaches to contemplation outlined in the book (involving entering into a cloud of unknowing, that which is always between the contemplative and God):

> And forthermore, yif thou aske me what discrecion thou shalt have in this werk, than I answere thee and sey: "Ryght none!" For in alle thin other doynges thou shalt have discrecion . . . Bot in this weke shalt thou holde no mesure; for I wolde that thou shuldest never seese of this werk the whiles thou levyst.[120]

[116] *Egil's Saga*, trans. Bernard Scutter, in *The Sagas of Icelanders*: *a Selection* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 152.
[117] Ibid., 153.
[118] Jonathan Arac, "What Good Can Literary History Do?," *American Literary History* 20:2 (2008), 11.
[119] Olson, *Causal Mythology*, 19.
[120] *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. Patrick J. Gallacher (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publication, 1997), 1479-1485.

The structure of immoderation theorized a little by this poem that begins *i made the bed* partakes in the hope of time and action that *holde no mesure*. Even while I do not implore the reader to engage in a spiritual exercise, a reader might nonetheless *holde no mesure* without ignoring the world–while being abandoned or handed over (writing, writer, friendship, and reader) to the World, and all the risk which might arise from the *there* found therein. After I write the poem that begins *i made the bed*, a love-poem, I will or will not rest. I will or will not have any visions that illuminate the poems included in this work. I will or I will not consider God as my reader. I will or I will not include more poems or revisions of poems or comments in this work. If I write a poem about constructing a dream-vision, a friend will be commenting on my poems, she will kiss them and I will wonder if that is anything like *hope*, and she will say *a comment is always already shot through with poetic time.*

i made the bed
with the wolf you left
when you left

milk out
when you

we no longer
believe in rest.

made: yes, there is nothing incorrect about this. ***the wolf you left***: "they are right, the poet mother / carries the wolf in her heart, / wailing at pain yet suckling it like / romulus and remus. this now. / how will I forgive myself / for trying to bear the weight of this / and trying to bear the weight also / of writing the poem / about this?"[121] Nobody's grandmother but your own. It is the dramatics of beginning of the end of a new work left with a hunger, because "The entire momentum of the book resembles the implosion of a giant crater. Because nature and childhood are absent, humanity can be arrived at only via a catastrophic process of self-destruction."[122] Walter Benjamin here speaks of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, but the momentum of the quote would present itself in high density in the tiniest of poems, if this poem would only invite in all the wolves which raised it. ***you left***: and someone blames. ***milk***: one part fern and one part electric bulb. "That it is justifiable to call desire *heart* and reason *soul* is certainly clear to those persons that I wish my procedure to be clear to."[123] ***you***: ". . . so many of you are the one's that I've lived mostly for, and with, and by, myself, and care the most for in the world."[124] ***we***: various riddles apply, *you, me, them, us, we, us, me, you, us, this, we, this*. ***believe***: as in, Robert Creeley's "The Revelation": "I thought that if I were broken enough / I would see the light like at the end of a small tube, but approachable. / I thought chickens laid eggs / for a purpose. / for the reason expected,

[121] Lucille Clifton, "Children," in *Mercy* (Rochester: BOA Editions, 2004), 18.

[122] Walter Benjamin, "Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*," in *Walter Benjamin*: *Selected Writings Vol. 1 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004), 81.

[123] Dante, "Vita Nuova," in *The Portable Dante*, XXXVIII, p. 644

[124] Olson, *Causal Mythology*, 2.

a form occurred more / blatant and impossible / to stop me."[125] Yet, as with ***rest***: "I will go on talking forever."[126] A wolf runs the length of the riddle, twice. At each end is a green bedpost, where the word 'green' is code for 'antler'. Once finished, the wolf carries in her mouth a scroll on which is written the results of the election, though she did not have it when she began and has never left your sight since beginning to run the length of the riddle. Her paws are smoking, her eyes are analog radio dials. No wolf's tongue—not the one which brought the king's last command concerning the poets, nor the one which infiltrates our allegory on a yearly basis—was ever a brighter ruby than this one. As her mouth opens to give you the scroll and then to eat you up, she howls, and her teeth are various letters of the Latin alphabet. They are in the order of a particular message and the wolf is laboring to open her mouth as wide as she can, as if she would turn inside out, as if to give over to you her very teeth, to be rid of the burden of the missive. And yet, for a wolf, this creature is very small. So say what it is called. The wolf will not rest until you can decipher this.

[125] Robert Creeley, "The Revelation," from *The Charm*, in *The Collected Poems of Robert Creeley*: *1945-1975* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2006), 58.

[126] Creeley, "The Door," in *For Love*, in *The Collected Poems of Robert Creeley*, 201.