



Poets In A Box or Pluto In Motion

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REALITY BEACH

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REALITY BEACH #12
Print edition of 100
Digital edition 2020

REALITY BEACH
Albany, NY

REALITYBEACH.ORG

Preface

I went to Phil's room
to get a whisk broom
there was a pile of 13-line poems
two to page, on his desk, they said
to me why don't you introduce us, after all
we're sort of about you; they were alchemical poems
if you will or even if you won't, polished magical stanzas
like gay girls making love to gay guys, all over the house
I mean the room leading to another room, one stanza after
the other and you know what? Some I'd never seen before yet
they were in this house where I thought I knew all the rooms
so I started reading more closely to see what would happen and
using a letter as a hand, each word offered me some money until
I had to begin again and again and I became so rich I had 17 houses,
even more swimming pools and there were forests everywhere with
no deer ticks in them, I went to the meeting of the eagles and
they made me an honorary one, I only had to repeat 13 times over

I'm hungry I'm hungry I'm hungry
I'm hungry

—Bernadette Mayer

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Introduction

Everyone loved to locate Utopia
believed to be somewhere just
north of the devil's workshop

Some of those who contributed to the confusion
were Ron Padgett (not to be confused with Kenneth Koch),
Allen Ginsberg,
Fanny Howe and Barbara Guest

and somewhere in everyone's
family tree is a farmer

They knew they entered the south when
more mules than horses worked the land

They had to have
a pleasing imagination

They had to have a sense of nonsense
before and after any occasion worthy
of a limited edition

They had to give the movement a name
They had to create a title

John Ashbery

Heavy sheets of paper resided in a box
a cover announces a curious collection
numerous poets work for another's need
which surely outweighs their means
however their words prove worthy
of a possible successful recovery
as the colored particles in the sky confirm
like a mythical bird sound climbing high
breaking out of a doctor's induced coma
not sleep, but reconnected circuits interrupted
more time is decided needed, perhaps a plea
heeded, heard, understood
people's appreciation received, recorded

Now many years after the fact
a new stanza is written, fashioned
lines are counted, courted and mixed
each with a different color and tone
like John Ashbery's glorious spring
dream of not going into Hawaii
or asking questions forgotten till
tomorrow when the next wave lands
on the shore yet to be investigated as
pages promise a day pass to visit
other realities diminished later as
we wonder which way is out or enter
whatever is constructed to be seen

Bill Berkson

We walk or roll along the river's edge
next to skyscrapers that may not escape
remote controlled flying objects
We are far from the ocean's moonlight
reflection, as gravity weighs heavier
than usually felt on a silent city sunrise
still far enough away from flooding time
the brain can only take so much high tide
when hypnagogic rarity gathered evidence
evidence of unbelievable language seen
seen like colored fumaroles emitted from
each key stroke of the Smith Corona typewriter
found later to change people's minds

On yellow paper Bill Berkson had his head
above the water and soldiered onward
never a coward to acknowledge genius
and remark on any uphill travails
like climbing over an East Hampton dune
A sun glare delight brushed across
blue billboards announcing
who is the bee's knees and a toast
to many more parlor car pleasures
couldn't be any less exact but
we get the point and enjoy the rhythm
above different weather than night's
weight keeping our life's secrets

Russell Banks

On some pages we find prose
shaped like a house unlike
two rivers that converge like
poetry running down stream
or a path through the woods
or a room with four walls that
we knock down to get outside again
from city sidewalk to country road
from glass park to the Poetry State Forest
from planet earth to the next planet
a dream of not being left behind
not running, but continue walking
steadily toward trails yet to be cut

One poetry lover who writes prose
Russell Banks owns multiple homes
and has walked enough to scar the earth
known to embrace solitude in words
understood urgent drama and answers
a certain call to benefit one who paid rent
who now lives near the historical
marker for the rent strikers in calico
and tin horns, tar and feathered too
above the cold wind that tosses in
the pines, over the mountains
and through the woods as dreams
begin to drift into focus again

Frank Bidart

Memory might be as important as
satisfying hunger or studying words
or hours in the day and all the birds
because once upon a time it was Greek
even on the shortest day of the year
or even when all the notebooks
untold treasures are gleaned like
the apples ready to fall before
black bears, deer and mountain lions
come to collect natural awards
like the biggest poetry prize
being formulated for the overdue
deserving recipient chosen

One winner who might be a voter is
Frank Bidart who remembers
Joe Brainard in a friendly way
not quite an elegy or romance
not quite undecipherable to the
big publishing house of poets
and in the end it is a huge coincidence
in the Dr. Seuss archive
somewhere between achieved and
preserved long after any epidemic
rewrote history for the punished
and the universal collage of kindred
folks expanding poetic history

Michael Gizzi

Now still perhaps unrecognized like invasive
species of trees invaded by invasive species
of bugs seemingly ungodly because they
belong elsewhere out of this element
like rewriting all the great movie music
movie music written originally for elite
audiences accustomed to champagne intermissions
not stuffy confessionals below transepts
never non-christian minded dreamers
always happy to be native in disputed territory
because it is only one more book away
books that fit very comfortable on bench backs
yet a beautiful mind still can escape these confines

Next Mother Mary worshiper enters the picture
twisty thought word rearranger, Michael Gizzi
once of Schenectady and after singing Latin
class rewrote hymns on a whim therefore
clearly got the troubadour devilish tendencies
like adding parakeets and buttered hat outtakes
gone wild while well crafted into the silent night
can't help himself become shellacked
daring to take on any baseball diamond
in any melancholy moment that moves him
or daring to tell all baseball card dealers
in any cauliflower farm field that he stands in
so burn more dreams into pages please

Susan Howe

Unlike Louise Imogen Guiney
did not die from a stroke yet had one
and was saved by doctor's working
for a French Roman saint who helped the poor
always admired Emma Goldman, Gertrude Stein
but never mind because cracked walls and a creepy
elevator that led to one ugly basement laundry
room could have done her in before extra volumes
would spring forth in this wedge of life in what
was the capital of the new art market world
while being smart with the wrong crowd at
the right time made possible by low rent and
the need to finish work, to beat the clock

A different lady not German american but
Irish american, no stranger to education
Susan Howe, found her place alongside
the Charles and elsewhere
Overachieving artistic sisters seem
similar in nature finding no finalities
took a course to impart history in
new techniques later to be labeled
mention wit personified marginalia
mention hypothetical narrative
all or nonintrusive commas out
A game of doubles out of control
The coming together of equals

Allen Ginsberg

Never not ready to speak one's mind
once told a legend to think about
conducting poetry business different
when others would only bow down
another benefit of Catholic abuse
never afraid to question conformists
always part of the poetry mystery
hoped to be part of the solution
writing poesy for a revolution
thought to page so fast it caught fire
till one day the headache was dire
it was thought to be part of the plan
but future thoughts were stronger

Allen Ginsberg was not just meditating
or masturbating, he was orchestrating
Ginsberg didn't want to be like other guys
yet his poem landed in the box
practiced generosity when not being
unkind to students trying to be like him
would not could not and didn't hide
burned the candle from both ends
late life paralysis lip didn't stop him
from being a great candle-waster
from the home of Paterson Falls
to the Rockies and beyond and
maybe too serious like a woman

Kenward Elmslie

Among the other fine New Yorkers who
found a patron willing to promote poets
allowed a cause for free books even though
shop owners protested no place for that
just a simple red cover did the trick
borrowed words, selected thoughts
located what might have been mentioned
at the beginning of this work
and will always be celebrated brilliant
brilliant enough to be translated into French
a collectors item produced for the people
People have the power a fan of yours said
now made too precious for many

Not just any nut from Vermont made the scene
Larger than life and loud Kenward Elmslie
in his underwater spaceship and costumes
Made a colorful entrance on baby blue paper
With billowing thoughts and loco songs
Traveling on constant cumulus, cumulus, cumulus
No stranger to all things Francophile and
Painted poppies in the Zzz-time
A new friendly polite word dippity do dip
enough to make the head skip up beat
Most generosity non-federally founded shine
Never really broke a real crime at parties
for all change the world word benders to find

Barbara Guest

In the archive a treasure of letters written
correspondence alphabetically measured
Request Box: 9 Folder: 6
once requested to teach the art of letter writing
a lost art now replaced with techno speed
still waiting for news to be delivered by mail
brought in a jeep by a handsome man
that all the ladies adore at the post
nothing lost in translation
only more gained through lost languages
only loss of fountain pen usage
replaced by inked ribbons
across too many miles to mention

Finally, Barbara Guest is up
being gleamy
making use of the blank space
between each short line
a luxury if ever there was one
found membership among men
herself no stranger to old pages
observer of the submissive
Italian statue and other
likely abstract thoughts
forget the anthology
forget the body, the coronet
what was it Baudelaire said

Lyn Hejinian

Where did all the old card catalogs go
cash was kept in Shakespeare's sonnets
after moving the collection, it was sold
A new hibernation collaboration was built
ingenuity in book cases rearranged
a new system of piling books began
request for recordings prevailed
consideration of the rights received
between the lines of love is a babe
is all the possibilities personified
presented with exact form-change
almost not as simple as it looks
it only took a non-wasted lifetime

Useless unless the imagination rings
open the door for Lyn Hejinian
created the ability for a conversation
in words to be published without
mention of a language school
collected thoughts like a birder
thoughts adventures mentioned
all sky colors grow in this poem
stepped over the creek in dreams
written effortlessly and open
to translation into Russian
pedantically perhaps not
so what desires does she need

Anne Waldman

Known to have paid tribute to Laura Riding
and motivated a whole new generation
Worked with the crew on Alice's Restaurant
delivering film to the lab
and became a renown photographer
met Frances LeFevre Waldman
and saw her in fantastic dreams
decided to not replace Catholicism
with Buddhism or any religion
celebrated as much hedonism
as money would allow and
With little money mastered motherhood
mastered the desire to write forever

Anne Waldman wrote about not stopping
listing women poets making words, words
reacting reaction one idea into another
never ever wanting to not progress
filling in empty space with verbs
speaking sexy talking points
paying tribute to the female voice
the rise and the fall, the big struggle
not giving up never giving up
recalling what was once contemporary
now knowing how seeing was changed
not to be confused with exact change
for the love of colorful scarves

Ann Lauterbach

Oddly left out of the outlaw anthology
Bernadette who met the catholic workers
the Berrigan brothers and others
made it into the disability anthology
made it into almost all anthologies
led the cry against landlord abuse
turned abuse into enlightened verse
invented the field guide to the alphabet
invented the poetry state forest
invented the writing at 4:15 a.m.
and turned white wine into red
turned boring into laughter
turned the old new again and again

Mentioned as first appearing in a portfolio
Ann Lauterbach wrote an invocation
a poetic power presence proper
out of silence came forth actions
beyond raspberry batches
bringing it home to grow
planting a seed to incipient cures
following a beginning from an end
watching constellations grow time
time bringing forth a metamorphosis
a metamorphosis out of darkness
an acquisitiveness denied
embracing calmness possible

Ron Padgett

While on the humbler path
due to the lack of Spanish moss
you were unable to ship
the underwater glass models
making up for seasons lost
many branches fell in the dooryard
while collecting bird feathers
rocks were assembled
typewritten pages were created
various rendezvous were completed
various intercontinental sites visited
all the while with walking stick
tra, la, la, la, la, la, la

How to be perfect Ron Padgett
put forth the bluebird of happiness
modest wisdom imparted
like the milkman who delivered
took notice of the obvious
turned his head toward greatness
watched the Paterson Falls
spoke to artistically inclined
never declined simple observation
gave good advice in dreams
like a cartoon bluebird in books
who can turn into a poem
tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet

Charles Simic

One of the poor poets
won the Shelley award
no equal pay for equal praise
lined up words
for the benefit of herself
wished everything was free
brilliant example of
life as artwork
consistently transcends
a whole other category
originality on golden rod pages
printed on society card stock
proliferation back to poetry

Charles Simic stood on
the same stage with
her highness
speaking not in his
mother tongue
saw darkness
in the infinite
no Serbian fool
saw the vast universe
uncovered his ears
a whole other category
poverty into poetry
poetry back to the people

Lewis Warsh

You came to the city for all
the wrong reasons remembered
You took the landlord to court
created a no heroin dealer zone
wrote to save the Statue of Liberty
let the kids graffiti their room
turned open arms to newcomers
turned a mimeograph machine on
appeared on public access television
witnessed the ghost of St. Mark's Church
walked from lower Manhattan to Harlem
lived next to glassy park and
won the battle for fair rent

A marriage without proper divorce
Lewis Warsh penned *Disorderly Conduct*
remembered reasons not remembered
read books to know how to behave
asked intelligent questions
acquired a taste for nameless sinners
accomplished more than some friends
observed long shadows on sidewalks
Was it worth it? Was daily life never enough?
accusatory thinking and false modesty
accomplished some dignity required to
walk across the Brooklyn Bridge
into higher education

Fanny Howe

Colors from the sky sang
Without belief others believed
allowed disbelief at painted arrows
one too many saints at the Uffizi
later wandered ancient Spain and
appreciated La Sagrada Familia
can still remember nun's names
and all the abusive people of god
decorated as a Christmas tree
read poems in the homes
near the largest landfill in the world
a favorite at the H & D Harbor series
a favorite at all poetry parties

When others contemplated
privileged Catholic mystic
Fanny Howe lit candles
as the machines kept breathing
she wrote meditation
called The Practice
outdoors to indoors to outdoors
surrounded by nature
pondering time and gray sky
words to live by
the ponds sometime freeze
and then they thaw
and then other things

Robert Creeley

Breathing *Ars Longa, Vita Brevis*
and surely long to be remembered
observed the world and by the world
from small presses to a big small press
from zines to magazines and newspapers
coast to coast marathon readings
briefly mentioned on the big screen
courted by scholars and podcasters
requests for raspberries and oysters
a hero on the shores of Lake Michigan
a hero on the shores of the Frisco Bay
brought workshop history here and there
always moving, always studying

Now remember the minimal poet
word artist, Robert Creeley
thought of the conceptual
thought of the bits sought
out of one eye on the mountain
and driving into the Rockies
burst on the poetry scene
and gained a lifetime achievement
watched the audience watch
became an innovated hero
to expand art's life in poetry
included all the weird news
to end of the line in Marfa, Texas

Michael Palmer

Called an *ironic intelligence*
a master collaborator
collaborated with poet spelunker
documented thoughts with poet art critic
a leader of poetry marathons
best marathon listener
better marathon conversationalist
a conference feature
always a reluctant panelist
innovative list inventor
head in Hawthorne's sentences
poetry lines in the clouds
and down to earth

Vancouver conference created
words shapes poetic minds
altered Michael Palmer's path
found mentors flowing like an anode
played the field like a fiddle
what of Eros and Psyche?
sometimes it takes an ice cube
sometimes it takes what you knew
found in stanzas colored blue
looking for what didn't disappear
and appear with a pocket full
a pocket full of prizes
enough to create a marathon

Tom Raworth

Won *Oulipo* admiration
added the nouns plus seven
counted the sestinas
taught them new tricks
a new synesthete codex
Gertrude Stein propensity
Brooklynese originality
wrote *New England is awful*
inspired and arranged for stage
conversations with your house
performed in New Orleans
not one group contains you
many groups embrace you

Rolling words off the tongue
at speed of light
with multiple passports
Tom Raworth wrote his report
out of breaking air
as imagination danced
without boots on
through habit and vapor
on both sides of the pond
a striking voice
expanded perceptions
across the field
above the improbable

Clark Coolidge

Best beret wearing woman
became speechless enough
paused to question man's behavior
knew enough to know better
surrounded by know-it-all men
weird sister included everything
danced to the Talking Heads
baked pound cakes
made new pathways to words
found a way to make poets listen
broke through nervousness
waited at the entrance
found a spelunker wisdom

With what was thought
and won't hold still
Bebop Clark Coolidge
with twisted language
shifted over intellectual mood
a multiple brain rhyme
cracked questions in half
subsequent thoughts
not unlike one locked in
not quite a monk's cell
but with more movie humor
zoom hum sun burned
name it claim it

Rosmarie Waldrop

Die schöne frau
as wild flower finder
coltsfoot first of spring
trillium stalker too
stopping for mushrooms
falling locust flowers
hit you in the head
daily thought machine
daily dream machine
a wild transcending time
escaped the Chelsea hotel
escaped bourgeois boredom
escaped the Warhol factory

Amazing what collector
what Dada art collector
when Rosmarie Waldrop
enclosed a skinny poem
no prose poetry in sight
for when reason forgives
for when night vibrates
within Latin phrases
and poem without meaning
no Helen of Troy
just new classical times
fills what is needed
till the ship finds port

Geoffrey Young

Often mistaken as native
often thought as political
could have been activist journalist
could have been poet provost
secretly shaping direction
a new direction for feminist
new thought for new change
philosophical shadows long
like a big large-eared owl soars
flying over uncut fields
nowhere and everywhere
all at once folks noticed
always knew who mattered

West Coast lover transplant
jazz loving word bender
took on a Cherokee theme
mentioned invention of alphabet
only takes 3,200 years to grow
brought culture into the Berkshires
a tree grows in Great Barrington
and The Geoffrey Young gallery
larger than a sequoia
a deep root system
scattered across poetic lines
hanging artwork correctly
a seed germinating system

William Corbett

Spark moved movement
motion in middle conceived
photos and Street Works
inspired by a painting
a title from Jasper Johns
only changed one word
only jumped off the page
into city vortex once empty
the expanding birthplace of SoHo
and a new New York generation
only to escape and return
to hold historic benefits
to pervert the next generation

Under Boston conditions
William Corbett held court
under ideal conditions
thinking while dressing
observing sky color
holding daily life space
looked in another world
heavyweight influence
realized optimistic pleasure
created printed matter
helped create benefit
believed in Brooklyn
believed in next generation

James Schuyler

Put a color in every line
each letter a different color
like a Russian entomologist
like the mind of the mnemonist
an early socialist realist model
often mistaken as Native American
created imaginary tribe
worked corresponding sounds
put sex in it and a curse word
mention an unmentionable
demand reason from unreasonable
mention a season and some sea salt
kept on writing and why not

Artist hotel's best breakdown
best at making a list hangout
best at turning a line around
Freely Espousing James Schuyler
showing us how to be open
tighten up and loosen up
humorous introspective nature
take a walk and dissolve
adjusted those chemicals
stood central in his field
just an outstanding individual
just a genesis that ended

Explanatory Note

This work was inspired by a box of broadsides put together as a fundraiser for Bernadette Mayer after she suffered from a cerebral hemorrhage in 1994. The set of 25 original broadsides, each signed by the author with exception of the one by James Schuyler was edited by William Corbett and Michael Gizzi and published by The Figures, Great Barrington, 1995. Called *Writing For Bernadette* and beautifully packaged in a purple box with an illustration mounted on the cover by Joe Brainard called *Pluto In Motion Studies*.

Each poem comprises two 13 line stanzas. The first stanza speaks to Bernadette Mayer's work and life. The second stanza speaks to the individual broadside donated for the benefit of Bernadette's life.

Acknowledgements

Two of these poems, John Ashbery and Bill Berkson, appeared online with **STANZA 251** (January 6, 2017) in English with Italian translation. Big thanks to Mathew Licht who made that happen.

A big thanks to Jamey Jones for including some of these poems in **The Hurricane Review** published by the English & Communications Department for Pensacola State College.

Thanks to Russell Day for taking the time to make suggestions.

Also thanks to Maureen Owen for reading my work and giving feedback.

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