

by MATTHEW LANDIS

Poetry should always be a process which is at its heart a critical endeavor. And the entire field of criticism would do well to inject itself with some of the linguistic and formal experimentation which embodies our most interesting modern and contemporary poetry. Poetry can be a valuable tool for the enrichment of critical theory. After all, "It is no longer a question of putting poetry at the service of the revolution, but rather of putting the revolution at the service of poetry." The best criticism strives to achieve what people assume poetry strives to achieve, to provide insight into our reality and inspire us to create new possibilities.

three letters

I

letters mark not only space, they not only designate linguistic properties of meaning, they designate time, they mark the arcane, they look ahead and point toward unseen futures and discarded hope. they seep to the level of the blue print of meaning, they abide each dip and furrow, they roll over the banks of floodwalls and form reservoirs. they are always in excess. they are the skim that floats along the top of the lake. they are pollutants, the additives and preservatives, enhancing flavor, carcinogenic, letters are infectious (to paraphrase burroughs). they are invisible markers, they are subtle and subliminal, not immediately obvious, but ever present. they are explicit. they draw lines in sand, they are explosives, demolition materials, imploding buildings, the collapse of markets, barricades on the boulevard, letters are gas masks and tear gas, they are occupation committees. they are the comintern. propaganda, a theocracy, letters are a prayer. the most minute formations of meaning, they make words words, they disassemble them and put them back together, recombine them, copulate within them and form double entendres and tethers, they are bonds and they are locks, they are keys, they are hairpins which pick the locks. they are equivalent. one letter equals only another letter. there is a homeostatic sort of relevance and shared meaning between them. a vowel is also a consonant, long and truncated,

harsh and soft, a glottal stop and a tongue rolling on the hard pallet, they are one in the same. they are numbers and equations, they are code, predictions and prophecy, they are prophylactics with spermicidal gel, morning after pills and fertility treatments. a birth and a death. letters are not only announcements and interjections, they are silences, they are beginnings and endings, alpha and omega, the name of god and the fall of man, they are hyperbole. they are true and untrue, all at once and all the same. they are the pupil of the eye, and iris they are the detached retina, they eye socket full of oil, a candle lit within, illuminating the bone behind the veneer of skin, they are gothic and pastoral, morbid and resurrected. they are incomplete and incorrect. a letter is a poem, no, *this* poem, which is a paragraph is a poem which is a word which is a letter.

u

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underneath the skin is bone
underneath the bone is marrow
underneath the marrow are cells
underneath the cells are atoms
underneath the atoms is space
underneath the space is language
underneath the language are lies
underneath the lies are truths
underneath the truths is power
underneath the power is greed
underneath the greed is lust
underneath the lust is longing
underneath the longing is desire
underneath the desire is feeling
underneath the feeling is touch
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y

your salt, a text of teeth, the concrete act

a reminder of
the salted seats of slave ships.
"i have tasted their salt." the weeping

seat. a fever followed.

yes, a setting sun, yes, bright as
"teeth scrubbed white with Spanish

urine." the thickness, but a penny
buried beneath a metric

ton of bike parts. a dirge,
questionable artifice

delirium, a new architecture

of music displaces.
i have heard this joke before.
this is obvious.

reason
has proven faulty. it inhabits

necessity. it is a stranger in
our home. i remember when

we
never locked our doors,

this is the memory

of memory.

there is no future
until we chew upon

that which
has happened.