

by STEPHEN PAUL MILLER

I believe there is dynamic tension between poetry and criticism. After all, discovery is crucial to academic products such as the doctoral dissertation, and a sense of the fresh and new is crucial to poetry. "Dunk" discusses this relation within the context of a poetic discourse about different modes of "poetry-criticism."

I use poetic, personal, and historical quandaries to situate poetry and critical thought. Poetry and cultural studies as new forms of each other now seem vital tools for producing and synthesizing knowledge. For instance, "Fort Dad" historicizes observations about Freud's theory of humor, fuzzy logic, the poetry of Stevens and Williams, and the New Deal.

FORT DAD: WILLIAMS, FUZZY FREUD, ROOSEVELT AND STEVENS

"Republicans don't believe in evolution because they haven't evolved," my 6th-grade son says while constructing an elaborate

Lego settlement—"Fort Dad," a present for me he equips with several intriguing features such as an intricately contained

inner sanctum I can use as my office simultaneously keeping me in and out. I want to edit myself a little. I'm good now—

a resilient piece of daddy heaven. Freud's *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious* notes veiled death threats toward Dad

in the most hilarious humor. Jokes, Freud says, arrest a joker's core desire to destroy Dad through

the reaction-formation
of not really meaning
anything in particular

while killing him savagely
with self-empowering-slash-impaling urbane humor,
beating a castrating Dad to the bris punch.

It's just a joke, never mind,
Freud, Letterman, and Emily Litella say.
"What I don't get about Scientology," Noah says

"is why anyone would pay to go to church."
Freud treats humor as he does dreams,
coy news in sleep mode. You are what you are, but

the middle term between plural you totters.
The nation breathes. It cheers the opposing
quarterbacks throwing the same game.

Balls spin slowly through humor and dreams
when horses startlingly intercept them
with scooping, sliding catches.

"I'm not even gone yet and
miss myself already," Ed
pre-mourns. Wilbur tells Mr. Ed

if his horse goes first
he'll leave him with
memories of the best

friend any human ever had.
Humor complements dreams.
It bypasses the purely

practical, reaching the seemingly
greater "reality" of one or another of Abe
Lincoln's unconsciousnesses.

I laugh at myself and tie a record,
bolstering my thin pre-fab frame.
Hey, people died here. I mean I know

reality's under attack in many fields.
Congressman Ron Paul John Ringo
calls the Civil War senseless. Tim Russert interjects,

"but then there'd still be slavery." But, Tim, Ron,
southern states secede before Lincoln is president.
He fights to hold his turf, only later linking our

land with a new birth of Tom Jefferson.
Ron says the slaves would've been freed anyway,
that Lincoln could have just bought them,

but doesn't the right hold on to everything?
FDR thinks he's conserving the status quo
by managing the economy 'n saving the rich.

The right's wrath amazes him. I save
a man from drowning, says
Roosevelt, and he turns around

and curses me out for
losing his hat. So maybe
there *would* still be slavery.

The right *still* fights Social Security.
I mean Hitler might be
too left for us.

The American right wouldn't let Hitler end unemployment thru public works or maintain social safety nets.

An American Hitler will *really* suck.
"What's with the pope?" my son asks.
"He's okay." "But," Noah speculates,

"wasn't he Nazi?" "He was just a kid."
"Well," says Noah, "I'm just a kid and I'm not even Republican." Yet the Republic

party—that is, Republic, Repube, or Repuke Party (why does the media let them keep saying Democrat or Democrap, Demorat party?—the

Republicans out-Nazi
Nazis on economic issues.
Demagogues after all need justify

themselves to the dema, or people,
who need to decide all the dictatorial
bullshit's worth it. But the right just

wants dictators to crack heads.
It won't say oh thank you
mr. president roosevelt for

saving our class. Who needs saving?
We're here to fucking crush the
wormy dema. It doesn't matter what

the dema think. It's the left who look
to demagogue/dictators—the right
sponsors just plain dictators—

Reagan's '66 California campaign
thoroughly innovates demagoguery, paving
the express lane

to economic demagoguery of
an authoritarian
right. Reagan

links government
to welfare and blacks,
using race as a nothing

you call something kinda gift.
According to Reagan,
poor blacks live in a

a zero-sum economy. Blacks take from us
while the rich tribe drinks
from bottomless cups

squirting money on
us all. The
beauty part's

the most feared totem,
dreaded welfare, is
actually what trickles thru,

driving the economy. The poor's
purchasing power's why
we prosper 3 post-Franklin

decades. Fair taxes, utility
and financial regulation,
relative sharing of riches,

and good faith
safety nets crazy glue into place
FDR's evenhanded

WWII wage/price controls, setting precedents
until the 70s. Purchasing power impels investment
and production, N-O-T the other way round.

Why should avoiding greed by sharing
with the poor NOT be the answer?
Economists only now begin to get it.

Keynes is on to it. FDR knows intuitively.
Unlike Michael Douglas
he feels "greed bad economic policy."

After much soul-searching, he feels
poor spend and rich invest and over-investment
without consumption =s depression.

Reagan tows Coolidge's line,
recalling how cool it is for
Cal to say government

must merely spur investment
thru fiscal concentration in
rich concentration camps (suburbs),

but chock-a-block consumer
participation's the first step
to economic growth. Right?

Coolidge is honest enough to
feel obsolete when the Great Depression
sets in and unfortunately die, as

James Madison on seeing wild Jacksonian
process says "I have outlived myself,"
a little as Mr. Ed does to rejoice in

his own amiable self. But
the Supreme Court is *ALIVE!*
and tells New Dealers to go home.

Remember how the Supreme Court uses
the 14th amendment, guaranteeing
due process for black liberty and property,

to kill black votes and select Bush?
It's a paranoid move. The right feels
persecuted and in need of protection.

Well, in the 30s the court uses the 14th
to make sure workers have liberty to work
100-hour weeks for crap pay.

They say everything FDR wants violates
their 14th amendment, as if they care for
anyone's liberty 'n property 'n due but their own,

like the Lithuanian accordionist
standing on a pile of dead Jews
in a big city square, their skulls

beaten in by crowbars. His accordion
sways as he sings the
Lithuanian national anthem since

the king of the hill's always victimized,
everyone after *his* liberty.
Oh, Hitler owns the 14th amendment.

Himmler phones Hitler's secretary Martin Bormann and says, "200,000 Jews are liquidated— I MEAN MOVED—200,000 Jews are MOVED.

I MEANT MOVED." Bormann goes ballistic. "Send those messages through SS couriers! I'm telling Hitler on you!"

It's amazing Himmler slips but also amazing how consistently Nazis speak the code—

as if they believe it. Maybe Himmler doesn't quite GET they're being killed SO he's not careful and spills it.

We long to go back to pre-Depression crap camp touchstones because we're so crappy. FDR cures the Depression via WWII cover,

not quite knowing how, or how to make it last.

it's enough to do it. In the 50s, Schlesinger calls FDR nothing if not an existentialist

The president's dying and modest. It's all much too much, a lot to take in.

And also time changes. Franklin senses that the very nature of doing something—

of making change—
has changed. Before the
Industrial Revolution

there are *tools*—
machines are rare.
But after machines come

all-purpose machines—
computers. There's something
Utopian in them. After all,

Computers imply
an interaction platform and Jerusalem literally
means "peace's platform." But

to disprove that mathematical propositions
are all on one platform, Alan
Turing describes a simple airtight model

or operative description
of any computable mathematical proposition—
or so-called "Turing machine"—

a little maybe like Jakobson's
breakdown of individual language acts.
In 1935, Turing shows there's no unified basis for math

cuz different Turing machines
have different bases but then
John von Neumann and Turing freak.

They *actually* can make these Turing machines
or algorithms or mathematical propositions—
they're like snakes on a plane, or snakes on a

computation-enabling platform—
a computer is a Turing machine symposium.
In a way a computer replaces the natural platform,

which doesn't exist with a kind of "infinite now" platform.
That's the magic of Turing breaking codes
The Germans think would take years to break

in minutes through the first proto-computer,
which wins World War II. Right?
It's true. The Industrial Revolution is based on the machine
which necessitates population concentration and cities.
Before the industrial revolution there are only tools.

A machine is tools working on a kind of platform.
It's a little like an algorithm or mathematical proposition
using the terms that compose it,

which are like tools. We go from tools to machines
to computers, which are all-purpose machines
made of Turing machines that are on

one workable platform or "Jerusalem."
Without knowing,
New Dealers tackle

the computer's pre-birth
like Mr. Ed living
in pre-death.

Computers are procedural.
In 1935, when FDR figures
the status quo needs breaking,

Alan Turing describes all computations

as “Turing Machines” or
codifiable numbers detailing

input, output, memory,
operation, and range.

This model shows

how different Turing machines
or computations use
contradictory logic

but Jon von Neumann
realizes Turing machines
describe computation

so as to farm it
out to mechanisms.
Exclamation point.

Reason’s graspable.
We’ve all a hand on
fortune’s wheel—solving everything and

we exist in one all-
powerful push. We play
the wheel, and the game, the reference board,

is who we are. Von Neumann
inaugurates game theory in 1928.
Robert L Simione points out

game theories and Turing machines
can be seen as one another, and
eco-political strategy--the New Deal—is both.

Roosevelt proposes logarithms.

He says something about government
very much like what Jasper Johns says

about art: I do one thing, I do something else.
As with Johns, each New Deal "doing" uses
input and output creating feedback

with other operations, and the nation's
an unlimited range of data or computation.
"You and I are not we but one," Meher Baba says.

In other words, not until the New Deal
do we see the nation as one unified economic field.
It sounds crazy but I'm pretty sure.

My son asks if aliens would have money
and you gotta believe it's unlikely.
The Roosevelt administration gradually

adapts Keynesian economics by the late thirties,
but New Dealers and their political heirs
never fully grasp raising the poor's consumption powers

is the most important reason their programs work. Unlike
the rich the poor must choose spending over investing 'n
we *still* assume investment and employment primary.

Maybe the problem is JFK appoints Arthur Schlesinger
court historian and Schlesinger helps avert a
Cuban Missile nuclear winter

but when he leaves for Washington
he's writing a Roosevelt presidency history.
After about 2000 pages, he's only up to 1936.

Still, later historians dialogue with Schlesinger's takes

and he never writes up the domestic
economic effect of World War II.

People don't know WW2's the New Deal's culmination,
that the end of the Depression's not about arms
expenditures so much as a progressive sense of sharing.

Well into his first term
FDR realizes he can't make everyone happy.
One--on the whole, rich right crybabies

won't negotiate a thing. Two—FDR figures
wealth needs to be better spread
to get out of the Depression and

Three—"I welcome your hatred," FDR warns
"the forces of concentrated wealth." FDR's
correct, people know it, so he welcomes

his enemies' hatred cuz he can turn it against them.
The super rich should pay super taxes.
At first, Franklin only jiggles the economy

to not upset the rich,
but they assault him anyway,
angering Roosevelt who

finishes the job at home during the war.
In brief, his presidency's three phases. First,
FR manages the economy to keep the status quo.

Then he goes after the status quo. Then
he goes after the status quo BY managing the economy
thru progressive taxation and wage-price control during the war.

We don't get the Depression.

Thought has stalled. People can hang,
talk, leave. Any questions?

Reagan appeals to
pre-Depression common sense.
His unconscious code
renders explanations themselves
more and more irrational.

This characterization of jokes
and humor and their relation
to Freudian psychoanalysis as

Reaganesque reaction-formation
corresponds to the undermining
of "logical reality" in the 1920s and 1930s.

Advances in logic during this period correspond to
contemporaneous developments in Freud's conception
of humor and twenties and thirties poetry by Wallace

Stevens and William Carlos Williams.
In the twenties and thirties
our basic logical assumptions

dramatically change.
In 1920, the Polish mathematician
Jan Lukasiewicz questions

Aristotle's law of the excluded middle,
stating that propositions must be
either true or false.

Instead, Lukasiewicz introduces
a weighted middle
introducing probability

into truth value. Lukasiewicz
allows—enables—
fuzzy logic, and

fuzzy logic lets logical
systems turn into aggregate factors of possibility.
For instance, computerized spell checks

recognize incorrectly spelled words with
enough “informational bits” in common with
correctly spelled words. Fuzzy logics

recognize patterns,
such as the neural nets that Noam Chomsky
says permit universal language acquisition.

The subtle thresholds that fuzzy logics allow
will likely prove invaluable in simulating
artificial intelligence—fuzzy logic

has so much to do with how
we intuitively recognize intelligence.
Freud’s notions of wit and the unconscious has

much in common with fuzzy logic.
Fuzzy logic is premised
on a workable range of the “possible,”

which is much like
the Freudian unconscious—
and indeed the computer’s

plenum unconscious—
much like the ongoing
plane of the New Deal

moving on in space and time
jokes exemplify the unconscious
ability to contain contradiction in

the same psychic space like
the young Darth Vader saying
something to the effect of

good is good 'n bad bad 'n
Obi-Wan counters
"only the Sith deals

in absolutes" 'n
everyone knows
he means Nixon/Reagan/W—

the eternal Siths. No
wonder Bush makes
fun of "fuzzy math." It's

one of his jokes. Indeed,
most of his jokes are
put in motion by the seeming

irresolvability of a
linguistic contradiction.
Kenobi speaks an absolute

to marginalize the All in "ALL multiplied
by ABSOLUTE." Makes sense.
Did you know Huey Long's

last words are "Don't let me die"?
Humor can be seen as the conscious
and wakeful manifestation of the

unconscious in fuzzy logic format.
In other words, humor occurs
in a comedic domain of the possible

much like California
where fuzzy logic cut
to the quick rules.

Wallace Stevens's great Reaganesque poetry
not only occurs in this comedic realm,
but also manifests it. "Let be be finale of seem"

Stevens's "The Emperor of Ice Cream,"
first published in 1922, famously says.
In other words, we do well to accept

that nothing devoid of truth value
and truth—Stevens is with Ben
Obi-Wan on this—is now not absolute.

With the usurping of absolute
truth comes the questioning
of absolute reality

and absolute power and hence
"the only emperor is the emperor of ice cream"—
Ronald Reagan in his underpants.

The force turns
with Reagan himself's
most original idea—

the perfectly imaginary unworkable
Star Wars reaction-formation
defense mechanism, which is,

like the first Reagan Super,
Bowl in 1981
nothing into nothing

when you might think
things are bad all around but
they decide to redistribute the wealth.

Stevens's "The Snow Man,"
also published in 1922,
postulates the most purely

unimaginative and solely
descriptive as paradoxically
also the most imaginative condition—

Reagan to a tee. Stevens after all
backs Taft over Ike for
the '52 GOP nomination.

To "have a mind of winter" that
"beholds nothing that is not there"
prerequisites noting

"the nothing that is"—
Ronald Reagan in other words.
Reality and the imagination

interlink though may involve
something greater than
the individual's sentiments.

William Carlos Williams's
"January Morning" (1917)
similarly posits fantastic

ordinary scenes. Williams
accomplishes this by simply
adding an exclamation point:

“Though the operation was postponed/I
saw the tall probationers/in their tan
uniforms/hurrying to breakfast!” In a

play with David Shapiro
I say, “I want to change my name
from Jewish Boy One to Jewish

Boy Exclamation Point.” Maybe it’s
David’s line. Williams likens this energy
of poetic (un)recognition to “...how/the young

girls run giggling/on Park Avenue after dark/
when they ought to be home in bed,”
comparing poetry to adolescent giggling

and humor. In brief, Williams points
out an eruption in the perception of reality
roughly corresponding to the period around WW I,

an eruption also rippling through
Stevens, Freud, Lukasiwicz, Fitzgerald,
many others, and the Great Depression.

DUNK

for the Tel Aviv University English Department, 12/29/05

Tell me when
you don’t get,
want to add or
ask something.

Does GET mean “understanding” to
you? Am I using too many American idioms?

Feel free to interrupt. I want to be accessible.

I’m millers@stjohns.edu.

Professor Karen Alkalay-Gut suggests

I take up the idea of the “poet-critic” to
introduce
my poetry
so why not use a poem—
this one, “Dunk,”
to set itself up? But,

first, dunking’s dipping a

ball in

a basket from above. Second,

there’s no one

way of defining

“poet-critic” since it

can mean

poet as art critic,

poet as academic critic,

poetic critic, discursive poet,

or simply someone both poet and critic,

yet

I steer clear of these meanings,

telling the committee evaluating my promotion

I mix poetry with criticism.

A historian of Chinese culture and literature asks,

“I accept your poetry

as cultural criticism,

but why

is it poetry?”

"Attention to language," I
say but screw it,
do I wanna be a poet?

Poetry's the only thing duller than criticism.

After a reading someone tells my poet friend Ken Deifik,
"I don't like poetry, but I like what you do," and
in this spirit I take the historian's query as a
terribly high
compliment. Okay, the committee's
confidential but thank
you, thank you Professor Kinkley!!! I owe you forever!
This poem's not poetry at all cuz

do I contradict myself?
No!!! I make sense!

Am I a
poet-critic or what?!

But no—poetry derails criticism and poet-critics
choose
the absorbent mess, says Charles Bernstein, over
falsely reflective, "neat" criticism—
po-crit recontextualizes non-stop, blotting
out criticism, so I'm one

shmegege poet-critic
even if philosophy doctors dunk.

"You don't look like you jam."

Here's how I do it.

God is a line...one very long thin line with millions
of colors twisting and turning into
shapes.

Getting a doctorate
makes
you feel like a doctor,
THE DOCTOR,
Julius Winfield Erving III,
Julius Erving,
Dr. J
(simply
"Doctor"),
extemporaneous behind-the-back-finger-
roll-reverse-bank-shot-genius, first to
fly free-throw-line-to-hoop and dunk (or "stuff") the
ball through the net's metaphoric ocean.
A New York Net, (before the team's
Jersey diaspora),
a Net,
Dr. J
realizes his object
of consciousness through
himself much as

God is a line through Him or Herself. Also, in this
fantasy,

Sade dubs me "Smooth Operator,"
"Diamond Doctor with all the lines," a
doctor of doctoring. Operatively tying John Ashbery to
Nixon's Oval Office through the self-surveillance device of
the convex mirror, my dissertation gives meaning,
its play a real thing,

like

the play as real thing,
real '80 NBA Final
"baseline move" thing—
when
from the right baseline
J soars,
meets Kareem-
Abdul-Jabbar, flies back behind the basket and
still airborne
flutters
left
in back of the other end of the
glass
and reaches under the board
for a soft
underhand
midair
bank-shot hoop.

"Should we take the ball out,"
Magic Johnson wonders, "or
ask him to do it again?"
(Hey, someone on TV in our Tel Aviv hostel's
doing that play again!)

Is that spin-
doctor-j-thing—how
it all "comes together"—what "thing"
originally means—
why I think
"The Doctor!" on getting my PhD?

No wonder I make
it through the wilderness-college-committee,
joining

the dialogue, as in a Bar Mitzvah promoted
to full-professor-MAN and so must doven
in secular fashion, the
university after all named
for the voice—John the wild—in the wilderness Jew
baptist, “baptist”
meaning spritzer-DUNKer.

“No one agrees with you,” a prof once tells
me on a job search
after I spritz in the boonies ‘n return with
John’s first interview choice.
“I’m a voice in the wilderness,” I
say. “Oy!” moans the prof.

—Anyway—

I doven for the St. John’s University-wide committee, the
next committee.

No, really, the candidate for promotion
gives a little speech:

“the works of Wordsworth
and Coleridge, Keats’s
letters, Emerson’s visions
of a new and organic
poetry, Whitman’s prefaces,
Pater’s impressionism, the poetry
and criticism of Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot, and all
the movements of modernism, with their various
rationales,
in which the formation of taste
and reception of strange or
difficult
are in part’s the
poet-critic’s project,

harmonizing
with the St. John's University Mission Statement's
call to merge 'imagination' with 'research'...." and so on.

Okay, I'm no expert,
any
more than
knowing
poetry and criticism interact. (Intersect? Or are
they inextricable—I mean
right from the get go?)

The term "poet-critic" I associate
with New York School Poets like Frank
O'Hara, John
Ashbery, David Shapiro, James
Schuyler, Peter Schjeldahl, and so on,
all poets *and* art
critics, but
when my cultural criticism's blurred
"radical poetry-criticism"
I suss out how
poets like Charles Bernstein use the term
"poetry-criticism."

I give Charles credit for what my
blah blah blah talk to the university committee calls
"the re-emergence of the poet-critic."

In essays like "The Revenge of the Poet-Critic..."—
shouldn't it be "Return of the Poet-Critic..."?
don't poet-critics have Jedi qualities?—
Charles shows criticism needs
poetry's upsets and

alluding to work like Charles's
the poet
and critic

and poet-critic
Susan M. Schultz
speaks of poetry-criticism
as negotiating
silence with language.

I think of it as Charles
being better than me.

I *had* to get a Ph.D.

Someone, *New York Times* art critic William Zimmer,
tells

me if you get a Ph.D. you can get a job. Is that true?
Don't Ph.D.s drive cabs? No, he says,
I can get a job. So I get a Ph.D. Thanks, Bill.

But Charles didn't *have to* get a Ph.D. He gets hired
to teach literature based on expertise his poetry
provides. He's a REAL poet-critic.

They hire me as
mere
critic.

But I can
dunk.

"Dunk"
probably should touch on
if not get lost in

"What makes me, as 'Dunk,' a poem?" I say,
"ease of and attention to language combined with
the rhetorical question,
'Why isn't this an f-ing poem?' shifting
the burden of proof,
as when Thoreau
shifts

power relations between
individual and state,

and national security's
not at stake here,
so let's shift."

Is this a lecture, a poem, both, or neither?

Am I in the po-crit zone?
It's so nice to be here with you.
I thought poetry senseless
since it's so full
you can't reduce it to understanding—
"Love hath reason, reason none," Shakespeare notes,
and Meher Baba points out,
"Understanding has no meaning. Love has meaning....Holding
on most meaning"

so

poetry's full and empty of sense.

My best poetry's meaningless,
though,
and even when I believe that
I'm driven
to *explain*—an
urge
part and parcel of my early poems.
Explanation joins fullness
as in a painter's mark
in the sense

Franz Kline and Barnett Newman say
marks are truly background,
background foreground,
because background's the real marking (or writing) utensil.

A simple statement forms a world of poetry-criticism

much like an abstract
painter jamming,
crossing over to paint "things" then
stressing visual or
conceptual components
conspicuous through supposed absence.

Think of a relatively young Andy
Warhol assuming real art messily indecipherable and playing
with his now iconic imagery. His soup cans drip paint.

Lose
the drips,
documentary filmmaker Emile D'Antonio advises.

Similarly, I'm just coming
from a Jill Magi poetry reading
where Jill
explains her poetry
as part of what radically
political
sociologist C. Wright Mills calls
the "sociological imagination"—a sense of
yourself as hanging on culture, like painting
with background, so

I expect Jill's "sociological poetry," as
she calls it, to talk,
but it's interpretively resistant—
a kind of "full" sociological datum.

Jill correctly—I surmise—sees poetry
as full and definitely not dominated
by reference or meaning,

but isn't meaning part of the whole poem's pie?

Can't poetry do the work of criticism?

And discourse poetry, upsetting poetry's too neat world?

Discourse is so beautiful and fictive after all.

"God is a line with millions of colors."

So, if light moves in waves, and discourse literally
means "away
runs" like river water from bank to bank,
is "discursive poetry" more apt than po-crit?
I don't love the term "poetry-criticism"
cuz "criticism" is from the Greek
"to separate"
but no I like poetry-criticism
better
than discursive poetry
because what's a line but
a separator, a cutter of space, so to
speak, cutting actual from potential.

Yes. Right. Poetry-criticism's the bomb,
counter to the "M.F.A. McPoem"
but
frankly I begin thinking of
poetry-criticism
as something tying
me to the projects of
other living poets and critics

when I apply for "full professor," what
American professors tend to try for
five to ten years after
tenure,
which is far more nervous-making
than going for full-of-it professor
since the tenure decision means "up or out,"
staying "forever" or splitting—getting fired
or seemingly staying for long as you want—
so applying for tenure I don't mention poetry.

Me hard-core critic.

Charles's poems get him better and better jobs
but mine can get me fired

though in the full professor process—it not being
life/death—I own up
to my poetry.

Tenure in America
usually comes with
promotion from assistant
professor, your usual rank when hired,
to associate professor.

Tenure's other-wordly.
You reincarnate with it,

but promotion to full professor's a slight
raise, seeming end to scrutinizing your *entire* life, and
more status, which gets you on the subway with \$2
but also makes it harder to be hired elsewhere
without being a superstar full professor.

Tenure freezes you to your plantation. C.

Wright Mills says he needs to write his way out
of O-klahoma.

In my full professor promotion process, poetry-criticism's
a rubric or heading under which to list both
significant sizzling critical feats and
distinguished Kong-like poetic features.
Aristotle, after all, says poetry compares
incomparable things, and as a poet who is a critic
everything I do I do for something like
"poetry-criticism"—hence, I've ten meters of poetry success and
ten of critical success
so when Ms. Poetry-Criticism fastens
these two poles my accomplishments
reach twenty meters—
ten whole meters longer!

At St. John's U
the only difference between
associate and full professor requirements is
an associate professor's achievements
must be "significant" while
a full professor's should be "distinguished"
so my poetry might *distinguish* my
significant research! I
synthesize
cultural criticism with poetry, I tell them, and
can I be the only one playing these games?

Kenneth Koch's the first major New York School poet
with a Ph.D.—New York School poet
and lyricist Kenward Elmslie
tells me Kenneth is the one
who pushes the term New York School
and wants that kind of togetherness
so, in a manner of speaking, origin of the term

New York School poet aside, Kenneth Koch is the first one

though he isn't an art critic
as much as he hangs with artists
and sees poetry as the object of
an artistic kind of contemplation,

and, in this regard,

near New Year's 1987,

Kenneth Koch tells me it's important
not to care about your dissertation topic.

His topic's incredibly insignificant—

I certainly can't remember it,

something about very, very old French literature, I think—
the idea's I guess not

to get too

attached to academic thought and

criticism, why

some people dodge Ph.D.s.

I've a feeling John Ashbery accidentally
on purpose doesn't finish his.

He doesn't need to.

T.S. Eliot simply doesn't hand in
his dissertation—he's conveniently
in Europe and can't since
working in a bank would be hard
with a Ph.D.

All these people are better than me
and can get all kinds of jobs
without doctorates.

Kenneth Koch might need one
but minimizes the accomplishment.

Ashbery says he can never use a word
without thinking he could've used another
(note to self—relate this to Saussure's
notions of linguistic stock and utterance—
to what a student might
be thinking of saying and not
saying in class—
hey, my spring Literature and Culture class
can be a poem!), and
re Ashbery never quite having the right word,
once you've a Ph.D.
you can't give it back,
if that makes any sense. In other words,

a Ph.D. sets you in
a way you mightn't like.

But I want to go where no academic has
gone before—
the idea
behind a dissertation—
to stretch the limits of the discipline—
to dunk in such a way the whole world outside the basket scores,

everything poetry except maybe poetry.

Before this talk I avoid
discussing poetry in poetry-criticism and

think of the genre
as a way to write about anything else
as when Andy Warhol tells
his actors to talk about anything but the camera.

May I address the sociology department?

How long can you focus on your focus
for others to focus?

asks George Tenet.

Real slam-dunks

bring peace.

In Jerusalem—meaning

“peace’s platform,”

implying the infinite consciousness

and finite knowledge (or vice versa) of rocks,

you rock on a very high level—the city’s slab dunk reverberates

stone love from the future,

but I prefer Tel Aviv, New York, whatever. I mean

I get Kenneth Koch.

I wanted to write a boring dissertation
but it takes talent

so I figure how
the 60s become
Reagan, and

a year after my book’s

out

David Frum

calls the shift *positive*.

My argument turns Neocon.

Then Frum slips

GW Bush the term “axis of evil,”

I think somewhat self-reflexively.

Forget poetry, reflexivity echoes what you mean.

Thank youuuuuuuuu...

Are there any questionssssss...

question mark mark mark