

## PROLOGUE TO LANGUAGE DOUBLING

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Boris Pasternak (older than Mayakovsky and alive *after* the Allen anthology) speaks somewhere of the necessity for writers to disregard the approval of their admirers, lest their writing be tempted to repeat itself. He speaks of the urge for perfection in a mode of writing as the mark of the imitator. Writers of course can imitate their own original manoeuvres what is practically an epidemic in the trade. Pasternak offers that the real exploration of new territory is constantly marked by abrupt change and barbaric intuitions, calling for still other *contrary* geniuses to appear, intuitively and without notice. The thrust of the argument is that too much rationale can turn an original idea into so much rati<sup>o</sup>n, ignoring the richness yet to be mined.

The “bottom line” here would be to intend or demand, to hear or to ask, to *turn over* as it were, so many sentences a day, multiplied by 360 (our year having roughly days equal to the degrees of the circle that describes it), times again a number of years, and there you have it: a paratactic if not a sympathetic record of the writer’s sensation or consciousness. Cast an ancient mathematical superstructure on it, or a not so ancient spatial one, and what have you got? What you have could be Dante or Vergil, or it could be Ron Silliman or Steve Benson.

It would be fluent to suggest that Ron Silliman and Steve Benson represent the *outer* and the *inner* possibility of 20th Century American writing in English at this point in time —a dialectic not unlike that of the not-so-recent projected pairing of Charles Olson (Boss Poet, as Robert Kelly called him) and Robert Creeley (Gray Chan Professor at SUNY-Buffalo), or even that earlier one of Ezra Pound (the great American Fascist poet) and T. S. Eliot (Old Possum, as Pound addressed *him*)— so I won’t do it; or rather, more accurately, I’ll stop with the suggestion.

Now, of course *all* art partakes of some usefulness of the artist as recorder and transmitter of an external world or an internal one, according to his or her idea of how best to do it. Limits are what any of us are inside of, find a form to accomodate the mess, etc. There is of course usually some motivating force in operation (what is called an ideology or a moral belief, depending on which side of the sphere you’re on) which is ordinarily more than numerology or circumspection. On the other hand an account of *almost everything*, inside or out, in any given historical era, is hardly too small a goal for any art to embrace.

Perhaps *embrace* is just the point. Passion, not compulsion, is what is meant. It seems to be the function precisely, say, of the *Iliad* or *The Canterbury Tales*, of

Shakespeare, Tolstoy, or of Melville —at *least*. As generally the ‘special’ interests in such great writers behave as *pluses*, rather than as focus, in the greater design.

Who could care for the archaeology in Homer or the eating habits in Chaucer, for instance, —the invective in Shakespeare, the manners in Tolstoy, or the detail of the whaling industry in *Moby Dick*— were it not for the greater *force* of the overall work, a condition required of any writing if it is to be more than an accumulation of its parts. What is crucial is not the ingenuity of a verbal work, nor the relentlessness of it, nor the verisimilitude of it —not the formal innovation, nor the meticulous care for detail, nor the working out of schema and intent, however much these may contribute— but something absolutely vital no matter what else is present; I mean that power to lift us out of our seats *and* keep us in them. Perhaps that old churchy purpose of literature to be *uplifting* is not so far off in a varied sense. To disclose in short a design and a vision which *impel* us to a greater apprehension of where we are situated as inhabitants of room on this globe, larger than we and smaller than the universe.

The world is full of writers whose main idea of what to do with the act of writing is to sell it or get it noticed-verbal art as commercial venture or job application. But what good is it to get caught up in some fix (as in *idée*), if there is not some more urgent purpose inherent in the consciousness. The question is pertinent to Aeschylus or Shakespeare, to Ovid or Dante, to Dickens or Dostoevsky, to Swift, Kokoshka, and to Kafka, as it is certainly not least of all to current examples. Then how that detestable phrase *post-modern* sounds the end by, almost bomb-like, assuming it.

And so we must fight against any writing which prescribes or predicts any goal at all... except what lies beyond. In that sense it will remain the writer’s job to exist *outside* the mode of any centralized or any *centralizing* discourse, especially that one projected by the writing already written.