

## LETTERS

**Larry Eigner**

*(Selected by Benjamin Friedlander)*

Dear Doug,

I can just write better than I can read, and only thing that actually hits me in OLE#2, of the verse (if that, but why split this hair i don't know, and I go jaded anyway), is Harold Norse's poem. (Lowenfels' I've seen before— that one abt J Wms.) Susan Gorzba's poem is long enough for me to lose track of, or to lack cohesion and/or be tedious—I suspect me rather than her. The liveliness of those reviews i have some kind of appreciation for—and Buk's essay as well, and Locke's, I appreciate more than the potshort verse... the prose.

And, well, I've just sounded paw (a pore old rusty like brokendown computer, needful of replete and repetitive programming) and maw (all apron-strings), and the idea is still, of course, that I do people big enough favors by sendings out mss. I'm tired of the piggybnk stuff, god knows, but more and more so. And, in fact, too big a library here for a l-armed paper-handler. I'd like to take a gander at that W W Antling bk if you'd just as soon lend it to me—and the Buk. bk. Paw ok with postage. Cd you use the 2 copies of OLE 2?

rgds L Eigner

Fb 15 65

Dear Doug

Your card mailed to Jim Boyle day after it came here abt ten days ago. Well, don't know how long waiting period should be —moral principles, ahem— but in the absence of a negative answer from Boyle I'd say go ahead and use the stuff if you want it. Other than robbing people of bread, furniture, etc, or how immediate prospects... my feelings abt property are very weak. Publication is a means of transmission, and it's too bad in a way that editors and others don't like to duplicate, or rather, that how much to duplicate is pretty indeterminable as I imagine it is...

C haos here. Maison des vieux. TV and radio more and more of the time—captive audience I, am, And stuff like WAGNER LITERARY MAGAZINE come out of the blue last wk is increasingly like Everest. I cd never put 12 ideas

together, and I'm asked my reactions! Wow! There's a limit to my powers of hibernation, on the other hand. So, the upshot is brownian motion. (And i put less and less coin through the rusty ole brokendown computer system mon pere)...

Anyway, in the full life,  
Larry Eigner

23 Bates Road Swampscott, Mass. 01907 Tuesday June 29 65

Dear Douglas,

I feel I may well get in dtch, with Boyle and Grady, say, when they're informed I've sent you letters they wrote me. (Boyle addressed a card to Larry Engineer, a while back, and another time asked i shd never mind sending verse of his anywhere, when I got and told him of a hunt notice similar to your own earlier one. It sure can run you ragged; whereas I live on air anyway, and can't live alone, cajoled and bullied all over the lot here, as i owe the world to mother— the truth.) Corman has rebuffed quite a few people, and refused to appear in anthologies, et al, while at the same time being warm-hearted in private matters. With him, certainly more than a matter of your discretion in selection of passages (refused mss for Grove Press Anth'y, e.g., tho on friendly enough terms with its editor, I gathered at the time). Anyway, this batch here is abt as much as my father feels able to mail in one package. To my surprise he brought up the notebook of Creeley letters from the cellar after a few minutes' search.

Creeley wrote me rather continuously back there ('50'55?), god knows why, as it didn't seem i cd understand him. A couple of notes since, most recently for instance telling of meeting a cousin of mine, and a fellow townsman. As you can see, these talk mainly of writing, very nervy gropings maybe after all. Or so I remember and have the impression from a brief and cursory sampling last night (have to go through material all at one sitting—with this notebk, in bed—and bog down in any case, If I don't skim...) (Well, I have it right here on the porch this morning, the set-up is, open, what am i saying?) One place he is writing as his son is refusing delaying birth. While, at that, i only heard of the loss of his daughter from a guy in England.

So, maybe some poets have quite a focus and talk preponderantly abt poetry (the prolific ones?) I don't know. In large part Corman's letters are sizings-up, evaluations and reevaluations, of various writers, stating such conclusions pretty flatly, without any lengthy dictations. Of particular writings (and mss from me sometimes) too.

\*Beetles in the skull might be anything from diarrhea to politics, of course.

Mine are constantly on the increase, it's evident all round. Put it to mother that everything i do she regards as child's play and she'll hit the roof. (Just yesterday I was finally wheedled into going to a camp on Martha's Vineyard, for palsies, where there are beautiful picnics, arts and crafts, all pamperings, transistors... lst

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two wks in August. No private life for me.) Father's nice (now 72), but things are hard for him too, he's bn like a poor old rusty broken down computer all along. (Cd mail only postcards but for him. Big hassle e. g. when i mentioned looking for Creeley's notebk and mother insisted i act on her superior office experience and get permission before sending any of their letters i to you. ((Cut off bottom line.))

She thinks I've too many papers, bks, etc., for her to dust, but is pretty lenient and indulgent that way, among others. A Good housekeeper More orderly than me, so she shuffles up the stuff twice a year Threatens suicide as one expression of aggravation. Trylag to keep me off brothers' backs, an eagle eye lest I give people a hard time ¶ brother and wife in SF want me to visit them next summer, but all signs point to my not going. ¶ All of which is unprintable, and how!

Saw Chekhov's *Three*

*Sisters* (BBC TV) a few wks ago, for 1 thing.

Things are remarkable and otherwise. I'm spastic, cerebral palsy from birth injury. Sept. 62 cryosurgery, frostbite in thalamus (awake to see if i was numbed, test whether they had right spot, felt much like killing of a tooth nerve!), tamed (and numbed some) my wild left side, since when I can sit still without effort, and have more capacity for anger etc. Before, I had to be extrovert, or anyway hold the self off on a side, in this very concrete, perpetual, sense. A puzzlement of the will. Always some compulsion or other. Had to be something of a Pollyanna. (Left hand still useless, while arm handier than right one still in wheelchr and all too much comes in i grow indiscriminate, but is does keep me going...)

Good luck on your project anyway. Such have turned out ok before.

The *Mica* Grady refers to, for instance. Diaries, letters. While together with «poems», however finished and unfinished. In a way somewhere between the poles of total homogeneity (sameness) and heterogeneity (wild disparity) may be best. Which is putting it very abstractly and loftily indeed.

Regards

Larry Eigner

The Perkoff as I recall ok. Too faint to reread, and I'd rather return than save it.

July 15 65

Dear Dougl..

Herein letter from Boyle, received last week. My own reluctance to show you anything, such as it's been, and is, is due to quandary, magnified by circumstances I explained enough, I hope, in my last letter, and too much, I of course feel, in a way. Dilemma being common-life is the thing, and anything can get to be a big sign on yr back. When you've overcome something, it is, finally, luck.

Wild weekend just passed, I've always been more or less manic depressive. Get nervous, what to do first, too eager. Anyway, 1 thing that came Saturday, one of the 2 things, let alone letters, more or less brief... was the Doubleday Anchor anthology, *A Controversy of Poets* (to loaf is to get waylaid at any page). Autobiographical and self-explanatory note I can hardly remember writing, from last year; among the others (a number of whom you are to publish) —John Wieners, for one, whereas his co-partner in a mag. MEASURE back there, says he always resists the temptation to autobiogr.ize. Other spastic there, V Miller, just says when and where she was born. However it is, I've done better verse, I guess. Repression isn't good, for me...

Devil of emptiness, on my other side. Only publishers I get with, Creeley, J. Wms. Maybe latter can advise you. Hope so. Sorry i can't .(Kelly put in a rush call for mss, as to the Anchor thing..) Good luck. And please don't clean yourself out..

Larry Eigner

Ease or something, i like, like Boyle writing\*.  
((Written sideways on the left of the page:))

\* Nancy Cave, if it's that Nancy, idea of it.. The sign, but not too much of it, on your back. Or whatever.

23 Bates Road Swampscott, Mass. May 29 1965

Dear Doug.. ,

Thanks (don't know how much, by god!) for the loan of Wantling's book, which I'll return, have returned in a short time; but the more I've read, the less competent I've felt at it in general, and doing a couple of book rvws 10 years ago noticeably put fear of height in me, and now i have agoraphobia as well. (San Quentin not the only prison, either, there's the world for instance, and from February till now —till a month ago especially— my ears have been quite blasted with phone-voices from ma's radio, Munich/Vietnam, Vietnam/Munich, etc.) Never was able to keep five pages in mind, very well, nor to really see what observation it wd be constructive to make, if any. Quite a bit of W's book seems to be strikingly diffuse in articulation (in "Korea" so much so as to sputter) —all a poem can do is move— or declamatory in too subjective a way to take effect, not narrative enough to be epical, and too mch the Queen's english (in "Glory" and "Two Paradoxes", the latter of which I go for in being able to provide a considerable variant:

“at the marketplace  
they sell so many things,  
love, courage, courage



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you bring them with you  
and pay as you go

But now I remember  
what they told me to forget ”)

Narcissistic rather a word for it —which man seems to be nowadays, pluming himself on his brain so much, starstruck, the condition of the lobster fleet and such, seldom being spectacular enough to make the papers —only when there’s trouble— and symbiosis in general. Don’t know what to make of “a dream full of laughter”, “The Death of Carryl Chessman” et al. I’ve just got through reading *Coyote’s Journal* #3, Wm. Brown’s “In Hometown”, which has for one thing quite an experience of death, e.g. it breaks up into actually different forms and so becomes real in the same sense that life does —and the idiom there realizes the experience.

Can’t size up importance or rightness of the “Capital Punishment” essay either. The last page touches the quick, the trouble being that maybe, 2,000,000 is company—Cuba? Yugoslavia?— but 300 million or 3 billion or 140 million is a crowd. The brass tacks land me nowhere. The execution of a man may well be terrible for relatives, or friends certainly, but to the public at large it’s almost a movie. People have to ignore the troubles of others, generally speaking, although the situation is worsened by the deadening of imagination and the free-enterprise (money-making) communications media that suit it and further it. Kitty Genovese suffered as individual a death as Chessman, and in Massachusetts a few months ago a woman gave birth on the sidewalk with people walking by in oblivion, nothing is very noticeable unless it’s put in the paper or on the transitor. Somebody noticed after a while or something. Puerto Rican woman, if I recall. Then you have gypsies, who keep to themselves apparently. Boredom, the failure of imagination itself, and the concomitant quest for excitement —narcissism again— I suspect leads to more violence than anything else. There are also irritations other than executions —the daily ones here making my judgement biased ((bottom of page cut off)). And the State being an impersonal instrumentality, manned by a conglomerate body of men, such as it is to quite an extent, how can it be immoral? Destructive, yes, or, as the other possibility, constructive —and of course its ((illegible)), its impersonality, is a limitation (destructive on the whole or not is an open question, and hardly to be determined a priori, in the abstract), since it’s an agency of, by and intended for, to deal with humans. Reading between the lines I can imagine Wantling is aware of this —and I’d say the decline in human confrontation generally makes the disadvantage of the State’s impersonality at least appear to outweigh the advantages— but his fairly exclusive focus on the capital punishment question obscures that.

Government looms as population increases. If population becomes too large, government, at the limits of the human, being a manifestation of the human, loses its character and ability to function. But the limit

is not very determinable and moment to moment, by the mother of invention, if it's not a stillbirth, government may keep on.

Here's hoping. (As, the sit-in becomes the teach-in. Though the life of a gimmick isn't what is used to be.)

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Larry Eignerr  
Regards and thanks

23 Bates Road Swampscott, Mass. Thursday June 10 65

Dear Doug,

A letter from Paul Blackburn inadvertently enough mailed you Monday at same time as return of the Wantling (no librarian these past yrs and can't be my own, much). One more dig up on my thorough survey —except for cellar I can't reach, nor can give father the eyes to— I enclose, though I don't know his present whereabouts, for you to write him, and I can see how even anonymous publication of excerpts from a man's letters without permission (while my sense of and respect for private property keeps diminishing), might well be harmful, at least as precedent (inept or malicious slicing off from content the only specific evil I can think of). I also enclose here my only two letters from Whalen, and likewise Snyder, as evidence, however unneeded or irrelevant, of how little comment on issues/events I've received in letters from poets, actually. Which doesn't bode well for poetry, "dangerous" or otherwise, being very efficacious in calming the world. Dilemma: Poets are not too superhuman, and need some quiet and thickness of hide themselves; Orpheus was, after all, torn apart. The line parted —and that some one of those spacewalkers will someday fall would be a forlorn hope. (Though still, quite a blessing in disguise, this wd be, if it decreased lunacy, which it wouldn't, though, would rather multiply it.) How much insensitivity is vital is of course indeterminate, which affords us our room, and world. And it's all going to end someday —an odd, and oddly comforting, prospect. As well as debilitating.

Drop the bucket,  
Pass the bottle,  
Sip in the sun  
And skip the subtle

This it is that makes Cid Corman, who besides a nonpoet up Maine-way has written me most, on current events et al, less a sulker and the more, as I suspect, a wise man, who, it feels like, has some kind of unfathomable secret. Troys that I enjoy, or can get myself to, can dig, he thinks it would be better to stay out of, has in fact, so he writes, refused invitations to (so I can't show any of his letters...)

Whereas I dislike doing anything, shutting doors —which it seems I eventually do, though, have done often, because of their density, their proliferating and profuse numbers, and as, for one thing, to spend is a rube goldberg affair with me, each time— or nothing what looks dull and weak to me... or anything I don't feel to be constructive. I suspect myself of being a Norman Vincent Peale in mended clothing. I can remember back when maybe I came within an inch of the *Reader's Digest*.

The letter from Paul Blackburn, the cold pad et al. in Provence, sort of exemplifies the peaceful, slow life, to my mind —what has by now become the exotic, in contradistinction to the jungle happenstance in Manahatta, Vietnam, Cape Kennedy, or the Congo.

Wild mass of letters in a package, letters from Creeley somewhere down cellar —no issues or events there anyway. Letters from Maine\* in such quantity and condition as to be beyond father's power to mail.

No letter from Bukowski that I can recall —i kind of think his memory fails if he says he's written me. You're welcome to use anything i say except, of course, specific references to members of my family when nasty. If you did send bck the letters I wrote you, I can't find them.

"After extermination" —wow. Abbe's "Narrative" is far from equalling his Foreward... And not only animals used in senseless experiments, but, of course (Schweitzer wrote about 1910 that people no longer have any notion what it's like to have to kill a chicken or hog), humans as well. As the centrifuge-riders at Brooks Air Force Base... These are volunteers, it should be noted. But how much so, since they're not philosopher-kings? Eh? If you're enough of a philosopher, from way back, you don't volunteer much, it seems.

Freedom-riders, etc., something you can get excited about while they last. But philosophy makes me pessimist. The big atoms decay, start disintegrating as soon as they're created, presumably. Integration a big word for civil right, only a part of the wholeness being aimed at. Fewer people hanging around, more running around. I can't tell how many years to think about. M. L. King one man not just grinding his own axe, talked about poverty in India and so on a year ago (June, 64 —commencement addresses broadcast) so that I'd wished he'd be put up for President. A matter for curiosity to how noticeable a degree he could get integrated with the Chinese Communist, with his eye for the good in his opponents. Those Atheists. I imagine he's too square to make much of a bed up with them, and they too doctrinaire (Always and everywhere there's been some compound of individual and communal enterprise —it's a practical matter, not one for a creed, really, only if a thing lasts it does take devotion, which is the rub) Looks like the biggest big man around, but it doesn't seem like anybody can be big enough for a

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\* Arthur McFarland, Friendship, Maine, has letters of mine —but I kind of hope these are enough— he's a boatwright, violinist et al... been sick. Seldom has much time. Better to ask Jim Boyle Robert F. Grady (4326 Manayunk Avenue, Philadelphia 28 Penn.) has recurring sickness too.

hundred million. Maybe if population increases enough we'll all collapse into cannibalism\*.

3 sundays a week, there should be in some parts. But where? This place is a "town" (pop. 20-30,000?), yet it looks like I may be the only one here who can think what to do with a Sunday

And a year ago in one of the fairly big mags was an article on a \$400,000 schooldesk (typewriter flashing lights and so on in such a way conducive to the spelling of words and sentences...) that has kids editing in-school litt. mags by the age of 8; while a few weeks ago a sunday feature artichoke in a Boston paper related how other research has confirmed how 2-year-olds pretty much in general can learn reading about as casually as speaking by having text written for them in large script (inexperienced eyes can't make out fine print, but on the other hand the brain grows even faster before birth than afterwards), and as a frequent and regular game.

And so on... But I'd better close. Lowenfel's  
L a n d o f R o s e b e r r i e s has just arrived from Mexico City!

...Larry Eigner

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\* Or enough gasoline-powered cars will come pouring out of detroit to choke a goodly number of us in smog... Or...