

# ROUGH TRADES



CHARLES BERNSTEIN

## **Rough Trades**

Charles Bernstein

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This is a pdf conversion of the digital book at  
<http://writing.upenn.edu/epc/books/bernstein/rough-trades/>

*the trades are rough  
& the tide is out*

## THE KIWI BIRD IN THE KIWI TREE

I want no paradise only to be  
drenched in the downpour of words, fecund  
with tropicality. Fundament be-  
yond relation, less 'real' than made, as arms  
surround a baby's gurgling: encir-  
cling mesh pronounces its promise (not bars  
that pinion, notes that ply). The tailor tells  
of other tolls, the seam that binds, the trim,  
the waste. & having spelled these names, move on  
to toys or talcums, skates & scores. Only  
the imaginary is real—not trumps  
beclouding the mind's acrobatic vers-  
ions. The first fact is the social body,  
one from another, nor needs no other.

“WE SELL ICE PICKS, DON’T WE?”

Spring fell off, like a mote inside a  
lock. “I’m please you took.” Therefore, or  
therefrom, bumptious in material exhaustion,  
mannered, as a hair might harm a  
hush. There is no quiet like the  
flounce of the bored, gnomed sea; no  
magic like the evanescence of befuddlement  
before a wand-weary song. Be a fool, &  
are arcade, shut slants of light, motive  
having crawled, & tusk tubes, moreover  
limned with screws, hailed as hammered  
pinnacle, deputized to fall. Have  
leering crusts bid scowls’ election,  
pirouette outweigh forlorn? Seeming’s  
double daily, Christ to pay, the hist’ry  
not the myst’ry weds the sty.

## PRECISELY AND MOREOVER

I died in chance abandon, made the clearing  
tough to take, or went to meet a bleat of  
feigning belly crates, to fly by number to  
render coil. By bait the trough is  
ridden, hung tanks upon a top of  
toil, or tender mute the silent, shrill  
the shorn, and bear a coal to castle's  
glare. Less 'parent than 'prehended  
shakes time to bugger oil (the bellicosity out  
(of). Sponge season, or fretful tongues with  
claws.

## RIDDLE OF THE FAT FACED MAN

None guards the moor where stands  
Receipt of scorn, doting on doddered  
Mill as fool compose compare, come  
Fair padre to your pleated score  
Mind the ducks but not the door  
Autumnal blooms have made us snore



## GETTING WISE TO THE WHEREFORES

Vexatious visage begins blunt  
showcase, lacks a  
plumage to sputter  
inconspicuously sorrowful teeters with  
neopolitan origin  
*go way to*  
oily nosebleeds, kicking  
as belting  
aluminum airway  
(tends been slow)  
to rosebud between  
enabling flick, so  
sallow to behave  
as if extra signage  
promotes *pommes frites*, impolitic  
perusal of interior visualizations of  
cascading hollows. Clue pinpoints  
pajamas, exclusively for the  
sidereal passion to remand a  
balanced barometric mensch—  
warmer. Swaddle as may, canned  
or can not or cantankerously  
loose toothed, with  
crabbed blanket and an hysterical  
ectopic cacorhythmia—bluesy  
blouse, blustery letdown somnolence.  
Hushly hailing marginal sailing. Meaning  
have you aired the veils, festooned  
the ——. Infelicitously carnal, suckers  
for the apron's nipple, hulled  
into.

## SITES OF INVOLVEMENT

Stumbled and stored, this wakefulness  
speaks only of decor, decoyed  
by dumbfounded doors, pierce  
as likely as before—all  
moors. A gnat who clamps  
upon this hose, in dignified  
despair—abler spout to  
what cannot be spare. Silence  
as the breath announced spends  
volumes to rescind, just  
wind.

## NINA'S PARTY AT JUDY'S GYM

Funny how these days lounge and flit  
past seeming rancor to the fits  
of fulsome plan. I have for long  
endured a passion subsumed by all I  
see, yet the weaving thins the layer  
and the fluted hopes evaporate  
in steam. Nobody launches  
except to sail, but lips grow  
sedulous, fingers fumble. How  
little to show before a firing squad  
of one's own device takes aim, replies.  
Conversation, not communion, communities,  
makes this world glow — lit  
but not consumed.

## EPIPHANIES OF SUPPRESSION (3)

No, it's  
this world  
we know  
little of  
kindly it  
hides and  
gratefully we  
are hidden.  
So, mentality  
drives the  
spoon, noting  
lips' aspirant  
deference. Got  
to get  
by without  
a ladder's  
seem(1)y plaque.  
Where to  
spin?—the  
cotton lurches  
for its  
gin, but  
fear never  
trusts *its*  
maker. Eyes  
hold glances  
to know  
containedness, ignite  
each store  
to dissimulate  
apparatus' reliquary.  
Or holes  
to holler  
to.

## HOW TO DISAPPEAR

I don't know much about art, but  
I know what I don't like. Hat  
packed, ready to go. As years embalm  
decay, mist on wing, wits  
on other. For sight is such  
a short-lived fling, of bone and spewn  
like tile atop the toil, who brings  
Jersey-suited ploys, or what by  
sought is summed, fazed onto, dub-  
doused flight, charred rescinds. The suitor  
blows a finer measure, capped as  
pierces against alarm, which fraught  
with force retards display.

## SALTMINES REGAINED

Where goes the paraposturous  
brain-dead morning as  
cleavage relieves its  
apostate narcissism?  
Or hinges shingles  
lipped up at  
callback stations, entering  
and then cordoning  
off of delinquent  
(or is it derelict?)  
fiberboard. Fire brands  
the stake, disbands the  
song, as if twirls  
might array, pearls  
might prolong. Seek  
having sucked  
& sucker calls  
that seer these  
plots, wading to  
allure & spun  
into glass.

## ROWING WITH ONE OAR

So the sieve is sifted, the spun attended to  
A token of foreign charm, lost here among  
The can of category, disdain of  
Destination. You catch if only to amount  
As cord-draped prongs befit of all  
But tides are guided, a needle through  
The Hey, or what's about faces, our  
Armenian friend who hopes to  
Cure his ponies and put away the  
Rest as hedge 'gainst eschatology  
Or moral 'dolotry. Planes down  
The view the better to begin to  
Build it up. Snow bound or wind  
Chapel. *Here* becomes the premised  
Glare—bowling and then bowled  
Over.

## TARGETS OF OPPORTUNITY

We share these sediments, sentiments  
out of hope of passing through  
divides into an uncrossed  
wildness that never can  
arrive, that always already  
has been sold. The world  
inhabited by its core  
of molten planes of  
pain—the loss which  
binds the gap, to  
break against such  
lore as those our father's  
father's father told to tune  
the flood of  
days.



## WHOSE LANGUAGE

Who's on first? The dust descends as  
the skylight caves in. The door  
closes on a dream of default and  
denunciation (go get those piazzas),  
hankering after frozen (prose) ambiance  
(ambivalence). Doors to fall in, bells  
to dust, nuances to circumscribe.  
Only the real is real: the little  
girl who cries out "Baby! Baby!"  
but forgets to look in the mirror  
— of a . . . It doesn't really  
matter whose, only the appointment  
of a skewed and derelict parade.  
My face turns to glass, at last.

## VERDI AND POSTMODERNISM

She walks in beauty like the swans  
that on a summer day do swarm  
& crawls as deftly as a spoon  
& spills & sprawls & booms.

These moments make a monument  
then fall upon a broken calm  
they fly into more quenchless rages  
than Louis Quatorze or Napoleon.

If I could make one wish I might  
overturn a state, destroy a kite  
but with no wishes still I gripe  
complaint's a Godly-given right.

## ROUGH TRADES

“By now I was tense, on edge, what they were saying didn’t have any meaning for me—just some cut-rate jive in social workers’ phraseology that proved a certain intellectualism, I supposed. But I didn’t have to listen to it; I was going to get the hell out.”

—Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*

BEING A STATEMENT ON POETICS FOR THE NEW  
POETICS COLLOQUIUM OF THE KOOTENAY SCHOOL  
OF WRITING, VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA,  
AUGUST 1985

I've never been one for intellectualizing. Too much talk, never enough action. Hiding behind the halls of theories writ to obligate, bedazzle, and torment, it is rather for us to tantalize with the promise, however false, of speedy access and explanatory compensation. *A poem should not be but become.* And those who so disgrace their pennants, however and whomever so deafened, shall tar in the fires of riotous inspiration and bare the mark of infancy on their all too collectivist breasts. Terrorism in the defense of free enterprise is no vice; violence in the pursuit of justice is no virgin. This is what distinguishes American and Canadian verse—a topic we can ill afford to gloss over at this crucial juncture in our binational course. I did not steal the pears. Indeed, the problem is not the bathwater but the baby. I want a poem as real as an Orange Julius. But let us put aside rhetoric and speak as from one heart to another words that will soothe and illuminate. It is no longer 1978, nor for that matter 1982. The new fades like the shine on your brown wingtip shoes: should you simply buff or put down a coat of polish first? Maybe the shoes themselves need to be replaced. *The shoes themselves:* this is the inscrutable object of our project. Surely everything that occurs in time is a document of that time. Rev. Brown brings this point home when he relates the discomfort of some of his congregation that formulations of a half- or quarter-, much less full-decade ago are no longer current to today's situation. The present is always insatiable because it never exists. On the other hand, the past is always outmoded and the future elides. Light travels slowly for the impatient humanoid. Half the world thinks the night will never end while another half sweats under the yoke of unrelenting brightness. It's time to take our hats off and settle in. The kettle's on the stovetop, the centuries are stacked, like books, upon the shelf. Bunt, then buzz.

## READING THE TREE: 1

A litter bin vexes the mill, we howl  
for more. The complex call, the xenophobic  
alternatives, with related concerns having  
reached a critical mast. What is shared, at  
best, is intriguing, your life, this  
surrogate social struggle. Language a  
sorrow gate, malled environ, woody  
ardour. In doing so clearly foreground,  
is now plain, of particulate importance, if  
only in reflected convenience. "I hate  
speech" & speech don't like me none too good  
either. Instead of rat brains I ate gnat  
wings. East of paradise, north of the  
corridor, to which none is subject, all  
member. Stepping through the water to the  
mops. Snow covers the boats, smothers  
the folks. Otherwise, the damage already  
glows, slows, mows. A cause, a  
pose, something on vapor (they used to be  
the leaders of the avant garde, but now  
they just want to be understood). *Only  
fragments are (f)actual*. Shapes sloshing,  
the wave of pandemonium or gloss of  
consternation, mute in the (a) sea that only  
scatters. Everyone keeps shouting  
in my ears: but rest assured, dear papa,  
that these are my very own sentiments and  
have not been borrowed from anyone. I want  
to put *this* word *here* (the dead  
should have known better). Folding cups  
to receive syllables. The  
flimsy charms, hysteric prognostication. She  
looked  
so nice you kind of wonder about her  
husband. O soredea! O weedsea! Men in  
Aida are appealing, aren't they? A day  
with Achilles in silly garb, Apollo on a  
deep hill—all pay high prices for full  
head, misunderstood as a measure  
of distance across a level field of things  
each defining a spiral dressed in shadow,  
tracing the rustling of language's identity  
turned into creamed figures, like constant  
commotion, repeatedly connoting. *This*  
I saw and said before dis-  
covering the wren. An ordinary, empty  
tune, inflated yet miniature, elbowed  
enzymatically. Stillness  
crumpling; holding the map that is

unattached, figurative boot in backstage  
foolscap. Apply thumb  
for answer: insatiable  
fatigue. For polis is peals,  
pelts, pages. Deep snow  
behind a red temple. Last week I  
wrote, "This morning  
the swelling's died & pilots  
compete for the sober hue in a pile  
of broken-up sentiments (tenements)." *Not  
fixed!? When then!?* All that  
aside, a girl is running. (—Don't  
tell *me* a girl is running.)  
Wild vistas inside blistering  
paint (pant, pummel the  
chimera). My vision of aspects  
houses prefabrication (the enigma  
rose before the triangulated  
nose). (Looking on hopelessly  
like children eating baloney.)  
Derision thrives whether or not  
it is possible to reply. I have  
destroyed my ammunition to make way  
for an ocean that shadows me as  
I walk in the unpaid-for park, yet  
the traffic draws away from me and I  
am ill at ease listening to the sugar  
pour and the gravity steam. Shall  
we stroll into focus or submerge  
in ponds: example is gratified  
by its spout. On the way to L.A. I  
meet a surrogate for you in a bar, give him  
room in the passenger seat and desultory  
conversation, a smoke, kisses, blowjob,  
encouragement, \$5, concerned disturbed  
uptight look. How can I characterize you  
that way? You're really gone. I confuse  
you with the reader. I can't scream  
in space. I come at myself (I'm  
not interested in *pursuing* lines  
of thought): you can hear the shapes  
and grates of the swoon. If to witness,  
if to judge, which is to say exacerbate  
the only sign of mottled hiss, embroidered  
embrasure. These  
are not my words but those that summer  
gives me, with a tenderness quite  
unknown in the real world, where  
there is little to remember but  
stormy days. I would have a house  
of my own, with a bay of pastel  
miasma, reality leaking  
from its edges, as the context  
conditions. Therefore, my style

seems to have fallen to  
pieces, deteriorated  
in the three-year interim  
between books; others  
may write better-made poems  
but those poems with their elegant  
turns of phrase, their vivid  
imagery, even their conceptual  
excellence, often add up to nothing.  
Either poetry is real as, or realer than,  
life, or it is nothing, a stupid  
& stupefying occupation for zombies.  
For my poetry is informed by  
something inside that doesn't  
flinch & won't budge. & I  
could never have done it alone.  
I may work in the factory but I glide  
to the music of the anemones.

## READING THE TREE: 2

The part plots a spindle but the  
true scales wattle off the clock.  
At at which pops as someone  
nodules quarts, wholly non-check  
slowdown. Bend nothing & nothing  
will bend you, jam the gorge  
astride the loom, black-away to  
tending send. A single everything  
points: the mud of bulk, tonal  
belief, perfect compassion. &  
graciously pissed (oh Hannah!):  
acting like a typical male  
chauvinist pigsty. Nothing  
comes quickly, too nervous,  
bulb which whose, you thought,  
screened bottom (I likes my  
repeated stupid) across (don't  
complete) sent(i)ence. That's all  
a silhouette for obedience, the  
oilcloth cuffs quip, maybe  
accuses the whole world of his  
darkness. You seem unable to  
understand that (pygmy whitemeat):  
drooping as texture, each embody  
dynamite *bluntesse*, puffing  
lint wheels syllabary to  
tea cakes. OK? Monotonous  
agitations thrown across spent  
bonbons. Well well well well.  
You have to enforce digestion.  
May I slip through the greased

palms of sociology tonight? Without  
even knowing what it *looks*  
like. I'm always resistant, while she  
sets as the shadow of my  
thoughts. Passion toys curiously: seem  
to recall, holding what you expected  
to be left out, finalized  
occurrence, past eventual  
pronouncing. At home, it means  
light to them. Luck as forced  
movement, passionate bondage.  
Only by the moon's house, the  
light's frost . . . Arm  
jammed, meaning's glance coats  
cool, cones emblem's jars, erupts  
immense drone, cucumbered out  
of clock, load dickering. Tuned  
full, leveraged gline. This  
is the evening before I ask,  
my hands hardened to let water  
in, or substance, acceleration,  
a line of sight inflating to  
become extinct. *Listen*  
*to reason*. It's only a few hours  
away and plunges down. Great  
logs of the moon: The things that  
make up daily life, meteorites and  
meteroids, air, food, housing.  
Years stars caught in space.  
My reefs, my trees having fallen.  
Then the reader crowds the page  
with the rush of ideas: a portable  
altar strapped to his back, waving  
fables and faces and manoeuvring  
between points, holes in clouds,  
condensing into a stream of ink.  
The present moss tears backward  
shading the grief  
of heaven's earthlessness, and melting  
into empty air. Blind love for the  
future, I used to say, as if  
measure met my grave. Dreams  
wheel their pale course, we write  
in sand. . . . But you've  
changed—money, self-destruction,  
metabolism, large major things,  
the real stuff. I remember you  
in certain immense situations: how  
the timing was wrong, or don't  
surge with me now, how what I  
could accept purples your words,  
flash images of fractional chance,  
crystal methodology, giddy  
visibility. When she smiles



another star is lit; when she laughs,  
she drops the balloon. Carrying  
swollen changes that rip in the whirl  
responsiveness makes. Lining  
the pictures & deliriously  
swinging upward toward our hats.  
I used to be American but now I just  
speak English. Conventicles sledging  
tumbled delusions, danishes in  
the pool. As per permanent noncling 100%  
banlon fodder (semidistinguishable  
dent) nods out to liquidating  
dropsy (would like to shut him out  
of misbegotten congelation of  
debasements). I mean I wanted to hear  
everything, not any way to pass  
judgment, as if one could remain  
or could stand aside from things we  
saw. Light long enough to recover,  
to gain a second beam. Mother tongue,  
father pastrami. Then one evening I  
twist myself around, keeping track  
of all my loose ends, which I hadn't  
expected because I'd always come out  
as component parts, so I cut back, can't  
see, at which point I'm facing  
perhaps the ablative absolute,  
humiliation of a class system to  
create final segment but now stands  
by itself, in someone else's  
clothes, as a way to set off to just  
where I've wanted to be all along:  
spectacularly encumbered but  
composed (some might say extended), a  
surface you can't hide in front of,  
or out of fumbling exhalation—tense  
windows—sound a press, gap a spill.  
Browsing for ice, the fragrance of  
its labor staggers outside the house  
of Rimes, green bottles smoked as  
they're hitched, the fish in the  
pail, and the pail in my hand. Later  
we go to lunch, but now we talk shoes.  
I began all this in April, 1972, at  
3:35 am. Those were the intentions  
I wrote down. In this way, from  
the outside, I put everything in.  
On April 11 I dreamt the history  
of all people in the world, good &  
evil. In June I started it again  
& what started it was that I wrote  
this: Her pins prick my skin.  
A blinding wedge, maybe the shape  
of selection (seduction): you leave

traces impossible to tear, I want  
to get out of here. *Hide me.*  
White verges, whirrings of remorse,  
seeth through the terminal, a kind of  
restored diligence, radial in its  
appetite, when the evening shuts in  
space or relaxes its axes  
in translucent thirst, ineluctably  
tainted by tendency. Whose blousing  
anecdotes within which trenchant  
anarchies tour ardor, penchant for  
flatulent latitudes backing into  
breath. The impact of the pipe  
like ice cream at the end of a  
sequence of themes memorialized  
in a pinhole. Blurry wheezes in the  
ricochet, crushing puffs of  
swelling fellowship. The Hudson  
lies, we get over who dies. Plethora  
jellies where the Persian Gulf  
empties into the roof. Say it,  
damn it! Then suddenly, a sedan  
comes around blasting and I drop  
to the sidewalk behind a hydrant, squinting  
to get the plate number. (Impotence  
itself should not discredit a man,  
but no one considers supporting it.)  
It is seven o'clock. I put on my  
coat and hat. Samples are recorded  
with a spinning arc, balancing  
incontinently to find the proscenium.  
Yet politics excited them, the avarice  
for neglected ideas under the locks  
in the hallway. No end  
in sight—nothing breaks, or  
spend all the time pending, sense  
of where, whose to what's, seen  
as sidereal blink, as in: sure could use  
a cold drink, a hot potato, an  
exact definition (remonstration). I'm  
afraid because I know a word  
without having seen it or read it.  
(All experience is conditioned by expectation.)  
& my feelings yearn for names known  
only by interval and tone. The points  
connect *only once*. I come  
to the door, I stop at the door, I  
push the door open.

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*“Reading the Tree: 1 and 2” have as their source the  
poems collected in In the American Tree, edited by Ron  
Silliman (Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 1986).*

## OF TIME AND THE LINE

George Burns likes to insist that he always takes the straight lines; the cigar in his mouth is a way of leaving space between the lines for a laugh. He weaves lines together by means of a picaresque narrative; not so Henny Youngman, whose lines are strictly paratactic. My father pushed a line of ladies' dresses—not down the street in a pushcart but upstairs in a fact'ry office. My mother has been more concerned with her hemline. Chairman Mao put forward Maoist lines, but that's been abandoned (mostly) for the East-West line of malarkey so popular in these parts. The prestige of the iambic line has recently suffered decline, since it's no longer so clear who "I" am, much less who *you* are.

When

making a line, better be double sure what you're lining in & what you're lining out & which side of the line you're on; the world is made up so (Adam didn't so much name as delineate). Every poem's got a prosodic lining, some of which will unzip for summer wear. The lines of an imaginary are inscribed on the social flesh by the knife point of history. Nowadays, you can often spot a work of poetry by whether it's in lines or no; if it's in prose, there's a good chance it's a poem. While there is no lesson in the line more useful than that of the pick-et line, the line that has caused the most adversity is the bloodline. In Russia everyone is worried about long lines; back in the USA, it's strictly soup-lines. "Take a chisel to write," but for an actor a line's got to be cued. Or, as they say in math, it takes two lines to make an angle but only one line to make a Margarita.

## WAIT

This is the way to start a sentence about startling a sentence.  
Here is the tense that has not heart, that tramples beyond its  
own infirmity. O! how exquisite is the loss of all that we have  
shared, all that we might better have hoped only to have lived  
for. Pleased, said I, who cares so little about such things,  
who'd rather be a mast on a plumb of piddle than underlit by  
dunks . . .

At this point dive into second. Soon I will try to correct a foil  
trivial to all but those who see behind a wet-pressed fin. Or would  
this mean that all was tossed in this here twirl? What am I to do  
sayeth the elderly man. I will goes into these houses that you  
have made for me and will tell you all I slate.

So it crawls off far into the sky that never answers  
Where daylight falls but knows neither you or ye  
    Fall into my arms of twilight  
    As I kiss the pit that stomachs not its pith  
And in this return to faithful sentience, gaze but have not  
Fear for all I try will bring to nought this pail of peers.

To say again.  
To say it here/  
Only this

can I know, that where I fly together will you warp that  
abode embrace my flight.

Or shall it only be that here do swim upon the grace of all  
that has o'ercome this vault of  
    sceptres. Steeped in vain revamp  
or put upon  
    at reason's heap.

Not to say or not to  
As

with this gaze upon failed Mystery  
*or in the giving go, the living loss*  
strikes against these bows

Which only says to this that will go variously to bay for noisesome  
    sleep.

Stern

among the frolicsome pompadors.

## HOUSE OF FORMALDEHYDE

It's not where you're going, it's  
Where you've been. Dateline  
In the harbor. Fellow rushes  
For funding, fuming, flipping  
Flaccid: rimless erosion, witless  
Emulsification. As on a bent,  
Meal, plaid, plane, a girl  
Holds a pail, defends a swirl

Stumbling for eviscerated lead hooks  
Englotted, Nordic stoops  
Whosoever irradiates decay, plunged  
As pediment, foaming sail, lining the  
Shifts with spongy (spectacular) spatulas.

Horatio of spell-bent positioning, fusing  
Co-spaniel foresight and copper-wire calumny  
Against the grain of saddlestitch cornmash.  
Precisely giddy, morosely fecundated. Snorkling  
& then snookered. Roadside rest-test adjoined  
To defamilial tireiron. (Unhooks what's  
Best left loose.) As was fonder than  
Revenants. Neither a fender nor a succotash  
Be. (Merely a spittoon of her petunia.) Seeking  
Not or seeing blotted—wave-high the croon,  
Defrock the peeling Argonaut. I would  
Not sink her ship nor span her  
Border as lacking sun-stained  
Catapults. Neither have I . . .  
Whose deflection can only pronounce insipience  
As the promise leadens enactment  
& the dusted gables parrot the stick to which  
Only lessening accounts. The serpentine miles  
Of the long-laundered parade dissolve  
In gulps, becalmed forays. Having hidden  
My amulets & fired my token,  
Alone on a dust-dark sea, with only  
Thee. Or wails oasis, deeded ground  
Where foot cannot fall, & felled, retains.

## WEATHER PERMITTING

She hits the  
lake and now  
it's time for  
    Like  
five'll get  
one, ten'll get/  
roaring into the  
blast of last  
year's rasp,  
or bereft on a  
beach outside  
a full-scale  
rivet. "We've  
got the best  
employee  
incentive plan  
around: they don't  
work  
out, we  
fire  
them." Slipping  
in the freeze-  
dried morning,  
sipping on old  
trends turned  
sour, new  
friends turned  
the corner  
to a bitterer break  
than cast  
iron. Bust  
your pajamas  
'cause the  
calendar is  
dormer. Hail as  
the whittle in a  
grain of plow.

## FORCE OF FEELING

Nothing is absurd when people are being killed  
around you like flies. Some way out  
of the mire, denuded dust. Checking  
(chalking) as it turns—spin of  
latched delegation, which forecasts  
felicitation. Not yet to dance, to tip  
as tone delays, ensnares. Silly widget  
creatured by antebellum forest rangers  
as if or when, who without wanting withers.  
Meanwhile, at glance disposed  
to any glaze while splay is act, foremost  
foremast incised by the veridical coat  
check boy swore he never took no  
cookery. Swell, just as well really, better,  
just forget it, forget it was ever  
mentioned.

# THE PURITAN ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALIZATION

constancy—or, rather  
questions about  
notably, mark  
at which the  
locus  
which this  
put  
*not all.* If  
what once  
enables  
“cold fish”  
of the severe  
image is uniform  
a steady. Ministers  
thus  
perceive—and in fact  
simply will  
by looking  
nor to whether  
objects? In my  
employ  
opposed the oscillating  
for example, the ringing of bells  
Behavior in the streets  
someone bumps  
with an even temperament  
moves abruptly  
(petty quarrels  
strenuously unleashed  
clutter (well for  
mood about oneself  
extend simultaneously  
can be illusioned  
in both rude &  
showering insipience  
Help to ought  
it be of manners  
Quota  
have played  
“infirmary”  
over something  
(view, with  
bottom all broked out  
endorsing a  
plausal relent  
this par &



## FILED REPORT

There is no sign other  
than the sigh of this  
unveiled removal.  
Given the mixed  
abjures, the journey  
no longer appeases.  
No easy answer  
abides, yet laxness  
is taken as virtue  
& bands of  
discontent are  
disconnected. One  
aimlessly distorts  
as play for 'plause  
(not that silence  
cures). Torrents  
of overcompensation  
showboat guest-laddered  
dipsomania.

In it but *out of* it  
("I need a drink").  
*Nail down your  
battens*. Impressed into  
service. substitution for  
(sure pest).  
Substitution blocked.

Or promise more  
than hope could  
hope more than  
promises.  
Angry without spears,  
or rigged to buoy-blind try  
against detour.

Bigelow or whigged out.

Be a blooper! (Can't  
get a hard-on  
with the light  
on.)

"It's like having  
our own baby. It's  
so cute & cuddly.

It's better than  
yours  
because we're puppets  
too."

Marshalling all my resources to play the  
role of a writer—a singular act of  
concentration to put out all that would  
distract me from this assignment, all  
that would discredit my performance.

Falling back into  
quasi-overt reverse  
psychobabble, patently  
trumpeted  
bounces  
up & off.

Chewing gum  
&  
spitting  
at the same time.

Better to bark  
out of fear than  
fear to bark—

## THE POET FROM ANOTHER PLANET

So they drove  
& the night  
becoming day became

a knife numb  
and gray &  
the all-toothed

allocation climbed into  
the realm of  
the beautiful and

lime. Thus aimless  
it becomes painless  
the genetic substrate

that courses remorse  
and bids goodbye  
to the anonymous

dispersion. A general  
economy as if  
to pray that

half a loaf  
would be not  
so good as

no loaf (half  
a boast not  
so good as

no boast). Restive  
without rest, anxious  
without anxiety. So

many fears, none  
real. There's a  
vision but there'll

never be a  
visitation.

## FOAM POST

Lose track of where seven Moabite  
Everything the stove as agent you  
Devolved and basically are  
Spunk in a minute reprobated  
Adverse elemental approbation gelatinous  
Curio sung to deeds socked with  
Ginger and gold sullen and then  
Surrendered by cave-lit trestle  
Of simpering slug-down egress.  
Or parts of guarantee cleaned  
Out pockets an unclasped shake  
Rant about owing restricted  
Tributary and wakes on  
These stupid tires implements  
Trashed in an overgrown bestiary  
In a vest of tiers. Notable  
Inclination: “Too much belly an’ no’  
Eno’ brain.” Sermons of  
Vibration who’ll holler before  
Discrepancy tuck jug—  
Tinsel of titularly vague versions  
Verging behind programmable dual  
Dipsticks. Everything seen so far  
Away and more produce on other  
Seismographic orifice bundle branching  
Toxemia inadmissible as to stuck-up  
Steam stadium circuits bored cauldron.  
Neptune’s climb from the ducks to the  
Decks (oilcloth) solvent to dementia  
Spud repertory condominium. Flown  
Boast (Kelly-green incapacitator): which  
Is very natural (“I do not care for the part about  
Pirates”), sometime aquatic (“Solange had to say  
It was over a long time before”), unconscionably  
Pede-like (“the soldiers marched valiantly  
To their reward”) and preternaturally triumphant  
 (“Available evidence suggests a lack of  
Further routes of inquiry”). Periodicity  
Or piquant insolvency (not currency but the  
Fear of is the). Rain rain  
Raining inside my tailored suit. “Twelve  
Yards, only twelve yards over, at the  
Intersection of Vein and Vine—another  
Lawn being mowed! Another  
Gracious day!” Not to have to  
Not to say, not to have to have  
To, not to have to prey, not to  
Have to, not to have to feel  
Not to, not to have to have to

Say. Pink lemons on the orange  
Lime tree.

## RIOT AT 111 STATION

*If I lose my temper you're totalled.*

Sallow trays of disgenerate plush, flushing  
the balcony of derision, conviction's

tumor. Lost my glasses

flashes. As might

incense a prod, wherever it

clogs. Suddenly

distends into arced, incoordinate

future frisson.

Mongrel angle detoured, brulant

and trampled, of volutuality manque

“as nauseous and tedious as adultery in literature”.

*The brick that broke the camel's sap.* Fit to be

frenzied (funny you don't look

tumescent). Fat Boy's famous

Jew-Punching Contest (“NO

CREDIT REJECTS HERE”).

As benefits bereavement

in whom return might anchor.

## SEVEN FOR AOTEAROA

Don't take  
the steak  
I ain't  
Dunedin.

—Robert Creeley, *Hello*

### *Ear Shot*

Here is the spare  
aside the locker room  
where I am marooned

### *Thermal Gardens*

This  
is not the blue  
lake or pink  
lake or orange  
lake—just a  
lake, landed  
by an unobliging  
perseverance who  
snaps, world  
weary, not worried  
& all the  
pushchairs plod  
along the potted  
parts.



*The Beauty of Brevity, the Bananas of Antibes*

Poussin did not eat baloney.

*Harsh Light*

I don't think I  
can keep her  
from the lighter  
much longer

*Free Turn*

If I had a dime  
for every hour I've had  
peace of mind  
I'd still be a poor man

[or]

I was gay & carefree  
but now I am grave with  
responsibility

*No Pastrami*

Walt! I'm with you in Sydney  
Where the echoes of Mamaroneck howl  
Down the outback's pixilating corridors

*Historic Bookplates of California*

No end to envy.

## SLOWED REASON

Poetry is sediment  
I wipe off the windshield  
The mindshield, a process  
Of such and such refrain  
An original instance  
Of many waiting  
The field of shifting

Expenses reclaim the years  
Remainders of what is there  
A battle of listening  
Degree of fuming  
Autopsies the barometer  
In children's voices, taut or piercing  
Moments, leers, discharge  
Against a flattened calculus of indication  
(I can tell by the feeling)  
Reminders to explain  
Insane parts of an entire flesh  
A map, a sword, a monkey.

Moisture of talk, minimizes mimicry  
Mummy's condensation, a repetitious scrawl  
Of transitions from previous notes  
Corresponding to functions  
Parts of a closed ambition  
The original instance of many

Waiting  
I can tell by that  
Or  
"Keep your clothes on"  
Process of sifting  
The entire field  
A calculated function of  
Degree (debris)  
Without which I must  
Rattle a gourd filled with pieces of my own flesh  
Matrices that correspond  
Inverted sentiment

—Nick Piombino & Charles Bernstein

## BEYOND THE VALLEY OF THE SOPHIST

You don't get the sense  
he has a lot to say; but he says it  
very well. The search  
which is a deference to the caving  
walls of essential acts, potential facts. Circling  
caustics in seas of suits. [I]  
want a phone, a sea, a  
curb; body parts impede essence. (Relation

Precedes production.) Athwart  
knack (flagon). As homemade  
bestiary enthrottles boheme. *Bruce*  
*is bruised by bluster* (Buster). Fight  
fire with water (warper). "This  
is a powerful, original, and deeply  
moving work and many will  
find it a disturbing one."

When in falcon time and of a ripe  
rage, I bloat a board, as ever  
has accord in a day-long waft . . .  
as or like may gird, sift, stultify,  
perish, churl. Anyone blessed with  
pumice. He said he had a mouse  
in his hard disk. Then apoplectic, disappointed.

"I purely couldn't tell you, partly  
couldn't consider, penultimately  
unavoid[avail]able." Even Pope John Paul II  
agrees. "I have read Professor Bell's  
letter with amazement. In my review I said  
his research was fascinating and most skillfully  
presented. As for  
the misgivings I felt (and still

Feel), they were expressed in as considered a  
manner . . ." Those things  
which I beheld as child—chair, table  
floor—concrete, that meant a life. Or  
blind to purloined recall, dodges for  
bull or Bill, only to inappropriately  
will. These china dolls, Moroccan  
scrawls: the cost of it all.

Retention that squanders its own demand,  
see-sawing and then fawning. "My ink  
is not good, my paper dirty, & I  
am altogether ashamed." Standing,  
stunned; strutting, stunted. He  
who is lost hesitates and hesitating finds  
(but not what he looked for). She

who meditates is tossed. Let geese

Be geese! (He does not care whose house he sets on fire as long as he can warm himself by the blaze.) There stands the hood, there the barking knife. *Take a scissors to write.* “She sure put a spook in my wheels!” Like two dogs with one prick. Nor cast your hose before gnomes; that is, skin them but don’t

Fleece them. For it’s better to be led by the nose than by the hairs, better to be led by the nose than to have a lead nose. Which is to say, he was a hatchet without a handle, a pudding in a puddle. What a muddle! “I only say suppose this supposition,” propose this proposition. Not a tragedy, just an

Inconvenience. & don’t be harsh without a reason. (Just after she screams she picks up her bottle & dreams.) *Then we came upon a grand beech forest Where once I lost my good friend Morris.* Willingly, I’ll say I’ve had enough. Wet as a mule and twice as disgusted. Take my husband,

Please! But the pleasures are entrusted to the wrong partitions: the cant of intellectual fashion (Paris) lies a decade behind leather design (Milano). Harsh, that is, without accuracy. For with Rehnquist & Meese, the only ones with rights are the unborn and the police. & reigning over all, the Great Communicator—master of deceit. No release.

Heave, hoe this firmament.  
What is here only that; no less. The tide pulls back its brim—in which we spin.

The prolonged hippopotami of the matter swivel for their breakfasts, fall in the middle landing soft with the horse shrill of honeysuckle, to the decimated acid of the sweet tub. They are hobbled, dejected & lie frozen with salted humbling. To the ocean of shorn horizon, averting America’s

sentient emptiness, here where the body's sightless ascent  
revolts in paltry recompense.

Obscurity beckons from down the block  
oblivion, too, bids me come & knock.  
The water calls me but I shall not go  
for a man's place is on the sho'.  
You can sing and you can pray & you can shout lots  
but you'll never get to Heaven without a box.  
Lox & bagels, bagels & lox, kreplach  
is on the stove, time for a plate of hocks.

I'd ask that you call me by my Christian name, Buddy  
(since I don't know your name, I hope you don't mind  
my calling you that).

It's not a lot to ask; purely, it's a small thing  
but I think it'd help to bond the cement between us  
put us on indistinct terms, if you know what I mean.  
What I want to bring across to you, Buddy  
is the vanity of conceits  
though you may call it what you please—

The story is told that a man came to a house noted for  
its views  
& was told, look to the West, at the mountain ranges that  
loom over the land  
& was told, look to the South, at the turquoise-blue lake  
shimmering in the blue-bright sun  
& was taken, then, to an Eastern balcony, overhanging  
a garden unrivaled in its varieties of plants & flowers  
& he looked to the North, at the thick-grown forest  
& listened to the birds that filled the branches of the  
cascading trees  
& he was ushered to the Western windows  
& he said, "But I've already seen that."

## The Persistence of Persistence

“I find myself in a world of forces which act upon me, and it's they, and not the logical transformations of my thought which determine what I shall ultimately believe ”

—C.S. Peirce

## FEAR OF FLIPPING

Presently, peasants are heard yodelling in the distance. “It’s the strain, two liters of Mercury and never enough flotation devices—how many more times do we have to ask”: shards of bucolic pastry anchored against cactus cabinets, Nantucket buckets. Sadly to state a grew-quite-a-lot-since-last-look, nut-flack visage advancing the caucus of Caucasians, the too-near / too-far avoidance contraption destiny tears (as in pears not peers) from Everyperson’s buxom brow. God, so much thought to be poisoned with and Lusty Lucretius gone all these years (Luscious Lucretia pawned for a prized pony ride): alack, this blighted Border, containing sectionate moorage and amalgamated heartburn, flitters its last edge, applauds its appalling prescience. For a fan is the best hat, and the void mind the finest conquistador—valiant without prostration, generous without justice. . . . never inflicting out of fear, but not fearing to inflict, as Uncle Hodgepodge put it. “All gored up on dickering and hope”—familiar freight to the returning antelope. Sinking into the quicksand that is a life, eyes already under, legs, cries; so a subterranean probe goads or litters with predetermined inkblots and galvanized regrets: not to get it ripped or not to get it rigged, surely a pain in the caverns of illumination’s erasure, vituperation’s cradle. Gone are the glaze; now all hollow to get hallow and break the bank of promise on the shore of presumptuous ill will. Oppress or be suppressed or cry *hornets* in a den of bumbling bees. The walls are our only floors and the floors, like balls, repel all falls. Adequate to any sense of sediment, as ‘garbage heap’ exchanges for so-called overall mesh, or disappointed not to have been, as ‘arbitrary’ reduces to ‘faker’, *wallow* to *value of*. “I love you so much and I hate this war so much.” Frames comparable to apparently, and have dippier or ferrets because you don’t, cleats beyond periodization patched at nod to reliance—take a walk. Sparked just the same, doubly blackground (“I’d like to see you waddle your way out of this one”) of an anyway able, especially wailing, no matter how good. Does before doing, trends when trend, inventories overload. Buzz is the word, two on Tuesday, and then nobody knows nothing but will cost but. Big Deal at Contestable Parameter. Mood shift or blurred gift. “If you don’t like it colored in, you can always xerox it and see it all gray.” Or else smuggle leers with guilt-edged

cheer. “You mean, image farm when you’ve got bratwurst?”  
You mean you have a life outside this page? Not  
on my greeting list: creation stares at null scooper. Dulled  
dodge—but good to get hit *sometimes*. But surely the jumps  
open chasms; yet the danger for the night watchman  
is turning against the dark, or animating it with  
demons and devouring them; and gain no sustenance. More  
toward is there, added to some, is beyond and  
present. Fat-bottom boats. Only fire will erase  
the pain of having done or not done what was  
done or not done. *Sheep sheep don’t you know  
the road*. Intimate essence hurtled into prepubescence  
and mangled by the lurch. Behind this metaphor  
lies Descartes, pulled by a train of horses. “It’s  
been years and twice as many tears.” Only the world  
happens  
and racing to get near enough. Cornered by. Something  
snapped—“like those nasty people with attitude do.”  
Singing fa la la, fa fa la or doodling with a billy  
club. A dab of adagio—humble and then humped.  
“A sideshow freak suffers from fits of uncontrollable  
laughter that prove to be fatal.” While according to Jones,  
Freud was fed at the breast, as one would expect. “Hands  
that have touched ham will never touch mine” (can’t  
see the forest for the wheeze). Half  
breed, half burrow. Or linked with  
steam of pink: never the big  
man or boy or bison, only the tongue-  
tied tightrope stalker, witness  
and then witless. Bounce back or bounce  
by, the husks are salted and the fruit  
is dry. Yet there will always be a there  
whether here or ne’er. As opposed to  
will include bending, funny to see, title  
is (in the sense of bells) perfectly eliminated  
demitasse or more inclusions, three-camp  
world-weary, crazed by mostly had makes, pull  
to find out the plug. Here’s the stage—  
wasn’t any of them toys? Felt very poured, humming  
and “stepped into,” not being as part of. Hook  
in second thoughts, choices like thematic  
trousers splitting perception in boomeranging tutelage. What  
troubles  
is troubling—not dealing with disagreement as  
disagreement but turning it into a test  
of scholarship or morality. The fact is  
none of these kinks are going to see red. Was  
to construct a thin skin, in every  
major way, take it like this, expose it and deflate  
it. In an angry mood, why assume a realer  
hidden truth comes out? Somehow when something—  
you leap, is said would rather (“offensively  
sloppy and ill-informed”). If I have reservations  
they pale before the list of villainies you offer.



Time and tiredness, to coin a phase. *Heaven's gate is nickel plate* (shook up and blistered). It's very hard to invoke just how immaculate such reception would have to be. & the volcano roared & the people said this is a message but there was none to say what it meant & the people wept that they might understand & the lava flowed. Waxy figures in an airbrushed memory of moderate times and tinkling moral sensations—the chassis with no suspension, the heart without its pump. Blue sky that absorbs such feats as these or those, caring not, nor staring, immutable redresser of, and the fallow heather that once was treasured. Going not, then gone. Lips like lisps—sibilant and sweet. Or vie for vision on a deck of pearl—hugely inchoate brick mixed with spit and darn-near squawks. For material is the in-substantial stuff that is craved in sprawl of gravures—arrangements of another day, cyclic hay. Where beauty is not found for want of good or bad and echoes carry ingots themselves to turn upon gradient's unmitigating fold. A cart that hauls in grandeur grim resemblance of resplendent tongues—swerving spigot of an unappointed dome.

## POCKETS OF LIME

Everything has happened, nothing  
    possessed. The lawn engages  
Its constituent appraisers. Burrows  
    fold by, unaccosted by memories of  
Synergies the doorjamb clops  
    to. Boulevards  
Beam in the near distance while  
    on its wand the  
Hermits are organizing affinity  
    clusters. In the cab, desiccated Dominicans  
Cop to outtakes from "Take the 'A' Train" as  
    the band plays late  
Into a night that never comes. On deck,  
    a shipboard romance turns  
Sordid when the expiration date embossed  
    on a Ouija board is  
Overlooked. The days so blinding, before  
    you know it's time  
For another frame of Limbo at  
    Club Lumbago. "There's no  
Buggy like the Buggy that ate my  
    baby in the summer of '82." Not  
Two days left, scouting under the eaves  
    for thrown-away cheese &  
Mink fleas. One chord crests, no  
    place for more, when  
You 'ear 'er, down by the Walla Walla  
    Feedway. (As if foreign or foreign-  
Scented.) Nothing has happened, everybody  
    has been processed. The  
Elevator leads to a flight of bronzed  
    stairs that ends near a  
Picture of your majestic presentiment,  
    rather noisier than had  
Been or would be anticipated or  
    asphyxiated, in some ways a  
Damp cloth and light dusting would have  
    done as well. *At this point*, the  
Nasobiliary tube is inadvertently  
    dislodged; before replacing it, we  
Decide to insert an endoprosthesis. "Worms  
    in brain, worms in  
Stomach, how'm gonna worm me way  
    out o' here." You see, you are  
What you tear, but only the baker knows  
    what the bread's been fed. "But the big  
Question, which they don't discuss, is  
    what kind of glue the man was  
Using." A soul as soft as Detroit, a  
    bile as big as a bagel—though the

World's not made of muslin and the only  
cosmic gas is static  
Electricity. *How would you treat the patient  
now?* Would you leave the  
Tubes in place for continuous drainage? Refer  
for laparotomy? Or  
Perform balloon dilation of the stricture  
and endoscopic sphincterotomy?  
Keep in mind that the bilirubin is down to  
1.6 mg/dl and the platelet count  
Remains low at 4,000. Where the harp is  
the loneliest fire station, adorned  
With piecemeal crescendi and unaugmentable  
nosegay, enlisted into an action  
Encumbered by touch, hostage to  
decision: derision's ubiquitous  
Breatholizer, haphazard and blousy.  
Double space everything; use *soft* not  
*Hard* returns; use  
*word wraparound*  
If available; spike headings, don't  
center anything; set tabs  
For tabulars instead of spacing over or  
among or inside or in between or across or  
On top of or throughout or beside or in place  
of; provide extra space between  
Text and other Elements; use letters for  
numbers where possible, numbers for  
Letters as necessary; order pages  
consanguineously (don't start  
Numbering from one). You may be asked to  
type simple "genetic codes" in the process;  
These serve as placeholders; do not  
type such codes without specific instruction  
From the Instruction Terminator.  
Everything has progressed, nothing  
Has occurred. The firetruck roars  
to the Lake District while at the encampment  
All that's left are  
flesh wounds. THE DAY THE \$  
STOOPED. BILLIONS FOR BROWNIES. BABY'S FIRST  
BATH. DESIGNATED VICTIM. "There's  
No question that he's got a big Freudian  
thing." "Arguably the most argumentative  
Poet in America." "You need to know that when you  
infringe on somebody else's  
Profitability, you have to have a clean  
operation or a load of  
Protection." "We're  
going through this coffee like  
A fly through butter." Keep in mind, however,  
that many of these changes need not  
Cost a leg nor require you to overhaul your  
imaginary. Clean, uncluttered shelves,

For instance, do not require a wrecking  
crew. Neither do neat, legible, complete,  
manuscripts. Similarly, you may not have been  
born with attributes of a Greek  
God nor the fashion sense of a Milan  
model, but you know what you'd  
Like to see in a competent art professional.  
I am sure that a stained smock, seen  
Through the haze of hemp smoke, is not what  
you have in mind. We won't  
Put up with that in our physician or stockbroker, then  
why should we expect our readers  
To accept less from us. "Don't question  
my similes," said the supple senorita. "Don't  
Mess with my metonymies," cried the mandarin  
matador. (He kept his prosodic  
Devices in a toolbox on the table of  
the padded basement shelter near the  
Washer-Dryer and Automatic Pump.) Not  
liberty but the leer of liberty  
Lulls the laddies from their crusted  
craters, the jaded from their lard-like  
Ladders. . . . and the ladies, with their crimson  
laces, Bill and Lou, Viv and  
Stu. Or saying:  
Broiled, broiled in the broiler with lemon  
Or poached, poached with some water, or  
fried, fried with butter in a pan on a stove  
In a kitchen. The green so green in the afternoon  
light so no longer color but a  
Cavern or expectancy jelled into a reel of  
gypsies dancing a pellucid romp  
On the altar of Nostradamus, vicar of the implausible  
audibles, then cast upon the foam  
Of a sailor's groan. Thus, certainty confronts  
us but we cannot be sure of it—  
A surrogate holding, cradled in the mist of  
an impossible necessary, and lost  
To its purpose, or our own. Vagueness, in  
which belief is mute, & manifest . . .  
*Even one thing can make a display.* And there  
was surfeit of singularities, odd  
Lots of broken middles, splintered  
threads—eidetic deniers as Michael once  
Put it—for to deny is measure of our  
heft; even small coins can be traded  
Or stolen. *The Unquiet Journey of Martin Heidegger.*  
As in the expression, 'What clock is it?'—  
"One clock," "three clock," "eight clock." For  
anything said is significant—& much that  
Is not said but only spoken, hinted—  
tossed from a glazed eye to a  
Nearing touch. And what the senses  
but limiting scanners, combing the

Ineffable to produce sound, searing  
the seamless to appear as  
Sour? *Soaring, senseless*  
night, of no limit, that  
None have known, or  
could wish to— “Pipe  
Down, you pipsqueak,” said the Piper, hitting  
me with a six-inch length  
Of galvanized tube. In the rooms the children  
suck & blow, talking of Moholy-Nagy.  
Segmenting the real: Coca-Cola franchises  
the metaphysics of  
Numerosity, according ‘classic’ and ‘new’ equal  
status, the diversity of constituencies  
Obliterating the elitism of “one common  
taste” of a people. (Thinking  
All is secure when nothing is secure, all is  
resolved when everything is  
Indissoluble.) In this sense, postmodernism coincides  
with pluralism and Daniel Bell’s  
Smiling. The end of idolatry is the beginning  
of commodity fetishism: God  
Isn’t gone away to a happier place, she’s  
not napping nor hiding nor  
Lying in wait, just having a snack & settin’  
back. No shit, no shoes, just  
Me & my electric windmill. “But despite  
six- and seven-digit severance  
Arrangements, a fall from the top can be  
grim; neither money nor the memory  
Of power inoculates against frustration, greed  
or a stinging sense of injustice.”  
*The memory of power.* Do’s and don’t do’s & could  
do’s & won’t do’s. “My  
Personal taste never enters into anything  
I do.” Everything  
Has been resurrected, nothing has vanished. “The regulator  
is never separated from the  
Main spring.” For only truth is  
reversible, lies fester  
Under the skin & make it rancid. & the  
smell of lies is everywhere  
& the people crave it as perfume for their  
perfume. But truth cannot be  
Smelled & is as nothing & reviled as only  
nothing is—a void & a pox & an  
Abomination—for what cannot be tasted nor  
heard nor smelled cannot be put to  
Use & what is not abused is less than  
nothing. Busy as beagles, we  
Think what we see and say what  
we gnaw. So cry not  
For the beloved nor lost but for the unseen, un-  
touched that we will

Not abjure. Cry for the steam, not the machine.  
    & Monsieur Madame takes me in hand  
To sing the Tut-tut-aloo, yes Monsieur et Madame  
    they take me in hand & sing  
The Tut-tut-aloo. *Calling Ruth, Ruth*  
    when there is no Ruth. Patterns  
Are what we fathom, needs  
    what we endure. A crack  
Is not a fault nor a fall an oasis,  
    neither are vases places. & I  
Have known disgraces. "I wish I were  
    a gurgling guppy, 'cause then I'd  
Swim, yeah then I'd swim / Sure if I  
    were a gulping guppy, the Atlantic  
I'd spin, Pacific I'd be in." But  
    *you* ensnare me with your wet  
Cold eyes and golden ear and I ripple  
    beside, bound to the tide.  
Nothing has changed, everything recalls (recoils).  
    The hunger of prostration, the lassitudes  
Of— "I've spent half my life covering up my  
    mistakes and another half trying to  
Expose them." These are the ways, counting  
    one and two, three and—; but  
To pray is still a dance, to fray a lost  
    leader . . . on the road merely  
Tread, the mill seldom silenced. Everything  
    is promised, everything  
Delivered. Who waits waits  
    in the company of women & men &  
Boys, for the Messiah whose come & gone  
    with no trace; for waiting is the custom'd  
Course for those who've missed the last boat, misplaced  
    the keys. No one was  
Promised, no one disfigured. & the breeze  
    becomes a gust but  
The house does not blow down. "I can't have  
    your experience, I'm not sure I  
Can have my own." "Up among the curls so  
    high, like a lever that's a  
Sigh." The baby play with its  
    fingers; this is called 'finger  
Play'. Sometime it work and sometimes it  
    doesn't: all the rest is  
'Redolent with breathless antipathy'.  
    "Where have they gone?" asked Jasper.  
"To the deep dark dank & won't be back, to  
    the end that has no beams."  
It's your dime but it's my quarter.

## BLOW-ME-DOWN ETUDE

Ah! through the hush the looked-for  
midnight clangs!  
—William Morris, *The Earthly Paradise*

“Put her in her Chair! Put her in her  
Chair!” The bleary weights of nothing-to-explain,  
nobody to explain to. News of the weave, nub  
of the bleep. I take what I’m given and give  
what I’ve taken, stake what I’m bidden, dumped  
when I’ve driven. (Upset to get.) Just when  
thought, for one thing, affecting has got  
to as possible point, whatever, a few  
as many were and worse didn’t—  
but not to dwell, to fall, specifically  
where was that it might, matter (formal)  
given coagulation. Remember you brought,  
prying to amount for, rather given your own  
dizzying play in that inflection. To open up  
as much of, as far as, to convey  
in this respect and a sense, at the  
same, more relevant in terms of revealing, finally,  
forged dominions have mistook. The only  
true epiphanies the ones misplaced (the  
forced replacements of). Arrived with silent  
fire, projector of what was faced. *We thought we might  
be better than.* But the knees swell, the  
feet collapses. No further shown, as if it’s  
only do too little, or much too much. As  
if more strobe at clay could quell command: fear  
frozen with fright, tautologies our  
topologies; tear the midsection & loose the  
rig. There was a moment that hope made  
realer than the pause endured, who wept  
like trawlers without recall. No villanelle to chew  
nor salmon to. These tendencies arise  
out of a culture and cannot be confined to those  
defined them: a pound of defiance is  
worth an ounce of lure. (She was a giant  
of the experience of being a baby & proud  
was I . . .) Summary  
or tainted with coats of (jangle what  
you will, where you pry—not fables with  
testy, tedious tirades, waves at)  
plaint. Oracular insects  
infusing pseudonymous stuffed desks (stuck  
decks). Rivers of lies, severs of  
glides, desperate for an even chance at less  
than might release, at least a vantage  
to profane the holier version of these  
visions, riddled with blitzkrieged  
orifices, adipose titration. Moon at

worn regales; the ink its sail. Plastered  
on the mesa & pacing fifty leagues  
anon. (*We thought we might be better  
then.*) You try to jump ahead, but fall  
behind, dropped back but are conspicuously  
frames. The falters make no better  
flutters, along the oak and toggled plane.  
Basically berserk, the body with only  
organs relies upon a  
peacock's prickly prudery; then  
resents what will not relent. Spilt  
or guided. For guilt is the burden of the whitewashed  
man: for what has not been done and what cannot be  
undone. "Where there is sorrow there is  
holy ground." The sink cracks, the  
furl falters, and Everyperson bastes its  
stew. Darting and then carted; filled with  
or unacquainted by. Who feeds the farmers  
cornered by a row of sediment, cooled  
erotics of unsublimated stokes. He  
speaks but does not offer, scarcely  
sweats before he swings: there is no  
denouement for pebbles or for wings.  
Of course, it *is* an honor to be sprinkled  
out, not that it's an evanescent one: I  
dislike the form and in most phases would  
not see the point in, to make stab at.  
That's fine, did you notice, seems an  
extraordinary, if it is in, however, for  
reasons that now can't see to reply  
to—stupid & wildly deranged—decided  
at least is a register, is having (dubious  
distinction) though as you know the lack of,  
loose extension, style of support, is  
segmented beyond the pale. Will lessen: I  
decline: one could: at least: there are:  
that will: when may: though is: you  
should: that might: is obvious: possibly  
substantive: worthwhile bothering. The  
concurrent and multiple variables affecting the flow  
of the construction stream can easily . . . Loss of  
pleasure in all or almost all or nearly mostly  
all; unresponsive to usually pleasurable . . .  
An situation amounts, the fledgling recriminations  
that border on beautification: a constituency  
of tissue and marrow and formaldehyde. Many  
disputes involve opinions and facts  
about stipulations that occurred over months  
and years. Everyone does not feel well-  
treated—the same slap applicated with  
the fine measure of meager interdiction, ignorance  
of extent. For instance, your actions seem  
divisive and policing of the very "community"  
you desire to support. Nothing represents



anything. Billboards poster our losses. Better  
jeer than leer. Waking up at least two hours  
early, body movements slow or agitated, excessive  
or inappropriate feelings of self-reproach.

That's the major  
problem we always  
have in this

country. We don't  
have a totalitarian  
society where we

suppress the opposition.  
We have an  
information glut and

we bury the  
opposition under piles  
of newsprint that

all say the  
other thing. So  
our side gets

to get a  
critical review in  
*The Guardian*, whereas

the other side  
gets to get  
a laudatory review

on the front  
page of the  
*Times Book Review*

[Michael Meeropol]

Overactive, talkative, pressured speech; racing  
thoughts, flights of ideas; inflated self-  
esteem; need no sleep; easily distracted; judgment  
wasted. The Westside wail of words. Steam  
pours onto subway platform as crowd hangs back  
of turnstile waiting to see if trains will  
run. Two feet canary, team fleets of  
aquamarine. For all the talk about decentered I's  
there's a lot of overbuilt egos. Like  
lips passing in the Fright. (We thought  
we might be better than.) Beyond any bromide  
hidden in assumptions and retarded by lachrymose  
perambulation, hollering for benefit when all  
the swirl spies pleistocene maquettes. Where  
during the time of the observance chortled  
aboard a lack, preemptive to detain  
maladroit possession, steamed at  
what reposed, dishevelled, on a fair  
and merry query. As right is as and

just enclosure deeds the doing spun, so  
bid departure, fore enamoured, seeds  
the sowing sunk. *They* asked me how I knew  
a shade of blue was blue; *I*, in tune, re-  
plied, when you've got two eyes, folks  
return your fire. Hunted down or  
hunting. Fabulous forsook, the code without  
the signals. And who remembers Leon  
Klinghoffer and forgets those with no names  
or faces who perish without trace and  
less sanction? The Lord looks on  
those or these, but, deaf and dumb, gropes  
at making signs of solids. Ignominious  
restitution, a civilization unable to rise  
as high as a gutter; yet kindness  
makes fools glow with sedulous light  
& the stunted grow incandescent. These  
are the words we cannot hear, a language  
of sighs. Here are the verbs we have  
not curved, vested by sleight: cascade, retort,  
vitate, effloresce. Staccato deserts the ob-  
ligato, amounts that turn against, in which  
to spread, invaginated prescience before a  
nod to cruise: pratfall or billy-  
goated & bubbling up like whine.

*The world we seek is wiped.*

Sitting up, standing,  
falling down. & the river turns  
to slush & the slush  
to shacks but there  
is no encampment  
& no prognostication for  
a sail is a Dot & a  
Rot is a shirt  
& a lurch  
devolves into twin  
doves or antiquarian  
swans  
but more likely a  
pigeon.

Clubbed by stupidity  
intoxicate of  
stupefaction. Coming on like  
gangbusters and then just  
banging. (We thought  
we might be . . .) Alerted,  
flushed, remanded to  
reminders. "He took so much  
disparity," she said. "He was  
so grave attending the . . ."

Milkweed

or filched rudders  
(rubbers).

The ghost of a semblance of a

diver. Altered, adiabatically foregone.  
Rosy-fingered hiccups, polyglot  
hibiscus. "At the time, I was troubled  
that poets could neither tell readers the name  
of the device dispensed nor possible side  
effects. Now, if you care to think about  
it, even advising a reader to give  
aspirin to a fevered child involves a  
complicated series of aesthetical and ethical choices."  
May philosophers, December social scientists. Having  
completed the spadework on the lattice, she  
took up, as one might a pair of spectacles, the long-jammed  
plan of village of R——, in the county of  
P——, professing no more than an historical  
interest in a rumored subterranean passage  
that connected the village to its  
remonstration. Never abandoning fury for curiosity  
self-aggrandizement for repulsion. However which  
adorn multifoliate pummelling, hung by  
plunge and agglutinated with tetradactyls.  
Sumptuous sunder (rife with rips). "Sawyer  
called it transference, I call it baloney."

Dovetails with  
apologia, garlic press. "I'll  
tell you this, Sam, you've  
got some serious problems that require  
professional help." Galvanized  
Gargantua, doppler of sudden *zeitgeist*. Sunless  
in the sun. For each of us  
must decide the level of response  
we can afford to give readers in their quest  
for truthful, accurate information. Benevolent  
deception, partial truths, white lies, and other  
forms of circumvention should not be ruled  
out. If readers come to us for authoritative guidance,  
it is important that we not disappoint them—or they  
will turn to other, less reliable, media. "I  
just can't hit that number  
worth a damn." Garden-  
variety effluvium.

When guest is seated, go to door and ring  
bell twice. Slow boat to Bayonne, big bust in  
Saskatoon. Elementary tuning porch. Who  
waves the flaccid flag, downing a silvery  
flask, and wrests cacorythmias from  
a nest of horns. *Bleat, bleat don't  
you know the shoals.* (We thought . . .) Still  
the joust has made its recapitulation and the Trout  
fills the hall: skies of pomegranates and a  
ceiling of guffaws. Along alighted melodies  
that . . .

Something there is that doesn't love a  
pawn, that wants it smashed, and that its pawning  
for. As if

a runner might o'ertake her strife  
and patch the lost, unstrap this pediment  
of feeling's long and agate train. Much  
as you say, to start, at least unconsciously  
familiar (usual bulging): but the, we did,  
was a, she managed, and how, every time.  
Or rolled over, onto something (alchemical  
projectile), schmaltzed up with predictable  
thrashing. Upstairs for; or is so in the meantime you  
can actually precondition, have trouble with, as you—  
quote—to absorb roughhouse, endless transfer inflicted  
in passing out (but toneless) exoneration. Yesterday  
I got, I became, I couldn't understand, I  
should be finishing, or some such function as  
a viper. Both because and because. Like  
the idea of soon, excerpting plans who asked  
to duplicate in terms of expanding, since  
if, which have been a part of, was news  
to me. Weird and Red! Though, for example, they  
say 'Baltimore' different in 'Boston'.  
Studiously unprepared (oxymoronic  
modesty). Like  
loss that melts, topical  
glaciers make their move. "There's  
a bay inside o' Heaven  
made of spray, mazed with crape  
& it's acommin' for us  
couple o' days, aft a long haze."  
The antimonophysite heresy: management  
refuses responsibility for personal belongings checked  
with management. Saucy sailing, bossy  
commiseration—before the point is dry.  
Fecundly familiar, incontinent supplication.  
But not, according to Myron O'Mally; the  
bored haberdasher denied any involvement  
in the multimillion dollar confidence  
confection. Roasting the Host, toasting the boast.  
As trippingly entreaties us to linger, where  
hushed in the calm of plums, a votive  
respirator hums. Humungous desolation, lodged  
at flotilla and superannuated fortnightly.  
Suppurating bombast (lain along the lane, the  
lady lit a Lucky). When I arrived  
the reader was lying  
flat on the bathroom floor  
without any clothes  
and complaining of  
severe logorrhea. These are  
the criteria I have tried to get  
out from under  
insofar as they would lead to  
tighter analogies, less rhetorical  
affect. Furthermore, we  
are simply miles apart

flatulently wrong  
bad bit of deflecting—because you support, on  
that topic, no more  
about as themes  
which well up against this  
(tiresome allegation) to  
a place like Sovereign Privilege  
(sense of from) go in  
the direction of, link  
constrained.

True I do load  
on a spectrum more  
than peripheral, and also  
more germane as a sweeping,  
without swaying. Unbridgeable gulf  
by a long shot.

Clear crystal adipose tissue. For  
example, yesterday I refused to sell a man  
a capon. Mule  
of a guy. At dusk,  
a dullard's thoughts turn  
to dinner. Always  
wants what's out of  
reach. The search  
for nonproverbial language:  
child sticks finger  
in crank. Suppose  
*your* tooth hurt.

Get dressed, descend the ladder.  
(Later.) To be among such constitutive & fibrous  
fathers & be so slaphappy. *The world we seek  
was swiped.* (We thought we . . .) & rushing  
headfirst into the saltmines of the heart. On  
the other hand, you can always spend more time  
improving your chess. Romanticism is  
analogic, modernism is digital. Marxianism  
with a tiny middle-class face. "I got  
bowls coming out of my ears." "There's  
a three-inch opening in the incinerator." &  
the Heart of Africa bleeds black blood. Every  
day of apartheid dwarfs (every  
slash of entitlements mocks)  
the grief for  
seven dead star warriors. Logic  
skates on the brain, reason  
weighs  
on the mind.

Once  
I  
saw  
a  
man  
walk  
into

a  
pole.  
“You’re like an uncooked nerve.”  
From amniotic fluid to  
semiotic  
fluidlessness. Semi-  
arctic; infra-  
papillary. Semi-idiotic. Semi-automatic  
nosedive. Baby  
Doc’s dead! Death  
to all tyrants  
who feast  
on the misery  
of the people!  
Illusion or  
myth?  
When reason swells  
with repose then love is scorched  
flight.  
Some  
like it  
popped.  
“Haiti? Isn’t  
that where Richard Burton made one of his  
movies?” “Every  
Jew a .22.” Blinking, mumbling  
sprawling. “Don’t  
eat so fast, people will think  
you’re hungry.” Crazy Eddy’s  
Martin Luther King Day Portable Stereo  
Sale. Sondheim  
slumped on a sofa in his Manhattan  
townhouse. “The important thing isn’t  
the parties you join but the parties you  
make.” Or, a shell game’s better  
than no game. When  
the Messiah comes, the rust  
will fall from the scales  
on our eyes. *Some  
like it cracked.* Doubled  
over with second guesses.  
“Just tell me what you want.”  
Stove-top denunciations, roving bands of  
expectation. For God is  
scales not vapor: each day its  
dew (a portmanteau in every curlycue).  
“I’ve done everything in my power to make this palatable.”  
In the priestless churches of San Juan Chamula (the  
sentence will not end). Asking,  
Where are the Bickfords of yesteryear, where  
the Schrafft’s? While in the back corridors of time, where  
nothing is lost, the crowds swarm Lundy’s at Sheepshead  
Bay. We (who?) thought to build a diadem  
& kicked against the slates by which

each is measure & found wanting what  
is ready at hand but grasped too hard.  
Better than this puncture's pride at punching, to  
find a deck of turns, a float of  
tufts, & prattle sightlessly among the chaise-  
lit lawns.

[from the back cover of the 1991 Sun & Moon book]

Charles Bernstein is, simply put, one of the most influential and widely read poets of our age. One of the true masters of irony in poetry, Bernstein manages to also infuse each poem with an affirmative vision which verges on the utopian.

Bernstein is a poet of language, in the fullest sense of that word, a poet who "want[s] no paradise, only to be / drenched in downpour of words ..." In *Rough Trades*, language is taken in every direction possible, from the straight lines of jokes filled with pregnant pauses (George Burns) to the paratactic lines of a Hennie Youngman, and from the lines of Maoist thought to the lines of ladies's dresses which his father pushed — not downstairs in the stree but upstairs in a factory as the head of a dressmaking company. These lines of language, of thinking, intersect, dissect, converge, and emerge again as new ideas and emotions, hit and bounce and point and disappear over the horizon, only to reappear from the periphery.

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[from the backmatter of 1991 Sun & Moon book]

## CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Born in 1950 in New York City, Charles Bernstein received an undergraduate education at Harvard University. After graduating, he lived in Vancouver, British Columbia and Santa Barbara, where he worked as a technical editor, before returning to New York City. In 1977 he married painter Susan Bee, his editorial and artistic collaborator.

His first book publication, *Parsing*, appeared in 1976. In 1978 he began editing, with Bruce Andrews, the influential critical journal, *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*. The title of this journal quickly became a descriptive term to characterize a wide range of American poets whose work, discussed in the journal, focuses on language itself—how language means, how it is structured, how it sounds, and how it looks on the page. Not all of these poets share the same aesthetic, but the term, “Language” poets—for better or worse—stuck and came to be recognized as a major force in American poetics from the 1970s to the present.

The same year, Sun & Moon Press, in its first book publication, published Bernstein's *Shade*, a work that came to characterize his early writing, made of basically short lines that each recontextualize and transform the meaning of the previous and the next. The poetry that results is a work of jumps, leaps, fissures, breaks, and other disjunctive devices that also function together to create a meaningful, and often lyrical, whole.

Two short works, *Poetic Justice and Senses of Responsibility*, appeared in 1979, and Bernstein's first collection, *Controlling Interests*, was published the following year in 1980. This book received international critical acclaim and established Bernstein's



poetic reputation, which was further solidified with the publication of *Islets/Irritations* in 1983 and with a substantial book of essays in 1985, *Content's Dream*.

*The Sophist*, published in 1987, further extended Bernstein's range, making even more apparent his comic genius and his fascination with pairing radically different syntactical patterns of language with the same poem and volume.

*Artifice of Absorption* (1987) gave further evidence of Bernstein's critical perspicaciousness. His other books include *Disfrutes* (1981), *The Occurrence of Time* (1981, a collaboration with

Susan Bee), *Stigma* (1981), *Resistance* (1983), and the *Nude Formalism* (1989, again in collaboration with Susan Bee). Bernstein has also translated and edited several periodical anthologies of contemporary poets.

In 1990 Bernstein was appointed to the David Gray Chair at the State University of New York, Buffalo.