

Paul Auster, from *Why Write?*

Twenty-five Sentences Containing the Words “Charles Bernstein”

Charles Bernstein is a poet. Charles Bernstein is a critic. Charles Bernstein is a man who talks. And whether he is writing or talking, Charles Bernstein is a trouble-maker. Being found of trouble-makers myself, I am particularly fond of the trouble-maker designated by the words *Charles Bernstein*.

Charles Bernstein has reintroduced a spirit of polemic into the world of American poetry. In the exhausted atmosphere in which so much of our writing takes place, Charles Bernstein has battled long and hard to make both writers and readers aware of the implications embedded in each and every language act we partake of

as citizens of this vast, troubled country. Whether or not you agree with what Charles Bernstein has to say is less important than the fact that it has become more and more important to listen to what he is saying.

At times, Charles Bernstein reminds me of a Talmudic rabbi. At times, Charles Bernstein reminds me of a stand-up comic performing for the late-night crowd at a Borscht Belt hotel—booked in for a two-week run and never using the same material twice. At times, Charles Bernstein reminds me of the city slicker who walks into a Wild West saloon and orders a glass of milk, and then proceeds to outpunch, outshoot, and outwit all the roughnecks who laugh at him.

What I mean to say is that Charles Bernstein is unpredictable. Charles Bernstein is everywhere. Charles Bernstein is relentless—and wholly committed to speaking and writing the truth as he sees it and hears it and lives it.

For a long time not many people were interested in what Charles Bernstein was thinking. Now people are paying good money to allow their children to listen to Charles Bernstein's thoughts. For the moment, Charles Bernstein is dispensing those thoughts here at Princeton, but next year he will begin to do so on a more permanent basis in Buffalo, New York, where he has been named to the Gray

Chair of Poetry and Literature. I think this is very good for Charles Bernstein. I also think it will be very good for Charles Bernstein's students—who, one hopes, will grow up to become trouble-makers themselves.

I should add that Charles Bernstein has published numerous books, including *The Sophist*, *Resistance*, *Islets/Irritations*, *Content's Dream*, *Stigma*, *Controlling Interests*, *Senses of Responsibility*, and *Poetic Justice*. I believe it was poetic justice when Charles Bernstein was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship a number of years ago. I also believe it is poetic justice that Charles Bernstein should be here to read his poetry to us today. Because Charles Bernstein is one of the few poets who knows that there is far more poetry in the world than justice.

Now that we have settled into our seats and are ready to begin, I will repeat the words *Charles Bernstein* only once more. But this last time is the best time of all, for it allows me to experience the pleasure of saying: *Here is Charles Bernstein*.

(Introduction to a reading at Princeton University March 14, 1990)