

BPJ

BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL VOL. 62 N°1 FALL 2011

# THE LOGIC OF YOO

**Michael Broek**

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**BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL**

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**Michael Broek**

*The Logic of Yoo*

Terra Anthropologica	5
Email	6
The Logic of Yoo 1	7
The Logic of Yoo 2	8
The Logic of Yoo 3	9
The Logic of Yoo 4	10
The Logic of Yoo 5	11
The Logic of Yoo 6	12
The Logic of Yoo 7	14
The Logic of Yoo 8	16
Notes	16
Egg and Sperm, Your Meat Loaf	18
The Logic of Yoo 9	19
The Logic of Yoo 10	20
The Logic of Yoo 11	21
The Logic of Yoo 12	22
Teleology	23
The Logic of Yoo 13	24
The Logic of Yoo 14	25
The Logic of Yoo 15	26
The Logic of Yoo 16	27
The Logic of Yoo 17	28
This Miniature Sea	29
More Notes	30
The Logic of Yoo 18	31
The Logic of Yoo 19	32
The Logic of Yoo 20	33
The Logic of Yoo 21	34
The Logic of Yoo 22	35
The Logic of Yoo 23	38

The poems in this chapbook are drawn from a larger manuscript of the same name.

## CONTENTS

### **BOOKS IN BRIEF, by Lee Sharkey**

#### **Genre Bending**

Kazim Ali, <i>Bright Felon</i>	39
Kazim Ali, <i>Fasting for Ramadan</i>	41
Brian Teare, <i>The Room Where I Was Born</i>	43
Brian Teare, <i>Pleasure</i>	43
Brian Teare, <i>Sight Map</i>	46

### **COVER**

**Mary Greene**, design

**Linda Connor**, "Fireworks, Paucartambo, Peru," photographs,  
2010

→

An arrow at the bottom of a page means no stanza break.

### **Poet's Forum**

We invite you to join the online conversation with *BPJ* poets on our Poet's Forum at [www.bpj.org](http://www.bpj.org). For the month of September, Michael Broek will moderate a discussion of *The Logic of Yoo*.

## TERRA ANTHROPOLOGICA

*Elska* is not a word I expect you to know  
but to someone in Iceland it is love, which is also  
nothing I expect you to know, but means  
etymologically there is steam under the earth  
which may gush from its fissures any time day or night  
but often when no one is watching, not even the stars  
caring either, their white light glowing  
with an aloneness no one even knows to feel sad about.

Or maybe we would be floating there  
like John White searching for his daughter  
in our fragile *barque* just off the coast  
& for the first time in a century we would see  
the earth cracking its seam just a bit & the steam  
would seem like the earth sighing,  
& the waves lapping over the gunwales  
would feel less cold than they really are,  
& the mist like a  
tongue like a  
palm like an  
aureole  
like nothing after you've died would rain.

Oh! I know I go on  
too much, all  
gathered into the prow so we might sink,  
but I want us to watch & imagine  
in our human way  
that the light is for us, when I know it is not, though at least  
I am for you. Do you forgive me  
my fecklessness,  
this indolence of too much & too many?  
Inside, something touches my tongue that might  
be a cloud, or might also be just stone.  
Always this pressure under the earth must explode.

## EMAIL

Date: Friday, Feb. 25, 2011 4:32AM  
To: #5@Academicwritinghelp.com  
From: Dianthus@ranney.edu  
Subject: senior thesis paper

Dear Writer #5,

I need a paper write away—48 hours actually. I've been accepted to Harvard! I bet you don't hear that too much. I am such an idiot for letting it get this late, but I think my proctor suspects me, so I tried to write it on my own, but then, what the f###, this system wasn't made for me, or I for it, I don't know. If I don't have this paper, then I'm not going anywhere, and I've soooooo wanted to go to H, since before I was born, my father says. My name's not really Dianthus, but if you'll just send me the thesis without the name, I can format the title page and the header myself. Is that ok? Is that how this works? Tell me if no, as I'm very flexible.

Anyway, you need to know what I need. Have you ever heard of John C. Yoo? You probably read the news all the time. I don't have any time for the news myself, though I like to read history—probably my major. Mostly memoirs. Did you read Bush's memoir? I think it was called Flash Points. Anyway, I need 30 pages, double spaced, MLA style, with at least a dozen citations, including a “good number” of primary and database sources (my proctor said he would know a “good number” when he saw it; what does that mean to you?).

Just make sure it's an argument. I don't care which side you take, but you have to prove a point. Yoo was a writer, like YOU! Get it? lol :) I think he wrote something about why we need to torture terrorists, so I'd like you to take that position. I'd do it myself, but I just couldn't read all that legalize. Didn't make sense to me. You'll get it. Anyway, you can text me this weekend if you have questions (though I probably won't know the answer!) I look forward to the finished product, a work of art.

Anxiously,  
“Dianthus”

## THE LOGIC OF YOO

### 1

He had agreed to write the paper, as he had the others,  
though he knew little of Yoo & nothing of the student  
who had requested it, who would pay for it,  
top dollar this time since it was a rush job requiring  
citations, an upper-level thesis, an original work of art,  
though he wouldn't define art that way, but the student had  
& the student was boss, brought in the cash  
& the student had a working title, "The Logic of John C. Yoo,"  
some ideas, too, as to the arguments the paper should make,  
which begged the question why didn't the little punk  
just write it herself? But then he would be out of a job  
& he reminded himself that this wasn't a student  
but a client who was owed a product & he was just a prole,  
a cipher & what the client did with it was her business.

## THE LOGIC OF YOO

### 2

Charging three whites & two reds to his American Express  
the 30-ish man with the slight paunch slouched out of Eros Liquors  
& crossed the street, not looking for traffic, hugging his  
brown bag to his chest to stop the pounding or maybe  
to keep it going, walked up the block, past  
Acapulquenos Mexican Grill, past the shuttered gas station,  
the Public Works yard, a dull thread of bottles  
knocking together & then turned onto the grayed packed-dirt path  
leading through the woods to his apartment building, stepping over  
the emptied Red Bulls & other trash in his way, keeping a sure grip,  
his fingers laced together now around the bag, until fumbling  
for his keys, one knee balancing the package, he pushed  
open the front door. He went straight to the kitchen counter,  
unpacked the wines, pulled the drapes, dropped two slices  
of whole wheat bread in the toaster & surveyed  
his catch: two Italians, one Californian, a French, a South African.  
“A U.N. delegation,” he muttered to himself & in the half-dark  
plotted which landscape to overthrow first.

## THE LOGIC OF YOO

### 3

He slipped the red into the white, made a pink,  
though depending on the ratios, the colors changed:  
rosy, fuchsia, carmine, magenta, hot,  
Barbie, coral, salmon, ruby, shocking, cherry blossoms in spring,  
flamingos & their algae, Dorothy's tights,  
pink of the dianthus, its frilled edges, thus the pinking shears,  
crossways pattern, interminably one-way, but never  
in the same direction. They were innumerable, at least  
in theory, one atom more or less changing the shade,  
refracting the light differently, since it was really the light  
& not the wine, though what he could perceive,  
what his eyes would allow, was only a certain number,  
maybe 100, give or take, until he forgot what pink was,  
whether it had any real substance & then  
he just went back to thinking gray, bottles empty,  
poured down the sink, where the wine would mix with water  
at the Public Works, those chemicals, then disappear.

4

Starting a new project he always listened to music,  
mostly grunge rock, Pearl Jam & Nirvana, the Seattle  
scene & it reminded him of the U-District,  
from Ravenna down to Portage Bay, Dick's Drive-In  
open till 2 a.m., where he had read French & sipped coffee  
before his comprehensives, CNN playing in the corner  
over the grill, screeching brain-numbing music  
like he heard the first troops had played in their APCs  
raging into Baghdad, hearts holding their breath inside their  
metal jackets, though the city was quiet, the world too,  
which reminded him of the Stevens poem, until later,  
he now knew, when the screeching outside burst  
over the gunwales, the APC a struck-and-foundering Pequod,  
& here he pulled down his *OED*, the *wale*,  
a ridge of stone or flesh, a *dicwale* in Old English,  
*on ða eastlangan dicwale, on that eastward stony ditch*,  
dying there, while he had read *Je voudrais pas crever*,  
Boris Vian, *I would like not to explode* & ate cold fries.

## THE LOGIC OF YOO

5

So he set to work in the dark, buttered bread  
& booted his Mac, the client's requirements  
spelled out on clean paper & he circled  
what he would have to prove, the number of citations,  
their style, the tone, the approximate argument,  
what \$1000 would buy: coffee & cigarettes  
(he only smoked when he worked), his month's  
rent & other bills, celebratory martini at the Ram's Head  
when it was done & if he was charming, maybe  
a girl there he could bring back & read French to  
before she fell asleep. Then another paper after that,  
maybe medical this time, something pulmonary, breathing  
coming easier to him now despite the smokes,  
something in his chest loosening, finding each paper  
juiced the soul, let the tether out further, enlarged the scope  
of what it owned & what it could do.

## THE LOGIC OF YOO

### 6

He had heard of this John C. Yoo, what he had written while soldiers packed black-hooded men into planes & wondered how far they could go, when it would be too much & for how long it could be endured, but Yoo was a bartender, a mixologist, making adjustments—too sweet, too bitter—so skilled (is this what one knew after Harvard & Yale?) at jiggers & proofs, siphoning cheap vodkas into designer blue bottles, switching labels on the Johnny Walker—Red to Black.<sup>1</sup> The hoods were not for the prisoners. The hoods were not the opposite of maps or the soldiers' names, which were already blank. The hoods were a permission. Lights dimmed, music cupping its sonorous white hands around the prisoners' ears, it was easy not to meet the eyes, just to look at the lines in the grain of the bar, serve up the shots. What was war, what evil, what measurements could be brought to bear?

<sup>1</sup> Matt Labash, "The Passion of Dick Cheney," *Weekly Standard*, 22 September 2008, sec. 14, 2. In an interview, the Vice President reveals that his Scotch of choice is Johnny Walker Red.

## THE LOGIC OF YOO

U.S. Code  
Section 2340A:  
“torture is an act  
committed by a person  
intended to inflict  
severe  
physical  
or mental pain  
and suffering  
(other than pain or  
suffering  
incidental to lawful  
sanctions)”

## THE LOGIC OF YOO

### 7

Of course, there were the “torture memos,”  
which could signal, if they were metaphoric, the little notes  
his wife had left him taped above the kitchen sink  
reminding him what he hadn’t done, how his shaking in bed  
had become intolerable, his dreams  
in which he woke himself with muted howls  
more than the treaty of their marriage had demanded.  
But Yoo was a literalist. Bound, gagged, shoved  
& pinned in a dark box where lay the soft-green tarantula  
the torturers had named *A. Gonzalez*, Yoo could  
argue his way out & the spider would think itself wrong.  
What was evil to him? He wrote of Remarque’s  
*untrammelled sovereignty of chance*.<sup>2</sup> Said the peacenik  
was wrong. Said intent meant *no one would be blamed*.

<sup>2</sup> John C. Yoo and Robert Delahunty, “Peace Through Law? The Failure of a Nobel Experiment,” *Michigan Law Review* 106 (2008): 924.

## THE LOGIC OF YOO

*OED*

definition of “severe”:

grievous  
—Bybee<sup>3</sup>

“knowledge alone  
that a particular result  
is certain to occur  
does not  
constitute  
specific intent.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Jay S. Bybee, memorandum for Alberto Gonzalez, Counsel to the President, “Re: Standards of Conduct for Interrogation . . . ,” 1 August 2002, 5. As Assistant Attorney General Bybee’s deputy in the Department of Justice Office of Legal Counsel, Yoo references this “torture memo” in his letter to Gonzalez issued the same day insofar as “it more fully explain[s] our reasoning.”

<sup>4</sup> Memorandum, 4.

8

He stuck the square Post-its across his desk,  
up the sides, then marching along the top  
like he was inserting himself into a frame,  
each yellow cell a perfect fact or equation, who said  
what, to whom & in which upholstered office.

NOTES

Torture = 31

(usage in all of Shakespeare's works)

Techniques ≠ Tortures

(see below)

Number of techniques usually needed to bring detainee to "baseline dependent state" = 3

(1, nudity; 2, sleep deprivation, with shackling & diaper; 3, dietary manipulation)

Number of times a detainee may be "walled" in a single session = 1-30

Cramped confinement = 18 hours/day

Confinement in "small box" = 2 hours/day

Etymology of "torture" = Latin *tortūra* (twisting)

Length of Alec Guinness's confinement in a small box in *Bridge on the*

*River Kwai* = 31 seconds (movie time)

(number of Academy Awards = 7)

Texas police convicted of "water torture" = 4

Number of 24 episodes = 24

Angle of repose = 45°

(degree of backwards inclination while bound in stress position)

Earning a degree from Yale in 1992 = John C. Yoo

(Deputy Assistant Attorney General, USDOJ)

Earning a degree from Yale in 1993 = Jonathan Coulton

(performer of "Code Monkey" & folk acoustic version of "Baby Got Back")

Location of Donald Rumsfeld alumnus portrait = Yankee Doodle Tavern,

Princeton

(next to Brooke Shields)

Harvard's founding purpose = train Puritan ministers

Fate of Harvard's first professor = fired for beating his students

"Code Monkey have long walk back to cubicle / he sit down pretend to

## NOTES

work / Code Monkey not thinking so straight / Code Monkey not feeling so great.”

Gross U.S. receipts for *Legally Blonde* = \$968,689  
(week of 9–17 September 2001)

Alternate titles = *Blonde et légale* (France), *Cutie Blonde* (Japan)

Among tortures committed by Japanese in WWII, cited by IMTFE = water treatment

Among tortures committed by Americans in Philippines, cited by JAG = water treatment

Why FDR vacationed in Warm Springs, GA = water treatment

Euphemism = 0

(usage in all of Shakespeare’s works)

Alaska sable = skunk fur

(*OED* regarding euphemism)

Other euphemisms = facial hold, insult slap, attention grasp, abdominal slap, wall standing

More euphemisms = “no evidence in literature or experience that sleep deprivation exacerbates any harmful effects of the waterboard”

Periods between interrogation sessions = 1–24 hours

Number of waterboarding sessions permitted per 24 hours = 2

Zubaydah = 83

(number of incidents of waterboarding)

Average age children learn to swim in U.S. = 6

Average annual salary of adjunct professor of French literature = \$23,532

Tenure of John C. Yoo in Office of Legal Counsel = 2 years

Duration of “Monkey Code” video = 3:49

Average charge for original term paper w/ citations = \$800–\$1200

Number of illegal wars of aggression = ∞

Number of illegal preventive wars = 0

Number of Dick’s Drive-ins in the greater Seattle area = 5

“Code Monkey very simple man / with big warm fuzzy secret heart / Code Monkey like you. Code Monkey like you.”

## EGG AND SPERM, YOUR MEAT LOAF

You kicked me in the teeth of my language,  
which was when I found out what a mass of flesh

my words are, how they develop syntactical  
hematomas that bloom like corals, fathom-deep

under skin, behind eyelids, bed linens  
& the veneer of a supposed and hoped-for life.

I deserved a good mauling, of course, a thumping,  
a trounce, my words had leaped ahead

& you just sat there silent, waving a copy  
of Flaubert & reminding me of what I hadn't done.

One could argue, I said, that what I really meant  
was something I had imagined I could not say:

"There is only one beautiful thing, and there is no  
end to all the beautiful things, and on this

problem my entire rot sits, waving stupidly under  
the sea, waiting for the right combination of egg

and sperm to light the tip of my tongue with speech."

But instead I said, "Your meat loafs remind me  
about something my mom once said about remorse."

## THE LOGIC OF YOO

9

He learned the first verb  
before eat or love or sleep  
the French verb *être*—"to be"—

*he is, they are, I am*  
in another  
language, another tongue, *autre lèvres,*

lips not the least organ of transformation.  
Derrida writes of *world hospitality*  
as antidote to *toleration,*

& Habermas  
of *mutual perspective-taking,*  
the *I* permeable, a slice of toast<sup>5</sup>

the world's butter melts into,  
not the *I* of the life raft, which  
if punctured is sunk.

Sitting inside Dick's, in Seattle,  
he watched the young men go off,

board planes, east to Afghanistan,  
bound west with black-hooded citizens *confined,*  
*of no country,* dark-skinned, praying.

*They were, he was,* not going  
to become anything new: tongue-lashed,  
sand-eyed, bone-shamed.

<sup>5</sup> John C. Yoo and Robert J. Delahunty, "Kant, Habermas and Democratic Peace," *Chicago Journal of International Law* 10, no. 2 (Winter 2010).

## THE LOGIC OF YOO

### 10

He tried to imagine himself naked,  
perhaps while dancing to Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance,"  
perhaps while drinking an Ensure,  
which would make for "nutritionally complete meals,"  
perhaps while hooded in the phosphorous glare  
of 24-hour lighting  
since interrogators could "exploit the detainee's fear  
of being seen naked," Yoo said, though not the fear of sex,  
since interrogators had been taught to avoid "sexual degradation,"  
for fear perhaps, it might turn Zubaydah on, there being  
no women in CIA custody, though evidently  
on the payroll since being "seen naked by females"  
was & is always a permissible threat.

She sings, "I want your horror. I want your design.  
Cause you're a criminal  
as long as you're mine." He knew they were different, he & Yoo,  
but when he went to bed at night & thought no one  
would ever touch him again like she had,  
he remembered the facial hold  
"one open palm placed  
on either side of the face"<sup>6</sup>  
how she held him immobile, enduring the indelible dark between  
her fingertips.  
It was always a threat to him.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Justice, Office of Legal Counsel, memorandum for John Rizzo, Central Intelligence Agency, "Interrogation of al Qaeda Operative," 1 August 2002, and "Application of 18 U.S.C. . . .," 10 May 2005; available from <<http://documents.nytimes.com/justice-department-memos-on-interrogation-techniques>>.

## THE LOGIC OF YOO

### 11

*Repetition will not be substantial  
because the techniques generally lose their effectiveness after  
three years, the wet-mop of Seattle  
left in his rear view, moving toward a promised job  
somewhere dry & free of constant growing—  
mushrooms, mosses splurging underground  
while he stood in the university quadrangle, immobile  
& forgot which direction was his apartment  
or else one half of his brain didn't want to remember:  
a hood over his face so the only breath he breathed  
was his own, headphones over his ears  
a continuous loop of language pointing toward the foreign  
pointing back toward himself.*

*The duration of confinement varies  
based upon the size of the container.*  
The body is a container, the sound box & score  
every language delineates, no more,  
unless one is a warrior, a crusader,  
for whom the box is just a coffin  
waiting to be filled.

*You have also informed us that he  
sustained a wound during his capture,  
which is being treated with the utmost care,  
& awaits his complete recovery from the wound  
we inflicted because he had wounded others,  
horribly, completely,  
so that we may wound him again.*

*You did  
deuse Strange Tortures for Offenders.<sup>7</sup>*

<sup>7</sup> *Henry VI, Part 2, III.i.* Other italicized passages are quotations from the "torture memos."

**12**

Because he had gathered evidence, started the paper,  
made citations, and Yoo was coming into blurry focus,  
he went to the porch to smoke, his furniture  
being leased, not wanting the memory of burns  
or smell to cost him anything extra, though neighbors  
complained, smoke rising into their open apartment windows  
& they occasionally yelled out & though he couldn't  
see them, he knew they felt safe yelling behind the screens,  
yelling costing little when the other was just a smell, not a face,  
but for him, after a while, the yelling just became  
part of the ritual: light, inhale, watch his breath rise  
into their bedrooms, mingle in their clothes, maybe  
settle on their bedsheets, reminding a boy how good it was  
to think bad, then wait for the voice to dribble down, a faceless  
voice like a sudden whitecap flaring in a flat sea—what  
made it happen, just below the surface, anonymous, gone.

## TELEOLOGY

None of it happens for the best,  
not the plane late, dinner spoiled, train tracks  
running through sleepy town square,  
not boyfriend huffing Wite-Out,  
not daughter vomiting her breakfast  
every damned morning in the same bathroom stall.

But there it is again,  
as if Jesus had conferenced in the break room under the  
 clichéd bare bulb, shadows like  
the missing maquiladora workers of Juárez  
burned into the walls, and he had said,  
“Yea, this was according to plan.”  
Meanwhile he’s pissing in his pants.

But it will all work out, won’t it? Even the  
not working out is a kind of solution, though some  
solutions I cannot live with,  
which is another kind of teleology. Evil,  
whatever mismatched sock that is,  
always knows.

I want to say it all makes sense, that the tattoos,  
beer kegs, spotlights are just so much  
extra foam mushrooming my pumpkin-spiced latte,  
effervescent, weightless,  
but I have no proof, not even a gut feeling,  
since my guts are roiling, the toilet’s flushing,  
& the only concrete is the concrete.

13

In a paper he wrote for another student, the topic was voyeurism & he found that when Marie Antoinette was imprisoned in the Conciergerie

awaiting execution, *une garde* never left her room. She slept, ate & prayed all under his gaze, his body hidden behind a tall screen but his head protruding above, like a phantasm, a secret eye hidden in plain sight, a panopticon of one, *voyeur* itself French, for “to see.”

The concierge named his castle after himself, proud master of the keep, master of the three towers: Caesar, Silver & Bonbec, the last,

where the torturer slept, between prisoners, *bon bec*, or *good beak*, which is the problem with the literal, since the torturer operates by analogies: *make him squeal, make him sing, bring in the Judas chair, break out the veil.* Hamida Djandoubi, the last one guillotined, 1977, a Tunisian, an amputee

before his execution, “quite flexible despite his wound,” himself a torturer, selling Algerian girls for sex, like Barthes said of France

(by analogy). Marcel Chevalier, the last executioner, beheader-in-chief, knight on horseback, *chivalrous* because he drew the veil, forty times. “You have informed us that he appears to have a fear of insects.” When they kept him awake, in that room with lights, where the mornings

kept tripping over night, Yoo wrote, “no more than eleven days at a time.” Did he go blind from all the seeing . . . have I?

## THE LOGIC OF YOO

### 14

When he didn't eat, he smoked British cigarettes

*in the same motion as the grasp,  
the individual is drawn toward the interrogator.*

He doled them out like rewards, one per completed page  
*not lasting more than 20 minutes in any one application*

flicking butts off the porch when it was wet or into *a small  
watering can with a spout*, not wanting to set the woods on fire

*i.e., the perception of drowning.*

He cited every source immediately, waiting was such  
a student's sloppy error.

He drew the client forward into an oily desire,  
the country of his defection into a shining release.

*With the exception of the insect*<sup>8</sup>  
there was little he hadn't tried, or begged, or wanted.

He read Yoo aloud as if sharing a letter found after years  
hidden in his desk, whistling a slow, faint

halting song no one else would hear.

<sup>8</sup> Department of Justice, Office of Legal Counsel, memorandum for John Rizzo, Central Intelligence Agency, "Interrogation of al Qaeda Operative," 1 August 2002, and "Application of 18 U.S.C. . . .," 10 May 2005; available from <<http://documents.nytimes.com/justice-department-memos-on-interrogation-techniques>>.

15

In another paper, "On Typography & Music," he wrote on the ampersand, its belly and twisting, its *tortūra*, looking almost like the musical clef introducing the score of connect-a-dots, its tissue & joints, where also the stave found its home & rest, the beat in between the beatings. Once he had held his wife's hand all the way to the operating room doors, where they made him let go. When she returned, they were halves. He was unsure how he was culpable, why their untwisting. The paper was a success, his client wrote, the A+ he had paid for. The &—which used to be printed at the end of the alphabet, not the beginning.

16

He purchased irony at the Cumberland Farms Convenience Store,  
great pudding cups full of it, though this was not Cumberland,  
nor had he ever stepped foot on a real farm  
& “convenience” in this context was not a noun  
as in *Auto Parts Store*, where one could expect to purchase  
car oil & filters. No, convenience was not a “thing”  
but an “idea” & here poets of things & ideas met at the checkout line,  
the poet of things cradling a Styrofoam carton  
of chicken eggs in his palsied arm while the poet of ideas  
slipped a 2-gig memory stick down his pants,  
already remembering the images he would place there.

He purchased a thing called Dark Hate,  
which would give him energy for another few pages of work,  
as well as some Mentos & a Hungry Man frozen meal  
made with Real Chicken parts. When the President said he would follow  
the advice of the Office of Legal Counsel,  
he thought of his dinner, how a man would eat anything  
if hungry enough, including the cranberry crumble  
which contained neither cranberries nor crumbles  
but looked a lot like it might, though where it was going, it didn't  
really matter. He was not an artist  
of things or ideas, just a copyist, Bartleby, folding-sheets man  
working in an office he'd rather die in than leave.

## THE LOGIC OF YOO

17

The “baseline dependent state”  
was his usual modus operandi  
his ipso facto,  
so he didn’t require a special diet or a diaper,  
just fishing his keys out of his woolen sports-coat pocket  
was enough, the problem of evil  
just another problem  
among the unwashed dishes & his color blindness,  
the green & red lights of the Christmas tree blending—  
a deuteranopia as John Dalton first called it—  
confirmed by DNA analysis of his preserved  
eyeball. Green-blind, that eutopia  
ού τόπος  
his “no-where” place seeming perfectly right.

What he saw was real.  
Some saw halos.  
Some saw scruffy dogs where devils were.  
Some saw existential threats in disgruntled pop guns.  
He saw an empty apartment, filled with papers, a perfect  
tinderbox of words:

*false wall, facial hold, lovely, please, your hair.*

## **THIS MINIATURE SEA**

Outside my torturer's room was the water, not  
a cheap plastic bottle, its label peeling, but a glass,  
tall like a cylinder, so that when my moans leaked  
under the doorway, rousing the anxious guard,  
who had not looked up when I was led past,  
I imagined the liquid trembling, a miniature sea  
frothed like the storm that swallowed Jonah,  
that set his monster free. When the torturer told me  
it was delicious, summer light trapped inside,  
the glass did not care if it touched the torturer's  
lips or my thrust-out tongue, though the guard,  
eyes at the edge of the cell-door window,  
watched the drops form, merged with torturer's  
sweat, where he had kissed only the night before.

## MORE NOTES

*The student body, like the majority of Americans, is essentially anti-intellectual in nature.*

—John C. Yoo, “What Education?,” 8 June 1989, *The Harvard Crimson*

*In essence, the masters’ new plan tries to balance diversity against free choice. But these two ideals, as we should all know by now, are contradictory and unworkable in tandem.*

—John C. Yoo, “Freedom of Choice,” 21 November 1988, *The Harvard Crimson*

*And what’s the difference between patenting a small bacteria that eats oil slicks and patenting a small white mouse that develops cancer?*

—John C. Yoo, “Dissent,” 26 April 1988, *The Harvard Crimson*

*Places like Au Bon Pain can get away with charging you four bucks for a lame, lumpy, and lazy sandwich. . . .*

*All were a delight to try, with the hot dog always superbly flavored and properly cooked, the toppings fresh and lively, and the fries crisply done to perfection.*

—John C. Yoo, “Thank God for Hot Dogs,” 23 January 1989, *The Harvard Crimson*

*Relieved from congressional back-biting, the executive branch could use military power in accordance with the demands of the situation, rather than with the demands of certain senators and representatives.*

—John C. Yoo, “Freeing Our Arms in Honduras,” 23 March 1988, *The Harvard Crimson*

*This class was a real pain. He would torment us with endless theory. We had to wrack our brains every day. He really put the thumb screws to us, and gave us the third degree. And he constantly listened to Iron Maiden . . . very distracting.*

—Student comment on Yoo’s Constitutional Law Class, Berkeley, 10 April 2008, RateMyProfessor.com

## THE LOGIC OF YOO

### 18

He read, "Peace Through Law? The Failure of a Nobel Experiment," which on its face seemed to argue for lawlessness & he thought not about Peace or Law but about Beauty & its contours, whether it was made or just was, whether it was a consequence or a Prime Mover, a struggle & if so then against what, if it indicted Truth & if so then what was the First Truth, which he imagined was Aloneness.

"They attacked the idea of freedom," Yoo wrote,<sup>9</sup>

though he didn't think about Freedom but that a Pluralism is not a  
Relativism,

which cut both ways, toward Yoo as True & toward Yoo as False,  
since the man standing up in the snowstorm couldn't simply lie down  
because the snowplow was coming, but that he also should lie down  
lest everyone stand in the road, no plowing done,

the snow piling up like a wet cloth, suffocating, which might though  
give Beauty some permission, since everyone in their houses would feel  
quite alone, which would be True, & might go mad to struggle  
outside, scraping, clawing with spoons & kitchen ladles toward whatever  
wasn't wherever they found themselves. And here, Beauty would be  
both Cause & Effect.

<sup>9</sup> John Yoo, speech at the Institute for Korean-American [sic] Studies Liberty Award Dinner, Lai Lai Garden, Blue Bell, PA, 22 January 2002.

## THE LOGIC OF YOO

### 19

At night he replayed the *Vanity Fair* video,  
Hitchens strapped down, having hired large-armed men  
to choke him,  
to prove the naysayers wrong, though no one could feel  
what Hitchens felt, proving only  
that phenomenology was a slippery floor upon which to set  
the sneakered feet of logic.

He threw the dead man's switch.  
He forgot the code word.  
He was suffocated in a garage, a white Frigidaire  
humming next to his head.  
He gave his account  
in front of a piano, Haydn peering over his shoulder  
from an instruction manual, perhaps *The Creation*, its so-happy Vanities.<sup>10</sup>

The angel Uriel, solo:

O glücklich Paar, und glücklich immerfort,  
Wenn falscher Wahn euch nicht verführt,  
Noch mehr zu wünschen als ihr habt,  
Und mehr zu wissen als ihr sollt!

Oh happy pair, and happy forever  
unless weak-willed and mad  
you wish for more than what you have,  
to know more than you should.

He lay between the slick sheets & tried to imagine  
would he have gone mad & whether he wasn't already  
to live like this, even if to live like this  
meant he read *Pilgrim's Progress* & listened to music, watched YouTube.  
Moaning, a little contra-alto, he woke himself  
from the nightmares in which beautiful music played  
& grayed figures walked toward brick houses, their undoing.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Hitchens, "On the Waterboard," *Vanity Fair* web exclusive, 2 July 2008; available from <[http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/video/2008/hitchens\\_video200808](http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/video/2008/hitchens_video200808)>.

## THE LOGIC OF YOO

### 20

Smoking another Dunhill on the way back from Eros  
he wanted to think that he had found it  
*another such escape from the area of ascertainable facts*  
how 0 became 1, without addition or treatment,  
how Eichmann in the box became  
Eichmann in the box & we all watching the drama unfold  
*and personal responsibility*

in *The Harvard Crimson*, next to his paeans for Chicago hotdogs  
*based on non-specific, hypothetical, abstract assumptions*  
*from the Zeitgeist down to the Oedipus complex:*  
here was how torture became a technique,  
drowning a release from breathing,  
grievous pain an antidote to love  
*so general that they explain and justify*  
*every event and deed*

On this Judas chair, Yoo had set his mind,  
which in a night of infinite standing  
could almost be called relief. Yoo was 21.

Ready with remote pointed at the sweet spot on his TV  
the now-ancient '80s movie he watched again & again began to roll,  
*no alternative to what actually happened*  
*is even considered*  
the French schoolboys are marched out of the courtyard by the Gestapo,  
*and no person could have acted differently*  
*from the way he did act*<sup>11</sup>

the question is not so much why the Gestapo man  
orders their expungement  
but why the students, who number many more,  
watch & like a dove has been stuffed in their mouths, don't.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Italicized passages are from Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 297.

<sup>12</sup> The movie referred to is *Au Revoir les Enfants*, directed by Louis Malle.

## THE LOGIC OF YOO

### 21

He had to escape to the sex clubs,  
though everyone there reminded him of his clients,  
who had paid him not  
to be ordering vodkas with lime & ice at the bar,  
though whereas they all wanted to get laid, he just wanted  
to watch, usually, though the sameness bored, not so much  
the women as the men, each the same  
sour smell, colognes all named after adjectives indicating  
desperation, or what passed for desperation in French,  
which none of them had studied.

So he often moved over to the gay clubs,  
their Caesars & Neros, the men on top of the bars  
dancing with laurel crowns in their hair, his Lycidas  
in a G-string, enormous codpieces  
portraying slick leather veneer as truth, *Veritas* the Harvard  
motto to which Yale added *Lux*,  
meaning light & also meaning toilet soap  
made in the French method.

There, the dreadlocked fat man, his face lost  
in his black jacket, could wave his dollars, just as the punk  
& the middle-aged professor & the skank &  
her lover & the bald phoenixes  
reflecting strobes. Here, he could dissolve  
into the corner sofa & wait,  
something like truth & light materializing  
out of the haze, something he could bring back to his apartment  
& add to his project,  
the shape of what was real hiding in dark.

22

So Hobbes argued that life is “nasty, brutish, and short,” which seemed pretty well common sense (my carpet smells of sour grapes & the last woman I brought home) but then his solution, since he was a humanitarian & interested in love, was the Leviathan, the *corpus regnum*, the Big Daddy, the Darth Vader, to which Filmer did not object per se, but having misplaced Hobbes’s memo in the loo argued that the monarch was descended from Adam, & as Adam had dominion, ipso facto, so did King (insert name here), all very logical, supported by textual evidence, in fact, citations!

Which Hobbes thought was so much bollocks since one hardly needed the imprimatur of divinity if one’s cudgel was big enough & one wasn’t afraid to use it, though one needed, first, the cudgel, which most arguments of this type required. But then Locke, meek & forlorn Locke, coveting his neighbor’s property, called them both on the carpet, citing Natural Law! Democracy! & the biblical necessity of capitalism & stealing the Indians’ fruit trees, all very logical, supported by textual evidence, in fact, citations!

“Another improvement we made over Treblinka was that we built our gas chamber to accommodate 2,000 people at one time.”<sup>13</sup>

I so wanted this to work.  
The logic of epistemology.

So that *KcA* reads “Agent *c* knows *A*,” or *BcA* reads “Agent *c* believes *A*.” So that what was known, say the rate of human decomposition given the set of conditions: temperature, moisture, soil composition, season, whether the body was covered or uncovered, computed, verified by previous observations such as those borrowed by General MacArthur from the torturers at Unit 731, would yield what is now suddenly more known: the body is a vessel made of hinges & ropes & it breaks, most certainly.

<sup>13</sup> “Testimony of Rudolf Hoess, Commandant of Auschwitz,” Nuremberg war crimes trial, 15 April 1946; available from <<http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftri-als/nuremberg/hoesstest.html>>.

## THE LOGIC OF YOO

Though what is believed, say the music of the spheres  
or that one loves the other & vice versa is less easily testable  
if not equally known, given the set of information that one can access  
& therein lies the secret detention camp of my beliefs

such that *BcA*: in all possible worlds compatible  
with what *c* believes, it is the case that *A* is the equation  
of holding my head in the toilet while it is flushed.

“Children of tender years were invariably  
exterminated since by reason of  
their youth they were unable to work.”<sup>14</sup>

The logic of *Théodicée* holds that my penis is not a weapon  
because God made me of flesh & not of iron.

The logic of embrasure holds that it is an opening  
through which I have aimed my cannon,  
*embraser* means “to set fire” & *embrasser* “to take you in my arms”  
& my belief that murder is not a sin depends on the context  
of three men, something we have given the name  
*waterboard* & a small can with a spout the janitor uses  
to keep the flowers alive.

I don't blame Yoo.

Maybe the *philosophes*. Melville scholar & ranked  
ping-pong player William Spanos blames the *Terra Anthropologica*  
& so do I. In the country of myself  
I am no torturer.

If intent equals goal, as Yoo said it does, then  
I am never your torturer.

My intent is to get to work, not to run you down  
on your bicycle.

My intent is to pay my rent, not  
participate in your magic tricks.

<sup>14</sup> “Testimony of Rudolf Hoess.”

## THE LOGIC OF YOU

You who had the misfortune to stand between me  
& my intent, you are

an escarpment to me, not a destination.

Though I may drive many miles  
hearing this screaming  
under the belly of my car—  
just the muffler, a piece of sheet metal—

some wire will fix it,  
bound tight against the chassis, this chest.

I would blame the poets, their discoveries,  
which are like the New World to the aborigines  
who I would like to think  
thought, “Are you kidding me?”

Plato had it right. Fuck the poets.  
Dawn as night. Night as the y-axis of cotton candy.  
This was the logic of metaphor.  
Sense run up the mast to blow in the breeze.  
“What ho! Tashtego,” nailing your red pennant  
while your ship founders into the darkening Pacific  
& the whale’s jaws come  
to swallow your Indian-ness, which is not  
even your real name.

23

Monday, the sun rising across the gray packed-earth path,  
he attached what he had to her email & hit send, just his notes  
& an outline, declared there had been an emergency, what a shame  
she didn't have more time, maybe she could make sense  
out of what he had done, still make it to Harvard in the fall  
where he now knew there was a great Chicago-style hotdog stand,  
if it was still there—there would be no charge.  
Or maybe the notes & outline would accrue to something else  
in her brain, an irrational map pointing the way out of  
a confined box with a small hole near the mouth to breathe through  
or where something could be inserted—forceps or a letter  
from her future self, rolled up like a Dead Sea scroll.

He drew out an old translation of Vilmorin:

Oh! The soft steps of the innocents,  
their silences overbrimming  
make so, make, make  
make of an evening dance a country  
where flames will converge.  
These lovers met, so  
the snow melts, the snow  
melts, and melts, and melts.

And he thought he would finish the translation,  
which was like a transforming, out of his wife's breath  
something the shape of a hot meal they could share, something brilliant  
in its use of bitter, at a small table against a window  
where, having chosen the wine, its origin, he could begin  
to explain what he had done & why, which would lead  
to a question, the only one that mattered & ever would.

## BOOKS IN BRIEF: Genre Bending

Lee Sharkey

In *Bright Felon: Autobiography and Cities* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan U Press, 2009, 110 pp, \$22.95 cloth), **Kazim Ali** offers an image of writing “not in a book but in loose pages or cards. Not to disassemble but to assemble oneself into oneself.” Assembling and reassembling is an ongoing impulse in all of Ali’s published work, from *The Far Mosque* to the recently issued *Fasting for Ramadan*. One manifestation of this is the poet’s resistance to traditional forms of coherence in narrative, point of view, and syntax. Another, closely related, is his restlessness with received genres, as if to conform to genre (generic) expectations were itself a form of dissembling.

Ali’s work keeps shape-shifting as it assembles itself from silence. “I came to New York to write poetry though unable to speak,” he writes in *Bright Felon*, and if we track the body of his work chronologically we can see a writer (re)learning to lay down first isolated words and phrases, and finally sentences that stand on their own. These are units of integrity for the writer, the “lonely threads” he floats out over silence. They indicate by indirection the journey he is making toward a home in ontological uncertainty, all the while shuffling locales, verb tenses, and pronouns (“Any pronoun here can be misread”).

The felony implied by the book’s title is the poet’s self-silencing, an outgrowth of family history, cultural practice, sexual identity, and the poet’s own temperament. Writing in the third person, Ali notes that he “dared himself into the future to find himself, to say what he wanted, say who he loved.” “Who he loved” is a man much like himself, and *Bright Felon* could be read on one level as an autobiographical tell-all whose plot is: Son of culturally conservative East Indian American family discovers he is gay, can’t tell his parents, as a result can’t commit himself in a relationship. He wanders the world, returns home, and succumbs to anorexia until the will to live asserts itself.

Ali deflects us, and himself, from this reductive reading, self-deprecatingly speaking of his manuscript at one point as a “little canvas,” with “a little autobiography littered on the surface.” Indeed, he deflects us from any pigeonholing of *Bright Felon* into genre categories, interspersing in the loose cloth he is weaving threads of politically infused travel sketches, spiritual odyssey (“All of us here are really citizens of wind traveling without papers”), and meditations on the writing practice:

Anaïs became my hero because her novels and diary were the same way.

Because you could not tell what was fiction and what was autobiography, what was poetry and what was prose.

To be in love like that.

One of the book's tutelaries is that master of passionate fragments, Emily Dickinson:

Judy was also the first to teach me about Emily Dickinson, that her books had been broken apart, that her poems even in their "authentic" versions had been relineated.

So everything I knew had actually come through decades of editing and authorizing.

So it was possible after all for a suppressed voice, a redirected voice, a suffocated or strangled one, to still speak.

Given his preoccupation with suppressed voices, it's apt that Ali keeps returning to the story of Abraham's sacrifice of his son, a foundational narrative of Islam as well as Judaism and Christianity, though in the Islamic tradition Avram (Abraham) calls Ismail (Ishmael) rather than Isaac to sacrifice. Ali sees himself not as the son "who cried out . . . against his father," but as "the obedient one. The one who said, 'You asked me to lie down and I lay down.'" He reads himself also into the infant Ismail, abandoned by a desperate Hajira (Hagar) in the desert. In *Fasting for Ramadan* Ali revisits the story: an angry Ismail hammers on the ground with his heels, a spring bursts forth, and he drinks. (I'm irreverently reminded of May Swenson's marvelous "Fable for When There's No Way Out.")

He reads himself into the Hajira figure as well, the mother who bolts, crazed, in search of water, from the scene of her son's dying. This he praises as her refusal to believe in her abandonment by her god. A similar refusal sustains the dream of coming home to the parents' circle of love and faith that brackets *Bright Felon*. The book opens with the Islamic tenet that "paradise lies beneath the feet of your mother." Toward the conclusion Ali invokes the "dear mother in the sky" who "could unbuckle the book and erase all the annotations," the *hadith* that guide behavior in Islam, but his father has already framed the choice for him: "Are you a Muslim or will you love."

The poet's response comes in the volume's last lines: "I will not choose. / Fathered by sound I am. / Kind mother your kin." He claims a tenuous kinship with language, through which he seeds himself—fathered by sound, I *am*—and acquires the qualities of the nurturing mother. The pleasure of reading *Bright Felon* derives in large part from its invitation to us to give ourselves over to the music of language as well.

Though it differs in voice and occasion, we might profitably read ***Fasting for Ramadan: Notes from a Spiritual Practice*** (North Adams, MA: Tupelo Press, 2011, 208 pp, \$19.95 paper, \$29.95 hardcover) as a sequel to *Bright Felon*. The starvation artist of the earlier volume here disciplines his body to a spiritual and political purpose: "The point of the fast is not to flagellate yourself to nothing, but to sharpen your attention, to diminish your worldly attention and distractions so you can better perceive what is actually around you." *Fasting* comprises two autobiographical accounts of month-long, sunrise-to-sundown fasts, a practice Ali began as a child in the company of his mother, the two of them being the only ones in the household who sustained the tradition ("Fasting was a secret between my mother and me. / We held hands invisibly throughout the day"). The first account, "New Moon in the Western Sky," constitutes a month's worth of blog entries that he terms "Ramadan essays"; the second, "Absence of Stars: A Fasting Notebook," is a set of journal entries written through the course of a Ramadan fast a few years earlier with no thought to publication. We thus encounter the later writing first—and travel back in time within the two accounts as well. Ali describes the blog essays as "the mind's reaching out, with the intention of external communication," the journal entries as "grounded in the body and the body's experience, which was internal, a practice of reflection." The former read for the most part like casually composed prose; with the latter, we enter more meditative territory. As quotidian details fall away, the beloved enters, no longer unseen or unspeakable. The ubiquitous pronoun is *you*—as in Rumi, ambiguously lover, God, or self—and paradox is the dominant trope. The effect is of entering a private space apart from the din of public exposure to hear one's thoughts. But the motive impulse of both pieces is, Ali tells us, to move between mind and body, reflection and expression.

The mix of quotidian detail and the extraordinarily rich vocabulary Ali has cultivated through the discipline of inwardness for raising subverbal impression to the level of speech locates the reader both

in- and outside of the fasts. We encounter observations on Islamic texts and practices alongside breakfast menus (oatmeal with pear chunks, soy milk, and rice powder), etymological musings (the name Ali means “restraint”), accounts of yoga practice (from the Sanskrit *yoke*, *yolk*, we discover), lines from Dickinson, Rumi, the Indigo Girls, and the Bhagavad Gita, ruminations on hunger, and scenes from *The Matrix*. All of these serve as spiritual sources, as does the love of his parents the poet is rediscovering, as does the mystery of the relationship between body and spirit: “And what if a human is not a separate entity after all but a microcosmic amalgamation of universal energy? // Tell me the difference between entity and eternity.”

If fasting for Ali is a spiritual practice that heightens attention, keeping the Ramadan journals becomes a parallel practice through which attention tunes creation. On the fifteenth day of the earlier fast, he gives this account of a reading:

When I was asked questions—about the difference between poetry and prose, my love of music, the role of sound in poetry, I seemed to answer not personally, not about myself, but broadly, even politically.

Aftermath of exposure is cloak.

Also for the first time ever I read from my autobiography of sentences.

The lonely threads that enabled me to speak, because I would speak in sentences not paragraphs.

Literally without consequence.

From the threads a picture emerged; I found I had to explain nothing.

Pure speech bracketed by time, and by writing all this down I lived.

We might call this practice the discipline of undiscipline. Within the structure of daily writing, writing frees itself of expectations, unconditions responses. Language grows comfortable with silence, from which renewed language can emerge.

■  
**Brian Teare's** work, much like Kazim Ali's, burrows down into a prelapsarian state of being to transform trauma that has attached itself to speech. "Circa," the first poem in his first full-length collection, ***The Room Where I Was Born*** (Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 2003, 112 pp, \$14.95 paper) returns to words before they

had grown adult,  
meaning like bones still soft

and accommodating, and the shape behind me not yet *house*,  
though soon enough it'd be

a noun as solid as a contract, as if two men shook over the good dirt  
of its name and one of them

built the thought inside it. Intrinsic as salt, aspirate—\h\—  
so soft in mother's mouth

it laid a body down dreaming and rose up around that boy:  
*house*: a noun but with arms

inside. . . .

***Pleasure*** (Boise, ID: Ahsahta P, 2010, 88 pp, \$17.50 paper), Teare's second book in terms of composition though released just this spring, opens with the Hopkins-influenced "Dead House Sonnet." Again we encounter, this time with a subjectless speaker, the house made of language, whose doors and latches "endlessly open" and shut to echoes of Gertrude Stein, whose history the poet strips, dismantles, and reconstitutes, but cannot silence:

gave to stain  
structure, made gone what touched him, stripped paint, grain of  
floor, made gauged the gouge of form, form the firmament fallen,  
made whiteness a wall, made framed the fallen lavish tragedian  
shadow where a picture hung, made what's left a nail, nib, of  
shadow, made it mine tongue unto nothing, made it quite, it query,  
quietude's quill, that silence : writing : then sirens

Though trauma fuels the need to write, language bears the wound. The "old forms" are not just rigidities of doctrine or cultural bromides within which cruelties shelter, but literary forms as well. For a poet such as Teare whose work is in passionate dialogue with the history of poetry and ideas, literary genre would seem to offer "a boundary

between death and life, / a line to control, a repetition, a ritual / I could shape in safety. . . . / I'd make the couplet / marry my thinking to centuries." But "received generic gestures" prove unequal to the task. Nonetheless, as Hopkins renewed the sonnet by stretching the definition of foot and line, so Teare redeems the lyric by interrogating it.

The deeply moving poems in *Pleasure* eulogize the lover Teare lost to AIDS in 1989 while they engage in—to quote the author in "An Extended Bio" (Ahsakta website)—"a dialectic between autobiography and the languaged page." In their search to stay grief, they confront, parse, rail against, and indict death and dying as framed by a particular juncture in contemporary American history. The rub of lyric form against the cruel indignities of the lover's dying generates a volatile verbal energy that has for me no contemporary equal. Teare writes of growing up with the prosody of the King James Bible and a Southern speech that "gave the vowel pride of place." Hopkins, among others, has added muscle to his consonants. His words proliferate, self-aware, material in their sensuality, encountered, like Stein's, on the cusp between sound and meaning.

The poems in the first of the two sections of *Pleasure* address the lover directly. Their project is to construct out of language the lost Eden where the two can be together. "Fuck the real," the poet says. His "lyric . . . courts the senses." It "places the rose / . . . among / the flowers in paradise." But the act of naming is "the beginning of systems," every word "a vehicle for annihilation," as much for the poet as for the medical personnel who reduce the existence of the lovers to positive and negative HIV/AIDS test results. In a culture dominated by a scientific worldview, the poems argue, the lyric can survive only by challenging its own nature as "a conceptual / system whose codes / and complications deny nature, / subject it to force, and shatter it." Within this turbulence, and fleetingly, the lyric voice might "mak[e] it beautiful, the tracheotomy's puckered / flesh a flower."

Through this territory the Eden poems move with formal dexterity from couplets to staggered stanza forms to fragmented texts. One virtuosic example is "Eden Tiresias," grounded in the Gnostic vision of "Thunder: Perfect Mind" from James Robinson's *The Nag Hammadi Library*. The poem tracks the process as Wisdom enters Eden in the form of the sibilant snake, luring the poet to exchange apocalyptic (derived from the Latin for "uncover, disclose") chaos energy for "a mind / to hew with wounds" until intellect became "its own elegy."



I loved it all.

What a heart muscle this poem has! Whoever can make their way to the final “and the bee gives suck to the book : *Ave Incunabulum*, love’s // first work : *Ave*, // *In Memoriam*—” without weeping has a tougher heart than I.

The second half of *Pleasure* constitutes a “coming to” from the intimate indwelling with grief. Three poems in this section, all titled “Californian,” return the poet to a real world place and moment: California in drought, dust coating everything, “feral / cats interring piss into nasturtiums,” the hills on fire. The backroom dealings of power company executives have resulted in rolling blackouts. The world’s body, too, is in extremis. “To Other Light,” the central poem in the section, first published in the Winter 2005/2006 issue of the *BPJ*, finds the poet working in a bookstore. From its dim ambience, surrounded by the weight of literary and philosophical tradition, the poet sees the world outside “as if upon a screen . . . / a quotation.” In what Teare describes as “the phenomenological, God-haunted afterworld of grief—and reading” he comes not to “the enigma of mourning” but “finally to suffer a clarity in language sufficient // to pain.” Six of the poem’s twelve sections emerge as if from the mind of texts he has been reading: Freud’s *Mourning and Melancholia*, *The Lives of the Saints*, Hans Jonas’s *The Gnostic Religion*, *The Nag Ham-madi Library*, Maurice Blanchot’s *Writing the Disaster*, Buber’s *I and Thou*. Though intertextual, their form and language are spare; the linguistic friction that resistance generated in the Eden poems gives way to quieter expression, as here in a section responding to *I and Thou*:

Sensation of time passing  
without him : moth wings’ gray powder  
on the fingers, regret

the understudy of capture, its dun  
brief stain . . .

The poem concludes with the speaker listening as someone, perhaps a customer, narrates a vision of people flickering out one by one on a subway train. Meanwhile, beyond the bookstore window, “the spectacular disaster / of the actual” awaits.

In ***Sight Map*** (Berkeley, CA: U California P, 2009, 96 pp, \$16.95 paper, \$45 hardcover, \$14 Adobe PDF e-book), most of which was written after the poems in *Pleasure*, the poet’s search turns from the

lost lover to an ineffable God. He takes to the road equipped with guidebooks and the writings of transcendental philosophers. The landscape is not the mythical garden but America, albeit one informed by literary heritage as much as by the senses. Three of the book's four sections are identified by latitude and longitude coordinates corresponding to Pennsylvania's Susquehanna Valley; Goshen, New Hampshire; and Oakland, California. The other section, "Pilgrim," a single poem first published in 2004 as a beautiful limited-edition letterpress chapbook by palOmine press, serves well as a name for the seeker we track through *Sight Map's* pages, both because he is taking leave of a stern childhood god and because his journey is in search of transcendence.

In the course of his travels, he encounters the god of rhetoric, self-created in the image of his earthly father "when I don't // know to love / language other // than to run / a larceny // all machine and god- / likeness, gear // and hinge, pocket / watch, tie- // pin, money clip and wing / tip." How economically that little run of words creates a world of artifice and calculation. And then the poet reflects, disarmingly, "It isn't // mastery I'm after. / It's certain // other terms / than my own // I wait for," as in "To Other Light" equating the poet with the listener.

In the New Hampshire section of *Sight Map*, God appears to have taken up residence in the fields and woods. "Morphology," a delicious poem for me as woods dweller, draws on Boughton Cobb's *Field Guide to the Ferns*. Its taxonomy offers "an organic syntax"; the lover has become earth's body. In "The Word from His Mouth, It Is Perfect," based on the Gnostic myth that "the speech of God . . . formed matter," the poet asks, "what remains remembered in flesh" of what "God spoke to matter // during creation . . . // is it longing / is the birch its shape." In "Long after Hopkins," a prayer of sorts, "The field kneels / under white pines," a posture that elsewhere in Teare's oeuvre is emblematic of sexual gratification of a lover. The poet longs, as is evident from the pun in the title, to know "what principle / animates the natural," but what is knowable is only what is visible, and what is visible turns into nouns ("Twenty dandelions gone to seed; / tent worms slung in the articulated / tree") we set in generic syntax and use as "scaffolds to hold up scenery."

A key means of genre bending in all of Teare's work, as in Kazim Ali's, is deconstructing the impositions of syntax. He uses punctuation,

spacing, and counterpointed line breaks to generate syntactic ambiguities that encompass contradictions (“Your mind rid of / nothing is the one thing / you love”) and enrich the possibilities for apprehension. The poems like “Eden Tiresias” in which he lays out sections then weaves them together are the most conspicuous examples of the use of these strategies. In *Sight Map*, he gives us two more of these poems, “To Be Two” and the extraordinary “Sanctuary, Its Root *Sanctus*.” That poem is set at Lake Merritt, a bird sanctuary and a sanctuary for the poet, who walks by the lake to sort out his thoughts. The sun is glaring, the water making ticking sounds against a containing wall as he replays scenes from a love affair that has ended and considers the relationship between praying and fucking, all the while observing other people and resisting turning the physical reality of the lake into a metaphor as his writer’s mind works to compose the scene. These elements combine and recombine, repeated phrases morphing as they roll over each other like wavelets (ouch, the lake as metaphor) in patterns too complex to track. Formally distinct sections seem to conclude (“the impossibility of emptiness : being”), only to have their syntax extended by the first line of the next section (“fucked is a version of prayer”). All the concerns of Teare’s poetry converge in this reenacted moment, language moving (“The lake water ends / with an *ĩ* in it, slip lipping to lip”) and mind keeping up with it, mind moving (“I desire // something / neither received nor seen”) and perception following on its heels. The pleasure is in the unpredictable recurrence, in the “*language entirely wakeful.*”

The formal inventiveness integral to both Brian Teare’s and Kazim Ali’s work is inseparable from this wakefulness, their impulse to true themselves continually to a self made of memory and perception in a world of changing circumstance. Ali might describe this process as an emptying; Teare, as a delving into “chaos’ energy.” In either case, the quality of attention this requires of them defines for me the integrity of their oeuvre. “It isn’t // mastery I’m after. / It’s certain // other terms / than my own // I wait for.” I take a moment here to express my gratitude and wish more poets engaged with poetry on these terms.