

POSTSCRIPTUM

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To begin to begin

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THE HOUR SHOULD BE EVENING. Yes 10:00 o'clock, the
chair sits the night lonelier than the phone at midnight

PSH PSH PSH. A prominent charm for topple the mountain, for
mountain move, for crumble away for boat sink for light tread for
to fly to taste quand-même to hold

Beauty in motion not in name

How should a poem begin?

A poem should begin with an opening where attention draws
close to the hearer, to the intelligible pulse of life, breath

The opening line will convince the poem of itself itsselfness
eroded with each coming line¹

How can a poem begin?

With the introduction of a theme, or a mention of the location in
which it is written: a palazzo in Tunis, a motel bedroom... To
pursue what can be the poem flees what is like a wristwatch
continues, counting unto nothing at all...

¹ We might remember here something that Anne Boyer says: "A poem's
'aboutness' is widely considered an inescapable insult to its is-ness."

Or, a poem just begins, like an end eating its end, the all-coming into the have-come. Let this start be a shadow waving at the sun. Let I be you and let you be them.

Perhaps a poem begins in sleep: Sleep is the most important aspect of private life. And private life is the kernel of the poem. In sleep, one achieves the solitude of waiting for life to begin. But sleep is not just patience sleep also is dreaming in which the qualities of reciprocity and inward freedom are epitomized

So how should a poem begin?

Lightly. Belligerently. Let it begin with a sigh. Sigh. Let it begin with an event. Let the poem happen to itself.

Let me say:

*he moved in light
to establish
the lovely
possibility
we knew
and let it pass²*

Let the poem be a fragment of his passing. Let the poem be the seed of fragment, a kernel of the echo.

Let the flung-out phonemes of Aphrodite [*he moved in light*] flicker behind the ears, below the cosmic degeneration of a sound divorced from flight. Of a fated indeterminacy always a direct

² From a Lorinne Niedecker fragment, in "Other Poems" from *For Paul and Other Poems*, 168.

oscillation between possibilities, between fragment and echo, and echo and echo.

Form, because there are consequences³.

Strato of Lampsacus used to say:

“That ass is the metrical equivalent of cash I discovered once by accident⁴.”

This accident wears in surreal detail the bodily humiliation of metonymy while serving the vestiges of the tongue their not-yets.

How does a poem say no: I refuse?

One such poem by the English writer and humorist, Thomas Hood, begins:

No sun—no moon!
No morn—no noon—
No dawn—
No sky—no earthly view⁵!

Yet these *nos* and their harmony of disuse are cloaked in ability, in the dispirited purgatory of expectation. So how to say not-no, but not-yes?

No replaces the contingency of ‘if’ as the vehicle of poetic frenzy:

³ From Lisa Robertson’s final line from the essay “7.5 Minute Talk for Eva Hesse (Sans II)”, *Nilling*, 45.

⁴ Darrel Hines’ translation.

⁵ From the poem, “No!” (1844)

No as the essential poverty of speech. No as the insufficiency of the origin. No cleaves to the mouth who speaks it best. But in no, the poem really says yes.

So, how should a poem be?

Impractically hospitable to fundamental questions, meaning let's attach ourselves to outcomes, let the ghosting door be invitation. Let's shelter without shackling. If we must leave let's come again.

Spread out our solitude over wide country. Each interchangeable landscape disrobed—let me talk. Let me, evidenced by this lonely word.

No. Which cannot say itself. Cannot not say: no.

Not only does the poem have no object, neither cash nor ass, a large part of its *operation* aims precisely to deny the object, to ensure that thought no longer stands in relation to the object⁶.

To speak of the core of a poetic experience, writes Alain Badiou, is to speak of an experience of thought: the poem's operation is equivalent to giving access to an affirmation of being that is not arranged as the apprehension of an object⁷.

A form of Being in life without wanting the world

Being in life without wanting the world⁸

⁶ Badiou, "What does the poem think?" *The Age of the Poets*, 29.

⁷ Badiou, "What does the poem think?" *The Age of the Poets*, 28-29.

⁸ From the last chapter of Lauren Berlant's *On the Convenience of Other People*.

How does my thumb appear in daydreams

Wait—the poverty of birth

Being does not give itself in the thought of being, for all thinking of being is in reality only the thinking of a thought⁹.

Where am I in a poem? Am I thinking or being? One delineation is that I am thinking when I speak and being when I breathe, but what is a greater thought than being or a greater existence than thought?

According to Parmenides, the object of thinking and being is the same, both thinking and being being object-full procedures:

Look upon things which, though far off, are yet firmly present to the mind;
for you shall not cut off what-is from holding fast to what-is,
for it neither disperses itself in every way everywhere in order,
nor gathers itself together¹⁰.

The poem is the pure dispersion of the object. The poem is always already the future perfect of a world in which neither time nor space are conditions for experience; which turns back and smizes: *what object?* The disintegration of the object is veiled in refusal, but is in fact the reject of a language which knows it too well, of a life too fully lived.

The poem's about-ness resurfaces as fragments of conflicting, contradicting positions which together are experienced as the subject "itself." The subject appears as the conjecture of what it is

⁹ Badiou, "On Poetry," *The Age of the Poets*, 8.

¹⁰ Fragment 4

not, the triumph of what has been called negative capability, and the capacious void into which everything is swallowed.

Centuries after Parmenides, Freud wrote: “Where it was, I will become¹¹.”

To which Paul Celan responds: “Where it never was there it will forever be¹².”

So how should a poem begin when the beginning is indistinguishable from the end? And the end is but a fragment of its beginning?

Or: WHEN SHOULD I SAY I AM YOUNG? Psyche—envelope
of the soul—the soul’s paycheck by candlelight
dreams hands clasped over the moon over crystal
morning in arkansaw,
 kansaw,
 butterfly

Here we are confronted with questions of time and space, the eventual supersession of space with time: what is yesterday in a poem: as if poetry were not the ability to combine facts that don’t belong together across a veneer of perfection (because it is)

Because it is, and, if what is is all there is, Lyn Hejinian reminds us, then it is impossible for what is to be imperfect—that’s one way to think of things.

¹¹ Translated homophonically from Freud’s dictum, “*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*,” [in James Strachey’s translation, “where id was, there ego shall be”] in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*.

¹² From the poem, “The Whitest of Doves,” translated by Pierre Joris.

TO WAKE UP IN THE MORNING FOR THE PURPOSE OF
HEARING THE FIRST BIRD SING. Unincreased. Slow lathe to
first dip, slowly toward drip dri i i p

THE FIRST DAY OF SPRING. Hindered erotics—clothing swap
Saturday, clothing not mandatory. And clearing. From the
continued study of renewal. Local newspapers say: the age of
beloveds and so let it be for you tune your lute to break a
string upon the melody and with excellent grief serve the afflicted
laughter of relief “Avoid troubling others no matter the
cost!” as every kind to set apart is correct, else national
death yet friendship, sun-dashed lives in the kiss, so rich it’s
the ruse of many a capital, and each lawsuit withdrawn of an
inch To get to the point: many events as many as a mouth
to a kiss

Thusly the question of how should a poem begin becomes when
does a poem end?

If the poem is a form of thought and not of knowledge, at the very
least you can hear the echo of your heartbeat in your ear
yes yes yes

The poem should be yes, by turns denial and affirmation of the
object, of experience that is not an experience of itself but
dissolution into subjectivity, the infinite deferral of pronouns, of
faces, of things...

What is an object in a poem?

It is what dispels the multiple of being from the captivity of meaning¹³...the shattered fragment which resists the reduction of thought to knowledge...

When does the poem end? or

What is last night in a poem?

THE HOUR IS EVENING. IT IS LAST NIGHT. 12 o'clock, the
chair sits the night lonelier than the phone at midnight I dreamt I
spat in a donkey's eye The donkey took the form of an American
gentleman and possibility fled and I with
sunlight part without what hunger
required more the thing outside in yesterday's
robe

¹³ Badiou, "What does the poem think?" *The Age of the Poets*, 31.

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