

Juxtapositions

Russell Atkins

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Ventilating Day At The Mall Down By The Lake

—please now,
give more avail'd of doubt's
benefit: who's here for sex or dope?
Not I—

rather the hereabouts of *air*,
air's "crack," an air "high,"
a water "high," by fountains of full'd
seltzer'd of spray! —aliked
as go-go girls who thrust their flash.

Addiction? yes:
but to wafts. —without the health'd
blown of which, I grow, like some, ill'd
at the lungs (inhalationc two jails,
escape's exhalations): there's gasp,
sweat Niagaras, heart thuds, the nerves vermin about
until a zephyr—like a fix—
shoots by

but should I—should I say
I'll never take the cure?

SPECTRES, SPECTRES

what afars for me? nears,
contortioning its ectoplasm?
shaped villains its beckoning,
"The way is here — here —"
some perfidious shrinkages
glee, a cluster for damning me!
until the heavying blear
grislys: by-pass it, put if off,
 eschew it
then gird — !
 onset of the belligerences,
mysterious grasp minions evoked
(fairly, perhaps deservedly!)

 diseased Humility
too eagers; the wild flights of Money
freak away; blank of shred Starve;
the pain of mix Belladonna;
Pneumonia's seances spooking;
the whole hideous gala
of Hospitalization's a pale behold;
aghast'd jails to prostrate me!
Charity sex'd of friends;
faint comes to my rescue
as my County Welfare!
wait, meet what is in store?
or leave before?

what afars for me? nears,
contorting like ectoplasm?
shaped villains its beckoning
“ — this way, Russell.”

PREFACE

Hp(human phenomenon) is an object-forming animal resembling groups of such animals, e.g. birds, spiders, beavers, etc. Object-forming may be viewed as working through hp's neural system through a stimuli exchange with the environmental and ending up as a kind of objectification of "mind" based, largely, on *gravitation*. Religious ideas, such things as "souls," "moralities," "justice," etc., can probably be shown to be forms of gravitational stress turned into object-formations — some abstract, some more concrete — through stimuli and the nervous system. Hp is the leading example of the object-forming process as "creativity," (largely because he is physically deficient and must compensate). At any rate, I. have considered these premises much more thoroughly elsewhere. Here, they constitute the basis of technique in my poems, poetry-dramas, "musical" works, etc. These works are regarded as my own object-forming processes at work and amount to an objectification of mental life taking the form of books manuscripts, notated music.

Let me add, I function on the premise of the possible right a thing has to be brought into existence — (but here "relevance," "communication," "transmitting *immediate* experience," do not necessarily qualify for "creativity" in my ethos). "Consciousness," as revealed in Hp, is not particularly relevant — the universe is, apparently, independent of it; one assumes that if we perished tomorrow, planets, suns, etc., would commence functioning. Even the earth itself maintains a certain *created* "irrelevancy" to hp's "consciousness."

Thus, when a poem, or idea, or "musical" work occurs to me, I don't question whether it will be relevant or whether it will communicate or "mean," I simply indulge its drive to be brought into existence, its drive to be. Creativity for creativity's sake! This may be confused with "art for art's sake." They are not the same but may complement each other, (However, let me state that I have nothing against art for art's sake.)

The poetry(as my work) indulges in its own principles without the slightest intention of conforming to contemporary poetic shibboleths, such as, "understatement," "economy," "precision," Ruskin's "presentability," and, for the poetry-dramas no encouragement of Blackmur's "measured prose." Instead, in the dramas, poetry is based on *orchestral* poetics, i.e., "Musical devices": 1) It is scored like a ton of bricks, using words for maximum momentum, volume, and "*doubling*" by *manipulating the implicit in a set of grammatical categories* as, e.g., a single melody upon two different sounding instruments,* 2) the use of prepositions, conjunctives, possessives to "split" word "atomies" of connotation, 3) general avoidance of "smooth" or "legato" in order to make words juxtapose each other rhythmically, 4) the continued resuscitation of the apostrophe "d" for a bold distortion of the weak verb so that its adjectival-action properties strike out simultaneously and three-dimensionally! *

Subsequent ideas are represented in work of mine published from 1954-1979.

The following publications are on record.

The Abortionist, (poem-in-play-form, to be set to music), *Free Lance Magazine*, 1954

The Corpse, 1954. A Poem-in-Play-Form to Be Set to Music. *Western Review* (University of Iowa, 1954) This work transformed into an opera, *The Widow*, in 1962 .

"A Psychovisual Perspective for "Musical" Composition," 1956-1958.

"Hypothetical Arbitrary Constant of inhibition," in *Free Lance*, 1964 and 1967.

See: Russell Atkins issue, *Free Lance*, 1970-1971. also, "Of," *Free Lance*, 1976

Phenomena, 1961. A book of poem-plays and poetry published by Wilberforce University Press & *Free Lance Workshop*, 1961. Contains a discussion of "conspicuous technique" in the Afterword. (See: *Publishers Weekly* Oct., 1961.

The Drop of Blood, 1961. A Poem-Play in Music-Form to Be Set to Music

The Exoneration, 1961 (Performed, Karamu Theatre, 1971)

Two by Atkins, 1963 Free Lance Press, 1963. (See: *Publishers Weekly* Nov. 1964.

Reprints: Johnson Reprint Company, 1969 (from Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.) also Kraus Reprint

Four Elegies: Kennedy, 1964, Langston Hughes 1967, Adelaide Simon, 1967, Malcolm X, 1979 as "conspicuous technique" in repetition. Also, "The Infanticide," *Free Lance*, 1967

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DESCRIPTION OF POEM(S)-IN-PLAY-FORM (WORD-SETS) AS POETRY-DRAMA

Poetry-Drama as Music-Form Based on Opera as Tableau

Glossary:

1) Poetry-Drama

The term "Poetry-Drama" is used to differentiate between a drama written in prose that is "poetic" and a drama written in poetry. Poetry-Drama is more of a tableau stage production dominated by poems as word-sets and employing "conspicuous technique" as music-form, symphonic poetics

2) Music-Form

Orchestral-poetics for poetry-drama is based on an approximation of sonata-form in musical composition using repetition, serialism leitmotiv, idee fixe, etc., plus First Subject and Second Subject.

3) Sonata-Form

The introduction of First and Second Subjects with identifiable word-sets, then a possible transposition (different words), followed by a repeat of First, Second Subjects (with possible transposition again) after which a "development" section begins using the word-sets already introduced. (Remember, we are not dealing with regular plays but with Poetry-Drama for which these procedures were specifically designed.)

4) Conspicuous Technique

This term means the deliberate use of poetry device at a maximum, not "measured prose" (Blackmur). Its aim is to project poetry as language device as music is used to project in opera. The devices should strive to be as "conspicuous" as possible. Devices: a) rhyme as propellant (loosely rhymed tercets, quatrains, etc.) b) refrain (repetend) as word-sets manipulated as in music's "idee fixe," or "leitmotiv" for the purposes of dramatic situations as "keys"(or scale); c) the returning of incremental repetitions like melody but in mirror-forms (permutations of words and word-sets, substituting words of the same meaning as intervals are substituted in "serialism"); d) parts of speech exchanged in the use of connotation and denotation so that, as in music, grammatical structure is altered as e.g., the diatonic one, four five is avoided as harmonic modulation in much contemporary music; e) the use of prepositions, conjunctions, possessives to "split" or "fuse" word atoms, further altering conventional grammar so that a CONDITIONAL DICTION covers the poetry-drama for ALL characters and situations (I.E., LITTLE OR NO IDIOMATIC LANGUAGE OF GROUPS SOCIAL STRATA, ETC.) much as a composer's music in opera covers *all* characters, etc., situations, etc; f) next, general avoidance of "smooth" or "legato" in the rhythmic juxtaposition of words.

5) Plots Situations & Characters

These are regarded as the "scales" or "keys" upon which the word-sets as poems are kept the same or permuted or added to as in "transitions," or, say, "passing tones." Voice inflection, "meaning" accentuations chance the words to fit the plot, or a character's expression or a situation even though the words remain the same throughout the poetry-drama.

6) Permutations (suggested)

Not using different word-sets for different self evident situations and characters, but instead using;

The same word-set(s) on different self-evident situations and characters or
word-sets *permuted* upon the same repeated self-evident situations plus characters:

Same word-set(s) on *same* self-evident situations plus characters, etc.

And word-sets or characters and other situations transferred to other characters situations, etc.

7) Brief Summary

Poetry Drama is not *acted* as much as it is RECITED and projected.

Timing: one hour.

Scenes should be shot (like poems) with lights dimmed (or curtain) of no less than a minute.

Sub-plot practically eliminated except as quick exposition early in drama in bits, references, etc.

Acting-plus-reciting tends to resemble singing-plus-acting in opera and one (either acting or reciting) **MUST** dominate. In poetry-drama, reciting must dominate as singing dominates in opera.

MANIFESTO

- 1) The practise of an art should be immersed in the bringing-into-existence-as-creativity process. The *result* need *not* communicate.
- 2) Art should conditional, i.e., conditions set by the artist. Once set he should not risk these conditions for what is called "communication."
- 3) Art should encourage mannerism.
- 4) Do not encourage "economy" in poetry.
- 5) Rhythm in poetry need not be "smooth" or "musical"(since that word has a questionable meaning). Be cautious of these descriptions as a so-called "good ear."
- 6) Do not allow "precision" of observation and literalness as "sense"(i.e. exegetical reasoning or "good" logic) to interfere with or dominate experimentation or expressiveness, i.e. do not destroy a poem trying to make it clear.
- 7) All voice qualities should be acceptable as the poet intends them(ironic innocence, bombast, intelligence, etc) However, do NOT accept understatement "plain-spoken," prose-like as being "sincerity."
- 8) Be self-indulgent as an artist. Use solipsism if necessary — be the source of everything.
- 9) Repetition: Use *redundancy*. If a thing is good enough to be said once, it is good enough to be repeated in some form immediately and thereafter. What a reader "already knows" or has "already been told once" should not be a criterion for a poem's processes since a poem need not be determined by, or directed toward, "meaning" or so-called "sense" either as "economy" or as information. The poet may, like the composer with a melody, tell his audience the same thing as many times as he chooses using different words (like different orchestral instruments), or the same words in the service of rhythm, momentum mood, and *stimuli extension* written volume, etc. Make use of "implicitness" since a poem is not obligated to avoid inherent meaning similarities as though they have already been written into the poem's words. Most grass may be "green" but the word "green" has its own properties.
- 10) Distract the reader. Generally, the casual reader goes straight for the "sense," or the "meaning" behind the words (as some alcoholics want to get full). Thus words as *performance* should intervene with "bouquet" or any kind of "conspicuous technique" with "meaning" secondary.

11) In Poetry-Drama (not "poetic" drama) the aim is similar: *the predominance of the poetry performance as technique!* Do not use "measured prose" (to quote a well-known critic) thereby leaving the poetry as an appendage of some play which would be self-sufficient without the poetry or measured prose).

Therefore:

12) If possible, avoid saying anything in poetry as it would ordinarily be said (unless as dialogue in the nature of quotation, or for contrasting effects). In short, avoid the language "really used by men" in everyday affairs ("the language of ordinary men" etc.) that's not far from the "grossness of domestick use" (therefore breeding contempt from familiarity), Question also "the language of common speech," to quote others. Rather, let poetry thrust toward a language "peculiar to itself."

13) ART: Art does not have to *convince*. Its aim is largely AESTHETIC, not essentially informative or "problem solving," or trying to "tell anyone anything." THEREFORE: "beauty," being its own value, is to be defined ONLY by the artist as he immerses himself in the bringing-into-existence-as-creativity process. Nothing the artist does is *obligated* to "work" for or "communicate" with an audience. It is a phenomenalist about which the audience is *relatively* free.

14) Art: Each artist — as creator — says: "This is *aesthetic* as I see it!" Do not confuse subject matter with Art: they are two separate entities. The art aspects should not be confused with "sincerity": the two things need not be the aim of each other in spite of all the nonsense about this. Art may be the treatment of subject matter and as such evolves intangibly through the artist as he brings-into-existence-as-creativity that from the sublime to the obscene. Art may be logically in the nature of ornament as in many cultures. There is no reason for poetry to avoid the nature of ornament.

15) Don't write the "good" or the "best" of anything. Write poetry or "music" that does what YOU want done.

The Following Misconceptions Relating to My Poetry-Dramas, Poems-in-Play-Form, etc.
(Subtitle: Somewhat silly comments made by others as "critics.)

Q " — the characters in your poetry-dramas don't speak as people talk today?

a)Of course not, and I intend to see to it that they don't. Unlike the past, the language of the plays is deliberately designed to be as far from ordinary speech as possible. The words should, as often as I can achieve it, have a grammatically rearranged order designed specifically to hold the same relationship to poetry-drama as music holds to opera or dance as ballet.

Q " — you say your poetry-dramas may have some "originality," yet you use weather to help create mood and telephones for monologues?

a)"Originality" is not necessarily avoiding everything that has been used before. Weather today, is one of our main preoccupations, far more than in the past. We have it from telephones, radio, television, newspapers, etc.; weather reports guide aviation, business, ships, traffic, etc. AS for the telephone, it serves the realistic presentation of the unreal and is a modern invention in its final forms and a perfect device for poetry monologues. It would be unresourceful to dismiss it.

Q " — are you writing about the problems of today?

a)My dramas are often *based* on problems of today, but I am seldom interested in communicating anything about those — rather, I'm more concerned with something *aesthetic* as the autonomous work, or, what is called "phenomenalism."

Q " — why do you write dramas in poetry? Are you a good enough poet for that'

a)One of the best — however, many quarrel with my refusal to conform to standardized shibboleths. Still, I have published over the years with recognized names, Pound, Auden, Moore, Gide, Frost, etc., and many others.

Q " — aren't you afraid of the Elizabethans, Shakespeare, etc?

a)No. Whenever poetry is put anywhere near a stage "critics" automatically dredge up the Bard. However, my work is based on techniques totally removed. The devices are lifted directly from "musical" composition, sonata-form, etc. (see other notes). The dramas seldom exceed having three characters at the most; they're without much/any sub-plot; last for an hour, and scenes arranged as single poems, and, above all, they use the same word-sets throughout the poetry-drama and these manipulated according to musical device. Also, the world has changed radically since the Elizabethans, and my plays refer to realities today, viz., cars, airplanes, ocean liners, radio,

television etc., drugs in the modern sense, diseases as we know them today (scientifically) sports, etc. The truth of the matter is that any use of poetry at a figurative *maximum* — instead of “measured prose,” — tends to be wrongfully identified with a past — I repeat, *any* use of highly figurative language !

Q “ — your use of the apostrophe “d”, did you invent this?

a)Of course not. Some version of it has appeared in English poetry from Chaucer to Robert Bridges through Whitman. It was a contractive device. I resuscitated it, so to speak, to specify a bold distortion of the weak verb which I use to exaggerate and disarrange the grammar. It holds the same relationship to my poetry-dramas as such things as "leitmotivs,, and intervallic substitutions hold in music-dramas and Schonberg's twelve-tone technique(which was current when I first began these experiments for poem-plays). Likewise, there is another analogy: the avoidance of the strictly diatonic in harmonic modulation in avant-garde(or contemporary)"musical" composition, that diatonic progression being somewhat like the rules of sentence structure — the one, four, five, in music a kind of subject-noun predicate-verb adjective relationship, etc.

Q " — you use a lot of repetition in your work — is this your idea — or whose?

a)No, repetition is not my idea and most of its forms can be found in practically every *Handbook Of Poetics*. In poetry, every repetitional device, viz., refrain, prolepsis, anadiplosis, incremental repetition is available to the poet since most of these devices have been in verse for hundreds of years *However, my idea was the use of these for dialogue — voice inflections acting upon the same words* in poetry repetitions throughout the drama e.g., Wagnerian "leitmotiv").

Q " — have you a general theoretical base for what you do in you, poetry-dramas?

a)Yes, for what it may or may not be worth: Poetry-Drama is an inclusion of hp(human phenomenon) within a "*mechanics of technique*" which I equate somewhat with environment. The idea is that hp is an extension of such mechanics(physics included) but that the mechanics may be more significant than he is, ergo suggesting a de-emphasis on "human" in some of its meaning and

Q “ — to some people, your work may seem like exercises, or "studies," etc.

a)"Exercises," "studies," etc., can be art as much as anything else can be. “Etudes,” "studies," etc., are now-completely accept able forms for the best in the arts." Studies" made by famous painters bring notable prices at auctions, not to mention developments in music, e.g., Etudes by Liszt, Stravinsky Schumann, Chopin and countless others where their ideas were "worked out." In fact, some Beethoven piano sonatas have been regarded as his "working out" of ideas that subsequently entered his larger pieces.

Q “ — suppose these techniques, etc., just don't work — ?

a)The word "work" has no valid definition in this usage. Art does not have to "work." It *is*. It's not created, necessarily, for the public to decide whether it "works" or not. It has no obligations in that respect. "Entertainment" is but one of any number of reasons for creativity. "Originality" does not have to "work," since what "works" is never to be permitted to determine it. Such mistaken ideas about what "works" have been the plague of much that was worthwhile when first introduced to critics and public. Also, a public which says in effect that it doesn't ask artists to write music, poetry, etc., and doesn't want them or need them and does not intend to pay for them, is, in my opinion, in no position to offer inane critical comments as to what "works" given the subjective nature of that word. Again, the artist is under no obligation to consider the commentary of "critics" who, so to speak, act as representatives of interpretation on behalf of the public as to whether or not something "works." Finally, an artist does not concern himself(herself) always with whether a thing "works" but rather with whether it's what he(the artist) wants it to be. If someone says, "This doesn't work," and yet it is whatever the artist has designed it to be, then, that's all that it need be.

Conclusions as to whether a thing "works" or not are subjectively conditioned by what someone wants it to be or do or —does not want it to be or do, e.g., if some one dislikes drama in which everything is sung rather than spoken, then opera will. not "work" for that person as in similar cases where some one wants direct realistic dialogue in drama: for that person poetry-drama will not "work," etc.

Exteriors, Interiors*

It has trouble enough of its own
this place that wishes to be left
to its own devices—
is awhiled with wan, long-length'd
with the solemnity of loomed
footfall'd

But I'm certain of not being certain
that there is someone
in that exterior. If I could enter now
behind the arch, for example
(the where
the one watches) I feel as certain as I am
leaning that anguished amber
the one
out and out
who is *not* seen
who

footfalls

*The Seer, a painting by De Chirico

OVER HIS DEAD BODY

of him,
milk in a years of sieved gush:
a threnody'd squawk of chickens,
of hundreds squabbled to grocers from farms;
stiffened in hells of stoves, at last,
as trundled bones on plates that lair
— all this:
crack'd apart of eggs, babes against
affrightful skillets glee'd by grease;
nameless butchers that pummell'd
the gory steaks for abrupt of his fork
and teeth; unravelled bacon by the yard
moving its char along his tubes,
could not be held, could not leave much;
oysters could not save a thing;
nor could shrimp from plundered shallows,
neckbones, heavy pork chops,
do much — nor could groundround
daunt; steamed up lobster,
lush'd with butter, failed completely
— the body no gravy could fill
to be morsel'd off to fat grubs
(Let my own personal feelings offend:
that he ate well enough we know
— as to what end —,

THRENODIC PHANTASIES FOR EXAMPLE:

somebody woeful'd close to Cypress'd,
vaunt at its dirged through a fabric:
sumptuously, be about to dine. Say:
Chateau d'Yquem, 1928 (zap a coroner
with gastric'd wow); "Chartreuse of pheasant,
charlotte glaze with strawberries,
— ile flottante and poires Alma";
Bifteck Bourguignon — add, squab!
of course,
expire as of beheld of fabulous'd:
Renoir'd glens, Rembrandts, Theotokopoulos,
Delacroix — that's for anybody
of willow'd to lorn Cypress'd!
— or tell of a sudden for travels:
aloft villa'd above a lake's sheened lapse
in Portugal, Switzerland's steeps
ski'd upon as thousand'd Alp'd;
of browsed gardens, the Castello Balduino
at Montalto di Pavia
— the Caribbean next
slendering in palms!
truth? from someone woeful'd close to Cyprus?
one too close to Cypress'd
should talk of a fabled of friends:
when they ask, "How's what's-name doin'?"
you know only his most: tell them
there's precious less than a Rolls-Royce;
a phone that Wall Street's its ring;
Madison Aved, or Manhattan'd offices
Head of a Bank with abounds of secretaries
obsequious'd hither with hie'd,
or of late, say
retired to Bermuda proned of by seal!
(the Queen yet visits — ah!)
fugues of music, John Bach's,
by all means, shall full at The End
in a bier'd church

On the Demolition

of abject, listen full'd, full'd up
somber'd into illusion'd mystery
as in expectation of some unearthly'd appear!
a bleak consternation, perhaps,
at Judgment after'd by skeleton'd rouse!
abrupt dark'd out at my approach
footfall'n through the hush fellingly yew
along'd by shadowy lamps: about null, dole of outcast
the erst of which, blown,
no dawn's, vast'd through
monstrous'd fled
(as of leaves that roar away in horrifying astound)
left its ceased
(for a moment,
as in a thenced, I saw
its late illumned;
diagram'd into diagram;
sag's lax Eucid'd
and the Eratosthenesian measured anew)
—notwithstanding, towers up
vain endurance under the confectioning sun,
that, little in immeasurable,
lessons down the sky

About the sidestreets more:
filth'd hush nigh or gutter,
seldom open silences of doors,
or around train rails further;
warehouses lone flung,
cryptic bridge over
which a car went on'd!
(but even decay passes:
if but a death could permanently kill!)
shorn houses? Shadows in veer
toward progeny next year

tonight, revisiting, feel
furious air!
everyplace a vacant exclaim
in this, a momentary illusion of end,
while keepsakes of yesterness
wild terribly hither and fro
under the medusa'd over
—clad of shrub shreds to rush
and for the exodus'd
difficult will snow

(From *Free Lance*, 1960)

GHASTLY CUISINE

there's enjoy'd's lack
weary'd over everything!
— abhor of food zoo'd
on a platter
— stark to vicious'd
in a lapsed gravy's sullen:
that's of any sort of grub!
For example: antenna'd lobster
thick in sly'd's vapor's
fetid tank; crab's horror'd
of grasp, or fowl's lying
in slain'd with haunch
knees'd to you! or catfish
aghast of an eye sideways
or of like in pig's feet
about to cloven from a dish
or ham's torso'd too much
of murderous'd, or barbecue's
burn-off like boards from
a housefire, or the slab'd
at death camps

(from *HOUSE ORGAN*, 1993)