



# THE CRUISE OF THE PNYX

ROBERT KELLY

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## TO THE READER

*There are three Modes or Measures discovered in this work. Poetry and prose are two of them, represented as they usually are in print. squared-off prose, poetry flush to the left margin but uneven at the right. The third measure is a between-rider, or transitional grade between poetry and prose. I dedicate this measure to the Queen of Between. It can be called logaoedic, prose-song. Like poetry, it occurs in lines, and its lines are to be respected as units of context and performance. Yet like prose, the lines tend to spill breath over, rushing towards the act or it happened prose usually aims at. This logaoedic measure is represented here by text which is set flush to the right margin, but irregular at the left— making a sort of mirror-image of verse.*

*Every experience  
is an earth  
you give one.*

*Every morning  
leaves spaces  
to begin —  
this is  
Form,*

*air  
elicits it  
from our dark  
internal sleep,  
our meat.*

*The path  
op ens  
out from here,*

*the syllables  
regularly grow  
to make a human heart appear*

*in the yellow  
of that cognoscent Rose.*

## I

The ship sails & the wind fails  
& the Northern Lights inspect us.  
Where were we for example going?

To her admirable paradigm  
walked with small steps  
meanwhile holding with both hands  
(childpaws) the object of her  
momentaneous care, intense.  
Is describing for example  
her enough? Not,  
but the fulvid wood of the purser's hutch,  
shallow modernity of such lumber  
(I grew with maple)  
made me only lonely. I looked at her.  
Like lodestone but heat-seeking,  
her-seeking, needled, spun.  
No such verb. The boat burns oil.  
Into those exalted waters north of home

capable to go, wind-fail no matter  
 except the doubt of going where the wind won't.  
 We can but we should? Every can  
 is should enough. So think?  
 Eumorphically. Press digits to greet her?  
 Nary a. Pinch a salute!

*Cloak of the Vampires* seen early,  
 still in Nantucket waters;  
 we lost the signal halfway through  
*Our Zombie Rose*, the late late  
 show & we were ocean only.  
 No furtive influence; alone

under the balsamic moon  
 on the sea of human birth

with all our squooshy video-cassettes  
 nominating verbs & energizing pronouns  
 till I hated the look in the mirror, yuk,  
 another one of us. *Un autre moi*  
 she planh't on her improvised vihuela.  
*Television was far ago* we played that night  
 nibbling Danish salami at the captain's table  
 though that officer did not appear.



In the first round of nostalgia  
 Dr Marie was able to remember  
*a clock made of flowers "in Canada,  
 but not far in."*

Travelling for health, P. Zweifel recalled  
 that embarrassing *time he tried to step up  
 onto the running board* of the first car not to have one.

But the rest of us were young enough  
 to come up with only most trifling  
 perturbations of the infinite meek present.

*The Mass in Latin*  
 was mine as the oldest of the youngest.  
*Wildcat in Woodstock. Stop signs were yellow. Milk in glass  
 bottles* were some of the best. Rejected as invidious  
 was *Thing that works*. By midnight she decamped,  
 left me to hold the snarling party  
 at bay with my paltry wit, plus some  
 elegant pericopes from the Fathers  
 I'd copied on a bare leaf in my passport.  
 I read them Nazianzen on the Prayer of Abstinence  
 & Ulfius of Ratisbon on chemical worship,  
 Clement on the girl who stole cheremoyas  
 when the table was rocked with controversy:  
 How came American fruits to Alexandria?  
 Who discovered America? Was Oswald unaided?

Any enigma is every enigma.  
 No one cared about my moral theology  
 except for Teresa Eckstein, an altar-girl  
 in her all-too-recent youth. We discussed  
 father-confessors we had known & lied to.  
 Then she told me some miracles of St Germaine,  
 luscious ones I'd never heard. The table rocked  
 as the *Hill of Pnyx* bellied in a trough.  
*Factum nihil, mentem omnem dico*  
 she guessed. "Anybody knows *intention*  
 is the handle devils hold you by."  
 But are there devils, I asked her.  
 Where? Where? Count Brzyrsko wanted to know.  
 At this merry moment *Turn, sir, turn*  
*away from your cigar* the girl sang  
 around the bar, then that old Red song  
*The Foreign Surgeon Generals.*  
 At the refrain we plunged our cigarettes  
 into the schooners of Malagache champagne.  
*Don 't smoke*, Kilda Katt quoted,  
 but Amaranth Arthur topped her with *Don't Drink!*  
 — a good laugh was general at Kilda's expense.

## II

“The particle is the authentic, the real article.”

*That* through a porthole as I shuffled down the deck—

I stopped to listen. A second voice asked:

“So what is your religion, then?”

“The small words of language, particles,  
pronouns, affixes, lewd infixes, huzzahs,  
conjunctions. These are the sexual parts,  
the flowers of language & I love them.

They make language *work*, begin to move  
the dreaded stasis of noun & verb.”

The voice I heard was rich with wine—

I had heard it once before

on the maiden voyage of the *Capillary*

starting our nine-day tour of the shrines of Livonia.

Now I had every reason to peek through the porthole,

but not the courage to. I waited

& sure enough the louvered door swung open

to let a tubby figure trip on deck, enlarging

his observations to the foggy night.  
 “That priest there,” (he pointed at me  
 as if I spoke only Latvian, but I let it pass)

“for example. He is a *noun*, if you will—  
 stable, obvious, black-beetle brittle,  
 stiff. No change for him, no offspring.  
 No Brutus to nurture, hence no kind  
 assassin to take his last troubles away.  
 Take him to the opera  
 & he’d hide from the pretty Lucia,  
 wrap his head in his monsignoral scarf  
 against the sight of her dusky charms.  
 Even if he saw her he’d defame her, blame her,  
 toasting her virginity & praising every No.  
 What good are they, priests, or verbs, those  
 businessmen? Give me the nameless proletarians,  
 ums & uhs & (ihuhs blackballed by the dictionary,  
 yeoman pronouns, energetic particles.  
*Gar, men. ne, nonne, num—*  
 these guide me to Jerusalem,  
*y-a-t eheu stain really doch*  
 lift from my neck the semantic yoke.  
 Mean nothing, eloquent small words!  
 Mean nothing & do everything!”

The rotund gentleman's exaltation  
 was bad for him in the night air. Phiegly coughing  
 till his reedy companion led him  
 with slow steps back into the stateroom  
 where I heard him crying for a notary.  
 As I strolled on I was able to place  
 his operatic reference, Doniz etti.  
 And right there in my ecumenical breviary,  
 only an octave & a vigil away,  
 was the feast of Saint Pasquale *il Cornuto*.  
 I turned to the Third Lesson of Matins & read:

*How the holy... was disappointed..., his beloved... Geronia  
 ran off with... application rejected... refusing resentment his  
 picture in... while his wife a tender letter... evident revisionist  
 intentions..., small town north of Quito... Nec spe nec  
 metu he quoted from Esdras... Micronesian apostolate open -  
 ing..., his father?... kuru-colony..., in the arms of.. "Not for a  
 Mass but for the love of later the..., tried to believe..., arms and  
 force of spirit he..., who would a flower to but to the true God  
 only... whom was he in fact seeking.. .forgave him and she  
 bent..., a bird ca/led a gannet... in his beloved winter to the  
 Lord*

Where could I go now, nose of the ship  
 nibbling the mist, no sense of motion given,  
 bar closed (those brandy-aleijandros!),  
 writing-parlor closed by fumigators.  
 In my virtuous cabin I could write  
 an ode to that or other awkward saint  
 struggling like me to lift a certain elegance,  
 his chalice,  
 up to the sun all the days of his—  
 & never getting much help except from women.  
 Which brought other problems into view.  
 So I would write an ode to Michigan, an ode  
 to song sparrows, centerfielders, disc-harrows,  
 matchbooks, Taching welders, sables, pool.  
 By then it would be dawn & I could sleep.  
 He could not know I was an Anglican,

meniscus of the newish moon, a lover  
 whose lady lay honest in our cabin  
 dreaming of blackberry pastilles.  
 How could I ever be pure as Donizetti?  
 Not to speak of Bellini, that nimble fire? Those rivals  
 sang in my head as I went to join her,  
 stripping off the wordy garments as I rose  
 in an atmosphere of perfect lust to touch her.

## III

*The Capture Chreod*

“Is it a way of being suddenly there?”

Finnan haddie next morning for Freddi & me.

The vinous gent of the night before behind me  
spoke clearly, provoking someone to ask so he could say:

“No, it is a point of origin  
& a space of possibilities for the point to travel.”

The thin voice said an enlightened Oh.  
Our own talk was meager, most of the breakfasters done.

And the nonagesimal clock ran slow  
as I learned from my scrutiny  
of the map of our voyage on the mezzanine.

The miles we’d come, the sealane chosen.

There was some reason to dread submarines  
so even over the organ we heard the watch whistling

*All clear, all smooth, no pz-rboats in the trough.*

Oh the clean ocean. Freddi was giddy  
but by then we were alone. It is

a way of being suddenly there. Almost raining,  
hard to tell from spray when the ship wallowed.

Freddi left me for midmorning squash.

After nine turns on deck I played a round  
of “Delicate Gardens” with Eileen & Irene.

But what was the purple light bathing their hands?

I had to figure that out before they diagnosed  
‘vetiver’ in the cologne on my collar.

*A woman carrying a large*  
beetle I guessed, & they guessed ‘Oil of Vivander.’

But theirs was asafoetida, & I was wrong.

The light was from the Pluto Chapel clerestory  
admitted through the bronze symbolic lepersquint  
a careless steward left ajar. Principles had kept me  
out of the chapel itself, as indeed out of so many  
on this world-famous Floating Fortress of Faiths.

It made their hands look good, sexual, kind  
if not healthy. Did they notice their pool of light?

I wanted to stroke their knuckles but reached  
instead for my game-tiles, deliberately  
let my fingers stray into the purple field —  
from which no sudden warp prevented  
as I feared. But my now amethystine finger nail  
sobered my gaudy mood — if colors could do this,  
then accidents more avail than essences.



Or is color an essence itself, grandly? Eileen  
 quincunxed just then with a clatter of ivory.  
 “I won, I won, or at least I cannot lose!”  
 Irene could tie on the next sally, but flubbed  
 the obvious Three Plums on a Glad Dish  
 trying for something more intricate, & bunked.  
 Eileen collected our kisses with mews.  
 This life aboard ship, so touchy-touchy & soft,  
 so far from the heroic departures, the mood  
 when a man says No, I won’t need that loofah,  
 or I *can* travel without my exercycle.  
 Now we just drifted from pleasure to pleasure,  
 half-drunk by noon & muzzy to supper  
 after the gorgeous queasy naps in sunshine.  
 We lived the mood of going far,  
 everything a little smaller than on land.  
 At last at noon my cable came—  
 they’d made me Bishop of Sunland *ad inferos!*

O Freddi fond of my too sweet repose  
 come back from the ballcourt & play with me.  
 It’s not good for a man to play alone  
 & E with I have gone for their Finnish lesson.  
 Oh the things we do before dining!  
 Oh the mornings of the world!

[Here it is Sunday & the boatgo  
 being imagined is halted  
 in the doldrums of the other Saturday stuff  
 vaguing down on us. camera stores & supermarkets,

Erev Pesah, oh life this bitter herb.  
 Yet he doesn't sound as if he suffers,  
 this notional suffragan newly promoted:]

I went to the Naked Cabaret last night  
 where bare customers dance nervously beneath  
 elegantly dressed chorusgirls working up on stage.

Naked, we watch an attractive secretary  
 type three stencils on a red Adler,  
 just like real life, the power! then glue  
 her boss's dried daffodils in the company album;  
*Pfingsten zum Igelsee* she wrote in white ink.

Tops was the Salabrian tin-mine routine  
 with girls hauling little hoppers, straining  
 sexily from the hips to move such clumsy cars.

"It is like the imagination, amplifying  
 outward what it cannot find inside"  
 said a familiar now detestable voice—  
 a voice that seemed never to have compromised  
 & always accused me of doing so. A satanist,

I ought to have concluded. I turned to him at last,  
 made verbal by our skinny-dip equality.  
 “Who are you then, who hold so much opinion?”  
 “August Schwefel is my name, your Grace; allow  
 me to congratulate you on your elevation.”  
 Short as he was, he bowed. My nakedness  
 revolted by his proximity, I bowed not.  
 “News travels fast.” “My concern is with Sunland;  
 nothing touches it but touches me.” He produced his card  
 deftly from a sporran on his jouncy thigh,  
 smiled & danced away with his partner  
 as soon as the band began the Nova Zemlya.  
 The card’s German text reminded me  
 that my new diocese was once upon a time  
 part of German Equatorial Ponce-de-Leon,  
 & High German was still the tongue of choice  
 in better schools & boarding houses.  
 Apart from a spree (could they know about that?)  
 once in Berlin I knew not a thing  
 about Germany. Their only philosophy I cared about  
 is What ever happened to Martin Bormann.  
 Meantime Schwefel was fresh at my table,  
 introducing his companion Mitzi Gallapher,  
 “daughter of the Chilean champagne.” They sat  
 unbidden & ordered some. Our stewards wore

basque berets to tell them by. Up on stage  
*The Revolt of the Stars* was being mummied;  
 I watched it with fervor born of my fear,  
 disgust with my compelled companions, yearning  
 for innocence. Again. Freddi had left me,  
 far as the boat would let her go. I knew it  
 would happen. After all my promises  
 to get out of religion & into some honest work,  
 she couldn't take my smug pleasure at becoming a bishop.  
 She could see I'd immediately forsaken our plan  
 to settle as turquoise dyers in Taos, handle Indian artifacts,  
 I'd buy from natives & she'd sell, how well  
 she could do it, & we'd dye together at night  
 improving the pale stones of natural condition.  
 And now she was off, alone or with whoever  
 & I was stuck with these creeps naked as I was.  
 Heavy noise of the Centaurus number,  
 a pretty redhead in indigo sequins  
 trying desperately to flee a villain named Sol.  
*Don't wanna live in your old prison!*  
 she kept belting out till some masked brunettes  
 came fanning her with their peacock wings  
 & struck the villainess down to earth. End  
 of The Revolt. Now there was dancing again.

## IV

Base strategy of all sexuality,  
to capture & intromit, as I with Mitzi,  
set up by Schwefel, that night, to my shame.  
Intromit & heave, as turn after turn  
under the moonlit porthole came,  
with ever new women working out  
the tiny craven repertory of sexual morphologies  
that act in the act. Giving. Taking. Touching. Letting Go,

Base strategy of all yearning,  
to capture a wanderer & bedew her with grace  
till she is sodden with your suddenness  
& goes her way corked with your silences,  
unwilling factory of automatic product,  
victim, slave of a slave!



Such rain at last alone on deck.

I once thought how happy I'd be rich  
 to travel with rainy weather round the world,  
     lover of wet seasons.  
     What is the rainiest city?  
     Even tropic rain I love.  
 Eve's tears of laughter, God's cool gleet,  
     Aphrodite's ointment. I call it  
     The Obvious from Heaven.  
 Let it always be raining, so to be out of doors at all  
     is to be caressed. Kiss of the weather.  
     Inside, the noisy *Capture of Kars*  
     stupefied the audience  
 but kept me from slumber under my cozy plaids.  
     Why did I do what I did? Why her?  
 A steward had brought me lines from Freddi:  
     *Once dearest—— —I with Elizaveta,*  
     *neither in love nor out of it. I'll come back*  
     *to no bishop. Thos o niente. F*  
     She meant nada. Did she mean 'am?'  
 My career or my new wife, no easy choice.  
  
 I let the rain talk to me, my eyes half closed  
 to see the secrets of that marrowspace  
 between inside & outside, mild demons,  
 spirits of air. *For every house*  
*is compact of them, nor one square ell*

*not teeming with their presences.* Freddi's soft lips  
my favorite book. I mumble her praises  
half-loud to be heard in hell.  
O come back & let me read that text.  
But I was baffled by the neutral spirits,  
joke on every vodka bottle, my tired wit.  
O Spirit everywhere  
I celebrate my dependence  
on your airs, quick intellectuals who  
resolving the world into utterable fire  
speak raptly in my conventional head.  
What order I am! What spectral dullness,  
like a suburb dead on Sunday,  
by vacuum attracting Angelic violence,  
I doze!

A woman ran past me jogging,  
seen from the corner of my eye, no other.  
Was she a person from my secret reading,  
lamia, succuba, Diana?  
She'd come again if I needed to see her.  
All life is now:  
deck solo, for chair creak & fuzzy blanket—  
is there a word 'coze?' The Dianas were witches,  
were women who wanted. Had a cold lord

whose picture they kept in the jakes & fondled,  
 image of an image.  
 But past their occult malecho  
 there was that other commonwealth  
 of kindly animas whose ghostly work  
 drives boar to sow & bee from branch to branch,  
 tumbling the given world to one flaunted jewel  
 of color & variety. I heard  
 their discourse in the intervals of rain,  
 soft dip-dap, a land-safe sound to hear  
 so far at sea.

The jogging one recurred.  
 Lilith in Pumas, her body vague in cotton  
 sweatpants, vinyl raincape, what a lonely  
 dismal way to use her thighs.  
 I raised my thoughts to high refusals.  
 I could control my sex by not knowing her name.  
 Desire specifies.  
 Ignore the jogger's identity  
 (but who was this Eliz aveta so pompously monickered?).  
 Were names in fact the bases of their power,  
 women, their nimble *namarupa* punch?  
 Each word a trap? I'd not be caught.  
 Pnyx—name of good omen: hill of human discourse,  
 manly, asexual, civic. I'd be a bishop.



But the hill had -nyx in it, 'night,' & what would I do  
 then, testicular sandstorms & lonely sheets? *Concubens  
 mecum Quaedam*. Anyone. All sheep fit my crook.  
 And not be responsible for friends, & not have  
 to work for a living & not have pets — dreams  
 of men growing old, ease off duties & remorse.  
 Just wanted to sit in the rain. While a stewardess  
 waited perched on the deckchair beside me  
 & the young sailors on sub watch sang overhead  
     I made me an answer to Freddi: *Honey*  
     *I'm too old to change. Remember Jim Pike.*  
     *You 'd have your own little queendom down south.*  
     *Come back to me & we '11 be epic.* Obscurely  
 bothered that I'd used more words than she.  
 Off went the tipped stewardess & Schwefel appeared.  
     "You enjoy Mitzi?" he asked sitting down.  
 I grunted my thanks. Tiffin rolled up on carts:  
     shirred eggs, iguana toast, mulberry tart.  
 We nibbled & chatted— Schwefel was decent today.  
     "I see you seek to transcend your normal.  
     Butterfly wings to you for that. Beats all  
 to renew. Hard at our age, keep it. That's the good word  
     nailed to the wall, believe. Even if me."  
 I responded in kind & he told this story  
 in a portentous manner I took to be verse.

Once was a bridge all rusty iron,  
 carried the cars across many a day.  
 All the town's people wanted to break it,  
 build them a new one all concrete & steel.  
 They had a mayor, a grey-haired old wise man  
 put his hand to the bridgehead felt the old metal  
 lifted his voice up outshouted the traffic  
 'I swear by my sliderule I swear by my salary  
 this old bridge will last us a good thousand years.  
 All the aldermen round him stood in alarm  
 squeezed their fur collars & groaned in the air  
 'O the contracts the elegant contracts, the graft  
 O lost opportunity to melt down the metal  
 sell it back to the city & make our millions.  
 O the sad waste it that once built it should stand  
 strong & availing— let's knock it down.'  
 But the mayor knew well his manner of underling,  
 set his militia to guard the old bridge.  
 By night & by day they marched the length of it  
 till the fell aldermen were stymied & mad.  
 Then their old leader wormtongued in counsel  
 snivelled a compromise: 'Make 'em pay  
 for what they have already, make them pay  
 again for their old bridge. Why should anything  
 ever be free? — Build toll booths!'



But I felt the story had a grander meaning  
than any Schwefel would allow. “Your name  
means ‘sulfur,’ doesn’t it?” “It does, by  
diachronic accident. My forebears  
(like Kant’s) were Scottish traders in Prussia.  
Their name was Swivel, our motto *Ambabus  
manibus*, or some say McSwivel. Germanized,  
the tribe took on a brimstone smell—our joke.  
And yours?” “I don’t know what my name means,  
if anything.” “A sulfur & a cipher meet on deck—  
the sea makes curious compromises.”  
I sniffed at his remark & would’ve quibbled  
had a siren not snarled at us from above.  
Submarine alert? Or was the ship on fire,  
to burn like

## V

*In the House of the Death Bat*

Then what of the boat?  
Those things we hear  
that are so high above us—  
we live like mice  
in a huge theater  
trembling at the rumble of inconceivable voices,  
tramp of unimaginable footsteps  
pounding the immense stage.  
What do we know?  
How little we know even how little we know.  
Sometimes it's the Cynic has the sweetest tongue,  
is nicest, is named  
for a dog & like one  
fawns on critical attention, puppies rump-up  
for our O.K.  
Like mice or rats we live  
nice but small, energetic,  
sexy, industrious, asleep.  
The bruising weight of consciousness



Strangeness had come to snatch us from the insoluble problems of everyday. Daily life is the one incurable wound after all, mother-of-war. We stood before our captors as simple people, humans on earth, all the long nonsense of our pretended choices (year after year!) laid aside. Whatever cruelty or humiliation they might do us, we were grateful to them at least for that. Now we were only who we were.

*[This unsigned paragraph was received in an envelope bearing a Mayastan postage stamp. The addressee supposes the handwriting to be that of his friend, the Bishop of — — , about whose fate conjecture has been active. To it we subjoin a radio broadcast received and transcribed by our operator on Cilantro Island.]*

Good evening. I have been asked to report on our capture and comment on our present condition. We were as you know sailing in the Athenian liner *Hill of Pnyx*. On our fourth day out of Boston, an explosion destroyed the fore-part of the ship, and the *Pnyx* sank rapidly. I found myself in a rubber liferaft with one of the ship's officers and fourteen other passengers. I was told that we had been torpedoed by a submarine. Within the hour we were taken on board the sub, where we were treated with courtesy and locked in

with thirty six other survivors, including my dear wife Friederike-Erzulie. Imagine our joy at being reunited. It was still not clear to us from the faces of our captors which power in the Three Way War had made us prisoners. Soon however Captain Zazil came to us and explained that we had the good fortune to be the prizes of the Mayan Theophanic Republic. After several days, during which the *Akab* continued its defense patrol, we prisoners, well-fed and as comfortable as the craft could make us, were landed at Tulum Naval Base where we are living now in the internment camp. To whom am I speaking? Why am I saying these things into this microphone? Nobody listens to the radio anymore. Who would hear me, no matter what I said? I could say anything. No one is listening. A guard is drowsing over the tape-recorder. Late at night we listen to Quito gospel songs and jazz from Radio Nederland, news from Moscow and London. No word about us. Who listens to me now? I could tell about the lizards in the hallways, never in our rooms, the reddish grease our food is cooked in, I like it, it agrees with me. Nobody listens to the radio. What we suffer here is neglect. We are fed, allowed to walk around the grounds. We have not been interrogated. After all, what do we know? Even the ship's officers are treated



with utter lack of curiosity. We are expected only to keep our quarters clean, and renew our bedding from the abundant foliage. From one little hillock we can see the ocean. Now the guard is stirring, I will continue my prepared statement. We are well cared for; we have not been brainwashed or programmed. We are not forced to labor, though many of us have chosen to weave guanabana baskets, just to keep busy. A young woman named Miss Tuc Ul teaches us how to plait and weave. Some of us garden, especially in the cool of the evening. We are in good health. Do not worry about us. I have been asked by the commandant to say that we will be taken care of until the end of hostilities on the American continent. When the two enemy blocs are defeated by the MTR. It will never happen, the war goes on forever, it has to. It is born of my despair. Because my wife and I aren't. Or she won't. I don't know anymore. I must tell this to you before the guard wakes and turns the instruments off. One day we walked together by the sea, they let us do that, we walked barefoot in the waves a while, then calmly made love behind a sand hill, burrowing in the nice warm sand. It was lovely. Then we strolled back to the barracks of the former leper asylum they hold us in. They wiped out the disease years ago, and only prison-

ers of war are kept here now. And people from the stars, someone told me, but that might be madness. When Freddi and I came in, the guards smiled as if they knew the romantic things we'd been up to. Do you understand? Smiled like Indians, which I suppose they are, can anybody hear me? Smiled and said nothing, respectful of our difference. Wake up, world, wake from this war! Hurry. They smile and smile, like angels. There is a rumor among the prisoners that we are going to be sacrificed to some awful god these people have. His name is Camazotz, the Death-Bat. He kills his victims with a sharpened stake—just the opposite of the old vampire movies. Which comes from which? They say we are, even now, being taken one by one, one each day, to be skewered to death in the temple. We see the jagged roof of it over the mangroves along the south shore. But our numbers do not seem to diminish, and no one I know has disappeared. I mean, of the people I recognize in the camp, none has vanished. Is that clear? Unless the Death-Bat can erase the memory of a man's life from the brains of his friends, so that the victim dies truly. I do not know. There is nothing but politeness and food and neglect. Maybe we're making all this up. Hurry. If there is anyone listening, be careful. Maybe it's wrong to be impul-

sive, all of what I'm saying is probably wrong. I don't really know where we are or what is happening. If only we hadn't gone into that fated vessel. Or if she and I were at peace this war could not exist. Is the recorder really working? Did the guard only pretend to turn it on, so they could hear what I'd say? But why would they care what I say? Is the guard only pretending to sleep? The commandant asked me to make this broadcast "to reassure friends and relations on the other side, and warn those who come after." How sure he is that they will win! Why can't I be sure? Listen. I'm not even sure if you should attempt to rescue us. The War Effort comes first. I've been dreaming that maybe we could escape by sea, just as we were brought here. But then there's a war out there. What is the war? What are the stakes?

Sharpened  
to pierce  
what breast  
with what news?  
Here  
is the news.  
Be new.  
The natural wood

sharpened  
by conscious skill  
heated hard  
in a fire of will  
drilled  
now into  
my lazy heart.

*April 1977*

A NOTE

## ON THE COMPOSITION OF THIS TEXT

As many have surmised, the poem is locked in the pen (quill, reed, calamus, stylus, biro, keyboard, graphite of all time compressed in the simplex geology of a pencil). We release it from the “stone.” Finding the stone. The Critise of the Pnyx began its journey in a certain multi-colored Venetian quaderno, and there its characters — the bishop, his exasperated wife still close to life, the devilish Schwefel — began their emblematic voyage.

Of course we are stars, or from the stars, and are trapped here. And while the way out is not verbal, words show the way. So the words had to find their own way to the reader; in this case, the poem kept trying to find a means, a blade’s edge between the habits of prose and the ecstasy of lines of poetry (since poiesis is ekstasis, the sassy line standing out from the daily fact of discourse, like a white ship from the harbor). That realm between would be the poignant midground of our departure, uneasy, one foot on the dock still, in jeopardy.

How to do that, how to show it to make it sound itself  
aright!

That is when Open Studio opened its resources to me,  
and gave me free use of the AlphaComp composing  
machine, and enough instruction in its use to be left  
alone with that remarkable instrument. And in that  
privity, this text came into word, as I discovered tech-  
niques of controlling the visual path, shaping it on the  
page in ways that would be neither possible nor under-  
standable in any conventional printing mode. So it's apt  
that Open Studio and Station Hill Press now make pub-  
lic a text that could not have existed without the skilful  
means they imparted.

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