

LANGUAGE *Matters*

Tony Quagliano

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First Edition

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Cover art and book design: Laura Ruby. Rainwear (drawing, 1990) interweaves the sheer pali (cliffs) where ancient Hawaiian warriors jumped to their violent deaths and the boot-clad nurturers of that now-pastoral landscape.

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Contents

I. Hawaii

Cliffs	13
Bio-Politics of Molokai	15
The Ancient Murmurs in the Blood Meadows	16
One for William Carlos Williams in Hawaii	17
Fierce Meadows	18
In Honolulu My Minimum	19
The Leper Eye	20
The Sand Sculptor	21
Concert	22
Waiting at Gate–Honolulu Airport	23
Six Poems After the Honolulu Peace Conference	24
Alzheimer's	26
A Haole Writes One Local Poem	27
The Condo Marxist	28
The Ride to Ho'omaluhia	29
On the Ambulance Run	30
Jazz Note	31
When You're at Koke'e	32
The Light on Monhegan, on Kauai	33
On Diamond Head, the Morning Rain	34
On Mauna Kea	35
Meanwhile I Just Said to Myself	36

II. Synaptic Trails

The Night Tide	39
A Biological Theory of History	41
What Primeval Terror Has the Gentle Man Known	42
Bashing Neanderthals	43
Nerve Stone Discourse	44
Biopoetics	45
Construction in Congratulations to the Electronic Bi-ped	
Striding Toward the Frontiers of Language	46
Experimental Language	48
Adding "Poetry" to Chaos Theory	
To Find a Poem	49
Oldenburg, Heisenberg and Oscar "Shotgun" Albarado	50

Man Alone the Beast	52
Hawk and Rock	54
On Idealization of Nature	55
What to Do with Scenery	56

III. Only If Something Matters

In My Brother's Coat	59
Some Guy Named Ludwig	61
Turning Over in His Grave	62
The Phoenix Myth	63
Celestial Mechanics	64
I Read This Poem about Geometry	65
Dr. Patterson Speaks with Koko Before an Audience of International Scientists	66
Sad Tropes	68
Say Jazz	71
Not the Uppers or the Downers	72
Papa's Existential Etiquette	73
To the Author of "To My Brother Miguel"	74
The Edward Hopper Retrospective	76
Early Onset	78
Heraclitus Once	79
Between a Rock and Mahatma Gandhi	80

IV. Poetry of Politics : Politics of Poetry

Witness for Peace	83
The Will Behind the Knife	85
Semiotic Self-Deconstruction	86
To the Manifesto Crowd	87
The Socialist	88
Four Political Questions	90
The Redistribution	91
The Suffix as Meaning	92
Hall of Fame	95
Right Attack	96
The Teeth of the Mask	99
One	100
This Man's Castle	101
Winslow Homer, War Illustrator	102

Sinēad O'Connor	103
"Twenty Cents and Curtains"	104
Ivy Manoa	105
Get Out of Poetry by Sundown	106
The Survivalist	108
On the Way to the Writing Workshop	109
On Bly on Poetry	110
The New Formal Poetry	111
Recollections of a Coot	112
Poets in the Schools	113
Renshi (Linked Free Verse)	
In the '90's	114
Snail Mail Poems	116
Short-Short on the New Anthology	117
The New Lit Mag	118
No Ideas but in Things	119
The Underground Press	120
Poetry Money	121
The Travelling Regionalist	122
Victory at Sea	124
You Can Tell "Creative Writers"	125
The Showdown	126

V. Word-Dance for Poets and Poseurs

A Jazz Note	131
For Doctor WCW	133
Hardly a Poem	134
An Occasional Poem to Czeslaw Milosz	135
13 Ways of Avoiding	
A Derivative Poetry Cliché	136
On Asked for Writing Advice	137
Ezra Pound in Hawaii	138
On Detractors of Kerouac	139
Letter from Hawaii to David Ray	140
On Bukowski Elegies	
And the Dipshit Clowns	
Who Write Them	142
On Andrei Codrescu's "Writers"	143
The Night I Let Bukowski Live	144
Another of the Wisdom Boys	145

Bunny Mullins Poet Laureate	
Not in My Name	146
A Fable for "Creative Writers"	147
On New Academics Foisting a New Moronicity	148
Hard Guy in the Faculty Lounge	149
Who's the Real Slim Talent	150
Some Boondockers	152
Language Poet at the Baseball Game	153
On Poetry	154
Andrei's Shtick on Letterman	155
Raymond Chandler	156
Investigative Reporter	159
The Genius Award for a Life's Work	
Of Elaborated Signage	160
Feed the Hungry, or	
Do Something Better	161
Last Chance Poem for Wing Tek Lum	162
Kesey on Kerouac on TV	164
To Kerouac	166
Benjamin Latrobe in New Orleans	167
Ezra's ABC's, and Deeds	168
Illimitable Country	170
One for WCW at the Post-	
Nuclear Philosophy	
Conference in Manoa	171

VI. Poetry Overheard

One Still Treescape	173
Wolfsbane for Cantwell	175
Intro to Camarillo Kate	178
Real Class	179
Post Op	180
Getting By	182
Her Blues	184
At the Artiste Bar	185
Shack Job	186
How I know	187
The Typo in the Tattoo Parlor	
L-O-V-E and H-A-T-S	188
The Great Turtle Priest on Television	190

Medical News on the Night	192
For Carl Furillo	193
Making Light	194
At the Fairgrounds Bar	196
The Botanists	197
The Wacko and the Shrink	198
Deconstructing a Disgusting Dirty Filthy Poem	200
The Vapors	201
Noir Letter to The Swede	202
Musial and the Bums	204
Sure, That's It	205

VII. Illimitable Country: Other Places, Other Poems

Ah, to Be East	209
Brighton-Manhattan Transit	211
Carnival Parlay	212
A Cold Walk Home	213
Krait Coiled in the Bedsheet	214
That November	215
A Brooklyn Dodger Fan in 1988	216
Color Line	217
A Cold Rain Obscures L.A. Tonight	218
No Handle on the Night	219
Ancient Gringo Savvy	220
Bus Ride Notes	222
Driving Through Donner Pass	223
Take a Magic Word Like Tundra	224
Society Island	225
Gauguin	226
Papeete Poem	227
A Jazz Note (N'awlins)	228
No Bullets in the Sky Tonight	229
Night Sky Piano	230
Edward Hopper's Lighthouse at Two Lights, 1927	231
Quick Cities of Shadows	232
To See Shoah	233

About the Author	236
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Bio-Politics of Molokai

if the chinese brought leprosy to paradise
why say so? did they want it
to give or have
any more than you or me?

if the british brought syphilis to paradise
why say so? did they want it
to give or have
any more than you or me?

if a thousand years of european serfdom
brought indentured slavery to paradise
why say so? could they have valued labor
any more than you or me?

if the shriven congregationalists of honolulu
shunned the belgian papist for his pride
losing themselves forever, are they lost
any more than you or me?

besides, the leprosy might have been east asian
the syphilis french, slavery american
class arrogance polynesian, and if eternal
damnation is equally distributed among all
the peoples of all the world, isn't that

aloha spirit, the rainbow truth
of paradise, of leprous molokai the friendly isle
and would anyone want it otherwise
any more than you or me?

Some Guy Named Ludwig

When Frederick Jameson, third
or fourth generation Marxist
(is Jameson still trendy?)
proclaimed there no longer
are "writers or artists as solitary geniuses"
Richard Rorty replied "Freddy,
speak for your self"
Who wrote Beethoven's symphonies?
The collective cultural ethos of his times
or some guy named Ludwig?
What is the personal exclusive self
of Johann Sebastian Bach —
chopped liver?
Was it the downtrodden and threadbare
socio-economic deprivation
of underdog South L.A.
that created the Mingus Dynasty
or one particular singular gent
named Charles?

Heraclitus once

Heraclitus once
was here
and said
things change

near the end
of his life he changed
his mind and said
nothing

ever really changes
then he was no
longer here

Semiotic Self-Deconstruction

Most theorists
of language
don't write very well
and their theories
don't tell them why