

TODAY WAS LILIES: POEMS & PROSE

by

THIBAUT RAOULT

(Under the Direction of Andrew Zawacki)

ABSTRACT

My fourth book and my dissertation, “Today Was Lilies,” proposes and executes a hybridization of several lineages of experimental American poetry with more traditional narrative modes and forms. As theory might be seen moving toward narrative, I instantiate narrative poetry moving toward theory, albeit *theory-in-practice*. Throughout the collection I pair multifaceted, ecstatic tracing of family mythology—real and imagined—alongside poems without discernible selves/speakers, resulting in a dialectical body of work that ideally has—to speak colloquially—a little something for everyone. “Today Was Lilies” stages my update of a Stevensian supreme fiction—something at once holistic and other—inflected throughout by strands of the New York, Oulipo, Language, Witness, and Post-Confessional schools.

INDEX WORDS: New York School, Language Poetry, Hybrid Text, Performance Monologue, Ecopoetics, Experimental Verse, Love Poetry, Avant-Garde

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CHAPTER 1
CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

TOWARD AN ENCAPSULATED POETICS

Dining is west.

Gertrude Stein (Stein 1997, 36)

She'd sell dirt, she'd sell your eyes fried in deep grief.

Lorine Niedecker (Niedecker 2002, 108)

*Each
act of my life, with me now, till death. Themselves,
the reasons for it. They are stones, in my mouth
and ears. Whole forests on my shoulders.*

Amiri Baraka/Leroi Jones (Jones 1964, 36)

OVERTURE: PILL AND POEM

*I learned to swallow pills from my best friend Ian's mother during an era of foolish afternoons
spent trying to out-rap Ian while smoking cigars up in trees.*

I was twelve and had never managed to get any pills down my throat without a racket. But Judy knew exactly what to tell me: “swallow the water as if that’s all there was.”

At this time I began dosing my first batches of Philip Levine, whose books my poet neighbor lent me after I had made a confession—not really a confession at all—of having written my first poem. I quickly became enamored with Levine’s lines about slag heaps and furnaces. But I was equally drawn to the creamy, textured paper on which the publisher printed the poems.

Pill and poem each call to us with their forms.

ENCAPSULATION: PRACTICE AND PURPOSE

In this essay, I will explore a range of creative and critical works that speak to the process of and thinking behind encapsulation. I define encapsulation as a writing practice that compresses narrative and language play into sound in order to offer the possibility for the author to return to their own text. The making and/or breaking of the *encapsulated* poem takes place at a crossroads where the poet must pay equal attention to the material, theoretical, and existential underpinnings of the practice. At the same time, the encapsulated realm is as much a tool for generating text as it is a mode of reading. I seek therefore to create a moderate encyclopedia that examines the missions and mechanics of theorists and writers who operate on the encapsulated frequency.

What might be the stakes of the encapsulated? For Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari “[t]o speak, and above all to write, is to fast” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 20). Mark Strand, however, articulates his own materialist [non-]dilemma in “Eating Poetry:” “Ink runs from the corners of my mouth. / There is no happiness like mine” (Strand 1990, 43). Aspects of consumption and abstention clearly inform reading and writing practices. There are page-turners and banned books. There are books so poignant or relevant we can only stand to read them one page or poem at a time. For many there is no text without the reader, who in most cases has other texts, objects, and beings vying for their attention. With fasting and feasting in mind, I’d like to explore how a recently completed project, a manuscript of poems and prose entitled “Today Was Lilies,” performs alongside the works that influence, impact, and incise it. This reading will hopefully offer perspective on how other poets approach making and how in turn poems engage the reader and vice versa.

More specifically I’m interested in how poetic compression plays out for the poet’s outlook, body, and body of work. How might moving toward the encapsulated offer a mobile economy capable of sponsoring both the grounding of an imagined life and the potential to transgress one’s articulated boundaries? And as one preserves image and story *via* the encapsulated—what does one lose or lose out on? The encapsulated seeks to build an imagistic and sounding world in as few gestures as possible and contains (while withholding) the premise for a larger work. Would not this gesture be a good starting point for a more honest accounting of the lacunae in the history of one’s engagements? This form, I should clarify, does not have to do with procrastination, postponement, or reduction. Rather, the encapsulated work concerns itself with mobility (less to carry around) and sustainability (less to worry over in the future),

each of which frees up the writer to go find new materials to contribute to the architecture (pill palace) beginning to take shape.

Encapsulation shouldn't be thought of only on medical terms (though the pill angle will play a vital role throughout this sutured essay). I think, for instance, of those encapsulated animal sponge bath toys that unfold and find themselves (and you) in water. This is how I see [my] lines ideally being treated by the reader. Depending on water supply and perhaps age, bathing as entertainment and story time might be a daily ritual. In writing "Today Was Lilies" I consider how such encapsulated lyrics might be something to build a life around on a *daily* basis. It is the everyday in which, as Henri Lefebvre proposes, "man appropriates . . . *his own nature*" (Lefebvre 1991, 46). Such everyday tension is precisely what can sustain a life that takes on (in all senses) texts, generates them itself, and shares the wealth by redistributing the encapsulated.

But the tension has to exist or be created in the poem's language *itself* and how it's put together. An encapsulated poem shows off its embedded story and song, which produce a mobile literary structure. The momentum in a poem's embedded qualities has everything to do with what can be added in thought and feeling down the line. Simone Weil speaks to this possibility when she claims, "we participate in the creation of the world by decreating ourselves" (Weil 2002, 33). This de-creation, I would argue, corresponds to one aspect of encapsulation: leaving out of the poem of what cannot (or will not) perform in multiple senses. When Pound claims verse must be "charged to a higher potential" (Pound 1987, 97) than prose, we're right to be a little skeptical, as with many of his prescriptions. But I take Pound to be saying that a poem must do more *word for word* for the author and reader; this idea might well serve as still another basis for the encapsulated practice.

“Today Was Lilies,” which contains several encapsulated poems, takes up one great promise of experimental American poetry—the dismantling of expected linguistic gesture and forms—as the book also seeks to stage more traditional narrative modes and gestures. This blend seeks to take advantage of what is most compelling in each while minimizing each’s shortcomings. This co-habitation of genre risks displeasing several camps. Of course, in several senses there *are* no camps, something which Cole Swensen and David St. John broadcast via their anthology *American Hybrid*: “everywhere we find complex and ideological differences” in “rich writings that cannot be categorized and that hybridize core attributes of previous ‘camps’ in diverse and unprecedented ways” (Swensen 2009, xvii). What might bringing together lyricism with narrative accomplish? To what end and audience this hybrid encapsulation?

An encapsulated poem serves as a seed bank of sorts for future work. One prose piece, “Corsica On Its Side,” in my second book, *Disposable Epics*, was generated out of a B-side poem in which I had a single line about krill performing some activity. My friend wanted to know more. And so I wrote a three page prose-poem with that line as a departure. Certainly this isn’t going to happen with every line in an encapsulated oeuvre, nor should it. But the *potential* for such future activity should be there. In encapsulation, I want the music of poetry with the world-making of fiction. And yet the end result shouldn’t necessarily look or feel like either at all points. A lyric essay with its formal blend of story and idea could well be a useful form for encapsulation. Still, it’s poetry—which can cede swaths of potential semantic territory as it turns toward a new line—that’s most equipped to enact and embody encapsulation.

ENCAPSULATED INTERLUDE: FRANK BIDART

Readers might know Bidart for his persona poems, dramatic monologues, and devotion to classical cultures and mythologies. Bidart's chapbook, *Music Like Dirt*, utilizes many of these tropes, but it also introduces an uncharacteristically *personal* dimension to his poetry. The following titular poem provides a compelling example of encapsulation:

Music Like Dirt

for Desmond Dekker

I will not I will not I said but as my body turned in the solitary
bed it said But he loves me which broke my will.

music like dirt

That you did willed and continued to will refusal you
confirmed seventeen years later saying I was not wrong.

music like dirt

When you said I was not wrong with gravity and weird
sweetness I felt not anger not woe but weird calm sweetness

music like dirt

I like sentences like He especially dug doing it in
houses being built or at the steering wheel

music like dirt

I will not I will not I said but as my body turned in the solitary
bed it said But he loves me which broke my will. (Bidart 2002, 9)

I see Bidart's dedication to distillation in the poem above as an unknowing embrace of the encapsulated. The poem's narrative and imagistic refrain, too, operates as a seed bank for the poem's genesis. Moreover, the straightforwardness of the poem's language and form are betrayed in part by lack of context in so many of the utterances. The contextual void—the feeling

that Bidart is withholding quite a few things—sets up a kind of thought loop inside the reader. I’m not sure if Bidart himself will return to this poem in particular, but the gaps in narrative logic and physicality of the poem’s words initiate just enough of a world that a reader venture inside, however tragic it stands to be.

HYBRIDITY AND THE ENCAPSULATED FORM

Returning for a moment to the idea of hybridity: with experimental verse as guitar and more traditional storytelling modes as amplifier, my goal in bringing together such aesthetic dispositions is not to produce a quietly-running hybrid but rather an axe (as Americans call their guitars) producing *feedback*. Moreover, it’s possible to continue to sample and loop this very feedback later on. This sampling and looping suggests an encapsulated line might be used again several times in its present state before becoming something else. To temper a rock and roll that might otherwise take itself too seriously, I often employ a comedic and d[em]ented ethos of fragmentation. Throughout my new manuscript I pair multifaceted, ecstatic tracing of family mythology—real and imagined—alongside poems without discernable speakers, resulting in a dialectical body of work that ideally has—to speak colloquially—a little something for everyone. For such a ‘both/and’ approach to succeed my choices of content, tone, and timbre must all be properly balanced. The risk in encapsulation emerges when something is off. In more conventional work—which is less diagrammatic in seeking completion—one glitch might not drag down or irrevocably damage the poem. The encapsulated poem doesn’t have such a luxury. The potential at the core of the encapsulated poem cannot tolerate inefficiencies.

My project’s title comes from a line in my sequence, “Southeastern Suite:”

The only thing I had
To do today was with lilies
Today was LILIES.

This diaristic digest represents another crucial dimension to poetry for me: the desire and ability to speak to a life. This speaking and writing honors the life's unraveling, and, in so doing, augments it, if only sonically. These particular lines above do not address my actual life—beyond my life in words—and thereby take up part of what Wallace Stevens espoused in his “supreme fiction” (Stevens 1997, 329): something at once holistic *and* other that belongs to the self even as it consumes it. This updated supreme fiction is another front where encapsulation can be effective and entertaining: the pairing of personal history with the fantasy of fiction. Consider for a moment someone dressed as a clown trying to act the role of a soldier. Something good is bound to happen. My particular investment in encapsulation centers on the performative tide pool of mixing of fact and fiction.

Here's “Suite” in its entirety:

SOUTHEASTERN SUITE

If I am Tennessee & honysoukii
& honeysuckle vanishes
I'd be out there myself
Fucking up the rain
Drooling for drilling
For new skies, tests
& more tests
(cicadas & less)
Oh microfiche of mine
Our weekend about breathing
But also firemen in their downtime

/

We get that horses have the life,
Early is midnight & I get people
Have different wattages & it gets ugly
For us reservoirs like how owl flips
Through me & my democratic belly,
How it flits at an oligarch's onyx-like motives
While a mill unravels: this teaches us
The life of a therapeutic underdog

/

This teaches us (further) we can't rely on any light
That doesn't also make a sound

/

Your world, my rubble
Because the sky
Could not be here
More ours
The only thing I had
To do today was lilies
Today was LILIES

/

Unfuck the ocean yesterday
Unfuck it to say
Nothing with my mouth
Of white trees & how
I know sweet limes

The italicized language in the first line does not belong to me; the phrase originates with a sports announcer talking about what he'd do if he were in charge of University of Tennessee's football team. As you might expect the concerns of the particular game don't matter very much to me; rather, I'm initially interested in re-appropriating the announcer's odd verbal phrasing. Emphasizing lyricism by the end of the poem, however, I subvert his rather humorous conceit of trying to speak as a state *in toto*. Here, the desire for both/and rears its head again. I want (the poem wants) to reflect and refract the domineering language—actual *and* imagined (i.e. “Fucking up the rain / Drooling for drilling”)—of the announcer as I also seek to move from critique into personal revelation. And it's this movement between registers—and the cosmetological work it enables—that interests me, underwriting this poem and project as a whole. This fractured movement stands in service of the encapsulated.

The poem's next section follows up on the refraction of received language. Echoes of expected language and sweeping generalizations—“horses have the life” and “it gets ugly / for us”—are dosed and counter-dosed with opaque narrative tangents such as “an oligarch's onyx-like motives” and “life of a therapeutic underdog.” While this might arguably result in a form of impressionism, I instead think of it more in terms of the encapsulated feedback I allude to earlier, which seeks to thwart the coagulation of a *single* poetic conceit or mentality. This kind of

compression becomes a digest, in which what has been already processed is made to process before the reader.

Another encapsulated sequence of mine, “The Truth Is Dragonflies Love Baking,” parodies cultural criticism, ecopoetics, and the Bildungsroman. Formally, “The Truth Is” interrogates the declarative via the declarative. The sequence is arranged alphabetically (based on the first word in each prose section), which facilitates a movement away from meta-narrative and puts more pressure on the reader to process and even *produce* a narrative arc. In order to encapsulate the writer forgoes certain dimensions of detail, context, and even narrative in the hopes of amplifying the reader’s role in the generation of the text. György Lukács’s characterization of the novelist’s duty to “carry the fragmentary nature of the world’s structure into the world of forms” (Lukács 1973, 39) would certainly apply here. Encapsulation results in a tug of war with the reader, who may come to experience the spiny hospitality of the poem before the poem is even through.

Content-wise, “Truth Is” investigates the crossroads between various economies: art, aesthetics, labor, religion, food, environment, and erotics. This sequence inhabits prose for one of the same reasons Language poets in the San Francisco Renaissance chose the new sentence: its ability to resist the typical strictures of baroque poetic architectures by emphasizing the social contexts and conditions of textual production. My ethos for encapsulated writing was born out of such Bay Area poetics: each gesture must displace lushness and completion in the interest of future writerly and readerly engagements.

MECHANICS OF THE ENCAPSULATED: OPENING/COLLAPSE/MOVEMENT/RETURN

The encapsulated work's future is dependent on both author and reader. In her essay "Language is Migrant," published last year on the Poetry Foundation's *Harriet* blog, Cecilia Vicuña describes opening up words to see what they have to say. Examining her interviews with passers-by in which she poses the question "what is poetry?", Vicuña highlights one street-dweller's response—"que prosiga" ("that it may go on")—as an all-purpose and perhaps all-consuming treatise. She also pitches awareness, the act of examining one's process, as a mode of "healing." More than simply an act(ion) within a framework of desire—that it may go on—writing offers recourse to the prescriptive conditions in our lives. We can name; but we can also void the very names we uncover. In this sense, writing can heal, although the net benefit might in many instances be rounded down close to zero.

This opening up of words in service of their continuance relates rather forcefully to theories-in-practice of the encapsulated. While Vicuña might apply her mode to many things, she would likely see the encapsulated poem as doubly available for her prototypical excavation. Sounds and phrasings in the encapsulated poem must be unpacked through such opening and in their opening the poem goes on. My final stand-alone poem in "Today Was Lilies" begins:

Stein would have wanted
us to collapse like this
to exhibit an unknown
saint's watercolor & run

This collapse refers to stripped-down gesture, which Gertrude Stein herself loops to varying effects, not all of which fall in line with the encapsulated. But collapse also refers to an implosion of single-minded legibility. In other words, the line positions itself as the kind of activity I outline and advocate for above in the context of the Swensen and St. John anthology. I seek a clear parallel between the title "Today Was Lilies" and Stein's sentence "Dining is west"

in *Tender Buttons*. These muted metaphors—muted because their metaphorical valence must contend with the concreteness of the utterance—serve as horse pills, as it were, for the book as a whole. Word for word they do the most work.

Eileen Myles has her own spin on Vicuña's sampled "que prosiga": "the best poetry keeps moving at all costs" (Myles 2009, 97). Myles seeks restlessness in form and articulation, which is sympathetic to how I've heard John Coltrane's oeuvre be described: the search for the perfect riff. If jazz, in many instances, is a prolonged divagation around or divestment from total resolution, why can't we treat writing in the same way? We might view the encapsulated line as a micro-resolution, then. It provides just enough for the poet and reader to continuously return but no more. It waves at the poet, *Come back, come back*, knowing that it might take a while for this to happen.

Writing is a process that continuously redefines itself *in situ* and that won't sit still. As with certain injuries, movement in writing is necessary for a complete recovery. But when such movement is *not* possible or desirable, the poet must turn toward the encapsulated as a mode for self-preservation in anticipation of *that which will get said*. The encapsulated poet declines to say more and doubles-down on a line's potential to be continued at some undetermined time. Sometimes we must wait for the forms necessary to carry out our content. An alliance with the encapsulated facilitates such waiting.

Vicuña's thoughts on opening up words and Myles's emphasis on movement remind me of when poet Li-Young Lee recently shared his intention to rewrite his collection, *Book of My Nights*. My interest was immediately piqued, as I had proofread his book many years prior. But then I thought of Walt Whitman's lifelong revision of *Leaves of Grass*, which is generally regarded as a gradual undoing and dismantling of the initial vitality present in the work. Still,

Lee's comments fall perfectly in line with one thread of what I'm exploring: how one might embed tension in gesture such that one may return to it at a later point to re-experience and, more crucially, re-envision it. I sensed Lee might have been writing a *new* book (and not simply another iteration) that transformed material from his earlier work. Rather than veering off the encapsulated path, Lee's new work might in fact be a prelude to another circling-back.

THE BODY: HERITAGE AND HORIZON

Once over dinner in France, my grandfather told me he thought the pill was the greatest invention of the 20th century. (Do I put the pill in quotes?) I never could gauge my grandmother's stance.

She was more keen on describing how every bank should be razed down to the ground, which strikes me as a different form of encapsulation—a reconfiguration of economic structures. (She insisted the destruction would benefit workers.)

Socialized health care in France facilitates the procurement and consumption of a dizzying and breathtaking range of colorful pills. Marcelle and Jean, my paternal grandparents, each had their own palette.

Perhaps there are two kinds of poets—those who write about grandparents and those who don't. It's difficult to write well about one's grandparents. For me direct language doesn't capture them fully.

I dedicated my third book, the cross-genre text «Pro(m)bois(e)» to my grandparents, though subject-wise the book had little to do with them. “Today Was Lilies,” on the other hand, features a handful of poems that directly address their role in how I’ve come to engage the arts, culinary and otherwise. The fictionalized rendition of some aspects of their lives and personhood (in “Résidence La Madeleine,” for example), coupled with the most salient details of their actual co-existence, serves to recreate their energies and bottle them up for future consideration.

ETHICAL ASPECTS OF THE ENCAPSULATED

Addressing the ethics of writing, Georges Gusdorf ascribes to the writer the responsibility of choosing the “right word” (Gusdorf 1965, 44). His immediate concern would seem to be the ethics of encounter: how the word itself grounds one’s own orientation while also perhaps cementing the other’s role as patron saint. I would argue the gravity in such a situation must be balanced. Friedrich Nietzsche’s urge “to dance with one’s feet, with concepts, with words” (Nietzsche 1997, 512-13) works nicely to temper the Gusdorf’s decorousness. In the encapsulated territory, the poem functions less as a dance than as a brochure for future dances. For some a brochure might even provide equal or greater pleasure than going out for the night. Perhaps the document serves as a memento for what might have happened and what might still happen. Such is what the encapsulated affords when the writer executes the “right word.”

But as Gaston Bachelard maintains, “the verbs *to be* and *to write* are hard to reconcile” (Bachelard 1969, 138). Maurice Blanchot seconds Bachelard to a large extent when he claims “to write is to renounce being in command of oneself” (Blanchot 121, 1986). I come at the

production of a poetic text along some of the same fundamental parameters but with a rosier constitution. The renunciation of self or *command* of self, that is, need not be a renunciation of being; rather, it can be an embrace of plural selfhood. The goal of collage and refraction of political economies, say, is equally about speaking truth to power as it is about the groundwork for communal song and stanza. Giving up certain designs on and immediate goals for the self's expression via the encapsulated can ensure that the word put forth is both right and returnable. The practice or mode I enact involves building into the fragment the extratemporal interstitial or, simply, the hook. Both attributes belong to the encapsulated, which elicits reappearance and revival.

HURT AGAIN

In the summer of 2006 I was working in rural Maine when I tore my Achilles tendon. Rather than leave the camp where I was counselor for a cabin of ten year-olds, I stayed, crutches and all, even though worker's compensation would have covered me for the remainder of summer had I wished.

The doctors prescribed me a powerful painkiller and I somehow missed the part of the label that urged extreme precaution when it came to mixing the pills with alcohol. I drank a few beers each night partially to celebrate the beauty of the coastal waters, but also to celebrate my newfound immobility, which I thought might result in making more music. It didn't work out like that.

Instead, after a week or so of modest celebration, I became convinced that a kink in my neck, the result of an eight-year-old Spaniard pranking me, was in fact a fractured cervical vertebra. The label was right—I had become somewhat delusional.

After a night sleeping on the porch of the infirmary I demanded to be taken to the hospital by ambulance, worried that I would somehow wind up paralyzed if I wasn't moved properly. It was another foolish era and it wasn't pretty.

ENCAPSULATION VS. THE LONG POEM?

I'd like to further investigate the encapsulated territories by examining the conceits behind the long poem/sequence. In teasing out what makes this kind of crafted space tick, I'm hoping to amplify through converse argumentation my earlier analysis of the mechanism and stakes of the encapsulated. Just as each encapsulated line is tempted to become a novella, so too might it desire to become by alternate means a long poem. Many long poems, therefore, embody the encapsulated poem's future. Two lines in my cycle "Clarabella"—"I lost weight in the 40m / Silence"—are representative of the inward/outward perspective of the encapsulated gesture. Lines like these seek to comment on multiple facets of culture at once (fascination with weight loss and the 40m dash) while also establishing a phenomenology against detrimental historical forces. It is a start of a phenomenology, however, not a total execution of one. The encapsulated gesture, thus established, can be thought of as a leading tone, which segues back to the root or heart of a long poem.

Another account of such movement can be seen in a letter by Jack Spicer, who recounts to Robin Blaser his idea (gleaned from mentor Robert Duncan) that there is “no single poem” (Spicer 2008, 163). Earlier in the letter Spicer suggests that there is no need and, moreover, that it might not even be possible to faithfully execute an idea “within the boundaries of one poem” (Spicer 2008, 163). On the surface these two comments conflict with one premise of the long poem, namely the desire to bring everything into one textual body, or at least attempt to do so. But they also serve as a firm foundation for encapsulated praxis. There are nuances and gradations, to be sure, between the long poem and the sequence, each of which might very well sprawl over *several* books. Still, I’d like to focus on what the long poem can achieve and how it goes about doing so.

Nathaniel Mackey’s two braided sequences, “Song of Andoumboulou” and “mu,” which span over a half-dozen books by now, point to the long poem’s capacity to uncover or instantiate new phenomenological ground. As before, I use phenomenology in a broader sense than just the philosophical one. Mackey’s works, which detail the journey of a tribe, need length for this expansive—yet continuously interrupted—journey to register its full impact. In part this is due to the mythological nature of the work. But it’s also related to the musical aspects: the denizens of this particular world are made, remade, and re-mode (in the musical sense) so many times that their fractures bleed over into our world. At the same time, each act to some extent stands for the entire journey. Mackey’s riffs reference the compositional structure in which they’re embedded and perhaps trying to escape. To me I see this cycle as embodying the encapsulated mode.

Often the long poem aims for what Hart Crane calls a “new cultural synthesis” (Berthoff 1989, 84). Yet I wonder how a poet can legitimately achieve such synthesis without cramming as much synthesized culture between the margins as possible. The documentary aspect of the long

poem demands a quasi-scientific process that in turn demands detail and repeated lines of inquiry. Thoroughness takes time, or, as it were, space. C.D. Wright, for instance, needs room in *Deepstep Come Shining* to capture the folk—real and imagined—in her rendition of the South. Each utterance—take “Hannah she calls the sun” (Wright 1998, 43) for example—builds on the last to become a secular gospel of the imagination.

Similarly, John Ashbery’s seminal “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror” (Ashbery 1975, 68) needs the space of a long poem in order to accommodate its extensive refraction of art historical discourse and to build the argument’s momentum. Ashbery roams (but doesn’t ramble) as he moves from one gloss to the next. While he uses a bevy of transitions, the logic is never airtight. But I’d also point out that the poem’s length, more than anything, is a record for precisely how much hasn’t made the cut and what will never be broached. This is where Spicer’s note regarding the non-existence of a “single poem” is useful. “Self-Portrait” will never quite satisfy as a single poem—its restlessness ensures that—but its satisfying legacy can be found by the reader in all of Ashbery’s subsequent work.

THE LONG VS. SHORT POEM: FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Shorter work can achieve the same weight as longer work because the encapsulated mode, both in reading and writing, extends the experience of a poem. Critic Murray Krieger writes in an essay on ekphrasis that the spatial and temporal aspects of a poem are converted into a simultaneity or “roundedness” (Krieger 1992, 263). Addressing presence, e.e. cummings’s statement that some poems are meant “to be seen & not heard” (cummings 267-268) would suggest, coupled with Krieger’s idea, that there are no limits, besides death, on how long one can

look at or experience a poem for. In other words, staring at a short poem for a whole year turns it into *one long poem*. This is as much about reading process and reader-response as it is about poetry itself, which feigns closure but in fact leaves the door to the first stanza wide open for re-visitation. Many of these aspects help define the parameters for the encapsulated field.

Another way a short poem can extend itself is through reference. Langston Hughes's famous poem, "I, Too," (Hughes 1995, 46), operates as a short-form rejoinder to the Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and in so doing absorbs and transforms much of the latter's argument and energy. By contrast the lyricism and open-endedness in W.S. Merwin's work—with its characteristic lack of punctuation and lush images not wholly situated in a *particular* life—make another case for shorter, encapsulated work rivalling the scope of a long poem. I think especially of Merwin's second and third books, *The Lice* and *The Carrier of Ladders*, respectively, for their mesmerizing fusion of image and disjunctive anecdote. A Merwin poem means as many things as the number of times you read it, which isn't to suggest that it has no core or core value(s), but rather that its encapsulated dimensions facilitate countless different interpretations.

ENCAPSULATED INTERLUDE: KATE GREENSTREET

As with Bidart, Greenstreet is a gifted reader and performer. She collaborates often with her husband on film and video works and as a result her poems encompass a multidisciplinary approach. Greenstreet's poem below belongs to a sequence of nineteen poems entitled "Salt," part of her haunting 2006 collection *case sensitive*:

14 [is needed by all humans for good health]

In every game, there is a best strategy
for each player. (See also: secret annex.)

Often these stressful experiences involve a demand.

A town in Ohio we passed through once.
This time I went back as me.
A town that had been built to test the effects,
but they'd gone to such lengths!

They wanted to know the exact location of the afterlife.

she: Are you listening? What are you thinking?

he: I was wondering . . . when the Bronze Age was. (Greenstreet 2006, 37)

Though I would concede that each poem in Greenstreet's sequence moves the work forward, I wouldn't necessarily say one exits the work with a clear context for exactly what kind of world she has built and which laws operate therein. Therefore it doesn't feel inappropriate to single out a particular piece for its encapsulated attributes. The first three lines, for instance, allude to a dramatic scenario, in which we don't know the players. We might be tempted to consider the four-lined third stanza as a profile of the "game," but I'd argue Greenstreet is simply moving on. Similarly, the "they" in the penultimate stanza seeking "the exact location of the afterlife" *might* be the "she" and "he" in the final dialogic couplet, but it's not for certain. We simply do not have enough to go on to make any final conclusions. But we have *just* enough detail and suggested trajectories to prop up a world in which to move around. The lack of contextual landmarks might beget vertigo for some. Greenstreet's work might not be for every reader, though her legibility and persuasiveness skyrocket when she performs. I would say, however, that Greenstreet's work and this specific poem participate in the encapsulated by providing more questions than answers. Her piece illustrates the necessary ebb and flow of context in the encapsulated poem while also reinforcing the role of heartbreak, which is always just under the surface.

We might think of the encapsulated as goods or vitamins FOR THE FUTURE. What future might that be and what does it look like? This of course introduces the idea of shelf-life. When you pack everything ‘in there’ one wonders how long it can last without access to more robust contexts and elucidations. But that’s where the next pill/poem comes in. The next pill—with its *own* granules of truncated contexts—rubs up against its neighbor. That’s how a story gets made.

FUTURITY AND FORM

Now, before bed each night I take only melatonin. But my wife still thinks I’m foolish.

I sleep so that I can return to poems—my encapsulated acts with glints in their eyes. Two hundred future friends up in trees. Chirping out cream-colored encapsulated tales.

EXIT [SELF-]INTERVIEW

Q: Are you troubled at all by your aestheticization of pills?

A: Somewhat. Writing is troubling. I don't mean to make light of addiction in any way and therefore don't aestheticize intoxication.

Q: Why return to a poem? Why not just keep plodding on?

A: It's not that the poem didn't get things right and so necessitates revision and/or variation. No, it's (hopefully) that the poem *only* got things right. But the encapsulated shouldn't be too kempt. Formally and content-wise the poem must invite the author back to try again. The poem's energy, so preserved, might in fact be deployed in service of another subject. The encapsulated poem offers some assurances for preservation. But its goal is not immortality, as many authors wished for in the past. It simply demands the philosophical and pragmatic return of the author.

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CHAPTER 2

TODAY WAS LILIES: POEMS & PROSE

TERROIR

lilacs like
lived lives

or acknow
ledged lies

lilacs like lived lives
impose themselves

on hillside they
could've asked

[us instead]

THE TRUTH IS DRAGONFLIES LOVE BAKING

A company like the one we're puncturing today used to guarantee its cherrywood, that is, guarantee GRANDFATHER CLOCK WOULD DRAIN, but now the company we're puncturing no longer indicates what steps are necessary.

An afterparty has butterfly veins but no structure, though it's not unstructured, my prairie. The high school where I went to middle school has interest in year-round left-hand sketches of the shepherd: German and blessed. As neighbors pile up near my rendition of Taurus, I'm clawed and called-upon. Placing blueberries in a masterclass, our vista looks out only for herself. She no longer cries into the gears.

Assume, for a decade, no one understands you. Why not channel this and reach out to vermillion coast, scan a jalapeño, relax. Why not simplify your shepherd, reconstruct sherry one asscheek at a time. In other news the Eure is unforgiving, which is fine—we haven't done anything. We prep for Paris. You know there are games there.

Brook and her daughter teach me to smile like a knocked-over box of matches. A dog in the back-ground relates to redwoods. Prankcalling my grandparents' boulanger, I often argue latitudes are ultimatums and question the need for both littleleaf linden *and* littleleaf box. Since you asked, there *are* guards for the guava. But I never enjoy any peach, knowing thousands grade on the other side.

Hemingway believed you have every right to be damaged goods by twenty. Actually, that was Seneca, otherwise an optimist when it came to nature's pinball prospects, and certainly a nihilist when confronted by the Galician in each of us.

I moved to Georgia so my throat could parody Fall colors, inserting a *dying to* before each multiple self orgasm. If piano can make it here on its own this late in life, I'll happily jump into weaponized river. This goes for everyone.

I was a page just short of fifteen years—my tongue in tatters the entire time. But now I can lean into any D.C.-area wind, be good as new. I've spent hours looking at stone logs and I'm beginning to love our country / is on hold.

In Western New York the hills are confidential and outages are wildflowers. Me, I'm stuck in a pile of quartz. Birds swat at me and then they run out of hot cereal. Can I be a rivulet instead? I'm asking. We're in the center where none of us move, and I'm awake.

Irish vertigo near plaster of Paris gets me out of bed in the morning. By seven p.m., however, I realize what I haven't done that day and move to selflessly congeal god's flashcards—my lips just numb enough to say *Thousand Island*.

It can't be melting already can it? It can. That's what tusks do, how does touch, how Chile relaxes, why Patron Saint wrongdoes the ranch, gunpowder gone all all gone. Dear face you use on land, don't think for a sec each letter's not a *département*.

Lilac-scented individuals will have an opportunity to document their night sky in daytime television. YES. But Spanish stars and sisyrinchium must not find out that I can hear them. My underlying—it's not enough to take a substitute teacher out for Thai cuisine; we must educate even the marbles.

Nobody told me stick figure hit this hard. (*Won't happen again. You have my ore.*) You ever boiled a novel? It resists the journey. After a single drop, our arpeggio no longer bears.

Numbers excite me but your *laugh* restores my grove. We're only a star away (from everything) and so I really thought on balsam backroads I would have spent more time by now with Spain's architects. Any progress? Any new dances? You can assume I'm naked in the phlox.

Old High German has renewed his materials, leading the rest of us to think circles around his mayoral stubble. Whenever he mentions *Niagara* in passing, we know we can bargain. But in the tradition of large men playing small instruments, let's not and say we did. If it were only a matter of image-consciousness, we could rally behind Old High German lapping us in the WPA-era pool of common desire.

One of the reasons we left Vega: have more time to develop puppy eyes. For many days after we arrived I took voice lessons, where I learned behind each received tongue there's a kept avalanche. Burn smooth, like on that first day. 'cause anything that pours like that has a good heart.

Our delta's tightknit and last laugh. It looks like a landfill, it tastes like a landfill—it must be a Republic. Still, State Law prohibits us from accepting any modifiers.

So parade backfired. Let's keep a celtic lid on it. Hearing later that the streets have flooded, I stuff my gums with twenties. I'd never bomb a history of the flute. With truce in place, can we finally just sit and watch minutiae dance?

There is a wonderful life sense in calling each bramble surrounding this house of ours (for the weekend) James Wright on acid. He was an industry leader, a commander of the dispossessed, his whole life an éclair on the edge of ruin, a waterfall converting us to centigrade and friends at large.

Vienna has made a life for itself, and when it comes out we all compose, breezes liquidate us, we don't feel the need to defend paintings, color combo doesn't regret *itself*, and French verbs are flying off shelves: I hope our tongues take a moment.

What with *hoppelpoppel* there's almost nothing left for a clown to do in this world. With no connection to ideal dew, I fan out and mouth my own cure. The work and play of God (contractions): I do both. Smallscale. The grass I think, my love, is g for generalcy. SHELL ME THEN.

When Ostrich jumped the curb, I was the first to point and say *bicentennial*. Ostrich carried furnaces around everywhere and went so far as to open up cans for seniors in his head. What logo could capture all of this? Certainly not this bough you have covered us up with, Diana. Sorry, *Goddess* Diana.

While no one was looking, an Alderman gassed himself at the bottom of the lake. Why oh why does *pianissimo* make so many go mad, missing, and molten? Let's find another / wind to hack. And now that we're on the subject: what would hormonal equivalent be of *brace yourself*?

Your flowers have two-and-a-half pints of water to entertain. I'll never drag you into it. Instead, I'll go out of your way to restore faith in London. And in return why not balance passionfruit with something—for lack of disjunctive—griddled. Try tucking in your blank.

Your landlord signs his name ELECTRIC. Father and son, realmeanwhile, compete for larger half of ampersand. Capitulum (you know the one) agrees to poke around the stables for breakfast. Other materials joust behind your back, but sedate themselves eventually with a cruelty unknown in steeples. The only thing is ~~flowerheads are deaf~~.

SPRING OF THE FLOOR TOM

There were all these tricks
We used to navigate

The night sky including
Having it out midsentence

With midcentury sax
Russian language worked

Like painting school for me
The word for *tongue* a bubbly

○

It was to be an era
When whistles were restored

To their riverlike potential
You were in the background

Nursing A speck of the ocean
Would prove to be A great leader to us

Which all happened Before
In the apple blood of our Alaskan youth

○

When dust took itself
For *a priori* SEX-Y

I did what I always did that is
I silenced the amphibian joy in me

& refused to cooperate
& when dust imagined itself

I slept in the drum
With all the moss I could find

○

But these were only ever first steps

For papyrus always came crawling back

(tongue out) & then what?
If we had focused

If we had focused the cypress
I think the cypress

We had raised
Would've gone far, Love



As a child I had the appearance of a pier
When fish swam under me

I heard nothing but praise
But fall came (once, I think)

& as we drowned a goulash dream
A dream of goulash made me feel

I should be inland instead, a one man band
Sponsors for everyone & everything



A day like any other
Five hundred pages

With no contractions
The roses revealed

Their own selfishness
I qualified for something

We slipped into sea
Half sibilant half shilling



Initially I thought of us
As successors to subtitles

For panfrancophone desire
Not small edible flowers

○

Desire a synapse
Which left unattended

For any longer might
Have repositioned itself

As a salt marsh inside you
You see your music taught me

Democracy the kind puppies knew
Not to touch or better yet revise

SOUTHEASTERN SUITE

If I am Tennessee & honeysuckle

& honeysuckle vanishes

I'd be out there myself

Fucking up the rain

Drooling for drilling

For new skies, tests

& more tests

(cicadas & less)

Oh microfiche of mine

Our weekend about breathing

But also firemen in their downtime

○

We get that horses have the life,

Early is midnight & I get people

Have different wattages & it gets ugly

For us reservoirs like how owl flips

Through me & my democratic belly,

How it flits at an oligarch's onyx-like motives

While a mill unravels: this teaches us

The life of a therapeutic underdog

○

This teaches us (further) we can't rely on any light

That doesn't also make a sound

○

Your world, my rubble

Because the sky

Could not be here

More ours

The only thing I had

To do today was lilies

Today was LILIES

○

Unfuck the ocean yesterday

Unfuck it to say

Nothing with my mouth

Of white trees & how

I know sweet limes

PLANNED COMMUNITY

He can't have salt
what can he have

can have cantata simple
salad *perceneige* his

own fruit another
trial run at dying

szechuan motion sensor
steam in the hazelnut tree

smoke in the throat
saying your name

RÉSIDENCE LA MADELEINE

our house is part forest dear jean

we sing all day & forest sings with

[known as longing]

dear jean I had the same fog when I was young

[known as longing]

& out of pine dear jean, beside myself

[a female deer, an iris ranch]

SOUTHEASTERN SUITE

art & rainwater
: the gap therein
impossible
not to want
to replicate

praise
goes &
children
study
the end

○

like group sex that doesn't happen—

—foothills of dried pasta instead

doing all the winking—

—land art has failed us

——body as neither
filter nor memory

○

& if it feels

like *blackcap*

it's a good

moment

to perform

an alibi

jurassic

in spirit

[*snare*]

○

dolce vita
incognito

○

drone for me
& anoint

venture capital
cats

aren't supposed to
like rosemary

rosemary isn't supposed to
have another baby &

baby gets what baby
navigates

○

how do I know my peach tree even likes me
or wind exists outside its sense of you

○

by that touching logic
prokofiev owes us

an ideal wood
where we only

get another ur-mother's
milk in which

to traipse
to be alsace