



The Architecture of Your Lineage

You know when you write poetry you find
the architecture of your lineage your teachers
like Robert Duncan for me gave me some glue for the heart
Beats which gave confidence
and competition
to the Images of Perfection

... or as dinner approaches I become hasty
do I mean PERFECTION?

There is a wonderful moment in Joanne Kyger's 1997 interview given to Dale Smith and Michael Price, published in Jacket Magazine and again in the beautiful book collected by Cedar Sigo: *Joanne Kyger, There You Are: Interviews, Journals and Ephemera*:

Dale Smith: Your poetry is very much in your mouth. You hear the voice thinking and exploring, revealing . . .

Joanne Kyger: It's a physical voice, yes. I think that's the best you can do sometimes, trying to "score" it as closely as you can on the page. I'm always amazed that this isn't taught more. How to translate the voice to the page, to get the little subtleties of breath and tone, or change of tone or character emphasis.

There's one really good essay that I've never been able to find again, I think by Williams. He says, okay, let's get this all down: a period has three breath stops; a comma has a breath stop, a semi-colon, a breath stop and a half. Empty space means nothing goes on but breathing until you get to the next word, etc. You're scoring your reading. Otherwise you follow this boring convention of the straight left-hand margin, a kind of cookie-cutter block stamp.

DS: You've mentioned before your daily practice of writing in a journal.

Yes, and in this daily writing, you don't have to think of it as "poetry," you don't have to think at all about what "kind" of writing you're doing. You're writing some kind of un-self-conscious open utterance, being as clear as you can, or as muddled as you want. You're not writing for anybody. It's spontaneous.



The projective method is rarely laid out as clearly as it is in this interview and Joanne Kyger had a way of getting to the point. Was it her Buddhist practice? That had something to do with it. The Olson fans in the house may also note his insistence on using the word “muthos” which is what myth was originally. “A story that unveils the true origin of the world and human beings.” That it shares an etymology with the word “mouth” is significant here. Joanne Kyger knew it and practiced the projective method as well as anyone.

The next moment worth noting in the interview is:

DS: What do you mean by “architecture of your lineage?”

Who your teachers are; how did you learn the architecture of your page, become aware of the “structure” of your thinking and the books in your life. Robert Duncan was especially important to me when I was young as he presented the “religion” of the household. He’s a person who just unabashedly made a wonderful, magical home. Unlike Spicer who lived a lonely life in dreary apartment rooms. How do you make your household? How do you keep it together, to live a life that is balanced with beauty? A place to put your bookshelves. But not get tied down too much. The rucksack revolution of the Beat Generation was to be able to know how to get on the road too. You had to know how to earn your living, at a job that you didn’t confuse with your “identity,” but gave you the economics to travel, and time off to write.

Writing from the energy this notion opens up could go to a couple of different places: 1) A poem that constructs the “architecture of your lineage.” You could start with as far back as you see your influences going, perhaps Sappho to Emily Dickinson, up through Lorine Niedecker, or H.D., through Joanne Kyger to Wanda Coleman with a few weeds of Brenda Hillman, to YOU. It’s ok to have non-poets in there too. Have their books handy and piece together a poem that drifts from one poet to another. You could start with the oldest, and move to the contemporaries or the other way around. Maybe the energetics of these poets could be invoked before you start. You might ask them what line of theirs needs to



be in a poem now? You may very well have some associations of your own to add and you can ride each quote until it goes dry, then go to the next poet. This method might work well for a daysong or part of one. Don't think you need to be comprehensive in the first stab at this.

2) What is the “religion” of your household? Here the individuating details of your daily life can populate a poem, or a whole series of something like, say POSTCARD POEMS. What are the foods, teas, wines, supplements, animal habits, composting methods and what make them a religion? You could write 31 poems from this stance, I am sure, and it would say volumes about your personal mythology. Like in McClure's Personal Universe Deck, be sure to include more than your “angel food cake” self. You can write anything if you are writing for your self, but if something you would want to share happens, excellent. If you have a Personal Universe Deck, here's where it can come in handy. For the daysong, too.

To put this R.O.Y.H. into practice, workshop participants will pair up alphabetically, the first name in the alphabet with the last. If needed, your humble narrator will participate. Get the address of the poet with whom you are paired up and write them an original poem on a postcard. You could include some allusion to the Religion Of Your Household. Letter Carriers are standing by.

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2:08pm
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Casa del Colibrí

Works Cited:

Kyger, Joanne. *Just Space: Poems 1979-1989*, Black Sparrow Press, 1991

<https://paulenelson.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Joanne-Kyger-1997-Interview-from-There-You-Are-Cedar-Sigo-ed.pdf>

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-myths/>

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