

ORIGINAL FLARF

From: Gary Sullivan
Sent: Monday, October 02, 2000 10:48 PM
To: subpoetics
Subject: Flarf! (Poetry's Elite)

Hello Sublistees,

A while back, someone asked us to chime in if we had won any awards lately.

I guess I'll go ahead and toot my horn: a couple of days ago I received in the mail my verification from The International Library of Poetry, that my poem, "Mm-hmm," was selected for Poetry's Elite: The Best Poets of 2000.

The poem follows:

Mm-hmm

Yeah, mm-hmm, it's true
big birds make
big doo! I got fire inside
my "huppa"-chimp(TM)
gonna be agreessive, greasy aw yeah god
wanna DOOT! DOOT!
Pffffffffffffffffffffffffff! hey!
ooh yeah baby gonna shake & bake then take
AWWWWWL your monee, honee (tee hee)
uggah duggah buggah biggah buggah muggah
hey! hey! you stoopid Mick! get
off the paddy field and git
me some chocolate Quik
put a Q-tip in it and stir it up sick
pocka-mocka-chocka-locka-DING DONG
fuck! shit! piss! oh it's so sad that
syndrome what's it called tourette's
make me HAI-EE! shout out loud
Cuz I love thee. Thank you God, for listening!

* * *

The letter I received, from Managing Editor Howard Ely, states as follows:

"Gary, over the past year, we have conducted an exhaustive examination of over 1.2 million poems that have been submitted to us. Only a small percentage of individuals whose poems we have reviewed were selected to be part of this distinguished project.

"'Mm-hmm' was selected for publication because it sparks the imagination and provides the reader with a fresh, unique perspective on life. We believe it will add to the importance and appeal of this special edition. _Of course, Gary, as always, you are under no obligation whatsoever to submit any entry fee or subsidy payment, or to make a purchase of any kind_. Your poem will be presented in the most elegant way possible. This coffee-table quality book will feature an 'Arristock leather' cover stamped in gold and a satin bookmark. The stock itself will be of fine-milled, acid-free paper to last for generations. All edges will be finished in genuine 24K gold leaf and quality typography will be displayed throughout. And best of all ...

"THIS SPECIAL EDITION WILL SHOWCASE The POETRY OF GARY SULLIVAN! ...

"PS: Since we are impressed with the poetic talent you have displayed in the past, you are welcome to have a different poem other than 'Mm-hmm' published if you wish. Simply enclose it along with your initialed Artist's Proof."

* * *

I'm hoping each and everyone on this list will buy a copy of the anthology.

It's only \$49.95, plus \$8.00 postage and handling.

Sought Poems

K. Silem Mohammad

One of the signature characteristics of contemporary experimental poetry is its emphasis on procedures in which the poet's textual material is supplied at least in part before the act of composition as such begins: examples would include chance operations performed on source texts à la John Cage's "Writing through the Cantos" and Jackson Mac Low's *Stanzas for Iris Lezak*; Burroughsian "cut-up" exercises like those performed by Ted Berrigan in *The Sonnets*; other forms of collage such as Ronald Johnson's sampling of Milton in *RADI OS*; and homophonic translations in the manner of Louis Zukofsky's *Catullus* and David Melnick's *Men in Aïda*. Surrealist, Dadaism, Oulipo, and other avant-grade traditions, which have in turn exerted a heavy influence on New York School, Language, and subsequent experimentalist practice, have often used these methods in combination with some form of collaboration, further diffusing the role of the unitary author in rearranging and reimagining the source material.

I want to talk about a trend I see as particularly visible in recent work by certain post-avant poets, in which the collaborative element is supplied not necessarily by actual multiple authorship in the familiar sense (though this may happen as well), but by *simulated* multiple authorship, an enforced or feigned collaboration with other subjects—subjects whose real identities may even be unknown or untraceable. The process might seem to involve a kind of wholesale co-opting of individual voices, but these are voices which have already been co-opted or dis-opted many times over as a result of their insertion into the great random catalog of the internet, where their often intensely motivated messages are reproduced ad infinitum in instances of sublimely unmotivated chatter. In the extreme democracy of webspace, right-wing hate groups become bunkmates with Marxist ideologues, home-repair specialists, and lonely pet-owners, and their discourses sometimes form unlikely chemical reactions in such close proximity to one another. These imaginary fusions supply the raw ingredients for the *sought poem*.

"Sought poem," as opposed to "found poem"—or not so much *opposed to as extrapolated from*. Whereas the idea behind found poems is that they're just something you stumble upon and say hey, that's poetry, I'm thinking of a process of aggressively *looking* for something, with the intent of *enlisting* it in some capacity. Sought poems come about as the result of invasive surgeries performed on already-mangled bodies. The poet knows those happy—or unhappy, as the case may be—accidents of language are out there, but it may take repeated sallies into the underbrush before they are flushed out. The sought poem is not passively awaited, but teased, prodded, and hectored into existence. The poet thus assumes a level of involvement that in many ways is very old-school: she once again puts her manipulative ego into full gear, and becomes responsible for aggressively intentional structures. The intentions in question, however, are by necessity largely confined to the level of formal arrangement and sonic or visual style, leaving the field wide open for the accidents of theme that make the aesthetic flourishes possible in the first place.

For me the preferred medium has been the Google search engine, or rather the pages of search results that Google throws up. The typical process—one that I stole from Gary Sullivan, Father of “Flarf”—goes as follows. First, I enter some combination of search words and/or phrases: let’s say “shock,” “awe,” “reindeer,” and “peace sign.” This gives me six results (with colored headers which can’t be duplicated here because of the limitations of print):

Money Clips and Jewelry Designed by Skystone and Silver

... Rebel Flag Moneyclip Red Panda Earrings Red Panda Pendant **Reindeer** Pendant

Road Bombs Pendant 3rd Army Pendant 7th Cavalry Pendant **Shock & Awe** Pendant. ...

www.skystoneandsilver.com/store.html - 75k - Mar 28, 2003 - Cached - Similar pages

Sailor Moon S Movie

... is actually a blimp carrying a sleigh with blow-up **reindeer** in front. ... Luna watches

on in **awe** and blushes slightly ... Usagi has a look of **shock** on her face which is

...
www.tcp.com/doi/smoon/movie/s.html - 53k - Cached - Similar pages

Live Reviews

... Highly Evolved’ is a short-sharp-**shock** of devastating ... around the hall, leaving you

in absolute **awe**. ... When considering that The **Reindeer** Section is comprised of

...
www.angelfire.com/sk2/mentalmusic/copy_of_Live.html - 98k - Cached - Similar pages

[PDF]EDITOR’S NOTE

File Format: PDF/Adobe Acrobat - View as HTML

... The Idaho Press Tribune’s article was a **shock** to me ... signs that ranged from “Honk

for Peace” to “Stop Operation Blood for Oil.” I chose the Honk for **Peace sign**. ...
www.albertson.edu/coyote/0203/Issue62002.pdf - Similar pages

[DOC]The Tale of “Snow Hex and the Seven Sprites”, Formally Known as ...

File Format: Microsoft Word 2000 - View as HTML

... is actually a blimp carrying a sleigh with blow-up **reindeer** in front ... AndrAIa watches

on in **awe** and blushes slightly ... Dot has a look of **shock** on her face which is ...

www.geocities.com/andraias_log/PrincessDaimonsLover.doc - Similar pages

Fandomination.net | If you build it... They will come...

... his feet touched the ground gently, absorbing the **shock** of impact ... And to top it all off, Santa's **reindeer** seemed to ... The other three stared in silent **awe** as Ami ...
www.fandomination.net/?mode=fanfic&FanficID=2521 - 76k - Cached - Similar pages

And this is what I have to work with. My first step is generally to go through and de-bold the bold parts, put everything in the same font size, remove some ellipses and paragraph returns, and delete all the colored header text, unless a particular word or phrase there strikes me as title material. That leaves me with

Rebel Flag Moneyclip Red Panda Earrings Red Panda Pendant Reindeer Pendant Road Bombs Pendant 3rd Army Pendant 7th Cavalry Pendant Shock & Awe Pendant

is actually a blimp carrying a sleigh with blow-up reindeer in front. Luna watches on in awe and blushes slightly ... Usagi has a look of shock on her face which is

Highly Evolved' is a short-sharp-shock of devastating ... around the hall, leaving you in absolute awe. When considering that The Reindeer Section is comprised of

The Idaho Press Tribune's article was a shock to me ... signs that ranged from "Honk for Peace" to "Stop Operation Blood for Oil." I chose the Honk for Peace sign.

is actually a blimp carrying a sleigh with blow-up reindeer in front ... AndrAIa watches on in awe and blushes slightly ... Dot has a look of shock on her face which is

his feet touched the ground gently, absorbing the shock of impact ... And to top it all off, Santa's reindeer seemed to ... The other three stared in silent awe as Ami

From here on, it's mostly a matter of whittling and shuffling. I pare away unwanted words, rearrange blocks of text, and fit it all into a new lineation system (I might choose to retain the formal scheme that has already suggested itself in the existing layout, but not in this case). I never add anything that wasn't already there (except for an occasional punctuation mark or capitalization, etc.). The first run-through at this stage might leave me with:

The Reindeer Section

Rebel Flag Moneyclip Red Panda Earrings
Red Panda Pendant Reindeer Pendant
Road Bombs Pendant 3rd Army Pendant
7th Cavalry Pendant Shock & Awe Pendant

a blimp carrying a sleigh with blow-up reindeer

Luna watches on in awe and blushes slightly
Usagi has a look of shock on her face

a short sharp shock devastating the hall
leaving you in absolute awe
signs that ranged from “Honk for Peace”
to “Stop Operation Blood for Oil”
I chose the Honk for Peace sign

a blimp carrying a sleigh with blow-up reindeer
AndrAia watches on in awe and blushes slightly
Dot has a look of shock on her face

his feet touched the ground gently
absorbing the shock of impact
Santa’s reindeer
stared in silent awe

Beginning to look more like a poem, but ... does it *cohere*? My tinkering urges are not yet fully satisfied. Since I started with only six results (my optimum target number is anywhere from 40-70 results), this could easily end up being a pretty short poem by the time I finish scratching away at it. If I do decide to give it another sweep-through, it might end up as this nearly haiku-brief stanza:

Short Sharp Shock

leaving you in a
blimp carrying a sleigh
with blow-up reindeer
rebel flag moneyclip
honk for peace sign
shock & awe pendant
absorbing the impact

Looking back, I worry that I might have lost something with the massive deletions—especially the “refrain” with the changing women’s names, which I liked at first and still do a little. At this point, however, the exercise is exhausting itself, and to tell the truth, the poem overall is probably not a “keeper” anyway. The entire process is hit-and-miss, much like standing over a hole in the ice with a fishing pole. Nevertheless, I’ve found that with the right synthesis of search results and authorial “adjustments,” it’s a process that can excite my compositional brain in ways that are very useful, and that help me to think about what happens when one composes in the “normal” way as well. The exaggerated Jakobsonian selection-and-combination approach creates the fiction that the poet is working not just with a source text, but with a very small *language*, the *only* language available in the circumstances. This language like all languages is marked by its preoccupations, which have been placed there in part by the poet (who selected the search

terms) and in part by the cross-section of the population that exchanges its views, sells its wares, tells its stories, and so on, over the web.

How is all this different from refrigerator-magnet poetry? In many ways, it's not. But because the poet is actively determining at least a portion of the "subject matter," and because the combinatorial decisions invariably reflect back on that initial determination (though they reflect on other things along the way as well), intention enters into the equation in a novel way. Intention is involved in the composition of a magnet-poem too, but there it is simultaneously more and less constrained. It is more constrained in that all the magnets have been chosen for you in advance—your selection options are essentially limited to the purchase of the kit—and less constrained in that you do not have a motivated set of concepts driving the entire writing operation. These initiating concepts ensure that the poem will be *about* something (e.g. Bush's "shock & awe" bombing campaign), even if only obliquely and absurdly.

Sought poems place the poet at the mercy of the raw material in a way that is different from "normal" composition only in degree; we are always constrained by the limits of our language, and this method simply puts extra emphasis on the constraints. That could be a general definition of poetic form, or of *meter*, and maybe sought poetry is a metrics above all. Because the rules impose sources rather than durations or rhythms, however, the prosodic factor cannot be separated from the thematic. This way of proceeding leaves a good deal of room for individual stylistics, since each poet will have an entirely different set of instincts about how to rearrange the sought material. Looking back at the initial search results, for example, I can imagine wanting to retain the format of the headers and URL info, and perhaps even the color of the text they appear in, making the poem mimetic of its originary context. My impulses direct me toward a more classically columnar lyric strophe, and thus the obsessive re-shaping, which can sometimes result in neo-Imagist severity or worse.

I don't entertain any notion that when I scavenge these voices and viewpoints I am somehow *representing* their speakers. They are unrepresentable once they go through the Google grinder. What I seek in such sought poems is not a new type of poetic subjectivity. Rather, I'm looking for instances of articulation (or yes, inarticulacy) in which the poetic object takes on an immediacy that is the product of its embeddedness in a fresh (if not always fresh-smelling) cultural discourse. This embedded object, however, like "embedded" Gulf War II reporters, is severely compromised in its ability to deliver anything like an "objective" account of its surroundings. The sought poem not only acknowledges this limitation, but expects and exploits it. The useful thing about Google from the poet's perspective is its simultaneous scariness as an instrument of total surveillance (it can and will track you down, no matter where you are) and undiscerning lack of frontiers (it may track down those who are tracking you down in the process).

MAINSTREAM POETRY

Poems are, like, total bullshit unless they are
squid or popsicles or deer piled
on elk in the trunk of David Hasselhoff's
Cutlass Sierra. Or black ladies dying
of men leaving nickel hearts
beating them down. MAINSTREAM poems
and they are USEFUL — Great if you like
having a Popsicle stuck in "I love George Bush," like,
the popsicle squid goes "gong" when all the other
dishes run out of toilet paper, how far can Bush go
with a squid up his motherfuckin ass — see what I mean?
We want LIVE world wide words of the MAINSTREAM ready
to sink her teeth into the flesh of our Deputy Defense Secretary
Paul Wolfowitz when the napalm in his blood
starts cooking. I could kill an entire day
with a popsicle stick and a small jar of insignificant
brain cells lost in the 70's by George W. Bush. We want
poems like epileptic Pokemon fits on Walmart's
lingerie racks, MAINSTREAM poems to smear on
a photo spread entitled the "Women of Enron," to showcase 50%
Chance Of May Rate Hike whose numbers are
Glycerin Suppositories between the asscheeks of
Justin Timberlake — Check it out ! Photos,
Soundtracks, Video Clips,
Fan Boards and More! Fucked-up poems that
everybody understands
like "The Morality Of Money 4:46 pm CD Sludge UQ
Wire: Kissinger — Bloody Hands," cavity searching
the man himself
with the broken off end of his Run-DMC glasses and
sending the swab sample to the Olson Twins for analysis.
Knockoff poems for Sindhis and Baluchis, Kurds, hundreds of
Brittany fans, some in full cowboy dress with a smattering
of applause from the Tekken Anime fans doing
their 5 Kick Massacre sidethrow, clutching their throats
and puking themselves into eternity "as TV Heroes
safe from these Viagra mushrooms proceed
to kick the Bard's ass in a Tom Hanks Bison-Death" — sub-
way poems like, "Aw yeesh, got my NASDAQ petunias
AAWWWL mixed up, woah, thass nice, flufffy lil
mestizo couch doing the ROLAID smooch in my NAWSTRils,
hhuh hauh ,, Mkaeing some TYPos, cuz i wasna be PRASSident of
the Ungdidtyedf Stsnaatesand go to coleege with
a ANDROiD bitch!!!!!!"
Robert Pinsky is pinned to a comfy chair at his favorite
hangout spot, a Barnes & Noble Café in Louisville Kentucky
reading a poem that begins, "I love shopping

in Brooks Brothers, oh, / and I found the cutest
sheer / cappuchino colored button" . . . rrrrrrrrrrrrrrr . . .
In his award-winning epic poem he revisited
Homer's The Iliad and The Odyssey, relocating to
Gap Kids . . . rrrrrrrrrrrrr . . .

Agggghh . . . searches Google . . .
Put it on him MAINSTREAM poet! Strip him nayKID
to the world wide world. Another MAINSTREAM POEM cracking
squid tentacles upside the tea-stained skulls of the
FAKE-ASS MAINSTREAM . . . poem scream
Son ecologistas; y Jorgito Bush es todo, "izquierdosos,
moros, Archienemigos," — Qué puta mierda. Me cago en Bush
y los 365 santos del año!! Llego tarde a la iglesia!
El jodido televisor no funciona!
Tongue-kiss the MAINSTREAM world for love.
Let their be no non-mainstream poems written until
love can exist freely on the headstones of Nixon's inner
circle. Let MAINSTREAM PEOPLE understand
that they are the lovers and the daughters and sons
of lovers and workers and children
of workers Are poems & poets &
all the loveliness here in the world

We want a MAINSTREAM poem. And a
MAINSTREAM WORLD.
Let the world be a mainstream poem
And Let All Mainstream People Speak This Poem
Silently
Or LOUD

MONEY

Money is a kind of lettuce Stegner Fellow.

– Wallace Stevens

Money, the long pink scorpion semaphores,
cash, stash, Charman Mao, extra sharp cheddar,
getting hard just listening to Terry Gross.
I just killed the Pilsbury dough boy.

Chock it up, fluff it all over yr own self,
Shelly Duvall it out. Watch it
burn holes through the argon gophers.

To be made of it! To have it
to slumber on in the frightening alien metal disks!
Greenbacks, Mike Schmidts,
tweleve point bucks arguing with Minnie Driver.

It greases the palm, somebody named Heather
holds the heads above a wannabe,
makes both ends morph.

Money breeds with leather instructional manuals.
Gathering questionable options, pounding on Dan Rather.
Always in circulation.

Money. You don't know why it's floating in front of you,
but you put it where your mouth put it.
And it talks to itself.