

Studies on Themes and Motifs in Literature

Ode Consciousness

Robert Eisenbauer

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Michael G. Cooke and Casimir France *in memoriam*

Preface

Wir zögern sogar, das Reh in der Waldlichtung, den Käfer im Gras, den Grashalm ein Ding zu nennen.

Martin Heidegger, "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes"

[We even hesitate to name the deer in a glade, the beetle in the grass, the blade of grass a thing.]

The soul of Confucius trapped for us to meet, make us stand still, then wander off into the woods where his Odes still sing.

A tree in China has different voices.

Heavy with crickets, a legend woven with signs, it grows inside you...

How to tell

One cricket from

Another?

Patrizia de Rachewiltz, "Beijing, Summer 1999"

A persistent trope of the ode involves the poet's identification with the primal forces, earth, water, wind, and fire; its rhetoric is energized by the invocation of a *Weltgeist*, Oversoul, et al., or a channeling of ghosts, poetical, political, tribal, familial. In an attempt to understand the psychological bases underlying such metaphysical empowerment (the equivalent of priest- or witchcraft), we observe the importance of Keats's ode "On a Grecian Urn" to the writing of "A Packet for Ezra Pound" from Rapallo, Italy—Yeats wishing/willing himself into a compact, distant yet near otherworld, the visionary contemplating the precursory *voyeur* in his theorization of a work of art. We note the impossibility and unreachability of that otherworld, but also Yeats's captivation by its resemblance to the Mediterranean scene, a "little town by the bay." How far ode consciousness can travel is illustrated by one of the epigraphs to the introductory verses of *Responsibilites*, a quotation concerning a dream of Confucius. As with the Keatsian vista, the citation is perspectival and reflexive, a statement or a "station," to borrow a useful term from Helen Vendler, of haunted sensibility. To the extent that what follows takes the form of a critical phenomenology of the ode, I assume from time to time that there is such a thing as collective personality, unconscious and otherwise, expressed in this most formal and ceremonial of songs and that it is worthwhile to study the mythic paradigms informing it—reifying the psychological subtext only when it speaks as *persona*, mask, the expression of a personal reaction to the name of a person, a season, a victory, an inauguration, et al. The poet assumes a near or distant relation to the irresistible *vox populi* or sometimes both at once.

D. S. Carne-Ross helps us understand the element of benevolence or *charis* involved in the gifting and singing of the ode:

It is the bond of goodwill and gratitude between victor and poet that is sealed by the victory poem, and sometimes that poem itself; it is the divine power of fertility quickening the limbs that won the victory...and inspiring the poet who celebrates it; it is the gladness in which the festivity crowning the victory is bathed; it is the favor or grace granted by a god which makes victory possible in the first place.¹

For Frank O'Hara the ode is constituted as a scene of discursive rivalry with poetic others or as a surreal act of goodwill reflecting fantasy-friendly "industry" of a charmed and "loaded" kind—only that everything has changed, including the "I," the "you," and—oh yes—the world. "Tough and quick" though he claims to be with well-honed axe- or scalpel-like incisiveness, O'Hara revives our sense of gratitude and gracefulness, even as he flatters a famous Beat contemporary:

What Corso is doing
 is surrounding the world with
 the positive question
 of his own value
 crazy question for the frightened, life for the poet
 accepting frail music for the ultimate answer
 an ode for the tie-tree of his Saint Sebastian
 Coit Tower, where all memories grow into childhood
 and the poet takes up the knives of his wounds to catch the light¹

Look out over San Francisco, and you can almost see Boeotia:

Yours are the waters of our river,
 the meadows our fine horses graze [upon] are yours
 royal ones of song,
 Graces of Orkhómenos the fertile.²

Take a walk through midtown and you get Keatsian glimmerings of laziness and autumnal satis-/liquefaction:

...I walk through the luminous humidity
 passing the House of Seagrams with its wet liquor
 and its loungers.... (FOH, 335)

However, O'Hara's festive conception of the art world and of the world as art may be difficult for us to respond to, given the post-*Festum* condition of the postmodern. We relate better to the magisterial, witchy negativity in Emily Dickinson, who never wrote an ode, but whose texts are pervaded or saturated by what we are calling "ode consciousness"—including the "unheard melodies" of Keats and the annihilative primal subtractions of Jalal al-Din Rumi. Postmodernism in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, because it is

mosaic- or collage-like in its denial of a transcendent telos and transgressive in its celebration of the antithetical and post-human, suggests the chaos and doubt of the seventeenth. The so-called “metaphysical poets,” Donne, George Herbert, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, and Crashaw, are seen as the usual suspects here. However, because he is jumpier (less logically ordered) from line to line, less “conceited” and orthodox, more physical than metaphysical, I make a case for the significance of Henry Vaughan, who saw “eternity the other night.” Anyone who reads lines by Vaughan, Dickinson, and Rumi within the space of an hour will affirm, however grudgingly, the justice of the literary arithmetic—a funny feeling worth its weight in toucan feathers if not in gold—that Dickinson=Vaughan + Rumi: “Rumi uses the image of ‘no-leaves’ blooming on a winter tree [*bargi bi bargi*] as a beautiful symbol for the state of awareness that has abandoned the world without leaving...it.”⁴

On the other hand, as tempting as the identification with enduring nature is, there is the awareness of the ode as transient song and the mortality of the poet who sings it. The ode, at its zenith, accommodates and, at times, celebrates cognitive dissonance. There is thus a certain identification involving insects that has yet to be dealt with sufficiently in scholarship on the ode. Entomological paradigms matter, as anyone who hears Pope asserting that “Man is not a Fly” or who studies Keats’s ode “To Autumn” will attest. Once again, it is Dickinson who brings it all, or much of it, back home. As the final poetic text in Thomas Johnson’s edition of the *Complete Poems* reads,

The earth has many keys.
Where melody is not
Is the unknown peninsula,
Beauty is nature’s fact.

But witness for her land,
And witness for her sea,
The cricket is her utmost
Of elegy to me.⁵

While it may be difficult to believe that Dickinson and the young Tennyson who writes the “Ode: O Bosky Brook” are living on the planet at the same time, they are poets for whom the mythography of the cricket and grasshopper, the untamed power of the small, matters in distinctly personal, but also emblematic ways:

There is a Zone whose even Years
No Solstice interrupt—
Whose Sun constructs perpetual Noon
Whose perfect season wait—

Whose Summer set in Summer, till
The Centuries of June
And Centuries of August cease
And Consciousness—is Noon. (*ED*, 481)

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1. Texting Modernity: The Ode Downtown

Languescente saeculo, liceat aegrotari.

Henry Vaughan, "To All Ingenious Lovers of Poetry"
[When the age grows languid, let sickness be permitted.]

J'ai la conviction intime qu'une ode est un vêtement trop léger pour l'hiver, et qu'on ne serait pas mieux habillée avec la strophe, l'antistrophe et l'épode que cette femme du cynique qui se contentait de sa seule vertu pour chemise, et allait nue comme la main, à ce que raconte l'histoire.

Théophile Gautier

[I have the intimate conviction that an ode is too light a garment for winter, and that one would not be better dressed with the strophe, antistrophe, and epode than [was] that wife of the cynic who, according to the story, was satisfied with her virtue alone for a shirt, and went around naked as one's hand.]

*I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat,
But the fools caught it,
Wore it in the world's eyes
As though they'd wrought it.
Song, let them take it.
For there's more enterprise
In walking naked.*

W. B. Yeats, "A Coat"

The bright grasp of what is there.

Avital Ronell

Context, we say, governs the way we use language: *il n'y a pas un hors contexte*. While English has a vocabulary for linguistic praxis, it has no word for articles of clothing shared by two or more persons, strangers or friends. The lines of Yeats, however, inform us that a poet's coat emblazoned with strange signs and occult figures can be grabbed at by others who, by plagiarizing and controlling the fabric, flaunt it as their own. What does it mean to share a genre, to work within a tradition, to write, as it were, *ensemble* with "old mythologies"? Is it not like wearing a borrowed garment, controlling or being controlled by it?¹ We can ponder the poetic garment (under the sign of Yeats's confession and Gautier's exemplum), as prime-time figura—surtout or rug, hair- or night-shirt, ermine or mink skin—resembling, in heaviness or lightness, the object it would describe. The proof of costume and argument lies in detail, a word whose etymology suggests a seasonal cosmos of literary/philosophical tailoring and a devil or angel at the cutting table. If Gautier lends the figure plausibility through the careful discriminations of an epigram, Carlyle overpowers it with a *mega biblion* entitled *Sartor Resartus*. Marx and Engels

in *The German Ideology* speak of an “uncloaking” of those intellectual sheep, the Young Hegelians,² while, according to Paul Rilla, the naked truth steps forth when the bourgeoisie allows its “ideological wardrobe” (“ideologische Garderobe”) to fall.³

Jerome McGann admonishes us not to “canonize the phenomena” (*RI*, 26), but is it not the arresting image, sound, or symbol that matters, precisely, as a “rhetorical and stylistic event”? Surely, since this is 2008 and not 1808, a scholarly phenomenology of the ode aspires to no system of knowledge, absolute or otherwise. Our eclecticism keenly grasps the obvious, suggesting a dialectic of hidden or intimated symmetries. The ode aims at a circularity it never achieves, except, perhaps, in the *Shih Jing* and the great texts of Pindar and Horace: “The ode is not an infinitely extensible sentence but an irregular rondure, a parody of the full circle, broken and finite or infinite only along its faults.”⁴ It arrives at states of complex interiority in Coleridge, a paradoxical non-intimacy or extimacy in Hölderlin and Keats, where world and self, object and subject are so reflexively intertwined that it becomes possible and, indeed, necessary to foreground consciousness in the emergency/catastrophe of the lyrical sign. Nakedness, indeed.

But should we canonize the canon, or privilege a genre which does not call itself “the ode” until the 17th century and before that bookish epoch of “dissociated sensibility” (Eliot) is known simply as “song,” Horace’s *carmen*?⁵ Are there not texts which in their deviation from strict convention deserve critical attention? Henry Vaughan’s charming “Upon a Cloke Lent Him by Mr. J. Ridsley,” whose self-mythologizing evidence I canonize *hic et nunc*, has been variously described as a macabre performance, phantasmagoric dream, or Democritean jest, but not to my knowledge as an anti-ode without strophe or antistrophe whose subject is an object or, rather, the subject suffering *under* the cross of the object—“that which must be borne”—whose slate-like identity is defined and literally drawn upon (character’d) by the objectivity of the borrowed garment, a textile-message that is heavy enough in its cacoethic weave to read as a versified psychoanalytic narrative. Like the children of the night, Vaughan’s text makes a strange sort of aleatory music, both erudite and ironically out of control, intimate and anatomical: on the one hand suggesting in a restricted, sub-analytical space the succession of mutant egos wandering through Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, and, on the other, sharing conversational eternity with Frank O’Hara’s “Having a Coke with You,” my second addition to the ode canon. Seventeenth-century spelling makes “cloke” a near visual double of “Coke” (the cult beverage of a wonderland continually saying “drink me,” a fauxtopian brew, utopia in a can or bottle), but the garment and the beverage are in some ways analogous symbolic gifts. My transtemporal rhyme makes sense from the pleasure/pain perspective of the ode *and* consciousness;

the horrid, horrendously bad disfigurements engendered by Vaughan's out-of-control cloak and noon-time allure of Coke suggest the egregious transferability of literary forms, the continuing debt of a debased present to the atoms of a golden past, and the impersonality of literature, especially, the ode—"here's my Pindarick," have a taste, pass it on—persons othered, others selved—Vaughan's body teletransported, disordered and/or "messed up" (his phrase), consciousness made unprivate.

The ode, like all art, belonged until recently to what Pierre Bourdieu defines as the field of cultural production, yet it cannot be designated a *habitus* or cultural habit when it reflects a unique set of conditions—this time, this ode—rather than the every time of a culture that considers itself and its odes a second nature:

Culture is thus achieved only by negating itself as such, that is, as artificial and artificially acquired, so as to become second nature, a *habitus*, a possession turned into being, the virtuosi of the judgement of taste seem to reach an experience, an aesthetic grace so completely freed from the constraints of culture and so little marked by the long, patient training of which it is the product that any reminder of the conditions and the social conditioning which have rendered it possible seems to be at once obvious and scandalous (cf. 1. 3. 1.).⁶

From Pindar's time to the middle of the 20th century, it was an artistic product intended for a specific, usually aristocratic and/or highly educated, audience. This is Hegel's argument in a nutshell, an art form intended for select circles or power elites. In the world of ancient Greece, a ludic context is necessary:

Ἀναξιφόρμιγγες ὕμνοι,
 τίνα θεὸν τίν' ἤρωα, δ' ἄνδρα κελαδήσομεν;
 ἦτοι Πίσα μὲν Διός· Ὀλυμπιάδα δ' ἔστασεν Ἡρακλῆς
 ἀκρόθινα πολέμου·
 Θῆρωνα δὲ τετραορίας ἔνεκα νικαφόρου
 γεγωνέτεον, ὅπιν δικαίων ξένων, ἔρεισμι' Ἀκραγάντας,
 εὐωνύμων τε πατέρων ἄωτον ὀρθόπολιν·
 [Ye harp-controlling hymns! (or) ye hymns the sovereigns of harps!
 What God? what Hero?
 What Man shall we celebrate?
 Truly Pisa indeed is of Jove,
 But the Olympiad (or the Olympic Games) did Hercules establish,
 The first fruit of the spoils of war
 But Theron for the four-horsed car,
 That bore victory to him,
 It behoves us now to voice aloud,
 The Just, the Hospitable,
 The bulwark of Agrigentum,
 Of renowned fathers,
 The Flower, even him

Who preserves his native city erect and safe.]"⁸

Far from the Pisa river, but equally subject to favor-giving and getting, Horace suggests how the imitator of Pindar risks the fate of Icarus:

Pindarum quisquis studet aemulari,
Iulle, ceratis ope Daedalea
nititur pennis vitreo daturus
nomine ponto.⁹
[Any poet seeking to rival Pindar,
Iullus, puts on Daedalus' wings of wax to
Rise in soaring flight, and a sea shall keep his
Name and his body.^{10]}

Only recently has the ode been mass-marketed in the people's utopia:

Wuxing hongqi yingfeng piaoyáng,
shéngli gesheng duome xiangliáng.
gecháng women ginai de zuguó,
cóngjin zouxiáng fǎnróng fugiáng.¹¹
[The five-starred red flag waves in the wind,/ our songs of
victory resound,/ we sing of our dear Motherland,/ which
from now on will move toward prosperity.]

An axiom, dubious as well as odious, might be offered on ode consciousness: cultures with a taste for syrupy soft-drinks cannot value the ode or poetry, in general. But O'Hara demonstrates how wrong such an axiom can be, or, rather, his many odes testify to the authorial desire to redefine the genre within what has become for us in hindsight one of the golden ages of American civilization, the period of high modernism, to frame it in terms of the habitual, of the artificial made into a second nature through the push and pull of (self-) advertising, like having a Coke, and to pitch it resolutely toward the vernacular. On the other hand, how many great odes are written today in countries where "witchier brews," tea, beer, wine, or whiskey, are preferred? And, if they are, where is the audience, except, for example, in China, where natives and guests have no choice but to listen as the "Ode to the Motherland" is performed to inaugurate the 2008 Olympics? Such respect for a tradition dating back to the ninth century B.C.E. has to do with the sense of cultural continuity and/or conformity that political leaders wish to inspire in a captive audience. And, no doubt, there is no way that the ode can compete with coke or Coke in the mass market, of China or anywhere else. A text launching the Olympics may represent no more than a literary T-shirt souvenir, lip service paid by totalitarian tailors to the canons of Confucianism.¹² The gnomic wisdom of Pindar or the *Shih Jing* becomes a catch-phrase or (state) slogan

flattering less “das Volk” than “the best sort of people” and the status quo of ruling elites. Despite such poetico-political gestures, there is probably as much formal, cultural distance between the Beijing Olympics and the rites of the *Shih Jing* as between Horace’s Rome and Pindar’s admonitions from the sacred precincts of Nemea and Olympia.

Certain periods privilege the ode or develop a taste for it, while others clearly do not. The 17th century in England is such an epoch, where religiosity, both Catholic and Protestant, combines with classical erudition to produce an unparalleled growth in the ode industry; a true mania for the borrowed cloak lasts into the first decades of the 19th century. Only the immense popularity of the novel surpasses the cult of the ode in the field of culture. In Germany, Klopstock’s radically innovative technique of versification, by no means acclaimed in the contemporary *Gelehrtenrepublik*, inaugurates a literary reawakening that culminates in the hymnic summers of Schiller and Hölderlin, to say nothing of the Sturm und Drang thunderstorms of *Werther*. As Lacoue-Labarthe suggests, the cultural product is intimated from the pulpit and the pew, in the communal songs of Protestantism. Pound’s strategic decision at the beginning of the 20th century to work in the orchard of the Chinese rather than the Greek ode suggests a critical consciousness aware of coats/cloaks that can no longer be worn and the obsolete mythologies that ornament them. His translations of the *Book of Odes*, continued from St. Elizabeth’s after the war, are nothing if not mutations born of the (al)chemist’s desire to “make it new.” Most alien of all to modern and postmodern sensibility, the pre-Islamic Arabic *qasida*, imitated by Tennyson and Platen, frames a significant landscape reduced to elemental and elegant pagan or tribal terms: the sacrifice of the camel mare, the relationship between lover and beloved—admirably imitated by Shelley with “My faint spirit was sitting in light/ Of thy looks, my love,” the longed-for coolness of a mountain meadow.¹³ Who could predict that the couplet of the *qasida* would find itself reinvented in some of the most sophisticated metaphysical poetry ever written, the odes of Rumi—in case we are counting—“3,229 separate odes, in 34,662 couplets”?¹⁴ Pablo Neruda, poet of a nation and politically engaged as no other in the modern era since Mayakovsky, appropriates the ode once more in order to speak with/as/for the voice of the people. Then, in post-World-War-II Japan, in an entirely different medium and language, we have the phenomenon of Osamu Tezuka, as popular as a baseball player, who in *Apollo’s Song* and *Ode to Kirihiro* storyboards the history of West and East since 1940 in the medium of *manga* (graphic novel), combining graphic expertise, psychobiography, and mythography to make the primary process and prime time utterly perspicuous—perhaps a little too perspicuous for finer literary/philosophical sensibilities. In Tezuka, the

caricatural displacement of the gods, an adolescent twilight already evident in Keats,¹⁵ is laid bare; the “ode,” its *trace* now entirely, spectacularly graphic, is stripped down to the barest pre-Socratic intensities of Love and Conflict, to say nothing of *manga*’s many concessions to mass taste. Had Heidegger only known! Word cannot compete with picture in the prime-time frames or cells of Tezuka: the ode revisits its ancient Asiatic sources; it is once more, as if for the first time, ideogrammatized, reduced to the arithmetic of primary emotions, “odi et amo” in comic book form, a language accessible to all “dose kids,” West and East, the antithesis of a hieroglyph, yet its confirmation too in the warring of contradictory ideas on the page.

Odes in their earliest Chinese and Greek forms are encomiastic; they praise persons, families, elements, tribes, dynasties and can thus be classified as an elaborate, sophisticated form of courtesy or flattery.¹⁶ Millennia later, the ode is converted into a vehicle for spreading the word (of sometimes quite arbitrary praise or dispraise, i.e., criticism) across the urban arts of jazz, painting, and poetry. A recent essay¹⁷ allows us to think that the ancient poetic art of flattery is being revived in the form of avant-garde partisanship in the subterranean jazz sanctum of New York City during the late fifties and early sixties. Allied with fabrication and, no doubt too, to one extent or another, with falsification, the first odes might resemble products of the “better than the original” school of portrait-painting, if they did not depend upon an oral/literary medium for their expression. It is thus possible to think about literary history, once more as if for the first time, in a primarily Horatian perspective; “aut delectare aut prodesse” makes Vaughan’s punishing cloak doubly or triply ironic; it does the same for Yeats’s highly decorated, but easily purloined coat and the pleasure of sharing a Coke while reinventing a dusty, ancient, dare we say “obsolete,” genre. In other words, as Coleridge points out in *Biographia Literaria*, it is precisely the hedonic/ludic surplus, its self- and other-flattery, even there where it should not be—“These pleasures, Melancholy, give”—that takes us to one of the primary sites of lyrical consciousness. And it is the purely psychological aspect which matters more than genre or causes us moderns to be unable to make tidy generic distinctions:

Es ist mir dabei recht aufgefallen, wie es kommt, daß wir Moderne die Genres so sehr zu vermischen geneigt sind, ja daß wir gar nicht einmal imstand sind, sie voneinander zu unterscheiden.¹⁸

[In this regard it has occurred to me how it happens that we moderns are so highly inclined to mix the genres, indeed, that we are not even capable of distinguishing them from each other.]

In his youth Goethe has the audacity to rewrite Pindar by appropriating “Fantasy” as a personal goddess; he devotes more mature years to translating

and imitating the *qasida* and *ghazal*. As we think more about the ode and its organizing power, we tend to think less about genre. What is it but mimic song and dance, as Hazlitt suggests? It is no accident that ode consciousness has been associated with children, i.e., those who dwell closest to powerful feelings, are blissfully unaware of generic distinctions interesting only to grammarians or literary scholars, and enjoy games, if not exactly as the Greeks, those ancient sophomores, did.

On the other hand, ode consciousness claims to know what time it is in Hegel's "animal kingdom of spirits." In the great odes of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley we encounter ancient tropes of seasonal pleasure and pain involving winged creatures of all sorts, whose brief, supposedly happy, but above all notorious lives are interrupted either by the mower's scythe or the first frost of winter, whose color reflects the circumambient green of forest and meadows surrounding them. Keats, who understands such tropes within the concept of "the poetry of the earth," works particularly rich and connotative changes on the consecrated (ancient Greek, biblical) symbolism of the abject insect "fool"—an incantation that is also in some measure a Romantic recantation based on an altered topography and inner-psychological rhythm, an "ex-scription" opting out of inherited tropes of prudential wisdom. The ground for such complex, subtle shifts of vehicle and tenor is prepared in the 17th century, by Milton, Lovelace, and Marvell, among others. Since the Chinese ode focuses on the grasshopper (known to the popular audience as a metaphor for a novice under the tutelage of a master or teacher) and the cricket (on the hearth, in the hall, and elsewhere), I explore this eventful entomological trope and its various implications (pleasure, annihilation, et al.) for ode consciousness. Flying at somewhat higher altitude, the various euphorias symbolized by birds in the ode do not limit themselves in quite the same way that the notorious nightingale consecrates itself monochromatically and supernaturally to melancholy. There can be no doubt that Milton's characterization of Shakespeare as a bird "warbling his native Wood-notes wilde" marks a new stage of dissociated consciousness in which the naive identity of subject and object is shattered in a moment of reflective, i.e., judgmental distantiation. In the adventure of poetic thinking, the unmediated cry of nature has undergone a modifying articulation that is miles ahead of the sensory certainty of "Sumer is icumen in/ Lhude singe cuckoo." We are therefore not surprised when Hegel in the *Aesthetics* devotes considerable space to animal fables and, especially, to Aesop, or when, in the *Phenomenology*, he speaks of the pantheism of "richer and poorer spirits" and of tranquil, then warring "spiritual atoms" in the context of natural religion.¹⁹ The philosopher's remarks concerning the intimation of the general or abstract principle in the particular trait of animal behavior could be applied equally to

Keats, Rumi, or the *I Jing*, a “this is how things are,” as Hegel says in a phrase worthy of Lucretius, which elevates animal behavior to a level of reflective thought where seriousness mingles with the joke.²⁰ At this point, Hegel happens to be thinking not about Phaedrus or Aesop, but the Goethean version of *Reynard the Fox*.

In explaining why the languages of art and “energy” are not interchangeable the Modernist painter Mark Rothko challenges us to think in art-historical terms about the disparity—one almost certainly involving the response of beholder and reader—between paint on a wall or canvas and words: “Not all the odes of Pindar, framed and embroidered, could duplicate the portrayal by Apelles’ brush of the *Hero of the Palaestra*.”²¹ Rothko’s younger contemporary Frank O’Hara—*inter alia*, an art critic of renown—recuperates the dictum *ut pictura poesis* in an over-the-top promotion of the color orange in “Having a Coke with You.” In “Why I am Not a Painter” he ponders painting’s aesthetic advantages, personalizing the art-critical thesis by slyly wishing he too could be a painter, skewing the aperçu in the direction of a conversational something, invented by him and Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka, called “Personism.” The text proceeds, once again, by way of shared—intimate but not communal—drinking, as if between “bosom *amigos*,” telling us that orange is “terrible,” causing us to infer that autumn and mortality make it so:

...for instance, Mike Goldberg
is starting a painting. I drop in
‘Sit down and have a drink’ he says; we drink. I look
up. ‘You have SARDINES in it.’
‘Yes, it needed something there.’
‘Oh.’...
But me? One day I am thinking of
a color; orange. I write a line
about orange. Pretty soon it is a
whole page of words, not lines.
Then another page. There should be
so much more, not of orange, of
words, of how terrible orange is
and life. Days go by. It is even in
prose. I am a real poet. My poem
is finished and I haven’t mentioned
orange yet. It’s twelve poems, I call
it ORANGES. And one day in a gallery
I see Mike’s painting, called SARDINES.²²

The age-old discussion of the common ground shared by poetry and painting is here downscaled and concretized in terms of a “real life” situation whose interlocutory ironies accumulate the more one reads. “Why I am not a Painter” pivots on Goldberg’s decision to use the linguistic materials and technique of