

# CRITICISM

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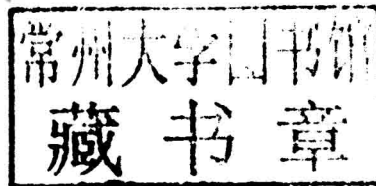
172

# Poetry Criticism

*Criticism of the Works  
of the Most Significant and Widely  
Studied Poets of World Literature*

## Volume 172

*Lawrence J. Trudeau*  
Editor



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## Preface

**P**oetry Criticism (PC) presents significant criticism of the world's greatest poets and provides supplementary biographical and bibliographical material to guide the interested reader to a greater understanding of the genre and its creators. This series was developed in response to suggestions from librarians serving high school, college, and public library patrons, who had noted a considerable number of requests for critical material on poems and poets. Although major poets and literary movements are covered in such Gale Literary Criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (LC)*, and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism (CMLC)*, librarians perceived the need for a series devoted solely to poets and poetry.

### Scope of the Series

PC is designed to serve as an introduction to major poets of all eras and nationalities. Since these authors have inspired a great deal of relevant critical material, PC is necessarily selective, and the editors have chosen the most important published criticism to aid readers and students in their research.

Approximately three to six authors, works, or topics are included in each volume. An author's first entry in the series generally presents a historical survey of the critical response to the author's work; subsequent entries will focus upon contemporary criticism about the author or criticism of an important poem, group of poems, or book. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from critics who do not write in English whose criticism has been translated. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Gale's Literary Criticism Series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a PC volume.

### Organization of the Book

Each PC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the author's name (if applicable).
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises poetry collections, book-length poems, and theoretical works by the author about poetry. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. In the case of authors who do not write in English, an English translation of the title is provided as an aid to the reader; the translation is either a published translated title or a free translation provided by the compiler of the entry. In the case of such authors whose works have been translated into English, the **Principal English Translations** focuses primarily on twentieth-century translations, selecting those works most commonly considered the best by critics.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. All individual titles of poems, poetry collections, and theoretical works about poetry by the

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- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Citations conform to recommendations set forth in the Modern Language Association of America's *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (2009).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** describing each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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# Michael Palmer

## 1943-

(Full name George Michael Palmer) American poet and translator.

### INTRODUCTION

Contemporary experimental poet Michael Palmer is known for work that is at once difficult and evocative—including esoteric references that alienate many readers—and yet evinces a deep pleasure in words, sound, and poetic thought. His poetry has been influenced equally by American twentieth-century avant-garde traditions, including Language poetry (also known as L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E) and the Black Mountain school, both of which focus on the materiality of poetic language, and by the meditative lyric tradition, which centers on the construction of the self and its relationship to others. Palmer's poems bring together cultural, philosophical, and literary references, drawing on the works of Continental philosophers known for their investigations into the structure of language and linguistic reference, the poetry of Robert Duncan and Jack Spicer, children's tales and dances, and contemporary politics and cultural events.

Throughout his career, Palmer has explored the power and danger of poetic language, its relationship to mimesis and affect, its use as a political tool, and its creative potential. He is a frequent contributor to major literary journals and has been included in most anthologies of experimental poetry published since the 1980s, as well as in mainstream anthologies. Translated into more than twenty-five languages, his poetry is well known in Europe. Palmer has collaborated extensively with the Margaret Jenkins Dance Company in San Francisco and has worked on projects with various visual artists and composers. He is also a respected translator of French, Portuguese, and Russian literature.

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Palmer was born on 11 May 1943 in New York City. He studied at private primary and secondary day schools in New York City before attending Harvard University, where he graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in French literature in 1965 and earned a master's in comparative literature in 1967. Between 1964 and 1966, while at Harvard, he edited the journal *Joglars* with Clark Coolidge, who also became an important poet. After leaving Harvard, Palmer spent a year in Europe studying at the University of Florence, returning to the United States in

1969 and settling in San Francisco, where he still lives. He was already acquainted with central members of the vibrant Bay Area poetry scene—including Duncan and Spicer, venerable experimentalists from a slightly earlier generation—and he settled into San Francisco life and poetry quickly. In 1972, he married Cathy Simon. They have one daughter, Sarah, who regularly appears in Palmer's poems. He has taken on visiting professorships at universities including the University of Iowa, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of California at San Diego, Brown University, and the University of Chicago, but unlike many poets of his generation, he has generally remained outside of the academic world, preferring to immerse himself in writing and writers and in the culture of the Bay Area. Instead of pursuing teaching as a primary career, Palmer has supported himself through his work as a translator.

Palmer has published more than twenty full-length volumes and chapbooks since the 1970s. His awards and fellowships include a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship (1975), a John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Memorial fellowship (1989), a Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund Award (1992-94), a Shelley Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America (2001), and a Wallace Stevens Award from the Academy of American Poets (2006). He has also received two grants from the Literature Program at the National Endowment for the Arts and was elected a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. *Company of Moths* (2005) was shortlisted for the Griffin Poetry Prize.

### MAJOR POETIC WORKS

Rife with puns and wordplay, tightly wrought and self-referential, and woven around allusions to and quotations from philosophers and critical theorists as well as other poets, Palmer's work is often described as difficult, resistant to both reading and to the experience of pleasure. For some critics, such difficulty is a criticism. For others and for the poet himself, it is simply the end result of his grappling with the difficult poetic and philosophical issues of his time. Palmer's central concerns include the construction of the self; language's relationship to the speaker, to the world it describes, and to abstract truth; the relationship among writer, poem, and reader; and the role of the poet in times of strife. For Palmer, the elasticity of experimental poetry and the demands it places on the reader make it an ideal form in which to explore these questions.

Palmer's poems frequently focus on the failure of language to communicate. In his "French for April Fools," from *First Figure* (1984), the speaker observes, "Once I could not tell of it / and now I cannot speak at all." But Palmer also obsessively returns to the idea that the self can be expressed and that communication is possible through language. His early work showcases investigations into basic semiotic theory, drawing attention to the materiality of the page and the word. In *Blake's Newton* (1972), the poet uses repeated deictics (words such as *we*, *you*, and *here* that specify identity or location in a conversation) to emphasize the way language straddles the real and the abstract, to demonstrate the importance of context and reference, and to engage with the difference between physical space, mental space, and the space of the page. In "This Is a Room," the deictic *this* illustrates these properties:

This is a room.  
Give me this and  
this. This  
book ends some  
time when it ends and  
this is a room.

As his career progressed, Palmer's investigations into linguistic structure, effect, and the role of the reader became more complex and more artistically compelling. *Notes for Echo Lake* (1981), sometimes described as the first volume Palmer conceived as a coherent whole, is both less abstract and more imaginative than his earlier work, evincing a new concern with the affective power of language. The characters Echo and Narcissus, drawn from the mythology of the Roman poet Ovid, recur throughout as models of poetic discourse and its relation to unfulfilled desire, sexual love, and violence, thus indicating the higher stakes of this enquiry. Like *Notes for Echo Lake*, *First Figure*—the book that introduced Palmer to a wider audience—focuses on the affective or phenomenological aspects of language as well as the semiotic. Expressing an increased sense of both hope and despair, its poems, including "First Figure," frequently end in the discovery, full of pathos, that all has been said before:

watery gates  
have already told everything  
needing to be known  
and the sentence is there  
free at last to occur  
in some other direction.

With *Sun* (1988), Palmer broadened his reputation with a turn toward a more political and socially engaged poetry that balances pleasure against the realities of the modern world. In these poems, he swings toward the realm of conscience, uneasy about the pleasures of poetry and worried that such pleasure might detract from the importance of speaking out about social inequality and atrocity. The poems in *Sun* register a consciousness of the increased role of the media in our awareness of foreign and domestic atrocity and political violence: what we have, Palmer implies, is not an experience of events but an experience of

the images of and descriptions of events. In "Short Walks," the narrator observes, "What matters is elsewhere, is other fires, with words streaming from faces before those fires. Actual words elsewhere. Objects elsewhere and the words to revive them." In the highly praised collection *At Passages* (1995), Palmer's skepticism is tempered by the hope—or, at least, the hint—of a possibility that there does exist an eternal wellspring of poetic or sacred knowledge, as articulated in "Untitled (September '92)":

Is it that a fire  
once thought long extinguished  
continues to burn  
  
deep within the ground,  
a fire finally acknowledged  
as impossible to put out,  
and that plumes of flame and smoke  
  
will surface at random  
enlacing the perfect symmetries  
of the Museum of the People  
and the Palace of the Book . . .

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

Palmer's reputation has continued to grow in the twenty-first century. *Company of Moths and Thread* (2011) were reviewed positively in major newspapers and periodicals, as well as online, as in Patrick Pritchett's 2011 assessment of *Thread* for *Jacket2* (see Further Reading), and praised by his poetic contemporaries. He has received considerable attention from scholars who specialize in avant-garde poetry, modernist and postmodernist poetry and the inheritors of those traditions, and critical theory. As Palmer (1981; see Further Reading) explained in an essay about identity and forms of autobiographical writing, supposedly transparent genres such as memoir or confessional poetry frequently use the screen of honesty to conceal. Poetry, on the other hand, by "foregrounding the inherent complexities and complex possibilities of discourse," forces the reader to engage actively with the text and recognize that there is no simple truth. Although Palmer is known for holding himself a little apart—he admits to friendships with poets but not to actual influence—readers have frequently assessed his work in relation to other poetic movements, both current and past.

Norman Finkelstein (1988) argued that Palmer's work enacts a struggle between his two major influences, Duncan and Spicer, expressing both Duncan's belief in "cabalistic 'orders' of language" and Spicer's focus on semantic discontinuity and uncertainty. This conflict, Finkelstein found, makes Palmer at once important and timely and "almost entirely unreadable." Robert Kaufman (2005; see Further Reading) described Palmer's work as exemplary of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century experimental lyric, which simultaneously pushes language toward the conceptual, or mimetic, and the affective, or lyric. David Arnold,



in his 2007 essay "Michael Palmer's Poetics of Witness," characterized Palmer's work as "oppositional" to the dominant culture, or "negative." He cited examples of the poet's use of "active objectification" to construct a self that resists universal or official narratives, such as the US government's version of events in the Gulf War. In another 2007 essay "Williams without Words: A Dialogue with Michael Palmer," Arnold maintained that both William Carlos Williams and Palmer deployed negativity to protect language from the charge of rootlessness. Robert von Hallberg (2005) identified Palmer as a practitioner of what French scholar Roger Caillois termed "lyrical thinking," which, von Hallberg contends, is used to "lead consciousness toward . . . ideas of order and coherence."

Jenny Ludwig

## PRINCIPAL WORKS

### Poetry

*Plan of the City of O.* Boston: Barn Dream, 1971.

\**Blake's Newton.* Los Angeles: Black Sparrow, 1972.

*C's Songs.* Berkeley: Sand Dollar, 1973.

*Six Poems.* Los Angeles: Black Sparrow, 1973.

*The Circular Gates.* Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow, 1974.

*Without Music.* Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow, 1977.

*Alogon.* Berkeley: Tuumba, 1980.

*Notes for Echo Lake.* Berkeley: North Point, 1981.

†*First Figure.* San Francisco: North Point, 1984. (Poetry and radio plays)

‡*Sun.* San Francisco: North Point, 1988.

*An Alphabet Underground: Poems = Underjordisk alfabet: Digte.* Trans. Poul Borum. Viborg: After Hand, 1993.

§*At Passages.* New York: New Directions, 1995.

*The Lion Bridge: Selected Poems, 1972-1995.* New York: New Directions, 1998.

*The Promises of Glass.* New York: New Directions, 2000.

*Cadenciando-um-ning, um samba, para o outro: Poemas, traduções, diálogos* [may be translated as *Harmonizing a Samba for Each Other: Poems, Translations, Dialogs*]. With Régis Bonvicino. Cotia: Ateliê, 2001.

*Codes Appearing: Poems, 1979-1988.* New York: New Directions, 2001.

*Company of Moths.* New York: New Directions, 2005.

*Truths of Stone = Waarheden van steen.* With Jan Lauwe-reyns. Trans. Tom Van de Voorde. Gent: Druksel, 2010.

*Thread.* New York: New Directions, 2011.

*The Laughter of the Sphinx.* New York: New Directions, 2015. Forthcoming.

### Other Major Works

*Relativity of Spring: 13 Poems.* Trans. Michael Palmer and Geoffrey Young from *Automne régulier* and *Tout à coup*, by Vicente Huidobro. Berkeley: Sand Dollar, 1976. (Poetry)

*Idem 1-4.* KQED, San Francisco, 1980. (Radio plays)

*Code of Signals: Recent Writings in Poetics.* Ed. Palmer. Berkeley: North Atlantic, 1983. (Essays)

*Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000.* Trans. Palmer from *Jonas qui aura 25 ans en l'an 2000*, by John Berger and Alain Tanner. Berkeley: North Atlantic, 1983. (Screenplay)

*Blue Vitriol.* By Aleksei Parshchikov. Trans. Palmer, John High, and Michael Molnar. Pennngrove: Avec, 1994. (Poetry)

*Theory of Tables.* Trans. Palmer from *Théorie des tables*, by Emmanuel Hocquard. Providence: O-blek, 1994. (Poetry)

*Nothing the Sun Could Not Explain: 20 Contemporary Brazilian Poets.* Ed. Palmer, Bonvicino, and Nelson Ascher. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1997. (Poetry)

*The Danish Notebook.* Pennngrove: Avec, 1999. (Memoir)

*Active Boundaries: Selected Essays and Talks.* New York: New Directions, 2008. (Essays and lectures)

\*Includes the poem "This Is a Room."

†Includes the poems "First Figure" and "French for April Fools" and the radio plays *Idem 1-4*.

‡Includes the poems "Sun" and "Short Walks."

§Includes the poem "Untitled (September '92)" and the poetic sequences "Seven Poems within a Matrix for War" and "Six Hermetic Songs."

## CRITICISM

### Herman Rapaport (essay date 1987)

SOURCE: Rapaport, Herman. "Signs and Effigies: Michael Palmer's 'Notes for Echo Lake.'" *NDQ: North Dakota Quarterly* 55.4 (1987): 286-300. Print.

[In the following essay, Rapaport discusses the nature of Palmer's postmodern poetry, focusing in particular on how he elicits suggestions rather than separate thoughts by assimilating moods, ideas, and events into "apperceptions" that often "dissolve or dematerialize at the moment of their becoming concrete." In this way, Rapaport contends, Palmer brings to awareness perceptions that may have only been intuitions on the threshold of becoming ideas.]

For many readers acquainted with recent developments in criticism and theory, Michael Palmer is certainly one of today's most interesting American poets. A serious rival to figures like Ammons and Ashbery, he too is gifted in the "long poem" and extends the limits of poetry in a postmodern direction whose challenges demand both enormous lyrical intensity and intellectual rigor. Unlike poets under the impression that postmodern poetry is the construction of numerous counter-factual statements which become significant, mainly, as sound textures or bizarre logical constructions supposedly going "beyond" language, Palmer, in a work such as **"Notes for Echo Lake,"** establishes a reflective mode of writing which is highly attenuated, not to say abstractly resonant, though such writing at the same time functions as a mode of intensive philosophical speculation. **"Notes for Echo Lake"**—the title poem of a volume by that name—can be read as a long meditation or understood as a series of twelve separate poems. However, as a series of separate poems dispersed throughout the volume, they are perceived both as subordinated to the book as a whole, even while there is an alternative view which suggests the entirety of the volume falls within the context of these **"Notes."** In this sense, Palmer is close to the deconstructive understanding of the differences between the outsides and insides of a text that has its basis, perhaps, in Mallarmé's notion of poetry in folds.

Although written under a certain erasure, **"Notes for Echo Lake"** establishes the sense that thoughts, reflections, and perceptions are being gathered, recollected, and sustained. What is extraordinary in **"Notes for Echo Lake"** is the capacity for resonance in the eliciting of evanescent suggestions that occur not so much as separate thoughts, but as the assimilation of moods, ideas, and events into apperceptions which anticipate constructions that dissolve or dematerialize at the moment of their becoming concrete. Palmer's work is evocative in the phenomenological sense of bringing to awareness those "protentional" and "retentional" aspects of perception in which intuitions only on the threshold of becoming ideas or impressions develop an identity through time even as these intuitive constructions are themselves subject to disintegration. This occurs in the "protentional" act of intuition when an impression is not yet constituted as a unity of integrated parts, as well as in the "retentional" act of recollection in which forgetting and lassitude contribute to an aphanasis or fading of the impression. Without doubt, Palmer's ability to suggest extremely delicate anticipatory and recollective moments of consciousness which have the capacity to evoke and elide concrete apperceptions of the world and the states of awareness in which this world is apprehended requires a handling of language that is somewhat foreign to the modernist tradition. **"Notes for Echo Lake"** does not appear to be concerned with outlining arguments, statements, or concepts, however fragmented or internally violent, but allows for the recollection and disintegration of intuitive apperceptions, hence leaving behind a poetic trace work.

However phenomenological, **"Notes for Echo Lake"** also reflects the assimilation of the objectivist poetics of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky, though Palmer has by way of West Coast poets such as Barrett Watten and Bob Perelman assimilated this orientation within a deconstructive and semiotic context. Some might best view his work as belonging to the recent "language poetry" movement, and, no doubt, there is much in a text like *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, edited by Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein, which would suggest that Palmer shares in the theoretical concerns of these writers. Yet, Palmer differs from "language poetry" in not having altogether abandoned the posture of writing a long reflective and meditative poem; moreover, Palmer's poetry addresses questions of language and consciousness, avoiding the structuralist emphasis expressed by Charles Bernstein when he writes,

The distortion is to imagine that knowledge has an "object" outside of the language of which it is a part ... Rather, we are initiated by language into the world through the terms and meanings that come into play. ...<sup>1</sup>

Although Bernstein's comments directly reflect the ideas of structuralists like Ferdinand de Saussure or Emile Benveniste, they radicalize structuralism to the extent that they develop a semiotics in which *everything* is functioning at the level of the signifier. This allows Bernstein to bring contemporary French theory into proximity with American objectivism so that the "sign" as an "object" in whose relation to other signs or objects meaning is engendered is not something signified that transcends these sign-objects but the materialism of the text itself.

Palmer, of course, appreciates the opacity and density of the signifier, and yet he is much more open to a Mallarmean poetic—an opacity of the text that remains very resonant, elusive, and anything but merely concrete, though at times even "objective," for all that. Nick Piombino, who is also part of the "language" movement, touches more directly on a poetics such as Palmer's when he writes,

The words prophesy their return in other spheres of experience. They are repeated as a mirror reproduces a silent effigy of an object and as one harmonic liberates and proliferates its possible modulations.<sup>2</sup>

This statement describes a poetry that instead of making up narratives is more interested in how words, however opaque in their presentations, prophesy their return in other experiential modes, in how the return of a word in a new context at once connects and ruptures moments of conscious apperception. Palmer's title, **"Notes for Echo Lake,"** suggests that words will echo or resonate, that however objectivized they may at first appear, they will be carried over and made to affect disjunct experiences and thereby problematize context, that aspect of discourse which serves to bring into an overall relation individual linguistic moments. But this carrying over occurs only because individual words have resonance and are repeated as mirrors reflect effigies of objects. Piombino's description is

apt, in this case, because the mirrors not only distort by reversal the object they reflect, even as they repeat it, but because the objects reproduced are always already effigies, mock-ups. Whereas Bernstein's interest moves towards concretization or a filling in of the sign, Piombino's interest concerns reflection and a hollowing out of the sign, for the effigy, clearly, is that which in reproducing an object, represents it as hollow, vacuous, or surfacy. Palmer's notes and echoes are themselves a hollowing out of the sign whose surface remains opaque and obdurate. Palmer's success is largely in having achieved a relationship between an extremely objectivized apperception of the sign and its resonance—as effigy, reflection, or overtone. In this sense Palmer's poetry facilitates a semiotic understanding of the phenomenological experience, that is to say, an account of the sign in terms of its role when consciousness engages in “protentional” and “retentional” modes of reflection whose sense of objectivity or of “world” is established in the moments of its dissolution, or, as one might say in semiotic terms, the emptying of signs. It is here that **“Notes for Echo Lake”** becomes important for the phenomenologist who wishes to pursue a semiotic understanding of intuition.

In the comments on Palmer's **“Notes”** that follow, I would like to avoid turning a theoretical approach into the story that Palmer's text itself has not tried to tell. However, it has to be said that criticism can never be fully successful in such an aim, first because criticism requires the isolation of a topic to be developed by way of argument, and second because criticism will necessarily appropriate elements of a work into its own network of objectified relationships. Still, I have tried to resist reducing **“Notes for Echo Lake”** to a general theory by isolating a specific feature—the emptying of the sign—that is part of a much larger problematic: the establishment in poetry of perceptual horizons of awareness whose “concretizations” (to borrow a word from Roman Ingarden) are surprisingly evanescent. That Palmer is able to write a poem that performs this evanescence of apperception in the very establishment of the perceptible has the consequence of an unusual orientation to narrative, since it necessarily declines the power of reference over the relation between signifiers and signifieds, in phenomenological terms, declines the mimetic in favor of the semiotic. That Palmer's poetry does not abandon a phenomenology of perception makes this turn to the semiotic especially interesting, since it thereby avoids a structuralist reductionism.

\* \* \*

#### NOTES - 1

Sign that empties ... That is *he* would ask *her*. He would be the asker and the unlistening, nameless mountains in the background partly hidden by cloud.<sup>3</sup>

Material but semiotic, the words hollow; attentive but unlistening, the “she” withdraws. Nameless mountains in the

background are partly hidden by cloud, as if to juxtapose “her” materiality or thereness with “her” retreat from the scene of asking, from the threshold of communication or transmission. This he and this she are effigies of hes and shes, reflecting upon the self-emptying of the sign, its necessary withdrawal in the process of conceiving, of writing down. The sign empties in the wake of asking, of a he that “would” ask a her, and the asking or transmission of the message, whatever it may be, fades or dissipates in the emptying of signs, their hollowing out, or pouring out: into effigies, mock ups, fakes, simulacra. In the space between the she and the mountains opacity occurs, the clouds set in, themselves ephemeral yet substance-like, effigies for the rock that is shrouded. Clearly, the objecthood of the mountain and the hollowness of signs concern one another.

Yet what is this “concern” of the sign? What does it mean in terms of consciousness of ...?

Sign that empties itself as each instance of meaning, and how else to reinvent attention.

These words from **“Notes for Echo Lake 1”** address a relation established in an excavation of the sign where attention bearing on being and non-being becomes noticeable, an attention held together by the “figure,” the husk of the sign.

And he sees himself now as the one motionless on the ground, now as the one bending over. Lying in an alley between a house and a fence (space barely wide enough for a body), opening his eyes he saw stars and heard white noise followed in time by a face and a single voice.

Now rain is falling against the south side of the house but not the north where she stands before a mirror.

“Don’t worry about it, he’s already dead.”

*Te dérange pas, il est déjà mort.*

*È morto lui, non ti disturba.*

Palmer relates excavation of the sign to the death of an other and considers the meaning of language largely in terms of the interring of the corpse in its alley between the house and the fence. Is “he” really dead, or does “she” just wish it, standing before the mirror? Is he ever anything but an effigy, in any case? And these translations from language to language, are they effigies, too, hollowing themselves out as they mechanically repeat? It is as if in these echoed transferences, these rubbings between English, French, and Italian that death occurs, that the alley is opened up by the furrows that language leaves in the blanks on the pages. Is he always already dead? Because the sign is always already hollowed out? Is the sign, like him, but an effigy of the death in which it participates because it is what it is: semiotic tomb, coffin, grave? Standing before the mirror, there is an opening up within the interplay of reflections, an embedding or engraving of signs signifying a concern whose mark is only appropriate as the death of signs, necropolis of the sigla.