

TED BYRNE: The Arena of the Invisible

The previous collection of letters between Charles Olson and Frances Motz Boldereff¹ actually ended on a note of *incompletion*, Boldereff's report of a sexual encounter with "a beautiful young negro," which had its intended effect—the book ends with Olson telegraphing his time of arrival. In this volume, the climax again occurs when she tells him that she has found someone else, "someone even more Maximus than yourself." This provokes a response that, on its own, should have compelled the publication of a single volume in the first place. "I am Maximus" he cries, in a tragicomic moment like that of Hamlet at Ophelia's grave, shouting "This is I, Hamlet the Dane." The intensity of this letter comes partly from its colloquial but uncontrived diction—it brings us into the presence of Olson's anger and confusion, as Boldereff must have felt and perversely enjoyed it. He cuts her to the quick of her intellectual existence, accusing her of misappropriating men's words: ". . . you are absolutely unwilling yourself, & in your life to take the risk of the very act of the men you have spent your life using the words of . . ." Sharon Thesen, in her introduction, says that Olson characterizes Boldereff as "electing male writers to *ventriloquize* her feminist and vitalist life philosophy." This is actually a little smarter than what Olson says, as it acknowledges that Boldereff, while appearing to serve her pantheon of "great men," puts them into her service.

This book is not the fiery Olson workshop of the previous volume. Boldereff here enters the period of her own working, beginning with her manifesto *Credo in Unam*. Printed here almost in full, *Credo in Unam* is an argument for her own lamentable ideas presented as a gloss and translation of a poem Rimbaud wrote at the age of fifteen. I hesitate to call *Credo in Unam* a feminist tract, but it is a manifesto, like her earlier pamphlet *A Primer of Morals for Medea*. It is a call for a new woman, a woman who is strong, independent, sexually liberated, and within whose ambit man can find his own maturity, as they enter the new age together: "She is neither to be ahead nor behind nor enclosed of man." But, at the same time, man's works are "visible and concrete," whereas woman "works in the arena of the invisible."

1 Charles Olson and Frances Boldereff: *A Modern Correspondence*. Ed. Ralph Maud and Sharon Thesen. Wesleyan, 1999.

The next decade is the decade of her monumental work on Joyce, elected to replace or incorporate the previous harbingers of the new Minoa. In all, she writes and publishes six books on *Finnegans Wake*. These are self-published, but self-published by a master designer/printer. She refers to her Joyce books as Baedekers to *Finnegans Wake*, and there is no other way to read them than alongside Joyce. They are assemblages, made up of equal parts encyclopaedic dictionary, “translation,” and a pastiche of lengthy citations from Joyce’s sources, or from contemporary scholars like Frances Yeats and Henri Frankfort. But she is also constructing an argument, and there are passages of pure Motz (as Olson might say) that fasten together the whole—small “mamafestas” like “Point of Order” in Reading *Finnegans Wake*. These books are not academic. They get overlooked in the mainstream Joyce industry, which she detested (“stupid professional twaddle”). There are also unscholarly moments of whimsy and personal expression: Joyce is “adorable”—“Yeh Joyce!”, “Neat thrust!” She, “the Reader,” is Joyce’s daughter. Her father wrote her a letter, within the body of *Finnegans Wake*, a letter in response to a letter she wrote long ago, did not address, and believed lost. His letter addresses itself to anyone who may find it.

Boldereff’s books are strange but not delirious. Her work on Joyce is substantial. She takes a thread—Irish history, Bruno, *The Four Zoas*, Berkeley—and traces it, archaeologically uncovering small treasures, geologically laying bare whole strata, working out patterns and then laboriously displaying the evidence across the entire text. She realizes that she may be fabulating. There’s a moment in the letters where she is devastated by her reading of Joyce’s notes for *Exiles*. “He seems to be dreaming of the ‘eternal’ feminine in a way which makes me ill all over.” She says that she may “have been reading more Motz than Joyce in *Finnegans Wake*.” This self-consciousness is repeated within the text of *Hermes to His Son Thoth*, where she observes that she is “running the danger of overreading Bruno in Joyce.” But at the end of the day, having spent some time with two of these books, I agree with her when she says, “I know what there is and I know the future has to employ what I have done . . . ”

After Completion: The Later Letters of Charles Olson and Frances Boldereff. Ed. Sharon Thesen and Ralph Maud. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2014.

**MICHAEL TURNER: Ceci n'est pas une pipeline (in memory of
Kathleen Gough Aberle, 1925–1990)**

this is not a pipeline but a picture from a press release left behind by an employee of the university who would never define herself as such but, in this instance, as a faculty member exploring the outer reaches her position inspires, its freedoms, as others had years before when university governors undertook a more radical act than that of faculty when they forced certain administrators to dismiss certain faculty for not crossing picket lines drawn in protest of earlier dismissals, we have learned, like the unplanted ivy, the brutal concrete walls of this East-meets-West architectural thought fortress, the idea of this place, we have learned, from which minds bend and sweat beads over Petrie dishes, poems, numbers and their symbols (equality, inequality, plus, minus, times, division), bodies broken at right angles, lost in concentration, eventually getting to their feet to move quickly through doors and down hallways, over concourses, conscious not to appear under the influence of the latest unsolved problem, awaiting the next glass window to practice a smile before stopping to share it, or sometimes not stopping but to nod one, dripping down the slopes of this Olympus, as information, this Bundt cake, as icing, not a hole up top but a void space staged, a place of imagination, we have learned, where what appears as a picture is not unrelated to the material consequences that result from it, as thought put into action, practice, praxis-praxis-praxis goes the engine of her car as she climbed the mountain earlier that day, an older wreck she cannot afford yet continues to pay for, turning the corner as she had the day before, and the days before that, the architectural tableau no longer an open-armed greeting but, in its expansion, its occlusion, this mill she contributes to as a labourer, she argues in a committee meeting dominated by those who prefer the ostensibly effortless entrepreneur, designations that should correspond to class but align more accurately to gender, he says: Think of your children before you go getting arrested, to which she replies: I am, and yours too, and she does, driven down the mountain in a van purchased with the help of her taxes, calculating the cost of the van versus the cheque she wrote for her last return, side by side with others, facing each other, hands behind their backs as someone hums a Wobbly song and another wonders, You're too young to know that, a song that borrows its melody from a long forgotten popular song erased by a lyric that carries with it a critique of its source, the

picture of their arrest already in circulation, clicked on, exported, re-posted, doing the work that pictures do, rooted as they are in actions, gestures, consequences, beliefs . . .

This piece was read at The No-Way Cabaret: Legal Benefit and Spirit Raiser for Burnaby Mountain Land Defenders held at UNIT/PITT Projects on December 15, 2014

A RAWLINGS: Physique, Drain

A recent addition to Reykjavík's cultural offerings, Týsgallerí's two rooms are protected by a neon-orange door that grabs every eye on Óðinsgata—Odin's Street, a side street with stops at chic Snaps Restaurant and hip café C Is for Cookie. The gallery touts local, emerging, and mid-career contemporary artists. It's a mecca for most-new and best-fresh in the scene. I attend every opening I can, each an opportunity for generative work that generates discussion.

Bryndís Hrönn Ragnarsdóttir opened her exhibition "Holning / Physique" during the Reykjavík Arts Festival in May 2015. "Holning / Physique" fills the petit first room of the gallery with a dervish of white paint, the paint marks indicative of lipstick-prints from labia lips, white cream or cum, lubrication for entrance. Gypsum board printed with factory-proof sideways k's cover the walls; pencil and paint marked these. Bryndís had performed two experiments that tattooed the space with evidence of her body.

First, Bryndís penciled the shape of her hand, then her shadow through the long early-summer sunlight that entered the gallery after dinner. Half-human, hurried sketches. Repeated, to catch the shadow as it crawled across the wall.

Second, she held steel slings which swung as she danced, metal sinking into gypsum with each body/wall collision. Through authentic movement, the metal became an arm-extension impacting the covered walls. In an effort to cover the violence, to heal and to repair the walls, Bryndís then spackled each collision-indent with white filler. The resultant white splotches scattered throughout the gallery room proved Bryndís' dance had extensive, multidirectional force. Her body, present through energy, kissed and blessed every surface of the gallery room.

Beyond Bryndís' physical traces of her brief gallery habitation, an open gallery door provides passage to a second room. Here, Kari Ósk Grétudóttir opens her exhibition

“Hvirfill / Drain” as a knee-high watercolour print installation stretching along the room’s street-side wall. “Hvirfill / Drain” argues for directional continuation. Motion. A game.

How do cycles sustain? The cyclic flow urges in one direction. We don’t die, live, and then birth. Or, if we conceptualize our existence in this way, we reverse so wholly an assumed, ingrained system that we must reconsider our architected perception. Birthed into the system, we understand it before we understand how to voice our understanding. We inherit the directional continuation.

Kari’s paintings figure. Fluid in/out of a metal corner. Air in/through net, mesh. The spaces in/visible between a pile of stones. Space around what flows. A stone a longevity whorl a cycle passed through the small box of a world game.

As with any visit to Týsgallerí, my brain whirls with the generative. I want to write, to think, to think through. Kari and I take coffee. We flow through shadow, trace, frame. We inhale. Of the actions and space, she murmurs, “It was like when the world had more oxygen, with the neanderthals.”

MELIZ ERGIN: “‘Poison in Lemon, Carbon and Monoxide in My Chest’: Elif Sofya’s *Dik Âlâ*”

The contemporary Turkish poetry scene is spearheaded by a cohort of innovative women poets. One distinct voice is Elif Sofya, whose third book of poems, *Dik Âlâ*, came out in 2014. Inspired by a muse that “smells of slaughterhouse and gunpowder,” Sofya’s poems are feisty and confrontational. Dedicated to her mother, an animal rights activist, *Dik Âlâ* is an exposé of civilization gone wrong. It unveils various forms of violence inflicted on both the human and the nonhuman through rapid urbanization, devastation of natural resources, speciesism, political oppression, state violence, and the limitations of a conformist, anesthetized grammar.

The book consists of six sections, each introduced by a drawing by Anita Sezgener, another Turkish poet and the editor of *CIN AYSE*, a feminist culture-art-literature fanzine. The drawings, which resemble humans, animals, and humanimals, foreshadow both the abundance of animals in the book and the posthumanist transformation underlying Sofya’s poems (“Take a good look at me, I / will then become an animal”). Animals enter her poems as witnesses to a number of interwoven ecological

and political problems, much like the poet who intends to spend a tranquil evening by the water with “river filling up my mouth” only to end up tasting “hydroelectrified waters.”

In a feral language that allows no room for the melodramatic personal lyric, Sofya writes from within the permeable and often violated boundary between the natural and the socio-political. Her poems are permeated by various birds, some chirping beautifully, some falling dead from the trees, others traversing mine fields, contesting the exclusively human history we write for ourselves: “weeding out land-mines and borders from the soil / birds besiege military barracks / . . . as they depart burying the wind under their wings / they know / there exists none but the human / in that tired old refrain called history.”

Dik Âlâ is marked by an absence of spatial and temporal references, which collapses any definitive geographical-historical context. Although Sofya hardly makes any explicit reference to specific socio-political events, the reader can trace a systematic demolition of the existing political order and the language it appropriates: “I choose a slice of history / that horses jump over / When a state maquette is smashed / The skeleton of this poem is constructed.” One exception is the poem titled “Ali Ismail,” the name of a young man who was killed during Gezi protests in 2013. The poem is an elegy as well as an urgent call to all of us who “are dying fast / dying like you just as much as you.”

Sofya’s poetics poignantly addresses the fractures within modern society and demands accountability from those who claim mastery over both the human and the nonhuman through a politics of naming (“You had already begun to suffocate me / . . . when you slowly gave me a name”). *Dik Âlâ* is a longing for silence in part to the detrimental language of politics emerging out of “a bloody mouth history,” and in part to the deafening noise of industrial machines and highways.

Elif Sofya. *Dik Âlâ*. Istanbul: Yapi Kredi Yayinlari, 2014.