5-2002

Bern Porter International: Volume 6 Number 9 (May 1, 2002)

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Recommended Citation
Porter, Bern; Holtz, Sheila; and Bernstein, Natasha, "Bern Porter International: Volume 6 Number 9 (May 1, 2002)" (2002). Newsletters. 55.
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I live the life of ashes.
I eat dust.
I shall hold converse
with the disk
Togethet they will set
the terror of me
In the thick darkness,
on the side of
the goddess
by the side of her forehead.

I have come equipped
(better equipped
than all others)
I am told that the present work came about when Roger Jackson sent Bern eleven pin-up pictures and asked him to write some text to go with them. What Bern did was to glue a single seemingly randomly selected piece of text or image onto each sheet of paper with a pin-up. The materials he selected (by use of the word “selected” I’m suggesting the choices were NOT purely random) have little intrinsic visual or literary interest in and of themselves. And, given the minimalist, blunt nature of his gesture, it is impossible to consider these pieces as collage.

What they are, more than anything else, is text, and specifically, poems, in a narrative series. They are text or poems because they have a unifying theme (pin-ups juxtaposed with a bland piece of printed matter), and because that theme includes meaning which can be apprehended and considered both intellectually and intuitively or emotionally. In other words, these pieces can be READ (both individually and as a series). In fact, reading (and by reading I mean looking at them linearly, in sequence, as one reads text) is really the only way that such work can be appreciated: as visual art or collage it is flat and prosaic (like text!). Reading it, however, leads one to ponder and feel the nature of problems of human desire, of beauty, of mortality, and of the interaction between desire (or love) and society and culture. . . .

John M. Bennett
Curator, Avant Writing Collection
The Ohio State University Libraries
Columbus, Ohio

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BEHIND THE BURQAA

In my house
we sit together
separate chairs
male and female.
You hold forth with animated gestures
having drunk considerable.
The black lace shawl
around my shoulders
becomes an object of interest
to my absent fingers.
I've had a few, myself.
I am not really paying attention.
This is America, after the war.
I draw the shawl across my chest
down over my knees.
I start to feel a little safer.
Are you talking about politics?
or work? Or football?
I am not really sure.

I pull up the lace
to frame my face
to cover my hair
I feel like a nun
a saint
Teresa of Avilla
pierced by the arrow
of ecstasy
Or Rab'ai, the Sufi
who threatened to burn down heaven
with a torch
and extinguish hell
with a bucket of water
so people would live only in the here and now
and learn to love.

Imagine.

Your language lapses into litany
then into a prose poem
which I can only vaguely comprehend:
Afghanistan
and Vietnam.
Afghanistan and Vietnam...
Till now I hadn't noticed how they almost rhyme,
These words, these syllables, these phonemes.
I take another sip.
You seem to be receding as

I pull the veil
I pull the veil
I pull the veil
and just like that
everything changes.
I do not exist
you cannot see me
I am invisible
you cannot see me

you do not seem
the palpable shi
but I do

The veil is made
and black
I feel, at first
more the Sicilian
than Afghani mul
but now I know
I feel
what before
I did not
Withdrawing into a veil
freed from your gaze.
I can for the first time
my own true face
Behind this curtain
I can be
who I am and not who I think
for you
for others
for your brothers
or myself

I can be who I am
Behind this Veil
I can feel my face
already it is changed
already it is changed.

The shift is tangible
the space has changed
in the room
in my aware
The air between us
with a new pulsation.
(You do not seem to notice)

From the moment of our paths diverged
This veil has changed me
I can never take it
Now that I know what real freedom feels like
I will never take it off.

I will never wear the veil of my American face again.
I will never take it off to wear the veil of my old face again.

I will not wear the veil that I put on on my first day of school
on my first date
on my graduation day
on my wedding day

The veil I learnt to wear on my first job
at family reunions
in bars
at parties
in the supermarket
in the subway
in therapy
is now a shreded and discarded cloth

Behind my new veil behind this black and lacy curtain another face is forming its contours are as yet unknown to me but now each day the shape grows clearer

The moment of the falling of the veil stands as a beginning This moment when I first learned I have another face a real face, a true face the face of what I really feel That moment and this face will guide me now.

Behind the burqa I am strong and silent
Behind the burqa I am beautiful
Behind the burqa I am free
In these final years of his life it became clear to Nerval's friends that his eccentricities, once so light-hearted, had become a serious mental disorder.

He paraded the gardens of the Palais-Royal with a lobster on a pale blue ribbon and, when asked why he did this, he replied that he preferred lobsters to dogs or cats because they could not bark at you and, moreover, they knew the secrets of the deep.
HELP WANTED:

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3/1/02
I was on a game show with Marwan for gay couples. The game show host was this sexy nerd who was a cross between Paul Blackburn and Jerry Lewis. It was funny because Marwan and I were the only couple NOT arguing in fact we laughed like we used to. The audience thought we were stoned. Everything the game show host asked made us BOTH think of flowers beautiful and blooming. Marwan pulled this tight-budded daisy from nowhere he whispered to it till it slowly opened to the Oooh and Aaah of us all.

3/2/02
roll the window up no roll the window back down
feel this

"Every man’s own reason must be his oracle."
--Thomas Jefferson, letter to Benjamin Rush, March 1813

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