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I live the life of ashes.
I eat dust.
I have come equipped
(better equipped
than all others)
YING YANG

by Bern Porter

Introduction by
John M. Bennett

YING YANG
LOOKS LIKE ART BUT IT'S LIT
(From the Introduction to Bern Porter’s YING YANG)

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

YING YANG by Bern Porter, published in two editions, is now ready for shipping

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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
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 mulu.
but now I know
I feel
what before
I did not
Withdrawing into
veiled from your
freed from your
I can for the first
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 aura.
The air between us
with a new pulsation.
(You do not seem to

From the moment of
our paths diverged.
This veil has changed.
I can never take it...
over my face
over my face
over my face

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 shredded 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

If you really attain the state of silence, you have attained God.
--Swami Muktananda

Sheila Holtz
12-21-01
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.

January 25, 1855

GÉRARD DE NERVAL

In the garden 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 look at you and more over, they knew the secrets of the deep.
HELP WANTED:

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Belfast, ME 04915 USA
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.

3/1/02
The game show host asked us BOTH to 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 all of us.

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

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"Every man's own reason must be his oracle."

--Thomas Jefferson, letter to Benjamin Rush, March 1813

For information call Cal Clark at 588-0347

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