



//////////PRINT // DOCUMENT SERIES 3 :: OF SYSTEMS OF

neptune court

anton yakovlev



the trouble with bartleby
in collaboration with
the operating system





THE OPERATING SYSTEM PRINT//DOCUMENT

neptune court

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advance praise for NEPTUNE COURT:

If one of the delights of poetry is the way it provides the reader access to a mind as different from his own as the landscape of another planet, then Neptune Court is an invitation not to be missed. The situations Anton Yakovlev responds to in these poems are the universal ones that face us all on the border between solitude and the risks of engagement: love overvalued and undervalued, lost, mourned, reimagined, counted on too heavily, longed for, mythologized, consciously transformed into the stuff of art, examined in the mirror of another's experience. What is different—indeed, unique—is the phantasmagorical imagery deployed to tell the stories—surreal, peopled with unexpected characters and humanized abstractions—against bizarre backgrounds where biographical events unfold like tiny dramas, almost accidentally but with surprising emotional force.

--rhina p. espaillat

If art is the lie you tell to tell the truth, the poems in Neptune Court are precision-made howlers that bring you nose to nose with yourself.

--jim klein

Anton Yakovlev's world is strange and beautiful, vaguely resembling Bergen County. Inside it, a zebra rides a motor boat on East River; there are ghosts and ghost writers, lovers drifting apart, the doomed and the graceless, and the always-grinning Almighty. You, the reader, will be mesmerized. You'll have to surrender all caution and enter his poems with "your sneakers soaked, / your camera steady, / your heart awake."

--claudia serea



///GRATITUDE///

Jennifer Koch, Concetta Abbate, Pamela Bailey Powers,
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Paloma Yannakakis, Ariel Yelen, and Don Zirilli





neptune court







WAITING FOR THIS MOMENT TO ARISE

Exit the Parkway
toward the Field of Wild Turkeys,
where your heart used to race so often
in garden centers, prim.
You browsed while in love.
Arms brushed against
the breathing satins
of domesticated orchids.

Cross the brook into Driftwood,
have some molecular pizza,
crash a book signing
by a celebrated mountain king,
avoid buying his book,
buy a teddy bear for your niece.

Wander into Dead Rock,
where you can always swig a cool pumpkin brew
while eccentric contractors paint the town blueberry.

/// WAITING FOR THIS MOMENT TO ARISE | 7 ///





Today you're wearing one of your finest dresses,
off-white with flowers like the milk of Kubla Khan.
My direct flight from Porlock
just landed in Teterboro.

If you want, I'll give you a ride
to Secaucus, Jewel of the Meadowlands, Land of Snakes,
show you the secret pavements,
introduce you to the indulgent forger
who set up shop behind the winery.

In the Borough of Trees,
I'll point out the house of the local doctor
who invented American poetry
with a fully realized epic about white chickens.

Don't you want to shop for apples, or ice picks,
in the Birthplace of Bergen County?

We'll pick at the world's most twisted angel hair carbonara
on the edge of the Thorn Between the Roses
on our way to a wedding cake shop in Flakes.

I'm not asking you to marry me, silly!
That shop sells other things,
like that ambrosial cannoli cream
I've tried at many a corporate get-together
at the Fyfedom's Fire & Oak lounge.





I wear Beatles “Blackbird” suspenders
 over an Alter Bridge “Blackbird” T-shirt.
 I’m banking on your liking one of these blackbirds.

I would wear eleven more of them
 but don’t want to look like a Christmas tree.

Instead, I think of places we could visit:
 Soul City, Little Poland, Sopranoland,
 Pasta Triangle, Soccer Town, the Grove,
 Burn, Bottle Hill, Pinkotown,
 Betsytown, the Venice of New Jersey;

or, if you have a little more time,
 we can take a trip to Tranquility
 by way of the Fluorescent Mineral Capital of the World.

And then we’ll reach Dingman’s Ferry,
 I’ll hand a buck to the man in the orange suit,
 and we’ll watch the waterfalls together,
 hike a bit of the Appalachian,
 drop in on the Russian imperial chocolate store,
 then drive back
 toward Silk City and Bears.

/// WAITING FOR THIS MOMENT TO ARISE | 9 ///





AFTER COPERNICUS STREET FAIR

In love for the very first time
at the age of twelve,
I stroll with Sergey and Ilya
past a Crazy Bus, a sci-fi Ferris Wheel.
Seagulls circle a garbage heap from
a quickly dismantling circus.

No one knows my secret.

No one will guess
why I got a 5% on that reading quiz
the day my beloved came to school
in an Audi with a broken headlight,
a twisted hood
and a broken heart.

The fireworks begin.

Some pigeons take flight.
We throw garbage to imitate them.
Driven back home in some backseat,
I pray for the Audi to bend its bumper
back into a smile
and hope, most of all, that she wasn't scared.





Years pass.

Letters from my beloved,
now six time zones away,
get lost on a shelf with video games,
unanswered until it is much too late
and I can no longer find her
in any of the world's yellow pages.

The graying birds on my wallpaper
followed her mood every day—
soaring, worrying, falling,
missing each other.

But now the birds are simply frozen in flight.

In fact, they are not even birds,
just wallpaper.





CAT OF DEATH

To keep warm, the cat snuggles up to the people
who are about to die:
death has a certain heat, an intensity in the body
fighting the now inevitable
or trying to depart with a last bit of fire.

It's not all about the blanket,
but it's not exactly about love, either.

At least at first it had nothing to do with love.
Over time he's developed a sense of responsibility
to the elderly that surround him,
a duty to comfort people
before they lose their 21 grams of soul.

So, when one family kept him away from their dying father
because they thought the cat's absence could somehow save him,
the cat was heartbroken and didn't eat for a week.
The father still died.





The elderly themselves are divided
in their opinion of the cat.
About half of them dread the sight of him,
always thinking he might be coming for them.

The ones who are really dying
have no strength to be scared of him
and welcome his presence when they see him settle beside them.

The old priest who tried to baptize the cat while giving himself last rites;
the lady who placed the top half of a Russian doll on his head,
believing it was a crown for the royal cat;
the tango dancer who detected
in the movements of the sleeping cat's tail
the best dance moves dreamed up in the lands of Astor Piazzolla;
the engineer who finally put to rest his zoophobia—
they all cherished him in their own way,
they all built cathedrals within their minds
where the Cat of Death rivaled in importance
their most beloved daughters
and the old flames passing them on ships.

Someday he too will snuggle, his body warmer than normal,
using his tail as his own smaller Cat of Death.
There will be no noise among the elderly
frantically trying to tiptoe around the cat
in realization that now, when their own time comes,
they will have nothing soft or catlike to see them off—
just the room and the unheard echo of their last heartbeat.





GRIEF

The car circles the eastern part of the village, cuts through the converted horse farm, repeatedly tyrannizes the overgrown fern on Hillcrest.

She looks forward to running out of gas—being stranded, the thrill of the shy hitchhiking. She will extend her quest as long as she can: ask for a lift to the hardware store, where she can buy a canister, then for another lift to the gas station, then for another lift back to her car. She will deliberately neglect to lock it. She will leave the keys in the ignition. If the car gets stolen, all the better. Another lift to the precinct.

For now, the roads are free of snow, or other drivers. She thinks about the apartment she'll buy in Old City. She'll sit on Walnut Street with a scone, and watch a security guard in a Phillies visor return a freshly-shoplifted shirt to a huggy waif. In the summer, she will walk down Market Street, drinking Chardonnay from the bottle, and hope to get arrested. But the cops will only high-five her.

The “check engine” light is on. God peeks in through the sunroof and tells her to hold on. She will try; she always does. She rounds a blind curve on a hill.

Eventually, she does drive back home. She throws her coat on the floor. Colbert comes up on TV. Someone is cooking chicken across the hall: she can smell their whimsical seaweed spices. It's midnight. She flosses.

She wears her pajamas inside out, reaches for the light switch from under the comforter. Half asleep, she remembers she hasn't silenced her phone. Then she remembers she no longer needs to.





HOPE

We spent the day wiping dust off video cameras,
exchanging stories, associating words.
You liked seasons, hated LA for its endless summer.
Your family had roots in Oceania.
You were a trusted friend of a certain cabaret singer
who had just given a TED Talk on being poor.

Without jealousy I listened to your account
of the changes in your Doberman's barking patterns,
now that you had a boyfriend
and the dog was no longer your only love.
For many years the way you described your boyfriend
became a blueprint for how I would strive to be:
determined, slightly obstinate, independent.

We joked. You said that before you met me
you thought all Russians wanted was a Big Mac
and a pair of American pre-ripped jeans.
I set you straight on that matter.

/// HOPE | 15 ///





Your internship was ending. Mine had just started.
We said goodbye with a promise to keep in touch.
For a while we exchanged translated song lyrics.

I saw you one more time in Hampton, New Hampshire,
working a news story about an ailing amusement park.

Weather really wasn't working out.
It sleeted just as the cameras started rolling.
I held my umbrella over your camera
and noticed in your thank you a quiet light
shining without needless emphasis
from behind your gray eyes.

Driving back, I saw the most beautiful sunset
over Route 95,
purple and green behind massive Tolkienesque clouds.

This is not a love story, and it doesn't end in a death.
You've been getting many good jobs in Hollywood,
and I don't exactly hail from a coffin either.
I don't feel the need to get back in touch,
and I'm not curious about your day-to-day goings-on.

But in the most random moments,
whether I'm driving, sad, or witnessing weather,
your sunset returns to me,





as do your grateful eyes,
as does the dark of your sweater,
your humble way of putting your foot down—
a picture of the best of my early 20s,
a storybook of healthy and hopeful life,
unsentimental and devoid of demonic details.

Unblinking from behind the video camera,
you filmed and filmed Fast Eddy and awkward Bobby
as they took apart a century-old roller-coaster,
not rolling your eyes,
not raising your voice,
your sneakers soaked,
your camera steady,
your heart awake.





THE APPREHENSION

“Oh yes, a lot of headless chickens in this town!”
whispered a fast-track businessman on the subway
to his friend before
he pushed me out of the way
with a polite “Thank you” at 14th Street.

From inside the train, I watched them
dominate the exit turnstiles,
while all around them oversize flightless birds
with bloody holes in place of their necks
stumbled awkwardly into each other,
falling off the platform by the dozen.

Still a long ride before I’d reach Coney Island—
and all I saw was a whole lot of dead chickens walking.

I had to find a way to see them differently.
So I pictured them as dinosaurs—
green, and tan, and magenta, and militant.

A dinosaur brushed a model airplane against me.

But it was a fox, not a dinosaur,
that accused me of being too in his face
then threatened me with a bag full of landscape paintings.





From the bridge, I saw a sickly zebra
drive a motorboat across the East River
then dump a lion's body into the currents.

In the second-floor window of a steakhouse,
a pale hyena was staring at a TV.

A dead shark floated in formaldehyde,
making a powerful statement.

I exited the train at the last station,
walked down a staircase built of musical chairs.

The way to the ocean was full of carnivorous plants—
it took all my skill to survive their petals.

I stood in front of a giant python covered in little carts,
talking politics with an old friend I'd run into,
amazed at never having noticed before
that he was actually a rhino.

Robots were picking currants.
A fried dough saleswolf was devouring a skunk's tail.
A kangaroo shoved babies into herself.

The monkfish, the crows, the meerkats, the tics, the doe,
the professional clenchers of teeth, the doomed and the graceless,
the elephants, the mutants, the Firebird's ashes,
the horned one, the liquid, the apparitions, the plasma dogs
shrieked, shrugged, shook, dashed, wailed, waltzed on the edge of the ocean—

then a hand tugged at my sleeve
and the menagerie went
silent.





FIRST SNOW

If I met your eyes across the table,
one passing of a salt shaker
would have made our blood run forever warmer.

Walking through Prospect Park,
I wouldn't wait until the last bench to kiss you.

We would rent a place on the corner of 1st and 1st,
befriend the working poets
who would improvise surrealist ballads
at seeing us stuck on a median, crossing Houston.

We would make impulsive decisions when buying
lemons,
make spreadsheets if planning travels,
raise a few children savvy in French baked goods,
or maybe remain alone, just the two of us.

And even if we fell out,
started separate families,
we'd always be at arm's reach,
even across the globe,
even if we went decades without talking.





But here I am, sitting under an oak
in a cemetery in Ridgewood, New Jersey,
while somewhere in Malaysia, or Norway,
two of your ancestors are sharing a Coke.

Rushing out to Whole Foods last night,
I saw your shape on the hood of my pickup truck,
traced in rock-hard snow.

Over my head, the Almighty must have been grinning.

When you look up at the same Almighty,
you won't notice the change in the radius of the Sun.

Like me, you'll wish to know the nature of consciousness,
drink coffee to fall asleep faster.

And maybe one day you'll pick up a metal detector,
hover it over a beach
where I've dropped some good-luck medallion,
dig it up,
and wonder what it is.





NIGHTFALL

She looked like Robin Wright in *The Princess Bride*.
She was your nurse, but you called her “my muse”
ever since your first check-up.

Your colonel threatened to lead you into harm’s way,
assuming you imagined her in wet dreams,
failing to grasp the meaning of the word “muse.”

This game of alphas was all well and good
until, just halfway into your deployment,
he did let your vehicle get blown up.

You awoke, and many thought you might still return
to active duty, until a routine injection
prompted you to knock your nurse muse unconscious.

For months you shied away from traffic lights.
Thankfully, your aim had gotten so bad
you missed your own temple at point blank range.

Today you spend most evenings in Middle Earth,
imagining you’re at a campfire with hobbit brothers.
The night falls.





For two months of the year
you're the star of the Pennsylvania Renaissance Faire,
jousting and wooing.

You've acquired a handful of Twitter followers.
You balladeer tasteful maxims
about the well-tuned diplomacy of pole dancers.

Your voicemail greeting is a legend.
The chickens in your front yard drive
every local farmer to jealous rage.

When children come trick-or-treating,
you throw a Dracula cape over your chain mail
and shower them with Belgium's finest chocolate.

But their parents impose strict curfews.
And even the hobbits have their bedtime restrictions;
Thorin the dwarf has to take care of his beard.

You slip back into that night in the hospital.
Your muse in scrubs lies on the floor next to your bed.
If only you could help her up.

An anchor stares at you from the TV screen.
A blast down the street
sends tremors through the hospital windows

and all those people running into your room.





SOTTO VOCE

||| 24 | SOTTO VOCE |||

The professional ghost writer,
who isn't much of a ghost
and whose enemies spy on him
just to see how much they can mess him up,
takes a trip out of town to attend a concert
of a 90-year old piano virtuoso
in Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania.





After the concert,
the ghost writer gets a few minutes
alone with the pianist,
who happens to be walking to the same bus
that will take the ghost writer
back to his bugged apartment.

The pianist rhymes off-the-cuff
about the extra large T-shirt
he bought at the souvenir store
and about his dog's cannoli obsession.

The rain starts,
and the ghost writer takes a deep breath.

While the rest of the concert goes
shake each other's hands outside Mauch Chunk Theatre,
the two of them pick up their pace
and become little dots to everyone who knows them.

The rain on the roof of the bus stop
sounds like an ice cream truck.





PIT 91

How are you feeling tonight, LA?
How are you feeling tonight, La Brea?

Are you ready to throw it down?

Louder, I can't hear you!

Now that's what I'm talking about.

Well, let me tell you, brothers and sisters.
These mariachis before you
come from a land of violence and destruction.
They are the mammoths drowned in the tar pits.

This percussion is the clattering of their ribs
during an earthquake.

This harp is the ground swallowing its bravest.

These trumpets are the voices of their children
watching them drown from just a few feet away.





This violin is the spirit of ancient horses,
embalmed by happenstance,
primeval neighing still on their jaws.

Therefore, ladies and gentlemen,
absorb the sound of skeletal vihuelas
and go out into your deserts
with the fire of wooly renegades
lost in nature's molasses.

You never step into a tar pit twice.

Enjoy your nachos, folks.

It's about to get hot.





RAIN

He could write about people inhaling
alphabet soup in a particular order,
their startling background stories
revealed by angles of their incisors.

He could drop a sexy aside
about a hyper sunflower grower
covering her face with her bandanna,
nauseous from whale ivory poaching.

Like a rabbit taken in by the cheek
of a landscaper in the Garden of Eden,
she clung to his every word
in a windy literary cafe.

A few sentences from his pages,
and she could breathe a few more days.

Or was it his eyebrows?





Two sickles cutting
the world into diamond slices
as he absorbed its rhythms.

She wanted to become a compact cloud,
gathering enough rain every couple of days
to pour on the road he walks,
touching his feet that way.

Beating the rigor mortis
of the Great Lakes in early winter,
they bid farewell in an unremarkable hut.

She had dreams she must try to chase.

He had houses to repaint.





THEY ATE LICORICE

Good afternoon.
 Leaving early her convex desk.
 Traffic lights conspire in her favor as she walks home.
 Noises of various cars create chord progressions.
 There are petunias springing where asphalt cracks.
 She follows a grey cat's face with her own, bemused.
 Street hoodlums proclaim God's fury, but it won't rain.
 She enters the lobby,
 picks up the undisturbed mail
 and loses a stare-down with a piece of paper:
 in a triumph of self-control, he has made a choice.
 To avoid hurting her, he will never see her again.

For hours the plane-filled skies darken,
 and she tries to play games.
 Noises of cars try desperately to figure things out.
 She's becoming allergic to beeps.
 She hears scalpels creaking:
 someone must be getting skinned for peeling onions wrong.
 Almost drowned out by the noises of other traffic,
 an elegant Chevrolet rushes human organs
 from nearby accidents to the hospital downtown.
 An artist walks by with his easel—well, good for him!
 He'll never amount to much painting those petunias.
 They should have executions for people like that.

Time will make things better again, she thinks.
 So she puts on her pajamas and takes a nap.
 Some years from now,
 in the same apartment, but greyer,
 she will awake to another good afternoon.





RINGWOOD

High on medicinal herbs,
the dowager walked the rolling hills
around her estate,
where sixty horses grazed.

As debts piled on,
she knew she couldn't afford
to keep the servants who took care of her stables,
but she also knew she could never sell
her magnificent animals.

So she placed an ad in The New York Times,
looking for unpaid intern talent.
Within days prospective jockeys and butlers
crowded at her gates.

The horses never had more fun.
The interns tended to their every whim.

All summer long,
worshipped day and night,
the horses frolicked through the green and the brown of northern New Jersey.

And then, in one afternoon, all of them were shot.

/// RINGWOOD | 31 ///





Obsessively wiping the blood off her pistol,
the dowager spent many days
getting up the nerve to turn the gun on herself,
but rebounded
and lived many more years in proud isolation.

Coda with Bear

Several world wars later,
the estate has been added
to the Register of Historic Places,
and people take tours of the dowager's stately rooms
while girl scouts reheat
coffee at the Visitor Center.

At Christmas,
standing next to one of the chimneys,
a life-size black teddy bear greets the guests,
wearing a Cape May shirt over his rich fur
and a Sandy Hook baseball cap.

He must be enjoying
his retirement at the Jersey Shore
after a lifetime of civil service.

He must have an old Beetle,
a raven to keep him company,
racing him along Garden State Parkway.

He must like cigars
and River Horse brews.





NEPTUNE COURT

In an unexpected development of Romeo and Juliet's story, after they both decided not to be (as Hamlet would put it) and were interred long enough to have decomposed, their bones climbed out of the crypt where they were together, buried in an embrace by their penitent families, and started crawling back toward their respective ancestors' burial grounds, to spend eternity there.

This was Shakespeare's addition to Arthur Brooke's original poem, which ended the way we know. But budgetary constraints forced him to scrap the scene, unable to dramatize their skeletal crawl, the difficulty of obtaining phosphorus for the special effects being what it was. It was, after all, only the 1590s.





But now, thanks to the efforts
of the Massachusetts Bay Transport Authority,
a draft of the final scene has been unearthed
from a tunnel at the edge of Logan Airport
near the crash site of a pre-war British airplane
between Neptune Court and the two parallel Service Roads.
Since then lovers in Boston have been leaving each other
at a much higher rate than ever before,
moving back near their parents in their native states.

—

I say these things to you, standing on a platform.
You've cried a little bit in the subway car.
You will cry much more on the one-way train to your birthplace.
I cry in the bathtub later, staring into your eyes
on a laptop screen, dangerously close to the water
but too far away in a city you now once again call home.

When the sun sets, the ghosts show up in my bathroom.
They try to start their old "seize the day" routine—
looks like their bony brains rarely have any other thoughts.
But soon they hear their own words eat into each other,
there being no day to seize—only distance and roots.
Irrelevant as king bees, they mutter along
nervously, until I no longer hear them.

"To hell with the motherfuckers," I tell myself.
I climb out of the bath. I wear your old robe. It fits me.
I wait a good while to call you, to give you the chance to miss me.
It's time to put some old photographs on the wall:
when your face is in black and white, I think of it differently.
This is the beginning of our first and last winter apart.





SMILE

You might notice his breath on your shoulder.
He wants to shake your hand.

His face is hard to see during the eclipses.
He sneaks up on you but never touches.

One-night-standers use GPS technologies
to avoid his walking trajectories.

His hand drips with sweat and grime.
He tells his life story to the dolphins in the Aquarium.

Lost balloons pass him in the night.
A rabid possum passes him in the day.

He smiles at the possum,
and the possum smiles back.

He reaches out his hand.

/// SMILE | 35 ///





**TWO DAYS LATER YOU WILL DECIDE
YOU WILL NOT RETURN TO THE U.S.**

||| 36 | TWO DAYS LATER YOU WILL DECIDE YOU WILL NOT RETURN TO THE U.S. |||

I cut in line to buy you fresh alpine cheese.

Our train leaves in two minutes.

For the first time in a decade
you will visit your native town,
where one wrong turn on a ski slope
can eject you from the French quarters
into German country.

I cut a daring tunnel
through winter fashion heroes,
barely make it onto the train
and onto the seat next to you.

I stop the fistfight in your eyes
with the unexpected piece of cheese.

You chomp down.

La Dent de Ruth floats by in the distance.

I take out my camera and start clicking,
tickling your midriff
to extract involuntary smiles.

Your hand blocks my view.





THE MARINA SHELTYE

His uncle's ashes are in a wooden box
on the dashboard of his master's camper,
parked by the boat that bears his uncle's name.

The dog can tell the difference in scent
between his uncle alive and his uncle burnt.

Daily riffs of "I Can See Clearly Now,"
played by his master on a 12-string Gibson,
force sunshine back into their days.

He used to hide from thunder.
Now thunder can take a hike.
He hides under his chair in any weather.

Every Sunday, he leans
on a broken bicycle seat
that sticks out of the marsh like an ancient skull,
and his master douses him with shampoo.

The brand's been changed since his uncle's passing,
but the old liquid Dove still hangs in the air.

The sun shines on his luxurious fur.





He's no longer allowed on the boat
after a spooky gastronomic incident
when he fell into the water while chasing a piece of cheese.

When his master is out on the bay,
the sheltie howls softly to the wooden box:
"I still know everything about you."

A girl in a Beach Haven adventure hat
overheard him once,
even used her phone
to record the sound of his dirge.

A marketing expert at some co-op,
she likes to listen to that recording
before dialing into
particularly important conference calls.

Howling running through her head,
she'll say to a returning customer,
"It's good to hear your voice."





MARSHFIELD

Getting on the train at 5:30 at South Station,
you wonder if your stepdaughter has finally given up
on your cat, who has gone missing two weeks ago:
“Can’t she accept he must have been pecked to death?”

Your neighbors have serious birds. You’ve seen them in action.

One photograph of you holding the stupid garfield
will forever remain between your diary’s crow-like pages.

In the Cohasset shelter, they had warned you:
outdoor cats die soon, especially in the woods.
“His year of freedom was worth ten years in captivity,”
you tell your friends at work. You have no regrets.

—

Passing through the caverns of Weymouth Landing,
you think back to 4 am that November,
three years ago, when your stepdaughter showed up
at your door, unable to stand another psychotic
outburst of her biological mother.
Your husband greeted her: “Your bedroom is ready.
We have waited for you for 26 years.”





You never had a daughter or a son of your own.

—

Arriving at Greenbush Station, you gather your manuscripts:
your homework as an editor, moonlighting at your own day job.
After that's done, you will restore some old chairs.

You get in your station wagon. "It doesn't cost much
to park here, I'm so fortunate," you exclaim
and speed through the tunnels of trees high above your head,
trying to forget that a day will come
when your stepdaughter has moved out and the house is empty again,
just like it was for decades,
only there is no one left to wait for this time,
and your ancestors will die with you.

On your way across Little Bridge, you slow down the car.
You notice how beautiful the river is under it.
You would like your ashes scattered across it.
That way, you will be forever part of the hill—
children, boats at high tide—and no flowers needed.





WAYS OF TREATING SANTA IN SCHUYLKILL COUNTY

Hang him by one of his feet
and by his cheap-looking beard.
Find the delicate balance.

Get the chains and hang him upside down.
Get the arrows ready. Let the blood flow.
If he brings wrong presents, just hang him traditionally.

Holiday decorations in Schuylkill County
stay out long after the holidays.
Pumpkins can still be seen on Thanksgiving.

How curious to see a martyred Saint Nicholas
still hanging out on Valentine's Day. Towards Easter,
all the martyrs assemble on porches with cups of boilo.

In your red coat, now back from a big city,
you walk your birthplace in wonder,
talking to the big boys in their hunters' vests.





Though you've grown up here, even your accent is different.
As a tourist, you're treated better
than you ever were when you lived in these parts.

—

Rudolph, the red-nosed reindeer,
appears from the forest, two deer on each side.
The hunters excuse themselves.

The beagle drags the shotgun across the road:
swear to God, buck season isn't quite over.
If any remain standing, the men will go sledding.

—

We're all born in strange worlds.
Your place is here, you tell me over and over
among the hills of almost bearable grandeur.

A choirboy's voice stage-whispers in my head.
I repeat my prayer. I take a photo.
As you walk off into the forest, I bless your silhouette.





TUNDRA

You've had enough.
You plan a trip to the tundra.

You want to stand
on a barren Arctic shore
before an invisible ocean
on a moonless night,
mindful of nothing besides
your scratchy coat.

—
Death comes in, wearing mittens over his heart.
His ribcage protrudes through his torso.
He rattles the air, eager to start a skirmish,
only to retire into a hammock
and swing his bony legs in the air.

Death is ill. Death waves
the world's most terminally boring flag.





“Hey Death,” you say, “can I make your day
sweeter somehow? Stop sulking,
Death! Make angels!”

—

Your lot in life is skydiving with the skylarks,
pomegranate slushie in hand.

My lot in life is being your commissar,
healing your warts,
being your bud.

Every morning, we get on the train together,
trade lychee custards.
Our alchemy is never to say goodbye.

We spin our vinyls infinitely,
and that’s what fortifies us.

—

Don’t fall for Death’s lovesong,
steel yourself against the derecho of fruit flies
that make holes in our hulls.

Stave off the tundra.
Beware the feathers of its cardinals.
Linger here;
dare sin and repent.

Scan the ocean
like it’s a farmer’s market
and hook the tilapias of the morning.





NOVEMBER

November ushers in memories of music
of a November-obsessed dark band you admired.

Dropping you off at the bus,
I would hurry to put on my headphones
to listen to a rough November song
to quickly mythologize
the time we'd spent together.

Long repetitive dirges slow down the mind.
Eyes remain fixed on a reflecting pool.

I sniff the air for moments I forgot.
Rotting leaves bring me back to the busy gate
near the cemetery,
where I leaned on black metal
saying goodbye to you.

/// NOVEMBER | 45 ///





Anonymous lovers hold hands in a shrieking way.

—

I dreamed of marrying you once.
You made teddy bears relevant.

Some of your last words to me were,
“I’m so domestically-minded,
sometimes I scare myself!”

I could have hoped for nothing better
than making a domestic life with you,
no matter how often I treated you
as if you were an orchestra in the sky.

—

Night makes every cat turn grey.

Staring into the pool, I see names and dates.

I turn off the rough music
that tries to encapsulate
every November that ever happened to man.

I learn to remember you in silence.

But the music always returns.





/// NOTES AND COMMENTARY





ABOUT SERIES 3 :: OF SYSTEMS OF \\\

Since its inception with two handmade books under *The Trouble With Bartleby* imprint in 2012, this chapbook series has sought to not only encourage and empower its participants via a collaborative, instructive process -- highlighting and involving all its poets in the design and conception of each series, as well as engaging in dialogue about book form and production -- but also to draw visual artists into that dialogue, creating covers in direct conversation with the poets and their texts. This year features Emma Steinkraus, who talks about the process below.

- lynne desilva-johnson, editor

I came to this project through Davy Knittle. I've been reading his poems for a year now. I've got two taped up on my studio wall. I think about poetry often and its relationship to painting; they seem to share a strange logic, full of slippages and juxtapositions, expert in uncanny, intuitive truths. So when Lynne contacted me about creating some art for these chapbook covers I was excited. I read through each manuscript and kept a short list of images that struck me or intersected with my own obsessions. I related to Anurak Saelaow's use of mirrors, mediation, and refracted, glinting light. I was taken with Anton Yakovlev's sophisticate handling of nostalgia and noted the appearance of sunsets and collections of animals (both recur in my own work). I kept thinking about Joseph Cuillier's line "We're on the other side of the American flag." At moments his writing is so blunt, but also subtle and subversive; I tried to maintain some of that balance. For Davy, I wanted something that made visual the amazing way he smashes together the personal and the urban. He writes domestic life with the velocity of a highway, and vice versa.

Reading and thinking alongside these poems was pure pleasure. As was scurrying around setting up still lives, transferring photos to pleather (that happened), sourcing textures, painting and collaging. If there were moments when I found this project stressful, it was out of a fear of disappointing good people and good books. My hope, though, is that in some small way these covers collaborate with their insides and lead you, dear reader, in.

- emma steinkraus

Emma Steinkraus is a visual artist living in Iowa City. Her current obsessions include imagined apocalypses, witches and mushrooming; her recurrent obsession is with depictions of romantic love. Before moving to Iowa as an Iowa Arts Fellow in the Painting program, she studied at the Maryland Institute College of Art and at Williams College. She has received a Hubbard Hutchinson Fellowship, a Frederick M. Peysner Prize, worked as a Steamboat Scholar in Contemporary Curation at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, and completed residencies at the Henry Luce III Center for Arts and Religion and at Pyramid Atlantic Art Center.





//// ABOUT NEPTUNE COURT

Most of these poems occur in everyday places: the two parallel Service Roads at the Boston Airport; Moscow; the Pennsylvania Renaissance Faire; the La Brea Tar Pits; La Dent de Ruth; Manhattan; Jim Thorpe; the Venice of New Jersey. Seen through the refractive lenses of memory, or imagined versions of actual events that have occurred there, these locations turn allegorical. Many poems center on characters who hope in their own way to avoid the place's resident Exterminating Angel. In the background, rapid rivers drown out unacknowledged symphonies.



- anton yakovlev

Originally from Moscow, Russia, Anton Yakovlev lives in Ridgewood, New Jersey and works as a college textbook editor. He studied filmmaking and poetry at Harvard University. Yakovlev's work has been published in *The New Yorker*, *The Raintown Anthology of Contemporary Poetry*, *Angle*, *Cardinal Points Literary Journal*, *The New Verse News*, *The Rutherford Red Wheelbarrow* and elsewhere. He has also directed several short films.

The author is grateful to the editors of the following publications, where some of these poems first appeared:

CityLitRag: "Grief"

The New Verse News: "Nightfall"

The Poet in New York: "Tundra"

The Poetry Storehouse: "Smile"

The Rutherford Red Wheelbarrow: "After Copernicus Street Fair," "Rain," "Ringwood," "The Marina Sheltie," "Ways of Treating Santa in Schuylkill County," "November"





THE OPERATING SYSTEM IS A QUESTION, NOT AN ANSWER.\\ \\ \\

THIS is not a fixed entity.

The OS is an ongoing experiment in resilient creative practice which necessarily morphs as its conditions and collaborators change. It is not a magazine, a website, or a press, but rather an ongoing dialogue ABOUT the act of publishing on and offline: it is an exercise in the use and design of both of these things and their role in our shifting cultural landscape, explored THROUGH these things.

I see publication as documentation: an act of resistance, an essential community process, and a challenge to the official story / archive, and I founded the OS to exemplify my belief that people everywhere can train themselves to use self or community documentation as the lifeblood of a resilient, independent, successful creative practice.

The name “THE OPERATING SYSTEM” is meant to speak to an understanding of the self as a constantly evolving organism, which just like any other system needs to learn to adapt if it is to survive. Just like your computer, you need to be “updating your software” frequently, as your patterns and habits no longer serve you.

Our intentions above all are empowerment and unsilencing, encouraging creators of all ages and colors and genders and backgrounds and disciplines to reclaim the rights to cultural storytelling, and in so doing to the historical record of our times and lives.

Bob Holman once told me I was “scene agnostic” and I took this as the highest compliment: indeed, I seek work and seek to make and promote work that will endure and transcend tastes and trends, making important and asserting value rather than being told was has and has not.

The OS has evolved in quite a short time from an idea to a growing force for change and possibility: in a span of 5 years, from 2013-2017, we will have published more than 40 volumes from a hugely diverse group of contributors, and solicited and curated thousands of pieces online, collaborating with artists, composers, choreographers, scientists, futurists, and so many more. Online, you’ll also find partnerships with cultural organizations modelling the value of archival process documentation.

Beginning in 2016, our new series :: “Glossarium: Unsilenced Texts and Modern Translations”, will bring on Ariel Resnikoff, Stephen Ross, and Mona Kareem as contributing editors, and have as its first volume a dual language translation of Palestinian poet and artist Ashraf Fayadh’s “Instructions Within,” translated by Mona Kareem, which will be published later this year, with all proceeds going to support Fayadh’s ongoing case and imprisonment in Saudi Arabia.

There is ample room here for you to expand and grow your practice ...and your possibility. Join us.

*- Lynne DeSilva-Johnson,
Founder and Managing Editor*





TITLES IN THE PRINT: DOCUMENT COLLECTION

In Corpore Sano : Creative Practice and the Challenged Body
[Anthology, 2016] Lynne DeSilva-Johnson and Jay Besemer, co-editors

Instructions Within [2016] - Ashraf Fayadh
Arabic-English dual language edition; Mona Kareem, translator

Let it Die Hungry [2016] - Caitis Meissner

Everything is Necessary [2016] - Keisha-Gaye Anderson

agon [2016] - Judith Goldman

Everybody's Automat [2016] - Mark Gurarie

How to Survive the Coming Collapse of Civilization [2016] - Sparrow

There Might Be Others [2016] - Rebecca Lazier and Dan Trueman

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2016: OF SOUND MIND

**featuring the quilt drawings of Daphne Taylor*

Improper Maps - Alex Crowley; While Listening - Alaina Ferris;
Chords - Peter Longofono; Any Seam or Needlework - Stanford Cheung

TEN FOUR - Poems, Translations, Variations [2015]

Jerome Rothenberg, Ariel Resnikoff, Mikhl Likht

MARILYN [2015] - Amanda Ngoho Reavey

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2015: OF SYSTEMS OF

**featuring original cover art by Emma Steinkraus*

Cyclorama - Davy Knittle; The Sensitive Boy Slumber Party Manifesto -
Joseph Cuillier; Neptune Court - Anton Yakovlev; Schema - Anurak Saelow

SAY/MIRROR [2015; 2nd edition 2016] - JP HOWARD

Moons Of Jupiter/Tales From The Schminke Tub [plays] - Steve Danziger

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2014: BY HAND

Pull, A Ballad - Maryam Parhizkar; Executive Producer Chris Carter -
Peter Milne Grenier; Spooky Action at a Distance - Gregory Crosby;

Can You See that Sound - Jeff Musillo

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2013: WOODBLOCK

**featuring original prints from Kevin William Reed*

Strange Coherence - Bill Considine; The Sword of Things - Tony Hoffman;
Talk About Man Proof - Lancelot Runge / John Kropa; An Admission as a

Warning Against the Value of Our Conclusions - Alexis Quinlan





DOC U MENT

/däkyə mə nt/

First meant “instruction” or “evidence,” whether written or not.

noun - a piece of written, printed, or electronic matter that provides information or evidence or that serves as an official record
verb - record (something) in written, photographic, or other form
synonyms - paper - deed - record - writing - act - instrument

[Middle English, *precept*, from Old French, from Latin *documentum*, example, proof, from *docere*, to teach; see *dek-* in Indo-European roots.]

Who is responsible for the manufacture of value?

Based on what supercilious ontology have we landed in a space where we vie against other creative people in vain pursuit of the fleeting credibilities of the scarcity economy, rather than freely collaborating and sharing openly with each other in ecstatic celebration of MAKING?

While we understand and acknowledge the economic pressures and fear-mongering that threatens to dominate and crush the creative impulse, we also believe that now more than ever we have the tools to relinquish agency via cooperative means, fueled by the fires of the Open Source Movement.

Looking out across the invisible vistas of that rhizomatic parallel country
we can begin to see our community beyond constraints,
in the place where intention meets resilient, proactive, collaborative organization.

Here is a document born of that belief, sown purely of imagination and will.
When we document we assert. We print to make real, to reify our being there.

When we do so with mindful intention to address our process,
to open our work to others, to create beauty in words in space, to respect and acknowledge the strength of the page we now hold physical, a thing in our hand...
we remind ourselves that, like Dorothy: *we had the power all along, my dears.*

the PRINT! DOCUMENT SERIES

is a project of

the trouble with bartleby

in collaboration with

the operating system

