

## Lana Turner Poetry Chronicle 2024

### *Arab War Documents*

*Lana Turner Journal* initiated its run in 2008, with our first issue featuring a special section of Iraqi poets writing the invasion and war a half-decade in. Exacting examination of the social concepts within these works, to paraphrase Adorno, shows Sargon Boulus, translated from the Arabic, sagely stanza an American war that has raged on since then. This war expanded from Mesopotamia to the Sahara and Iran. Boulus's expert, calculating use of long, freest verse line, the tense focus of the irony and condemnation is non-identical with bipartisan support for destruction of Iraq, with the personal poetry so prominent in America. Tens of millions have since been displaced in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia. Who can count the dead? Poetry can't but it can stanza, intensify perceptions through language, criticize through its originality the espousal of received language and sentiment. It can smell the smoke of the future's fires. This review is thrown into this haze of the war structures past and present giving rise to some exemplary poetry.

In a classic analysis, Issa Boullata writes that Arabic poetry underwent acutest formal change during postwar Arab nationalism, a change weightier than the revolution of the word in the early 20th century. How much like Modernism was this affair, deriving itself from Romanticism and later Modernism in the West. Revolt in diction, content, form, rhyme, meter, gave voice to the sensibility of an Adonis, a Darwish, bequeathed a poetry to challenge or rival any of the last century. Indeed, these last two are often more human, earthy, grounded than the easily surreal or formally novel works we know in the West.

What of younger Arab language poets picking up this mantle? Offered to me after a poetry reading we gave together for *Tripwire, A Barcode Scanner* by Zèden Xelef, translated from the Arabic by Shook, Bryar Bajalan, and Xelef, is a noteworthy first collection; a book of our art, it is also a product of book arts. I hold this slim volume, its pages intentionally yellowing, thin, unlike and like a damaged document, a passport of poetry, the papers of those without good ones. This volume glimpses

the life of the Iraq war gone on so long a generation grew up in it, war forming the basis of their consciousness and, in the case of writers, their words. Its condensed and haunting snapshots are the other side of the ultra-concrete infrastructure of Baghdad's green zone, which protects the ongoing orgy of corruption and looting; his poetry emerges from the tent and refugee cities scattered across a once prosperous Iraq. "Muddy street, then tent block, then muddy street" hums the refrain of the collection's title poem. It aims an ironic finale at an American audience:

Dear Consumer—

Could not identify the producer of war!

The Arabic fragment—its early modernity, Quranic belatedness, lightness and reach, here composed with forceful pith—is Xelef's hallmark. The paradoxical presence of American consumerism in Iraq—coming to Iraq only after invasion, sanctions, another invasion, and civil war, with Americanization developing alongside Islamic State militants—is a kind of principle, white-hot theme of the text. Its angry humor is uncommonly jarring: "And every day you are the army that kills me / I'm the last sparrow on the world's tree." How does one make sense of a war-ravaged condition other than through understatement and steely wit. There is no identity here, only voids in charred remains. Reading him is like feeling the brightest edge of the burn, where realism reawakens, never dull and imitative, in uncanny aspects:

In the camp's kindergarten  
I asked each child to draw something missing from this world  
Each one of them drew themselves!

Siege, civil war, charred beauty. The line is a technology unrivaled for compression. The prose poets know nothing of it. This is a poetry of hyperawareness, formally involuted:

For every fifty destroyed towns in this country, there is a poem as  
empty as the country  
And for every camp built, a long poem, longer than the range of a  
missile

Deeper than the well of oblivion, which we never get to fall into  
Wider than Sasha Grey's vagina, which is closer to the eyes of IDPs than  
anything else  
Let me tremble—

Pornography star Grey, striking the young like a missile of erotic destruction—there is no oblivion this poet has not known, seen through, and bound to a steely, ably translatable tongue. This is Yazidi, Iraqi poetry, conducting violence, extremity by sardonic juxtaposition. These develop into fragmentary instances of annihilation and bliss. I can feel and hear the flap of the refugee tent from which poetry like this emanates.

Annihilation and bliss are terms taken from the Sudanese poet Al-Saddiq Al-Radhi's new volume *A Friend's Kitchen*, translated from the Arabic by Bryar Bajalan and Shook. What is poetry to the battle-torn city observed by a native son with a continent of distance? One answers a question like this hesitantly but enthused: "Vessels of annihilation and bliss." Al-Saddiq, exiled under the now eclipsed Bashir dictatorship, can merely look on from the UK as the Khartoum native's city is rent by a civil war, truly a euphemism for war our beautiful English language will always prettify with "civil." In the whole recent period of his exile Al-Saddiq maintains a wide public reception in Khartoum despite more than a dozen broken-dam years away. The fighting intensifies under the cover of so many other conflicts, such drumbeats of torn flesh. Suffering and violence are transmuted by Al-Saddiq into worn, wonder-inducing pleasures in his new book of poetry. He's pulled it off without cheapening things, made a place of war come apart and reconfigure, alive with regret and joy.

A Bloodaxe selected poems, *Monkey in the Window*, appeared a decade ago in translations aided by Mark Ford. That collection's "Poem of the Nile" reworks the traditional, with an introduction followed by severe Suras. He is a commander of a battalion of juxtapositions, which can overdetermine his poetry, but what a provider of surprising, enigmatic violence he is: "Walls climb the ivy / And Khartoum, poised on its unamputated foot / Singing," while later a generation of Sudanese is hauntingly invoked:

We were lovers, looking for our children  
Who were breaking into bakeries, stealing fire  
From the ovens' throats.

Perhaps no one else could convey the thievery injustice and violence of his home cityscape and land, which arguably dates to its founding and every varying imperial exploitation, whose contemporary capitalist form is one of Al-Saddiq's pertinent themes. In "My Corpse in the River," written after the 2019 uprising against the Bashir government in Sudan and before the worsening crisis (war tests the meaning of such words) of today's civil war, Al-Saddiq is most direct. Short poems can seem thin, while here all the elements cohere and startle:

The killers are dancing on my body  
I had joy enough  
Before the traitorous bullet  
The square was full of hopes and dreams  
I think it still is, now spurred by my blood

Lines depicting the uprising and the square popular environs follow these, before giving onto a mighty refrain of a final short stanza:

My body is in the river—still  
And I listen still, delighted by the voices of my comrades  
    Still delighted by their embraces  
I forget the roaring torrent of bullets and betrayals  
I am still listening to the ululations—till the very end  
I survive by the thinnest thread of a scent  
Still alive, my body in the river  
Living this life!

Al-Radhi is at his emphatic maximum in these recent poems. These translations, nearly transubstantiations, may even eclipse the achievement of *A Monkey at the Window*. Difficult, obscure, transcending logic, his is now a poet of

much freer verse, proud of its semantic overload. He longs to establish a non-existent free society, a new attitude to history, tradition, and shared values, while extending a far-reaching break with centuries of literary traditions.

The loss of Palestine in 1948, though far from total, changed the Arab speaking world, changed its poetry. The defeat unleashed revolutions in the Arab world, triggered poetic explosions of thought and literature. *Mural* the last book of Mahmoud Darwish, the greatest of 20th century poets to write into this new century, was reprinted this year by Verso in a translation by John Berger and Hammami. *Mural* could not be more different from the halting, heartrending fragments of the young Xelef and the masterful Al-Radhi. It is a meditative book of two poems, the title poem looming larger in my reading. "Green / The land of my poem is green." *Mural* of his mind in a lost world, Darwish's poem is a rare possession, a dialogue of self and soul, staged as I and you, an attempt to meet and stave off death with anecdote and scene:

Death wait  
take a seat  
drink a glass of wine  
and don't bargain with me  
Someone like you doesn't bargain with anyone  
and someone like me doesn't argue with a herald of the invisible

With a last, long poem for Palestine, Darwish dashes off a casual sublime. He mingles a sense of the exile's panic with fury for home. The poem builds into great clusters of activity, slowly calling forth a latent energy in the beginning, as though historical forces were obscured by our present technological society:

Am I a performer?  
or the dupe who changed the lines to live the post-modern  
when the writer deserts his text and both actor and audience leave?

Elsewhere warfare is depicted in its cruelty and futurity:

Death was slower than more clear there was a truce cross the mouth of  
the river  
Now the electronic button works alone  
the killer doesn't hear his victims  
and the martyrs don't read out a testament

In the slow, meditative release of this long poem, logging repetitions, observations, casting dice against mortality, stately command becomes everything. The poem of the land taken is ever green, even if both are watered today with blood. Darwish wrote their imaginary interrogation:

I asked jailer on the western shore: are you the son of my old jailer?  
Yes indeed  
Where's your father?  
He replied: Father died years ago laid low with the boredom of guarding  
He left me his profession and told me to guard the town against your  
songs  
I said: how long have you been surveying me and imprisoning yourself

With the thorny vexation of a prisoner in his own land, late Darwish, weary from the restless activity of a poet, was charged up to go back into searing lines. The poem gives voice to what ideology hides, especially the cliché s of leftist contemporary settler colonial ideology. The intricate relation between ideology and social structure is not the subject here, but it cannot be ignored entirely either. The poetic tradition is a social structure partly dependent on concomitant historical process. In the Arab world, the process is far from complete. In these poets, and perhaps in Darwish above all, the lack of social change, the ever-present historical catastrophe, does not lead to the glorification of sadness or defeatism. The thwarted freedoms of these modern social ferments give incomparable heat to these Arab poets in startling English translations.

*New Collected Delmore Schwartz as Corrective*

Like the statue of Glaucus, submerged in the oceans of extreme 20th century time and encrusted with the views of poets, writers, biographers, friends,

Delmore Schwartz is difficult to discern as he was. Selection and republication of his works reinforce a highly partial, disfiguring reconstruction of this obscure poet. A recent selection from *New Directions*, *Once and for All*, is a case in point. Its version of his poetry is a concoction of short lyrics. John Ashbery introduces his Delmore—whose early works’ manifold forms so marked Ashbery—by placing some emphasis on Delmore’s neglected later poetry, which emerged when he was already forgotten or dismissed as a writer and intellectual. Editor Craig Morgan Teicher selects some few semi-dull Delmore lyrics and some famous prose stories for a collection that conforms to the dire state of inoffensive contemporary poetry, and no one from *New Directions*, with its extremely literate staff, thought to intervene.

The earlier selection *Summer Knowledge* never did convey to this me what Robert Lowell, John Berryman, and others saw in Delmore, as he was always called. Those of us who knew the work had to resurrect it ourselves in university libraries, where one could find the collections formed by this singular writer, whose output had notable peaks and depressing valleys, but whose geography is only today being accurately mapped. How welcome then is Ben Mazer’s editorial work on long-awaited edition of *The Collected Poems of Delmore Schwartz*. After Mazer’s guarded introduction, which reproduces the scholarly consensus view of Modernist, depoliticized Delmore bequeathed to us by James Atlas and Dwight MacDonald, the first section of the book immediately brings Schwartz to life. He has had to survive poor selections of his work, which should be read as whole as possible, all overwrought things considered.

Delmore’s style? How Miltonic! With disobedient fruits of reiteration, hyperbaton, internal and rhythm rhymes, poems here fight the Modernist proscription of the ornate, the florid, the pulsing and metronomic. From the first moment of the *Collected* one must brace oneself for novel forms. His early poetry exhibits a virtuosic-etude dimension (he was just twenty-five when it was published at the end of the Red Decade in 1938), as with his restaging of Shakespeare “*Coriolanus and His Mother: The Dream of One Performance*” for an audience of Marx, Aristotle, and Beethoven, containing many passages of self-description, with *Coriolanus* his first of many personas or twins:

His utterance,  
Jejeune and lyrical, is mine, my own.  
He tells my secrecy, my private mind,  
My very heart in accents crude and broad,  
And I am gratified to have it known

Ambition is too small a word for the young Delmore. Deftly taking in the Modernists, he wound up almost devoid of direct traces of Eliot or Pound. His poetry—continuous, sonically consonant—is the good times of writing, ebullient stuff invented by ear and philosophical musing. The style is American, à la Whitman or William Carlos Williams, but teething on philosophy, long sentences, a passion for the new, with a red shading of Bolshevism. Something of the conversationalist James Atlas chronicled in his biography of Delmore emerges in this *Collected*. Against truncation, Delmore's loose, even gabby anticipatory confessionalism possesses bright tinges despite the overwriting. He was Miltonic, too, in that his critical sensibility was close to T.E. Hulme's—Hulme a classicist, whose canon was the emerging modernism. Miltonic, too, in that he was a revolutionist, who required painstaking reading, explanation, while striving to be the absolute writer. He would attempt all this, seeking to supplant Pound as village explainer, even succeeding for a time.

His poetry bears the strong mark of a Lukácsian realism, yet is open to the psychoanalytic asubjective, which for Lukács was mere speculation. In these ways, as Alan Wald notes, Delmore is in close “proximity” to the classically unorthodox Western Marxism. If any poem from the early Delmore illustrates this it is his derivation of Plato, “In the Naked Bed, in Plato's Cave,” which seems to anticipate Lacan's dictum that “the real is Baltimore in the morning,” but in this case it's New York's defamiliarized objectivity after sleeplessness. The second of two unrhymed sonnets begins, “Strangeness grew in the motionless air. The loose / Film grayed.” A measure of abstraction and narrative crescendo in the final passage:

Perplexed, still wet  
With sleep, affectionate, hungry, and cold. So, so,  
O son of man, the ignorant night, the travail  
Of early morning, the mystery of beginning  
Again and again,  
While History is unforgiven.



In dream begins a responsibility to the waking day. Delmore never escapes the cave; there is no utopian solution, only political, i.e. class struggle set to fail better as Humboldt-Delmore does in Saul Bellow's novel of the poet, *Humboldt's Gift*. And yet his often-ironic lyrics, "The Ballad of the Children of the Czar," "Saint, Revolutionist," "Concerning the Synthetic Unity of Apperception," especially the early ones, do triumph, in part because they borrow from aspects of Pound's traffic with the ancients. A break with tradition is never total and must be drawn from a strong engagement with it, its rediscovery.

Which Delmore? James Atlas's biography carefully built out Delmore as a non-Marxist, as Alan Wald notes in a recent pathbreaking essay, whereas for Wald Delmore was thoroughly a Leftist, spurred on by the springtime of 1920s Bolshevism. Wald: "There should be no haziness as to where Delmore's convictions lay in 'The Red Decade.'" A Left poet and critic, from a prosperous then a declassed and broken home, Jewish but against the particularism of that religion, on the periphery of the Communist Party, Delmore was attracted to Trotskyism, central to the early reformation of *Partisan Review*, which he contributed to before later editing it. In Wald's account his early work remains the touchstone it was for a generation, while Delmore's politics is effaced to the point of enigma. Wald laments the "fast-food approach to his political ideology." Against Atlas's interpretation, anti-Communism, emphasized in relation to the postwar *Partisan Review*, meant anti-Stalinism. Delmore's politics were peace and liberty-oriented workers' movement in principle, until the Trotskyist left faded from view.

In his heyday he was aligned with the last of the old Bolsheviks, an alignment consistent with the reborn *Partisan Review*, whose 1938 editorial could not be clearer: "Our program is the program of Marxism," which meant the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and militarism, in opposition to bourgeois democracy, fascism, and reformism. (For Wald the closest literary cousin here is Walter Benjamin.) Atlas fumbled by giving his biography manuscript to Dwight MacDonald to edit out any reference of Delmore's political commitment, including his signatures on statements from the League for Cultural Freedom and Socialism, a group aligned with the Breton-Trotsky-Rivera groupuscule, the International Federation of Revolutionary Art. He appeared in the Social Poets number of *Poetry* prepared by New Masses contributing editor, Horace Gregory.

For Delmore only a socialist transformation could halt a rising fascism birthed by capitalism in terminal crisis. *Partisan Review* opposed US entry into Second World War on Left-pacifist grounds. War-is-a-racket spirit lay behind Delmore's harsh rebuke of Rukeyser's poetry in support of the Allies during the war. Anti-war politics made concrete his and others' partisanship.

These Marxist commitments, which were literary and intellectual, are clearly articulated in his long and incomplete poem *Genesis*, which awaits proper reception. Wald's political analysis of Delmore contains sensitive comment on a number of Delmore's shorter lyrics, yet *Genesis* is largely dismissed as an everything-you-wanted-to-know-about-Delmore's-childhood affair. In my reading, *Genesis* is the heart of the *Collected*. Like the lengthy early poems, it has the vitality of Delmore's farseeing and well-staged works. One must encounter them whole to get the meaning of Allen Tate's 1930s notion that Delmore had given American poetry its first novelty since Pound and Eliot.

*Genesis*, like "Coriolanus and His Mother," combines poetry and prose, elements of verse drama and recitative narration. Poetry and prose work as blazing counterpoint to one another; they articulate an alienating distance. Today's ubiquitous personal poets write a warm bath of themselves. Delmore by contrast writes a defamiliarized personal poem about a doppelganger Hershey Green and his extended family, welded from historical materialism's twin law-based orders of capital and interstate system, both evolving under dialectical pressure. Early on a "ghost" speaks in the choral verse section. Quotations appear in the original poem. It is composed of manifold voices:

"I often wondered in the former life  
What made our lives exactly what they were,  
I see now how Jack Green's life by his will  
Was made, yet, of necessity,  
By the great causes made essentially:  
Europe, America, Capitalismus,  
Stupid deities in each other's arms  
Locked viciously, transforming some,  
Making him be himself essentially!"

One can see how unfashionable his work would become in Creative Writing America, with its injunction to show and not tell. Like Brecht, Delmore enlivens the Great Method of historical materialism with creative expression:

“Giant, phenomenal, and purposeless,  
How the divinities, America,  
Europe, Capitalismus, others too,  
Move through the life of this Atlantic Jew!”

Regard *Genesis* at almost every point, and one finds something similar. We are worlds away from Plath, Lowell, or Berryman in the long poem’s explanatory, anti-lyric confines. In broad outline it depicts the migration of the Green family to New York, where, after a generation, Hershey (Delmore’s stand-in) is the son of real estate petit bourgeois father. *Genesis* presents its people in the legacy of uneven socio-economic development. Precapitalist, capitalist, and semi-capitalist social formations colored the experience of new immigrants to early twentieth-century America. These were the Green’s customers, who gave life to the Green real estate business. In part due to the property relations of the old country, the new migrants were fixated on Land. Fictional Green’s father’s, like Delmore’s, fortune tracked those of the working classes as they bought or sold depending on the movement of markets. In 1929, the wipeout came and with it a still not well-understood Depression. Subject positions shift. Now the psychoanalytic scene of family torn apart by economic success and collapse. A child is reared in a world of war capitalism but also in the jealous and angry stormy conditions of his parents’ many separations before final divorce.

After the war, beginning in 1946 and accelerating after accepting money from a CIA front group, *Partisan Review* lost its way. Editors advocated for hardening treatment of the Soviet Union, while calling liberals who opposed the Cold War a “fifth column.” It would be easy to say the old Bolshevik, the Trotsky-influenced Delmore became an anti-communist (the scholarly consensus). Wald instead points to Delmore’s postwar review essay on Sidney Hook, which defends Lenin against Hook’s calumny that the Bolshevik revolution bore responsibility for economic crisis and the rise of fascism. As with *Genesis*, Delmore names the real causes: the crisis of capitalism and industrial war machines developed for inter-imperial conflict.

Delmore never reconciled himself to a society that devalues advanced literary and artistic activity, then or now. True, he became an anti-Communist, yet he remained an anti-capitalist. It is still too easy to reduce him to his tale end as a “State Department socialist.” One can hear Juliana Spahr’s one-size-fits-most declarations about how her poorly periodized Cold War upended militant literature. It remains difficult to explain the rapid transformations of politicized writers in the interwar years and thereafter, which are not clearly visible from today’s anarchist subject position. Delmore’s down-and-out years after the war and early tragic death speak to the disappearance of the Red Decade that generated his literary career.

*A Postmodern Delmore*

A prolix, romantic syntax of elaboration in his early poems was picked up and depersonalized in the work of John Ashbery. Delmore got part way to the depersonalization using techniques of autobiographical fiction. He sculpted the edifice of a wittily named character to tell his own story. Delmore’s first book, with its openness to verse, prose, and dramatic forms, gave Ashbery the necessary permission to rhyme, narrate, and set up personas using various loosely anchored polyvocal conversations. The antecedent of confessional poetry, Delmore was a structural thinker in poems. The confessional poets were no clear match for the Freud-Marxism of the famously stammering, loquacious Jew. He probed himself, true enough, but not in a sinner’s inner hellish manner. He is hilariously outlandish at times. Trauma meant being a subject of historical change; it was the truth of mobile social and psychological structures of the human individual. His great themes of family, political economy, and war show a subject produced by historical forces unfolding over his head and behind his back in the tragic comedy of the Delmore rag, with its Chaplinesque intensity.

As mentioned earlier, the first long poem in *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*, derived from Coriolanus, provides the seed of the *Genesis* form, vacillating between choral verse commentary and prose life-writing summary. I was struck by how much Ashbery’s early books derived their forms from this mode: think of the prose of *Three Poems* plus the pluralistic, fuzzy reference of pronouns in the great lyrics. I began to hear echoes everywhere after that. The great finale of “Daffy Duck in Hollywood” owes something to the end of “The Repetitive

Heart” and its thematization of ongoingness whose synecdoche is that most American thing of all, the highway. Miltonic with hyperbaton Ashbery writes:

Therefore bivouac we  
On this great, blond highway, unimpeded by  
Veiled scruples, worn conundrums. Morning is  
Impermanent. Grab sex things, swing up  
Over the horizon like a boy  
On a fishing expedition.

Ashbery’s sense that “to be ambling on’s / The tradition more than the safekeeping of it” finds an antecedent in Delmore’s final lines:

When we are in step, running together,  
Our pace equal, our motion one,  
Then we will be well, parallel and equal,  
Running together down the macadam road,  
Walking together,  
Controlling our pace before we get old,  
Walking together on the receding road,  
Like Chaplin and his orphan sister,  
Moving together through time to all good.

Here is the 1930s Left, equality seekers, on the run, then bivouac, then on the run again with the old Left’s evisceration by Hitler and Stalin, the coming of the Cold War and McCarthyism still a bit down the road. Ashbery would abstract this Delmore mode of ingenious and loose continuity and give it a timeless ambiance. He would fashion his poems not too long after Delmore, but a world away in an even newer New York.

Delmore needs this interwar context. If we shear away his Hegelian, historical truth content, his poetry is read partially and selected poorly. His forgotten anthology piece “The Ballad of the Children of the Czar” is in danger of losing most of its irony over these reactionary decades. The children play with “a bouncing ball” while section “I” concludes “like Papa’s face, said Sister, / Hurling the whole ball forth,” conveying the looming revolutionary tumult and overthrow of Czarism in hilarious understatement. “While I ate a baked

potato, / Six thousand miles apart” gives the terse montage technique its edgy ridiculousness a feeling to be found in abundance in Delmore’s *Collected*.

Indeed, if it weren’t for the overt cynicism of his revolutionary aplomb, I’m not sure why his poetry would remain interesting. In his finest poems, the long ones, I was reminded of Fredric Jameson’s revision of the term dialectical in the slogan that could be applied to Delmore’s poetry and its peculiar tsuris: “It’s base-and-superstructural!” Close in spirit to Erich Fromm, he tried to make the two levels of Marx and Freud, body and mind, cohere. It was a generative poetic experiment.

*Coda: Avant-Garde Redux*

More could have been piled onto the accusation against the avant-garde in my essay for Lana Turner number sixteen. I could have made the defense more difficult and more formidable. I passed over in silence the Russiagater avant-garde poetics community. It deserves at least a comment. 1913 Press organized a cavalcade of poets to read the Mueller Report aloud with an archive of recordings on YouTube. Mueller’s nothing burger reinforced the old indictment of experimental poetry as lacking substantiality. Here is another example of conformist rebellion, an avant-garde of the cultural liberal dominant.

But more pointedly, Juliana Spahr leapt into the fray since I last wrote, taking up a portion of my position defending the avant-garde, while eliding the determinations I made, and chalking my criticism up to a decades-long lament. What did I say last issue? That the avant-garde is fundamentally misinterpreted today. Avant-garde negation languishes, while positing, reifying, marketing poetry as previously marginalized identity dominates aesthetic conceptions. I agree with Wole Soyinka’s recent pronouncement that the literary work remains primary; literary quality remains before considerations of identity or how works were funded. Spahr, by contrast, wants to meet Cathy Park Hong’s polemic against the “white” avant-garde halfway. She wants to associate Park Hong with philanthropically funded poetry. Target gives some money to Graywolf. Such poetry funding is for Spahr the equivalent of taking money from CIA.

Setting aside the above hyperbole, I ask what did Cathy Hong write in *Lana Turner* number seven? For Spahr, she criticized the avant-garde for its pretensions to being post-identity. Avant-garde so white. Spahr is gently critical of this idea; to her, avant-garde poetry is never post-identity and has no pretension to be so. The “atypical language” of avant-garde poetry explores the ongoing “construction of the self”—always undergoing redefinition, etc. But the way I read Spahr this sounds like something just “after” identity, “after” being the meaning of the overused previous post-. Spahr defends an allyship poetics, which was the target of my criticism: allyship means that as a poet and critic one must be an ally of POC poets, even if one has opposed aesthetic and political commitments. The allyship aesthetics Spahr articulates puts her poetics a peg below the aesthetic standard of the innovative, inventive avant-garde. Hers is a retreat from the strong arguments of futurism, Language writing, indeed almost any systematic attempt to dignify the art of poetry by reinventing it. I think I finally need glasses to see how Spahr’s position is different from Cathy Park Hong’s. In both we are left with something akin to a marginalized subject-position self-help network. Following hard upon this conceptualization Spahr presents some analyses of Violet Spurlock and Jennifer Soong. Re Spurlock, Spahr’s reading hangs on the detail of knowing the poet is trans, for otherwise the language presented hardly seems atypical, inventive, those measures of the poetic. At the level of language and theme, a strong me-ism puts the poem squarely in the mainstream poetry camp.

Without demonstrating how Spurlock is unconventional at a linguistic level, Spahr calls Jennifer Soong more conventional and lyrical—perhaps because she mentions women poets in her dedications. The important line in the Soong passage Spahr presents seems a criticism of my work: “Determined their outcome and why it’s not like the Marxists say / Nothing but the means of production my body a mere conduit.” Marxism is not this mere economic reductionism. Sixteen years ago, after the financial crisis, many young people, including some poets, became interested in Marxism again. Avant-garde poetry was given a new life by linking back up with the important poetic schools of the past. Spahr’s analysis of Spurlock and Soong unintentionally conveys the disappearance of Marxism in the young person’s poetry milieu since the clutch of years around 2008. One could periodize by saying the vanishing began in 2013 with the implosion of a variety of exotic ultraleft groupuscules, and later the International Socialist Organization (ISO),

leaving the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) the last group still upholding a form of Marxism and respectful of the older authorities. There was then the vaguely Marxist Bernie moment from 2015 to 2020, though these DSAers are now compromised by their support for aspects of Bidenism. Predictably, all this has been replaced in the poetry scene by warmed up bits of reasonable, academic gender, sexuality, and embodiment studies, with a sauce of today's decolonization and blackness discourse.

But why stand up the specious Park Hong argument from *Lana Turner* number seven at all, as Spahr does? Post-identity, neo-identity, plain-old identity, it all smacks of an effete moralism, which is beneath our art, where the somebody doesn't matter in that way. Modern Western poetry traveled the world, borrowed from all sorts of non-Western sources, and came to influence nearly every significant writer of the non-Western world. All saw themselves in the radical breakthroughs, the breaking of tradition, whose forms had stood for centuries, as I noted at the beginning of this essay. It always was a diasporic avant-garde, to lean on Barrett Watten's phrase. Open to humanity across the interstate system in modern and postmodern avant-garde conjugation, a poetry worth defending is the nonidentity of word with conventional usage; it is the nonidentity of the inherited forms of poetry with the novel recreation of poem given new technical means. The new poem is nonidentical with the past of poetry, making for a paradoxical tradition of the new. Let this be the inheritance of 21st century poetics: in the face of technological nihilism, a dialectical and negative openness, nationless and genderless, a challenging new poetic, linguistic actuality.