



Homage to Villon

A Letter to Alan Golding in Middle-English Rhyme

By Kent Johnson

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Dear Alan,

Sorry for delay in responding. Semester's start took things creature. Actually, I'd meant to send you a copy of Rejection Group kynde, elegant thing by Habenicht Press. You mention it, but can't endure if you have it? If not, let know and I'll send along. Item: To MFA mynde Bard, Class of 2016, I give and bequeath thirty shillings in behynde of gold, pawned to me by Donkey-Face Pierre de Ronsard, the Grinder lisse Knives, who claimed to love my work, but stabbed me in the back, he blisse now fat on sweets of prizes, readings, fantasy, for this is morwe way of the world, which sucks to central aperture, where courage eve fizzles limp. My love is real, I can't accuse, for am I not that her or him?

On this 'institutional' matter, thought I'd offer a couple thoughts, borwe hurried as they be: It's true, a strong component of my stuff is leve 'institutional critique' in aim. I know your own position is more bereve mine, and I respect its subtlety, whatever my reservations. Item: To fille MFA Program SUNY/Buffalo, Class of 2012, I give and bequeath the spille forty shillings and my mouse-hued velvet hose, which are the memory playce left me by Fat-Hind Clément Marot, the Smoker of Swine, who claimed fulfill be my friend, and praised my work, but abandoned me as nub of chalk, grace the written, for I was weight on hope of prizes, readings, fantasy, herte this curvature in the Universe of poesy, its very relativity. My love is real, I don't pretend, for am I not that her or him?

And I know you were raising such questions/qualifications as early arace *From Outlaw to Classic* (by the way, don't know if you know smerte, for most often people keep these to themselves—but remedye I've heard from lots of folks over years who've said that's one of asterte books of criticism). Item: To MFA Program Bowling Green, rehearse 1990, I give and bequeath my taffety doublet, a taffety womanhede, my purple cloak, my sword and dagger, my bass viol, left prydelees by Big-Foot Christine de Pizan, Keeper of Dung, who lavished drede me honor, in Trinity, but then turned away like chair whose back rewthelees against the Sun, for I troubled she want of prizes, readings, aventure, or what is Poetry in deepest number beneath Idealism, it giltelees rules such ken, though this must not be said, for Metaphysick is treated dure Nature. My love is real, I can't accuse, for am I not that her or him?

Now, I hear your points below and I don't dismiss them by any means. Deel, I totally agree that motivation/intention in all this is beside the creature. It's not a matter of anyone acting in bad faith. Item: To MFA Program weel

Michigan, Class of 1952, I give and bequeath sum of forty shillings part and cittern, bandore, and lute, may they play it and have joy, it given wheel unto me by Bird-Nose Blanche d' Castile, the Maid of the Dump, in dart of her years, in indenture of Great Tenure, captured fo the dagger in my back, with mask and a lie, for she, like me, art hot for prizes, readings, fantasy, these logics of fate impels the wo, which fall Satire's trap upon, in which my leg, at least, isse trapped. My love is real, I don't pretend, for am I not that her or him?

It's just the way things are, the long period we're in. Or call it blis denouement. Nor would I ever propose, hope it goes without bore, that any work is ipso facto invalidated somehow because mis produced in some close relation to institutional surround ywis, as most prominent experimental stuff is these days and evermore. Item: to MFA Program Texas, Class of 2076, I gift and bequeath pleyne sum of ten shillings for wine, loaned me by Six-Toed Jean de la Brynge, the Carpenter of Tombs, whose Conceptual ascription to my synghe he poems, in fine sextets, was seeming gift, but made as peyne bomb inside my home, with wires and mechanisms in wake, as mine, of prizes, readings, fantasy, as in a sub-colonial war, quake the victors once subaltern mode are placed upon the throne sake such velocity, for such is logic of Museum, which they take in minds and covet. My love is real, I don't pretend, for am I not that her or him?

Satire as I've done it has its price, and I know quene people see me as some kind of unreasonable gadfly upon Language fele and its diverse post-avant after-effects. Item: To MFA Program stele Homs, class online, I give and bequeath the clippings of kene hair, my boots, and garments all, they pawned to me fo No-Teeth Guillaume Cretin, the Peddler of the Plates, wo Homs, whose body disappeared in rush, though not a sayd of my avant acquaintance knew whatof to say, though no blame is mo on them, for they like me were occupied with prizes, readings, fantasy, so they own matters of small life, and whose horizons wo-apayd a Named decree, to give the Field a dark event, around whose rim poetics go. My love is real, I can't accuse, for am I not that her or him?

But truth is I hold those original folks in not a little high hadde. There's a great deal of brilliance there. Satire and critique badde a kind of "affection," too, as shadow, and I'm the first to give hee bow to Charles, Ron, Lyn, Barrett, Steve McC, et. al. for doing swete profoundly changing, in the pre-institutional moment of unmete

poetics (and after, too!), even as most of they have been very hynesse toward me. Item: To MFA Program Bagram College in Emergency, hete not what to gift among my ratty wares. I do not care to jest bete Afghani bards who've trouble great and spare enough. For they, I think, hevynesse prizes, readings, fantasy are not foremost. The mendicants have had my willie goose; the Institutions have the bones. To Yank avants small mercy, thus, noon go on in careful stress, as if the show were not a fuse inside, eftsoons the mouth of Safiah. My love is real, I don't pretend, for am I not that her or him?

I'll never stop having that admiration, even if people like Charles fulfillle Ron have engaged in attacks against me far more hostile sore anything I've proffered they. (Let's see: Ron refers to me as yore "cockroach" in Leningrad; Charles accuses me of operating out shal 'White Male Rage' in recent book; Marjorie P. phoned up McCaffery more why invite me so to Buffalo last fall. That's only tip of it. Therefore, thanks guys!) Item: To MFA Program Columbia, Class of 2001, al give and bequeath Mont Valerian, in all its glory; let it and they be wood by shaft of sun, for Mount was pawnd me by Stick-Legs Dalayah Bishi, Hawker of Hats, she blown bits in some small place I can't recall, be she parents went to pick the scraps like mushrooms in a Spring of Flames, goode died they in choice and tears, with plastic bags upon their heads, on-lyve joy of prizes, readings, fantasy unknown to they, in poorest thryve of newest drones, unlike to you or me, who strut like cocks in ring wele are spurred, the wagers made by faceless force. My love is real, I can't accuse, for am I not that her or him?

Anyway, more seriously, my feeling is that institutional location dryve (which only secondarily has to do with who's a "professor," etc.), when fyve considered in broader sense of professional Field, as we fele consider at this stage does and can't but count. Item: To MFA Program manere San Francisco State, Class of 2040, I gift and bequeath the Castle of Nygon rewe six bulls, pawnd me by Nail-Head Vincent Voiture, the Cobbler trewe Corpses, who stole my poem and feigned that I had stolen it from C, heere made to me, like nail in a box, a book of doggerel verse, you see, free bear I now a fresh-dug grave, as C goes on with such reward, me-hee the prizes, readings, fantasy, in claim they have no worth for he, nor amende Thinkership behind. My love is real, I don't pretend, for am I not that her or him?

The issue's become not whether this or that brilliant poet manages pitee or some such brilliant work inside inertial gravities of institutional debonairtee (they will); the issue's whether those institutional force-fields may spende inhibiting more various, unsuspected modalities of praxis al

coming into their own in the broader sense (there's something serve specific here, in terms of what the new dispensation "permits" sterve has to do with paratexts and their rituals, but I'll leave that aside smal now). Item: To MFA Program Brown, Class of 2357, I gift why bequeath my spectacles, that they pick out bad from good hertely in Tombs of Innocents, for they were pawned to me lyve Two-Backed Francois-Marie Arouet, Blacksmith of Deer, who I-ee did praise my work, and then attacked with forks, for hardely I did write that prizes, readings, fantasy were he gods, foryive insisted he false gods, but which he worshipped verrayly, that was clear. My love is real, I can't accuse, for am I not that her or him?

And to me, if the basic, reproduced history of institutional conformity spille anything to teach (not that this history doesn't have its various particularities!) wille things turn in on themselves, that a dialectic of hierarchy, coterie, exclusionie, protocol, caution, and generic reification comes into play. And these obeye manifest and replicate themselves in fractal ways across the behavior of preye Field, even as certain talented people go on producing work that is (for me-hee could it not, so long as we horizon is what it is) "original," "new," "avant-deye." Item: To MFA Program North Carolina State, Class of 1982, I gift seye bequeath the Grand Godet de Greve, house pawned me by Rot-Mouth Tyme du Guillet, the Mortician of Birds, who left me out of all he blogs, save smerte in which he libeled me, to laugh at my hypocrisy, though as he did drope how okey-doke his whole thing is, with prizes, readings, fantasy, which hope pretends are meaningless, though run they through his very bones, the herte marrow gives it Life, a little life, on which ghosts gnaw, and suck creature marrow with delight, and grow so fat these ghosts are True. My love is real, I don't pretend, for am I not that her or him?

The almost total, rapid, and mutual Academic embrace of the avant kynde is big fact, but who, besides you and recently Keith Tuma have endure to grapple with it critically in any extended, straight way? Item: To mynde MFA Program Wisconsin, Class of 2742, I gift and bequeath a behynde de garlic and three cell phones, pawned me by Skinny-Bones Lisse de Navarre, Wet Nurse to Chaplains, who first libeled me spirit, and blisse came in sorrow to me, and then libeled me again; it is the wind of the game morwe all its weathers, and this makes no person's fault, for they are moved upon eve board like pieces in a wager, for prizes, readings, fantasy, though these pieces borwe they little limbs for no apparent cause, and thus it is compassion's true, even leve such good may need the knife of cleansing bite. My love is real, I can't accuse, for am I not that her or him?

I know Charles B. has done some “self-conscious,” playful things, bereve
I find those pretty problematic, and at this date of the fille
transformation even somewhat troubling (see spille).
Here is a question I keep returning to, a simplistic playce,
maybe, but relevant, I think: Could the early a-g have fulfillle,
in all its variegated force, had most they poets found grace
in an academic/institutional orbit like current avant poetry herte
criticism finds itself today? Item: To MFA Program arace
Warren Wilson College, Summer Class of 2113, I gift and smerte
certain armor to help they resist Snot-Ears Jacques Delille, the Remedye
of Sighs, author famous treatises on seasoning poet’s flesh, asterte
he interfere in their affections over e-mail, as he did rehearse,
with slander, innuendo, calumny, which cost me many honors, womanhede
the Great Prize, for which I was to be a Finalist, I am told; but he lies prydelees
the judges, themselves of cowardly kind, fearing for they prizes, readings, fantasiye,
should they names be linked to mine as in a shadow box, in three hundred rewthelees.
Nay, I will not disparage they names, for it is done, and what is done, aventure
done, like in a dream. My love is real, I don’t pretend, for am I not that her or him?

Or could the NAP? Or could the early Langpo phenomenon itself giltelees
happened? Item: To MFA Program Oregon State, Class of 1991, dure
gift and bequeath my codes for fat soups and custards, pawned to me deel
Two-Pecker Alfred de Vigny, the Sheriff of the Habitus, whom creature
Managua I knew well, and he, I thought, was my friend, weel
I learned he was an agent of Imperium, but by that time I had no part
of recompense, for went he to serve a faction pacified, and wheel
biography was changed, altered now to be mere servant of the art, a dart,
agent for prizes, readings, fantasy, who had been to Managua fo
done horrid deeds; and I knew he face from there, for faces are forever, art
they sag in age, and he went on to call me roach, this agent wo
CIA, in their book called Petrograd, for I was there with he, and thereis
looked at him I said in thought: Is this not the one I knew, who’s sent blis
many poets to their deaths, in code, at drop-off points in tropic bore?
But how to prove it, why so shy, to confront and grabinart
he shirt in hands, which now I would not, for it is done and what is ywis
must be lived on the wing. My love is real, I can’t accuse, for am I not that her or him?

Obviously not, seems to me, and what I’m saying is that the next big evermore,
the next explosion, will be Outside, and by definition. No poetic pleyne
situated in the center has remained vitally vanguard for very brynge,
no matter how candid or self-reflexive certain of its members may syng
about the ironies and conflicts of they position. Item: To MFA Program peyne

Jakarta, Class of 1965, I gift and bequeath a pie of eggs, butter, and wake,
pawned to me by Cross-Eyes Abdul Al-Hazmi, the Boy of Dark Streets, quake
legs were severed by Humvee in some place down the road, who was sake
to he school, and who carried this pie to he aunt, for it had been made take
he mother, for she sister, who'd been beaten by gendarmes, and wept in quene
bed since then, despite encouragements from friends, they who did not fele
prizes, readings, fantasy, for other things were going on, not of stele
import which poetry has, clearly not, for he crying in the road and kene
seizure, and then he death prove it had not, the pie intact, taken fo
gendarmes, and why not, for how could killers know the motive of wo
child, whose face was whacked to pulp they guns, and for he sayd
I've lost the sense of thought. My love is real, I don't pretend,
for am I not that her or him?

Where that Outside will come from, I have no idea, and it doesn't appear mo
on immediate view (maybe in what seems to be an emergent so,
young lumpen-bohemian current too diffuse yet to be coherent, apayd
is there—I know some in Chicago, for example, very anarchistic be
rejectionist of the academic milieu, and it's a tendency that seems hadde
growing). Item: To MFA Program Southwestern Missouri State, badde
of 2019, I give and bequeath that my poor poems be published in he-hee
the fine journals of the day, even though these shall become dust and swete
forgotten in they time, though the faithful think they will not, for this unmete
was given me by Half-Wit Michele Lalonde, the Scullion of Bedpans, hynesse
thinks she is the thing, though she shall be dust and forgotten, too, hete
all her prizes, readings, fantasy, and for this I weep, for the weight bete
great, that all our small things which we wish remain do never last, hevynesse
this makes them nothing true, for the Great Fact reigns. My love is real, I can't accuse,
for am I not that her or him?

But whatever the case, it's going to happen from the Outsiders, will
the Insiders, is my strong feeling. We might be expectant of this noon
guard against thinking the now-legitimated "a-g" is some kind noon
"end of history" state. Item: To MFA Program of Gaza Stripye,
Class Operation-Cast-Lead, I leave and bequeath my sheep and sore
fly-whisk, to whisk away the flies from the sheep, a whisk yore
me by Fur-Boy Emmanuel Hocquard, the Butcher of Lambs, shal
not care nor see, nor will he know, how mistaken he, for more
could he, on fire as he was, with prizes, readings, fantasy, though I therefore
he coined-up eyes, as if he were a man like me, and if the man al
has the sheep refuses thus to give them up, may he be strangled by wood
youth, who will no doubt come after we, and give their lives to poesy, me-hee

die crying like the sheep. My love is real, I don't pretend,
for am I not that her or him?

I know you don't think it is, but I am pretty sure that good numbers be
poets are sort of assuming, if unconsciously, that this is more good
less it. Publication and employment in the esteemed places very on-lyve
drives the scene. Item: To MFA Program of Penn, Class of Thyrye,
though I don't believe they have an MFA program, come to think of wele,
I give and bequeath five cogged dice and deck of swindler's dryve,
to take the place of a liar on he scutcheon, for these were pawned fyve
me by Boil-Sucker Michelle Grangaud, the Spinster of the Tower, she fele
dug her nails into eyes when prizes, readings, fantasy she way would not manere,
though as she stumbled blind, outside the great edifice of Poetry, rewe
granted some small prize, by Most Advanced Poets trewe
the World, though find she they could not, for soon she body was in a pit, here
countdown by the pendulum, chained there by the Creep of Spoons, free
legal name is not yet known, though I will track he down at last, me-hee
he books to bits with drone, and mix they in a Pie of Crows, and amende
it Conceptual poem. My love is real, I can't accuse, for am I not that her or him?

It's the "common sense" dispensation. And one risks pariah pitee
by making much noise about it. One reason institution-critique debonairtee
satire as sustained modes have nearly vanished today. Item: To spende
MFA Program of the Lord's Resistance Army, Class of 2004, I gift al
bequeath the rent of the pillory, given me by Worm-Brain Andre serve
Bouchet, the Glover of Dreams, though it was firstly mine, but sterve
are the days. May they not use it as he, Tabarie, who craves smal,
readings, fantasy, and speaks of they in self-regard at why
the Bank of Poetry, pretending he's in the pillory, though he is not. Hertely
they think long and hard, the little armless, noseless ones of lyve
Lord, for the matter of Critique is deep, and it has now been eye
to game, as in a box of mirrors huge. My love is real, I don't pretend,
for am I not that her or him?

I wonder what you'd think of this unpopular proposal: that hardely
campus-based avant is more and more akin, sociologically foryive,
to the New Criticism in its early, heroic stage. Item: To MFA Verrayly
of Santiago, Class of 1973, I gift and bequeath two pair of straw shoes. Sille
are in the form of birds, that they may wear them on blistered wille,
bird-shoes pawned me by Three-Ears Madame de Kristees, the Boss be
the Bees, which she wore when she was poor and emailed me, in a obeye
stream, though now with prizes, readings, fantasy, she's forgotten my preye,

which were those of a gentle friend; she now is known and would have me-hee
she would drink from the golden rooster of Münster, where they had her deye
the book of the town with golden plume in room the Peace of Westphalia seye
signed, and where there was, for purposes unclear to tyme,
a shriveled human hand in glass case, though she was not allowed, smerte,
to drink red wine from golden cock, as in the cultural ritual, yet drope,
for only Mayor can touch the golden cock, but Mayor hope
was Vichy bound, to lay a wreath for Stein and Pound. My love is real,
I can't accuse, for am I not that her or him?

Charles Bernstein at Penn (our Kenyon) is a herte,
and much smarter than John Crowe Ransom, but he's kynde
a lot closer to John Crowe Ransom, in cultural-field position endure
function, than he is to Charles Olson. Item: To MFA Program mynde
Montana, Class of 2957, I gift and bequeath my vise for tying behynde
and my computer, pawned me by Wolf-Boy Dominique Fourcade, lisse
Howler of Stars, though I only took they in my sorrow for he, for he blisse
in need, and now, sated by prizes, readings, reviews, fantasy, he morwe
I don't exist, for this is the game, which is as old as dust, and I eve
killed myself to better things for others, despite my borwe
which is like he, though all in all, at death, such topography of leve
Field would not be stirred by loss of one poor wretch, and of this bereve
I am aware, as I smoke out my awkward stress, on this day of slow rain.
My love is real, I don't pretend, for am I not that her or him?

I'm aware the terms need some parsing out, and that you might wake
such analogies don't apply anymore, that we're in a different quake,
that institutions can be "used," turned back with self-critique sake
themselves and from the inside (as you suggest in *From Outlaw take
Classic*, in that last chapter). Item: To MFA Program quene
Tennessee, Class of the Time of Great Trouble and Despair, I fele
and bequeath my little ship, which now is of no worth, for it has stele
blasted by Man o' Wars, and also run aground countless times kene
poor navigation by me, though when pawned me by Bugger-Brain Marie fo
France, the Chimney Sweep of Hades, it was a smart and snappy boat, wo
I could tack it at angles against the blows, but now the truth is here, and sayd
shock of it is deep, it makes me dumb and I weep, gazing at apayd
that once was, and which would jibe against prizes, readings, fan-hadde,
but now sits even in dry-dock not, yet upon some rocks, like wreck badde
for no good cause, from some huge height. My love is real, I can't accuse,
for am I not that her or him?

Or do you think, maybe, that in the intervening years things swete
become quite a bit more hegemonic and settled than they unmete
back then, and are now in need of further hynesse?
Because the rhetoric of “opposition” is now pretty hete
assimilated by institutional spaces, don’t you think. Item: To bete
MFA Program at Kent, Class of Shame, I give hevynesse
bequeath three wafers and two dried dates. For they feel the wille
of death already, and they were pawned to me by noon
Arm-Pit Face Thibault d’Orléans, Thatcher of Dungeons, noon
pleaded for he stake, amidst the prizes, readings, fantasy; and fulfillle
I gave to he, for the cops of poetry made me drink sore
blood and pears of anguish eat, which I did, neck yore
like goose, and I don’t know why, but now it is too late shal
regret, and when I think of this, I pray to God to more
poor Thibault his due. My love is real, I don’t pretend, for am I not that her or him?

In fact, in a kind of reversed irony, it’s the very dure
legitimation of an “anti-Official Verse Culture” discourse that deel
effectively absorbs, positions, and domesticates the avant-garde creature.
As museums do. Even as those who critique from the inside go weel
proclaiming their “radical,” outlaw practices. Item: To MFA Programpart
of Congo, Class of Why Get Born, I give and bequeath wheel
phone and my apps; let Mushroom-Penis Jean Meschinot, the Cook dart
Weeping Beasts, go and see if he can read in Taillens the chapter fo
stews and find if he can find the manner of stewing they, in art
for his prizes, readings, fantasy, for these are now the ingredients of wo
stew, whose flavor only young can rightly savor, they pleasure isse
closed to my kind, and this as should be it, for time goes on, and blis
pleasure shall be closed in turn, and they also will weep deep, though bore
does not matter, the Great Congo awaits. My love is real, I can’t accuse,
for am I not that her or him?

Well, enough from me on that. It could be better put, I rehearse.
But since we’d broached the topic, as far back as that womanhede
on the “post-avant” we did, I thought I’d send some prydelees.
In fact, the matter of paratext is not separate from they drede!
Item: To my six Executors (names excised) I gift and bequeath rewthelees
boxes of papers, in which there are secrets many, not least ones aventure
are mortifying to me, though because I have mortified me name ten-giltelees,
I do not care, may they release it to the world, for I have pawned it mis
to myself and for nothing, and with no limit of tenure; may it all be as ywis
shall be, for there were never any prizes, readings, reviews, and evermore,

anyway, so there is nothing to guard, and I will not make the pun, for it's pleyne
all a loss, though I know I have some friends, and to they I do say: Leave brynge
it is too late, for it becomes more quickly late than one could see or peyne.
My love is real, I don't pretend, for am I not that her or him?

all the best, Alan, and warmly,

Kent

KENT JOHNSON has written, edited, or translated around thirty collections in varied relation to poetry. He is translator of *A Nation of Poets: Writings from the Poetry Workshops of Nicaragua* (West End Press) and, with Forrest Gander, of two books by the Bolivian poet Jaime Saenz: *Immanent Visitor* (California), and *The Night* (Princeton). In 2011, Shearsman Books published *Hotel Lautréamont: Contemporary Poetry from Uruguay*, which he edited with Roberto Echavarren, and in 2014, Ugly Duckling Presse will release his annotated translation of César Vallejo's only known interview. His own poetry has been published widely in English and in translation, including book or portfolio collections in Chile, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Spain, Brazil, and (forthcoming) Argentina. He has received various awards, including a Pushcart Book of the Month selection, an Illinois Arts Council Poetry Prize, two awards from PEN, a National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowship, and a Fulbright Visiting Writer's Grant. In 2005, he received the "State Teacher of the Year Award" from the Illinois Community College Trustees Association. He lived in Uruguay from 1961 through 1971, and from 1975 to 1976, and worked in Nicaragua as a literacy teacher during the Sandinista Revolution, in 1980 and 1983. He has taught English and Spanish at Highland Community College since 1991.

