The broken CITY

Prose Poetry Photography Art Music

History, repeated



Personal history re-enactment • A letter to a renowned poet/painter/musician • Six questions for King Sihanouk • The debauched gentry • Poetry to re-engineer the human machine • Photos galore!

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Cover Illustration: Mouki K. Butt

Mouki K. Butt is an illustrator, animator, and music maker. She currently resides in Vancouver. If history really does repeat itself, Mouki is probably somewhere procrastinating right now.
http://minorepic.net/~mouki

The Broken City is currently accepting submissions for its winter 2009 edition, *The New Hip*.

I Love Nerds t-shirts used to be irreverent; now they're an indicator of a dramatic shift in cool. It's suddenly hip to be a nerd or a geek. Let's celebrate dorkiness before it's forced back into dark bedrooms and convention halls.

Have you been itching to write the definitive essay on the Star Wars vs. Star Trek debate? Do you create poetry that looks like source code? Are you imagining a short story about video game developers at Atari? Do you have a room full of toys in their original packaging that you can take some pictures of? Did a comic book change your life in 1989?

We want to see it all. Please send your poetry, fiction, non-fiction, comics, art, photography, music/book reviews to thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com. Please, no fan fiction.

More details at www.thebrokencitymag.com/submissions.html. Nothing that fits the theme? Send something anyway—there will likely be room for non-conforming work too.

On the Subject of Letter Writing

girlfixer

Dear Mr. Renowned *Poet/Painter/Musician,*

I write to you because it has occurred to me that up to this point in history, all artists, at least those with anything to say, regardless of discipline, have at one point or another taken to letter writing. They wrote to friends and lovers, and often to one another—the poets and short story writers could especially be counted on for that. And, although I'm sure the idea would be met with much dissent, I am convinced that for many, those letters represent their greatest work, or at least their most telling. Perhaps it's the difference between writing for a singular audience and writing for the masses. Think *Bukowski's* letters to *Martinelli*.

Now, sitting at my computer, the modern typer, I wonder what we will be left with fifty, or even just thirty years from now. E-mail?—effortless, overly familiar, and entirely too ephemeral. And I doubt that we will ever see the posthumous publishing of a book entitled *Mr. Renowned Poet: Text Messages 2004-2008*. Worse still, is that some time over the last decade, letter writing went from simply being antiquated to being odd. I mean, you do need an *envelope* after all, and crazier still a *stamp*—fifty-two cents! Ninety-six to the States! And how absurd, the men and women in short pants with messenger bags, carrying those envelopes from point A to point B.

Maybe I'm too cynical. The last letter I wrote was to a boy I met during a blissfully parent-less two weeks the summer before my freshman year in high school. I turned thirty last week. *Boy, was he worth the stamp!* No more than a week apart and there was so much to tell him. I filled three pages, double-sided, single-spaced. He didn't write back. It was the beginning of the end.

So why, now, do I risk the stigma of the letter writer? In the name of science... or maybe it's linguistics, anthropology perhaps? Let's just call it an experiment. As an admirer of your *writing/painting/music,* I send you this letter. From here, theoretically, one of the following could occur:

A. You read the letter and immediately throw it away—no reply.
B. You read the letter and reply in kind.
C. The intern or p.a. in charge of your mail reads the letter and sends me a lovely form response—you know, the kind that begins *Dear fan, Mr. Renowned Poet thanks you for your support...*
D. The letter is never read.

Now, both C and D would lead one to believe that the time of the letter has, indeed, passed. Option B, on the other hand, breeds optimism. It's that A that's the tricky one. Does it speak to the condition of written correspondence in the digital era, or simply reflect the lack of anything particularly interesting to say on the part of this letter-writer?

Admittedly, the experiment is flawed. I could really only ever know B or C. Besides, there are almost limitless other variables to be considered. Take mood for example. What if the mail were to arrive just as you were fixing breakfast, and as you exchanged pleasantries with the carrier, your yolks turned hard and the toast black? Something like that's bound to colour your judgment. Still, while the experiment may not adhere closely to the scientific method, I can't help but be curious regarding its result.

So now it is left only to post this letter and wait (the anticipation being perhaps the best part). Maybe you'll read it, maybe you won't. But, if I've managed to hold your attention this long, I would be remiss in not making one last appeal. *Please write*. You can write to me, to someone you love, or at the very least to someone who loves you, but *please write*.

Sincerely yours,
girlfixer
Burnaby, BC

girlfixer has erased, deleted, garbaged, or burned almost everything she has ever written. Occasionally, during brief moments of insanity, she will grant something a reprieve. Visit her online at www.myspace.com/suicide_room.

An Address To Cambodia's King Norodom Sihanouk

Tammy Stone

Who are you, King Sihanouk?
Neither ill nor well,
Neither as young as public portraits nor as old as the wind
A king once dethroned
in the name of something willowy now gone.

What are your passions, King Sihanouk?
Who once walked the length of your land
And then took to the business of seeing the world
Living in China 12 long years
Who in time of crisis
Weathered not the tides and times of unrest
But fled to a studio, to make tens of films and more.

(Where are these films, King Sihanouk, and how can I find them?)

King, How did you endure?
When the French placed you on the throne
and no one wanted a colony
When as prime minister you were taken
by Lon Nol and had to flee to the north
When support for the reds left you without allies
And finally, when a modern election left you
as figurehead without an arena for your
eloquent voice?

How do you sit, still and voiceless?

Robot Arm
Christopher Felling

"He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him."
~Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: "Manifesto of the Communist Party"

Dishwasher: The Womb: machine hole shuddering, about to,
ready to, screaming to blow: spit what it swallows, to gargle scum + shunt
bones clean to gleaming + steaming w/ chemistry, alkaline scoured + acid dry.
A scale-model temple to headache, vomiting,
fever: right angles + 180° temperatures, rustproof
steel w/ vicious skin folds etched into
hard tissue, grain stained w/ coffee. Dish-pit: old altar steel
like smoker teeth + plaque + snot
colonies dug in the folds + gums + corners
+ sciatic vertebrate spine after spine meshed
w/ leftover cartilage, sugar scabs + milk clots slosh in cranberry juice.
Work, chiropractor! Pop + wash discs veined w/ syrup + snakes
of icing pump like decades-earned hernia coiling in chefs.
Knee joints burst like nutshells, oranges, the fried skin + soft meat off
scapegoats. Broke satyrs w/ freak knees + bone feet, waddling
on stumps, w/ so much flesh to drape + drape
w/ gravy. Plaque + snot skins char on stainless steel. Leek
scabs, spinach scabs, rotten demands,
ghoulish, ghoulish far-away chewing. Work, gravedigger!
There are so many bandages, so many
latex gloves, aprons, barriers + burn ointment,
acid + chlorine gallons, litters of filth + blooms
of food hungry for wet hands
+ shrieking, shrieking delivery.

Swallow coffee, tea, sleep + gasoline. Drink. Still work slouches. Still snot. Still the mop.
Still waves of bones clattering. Still wolverine air ducts, ravenous for steam.
Still butcher-white satyrs pulling to pieces @ the seams of their meat.
Still the machine: roiling sure as the cold moon's long winks. Work, dishwasher!

Death drive asymptote.

Christopher Felling

I savor hot sidewalks, vital door handles
+ broken fans in New York like 99¢ coffee.
The last breezes of steel + drywall
taunt past like shy steam, curl
out into a city of gray ventilation.
Beyond the venetian blind grates, they're the stage
fright flossing through Times Square, until finally
they fold on the ivory edges of switchblade planes
+ wet the lips wings slice open. + the summer
Sun screams through today. That's the day for the wind,
for the white + lanky fingers vining from manholes,
from black storm drains—for the mechanical breeze,
its anxious blue pigeon's heart.

I can't sleep because of the peace, the noise,
the relief of air conditioning—caged by stairwells,
wrought iron fire escapes, bulletproof plate glass.
Parking lots grow spines + oily elevators, even.
These years are clay + steel
+ the grim white hammers swung
to dust + dent them. To brush teeth clean
off our gears, bleed and grin out gums, axles + hydraulics.
Someday I'll blackout w/ this city, teach it to yawn, fall
prone to smolder overnight. Wake up cold, naked,
happy in thin loose sheets of hunger. Orgasmic
w/ headache. Orgasmic w/ a jar of nails + long screws,
a sleek driver, a hammer
for a new world in the green shoots of wreckage—
but air conditioner, skyscrapers, wage labor until then,
until then,
until then.

Someday I will take unpaid vacation. One day the birds will explode
+ the smiling white planes will finally land in my window.

The first poem was written by machines. The last poem will be written by machines.

Christopher Felling

Soon the paper evaporates. Soon
bursts a world w/o trees, through
rotten bark + beetle hairs. A world w/o
our drooling urge for time
to strip its gears bald,
lurch into reverse
or stop when we expect
the giddy accelerator + brakes
in our empty-space ribcages, tight-leashed
limbs + brain.
When we expect the bellows to the furnace of engines
or the passion of factories
+ their ambrosial smog
we grind our piston feet
down on nothing.
Just hear the antenna shudders of Earth, circuit boards, capillaries,
refrigerator piping + our stupid weeping species—
our stump-worship + crucifixion of physics when
the Romantics obey binary meter like calculators—
the diplomatic immunity we claim for our electrons
in salvoes of paper thrown, vetoing Physics w/ motions,
w/ votes we salute w/ palms hailing fascist Time + Space.
Physics surrenders no choices to carbon or Christ, offers no rest
beyond Dante's Coccyx hell of 0-Kelvin. Physics damns us all
in periods, in wavelengths, lances our hunched bodies,
teaches them to dream w/ the radio turned on, grinding.
Physics damns us all, its desiring machines, its Lucifers,
to beat our wings raw, w/ fists + feet die-cast
+ caught in forever-praying hands of pious ice.

Christopher Felling studies creative writing, ethics and politics at the University of Victoria. These are his first published poems, appearing alongside works selected for splinterswerve #9, "eye (i) sight," and Steel Bananas' upcoming print anthology, "GULCH: An Assemblage of Poetry and Prose." He says: All selections are indebted to the criticism of Tim Lilburn, Lise Gaston, Maia Wasowski, Kyeren Regehr and Jessica Bloom. Thanks also to Susan Musgrave for her praise and to Wendy Morton for her Planet Earth poetry series.

Cool Sweet Kissing

Justin Steepe

Merry with a hat on. Standing in the sunbeams.
Coming through the elm trees. Scenting up the air there.
Berries she'd been picking. Sitting in the wooden basket.
Music would be fitting. So a Songbird starts to chirping.
Merry sits and berries up her lips.
Juices from the sweet raspberries. Painted on her smiling face.

Alexander wanders under. From the sun into the shade.
Bringing with him sliced cucumber. A deck of cards. A kiss is made.
Ingredients from both their lips. Sandwiched tight together mix.
Berries and cucumber slips. Smuggled by their tongues.

Now her mouth is cool and freshened. Now his lips are red and stained.
Playing cards a stare between them. Grows into a silent roar.
On the Aces, Queens and Tens. Rolls the lovers, clasping hands.
Corsets off. Pants are off. The switch that guides the etiquette and predicate
Is off, is off, is off.

Songbird blushes. Blood, it rushes. Through the hushes.
In the space between each breath. A firework explodes.
The wiggling of toes. The tickling of pale white skin. Just below the breast.
A porcelain feast. A pair undressed.

Tumbling out her hair and nipples. Red and pink.
Nature has no clashing colours. Into the mossy grass they sink.
They lay each other and they look. Between the leaves. Into the clouds.
They wonder how a kiss, can hold so much of life's true answers.
Her hand in his she whispers Alexander.
And falls asleep as Merry as her name.

Justin Steepe, born in 1981. May have been raised by musical chairs, though conclusive evidence has been elusive. Found sitting, legs crossed, among the library stacks, learning to read by devouring an entire dictionary, at age two. Formative years split between prose and song. Last seen fronting a Foot Rock band called Shabamzy. Find him and add him to your life at www.facebook.com/justin.steepe.


Gillian Manford


Gillian Manford



Gillian Manford lives in Guelph, Ontario, where she is learning how to go to university, mend books, play the accordion properly, bake bread, make art, and procrastinate, all at the same time. She is working on the confidence thing too, and has had photos and other art-like ventures published in local zines and blogs. She likes things that are old, crumbly, spooky, confusing, anthropomorphic, or any combination thereof. Her photographs, both silly and serious, can be seen at http://www.flickr.com/photos/gillianam/, and she sells photos and other art-like miscellany at http://missgillian.etsy.com.








Tammy Stone


Tammy Stone

Living History

Ben Shakey

Ben Shakey lives in Vancouver BC where he writes the blog www.readanexcerpt.blogspot.com. He has a wonderful wife, son, two birds, and a guinea pig.

The first member of the Civil War Re-enactment Group to suggest other events was Jim

Jim read about the lives of Frank and Jesse James after learning they were Civil War veterans.

He proposed a production of the failed Northfield robbery. Jim played Frank James and prepared for the part by reading several works by William Shakespeare and brewing applejack liquor. It was a really good time.

From there the full imagination of the Civil War Re-enactment Group was let off its chain.

They began to recreate countless historical events. They acted out battles from the Boer Wars, soup kitchens from the Great Depression, even the Kennedy and Khrushchev talks during the Cuban missile crisis.

Slowly, the recreations of military or even political events moved to entertainment. Jim was tall enough to play Dean Martin in the re-enactment of a Martin and Lewis nightclub act. They did Elvis on Ed Sullivan, The Ramones at CBGB's, Elvis Costello going off script and changing numbers on Saturday Night Live.

Based on an excellent impression, Simon put together a proposal to recreate Steve Martin on his Wild and Crazy Guy tour.

Jim was actually there. He was in high school and took Linda Gallo to the recording of the album as a first date. He bought her an official arrow through the head but both of them were too concerned about looking cool to try it on. They made some small talk about their upcoming final exams; both agreed the finals would be hard.

Steve Martin was too far way to see. He was a tiny white dot, like a distant star, cutting up in the dark. Jim laughed a lot more than Linda. At times he recited catch phrases along with Steve but there seemed to be no recognition of them from her.

During the show, a scuzzy guy old enough grow a moustache like Freddie Prinze smoked a joint and stood in front of Linda so she couldn't see. Jim tried to say something to him but the high guy gave him a thumbs up as he smoked, and for that moment, his approval seemed more important than Linda Gallo's. He stopped speaking and smiled weakly at Linda.

They didn't talk on the drive home and at the door Linda said "You sure have an odd sense of humour," and "You are a good friend." For a moment, Jim thought about shaking her hand.

The re-enactment was booked in a local community hockey rink. Simon was a faithful Steve Martin, white suit and everything, and most of the seats were filled with cardboard cut-outs of audience members.

Jim coached Kate Dubois on how to be Linda Gallo. She maintained the bored look, the awkward pause, the strain to hear Steve Martin's distorted tinny voice over the P.A. system.

After the re-enactment, Jim drove Kate home in silence and at the lobby of the condo development, she rejected him with the same offer of friendship.

Once home, Jim called her on his cell phone and told her it was perfect. For the first time, a primary source verified the authenticity of a recreation.

From there the group rejected popular history in favour of personal history. They re-enacted events like talent shows, fist fights, bush parties, and even a traumatizing session of spin the bottle.

Jim received a phone call from a man introducing himself as a hardcore, authentic re-enactor of General William Tecumseh Sherman. His voice sounded weary and brow-beaten, like he had seen too many theatrical representations of war.

"We are looking to stage a Battle of Kennesaw Mountain and we need more men to mount the campaign. Can you raise the troops, son?" he asked.

"Well, to be honest, we actually don't do much in the way of Civil War recreation any more. We should update the Web site."

"Joseph! Please tell me we haven't lost you to the Creative Anachronisms. We don't need good men sitting around drinking mead and playing a lyre." His voice crackled like a phonograph cylinder.

"We actually recreate events from our lives."

"That's plum ignorant! You can't keep working over the past. That's not how Sherman won the war. You win with No Retreat and No Surrender!" Looking back,

Jim was not sure if he had said Sherman or I.

"It helps us work out some stuff." There was a whining tone to this that unsettled Jim, so he added "sir."

"Work out what? Everyone had bad times. Hokum! You think it was easy having mutton chops in high school? Do you? Do you, son?"

"No sir." Despite the 'sirs' and 'sons,' Jim was starting to wonder if they were roughly the same age.

"Where is this going to end? You going to re-enact what you did last weekend? What did you do?"

"Uhmm, we re-enacted an air band contest."

"A what? You can't re-enact a re-enactment. You're not making anything happen for yourself because you're too busy with what happened to you before."

"I guess we could re-enact a really good re-enactment."

"You're not hearing me son!" and the man dressed as a soldier from 1864 told him "Stop living in the past."

This issue, The Broken City asked contributors: If you could travel back in time, when would you go, and why?

girlfixer: The ability to return to some point, any point, in the past is an overwhelming concept, given the at once wonderful and horrific history of man. My journey, therefore, would be a personal one. I would return to the day of my conception. That way, my life will forever have been a matter of choice, rather than chance.

Justin Steepe: If I could travel back in time, I would go back to five minutes before I was foolish enough to try my hand at time travel. This brief window would allow me to properly warn myself that no one is smart or careful enough to travel through time without seriously ruining our timelines. Then, after a warm hug with myself, a high-five and a wink, I would return. It would be a comfort for me to know I was the person who didn't destroy the fabric of our very existence, prompting an additional self high-five. The rest of the day would be spent eating licorice and quietly gloating.

Ben Shakey: I guess if I were to travel back in time, that would also mean that my understanding of science would be much stronger than it is now, so I would be able to Quantum Leap back and take part in the Apollo moon missions. During 1969–1975, it must have seemed like by 2009, we would be building Chuck E. Cheeses on the moon. But now, due to problems, like, I don't know, lack of money or curiosity—I can't really put my finger on it—that futurism only exists in the past.

Christopher Felling: I would preemptively (retroactively?) book some plane tickets to France, then flash back to the post-WWII era. The goal: to move in with famous existentialist philosopher-novelists Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Amongst them, I would achieve enlightenment. Sartre would occasionally ask me to go out and buy eggs. I would forget. De Beauvoir and I would eat sushi while I avoided bringing up her lover's lazy eye in conversation. The various things the couple had going with the Kosakiewicz sisters and Jacques-Laurent Bost would get only slightly more complicated. To be courteous, I would chip in a share of francs so that our menagerie could upgrade to a queen- or king-sized bed. When Sartre, de Beauvoir, and our mutual friends discussed Stalin, I would chuckle, knowingly, and refill their wine glasses with Shiraz in very small tips and flourishes. After many years, I would catch a plane to Iran with Michel Foucault and probably die there. So worth it.

Mouki K. Butt: If I could travel in time, I would go back to 1956 and tell Connie Francis to marry Bobby Darin. This would probably change the course of history, but it's a risk I'm willing to take, because I love love and Connie Francis.

Gillian Manford: Time travel is something I think about an awful lot. If I were going to be practical, I'd travel back in time to a certain point in my own history. I'd change something I said, or not say it, or say it earlier. I'm not sure which. But I'm not very good at being practical, obviously. If I was going to be silly and frivolous, which comes much more naturally to me, I would travel to sometime around 1918 or so, where I'd buy pretty dresses with enormous skirts, go to see silent films with live accompaniment, learn the cakewalk, and hide a flask of gin in my stockings. Then I'd return to the present and my computer and voting rights and all the other lovely things. But I'd bring the dresses with me.

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