



JA: Pierre, I understand Nicole (Peyrafitte) is pleased that your romance with Celan is coming to an end. What about that?

PJ: “Romance” may not be the right word. Actually she is saying that she is happy to see the end of this particular “ménage à trois” — though I point out laughingly that I lived with him, Celan, twenty years longer than with her, so... Which is true in that I started translating Celan all the way back in 1968 at Bard College & thinking back on this it now seems to me it was my way of bringing a deeply radical European thought & poetics to the US (though of course Jerry Rothenberg, Robert Kelly & Cid Corman had translated a few Celan poems a few years earlier.) The previous year, and upon arriving in New York, I had unsuccessfully tried to get publishers interested in the other 2 books I had brought with me in my satchel on my maiden voyage, namely Foucault’s *Les mots et les choses* and Derrida’s *De la grammatologie*. Still waiting to hear back from the publishers I had sent sample translations to in the fall of 1967, by the way. But those two found their translators and their ideas made their way through the universities here over the next three decades.

But the Celan too — *Atemwende / Breathturn* — would have to wait until the early 90s until I was published, given the copyright problems for Celan’s work back then. And that may also be why now, more than 50 years later, I am still working on Celan, completing this summer the translations — with commentaries — of his first four volumes of poems, as well as the volume of posthumous prose, both to be published next year — Celan’s centenary & his 50th death-year — the first by FSG under the title *Memory Rose into Threshold Speech* as companion to the volume of the later poetry, *Breathturn into Timestead*, and the second under the title *Microliths they are, Little Stones* by Contra Mundum Press. Then indeed my Celan work will be done — & not only Nicole will rejoice, but me too, me too — it has been a long, exhausting, exhilarating, expanding trip!

It is still exhilarating: thinking back on spring ‘68 & that moment when I started on the translation of *Breathturn*, I was also surrounded by & involved in the current scene, in the US the antiwar

demonstrations, with news of German & French student uprisings filtering through, even if bucolic Bard was maybe more given to that other aspect of revolution: dope & sex. Only this morning a friend reminded me of an unauthorized lecture given by Timothy Leary at Bard that spring & the opening line of which was "the only hope is dope." I remember a few afternoons sitting on my adviser Robert Kelly's porch going over the first drafts of those translations — with me high as a kite from having spent time earlier in the day capping mescaline. Not that the organic botanical & mineralogical cosmos of mescaline hallucinations was antithetical to Celan's work: to the contrary, the dense rock & glacier & plant structures of the later poetry held strong visionary resonances — especially in the sense that what seemed clear to me, even if not easily analyzed in terms of traditional litcrit strictures, was that these elemental images were not metaphors. That is, they didn't stand for something else, some other hidden meaning, but were the actual cornerstones of a new universe Celan was proposing, for him a necessary new universe after the Holocaust.

I now of course have an image of Celan in May '68 joining student marches, have learned from his own political stances: it was through him that I turned to Peter Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*, back then in the 70s, rather than, or better, as a corrective to, the Marxist canon. And also over the years working on Celan, to the likes of Lev Shestov (his *In Job's Balances* still fascinating), Gustav Landauer and Margarete Susman, still seminal today.

JA: That's some trajectory, Pierre, to bring us to arguably the most incendiary political moment since May '68, and not simply here in the US. I'd like to dig into this a bit with an emphasis on your background. To rehearse a few basic biographical facts: though born in Strasbourg and raised in Luxembourg, you write poetry in English, and your primary residence is the US, though you've lived and taught on three continents and traveled far and wide. So you're clearly a hyphenate, both as a matter of citizenship and as an intellectual worker, or as indicated at your Wiki page: "Luxembourg-American poet, translator, anthologist and essayist." Your life, with its various and often self-imposed wanderings and dislocations — leaving Luxembourg at nineteen, for instance — is a rather explicit demonstration of what you've articulated with great erudition as a nomadic poetics. Whether we think of such peregrinations through your figure of the nomad or via Appiah's "rooted cosmopolitanism" or as a matter of Glissant's "relational poetics," what I'd like to know more about is not the lived experience per se but that momentary tension emerging from the flux between now and then, here and there, that for you comprises the poem, what you call "poasis." This has precedent, as you've indicated, in certain pre-Islamic poetries. What I want to know is, in short, how this understanding of the poem can help to clarify, perhaps even to mitigate, the various political and social predicaments in which we seem to be mired today, at every turn. It's a fool's errand to try to make poetry change the world. But poetry is nothing if not a fool's errand. So I'm asking in effect what kind of fools would you take us for?!

PJ: “The flux between now & then,” you say, “that tension,” i.e. also history/herstories/theystories & how that enters the poem or not. It enters it as the political or else it is only decoration, wall-paper, sepia pics, excuses. Ingeborg Bachmann wrote in her novel *Malina*: “History teaches lessons, but there are no pupils.” Or, as the Spanish novelist Javier Marías was recently quoted in *The Times*: “The past has a future we never expect.”

Yes, you’re right poetry does not change the world — but it’s the only thing we have to do so! I’ll be out in the streets demonstrating & trying to bring down this fascisoid government, of course, but: what are we going to put in its place? At this juncture it seems to me that we have to do the impossible: change our actual politics immediately in order to save the planet itself, even more so than just *homo stupid stupidissimus* — that’s the fools I take us for! — this addled species whose disappearance may be the best guarantee for the planet’s other life forms’ survival, *and* simultaneously take the time to think through how to do this by countering a history of the species that has worked toward exactly this present disaster since its very beginning. Or so it seems.

Since the middle of the last century, i.e. since the moment the species’ ingenuity was able to produce the means of its own & the planet’s destruction, we have also been able to look back at that species’ mental, intellectual & artistic origins, via the cave art the 20C also “brought to light” — if that isn’t too charged a metaphor... Happenstance? That thought that both beginning & end are in sight has haunted me here, of late, “nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita.” Not sure what to do with it, so...

JA: The idea that we can imagine ourselves, on the one hand, as cave dweller-artists, who painted their surrounds even when survival of the species was far from certain, and on the other, as “soulless bipeds” (Don Byrd), fully capable of bringing about our own extinction, and the extinction of so many other species, ain’t the path to salvation that Dante had in mind for us (!). But if indeed Dante applies, I would say the struggle, poetic and otherwise, is in many ways spiritual, and I’d want to ask whether, collectively speaking, we’re still stuck in our private hells, or we’re ascending Mount Purgatory and reaching an especially precarious ledge, or — most unlikely! — we’re advancing toward the Empyrean. What say we take a different tack and toss the monotheism, as Adonis would have us do, in favor of one of a variety of mysticisms. I must tell you at the outset that while I feel the spiritual is absolutely necessary, I’m not able myself to endorse any spiritual absolutes, whether they be rooted in the Almighty or in gnosis. At any rate I was very much struck in your dialogue with Adonis at how you each kept pulling at the other to distinguish between what Adonis decries in US poetry as a “storytelling” or narrative impulse as against a more salutary *form* of poetic seeing (pp. 56-7). His negative comments in particular re experimentation (p. 71) seem on the face of it to challenge much of what you and I both hold dear in poetic practice and the forms emerging therefrom. If — if — it’s not too much to ask that poetic form can lead us out of the dark wood of this new millennium — I agree with Adonis that “There are no solutions” as such, as we have no once-and-for-all solution to our social ills (p. 82) — how are we best to understand such form?

PJ: Of course, Joe: no spiritual absolutes of any kind — & the best solution for that is to keep in mind what I think is the essential thought Olson pointed me too (among a vast range of useful pointers!), namely Keats's Negative Capability, which I consider the essential methodological base for any & all of our actions, be they spiritual, writerly, political, sexual, scientific, whatever. And the singular spiritual experience of the Sufi enters here as just such a non-orthodox, negatively capable, process. But if Mansur al-Hallaj or Ibn Arabi seem too far-fetched, just go to Blake or Sor Juana Inés, where you'll find a very similar process. It is one of Adonis's great merits to have shown that basically all the great Arabic poets of the Islamic age were in fact heretics & strong opponents to orthodox religion.

Thinking about Adonis, he is so concentrated on Arabic and French poetries and he has not had the occasion or possibility to read the very complex experimental work being done, much of which has not been translated into French & certainly not into Arabic, so his sense of narrative as core impulse may seem a bit odd to us. But then, if you think of the mass of personal narrative poetry churned out by creative writing programs, and even most of the poetries of Official Verse Culture, he does have a very good point as it seems that the sheer quantity of that stuff has overwhelmed the literary landscape — the image that comes to my mind is that of the immense quantities of unrecyclable single-use plastic items accumulating as vast islands of garbage clogging the Pacific.

As to the question of “experimentation,” what I think he means is that he does not value experimentation for the sake of experimentation. He sees himself in a cultural and historical situation where there is no time for play for play's sake. In a way his thinking here is very similar to that of Celan, who dissed concrete & sound poetries exactly for that sense that they were just aesthetic games at a time of crisis and urgencies. I tend to agree — even if I may give those experimental exercises a bit more leeway, though I too see most of them as too artsy-for-art's sake. Look at Adonis's chef-d'oeuvre, *El Kitab*, or Celan's major volumes of late work: at the level of their poetics they are as experimental, as inventive of new, needed ways of saying things in poetry in our age, as *any* of the purely experimental poetries (if there is actually something like that) while at the same time chockablock with historical-cultural data & propositions that for the one (Celan) try to invent a possible language and space for a post-*Khurbn* world still shot through with fascist or fascistoid elements, and for the other (Adonis) undertake a re-evaluation of the whole of Islamic culture from its pre-Islamic Arab roots forward. It is a poem that stands with the major epic-length work of modernity, say Pound's *Cantos*, but without the latter's crazed politics. It feels like some of the lessons of the modernist's aberrations had been learned.

Pour la petite histoire, as the French say, for the little story, the anecdotal, i.e., not for history: in 1965 in Paris when I was a medical student I would walk by a Greek restaurant called “L'acropole” in the rue de l'École-de-Médecine but never thought of going in, it didn't look interesting, was too expensive, whatever. But later I learned that Celan used to eat often in this restaurant, as did other writers & today it is where I most often eat with Adonis — who told me how he met Celan there, as he too has eaten

there for many years. Hmmm, anecdote etymologically means “unpublished”— but if published does it then become history? And what would the point of the personal story be in “his-her-their-story”? Or could that only crystallize if set into a different / differently encompassing *form*, i.e. poetry?

Despite what much of my work seems to still argue for — i.e., the open-ended & openly-invitational lyric where the first person (revised post-Rimbaud as meaning “I is many others”) is primarily a demultiplied Jakobsonian “shifter” & around which, no, not around, but all over which & transforming it, any other material may accumulate — despite this I feel the need to move on, or rather I sense that poetry has to move beyond even such openness, has to integrate further elements, levels, discourses — the essayistic, the scientific, say — to be accurate to our situation in the urgencies of this so hubristically-named Anthropocene. Which I prefer to spell as the “Anthropocene,” a quickie on which the curtain is likely to descend I mean drop rather too fast for even a quick curtsey & apology from our side. Though at times the urgency of the matter seems so absolute that I feel like throwing away my beloved fountain pen & running into the street screaming in the hope of finding thousands, nay, millions there also screaming & rushing the places of power. I was born on Bastille Day, & storming the prisons & the palaces seems like a natural activity or necessity, even if I am not a physically violent person. I’ll most likely not throw those pens away on impulse...but agree with how Celan ended a poem “Friede den Hütten / Peace to the huts,” quoting a line from a 1834 call to arms in a political pamphlet by the poet & playwright Georg Büchner, who wrote: “Friede den Hütten, Krieg den Palästen / Peace to the huts, war to the palaces.”

Excuse me for punning — you ask about form out of “the dark wood of this century.” Ain’t no dark wood left, they’re all burning bright, even our Amazonian lung, on fire right now, so the form you ask for is, has to be, whatever form an urgency, an emergency of that order can take. If, as I said earlier, I’ll probably not run into the street (unless the call comes from down there, from many people needing one more voice or pair of feet or hands) but will keep working at my trade, one of the ways will be via the performance-work, the Karstic actions Nicole Peyrafitte & I are collaborating on. “Karstic” refers to a topography of limestone terrane inscribed with sinks, ravines, underground streams. Geology, already brought up earlier in our talk, in relation to the imagery of Celan’s late poetry, and now in relation to our current work, much of which is generated by Nicole’s interest & research in prehistoric cave-art of the so-called “Stone-Age” (a very derogatory term indeed), may indeed be the core (rock-bottom?) reference we’ll be left with — we’ll have to stand on, if we are still able to stand up.

JA: I love puns! And it strikes me that this might be a good point at which to bring squarely into our exchange your new volume of essays, *Arabia (Not So) Deserta*. In your book, Arabic poetry and culture are re-positioned as a much more central presence in global poetics than has often been acknowledged. I’m thinking here as well of the ways in which medieval Arabic culture (Al-Andalus) has in the last few decades begun to inflect work in medieval studies. In light of the fact that *this* interview has been prompted by a poetry and poetics venture (Dispatches) originating on the North American continent

and published in English, and given that your chosen language for writing poetry is English, how do you understand the significance of Arabic poetry for English language poetries today? And what bearing do English language poetries have on Arabic poetry today?

PJ: I have to go further back to get to that story. One reason I started to write in English — when French, more than German, should have been my logical choice — was that I found French writing, poetry or prose, boring & banal at every level that interested the 18-year old I was. So I decided to use American English, because of the Beats, rock, film etc., & then, still in Paris, just before leaving for NY, I met the Moroccan poet Mohamed Khair-Eddine, who showed me his work (in French), which blew me away, & he introduced me to the contemporary Maghrebi writers, poetry or prose, such as Kateb Yacine's great novel *Nedjma*. That's when I started to realize that the most interesting French being written was that of the colonial or excolonial countries: North Africa, the Caribbean, Quebec too. Again here, the importance of the political edge that drives language into new territories in order to say something new, to invent other possibilities for (thinking) the world.

Later, in the mid-seventies, I got a job at the University of Constantine in Algeria where I taught for three years, met my companion of the next 13 years, who was an Algerian scholar, and also my still close friend & sometime collaborator, the poet Habib Tengour with whom I would do the Maghreb *Poems for the Millennium* (Volume Four) anthology thirty years later. The postcolonial intensity opened up that vast realm of culture — the Arab world — that had been obfuscated by the ethnocentric Northern European culture I was raised in. It was the Arabs of Damascus & Baghdad, and the scholars of Al Andalus, I learned, who rescued & then translated the core Greek texts on which the Northern Europeans would base their Renaissance claims to cultural fame as inventors of democracy, etc...

But back to your question: the importance of Arabic poetry for American poetry today? The essay that opens my latest book, *Arabia (not so) Deserta*, was a talk I gave at Naropa a week after 9/11. I was going to speak of nomadic poetics worldwide, but given 9/11 I decided to speak only of Arabic poetry, knowing that it was the Arab peoples & their cultures, already a major unknown in this country — or else chastised as the enemy of "our special ally," Israel — that were going to be demonized by the politicians (of just about every stripe) trying to profit from that terrorist attack. And even, and especially today, it is important for people to know that there are other cultures, as rich & varied, & even older than that white European culture that has laid claim (truly fake news, that) to being the greatest & only worthwhile culture on earth. I don't need to go into more generalities here, but given the present lethal xenophobic situation our fascist government has created, anyone can see the need for some basic enlightenment along those cultural lines.

In terms of poetry specifically, & besides the sheer pleasure of reading good poetry from another part of the world to know what people are up to over there, I always wanted my students to read it because, even when posing as “love poetry,” it was a poetry that came out of culturally & politically strenuous circumstances. Mahmoud Darwish, for example, cannot not write about the disastrous situation of his people, even if he tries to speak of personal matters. The personal is the political in a more urgent and absolute way than that sixties line was often thought of here in the “peaceful” Occident. And of course what is also of major interest is to look at how the old traditional forms of Arabic poetry were exploded in the fifties & a modern poetics was introduced by the likes of Adonis & the other poets around Shi’ir magazine (not to mention the francophone ones in the Maghreb). Though not as a servile kowtowing to western Modernism, but via a simultaneous rediscovery of the fact that certain traditions of Arab poetry were as modernist as any 19C European breakthrough. A thousand years before Baudelaire, Whitman, Rimbaud & their likes, it was the poets of 10C Bagdad who had invented a formally innovative “modern” poetry of the city, of excess in wine, hashish, gay love, whatever!

At this point the formal adventuring of Arab poetry has not only caught up with anything here, but has gone beyond it: in Morocco, say, Mohammed Bennis has brought the poetics of Mallarmé up to date and enriched them by marrying them to the achievements of the likes of Ibn Hazm. Or, maybe the greatest contemporary single poem I know of — at least as far as I, who remain ignorant of many, especially the far-eastern cultures, can judge — is Adonis’s *El Kitab*, a thousand-page epic that writes through & rewrites Arab culture from pre-Islamic days into a possible future (we discuss it in more detail in *Conversations in the Pyrenees*). One of the reasons, I think, of this incredible richness is the fact that Arab culture has never, unlike European culture, relinquished its oral heritage: it has always been both an oral and a writing culture, simultaneously. One of the great Arab oral epics, the story of the Beni Hilal’s nomadic migrations from Arabia to Morocco, can still be heard “live” today in the mountains of the Maghreb, and is being added to — & we can now hear this, given tape-recorders. Imagine that somewhere there were some Greek oral poets adding to, inflecting, reworking, updating the *Odyssey*. The latter, once written down became fixed, paralyzed — oh the beauty of the poem remains, just check out Chuck Stein’s marvelous translation into 21st C poetry — but has served mainly as schema for the bourgeois coming-home novel of an promiscuous husband to his poor wife confined for half a lifetime to her palace. I simplify, but...

JA: Let’s pursue a bit more that parallel development of oral and written culture to which you attribute the success, if not superiority, of contemporary Arab poetry. We know that the Beat moment in the US, still one of the most popular literary movements of the last century and by your account one of the key factors in your decision to write in English, was met in the seventies by something of a resistance to orality with the rise of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, even as spoken-word poetries never really left the scene thanks to the performance-based work of the Black Arts Movement beginning in the sixties, the Nuyorican Poets Cafe in the seventies, the Green Mill Uptown Poetry Slam of the eighties, and so

forth. Today it's commonplace to argue, especially in the wake of Dylan having been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature — which I must say pleased me to no end, but which seemed to grate both on my more conventional and my more avant poet-friends, to judge by the responses I fielded on Facebook — that poetry is to be found in hip-hop lyrics, for instance. All of this suggests a broadly cultural inclination to the oral, perhaps as against but certainly in fast conjunction with the written (*cf.* Ong's secondary orality), which latter is sometimes misunderstood as a sign of elitist academic pretensions and the like. I'm OK with hip-hop lyrics as poetry — they do lose something absent the music — though I tend as a teacher to direct students' attention to poetry written primarily by self-professed poets under the assumption that NWA and Tupac and Kendrick Lamar will likely be familiar to them to varying degrees, whereas Amiri Baraka and Bernadette Mayer and bpNichol will likely not. (Based on anecdotal evidence, I'm batting 1000 to date.) I use resources such as UbuWeb and PennSound to be sure to emphasize the aural dimension, but my writerly bias, let's call it, is toward writing, finally (as tautological as that sounds!). If we take poetics to designate a theory of poetry, let's imagine that such a theory has to address not simply reception, which typically conjures notions of *theoria*/contemplation, but the making of poetry, or *poiesis*. So: how would you theorize, in brief, a convergence of the written and the oral on the evidence of US poetry as you understand it today, beyond the two-prong composition by field and kinetics of breath posited by our beloved projectivist, Charles Olson? It seems to me that poetry suffers when we compartmentalize our various approaches to the poem as discrete pursuits, even if there are reasons at times for doing so. Of course my assumption here is that theorizing our practice in this manner is helpful, though I hasten to add that I've known artists of various stripes who are loath to do so for fear of compromising their intuitive talents.

PJ: I may have retired from academia too long ago, Joe, because nothing directly pops into my interviewee (oral) thought process (*theoria*). But I have a sense of where I would go if I was to write on this now: not the continental US of A primarily, but the outlying islands. I.e. I would get all my Kamau Brathwaite & Edouard Glissant off the shelves & dig back in there. Because my suspicion is that the convergence which you suggest, and which presupposes a divergence that needs to be addressed, is already too theorized into the mainstream poetic culture & it is this that sets up this disastrously dichotomy-ic thinking of oral vs. written, or even of intuition vs. theory (where intuition wld usually be associated with oral & theory with writing.) Could in fact draw on those old Olsonian chiasmatic X's with the 4 terms at the four end points.

On my mind right now my good friend Steve Dalachinsky who passed — wow! nearly two weeks ago already! — & who, in some way, was the NY incarnation of the “Jazz poet,” a moniker he, btw, did not like one bit even if or especially because often applied to him. In a little obit I said that “Steve was & lived what I thought & dreamed New York poetry & Jazz were & had to be even before I left Europe for these shores.” And this is where I see one of the most fruitful interactions of oral & written: poetry collaborating with music. Steve, for example, wrote, composed poems, but when working with improv

Jazz musicians, those written poems would take on an oral dimension where reading voice attached to & worked with listening ear to create an oral performance wider than the printed written word. But all this is obvious. Just as obvious is the sense that an improvisational musician starts from some little cluster of notes, some little figure (that was, or can be written down, or was prerecorded as another musician's tune, etc.) from which she then moves to invent new, further figures, notes, runs, a whole discourse, if you want.

Historically the most formal fixed forms were those used for oral (re)production, the memory-system of rhymes, stresses etc. And that can give great works even today: there is an Arab poem-form from the 13th century, the *malhoun*, used by contemporary musicians to great effect either to write new songs or to use & record as such, a very lively tradition bridging high culture & street culture (high street *kulchur*? our love of puns may suggest...), that oral/written divide. Go listen to some El Hadj Houcine Toulali.

By the way — have lost track of where I was going with that or what exactly your question entailed, but I think essentially what I want to suggest is a “both and” rather than an “either or.” In terms of how you direct your students — to Baraka or Bernadette Mayer rather than to the hip-hop artists they already know anyway — I of course agree wholeheartedly. In what some would consider a somewhat elitist (even either-or) *sortie*, I must confess that I would often use an anecdote harking back to my own undergraduate years at Bard, i.e. the late sixties & the moment rock was blossoming, I mean exploding. Back then Robert Kelly, a major major classical music lover, had asked rather rhetorically in a class what the perfect album cover for a pop record would be (“pop” was, if I remember correctly, the word he had used) — & then, as we shrugged our collective stoned shoulders, answered it himself: a mirror, because, he went on, what you are looking for when listening to those songs is yourself, i.e. identity, sameness, reassurance. Whereas, he'd conclude, true art is the opposite, it is about what is not you, what you don't know, it is (about) the other, something that changes you when you experience it, something not about recognition but something that if you go through it will make you come out different, transformed. I myself could only agree with that, as the reason I was there at all, in the US trying to become a poet, was because back in high school one day in Luxembourg, a peripatetic scholar had read us some poems & among them Celan's “Deathfuge,” which had exactly such an effect of estranging, of othering on me, letting me know in my body/mind that there was a use of language that was different from any other one, home, street, song, “literature,” whatever, and that was the poem at that absolute level of power.

Well, I am answering this question after a two-week interruption during which I finished those two last Celan projects, now sent off to the publishers. I may in fact be done with translation — *stricto sensu* — from one language into the other, because, of course, in a wider sense, all origin is translation.

JA: Thanks Pierre. Your rumination here forces us to consider whether the cultural status of poetry is — not a reaction or formation against — but a necessary adjunct to a popular culture that too often

insists on a facile embrace of relation (as in, *I can relate*). Poetry and the popular are of course interpenetrating domains, but I find it difficult myself to imagine worthy art of any sort emerging from a constant harping on similitude, especially when social circumstances so often demand compliance to damaging norms. Not to sound an overtly Brechtian note, but the more accomplished poets I've known — and here I'm suggesting, without I trust any undue reverence, that we listen carefully to those who have given their lives over to the art, who have been around for a while — tend to reflect on their method as such and its various effects, and this includes their more performative gestures, with an eye and ear toward how their work might work in conjunction both with their immediate aural-visual-tactile surrounds and in the larger sociocultural sense. We never really know what we achieve when we write, perform, project our musings and makings into the present, and almost inadvertently into posterity, but this doesn't mean we ought not to pay attention to where we find ourselves at present, including the present moment, and where we've been. And to do so demands I think a commitment to challenging simplistic and ultimately reductive apprehensions of the art. As the great blues-rock-**J**Azz (etc.) guitarist Warren Haynes puts it in a recent *Guitar Player* (Nov. 2019) interview — the instrument to which he refers is guitar but could as well be any instrument, so defined — “the longer you continue to pursue the instrument, the more important it becomes to ... figure out ways to challenge the norms and color outside the box a little bit.”

I'd like to conclude by doing something I've long wanted to do — to play my **J**Ames Lipton to your Celebrity Poet. Talk about interpenetration! Try not to blush Pierre, OK? (Readers: Pierre and I are doing this via email, so I can't see him blush anyway. Though Nicole can.) Following Lipton's lead on *Inside the Actors Studio*, herewith is his final questionnaire, which Lipton himself is always sure to credit to French talk show host Bernard Pivot:

1. What is your favorite word?
2. What is your least favorite word?
3. What turns you on creatively, spiritually or emotionally?
4. What turns you off?
5. What is your favorite curse word?
6. What sound or noise do you love?
7. What sound or noise do you hate?
8. What profession other than your own would you like to attempt?
9. What profession would you not like to do?
10. If Heaven exists, what would you like to hear God say when you arrive at the Pearly Gates?

PJ:

1. The next one I'll come across that will yield a poem.

2. Since 2016: “Trump,” in whatever grammatical or ungrammatical form it appears.
3. Everything that’s outside (of me).
4. Walls.
5. Not any single word, but a curse-phrase I made up some time ago: “May your finger pierce every piece of paper you apply to your ass.”
6. Birdsong standing out / cutting through car-swoosh of Belt Parkway.
7. Tinnitus.
8. None.
9. Professional retiree.
10. “You & Nietzsche were right: I don’t really exist. You can call me Bento.”

Pierre Joris has moved between Europe, the US & North Africa for some 55 years now, publishing as many books of poetry, essays, translations and anthologies— most recently *Arabia (not so) Deserta* (Essays, Spuyten Duyvil Press,) & Adonis & Pierre Joris, *Conversations in the Pyrenees* (CMP 2018); earlier books include: *The Book of U* (poems), a translation of Egyptian poet Safaa Fathy’s *Revolution Goes Through Walls* (SplitLevel), *The Agony of I.B.* (a play), *An American Suite* (early poems), *Barzakh: Poems 2000-2012*, & *Breathturn into Timestead: The Collected Later Poetry of Paul Celan. Microliths: Posthumous Prose* by Paul Celan is forthcoming from CMP & *Memory Rose into Threshold Speech: The Collected Earlier Poetry of Paul Celan* from FSG in 2020. Also forthcoming is *A City full of Voices: Essays on the Work of Robert Kelly* (co-edited with Peter Cockelbergh & Joel Newberger, Contra Mundum Press) & a *Pierre Joris Reader* (BWP). When not on the road, he lives in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, with his wife, multimedia praticienne Nicole Peyrafitte.



Joe Amato's most recent books are *Sipping Coffee @ Carmela's* (Lit Fest Press, 2016) and *Samuel Taylor's Hollywood Adventure* (Bordighera Press, 2018).