

LETTRES ACKERMANIAQUES

Lettres d'Al Ackerman à son traducteur français (1990-1995)

Mars 1990.

Dear Philippe :

Yes, you have my permission to translate my text about the origins of Neoism for publication in a future issue of your *Lettre documentaire*.

Below, I will try to answer your questions as clearly as I can. The problem you face in translating my stuff is that I write in what might be called «Demotic American». Good luck to you. (One poor fellow who tried to translate my work into Hungarian suffered a nervous collapse.)

Answers to your questions :

1) «a young unmarried woman» is «a miss», i.e., Miss Smith, Miss Jones, etc. The contraction of «a miss» is «amiss», which means «awry». This is a pun that probably can't be adequately translated into French. I suggest you just avoid it altogether and substitute : «A word of amplification, however, might not be out of place».

2) «feverish M/A activity». M/A is an abbreviation for Mail Art.

3) «into the hall closet» : into the wall cupboard. A hall closet is actually a large cupboard that's found in the hall, usually downstairs.

4) «light housekeeping» : precarious housekeeping is OK, but «transitory housekeeping» probably comes closer.

5) «Jack Chick posters» : Jack Chick is an American religious phenomenon. He publishes extreme right-wing pentecostal books, pamphlets, buttons, tracts and posters. These are all centered on violent religious themes, such as the end of the world, etc. The style is bright, garish, sometimes surreal but most often displaying a kind of hallucinatory comic book realism. David Zack covered the inside of his house with these awful-looking Jack Chick posters the way some collectors cover the inside of their mansions with pop art. He did this deliberately, as a sort of joke about fads in the art world.

6) «a popeye from 42nd st.» : yes, a marginal character, one who usually carries a plastic shopping bag and frequents cheap movie houses along 42nd st. in New York City.

7) «He'll arrange your lounge and club bookings». A lounge is equivalent to a tavern. So this could be read as «He'll arrange your tavern and club bookings». In English/Americanese, a «lounge» connotes a rather low, seedy type club or tavern.

8) «Neoism was born in the convenience stores of Portland.» Yes, this is a sort of joke. A convenience store is a small grocery store. It's where Zack and Monty Cantsin went to steal beer and soft drinks. It might be translated as «Neoism was born in the small grocery stores of Portland». By saying this, the newspaper writer was indicating that Neoism had been born through petty criminal activity.

9) Sal Mineo was a famous young actor who played in movies like *Rebel without a cause*. He played James Dean's friend Plato in this movie, which dates from the 1950s. Thus, «Sal MiNeoism» is meant to suggest that branch of Neoism that takes place in the past, i.e., has already taken place, is over and done with. So by being in charge of «Sal MiNeoism», it meant I didn't have to do any work, since everything had already happened.

10) «which is in the past» : which is related only to the past.

11) «the base cannard» : actually, this is a misspelling. It should be «the base canard». This is archaic English meaning «the base rumour».

Hope this is of some help to you in your translation, Philippe. I'll look forward to seeing the translated text when you've completed it.

P.S. Please note my new address on the other side of the page. (208 Routt St, San Antonio TX 78209).

Best regards.

Dr Al «Blaster» Ackerman

Mai 1990.

Dear Philippe,

your translation of my neoist letter to Lloyd Dunn looks fine to me. Very good translation. You certainly have my permission to proceed with your plans for publication. I'll look forward to seeing this neoist edition when it's published.

Yes, sure, by all means, you also have my permission to do a translation of the «Leaping panty hose» narrative from *Lost & Found Times*.

Later this year, Verlag Golem Press will be bringing out a collection of my pieces. I think the book will be titled *Tiny nasty things*. I'm finishing correcting proofs on it for the editor/publisher now. When it appears I'll send you a copy. It has some of my best stuff from the last five years.

Here, I'm enclosing the most recent article I did on Istvan Kantor, written at his request for a magazine that will be devoting an entire issue to his work. I wish the xerox copy of this was better, but maybe you can get the major ideas in the piece, anyway. The nice thing about writing about Kantor-Cantsin is that it requires very little invention. I don't have to make up many details, it is practically all straight reporting.

So, I'll look forward to hearing from you as this eerie quest goes on.

With best regards,
Blaster Al

Fin mai 1990.

Dear Philippe,

Many thanks for *Lettre documentaire* 11 and 12, just received. Wonderful, both of them. I'm glad, as your girl friend says, that you're not losing time in the bars. If wine prices there are similar to what we have here in the USA, it's cheaper to get drink at home, anyway. Also, shorter distance to walk to your bed when it's time to pass out (collapse in a sodden heap).

OK, here are answers to your questions :

Panty hose : these are a specific type of women's underwear which combine underpants and stockings all in one garment. See Fig. A. These are generally made out of nylon or some synthetic fabric. Fig. B shows the rubber novelty item that was modeled after these garments, the famed «Leaping Panty Hose» novelty item. Incidentally, this novelty item really does exist. When I worked for the carnival, we used to sell them along with the inflatable Superman dolls, etc.

Fabled = fabulous, but also legendary. Legendary might be best.

Beans = money, or, as you say, corn.

Nothing much in the way of a crowd = means only a very small crowd, a poor showing of spectators. Specifically, «in the way of a crowd» means «as far as a crowd goes» or «as far as a crowd is concerned».

Love offerings = this is usually or frequently used in cases of television evangelists. Television evangelists are always asking their viewers to send them «love offerings» = money sent to the evangelist. Also money that the evangelist collects by passing the hat or offering plate among the church audience. Since so many evangelists are crooks, «love offerings» has come, in this country, to have satiric connotations.

Streetwalker = prostitute, specifically a prostitute who solicits in the streets, a low type of prostitute. The meaning of this phrase as used in «Leaping Panty Hose» story is meant to convey an extreme sadness, since a «streetwalker's father» not only has a daughter who is a prostitute, but also the lowest type of prostitute, one who probably makes very little money.

Malt liquor = yes there really is a drink in the USA called «malt liquor». It's a form of beer but has a higher alcohol content than our regular beer, i.e., a beer whose alcohol content is closer to liquor. In other words, malt liquor is «fortified beer».

Friedness = either «very very drunk» or (sometimes) «very very hungover». In this case, in the story, «very very drunk» is meant.

Milk of magnesia = a laxative. Milk of magnesia is a very nasty tasting, white, chalky liquid laxative, quite powerful (people seldom take more than one tablespoon per dose). An equivalent would be «castor oil».

Pork-pie hat = a hat, usually made out of straw, with a narrow brim and a flat or indented crown, generally worn by jazz musicians, street characters, con artists, etc.

Fledging = recently opened.

«With no cover charge» means that no entrance fee is charged at the door.

Coruscate = flash or strobe.

Jack Webb = a TV star of the 1950's and 60's. He played Sgt Joe Friday in the *Dragnet* (police) series. He was very ugly, sort of like Yves Montand with a more bulbous nose, squintier eyes, warts, and extremely large protruding ears.

Mewled = mewed (but slightly higher pitch – signifies pain or hunger).

Bonkers = mad.

All great cards = all big practical jokers.

Bonafied = bona fied.

Show-stopper = any act (musician, comedian, etc) whose performance causes the crowd to go wild and applaud so that the show literally stops while everybody is cheering and applauding.

Lee of the juke box = front of the juke box is OK.

No-win humor = tragic humor = black humor.

Incontinent = can refer to either uncontrolled pissing and/or shitting. Here, it's used to mean uncontrollable, involuntary shitting.

Wingtip shoes = shoes with perforations in the leather, often in two colors, black and white, brown and white.

Hope this is of some help.

Blaster Al

Juin 1990

Dear Ph.,

Thanks for sending me your translation of «Leaping Panty Hose». It looks good and accurate to me. As to your questions :

«A calling at which» – yes, vocation is OK.

«Mouse size» – «size of a mouse» is fine. There's no hidden meaning as such, merely whatever humour is inherent in a pair of panty hose being reduced to the scale of a mouse.

«Brother Larv» – yes, it has affinity both with «larva» and with «love» or «lover» (the «larva» association is perhaps the prime one).

Sure, go ahead and print my address when you use this text in *Lettre documentaire*.

As for biographical articles etc. There was a long one written by Musicmaster which was published in a Portland (Oregon) art magazine back around 1978? I think that's the date. The magazine's name I forget, it's been defunct for several years and I didn't bother to save a copy. There's a chance that John M Bennett might have the article in his archives. It was titled «The Blasters : Portland's best-known unknown art mob», and it concentrated mainly on my use of multiple names (Blaster, Mrs Blaster, Leonie of the Jungle, Gnome Kink Club, Ralph «\$ 50.000 Party» Delgado, Laurel McElwain, Harry Bates, Ling Master, C.A.S.F.C. (which stands for Clark Ashton Smith Fellowship Chapter and also Clarke A Sany Fan Club), Eel Leonard, Glans T Sherman, «Swarthy» Turk Sellers, 14 Secret Masters of the World, etc).

It's true that John M Bennett and I have been friends for nearly 20 years but so far have met only through the mails.

I'm afraid that at this stage of the game, any accurate biography of my past doings would sound so improbable that nobody would believe it. But here are a few facts : Born in 1939 (Sagittarius). Never had any art training, all my formal college education was devoted to Philosophy / Theology and Medicine. In the 1960s I wrote a great deal of material for the Confession magazines (i.e., pulp romance magazines like *Secrets*, *True*

Confessions, etc) and for TV. Between 1964-1983 I worked in different hospitals all over the country, with a year of flying med-evacuation into Viet Nam. I am married to Patty Blaster and have one daughter, Stephanie. I entered the mail art network in 1972 and have been doing it ever since. I am the author of «Hamburger Lady», which Throbbing Gristle (industrial music) featured on their *D.O.A.* album. I am the author of one book (*Confessions of an American Ling Master*) and have a second book, a collection of my old magazine pieces, due out this winter from Verlag Golem Press of Rhode Island, who also publish the poet Catullus etc. From 1972 to the present I have specialized in issuing small magazines of the t.l.p. variety («t.l.p.» means «tacky little pamphlet»). Have so far issued over 100 of these t.l.p.'s, such titles as *Gnome Kink Club News*, *Scientific Electricity Newsletter*, *C.A.S.F.C. Bulletin*, *Laughing Postman*, *Drunkard R.N.'s*, *The Keeper*, *The Gulf Bulletins*, *The Other Room Magazine*, *No Meat in a Brownie Magazine*, *The White Worm Review*, *Unowned Worlds*, *Ask Ling*, and many others.

Well, I think these are the more printable facts.

Hope this is of some help, Ph.

Till next time,

Blaster Al

Juillet 1990.

Dear Philippe,

I'd rather NOT have my natal day-month-year given out. I'm superstitious, and have always resisted efforts of astrologists to cast my horoscope etc. If you want to, you can say that I'm a Sagittarius and that I claim to have been born around the 17th century. Otherwise, let's keep my birthdate our little secret, OK?

Thanks for the French bank note. I'll see if I can find a copy of the Ling book. They're very rare nowadays. What I may have to do is LOAN you a copy (I have exactly one copy of the book, if I can find what I did with it). So if I send it to you, please return it when you're done reading it. If you want to make a copy of the thing, that's fine.

I hope your new job isn't too taxing. I just finished a 2 ½ months job with the Dept of Commerce that left me in a limp and exhausted state. Too limp right now to do much in the way of writing but I'll enclose an old *Ack's wacks* that you might enjoy.

Till then,

(image)

Septembre 1990.

Bravo, Philippe !

This *Lettre documentaire* 16 is really excellent. I got a lot of pleasure out of your skilful translation of my «Leaping Panty Hose». Seeing things rendered over from English to French is always wonderful, especially lines like «une paire de splendides chaussures bicolores en moleskine marron et blanche» and «une forte dose de LSD avec une bonne ration d'huile de ricin». Always fascinating to watch the adjustments that have to be made from one language to another. The most bizarre example of this I've so far experienced was when my «Loni Sperty» story got translated into Norwegian a few years ago – it was literally unearthly. Anyway, I congratulate you on a splendid job.

Yes, you have my permission to use anything you like from my John M Bennett introduction.

I will try to unearth the only copy of *Confessions of a Ling Master* I have and mail it to you. You're welcome to keep it as long as you like but eventually I need to have it returned, OK?

I am going over to the xerox shop tomorrow and have some extra copies made of *Lettre documentaire* 16, which I'll distribute along with the copies you've already sent me. This way all my correspondents will be able to see it and you won't have to waste any time or postage mailing out extras.

Here, you'll see I've enclosed «The magic of bigamy». This is a very important «Alternative to the art Strike» which I've just completed in

hopes of satisfying the various different editors who keep writing me and asking for comments about the Art Strike. (I don't know if you have the word «bigamy» or «bigamist» over there? It means somebody who enters into marriage with one person while still legally married to another. Gene Autry was an old cowboy singing and movie star of the 1940s and 50s, later owner of a professional baseball team. He's a big right-winger, and a pretty terrible singer and actor, so, over here, when you mention his name, it automatically conjures up images of hokiness.)

I have two small books of poetry due to be published soon, one that John Bennett is putting together of my «Hacks», the other from an Australian publisher featuring collaborations in the *tanka* (Japanese verse form) that I've been doing with the poet Sheila Murphy. I'll send you a copy of both books when they appear.

OK, that's it for now, Philippe. Take care of yourself.

Blaster

Octobre 1990.

Dear P.B.,

Thanks for your letter and wonderful xerox images.

Yes, Gerald Burns is a real if somewhat improbable character. In this country, he is a well-known poet, author of several books, recipient of a \$ 35.000 National Endowments for the Arts grant, and cartoonist (draws the adventures of Molferatu, the vampire mole). He has also worked in circuses and carnivals as a clown-magician. If you do a little biography of him when you print the translation of his poem and my «Rotational Situationism», it might be fun perhaps to have a line about me following the Burns' biog which would say something like «Dr Al Ackerman's lapel is conspicuously bare of honors, decorations and awards.»

Now, let me find your letter and see if I can answer your questions.

On the Gerald Burns' poem, it's important to realize that he prides himself on writing obscure verse, that is, verse that is often deliberately ambiguous. With this in mind, plus the fact that I myself often have trouble figuring out what he means :

1) «quivering from the motion of the moving truck» : a truck is like a lorry. I'm not sure whether Burns means that the truck is passing by my house or whether I'm lying in the back of the truck? An obscure line. Do your best.

2) «heel of his hand» : lower part of the palm of the hand.

3) «vet» : veterinary, yes.

4) Lepage : a brand of glue – implication here is that I probably either sniff or drink the stuff so as to get high.

5) «smart» : in this sense probably means intelligent, clever, etc.

6) «you can think of it as insurance» : probably means it would be good for me.

7) «I mex it from Scrip blue-black» : a brand of ink.

8) «my kid's paint box» : a paint box for kids, but I'm not sure if he means specifically HIS kid. Possibly he does (I think his wife recently had a kid but I don't know whether it was a boy or a girl).

Rotational Situationism :

«some goober selling *Gideon Bibles*» : a goober is a peanut, hence a «nut», play on words here indicating that the *Bible* salesman is nuts, deranged, etc.

«given to cigars and not shaving» : the idea here is that this man wearing a woman's slip or negligee is smoking a cigar and has an unshaven or stubbly face. It's to impart the contrast between a rough-looking masculine man wearing women's underclothes.

«embrangement» : an actual English word, although somewhat archaic. Means a mess or entanglement, a complicated situation.

«the Flying Ballywash» : a made-up name, probably untranslatable. It's meant to impart the sense of a circus act with a somewhat unsavory name. «Ballywash» over here would probably impart the sense of a laxative or cathartic.

«I. P. Freely» : an old grade-school joke. «I. P. Freely» when said aloud in English can also be construed as meaning «I pee (urate) freely».

«Hiney-Eyes Martin» : a hiney is an ass, buttocks. Literally, «Ass-eyes».

«Mogen David» : yes, a real brand of Jewish passover wine. Any cheap brand of French wine will do, the cheaper the better, perhaps some French brand that's used for communion or religious occasions.

«'Nuff said» : a colloquialism from the 1920's, means «enough said».

«in line at the E-Z Mart or 7-11» : these are names of convenience stores. I don't know whether you have convenience stores over there? A convenience store is basically a grocery store with a limited number of products, chiefly selling ice, beer, wine, and canned foods. These are usually franchises. That is, 7-11, for example, is name of a chain of convenience stores found in many places across the USA, same for Mart. A delicatessen would come close.

OK, that should do it.

Can't remember if I've sent you any of these *Wheat-Pete-Seat-Gleet-* etc series yet, my newest, so here some are.

Take care,

Blaster

Décembre 1990

Dear Philippe,

Merry Christmas! or, as we say over here, Joyeux Noël!

Thanks for sending me your latest work. I thought *Lettre documentaire* 20, the John Bennett issue, was just excellent. I'm sure John will be pleased with it.

Your translation of «Rotational Situationism» seems fine to me, and I made a xerox of the Gerald Burns poem (your translation of his poem) and have mailed it to him, to see if he has any corrections. As I say, my own «Rotational Situationism» looks good as you have translated it.

I'm glad to hear that «rot» in French means belch, and that you were able to uncover «importunité» as a parallel for «embrangement». (In English, we have «importune», which is taken from your French, I believe, and which means to solicit persistently or troublesomely.)

As far as the Ling Master goes, I created him in the early 80's (I forget the exact date, 1981 or 1982), the result of an accident while I was cutting up newspaper scraps for a collage. I cut the word «telling» in half and saw the word Ling, and the idea for the Ling Master sprang full-blown into my mind. So it's not a dictionary word in any sense (although Ling is a pretty strange fish). Ling is a pastiche or travesty on characters like The Shadow, The Green Hornet, etc. Ling is perhaps what these characters would be like if they had not been born rich and handsome, and if they drank a lot of wine. Ling's first appearance («Confessions of an American Ling Master») appeared in R. Kern's trashzine *Dumb Fucker*, in NYC. The story received a lot of response, and for several years thereafter I was kept busy doing Ling pieces. Eventually this evolved into *Ask Ling*, a publication in which Ling supposedly undertook to answer questions mailed in by readers, at \$ 5 a pop. In 1984, I self-published the book I sent you, *Confessions of an American Ling Master*, and in spite of some very puzzled reviews, it had a big success, mostly thanks to word of mouth, and went through five separate printings, until I finally got tired of collating and stapling. After that, the book went through several more editions as other small press publishers reissued it, most notably John «Pego» Berndt, who included *Confessions* in his series «*Great American Crank Works*». Ling was #2 in the series (#1 had been a large volume of ravings by a man who apparently receives messages from Mars on the gold fillings in his teeth, so *Confessions* was in good company in this series). These last few years (after 87, say) I haven't done many Ling pieces, because I've been busy with other things, but recently (in the current *Shattered Wig Review* and in the upcoming *Lost & Found Times*) I've gone back and resurrected Ling and his adventures. Over the years Ling has had a number of rather weird spin-offs, with people in different parts of the world calling themselves The

Ling Master and pulling actual stunts or scams in the name of Ling (S. Home came up with The Young Ling Master and did some pieces about him). So Ling has been one of those creations that starts out fictional and then takes on a kind of separate and autonomous life of their own, God knows why, but it's always interesting when it happens.

OK, Philippe, I'm enclosing «The Gospel according to Peanut Butter» and «The Testanacle of Merkin», two of the most recent tlp's (tacky little pamphlets) in this new «Creative Theology» series that John Mumbles and I are working on. Hope you enjoy them.

Till then,
Blaster Al

Février 1991.

Dear Philippe,

Many thanks for the copies of your mag with the «Rotational situationism» translation, which I think you did a great job on.

In reading your translation, I was, as always, amused by the things that can happen when English passes into French and, in this instance, was most pleased to see the «Little Beaver» name turned into «Castor». For some reason, Castor always makes me think of Simone de Beauvoir, probably because that was her nickname.

I expect, by now, you will have heard from Gerald Burns, saying how much he liked the translation you did of his poem. If I know Gerald, he'll bombard you with poems from now on, but don't worry : they'll do you no harm if you don't read them.

My wife and daughter bankrupted us in the stores at Christmas and as a result I had to drag out my oil crayons and black velvet and start doing portraits again, for sale. So far, since Jan. 1, I have done (and sold) 12, not too bad. These portraits are very gruesome. «Po-Mo» (Post-Modern) kitsch raised to the level of feverish schlock. I'll try to send you photos of a couple of them by and by, so you'll be able to see what I'm talking about. Anyway, that's where my time and energy has been going this past month. Haven't done much writing to speak of, although I did turn out this (enclosed) *Toad & Rice Weekly*, as a joke. My friend in Baltimore, Pego John Berndt, who's publishing a collection of my stories, sent me a copy of *Toad & Rice Weekly*, his creation, harmless nonsense, and I thought it would be funny to use his *Toad & Rice* logo and do an issue of my own. He doesn't know anything about this as yet. But I have one of my agents (in New Jersey) who is going to mail him a copy of the clandestine pink one you see here, along with a note saying : «Dear Sir, I cannot understand why you sent me this awful *Toad & Rice Weekly* or why anyone would want to traffic in such perverted filth. Sincerely yours, Deidre Belt, Association of Christian Housewives.» I think it will be quite a surprise for him when he gets it, eh?

A friend of mine, Steve Steele, is planning a one-man theatrical piece based on the Ling stories. It will take him a few months (or could be it will take him longer than that) to adapt the Ling pieces to the stage, but eventually he hopes to tour Europe with his show. I gave him your address, so if he writes you, you'll know who he is. He lives in Nottingham, England, and is well-known for his roles in Tennessee Williams' plays. A good guy.

OK, thanks again for «Rotational situationism» translation and more later.

Blaster

Mai 1992

Hello Philippe —

Quite a long break in our interesting conversation, eh?

But I took a year off from the mail in order to give my gypsy tendencies full reign, and since March of '91, I have been traveling, having adventures and generally staying one whistle-stop in front of the sheriff etc. Pretty extensive cross-country perambulations : San Francisco, Los Angeles, Brooklyn, Jersey City, northern New Jersey, Manhattan,

Baltimore, New Jersey again (I was romancing the butter heiress in New Jersey) and now back to Baltimore where I've been arranging for publication of some of my works with Shattered Wig Press and Dialectical Immaterialism Press.

The little book enclosed here, *Let me eat massive pieces of clay*, is the first. It's made up, for the most part, of my occasional pieces : poetry and unclassifiabes, anything that didn't seem to fit into the longer trade-paperback that Dialectical Immaterialism is assembling for publication later this year.

So I hope you will enjoy this little book. If the mood seizes you to try your hand at translations from any of these pieces, you have my permission, of course. I'd enjoy seeing anything you might come up with.

Trust this finds you well and perkling (American slang for a coffee pot when it's busy and productive and doing what it does best).

Best,
Blaster Al

Juillet 1993.

Dear Philippe,

I think your translation of my «Goose in the bottle» story seems great – as excellent as your translations always are! Many thanks!

Here in Baltimore we have been undergoing a terrible hellish heat-wave, 100-104° every day! It makes it hard for me to keep taking my 4 girlfriends out to our accustomed rounds of nightclubs every evening, but I am struggling on – doing the best I can!

Sorry to hear that your library job is consuming so much of your time. But I hope that you may be able of finding time to look at this enclosed «2976 Vienna sausages» story, one of my all-time favorites from among my own works.

Best.
Blaster

Mai 1995

Dear Philippe,

Glad to hear you'll be able to do a book of my stuff. Money or the lack of it doesn't worry me – the *Omnibus* is making enough and I'll have another collection published over here in a couple of months, that will add to that. So go ahead with whatever your plans are and let me know how it goes.

Best,
Blaster