

TECH SUPPORT SAYS “DEAD DON WALKING”: TRADITION, THE INTERNET, AND INDIVIDUAL TALENT

Daniel Y. Harris. *Hyperlinks of Anxiety*. Cerva Barva Press, 2013.

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Author of *Hyperlinks of Anxiety*, Daniel Y. Harris is a Paris-born, California based Jewish poet, artist, and divinity scholar with a special interest in Jewish mysticism and hermeneutics. At a lecture called “Post-Digital American Jewish Poetry” at the University of California, Irvine, Harris describes his task as reassembling Web detritus into a Golem, “Technology and hyperreality meet Judaic midrash and Biblical exegesis in stanzas which seek to create a human being from the refuse of bandwidth” (Schneider, 84). In his new book of poems, Harris positions himself as an ambivalent ventriloquist of the human voice. He is an old school page poet—“an analog/ in an age of digits” (32)—announcing his situation as author writing on the cusp of the Brave New Web environment. He suggests “an age of digits” simultaneously amplifies and extinguishes the value of his current practice through the dissemination powers of an intelligent machine. In “Emoticon” he writes: “Unhip to need/to be here, but the way back is splayed:/he can sit and click, exchange/links, but the state of bandwidth/is skin, the widget in the corner of the screen/exudes the bot of bodies. Digitally,/he clones and is multiple again.” He continues: “He logs on./The domain is as big/as a yotta.” (6). Given that a “yotta” is the largest unit prefix in the international system of units (Wikipedia), we note Harris’s ambivalence towards entering literary voice on the web as a sublime event. In “Emoticon,” the Brave New Web expands personal visibility on such a monumental scale that traditional notions of identity and romantic ideas about creative self-expression are put in question.

In “Confessions of a Blogger,” Harris addresses with typical ambivalence his motivations for and concerns about the outcome to achieve the common philosophical desire to (literally and figuratively) go “in search of myself” by entering his name and texts on the web: “digits/for countless others probing/the Net for my name—/me numbered, me squared/to a thousand and one/nights of the Boolean me:/tapered/linkrot of vanity/shaping me as helicoid/in search of myself” (3). His title winks back to the groundbreaking “confessional” movement of the 1950s (think Lowell, Plath, Berryman). Fifties “confessionalism” was self-consciously rejecting Eliotic “impersonal-

ism,” and returning American lyric to a Wordsworthian self-expressionism with a touch of Catholicism through reference to the expiation of guilt via confession, as in St. Augustine. The irony, of course, is that Harris’s crisis in large part concerns the deconstruction of the relationship of “voice” to “author” to “authenticity” to “word on page” that Fifties “confessionalists” such as Lowell privileged in phrases such as “Yet why not say what happened?” from “Epilogue” (1977). The idea of “confessing”—in either a religious or a lyric autobiographical—manner via the digital environment of blogworld seems absurd. And in fact Harris echoes Pound’s *Mea culpa* keyword in the *Pisan Cantos*—“vanity”—by associating authorial presence with a web world animated by Boolean logic—composed of algebraic combinations of “and,” “or,” and “not”—in a form Harris likens to a minimalist term related to the geometry of space. (A Helicoid concerns the minimal surface having a circular helix as its boundary. It is the only ruled minimal surface other than the plane.) Harris suggests the paradoxical nature of Web existence in the passage above. On the one hand, as in the Arabian Nights folk tales, the dissemination of the poet’s name and story become a textual form of survival that defers execution.¹

At the same time, Harris acknowledges that whatever sense of identity is transmitted via the Web is not merely publicized through narrative, but rather identity is dispersed into rhizomatic combinations of storylines, themselves the product of algebraic set theory logics and spatial designs that take the “confessionalist” far away from, as in Lowell, a “life study” in which the speaker simply says what happened. In “Confessions of a Blogger,” Harris continues, the translation of “self” into the virtual realm distorts or even destroys authorial intent, but, ever the knotty self-ironist, Harris also suggests that his “original” voice was nothing to write home about in the first place because “his” language was always already uncivilized (too early) and commodified (too late) for significance. The blog realm seems of a malicious intent, with its own cruel wish to “break/me, pulp my savage accent,/my

1. The main frame story concerns a Persian king and his new bride. He is shocked to discover that his brother’s wife is unfaithful; discovering his own wife’s infidelity has been even more flagrant, he has her executed; but in his bitterness and grief decides that all women are the same. The king, Shahryar, begins to marry a succession of virgins only to execute each one the next morning, before she has a chance to dishonour him. Eventually the vizier, whose duty it is to provide them, cannot find any more virgins. Scheherazade, the vizier’s daughter, offers herself as the next bride and her father reluctantly agrees. On the night of their marriage, Scheherazade begins to tell the king a tale, but does not end it. The king, curious about how the story ends, is thus forced to postpone her execution in order to hear the conclusion. The next night, as soon as she finishes the tale, she begins (and *only* begins) a new one, and the king, eager to hear the conclusion, postpones her execution once again. So it goes on for 1,001 nights. (Wikipedia)

hack-herd packing words/in viruses with a thin/mdash” (3).

A page poet, Harris nonetheless approximates the bewildering explosion of personhood in a web realm by giving voice to the displaced Other through a virtually untranslatable opaque verse style: “Diaspora the body in all places/at once,” he writes in “The Agon Poems” (29). His book specifically addresses from multiple Jewish perspectives—prophetic, diasporic, ethical, midrashic, gnostic—the vexing problems and sublime potential of disseminating lyrics, the ancient form of transmission and preservation of the singular, private human voice across time and space to an individual reader, in an environment in which e-poetry and digitalized poetics pose a crisis (understood as both opportunity and threat) to traditional page poetry.

A University of Chicago Divinity School graduate with a thesis guided by the hermeneutist Paul Ricoeur on the role of Kabbalah in the works of Moses de Leon, Gershom Scholem, and Harold Bloom, Harris’s website lists a genealogical ancestry that includes a composer, members of the French Resistance during World War Two, archeologists, the chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of Paris, and an 18th Century paternal ancestor who was a prominent Lithuanian Rabbi, Talmudic scholar, and Kabbalist. Given Harris’s fascination with deep genealogical personal history and its relationship to Jewish hermeneutics, mysticism, and political resistance to overwhelming state terror during the Shoah, it is fitting that although he remains a traditional—if brutally obscure—page-oriented author with a modernist disposition, his lyrics reflect on how the mediation of voice in a digital format will impact poetry’s primordial function of preserving the human image across time and space. Harris regards the realm of hyperlinks as the ultimate vehicle to conserve and disseminate words and images. At the same time he worries that the new media environment for poems resembles the Kabbalist’s broken vessel, shattering text, rather than shards of glass. At others times, he fears, the hypertextual environment seems like a decidedly non-kosher Octopus. Its dangerous tentacles are bent on choking out the personal voice and exhausting the human body with a vengeance reminiscent of the Shoah that his grandparents actively resisted. Harris records his sense of appearing as a trace in the aftermath of a catastrophic alteration to personal presence in “I”: “I, barcode and libido of might am here/after rapture, extermination and fetish.”

Designed for the page, his poetry is by necessity hyperlinked. I say this because one is pretty much forced to read Harris’s book while remaining online to Google for definitions of unusual concepts and esoteric terms associated with Greek philosophy and Jewish hermeneutics, aesthetics, and

religion. Examples include “Theomorph,” “pantomorph,” “Opuscule,” “Khidr,” “Yotta,” “Methexis,” “Henosis,” “Shevirah,” “Shekinah,” “heli-coid,” “amygadale,” and “Notarikon.” One thus reads Harris in the interstitial space between page and web, where his esoterica becomes heteroglossed in ways that take the reader on lines of flight that defy authorial intention. Consider my web-assisted experience of deciphering the following passage from “The Ballad of Don Notarikon”:

With spiritus, golemic hurl of speckled air,
my brain spills into a new nerve. I awake to the
pitiless gloom of the first person to blankly
gaze at a spate of pellicles evoking the “I”
to stir the canon roused by a dare.” (55)

A seriously elliptical mouthful from an author who states that he “major[s] in opacity” (56)! An online search for “spiritus” pulls up the Latin terms for spirit or breathing, but also notes it as a title for a journal of Christian spirituality as well as a high proof Polish vodka. As a modernist myself, I can’t help recalling Wallace Stevens’s questioning “Whose spirit is this?” as he imagines the world-making significance of the female singer on the beach who has dazzled the speaker after she “sang beyond the genius of the sea” in “The Idea of Order in Key West” (1934). I also recall W.B. Yeats’s invocation of the “Spiritus Mundi” (or great archetypal mind) from which the mystic Irish bard draws out the image of the “rough” apocalyptic beast as it “Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born” in “Second Coming” (1919). Might not such a reference connect us to the “golemic hurl” image? A Golem, after all, is, like the Yeatsian beast, a monster, albeit from folklore created by Jews as protection from enemies (Wikipedia). Through the Golem reference, Harris expresses fear about creating discourse on the web that defies authorial control. Hence the reference to “pellicles evoking the ‘I.’” Pellicles? Online research reveals it is, among other things, a biological term defining the thin layer supporting the cell membrane in various protozoa, but also a protective cover applied to a photomask used in semiconductor device fabrication; the pellicle protects the photomask from damage and dirt (online sources). Offering an exact paraphrase of the “pellicles” passage may be a fool’s errand, given its hermeticism, but one can safely say that the “pellicles” reference benefits from hyperlinked investigation into its connections with the microscopic skin of the one-celled animal and its function as another kind of protective skin for a microscopic computer reproduction device. In each case, the “pellicle” skin protects a fundamental element of biological life and technological reproduction of images, and thus, for Har-

ris's poetics, "pellicles" represent the conservational properties of web-based literary appearance. At the same time, one senses Harris's disenchantment with the pellicled Golem. I say this because such figures for a web-based image of his voice and vision suggest an unruly monstrous Other, a skin without a body, that seems alienated from selfhood that, paradoxically, may be regarded as a retrograde act of vanity and self-commodification: "I awake to the/pitiless gloom of the first person to blankly/gaze at a spate of pellicles evoking the "I.

Harris's poetics are steeped in Harold Bloom's theory—outlined in his notorious 1973 study *The Anxiety of Influence*—of agonic competition among male poets from different generations engaged in an Oedipal struggle for acknowledgment and literary power. Harris also illustrates Bloom's understanding that contemporary poets are terribly self-conscious about arriving on the literary scene late in a tradition already saturated with major accomplishments by prior masters. In an interview with the author, Harris stated:

My "hermetic style" and my "stylistic opacity" are saturated with an interpretive variability richly informed by the limits of the western canon, hermeneutics, deconstruction, postmodernism and such exemplary print poetry at Stevens, Ashbery, Celan and Hill. At its core, the strong poem (in Bloom's sense), is invention itself, wrestling with agonic tropes that cause the myths of catastrophe creation to keep breaking forward. Invention is by definition historiographic. From the amalgam of disparate traditions demanding honor and bypass, arises the new poem. The demands are great. (Morris)

One feels the "anxiety" referenced in Harris's book title is Janus-faced. His burden as an author is Bloomian because it stems from his desire to distinguish his elliptical stylings from merely imitating past masters ranging from Rashi to Celan to Kafka to Stevens to Ashbery.² What makes Harris's anxi-

2. In terms of literary forebears, Harris is clearly indebted to international modernism. One hears in Harris's peculiar admixture of conversational, philosophical, and self-consciously sonic and playful discourse the poetics of Wallace Stevens's "The Idea of Order at Key West." His poetry, again like Stevens, is Emersonian, in its essayistic quality. One has the sense of a mind working through concepts, ideas, and problems related to imagining and disseminating the poet's voice, self, and authorial imagination not only in and through the artificial form of page poetry, but in a hypertextual environment where notions of body, community, acknowledgment, authorship, and visibility, as well as issues of void, chaos, and loss of control of one's text, and a radical hermeneutic instability are major concerns, as is the issue of the transmission of culture and the preservation of the human image across time. Besides the Stevensian strains, we notice the punning and love of word play found in James Joyce, the wicked self-criticism and implication in authorial hypocrisy found in Eliot and Baudelaire. The very concept of "anxiety"—foregrounded in the book title—is itself a mod-

ety about belatedness unique, I'd argue, is that he is also concerned with the frightfully sublime challenge of confronting a virtual format that threatens spatial and temporal moorings of traditional page poetry.

Let me explain. Harris's fascination with word play and the amplification and distortion of meaning, sound, and graphic significance is indebted to Kabbalistic acrostics, but may also be likened to mid 20th Century Concrete poetics that materialized language to upset the transparency of representation and thus challenge the order of things. Although written in a hermetic style that disrupts a tight fit between sign and signification, and thus defies easy reading for "meaning" or "content"—"The Agon Poems" reflect his self-consciously Bloomian account of belatedness. What makes Harris's agon peculiar is that his temporal problem in relation to innovation, contra Bloom, involves arriving to poetic maturity *prior to*, rather than *in the aftermath of*, major developments in the field. For Harris, I am saying, belatedness, ironically, means appearing on the scene too early to fully engage creatively with a new electronic field that has, from his perspective, arrived too late for him to take full advantage of its resources.

Iconbyte or
url

hole in the void

word-machine as obtuse as incomplete
obscurity how

the new language scales the new village
to look out from a bestiary
of code
e-signs eye-level new anti-art chat to carry
on the phantom sum
of anonymity

beating like a pulse (28)

ernist emotion, suggesting an interior disease that Auden referred to as a modern affliction in "The Age of Anxiety." One does not associate the postmodern condition with anxiety, but rather, as in Deleuze, with the ecstatic synesthetic rush of schizophrenia. Of course, "anxiety" is a keyword in Jewish gnostic Harold Bloom's theory that "strong" major poets are engaged in a private intergenerational agon, if the hermeneut is able to read the hidden code. Harris is intensely concerned with ancestral relationship, as the genealogical section of his website reveals.

Given his obsessive concern with literary forebears, Harris is not what Marjorie Perloff, in *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century*, would consider as an avant-gardist, or writer interested in discovery and detachment from past aesthetic models, but rather as arriere-gardist, one committed to recovery in new formats of disregarded predecessors (67). Writing that the arriere-garde “treats the propositions of the early twentieth-century avant garde with a respect bordering on veneration (56),” Perloff, referring to Brazilian concrete poets, explains,

The *arriere-garde*, then, is neither a throwback to traditional forms—in this case, the first-person lyric or lyric sequence—nor what we used to call *postmodernism*. Rather, it is a revival of the avant-garde model— but with a difference. When, for example, Oyvind Fahlstrom makes his case for the equivalence of form and content, his argument amalgamates Khlebnikov’s zaum poetics of the Russian avant-garde with principles developed by the French *lettristes* who were his contemporaries. (58)

Arriere-gardist in Perloff’s sense of the term, Harris’s book bears affinities with the *Zohar* (Radiance/Splendor), the legendary Kabbalistic text of esoteric Torah commentary authored by Moses de Leon, the 13th Century Spanish Jew who claimed his writings were based on Aramaic midrash from the Second Temple period. The *Zohar* was later redacted between the 14th and 18th Centuries in Italy, Germany and Poland by Jewish and non-Jewish scholars, mystics and theologians.

The key long poem “The Ballad of Don Notarikon” illustrates Harris’s fascination with word play that bears affinities with how linguistic creativity occurs through acrostics in the *Zohar*, but also with modernists such as Wallace Stevens and James Joyce, and with hyperlink poets such as those associated with the Flarf movement who turn to the Web itself as a post-modern resource for a peculiar kind of self-expression that manipulates prior texts:³

This earnest
quip to know thyself is paravisual, emblem
of italics that hints at bereshit—the proper
name of Don Notarikon is a tetragrammaton:
the T-B-D-N syllabary styled on rabbinic
acronymics. “The,” courtly article, bringer
of names and potency. “Ballad,” its prosodic

3. “While traditional notions of writing are primarily focused on ‘originality’ and ‘creativity,’ the digital environment fosters new skill sets that include ‘manipulation’ and ‘management’ of the heaps of already existent and ever-increasing language,” writes Kenneth Goldsmith in *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age* (15).

reach in twenty stanzas of twelve line tropes.
 “Don,” head dominus, Don Juan, don a Don
 Quixote chivalric self to anoint your reader
 S Panza, or Horatio or a Don Paterfamilias,
 Don Immanuel the courtier of Zeona, Spain,//
 who survives being burnt at the stake in 1492
 to wear the eyes of Don Notarikon. (50)

In such a passage, one glimpses how Harris connects a mystical Iberian strain of Jewish hermeneutics with digital poetics and the realm of hyperlink. In *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age* Kenneth Goldsmith argues,

The Internet and the digital environment present writers with new challenges and opportunities to reconceive creativity, authorship, and their relationship to language. Confronted with an unprecedented amount of texts and language, writers have the opportunity to move beyond the creation of new texts and manage, parse, appropriate, and reconstruct those that already exist. (<http://cup.columbia.edu/book/978-0-231-14990-7/uncreative-writing>) Goldsmith’s emphasis on “reconceive[ing] creativity” as a process of appropriation and reconstruction of prior texts recalls the alchemical method Kabbalists employed to derive spiritual meanings from Bible text through rearranging words and sentences. In both computer generated poetry as described by Goldsmith and the dissemination of text in Harris poems such as “The Ballad of Don Notarikon” the emphasis is on textuality and plurivocality.

“The Ballad of Don Notarikon” also reflects on Harris’s mixed relationship of web era poetics and Jewish hermeneutics through his invocation of the Greek term for a Kabbalistic method of rearranging words and sentences in the Bible to derive the esoteric substratus and deeper spiritual meaning of the words (Wikipedia).⁴ In the ballad—a venerable narrative folk genre that precedes print culture as well as disrupts the association of lyric subjectivity with a single author—, Harris writes, “The circuitry/for this hardware is offline. Tech support says ‘Dead Don Walking’ spins codes of hyperlink/as the original alias remains camouflaged on/the edge of mad stanzas built like Babel to/First crisis.”⁵

4. Besides signifying the Kabbalistic idea that Torah words are formed from the first letter abbreviations of other Hebrew words, the word Notarikon is also itself an online software application that allows users to search and find Bible codes such as acronyms and numerical values. (Wikipedia)

5. **Poetic Form: Ballad (online source)**

Centuries-old in practice, the composition of ballads began in the European folk tradition, in many cases accompanied by musical instruments. Ballads were not originally transcribed, but rather preserved orally for generations, passed along through recitation. Their subject

The passage quoted above is itself a coded pastiche. It tropes on a 1995 film by Tim Robbins starring Sean Penn and Susan Sarandon about a condemned man befriended by a nun as he is about to perish on Death Row in Louisiana, and then likens the unruly dissemination of many languages characteristic of a web environment to the “Tower of Babel” story from *Genesis* 11 1-9. The Babel story is an etiological explanation of the origins of multiple languages as God’s response to concerns about human freedom and power that, God decided, needed to be divided to create misunderstandings and miscommunications through the confusion of tongues (Wikipedia). The Babel story speaks to Harris’s fascination with roots, origins, and genealogy. In an essay that appears on his website—“Strangers and Friends—Cultural Identity and Community”—Harris urges readers to unearth “the forgotten histories within ancestral memories and places” so “we might have a starting point for healing a change.” Interested in the “fertilizing and benevolent presence of strangers in traditional societies,” Harris notes that the “Golden Age of Spain” in which Jewish mysticism and learning thrived for 200 years on the “anxious edges of the Inquisition” because of “relatively little resistance from clerical and royal powers.”

The Babel story also raises questions of authorship, as well as the issue of linguistic control of texts one disseminates via digitalized media in which everyone is potentially an author and conceptions of audience are bewilderingly estranged from traditional ideas of intimate union between solitary writer and solitary reader. This is so even as, in the passage quoted above from the “The Ballad,” Harris, in Derridean fashion, self-consciously mocks his anxiety about the relationship of author, voice, text, and originality through description of the source of Don Notarikon’s language and

matter dealt with religious themes, love, tragedy, domestic crimes, and sometimes even political propaganda.

A typical ballad is a plot-driven song, with one or more characters hurriedly unfurling events leading to a dramatic conclusion. At best, a ballad does not tell the reader what’s happening, but rather shows the reader what’s happening, describing each crucial moment in the trail of events. To convey that sense of emotional urgency, the ballad is often constructed in quatrain stanzas, each line containing as few as three or four stresses and rhyming either the second and fourth lines, or all alternating lines.

Ballads began to make their way into print in fifteenth-century England. During the Renaissance, making and selling ballad broadsides became a popular practice, though these songs rarely earned the respect of artists because their authors, called “pot poets,” often dwelled among the lower classes.

However, the form evolved into a writer’s sport. Nineteenth-century poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth wrote numerous ballads. Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” the tale of a cursed sailor aboard a storm-tossed ship, is one of the English language’s most revered ballads.

perspective. “The circuitry...[for the] mad stanzas” -stems from an “original” source “offline” that is associated with a still living, but doomed “Dead Don,” but one that is itself fictive—an “alias” that is itself a subterfuge—“camouflaged.” Don’s poetry, he comments, is, like the Biblical city and tower, meant to confront what he calls a “First crisis.” Harris is a liminal figure situating his poetry at a “crisis” point—an in-between space or turning point that, while itself a time of uncertainty and confusion, will pivot the course of future events markedly in one direction or another. The “online” world is thus not a comfortable home for the Don—he prefers the “offline” realm of “hardware” as opposed to “software.”

In a long, tour de force passage from late in “The Ballad of Don Notarikon,” Harris, recalling the persona (or mask) poems of Eliot in “Prufrock” (1915) and Pound in “Mauberley” (1920) reflects with his characteristic deep ambivalence on an alchemical process and diasporic journey of transfiguration from flesh and blood human existence to avatar in the “wide empty” of an intelligent machine.

I, lifted alias, potency and low politique to mediate between demiurge and apeiron, my body chrysolite with mineral silicates of iron, part topaz, olive, clay—man of light—light man of green—morphed as Notarikon across the wide empty filled with steps. I am born or pre-born, stillborn not still, nor implied coupling as no couple has yet to rub sweet swells of comfort on cicatrix or schism that I am. I am Don Notarikon. I, in sound mind and amygdale, am the ars poetica of a winged devarim who scaled heights of darkling tiers

to decrescendo in faults of a man made out of words. Here’s one: anthropos, arms curved to the knuckle of a prehensile hand marking basalt with spurs. Here’s one: pantomorphos, shape-master, “All-Shaped” whose covering cherubs and ministering angels bask in rays of cabalic privacies. I am now their dread, a matriculant in the School of Contraction, with an emerging student body of tympanic shapes. I major in Opacity, minor in Limited Down. First things first. I have taken a step. My body is oblongi....(56)

The speaker is “morphed,” symbolically devolved, and reinscribed into an-

other, non-human form. I take the image of the anthropos (first man) and the apelike figure with the prehensile hand to represent the Devo experience. Devo is then reconceived as an Odysseus, metamorphic figure—the pantomorph—who then is electronically reborn from the primitive cellular forms of the mind (the computer mind as new biological/evolutional incubator of creative breath, the Yeatsian “spiritus mundi,” the Kabbalist’s notion of the Hebrew letters of the Bible as acrostically generative of new words and new worlds). I say “electronically reborn” because “amygdale” refers to the almond-shaped structures associated with groups of nuclei located deep within the medial temporal lobes of the brain, and linked with memory and emotional reaction. The speaker brags in bravura tones over his appearance as a Kabbalistic version of a Stevensian “man made out of words”—“ [I] am the ars poetica of a winged devarim who scaled heights of darkling tiers”—devarim is the Hebrew term for “words,” and also the Torah portion from Deuteronomy in which Moses begins his repetition of the Torah to the assembled Children of Israel [Chabad.Org]. At the same time, the “demiurge” (or subordinate deity who fashions the sensible world in the light of eternal ideas; Merriam Webster Online) who mediates an unlimited, infinite space—the “apeiron”—is DOA. The Great Don, like the Stevensian Emperor of Ice Cream who, in a famous poem from 1922, rules with his phallus (the big cigar) a frothy insubstantial realm of “concupiscent curds,” is merely a spectral figure. He is “stillborn.” Further, the poem references the language of a last will and testament (I, in sound mind...), and there is a suggestion that while the image of the Don may be infinitely reproducible via the web, he is impotent. He exists in an asexual, disembodied environment in which his trace is likened to a scar:

no couple has yet to rub sweet
 swells of comfort on cicatrix or schism that
 I am

Given that “cicatrix” refers to the scar left by the formation of new connective tissue over a healing scar or wound (Free online dictionary), one can infer that Harris regards the Don’s web-based representational appearance as absence-based (non)existence. (Harris picks up on the theme of electronic appearance as a smoke-ring like trace, an aftermath of embodied life, in “Noone”: “without words/soars the severed skull free/of human shape” and “Noone was here/is/smile the leg/the road//without body” [11]).

For Harris, Jewish poetry in the digital age is a source of ecstatic hermeneutic practice. It is also a source of anxiety (Bloomian and garden variety neurosis stemming from future fears) about what Eliot termed the rela-

tion of tradition and the individual talent, as well as the place of embodied existence altogether. According to Harris, “People are obsessively concerned with identity. There is an insufferable desire to be understood but honor what has come before. The danger is that we could be living in a vacuum of platitudes where everything is cliché” (Schneider). As DePauw Religion and Literature Professor Beth Hawkins Benedix notes in a full-length introductory essay to the volume, lines from Harris’s poetry such as “Does anyone ask about identity?,” “Do we live here?,” “Too many/writers and not enough readers,” and the author’s parodistic comment that his task may be to “self-publish the urbanism of lonely obfuscations” speak to what Benedix calls the “wish for connection, for a listening Other, [which] sits side by side an equally compelling need to expose the naiveté of this wish” in the dizzyingly intangible virtual space of New Media. An utterly contemporary and post-modern condition for poetry, as witnessed by recent studies of poetry in the digital age by Adelaide Morris, N. Katherine Hayles, Marjorie Perloff, Kenneth Goldsmith, Kevin Stein, and C.T. Funkhouser, Harris suggests current practice is resonant with ancient Jewish mystical traditions (associated with, for example, Moses de Leon) of esoteric creativity through the decidedly Jewish and diasporic Derridean processes of dissemination, textuality, and plurivocality that characterize web-based communications.

It is important to distinguish Harris’s mixed response to poetry in a New Media era to that of leading theoretical proponents of e-poetry such as Goldsmith, Hayles, Perloff, and Funkhouser. Closer in spirit—if not stylistics—to Kevin Stein, who offers a judicious commentary on e-poetry from the perspective of a page poet in *Poetry’s Afterlife*—Harris is a fascinating cusp figure with a deeply modernist sensibility. His tonal touchstones (Stevens, primarily), focus on interiority, anxiety, word play, allusiveness, verbal opacity, and an assemblage/collage aesthetic all put him in modernist camp even as the modernist is confronting a consuming postmodern realm of electronic reproduction. Like Eliot, Pound and Walter Benjamin in the *Arcades Project*, for Harris originality and innovation are, paradoxically, contingent upon extraordinary scholarly efforts to compile and collate esoteric wisdom texts, political tracts, and sacred and secular literature. For Eliot and Pound the project was to quote and thus appropriate Confucius, Jefferson, Bhagava Gita, Shakespeare, ragtime music into graphically and semantically charged compositions that, far from intended to a dizzying state of bricolage are, in Eliot’s famous phrase from *The Waste Land*, “These fragments I have shored against my ruins” (Eliot and Pound were notoriously involved in reactionary political movements that spoke to their Stevensian “rage for order” in a period of massive social, political, aesthetic, and economic upheaval).

Flarf writers and e-poets such as Funkhouser and Jim Andrews and installation artist-poets such as Mary Flanagan generate decentered texts by, for example, linking URLs, thus creating hypertexts as “readers” may proceed through webpages by linking on to whichever webpage the “readers” decide to click upon—thus creating a thematically dizzying number of possible versions of the “original” version of text the Flarfist originally “programmed” into being. Harris, by contrast, publishes page poetry on online ‘zines such as *Zeek* and via his website, but is at bottom a 21st Century modernist in that his forums are primarily obscure print little magazines and small presses—*Hyperlinks of Anxiety* appears with Cervena Barva Press of Somerville MA and is distributed via SPD (Small Press Distribution).