



p a p e r p o e m  
r i c k s n y d e r

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DUSIE

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Your papers litter the floor  
your litter papers the floor  
your papers had a litter  
and none of them survived  
the poems you put on them

The victims of hurricanes  
want to come here, it seems –  
in the papers some are  
waiting for years and leaving  
right now some are losing  
everything they have some  
are boarding ships and drowning  
in rivers some are walking  
hundreds of miles and getting  
turned back to try again  
some are making it through  
to work for less than  
you made in high school  
if you believe the papers  
have real stories of people  
strewn across the floors  
the streets the train car  
taking you from one island  
to another you hold tightly  
between the people reading  
under the East River.

In the Document Production Center  
we produce documents.  
We take sheets of 8.5" x 11"  
paper and feed them into  
laser printers. I check  
to make sure the new document  
matches the old document  
with the lawyer's changes.  
Often, I mark corrections  
and return the pages  
to a person who changes  
the computerized document  
and prints out a new one  
for me to check again.  
In this way, we avoid  
errors. In this way, we  
attain a perfection of sorts,  
executing a lawyer's wishes,  
initialing the carbon paper  
stapled to the document.  
In this way, we can finalize  
your will, merge your aero-  
space concerns, liquidate  
your scrap-metal holdings.  
In this way, we are latter-  
day scribes, for each will  
is the same, only the names  
and numbers change,  
and it is my job to ensure  
that the document is copied  
and changed correctly.

At approximately 10:20  
I bought a paper from  
a middle-eastern man  
standing in a small structure  
lined with magazines,  
just off Fifth Ave.  
After receiving my change  
I hurried in, out of the cold,  
to the building that houses  
the Document Production Center,  
floor 31.

It's gotten to the point where I write  
more when I near the end of a notebook.  
The paper's no longer attractive, somehow,  
it's slightly creased, the edges are dirty –  
what surprises can come in this context?  
I crave the clean sheets of the new notebook  
that's already sitting in a plastic bag  
on the shelves filled with poetry books.  
This is merely an exercise, an inevitable  
conclusion to something started months ago.  
When I start a notebook, I look ahead  
to all the poems I imagine I'll write.  
When I finish one, I can't help but look  
back at the scrawled, semi-legible pages,  
hoping that a few will

In The Thief The Wife  
a man has his throat  
stuffed with papers  
of some significance.  
In The Pillow Book  
a Japanese woman gets off  
when she's written on.  
Of course her lover's made  
into paper. In both  
cases it's merely gross.  
How can you film such  
beautiful people and make  
such a boring film?



Today I have to call copy shops to price out the first issue of *Cello Entry*. My friends have sent me some great poems, and I would like to print on something heavier than 20 lb. bond, but because of the irregular size I've chosen — 8.5" x 14" folded and trimmed to 8.5" x 6.5" — the cost of good paper may be prohibitive. In that case, I'll spend about \$100 on good 80 lb. covers, dark navy blue, which I'll stamp with a hand-lettered design and staple over the thin-papered poems. Then, I'll give away as many copies as I can to poets and the few others I know who read poems. I'll even take some copies to a Document Production Center, where people who helped me with the design and layout have asked to see the final version.

In my next life  
I'm going to be a cobbler  
and a candlestick maker,  
a blacksmith and a  
Gingerbread Baker,  
playing the drums  
even when I'm spent

Do you have your papers?

I've got bud  
but no papers  
was something I said  
more than once in high school.

It's a common theory  
that when the cops  
shot at Amadou Diallo  
41 times  
he was reaching  
for identification  
or a green card.  
In the paper it said  
he was only carrying  
a wallet and a beeper.  
In the Post it showed  
black ink in the shape  
of a small human body,  
with white dots where  
each bullet hit.

In Chicago I saw a picture of nearly 20,000 people becoming citizens in a ceremony at Soldier Field. It was a very hot day, and the Chicago Tribune said several elderly people had to be taken to the hospital. It also included quotes from people who were proud to now be American citizens. From alien to citizen in a single hot ceremony. The story also mentioned the difficulties of the citizenship process, how large the backlog of applicants can be, and how perplexing the bureaucracy is, especially when English isn't your first language. On page two of the Tribune there's always a box that says the paper is printed at The Freedom Center, on Chicago Ave., where guided tours are available for groups of children.

The phone keeps ringing  
but I don't answer  
because I'm afraid  
it's an agency  
asking me to go to a  
Document Production Center.  
When I check my messages  
it's Rob telling me  
he's been very busy  
working OT and getting ready  
to help his girlfriend  
move into his apartment.  
He also mentions a book  
about Paul Celan,  
who wrote "Cello-Entry/  
from behind pain"  
in German.

There's also a message  
from an agency.

To the best of my knowledge  
Celan never visited the U.S.,  
but resided in Paris after  
the Holocaust, making one  
trip to Israel before he died  
by walking into the Seine.



ESL teachers were told to never provide answers and to always ask new students why they came to the U.S. and what they wanted to do.

Whenever I asked, students said that they had come here for a better life and that they wanted to work anywhere – in an office, store, factory.

One night several people explained that in their hometowns they would work two weeks to earn enough to buy a pair of pants, but working one day here,

they could buy several pairs of pants and sweatshirts too. Here, sweatshirts cost \$5, and it is easy to make that. When I asked why it was hard to make money

in their native countries, no one answered. After that, we practiced irregular verbs and wrote sentences using the past and perfect tenses: run, taught, eaten ....

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(Brooklyn, 2001)