Ode to d.a. levy

Beginning with an epigraph:

My heart rouses
thinking to bring you news
of something
that concerns you
and concerns many men. Look at
what passes for the new
You will not find it there but in
despised poems.
It is difficult
to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack
of what is found there.

—W.C. Williams
“Asphodel, That Greeny Flower”

Darryl Allen Levy was born in Cleveland
on October 29, 1942

He was a 1960 grad
of
James Ford Rhodes High School

"I didn't have
enough money to
go to college," he
told the Cleveland Press
later.*

He was in the Navy
7 months. His parents
lived in Cleveland
during his times
as a bard
Joseph Levy, his father
was a shoe salesman—
his mother's name was Caroline

By early '63 he'd started a press—
He called it Renegade Press

We gave our magazines & presses
OUT THERE ON THE BARRICADES

titles

mine was Fuck You/ A Magazine of the ARTS
among d.a.’s were the MARRAHWANNA QUARTERLY
and later the
Buddhist Third Class Junk Mail Oracle

He described it:
"It was February ’63 when I had enough money
to buy a 6by9 letterhead hand press & type. Spent
almost a year at my aunt & uncles printing, some-
times 8 to 16 hours a day for days and days (playing
'the man with the golden arm' & some old 78s: peggy
lee, jack teagarden, dexter gordon, etc. over & over
while i worked)

Some of the hippie highschool shits who think i’m
hip don’t realize i’ve worked my ass off for the past
3 years trying to change the literary reputation of
Cleveland."*

*The Mary Jane Quarterly
Volume 2, Number 1  1966

Three years he designed, adorned and printed
from his letter press—

In early 1964 he wrote me in New York
asking for a manuscript.

I was overwhelmingly excited.

"If you want a book done," the letter said,
"I'll do it -- the wilder the poems —the more
I enjoy printing them and thus better
printing job."

Few publishers there are
in infinity
that ask for
poems, the wilder the better

Wow! I thought,
as I jogged around our little three room pad
on the spot, pulling from file folders
the poems
for the book he published on his hand press
with the title, "King/Lord Queen/Freak"

He asked me to send him some copies of *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts* and I did.

His own poetry arose toward greatness.

He was relentlessly honest
He refused to be hypocritical
& he called it like he saw it.

His message was freedom
freedom to write
& to read aloud
freedom for the soul to soar
& freedom from poverty.

"All I want to do is write poems, say what I want to say and be able to turn on once in a while. Is that asking too much of your country?"

(d.a. to *Plain Dealer* 1-13-67)

He had an eye as sharp as the Eye of Horus
He seared through the fluff into the sempiternity.

He was spiritual
Believed in soul-talk
& sequences of lives

I used to adorn my verse with Egyptian glyphs and images and he too knew that the
visual in our century was in the ascendency

We both sensed that the ability to differentiate & analyze fine points in the visual gestalt was on the rise -- in fact it was one of the most powerful forces of the era

He had a highly developed visuality in his verse
Artist Painter Collagist Typesetter he had a Good Eye for visual array
did important work in concrete poetry He was good w/ scissored shapes good at positing images among one another good at gluing and fashioned a museum quality series called "Zen Concrete"

I called these visual images "glyphs"
A good glyph in a poem thrills the sky.

I used the Eye of Horus renamed Peace Eye
Levy studied Buddhism as Kerouac also studied Two troubled American artists in the ascendency He loved those ancient texts

All of us were searching for DIRECT TRANSMISSION OF MIND that writers have to mill around together search across the electric forests like hungry deer He wanted to do it in his home city so he reached out and roped together the best minds in his poet-region though it's so hard to get your compatriot best minds to study the same things you study.

The great fear so endemic to America rinsed over his 23 year old soul "Have you read 'The Sacred Mushroom--Key the Door of Eternity'" — he wrote me in January of '65. "It is a bridey murphy thing in egypt. How aware are you of yr Egyptianish
poems. I am not finished with the book but turn on like a light bulb cosmic high when reading it.

"...I still get paranoid... think cia & fbi are going to get me for something (burn this letter) many people here becoming very sensitive and perceptive...

New coffee house opened THE WELL — could be a Le Metro in cleveland... it is backed by a christian, leaving the church & going back to god... Everyone sez it is unhip to talk about it... what is it... do you know?"

Two sea-line threnodies roiled our generation:
d.a. felt their swell—
the threat of the bomb
& the threat of the Vietnam war
to which you could have added two more:
the lack of economic justice
& the threat
of the secret police & the CIA
plus the rinse of, the rinse of 'noia

He drifted toward trouble. Ginsberg and I helped set it up.

In 1963 I called for legalization of marijuana in an editorial in *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*

that many poets read.

In early '65 we formed LEMAR
The Committee to Legalize Marijuana
Ginsberg and I and others at Peace Eye Bookstore in N.Y.C.

The photo of Allen Ginsberg
holding a POT IS FUN sign
at a demonstration
outside the courthouse

was in the newspapers
and it made the cause seem safer.

We put out The Marijuana Newsletter
off of the Peace Eye Mimeograph
I sent it to d.a.

On April 19th, 1965, he sent a post card
to LEMAR:

"Please put me on your mailing list & I will
sign petitions... wd distribute the
Marijuana Report if I could afford..."

d.a. jumped to the cause
with the same tenacity
that glued him to the
letterpress the past three years

He thought he'd bring it to
Cleveland
and started the MARRAWANNA QUARTERLY

after which he was an early
casualty
—one of the first—
of the drug wars.

On January 1, 1966
the police raided Peace Eye
and I was arrested

They hauled away a squad car full
Fuck You's, and they seized
and marked for evidence
such publications as W.H. Auden's "Platonic Blow"
and d.a.'s Renegade Press edition
of "Farewell the Floating Cunt."

The police
killed my magazine
The ACLU
recommended
I not publish
till after th' trial
and even though I won the case next year
I never resumed it
such a crimp was placed
in my Mind.

d.a. began to bring
poetry to the coffee houses & bars
in the University Circle area--
near Case Western Reserve University--
a resumption of the
beatnik bardic oral tradition.

Just the word "beatnik" in those
days had the power to inflame,
enrage or bemirth.

He granted an interview with the Cleveland Plain Dealer
in January, 1966, which was published on page one
under the headline BEATNIK LEADER
WANTS MARIJUANA
LEGALIZED IN AMERICA

To say the least, it caused a stir.
"I felt that someone had to come out in the
open and challenge the hysterical arguments and
myths spread by the police, the press and the
government," he told an interviewer at the time.

The police put him on their list.

First issue of Marrahwanna Newsletter
from Cleveland came out in early '66
Price listed: 10 cents
The second issue out in the
summer of '66, with part 5
of d.a.'s North American Book of
the Dead

The publication d.a. continued as
The Marrahwanna Quarterly,
with an emphasis on poetry
and d.a.'s comments on the cleveland
police & psychedelic scene

(acid had just been made a federal crime)
Levy wrote an editorial, "the first time i discovered the cleveland public library wasn't worth a shit was when i wanted to read bks of contemporary poetry... they were mostly academic poets/only a few of the 'beats & post beat generation'"

d.a. announced he'd "recently presented over 40 books of poetry to the library... included were books by Gary Snyder, Charles Olson, Antonin Artaud/Clayton Eshleman/Diane Wakoski/Jonathan Williams/Charles Bukowski/Kenneth Rexroth/Jacob Glantz/Bob Kaufman/Denise Levertov/Frank O'Hara/ Paul Valery/Ludovico Silva/Roger Taus/Charles Reznikoff/George Oppen/Robert Creeley"

Attention from the Establishment

He stood on the spiral staircase of risks and sang how RE-CREATION was his mythopoeia:

Recreational
buddhism
Recreational
poesy & collage
Recreational
letterpressing
Recreational
fucking
Recreational
pot & music
Recreational
telepathy

He was a victim
of the cold vectors of war-mind
and the sound of the sloshing waves by Plymouth Rock.

I've never been fully able to understand it but somehow a few powerful people thought Levy with his pot manifestoes, verse and beatnikery was somehow a detriment to the local real estate market
Maybe it had to do with keeping prices up
for urban renewal deals,
new apartment houses and parking lots....

d.a. covered the real estate manipulations
in his underground newspaper The Buddhist Third-Class Junk Mail Oracle

It was the eery drone
of the police state
that began to unnerve him

Cops with body wires
monitored the poetry readings
levy attended

eye hated the MARRAHWANNA QUARTERLY

There was a reading at The Gate,
the coffee shop in the basement
at Trinity Cathedr
don November 16.

Police were there in secret,
looking for pot,
but settled
for taping the reading
and voila! a poem was
read with the word "cocksucker"
in it

That same month a grand jury indicted him for obscenity.

On December 1 of that year, narcotics officers
raided the Asphodel Bookstore
and in some geeky twist
seized 9 crates of d.a.'s publications
on the grounds that they advocated the legalization of hemp.
Jim Lowell, the Asphodel's owner was arrested.

Also seized, as if it were the era of Dostoievsy,
was a mimeograph machine.
1-9-67
establishment
CLEVELAND
PRESS HEADLINE:
"Grand Jury Named Beatnik Poet in Secret Indictment on Filth"

That about says it all about Cleveland in '67

The press dripped deprecation with such ditties as:
"Levy is a widely know figure around University Circle beatnik haunts."*

*Cleveland Press 1-9-67

The squares did not know that in just a few weeks the word "Hippie" would blow the word "Beatnik" away as a pejorative in the pejoracracy.

d.a. went into hiding but on January 16, 1967 turned himself over, and was released on bail.

Then, on March 28, d.a. was rearrested, and charged on five counts of contributing to the deliquency of minors, in that, at the famous reading in the basement of Trinity Cathedral last November 16,

he had read obscenity to a fifteen year old girl and a 17 year old boy. The lad's parents had discovered a poster in his room, and complained to the police.
"Specifically," the Plain Dealer intoned, "Levy is charged with accepting immoral and indecent poetry from the boy and publishing it, as well as reading and distributing it at the coffee house."

d.a. gave beautiful interviews in those few days—
"I am part of a movement trying to make this planet more civilized."

Case Western Reserve Law Students and professors picketed the Criminal Court Building

Poets made legalize d.a. levy stickers and sprouted them onto the buildings of Cleveland

Known beatniks gathered to howl verse in public protest.

There was a claw-hammer crudeness to his arrest

No attention to the 1st Amendment
They seized his mimeo and it leaked ink on the desk at the police station.

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

THE BILL OF RIGHTS: Amendment One

Pot was easy for the police to pick on
for there were no guns
   no capos with hit lists
   just poets and love lists

In court on January 17
   there was a legendary colloquy with the judge:

The judge, to Levy: "You write poetry... do you sell it?"

Levy: "I sell poetry for 89 cents a day."

The judge: "Bail of $2,500 is not excessive for a great poet. Maybe you should charge more than 89 cents."

The great fear rinsed through Cleveland
   and d.a., already prone to fear
   was battered in the fear-foam.

   The prosecutor in both cases was
       George Moscarino

   (& in 1989
       21 years later
       had trouble
       recalling the case
       or Levy's name at all

   but in '66 Moscarino bedeviled him.)

d.a.'s poem "Kibbutz In the Sky"
   traces the arrests.

Friends published a huge anthology
   about Levy and his work
   a classic act of solidarity,
   titled UKANHAVYRFUCKINCITIBAK.

A bunch of us— Allen Ginsberg,
   and the Fugs
   flew to Cleveland to do a benefit for d.a.
at Case Western.

The day of the benefit
we tried to do a preliminary poetry reading
at the Gate
   in Trinity church
   but the fuzz broke it up.

1967 was a year
in which you didn't give up
and d.a. was no exception.

He began publishing
a post-beat newspaper:
The Buddhist Third Class Junk Mail Oracle.

After all, why give up.
It was the year all the beatniks (those young
enough, anyway) became hippies,
and the year they put flowers
down the barrels of rifles
   when we exorcized the Pentagon.

There were Love-in's
at the Cleveland Museum
the summer of '67

I had written asking for
a poem to publish,
he wrote back frazzled,

"cannot possibly sent you manuscript
in time and thot i should let you know/
everyday for the next two weeks are
shot/ my trial has been detained again/
best of luck & many prayers for you"

It doesn't take that many years
to scorch a psyche—

America broke his heart
when he realized
   as did Allen Dulles
that few actually read

& that
"the people want blood."

The Great Fear
of the era
was giving its
final soul-rinse

"the people want blood."

You have to
hang on to
a controversy
with the passion
of a fanatic

Attacks
wear you down
The hatred
of officialdom
officiates
at your
erasure

Attacks ate Debs
They ate
Norman Thomas
& Emma Goldman
They ate
Martin King

It finally wore d.a. down
Controversy
is like roadway
on tires—
you wind up with metal.

His poems were riven with death:
he wrote about it
in a Poe-like
surge of work—
tombstones, epitaphs
and thanatonoia
filled his fingers with ink.

After his arrest in '67
he described an incident when he was 17

"Unable to find competent leaders or teachers,
unable to discover intelligent persons in places of authority, unable to find anything other than pseudo-christian bigotry & ignorance - I decided to commit suicide at the age of 17. Changed my mind at the last minute & started to read everything & write poems.

Death was always a crow's wing in his eyes.

He lived very quickly for about five years He was stunned He was in the end overwhelmed He was a loner lover liver & giver He liked to help his friends d.a. levy was his name

1968

'68 cracked the bones of America.

The Tet Offensive in February
   The My Lai Massacre in March
   MLK murdered in April

   Robert Kennedy in June
   the Riots in Chicago
   the Birth of Nixon

what a horrid year.

d.a. kept up the Buddhist Third Class Junk Mail Oracle but money was difficult.

Early in '68 he made a deal that sealed his anger and depression--
His lawyer says he was very afraid of jail and he was facing something like 5 years so he pleaded nolo contendere to the charge of contributing to the delinquency of minors
in exchange for probation
& the dismissal of the obscenity charge,
& a $200 fine.

He sent his beautiful manifesto on
verse and the poet in
the American capitalist milieu,

**PROSE: on poetry in the wholesale education**
& culture system
with a note:
"Ed--
this was printed
last night -- it is
already out of
print -- please
read it if you get
a chance to breathe—
a different bag—
john scott just got two
years in the county
workhouse & we can't
do a damn thing except
wait send the motherfuckers
bent love rays—

yrs

 d.a. levy"

Vol. 2, Number 2 of *The Buddhist Third Class Junkmail Oracle*
was published in July 1968
Volume 2, Number 3 August-September '68

with d.a.'s editorial:

"At this point, I am left with no choice other than
discontinuing this paper. The rumored 'hip' comm-
unity is either incapabl or unwilling to support this
paper so fuck it. The spiritual corpses of the 'hip
community' can continue to learn where it's at from
Life Magazine and the Cleveland Plain Dealer as they
have in the past. A section of the Cleveland
Underground would like to leave & go to areas where
there is a more constructive community, where there
is less talk, less apathy & a little more constructive
psychic action. We are tired of being Eunuchs for the
local Christian Death Cults, We are tired of being kept
humble by (...)hic businessmen, We are tired of being
forced to worship the power of the American god, the $,
or starve. DON'T SEND MONEY - all mail received after
OCT. will probably be burned unopened... piece/peace & awareness d.a. levy c/o The Asphodel Bk Shop
306 W. Superior Ave Cleveland 44113  THIS IS A MAILING ADDRESS ONLY.

August '68 wrote the 24 page SUBURBAN MONASTERY DEATH POEM
printed by ZERO EDITION
E. Cleveland Ohio
U.S.A - 1968
with its periodic outcries, such as

"William Burroughs - rescue me!
forget that!
Michele Ray - Yael Dayan - rescue me!"

and

"Ingrid Swanberg, Aileen Goodson, HELP!"

and

"Vajra Yogini Help!
Papa Legba — open the gates
I don't want to die in Ohio anymore!"

He inscribed the cover:

"to ed sanders
KOSHER
musical joint
for Peace
da. levy - 1968"

Perhaps a sign he sent it around
the Jewish New Year in the fall of '68,

and maybe also a reference
that I left the "STRICKLY KOSHER"
sign on the outside of Peace Eye Bookstore
in place when I opened it
(It had been a Kosher meat market before)

In October of ’68 he was invited to
Madison
to be "Free University Poet in Residence"
in the alternative school
associated with U. of M.

d.a.'s course was one on telepathy
and he did not attend.

The class grooved with it,
and continued to gather,
focussing on levy from afar.

Levy created a series of collages in Madison
— someone gave him some old Greek texts
which he turned in a half hour
into startling electric Greek collage poems

and then October was over, and he returned
to the Cuyahoga—
the first week of November Nixon was granted to us

He was
an organism
that
sometimes
longed for
death.

He was thinking about moving to California
He was thinking about staying
He hated to be driven from Cleve'

On November 24, he shot himself
in the forehead
with his childhood 22
sitting lotus,
and once again
pled nolo contendere.

It's always difficult
to make sense
of a poet's
brief florescence

Hart Crane
da. levy

the chaff of
genius
It may take centuries
to sort him out
It often does
with poets

The issues of
economic justice
and personal freedom
which wore out the good bard levy

have not yet
been addressed
in America

& we need a way
that a
shyer
yes even more
timorous
and fearful
genius
flourish
their proper span.

and darryl allen levy lived not his span
but his poems:

“The Bells of the Cherokee Ponies”
“Kibbutz in the Sky”
“North American Book of the Dead”
“Cleveland Undercovers”
and a big series
of conrete books

find their measure

Shine on
oh d.a. levy
rinsed in the American dream!!

—Edward Sanders
Boulder, Colorado
for a d.a. levy celebration