

# Alejandra Pizarnik

César Aira

*Translated from the Spanish by Katherine Silver*

Flora Pizarnik (her real name; Alejandra was adopted when she was a teenager) was born in 1936 in Avellaneda, in the province of Buenos Aires, the second daughter of Jewish immigrants who had arrived in Argentina three years earlier from Rovno, a city that was alternately in Russia and Poland. Her father was a jewelry merchant and made a good living. She went to high school at the Escuela Normal Mixta in Avellaneda, then began and successively abandoned studies in philosophy, journalism, and literature, as well as painting in the studios of Juan Batlle Planas.

In 1955, under the name of Flora Alejandra Pizarnik, she published her first book of poems, *The Most Foreign Country*, which she would later disavow. Two others followed in rapid succession: *The Final Innocence* and *The Lost Adventures*.

In 1960, she traveled to Paris, where she would spend four years of fundamental importance to her education and vocation. In 1962, *Diana's Tree*, the book that defined her distinctive style and methodology, was published in Buenos Aires.

Soon after her return to Argentina in 1965, she published *Works and Nights* to unanimous critical acclaim. She wrote occasional reviews and criticism, which appeared in newspapers and magazines, and a more ambitious one, *The Bloody Countess*, serialized in *Diálogo* in 1965 and published as a book in 1971.

Her father died quite young, in 1967, and the following year the poet, already in her thirties and still living in the family home (in Avellaneda and later in the Constitución neighborhood of Buenos Aires), moved into her own apartment on Calle Montevideo. In 1968, another book of her poems, *Extracting the Stone of Madness*, was published. That same year she was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and traveled briefly to New York and Paris.

It was around this time that she suffered a series of personal crises. Her first suicide attempt in 1970 was followed by others, and she was hospitalized several times in the psychiatric ward of Hospital Pirovano. In September 1972, when she was thirty-six years old, she died of an overdose of sleeping pills. At the end of the previous year she had published her last book, *A Musical Hell*. Several other works appeared posthumously, the most important of which was *Shadow's Texts and Other Poems*. In 1994, a volume of her complete works (*Obras completas*) was published; it included her entire oeuvre with the exception of her first book and a few articles. There is also her diary, which has been published in full (*Diarios*), and letters, a volume of which is being prepared. In 1991, a biography (by Cristina Piña, editor of her *Obras completas*) was published, an extraordinary event in Argentine literature that can be attributed to the aura of almost legendary prestige that surrounds the life and work of A.P.

As is often the case with literary criticism, my own has its origin in a desire to correct an injustice, the one I see in the quite habitual use of certain sentimental metaphors to talk about A.P. Almost everything written about her is chock full of "little castaway," "lost little girl," "statue uninhabited by her self," and others like it. This shows a rather alarming lack of respect, or an overdose of confidence, but in any case, a devaluation. Which would be merely anecdotal if it didn't indicate, as is always the case when a metaphor is used, a reification, and, as such, an obstacle to a view of the process. It reduces a poet to some kind of bibelot decorating the bookshelf of literature and shuts down the process through which poetry emerges, a frequent result of the work of critics who, despite the very best intentions, seem to be determined to freeze literature into objects. And then it doesn't matter that the writer's work had been, precisely, to unfreeze the world, make it flow in an endless operation: the work, and the writer herself, ends up, in the words of my colleagues, as a "little statue of terror."

This is a quote from A.P., as are the majority of the phrases used in these cases. She didn't skimp on autobiographical meta-

phors, but that is no excuse to use them against her, especially because doing so confounds poetry already made with poetry in the process of being made. In the later instance, the metaphor of the subject is used to continue to make poetry; it could be called a disposable tool. What I mean is that in order to constitute the subject that is necessary in order to be able to write, the poet makes use of, among other things, metaphor. But a metaphor, no matter how attractive it may be, is not the destination. If it were, there would be a freeze, a museification, we would be left with a catalog of objects, and once there are objects, the poetic task of “creating process” will have been betrayed. Poetry would then be considered “done,” and there would be nothing left to do but stop writing, or die. I’m not saying this doesn’t happen. For now, we only need to admit that in order for the continuation of the process to be worthwhile, the metaphor (or the poem itself) must be good, and quality can be discerned only in what has been frozen or reified in some way or other. Poetry, however, keeps going, because a process is established on another level, in a dialectic between the process and the result.

Art comprises these two coexisting and simultaneous phases engaged in a perennial dialectic: process and result. It is not a matter of separating out what corresponds to one or the other in any particular work or artist, but it is possible to distinguish the two ends of the spectrum: the result end tends toward commercial—“consumable”—art, and the process to experimental or radical art. On the result end is the reader or the spectator; on the process end is the artist. One could say that there is harmony between process and result in classical art, and it is this harmony that defines the classical. In the modern era, this dialectic has been exacerbated; in their eagerness to achieve art that was nothing but process, the avant-gardes of the twentieth century placed it front and center; this culminated, I believe, in Russian constructivism, which did not, however, leave any heirs; around the same era (about 1920) Dadaism—less systematic—was more fertile through the surrealist legacy. I would like to begin these lectures with some reflections on the dialectics between the process and the result in

surrealism, in part because this is still, to a large extent, our own predicament, and in part because it is an introduction to our topic, for A.P. lived and read and wrote in surrealism's wake.

In surrealism, as in any "school," at least during its militant phase, the process is what prevailed. The avant-garde movements were essentially recipes for "how to do it"; the only paradigm of quality that mattered was the execution of the creative process, for only time could determine the quality of the result, which by definition remained in a state of suspense.

The key process of surrealism, or the key to the process, was automatic writing, which is sort of the process in its pure state, in as far as it claims to be the free flow of the unconscious, that is, of the mental arena liberated from any consideration of the result—from critical judgment. The result is reabsorbed into the process; the process itself is already the result. This, in itself, is somewhat paradoxical because it means that if the flow is truly automatic, if it is cleansed of any critical judgment, then it will be good, that is, it will satisfy that critical judgment excluded on principle but recovered in the course of events.

It is through automatic writing that surrealism creates its origin myth, but there is more to it than that: it is an origin myth in a constant state of re-actualization. If the premise of automatic writing is carried to its extreme, every surrealist work is already dead, already relegated to the past at birth. The method forces the artist to be a perpetual Orpheus, forbidden to turn around and look at what she has done. Because even the most distracted glance carries with it an evaluation; this is inevitable, but it shuts down the process of creation. The myth divides time in two and preserves each half in its purity: the evaluation produces a pure past, in which the present—blind action, divested of critical judgment—plays no part. And creation produces a pure present, which will never become the past because it is not allowed to contemplate it from the outside. Once the work of art is made, it ceases to be art: it is a document, the record of a process. This peculiar compartmentalization of time gives surrealism its

intriguing character as a “dead” school, always surpassed, from its very inception. Since its initial eruption, surrealism has always been considered dead, and finding it still alive has always been cause for amazement.

All of the foregoing is, of course, in terms of “maxim,” the ideal reading of the myth. In practice, the myth was modulated by practical realities. After all, the surrealists were human and the human is always too human. Critical judgments continued to hover right around the corner, as is illustrated by this apothegm from Aragon: “If you write pathetic inanities using surrealist techniques, they will still be pathetic inanities.” Here they don’t live up to their own invention; we would have preferred the surrealist method to be capable of transforming a pathetic inanity into poetry. Be that as it may, the vacillations and contradictions of the surrealist doctrine throughout its long and turbulent history stem from these demanding premises and their clash with reality.

When A.P. began to write in the fifties, everybody thought surrealism was dead (which was not news). It was natural for the poet, shaped as she had been by surrealist tastes, to instrumentalize the methodology of a dead school, like someone who wears the wristwatch of a dead parent. The ideology having vanished, its mechanism could be useful for new creations; in other words, automatic writing could be used to make good poetry. Which seems to be exactly the opposite of what the surrealists proposed. However, the surrealists did the same thing: the opposite of what they proposed. Hence their myth, which fulfilled the purpose of all myths: to mediate between opposites. It was due to this internal contradiction that surrealism was dead from the start (it was its own origin myth) and was guaranteed a long life, always posthumous.

In the young A.P., the stance of the poet becomes more sincere, and simpler. There is no utopian or ideological disguise but rather a single and explicit goal: to write good poems, to become a good poet. The result is everything, the desire to write “good” poetry overpowers all else, with the conviction, which A.P. shares with all young poets past and future, that all other ends can be

sacrificed to this one because by achieving it they will, by default, achieve all the others.

With this plan, A.P. appears to be placing herself on the opposite end of the spectrum from the surrealist plan, but I think that in fact she is taking it on from the inside, reinventing surrealism from within its nucleus of prenatal death, and by doing so differentiating herself from many retrograde “surrealists” still deluded about the survival of old utopias.

The adoption of the method of automatic writing is a function of its usefulness to attain the New. And the importance of the New is supreme, the *sine qua non* to continue writing. Surrealism was primordially a system of reading, the richest and most productive one in the modern era. (This also constitutes part of the surrealist contradiction: it was a system of reading, and it proposed a system of creation wherein reading was taboo.) The surrealist omnibus is very large, even exhaustive; it can make one think that everything has been written. The function of automatic writing was to “catch” what might still be new in the depths (unconscious, oneiric, transpersonal, random) where it had taken refuge. For this reason, and whatever Breton might say, automatic writing was being instrumentalized from the beginning.

To summarize: A.P. inverted the surrealist method by placing the evaluation, the *critical I*, under the command of automatic writing, thereby emptying it of its programmatic contents and turning it into a method without ideological illusions, at the service of a *métier*. It retains from automatic writing precisely what this had been called on to dissolve, the result, this thanks to the limitless range in the choice of terms, which makes it possible to form a sentence with elements taken from any area of discourse and achieve novelty impossible in that world of the exhaustive “Surrealist Library,” where everything has already been written.

So, through this method, the *critical I*—which A.P. not only retains but even puts in charge—takes the shape of a foreign body. Once there, it must be either elaborated upon or camouflaged, homogenized into the rest of the worked material through the combinatorial possibilities of automatic writing. Otherwise, it

would stand out too much and expose the adolescent entity it represents. This is the source of the autobiographical metaphor that inscribes all of A.P.'s poetry, to such an extent that it becomes a theme and results in the deplorable posthumous rubric with which we began: "little castaway," et cetera.

This autobiographical metaphor suggests a different genealogy. The "maximum latitude" in the choice of terms, the first and last benefit of automatic writing, threatens to make the watchful *critical I* explode; for surrealists, such an explosion is acceptable and assumed, at the cost of making poetry objective; A.P.'s personal system, subjective to an exaggerated extent, requires the participation of a mannequin of the *I* to give it continuity and contain the chaos. Above all, because without a subjective entity that survives the poetic labor—that is, the creation of a "good" poem—it would all end there. The poet would become reified and substantiated within the poem.

This kind of metaphor plays the role of a biographical synthesis or a mnemonic formula. It's what in marketing jargon would be called a "publicity stunt." Who was Emily Dickinson or Karoline von Günderode, or anybody else? "The wind's passionate lover," "the traveler with her birdskin suitcase," et cetera. I think it's unfair to reduce A.P. to one or many of these formulas because she used them only so she could continue writing, not in order to shut her work down. It is still not the constitution of a subject (I intend to show that in A.P. the subject is constituted through its dislocation) but rather a parody of it, its reduction to the absurd. When they are not corny, the often pathetic modulations of these formulas—"forgotten little girl," "dead little girl"—play the role of subjectivizing automatic writing and maintaining the machine in motion.

In fact, we are dealing with a subject in the form of an object. We should call it a "character": character is the recourse used to overcome the contradiction between subject and object. In lyric poetry the subject is almost always the character, thereby rendering literary what would otherwise be purely narcissistic whining. The character subject—fractured into little girls, sleepwalkers,

castaways—allowed A.P. to move forward in her writing without falling into the conventions of old-fashioned sentimental lyrical poetry.

It is, admittedly, a temporary solution, subject to the depletion of a combinatorial system with a limited number of terms. How far can one go on the strength of little lost girls, tiny sleepwalkers, and travelers with empty glasses? It is this dangerous game that brings A.P. closest to kitsch, and it is precisely what rescues her with the best of intentions. The danger defines the limits of this recourse, strictly monitored by her horror of the ridiculous and by an elegance nurtured through her reading of the poets in the surrealist canon.

This limitation is one of the most distinctive features of A.P.'s poetry, which presents itself as an oeuvre that will be completed; rather than remain indefinitely open to the dictates of inspiration or experience, it is closed like any combinatorial system, and the end is always in sight. From the very beginning, since *Diana's Tree* in any case, there are signs that it is advancing toward a point where everything will have been said that was possible to say within the rules of a very demanding game. This depressing suspicion gives the ensemble an anguished tone, and forces upon it its nocturnal, pessimistic, vampiresque themes (because the movement is nurtured by a given quantum of life). For moments, it seems as if A.P. is commenting ironically on this situation, hollowing out her voice to pull her own leg: "I speak of the places where poetic bodies are made—like a basket filled with the corpses of little girls."

Having said all that, a character exists only within the mechanism of a story, and a story needs changes of tense, which is opposed by the surrealist poet's restriction against mixing the past and the present. The key to automatic writing is the purity of the present, and here we can already see one of the paths that lead to the brevity of A.P.'s poems. (She always lacked the narrative impulse that characterized other Argentine surrealists, such as Olga Orozco or Enrique Molina. It was lacking even when she



explicitly wanted to harness it in the long prose poems from her final period.)

When the surrealists adhere to their original method, even in longer formats such as “novels,” like those of Benjamin Péret or Giorgio de Chirico’s *Hebdomeros*, *the Metaphysician*, they maintain an absolute present of reading that prohibits conventional mental recomposition. The reading continues in the present tense of invention, of writing, which in a way cancels what comes before and begins anew with each sentence. It promotes a new kind of reading, one that is no longer reading—defined precisely as the conventional recomposition of what’s been written—but rather an updating of the writing. This demand for the present closed like a trap door over A.P.’s work, contributing to its claustrophobic atmosphere. Thus can be explained (I don’t know how else to explain it) the poem “Wristwatch” from *Works and Nights*: “Tiny lady / living in a bird’s heart / emerges at dawn to utter one syllable / NO.” There is the subject character, the “tiny lady,” confronted by her own contradiction at not being able to function as a character because she explicitly denies herself the passage of time or the coexistence of tenses that would make a story possible. The contradiction is resolved through negation, which determines the brevity of the poem (a “yes” would have opened the gates to the story of the adventures of the lady through the fronds of time, so much denser by virtue of the action of automatic writing). Incidentally, this poem suggests other convergent themes: hints of a magical toy shop suggest the irreducible nature of childhood, which is never left behind; the exponential increase of miniaturization (the bird is already small, its heart is more so, and the heart is the lady’s home) suggests a compression or economy always in the process of emulating itself; and its brevity, associated with the idea of a jewel or a precision mechanism, suggests her ironclad control over quality. As for the “dawn,” I’ve noticed that it is the emblematic moment in A.P.’s poetry, when time is nullified, perhaps for autobiographical reasons (insomnia), perhaps as part of a general process of inversions, which I will speak about later.

The coexistence of tenses in a story is basically the cohabitation of the present and the past: the past in which the events took place, and the present in which they are being recounted. Stories are essentially optimistic because the narrator has to have survived the events, "lived to tell the tale." The gloomy tone of A.P.'s poetry derives also from her refusal, or inability, to adopt a narrative rhythm.

The present in itself is brief; to the imagination, it seems "miniature and capricious" (Bachelard). I see this restriction to the present tense as one of the overdetermining factors of the brevity of A.P.'s poetry, a feature that should not be taken for granted. In the books that came before *Diana's Tree*, the length fluctuates, and is more or less conventional. One place where the passage to definitive concision can be seen is in the section, "Other Poems," appended to the end of *Diana's Tree*, poems written just prior to the book. These poems seem like fragments and based on their placement represent something like the "liquidation" of her stage of apprenticeship. It is as if she had pruned everything superfluous off the last poems from that period and left only the best, only what makes them poetic, without the discursive scaffolding of progression and development. I see here two other factors that determine her brevity: first, the will to maintain quality without fluctuations, the consequence of having made quality the only ideology of her work; and second, by suppressing development, the transfer of all "explanations" to the extratextual autobiographical plane.

But brevity also stems from surrealist premises. All the overdetermining factors I have enumerated can be summed up in the demand for purity, the key element in all programmatic schools and movements, and the consistent core of surrealist concerns. Brevity guarantees purity a priori by shutting out everything accessory or trivial that comes with extension. Within the surrealist methodology, this issue presented some pretty unsolvable problems. As far as I know, Breton theorized about it only in one later text, *Le la* [*The La*] (1960), which begins, "The 'dictation of thought' (or of something else?), which surrealism

originally wanted to surrender to and recover from, was called automatic writing; I've already said how many vagaries wakeful listening (active-passive) was susceptible to." In other words, how many impurities threaten this dictation that derives all its value from the unpolluted purity with which it emerges from "thought" or that "other thing" (with a question mark), which could be the unconscious or dreams or any other untouched area. Breton continues:

Therefore, I have always cherished dearly those sentences or fragments of sentences— snippets of monologues or dialogues extracted from dreams and captured with accuracy, both in their articulation and intonation—which remain absolutely clear upon waking—a state they seem to provoke, for they appear to have just been pronounced. On every possible occasion, and no matter how sibylline they are, I have collected them with the same care I would precious stones. At one time I would insert them uncut into the beginning of a text. Then I would force myself to "enchain" from there, even if in a very different register, to make certain that what followed held close to them and shared their high degree of effervescence.

And further on:

Even though "the shadow mouth" has not spoken to me with the same generosity—far from it—as it spoke to Hugo, and has settled for disjointed remarks, the essential thing is its willingness to sometimes whisper to me a few words, words that remain my touchstones, and which I am certain were meant only for me (I even recognize my own voice, though cleansed and imbued with a bewitching power) and which, however disheartening they may prove for a word-by-word interpretation, on an emotional level, they were made to give me the *la*.

That is, the note used to tune the rest of the scale.

Brevity guarantees purity, and this guarantees quality. Carried to its ultimate consequences, this line of reasoning restricts the work of the poem to these "touchstones," these "gems," this *la* of the tuning fork, and nothing more. In other words, to a pure result, cleansed of the swirl of the process that led to it because it would be a prior result, existing before beginning to write, fallen from the heavens or extracted from the depths by some force outside the poet. In other words, we are now on the level of pure objectivity. The objective impersonal emphasis of a large part of "classic" surrealist poetry can be seen in the sentences Breton transcribes after the passage quoted above—or they can serve as a caricature thereof. Herewith his harvest of oeneric epiphanies:

"O<sup>3</sup> whose chattering skin resides in C major on average."

"The moon begins where cherry ends with lemon."

"So then, one will write a journal whose signature, complicated and nervous, will be a nickname."

"If you love golden white bison, don't make the cut of golden white bison."

It was after that, according to Breton, that one should write the poem, using the sentence as a point of departure. Whatever that poet in particular had to say, the expression of her subjectivity, this was the material of the process. This is normal and common: the process is subjective, the result is objective. The result is seen from outside, and this is what turns it into a result; to the extent that the subject intervenes, it turns back into a process. Surrealists do not distance themselves from this norm; their only trick is to switch places, and put the result first, before the process.

I think A.P. inverts the terms once again, which does not mean that she returns to the initial situation. She maintains the temporal primacy of the result (the perfect brief poetic phrase) but burdens it with subjectivity, turning it into the object of exhaustive conscious work. It is as if she were trying to rescue the surrealists' implicit refusal to maintain the extremism of their method till the bitter end by making brevity and purity the work itself, without any further development, wherein the subject has no choice but to move into it. The somnambulistic dictation does not come from

the unconscious but rather from the critical consciousness, which seems contradictory but is what gives her poetry its unique tone.

To summarize: A.P. unloads all her subjectivity on the prior result, and there interrupts her work. There is no process. It is as if the process had come from her and become transpersonal, and this is perhaps what sustains the myth that A.P. has turned into: the process remains open, because the result was placed first, in keeping with the lesson of surrealism.

The surrealists also placed the result first, but they wrote after. And they wrote a lot (surrealists typically lived long lives and wrote dozens of books). At that second moment, they set in motion a vain and petit-bourgeois subjectivity, which is determined to complete the process. In A.P., however, the process is left unresolved, and it appears to have vanished. I think this is the last secret of her poetry: it is as if there were no process. As if the process had been reabsorbed into what came before, into life, into childhood, into the personal myth. Whereas the surrealists conceived of the transpersonal only in its object form, A.P. makes the more exacerbated autobiographical subjectivity a transpersonal experience, and for her, this is poetry.

Finally, I would like to look at a related problem. The short pure objective sentence, either transpersonal or unconscious, whether it comes from a dream or a collage, offers no guarantee against the recuperation of the most conventional meaning. It turns out to be a mechanical means to achieve a "novelty" that the surrealists would have energetically rejected as simply new combinations of the old verisimilitudes of literature. This is something Breton seems never to have noticed. Any of the sentences or verses produced using the surrealist method (without going any further, any of the oeniric sentences of *The La*) can be made verisimilar in a story, more or less long according to the degree of the absurd it contains, but always without any leftovers. Any of you can take the test yourselves using any of them: take the original and most famous "exquisite corpse": "The exquisite corpse will drink the new wine." This can be reconstructed without any problem (true, everybody will do it in his or her own way): for example, we can

posit a crypt containing the corpses of warriors killed in battle, or the victims of a sadist's bloody orgies, and then some kind of chthonic electrical activity begins, which brings the corpses back to life, and they are thirsty, and they discover that the crypt leads into the castle's wine cellar, and in the wine cellar there are aged wines and new wines, and among the corpses are men of more or less refined taste, and the most refined corpse of all, one that has exquisite taste, discovers that as opposed to what one might think, the new wine is better than the aged wine... Anyway, there it is: "The exquisite corpse will drink the new wine." (If I thought about it a little longer, I could come up with a better reconstruction, but that's the idea.)

There are two recourses available to the surrealists to prevent this closure that results from verisimilization, recourses that destroy all results, reanimating the process precisely where least expected. The first: to emphasize the absurd (which they preferred to call the "marvelous") in order to make reconstruction more difficult; but none would be so difficult as to make it impossible, at the very least every reader would create a different one. The second: to collect one enunciation after another at such speed and with such intricacy that the reconstruction of meaning is discouraged. Let's take one sentence at random from *The Immaculate Conception* (by Breton and Éluard, from the heroic era of automatic writing; A.P. translated it and I will quote from her translation). "*Flores saladas*" [*fleurs salées* / salty flowers]: this is easy and almost commonplace; one can imagine bringing a petal to one's mouth, tasting it, describing it for some reason. But that syntagma is wrapped in a longer sentence; what follows, "*flores saladas y abanicos de yeso*" [*des fleurs salées et des éventails de plâtre* / salty flowers and plaster fans], already makes things a little blurrier, because a synesthetic or sculpted or decorative aspect must be added to the previous tasting, and moreover a connection must be made between these two things. And the whole sentence, "*El enemigo de la naturaleza está perdido en medio de flores saladas y abanicos de yeso,*" [*L'ennemi de sa nature est perdu au milieu des*

*fleurs salées et des éventails de plâtre.* / The enemy of nature is lost among salty flowers and plaster fans.] already imposes a fairly complicated narrative. And if we see that this sentence takes up merely three lines of a dense text of several pages, we have good reason to feel discouraged and give up.

Let us recall the original definition of automatic writing from *Manifesto of Surrealism* Breton published in 1924: “a monologue emitted as quickly as possible so that the critical mind of the subject cannot pass judgment...” In the foreground is the speed of the emission, and the prolongation of the emission, the “monologue,” that is, the action, the process. Due to its affiliation with Dada, the surrealist method began as pure process: a copious emission, in which meaning was always held at degree zero because of the impossibility of reconstructing a story that arises out of that absolute present. But, forty years later, Breton ended up placing more value on the objectified sentence, freed from its emitter—that is, the result. In reality there is no contradiction, or the contradiction is deeper and is what constitutes the methodology. Surrealist Orpheus, forbidden to turn around to look behind him, moved forward backwards.

The assessment of poetic quality was present from the beginning through the preeminence the surrealists gave to the “image,” which is surrealism’s official name for the result. The name itself is revealing. The “image” is the utterance that can be seen in the imagination. And in order to see it, one must reconstruct meaning, create a story. By making the image the culmination of poetic activity, the surrealists were interrupting the game, removing it from the rules they otherwise maintained so dogmatically, and carrying it to the terrain of the serial, of the gothic or fantastic novel, of Jules Verne or Hugh Seymour Walpole or Matthew Gregory Lewis—where there is a plethora of crypts full of corpses that have come back to life—or Raymond Roussel, or even Lautréamont, where everything began. This is where the dialectic recommences on a different level, through the reading and the writing, which is the battlefield where surrealism really took place.

As for A.P., her brief utterance, which is subjective, runs no less of a risk, for her meaning "shuts down" automatically in confession or pathos. And this had to obey the "prior" and almost burlesque shutting down that occurs through the character: "prior" to the death of the poetry that was threatening the premature arrival of the results. The character's only purpose was to maintain the process in motion; this prevented the shutting down of meaning because it was nourished by the life of the poet, and it maintained her in motion by bleeding her dry; it was the corpse (exquisite, most of the time exquisitely corny) under a permanent spell of reanimation in her personal novel; to rescue it after A.P.'s real death can only lead to carnivalesque identification. It is the equivalent of reanimating her, which might be defensible. But it is unfair. A.P. was not only a great poet, she was the greatest, and the last. Poetry died with her; and this has nothing to do with the poets who came after but with what her work consists of from within. To act as if she were still alive, even metaphorically, is to devalue her. Later, and after a few more twists and turns, I will attempt to show the strange shape death took through the dislocation of the subject.<sup>1</sup>





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Finally, a hearty note of gratitude to Dubravka Ugrešić, one of the most entertaining correspondents we've had the privilege of working with. Every letter has been a reminder of why her work is celebrated in these pages.

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