

Four Unpublished Poems*

Maya Deren

Never Alone

1. Never alone! Never alone!
There's always somebody near
Someone will follow me close to my bone.
I'm never alone! Never alone!
2. You may think that you are alone,
But there's always somebody near.
That somebody finds out your secrets with ease,
To your drawers he has all the keys.
3. And now I'll tell you who I mean
I know you'll be glad to hear
That its God, its God, Almighty God,
That keeps so very near.

Summer 1927

Untitled

When rains come down to flood the town
And earnest citizens really ought'er
try to make and keep things sort'er
dry...

I make water.

When water's rare and cattle's dying
and I'm as thirsty as can be
and long for some water in me—
God-damn it!

I still pee.

1938

To F.M.

I waited for you in the fields of afternoon'
Eyes closed, I lay upon the grass
Listening for the sound of steps in the swaying of the trees;
Waiting for my lips to feel lips where the soft breeze had been;
Body tense to feel the warmth of hands where warmth of sun had shone.

You did not come. I went inside
Complaining that the suns go down
And that the wind is far too chill

And that trees make so much noise
A person'd better take her nap indoors.

1938

It Must Be Done with Mirrors

It must be done with mirrors
my head that rests on nothing in mid-air.

Where is my body
where oh where?

I can see the stones
hidden in the hands.

O bring back my body to me, to me,
O miracle bring it back
before the mirrors break.

March 1942

My Day

The idiot child with three eyes
who plays its senseless games endlessly
in my back yard
and stops suddenly to laugh or cry
for no reason at all
became enraged at nothing this morning
and drank up all the soup in the kettle.

Its two-legged dog peed all over my carpets.

When I went out to hang them up to dry
I found that the two of them had shed skin
all over the lawn. As I was raking this up
they set fire to the house, using it to cook
the spaghetti which they wreathed around them.

When I arrived in Asia, they were both contemplating
their navels. Upon closer inspection I discovered
that there were gold-fish bowls embedded in their bellies
in which they had caged two mating humming birds.
It was this which in truth held their attention.

In India, as I was swimming, they caught me on a line
and dragged me all the way to Paris, where they began painting
and became famous. They received tooth-picks in payment

and exchanged these for passage on a transatlantic whale.

After this arduous journey they both slept forty days
screaming from nightmare every seven minutes.
Then they went out into the back yard to play.

March 10, 1942

**These poems are found in Maya Deren's papers, which are housed in the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University.*

Deren studied journalism and literature as an undergraduate student at Syracuse University and then at New York University, where she completed her B.A. in 1936. She earned an M.A. in English literature at Smith College in 1939. Her M.A. thesis explored the influence of the French Symbolist tradition on Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. Her interest in poetry was intense, and she wrote poetry from the period of her childhood on up until her turn, in 1943, to filmmaking. She did not, however, publish her poems in any professional context.

The first poem published here, "Never Alone," was written when Deren was ten years old and living in Syracuse, New York. She and her family had emigrated to the United States from Kiev, Ukraine only six years before. Deren began her formal education in Syracuse, but was sent abroad to finish her secondary education at the League of Nations boarding school in Geneva.

The poems written in 1938 ("Untitled" and "To F.M.") were written in Northampton, Massachusetts while Deren was at Smith. Her letters and diaries indicate that she read widely, but her thesis offers evidence that she regarded Eliot as the most fully realized poet of his day.

The poems from 1942 were written in Los Angeles after Deren had joined up with the filmmaker and cinematographer Alexander ("Sasha") Hammid to whom she was briefly married. (Hammid was the second of her three husbands.) While I am disinclined to give these later poems (seemingly, based on the evidence in the archives, some of the last she would write) a too-teleological reading, their emphasis on vision and paratactic imagery seems to anticipate her turn to filmmaking.

Robert Steele, a professor of film at Boston University who died leaving behind several unfinished biographical and critical studies on Deren, tried repeatedly, but with no success to interest numerous publishers in putting out a volume of Deren's unpublished poetry. The rejection letters he received—also found in the Maya Deren Collection—tend to reiterate the opinion that Deren's poetry had no intrinsic interest.

-John David Rhodes

From the Maya Deren Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University.

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