

Foreword to *Out of Words*

The term, 'subverse poetry', was invented by endwar in 1989, to describe a type of subtractive permutational or anagrammatic poetry. This form, described below, had already existed since the mid 1960s, with Emmett Williams's *sweethearts* (1967) and David Aylward's *The War Against the Asps, or The Serpent Problem* (grOnk series 4:4, 1968). As i was ignorant of these works at the time, for me, subverse had its origins in the subprose poetry of paloin biloid and also in the piece "fragment" by Timm Ulrichs.

Subprose poetry originated in the early 1980s. Paloin Biloid, subprose poet, now defines subprose as non-prose writing, though in practice, at least initially, subprose poetry referred to a way of writing (or displaying) anagrammatic poems, for instance:

```
genesis
      s
     i
    n
   g
  s
 e
e
```

which is one bil wrote in tribute to the band Genesis. To read the poem, you read down. Once you've used up all the letters of the word, you can start over with a new stanza (as it were), at least in all the examples i've seen. For instance bil wrote one entitled "insomnia" that cycles through 4 or 5 times. To me, the main thrust of subprose is in drawing messages from within words, a kind of redefinition process. Biloid views subverse as a type of subprose.

Subverse, you may notice from the examples in this book, was born out of this early subprose. Subverse also takes letters out of words, but keeps them in order and doesn't require that you use them all. *The Subverse Wanders Off The Word* (IZEN, 1990), my first book of subverse, was in part a collection of examples for pedagogical purposes. You can use less than one word per line, for instance if you need to space a word over two lines. For instance:

```
fragment
      men
     me t
    f a   t
     e
```

where "fate" is split over two words so the e can go in the proper place. Also not all the letters are used (e.g. "g"). You generally don't want to split a word more than you have to, though you can do that for effect, as in:

forest

t
r
e
e
s

which is really almost early subprose. Sometimes if a letter appears more than once in a title word, the writer has a choice of which position to place that letter in a line.

The idea is also that the word at the top, which i've toyed with calling "the verse" under which the subverse is written (but it is too likely to be confused with the common meaning(s) of "verse"), should have some relationship to the work beneath it. The verse serves as a title. There is also the idea that the subverse is drawing out meanings or messages from the verse or title. However my first example above doesn't do that.

And the first subverses i wrote also didn't do that. In fact, they also used the verse word "fragment". One reason for this is that the other source of inspiration for subverse was a piece called "fragment" by Timm Ulrichs reproduced in Jean-François Bory's *Once Again* anthology (New Directions, 1967). It consists of fragments of the word "fragment" in what looks like Helvetica type. Something like this (in the knock-off Arial):

f agment
fragmen
men
g e t
f a t
fr gme

and so on for over 200 more lines. I was basically taking Ulrichs's format and adding the idea of extracting meaning anagrammatically from subprose.. The first subverses were "fragment" and "fragments" in *The Subverse Wanders Off The Word*. As in:

fragments

ra ts
ra n

men
rag e

ra ts
g e t
f a t

men
ag e

So for me the breakthrough here was in transforming the arbitrary letters of Ulrichs's poem into something that communicated a verbal message. I ran with that idea, producing *The Subverse Wanders Off The Word* and *From I to Iran* (IZEN, 1990) and a number of other subverse poems in the next few years. The pieces in this book are drawn from those other, non-published pieces of that period, with additional revision in 2003.

endwar
Athens, Ohio, 2003