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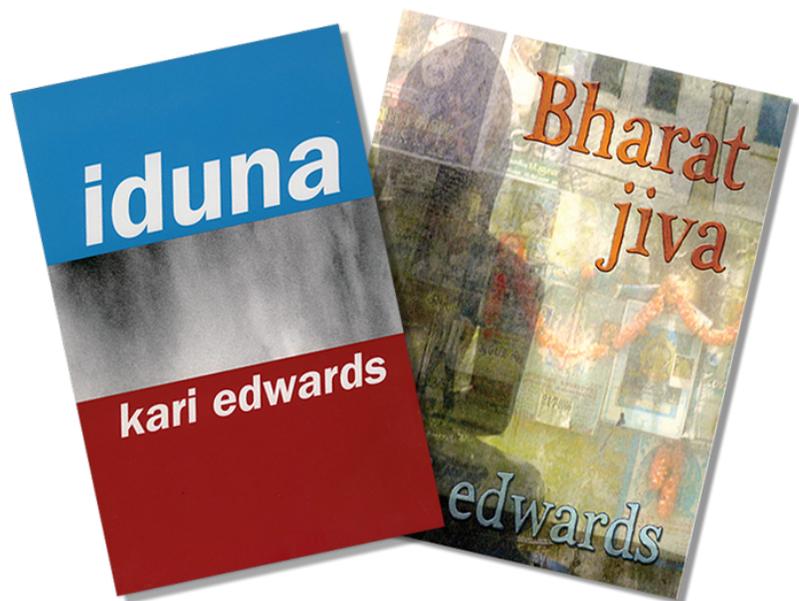
kari edwards
Teaching Guide

iduna

O Books, 2003
ISBN 978-1-882022-49-6
\$12 USD, 104 pp

Bharat jiva

Litmus Press, 2009
ISBN 978-0-9819310-0-5
\$15 USD, 116 pp



Book Descriptions

Bharat jiva

Bharat — a republic in the Asian sub-continent; second most populous country in the world; achieved independence from the United Kingdom in 1947.

jiva – living spirit.

Bharat jiva is a poetic lament mourning the loss of agency and connectivity amid the violence of late capitalism. The book's image-laden language, rendered in lower case text and formatted in small prose blocks or short poetic lines, evokes a tenderness and vulnerability as it considers sprawling questions about nationalism, climate change, spirituality, and the fallibility of human life. Its poems bear witness to a self as it cycles, hurts and seeks dis-solution beyond binaries of life/death, male/female, consumer/producer, rendering a quest, which CAConrad has described as “mystic, in all its severe colors.”

Praise for *Bharat jiva*

This writing is the New Brave. Few writers have so given in to the entropic forces that disentangle our bodies in the end, while at the same time furiously pooling social content into observable patterns. And there are thousands! Millions! Billions! In biological systems, DNA nucleotides are linked by enzymes in order to make long, chainlike polynucleotides of defined sequence. In writing, the sub-social is linked by signs that make ringlets of undefined sequence. Only we can think to make thought from it. It cannot be conceived of in advance. It cannot be found on the web. No se vende ni se compra. edwards's radical neo-communitarian impulse is something that's blood-borne, but not bloody, something that's keen & observant, but not oculocentric. Like Antonin Artaud, edwards sought to make Writing = Life.

— **Rodrigo Toscano**

This is one of the most important books for me right now. I find myself rereading passages like songs I NEED to listen to over and over for the messages to be integrated into my life.

— **CA Conrad**

Radical rishi poet-seer-sage kari edwards's stunningly powerful and erudite essay-rant-manifesto-“swarm of / messages” calls a nation of docile bodies to account: “no more... protecting the audience from / exploding stigmatas, tracer bullets and the / shit of the dead.” Deploying lyric thrust “to detonate the heart,” blown bodies, categories and lines enact new “delicious fractal” social contracts for reducing suffering in the body public/private and generating “growth in the sky of mind.” Read this book and you'll never go back.

— **Rachel Zolf**

iduna

iduna is a book of poems that utilizes wild textual experiments to evoke the strange adventure of inhabiting a trans body in contemporary America. Employing a variety of typefaces, and placing text backwards, forwards and upside-down, edwards gives voice to the exhilarating and disorienting activity of forming one's identity against the backdrop of a media-saturated world. *Iduna's* poems meditate on the potential of il/legibility, both tender and defiant. In the words of feminist book artist Johanna Drucker, "A machinic drive echoes in this work as a human, subjective voice struggles to come through the registers of current language events, noise, news, records, communications."

Praise for *iduna*

Having evacuated the endemic patriarchal script, edwards writes hir own rules of the game in the wee hours when the sky turns green and binary logic decamps posthaste. Under the ruins of gender, *iduna* is a wild garden where "sexuality begets language." The anarchic profusion of voices, discourses, idiolects, fonts and typographies that seem to rain down upon the page becomes the new "formlessness" which is the political signature of this resistant and absorptive text.

— **Chris Tysh**

Paratexts and processing suggestions stream through kari edwards's *iduna*... The constant drive to make use of formal possibilities at the level of page and opening brings graphic format into substantive play... A machinic drive echoes in this work as a human, subjective voice struggles to come through the registers of current language events, noise, news, records, communications. The shape of a human outcry presses through the mass of mediated material. Form embodies possibilities enabled by the instructions of forced justification, font shifts, hard returns, tabs, chunked blocks, and other basic elements of text processing.... Before we can ask what something means when we read it, we must ask what it means to read — and edwards poses that as a high-stakes question providing the point of departure for current poetic production.

— **Johanna Drucker**

kari edwards has written and conceived a bold, complex text that pushes lyricism to the brink of an interstice, between the Dictionary and its scream. Auto-translative, self-contaminatory, *iduna* never renounces its splendid linguistic excess, fabricating a textural world of legibility and illegibility, gravitation and non-gravitation, that powers its dweller (for one must dwell in *iduna*) gesturally around and among its morphs and torques.

— **Steve McCaffery**

Lesson Planning — Discussion Questions

Bharat jiva

- *Bharat*, in addition to being a poetic name for India, could also mean seeker of light, or one who is engaged in a quest for knowledge. *Jiva* is a living spirit. So we might translate the title as soul seeker, a soul that seeks truth. At times this book reads like a manifesto, edgy and angry. Other times it seems filled with despair, a book about longing for death, or perhaps, a quest for reincarnation, a radical refiguration. Discuss the significance of the title in relationship to the poems. What are the poems seeking? How might Buddhist thought inform the book's relationship to the "quest for knowledge"?
- What do you imagine are the cultural events or circumstances to which this writing is responding? What is the time and space it seems to speak to?
- Is this narrative writing? If yes, what makes it so, and what story does it tell?
- Parts of the book approach an almost ecstatic transcendence—a cry *de profundis* (out of the depths)—that align it with other poems in the epic tradition (see pp. 80-81). Is this an "epic poem"—why or why not?
- *Bharat jiva* is composed of three parts: "preface," "process," "aftermath." How does this 3-part structure impact your reading of the text? What is the "process" of the work?
- Look at or notice the shapes the text takes (some poems appear as justified blocks, others are centered). How does visual-spatial form impact the way this text works? A few possible sections to turn to and close read: p. 13, pp. 66-7, p. 93.

iduna

- Etymologically speaking, "queer," from OE *quer*, means going by an indirect path, crosswise—the opposite of straight. kari edwards once referred to *iduna* as a queer text, because it "can be read any way." This implicit pun on "being read" in a queer context applies to both persons and the text; the book signals on multiple levels and in multiple directions.

How then do we approach reading a work like *iduna*? How does this visual textual freedom affect the experience of reading the poems on the page? In what ways are you "orienting" yourself in the text? What about the possibilities for oral performance? How does its multifarious and "queer" typographical nature, along with its queer content lend itself to multiple interpretations?

- Investigate the word “palimpsest.” Is *iduna* a palimpsest? How or why might this term be a fruitful lens to use as you explore the work?
- The poems on pp. 30 and 31 (“I could be a fire place” and “have you ever retired a human”) both revolve around images of technology. Talk about how technology functions in one poem vs. the other.
- Look at the poems on pp. 39 and 41 (“How to explain a picture to a dead hare” and “vote”) and discuss the speaker’s relationship to the word “destruction.”
- The poem “Hooker Green Or The Sky Is Always Higher” is in all caps. Rewrite it with conventional capitalization and discuss the different effects of the two versions.

Both books

- kari chose to use lower case in hir name—what does this signal? How does it put hir in conversation with other writers, e.g. [bell hooks](#)?
- In *Bharat jiva*, one has the sense of a person suffering, longing for spiritual transformation (“eager to die into the deathless” [103]), contained within the boundaries of an evil state. It is different from *iduna*’s visual expansiveness and experimentation with typography in that there are contained margins; at times, it almost feels claustrophobic. One could argue that *Bharat jiva* is more radical in its thought than in its form. How does the form reflect the ideas in this book? What does it signify visually? How might one compare it to *iduna*?
- In his essay “Noise and Politics,” Jacques Attali writes: “Everywhere we look, the monopolization of the broadcast of messages, the control of noise, and the institutionalization of the silence of others assure the durability of power.” Read Attali’s short essay to invite a discussion of noise—cacophony, atonality, and dissonance—in *iduna* and *Bharat jiva*. How does edwards’ special brand of poetic noise address forces of cultural and political domination? The Attali essay can also be used to incite conversation about edwards’ poetics in relation to experimental music.
- From *Bharat jiva*’s “...I exist in mass absent lacking...” (16) to the many poems in *iduna* packed with perceptions articulated by a first-person speaker, edwards writes varying formulations of selfhood. Read pp. 11-17 in *Bharat jiva* alongside the poems “november 28th’s carrier pigeon” (16), “I could be a fire place” (30), and “it’s that thing again” (67) from *iduna*. Draw language from these poems in order to discuss the different ways in which edwards construes the relationship between self and world, particular and universal.

- In the context of an American Studies or American Literature course, the discussion of edwards' "I" can be linked with a reading of Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself." Compare the two poets' conceptions of the self's relation to community. What is different or similar about their understandings of American pluralism, and the individual's role in it?
 - In reading about kari you'll notice that hir pronouns are slippery and used interchangeably. "Language is one of the many ways in which we get to be wildly, wonderfully alive" [says poet TC Tolbert](#), who uses "s/he" pronouns in writing and "he" pronouns in conversation. How does a mode of address work to situate one in the world politically? What are the creative possibilities of referring to a person in writing versus speaking? Do you know examples of how pronouns work in other languages?
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Lesson Planning – Writing & Performance Exercises

Bharat jiva

- *maybe a speechless idiot idol, feeling the return, returns to the flesh, something sent through the gate returns hollow, broke, expansive, turned from no longer mind to almost human. / returns again, no longer human, almost mind.... (37)*

if beyond the self is the self, is the self beyond essential multiworld universal non-escapable caring, curious, multiple wave forms snaking sensual manifestation of another walking talking piece of praying salvation childhood romp in a field, not quite a field, expanding rough hewn physical expression of momentary dream centers, centered in that that has no center, transforming harmony to a determinate other, to another succession of overlapping infinite appearances, appearing for the first time beyond anything and fully present in a dying mumbling prayer... forming an egocentric appendage realized in transmutable variables, sending and receiving to a self that has no center, only moments of semi-aquatic lucidity. (76)

Contemplate this notion of "no longer mind" and "almost mind," of self that is beyond self, that has no center—and attempt to write from this ego-less, decentered-yet-everywhere subject position. Experiment with what happens when the "I" disappears or dissolves.

- At Rise Description = a stage direction at the beginning of an act or a scene that describes what is on stage literally "at rise" of the curtain, or more commonly in contemporary theater, as the lights come up.
Imagine *Bharat Jiva's* speaker as a character in a setting. Describe the setting that you see in your mind as you read the book: What elements or objects does it contain? What kinds of interactions does the speaker have with those elements / objects? What does the speaker look like? Provide as much detail as possible. Create an "at rise" narrative.

iduna

- *Writing a queer writing a queer text is fluid, inside outside, inside a body space with no boundaries... boundaries are not queer, sovereign boundaries are colonial, location of the self within the state. Queer location is a discontinuity within the panoramic whole, taking into account the unaccountable, accounting self in space, attempting language. ("Subject: Statement" in EAOGH: Issue Three, Queering Language).*

Take a few deep breaths. Begin a 10-20 minutes free write with this idea of "attempting language"—not trying to write or arrive at any one thing in particular, but practicing the mindset of fluid, boundaryless writing. If you don't know what to write, write "I don't know what to write" until something else arrives. Try to let it be easy, without directing or controlling the writing, as if skating on frictionless ice.

- Pick a poem or excerpt from *iduna* to read multiple times. Take a pen and paper and translate your reading experience into a drawing. Experiment with making a map of your reading process. Where do you begin? Where do you pause? Play with direction, attention and rhythm on your drawing/map. Try to denote specific words that signify moments when you were immersed in the text and moments where you may have felt as though you were outside of the text.
- Split into groups of 4-5 people. Each group devises its own way of interpreting "PLEASE FORWARD" on p. 18 into a vocal score. Session ends with performances.
- Read pp. 47-50 aloud as a group. Talk about the repetition of the poem "our return policy on suicidal fantasies." Split into two groups, with one group assigned the iteration of the poem on p. 47 and the other assigned the poem on p. 50. Each group thinks about the distinct characteristics of their iteration of the poem, and then designs a performance that emphasizes those characteristics. Session ends with performances.

Reviews

Bharat jiva

- CAConrad @ PhillySound
http://phillysound.blogspot.com/2009_11_01_archive.html
- Cara Benson reviews @ Jacket2
<https://jacket2.org/reviews/another-personal-narrative-burns-heap-citations>
- Catherine Daly reviews @ newpages
<https://www.newpages.com/item/3481-bharat-jiva>
- Tom Beckett @ Galatea
<http://galatearesurrection14.blogspot.com/2010/04/bharat-jiva-by-kari-edwards-no-gender.html>
- Eileen Tabios @ Galatea
http://galatearesurrection14.blogspot.com/2010/04/bharat-jiva-by-kari-edwards-no-gender_30.html
- A Close Reading of Bharat Jiva by Trace Peterson @ UPenn
http://writing.upenn.edu/epc/authors/peterson/peterson_edwards.pdf
- Translation of selection by Richard L. Kramár @ Psí Víno
<https://www.psvino.cz/narodila-som-sa-neznicitelna/>

iduna

- Eileen Tabios @ Moria
<http://www.moriapoetry.com/tabios900.htm>
- Eileen Tabios @ Corpse Poetics. 28 Oct 2003 & 26 Oct 2003.
http://winepoetics.blogspot.com/2003_10_01_winepoetics_archive.html
- Ron Silliman's Blog
<https://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/2004/02/q-how-does-one-pronounce-title-of-kari.html>
- Betsy Andrews @ Gay City News
<https://www.gaycitynews.com/sitting-screaming-about-everything/>

Supplementary Materials — kari edwards' Bibliography:

Transdada Blog archive:

<http://transdada.blogspot.com/>

<https://transdada2.blogspot.com/>

<https://transdada3.blogspot.com/>

Books:

post/(pink) (Scarlet Press, 2000)

a diary of lies (Belladonna*, 2002)

a day in the life of p (Subpress: 2002)

obLiqUE paRt(itON): colLABorationS (xPress(ed): 2002)

iduna (O Books, 2003)

obedience (Factory School, 2005)

having been blue for charity (BlazeVox, 2006)

Bharat jiva (Litmus Press, 2009)

Succubus in My Pocket (EOAGH Books, 2015)

dôNrm'-lâ-püsl (Punctum Books, 2017)

Anthology:

No Gender: Reflections on the Life & Work of kari edwards (Litmus Press/ Belladonna*, 2009)

Supplementary Materials - Related Content:

on/with/about kari

- kari edwards on PennSound
<http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Kari-Edwards-Memorial.php>
- kari edwards' profile at the Academy of American Poetry
<https://poets.org/poet/kari-edwards>
- Blau, Frances in "No Gender: Reflections on the Life & Work of kari edwards" (Litmus Press/ Belladonna*, 2009)

- “Shifting the Subject: An Interview [by Akilah Oliver] with kari edwards.” Rain Taxi, Spring 2003.
<https://www.raintaxi.com/shifting-the-subject-an-interview-with-kari-edwards/>
- Peterson, Trace “Becoming a Trans Poet: Samuel Ace, Max Wolf Valerio, and kari edwards.” *Transgender Quarterly* 1 (4): 523–538. doi:
<https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2815219>

kari's reach/situating kari:

- Abi-Karam, Andrea, and Gabriel, Kay, eds., *We Want It All: An Anthology of Radical Trans Poetics* (Nightboat, 2020)
- Burger, Mary; Scott, Gail; Roy, Camille and Glück, Robert, eds., *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative* (Coach House Books, 2000)
- Ingram, Brooke; *Maneuvering Past Meaning: Queering Language Through Trans-Poetics*. Dissertation (Marshall University, 2019)
<https://mds.marshall.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2220&context=etd>
- Lawlor, Andrea; *Position Papers*. Excerpt.
<http://www.factoryhollowpress.com/out-of-print/position-papers-andrea-lawlor>
- Tolbert, TC, and Peterson, Trace, eds., "a narrative of resistance." *Troubling the Line: Trans and Genderqueer Poetry and Poetics* (Nightboat Books, 2013) 7-10.

Possible Text Pairings:

- Attali, Jacques; *Noise: the Political Economy of Music* (University of Minnesota Press, 1977)
- Whitman, Walt; “Song of Myself”
- Ahmed, Sara., *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press 2006)

Supplementary Materials - Relevant Resources:

- Trans Lifeline: Radical Community Care & Trans Peer Support:
<https://translifeline.org/>
- Psych Central, Trans and Trans Positive Hotlines
<https://psychcentral.com/blog/trans-hotline#trans-hotlines>
- GLITS INC: Gay & Lesbian Living in a Transgender Society, Housing & Health Resources
<https://www.glitsinc.org/>

- *Transcending: Trans Buddhist Voices*, edited by Kevin Manders and Elizabeth Marston
(contains resources for queer sanghas in the US)
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Contributor Bio — kari edwards

kari edwards was a Bay-area based artist, gender activist and poet born in 1954, Illinois. Hir* work resists containers of binary gender, genre and disciplines; For 12 years edwards taught sculpture and performance art at Denver University, after which she went on to receive an MA in psychology and an MFA in writing from the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado. Together with her partner Frances Blau, edwards moved to San Francisco, where she became active in the local poetry and transgender communities, working at homeless shelters and advocating for LGBTQIA+ rights. edwards also launched a blog, *Transdada*, and remained committed to social justice and queer activism throughout hir entire life.

In a 2003 [Rain Taxi interview](#) with akilah oliver, edwards remarked: “for me language becomes a tool that can be used and then destroyed or reused again in a different way.” Describing her dyslexia, edwards added: “I may be fortunate or not to be dyslexic, so I have the ability to look at an object and lose its name; for a moment I’m in the presence of that object. I guess the same goes for gendered individuals [...] it could be that they are a male or female but I never try to fix them to position.”

She received a New Langton Arts Bay Area Award in literature, the Small Press Traffic’s book of the year award and a posthumous Lambda Literary Award. edwards’ work can also be found in *Scribner’s The Best American Poetry* (2004), *Bay Poetics* (Faux Press, 2006), *Civil Disobediences: Poetics and Politics in Action* (Coffee House Press, 2004), *Bisexuality and Transgenderism: InterSEXions of the Others* (Haworth Press, 2004), and elsewhere.