

(from *Negativity's Kiss*)

My only value is poetry. Listen up,
Street
What comes from mouth and wrist ill-
reputed
Oh you know -- the Stupid voice says --
it can't replace religion. And it isn't

as big as painting! And it doesn't
speak to our
Sacred Street like music. And
who can read it? -- it isn't a novel
And what can it say
precious -- or corny

like bad prose; or it's abstract
so five guys can gloat? What you
think you've made of it: of course it
doesn't care what you think, or how small-

minded its own practitioners
become. It screams through
my mouth in syllables of trespass,
assassination, and faithlessness: like a
diamond

can cut you on approach, hates your
propositions
Fuck you, I'm beautiful and unattainable
Flame-keeper, you have a mind like a
pandering rat's

So if it isn't human worth, what is it?
And since *you* want to define it, so you
can ply your craft -- 'Broadly, it's
anything, anything I say it is' -- you have

no idea. An idea a glass. Poetry,
that illegality, fills it with poisons
you're
afraid of. Have never drunk. You've
tried to accumulate millionaire memories --
I deny memory you say, I live in the

present. Special! Box of billets-doux and
testaments to

precisely you. Didn't even try to make a
world of love. I

work from the absent district, under the
black rainbow sign; I
spew death words on your classes
academic and social

Alice Notley