

POETRY PROJECT

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AP

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Tim Dlugos,

Ed Friedman's review of Maureen Owen's *Amelia Earhart* is good without flaw, and a pleasure indeed to read, for sure the way he ends it. But I want to add something.

Maureen is prolific and enjoys publishing, two characteristics I share. In this *Amelia* book I saw the first signs of a heightened self-awareness (the over-written beer-drinking scene in the hangar and the brilliant use of colors and exotic descriptions repeated from over ten years ago). She thus shares a unique difficulty with Jessica Lange: we know the voice, irrespective of the beauty, and the voice hasn't changed. No matter how good the work, the voice is the same.

In one sense, Maureen's overt identification with Amelia may be seen or witnessed as a test, through Amelia, for a change of voice by inhabiting Amelia's body. There's a muscle and force in this book that's unusual in Maureen's work. In the past, she's deferred to her sense of humor. So this work might be a sign of change. She's coming into focus as a woman, conscious, tough and talented. This is the message *Amelia Earhart* brings us, the real message, in flight, on solid ground.

Keep in mind that in 1937 that woman pilot was a spy on a high risk, top secret mission, to observe Japanese landing fields and air strength on their islands in the South Pacific. Her Lockheed Electra was fitted with new, high-powered Wasp Senior engines. Extra fuel tanks and fuel space were

added. She could fly faster and outdistance enemy fighters. She knew what would happen if captured. So did Fred Noonan, her co-pilot and navigator. Lost in a storm and flying at night, blind, they miscalculated and, low on gas, radioed for help. In the morning they crash-landed in shallow water onto a beach landing gear retracted, flaps down. Noonan had a bad head injury, Amelia was unhurt. Natives helped them onto land. Several days later they were captured by the Japanese, who took them to the main base on Saipan. Noonan was executed. Amelia was tortured, and later died of dysentery.

Maureen knows all this and no doubt much more, but reality and truth, you see, are not her direction. Her direction is toward identity. And if there is any part, hidden or in plain sight, to be criticized in this work, it may be found in Maureen's choice of a romantic and exotic legendary woman, which in her amusing and not at all amusing way, she sees of herself, overlooking the true reality, which she could have given in a brief introductory note or footnote. In poetic practice, she risked a distinct limitation—this is her experiment—by forcing a familiar voice to carry all. The stress is evident.

Fielding Dawson
New York

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

CHARLES BERNSTEIN coordinates the St. Mark's Talks lecture series at The Poetry Project. "Blood on the Cutting Room Floor" will appear in its original longer form in his new collection *Content's Dream: Essays 1975-1984*, coming from Sun and Moon Press later this year. BRUCE BOONE's most recent book is *La Rochefoucauld*, a collaboration with Robert Gluck published by Red Star Editions. He lives in San Francisco. AMY GERSTLER lives in Los Angeles, where she has been on the staff of the Beyond Baroque Literary Arts Center. Her brand-new collection, *Early Heaven*, is available from Ouija Madness Press. BOB HOLMAN was Program Coordinator of The Poetry Project from 1981 through 1984. GARY LENHART's most recent collection is *One At A Time* from United Artists. STEPHEN PASCAL is on the editorial staff of Conde Nast Publications. LORENZO THOMAS teaches at the University of Houston; his most recent collection of poems is *The Bathers* (Reed Cannon Books).

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BLOOD ON THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR

by Charles Bernstein

Imagine that words have a life of their own, radiocontrolled by an automatic pilot called history. Imagine, that is, that it is not we, as Humpty Dumpty liked to think, that control our words but our words that control us. Control? Well, let's say, say more than we ever intend to say, do more than we know what to do with.

Imagine, that is, that writing is an artificial intelligence—*intelligence* in the sense of having a power over mind, *artificial* in the sense of transpersonal and nonhuman (it neither breathes nor bleeds, nor ever has, though its origins issue from flesh and blood).

To understand language as artificial intelligence is to conceptualize writing as a kind of psychic surgery—knitting together pieces of deanimated flesh until, like the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, they come alive. Has there ever been a more lucid (or lurid) description of the relation of writer to text than this from Shelley:

My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reveries. I saw—with shut eyes, but acute mental vision—I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handiwork, horror-stricken. He would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated would fade; that this thing which had received such imperfect animation would subside into dead matter, and he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench forever the transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life. He sleeps; but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold, the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes.

As Karl Kraus has observed, "The closer the look one takes at a word, the greater the distance from which it looks back." Or as Shelley goes on:

I thought that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter I might, in the process of time (although I now find it impossible) renew where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption.

I propose Dr. Frankenstein's creation as a central image for a poem because, in the blase sophistication of the humdrum, there is all too great a willingness to domesticate that which is beyond our control and in so doing cede that measure of responsibility we can assert. This may begin to suggest the inadequacy of a word like *imagination* to convey what is going on in a poem, or the kind of poem I'm interested in, since it's all too adequate to describe most poetry.

Nor am I suggesting that language is a given entity apart from the world. Rather I am speaking of that language which comes to be in the world as the condition of a specific place, a specific negotiation by a writer that does not appropriate words but invests them. Not that the words inhabit us only, or as much as, world inhabits us through these words. Always the hard part—whether in a poem or essay—is to leave the mechanics (language operates so, can do this and this) and enter into the engendering. Language is not self-determining (this is the always wrong-headed call of a perspective based on the ideas of the arbitrariness of signs) nor is it determined by forces wholly external to it. Rather, language is a living necessity making place and time in the world in which any of us lives for any lifetime. We are confronted by language as much as confront with it; its shapes arise from the way we handle that which occurs.

The description of a poem's making as a kind of psychic surgery emphasizes that poetry is a *technology* that makes, not exactly as William Carlos Williams had it, "a . . . machine made of words", but more like a *flesh* made of words. If *flesh* seems too organic a metaphor, it is not intended to oppose a *social* construction with a *biological* one but to point to how *self* is as much a social construction as a poem. The practical implication of these observations is both to debunk the association of technology primarily with scientific rationality and to deepen the conception of what fuses a poem composed of discrete pieces into a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

Although the root of *technology* is *techne* (the Greek word for practical knowledge, craft, or art), in our culture art has lost its legitimacy as producing knowledge. The exclusive association of "scientific method" with knowledge production is reductive and represents a dominance of the ideology of science over other knowledge-producing investigation, which are generally agglomerated together as *aesthetic*. Art proposes and pursues *methods* of acquiring knowledge that are alternative to scientific models.

Poetry is potentially the most powerful technology to realize the multidimensionality of reading value—to sound the sonic, measure the lexicon, and refuse a standardization and regimentation that deafens us to the living past in language and diverts us from enacting living presents—decentered and plural—for language.

But these living presents may be more than can be accounted for; rather than being the devourers of words, we may find ourselves devoured by them. The latter scenario is the legacy of the willful refusal to recognize the power *in* words; that power cannot be overturned or mastered, but it can be heard and channeled. When you put bits and pieces of language together you get more than the sum of the parts, the process resembling Dr. Frankenstein's stitching together pieces of flesh and engendering not dead matter, not an abstractly arid and random collation of parts, but a simulacrum of human being and a being in its own right. This is the story of the poem, its internal narration, as the kidneys

and liver and heart narrate the body's story. We are, then, systematically *deluded*—led from play—by reductive understanding of such techniques as collage or juxtaposition or parataxis.

The problem with *juxtaposition* is the emphasis on a possibly arbitrary relation between two elements, placed side by side, which tends to undercut the overall system of relationships—the total prosody—that makes a poem a whole. That is, every part of a poem relates to every other part—the parts are fused, coalesced, grated together. *Collage* and *parataxis*, while accurate descriptions, may minimize recognition of the degree of overall musical and thematic construction.

In this context, Denise Levertov's term, organic form, was an attractive alternative to *free verse*. The problem, however, is that it may suggest a unity of naturally harmonious parts—again a biological as opposed to cultural unity that misses the interpenetration of these aspects in creating the *social flesh* that is the poem. As Sergei Eisenstein writes in *The Film Sense* [trans. and ed. Jay Leyda; New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovitch, 1975], “the image planned by the author has become flesh of the flesh of the spectator's risen image” [p.34]. But Eisensteinian montage is also a limiting case since it suggests the primacy of a thematic “image” (“single, unifying, and definitive” [p.70]) determining—presumably in advance—the choice of elements to be juxtaposed. Insofar as this image is understood as “single, recognizable, and whole” [p.16], it precludes thematically and ideationally nonidentical material. (“Each representation is, in the image sense, individual, dissimilar, and yet identical thematically” [p.34].) This would necessitate making a distinction between the “common denotation” of sharply conflicting elements that is the essence of Eisensteinian montage, and some other, less iconographically representable, whole. Irreconcilable material, that is, may produce an unforeseeable (indeed unseeable) fusion that is not an image in the Eisensteinian sense.

Dysraphism may be a useful term in this context. Medically, it would mean a congenital misseaming of embryonic parts—*raph* means seam, a rhapsodist being one who stitches parts together, that is, a reciter of epic poetry. So different parts from the middle, end, and beginning—it's a 4-D image—are fused together to become one entity.

These considerations hold open the possibility of a maximum *differentiation* of parts—style, vocabulary, syntax. You start with the integrity and autonomy of parts and find the whole in them. What made Dr. Frankenstein's creature a monster was just the reverse—starting with a preconceived whole and tailoring the parts to fit.

Reconsideration of the possibilities of the part-to-whole relation will allow further alternative prosodic techniques to the common and positivist rhetorical techniques of “ego” unity and rationalistic expository unity. At the broadest level, the part-to-whole relation means the relations of one text to another, one poem to another, and one book to another; the idea of interweaving of all of the work of a single author and beyond that of the related interweaving of the works of different authors. This is common enough as a reading practice, as when one skips through a number of books at the same time. As a writing practice, there is the collaboration of writers on a single work as well as the appropriation by a writer of other texts. In these and other ways, the endpoints of a given poem or a given author are radiated outward. On another level, the part-to-whole relation concerns syllable to word, word to line and word to

phrase, phrase to line, line to stanza, line to poem, stanza to poem, poem to book, and so on. Within this conceptualization, the territorial integrity of the poem begins to break down under a shifting focus that suggests a number of places in which the membranous line that may be called closure or poem's end can be invoked. What is the smallest or largest discrete unit of a text? Where does mine stop and yours start? Every cesura, whether the line break or the last page of the book, opens up to a possibility of continuing (rereading the book, going on to another) or *stopping*. For the practicing poet and practicing reader, the concern does not so much have to be with an increased definition of prescribed boundaries as with how these provisional limits—horizons—are invoked or provoked: allegorically as the continuities and fissures of a life (Lyn Hejinian's *My Life*, Robert Creeley's *Pieces*), structurally as the component parts of meaning-generation (Ron Silliman's work), narratively as the progression of story (Laura [Riding] Jackson's *Progress of Stories*), historically and geographically as the creation of a place (Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems*), and so on.

The poetics of part to whole cannot help but expose motivations for, and principles of, unity and the mechanisms by which they are approached. Louis Zukofsky's “A” manages to do this with the metaphor of a life's work. Its carefully composed articulation of distinct movements, as in a symphony, permits maximum differentiation section to section without recourse to a single thematic or syntactic underpinning to create unification. “A” seems exemplary of a genuine negative capability for fusing a poem together: significant for each of its endings; serial, in the Spicerian sense, more than thematic.

Consider a work composed of a number of autonomously distinct pieces that nonetheless functions as a whole by articulating the relations among the parts—that is, has an overall configuration whose music is composed of differences. But what are the possibilities for a whole that is not constructed along narrative or overtly thematic/historical lines? I've pointed to some limitations of an overly explicit or regulatory constituting framework—whether called coherence, closure, or unity ruling out possibilities for heteroclitics, anomaly, oddness. One alternative image to the uniplanar surface of “ego” or “ratio”nally-organized writing is of a mobius textuality, aspiring not toward the arbitrariness and accumulation of juxtaposition but rather the fusion of social flesh. That is, the succession of displacements involved in a mobius rather than otherwise rhetorically-unified poem are not centrifugal but centripetal, do not displace from the site of the poem but enact an emplacement as the poem.

Of course, any movement, any duration involves displacement, which can be more or less disguised. The poem can acknowledge its duration as an emplacement, as *metaphor*, insofar as metaphor means to transfer. So we get to duration in a poem by a series of substitutions or replacements that don't *stand in* or in *place of* but themselves embody that moment of time. Duration, then, becomes not a series of constantly postponed absences but the site of the *confusing*.

So the poem enters the world, and each of us beside it, facing it. It keeps beat not to an imposed metrics but to the marks of its own joints and the joints of the reader's projection. The poem sounds as music the marks of its continual newness in being made; and the only mark of its past, of its having been made, is the blood on the cutting room floor.

JAY WRIGHT'S SPEECH: "A PLUMB LINE TO THE ECHO OF THE EARTH"

by Lorenzo Thomas

Jay Wright's first major book, *The Homecoming Singer* (1971), was published when he was 36 years old by Ted Wilentz's Corinth Press and astounded most of New York's young Black poets. Not that Wright was unknown—he'd been included in the important 1968 anthology *Black Fire* (Morrow), and was respected in the Black Arts Movement circles—just that such a rich collection was unexpected. At first, the poems seemed much too long and they were not about anything necessarily Black (in the superficial sense that some readers still expect). "The fluted stove is giving out," Wright sang, "It burns as red as a dog's penis, / then gives up some of its sides / as a share of the ashes." But, sure, that was Black poetry... a counting of costs with a serious understanding of tradition. Wright was no irresponsible rapper shouting "burn baby burn."

Wright's supple line and longwindedness was derived as much from the African griot tradition and the Mexican *corrido* (Border ballads) as from Amiri Baraka (circa *Dead Lecturer*); and there was also a precision of diction that can only be learned if one really understands the structure of the English language.

Wright's "First Principles", and other poems in *The Homecoming Singer*, begin with the hip flipness of Baraka but quickly take on a more sombre tone:

I see my father
standing in the half-moon
that the ancient lamp
throws on the street.
There's broken glass
scattered on the sidewalks
like sugared diamonds,
all around him.

Is this a "crystal night" or Harlem "riot"?

He looks a little strange to me,
almost ecstatic, as he stands there,
with his left foot planted
unconsciously on somebody's
discarded and torn shirt.
I walk toward him,
breaking my pace,
trying to approach him
as if there were no reason
to be in a hurry...

Why is it that trophies, dreams or photographs, can cause such trouble? Why is there always something vaguely messy about a trophy? Or a poem that seems to hide deep feeling while focusing the reader's attention on something perceived beyond statement?

A line such as "breaking my pace" tells you that you are in the presence of a poet who will reward your closest attention. Jay Wright is not a rapper or a punster; he can take you to the mountaintop emotionally while also focusing attention almost microscopically on the smallest phonemic fragment. To use Don Sanders' wonderful phrase, Wright is a "heavy word user."

In *Death As History* (published in 1967 by Diane DiPrima's Poets Press), Wright suggested the passions that determined his vocation:

Those, who would make you
want to live, are dying,
passing with no lament...

Think *that's* a bad scene? Worse is the fact that

Young poets sit in their rooms
like perverted Penelopes,
unraveling everything

Wright, like many other poets of the Black Arts Movement, made it his business to stand up and testify... to study the traditions and ensure that those who gave us life would not be forgotten.

Now a mature and distinguished poet, Jay Wright continues to simultaneously knit and unravel our perceptions with his amazing and beautifully demanding works. The University of Kentucky's excellent *Callaloo* publishing series has recently presented a new volume of poems entitled *Explications/Interpretations* and a special issue of its journal includes important Wright critiques by Gerald Barrax, Vera M. Kutzinski, and Robert B. Stepto.

Explications/Interpretations, Wright's sixth collection, is wonderful. It is clear that *The Homecoming Singer* was only the first installment of a work that grows stronger and deeper as the poet reckons his way. This new book will certainly astonish a new generation of poets and warmly reward those who have been listening all along.

In "The Continuing City: Spirit and Body," Wright sees the world as a living thing and also as a material trap for the soul:

I measure and control my god's intent
and call it flesh,
the visible intention of sight

He sees (in "The Measure")

a seed as an act,
a word as a gift of perfection.
The hand that slips the abundant
seed into the darkness of earth
extends from my body.

This is not the "cosmic" poetry that Pound warned against in 1913; this is as graphic a description of biological reality as a metaphysic can bear. Wright's four-part poem "The Body" is a beautifully cadenced suite that draws upon African religion and mythology as carefully as it explores the most "deliberate measure" (see pp. 24-25) of the English language. Among Afro-American writers (and the term *Afro-American* includes the whole hemisphere), Jay Wright is in a position to challenge James Baldwin and Derek Walcott in the contest for absolute mastery of the English language in all of its sonic nuances. In some dialects of English, though, there are problems. A long poem in this new book, "Macintyre, The Captain And The Saints," a

memento of Wright's sojourns in Scotland, is a bit too complicated and crabbedly polyglot; emblematic of the few faulty notes we get from this singer. Sail on!

If this article seems to make Wright's poetry appear to be intellectually demanding, that's because this *is* demanding poetry. Wright's work is also marvelously sensuous and carries an emotional charge. "A young man," Wright says in his *Callaloo* interview, "hearing me read some of my poems, said that I seemed to be trying to weave together a lot of things. My answer was that they are already woven, I'm just trying to uncover the weave."

Jay Wright, at this point in his career, is neither Penelope nor Odysseus welcomed home. All to the good. *Explications / Interpretations* gives us Wright as an extraordinarily wise wayfarer in plain clothes devising the test of the single string that, pulled properly, unravels what is false and reveals the identity of truth.

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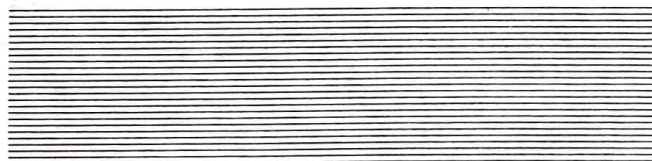
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Explications / Interpretations by Jay Wright (\$9.00) and *Callaloo 19*, a special Jay Wright issue (\$5.00) are both available from *Callaloo*, Department of English, University of Kentucky, Lexington KY 40506-0027.



AN AMY GERSTLER PORTFOLIO

I fall to pieces

What does a kiss mean in our kind of relationship? A truce of lips? That though we're both animals, you won't bite? After necking in the cemetery, I felt scattered as that married couple's ashes. You read their plaque aloud: TOO BAD, WE HAD FUN. Hope my crumbs and dust wind up feeding a cactus whose fruit becomes your tequila. You'd drink me, and I'd enter your temple: an ever-faithful headache. But I wouldn't be able to see your Adam's apple jump when you swallowed. Glug glug. So let's walk upright awhile, keep paradise at bay, OK? Kiss me again, breathe your little ills and weird fear into me. Erase my name, leave me speechless.

Since You've Been Gone

Last night, after the satellite shower,
there was a ring around the moon,
the color of ice-dew, ivory, glue, lunacy.
Then a big streak across the sky.
Can you answer questions? What's under
that smeared air? An erased constellation?
Do you look down from your electric chair,
afloat in the charged dark? What are you
doing up there in lullaby land? A census
of blessings? Plotting to come back as
an alligator bag I can hang on my arm?
Choosing your moment to surface through
losses' waters, waves billowing over your
new amphibian skin? Or did you opt to turn
into the wise and bright star I address
this gibberish to, night after night?
Rise and die. Slide down that silver spike
of light. Ignite or untie me. Ah well.
Your intensity's melting, and I'm talking
to myself again.

Apology

How could I refuse
a beautiful Chinese girl?
No one's *that* immune.

Dear Boy George,

Only three things on earth seem useful or soothing to me. One: wearing stolen clothes. Two: photos of exquisitely dressed redheads. Three: your voice on the radio. Those songs fall smack-dab into my range! Not to embarrass you with my raw American awe, or let you think I'm the kinda girl who bends over for any guy who plucks his eyebrows and can make tight braids—but you're the plump bisexual cherub of the eighties... clusters of Rubens' painted angels, plus a dollop of the Pillsbury dough boy, all rolled into one! We could go skating, or just lie around my house eating pineapple. I could pierce your ears: I know how to freeze the lobes with ice so it doesn't hurt. When I misunderstand your lyrics, they get even better. I thought the line I'M YOUR LOVER, NOT YOUR RIVAL was I'M ANOTHER, NOT THE BIBLE, or PRIME YOUR MOTHER, NOT A LIBEL, or UNDERCOVER BOUGHT ARRIVAL. Great, huh? See, we're of like minds. I almost died when I read in the *Times* how you saved that girl from drowning... dived down and pulled the blubbing sissy up. I'd give anything to be the limp, dripping form you stumbled from the lake with, draped over your pale, motherly arms in a grateful faint as your mascara ran and ran.

LARRY STANTON: Portraits of Writers

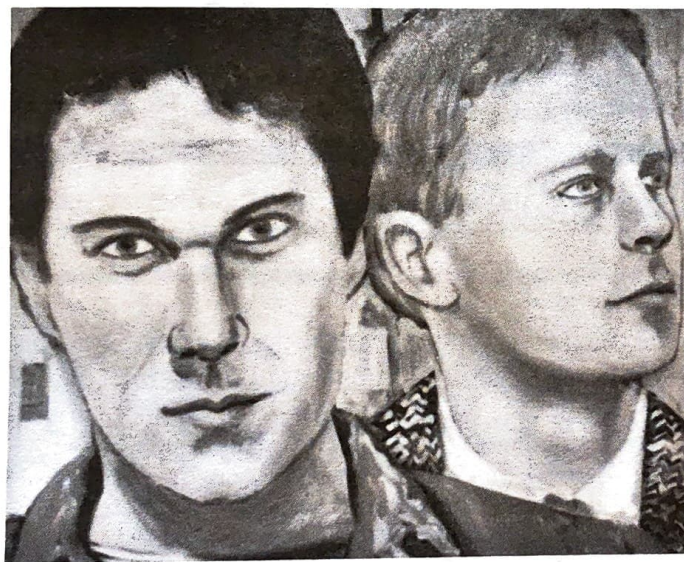
In the final year of his life, painter Larry Stanton (who died last October at the age of 35) began what he planned to be a large series of portraits of the many poets and writers in his circle of friends. The first in the series, "Three Poets," was a portrait of Donald Britton, Dennis Cooper and me. We posed for it on a muggy summer Sunday afternoon, standing in the dark yard behind Larry's tiny studio next to the Ninth Circle as he took photograph after photograph of us in various arrangements. (Larry painted from Polaroids.) The painting that resulted was the subject of several drastic revisions in the months that followed. While fussing with it, he managed to sandwich several other paintings of writers in

between the dozens of portraits he so feverishly generated, of friends, acquaintances and what Frank O'Hara called "temporary neighbors".

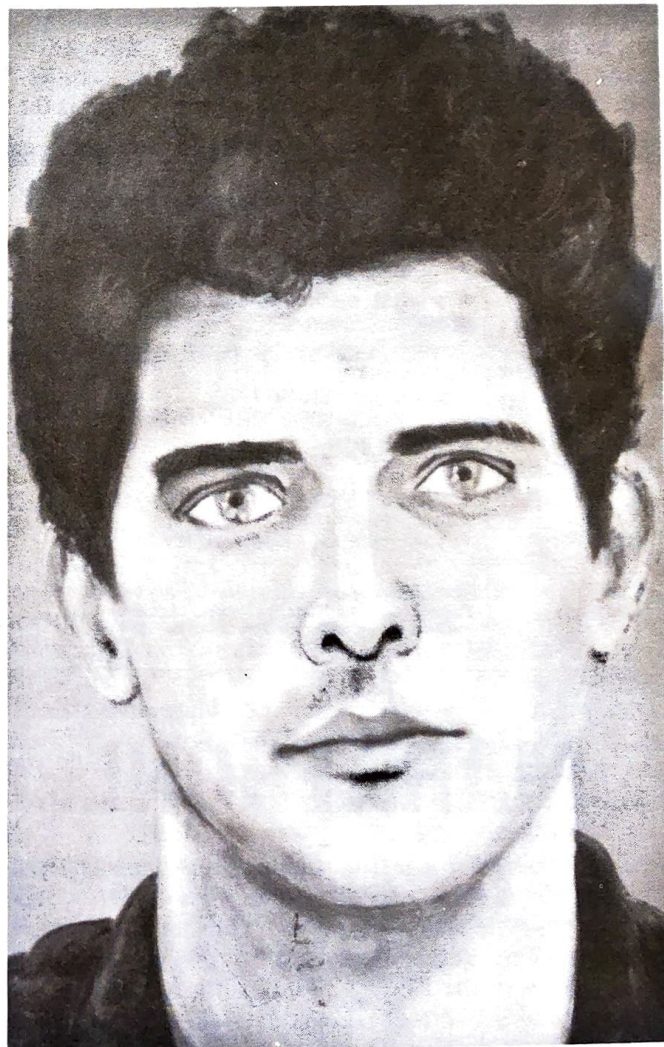
Larry managed to finish only seven of his "poet paintings" before his illness (AIDS-related pneumonia) and death. Four of them are reproduced here. A major show of Larry's drawings and paintings, selected by his friends Henry Geldzahler and David Hockney, will take place later this year. Another friend, Arthur Lambert, is coordinating the publication of a book of his work, which will be based on the exhibition.

—Tim Dlugos

"Dennis Cooper and Donald Britton" 1984



Photos: Stacy Fields



"Brad Gooch" 1984



"Steve Hamilton" 1983



"William Burroughs" 1984

Not shown: "Steve Hamilton" 1984; "Donald Britton" 1984; "Three Poets" (Tim Dlugos, Dennis Cooper, Donald Britton) 1983-1984.

Book Reviews

GROUND WORK: BEFORE THE WAR by Robert Duncan.
A New Directions Book. \$10.95.

If the mood of the country now (the recent elections an alarming manifestation) is to let things slide, put off urgent ecological, social and political changes everyone knows are desperately needed, Robert Duncan in *Ground Work: Before the War* is as much a radical as ever, maybe more. Cassandra style (better: like Blake) Duncan demands we start giving a lot of serious attention to signs of Negativity we can see all around us: isn't the penalty for not doing this some great apocalyptic event? Duncan's *Ground Work* (part two of it's to be called *Ground Work: In the Dark* but isn't due out till 1989) is an exciting, swirling view of all Duncan's latest on society, nature, politics, us—in relation to the growing Dark. This in itself would make it a must-to-buy, as the *Voice* would say. But there's also an extremely personal, poignant, autobiographical note in this collection, and I think the best thing about *Ground Work* is the

way the two collide—

the wave of a life darker than
life before me sped, and I
larger than I was, grown dark as
the shoreless depth

—he says, catching his breath, giving the main thing obliquely, *between*.

The Dark and Death's as complex, ambiguous as it can be for Duncan. As far as style goes, the poet's awareness of ecological, social and other disaster at the heart of the collection doesn't make it a particularly public or open book. Duncan's for himself completely the singer, the lyricist—and the new stress on personal just enhances this. Ginsberg's by contrast polemical: if once in a while he picks up an instrument to accompany himself, well, that doesn't change things. You're what you are *through* the changes when you're a really good writer. Facing limitations of age and death, Duncan's very moving first-person quality becomes the life of the new collection, gives real in-depth urgency. Duncan here is self-defined as a champion of Light, as he always has been. So the big question of the book, as I see this, is how any person—you, I, whoever—can start to reconcile this stance of attraction to the same Dark that's on another level so threatening. Put in the con-

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the Arts, and the New York State Council on the Arts.

MARATHON!

Allen Ginsberg's fresh-from-the-notebook poems from China... Karen Allen's speech from *Camino Real*... Sapphire, a 60s-style black militant authentic enough to have come from Central Casting, drawing angry jeers by shouting "Victory to the PLO"... Rudy Burckhardt in wrap-around shades... Phoebe Legere's wall-shaking "East Village Blues"... Peter Cherches' hilarious pop songs, a weird amalgam of dada and Allen Sherman... Spalding Gray's monologue... Michael Lally dropping in from LA on the eve of his premiere as the villainous Mr. Allen ("that scumbag") on NBC's *Berrenger's*... Bob Telson's dynamic music from *The Gospel at Colonus*... to them and all the participants who helped make the Poetry Project's New Year's Marathon Reading the most successful ever, a thousand thanks.

St. Mark's Talks

On Thursday, February 28, at 8 pm, St. Mark's Talks will feature

GEORGE-THERESE DICKENSON and PETER SEATON
discussing *The Anxiety of Literacy*.

"It's only poetry that successfully transcends the technological imperatives of reading and writing. In the ubiquitous press of conventions for the use of a literacy designed to deal with primeval scarcity and thereby destined desperately to promote it, the hallmarks of the contradiction are obsession, anxiety, manipulation, alienation and mannerism. Demanding unmediated, non-hierarchical, non-colonial contexts of "appreciation," poetry is hardly a vehicle and scarcely a product. For it is precisely at those points that poetry is popularly thought to be inaccessible that its immediacy is most apprehendable and keeps us sane."

George-Therese Dickenson is the author of *Striations* (Good Gay Poets, 1976) and the forthcoming *Transducing* (Segue). She is co-founder of Incisions Arts, which conducts workshops and readings for inmates of New York area hospital prison wards. Peter Seaton is author of *Agreement* (Asylum's), *The Son Master* (Roof) and *Crisis Intervention* (Tuumba).

AMY CLAMPITT WINS BIG

The Academy of American Poets has announced that Amy Clampitt has been awarded its \$10,000 Fellowship for distinguished poetic achievement. Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Robert Frost, Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop have all been recipients of this award, the first of its kind in America.

text of the late '60s (much of the book being written then)—can a person be against the war in Viet Nam, the horrible eco-menace of capitalism, its globally destructive way of life etc.—and still be *for* all the Dark urges that sometimes seem to lie *behind* them. An important question. And it's evident Duncan wants very much to answer Yes, though he's also still working on the question. And anyway— are we being given the choice?

So there's a certain shiftiness, elusiveness here. Take the long poem called "Santa Crux Propositions". The hyper-rationalisms, destructions of capitalism, the poem seems to be saying, inevitably are going to bring about some cosmic retaliation, a righting of the balance by the universe. And then

SHE appears, Kali dancing, whirling her necklace
of skulls trampling the despoiling armies and the
exploiters of natural resources

and so on. As a reader, you take this pretty much at face value. But then—and there's where the surprise comes in—Duncan announces these lines (at least the passage) aren't his, but are taken from something by Denise Levertov, a friend with whom he's then fighting, separating from in fact. So the *meaning* changes. Was the eco-discussion a red herring? No, but the ground's shifted. Text's become meta-text; speaking voice the one spoken. And this is a very *epistemological* shift, isn't it? Is a shift of this kind in writing part of the Dark too?

Does Duncan's reflexivity—textual "self-awareness"—put him in the same general grouping as current "text"

writers like Ashbery or the Language Poets? Duncan's writing *uses* textuality, but as a means. Textual writing *stays on the page*: with Duncan the writing tends outward, elsewhere, to a beyond. Duncan's writing is Romantic and emotional. In spite of using the language of Western myths (though not as much as in the past—this collection uses simple and direct language as a strategy, I think) this links Duncan with popular writing. Sometimes only horror writing in our time (Bram Stoker, Stephen King, etc.) has been able to achieve the expressive, *mystical* feeling about the Dark that Duncan has. In lushly beautiful lines like these for instance—

the sea
comes in on rolling surfs
of an insistent meaning, pounds
the sands relentlessly, demanding
a hearing. I overhear
tides of myself in it

—you get Duncan's writing practice. Meaning breaks down. Out of that comes a connection. From the Dark—

Fugitive evangel of morning
I don't know in what sense you are "mine."
Yet I was waiting. Were you
barely fitting the shadow of an old desire
the mind would not let go, or
do you come as the river of fire in the poem comes
surpassing what the mind would *know*

—a possibility of a face—companion.

—Bruce Boone



"Beast seeks Beauty (and truth)"*

and other half poems, a.k.a. miniature prose poems, (e.g. The Ideal Woman: "She does not seek/the ideal man.") in this collection of

13½ Poems for the Ideal Woman

by Charles Haseloff (dealing with the mystery and madness of relations between the sexes (love included) will make

A Perfect Gift for a Real Woman.

32pp. Paper. \$3. At The Gotham, 41 W. 47; Books & Co., Madison & 75th; St. Mark's Bookshop, on 8th, betw. 2nd & 3rd Aves; Sohozot, 307 W. Bldwy. In Soho; Papyrus, 114th & Bldwy. Or from PO Box 459, Canal St. Sta, NYC 10013. Make check payable to Pockelbook Press. Money back guarantee.

* © 1984 by Charles Haseloff

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NEW POEMS [1907] by Rainer Maria Rilke. Translated by Edward Snow. North Point Press, San Francisco. \$15.00.

"It should refer to nothing that lay beyond it, see nothing that was not within itself," wrote Rainer Maria Rilke about the sculpture of Auguste Rodin. Rilke met the sculptor in 1902, when he had a commission to write a monograph on him. Rodin's careful study of objects and surfaces and his manner of work ("Travailler, toujours travailler") converted Rilke. Galvanized, he abandoned his melodious, sometimes incantatory style and began writing (1903-7) *New Poems*. After critics used the adjective to describe Cezanne, Rilke would call these *sachlich*—objective—poems: "poetry that would . . . belong," as translator Edward Snow says, "to the world of things rather than feelings." Things include a woman's fate, a panther, the birth of Venus.

The poems are compressed to a very dense and energetic state. Internal rhyme, alliteration, spare syntax, and new coinages pull already short works tightly together. Several of them, variant sonnets, consist of one sentence. Grammatically, the poems can be tricky, and determining what J.B. Leishman called "Which 'which' is which" can be a puzzle.

One of the merits of Snow's new editions is that the English-speaking reader finds it all sorted out, with Rilke's tempi and pauses undisrupted. Snow has partially smoothed things, however, by eliminating most of Rilke's rhyme schemes. Snow carefully matches the nuance of individual words—Rilke was busy inventing them—and synonyms sometimes allow him to equal the German's alliteration and internal rhyme ("das Fliegende, Entfliehende, Entfernte" becomes "the flying, the fleeting, the faraway"). All of the poems in their original language (excluding the final five)

are meticulously, schematically rhymed, however, so the apparent decision to give the English reader a fuller measure of the poems by setting their rhymes aside should have been justified in Snow's introduction. Incidentally, also absent in front is a list of the German titles.

The beauty of Snow's versions is that their tone is quite right; the break and balance of the original lines are also preserved. In the final five poems the translations show Rilke rising to full stature:

And aren't all that way: simply self-containing,
if self-containing means: to transform the
world outside
and the wind and the rain and the patience of spring
and guilt and restlessness and muffled fate
and the darkness of the evening earth
and even the changing and flying and fleeing
of the clouds
and the vague influence of the distant stars
into a handful of inwardness.

Now and again it seems that evocative rhythms are sacrificed to tidiness. In "The Marble Wagon," the lumbering "*Auf Pferde, sieben ziehende, verteilt,*" becomes "Parcelled out on seven drawing horses." A nit perhaps, because examples of faithfulness can be found throughout. In "The Panther," the "supple pace of powerful soft strides" marvelously echoes the padding animal that can be heard in "*Der weiche Gang gescheidig starker Schritte.*"

When *New Poems* was at the typesetters in 1907, the *Sachlichkeit* of Cezanne's paintings at the *Salon d'Automne* overwhelmed Rilke. "In the poems there are instinctive tendencies toward similar objectivity," he wrote to his wife, "From the amount Cezanne gives me to do now, I notice how very different I have grown." The book he then began, *New Poems: The Other Part*, appeared in 1908; Edward Snow's translation is promised by North Point Press for later this year.

—Stephen Pascal

AP by Steve Carey. Archipelago Books, c/o Margaret De Coursey, 898 Union Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215. \$4.00.

Steve Carey's new old long poem could well serve as an introduction to contemporary verse technique. In the first line the poet reveals the secret, Associative Prowess, though a couple of pages later he plays with the obvious Associated Press, and Artist's Proof further illuminates the process. There are many varieties of associative poetics, but in method SC's *AP* curiously reminds one most of Robert Duncan's artful generations, though Philip Whalen is acknowledged presiding spirit—letters to him in Japan comprise substantial parts of the poem.

AP belongs near Bernadette Mayer's *Midwinter Day* and Ted Greenwald's *You Bet* in the pantheon of radiantly transformed dailiness. Comparatively, Carey's poem extends in time and space, is less imagistic and more conversational. Seasons change, the poet moves from Los Angeles to San Francisco, but as many times as I've read the poem I've no image of the place where he writes. The geography might be more distinctive to someone familiar with the terrain. As the narrator notes with fond annoyance, his memories resemble memories of Sunday afternoons. His mind is stuffed with media images of blond suburban thoughtlessness

that's difficult to satirize.

When I watch television in Los Angeles
I know where I am
and not with whom

It's remarkable how early in its history television was committed to the marketing of nostalgia.

I don't know to what extent the poem has been revised since its writing (1967), but it has qualities of a poem written during precocious youth: generous amounts of parody, self-consciousness to the verge of ennui, frequent virtuoso display. The distances are those of the American West; you can't go downstairs for a carton of milk and a pack of cigarettes. The poem includes concepts for art projects, *TV Guide* blurbs, melodramatic suppositions about anonymous neighbors, vaudeville crosstalk, lists of odd sorts (useful abstract nouns, grocery items, sneeze factors, etc.), a duet for Burgess Meredith and Hugh Downs, a brief biography (Paul Serusier), photography criticism, a juicy role for Mick Jagger, baseball scores, notes, deletions, addenda, epistles, and more. Often a line pivots on a felicitous phrase and the poem jaunts off in an unforeseen direction. At other times, it seems regional realism limned with minimalist economy. What is a line of thought, and how do you get there from here?

(As they say in riding circles,
"Give him (the horse) his head")

Written almost entirely in the present tense, consisting of 32 parts, many of which consist of smaller fragments, the poem is immediate, apparent, and frequently interpolated, but what goes around comes around with a difference.

Watch this:

Here comes the mailman
none too soon

He loads up at the corner there
then starts up this side of the street

What a fine handwriting!

(PAUSE a few seconds; CUT to clock)
... Got Nothin'...

For Carey, like Whalen, it's a musical shot. Themes recur with variation. The visual arrangements are graceful and spare. The rhetoric roams from chit-chat to declamation.

AP is part two of the trilogy, *The California Papers*. The first part was published under that title by United Artists in 1981. In both books, the poet's skills dazzle, but the landscape continues problematic. How do you wrench a poem from this context? Carey attempts to locate it with utmost attention and trust, a la Whalen. But Whalen's idiosyncratic habits and tastes permit divagations that compare to those highways that wended through cities and towns, and were interrupted by cattle crossings. In Carey's post-freeway poem the landscape has been face-lifted until one mile looks like the last. The shapely brown air he breathes is polluted with arbitrary celebrity and trivia masquerading as Americana. The characters remain barely perceptible, shadows of acquaintance.

"But I can't go into all that now. All I need
is your name for the moment."

No matter the effort "I" makes to connect, there's persisting interference, medial distortion, and commercial

flack. With a valiant effort Carey clears a space to stretch his legs. What can the poet but make do?

During and after this time,
whatever is made of this
is in fact made, and so is
what came of it
which may be the same thing
but which has also made you
feel for something else,
and not just what was made of it,
nor, necessarily, something
entirely new or different
or, for that matter, old, familiar,
but something nonetheless,
that is if what I said was the truth.

—Gary Lenhart

INCIDENT REPORT SONNETS by Bernadette Mayer, **LOCATIONS** by Tone Blevins, **BUMPY RIDE** by Simone Davis, **OBLIGING NIGHT** by Cheryl Fish, **YAHWEH'S COFFEE BREAK** by Ann Kregal, **JOAN** by Jennifer Nostrand. All produced at the 1984 Poetry Project Mimeo Workshops.

Here's the latest salvo in the Mimeo Wars—six various books, the fruits of Maureen Owen's Mimeography Workshop held over the summer. While it seems to be getting harder to get the job done via mimeo (cf. the production problems of recent *Worlds*, the *Newsletter's* switching to offset), these books present the case, once again, for the utility of the old Gestetner. And five writers, most of whom have been regulars at Project-sponsored writing workshops, have graduated into the ranks of Whitman *et al* by producing their first books themselves. Congratulations are due all concerned, especially to Ms. Owen for seeing such a major undertaking through to such lively and timely conclusions!

Bernadette Mayer's *Incident Reports Sonnets* is the sixth book from Peggy DeCoursey's Archipelago Books, which has also recently brought us the offset, and wonderful, *AP* by Steve Carey, "*The California Papers*, Pt. II." Ms Mayer, of course, already knows the intricacies of mimeo, the world still mourning the loss of the mimeoed United Artists magazine, which she published with Lewis Warsh, and in the pages of which these sonnets first appeared. Between their own Persian Royal Hyacinth blue covers, with an official rubber-stamped title, the poems read as actual reports: news bulletins from Utopia, or cursive writing in a wide-line blue book. *Incident Reports* evokes the occasional genre, so well-suited to mimeo; each sonnet is dedicated, in different ways, to Grace, which seemed funny in the magazine, but here resonates as the gifts they are; offset, such a slender collection might appear precious, here they are as immediate as mimeo itself. (8½ x 11, stapled.)

Locations (Out There Press) allows us a glimpse at the writings of performance artist/dramaturg Tone Blevins. This collection of short prose feels like an Ur-text for a performance—a sleazebo carny barker is shouting at the entranceway, but inside the location is still. A walk-in meditation installation. People have become women. The audience is ignored: viewers at a zoo. Verbs are directions on a primitive landscape, or instructions for a recipe for sur-

vival. Memories are "pre-Zone." Genetics and shamanism twine DNA. "A clean mystery rather than an arguable symbol." Enticing and entertaining and very handsomely produced—7 x 10 with skyblue wraps, title pasted on, 4 staples.

Simone Davis writes performance poems—they jump off the page. Scores: all caps, italics, words enjambed, sounds, asterisks. "Premenstrual Syndrome" has words rubber-stamped in red ink. The book is called *Bumpy Ride* (Snow Pea Press, 8½ x 11, stapled) and that's what it is. The highs are exhilarating—poems that sing to you, or boss you around in a funny, never frightening, way. The lows are when the language can't stretch Ms. Davis's performance keen into poetry. Makes me want to hear her read them.

Cheryl Fish comes through clear in *Obliging Night* (Hurricane Books, 8½ x 11, art by Eileen Marquez), a classic first book. The 19 poems range from Creeley concision ("step out of line / flapping lift / to sky") to a New Wave Personism ("I no longer like you / to make me nervous / there's no room to dance anywhere"), she tries it all, which is usual enough, but for Ms. Fish, it pretty much all works. A light hand is at the controls, working them over, staid. Her observations point, but attractively and gracefully. And while most first books would be improved by simply cutting the last line or two of each poem, I am in awe of her single closing line, "shoulderblades", and the end of "Raw Materials": "because I can't have / Why do I love you?" The author states at the end of *Night* that copies may be obtained by writing her at 201 West 21st St., NYC, 10011.

Eccentric and/or hermetic, *Yahweh's Coffee Break* (5 x 7, robin's egg blue wraps, secreted staples) might be poem as book-length running joke: there's a prologue referring us to Mark 14:51, a one page ready/steady/go, and then one 20-page teletyped sentence that stretches from St. Mark's Church to Minnesota, Minsk, Afghanistan—a family tree that blossoms at both ends. Old Testament Borscht Belt. All of which, as signified by a drawing on the last page (likewise on the cover) is simply a coffeebreak ruminatin by the Senor Yahweh. Paper-clipped to the cover is a "2nd version," with a slightly different cast, but mainly calling attention to the ongoingness of this thing ("Generations have trod . . ."), a Kabbalah trot . . . Mimeo is not fast enough for this poet! Mayakovsky called for planes with engines running, awaiting such rewrites!

"How can they comprehend/ingenuousness?" the author asks about the crowd approaching the Saint in *Joan* by Jennifer Nostrand (Mimeograph Press, 8½ x 11, cream covers with a constellation of little red rubber-stamped stars on the title, stapled) which is a good question for readers approaching this book. Ms. Nostrand here joins Eileen Myles in creating a new Joan literature: ". . . I'm touched / by the optimism of little girls / who took 'Joan' as their / confirmation name," says Ms. Myles ("Ptolemy") and of course, in "Joan": "Today, May 30th, Joan / of Arc was burned." In Ms. Nostrand's *Joan* I saw big white fields touched by shadows, a rhetoric of strained flatness that cracks into metaphysics, maybe, or at least becomes the newest book of the Apocrypha.

Conceptually, the Mimeo Workshop was to revive a tradition that has been called to account for itself. The books make good reads and you don't hold a computer terminal in your hands. Books are hands on; these books are hands on, beginning to end, as this tradition is handed on.

—Bob Holman

This Month's Readers

Monday, February 4: Open Reading. No admission charge.

Wednesday, February 6: **Kimiko Hahn** and **Rochelle Kraut**. Kimiko Hahn's poems have been widely published. This Asian American poet, editor, scholar and political activist has been called "one of the most promising of our poets" by Jessica Hagedorn. She is the poetry editor of *Bridge: Asian American Perspectives*. Rochelle Kraut is former coordinator of the Monday Night Readings at the Poetry Project. A visual artist and actress as well as a poet, her new collection *Art in America* will appear imminently from Little Light Books.

Monday, February 11: **Mary Sternbach** and **Nancy Flynn**. Mary Sternbach is the author of *Countries with No Name* (1982) and the chapbook *8 Pieces Written in Italy*. Nancy Flynn's latest book is the picaresque *A Dream of Reality*. She is bicoastal, and used to work on the staff of *American Poetry Review*.

Wednesday, February 13: **John Ashbery** and **Anne Lauterbach**. If John Ashbery isn't the best poet writing in the English language, he's mighty close. His latest book is *A Wave*. Anne Lauterbach's collections of poetry include *Sacred Weather* (1984), *Later That Evening* (1981), and the highly-praised *Many Times, But Then* (1979). She has curated and coordinated art exhibitions in New York and London.

Monday, February 18: **Penny Arcade**, **Patrick McGrath** and **Franco Beltrametti**. Penny Arcade is an improvisational performance artist who has worked with John Vaccaro, Jackie Curtis, Jack Smith and Larry Rivers. Patrick McGrath is a British expatriate fiction writer who lives in New York. He frequently reads his macabre texts at Lower East Side performance spaces. Franco Beltrametti lives in Switzerland, and comes to the Poetry Project direct from performances in Naples, Paris, and a poetry festival in Cogolin, France. He is a poet, publisher, performer and visual artist.

Wednesday, February 20: **Charlotte Carter** and **Tim Dlugos**. Charlotte Carter is the author of the underground classic, *Sheltered Life* (1976). A 1981 CAPS recipient, she is currently working on her second novel. Tim Dlugos edits the *Poetry Project Newsletter* and is a contributing editor of *Christopher Street*. His most recent collection of poems is *Entre Nous* (1982).

Monday, February 25: **Connie Deanovich**, **Zak Chassler**, and **Edmund Berrigan**. Connie Deanovich hails from Chicago, where she edits *B-City* magazine. Her poems have been widely published. She is on the staff of the Poetry Center at the Art Institute of Chicago. Zak Chassler was born in 1970. He began writing stories in 1981. He's the co-author, with Joel Chassler, of the *E.T. Jokebook*, and edited the magazine *Parchment* at Manhattan East School. Edmund Berrigan has made two books of poetry: *Dinosaur* and *Ace of Hearts and Half Past*.

Wednesday, February 27: **Elaine Equi** and **Jerome Sala**. Elaine Equi and Jerome Sala are the madcap Queen and King of the new Chicago poetry scene. Equi is the author of *Shrewcrazy* (1981) and the soon-to-be-released *The Corners*

of the Mouth. Sala wrote the overwhelming *Spaz Attack* (1980), and anticipates the forthcoming *I Am Not a Juvenile Delinquent*.

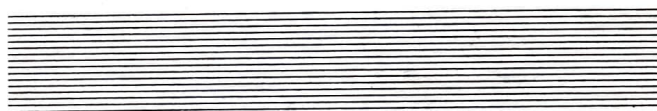
Thursday, February 28: **George-Therese Dickenson** and **Peter Seaton**, "The Anxiety of Literacy," St. Mark's Talks.

All events take place in St. Mark's Parish Hall, and begin at 8 p.m. Admission \$3.00. Your poetry hosts and hostesses: Monday nights, Chris Kraus and Marc Nasdor; Wednesday nights, Eileen Myles and Patricia Jones; St. Mark's Talks, Charles Bernstein.

READING IN JANUARY

Because there was no separate January issue of the Newsletter, here are the writers who distinguished The Poetry Project by reading here in January:

Ned Rorem, Richard Sober, Elio Schneeman, Jane DeLynn, Steve Carey, Julian Beck, Judith Malina, Kevin Jeffrey Clarke, Sekou Sundiata, Peter Cherches, Stuart Sherman, Maxine Chernoff, David Leavitt, and Steve McCaffery.



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