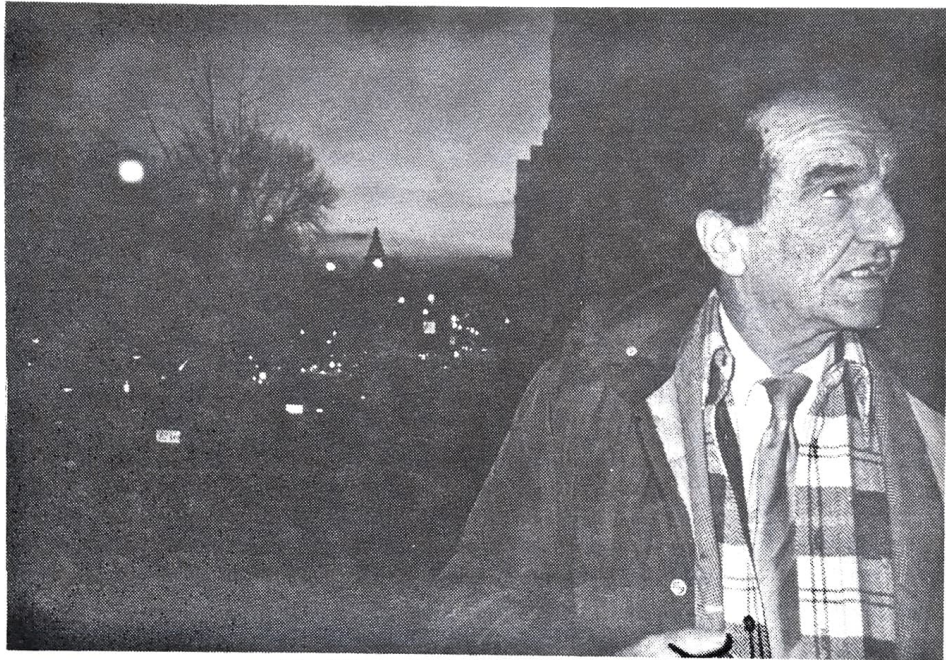


POETRY PROJECT

The Newsletter of The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery

Issue 114, May 1985 \$1.00



John Wieners in Boston, December 1984

John Wieners: Ten Poems

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**AND: DONALD BRITTON ON ACKROYD'S ELIOT BIO,
PETER SCHJELDAHL ON JEROME SALA,
AND POEMS! NEWS!**

CATHEDRAL HONORS MELVILLE, POE

Herman Melville and Edgar Allan Poe will be inducted into the American Poets' Corner in The Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine on Sunday, May 12, at the 7 p.m. Vesper Service.

Joseph Brodsky, Josephine Jacobsen, Stanley Kunitz and Carl Rakosi will read from the works of Melville and Poe. At the conclusion of Vespers, memorial stones will be unveiled with the inscriptions "The running battle of the star and clod ("Clarel") and "Our of Space—out of Time ("Dreamland")."

The following day at 8 p.m. in the Cathedral's Synod House, John Hollander will introduce J. V. Cunningham, who will give the first annual "Poet's Corner Cathedral Lecture." Mr. Cunningham's lecture is entitled "If Fame Belonged to Me: Dickinson."

A reception will follow both events.

WBAI WANTS YOU!

Poets interested in collaboration with Peter Bochan for possible broadcast on his program "Shortcuts" (WBAI-FM, Monday 5-6:30 PM) should send short, semitopical poems of general interest on cassette (w/text and SASE) to Sal Salasin, 218 East 27th Street #3, New York, NY 10016.

NAROPA GRANT HONORS TED BERRIGAN

The 1985 Summer Writing Program (July 14 through August 10) at Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado, is offering a Ted Berrigan Memorial Scholarship to a qualified student.

The Writing Program will offer classes, workshops and performances. Among the faculty are Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, Anne Waldman, Bernadette Mayer, Amiri Baraka and Gregory Corso.

The awarding of the scholarship will be based on talent and financial need. For guidelines and application, contact Randy Roark, Naropa Institute, 2130 Arapahoe Avenue, Boulder, CO 80302, phone 303-444-0202. Application deadline: May 24, 1985.

THE ZEN OF LANGUAGE

Poet Norman Fischer has organized a day-long symposium to probe the connections between "language-oriented" poets and Zen, a discipline in which he is a priest. Entitled "Beyond Words and Phrases?: A Symposium on Meditation and Language," the program will take place Sunday, June 16, at the Zen Community of New York's Seminary at 690 West 247th Street in Riverdale. Participants will include poets Charles Bernstein, Armand Schwerner, Nick Piombino, Jackson Mac Low, Susan Pliner, philosopher Nancy Baker, Fischer, and others. For more information, call Norman Fischer at 212-548-4315.

For K.M.

I am going to sit here for about a minute
Dedicated to you the air all soft breezes
Lost in the lofty green branches

—Steve Levine

In regard to Dennis Cooper's book review of March, 1985, in which he states: "At best young poets create factions, usually based around a particular magazine... ISSUE, SULFUR, BOXCAR, etc."—this is all too typical of Cooper's critical prose, that is, lumping clichés together to form a truth. I can speak only for ISSUE in stating that we've never had a faction or any idea of it *NOR* have the authors gathered round us to relive a feeling of... "isolation, being Unread, ignored..." This is silly politics I think. Cooper doesn't mention his Little Caesar or his days as Beyond Baroque Reading Series Chairman, where he indeed did try & create a faction, including all those listed in his review, Smith, Gerstler, et al, publishing books by them and having the same readings over & over again. I doubt whether L.A. needs further mythologizing by Dennis. I agree, it's tough there. I live now in San Francisco partially due to that, BUT, I feel that Cooper's mere mention of those magazines in that light is derogatory & unneeded in a review of authors who haven't graced those magazines. As most of the authors in ISSUE, BOXCAR/etc have not been seen in Little Caesar nor other publications of the "new" pop poetry. Their work aside, the poets mentioned in said review are as published, if not more so, as any poet nowadays and an article stating that they're not is whiny & foolish. NOT to mention irrelevant in discussing their work. Please Dennis, stick to Facts every once in a while.

Todd Baron
ISSUE
San Francisco

DENNIS COOPER REPLIES:

Here are the facts: (1) Do the publishing careers of Gerstler, Trinidad, Smith, Krusoe and Skelley really rival that of "any poet nowadays"? Does Baron mean Merrill, Forche, Lifshin, Ginsberg or just whom? (2) During my three years at Beyond Baroque I hosted readings by more than two hundred poets and writers, exactly twenty-two of whom ever had work published in any Little Caesar publication. (3) If Baron didn't intend a faction to form around himself or ISSUE, fine. But one did form and was more than a little whiny itself, at least when I lived in Los Angeles.

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WHAT DO WOMEN (POETS) WANT?

by Alicia Ostriker

“We think back through our mothers, if we are women,” wrote Virginia Woolf in 1928, making a statement which is memorable not only because it is a ringing pentameter line. It is mysterious. We think back through our mothers, if we are women. Let me draw your attention, briefly, to the first person plural, the creative identity as a female “we;” the unconventional association of women and mothers not with feeling, or loving, or caring, or tenderness, but with thinking; and, lastly, the new verb formation Woolf has invented. We think back through our mothers. To think back is to remember. But what does it mean to think back through something, another person, a set of people?

We trace our own past with their help, perhaps. Or we remember it through remembering theirs—but how does one do that? Or we re-think ourselves by re-thinking them. And there is the strange sense in the line that to think back is not easy, but is a groping, a feeling in the darkness. And, too, we know that when Woolf says think back, she means move forward; for she is talking, after all, of the need for a usable past that will enable us, if we are women, to say what we mean.

While tracking in *A Room of One's Own* the embattled but live tradition of women's fiction, Woolf insists over and over that “it is the poetry that is still denied outlet.” Shakespeare's sister lies dead at the crossroads of the Elephant and Castle, and is yet to be reborn, she says. If women writers have 500 a year and rooms of their own, if they have “the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what they think,” if they look past Milton's bogey at the world of reality, Woolf estimates that the woman poet will be born in a century or so. “As for her coming without that preparation . . . that would be impossible.”

In 1928 H.D. had written most of her early poems, surely with something like the androgynous incandescence Woolf says she longs for. Marianne Moore had published *Poems and Observations*. Amy Lowell was three years dead. Elinor Wylie, Sara Teasdale, Edna Millay, Leonie Adams, Louise Bogan, and others, were creating a body of lyric poetry worthy of comparison with Elizabethan and Jacobean song. Emily Dickinson's works had gone through multiple editions. So that one wonders whether, when Woolf claims that “it is the poetry that is still denied outlet,” she had only England in mind and not America.

In America too, however, women poets have lamented the lack of mothers. Amy Lowell in “The Sisters” begins by remarking how queer women poets are and “how few of us there've been,” and ends after imagining meeting with Sappho, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Emily Dickinson, by rejecting all three as mothers for herself. Yet of course there were not really “few” women poets when Lowell wrote, for what Hawthorne in the nineteenth century called “the d----d mob of scribbling women” included scores of women poets—indeed, the hegemony of poetesses over poetry in 19th century America has been complained of as constituting a debilitating feminization of culture.

Decades pass, but we continue to hear these wistful complaints. A fellow student at the Iowa Writers Program in the

Forties told the young Jane Cooper that a woman poet was a contradiction in terms, and she noted that “men's praise of women's poetry didn't seem to go much beyond Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop.” Adrienne Rich in the Fifties was “taught that poetry should be universal, which meant, of course, nonfemale,” and even when she read “the older women poets” like Sappho, Rosetti, Dickinson, and so on, as well as the maidenly and discreet Marianne Moore whom all the men recommended, she “was looking in them for the same things I had found in the poetry of men.” Carolyn Kizer in “Pro Femina,” published in 1965, complains that the women poets of the past are all either “old maids to a woman,” or ugly cigar-smokers, or “the sad sonneteers, toast-and-teasdales we loved at thirteen.”

When a woman says she cannot locate poetic mothers, I think it means something like the following. She too despises the mob of scribbling women and wants to dissociate herself from their presumed mediocrity. Louise Bogan, asked to edit an anthology of women poets for *The Nation*, responded that “the thought of corresponding with a lot of female songbirds makes me acutely ill.” If a woman is ambitious and means perhaps to be a major poet, she will have read major critics—men of course—writing about the poets she might consider identifying with. Adjectives will have entered her bloodstream: modest, reticent, graceful, delicate, pure, womanly. She will not, in connection with women poets, have often encountered terms like great, powerful, forceful, violent, brilliant, or large. If learning how to write in the Fifties, she will read, perhaps, Blackmur on Dickinson: “She was neither a professional poet nor an amateur; she was a private poet who wrote indefatigably as some women cook or knit. Her gift for words and the cultural predicament of her time drove her to poetry instead of antimacassars.” (This is like saying Pound wrote indefatigably the way some men go to the office, and that his gift for words and his cultural predicament drove him to poetry instead of golf.) Or Ransom on Dickinson, “a little home-keeping person” who in common with other women poets “makes flights into nature rather too easily and upon errands which do not have metaphysical importance enough to justify so radical a strategy.” Or Ransom on Millay: “the limitation of Miss Millay . . . is her lack of intellectual interest,” more precisely defined as “deficiency in masculinity.” Of H.D. the young woman poet will learn from *The Pound Era* that imagism was a trivial pebble in the great Pound stream, and that H.D. was neurotic; from Douglas Bush's great work on *Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry* comes the pronouncement that “H.D. is a poet of escape,” whose Greece “has no connection with the Greece of historic actuality” (no more does Keats', or Matthew Arnold's, or Poe's, but never mind). And she will read, and believe, that Marianne Moore is “unassuming,” “unpretentious,” that “her humility is vast.”

In sum, it is difficult to discover who our mothers are, much less think through them, thanks to a long history of criticism—brilliant and authoritative, gallant and condescending—which veils them from us.

What then do we want in our poetic ancestresses? My

belief is that we want strong mothers; and I use the Bloomian term not because I believe that the woman poet's achievement depends on killing and superceding her predecessor. Rather than Oedipus and Laius at the crossroads, the model among women writers, critics as well as poets, is Demeter and Kore: only it is the daughter who descends to Hades, groping in the dark, to retrieve and revive her mother, who is strong and beautiful and wise, but has been raped—or is it seduced—by a powerful male god. As the mother returns to earth, the daughter will blossom.

I believe that we seek, in our strong mothers, three linked qualities. First, we want models we can seize on for sheer excellence as poets: poets who have themselves mastered and contained the past, who speak in their own voices and yet with the voice of the age, who work at the highest levels of

poetic imagination and technical skill. Second, we want poets who are subversive: whose work constitutes a critique of culture, who are in Adrienne Rich's words "disloyal to civilization." For civilization systematically oppresses, excludes, marginalizes and trivializes the female, and privileges values which women not uncommonly feel to be deeply wrong—or, at any rate, deeply partial. If the subversiveness of our mothers has been disguised, as is often the case, by apparent compliance, it is our business as poets and critics to retrieve it. Third, we seek not merely critique but the promise of alternative vision: acts of imagination where-by we might conceive, as it were, the valleys being exalted, the crooked made straight and the rough places plain.

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JOHN WIENERS: TEN POEMS

The following never-before-published poems were written by John Wieners between 1965 and 1984. Some of them will appear in the first volume of *The Collected Poems of John Wieners*, edited by Raymond Foye with a foreword by Allen Ginsberg, to be published by Black Sparrow Press in September 1985. Thanks to Raymond Foye for his kindness in

making these poems available to this Newsletter; thanks also to the Poetry/Rare Books Collection of the State University of New York at Buffalo, through whose courtesy "Time," "December 30," and "No gods, mother, boys, beauty" are published.

—T. D.

There is no wickedness I do not want to invoke
the devil or black magic
commit sacrilege rather

appease the gods who create
a child
shining in light

I will sing songs to him like Brahms
or August lamplight please God
do this for me

holy holy in the moon
in the noon one more time
shine on us and release this

dream to waking. Let
no tears fall. Get up
out of bed & walk to the door

get your clothes on & go into the streets
see the city without
child in your belly it will not hurt you

it is only the moon
that hurts you it will pass
pass by that door marked "death"

& you will live forever in your summer.

No gods, mother, boys, beauty

It's too easy. It begs description.
Defies the gods. Leaves something out
We were listening to, other voices
in the afternoon: Children, birds, ghosts
of the haunted silence. Trucks.

Bells play across Columbus Avenue
I dont know why. We were asleep
In our plan. Another order descended,

we were transmitted to an enchanted plain
where there was reason behind intellect
and we were not commanded by gods, too.

Sonnet Jeannette

Foyer; where the press interviews given
last year resound encouragingly—over
whelmed I stand on a white rug. Papers
stuffed under a foul sweater beneath a
soiled pillow—in make-believe possessed

By Vedanta in the Papal chamber
with memories of Charlemagne
during the coronation attendant
as truth to his chief title spouse
through snow by summer throne room.

The moon our guard, his cabaret child proof
Beauty declines; no! via canonization upon pense

Buds on the Trees

Her kisses never mean the same thing
that's just the way it is
I can't help it

the trap door springs
Oh woman I can't condemn you
nor is this a cop-out
The world knows its two opposite sexes
please forgive me

One minute told me it was you
 But what should I do with my true love?
 The love in my heart is not normal
 Oh to surrender to you
 Is to her hypnosis beyond the points of recognition.
 To seize the drunkenness upon the wind of its action.
 I hate all poets.

To D.

Forgotten what I once loved
 a good haircut and a manicure
 early death, the loneliness

of summer afternoons on apple boughs;
 down the brook up the field.

Before the parch of adolescent love,
 dirty boys together by the stream
 surprised caretakers in what they do

climbing over dams behind
 blind pebbles lane

Under bushes my first come,
 first served forgetting the world
 renaissance at their feet

yearning to be caught, held
 in crushes' obedient trust.

Maine

At last destroyed someone
 so many have destroyed me
 for a short while what happened
 in the trap if accepted

your offer to sleep
 or was it that, a confession
 of frustration, to become a weapon
 against women, their closed womb

temptation to arm myself
 at your side against infidelity,
 thus bring ourselves the discovery

of endless single beds broken blossom.

Metropole

Each silver bead
 each shaken hip
 lips on shadowed stage
 to moonlit lip
 each careful bodice of
 precious gauze
 remains to haunt
 the jaundiced law
 each upturned arm
 fails to find determination
 harmless but fraught
 with discarded frocks
 to ignore that big scene
 of what Papa really was
 in touch with golden locks
 of morning stars.

December 30

1AM

Sitting up by candlelight
 Waiting for the right
 voice to fall across inner ear
 exact image to descend
 and proper object to appear

out of a stream
 rocks rise or reside
 in the middle of dream
 opium shadow curtains hang
 off eyelids, lips parched

(starch on mouth)
 marched in
 a line, refined the mind
 to order's design,
 eyes blind to glass swung
 from stars one stung by the shine.

In dream my mother gave me a blue stone
 it passed through her to Uncle John then
 to grandpa, then to me. A blue stone
 which held blue sea. A diamond which
 flashed a thousand times brighter than any
 star. It caught and held a thousand lights
 which glittered from afar, white as the lights
 in a star sapphire gleamed and glittered
 as diamond streaks on blue heaven's mountain
 peaks.

Ah would that dream come again and touch
 my heart with peace as then, but my eyes
 opened to the sun, and now it's spring still
 the one wish inside myself is to see the blue stone
 light tonight's mystery. My mother rubbed
 the gold and I saw before my eyes the name
 of my grandfather take hold, it's true only his
 initials flamed. Now, the rain falls to times roll
 by. Still, I'll close my eyes to see the sky.

Time

June, then September—life dredges past
 as an avalanche. A week goes by
 in the wink of an eye.

Friendships fall hollow,
 old ghosts remain, carefully tendered
 by the rain.

Streets of the cities, I have walked
 My feet ache from the
 miles, and yet they seem
 a scant pathway to your door; where I sit
 now
 contemplating old dreams that never change.

Old longings never subside; they rise in the breast
 as tides of change that never rest.

This is the only eternity: what exists in the word.

INTELLIGENT KINDNESS

COLLECTED POEMS: 1947-1980 by Allen Ginsberg.
Harper & Row. \$27.50.

by Michael Scholnick

This absorbing text of skillful poetry is arranged in precise chronological order. The affixed dates and consequential specifications of locale add a necessary control, a metaphysic nexus, to the globetrotting wheel of assessments. As a fastidious Mr. Ginsberg suggests in "Author's Preface, Reader's Manual" remarks, this logical motif enables readers to appreciate the collection's autobiographical nature.

I would resist Mr. Ginsberg's wish that the book itself be viewed as a "lifelong poem," however. Though concerns interweave works, the sweeping uniformity of texture, laudably inclusive of all possible variety, nevertheless belies the gaping disparities of success if uncritically considered as a single unit. In fact, the poet's resourcefulness continually graces the more than 800-page volume with surprise. More so then, the element of his dogmatic advice here is irritating.

He would also dictate the journey's poetic peaks, providing a handy list of "strong-breathed" poems which distorts appreciation, not only of the poet's eventful career, but of vaster subtleties. I quite like the visionary intransigence of "September on Jessore Road." "Birdbrain!" is less beautiful, an altogether different cast of mind besides. "Ecologue," a congenial poem depicting with affection the activities of farm life, yet peculiarly haunted by Robespierre and a bleary-eyed psycho-political tract (*Fall 1970*), is an unfortunate omission when compared, for instance, with "The Change." Because it's material coincident with "Howl," why vaunt the inspiration of "The Names?" Rather note "At Apollinaire's Grave," a shoo-in masterpiece full of the specialist's gaudy wit and unchecked, mocking bookishness.

"Wichita Vortex Sutra" is autopoetry, the lovely, ephemeral cadence tape-recorded on the road, transcribed and committed to the page sometime later. The generative breath isn't equivalent to the coarse sonorities of "Plutonian Ode." And, anyway, for the full-bodied peak in this section, turn to the truly adept "War Profit Litany." Again, I rather link to "Kaddish" the reposeful "Fourth Floor, Dawn, Up All Night Writing Letters," than either "Sunflower Sutra" or "Television Was a Baby Crawling Toward That Deathchamber." The popular "America" is missing from the line-up of suggested Greatest Hits. So are "Death to Van Gogh's Ear" and "American Change," both potent works of a heightened consciousness. One is forced to wonder, at least, what poems unlisted are to these designated points antithetical, the purported valleys in this cyclic continuum.

Beginning the body of poems, many solid works shine forth within *Empty Mirror: Gates of Wrath (1947-1952)*, even as Allen has refined those intentions and continued to grow in more recent years. The prolific young poet engages in mature discourses on love's conventions and truth's language that will mark his poetry's persistence and rise. William Burroughs, Herbert Huncke, Carl Solomon had

made their estimable impressions and heavenly Neal Cassady had appeared on the legendary scene. And while A-bomb tests in Nevada were being followed by bad weather in the east, Jack Kerouac transmitted to the intellectual dude a seemly confidence in originality and new directions for the poet's classical ear. Most importantly, along with Robert Creeley, John Wieners, Philip Whalen and Paul Blackburn, among others, Allen Ginsberg's business had been to observe every gnarled advancement in the work of William Carlos Williams.

In several superb poems such as "Walking home at night," and "An Atypical Affair," Ginsberg expresses agonizing feelings of alienation with, somehow, a provocative candor. A chilling humor, too, is in effect. "Two Boys Went Into a Dream Diner" outlines Mankind's accursed predicament of toil and greed and bitterness in a left-wing parable of innocence buried in debt. These graphic, marginally confessional poems, formerly comprising the text of *Empty Mirror*, are the savvy products of tolerant insights into life prompted by self-awareness, concisely unbound. Williams (in '52) praised unstintingly the accessible, crafted speech of the young Jewish Poet, comparing the measured terror and "hidden sweetness" of the poems to Dante Alighieri's pleasing art. He did so in an Introduction to *Empty Mirror*, proudly and pertinently reproduced here in the epic Appendix.

*"Most importantly. . .
Ginsberg's business had been to
observe every gnarled advance-
ment in the work of William
Carlos Williams."*

These same solid compositions, unfortunately, are somewhat marred, not elucidated, in the present volume, interleafed and in context with the entire text of uneven works from *The Gates of Wrath*. Although Ginsberg has recognized and acknowledged the inferiority of these "imperfect literary rhymes," the ms. has remained nevertheless unalterably dear because transfiguring visionary breakthroughs and holy, erotic summits are referred to. "Many Loves," belonging to this uncommon spiritual category, a heretofore uncirculated tidal wave of a recollection, was written in 1956 and isn't found until Section III. Any number of these haltingly simplistic early efforts, however, bogged down with a trite, personal symbolism, might have been excised totally from the *Collected Poems* without loss or, perhaps, relegated to the Appendix. Though the new order valuably juxtaposes disparate, but unequally successful styles, the insistence comprises even the wise author's good taste and will surely alarm a hearty swatch of respectable poetry consumers. Quibbling aside, the necessity is clearly established at the onset, around the boundaries of the present text, for a cautiously edited *Selected Poems* to pin down more assuredly the bedrock mass of inscrutable marvels thus far wrought.

The book's centerpiece is "Kaddish." Studious and ecstatic, an abstract, in-depth psalm addressed beyond appearances to the grave, it tells the story of Naomi Ginsberg, the poet's mother, her plight in America (watching Capitalists in white furs and diamonds take seats at the Met), the family's interrelationships, her decades of madness.

There, rest. No more suffering for you. I know where
you've gone, it's good.

Moreover, a concise, clean autobiographical portrait of Allen's existence is presented. A philosophical bent is whetted by the burdensome loss and by the futility of Naomi's defiance. These lines thunder to the very core of immortality.

Myself, anyhow, maybe as old as the universe—and I
guess that dies with us—enough to cancel all that
comes—What came is gone forever every time—

Naomi's scandalized ravings and tortured sorrows are imbedded in the prophetic poet's alternating current of calm, declarative shapeliness, sanity, description, acceptance, and, elsewhere, pain-ridden grandiosity.

Dreaming back thru life, Your time—and mine
accelerating toward Apocalypse,
the final moment—the flower burning in the Day—and
what comes after. . .

Ranging in imagination constantly between dramatized remembrance, highly intuitive and minute psychological conjecture ("every noise hurt—dreams of the creaks of Wall Street—"), the long poem's unmistakable beauty is lodged in the degree of emotive music overlaying and bearing in upon the rhythmic diversity of the involved and un-wavering narrative thrust.

Nothing beyond what we have—what you had—that so
pitiful—yet Triumph,
to have been here, and changed, like a tree, broken, or
flower—fed to the ground—but mad, with its petals,
colored, thinking Great Universe, shaken, cut in the
head, leaf stript, hid in an egg crate hospital, cloth
wrapped, sore—freaked in the moon brain, Naughtless.

A single day's world of grief was imprinted on Allen's powerful mind when, aged 12, he took responsibility for Naomi's paranoia and shepherded her on an aggravating journey of busrides to a furnished Rest Home "on a long dead street filled with crickets and poison ivy" at dusk. He rode home "sunk in a seat" through New Jersey ("Bayonne preparing for World War II") in torpor, depressed and exhausted, fateful head spinning with passionate vows. Father Louis worried, disapproved of Allen's decision. For Naomi, the following afternoon began three years in the madhouse. Home again, she sat on the new couch by the front window, suspicious of Roosevelt, "picking her tooth with her nail." She'd read the "book of Poe" to Allen. See in the Appendix the 1940 photograph of Allen, Naomi, and Louis at the New York World's Fair. She's adjusting her hat, girlish, the other hand wearing black glove holding a folded newspaper or map. Allen's embracing a philosophical-looking Louis with his left arm and clownishly standing on the pedestal of the background statue, resting his right arm on a stone shoulder. "Metrazol had made her fat." She lived in Manhattan for a time while Allen attended Columbia. But the decline was steady; she saw Hitler's mustache in the sink and removed to the Bronx to live with sister Elanor and brother-in-law Max. "Ah Rochambeau Ave. . . here these communist sisters lost their revolution." Along the line,

Allen swore to illuminate Mankind, nimbly recording the endless message of the entire Universe. While Death came to Naomi's hospital solitude and rejoined her to Creation.

Ginsberg's purely poetic appeal is a complex matter. The late Edwin Denby, being interviewed and without much ado, perhaps momentarily a trifle piqued, allowed no comparison between Ginsberg's magnanimity and fame and John Ashbery's evolving pertinaciousness. But he elaborated the issue, pointing out that Ginsberg is invaluable as an historian whose accurate perceptions will be useful generations from now. Indeed, this function, in tune with deeper, less concrete intents, creates an heroic niche Mr. Ginsberg has cultivated admirably. The imperious Times Square dreamer is a forebearing activist, in correspondence with C.D. Sulzberger and dining with Richard Helms. See the appendix's riveting and definitive notes on United Fruit and Karma. The vigilance is in earnest; he wants to inspire reform. "Television concentrates its blue/flicker of death in the frontal lobe" and Ginsberg retaliates, facing the nation, antagonistic to "petrochemical witches' blood boiling underground." And "Billion year old leaf plates become inert matter/Plastic particles mixed/with living cells in the Walleyed/Pike's retina." The strange scribbblings entertain remarkably well with their indelicate additives and "pesticides that round food Chains revolve." Surely, future Woodwards, Bernsteins and Mark Lanes will read and devour the XXth Century information ferreted out and wrathfully publicized in "Hadda Be Playing on the Jukebox." He raises the ephemeral news to mandalic proportions and faithfully partakes in the image without hesitation. These thoughts coursing through his fearless brain act to preserve a culture's moral conscience.

Often, though, insuperably flawed accounts disappoint; the artist's hard-won craft is being sacrificed. I appreciate the strengths of spontaneous composition. The cataclysmic adherence to the principle of "First thought, best thought," however, seems better taken as advice on how to get dressed in the morning than as a creative method. "Strotras to Kali Destroyer of Illusions" slowly drags and thuds along, an abysmal yawp of a poem, all told, no matter its bloody raiment of skulls and precious associations. Ginsberg mentions in the preface that in the present volume a "half-dozen foggy adjectives" were eliminated. Though I find "Contest of Bards" no table for certain lengthy passages of pure description, perhaps one more adjective from this line could be added to the list: "Your voice you've heard naked and hard commanding arrogant, pale dandied. . ." Perhaps not. This type of proliferation, though, is habitual and needs attention. Line numbers in margins would help considerably.

"Journal Night Thoughts" is a controlled, demonic extravagance. Still, I'd direct the reader's consideration to a specific part.

The cat vomited his canned food with a
mix of inch-long worms
mix
mix of inch-long
I threw it in the garbage bag aghast—
cockroach crawls up the bath tub Yosemite wall,
rust in the hot water faucet, a sweet smell
in the mouldy chicken soup,
and little black beings in the old bag of flour
on the pantry shelf last week

Ginsberg's interjection of E. California bath tub wall, syn-

chronizing and making apparent vast simultaneities of occurrence, illustrates a blissful, panoramic effect he usually depends on with patented flair. It's an effect, by the way, that Dante employs regularly. Here it's a bit superfluous. "Black Magicians screaming in anger Newark to Algiers, / How many bottles & can piled up in our garbage pail?"; "Executives with Country Houses— / Waters drip thru Ceilings in the Slub—"; and, "what shines on old hospitals—as on my yard," do better.

So there are countless waves or traits, to savor. He's the angelic elegist. Taking arms against an impersonal sea, it's Allen Ginsberg whose "Elegy Che Guevara" commemorates the slain doctor-warrior's singular deeds, the one petulant soldier "turned aside from operating room / or healing Pampas yellow eye / To face the stock rooms of Alcoa, . . . To go mad & hide in jungle on mule & point rifle at OAS." Somewhat obstructed by repetition and written under the influence of Pound in Venice, the contrast in the poem between sexual adoration of the radiant corpse, face "photo'd eyes opened," and the piercing, finger-pointing denunciation of criminal money-law-electric networks, works in the tenderest manner to honor the Argentinean's smiling dignity. In "To Aunt Rose," Louis Ginsberg's sister is remembered, a ghost walking still, collecting donations at Spanish loyalist fundraisers, limping down a dark hall "on the running carpet / past the black grand piano / in the day room."

Father Louis' old age and death, too, are subjects handled with fond, stoic success in two poems with the same title, "Don't Grow Old" and "Don't Grow Old." In 1978, in the latter work, Allen recalls a visit Louis made to Naropa Institute as a fellow-poet a few years previously.

Guests after supper on the mountainside
we admired the lights of Boulder spread glittering below
through a giant glass window—
After coffee, my father bantered wearily
"Is life worth living? Depends on the liver—"
The Lama smiled to his secretary—
It was an old pun I'd heard in childhood.
Then he fell silent, looking at the floor
and sighed, head bent heavy
talking to no one—
"What can you do . . . ?"

"Memory Gardens," a lament for the famous novelist in his grave at Lowell, is deservedly celebrated. The subways run, but "Jack no more'll step off at Penn Station / anonymous erranded, eat sandwich / & drink beer near New Yorker Hotel or walk / under the shadow of Empire State." And, "Has the battle been won?" the crying poet asks Neal Cassady, accepting the lonely spirit, "world left standing empty, buses roaring through streets." Nearly equal to Kerouac's pull on the mature Ginsberg was the golden heart and chattering tongue of Frank O'Hara, "Poet of building-glass," curator of "funny emotions to the mob." "City Midnight Junk Strains" pays significant tribute to that importance with its helplessly imitative opening line so ponderous and breezy: "Switch on lights yellow as the sun / in the bedroom . . ." Around 1951 they met in the Cedar Bar and over mutual interests—the Living Theatre and Gregory Corso's Poetry—they became fast associates. Mutual respect, of course, was in no short supply between these enormous talents born in 1926; the poetic transferences were mutual. Ginsberg certainly encouraged O'Hara's movement towards a tangy surface of plainness, while in

"My Alba," 1953, O'Hara's tingling, internal amplification comes through the ladder of Ginsberg's deft phrases and enjambments of tone. For Allen, the moment emerges full-force during 1963, recovering from a slump which followed "Kaddish," in the inspired poetry of "Morning," "Waking in New York," "Today," with its three pages of details, and the hilarious "I Am a Victim of Telephone."

Unabashed homosexuality, at least since 1955 on the West Coast, has always been a major component of Allen's cosmology. Now America can delight in his manifold loves and longings, the honest, male-breast worship. "Many Loves," "Please Master," and "Come All Ye Brave Boys," are charged, respectively, with an ideal passion, immeasurable prurient appeal, and joyous consent. It's not all taxis and orgasms, though. Ever-present disillusion fills the years with remorse: "My heart hurt me much in youth." But these confessions further demonstrate a near-perfect lucidity. Yet I do become impatient with the seductive claim that beneath our eyes and skins we're all the same person.

Finally, Allen's version of the William Carlos Williams mode of ordinary speech, "the variable measure of nervous systematics," a sequence of thought-forms passing through the mind, the poem returning to the physical moment, proves a secure and flexible one. It's found strong in "Sakyamuni Coming Our from the Mountain," a very fine poem composed in the New York Public Library, and in the unaffected diaristic ease of "Havana 1953." "Dream Record: June 8, 1955," displays a syntactic tautness reminiscent of the wily Pediatrician at his orneriest. Coming to the unrhymed quatrains of "Garden State" (1979), an incredible work mixing the trolleys that trammed through Newark with the Data Terminal on Route 40, we confirm his resilient indomitability. When the kaleidoscopic excesses are curbed by a thematic emotion, Allen Ginsberg's art soars on diamond wings. Such refinement is most effectively accomplished in several aforementioned works, the recent "Grim Skeleton," "Manhattan May Day Midnight," and the whimsically poignant "Eroica." The following is merely brief enough to quote in full.

Fourth Floor, Dawn, Up All Night Writing Letters

Pigeons shake their wings on the copper roof
out my window across the street, a bird perched on the cross
surveys the city's blue-gray clouds. Larry Rivers
'll come at 10 A.M. and take my picture. I'm taking
your picture, pigeons. I'm writing you down, Dawn.
I'm immortalizing your exhausts, Avenue A bus.
O Thought, now you'll have to think the same thing forever!
New York June 7, 1980, 6:48 A.M.

"White Shroud," a long poem mentioned in a footnote in the course of the Preface and published this past year in the New York Times Magazine, continues in this rich vein of excitement. The present publication's designed with invisible finesse, adding to the quality of the product. The memorable jacket is alluring, bright red, gold, black with a geometrically-squared illustration by Harry Smith reproducing an incision in the form of three intra-eyed fish placed somewhere in one of Buddha's footprints. An up-to-the-minute Author's photo by Robert Frank rounds out the package.



T.S. ELIOT: A LIFE by Peter Ackroyd. Simon & Schuster. \$24.95.

Unless more is subsequently learned about the matter, it can now be asserted definitively that the most T.S. Eliot and Gloria Vanderbilt could be said to have in common is that both, after long suffering, achieved the distinction of winding up "happy at last." I have no idea whether Ms. V. has remained rapturous enough to this day for the assertion of her recent biographer to remain true. But according to Peter Ackroyd in his superlative *T.S. Eliot: A Life*, in the last years of his life, Eliot was able to enjoy a species of happiness with his second wife, Valerie, which his own aloof and austere temperament, profound melancholy at the seeming collapse of Western civilization, and first marriage to a madwoman had long denied him.

Though the title of Ackroyd's final chapter, "Happy at Last," smacks slightly of the smarmily sentimental, by the time one has gotten that far in the recounting of Eliot's life and career it seems entirely earned. Eliot was not what you would call a fun guy. He suffered throughout his life from what he himself called *aboulie*—a loss of will deriving from a Greek word meaning "irresolution"—which Ackroyd defines as "a withdrawal into negative coldness, with an attendant loss of mental vigor and physical energy." Especially during the first seven years after his marriage to Vivien in 1915, when "The Waste Land" and other now famous poems were completed, the state of Eliot's nerves and health was so precarious that, for me, the question arises as to how he ever managed to get any work done at all. Suffering from anemia (he had, allegedly, the thinnest blood his physician had ever seen) and forced from a relatively early age to wear a truss because of a congenital hernia, he was in and out of spas and sanitoria almost as often as Vivien. The sense of physical and spiritual exhaustion which suffuses so much of Eliot's work—"Prufrock" and "Gerontion," for example, to say nothing of old Tiresias with his "wrinkled dug" in "The Waste Land"—clearly derives from Eliot's own lack of physical vitality. And Vivien herself was even more afflicted, not only with severe emotional problems, but also an irregular and over-frequent menstrual flow which caused her acute distress. Partially as a result of their bodily idiosyncracies, which seem to have inspired in both an abhorrence of intimate contact, the mutually ailing Eliots were monumentally unsuited for each other sexually. Ackroyd convincingly claims, however, that there is nothing in Eliot's aversion to the flesh to suggest that he was a homosexual, as some have claimed over the years.

Ackroyd is equally convincing in showing that Eliot and Vivien were not entirely incompatible in other aspects of their marriage, at least at first. Her editorial hand is in evidence in some of his manuscripts, and Eliot seems to have closely depended on her for advice and criticism. Nevertheless, the central drama of their relationship—which is chronicled here in clean, efficient yet always compassionate prose—is the series of slow and inexorable movements toward Eliot's painful decision to leave Vivien in 1933.

During that period, Eliot was becoming entrenched in British letters and life, a position he solidified in 1927 by becoming a British citizen and converting to Anglo-Catholicism. As editor of the influential magazine *Criterion*, and then as editor of poetry for Faber & Gwyer (later Faber & Faber), he rapidly acquired an extraordinary power which

ultimately enabled him to impose his personal tastes on the poets and poetic styles which would dominate English writing for the greater part of this century. Vivien, meanwhile, was becoming unhinged. As Eliot's fame as a poet, critic, editor, and all-round "cultural magus" grew, she came to feel less and less a part of his life. Earlier, she had been diagnosed as suffering from what at the time was called (quaintly yet probably accurately) "moral insanity." Now, she began to act even more strangely. Her illnesses became more frequent. In public, the husband and wife were observed directing "streams of hatred" at each other. While Eliot tried to avoid going out with Vivien, there was almost inevitably a "scene" when they did. And though her increasingly erratic behavior presages some of the reasons she was eventually to spend the last years of her life in a mental institution, Ackroyd repeatedly makes the point that her actions were "not a sign of madness... merely of desperation."

Retreating more and more from Vivien—withdrawing into his work and his newfound religious faith (which, Ackroyd says, he placed around himself "like a carapace")—an agonized Eliot finally decided before he left on a lecture tour of America in 1932 that, when he returned, it would not be to his wife. After the separation, Vivien managed to convince herself for several years that Eliot would come back to her. She signed her Christmas cards "From Mr and Mrs T.S. Eliot." She even placed a testy-sounding (and probably highly embarrassing to Eliot) advertisement in *The Times*. "Will T.S. Eliot please return to his home 68 Clarence Gate Gardens which he abandoned Sept. 17th 1932." But Eliot's decision was irrevocable.

While Vivien fumed and deteriorated, Eliot took up solitary residence in the presbytery of St. Stephen's church in London. His choice of such a living situation perhaps reflected not only his desire for penitent seclusion after the failure of his marriage, but also the compulsion for order, orthodoxy, and certainty which led him to turn to the Church in the first place and which, in turn, was coming increasingly to characterize both his creative and critical work. Ackroyd describes Eliot as a chameleon, mimicking in theatrical fashion the forms and conventions of an environment to which he wished to belong. And at St. Stephens, Eliot almost certainly found reinforcement for the role of moralist in the criticism of literature and culture which he had been refining for several years. The company of priests, Ackroyd notes, "had become congenial"—so much so, in fact, that Eliot was said to look very much like a businessman in church, very much like a cleric in business. The bravura tone of moral authority which suffuses his critical writings, and the incantatory music of his poetry from "Ash Wednesday" through "Four Quartets," have, indeed, contributed to the impression of Eliot as a kind of secular "priest" of art—an impression which Eliot, who despite personal setbacks was a superb manager of his own career, obviously cultivated.

Apart from its "revelations" about Eliot's first marriage—some of them dramatized, one gathers, in the recent play, *Tom and Viv*—Ackroyd's biography, as meticulously researched and well written as it is, uncovers little that was not already known, in broad terms, about Eliot. There is, however, an on-the-mark analysis of how Eliot's early reputation was made by critics in the academies who latched upon Eliot's free appropriation of Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and other "classic" writers in his work because it

gave them something to explicate in poetry which was otherwise alien to them. Ackroyd also respectfully suggests that much of Eliot's seeming erudition was simply a bluff to impress or intimidate, and that the pompousness of some of his essays merely covers up how muddled or contradictory many of his ideas actually were. And while the second half of Eliot's life contains far less of the *sturm und drang* of the earlier years—he had become, by his forties, the most well-known poet of the day, and on one remarkable occasion delivered a lecture to a packed football stadium, no less—Ackroyd does a good job showing that Eliot was not quite the cold, ossified public figure many people considered him to be and that, in most respects, his personal anxieties and search for something to believe in mirrored to a “clairvoyant” extent those of his time. Still, until his second marriage, to Valerie Fletcher in 1957, Eliot's life was singularly arid and lonely. Add to this the fact that he did not appear to derive particular pleasure from any of the accolades of greatness laid upon him (for example, he is surprised, but mostly bored, when he learns he has won the Nobel Prize) and you have a cautionary lesson to those whose ambitions tend in a similar direction.

—Donald Britton

At the Pathmark Counter

1.

I want to know the fragrance of *reseda*
On what day were owls made
and the admission charge to Malraux's
Le musee imaginaire de la sculpture mondiale

What amusement. I am holding two boxes
of sanitary napkins and trying not feel
conspicuous amongst the little old ladies
and taxi drivers buying cigarettes.

2.

here it is Spring again!
The counter girls explained
the seasonal significance
when they instantly recognized
the actor recently murdered
on ALL MY CHILDREN
They said nice things to him
and did not giggle (this is
New York City)
he was a little embarrassed
and a little pleased.

After he and his girlfriend
escaped to the dust and glass of Broadway
one girl turned to the other and said
“He's really nice. He gave his girl-
friend a diamond. Did you see it?”
Yes, says her counter mate. But
I'd like to meet the guy who plays
Mark. He's really good looking!”

and as the first girl rang up my
purchases, I thought quite gleefully,
so would I.

So would I.

—Patricia Jones

I AM NOT A JUVENILE DELINQUENT, Jerome Sala, Stare Press, 1480 West Webster, Chicago IL. \$5.00

In a way over which he appears to have no control—dragged whimpering up Mount Parnassus by an unseen power—Jerome Sala is becoming some kind of great poet. He isn't there yet, but the vector from his rude, crude, delicious first book, *Spaz Attack*, through this similarly jarring but far more supple one is hard to miss. Apart from a wonderful rhythmic resourcefulness, his technique remains crude; and he has found no new way out of the poetic-prose / prose-verse dilemma we are all mired in. The main improvement is a matter of depth, of sudden, between-the-lines abysses into which feeling tumbles with a gasp. And what is poetic greatness but a stamina for such tumbles, a crazy lack of the rational wisdom that falling down can hurt you?

When we last saw him, in *Spaz Attack*, Sala was a drunken punk screaming at rock-concert audiences: the spectacle entertaining, the prognosis poor. In this book—since we are fated, always, to know everything about his life—we meet a shakily sober Sala. The somewhat enfeebled personal precisely underlines a suspicion that something divine is going on here, because the language is so imperiously alive—as if poetry couldn't care less what shape poor Jerome is in, having its seigneurial uses for him.

Writing breakneck and headlong, Sala never pauses to get bearings and is almost never lost. His Mayakovskian associative process (everything crisscrossing in an inside-out, public-sectored “I”) arrives on the page at a steady, unflappable rate, a democratic velocity that is the most astonishing thing about this book. The tone of his through-line may be treble-register, slight, and reedy, but if you stood in its way it would flatten you.

Even more impressive, if only for its promise so far, is the flickering appearance of an egoless dead-seriousness, a tone with moral weight: the unseen power in total command, ventriloquizing through dummy Jerome. The matters are Op Ed staples—culture, religion, war—wizened for lack of the juices that great poetry taps. With a little spurt here and a little spurt there, Sala excites a large thirst.

—Peter Schjeldahl

BOOKS RECEIVED

From Alfred A. Knopf: *Facing Nature* by John Updike (\$13.95); *Henry Purcell in Japan* by Mary Jo Salter (\$13.95, \$6.95 paper); *The Unlovely Child* by Norman Williams (\$13.95, \$6.95 paper); *Assumptions* by Marilyn Hacker (\$14.95, \$8.95 paper).

Collected Poems by William Corbett. National Poetry Foundation, 305 EM Building, University of Maine, Orono ME 04469.

The Curse of the Drawn-In Infield by Carl Schurer. In Camera, Detroit, \$7.95. Order from Bookslinger, 213 E. 4th Street, St. Paul MI 55101. (Photographs from the official photographer of the Lines: New Writing Program at the Detroit Institute of the Arts.)

The Commander of Dead Leaves: A Dream Collection by Stanley Noyes. Tooth of Time Books, 634 East Garcia, Santa Fe NM 87501. \$6.00.

The Writing Business: A Poets & Writers Handbook by the Editors of CODA: *Poets & Writers Newsletter*. Dist. by Pushcart Press / W. W. Norton & Co., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010. \$11.95. (Anecdotal, chatty treasury of practical advice for writers, culled from the pages of CODA. Though neither as systematic nor as comprehensive as one might expect a “handbook” to be, it's still a must-read for writers who are serious about their careers.)

Writing/Talks, edited by Bob Perelman, Southern Illinois University Press, P.O. Box 3697, Carbondale IL 62901. n. p. i. (Bernstein, Watten, Hejninian, Harryman, and plenty more. . . selections from talks delivered by writers in the San Francisco Bay area from 1981 through 1984.)

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This Month's Readers

Wednesday, May 1: **Reed Bye** and **Helena Hughes**. Reed Bye lives in Boulder Colorado, where he edits Rocky Ledge Cottage Editions and teaches at the Naropa Institute. His books of poems include *Some Magic at the Dump*, *Border Theme*, and the forthcoming *Heart's Bestiary*. Helena Hughes hails from Bristol, England. She is the author of *Kiss My Lips*, and has collaborated with James Schuyler on *Collabs* and the forthcoming novel *In County Wexford*.

Thursday, May 2: poet Anne Waldman will speak on "What Takes," as part of The Poetry Project's talks series coordinated by Charles Bernstein.

Anne Waldman, former artistic director of The Poetry Project, is an internationally-known poet, editor and performer. She currently directs the Poetics Program at the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado.

Monday, May 6: Open reading. Free.

Wednesday, May 8: **Bernadette Mayer**. Former artistic director of The Poetry Project, Bernadette Mayer is one of America's foremost writers of experimental poetry and prose. Her ten books include *Studying Hunger*, *The Golden Book of Words*, and *Utopia*, which appeared last year.

Monday, May 13: **Murat Nemet-Nejat** and **Catherine Texier**. Murat Nemet-Nejat is a Turkish-American poet and translator. A collection of his poems, *The Bridge*, was published in England; his translations have appeared in *The Penguin Anthology of Turkish Verse*. Catherine Texier, a writer from France, has published fiction both in English and in French. Her novel, *Chlor L'Atlantique*, appeared in France in 1983; she is currently co-editor of *Between C & D* magazine.

Wednesday, May 15: **Steve Levine** and **Carl Rakosi**. Steve Levine lives in New York; his books of poems include *A Blue Tongue*, *Three Numbers*, *Pure Notations*, and the forthcoming *The Cycles of Heaven*. Carl Rakosi was a prominent Objectivist Poet in the 1930s. Following a twenty-five-year long silence, he began writing again in 1968. His books include *Amulet*, *Ex Cranium*, *Night*, and the forthcoming *Collected Poems*.

Sunday, May 19: **A Celebration and Reading of Children's Verse in America**. This celebration, co-sponsored by Oxford University Press, features poets Donald Hall, Eve Merriam, John Ciardi, Mary Ann Hoberman, and special surprise guests. 3 p.m. Adults \$3.00, children free.

Monday, May 20: **Carolee Schneemann**. Carolee Schneemann is one of the best-known performance artists in America. Her books include *Cezanne*, *She Was a Painter* and *More than Meat Joy: Notations and Performance Works*. She will read project slides in a selection from her latest Image/Test, "Next: Rising Fractions."

Wednesday, May 22: **Akua Lezli Hope**, **Patricia Jones**, and **Marie Ponsot**. Akua Lezli Hope is a widely anthologized and published poet. She edits *New Heat*, a Black literary magazine. Patricia Jones is the author of *Mythologizing Always*. Widely published and anthologized, she participated in the Heresies Collective's "Mothers, Mags and Movie Stars" exhibit at the New Museum, helped organize the American Writers Congress and Artists Call, and is currently Program Coordinator at The Poetry Project. Marie

Ponsot, one of the first poets published by Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights Books, is also the author of *Admit Impediment*.

Monday, May 27: "**tentatively a convenience**" and **Lynn Swanson**. "tentatively a convenience" is a performance artist, composer, and filmmaker from Baltimore. Lynn Swanson, performance artist, will premiere "Well Helen," the third in her trilogy of mordant updates on mythological heroines.

Wednesday, May 29: **Maggie Dubris** and **Jeff Wright**. Maggie Dubris, a Georgia native, was called "the true voice of the contemporary South" by Tennessee Williams. Former co-editor of KOFF, one of the East Village's livelier literary mags, she currently plays guitar in a band called Lulu Revue. Jeff Wright's books include *Employment of the Apes*, *Take Over*, and the forthcoming *All in All*. He publishes poetry postcards from Hard Press, writes a column for the *East Village Eye*, and is a playwright whose drama about Sir Thomas Wyatt, *The Disciples of Distress*, was recently staged at Darinka.

All readings begin at 8 p.m. in the Parish Hall of St. Mark's Church, unless otherwise indicated. Admission \$3.00. Your poetry hosts and hostesses: Wednesdays, Eileen Myles and Patricia Jones; Mondays, Chris Kraus and Marc Nasdor.

The Poetry Project's Writing Workshops continue, free of charge, each week in the Parish Hall. Tuesdays at 7: Workshop led by Alice Notley. Fridays at 7: Workshop led by Dennis Cooper.

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