

## The Poetry Project Turns 20

by Eileen Myles

### Little Did I Know in 1974

when I stepped into the office of St. Mark's Church and asked to look at some of their records that I would be remembering that moment at all 12 years later. I was an assistant to a history professor at Queens College. We were doing a study of the political make-up of the East Village in 1910, and armed with a map of the neighborhood at that time, my job was to go into every church, boy's club, Polish club, Democrat club, clinic and library that was still standing and ask to see any lists they had of who their members were sixty-four years ago. My professor's idea was that a real political portrait of the neighborhood could be obtained by studying the social mix (ethnic, religious etc.) of those organizations.

What I discovered in St. Marks' files was that a "Poetry Project" existed in this church, and I subsequently went to a reading by Aram Saroyan, who confused me because he read from a novel that implied that he was famous, but I had never heard of him. There seemed to be similar events going on in the back room on the next night I came, but I couldn't understand why the guy was so serious, why it was so brightly lit, what people were laughing at, how come nobody seemed to want to make me pay, was I actually welcome? I stumbled into a workshop one night run by someone with extremely long curly hair. Again, it seemed kind of serious and political, and I thought it didn't seem like someplace I belonged. I came to the New Year's reading in '75, and I couldn't get in.

But I came back and heard Ron Padgett, and Bill Zavatsky, James Tate and Bill Knott. The all-maleness of the place was intimidating, yet I liked the poems I heard, though the sound system wasn't too good. Finally, in '75 I showed up at Paul Violi and Bill Zavatsky's workshops and by now I had dropped out of school "for good" and admired the atmosphere of drop-in scholarship. Despite the fact that there was no formal procedure to keep you in or out, a group emerged--Mike Sappol, Maggie DuBris, Richard Bandanza, Rachel Walling, David Wojnarowicz. Paul Violi encouraged us to find poets we liked from the past like the black-hearted Italians from the 16th Century that he so loved, poets who would inspire us into new areas of complaint. Bill Zavatsky came in with a shining stack of new books each week. I remember Reznikoff and Nicanor Parra, and the books Bill's press published--

Ron Padgett's Toujour L'Amour with the pre-conceived ink spot on the page, and Bill urged us all to go out and start our own magazines and at least five of us from that workshop did so. And we published a workshop magazine, Life Without Parole.

What I admire today about the Poetry Project is that it still works. I met a performer last night in the xerox place and she told me that she was going to Alice Notley's Saturday afternoon workshop and she saw a tape of Charles Olson reading which she said "changed her life," and a third woman in the xerox shop went, "Oh, where's this?" and then we all exchanged flyers and I came back here feeling that the Poetry Project allows people

The Poetry Project is not great because Patti Smith started here, or because Yoko Ono was in a benefit, or because we are the living canon, or the poetry revival is right around the corner, so you better start watching now. We're not the only show in town, but we are the only show like this. For twenty years the version of American poetry authorized by those who make it, gets play here.

Believe it or not, some people consider that dangerous. The time of "access" is drawing to a close, and "quality" is on its way, as if quality is not what people need access to. I was not much of a hippie in 1966, when the Poetry Project began. I was 16--I guess I could have been a runaway. For me, 60's nostalgia means looking back and forward, hopefully, to the persistence, and even proliferation of idealistically structured organizations. A "poetry project" should exist in every town and city in this country, like libraries, or public gardens. The making of new language is an aspect of human freedom, and an endangered one.



Photo by Gene Bagnato

New Year's Benefit 85

access to a culture that's not commonly available in commercial venues, or in University settings.

The Poetry Project is a brave model of community in a culture that's rapidly being ripped away from any primary sources of information, or original sources of knowledge. In my years around the Poetry Project and the "poetry scene" in general, I've learned things which seem obvious, yet considering the position of poetry at this time in history, things which bear repeating. Poets are artists, and most poets are scholars, though un-affiliated, and often the productions of their scholarship are poems, rather than papers. Poets are often the people most able to think about language as something they experience, and "make," rather than reducing it, or recognizing it only as a tool.

"What is it?" is so often the reaction to real language because most writing is directed somewhere else. "Harry Houdini was not an escape artist, he was a man on his way!" said Patti Smith in an early reading here, just before she exploded into song.

### In 1985

the Poetry Project's grant from the National Endowment was cut from \$50,000 to \$20,000. To keep our readings and workshops and performances afloat we are asking poets and performers to donate their talents to our New Year's Day benefit. In February we are holding an art auction, thanks to the generosity of visual artists who support us, and a Rock Benefit is projected for the spring.

Still, we think the Endowment needs input from individuals who believe that the Poetry Project does directly support the artist, hence it supports the development of American poetry, and provides the public with access to that art. The Endowment gives grants of \$20,000 to individual poets, and in 1985 began supporting University presses for the first time. These two kinds of support are stated as priorities, and the validity of Literary Centers, which the Poetry Project is, is under examination. We believe the Poetry Project's significance is established by the artistic quality of our programming and the fact that 15,000 Americans use our programs annually. Write your congressman in support of poetry, the Poetry Project, and the category of Literary Center. The Endowment needs to be convinced that Literary Centers are suppliers of quality art. If you prefer write directly to Frank Conroy, head of the Literature Division, National Endowment For The Arts/1100 Pennsylvania Avenue NW/The Nancy Hanks Center/ Washington D.C. 20506.

# Of Brass Monkeys and Oat Hoofs

## Popular Fiction

by James Sherry  
Roof Books/New York  
\$6.00

**M**y favorite bookweight-to hold pages open when I need to refer to specific text is the three no evil monkeys, brass plate over basemetal: the three little crouched deniers are holding open the pages of Popular Fiction, as I review the notes I made as I read, identifying the popular fiction forms he had employed. "What grammatical must rhetorical would." sez Sherry in "Fleecing." The term popular ought to be in quotes. I've written 'philosophical meditation' on "West Indies Exercise Book," for example. Worse: I've written "the noun-making urge in American speech" on "Dis-internment." I should start at some sort of beginning.

It's a bedrock piece of received wisdom, something 'everybody knows,' that there are two choices open to 20th Century writers, both of them, at 20th fin de siecle, well-worn as well as well known: One can either address the stuff of language itself, since, if writing is about words, then language is the material, as painting is about paint, and a subject is not 'what happens' but 'what', OR one can remain within the conventions of 19th Century language—that is, using language as vehicle—maintaining "a normal relation between grammar and content" and tell the new, the modern story, "the details of uncertainty." (The words in quotes are James Sherry's. I haven't assumed he's concerned about these things; his pages are riddled within.)



James Sherry at St. Mark's Church

Photo by Sharon Guynup

Do you worry about either/or propositions? I suspect Sherry does. He's too agile, too slippery not to rattle the cage. He's modern (a.k.a.) paranoid; of course he suspects that an unlikely oddball, or even a whole gang of folks who never heard the proposition, might kick out a hole with some unimaginable boot. (It might have already happened while you're sitting there believing it's all over.) But it hasn't happened here, in these works. Perhaps, at bottom, Sherry's too orthodox not to believe the bars are steel.

Perhaps a genuine theorist, which I am not, might make the case that poaching forms is unlikely ever to produce anything more than some form of parody.

"Don't take these adventures for anything but exactly what they say," Sherry says. There's no doubting his intelligence, nor the seriousness of the quandry he addresses, nor his awareness of it. At least, I think he addresses it. For me to say "not enough" is a shabby complaint when what is here is what the writer wants it to be. He says so.

Is all this work tongue in cheek, then? The 19th Century travel literature, 1930's comic books, ad slogans, soap operas, ethnic epics, science fiction, the (of course) detective novels—all here done up and done in? (But none of it, let's tell the truth, is remotely popular. James Mitchner is popular.)

Is Sherry's tongue so far in his cheek it protrudes through his cheek skin? What's a reader to do with a composition that contains—in the five word sentence section of its merry upward progression—"I like rain and sex" next to "Steno rye on a slip?" I'm talking about simple dictionary meanings, not associations. Three of those five words are enough to set me blithering. Rye, for one, which—grass, grain, bread, whiskey or a male gypsy. Let's not even start with slip. (Do you do it, wear it, plant it, tie a boat in it, or just forget it?) This is outrageous.

I hate it. It's terrific. But I've already spent so much time playing games with these five, these ten, and I'm off and running on my own; unless I deliberately put a brake on my brains, I've forgotten all about Sherry, and his architecture, I'm only listening to myself. "Oaf hoof" jumps off the page at me. "Oaf hoof"—I'm off. It's a problem. The entire line reads: "Oaf hoof. Enclosed suction. Involved dust." (See page 28, and believe me, there are a lot more lines on that page.) If I don't set up my brass monkeys again, I'll never stop wandering. Is this a problem only I have? It doesn't matter, it's a problem to anyone who is romantic enough to believe that something happens when you read.

You can spend your time here; it might take more than you meant to spend—but does something happen? Should you take this seriously? You won't be bored, in spite of finding yourself stranded now and again. I think you may be a fool if you trust it. And it's a bit like an encounter with a Sacher torte: you need a plain brisk walk in the fresh air after.

It is, no matter what else, serious in this respect: it operates successfully in limbo. I happen to think you can't think your way out of a problem; something more visceral has to happen. And I don't want to be Sherry's victim, in any event; this is a matter of disagreement more than it is a matter of criticism. The paradox is that I'm interested in reading this work. Provoked. Beguiled. Gulled?

What's a serious artist to do in an insensible time? Poach for congruence? The court of all appeals is instant appeal. I'm as attracted by an instant appeal as any of my fellow consumers, I'm as spoiled by it. I think of Keith Haring—who plays his work out with a vocabulary of four, maybe five elements. Those limits serve to make him instantly recognizable (a marketing must) as well as accessible. He's Popular! But Sherry's got the vocabulary of a life-long hoarder, not to mention acquaintance with a history of form he doesn't ignore—all those words, words by the bin, words attached to sources like pearl is attached to the grit of its origin....

Popular Fiction opts for the available proposition that writing is about words, and is chronically subverted by the words themselves, and by Sherry's considerable ebullient skill, and by his erudition. He can have his readers on in a twinkling. Does that in itself fuel the rage under the layers of words? The truths and the falsehoods that shimmer side by side?

by Martha King



SWINBURNE, RECITING POETRY OVER COGNAC

By Mark Rogers

# TWO BY LAURIE PRICE

## La Tete

In sleep I saw  
a head I'd never seen--  
more beautiful than any other.

In a French restaurant  
I wanted to order "head"  
and not be led to  
some back room or quiet corner.

## Colorado

I'll say your name in English.  
You just follow.  
This used to be a great country--  
wide as a woman, thick as a man.  
When night falls on this town  
the dogs bark and thin needles fall  
from the trees into attributes  
of people remembered.  
This was a dry region  
but folks troubled over every move  
you made and counted up what they thought  
you owed. The windshield's steaming up  
inside this car. Lookee!  
We're almost gone.

### THE NEW YORK CENTER FOR ART & AWARENESS

(Ravi Singh & Alice Eichen-Winslow — Directors)

Presents

### "THE NEW ROMANTICS" Poetry/Performance Series

January 10, Rose Lesniak & Ravi Singh

January 17, Claude Debussy's *Ariettes Oubliées*  
(Forgotten Airs — 1888)  
set to the poems of Paul Verlaine  
sung by Margo Mc Lean

&

Bright & Early  
featuring the songs of Steven Hall — guitar/vocals  
w/Arthur Russell — cello

January 24, Janet Hammill & Robert Hershon  
(intro Bill Zavatsky)

January 31, Paul Violi & John Yau

All readings are Friday evening at 8 p.m.  
at 61 4th Avenue (at 9th St., 2nd Fl.)  
admission \$5

for more information call (212) 475-0212

AN OUT THERE PRODUCTION

**POETRY PROJECT**, The Newsletter of The Poetry Project at  
St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery, Second Avenue at East 10th  
Street, New York, NY 10003. (212) 674-0910.  
The Newsletter is published monthly October through May.  
Subscriptions: \$7 a year for individuals, \$22 a year for institu-  
tions.

Advertisers please write for rate sheets.

Thanks to Laurie Fabiano

James Ruggia, Editor

Copyright © 1986, The Poetry Project

## This Month's Events

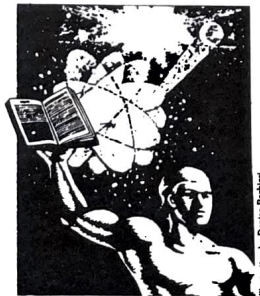


Illustration by Denise Barbieri

January 6: OPEN READING

January 8: Barbara Einzig & Harriet Shorr. Barbara Einzig is  
a "California poet, presently living in Piermont, New York."  
She is the author of *Disappearing Work* (Figures, 1979) and  
*Robinson Crusoe: A New Fiction* (Membrane, 1983). Her new book,  
*Life Moves Outside* will be published by Burning Deck. She has  
published poems and translations of modern Russian poetry in a  
number of journals. Harriet Shorr is a poet and painter. Her  
poems have appeared in cultural journals such as *Tracks* and  
*Appearances*. Her work is exhibited at Fischbach Gallery and  
other prestigious university and museum galleries throughout  
the United States.

January 13: Films by Jo Andres & Performance by Mary Ann  
Capehart.

January 15: Cynthia Kramen Genser & Dennis Phillips. Cynthia  
Kramen Genser is the author of two books of poetry: *Taking On  
The Local Color* (Wesleyan 1977) and *Club 82* (Workingman Press  
1979). Her work has been published in major anthologies in-  
cluding *Ordinary Women* (1978) and *POEMS: New York* (1980), not  
to mention literary journals like *The Paris Review*, *Quarterly  
West*, *Out There* and *The World*. Dennis Phillips lives in Los  
Angeles where he toils as the director of *Beyond Baroque*, an  
arts and literary center. He is the author of *The Hero Is  
Nothing* (Kajun Press, 1985). His poems have appeared in  
*Boxcar*, *Hambone*, *Issue* and *Sulfur*.

January 20: Holly Hughes & John Kelly.

January 22: Phillip Mahony & Lorenzo Thomas. Phillip  
Mahony is an emerging writer whose first book, *Catching  
Bodies* from North Atlantic Books has received extraordinary  
critical attention. He has published his work in a variety of  
magazines including *Poetry Now*, *Hanging Loose*, *Aspect*, and  
*Ploughshares*. He works as a New York City Police Officer to  
support his poetry habit. Lorenzo Thomas teaches at the  
University of Houston in order to support his poetry habit.  
Thomas is one of contemporary poetry's best known and most  
admired practitioners. He has written two influential books;  
*Chances Are Few* (Blue Wind, 1979) and *The Bathers* (I. Reed  
Books, 1981) and numerous essays and articles on black poetics  
music and cinema. He is anthologized in *Another World* (Bobbs-  
Merrill) and *New Black Voices* (New American Library).

January 25: St. Mark's Plays, NOTHING TO DECLARE (Extended  
Version) plus *Dead Men's Tails* by Chuck Borkhuts.

January 26: St. Mark's Talks, Sunday at 8pm. Lorenzo Thomas,  
"Projection: Cinema, Projective Verse & Black Poetry." The  
Black Arts Movement will be discussed, along with its descend-  
ants in the context of the ongoing project of making images  
with a political subtext. "Projection is a means toward the  
perfect body": through the alchemy of poetry the possibility  
of social transformation is revealed.

January 27: David Cale & Kestutis Nakis.

January 28: Tobey Kaplan & Simon Pettet. Tobey Kaplan is a  
Berkeley based poet who currently teaches in a local prison.  
She is the author of *No Turning Back*, and has published in  
several magazines. She is a consulting Coordinator for the  
California Poets in the Schools program and is a member of the  
Talking Leaves Book Store Collective. Simon Pettet is an  
English born poet currently living in New York City where he  
co-coordinates the Committee for International Poetry. His  
latest book, *LYRICAL POETRY* is out from Archipelago Books.  
Earlier works include *Leaving London* and *An Enigma and Other  
Lyrics*.

Programs Begin at 8pm

JANUARY'S

PO

ET

RY

Special Events

**1 NEW YEAR'S DAY  
MARATHON BENEFIT  
FOR THE POETRY PROJECT**  
7 pm \$10

**25 SATURDAY EVENING  
PLAY SERIES**  
Host Elinor Nauen 8 pm \$4  
*"Nothing to Declare"* (Extended Version)  
& *"Dead Men Trials"*  
by Chuck Borkhuis

**26 ST. MARK'S TALK**  
Host Charles Bernstein 8 pm  
Lorenzo Thomas on *"Projection:  
Cinema, Projective Verse,  
and Black Poetry"*

Monday Evening

**PERFORMANCE/POETRY**  
Host Richard Elovich 8 PM \$4

6 Open Reading & Performance *Free*  
13 Jo Andres & Mary Ann Capehart  
20 Holly Hughes & John Kelley  
27 David Cale & Kestutis Nakis

Wednesday Evening

**READINGS**  
Hosts Eileen Myles & Patricia Jones 8 PM \$4

8 Barbara Einzig & Harriett Shorr  
15 Cynthia Kramen Genser & Dennis Phillips  
22 Phillip Mahoney & Lorenzo Thomas  
29 Tobey Kaplan & Simon Petzet

Workshops

**READING WORKSHOP**  
7, 14, 21, 28 Bob Rosenthal 7PM Tue. *Free*

**POETRY WORKSHOP**  
10, 17, 24, 31 Susie Timmons 7 PM Fri. *Free*

**ADVANCED WORKSHOP**  
4, 11, 18, 25 Alice Notley 12:30 PM Sat. *Free*

**THE POETRY  
PROJECT**  
AT  
**ST MARK'S CHURCH** 2 AVE & 10 ST  
NEW YORK  
CITY 10003  
212.674.0910

The Poetry Project receives generous support from these public and private agencies: The New York State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, City of New York's Department of Cultural Affairs, Film/Video Arts, Inc. for film screenings, the Lila Acheson Wallace Fund, the Foundation for Contemporary Performance, the Mobil Foundation, and the Gramercy Park Foundation. Also, the members of the Poetry Project and individual contributors.

# AN UNCOMPROMISED LIFE: A Review of X

by Patricia Jones

**X**an opera composed by Anthony Davis with a libretto by Thulani Davis based on a story by Christopher Davis received a full production at the American Music Theater Festival in Philadelphia, in October of 1985. The opera in three acts based on the life and times of assassinated Black leader, Malcolm X, was directed by Rhoda Levine with music direction by Peter Aaronson. The full opera will be staged and premiered at the City Opera in 1986.

X often succeeds in recreating this dramatic life. The many transformations of Malcolm X from Malcolm Little to Malcolm X to El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz makes for one of the most extraordinary biographies of the Twentieth Century. Davis' music is often as uncompromising as Malcolm's political pronouncements. Thulani Davis' libretto informs as well as dramatizes. The essence of the work is a celebration of the liberation movements of Blacks in America. Movements which have had global impact. Thus, the Garveyism in the first scene when the chorus sings "Africa for the Africans/ Africa's time is coming."

Later Malcolm's sermons merge into an anthem "We are a nation/dying to be born/We dream of our land/our own land/We dream of our home/a black zion/It is our will to be/our will to be free." Also repeated are the words freedom, justice, equality. The repetition in both the text and the music is unsettling and vital. Ultimately the opera demands that Malcolm X's life be seen in the context of the Black experience, not separate from it. He was exceptional because all leaders are exceptional. But that leadership came out of a particular intellectual, spiritual and racial environment. Moreover, his political evolutions and his martyrdom is a distinctly American experience shared by many others in the sixties.

The Philadelphia production was both illuminating and frustrating. The stage production was often unimaginative and lethargic with little or no movement or energy in several places. The music direction should have been stronger so that the repetitions and overlong instrumental solos could have been cut. The opening piano solo was particularly irritating and got the opera off to a sour note (groan,

groan.) The musical ensemble, Episteme, Davis' group and the Concerto Soloists of Philadelphia played beautifully, but often too loudly and there were a couple of times when the chorus was drowned out completely. The most frustrating element was Avery Brooks' performance as Malcolm. Brooks was brought in at the last moment because of an illness to the lead. He is a fine actor and strong singer, but in the performance I saw he was clearly tired and he was often inaudible especially during the crucial aria "I would not tell you/what I know/You would not/hear my truth."

The opera itself has problematic elements. There are times when the music does not support the singing. At those moments, the energy literally drops. The repetitions in some scenes are simply unnecessary. However, the largest flaw is in the story. The story begins with a depiction of Malcolm's home and the break up of his family after the death of his father. In later years Malcolm becomes an exemplary husband and family man. None of this is shown. The moment when he has been silenced by Elijah Muhammed and then must decide what to do cries out for a duet with his wife. There is none. Maybe in a more fully realized production, the opera will be able to deal with this issue. As it is Malcolm's political and spiritual development are realized in the text, but not his development as a patriarch, as a man responsible for his wife and children. For a man who had been a pimp this was a major evolution and cannot be ignored.

Also, the last scene is barely resolved. The assassination is not handled dramatically and in the production it was poorly staged. There is no real build-up and the death of Malcolm X becomes anti-climactic, not the stuff of great drama, great opera.

Despite these criticisms, there is much to applaud about X and about the Philadelphia production. Seeing and hearing so many fine black performers was quite moving. Thomas Young in the dual role of Street and Elijah Muhammed literally stole the show. He has a strong clear voice and he is a great actor. He became Elijah as soon as he put on his Muslim hat. Deborah Ford as Ella and Raymond Bazemore in a variety of roles were also in fine voice. The children in the first act were fun to watch and they handled the dramatic changes very well. Savion Glover as Young Malcolm sang the eerie "Momma help me" with great feeling. Episteme and the other musicians played well especially in Act II in the confrontation scene between Malcolm and his brother Reginald.

Continued on back page

## MANHATTAN POETRY VIDEO PROJECT

FEATURING THE POETRY VIDEOS OF  
**ALLEN GINSBERG FATHER DEATH BLUES**  
**ANNE WALDMAN UH OH PLUTONIUM**  
**BOB HOLMAN RAPP IT UP**

FIRST PLACE WINNER  
1985 AMERICAN FILM FESTIVAL  
FIRST OF ITS KIND - A COLLECTOR'S ITEM  
NANCY AND I LOVED MR. GINSBERG'S MUSIC  
- PRESIDENT REAGAN

**XMAS SPECIAL ONLY \$49.95**

ORIGINALLY \$100  
SEND CHECK OR M.O. TO  
OUT THERE PRODUCTIONS, INC.  
156 WEST 27 ST SUITE SW  
NYC 10001  
212.675.0194

OTHER ART VIDEOS AVAILABLE  
SEND SASE OR CALL FOR FREE LISTING

©1984 ROSE LESNIAK  
AN OUT THERE PRODUCTION

THE MINDS, THE GLITTERING personalities and eccentrics of Berkeley and San Francisco society come to life in these two long unavailable novels by Beat poet Philip Whalen. Set in the late Fifties and early Sixties, *You Didn't Even Try* (1967) and *Imaginary Speeches for a Brazen Head* (1972) provide a remarkable window on the nascent of what would later be called the counterculture.

"Whalen's poems are now classics but all too few readers know the equal power of his prose, its ironies and perceptions, its consummate articulation."  
—Robert Creeley

"The combination of humor and clarity and a superb intellect makes each of his books a rare treat."  
—Diane di Prima

**ZEPHYRUS PRESS**



Philip Whalen

### Two Novels

*You Didn't Even Try*

*Imaginary Speeches for a Brazen Head*

Introduction by Paul Christensen

256 pages  
\$9.95 paper • \$16.95 cloth  
\$25 signed (1-50)

Distributed by Inland Book Co. Available from booksellers, or by mail from:

Zephyr Press, 13 Robinson St., Somerville, MA 02145. Please enclose \$1.00 per book for shipping and handling. Signed edition available only by mail.

I enclose \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ copies of *Two Novels* by Philip Whalen, paperback/clothbound/signed cloth (circle your choice of binding).

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

# Charles In the Box

by Paul Ryan

**I**t's summer. I'm in Gloucester. Computer Highway 128 has me thinking about poets and computers. Olson and Expert Systems. Expert Systems are the current rage in AI, or Artificial Intelligence. As the field backed up from its foray into general intelligence (i.e., to play chess is to think), it found it could deliver programs that operated at the level of experts. INTERNIST/CADUCEUS, a program known as "Jack in the box," developed by physician Jack Myers and computer scientist Harry Pople, does internal diagnosis. It covers more than 80% of internal medicine with a knowledge base of 500 diseases and 3,500 manifestations of disease. It can solve most of the clinical pathology cases that appear in *The New England Journal Of Medicine*. MYCIN is another example. It diagnoses blood and meningitis infections and then advises treatment. MULGEN, still another, gives advice on gene cloning to genetic engineers. PROSPECTOR assists experts in field exploration for minerals. All these programs depend on extensive knowledge appropriate to the area of expertise.

This past spring, I heard a proponent of Expert Systems, Ed Feigenbaum, describe these "vertical" knowledge bases. As I listened I had the image of a house of cards, a digital Tower of Babel. Little was being done to integrate these knowledge bases, or even to anticipate their integration.

Olson sought an integration of knowledge. No treatise on geology, on projective geometry or on history was outside his ken. He fought the tendency to marginalize poetry as a special interest genre, a mere vertical knowledge base. Yet I think there is a legitimate sense in which Olson can be considered an expert. Charles Olson was a poetic expert on Cape Ann. I'm intrigued by what we could learn from an attempt to develop an expert system based on Olson's poetic intelligence about Cape Ann.

An Expert System is set up by a "Knowledge Engineer" working closely with computer programmers. The task of the Knowledge Engineer is to mimic with great precision the mind of the expert and translate that understanding for the computer programmers. As Olson himself is no longer with us, a first question is whether sufficient mimetic precision could be culled from texts and the network of his friends, students and scholars that still survive? If not, then the project might shift to working with a live poet. How could such a poet be chosen?

What could not be coded for the computer? What about Charles that's not-in-the-box? In response to a question about intuition, Feigenbaum said that once computer scientists figure out the algorithm (he put it in a 10 to 15 year time frame) "intuition" will be understood as just a vague misnomer for a specific process.

Is there an algorithm for the "negative capability" Olson celebrated? What about Olson's own proprioception relative to his intuitions? How could a computer generate a poetic phrase like "mappe mundi, myself included."?

What about intention? Would the very absence of Olson's living intentions guarantee that the Expert System would be a travesty? Or could such an Expert System be considered a sort of legitimate publishing of Olson's methods?

\*\*\*Olson claimed, "there are no hierarchies." David Bolter anticipates that all creative writing will be codified hierarchically for computers. This would be an interesting issue to watch.

\*\*\*An Expert System is designed to substitute for or assist an expert. Suppose an "Olson Oracle" were successful. Could it generate Maximus VII, VIII & IX? Would that be the test of its success as a substitute? Could the Olson Oracle have answered questions on the Beirut Hostage Crisis from the vantage of an expertise about Cape Ann that extends back to Mediterranean history? How could such an Expert System aid current poets in Gloucester? Or poets of place elsewhere? Had Olson himself had the assistance of a tailor made Expert System would his poetry have been different?

\*\*\*A successful poet is singular. The cone of his influence extends from the point of his uniqueness. The general worth of his work is proportional to the number of codimensions it takes to specify his singularity.

Charles Olson was a successful poet. The general worth of his work grows apace of the scholarship that reveals an ever increasing number of codimensions to his singularity. How general his worth, how integrating his knowledge, remains to be seen. The questions raised here turn around how close an Expert System could approach poetic singularity? Is it possible to develop an alchemy for the computer world via Expert Poetic Systems?

# Hundred Flowers Baseball

## The Temple of Baseball

Edited by Richard Grossinger

North Atlantic Books

252 pages, \$12.95

**T**his is a thoroughly sophisticated and up-to-the-moment (1984 Season) anthology of baseball pieces, most of which are a great joy to read. The piece I liked best is the one by the anthologist himself, on the Mets, since I have been into the Mets from 1963 on, when somebody said to me that the Mets were the beatniks of baseball. Paean to an America like Kerouac's, really like Ginsberg's, like Whitman's, somehow intermingle with the baseballism and produce "oddities" which are really not oddities like Sadaharu Oh's piece on Zen and baseball. References in one of the pieces to the Boschian quality of midwestern faces denouncing a player for a baseball miscue evoke for me images of baseball-mad boys wearing baseball caps in mental hospitals like I wrote about in the Fifties. Extremely hip sociological insight with a baseball backdrop are the province of most of these contributors who are, in their minds, watching everything from Greek Tragedy to totalitarian rallies beside mere baseball games.

There is a surreal sketch by W.P. Kinsella, about ghostly fans replacing artificial turf with real sod in a stadium during a baseball strike. Strangely enough, this piece reminded me both of early fiction by John Hawkes and recent passages from Stephen King's "Pet Semetary."

There is a recurrent intertwining of the literary-philosophical and the athletic throughout this anthology which makes it plain that this is not merely a baseball book, but a book about poetry and baseball, or about the poetry of baseball.

For me baseball and fishing are two sports which I have had recourse to throughout my life when I met reverses elsewhere or when I wished to establish some sort of continuity. Baseball is definitely a means of recapturing contact with the Zeitgeist when you have, as has always been inevitable with me, been thoroughly outdistanced in many areas.

However there is baseball and there is this sort of intellectual approach to baseball. Just as there is fishing, when you fish with nonliterary types, and fishing when you go fishing with Allen Ginsberg in a rowboat at City Island. Others wait patiently for bites while Allen recites Haikus about "little silver fish." The literary types inevitably revert to their specialities. What generally emerges, though, is a mingling of corn and erudition.

And to add to the generally stew-like nature of all of this, besides the patriotic zen-beatnik-kerouacian types, you also have the Fidelistas and other Marxian types throwing their two cents in. No Russians claiming baseball is a Russian game, anyway. The answer seems to be that anyone can make anything of baseball. Just be American after your own fashion. Like a Maoist hundred flowers kind of Marxism.

Codrescu's piece draws on Freud; Mikhail Horovitz, Tom Clark, Tom Blaess and Debra Heimerdinger contribute visual art which further adds to the grab bag of goodies here enclosed.

It's been a long road for me between the Al Simmons' days and the Dwight Gooden days, but I find names and occurrences in this book which remind me of just about every phase anyone my age can recall. Posing as a baseball maven is just a little bit embarrassing to me, because a cousin of mine in the Thirties, who was writing sports for the New York Post (the pre-Dorothy Schiff New York Post), wrote an article referring to me as "The Boy Baseball Sage Of The Bronx." I was 8 then. Kerouac saw this piece and it has been hard to live down.

I suppose Ring Lardner's rawboned, tobacco chewing ball-players were like Ring Lardner and I suppose too that Richard Grossinger's post-structuralist ball players are like Richard Grossinger--extremely cholesterol-conscious and other odd up-to-date things. Therefore, though you probably need some college to read this anthology, it can still be characterized as excellent baseball writing.

by Carl Solomon

# Creeley on Koch

Selected Poems 1950-1982

by Kenneth Koch  
Vintage, Random House  
\$9.95

**I**nevitably people seem bemused by humor, if not actively offended. Kenneth Koch has paid the dues of that situation in a number of ways. He's presumed to be confident in his laughter and to be certain of company concerning what amuses him. Neither is very true at all. No one of my generation remembers more accurately or more fully the seemingly incredible grounds for taste and right thinking that our youth had to deal with. Reading the present collection—and I've read him persistently—I recognize once again the heroism of his particularizing anger and the consummately learned abilities that have enabled him "to play a game" of such lonely condition and "to be serious" in a way so hidden from usual habits of recognition.

John Ashberry knows it well, and goes his own brilliant way. Frank O'Hara was its obvious genius also, but his characteristic casualness was more sympathetically open to the randomly met. Kenneth Koch was shier and therefore, paradoxically, seemed more secure. But if one read "Fate," for example, or the truly extraordinary "To Marina," some sense of the actuating experience and risk must come through.

In any case, my delight in this poetry and respect for what he's got done, as this partial selection demonstrates so substantially, is very great. For one

thing, he never forgot where we all began, so that in the poems there is often a wildly parodic judgement of the cul de sacs of that time, the deadends then so touted. He notes that he could not take excerpts from *Ko* and *The Duplications*—which is a shame in that their singular force as narrative—Kenneth as master of any shaggy dog that ever lived—may therefore be passed over. But he is a very conscious formalist and knows that such pieces as might be taken out would forfeit the whole, like they say.



Kenneth Koch on Long Island

His odes have always been terrific, especially in times of one's own self-serious immolation. "On Beauty" answers a question that Keats left as an insistent solipsism, however movingly. Reading, one gets not only signs of the time but a time so accurate you could set your watch by it. So the future is where it always will be, and the past an active present at least that doesn't have to wait till Christmas to be opened.

Years ago Kenneth read at a public gathering a poem he knows I like especially, probably because it is less overtly, subversively, funny: "Sleeping With Women." The sounds, rhythms, so gather in that poem, so

quietly, physically. I guess I felt entirely safe with it. Now I'd like to say how much I've felt about all he's written—that it's kept the faith immensely, and the human world its own significant fact, in mind, in heart, in common.

## and Grenier

*A Day At the Beach*

by Robert Grenier

Roof Books/New York  
\$6.00

**W**hat locates in us as "information" has a diversity of patterns, of grids, places of various impingement and authority. We know without the least obligation of wanting to, that the language itself "speaks" insistently in its own "system," of syntax, of community, of all those bits and pieces that conjoin to say far more than any one of us might either intend or be capable of stating conclusively. The simplest seeming proposals—in fact, any of those which begins with that singular pronoun "I"—fade in the immense condition of common place, that so-called "world" in which all of necessity has to find itself. Robert Grenier is a poet, therefore, of great interest because his work takes place at the double edge of hearing and saying things—"things" which are neither simply one nor many, nor material

only, nor abstract, but the complex conjunction of all such, as it leaves and enters simultaneously *A Day At The Beach*.

That, of course, says it with awkward, generalizing emphasis. But I want the occasion of this writing explicit. There are no didactic grids of imposed location more than the title itself makes evident—that is, no formal poems more than the instant coherence of language itself or the complex of feelings, thoughts, that move to make use of it—with humor, reflection, sadness at times, and all the consummate ability to hear and make evident the sounding of words themselves:

### SUNSHINE

I think almost without limit

Here the playfulness of the echo, of rhythm, of sound, makes actual what "limit" is.

*A Day At The Beach* offers, then, a remarkably specific place, and its ground is quite substantial. If one value the act of thought as it feels the world evident, thinks of it, like they say, and listens, then this book will be pleasure indeed. I mused for years on the reputed Chinese apothegm, "How is it far if you think it?" In this book also, the wonder is in what is.

### Jones Continued

X is an ambitious work. Davis, best known as a new music composer with a particular affinity for the work of Ellington and Mingus, has created a score in which the voice truly gives life and emotion to the music. Poet, Thulani Davis, his cousin, provides the libretto with information and poetry. There is still much work to be done, but with a director of greater imagination and a music director who knows when to edit as well as when to enhance the score, X should prove to be one of the best new American operas produced in this decade. Start saving up for the City Opera production in 1986.

**THE POETRY  
PROJECT**  
AT  
**ST MARK'S CHURCH**  
2AVE & 10ST  
NEW YORK  
CITY 10003  
212.674.0910

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED  
FORWARDING & RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED

NON-PROFIT ORG  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
New York, N.Y.  
Permit No. 605

02715  
R. AARON  
242 ORTEGA ROAD  
SANTA BARBARA

CA. 93108