

# THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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MARCH 1986

\$1.00

## BOB KAUFMAN, A PROVEN GLORY

by Raymond Foye

**B**ob Kaufman died in his sleep in San Francisco in the early morning hours of January 12th, 1986. The previous night he got out of bed, carefully changed into clean white clothes and neatly arranged his room and bedside table. Smiling, he cryptically told his companion Lynne Wildey, "If you're in the neighborhood, drop in and see me." It was a poetical, peaceful end, for a man who had spent the last year of his life reading only Suzuki.

The few years previous to Kaufman's death had been his most active in two decades. About North Beach, the Haight and the Mission, he was visible and convivial, giving readings and appearing at parties, including a well-attended fete for his own sixtieth birthday last April. I saw Kaufman last in March of 1985, in the Cafe Trieste, his favorite North Beach hangout. He carried a handsome Italian notebook, which he laid on the table, and opened to a poem he'd written the night before:

SKYROCKETS BURSTING  
MY HEAD,  
SHOW ME THAT I AM  
NOT DEAD,  
BUT I THOUGHT I WAS  
IN ANOTHER DREAMLIFE  
IN WHICH DEATH WAS  
A PROCESS NOT AN END,  
A NEED TO WRITE IS  
RETURNING FROM THE VOID  
NOW TO FIND THE WORDS  
WRITTEN ON THE SKY AND  
PUT THEM DOWN ON PAPER,  
BUT IS NOT BLOOD, AND THE  
SKY IS RED.

5.iii.85

For almost two decades Bob Kaufman had walked the streets of North Beach, wrapped in what seemed like centuries of solitude. It was well known that he'd taken a ten year Buddhist vow of silence following the Kennedy assassination, broke that silence in the early seventies, but lapsed once again into another eight-year spell of wordlessness. Like Poe's *The Man Of The Crowd*, he wandered the streets of the city with great determination, eyes lowered, only a curt wave of the hand to an old friend. I confess now that

after several years of watching him do this, I followed him. Starting in North Beach, he walked the length of Grant Avenue, through Chinatown, across Market, past the Southern Pacific stockyards, mile after mile, until he reached the docks. There he stood staring motionless for over an hour.

### Sea Poem

The ship slips from its mooring.  
Man and boy, I have  
sailed these seas  
for thirty years.  
The old sailor, walking  
between the rows of  
sunken ships.  
The cruel sea  
works its magic. (1982)

**T**he rich weave of images and influences found in Kaufman's poetry can all be found in his remarkable biography. He was born in New Orleans, one of eleven children. His maternal grandmother was born on the Ivory Coast, was sold into slavery, escaped to Haiti, and married a Native American from Texas. Together they returned to America after emancipation and bought land on the plantation where she once was a slave. As a child, Bob would accompany her to market, and she'd fill his head with tales of African magic, Haitian voodoo, and Cajun folklore. (I once heard Bob greet a childhood friend with a spiel of patois.) Kaufman's father was a strict German Jew, who operated a small bar and

hall, and who drowned in a fishing accident when Bob was thirteen.

Following his father's death, Bob lied about his age and shipped out with the merchant marines as a cabin boy. He loved the sea and stayed on ships for twenty years, sailing around the world eleven times, with extensive travels in India. Once, by chance, in a waterfront bar in San Francisco, I met an old merchant marine who knew Bob from the ships. He remembered him as a voracious reader, sharp and quick-witted. Bob also had a reputation for taking on the most dangerous assignments, such as climbing a mast to tie down a rigging in a storm. Following WWII, Kaufman used his knowledge of the sea to run guns to Israel.

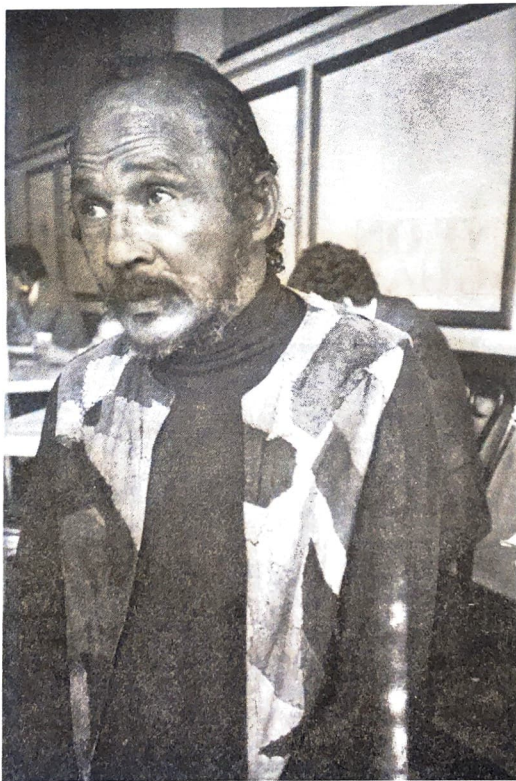
Between voyages, Kaufman studied Communist labor practices at the New School, and made trips through the deep South, organizing black mineworkers. (In happier moods in later years Bob loved to sing old union songs.) In 1956, when his wife Eileen first met Bob, he had been unable to eat solid food for three months, due to an especially brutal beating by Texas sheriffs, who picked him up at a strike and spent several hours kicking him in the stomach back at the jailhouse.

Bob was forced off the ships during the McCarthy era, owing to his Trotskyite affiliations. He was working as a dishwasher at the Los Angeles Hilton when he read an article in *Life* magazine about the hipsters of San Francisco. He withdrew his savings that day, bought a Buick convertible, and drove up the coast. Kaufman was enraged when the car ran out of gas part

way, and abandoned it, hitch-hiking the rest of the journey.

**I**t has often been said that like Villon's, much of Kaufman's biography will have to be reconstructed from police records. In 1959 he was arrested 39 times for disorderly conduct. A mean, bigoted young cop had it in for Bob, and once stormed into the Co-Existence Bagel Shop and tore up Bob's Abomunist Manifesto, which hung in the window. (There's a marvelous photo of Bob fending off the cops, in Ferlinghetti & Peter's *Literary San Francisco*.) This cop (fired from the force three years ago for corruption) stomped Kaufman's foot and broke his toe, then threw Bob in jail. "Saturday is a good day to go to jail," Bob said. It was there in Cell No. 3 that Kaufman wrote his sublime "Jail Poems," from *Solitudes*, beginning "I am sitting in a cell with a view of evil parallels..."

In 1959 Kaufman's son Parker was born. Unable to pay the hospital, Bob enlisted Ferlinghetti to create a disturbance at the nurse's station, while he whisked Eileen and the baby into a waiting car.



Bob Kaufman. Photo by Raymond Foye

# Foye Continued

A few weeks later Bob was interviewed by the newspaper as a "man in the street." When asked what he liked about San Francisco, he noted that the hospitals were free. The head nurse later wrote him: "Dear Mr. Kaufman, the hospitals are cheap, not free. Congratulations on your son."

In 1960 Kaufman was invited to read at Harvard University, and had a standing offer for a book at New Directions. He flew to New York but got strung out on speed and missed the reading. He later told me he knew the trip was ill-fated when he got on the plane and the windows didn't open.

The New York years were largely ones of addiction and poverty. Bob made a little money ghostwriting songs for Fats Domino and Chubby Checker. After three years, Eileen arranged for the

family to return to San Francisco. On his way to meet the ride, Bob was arrested for walking on the grass in Washington Square Park. He was taken to the Tombs, then to Riker's Island, then to Bellevue Psychiatric, where he was termed a "behavioral problem" and threatened with a lobotomy. He returned to San Francisco in October of 1963, having had enough of society, thus began the long withdrawal.

Eileen completed the editing of *Solitudes* (New Directions: 1965.) Claude Pelieu and Mary Beach edited *Golden Sardine* (City Lights: 1965.) and I edited *The Ancient Rain* (New Directions: 1987.) Bob took no part in publishing his work; indeed, he had an aversion to even writing the poems down. He wanted to live a simple life, a man amongst his friends. "I want to be anonymous," he once told me, "my ambition is to be completely forgotten." And I think he meant it.

San Francisco has marked Bob's passing with memorial services, readings, and a New Orleans-style jazz procession up Grant Avenue. That would have pleased Bob. "I love North Beach," he once told me, "when it's 2 a.m., and Bessie Smith is wailing in my closet, and Paul Robeson is singing the Soviet National Anthem in my head. I go out and walk these streets, and I know I'm home."

## Michelangelo the Elder

I live alone, like pith in a tree.  
My teeth rattle like musical instruments.  
In one ear a spider spins its web of eyes.  
In the other a cricket chirps all night.  
This is the end,  
Which art, that proves my glory has brought me.  
I would die for poetry.

Bob Kaufman



Photo by Sharon Gwynup.

Allen Ginsberg speaking at the P.E.N. Congress.

Christoph Buch...Per Chr. Jersild...Stephan Hermlin...Linda Wolfe...Shiela Solomon Klass...Ethan Paulus...Richard Walton...A.D. Coleman...John J. Gill...Ed De Grazia...Irene Kolnick...Nicolas Kanellos...Harold Taylor...Mary MacArthur...Predrag Matvejevic...Anne Bernays...John P. Marquand, Jr...Katy Moran...Naomi Replansky(as above with Amos Oz)...David McCullough...C.K. Williams...Horst Beinek...Robert Coover...Donald T. Sanders...Fernando Alegria...Meto Jovanovski...John Allman...June C. Canada...Mark Thompson...Jonathan Levi...Barbara Raskin...Regina Weinrich...Shiela Schwartz...Karen Malpede...Eileen Cottman...Russell Banks...Aileen Ward...Harvey Schapiro(in agreement with Amos Oz and with additional protest over Sandinista Censorship of the press in Nicaragua)...Katha Polit...Charles Molesworth...Jay Neugeboren....

1/12/86

We undersigned writers disapprove of the United States' Government's policy on intervention in Central America.

Arthur Schlesinger Jr. ....Bernard Malamud....Allen Ginsberg

1/17/86

We undersigned writers disapprove of the United States and Soviet Union policy of intervention in Central America.

Alfred Kazin...Mario Vargas Llosa

## STATEMENT ON NICARAGUA

1/12/86

### A P.E.N. Congress Proclamation

Undersigned guests & delegates to P.E.N. International Congress, on occasion of our rendezvous in New York, proclaim our acute distress at U.S. Government's intervention in Nicaragua. What chance the Sandinista Government has to evolve toward democratic community is sabotaged by U.S. Administration's subsidy of the war of Contras, whose majority leadership is made up of the late tyrant Somoza's National Guards.

The hyper-militarization of the Sandinista Government and constriction of civil liberties arrives as a consequence of economic deprivation, illegal sabotage, and internal & external war funded and advised in major part by U.S. Government. This condition is a continuation of the century-old policy of Big Stick domination of Central American "Banana Republics".

Whoever wins, in this blood battle sponsored by the U.S. Administration, the crisis conditions provoked in Nicaragua can only cause greater ruin for its people and more limited possibilities for their liberty and safety.

Signed:

Gunter Grass...Rose Styron...Kurt Vonnegut... Wang Meng...Nadine Gordimer...Arthur Miller...William H. Gass...Arthur Schlesinger...Norman Mailer...E.L. Doctorow...Allen Ginsberg...Gay Talese...John Kenneth Galbraith...Hans-Magnus Enzensberger...Galway Kinnell...William Kennedy...Juan Benet...Volker Schlöndorff...Susan Sontag...Vance Bourjaily...Heng Liang...Michael Morrissey...David Albahari...Justin Kaplan...Toni Morrison...John Ashbery...Dick Seaver...Charles Fuller...Grace Paley...Peter Schneider...Ted Morgan...Breyten Breytenbach...Per Wastberg...William Meredith...Sol Yurick...William Gaddis...Victor Navasky...Salman Rushdie...Amos Oz (with a protest over Sandinista support of Arab terrorism)...Margaret Randall...Jerome Rothenberg...Ralph Ginzburg...Tarnofsky...Richard Gilman...Zhu Hong...Nicholas Mohr...Joyce Johnson...Daniella Gioseffi...Rachel Hadas...Ed Vega...Anthony Heilbut...Bell Gale Chevigny...Fernanda Pivano Heiner Muller...Inge Morath Miller...James Atlas...Justo Jorge Padron...Sidney Schwartz...Peter Straub...Willis Barnstone...Sharon Gwynup...Michael Green...E. Elhelbert Miller...Sidney Sulkin...Eileen Watson...Samuel Chavkin...John Bart Gerald...Bill Barattelli...Mary Morris...Richard Eder(I also think there is an inherent totalitarian element)...Meredith Tax...Robert Boyers...Mary Lee Settle...Jakov Lind(I agree with Amos Oz)...Hiber Conteris...Marshall Berman...Harry Smith...Olga Carlisle...Domenico Porzio...Arthur A. Cohen...Richard Howard...Hans

## THE INVASION OF GRENADA ON FRENCH TV

My wife and I were traveling in northern France during the time when the Marines invaded Grenada. We had no idea what was going on in the outside world during our several months of travel. While my wife was sick in our hotel room in Nancy, I went down to the end of the hall to turn on the TV and watch the news. After a local story or two the news changed: a French news team was interviewing U.S. Marines on Grenada. The videotape was very poorly edited. Occasionally the camera would just swing to the ground or in to the sun.

This platoon of American soldiers was camped on a hill just outside the capital city of St. Georges. They seemed to be teenagers. As soon as the G.I.'s spoke, the French translation would begin. Fortunately, the tape was so badly edited, I could hear the voices of the soldiers right over the translations.

One soldier complained that they'd been sent ashore with tourist maps and two days of food. They had already been there four days. He was not sure whose side the Grenadians were on, and repeatedly asked the news team. He said the natives were nice during the day, but at night they shot at them.

A young Grenadian man shuffled along, in a loose style of walking peculiar to the Caribbean which resembles the gait of the Pink Panther cartoon figure. He was carrying a ten gallon jug of lemonade. The entire platoon was thirsty. One of the black soldiers asked for a cup. The Grenadian man poured him a tiny Dixie cup full. It was gone in a second. The Grenadian man held out his hand.

"Man, he wants five bucks for this shit!"

Two more G.I.'s wanted to know if it was poisoned before they bought a cup. The Grenadian took a gulp himself to assure them. The G.I.'s lined up. Capitalism was restored to the island of Grenada.

By Kirby Olson

# LETTERS



Illustration by Denise Barbieri

# This Month's Events



Illustration by Denise Barbieri

Dear Editor,

Paul Ryan ("Charles In The Box", Jan. '86), although apparently familiar with some of the concepts of artificial intelligence, falls prey to that great predator of journalism, the newsworthy issue. Ryan, along with many writers about computers, journalists and scientists alike, wants computers to "think" and when they can't "think", begins wildly speculating about digital encroachment on the territory of poetry.

The sure sign of an off-base position on computers is when the positor claims computers can or can't think. If Feigenbaum actually claimed that intuition can be reduced to a series of ones and zeros, he is guilty more of self-glorification and not thinking about what arts making actually requires than of saying something that is either right or wrong. Poets who fear computers and what they think they stand for must remember that it is not only "intuition" that makes good poetry, but also feeling, thinking, technique, sensibility and luck. And very few of our best poets write off the top of their heads, but rather write, read and edit before the finish. And Paul Ryan fell right into the trap by focusing on Feigenbaum's facile projection of computer's capabilities that depend more on how we define the problem of art making and "intuition" than on whether it is possible to imitate the brain's thought processes.

Scientists can give credibility to the way a poet knows things in spite of the apparent strangeness of the methods. Poets can accept the usefulness of computers even though science dominates the arts in the public eye and takes attention and power away from the artists. The difficulties arise when someone goes off half cocked, not when any of the considered positions is analyzed.

The object of Artificial Intelligence is not so much to create a thinking machine, but rather to use computers to help us find out how we think, because we still do not know that, and to aid and extend our capabilities. The problem we face is not to secure the dimensions of poetry and computers, art and science, against each other, but to find out how to use the ways in which each understands phenomena to mutually support problem solving and artistry.

James Sherry

*James Sherry*

## PAUL RYAN RESPONDS

Evidently, James Sherry misread what I wrote. I swear on a stack of Maximus Poems, I've never wanted computers to "think", though I do confess, I myself love to speculate.

While Mr. Sherry's letter focuses on Feigenbaum, the article focuses on Olson. James Sherry mistakes a report of "facile" for facile. The thrust of the article I wrote turns around what we could learn "from an attempt to develop an expert system based on Charles Olson's poetic intelligence about Cape Ann." This is just good old trial and error learning, not moralizing about art, science and computers. Turf fights between poets and computer folks may be part of the learning. So be it. I think it would be a good thing if a Charles Stein and/or a Don Byrd got the resources and went after such a poetry project.

Obviously, such a project would increase our understanding of "how we think", but that's hardly the whole ball of wax. If I may speculate...albeit wildly...According to the Gaia Hypothesis, earth is a living ensemble of self correcting processes. Computers are tools for generating procedures. Best case is we use computers to generate elegant procedures that increase our fidelity to the life processes of earth.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

The Poetry Project, as well as Writers & Books in Rochester, Intersection in San Francisco, Woodland Pattern in Milwaukee, Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance have received a microcomputer system from Apple Computer Inc. Thanks!

March 2: St. Mark's Talks, Clark Coolidge & Michael Palmer: A Conversation. Clark Coolidge has two new books due this spring: *Solution Passage, Poems 1978-1981* (Sun & Moon Press) & *The Crystal Text (The Figures)*. He spent last year as a Fellow in the American Academy in Rome & will be teaching at Naropa Institute this summer. Michael Palmer's most recent books are *First Figure & Notes For Echo Lake*, both from North Point Press. He is a core faculty member in The Poetics Program at the New College of California in San Francisco.

March 3: OPEN READING

MARCH 5: WILLIAM ALLEN & BOBBIE LOUISE HAWKINS. WILLIAM ALLEN is an emerging poet & visual artist. His poems have appeared in *Blind Alleys, Avenue E, Central Park & Poetry Northwest*. His artwork & photography have appeared in *Art In America & Real Life Magazine*. His translations have appeared in *BOMB*. BOBBIE LOUISE HAWKINS is a poet & prose writer. She has published several books including *One Small Saga* (Coffee House Press, 84) & *Back To Texas* (Bear Hug Books, 77) She is best known for her work with Female Musician, Terry Garthwaite.

March 8: Gregory Corso, A Special Event! Gregory Corso, author of numerous books including the classics, *Gasoline & Happy Birthday Of Death*, is the antihero of a couple of thousand unconfirmed & growing legends. His poems as crisp and as lyrically bitter & gleeful as a curling coyote's lip conjure the elegance of slow ruin set against the back drop of a quick apocalypse. Admission: \$5.00.

March 10: Music by *Fast Forward*, Films by *John Jesurun*.

March 12: Charles North & Michael Palmer. Charles North is a poet & an editor. He is the author of many fine collections of poetry including *Leap Year* (Kulchur, 1978) & *Gemini* with Tony Towle (Swollen Magpie, 1981). Michael Palmer is a poet & teacher from San Francisco (see March 2) whose books include *Code Of Signals* (North Atlantic Books).

March 17: Emily XYZ, Ron Kolm & Richard Bandanza.

March 19: Olga Broumas & Eileen Myles. Olga Broumas is a former recipient of the Yale Younger Poets Award (1976 for *Beginning With 0*). She is the author of *Pastoral Jazz* (Copper Canyon Press, 1983) & the forthcoming *Black HoLes/Black Stocking* (Wesleyan University Press). She is the founder of Freehand, an artist's colony for women. Eileen Myles is the current Artistic Director of the Poetry Project. She is the author of three highly acclaimed volumes of poetry including *Sappho's Boat & A Fresh Young Voice From The Plains*. She'll be reading from two as yet unpublished manuscripts, *Ponder & Bread and Water*.

March 23: St. Mark's Talks, Barbara Guest, "Mysterious Speaking Of The Mysterious: Byzantine Proposals Of The Poem." Barbara Guest is one of America's most distinguished poets. Her books include *Poems* (Doubleday), *The Blue Stairs* (Corinth), *Moscow Mansions* (Viking), *Seeking Air* (a move!) (Black Sparrow), & *Biography* (Burning Deck). Doubleday recently published her biography of H.D., *Herself Defined*, & she is presently at work on a biography of Bryher.

March 24: Dan Hurlin & Carol McDowell.

March 26: Anne Waldman. Anne Waldman is the former Artistic Director of the Poetry Project. She is the author of several books of poetry including *Makeup In Empty Space & Skin Meat Bone* (both from Coffee House Books). She is currently the Director of the Department of Poetics and Writing at the Naropa Institute in Boulder Colorado.

March 31: Paul Schmidt & Johnny Eagle.

*B. Dalton*  
BOOKSELLER

Anne Waldman  
will read from her work  
Saturday afternoon at B. Dalton's,  
8th Street and Sixth Avenue.

3/22/86

# MARCH'S

# poetry

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## Monday Evening

POETRY /  
PERFORMANCE  
Host: Richard Elovich 8pm \$4

- 3 Open Reading
- 10 Films by Sokhi Wagner & John Jesurun  
Music by Fast Forward
- 17 Richard Bandanza, Ron Kolm & Emily XYZ
- 24 Dan Hurlin & Carol McDowell
- 31 Paul Schmidt & Johnny Eagle

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## Wednesday Evening

READINGS  
Hosts: Eileen Myles & Patricia Jones  
8 pm \$4

- 5 William Allen & Bobbie Louise Hawkins
- 12 Charles North & Michael Palmer
- 19 Olga Broumas & Eileen Myles
- 26 Anne Waldman

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## Saturday Evening

ST. MARK'S PLAYS  
Host: Elinor Nauen 8pm  
Suggested Contribution \$4

- 22 Green Goose Theater of Poland

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## Sunday Evening

ST. MARK'S TALKS  
Host: Charles Bernstein 8pm  
Suggested contribution \$4

- 2 Clark Coolidge & Michael Palmer  
"A Conversation"
- 23 Barbara Guest on "Mysteriously Speaking of the Mysterious: Byzantine Proposals of the Poem"

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## Workshops

NARRATIVES  
Tuesdays 7pm the Parish Hall  
4 11 18 25 Kimiko Hahn

POETRY  
Fridays 7pm the Parish Hall  
7 14 21 28 Susie Timmons

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## Special Event

- 8 Gregory Corso 8pm \$5

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

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# MARCH AT THE PROJECT

3/5/86

William Allen & Bobbie Louise  
Hawkins

KHMER ROUGE

How heavy my eyelids have become,  
and the rifle so silent!  
Strange, the echoing of Cambodian birds in the night,  
the accentuated green  
or the red headbands on young boys with guns from the jungle,  
piles of black bones under the temple walls,  
and the sleep which comes out of hiding  
to rip the fine blue veins  
from the heart which is beating inside me.

by William Allen

from "ONE SMALL SAGA"

I used to think I wanted to be a sophisticate, but  
now I see it's not for me.  
I'll forever be just me again pushing hope and theory  
in lieu of experience, and backing it up with a little  
bit of courage and a lot of ignorance. (My grandmother  
said, "You don't have to be ashamed of having ignorance  
and lice. You just have to be ashamed of keeping  
them.")

by Bobbie Louis Hawkins

3/12/86

Charles North & Michael Palmer  
LOOKING AT THE BRIGHTER NIGHT

you get to feel the limits of framing, not unlike  
Charles the Bad (d.1387) who, having been sewn into  
a sheet soaked with brandy by doctors who thought  
alcohol a panacea, and who then held up a lit candle...  
the idea being that the form proclaims  
the formless, regardless of night and its celebrated reductions  
linking all things to their proper names, Bar des  
Bouquinistes et Filles aux Cheveux de Lin,  
Cheap Passage to Natchez, Harborside Cock  
And Pullet (England); 0 city tromboned beyond its poles

by Charles North

A book of

A book of nothing gives  
him its elbow  
or its fist.  
Palms followed by wind  
carrying salt. Grey dogs  
at the edge of the road.  
It's time to walk and walk  
pretending to be lost.  
Look straight up  
at the creased rock  
the color of a tongue.  
The rest  
seemed to be metal.  
You will write some salt.

by Michael Palmer

from "NOTES FOR ECHO LAKE"

3/19/86

Olga Broumas  
& Eileen Myles

PRIVACY

Finally  
the only one I want  
to caress is you  
You watch the changing  
light across the sky  
I watch your eyes

by Olga Broumas

PROPOSAL

I want  
to go  
out &  
express  
myself

through  
a wide  
variety  
of acti-  
vities.

by Eileen Myles

from "A WORK IN PROGRESS"

3/26/86 Anne Waldman  
JOANNE

She suffers even in medicines, idols,  
refuses cool guys though they be gallant  
with all that breezing. Movements of  
this kind arouse the humor of the living  
lady and stress incantation over formula  
and laughter's just an ornament, be it  
ordinary or supreme. Finds Jewels in  
those whose vanity comes apart and  
tolerates carelessness in a kind of  
walking she does so well and bones,  
nerves, organs come alive, charmed  
to consider annotated pages conceived  
in grace and required by a long  
skill in quixotic luxury singing.

by Anne Waldman from "INVENTION," Kulchur Press

## THE POET AS WITNESS

QUIET LIVES

by David Cope

Vox Humana Press \$7.95

David Cope is an acquaintance who  
somehow witnesses an intimate trauma,  
the stranger that people talk to  
in line at the supermarket, an open  
ear on the next seat at the luncheonette  
counter:

I see the man who killed my father,  
the young boy said.  
he lives down the street; he got out  
somehow  
& now he chases chicas all over town.

This little story, told over a cup  
of "Coffee", would be important news  
on my block, if not on the next:

the coffee cup steams before him;  
his young eyes meet mine.  
he forces a laugh, looking down into  
the cup.

That's all. Since it's really none  
of Cope's business, it has to end there.  
But he did listen and he was touched.  
The routines of a regular job, the  
familiar geography and constant obser-  
vation keep carrying Cope into this

sort of encounter. Most of the poems  
in *Quiet Lives* are brief, concise and  
deftly composed accounts of what happens  
to these people.

Tham is tiny among these burly Americans  
shuffling thru the room,  
filling out applications.  
a man turns to me: "thirteen months I  
been lookin'-  
no goddamn jobs anywhere, 'less yer a  
nigger er Vietnamee-"  
a glance at Tham.  
a door slams. an angry man pushes past us:  
I want my steward! they're pushin' us  
too damn hard!"

Maybe times are better now at "Slagboom  
Tool & Die". I doubt it. Tham is  
a tiny alien. The man who can't find  
a job is wrongheaded, but by god, he's  
got his reasons. The angry man may  
have Slagboom coming down on him because,  
well, there's always cheap labor out  
in the employment office. Cope judges  
none of them. Whatever his part is  
in these "little movies" (as Allen  
Ginsberg calls them), it's rarely ever  
a speaking role.

Occasionally, Cope seems about to head  
for the podium, but these moments are  
rare. Rather, an underlying and cumu-  
lative consistency of tone reminds  
me of what Creeley once said about  
political commitment, about standing  
by one's word and not being blocked  
or shamed or coerced out of one's natural

skin.

Cope has been compared to Reznikoff  
because of his commitment and his re-  
straint. But Reznikoff's hard facts  
often came from books, and he wasn't  
(to my knowledge) ever a janitor in  
Grand Rapids like David Cope.

The fine quality of emotion found through-  
out *Quiet Lives* comes from the accuracy  
with which Cope perceives the feelings  
of others. Perhaps I say that because  
Cope is a self-effacing man. What  
can't be denied is his compassion,  
and with it, the profound respect he  
shows toward the people whose lives  
he has been permitted to witness-no,  
to enter. People really do speak for  
themselves in these poems. That the  
poems function so so well so often is  
testimony enough. It's only language.

We are a nation at "peace", which means  
we have turned to our own concerns  
and pleasures, as Joel Oppenheimer  
put it. Of course, there is no peace,  
but there is the pursuit of happiness.  
You won't find a single flippant joke  
about sanity in *Quiet Lives*. Most  
lives are invisible, not quiet. "I'm  
as much a brother as each of them",  
Cope says at the end of one poem. "It's  
all here, it has to be here, what we  
share together", he says at the end  
of another.

by Bob Rixon



THE NEW YORK CENTER FOR ART & AWARENESS

(Ravi Singh & Alice Eichen-Winslow — Directors)

Presents

"THE NEW ROMANTICS" Poetry/Performance Series

March 7, Jeff Wright & Patrick McGrath

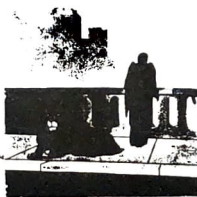
March 14, Richard Bandanza & Marc Nasdor

March 21, Lewis Warsh & Christopher Kadison

March 28, Bernadette Mayer & Susie Timmons

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**3/8/86**

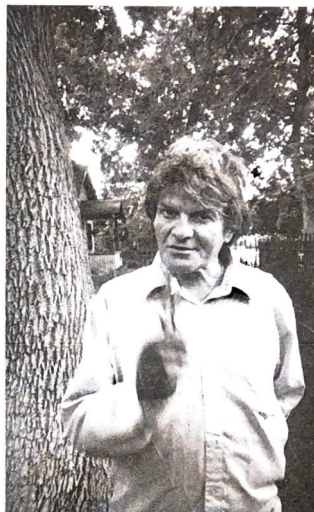


Photo by Allen Ginsberg.

# Naropa Summer Institute 1986

4th Annual Writing Program

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# UNIMPROVED VERSE

MARGARET & DUSTY by Alice Notley

Coffee House Press

St. Paul

\$8.95

**A**lice Notley's poem As You Like It, in this book, is one of the great poems of the decade. It has the beauty of deep gossip, insane conversation and impeccable unimproved construction that will be the absolute requirement of and for great poetry to come, of the Nineties? Zero Zeros? Tens?

This is a tale inside your tale. You sat down & wrote this.  
You are on Holy Ground.

.....  
Who took the tacks?  
You have filthy hands.  
I'm a witness to that.

.....  
I am my own French translation.  
So?

I want to be person in time, rather than personality.  
It was not suitable for newspaper. It was subjective in a formal way.  
It was fantastic.

When it moves along like that--and these aren't even fair representations--you know there's something going on. Not that I haven't known there was/is something going on in Ms. Notley's poetry for going on two decades.

Always, there is plangency and intelligence at work to make music beyond either of those vague nouns, marshaling all our vague colloquial nouns, qualifiers, verbs, and somehow, in instantaneous-seeming syntactic decisions, warping and woofing them into a song-speech of enchantment and surprise, replete with land-mines of sarcasm, irony, humor, and compassion. All those things certain contemporary, mainly Bay Area banditos waving the Jolly Roger of the Non-Referential are trying to declare infra dig, on one hand, and the poetasters of the 'mainstream' invented by uptown NY houses (L.Gregg, A.CIambake, etc.) would seem to gape at in astonishment, being too busy trying to write a sentence with more than 2 clauses and then making it bend over a few lines of print, on the other. The latter group's intention, no doubt, is to give the sympathetic critic the idea that this stuff is "well crafted" beyond the dead language of the Times or NPR prose (the exception to the last-mentioned being Andrei Codrescu when he gets it on, which is most of the time.)

Many years ago, Alice Notley and I attended the Central School of Pseud Pods, located in a secret pocket of the Midwest, that has since spewed forth muchos pseud pods, who use interchangeable pseudonyms such as John Ford, Dave Smith, Mary Dew, Mike Ryan, etc. We had a good cynical time there, drinking 3.2 beer at Irene's Tavern and discussing the real poets who weren't there anymore, such as Charles Olson, and the ones to (then) come, such as Ted Berrigan and Harris Schiff, not to mention H.D., H.C. Artmann, Arkhilokhos, and Anne Waldman. The time was the notorious In-Betweens, neither Sixties nor Seventies: and I believe that we, even then, surpassed the notion of "Post-Modernism" and invented

the term "unimproved": twenty years later, it cropped up in a conversation between Jennifer & Edward Dorn and Jane & Anselm Dalrymple-Hollo, when Jane called to mind the concept of the "unimproved" campground, i.e., one that has no "hook-ups", electric lights, etc. It seems to me that the term could be a useful one.

No one truly reads anything any more, including myself, unless confronted by a book such as MARGARET & DUSTY, or DEATH OF AN EL SALVADOR JOHN, as long as the latter's author isn't Carolyn Forché, who seems an unfortunate turista not unlike Jimmy Carter. There is boundless pain as well as plain suffering in the world, and few of us up here in the 'true' North will ever be called upon to 'do' it:

Some of these monks should have learnt it.  
Not just vitamins & diet either. You have to  
rub stuff all over yourself.

Bob & Simon's Waltz is a wonderful Brothers Goncourt record of verbal event, and there is a great deal of what's fashionably termed sub-text in all the work:

Walking backwards makes me cry, tiny  
roses die. Oooh! I would like to prove  
not only that do I? I do not, have a mind, but  
I am vigorous. Okay, and this is serious:  
take good care of your skin.

In a recent full-page essay on John Ashbery's poetry in the NY Times Book Review, that old standby of oil company owned publishing concerns (well, 'oil' may be a little old-fashioned--substitute your favorite, and don't twist yr little spikes too hard), Britisher John Fenton wails that American poetry no longer provides him and countrymen with the thrills it used to back in the Sixties, etc. Well, John boy, and I mean Fenton--quite apart from Tom Raworth, who's certainly it for yer little ol' hemisphere since Mr. Graves took his last Toke (and, let me tell you, he was as beautiful as he was wrong-headed & vice versa), you definitely should look over here at some of these poets who are also great ladies, particularly Alice Notley, Anne Waldman, Maureen Owen, and Susan Howe...I think that most if not all of them are in the vanguard of what is bound to supersede the "Post-Modern": the "Unimproved".

Unimproved, un-regenerate, triumphantly valedictory:

on New Year's Eve, my father  
poured me a glass of champagne  
& said, 'now what, Lib?' And I said  
'Perhaps this year I won't know  
anyone.' And he said, 'That wouldn't  
be nice.'

Here's to you, Alice: you speak to my heart.

by Anselm Hollo

## erratum.

Citizen Readers please note that in the BATTLE STATIONS! section of February's Newsletter the list of Senators was actually Congressmen & vice versa. Your bone-headed editor begs your pardon. Write Congress Now!  
James Ruggia

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