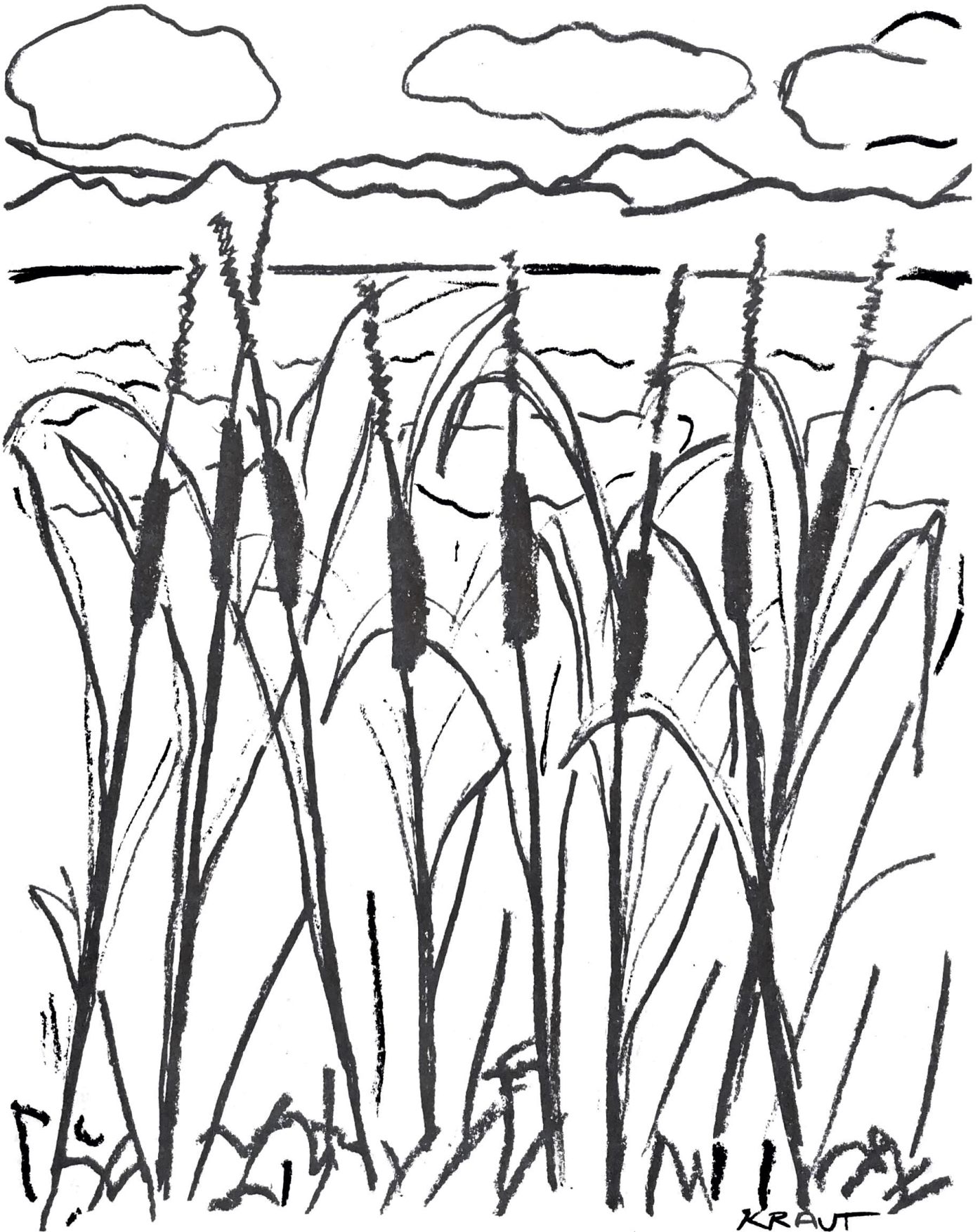


THE POETRY PROJECT

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The Last Confessions of a Member of the Committee For International Poetry

by Bob Rosenthal

This little saga starts much earlier, but I think I'll drop in on it on the Long Island Expressway in a taxi going out to JFK with Wei Wei Ai. It was the day before Election Day, 1988, I was trying to explain the electoral college and how it works. Wei Wei was incredulous. The Palestinian taxi driver leaned back to hear my bizarre story. Wei Wei and I were bound for San Francisco on America West airlines (changing planes at Phoenix). Bill Murphy, my travel agent, had promised us free drinks on the plane and he was mostly right. The movie was *Bull Durham*. We arrived in San Francisco late and caught the mini-bus to our airport motel. In the room, we watched the election news. Wei Wei seemed to hold me responsible for the lame candidates for the presidency, "Mao wrote beautiful poems!" he yelled at me as I came out of the shower. After an early breakfast, we went back to the airport to meet the four poets expected to arrive from the People's Republic of China.

At 8 a.m. we approached the CACC desk and were informed that the plane would be late. We were not surprised. We settled down to work further on Gong Liu's translations. Then we were paged immediately to meet our party at baggage. The plane had already been in for a while. The poets recognized Wei Wei. After all, Wei Wei's father, Ai Ching, had been Gong Liu's mentor. Gong Liu, Jiang He, and Li Gang were standing among a pile of massive bags. Each wore a giant grin of relief and disbelief that indeed they had landed in America — although it looked like China to me because everybody in baggage was Chinese. But where was Liu Sha He? The stories started to come out. The Chinese Writers Association had been working against us and had been discouraging the poets from coming. Liu Sha He could not get a passport, even though he was a local president of the Writers Association. Shu Ting had also been denied a passport, but we had known about that and thought it was just the local rural bureaucrats. It quickly emerged that the three who did get out had to use their own personal connections. They were harassed every step of the way, while the Writers Association kept assuring me of its full cooperation. So the poets were happy just to sit with their bags about them in the airport, waiting for our next flight which would take us to the first reading, to take place the next day in Los Angeles at UCLA.

Chinese Gossip

very interesting

no harm

anyone

just music in

my ears

After making some phone calls and checking the bags, we stopped to get some food. Gong Liu, our elder poet, pointed to a brownie and asked if it was chocolate (he loved chocolate). Li Gang had coffee and more coffee and Jiang He had juice. Everyone was excited — talking and laughing — except for me. But I was starting to realize how terrific the tour would be. After two years of preparations, I had felt tremendous anxiety. Seeing how friendly and happy everyone was, I relaxed. Li Gang, who had served in the military, presented me with Chinese army rations, a gift I could never have foreseen. Wei Wei said that Li Gang was not sure that there was enough food in the USA — I was still trusting Wei Wei's interpreting.

By the time the plane landed in Los Angeles, Bush had won the election. A UCLA bus took us to the Century Wilshire Hotel in Westwood. The hotel was the only vestige of Old California architecture left on Wilshire Boulevard. It was a low, white building with an interior courtyard covered with astroturf. The elevator was rickety and the rooms looked lived in, but solid. Gong Liu was seriously tired after the fight to leave China and the long plane journey. He didn't want any dinner — just sleep. The rest of us awaited my niece, Bryna (a UCLA Junior), to pick us up. The election returns were on the news and Wei Wei continued to scowl at me. Luckily, Bryna appeared with her little Japanese car. Li Gang, Jiang He, Wei Wei, Bryna and myself were soon walking around Westwood proper looking for and finding Hamburger Heaven. After describing the huge menu with a few well chosen words, Wei Wei decided that Jiang He should order chicken wings. When the food came, Jiang He's platter was filled with the biggest chicken wings I had ever seen. Jiang He looked at his plate. We looked at him and then we all burst out laughing. Jiang He turned red and berated Wei Wei for ordering him so much food. Although Jiang He was obviously not prepared for America's excessive servings, Li Gang devoured his Russian Hamburger with aplomb.

I retired to Bryna's apartment to type up more translations. In the morning, I found Wei Wei sound asleep. He mumbled something about driving and a nudie bar and went back to sleep. Later, I found out that a friend of Wei Wei's living in Los Angeles came by and picked up the boys, who were

eager to see Western-style titillation. Apparently, seeing full nudity was not achieved. I asked how much the beers had cost — \$4. I figured that full nudity must cost at least \$10 a beer. Gong Liu was still exhausted and wanted to spend the day resting. He had Jiang He's doggy bag of chicken wings to keep him alive. Wei Wei's friend with the car came back and we drove off to Venice Beach. While walking down the beach, Li Gang put his arm around me and said, "Bob". I answered, "Yes?" He pointed to some girls on the beach and I casually asked what his sexual persuasion was. Wei Wei asked in Chinese and Li Gang answered and then Wei Wei told me, "He says he likes to make love to animals." I smiled as Wei Wei repeated this "answer" back in Chinese and everyone broke up. Li Gang grabbed me and uttered his other English word, "No! No!" We took many photos of each other and Wei Wei took photos of some girls in swimsuits, explaining that he was freelancing for the *New York Times* on an "End of the Summer" feature. The girls posed as Wei Wei and Li Gang snapped away. Li Gang without a word of English got the girls to continue posing after Wei Wei had quit. The girls came by later and asked when the photos would appear — they were visiting from New Jersey.

We had the first reading that evening at UCLA. I had the pleasure to read the translations of Gu Cheng who, with wife, She Ye, and baby, Samuel, had joined us at the hotel that day. They had come on their own from New Zealand. Gu Cheng always wore a mysterious cloth hat that resembled a soft top hat but with no top or brim. It pushed his hair up so that it stuck up above the crumpled cloth. It looked uniquely good on him. Later I found out that the hat was simply the cut-off portion from trousers' legs which were too long. Gu Cheng's poems were excellent but I did not realize how really good they were until I was in the midst of reading them to an audience. About a hundred people had come and many of them were Chinese-American. Michelle Clinton gave a standout reading of Shu Ting's poetry and Manazar Gamboa read in a soft strident tone for Liu Sha He. Li Gang read the Chinese original for Liu Sha He as they were both from Sicuan. Li Gang read these poems in the regional dialect, which amused the other poets no end. The audience responded warmly to the whole reading. A Chinese-American lady came up to me and told me how much she enjoyed the poems both in Chinese and in English. It was the first time in doing bilingual readings that a bilingual person had told me that. She said that the English translations showed her things about the poems she hadn't realized. I felt that we were indeed off to a good start.

The poets went back to their hotels and I encouraged them to get some sleep as we had an early flight in the morning. Bryna walked me across campus to her apartment. She pointed to several dark corners and told me about rapes and muggings. The next morning we were a crew of jabbering Chinese about to fly to Albuquerque. Wei Wei was only speaking Chinese so I listened and only spoke myself when they seemed to be referring to me. I had to say something archly funny in order to get Wei Wei to translate it. I've never laughed so much about who knows what. We laughed all the way to Santa Fe which I promised everyone would be the highlight of the trip.

We flew into Albuquerque and I picked up the van that Linda Klosky had rented for us. It was comfortable and fun to drive. We drove awhile and then stopped to take a stretch in the desert. Wei Wei was knocked out. He had grown up in the Gobi with his family during the Cultural Revolution. We truly seemed like happy pilgrims. Linda is a director of the Center for Contemporary Arts in Santa Fe. We found the Center and saw the great scary sculptures in front left over from Halloween. Linda came out and led us to the town houses where we would stay. Each house had two complete baths on the second floor and a half-bath on the first. There were two bedrooms and a pull-out bed on the first floor. We all bundled into two adjacent houses. Linda had arranged a complimentary New Mexican meal at a fine restaurant. It was so hard to explain the different dishes that we rather arbitrarily ordered for people what we thought they would like. Wei Wei viewed all this decision making as a burden while I was immune to it. We had a terrific meal with our New Mexican hosts.

Our readings took place over two nights. Arthur Sze, Chinese-American poet, came by the next day to guide us around. Arthur had translated Gu Cheng and was happy to finally meet him. We drove out of Santa Fe to explore the cliff dwellings. Gong Liu could not walk the whole path but waited on the side of the cliff as we went on. He was practicing his English for the first time in several decades. Naturally, reading English would not have been cool in China in the sixties. There were wonderful petroglyphs along the cliff and tiny caves carved into the rock. The view commanded the entire valley. We took more photographs. Wei Wei took off his clothes and we snapped him. She Ye carried Samuel on her back. He was like a tomato absorbing all the excited words and wondrous surroundings. We lunched at Bandelier State Park but were too tired to climb to its ruins. Later drove to Los Alamos. The Bradbury Nuclear Bomb Museum was closed for Veterans Day. Snap — we were there. Later in the afternoon, Li Gang started to sing Chinese folk songs in the van. He had a beautiful voice. Everybody laughed and started to sing songs. Soon the songs were being sung in fake Beijing Opera style, but when Red Guards songs were sung Beijing Opera style, the tears were rolling down Gong Liu's cheeks. Arthur translated tidbits for me. I really had never been confined with any group of people as happy to be together as we were. We were still euphoric as we readied to go to another complimentary meal, this time at a Chinese restaurant. We had a very long table with both the visiting poets and the American poets who would read the translations. Wei Wei was asked to order for the whole table. Luckily, the waitress made all the decisions. The readings at the Center were very moving once again. Arthur read for Gu Cheng, I read for Li Gang, Carol Celusi read for Gong Liu, who presented her with a present. The audience once again were eager to buy books which didn't exist yet. (Please note that Bei Dao's Poems will come out soon from New Directions.)

Later that night, Li Gang got out his pens and ink and calligraphy paper. The poets started to dictate poems to Li Gang as he drew them out. Everybody was ribbing him and teasing him about his calligraphy, which was in reality very good. Then other poets drew some poems. We all stood around

the dining room table shouting ideas and laughing. No booze at all. Wei Wei asked Li Gang to write a small poem for me. Roughly:

SNOW SCAPE

blinding above river

well is a black hole

yellow dog become white

white dog fattens

Zhung Dai (Chin Dynasty)

Bob laughs

Many collaborations were made as presents for Linda and the others. I felt delirious. I was reminded of being in Iowa City in a small living room with a typewriter on a hassock being pushed around the room to create collaborations.

On Saturday, Arthur came back and drove to El Santuario de Chimayo, which had a famous "healing well," and a Black Christ. Then we lunched at Matilda's Cafe in Espanola. That afternoon, I told Arthur that we wanted to go to a supermarket. I suggested that we find a modest-sized store. I was afraid the long aisles of frozen foods would put the poets into shock. I was surprised when they broke into hysterical laughter at the produce aisle. They had never seen every vegetable and fruit all in one place at the same time. We eventually made our way around the store. We bought the ingredients to make pork dumplings. The dumplings were made with great precision by Wei Wei, Gu Cheng, Jiang He, Li Gang, and Gong Liu. In fact, Gong Liu was the master dumpling folder. That night there was a dinner party in a private home. The dumplings were a big hit. The next day we left for New York City. These last few days had solidified the tour and made us all fast friends.

The hotel in New York was a rare find. Wang Ping, who had knocked herself out translating the poems into English, had a cousin who managed a small Chinese hotel off Fulton Street in lower Manhattan. The rooms were below the standards of most motels, but there was a fantastic kitchen and eating area, and three meals a day amounted to about three dollars. I felt good that the poets would be in a Chinese-speaking arrangement and I would not have to be there every second. Bei Dao and his wife, Shao Fe (a painter), were already at the hotel. Bei Dao and Gu Cheng are two of several prominent young Chinese poets who have inspired the naming of a school. Sometimes called the Misty School, or the Obscure School, their poetry is simply free to say what they please, be it clear or obscure. They broke the rigid patterns of Social Realism. Bei Dao had been out of the Peoples Republic teaching in Europe, and most recently at the International Writers Conference at the University of Iowa. The next three days in New York held in store readings at the Museum of Modern Art and a panel discussion at the Asia Society.

We didn't really do any sightseeing. The poets were tired and having a good time at the hotel. The food there was excellent. I was finally getting family-style Chinese cooking. Once, I thought I was eating squid but it turned out to be intestine rings. I took the poets on a crowded Subway up to MoMA for the evening reading. We had franks from a street vendor on 53rd Street. Gu Cheng was read excellently in English by Simon Pettet. Li Gang was also a hit.

The next afternoon there was a panel discussion between many Chinese writers already in the United States, other China hands, and the visiting poets. The discussion was organized by Anthony Kane of the China Council. Like many discussions, it alternated from interesting to lugubrious. After the discussion proper, the visiting poets and Allen Ginsberg drew up in a close circle and talked candidly about the troubles we all had in organizing the tour.

That is, the trouble given to us by the Chinese Writers Association. The poets had already received their airplane tickets from me when they, the Writers Association, cabled them to tell them the tour was canceled. The poets persevered, and with no help at all from the Writers Association had managed to get their passports. One poet had friends in the Police Department, etc., etc. Someone had heard that we had refused to bring over an official interpreter and that the Writers Association soured on us after that. It was true that they had asked if we could sponsor a ticket for an interpreter but I had politely responded that we didn't have enough money for that and we would provide full interpretation services. In essence, I had probably refused their official watchdog. All in all, it was abundantly clear that we had been extremely lucky to get three poets out of the P.R.C. It would not have been surprising, according the poets' stories, if no one had gotten off the plane in San Francisco. Jiang He said that even after he had his ticket, his passport, and his visa, the CACC airlines official asked him how he could prove that he hadn't just found the ticket on the street.

The last set of readings at MoMA were jam-packed. The American poets were Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder and Michael McClure. Ginsberg read the English for

Bei Dao. Shu Ting's poems were presented in Chinese by She Ye and in English by Rochelle Kraut. Gong Liu opened his reading with a talk about how his daughter had only wanted him to bring her a replica of the Statue of Liberty but that everywhere he looked he could not see the Lady of the Harbor. He was quite tongue-in-cheek and amusing. I read the English for Gong Liu. I had fun since I had worked on many of the translations myself. As Gong Liu concluded, he reached into his bag to present me with a present. I saw it coming and reached into my own bag and presented him with a box of chocolate truffles. Later in the reading, Raymond Foye ran out and bought a gaudy miniature Statue of Liberty which Michael McClure then presented to Gong Liu, much to the audience's delight.

The next day, Marc Nasdor and Wang Ping took Bei Dao, Gu Cheng, She Ye, and Shao Fe to Rochester and Detroit for more readings. Wei Wei and I took Gong Liu, Li Gang, and Jiang He to Milwaukee. Woodland Pattern is a charming Milwaukee book store with a room for poetry readings. Anne and Carl Kingsberry have been running it for several years. The room was small and soon filled to utter capacity. The Mayor's wife presented the poets with a huge seal of the City of Milwaukee done in chocolate. Local Milwaukee poets also read that evening. Woodland Pattern had one poem by each of the local poets translated into Chinese. The local poets also read for the Chinese poets, and in turn the Chinese poets read back the poems which had been translated into Chinese. It was amusing to hear Antler's deer-shitting poem opening eyes among the Chinese speakers. After the reading, there was a long beer party in the space.

The following day we went to an ethnic food fair at the Mecca Center. We laughed to see green trash cans which said MECCA. We all ate different kinds of foods and shared them. Then we drove out to a farm in the country, invited by the Chinese teacher who lived there. The neighbors, real farmers, invited the poets to drive a big combine around. Wei Wei couldn't wait. Then we drove to nearby Meryl's Diary Farm and got a full tour of the operation from Meryl herself. We were like children, giggling whenever a cow lifted its tail to shoot out a big plop. Meryl had been a school teacher and delivered a high-paced informative presentation. At one point she pointed to Jiang He and said, "Please tell him that he just put his hands into cow manure." Jiang He laughed but had nowhere to wipe his hands. I had never really seen a diary farm before and was very impressed. Milwaukee is a great city full of nice book stores. There is even a good used book store in the airport. The next day, as we flew back to New York, I could hardly believe that our shoestring budget had come through with a tour of the USA, from Venice Beach to ancient cliff dwellings in the Southwest, to the Museum of Modern Art and a diary farm in the Midwest. I felt proud of poets who could do so much with just good will and good poems and a very few dollars.

On the last full day in New York, some of us went to MoMA again. This time to see the paintings. Gong Liu and Jiang He knew every painting in the permanent collection. They loved it. That evening we had a pre-Thanksgiving turkey-dinner-with-everything meal at my house. The poets took tiny portions at first because they had never had such a dinner. On the second round, the bird was completely devoured. It was sad to see such a long-worked-for project come to a conclusion, but I was immensely happy also, for a weight which I had carried for two years was lifting. We still have the poems which someday may be published. And in the spirit of one world, we now have more friends.



Gong Liu with "every vegetable and fruit in one place." Li Gang on Venice Beach purporting to be from *The New York Times*.

It's true then,
 That you will wait for me
 Till I've sowed all the seeds in my morning basket,
 Till I've chased home the errant bees of afternoon,
 Till the oil lamps or torches of evening have been lit
 In the windows of the junks, the shacks, the factories.
 Till I have perused them all, both bright and dim,
 and communed with minds both bright and dim;
 Till the highway becomes a song,
 Till love emerges in the sunshine,
 Till the silver river in the sky
 washes us apart,
 You will still be waiting patiently,
 Trying to tie up your trusty raft.

It's true, then,
 That you will never change
 When my soft hands are chapped
 and my cheeks have faded,
 And my reed flute is stained with blood,
 And the snow will never melt again?
 Even if, whips on my back, I face the abyss,
 Even if dark overtakes me before I reach dawn
 and the earth and I sink together
 With no time to send you a message-dove,
 Will your patience, your loyalty
 Be my only reward
 For the sacrifices I have made?

New let them fire on me
 While I walk calmly towards you
 across open ground;
 To you, to you,
 As the wind blows through my long hair.
 I am a lily in your storm.

-- Shu Ting
 (trans. Edward Marin & Dennis Ding)

Save it all for yourself
 Offer these dense, dark clouds to the night
 He draws the lightning sword in your hesitant manner
 You let the rainstorm pouring outside the window hover
 over all
 As if drifting, eyes closed, on a hopeless sea
 As if the last fruit shakes in waves of trees

The decision of fate
 rests high above dark clouds
 Cold glance of a mountain peak

You will experience the path of death
 Seeing off dear ones
 On their long lonely voyages like grains of sand
 lost in the expanse of sky

You are only a tree
 a seed
 erupted out of a
 rotten
 fallen
 fruit

Clear sky after passing rain
 There is no trace of you, drifting
 You spit out the pit, that sun
 Whether it belongs to you or another
 Is no longer important

— Jiang He
 (trans. John Chow & Steven Taylor)



The author, Gong Liu, Li Gang, Arthur Sze, She Ye with Samuel,
 Gu Chang, and Jiang He at the Sante Fe Cliff Dwellings.

MARCH

I was born in March,
Thank God.

I thank God,
Apricots blossom in March.

Apricots blossom. March.
Drizzles. South.
Maybe apricots and I are twins?
At least we're folks.

Soft drizzle,
Warm drizzle,
Sweet drizzle,
Like jars of
newly-opened homemade wine.
Petals are clicking red lips,
Rain is drifting wine fragrance.

Soft drizzle,
Warm drizzle,
Sweet drizzle,
You have melted the boundless
blue

crystal sugar.
How nice!
Cloudless!
Sunny!
Pigeons on their first spring trip
soar in pairs.

At this moment, my body
is looking around under eaves,
looking around, and my soul
is leading pigeons into the sky,
soaring,
soaring,
The sinful body is on earth,
The free soul is in heaven,
And the pigeons, a swarm of pigeons,
sing in mixed chorus:

Ah, Mar-ch —

May you live longer and longer!

Heifi, April 7, 1985

Written among the tingling of repairing water pipes.

— Gong Liu
(translated by Wang Ping and Bob Rosenthal)

* * *

Women On St.

The women one
walks by on the st.
are the same women
one meets in parties.

In parties they smoke
and
seem
to be *applying* themselves

On their broad foreheads —
suddenly wide
lines arrive —

and they stab at the air
with fingers

speaking of cats

'The grey one I found by a lake'
-
but on the street,
their heads bow unsmoking
as they rise by.

-
Women in parties
always
know about Science.

They have read about
icecaps this very day

but women on the street
only know their way,

the same way
to the
store.

-
I don't hate women

and I don't want to hear that any
more
from my "friends."

What I hate is their stare
as they cross
my gaze

-
as if I were the one who
made the subway so slow,

as if I were the one
who slowed the subway.

— Sparrow

"AN INCLUSION OF VECTORS INEXPLICABLE TO SYNTAX"

(4 Lectures: *Poetry for the Next Society*, delivered Friday Evening, May 5th, in conjunction with 1989 Symposium)

Marjorie Perloff

"The secret," Clark Coolidge once said of Frank O'Hara's poetry, "is that flamboyance *can* be so exact. (Discreet?) And the word "discreet" can be used for something more precise than prudence if you move one of those e's to that end . . . it's odd all [O'Hara] can bring to graceful closure by suddenly seeming to stop before you're ready for it to. A slam of brakes with finesse. Shocking ease of stopping the car with the fingers."¹

That transformation of *discreet* into *discrete* by the mere movement of "one of those e's" to the other side of the "t" is the stuff Coolidge's own poetry, like Frank O'Hara's, is made of. But what Coolidge calls the "shocking ease of stopping the car with the fingers" may well be more difficult today than it was in the buoyant days when O'Hara could declare, in his "Poem Read at Joan Mitchell's":

*It's so
original, hydrogenic, anthropomorphic, fiscal, post-anti-
esthetic, bland, unpicturesque and
WilliamCarlosWilliamsian!*²

That was 1957; an auspicious moment in our poetry which we associate with Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* and John Ashbery's *Some Trees* as well as with O'Hara's *Meditations in an Emergency* — a moment when, among other things, William Carlos Williams was finally recognized as the great American poet he is.

Thirtysomething years later, things are different. In the pages of *The New Criterion*, we have Bruce Bawer, one of a coterie of very vocal young men and women who call themselves "the new Formalists," announcing that, as opposed to Eliot, who "labored over lines that were more dense, allusive, comprehensive, and symbolic than anything in living memory, Williams churned out poems that were deliberately flat, talky, trivial, and naturalistic."³ Williams, according to Bawer, "did not join the exodus to Europe . . . because he didn't have the nerve to leave home"; the poetry he wrote "at home," was, at best, "of slender merits," and at worst reflects an "almost aggressive mindlessness." He was "either incapable of, or uninterested in, writing coherent argumentative or expository prose." As for his followers — Ginsberg, for example, or Olson and Creeley — they were, in Bawer's words, "at once tin-eared, uncerebral, and egomaniacal" (p.25). Only the rare exceptions like Robert Lowell and Louis Simpson could profit from Williams's example and that's because they had been trained in "formal verse" first, and hence were not as easily corrupted as were the likes of Zukofsky, Oppen, Olson, and Creeley. Indeed, Bawer concludes, it is time for young poets to turn back to Williams's "old antagonist" Eliot and to learn "to work in those amarantine forms that Williams spent a lifetime trying to bury" (p.26).

When I came across this essay last fall, I could hardly believe that a "serious" journal, whatever its political or aesthetic orientation, could publish such simple name-calling. Philistinism, of course, has always been with us, but not quite in the form it exists here. For one thing, Bawer, who holds a Ph.D. in English, makes no pretense of doing the most rudimentary homework: he writes, for example, that "Having entered his major phase with *Sour Grapes*, Williams spent the remainder of the Twenties concentrating on prose" (p. 19), and seems to think that "The Great Figure" and "This is Just to Say" were published in *Spring and All* (p.20). No editor, it seems, has bothered to verify Bawer's spelling (e.g., *bete noir* for *bête noire*), his dating, his consistent errors. No wonder then, that when the New Formalists (so called, because they advocate the use of "meter" as opposed to "free verse," as if the former were the only alternative to the latter or as if "free verse" meant one fixed thing), publish manifestos, as they are currently doing with some zest, and they come up with programs like Robert McDowell's in a recent issue of *Crosscurrents*. Here is "a checklist of the ten elements that a new narrative poem needs in order to be successful":

(1) A beginning, a middle, and an end.

Just as it is hard to get the whole story, it is hard to allow a story to tell itself. Poets become enamored of a segment, an anecdote, and are content with nothing more. When this occurs, like the detached tail of a lizard, the story just wriggles and dies.

(2) Observation.

The poet whose senses are attuned to all of the elements of the story can create the impression of participation. In a good narrative poem the narrator is a witness.

(3) Compression of time.

Whether a narrative poem is 4,600 or 46 lines long, the poet must handle the passage of time in far less space than prose would require. This restriction demands the poet's restraint in choice of language. . . .

(4) Containment.

No character and no action may violate the essence of that character or act. A character must be consistent; an act must logically follow acts preceding it. Even illogical acts must be logically constructed.

(5) Illumination of private gestures.

A character's gestures define that character. They also bind that character to other characters. . . .

(6) Understatement.

This device sustains and contributes to the development of drama. Without drama there is no tension; without tension the story sags.

(7) Humor.

. . . . The most frequent form of [humor] in poetry anyway, is irony. But humor in a narrative poem might display more tenderness than irony allows. Humor may also change the pace subtly, allowing the reader to reflect on what has been read and prepare for what is to come.

(8) Location.

Memorable literature is the history of authors who have successfully presented their intimate involvement with an identifiable region.

(9) Memorable Characters.

Any character is potentially memorable. one might tell us something about ourselves we did not know (or own up to) before we met him or her

(10) A compelling subject.

. . . . Subjects resist authors lacking the experience, knowledge, and staying power to tell them.⁴

We can, or course, dismiss this “check-list” as simply absurd or as simply “right-wing,” the product, as they say, of “the Reagan era” or, as they say, of late monopoly capitalism, with its commodification of the poetic, its co-option of the arts. But such tags cannot quite account for the positive reaction the New Formalists have been receiving from respected critics (Robert Alter, for example, praises Robert Richman’s *The Direction of Poetry: An Anthology of Rhymed and Metered Verse Written in the English Language Since 1975* [Houghton Mifflin, 1989] as a “startling revelation”),⁵ or for the general acceptance the poetry public will give to a theorem like “Free verse is exhausted; let’s go back to meter,” as if one could simply “go back” to a form at will and as if “meter” always meant iambic pentameter in rhyming stanzas.

No, my sense is that manifestos like McDowell’s — not to mention the poetry connected with such manifestos — are disseminated in respectable journals because there is no vocal opposition, no Ezra Pound to declare that poetry must be at least as well-written as prose, no Gertrude Stein to observe that remarks are not literature. Poets today operate out of their own communities, whether feminist, gay, Black, Hispanic, Asian-American, New York, Language Poetry, and so on. As such, the poets of Group A are reluctant to take on those of Group B, and besides, they don’t publish in the same journals. The attention that once went into attacking the enemy now goes into getting a piece of the pie, which is to say, make sure that “we” (whether women poets or Black poets or Language poets, etc.) get “our” share of NEA grants or panels at St. Mark’s and so on. Beyond getting that fair share, it’s pretty much live and let live, a “healthy” pluralism, eclecticism. I have myself seen, at poetry readings, Poet X, who must, in his heart of hearts despise Poet Y, with whom he is billed, be friendly and conciliatory, as if to say there’s room for all of us on this platform.

Such pluralism also reflects, I would argue, the influence of Foucauldian post-structuralism on contemporary poetry. If the “aesthetic” is no more than a set of values imposed on art discourse by the dominant classes, if value itself is always relative, if texts are “produced” not by poets but by readers, then we cannot really fault Robert McDowell for advocating such principles as “No character and no action may violate the essence of that character or act.” Rather, we must be *understanding*.

And indeed, the New Formalists do have a gripe, belonging as they do to what we might call the post-Creative Writing Boom generation. The good MFA jobs are all occupied by tenured poets of the previous generation — Dave Smith, Charles Wright, Cynthia MacDonald, Tess Gallagher, Stanley Plumly — those who wrote the lyric, epiphanic free-verse poems to which the New Formalists so strongly object. While their elders, like Joseph Epstein, sit around and bemoan the role of the Creative Writing Program, these new young Formalists can’t get creative writing jobs at any university, even when, like Bruce Bawer or Dana Gioia, they have Ph.D.’s in English. Accordingly, when they assail the “academic,” they are assailing not the New Critics, as did Don Allen’s *New American Poets*, but precisely those “free verse” poets who got the jobs. And life being as long as it is today, and retirement no longer being mandatory, these not-quite-elder statesmen are going to be around for a long, long time.

But understanding the venom of a Bruce Bawer is one thing; excusing it or ignoring it is another. The serious poets today — and there are many of them, and many right in this room tonight — must be willing to argue the case. Thus I applaud Hank Lazer for writing about Language Poetry in *The Nation* and for Paul Christensen for writing about ethnopoetics in *Parnassus*.⁶ It is not enough, I think, for the younger New York poets to congratulate each other in the pages of the St. Mark’s Poetry Project *Newsletter*, or for the Language poets to do likewise in *Paper Air* or *Poetics Journal*. And so I am personally delighted when I see developments that try to transcend (dirty word!) the local, the parochial, and yes, even the community.

So much for caveats. What, then, about “poetry for the next society”? I have two predictions on this front. The first has to do with what I see as a clear-cut change in the philosophical climate within which poetry now operates. If German philosophy, especially the phenomenology of Heidegger but also the Frankfurt School theory of Benjamin and Adorno, dominated poetic discourse in the seventies, it seems that in the late eighties the pursuit of *being* and *authenticity* on the one hand and the pessimistic discussion of the “consciousness industries” on the other, has given way to what we might call the pragmatic mysticism (or mystical pragmatism) of the Anglo-Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein. It can hardly be a coincidence, surely, that the last five years have witnessed the publication of novels “about” Wittgenstein, like Bruce Duffy’s *The World as I Found It* (1987) and Terry Eagleton’s *Saints and Strangers* (1987), performance pieces like David Antin’s “The Idea of Poetry” and “The Idea of an Idea” (performed at Berkeley in October 1984) and Laurie Anderson’s “If You Can’t Talk About It, Point to It (for Ludwig Wittgenstein and Reverend

Ike)", Charles Bernstein's essay, "The Objects of Meaning: Reading Cavell Reading Wittgenstein," and the following poetic texts:

Steve McCaffery, *Evoba: The Investigation Meditations 1976-78* (1987).

Rosmarie Waldrop, *The Reproduction of Profiles* (1987).

Ron Silliman, "The Chinese Notebook" in *The Age of Huts* (1986).

Alan Davies, *Signage* (1987).

Tom Mandel, "Mute Canto" and "Readiness" (1988).

Michael Palmer's *Sun* (1988), although not explicitly deriving from Wittgenstein, bears the imprint of the *Philosophical Investigations* in its enigmatic letter and number variations. And, just this month, at Small Press Books in Berkeley, Johanna Drucker is scheduled to give an art talk called "Wittgenstein's Gallery."

What does this predilection mean? In his talk poem on Wittgenstein, David Antin remarks that the author of the *Tractatus* had a "terror of Dada," that is to say, a terror of illogic, of nonsense, of all that "whereof one cannot speak" and therefore "must be silent." "At the basis of the whole modern world," we read in the *Tractatus* (6.371), "lies the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena." And again (6.373), "The world is independent of my will." It is the rigor of Wittgenstein's exclusions that poets seem to find so appealing, a rigor coupled with the most severe, stringent, and exhilarating examination of language use. Thus:

When philosophers use a word — "knowledge," "being," "object," "I," "proposition," "name" — and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home?

(*Philosophical Investigations*, 116)

The dismantling of Augustinian language theory — *verba nomina rerum sunt* — a dismantling that, unlike Derrida's, does not reduce language to a mere set of "traces" to decipher but, as Charles Bernstein puts it, locates us in an actual world "with meanings to respond to" — this privileging of the language-game is providing poets with immense challenges. Then, too, Wittgenstein's posthumous collections — *Culture and Value*, *Zettel*, *Lectures & Conversations*, *Remarks on Colour* — now available in English translation — reinforce the reader's sense that the *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations*, made up, as they are, of aphorisms, oddly and mysteriously connected by numbers that don't by any means "follow" logically, are themselves to be understood as poetry rather than "straight" philosophy. After all, as Wittgenstein says in the Preface to the *Tractatus*, "This book will perhaps only be understood by those who have themselves already thought the thoughts which are expressed in it — or similar thoughts. It is therefore not a text-book. Its object would be attained if it afforded Pleasure [*Vergnügen*] to one who read it with Understanding [*Verstandnis*]."

Not a text-book. Indeed, the *Tractatus* doesn't meet any of the narrative prescriptions put forward by Robert McDowell: it has no beginning, middle, or end; its "illogical acts" are not "logically constructed"; it displays no "intimate involvement with an identifiable region"; and, strictly speaking, "no compelling subject." As such, it manages, of course, to define the "world as we find it" at the end of the twentieth century.

I cite the word "world" intentionally here because Wittgenstein also provides us with an emblem of the world — what Marshall McLuhan called "the global village" — rather than the "identifiable region" of New Formalism. A Viennese Jew brought up in the Christian faith, an officer in the German army whose intellectual and spiritual home was Cambridge, England, Wittgenstein's trans-nationalism is exemplary for us today. For whatever the "poetry for the next society" will be, poetry in English will no longer be exclusively the domain of England or the United States. The parochialism of English Lit studies, as we know them in the universities, will not service the turn of the century. India, the African countries, Australia, New Zealand — all these will constitute "our" poetry, not to mention our immediate neighbor, Canada. Let me conclude with a word about the Canadian/U.S. relationship.

The modes of production in our two countries are such that Canadian small-press books rarely enter our bookshops or libraries, much less the university press book lists that flood our mailboxes every day. But I am happy to report that just as I was writing this talk, the new issue of *Sagetrieb* arrived, a special Canadian Issue, guest-edited by George Bowering and Ken Norris. Here is a good place to begin exploring a poetry now at least as rich as our own — from Bowering himself and Daphne Marlatt in Vancouver to Michael Ondaatje, Karen McKormack and the late b.p. nichol in Toronto, to the Québécoise Nichole Brossard. Again, Canadian journals like *Rampike*, *Line*, *Writing*, and *Tessera* are currently some of the liveliest little mags around.

In a text like Steve McCaffery's *Evoba* (*Above* spelled backwards), the sign of Wittgenstein and the sign of Canada come together. Let me conclude with a lyrical fragment from *Evoba*:

*Logic is a mechanism
made of infinitely hard material*

*and logic
cannot bend*

*the steel wheel 'rolls' but
a wheel made of butter goes*

on rolls

*(explanation linking with
acceptance*

*not
its cause*

*(to make you walk
along a river when
the reason is*

the road you went

But suppose you hate me . . .

then the molecules in the sofa
would attract the molecules
in your brain⁷

"The secret," as Coolidge said of O'Hara," is that flamboyance can be so exact."

Footnotes

1. Clark Coolidge, "FO'H Notes," in *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, ed. Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur (Berkeley: Creative Arts Book Co., 1980), p. 183.
2. *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. Donald M. Allen (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. 265.
3. Bruce Bawer, "The Poetic Legacy of William Carlos Williams," *The New Criterion*, September 1988, p. 14.
4. Robert McDowell, "The New Narrative Poetry," *Crosscurrents*, 8, number 2 (January 1989): Special Issue: "Expansionist Poetry: The New Formalism and the New Narrative," ed. Dick Allen: 34-35.
5. Robert Alter, "Rhyme and Reason," *Commentary*, April 1989, p. 70.
6. See Hank Lazer, "Radical Collages," *The Nation*, July 2/9, 1988, pp. 24-6. Paul Christensen, "Some Bearings on Ethnopoetics (Jerome Rothenberg, Armand Schwerner, Sherman Paul)," *Parnassus*, 15, no. 1 (1989): 125-162.
7. *Evoba: The Investigation Meditations 1976-78* (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1987), p. 14.

*

*

Love & Language

I saw your body swim up the vivid night sky
A silvery white weight wet haired
Salmon breasting fire tides in silk swift ascension
While on the wide flowing black periphery
Wild stars flared out and showered
Failing to follow you in your higher leaping motion

But with my memory that fluid shape too will die
No one will see what I've seen
No one will go where I've been
Wan worlds from which the colors drained away
Leaving only these strange unearthly word outlines

— Tom Clark

Panel Discussion, *Ted Berrigan's "Sonnets": a 25th Anniversary Assessment* (Delivered Saturday, May 6th, 1989)

Joel Lewis

"I'm a sophisticated American primitive. I make up each poem (i.e., verse form) as it arrives by putting things where they have to go tho' I sometimes vary this by putting things where they don't have to go. My influences are obvious & I put them in too, just like everyone else does."

— Ted Berrigan

Ted Berrigan was born in Providence, Rhode Island in 1934 and raised in nearby Cranston and South Providence, the eldest son of a large working-class Irish Catholic family with a strong New England background. His father (who was being groomed to be a Classics scholar until a family financial crisis forced the abandonment of those plans) was chief maintenance engineer at the Ward Baking Company — where he patented several innovations for slicing and baking bread. A football player at a Catholic parochial high school, Berrigan attended one semester at Catholic Providence College, before he was drafted into the Army to serve in Korea, where he mastered the fine art of sleeping while on sentry duty. After a brief return to Providence to live on the top floor of his family's three-story house (where his sister, Kathy Dwyer, can remember removing empty Pepsi bottles that were "everywhere and under the bed"), he left to enroll at the University of Oklahoma as an English major, and, shortly thereafter, met a trio of precocious high schoolers — Ron Padgett, Dick Gallup, and Joe Brainard, with whom he would become lifelong friends and form the first of many writing communities he would be involved with. Berrigan recalled that he was not initially given to reading or writing poetry and when he did begin reading contemporary verse, he was attracted to the standard fare of the fifties — Richard Wilbur, Theodore Roethke, W. D. Snodgrass, and Conrad Aiken. It was the poets of Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* (and Frank O'Hara in particular), however, that made him aware of the possibilities of poetry and of the possibility of becoming a poet. By 1960, wearied of graduate school and the Oklahoma lifestyle, it appeared a good time to leave.

Berrigan arrived in New York City in 1960 along with friends Padgett and Brainard. Settling into an apartment near Columbia University (which Padgett was attending), he embarked upon a concerted period of apprenticeship to become a poet. Supporting himself with various odd jobs (including reselling stolen books and writing term papers for Columbia students), he spent his free time reading voraciously, going to movies, visiting museums and art galleries and completing a Master's thesis for the University of Oklahoma, entitled: "George Bernard Shaw: The Problem Of How To Live."

Berrigan's journals of the period almost read like a Hollywood script of the young poet in search of his "voice." The 1960 journals are full of long passages copied out from Alfred North Whitehead and George Bernard Shaw. He creates a list of his

poems, and the John Ashbery poems which each text is modeled after. There are many passages of self-critiques and vows to write better. The entry from February 19, 1961, timed at 3 a.m. reads: "Q- What is my goal in life? A- To Be God." The January 1962 comment on that passage reads: "Wow!" Many of the entries are lists of films he had seen, gallery and museum shows he attended, and books he had read. During this pre-Sonnet period, it seems that Berrigan undertook a program to learn all he could about film theory. He was mostly interested in Kracuer, Eisenstein, and Pudovkin's writings, and among film directors *per se*, he seemed most attracted to Howard Hawks and John Ford, though he was a regular attendee of showings of avant-garde films as well. In an entry dated February 27, 1961, some of the first glimmerings of the theoretical grounding of the Sonnets appear: "I am trying to present these specific images in a movie-type technique — that is . . . flashing from a thought to a scene with dialogue, to a newspaper headline, to a poem of mine, etc. I am influenced by Dós Passos, Joyce, Eisenstein, Agee and indirectly by Camus, Gide and Sartre." However, doubts remain, for on March 4, 1961 ("in Padgett's room" — he states: "I make a vow — I will try harder from now on to be a realist. To see. To penetrate the Personae of the word. To be in Harmony with my will.")

In the midst of such horribly earnest young poet-type pronouncements, movie lists and thoughts of old girl friends back in Tulsa, a passage appears out of nowhere that will ultimately have much to do with the personal situation of the author during the writing of the Sonnets: "February 13, 1962 — I was married today at 2 O'Clock in the afternoon to Sandy Alper of Miami, Fla. She is 19. I am 27." Berrigan had met and married Alper over a weekend in New Orleans while visiting Dick Gallup. The Alper family reacted to the news by having their daughter committed to a mental hospital a month later — an incident reported on in Sonnet XXXVI: "I never thought on the Williams / burg bridge I'd come so much to Brooklyn / just to see lawyers and cops who don't even carry / guns taking my wife away and bringing her back." In a passage dated April 12, 1962, Ted is happy to report: "Received *this journal* today from the Alpers in Miami where it has been since they had her committed on March 1, 1962. So we are together, and we even have my journal back!" The Sonnets would be written a year later, while Ted was awaiting the birth of his son David and in the backwash of this unfriendly family welcome by the Alper clan.

In the months before embarking upon the writing of the Sonnets, Ted encountered a number of writers and artists who would figure prominently in the making of them. In the fall of 1962, Berrigan made repeated visits to MoMA's *Art of Assemblage* show. In the Spring of 1963, he attended the 50th anniversary restaging of the Armory Show, which featured many of Marcel Duchamp's most famous pieces. Berrigan, during the winter of 1962, appears to have gone on a Gertrude Stein binge, with a particular eye towards the essay "Composition as Explanation." On December 10, 1962, he writes that he has read John Ashbery's works using Frazer's *Golden Bough* as the analytic anchor. Also in that December, he receives some affirmation of his calling as poet with his first major magazine publication in *Locus Solus* #5 — from the journal: "Locus

Solus #5 came out yesterday, and to my complete surprise and delight had a poem by me in it."

In interviews throughout his life, Berrigan emphasized that he really had no realization of what he had accomplished in the Sonnets until he was well into the writing of them. In some ways, the Sonnets were initially begun as a mean of salvaging good lines from early poems that Ted felt uncertain about. He was neither reacting to the anti-formalist bias of the New American Poetry, nor attempting to revive the art of sonneteering. Berrigan's interest in the sonnet as a form coincided with his first adult attempts at poetry in 1958. Ted continued this interest in the sonnet form, particularly Shakespeare's, in New York. Many of these early attempts were written in "the traditional manner," which, when combined with Ted's sense of the absurd, produced, for example, a sonnet which began "Shall I compare thee to a baseball bat".

The first journal entry noting the writing of the Sonnets occurs on 1/23/63, merely a notation of the sonnets he had written that day. This date sets back the period of the composition of these poems by at least a month earlier than the date Berrigan noted in the United Artists edition. Examination of the manuscripts at SUNY Buffalo further suggests that Ted was already experimenting with cut-ups and line rearrangements at least a year earlier. A poem entitled "Solipsist 5:15 Pre-Dawn Sonnet" dated January 1962 (which appears slightly altered as "Sonnet LX") appears to be a Burroughs-inspired collage of lines from early poems. On February 16, 1963 he notes the sending of some of the Sonnets to *Poetry* (he kept editor Henry Rago's rejection slips in his journal) and states, on that same day, "I want to write poems that cannot be understood until they are felt."

Berrigan had, at around the time of his submission to *Poetry*, already begun reading these Sonnets in public and was pleased by their positive reception — enough so as to collect a portion of the work in an issue of his "C" magazine. May 19, 1963: "made a book today of my sonnets 16-31, & am very pleased with the results. I can write. There is much more to do, but I can write." On May 27th, he simply states: "What excitement!" In June 1963: "Now out to the Colonnades, wet Pepsi-Colas and cold Dreams of Sonnets." The following year, *The Sonnets* is published as a mimeo book, with Ted mailing copies to everyone he wanted to read his work — an eclectic list ranging from Conrad Aiken to Jasper Johns. In 1965, he reads the complete *Sonnets* at the Berkeley Poetry Conference and gains recognition as a significant younger poet. National recognition comes when Donald Allen accepts *The Sonnets* for publication by Grove Press, where it went through two printings of about 6,000 copies until it went out of print in the early '70s. It was reissued in 1982, with six sonnets that were cut from the original manuscript restored to print, by United Artists.

In line with Ron Padgett's [the Panel chairperson] request, I decided to (unsystematically) list some possible explanations for the lack of recognition of *The Sonnets*, twenty-five years after its initial publication. It is worth noting the *The Sonnets*

was only readily available to the general poetry-reading audience in the mass-distributed Grove Press edition for about four years — the mimeoed “C” edition being limited to a few hundred copies and the current United Artists edition suffering from the distribution problems common to the small press world. To my knowledge, *The Sonnets* is not mentioned, even in passing, in any standard survey of contemporary American poetry. It is not mentioned in M. L. Rosenthal & Sally M. Gall’s *The Modern Poetic Sequence*. Berrigan’s poems were dropped from the new edition of the *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* and selections from it were not included in the Butterick/Allen update of *The New American Poetry: The Postmoderns*. In the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, the student looking for information on *The Sonnets* will come across this description: “The content of the poems is primarily personal, with references to his friendships, his sexual encounters and various of his other experiences [One wonders what this author thinks other poets write about!]. He sees with a more detached eye in several sonnets, however, as in ‘Penn Station,’ in which he comments on the transience of life.” And just to show that the DLB is not lacking in humor, the bibliography of this entry has transformed Ted’s “Living With Chris” into “Living With Christ,” perhaps confusing him with his distant relative, Daniel Berrigan.

Anyway, below are some potential “explanations” for the marginality of *The Sonnets* in particular and Ted Berrigan’s work in general:

1) The “Don’t Look Back, Something Might Be Gaining On You” Dept. *The Sonnets* is not only Berrigan’s single most important work, but it also served as his introduction to the poetry community. At his 80 Langton Street residency in San Francisco in 1981, he noted that, “When I came to New York I hadn’t written anything good at all. I came to New York to become this wonderful poet, to become a poet and I was to be very serious. . . . That only took about a year and a half, then I wrote this major work and there I was. It’s great! I wish something like that would happen again. For about twelve years, good friends of mine would go about saying ‘What has Ted done since *The Sonnets*?’ ” Even some of Ted’s most sympathetic readers often view his later work as a case of downward mobility, rather than as a decision to go in a different direction.

2) The “This is Serious Business” Dept. In his fake interview with John Cage, interviewer Berrigan asks fake Cage what he thought of “Happening” theorist Alan Kaprow. “Alan Kaprow can go eat a Hershey Bar!” says Cage. Ted made no attempt to align himself with the “official” avant-garde or even to create the persona of the avant-garde poet hard at work. When *The Sonnets* was reissued by Grove, Ted had his friend Joe Brainard write the notes for the back cover, these mostly emphasizing his strong points as a family man and as a poet. The public statements that Ted made in regard to explicating *The Sonnets* came after the work had gone out of print. There is no accompanying programme or manifesto that goes with *The Sonnets*. It is also a funny work. No wonder the tone of exasperation in Renny Pritikin’s voice in his report on Ted’s residency at 80 Langton: “Rather than the straightforward,

clearly stated goals, interests and principles that the Langton audience has come to expect from many residents, it became apparent that Ted Berrigan doesn’t care to articulate his poetic so much as embody it.” I suppose Pritikin would never expect Langton Street regular Barrett Watten, for example, to proclaim: “I am an amalgam of Horatio Alger, Huntz Hall and myself,” as Ted did during his residency.

3) “crowds disperse my purpose” Dept. The immediate precursor text for *The Sonnets* is John Ashbery’s *The Tennis Court Oath*, a volume regarded by many readers of Ashbery as an aberrant text — the extreme being Harold Bloom’s declaring said work to be “a fearful disaster” and an “outrageously disjunctive volume.” Consequently, writers whose work has been informed by *The Tennis Court Oath* — a list that includes (along with Berrigan) Bill Berkson, David Shapiro, and Ted Greenwald — have been marginalized in favor of poets who are informed by the university’s version of Ashbery found in *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, and *Houseboat Days* — poets such as David St. John, Ann Lauterbach, and Douglas Crase.

4) The Hidden Injuries of Class Dept. My final “explanation” is the trickiest to articulate: the role of class relations in poetry. When this question does get raised it is usually staged as the battle between the ruling classes versus the pesky and rising middle classes. Rarely is the concept of a working-class writer, perspective, or readership taken into account. Hence the need for a *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* (itself a microwave generation’s reduction of the Harvard “Five-Foot Shelf” into digestible bits), and the explanation of the cultural bias of the S.A.T. as being the need for students to adjust to and absorb the University’s upper-class world view.

The aforementioned is not intended to make Ted out to be a working-class hero or to suggest that the working class sees its needs and desires being articulated by artists — a point that my factory-worker father noted on numerous occasions, “Poetry is for rich people — go to law school!” Nonetheless, throughout his life, Ted’s themes continually returned back to themes of American working-class life — family, friends, the quotidian and, most importantly, SURVIVAL.

Ted’s other major work, *Tambourine Life*, begins with FUCK COMMUNISM in bold letters and ends, 69 sections later, with, “Joy is what I like, / That, and Love”. His “Anti-War Poem” is more about a troubled marriage, a little war of its own, — than with the big picture of the day — Vietnam — being summed up thusly: “The War goes on / & war is shit”.

When Ted’s work did come under consideration by mainstream commentators, his bohemian lifestyle and references to drug-taking seemed to be what was mostly latched onto. It is no secret that many of our major poets lived economically marginal lives, took drugs and/or had drinking problems, but these things are not supposed to be mentioned publicly by the poet (something about decorum and the “proper subject” for poetry). It seems more fashionable to wait for the poet to die and read the juicy gossip later. In the *Morrow Anthology of Younger American Poets*, Anthony “Venetian Vespers” Hecht

states that: "Their poems (of the poets gathered in the volume) are not offered as the adornments of or by-products of colorful or eccentric personal lives." The dominant poem of our time is to be the poem of the suburban landscape written in deep suburban language, free of the taint of the unlearned grammar of urban ethnic working-class yahoos -- they exist mostly as "Mewling melodramas of the singular self," as termed by Michael Palmer.

Majorie Perloff is correct in saying that we are well past the age of poetic pluralism — a condition that itself originated during the '60s when it seemed that there were enough grants, magazines, and publishing contracts to go around (not to mention pluralist anthologies such as the Kelly/Leary *A Controversy of Poets*, and Donald Hall's *Contemporary American Poetry*). We are long past that period, and, yet, there remains a reluctance to counter a contemporary canon that threatens to doom many writers to marginality and a limited opportunity to practice their craft. The rise of neo-Formalist poetry, whose obsession with meter is such that the propagandists of the movement stepped over one another in their praise of something as mediocre and silly as Vikram Seth's sonnet-novel *Golden Gate*, are in some ways shock troops for a new sensibility that is attempting to make art and higher education

once again the domain of the well-to-do. Ted Berrigan made the hard point that poetry was as serious as your life, that it could change your life and, even, save your life. His Runyonesque motto of his early days as a poet, "Get the money," implies a bottom-dog view of class relations as did his listing of his membership in the Mechanics Union in his notes in Allen De Loach's *East Side Poets* and his ironic description of himself as "self-employed small capitalist" during the Langton Street residency.

That Berrigan ultimately paid the price for being "as much a 'full-time Poet' as American Culture allows" is a sober reminder that for him poetry was not the stuff of antique chairs in the alumni room or of literary prizes given in honor of Whitman and Williams that negate both authors' works every year that they are awarded. One motto of his later years was "Never Give An Inch!" — which was addressed both to one's poetry and to the manner in which one conducted one's life. He simply couldn't afford Auden's description of American poetry as "an airplane flying over Wyoming in the middle of the night".

Symposium photos by Tony Towle

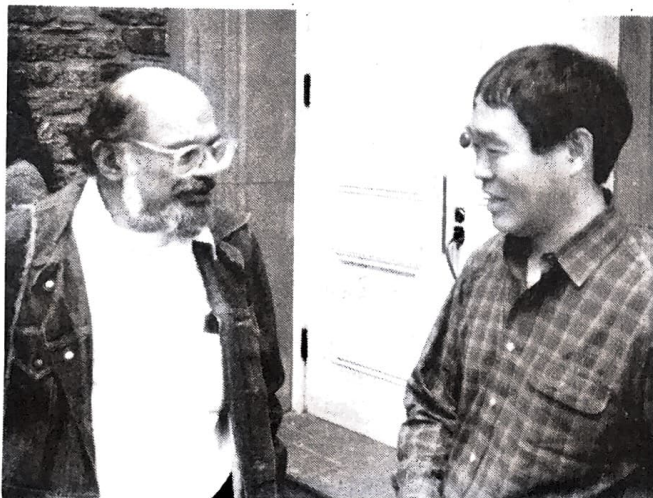
1989 Symposium: Ted Berrigan's "Sonnets" Panel



Joel Lewis, Kenneth Koch, Ron Padgett, Marjorie Perloff, Philip Whalen.



Ed Friedman and Charles North



Allen Ginsberg and Yuki Hartman



Larry Fagin, Kim Lyons, Greg Masters, and Richard Hell

WEDNESDAY NIGHTS

October

4 **ROBERT CREELEY's** *Collected Poems: 1945-73* was published in 1982. Among his works are *Memory Gardens, Mirrors, Collected Prose*, and a limited edition of *It* with pastels by Francesco Clemente. *Windows* is forthcoming from New Directions. **TED GREENWALD's** many books of poetry include *Word of Mouth, Exit the Face* (with artist Richard Bosman) and *Common Sense*. He is a member of the Poetry Project Board of Directors.

11 **ROBERT GLUCK** is the author of *Reader: Poems and Short Prose*, and *Elements of a Coffee Service*. His critical writings have appeared in *New Directions Anthology*. He is director of the Poetry Center, San Francisco State Univ. Novelist and poet **JAIME MANRIQUE** is the author of *Colombian Gold* and the forthcoming *Scarecrow* and *The Interpreter*. He is writer in residence at the New School.

18 **KATHLEEN FRASER** is the author of nine books of poetry and is founding editor of *HOW(ever)*; her critical writings include an essay in the forthcoming *The Line in Post-Modern Poetry*. **HANNAH WEINER's** books include *The Code Poems*, and *Little Books/Indians*. She has published poems in *(HOW)ever* and *Big Allis*.

25 **YOLANDA BLANCO**, is the author of two collections of poetry: *Penqueo en Nicaragua* and *Aposentos*. Her work has appeared in anthologies of Latin American Writing. **CARMEN VALLE's** books include *Un poco de lo no dicho, Glenn Miller y varias vidas después* and *Vivir No Es Sinónimo De Maroma*. She teaches at CUNY and leads a writing workshop at The Poetry Project.

November

1 Films by **RUDY BURCKHARDT**. Screenings at 8 pm and 10 pm, including "The Automative Story" with text by Kenneth Koch, and "Ostensibly" with John Ashbery reading. His photography and film was the subject of a retrospective at MoMA in 1987.

8 **JEROME SALA** is the author of *The Trip*, and *Spaz Attack*. His poems have appeared in *Broadway 2, Shiny*, and *Cuz* (forthcoming). **BENJAMIN WEISSMAN** has published fiction in art and literary magazines and exhibition catalogues, including *L.A. Weekly, Shiny*, and *L.A. Hot & Cool*. He coordinates readings at Beyond Baroque.

15 **MARY FERRARI** is the author of *The Isle of Little Gods* and *Mockingbird and Other Poems*. Her work has been anthologized in *Broadway 2* and *The Poet Exposed*. **JOSE KOZER** has published 11 books, the two most recent being *Bajo Este Cien* and *Carece de Causa*. He has been translated into English, Portuguese, Greek, Italian, and Hebrew.

29 **JOANNE KYGER's** most recent collections of poems include *Going On: Selected Poems 1958-1980* and *Phenomenological*. Also among her eleven books is the *Japan and India Journal 1960-1964*. **CHARLES NORTH** is the author of *Leap Year* and *Gemini* (co-written with Tony Towle). His critical writings have appeared in *Art in America*, and *American Book Review*. Forthcoming is *The Year of the Olive Oil*.

MONDAY NIGHTS

October

2 **OPEN READING**

9 **TERESA KEEFE** lives in Brooklyn. Her work has been published in *Lame Duck, The Poetry Project Newsletter*, and her play, *The Day A Stranger*, was produced in the Poets Theater Festival at La Mama this past spring. **The Shams**, a New York city cross between the Shags and the Tams, are **AMANDA UPRICHARD, AMY RIGBY**, and **SUE GARNER**. They've been touring most of the summer, opening for the Indigo Girls, and have a record coming out soon.

16 **SUSAN ROBERTS** lives in San Francisco. Her poems have appeared in *HOW(ever), Notus, Central Park* and *A•BACUS*. She runs a catering business and teaches kindergarten. **TODD BARON** lives in L.A. where he edits *Issue*. His work has appeared in *Temblor* and his books include *Partials*.

23 **BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER**, co-editor of *Lucy & Jimmy's House of K*, lives in Oakland. His work has appeared in *AQL*, the forthcoming *Acts* and he will read, among other work, his Paul Celan translations. **PAUL BEATTY** has been published in the *Brooklyn Review, The City Sun* and *Longshot*. He's working on an MFA in Creative Writing at Brooklyn College and is "waiting for my friends to stop trippin'."

30 **ROBIN CARR** lives in L.A. and is author of *Mudpies*, and *101 Girls*. Her work has appeared in *The L.A. Weekly, Barney, Lemon Fingers Emerge* and *Santa Monica Review*. **MICHAEL FRIEDMAN** is the literary editor and publisher of *Shiny* magazine. His first book of poetry, *Distinctive Belt*, was published in 1985.

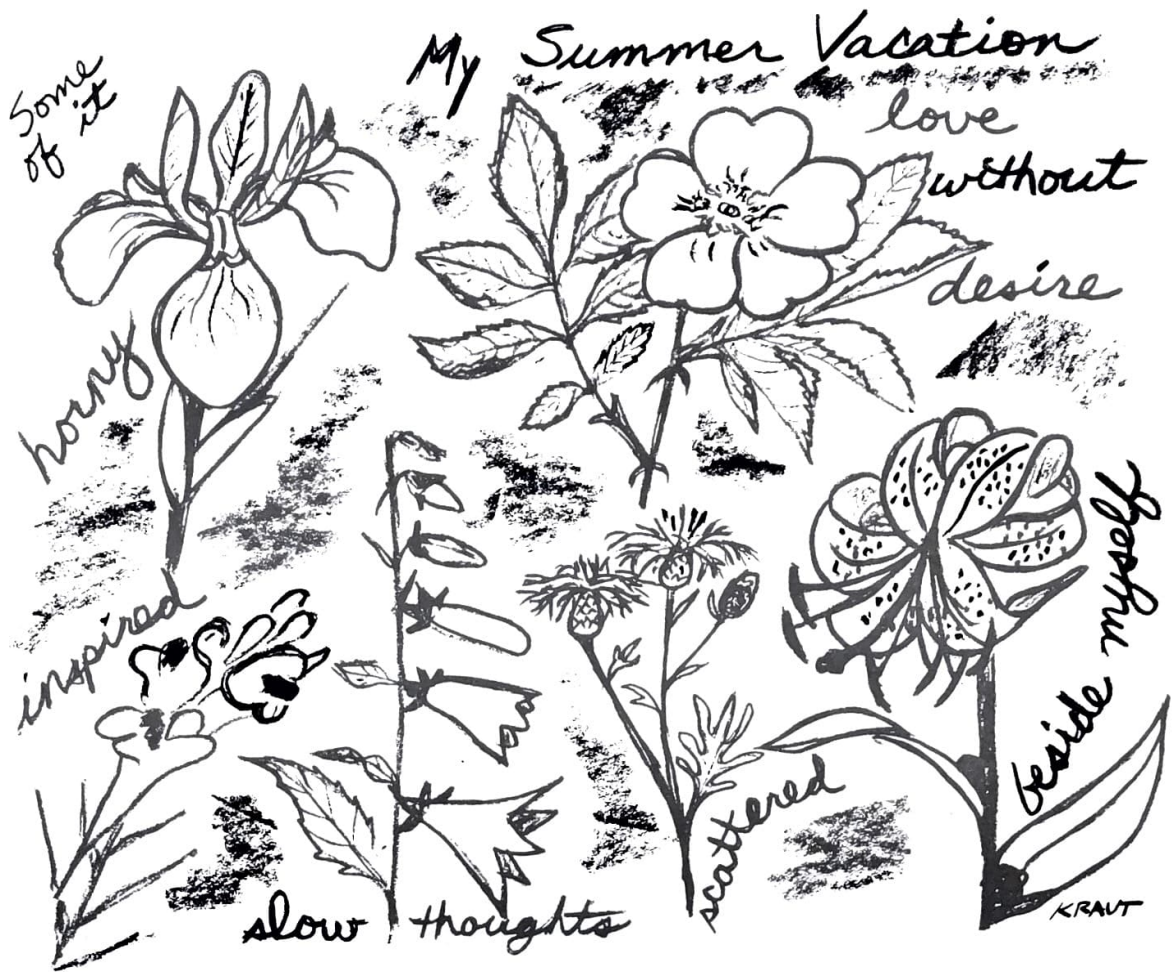
November

6 **Open Reading**

13 **GALE NELSON** edits paradigm press and teaches playwriting at Trinity Repertory Theater Conservatory in Providence. Gale's poetry has appeared in *o•blek, Central Park* and *Giants Play Well in the Drizzle*. **STEPHEN LOWY** is from Vancouver and now lives in New York where he is working on a biography of John Cage. He is a composer of new music and his collections of poetry include *A History of Lao Tzu wording through Das Capital The Bible Of Grammatology*, a computer-generated poetry piece.

20 **FILM & VIDEO NIGHT**. A 35-minute video of Frank O'Hara, from the N.E.T. Out-take Series, reading "For the Chinese New Year & Bill Berkson" among other poems. **PETER HERWITZ** is a fine-arts filmmaker, has studied in Boston and San Francisco and presently lives in New York. His work was recently shown in MoMA's Cineprobe series.

27 **ESPERANZA CINTRON** is entering the SUNY Albany English Ph D. program in the fall, to study Caribbean literature and Feminist theory. She is currently completing a novella, *Shades*. **JANET GRAY** is an L.A. poet transplanted to the Princeton Graduate English Department where she is studying 19th-century women poets. Her books include *Flaming Tail Out of the Ground Near Your Farm* and a forthcoming long poem, *The Purse*.



THE POETRY PROJECT

St. Mark's Church
New York, NY 10003

2nd Ave. & 10th St.
(212) 674-0910

October

- 2 Open Reading
- 4 Robert Creeley & Ted Greenwald
- 9 Teresa Keefe & The Shams
- 11 Robert Gluck & Jaime Manrique
- 16 Susan Roberts & Todd Baron
- 18 Kathleen Fraser & Hannah Weiner
- 23 Benjamin Friedlander & Paul Beatty
- 25 Yolanda Blanco & Carmen Valle
- 30 Robin Carr & Michael Friedman

Lecture Series:

- 14 *Stein Saturday*, a one-day Conference, Playreading, and Celebration of Gertrude Stein (presented as part of National Poetry Week).

(See following page for details)

November

- 1 Rudy Burckhardt: Films (See preceding page for details)
- 6 Open Reading
- 8 Jerome Sala & Benjamin Weissman
- 13 Gale Nelson & Stephen Lowy
- 15 Mary Ferrari & Jose Kozer
- 20 Frank O'Hara film & Peter Herwitz
- 27 Esperanza Cintron & Janet Gray
- 29 Joanne Kyger & Charles North

Lecture Series:

- 19 Talk by John Clarke: *Editing the Epoch*
(See following page for details)

LECTURE SERIES

Saturday, October 14th, 12 Noon: *Stein Saturday*. A one-day conference, playreading and celebration of Gertrude Stein. Presented as part of National Poetry Week.

12 noon Panel discussion: *Text and Composition*. Panelists will include Harriet Chessman, Ulla Dydo, Leon Katz, and Lorna Smedman.

2 pm Panel discussion: *Language, Style and Grammar*. Panelists will include Stacy Hubbard, Bernadette Mayer, and Chris Tysh.

3:30 pm Panel discussion: *Performance, Culture and the Arts*. Panelists will include Charles Bernstein, Ed Burns, Reverend Al Carmines, and Lawrence Cornfeld.

7 pm Playreading of *Re-Read Another* and *White Wines* with the Speedy Dry Players: David Abel, Mitch Highfill, Greg Masters, Sharon Mesmer, Wanda Phipps, Bill Rice, Emily Rubin. Directed by Lorna Smedman.

Poet **DAVID ABEL** is co-editor of *Red Weather* magazine. Former owner of the Bridge Bookshop, he is now associated with Granary Books. **CHARLES BERNSTEIN** is the author of 12 books of poems including *Rough Trades* and a pamphlet, *Nude Formalism* (forthcoming). He currently teaches at SUNY Buffalo. **EDWARD BURNS**, Literary executor of Alice B. Toklas; has edited numerous books on Stein. Editor of the letters of Alice B. Toklas, he wrote the forward to *Useful Knowledge*. **REVEREND AL CARMINES** wrote music for over 75 productions of Gertrude Stein's plays at Judson Church Theater and elsewhere. Won an Obie for *In Circles* in 1968. **HARRIET CHESSMAN** is the author of *The Public is Invited to Dance: Representation, Body, & Dialogue in Gertrude Stein*. Assoc. Professor of English at Yale. Obie Award-winner, **LAWRENCE CORNFELD** has directed since 1956, an unprecedented number of Stein plays off Broadway, off off Broadway and elsewhere. **ULLA DYDO** has written numerous essays on the work of Gertrude Stein and is preparing a book, *The Language That Rises*. **STACY HUBBARD** is Assistant Professor of English SUNY Buffalo, and is at work on a book on Stein, Silvia Plath, Marianne Moore and Gwendolyn Brooks. **MITCH HIGHFILL** is the author of a book of poems, *No Precautions* and the proprietor of Frontier Books in Brooklyn. Playwright **LEON KATZ** retired in 1989 as Professor and Co-chairman of the Dept. of Dramaturgy and Criticism, Yale. He is at work on preparing the complete notebooks of Gertrude Stein. **GREG MASTERS**, a poet, has published his work in *Transfer* and elsewhere. He is on the Board of Directors of The Poetry Project. **BERNADETTE MAYER** is the author of eleven books of poetry and prose, including *Sonnets* (1989). Formerly the Artistic Director of The Poetry Project, she leads workshops at the New School for Social Research. **SHARON MESMER** is a poet, the author of *Jayne Mansfield's Head*. She is on the faculty of Brooklyn College. Poet **WANDA PHIPPS** performed "Or" and "At Dawn Fishing Among the Tules" by Leslie Scalapino for Eye and Ear Theater, spring 1989. **BILL RICE** has appeared in films and plays including "Plates" by Taylor Mead in the Poetry Project Poets Theater Festival in 1989. Actress **EMILY RUBIN** performed in "Repairing Major Appliances" at P.S. 122, spring

LECTURE SERIES

1989. **LORNA SMEDMAN**, author of a book of poetry, *Dangers of Reading*, is on the faculty of Hunter College. She is the founder of the Speedy Dry Players. **CHRIS TYSH** is the author of several books of poetry including *Porne* and *Coats of Arms* (forthcoming). She is on the faculty of Wayne State University.

Sunday, November 19th, 7 pm : *Editing the Epoch*. A talk by poet and editor **JOHN CLARKE** who heads off at the pass the Christopher Columbus '92 hoopla with speculations, questions and answers, commentary on *Curriculum of the Soul* and more.

JOHN CLARKE is the author of several books of poetry and a book of essays: *From Feathers to Iron, a concourse of world poetics* (Tombouctou, 1987). He edits the 18-year project, *A curriculum of the soul* (#26 just out: *Phenomenological* by Joanne Kyger) and *Intent*, a quarterly newsletter of thinking and document. He is a professor of English to SUNY, Buffalo.

WRITING WORKSHOPS

"Autobiography, Prose & the Short Story," **Thursdays at 7 pm (October 19th through the end of January)**. Workshop leader Susan Cataldo will focus on quality, editing, the use of journals and autobiographical material in prose writing and the resolution of the short story.

SUSAN CATALDO, poet, prose writer and photographer, is the author of *Brooklyn-Queen's Day* and is the editor of *Little Light Magazine*.

"Minimalist Poetics" **Fridays at 7 pm (October 20th through the end of January)**. Taught by Elaine Equi. Zukofsky says that "condensation is half of composition." This workshop will focus on the short form, from haiku and aphorisms to fragments and the analytic lyric. Compression and subtraction will be explored as ways of composing.

ELAINE EQUI is the author of four books of poetry including *Acessories* (The Figures, 1989). *Views Without Rooms* (Hanuman Books), and *Surface Tension* (Coffee House Press) are forthcoming.

"Poetry Writing" (conducted in Spanish) **Saturdays at Noon (October 21st through the end of January)**. Led by Carmen Valle.

CARMEN VALLE, a poet and scholar of Latin American poetry, leads a poetry workshop in Spanish. Emphasis will be on writing exercises, journals, and in-class discussion of the work of Neruda, Vallejo, Sabines and other 20th century poets.

Future Is Now

(Delivered on "Rendering the Future" Panel, 1989 Symposium Friday Afternoon, May 5th)

Yuki Hartman

A poet brings to the future what is beyond Time and Space. A pet at his side. His wings are made of cheesecloth. His eyes are buttons, glowing in the dark. What is not known. What is about to happen. He is there, half in a dream-world.

And if he gives you a headache or a heartache, that's his pleasure. If you miss that, there is no future. That is to say, he knows how to push you against the wall. Gently. And you fall into a mythical dimension — You don't know that yet. Seeing is not always believing, you might say. Seeing sometimes makes you wonder. And wondering leads you astray. Have it any way you want. That's *your* pleasure. You break the framework. Future shock, a poet keeps his suitcase packed. You'll never know when he is called to the unknown. He is already there. Look deep into his eyes and beyond, and there you have it. And you, too. You learn a new motor skill, a new language, an awkward attempt at singing. The voice comes not from the same place as before. And you choke. That's a good sign. You are trying.

You try to catch something and you don't even know what it is. It gives you a jolt, a surprise encounter, which is followed by nightmares. Aren't they wonderful? A rite of passage. A roller coaster is about to take off. You hold on. All upsidedown, twisting and turning, and the sky is so blue. You turn up the power, and it turns bluer. Your control is excellent.

You draw a red line on the blue background. It tells you something. You have created something. You follow that red line to its logical conclusion. You enter the abyss.

That's the future. And this is the mirror that reflects the labyrinth, that is us. The future looks into it, and shattering it, replaces it with its own reflecting pool, burning at the edges.

We are poised for something. We stumble onto a blank stare, and nothing is revealed. Such sweetness. What you already know: Comings and goings. What can happen. What can't. It's time for wine and pleasure. And for destruction and revolt. Take your pick. All that is of life and art, its false and true premise. What you don't know. What may happen. You go down on a barge to the original forest. Where your faces are undisguised and clear. Our slender beliefs. They are embedded to this realm. That's the future.

Look, Time is a holograph. You start from a point in the holograph. You go on. You end up on the same plane. You start from the outside to its core, and you will become smaller and smaller, until there is no you. This is where a poet disappears and sings. You see, dimensions can be exchangeable.

I've heard that when an airplane crashes in the Amazon, no one goes to look for the survivors for more than a day or so. The assumption is that no one survives the Amazon. The survivors, if any, are on their own, obviously. Once there was a 12-year-old girl who escaped from a crash and travelled 420 kilometers. I think it took her three weeks.

A poet who disappears into the beyond, who would look for him? When no one actually knows whether he is gone or not. Most likely, though, he is gone, and trying desperately to come back. And when he returns, there is a rejoicing. Or a disturbance. Disturbance because, as he comes back, Time contracts and expands strangely, and all else must be aligned to this standard. Call it a warp. And it begins to shake your foundations.

The journey that he takes to the beyond. He takes you back and forth in any mode you like, and don't. Including the future. Illumination is the vehicle, sometimes dark as black diamonds.

Seeing is not always believing. What you can't see, what is beyond your grasp. You believe, and that's not what you mean. You give up. And maybe, it may begin to make some sense. You come back, where nothing is the same. You've come back to the future. You study it for a while. You share it with the world. In a way.

The future. It catches up with you. Is it going upstream or downstream? If you can answer that, you've rendered the future.

We surrender our notion of Time and Space, and arrive at the beginning. In the meanwhile, there are our sweet confusions that we indulge in, and their bitter after-taste. We construct a mirror that reflects these things. What we don't know. We look into it, and we don't see. We stumble upon it, and we see too much. Breaking and entering, we come into this strange and deserted arena. And the mirror stands still. We look into it. And the mirror is flying.

It is May 5, 1989, in New York City. I ask Frank O'Hara, *Is this it?* And he just laughs. He has just come back from a show: "The Effect of the Future On Post-Modern Art". He is amused. He is about to say something, but changes his mind. Instead, he wants a large beach towel. And after that, a stiff drink.

When a dream comes true, you think you are still dreaming. It means that you are not there, yet.

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REVIEWS

Collected Poems, Philip Larkin (edited and with an Introduction by Anthony Thwaite); Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1989. 330 pages. \$22.50.

In a period of depressing predictability and sameness in almost all sectors of the English-speaking poetry scene, the publication, three years posthumously, of British poet Philip Larkin's *Collected Poems* is an event of real magnitude.

Larkin, as this book ought to prove to anyone who still doubted it, was not only a good but a great poet, one whose wry, disaffected yet oddly salutary pessimism comes to feel more and more timely and tonic, if not also prophetic, with the years.

The dominant note of feeling in the poetry we find here is one of sadness, or to use Larkin's own words, of a "sometimes gentle, sometimes ironic, sometimes bitter, but always passive apprehension of suffering" which came to him both naturally and by way of his chief influence and the poet he most resembles, Thomas Hardy. An earlier influence of Larkin's youth, much evident in the juvenilia relegated to the rear of this book by editor Anthony Thwaite, was W. B. Yeats, who once commented that "passive suffering is not a theme for poetry." Larkin, in an essay, responded caustically that the Celtic bard's remark had been "fatuous." The evidence of Larkin's own verse — much amplified in this *Collected*, which contains some 130 poems not included by the fastidious poet in the four slim volumes he chose to publish in his lifetime — is certainly proof of the truth of that retort.

It is Larkin's acute apprehension of suffering that makes his poetry, for all its rhyming and scanning and other reactionary surface tendencies — reflection, in technical terms, of certain of his social attitudes — so surprisingly relevant to the administered world of the present moment.

For where there are passive victims, there are Larkin themes. The unhappy condition of the institutionalized ill and elderly in Britain's welfare state, for instance, is a subject more than once circled back to here, as in the 1961 "Ambulances" ("Far / From the exchange of love to lie / Unreachable inside a room / The traffic parts to let go by"); or in the previously uncollected 1972 "Heads In the Women's Ward," which soon leads, as this edition's useful chronological rearrangement of the poems shows, to a superior effort on the same theme, "The Old Fools." (Here, as elsewhere, the new order of poems enables us to see the neurotic-perfectionist poet playing with and worrying over his subjects until at last they yield a fully realized work.)

In Larkin even death itself — final cog in "the unbeatable slow machine / That brings what you get" — is mechanical and administered. Another of this book's eighty or so uncollected (post-1945) mature pieces, and the most complex and accomplished of them, the 1977 "Aubade," is a hyper-gloomy middle-of-the-night meditation on "the dread of dying, and being dead." This poem elevates Larkin's congenital morbidity to new imaginative levels, eventually vanishing into a chilly

administrative image: "postmen like doctors go from house to house."

"Deceptions," part of a 1950 burst in which, as one sees here, a Larkin still shy of thirty, left tentative starts behind, and grasped in one prolonged rush the tougher, darker voice of his mature work, is at once a poem specifically about rape and sexual violence, and a statement of the metaphorical relation joining the victims of such crimes with all passive sufferers in an administered world. Its occasion is the forcible "ruining" of a poor London slum girl of the early industrial era. "I would not dare / console you if I could," the poet tells the long-departed victim.

*For you would hardly care
That you were less deceived, out on that bed
Than he was, stumbling up the breathless stair
To burst into fulfillment's desolate attic*

There are no more youthful illusions in the poems following that one, and especially not in those confronting contemporary sexuality. Shy, reclusive, bachelor-librarian Larkin wrote little romantic verse after his poetic apprenticeship. "Love Again," a previously unpublished 1979 piece, seeks out a realistic definition of modern love in the clinical language of the modern scientific researcher:

Isolate rather this element

*That sways them on in a sort of sense
And say it never worked for me.
Something to do with violence
A long way back, and wrong rewards
And arrogant eternity.*

Larkin's apprehension of passive suffering extends outward from the human to the animal world, where the spectre of domination that haunts his verse finds perhaps its purest victims. The uncollected 1979 "The Mower," an ironic variation on a theme of Andrew Marvell (whom Larkin revered as a one-time fellow resident of the provincial town of Hull), mourns a hedgehog caught in the poet's lawnmower — but with a characteristically Larkinesque refusal of sentimentality: "Now I had mauled its unobtrusive world / Unmendably. Burial was no help: / Next morning I got up and it did not." Even more to the point is the unpublished 1965 "Ape Experiment Room," surely an example of the kind of "naked" or "raw" poem which, Thwaite suggests, Larkin often held back from publication.

Administrative cruelty is once again the central motif, with the amorality of institutional lab researchers — "putting questions to flesh / That no one would think to ask" — placed in tension against the mute suffering of the creatures they torture. This is a poem with all the moral gravity, if not the polished finish, of Larkin's finest.

A grimly witty note, it should be said, is never completely absent from this poet's voice, and his satires, especially those aimed at himself, become increasingly acerbic — and funny

— in the few poems he wrote in his later years. Those major pieces which won him the literary fame and publicity he abhorred and shunned — “The Whitsun Weddings,” “Church Going,” “High Windows,” “Dockery and Son” — are all of course here, and they are as great as ever, but a poem we might now remember Larkin just as accurately by is another of those withheld later pieces, the 1978 unpublished “The Winter Palace.”

This short poem — whose spareness, clarity, and merciless candor are trademarks of the propositional style Larkin came to just before running dry as a poet in the last years of his life — is a self-mocking admission of personal regression (“Most people know more as they get older: / I give all that the cold shoulder”) which comes down to a familiar Larkin image, one of floating away into vacancy and nothingness. The isolated redemptive moments of his poetry bring all the planet’s lonely and sad consciousness-sufferers similar prospects of ultimate release.

*It will be worth it, if in the end I manage
To blank out whatever it is that is doing the damage.*

*Then there will be nothing I know.
My mind will fold into itself, like snow.*

— Tom Clark

* * *

Sonnets, Bernadette Mayer; Tender Buttons, 1989. 83 pages. \$5, paper.

“Look at the typical American family scene: Man walkin’ around fartin’. Woman walkin’ around scratchin’. Kids goin’ around hollerin’. Hey, man, fuck that!”

— Elvis Presley

An adjunct cultural phenomenon to the bad weather that is the Reagan-Bush era, has been the rise of what has been dubbed “New Formalism” poetry. Minus its cloak of darkness, “New Formalism” is really only a combination of metric poetry in sheepskin clothing and an aesthetic that considers poetry as only a doorknocker on the bronze decor of the proper civil life. Perhaps it shouldn’t be surprising that a culture that silently supports government policing of homoerotic and anti-religious tendencies in the arts would also be ready again for the polished hardwood surface of Auden-style poetry. Call it the Revenge of the English Professors, or the negation of that great old Blue Note album called “No Room for Squares,” but I thought I saw an anthology called *The Direction of Poetry*, and it was brimming with the small ghosts of all the Oscar Williams anthologies I bought in the used book shops of downtown Passaic, New Jersey. “If this is the future,” my friend Jersey Ed told me, “then I’m taking up rubber-stamp art!”

What bugs one about the appellation “New Formalism”: what is so “new” about Nicholas Christopher, Molly Peacock, and Vikram Seth? Not too much, as they plough over much the same territory as earlier generations have with a lot less wit and

intelligence. Perhaps New Formalism is a code word for the conservatism of cultural literacy and the retrenchment of that white man’s burden to carry Western Civ on his back for the sake of *mankind*. And was it almost ten years ago, while walking behind a group of men with Italian accents in Washington Square Park, that I heard one of the group say to another of his fellows in a loud voice, “Go form your *own* school of poetry!! Then everybody will follow you!?”

Bernadette Mayer’s *Sonnets* strike me as the authentic version of what New Formalist writing really should be, if there were to be a need for such a label. The writing of a contemporary sonnet, particularly by writers of the non-academic territories, is the equivalent of a tenor saxophonist performing “Body and Soul” or “Giant Steps” — the challenge of connecting with a particular artistic tradition while at the same time saying something a little bit different. Mayer has gotten up on the bandstand to jam with the Big Guys and has come up with another look at the tradition.

*A number of lines has a structure picked up
From habit at you and melancholy truth
I might sing forever with never a goal nor solution
Except the singing of the tables of the alphabets
And the millions of interconnecting macaronic words
In the free verse families of the Indo-European stones.*

(from “Epistemological Sonnet”)

In her entry for “Sonnet,” in the quite useful *Teacher & Writers Handbook of Poetic Forms*, Mayer places a certain weight on the Latin root of sonnet — *sonus*: a sound. She also defines the most common subject(s) of the sonnet as being mostly “love and/or philosophy.” Mayer argues that the reason for this is that the sonnet form “reflects the way people think about ideas of love” (though I think that the poetry of Bruce Andrews and P. Inman better resembles most of us when under the spell of the warm fuzzies).

Although few of the works in *Sonnets* are formally constructed, there remains through the whole sequence the “sound” and texture of the sonnet and of the sonnet sequence. As with master jazz musicians, Mayer can imply or, even, play with the formalism of the sonnet without resorting to Ginsu-knife demonstrations. In “Sonnet We Are Ordinary C’mere,” the envoi of the poem is simply:

*C’mere
Tell me the rest of it*

and thus subverts John “Blue Wine” Hollander’s description of the envoi as tending “to sum up neatly how the sonnet ends.” Mayer joins that sadly small group of iconoclast sonneteers (Edwin Denby, Ted Berrigan, and Merrill Moore to name a few) who prefer to play with half a tennis net than with none at all.

As Mayer states in her notes to *Sonnets*, the book is mostly about love — and love in doubt, in particular (and, by the way, whatever happened to that radio station that played “nothing but love songs” 24 hours a day?). Among the current players, only

Marilyn Hacker can mine that old warhorse sonnet for as much authentic emotion and raw nerve energy as Mayer does:

*To fuck everyone as in the millenium
It might be a very great pleasure
To seduce and slap at all smells
I could hit your penis grand father
Of a funeral parlor or a regular field
And all that is complaining darling*

(from "A Marriage Of Cut Flowers")

We seem to have the makings of a potential TV series (a domestic comedy about life in Bohoville), or (at the very least) a new direction of writing that merges the best of Petrarch and Screamin' Jay Hawkins. Mayer's sonnets are not of the still-pool surface much favored by the New Formalists. Rather, they often lurch towards completion, making abrupt shifts in tone and thought:

*It's a secret if you don't tell and don't lie
He can really eat a ham and cheese sandwich
No kidding, will he come, now he's too cold, I count,
I will give him another name, I will wake him up as if
All people could do all things, you court the food of sleep*

(from "The Presence of One Who Leaves Place")

The New Formalism (slight return): Mayer's sonnets set off a portion of the white pulp field as the site of (literary) production. As in the case of Ted Berrigan's *The Sonnets*, we are asked to first remember everything we know about the history and mechanics of the sonnet, and then to forget it all and *read*. The art of sonneteering has, again, been empowered — demonstrating the *social* value of the form as well as the technical possibilities still available to the writer.

It seems a common Philistine verity to claim that Mayer has long ago abandoned "experimental" writing for the retirement village called "realism." As *Sonnets* amply demonstrates, there has never been a backing away from a commitment to change the language — there have been only different approaches to achieving this Utopian goal. "Build, therefore, your own world!" said Ralph Waldo Emerson, and that's what Mayer has been doing in these sonnets, and in a writing career that is a near twin to the Beatles' first performance on the Ed Sullivan show. Ask me tomorrow about what that could signify, but in between the sets, remember the words of Robert Kelly: "It is one of the few consolations of this planet that houses cannot move."

— Joel Lewis

* *

GOOD DOG

He is a good dog. At times he appears to be on the brink of transcending his animal nature. Once, I thought I heard him say, "Will you be needing me today, Mike?"

— Mike Topp

Air Pocket, Kimiko Hahn; Hanging Loose Press, Brooklyn, New York. \$8 paper, \$15 cloth.

The poems in *Air Pocket*, Kimiko Hahn's beautiful first collection, do their work indirectly, laterally, and their considerable capacity to surprise the reader stems from a not immediately apparent but very powerful, almost spiritual, detachment the poet brings to her material. Hahn has the ability to be direct, even violent:

*The first mistake you made
was smiling back.*

*fucking cunt
she'll get hers
and I'll give it
if she tries
one more time
that razor tongue
bitch the nerve
to even look that way
at him*

*Speaking of razors
reminds you of Sheila
in confirmation class . . .*

But, as this passage from "As The Dolls Grow Older, The Girls Change" suggests, the poetic process is enlisted in order to deflect and circumvent, through the use of irony and neutrality of tone and stance, the casual violence of the world and the more purposive and frightening violence of the State.

If we make a rough distinction between poets who reveal and poets who conceal, Hahn, in this book anyway, definitely belongs to the latter category. The problem such poets usually face is a product of the fact that, in order for their poems to succeed, they have to convince the reader that what they conceal is in fact worth concealing. Hahn doesn't have this problem. The aura of silence that surrounds her work, the distance and objectivity she strives to bring to her material, are necessitated by a reponse to the world so fundamentally passionate, that all the technical resources available to the poet are required to domesticate it. Although the poems appear, at first glance, to reject the self-conscious rhetoric and formality so fashionable these days, they are thoroughly worked out and strategized. For example, a poem like "Nora," a narrative account of one of the most celebrated heroines of the Nicaraguan revolution, begins straightforwardly as a verse biography. But the continuing value of the poem, what makes it elicit much more than just a nod of approval for its political sentiments, lies in the way the poet, possessing a developed consciousness of history and an awareness of moral ambiguity, weaves these elements into her story, and convinces us of the reality of her engagement and concern. The last lines of the poem,

*As I complete this narrative
I think of all the women
I'd love to fight alongside,*

*here, North of the border,
as a gift to Nicaragua.*

delivered as they are, without bravado and with a lucid awareness of the writer's own position with respect to the events she chronicles, make us believe in Hahn both by their unexpectedness and their inevitability. Hahn prepares the ground for these kind of strong, simple political gestures as well as anybody around today.

And she goes even further by providing an ever-widening context to sustain such gestures. Multi-cultural allegiances (she is part Japanese), sexual conflict, the immemorial rites and duties of women, all bind the poems to each other, provide themes that are picked up, dropped, returned to or dissolved in little lyric epiphanies like this one:

*Smashing the Japanese doll
for example.*

*Shards of glass, splinters,
ceramic head. . .*

*Still what you desire
has the sensibility of the nursery:
you go from their chest
to your own
to the chest you put them in.*

A long, disjunctive, intellectually ambitious poem like "Resistance" is balanced by pieces of almost childlike simplicity and ardor. And all of these elements cohere, inform each other, and give the reader constant glimpses of a vast literary undertaking.

In fact, the one small hesitation Hahn's book incites, derives from the size of her ambition. Poetry can only do so much, and one wonders if Hahn's work can consistently survive the multiplicity of pressures she subjects it to. If there are dangers for her, one hopes that she can surmount them. Kimiko Hahn is so good in so many different ways that it would be impossible for a reader of *Air Pocket* not to wish her well.

— Vijay Seshadri

*

What's Wrong With This Picture?

The farmer's shirt is missing its buttons.
That is the only thing wrong with this picture.

Otherwise, everything in the picture
is just as it should be, perfectly
realistic down to the last detail,

except for the milking stool.

There seems to be something wrong
with the milking stool.

— Billy Collins

Broadway 2, A Poets and Painters Anthology. Edited by James Schuyler and Charles North. Hanging Loose Press, Brooklyn, New York, 1989. 135 pages (8 1/2-by-11" format). \$15.

This is an *avowedly* personal anthology. The two editors invited some 80 poets and artists of their choice to contribute a single poem or drawing each; and it is, I think, that the choices were personal — rather than an attempt to sum up the age, or some other such vain absolutist quest — that the results make a cohesive book rather than a hodge-podge. While not *vastly* eclectic, the selections of Schuyler and North are by no means narrow, and if the age is not "summed up," it is fairly well represented: Ashbery, Ginsberg, Creeley, Koch, Guest, Notley, Prynne, Coolidge, Mayer, Silliman, Welish, Trinidad, Lauterbach, Brodey, and Bernstein, among many others (and including the editors themselves, and why not?). Although esthetically and geographically it may seem to be weighted in the general vicinity of New York, the contents make a case for that: Here, and not elsewhere, is where it's happening right now, the book seems to be implying.

The visual artists (given a full page each) certainly hold their own. Although images tend to overwhelm words in most situations, this is not usually true in anthologies and literary magazines, where poor reproduction often blurs artwork to pointlessness. That is not the case here, however. Drawings by Trevor Winkfield (who did the front and back covers), the late Fairfield Porter, Yvonne Jacquette, Nell Blaine, Joe Brainard, Alex Katz, Jane Freilicher, Mary Abbott (and others) can, in most cases, actually be lingered over and appreciated. All in all, *Broadway 2* is an unpretentious gem, something to have and hang onto.

— Michael Koenigsberg

*

*

WILL

Fury and sorrow commingled.
Bones ground and leaf made meal.
We had come to expect
neither apology nor gratitude.
Inside us a blue blade
sparked our idea of sharpness.
And so with wry amusement note
how detached we are become,
how unbound by earth
excepting that snivelling monarch —
pain. Terror has ceased tho'
honestly a dread perseveres
passing itself off as ambition
gone stale. But now it had
remained time to speak on behalf
of a friend who died trying
to fly against the grain,
a shadow on fire eating words,
beautiful words of loss and pain.

— Jeff Wright

BOOKS RECEIVED

Blue Book, Steve Benson; The Figures/Root, 1988 (303 E. 8th St., NYC 10009). 223 pages. \$12.50 paper.

Crow with No Mouth (Ikkyu, 15th Century Zen Master), versions by Stephen Berg; Copper Canyon Press, 1989 (P.O. 271, Port Townsend, WA 98368). 88 pages. \$9 paper.

The Collected Poems of George F. Butterick; The Poetry/Rare Books Collection, 1988 (SUNY Buffalo). 240 pages. \$8 paper.

Raised by Puppets, Andrei Codrescu; Addison Wesley, 1989 (Jacob Way, Reading MA 01867) 198pp. \$15.95 cloth.

Striking Resemblance, Tina Darragh; Burning Deck, 1989 (71 Elgrove, Providence, RI 02906). 62 pages. \$7 paper, \$15 signed.

Letters to Gala, Paul Eluard; Paragon House, 1989 (90 Fifth Ave., NYC 10011). 343 pages. \$24.95 cloth.

Hotel Cro-Magnon, Clayton Eshleman; Black Sparrow Press, 1989 (Santa Rosa, CA 95401). 161 pages. \$10 paper, \$20 cloth.

Selected Poems of Salvador Espriu, edited and translated from the Catalan by Magda Bogin; W.W. Norton, 1989. 153 pages. \$15.95 cloth.

A Personal Correspondence 1930-1952, John Fante & H.L. Mencken; Black Sparrow Press, 1989. 172 pages. \$10 paper, \$20 cloth.

Montefeltro, the Hawk Nose, Soichi Furuta; St. Andrews Press, 1989 (Laurinburg, NC 28352). 88 pages. \$10 paper.

Fair Realism, Barbara Guest; Sun & Moon Press, 1989 (6148 Wilshire Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90048). 114 pages. \$13.95 cloth.

The Deep North, Fanny Howe; Sun & Moon Press, 1989. 150 pages. \$13.95 cloth.

The Legend of Being Irish (A Collection of Irish-American Poetry), edited by David Lampe; White Pine Press, 1989 (P.O. Box 236, Buffalo, NY 14201). 120 pages. \$9 paper.

The Plastic Factory, Ron Kolm; Red Dust, 1989 (P.O. 630, NYC 10028). 19 pages. \$3 paper.

Naming Our Destiny (New and Selected Poems), June Jordan; Thunder's Mouth Press, 1989. 200 pages. \$12.95 paper, \$24.95 cloth.

Mazes, Hugh Kenner (essays); North Point Press, 1989 (850 Talbot Ave., Berkeley, CA 94706). 336 pages. \$22.95 cloth.

Phenomenological, Joanne Kyger; The Institute of Further Studies, #26, 1989 (Glover Publishing, Rte 4 Box 77, Canton, NY 13617). Unpaginated, no price listed.

The Bird of Endless Time, James Laughlin; Copper Canyon Press, 1989. 128 pages. \$9 paper, \$15 cloth.

The Art of Being Ruled, Wyndham Lewis (edited by Reed Way Dasenbrock); Black Sparrow Press, 1989. 460 pages. \$15 paper, \$25 cloth.

Out of Bounds, Harry Mathews; Burning Deck, 1989. 28 pages. \$5 paper.

Hill Field, Poems & Memoirs for John Montague, edited by Thomas Dillon Redshaw; Coffee House Press, 1989 (27 N. 4th St., Minneapolis, MN 55401). 110 pages. \$11.95 paper, \$22.95 cloth.

Deadly Nightshade, Barbara Moraff; Coffee House Press, 1989. With illustrations by Kent Aldrich. 26 pages. 400 numbered copies signed by author and artist. \$10.

Twelve Parts of Her, Jena Osman; Burning Deck, 1989. 20 pages. \$4 paper.

Captive Audience, Bob Perelman; The Figures, 1988. 62 pages. \$6 paper.

Time's Power, Poems 1985-1988, Adrienne Rich; W.W. Norton, 1989. 58 pages. \$7.95 paper, \$15.95 cloth.

Covers, Kit Robinson; The Figures, 1989. 36 pages. \$4 paper.

Last & Lost Poems, Delmore Schwartz, edited by Robert Phillips (revised edition); New Directions, 1989. 192 pages. \$9.95 paper.

[where late the sweet] BIRDS SANG, Stephen Ratcliff; O Books, 1989 (5729 Clover Dr., Oakland, CA 94618). Unpaginated. No price listed.

More Classics Revisited, Kenneth Rexroth; New Directions, 1989 (A Revived Modern Classic). 160 pages. \$10.95 paper, \$21.95 cloth.

Emergency Measures, Stephen Rodefer; The Figures, 1989. 64 pages. \$7.50 paper.

Seeing America First, Nathaniel Tarn; Coffee House Press, 1989. 128 pages. \$8.95 paper.

Tell Me About It (Poems for Painters), Anne Waldman; Bloody Twin Press, 1989 (4525 Blue Creek Rd., Stout, OH 45684). 24 pages. \$7 paper.

Relation, Diane Ward; Roof Books, 1989. 64 pages. \$7.50 paper.

Below are selected responses to the last question in the 1989 Questionnaire, Question 9, which was: Write in your own question and then reply:

How are you? I am fine. Thank you. (Charles North)

How do you handle rejections of your poetry by magazines? Not very well. (Alana Sherman)

Should I have spent the time to fill out this questionnaire or should I have spent the time doing something else? Depends on the something else. (Laura Foreman)

What, to your mind, are: a) The worst aspects of the current poetry scene? b) The best? a) The practices of our half-educated postmodern Mandarins: blandness, reactionary conservatism, and cultural nostalgia for "traditional forms," coupled with the deliberate burial (alive) of active American traditions that do not pander to those tastes. b) The dozen or so small presses that keep on publishing work with some life to it. (Anselm Hollo)

I see it like this: Poets don't write questions, they answer them. (Perry Souchuk)

You gave great readings at St. Mark's in 1979 and 1984; when are you going to read there again? Good question! (Maria Giin)

Do you think there is anything about white, privileged (sic) heterosexual men that remains to be said? (Dalton Trumbo)

Why should I write in my own question? I refuse to answer that question. (Herbert Elbern)

Aren't all us poets just too too marvelous for words? Goodness, what a question! But thanks for the compliment, anyway. (Bill Kushner)

What's enough? What knows its name? (Tom Beckett)

What is the meaning to Life, the Universe, Everything? 42. (George Liaskos)

Can you be funny in a poem? Yes. (Joe Somoza)

Are you right-handed? Yes. (Paul Muolo)

Why do I bother to answer these questionnaires? Anything to get published, and not perish. (Charles Haseloff)

Does anybody care? I do. (Richard Jarboe)

Taylor, how are you? O.K. (Taylor Mead)

Where were you the other day in that *hat*? Oh yeah, ha ha, I just stuck my head in that bar, Nightingale's, to see 3 women play 3 chords, but decided it wasn't worth 3 dollars. (Sparrow)

What does it mean when a poet has to play the part of a poet in public by always quoting literary figures, speaking very abstractly, seeing himself as a person who's a member of the poetry family, being a hip clone, etc. And how does the notion of responsibility to himself and others come into this formula? I don't know, but I detect some feelings of hostility and jealousy in the question. (Mark Yanofsky)

Why? Why not. (Morrie Warshawski)

Oddly enough, I can't think of any questions to ask. I've postponed sending this in for weeks in the hopes that a juicy one would arise and it hasn't. If I remember, I submitted a few unasked for questions last year. If that was the case, why can't I think of anything to ask about this year? (Tom Savage)

Can we stop now? (Kimberly Lyons)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

On the second Tuesday of every month Vincent Katz and *Cover* magazine will present a program of "Big Shot Poetry" at The Knitting Factory (47 East Houston Street). These events will combine poetry with other media. (The first of these programs was presented last March.) Upcoming events include a multi-media presentation of some of Kenneth Koch's *1000 Avant-Garde Plays*, and a program of poetry and visuals by artists from Chicago.

THE GELL HOUSE, located in Bristol Valley, New York; it is "a retreat space for writers who wish to write in the midst of the serenity and beauty of the widely-celebrated Finger Lakes area." Surrounded by 38 acres of woodlands. For information on applications, write to: Gell House, Writers & Books, 740 University Ave., Rochester, NY 14607.

The Fernando Rielo Foundation announces that it is sponsoring its Ninth International Mystical Poetry Prize. Any unpublished poem or group of poems with a total length of 600 to 1300 lines, written in or translated into Spanish, and formally submitted to the Foundation shall be eligible. The Prize shall be awarded for mystical poetry. A single Prize of 600,000 pesetas shall be awarded, along with the publication of the prizewinning entry, one year later. The Prize may not be awarded if no suitable entries are submitted. Three typewritten double- "spaced", fully legible photocopies of each entry must be submitted. The poet's name, address, and "telephone" number must appear on the first page along with the title. THE USE OF PSEUDONYMS IS PROHIBITED. Entries must be received by November 1, 1989, and sent to: Fernando Rielo Foundation, Jorge Juan, 102 - 2B, 28009 Madrid, Spain.

ENERGY

In an alternate universe, this poem doesn't escape me, it gets written instead of me saying fuck it and not getting out of my futon, tired at night, and shaping the raw energy of inspiration into words I hope will convey the poetic oomph I got when the Gestalt hit me, before my mother could bring me down, while I pee in the bathroom.

But this poem that doesn't get written is about alternates — alternate choices, my having a taste of the life I'll never have, at least experientially, it hitting me like a bone thrown at a dog, all at once, and not literally.

It's really more than a poem, it's an energy, reinforced by night, but not just night, night in my room with the green walls softly illuminated, the glassy blues, the sleek hints and illusions of the new-age life the me in I at the moment yearns for. But I leave my room and cross the border, the door to the hall and the world of my sick and pathetic relatives and the sick Bronx, which is my dragon, and the world of make-due I've manifested. Of course, the door is hollow and shabby, it would be unpoetic any other way, but it acts to catch and capture my boundaries. Microcosm can no longer be just a metaphor, but the night, and my life, are young, at least from some perspectives.

In an alternate universe there are no typos, and I telepathically command the toilet to not overflow and back up, and I ask my lover if she can spare a prose poem, while being in sync with the rhythms and forces of life.

In an alternate universe I pee and think about a poem, but am too tired to write and lack confidence in my ability to use words to relate exactly how I feel, which I'm not even sure of, but a magician with a dictionary from my past helps me, secretly, while I pee in the cold whirlpool of water, away from the warmth of my safety-zone room, jail cell, retreat, and mirror. I just know that the poem would deal with my dissatisfactions, paradoxes, and other unnamed creatures.

So back I go into my futon, and turn off the lamp as the poem, these good feelings, and my very reality disappear into unreality. I dump on myself for being so dependent on the external to nourish the internal, but before I get on to thinking about my mother and the Bring-Out-Your-Dead archetypal childhood I had, my left hemisphere is playing around with all this — the would-be poem triumphs over the sorrow that is my life, and it writes itself in spite of me and to spite me — spontaneously, give or take some time. Great lines are forgotten, as the raw energy of me, sparked by a Goddess Festival lecture, is bastardized and transmuted, vulnerable and defenseless, open to losing in translation from me to the world back to me, only to be resurrected as a new energy through it being read in a class by another, not as my collection of a savant's focal-pointing a fantasy, or a mystic feeling the power of dimension shifting, but as a new energy, a so-called, alleged, and unoriginal, but universal, at least to me, poem.

In an alternate universe, I'm in a hot tub taking aromatherapy classes, and getting a massage with crystals by my body in a plant-filled and sunlit woody setting.

In an alternate universe, there are alternate universes.

— Mark Yanofsky

THE GREEN FUSE

A MEMOIR BY

LITA HORNICK

152 Pages
18 color plates

\$7.50 paper
\$15 hardcover

T H E G R E E N F U S E

A M e m o i r b y L I T A H O R N I C K

Writing about her early life to give narrative background, and enough about her sex life to set things straight, Lita Hornick, in this literary and art world memoir, has recounted the history of Kulchur Magazine, its contents, contributors, and editors, Kulchur Press and Kulchur Foundation books, with brief critiques and descriptions of each book, and the poetry readings she presented for sixteen years at the Museum of Modern Art, including the three international readings. She has also given an account of how she acquired a collection of approximately 500 art works. Accompanying this are accounts of the many poets, artists, dealers and collectors, she came to know, and the events and social life she participated in on this scene.

Publisher: **Giorno Poetry Systems**
222 Bowery, New York, N.Y. 10012

Distributor: **Small Press Distribution**
1814 San Pablo Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94702

MAGAZINES RECEIVED

Another Chicago Magazine, #18 (Another Chicago Press, Box 11223, Chicago, Ill. 60611) 280 pages. \$8.

A View from the Loft, Volume 11, No. 11 (2301 Franklin Ave. East, Minneapolis, MN 55406).

The Big Fish ("Special Hat Size Issue!") \$1. No address. Contains letter from Sparrow to Mrs. Gorbachev.

Brief, Number Four (Jim Hydock, ed. PO Box 33, Canyon, CA 94516).

The Difficulties, Susan Howe Issue, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1989. (Tom Beckett, ed., 596 Marilyn St., Kent, OH 44240). \$10.

Hanging Loose 54 (Hanging Loose Press, 231 Wyckoff St., Brooklyn, NY 11217). Includes section of poets of high-school age. \$3.50.

Issue, #3, Todd Baron, ed. (1651 Larkin St., Apt 7, San Francisco, CA 94109).

The Ledge, Poetry & Prose Magazine, Vol. 1, No. 6, Tim Monaghan, ed. (64-65 Cooper Ave., Glendale, NY 11385). Includes work by Jim Brodey and Bob Holman. 74 pages. \$2.50. *The Ledge* is looking for contributors.

New Observations, 66, Guest Editor Mike Topp (142 Greene St., NYC 10012). Includes work by John Cage, Patrick McGrath, Eileen Myles, William Wegman, Ron Padgett, Steve Levine, with a cover drawing by Ida Applebroog. \$3.

Parnassus, Poetry in Review, Volume 15, No. 1 (15th Anniversary issue). 350 pages. \$7.

Poetics Journal, Number 8 (Lyn Hejinian and Barrett Watten eds.) 157 pages. \$8.

Talisman, A Journal of Contemporary Poetry and Poetics, Number 3, Fall 1989 (Box 1117, Hoboken, NJ 07030). 128 pages. \$3. Includes work by Clark Coolidge, Ted Berrigan, and John Cage.

The Mailman's Lantern

The lantern by the Road is a welcome sight to the postman on his hurried flight, leaving a package to be mailed in the mail box in the land up north where gremlins dream and wimand9us finds

and Ozimandius finds Nebacanizers womb outside the portman's door belonging to anyone by the dark of a lighted day

— Al

CENSORSHIP AND THE NEA

We're sure that many *Newsletter* readers have been following with dismay the recent events in Washington involving the Congress and the National Endowment for the Arts. To recapitulate:

On July 12, after rejecting major cuts in the NEA budget (including one effort to eliminate its funding entirely!!), the House of Representatives approved, by a vote of 361 to 65, an amendment that reduced the NEA's recommended appropriations for fiscal year 1990 by \$45,000. This measure was designed to indicate the House's disapproval of the NEA's funding of exhibitions of the work of Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano, on the basis that this work was pornographic and blasphemous respectively, the cut being equal to the amount of the funding the institutions that organized these shows received.

On July 26, the Senate approved by voice vote a devastating amendment introduced by Senator Jesse Helms, Republican of North Carolina, which would bar Federal art funds from being used to "promote, disseminate, or reproduce obscene or indecent materials, including but not limited to depictions of sadomasochism, homoeroticism, exploitation of children, or individuals engaged in sex acts; or material which denigrates the objects or beliefs of the adherents of a particular religion or non-religion." It also bars grants for artwork that "denigrates, defaces or reviles a person, group or class of citizens on the basis of race, creed, sex, handicap, age or national origin." This action also bars grants for the next five years to the two institutions that supported the Serrano and Mapplethorpe exhibitions.

To point out just one brief example of how idiotically sweeping this language is, it would seem that atheists and agnostics, as members of "non-religions," could legitimately object to Federal funds being dispersed for a travelling show, say, of El Greco and Zurbarán, on the basis of the "offensive" Christian, particularly Roman Catholic, content of their work. The opportunities for this kind of absurdity are virtually endless. Any art, past or present, is going to offend *somebody*.

Equally serious is the fact that the institutions in question are being punished *retroactively*. They followed the government guidelines to get the money. This is the equivalent of an *ex post facto* law, which is convicting someone of breaking a law before the law was passed. The prohibition against such inherently corrupt practice was incorporated into Article One of the Constitution. This five-year withholding of funds is meant as a warning, of course, to every art institution that applies for any NEA funding whatsoever: *Censor Yourself—Because If We Decide Later We Don't Like It, You're In Big Trouble, Financial-Wise, Dig?*

Legally sanctioned censorship at the Federal level, if tolerated, will certainly inspire and unleash the always-vigilant regressive forces to promote censorship at state and local levels as well. Though the Helms' legislation is limited to es-

establishing censorship within an agency that distributes public funds, it echoes previous legislation and encourages new initiatives aimed at prohibiting access by the U.S. public to "provocative" artwork entirely.

By the time you receive this issue of the newsletter, there will have been an important meeting of the Appropriations Subcommittees of both Houses, to resolve their differences in approach regarding the NEA. On the basis of these meetings, legislation will be drafted and proposed that will effect the NEA during 1990. It should also be noted that the NEA's contract as a government agency is up for renewal this coming year and the actions of the Appropriations Committees are certain to have an impact on what basis the NEA will be renewed as a government program, if it is renewed at all.

There is a McCarthy-Era-like fear beginning to permeate this country's political climate. Recent actions by the legislatures on such issues as flag desecration and on the Mapplethorpe/Serrano grants indicate that politicians are feeling vulnerable to attacks that question their patriotism and dedication to "American values." The effectiveness of negative advertising during the last Presidential election has made our elected representatives wary of being associated with "controversial" ideas and "liberal" causes. In this sort of climate, it is imperative that we, as artists and citizens, be heard from. Public officials must understand that encouraging a vital cultural climate in this country, one that includes work by such artists as Mapplethorpe and Serrano, is in the interests of our society as a whole and not just some capricious, "aberrant" few.

We strongly encourage you to write to your representatives in government. Voice your support for the NEA and your abhorrence of any attempt to dismantle the "peer review" system for distributing artists' grants. Encourage elected officials to use the occasion of the Helms' legislation to establish even greater autonomy for the NEA. We should transform our initially defensive posture in regard to these matters into an empowered advocacy that will discourage further attack.

Please write strong letters immediately to Senators Alfonse D'Amato (R - New York); Robert C. Byrd (D - West Virginia); Ernest F. Hollings (D - South Carolina); J. Bennett Johnston, Jr. (D - Louisiana); Dale L. Bumpers (D - Arkansas); Ted Stevens (R - Alaska); Warren Rudman (R - New Hampshire); Peter V. Domenici (R - New Mexico); and Don Nickles (R - Oklahoma). These Senators are members of the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations and all probably will have a voice in the deliberations of the important House-Senate Conference Committee.

Warm letters of thanks should also be written to Representative Sidney R. Yates (D - Illinois), who has defended our interests in the House, and to Senator Claiborne Pell (D - Rhode Island), and Senator Daniel P. Moynihan (D - New York), who have been our advocates in the Senate. Letters to Representatives should be sent to the House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515, and letters to Senators to the U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510.

Here is an example of a "strong" letter:

Dear

Re: Sen. Jesse Helms arts-control Amendment to Fiscal 1980 Interior Agency Appropriation Bill:

This arts censorship rotgut originated in the beer-soaked bucks of Joseph Coors, was moonshined in Heritage Foundation think-tanks, & is peddled nationwide by notorious tobacco-cult Senator Jesse Helms.

These alcohol-nicotine kingpins have the insolence to appoint themselves arbiters of Public Morality.

Legal narcotics-pushers wrapped in the flag, they threaten to give the needle to any politician opposing their takeover of culturally free turf in America.

After thirty years' broadcast liberty, my poem "Howl" was bumped off the air in public 1988 by a Heritage Foundation-Sen. Helms-FCC 24-hour-a-day ban on mystific "Indecency."

These hypocrite scoundrels have muscled their way into museums already, and plan to extend their own control-addiction to arts councils, humanities programs, universities. How long will Congress, the Public, & the Arts be held hostage to this cultural Mafia?

Allen Ginsberg, Poet;
Member, American Institute of Arts & Letters;
Executive Board, American P.E.N. Center;
Member, Freedom to Write Committee;
Distinguished Professor of English, Brooklyn College

* * *

The Collected Poems of George Butterick.

edited by Richard Blevins.

Introduction by Robert Creeley

Published by The Poetry Collection

Price: \$8.00

Send orders to: The Poetry Collection
420 Capen Hall
SUNY
Buffalo, NY 14260

All checks and money orders should be payable to the UB Foundation.

Library orders accepted.

Standard discount to the trade.

“loving them both so in a northern town”

Here is what happened on August 12:

It rained. It rained so hard we thought we were in Seattle. It rained so hard it was scary.

Are you sure you don't want to go tomorrow instead? I asked. “Absolutely not!” Steve boomed. That generous baritone.

Across Houston, through the Holland Tunnel, onto the Turnpike to the Garden State. Steve said, “Joe, pay attention. Bruce Springsteen has thrown many a quarter in this tollbooth. Bill Bradley too.”

We talked about Steve's “narrow escape” from last month's heart attack: “Forty-three is too early to check out!” And to prove it: “I'm feeling randy! Which of you women would like to go first?” I'm waiting for Joe to grow up, I said. Marion laughed.

We took exit 98 to Route 34 to a roundabout, where we collectively decided the ocean lay west. “I was thinking of Malibu,” Steve said when we got straightened out. “Wrong ocean, that's all.”

We found Spring Lake and hugged: Marion's family all together for the first time in 8 years. Her sister made spaghetti. The Farriers were being very English around the table and it was Steve who put everyone at ease by announcing, “Colette, this is marvelous!” Steve's remarks always the ones with exclamation points.

We watched a *Mr. Ed* rerun. Some old guy waved an arm: I like him, I said. “You like guys with grand gestures. That's why you cast me in your plays.” We laughed about Steve as Mayor Kroch in a bald wig in *New York Is Missing*.

He claimed the dining room table. “*This* is where I will write this week.” Work outside, I said, you can be a nature poet. “No, I'll be a New Jersey poet.” We talked about the Jersey poets like Ed Smith, who'd been in Steve's workshop. “I threw a baseball line and Ed caught it. What a great poet.” We walked to the corner, past gardens. “There'll be marigolds in my next poem.” He could be somewhere by being outside somewhere; an attachment to things through flowers. “I have a lot of new poems from our trip to Colorado. I threw the ball to my son. Father and son, playing catch. Sandy Koufax once said Joe's pitching form was perfect.” Marion and another sister were deep in catch-up ahead of us. “This is a historic moment, Nor-Nau!” Steve said. “You are privileged to see all the Farrier women together.” I felt privileged. “And doesn't Marion have a great ass!”

This is what happened on August 13: Steve had another heart attack and died.

Buried at Woodlawn, near Marilyn Monroe: Steve Carey, Poet.

— Elinor Nauen

You think so

Odds are

Six years of fencing lessons
that you might walk into a room —
on camera and off — properly
and at least once perfectly —
down the crapper

The sudden sense that
all your life has been only preparation
for this moment
in this car
at this intersection
this afternoon
waiting for this light to change

Alternately, maybe you just know
you're going to die today
and just barely don't realize it

The weather gets quickly heavy
or the forecast does

Rooms (cars) are rife —
ripe —
with portent

Ripe

“I never died,” said he
“How about you?
How're you doing?”

“LIFE IN A NORTHERN TOWN”

Six in the morning, outside
Blowing snow in the perfect dark, 22°
I'm awake after awakening dreams
(Often happens just before dawn)
Marion and Joe abed asleep
Joe wearing his earphones, radio going
I put them on, pour a glass of juice
Get some coffee going
Come out here in skivvies to write this
Loving them both so in a northern town

— Steve Carey

* *

Elegy for Will

On Saturday, June 24th, a saddened huddle of friends and relatives gathered in the Parish Hall at St. Mark's to remember Will Bennett, his poetry and his person. Most of us were stunned by the fact that he was gone and over the circumstances of his sudden death. When, in his very moving service for Will, Reverend David Garcia talked about the high value and regard people place on poetry and how important it is to them in their daily lives, Eileen Myles leaned over to me and said "Who is he talking about?" And though David's words were wonderfully heartfelt enough — who indeed *was* he talking about? Maybe if more people in this culture cared about poetry at all, Will would still be alive. I don't know, but maybe. Friends read testimonials, remembered Will's lucid energy, his fresh approach, his quirkiness, his gleefulness, his sensitive eyes and hands, his generosity, his dedication to poetry. They read from his works so desperately beautifully. A small group who cared so much for Will and what he was about. At the last we all held hands and formed a circle around the table with the basket holding Will's ashes. Strangers squeezed knuckles and palms. Will Bennett 1952 - 1989 A Poet. A Poem.

— Maureen Owen

*

Latitude

A day to make a game, just a second meridian equatorially hot. From where I stand buildings become elevations of social quality, a legend including a scale of game points, a million to the inch. Hundreds of small-scale details, like cotton to the south, & I live on a mountain twenty feet high But I do not have to climb these red contours, I have my world without maps, a relief.

Map Country

Plastic light, of glass broken but not yet fallen. A bad kid, a Yiddish poet, a friend giving you useful but depressing advice. So like the night, everyday clothes, to be cold. Only at Christmas is the cold so cold & the ache so deep & quiet as to be felt around the block. The world is at rock bottom & so at peace. Every night is not like this half sparse light & half part of a larger being, a friend. Yet another part half-sober. Spanish on Avenue A, just a light boatride from Second, where lights go out & on & grey takes over the people sleeping beside their telephones always at the ready.

— Will Bennett

(from *Zero, Telephone Books, 1984.*
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In Memory of Joe Ceravolo

The moon blinks
off and on
on Silliman Street
honking as one —
fifty pages after noon.

— Ben Friedlander & Stephen Rodefer

* *

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DREAM POEM

The shaman paints a dancing skeleton
on a woman's chest.
She lies down stiffly,
like someone who has worked hard all day,
among the stones of old campfires.
Animals come from the woods
and ring her with veneration.
A bear sniffs her hands.
Only her eyes move, watching clouds.

— Robert Edwards

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