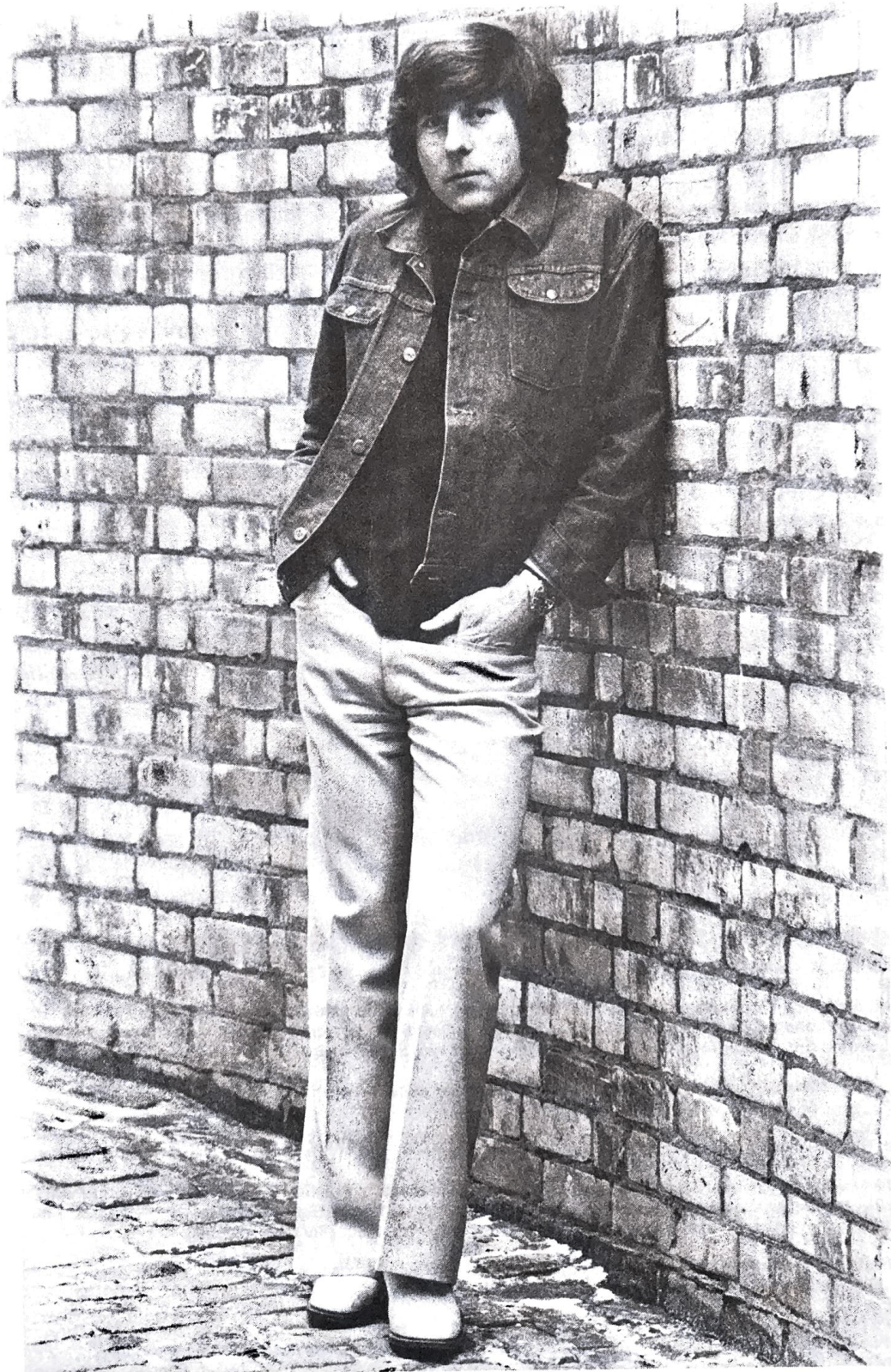


the poetry project

april / may 1995 • volume no. 157



Gerard Malanga

t o t h e f i l m i n d u s t r y i n c r i s i s

CONTENTS

Dirt by Gillian McCain ... 3

TO THE FILM INDUSTRY IN CRISIS

Nick Zedd on Jack Smith ... 5

On Auditioning for "On the Road" by Tim Griffin ... 7

At the Audition by Sparrow ... 8

The Poet on Celluloid: Eight Trailers by Amanda Bristow ... 9

Short Cuts: Jeffery Conway, Wang Ping, Lisa Janssen & Jaime Manrique on Discuss the Movies ... 11

That's Blaxploitation!!!! Film Synopses by Darius James •

Biographers on the Couch: The New Plath/Sexton Biographies by Jo Ann Wasserman ... 13

Poetry Project Events Calendar ... 16

Poetry Project Bulletin Board ... 18

Reviews ... 19

Mob by Abigail Child • 19 • *Jack Kerouac is Pregnant* by Aurelie Sheehan • 19 • *Conversations with*

Amiri Baraka • 20 • *Fresh Girls and Other Stories and Oedipal Dreams* by Evelyn Lau • 20 • *Memory*

Play by Carla Harryman • 21 • *Exact Change Yearbook #1* • 22 • *Most Way Home* by Kevin Young •

23 • *Talking Pictures: The Photography of Rudy Burckhardt* by Rudy Burckhardt and Simon Pettet •

24 • *Rubbed Stones: Poems from 1960-1992* by Rochelle Owens • 24 • *The Art of Practice: 45*

Contemporary Poets • 25 • *Rodent Press* • 25 • *Images* by David Lynch • 26 • *Poems for the Whole*

Family by Daniel Krakauer • 26 • *Distance Without Distance* by Barbara Einzig • 27 • *Larry Fagin*

Collaborations • 27 • *The Desire of Mothers To Please Others in Letters* by Bernadette Mayer • 29 •

Nuyorican Symphony: Poetry Live at The Knitting Factory • 30

Poems

B-Movie Remake by Robert Hershon ... 23

Hollywood Unrealism by Susan Cataldo ... 32

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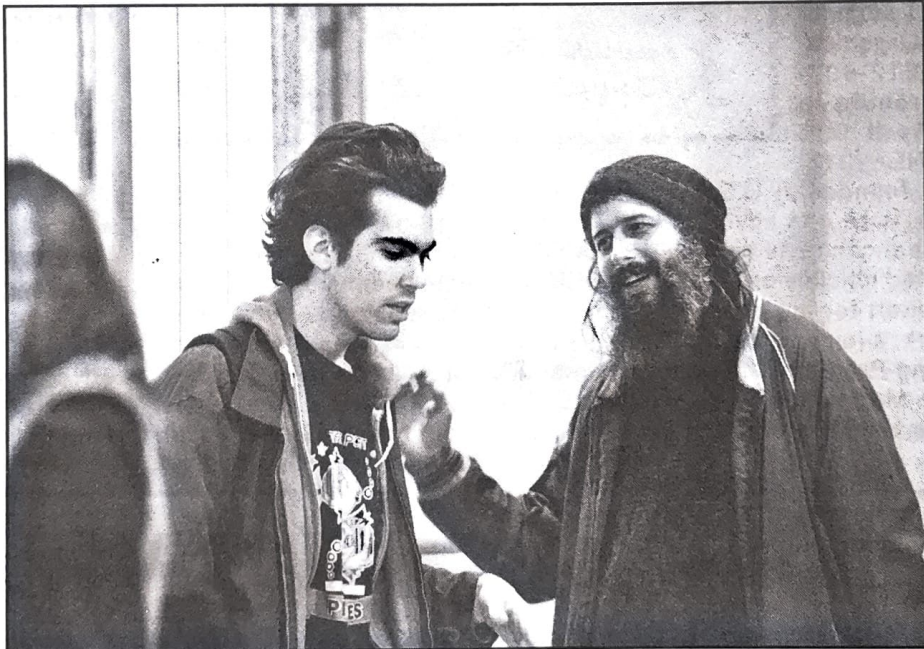
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g i l l i a n m c l a i n

William Corbett would like to hear from anyone who has letters or post-cards from **James Schuyler** or from anyone who has information that might help him as he edits a book of letters by James Schuyler. Please write him at 9 Columbus Square, Boston, MA 02116 ... **George Schneeman** will show paintings and ceramics at HOMEPLATE, his studio/showroom at 338 East 5th street.

The show will run for the five weekends in April, hours on Saturdays and Sundays from 2 to 6. Opening on April 1 from 12-7 ... **Gerard Malanga** had a photo show called "Transcending the Myth" in February at the Berkshire Coffee Roasting Company in Great Barrington, Massachusetts which included photos of among others, **Tennessee Williams**, **Cybill Shepherd**, **Charles Bukowski**, **Mick**



David Greenberg, Sparrow (& Bernadette Mayer's back)

Jagger and the photo of **Roman Polanski** on our cover ... The following writers received The America Awards for Literature in 1994: **Aime Fernand Cesaire** (International: awarded to a living writer of international stature for a body of literary writing), **Harry Mathews** for *The Journalist* (Fiction), **Robert Creeley** for *Echoes* and **Jackson Mac Low** for *42 Merzgedichte in Memoriam Kurt Schwitters* (Poetry), **Mac Wellman** for "The Hyacinth Macaw" (Drama) and the late **Jospeph Ceravolo** for *The Green Lake is Awake: Selected Poems* (Belles-Lettres and Other). For more info about The America Awards write P.O. Box 57172, Washington, DC 20036 ... I agree, you never would have

guessed: **Foamola** mentioned in Time magazine! In the January 23rd article "Hacker Homecoming," about **Phiber Optik's** just-out-of-jail-and-back-online celebration party at Irving Plaza, Joshua Quittner writes, "Onstage is a band called Foamola, consisting of a bald male organist, a homeless man playing what appear to be a pair of rocks and a female vocalist who yowls, 'When

I read a book, I always read **Balzac!** When I take a drug, I always take **Prozac!** Mercifully, an emcee named Jane Doe finally seizes the mike ..." **Sparrow**, not to worry, I'm sure Ellen and Sylvia will let you come back home ... **Spam Diaries**: The following is reprinted from a press release/ letter sent to Ed Friedman from Jack Collom: "In 1979 and again in 1989 I (**Jack Collom**) won NEA Poetry Fellowships. The awards totalled \$30 000, were given on the basis of the poetry I submitted. Can't remember the '79 but the 1989 batch consisted of environmental poems. Couple years after, early '90s, in response to a running joke about SPAM on the part of Boulder Daily Camera food editor John Lehndorff, I wrote &

gave him a dozen acrostics on SPAM; he ran them in the Camera. The poems apparently got into the "SPAM Network," and on July 3rd, 1994, two of them were printed in the **New York Times Magazine** as part of an article on the humorous or folklore aspects of SPAM. Mention was made that I was two-time NEA winner (an info-check from the Times called me & got this

fact). Incidentally, the two poems were printed in the **London Times Literary Supplement** (July 15, '94) as part of a delightfully British letter to the editor. About the end of July I got a phonecall from a man vaguely identifying himself as "wire services" who asked a few questions apparently based on the NY Times article. Feeling genial about the whole thing, I answered them as well as I could. I confessed that **bacon** is my favorite

food. I did not speak of the NEA awards in any context of "remorse," there is of course no connection between those awards and my **SPAM** pieces. On August 16, 1994, an issue of **The Star**, the National Enquirer-like tabloid, contains an article stating that I got "\$30 000 to write ditties about SPAM." Well, not so. Incredible bare-faced lies, as well as other distortions of truth. The article insults the National Endowment and modern poetry. It's one more instance (in a long series of attacks) of poetry being both jerked out of context and lied about. Another sad & sleazy wedge driven between contemporary art & the larger public. I've taken the matter to a really good lawyer, sympathetic to the arts. His advice so far is

discouraging; he basically says rags like **The Star** have a battery of lawyers with nothing better to do than fend off any objection to libel. To fight them in court is impossible for the ordinary person." Editor's Note: A short selection of Collom's wonderful SPAM acrostics: **S** lice!// **P** an-fry!// **A** llow grease to run off!// **M** asticate!

Also, the headline in **The Star**: **POET GETS \$30 000 TO WRITE DITTIES ABOUT SPAM!** ... People looking to get involved in fighting the **Contract on America** can contact the following groups: The National People's Campaign, a coalition of various progressive groups at (212)-633-6646. The Center for Constitutional Rights (212)-614-6422) will be holding protests all spring and summer long. The National Organization for Women (212-807-0721) will be marching in Washington on April 8th. American For The NEA (212-245-4802 ext. 146), founded by U.S. Rep. Jerrold Nadler, is an arts advocacy organization that connects citizens with their elected officials on issues of federal support for the arts. The Literary Network, a joint product of Associated Writing Programs, the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses and Poets and Writers is conducting a writing campaign to flood Washington with letters and cards. To become a member (no fee) contact Ann Burt, The Literary Network, c/o CLMP, 154 Christopher St., #3C, NYC 10014 or fax (212-741-9112). Much thanks to Brenda Coultas for giving me this information

... Call 303-444-0202 for information about the **Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics** Summer 1995 program. This year the weekly themes are Dharma/ Eco-poetics, International Writers, The Oral Tradition and Experimental/ Wild Forms. Visiting poets include **Robin Blaser**, **Hubert Selby, Jr.**, **Joy Harjo**, **Jim Carroll**, **Bara Guest**, **Arkadii Dragomoschenko** and **Lyn Hejinian** ... The Loft in Minneapolis announced its first annual **National Prize in Poetry and Fiction**. One winner will be chosen in each genre and will receive a \$1000 prize. Through the cooperation of the **Michigan Quarterly Review**, each winning entry will be published in its

Moyers," premiering Friday, June 23rd from 9-11 PM ... **Jordan Trachtenberg** is working diligently on getting the wonderful lit-rag **Monster Trucks** up on the internet. For more info call Jordan at (212-465-3134). Also, call **POEMFONE**, the free poetry hotline, founded by Jordan and **Todd "hippie windchimes" Colby**. Give them three minutes and they'll blow your mind. Call 212-631-4234. The upcoming spring line-up is **Anne Elliot** in April, **Sparrow** in May and **Bob Holman** in June ... **EX-ILE** rocks the house again. Their winter 1995 issue's cover presentation is "William Blake's Predictions for 1995"—one of which is "**Clark Coolidge** releases own line of cologne, 'ing.'" Other predictions: "New FOX television show: **The Eshleman Files**"; and "**O.J. Simpson** revives cut-up method" ... **Serpent's Tail** is introducing a new line of paperback reprints called **Midnight Classics**. Look out for reissues of **Rudy Wurlitzer's** *Nog*, *Slow Fade*, *Flats*, and (forthcoming in June) *Quake* ... Check out "Relationships from Hell: A Spoken Word Odyssey into the Netherworld of Love and Lust," a CD on the perils of romance with the unimitable **Nick Tosches**,

entirety. For more information, call **Jerod Santek** at 612-379-8999 ext. 15 ... **Kenneth Koch** won the prestigious **Bollinger Prize**, past recipients include **Wallace Stevens** and **Laura Riding Jackson** ... **Mark Rudman**, **Eleni Sikelianos** & **Alice Notley** received NEA Fellowships in Poetry ... I'm very happy to report that **Grove/**

Home Erotic, **Hal Sirowitz** and more. **Roy Derien** (a.k.a. **Carl Watson**) performs his classic "Let's Get Drunk and Watch TV." **Harold Goldberg** produced it— for more information write him at P.O. Box 2072, **Peter Stuyvesant Station, NYC**

10009 ... **Kids**, photographer **Larry Clark's** first feature film debuted as a work-in-progress at Sundance ... Check out **B City's** next issue, which is devoted to writing on film ... Also, check out **Peter Gizzi's** *Music for Films* (Paradigm Press, 1992, \$5), available from **Small Press Distribution** ... Have a great summer!



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Atlantic Monthly Press is going to be publishing **Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk** (by **Legs McNeil** and myself). Look for it in bookstores in the spring of 96 ... **Sekou Sundiata**, **Naomi Nihad Nye** and **Adrienne Rich** are just a few of the poets being featured on PBS's "The Language of Life with **Bill**

NICK ZEDD on Jack Smith

c i n e m a

In 1981, I met the underground filmmaker Jack Smith who directed *NORMAL LOVE and FLAMING CREATURES*, “a masterpiece of inane kitsch” back in the Sixties. He lived in a tiny sixth floor walk up jammed with garbage and decorated to look like a kindergarten version of Baghdad. The bathroom was a lagoon filled with plastic vines. His bathtub was filled with moss. He planned to film a pirate movie with miniature ships in the bathtub. The door frames were modified with spackle to resemble Arabian arches and the place was crawling with roaches. He kept his movies in a closet in the kitchen under his bunk bed.

I used to come over to help him paint the walls of his “set.” He would have us take time out so he could make tea. He sat at the kitchen table and placed the package of tea in front of our cups. As soon as he opened the package at least twenty roaches came scurrying out. He remained oblivious to their presence and asked me how much tea I wanted as he stuck the spoon in the white powder. I said “none” as I watched him drink it.

One night I was at his place with a Cuban filmmaker named Ela and we decided to go out. He wanted to put on “exotic attire” before leaving and came out with a pair of hideous striped platform shoes which I convinced him to wear and an Arabian scarf which he affixed to his head. In the platform shoes he stood at least seven feet high. He made an attempt to descend the six flights of stairs but tripped and fell before he could make it to the fifth floor. He took off the shoes and left them in his apartment. Smith had a paranoid obsession fixating on a man he called “Uncle Fishhook,” a filmmaker named Jonas Mekas who he claimed had stolen his films and was sucking him dry. “Uncle Fishhook stole my roachcrust,” he’d

mumble. He had a rolodex in which were scribbled cryptic messages like “It’s no use ... I’m too old ... I have no more pasty cheerfulness ...” and “Unexotic Aftermath of Nuclear Hollow Crust.” He felt the image of lobsters being boiled alive was a perfect metaphor for man’s existence.

Anyone he despised was a “crust,” what

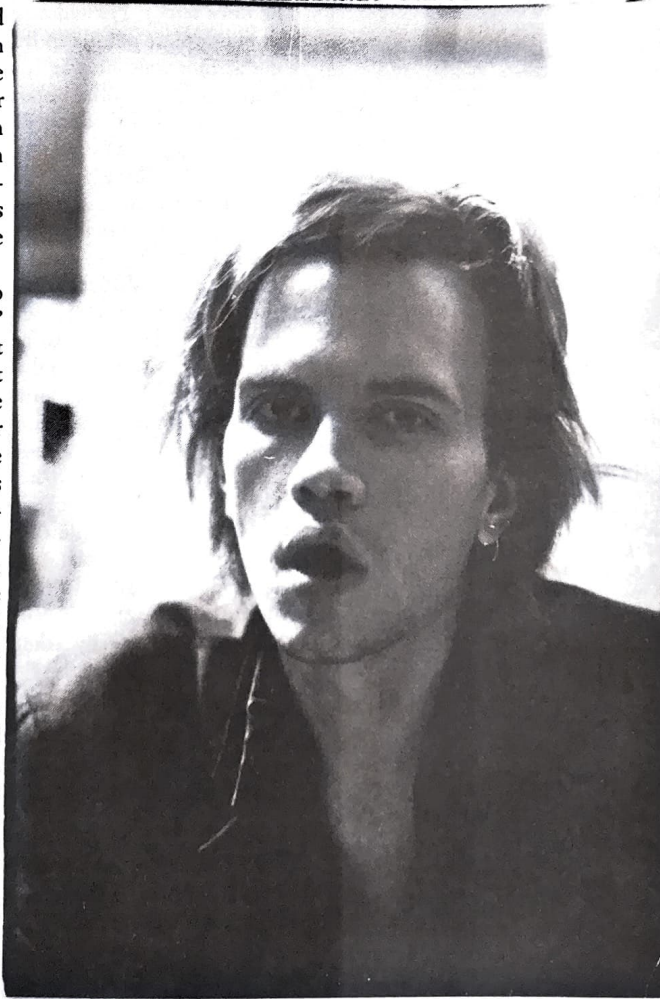
Super, a loud fat Russian, slammed the door in his face and started screaming hysterically for no reason. When I couldn’t reason with the beast, a guy I knew named Tom went in the vestibule. The Russian suddenly stopped when Tom screamed at the top of his lungs, sounding more insane than him.

I was impressed since Tom was only five feet tall and the Russian was six foot two. He finally let us enter the building, but it was Jack’s passive weirdness that set him off.

I wanted Jack to play a college professor in one of my films and he insisted that he’d memorized the script but it was essential that I purchase a pair of glasses for him from a junk store. How would he be able to see with the wrong prescription, I asked. He said if we looked hard enough we’d find it. We went to all the local thrift stores looking for spectacles—a waste of time since he could just as easily have worn frames with no lenses in them but he refused, saying they had to be authentic. He planned on making a “Sinbad” movie in his apartment. When I asked how he could shoot an entire feature in a one room apartment he said he’d play all the parts to save space. He later decided his stuffed penguin could do a better job.

He wanted to change his name to Sinbad Glick, the Pink Pirate, but then decided it might offend “anti-Semitic pressure groups” so he changed it to Sinbad Rodriguez. He said one day he planned to burn all his

films so nobody would steal them. He had an expensive 16 mm camera he’d been given by some camera company which grew dust in his closet for years. When it came time to rehearse a scene he showed up at my place without his glasses and said he couldn’t see anything so we went to his apartment.



E.V. Auteur Nick Zedd. Photo by Rosanne Mello

was left over after being eaten out, including Andy Warhol, who he’d made a film with in the early Sixties. Everywhere we’d go he’d get strange reactions even though he was totally passive. When I had to move out of an apartment, Jack came over to help, holding a Chinese umbrella when it wasn’t raining. The

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When he put the glasses on he revealed that he hadn't memorized any of the script and tried to cover it up by attacking its literary merit. He was incapable of rehearsing the scene with the other actor since he refused to take it seriously. He recited the words on the page in a monotone so we left Jack sitting in his room staring at the sheets of paper. "Don't you want them back?" he asked as I left.

I never saw Jack smile the entire time I knew him but he was constantly trying to get other people to laugh. He told me once that "In Europe, I danced with a penguin. I was paid an enormous amount of exotic currency and was treated as royalty. The penguin was inert and feeble and at the conclusion of our dance I inserted my finger in his rectum. I smelled my finger. It did stink." He would tell me stories like this in a sad whining voice and a completely straight face. He thought he was "unphotogenic" and wanted to have his nose removed since it was shaped like a hook. I'd tell him it was his best feature but he wouldn't believe it. "I was the world's most glamorous pie crust," he once wrote. He had a strange charisma and often tried to manipulate people to do all his work for him. He told me at one time he was turned into an "art machine" by unscrupulous "college scum" who fed him drugs so they could exploit his ideas. He once punched out a federal narcotics agent at a poetry reading for attempting to bust someone smoking pot.

Smith was living on bonds purchased with money he'd inherited from his family years ago and constantly complained about the sordid nature of his sex life, as he would go to Variety Photoplays and get blow jobs in the balcony seats. He did the same thing at the bath houses and complained of the lack of romance in these encounters. I wondered if I might become a sexual attachment in his eyes and tried not to spend too much time with him even though I found the nature of his genius fascinating. I asked him if he had ever been in love with anyone and he said yes, once, but he drove them away. "It was a terrible mistake," he said.

One day, a couple of weeks after I'd spent an afternoon painting gold trim over the arches of Baghdad in his apartment, I called to invite him to a performance I was doing with Nazi Dick and Tommy Traitor at a dive called Darinka. He angrily asked "Why would I want to go to that?" and made it clear that he considered me a traitor for not visiting him or calling him more often. I told him that he was a flaming turkey. We never spoke after that.

Every person he knew at one time or another had been subject to his paranoid wrath and an army of enemies existed in his mind, isolated for decades in his fantasy world on First Avenue drinking bottles of Guinness Stout. In 1989, at the age of 57, he died of AIDS. Someone told me he said it was "a glorious way to die."

Jack Smith was a "failure" but he refused to commit suicide. By refusing to make concessions to everyone else's feelings, he remained pure and uncorrupted, maintaining his individuality in a way that no one else could. He showed me that most people who are "successful" are really shams because they've committed mental suicide through the process of compromise. He proved to me that you can rise above living for other people and that the integrity of one's vision can be maintained even in the face of poverty and indifference—if you believe in yourself.

From *Bleed* by Nick Zedd (Hanuman)

by Tim Griffin

On Auditioning for "On The Road"

At first it seemed beautiful. In the early morning, snow was falling like in that old picture of the ancient Auden struggling across St. Mark's Place, the way snow hardly falls anymore in New York. Big heaps of snow hanging off branches in Greenwich Village above buried cars and sleeping sidewalks. I took a couple slugs of whiskey to get myself in the mood. Then it was business. I set about deciding what to wear. Big beaten up wingtip shoes, trench coat, yes. It's cold. Jacket, baggy white shirt, why not? I stuck a tie in my pocket, just in case, and shaved off my sideburns while Kerouac was cooing "Blues and Haikus" on my miniature stereo in the closet. I grabbed the photographs. Two days earlier I had called up an old photographer friend and sunk thirty dollars and lunch on me for 8x10 "head shots" to fit the part: one with the head craned forward from the body, gesticulating in an elocution of consonants; another taken from below, standing tall, eyebrows arched under a furrowed forehead, looking to a point above, lips formed in Kerouac's favorite syllable, "Ooo." I decided on the latter. I had been up until four that night trying and retrying the perfect one-minute reading from *On The Road*. A friend who worked at Gotham Book Mart in the Seventies told me, "Read anything from Chapter Thirteen, Part One."

South Main Street, where Terry and I took strolls with hot dogs, was a fantastic carnival of light and wildness. Booted up cops frisked people on practically every corner. The beatest characters in the country swarmed on the sidewalks— all of it under those soft Southern California stars that are lost in the brown halo of the huge desert encampment LA really is. You could smell tea, weed, I mean marijuana, floating in the air, together with the chili beans and beer.

As to be expected, it was the first try I had taped which ultimately seemed best. I erased the rest and raced out the door: Ten-thirty.

Now, you saw the posters. Francis Ford Coppola personally conducting an open casting call for all major parts in his movie version of *On The Road*. You saw the advertisements in *The New York Times*. You saw the posters at Union Square. You saw them in midtown; come one, come all, wearing "simple dress of the period." Bring a photograph of yourself, and a one-minute audio tape of you reading from the novel, or works by such others as dos Passos, Ginsberg, or

Whitman. No chance, right? Total publicity move, right? Have some goddamn dignity, right?

By eight a.m. that morning, when snow trucks were just barely getting a handle on the winter's first storm, there were already hundreds in front of St. Paul the Apostle Cathedral on Ninth and 60th. By the time I got there at eleven, an hour before casting officially began, a line of thousands stretched on Tenth Avenue— first weaving through a local parking garage and then turning the corner to end on 61st street— where it stayed for most of the day.

You had to ask yourself: who were these people? I found out about the audition through a coworker complaining that an acquaintance who acted in skin commercials had called up asking to borrow "that Jack Kerouac book." Slackjaw Jim Knipfel from *New York Press* told me his friend at the New York Public Library was fielding the same idiotic question from hundreds: "Do you have a book called *On The Road*?" These were a lot of the Kerouac look-alikes right now in the slick hair, jazz scene look, or unshaven, pug-nosed sailor attire, populating the local diners and delis and every corner.

Honestly, neither I nor Jordan Davis, the one friend I had cornered into coming with me thought we had a chance, but we were both writers and figured maybe that could somehow justify it. We also enjoy being goofballs. So before long we were laughing and making the best of it. Jordan went to make a phone call and came back with a big baguette, a pack of Virginia ham, and two bottles of stout. I left for a bit and picked up some Jameson's and cigarettes. These we shared with the unheralded, New Jersey-based actor Gary Santana, who started giving us audition tips: no matter what, improvise. *You can't let them think you're not on their level.* Okay. Two hours passed: we started reading from the books we brought for the audition, *Visions of Cody* and *On The Road*. Jordan also had an anthology of postmodern poetry, and soon you could tell people were all a little uncomfortable being around us. Beatnik jerks. (Yes, it was cliché. But what were you going to do, be serious?) Soon enough the NYU drama students in line behind us joined in. Gary started taping random people in line reading Ron Padgett poems, and the whiskey started really going around hard. We kept passing empty jugs of wine as remnants of food and empty cigarette packs gradually littered the ground.

There the romance ended. As ambulances and television crews started cruising the neighborhood for frostbitten hipsters, rumors spread that Brad Pitt had already been cast opposite Johnny Depp. This added insult to injury. *Hell, why not cast Keanu Reeves?* we thought. He played Buddha, after all. We started talking about Coppola's style, his epic, over-the-top gestures like the slaughtered cow in "Apocalypse Now." Well, right now we were the slaughtered cow. The casting company passed around free chicken soup. We shared cigarettes and froze.

At five o'clock I entered the cathedral. Isolated screams of "Francis! Francis!" from the line turned into a quick lipstick cheek and the arranging of oily pompadours. I couldn't even fill out the required application form, my hands were so numb. To the right of the hall, press photographers took pictures of a number of slinky ladies, who were so composed that it seemed impossible that they had stood in the snow at all. Where did they come from? No one knew. Soon a silhouetted Coppola stood and paced back and forth to deliver some words, interrupted quickly by people calling out "Wait, we can't hear you!" He then sat down. I joined a line to brightly lit tables at the head of the room. There they taped my materials together and told me to go to the last table, on the right. And there was Coppola with this woman: "Are you taped?" "I'm taped," I said. She looked at the photograph and he came forward: "Very *On The Road*-ish." Indeed. She placed it in a box. And that was that. Like many a beat-looking figure there I wandered around dazed through the hall, not wanting to leave quite yet because it was warmer inside, shocked and bewildered at the speed of the final process. What just happened?

So right about now I have to ask myself a question. Why the fuck *was* I out there? A couple of times I was thinking pneumonia was a real possibility, and I have no insurance and almost no money. Why had I dumped all this cash into pictures, beer, whiskey, cigarettes, Virginia ham for Christ's sake, when I can barely pay the rent?

This I cannot answer. But I can maybe take a look a Part One, Chapter Thirteen of *On The Road*, just a little above the passage I recited on that audiotape, where you can read: "New York gets god-awful cold in the winter but there's a feeling of wacky comradeship somewhere in some streets." And I know it sounds really corny when I say so. But in this case it just might be true.

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"At the Audition" by Sparrow

Waiting for the R train at 8th street, I wondered how many of the people around me were heading to the audition—a lot of them, in leather jackets and bleached hair, could have been. The *world* has become an *On The Road* audition.

In the lobby of the address Gillian gave me—10 Columbus Circle—a guy with a walkie talkie told me, "No, you want the church around the corner. Good luck!"

Walking down the street, I asked a young guy, "Do you know where a church is around here?"

"Are you going to that audition?" he asked.

"Yeah," I said.

"You'll see it," he said. "There's a line around the block. But I'm warning you, there are people there who have been there since 12:30." It was 6 p.m.

"Did you go to it?"

"Yeah. I came down from Boston ..."

"Just for this?"

"Yeah."

"But I'm leaving. Good luck."

I guess everyone in NYC tells you, "Good luck" when you're going to an audition. This is a sweet town.

I turned a corner, and in the shadows of a huge Romanesque Church there was a line of people standing in the snow. I stopped to take in the scene, and my friend Eric Wood walked by, singing to himself.

"What's up?" he asked.

"I'm going to this audition for *On The Road*," I said, pointing.

He looked behind him and laughed.

"I've never seen anything like that. All those people want to be Jack Kerouac?"

"I guess."

"Well, they're actors, aren't they?"

I walked across the street and met a young woman who had just finished her audition. She was young, blonde and wore a beret, like a beatnik.

"How did it go?" I asked.

"I got to drop off my tape and my picture and get shoved around by this *penis*," she said. "I asked him, 'where is the bathroom?' and he said, 'Behind those double doors,' so I started to go through them, and he grabbed me and said, 'where are you going?' After five hours of waiting, I think they could let me use the goddamn bathroom."

"Did you meet Francis Ford Coppola?"

"Yeah, he was a real gentleman—but these people that get \$5.50 an hour are such assholes. And Allen Ginsberg was there," she said. Then she turned to me. "You look like him."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Are you him?" a tall guy asked me.

"I don't think so."

"Who do you want to be in the movie?" I asked the woman.

"I would like to be Carolyn Cassady. I would like to pretend I'm married to Neal Cassady. But I'll probably be some person standing in a line in the cold. I have plenty of experience at that."

I walked to the back of the line, past hundreds of freezing people, who looked stunned.

"It's amazing to think that one of these people will be Jack Kerouac," I said to a woman at the end of the line.

"I think they're duping us. I think the principals have been cast," she said. The line started moving, and we reached the door of the auditorium.

"That's it. We're not taking anyone else," the guard said. He started to close the door, and a middle-aged woman squeezed by him. Inside, another guard struggled with her. Finally, they pushed her out the door.

"That motherfucker had me by the hair! Where is my hairpiece?" she shouted.

"I wasn't right for the part, anyway," a woman behind me said.

Eight Trailers

Amanda Bristow

Orpheus Directed by Jean Cocteau. Jean Marais plays Orpheus—a handsome, egocentric and overly-curious poet who dabbles in otherworldly affairs. Even though he is revered by publishers, teenage girls, and housewives alike, he readily embraces his unpopularity amongst his fellow poets. Yet dissatisfaction emerges when he meets up with “The Princess,” a mysterious woman from another realm who desires Orpheus and attempts to lure him into her world by transmitting mysterious poetry from beyond the grave via car radio. Orpheus becomes moody towards his wife and obsessive over what he believes are “words of genius”—a miracle solution to gain popularity. By transcribing these words he can “write, and not be a writer,” and greedily drink from the fountain of instant poetic inspiration. These often non-sensical words distract him so much that he refuses to speak to his publisher and doesn’t notice that his pregnant wife has died. In the end, Orpheus must make a decision between losing his steady flow of car radio poetry, or trying to get his wife back from the evil clutches of “The Princess.” It doesn’t matter anyway—the poetry is actually plagiarized from the dead poet Cegeste, who was popular among his peers, and soon Orpheus’ publishers lose respect for him. In the end, after getting his wife back, he recognizes that it is better to be a dutiful family man who, like all of us, must struggle with our own words. Marais’ kitschy portrayal of Orpheus made him out as a Super-Hero Pathetic Romantic, vacillating between a typical “nobody understands me and I’m glad” kind of role to a simpering, helpless know-nothing. Rating: C-

Leolo Directed by Jean-Claude Lauzon. Maxime Collin plays twelve-year-old Leolo, a victim of a demented family life who resorts to writing poetry as a buffer from insanity. Throughout the film, one can find Leolo constantly scribbling in his notebooks... turning out thoughts and perceptions far above his age level. Leolo insists that everyone call him “Leolo Lozone” instead of his French-Canadian name “Leo Lauzeau” because he insists that his mother was accidentally impregnated by a contaminated tomato from Italy. His father’s philosophy for good health is “A shit a day keeps the doctor away,” and therefore

forces everyone in the family to line up for a daily laxative pill. His brother Fernand, upon getting beat up in an alleyway, decides from then on to lead the life of a bodybuilder in the hopes of someday avenging his dignity. Leolo’s sister “Queen Rita” spends all of her time in the basement, combing her hair and playing with deerflies. Not used to the natural light, she becomes a vegetable when she is finally institutionalized. Leolo’s grandfather attempts to drown him in a wading pool for splashing him too much. Leolo’s friends consort with prostitutes, take any drug they can get their hands on, and will “fuck anything that moves”—including an unfortunate cat. Eventually failing in his attempt to remain sane, Leolo has delusions that he and Bianca (a Lolita-like neighbor) are together in Italy, and he attempts killing his grandfather. Just like his family members before him, Leolo is institutionalized, leaving his incredible manuscripts of poetry behind him. With his Freudian longings for his mother, his penchant for masturbation, and his wise-beyond-years pose, Collin’s convincing portrayal was what drew me into the film. A definite must-see. Rating: A

Poetic Justice Directed by John Singleton. Janet Jackson plays “Justice,” a young woman plagued by the tragedy of a murdered boyfriend. The only outlet for her misery is in the writing of poetry, and she often reads her work to her coworkers at the beauty salon. She clothes herself in black and is teased for “never having any fun.” She is silent where most everybody around her is argumentative, yet she is the voice of reason in every conflict. She doesn’t stand for sexual harassment, yet ironically, by the end of the film she’s hooked up with Lucky, a sensitive single-parent postal worker played by rapper Tupac Shakur (who, in real life was recently jailed on several accounts of “sodomy”). Quotes from Justice’s poems, which were actually written by Maya Angelou: “Love is a juice with many tastes ... some bitter some sweet.” “I’m a woman, phenomenally. Phenomenal woman, that’s me.” And, “Love extracts a pain unequalled on the rack.” I could have believed Janet’s sullen-poet’s pout ... but only if the teen-angst poetry didn’t make me cringe so much. Rating: B-

Gothic Directed by Ken Russell. Russell combines Percy Shelley, Mary Shelley, and Byron in order to create a film about intrigue, forbidden desires and hidden fears. Using their fertile imaginations, Percy, Mary, and Claire confront their worst nightmares face-to face at Byron’s castle. Claire confronts her fear of rats by eating one live, Byron allows himself to be converged in leeches, Mary confronts the death of her baby, and Shelley gets chased around by a monster born of his imagination. Byron is portrayed as having no morals or virtues—a sex-driven hedonist, he accepts no responsibility for his actions and thrives off of tormenting others. Shelley’s more sensitive, but spineless. One minute he is naked in the middle of a lightning storm, the next minute he’s cowering in the corner crying over a scary ghost story. Gabriel Byrne and Julian Sands do a good job of playing these two witless poets. I’d like to believe that Shelley and Byron really were lustful fools rather than well-to-do, famous Romantic poets, but the fact that they’re poets doesn’t seem to enter much into the film. Rating: A-

Tales of Ordinary Madness Directed by Marco Ferreri. Ben Gazzara plays Charles Circe in “Tales of Ordinary Madness,” adapted from the Charles Bukowski work. The film opens with Circe getting laughed at by the audience at a poetry reading and then proceeds to track Circe as he molests a sixteen-year-old girl. We see Circe wandering around L.A. drinking, raping, and pillaging, yet still finding the time to write. Counting himself among “the defeated, the demented, and the damned,” he continues his life of lechery up until he meets Cass, a self-destructive young woman who somehow falls in love with him. Their relationship is interrupted when he is called away from L.A. to NYC by a factory-like publishing company where he is forced to crank out work in the confines of an office cubicle amongst other writers. Charles acts up at the office with his drinking and is told: “You need a doctor, and a publisher.” Circe gives them a polite “Fuck you” and leaves for L.A. only to discover that Cass has killed herself. After all of Circe’s misogyny, it is hard to believe sentimental lines like: “Poets rhyme their loneliness,” and “My mouth has always

been big, but I like to think the words are beautiful." Despite this film's extraordinarily cheesy end, Gazzara plays the part of the poet surprisingly well. His whiskey voice and snake eyes are very Bukowski, and despite all of Circe's women, it is surprising that he even cares enough to write and that publishers care enough to publish him. A classic line that seems to define the gist of this film: "You show me your titties. I'll compose a poem just for you." Rating: C

Heart Beat Directed by John Byrum. John Heard and Nick Nolte are the Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady of "Heart Beat"—adapted from the memoir of the same name by Carolyn Cassady. Neal (played by Heard) was as sensitive as could be, which left me sentimentally siding with Jack in their quest for Carolyn. Jack is portrayed as a diligent worker and is seen constantly typing away, taking pills to keep awake, eagerly trying to get *On The Road* published. He suffers in silence as a railroad bum, a field worker in Mexico, and a Navy ship cook. While Jack is portrayed as driven and innocent (except during his fame-phase), Nick Nolte is the handsome, butt-grabbing Neal, who always gets the girl in the end. Unfocused and adventure-hungry, he makes Carolyn (played by Sissy Spacek) look like a martyr/stand-by-your-man type gal. Allen Ginsberg's portrayal by Ray Sharkey was surprisingly the most annoying one in the film. Ginsberg was made out to be a hyperactive, rambling revolutionary who causes trouble by seducing Neal in a three-way bed scene. Sharkey throws out all sorts of pretentious, political clichés such as "Being polite seems like such an arrogant gesture." I have a big problem with the way the whole Beat era is portrayed on film. I always wind up annoyed, and the poet in this film, namely Ginsberg (who rightfully opposed his portrayal), is portrayed as a bongo-toting social lunatic. But, this film is about Carolyn ... right? Rating: D+

Interiors Directed by Woody Allen. Diane Keaton plays Renata, the successful poet in this incredibly tragic film, who has an insecure and hyper-sensitive temperament that allows her parents' divorce, and the deterioration of her own marriage to seriously affect her work. "I mean, do I really care if a handful of my poems are read after I'm gone forever, is that supposed to be some sort of compensation? I used to think it was." She constantly encourages her novelist husband Frederick (played by Richard Jordan), yet he rarely compliments her on her poetic aspirations: "I'm not in the

mood for your lesbian friends and a lot of vacuous gossip about New York poetesses" and "There'll be a lot of superficial chit-chat about the nature of poetry ... your symbols, your imagery, your contribution to whatever ... they're so enthusiastic college kids ... I get embarrassed." Diane Keaton, as usual, was very convincing in her role. Renata had a constant obsession with her own mortality, and played the part of the pretentious, hard-working, upper middle-class poetess perfectly. She had just the right balance of insecurity and selfishness, blended with an essentially strong backbone. There was always the cliché, though, of Renata constantly holing herself away to write to escape from family problems: "I need isolation, I need to be alone ... the creative thing is very delicate." Yet she tells her husband: "I'm not afraid to subsidize ... I put food on the table, I turn things out." Keaton's portrayal was apt and very convincing in a film that astounded me. Rating: A

What's New Pussycat?

Directed by Clive Donner. Peter O'Toole plays Michael James in this way wacky, slapstick film about a run-around man and his eventual commitment to the one woman he loves. Michael, pressured by his girlfriend to settle down into marriage, takes one last spin in his adventures with women of all types, including Tempest (played by Nicole Karen), a stripper/"political poet" who he dances with in the strip bar she works at. She takes him back to her place and forces him to listen to her poems, one of them entitled: "Who Killed Charlie Parker?" and introduces the poem saying: "I wrote this at Hale Hospital, just after my first nervous breakdown." Tempest speaks in a monotone, wears a lot of eyeliner, and is bluntly honest about her instabilities with such lines like: "Would you excuse me for a moment? I have to go into the bathroom and take an overdose of sleeping pills." In fact, every time Michael upsets her, she overdoses, he calls an ambulance, and she always apologizes while lying on the stretcher. She is only one of the many women who become obsessed with Michael and eventually drive him crazy. In the end he renounces all other women from his life and marries Carole. With lines like, "Did you like the one about peaceful existence called 'Ode to a Pacifist Junkie'?" Actually, the poem wasn't about sex at all, it was a plea for better housing," this film has a certain campy appeal. Tempest reads her poems yelling at the top of her lungs, and grunting in between the pauses, and I have to admit, it did make me laugh a little, just because I'm seeing that kind of style around a lot lately. Not a film I would recommend unless you're interested in a lot of women in catsuits. Rating: D

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Short Cuts

Teenage Angst

"Sarah T: Portrait of a Teenage Alcoholic" is the best film about teens ever (on TV, anyway). At fifteen, I worked at Joe's Liquor, and I sneaked *Pluggin'* into the walk-in refrigerator and drank little bottles of cheap wine. Now I work for a gay porn magazine and there's a photo of Linda Blair (that I pulled from the "Celebrity File" above my desk. (Jeffrey Conway)

There are many beautiful movies about children: "National Velvet," "The Yearling," "The Spirit of the Beehive," "Forbidden Games" and "The 400 Blows," just to name a few. But most movies about teenagers are dopey and banal—wonderful exceptions are "The Member of the Wedding" and "The World of Aqua." The movie that affected me the most as a teen was Tony Richardson's "A Taste of Honey." Like Rita Tushingham I thought I was unloved (which I wasn't), ugly (I didn't know I'd become a swan) and a genius (which I was). As a teenager, I wanted to be Sae Lyons or Anita Ekberg. (Jaime Mannique)

"The Tunnel Wall," Chinese guerrillas fighting the Japanese in WWII. I saw it at least fifteen times because it was one of the few movies that was allowed to show in the Sixties in China. I never had a crush on anybody. If any, it would probably have been Mao or Premier Zhou. (Wang Ping)

I have a little saying for why I never got into punk rock as a teen. "I didn't hate authority, I hated my peers." Thus I didn't identify with many teen films. One movie I saw back then that seemed to me to portray the ideal adult life was "Shampoo." I dreamt of wearing Julie Christie's black sequined mini-dress to the Oscars someday. The scene where everyone goes to the big Beverly Hills party and there's hippies skinny dipping to "Get, Pepper" made me think grown-ups were so lucky to do such things. (Lisa Janssen)

The Moving Image as Poem

"So Far Away, So Close," John Woo's violent ballet sequences, "Judo's" use of red, the fire in "Farewell My Concubine," and the food, sex, bodies and violence in "The Cook, The Wife, The Thief, The Lover," (Wang Ping)

"Performance" has all the elements of a great poem. Mick Jagger plays an aging rock star who switches identities with a gangster in Sixties London. It's got metaphor (rock star/gangster), literary allusion (Borges is quoted throughout) and all sorts of crazy symbolism having to do with performing and madness. I saw this movie for the first time at age thirteen and a million times since. I have often wondered what the attraction was for me. I think it has something to do with my lifelong dream of never having to leave the house. (Lisa Janssen)

The first film I wrote about was Bunuel's "Diary of a Chambermaid." I was fifteen years old. But it was after I saw "A Taste of Honey" that I started writing a novel called "The Void." There is no poem I'd like to see made into a film, although Byron's "Don Juan" and "The Odyssey" might make thrilling films. For me, the most poetic film of all is Truffaut's "Jules et Jim," which contains Jeanne Moreau as one hell of a poetic image. Everything she did was unforgettablely lyrical and sensual. (Jaime Mannique) (continued on next page)

That's Blaxploitation!!!!



by Darius James

Soul Of Nigger Charley Buckwildin' action South of the border. Colonel Blanchard, and his crew of confederates, just can't believe blacks are something more than live stock. So they hold seventy-one former slaves hostage in a Mexican labor camp. Nigger Charley got no choice but to get Nat Turner on they ass. "Star Trek's" Lt. Uhuru gives him some pussy.

Slaughter's Big Rip-Off "The Mob Put the Finger on Slaughter so he gave them the finger right back—*curled around a trigger!*"

Da mob pops his boy and Slaughter ain't sittin' for it. A pimp named Joe Creole gives him a tip leading him to da killa, but when he arrives, he finds da killer dead. Anyway, P.I. Brock "I Am The Link Between Man and Ape" Peters talks him into breaking into the safe of Crime Boss and Johnny Carson sidekick, Ed McMahon. Now you know why he can afford to give away a million dollars every year in the Publishers' Clearinghouse Sweepstakes, he's getting rich selling your kids *cock!*

The Slams A jail house action drama that might cause the opium-eating playwright of "Short Eyes," the late great poet Miquel Pinero, to say: "He threw away a suitcase full of *what?!!* Shee-it! That nigga *deserves* to be in jail!"

Black Gunn In "Black Gunn," Jim Brown plays a nightclub owner whose brother, Seth, a Vietnam-vet, rips off da mob and uses the money to finance B.A.G., or the Black Action Group, a unit of guerrilla soldiers out to liberate the hometfolk. And, oh my god, why these idealistic, gun-toxin' knuckleheads wanna fuck up Green Power! Black bid'nis' man Gunn's do to' set' capitalist dreamworld with some crazy shit like that?

Along with "Trouble Man" and the obscure seventies' underground comic book *Super Soul Comic* by Richard Green, "Black Gunn" also seems to be a major source for Keenan Ivory-Wayan's lame blaxplo-parody "I'm Gonna Get You Sucka!"

The Big Bird Cage In this sequel to "The Big Doll House," Pam Grier liberates some oppressed money in the Philippino nightclub she sings in to finance her revolutionary comrades in arms, some of whom end up in a primitive tropical pokey with a big bamboo sugar mill—the scene of some deliciously sadistic action. So Pam and her chrome-domed boyfriend, Sid Haig, burst in and incite the inmates to a bloody insurrection. I admit it. I like it because I am a very sick man.

Friday Foster *Glance* magazine photographer, Friday Foster, finds herself in the middle of an airport shoot-out as assassins attempt to take the life of black billionaire Blake Tarr (*Blake Tarr?!*). The next day, Friday sees one of the would-be hitmen at a fashion show presented by the cat-growling Eartha Kitt, and points him out to her boyfriend, P.I. Yaphett Kotto. The code words "Black Widow," uttered from the mouth of a dying fashion model, leads Friday and her P.I. boyfriend on a trail straight to Washington, D.C.; where they learn that the entire plot was dreamed up by a racist Mr. Magoo!e entire plot was dreamed up by a racist Mr. Magoo!

Foxy Brown Foxy's shirtless, would-be hustler brother (played by the great Antonio Fargas) is being chased by some numbers-running hoods he owes a lot of money. To pay off his debt, he rats on the whereabouts of Foxy's narc-agent boyfriend, who has just undergone plastic surgery (the scene with Pam and her boyfriend in the hospital room is one I still beat off to). Anyway, after her boyfriend is bumped off, Foxy develops some serious PMS—drivin' a plane through a ranch full of gangsters and orderin' castration for the head honkie in charge! Movie entertainment at its finest.

Drum More Lurid Tales of the Old South. This Sequel to "Mandingo" is so lurid, in fact, Dino De Laurentis had his name dropped from the credits. But this is great lunatic storytelling, filled with incest, castration, bed-hoppin' miscegenation from the slave shacks to the big house, Ken Norton and Pam Grier as a pair of breeders and plantation slave-revolts. As Spike Lee's little brother, Cinque, is all too fond of saying, "Yackum Smackum!"

The Arena In my talk with Ms. Grier, she said she and her lawyers couldn't keep track of how, when and under what title this foreign-lensed feature showed up on the vid-market. I have it under the title of "Naked Warriors."

The Nubian Manawi and the Druidic Bodicia are captured by those orgy-lovin' feed-them-Christians-to-the-lions Romans, and sold into slavery to satiate their need for decadent entertainment (like watching big-boobed babes beat the living shit out of each other). But Ancient Rome or not, Ms. Grier kicks her some honkie hince and talks plenty o' pro-Black shit. And I must add Margaret Markov is *fine!*

Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold Dragon Lady Stella Stevens holds homeboys hostage in Hong Kong and, with the help of Mi Ling and her motorcycle-ridin' P.I.s, clumsy hapkido master and clothes horse, Cleopatra Jones sets down in the real Chinatown to bust up Dragon Lady's shit. But the real spectacle in this Warner/Shaw Bros. China-lensed coproduction is Ms. Dobson's rapid-fire wardrobe changes—which, I'm convinced, elevated her status in the black pop pantheon to "Patron Saint of Harlem Drag Queens." When it comes time to launch RuPaul's movie career (and I don't know why Donald Bogle didn't think of this first), the point won't be lost on some enterprising young producer, who'll not only insure the RuPaul's Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold remake is infused with all the campy gusto it deserves but will remember to cast Joan Rivers as a *turan-nicial, crack-smoking drug lord!*

Willie Dynamite An x-ho turned social worker plays square-world games on the brain of the newest member of N.Y. pimp Willie Dynamite's stable. In on the action on the fate of this street walker's soul, and fuckin' with Willie's head, is a rival pimp, two vice cops, an assistant d.a., and Willie's mom. When his new girl gets busted, and her ass kicked in jail, she reconsiders her ways with the relatives of the x-ho turned social worker's relatives. In his effort to save his ride, his hoze and closet full of clothes, Willie cracks under pressure, especially after his mama dies. Willie Dynamite's star, Rosco Orman, was last seen in the role of Stepin Fetchit on the New York stage.

The Candy Tangerine Man A pillar of booshie L.A. by day, but by night, like Clarence Reid donning "Blowfly" bodystocking, Ron becomes the "Black Baron"—a vanilla ice-cream suited Super Pimp riding a yellow and red rolls Royce on Hollywood's Sunset Strip! Chocked full of the kind of sleazy, surreal bits in the unflinching Mondo Cane style that's made pimping mighty unpopular with feminists the world over.

Excerpted from THAT'S BLAXPLOITATION: ROOTS OF THE BAADASSSS TUDE by Darius James (St. Martins, August 1995).

(Short Cuts, continued from page eleven)

Carrie's eyes bulging out from her pig-blooded face as she begins her reign of terror. Gum-smacking Violet as she rides down the psychedelic chocolate river in the Wonka Boat hounding Willie Wonka, "What is this, a freak out?" Betty Blue as a waitress piercing that annoying customer's hand with a fork. (Jeffery Conway)

The Best or Worst of Translation

A great book-to-film adaptation for me is "A Clockwork Orange." This one really succeeds in being a great film in its own right, independently of the book, which is also great. Stanley Kubrick took great liberties with the novel, but all in the name of visual fucking brilliance! My favorite scene: As Alex walks along the water in slow-motion to Rossini's "Thieving Magpie" and oh, so gracefully slits Dim's wrist. A thing of beauty to behold! (Lisa Janssen)

As long as Meryl Streep does not beat out Kay Ballard for the role of "Anne" in a film about Anne Sexton's life, the world will be an okay place. Lynne Tillman's *Motion Sickness* made into a film directed by Ridley Scott would be truly fierce. (Jeffery Conway)

I can think of some pretty terrible movies about writers. Most recently, "Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle." A good movie about a writer was "Prick Up Your Ears." I don't think there's any favorite book I'd like to see made into a film—I don't like the idea of anyone destroying my favorite books that way, and it would seriously disturb me to see *Love in the Time of Cholera* directed by Robert Redford. (Jaime Manrique)

Best: "Purple Noon" based on Patricia Highsmith's Ripley books, also Hitchcock's adaptation of Highsmith's *Strangers on a Train*. All her novels would make good movies. Lewis Warsh's *A Free Man* would make a great movie directed by Rudy Burckhardt. (Wang Ping)

"To the Film Industry in Crisis"

No more mega-dollar promos. More homos. Happy endings are sad. Don't make any "you da bitch!" daytime "talk" shows into a film. I think I'm addicted to movies where women humiliate, have their way with, and kill men—could you please make more this year? Thanks. (Jeffery Conway)

I love the gossip, the glitter, the glamour, the innumerable ways great films stir me deeply and change my heart and transport me and enlarge my understanding of the beauty and the mystery of the universe. The great Mexican diva Maria Felix said that a movie actress is, above all else, a mystery; and the great films are a mystery and a rarity as well. They have the power of changing your life, and they can haunt you forever. I despise the movie people who came into power during the Reagan/Bush years. I think Spielberg ought to use some of his dough to make a spaceship, put them on it, and launch it on a one-way trip to the farthest galaxy—with Spielberg as Captain of the ship. (Jaime Manrique)

The best Chinese filmmakers often have problems showing their movies in China. They raise money from outside sources to make movies for themselves, and then receive awards at international film festivals. (Wang Ping)

You can't exactly blame the film industry for fifty-zillion people going to see "Forrest Gump." Any industry that wants to make money has to cater to that good, ol' common denominator. What is ironic to me today is to see how hungrily the public eats up the horror of serial killers and

(continued on page fifteen)

biographers on the couch: **C**omments on the new **P**lath/**S**exton biographies

by **J**o **A**nn **W**asserman

"The voyeurism and busybodyism that impel writers and readers of biography alike are obscured by an apparatus of scholarship designed to give the enterprise an appearance of banklike blandness and solidity." Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman*

"I had already written about Mother in *Rituals* and in *Mirror Images*, but this time I felt different. This time the more I had tried to hide behind the wall of fiction, the less I was able to create differences between the characters and myself. Perhaps what I needed to do was to write about the issue directly ... This time I would dare speak in my own name, to use the gift of words she had made my legacy." Linda Gray Sexton, *Searching for Mercy Street: My Journey Back to My Mother, Anne Sexton*

In 1993 Janet Malcolm published her meditation on Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes, *The Silent Woman*, adding her contribution to an international fascination with the lives of these two poets. Sylvia Plath's nature lent itself to a transformation from person to character, and often her biographers' fascination has more to do with the telling of her life than it does with any real person. Esther Greenwood is the fictional character who stands in for Sylvia in *The Bell Jar* and Plath biographers often interchange Esther and Sylvia when examining Plath's life. Anne Stevenson, author of the Plath biography *Bitter Fame: A Life of Sylvia Plath*, actually interposes names of characters from *The Bell Jar* with the names of Plath's classmates and associates during her years at Smith. Stevenson writes, "Sylvia did not like guest editing for *Mademoiselle* ... Her puritan fastidiousness was as much repelled as attracted by the Doreens and Lennys and even by the self confident Jay Cee ..." (Doreen, Lenny and Jay Cee are personalities from *The Bell Jar*). Plath left behind dedicated journals and a large cache of letters from most every period of her life and in light of these documents, real people are easily identifiable in the text of her poetry and fiction. However,

the fact that Plath employed observations in her writing of those she came in contact with does not mean that those people actually inhabit the writing. The draft of a character may have "a double" in reality but it is presumptuous to assume that the characters of Plath's writing can be viewed as the people in her life, however seductive this association may be. Had that been Plath's intention she would not have written poems or fiction, and would be known today as the author of several poignant memoirs. Plath's work earns her the right to be considered and remembered as a poet, which is easier said than done. While biographers have long been able to consider the men they write about as artists, writers, athletes and statesmen, biographies of women have often focused on the personal details of their lives and regarded their work as a secondary interest. In *Bitter Fame*, Stevenson struggles to give Plath's work equal time but she remains secure in interjecting elements of Plath's writing into the reconstruction of Plath's life. Her continuous shifting between these two realms has the effect of contributing to the Plath-Hughes Mythology, though Stevenson expressed a desire to do just the reverse. In her epilogue to *Bitter Fame*, Stevenson writes, "I can only hope that this book will go some way to unravel the mystery and make her great qualities recognizable for what they really are."

Bitter Fame served as the bait in luring Janet Malcolm into the matrix of Plath biographers. Though new to the Plath-Hughes theme, Malcolm was no stranger to the project of exploring lives caught in accounts of fact, fiction and scandal. In 1990 Malcolm published a study on the relationship between writer and subject entitled *The Journalist and the Murderer*, which details the lawsuit of Jeffery MacDonald, a convicted murderer, against Joe McGinniss, author of *Fatal Vision*, the best seller which told the "story" of the MacDonald murder. The journalist had befriended the murderer and promised the prisoner a book which would prove his innocence.

Instead, McGinniss wrote a condemning account of MacDonald, which was even turned into a made-for-TV movie. The MacDonald/McGinniss example becomes Malcolm's vehicle in scrutinizing the tension, trust and betrayal which is all but inevitable between subject and author. Malcolm's inquiry into the writing of *Fatal Vision* is also a somewhat autobiographical work. In 1984 Malcolm wrote *In The Freud Archives*, a narrative of the relationship between the flamboyant psychoanalyst, Jeffrey Mousaieff Masson (who was to assume directorship of the Freud Archives) and his mentor, K.R. Eisler. According to Masson, in the course of Malcolm's research for her study, the two had become friends. It was Masson's belief that Malcolm was going to tell the sort of exonerating tale which MacDonald had hoped for from McGinniss. Ultimately Malcolm's book served much the same fare to Masson which McGinniss had offered MacDonald. *In The Freud Archives* was an unflattering portrait of Masson, resulting in the psychoanalyst suing Malcolm for libel. In her afterword to *The Journalist and the Murderer*, Malcolm states that her involvement in the MacDonald/McGinniss affair is not a veiled attempt to vindicate herself in the Masson ordeal. Only because "MacDonald's lawsuit [against McGinniss] had no elements in common with Masson's did I feel emboldened to write about it." She writes about the "timorousness" of the journalist who, unlike the novelist, does not "fearlessly plunge into the water of self-exposure."

Janet Malcolm was drawn to *Bitter Fame* not so much for its subject as for its author. Malcolm and Stevenson had been at the University of Michigan together in the Fifties. Malcolm had loosely charted Stevenson's success as a writer and though the two had not actually known each other at University, Malcolm had always admired Stevenson as "one of the figures who glowed with a special incandescence in my imagination." For its part the text of *Bitter Fame* also held interest in that it was

revisionist. Stevenson's self-proclaimed mission to demystify the Hughes-Plath legend appealed to Malcolm as did the opportunity to yet again employ a larger-than-life example in illustrating issues of concern to writers and readers alike. This time Malcolm's subject would be the biographer, not the journalist, but points of ethical and artistic dilemma would no doubt be a large part of the story. Malcolm met with Stevenson several times and reviewed much of Stevenson's correspondence with the Hughes as she began the project of *Bitter Fame*. The book was the first to be "sanctioned" by Ted Hughes and his sister Olwyn, who served as literary agent to the Plath estate. In Malcolm's portrayal, *Bitter Fame* placed Anne Stevenson in the Hughes' "camp," a position in opposition to those who support the legend of Sylvia Plath as a woman driven to suicide by her husband. Malcolm interprets Stevenson's book as a type of match: Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath in different colored satin trunks duking it out, with Stevenson appearing to be on Hughes' side of the ring along with Olwyn (Olwyn is the one with the Ben-Gay and water bottle, fortifying her brother for another round).

It is surprising that Janet Malcolm had come to this conclusion. Malcolm does acknowledge Stevenson's exasperation in working with Olwyn (in a letter to Olwyn reprinted in *The Silent Woman*, Stevenson claims that Ms. Hughes has "brought me to the edge of breakdown many times in the past year"), but she insists on somehow opposing Plath and Hughes and opposing their respective supporters. This sort of push/pull, two-

sided argument fits well into Malcolm's style in demonstrating points of writer/subject tension, but after reading Stevenson's biography, Malcolm's binary presentation seems off the mark. When Stevenson began writing *Bitter Fame*, she was not a fan of Plath (the person,

mitting them. Malcolm writes of the assumptions audiences of biography bring to their reading: "The biographer's business, like the journalist's, is to satisfy the reader's curiosity, not to place limits on it." According to Malcolm, Stevenson's admission that she could not possibly tell the whole story, because a whole story does not exist, infuriated readers. Stevenson's book was "seen as having been used by Ted and Olwyn Hughes to put forth their version of Hughes's relations with Plath."

In *The Silent Woman* (and to a lesser extent in *Bitter Fame*), the author plays a significant role, both as a person now engaged in current events and as an add-on fictional character drafted late into the scripting, intended to add some new blood to an anecdote which has grown stale in the telling. Malcolm is not naive when it comes to writing her own life into Plath and Hughes's. As the biographers weave themselves into what has been established as the poisonous cloth of the Plath legend, they become part of a popular life story. They are granted intimacy to a person they have never actually known. This single-sided intimacy has a mirror quality: far less reflective of the subject than the observer, the mirror provides a tool for self-examination. This element of self-examination is ultimately the

most intriguing part of the biographies. Linda Gray Sexton makes no claims otherwise in her memoir *Searching for Mercy Street: My Journey Back to My Mother, Anne Sexton*. Gray Sexton, unlike Malcolm or Stevenson, was part of the actual events that she narrates, and therefore has an immense amount at stake. As a fiction writer, writing a book about her mother could draw a larger audience for her own work, and Gray Sexton has things to say about herself that the reader might



Plath or Greenwood? Only her biographer knows for sure

not the writer). Her sympathies lay with Ted Hughes, whom she believed had suffered at the hands of the Plath mythology. However, her statement in the epilogue seems heartfelt after reading the biography. Though Stevenson had labored to be fair, her own prejudices had of course come into play in the writing; but in doing her research, she had also developed sympathies for Plath, which had ultimately contributed to a better book. Malcolm's contention is that Stevenson's cardinal mistake was not in having prejudices (all writers have them), but in ad-

most intriguing part of the biographies. Linda Gray Sexton makes no claims otherwise in her memoir *Searching for Mercy Street: My Journey Back to My Mother, Anne Sexton*. Gray Sexton, unlike Malcolm or Stevenson, was part of the actual events that she narrates, and therefore has an immense amount at stake. As a fiction writer, writing a book about her mother could draw a larger audience for her own work, and Gray Sexton has things to say about herself that the reader might

not take much interest in if the story didn't include details about her relationship with her famous mother. But this is only part of her memoir. *Searching for Mercy Street* (named for Anne Sexton's play of the same title) is less a successful biography than it is a useful tool in Gray Sexton's therapy. Employing the biographical mirror as a deliberate and acknowledged means, Gray Sexton gains access to suppressed memory and reconstructs parts of her childhood which had been too painful to contact previously. A memory of a conversation between mother and daughter is touched on in *Searching for Mercy Street*—the discussion centering around Linda's beginning nursery school at the age of two. Anne Sexton had made arrangements for Linda to start school a year early because caring for Linda interfered with her writing and "any demand [was] too much." Convinced of Anne Sexton's desperation, the school administrator agreed to take Linda. In the memory Linda describes her reaction to her mother's relating of this story. "Did I like it?" Linda asks Anne, at which point Anne shrugs and proceeds to explain that for a whole week Linda would pretend to go to school and spend the day hiding in the garage. It was not until the woman from the nursery school called to inquire about Linda that Anne realized where her daughter was. At this point the memory of the conversation ends and Linda reveals that only through contemplating this incident for her book was she able to recognize the isolation and fear she had experienced hiding in the Sexton's dusty garage.

Gray Sexton's book does not claim to be about Anne Sexton. In the first chapter of *Searching for Mercy Street*, Sexton Gray establishes the context of her memoir. She recalls finding a letter from Anne in 1974, just a few months after her mother's suicide. It is a letter that Anne Sexton wrote for the future forty-year-old Linda. Though not a suicide note, the letter is designed to "clear things up" about a few incidents which had recently taken place in the Sexton home. Anne's message of unconditional love for Linda is also clear. In the letter, Anne hopes that her daughter will re-read these words at forty and know that she was loved. Linda concludes this first section of her memoir by writing, "Mother are you listening? This is what I have seen and heard and learned. I am the forty-year-old Linda and I am ready to speak back."

Linda Gray Sexton wrote *Searching for Mercy Street* with a certain degree of freedom from presenting "facts" about her mother's life. In 1991 Gray Sexton had cooperated with Diane Wood Middlebrook to produce the controversial *Anne Sexton: A Biography*. As agent to her mother's literary estate, she supplied much of the material Middlebrook utilized in her highly readable biography of Anne, including authorizing the use of her mother's transcripts and tape recordings of therapy sessions with her psy-

chiatrist, Dr. Martin Orme. The surrendering of these materials remains one of the most celebrated acts in the recent history of the biography. It violates "the rules" of biography in the same sense that Anne Stevenson upset the "regulations" by admitting to subjectivity. Dr. Orme, who had previously remained obscured in the story of Anne Sexton, emerges (along with the text of the transcripts) as a principal character in the drama. He and Gray Sexton felt that the transcripts provided essential information about Anne Sexton and more importantly, they were sure that Anne would have wished to share their content. Much of Sexton's poetry had been directed at understanding, translating and explaining mental illness, and in this regard her work was groundbreaking. It was the belief of those concerned with the Middlebrook project that Anne Sexton, through the autobiographical content of her poems, had written her own life this way.

Anything the individual writes is ultimately an attempt at translation and explanation. Sometimes the sheer act of writing a work can make something real, in the way Gray Sexton was finally able to remember thoughts and feelings once she had put them down on paper. In *The Bell Jar*, Sylvia Plath recreates the story of her first suicide and alters details, often seeking revenge on those she felt hurt by, and also creating elements that reflect wishes about the course of her own real life. Stevenson's account of Plath's suicide attempt concluded with the passage from *The Bell Jar* describing Esther Greenwood's sensory images in her mother's basement after her overdose. Writers encourage these sorts of liberties, and the temptation is always to search the work for the person. In this way writers leave themselves open to a whole host of misinterpretations, which is even more acutely true for women writers, especially those writing in the Fifties and Sixties. In *The Silent Woman*, Malcolm touches on this subject: "*Bitter Fame* pulled me back into a period that I still find troubling to recall, precisely because duplicity was so closely woven into its fabric. We lied to our parents and we lied to each other and we lied to ourselves ... We were an uneasy, shift-eyed generation." Plath, Sexton, Malcolm and Stevenson were anomalies in their generation—all of them writers, struggling with the conventions of marriage and/or motherhood and/or social classification in addition to pursuing their ambitious careers. What Malcolm refers to as duplicity and "[lying] to ourselves" reveals the chief challenge in writing about female writers of that time. Each woman's many separate selves operated in the world as mother, wife and artist. Often at odds with each other, these separate lives subvert the traditional biographer's intention and in that subversion lies something of a new genre of writing lives.

(*Short Cuts, continued from page twelve*) cross-dressing talk shows, yet the movies being made today are so bland and predictable. I was watching "The Magic Christian" (which was made in the early Seventies) the other night and it occurred to me that a film like this would never get made today. The surreal editing, chopped-up plot changes, the jokes that you have to catch ... I guess these things are just too weird for us these days. (Lisa Janssen)

Five '90s Favorite Films

The last five years are probably the direst in all the history of movie-making. But here are a few films I've enjoyed: "Vincent and Theo," "Vanya on 42nd Street," "King of the Hill," "Six Degrees of Separation," "Danzon," "A Bronx Tale" and "The Last Days of Chez Nous." Though these are far from being great films. (Jaime Manrique)

"Farewell My Concubine," "Raise the Red Lantern," "To Live," "Old Well" and "Blue." (Wang Ping)

I racked my brain on this one. Ummm, that would be: "Goodfellas, Goodfellas, Goodfellas, Goodfellas, Goodfellas." I went to see this alone when it came out and found myself crying in the middle of it. Not because there was a sad part or anything, but because I realized that it was a great piece of art. That may sound cheesy, but this is the kind of thing that gives me reason to go on when I think I can't stand one more idiot in my face. Simple faith in human achievement. There, I've gone and made myself cry again. (Lisa Janssen)

"Thelma and Louise," "The Last Seduction," "The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert," "Jesus of Montreal" and I think I really liked "The Crying Game," but years and many "Entertainment Tonight's" later, I can't be sure. (Jeffery Conway)

Jeffery Conway's poems have been published in *B City*, *The Brooklyn Review*, *Blue Boy* and *Milk*, among other places.

Wang Ping's novel *American Visa* (Coffee House Press) was reviewed in issue #155 of *The Poetry Project Newsletter*.

Jaime Manrique's first volume of poetry received Columbia's National Poetry Award. He currently teaches at Mount Holyoke College..

Lisa Janssen was psychologically damaged by seeing "Performance" at an early age. Send her \$2 (1221 Downing St., #3, Denver, CO) and you can get her book of poetry *Morbid* or the seven inch single by her band Secret Square.

THE Poetry Project

APRIL

MAY

3 Open Reading Sign-up at 7:30 PM. [8 PM]

5 Diane Ward & Lewis Warsh Diane Ward is the author of several books including *Relation* and *Imaginary Movies*. Lewis Warsh is the publisher of United Artists Books as well as the author of two novels and numerous collections of poetry including *The Corset*. [8 PM]

7 LIVE! Friday Nite from the Poetry Project Host Douglas Rothschild chats with Emily XYZ and Reg E. Gaines about poetry *Not in Print*. Additional unprinted material from the house band Vole. [10:30 PM]

17 The 20th Anniversary Celebration of The Fiction Collective II Hosted by Ronald Sukenick featuring Eurydice, Mark Amerika, Jacques Servin & Ivan Webster. [8 PM]

19 / Remember Reading An evening commemorating the Viking re-publication of Joe Brainard's *I Remember*. Featuring John Ashbery, Alex Katz, Larry Rivers, Jane Freilicher, Kenneth Koch, Elizabeth Murray, Harry Mathews and others will gather to celebrate the work of this important visual and literary artist. [\$10. \$8 for Poetry Project members] [8 PM]

21 Ian Stephens & Sapphires Ian Stephens is a writer and musician whose books include *Queeries* and *Diary of a Trademark*. Sapphires' poems have been included in *The City Lights Review*, *High Risk 2*, and *Callaloo*. [10:30 PM]

23 A Celebration of Lynne Beyer Poems and memories shared in person and in absentia, from David Raphael Israel, Bill Kushner, Alice Notley, Hal Sirowitz, Gwen Sprinkle, John Yau & others. [3 PM, FREE]

1 Open Reading Sign up at 7:30 PM. [8 PM]

4-7 The Poetry Project's 1995 Symposium Four days of lectures, readings, performances, panels, workshops & community gatherings. Look for a special mailing on the symposium in your mailboxes early April!

8 Wayne Berninger, David Greenberg & Kevin Young

Wayne Berninger is a poet & teacher whose work has appeared *The World & Bold Print*. David Greenberg is a painter, poet & musician, & the lead singer of Pen Pal. The author of *Most Way Home*, Kevin Young received a fellowship from Stanford and is currently working on his MFA at Brown. [8 PM]

10 Maureen Owen & Ed Sanders Ed Sanders is a poet,

journalist & prose writer whose books include *Poems from Jail*, *20,000 A.D.*, *Hymn to the Rebel Cafe* & his definitive account of the Manson murders entitled *The Family*. His opera *Cassandra* will be performed this spring at Lincoln Center. Maureen Owen was editor & publisher of the influential *Telephone Books & Telephone Magazine*. Her work has been described as "... unique & unusual in its look: the poem moves across the page mimicking a player piano roll in the way it triggers the synapses." Owen's books include: *Imaginary Income*, *Zombie Notes*, *Country Flush* and *No Travels Journal*. [This reading is part of the National Literary Network's Writers Tour which is supported solely by a grant from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund.] [8 PM]

12 LIVE! Friday Nite from the Poetry Project Host Douglas Rothschild is joined by special guests and the house band Vole. [10:30 PM]

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23 A Celebration of Lynne Beyer Poems and memories shared in person and in absentia, from David Raphael Israel, Bill Kushner, Alice Notley, Hal Sirowitz, Gwen Sprinkle, John Yau & others. [3 PM, FREE]

24 Brenda Coultas & Janice Earlbaum Brenda Coultas' most recent work can be found in the current issue of *The Indiana Review* and on the audio disc, *Lp*, produced by *Bloodtest* for WAC. Janice Earbaum, former member of "The Pussy Poets," is the author of *Girbaum*. [8 PM]

26 Kathy Acker & Robert Gluck Described as "completely original" by the *New York Times*, Kathy Acker is the author of thirteen novels including, most recently, *My Mother: Demonology*. *The Advocate* described Robert Gluck's novel, *Jack the Modernist*, as a "story that most artfully allows gay male experience to transcend the simplistic myths that society has arranged for us." Gluck's books include *Elements of a Coffee Service* and *Margery Kempe*. [This reading is part of the National Literary Network's Writers Tour which is supported solely by a grant from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund.] [8 PM]

28 Poetry Project Workshop Reading A reading by members of the Poetry Project's 1994-95 writing workshops. [10:30 PM]

30 St. Mark's Day 1995: Building the Future This event, sponsored by St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery in conjunction with the Arts Projects at St. Mark's, honors excellence in educating young people. The Poetry Project will present a dedication to the Teachers and Writers Collaborative. The day will include performances, workshops, readings and presentations. [10:30 am-2 PM, FREE]

2nd Avenue & 10th Street at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery

Admission \$6 (contribution)

except where noted.

Program subject to change.

Call (212) 674-0910 for more info.

Notes, Country Hush and *No Travels Journal*. [This reading is part of the National Literary Network's Writers Tour which is supported solely by a grant from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund.] [8 PM]

12 LIVE! Friday Nite from the Poetry Project Host Douglas Rothschild is joined by special guests and the house band Vole. [10:30 PM]

15 Keith Seward & Lee Williams Keith Seward is an art critic with *Artforum* as well as the publisher of *BLAMI*, a CD ROM magazine. He will be reading from his manuscript *KREEPY*. Lee Williams is a poet, fiction writer & video artist. Her publications include *Playgirl* & *Processed Word*. [8 PM]

17 Joel Lewis & Lynn Crawford Joel Lewis is the author of *Paboka of the Ozone* & *House Rent Boogie*. A former editor of *The Poetry Project Newsletter*, Lynn Crawford is the author of a collection of short stories entitled *Sobow*. [8 PM]

19 An Evening with Bud Court Following a screening of "Ted & Venus," the film's auteur, Bud Court, will answer questions & give a brief talk. Bud Court is an actor, writer & filmmaker. He has appeared in many films including "Harold and Maude" & "M*A*S*H." Friend Darius James will introduce [10:30 PM]

22 Johnson Royal Stevens III & Ken Sorkin with Stefie Johanson Johnson Royal Stevens III is a poet & the founder of *Talent Showcase*, an attempt to exhibit the creative work of his fellow *New York Times* employees. Leader of the band *The Twenty % Tippers*, Ken Sorkin will be performing with vocalist Stefie Johanson. [8 PM]

24 Carolyn Forché & Maurice Kenny Carolyn Forché is the author of *Gathering the Tribes*, *The Country Between Us*, & *The Angel of History*. She recently edited an anthology entitled *Against Forgetting: 20th Century Poetry of Witness*. According to *World Literature Today*, Maurice Kenny may be the most distinguished figure in the renaissance that has occurred in American Indian poetry ... His publications include: *The Mamma Poems* & *Rain and Other Fictions*. [This reading is part of the National Literary Network's Writers Tour which is supported solely by a grant from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund.] [8 PM]

26 Hudson River Valley Writers: The Next Generation Young writers from up north strut their stuff with readings by Bridget Brehen, John deVries, Christopher Porpora & Jim Donnelly. [10:30 PM]

29 Tribute to Pagan Place & Tamarind Magazines Readings by Tom Savage, Jon Mazur, Elizabeth Morse, Dan Freeman, John Silver, Christian X. Hunter, Bill Kushner, Susan Maurer & more. [8 PM]

31 To Be Announced.

letters to the editor

Re: E. Weinberger's letter in issue #156: Bourgeois intellectuals like Weinberger use lies to replace substantive analysis.

He says, "Baraka's tirade against homosexuality + pornography." Why lie, Weinberger? I sd "Being straight or gay, Black or White, woman or man does not make you a revolutionary!"

In response to a stereotypical Weinberger dismissal of "social realism" I asked what had the absence of social realism done for U.S. bourgeois art? Was E.T., Schwarzenegger, + porno pop, U.S. soi disant art, the results?

Weinberger has no answers so he lies.
Sincerely, Amiri Baraka

Dear Poetry Project, Eliot Weinberger reminds me of the Duracell rabbit: he just keeps going and going and going. Having already written a CV waving, chest beating, foot stomping missive to *American Poetry Review*, in which he claimed that he attended my wedding (he didn't), called me a "scumbag" (he wanted to raise the level of the discourse), accused me of having "a nervous breakdown" (he is an expert in these matters), pointed out that I have suddenly become an "angry outsider, person of color" (he not only resorts to demeaning labels when someone disagrees with him, but he also wanted it to make clear to everyone that I am no longer white), and branded me a "Soho art critic" (evidently Jasper Johns, Frida Kahlo, Wilfredo Lam, Hung Liu, Joan Mitchell, and Miguel Angel Rios aren't known outside of downtown Manhattan), it is not altogether surprising that Eliot Weinberger now claims that I am lying. The information about the libel suit was conveyed to me by someone at *American Poetry Review*. Eliot Weinberger brought it up in order to get the magazine to consider censoring an editor, as well as to ensure that they would publish letters and testimonials on his behalf. In his letter to *The Poetry Project Newsletter*, Weinberger wants to "Break [my] toes" because he believes that both physical and verbal brutality are appropriate responses to someone who doesn't accept either his view of post-war American poetry or his self-estimation. This from a man who in the same letter writes: "we obviously need a new model for revolutionary society: One that won't kill us ..." It seems that killing those who refuse to kiss the ground on which he walks is too merciful an act.
Yours, John Yau

the pOetry project

THE WORLD

new writing from the poetry project

#50 Juliana Spahr • Jackson Mac Low • Peter Bushyeager • Bernadette Mayer • Dale Herd • Vyt Bakaitis • Paul Violi • Roberta Allen • Elinor Nauen • Barbara Henning • Fielding Dawson • Dennis Moritz • Vincent Katz • Sean Killian • Jessica Grim • Barbara Einzig • Phyllis Wat • Forrest Gander • Elio Schneeman • Wang Ping • Terence Winch • Wayne Berninger • Donna Cartelli • Morton Marcus • Tony Towle • Bill Kushner • Leonard Schwartz • Rachel Blau du Plessis • Lita Hornick • Greg Masters • Josie Sieuw-Phaik Foo • Chris Tysh • Edmund Berrigan • Anselm Hollo • John Farris • Stephen Ratcliffe • Harris Schiff • Dick Gallup • Wanda Coleman • Jack Collom • Jordan Davis • Lewis Warsh

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To the Editor: A few comments on Jose Padua's interesting review of "The 'Priest' They Called Him" in No. 156. It is true that tapes from Cobain and Burroughs were united in the studio without their having met; however, far from being a "throw-away project," the production was very painstaking, with Kurt's thirty minutes of raw guitar noise edited down to about ten minutes, and William's voice carefully tightened up, with appropriate pauses between story sections. (Several months later, in October 1993, the two artists did spend a day together in Lawrence, Kansas). When Padua suggests that perhaps I should have morphed them together for a video that Beavis & Butthead would have liked, I'm sure he's being tongue-in-cheek; ironically, the MTV cartoon characters spoke most approvingly of William's cameo in Ministry's 1992 "Just One Fix" video, in the episode named "Twister," saying, *Yeah, even the old guy is cool*. Kurt did in fact invite William to act in Nirvana's "Heart-Shaped Box" video (playing the crucified elderly man), but it didn't seem quite appropriate. Sincerely, James Grauerholz

newsletter corrections

My sincere apologies to David Henderson. The last couple of lines (and his byline) of his review of *Black Noise* (issue #156) were cut off. The last two lines should have read: "So, black, check time and tempo/ Revolution aint never been simple."

bernadette mayer fund

Update: After a lengthy hospital stay which began in October as a result of intracerebral bleeding, Bernadette Mayer has been released from Bellevue Medical Center and is continuing her recovery at home. We would like to thank everyone who contributed to The Bernadette Mayer Fund over the past few months.. Bernadette's physical therapy will progress at home for some time and any additional assistance you can provide at this time is greatly appreciated. Gifts to Bernadette's fund are tax-deductible. Please make contribution checks payable to: *Giorno Poetry Systems/The Bernadette Mayer Fund* and mail to *Giorno Poetry Systems, 222 Bowery, New York, NY, 10012*

w r i t i n g workshops

The following workshops began in mid February and will run through mid-May: **Erica Hunt's Exciting Excess/Thinking Words** (Tuesdays at 7:30). This workshop explores the use of "excess" in poetry, as strategies for thinking with and through words. Poet and essayist Erica Hunt is the author of *Local History* (Roof Books). **Darius James' Writing, How To** (Fridays at 7). Participants' fiction manuscripts are read aloud and critiqued. Darius James is the author of *Negrophobia* (St. Martins). **Todd Colby's Poetry Blast Off** (Saturdays at noon). This workshop draws on a variety of sound texts. Participants keep journals, discuss guerrilla publishing tactics, become spies, and find as many new ways as possible to write and perform work. Todd Colby's latest book is *Ripsnort* (Soft Skull Press). Workshops cost \$150, which includes membership to the Poetry Project.

Abigail Child

Mob
0 Books, 1994
96 pages, \$9.95

Amiri Baraka characterizes revolutionary art as that which "identifies the problem." Duke Ellington said, "you've got to say it without saying it." In her latest book, Abigail Child writes: "How can I make this irrational?" In *Mob*, language-as-adversary rears its head, but also language-as-revolutionary-practice for keeping and maintaining one's freedom in the playground-run-by-bullies that controls so much of earth's ground and discourse. "We conquer our freedom," she writes in the first stanza of "Unchained Reaction," instantly skewing the problem to a *mise en abyme* typical of this book where the individual is constantly becoming the mob and vice-versa. Reminiscent of Whitman, but unresolved with "I contradict myself," the poet reports from the periphery of that mob, going in and out, where "belief is a privilege." The mob becomes the great nonfigurative of desire, defined by a relation of movement and rest, fulfilling the promise of language to make a molecular flux out of the dualistic, mutated tendencies of the signifier: "an inadequate qualm/ brutal/ light spar/ And by Sunday we asked— What had happened? What form/ the class struggle might take. Protest marking the spots./ For sure turned into tragedy: I was agrunting, voracious pig/ in heat. Retributive bodies of blue forfeit property— public./ yet terminal, fuzzy, stinking, affordable & monthly. I thought/ why not open a rat restaurant? This surgical operation refines/ greed, rehabbing the neighborhood until enclitic maniacal/ light eviscerates the end of the story./ To think / in the "land of the free" insures displacement ..." (from "Civilian Liberty").

However clever it gets, this writing is always quick to remind us of our position in the world or some incipient totalitarianism—"the privilege of a window ignoring its cost" or "Those without property will die"—which is Child's way of *identifying the problem*, but never without a mirror and a mob lurking in the mirror where who you are and what you think and/or believe becomes entirely irrelevant at times. Then again, *Mob* is not merely a problem (atization) of *identifying the problem*, but the very process; a generous topology of "groundwork's condition" that maps Eros as much as Thanatos: "There's a tangle of questions all over the floor// Shadows tip the lover onto the circumstance/ She wants to be touched or touched continuously/ The sun makes close enough open/ Skirt a retinue of clings/ A sanitized restraint gives way/

To lustre's substrate// Waiting become an exciting chance to breathe ..." (from "Beyond Surplus"). These sirens contaminate the *straight* body and sweep it up into the mob.

It would be difficult to read this poetry without reference to film, not only in its strategy and syntax (rapid montage), but with regard to the poet, who in this case is as much a filmmaker as writer. Indeed, some know her only through that medium and have come to rely on her *woman with the movie camera* approach, where the very material of film is always palpable "as a warning against materialistic vision"—and she does the same with language. *Mob* confirms Abigail Child's commitment to a total art that keeps the pivot unwobbling like few others. Robert Hale

Aurelie Sheehan

Jack Kerouac is Pregnant
Dalkey Archive Press, 1994
188 pages, \$19.95



The extraordinary girls (and they are girls) of Aurelie Sheehan's first collection of stories try to cloak themselves in the cloud of unknowing of ordinary life, but the luminous power of their individuality prevents them from ever really disappearing, from attaining the "delicious smallness" they crave, the false shelter they seek in the working week.

You see these flesh and blood girls everyday—sleeping on the 5:30 subway, nervous in a noontime snack shop—you just never recognize them. "My days were spent cowed behind a desk, eager to compromise my once-in-a-lifetime life for pocket change," observes the narrator of "Matilda" who desires a primordial twin to make her whole and restore her power. Yet instead of assuming responsibility for their own power, their own beauty, they acquiesce to the beauty they observe out-

rEviewS

side themselves. In "Belle's Sister," a waitress appropriately named Belle (perhaps the unnamed narrator of "Matilda?") watches the reflection of a glamorous female customer—whom she has named Matilda—through the window, and automatically wraps her psyche in sacrifice and submission: "I will fill her glass with water. Serve from the left ... " Sacrifice is a motif here. In the exquisite "Charisma" (my favorite), the narrator loses the one thing she can call her own, her idiosyncratic soul, when she reaches for something glittering, glamorous and ultimately useless. *Why do they do it?* the reader wonders. Because they inhabit landscapes of pre-consciousness, afraid to awaken, afraid to activate their power. They lack the map, the lantern, because they believe that such things are obtained from inaccessible sources. We know this when Belle's secret twin, Matilda, says, "I've come across a new map of the world ... There is one road, a scarlet chasm, and it cuts through the land like a lightning streak." The map and lantern they lack (or think they lack) is language, the ability to speak and be healed. The narrator of "Lost in the Last Act of *La Traviata*" can only use words to write letters like a high school girl does, to a boyfriend blind to her true worth, and meager stories in the spaces between his phone calls. She occupies a universe that is constantly narrowing to the size of a bare anxious mattress, or a mailbox.

But these girls are not to be pitied. They are not martyrs. There is no slick manipulation of victim imagery here, no fierce litany of transgressions disguised as literature. Sheehan's gifts are compassion and dispassion, proximity and distance, and her characters are grounded and earthbound: waitresses, temps, receptionists, prostitutes. It is their familiarity that shocks, because Sheehan has dispelled the cloud to reveal what you've already seen, are seeing now, the beauty that these beings of light seek to obscure. In "A Shape in the Water," a beaver swims just below the smooth surface, a V-shape forming in its wake: "You can see the V-shape, and that is how you know she is there. But the animal thinks she is secure. She swims quietly. Only everyone can see the arrow, the whole lake is pointing at her." Sharon Mesmer

Conversations with Amiri Baraka

Edited by Charles Reilly
University Press of
Mississippi, 1994
271 pages, \$14.95

I haven't read Proust, Balzac, Whitman, Ginsberg, or the Pulitzer Prize winner I studied poetry with, or for that matter any of the great whites—sharks or scribes—yet Amiri Baraka has. I have spent the last seven years reading the Afro-American, African, Caribbean and Latino poetic canon, which Baraka approached during his thirties.

My initial reason for not reading the "great whites" is because I usually get pissed seeing blurbs about black writers (like a Ralph Ellison) and white critics saying, "he is Harlem's James Joyce," like a black genius does not own an original thought. But the obverse never happens. Yet anyone with half a lyric brain knows that Bob Kaufman was the "beats" spiritual and poetic gism. I am not totally happy with my stance. But the other pressing reason for my position is that, although I wrote poetry, I did not read much verse until I was twenty years old. I read history. I saw nothing worthwhile in fiction. Yet I penned sonnets. I find my "voice" slithering between Baraka's art as movement and some of the Academy's iambic museum. And the flip side of it is, although I have read Karl Marx, I have not read Mao Tse Tung, or Frantz Fanon, or C.L.R. James. And I am not a Marxist, a new beat, or a cultural nationalist, just a lover of the people, and the word. Subsequently, I come at this critique as a "poet chauvinist"—to cop a Barakan chakra. These words are really a conversation on paper because what Baraka says speaks to me in a place that knows no language. He be the guitar player, and I be Robert Flack and he be killing me softly with his shit, killing me softly, telling *most* of my life with his word.

The book's editor, Charles Reilly, culls twenty-five interviews with Baraka spanning the years 1960-1993. Reilly orders the essays chronologically, which allows the reader to see Baraka's intellectual and political growth from apolitical "beatnik" to cultural nationalist to Marxist. But the truth is Baraka's wisdom knows no time.

Reading these interviews, I notice poise, when that's necessary; humor, when that is necessary; trenchant lightning, when that is necessary. Many of Baraka's concepts provide a language for my mouth when it is open around a notion but I can't find the words to

construct the concept.

Baraka's intellect is multifaceted: he can discuss how prayer, as a form of energy, can make a flower grow faster; how Malcolm X exposed him to Islam as progressive social thinking; how describing whites as "evil" is too abstract, they do things according to their needs; how one can "hate" correctly: a cancer surgeon might not hate cancer but he is determined to remove it; how interviewer David Frost accused him of going to extremes and Baraka quips, "the first extreme is slavery;" how poetry has to be about the lives of men and as essential as a supermarket; how helping Kenneth Gibson win the 1970 Newark mayoralty, and electoral politics—seeing a black middle class benefit, and no changes for the majority—led him to explore Marxism; his ability to acknowledge a writer's skill but refusing to embrace the scribe because Baraka is ideologically opposed to the work; how African slave society is no better than European slave society: *folks still be slaving*; how the best book on literary criticism he ever read was Mao's "Yenan Forum on Art and Literature" where Mao declares being a Marxist doesn't mean a person is going to write a great play: or that the deadliest thing is a highly skilled artist with a backward political life; how art has a tremendous influence on people but it is not the main part of the struggle; how the Civil Rights Movement, Malcolm's assassination, Cuba, and African & Asian independence helped to bring about his ideological shift from "Hey, I'm just a poet" to using art as a political weapon; how revolution is a violent act that has to be rationally considered; how if a person is concerned with words *they have* to be a poet; how good writing in any genre employs the poetic—an intense sense of language, rhythm; how music is poetry, but music is the freest form, and its rhythm drives a poem because people's lives and emotions are rhythmic; how we respond so deeply to poetry and music because they speak to a rhythm that lies at the essence of human existence; and how this has got to be the *longest* sentence in literary criticism.

His is a vicious wisdom. And this "vicious" does not imply mean. It connotes penetrating, resonating long after the "cheap thrill is gone." And I know sometimes hackles rise when Baraka unleashes his piercing public wit. But Baraka responds to his interviewers with maturity and balance. These interviews are tender—not effete—tender, reasonable, and seasoned with vision.

My only bone to pick with this intellectual Empire State Building is how he contends that rap has an advanced, intermediate, and crucially backward element; but when he analyzes post-Seventies intellectuals there has only been a *retrograde* trend pro-

duced from the commodores of Stanford, Yale and Harvard. I graduated from Yale, with honors. I will not apologize for that experience, nor am I ashamed of admitting that as much of my education came from Liberation Bookstores as it did from Bulaa land, or my pops, an uneducated but brilliant mof. I know as many venal, Machiavellian, culturally retarded college grads who went to state universities as went to the Ivy League. And there is as much drivel in hip hop as there is in the Ivy League. But we can empathize with the "oppressed rapper"—even if he is a millionaire; but we vilify those who are "perceived" to have privilege. I live in Langston Hughes' house: crack dealer on each corner. I haven't made \$20,000 in a year: yet; I'm almost thirty; I teach poetry in public schools and prisons; retro Yalie: *not* !

Other than that, these interviews are a prayer: two brilliant hands clasped around the seen and unseen. And even if I don't agree with every point, I cannot dismiss any of what Baraka says. And that is the ultimate compliment because the opposite of love is not hate: it is indifference. Baraka represents the apogee of the intellectual, political and spiritual life of a revolutionary African-American artist. Read this book: sip it slowly. David Mills

Evelyn Lau Fresh Girls and Other Stories Hyperion, 1995 110 pages, \$17.95

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Oedipal Dreams Coach House Press, 1994 95 pages, \$12.95

During a first reading, the raw sexual violence of Evelyn Lau's two new books will make most people squirm, particularly feminists and those tiring of a culture that glorifies victimization. In her book of poems *Oedipal Dreams*, Lau introduces narrators that include a drug-induced prostitute and a young woman seduced by her analyst—narrators who, with chilling detachment, partake in orgies and sexual behavior that always seems on the brink of serious danger. Even more explicit are the scenarios in Lau's book of stories *Fresh Girls*. In the most disturbing piece, "Pleasure," a middle-aged woman is bound, blindfolded, and gagged before she is tortured with clamps that leave her "abused nipples misshapen" and beaten so that there are welts on her thighs. Yet this character, upon being bound, feels "a strange relief creeping in, that he was now in control of what would happen to her. She could not be held respon-

sible for anything that happened next." And her torturer is confident she will be back for more.

In her book *A Burst of Light*, Audre Lorde discusses sadomasochism in light of her feminist principles: "I ask myself ... whether I am puritanical about this—and I have asked myself this very carefully—and the answer is no ... As a minority woman, I know domination and subordination are not bedroom issues. In the same way that rape is not about sex, s/m is not about sex but about how we use power ..."

Evelyn Lau, even in her most graphic descriptions, seems to know this too. Even though her two latest books are filled with descriptions of brutal sex, she is careful not to eroticize the violent, which seems to me a formidable task. How can writers write about rape without inciting the rapist? One of my most fearful moments living in New York City did not take place on a dark deserted street on the Lower East Side, but instead in a mid-town theater watching the film "The Accused." A group of teenage boys began chanting, hooting and clapping during the famous scene in which Jodie Foster's character is gang raped. Although I'm not sure what effect these stories or poems would have on these same boys, it seems Lau has taken great measures to capture the depression and rage of her female characters so that the sex in these books is not particularly sexy.

Many of Lau's female narrators have vivid fantasies that include the death or maiming of those who are taking advantage of them. In *Oedipal Dreams*, the narrators' awareness of their own false behaviors (clothing, smiles, girliness) as survival mechanisms builds, in successive poems, so that by the end of the book, fury infiltrates Lau's language. In "Night After Night," a prostitute dreams about cutting up her john and stuffing him into the garbage chute. In "Afternoon #1" a dominatrix says of her client: "I am/ afraid of killing you here in this afternoon/ where the afternoon is real/ where the neighborhood children outside shout their games."

Lau, who is only twenty-three, is amazingly able to tackle such issues as ageism for women whose livelihood depends on a youthful appearance. In the title story "Fresh Girls," Jane, a nineteen-year-old prostitute, thinks: "I never wanted to get old like ordinary teenagers, I knew there was nothing up there to look forward to except smelly old regulars and a parade of new girls, sixteen, seventeen, coming in illegally through the doors of every massage parlor and crowding me out." A certain futility marks these stories which, along with rage, makes them completely believable in their shocking details. Denise Duhamel

Carla Harryman

Memory Play

O Books, 1994

69 pages, no price listed

Thought ... thinks at boundaries, it thinks the boundary, the limit of interiority. And to do this is also to think the art of memory as well as the memory of art. Jacques Derrida

In *Memory Play*, Carla Harryman refuses to present memory as a simple interiorization of experiences or the art of theater as a re-presentation of an interiorized experience. Instead, memory, theater, text and visual art conspire together, inspiring and requiring an active participation on the part of the reader. Animals, children and toys talk, which reminds me not only of *Alice in Wonderland*, but also of Socrates and his pals talking and thinking about thought and recollection in the marketplace.

Initial stage directions describe a "bedtime story/conversation in a little tent town out on the salt flats." To converse is to play together, to turn oneself about in company with others; a bedtime story promises to entertain and to seduce with a once-upon-a-time; but the slash between story and conversation adds a complication. Indeed, we are dislocated in a waterless place with three animals, two of whom definitely need water to exist. Despite (and perhaps to combat) their desperate situation, they jabber to each other, losing and finding themselves in and through their own tunnels of thought and language. Linguistically deferring and leaping, they are jarred ever so slightly by the talk of the other, all the while defending their particular ways of playing over the bomb site. As a reader, I am carried along, writing in the margins, reading off the page.

"Why do you think non-existence is so bad? Why do you think it means diminishment? ... You and I are part of the great chain of nature. If you jump off the pier in my movie, honey, you and I reaffirm the great dynamic between the predator and the prey." Even though Pelican (as he tries to manipulate the others) usually speaks with the rhetoric of a used car salesman, there is some truth in what he is saying. Why does Fish think of non-existence as a diminishment? Why do I think of it as diminishment? Fish seem to be in a state of perpetual anxiety about the stability of her identity. Pelican, as a predator, uses his logic in an attempt to reshape and seduce her. In the "real world" of houses and parades, a child appears and disappears, along with an Instruction, who sits between Pelican and Fish, and a large toy called the Milton Humiliator ("It's the machine made of words") who sings about doubt's and shall's and be's and ultimately com-

mits suicide. "He was a lousy singer anyhow and an orator living in the wrong age," explains Pelican, who ultimately profits from the suicide, confiscating the Humiliator's ice skates.

Early in the play, Fish poetically plays the opposition between being and nothingness with a beautiful soliloquy (one of many): "In the beginning, there was nothing to hold and nothing to hold in mind, since there was no beginning, no nothing, and no mind ..." As she passes through the parade in a fishbowl, she appears lost to herself: "these are the things nobody wants to hear anymore ... a series of small conclusions folded into someone else's domestic memory ... puffs of untamed ... events that organize separate adornments of another situation." Fish changes. She stops suffering and becomes more analytical, explaining that the bowl was not her real self, but instead a "metaphorical presentation." Pelican immediately loses his desire for her.

An intelligent reptile commentator explains how theater uses the retelling of memories in order to seem more real. S/he offers allegories within allegories (e.g. despite their illusions, people enjoy themselves): "Men wandering into floating labial fences ... The spectator, I, a lady, a gentleman, seats itself in the buzz." Reptile elaborates on patterning, pity, ceremony and the way remoteness gives pleasure. S/he tells the fish "what it was like to live solely among my own species, within that dry scaly geometry ... The silence, the indifference, was spectacular." The indifference and silence of sameness, of equality, and of a pursuit of commonality as the crucial relationship between the past and present harkens us back to Plato's theory of recollection and essential forms. The Reptile's final contributions confirm his/her interest instead in the evolution of language through difference and linguistic play. He/she recites a list of words beginning with "e" and this list provides the clues for the final speeches.

Things happen in this play, but the dramatic events are not central to the play. It is the proliferation of meaning that is the most remarkable here, culminating in "Rich and luxurious stages of life and trains of thought." Literary madness!

Memory Play is a seductive, inviting, experimental and thought-provoking work. With a polyphony of voices and little winds of conversation, Carla Harryman humorously attacks our all too familiar ways of talking about identity, memory and history, and she invites her readers to join in with the other animals in "Well, I think ..." Barbara Henning

Exact Change Yearbook #1

Edited by Peter Gizzi
Exact Change, 1995
400 pages, \$35

Around the first of 1995, Peter Gizzi's most recent editorial project, the *Exact Change Yearbook Number One*, arrived in stores. It costs thirty-five dollars and it comes with a compact disc. It has a big dour picture of Michael Palmer on its oblong cover. Somewhere between a magazine and an anthology, it is divided into twenty-one discrete sections, almost all of which contain something interesting. Seven sections of the book are given over to the poetry of different countries: the UK & Ireland, France, China, Germany, Canada, Russia, and the Caribbean islands. Work by Exact Change authors Gertrude Stein, Louis Aragon and Giorgio de Chirico is interspersed throughout. There are chapbooks by Jeremy Prynne, Beverly Dahlen and Susan Howe, a couple of conversations between Morton Feldman and John Cage, a talk by Barbara Guest, some "film writing" by

Clark Coolidge, John Wieners' journal and Trevor Winkfield's translations of poems by Erik Satie.

The intention seems to be to put the reader in the presence of many pleasant possibilities for poetry. One of the happiest publications in poetry lately is the CD that comes with the yearbook. Robert Creeley's 1963 reading of "Heroes" and "For Love" and Alice Notley's reading of "At Night the States" make a strong case for their prosodies: Creeley's slight hesitation and half-absence betraying him as he has already gone on to the next thing; and Notley's repetition as a means to remember, forget, emphasize, overdetermine, disconnect, mourn. It's hard to listen to John Ashbery's "They Dream Only of America" and hear any ambiguity any more, proving that he has successfully adjusted the world. John Godfrey (the true Bob Dylan) and Kenward Elmslie read well, but the stars of the disc are Bernadette Mayer and Ted Berrigan. Mayer dedicates "The Complete Introductory Lectures on Poetry" to Berrigan, and Berrigan dedicates "Red Shift" to—whom? What? Poetry itself? His reading is amazing; his diction and force go so far beyond the best rock and roll and jazz of his time it's surprising there aren't any al-

bums of the Ted Berrigan Experience.

The book itself: Michael Palmer's talk, "The Site of the Poem" has a great line about his daughter's High School English class: "The students, of course, (however simplistic some of their responses) had thought they were manifesting a profound respect for poetry, for its indefinability as well as for the complex freedoms it seemed to embody." Susan Howe's "Chanting at the Crystal Sea" has a lot of the rare historical pathos people love in her work, with lines like "I kept my gun-match burning when it rained ..." and "We screamed our war-cry."

The archival sections are very nice. Gertrude Stein's poem usually called "Before the Flowers of Friendship Faded Friendship Faded" is printed opposite the poem by Georges Hugnet about which it is difficult to care. What's nice is to see how Stein riffed and when she chose not to pay any attention to her source, which is ably discussed in Juliana Spahr's clear note. The John Cage-Morton Feldman talks (spastically called "radio happenings") reveal that Cage, the zen predecessor of Spalding Gray, was also a graceful interlocutor, and that Morton Feldman had the idea to write a piece of music "to capture the pulsating of the tires going

burning deck



DAVID MILLER: **Stromata**

Poems that "sift and resift the lessons of perception, in order to define just what it means to be alive and think."—Norman Jope. David Miller was born in Australia and lives in London where Stride Press recently published his *Pictures of Mercy* (1991) and *Tesserae* (1993).

Poems, 64 pages, offset, Smyth-sewn, original paperback, \$8

COLE SWENSEN: **Numen**

New poems by the author of *Park* and *New Math*, that explore the space between science/mathematics on the one hand and transcendence on the other, between number and numen. "A calculus of light"—Michael Palmer Poems, 80 pages, offset, Smyth-sewn, original paperback \$8

DALLAS WIEBE: **Skyblue's Essays**

"One of our best writers of innovative fictions... And what do we find in this feast of short fiction? Well, energy, passion, parody, satire, a rich and often superb style, and somewhere in all this the credible, delicate confrontation of a lunatic culture and a struggling self."—Doug Bolling, *American Book Review*. Fictions, 160 pages, offset, Smyth-sewn, original paperback, \$8.95

FRIEDERIKE MAYRÖCKER: **Heiligenanstalt [Dichten = : No. 1; trans. Rosmarie Waldrop]**

Four fictions around Chopin and other Romantic composers by one of the most original and prominent Austrian writers, famous for the "hallucinatory" quality of her poetry and prose.

Fiction, 96 pages, offset, Smyth-sewn, original paperback, \$8

PAOL KEINEG: **Boudica [Série d'écriture: No. 8; trans. Keith Waldrop]**

Tacitus records how the Romans were defeated by "a simple woman," the Breton Queen Boudica. Keineg's poems raise a monument to her courage and, by bold anachronisms, to Breton resistance of forced assimilation. Poems, 64 pages, offset, Smyth-sewn paperback \$6

Burning Deck has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Fund for Poetry, the Charles Phelps Taft Memorial Fund, and the Services Culturels of the French Embassy.

Order from: **Small Press Distribution**, 1814 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley, CA 94702 (800-869-7553)

in the rain on the drive." Spicer fans will enjoy the transcription of the bootleg recordings of "Imaginary Elegies," and De Chirico admirers will enjoy his 1972 relapse into mania. J.H. Prynne's poems are extraordinary (even after they abdicate) and the Aragon manifesto is fun, too.

Of the "furriners," the Russians seem to have the lead. Sun & Moon veteran Arkadii Dragomoschenko's science literature keeps climbing towards beauty, which Aleksandr Eremenko keeps heading down from, hands in pockets. I like Nina Iskrenko's trashy, overdone poems, and Vadim Mesyats' poems of strength and weakness are pleasant—but I wonder whether I'd forgive English-language poets lines like "The whole year is like arguing with the Rainman."

The Americans make a good showing in a section called "The Gallery." David Shapiro, Ben Marcus, Kate Rushin, John Godfrey and Paul Beatty stand out. Marcus's mechanisms in "Where Birds Have Destroyed the Surface of Fathers" are splendid, if hermetic (splenetic?). Reminds one of David Lynch. Beatty's "All Aboard" zaps Nabokov, L=A=N=G and the author himself; it ends badly, but it starts pretty well.

Among the Canadians, The Barscheit Horse has the one sentence I'll retain from the book: "Sincerity is verbal etiquette. It works for some boys." The three-woman team also uses the three-letter word "vex" in their manifesto; look out when you see the word "vex" in a poem. Susan Clark and Kevin Davies are the clearest of those practicing "post-language" poetry in the book, which is turning out to be a slowed-down cleaned-up Olson open-field thing after all. Ken Edwards wins the Anglo-Irish section right about when he says, "the whole thing's celebrating/ Itself like a sonata in certain pursuit of its major triad." Of course it's straight out of late-Seventies Ashbery, so what? That's our condition! Edwards braces up for it. Runners-up among the circumlocutious Anglo-Irish are: Miles Champion, who writes lively sonnets on slightly dead subjects; Anthony Howell, who gracefully neglects to be witty most of the time; and honorable mention—the heroic Tom Raworth.

I hate to read poetry in two columns. I hate it when the type changes from section to section. I don't like to read the sentence "I have found the Key to all Existance" (sic). Those are my main objections to the book, for which, as a reviewer, I did not have to pay. Gizzi and Exact Change have made an immense cheering book, to be looked forward to like a new year. Jordan Davis

Kevin Young Most Way Home William Morrow, 1995 70 pages, \$20



What can I say, this is a good book. Lucille Clifton thought so—she picked it for the National Poetry Series. It's yet another illustrious shard coming out of Boston's Dark Room Collective (others including co-founder Thomas Sayer Ellis's ambitious anthology *On The Verge*). Kevin Young, in this well-woven work, is an archeologist of sorts, gathering sights, sounds and flavors of Black folk wherever he can find them. As the title implies, this volume is a journey home. And there are plenty of stops along the way (Sorry Dorothy, there's no clicking heels, no flying monkeys, this one's about planting your feet in darkness and reaching up like a tree). People in Young's engaging poems are survivors who have mucho moxie. But it's Young's own spirited connections with his culture and his ability to harvest sad and humorous voices from the ruins of servitude that make this book sing the gospel-blues. It's a warm tribute divided into four sections: "Husbandry," "The Spectacle," "Getting Religion" and "Beyond the Pale." Family, Pig's feet, okra, quaddoons, crawdads, fold sayings, and revivals were just as much Young's teachers as were Seamus Heaney at Harvard, where Young graduated, and Lucie Brock-Broido from whom he received additional instruction.

The poems speak directly. *Most Way Home* is a trip back south that opens easy as a screen door. "Visiting Home" tells of being cheated out of family land because the deed was signed with an X and a white man said it was his. "Home for us," says Young articulating the family's angst in the poem's resolution, "is wherever we are not."

In "Miss Lucille," the section of the poem called "Labor Day" recounts how tradition shapes lives: "She had dropped enough spoons in her time to know/ she was in

a family way./ Who needed a doctor when the metal said it all?" And in "Wake" he juxtaposes Christian symbolism with the erosion of Black identity: "Jesus tucked with cousins into mirrors/ this bedroom reflects more savior than self, see relatives whose names fade with sun until what's left we call resemblance, kin."

Way Home shows how a people try against common sense to fit into a society that has marginalized them beyond the horizon. In "Spectacle" Young brilliantly shows the irony of Black women trying to conform to the American standard of "Beauty" by getting their hair straightened: "Once blue/ you take the forked iron out and pull it through until your roots come out straight." There are nice poetic pictures of simple living amidst the strife peppered throughout. His narrative/lyrically-tinged style is varied, but the voice constant. His eyes never close. There's a little Ishmael Reed (cultural irony), a little Elizabeth Alexander (vision in Africa American artifacts), a little Lucille Clifton (getting things said straight, no chaser), and a whole lot of his own stylistic Youngblood running through these pages. He sifts through the bones and finds some meat, as he points out in "Revival," Black folk always had to make do with the leavings. And he has found that every left piece has a story. Gavin Moses

B MOVIE REMAKE

When Lord Ashford is found punctured in the library of the great house where we are all trapped for the stormy night—the third murder since dinner and dinner wasn't very good—some genius always says: I think each of us should go to his own room and lock the door. So we all bolt ourselves in and poisons proliferate and pokers are bloodied and heads are twisted clear around. Since we are living in a conservative genre this establishment of individual proprietorships makes a certain shopkeeperish sense but we all remain here in the billiard room filing away at the character roles with such vigor that by the time dawn fills the grand leaded windows and Mrs. Murdock's key is heard in the kitchen door we are no longer sure which of us is the French governess who slept with Nazis and which is the rugby player who collects children's underwear. Thus climaxes are avoided confrontations are sidestepped and the carpet is spared some nasty stains. Train schedules are consulted in the weak tea of underlit film and we never become known to a larger public.

Robert Hershon

Rudy Burckhardt & Simon Pettet

**Talking Pictures:
The Photography of
Rudy Burckhardt**
Zoland Books, 1994
238 pages, \$26.95

The relationship between the visual and verbal, how they affect each other, and the space in which they coexist, constitute a crucial question of our time. In a visual habitat where thought and feeling are molded by electronic communication, words may be the only thing that truly belong to a person—the only way the individual may reenter this space with spiritual power. But for this the individual must create a counter-space in which the relationship between word and image is contentious not parasitic, rich and at the individual's control. Rudy Burckhardt's & Simon Pettet's *Talking Pictures* is a remarkable step in this process.

The witty, understated, peripheral quality of Rudy's photography and the minimalist style of Simon's poetry, whose interest since *Lyrical Poetry* and *Twenty One Love* has been the tonalities the surface presence of words gain by their positions in a given space, are ideally suited for this experiment. The result is a new entity.

The book consists mostly of a sequence of doubles, on the right page almost always one of Rudy's photos, on the left a selected fragment from Simon's long interview with Rudy. But the selected text does not function referentially, as a caption or explanation, or as a verbal frame to the photo; it often has a contradictory, tangential, baffling and profoundly disconcerting relationship to it, which most often sends the viewer back to the text or to other parts of the book. This continuous zigzag of word/image/word is the center of gravity. The text does illuminate with inimitable mischief subtle aspects of Rudy's art, life, preferences and obsessions; but it also distorts the viewing of the photos. In this distortion is the originality of the book. *Talking Pictures* is not about Rudy's photography; but a new experiment in language, of which Rudy's visual style, with its radical basis in language, and its deconstructed framing, is the photographic precursor.

Talking Pictures is built around the extended co-presence of two spaces: a verbal left (with a visual arrangement integral

to it) and a visual right (with a unique connection to language), and a common border joining them, which is the spine of the book. In this white space of common periphery (the heart and energy center of the book) seeing the invisible and saying the unsayable unify and etch their revolutionary magic. It is a space where the invisible, reviled and accented can find its song, be visible, empowered.

How does this process occur? A profound insight lies at the heart of it: invisibility is charged with feeling, individualized through mismatch. Difference (visually absence), not identity (visually presented image), energizes white space. Continuously, the verbal left arouses expectations of identity, which the photograph undercuts, baffles. For instance, on page four, Rudy describes the art of filmmaking as avoiding scratches, and "black spots" formed by too much light. The corresponding photo, "Cat on the Piazza San Giorgio, Venice, 1955," is dominated by a black cat, seen from the back, in the middle of a slab so clear that its scratches are visible. The mismatch turns the black cat and the scratches into a picture of "what is not." On page fifty, Rudy mentions his grandfather ("a general") who used to walk uselessly as an old man in the Basel streets. In the corresponding photo, "Man Walking (Going Somewhere), New York, 1947," a profile of a formally dressed, slight disheveled old man, not Rudy's grandfather, crosses an empty place. This misidentifying deneutralizes the photo's flat space, ionizes it. This charge is not possible when word and image remain segregated, each retaining its cool surface. This mismatch turns what is seen into a picture of the unseen, unsaid, unacknowledged, unheard, an explosive white space.

The intense pleasure of this book is the inexhaustible means by which through mismatches the book creates charged invisibilities. (Just a few of my favorites: page sixteen and corresponding "Parallel Poetry, Mississippi, 1948"; page forty-eight and "Paris Realization, Paris, 1947"; pages one-hundred and six, one-hundred and eight, one-hundred and twelve, crisscrossing with photos "Ascensione, Rome, 1951," Edith in Arezzo, Arezzo, 1947" and "Jacob Running, Venice, 1951"; the photo "Priscilla Lane, Brooklyn, 1952" on page fifteen, where the words are inside the photo, the left page left empty).

Talking Pictures is a gift, a guide to those with a deep sense of periphery as artists. Its steal price of \$26.95 is a sign of its economic invisibility. Murat Nemat Nejat

Rochelle Owens

**Rubbed Stones:
Poems from 1960-1992**
Texture Press, 1994
86 pages, \$8

Rubbed Stones is a lucky break for those who haven't been able to put together a complete set of Rochelle Owens' books for their own library. This collection highlights works from: *Not Be Essence That Cannot Be* (1961), *Salt & Core* (1968), *I Am The Babe of Joseph Stalin's Daughter* (1972), *The Joe 82 Creation Poems* (1974), *The Joe Chronicles Part 2* (1979), *Shemuel* (1979), *Constructs* (1985), *How Much Paint Does the Painting Need* (1988), *Atelier: Discourse on Life & Death* (partial) (1989) and *Black Chalk from Luca: Discourse On Life & Death* (1992).

Writing this review was on my mind when I walked downstairs and into the office of one of my co-workers. I'd been studying Rochelle Owens' poems and thinking about them like mad. I had the advantage of hearing her read on several occasions and having been fascinated for years by the primordial energy and underlying apocalyptic motif in her voice, I was hearing her live even as I popped into my friend's office. There on the wall behind his desk was a xerox of a collage that said "DESTROY THAT WHICH BORES YOU!" in twenty-four-point Futura Bold Condensed. The rest of the text, with lines like "... alienated voids who hang their brainwashed heads out to dry on every occasion only to find them burned out by the routines they insist are practical and responsible..." and the collage of tangled images, from the well-known hands advertising Palmolive dishwashing liquid to a morass of video plugs and wires, was an immediate cut into the poems ricocheting off the sides of my mind. The collage was from an AK Press book, *Ecstatic Incisions: The Collages of Freddie Baer* (the text for this one by Jim Gilman). I thought *this* is so much what Rochelle Owens is about. Certainly no one could ever accuse her work of being boring. In fact, a central theme of Owen's work could be identified as that courageous "Jeanne d'Arc gallop" into and against the barricades of boredom. One can almost see her armor glinting in the sun and feel the pounding of the hooves in each poem, with Owens charging out anew across the rugged turf of that field. One feels an almost mystical violence in her approach to claiming a rescued hill or to charging and/or changing what Susan Smith Nash calls in her definitive introduction, "the structure and form of patriarchal discourse." This discourse is really a cultural criticism, an uprising against a staid and conservative definition of what one *should* be and how one *should* feel about things; against

that pragmatic violence that exists couched in language. Owens' refusal to compromise or acquiesce to the political grammar of the status quo is a testimony to her commitment to challenging the platitudinous definition of an individual's own experience of life (or of the world at large) that the Powers That Be have laid out for us all. She is constantly questioning how poetic language configures in that quest of gaining knowledge, and any apparent confusion she raises in the reader is actually a creative matrix. She casts aside the dogma and commercialized Hallmark Card aphorisms and goes cold turkey on the agony and delight of living in this century, complete with the pain of awareness, the violence of critical change and the unabashed passion of being. Susan Smith Nash reminds us of how even the imagination can fall prey to internalized authority figures; and hand-in-hand with that, how tragically simple it can be for us to slip into deadening conventionality. But Owens refuses to let us go. She is not the silent mirror on the night stand, more the Shaman-genius exploring deeper realities in the psychic realm. She reaches down into the living, breathing mythical core and pulls up the forces of chaos, spitting and kicking; she gives us back the hungry power of our own imaginations.

This is a book of poems to burn a hole in your pocket, to wake you in the dead of night like a scream, to make what you thought yesterday seem absurd, to snatch you up playfully and inspire an assailment on those battlements on the other side of that messy turf. From "A Sandworm Emerging": "I remember the woman/ in mutton-sleeves who/ breathed scalding steam/ The rare earth she walked/ Passion, laughter,/ angular jaw, sufi smile/ Eyes of Mona Lisa/ She meditated on fuel/ shortage, a way to/ lighten the load/ Would you spend money/ on a ruptured camel?" Maureen Owen

**The Art of Practice:
45 Contemporary Poets
Edited by Dennis Barone
& Peter Ganick
Potes & Poets, 1994
384 pages, \$18**

If you're up for another anthology you should check out *The Art of Practice*. Following in the footsteps of Silliman's *In the American Tree* and Messerli's "Language" Poetics, this book attempts to present yet another configuration of language writers. The editors' introduction gives a re-hash of the basic tenets of language poetry, with emphasis on the idea of "practice." As Barone and Ganick say, "The work herein works, but it does not complete. It questions, but it does not answer ..." and "Every single poem in this work articulates its own

form in its speaking, shows what a poem means: to make, to create ..." To be quite honest, I find the introduction and even the organizing principles of the book to be a little bit wishy-washy. Ron Silliman's afterword ("The Practice of Art") is kind of interesting, but I don't believe him when he says this anthology isn't "Language Poetry: The Next Generation." Really, in some ways it is— though it's very hard to tell these days who wants to be called a language poet and who doesn't. According to Silliman, "more than 160 North American poets are actively and usefully involved in the avant-garde tradition of writing." I'm not sure where he gets that number from, but he finds it "stunning." Whether you find it stunning, curious, or downright confusing, you could milk 3.56 such anthologies of "45 contemporary writers" out of that number, not to mention the various possible combinations therein. Barone and Ganick say they're going for the "democratic" and they drop the traditional contributors notes, listing recent publications by the authors instead. The traditional contributors notes would have been helpful because many readers (including myself) don't know who all of these people are and where they're from. When you get past all the politics of what's being presented, you're faced with one more slight problem—the format of the book. I had a hard time reading it because the poems tend to begin about an eighth of an inch from the top of the page, and some of the prose poems are printed in a very tiny font.

But to get to the good part: If you look at *The Art of Practice* not as an anthology but as an oversized magazine, it's a project worth checking out. There's something interesting about the odd mix of inhabitants—it's not every day you see an anthology which includes a range of poets like Gil Ott, Jena Osman, Elaine Equi, and Rachel blau DuPlessis (to name a few). Of course there are also some poems worth reading— my favorites were the Canadians, like Steve McCaffery and Jeff Derkson, but also Dodie Bellamy who has a great line about iguanas. Lisa Jarnot

Rodent Press

I had been noticing these books for some time now, simple slim volumes, cheap (\$3), Whitman (the candy) samplers of writing. Over twenty titles. Each distinctive, some with letter press, gaudy xerox or austere covers. Designed, edited and published by Poetics students Matt & Sarah Corry, who both encountered lots of work they felt needed to be seen.

Some samples: Boulder legend Tom Peters' *Listen to My Machine* is a book about love, America and the open road. In "Dejeuner du Matin XXXIII" he writes from a big heart: "My life is voluminous & as big as this house/ yours is amazing & complex as an escalator—/ the legions ante up & are as simple as/ staircases in the dormitory/ I'm confused like a pie in the face of self doubt ..." The editor of "Psalms 151" sensual mysteries, Laird Hunt's book *Pieces* is filled with fragments that speak worlds. Some stories are composed of two lines as in "Lune": "Father, I said/ Hush, he said." His work suggests the logic and structure of dreams. Composed of thick sparse sentences, *Pieces* is an amazing book of fiction. Katie Yate's *so difficulty* is an "in love in Boulder" poem. Rich space. Open text. A vow really, a pledge from a true romantic. My favorite line: "noting the belles/ falling between breasts." *Tropic Rot* by J. Malia Harsh: A long story with details that stack up into little volcanoes. Brown leaf mold on the trees in paradise. Will Christopher Baer's *Sometimes Rachel*: A long story composed of tightly coiled scenes. His sentences are snakes. Sometimes overworked but Baer knows this world, a transgressive hetero-trailer park of single mothers and dead end guys. *Bones Ripen* by Rebecca Bush: A long poem written in response to Claude Thomas reading his Bosnia peace mission journals in 1993. Her work always contained boomerangs,

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darts and such. She has always had an eye to nature: "she sees/ the line of life a little seed/ so plant the forest ..." She has always called for action, for a response, for outrage. For all the Bobbie Louise Hawkins fans, there is the wonderful *Some Small Poems* to sustain us: "a rambling discourse, loosened free into the/ air, as if birds flew there, a conjecture/ that moves along a decent progression,/ gathering meaning as it goes ..." *Code of the West: A Memoir of Ted Berrigan* by Ed Foster is as much about living the writing life as it is about Berrigan. Andrew Schelling's *Two Immortals* contains an essay on Vidya, The Sappho of India, and a recollection of William Everson. *Teething on Type* by Julie Patton is a literal alphabet soup of a poem. To be sung out loud as well as read silently to the self. These books can be ordered through SPD or directly from the publishers at 1900 Gross #311, Boulder, CO 80302. Brenda Coultas

David Lynch

Images

Hyperion, 1994

192 pages, \$40

"Would it help by saying I don't understand what the hell is going on here?" (A TV critic reviewing "Twin Peaks")

It's not easy writing about David Lynch. His peculiar and distinctive films have unsettled an entire generation of movie-goers and in the process have spawned a frighteningly new breed of filmmaker (Quentin Tarantino being only the most obvious example). As a result of the popularity and critical acclaim he received for his "Twin Peaks" television series in 1990, Lynch managed to cross-over and firmly plant one foot into the mainstream entertainment community while just as firmly keeping the other entrenched in the nightmarish and bizarre world engendered (as he readily admits) by the regular consumption of greasy Bob's Big Boy burgers and way too much caffeine and sugar.

The publication of this book seems intended to revalidate Lynch's somewhat fading reputation as an underground master of the dangerously absurd while at the same time hawking him as a "legitimate" and deeply intellectual visionary worthy of the high art accolades that the *New York Times* has showered on him. As the results show, it makes for an uneasy alliance at best. Basically, *Images* is a collection of photo stills taken from Lynch's movies, television series, and theater work, as well as previously unseen paintings, drawings,

sculpture, photography, short (very short!) works of fiction and even something called "organic art." Of the two main sections, it's the second that seems more possessed, but by what I'm not sure. Here are photographs of some of Lynch's more idiosyncratic obsessions: spark plugs and industrial wastelands; dental surgery and architecturally enhanced bald women; snowmen from Boise, Idaho and decomposing biological artifacts (including one of my favorite pieces, entitled "Spineless Chicken Shit," which is literally just what it says). "Meaningless Conversations," one of the book's few literary pieces, rambles like a drunken manifesto across two pages of text discussing such topics as "the fears associated with the negative occurrences which follow the hideous odors emitted from the oral cavity." There are Ricky Boards and Bee Boards—wooden panels which consist of four rows of five bees, with each bee having an individual name—through which Lynch attempts to explain (to Jay Leno on "The Tonight Show") the idea of "what the Japanese might do to organize controlled accidents in a formal setting." A chapter titled "Nudes and Smoke" shows a variety of, well, female nudes and lots of smoke. The "Paintings & Drawings" chapter includes several pages of rough, scratchy, pen and ink drawings with titles like "Bugs Are in Every Room— Are You My Friend?" which remind me of a child's first kindergarten assignment. The more intense and enigmatic paintings are located in the back of the book and printed in color (most of the books photographs are in black and white).

Most of the first section, which covers photos from Lynch's films and television shows, is a throwaway collection of tabloid digest glossies. The main exceptions (and for me the best part of the whole book) are the very front pages, huge color blowups from several of Lynch's films, including a very exotic Isabella Rossellini with thick dark eyebrows, dagger earrings, blister-red lips and strawberry-blond hair; and a very dead Laura Palmer— blue lips, blue skin, angelic and haunting, framed forever against a clear-blue plastic body bag.

Ultimately what I got from this book wasn't so much a statement on David Lynch but rather a feeling, a taste, indistinct but palpable. The closest corollary I can think of is from WWI where the allies conducted battlefield experiments against the Germans using subsonic radio frequencies, which caused undue nervousness and anxiety in humans beings, a subtle but constant state of agitation. While the large battlefield experiments ultimately failed, Lynch, working on a much smaller scale, quite often succeeds. David Vogen

Daniel Krakauer

Poems for the Whole Family

United Artists, 1994

86 pages, \$7

Lots of different people have come away from looking at the Mona Lisa with different pictures lingering in their eyes, from Walter Pater to Nat King Cole. It's the long potential smile to come that Daniel Krakauer, typically, picks up on: ... *we see only the start of her smiling ...*

Krakauer is the poet of the shapes behind the edges of things, of the mysteries of definition, of "shapely silent laughter" and the way a "sailing boat is like a line" ("Three Sonnets"). His allegories twirl and juggle concepts rather than confining them: From "Three Allegorical Figures" (dedicated to Lewis Warsh): *One is Tenderness in her little white hat / One is Honorable in a real screwball / One is Mister he's an ornament / but an ornament to what / that question is left open ...*

What you want from Krakauer's work is a lot of it to page through— then it's like having your own private episode of "Mystery Science Theater 3000," co-hosted by Bukowski and Baudelaire, to enjoy: "Prince Valiant shaking a sapphire-blue carpet— the dust forms a message of petrified cheekbones crying at the bottom of summer lakes. Answer comes to him, a smoke signal, from the distant shore: The Queen of Brimming Guitars left twelve years ago. How time flies." ("Prince Valiant's Childhood").

In "Poem for Jim Brodey," he writes: "perhaps your poems should be/ like the notes a prisoner/ smuggles out of jail/ if they fall into the wrong hands/ they'll just look a bit weird/ but won't give away/ the obvious message."

Perhaps; if say, the jail is consciousness and the notes are imagination. Or, perhaps, though a poem doesn't need to rhyme, or scan, or have an agenda, it still needs to be an out-of-body experience to be a poem. Or perhaps not.

Even the most definitely located of his work ("O illustrious jukebox!— 'nostalgia' is such a little/ word! Tried to reach her over the phone— for ten rings/ watching the Rheingold sign— no answer./ 'I wrote you a six page letter!'") ("Selestina") spirals off into clues, hints, suggestions, and leads you to another set of crossroads or another pair of doors. This is a book full of questions and mirrors and delights.

I guess this qualifies as the summer issue of the newsletter: you couldn't do much better than to take this book with you for the season. It'll make equally good reading by candlelight in some abandoned windmill in the Sporades, or waiting in line at the DMV all day long. It doesn't weigh much, so you won't have to leave your toothbrush behind (you could make do with a green twig anyway).

Better, maybe, to leave most everything behind, and spend the summer looking through this book's world-view: "How exciting—/ To live on a Planet!" Frank Nims

Barbara Einzig

Distance Without Distance

Kelsey St. Press, 1994
123 pages, \$10

Distance is what separates. To see something "from a distance" means you have to look closely, or possibly through something else—a veil, a cloud. Distance creates angles of vision and observation that are different, but not that different, from when you see something close up. Distance doesn't imply distortion. In some cases, you need distance to see things more clearly. Intimacy, though I like to think otherwise, is often blinding. The closer you get to someone (or something) the less you see.

The title of Barbara Einzig's latest collection of prose sequences, *Distance Without Distance* (a phrase from a quote by Maurice Blanchot which she uses to open the book), is like a beautiful zen analog, where something immeasurable exists and doesn't exist at the same time. The sequences consist of prose paragraphs, often one short paragraph to a page. Connections between paragraphs seem purposely fragile, as if layered with narrative possibilities of connectedness and reference that expand and contract randomly, giving hints of real characters (a "she" or "I") in real places (Mexico, South America, New York). There's no traditional story-line, and none of the relationships are developed with any sense of ultimate resolution; instead, both characters and places function like props in a photograph. In Einzig's work, angle of vision and observation are everything, and everything she sees passes through the eye of a sieve, delineated with clarity yet understated as if to render things almost invisible. It's as if she were inventing a new erotica where people and objects deflect off one another or brush against each other without really touching.

One of Einzig's methods is to write a kind of gloss on a book, movie or painting: Wim Wenders' movie "The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick," Christoph Hein's novel *The Distant Lover* and Fernand Leger's "Mural Painting" are some of her subjects. But the real centerpieces of the book are her travel/semi-narrative love stories. Einzig explores the boundaries of relationships by defining them in terms of direct observation. She approaches an attempt at articulating real feeling and then interrupts herself, backtracks, creates hidden obstacles, tries to connect the artifice involved in creating something (movie, book, painting) with the possibilities of real feeling and intimacy (no artifice allowed). In this sense, the artificiality in-

involved in creating art is the ultimate occasion for creating distance, as if an almost Victorian space (repressed emotion and sexuality) existed between the thing you see and the person who sees it. She has a wonderful way of glimpsing nature that involves the slowing down of all natural processes (the speed of light etc.). By the time you see or hear something it changes into something else, you change as well, and what you're left with is the memory of something that was illusory to begin with. "This place still exists," she writes, "I could go there again."

What's disturbing about Einzig's work (both her great strength and minor weakness) is that the level of distancing never changes. Austerity of vision and a passive deliberateness are part of her way of defining the texture of experience. It's only when you realize that what you see is not exactly what you're getting but something peripheral, centerless, a promise that turns into a question that can only be answered by another broken promise, that the image (and the world itself) begins to take on a new dimension, as if what was happening outside the frame was more important than the picture itself. And there's always something happening.

There's *always* something on the verge of happening: the self-protectiveness involved in "keeping your distance" has the unintentional result of putting emphasis on your own vulnerability. Einzig as problem-solver—scientist and confessor simultaneously—offers a call to attention and detail that leaves out nothing and takes nothing for granted. She pins her hope on the reconciliation of everyday avenues of desire with ethereal wisdom, does it with dignity and without compromise, and on the absence of epiphany, which has nothing to do with art or life. Lewis Warsh

Larry Fagin Collabs

You won't find an entry for "collaboration" in the venerable and weighty *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Although there is a world tradition for a collaborative poetry—the best examples being the Japanese renga—the Anglo-American poetry tradition still remains too gripped in a Romanticist notion of originality and individualistic primacy to consider the notion that two (or three or four) poets could get together and write poetry for that suspect category of "fun."

The one community of poets with a continuing interest in collaborations has been the poets associated with the New York School and the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church. No doubt inspired by the work of French collaborators (poetic and not vichy) such as the Surrealists Andre Breton and Paul Eluard, there is a large body of mostly uncollected collaborations that have found a resting place in a quarter-

(continued on page 29)

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To the Memory of Lynne Beyer

The wake for Lynne Beyer (1947-1994) was held in Bisbee, Arizona, soon after she died there last November. She had moved to Bisbee the year before upon leaving New York. Lynne put in some solid time as a volunteer with the Project, during her years here, and at 2 PM, Sunday April 30th, a memorial for her is scheduled to take place at St. Mark's Church.

Writing

BY

WILLIAM LEFTSCHATZ

Writing is perhaps the most profound nonfiction work of the last quarter of the twentieth century not only in literature and criticism but also in religion, philosophy, art, morality, politics, economics and social issues. Its scope and scale are awesome, ranging from cosmology and the structure of the universe to social organization and autobiography. Although an independent work in itself, it is also the prologue to *The Fall of Heaven*, a novel on which the author has worked for over fifty years, and brings its monumental epic structure to completion. At the birth of a new century and a new millennium and the quantum leap of modern man and woman into unimaginable veracities, if we renounced the fashionable minimalism of John Ashbery and chose the monumental epic structure of *The Fall of Heaven* as a more legitimate expression of our age, we could build a culture that would be legendary throughout all future time until the galaxies cracked and the constellations dissolved.

Clytemnestra, Juno On Olympus, Medea, Whatever Trumpets Do Not Sound, Writing - \$12.95 each.

The Death of Tutankhamen - \$8.95.

century's worth of side-stapled mimeo magazines. Among the better-known collaborations are James Schuyler and John Ashbery's novel *A Nest of Nimmies*, and Ted Berrigan and Ron Padgett's *Bean Spasms*. And, heck, even *The World* once gave over an issue to collaborations.

In 1995, there seems to be less collaborating going on. I'll blame it on a collapsing economy that robs the poet of his/her leisure, i.e., there's just less time in the day for most of us. Not to worry, though, there is Larry Fagin to keep the tradition alive. Thanks to the offices of Geoff Young's Figures Press, *On The Pumice Of Morons: The Unaugural Poem*, a brilliant collaboration between Fagin and Clark Coolidge, is available to the unsuspecting reading public.

Ingredients: take Maya Angelou's inaugural poem *On the Pulse of Morning*. Add secret ingredient N-7, a method in which one replaces a noun in a poem by opening up a (preferably big) dictionary and going seven nouns up or down in the book and picking your favorite. Have two poets stir the mix up and you get this: "Here on the pumice of this new davenport/ You may have the gradient to look up and out/ And into Sisyphus's eye-holes./ And into Brown Betty's eyewash./ Your countertenor./ And say simply/ Very simply/ With hooray — / Good moron."

Add to this a book design that mimics exactly the Angelou pamphlet that was next to every bookstore cash register two Christmases ago. A little bit of a miracle that recovers Maya Angelou from the thrall of Cornballia (a nation state north of Academo).

Two other Fagin & friend productions are *The Atmosphere of the Other Guy* (again with Coolidge) and *Lime Ricketys* (with the venerable Jack Collom). *Atmosphere* (Paradiddle Press, 1993) appears to be Fagin and Coolidge alternating stanzas running the changes on the art of being a jazz fan: "Jazz began with when some human began to piss and holler about whatever and got thrown down loads of marble steps and dreamt of turnstiles whirling him away into avenues of sponge sandwich and ubiquitous RIFT." Whump. Poetry for a future and hipper society.

I miss Jack Collom's presence in Manhattan. And I especially miss the really terrific way Jack could smoke a cigarette and make smoking look like an interesting thing to do. In the meanwhile, I'll settle for *Lime Ricketys* (G. Legman & Sons, 1994), a truly demented set of limericks—he and Fagin sound sort of like Vachel Lindsay angel dusted: "I love my eggs boiled in picante;/ I feel I'm encircling Dante./ In the 9th circle fries/ My leg and your eyes./ Like a tableau of life in Ypsilanti."

So Manhattan is being swallowed up by coffee bars. And beyond caffeine jitters, maybe this new fixture in city life might inspire a new

generation of collaborators. Fagin and friends seem to have fun decorating the clock of poetry—shouldn't you? Remember—people that love echoes; well, they're just bumping their mothers. Joel Lewis

Bernadette Mayer

The Desires of Mothers To Please Others in Letters

Hard Press, 1994
346 pages, \$12.95

Frank O'Hara's "Grace to be born and live as variously as possible" is a guiding principle which few writers have been able to follow, much less make their own. Bernadette Mayer is a notable exception. According to Mayer, "*The Desire of Mothers To Please Others in Letters* is a series of letters written but never sent to people living and dead during a nine-month period in 1979-80." Which is to say, the "letters" were written during the time Mayer started and published *Midwinter Day* (1982), a long work combining prose and poetry which recovers a single day, December 22, 1978, in the author's life.

Whereas *Midwinter Day* is divided into six discrete periods (dreams, morning, noontime, afternoon, evening, night), evoking both linear and cyclical time, *The Desires of Mothers To Please Others in Letters* is defined by a self-contained, chunk of linear time, the term of Mayer's pregnancy. In her first letter, Mayer hopes she's "not pregnant again." By the end, she celebrates with a friend, "Dear Peggy, baby's born Max Theodore, though you are already here and have held him, I thought you might like to have this written record of it, Love, Bernadette." Time, as this book makes evident, unfolds in many ways.

The reader of this book will learn that the author and Lewis Warsh moved from their Manhattan apartment ("12A") to Lenox, Mass., and, after a few months there, moved to Concord, N.H. ("We have a house and it has nine rooms!"). They have two daughters, Marie and Sophia. A son, is born. Among their friends are Clark, Peggy, Grace, Bill C., Bob C., Russell and Fanny. That's the surface or "plot" of the book, but within this space of writing so much else happens, what Mayer registers as her "alternating moods."

Mayer doesn't disclose anything resembling a fixed entity (or character) so much as reveal the many different, contradictory and overlapping ones anyone (author, mother, wife, worrier, observer, dreamer) is. The conflict propelling this book is both Mayer's recognition of being alone and the desire for chaos ("I'm enraged at nature for being so sublimely dumb with no analogy in it, nothing to enact") versus both her recognition of being part of something larger (family, community) and the concomitant need for organizing rituals ("Reggie Jackson got a hit off Nolan Ryan ..."). Unable to write her way out of this

conflict, Mayer writes letters, which, as a form, are both indiscreet and discrete.

In contrast to most conventional autobiographies or, in this case, series of unsent letters, Mayer isn't trying to either extricate a distinct self or to prove its existence through her writing. Where one thing (body, self, fiction, fact) ends and another begins is not the point. "I've got to tell you I often talk as if you were both me and you and a third person, another person too." This fruitful confusion of identities becomes particularly resonant when the reader remembers that Mayer is pregnant while writing these letters. However, while the book is framed by Mayer's biographical circumstances, the whole movement of the writing is to enlarge, as well as discover, what has been called autobiography and, beyond that, the very limits of writing.

"The novel," Mayer observes, "is a rigid form, it is not like life like they say it is and it makes money. The new mother automatically protects and praises her young (ones) no matter what she thinks. I'm not saying I'm leaving out the murderous anger and fear of hostile retaliations, they are like dialogue, part of the form. The aggression necessary for self-preservation has a peculiar expression in capitalism." This four sentence chunk indicates some of what she does best; she both moves all over the place and zeros in. And the place where this moving takes place Mayer sums up as "The united states of consciousness of all people gives me courage also to shout but the adored children shouting begin to make the thing absurd." Without succumbing to either the contemporary dilutions of Blake's mysticism or taking sanctuary in a theorizing structure, Mayer recognizes that the macrocosmic and microcosmic not only exist within each other, but that they are also dancing together. Always, she does so at her own peril, which makes her a decidedly un-academic writer.

Improvisational, full of long sentences marked by independent clauses, shifts in direction, tone, and diction, *The Desire of Mothers* gives us the impression that Mayer wrote each letter in one sitting. Weather, family, a nexus of writers, the local news, gossip, living in town—she's always in the thick of things. About a storeowner, she writes: "We got some jelly and bread and paid the two-bit shunker who runs the place. He seems so hot in the biscuit for anybody's boodle, that's what stinks." She sees herself in the eyes of others: "... and by this time they're thinking I'm a certified nervous lunatic, this mother with brown braids who's obsessed with something about a \$275-car, a gas guzzler." In Mayer's writing, "The noise of life," as Tennyson called it, becomes a sinuous music that is simultaneously rapturous and full. This fullness embodies a range of anticipations, as well as articulates introspective moments of (continued on page thirty)



Exquisite Poetry

From May Sarton's Well

Writings of
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Selection and
Photographs by
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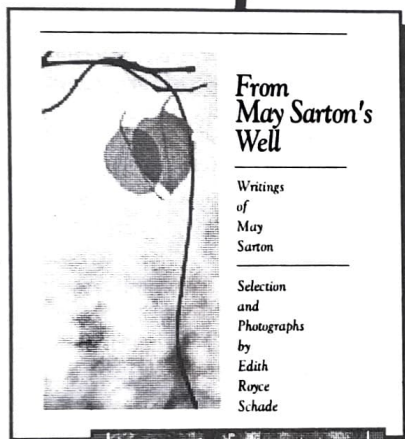
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Between One Future and the Next

by Ruth Daigon

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looking forward and backward in time ("Lately I fall asleep and dream nostalgically of the hairdressers" or "I wish I had a dream disease, I mean dread disease so I could do a lot of dreadful things without being afraid"). This last sentence was written in another time, before AIDS.

This book is haunted, as all of Mayer's writing is, by the desire to be more fully alive and responsive at any and all moments. "Trees," Mayer writes, in what amounts to an unanswered prayer, "forgive me for speaking this way when I've just met you, it's the harshness of all I can't explain what makes me want to want to beg you to be more explicit." *Gnosis* (without the hope of reaching God) or the melding (melting) together of writing and explicitness is what Mayer aims for. John Yau

Nuyorican Symphony

Poetry Live at The Knitting Factory CD-Knitting Factory Works, 1994

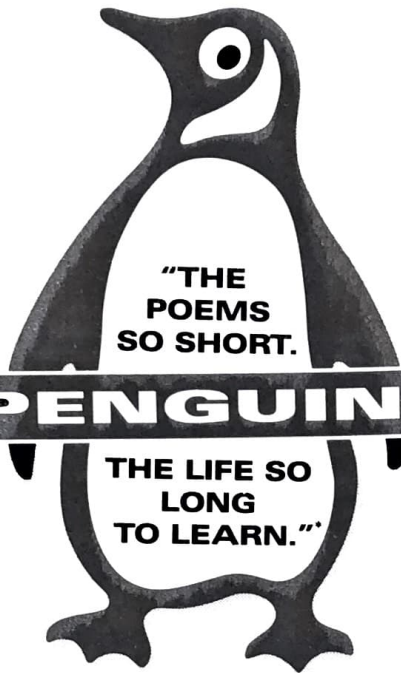
At a time where language has been dug up and marketed through the world's eroding tell/&/vision as another next trend, where the spoken word movement may have passed us by, leaving us just poetry, at a time where the body waits for a pulse ... we get a breath of fresh air: "Nuyorican Symphony," a recording by Knitting Factory Works.

This urban folklore which is the infamous Poetry Slam, has brought a renewed awareness to the oral tradition, bringing a range of voices through the Nuyorican Poets Cafe and nurturing a variety of poetic form and content. To me, the beauty of this CD is in *how* it captures this range. How alive it is. Both, as a poem of poetry and as an aural landscape.

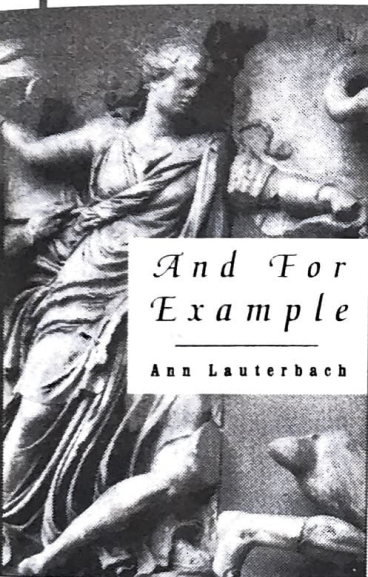
"Nuyorican Symphony" was recorded on June 8, 1992 by James McLean from 7 pm to 2 am, at the Knitting Factory on Houston Street, and was hosted/produced by Bob Holman, Carolyn Peyser and Paul Skiff. Executive Produced by Michael Dorf, everyone contributed to make this more than just another "spoken word" collection. With the thought to preserve the energy of what was happening in the downtown poetry scene, a massive reading was organized called, "The One Hundred Greatest Poets of All Time." As you know in poetry, one night can make all time ... at least until next time. And here, every poem is a symphony of moments, a Nuyorican night on the town ... words are taxi-cabs verbing us through secrets. The rhythm bed laid bare—as eight movements within the symphony; INTRO, BRILLIANT CORNERS, RANT, LOISAIDA, SEX, HUMORS, JAZZ, CODA. Each movement has five to eight poets ... SEX of course has sixteen. Sometimes two will appear side by side, left/right speaker codas in concert with each other. Pairings that range from explosions to honey in the ear ... and this is where it flies. The Symphony has been composed using whole poems or pieces that disappear to resurface later as poem fractals, a concept that gives the entire piece drive— it's as in Orion Fieg's voice repeating during the HUMORS movement, "O.K. I'll be brief ..." as in the singing of Jose Figueroa leading into Lois Griffith's piece in a symphony of hearts, not just voices. And sometimes we'll hear just one, as a beacon shining clear on the bed we've just passed. And this may float as in Indran Amirthanayagam's beautiful solo guiding us into the stray of more voices. Or it may rivet as in Sapphire's electric reading of "Wild Thing."

Too many moments to mention. And we can read the poems in the booklet and see which ones work better in print or in voice. Music of speech-patterns of music. Each movement, forever a night on the town. Your choice, to lay yourself bare in the hands of the conductor. In the intuitive ears of the orchestrator Paul Skiff, who's compositional skills are at its heart. As he says, "when you're handed so much passion and love to work with, you just can't go wrong."

In this State-Of-The-Art era, it's so great to hear technology used to capture the music of people of circulation of air of ethnic arias that come from no race. Sit back and make the CD/cassette player a symphonic sonaria of similes, and let the pulse-boombooma-pulse redefine the language in your poetry. Edwin Torres

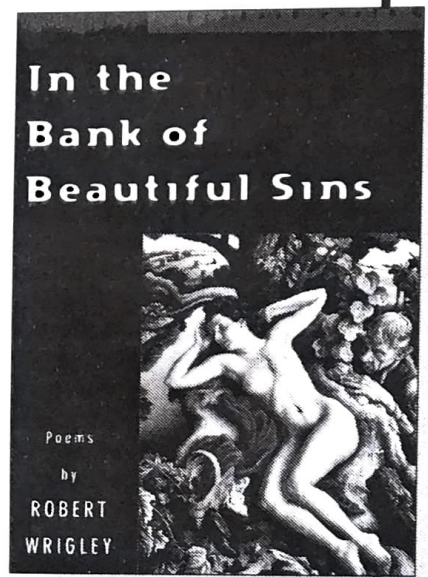


THE PENGUIN POETS



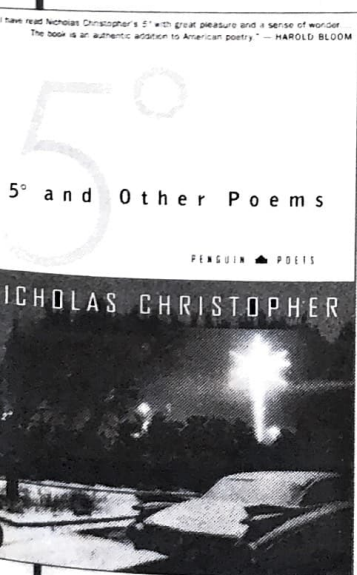
ANN LAUTERBACH
AND FOR EXAMPLE

MacArthur Fellow Ann Lauterbach explores a radical lyricism in this inventive, exhilarating work. "Lauterbach's poetry goes straight to the elastic, infinite core of time...exploding in colors not seen before." —**John Ashbery**



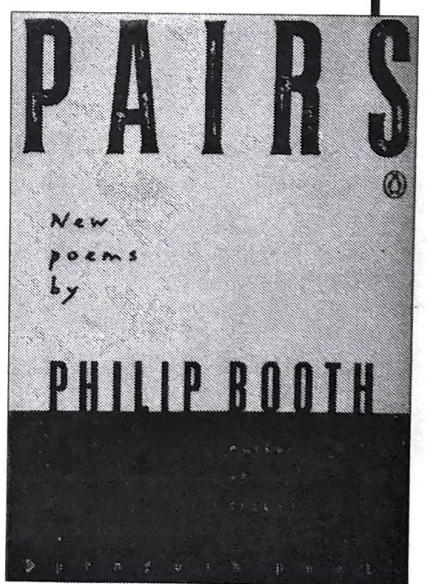
ROBERT WRIGLEY
IN THE BANK OF BEAUTIFUL SINS

"Possessing the resonance of Wordsworth and Bishop and the range of Big Joe Turner and Aretha Franklin, these poems ring like prophecy and move like jazz." —**T. R. Hummer**



NICHOLAS CHRISTOPHER
5° AND OTHER POEMS

From the author of the Melville Cane Award-winning *In the Year of the Comet* comes a sequence of thirty-five interlocking poems about a single night in a city in which it is 5°. "Christopher's poetry is...in a class by itself." —**Anthony Hecht**



PHILIP BOOTH
PAIRS

The author of *Selves* returns with a collection of poems that explores how selves and pairs come to terms with each other, themselves, and their aging lives. "Anyone who cares about poetry knows his work." —**THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW**



"Measures," from *Pairs* by Philip Booth

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the casting lady
who found me for this role

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the poetry project's fall 1995 workshops

poetry workshop with maureen owen



saturdays at noon beginning October 21st

The workshop will begin each week by focusing on one poet's works. The workshop will read poems aloud and participants will discuss the works. If the poet used a particular poetic form, it will be examined along with other examples of that form. Using reading/discussion as inspiration, there will be a "free writing" period. The assignment for the week will incorporate material from the free writing as well as inspiration from the poet we have studied that session or the poetic form we have been discussing. Each week participants will read their own assignment poem and entertain comments.

Maureen Owen is the author of eight books of poetry including, *Zombie Notes*, *Amelia Earhart*, *Imaginary Income* and *Untapped Maps*.

tuesdays at 7 pm. beginning october 17th

This workshop is for beginners to veterans, preferably with manuscripts in mind. With an emphasis on new writing on a weekly basis and on previous work only as it relates to the overall concept of the formulation of a manuscript. Not just limited to poets. Prose writers, fiction, non-fiction writers, letter and journal writers and artists in other disciplines are welcome. The emphasis is on the poetry that exists in all writing, in all art, in all endeavor.

David Henderson is the author of the best selling biography of Jimi Hendrix entitled *Scuse Me While I Kiss The Sky*. His books of poems include *De Mayor of Harlem* and *The Low East*.

poetry workshop with david henderson



performance. poetry. collaboration workshop with wanda phipps



fridays at 7 pm. beginning october 20th

This workshop entitled *Alchemical Marriage: The Possibilities of Poetry, Performance and Collaboration*, will explore the interdependent and transformative qualities of collaborative poetry and performance. Using simple awareness and documentation of dailiness, the workshop will strive to generate writing which reflects the randomly falling turns of the universe as the only trustworthy syntax. In-class writing experiments, collaborations, journal keeping, guest artists and field trips will be part of the process. Poets, musicians, dancers and visual artists interested in writing and collaborating are welcome.

Wanda Phipps is a writer/performer/translator/dramaturg. Her work has appeared in numerous journals including *Exquisite Corpse*, *The World*, *Agni* and *oblek*.

Annual tuition for workshops is \$150 which includes a one year membership at The Poetry Project, granting admission to all our regularly scheduled events, a year of the Poetry Project Newsletter as well as discounts at special events. Registration is available by mail or in person at the Project during our office hours 11am-5pm. Call 212.674.0910 for more information.

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National Literary Tour At The Poetry Project



Li-Young Lee & Randall Kenan Wednesday, March 29th at 8 pm

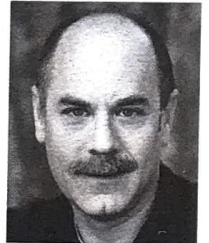
Li-Young Lee's first collection of poems, *Rose*, received great critical acclaim. *The Kenyon Review* praised his "wonderful Whitmanesque vitality." Lee's second book, *The City in Which I Love You*, was the 1990 Lamont Poetry Selection of The Academy of American Poets. *The Winged Seed*, Lee's memoir, is being published this spring by Simon & Schuster.

Randall Kenan was described as "a fabulist for our time" by Henry Louis Gates Jr. Kenan is the author of *A Visitation of Spirits* and *Let the Dead Bury Their Dead*, which was termed "nothing short of a wonder book," by *The New York Times Book Review*.

Kathy Acker & Robert Glück Wednesday, April 26th at 8 pm

"No writer is more audacious than Kathy Acker," declared novelist Lynne Tillman, "[Her] anarchic wit drives a thorough-going attack on conventions and complacencies of all sorts." Acker is the author of thirteen novels including: *Great Expectations*, *Blood and Guts in High School*, *Don Quixote*, *Empire of the Senseless* and most recently *My Mother: Demonology*.

The Advocate described Robert Glück's novel, *Jack the Modernist*, as a "story that most artfully allows gay male experience to transcend the simplistic myths that society has arranged for us." Glück's other books of fiction include *Elements of a Coffee Service* and, *Margery Kempe* (High Risk Books).



Ed Sanders & Maureen Owen Wednesday, May 10th at 8 pm

Ed Sanders is a poet, journalist, fiction writer and musician whose books include *Poems from Jail*, *20,000 A.D.*, *Thirsting for Peace in a Raging Century*, *Hymn to the Rebel Cafe* and *The Family*, his definitive account of the Charles Manson murders. Since the 1960s, Sanders has performed and recorded with the poetry-rock band *The Fugs*. His opera *Cassandra* will be presented this spring at Lincoln Center, and his epic poem *Chekhov* is due in April from Black Sparrow Press.

Maureen Owen's poetry grasps essential details of daily thought and experience and sets them into play with each other, resulting simultaneously in complexity and clarity. She was editor and publisher of the influential *Telephone Magazine* and *Telephone Books*. Her collections of poetry include: *Imaginary Income*, *Zombie Notes*, *Country Rush* and *No Travels Journal*.

Carolyn Forché & Maurice Kenny Wednesday, May 24th at 8 pm

Carolyn Forché is the author of *Gathering the Tribes*, *The Country Between Us*, and *The Angel of History*. *Publisher's Weekly* asserted "Forché has not only created a poetry of consummate beauty, but borne witness to the wounds of our collective history." She recently edited an anthology entitled *Against Forgetting: 20th Century Poetry of Witness*.

Maurice Kenny's publications include: *The Mamma Poems*, which received an American Book Award, *Dancing Back Strong the Nation*, *Between Two Rivers: Selected Poems*, and *Rain and Other Fictions*. Kenny's *Black Robe* was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and received the National Public Radio Broadcasting Award.



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These events are being presented as part of the National Literary Network's Writers' Tour, which is supported solely by a grant from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund.

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Ed Sanders, Maureen Owen, Carolyn Forché, Maurice Kenny

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Since its founding in 1966, the Poetry Project, Ltd. at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery has served as a venue for public literary events and as a resource for writers. Now in its 29th season, the Poetry Project continues to furnish encouragement and resource to poets, writers, artists and performers whose work is experimental, innovative and pertinent— to writing that proposes fresh aesthetic, cultural, philosophical and political approaches to contemporary society.

The National Literary Network

Comprised of Intersection for the Arts, Just Buffalo Literary Center, Woodland Pattern Book Center, North Carolina Writers' Network and The Poetry Project, the National Literary Network supports and promotes the work of contemporary authors. The Network's programs, tour readings and activities are designed to foster an inclusive national literary community, while developing new audiences for emerging writers and writers working in emerging forms.

Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund

The Poetry Project's participation in the National Literary Network and the National Literary Tour is funded solely by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. The Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund promotes the vitality of the arts nationwide by encouraging interactions between artists and communities. With annual grants of more than \$30 million, the Wallace Fund is one of the largest private funders of the performing, visual and literary arts in the United States.