

# poetry project

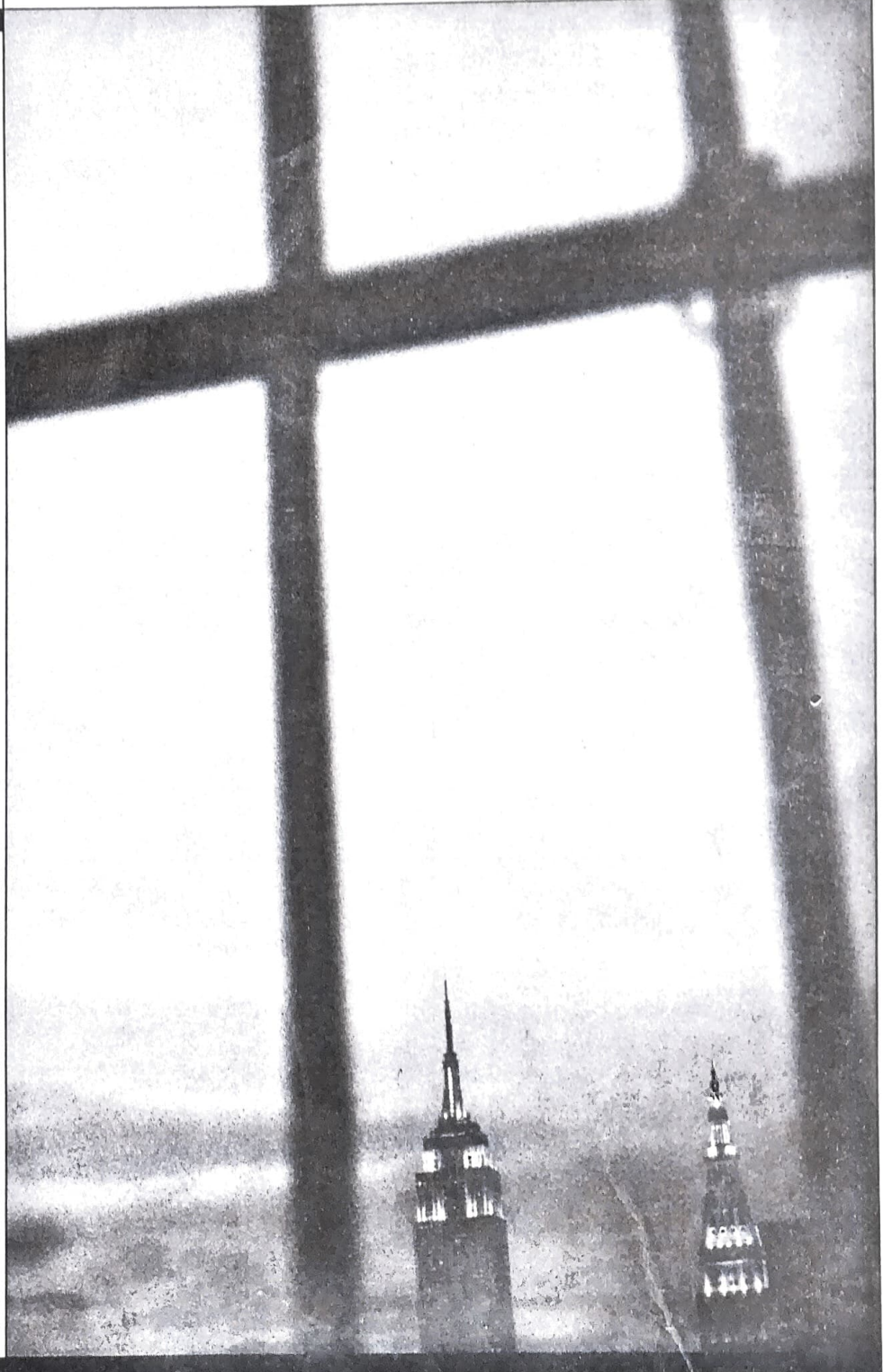
NEWSLETTER

JUNE/JULY 1998 ISSUE #170

\$5.00

## SUMMER READING:

Peter Gizzi  
Yunte Huang  
Tomaz Salamun  
Jane Ransom  
Tony Lopez  
Andrew Levy  
Keith Waldrop  
Janine Pommy Vega  
Joseph Lease  
Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge  
Michael Friedman  
Sianne Ngai  
Michael Rumaker  
Joan Larkin  
Bob Holman  
Michael Gizzi  
Pamela Lu  
Dodie Bellamy  
John Clarke



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**Andrew Levy** by Daniel Bouchard  
**Keith Waldrop** by Steve Carll  
**Janine Pommy Vega** by Ilka Scobie  
**Joseph Lease** by Larissa Szporluk  
**Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge** by Jena Osman  
**Michael Friedman** by Tim Davis  
**Sianne Ngai** by Alan Gilbert  
**Michael Rumaker** by Richard Connolly  
**Joan Larkin** by Tom Devaney  
**Bob Holman** by Chris Funkhouser  
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**John Clarke** by Albert Glover

**BOOKS RECEIVED** 30

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# announcements

## Staff Changes at the Poetry Project

Curator of Hudson River Valley readings, database empress, and sugar consumer supreme Program Assistant Bridget Brehen is leaving the Poetry Project this spring. No more little candy treats left on our desks. No more runs for Gobstoppers. We'll all miss her like crazy, but we wish her the very best of luck.

The Poetry Project is pleased to announce that next year Anselm Berrigan will be the Coordinator for the Monday Night Reading/Performance Series. Marcella Durand and Eleni Sikelianos will be the Coordinators for the Wednesday Night Reading Series until Lisa Jarnot rejoins the Project next Winter. Wanda Phipps will be the Coordinator for the Friday Late-Evening Events Series. The new Editors for the Poetry Project Newsletter are Brenda Coultas and Eleni Sikelianos.

## Summer Events

Kenneth Koch will be reading at the Poetry Project on Monday, June 1st at 8 pm to celebrate the publication of his latest collection of poems, *Straits* (Knopf). Koch, a pre-eminent figure in American poetry and one of the original New York School poets, is also the author of the just-published *Making Your Own Days: The Pleasures of Reading and Writing Poetry* (Scribner); *Ko, or a Season on Earth*; *Thank You and Other Poems*, and many other books of poetry and prose.

On Wednesday, June 3rd at 8 pm, the Poetry Project presents *A Celebration of An Anthology of New (American) Poets*, published this year by Talisman House. Kim Lyons, Brenda Coultas, Edwin Torres, Lisa Jarnot, Leonard Schwartz, Eleni Sikelianos, Chris Stroffolino and others will read.

From June to September, the Poetry Project will co-host Summer in the Square, a reading series that will take place every Wednesday at 6 pm in Union Square Park (except for the first reading, which will be on Saturday, June 20th at 2-3 pm). Hosted in conjunction with Barnes & Noble, the series is produced by the 14th Street-Union Square Local Development Corporation and Business Improvement District.

### Schedule:

#### June

- 20 Beatrix Gates & Dael Orlandersmith (2-3 pm)
- 24 Ron Padgett & Edwin Torres

#### July

- 8 Constantine Contogenis & Giorgios Chouliaras
- 15 Sharon Mesmer & Hettie Jones
- 22 Gerry Gomez Pearlberg

- 29 Wanda Phipps & Todd Colby

#### August

- 5 Peter Constantine & Peter Manolakos
- 12 Frank Lima & Robert Hershon
- 19 Dean Kostos, Penelope Karageorge & Barbara Lekatsas
- 26 Lynne Tillman & Jane Delynn

#### September

- 9 Dorothy Randall Gray
- 16 Carmen Valle & TBA

## Ronald Johnson 1935-1998

Poet Ronald Johnson died in March in Topeka, Kansas. He was the author of ten volumes of poetry, including *The Book of the Green Man*, *The Spirit Walks*, *the Rocks Will Talk*, *Songs of the Earth*, and *Ark*, a multi-sectioned work which he composed over two decades. He has three books forthcoming, including *The Shrubberies* from Sun and Moon.

## Hilda Morley 1919-1998

On March 23rd, poet Hilda Morley died in London. She was the author of several volumes of poetry including *What Are Winds What Are Waters*, *To Hold in My Hand: Selected Poems*, *Cloudless at First*, and *The Turning*, just released from Moyer Bell. Morley was influential to many American poets and artists, especially those associated with the Black Mountain School where she was a teacher during the 1950s along with her husband the composer Stefan Wolpe.

## Jack Micheline

San Francisco poet Jack Micheline died in February at the age of 68. Micheline was associated with the Beat Generation, identifying himself with American street poets and writing about the struggle of the underclass. He was the author of more than twenty books, including *North of Manhattan: Collected Poems, Ballads, and Songs 1953-1975*.

## Octavio Paz 1914-1998

Mexican poet, essayist, and social critic Octavio Paz died in April at the age of 84. Paz's work as a writer had a tremendous impact in Latin America and internationally. In 1990 he won the Nobel Prize in literature and he was the author of several books including the influential *Labyrinth of Solitude* and the 1957 poem "Sunstone". His *Collected Poems* were published in 1987.

# book reviews

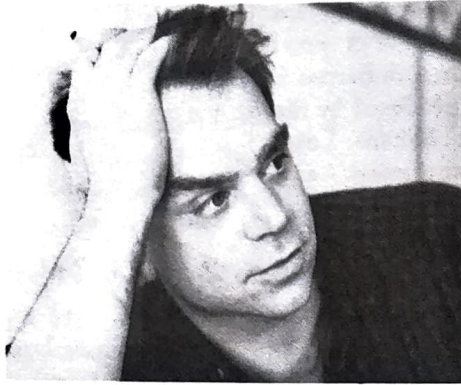


photo by Elizabeth Willis

PETER GIZZI  
**Artificial Heart**

Burning Deck Press (71 Elmgrove Avenue, Providence, Rhode Island 02906), 1998, \$10.00.

Never

is also part of the greater composition, looking away  
at the toy horizon.  
Who will die from happiness, knowing that their ungainly self  
was loved  
and the clumsy heart embraced? Dinner is never dinner  
this season,  
living in a bubble, the I sinks, I decline too  
in this construction even and if only even as  
the putative author  
of these lines, this subject. The subject matters,  
wrote the good scribes in disbelief.

— "A Textbook of Chivalry"

Peter Gizzi pays his poetic addresses to the heart according to his own "chivalry," with a gaze that never strays from its subject. *Artificial Heart*, his new book, is "definitively a path opening on all sides, / as all eyes open . . . to focus / as with the apertures of the heart". Gizzi gives the heart the top spot on the marquee, but the sonic and structural responsibilities of a chorus. He coaxes it to provide a secure base for linguistic sculpture, then turns around and wrings it for all the longing it can muster. At their most resonant the words "artificial heart" do not refer to one that is shallow or unfeeling, but to the heart as construct, built like any work of art. This malleable heart has notable consequences for poetry, a genre engaged in an ongoing battle with its own reputation as confessional and personal. The tension between "artificial" and "heart" is parallel

to that generated by expression and impulse, for any impulse can only be manifested through action, whether manipulated poem or unedited expletive, musical piece or repressive shudder.

In his essay "Semblance," Charles Bernstein writes of the "sense of music in poetry: the music of meaning—emerging, fogging, contrasting, etc. Tune attunement in understanding—the meaning sounds. It's impossible to separate prosody from the structure (the form and content seen as an interlocking figure) of a given poem. . . . (N)o one has primacy—the music is the orchestrating these into the poem, the angles one plays against another, the shading" (*Content's Dream*). Read Peter Gizzi's *Artificial Heart* and add beating, pounding, ticking to Bernstein's list. Formally engaged, slightly dissatisfied, this collection renders a "heart of poetry" that sees itself as part, not the crux, of the matter. And what is that heart? It is "fatigue," "an angry child," "a ripped sock," "an empty lot," "a hollow man," and, finally, crucially, it simply "is". These poems prove that poetry can have a heart—an unsentimental organ, a marred and vulnerable object—and not collapse beneath its weight.

Evidence exists in *Artificial Heart*, then, for rethinking the heart in light of the productive artifice with which it is entangled. The "machine / of the heart // betwixt time / space / and an approach of day" identified in 1992's *Music for Films* extends its reach in this later work to surpass the merely mechanical and delve into the fuller implications of building. The resulting machinations deliver the heart to a site ripe for dissection and true analysis resulting in an understanding of parts as interdependent elements, whether components of setting or words in a text. Gizzi expresses no "ordinary fictions, objects disappearing / without a mark"; rather, his poetry articulates a vastness secured by the details that compose it. Poems such as "Ding Repair" create a means for the world to be entered, viewed, seen, visited, perhaps even understood, always with attention to linguistic structure that is not concealed by but coordinated with sonic and visual layers of discontent:

Imagining another home far from here  
not from where we have come but where we imagine,  
where vulnerability won't reproduce cruelty.  
A home in the act of finding a home in the act of  
what will suffice? No place was set  
at the table but you are invented to listen  
even if silence is a condition of mind  
you will never be forgotten here, where to learn  
the speech of the place is to earn to speak in this place.

.....

Things come to them, a tuning fork  
pulling focus, facing each other at breakfast.  
Outside sea and sky enlarge the chamber piece. . . .

Others shift the balance of emotion and expression so that the inescapability of form dominates. Consider these lines from "Another Day on the Pilgrimage": "Road, sing the changes your geometry gives. . . / A tiny voice has begun to sing the background / of everything the foreground blurs". Or examine the landscape of "Mourning & Materiality," which reflects a steady hand despite car travel and the emotional weight of grief. The fact that "it will not be alright" leaves a mark parallel to that of the "open lot" or "mounds of earth," like lines that will never meet but depend on one another for definition. Bernstein's "angles" coincide with Gizzi's articulate "geometry."

**Artificial Heart** replicates the attention to structure necessary to musical works, along with their resulting intrinsic democracy. Solos emerge but in perfect balance with ensemble play; an interdependence too often absent from linguistic narrative is here found in every poem. The standards outlined on the lead sheets of Gizzi's "fake book" are composed by writers as diverse as David Byrne and Charles Ives, Robert Creeley and David Shapiro, Michael Palmer and Percy Bysshe Shelley. "Inside the song, it's weird," and like Hansel and Gretel we can rely on the concrete—the "trail of crumbs," the instruments, the "grass blade and gown"—to find our way through the interactive text and understand the "science to this song". Here, "sky participates in our diaries / H for silence and breath". The scale includes no note *H*, but as a letter it is indispensable; we cannot spell or read "heart" without it, and without it we cannot hear. *H* is dropped in some regions; practice this and nearly speak "earth". Bring the two words together to spell "hearth" and evoke the wandering, restless inquietude in the final section of this book, poems like "Ding Repair," "The De-evolution of the Father," "The Truth and Life of Pronouns," and "Tous les Matins du Monde," some of which stunned me first in the pages of *The Germ* last fall and which here act to balance the rest of the collection, with quieter, sparser pieces like "Reed," "Caption," and "Will Call"—movements in a composition, if you will, or the balance in collaborative work produced only by the most practiced ensembles. The soloist and the choir. The verse and the chorus. The soliloquy and the chorus. The verso and the recto. Here, hear.

BETH ANDERSON

YUNTE HUANG  
**SHI A Radical Reading of Chinese Poetry**

Roof Books, Segue Foundation (303 East 8th Street, New York, New York, 10009), 72 pages, \$9.95.

Kung said, "Make it New." I've heard that quotation used as an excuse, a charge, a permission and a manifesto over the past decades of my reading. Rarely has this bell rung true. Most often the promise is unkept. However, now and then, in poetry there is something new under the sun and moon. **SHI, A Radical Reading of Chinese Poetry**, by Yunte

Huang is such an endeavor. As an introduction, Yunte Huang is a Ph.D. candidate at SUNY at Buffalo's Department of English, specifically within the Poetics Program. His translations of Charles Bernstein, James Sherry and Hank Lazer have been published in China. And, to his credit, he has translated Ezra Pound's *Pisan Cantos* into Chinese and this translation, in book form, will be published later this year. He is also the editor of *Displace*, a poetry magazine.

The word *shi* translates into the English word poetry. Huang's poetic adventure begins in his useful introduction that explains the innovative form taken by his translations of traditional Chinese poets, Tu Fu and Li Po, for example. Huang's form includes the translator as a vital and visible aspect of the poem's metamorphosis into another language. The translator can be heard. The translator is not hidden behind the smooth rendering of foreign language into Disney English. To accomplish this Huang includes the original Chinese in his book, a traditional translation, background and history of the poet and place of the poem, keys to cultural colloquialisms, explanations of historical references, extended creative commentary, a radical translation and lists of aspects of language that occur only in English and direct literal translations of Chinese characters, without English embellishment. What the reader is presented is a complete process of a form of translation, with the translator present and acting as a guide. This form of translating alters irrevocably all translation that precedes it. The language clashes that can not ever mesh are not avoided. Here theories of translations collide and are welcomed. The victory is to the new.

Of course the book *Shi* (poetry) is a collage. This aspect of the book obviously comes from Huang's close study of Pound. Ezra Pound appears in his explanations numerous times, but not only Pound. Huang calls upon many historical literary figures, Amy Lowell, Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, Robert Duncan and Ernest Fenellosa. *Shi* is a poem, a book of poems as a poem, full of history, not only the history of Chinese traditional verse but the history of Modern English poetry. Huang does not forget Mao, one of China's most notable poets.

*Shi* is not only a collage of found juxtapositioned parts and poets, but also a collage of created facets and poems. Each piece of this process collage is a separate entity and can be read as such or it can be in symbioses with the other aspects of the poem. Each segment or translation is an interpoetic poem. Each piece, a poem in Chinese, a bit of history, comment, a translation, has a context in which to exist with other parts, and they can also stand as separate, solo pieces. With all of these clashes of form, history and criticism, the poems, the book becomes also a visual poetic event and with the clash of Chinese and English a sound poem. The radical translations and list of translated Chinese words read like much contemporary disjointed narratives, "ten-mouth-ancient walk-road west worm-wind sick-bony horse." With the book existing on a multiple poetic levels the television English of other transla-

tions, Chinese, Spanish, whatever, are now hackneyed, reduced to the texts of our honorable but ancient ancestors. Huang updates translating. His translations moves in a matrix and he is able to make his own poetry by translating translating.

I felt comfortable reading Huang's book of translated poems, which are curiously his poems more than the poems of the original poets. The usually invisible translator is more than everywhere in this book. Yunte Huang's humor, particularly his humor, his puns, his intelligence and his opinions form a constellation of broken poetic rules that are reassembled into a vivid 21st century world poetry. It is new. Isn't that what Kung said? In this achievement Huang does not forget China. His translations allow a moving around in another cultures poetry easier. The visibility of the translator, the texture of the book, the merging and juxtaposition of forms makes Shi, not a translated or a transLOST group of poems but a transApparent book of poems that transmits poetry, and with the translator making numerous TransAppearances.

MICHAEL BASINSKI

**TOMAZ SALAMUN**  
**The Four Questions of Melancholy:**  
**New and Selected Poems**

White Pine Press (10 Village Square, Fredonia, New York 14063), 1997, 265 pages, \$15.00.

In the perfect world, the poem encapsulates pure energy in the language and on the page until the reader or hearer comes along to unleash it. In the perfect poem, so much energy has been captured and condensed that the reader experiences a chemical reaction, a shock, a surge of exuberance or beauty or even dread. Emily Dickinson rather famously said: "If I read a poem and it feels like the top of my head is blown off, then I know that is poetry." I am here to testify, and by Dickinson's criterion: the things that Tomaz Salamun makes are poetry.

This is how I began my introduction to Tomaz Salamun when he read at The Poetry Project in December. I first read a poem by Tomaz Salamun in a class on Twentieth Century European poetry taught by Anselm

Hollo at the Naropa Institute. The poem was called "Who is Who," and it began: "Tomaz Salamun you are a genius/ you are wonderful you are a joy to behold." The poet then goes on to compare his various powers and body odors to everything from Mount Ararat to the scent of nard to solar dust. "The stars are amazed who is amazed at the stars" he says, and declares himself the speculum humanae salvationis. It was this semi-biblical irreverent hyperbolic self-mythologizing braggery (verging on waggery) that made me rush out to buy **The Selected Poems of Tomaz Salamun**. Edited by Charles Simic, the book contained translations by the poet in collaboration with, among others, Anselm Hollo, Bob Perelman and Simic himself. All I knew about Tomaz Salamun at that point was that he lived in what was then still Yugoslavia, and that he was possibly a used car salesman.

In his **Selected Poems** were works playing with and rearranging the definition of the self—but not in the terms of any jessamied psychoanalysis or identity politics. In "History," the first poem in the book, he begins, "Tomaz Salamun is a monster./ Tomaz Salamun is a sphere rushing through the air./ He lies down in twilight, he swims in twilight./ People and I, both look at him amazed,/we wish him well, maybe he is a comet." A few lines later, the speculum humanae turns into an apparently unworthy speck: "He might only be a hump, his head/ should be taken off like a spider's./ But then something would suck up/ Tomaz Salamun, possibly the head." The self is being exhumed at the deepest layer, and recreated shamanistically into as many configurations as science, yoga, and Houdini might allow, becoming here godlike, there terrible, then innocent or all-knowing. Often, as Salamun makes a mythos of himself, he thwarts our expectations of shape or crescendo. Take, for instance, "Proverbs":

1. Tomaz Salamun made the Party blink, tamed it, dismantled it, and reconstituted it.
2. Tomaz Salamun said, Russians Get Out! and they did.
3. Tomaz Salamun sleeps in the forest.

The sheer force of the personality of the poet, or rather the persona of the personality of the poet, threatens and promises to take over that of the reader, and perhaps of the writer. In the brilliant ending stroke of "Are Angels Green?" the poet commands, "I want everyone to breathe, mouse, shit." This versatile ego/id reaches back to the first scientific conglomerations of stellar detritus that clumped together to make a planet (probably Earth). It is the self that moves through history, that made cave paintings at Lascaux, that built mounds in prehistoric Kentucky. Later, this self could be found shaking a stick at the iron curtain and doing a tribal dance around party politics. It is a self that exceeds definition, exceeds nations, exceeds the self. Like the seething visions of Lautréamont or Rimbaud (whom Salamun began to read at the age of 15 or so), these poems are contradictory, explosive, exuberant, and visionary.

Salamun's most recent book in English, **The Four Questions of Melancholy**, edited and informatively introduced by Christopher Merrill, contains the same ecstatic energy. In fact, it includes most of the goods found in the **Selected Poems** as it gathers further representatives from twenty-six of the collections published in Slovenian. It is always great to have more poems by a truly fantastic poet. Yet, these bursts are so high-fused and bright that one might not wish to see them crowded together like a flock of tightly herded and blazing sheep. Fires need oxygen, and so do highly flammable poems. On the other hand, this collection helps the reader more fully realize why Salamun is one of the foremost poets of Central Europe, and why he is beginning to receive so much international recognition. (His poems have been translated into over a dozen languages, and he is currently up for the **Los Angeles Times Book Award**.) In these poems, his tone is again by turns ecstatic, delirious, rebellious, sometimes wistful and tender. His forms range from Surrealist ephemera, like strange shopping notes you might find scratched on a paper bag:

immortality, verbs of the sun,  
stop, rest, lay the flutes aside...  
...in the circles of turning, uprooted  
stick of night

a stone, Pan, mountains of evenness  
ides of March, door to dawn  
a thousand seas, ash of lava,  
a thousand furrows of tranquility  
I am dealt out, underfoot, great in tiny  
vermin's eyes

to Sapphic fragments:

Little robin,  
bones pinned to the cosmos.  
Who whistles, who calls?

["Untitled"]

and further, to Whitmanic declarations and New York School riffs.

If I seem to mention a lot of American influences, it's because there are a lot of American influences. Salamun is, more than Coca Cola, the real thing, and he might out-New York School some New York Schoolers. (But of course with a Slovenian twist.) Salamun was indeed in contact with and influenced by some of our very own New York people, and some of our other very own people. It should be mentioned, and happily, that Frank O'Hara is one of the most popular and influential poets in Slovenia. Was Salamun in part responsible for the rise of Frank O'Hara in Ljubljana? It seems so. In 1970, Salamun was invited to New York to participate, with his band of conceptual artists, OHO (a Slovenian acronym for something like EyeEarEye), in the Information Show at the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art. Salamun was introduced to O'Hara's work by Kinaston McShine, curator at MoMa and friend to O'Hara. Salamun became, subsequently, the first person to translate O'Hara into Slovenian. As Salamun rose to power as one of the most influential poets of Slovenia, so did Frank O'Hara, embedded in Salamun's poetic consciousness.

Salamun shares with O'Hara (among other things) that delightful sense of child-like liberty. The playfulness of the poems often approaches an energy level I have seen in the fantastically alive poetry of third graders:

Ride your bike to Cordoba! Your rain  
will be my rain. I am the rain, little  
tiger, you'll rave steam as you ride over  
puddles

["The Dromedary"]

# POP LITERARY GAZETTE

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AUTHENTIC UNDERGROUND  
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as a hit pop song. \$3 cash.

The newer poems included in *The Four Questions of Melancholy* are important in other ways. Although the war does not appear so much as fact, it appears as force and terror. In "Happiness is Hot, Splattered Brains", Salamun writes:

The body blossoms into a terrible silence,  
walls and chairs awaken.

Parts of things were once human  
members, too...

.....  
We're passers-by here, lost and  
helpless. Color, weight and sex  
dissolve. My waterfall is hurting.

"Poetry is a parallel process to spiritual development," Salamun said in an interview published in *Trafica*. In it, "you are trained not to be scared... you are trained how to be with the world as long as you can endure it." That is why Salamun can, in the face of war, write, "Hear me out, the world/ is not in danger./Just as the fingers of the hand/interlock, so we are cared for above" even though he must end this same poem with an

unmitigated and blunt assessment: "Everything is terrible." This is, in some parts of the world, the poet's job to record and, like Lucy after her balloon, to invoke and threaten and exhort:

Cover me.  
Cover me with a hood, grass, sand,  
rams, keep squeezing  
the air out to prevent a tragedy.

Salamun is temporarily stationed in New York, serving as the cultural attache for the Slovenian Consulate. This Spring, he will make his way back to Ljubljana. He possibly was at some point in the distant history of human existence a used car salesman, but if so, only for the briefest instant.

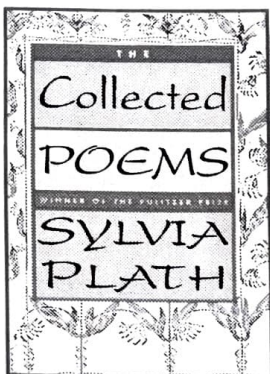
ELENI SIKELIANOS

### JANE RANSOM *Scene of the Crime*

Story Line Press (Three Oaks Farm, Brownsville, OR 97327), 1997. 50 pages, \$11.00.

The first things that grabbed me when

# Contemporary collections from modern-day legends.

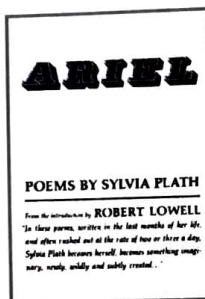


## **The Collected Poems** **Sylvia Plath**

The complete collection of one of the 20th century's finest poets, featuring an introduction by Britain's Poet Laureate Ted Hughes.

## **Ariel** **Sylvia Plath**

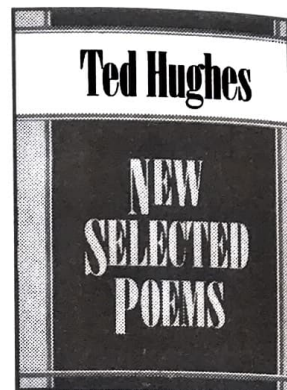
One of the classics of American letters, from the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet.



## **Sylvia Plath Reads**

Read by Sylvia Plath herself, this mesmerizing audio captures the haunting depth of her work.

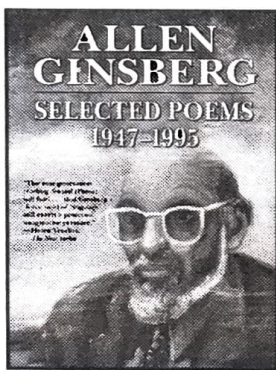
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## **New Selected Poems** **Ted Hughes**

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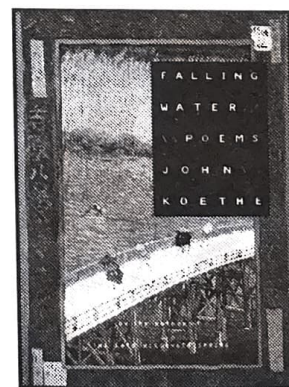
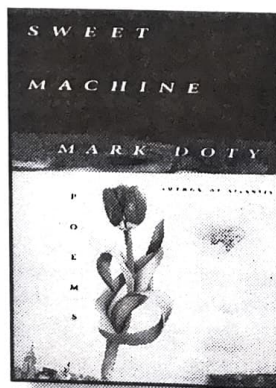
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I discovered the poetry of Jane Ransom were its elusive wildness, its voracious speed, the rather unique combination of intellectual play and sexual punning that add up to a percussive and permissive maximalism that seems radically free of the taboos that often play a large part in defining the styles of young poets. Take, for example, the beginning of "The Impasse Rides Again:"

At the impasse, fellas, this possible ladder  
unfolds from out of my pocket  
Dictionary, and snaps into space. If you  
cross words under it, it's bad luck,  
Which is better than none. The ladder  
links shake with weight, tenuous as lips  
Saying "sensuous." Link shake with  
weight—and see, the old links break.  
So many ways to read my links, take my lips,  
speak without being broken to  
Fragments. I break just like a little buoy.  
The hot air pops open  
And I sink like a fallen woman. Do you  
remember the Muzak I do?....

In analyzing these lines, and in trying to discover why I receive pleasure from reading them, I first notice the casual (yet hyped-up) way Ransom dramatizes a meditation on the relationship of words to things: we move from an "impasse" to a realm of "possibility" in which an "imposse" of personified words is breathed into being to become living entities seemingly detached from proper linguistic moorings. Thus, the word "shake" in the phrase "ladder links shake with weight" is both a verb and a noun, and in the space between these two meanings or functions a single word can share, we may find the freedom and the madness of the ambivalent indeterminacy Ransom is so adept at courting and conjuring.

However striking I find this kind of intellectual play (and there are many instances of it in *Scene of the Crime*), it is not, in and of itself, what I find most unique and engaging in Ransom's poetry. To come closer to the full scope of Ransom's achievement, I believe we must consider such lines as "I break just like a little buoy." In the first place, such lines are likely to make a reader wince—yet it is precisely by eliciting such a wince that this sentence (hardly a "new sentence") is able to call attention to its importance, not only to the reader but also

to the writer herself. Ransom's punning response to Dylan's "Just Like A Woman" should not be mistaken as gratuitous, if only because Ransom refuses to let it be so. Rather, it becomes an integral part of the skein the poem simultaneously ravel and unravels, engendering anxieties about her authorial specificity (as a woman born in a particular historical time), while at the same time dismantling—or distancing herself from—them. This line determines the shape of much that follows in the poem. As soon as we are told that there are "so many ways to...speak without being broken into / Fragments," the "I" enters to remind us that this realm of possibility bursts, breaks, falters. Even though Ransom embraces the freedom that occurs when the ladder (which may serve as the overriding metaphysical conceit here) becomes less a means of ascent or descent than a grid-like structure that "pulluates/ Improperly" and may be "bridged" by the reader, the very "impossibility" that freed her from an impasse becomes another impasse. On an idea-level, then, we see how freedom has its limits, how meaning becomes meanings.

If the above commentary may leave you with the feeling that Ransom is another heady, over-intellectual poet of abstractions, it must now be stressed that what also distinguishes Ransom from much "poetics of indeterminacy" is the authorial persona she develops in many of the poems in *Scene of The Crime*. This persona, gendered female, often casts itself in the role of "sadist" and therefore implies a "masochist" for its (usually male) reader or interlocutor. The way Ransom invests the relationship between reader and writer with erotic (and feminist) significance is perhaps her central achievement in *Scene of The Crime*. In contrast to her earlier volume of poetry, *Without Asking*, in which she wrote largely narrative lyrics in the "nice girl" mode of Sharon Olds, in her new work, Ransom both aggressively and playfully challenges the reader to a power-struggle which may yet be love. She announces her "Ground Rules" in the book's first poem: "You can heckle, / You can jeckle, but you can't hide...." While Helen Vendler claims that the best lyric poetry silently asks the reader to identify with the "I" of the poem

rather than the "you" of the poem, Ransom writes "Be my reader, reader, / Author-eater. Read my life/ But don't you be her." By calling attention to the *difference* between reader and author (and in the cadences of nursery rhymes at that!), Ransom announces her break with the twentieth century mainstream lyric as championed by Vendler as well as the "experimental" lyric which scorns childlike or slam-like rhymes. Rhyme itself is part of an alienation effect for Ransom, one teeming with convulsive beauty. The discomfort is part of the beauty, and the beauty is part of the point.

The interlocutors Ransom addresses, mostly figures of male authority, help define the speaker. In "Authority, Don't Give Me That Archaic Smile," perhaps the most formally constructed poem in the book (divided into 13 stanzas, each one beginning with a letter from an alphabet read backwards from z to m), Ransom speaks as a "double-crossing" feminist to a patently male authority who "mourns the loss of Grecian Urns and Western Sperms." "Masturbating" become "masterbaiting" and, in a linguistically complex questioning of what Derrida would call the "phallogocentric" myth of origins, Ransom makes much use out of the fact that "zygote" is one of the last words in the dictionary. Similarly, in "Letter of Explanation," the double-entendre inherent in the words "characters" and "conception" becomes fodder for Ransom's critique of the primacy of "birth" as well as a critique of platonic idealism.

Yet, the very fact that Ransom comes to embrace sexual difference (even as she inverts the traditional connotations of this difference) distinguishes her from mere post-structuralism. Aside from her refreshing frankness about masturbation, menstruation, bisexuality, and the fantasies of murder stemming from the death of her mother (themes explored more in depth in her first novel, *Bye Bye*, NYU Press, 1997), this book also includes some relatively traditional dramatic monologues that are likely to be appreciated by those who find other poems in this book "marred" by her puny language digressions. In "This Is Just A Fairy Tale" Ransom brilliantly conflates the Biblical story of Moses and the classical story of Europa to

achieve an effect at least as startling and lucid as a koan or ideogram. Moses becomes Zeus raping the woman (Miriam) who finds him. Ransom takes Holderlin and the early Wordsworth's desire to recreate the Greek Gods to its feminist conclusion. Ransom's revisionist poem willingly sacrifices itself to mere "fairy tale" status on the condition that it be allowed to take all of HIS-tory down with it.

In addition to allowing us to see old myths in a new light, Ransom also creates contemporary myths. "Mr. America Visits Sex-Surrogate Miss History, She Says," at once a love poem, a feminist poem, and a metaphysical poem (on the relationship of time to space), is, perhaps, the most tightly constructed poem in the book. In contrast to "This Is Just A Fairy Tale," Ransom is not content in this poem to merely critique "history" as other. She identifies with an alternative history, one that knows "the art of loss" at least as well as Elizabeth Bishop, and that art of "nature bemoaning its fragmentation into individuals" at least as well as Nietzsche. In refusing to adhere to the "show, don't tell" mode of her earlier work, Ransom casts the interlocutor into the pre "death-of-the-author" passenger seat of the "reader"—and makes him love it.

Whether Ransom can make you, the reader of this essay, love it I must leave up to you. I, however, am a convert. Perhaps the highest praise I have for *Scene Of The Crime* is that I have not found the critical language to be able to adequately discuss most of what it does in the space of a short review. The meaning she's able to pack into such phrases as "patriotism's our common/ dildon't" or "personal perversion's a redundancy," the way in which she questions the flattering assumptions that the sexual and textual revolutions of the 1960s accomplished anything more than a transformation of "lasses in sun-dresses" to "bitches in heat", the way she uses clichés (the better to explode them: for instance, "look hands, no god")—are just a few of the rapid-fire pleasures in this book. Her fairy tale song about "McDonalds in Moscow" and the metaphysical turns on her nipples in "My Idle Idyll Essence" are others ("if I were a couple, I'd divorce

myself").

Although *Scene of The Crime* is not a "pretty" book, it is a beautiful book. Nor does she, in the final analysis, succumb to the reductive, debasing view of relationships proffered by Howard Stern, *Newsweek* and Jerry Springer. She is "in" this world but not "of" it ("I prostitute so as not to bore you"), yet is as acutely aware as Blake was of the need for some kind of marriage of heaven and hell. Self-consciousness need not be a burden ("I've always known better, and it's never stopped me"). These poems are acts of "unsubtling" after a long day of meeting the intellectual demands of theory or "avant-garde" poetry. Although there is much criticism of contemporary society in this book, it is not in the least bit whiney. Ransom remains too aware that we may have a desire to be made uncomfortable, to be dissatisfied, to whine. When she evokes the media circus of the triumph of capitalism and the persistence of patriarchy, she jarringly changes the subject to the relationship of her critique to her emotional state:

I wouldn't feel giddy enough to tell you  
any of this

Unless turned impudent by improvidence  
of new love, Skoopy-  
do-love, hoppity hope

Kneading clipped claws into my skin.  
Yes, I've met someone. I too want to  
Selfishly sin, to thrall for the fall....

This is a celebration, even of the very lack which is desire. Nor is this book immoral: the "crime" of the title is her right to celebrate herself and sing herself (even if she can't fully author herself) that she engages everywhere in this book.

CHRIS STROFFOLINO

TONY LOPEZ  
**False Memory**

The Figures (5 Castle Hill Avenue, Great Barrington, MA 01230), 1996, 40 pages, \$6.00.

Some of *False Memory* has already been seen, but Tony Lopez's poem remains to be seen full scale: one hundred fourteen-line stanzas deployed, on the decimal system, in discrete proportionate sections, six out of ten being given here. Of these the first and second, "Corneal Erosion" and

"Studies in Classic American Literature", were published in *Negative Equity and other poems* (Equipages, 1995), where they bracket four other, free-standing poems, amongst which the title poem is exceptional by its foreclosed brevity. Four stanzas of the third section, "Assembly Point D," made a fugitive appearance as a Short Run Press item. *False Memory* continues a history of work in circulation while in progress, now complete in manuscript and in search of a publisher; this by way of a reader's report on what of it is currently available in this edition.

In any of these sixty stanzas language emits the toxic glow of an intertextuality for which a functioning media awareness is its sufficient context. Much of it has been heard before, or heard already after being read, with or without accompanying visuals. What stands between *False Memory* and print journalism is that Lopez has no story to tell or opinion to editorialise; if anything he's beguiled by the tectonics of number systems. The even number series of the poem's exposure as parts of work in progress requires a shifting point of the decimal fraction to be given its values (2, 0, 4, 6 sections), and this ratio, however fortuitous, is more or less the parodic inversion of how for the poem as a whole the relation between higher and lower units, the decimal system coordinating the whole to its subordinate sections, does not include the sum of its parts. Quite different properties of cardinal numbers are implied by the poem's stanza, even if qua sonnet its antecedents reach no farther back than Ted Berrigan's fourteen-line accumulations. These number systems have in common the integer of the line of verse, but are thereafter incommensurable; discontinuous number systems exclude the possibility of dialectic, there's no talking to them, and to preclude synthesis at this structural level turns out to be crucial to Lopez's project. This systematic stand-off of arbitrary limits sustains the effort to attain them; at this size it is not quite compulsive repetition, and as an instrument for producing verses its effect is prodigious rather than profligate, though I might review my opinion if he were to let rip on another 12,600 lines.

ANDREW CROZIER

ANDREW LEVY  
**Continuous Discontinuous**

Potes and Poets Press (181 Edgemont Avenue, Elmwood, CT 06110-1005), 1997, 136 pages, \$13.50.

In the current period of high rents, the appearance of Andrew Levy's *Continuous Discontinuous* is a welcome thing. You can take this book home; you are encouraged to do so. There is a remark Williams once made about Kenneth Rexroth in a letter to Marianne Moore: "for him words are sticks and stones to build a house—it's a good house." That image came to me repeatedly while reading Levy's book. *Continuous Discontinuous* is not like any of these poets but the idea of a poetry book as a house rings well enough within these rooms of verse. But like new homes or new places you move to, a new book of poems is something one warms to. Or doesn't. Or does, but it takes a while. And when it's the last case then love for the book is real because it's been tried.

For Andrew Levy the good house is not made up of words so much as phrases. This, "a rock fell from a dream at play in a landscape/ put the book together/ like a core to inhabit/ I continue to do what I normally do/ I wake up well/ dream many dreams/ a simple grammar of presentness" is from "King Habit," found in the first of four sections that comprise the book. The mind zeroes in on "core" and how it may (or may not) function like a beam in the architecture of the book, or, more so, like a mantle in a room. There are many found beams here, many mantles and steps—a lot of climbing: "the return of the curve" ("Soft Buck")—different rooms, some really great sex, jazz standards, and food; to name a few things.

Four sections: they read independently of each other, somewhat (if that, a contradiction, refer to the book title for reassurance). They are "Passing Theories," "Song From My Family," "Songs and Improvisations," and "Endfield." This is the house that Andrew Levy built. Remember this house: a house of writing, poetics, thinking. Its enunciations and concerns are not coming out of the woodwork so much as make up the wood. But despite the "house" analogy, I don't want to associate a well-wrought ambitiousness with these poems. They're fluid, organic, *real*. From "Song From My Family": "ableness to construct thought/ parallel to this/ re-adherence to self most needed/ habits to be not fallen upon/ syntax is fucked/ but it's how I write to think." These poems are put together. They invite inhabitation; a place to think. Books are like houses? Are they not selected carefully, given an opening party, enjoyed intensely, complained about, occasionally neglected or taken for granted?

More so than the mere familiarity of a place, the poems intersect, cross-over, double-back; in repetition of phrases, bits of song, revisited themes. Take "do nothing till you hear from me" in "Songs and Improvisations": fragments of an Ellington favorite that mingles with the thought processes and line constructions of the poem. It continues with the Ellington lyric and then diverts: "pay no attention to what, s said/ follow argumentation beyond opaque body/ consider our romance/ suffused with contentiousness" and falls back into Duke, digresses, progresses, picks up on another tune ("missed the saturday dance") and moves on with a mood or thought. Singing around the house.

# Bob Holman

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DANIEL BOUCHARD

KEITH WALDROP

### **The Silhouette of the Bridge (Memory Stand-Ins)**

Avec Books (PO Box 1059, Penngrove, CA 94951), 1997, 76 pages, \$8.95.

### **Analogies of Escape**

Burning Deck (71 Elmgrove Avenue, Providence, RI 02906), 1997, 80 pages, \$10.00.

These two recent books by Keith Waldrop examine some intertwined concerns of poetry as well as philosophy: how human memory works, how deeply implicated language constructs are in that process, and what purpose memory ultimately serves.

#### *1. The Bridge*

On page 65 of *The Silhouette of the Bridge (Memory Stand-Ins)*, Keith Waldrop finally asks, parenthetically, the question raised by its title:

(just what *did* I mean by "bridge")

This rhetorical invocation of memory suggests the obvious reply that memory itself is a kind of bridge between the past and the present, between the ego and its collected experience.

Memory is so important to us because of our need for self-consistency, which we pursue by linking our present actions to those of the past and thus staying safely within the known, within habit. But, as Waldrop writes: "Habits can have wrong results even if, in some sense, they are good habits." For memory brings with it the sense of loss of the past, its unreachability (this is why we have merely a silhouette of a bridge: what we touch in memory can be touched *only* in the language of memory). This sense of loss, the burden of memory we bear which prevents us from mov-

ing on, may be what we lose when the bottom drops out of our "basket", as happens to the man in the lecturer's story at the beginning of section I. of *Silhouette*.

#### *2. The Silhouette/Analogies*

*Silhouette* is divided into 6 sections, each of which is composed of a sequence of shorter vignettes which, while creating an organic sense of narrative, preserve some of the "random" nature of memory, or better put, its capacity to move along several associative axes at once (chop chop). Waldrop also moves his writing in and out of simple storytelling, philosophical meditation and lyricism with grace and humor given gravity at times by darker moments which well up (the arguing of the aged couple next door, a somewhat bitter remembrance of the narrator's father snooping in his diary.)

Waldrop uses the loss of memory as a means of throwing light on particular memories and on the nature of memory itself, its constructedness a function of the medium in which we gain conscious access to it. The title tells us these are not *real* memories but in fact, memory stand-ins, narratives, marking the places where, presumably, real memories once were, but not able themselves to lay claim to the status of memories. The narrator's reaction to the father reading his diary is to throw it away and never keep another, yet we are reading of the incident now as though it were lifted from an internal diary that was kept instead. The story enters writing now rather than then, but its only presence is as the language-trace of an experience, a silhouette of the memory bridge, an analogy for its contents.

#### *3. Escape*

But if language stands in for thought as reflection upon being, how to get language to stand aside so one can simply be? This is the implied concern of *Analogies of Escape*, from the Royet-Journoud epigraph "Will we escape analogy?" forward. This writing attempts to get outside, to achieve a point of detachment from intellectual constructs which in turn have overmediated one's experience of the world. Waldrop employs a shifting

constellation of associations to explore this: "I build houses I will not inhabit" for example, or

experience is typically experience until (p. 66) *he falls outside himself*

Escape is never permanent, of course. But having escaped, we become momentarily free to choose our re-entry point. We build our own virtual bridges into and out of our conditioned experience. Waldrop plays with genres and styles in *Analogies* to illustrate some techniques for doing this, employing single poems, serial poems, and lyrics from an Elmslie-esque musical to keep *forgetting* where the ego-narrator of memory is. Having thus "escaped", he can proceed with beginner's mind, discovering anew:

uncertainty  
is a gift

I will  
teach you the  
glory of  
the next

Growth and learning can be seen to accompany each other when an element of chaos is introduced into a system, necessitating an escape from the past (but one which preserves the lessons of the past in kernel form which will be useful in the next cycle, if the chaotic can be integrated and a new balance arrived at.) Language acts as the hinge here, as implied by the coupling of the title with the Royet-Journoud epigraph to create a linked pair of paradoxes: These are analogies of escape *from* analogy, or escapes from analogies of escape. Language's dual nature as both representational and also altogether present, and the poem's existence as the site of organic instability, mean that that which traps us can become our mode of escape from its trap. But then we must re-enter it as non-trap. The book ends:

There are ways of losing oneself in ever more comprehensive unities. As if the only interest lay in the whole movement.

Imagine other rooms.

The strength, grace and clarity of

Waldrop's thought as traced in his writing is as helpful a guide to imagining other rooms as one could hope for.

STEVE CARLL

JANINE POMMY VEGA  
**Threading the Maze**

City Lights Books (261 Columbus Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94133), 1997, 192 pages, \$12.95.

Janine Vega is a survivor, be it the turbulent anodyne infested 60s or a white out on an Annapurna trek. Well known as a beat ingenue poet, Vega has matured into one of the truest voices writing today. This collection details her travels on four continents.

Recovering from an auto accident, Vega begins in Glastonbury, searching for the Mother Goddess. Tracing an ancient earthwork of concentric circles ranging a gentle hill, Vega "threads the maze." It is this same passionate clarity that fuels her journeys and mesmerizes the reader with vivid descriptions of far flung places.

Travelling can be a test of courage and Vega approaches her experiences as an odyssey of discovery and transformation. Thus, in an Irish pub, she meets a barmaid drowning her creativity in drink and sex. In Vega's journal she writes, "Where are we different, Kathleen and I? In both of us there's a willfulness that would give it all up in a second for love, or work or battle....Where are we different? Mainly I have my writing, I have my work."

Climbing in the Andes, Vega follows the trail of the Shining Path revolutionaries. In remote villages, she learns of "disappeared" tourists and continues her trek. For two weeks she is immersed in wild rivers and sunny slopes. She says, "What can I give in the face of your generosity? Nothing small will do. Can I give my heart to a land mass, to a river? Does that make me sound sentimental?"

Vega visits the infamous Chorillos prison in Peru, and later journeys down an Amazon tributary to visit her friend, a former prisoner. Deep down the river, at her friend's *fonda*, Vega encounters the undulating serpent power that is the jungle itself. Years later, in Nepal, she survives a landslide as her guide eats a second breakfast, unaware of her plight. Walking over the Annapurna she does discover the Goddess... "She was the mountains and the devotion of the people and their kindness to a stranger, who was also Her. She was the energy breaking through for necessary change."

A woman on the road needs strength and inspiration as much as cash. In her veneration of the female soul, Vega's travels are imbued with a spiritual and cultural context. Like her predecessors, Isabelle Eberhardt and Alexandria David-Neel, Janine Vega's true adventures celebrate independence. Her sharp and elegant observations make this book much more than a great travel journal through the eyes of a gifted and lyrical woman; **Threading the Maze** will carry the readers further on their own quests of self-discovery and adventure.

ILKA SCOBIE

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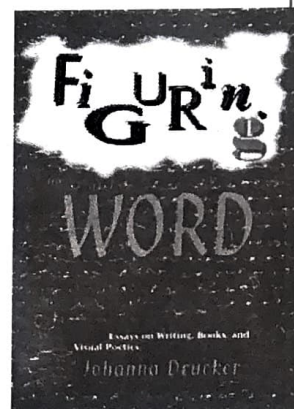


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JOSEPH LEASE

**Human Rights**

Zoland Books, (384 Huron Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138), 1998, 63 pages, \$13.00.

Trust is one of *Human Rights*'s many foci, albeit thwarted trust, and its worn but ultimately invincible spirit permeates this poet's second book with a fabulist's sense of beauty:

"...until he appears

at the bottom of the stairs  
and she thinks,

He returned

as a ghost  
to torment me—" ("Essay on  
Addiction");

"To stand in icy water.  
To believe in words.  
To believe in words spoken

by an angel;  
to worry about the angel's  
intentions. To open

smoothly, like a hand." ("The  
Apartment");

The undercurrent of uncertainty roiling beneath each poem and the speaker's inclination to eschew and invent elevate the work from an exemplar of mere talent to one of sublime utterance. The uncertainty is derived from the poet's awareness of horror, human horror, as evidenced by the Holocaust, as well as from the inevitable injustices of a modern capitalist society, which takes from the individual as apathetically as it gives. But it is the entire history of trust that infuses Lease with his unique power—how to trust the dead, who owe the living nothing; trust the fable, which clings to the subconscious, toyingly; trust recovery, which is never complete, and so on. All of this is handled so subtly that it is felt rather than understood, adding complexity to the poetry without obscuring it:

Here is the friend who  
betrayed me, he returns to wind: now pick

a card. Wrong again.

I lift a bruise from my leg.

My lips move when I sleep.  
When I think in sleep

where is the broken friend?

("Slivovitz")

*Human Rights* is Lease's work from the last two years interwoven with several powerful poems from *The Room* (Alef Books, 1994). While there have been stylistic changes (a significant emphasis on the sequence, increased lyricity), the themes are largely the same. His concern with the right to property (psychological privacy), and how it is constantly violated, is explored with a fluid persistence of words and phrases, objects and sentiments, that meander throughout the course of the collection. The poems are in close contact with one another, engaged in a sophisticated colloquium of imagery, sound, and phantasm. As the poems taken from *The Room* tend to be more compressed and narrative, they create an accordion effect with the more expansive later work:

"My hands breathe new tightening  
inside the branch, inside the branch."  
("I Can No Longer Live by Thinking")  
is followed by "Pressure of cotton  
against/the back of a hand,/paradise

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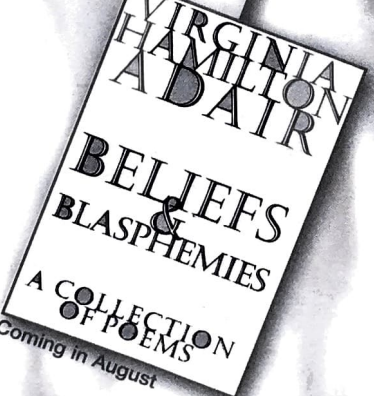
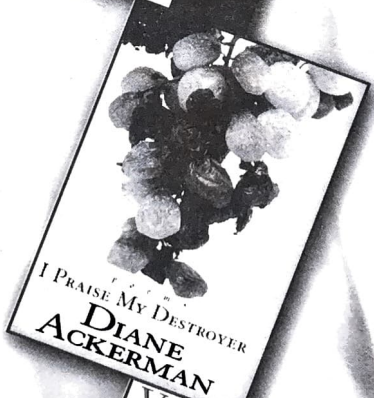
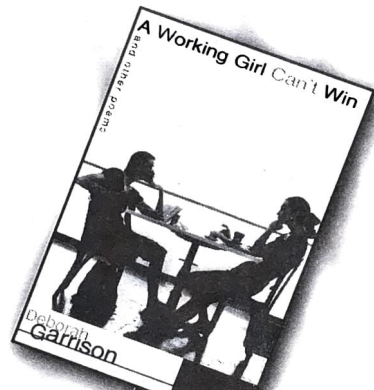
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Virginia Hamilton Adair

"Her voice is clear, assured,  
varied, and utterly her own....  
Her poems [are] intellectually  
alert, full of life and curiosity...  
and extraordinarily moving."

—*The New York Review of Books*

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unbuttoned," ("Thief"); and the high imaginative play of "Footloose Radish" ("Radishes, turpentine, broom on the wall/near the back stairs that lead//to waves of wet dark.") is raised by the final poem "Psalm in which a Glint of Hot Metal Joins Earth and Sky":

staying home is like  
going away—look away

from the place

where there is nothing—  
pennants flutter, memory never stops—

no sleep is ever enough—

One of the most interesting motifs is created by Lease's obsessive reference to architectural space, both in titles ("The Room", "The Apartment") and phrases from nearly every poem: "Your house in the sun/Shall have black cloth walls." ("Hammer"), "Winter light in a courtyard. Learn myth from an apartment building." ("Sitting On a Wall Outside Harvard Law School") These references are then juxtaposed with the speaker's fleeting, riverine narrative. I admire the way the voice splashes up against the concrete imagery, exciting the poem's air: "A boy remembered he was a shiny black rock, lima bean shaped, this night a stream which swallowed him but could not penetrate his breath." ("Listen with Pain"); "...cardinals singing in abandoned houses://there really are things in the night—//resist/the widening gash in your/water, your idea—" ("Psalm in which a Glint of Hot Metal Joins Earth and Sky"). It's almost as if he were trying to will a flood on the visible world, recreate a state of the beginning of things, undo the damage of this century, not with denial or deconstruction, but with the psychic forces that align themselves with every genesis.

An artist at home with his craft, Joseph Lease skillfully manipulates the raw material of his medium to satisfy his vision, the material being his archive of language and water, ordered into channels and canals of clear intellectual structure. But most extraordinarily, in spite of entanglements with historical ghosts and Gothic presentiments, this poet is free: Full of bold fear, his poems "ferry us" across the strange and wondrous imagination of their creator.

LARISSA SZPORLUK



photo by Dorothy Alexander

MEI-MEI BERSENBRUGGE  
AND KIKI SMITH  
**ENDOCRINOLOGY**

Kelsey Street Press (PO Box 9235,  
Berkeley, CA 94709), 1997, 28 pages,  
\$17.00.

*Hormones are molecules, material, invisible.*

*Their flow is random, mesh through which the  
body is sensed, not an image.*

This book is a reproduction of an artist's book originally produced by Universal Limited Art Editions. Although the book has lost what must have been a unique tactility, you can "sense" the texture of the original paper with its flecks and inked edges. Strips of Berssenbrugge's text are pasted across the pages, accompanied by Smith's anatomical figures. Text and image lie on the page like dissected specimens musing on their fragmentation, plotting out formations and collaborations. In the endocrine system, a linking substance shuttles between two objects in order to cause action/growth/development. The link between the material and the ineffable is the biology of this book.

I imagine the original paper must have been quite fragile and transparent, that the pages were easy to tear. In this "copied" version, the pages are sturdy but still communicate a past; they transmit memories. You can still see the ghost of the next page as images bleed through. Looking at the page is also looking through it: this book is a copy of a ghost. It brings us as close as we can get to the "material-invisible," the contradictory character of words.

In Berssenbrugge's text body relates to thought in the way that Zeus' pitu-

itary region relates to Athena: the connection is productive but non-linear, removed from familiar expectations. "Feedback between health and fate unfolds so fast, /there's no way one step in the chain can be based on the previous one." Endocrinology is the study of the endocrine system gone awry. Athena's birth and the Berssenbrugge-Smith collaboration prove that it is through irregularities that we can begin to see what linear productions hide and resist.

Hormones are a relay system. The string between two tin cans. The man on the runway with torches in his hands, signalling where the plane should land. Connectors. Organic communication systems. Linking the parts which in the typical mode of dissection we carelessly view as autonomous. Words are a relay system. The string between two tin cans. Linking thoughts which in a more prosaic model we carelessly view as hopelessly disjunctive. These paratactic systems cause action/growth/development.

Medical terminology is scattered throughout the book, infusing otherwise lyric lines with a technical edge. That chemical-linguistic solution is "doped" with traces of narrative: "she lives on moisture from dew condensed on soil surfaces from night air." A "bird eight feet tall with disproportionately huge claws and beak" begs classification: magical realism or freakish biological irregularity? Alterity and biology connect to cause the material-invisible (i.e. our words). Here is an anatomical diagram: a webbed gland. And here is the design left by frost, and flowers. Endocrinology is about how to read and link one to the other so they form a system that functions:

*"you see something at the far edge, and your eye  
going over this space makes a whole..."*

*"To make this whole, any object, brings into being  
something not in nature..."*

*"Where your eye goes over space to the horizon  
makes a whole, but where sky meets the earth, the  
fragment is not the same as a whole."*

Kelsey Street Press has published a number of wonderful collaborations between poets and visual artists. Endocrinology stands out in that the text and the visuals are thoroughly integrated and interdependent. The book actually performs its own content, for it draws links between the images and the strips of text, between technical terminology and lyric narrative. As readers,

Roberta Allen, Ece Ayhan,  
Anselm Berrigan, Charlotte Carter  
Clark Coolidge, Marcella Durand  
Ed Friedman, Kimiko Hahn, Yuki Hartman  
Allison Hedge Coke, Paul Hoover  
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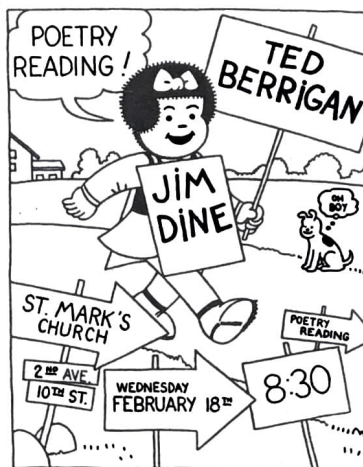
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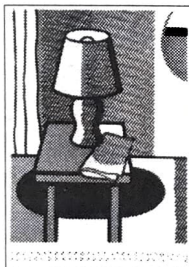


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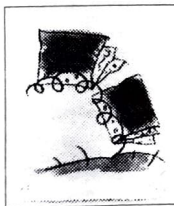
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we become conscious of the complex relation of the physical world that we see and the intangible world that we think as our words shuttle back and forth between the two.

JENA OSMAN

**MICHAEL FRIEDMAN**  
**Arts & Letters**

drawings by Duncan Hannah  
The Figures (5 Castle Hill Avenue,  
Great Barrington, MA 01230), 1996,  
36 pages, \$10.00.

*Arts & Letters* is a lofty title for a book that ends "no biggy." Of course a man whose magazine's named *Shiny* is allowed a certain virtuosity with gloss. Friedman's prose poems apply light coats of charming banter, sexually bemused and encoded pillow talk, lendings from the yessirreal inveigling of the corporate board room, and the dreamt Barnaboothian protocol of his ancestors Valery Larbaud and Max Jacob—leaving the reader peering through a thick, crystalline, refractive coat of polish. These poems poke holes in parole, speaking to you with the salesladylike sincerity of a person handing you a sizeable styrofoam brick; they dissuade you from your senses.

I'm not sure who invented the paragraph, but we might suppose it was someone without much faith in the language to stake its own claims: being really just a strange hitch or trick or prestidigitatory caret we seem to need to show "hey, here's the next idea." At any rate it's hard to approach understanding it as a unit of poetic composition without irony, and Friedman's paragraph poems traffic in it like a savvy cartel. "The pig is my friend. It would be helpful to speak to him about counter-transference, me as opposed to not-really-me....I observe the pig without fully grasping what makes him tick." Friedman writes in "Thought."

Content, for Friedman, is as "not-really-content,"—so many giddy, mica-like layers of saying, without "something to say" (i.e.: the grave)—again, inveigling, (what Lacan said the ego is) and as the poet is a "do-er," a lot can be said to gush from the wellsprings of the deadpan:

Picture if you will, a hydroelectric power station. Now imagine, for a moment, that the sky really is the limit.

You've gotta love the guest-host voice of these promptings, which seem derived from prehistoric self-help cassettes. Reel-to-reel, rather—and only as prehistoric as the Mantovani 50s. Duncan Hannah's black and white en face drawings do a lot to compliment the lime-green, martini-in-a-bomb-shelter, mom after shock therapy poems' tone. The drawings are of a double ilk. Half might have been torn from the sketch book of a Barbizon-bred young lady's first European grand tour. The others are derived from the pulp novels she likely snuck inside her steamer trunk.

What's loveliest about Hannah's and Friedman's interaction is their interaction. Most 20th century poets have preferred to collaborate with abstract artists. That way, the poet can hog all the representation, and riff off the visual artist's "vibe." Think of O'Hara and Rivers' *Stones*. In the case of Guston and Coolidge's *Baffling Means*, the case is reversed, with Coolidge's jitterings abstracting from Guston's glorious representational goofs. Here, both folks borrow. "Characters" are exchanged between drawing and poem ("Smashed canape? The hostess was oblivious to her guests, so the evening came off without a hitch" we read next to a drawing of a wineglass-wielding vamp)—though with a level of ephemerality that reminds us how much is missing from the notion of character.

These works ache with something missing. They froth and bubble in the wake of a long past reference trawler. They are residual—the specs to a corporate annual report never quite collated; nixed advertising campaign sketches and slogans for a narrative fantasy camp for the moneyed "congenitally disjunctive." This sense of lack; of entire registers of our scales of self gone missing, is familiar to all post-, meta-, and even non-modern poets. What makes *Arts & Letters* special is its flirtation with (and I mean that literally as well as literarily) the "unthreatening," well-mannered language of privilege. The book reminds one of the Maysles Brothers' film *Grey Gardens*, in which a couple of feral Bouviers parade around their raccoon-shit-filled Easthampton mansion, with their manners perfectly intact but rendered abstract and exotic, divorced from social registration. *Arts & Letters* goes into business with simi-

The Poetry Project would like the thank the following contributors who made our Cocktail Party with Kenward Elmslie on May 6th such a success: Brooke Alexander, Frank B. & Mary Ann Arisman, Brad Bailey, John Barnhill, Dianne & Irving Benson, Wendy Ann Benson, John Bornhill, Erin Clermont, Holly Crawford, Michel de Konkoly Thege, Frank X. Decolator IV, Georgia Delano, Jane Delynn, Kathy Fahy, Morris Golde, Red Grooms, Steve Hamilton, Jacqueline Hayman, Robert Jenkins, Jane Kitselman, Jerre Konowalskyj, Mr. & Mrs. Mark Levinson, Gillian McCain, Robert Molnar, Doran Mullen, Maggie Paley, Jonathan Piel, Susan Rockford, Rena Rosenwasser, Richard P. Rubinstein & Katherine Kolbert, Paul Slovak, Melissa & Robert Soros, Ann Tenenbaum, Fred Tepperman & Barbara Goldfarb, Kimberly Venardos, Karrie & Trevor Wright, and Kazuko

lar figures of an upper crust that's gone to seed: "No place to go, nothing to do. So the members turned on the game. This was known as the vanishing point. In some circles."

TIM DAVIS

**SIANNE NGAI**  
**Discredit**

Burning Deck (71 Elmgrove Avenue,  
Providence, Rhode Island 02906),  
1997, \$8.00.

The first page of Sianne Ngai's chapbook *Discredit* proposes the themes that are intelligently developed throughout the rest of the work: a displaced unconscious (that "you call from the phone across the street"), a voice which figures and disfigures the objects

and relations it seeks to represent, and a self finding its expression in the external world of phenomena. It's a poetic sensibility blending phenomenology and psychic excavation with a stylistic dash of surrealism:

I am telling you laughter and anxiety are the same thing.  
The mirror has lost the mirror, not the other side  
of its reality to you.

To retrieve my appearance I appear in longer windows.

For philosophers of language such as Wittgenstein and Lacan, the other side of the mirror's reality is silence. Silence finds its formal manifestation in *Discredit* in the ways in which the blank space of the page is used to disrupt both voice and narrative. Silence also enters the work through the use of repetition: what is said and not said when the same is also changed. This repetition is partially initiated in combination with a central concern of the book—the representational capacity of language—in the image of windows that appear at the end of the first page. Windows, in turn, recur in different guises throughout the work.

While acknowledging their own transparency, these windows—as in Robert Creeley's poetry—delineate a space between internal and external. The means by which this space is made fluid is a primary motif in *Discredit*. This fluidity is enacted through an outward projection of interiority, as well as by a constantly shifting sense of perspective that owes much to Rosmarie Waldrop's *The Reproduction of Profiles*. In both Waldrop and Ngai's writing, this focus on perspectives is an aesthetic preoccupation with the interactions between language and world. But whereas Waldrop's alternating perspectives are at times clinical in their careful demarcation of internal and external, the poetry in *Discredit* is imbued with a more explicit and pervasive sense of interiority. This process by which interiority is projected onto and transforms an external environment is a kind of poetic transference functioning throughout the work.

Nevertheless, both Ngai and Waldrop are focused on depicting a partially detached and crystallized moment of aesthetic and philosophical perception, and in this sense they share a rooting in American Objectivist poetry. In its postmodern version, this tradition sometimes adopts a slippery Wittgensteinian substitution of language for phenomena:

A space composed uniquely of openings:

the chair itself  
(void of actuality)  
the chair itself  
the chair in gentle dread

Here, as elsewhere in *Discredit*, language overrides the existence of the object as both phenomena and noumena. The chair exists as posited by language; it's "a thing expressed by the name it bears," as Ngai writes elsewhere in the book. But language itself is posited as threatened with dread, a dread that would seem to arise from a fear of linguistic isolation. It's in the movement away from this sense of disconnectedness that the poems attain their materialism.

This isolation is partially denied by a series of quotations sprinkled throughout the text. This occurs quite literally, at one point, with the phrase "I resemble that remark." In certain instances, it's difficult to tell whether these quotes are snippets of overheard conversations, quotes from books, or parts of an interior monologue. Thus, the quotes serve as another set of windows, which can be looked in and toward the self fashioned in the writing or out of and toward an external world. As tropes commenting on the nature of representation, the text-as-windows / windows-as-text also function both ways at the same time.

*Discredit* combines its phenomenology with a specific concern for perspective in which permeable boundaries between self and world are transgressed by a glancing language. At the same time, this cognizance of phenomena through language never forgets its own psychology. As Freud writes in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*: "One can save oneself from an external danger by flight; fleeing from an internal danger is a different enterprise." A concise blending of these various issues in *Discredit* can be found in the line—"The scar is the shape of a garden named after a bird of a passing complexion."—where the scar is the result of an interior wound, shape is a formal quality, what is named is named in reference to other names and not to itself, and the bird is less a concrete object that names any of the nouns that precede it, and more a fleeting appearance making a brief psychological impression.

The language Ngai uses in presenting these various concerns never takes itself too seriously, and is frequently playful in its rhythms and diction. The chapbook consists of one long piece broken into six sections. Parts of it read like fragmented prose poems, as opposed to self-contained and separate poems. This gives the language and thought more room to roam and enables them to slowly build on a varying set of ideas, tropes, and images: "everything that was the same a malapropism / everything that was different a pun". Partaking in a kind of inverted predetermination, in which the convention of refusing closure has itself become a version of closure, no conclusions are arrived at in *Discredit*: the title of the work and the closing line with its reference to a question finally having been addressed—but not answered—make certain of this. As a result, at the end of the work a certain degree of silence is left over concerning some of the very issues the writing presents.

The tautology embedded in much postmodern poetry is that representation represents representation. While *Discredit* poetically analyzes this truism to a certain degree, Ngai's decision to frame this concern within a larger one of the self's relationship to the world moves her writing out of the realm of mere self-reflexive linguistic exercise. Her book re-interrogates the schism between subjects and objects, and seeks to make the subject as much a determiner of language as determined by it. The result is an engaging and rewarding contribution to contemporary experimental poetry.

ALAN GILBERT

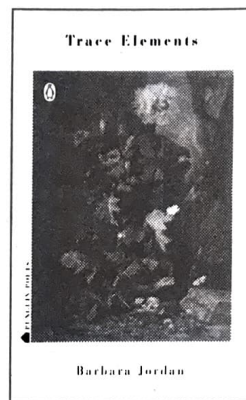
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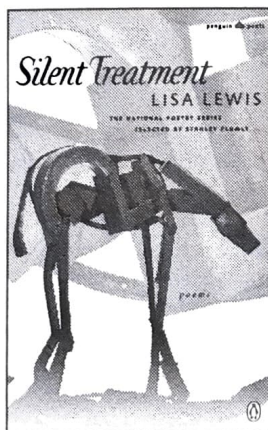
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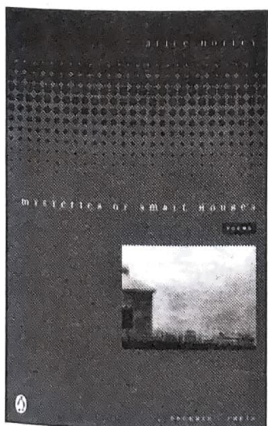


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MICHAEL RUMAKER  
**Robert Duncan in San Francisco**  
Grey Fox Press (PO Box 31190, San Francisco, CA 94131), 1996, 81 pages, \$9.95.

"Robert Duncan's poems are his eyes. Ours too. They light the ground and air."

On the front cover of **Robert Duncan in San Francisco** by Michael Rumaker there is a black and white photograph of Robert Duncan. The photograph, taken by Harry Redl in 1957, shows the poet Duncan with his eyes focused on someone or something other than the photographer, dressed in a V-neck sweater and starched white shirt open at the collar, seated in front of a slightly out of focus image of an abstract painting, cigarette in hand, his dark hair parted on the left with a coxcomb of hair standing up from his forehead, a grin of sorts on his plump round face. The image we see in this photograph helps us to appreciate Michael Rumaker's description of Duncan at the beginning of his remarkably honest and open portrait of the openly gay American poet.

The first thing of course, were his eyes, those curious and lovely eyes that looked at me, directly, while in the same instant, with hesitancy and vulnerability, looked around me and off to the sides. He was nervously casing me and, simultaneously, what lay beyond the door.

Beyond the door was Rumaker's room at 21st and Spruce in Philadelphia where he was living after graduating from Black Mountain College in North Carolina. The year was 1956, and for Michael Rumaker meeting Robert Duncan for the first time was frightening.

So here was a real faggot, open and reasonably happy about it, unafraid to be what he was. It frightened me. I, who had so carefully striven to appear "straight" in my job and in the city of my birth, crowded with working class relatives.

These two gay male writers, living in 1950s America, came together through their writing. The younger Rumaker learning about Duncan when he was a student at Black Mountain College; the

older Duncan learning about Rumaker from Robert Creeley who published Rumaker's and Duncan's work in **The Black Mountain Review**.

What Rumaker does in **Robert Duncan In San Francisco** is to convey, with a truly remarkable depth of empathy, compassion and wisdom, a sense of what it was to be a gay male in 1950s America. In a time when we often tend to look back to the past with nostalgic inaccuracy and glamorized distortion or with politically correct interpretations of what should have been, Rumaker's honesty is refreshing and valuable. As Rumaker tells of his visit to San Francisco in 1956, of his meetings with Duncan and his friends we can see and feel the fearful realities of gay male lives in an oppressive and repressive place.

I was to learn in my year and a half stay in San Francisco that it was indeed a police city. There was, in spite of the extraordinary quality of light over the city, a heavy climate of fear...

For Rumaker and the people he was attracted to in San Francisco, one way of dealing with these fearful realities was to drink alcoholically and to use whatever other drugs helped one to get by. And, what is remarkable about Rumaker's skills as a prose writer is that he is able to write about these people, and about his own self-destructive alcoholic life with an amazing clarity of mind, heart and spirit.

In the second section of this book in three parts, Rumaker has what he calls "FAST TAKES", a sequence of motion-picture-like pieces which are brilliant bursts of creative prose. In these pieces we can truly see Robert Duncan through Rumaker's eyes, the eyes of a creative artist living with dark memories of the past and viewing them in the light of the present.

Sitting across from Duncan at a table up in the balcony of The Place. Duncan, having had a few steam beers (he didn't drink that much), folded his arms on the table, leaned over close and looked at me slit-eyed, became a Spaniard. "I need glamor," he said.

The portrait which Rumaker creates for us of Robert Duncan, set against the turbulent background of Rumaker's

arrest by the San Francisco police, the HOWL trial where Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Shigeyoshi Murao, of City Lights, are prosecuted for selling Allen Ginsberg's book, and the police stepping up their hassling of hippies and arresting gays, is certainly not glamorous. It is honest and true to the spirit of the writer, Michael Rumaker, a writer who has obviously found a gay-male way of the spirit.

My story is his story, and theirs; we shared the same experience, all the gay women and men shared the same. The details of our stories differ but at root they were each the same: that in some deep and vital part of us we were hobbled and misshapen by the sickness of homophobia that permeates America from top to bottom.

I'm a survivor, too, and Robert Duncan; we are survivors...

Robert Duncan gives tongue to that, and speaks for all our unuttered hearts in celebration, is vibrant and living testament of it.

RICHARD CONNOLLY

JOAN LARKIN  
**Cold River**

Painted Leaf Press (P.O. Box 2480, Times Square Station, New York City 10108-4940), 1997, 43 pages, \$12.00.

**Cold River** is the latest installment in the bold and sensuous writing of poet Joan Larkin. She is the author and editor of 7 books, including **A Long Sound** (1986) and **Housework** (1982). She collaborated with Jaime Manrique on the new translation **Sor Juana's Love Poems Poemas De Amor** (1997), and edited the celebrated and now standard collection, **Gay and Lesbian Poetry in Our Time** (1988) for St. Martins Press. **Cold River** continues Larkin's project to chart the deep movement and ever-flowing purl of our emotional life. For Larkin language is a bodily activity and her achievement is a poetry of a profound and naked intensity. In a central poem "Legacy," she writes:

When my mother finally left her body

San Francisco police, the  
where Lawrence  
Geiyoshi Murao, of  
prosecuted for selling  
books, and the police  
massing of hippies  
is certainly not  
true and true to the  
Michael Rumaker, a  
recently found a gay-

...ry, and theirs; we  
experience, all the gay  
shared the same.  
Stories differ but at  
the same: that in  
part of us we were  
shaped by the sick-  
ness that permeates  
to bottom.

...oo, and Robert  
...vivors...

...es tongue to that,  
...ll our unuttered  
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...t.

...HARD CONNOLLY

...P.O. Box 2480,  
...n, New York  
...1997, 43 pages,

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...on *Sor Juana's  
De Amor* (1997),  
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e* (1988) for St.  
...*River* continues  
...chart the deep  
...owing purl of our  
...kin language is a  
...achievement is a  
...nd naked inten-  
...m "Legacy," she

...ly left her body

it was mine to keep  
along with her ring,  
some blackened silver,  
a box of Jewish books.  
At first I thought it would be a difficult fit  
but here a tuck and there a seam let out  
and you'd swear it was made for me.  
My freckled throat,  
creased stomach,  
soft, white hips—  
even my thoughts at 3:00 a.m. are hers.  
I'm lying here in her body!  
She doesn't miss it,  
she likes the way I look in it,  
winks when I feed it her favorites.

Larkin's poetry gains much of its  
power from a tactical sense of the inner  
contours and the fleshy gestures of one  
life or many lives deeply felt in another.  
The idea of lives "fitting" into others—  
traits being passed on, is where much of  
the poetry in these poems is located.  
From the line "At first I thought it  
would be a difficult fit," to "I'm lying  
here in her body!" we are on a com-  
pressed journey that only the bodily-  
aware-mind of artist like Larkin can  
take us. Here, the strong and urgent  
voice of "you'd swear it was made for  
me," speaks to us directly. "Legacy"  
ends:

Sunday I'll walk down the aisle at my  
daughter's wedding/and the thin breast  
in grey silk/will be my mother's. Veins  
in sticky hose,/bunioned feet in shoes  
that match the dress—/more and more  
will be hers./I'll walk past the narrow  
eyes of those who doubt me/safe in  
mother's armor—/faux-peral choker  
and stiff, glittering clasp—/as their  
whispers weave around me/my face  
wearing her little smile,/her scared eyes  
shining in triumph.

*Cold River* is divided into three  
sections: the first takes the difficult task  
of making a poetry from the lives of  
friends, lovers and a community  
besieged by AIDS. In reading this sec-  
tion, I recalled Tim Dlugos' "G-9"  
which may be the most eloquent and  
powerful poem to take AIDS as its sub-  
ject. He writes, "What we have/to cher-  
ish is not only/what we recall of  
how/things were before the plague,/but  
how we each responded/once it start-  
ed." Similarly, Larkin's response in  
*Cold River* may be the most artistically  
crafted and confidently rendered *group*  
of poems to measure the impact of

## Elbow Press/Cityful Press announce Think of The Self Speaking: Selected Interviews of Harry Smith Introduction from Allen Ginsberg

"I was young and foolish when I made my film *Number 12*. I thought that more elaboration  
of things possibly would make something that would be best. But even the scratchings  
on the pavement by the dog, or something, are beautiful if they're looked at properly.  
No creation of God is unbeautiful. The trappings of civilization in no way compensate  
for the tortures they cause." Harry Smith, from an '76 interview with A.J. Melita at the Chelsea

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AIDS on one artist's consciousness. In  
the poem, "Waste Not," she writes,  
"We're using every bit of your  
death./We're making a vise of your  
mouth's clenching and loosening/a  
engine of your labored breathing,/a  
furnace of your wide-open eyes." The  
poem ends: "Your beloved has folded  
your house into his—/I'm wading the  
swift river, balancing on stones." These  
poems are certainly a contribution to  
the tradition of elegy, yet they do not  
commemorate, nor transform their  
subject into emblem or symbol, they  
remain only more and more particular.  
In "The Fake," Larkin addresses a dead  
friend in her head. She writes:

The man in front of me is you  
from the back—the same  
wrinkled plaid, the same  
fine hair, wire rims.  
When he turns, I see  
his red face—a coarse  
copy of your lost health.  
The room is hot.  
I scan the crowd  
for anyone who knew you.

In *Cold River* we read some of most  
truthful family poems (and when I say  
family I include friends and lovers)  
since Ginsberg's "Kaddish." Larkin's  
poems are a sort of testimony, but I do  
not mean that they are offered merely in  
evidence. For all her concentration  
upon the truth, she's not a reporter.  
Instead, she tells us of something that is  
passing through her mind—of which her  
heart and body are ever opening. For  
Joan Larkin, the past occurs in a present  
that is continually registering its body-  
weight with her own bold and naked  
presences.

TOM DEVANEY

1  
29  
90

## BOB HOLMAN In With the Out Crowd

Audio recording with Chris Spedding,  
Wayne Kramer, Bob Neuwirth, and  
Brock Avery, Mouth Almighty/ Mercury  
Records (825 Eighth Avenue, New  
York, NY 10019), 1998.

Bob Holman's newly released first full-  
length album *In With the Out Crowd*  
(produced by Hal Wilner) is elegantly  
actualized, full of effective effects and  
memorable lines. The author embod-  
ies multiple voices; he is a pop media  
poet / provocateur who samples culture  
(literally and figuratively) along with his  
own tongue and chords.

Topicality here is generally "politi-  
cal" and comradely, addressing complex  
and important issues in a fairly simplis-  
tic manner (i.e. hear Holman wail in  
"We Are The Dinosaur": "The whole  
world's dialin' 911"). As a messenger  
service, his delivery is thus direct, aimed  
at achieving a broadly informed societal  
illumination through language and  
entertainment.

Admirably vibrant, Holman has no  
fear of rhyme, and does not hesitate to  
take the low road through good old-  
fashioned *schmaltz* to draw listeners in. It  
is perhaps a questionable tactic, but who  
says there are rules around here? In the  
second half of this series of recordings the  
pieces veer towards camp-style indie  
rock (along with touches of Lou Reed  
or possibly the hard-hitting yet sensi-  
tive populist poet Andy Clausen). This  
slant of the album is well served by the  
poet's wit. Don't be surprised to hear  
"That's Why" more than a few times on  
alternative radio this season, with a  
great last line GenXers may die for:  
"Whose dust are you?"

Holman's ability as a performer  
translates skillfully when plugged in

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and distributed asynchronously. You can believe, as he proclaims in a charged elegy to friend Jorge Brandon, that "the syllables become birds." The accompanying soundtracks to the poems drift well along with the words enabling Bob to blow strong song. With the volume cranked up, we hear his verse and stories in a new way; playback is possible! *In With the Out Crowd* is a positive addition to the pantheon of literary recordings now available. As with all poetry-based albums, you may not find yourself listening to it every day. Nonetheless, you'll have this to go to for some of Holman's particular poetified ear-fire when needed.

CHRIS FUNKHOUSER

MICHAEL GIZZI  
*No Both*

Hard Press/The Figures (PO Box 184, West Stockbridge, MA 01266), 1997, \$12.00.

At an age when much avant-garde

poetry seems dominated by a lyricism reminiscent of 1970s and 80s French writing, it is a refreshing change to turn to the work of Michael Gizzi. Refreshing, because Gizzi's lyrics refuse the purity of their mode, the familiar, dramatized problematics of person, address, representation. Gizzi seems to want nothing but that his poems give him pleasure; "Tinier in mind than Rhode Island of the bulge bada-bing" begins one called "Too Big Canader," in his latest collection *No Both*. And that tone of aggressive playfulness this phrase sets carries throughout the whole book, recalling, in its extremity, something John Ashbery once said of Frank O'Hara's work: "One frequently feels that the poet is trying on various pairs of brass knuckles until he finds the one which fits comfortably." Ashbery continues: "It is not just that [the work] is often aggressive in tone—it simply doesn't care." That Gizzi achieves this "not caring" without recourse to self indulgence or triteness is a testament to his poetic facility. And his "not caring" betrays, as it did in O'Hara, an almost noble belief in the truth of poetic process—or precisely the opposite of truly not caring.

The volume is divided into two sections: a title sequence, and a grouping of shorter works. The former, written between the anniversary of Gizzi's father's death and his mother's birthday, flirts with autobiographical musing and the detail-saturated nostalgia characteristic of some of Kerouac's novels. Yet, though Gizzi's sequence incorporates autobiographical detail, his autobiographical details are often more cryptic than revealing, presenting the reader with the distant tone of autobiographical reflection minus an impulse to tell one's story.

A near myth childhood hovercraft  
Near a 16 foot insect

*Der fliegende Hollander* pouts  
So stream of air

Might partly stroke  
Goldfish theories of Clicquot

Amnesia sweats the emptiness

Composed of sponges

Alone among the spoils of gleam

Brats watched over  
By a sapling daycare

With the creation or recreation of one's life effectively out of the picture, Gizzi's "autobiographical" mode becomes a framework for (energized) poetic process. This rampant energy galvanizes the reader even from the work's opening sentence:

Only last night because I'm always  
growing a proboscis I said  
"Tomorrow I'll begin this new  
notebook with the words *I surrender*."

In tone and content, everything in that sentence might seem normative of contemporary lyricism, BUT FOR the stunning clause (I want to call it, an admission) "because I'm always growing a proboscis." Here, representation—or rather, the convincing illusion of representation, known to both author and reader as an illusion—breaks down. The way it breaks down—in an almost whimsical remark that refuses the politesse of its context—is at the core of Gizzi's poetics. One is tempted to reach for the adjective "improvisatory" when writing of Gizzi's work. Indeed, this might just apply, yet I want to resist its application, because to do otherwise would risk conventionalizing the work itself. The tradition of "improvisatory" literature, of which Kerouac is a part, in other words, is richly contextualized, and to place any contemporary figure in that nexus is to risk domesticating the experience of reading them. If the challenge for Gizzi must be to find new ways of working in a mode that recalls this tradition, then the challenge for readers is to find ways of engaging his work which recognize its very newness, its potency.

The Miracle of the Growing  
Macaroni like Jesus and the Little  
Fishes. Marconi cajoling the 2nd  
class coming of fazool. Like  
Noonoo and Nonnie pastina  
blimps of respectable poverty read-

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"Parker"  
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Mohawk  
Angel tok  
A Woody

ing aloud from pats of butter.

Noonoo—the John Henry jackhammer self-conscious paesan of little Maria Rilkean spiritual work veils—practicing veronicas in the wardrobe they won't accept in the other world, who wore behind his ear sawdust every night that his wife might enjoy the smell of wood.

If I knew him (I did in infancy) when I dreamed I was convinced I knew him (Viareggio stories bounce me on his knee like a rosso rubber sfero) but he was bald by then no longer that Red Italian like Red Malcolm X which distinguished them both but somehow all coalesced in that *Red Balloon* French children's book for American kids wherein I confused or clarified it sussing out a little European boyhood picturesque—me a Guinea mixing my identity with Frenchy like the macaroni and the fish.

Here Gizzi mixes run-on, rhythmic details in an expansive wordplay pileup. Yet if his "poetic" prose (note the singsong, alliterative "Marcaroni" and "Marconi, "Noonoo and Nonnie," "rosso rubber sfero," etc.) and references to American icons (John Henry and Malcolm X!) recall Kerouac, then the poet ultimately rejects the self-mythologizing at the heart of Kerouac's popular appeal. One doesn't read *No Both* to learn about Michael Gizzi's life and times. The poet may flirt with autobiography, and even with confessional ennui (insofar as his sequence's ostensible "theme" might be read as artistic-son-comes-to-terms-with-father's-memory); yet ultimately neither of these impulses are allowed to hold sway. Instead, the force which animates both the title sequence and the entire book is that of Gizzi's increasingly carefree literary pyrotechnics, which mix the grace of Fred Astaire, the linguistic intensity of Louis Zukofsky and the good natured charm of Ted Berrigan.

Uma Thurman dos amigos  
Quattrocento niner zed  
What music did I face  
Defacing the flower bed?

(from "The Incumbents In Her Garden")

Many of the shorter poems borrow inspiration from jazz—as if to belabor the role of the "improvisatory" in Gizzi's writing. However, despite some titles like "Bird on Dial," "Parker's Point, Chester" and "Ask Me Now," Gizzi's poems generally are not about jazz so much as they get off on the rhythm, going wherever they will thematically and not caring so much about being "jazz poems" as being texts parallel to the experience of listening.

Mohawk serious flow mistress of man-eating drum, counter intuitive  
Angel token we thought was incense but was liposuction stallions  
A Woody Herman porch-hopping goober satori *apres* Dodge scalp-  
ing party

The Quest for Penis Severed Pyramid, a maplick of Big Canader  
leatherstocking

Sumac attacks, Nueva Roma prepubescent sunshine on specious  
ribbon of

Redwing belle buoyant upon enter Utica—put a cashew feedbag on  
the driver

Iroquois dura mater limestone browhanger pitching birds

Oneida sedge mocs go splash kerplooeey portajohning big sea waters  
So what other animal's mind's made up of others' futures?

(From "Too Big Canader")

As texts parallel to the experience of listening to music—and as texts written around theme (as here, in this excerpt from what's billed as poetic "travelogue")—Gizzi's poems intersect usefully with those of Clark Coolidge. While Coolidge's jazz poetry, such as the amazing *The Rova Improvisations*, is generally more abstract than Gizzi's, both use jazz as a starting point, just as a jazz composer might use some other experience as a starting point toward the creation of a piece of music. Gizzi and Coolidge both go on instinct, what Frank O'Hara called "nerve," letting things fly. Both fly as if parts of some airtight, layered solo keeping us strung to every breath. Both are masters of the layered response composed inside an instant.

We don't want to waste our ammunition  
We wanna use it  
That leftfield homerun that took your photograph  
The same one you ran up to and learned from  
Now I have my own little acre of wisdom

Cut 'em off at the pass atrophy  
You know, it'd look better as a ruin  
Everything American from Mars  
Now jittery in low-rent loge  
My smoke grows a crayon

(from "Exoduster")

Michael Gizzi's poetics keep words alive at all points of intersection with the reader. His work is a virtuoso liberation of world from context, work from the dreary falsifications of poetasting appraisers. Read him and weep—like-ly from joy or sheer marvel. Or *the terror of a recognition*.

I wonder if sensation  
takes place in words  
without intervention of blood  
like the Sleep of the Just  
the just dead

(from "Code of Silence")

MARK DUCHARME

PAM LU

**Pamela: A Novel**

Atelos Press (P.O. Box 5814,  
Berkeley, CA 94705-0814), 1998.

Though there are a number of ways to enter Pam Lu's crisply-written first book *Pamela: A Novel*, there is, perhaps, no way to escape it. Lyrical in both its intent and intensity, Lu's story swiftly takes its reader to the heart of a poetic ambivalence told through the figures of self, love, and art. The many intellectual turns that this novel takes are matched only by the unwavering interrogation of self that takes place between P, the novel's speaker, and her highly aestheticized avatar, Pamela.

As an avid reader of Pam Lu's poetry over the past few years, I was surprised to learn that her first full-length book would fall under the category of prose. Lu's "Intermusement" series had prepared me for the accuracy of ear that I encountered in the novel; it even set the stage for the always astonishing compactness of Lu's insights, even as they encompass such quandaries as the individual's relationship to history:

Similarly, I had inherited, over a period of centuries, a number of ethical and cultural crises which caused me to wonder if things would ever be made right again, or if anything had even really been right to begin with. Something crucial had happened, around the time of the industrial revolution, and it had been a source of conflict for me ever since. As a result, I could never be held fully responsible for myself in the present moment. Indeed, it was a trying experience for me to sit in a cafe and sip coffee, or to keep up with R or some other friend in casual conversation, when I was in fact still recovering from 1945 and, moreover, was preoccupied at that very moment with the task of taking all of western civilization personally.

What my familiarity with Lu's poetry did not prepare me for, however, was the intellectual clarity and coherence of her narrative style. Though the story itself concerns the speaker's inability to actually tell her story, ("I was like an author trapped in a place

that had no narrative, except for the narrative about the lack of narrative, which was, in effect, about the futility of desire and belief") Lu manages, through analytic economy mixed with effulgent emotion, to keep the reader enthralled by P's predicament.

The novel's power lies not in its primary dilemma—the narration of the inability to narrate—but rather in its more poetic and philosophical underpinnings. For the novel functions, in the final analysis, as a prologue to, or a rehearsal of, a love poem. In other words, I read this novel as the story of how one would come to the writing of poetry:

Every generation preoccupied itself with the struggle to produce something new—a defining moment, action, or style that would mark it as unique and constitute an answer to the question of "Who are you," or more often, "Who were you?". Now we too were faced with the very same question and wondering if we were destined to be remembered for our refusal to answer the question. Because once the foundations of knowledge, morality, and power were exposed as rhetorical exercises, "answers" were no longer the answer, and no single solution could possibly tie up all the loose ends and frayed arguments that had resulted from a human presence in the world.

A more concrete version of the above—one which tells the story of another of the novel's protagonists, C—demonstrates Lu's knack for mixing high philosophical commentary with a more politicized observance of the everyday:

And if the monuments in his poems took on the shapes of capitalized words like Love, Beauty, Courage & Truth, then these were names less of human forms than of ideas, and less of ideas than of their memory, which in this case, was the riskiest thing of all [...] For C wrote with the awful clarity and slenderness of someone who had grown up Asian in India, the memory of anger and that daily experience of coming home single to watch the double of his face peel away from itself in the mirror now sublimated into a stunning command of the English language that manifested

itself as poetry, or a series of eloquent, articulate stabs at reality.

Lu has an uncanny ability to write along the boundaries at which the ideal and the real intersect. And this is the truly poetic aspect of the novel: its ability to persist in exploring a narratively constructed space of paradox while resisting the tendency of such explorations toward self-satisfied cleverness.

Part of what keeps Lu's glittering intellectual antics from becoming mere irony is the sometimes buried sentimentality of the speaker:

The world continued to foster our presence in a way that depended on this presence never being seen, and on denying any involvement with us. Hence we were awarded presence precisely because we were so conspicuously absent. The persistent Romantic image of a lone hero impacting the world with his passion hardly applied to us because no matter how passionately we hurled ourselves at it, the world was always prepared to dodge.

It would seem that as a poet Lu has turned to a strange sort of pre-poetic narrative as one way to work through the problems that face contemporary writers today. As Juliana Spahr puts it in her first book *Response*, Lu asks the always pressing questions of "how to tell without violating? / how to approach mass thought patterns / as history? / as opportunity? / as truth? / as art?". But where Spahr minimizes the speaker's subjective presence in an effort to witness the world around her, Lu turns a sensitive eye inward, telling the story of our minds and the landscapes that bleed through and into our perceptions:

At the time when I began to meet everyone else, I had just emerged from a long period of being almost completely mute, a condition which rendered simple tasks such as buying coffee or answering the phone unbearably painful, as though they were discolored paintings placed along the walls of a long, silent waiting room. Having decided that speaking was suspicious in its very nature, I soon found that I could no longer speak at all, and neither



silence nor forced speech could save me from that feeling of being always about to disappear from my situation. Instead, I developed habits of austerity and artificial lighting, and adopted a certain tone in my writing, comforting in its extreme formality.

This is not to imply that Lu's narrative is narcissistic. Indeed one of the more poignant moments in the novel concerns P's confusion as to which pronoun to use. Like Spahr, whose recent work comments upon while at the same time displacing any sort of centeredness of self, Lu writes from within the confines of a questionable identity:

... "I" (which expanded during times of war or crisis to "we") was the most ubiquitous, and therefore elusive, self we could imagine: there was no way to find "I" without by definition losing it, and therefore losing ourselves. "Me" was a different matter altogether. It was inherently more objective and hence more honest to

talk about "me" than about "I," because "me" never pretended to be anything other than itself and was perfectly happy with just being talked about. "I," on the other hand, talked about itself incessantly, all the while acting as though someone else was doing the talking...

Though Lu is a genius when it comes to the sort of journalistic or amodal writing described best in Roland Barthes' lit-crit classic, *Writing Degree Zero*, she does not shy away from the more quotidian and often comic aspects of P's life:

...we were too busy being someone else to notice that we had disappeared, as when R and I turned on the TV to discover a news special devoted to covering an organization of transgendered firefighters and cops, a.k.a. TOPS. A heart-to-heart interview with an MTF police officer was followed by a speculative discussion about the relation between transsexuality and homosexuality,

and capped with the final bold conclusion that "transsexuals and gays are just like the rest of us." For R and me, this meant that we were just like ourselves, or more accurately, we were just like the "rest of us," which naturally led to the question of how the "us" had gotten split in the first place.

The contradictory elements in this narrative—elements Lu manages to balance brilliantly in a sort of analytical suspense—cannot be eternally stanchied, even by the most acute of intellects. In my view it is the mounting pressure of the paradoxes that develop as the piece wears on that finally bring the speaker to the brink of poesis—a brink embodied best by a striking passage in which P finally ceases to intellectually "stalk" herself, only to be pursued by the text itself:

Or like the time I walked through Berkeley with L shortly after the rains had stopped and suddenly became aware of the potential for travel—how

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## THE POETRY PROJECT SEEKS NEW PROGRAM ASSISTANT

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the street tilted east and west in a line which one could follow indefinitely, walking straight into one's life as if it were a long distance culminating in freedom, leading away from and then back toward one's starting point in an orbit that magnified (or perhaps restored) the world to spectacular proportions. During moments like these I faltered. I tricked myself out of desolation; I could not tell if I was moving or moved. And such feelings seemed to contradict me, the way love seemed to contradict itself and its lovers with a sweeping gesture that travelled as much as it trapped. Love was stalking us. Love was always a part of our story, or we a part of its story, for if we were lucky enough to escape from love, then there still remained the problem of the love story, which persisted in hounding us...

To the degree that she is hounded by the narratives of her time, P is not, perhaps, so very special. The extent to which she lives the life of one

stalked—to which she allows the ontological intensities of her daily life into the space of utterance and understanding—P is exceptional. If it can be said that the mark (among many possible marks) of great poetry is its ability to define (in whatever terms will do) the ineffable, **Pamela: A Novel** may be defined as great poetry. By writing through the voice of an oppressively analytical speaker (not unlike that of Eliot's Prufrock), Lu achieves moments of extreme lyrical clarity: "At some point during our adolescence we began to aspire to become characters in the love story," she writes,

that is, we aspired to be not the characters themselves, but rather snapshot representations of these characters in their most beautiful and breathtaking moments. This was the definition of sentiment—that we wanted not the love story in its entirety, but the love story abridged; we could have had the uncut story, restored to its full lurid glory, but we settled for the highlights—black-and-white movie still from the vault of recognition, static photographs of ourselves as lovers caught in moments of bliss or exquisite existential despair....

"That we wanted not the love story in its entirety, but the love story abridged" goes a long way toward explaining why Lu, a poet by training and, in my view, inclination, would undertake a project in prose. That poetry might hound Lu, as it has hounded writers for centuries, is no surprise. What is surprising, however, is the sense of exile that pervades this novel—the sense that Lu has escaped into prose to find solace, only to find herself stalked by the "full lurid glory" of prose.

KATY LEDERER

### DODIE BELLAMY **The Letters of Mina Harker**

Hard Press (PO Box 184, West Stockbridge MA 01266), 1998, 221 pages.

Mina Harker is a vampire who has come a long way—from the Victorian

century where she was Dracula's swoony prize, to the 1990s, where she has come into a full awareness of herself as predator, and likes it. Dodie too likes being embodied by this lusty intellectual, and together they are an inspiring duo, smart super-girls of millennial lust who managed to make it through fads of French feminism and the Marquis de Sade with a sense of humor.

The narrative (to which Dodie and Mina wholeheartedly submit) is revealed through letters which Mina is writing to her friends—some new, and others, like Van Helsing (the good Doctor) and Quincey (the transfusion cowboy) who she knew from her Bram Stoker days. Dodie is happily married to KK (Kevin Killian, in real life too) and it is a good thing that their relationship is open to transgressions, because once Mina takes possession of Dodie every encounter is a potential f--- (can I say that on prime-time?) and every object is a simile the narrative passes through, loaded with semen and all the other juices. A libido battle is raging, but in this case everyone wins (particularly KK who is often on the receiving end.)

Although the undead Mina doesn't need George Bataille treading on her turf, he says it succinctly: "Two things are inevitable; we cannot avoid dying nor can we avoid bursting through our barriers, and they are the same." Barriers are bursting all over the place in this book, right down to its narrative structure. The page is an open vortex upon which the narrative is not something with a beginning, middle, and end. Rather, it is a series of frames that intersect and run together, into which the characters themselves have been framed—for they are aware that they exist only in Dodie's act of writing. Mina writes:

...I dream I'm being fucked in a park with a dildo, surrounded by a vast expanse of green bordered with shrubs and maples getting away safely means finding the right distance people in the midst of picnics and volleyball freeze then somebody presses the buttons on their shoulders and slowly they turn towards me I am the dumb fuck at the center of their gaze a lubricated tool pistons my snatch raw—it won't quit 'til I come—and I never will not exactly a

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writer's block, more like cabin fever  
Dodie framed me DAVID it's grow-  
ing cold the margins come rumbling  
in EEEK! (163)

Mina a.k.a. Dodie masters humor  
with a lushness of language which is  
lusty, blunt, and sharp as a vampire's  
two front teeth. Mina is the mistress of  
misplaced metaphors: "His cock  
curled back on itself like a question  
mark" or "While KK and Dodie play  
out the story of the big O, I go to the  
movies—the hot stuffy theater is  
packed as a jar of raspberry jam a  
thousand seeds suspended in dark  
cinematic go, my vagina the rubescent  
core." This is humor that builds and  
builds, then turns back around to  
head in another direction. Just like  
the story itself, every paragraph is a  
micro-organism/(gasm) of the book's  
larger narrative structure, which  
reflects Dracula and from there every  
other reference and source that  
inspired it: horror movies, poets and  
Drew Barrymore, to name a few.

Death and sex are inextricably  
linked (remember Bataille?)—for in  
that final moment, out of the final  
breath, we have given it all up to the  
devouring, unpredictable other.  
Mina, being dead, knows that better  
than anyone, and writes: "Sex and  
Death: you and I write about them as  
if our lives depended on it." Ah, but  
rest assured, this book is no lugubri-  
ous Marguerite Duras, wallowing  
through the labyrinth of passion and  
desire, confronted only by the bleak  
and interminable void. Or rather, this  
is the wallowing through of passion  
and desire (etc.) but without the uni-  
versalizing speculations of what is  
death and what is writing; what is  
female desire and what is the violence  
of the page. Mina, again, says it all:  
"only during sex did he feel real  
COCK-BALLS-FUCK-SLURP I  
came in spasms that cramped my sub-  
jectivity." So George, Marguerite,  
Hélène, and Luce, stick your neck out  
for the bite—this is the subjectivity of  
the subject who spreads it for the page,  
is aware that she is being read by a  
reader who is aware that he/she is  
reading, and is conscious that "she I  
am Mina Harker a sexy construct a  
trope a simulated force of nature  
Dodie's embarrassment a vortex of  
urges swirling around a void."

The book is a narrative surround-

ed by mirrors, like the bedroom of  
Sade's *Philosophy of the Bedroom* in  
which "everything is visible, no part of  
the body can remain hidden: every-  
thing must be seen...so many deli-  
cious tableaux wherewith lewdness  
waxes drunk and which soon drives it  
to its climax." Mina shows us every-  
thing, from every angle: Dodie in her  
flannel pajamas, Dodie in the morn-  
ing, on the couch, eating dinner with  
KK (and most other things about  
KK), details from her lovers' various  
techniques. Since Mina is writing her  
letters through Dodie, the book is the  
autobiography of both—but the genre  
will never be the same. The question  
of who is the fictional character and  
who is the writer becomes as blurry as  
the difference between reality and  
fantasy. This is an autobiography  
where the stories of everyday life are  
told with a pinhole's precision—and  
the fantasies, dreams, and images  
from TV or movies that inevitably are  
a part of everyday life are all woven in  
as well.

Mina can go off into a fantasy while  
Dodie is having sex—and visa versa, so  
who really knows who is having sex  
with who? In the end, it doesn't really  
matter, because it is not the plot that  
saves this book but the cumulation of  
all the plots from all the sources that  
come together in a epic feast of quo-  
tidian details and cultural commen-  
tary. Pornography, vivacity, humor,  
and satire—The Letters of Mina  
Harker has it all.

KRISTIN PREVALLET

JOHN CLARKE  
*In the Analogy. (Books 1-7)*  
shuffaloff books (653 Euclid Avenue,  
Toronto, Ontario M6G 2T6,  
Canada), 1997, 258 pages, \$18.00.

"I, personally, enjoy the ultimate  
freedom of being unknown" Jack  
wrote to me once; he was echoing  
*The Teachings of Don Juan*, a book  
we shared. And during a life which  
was in some regards conspicuously  
public (increasingly so as it neared  
conclusion; he even served a term as  
"the poet laureate of Ohio"), Jack  
maintained an absence from poetry  
anthologies and prizes usually associ-  
ated with success in a poetry career.  
Recognized by a few (he took Olson's  
advice about "the lie of a wide audi-

ence"), Clarke's life/work remains a  
largely unexplored island on the river  
map. There is a useful introduction  
by Ed Sanders to an earlier set of  
sonnets (*The End of This Side*,  
1979); another fine introduction by  
John Thorpe to Clarke's impressive  
"Concourse of World Poetics" (*From  
Feathers to Iron*, 1987); an essay by  
Duncan McNaughton in *Temblor*  
#8, 1988, and a recent short retro-  
spective by Ken Warren published  
from *Contact II* on Joe Napor's  
website. Mike Boughn, who pub-  
lished this collection as well as an ear-  
lier edition of *Book I* (1991), also  
contributed to the production of  
Clarke's newsletter (*intent. Letter of  
Talk, Thinking, & Document*)  
which appeared from spring 1989  
until Jack's death in 1992. It may be  
that this fine volume of sonnets will  
provide incentive for a new genera-  
tion of readers to explore, ponder,  
and draw inspiration from the body  
which Clarke's intellect, imagination,  
and devotion produced.

I met Clarke when he joined  
Olson's classes at SUNY, Buffalo in  
1964; mentored by Al Cook, he was  
just beginning his academic career as  
an Assistant Professor. A bit older  
than the graduate students and a  
member of the faculty, Jack became  
an ally in an environment essentially  
hostile to Olson and his work.

While it was difficult to project  
that hostility toward Charles during  
his lifetime (the speed of his intellect  
and imagination coupled with his  
enormous range of learning, over-  
whelming presence, and considerable  
charm) made him formidable, his  
students or "disciples" or "mules," as  
we were variously called, were an easy  
target. To make matters worse, Jack  
agreed to take on Olson's class "Myth  
and Literature" when Charles sud-  
denly went home to Gloucester after  
the beginning of the fall semester,  
1965. Worried that projects started  
in 1964 might languish, George  
Butterick, Fred Wah, Jack and I orga-  
nized *The Institute of Further  
Studies* which would publish a modest  
magazine, organize lectures and  
readings, and publish Olson's new  
works as they became available. These  
efforts, while supported by visiting  
faculty such as Robert Duncan or Eric  
Mottram, were less than welcome by  
others. True recognition is "else-

where," Jack would remind me. After Olson's death I had a vision of a collaborative epic which would be a memorial for him, and Jack used Olson's "A Plan for a Curriculum of the Soul" which we had published earlier in *The Magazine of Further Studies* as a template of topics which he assigned variously to twenty-eight poets following the numerology of Yeats' *A Vision*. Published as "fascicles" in imitation of the Cambridge Ancient History project, *A Curriculum of the Soul* remains unfinished after twenty-seven years, although twenty-five of the twenty-eight projected titles were realized before Clarke's death. The twenty-sixth book, *Bach's belief* by Robin Blaser, appeared in 1995.

Clarke's work (both poetry and prose) is marvelous to read and difficult to comprehend; at least that's my experience. As a visionary-scholar-poet in the line of Milton and Blake, Clarke's field of reference is extensive. Yet as an adept bent upon the exegesis of his soul, Jack's diction is often ordinary. At a threefold level, the extent of Clarke's contribution to the Romantic project is almost out of sight. Nevertheless, given whatever audience might be available, the work gets done.

I labored for years under the delusion that "understanding" might take me further when, it now seems, such a method can only put one back. The study is primary: *read the work*.

In the *Analogy*, painstakingly edited by his third wife, Cass, and dedicated to his best friend and reader, Harvey Brown, contains six books of forty sonnets each and a seventh book which stops after only four. The "poetics of the situation" might be bounded on one side by the following quotation from Duncan McNaughton's doctoral dissertation, directed by Clarke, *Love Triumphant. Meditations on William Shakespeare's Sonnets*:

For, the homologation of personal exegesis and al-chemie is exact. (57) The latter is a physics inseparable from the events of the soul: the practice of al-chemie is conceived as concomitant with the salvation of the soul. It is allusive: the materials and procedures are metallurgical; the operation is hieratic. The traditional kinship of the poet and the al-chemist, or smith, is not casual. A most intimate and inviolable confidence exists for both: between how one finds out anything and what it is one finds. (xxvi)

57. "To eclipse the apparent, to manifest the eclipsed, is, in so many words, the operation of the *ta'wil*, upon which we have dwelt earlier, and it is the definition of the alchemical operation, in Jabir, as the perfect case of *ta'wil* . . . *Ta'wil* as 'exegesis of the soul' eclipses the soul's common false appearance and manifests and causes the 'rising' of its true and hidden meaning." Corbin, *Avicenna*, p. 187, note 48. Cf. same, pp. 28 ff., "*Ta'wil* as Exegesis of the Soul."

In practice this method produces a sonnet such as:

*Things at a Stand Still. Still . . .*

Except for Frisbee (to hark back to *Fathar III*)

my follow-through has been scandalous, no ideas, and Cass, too, never met with other than laughter, the Department won't hear unless it is "touched," as this week Magic, or Isabella some 500 years ago, what has truly been a scandal, the state of the soul in the Atomic Millennium, down, down, even to China to the point of knocking the accent out of her speech which came back tonight riding in on a time-quake just where the systems converge on a single sound against the world/audience supposed to be out there, for tonight it was the aurora borealis, red & green, the "brightest" since Cass's birth in Christmas colors 1950 opening the package of time, glistening, listening.

Other sonnets, however, add extended "links" via quotations used as preface.

For example:

#### Exceeding the Sensible

"Neural structures that allowed early hominids to abstract from their perceptions a 'secondary representation' of the world improved their capacity to adapt to their 'environment.'"

—Philip Ross, *Scientific American* (commenting on the Bickerton-hypothesis, *Language and Species*, 1990)

"A darkness within which all known things exist. So, a moment before the appearance of one most feared or one most desired, or one most loved."

—Robert Duncan, "An Essay on War"

"Enyalion  
goes to war differently  
than his equites, different  
than they do, he goes to war with a picture."

—Charles Olson

"Mental Things are alone Real; what is call'd Corporeal, Nobody Knows of its Dwelling Place."

—William Blake, *A Vision of the Last Judgment*

First the construct, then the referent, world-thing as "reading" of dream, labrys, the fire of thine eyes, then the likening, this is the order of the eventual finding (fingering) out of everything, as first June, the outline precedes the seeing by a least a night, we go on the confidence of storm, having also "heard" the distant murmur now distinct from the Lockean lull, pre-LSD Blake doors-of-perception sense so named the Magellan Project wants help with the features of Venus, "900 impact craters may be named only for women who died more than three years ago and are worthy of such honor," how would the first man know, when we still can't believe the story enough to force its meaning, make it stick to our ribs, missing and all from those who were simply hungry?

Reading 247 of these texts, each discrete yet contained within a paratactic narrative (neither series nor sequence) is not a simple entertainment. When I think of another Jack's *Mexico City Blues* and the figure of Charlie Parker to whom those choruses are devoted, I want to summon John Coltrane to this work, especially here the Coltrane of *Interstellar Space*, for instance. Clarke was a pianist, perhaps as much a musician as a poet. I once saw him play with Charles Gayle, the saxophonist, at a Sunday afternoon open session at a club on the Millersport Highway. Gayle came in with a drummer and began playing free jazz in a room sparsely populated. The other musicians left the stand, but Jack began to play "Greensleeves." Gayle picked it up, and that drove the drummer off the set. He came to our table and tried to light a cigarette from one of those candles in a red glass bottle, poured hot wax on his suede shoes, and whined "Ohh, man! Look what I've done to my shoes!" The duet never stopped and it was fabulous. And just as Coltrane had somehow made that moment possible, his presence is in the analogy for me, that push ever further into the present, a world music.

"Andre Breton writes in *Signe Ascendant*: 'The poetic analogy (meaning the European Surrealist analogy) differs functionally from the mystical analogy in that it does not presuppose, beyond the visible world, an invisible world which is striving to manifest itself. It proceeds in a completely empirical way.' In contrast, the African surrealist analogy presupposes and manifests the hierarchical universe of life-forces." (Leopold Sedar Senghor, "Speech and Image: An African Tradition of the Surreal.") It is, certainly, that "invisible world" which Clarke explored, first with Blake and then with poets such as Novalis and Olson. That world, which can only be entered through the present moment (what Lawrence called "the mystic NOW") remains the object of Jack's attention. And while Clarke's poetics resides near Orphism, the inclusion of life-time as played and played upon keeps

insistence upon language as neither material nor representational but as imaginal. The particular quality of this heart (that "subtle organ" Corbin called it) is to give objective body to its intentions.

ALBERT GLOVER

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