

# poetry project

NEWSLETTER

JUNE 1999

ISSUE #175

\$5

## WHAT'S INSIDE

In Memoriam:

William Bronk *by Edward Foster*

Paul Schmidt *by Eileen Myles*

Armand Schwerner *by Burt Kimmelman*

A Silent Interview *with Samuel R. Delany*

## REVIEWED

Jack Spicer

Renee Gladman

Merry Fortune

Maggie Dubris

Visit Teepee Town

Oulipo Compendium

Ange Mlinko

Myung Mi Kim

Jack Collom

Anselm Berrigan

Andrew Schelling

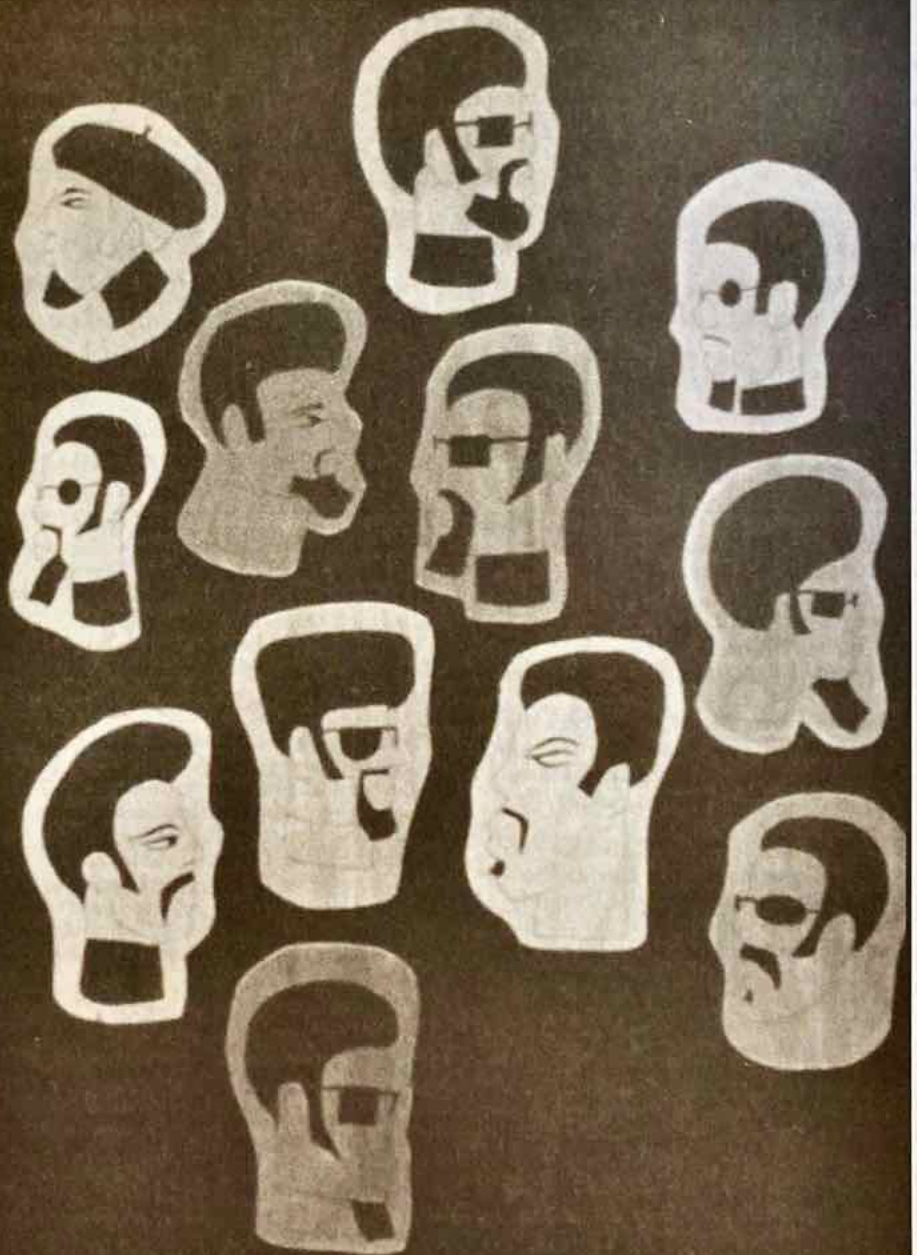
Leonard Schwartz

David Henderson

Jeff Clark

## POETRY

Anne Waldman



# contents

ANNOUNCEMENTS	3
REGIONAL UPDATES	4
IN MEMORIAM	6

William Bronk by Edward Foster

Paul Schmidt by Eileen Myles

Armand Schwerner by Burt Kimmelman

## FEATURES

A Silent Interview with Samuel R. Delany 8

from *Marriage: A Sentence* by Anne Waldman 12

BOOKS REVIEWED 16

BOOKS RECEIVED 28

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# announcements

## Workshop Reading

On Wednesday, June 16th at 8 pm, the Poetry Project hosts a reading by its Spring Workshop participants. Workshop leaders are Larry Fagin, Lisa Jarnot, and Murat Nemet-Nejat.

## The World 55

*The World 55* is now available, with work by: Paul Violi, Brenda Coultas, Jaime Manrique, Bill Luoma, Bill Berkson, Maggie Dubris, Elinor Nauen, Wanda Coleman, Eleni Sikelianos, Zhang Er, and many others. To subscribe, send \$25 (make check out to the Poetry Project); a single issue is \$7.

## Thank You

Many thanks to all the volunteers who helped with our special events in April and May: Edmund Berrigan, Debby Branch, John Coletti, Greg Fuchs, Merry Fortune, Eric Gelsinger, Jeanie Gosline, Daniel Kane, Rachel Levitsky, Lisa Lubasch, Josie McKee, Kristin Prevallet, Kara Roadina, Douglas Rothschild, Joel Schlemowitz, and Elizabeth Willis.

## Congratulations

Hearty congratulations to Alice Notley for receiving *The Los Angeles Times* Book Prize in poetry for 1998 for her book, *Mysteries of Small Houses*, which was also one of three finalists for the Pulitzer Prize this year.

## Western States Book Award

Mei-mei Berssenbrugge's *Four Year Old Girl* recieved the 1999 Western States Book Award for poetry,

selected for its "highly original use of language."

## NYFA Awards

Among this year's recipients of the New York Foundation for the Arts Awards are Bill Kushner, Sharon Mesmer, Eileen Myles, Lisa Jarnot, Dennis Nurkse and Bob Hershon.

## For Paul Schmidt

"In memory of a great and lovely man," Barry Hoggard and James Wagner have made a donation to the Poetry Project in the name of poet, translator, and friend Paul Schmidt, for which the Poetry Project gratefully thanks them. A memorial/celebration of Paul Schmidt's life will be held Sunday, June 13 at 12:30 pm at the Agassiz Theatre, Radcliffe Yard, Cambridge, MA.

## Web Announcements

New works by Norma Cole, Rachel Levitsky, Susan Mills, Hoa Nguyen, and Jo Ann Wasserman are now up in Poets & Poems. In our Features section is "Cruizin the Iceberg," the introduction to *Visit Teepee Town: Native Writings After the Detours*, edited by Mark Nowak and Diane Glancy. Now online in our Archives is "An Interview with Edward Sanders" by Lisa Jarnot. Always expanding is the Tiny Press Center, with new listings of chapbooks, broadsides, and more. Special thanks to John Coletti for his help. Address: <http://www.poetryproject.com>.

## Boston Conference

The 2nd Annual Boston Alternative Poetry Conference will take place

July 23-25, 1999 at the Art Institute of Boston, 700 Beacon St. Participants include John Wieners, Anne Waldman, Gerrit Lansing, Anselm Berrigan, Magdalena Zurawski, Lisa Jarnot, Forrest Gander, Tina Darragh, and many more. For more information, e-mail Aaron Kiely at [aaron7k@hotmail.com](mailto:aaron7k@hotmail.com).

## Calls for Submissions

*Karawane*, formerly *Voices from the Well*, is seeking poetry, short fiction, plays, and visual art. *Karawane* is devoted to writers and poets who perform their work in public, as well as performance artists and experimental playwrights. Indicate on cover letter where you perform or have performed your work and include a SASE. Send submissions to: Laura Winton, *Karawane*, 402 S. Cedar Lake Road, Minneapolis, MN 55405.

*Article* ([www.articlemagazine.com](http://www.articlemagazine.com)), a new web magazine featuring essays on the visual and performing arts, literature, and portfolios of young visual artists, is seeking essays and reviews. "We offer a modest honorarium." Contact David Gibson at [dgibson67@hotmail.com](mailto:dgibson67@hotmail.com).

## Goodbye, and Thanks

We would like to thank all of you who helped on the Newsletter this year in various ways—writing reviews and articles, spending hours in the office explaining Quark or typing documents, proofreading, and offering moral support. Thanks to Ed, Marcella, Anselm and Jeanie. Thanks also to Edwin Torres, Heather Ramsdell, Dan Machlin, and Brendan Lorber for many hours of technical assistance.

—Brenda Coultas and Eleni Sikelianos

# regional updates

## AUSTIN

It's time-consuming to solicit work and correspond with writers. It's exhausting to design, format and produce a zine every few months. We publish *Skanky Possum* because it gives us pleasure to share poems with people. We're lucky to have many sympathetic friends in Austin who contribute their time to the magazine. We also know many writers kind enough to send us their work. We hold possum parties where friends join us to paint possum covers. The last such party was in February and lasted well into the early morning hours, as we sipped tequila and listened to Harry Smith's folk music anthology. This made our living room seem suddenly very old, circa 1899. Mournful banjo music and intimate conversation sustained the long hours. *Skanky Possum* gives us control over production. It's an artist's dream. We believe that what Lou Reed said about making music is the same for making a zine, or even a poem: "The thing you learn is that popular music is easy. The song will play itself. So all you need to do is make it sing a little, make it human, and not fuck it up."

We named the magazine after a possum that lives in the creek near our house. Skanky is of West Indian derivation, coming from words like ska and skank, which is a kind of dance. Possums are the only North American marsupials. We like the "New World" possibility of this word combination. Just say it out loud, then laugh: Skanky Possum.

We publish solicited work and random submissions that float through the mail. Eileen Myles, Alice Notley, Carl Thayler, Diane di Prima and Tom Clark have been in our first two issues. Tom Devaney, Julia Connor, Linh Dinh, and Betsy Fagin also have been carried in the possum's

pouch.

Books by Carl Thayler, Leslie Davis, Sotere Toregian and Tom Clark are scheduled for publication during the coming year. Publishing these and our small magazine challenges our own poetic ideals and broadens our imaginative possibilities.

*Skanky Possum* is a quarterly journal of poetry, side-stapled with handpainted covers. \$5 an issue/\$20 for a year subscription, including postage. Orders may be placed via e-mail at skankypossum@hotmail.com or by sending a check made out to either editor (Hoa Nguyen or Dale Smith) to 2925 Higgins Street, Austin, TX 78722. Please inquire about our book titles.

— Hoa Nguyen and Dale Smith

## LOS ANGELES

Avant-garde Los Angeles is fairly fortunate with respect to magazines (*Primary Writing*, *Re\*Map*, *Rhizome*, *Ribot*, *Arshile*) and publishers of poetry (Litoral Books, and Sun & Moon Press). Seeing Eye Books was founded in 1997 in an effort to promote contemporary poetry. Thus far, nine titles have been produced and a tenth is underway. As I have no distribution, Seeing Eye Books are sold in yearly series through subscription only, with previously published titles available individually. This year's crop includes work by Dennis Phillips, Claudia Roquette-Pinto, Jeff Clark, and Franklin Bruno. So far, the chapbooks pay for themselves, with subscriptions from within the poetry community and from libraries. I enjoy the work, and will continue to produce these books as long as there is interest in them. Please visit Seeing Eye Books at [www.litpress.com](http://www.litpress.com)

and/or e-mail me at [guybnt@idt.net](mailto:guybnt@idt.net) for information.

— Guy Bennett

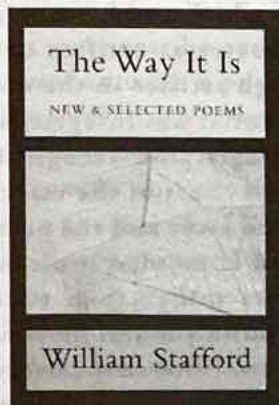
## TINY PRESS CENTER

Like micro-breweries, micro-presses are growing both nationally and internationally. The refreshing thing about these brews is that they've got undiluted devotion to writing, art, and printing written all over them. A high proportion of letterpresses seem to be operating happily—a healthy rebellion in the face of untouched-by-human-hand productions. Another exciting facet of these tiny presses is the evident interest in diverse artwork, typography, materials, and design. Some burgeoning tiny presses are, in NYC, the new Hophophop chapbook series, Angle Press, CUZ Editions, Explosive Magazine/Spectacular Books, Time Release Press, and Situations Press; Skanky Possum in Austin, TX; Idiom Press and Double Lucy Books/Outlet Magazine in Berkeley; Blue Press and Angry Dog Press in San Francisco; Arcturus Editions in Sacramento, CA; Instress from Saratoga, CA; Erudite Fangs in Boulder, CO; Gare du Nord in Paris, France; LVNG in Chicago; the nominative press collective in Buffalo, NY; Periplum Editions in Española, NM; reference: press in Jamaica Plains, MA; Seeing Eye Books in LA; Erato Press in New Orleans; Wild Honey Press in Ireland; and many more. Memorial tribute goes to *Clamour Magazine* and *Proliferation*, both of which have recently published their last, wonderful issues. For information & addresses, visit the Tiny Press Center on the Project's Web site at [www.poetryproject.com](http://www.poetryproject.com).

— Marcella Durand

The regional updates of this issue of the Newsletter will be republished in September on "The Tiny Press Center" at the Poetry Project's Website at <http://www.poetryproject.com>.

# A RARE BREED OF PUBLISHER FOR 25 YEARS



## The Way It Is:

*New and Selected Poems*  
**WILLIAM STAFFORD**

"Stafford, a National Book Award winner and once Oregon's Poet Laureate, left behind a body of work that represents some of the finest poetry written during the second half of this century. . . . The poems, which reveal many of Stafford's themes—his affinity for Native Americans, love of nature, protest of war, and concern about the dangers of technology—are subtle and powerful in tone, but imagery is paramount. . . . Highly recommended." *Library Journal*

Available in Paperback, \$16.00 (1-55597-284-5)



## Feeling as a Foreign Language:

*The Good Strangeness of Poetry*  
**ALICE FULTON**

"These deeply satisfying essays turn issues of form and content inside out, refusing old dichotomies and familiar answers. Alice Fulton points toward just how rich and strange postmodern poetry really is, or might be: something perennially surprising, uncharted, an art as slippery, fresh, and difficult as American experience now. This engaging book will delight and challenge readers of poetry, but it also offers serious pleasure to anyone who loves language." *Mark Doty*

Paperback, \$15.00 (1-55597-286-1)



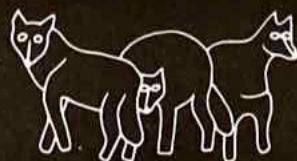
## Tug

**G.E. PATTERSON**

"[Patterson's] vivid, musical, witty, sociologically ambitious poems are the work of a very promising new poet." *Booklist*

"You will have to travel far to find a book that tackles the interior landscape of a black man with such tenderness and lyric power. *Tug* is the book I know had to come down the pike sooner or later. Reading it, I couldn't ignore the feeling that a fire was being lit under American Poetry." *Cornelius Eady*

Paperback, \$12.95 (1-55597-285-3)



## GRAYWOLF PRESS

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# William Bronk

1918–1999

WILLIAM BRONK died early in the morning of February 22nd. He had been working that day on the following, which recapitulates ideas often stated in his work:

Art isn't made, it's in the world almost  
unseen but found existent there. We paint,  
we save the sound in music, we write it down

The radio was turned to a classical music station, as always in his house. There were works such as the adagio in Mozart's "Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra," to which he listened with much care. He liked baroque compositions, and it is the baroque, as in Sir Thomas Browne's "Urn Burial" and Shakespeare's sonnets, that shapes his poems. He used paradox and contrast, and his poems are like buildings by Borromini, an architect he admired.

If the building no longer abides by the laws of construction in space, but makes space visible in the infinite variety of its possible forms, it is no longer a plastic form inserted into the perspective of space, but a crystallization of space itself. . . . The common notion of space is no longer dictated by mathematical principle, but by experience.

— Giulio Carlo Argan, *The Baroque Age*

. . . it is real  
this passion that we feel for forms. But the forms  
are never real. Are not really there. Are not.

— "The Arts and Death: A Fugue for Sidney Cox"

Bronk distrusted terms like "unified subject" and "material signifier," but he distrusted more the poets who, so he thought, used them to evade personal responsibility. He required honesty from friends. A New Englander who lived only briefly in New England, his principal American source was Thoreau (another of Browne's disciples) and shared with him the problem of friendship in a world where "the forms / are never real." He greatly disliked poets who busied themselves promoting their work and never the work of others. "The arts," he often said, "are not competitive."

When his own poetry was recognized, he was pleased but indifferent, too. He valued George

Oppen's friendship but saw little in the work that resembled his own. He was aware of essential differences between poets and between poetries and did not want things otherwise.

He could be brutally critical of other poets, but the criticism often had less to do with their work than with the moral base on which it was set. He had no tolerance for talk of poetry as artifice or performance. There was enough artifice in the world, and what he considered essential was integrity and candor—with, correspondingly, the recognition that these, too, could also fall short of the mark. But he had been an officer in the army and the president of a successful business and knew what it meant to rely on systems and manners rather than candor and integrity. He was a profoundly moral person.

He said in conversation, "I have repeatedly had the experience, when the poem gets written down, of saying, oh, God, no, I don't mean that—but hesitating to change the meaning because it seems to me the way it has to be said—and then only later, maybe the next day, two days later, the next week: yes, I guess that's what I do mean."

Bronk's last book, completed a few weeks before his death, is *Metaphor of Trees*. In it he says,

Reality isn't real. Why do we look?  
We look because the real is the shape of desire:  
that the world be real and we a person in it.

The poem may respond to Spicer's statement, "Where we are is in a sentence." But Bronk also said, "My poems come to me in their own language, and if they were not in that language, they would not have any force."

Among the many things which made Bronk pre-eminent among his peers was a personal integrity that could require the complete effacement of the self in the face of language: "we write it down."

— Edward Foster

# Paul Schmidt

1934–1999

I MET PAUL IN THE MID-eighties. He had just returned to New York from Texas where he was a very high pow-

ered academic and I asked him why he left academia and he said that he had seen the writing on the wall and it was in French. I was working at the Project then, and he already knew my poetry and everyone else's and he wanted to become involved in the scene. In fact our first conversation, I think, was about his desire to be in the New Year's Reading. He continued to read in it every year he was in town. He planned to read this year too, with a poem he had written about Matthew Shepard, but his health didn't hold up. Paul always wore something amazing to the New Year's Reading—a tuxedo, or a cowboy hat, or both. I invited him to be on the Board of Directors and he took his role on the Board very seriously. Paul was a mensch. The year our NEA grant got chopped to bits we had a "Deficit Dance" in the Sanctuary with colored lights and loud music and unfortunately no people and the event was a real dud. I remember Paul dancing so hard, trying to make this miserable event be fun. He was totally the kind of guy to try to make something ridiculous seem elegant. If he was on your side, and he was on my side and our side, the side of poets and saints and visionaries and screwballs and people who are simply obsessed with their own version of life, then you felt the sincerity in his elegant manner. He did not let people slip away. Paul had the best blue eyes. His voice was strong and soft, and he said Dear in a way that felt like he meant it unreservedly. There are people who you meet in your life that make you want to do better, be better, whose bursts of delight and approval help you know you're on the mark. I think more than anything Paul valued himself as a poet. He was a great lover of theater, which is poetry too, but I believe that poetry was his great love. His translations of Rimbaud, and Khlebnikov, Mayakovsky and Genet and Chekhov were total acts of love. Look at his own work: two books published by Painted Leaf Press in 1996, *Night Life*, poems, and *Winter Solstice*, a long prose poem. He laughed at his own inability to not count beats, but I love his prayerful urgency: "Let go, /let go. It all dissolves in different places. Streets and avenues glitter. . . It's hard to feel it happening, but here it is."

— Eileen Myles

## Armand Schwerner

1927—1999

THE LOSS OF ARMAND SCHWERNER has only begun to be felt. He was an extraordinary poet, essayist, translator from many languages, artist, dramaturge and musician. He was warm, loyal, brilliant and exciting. He published a dozen books of poetry, including his monumental work *The Tablets*, one of our great epics. Its fictional translations of ancient cuneiform are a meditation on textuality engaging fundamental issues of time and identity. There are numerous voices in *The Tablets*, including the commentary of a Scholar-Translator who will stand as one of the great comic creations of our century. The poem's various pictographs and signs interact with English and other words to yield a greater and wonderfully elusive significance.

Armand was a handsome man, who, in later years, was ravaged physically by this cancer. In his last days, I was struck by what might glibly be called his bravery; how he was able to live in the present, to take advantage of whatever time he had, has been instructive. Even when he could no longer speak he was very much alive, interested in everything.

The breadth, variance and richness of his rhetorical gestures were astonishing. And as a mentor, he was capable of a great sympathy—as in this passage from "The Aquarium Fancier," a talk he gave at St. Mark's Church:

[T]he poet, though forever exiled from the hawk-soar, can be a flexible slinger. In his youth Rimbaudian indignation at gravity's impositions, however moderated by his intelligence, often serves as food for metaphors of power. [....] In mid-life the poet may fall into a greed-dream pierced by flashing visitations of great flightless birds—emu, cassowary, the small rhea. *If not flight at least these, an arrangement, a compromise, a standing, I'll make a deal, empower me.* Through sweet-smelling honeycombs of the world, unlikely stand-ins for carnivores, poets wander: daring ornithopter-persons whose heavy Icarian wings—thickened by the waxy exudae of savory delusions—suffer a dashed grounding; it is one function of poetry to embody again and again the saving clear-eyed anguish of such falls to earth.

— Burt Kimmelman

# A Silent Interview

with

## Samuel R. Delany

**IN YOUR AUTOBIOGRAPHY, *The Motion of Light in Water*, you state that you are "neither black nor white...male nor female. And [you are] that most ambiguous of citizens, the writer." What roles does or will that most ambiguous of citizens play in our public or private culture(s), or in our potential utopias?**

You'll remember, in *The Motion of Light in Water*, I present it as an error in my thinking that I got trapped into when I was at an emotional nadir—and on my way to a nervous breakdown that eventually landed me in a mental hospital.

Only when I began to get it back together and was in the midst of the kind of thinking that got me out of the hospital and, at twenty-three, back into the world—and that started me writing again—did I realize that I was a "black man, a gay man, a writer"; that these were specific, if complex, categories. As categories, they were social impositions—not essences. They were what had always already given me my identity; and an identity was something to be examined, interrogated, analyzed: Vigilance and, sometimes, resistance were the conditions of being able to function.

Now people desperately love all that wonderful-sounding ambiguity—just as I desperately desired it when I was beaten and confused and exhausted by life and overwork. "I belong to no category; I straddle them all..." It sounds romantic—decadent, but somehow still transcendent. When we pursue such ambiguity, mistakenly we feel it's a way to escape social accountability. That we crave it is the sign of just how wounding the categories can be or have been. Still, espousing that ambiguity was and is a way of saying: "Not me...I'm above all that, out-

side of it, not a part of it."

What I learned is that precisely when

one says "I'm not a part," one is most trapped by one's identity, most paralyzed and most limited; that's the sign one has given up, given in; that you are precisely *not* in a condition of freedom—but of entrapment. Saying "I am not a part" is very different from saying, "Because I am a part, I will not participate in *that* manner." The first is delusion. The second is power—which is inimical to the cry of powerlessness that you quote.

**In *Longer Views*, your collection of essays, you name a dozen poets whose work you have enjoyed over the last few years. How has poetry influenced your work? What is the connection, for you, between, say, poetry and science fiction writing?**

Auden's on my mind: Yesterday someone sent me an audiotape of a TV program that featured Auden, which I watched on *Camera Three* in 1953 when I was eleven years old. The show in which Auden was interviewed made a great impression on me as a child.

One of my best friends in elementary school was named Johnny Kronenberger, whose father, Louis Kronenberger, had collaborated with Auden on *The Oxford Book of Aphorisms*. From time to time Auden babysat for Johnny and his sister Liza. So, by the time I was eleven, I already knew of Auden and knew he was a famous poet—that, indeed, he was queer and lived with Chester Kallman. (The kids at my New York private school were quite a bunch of

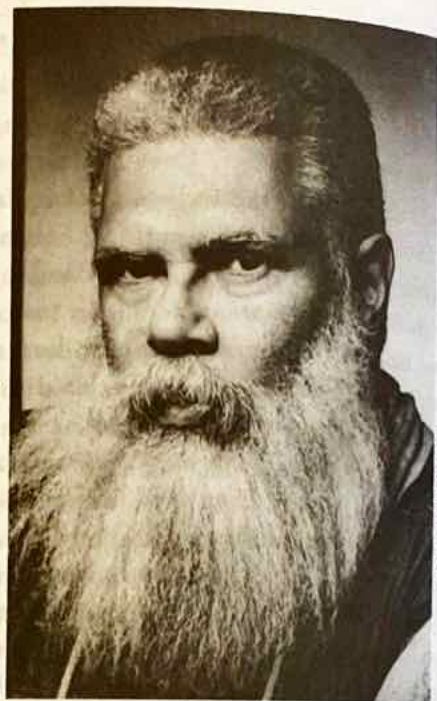


Photo by Becket Logan



gossips.) With great glee, Johnny had described to me Chester's imitations of Diana Trilling at his parents' annual Christmas party.

I listened to the soundtrack of the programs just last night—for the first time in forty-five years. Having heard the voice of Jim McAndrew, the spokesperson for *Camera Three* (in the 1950s he was the poor man's Alistair Cooke), for the first time since I entered puberty, what I was most aware of last night was how people use poetry for their own purposes—which may or may not have anything to do with what the poet is interested in, writing his or her poem.

In 1953, McAndrew was probably somewhere between 38 and 42. He'd just missed out, doubtless, on the New Criticism, and probably regarded it as a suspicious order of recent academic nonsense—the way someone who'd graduated college in the fifties might have regarded post-structuralist literal theory ten or fifteen years ago. Interviewing Auden, clearly he had an intellectual agenda already in place. What I realized last night, however, which had completely escaped me at eleven, was that his only interest in Auden was how Auden was going to validate that agenda. Equally clearly, he couldn't imagine Auden himself having any other interest than to validate it. With every "question/statement" McAndrew poses, his point is that the historical purpose of the poet has been to provide images of heroes for the nation. Clearly that's what Homer did. Clearly that's what

Shakespeare did. Thus, that's what Auden must be doing, too. ("The poet must speak from a position of strength..." he begins by declaring): "Okay, Mr. Auden, tell our audience just how *you* go about doing this." And whenever Auden tries, however politely, to move the conversation toward something that might actually be interesting about poetry (at one point, while describing how technology changes the structure of the personal act, Auden explains that pressing a button to drop a bomb is far different from Achilles fighting a one-to-one combat with Hector), McAndrew diligently takes it back to this narrow and straited notion: "Of course the people *must* find a hero in the midst of something technological. They might pick the tail gunner of the plane that dropped the bomb on Japan twelve years ago. But the poet wouldn't be interested in the tail gunner, of course."

Realizing he's been completely misunderstood, Auden declares: "Oh, he *might*..."

Today McAndrew sounds unbelievably clunky, dated—and dictatorial: He knows what poetry is for, and that's all he's interested in hearing about. At the same time, the establishment critical position was that the purpose of poets was to write great poems about great political leaders; and the fact that no poet whom anyone actually wanted to read was even vaguely interested in doing anything like this was a sign of the decadent times in which we lived.

While there are *more* poets

today, and people have become *somewhat* more comfortable with them, conversing with them, hearing them read, and perhaps a little more polite to them, I don't know whether the fundamental situation has changed. We find lines that we love and quote them out of context—only to reread the entire poem a decade later and discover that the poet was telling us that is something we must *never* do or think!

The very brilliance of expression was the poet's attempt to allegorize its seductiveness as a dangerous idea.

In his essay, "Writing," Auden tells us:

The English-speaking peoples have always felt that the difference between poetic speech and the conventional speech of everyday should be kept very small, and, whenever poets have felt that the gap between poetic and ordinary speech was growing too wide, there has been a stylistic revolution to bring them closer again.

By the time, a dozen years after watching him on *Camera Three*, I too had begun to write, Auden's work was there to help make me aware that the language labors that produce poetry were not very different from those necessary for prose.

That fundamental closeness between poetry and prose in English is what allowed me to see poets laboring over their poems and to put like labor into my prose. What differentiates the two is the discourses that control the way in which they're read. Though there's some, of course, there's much less difference in the way the two are written than it would otherwise seem.

## Can art—poetry, say—really change people?

A communal task that art accomplishes—particularly the verbal arts of fiction and poetry—is to help with the shifts of discourse that must occur for there to be meaningful historical change.

Because it is a communal task, because no *single* work of art can accomplish such a discursive shift by itself, the artist (responsible only for her or his own work) doesn't have to worry about preaching. It's far more effective to look at a situation and dramatize in however complex allegorical terms you'd like what it is you've seen.

For the same reason that poets and artists don't have to worry about preaching, the general public doesn't need to worry about censorship. "For poetry makes nothing happen," Auden wrote in his elegy for Yeats. That privileged lack-of-power of the single work of art—the single poem, say—is precisely what, I feel, Auden was getting at.

Many works of art taken together, however, through the very process by which we learn to read them, establish discourses—establish discourses of the possible, discourses of the probable, discourses of desire. Discourses are the conceptual tools with which we socially construct our world, materially and imaginatively.

### List your favorite utopias.

I don't very much like utopias as a form. I much prefer science

fiction—which, as a genre, is fundamentally anti-utopian (and equally anti-dystopian) in its thinking. I suspect, indeed, that's why science fiction has largely displaced utopian fiction as a genre. Again, Auden is the one who spelled out the explanation for us, in *Horae Canonicae*, and again in some of his essays in *The Dyer's Hand*.

For city lovers, the city is the site of New Jerusalem—the site of knowledge, sophistication, freedom of action, as well as of all true learning and culture—while for the urban-oriented temperament the country is the superstition-, disease-, fire-, flood-, and earthquake-ridden Land of the Flies, where life is harsh and brutal and all society is bound by the chains of gossip and village opinion. For country lovers, the land is Arcadia and the city is, rather, the dirty, shabby, mechanized and inhuman place where everyone wears the same uniform and does the same meaningless tasks in quintessentially boring setting: Brave New World. As Auden points out, the decision as to whether you are more comfortable in the city or the country is largely a matter of temperament and/or habitation. It is not a matter of objective facts. You pay for the culture, variety, and freedom of cities by having to toil in Brave New World. You pay for the beauties of nature by having to live in a relatively small-minded and oppressive township.

Science fiction—unlike utopia/dystopia—has traditionally taken its images from all four forms; Junk City and the Empire of the Afternoon have joined with New

Jerusalem, Brave New World, Arcadia, and the Land of the Flies, and integrated them into single visions of a rich and complex world. (After all, temperaments change, sometimes hour by hour.) The best and most characteristic science fiction novels (Bester's *The Stars My Destination*, Pangborn's *Mirror for Observers*, Harness's *The Paradox Men*, Sturgeon's *More Than Human...*) allegorize complex possible relations among all four. More recently, since cyberpunk, two more image clusters have added themselves to the mix: Both Techno-Junk City and the Empire of the Afternoon (the decadent, *beautifully* polluted landscape) have joined the New Jerusalem, Brave New World, Arcadia and the Land of the Flies. Such complexity—the hallmark of science fictional thinking—leaves the simplistic templates of "utopia/dystopia" far behind.

If only because of their insufferable and insulting arrogance, I don't think there's a place anymore for the time-hogging utopian monologist. Rather we need to encourage a polyvocal politics, through dialogue and an appreciation of multiple perspectives, which is what science fiction as a genre does and by science fiction I specifically do not mean speculative fiction, which is, at least today, a monologic imposition by which one or another academic tries to privilege the particular science fiction she (or he) most prefers (cyberpunk, social, feminist, or what-have-you), at the expense of the overall genre's range and richness, a range and richness which makes the individual novels and stories

in any or all of those parenthetical sub-categories signify in a dialogic and polyvocalic process.

**Define silence.**

I won't try to define it, because silence—at least in the way it interests me—is one of those objects that resists definition. But I can make some descriptive statements about it so that we might be more likely to recognize it the next time we encounter it in one of its many forms.

Today silence is in a rather beleaguered state.

Silence is the necessary context in which, alone, information can signify—in short, it's the opposite of "noise."

As such, it's seldom, if ever, neutral. It's pervaded by assumptions, by expectations, by discourses—what the poet Osip Mandelstam (born the same year as our Zora Neale Hurston, 1891) called *shum vremeni*, "the hubbub [or buzz; or swoosh] of time." As such, silence is the only state in which the *shum* that pervades it can be studied.

Since Wagner at least, silence has been considered the proper mode in which to appreciate the work of art: Wagner was the first major artist to forbid talking in the theater during his concerts and operas. He began the custom of not applauding

between movements of a symphony, sonata, concerto, suite, or string quartet. Also, he was the first person, during performances of his operas at Bayreuth, to turn off the house lights in the theater and have illumination only on the stage.

Silence.

Darkness.

For better or worse, this aligns art more closely with death: It moves us formally toward a merger with the unknown.

Carnival, circus, and social festival are the lively arts that fight the morbidity of that early modernism/late romanticism. They are the arts around which one is expected to make noise, point, cry out "Oh, look!", then buy cotton candy from a passing vendor, and generally have a life, while artists satirize it in simultaneous distortions, as clown, acrobat, and animal trainer—with silly prizes to the people for random effort and skill.

But, whether one is looking at comic books or construing philosophy, silence is still the state in which the best reading takes place; not to mention the writing—or revising—of a story or a poem.

March 18, 1999, New York City

Samuel R. Delany's many books include *Dhalgren*, the *Neveryon* series, and *Shorter Views: Queer Thoughts & the Politics of the Paraliterary*.

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from

# Marriage: A Sentence

by

Anne Waldman

If you had three husbands.  
 If you had three husbands.  
 if you had three husbands, well not exactly that...

Gertrude Stein

THE COUNTRY is calling. Rudimentary fear. War breeds espousals, mighty good for Capital. R's brother brings home a Korean wife. A's sister is clear about marrying him in his uniform. Marriage is as good as a job. Marriage comes with a job. Or lobby in a health class wanting information on pubis on pubic. On contraception. It is better to marry than have exceptional sex. Completion of the circle. Some poorer pale illustration of a mythic bond and there were bows abounding, maryjanes abounding. So & So becomes stereotypical. I want to get out of here. When you say "fifties" what do you really mean? As if a poodle skirts keeps your eyes on the prize. The gods on Olympus were already married, the presidents were married, the ministers were married. Japanese were married. Jews were married. Black people are married atheists are married. Muslims are married. Somebody else was "queer" or strange. Sentences are sweet when they are queer with a semi-colon or a torqued pluperfect tense. When will you ever not be going stronger on the sentence structure. Margaret Mead described a different kind of tribal ceremony and would I would have been inside a Samoan dream I might have always ever been perfectly wed. Wed to my kin, my kindred kind whose totem is woods-related. I hunted, I gathered, I gather I hunt I gather I hunt. I hunted. Never for a husband.

—tell a story about a threshold here—

...

In some places a woman would marry a woman which torques the definition of marriage could it be so simple any such definition. For they throw stones at you in the torqued definition of marriage. It hurts to be unkind they say & cast a stone.

Or someone had a man take a slug at her on an emotional national holiday because she was a known lover of a woman who had a wife. And it was a man's holiday, a memorial day for dead warriors who are mostly especially in the two wars men. Or maybe she the woman slugged was a wife. This is a two wives tale. It was unseemly to see two women kissing, two women embrace under the primrose tree. Two women in a Lautrec brothel holding the tide together against the slings of men. Caressing against the tide of pimps & other men. Some get murderous in Oregon to see the women, 2, shopping together as might a man & wife. Living as do a man & wife in an ordinary man & wife apartment, doing man & wife things. Except at night in the deep dark of night, they said, they who were murderous & dark. What do they do at night? While we are doing our man & wife things, what do they do in the dark of night what do they do.

—dark o' night—

...

though  
 claimed

another kin answered  
 her call

implicit climb  
 from the beginning  
 that they would cast a flower over the village wall  
 & whoever caught it was to be "wifed"  
 & our headwoman would have a "vision"  
 inculcating fire, induces fire, resembling fire.  
 paints fire, paints a clime of fire  
 her "daughter" with fire

limb-kin, kin of sweat

night-kin, metonymy

kin rambler,

kin of the ox totem,

kin far to the farthest to the next-of-kin next to him  
 kin that would make sense

so that our eyes stay brown,  
our hair  
close to a texture  
a webbed plant  
genes won't go wild in derision

—pillar of fire—

...  
One said once to get down on a lithesome knee & ask for a fecund hand in marriage. Rove was yesterday, sounds mute or a moot point talking formality today. Its fecund aspects that get everyone down to the floor, Persian rug, & details of posterity for roving drain the house. Victoria's lace a grandmother sewn off she died once & one dressed in black and one didn't wear something borrowed the first time was that an old wives' problem. Victoria's? Superstition abounds like ivy & something blue another old wife asks. Ask a Mister's permission for her hand in marriage but the handshake of the bridegroom to be he thinks is weak like a gay man like a drugged man, not the Earthy Fecund Man. Could be. Asks for assurance, knees & hands. Ho. Hard to please in the cool modernist New York springtime. We were very gay then.

—on a knee—

...  
one said  
once  
to get  
down  
upon a  
knee  
  
will  
take  
  
the girl  
as she  
stands  
down  
  
& her wobble  
for  
the  
world  
does  
bend  
the mind

up  
in obliged  
supplication  
of hand

whatever else  
they may  
think,  
hand  
over  
mouth  
knee shaky  
in atonement  
nails  
- paint them -  
ruby red



—gender game—

...  
Thinking you want to secure "on an even keel" is not enough in this bedroom. Curtains closed sheets are warm o yes you await "the touch." O yes it is the designated room where you lie prone. The bed is sound & made for ache and consummation of please marry this marrying feeling to the seduction of please marry this feeling to the desire of your head. Yet love is an enemy you need to get you off the track of back of possession & desire. Hear me out stake me now in the obligations of marrying love. Obsequies. How many years. Been to the desert (of love) lay down with scorpions mutated heat waves mirages old fellows of the carriage trade I tracked silk routes of abandon and commerce drunk on gold and other alchemical substances I fought the evil fight the desert fox the desert storm. I deserted my country for this one way out with sand way out with sand that blinds founded a kingdom there dreamed the enemy was the I I adjusted my psyche to locked to the pleasure of her company. It was a mitigated curse no it was blameless. If there ever was a good idea it was conceived in love, but a kind of paranoia sets in to make you think in reverse. Because love won't stop his whips was coming around with a harness on with a scorpion ready to sting. Stay the lashes love always brings bring them on of outrageous activity realms all the corners of the sensual universe. Because you want no one to touch you because you are the inexplicit virgin young & afraid. Steals your power. Or you might think that: hide from nuptials. And then be sacrificed the next day to a tutelary deity with your feather headdress on.

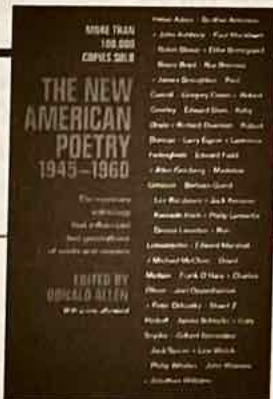
—even keel—

Marriage is like you say everything in stereo stereo fall fall on the bed bed at dawn dawn because you work work all night. Night is an apartment. Meant to be marriage. Marriage is an apartment & meant people people come in in because when when you marry marry chances chances are there will be edibles to eat at tables tables in the house. House will be the apartment which is night night. There there will be a bed & an extra bed a clean sheet sheet sheet or two two for guests guests one extra towel. Extra towel. How will you be welcomed? There will be drinks drinks galore galore brought by armies of guests guests casks of liquors and brandies brandies elixirs sweet & bitter bitter bottle of Merlot Merlot Bustelo coffee coffee. Will you have some when I offer. When you are married married there will be handsome gifts for the kitchen sometimes two of every thing. Everything is brand new. Espresso coffee cups, a Finnish plate, a clock, a doormat, pieces of Art. And books of astonishing Medical Science with pictures. Even richer lexicons. When you are married there will be more sheets & towels arriving & often a pet or two. You definitely need a telephone when you are married. Two lines. When you are married you will have sets of things, of more sheets and towels matching, you will have duplicates of things, you will have just one tablecloth. When you are married you will be responsible

when neighbors greet you. You will smile in unison or you might say he is fine, she is fine, o she is just down with a cold, o he is consoling a weary traveller just now, arrived from across the Plains, she my husband is due home soon, he my wife is busy at the moment, my husband he is very busy busy at this very moment. Meant goodbye, goodbye. When you are married sex sex will happen happen without delay delay. You will have a mailbox and a doorbell doorbell. Bell ring it rings again a double time. You do not have to answer. That's sure for when you are married married people people understand understand you do not not have to answer a doorbell because sex may happen happen without delay delay. You will hear everything twice, through your ears and the ears of the other. Her or him as a case case may be be. When you are married you can play with names and re-name yourself if you like. You can add a name, have a double name with a hyphen if you like. You can open joint accounts when you are married. Marriage is no guarantee against depression. A shun is no guarantee against anything. Marriage is no guarantee against resolution. Revolution is a tricky word word. Here, you hear here? Marriage is no guarantee against adultery. Adult, a plea. (Make your plea.) Marriage is sweeter than you think. Think.

—stereo—

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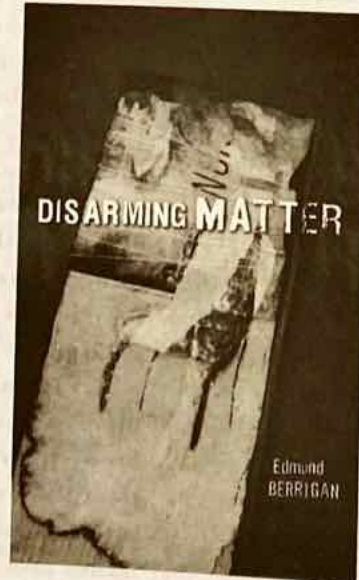
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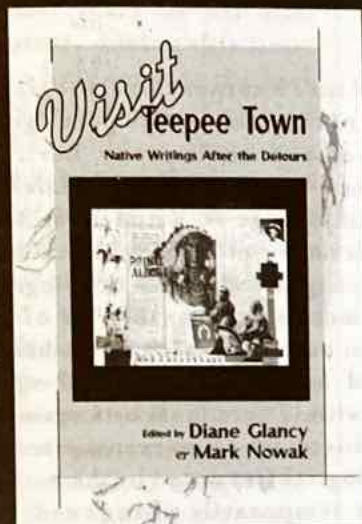
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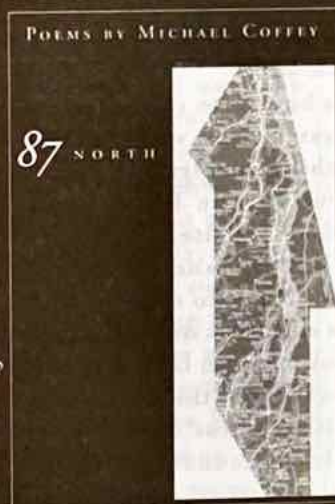
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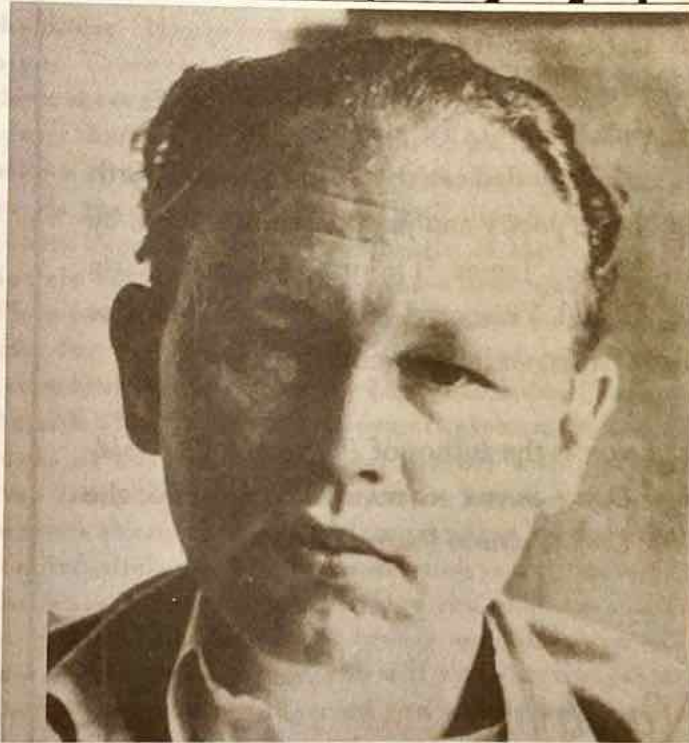


photo by Edgar Austin

## JACK SPICER

*Poet Be Like God: Jack Spicer and the San Francisco Renaissance*, edited by Lewis Ellingham and Kevin Killian  
Wesleyan University Press, 1998, 439 pages, \$35.00.

*The House That Jack Built: The Collected Lectures of Jack Spicer*, edited and with an afterword by Peter Gizzi  
Wesleyan University Press, 265 pages, \$18.95.

*Golem* (poetry by Jack Spicer, collages by Fran Herndon)  
Granary Books (568 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012), 1999, 24 pages, \$150.00. Also available on-line at <http://www.granarybooks.com>.

Jack Spicer burned out early. After a serious auto accident in 1963, two years before he died, the doctor who treated his broken ribs warned him to stop drinking. "Oh fuck," was his response. "They don't know anything." Spicer was hardly a great role model for poets of the future, but reading his biography made me nostalgic for a time when poets would rather self-destruct than accept the indignities offered them. Battling with personal demons that were in some way the major source of his poems (if I were cured, i.e., if I stopped drinking I'd no longer write poetry) created yet a further cycle of dilemmas that superceded the need for money or fame. It's possible, he reminds us—these books remind us—to regulate your life around a set of values that allows you to participate in the battle and stay on the periphery at the same time. You can't be a poet without defining

your own terms.

*Poet Be Like God* isn't a conventional biography in that it doesn't dwell inordinately on the poet's genealogy or even his childhood and adolescence. Born in 1925 to middle-class liberal-minded parents in Los Angeles, by page eight we find him age 20 a student at Berkeley. By page ten he's already met Robin Blaser and Robert Duncan. "He once spoke of 1946," the biographers tell us, "the year he met Duncan, as the year of his birth." Spicer created an aura of secrecy about his past, as if "something" had happened—but what?—that he was refusing to deal with. There must be a reason a person might want to obliterate the first twenty years of his life. The only psychological fact noted by the authors is that Spicer's parents temporarily abandoned him when Spicer's mother was pregnant with her second child. "When Spicer reached his thirties, his misery about this expulsion catapulted him into a breakdown and analysis." Measuring the mysteries of the first twenty years more fully might have given this life story an added dimension, as well as providing a backdrop for the years of sadness that followed.

The plan of the book is to recreate a cultural history of postwar American poetry with Spicer at the center. One of the refreshing constructs of the Spicer circle (which evolved out of The Berkeley Renaissance, a group of like-minded writers and artists, rotating around Spicer, Duncan and Blaser, who gathered together in the late 1940s to study modernist thought and magic) was its emphasis on community as opposed to school. The problem with labeling oneself (or being labeled) as a school is that the practitioners become a kind of faculty with a status quo to protect. Spicer's world was distinctly communal, particularly welcoming to the young (male) poet who might fit in simply by being open to poetic teaching. The erotics of the group were enmeshed with the poetics. Instead of craving attention, Spicer's stance was to keep the world at bay. As Peter Gizzi points out, in his afterword to *The House That Jack Built*, this was part of the erotics—if you want me, if you want my poems, you have to prove yourself, and even then I might not even be there for you. Robert Duncan was a target of Spicer's scorn for publishing with mainstream presses, for applying for and actually receiving grants. (Duncan's decision, midway in his career, not to publish for fifteen years after being dissatisfied with the way his books were produced by mainstream presses, could be interpreted as an admission that Spicer was right, at least in principle, and that pub-



lishing one's work in small editions, and circulating these books among friends, might be the only way to preserve the integrity of the work—not to mention your soul.)

The major part of *Poet be Like God* covers the last years of his life, 1960-65. Spicer, during this time, was content to hold forth in the back of a bar in North Beach. There's a sense that he couldn't reach out beyond his circle even if he wanted to, that he had created a poetics that was a function of the limits of his personal psychology, and that being in the back of a bar every night was a kind of comfort zone. His scorn for the trappings of success—"selling out"—became part of the rigid metaphor that was connected, as well, to the promise of love (unrequited love, love for the inaccessible) that could only end in rejection. Even his last book, *A Book of Magazine Verse*, involves writing poems directed at magazines like *The Nation* or *Poetry* that would never accept his work, though the book itself (as in all of Spicer's work) is more than an ironic gesture.

Most of the young poets who entered his life during these last years were sexually straight men in search of a surrogate father. Spicer would read and comment on their poems and incorporate the figures of the poets themselves (as mythological muses) into his latest book. Killian and Ellingham are best at depicting the great pathos that invigorated the poetry of everyone who passed through this world. A group of young men enter the bar and Spicer labels these new recruits The Jets (after the chorus line in *West Side Story*) or "the blackheads" (because they're all obviously Jewish). The authors of the biography focus on the evolution of the community through its magazines (*J* and *Open Space*) and The White Rabbit Press which published much of the work in limited editions. (A useful companion volume might be an anthology of the Spicer circle,

including book length poems like George Stanley's *Pony Express Riders*, Ronnie Primack's *The Late Major Horace Bell of the Los Angeles Rangers*, Jim Alexander's *Jack Rabbit Poem*, Harold Dull's *The Star Year*, Ebbe Borregaard's *Sketches for Thirteen Sonnets*, Larry Kearney's *Fifteen Poems*—to name just a few.) Spicer's approval—"What would Jack think?"—brought out the best in the poets who dared to enter his circle. That few of these poets created a substantial body of work after Spicer's death is part of the weird legacy.

Peter Gizzi, almost two generations removed from the world of the sixties, has done much towards reviving the work of Spicer and his circle. Through his classes at Brown University in the early 90s, he helped reestablish Spicer's place as central to post-language pre-millennium writing. Spicer's poetics, as expounded in *The House That Jack Built* (four lectures given in June and July 1965, literally weeks before the poet's death), are there to be used, like a conduit into the future. Especially important are the first two lectures, presented to an intimate audience, mostly poets and painters, in a living room in Vancouver, and in which—usually in response to questions—he discusses his theories of poetry as "dictation" (coming from the outside in) and "the serial poem," possibly his greatest gift. His sense of narrative is akin to DeKooning's idea that content is just "a glimpse," a dark room where (as Robin Blaser describes it) "a light is turned on for a minute. Then it's turned off again and you go into a different room where a light is turned on and turned off." At the center of every serial poem there's a sense of self displaced by language that recreates a feeling of longing to find something outside oneself that is permanent, "the real," something that endures more than a minute. The promise of love that sex carries with it is never more than that. In Gizzi's terrific after-

word, he says that "instead of seeing poetry as a vessel for self-expression, it (Spicer) prefers the removal of self from the concerns of the poem." Spicer's poetry is mostly about this process of removal, the impossible task of stepping aside.

In *Golem*, a lost book-length poem discovered by Kevin Killian and Fran Herndon in Spicer's archive, the overriding metaphor is "the fix," i.e., you can't fight against anything that's already been corrupted. There's no reason to. This is pretty much the seemingly apolitical stance of Spicer's discourse in the Berkeley lecture, "Poetry and Politics." Non-involvement (as a way of being in the world) doesn't mediate one's anger at being alive in a world where resistance is the only sane activity. Spicer was, if nothing, and at times in spite of himself, humanely political. "He died from killing himself. / His public mask was broke / because / He no longer had a public mask," he writes in *Golem*, and in the Berkeley lecture: "I think poets ought to center on, not just poetry, but, well, 'community' is a good word. If you could make your own community, which you can't—there's no question about that—but if you could, that would be ideal."

Spicer's generosity to the young was the embodiment of his teachings, and he gave himself up to a future he had already mapped out in his poems. His authority was fueled by living on the heroic edge of anonymity, by paying a price without making concessions, and as a consequence his work transcends the time in which it was written. *Golem*, dated 1962, could have been written yesterday, and still sounds new. These books do much to widen the periphery and bring Spicer's poetry into clear light.

— Lewis Warsh

Lewis Warsh is a poet, novelist and publisher.

**RENEE GLADMAN**

*Not Right Now*

Second Story Books (946 DeHaro Street, San Francisco, CA 94107), 1998, 24 pages, \$5.00.

Big sad-faced parallel infinity (I said), What's your story?

Twenty-five small, squarish prose paragraphs from on the bus, on the job, on the street, in the bed. Reading, one finds the world has been forgotten. And in the same moment the world has forgotten one.

I am, I said. Reading this.

I am on the job, on the bus, on the street, in the bed. Emerging, I am stunned.

Suppose you make the acquaintance of a person who is attractive and interesting, but who seems to be harboring a secret. It would be tactless and reprehensible to try to penetrate this secret and wrest it away into a parallel infinity.

My first teacher said: Never stop writing because you have run out of ideas.

I am, I said.

The longer you delay in writing down an idea the more mature it will be when it finally surrenders itself. Reading this in time, the time itself bursts open, so to speak, like a flower whose calyx emits the astrigent perfume of irony.

Reading twenty-five small squarish

block prose paragraphs, I find myself not in the center of the language forest but on the outside, on the bus, on the job, on the street, in the bed. From plain and simple prose paragraphs big sad-faced parallel infinity calls into the center of the language forest, aiming at that single spot where Echo is able to give, in her own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one.

Reading this, it would be tactless and reprehensible to try to wrest this secret away from one, in the same moment the world has been forgotten.

— Tom Clark

Tom Clark's latest work is a poetic novel, *The Spell*, forthcoming from Black Sparrow Press in Spring 2000.

**MERRY FORTUNE**

*Blind Stints*

Linear Arts Books (New York, NY), 1998, 68 pages, \$9.95. Available at St. Mark's Bookshop.

Imagine yourself a scientist, perhaps in the movie *Fantastic Journey*, shrunk to fit inside a human body. You enter through the ear and there's no leaving until you get to the heart. That's the reader's experience in Merry Fortune's *Blind Stints*—a collection of stories and poems organized into three parts. With each successive section, *Blind Stints* cuts through another layer to discover the true nature of passion and daily experience. This collection is often lyrical

cal and wry, always stimulating, emotional and honest.

*Blind Stints* is as much about process, experimentation and precise language as it is about content. *Blind Stints* rebels against uniformity, which Fortune likens to using all the crayons in her box of 64. More importantly, Fortune trusts her intuition. Her mind freely roams across the page uncensored, creating dynamic and original pieces, like "Lore/November 23, 1994," about the life of a poetic aesthetic.

Child is born by mouth loved once or not.

They say it all happens in a season or lifetime

spoon is born  
dance is born  
dance is taken away, loved once or not

In "Love Dogs Nobody Knows The Names Of," she reminds us we're just another species in the animal kingdom, and when measured

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against dogs it's clear we can learn a few things about life's essentials:

Only dogs are beautiful. Trained or not, only dogs can reveal truth. Only dogs love. Really love. And dance—really dance. So let's wrestle ourselves like dogs to familiar grounds please. A signal please. Now.

Trust Fortune as she leapfrogs vast territories of fantasy, dream, memoir, rumination and observation, all the while making brilliant mental connections between seemingly disparate thoughts. In the opening story, "Untitled," about the condition and struggle of the artist in society, we go from a state of awareness—"I am not desiring tangibles, materials—but desiring...the softness of a flame—not the softness of the hair, which you can touch..." to musings about dreaming—"Dreams become metaphors for bodily processes my many hearts become bicycles and dirt, shadows are vocal chords...Born blue in the baby morning risen by spare love and change the eyes are given powers they don't have..." to a recollection about a jazz musician who would only play for money—"I told him he could miss a lot with such an attitude like perhaps someday having an opportunity to play with me."

*Blind Stints* doesn't change life, but affirms it. Fortune goes through the world heart first. This vulnerability allows her to marvel at life, and appreciate the moment in an unpretentious way.

— Donna Cartelli

Donna Cartelli, curator of the Rising Cafe reading series, has work forthcoming in *Explosive* and *Lungfull!*.

MAGGIE DUBRIS



photo by Suzanne Gallant

*WillieWorld*

Cuz Editions (P.O. Box 1599, Peter Stuyvesant Station, New York, NY 10009-1599), 1998, 59 pages, \$6.95 paper.

For many years I've been fascinated and almost obsessed by attempts to distinguish what differentiates much American writing from writing in other parts of the world, places with more obviously inextricable ties to elsewhere, places with more apparent "history." Not that there's any lack of history or ties here, but too many of our most innovative and formally interesting writers expend too much energy on diminishing or disguising such concerns, lest they appear too clear or, worse yet, too human, with all the attendant ambiguities that might engender. There are, of course, many practitioners writing books where people still open doors and windows and walk around and scratch their noses and put sugar in their coffee, or the equivalent. And then there are made-to-order multiculturalists with ready made fare, only too willing to plug into the reader's expectations. But there are also more and more writers who've been on the receiving end of history and place and peoplehood and who have managed to refuse any and all of the circumscribed terms described above, producing work that has allowed America a path back into the world on ancient terms that are so new we're always still startled by them. I think here, for example, of some of the work of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Juan Felipe Herrera, Leslie Marmon Silko, Myung Mi Kim, Sesshu Foster, and others.

When I first encountered *WillieWorld* by Maggie Dubris, there was a superficial resonance that led back to Hubert Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn*. The often harrowing accounts of her life as a 911 paramedic in New York City seemed like familiar terrain. But the further into her world I entered, the more I understood that she is carving out a new space, breaking the all too commonly adhered-to rules of self-censorship, circumscription, theoretical smugness and programmatic blindness along the way. Here are sentences that, at any turn, could tear your heart open: "I remember as we lifted her into the ambulance, her bangs fell back, and that was when I noticed the holes in her head; as if someone had taken a nail and driven it into her skull." Here are words willing to stake out a relationship to the real that has to be earned; in Jack Spicer's terms words as "what we hold on with... as valuable in themselves as rope with nothing to be tied to."

In this stunning debut, Maggie Dubris creates a fabric in which words are tied to the world, to the elusive fate of people exposed to misery, evil and tenderness of their own and others' making. This world—and the eerie and eloquent poetry, prose and prose poetry generating it—corresponds more to writing emerging from situations of enormous urgency (the Beirut of Etel Adnan

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or Mahmoud Darwish, the Istanbul shanties of Latife Tekin, the twisted exile of Emine Sevgi Ozdamar's Berlin, the terrorized Buenos Aires of Alicia Partnoy, or the besieged Sarajevo of Semezdin Mehmedinovic) than anything American that readily comes to mind.

More startling even than the role of witness that makes some of this writing seem like a survivor's account, is the willingness Dubris has to skirt the borders between tragedy and sentiment, letting her words open emotional spaces that are too often considered uncouth, out of bounds, off limits. After "a small blond boy" is discovered "with a pitchfork through his back," followed by a vision of a familiar street figure walking through the Upper West Side, "his flesh long dissolved into the earth of Potter's Field," his bones "bleached," we are given this: "The rain falls into a tired sea. How

many children does / the sandman need? / All I wanted to do was race through this life. Soot from the factories / sifts through the air where we stand. And you catch / what you catch as / moss grows on the stones of the damned." In addition to such exhilarating flights of lyric that achieve the redemptive noise of great rock songs, there is an ever-present sense of vulnerability, fragility and mortality in *WillieWorld*, sorely lacking in too much of what passes for work that should be paid attention to. There are many reasons why *WillieWorld* is an important book; suffice it to say that it is a work of fierce resistance and its author, Maggie Dubris, a writer of profound integrity whose new work we can only await with eagerness and trepidation at the bittersweet encounters and myriad challenges it will be sure to offer.

— Ammiel Alcalay

Ammiel Alcalay's new book, *Memories of Our Future: Selected Essays 1982-1998* is due out this fall from City Lights.

## DIANE GLANCY, MARK NOWAK, EDITORS

*Visit Teepee Town: Native Writings After the Detours*  
 Coffee House Press (Minneapolis, MN), 1999.  
 372 pages, \$17.95 paper.

With the arrival of this book comes the arrival of a generation. It is a generation of voices that have had centuries to resonate inside time and humans, through cultures that have survived many lineages, and many generations. *Visit Teepee Town* contains the kind of work I await in the upcoming years. In the pages of this anthology are endless allegories and paradigms of possibilities. From each unfold amazing constructions and complex orchestrations. Connecting and spanning bridges to disseminate such tremendous and important work is vital and must be

pursued.

In the introduction, Diane Glancy writes:

Read quickly, misread the possibilities of word and their happenings. At the same time, I think of the insertiveness of these writings as a slow map of the poetics, the bricolage, the word possibilities up-to-bat. To ease past the significant detail and study of this field.

The language of relationship, formation and gesture are apparent in James Thomas Steven's *Tokinish*. While there is a longing to connect with land masses and persons, *Tokinish* is at the same time a celebration of individuality within the 20th century and the facts of survival. While this redefinition of Post-Indian Poetics is evolving, its inspirations are rooted in a history as old as Earth.

As contemporary indigenous beings we can document stories of our ancestors and create novel ideas for new stories such as those represented in this collection. These stories may vary from boarding school stories in Lise McClouds' "Mixed American Pak" to those who witnessed oppression throughout the centuries and fought for the survival of their stories. There are many representatives here, from the Latino and Yaqui to the Kanaka maoli, or Hawaiians.

There are newly published writers such as Allison Adele Hedge Coke. Her book *Dog Road Woman*, which is also the title of the poem included in the anthology, was published by Coffee House Press several years back. Her poems are fluid, with images ranging from a struggling migrant worker harvesting tobacco fields in Virginia to a mother fighting off tyrant rats to save her two children from death. More established writers like Sherman Alexie are also included. In "Native American Broadcasting System," Alexie is riding the airwaves. The orchestration of verse and syn-

tax is intriguing, yet the poem seems to be fumbling with each phrase. Just as it appears to be lost it regains its structure and concludes in a uniform manner. Diane Glancy uses a cunning approach to deconstruct and reconstitute the word "tomatoes" in "Tomatoes." Finally, Peter Blue Cloud's satirical perspective on assholes and anthropologists leads us to the conclusion that it would be easier to excuse those who must excuse their own behavior. These endeavors will inspire others to carry on.

The broad perspectives in Native contemporary and traditional voices this collection has to offer is astounding. I have yet to discover a place that has the variety of *Visit Teepee Town*. If I were to recommend a place to go today I would say, Visit Teepee Town.

—Cris Apache

Cris Apache graduated from the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

**HARRY MATHEWS, ALASTAIR BROTCHE, EDITORS**

*Oulipo Compendium*

Atlas Press (London, UK), 1998. 336 pages, \$19.99.

The word "Oulipo" (Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle/Workshop of Potential Literature) comes from the French and is the name of the group founded in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and Francois Le Lionnais. *The Oulipo Compendium*, edited by Harry Mathews and Alastair Brotchie, tries to package a wealth of knowledge in one 336-page volume. For those who don't read French, the most obvious advantage of this book is that the text is in English—here is a great source of some of the group's work in translation. The first in this volume—the one that led to the formation of Oulipo—is Raymond Queneau's *100,000,000,000,000 Poems*, written in 1960.

In the front of the book is a "Directions for Use." These directions and the layout of the book are more confusing than helpful. Sometimes they almost seem like a Oulipian writing technique, filled with mathematical circumscription. Yet, despite being confusing at times, and not always clearly explaining terms, the book is inspiring.

This compendium is a handy book for writers who believe they are experiencing writer's block. Read about one of the Oulipo experiments, and write a poem. The German poet Schuldt, whose work is Oulipian although he is not a member of the group, works with acronymic poetry. The entry reads: "Acronymic poetry. Verse in which the letters of a given word furnish the initials of the words used in each line." Then an English example of his poem "laugh" is provided to help demonstrate the

form. Another, well-known Oulipo experiment, N + 7, is given a comprehensive definition that begins: A method invented by Jean Lescure that (in Queneau's terse definition) "consists in replacing each noun (N) with the seventh following it in a dictionary."

The compendium has to some degree the format of an encyclopedia, and the entries are in alphabetical order. Besides a large section for a "Bibliotheque Oulipienne" (a list and descriptions of pamphlets written by the group since 1960), there are three small sections for splinter groups: Oulipopo (potential detective fiction), Oupeinpo (potential painting), and Ou-x-pos (potential groups concerning fields other than literature). The Oupeinpo section provides plenty of black and white illustrations and photographs. The entry for Plaited pictures includes images that can be cut up and constructed into a Plaited picture, and the Ou-x-pos section includes comic strips.

From this book one gets an historical perspective on Oulipo and an understanding of its techniques. There are plenty of biographical notes such as the entry on Oulipo's current President Noël Arnaud and analyses of works such as Georges Perec's novel, *Life A User's Manual*. From this volume one can also learn which of the group's work is available in English translation. While Oulipo may never enter the spotlight with its avant-garde precursors, Surrealism and Dadaism, this compendium may increase an awareness in the inquisitive English reader. Those of a more scholarly bent will find this a worthy addition to other Oulipo-related books in their libraries.

—Philip Good

Philip Good is the winner of *Tool a Magazine's* poultry-house - inspired poem contest.

**ANGE MLINKO**

*Matinées*

Zoland Books (Cambridge, MA), 1999. 55 pages, \$13.00.

Since everyone in the poetry world knows everyone else, little disinterested attention comes the poet's way. We love, rightfully so, the review out of the blue written by one we "know" by name only. This review is by a friend of Ange Mlinko's who believes that, to paraphrase James Schuyler's lines from "To Frank O'Hara," one day people who never laid eyes on Ange will meet and talk about her work. They too will "get a great big cuff from a two-by-four of light."

To my parents' generation a matinée meant sex in the afternoon. The sex in *Matinées* is between Mlinko and language and the poems are gratified like Lucky Pierre.

They have that rosy look of delight; they take joy and give it. Mlinko learned from Frank O'Hara and Bernadette Mayer to embrace inspiration and give herself to a poem wholeheartedly. Her first lines plunge right in, "Three glasses of clover and bad handwriting" or "teaching hand massage at a party lying in a strange bed." Even the sentences that begin poems hurry, "I turn off their songs to hear my song hearing nothing I wait." The poems that follow are all feeling and appetite. Mlinko loves parties so much that she might agree with Jane Austen that "everything happens at a party." Her way is to abandon herself and then, step back a little. The title "Immediate Orgy and Audit"—she used it for a chapbook—is Mlinko to a tee.

Boston... Providence... New York, Mlinko is a city poet for whom the city is fresh and light-filled, as it is when we leave a *matinée*, pleasurably guilty to have spent the afternoon in a movie. Her work has two qualities that cannot be faked: a sense of humor and life itself.

— William Corbett

Zoland Books will publish William Corbett's new collection of poems *Boston Vermont* this fall.

**MYUNG MI KIM**

*Dura*

Sun & Moon (Los Angeles, CA), 1998. 87 pages, \$12.95.

Book, Word, Letter, Syllable.

The untranslatable world. Translate it.

*A provisional translation* (44)

And again, translate it. *Task of tender* (35)

*Parts agree disagree in single action* (16)

Parts pull apart, towards, into—withdrawn and exoskeletal, an interior opened and an exterior exploded and the valence being. Being oppositional, simultaneous, not continuous, contentious, complementary, conjunctive, accumulative, the single action become plural. And becoming. A book which refuses to contain, which moves forth, seeks, [brackets open

*If one thing is seen and seen clearly and the effort to see it* (14)

Effort and sight, relation and distinction, the desire to see (not possess) to speak (not define) to examine *Place, Time, State, Attitude, Activity, Experiment* (108). Precisely provisional translations in seven sections:

**COSMOGRAPHY:** *Of the opening spaces of the opening itself* (14)

*The beginnings of things* (9) in spaced lines, paced, phrases spaced across the line and the page, refusing explanation in favor of *Transcription barely permeable* (11), *Globe and a model of the planets* (18), *Sound as it comes* (18).

**MEASURE:** *A way is open(ed), a hole is made* (27)

Couplets which are not couplets, unwilling couplings, *Signets to authenticity and foremost authority* (28), pairings which undo into *The even invisible currency* (28) of appropriation, misappropriation, misapprobation, *So writ the purpose / voyage lay bare* (23).

**LABORS:** *Due west directly west* (32)

Constructing America, constructing a name, a pronunciation or pronouncement in sections of seven lines (save one lost), *Placement between l and r* (33). Assumptions, occupations, labors, powers, to afford, to title, to attribute, to evidence, *To cross and alter* (35). *Paper follows the trade route west* (25); we follow paper.

**CHART:** *Call ancestry lost / Collapse and valence / Brevity and gesture* (42)

Couplings of a different sort (*Ritual feign / Hostile warrant / Burning stylus* (39)) in sevens and eights, space and crowd. From *Native place* (39) to *To be precisely from nowhere* (50). Events as time mishearing (40) where, pond, plants, body, house, heart, the human heart, *Framed by amateurish maps* (40) become lost, dispelled, severed, rifted, stunted, commodified, in *An America as big as it is* (42).

**THIRTY AND FIVE BOOKS:** *Error gathering. Listen with your eyes because here you cannot decipher what is said out of the effort of mouths.* (68)

Suddenly sentences. Formed phrases, paragraphs, splinters of narrative, proposings, descriptions, interpretations, limits. A life—*Little in the way of progress* (59)—of daily soil, adjustments, *Names of capitals. Names of cities. Search for water with plastic jugs that two gulps will drain* (62), ventures, police, news, blood, *What is nearest is destroyed* (73). *Having arrived here* (85), *In all respects already dying* (82), being put to a proposal and process of dying, and yet *All harmonics sound* (85).

**PROGRESS IN LEARNING:** *Shaped like relation suggested like progress* (93)

A conversation between fours and threes, tonalities drawn, raised, lowered, displayed, *Citation under iteration* (90) with space *Stroke by stroke / carved* (92). Free will already perhaps foreclosed, *Experiment of populations* (93) propelled (progressing?) to *Polity harvest other human constructs* (93).

**HUMMINGBIRD:** *Translate:* (97)

Bracketed and unbracketed, a renewed space. Closing certain books, opening certain others.

Letter, syllable, and word model plurality / Studios need might useful arts explore (105) Needful, needed, plural, provisional (nourishing: provisions), useful, studious, exploratory. Syllable, letter, word, book: *Dura*.

— Jen Hofer

Jen Hofer is currently editing and translating an anthology of contemporary poetry by Mexican women.

**JACK COLLOM**

*Dog Sonnets*

Jensen/Daniels (P.O. Box 3157, Jersey City, NJ 07303-3157), 28 pages, \$4.00.

An argument might be made that Ted Berrigan was the first poet to democratize the sonnet. Ted performed this Whitman-style, cobbling his sonnets from lists of poetic lines. Or, if Berrigan's aleotropic equalization of the sonnet's syllogistic mode doesn't seem so populist as fuzzy-logical, perhaps the argument might be that Berrigan turned cyber-sonnets, collaging their syntax so the lines conjoin Lucky Pierre style: front, back, top or bottom. Either way they're as American as Chuck Berry's "Any Old Way You Want It."

That freedom propels Jack Collom's entertaining, intelligent and educational *Dog Sonnets*. While not necessarily as syntactically free as Berrigan (though Collom does crank out some twists worthy of Clark Coolidge: "to moment is to know"), these *Sonnets* show a breadth, width and range of vocabulary that, when coupled with Collom's facility with rhyme and rhythm, makes them swing very loose and lovely. Vocabulary samples from ecology, linguistics, ornithology, dramaturgy, politics, and car mechanics, to name a few, jam appropriately and/or playfully. "Inhumans perch and fade,

shapeshifting symbols,/Perhaps, of my own phenomenology./Optician tells me they're normal glitches—dimples/in windshield of epistemology." In her useful intro Lyn Hejinian notes, "there is no part of experience precluded from [his] sonnets."

Collom's nights and days are processed in meditations such as these: "There is one patch of ice, a northeast circles,/Sharply darker than the rest. I think /In spring this part'll liquefy first; the murk'll/Percolate its lively inner stink//loaded with food. Ma llard, milady swim/thereforeon." The *Homemade World* (as Hugh Kenner aptly titled some American art) is never more sophisticated nor more primal than in Collom's homespun poems. His poetry is a national treasure, and should be better known. Stop me if you've heard this before but all Collom needs is a good editor, a *Selected Poems* and some national distribution. As Collom writes, "You oughta read my head."

— Keith Abbott

Keith Abbott's latest novel is entitled *Arfy Darfy Love*.

**ANSELM BERRIGAN**

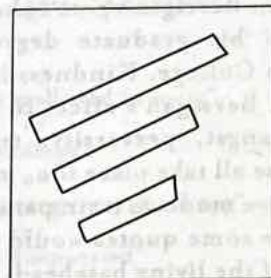
*Integrity and Dramatic Life*

Edge Books (P.O. Box 25642, Washington, DC 20007), 1999, 63 pages, \$10.00.

Another perfect-bound book, filthy with poetry. But look, this one is smiling and waving. Can it be? Dear me, it is, the first full book of poems by Anselm Berrigan. Eddie's brother. For the last three or so years, he's re-made New York his home, working here and there, writing poems. Great poems. He's figured something out that very few before him have—Bob Dylan, Eileen Myles, Alice Notley (his mom)—that it's probably more important to keep talking than to let the moment

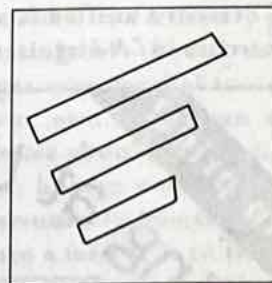
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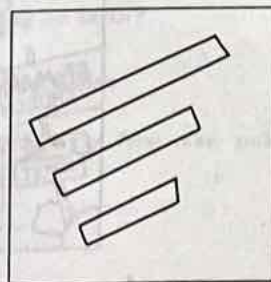
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*Integrity and Dramatic Life* comes from Rod Smith's Edge Books, same place that brought you *They Beat Me Over the Head with a Sack*, which it includes, minus the poems titled after Pavement songs. Just for the record, it adds a section of prosy 18-line poems Berrigan wrote as he finished up his graduate degree at Brooklyn College. Kindness is one aspect of Berrigan's affect in these poems; angst, perversity, teasing and praise all take place too, mainly in a passive mode. L train parataxis.

Maybe some quotes would help. "Night of the living baseheads. Dirt of luck," he writes, in "The Utility of Secrecy," writing down a couple of album titles on the jukebox at the bar on the corner of 7th St and 1st Ave. "Often I'm permitted to blow/My brains out" he says, introducing Robert Duncan to Kurt Cobain. "Present a unified facade & gloat," he writes in "A disguised fate

is wearing a net," a more Baudelairean analysis of the current deal for poets than one was prepared for.

Questions: "Shall we decode together?"; "Shall I/No longer be briskly emaciated?"; "Am I sleeping with peace?"; "Alaska, when will you let me know/If I shall ever write again?"; "Buddha/Why do you take my heart away?"; "Shall we blame our flaws on society? Over a glass of scotch?"; "Huh?"; "Eh?"; "What kind of present would you like?" Rhetorical though they may be, the questions really do draw the reader into the varying depths of irony and sincerity Berrigan navigates cheerfully.

Some key words: "citizen," "depressed," "just," "yogurt," "best," "love". Titles: "Poem minus thing," "He's enthusiastic so we like him," "A four-minute history of getting it together in order to be fabulous, briefly," "Not All There." Understated elegies: for his sister

Kate, for his father (who else could sneak chocolate donuts into an elegy?). Various tributes: Eddie as the young Abraham Lincoln; the one for his mother's fifty-first birthday is my favorite.

What makes these poems remarkable? X-ray the book if you want, he's gracious about what he's been given. You'll see. Zap zap zap.

— Jordan Davis

Jordan Davis's most recent book is *Poem On a Train*.

### ANDREW SCHELLING

*The Road to Ocosingo*

Smokeproof Press (Eric, Colorado), 60 pages, \$6.00.

Andrew Schelling's *The Road to Ocosingo* fits into the "occasional" poem category though in this case it is a kind of serial haibun, consisting of short passages set in August 1995. It's also a book of travel poetry, a journal (in both prose and lyric) of a brief trip through Mexico. Lorca's *Poeta En Nueva York* and Bishop's *Questions of Travel* come to mind as the heightened, almost hallucinatory sense of movings through landscapes (including cityscapes) not your own, and perhaps full of apprehensive fantasy or even spectral fear of—what?—the other, the alien and unknown (unknowable?).

In Schelling's version, this unknown is welcomed as inextricable with what we observe/become, unable to refuse a part of the polis in its own singular straits. By mirroring its strangeness, do we distort it the more or somehow enter its own almost-baroque festivity of cruelty, tropic color and parrot-cry? Schelling, clearly emulating another pilgrim-poet, Matsuo Basho, contemplates his new terrain with a lucid precision of detail (the microscope of Zen too site-specific to ever focus on more than "the slide" beneath its nose, but/so it sees the world). There is, in *Ocosingo*, an almost physical sense of the spec-

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A folio of 11 classic Brainard flyers and one full-length comic strip, with a special introduction by Bill Berkson. Printed in an limited edition of 250. 8 1/2 x 11 inches. Available from the Poetry Project. \$14.95.



tral, the seen (and unseen)—which acts as a cryptic undertow to what is supposedly a straightforward account of an actual trip. Nature, for Schelling, is both body and compelling evidence that, beyond a body, we're enveloped by bodies and embodiment itself—thus, compassionate extending of oneself is both necessary and complex (how to relate, how to see oneself in "foreignness") for the traveler trips in more than one way. Chiapas must include its own errancy. But the error of setting-out finds, then, the amazing occasion of its finding itself in locality which, of course, includes politics and social conflict. The occasional poem, far from being banal or unworthy, enacts itself (as Auden, for one, saw) as a powerful tiding of time, an almost literal letting-in of the power and tide of time, announcing it, its passing, this impasse.

*The Road* presses its case as a self-questioning evocation of genius loci, in this instance, militant and even bloody. But there is also a kind of luxuriating in food, drink, smoke, sun, music, conversation, that bespeaks an epicurean temperament bent on digging-in voluptuously—enjoying itself. Surely this slight contradiction is not inimical to being human, since we all want to enjoy ourselves—sometimes even in the midst of war, deprivation or mourning. Schelling puts forth a feast for the senses, a meal in itself; inside that meal, however, is a toxin that may intoxicate the reader or knock the reader out. This toxin is nothing less than the contemporary, this bracing time we live in, pressing in our face atrocity exhibit ad nauseum (four balls for Ballard, let him walk) and the slack indifference/ignorance also sensed, since, in fact, we carry on as if the world weren't exploding, if our little world manages not to. Schelling exposes the reader to a rendering of a place where time and history matter, where space constricts one as well as opens one, where details drive in guilt as well as innocence, where death has been present, where wrong has wronged.

But I'm not concerned in this review with one more political "suggestion" concerning Chiapas. Schelling exposes us to our own frailty, our own decisive wandering between fact and fiction, power and weakness, sadness and joy. Sometimes his eyes are "proud and unreadable," sometimes instead showing "colored threads out of...visions" or "flowers-and-song." For behind much of this depicted land, the archaic hovers like a ravishment, in lush, cruel terms, in a dazzling nativity of man primitive on primal earth. The danger, here, is Rousseau's elegiac take on "first peoples"—but since, throughout this Ocosingo piece, there lingers the stench of bloodshed and the mask of bandanna, we're in a very different up-against-it. There's a visceral taciturnity to this work, a sort of grim but gleaming silence beneath it (like a skull made of sugar).

*The Road to Ocosingo* ends strongly with a chant to glyph

which effectively erases the word itself that it reappear fresh by repetition and dislocation. Then, on his way home—at the airport, Schelling sees that Jerry Garcia has just died in California.

"What does it matter. Unnamed staff writer declares him shrewd businessman. Not a word for the music." And so human business becomes its own "returns"—sly, tough, even evil. The music, whether of a native people or of the earth itself, gets "punished," trampled, sequestered, reduced.

"Distant mountains swallowed in smog"

or

"Machine guns & sandbags"

or

"Grove of crosses leaning every which way"

or

"Temple of the Sun disappeared"

or

"Six pesos each"

Schelling, in sixty pages, compels our entrance into a world that he celebrates, terribly "Mexican," terribly "concrete"—made turbulent by the fact of terror, of murder, of what, in all worlds, threatens, impinges, rivets. Perhaps a North American should never be mistaken that he or she is situated in a citizenry powerful, presumptuous and even isolated—though the Mexico that is here in these pages may parallel too often the world we "reserve" as our own. If we can ever read another culture, perhaps we should look back and be aghast at human likeness, human complicity—though what escaped Pandora, fortunately, remains.

The hope of seeing into a mirror is to find a better bettered by its own insight into blindness. What is exotic must never be an isotope. It has to trap us and invent the "violence" of our response. The poetry of travel is indeed such a repository. It insists on our "resistance" though, through this very resistance, we connect to what we witness, and catch ourselves—

Will I have to go like the flowers that perish?  
Will my name mean nothing on earth?

—Sean Killian

Sean Killian's latest book *Feint by Feint* was published by Jensen/Daniels.

**LEONARD SCHWARTZ**

*A Flicker at the Edge of Things—Essays Towards a Poetics 1987-1997*

Spuyten Duyvil (P.O. Box 1852, Cathedral Station, New York, NY 10025), 1998, 102 pages, \$12.00.

[T]hough I have as much enthusiasm for negation as I do for tenderness, love has it over nothingness in this: the

caress not only negates all consciousness of failure, freeing one from one's past, present and future in the bargain, but it also leads to a paroxysm in the glow of which even the simplest things are invested with grandeur.

— "A Landscape as Brutal as This One:  
On Andrey Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice*"

In the works of *A Flicker at the Edge of Things*, Leonard Schwartz's ability to move from phenomenal observation to philosophical criticism to personal anecdote is exemplary of the great tradition of essayists—perhaps it was Schwartz's description of returning some 200 love letters to a former lover in the essay on Tarkovsky that first attracted me. Or a prose style which evokes a conversation with an ideal interlocutor—always provocative and challenging, yet never condescending or combative. Even in the height of polemic, Schwartz's tone is calm, contemplative, engaging, and grounded in the specificity of his own voice (as in qualifying a statement by "I think," or in returning from digression with "which brings me to..."—"the way a sudden turn / toward intimacy in a conversation can resemble // a cycle of fire purifying your past" (Joseph Donahue, "Desire," from which Schwartz's title comes).

The book is rich in sources, argument and implication—I regret I can only briefly engage the central argument regarding the revitalization of lyric, as "after a long illness." (See "A Flicker at the Edge of Things: Some Thoughts on Lyric Poetry" and "Transcendental Lyric.") This argument is philosophically grounded in a notion of "the transcendental," which Schwartz describes both statically, as a standing outside oneself in a phenomenal bracketing of particular experience, and dynamically, as the movement to become something other than oneself. Schwartz expresses a commitment to an evolving subjectivity, for which poetry is better suited than philosophy, because it "remains closer to the living body, and since it is perhaps a matter of breathing life into illusions not hardened into beliefs just yet, and of breathing out what is poisonous to the imagination, until illusion is as central as breath."

*Illusions hardened into beliefs:* Schwartz reflects on the theoretical paradoxes of late 20th century avant-garde and questions the extent to which its actual value lies in a mimetic attachment to contemporary techno-urban life. Warning then of an ironic (and mannered) positivist-realism in Language poetry—as "representation of the technological veil it critiques"—Schwartz argues that mimesis in itself is reactive, whether the mimesis of a suburban or an urban late modernism. I would go even further by analyzing the affinity between process and management, for example, or formal invention and product development.

As a model for overcoming reactive immediacy, Schwartz regards Duncan's 1987 poem "After a Long

Illness" as seminal: Schwartz finds in the poem the moment of significant transition "between the personal self and its impersonal ground." In a reevaluation of a release from immediacy, Schwartz embraces Duncan's imagination and "the poem as Vision." The edge state, or moment of the dialectic, if you will, is experienced in the Duncan poem as an "extraordinary contiguity," and an "oscillating border." My only disappointment in the book, however, is in its definition of the dynamic of the dialectic—in articulating precisely what this oscillation is. A concept such as a *determinate* negation would be useful, as would a fully articulated conception of mimesis. Despite these quibbles, though, Schwartz's argument cogently and gracefully points a way out of the post-modern endgame, a way "beyond the immediate so as to detach from the contingent fictions of the world, and not merely in a purely formal sense, but with the forces of an ecstatic throb."

While I've only touched on one aspect here, as a whole the essays in this book represent a breadth of understanding and engagement that is rare in the poetry world, returning what might otherwise be local polemic issues to a greater history of discourse. *A Flicker at the Edge* is necessary reading in what I see to be a new poetics and critical thinking in the making.

— Garrett Kalleberg

Garrett Kalleberg is a poet.

## DAVID HENDERSON

### *Neo-California*

North Atlantic Books (P.O. Box 12327, Berkeley, CA 94712), 1999, 144 pages, \$20.00.

Much has been said about the influence of jazz, particularly the pulse of John Coltrane and Miles Davis, in David Henderson's poetry. In his latest collection, *Neo-California*, the poet's love of improvisational rhythms is evident in almost every poem in the collection. Although I enjoyed the jazz-infused passages of this volume, I found myself admiring less remarked-upon aspects of Henderson's poetry.

Geography is one of the main themes in this collection, and many of the poems are set in the Northeast, the West, Mexico, the suburbs, the inner city. Henderson has an uncanny eye that can capture the essence of a place. In "California 13," for example, he writes:

Santa Monica and Venice Beach  
weekenders biking walking jogging skating  
disco-skaters rocking backyards  
tank tops halter tops and shorts  
cradling boom boxes like babies

Whereas in some of these descriptions we see a painting with the essential details in motion, there are others in which he creates an image that is a meditation, a reverie. In "Mexico City Subway Inaugural," we read:

los indias  
she walks  
slowly  
from car to car  
holding a glass  
of holy water

Politics is another major theme in this collection. One political fable about the exploitation of native cultures by greedy politicians, "Tlaloc, God of Rain" (a story told to the author by Bertha Zapata—Emiliano Zapata's wife?) is a powerful tale about the vampiristic practices of capitalism on native peoples. In the skilful hands of Henderson, the story becomes also a lovely magic realist work. This wonderful poem, perhaps my favorite in the volume, is followed by another peak, "Neruda," a haunting elegy about the death of the great poet:

Somewhere is a man  
so gracious  
as to die  
with his people  
on the day  
on the book burnings  
on the day of no political asylum  
on a day  
of the no-way equinox ...

This is the first of a handful of elegies that appear in *Neo-California*, and it is in these poems that this book, in my view, achieves its most memorable moments. The elegies to Bob Kaufman, to Miguel Piñero, to Jean-Michel Basquiat, are poems in which Henderson comments eloquently on the voraciousness and insensitivity of contemporary society toward its revolutionary artists. About Basquiat, Henderson writes:

Black boy in outerspace  
interior boroughs of the mystic city  
father figures & slobbering blow jobs  
art to die for  
right out of magic fingers  
the warhol tag on black skin  
stretching heroin as just another white surface ...

A critic of American society, a country with which he has (and rightly so) a love-hate relationship, Henderson writes that "every cause is a cause for poetry." From the evidence offered in *Neo-California* I would say yes and no. No, in his poems about South Africa and Nicaragua, which were agitprop-valid instruments at one time, but that now are just historical record and passé. Yes, when he writes ironically, and in almost a surrealist vein, about the political issues that are not

just of the moment, but that apply to all of the human condition. In a visionary vein, in "Minority," he writes:

color a minority within a minority within a minority revolution a minority within a minority within a minority within a minority

lesbians became a double minority within a majority male homosexuals became a minority within a majority a majority of white people became the chief minority and all it took was a few words at the right place at the right time.

—Jaime Manrique

Jamie Manrique's autobiography *Eminent Maricones* has just been published by University of Wisconsin Press.

### JEFF CLARK

#### *The Little Door Slides Back*

Sun & Moon (Los Angeles, CA), 107 pages, \$10.95.

*The Idiot knows the wear of his shoes can be traced to two or three boulevards in particular...*

*The Little Door Slides Back*, selected by Ray DiPalma for the 1996 National Poetry Series, is a highway of flip-pant remarks and settling selections. In this debut Clark creates a world that escapes definition, "things are not as we would have them be..." Here a space is created out of confusion; Clark using the unknown to his advantage. Floating across is a nice terror; the words here are both frightening and comforting. In "Some Information about Twenty-Three Years of Existence," Clark skips over any anticipated visionary humdrum and places himself, or paces himself, in the very real, set in hazed possibility... "all notions occur to me beginning: If I were..." The words are always moving against a sort of irritable tense-glow against gas—which is, as Zukofsky showed us, very much the ingredient of "upper limit: music, lower limit speech..."

Standout pieces include "Lunar Tercets," "Blow Notes," and "Interior," in which light is a moving part... "Glare keeps the little ones at the conveyor/and out of the head...but then, from way off, with cranking/comes my night, and when it arrives/I go to it like a callboy to a c-note."

Clark represents the Outside, a world full of confusion. What if instead of burning tires and lackluster Coke bottles, we visited convenience stores for the sweet music completed here? This book is indeed, "one part fear, one devotion." Point blank, a great book of writings.

—Erik Sweet

Erik Sweet is the co-editor of *Tool a Magazine*.

# books received.

**IVAN ARGUELLES**

*City of Angels*

Potes & Poets Press (181 Edgemont Ave., Elmwood, CT 06110-1005), 1999, 52 pages, \$7.00.

**STEVE BENSON**

*Roaring Spring*

Zasterle Press (Apdo 167, La Laguna, Tenerife, Canary Islands 38200), 1999, 52 pages.

**EDMUND BERRIGAN**

*Disarming Matter*

The Owl Press (P.O. Box 126, Woodacre, CA 94973), 1999, 82 pages, \$12.50.

**JORGE LUIS BORGES**

*Everything and Nothing*

New Directions, 1999, 108 pages, \$7.50.

**LEONARD BRINK**

*Secrets of the Universe*

Hophophop Press (234 West 16th St. Apt. 1B, New York, NY 10011), 1999.

**LAYNIE BROWNE**

*The Agency of Wind*

Avec Books (Penn Grove, CA), 1999, 125 pages, \$12.00.

**LEE ANN BROWN**

*Polyverse*

New American Poetry Series, Sun & Moon Press (Los Angeles, CA), 1999, 187 pages, \$11.95.

**TINA CELONA**

*Songs & Scores*

Spectacular Books, (P.O. Box 250648, New York, NY 10025), 1999, 24 pages.

**MICHAEL COFFEY**

*87 North*

Coffee House Press (Minneapolis, Mn), 1999, 105 pages, \$13.95.

**MARTIN CORLESS-SMITH**

*The Garden*

Spectacular Books (P.O. Box 250648, New York, NY 10025), 28 pages, \$6.00.

**CID CORMAN**

*Nothing at All*

Poetry New York (P.O. Box 3184, Church Street Station, NY 10008), 1999, 19 pages, subscription for six pamphlets a year, \$20.00.

**LYNN CRAWFORD**

*Blow*

Hard Press (West Stockbridge, MA), 1998, 84 pages.

**RACHEL M. DALEY**

*By Postcard*

Nominative Press (19 Hodge Ave. #9, Buffalo, NY 14222), 12 pages, \$5.00.

**MICHAEL DAVIDSON**

*The Arcades*

O Books (San Francisco, CA), 1999, 93 pages.

**ALFREDO DE PALCHI**

*Addictive Aversions*

Xenos Books (P.O. Box 52152, Riverside, CA 92517), 1999, 138 pages, \$13.00.

**TOM DEVANEY**

*The American Pragmatist Fell In Love*

Banshee (P.O. Box 11186, Philadelphia, PA 19136), 70 pages, \$10.00.

**MARK DUCHARME**

*Ballad*

Dead Metaphor Press Broadside Series #1 (P.O. Box 2076, Boulder, CO 80306).

**MARCELLA DURAND**

*City of Ports*

Situations Press (71 Greene St., NY, NY 10013), 15 pages, \$6.00.

**STEPHEN ELLIS**

*White Gravity*

Poetry New York (P.O. Box 3184, Church Street Station, NY 10008), 1999, 16 pages, subscription for six pamphlets a year, \$20.00.

**DAN FEATHERSTON**

*26 Islands*

Primitive Publications (1706 U St., NW, #102, Washington, DC 20009), 1999, \$4.00.

**BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER**

*Algebraic Melody*

Zasterle Press (Gran Canaria), 1998, 45 pages.

**B.H. FRIEDMAN**

*Swimming Laps*

Edgewise (24 Fifth Ave., N224, New York, NY 10011), 1999.

**SCOTT GIBSON, EDITOR**

*Blood & Tears*

*Poems for Matthew Shepard*

Painted Leaf Press (New York, NY), 1999, 147 pages, \$15.00.

**ALLEN GINSBERG**

*Death & Fame; Last Poems 1993-1997*

HarperFlamingo, HarperCollins Publishers, 1999, 116 pages, \$23.00, hardcover.

**ZALIN GRANT, ED.**

*The Two of Us; Forbidden Tales of the French Erotique*

Pythia Press (P.O. Box 2010, Reston, VA 20195), 1999, 217 pages, Hardcover, \$25.00.

**ALLAN GRAUBARD**

*Fragments from Nomad Days*

Allan Graubard (442 W. 57th St., 3H, New York, NY 10019), 1999.

**TED GREENWALD**

*Something, She's Dead*

Poetry New York (P.O. Box 3184, Church Street Station, NY 10008), 1999, 25 pages, subscription for six pamphlets a year, \$20.00.

**JUAN FELIPE HERRERA**

*Border-Crosser with a Lamborghini Dream*

The University of Arizona Press (Tucson, AZ), 1999, 99 pages.

**FANNY HOWE**

*Forged*

The Post Apollo Press (35 Marie St., Sausalito, CA 94965), 1999, 40 pages, \$7.00.

**ANDREW JORON**

*The Removes*

House of Outside Series, Hard Press, Inc., 1999, 77 pages, \$12.95.

**SHERRY KEARNS**

*Sister*

Poetry New York (P.O. Box 3184, Church Street Station, NY 10008), 1999, 18 pages, subscription for six pamphlets a year, \$20.00.

**DEAN KOSTOS**

*The Sentence That Ends With a Comma*

Painted Leaf Press (New York, NY), 1999, 105 pages.

**DAVID LEHMAN**

*The Last Avant-Garde; The Making of the New York School of Poets*

Doubleday, 1997, 433 pages, Hardcover, \$27.50.

**GARY LENHART**

*Father and Son Night*  
Hanging Loose (Brooklyn, NY), 1999, 71 pages,  
\$13.00.

**DENISE LEVERTOV**

*The Great Unknowing; Last  
Poems*  
New Directions (80 8th Ave., New York, NY  
10011), 1999, 80 pages, \$19.95.

**JOEL LEWIS**

*Vertical's Currency; New and  
Selected Poems*  
Talisman House, Publishers (P.O. Box 3157, Jer-  
sey City, NY 07303-3157), 1999, 136 pages,  
\$13.95.

**DAVID MATLIN**

*A Halfman Dreamer*  
Poetry New York (P.O. Box 3184, Church Street  
Station, NY 10008), 1999, 15 pages, subscrip-  
tion for six pamphlets a year, \$20.00.

**BERNADETTE MAYER**

*Midwinter Day*  
Reissue, New Directions (New York, NY), 1999,  
pages 128, \$12.95.

**CHRIS MCCREARY**

*Sansom Agonistese*  
Potes & Poets Press (181 Edgemont Ave., Elm-  
wood, CT), 1999, \$6.00.

**JENN MCCREARY**

*Errata Stigmata*  
Potes & Poets Press (Elmwood, CT), 1999,  
\$6.00.

**EDWARD MENDELSON**

*Later Auden*  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999, 570 pages,  
Hardcover, \$30.00.

**SHEILA E. MURPHY & PETER  
GANICK**

*Numens from Centrality*  
Paper Brain Press (San Diego, CA), 1999.

**CHARLES NORTH**

*New and Selected Poems*  
New American Poetry Series, Sun & Moon Press  
(Los Angeles, CA), 1999, 205 pages, \$12.95.

**VALERY OISTEANU**

*Zen Dada*  
Linear Arts Books, 1999, 51 pages.

**JENA OSMAN**

**The Character**

Beacon Press (Boston, MA), 1999, 128 pages,  
\$15.00.

**BOB PERELMAN**

*The Future of Memory*  
Roof Books (New York, NY), 1998, 115 pages,  
\$14.95.

**FERNANDO PESSOA, EDITED AND  
TRANSLATED BY RICHARD ZENITH**  
*Fernando Pessoa & Co.: Selected  
Poems*

Grove Press, 1998, 290 pages, \$13.00.

**WANG PING, ED.**

*New Generation: Poems from  
China Today*  
Hanging Loose Press, 1999, 235 pages, \$16.00.

**LEROY V. QUINTANA**

*The Great Whirl of Exile*  
Curbstone Press (321 Jackson St., Willimantic,  
CT 06226), 1999, 59 pages, \$12.95.

**BIN RAMKE**

*Wake*  
University of Iowa Press (Iowa City, IA 52242),  
1999, 114 pages.

**TOM RAWORTH**

*Meadow*  
The Post-Apollo Press (35 Marie Street,  
Sausalito, CA 94965), 1999, 40 pages, \$7.00.

**MATTHIAS REGAN**

*The Most of It*  
Nominative Press (19 Hodge Ave. #9, Buffalo,  
NY 14222), 16 pages, \$5.00.

**KIT ROBINSON**

*Democracy Boulevard*  
Roof Books (New York, NY), 1998, 101 pages.

**JUDY ROITMAN**

*Diamond Notebooks*  
Nominative Press (19 Hodge Ave. #9, Buffalo,  
NY 14222), 43 pages, \$5.00.

**LEE ANN RORIPAUGH**

*Beyond Heart Mountain*  
National Poetry Series, Penguin Putnam Inc.,  
1999, 71 pages, \$14.95.

**CAMILLE ROY**

*Swarm*  
Black Star Series (4303 20th St., San Francisco,  
CA 94114), 1998, 119 pages.

**LINDA V. RUSSO**

**Constellation Voice**

Nominative Press (19 Hodhe Ave. #9, Buffalo,  
NY 14222), 16 pages, \$5.00.

**SAL SALASIN**

Green Bean Press (P.O. Box 237, New York, NY  
10013), 1999, 81 pages, \$9.95.

**LESLIE SCALAPINO**

*New Time*  
Wesleyan University Press, 1999, 104 pages,  
\$11.95.

**AARON SHURIN**

*Paradise of Forms*  
Talisman House Publishers, 1999, 144 pages,  
\$14.95.

**JULIANA SPAHR**

*Spiderwasp or Literary Criticism*  
Spectacular Books (P.O. Box 250648, New York,  
NY 10025), 1999, 28 pages.

**MICHAEL GREGORY STEPHENS**

*Going Thoreau*  
Poetry New York (P.O. Box 3184, Church Street  
Station, NY 10008), 1998, 21 pages, subscrip-  
tion for six pamphlets a year, \$20.00.

**COLE SWENSEN**

*Try*  
University of Iowa Press (Iowa City, IA 52242),  
1999, 79 pages.

**MERVYN TAYLOR**

*The Goat*  
Junction Press (P.O. Box 40537, San Diego, CA  
92164), 1999, 93 pages, \$11.00.

**SUSAN THACKREY**

*empty GATE*  
Listening Chamber (1605 Berkely, CA 94703),  
1999, 84 pages, \$10.00.

**DARREN DANIEL, RANI SINGH,  
EDS.**

*Think of the Self Speaking: Harry  
Smith*  
Cityful Press (Seattle, WA), 1998, 175 pages,  
\$16.95.

**MIKE TOPP**

*Basho's Milk Dud*  
Low-Tech Press (3073 47th St., LIC, NY 11103),  
1999, 16 pages, \$6.00.

**RODRIGO TOSCANO**

*Partisans*  
O Books (5729 Clover Dr., Oakland, CA  
94618), 1999, 64 pages, \$10.00.

**GEORGE TYSH**

*Dream Sites: A Visual Essay*

Past Tents (332 West Woodland, Ferndale, MI 48220), 88 pages, \$12.00.

**SANDRA TURNER-BARNES**

*Always a Lady*

Cadillac Publications (P.O. Box 167, Palmyra, NJ 08065-0167), 1995, 51 pages.

**KEITH WALDROP**

*Two-Part Invention*

Poetry New York (P.O. Box 3184, Church Street Station, NY 10008), 1999, 19 pages, subscription for six pamphlets a year, \$20.00.

**JO ANN WASSERMAN**

*What Counts as Proof*

Sugarbooks (106 Ridge St. #2D, New York, NY 10002), 18 pages, \$3.00.

**ROSANNE WASSERMAN**

*Other Selves*

Painted Leaf Press (New York, NY), 111 pages.

**TOM WEIGEL**

*Gingeroot Trail*

Nameaug Press (58 Huntington St. Apt. C, New London, CT 06320), 1999, 23 pages.

**JOHN A. WILLIAMS**

*Clifford's Blues*

Coffee House Press (Minneapolis, MN), 1999, 309 pages, \$14.95.

**MAGAZINES**

*First Intensity #12*

Editor: Lee Chapman (P.O. Box 665, Lawrence, KS 66044), 154 pages, \$9.00. Contributors: Tim Davis, Julia Connor, Sam Truitt, others.

*Crazyhorse #56*

Editors: Ralph Burns & Lisa Lewis (Little Rock, AR), 1999, 154 pages, \$5.00. Contributors: Sara Monahan, Reg Saner, others.

*Dharma Beat [Spring 99]*

Editor: Attila Gyenis (P.O. Box 1753, Lowell, MA 01853-1753), 1999, 12 pages, \$3.50. Contributors: Ed Ford, Stephen Ronan, others.

*Explosive #7*

Editor: Katherine Lederer (P.O. Box 250648, Columbia University Station, New York, NY 10025), 1999, 150 pages, \$6.00. Contributors: Tim Griffin, Elizabeth Robinson, Tom Devany,

Drew Gardner, Alicia Wing, David Larsen, others.

*Ixnay#2*

Editors: Chris McCreary, Jenn McCreary (1164 S. 10th St., Philadelphia, PA 19147), 1999, 53 pages, \$5.00. Contributors: Mark Salerno, Maggie Zurawski, Mark Wallace, Sheila E. Murphy, others.

*Key Satch(el) [Vol 3, #2]*

Editor: Gian Lombardo (P.O. Box 363, Haysden, MA 01039), 24 pages, \$3.00. Contributors: Ben Miller, Tom Whalen, others.

*6,500*

Editor: Brandon Downing (P.O. Box 14842, San Francisco, CA 94114-0842), 148 pages, \$8.00. Contributors: Gregory Fuchs, Noelle Kocot, David Cameron, others.

*River Styx #54*

Editor: Richard Newman (St. Louis, MO), 74 pages, \$7.00. Contributors: Catherine Bowman, Donald Finkel, others.

*Shiny #9/10*

Guest Editor: Larry Fagin (P.O. Box 13125, Denver, CO 80201), 1999, 220 pages, \$15.00. Contributors: Ted Berrigan, Carol Szamatowicz, Tony Towle, Michael Gizzi, others.

*Sniper Logic #7*

Editor: Michael Carr (Campus Box 226, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO 80309), 1999, 120 pages. Contributors: Robert Creeley, Robert Bove, Jane Wodening, others.

*The American Poetry Review [Vol 28, #3]*

Editors: Stephen Berg, David Bonanno, Arthur Vogalsang (Philadelphia, PA), 1999, 80 pages, \$3.95. Contributors: Michael Palmer, Barbara Guest, others.

*Tomorrow Magazine #19*

Editor: Tim W. Brown (Contemporary Arts Publishing, P.O. Box 148486, Chicago, Ill 60614-8486), 1999, 38 pages, \$5.00. Contributors: Walt Phillips, Nathalia Ketterer, others.

*Verse; Vol. 15, no. 3, & Vol. 16, #1*

Editors: Brian Henry and Andrew Zawacki (English Dept., Plymouth State College, Plymouth, NH 03264), 1999, 251 pages, subscriptions \$15.00, three issues a year. Contributors: Karen Volkman, Susan Schultz, others.

*Xcp 4 Cross Cultural Poetics*

Editor: Mark Nowak (601 25th Ave. So., Minneapolis, MN 55454), 1999, 158 pages, \$10.00. Contributors: Juliana Spahr, Edwin Torres, Will Alexander, others.

**Singing Horse Press**

Rosmarie Waldrop

*Split Infinities*

106 pages \$14

Linh Dinh

*Drunkard Boxing*

36 pages \$8

Harryette Mullen

*Muse & Drudge*

80 pages \$12.50

*S\*PeRM\*\*K\*T*

36 pages \$8

Killian & Scalapino

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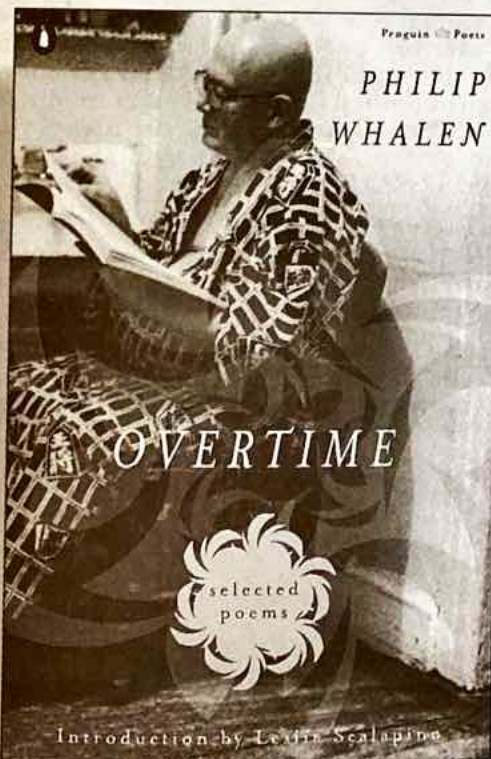


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