

# POETRY PROJECT

NEWSLETTER



Summer 2001 Issue number 185



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# News and Announcements

The questionnaire last issue asked, "What is your favorite biography (of a poet), and why?" Here is your beach reading, poets:

## Mike Scharf:

*Hope Against Hope* by Nadezhda Mandelstam (Modern Library paperback). Poet Osip Mandelstam was an early proponent of revolution in Russia, and actively worked toward it, but became disillusioned as the direction of the USSR became clear, even before Stalin seized power. This book covers the period of 1934-1938, from Mandelstam's first arrest (for composing—he never wrote it down—a poem that holds Stalin responsible for the mass killings of peasants during collectivization) to Mandelstam's death, exiled and ill in a far eastern camp. Part biography, part memoir, and part counter-denunciation, Nadezhda ("Hope" in Russian) Mandelstam wrote the book during the Krushchev "thaw," and it is simply extraordinary, documenting what she and Mandelstam had to do to stay alive in those years, and what they thought and saw while doing it. She's brilliantly and passionately devoted to the ideals that drove the revolution, to her husband's work, and to friendship. The translation is excellent and immediate. I don't think it is possible to go further than this book in making clear the stakes of poetry.

## Gary Lenhart:

I hoped for a long time that someone

would outdo Boswell by taking Frank O'Hara or Ted Berrigan as subject. There's no substitute for an eyewitness ear, unless you're even further inside, like Alice B. Toklas. Richard Holmes does the next best thing through inspired detail and obsessive enthusiasm in *The Pursuit*, his life of Shelley. This year I enjoyed Ed Sanders' life of Allen Ginsberg.

## Elizabeth Treadwell:

Because I am a big gossip I did kind of enjoy Anne Sexton's daughter's biography of same. And I suppose also because the poeming within the life of self and family is of interest to me. So also, Diana Souhami's of Stein and Toklas. Right now I am reading Janet Todd's *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* which is really a page-turner because Behn was a spy, a spendthrift, and a workin-it gal in the scene of back then in London. Also I get to find out little nuggets like that she was pals with a certain un-B&N bookseller and so could borrow unbound copies of books. Apparently they only bound 'em if you were actually purchasing.

## Stacy Szymaszek:

My two favorite poet biographies are *Poet Be Like God* by Lewis Ellingham and Kevin Killian and *Voyager* by John Unterecker. Both Spicer and Crane were outcasts and, with notoriously difficult personalities, often outcasts within their own community. Each biographer succeeds in illustrating that the singular passion

that drove these men was the desire to write poetry, the desire to become their desire.

## Lisa Jarnot:

Carl Sandburg wrote a great biography of Lincoln. I think of Lincoln as a poet. I mean he wasn't a very good poet, but he was a terrific poetic speech-writer.

## Mark Hillringhouse:

My favorite biography of a poet was Richard Holmes' two-volume Coleridge. I liked it so much that I even went to Nether Stowey to visit Coleridge's cottage and stayed in Wordsworth's house (now a B&B) in nearby Holford, and hiked the trails he took over the Quantock Hills and along the cliffs of the Bristol Channel over to the Valley of the Rocks in Lynton.

In Hampstead, London, in an Indian restaurant, I thought I saw Richard Holmes from my window. I jumped out of my seat and ran out of the restaurant and across the street (damn lefthand traffic!) and blurted out, "Are you Richard Holmes?" I terrified this poor man (he was a dead ringer) who thought he was about to be mugged by this big out-of-breath American tourist.

In Highgate, London, I had trouble finding Coleridge's last residence, but in a pub when I asked the bartender, he said, "Who's this Coleridge bloke you keep talking about?" Coleridge's Highgate residence was across from the pub with a blue

# Poem

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## Mark Morris: 2 Poems

### Proposal

Wretched age! but for you, my dearest,  
I'd recover my senses and depart  
for Australia turning my back  
on considerable grief, the anger of chauffeurs

and the malice of one-eyed politicians  
standing like a roof-gutter in need of repair  
and set up as an expert in desire  
—I'm very good—knowing how to sabotage

myself and my love so well I'd be a hit—  
and you'd be right to throw me out  
you'd be smart to change the codes  
of your fevers and heats before winter

as cold I'd surely flutter to your nest  
to ask for my food of kiss and your honeysuckle lip  
the long stringy plant of my captivity  
is yours to handle with roughness or with tact

am I clear enough? let me sit with you  
athwart cavities of fascinating night  
and if you'll love me half-way, I'll do the rest  
the roar of spring is too loud for me

the fire-trucks, the police, the babies  
too much gear and never enough  
and everyone sprawled out in trouble  
just how it feels to be apart from you

even to think of a hibiscus by itself  
on walks where you slip by like a breeze  
this is my nightmare and it's starting—  
you know me already, so come, let us go in.

## Going on Record

Some nights there's no stopping  
the sabotage of my government by your agents  
provocateurs, and I calculate the cost of my defence  
in tickets to Russia, scowls, schemes, & wars

where you can't follow, nor your picture last long  
your name feeds on this idleness—the shelves  
complain I've neglected to read and so does my tongue  
babble in confusion that I've gone to hell

all for a too-long look across the restaurant  
or was it in the library next to the telephone  
a foot perched on your instep, it was the bakery  
that gave me the metaphor for your skin

I've nothing to add to the record of infatuation  
except to sign my name, kneel to the construct  
of labor and breath that vitiates sense  
which you know nothing about, being the enemy

of plain talk and the mother of figuration  
some blame you for deviant linguistic behavior  
but I say it's not your fault that the words dawdle  
and part goes south to plunder the thesaurus

yet, I cannot support you for mayor of my heart  
yet, you are my corporate boss and make no mistake  
how will we get round these waiters and find  
a table secure from the light of contradiction

of confusion and pose and anything goes  
these busboys annoy me with their white shifts  
and hide your face whenever I look  
past the dinner clientele to your envied seat

you should tell me if you'll marry me soon  
my ideas are diminishing, I can feel it  
will you say what you mean and tip the waiter  
to deliver it, to the letter, the way that lawyers do?

# Adventures in Poetry: An Interview with Larry Fagin

by Daniel Kane

(Plus: Adventures in Poetry books reviewed by William Corbett, Peter Culley, Michael Gizzi, and Mark Wallace)

After a long hiatus, the legendary mimeo magazine *Adventures in Poetry* is being reincarnated as an imprint under its original editor, Larry Fagin, and the Boston publisher Chris Mattison. The 2001 author lineup includes John Ashbery, Clark Coolidge, Charles North, David Perry and Jacqueline Waters.

Daniel Kane interviewed Larry Fagin last December and January at two apartments on East 12th Street. Comments in brackets are Daniel Kane's.

Larry Fagin: ...so no matter what, you come off [in an interview] sounding either brittle or glib. Though Charles [North] managed to avoid both in the February/March issue of the *Newsletter*.

Daniel Kane: Well, let's give it the old college try.

LF: Rah rah.

DK: *Adventures in Poetry* began in 1968 as a mimeographed magazine, 8 1/2 by 11 inches, stapled—right?

LF: Let me get my catalog...it says here the first number is from March 1968. And the pamphlets begin in 1970.

DK: The pamphlets were booklets in the same format?

LF: Yes, from two to four dozen pages, depending on whether text appears on both sides or just one. The first was Tom Veitch's *My Father's Golden Eye*, about 30 pages. 400 copies were made and 26 of those were signed. Speed was the key. The idea was to get them out fast.

DK: You say speed was the key. I have this vision of Benzedrine speeding or feeding this process. Is that true, or am I just being corny and romantic?

LF: There was some amphetamine going around—"black beauties." And, of course, major weed and acid were everywhere. But I don't think drugs were the main source of inspiration. That came from all the good work being done in the same place at the same time. People were writing and publishing almost simultaneously. There was that '60's concept of "nowness." So it's amazing that the quality was that high. It would have seemed absurd to wait for six or eight months to see something set in stone. On a typical evening, the last of the magazine would be run off on the Gestetner [mimeograph machine] in the Project office, followed by a collating, stapling, and distribution session in the Parish Hall that lasted well into the night. Then we'd find ourselves at four in the morning eating dinner at Ratner's, a few blocks down Second Avenue.

DK: Why did you start *Adventures* in the first place?

LF: There was plenty of incentive—the writing, of course, and some good magazines [that had recently

folded] to serve as models: Ted Berrigan's *C*, Aram Saroyan's *Lines*, and Tom Clark's *Once* series, to name a few. Actually, the first mimeographed magazine I ever saw was Spicer's *J*. But, for me, the most important example would've been *Open Space*, edited by Stan Persky in 1964 in San Francisco.

DK: But it was the *Once* series that provided you with a link to New York.

LF: I guess so. I was curious about the New York scene, and had lived here in the winter of 1963-64, but hadn't had much contact with the poets and writers. Jamie MacInnis and I found a nice, big apartment on 8th Street at Avenue C for about \$75 a month. We attended readings at Le Metro and the Five Spot, where we heard Louis Zukofsky read his versions of Catullus. And we hung around the jazz scene a lot. One day, I went to a Kenneth Koch reading at NYU. There were these three smart alecks in the audience, whispering and giggling, who were obviously "insiders." It was Ted Berrigan, Ron Padgett, and Dick Gallup. I sort of "knew" them without knowing them. Later, I met Ted at the Berkeley Poetry Conference [1965], where he read his sonnets. That was a turn on for some of the San Francisco poets. But, yeah, I didn't really know that much about the work of the younger poets in New York until Tom Clark began to publish them in *Once*, *Twice*, *Thrice*, *Frice*, *Vice*, *Slice*, *Spice*, *Ice*, and *Nice*. Wow.

DK: That magazine came out of England [1966-67], where you had gone to live, after your years in San Francisco.

LF: Right. Tom was studying and teaching in Essex, where he ran off the series. He would come down to London and we'd hang out on the music and poetry scenes.

DK: London in 1966 must have been incredible.

LF: Yes, but I don't remember.

DK: Let's go back a few years to San Francisco, where you were among the poets gathered around Jack Spicer.

LF: Yeah, other than that brief stay in New York, I spent most of those years [1962-65] in Gino & Carlo's Bar on Green Street, trying to write a poem that Jack

would like.

DK: Any luck?

LF: No luck. Well, actually, I wrote some science-fiction poems that he liked, but they were so imitative of his style, I eventually threw them out.

DK: After Spicer's death, you left for London.

LF: A lot of those people had scattered by the end of 1965. I went to visit my parents, who were living outside of London, and wound up staying for a couple of years.

DK: Other than your discovery of the young New York poets, what made you come back to the U.S.?

LF: It was just time to go. Also, Lewis Warsh, whom I had met in San Francisco, and Anne Waldman showed up in London and convinced me that it was "all happening in New York." So I returned in the fall of 1967 and gave my first New York reading in the Parish Hall of St. Mark's.

DK: How did that scene differ from San Francisco?

LF: It was happy and stoned, not neurotic and drunk. And it was somehow familiar. I felt I should've been here all along. A little later, I got this rent-controlled apartment. And that's the story of my life.

DK: You've said that starting *Adventures in Poetry* was a way for you to gain control of people's minds.

LF: I never said that! I said it was a way to pass myself off as an arbiter of taste, and to gain acceptance—to click with the scene. I didn't realize that I'd been accepted from the start; I was still paranoid—a hang-over from the Spicer days. But I had enough nerve to persuade people to give me their best new work for my magazine.

DK: What with the demise of *C*, *Lines*, and the others

you mentioned, the main competition for *Adventures* must have been *The World*, which I remember you once compared to a game of pick-up basketball.

LF: Intramural sports. Anne Waldman, the most spontaneous person in America, was the editor, so *The World* had this fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants quality. Like most magazines, it would publish one or two poems each by 30 or more contributors. What I tried to do with *Adventures* was present big chunks by fewer people—something Ted had done with *C*. The first issue began with 11 poems by Joe Ceravolo. *Adventures* •3 had just three authors. So I was going for more depth, trying to be serious. But playful, too.

DK: Speaking of playful, what about all that goofy, collaborative stuff you guys used to do? When you open early issues of *The World*, you see single poems that were written by three to seven people.

LF: Oh yeah, well, that was one aspect of the scene: community effort. Someone would come into your apartment and type something on your typewriter, and someone else would

add a line, then you added one, yourself. That happened all the time. It was a stoned thing. But Ashbery, Koch, Schuyler, and O'Hara had already done it, and so had the French surrealists. An issue of *Locus Solus* was devoted to collaborations. I did my share of it; I still do, with Clark Coolidge. But I didn't publish much of it in *Adventures*—a few things by Ted and Ron. There's hardly been any collaborative writing since those days.

DK: *Adventures* •10 was entirely anonymous—no table of contents, no authors' names appear anywhere. Even the name of the magazine is missing. The covers are pornographic cartoons.

LF: I like that issue very much. It's interesting how anonymous writing alters the way one reads and understands. Something funny happens between the reader and the text. The reader is made uneasy by a strange presence—absence, really—and spends time trying to figure out who it is. It's hard to free yourself of all

—New York School? I guess it'll never die.  
People still get so earnest around that idea.  
They think it's an entity that actually existed.



that baggage—history, culture, identity, and “team” mentality. (Yes, I realize that I’m retailing Foucault.) It can be intimidating, but it creates the possibility of an unbiased reading of the poem, without a whole set of those associations.

DK: So if, say, O’Hara is on your “team,” you’ll read his poem with a positive mind-set. And maybe Stanley Kunitz is on the other side, so his poem might not get a fair hearing.

LF: Yes. The Kunitz poem doesn’t add anything to your intellectual property because it comes from the “wrong” team. Is this the end of the information part of the interview and the start of the metaphysical/political section?

DK: The end of the brittle and the beginning of the glib.

LF: God, I hope not.

DK: To continue, I suppose the idea of quality becomes a lot wobblier when you don’t know who the author is.

LF: Your whole critical apparatus gets turned on its ear. Readers are used to judging a priori by brand name alone. Maybe I should have done the whole run like *10*. But I doubt if anyone would’ve read it. They certainly wouldn’t sit still for it now.

DK: I can’t imagine anyone consuming something without a label/author. The cult of personality is too powerful.

LF: I don’t think they have the curiosity, let alone the stamina.

DK: What else has changed?

LF: I don’t know, maybe everything. Recently, Godard said about young people: “They have no doubt.” That sounds true. And sad.

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DK: Looking through the list of poets you published in *Adventures*, it seems pretty apparent you wanted to focus on the New York School.

LF: Well, I was here, wasn’t I? It was one point of view. But, Daniel—New York School? I guess it’ll never die. People still get so earnest around that idea. They think it’s an entity that actually existed. Anyway, if you look again, you’ll find plenty of work in *Adventures* by Wieners, McClure, Whalen, Borregaard, Bruce Boyd, Helen Adam, Meltzer, Spicer, Ginsberg, Corso, and even Stanley Kunitz, for cryin’ out loud!

DK: I sit corrected. You were also extending what *C* did in featuring translations of earlier French poets, such as Apollinaire, Picabia, Cendrars, and Valery Larbaud.

LF: Robert Motherwell’s book *The Dada Painters and Poets* [first published in 1951] had a lasting effect on New York artists and writers of the ’50s and ’60s. Certain French and Russian poets were important influences on the first generation. And later, Ron Padgett and others did some brilliant translations.

DK: Let’s talk about the new *Adventures in Poetry*, the series of books that you’re starting to publish.

LF: No, first let’s talk about my new magazine, *Sal Mimeo*, which is more like the original *Adventures*.

DK: Yes, the name alone says a lot. It duplicates the old magazine’s modest format—8-1/2 x 11, stapled, etc. And you’re still publishing generous amounts of work by fewer poets per issue.

LF: And providing space for neglected poets like Merrill Gilfillan, George Stanley, and Carol Szamatowicz—people who don’t exactly fit into easy categories.

DK: But you’re also introducing some younger writers as well.

LF: Yeah, interesting, peculiar writers—young or otherwise: Fran Carlen, Jacqueline Waters, Geoff Bouvier, Ron Horning, David Perry, Rick Stull, etc. The current issue begins with 14 jittery, spidery, rueful lyrics by John Godfrey, a poet who deserves a big trust fund.

DK: And it ends with translations of some of the earliest prose poems.

LF: Yes. Aloysius Bertrand, from the generation just

before Baudelaire.

DK: Now, what about this new press?

LF: Several years ago, I asked John Ashbery if he'd be interested in republishing his funny "poem," "One Hundred Multiple-Choice Questions," which had originally appeared in *Adventures* #5. John liked the idea, but for one reason or another, it was put on hold. Then I met Chris Mattison, a publisher in the Boston area. He proposed that we start a small press. We agreed to launch it with John's booklet and a selection of Charles North's recent poems, *The Nearness of the Way You Look Tonight*. Three other books are due out later in the year: David Perry's *Range Finder*, Jacqueline Waters' *A Minute Without Danger*, and a gang of Hopalong Cassidy poems by Clark Coolidge, *Far Our West*.

DK: So you're reaching back to North, Ashbery, and Coolidge to echo what the old *Adventures* did, and you're taking us on new adventures with Perry and Waters.

LF: You could say that.

DK: Some of you old fogies continue to grouse about current poetry.

LF: And we will until we die. Unless it changes.

DK: Can you specify any of your complaints?

LF: Well, let's see...The obsession with the recent past seems shallow at best. The way some poets try to extract the ironic tone of '60s poetry—all the faux Frank O'Hara stuff—comes off like lame stand-up comedy—lots of name-dropping and product placement. And the timing is way off.

DK: It sounds like you've been attending poetry readings lately!

LF: Some. There's so much playing to the crowd, which is a way to connect with one another, I guess. Conversely, there's a good deal of fractiousness and paranoia. So, who knows if there's a real community to speak of? Younger writers don't seem to have that

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much in common, except a desire for self-expression and the fact that they have to work like stevedores to meet their absurdly high overheads. So they can't be serious. And they're no fun.

DK: Is the nervous tittering you mention really nervousness or in-crowd clubbiness?

LF: I dunno, maybe it's the anxiety of wanting to belong. Plus ambition, which is silly because there's so little at stake. A young friend of mine calls it "The Regarding Pole"—people trying to get on top of other people. It sounds like fucking, which might be more productive than writing at this point. In fact, it would be fine with me if everyone were to stop writing for, say, five years.

DK: Do you and poets of your generation feel marginalized in light of the current "scene?"

LF: On the contrary, I think that many of us are doing some of our best work now, though we do occasionally refer to ourselves as "fellow strugglers in the desert."

DK: Why do you think the younger poets can't pull it off without sounding stilted, derivative, or worse?

LF: Maybe fear of disclosure. Trying too hard to avoid sentimentality. Of course, the apparent ease, the irreverent worldliness that we associate with O'Hara, Schuyler, Koch, and Ashbery comes from a time when people had more control over their diction and destiny. They were able to develop a large, sophisticated frame of reference. It was practically a birthright of the late Victorian age.

DK: Which ended when?

LF: In the Spring of 1975, when real estate took over the world.

DK: I've been doing some research, and I find that you are one of the very few poets of your generation who continue to work as an editor of a little magazine—that being an activity that characterized the scene in the '60's, and was a way for "beginning" poets to establish themselves in the universe.

LF: And not in the university, which still kills poetry in spite of providing work for poets.

DK: You're a wonderful person.

LF: So are you.

DK: So, back then you guys didn't have to work all day like we do?

LF: No, we just got stoned and wrote.

DK: When there's so little at stake, in terms of

...the apparent ease, the irreverent worldliness that we associate with O'Hara, Schuyler, Koch, and Ashbery comes from a time when people had more control over their diction and destiny.

rewards for your work, authorship or personality becomes your commodity. I mean, no one really reads contemporary poetry outside of a tiny group. The level of visibility is so low that the sense of ego is conversely elevated.

LF: Way up there.

DK: One only has to leave a poetic community to realize that, I suppose.

LF: Or just ignore it.

DK: Should I move to Turkey for a year, you think?

LF: Sure, be an archaeologist.

*A complete run of Adventures in Poetry may be seen in the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library. Copies of the original magazines and pamphlets are for sale through Granary Books—see [www.granarybooks.com](http://www.granarybooks.com) and click on "Search Rare/OP Poetry"*

*Daniel Kane has poems published in The Hat, Exquisite Corpse, TriQuarterly, and other magazines.*

# Adventures in Poetry:

## 4 Reviews

Michael Gizzi on Jacqueline Waters

Peter Culley on Clark Coolidge

Mark Wallace on David Perry

William Corbett on Charles North

### A Minute without Danger

by Jacqueline Waters

There are several ways out of this. There's the  
[spillway.

A tap at the valve, and winter softly  
unloads a spring.

I fault no one. It was my limb.

I went out on it.

The severing was startling  
like a hail of fumes from the sky.

(“No News Is”)

So begins the first poem of Jacqueline Waters's first book *A Minute Without Danger*, one continuous command performance of skating over thin ice or, if you prefer, whistling in the dark—something only a kid in a cartoon nipping at her own heels might achieve so profoundly. It's only as children watching cartoons that we so intensely experience a few minutes without danger, and true to the chivalry of youth, Waters is always one thought balloon ahead of being caught. There's a sense in which the poems surface and even her punctuation floats assisting the book's forward progress like a funicular ride in a Norbert Davis novel—I'm thinking here of *The Mouse in the Mountain*.

I'm also reminded of pronominal Rimbaud, “I cannot choose one or the other: I am like the fork.” (“White Zombie”). If New Jersey was Abyssinia and Harrar the Big Apple, one could imagine Waters/Rimbaud with manuals, gadgets and her “pronoun of distinction” (Bill Berkson) sailing diaphonously over desert and city. Not to mention an air of precocity when we consider Ms. Waters' youth—hell, she's almost

a kid! And if language is a virus, then from time to time it strikes the young.

Waters seems to make use of conceits—she's more metaphysical than metaphorical—to power her conceptual trolley car over such sustained, philosophical terrain.

We believe an idea  
that has been hooked but not yet landed,  
unless handled adroitly,  
can poison all existence  
much as a prayer  
far along in its missing would do.

(“John Donne”)

Thou hast not Donne but Waters.

If she resembles any poet, it is John Ashbery; this is nothing new, but neither is it nugatory. Like Ashbery, Waters has a “penchant for abstract boldness” and mystery, and tries on various capes and templates. Imagine a Nancy Drew caper:

At the junction where the trolley turns, a funny  
story is slapped  
Out to the row houses, introducing the dresscutter  
With the marble pallor, or the woman described as  
Cancelled postage, aging, making the whole city  
[cry,

As if crying could win you a paid vacation.

(“The Most Difficult Clock”)

One cannot say enough about this book; it is quotable in toto. “The great nonfiction / Is the terror of having to move.” I could go on and on, but I'm out the door, her poems apocket.—MICHAEL GIZZI

## Far Out West by Clark Coolidge

The western is an elegiac mode from the gitgo. Frontier expansion left, like a trail of rotting buffalo carcasses, a flood of dime novels in its wake: industrious nickel-a-worders like Ned Buntline got weirdly lengthy pistols named after them by nostalgically evoking even then a time more free and lawlessly open, receding like pastoral Arcadia past any traceable origin. Owen Wister's "Virginian" (...smile when you say that...) might have, a bit further on, introduced the soft spoken, tough laconic mode (in contrast to the Boothian speechifyin' of the dime novel crowd) echoed six decades on by a young Clint tearing fistfuls of dialogue from Sergio's scripts. The cowboy movie was a natural and inevitable dead lock. Skilled wranglers arriving on the west coast sans cows or frontier met Astorian entrepaneurs in search of free land and cheap light. The Spahn ranch was open for business, and for decades to come the western is the absolute bottom line Hollywood product. For every airy comedy and lavish musical there were at least 200 westerns, and mostly they weren't the classy John Ford kind but pure Poverty Row sausage, with cardboard sets and stock footage stampedes, leaden exposition enlivened by abrupt denouements and cheating cliffhangers. Early TV, desperate to fill the temporal void between Hugh Downs and Jack Paar, fell ravenously on this bulging, leathery archive. One old series of cinematic time rustlers, Hopalong Cassidy, got so popular with the coonskin demographic that a new series was produced, infecting a whole new generation with its sculpted tedium and dry cracker landscapes.

Cut to: a hotel room Anycity, USA, an afternoon in January or February 1957. Tenorman Sonny Rollins, bestriding like a colossus the post-bop firmament, mentally prepares himself for an upcoming Los Angeles recording date, where he will be paired with west coast mainstay Shelly Manne and East Coast expatriate Ray Brown. Now the east coast/west coast jazz rivalry of the fifties—whipped up by Downbeat hacks and desperate publicists (and sadly perpetuated by Ken Burns' vile Jazz) which spuriously pitted the supposedly effete workshop experimentalism of the west coast against the imagined manly school of hard bop of the east—can have had little meaning for as astute a musician as Rollins, who would have greatly anticipated working with a rhythm section of this caliber on any coast. But let us suppose that in this hotel room a TV has been left on, and in time for the kids getting home from school a Hopalong movie is playing, leading Sonny to goof on matters west and western, perhaps recalling

the Herb Jefferies Bronze Buckaroo flicks of his own boyhood. The next album writes itself! I can play anything! Thus is recorded in March the classic "Way Out West" containing not only cowboy faves such as "I'm an Old Cowhand (from the Rio Grande)", but wrapped in one of the all time great album covers, Rollins in full dude ranch regalia, saxophone in holster, puncturing for all time the journalistic meringue of the bicoastal feud. Cut to: the California compound of prosodist emeritus Clark Coolidge, the present day.

Newly settled on the west coast, the poet's satellite (saddle light?) lands on an on old western, faintly recalled from his youth, the very same Hopalong Cassidy. Inspired by the monochromatic vistas and molasses in January absurdity of diction he "without hardly aiming to" enacts 39 improvisations. "Far Out West" is Coolidge in high Sonny Rollins mode, that is effortlessly masterful and peerlessly funny, running insouciantly through the registers of cowpoke speak, both sending it up and revelling in its unexpected richness. It's all here and they're all here: the campfire intimacy, the sexy mountains, the dry gulches, Royal Dano and Robert DeNiro, Sterling Hayden and the Molybdenum Kid. Vintage Coolidge, aaayup, smile when you say that.—PETER CULLEY

## Range Finder by David Perry

This engaging first book presents readers with poems that live very much in the present while pleurably recalling the traditions that inform them. Think of the formal restraint and cultured precision of Kenneth Koch, say, and combine it with a campy wit honed on 90s ephemera and that's not so much arch as sophisticatedly resigned, yet still trying hard to make things better. Perry's bon mots are sometimes designed to expose human shortcomings, but more often they share the mutual foibles and failures that make people and the world loveable even when part of us wishes they weren't. *Range Finder* is a charming book; one wants to share some afternoons with it at a favorite local spot, sitting in the sun and chatting.

Not that Perry's poems don't have their moments of darkness, because indeed they do. "People will talk and sometimes/I will listen, or so I say," he writes in the book's title poem, "Yet what is/there... nothing but suddenly/this wrung language, that flooded/engine, this gusting room of ghost notes?" Admittedly, to speak of language as haunted by the ghosts of its history is hardly the most original insight or imagery, but that's part of Perry's point; so much has been mapped,

or overmapped, that every gesture one might make brings with it a kind of shadowed double. Imagine living in a world in which everything you might say felt as though it had been said before, by you or by somebody else, and maybe even better? That could never be the whole story, of course, but perhaps no condition better marks the circumstances in which many young American writers of innovative poetry find themselves. Perry's poems occupy a world in which writing a poem brings the history of poetry down on his head, in which the struggle is to "find upon release from my person/by moonlight that I too am beautiful." There's less and less space for new people and new words, but that hardly makes anybody less lonely.

Even at his darkest, though, Perry is too wise for self-pity; indeed he's just plain too wise, which either helps him or doesn't, he never quite knows. He has the sense, which he's not sure he wants, of "being there and nowhere in particular," yet there are distractions and entertainments, dalliances and affairs, connections and misunderstandings. He wants love but understands its complexities: "If you wake someone else/You can only hope that someone else/Will wake you up and call you honey." At times, Perry's poems run the danger of so much knowingness, which is the ability to be too cavalier about the issues he raises, too self-consciously urban retro when he admonishes someone who has gotten their "knickers in a twist." But he always pulls back from such witty but ultimately shallow postures; he may want to blow things off and have another cocktail, but he knows that's part of his history too, and finally, however campy the poses he strikes, his purposes never allow the poems to collapse into silliness.

One of the books being published in the new wave of the historically important *Adventures in Poetry*, *Range Finder* is not only well worth reading, but also worth taking around. Take it *with* you lightly, but don't *take* it lightly. Read it like you're having a conversation, one which you greatly enjoy but ends up reaching you more than you first noticed.—MARK WALLACE

## The Nearness of the Way You Look Tonight

by Charles North

Charles North's *The Nearness of the Way You Look Tonight* marks the return to publishing of Larry Fagin's *Adventures in Poetry*. It is an exceptional book by a poet whose work has leapt to the fore the past five years. Following upon his selected prose *No Other Way* (1998) and his *New and Selected Poems* (1999), *The*

*Nearness of the Way You Look Tonight* confirms that North is one of the top poets of his generation.

North's immediate forebears are Wallace Stevens, Elizabeth Bishop, John Ashbery and James Schuyler. He honors them by forming new combinations from what he has learned from their work. North is adept in many forms both conventional and original to him. Within these forms he has great range and effortlessly moves from the concrete to the abstract. He is a poet of improvisation and discovery. He has a sense of humor, embraces beauty for its own sake and has a gift for short poems that grow large in the reader's mind. Indeed, all of North's poems effloresce. If he has a subject this line from "Notes on Fog" is one way of putting it: "The utter disorientation, seeing things and not seeing things." At the heart of North's poems two and sometimes more things happen at once.

At forty-eight pages *The Nearness of the Way You Look Tonight* recalls the "slim volumes" of yore. Since North writes slowly these might be all the poems he had on hand, but his book has an interior design. North arranged his poems so that variations on the Richard Rodgers song "Younger than Springtime" thread through the book. He counters Rodgers's "Gayer than laughter are you / Sweeter than music are you" with "Smarter than morons—faster than slowpokes—" North's oxymorons accentuate the doubling in his work as they sustain an echo in this book, one that reminds the reader of how much fun it is to read North's poems.

Fun is a risk North has long been willing to take. His "lineups" are the best game invented by a poet since—well, I've wracked my brain and not found anything remotely in the same ballpark. They are incomparable both for what they are and for their refusal to wink at the reader. North is a poet able to deliver pleasure without assuring us that it will help us build strong bodies in twenty-seven marvelous ways. He is confident that gorgeousness is good and so is plain speech. For him it's not a matter of one or the other but of having it both ways. North does not need a reason for what he does beyond the nature of his imagination and the demands of the poem under hand. The core value of North's work is in the freedom with which he operates. His "Risks inside art" become exhilarating risks for his readers. It is good to read a book and be delighted by it, to feel one's imagination engaged for its own sake, to get the sort of workout that poetry alone gives. "A poem is a pheasant," wrote Wallace Stevens. *The Nearness of the Way You Look Tonight* has exactly that sort of presence.—WILLIAM CORBETT

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# Questionnaire

What are your favorite poetry magazines? What makes them good?

Send your answer via email ([poproj@artomatic.com](mailto:poproj@artomatic.com)) or post-card to the Poetry Project (131 E. 10th St. NYC 10003) by August 15, 2001.

(continued from page 3)

plaque indicating the years he lived there.

Back in Nether Stowey, when I entered the cottage where as a young poet he wrote "Frost at Midnight" I felt a hush in the room as I walked in, and Derek Woolfe, the custodian, showed me around. I had gotten lost getting to Coleridge's cottage from Wordsworth's place about 4 miles away, and I was cut and bleeding from falling into a hedgerow. I got lost in the hills and found myself on the A39 where there is no room for pedestrians. I could hear a semi-trailer headed my way, its side mirrors scraping the hedges that grew like tunnels around the road. I dove in.

Later some skin heads threw a beer can at me (empty!) but I made it to Coleridge's cottage. And it was all Richard Holmes' fault. He writes so damn well.

## Sparrow:

In Stephen Spender's biography of T. S. Eliot, there is a great passage: "Even Eliot's casual conversation revealed his poetic gift. I remember a breakfast, for example, when he said, 'Marmalade? No. I prefer jam.'" (Quoted from memory)

## Anne Waldman:

Invertebrate addicted bio reader (just mistyped as "raider") I finished excellent Graham Dobbs testy & ironically-minded *Rimbaud* (which corrects the pieties) this grey Boulder April dawn & now onto *Ho Chih Minh* by William J. Duiker. Favorite? I still honor the marvelous Shelley (*The Pursuit*) Dutton (out of print now?), Richard Holmes's dedicated labour of love, "more a

haunting than a history" in the author's own words. You creep inside the poet's skin at times thanks to Holmes' passionate attention to particulars. He's alert to the radical politics, intellectual philosophizing, love affairs, family tragedies, the ego & its contradictions. And smart about the poetry. Shelley's like a relative by the end as the reader collapses in a vale of tears. The 800 page tome closes with a reference to Edward Silsbee on whom Henry James' ("damning") *The Aspern Papers* (1888) is based. Silsbee was a Harvard grad who sought Shelley's love letters from the crusty "dark-eyed old lady" Claire, Shelley's sister-in-law, long after the poet's untimely death. Fortunately, Holmes escapes the follies of the snooping fatuous biographer which James sorely condemns...

## Guillermo Juan Parra:

My choice for favorite (auto)biography is Stephen Spender's *World Within World* (1951). I appreciate his candor when writing about mistakes and failures in his own life. He managed to convey a sense of how poetry is often lived rather than written: "In describing my life with Elizabeth, I feel as though I were writing of a kind of lived poetry, which I re-live in the writing of it. At the time, perhaps just because it was so like poetry to me, I failed at any moment to lose myself completely in the life with her...It was as though I were standing outside and watching experience even while I partook of it..." (p. 218) *World Within World* could be read as an attempt to answer the question: What does a poet do? In his prose, as in many of his poems, Spender achieves a beautiful balance between eloquence and humility.

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The Poetry Project received a book too good not to excerpt in these pages: *The Complete Guide to the Poet* by Tony Dohr and Fovea Froglais.

"Anyone who has been licked by a poet knows it can be quite a rough experience! The poet's tongue is a multipurpose part of the poet's anatomy. Mobile and muscular, its spoon-like shape makes it ideal to lap up praise. It is covered with praise receptors to help the poet differentiate between critics. The surface of the poet's tongue is covered with small raised knobs; those in the center are hook-shaped and backward-facing. They help to hold onto praise and to lick critics.

"Poets are equipped with an exceptionally useful extra piece of 'taste' equipment in their sensory arsenal that allows them to 'judge' 'taste'. To make it work best, the air has to be drawn into the mouth in a certain way called 'flehmening.' This produces a very distinctive facial gesture where the poet pulls back his or her lips in a type of grimace, during which air is drawn into a small cigar-shaped sac situated just behind and above the front teeth. This is called Fagin's, or the vomeronasal, organ.

"When the poet flehms, it presses its tongue against the roof of its mouth, forcing the air through the organ, where it can concentrate the creative endeavor it wishes to sample. This behavior is most commonly seen in poets when they are attending performances of other poets, and the poet is trying to form an opinion as to the value of a particular work without actually having to think."

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"Poets living in groups—free-roaming and gainfully employed poets sharing a house—tend to rank themselves according to dominant traits. Right to publication is one of those traits. Another trait is the ability to pay the rent. If the new poet is introduced to a resident poet, the resident poet is dominant by nature of his claim to pay the rent until proven otherwise by the new poet's claim to publication.

"A stranger in their midst may spark discord within a group of poets that normally read together congenially. Not only is the new poet inspected and possibly attacked, but familiar poets also scrutinize and critique each other as if they were strangers.

"I once noticed this same kind of intolerance when I transported two poets to the Poetry Project. I had asked the host if the two were compatible, and when informed that they were, I put them together for a reading. One whined apprehensively during the trip to the Project, but they both seemed glad the other was along

for the trip. However, after the reading a day later, when I took the poets out for a beer, the two hissed, swatted, and screamed at each other. This situation occurred nearly every time I tried to place two poets together for a reading, and I finally learned to provide each poet with his or her own audience.

"If you sense that your poet is feeling threatened by other poets, a condition they often develop by going to too many readings, you can help your poet feel more confident by closing all the doors and letting it read out loud to you, or by declaring all other poets boring in his or her presence.

"One might also chase other poets away from the venue and generally praise one's poet when it is reading. When the poet feels secure, it will feel less need to mark your home by leaving open books & manuscripts all over your apartment and on your furniture."

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"Taking in a poet can be as easy and inexpensive as opening your back door and feeding the poet outside. Or if you choose a high-maintenance poet from a particular school, it could cost you hundreds of dollars. Language poets have a reputation for being a bit more demanding than other breeds. If you prefer a poet who will live alongside you without being as demanding of your time, you may want to consider a Beat poet, who, however, is known for not being as fastidious with its grooming habits as other breeds, and may occasionally soil outside of the litterbox."



# Captain Poetry: Remembering Gregory Corso (1930-2001)

by Darrin Daniel

To believe that life dies with the body  
is to be spirit-sick  
this is the great danger  
to body-think the spirit an ephemeral thing...

"Window" by Gregory Corso

A friend called from San Francisco to tell me the news of Gregory Corso's death in Minnesota on January 17th from a bout of prostate cancer. Gregory had been ill and recovering in Minneapolis much of last year. Despite a couple of recent close calls, Corso was still working on a CD project of his poetry with Marianne Faithful, and working on a final book of poems in Minnesota, while being cared for by his daughter, Sherri Langerman. After a couple hours poring over his poems, it finally struck me that the last of the Beat Generation figures was gone. Memorials all over the U.S. were happening, and writings from close friends and colleagues appeared in a range of magazines and papers. To try to recap the last 40-50 years of events and breakthroughs the Beats discovered, would be a monumental task. What stands is a deep realization of what the Beats represented in regards to challenging censorship and social and literary taboos. Corso took his "Bomb" and "Marriage" to America's jugular just as Ginsberg did with "Howl" and Burroughs with *Naked Lunch*.

A week after Gregory died, I left Colorado for a week trip to San Francisco. Steve Silberman called to invite me to a memorial Corso's former wife, Lisa Brinker, was hosting at her home in Noe Valley. On Sunday, the 28th, we arrived late and found a gathering of local San Francisco poets and numerous friends of Gregory's—Jack Hirschman, the Foleys, Kush, and many others. One by one, people got up and read from Gregory's work and reminisced in song and stories while surrounded by photos of him over the years with friends and family. It was a celebration of Gregory; a living, fluid community of people who had been affected by Corso's life and work. I spoke with George Scravani, a close friend of Gregory's for over 30 years, as people read on in the living room. George eloquently sketched in some of those years in New York at the Chelsea, dispelling some of the legendary rumors about Gregory. He spoke of Corso's tenderness and ability to reach out to those he loved. At the end of the evening, Lisa Brinker walked Steve and me around the living room, telling stories about the photos—mirroring Corso's own work. The poetry commanded the ear, but also the

heart of the audience. The entire evening was a reflection of his devotion to poetry. Each reader shared a piece of why Gregory Corso was so unique to our American landscape—as poet and social critic.

I met Gregory in Boulder, Colorado at the Naropa Institute's 1994 Summer Writing Program. It was the last time I saw him. After a panel discussion I asked him to sign a chapbook. As he signed it, crossing out errors and lambasting the publisher for mistakes, he read a few poems from it and added comments on where the poem had been written and how it was inspired. A small crowd circled him as he went on reading. He circled the tent with complete animation, working the crowd like a traveling salesman. He loved being the center of attention. He used rancor as a foil for a greater purpose—to draw the audience in a little closer. Eventually, Corso was herded off after he finished.

Later that week, Corso read for the Allen Ginsberg tribute sponsored by Naropa, along with Joanne Kyger and Amiri Baraka. A charged Anne Waldman introduced Corso, touching on his writing as "news that stays news," and on himself as a legendary figure in American poetics. Later in the reading, Corso confessed his preference for some of the smaller, lyrical poems he had written over the longer oral poems, which brought him notoriety, such as "Bomb" and "Marriage". He thought Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti were the poets of the oral 'shot'. He went on to give a spirited reading while still toying with the crowd. The reading, half stand-up and half Shelley, surpassed anything I had ever seen him do on stage. His approach to difficult subjects through humor is what set him apart from his peers. He went beyond a 'routine', embodying a deeper resolve. It played itself out much of the time through Corso's idiosyncratic snapshots, underpinned by poetic quip and irony. "Captain Poetry" as Allen referred to him in his introduction to *Mindfield*, had truly delivered, once again, "moustaches of gold."

George Scravani and Corso's family assisted in getting permission from the Italian government for his remains to be buried in Rome this May, as Gregory wished. Corso's final resting ground will be in the same cemetery as his most cherished poet, Shelley.

*Darrin Daniel is the author of Harry Smith: Fragments of a Northwest Life, a document of the early years of Harry Smith. He lives in Boulder.*

# from An Unpublished Interview with Gregory Corso on an Unmade Film on Rimbaud by Jonas Mekas

In 1969 I lived at the Chelsea Hotel. Gregory Corso lived—most of the time—there too. We had many drinks together at the hotel bar, Quixote. One day, Gregory proposed we do an interview for the Village Voice, where I was writing at the time. I taped it, but over our next drink at Quixote Gregory expressed some reservations about the interview. He thought we should do another one. But as time went on, we somehow got involved in other things and forgot about it.

The other day I was looking through my old papers and I found a transcript of the interview. It was supposed to appear in the Voice as one of my Movie Journal columns. Here is an excerpt.

*Pasolini is making movies. Susan Sontag is making movies. And so are Marguerite Duras and Robbe-Grillet. Who is the next literary person to make movies? It's Gregory Corso, of course. His Chelsea Hotel room is cluttered with film, all over the floor. And he holds his Bolex like a wife: he talks to it, he praises it, he takes care of it better than his typewriter.*

**Jonas Mekas: What's this stack of movies here? What are you after? Why are you budging into enemy territory?**

Gregory Corso: I just want to make a few particular movies. Always wanted to see the life of Rimbaud, Shelley. But you need a beautiful movie man to do it and the few there are, are in big money films.... Like, even \$10,000 is, filmly speaking, big. I ain't no beautiful movie man, but I got the right spirit, and so there's only me I can go to, and I went and bought me a real nice camera, Bolex Reflex with Vario-Switar lens—which you so graciously recommended—thank you—and it cost me all my poems....

You see, I've been writing like always, but I've not been always publishing them—in fact, I've not given a book to be published in eight years.

**JM: Why not? Why don't you accept the fact that you are a poet?**

GC: My reasons are, firstly, I found myself writing topical stuff, things that demanded immediate publication.... Well, I decided that the best way to call them apples was to forego publication altogether. I mean, no good this being in demand. It was 1960 or so I think when my publisher, New Directions (who's always been straight with me) told me I was one of the ten bestselling poets in the country, like, I bet, those people on the best-dressed list who spend a good deal of their time dressing FOR the list. So, anyway, I like all things, I've changed. Years ago, I had something to say...I gave readings and got into print. Today, like most souls of truth, I have something to do, and I'm yet muse-blessed to say it vondrously [sic]. Poems to thrill the heart and brighten the head—the task of alerting, enlightening, protesting, heralding, was an elec-

tricity of joy for the young poet.

So I have no regrets about taking myself out of the daily image-self-lineup. Where it works for Allen, it wouldn't for me. Allen gets high on activity, I get wild on the unpredictable. To give a reading was always a heavy business. I'd painfully read poems that were never meant for public utterance, more than once. Now the only thing film has to do with all this is I bought my \$1,400 camera with a good deal of the poems I've written these past years—sold them to a college library where they'll always be cared for and read by those who care. What with my travelling about and no one stationed place to call home, only getting them published would ensure their safety, or giving them to a college archive. Because I've lost a lot of poems, suitcases full, and by the looks of the poetry I see coming out I know I shouldn't lose mine....

My Rimbaud movie will not be exactly about Rimbaud. Rather it will be about a young hippie genius—before these mere hippies—called Arthur Rainbow, and he'll come from a small town, like Rimbaud, and go to New York City—as Rimbaud had Paris—and make his way there. Meets Verlaine, whom Ginsberg could play—ha—and so forth, all in exactitude with the beautiful Frenchman's young life. Goes to Tangier (instead of Aden), deals in grass (instead of guns and slaves), gets cheated in his bizarre quest to get rich (like King Menelech screwed [Rimbaud] with gun roster), discovers perhaps some rare anthropological artifact (like Rimbaud did territory in his explorations) and ultimately returns to the States, loses leg, sees the influence of his poesy on youth (as Symbolism on French youth) in birth of the hippie breed, and dies....

This, of course, is simple outline. Things like his crossing of Alps in dead of winter, his drug cures, love woes, getting shot by Verlaine (such as Ginsberg would never do).... But after all, Rainbow ain't Rimbaud, nor then [Verlaine] Ginsberg—just a famous elder poet suffices.

*Jonas Mekas is a filmmaker and author of I Had Nowhere to Go and There Is No Ithaca (Black Thistle Press, NY).*

LIKE "A S"

# 50 White envelopes

A CARTOON IN 839 PARTS  
by Brenda Iijima ©2001

LIKE A SIMPLE tune, as nimble and easy



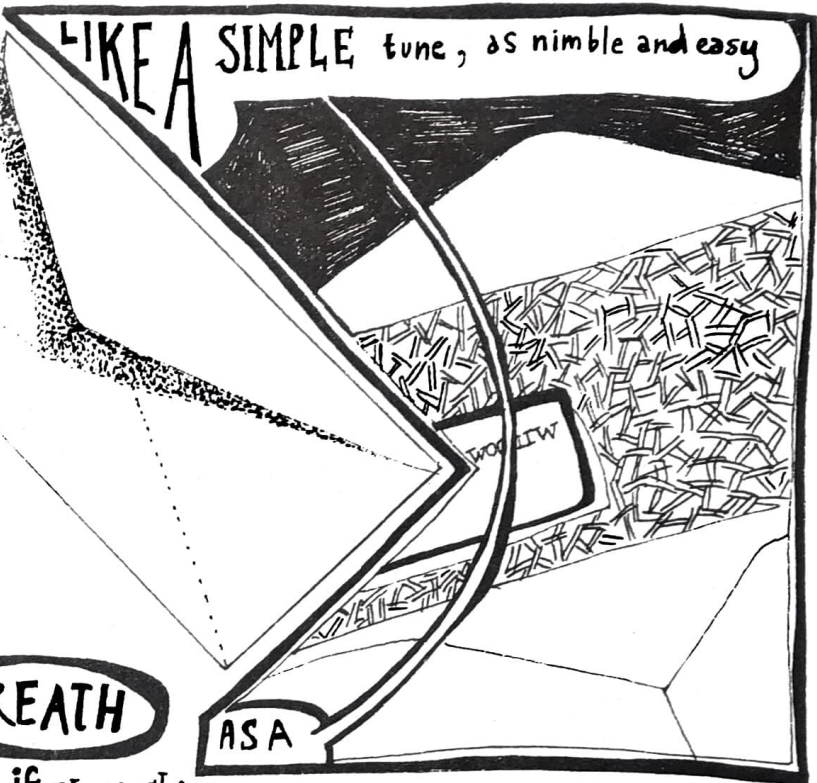
Toes ache

like a brook

BREATH

AS if on a ship, I feel echo and shadow

ASA



slowly,  
the camera  
drags over metal



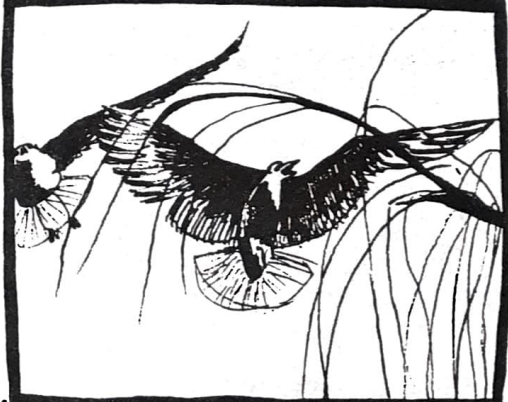
railroad shatter  
as screws stick out

birds are (like) lines



weightlessness

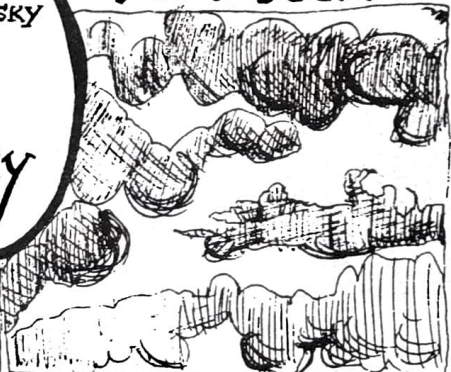
as if sky were EYE



"Bodies close as married"

Not seen

IS SKY  
as  
sky



Accommodate each other

Edwin Denby, Snoring in New York



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Like  
 THE HELLBENT  
 wheel with  
 which I  
 make  
 ways



AS in A THIRD  
 it rescues



as in lending my  
 first to become  
 one's third  
 So giving up a  
 blind eye



Eyes Closed  
 What exactly on the cotis blank-  
 ness? Window pressed scene.  
 Eyelids clamped so screen of  
 molecular orange forms cactus blooms  
 because the sun rushes. Alarming rush.  
 Light perambulates its bounds, skin pressed  
 tight over this frame slim bone. Spelling  
 change.



Like headlong & forceful  
 an equation in the order of world  
 came out of this mountain, came out of this mouth



# R VIEWS

## A Border Comedy

by Lyn Hejinian

Granary Books, 2001. 240 pp.

My ambition being to unite, as Breton says, the  
[process of  
transformation with that of interpretation  
And if that's taken as didacticism  
Then what have you learned from this poem

Lyn Hejinian's work increasingly explores poetry's relation to knowledge. Does this make her most recent book—a serial poem in 15 “books” called *A Border Comedy*—a work of didacticism? By the point at which such questions thrust themselves with humorous self-reflexivity into *A Border Comedy's* rapidly mutating, quasi-narrative present tense, readers will have learned that while defiance in the face of a moralized 18th century generic category like “didactic poetry” retains force (and allows us to feel contemporary), we do “learn” from poetry—or we're learning to again, if we can only find frameworks in which a new poetry of knowledge, in all of its unpredictability and non-utilitarianism, can make sense. But rather than abstract frameworks, one finds in this book coyotes, geese, didactic asides, horses, philosophical anecdotes, hawks, intercourse, wasps, Russian Formalist literary terms, goats, pigs, ravens, and a great deal of urinating. It is through this particularity that Hejinian invents a poetic pedagogy (which is at the same time what she would call a “language of inquiry”) at home with its foreignness to itself, poised both to topple and attain intellectual authority, happily open to its lack of totalizing system. Certainly the New Critical language of paradox (understanding poetic language as a discrete category removed from other languages) is not one of the pedagogical frameworks Hejinian, “Doing a wheelie and waving a dirty hand,” would propose. Situating her project more broadly within intellectual history, she writes: “Digressing in a didactic tale will teach one to digress.” And digression, in all of its entertaining modes—the anecdote, the interpolated comment, the sudden shift of attention—is the displaced center of *A Border Comedy*.

Can we say that anecdotalists are provocateurs?  
Anecdotalists on wings?  
They are of consequence and of extremes  
Making appearances as quasi-characters whose  
[quasi-plot ends with  
the telling of a story  
In which the question *why?* throws everything into  
[chaos  
By requiring retelling  
In one sentence

Each book in *A Border Comedy* tends to run about ten pages of continuous lines without stanza breaks; there are occasional indents—like the one above—though often these mark the entrance of another thinker into the field of play. Deleuze and Guattari make cameos, as do Jalal Toufic, Hannah Arendt, Aristotle and Kit Robinson. These thinkers help out the best they can, both by interpreting what's on the dissection table and, as often, by transforming the scene through the material entrance of their proper names. Names themselves become anecdotes.

Spinoza too loved watching spiders battle  
Splendors  
In a 'vital anecdote'  
Such love might account for anecdotalism's  
[mournful  
personifications  
And the relief expressed by a river as it's crossed  
In taboo

Names can also seem to provide an illusory command of history and geography, appearing to contain both through the habitual association of their sound with events and locations.

Yes, as Apuleius says, stupid people dismiss as  
[untrue anything that  
happens seldom  
Hence the credibility accorded to names  
As if a certainty of event were bound to its  
[subjects  
Named Lewis and Clark or Ghengis Khan or Stalin

But the bond between these names and subjects persists, and seems to lend force to the anecdote's

appeal.

An anecdotal story is merely a span  
Consisting of separate facts  
Each tenuously connected to the next  
What we respond to are the attractiveness of the [facts]  
And the view each one provides

Because of this interest in the rhetorical underpinnings of the anecdote and the digression (I'll get to quasi-characters and quasi-plots), it is tempting to read *A Border Comedy* as a work that rejects transcendent frameworks and remains committed to a view of knowledge as contextual and subject to infinite, entertaining jolts and inflections, from line to line. And there are plenty of hilarious jolts and inflections, reframings of all kinds, to sustain such a reading:

Love of ambiguity is mere liberal humanism  
Ambiguity disturbs humans  
I'm a human, said an ass, having come a long [distance and I am  
moving slowly now to recover my wind

But one of the interesting oddnesses of the book, which forces us to catch our breath and occasionally to huff, is that quasi-transcendental or a priori insights (often linked to continental philosophy) find their way skillfully and unpredictably into what is otherwise a radically nominalistic, context-dependent intellectual setting.

Love is a division through which standards are [changed  
It provokes extravagant enthusiastic doubt and [(sometimes) a  
tyrannical metaphysics  
And encourages plagiarism

That linking timeless categories like love and plagiarism is an occasion of humor, rather than piety, contrasts Hejinian's work with less lively poetries also in dialogue with continental philosophy. Moreover, this interest in the *a priori* and the transcendent suggest that Hejinian is not always the Wittgensteinian thinker Marjorie Perloff, for instance, would have us take her to be. Instead, questions about the sublime, the "speed" of thought, love, the border, the foreigner—all of which maintain a level of contextual transcendence—intermingle with radically specific and hilarious contexts involving geese, a vegetarian bartender, a small metaphysician, wild goring pigs and pissing horses. It is as if, in the linguistic world of *A Border Comedy*, transcendent concerns were verbs in their infinitive form,

existing as pure potentiality; for them to take form they must embody active tenses and encounter a world of agents in particular situations. The book, then, explores *this* very border—between infinitive and present modes of thought, between abstractions and anecdotes, between concepts and examples.

The invention of stunningly funny philosophical "examples" is one of the best aspects of this book. In an ideal philosophical world an example is a pure instrument of thought: no distracting details get in the way. In *A Border Comedy* the example is always flush with the uncontainable and distracting substance of the world. To flesh out a point, the author finds herself:

Noting the numbers of people who've suffered wasp stings or been bitten by snakes or by cats,  
those who've been pecked by ravens or kicked  
by a horse, those who've been butted by goats  
or even gored by pigs

And because noting the numbers ultimately isn't enough, we also find ourselves getting to know some of these people and animals as quasi-characters who enter briefly, often with speaking parts. Such is the logic of the anecdote.

There was once a muscular sandpiper who found a ruby of historic size amid the obscurities and glimmers of the rising tide, also there as a vegetarian bartender once, his shoes squeaked indoors and out, and there as a burly doctor too, and a man with a chirp in his ear which called him terrible names.

In order for these characters to illustrate ideas, though, we must (impossibly) link shoe sounds, jobs and dietary habits in the blink of a drive-by allegory. So in case we miss the point of any of these anecdotes, or informative backgrounds to anecdotes, the author has usefully provided us with a number of morals. For example:

Moral: Every revolution has a brim, but this does not mean that every revolution is a hat. Yet every revolution is plucked. And every revolution is a demarcation standing in the wind—but this could be said also of bridges.

Thus the language of moral summary associated with morals turns in on itself, the moral discovering, in the very process of its delivery, that its level of generality opens it to embarrassing misinterpretations (literary devices often go through this kind of public humiliation in the book, though they are also occasionally congratulated, as when personification gets told that it's

doing the best it can). The idea of the moral is important not only because *A Border Comedy* revels in an excess of interpretable events, but because its quasi-narrative quality seems to demand results, rallying, of which morals stand as the caricatured extreme: outcomes processed for maximum use within moral life. Morals exist beyond the border of action; they come at one from a transcendent space cleansed of distraction.

While the idea of the border takes on wide implication in the text, its central senses, in addition to those I have already listed, have to do with the temporal and logical borders separating events, as in narrative and anecdote, and the generic and institutional borders separating discourses—say poetry and philosophy. Traditionally comedy, as a genre, involves transformations that cause displacements and misrecognitions, but not the irrevocable losses of tragedy. Though loss remains a possibility in *A Border Comedy* (and this keeps the stakes of movement authentic) the book is a comedy because it understands borders as thresholds marking shifts in intensity rather than stark edges at which differences in kind dilate. *A Border Comedy* is an eloquent and passionate advertisement for this view of thresholds, and frequent migration across them.

Passion, as Nietzsche says, applies playful  
[impressions to  
serious matters  
It speaks disturbed  
And sometimes it regrets while sometimes it  
rejoices in absurdity

—LYTLE SHAW

**Career Moves: Olson, Creeley, Zukofsky, Berrigan, and the American Avant-Garde**  
by Libbie Rifkin  
University of Wisconsin Press, 2000. 172 pp.

This book's title masks its true aim. Granted, the avant garde can always stand to be reminded, as Rifkin does here, that its own presses, journals, contests and prizes are largely homologous to those of its mainstream counterparts—at times replicating the very repressive structures it wishes to challenge. But is there anything more bristling to poets, especially those outside poetry's professional and managerial class, than the charge of being careerist? Ted Berrigan hustles some secondhand books for a loaf of bread as a means of improving his poetic street cred: yeah, well *symbolic capital don't feed the kids!* (Bourdieu blushes in shame as his field of cultural production becomes yet another

bloodless formalism, that is, becomes academic.)

Rifkin avoids such a mistake. Of course poems emerge out of specific sociohistorical conditions, are published by certain journals and presses with certain editorial criteria and through certain networks of colleagues and friends. So how does one discuss these phenomena without succumbing to either the biographer's search for even the slightest evidence of the poet's self interest on the one hand, or the business world's love of pie charts and Powerpoint presentations on the other? Rifkin suggests that where poetic text and socio-cultural context intersect, there emerges something she identifies as the psychosocial. In other words, "career moves" translates more accurately as a kind of poetic identity politics: the assertion or insertion of the poetic self—via a poem, a letter, a journal, or a public pronouncement—into the web of social relations inevitably calls the poet's identity into question. Poems, letters, etc., thus become sites of complicated negotiation between the poet and the world.

One of the book's strengths is the skill and care with which Rifkin chooses and handles materials to build her case. Olson's 1965 Berkeley lecture, for example, might seem like an odd place to begin, considering its unusual status as textual artifact (having been transcribed and published in several different versions—"I am now publishing. . . tonight. . . because I'm talking writing" he says at one point). But given also the institutional significance of that moment for the New American Poetry, the number of established and emerging poets in attendance, and the importance of the talk genre for a younger generation of language writers, the lecture certainly deserves the kind of attention Rifkin offers. She is concerned with assessing it less as drunken ramble or hieratic pronouncement and more as an instance of precisely the poet's insertion into the social. Olson had to negotiate not only his notorious difficulty with public speaking engagements but also his position as spokesman for a generation of poets who were largely decades his juniors. "I'm either going to lose my position," he says later, "or I won't, that's all." The irony of the qualifier does not go unnoticed. After then taking us through the avant-garde woodshedding of the Olson-Creeley correspondence, Rifkin turns to Olson the ethnographer or, as he would have it, culture-morphologist. Olson's excursion into the Yucatan presents a fascinating case of interdisciplinarity, where the poetic self must overcome its relative amateurism in the face of officially-sanctioned professionals. Olson essentially has to make a virtue of necessity: lacking a facility with the Mayan language, he nevertheless reads into those glyphs a profound and immediate poetic language.



Even more so than Olson, the case of Berrigan seems ready-made for Rifkin's analyses: poetic self-fashioning as a trope runs through much of Berrigan's poetics. Such artificing, as Rifkin shows, is quite deliberate in the "outsourcing" of Sonnet 1 for example. But we would be mistaken to overlook the conscious irony at work in this artificing as well. "C" magazine did in a sense create the New York School, even if it was already there for Berrigan to create. Why wait for posterity to ensure your fame when you can do it yourself now? Indeed self-fashioning becomes part of a larger trope marking Berrigan's poetics, namely prolepsis, or beating the inevitable to the punch. Each fixing of the moment in time doesn't so much forestall death as enact it in advance again and again: as D. G. Rossetti reminds us, "a sonnet is a moment's monument."

Unlike Berrigan, Zukofsky seems the least likely candidate for a study in poetic careers, given how insistently his life-work retreated from the public into the domestic. For Rifkin, this fact itself is central to Zukofsky's poetic identity. But where Berrigan in a sense creates his posthumous identity in the present, Zukofsky builds a time capsule for future readers to discover in a Texas research archive (which financed the publication of *Bottom: On Shakespeare*). From his careful documenting of the compositional methods and source materials used in A's late movements, we have to assume that Zukofsky desired a sympathetic readership; Rifkin suggests that the increasing difficulty of his work and the increasing attention to domestic life together manifest Zukofsky's concern to master or control objects of desire. From "Poem Beginning 'The'" and the early movements of A through *Bottom* and late A, Zukofsky's poetic identity finds itself negotiating between objects as "historical and contemporary particulars" and the "desire for what is objectively perfect" that those particulars continually resist.

One point of commonality Rifkin finds in these different career moves—Creeley's included, though the treatment he gets overall is conspicuously short—is their manifestations of homosociality: Olson's awkward quips to Duncan and Ginsberg at Berkeley, the intense male bonding of the Creeley-Olson correspondence, the eroticization of the young Richard Chambers in early A, and Berrigan's guarded attraction to O'Hara. Some readers will likely want to see this area brought more into the foreground, others perhaps omitted entirely. In some ways there isn't much new here: a quick trip through Tom Clark's biography of Olson, for example, shows all too well Olson's own awareness of such phenomena. Rifkin cautions us that her goal is not to queer or "out" the avant garde. She does not hail

from the "a-HA!" school of criticism, nor does she take these poets as her dupes. Rather, I think, because much writing on avant-garde poetry borders on hagiography (Berrigan especially), Rifkin wants instead to demystify the forging of poetic identities in the (at times still) male-centered avant garde. Although the ironic tone Rifkin occasionally adopts towards this end—Berrigan, for example, "doesn't attempt to cheat time so much as to put it to work in his public relations campaign" (125)—verges on the heavy-handed, the book's demystifying thrust, and its efforts to rehabilitate and destigmatize the notion of careerism, is one of its more refreshing aspects.

So it's no accident, nor is it a contrivance, that the primary figures here are male and that the projects of exemplary women for Rifkin—Anne Waldman's running of the early Poetry Project, the publication of Bernadette Mayer's collaborative writing experiments in *Unnatural Acts*, and Alice Notley's recent narratives of poetic identity in *Mysteries of Small Houses*—are given only brief treatments in the book's conclusion. The typical countercanon-building gesture would be to supplant the old with the new; for Rifkin, the avant garde is always provisional and open-ended. And like all worthwhile criticism, *Career Moves* reframes old questions and poses new ones rather than offering a lot of easy answers.—TOM ORANGE

**Joe Brainard: A Retrospective**  
by Constance M. Lewallen  
University of California, Berkeley Art Museum &  
Granary Books, 2001. 156 pp.

Younger poets probably know Joe Brainard's book covers; perhaps the cover of Michael Brownstein's *Highway To the Sky*, or Bernadette Mayer's *Golden Book of Words*, Anne Waldman's *Giant Night* or Kenward Elmslie's *Sung Sex*. Many remember Brainard's many artworks associated with the Poetry Project, in the newsletter, posters and *The World*. Still more were familiar with his gentle presence in the poetry scene, his memoir *I Remember*, or the exhibition of some of his works a few years back at Tibor de Nagy. Since Brainard stopped making art in the last decade of his life, it may come as a surprise to some that he was once an incredibly prolific artist with a broad range of media at his disposal. His collages sparkle with a devotion to the object on its own terms. Ostensibly considered a pop artist, Brainard dispensed with the usual irony associated with that movement. His assemblages have all of the charm of pop assemblage without the knowing wink and nod. Earnest (some

would say to a fault), Brainard is not kidding when he builds an altar to Prell Shampoo in 1965—he is serious. Decorative, yes, witty too, but Brainard's collection of objects and clippings were obsessively gathered on purely aesthetic grounds. Brainard felt that the primary activity of the artist is to look at the world, not to comment on it. In one of the interviews republished in this book, Brainard's work is compared to the works of Niki de Saint-Phalle, and Brainard rejects the comparison thus: "No, because I don't think she respects the objects she uses in the same way I do. I place an object in a collage with a beautiful surrounding." And that is exactly where Brainard differs from most "pop" artists, he is in the pop vein without being of it.

Now the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum is showing a giant retrospective of Joe Brainard's work. The show will eventually make New York, but in the meantime, the museum has co-published this sumptuous catalog with Granary Books. Beautifully produced, with over 60 color plates, this catalog presents Brainard's work in all of its variety. There are reproductions of line drawings, cartoons, mixed media collages, oil and gouache, paper cut-outs, and those grand-scale assemblages.

The wonder is that Brainard seemed entirely suited to each and every media he worked with. His oil painting, "Whippoorwill's World," a send-up of Wyeth's "Christina's World," also references Fairfield Porter in its clarity and brushstroke. The Madonna collages (mid to late 60's) raise candy wrappers and other detritus to the level of spiritual contemplation. One can feel his genuine affection for each item glued to the surface. Brainard's mixed media flower collages are certainly decorative, but they also revel in color which evokes the 60's in a way that Warhol's silkscreened flowers can only sneer at. This book is full of surprises, such as the paper cut-outs that mimic grasses, leaves, and sometimes wildflowers. They are artificial, but in their arrangement and color, they evoke miniature forests in extreme close-up. It is as if the viewer is actually lying on one's belly in the grass, chin resting on one's hands, inches above the forest floor. Brainard painted each cut-out leaf and stalk by hand, and then mounted them in plexiglass boxes.

John Ashbery contributes an introductory note in which he praises Brainard as an artist and as a friend. Although this note is reprinted from a 1997 catalogue, it fits nicely, and sets the tone for the rest of the book.

Constance M. Lewallen's biographical essay, "Acts of Generosity" sketches Brainard's life and art gracefully. Born in Arkansas in 1942, Brainard was 15 years old when he started winning prizes in the Oklahoma

state fair competitions. Throughout high school, he continued to paint posters and canvases, winning a scholarship to the Dayton Art Institute. In 1958, Ron Padgett and Dick Gallup asked Brainard to be the art editor of their new literary magazine, *The White Dove Review*. Before long, he was in New York, where he produced a massive body of work. Brainard met the poets and artists associated with the "New York School," and immediately began collaborating with them. C Comics, a C Magazine spinoff, contained comic strip collaborations with John Ashbery, Bill Berkson, Ted Berrigan, Kenward Elmslie, Barbara Guest, Kenneth Koch, Frank O'Hara, Ron Padgett, James Schuyler and others. By the 70's, Brainard was working at an incredible pace ("once he worked for three days without sleep"). He exhibited at solo shows in Philadelphia, Kansas City, Newport, Bridgehampton, as well as Australia and Paris. After a decade of what some called obsessive production, in 1979 Joe Brainard stopped. He still did occasional pieces for friends (notably *Sung Sex*, with Kenward Elmslie), but he slowed down the pace, paid more attention to his health, and spent more time with his friends. After struggling with AIDS for some years, Joe Brainard died in 1994.

Carter Ratcliffe's appreciation of Brainard's work, "Joe Brainard's Quiet Dazzle," is enthusiastic and informative. Ratcliffe discusses Brainard's various "Nancy" pieces in a way that sheds light on Brainard's use of camp, and on camp in general;

Brainard adored Nancy, no doubt, yet she is not the only or even the primary subject of his variations on her image. Their larger subject is imagery itself, its tireless proliferation over the centuries, its manic proliferation now, and its vulnerability to style. Some artists shift styles as if to show that style is superficial, inessential. They play with it only to mock it. No trace of that bitterness appears in Brainard's art. No matter how fleetingly he used a style, his use was always an embrace...

He closes with this observation:

In a time obsessed with the future and the stripped-down essences to be found there, Brainard dazzled by taking art back to those moments, early in life, when the very idea of an image becomes intelligible and almost unbearably rich with meaning.

The second half of the catalog features Brainard's writing. There is an excerpt from Brainard's groundbreaking *I Remember*, some diary entries, such as this one; "Painting a pear today, it occurs to me that what painting is really all about for me (at its best) is dis-

covery." There are brief selections from his other published books, *New Work* (1973) and *Nothing to Write Home About* (1981). There are some previously unpublished writings about art and three interviews. The interviews are especially enlightening, because here Brainard clarifies what the artworks so clearly articulate: a sense of wonder and the generosity to give that wonderment to his friends and, for that matter, to the viewers of his art.

A true poet's painter, Brainard's presence was an essential part of the New York School. Like George Schneeman and Basil King, his covers graced so many of the best poetry books from the 60's forward. When you look at the collections from which this show was collected, you find a stellar sampling of New York's distinctive poets and artists, including Harry Mathews, Ron & Pat Padgett, Joe LeSeuer, Michael Brownstein, Duncan Hannah, Bill Berkson, Kenneth Koch, John Giorno, Ned Rorem, Greg Masters and Kenward Elmslie. Now we have a book devoted exclusively to Brainard's oeuvre, and I can't wait to see the show.  
—MITCH HIGHFILL

## Juice

by Renee Gladman

Kelsey St. Press, 2000. 63 pp.

The first full-length book from Bay Area poet and prose writer Renee Gladman contains four dream-punched realities provoked by a single mind into stories made of prose poems that are complete works in-and-of-themselves to boot. Gladman has a ground-rooted personal tone that does not rely on a barrage of information to assert or connect the complex and transparent variations of mind and spirit each story inhabits. But the casual directness of feeling framing each piece is driven by an undissembled intimacy welled into the speaking voices of the stories: "About the body I know very little, though I am steadily trying to improve myself, in the way animals improve themselves by licking. I have always wanted to be sharp and clean. But this is not a story about me." Gladman's sense of humor is wry and defusing—where one might expect the tone to turn aggressive that impulse is undercut, and the stories continue to invent themselves sharply, her humor allowing you to trust the fact that she's going somewhere you can't quite see.

*Juice* contains ink-stained mountains, archaeological gangs, a directionalist sister, neighborhood gossip, civic juice crises, a separation of mind and sight, bodies rendered partial by telephone calls, vanished peoples, and a collection of sleeps various enough to renew a

community imagined into a state of absence (you have to see them coming back from work). Feeding off a notion of time as cut off from its temporality (as channeled through a quote from Alain Robbe-Grillet), years pass in weeks or moments in these pages. The speaker in the first story, "Translation", speaks of dwelling in endless possibility while being confronted with abandonment by the entire people of her town. Time turns into something to be shared with spirits once no one is around to die. And bodies—the spaces between them at jobs, on the street, in bed, at a museum designed to absorb art into a sterile vein of categorizing, in work postures against surfaces—are used in the later stories to reposition consciousness. In this passage from "Proportion Surviving" this is established in terms of two lovers' sleep patterns during a kind of metaphysical crisis caused by a city's "sudden depletion of all its fresh apples"—no juice:

Sleep became our network: falling in and out of it for change. The rule of survival is that no two people can lie in the same bed and sleep at the same time. So I kept an eye on her and played this game of freshness. If by morning I could quickly run out and do seven things that did not involve longing, she would reward me.

Gladman continually links belief with not looking ("In order to believe in them, we did not want to see them," in reference to a townspeople's collectively chosen artifacts). Her sentences shape themselves to such a full extent that the subject(s) can, and often will, freely change from one to the next, taking the train off its track without stopping its wheels. However, the fact of transformation itself is usually not the point, although how to take hold of such transformation (in one's life, social, racial and sexual senses of others, and particularly in writing) and live in it without claiming sovereignty might very well be. Gladman is an expert at allowing you to meet your own mind as hers takes shape on the page: "The one tells the other: I want to exchange what you know about me for what I have gained on you."

Gladman writes through a surface that appears to wander rather than break or dramatically cohere, a quality that has long drawn the ire of the more stalled-in-their-aesthetics denizens of east coast Poetryland (no compressed leaps admiring themselves in this prose). Don't let surfaces elude you, this writing always knows exactly where it is, even, or especially, if that "is" is a space previously uninhabited.—ANSELM BERRIGAN

Elizabeth Robinson:  
**House Made of Silver**  
Kelsey St. Press, 2000. 72 pp.  
**Harrow**  
Omnidawn Publishing (Richmond, CA), 2001. 88 pp.

"The flaw of grace is proof. Stones become restless too, tired of being encoded, a trinity. But a temple should carry the memory of narrative" ("Apollo"). And closer to home, "The brick floor from which the / kingdom of God extends // or could extend // This is the hard table // with the door-like segments of its foldings" ("Term"). Linguistic and architectural construction join forces in Elizabeth Robinson's two new books to provide sites from which the poet investigates the place of the abstract in a world concretized on every front by those who inhabit it. *Harrow* is more luxuriant than *House Made of Silver*, but both collections present us with verse at its most salient.

Robinson's work has always been deliberate and diligent, involved with intrinsic elements of setting and "the effort / to scale down the sense of fit" ("Site Legend"). The floor, the dust upon it, a "watch laid / across a table before bed" erected 1990's "The White House" (*Bed of Lists*), and the author's attention to the essential has not diminished in the decade since. The move from white to silver house has extended the reach of the abode and brought about a shift in perspective appropriate to the shift from matte to metal. The edge of a table now also serves as an edge of light ("Term"). Fingers held under water for the length of a multi-section poem must "warp and soften," growing malleable as molten metal; a speaker finds refuge from a storm in the "midpoint" of a name rather than a cellar ("Return"). Voice, the tongue, "is a fire, / a sign painter . . . / A vocation" ("Entry for Song").

In *The Book of Questions*, Edmond Jabès says, "Writing is the way of god," a statement with which Robinson seems to agree. But let me emphasize that the *God* of Robinson's work is a device more related to the I of John Ashbery than to the figure dominating stray Sunday school memories. With his notoriously flexible and elusive pronouns, Ashbery changes our readings not only of the poem, but also of the very elements constructing that poem—and on which we rely to help us read. His pronouns raise more questions than they answer, and Robinson's *God* works a similar trope. The religious connotations of that word become entwined with day-to-day settings and sweeping mythologies in a manner that conjures but does not depend on historical associations—House of God/domestic house, Word/ word, etc. The figurative core of language is a base from which Robinson examines human history and its tangled relationship with

complex, fallible, and endlessly various systems of belief. Her poems remind us, crucially, that whether or not we see ourselves as believers, the systems people have accepted and rejected throughout history are irrevocably a part of our own, more concise stories.

She finds proof of this fact in all forms, from vast cathedrals and Greek temples to the home, where "the domestic storybook shows / God baking a pie" and drawers might hold the "Lord folded four times" ("The Ferry," "Creases"). These structures, along with our own words, and houses and gestures, share with Robinson's "stones" the burden of symbolic weight; that interplay with manifestations of the abstract is what her poems address, expose, and refuse to back away from. Any faith we have is in the expression of that faith as much as it is in its overt object. The rituals in which we participate—making lists, singing hymns, washing dishes—allow us to render tangible our lives but also demand commitment. Ask yourself, To what am I dedicated? In what do we as readers and writers of poetry have faith? We may consider ourselves lucky if we have made our commitments as completely as Robinson has made hers to every element of her silver house, to every word of each one of her poems.—BETH ANDERSON

**The Master Thief**  
by Camille Guthrie  
Subpress, 2000. 112 pp.

On the cover of *The Master Thief* by Camille Guthrie, a color photo at first looks like a medieval tapestry: against the rich gold and red hues of a forest, two hunters carry an antlered stag. But instead of being men in vermilion tights and striped bodices, they are two very contemporary looking women (poachers?) carrying a "twelve-point" buck. This cover photo perfectly introduces the surprises of *The Master Thief*.

Divided into twelve parts, *The Master Thief*, true to its name, steals like crazy from texts and authors as various as *Frankenstein*, Christine Rossetti and John Donne, splicing together familiar images, metaphors, meters, and words in a wild sampler of mythological and literary allusion. The reader is given just enough familiarity to feel disoriented in the way that déjà vu can more productively shake one up than sheer unbounded hallucination. The wilderness may be the only constant in this spliced semi-recognizable world. It is that same treacherous forest, the one that "covers the world," which appears in so many myths, fairytales and other conduits into the secret holes of our brains. It provides a convenient foil for humans seeking to set boundaries to their perception.

The narrator assumes a thief's liquid and elusive identity and transformation comes from a dizzying multitude of catalysts—marriage, parenthood, wild nature. And there's the horror of giants, wizards and lovers who thieve and swindle, down to the very parts of her body. "A face. Scenery. A man's leafy promises:/ 'If you can love me by the morrow,/ I will make you a new pair of hands.'/ What was I to do?/I said 'I will,'/ and pulled dresses from acorn shells." Too bad she ends up with glass hands. And married love has the same unthinking beauty and terror as a tidal wave. "So I married, deflowered on a river bed/By an eager shark— Together, our flood/Whelmed volumes, poured shores— We distilled/Ten maelstroms through one hundred glass funnels ..."

Guthrie handles scale masterfully—moving from the minute to the epic in the space of one stanza, using at times strict rhyming forms to structure this dizzying range. It's like looking at a meticulously painted work by Jan van Eyck, and then looking at a Richard Serra. One moment you're drawn in by the minute detail; the next, you're exhilarated by primal and gargantuan upheaval.

Despite such range, or perhaps because of it, the work hangs in a timeless suspension. One particular section—ostensibly from the voice of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley—includes historical details, such as Napoleon Bonaparte invading France. But through the eternally tragic event of losing a child juxtaposed with everyday activities the narrative keeps from actually entering a timestream. "Transcribe, after dinner, walk in the garden/Write Preface. Finis./We talk, study a little Greek, and go to bed/This is repeated throughout the week."

*The Master Thief* makes one think about change and continuity in cultural mythology: it addresses the liquid identities women (and men) assume while undergoing transformation; the movement between primal and unchanging externality (the endless forest) and everchanging interiority (identity); and thieving itself—an illegal activity which is frequently moral. Those two women stealing through the forest with a deer could really be new Robin Hoods—people with their own set of internal morals who judge each situation individually, leaving life open to a greater range of self-transformation.—MARCELLA DURAND



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NEW STAR BOOKS

# Books Received

## Books

Noel Black

**This is the Strange Part/  
Under Days**

Old Gold Press, 2001.

William Corbett

**Back and Forth**

Pressed Wafer, 2001.

Duncan Dobbelmann

**Tronie**

Harry Tankoos Books  
(harrytankoosbooks@att.net),  
2001.

Thomas Sayers Ellis

**The Genuine Negro Hero**

Wick Poetry Chapbook Series,  
Kent U. Press, 2001.

Theodore Enslin

**The Roads Around Jenkins**

First Intensity Chapbooks #1,  
2000.

Ed Friedman

**Drive Through the Blue  
Cylinders**

Hanging Loose Press, 2001.

Kenneth Irby

**Studies**

First Intensity Chapbooks #2,  
2001.

William Melvin Kelley

**dem**

Coffee House Press Black Arts  
Movement Series, 2001.

Ann Lauterbach

**If in Time: Selected Poems  
1975-2000**

Penguin Poets, 2001.

Friederike Mayrocker

**Peck Me Up, My Wing**

translated by Mary Burger  
smokeproof press, 2000

Maggie Nelson

**Shiner**

Hanging Loose Press, 2001.

Cedar Sigo

**Goodnight Nurse**

Angry Dog Press (1083 Natoma  
St., San Francisco, CA 94103),  
2001.

## Magazines

**The @tached Document #1**

Editors: Jeff Chester, Derek  
Fenner, Todd McCarty  
Contributors: Lisa Jarnot, Jeni  
Olin, Kevin Killian, others.

**Cello Entry #3**

Editor: Rick Snyder  
Contributors: Nada Gordon,  
Devin Johnston, others.

**Combo #8**

Editor: Michael Magee  
Contributors: Kristen  
Gallagher, Rodrigo Toscano, K.  
Silem Mohammed, others.

**Gargoyle #43**

Editors: Lucinda Ebersole  
and Richard Peabody

Contributors: Diane di Prima,  
Linda Smukler, others.

**The Hat #4**

Editors: Christopher Edgar and  
Jordan Davis

Contributors: Kyle Connor,  
Daniel Kane, Hoa Nguyen, oth-  
ers.

**Interlope**

Edited by Alvin Lu  
Contributors: Pamela Lu,  
Eileen Tabios, Quentin Lee,  
others.

**Poetry New York #12**

Editor: Burt Kimmelman  
Contributors: Basil King, Albert  
Mobilio, Jill Stengel, others.

**Shark #3: Historiography**

Editors: Lytle Shaw  
and Emilie Clark  
Contributors: Anselm Berrigan,  
Stephen Cope, Jacques Debrot,  
others.

**Talisman #21/22: Maureen  
Owen**

Editor: Edward Foster  
Contributors: Jackson MacLow,  
Fanny Howe, Elaine Equi.

**Tripwire: A Journal of Poetics  
#4**

Editors: Yedda Morrison  
and David Buuck  
Contributors: Eileen Myles,  
Bobbie West, Alan Gilbert,  
Rosmarie Waldrop, others.

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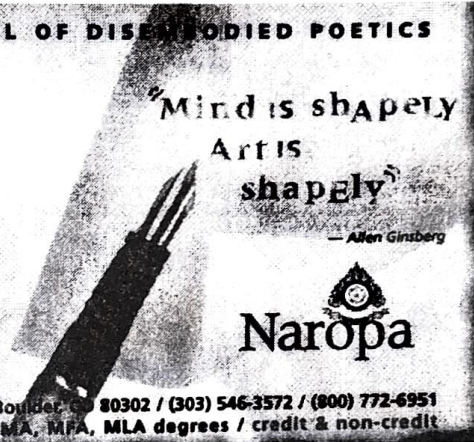
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