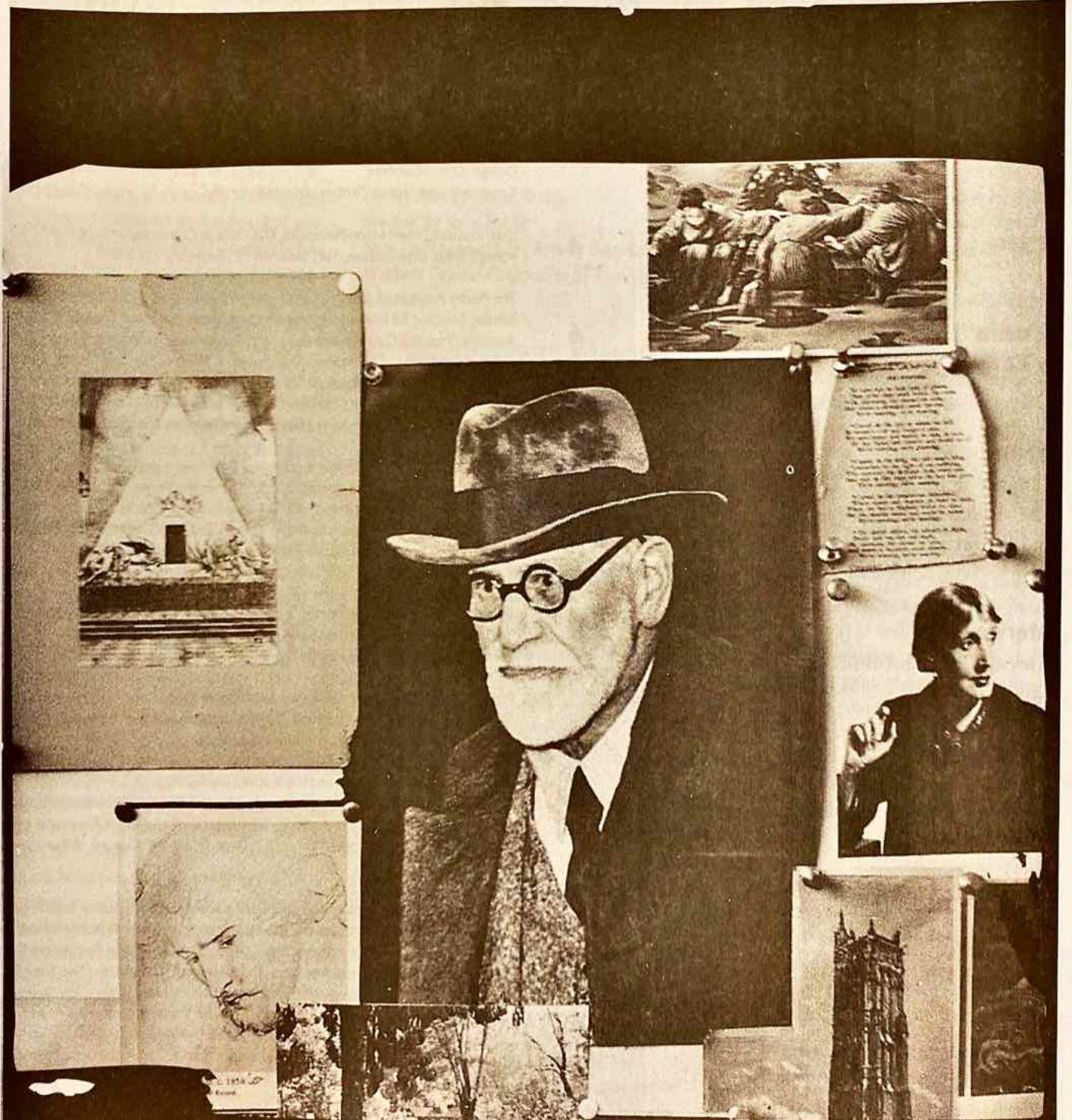


Poetry Project

NEWSLETTER



October / November 2001 Issue number 186



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News and Announcements

Since last spring there have been a number of changes in the Poetry Project's program and administrative staff. We're thrilled to welcome **Maureen Owen** as the Project's Program Coordinator. Maureen was the Program Coordinator from 1976-80. In the intervening years, she's raised a family, given a million readings and workshops, and published terrific collections of poems such as *American Rush: Selected Poems* (Talisman House, Publishers). **Veronica Corpuz**, late of Brown University and the Naropa Graduate Writing Program, is joining us as the new Program Assistant. Poet, author of *Freud in Brooklyn* (Hanging Loose Press, 2000), and former acting instructor **Joanna Fuhrman** will be hosting the Monday Night Reading/Performance Series. Friday Late-Evening Events Series Coordinator **Christopher Stackhouse** is a poet and visual artist. His recent work can be seen until October 20th at the Atmosphere Gallery, 134 10th Ave. in Manhattan. We also bid a grateful farewell to Tracy Blackmer, Jenny Smith, Rachel Levitsky, and Regie Cabico. We wish them well in their new ventures.

Poets in Need is a non-profit organization providing emergency assistance to poets who have an established presence in the literary community as innovators in the field and a substantive body of published work. Assistance is given only in cases of current financial need that is in excess of and unrelated to the recipient's normal economic situation and that is the result of a recent emergency (due, for example, to fire, flood, eviction, or medical crisis). Poets in Need is seeking donations. Checks may be made out to Poets in Need and mailed to Lyn Hejinian, Treasurer, Poets in Need, 2639 Russell St., Berkeley, CA 94705. Questions about the organization should be directed to Leslie Scalapino, 5729 Clover Drive, Oakland, CA 94618.

Come celebrate the launch of **Faux Press** on Friday, October 26, 2001 from 6-8 pm at Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 5 Union Square West, 7th Floor, New York City. With readings by the authors of:

On My Way by Eileen Myles
Memoir by Tony Towle
How To Proceed in the Arts by Gary Sullivan
Western Capital Rhapsodies by Marcella Durand

Snacks, liquid refreshments, and books for sale will be available in plenty. For more information, call (212) 691-6590.

Our new Monday Night Readings Coordinator, **Joanna Fuhrman**, is looking for poets' films to show in her series.

In response to our last questionnaire...

Diane di Prima:

Two of my favorite magazines are *First Intensity* edited by Lee Chapman out of Lawrence, Kansas, and *Skanky Possum*, edited by Dale Smith and Hoa Nguyen from Austin, Texas. They are very different but in both cases you'll find *all kinds of writing* (I always find something unexpected in each issue).

Doug Holder:

I've got a few magazines. First is *Spare Change* (1151 Mass. Ave Cambridge, MA). Although not all poetry, this street newspaper has a large poetry section. They feature poets from the margins of society, who usually don't have a forum to express themselves. Here discharged mental patients, homeless, and the indigent get a chance to strut their lyrical stuff. *Poesy* (Santa Cruz, CA). This is a bi-coastal magazine edited by Brian Morrissey. Informative interviews with

established and emerging poets, poetry that is lively and well crafted, artwork, and insightful reviews. *Lummo Journal* (San Pedro, CA). Raindog has produced this digest-sized zine that explores the creative process. There is extensive poetry event listings from around the country, reviews, and interviews that explore the muse of many cutting edge poets. Also they have a great chap series, "Red Book." *Small Press Review*—the organ of the biz, from Paradise CA. Extensive listing of small press and other little literary magazines, reviews, picks of the month, listings of free magazines, new publishers, a must for the working poet.

David Baratier:

My favorite poetry magazines are difficult to find in Ohio, like *St. Agabus*, an unknown servant of God. Saint Agabus? Would you say that name fast? Agabus. Agabus. Very good. As the patron saint of fortune telling, Agabus is only mentioned twice in the scriptures, both in the book of Acts. My favorite Saint, Agabus, the unknown, would lead me to admit Prius as my favorite. But they are changing their name due to recent legal complications. What makes them good? They publish godly poems. By this I mean, not of god, or as trite as to mention the being, but rather, fearlessly obscure, and often use copyrighted trademarks. I should say: they publish good poems. Also, there is a poem about the Fantastic Four, and since they are Fantastic, one would think more literature should be devoted to them.

Sparrow:

Lungfull! is the most graphically sage magazine; and the only one to recognize that writing *is* handwriting. *Mudfish*, read sequentially, is exactly like a novel written by a 110 separate people. Finally, *Cute Alien* (dead now five years) was the best very small—under 6 square inches—journal on the East Coast.

Letter

Mr. Fagin:

Your recent interview in the Poetry Project Newsletter made me very angry, and upset many poets I know. How angry did it make me? I performed a dramatic reading of your interview at a recent Friday poetry reading, reciting your interview answers in a voice that was a cross between Burgess Meredith and Charlton Heston (think: cranky and old).

I posted an angry message on to the Buffalo Poetics Listserv, in which I accused you and others of a "new old-fogeyism":

"What we are witnessing, what we are enduring, is a new old-fogeyism: a fanatical, nostalgic golden look back at our art, at all art. These voices tell us, 'Sorry, kids, we had it great and you missed it.'"

"Bullshit. These voices tell us, 'Poetry doesn't mean what it used to, poets aren't as smart as they used to be, our magazines were better, our poems were better, our poets were better. Our weed, our sex, our boys and our girls—it was non-stop heaven.'

"Bullshit. These voices tell us 'We had greatness, we had rhythm, we have our Mt. Rushmore of poets, and now we just need to stop.'

"Bullshit. I don't think you had to be a white guy and go to Harvard in the 1950's to be a poet in this country."

"Do we need new poetry? Yes. Do we need new poetry from you? You decide. Curl up with your favorite golden oldies by the fire and remember how great it was, nobody's stopping you. The rest of us will be writing.

"Mom and Dad, I'm glad you don't like my music. It's 9:30, why don't you go

to bed now?"

What set me off, why did I feel so angry? You sounded so smug, you sounded like a real asshole. That young poets aren't smart enough to write poems, that we don't have control of "diction and destiny." That we're "no fun." That because I have to work for a living and can't get stoned all day, I can't write poems. That all young poets write is "lame stand-up comedy." That everyone should stop writing "for, say, five years."

It's possible that you are a smug asshole. It's possible that you got caught up in the interview. Maybe you just don't know what you're talking about.

I'm happy to report you are a lousy critic of the current generations of young American poets, that you have no sense of the great work that is taking place across this country. Mr. Fagin, you don't know what's going on.

There's as much good poetry out there as there's ever been, some truly wonderful work is being produced.

I'm thrilled to be a reader, an editor, a poet, at a time when there's this much energy, these many voices.

Is every young poet great? No. Have young poets figured it all out? No. But neither did you, Mr. Fagin, neither did the poets of the 50s and 60s.

Younger poets didn't invent poetry. This is the American Poetry you have given us. If we love Ashbery, Schuyler, Koch and O'Hara, great. We should love them, and love a million others. You are our teachers, you edit the anthologies, you publish the books, you raise the rent, you show us the way.

We didn't invent sounding derivative, we didn't conjure up "clubbiness", and

we're not the first to write bad poems. As the wise anti-drug commercial of my youth said, "I learned by watching you!"

This is your wake-up call, Mr. Fagin. You ought to find out about some of the great poetry being produced.

You now owe that to young poets. I'll say it again. The kids are alright. Why don't you give them a fucking chance?

—Jim Behrle
Brookline, MA

The WORLD 58

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**In Memoriam
TED WILENTZ**

Eulogy by Amiri Baraka

Ted Wilentz was an old and I hoped close friend, "back in the day"!

Together, Ted, his brother Eli, and I initiated the Totem-Corinth book series, which included Allen Ginsberg's first, unpublished book of poetry, "Empty Mirror" (Fielding Dawson cover), Kerouac's "Golden Eternity" (Dawson cover), O'Hara's "Second Avenue" (Larry Rivers cover), my own first, "Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note" (Basil King cover...before he turned "white" watching TV and helped turn me "black").

The Wilentz brothers (Corinth) and I (Totem) did Snyder, Whalen, "Four Young Lady Poets," Olson's still underunderstood "Projective Verse." The Moderns—a hardcover anthology of fiction—Burroughs, Rumaker, Creeley, di Prima, Dorn, Shelby, Metcalf, Kerouac, Eastlake, Rechy, Woolf, Edson, Dawson, Jones...edited by LeRoi Jones before any of them guys, save Kerouac, had much rep. (April '63).

This was a few months before JFK got iced (November '63) by the same forces in the Caucasian crib right now, with its Counterfeit President for a Fake Democracy! That was one step away from all that, another toward this.

Two years later Malcom was murdered, and that whole era got in the wind.

Add the other Kennedy and Dr. King, and even the bizarre backwardness of giving Totem-Corinth entirely to the Wilentzes, which I did in some fit of continuing rage at Malcolm's assassination, seems more historical and distant than understandable.

Looking back, as if memory were as real as the future, I remember Ted as one of the uncynical optimists of that age, and though our later relations were wallpapered with some of the rude crankery of those and these times, facing each other, no matter, as diverse sons of two nations side by side would permit. Which every time I look at Bush II or The Colon, is worth accolades, even if only to each other, over our shoulders, from our twinned selves.

The Poetry Project wishes to thank the following individuals for their generous contributions in memory of Ted Wilentz: Bruce & Linda Baum, Elizabeth P. Benson, Henry Berliner, Ronald Columbus, Helena Curtis, Norma Hess, Lireka P. Joseph, Joel Kleinman & Dusanka Kleinman, Carla & Morton Klevan, Jarel, Philip, Mark, & Matt Kromer, Anna Lipman, Houston and Mary Lee Maples, Carol Mendez, Theodore Merrill, Jr., Bill Morgan, Kate Owens, Jeanette Sanger, Ruth Hein Schmitt, David & Hatsumi Wilentz, and Mrs. Joan Wilentz.

**In Memoriam
JOE LE SUEUR**

**In Memoriam
SUSAN CATALDO**

**In Memoriam
MORRIS GOLDE (1920-2001)
One of the Poetry Project's dearest friends.**

Poem

David Perry: 6 Poems

Replica

The sun is one you know—
Another last turn to go

Until you're done being here
But not yet begun elsewhere

We don't get it like this often
Enough to trace its descent

Dueling all through the house
And out into the street below

The window of your most recent
Reflection appears without a dent

Two rights and a left to the liquor store
Mysterious premonition of rapid turnover

Enough! Between us is a fence
With you, object of frustration

Consciousness cut in two or more
Lots to be re-divided later

Words want us to do things
That we can't do with them

Ancestral Wig

The pleasure boats bumping along
By way of waves and particles

As though sketched in my daybook
Modeled on dusk and the old gray mule

Over the breakwater thoughts occurred
With the oncoming noxious fog

The tide dropped two feet in six seconds
To the surprise of all the sea creatures

For the pilgrims bumping along in their cars
The sun is the mind of God on drugs

While we made our way by foot through the fen
To confront at last what we most feared

And slipped away and walked the strand
To find everything just as it was

Sad Walk

Impoverished on the wing
If you have to tell the birds to sing

How curious the stillness
Rises to crush us!

Wouldn't you know sunshine
Comes in through experimental hoops?

Promontory socks the wind
Rushes of coming to after being out

And despite appearances such as ocean blue
We are not better off as people

Thunk

The object of my failure is description.
A portrait of a ghost, like the one before you
waiting for you to catch up to it: your likeness
in the space where you keep appearing
and disappearing, knowing it will come again
to prime the brain with its many unstable compounds.

That's for time to know and space to find out
in the sunset of a former colonial outpost
or mournful site of lost imperial glory
giving one a sense that one does now
want: that of being there and nowhere in particular

where formative things (uptake inhibitors)
were meant to happen, and did, with the inevitable
mutations. Everything's been wired since
I awoke. Listen. Them's the boids!

Fifi

The people I know—
if only you knew them too
you'd be closer to me. Too close.
Where the air is hinged
light drips through the drapes,
fine hairs all around me
paving the way for night.
It's the only way I can experience life
I'm afraid. As for smoothness
I can't find the conjunction.
What's a missing poodle to do?
A keening in my ears,
cupcake fragments—that sort of thing.
In the end, life is unreconstructed
slush. Cats come in from the rain
to sit and wonder. Feed them.

But we must stop walking
at the speed of what we left behind.
Come on in and stack yourself in the corner.
Wait with me for winter to wind down.
You're my choice—for now.
Yes, the talking dog,
suspicious friend of man,
alone in the dark
waiting for the call in the woods
or the lights to come up.

Notes on a Blown Notion

I'm glad I did what I did last night.
I could do it once again if only
over your dead body. And that, Jack,
is definitive fact. Count: (1) Police
chopper blocks moon, threshes
the dark through a large-gauge
need for absolute power.
(2) The little grasses
sit suspect, each act
of congress in the grass between
us, as it were (and it were)
appears in sudden relief—syntax, say,
snapped everywhichway in the
hidden valley of our collected words.
(3) The afternoon's emotional cakewalk
in the park could have been around
an upset pedestal. Step down, please.
Be famous on your own time. Thanks
to the little people I no longer have
to make my story up (the one about the grass).
(4) I can sit back and let it
spin itself into
some abbreviated future.
Maybe that was the understood thing
mentioned in the hypnagogic almanac I found
stuffed in the old wicker hamper down in the basement.
(5) Consider the bin
as if it were an engine
in a flowerbed
filled with books
where one can dry out
one's brains. (6) A slick surface,
a twitch in the eye. Will these hold together
without an audition? I so long someday to be one
of the voices in your head, but only later,
after I've arrived. I'm going over it now in the mirror.

David Perry's first book of poetry, Range Finder, will be published this fall by Adventures in Poetry.

The Wasteland

Chapter 12 of *Robert Duncan: The Ambassador from Venus*

by Lisa Jarnot

Previous chapters of this book have appeared in *The Chicago Review*, *Blaze Online* and *A.bacus*. Those sections outline Robert Duncan's birth in January of 1919 in Oakland, California and his subsequent adoption by Edwin and Minnehaha Symmes, a young middle class couple with an interest in the occult.

"...your resemblances and 'recognitions' may mark you as a Symmes on the broad canvas of Duncan."

—Edna Keough to Robert Duncan, undated letter

During the fall of 1927, Edwin and Minnehaha Symmes made a decision once again based on an astrological forecast drawn by the elders of the Hermetic Brotherhood. The planets had willed it—the Symmeses were to leave Alameda for a new and more propitious place. When Edwin received explicit instructions to relocate to the site where he had first contemplated a career in architecture, he remembered that in 1905 he had prepared for architectural school examinations while his own father "a railroad engineer...was working in the roundhouse in Bakersfield."¹ The family was soon on its way to that Southern California town. The move marked a turning point of another sort—it was the last time that the mysterious imperatives of the cosmos took precedence over household decision-making based on more mundane socio-economic principles. With the move, the Symmes's connection to the Northern California occult circle was geographically severed. As their religious practices began to wane, Edwin and Minnehaha re-invented themselves as upwardly-mobile non-denominational suburbanites.

In Bakersfield, a town with a mere thirty year of history and development behind it, Edwin Symmes saw the promise of an architectural practice of his own. Soon after the family's arrival during October of 1927 he found the employment he had anticipated, as a public works architect. For the family as a whole however there were adjustments to be made. They had landed in a hot desert valley three hundred miles south of friends, relatives and the urban sophistication of the Bay Area. With money from the sale of the house in Alameda, the Symmeses purchased a one-story adobe cottage at 1908 Verde Street not far from a row of tar-covered streets classified as downtown. The new living arrangements paled in comparison to the shady angular property in Alameda, and the transition was not as effortless as had been foretold by the Hermetic Brotherhood. The children, now uprooted from the indulgences of their extended family, found themselves even more isolated when Minnehaha suffered an allergic reaction to the San Joaquin Valley's foliage. By the following summer her condition had burgeoned into a chronic hay fever which periodically left her confined to bed.

While she retreated to the back room of the new house sipping medicinal lemon water prescribed by a physician, eight-year-old Robert and his younger sister

familiarized themselves with the neighborhood by pedaling their bicycles up and down Verde Street past the low flat houses and palm trees, and around the nearby Roosevelt Elementary School. On other occasions when left alone to explore, Duncan found himself drawn to the boundaries of the town and to the banks of the Kern River just north of downtown Bakersfield's main artery Truxton Avenue. He later said he had few fond memories of the geography or culture of Bakersfield, but in fact that locale resonated throughout his creative life in subtle nostalgic reveries. In a poem written decades later he remembered the place he had sometimes characterized as a suburban hell:

the wilderness beyond the edge of town, the riverbottom
[road,
to find some wanton promise the derelict landscape most
[portrayed in me,
the fog's sad density of cold,
in me, the solitary and deserted paths,
in me, the marshy wastes, the levee road
where day after day as if driven by the wind
I impatiently strode...²

But within the derelict landscape there was an alternating force of growth. The town's namesake, Colonel Thomas Baker, had been responsible for first transforming the southern portion of San Joaquin Valley swamplands into alfalfa fields during the 1860s. Those fields became incorporated into a town of Kern County in 1898 and became the seat of an active grape and cotton farming industry. While the strips of city streets lie flat in the valley, mountains rise up on the horizon—to the west, the Temblor Range; to the south, the Tehachapi range and to the east, the Sierra Nevada range which extends into Northern California. Along the foothills are ample grazing areas for sheep and cattle, and with surrounding oil-rich land, Bakersfield's population quickly swelled throughout the early part of the twentieth century.

As members of the middle-class in the post-war lull of the early 1920s, Edwin and Minnehaha Symmes maintained a household that was economically stable and politically conservative. Those traits were ingrained in their children to varying degrees. Money would always be an organizing point for Robert Duncan, whether it be in his battles with his mother over his trust fund and allowance, or in his meticulous financial record keeping while on reading and lecture tours. The material comforts of a household were at the center of his thoughts, and as he said in an interview in 1976, "When I was a child I was always wanting to play household and house..."³

But in the realm of politics, he found himself embattled with his parents, and later even with himself—his early life left him with deep conflicts in regard to his own political views. Those repressed conflicts remained essentially inaccessible to him during his adult years. In his writing and in public he portrayed himself as an anarchist, espousing a disregard for governments and doctrines, and calling for an attention to the natural laws of the universe. And as he wrote in his 1944 essay "The Homosexual in Society":

...only one devotion can be held by a human being seeking a creative life and expression, and that is a devotion to human freedom, toward the liberation of human love, human conflicts, human aspirations. To do this one must disown all the special groups (nations, religions, sexes, races) that would claim allegiance.⁴

It was a belief that led Duncan into a series of puzzling contradictions. While he possessed an insatiable curiosity about and openness in regard to humankind, among friends he sometimes lapsed into tantrums against "special interest groups," arriving at an anti-semitism and bigotry reminiscent of his parents'.⁵ There are clues throughout his autobiographical writing as to the political and social views that permeated his childhood household and fed into his own outbursts of intolerance. In lectures and interviews Duncan made frequent references to his family's anti-semitism, and he also made note that his parents "thought they were very adventuresome when they had some Catholic friends."⁶ With that in mind, Duncan deemed his mother "a Ku Klux Klan democrat," though his sister Barbara characterized her more benignly as a woman who distinguished herself in the community by caring for those in need.⁷ Meanwhile Edwin Symmes aligned himself with traditional Republican politics, as evinced by one of his daughter Barbara's early memories of the Verde Street house. Waking up one morning she found that her father had crept into her bedroom while she slept and pasted a sign across her wall that read, "Hoover Wins—Hurray!"⁸

The Symmes's political views and biases were by no means unlike those of their neighbors. While Bakersfield itself hosted a significant number of Japanese immigrants, they were relegated to labor in the oil fields and railroad yards. Basque farmers from the French and Spanish Pyrenees who had arrived in the Central Valley during the Gold Rush era also filtered into Bakersfield to dominate the shepherding industry. An unchecked flood of aliens nation-wide led to new

Congressional immigration quotas and an unprecedented spike in Ku Klux Klan activity. By 1924 the organization had reached its peak, boasting a membership of nearly five million.

To avoid small town gossip in an era of increasing social discretion, the Symmeses developed a prudence about their public activities. And as Duncan wrote of his parents in the *H.D. Book*:

They were isolated from their Brotherhood, their studies changed to studies that were respected by the community into which they had moved. By the time I was adolescent, my father was involved in the study of botany and local historical sites. After his death, Mother was relieved, I think, that this way of studying things might be dismissed. New friends did not share her belief—that was part of it—but then, though her belief may have lasted, her interest did not last.⁹

The Symmeses also briefly sent Robert and Barbara to a Congregational Sunday School,¹⁰ and Edwin Symmes joined a local chapter of Masons, ascending its ranks with evident ease. When he died in 1935, the front page of *The Bakersfield Californian* described the Masonic funeral rites held in his honor, reporting that "So greatly beloved was Mr. Symmes in civic life, many organizations have passed resolutions of sorrow at his death..."¹¹

Almost overnight Robert Duncan had lost his status as a phantom from an underwater kingdom. He was now eldest son of middle-class professionals. And though he was keenly aware of his parents' social anxieties, he felt no particular need to comply with their newly established normalization program. While his father continued to tutor him in mathematics and architectural drafting, Duncan's thoughts were summoned elsewhere. He found that he was capable of entertaining himself in a number of ways—writing poems, reading the *Oz* books, and occasionally honing his own storytelling skills in front of an audience of neighborhood children. Fueling these creative impulses were his first memories of his family's life in the Hermetic Brotherhood. The household in Alameda had taken hold of his imagination in such a way that he became the lone archivist of the Symmes's theosophical history. Not only in his poems, but also in his essays and lectures was the theme repeated:

What was left me from the talk of the elders in that antechamber of my childhood was now all my own. My parents, living far from the center of things, were concerned with security and status, the politics and business opportunities

of Bakersfield: our religion became something we did not talk about to everybody. I talked to myself about it.¹²

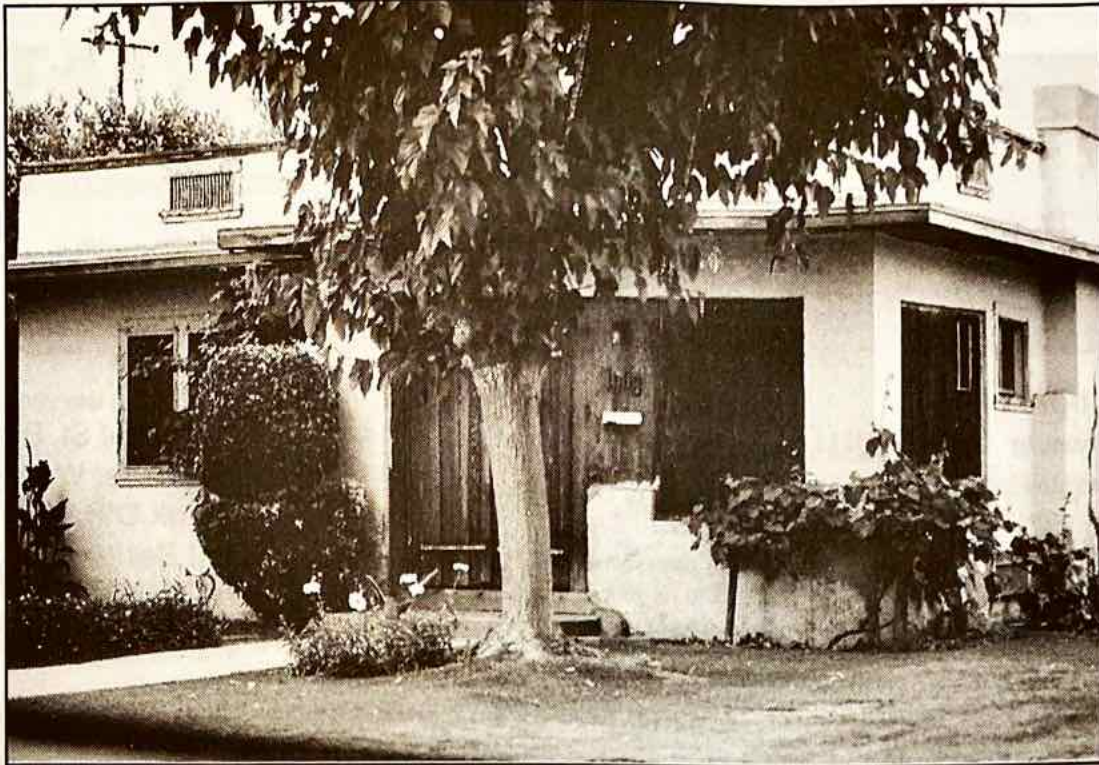
And when not talking to himself he began to communicate his ideas in written form, penning his first poems around 1928 at the age of nine. The one enduring memento of that era is a Bell-Wether Invincibles cigar box, decorated with colored construction paper, inside of which he safeguarded "Poems by Robert E. Symmes" dedicated to "the bestest grandma in the world from her grandson."¹³ The collection included a number of "occasional" poems written for "Thanksgiving," "Roosevelt's Birthday," and "Spring":

Baby life in fields does play
Cherries are ripe, birds are gay,
Between them all they raise a cheer,
Sweet cherries are ripe, spring is here.¹⁴

Though Duncan's early poems were conventional, there was a peculiar obsessive element evident in the process of his work. As a complement to the poems, he cut strips of construction paper into geometric shapes and glued them against each other at odd angles in a pattern akin to a Cubist composition. The montage of blues, oranges, reds, and greens were arranged into the shape of a castle with tin foil spires. From the beginning Duncan's creative activities were organized toward establishing the orders of a cosmos. As he reported in *The H.D. Book*, he periodically amused himself with an "Atlantis phantasy" facilitated by his parents' Mah Jong tiles:

I had had to build with utmost care and grandeur my little piled-up city or kingdom with many levels, for in the care, piece by piece, a place for something to happen was prepared, an other realm was built up.... What I would see then was the monolithic real building I was engaged in, coming into existence block by block and yet the blocks themselves coming into existence in the building, out of what they were—the imposing gleam of the red dragon and green dragon walls, the mysterious symbols of the Chinese game with its winds and flowers converted into ancient glyphs and signs of a fated citadel.¹⁵

Duncan also sometimes tried to include his sister Barbara in his imaginative productions, even when she failed to see the point of the day's experiments. On one occasion when he asked that she sketch a portrait of him, she attempted to opt out of the art lesson citing a lack of confidence in her abilities. Duncan insisted that she persevere, prodding her to "just keep drawing." He was intent on having an apprentice.¹⁶ And



1908 Verde Street, the Symmes's first residence in Bakersfield.

in those moments that his tomboyish younger sister managed to escape his grip, Duncan retreated by himself to the dusty volumes that he found on his parents' bookshelves and in the Beale Memorial childrens' library downtown. In addition to the Oz series, it was Kipling's *Jungle Books*, Grimm's *Fairy Tales*, and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* that kept him occupied into his teen years. His habits of obsessive reading and writing became a slight matter of concern, a sign of eccentricity that estranged him from his fellow classmates. At home there were moments of confusion as well. The details of Barbara and Robert's adoptions—which Edwin and Minnehaha never attempted to conceal from them—were a cause of some anxiety for the two children, particularly at the annual Harris family reunions where they were singled out as adoptees. As much as Duncan later worked toward inventing a universe of poetry, he had first faced the task of inventing himself.

Notes

¹ Robert Duncan. *The Naropa Institute Interview with Robert Duncan*, 1978. Boulder, CO: Erudite Fangs Editions, 1997.

² Robert Duncan. "Poems from the Margins of Thom Gunn's Moly: Preface to the Suite," *Ground Work I: Before the War*. New York: New Directions, 1984.

³ Robert Peters and Paul Trachtenberg. A Conversation with Robert Duncan, 1976. *Chicago Review*. Fall 1997, Volume 43,

Number 4. Robert Duncan's life-long fastidious record-keeping seemed to be more an exercise in numerology than the work of an accountant's mind. Despite his obsession with lists of purchases (from books to toothpaste), nothing distressed him more than balancing his bank book and filing his taxes.

⁴ One version of Duncan's "The Homosexual in Society" is printed in the appendix of Ekbert Faas's *Young Robert Duncan*. Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1983.

⁵ While visiting New York in 1954, Duncan denounced the city to a friend as "The Kingdom of the Jews". Later during the 1960s and 1970s he made it clear that he would never live in San Francisco's Castro neighborhood because he thought of it as a homosexual ghetto. Sometimes Duncan's verdicts were laced with less defensiveness and more naivety—he applauded the Civil Rights Movement but viewed the all-black alliances within the movement as detrimental to the cause.

⁶ Joseph Cardarelli. Interview with Robert Duncan. April 1985, Baltimore, Maryland.

⁷ Barbara Jones remembers that during the Depression years, Minnehaha took it upon herself to feed hobos and migrant farm workers who wandered onto their property from the nearby railroad yards.

⁸ Barbara Jones in conversation with the author. January 16, 1998.

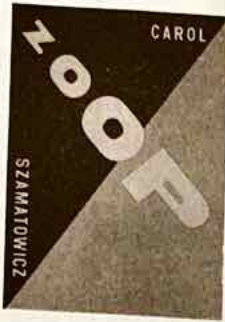
⁹ Robert Duncan. *The H.D. Book Online* (<http://onezerozero.net/books/index.html>), page 86.

¹⁰ Barbara Jones in conversation with the author. January 16, 1998.

(Cont. on page 29)



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WRITING WORKSHOPS

...AND NOT NEITHER, EITHER: POEM-STORIES – Sharon Mesmer
TUESDAYS AT 7 PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN OCTOBER 16

A "poem-story" begins in poetry, with heightened language, imagery, and rhythm, but moves quickly into story via traditional narrative elements (for example, Octavio Paz's "My Life with the Wave"). To construct poem-stories, we will read model texts and do in-class writing experiments (cut-ups, "Third Mind" improvisations, word collages, assemblages of juxtaposed journal notes — methods normally associated with the writing of poetry) — to generate ideas, scenes, characters, conflicts, and dialogue. Sharon Mesmer's books include *Half Angel*, *Half Lunch* (poems, Hard Press), and *The Empty Quarter* (stories, Hanging Loose Press).

CROWNING SONNETS: POETRY WORKSHOP – Patricia Spears Jones
FRIDAYS AT 7 PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN OCTOBER 19

This is a workshop for poets who want to informally explore the dynamics of the sonnet and create new ones as well as work on poems that reflect their personal style. The goal of the workshop will be the creation of a crown of sonnets (7) on a single theme by each of the participants. Interested applicants are asked to submit (1) a selection of 10 poems and (2) a brief summary of their writing experience by October 5th. Patricia Spears Jones is a poet, playwright and author of the collection, *The Weather That Kills* and the play *Mother*, produced by Mabou Mines in 1994.

POETRY WORKSHOP – Anselm Berrigan
SATURDAYS AT 12 PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN OCTOBER 20

Reading, Writing, Discussion. poem as site of arrangement. metaphysics of using cut language and stealing (from yourself, among others). reporting and rewriting. process, and suspicion thereof. how many different places are there to write from? timing, unconscious allegory, eco-systems, comedy, documentation, dreams, elegies, mind matter, rhythm. Anselm Berrigan's books of poetry include *Integrity & Dramatic Life* and *Zero Star Hotel*.

Tina Darragh interviewed by Marcella Durand

Tina Darragh's books include *on the corner to off the corner* (Sun & Moon, 1981), *Striking Resemblance* (Burning Deck, 1989), *a(gain)2st the odds* (Potes and Poets, 1989), *adv. fans - the 1968 series* (Leave Books, 1992), and *dream rim instructions* (Drogue Press, 1999). Darragh is employed as a reference librarian at the bioethics library at Georgetown University. She lives in Greenbelt, Maryland, with her husband P. Inman and their son, Jack, and has been active in the Washington, DC poetry scene since the early '70s (<http://www.dcpoetry.com.history.htm>).

Marcella Durand: I'm very intrigued by your idea—and practice—of linguistic/poetic "investigations." In particular, I'm interested in how you recast a poem outside its initial medium. You frequently "illustrate" your own work, with the illustration containing all sorts of doorways and loops, through which language appears. It's like you're investigating how your own writing can be reinterpreted and reformed beyond the limits of typed text laid out in lines on a page.

Tina Darragh: Well, the first investigations, really, involved looking words up in a dictionary! I was working as an editorial assistant at a legal publishing company, and I wanted to have an office "writing" life the way Stevie Smith had one (writing her *Novel on Yellow Paper* odd times at work.) So if I wanted to write a poem about someone, I would look up that person in the dictionary using an "off" association instead of a proper name and then transcribe that part of the dictionary page. Sometimes dictionary illustrations became part of the transcription as simple things that I could draw on the page, like an arc. Using the _____s on the page where I'd find them was the most fun, actually, and made reading the poems aloud interesting since I'm hammy and would move my head instead of making sounds. Then with the transcriptions for each letter of the alphabet that became *on the corner to off the corner*, I

started drawing on the page in a way suggested by the first/last words for that page. For the ambiguous figures project, I "built" the figures using photocopies of parts of dictionary pages, and with the bunch-ups, I'd cut out the bunched-up part from the window blind drawings and paste them over photocopies of random dictionary pages. I could "follow" words around like Francis Ponge followed soap around in his poems. I felt that I was taking myself out of the poem and letting the words relate to one another, the image replacing/critiquing the "author."

MD: Do you know Ponge's *The Making of the Pré*, where he writes and rewrites a piece over and over again? I found his book a really interesting way to break down the boundaries of the discrete text. You have an epitaph in *a(gain)2st the odds*—is he an important poetic figure for you?

TD: I spent a day at the Library of Congress once looking for that quote, getting all the Ponge books I could to see if I could find it. At one point in the late '70s when Jack was a toddler, I worked part time as a "deck attendant" at the Library of Congress—shelving books in the stacks, and I looked briefly through a Ponge book as I reshelfed it and saw a quote about figures of speech. Then, years later, I was in one of my "what is

this writing _____" phases that I get in, and I remembered seeing that Ponge quote on the fly but couldn't remember much else about it. So I took a whole Saturday to go to the Library of Congress to see if I could dig it up—it was such an extraordinary event, timewise. P. took care of Jack for the whole day instead of us splitting it, and I spent the whole time just looking at things. So it started me onto a new project. I'm going to try to get *The Making of the Pré* out of the library tomorrow so that we can talk about it, since you love his work, too.

MD: I think when I read *The Making of the Pré* (which was a while ago), Ponge was someone I was very much looking for: a poet involved with "matter." I had been getting involved with deep ecology, where you try to move away from human-centered (anthropocentric) stuff and into equality of all beings. I wanted not so much the fox to represent the poet's deep dark interiors, as to be a fox in and of itself, and Ponge was very exciting to me in that search into the existence of "things" & processes.

I could "follow" words around like Francis Ponge followed soap around in his poems.

TD: I never thought about Ponge vis à vis deep ecology, but you are so right about that. Reading your observation took my breath away, because I've been taking notes on a deep ecology book I came across at work—*Contesting Earth's Future* by Michael Zimmerman—but haven't done anything with them. It would be interesting to line them up beside *The Making of the Pré* and see what would happen. Maybe we could both do something like that re: Ponge as a collab. I think any interview is really a collaboration, and it would be good (if this is all right with you) to have a collab develop out of our exchange.

MD: Michael Zimmerman was my teacher in college and the one who got me turned on to deep ecology in the first place! He was wonderful. I didn't know he had a book out—I will have to go find it immediately. A collaboration sounds great. Also, I'm interested in hearing more about how work and poetry intersect for you.

TD: Sometimes the effect of working in a library on my writing is the equivalent of not wanting to eat donuts because you work in a bakery—I can't look at another book. Other times it is very calming to be surrounded by books when I'm trying to sort things out. When I worked at the Epilepsy Foundation

library in the late '80s/early '90s, it was amazing to read about the history of the treatments, the stigma, the sterilizations, and the different cultural explanations for the epilepsies—even to know that it was not plain "epilepsy" but many epilepsies. Also, there were some researchers at the time using chaos theory to try to figure out new combinations of drug therapy for those with intractable seizures, so chaos theory seemed to have a "practical" problem-solving side to it, not just a trendy side! I really miss doing reference work for people with epilepsy.

Of course, the epilepsy library was a room in an office building, and now I work in a "real" library with stacks, etc. In terms of my writing, a difference here is my co-workers' response to my writing. It used to be that when it became known at work that I wrote poetry (usually when I had to go somewhere for a reading), co-workers would ask to read my work. I'd make sure to let them know that it was more than OK for them not to like it. It would be funny because people would insist, "Oh, you are being too modest—I know I'm just going to love it." And then after they'd read it, they'd say, "You are right, I don't like it!" Here at the bioethics library, with a big collection of Nazi medicine literature, the response was, "Well, I would not like work like this, but at least you are a postmodernist with a sense of humor." So there is a way in which a major part of the library collection is a critique of my work, portraying postmodernism as a philosophical approach advocating erasure of history and the subject—postmodernism as veiled Nazi collaboration. Of course, there are books like

Zimmerman's that address issues such as Heidegger's collaboration with National Socialism while seeking to retain the "best parts" of postmodernism and link them up with civil rights and radical ecologies. As you can imagine, it was a real relief to find his book!

MD: Speaking of science (and epilepsy), I'm also quite interested in how you integrate that into your work. You mention popular science and how much you enjoy popular science books, and how you felt when someone dismissed those.

TD: Well, growing up, "science" was all about "fear"—not just because the nuns who taught the science courses were tougher than the others, but also because of that '50s mix that brought us the dive-under-your-desk nuclear attack drills. Once we were on the moon, I think science got a lot friendlier, but by then I was a total phobe. My high school guidance counselor told me that I would flunk out of college because I wouldn't be able to do the science (or math either)—that I should go to a community college, but even that might be too hard for me. I finally told a friend of mine from high school that story about a year ago, and she clued me in that the guidance counselor said that to everyone! Maybe it was the nun's habit she wore—one of the real uncomfortable ones that

made her look as if her face had been caught in a bus door. Anyway, by college there was a science subculture mix of Cultural Revolution (erase the distinctions between the intellectuals and the technicians), advanced Cold War (if we don't do science, commie science will do us), and self-help (let's eat a bunch of things we can't pronounce to keep fit). I know that most of this mix ended up as New Age day-glo products, but the questioning of scientific certainty going on in the background gives us real permission to challenge our deferment to "rigor" so we can "experiment" with materials from lots of different sources. Having said that, I don't think we are caught in the circular argument of "well, you can't prove something with certainty, so why should we _____ (stop burning fossil fuels or stripping forests, etc.)" We can still do ranges! And the fact that we can include various kinds of information in calculating the ranges (since we're not bound at the hip to "rigor") may mean we'll come up with interim solutions that would never surface if we relied on strict data.

MD: I'd like to hear about your current project.

TD: My current piece started out as a tribute to the Sea Turtle Restoration Project demonstrators at the Seattle anti-WTO march back in December, 1999, and by default the blue-green coalition getting going (the Teamsters just LOVE the turtles!) Now it is looking at language and animal rights. Traditionally, humans are responsible for protecting animals because we have language and they have pain. I don't like that dualism as a basis for fighting for rights, either for human animals or other animals. I've been re-reading the Zimmerman book since this question cuts across both the deep ecology and social ecology arguments. Very tentative, but of course I've been saying that for a couple of years now! Did I mention how important it was for me to read an essay by Bernadette Mayer in a magazine in the mid-'70s where she says something like "poets never admit how long it really takes them to write something." I can picture where I was sitting at the time (waiting for a bus at Porter and Connecticut Avenues). Maybe it will help other writers to mention that again here—it certainly continues to help me. Have I said thanks? Starting our Zimmerman/Ponge collab has been such a help. Thanks again.

Zimmerman/Ponge/Durand/Darragh collab (a beginning)

Deep eco pre 1

8/11/01

DEEP ECO PRE - conceived as a collaboration via the Internet, this summer, not far from such places as the green belt around the co-operative where I live with P. and Jack, and the best harbor in the world.

We, e,e, we

From (deep) ecology from (social) ecology from ecofeminism, the pre as eco, eco as a pre. Great _____ delle LAY brugge 1300 poems.

Mixed extension (from the point where we were, the spot where we happen to be, from where we overlook the scene, where we thought of it, first time, as a pre), we were among bucklings, common colors, popular scrubs, ant-wide wypo-utes.

And right below us ran shape betrays, some relation OutI before Listener laws end chemicals.

Between the two, deep eco pre. A summer camp class picking up trash from their playground.

We reflected, then, on nature without homage to origin. A trans-what-is-morph-isis of natter, we said to ourselves, linked with the Internet, that is, with lines that are sometimes up and sometimes down, small fragments reduced to letters, seconds - and layers, questions round. That nonetheless remain sound, wagging.

Marcella Durand's book, *Western Capital Rhapsodies*, is coming out this fall from Faux Press.

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OCTOBER 1, MONDAY

Open Reading

Sign-up at 7:30 p.m. [8:00 p.m.]

OCTOBER 3, WEDNESDAY

New Poems to End Greed, Imperialism, Opportunism, and Terrorism

Poets respond to the death and destruction of September 11, 2001. Proceeds will go to local and global relief efforts. [7:30 p.m.]

OCTOBER 5, FRIDAY

The New Traditionalists Compositional and Improvisational Music

Contemporary folk-pop and progressive instrumentalists, featuring saxophonist Marlon Ariola, drummer Ryan Sawyer, clarinetist Patrick Holmes, violist Dylan Willemsa, and songwriter/guitarist/vocalist Theo Eastwind. Each musician is in pursuit of a personally defined mode of expression that represents and transcends the preeminent styles of the instrument based on Modern American Music. [10:30 p.m.]

OCTOBER 8, MONDAY

Aaron Kunin and Cort Day

Aaron Kunin teaches film, curates the Mellon Poetry Seminar at Johns Hopkins and is currently at work on a Ph.D. His experimental fiction explores the interior design of ideas while his poetry blurs the boundaries between translation and creation. Cort Day's first collection of poems, *The Chime*, was published by Alice James Books earlier this year. "It is a work by turns, humorous and darkly erotic, where the ships of reason burn on an ocean tuned to an open frequency."—Michael Palmer [8:00 p.m.]

OCTOBER 10, WEDNESDAY

Fanny Howe and Kimberly Lyons

Fanny Howe, poet and novelist, teaches at the University of California San Diego. Her most recent books are *Selected Poems* (University of California Press) and *Indivisible* (Semiotext(e)). *The Chicago Review* instructs "...the intrigued reader has no excuse: get your hands on [Howe's] books, and get cracking." Kimberly Wallace wrote in *Asian Postscript* ("The New York Times Book Review," 2003), "Howe's precision of detail, as well as meditative subtlety." [8:00 p.m.]

Yuri Hospodar and Shelley F. Marlow

Yuri Hospodar has published one book, *To You in Your Closets* (Stone Soup Press, 1990). "Like the best public poetry, *To You in Your Closets* achieves an empowering catharsis on both page and stage...poignant tenderness alongside of humorous satire and angry indignation."—Chris Stroffolino. Shelley F. Marlow is a fiction writer and visual artist. She has just finished writing the novel, *Swann in Love Again/The Lesbian Arabian Nights*. In addition to reading, she will also present her video *How My Dead Grandmother Helped Finish Writing the Novel*. [8:00 p.m.]

OCTOBER 24, WEDNESDAY

Jo Ann Wasserman and Sharon Strange

Jo Ann Wasserman is a former Poetry Project Program Coordinator. Author of two chapbooks, she has recently completed a book-length series of poems entitled *The Escape*. Sharon Strange is the author of *Ash*, winner of the 2000 Barnard New Women Poets Prize. She is a contributing editor of *Callaloo* and cofounder of the Dark Room Collective. Yusef Komunyakaa writes, "Ash embodies a voice we can count on, informed by the grace and wit of the South." [8:00 p.m.]

OCTOBER 26, FRIDAY

Language Art—Talk That Talk

A night of "round-robin" style reading from a diverse group of writer/performers. Lloyd Robson's *City & Poems* was included in *The Independent Newspapers Best Books of 1996* (Cardiff, Wales). Nigerian-born Bassey Ikpi, a regular on the NYC slam circuit, is a member of Team Union Square 2K1 and the current NY Def Poetry Jam representative. Marco Villalobos is poetry editor for *Brooklyn Bridge Magazine*. Griffin Hansbury's poems have appeared in *Blood & Tears: Poems for Matthew Shepard* among other publications. Eisa Davis is a poet, performer and playwright. Her play *Paper Armor* will be read at the Langston Hughes' Centenary Conference at Yale in February, and her play *Umkovu* was featured in the Hip Hop Theatre Festival this past June. Patrick Kosiewicz is working on his first book. He is an editor for *Tribes* and *The Durable Press*. [10:30 p.m.]

OCTOBER 29, MONDAY

foster a poetic polylogue by printing poems that talk with one

Research. Using video, computer music, sound and lights, the two artists collaboratively present a "multi-modal media meditation." [10:30 pm]

NOVEMBER 12, MONDAY

David Hess and Alice Notley

David Hess's chapbook *Cage Dances* is just out by Skanky Possum Press. He lives in St. Louis. Alice Notley, a major voice in contemporary American poetry, is the author of numerous books of poetry, including *The Descent of Alette*, *Mysteries of Small Houses* and the new book *Disobedience*. She lives permanently in Paris. [8:00 pm]

NOVEMBER 14, WEDNESDAY

The Angel Hair Anthology Reading

A celebration reading for *Angel Hair Sleeps with a Boy in My Head: The Angel Hair Anthology* (Granary Books, 2001). Edited by Anne Waldman and Lewis Warsh from the rare original magazines and books, this large and generous publication, Jerome Rothenberg has praised, "is not only an archival masterpiece—the best of a time that's now gone though scarce forgotten—but an incitement to keep their work alive for a still newer generation." With readings by John Wieners, Anne Waldman, Lewis Warsh, Tony Towle, Mary Ferrari, Ron Padgett, Michael Brownstein, Bob Rosenthal, William Corbett, James Koller, Larry Fagin, and more! [8:00 pm]

NOVEMBER 16, FRIDAY

The Fast Californians

Michael Mills' "Project Anubis 7" re-builds the Egyptian tree of life with poetry, electronic music composition, performance. Donnell Alexander will read excerpts from his novel *Ghetto Celebrity* (McSweeney's) collaborating with free form DJ Marina Rosenfeld, whose composition was included in the Whitney Museum's 2001 survey of digital art "Bitstreams." [10:30 pm]

NOVEMBER 19, MONDAY

Alan Gilbert and John Tipton

An editor of the influential, now defunct, *Journal*, Alan Gilbert fuses political conviction with humor and wit in the music of the line. John Tipton's music explores the intersection of the music of the clause automated, as pursued by Cenzo Lirio's *Teas*. [8:00 pm]

...the intrigued reader has no excuse: get
Lyons is the author of *Howe's* books, and get cracking." Kimberly
Wallace wrote in *Rain Taxi* (online): "The work has an understated
precision of detail, as well as meditative subtlety." [8:00 p.m.]

OCTOBER 12, FRIDAY

Celebrating Gertrude Stein

Beyva Rosten presents Part I of Celebrating Gertrude Stein. Poets and performers will present works by Stein and works of their own that were influenced by her. Participants include dancer Sally Silvers, poet Bruce Andrews, playwright/director Irene Fornes, Anne-Marie Levine, and surprise guests. (Part II and Part III will be held at the Judson Church on October 13 and 14.) [10:30 p.m.]

OCTOBER 13, SATURDAY

Book Party for Elio Schneeman's *A Found Life*

Poet-friends of Schneeman's will read from the posthumous collection. A reception will follow. [6:30-8:30 p.m.] FREE

OCTOBER 15, MONDAY

Tom Devaney and HeidiLynn Nilsson

Poet Tom Devaney is author of *The American Pragmatist Fell in Love*. He writes for the experimental puppet group The Lost Art of Puppet. HeidiLynn Nilsson teaches at the John Carroll School in Baltimore. Nilsson has been described as "a new voice in American poetry—intense, musical, unpredictable and subtle—bringing a rare sincerity to transcendental concerns." [8:00 p.m.]

OCTOBER 17, WEDNESDAY

Kenward Elmslie and Bill Berkson

Publishers Weekly has described Bill Berkson as "...a serene master of the syntactical sleight, transforming the mundane into the marvelous." He is the author of 15 books and pamphlets of poetry including *Serenade* and, just out from Zoland Books, *Fugue State*. He is also a Corresponding Editor for *Art in America*. Kenward Elmslie's way with words cuts a singular swath through a polymath variety of forms. His works include *The Champ*, *City Junker* (a play), *The Grass Harp* (a Broadway cult-fave musical), and *Nite Soil*, among others. [8:00 p.m.]

OCTOBER 19, FRIDAY

With Out Hands: Slide Presentation, Poetry Reading, and Discussion

Liberian born painter/photographer D. Hamilton Caranda-Martin will present a slide show with music, during which he will discuss the political philosophies that inform his paintings and photographs. Caranda-Martin, the son of a prominent Liberian government official, is currently represented by Atmosphere gallery in South Chelsea. A reception will follow. [10:30 p.m.]

OCTOBER 19, MONDAY

Pom Pom: Poetry Journal

Pom Pom is a brand-spankin' new journal for poetry that seeks to foster a poetic polylogue by printing poems that talk with one another. Readers this evening are Chris Jackson (Nashville), Jenn McCreary (Philadelphia), Carol Mirakove (Brooklyn), Jenn (Seattle), Deborah Richards (Philadelphia), C.E. Putnam (Brooklyn), as well as the editors: Allison Cobb, Jen Coleman, Ethan Fugate, and Susan Landers. [8:00 p.m.]

OCTOBER 31, WEDNESDAY

Victor Hernandez Cruz and Edwin Torres

Born in Aguas Buenas, Puerto Rico, Victor Hernandez Cruz moved to New York City with his family at the age of five. His latest collection is *Maraca: Selected Poems*. Torres' CD *Holy Kid* (Kill Rock Stars) was part of The Whitney Museum's "The American Century Pt. II." His newest book is *The All-Union Day of the Shock Worker* (Roof Books). [8:00 p.m.]

NOVEMBER 2, FRIDAY

Poetry Dog Tags: Neck to Neck Haiku

Hosted by Regie Cabico, Poetry Dog Tags is a contest between poets who will bring their own Dog Tags to the show, and slam off against each other with haikus they'll be wearing around their neck. [10:30 pm]

NOVEMBER 5, MONDAY

Open Reading

Sign-up at 7:30 pm [8:00 pm]

NOVEMBER 7, WEDNESDAY

HAL WILLNER'S DOC POMUS PROJECT: A Benefit for the Poetry Project

An evening of Doc Pomus' words and music, read and performed by his friends, admirers and collaborators. Special guests include Lou Reed, Jimmy Scott, Garth Hudson, Peter Guralnick and many special guests. Inducted into the Rock 'n Roll Hall of fame in 1992, Presley, The Drifters, Ray Charles, and B.B. King. Hal Willner has produced records by Allen Ginsberg, Lou Reed, Marianne Faithfull, Laurie Anderson, Terry Southern, and Lenny Bruce. \$25 general admission, \$20 for Poetry Project members, \$200 reserved tickets with special gala reception. [8:00 pm]

NOVEMBER 9, FRIDAY

In The Present Future Tense: Electronic Music and Parapsychology

Music by Muata 25, Lecture Q&A and Demonstration of "The Mind Machine" by Raymond Strano. Muata 25 a.k.a Thomas Murray, a guitarist turned electro-composer, has been a session musician and has toured with Lee Scratch Perry, Terrence Trent D'Arby, Eurhythms, Tom Tom Club, among others. Raymond "Cosmic Ray" Strano is the director of the Higgins Center for Consciousness

NOVEMBER 19, MONDAY

Alan Gilbert and John Tipton

An editor of the influential, now defunct, journal *Aperç of the M*, Alan Gilbert fuses political conviction with a care for the music of the line. John Tipton's poems explore the inherent paths and humor in thinking seriously about the nature of language. His new chapbook *clause automat* is published by Cello Entry Press. [8:00 pm]

NOVEMBER 16, MONDAY

Carrie St. George Comer and Geoffrey Nutter

Carrie St. George Comer's kooky, funny poems combine childhood and dream imagery in order to rattle and rebuild the house we don't realize we are living in. Geoffrey Nutter's book, *A Summer Evening*, won the Colorado Poetry Prize. Simultaneously joyful and rhapsodic, Nutter's poems might make you believe that the purpose of "thinking" is to sing. [8:00 pm]

NOVEMBER 28, WEDNESDAY

Tonya Foster and Brendan Lorber

Tonya Foster teaches writing and literature in City College of New York's Bridge to Medicine Program and in Bard College's Language and Thinking Institute. She is currently working on "Monkey Talk," a piece on paranoia, race, and language. Brendan Lorber is the editor of *LUNGFULL* magazine and cocurator of The Zinc Bar Reading Series. A book, *Welcome Overboard*, is in the works. [8:00 pm]

NOVEMBER 30, FRIDAY

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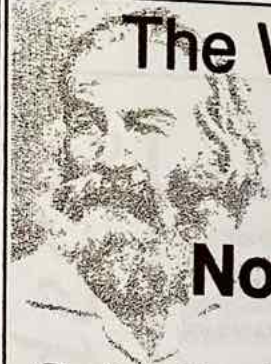
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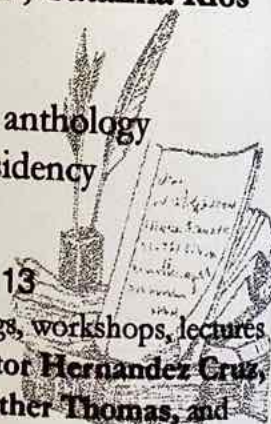
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The Annotated 'Here' and Selected Poems by Marjorie Welish Coffee House Press, 2001

Marjorie Welish is an Anti-Imagiste who nevertheless, as poet, art critic, and painter, is consummately interested in the image. Only her interest does not fly into a material target with a zing of ecstatic emotion. Instead it hovers, but not familiarly. Not between the self and the world in some version of Romantic or Symbolist dualism. It hovers between three interpenetrating realms, between an object, the conscious act of perceiving the object, and the word that stands for the object. The ferocious, sometimes hilarious ("Ugh! Aargh! Oh, Anna...") and always provocative poems of "The Annotated 'Here'," the most recent section of work in her gorgeous new book, take place then as part of a phenomenological inquiry.

It might be said that in "The Annotated 'Here,'" consciousness is defined as consciousness-of-something. This is the "thought about" of the poem "Crude Misunderstandings" and it is the *a priori* of Husserlian philosophy. In Marjorie Welish's poems, the mind's world and the world of physical event are inseparable. In a sequence of poems entitled "Thing Receiving Road," Welish considers the implications of Wallace Stevens' curious assertion in "Anecdote of the Jar" (a poem woven also into a recent serial by Robert Creeley), that the speaker of Stevens' poem "placed" rather than found a jar (in Tennessee) around which the world ordered itself. The "poetics of seeming disclosure (we have cited)," Welish writes, "sets upon earth or its buried representation." Here, as elsewhere in her work, Welish makes use of a critical and analytical diction but in the service of poetics. She isn't developing logical arguments or pilpulistic thematic procedures. Instead, she conceives a remarkable lyric poetry that manifests itself principally as deployment. Purposive perspectival shifts constitute the literary event of Welish's body of work. At the velocity of cerebration, the poems investigate perspective by shifting perspective. Their exploration of semantic representation develops as language play, as "jars of private language," as shifting arrangements of the letters "i," "p," "t" and then "h" and "p" in these lines from "Still Life," the first poem in "Thing Receiving Road":

is intentionally petitioned
at a time of implicative possibilities

To perceive is to intend
habitats and plaintiffs,

hence to place...

If "To perceive is to intend," then our attention biases what Welish later in the sequence calls "the clearing toward disclosure." But Welish relishes rerouting our biases. In her lines, disclosure seductively defers itself. Slippage is a primary *modus operandi*. Documentation methods (a quotation followed by the number "45" for instance) allude to missing sources. Familiar references—well-known poems or paintings—are deconstructed in formal translations. The incessant border crossings are not only conceptual, but visual and aural. The word "gray" slides into the word "gravity," and "gladiolus" gives way to a "bouquet of gladiators." The poems are as much about how we read as they are about what we read. Each word seems to open out into that galaxy of language wherein consciousness takes form. If clarity and good sense are the goals of your readerly application, this poetry is surely not for you. In alphabetical and numerical games, in structures mounted through a constant reworking of text, in formal representations of difference and variation, Welish celebrates the élan of thought in unsummed and expressively underdetermined sentences. The heady sense of flux we associate with her poems is created less often by syntactic instabilities than by more subtle displacements of conventional contextualization. We must place ourselves in the wilderness of the poems to discover their geometry of implication.

Here, lovely example, is the middle poem in "Thing Receiving Road":

Spilling mien through wilderness, this, after interval.
A mien near wilderness, an increase of mien.
Demeanor near tarpaulins, and that jar.

That jar in requiem for wilderness even on a fingernail.
Mien rubbing itself against folded tarpaulin: folding mien
outside domain, place asleep; place, crossing a fence.

Place of two witnesses, and near, place of the first-born.
Jars spilling wilderness, wilderness as yet not tithed.
Near and far are jars unverified, jars of private language.

Participating jars and tarpaulins are proximate.
Tarpaulins tangent to jars lie there.
Jars in sections nearly spill.

Diametrically-opposed tarpaulins spill a wilderness.
Jars on the horizon, tarpaulins at hand.
A wilderness equidistant between a jar and an aspect of a
[jar.

Ezra Pound warned us to "Go in fear of abstraction," but Welish identifies abstraction as an essential quality of human intellectual experience and curiosity. *The Annotated 'Here'*, although divided into sections, might be read as a collect of poems concerned with specific artworks (by Jasper Johns, Donald Judd, and Cy Twombly) and poems (by Wallace Stevens and W. C. Williams) that emphasize the abstract dynamic of subject, object, and field. Readers find themselves "setting out" from the section's first poem in order to address the "in face, to face" of canvas/page, eye, and perception/conception, those necessary orientations to what is the central human activity taking place in "The here of actual space". By the time when, in the last poems of this section, Welish refers to a "tarpaulin with focal points," we construe from the single image a string of simultaneous impressions. Her tarpaulin is the scene itself stretching out around any point (or jar) in the landscape to which we give our attention. It is also the blank page on which the poem (about the jar) is written. And it is the canvas on which a particular aspect (of the jar) may be rendered. It is equally a metaphor for the inquisition (a focused receptivity, a stretching open) we must make if we are to move toward what Welish identifies as "a sentence of significance." *The Annotated 'Here' and Selected Poems* is a vital, original, and significant book. No one has ever written like Marjorie Welish. —FORREST GANDER

C.S. Giscombe:
Into and Out of Dislocation, North Point
Press, 2000
Inland, Leroy Books, 2001

C.S. Giscombe's two most recent books represent a departure from his work of the last decade—the "long song", as he calls it—in *Giscombe Road* (Dalkey Archive, 1998). Neither *Into and Out of Dislocation* nor *Inland* is a book-length poem. They mark a turn towards "compound sentences of description" in a series of prose poems in the latter, and an extended nonfiction travelogue/biography/memoir in the former.

Complementing *Giscombe Road*, *Into and Out of Dislocation* is the nonfiction account of Giscombe's search for an elusive possible ancestor John Robert Giscombe, a late-nineteenth-century Jamaican who emi-

grates to Canada and becomes known as an explorer and pioneer in British Columbia. If *Giscombe Road* is Giscombe's improvisational jazz rendering of what he calls "my going out to find a black trace in a 'white' landscape," then *Into and Out of Dislocation* is his attempt at a factual account of his, Cecil's search for this man, J.R., who moved about the Canadian landscape, leaving his name on a portage, a town, a canyon and rapids there, in the far white north of our continent.

Giscombe and his family moved to Fort George, B.C. in the winter of 1995 with Fulbright funding to complete research and a book on Giscombe. One recurrent chapter title, "Winter in Fort George," punctuates the book with repeated descriptions of Giscombe's fruitless search that winter for evidence of J.R. He finds little documentary evidence. All there is is the geography, the named places in the landscape. Giscombe becomes, for him, "a series of references and, more important, he was landscape itself and the way through landscape both"—a portage, in the sense that Giscombe Portage "connected two river systems themselves, the farthest inland reaches of two oceans." For Giscombe, Giscombe becomes a "Creeley-esque 'figure of outward'"—"not the edge but the way between edges," "the definitive landscape of the black North itself."

On one of many such expeditions, out to the town of Quesnel, the town where J.R. and his partner overwinter during the 1862-63 trip on which they discover what is now the Giscombe portage, Giscombe and his family search for the site of J.R.'s cabin:

Anyway, we found Bouchie Creek easily on the map—it bisects the golf course right before it flows into the Fraser. We found the golf course easily as well but it was closed for the season and the road down into it was a swirl of ice. We could have, I suppose, parked and walked in through the snow alongside the icy road but then, likely, the RCMP would have appeared. I've been stopped often enough by cops to know I could probably talk my way out, but such encounters are exhausting; one tries not to invite them. And it was a cold day, the air having, come, said the local CBC station, "in from Mackenzie." So we stayed in the car and drove up over some roads north of the links to try to double back onto the creek, but the roads all bent on farther north and we found ourselves in a continual ascent into a series of bluffs, away from water level. At the top of one rise we found a dead moose, a road-kill item; Madeline was curious but Katherine, leaning out for a closer look, said that she didn't really want to see it and we spirited ourselves away and turned around a mile later when the road, still rising, turned to gravel. It was a frustrating expedition and as we drove back into town my mind was full of the necessity of coming back in the spring to traverse the length of Bouchie Creek. Looking for what? (171-2)

Here, with a reference repeated several times else-

where in the book, Giscombe cites Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*: "I glanced casually into the little cabin. A light was burning within, but Mr. Kurtz was not there." Giscombe doesn't return to Bouchie Creek in the spring. Giscombe is not there.

As the book progresses, Giscombe becomes much more than a person, a name, or a place, and is not at all easily reduced to the symbolic representative of a black landscape. Instead, the search that we participate in, as we read further and further in the book, becomes a search for something else, some other movement or place. As Giscombe writes, contradicting his sources: "he did not clear a way for others like him to follow, he was not a 'pioneer.'"

It is difficult to describe what one *does* find in the course of reading this remarkable book. It is about much more than the search for J.R. Giscombe. Much of it is comprised of a series of reflections on the Americas in all its contradictory differences, in its racial divides and joinings. Giscombe writes about the people he meets during his search: about the Giscombe family, who come to be his own family in the U.S. and in Jamaica, and the many strange encounters while travelling by train, bicycle and car across the immensity of the continent. Here is the real appeal of the book—in what happens fortuitously. Giscombe's own exploration of our continent is what happens in the searching. Patient, introspective, warmly human, he makes us interested in all the multiplicitous and frail people that make up the places we call America:

There, in the coaches, the lights were turned way down and people were asleep, sprawled over the seats and snoring in any number of positions. Beached animals, their bodies washed up onto this moving shoreline and myself, temporarily upright, moving through them. Soon I'd be asleep too. ... I suppose, though, that I think we Americans are not a beautiful people: we're overweight, we tend to process our hair into bizarre yet unimaginative frizzes, we wear T-shirts that say utterly inane things. Yet the sight of so many of us asleep—women and men of various ages and sizes, a handful of impossibly gawky teenagers, some babies—and together was itself, as a composition, lovely. ... I thought of the trust implicit there among the strangers I was wading through—and recalled that I was one of them on the trip out asleep and likely snoring next to a woman named Leslie whom I'd just met—and knew that nobody was anybody's guardian, and was moved. (221-22)

By chance, Giscombe and I live in the same small rural central Pennsylvania town, and we recently made some time to talk about his ongoing projects. *Inland*—a beautiful chapbook put together by Renee Gladman's Leroy Books—is one section of a projected book to be called *Prairie Style*, poems about midwestern, downstate Illinois, where he lived for ten years. The prose

poems of *Inland*, he tells me, are "working without a net (as they say in the circus), without the net that lineation provides." He describes them as "chunky lyrics." "They're not trying to be graceful." Yet, in that they are lyrics, they represent something of a return for him to the short form. "I've got a past with lyric mode," he says. "I wanted to revisit that and see what I could do with it now after having built long stuff for all this time."

He is also at work on a second book of non-fiction, as he says, to be about "trains and train metaphors, one that will include or allude to other forms of public transit (meaning, particularly, buses) as well; I'm also writing, in this book, about motels and hotels, about forms of low-budget travel." But when I press for an explanation of his love affair with places—the places he and his family have lived, the travelling to and through places by train, bus or bicycle, and the places that happen to one in the midst of life, as it seems to me his work comprises an entire poetry of place—he prefers to swerve around the explanation: "I want to insist on it," he says, "to act place out and complicate it, to get vernacular on it because that's the way I see it, to do that rather than try to break it down into math which would be a different project. I need to equivocate rather than produce equations; I want to get out—in the writing—into the multiple as much as I can."—SHERRY BRENNAN

If In Time: Selected Poems 1975-2000

by Ann Lauterbach

Viking Penguin, 2001. 253 pp.

If In Time, the title of Ann Lauterbach's new and selected poems, seems open (like the poems themselves) to a number of possible readings. From its conditional perch, the reader may wonder—if in time, then what? Notice she said if in time; it's not a given. Perhaps we are somewhere else. If in time as opposed to what? Something transcendent? What should we call it? God? The imagination? Should we call it, as Calvin Klein does, Eternity?

But "if in time" also suggests the possibility of disaster averted. An escape clause. Its melody is easily confused with "Once upon a time...". If in time, there was an exhausted prostitute, a knight, a clown, a woman in her youth, a terrorist, a boy. And indeed, all appear in these poems.

I read the first one on a train. The next in a garden. The one after that in a bad mood. And the one after that one in a diner. I like the idea of placing them in various settings or specific lights and watching the way they shift and flicker between being in the moment

and beside it.

there were steps
these steps went down

into magic
as in a story

where what is is
changed by language.

The time span covered in *If In Time* is from 1975-2000. The poems are arranged, as in many such collections, from newest to oldest—a pattern that always feels a little odd to me, like looking at a landscape by starting with the sky. But I also like the reverse chronology because it reminds me that time is not a one-way street flowing forever toward the future. As M. Merleau-Ponty says, “Past and future exist only too unmistakably in the world, they exist in the present.” A selected poems, by nature, is a reconfiguring of the poet’s work. Those “selected” exist anew, simultaneously, in the context of the remade book. It can suggest a trajectory. It may or may not impose a coherence.

Reading from section to section of *If In Time*, the poems strike me as being (and always having been) marvelously aware of themselves as performative acts. I would even go so far as to say it’s useful to think of Ann Lauterbach as a “performance poet,” one whose work practically insists on being read and heard aloud.

Another ever-present theme or effect of these poems is spaciousness. Often they are about the creation and depiction of space. And equally as often, they represent a space, draw an imaginary line, only in order to cross it and go further: “And now look, far/ is near, next door is another century ...”

Am I changed by reading these poems? Yes, I decide I am. They are not simply beautiful machines made of words meant to elicit my admiration and possibly envy. They challenge. They unsettle me. They draw me out. They lead me on. In them I find a curious blend of romanticism and cynicism, faith and doubt, in amounts that almost, but don’t quite cancel each other out. Each line a roll of the proverbial Symbolist dice.

As in the work of Barbara Guest, reality and artifice are often caught mirroring each other. “Gradually, I admit to wanting you as if you were real.” And what is meant by “real” in these poems is usually exposed as constructed. We see behind the scenes of desire’s production company

a narrow sky
hung with cares
and lies
on unseen ropes

and held by a
system of passions

Lauterbach seems very courageous in that she doesn’t avoid the crucial anxiety of our age—that the nature of reality has radically and inalterably changed, or rather that it has revealed itself as fantasy. She also seems brave in her refusal to hide behind the elegaic, a stance so many consider to be the heart and soul of the poetic. These are not poems of nostalgia or mourning for a lost something or other—toy world. Instead, they are poems of curiosity, inquiry and investigation, refusing an easy solution or denial of our anxiety.

In the film it was evident
there was nothing to tell. You could tell
that. Only spillage, only excess
as a form of boredom ...

You could tell you were moving away
from what you owned. No one knew
what to call the next one, only
that it would come and that it would be the same.
Same and silent, an anonymous likeness.
Wanting to say this is not the same
this is not the same as this.

Perhaps courageous is an odd compliment to give a poet in our ultra-ironic times, but the word seems in keeping with the risk Ann Lauterbach takes. She is sweeping: vast in her ability, vast in her ambition. I believe that one should judge poets not only by how well they use words (and here, Lauterbach’s polyvalent ambidexterousness is a given) but also by how well they use infinity, by how willing they are to engage in a dialogue with with the unknown.

This method is one of fading, of
hanging out days on end into the sun until
fabric lets go of substance and light is remnant.

In an early poem, Ann says: “I write this way for mystery and need...” As it turns out, I read her for the same reasons.—ELAINE EQUI

Push the Mule by John Godfrey The Figures, 2001

Reading John Godfrey’s newest volume of prose poems, *Push the Mule*, proved to me yet again that the difference between poetry and prose hasn’t much to do with line break, though that’s what I’ve been told in grad school. If I were to write the textbook, the definitions (poetry vs. prose) would be relative to a work’s interest in epiphany, with poetry striving towards a

constant supply of it. Almost any selection of *Push the Mule* could serve as example.

Fueled by his own breed of tenement surrealism, Godfrey uses his sentences as a runway. By the time he reaches the period, he's leveled off into a strange wisdom that's come at you sideways through an urban landscape staked out by cornerstore metaphysics.

Poems like "The Ticket," the opening piece which describes a "World Type B," tend to be the most impressive in the collection. The larger the poem's world, the wider Godfrey's tonal range, as if variety in subject were in direct relationship to variety in syntax. Where he has more legroom, he tends toward wilder dance:

The dead, they bask off singing in time to melodic ways. The leftbehinds tuck themselves into beds redder than eyes. In their dreams there's stained smocks on the baby, on the cops, on the guys rolling the juice of hops off trucks in kegs. As for me, I done bent my fallow all out of shape 'til it beguiles the fourth dimension with pollen.

("The Ticket")

The love poems reveal themselves as such through the speaker's surveillance of a "you" on the horizon, the eye as micromanager rather than the mouth as rose-spitting heart. Here the speaker synonymous with the lover is a cartographer and the poem is a map where both the lover and the beloved can be kept under strict watch. The hope is for an understanding of the invisible through an acute observation of the figure in motion, as if observation could find essence:

Your profile changes when you squint into a gust. At this time of day a guy spends all he can on uselessness. Your face turns to look and behind you in the deserty rains. I fork out some change and watch it melt on passing cars.

("Behind You in the Desert")

Poems like "Day Goo" tend toward more surmise on the part of the speaker, as if the surreality of urban poverty were too real (which it is.) The psyche of witness doesn't feel safe without the defense of evaluation beyond the phenomenological:

My car is unsteady in a crosswind, and there are kids who live in an unending hurricane. They have kin whose will to protect them is too diffuse because gratifications they maintain are beyond the power to share. Every birth has one luminous moment, and darkness is always waiting.

Godfrey cuts to the core, twisting the line just right so we can see just how dark a city it is. The fact that he can hit it sentence after sentence is astonishing. It's no wonder that's been over ten years since his

last volume. Poetry is a distillation process which if translated into moonshine would be something like forty potatoes for two drops of vodka. But without it there'd be no books like *Push the Mule* which is nothing but 95 pages of the goods.—MAGDALENA ZURAWSKI

How Charlie Shavers Died and Other Poems

by Harvey Shapiro

Wesleyan University Press, 2001

I wrote a book on literary New York City out of which, I am ashamed to admit I left out Harvey Shapiro. No reason. I knew he lived in Brooklyn, knew his work or thought I did and just nodded. Now his down to earth, totally satisfying new book, *How Charlie Shavers Died*, tells me that he is a fine poet.

In "Brooklyn Snaps" he writes:

Manhattan is my favorite island,
seen from this shore. These days
when I see it in the sparkling sun
I think of the poems of Schuyler and O'Hara
as I used to think of Reznikoff and Crane.

Shapiro belongs in that company. He has Schuyler's plainspoken modesty, his eye and ear for the everyday and refusal of the big statement. For both poets enough is as good as a feast. They are confident writers; free to go where the spirit moves them. And they are writers whose virtues are so obvious there seems little for the critic to do but advertise their wares.

Shapiro has nothing in common with the vatic Crane or ecstatic O'Hara, but he shares Reznikoff's ambling gait. Reznikoff probably walked more miles through New York's five boroughs than any poet did ever. Shapiro's poems are scored to a walker's pace.

How Charlie Shavers Died (Shavers was a swing era trumpeter) are the poems of a man in, I'm guessing, his late '70s who is not looking over his shoulder. He knows what he wants to say and unabashed, unswayed by fashion, he says it.

Places

The Pazzi Chapel in Florence
and the Mosque of the Golden Dome
in Jerusalem and Cynthia's cunt
have been the loci of my strongest
aesthetic experiences—overwhelming
Solitude and an unearthly light.

The voice of this book is joyous with an edge of New York Jewish comic melancholy. Not a note resignation but acceptance of the world in all its cockimami-

ness.

These poems "don't explain anything. They / don't have to explain anything." Shapiro has no "poetics," he just writes poems fully conscious of his world and his words. They are simple and direct poems, and their pleasures ought to be obvious to all that open this book. If the book's pleasures are too obvious or otherwise not to your taste *How Charlie Shavers Died* will not mock you for returning it to the shelf. Shapiro is a poet who knows his own worth.—WILLIAM CORBETT

Your Last Illusion, Or Break-Up Sonnets by Wanda Phipps Situations Press, 2001

The last word in Wanda Phipps' book is, appropriately, "loss." The final phrase, in fact, is "thoughts of loss," which is what *Your Last Illusion, Or Break Up Sonnets* catalogues—the shifting character of thought during the death of a love affair.

Like the mind-movie that spools continually at such times, the words and phrases of these nineteen sonnets repeat and reconfigure in lovely, dream-like sequences. Phipps successfully (and succinctly) binds emotional experience to language to "give an active/push to memory and pronouns." Words, then, are the measure of the end of the affair. Applying Burroughs' cut-up method to the writing of sonnets via Berrigan and Mayer, Phipps creates ingeniously intricate phrase arrangements that shift easily from the highly personal to the universal, the proximate to the distant, the confident to the nervous.

The series begins with three quotes: "'what a planet!'/ 'what a life!'/ 'what a concept!'" These three phrases appear in the subsequent poems either on their own, remaining quotes, or joined with other words to create new phrasings: "what a planet you are"; "a planet is an active window"; "you're a brazen life"; "a concept of a life in hard surfaces"; "what an individual concept." Other phrasings are marked by the twisted sensibility one often finds oneself in possession of during a break up: "who sleeps with you?/I sleep with you"; "and now I sleep with books"; "who sleeps with you?"; "and now I sleep in the bathtub." In another instance, the phrase "this is as good as it gets", morphs into the following sequence when cut with other words and scattered among the sonnets: "this is as good as it is odd," "this is less odd than likely," "still this is and nothing changed," and finally "still this is a concept worth savoring," suggesting the movement from a simple confidence to a studied rationalization headed for trouble.

Throughout *Your Last Illusion*, a basic set of six

reconfigured phrase motifs mimics the way obsessive thoughts attach themselves to the complacencies of the peignoir. One motif explores the shedding (or perhaps sacrifice?) of personhood: "in group activity individual loss is secondary"; "individual loss does not exist in group activity"; "to lie in seriously individual slumber"; and "an individual proclaims: we are not villains." Another motif counterposes the everyday and the sublime: "messy mind/shiny sex," which then becomes "one messy bed...shiny mind and dark blue books...what a mess," and then "God's a shiny fuck" (my favorite) and finally "your vast shiny mind." Not all phrases follow through to the very end (the exception is the planet-life-concept series mentioned earlier, which appears in all but five of the sonnets), and this is appropriate, suggestive of something being forgotten, sloughed off, left behind. What replaces the original phrasings is a motif of color: blue, bright green, gray, and red. These color phrasings start out simply—in sonnet 4, we read of dark blue rings around the lover's pupils; in sonnet 5 a bright green awning suggests a scenic interlude, or perhaps a post-lude—but by 13 and 14 the colors run into each other more than once in each sonnet: "now a wave of green blue/no-gray blue turning planets...will stay and play away the gray," suggesting a blur of associations and emotions. One of the most surprising phrases in *Your Last Illusion* appears only once: "once again fucking speech"—evoking the sensual, the sexual, the verbal.

Despite the theme of loss, what remains is an amazing feeling of trust, although what is trusted, perhaps, is language itself. No matter how much things are thrown up for grabs, they end up falling into place serendipitously, so that there is always another moment of creation following destruction. The final sonnet contains the beautiful passage:

a crazy burning keeps us faithful to a memory
of peaceful blue beds & pure light
we'll meet there soon to drown all thoughts of loss

—SHARON MESMER

The Straight Line: Writing on Poetry and Poetics by Ron Padgett The University of Michigan Press, 2001

I never liked being a student, although to be fair I probably wouldn't have liked being much else either. Which makes it all the more remarkable that Ron Padgett has such a genuine love of the processes and complexities of teaching poetry that while I was reading *The Straight Line* I found myself wishing, more

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than once, that I could be in a class where Padgett was the teacher. *The Straight Line* features a lot of different types of essays about poetry, many of them having nothing to do with the classroom. But even those essays which don't discuss teaching or poetry exercises reveal Padgett's investment in making poetry available and interesting. For Padgett, involvement with poetry seems to be something that at its best creates new ways of thinking and new connections between people. *The Straight Line* presents us with a thinker and teacher who wants to pass poetry along because he knows its potential to make our lives more enjoyable, responsive, and generous.

The Straight Line has three sections. "Poems about Poetry" presents some of Padgett's entertaining and insightful short lyrics and sets the stage for the development of his main interests. "Prose Works" contains his more in-depth critical pieces on poetics and, crucially, poets. These essays tell us not just about the value of the writing he discusses, but offer insights into the lives of those who did the writing, and what the connection between writing and living is. "Essays on Teaching Writing," the third and final section, concentrates on poetry exercises and forms, but also on how these exercises and forms are related to the social dynamic of teaching. This final section has a great deal to say about how poetry can create possibilities and connections in a world with no shortage of dead ends.

Of the poems, "16 November 1964", something of a rewrite of O'Hara's "Why I Am Not A Painter," really gets at how the process of writing a poem can take us, if we let it, to all sorts of places we never expected to be. "Talking to Vladimir Mayakovsky" expands on that sense of surprise, looking at the possibilities and pitfalls of being "inside" rather than "outside" the poem. And "Voice" contains an amusing, ironic undermining of the concept of "finding your voice" that's a basic cliché of the contemporary mainstream workshop; Padgett ultimately acknowledges that voice in poetry exists and devotes himself to avoiding it.

The "Prose Works" section retains the pleasure of the poems but explores things in more detail. "Foreign Language" is simply one of the best essays on translation I've ever read; it's far more insightful than Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" in its elaboration of the many ways that translation occurs, both between languages and social contexts. Translation becomes, in this essay, not a single process but a series of changing interactions, ongoing rather than stable and fixed. The essay "Pierre's Room" is a piece of stunningly beautiful writing about Padgett's search during a trip in France to understand some of the daily experience of Pierre Reverdy. I'm usually skeptical

when living writers go on worshipful journeys in search of connection to dead great writers; I'm wary of the self-importance of the pilgrimage. But Padgett's restraint serves him well here. He doesn't overdo it, but instead gets at a few illuminating details but also at what those details don't show. The fields where Reverdy walked, the house where he lived, and the routine of his still living, now aged wife, don't become keys to some mystery so much as instants that are both ordinary and mysterious, and they're not given more significance than they can hold (Padgett had great weather for his trip too, lucky guy). His long introduction to Edwin Denby's *Collected Poems*, reproduced in *The Straight Line*, is similarly insightful both in what it can tell us about Denby but also what it can't. Reading the essay, one knows Denby and his work better, but feels as well the careful if always kindly distance of the man. And "Everyday Oops: Slips in the Poetry of Daily Life," elaborates hilariously on the usefulness for poetry and life of the misheard and the mistaken.

"Essays on Teaching Writing," the third and final section, presents the reader with many poetry forms, games, and exercises. It's full of great things to try. But "The Care and Feeding of a Child's Imagination" may be the best essay that exists not only on how to teach poetry to children but also why. Padgett's conclusion that kids who write poetry with confidence are "less likely to become mindless victims of mindless power" feels totally convincing after the set-up he gives it. The essay is an absolute must-read for anybody interested in either children, teaching or poetry.

A few parts of *The Straight Line* seemed less convincing or necessary. Padgett's essay on computers and writing doesn't really tell us much other than that, as the author admits, "It's funny how wrong my optimistic prediction was." It is funny, yes, but the essay still feels like padding. So does reprinting the eleven sections that Padgett actually wrote of *The Handbook of Poetic Forms*. *The Handbook* is great, and although I was happy to read these sections here, they have more value when presented in their original context. Also, while I had few disagreements with Padgett's thinking on poetics, one of those disagreements came with the first line of the first poem in the book. Padgett's assertion that "grammar is a direct result of how humans feel in the world" implies a sort of natural fit between people and grammar that seems to me dubious, especially coming from a teacher. I taught a few years of pre-credit community college English courses; seeing the frequently unwinnable struggles of students there with commas, periods, verb tenses and sentences. I've come to the conclusion that grammar is no more

natural to humans than operating heavy machinery, and often as dangerous.

But these small problems are hardly damning to the book as a whole, especially since Padgett's writing gives the impression of someone who is impressively willing to rethink and try things out. An open generosity of spirit isn't exactly a common feature of poetics these days, nor is a genuine love of poetry's processes. Most poetics has a point to make—sometimes even a good one—and tends to take actual care about poetry for granted in its concern with whatever more pressing issue is at hand. We live in contested times. Much of our poetry and poetics sincerely, eagerly, or angrily wishes to jump into the fray, and literature these days is most often judged on how well it jumps. Padgett has hardly withdrawn from such social problems, and his book would have much less value if it did. But what *The Straight Line* points out is that one of the main values of poetry is not its power to seize the field, but the way it opens us to a fuller exploration of the world we find ourselves within, however obviously troubled and in need of change that world is. —MARK WALLACE

Cont. from page 11

11 "Masonic Services Held for Symmes," *The Bakersfield Californian*, 13 Sept. 1935.

12 Robert Duncan. *The H.D. Book Online* <<http://onezerozero.net/books/index.html>>, page 87.

13 Now in storage at the Poetry/Rare Books Collection of the State University of New York at Buffalo.

14 Robert Duncan. "Spring," unpublished manuscript, SUN-YAB.

15 Robert Duncan. *The H.D. Book Online* <<http://onezerozero.net/books/index.html>>, page 88.

16 Barbara Jones in conversation with the author. January 16, 1998. In some ways the relationship between Duncan and his younger sister would later be echoed in Duncan's relationship with his partner Jess—with both individuals, Duncan had found a less domineering companion to participate in events of the imagination.

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Lisa Jarnot is the author of *Some Other Kind of Mission* (Burning Deck, 1996) and *Ring of Fire* (Zoland Books, 2001). Her new CD, *Poems from Ring of Fire*, was released this summer.

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E. Tracy Grinnell, *Music or Forgetting*. O Books, 2001.

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Adeena Karasick, *The Arugula Fugues*. Zasterle, 2001.

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Be LaRoe, *Cypress Knees and Palms*. Ten Pell Books, 2001.

Reno Lauro, *A Study of Time and Distances in North America*. Buckaroo Press (5406 Montview St., Austin TX 78756), 2001.

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Jaime Manrique, *Tarzan My Body*. Painted Leaf Press, 2001.

Jennifer Martenson, *Xq281*. Burning Deck, 2001.

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Susan Wheeler, *Source Codes*. Salt Press, 2001.

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Magazines

100 Days: An Anthology. Editor: Andrea Brady (www.barquepress.com). Poetry, prose, cartoons, photographs, drawings, and rants protesting George W. Bush's first hundred days in office.

Abacus. Editor: Dan Featherston (www.potespoets.org). Special Issue: Excerpts from Lisa Jarnot's Robert Duncan biography.

Bombay Gin #27. Edited by: Veronica Corpuz, Michelle N. Pierce. Contributors: Michael Gizzi, interview with Lisa Jarnot, others.

Boomerang! #11. Edited by Rachel Zucker (c/o 175 West 93rd St., #11F, NY NY 10025). Contributors: Arielle Greenberg, Elizabeth Robinson, others.

Cello Entry Spring 2001. Editor: Rick Snyder. Contributors: Yedda Morrison, Charles Borkhius, Drew Gardner, others.

Hanging Loose #78. Editors: Robert Hershon, Dick Lourie, Mark Pawlak. Contributors: George Schneeman, Valerie Fox, others.

The Invisible City. Editors: Marcella Durand, Richard O'Russa, Karoline Schleh (c/o 332 E 4th St. #24, NYC 10009). Contributors: Will Alexander, Alice Notley, Lytle Shaw, Edwin Torres, others.

Joe Brainard's Magazine. Editor: Kevin Opstedal. Contributors: Joanne Kyger, Noel Black, Bill Berkson, others.

Outlet #7: Heroines. Editor: Elizabeth Treadwell. Contributors: Carol Mirakove, Nicole Burrows, Rachel Blau du Plessix, others.

Poetry Broadside #1. Editor: Kyle Connor. Contributors: Joseph Massey, C.A.

Conrad, Nguyen Quoc Chanh, Frank Sherlock.

Pressed Wafer #2. Editors: Daniel Bouchard, William Corbett, Joseph Torra (c/o 9 Columbus Sq. Boston MA 02216). Stephen Jonas letters, Jennifer Moxley interview, tribute to Joe Brainard.

Skanky Possum #6. Editors: Hoa Nguyen and Dale Smith (skankypossum@hotmail.com). Contributors: Amiri Baraka, Elaine Equi, Diane di Prima, others.

The Styles #1. Editor: Sophia Estante (www.thestyles.org). Contributors: C. Leiren Mower, Laura Mullen, others.

The Tangent #9. Editors: Kaia Sand, Jules Boykoff, Neal Sand, and Maxwell Boykoff (4016 Calvert St. NW #2, Washington DC 20007). Articles: "Unionizing the Ivory Tower," "The Marxist Model of Crime." Poetry: Leslie Bumstead, Emily Lu, others.

Books

Antler, **The Selected Poems.** Softskull Press, 2001.

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Morgan, Gavin McShan Pate, Deborah Richards. (theattacheddocument@earthlink.net)

Kamau Brathwaite, **Ancestors.** New Directions, 2001.

Wanda Coleman, **Mercurochrome: New Poems.** Black Sparrow Press, 2001.

Clark Coolidge, **On the Nameways: Volume 2.** The Figures, 2001.

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Thomas Sayers Ellis, **The Genuine Negro Hero.** Wick Poetry Chapbook Series, 2001.

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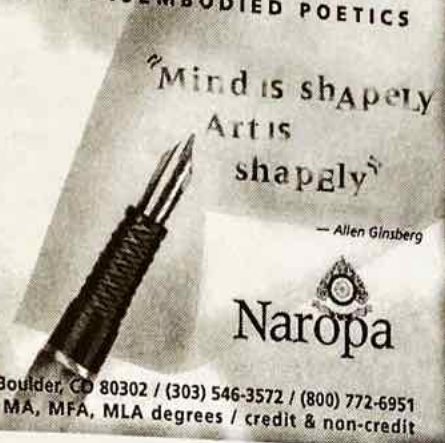
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