

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

November 1982

#93

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Brakhage Scrapbook(Collected Writings 1964-1980) by Stan Brakhage, edited by Robert A. Haller (Documentext, New Paltz NY \$9.95)

The first time I read this book I was overwhelmed by it - by the contagiousness of Stan Brakhage's absolute 'anything is possible' enchantment with FILM, which in the face of the enormous practical difficulties of making it, is the only way that 'art film' (as opposed to 'independent film', with its limited but workable economy) can be done.

Brakhage is a purist, in both his obsession with the properties of the medium and the discipline of his life (large family, no money, outside the city, acute self-reflection). I think it's impossible to uphold this kind of purism without it becoming exclusive: to Brakhage, this purism is not an aesthetic choice about art, it *is* art. This purism, it seems, was honed by years of being considered an eccentric by those who did not recognize him to be a leading American filmmaker and aesthete. And there's lots of stuff in the book about losing: standing in a phone booth in 20 below zero weather in South Dakota, finding out from Filmmakers Cooperative that he didn't win a prize in Milan; not getting a Ford Foundation grant; not getting equipment. So: this not getting is turned into a little moralistic story, a virtue: one only gets the things one needs: lust doesn't pay. For Stan Brakhage this seems to have been utterly true. But this commitment-born-of-abnegation does partly explain the didactic nature of some of these writings. Stan Brakhage seems to think, or at least to verbalize thought, in manifestoes. There is ambiguity and (e)motion in his films. His writing constitutes an argument as to why the film must be looked at.

But there is something compelling in this 'advertisement for himself'. Beyond its didacticism, the book is a little lesson in the opacity of translucency. Brakhage can gab endlessly about the details of his life situation and work. He'll say anything. And taken in a certain light all these anything's are elusive: they don't explain (i.e., finish) the mystery of the man's perceptions and process, they augment it. And so reading this book is an expansive experience. Certain sections of this book set me spinning for a couple of days - they are affirmative and repetitive of Brakhage's fidelity to the physical process of sight. For him, film is connected to the optic nerve. It is reduced to its most minimal concrete properties and from there is allowed to be.

Brakhage's economic optimism is also inspiring this year when everyone's comparing how much they make an hour at jobs they hate. Many experimental filmmakers are looking for jobs in the film industry, and while this is always a personal choice it also suggests that the rewards of personal

filmmaking are not surpassing its demands. Stan Brakhage quit his job(s) in the film industry during the 1950's to make amateur films at home. The money that he needed came his way. Amateur: to love. He is the greatest proponent of amateur art:

"...an amateur works according to his own necessity...and is, in that sense, 'at home' anywhere he works, and if he takes pictures he photographs what he loves and needs..."

That is a very economical approach to art in general, and film in particular.

Stan Brakhage teaches poets how to make films in the famous "A Moving Picture Giving and Taking Book". To make a film he says "provide yourself with a piece of film." It may be clear leader, white leader, black leader, gray leader, or even moving pictures. Learn to tell the base side from the emulsion and then scratch the emulsion side, dot it with india ink, scratch and dot it. And notice the lack of veracity in all these colors...the brown within the black leader, the blue within the clear, yellow in the white, purple in the gray. There is a dramatic tension present in the chemical composition of the medium which exists as soon as it's recognized. And all of this can be projected.

In "In Defense of Amateur", Brakhage talks about the poignant tendency of un-self-conscious amateurs to want to stage little dramas, mini-motion pictures, in their basements. Twenty years later, amateurs with self-consciousness, i.e., artists, pursue and exploit precisely this quality: plots that extend dangerously, ironically, hilariously beyond the limitations of Super 8 film, friends, and filmmaker's immediate environment. I'm thinking especially of Vivienne Dick's work, Lindzee Smith, and Betsey Syssler's film, *Menage*. Many artists now working in Super 8 see themselves in conflict if not with Brakhage, at least with a certain tradition he has come to represent. "[Millenium] got boring after awhile..." Vivienne Dick says in a recent interview in *October*. "The people...were all shooting the beach at Coney Island or the Staten Island Ferry or Central Park or pigeons...I met the group that started CoLab...They wanted to have actors and make up little stories. That seemed like a great idea to me." There is absolutely no sanctity-of-image in these current films, it's the opposite, the motion of the mind and its intentions leave what images fall behind in its wake. But it is Brakhage's sense of sanctity-of-image, and sanctity-of-the-order-of-succession, which to me seems simultaneously the most precious, and culturally dated, concern of this book.

BOOKS RECEIVED

From North Point Press, SF: **Italian Journey (1786-1788)** by Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, trans. W.H. Auden & Elizabeth Mayer (\$15.50c) & **Not Now But Now** by M.F.K. Fisher (novel out of print for 30 years - \$9.25c)...**Collected Poems & Opus Posthumous** by Wallace Stevens (Vintage Books NYC - \$8.95 & \$6.95)...**Death & the Newly-Married Lady** by Philip Dray (Phenomenal World Press, 516 E. 5 St #16 NYC 10009 \$3.50 - precise noir stories with alley rain, boiled dwarves & other turns the writing pushes you through)...from Sherwood Press, LA: **My Mark** by Dennis Cooper (\$4 - unhurried portrait of & testament to a lover gone but memory is carved into *this* monument) & **Christy's Alpine Inn** by Amy Gerstler (\$3 - still lifes of dream interiors)...**Lawrence Ferlinghetti: A Comprehensive Bibliography** by Bill Morgan (Garland Publishing, Inc. NYC \$48)...**Riddle Road** by Kit Robinson (TUUMBA PRESS Berkeley \$3)...**Poetry Comics** by Dave Morice (Simon & Schuster NYC \$6.95p \$14.95c)...**you were a bastard for being so fucking good in bed or THE UNMENTIONABLE** by Joe Lesueur (Chelsea Copy Press 224 W. 23 St. NYC 10011 - \$7, I think; more great art from heartache)...**White & Nervous** by Vicki Hudspith (Bench Press 141 W. 24 St. NYC 10011 \$5 - former editor of these pages reveals & congeals to get you through your hangover breakfast, i.e.)...**By Ligual Wholes** by Victor Hernandez Cruz (momo's Press SF \$5.95p \$15c - the four people who've seen this book since it came in last week have all called it something like the best book of the season)...**Paper the Stars: Poetry From Phoenix Programs 1979-82** (Phoenix Programs, Inc. PO Box 315 Concord CA 94522 \$5)...**Invisible Future Chickens** by Diana Middleton McQuaid (Smithereens Press 4064 24th St. SF, CA 94114 npl)...2 books in a series from Starlight Press Box 3102 LIC, NY 11103 \$2 & \$3, both by Ira Rosenstein: **Left on the Field to Die - 1: Timothy Richardson, 2 - Yehudi Weismann...Girlie Pictures** by Hal Sirowitz (Low-Tech Press 30-73 47th St, LIC, NY 11103 \$4)...**An Intimate Distant** by Keith Shein (Trike SF \$6)...**Posthumes** by Bradford Morrow (Cadmus Editions CA \$5)...**Scarpdancer** by Alan Alexander (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1 Finnerty St., Fremantle Western Australia 6160 \$6.50)

MAGAZINES RECEIVED

United Artists 16, ed. Lewis Warsh & Bernadette Mayer (172 E. 4 St 9B NYC 10009 \$2.50 - Warsh, Mayer, Coolidge, Lenhart, Ward, Notley, Savage, Bye, Waldman, Greenwald)...**Tangerine #2**, ed. Tom Weigel 515 E. 5 St #C8 NYC 10009 \$3 - A Mary Queen of Scots Commemorative Issue: Waldman, Notley, Berrigan, Collom, Brodey, Hughes, Malanga, M. Weigel, Lesniak, Howard-Howard, Hudspith, Scholnick, Cataldo, Cohen, Pettet, Southwell, Harrington + also available **Tangerine #1** which features many of these same people with Robert Herrick appearing as bouillion)...from Lines (Box 18 Annondale-On-Hudson NY 12504 npl - **6 Poems** by Kimberly Lyons)...**River Styx** Issues Number 10 - Divine Comedy: The Comic & Number 11 - Divine Comedy: The Surreal (Nemerov, Harper, Owen Adam, Holland, Ginsberg, Swenson + + +)...**Poetry Comics No. 17**, ed. Dave Morice (PO Box 585 Iowa City Iowa 52244 \$5 - useful postcard issue made up of 32 separate pieces from **Poetry Comics**, above)...**Oro Madre** Summer 1982, eds. Loss & Jan Glazier (PO Box 7324 Fremont CA 94536 \$10/sub. - Taylor, Swiderski, Weber, Glazier, Knight + reviews)...**Straights**, ed. Glen Mannisto (Detroit Council of the Arts 47 East Adams Detroit MI 48226 - \$5/1 yr. sub. - monthly - Notes for Lecture by Diane diPrima, + Sinclair, Tysh (C & G), Lichter, Gustafson)

Ted Berrigan will be reading on November 22 at the Williams Center for Performing Arts, Williams Plaza, Rutherford NJ at 8 PM, \$4

Pedro Pietri & Miguel Algarin will be reading at the New School, 66 W 12 St., as part of the Conversations With Writers series on November 2 at 8 PM, \$5, 741-5600.

WEDNESDAY READINGS: at 8 PM, suggested contribution \$3. *Hosted by Bernadette Mayer & Bob Holman:*

November 3 - **Cliff Fyman & Yuki Hartman**

November 10 - **Poetry & Music From Irish America: "Celtic Thunder" & poets Bob Callahan, Suki Howe, Eileen Myles, Maureen Owen & Terry Winch**

November 17 - **Kathleen Fraser & Paul Metcalf**

November 24 - **Ted Greenwald & Rae Armantrout**

MONDAY READING & PERFORMANCE SERIES: at 8 PM, suggested contribution \$1. *Hosted by Rochelle Kraut:*

November 1 - **OPEN READING**

November 8 - **Barbara Einzig & Hannah Weiner**

November 15 - **Sandy Berrigan & Maureen Owen**

November 22 - **Mitch Highfill & Linda Spencer**

November 29 - **Michael Cooper & Marjorie Welish**

Free Workshop in Poetry with John Godfrey meets every Tuesday at 8 PM in the *workshop room*.

THE WORLD #37, edited by Harris Schiff, is now available for \$2.50 at the Poetry Project & \$3 by mail & in bookstores. The cover is by Diego Rivera (photographed by Judy Pomerantz) and contributors include: Hollo, Troupe, Cataldo, Berrigan, Warsh, Notley, Waldman, Rosenthal, Fyman, Holman, Schneeman, et al.

Edmund White & Joe Brainard will be reading together on November 22 in the Poets at the Public series - 425 Lafayette, \$4, 8 PM, 598-7150.

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THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

St. Mark's Church
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Greg Masters, editor

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There is a visible absence of irony in this book.

His conviction of the absolute importance of his inner life is so convincing that Brakhage's letter to Ed Dorn about his habit of driving to different bars every night, ordering a brandy and reading a book, is fascinating.

Much of the material of Brakhage's film has been a kind of chronicle of his domestic life ("home movies"). Needless to say his life as a man in America during the 60's was quite conducive to this. But this chronicling never becomes aesthetically oppressive, because unlike other films of the era, there is no attempt made to mythologize anything. There's lots of parts in the book about Brakhage's five children, his wife, Jane Collom Brakhage, her "tapestries and table and recorder-playing." There's a three way conversation in the book between Brakhage, Hollis Frampton, and Jane Brakhage which is really a dialogue between Brakhage and Frampton and "Jane", as she appears in the transcript. She says she is a performer in Brakhage's films by default, the "someone" who happened to be "having a baby, minding the kids, standing around..." This is a very credible performance style, but one she is not credited with as it was directorially imposed. It would have been very interesting to hear what she had to say about functioning WITHIN the frame; how becoming an act-er observed affected her actions. Instead, there's Hollis Frampton teasing her about cutting her hair. Really, if taken personally the dynamics of this collaboration are infuriating because they're so endemic of the relation of male artists to woman during the 1960's, but we can't hold Stan Brakhage responsible for an entire socio-sexual mileau, can we girls??? Someone said to me, perhaps facetiously, that Brakhage also made a film in which he ficticiously murdered his entire family. This also made a lot of sense because that was probably all that was left for him to do with them (as subjective subject matter). But really the material of Brakhage's film can't be taken too personally. These are the films he happened to make. Other homes, other movies.

Stan Brakhage is very unfashionable now among some people downtown who look at films. I know this because two potential screen-ers of my film have asked over the phone: "It's not boring, all dots and squiggles, like Stan Brakhage, is it?" I think this is unfortunate because I'll always love his work for the same reason I love Ken Jacob's movies, and that is this fierce commitment to the most primitive, indestructable-in-its-indefensibility-in-the-world kind of vision: "(the sky) is a furry animal. The stars are silver hairs...Big dust motes." (Brakhage, *The Stars Are Beautiful*); two hands coming together to form, on a rooftop after ten eventless minutes, a viewer for the eye around the sky which IS the first camera ("Little Stabs At Happiness", Ken Jacobs). These are visions which validate all others because they're so persistent and defenseless and are probably pertinent to poetry, although not being a poet, I don't know how.

—Chris Kraus

Frances Waldman

Frances LeFevre Waldman, who died on May 15th at the age of 73, was the daughter-in-law of a poet, the mother of a poet, an accomplished writer and translator herself, and in her late years a talented actress. She edited this Newsletter from 1976 to 1978. To everything she did, from literary projects to her numerous acquaintanceships, she brought an exemplary intelligence, interest and forthrightness. She was singularly helpful to young writers starting out, or starting out in New York, and in the late 1960's her house on Macdougall St. was frequently filled with poets (as well as, it seemed, every book of poems, big press or mimeo, there ever was). When a St. Mark's workshop group was locked out of the Church, it went to Frances's. She herself traveled to an extraordinary number of gatherings involving poetry, braving dark distances on foot, even in her late years: it's hard to think of anyone who supported poetry more consistently.

Frances was a wonderful, fluid prose writer. As a matter of fact, her prose seemed so effortless that more than once, a letter from her left me with the depressed feeling that I had no business writing prose. I keep wondering if maybe secretly she wrote the memoirs others kept urging her to write; with her knowledge of the comings and goings around St. Mark's and elsewhere, she would have been the perfect chronicler of the exciting poetic decade that began in New York in the mid-60's. Of her admirable translations, two books have been published: *Amour A Mort*, poems in French by the Peruvian-born surrealist Cesar Moro; and just this year, the stirring *Border Guards*, poems of the Greek Resistance by her celebrated father-in-law, Anghelos Sikelianos. All her dealings with literature were marked by her catholic—and sharply discriminating—taste. Somehow Frances could appreciate poetry other poets wouldn't even look at. She was also fond of distinguishing between "lightweights" and "heavyweights"; and she knew what she was talking about. In a time of disturbing poetic factionalism, which is threatening to deprive poets of colleagues as well as audience, her taste and her tough-mindedness stand out more than ever as the healthiest, and perhaps the most *genuine*, approach to the whole, strange business of poetry.

During her tenure as *Newsletter* editor, she annoyed some readers as well as contributors with her rigorousness. I once had a 45-minute telephone argument with her over a baseball analogy I had used. I was sure it was brilliant, and that Frances didn't quite get it, but she wouldn't budge and I hung up fuming. The net result was that the piece as printed was clearer than I had originally written it. Of all Frances's memorable qualities, I keep coming back to her pluck. She had so much life, so much spirit, that even when her health was failing badly, it seemed she of all people would have no truck with death.

—Charles North

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Collected Poems by Mary Barnard (Breitenbush Publications, Portland Oregon; \$12.95c (1979) & \$8.95p (1981))

There's a received opinion that landscape is important in the poetry of the Pacific Northwest. In the poetry of Mary Barnard (who was born in Vancouver, Washington, in 1909 and though she has travelled still lives there beside the Columbia River) I'd say it's not the landscape but the land.

She includes in her collected poems a few lines she has translated out of Homer's tens of thousands—surely the choice is instructive—Odysseus's speech when he reveals his identity to the Phaeacians at the beginning of book nine: he tells his own name and who his father was, alludes glancingly to his deeds and their notoriety, then gives a detailed and passionate description of Ithaca,

an island of clear skies and a wooded windswept hill,
Mount Neriton —

one of the western isles,

...yet more to seaward, turned
to the west while they face dawn and sunrise.
It is a hard land, a breeder of men; and I know
no sweeter sight than a man's own country.

Calypso held him, he says, and Circe kept him,

but neither of them could ever persuade my heart,
because this is true: his own country, his own
kindred are what any man loves most, though you find him
settled among foreigners in some richer home.

The feeling she isolates in Odysseus is no doubt her own, one that comes from a relationship to the land that is deeper than any appreciation of its scenery and even deeper than love for it, though these things may also apply. His description of Ithaca, that hard poor land out there in the far west, is his answer to the question "Who are you really, stranger?"

Her own descriptions of the land are concrete and objective:

The River Under Different Lights

3. The Estuary

Where fresh water meets salt
a single wave shears
the fog with a slow edge
lifted by tide or current or
hull's pressure.

Nothing is sure, neither
tide, season, nor hour
in this flux of stream and ocean,
daylight and fog,
where only the fish,
a secret presence, move
surely on spring's errand.

She really is looking out at the estuary; but looking out in that certain way lights up the inside so we can see it too, secret, archaic, passionate, changing, staying the same.

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 T Y P O G R A P H Y

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The Whisperer

Where the sea runs a cobalt wedge under the coast bridges
and rhododendrons burn cool above concrete piers, an eddy
of air

at the bridgehead will be I as
walks alone here between watered lawns at moonrise.

The eyes lie in daytime, that say these chairs, fields,
faces, are I, who am a strand of air raveling in the sound of
leaves.

If the winds of the soul be unconsumed, I am lost,
left clinging at a bridgehead over sea water.

There is no reprieve in the touch of flowering trees.
Finger is sister to bark, both mute and solid, both
independent in death. Pity the poor soul, the public wind
imaged in language, proud to whirl papers down a littered
street,

a draft at the door, whining for the bellows under your ribs.

In her poetry there is no fixed frontier between the local and the mythical, any more than there is between anger beauty laughter and awe. In one poem, "Wine Ship," she imagines a "sharp-eared foreigner" shipwrecked on the Northwest coast:

A mast askew in the surf,
wood of another climate
bedded forever in half-liquid sand.

Here are no myrtle groves nor shrines, not even grapes or moss, just bitter berries "and the harsh / grass on the dune top," and the wind is cold.

From this shore an exile learns
to keep where a fire burns,
but there is no disguise
in small hand or white throat
when still by night a disturbing rhythm returns
from groves forgotten.

When the long eyelids are lifted
suddenly, outlandish lights appear
in the woman's eyes: we think we hear
the tap of hidden hooves
somewhere in our closed corridors.

To me this feels like being present at the inception of a myth, in its simultaneous mystery and clarity; the effect is intensified by the finality of sound in "closed corridors," a finality so surely wrought that the word "corridors" seems to rhyme, though it's not obvious what it rhymes with. We "think we hear" that too.

Staying back near where the myths begin, in wonder and humor, she can make them welcome in her home. (In her book *The Mythmakers*, published in 1966 by the Ohio University Press, she argues learnedly but intelligently that early peoples dressed like animals, got drunk, cavorted, danced, and made up songs and stories because it was fun, then found the ritual occasions for doing so.) Persephone, an ondine, Anadyomene, make their way here to the Pacific at least as unselfconsciously as the Mediterranean join Molanna, Bregog, Mulla and Sabrina fair by the Irish Sea in Spenser and Milton. And an axe in the shadow of a house, a fable from the Cayoosh country, Ezra Pound old in Martinsbrunn and Sant'Ambrogio, seem about to become myths. In the poem called "Prometheus Loved Us" she walks restless and idle in the rainy twilight along the edge of town,

...nowhere in particular,
Nothing.

Except that the merest match-wing
of fire pricks through the rain
and the street is stung to life.
Heart leaps, like a fish striking.

Verbally she's entirely sure, both diction and sound: you can trust her with your ears. She takes a kind of care with language that seems to have gone out of fashion some time along in the sixties when so many people had so much they thought needed to be said that they didn't listen well at the same time. I'm glad to say that the same sureness is in her translations from the Greek, a few poems in this book and *Sappho: A New Translation* published by the University of California Press in 1958. The poet Bert Meyers used to say that the verbal degeneracy of our youth was caused by reading too much poetry in translation; but her translations have a bite they learned from their originals that even carries over into her other poems:

Some say a cavalry corps,
some infantry, some, again,
will maintain that the swift oars
of our fleet are the finest
sight on the dark earth; but I say
that whatever one loves, is.

(*Sappho*, no. 41)

Cassandra

...

If we knew how the world looked, turning
into the shadow, if any woman stood
as she did by Apollo's shoulder
and caught the smell of burning
even before night closed upon the towers—
she would have little care for what was said
in a city seven times buried.
Her mind would be a cauldron. She would have
no thought for the dead.

Mary Barnard went to upstate New York in the thirties, spent two summers at Yaddo, was praised by Pound and Williams, had a gathering of her poetry published by New

Directions in 1940 (*Five Young American Poets*) and a small book of her own in 1952 (*A Few Poems*), but she's not as famous as I'd think she'd be given the quality of her poems. It's true that they are few. And she hasn't been interested in fashionable subjects; in politics least of all. She says in her "Footnote" to the Sappho book that Sappho "is said to have been exiled by the tyrant Pittacus for political reasons; nevertheless, if we may judge by the surviving poems, what interested her most was her private life and her poetry. In these interests she is not untypical of women and poets generally." No doubt there were women and poets who would have found such an attitude offensive in 1958, let alone now. But the seventy poems in this book have such depth of feeling and such verbal intensity, and her own presence in them is so distinct and so angular, that many of them have lodged in my heart. She's one of the ones it's easy to remember.

The Spring

The water whispers in a quick
flow out from under a boulder
to moisten the thick-standing mint.

It fills the pond, goes down over
the spillway and under the road.
It fills another small pond, then
falls quickly away between tall
cottonwoods, a mere trickle still,
to find its fate in the river.

Nameless, it has two little ponds
to its credit, like a poet
with two small collections of verse.

For this I celebrate it.

—review by Dick Barnes

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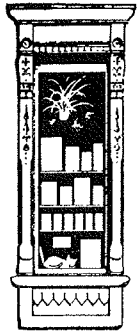
When workers want more \$
it's called Socialism

When bosses want more \$
it's called Capitalism

When I want more \$
it's called Individuality

When you want more \$
it's called taking something that belongs to me

—Barbara Barg



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First Baby Poems (Rocky Ledge Cottage Editions) and Cabin (Z Press) by Anne Waldman

In *Democratic Vistas* Walt Whitman foreshadows the current political scene and calls for a poetry that is to be a powerful moral force working on and in the language to give weight to the excesses of an unbridled materialism. Whitman wants poets to write "the great poem of death," the "great poem of metaphysics," it's up to poetry to save Democracy from its own glaring excesses. This hysterical faith in poetry, along with a fair amount of energy and a sound of Shakespeare and the Bible, accounts for what Whitman wrote—why it is still so powerful though so purple.

Currently many writers, removed from the "markets" of poetry, are following this path—seeing poetry in its most direct and technical aspects as morally charged, wanting poetry to be effective, descriptive, projective, exploratory. Curiously, this take on poetry usually de-emphasizes the attractive aspects of prosody as too seductive, so that, as with Whitman, "poetry" per se is downplayed, becomes indistinguishable (technically) from prose.

On the other side of this heroic ideal of poetry is the poetry of trance, of song, what comes direct from the muse to transport us far away. This poetry (Keats' Greek flights, Yeats' Irish lilt) is nothing like prose, no arguments, a heightened sense of an ideal beauty, the momentary seizure of real beauty.

Anne Waldman's new books are this way, inspired music, to sing about the new baby or the cabin she lives in. I have read a great deal of poetry about the new baby and the cabin you live in and even though much of it is good it is nearly impossible to escape the excess of too much raw feeling curling the words up, even if the words are right it isn't right unless the muse does it as she does do here. Here Anne Waldman shows herself to be the poet-adept, making everything spin. All kinds of verse forms from a delightful sestina, to a pantoum written from a baby's point of view, irregular John Donne stanzas in the shape of triangles, tiny Emily Dickinson lines, prose poems. Pantoum, before you look it up, is a Malayan verse form, often copied in French and English, with a complex stanzaic and rhyme scheme, this one is very good, how whole brief lines of baby-consciousness get recycled throughout to make a mosaic of feeling ("They love me smiling / I try to speak / I don't know what I look like.") In "Song: Time Draws Neere," Waldman turns on an olde Engleesh sound and actually says:

Pangs of the babye
tossed in a bellie
birdies & woodlands cheer!

and makes you believe it totally. Maybe the best poem in this book is "To Lure Him to the Objects of the World He So Desires", not the baby but the objects for the baby (Hildegard the duck, a red caboose, Lady's Lucky Locker, a tooth brush, tupperware, Aquaman, and all the stoned wheat thins make their way to baby) ending with "Flute make a toot / socks leap to baby's kicking feet."

Cabin is a more subdued work. Done up in handsome plain yellow covers with lots of white space dominating each page, it consists of five poems, the longest, title poem, is ten pages, four three-line stanzas each page, that builds up a tremendous charge of feeling for a particular place. This poem is a hymn (Greek: *Hymnos*, song of praise) amazingly not a parody of or comment on but is exactly a straight hymn and proceeds with that pace and stanzaic build up that is finally very beautiful and moving and serious:

dear cirques, dear constraint, dissenting
inclinations of a man and a woman, metonic cycle
all that sweats in rooms, lives in nature
requiems & momentum & trimmings of bushes
dried hibiscus & hawks & shyness
brought to this place of love
trees rooted fear rooted all roots brought
to place of love, mystery to heart of love
& fibers

In the preface to his book *Decompressions*, Philip Whalen comes out for total overthrow of greed capitalism and the establishment of a new state but says that he thinks the most revolutionary poem is probably about a flower. It may not be news to say that the beauty of a poem whose music is accurate and skillful can be more effective than didactics, but that is proved (and it is a relief) very convincingly in these books. I have lately been pressing and pressed with and by language to make it help more, but these books do refresh me and make a ringing in my ears.

—Norman Fischer

**OPENS
OCT. 20th**

Book by
JOAN HARVEY

Lyrics by
JOAN HARVEY
and
JOHN AMATO

Music by
JOHN AMATO

Directed by
JOAN HARVEY

FREEDOM AIN'T NO BOWL OF CHERRIES
A POLITICAL, MUSICAL, COMEDY
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Angels Laundromat by Lucia Berlin (Turtle Island, Berkeley CA, 86 pp, \$4.95)

The stock of truly original new short fiction, these sparse days, seems to have shrunk to the back of the cupboard. For the story form, times have been looking as tight as the money supply. But here is a short-fiction collection that steers refreshingly clear of mass-market obviousness and creative-writing-school pretensions.

"Maggie May," the final story in *Angels Laundromat*, is a classic on the subject of menial work. (It was first published under the title *A Manual for Cleaning Women*.) Work, they say, is the great equalizer, but not when it comes to the sexes, where it's always been "man may work from sun to sun / but woman's work is never done." Who could like doing housework, especially other people's? Nobody. How many people could write interestingly about it? Nobody until Lucia Berlin.

Berlin's stories come from domestic interiors that are, literary-wise, the real other side of the tracks, because nobody ever talks about them. The cleaning lady tells us about people's lives from an intimacy we never dared consider. What existential meanings lurk in the dirty sheets and shag carpets? "As a rule, never work for friends," Berlin's cleaning woman advises. "Sooner or later they resent you because you know so much about them."

"Maggie May" is a real-life primer in the art of the dust rag and the scouring pad, but it is also a tale of the life and death of the spirit. It opts, through tears, for life.

In between the desperate hours of dispensing streams of Comet on stove grills for ladies of the Christian Eastern Star, Berlin's cleaning woman learns more about the strange corners of life than you could find out in a dozen "Nine to Five"s. Her fits of rebellion and moments of enlightenment are only punctuation marks in the endless sentence of the job, with its drifts of raw bother and tedium, its reveries beckoning mirage-like from beyond. Maggie May's reveries concern a dead lover; what could be farther away.

"Maggie May" is one of Berlin's several stories on the theme of working. In "El Tim," a junior high school teacher is driven to confrontation with a "problem" teenager, and nothing is delivered. "The Musical Vanity Boxes" harks back to a child's first experience of hustling the almighty dollar (in this case it's nickels and dimes, in El Paso, 1943). And for Dad, the retired oldtimer in "Mama and Dad," work has shrunk to the daily making of jello, an act thereby delegated a nearly sacred role.

One gets the feeling a lifetime of paying attention to the job of living went into this book, with its clear perception of a downside everyday reality, in bus stations, laundromats, junkyards, and second-hand stores with army cots. The sadness of the poor is boredom in Berlin's stories: waiting for buses, unseen by rich people in cars, or waiting in welfare and unemployment lines. Of such tedium-laden bottom depths Lucia Berlin writes with humor and honesty and the kind of observation that restores a natural dignity even to a world where there's nothing doing.

—Tom Clark



In a Blue River by Ted Berrigan (Little Light Books, NYC, \$2.50)

A gathering of this poet's short poems is a true cause for celebration. For there is considerable breath and volume in this responsible collection, edited by the ever-vigilant Susan Cataldo. The book calls to mind some words written by the surrealist painter, De Chirico: "There are many more enigmas in the shadow of a man who walks in the sun than in all the religions of the past, present, and future." So appear the shorter poems of Ted Berrigan, to be enigmatic and singularly compelling in the heat of their craft.

Some with their uncanny quality of sheer inclusiveness, expand upon their few but hardly sparse words, like a novel glimpsed and then totally absorbed in the survey of an evening, "Man Alone" for instance:

In front of him was
his head.
Behind him were
men.
He was a man alone.

There are one-line poems too, but not one-liners, that do more than attract our attention, they display a quickness that might be worth noting. Great lyric moments abound here as well, contracted to a sort of resonance which links up to the tradition of Gertrude Stein:

one can only are

Ted, as always, takes many chances, while drawing from a considerable mound of chips. So will this hands-down winner see many a mile.

—Tom Weigel

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SPOTTING MIRO

"There you go, Dougy, 685 Madison. Take a taxi—it's a Miro."

The tube was taller than Benny was, as tall as Jimmy, almost as tall as Doug. He could have polevaulted the stairs with it, had he chosen. Nor, out on Third, did he allow himself to joust with the onrushing trucks and buses. He did stop to hail a taxi on 51st, wave his Miro in the air. The taxis would have none of it, they wanted *briefcases*. Well, if a cabbie didn't know a Miro when he saw one, who among these walkers would? They headed west. The Miro would enjoy the stroll; in fact, was nudging some of the girls as they passed by. He had good taste. On Madison, Doug stopped to let him look over the window display of a jewelry store, but the Miro could find no ring that fit. Try that bracelet then. No...How about that choker there? Ah! Ah! Well pleased, they headed on. The Miro had never seen so many Americans before, not outdoors. Why weren't they staring? They did not even stop to look! Doug patted him, and the Miro patted back.

It was at 685 that the Miro balked, grabbing for the closing door. Doug had to pull him in. There was a lone man inside amid all the art. This was a man who would know a Miro. He had a little dripping nose, close above a warping mouth. His wet eyes peered out through their spectacles in alarm at sight of life. "Yes? Yes?"

"I have a Miro!"

"Ah, the Miro! What, have they taken it off of its frame?"

"I guess they have at that."

"Here, let me see." The man wiped his nose with a white wet handkerchief, pecked testily at the binding tape. That did not take so very long, but the plucking of the Miro did. It was done with little pinching tips, all around the rim. When he had a few inches out, the man had Doug hold the tube while he drew most delicately out from it. Now he took the Miro to a table, gently spread it there. He sniffed every inch of it, turned it over on its face.

"What's this on the back?"

"I don't know." If not another Miro, it looked like a shopping list.

"All right, I'll accept it," the man sniffled, reaching for Doug's receipt. There was an exquisite Klee behind his back. Waving the signed receipt Doug left Lester McLester to sniff that shopping list, and pretended not to notice him drip on it. Outside, in the sun again, he sauntered south. Soon he sauntered east toward Lexington. There are no public phones on Madison.

—Douglas Woolf

Kerouac's Crooked Road: Development of a Fiction
by Tim Hunt (Archon Books, The Shoestring Press,
Hamden CT 06514, 1981, 262 pages \$19.50)

American scholars have been slow to recognize Jack Kerouac. Possibly blinded by the sensationalism that made a curiosity of the writer and mocked the work, serious critics have left comment, with few exceptions, to biographers, mythmakers, and Hollywood filmmakers. Into this breach of judgement comes Tim Hunt's recent work *Kerouac's Crooked Road*; with him come perceptive reading, reasoned exposition, and historical perspective to place Kerouac as the post-WWII avatar and innovator of traditional American literature.

Hunt knows that although Kerouac himself is not neglected, his work is, and that contrary to popular myth, Kerouac dealt with his material critically and in the spirit of literary exploration. He proves that *On the Road*, "a skillfully managed traditional novel," is Kerouac's last apprentice work, and that *Visions of Cody* is his first mature text, the paradigm for the canon. Citing five *Road* manuscripts, Hunt supports and defines his contentions with the manuscript history. In three substantial chapters, Hunt analyzes *On the Road* and its origins in American literary tradition; he sifts the evidence of the *Road* manuscripts to show that the Viking *On the Road* is Kerouac's fourth version and *Visions of Cody* the fifth; he explicates *Visions of Cody* in terms of its relation to *On the Road*, its experimental achievements, and its significance in the canon. Throughout, Hunt cites letters and journals when he can, and carefully scrutinizes selected passages from the novels, employing the close critical method that has been favored by scholars since the 1950's. Hunt's field of study is well-defined and well-chosen; his argument is for the most part effective and persuasive.

So right is he in his analysis of *On the Road* that even to a casual Kerouac reader he seems to state the obvious—except that no one has stated it extensively with proper documentation in print before. He offers a graceful definition of the troublesome Kerouac concept "IT": "The ecstasy and community of 'IT' are at best temporary states and thrive perhaps only at moments of transition or outside the normal social order." Verifying the irreducible Americanness of *On the Road*, Hunt shows how Twain, Fitzgerald, and Melville influenced Kerouac's conception of Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty. He expands Carol Vopat's seminal observation of the double vision of the narrator Sal, whom Kerouac distinguishes as Sal the naive character and Sal the aware narrator, with the time of the book's action played against the time of its telling. Such distinctions banish the popular notions that Kerouac spewed his experiences to make the novel and that he identified transparently with Sal Paradise. These are just highlights of a chapter full of articulate interpretation and historical recognition about the most famous and most misunderstood of Kerouac's novels.

To tackle the history of the *Road* manuscripts is a heroic task, at least because a major portion of the documents in question are unavailable for examination. They are of absolute importance in order to verify what Kerouac meant when he denounced revision and to what extent, if any, the Viking *On the Road* was revised. Hunt judiciously notes that Kerouac denied others the right to edit him, although he may have been "slaving over revisions" himself; "his primary concern was that the conscious critical mind might censor the richness of the imagination." This seems fair, as do Hunt's notions about the character and disposition of the five *Road* manuscripts. At some points, however, he treads incautiously: to argue extensively from a facsimile of the first page of Kerouac's 1948-9 travel diary reproduced in

a catalogue celebrating the archives in which it is kept is to invite, rightfully, charges of speciousness. Perhaps the risk is eclipsed, or justified, by the excitement in these speculations and what they suggest about Kerouac's artistic development, though the grounds for argument seem thin.

In the last chapter, Hunt seeks to teach readers how to approach the difficult *Visions of Cody*. He convincingly shows that it was entangled in Kerouac's struggle with the *Road* material and that its "vertical structure or 'wild form' derives from the experimental impulse of sketching," Kerouac's innovative approach to style. Discussing the fraternal ties between *On the Road* and *Visions of Cody*, Hunt reviews each section of the latter for experimental achievement and virtuosity. *Cody* is such a profound and complex book it is not surprising to feel that Hunt takes only one of the many paths through it, as opposed to his comprehensiveness with *On the Road*. Still, it is here that his discussion bogs down with aesthetic and technical rhetoric to the extent that an already difficult text is obscured by critical apparatus, too often a fault of academic criticism. Ironically confusing a reader as he seeks to make *Visions of Cody* accessible is Hunt's only real lapse in this study, and it is one that derives from his sincere and compelling wish to reveal the novel's awesome achievements.

Although almost prohibitively expensive and available only from the publisher, *Kerouac's Crooked Road* is an important critical breakthrough on the work of one of the most important voices in American literature. It is essential that Kerouac be annexed and assessed by academic scholars because it is they who will establish his name in the classroom, where generations of students historically cut off from the cultural vanguard of the Beats and even of the Sixties will have a chance to recover this heritage. It is my hope that Tim Hunt will be widely read and that his work will initiate an overdue revision of Jack Kerouac's literary reputation by professional critics of literature.

—Ronna C. Johnson

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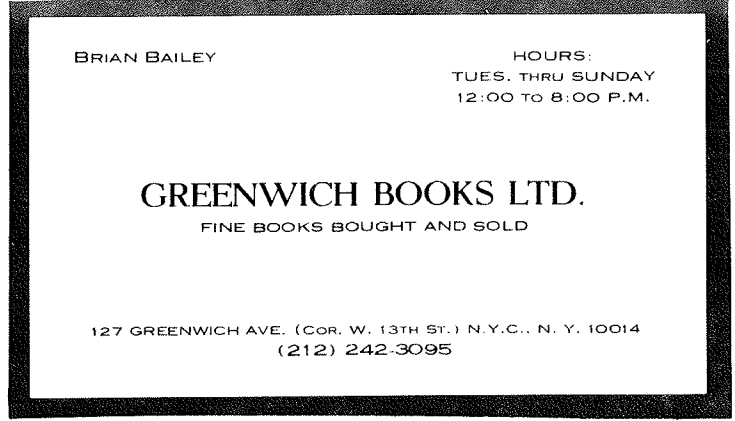


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First Baby Poems by Anne Waldman (Rocky Ledge, Cottage Editions, \$3)

The complaynt, the sestina and the song, if one cares to make a case for Donald Allen's "postmoderns" are the revitalized forms given new breath and joy here by the poet. This actually is the second 'baby book' by Anne Waldman. The first *Baby Breakdown*, was published by Bobbs-Merrill in 1970 and exerted an equally wonderful influence on myself, giving me the courage to abandon reticence for nerve and chance, in the writing and hearing process attendant to poetry. This book is likewise representative of a first-time plunge into new relations captured in form and design by the poet, who has been a long-time enthusiast of the Italian and French Renaissance courtly poets in her notable translations, adaptations and workshops given in New York and Boulder, Colorado. When not speaking as a first-time mother, humorously and even introspectively of this new relation to pregnancy and son, Ambrose, Waldman energetically adapts the infant's voice and feelings. The results are more than successful, real baby poems are delivered that are truly persuasive in their bioluminescence. Touched by the awful speed of life, the occasion of impressions, how it has been and goes out to be sensed:

"Unusual I don't sleep really
 unless it's dark night everyone in bed
 Others sounds are creak of chair & floor, water
 dripping on heater from laundry, cat licking itself
 & occasional peck on typewriter, peck on my cheek"

Music of form for the new mother's ruminations is admirably worked out to something like a feat of strength, not at all unusual for this reigning queen of living personisms. The opening poem "I feel the sweet trouble beneath my girdle..." almost moves with the stealth of Whitman's bend in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" only restricting itself to seven lines:

"this live belly—whose?—mine?
 dark night, sitting—mind still—whose?
 solitude—this mind—mine?
 baby—what mind?
 minding the breath
 minding the mind inside the belly
 the belly inside my mind"

First Baby Poems is an admirable cycle of poems arising from an experience that is still not so uncommon to women today. Yet, even in these so called 'postmodern' times, the experience of childbearing has not been so well rendered in poetry. Though the names Notley and Kraut suddenly spring to mind, I'll leave such to the baby poem anthologist of the future.

—Tom Weigel

Who Hates Such Fancy Bred

Fancy does as fancy is,
 Who hates such fancy bred
 Keeps us apart & mislead;
 & so it's no fun for the heart -
 Worse fancy yet, for the head.

—Tom Weigel

Beat Angels - published by Arthur Knight, \$9

A pensive, suburban-looking Jean Louis Kerouac stares out of a front-cover photograph. "We're all going to heaven hand in hand"—he says on the frontispiece. Then the book begins, with a raunchy piece by Harold Norse on sexual intercourse—subject not terribly original these days but stimulating nonetheless. Called "Sniffing Keyholes." Moves on to a Gerald Nicosia interview of Robert Duncan in which Duncan makes much of Kerouac's affinities with Saroyan, the *naif* quality presumably, and concludes with a discussion of drugs, the media, male sexuality and things in general. Next a very moving piece by Eileen Kaufman about her husband, Bob, which reveals many unknown details of the life of this poet who, it is said, enjoys a much larger reputation in France than he does in the USA. Photographs of numerous people somehow related to the subject. 1950s letters by Kerouac to Ginsberg. A gallery of Kerouac photos assembled by Nicosia. An interview with Pierre De Lattre, clerical friend of Neal's near the end of his life. A photo of the Mexican railroad tracks where Neal died. An essay by Carolyn Cassady endeavoring to clear up many pejorative myths about her deceased husband (her chief whipping-boy, justly or unjustly, seems to be novelist Alan Harrington). A lively letter by Corso telling about a fistfight with Norman Mailer on the subject of the Beats, occurring at the usual literary "cocktail party". Early diary jottings of John Clellon Holmes which bare his early idealistic self. An interview with Ted Joans revealing interesting facts about the Beatnik craze of the late '50s. Photos of that craze. A jail memoir by Huncke, excerpted from his biography *Guilty of Everything*. A Tangier letter by Burroughs. Poems by Michael and Joanna McClure. Concluding letters by Allen to Jack. A goodbye collection of Kerouaciana for fans and curious others.

—Carl Solomon

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LET'S SPLIT!

THIS CAPTION WAS DELETED AT THE LAST MOMENT OUT OF RESPECT TO
 ... my mother who loved BUTTERFIELD-8

Bic

Alice's Summer Loan

Wait to hand Alice a little money
Not that I'm rich, but that I can afford
The sky donates colors in its journey
kids' glee, bookie joint, rectory, morgue
Here where I was younger, younger faces appear
eating sweet watermelon that's so ripe
I jump down to my feet, ah, shoulders bare
in my purple muscle shirt! as Alice pipes
hi! Shade softens as though we're in a tent
In her sad face the color green is featured
On my block near "A" the tenements
lean lean, inscrutable, chiseled, bleached
Time disperses lives and homes
She looks deep into me, Alice's loan

—Cliff Fyman

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