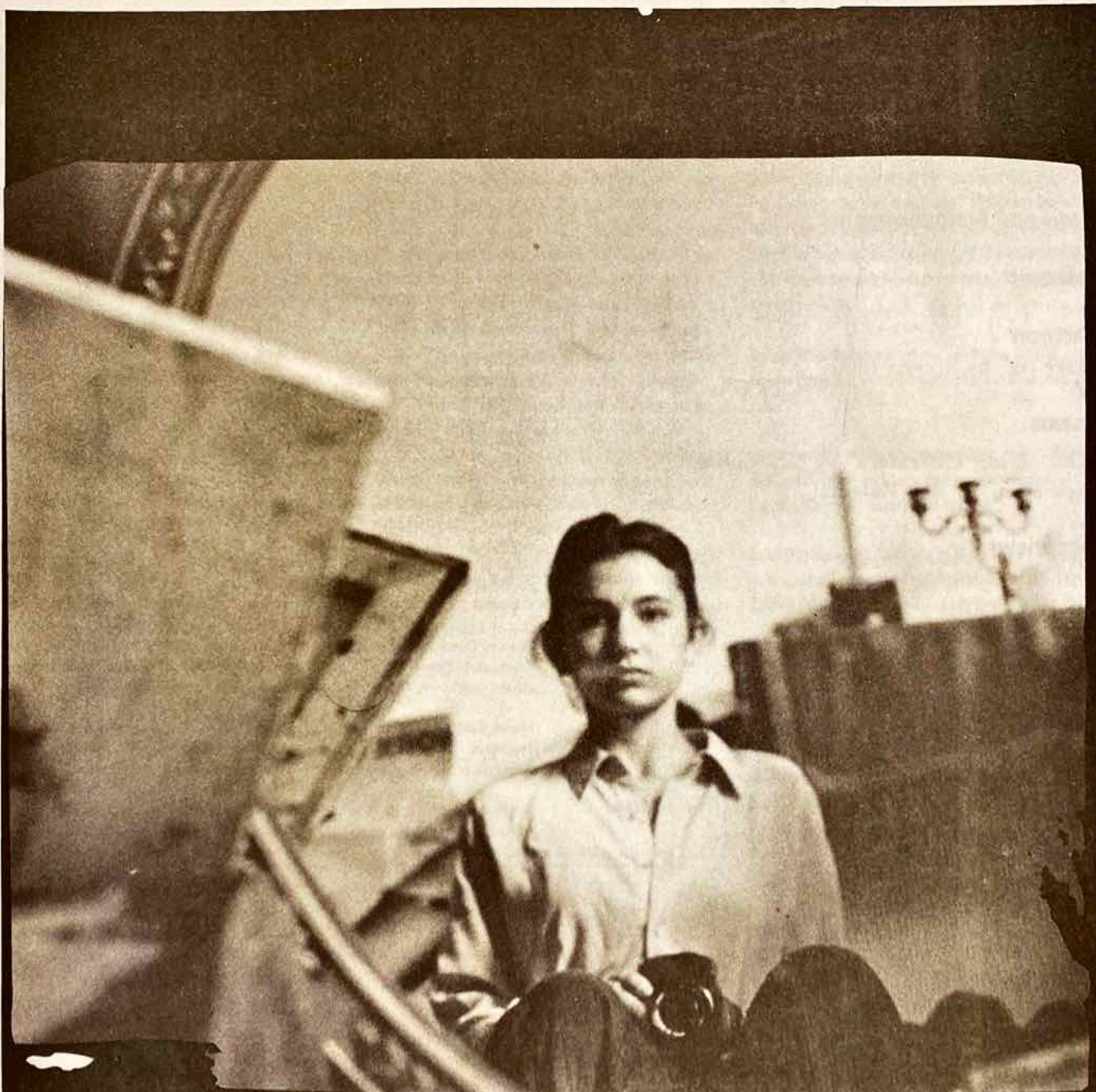
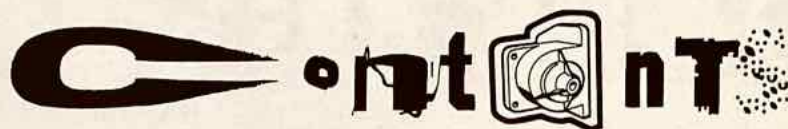


# Poetry Project

NEWSLETTER



February / March 2001 Issue number 183



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# News and Announcements

The Poetry Project Newsletter would like to have your thoughts on what you read in these pages. Send us letters to the editor! Send us questionnaire responses! Offer questionnaire suggestions! And feel free to send us announcements and **brief reviews of readings about town** that you think deserve honorable mention. Whether it's a reading at the Project or any other reading, share it with us.

Congratulations to **John Ashbery** on being named State Poet of New York. And a notice just came in the mail announcing **Lorenzo Thomas**, whose recent book *Extraordinary Measures: Afrocentric Modernism and Twentieth-Century American Poetry* was reviewed in the last issue of the Newsletter, won an award for his poetry from the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts.

Congratulations to poet and former Newsletter editor **Jordan Davis** and his wife **Anna Malmude**, on the birth of their first child, **James!**

On a sad note, **Julie Patton**, who recently performed her poetry at the prestigious Jazz Standard in Manhattan, is leaving us for a teach-

ing job in Ohio. We are losing a paragon of style and vitality. Who will stand out so radiantly from the bankers and dot-commers of the East Village?

And now for your favorite couplets. The plethora of song couplets over poetry couplets took me a back. If you're going to prefer banal lyrics over poems, you could at least give me Dylan or Morrissey. But Morrison? **Sharon Mesmer** likes "There's a killer on the road / His brain is squirming like a toad" from his *immortal* "Riders on the Storm" and **Robert Glück** likes "I see the girls go by in their summer clothes / I have to turn my head until the darkness goes" from the Rolling Stones (*those heirs to the Romantics*). Along the same lines, Susan Landers is fond of "I wanna bathe in milk. Eat grapes. / Robert DeNiro sit on my face." from stormy genius PJ Harvey. Among **Chris Stroffolino's** offerings, one had this hint of beauty: "And it rained like a slow divorce / And I wish I could ride a horse" from Robyn Hitchcock. Points for the nice simile, but the second line doesn't quite make it. Similarly, **Carol Mirakove's** "Two characters in search of a country song / Just make believe, but so in love" (Stephan Merritt from the Magnetic Fields) also has one good line

and one indifferent. **Alicia Wing's** "Simple monotone why do you roam / A home is no home without leaving" (no attribution, Alicia? Is it yours?) has a poetry to it—plaintive and assonant. Nice.

I would like to thank those who sent in poetry couplets. Yes! Poetry! Our *raison d'etre!* **Kevin Davies:** "A dog starvd at his Masters Gate / Predicts the ruin of the State." (**William Blake**) Kevin got so inspired he sent two more Blake couplets, including "Each outcry of the hunted Hare / A fibre from the Brain does tear." Thank you Kevin!

**Susan Wheeler** inspired me with this **Louise Bogan** couplet: "At midnight tears / Run into your ears."

**Amiri Baraka**, along the same lines, sent "What did I do / To be so black and blue?" crediting Brooks, Razaf (lyricist) and Waller.

**Bob Holman** sent: "My life is the poem I would have writ / But I could not both live and utter it." (**Henry David Thoreau**). Lovely! Thank you Bob!

**Mark Hillingrouse**, where would we be without a **Ted Berrigan** couplet? Thank you for sending "It's true, I weep too much. Dawns break / slow kisses on the eyelids of the sea."

**Guillermo Juan Parra** gets the prize for most beautiful couplet: "Lleguas tú, con una copa de almendras suprimes el relámpago. / El ancla de este sueño abre mis ojos a la vida." Translation: "You arrive, to quell lightning with a glass of almonds. / This dream's anchor opens my eyes into life." (by the Venezuelan poet **Juan Sanchez Pelez**)

I give **Jacob Burckhardt** the Editor's synchronicity award for sending a couplet from **Edwin Denby's** sonnets, which I happen to be reading also: "For with regret I leave the lovely world men made. / Despite their bad character their art is mild."

And I leave you with a couplet from **Bernadette Mayer's** sonnets: "Sex, where's the couplet? / The concluding modern thought's a warm winter scarf."

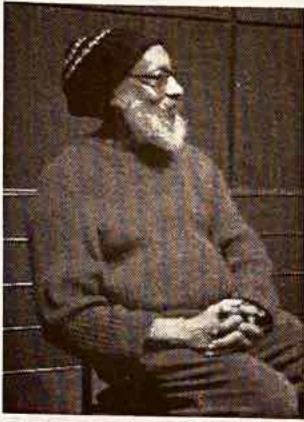
## Letter

To the Editor:

In passing, Anselm Berrigan's very generous review of my book *Serenade* gives the impression that I curated the exhibition of late de Koonings at MOMA. Here at least I can be certain that Anselm Berrigan is being overgenerous: the late de Kooning show, which I wrote about for *Art in America* in 1997, was curated by Gary Garrels.

Also, a typo occurred in the rendering of a quote from the poem "Lorelei": the correct version of the line "Anyone can anything at anytime" is "Anyone can anything anytime."

Cheers,  
Bill Berkson



**Between Caliban & Sycorax: Kamau Brathwaite & Caribbean Culture**, an NYU colloquium organized by Timothy Reiss (editor of *For the Geography of a Soul: Emerging Perspectives on Kamau Brathwaite*, a festschrift forthcoming from Africa World Press), December 8-9, 2000.

This gathering reconnected segments of Kamau Brathwaite's family (and its extensions) from all periods of his peripatetic life. After a casual welcome by a Dean, a piercing scream struck from the back of the small auditorium, beginning the WILD Praise-song by Zweli-Bansi Sibiyi, whose feet, feathered head-dress, and ceremonial wand overtook the space and those in it. Sibiyi's veneration of Brathwaite through movement, vibration and word forcefully concludes, "you are an academic, not a fuckademic." Several fine poet-per-

formers—Margaret Gill, Dale Byam, Lasana Sekou, Pam Mordecai, and the aptly named Gabby—came from afar to salute Brathwaite. It was no typical university event, though three panels, "Counter Histories/Countering History," "Righting the Imaginary, Unmasking Cultures," and "Publishing," featuring scholars intimate with his work, were illuminating and educational.

The aggregation peaked near its end with a reading by Brathwaite, musically sweeping his hand across pages and tapping rhythms on the podium as he poemed for an hour. Now at age seventy, Brathwaite has returned to NY after three years in Barbados (his first period there since his upbringing). A survey of new and old work affirmed the close identification he has with his native island and complexities faced by the fragmentation of people everywhere.

The most pressing needs for artists today? According to Brathwaite: "...a place to live so we can write and be ourselves...publishers who will publish what we write when it is written good...and provision for the archives of our work, both personal and communal, both individual and national."—Chris Funkhouser

### Poets House — a place for poetry

The library is open Tuesday through Friday, 11am-7pm; Saturday, 11 am-4 pm  
72 Spring St. 2nd fl, New York, NY 10012 212-431-7920



### Seminar in Cross-Genre Poetics with Anne Waldman

Saturday, February 17, 4-7 pm  
\$50, Associate Members and above \$40

Please call or check [www.poetshouse.org](http://www.poetshouse.org) for a complete schedule of upcoming events.

A CARTOON IN 839 PARTS...



BY BRENDA IJIMA 2000

AS FAMILIAR AS VOLUME

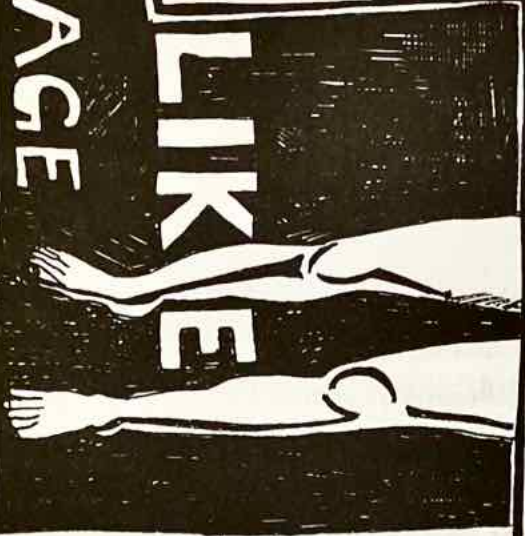


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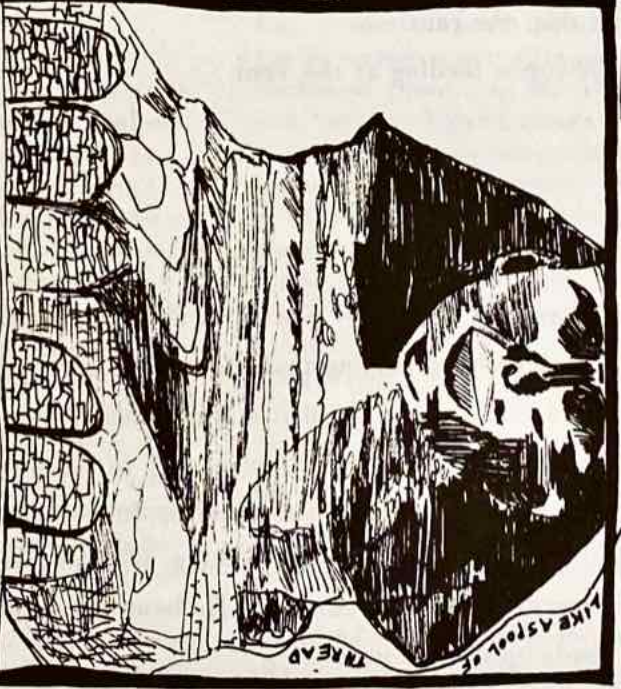
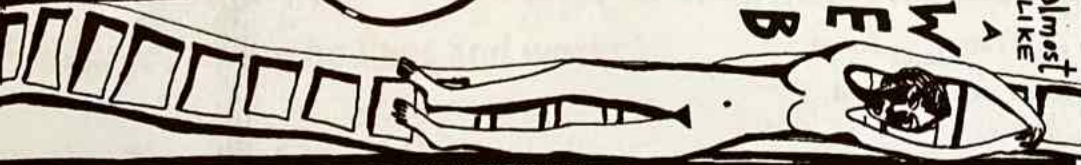


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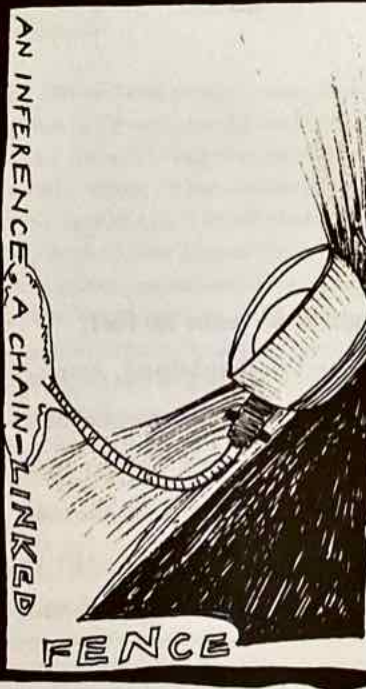


CHARACTERISTIC



AS SPHINX AS DICK

LIKE A light source,



AN INFERENCE, A CHAIN-LINKED

FENCE

# Poem

## UNSINN MIT OUTRIDERS

8-15-...-00

I stand at last a Meister Sonneteer  
(Who started way back shadow-kicking repetition).  
It's not that "it" kicked back but that the beer  
Of sounds repeated, *pas de deux*, perdition...

The reason t' be a sneakthief blink it works:  
If I confessed the sunrise flits my form,  
Trinomial profs'd prob'ly (hopefully) swarm  
Around a point in Nowheresville, Glass Mountain Center though & jerks

With purple feathers might emerge, the count  
Would edgar down, the 19th Sentch'ry extract  
duh special ocean from *that* Fairyland Fount  
With teeny fishes in it, super-sex-wracked.

I love it when it falls like this, the rent  
Is paid. Tra-la-la And tubeworms feeding at the Vent.

-Jack Collom

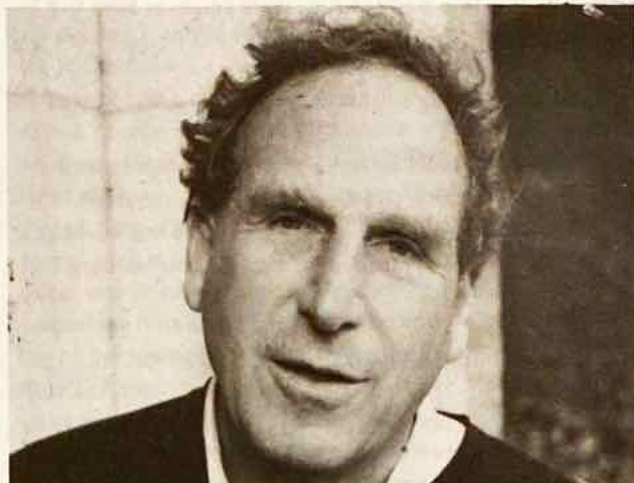
## APE MAN

Why is it that I write so often about writing? I'm not a theoretician of language. I do seem to feel, though, that there is something about writing that no one has ever quite described or explained, something about the way words are like a food chain that goes down simultaneously to the smallest creature and to the pit of our stomachs. But that doesn't come near to the mystery. Perhaps it can't be put into words, because words can't be used to describe themselves, just as an eye can't see itself. It can see only a reflection of itself, a glimpse at the fascination of being, like the pre-human creature that got split in half by the shimmering water he was about to drink. He bent down and drank from his own lips. I bend down and suck my own words up off the page.

-Ron Padgett

## A Conversation with Nathaniel Dorsky

by Mary Kite



Nathaniel Dorsky has been making 16mm films in the avant-garde tradition since 1964. In recent years, his films have been prominently featured at the New York Film Festival. This interview, in which he talks about the influence of contemporary poetry on his work, took place in August 2000 in San Francisco, where he lives and works.

*MK: Do you feel there's a link between your work and John Ashbery's?*

ND: When I was twenty-two, friends of mine who were poets in New York introduced me to John Ashbery's work. By coincidence, he had loved the first film I had made. It was called *Ingreen*. When I'd see Ashbery occasionally at parties, he'd come up and say, "I loved that film". Michael Brownstein introduced me to *The Tennis Court Oath* and *Rivers and Mountains*. I read these poems very slowly. Amazing. It became difficult to read other authors. Ashbery's poetry contains a super consciousness about language formed ideas. There's a playfulness with the forms. It assumes there is an agreed upon acknowledgment about what language is. The normal momentum of language is there, but the content is very playful. He uses that momentum while plugging in a variety of specifics that are fresh to the ear. This affected my ideas on filmmaking. Many of his poems, like *The Skaters* for instance, have an evaporative quality. There's a momentary congealing of meaning and then the poem evaporates. It evaporates completely or gets torqued immediately into another sense of continued meaning. A gap or open synapse exists within the logical momentum of materials. The way he weaves motifs allows me to think

of visualizing things as they might occur in the language of film. We spent our youth speculating on an open form of film, but the medium is quite different than poetry. It needs its own discoveries. I mentioned this to P. Adams Sitney and P. Adams said, "Well hasn't Stan Brakhage been doing that?" I said, "Stan did it. But when using recognizable images there was usually a literary or descriptive or mythic underpinning associated with it." In other words, a film might be associative or contain a stream of consciousness, but for some underlying agenda or reason. The montage that I am talking about moves from shot to shot outside any other necessities, except of course the accumulation of being. It has no external obligations. It is the place of film.

*MK: So there are no borders to it?*

ND: Yes, there are no borders. There is no subtle concept behind it that is being filled in prismatically. Cubistically you're not filling in and underpinning. It's the actuality of being one place and then the other and the other. It is a place where the film itself can be, can dream. It can gratify its own needs.

MK: Like a scroll?

ND: Well you could call it a scroll in the sense that film is linear and it unfolds.

Do you mean landscapes? Well, yes but not quite. The landscapes have an overall descriptive quality. This is a little bit more like an exquisite corpse. Do you know what the exquisite corpse is? Well this is like the exquisite corpse but you know what the previous body part is. Have you ever seen the real ones?

MK: No I haven't seen the originals.

ND: Some of the original drawings are at the Art Institute of Chicago. This is something different. It is reactive to itself. This isn't chance operation. It's interesting. There are works at the San Francisco Modern Museum of Art by Rauschenberg. Have you seen them? There are 97 panels?

MK: I just concentrated on Walker Evans.

ND: Because there are 97 panels . . . you're going to be here through when?

MK: Tuesday.

ND: Well we can go on Monday. There's a room with 97 panels. They are called *Hiccups*. They are each connected by a zipper. Supposedly one can arrange them in any order. In a sense, they're a scroll, not a continuous circle. They resemble John Ashbery's poetry. By reading Ashbery very slowly, one word at a time each word is like hitting a note on the piano. Each word is a resonant stepping stone across a stream. There is an openness to it, but there is definitely an underworld of mood and atmosphere indicative of human effort, usually humorously so. If it didn't have underpinnings, it would fall into what is called in Buddhism "nihilism". The downside is that it opens up relationships that are just a collection of the various, or the continuum or forced forwardness of the various. In that case there's no presence or mystery which blooms just because you've stretched two aspects of the relative world.

At its best, poetry breaks the surface of the relative world. That's where the magic is. It's helping us into a deep

### Nathaniel Dorsky at MoMA:

Sunday April 15: *Trilogy (Triste, Variations and Arbor Vitae)*, 5 pm

Sunday, April 15 and Monday, April 16: Early works (*Pneuma, 17 Reasons Why and Alaya*), 3pm

appreciation of the unnamable which is being. Because it's unnamable, the only way we can get to it with language is by opening it up. In this way Ashbery and haiku are very similar. It isn't that Ashbery is imitating an Asiatic form or a seventeen syllable form. There is a sensibility of opening, of turning things to open up mystery. Ashbery's *The Skaters* has an atmosphere that continues on beneath. So I think I know . . . I do know that there has to be some kind of atmosphere or it gets too nihilistic. Dreams for instance have a mood which pervades the openly associative visual language.

MK: I'd like to take this moment to ask you about spatial layering.

ND: Yes.

MK: And perhaps ask you if you feel like there's that aspect to spatial layering?

ND: I don't know what spatial layering means. I've never heard that term.

MK: Okay, for instance in the beginning of the Jack Chamber film *Hart of London* . . .

ND: You saw that?

MK: Yes.

ND: Did you like it?

MK: I thought it was startlingly beautiful but in a very disturbing way.

ND: Yes.

MK: You know it's funny but a lot of people describe John Ashbery's work as having this quality known as "spatial layering" and in your work . . . with references in writing towards *Film in Search of a Language, you space feeling with balance. In your film there's a layering? I was wondering how that might be a sense of "nowness"? Because you have compressions of imagery . . . one on top of another. Like a palimpsest . . . where you take a material and you write on top of it and then erase it to use it again but the previous script is still slightly visible?*

ND: What was that word?

MK: *Palimpsest. So in film we have images impressed upon each other which of course forces a consciousness. I was wondering if that could be described as another form of vertical thought? Would that come under "nowness"?*

ND: There's an area in the *Hart of London* before the birth suggesting a state between incarnations. We're deciding whether we wish to be reborn. We're floating. There's birth. After birth there's blood, water, fire, and earth. Then it goes

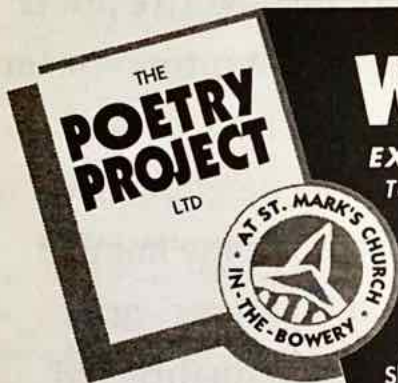


into the area of the footage where we see an autistic boy with the bird and huge flowers with umbrellas over them? That area of the film is open-ended montage, just moving through things. It is what we're talking about. There is a similar sequence in a slightly earlier film of Chamber's called *Circle*. *Hart of London* is extraordinary in that it uses different film language during a long mythic form to express and to actually be different states. Film and writing poetry are two different elements. For instance, we could compare renga and filmmaking by taking Basho's rules of resonance which are appropriate to language, but we need to make up our own rules of resonance to some degree which are appropriate to film.

Film has other primary concerns language wouldn't need. It has primary concerns that the language doesn't have. There's a parallel between layering in Ashbery and the layering that takes place in film. Layering (I know that in my own photography there is a sense of layering and so forth) ... has to do with the idea that we're trying to get a sense of the entire view. There are three layers: there's the external world in front of us, then there's a surface vision of our own eye and there's a dark room from which we view the world. There are three things: a dark room, surface, and the world. If the view is profound, we have a sense of the dark room, the surface and the world ... all three. Traditionally, sitting in the mouths of caves in Tibet is considered one of the ideal places for meditation. It is a metaphor for film. We're in darkness looking out. So in that sense it layers but that is only within a visual/spiritual context. You mean a layered language I believe. Great narrative

filmmakers let us feel the context of the cave. When we look at the screen we feel the screen as a manifestation in darkness rather than just something to represent the "external world". The screen itself becomes a symbol. If we read *The Skaters* it's very much like the layering you are talking about. In *The Skaters* ... we'll be about to leave on a train. All of sudden we start to think about boats. We're sailing ... we're out at sea ... we go way out onto this trip ... about having the happiest day of our lives ... it's very funny and romantic ... we're on a boat ... sailing ... and so forth ... then suddenly we're back on the train. The train is a boattrain. Our minds pop open. Then the train is put on a barge. Now we're going somewhere towards Africa. Maybe towards Morocco? We are on a boattrain. Is that what you mean by layering? Forty years ago Ashbery was at a level of sophistication which makes film feel like kindergarten. Film is such a different medium. We can go other places with it. I do try to get a lot of resonance in my film. In other words, we see something and then it will remind us of something nine shots back. All the time we try to obtain layering ... synapsing backwards while the film is going forwards. That's all that I have been able to achieve. I haven't been able to capture that magical style of John Ashbery where we're sent someplace and then we're away until we're somewhere else. Finally we return. I don't know if film works that way. But there is the possibility of subtle visual synapsing much like dream-language. Yes, to answer your question, layering is elemental to verticality or oneness.

(continued on page 15)



**131 EAST 10 STREET  
(AT SECOND AVENUE)  
NEW YORK, NY 10003  
212.674.0910**

The workshop fee is \$250, which includes tuition for classes and an "Individual" membership in the Poetry Project for one year. Reservations are required due to limited class space and payment must be received in advance. Please send payment and reservations to: The Poetry Project, St. Mark's Church, 131 E. 10 St., NY, NY 10003. For more information, please call (212) 674 0910, or e-mail: [poproj@artomatic.com](mailto:poproj@artomatic.com)

## WRITING WORKSHOPS

**EXPERIMENTATION, FORM, AND MIMICRY - Prageeta Sharma**  
TUESDAYS AT 7 PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 20

In this workshop we will read a wide range of poems from Shakespeare to Dickinson, Tagore to O'Hara to our most recent contemporaries. The class will focus on developing the student's own style of writing. We will discuss how poets over the centuries and in different cultures have developed different forms and styles of poetry through experimentation, collaboration, and perseverance. We will incorporate visual art and music and discuss how poems inspire and inform other genres of art-making. Prageeta Sharma received an M.F.A. from Brown University. Her book *Bliss to Fill* and chapbook "A Just-So Poem" were published in February 2000.

**WORKING PAPERS TOWARD THE NEW EPIC - Maureen Owen**  
FRIDAYS AT 7 PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN MARCH 2

Participants in this workshop will read and discuss epic poetry as inspiration toward writing an epic. Some of the works the class will explore are H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, William Carlos Williams' *Paterson*, Stephen Vincent Benet's *John Brown's Body*, and E. Tegner's *Frithiof's Saga*. The traditional epic form will be reviewed. There will be in-class reading and writing and much discussion on the various epic works-in-progress by workshop members. An opportunity to stretch your poetic legs with the longest of the lyrical forms. Maureen Owen's books include *American Rush: Selected Poems*, *Hearts in Space*, and others. She has served as the Acting Director of the Poetry Project, where she has also taught writing workshops.

**MANUSCRIPT DEVELOPMENT - Larry Fagin**  
SATURDAYS AT 12 PM: THIS CONTINUING WORKSHOP IS NOT OPEN TO NEW STUDENTS.

## Interview with Charles North

by Ange Mlinko

This winter, Adventures in Poetry will publish Charles North's *The Nearness of the Way You Look Tonight*. It brings full circle a career that began with the 1974 chapbook *Elizabethan and Nova Scotian Music*, from the same publisher. These will probably remain my favorite works from one of my favorite poets, who also happens to be one of the quieter ones. (This is his first interview for a literary audience.) He lives on the Upper West Side, not far from where I recently moved: now that I live there, I don't so much see the neighborhood in his poems as see his poems in the neighborhood, which has become imbued with the light and grace I get from reading his "People and Buildings" or "Building Sixteens." The challenge of writing about the sensual qualities of New York City, which seems so tired, by North's pen becomes transcendent again. And that's only one of the things his poetry accomplishes. He is witty when wit seems all but lost, gorgeous when gorgeousness is supposed to have crawled off to wherever Frank O'Hara's odes came from. *The Nearness of the Way You Look Tonight* is about as flawless a book of poetry as I have come across. And I feel certain that others will soon be sharing this opinion.

This interview took place at 119th & Amsterdam, New York City, on November 12, 2000.

AM: Can you tell me about your relationship with James Schuyler?

CN: It wasn't as much of a relationship as I would have liked! Mostly a poetry relationship, though I did see him once in a while and for a couple of years he came regularly to dinner. And of course, we wound up doing the two *Broadway* anthologies together. When I first began writing poems, it was pretty much worship from afar. After I met Tony Towle, who knew him, I dedicated a poem to him which Tony, to my embarrassment—I was pretty shy—forwarded to him. Months later I got a poem out of the blue ["Light from Canada"] with a note saying, "Let me return the compliment." You can imagine how I felt.

I finally met him at a party and was almost literally dumbfounded. I felt that was it, I had blown it! Later, I realized that he had said almost nothing either. Part of my regret is not having known him when he was healthier. I had heard how lively and witty he was. When I knew him, at least at the beginning, he was anything but animated. I used to visit him, at the Allerton Hotel on 8th Ave., one of the most depressing places I've ever set foot in, then at the depressing Lincoln Square Home for Adults uptown—at 50 or so, he was the youngest person there—and finally when he moved into the Chelsea. I envy those friends who lived far enough away to get his fabulous letters.

*Broadway 1* and *Broadway 2* were extensions, sort of, of a one-shot magazine he had done in the late 60s called *49 South*—South Main St., Southampton, where he lived with Fairfield and Anne Porter. We chose the poets and artists together, and boy, could he be tough! I remember him absolutely putting his foot down about certain potential contributors. I also remember him chuckling over the invitation we composed and the pressure it would put on certain people: "Please send us your best poem or drawing."

AM: So he wasn't really a mentor?

CN: Only by example. I never sent him poems to critique. Actually, I've rarely showed unfinished poems to anyone, with one or two exceptions.

AM: In *No Other Way* you argue forcefully against critical frameworks—systems—that approach poetry

prescriptively, proscriptively, or on anything other than "its own terms." Interestingly, a hundred years ago William Carlos Williams argued the purpose of art "lies in the resolution of difficulties to its own comprehensive organization of materials." And I'm reminded that Fairfield Porter's criticism is called *Art on Its Own Terms* (Rackstraw Downes, for one, talks about how Porter's stance contra Clement Greenberg was very helpful to him as an artist just starting out in the stifling critical climate of the sixties). In his inimitable way, Frank O'Hara was doing the same thing with "Personism: A Manifesto" and John Ashbery has always stood up for the autonomy of the artist, which the publication of *Other Traditions* makes abundantly clear. I see a web of associations here: you have written on Porter, Downes, and Ashbery, and *No Other Way* opens with a quote from O'Hara's "The Critic." Since poetics is more fashionable than ever in my "generation" (actually, I hate that concept), I fear that poetry is more in thrall to critical frameworks than ever.

You know what an aficionado of line I am. I find mastery of line ineffable, is that the word? You know it when you see it ...

CN: On the one hand, what you're describing is the ongoing battle between the artist and the critic who thinks he/she knows better than the artist, which often results in reactions like de Kooning's and Porter's: If the critic says I can't do this, then that's exactly what I'm going to do! In fact, that sort of rebellion is one of the chief impetuses for new art, isn't it? I know it's been one of mine. In my darker moments, I try to console myself with the thought that whatever the latest prescriptions and proscriptions, they're likely to become the impetus for new rebellions!

The other side, I think, is what I railed against in *No Other Way*. Well, I tried hard not to rail, but yes, I do feel strongly about the dangers of not taking art, poetry, etc., on its own terms, however that's to be done. My own feeling, as I think you know, is that all good poets elude their critics at least partly. But with some, including some of my favorites like Schuyler, Schubert, O'Hara, the work is like Gore-Tex: the Criticism doesn't penetrate. It's hard to imagine

the three I just mentioned ever getting their public due.

AM: Scary!

CN: Well, only to a very few, relatively speaking.

AM: You were trained in philosophy, and despite the fact that a lot of poets namedrop philosophers, your work contains constructions (e.g., "while deracination is fast qualifying as essence rather than attribute") and ways of *thinking* which indicate more than a passing acquaintance with the history and methods of traditional philosophy. Is this a temperamental thing? Is it, as I suspect, a deeper rigor? And how does *rigor* figure into poetry? Where is the intersection of poetry and philosophy—beyond the conventional surface interest in each other's rhetorics?

CN: Whew. Actually my "training" in philosophy didn't go very far, though philosophy was my first love. I majored in it as well as English in college and did enroll in a Ph.D. program, but didn't go through with it. Now that Jill, my daughter, is in her third year of graduate school in philosophy, I'm much too aware of how inadequate my training was!

Is my interest temperamental? A deeper rigor? I don't know that I'm qualified to say. My guess is that there must be something temperamental about it, though I don't know how to pin it down. Rigor is something I care a lot about when I write critical prose—though I don't know if it shows. [laughs] Rigor applied to poetry is much trickier, it seems to me; I'm not positive I know what it means. I'm sure you don't mean form! I hope you don't mean something like "rightness" or "coherence," neither of which I value in and of themselves. I think I remember using the term about Joe Ceravolo's poetry, but I'm pretty sure I hedged there too. Something about no sloppiness, which isn't quite the opposite.

My friend Marjorie Welish uses the term "scruple" when she speaks of poets she admires, which I take to be something like artistic integrity. If that's what rigor means, I hope my poems have it! But that's pretty far from whatever rigor means in philosophical matters. Maybe avoiding sloppiness of whatever kind—thought, when that's involved, feeling, diction, line breaks—is meaningful with respect to poetry?

AM: I thought you'd connect rigor and line breaks!

CN: You know what an aficionado of line I am [laughs]. But even with lines, if rigor means anything. I don't want it to mean "logical" or "grammatical" or "coherent." As I tried to suggest in the piece on Schuyler's lines, I find mastery of line ineffable, is that the word? You know it when you see it and hear it and feel it, and often it's impossible to do anything other than point to it. And of course not everyone cares about lines or views them in the same way even if they do care. Schuyler appears to break his lines intuitively, even casually—can the term rigor apply? Here again, you have to stretch the meaning.

As for the "intersection of poetry and philosophy," that strikes me as even harder to talk about. I'm not sure why I'm revealing this, but in my senior year in college I applied for a fellowship to do work that I hoped would combine my chief interests in school, literature and philosophy. When I went for the final interview—I didn't get the fellowship—I remember being intimidated by more than one member of a committee who sat behind a table and pressed me for better explanations than I was giving about the very intersection you're asking about! I know that doesn't prove anything. Obviously ideas, including philosophical ideas, have made their way into some interesting poetry. On the other hand, the philosophers who have written interesting poetry represent a committee smaller than the one I faced. The two mix, and they don't mix. Actually, even while I was still thinking about graduate school, I felt—though I didn't trust the feeling—that the people who specialized in aesthetics had pat ways of looking, when they *looked*, at novels.

**This relates to the current focus on poetics and theory at the expense, I would argue, of poetry. Too much talk about... what appears to be falling by the wayside is the private engagement with the poetry of the past...**

poems, sonatas, paintings, etc. They didn't really seem to understand their subject matter, for all the conceptualization they were bringing to it. Actually, this relates to the current focus on poetics and theory at the expense, I would argue, of poetry. Too much talk *about*. It's a big topic and it includes whether or not there's simply too much School for Poets these days, but what appears to be falling by the wayside is the private engagement with the poetry of the past—both before and after *The New American Poetry*. To me, that's dismaying.

I really do have to add that the "interest in one another's rhetorics" seems to me perfectly valid. If it seems to you merely conventional, something's gone wrong! Poetry deals in language. I remember Ashbery once saying something about not writing philosophically, but using philosophy in his poems. That seems valid to me. You can use anything if you use it well.

AM: But you used to be a classical musician too. Don't music and philosophy share an analogous rigor, built as they are of structures? I keep thinking it must have had some effect on your poetry.

CN: Some music isn't so rigorous, just as some philosophers don't think as well as they should. I'm sure the music had an effect, but I don't think I'm in the best position to say what it is. Actually, I feel music had an effect on my prose too. Are you sure you're not trying to make me into a philosophical poet? [laughs] That's not how I see myself. One thing about music, and not philosophy, is that it can move you to tears, whereas the tears in philosophy come from struggling to make sense, as my daughter has had to do, of philosophers like Wilfrid Sellars!

AM: You've written that before. Is that emblematic to you, is that what the arts do—bring you to tears?

CN: No! Only sometimes. They also make you laugh. And, as I keep trying to tell my poetry students, they make you react in all sorts of unexpected ways, often for mysterious reasons. They stimulate and satisfy,

how's that?

AM: You don't seem to publish very much. Do you write slowly? Are your work habits pretty steady, or do you work off and on as the muse strikes? You mention someplace that you drag out poems that are months or years old to revise; do you let things sit awhile before publishing? Do you think publishing is a curse? a distraction?

CN: I don't write slowly, but I *finish* slowly. Too slowly. I don't labor over poems, but I'm always putting things into a drawer and then not liking them enough when I pull them out again. At my worst, it can take years of putting in and taking out! As it did, though I'm sure it doesn't look it, with a short prose poem in my new book, "Landscape and Chardin." I do

scribble in notebooks, but only a small portion of the scribbling amounts to anything. As you can see, I don't believe in Ginsberg's "First Thought, Best Thought." [laughs] Actually, hearing him say in an inter-

view that he published "about one percent" of what he wrote in his notebooks leads me to believe that he didn't believe in it either!

I would like to publish more, and give myself pep talks from time to time on the topic. It's hard not to feel like a failure, at least temporarily, when you're asked for poems and don't have anything to send. Sometimes, I think I'm making progress in this area, other times no. By the way, a secret—formerly secret—reason for titling my first big book *Leap Year* was learning from Elizabeth Bishop's introduction to her anthology of Brazilian poetry that certain poets in Brazil who produce books rarely are given the name "leap year poets." That, especially in light of Elizabeth Bishop's own small production, gave me courage. As for the way I go about writing, "habits" is probably too strong a term. Sometimes I try to write steadily—especially summers and between semesters—but that's worked, really worked, only occasionally. More often

**All good poets elude their critics at least partly. But with some, including some of my favorites like Schuyler, Schubert, O'Hara...the Criticism doesn't penetrate.**

it's when I have some free time or, as you say, the muse strikes, which for me can mean that I'm not as distracted as I usually am. I don't think, though I haven't given it a try, that I'm cut out for Yaddo or MacDowell.

Publishing one's work is an interesting topic for other reasons. I know it will sound like *very* sour grapes, but I really do believe that many poets publish too much. I certainly don't advocate my way; but I think there must be a happy medium—even though it may be impossible for any individual poet to discover just what that is for him/herself [laughs]. Patience, of the non-pathological kind, is one of the seven literary virtues. Publishing's useful side—it certainly can be a distraction and more, if you let it—apart from fame and fortune, is freeing the poet for new poems. It accomplishes a kind of separation that, at least in my experience, doesn't happen otherwise. The bad side is that publishing gets to be seductive and even addictive: it's very hard to resist the temptation, especially when you're asked for work. My friend Paul Violi and I try to remind each other of those occasions when we succumbed to temptation and rushed things into print—and invariably regretted it. They stay in print! Most of the time I'm pretty good about it—of course, helped along by my private difficulties in finishing things that, in Schuyler's words, I'm "not unproud of." But sometimes the temptation is too strong. The latter happened to me recently, and I can't bear to think about it! It's endlessly embarrassing.

AM: What was the impetus for "Day After Day the Storm Mounted. Then It Dismounted"? It seems to me to be the centerpiece of your new book. What was the seed of it, and how did you proceed with it?

CN: This is the type of question I was dreading [laughs]. I don't know if I can say, or actually if I want to say, much about the origins of particular poems. It's not like the origin, say, of Superman, which as a kid I found endlessly intriguing. I always find myself distrusting poets who say a lot about their poems; it's as though they're erecting a podium for what won't quite stand on its own. The "seed"—as in seeding clouds?—was the desire to write a longer poem than I had written to date, to keep a poem going over a period

of time. I do recall that I had just reread *The Iliad*. As I look over the poem, it certainly doesn't seem very happy! There's death and darkness all over the place. It took me much longer to write than is apparent, I'm sure—again, not to get down what's there, but to decide that what I had was finished, that it proceeded in a way that seemed to me acceptable. And then when it was printed in *Lingo* I got depressed, because it looked small and squeezed together, when I had meant it to be roomy, have more air than I usually had. Does this illuminate anything? Oh! The title came from a Looney Tunes cartoon on TV, it might have been Woody Woodpecker. But it took me years to decide how and where to use it.

AM: You mentioned your poem "Landscape and Chardin." Have you been a lifelong student of paintings (I know you're married to a painter, Paula North, and have written on art)? What have you learned from painting about poetry? So many of your poems engage in a *plein air* vocabulary—buildings, windows, trees and leaves, kinds of light.

CN: I think it's as much the actual air, trees and light as it is painting. Both. *Weather* moves me [laughs]. So does a Chardin still life. It's true that Paula's painting was, and is, extremely important to me—she began painting just before I started writing poetry—and we went to galleries all the time, read the art magazines, and so on. And when I came on the scene in the late 60s, it seemed like every other poet was writing about art. My own brief career as an art critic began in the middle 70s when Peter Schjeldahl, then Senior Editor—I think—of *Art in America*, invited me to write a piece on Richard Tuttle, who was then having a retrospective at the Whitney. One thing I rapidly discovered was how different the experience of looking at art becomes if you're going to write about it. There's a special focus and intensity that can be present at other times, but isn't always. It's also qualitatively different if you're not forced to look at paintings over other people's shoulders! The experience is quiet and private, as it should be; in the gallery, unlike the grave, one can "embrace" the art. I know I'm going against the grain, but as I said before, I believe a certain privateness is vital for poetry too. Things have gotten *too* public.

(continued on page 27)

Dorsky cont.

MK: *The one thing that I've noticed in your film is that you were trying to capture the state of nowness in objects. John Ashbery says the same thing about his poetry.*

ND: He does?! Have you ever read *Three Poems*? [Dorsky picks up a book of Ashbery's and begins to read.] "I thought that if I could put it all down, that would be one way. And next the thought came to me that to leave it all out would be another, and truer, way.

clean-washed sea

The flowers were.

These are the examples of leaving out. But, forget as we will, something soon comes to stand in their place. Not the truth, perhaps, but—yourself." . . . In other words he's saying that you try to be absent and then the moment you're absent something else comes and stands in the place of it. Then one asks, "Who is present?" John pops open the dual concepts that "you" have possessed the mystery and "who are you"? He lifts up what is projected on scrim after scrim. You fill in the blanks and then you think it is contaminated, but who is thinking that? He says, "No it is

you who made this therefore you are true." He pulls the rug out once again. It all evaporates. [reads] "Have I awakened? Or is this sleep again? Another form of sleep? There is no profile in the massed days ahead. They are impersonal as mountains

whose tops are hidden in cloud.

The middle journey, before sands are reversed: a place of ideal quiet." . . . So anyway, I feel that I'm just beginning to get to work with a minutia of that sophistication. Also, in a poem, you can just write anything you need. In film we must have concrete images that are photographed. We actually have the images. Then they need to cut together nicely. Film's major property is visual. Not that poetry doesn't create vision. But in itself, poetry is not required to succeed on a visual level. The delineating factor between the language of poetry and the language of film is that film must succeed visually.

MK: *Do you consider yourself to be synaesthetic?*

ND: Does that mean cross-sensed? Yeah, very much so. I can't read if there's music on. My mind can't isolate one form from the other, easily. But it is not a severe case. It's probably not uncommon.

MK: *Does the new film follow this pattern?*

ND: The new film that I will show you will be at the New York Film Festival in the fall. Only two or three people have seen it.

A friend of mine, Steve Anchor who runs The San Francisco Cinematheque here is very, very bright, very earnest and a very good person . . . he said, "Don't ever explain, even in conversation, what the relationships mean to you because of the openness of them. You shouldn't be reductive. Don't reduce the film for anybody. If someone can't get it, don't try to make them get it by giving them your version. He warned me not to do that in this case." What I've found is interesting. I put certain shots together to create an element of surprise. They offer me something unexpected, but there must be an initial visual gratification. Visually, there's something successful in the transformation from one image to the other. Aftershocks also need poetic resonance and evocation. If your mind can substitute a meaning to the cut, the cut closes down. I'm sure there's a Japanese word for what happens in haiku when you open up mystery. Strangely enough, if the level of the storytelling in the film is successful for yourself, other people will have another story which is also successful for them. In this new film that we shall see, there are birds flying behind winter trees. It then cuts to a shadow on the sidewalk. People are walking through a shadow of a flag floating on the sidewalk. The shadow is behaving in the wind. Therefore, there are two different things in a row behaving in the wind:

birds and flag shadows. But then of course, there's a reversal going on. Within the previous shot, the foreground has trees with birds in the background. After the cut, the foreground has walking figures with a shadow flopping around in the background. So what's happened in terms of

**There are three layers: there's the external world in front of us, then there's a surface vision of our own eye and there's a dark room from which we view the world.**

layering is that the foreground . . .

inverts . . . performing an act of sentience. We see a background of birds, to a foreground of walking. The continuity of inversion is that both images are playing with air. I may or may not have mentioned but, Freud in his *Interpretation of Dreams* postulates how the insides of your eyes morph shapes within your dreams and move them into different things.

MK: *How do you approach the action in your films? What is your philosophy on action? How can you relate this to Asian art and vanishing points? I noticed in some of your films there seems to be a diminished vanishing point. I think that in a way this troubles our Western sensibilities and our syllogistic patterns of thought. In other words, by deleting vanishing points and I use this term very loosely, you are acting as an anarchist. But this activity has more of a healing aspect to it rather than destructive.*

ND: When Stan Brakhage saw the film *Triste* he said, "This film doesn't have any vanishing points." At first I didn't know what he meant, though I knew what he meant literally. I'm attracted to European paintings that were created in the middle 1400's.

(continued on p. 18)

# Event

## at the POETRY PROJECT

### FEBRUARY 2, FRIDAY 2001: A Boog Odyssey: A Celebration of the Portable Boog Reader

Poets, musicians, and break-dancers come together for the publication of this instant anthology of New York City poetry. Hear Wanda Phipps and band, a multi-instrument blues, poetry, and rock 'n roll ensemble. Feel the Syrenz—an all-girl New York City break-dancing crew, getting down with your host, Regie Cabico. The Syrenz will lead interested audience members in a moonwalking lesson. [10:30 pm]

### FEBRUARY 5, MONDAY Open Reading, sign-up at 7:30 p.m. [8:00 p.m.]

### FEBRUARY 6, TUESDAY Poetry Workshop taught by Jayne Cortez

This workshop has been made possible by a generous grant from the Jerome Foundation. Admission to the workshop is \$7, \$4 for students and seniors, and \$3 for Poetry Project members. [7-9 pm]

### FEBRUARY 7, WEDNESDAY Todd Colby and Jayne Cortez

Among Todd Colby's books are *Ripsnort*, *Cush*, and *Charm Factory: New and Selected Writings*. He edited *Heights of the Marvelous: A New York Anthology* (St. Martin's, 2000). Colby was the lead singer for the defunct band Drunken Boat. Jayne Cortez has published ten collections of poetry, including *Somewhere in Advance of Nowhere*, and has recorded six CD's with her band, the Firespitters.

### FEBRUARY 9, FRIDAY What Will I Say Next? A Night of Improvisational Poetry: Jen Abrams, Matthew Courtney and others

Poets Jen Abrams, Matthew Courtney, and others will perform their improvisational poetry. Following the readings, the audience will be invited to compete for prizes for the best improvisational poem. Two words will be given to each contestant, who will then have one minute to compose a poem and 3 minutes to deliver it. [10:30 pm]

### FEBRUARY 12, MONDAY Stefani Barber and Karen Weiser

Born and raised in Los Angeles, Stefani Barber has had work published in *Five Finger Review*, *Mungo*, *YS*, *Black*, *Blindfire*, and

Melvin Kelley's *A Different Drummer*, nearly three decades after its first publication, remains one of the most imaginative, and hard-hitting works of fiction to come out of the bitter struggle for African-American civil rights. Kelley's novel *dem* is being republished this year by Coffeehouse Press. He lives in Harlem and is Professor of Creative Writing at Sarah Lawrence College.

### FEBRUARY 23, FRIDAY A Night of Taboo-boos: My Most Embarrassing Moment

Poets Tim Wells, Ivan Penaluna, Clara Sala, Lukewarm Water, the theatrical rock band The House of Pernod, and others will read poems about their most embarrassing moments. Following the reading, there will be an open mike, where prizes will be awarded for the best "most embarrassing moment" poems. Prizes include thongs, boxers, deodorant, anti-fungal cream, and more. [10:30 pm]

### FEBRUARY 26, MONDAY Jenny Smith and Fanny R. Ferreira

Jenny Smith is the author of *Egon* (Involute Press, 1999). Her poetry has appeared in *Exquisite Corpse*, *The Portable Boog Reader*, *Jejune*, *The New Orleans Review*, and other journals. She is a co-founder of Prazska Skola Poetika, a Czech and international school of poetics in Prague, CZ. Ms. Smith is the Program Assistant at the Poetry Project. Fanny R. Ferreira is the author of two chapbooks, *Many Faces Make a Soul* (asphaltjunction, 1999) and *Pink Passages* (syendo, 1997). She served as one of the editors for *Bombay Gin* and currently lives in Hell's Kitchen, NYC.

### FEBRUARY 28, WEDNESDAY Magdalena Zurawski and Prageeta Sharma

Magdalena Zurawski was born in Newark, New Jersey in 1972. She currently resides in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Her chapbook, *Bruised Nickelodeon*, was published in June, 2000 by Hophophop Press. Last summer Ms. Zurawski was a fellow at the Breadloaf Writer's Conference. Prageeta Sharma, recipient of The Academy of American Poets prize, is the author of *Bliss to Fill* (Subpress). Her recent work has appeared in *Agni*, *Explosive*, *Shiny*, *The Hat*, and *The Poetry Project Newsletter*.

### MARCH 16, FRIDAY poetrychoir.com

Original poetry performed in a choir setting, with musical improvisation and spontaneous metaphors, where music flows from the poem and poetry flows from the jazz. Conducted by Tyrone Henderson; featuring poets Golda Solomon, Quimetta Perle, Elizabeth Conrad Dispenza, and Gha'il Benjamin, and musicians Tom Aalfs on violin, J.D. Parran on reeds, Ray Turull on percussion, and Joe Exley on tuba. [Doors open at 10:00 pm]

### MARCH 19, MONDAY Katie Degentesh and K. Silem Mohammad

Katie Degentesh is an editor for *6,500 Magazine* and a member of the sometime poetry collective *9x9 Industries*. Her poems have been published in *Lungfull*, *Beehive*, and others. K. Silem Mohammad lives in Santa Cruz, California. His work has recently been featured in *Rhizome*, *CrossConnect*, and others; his serial poem *hovercraft* was published as the summer 2000 chapbook issue of *Kenning*.

### MARCH 20, TUESDAY Special Writing Workshop taught by Allison Adelle Hedge Coke

This workshop has been made possible by a generous grant from the Jerome Foundation. Admission to the workshop is \$7, \$4 for students and seniors, and \$3 for Poetry Project members. [7-9 pm]

### MARCH 21, WEDNESDAY Allison Adelle Hedge Coke and Elinor Nauen

Ms. Hedge Coke has co-edited two collections of Native American poetry and writing, *Voices of Thunder and It's Not Quiet Anymore*. Her book, *Dog Road Woman*, was the recipient of the American Book Award in 1998. Elinor Nauen's books of poetry include *American Guys* (Hanging Loose, 1997) and *CARS & Other Poems* (o.o.p.). She edited *Ladies, Start Your Engines: Women Writers on Cars and the Road* (Faber & Faber, 1997) and *Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend: Women Writers on Baseball* (Faber & Faber, 1994).

### MARCH 26, MONDAY Rick Snyder and Jerrold Shiroma

Rick Snyder is the editor of *Cedar-River* magazine. He is the author



**Rick Snyder and Jerrold Shiroma**  
Rick Snyder is the editor of *Cello Entry* magazine. He is the author of two chapbooks, *Blueprint* and *Double Ear* (both from 811 Books). Jerrold Shiroma is the editor & publisher of Duration Press, which publishes a chapbook series dedicated to contemporary poetry in translation, and is the director of durationpress.com, which, since its first uploading in the spring of 1999, has quickly grown to become one of the largest independent internet resources for contemporary world poetry & small press publishing. His own chapbooks are: *2 poems* and *untitled object* (Potes & Poets, 2000).

**MARCH 2, FRIDAY**

**Glue Puppet and Vicki Hudspith**

A night of live music and poetry with Glue Puppet, a band which, in their own words, is "spoken word and sticky groove; pop poetics through a rhythmic prism." Also featuring a reading by Vicki Hudspith Turbeville, accompanied by a percussionist. There will also be an open mike, where prizes will be awarded for the best "sticky" poem and the best "puppet" poem. [10:30 pm]

**MARCH 28, WEDNESDAY**

**William Corbett and Siri Hustvedt**

William Corbett's many books of poetry and prose include *Philip Guston's Late Work: A Memoir and New and Selected Poems* (Zoland Books, 1999). Robert Creeley writes of William Corbett, "The skills of this poet are so quietly and firmly established in his work that one is apt to forget about them in either reading or hearing—which is, of course, their mastery." He is also an editor of the magazine *Pressed Wafer*. Siri Hustvedt is the author of a book of poems, *Reading to You*, two novels, *The Blindfold* and *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl*, as well as a book of essays, *Yonder*. Her work has been translated into fifteen languages.

**MARCH 5, MONDAY**

**Open Reading, sign-up at 7:30 pm [8:00 pm]**

**MARCH 7, WEDNESDAY**

**Erica Hunt and Chris Tysh**

The author of *Local History* (Roof Books, 1993) and *Arcade* (Kelsey St. Press, 1996), Ms. Hunt currently works as a program officer for a social justice funder in New York. She is a theorist and the author of the famous essay, "Notes for an Oppositional Poetics," which first appeared in the anthology *The Politics of Poetic Form* (ed. Charles Bernstein, 1990). Chris Tysh, born and educated in Paris, teaches creative writing and women's studies at Wayne State University. Her books include *Secrets of Elegance, Pome, Coat of Arms, In the Name, and Continuity Girl*.

**Richard Hell and Vincent Katz**  
Richard Hell was one of the inventors of Punk. *Blank Generation*, his 1977 album with the Voidoids, was chosen by *The New York Times* as one of the ten best albums of the decade. He is the author of several books, including the novel, *Go Now*. In the late 80's he edited the literary magazine CUZ for *The Poetry Project*. Vincent Katz's new collection of poetry, *Understanding Objects*, recently appeared from Hard Press. A poet, translator and critic, Mr. Katz has published collaborative books with several artists, including two with the late Rudy Burckhardt. In 1995, he published *Charm*, a translation from Latin of the first book of poems by Sextus Propertius.

**FEBRUARY 14, WEDNESDAY**

**Beyond Spring: Translations Read by Julie Landau with Lu Yu, Fay Chiang, and Cao Bao An**

Julie Landau will read translations from her book *Beyond Spring: Tzu Poems of the Sung Dynasty* (Columbia University Press, 1994). Ms. Landau is a writer whose romance with Chinese poetry began years ago while living in Hong Kong. The actor Lu Yu will read the works in the original Chinese. Also performing will be Fay Chiang and musician Cao Bao-An. [10:30 pm]

**FEBRUARY 16, FRIDAY**

**Chris Chen and Peter Neufeld**

Chris Chen, composer of "Symphony For A Billion," is "Shanghai Slim," the sentimental lead singer of the seminal 80s New Wave band, "The Hong Kong Cavaliers." He is also the author of the knee-jerk dirge, "Uncle Chen's Oriental Slapstick," a 16-part comic book satire of Chinese imperial history published in excerpted form by Incidental Press. Peter Neufeld lives in Brooklyn, New York. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Cello Entry, Lipstick II*, and *Booglit*. He is an editor of Melodian Press and the soon-to-be-released lit mag *Aufgabe*.

**MARCH 12, MONDAY**

**Chris Stackhouse and Stephanie Williams**

Chris Stackhouse is a poet, performer and visual artist. He performs in the Live Session art/music happenings at CBBG's 313 Gallery and has been a fellow of the Cave Canem writers workshop. Stephanie Williams is a professional book publicist in New Orleans, Louisiana. She has worked closely with Lorenzo Thomas, Anselm Hollo, and Steven Taylor. Her work was featured in the inaugural issue of *Mungo vs Ranger*.

**MARCH 30, FRIDAY**

**Queer Shoulder to the Wheel: Commemorating Allen Ginsberg**

The opening night of the People's Poetry Gathering, a festival which celebrates the oral tradition, features an extraordinary group of queer poets commemorating Allen Ginsberg's work. Each poet will read one of Mr. Ginsberg's poems, followed by one of their own which reflects the spirit of the Ginsberg piece. Featuring fifteen poets including Douglas Martin, Cheryl B., Wayne Koestenbaum, Bill Kushner, Rachel Levitsky, Timothy Liu, Gerry Gomez Pearlberg, and others. [10:30 pm]

**MARCH 14, WEDNESDAY**

**Jackson Mac Low and Anne Tardos**

The evening with these two multi-disciplinary innovators will include presentations by each of solo work as well as performances of their collaborative efforts. Poet, composer, visual artist, and performance artist Jackson Mac Low is the author of twenty-eight books. A recipient in 1999 of the Tanning Prize of the Academy of American Poets, his most recent publication is *20 Forties* (Zasterle Press, 1999). Poet and visual artist Anne Tardos is the author of the multilingual performance work *Among Men*, which was produced by German Radio in Cologne. Her books of polylingual poems and graphics include *Cat Licked the Garlic, Uxudo* (Thumba P/O Books, 1999).

**FEBRUARY 21, WEDNESDAY**

**Charlotte Carter and William Melvin Kelley**

Charlotte Carter's poetry and prose have been collected in *Sheltered Life and Personal Effects*. Since 1997 she has published three novels with Mysterious Press/Warner Books. *The Detroit Free Press* described her *Coq Au Vin* as "Absorbing...a witty, erotic, and moving love song to Paris and its glamorous black past." William

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**Dorsky cont.**

During that time, there were few vanishing points. If vanishing points existed they were only an expression within other visual ideas or philosophies. Asian art is saying that life is here and is sacred. It's a dream at the same time it is actual. But in the 1300's European art, to be simplistic, was anti-body or anti-earth. It was the spirit that was actual. It was very flat as earthly expression. After the transition period of the 1400's, the visual creations in the 1500's became pro-body and pro-perspective and pro-vanishing point. This period of transition included both views we have been talking about: all is me and all is not me.

Up into the middle of the 13th century the official philosophy of the church was that all matter was light. There's something about being in a church glazed when all that was sensed as matter is light. It's amusing because when you wander out-of-doors from a structure built within that philosophy . . . everything . . . the ground . . . the earth . . . appears to be pieces of glass. Everything seems translucent. "Form equals emptiness and emptiness equals form," as is said in the *Prajnaparamita*.

Well to get back to the point, if we inspect paintings from the 1400's, even if they are portraits, the portraits are always counterbalanced with something very detailed. A sense of the world rests behind it. We, the viewers are looking in at something, a person, that is actually there. Both the viewer and the subject are permitted equal presence. Both are included . . . a sublime face-off.

*MK: I'd like to hear more about your use of negative capability with Keats.*

ND: Yes. Keats. Negative capability is something I was introduced to at Naropa. What it means to me is to respond to a calling or a world we do not know. So negative capability is certainly the essence of haiku. What I learned from Keats essentially wasn't negative capability, however, when I was nineteen or twenty I couldn't understand him. He has "rills" shimmering in long poems. I couldn't understand them but what I realized as I was reading was that they did something to my mouth which was very pleasant. They were wonderful to speak. There was something about the way they formed in my mouth while speaking which was non-aggressive. In my filmmaking I try to work in a way so that the films themselves have a gentleness to the eye, a directness which is comparable to what someone might experience with Keat's language.

*MK: Do you feel that form/haiku nested within your film is a temporal seduction?*

ND: Like anything that's rather powerful, film has the power to be a great poison or a great enlightener. Film is very temporal . . . in certain ways more than music because one's visual sense is so strong. You're creating a world based on your eyes. As a filmmaker, the chances of poisoning your audience are extreme. On the other hand, because of the power of the tem-

poral form you're locking people into, there is also the ability to utilize the plasticity of the temporal. We can open up the temporal and break it. Change time. Change time from the slavery of the temporal belief system to the verticality of presentness. That's how I work with film. I use film's temporal plasticity to open up the vertical. I use the horizontal to open up the vertical. On the whole, the more successful a film is, the more verticality it opens up. There are films that are purely successful temporally. They tend to be exhausting. They go nowhere. In a way they're ungenerous, but absorbing. Excessively vertical films, on the other hand, don't respect the temporal needs of life.

*MK: Is it truly possible to enter into a world without vanishing points? It seems our minds are constantly being trained to operate within a realm of perspective.*

ND: Well you see there's something called devotional art. It's funny because I was at The Art Institute of Chicago in early May and there are various panels of painters from the 1300's and 1400's. These are pieces that are done for devotion. There's a form of Italian painting called *tavalo*. They are portable altars that fold. There's a middle and two wings. I guess it's the origin of the triptych. The outside flaps fold in and therefore they cover the sacred areas of the piece. They are devotional pieces ideal for travel and are as portable as a Book of Hours. I was realizing then, how much I admire devotional art. They also had a de Kooning called *Excavations* and it is a huge painting. Looking at it was like an excavation because we worked our way through layers. The devotional doesn't require the embodiment of religious form. My example is the de Kooning. Devotional art subverts temporal compulsion. It's there to inspire the verticality of one's psyche. It breaks the absorption in the relative allowing the mind of devotion to selflessly rest on phenomena. From a Buddhist's point of view the idea of trying to resolve yourself within the relative world is considered futile. I'm a person with neurosis and sometimes it horrifies me. If I'm in a less stable state I will think, "For the next two hours I have to get this done." To what degree does that contaminate the oneness of the situation? It could be picking up shoes or getting things xeroxed. It becomes a temporal fixation bracketing the next area of the day. Then you can make dinner and someone will come over. But this can all come from a reference point of fear. Fear of negative capability makes for an addiction to the temporal.

So to me what's called "art" does refer to devotional art. This means art disrupts temporal absorption. This is not a new idea. When we view Egyptian pieces they disrupt verticality. Art at its wildest best is so vertical that it suggests that death is as present as life. Metaphorically this could be like seeing a film in a dark room, or seeing the world out of our own darkness.

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*Mary Kite is currently working on her M.F.A. in Writing and Poetics at Naropa University.*

## The Hasty Papers Edited by Alfred Leslie Host Publications, 1999

Much as Pliny's *Natural History* has come to operate as an encyclopedia of what was known and imagined in ancient Rome, so painter and filmmaker Alfred Leslie's one-shot magazine *The Hasty Papers* presents an encapsulation of what a tiny group of artists and writers in the downtown New York of 1960 understood as their cultural moment: along with statements from painters, politicians and scientists, copious film and television stills, plays, poems and fiction, there is pseudo-documentation of the history of stilts, heckling and eclipses, as well as literary and art criticism. Behind this vast and often humorous dispersion is an argument for interdisciplinarity directed at Leslie's own early supporter, the art critic Clement Greenberg, who, since the late 1930s, had been arguing for a rigorous discipline-specificity "to entrench" each separate discipline "more firmly in its area of competence." Greenberg's argument has sometimes been known as "modernism," and more frequently caricatured as such. Certainly if we took interdisciplinarity as our only criterion, *The Hasty Papers* would be proto-postmodern—but so would happenings, artist/writer collaborations, and assemblage art (Rauschenberg in particular). These forms of interdisciplinarity were known and imagined in the New York of 1960. But it would be roughly a decade before they would settle into the version of postmodernism that positions "Greenbergian modernism" as the repressive ogre which must repeatedly be slain by interdisciplinarity. Which is to say that because Greenberg in 1960 was very far from a straw man, one could still strike out against his doctrine of discipline specificity with significance—as Leslie did.

For Greenberg, framing art in terms of process—gesture in painting or any kind of proceduralism—relied on notions of temporality that were not essential to painting or sculpture. Before getting to versions of process poetry (poetry that charts its own coming into being), the reader of the 1999 reprint encounters an analogous editorial move in a section titled "Brother Can You Spare a Dime," which reproduces facsimiles of most of the correspondence between Leslie and his

contributors, actual and potential. In addition to demonstrating Leslie's exuberance, wit, and brash persistence in pestering world famous figures like Castro and Genet and T.S. Eliot (who were late or never delivered), we learn of the magazine's funding source: "I am a painter and have made a few extra bucks." We also learn of those who *don't* contribute: like Bertrand Russell (whose secretary responds), Archibald Macleish, Denise Levertov (who is the only one to ask about \$), Stanley Kunitz, Chester Himes, Truman Capote, Hemingway, Faulkner, Lowell, Pasternak, Camus and Beckett. This larger roster gives a sense of who Leslie imagines as his intellectual community, and thus helps to frame what *is* included. Though there are some long duds (like FitzHugh Ludlow's novel length "The Hasheesh Eater" and Donald Windham's memoirish "Violence in Venice"), Leslie's inclusiveness ultimately allows for a kind of thick description of 1960 intellectual life: Sartre next to W.C. Williams; physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer next to poet Joel Oppenheimer; curator Pontus Hulten next to Jack Kerouac; technology head Billy Klüver next to Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso and Charles Olson.

Still, amid this proliferation of names and disciplines, what most current readers will recognize is something like an anthology of first generation New York School poets—Guest, Koch, O'Hara, Elmslie, Ashbery and Schuyler, caught at their most experimental moment. Certainly that is the case with Kenneth Koch's *When the Sun Tries to Go On* of 1953, published here in full for the first time. Like O'Hara's "Second Avenue" (which it began in dialog with), and Ashbery's 1961 *The Tennis Court Oath* (poems from which appear here as well), Koch's book is an early moment of intense linguistic experimentation from which the later work will turn away. Also like Ashbery, and O'Hara to a lesser extent, Koch uses mis- or homophonic translation to generate unexpected sound patterns, and rich moments of asyntactic density. But unlike "Second Avenue," or Ashbery's "Europe," both of which include sections of flat, discursive prose and largely recognizable shifts among vocabulary registers, Koch's disjunction operates primarily word to word, or short clause to short clause, without larger units or breaks.

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Babel sick, yowl earnest "bee"-boat, seven, connote  
"Yoo-hoo" of a gray, bad "bat" disk "bat" boat key  
Helen, Sue, Loss, sea "hoe" "doe look"

Twenty years later, in the wake of the new social movements of the 1960s, Language writers would argue that such modes of writing allow one to experience the linguistic raw materials of subjectivity, the lexical and phrasal substratum of identity as it comes from and into the social world. Though after 25 years this latter account is itself losing momentum as a rationale for disjunction, Koch clearly belongs to an earlier moment in which the unconscious could be celebrated as a site of liberatory expression.

Early aesthetic radicalism and distance from more recent critical vocabulary also characterize what *The Hasty Papers* presents as drama. If the happening would later be understood as a postmodern genre, this was not O'Hara's read: "Happening is just like a little play. There's nothing mysterious about it at all," he says not in this magazine. From the perspective of more normative "drama," however, everything is mysterious about O'Hara's "Awake in Spain," which dispenses with psychology, conflict, consistent temporality, and doable stage directions ("A sky filthy with bangles, but soft, somehow, and pensive. There is a verdant meadow upside down in the center of the stage...") in order to build a string of impossible, imploding scenarios acted by characters including The Empire State Building, Larry Rivers, John Adams, Thomas Hardy, Sheep and William Blake. Though Derek Walcott's *Malcochon!* is more recognizable under the traditional critical category of drama, its interest in the context of *The Hasty Papers* is its emergent post-colonialism: formally, the exploration of patois and thematically, the problem of judgment in the murder of a white planter on "a West Indian island." Walcott's drama is at the early edge of a transformation in the 1960s in which the very concept of "Caribbean literature" will become increasingly politicized, bound up with critiques of colonialism and imperialism.

In this context, one of the most moving documents in the magazine is Fidel Castro's 1960 speech to the U.N., a closely argued account of American imperialism both in Cuba and in the "developing" world more generally: "the problems of Latin America are the problems of the rest of the world: Africa and Asia." Charging that the type of discourse even possible within the U.N. upholds first world and especially American interests—"I understand very well that it is somewhat difficult and invidious for anyone here to speak in any but stereotyped terms"—Castro goes on to produce a string of public speech acts whose total implausibility and seeming "inappropriateness" prove

his point quite eloquently: "we proclaim the nationalization of the natural resources of and foreign investment in the under-developed countries. And if the industrial countries wish to do likewise, we shall not oppose them." Outgoing Ike can breathe easier. But since America has already interfered in Cuba's process of nationalization, Castro can ask: "Does this mean that the Cuban Government, then, has the right also to promote subversion in the United States...to violate the air and radio frequencies of the United States of America?"

Print frequencies would have to do. And while Leslie did print Castro, he did not include Genet (for fear of being jailed on obscenity charges), whom we now get. Added also is an introduction by David Lehman which, though useful for background and facts, is limited by his attempts to read the New York School poets in terms of a single aesthetic and politics. Lost are Leslie's original film and TV stills (gone in the 1966 fire that consumed all of *The Hasty Papers* beyond the roughly 1000 in circulation), replaced by what he calls "paraphrases" (of the originals) and new "attachments." Summarizing, falsely summarizing, shifting gears, or offering a humorous patina of Hollywood cliché, these images annotate the text in inventive ways—operating as moments of dense, often overdetermined, narrative meaning, extracted from their contexts, much in the manner that Roland Barthes describes as "the novelesque without the novel." It is this projection of a rich, intricate world from limited details that we are offered by the republication of *The Hasty Papers* as a whole, which, beyond an interdisciplinary anthology of New York School poets, gives a broader sense of what interdisciplinarity itself might have meant in 1960, the same year as American poetry was being redefined by Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry*.—LYTLE SHAW

## Other Traditions

by John Ashbery

Harvard University Press, 2000. 168 pp.

I've never been comfortable with the distinction between major and minor poets. For perhaps obvious reasons John Ashbery, author of these lectures, and W.H. Auden, presiding spirit, aren't so discomfited. Ashbery tells us that when he was invited to deliver the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, he decided to address the question, "what is the poetry that I notice when I write, that is behind my own poetry?" But he didn't wish to discuss the major poets whom he admits as influences, because he doubted he "could add anything of value to the critical literature concerning" them.

So he cites Auden's guidelines for distinguishing between major and minor practitioners before beginning to discuss five "certifiably minor poets" he "reads habitually in order to get started" and turns to "when [he] really [needs] to be reminded yet again of what poetry is." A sixth writer, Raymond Roussel, was the subject of an unwritten dissertation Ashbery researched in Paris just before Michel Foucault published his first book, a critical study of Roussel.

So these essays serve not only to introduce readers to poets Ashbery admires and whom he believes are underappreciated, they also promise to divulge enthusiasms and maybe even craft secrets of, perhaps excepting Robert Creeley, the only consensus Big Kahuna in contemporary American poetry. In 1966 Ashbery edited, with Thomas Hess, a collection of essays about painting, sculpture, and architecture titled *The Grand Eccentrics*, to which Ashbery contributed a brief essay on the artist Max Klinger. The poets he discusses in these lectures are similarly off-center, a dotty group of eccentric uncles and one crusty aunt. Each, he maintains,

requires some sort of special handling...reading their work isn't quite as simple as it is with a poet such as, say, John Keats, where one can simply take down a book from a shelf, open it, and begin reading and enjoying it. With each of them, some previous adjustment or tuning is required. It also helps to know something of their biographies and the circumstances in which they worked, since these are responsible for wide fluctuations in the quality of what they wrote.

Though they should not be unfamiliar around the Poetry Project, where it's a measure of Ashbery's presence that books by these poets have been circulating for more than twenty years, these readings of their poems should send many of us scurrying back to read them again. For Ashbery is the discriminating, sympathetic reader most of us yearn for. Besides Fairfield Porter, Edwin Denby and maybe Marianne Moore, I can think of few critics who approach their subject with this combination of almost insouciant modesty and rigorous precision. If his lectures tell us much about poetry, they also tell us much about how to read.

The first two chapters are devoted to nineteenth-century English Romantics John Clare and Thomas Lovell Beddoes. About Clare, Ashbery writes, "Though the effect of Clare's poetry, on me at least, is always the same—that of re-inserting me in my present, of reestablishing 'now'—the means he employs are endlessly varied despite the general air of artlessness." Comparing him to Beddoes, the author says, "I find

both kinds of poetry necessary; my own has swung—on its own. I might add—always between the poles of Clare's lumpy poetry of mud and muck and Beddoes's perfumed and poisonous artifice."

Maybe it's because Roussel is the only writer of the six who doesn't write in English, or maybe it's because his "curiously backward" influence never "directly inspired" Ashbery to write, but the chapter devoted to his work seems more retrospective and glancing than the others. Also, by its nature Roussel's work resists excerpt or explication. But Ashbery was among those who stirred renewed interest in Roussel when the French writer was an "all-but-forgotten-figure," and this entertaining introduction to a writer who squandered a fortune on opium, chocolate soup, and extravagant but unsuccessful productions and publications of his own plays and poems, should send readers in search of *How I Wrote Certain of My Books* and *New Impressions of Africa*.

Some may be exasperated by the chapters on John Wheelwright and Laura Riding. Ashbery acknowledges Wheelwright's contempt for mystification and Riding's "extraordinary attempt to control the way her poetry is read," but rather than attempt to clarify the ideas of these extremely programmatic poets, he seems to delight in the obscurity and incomprehensibility of much of their work. Referring to Wheelwright, he recalls W.S. Gilbert's lines "If this young man expresses himself in terms too deep for me / Why, what a very singularly deep young man this deep young man must be!" And he writes, "One must misread Riding in order to be enriched by her. One must ignore her promises of future enlightenment, the pie in the sky which will turn out to be better than poetry ever could be." But he also provides luminous examples of Riding's "overwhelmingly spare and beautiful language" and of the elegance and "extraordinary power of [Wheelwright's] language as it flashes by on its way to somewhere from somewhere else." I don't imagine many Ashbery readers will be surprised that he finds more pleasure in the spark and dart of words than in programmatic coherence.

This aesthetic bent discovers its most fitting subject in the poems of David Schubert, subject of the final chapter of *Other Traditions*. Ashbery states boldly that he values Schubert "more than Pound or Eliot," and it's easy to hear why. He quotes Rachel Hadas that "what Schubert's best poems capture is the texture of thought itself—ragged, rapid, dancing zigzag from likeness to question and from wish to intention," then closes the book with three radiant poems and a brilliant "Short Essay on Poetry" by Schubert. Ashbery cites the neglect of Schubert, who died in 1946

at the age of thirty-three, as evidence that the poets "who become known and are remembered and put in anthologies are there as much from happenstance as intrinsic merit." He then generously acknowledges the debt his own career owes to W.H. Auden, who upon hearing that the manuscript Ashbery had submitted to the Yale Younger Poets competition had been returned, asked to read it and selected it for publication over those that had made it through the initial screen. It's a graceful note on which to end the book, and left me pleased that the luckless Schubert's live-wire poems finally found such a reader. Major poets often fare worse.—GARY LENHART

## A Salvo for Africa

by Douglas Oliver

Blodaxe Books, 2000. 112 pp.

How does the late Douglas Oliver's *A Salvo for Africa* fit in the lineage of political poetry? The British press ranked his earlier *Penniless Politics* (Blodaxe, 1994) on a par with T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*. While *Penniless Politics* deployed an allegorical landscape as a means of social critique, *Salvo* takes a different approach from Oliver's previous books. *Salvo* is not radically experimental, like Oliver's midcentury texts. Nor is it emotionally candid as some of the works in the recent *Selected Poems* (Talisman House, 1996). And yet, the erudition of the political insights volleyed in *Salvo* find an ally in the experimental rigor of the Postmodern Left, while the personal revelations and direct discourse in the book find affinity in the legacy of the post-war social revolution.

Oliver's *Salvo* is, in fact, the product of a big, big brain and a big, big heart. I, personally, have never read anything quite like it, though I suspect there are distant British precursors of which I remain woefully unaware. I suspect this because the poetics of Sidney, Dryden and Johnson came to mind during a reading of the book. They came not as relics of the historicity of poetry, but emerged as part of the fabric of a living poetics tradition in the English language. To draw attention to the fact that the potential vitality of this tradition in England is diametrically opposed to its habitual quaintness in America highlights the differences between many English and American poets.

Oliver, who was raised in England and lived in Europe most of his life, settled in America for five years and visited the US often. While influenced by a close reading of American literature, Oliver's poetics are 'British' in both form and content. The considerable recognition accorded him in American literary

circles pales in comparison to the accolades and respect he received in his homeland. In the introduction, he refers to the works in *Salvo* as "British poems," thus avowing his 'European' sensibility at the same time that he alludes to the role of Great Britain in the colonization and ongoing socio-economic subjugation of Africa.

I don't often read poetry in which the intricacies of "debt restructuring" are addressed in factual detail, nor would I ever have imagined that I could find this information thoroughly compelling. But *Salvo* changed me and the way that I view the African continent. Oliver has, in fact, masterfully achieved his mark. As he writes in the introduction:

Why poetry on such topics? Poets become foolish when they suggest amateurish solutions to mighty problems; they become exploitive if they parade their compassion; and if they sneer at politicians' difficulties from safe avant-garde margins that's rather despicable. More interestingly, a poem can re-imagine a dulled-over political issue for us, making it lively.

*Salvo* is exactly that—lively, imaginative, vivid. By combining prose and poem forms, Oliver sets the scene and then animates it with persons and events that allow us to understand and grasp issues from the multiplicity of perspectives that render a subject round and vital. Oliver's technical expertise comes into play here—his prose is matter-of-fact and clear, his poems more often narrative than lyrical. An expert on prosody (at one point in his life, Oliver wired throats to study vocalisation), he can alter rhythm and beat faster than a G4. I often found myself stopping to admire a line break, or to marvel at the way he concludes individual pieces. Professional ease and poetic authority are everywhere evident.

Most of the poems in *Salvo* focus on a single African country, its history, politics, culture, hope and/or lack thereof. Nationalism is, of course, the 'natural' divider. From Botswana's diamond trade to Zimbabwe's missionaries, from Azande medicine to Sudan's civil war and points between, Oliver leads us on a tour of a continent mired in post-colonial entropy. But his poems are also quick to point to the resources and assets of African lands, and "refusing to despair," the recent sea-change in international attitudes toward the continent.

In his *Selected Poems*, Oliver writes that the Africa works are "part of a life-project to widen my political attention." He explains that this process occurs by moving deeper into self-knowledge as a means of understanding the world 'out there'. "In such a way," he writes, "I've tried to show that any political

flaws in the public arena also reside in the 'self'—in 'myself'—and therefore inside the area of the poem-as-art too." Oliver's honesty and compassion are as hard-won as his erudition. It is a great loss that we will not have all the books that were projected to accompany *Salvo*. We need them.—DAWN MICHELLE BAUDE

## Bruised Nickelodeon

by Magdalena Zurawski

Hophophop Press, 2000 (c/o Karen Weiser, hophophop@mindspring.com).

Dear Maggie,

Thanks for answering my email. It wasn't so much that the info I would receive from you would hand me the key to *Bruised Nickelodeon*—though maybe the part about your Polish parents being "right off the boat" is an elucidating detail, since either you moved freely through both languages in childhood, or regarded their Polish speech as a wall that had some opaque and transparent bricks but certainly rendered your parents' meaning as flickering rather than constant. The flicker I get in your work maybe happens around the body. I love "What Skyscraper," a ten line poem knocked into three stanzas, a small song of a poem that opens:

What skyscraper could have satisfied  
I always forgot to look up.  
And then the ghostly made its way  
Through the wet city, stripped me of my trousers.

The speaker of the poem is male, or deliberately antique, nattily throwing on another gender or time. There's already a weather in this poem, and it's a weather that takes rather than tells and so the poem begins empty and the middle stanza kind of ducks which was when I thought of the "other language" thing, a kind of density coming on the heels of vulnerability as an organic choice bred by habit, or home. The last two lines slap against each other: "I get excited / The door says, 'Calm down.'" That strikes me as a girl line. It could also be a line written by a man brought up to be a girl, but I think I'm getting weird now. The poem's called "What Skyscraper" and in its elusive emptiness it manages to stand tall. I also think about how "skyscraper" came from the name of the tallest mast of a ship. I imagine them pulling in to the city and creating it. Staying tall.

I liked the three poems that make up "taken from: A Handbook of Neurotic Disorders." Very seventies. The seventies was one big "how-to" decade. Here you really dart between poetry and prose with ease, so I'm not surprised that you're encamped there now. The

third section, "Fig 1.2: Pattern of Recreating in the Insomniac" was my fave. I like the violence of it: "After I shot her / she disappeared and was later found / twisted around my spine in the form of seaweed." A moment of anger, then the fantastic—the transformations opening successively. I think there's so much feeling in this line. We don't really want to dwell on feeling in poetry unless you're really able to get sweaty and occupy the flesh in some way that really aches. I couldn't stand to do that myself. But we do need tons of shorthand for the body, thousands of little hands waving as we go. Your moment seems chemical. Pretty aware and yet swift. Asking by the very clear nature of the transmission that we just hold it for a microsecond. Actually here's about a million things I like about this poem. The end is so great:

In an effort of escape I drew my body  
As a map of all territories west of itself

I was sensitive and wept often, etc.

I wrote "poet of tone" in the margin, but that's stupid. The first line "She was sensitive and wept often" is fictional and by the time your map is manifest, the "I" swoops in and claims the poem, again making your feat emotional, which I applaud.

I'm looking at "Six" from "A Book of Felled Musing." "In diving there is danger of transformation." That's the beginning. Yet, "The diver can wake and say baby." No kidding. *Bruised Nickelodeon* is a small pale yellow pamphlet, an act of diffuse, obtuse and elegant intimacy. At the end of "Six" the poet says "... 'Because I love you, / the ceiling and the heart and the air' / notice how ridiculous it sounds. Feel sorry for me." This poem doesn't yank you out of bed. The camera holds in the poem in the poem. I'm grateful for your massive silence, Maggie. It's hell without yell. Body sound.

Truly,  
Eileen (Myles)

## What Night Forgets

by Don Yorty

Herodias, 2000 \$36

I'm grateful when I get my hands on a book that enthralls me like Charlotte Carter's Nan Goldin books and now at last Don Yorty's *What Night Forgets*. The title is from a poem of the main character, John Wengert, and day is not what night forgets.

The most stunning moment is when John is in Mexico and the Three Mile Island plant starts to leak



radiation. His family lives very close to it and the news is momentous and terrifying. Equally amazing is when tourists are gruesomely killed in Tumbala and not long afterward Antonio, John's lover, is killed in a car accident.

John or Juan or Don is obviously a thinker in Latin and Greek and writes sentences accordingly: "Some people have all the luck and it was usually someone like this jerk who at the moment was smiling fondly at his daughter prancing before a parrot delighting the maid." That's almost a direct quote from Catullus.

This portentous book is about being a bisexual Lothario in Oaxaca which happens to be where Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz lived and, in Monte Alban, where mescal is made. Ahoy!

You can also see evidence of Don's experiences as an organizer of the community garden La Plaza at 9th St. and Avenue C, which if you're nearby you can go and visit. For free! The stuff in this book is as imminent, politically and sexually savvy and scary as what you'll encounter there on any normal confounding day. Read it, learn some Spanish, check out the behavior of a poet in Oaxaca and instead of weeping, hope Don Yorty will grace us with another joyful missive become a work of fiction.—BERNADETTE MAYER

## The Niche Narrows: New & Selected Poems

by Samuel Menashe  
Talisman House, 2000

You probably don't know Samuel Menashe's work. He's as much alienated from the "academic" world of MFA poetry as he is from the world of "experimental" poetry. He also writes lots of tiny (3 to 6 line) rhyming poems. Menashe is unfashionable.

Nevertheless, Menashe's book *The Niche Narrows* (Talisman House) should be read by anyone interested in poetry. This is a poetry of archaic language and Blakean aphorism that is delightful in its daring sentimentality. Menashe has no hangups about portraying himself as a kind of shaman-poet speaking an oddly ego-driven rhythmic language of the margins:

### WINTER

I am entrenched  
Against the snow,  
Visor lowered  
To blunt its blow

I am where I go

Many of Menashe's poems read as if they were

engraved in stone, carrying an authoritative tone that's almost hard to believe. At first reading, one is not sure if Menashe is joking, or if he's taken it upon himself to evoke a time when poetry was the language of the tribe. His many religiously inflected poems suggest the latter, for which I am grateful:

### REEDS RISE FROM WATER

rippling under my eyes  
Bullrushes tuft the shore

At every instant I expect  
what is hidden everywhere

Poet as visionary, poet as shaman, poet as spokesperson—these are all models of the author that most of us are embarrassed by in these post-authorial times of ours. Nevertheless, Menashe's poems are compelling and moving—partly because of their very refusal to engage with current poetic standards. I hope more people read him. His new book of selected poems is a good place to start.—DANIEL KANE

## Species

by Michael Friedman

The Figures, 2000. 80 pp.

Sometimes it's not the poetry that claims to be most ambitious that ends up winning the reader over. In the last year I've read a lot of books of poetry that demand to be considered very serious, but many of them I've thought about a lot less than Michael Friedman's *Species*, a book that offers no radically new insights and suggests no grand earth-shattering changes, even for poetry, yet manages to be far more memorable than many more ambitious books because its stylish combination of humor and awareness creates a skeptical world view that one wants to revisit long after greater claims have proved so much conference table-pounding.

*Species* has style, undoubtedly, both in language and attitude. Indeed Friedman suggests that sometimes poets have little else with which to protect themselves than the snappily twisted phrase flung out from the midst of chaos that's more banal (if every bit as nasty) than could have been predicted. Or not even protection; the poem may not help even in its own moment, but is just as likely to leave us there, in its own intensity and confusion: "I've reached the middle of my rope, staggering around the kitchen before the night turns white hot." Nothing's saved in a moment like this, nothing's discovered, nothing's even perhaps illuminated, but the poet's there anyway, perversely enjoy-

ing his own impending disintegration just as much as he can't stand it, slightly embarrassed, as if it was a matter he wished he didn't have to put before us.

In fact, the narrative voice in these poems repeatedly refuses to insist on its own importance: "Last night I sermonized a bit; what of it?" He's not convinced he has the solution to great historical dilemmas, or even the means to expose them. He's not rewriting our understanding of language or love. All these problems are there, of course, in all their complexity; there's no way to avoid both the world as it is and the dreams people have of how it might be different. But for the narrator of *Species*, it's a world of that complexity where he has to live. And determined to live he is, if only for a few odd moments that always end up leaving him (and us) somewhere unexpected: "I took a wrong turn in County Galway en route to the salmon leap."

Finally, then, it's the book's sense of the wildness of living that keeps it on my mind. Something's always going on in *Species*, and it's always weird and lovely and creepy and sometimes dangerous, and it's more than a theory or a solution or an analysis, although it has elements of all those things just as much as it has sundown and drinks and perfume, armies, linoleum and static. And the author, well, he's just hanging around, trying sometimes to make things happen, trying more often just to put up with them. After all, it's not like he hasn't met more than one sincere loser who wants to save the world.—MARK WALLACE

## The German Lunatic

by Robert Hershon

Hanging Loose Press, 2000. 104 pp.

Readers opening Robert Hershon's eleventh book of poetry will find him alive and well, still a master of a poetic style in which the New York demotic rubs elbows with the fancy literary. Hershon's poems are usually set within the context of Brownstone Brooklyn, a place of alternating sylvan greenery and urban grit. Squirrels wake him up by dropping acorns on his roof; winos beg on the F train; mice run rampant through midnight rooms; and the identity of the corner store keeps changing everytime he walks by.

Suffusing the poems is a humor generally wry, but often with bite. A conservative is a liberal who has been mugged, as the saying goes. Hershon is still a liberal, but his idealism has had its nose rubbed in the dirt on many occasions, and he has a jaundiced eye for bullshit of both the political and the poetic varieties.

His poem in memory of the San Francisco poet Bob Kaufman begins:

I never called the police when I heard Bob Kaufman  
getting beaten up in the alley behind the house in  
[North Beach  
since it was always the police who were beating  
[him.

As for poetry world b.s., Hershon has "A Primer for Tonight's Audience," a hilarious poem in the form of question and answer about poetry readings, which begins with the question "Why does the audience sit as far away from the reader as possible?" and ends with the question: "Say, do I have time to read a few more?", which receives a reply that most of us have silently given on countless occasions.

It is the intimations of mortality that surface in poem after poem that gives this volume a particular poignancy. There are poems about the deaths of Hershon's father and mother, poems about friends like Kaufman who have died, and worries about his own demise. I quote "His Family Her Family" in full:

It's simple  
Everyone in my father's family  
dies of cancer  
Everyone in my mother's  
family dies of heart disease

It took me a while to realize that  
his family and her family  
added up to my family  
Now I can hear them arguing  
in their adjacent graves  
You take care of it  
No, you

A part of the recognition of mortality is the impulse to document what one has seen. Hershon titles a section of his book "James Boswell" and includes poems on the Scottish author, movie stars, his fifth-grade teacher, old schoolmates, new friends, and a baseball player. In all of these, Hershon finds poetry in the everyday. "You know I love the talkers," he says in one poem, and he's a wonderful talker himself.

The title poem is dedicated to and very much in the style of Paul Violi. Hershon takes a Ripley's Believe It Or Not anecdote about a madman with an obsession for playing cards and dissects the monomania in a manner that is all the funnier for being deadpan. "I did it. I could do it again," says the lunatic to himself at the poem's end. Do it again, Bob.—REAGAN UPSHAW

## Me and My Dog

by Barbara Henning

Poetry New York, 1999

pamphlet series #23. 28 pp.

In Barbara Henning's *Me and My Dog*, everyday details and language of death become a means to both witness and revel in how we live. The result is breathtaking work, simple and profound.

"Out of Harms Way," the opening poem, is a fine example of how Henning subverts the narrative about death to make it a part of these poems of daily life. This haunting beauty is rich in rhythmic mantras of sounds and images, nuanced repetition, subtle and metaphorical language as well as astute observations and a measure of emotion and dispassion which, in this case, administers a dose of universal reality without being sentimental or maudlin:

Sometimes we leap into a pose that isn't a pose and it

[stiffens

Sometimes we sleep in a pose that isn't a pose

More often than not, you woke in a state of confusion

Surprised by the afternoon light and the touch of my

[hand

Most nights, I sleep with my hands in prayer position

The dog lies under the bed, waiting for you to come

[home

The dog lies under the bed, waiting for me to wake up

The dog lies under the bed

This poem, and the book overall, lifts the spirit the way Arvo Pärt does in his sublime *Cantus in memory of Benjamin Britten*. And Dorothy, the lively dog on the cover, intermittently disappears and reappears, as a reminder of an unconditional love which runs through-

out the book. ("How many cocoons, I wonder, made the silk threads in my nightgown which briefly touched your leg and then became this love letter with no return address"—"Each Plastic Bead Has A Tiny Hole")

*Me and My Dog* puts us in a state of hyperawareness about our own lives—how we choose to live, where we choose to put our energies, and ultimately leads us to examine what's important.

—DONNA CARTELLI

## North, cont.

I'm sure I've learned some things about writing poems from looking at paintings. Saying what they are is, as usual, the hard part. Painting in this century has represented innovation—fresh air—more consistently and dramatically than poetry has, and is therefore a more consistent encourager. To me, the beautiful paintings one keeps going back to are a sort of impossible ideal. You know you can't possibly, but you find yourself trying to, do something equally beautiful, or wonderful. That's happened to me with Chardin and Vermeer; it's happened with Rothko and Guston and Johns; it's also happened with Albert York and Richard Tuttle and Wayne Thiebaud and Trevor Winkfield and Paula North and loads of others. But there's Chopin too, and Palladio, and Thelonius Monk.

.....  
*Works by Charles North include New and Selected Poems (Sun and Moon) and No Other Way: Selected Prose (Hanging Loose). The Nearness of the Way You Look Tonight is forthcoming from Adventures in Poetry.*

*Ange Mlinko is the editor of The Poetry Project Newsletter.*

"For the poetical, the people. Not for myself, merely. Or ever. Only for the better, warm, human loving, kind person. The guy on the street who might hold open a door for you, left the bumper on your car, stops to give you instructions, spares some change, lets you in his bookshop. Friends I take for granted, like the future."

—John Wieners, on being asked whom he writes for.  
(*Selected Poems: 1958-1984*, Black Sparrow Press)

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Interviews with Larry Fagin and Alex Katz  
Reviews of Lisa Jarnot, Eileen Myles  
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# Questionnaire

- 
- 1) How important to you is the idea of being “amusing”—as in Ted Berrigan’s definition of amusing work (“your muses respond to its muses”)? Is it important to amuse your readers?
  - 2) Are your judgements about poetry really “about the work” itself, or does it inevitably involve judgments about the poet’s appearance and lifestyle? In other words, do you require your poets to be heroes? or fit a role?
  - 3) Do you really like to go to readings? What makes a good reading?

Send your answers via email ([poproj@artomatic.com](mailto:poproj@artomatic.com)) or postcard to the Poetry Project (131 E. 10th St. NYC 10003) by February 15, 2001.

## New York Literary and Cultural Events

### February 8

Club Poetic de New York. Join special guest, Tony-award winning Yvonne Constant who will sing popular songs in French. Also poets John Suss, Victoria Campbell, Ismerie Leveque, Pierre Gazarian, Stephanie Sellars, and others for an evening of French poetry. (Parts of this evening will be held in English and other parts in French.)

### March 10

Melvin Jules Bukiet moderates a panel of writers who are also book reviewers. In association with the National Book Critics Circle. Welcome by Barbara Hoffert, *Library Journal*.

### April 12

New American Writing 30th Anniversary. Join Charles Simic, Jackson Mac Low, Kenward Elmslie, Geoffrey O'Brien, Eleni Sikelianos, Elaine Equi, Jerome Sala, Milcho Manchevski, David Lehman, William Corbett, Marjorie Welish, Ron Padgett, Charles Bertnstein, Keith & Rosmarie Waldrop, Maxine Chernoff, Paul Hoover and others.

### May 31

Beloit Poetry Journal's 50th Anniversary [tentative] Join John Rosenwald and others.

### October 24

Greensboro Review 35th Anniversary [tentative]. Join editor Jim Clark and others.

Events are free. For more information on times and locations, please call (212) 604-4823 or email [podium2@aol.com](mailto:podium2@aol.com), or leave your name and address to receive an invitation. Or send a letter to: Shapiro, 27 West 44 Street # 50, New York, NY 10036.

# Books Received

## Magazines

**Future Swoop #54.** Editor: X.J. Dailey (3003 Ponce De Leon St., New Orleans LA, 70119) Contributors: Chris McCreary, Bill Lavender, Sheila E. Murphy, others.

**A Gathering of the Tribes #9.** Editor: Steve Cannon (285 East 3rd St., NY NY, 10009) Contributors: Edwin Torres, Tracie Morris, Eve Packer, others.

**Hambone #15.** Editor: Nathaniel Mackey (134 Hunolt St., Santa Cruz, CA, 95060) Contributors: Carla Harryman, Jena Osman, Gustaf Sobin, others.

**Hanging Loose 77.** Editors: Hershon, Lourie, Pawlak, Schreiber, Jarrett (231 Wyckoff St., Brooklyn, NY, 11217). Contributors: Kimoko Hahn, Elinor Nauen, Merrill Gilfillan, others.

**XPC: Cross Cultural Poetics #7.** Editor: Mark Nowak (601 25th Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN, 55454) Contributors: Rae Armantrout, Harryette Mullen, Nicole Brossard, others.

**ixnay #5.** Editors: Chris McCreary, Jenn McCreary. (ixnaypress@aol.com). Contributors: Kyle Connor, Brendan Lorber, Michael Magee.

**Combo #7.** Editor: Michael Magee. (www.combopoetry.com). Contributors: Mark McMorris, Fran Carlen, Summi Kaipa.

## Books

**Poems for the Nation: A Collection of Contemporary Political Poems,** ed. by Allen Ginsberg with Andy Clausen and Eliot Katz. Seven Stories Press (NY, NY), 2000. 1-58322-012-7

**Mark Wallace, The Big Lie.** Avec Books (Penn Grove, CA), 2000. 1-880713-22-5

**Charles Borkhuis, Alpha Ruins.** Bucknell University Press (Cranbury, NJ) 2000. 0-8387-5442-2

**Camille Guthrie, The Master Thief.** Subpress (Honolulu, HI) 2000. 1-930068-05-0

**John McNally, Exes For Eyes.** Subpress (Honolulu, HI) 2000. 1-930068-06-9

**Susan M. Schultz, Aleatory Allegories.** Salt Publishing (Applecross, Australia) 2000. 1-876857-01-3

**Nathaniel Tarn, The Architectures.** Chax Press (Tucson, AZ) 2000. 0-925904-28-7

**Joseph Torra, August Letter to My Wife and Children.** Pressed Wafer (9 Columbus Square, Boston, MA 02116).

**Tim Reynolds, What Ever Happened.** If Publishing (Los Angeles). 0-9674720-0-8

**Kenward Elmslie, Blast from the Past.** Skanky Possum (Austin, TX), 2000. 0-9703-9521-3

**Tom Clark, Cold Spring: A Diary.** Skanky Possum (2925 Higgins Ave, Austin, TX 78722), 2000.

**Kai Nieminen, Serious Poems** (translated from the Finnish by Anselm Hollo). Rain Taxi Brainstorm Series #5 (Minneapolis, MN). www.raintaxi.com

**Joanna Fuhrman, Freud in Brooklyn.** Hanging Loose Press (Brooklyn, NY), 2000. 1-882413-73-3

**Jim Behrle, City Point.** Pressed Wafer (9 Columbus Square, Boston, MA 02116), 2000.

**George Stanley, At Andy's.** New Star Books (Vancouver, Canada), 2000. 0-921586-76-0

**Anselm Hollo, Rue Wilson Monday.** La Alameda Press (Albuquerque, NM), 2000. 1-888809-22-1

**Catullus: Blues from Ancient Rome.** Translated by Ryan Gallagher, photography by Derek Fenner. Bootstrap Press (Boulder CO), 2000. theattacheddocument@earthlink.net

**Kevin Varrone, g-point Almanac.** ixnay press (Philadelphia, PA), 2000. ixnaypress@aol.com

**Chris McCreary, Clockwork.** ixnay press (Philadelphia, PA), 2000. ixnaypress@aol.com

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