

MARSDEN HARTLEY: FORGOTTEN CLASSIC

By David Cope

In 1980, I was teaching the poems of Charles Reznikoff in the summer session at Naropa, & Allen Ginsberg brought me his copy of Marsden Hartley's poems, long out of print. I was so taken by these poems—their plain & sincere outlook, their sense of pictorial *focus*—that I changed my lecture plan & devoted my second lecture to Hartley. Later, Allen sent me xeroxes of Hartley's poems; I bound them myself, & this has been my copy of them. They remain out of print.

An older but close friend of the young Williams, Marsden shared in that excitement of composers, artists & poets before the first world war: they were inventing new ways of seeing and hearing, new ways of making poems & pictures & music. His work is often purely objectivist, tho, importantly, he does not always confine himself to this method of writing. The lush descriptions of *his family's life & history*, as seen in *Family Album in Red Plush*, his fascination with the casual but tender view of death, as in *Three Small Feathers*, & his sense of real situations that are absurd—the window washer holding an imaginary conversation with a nude manikin, mark his style as distinctly different from Reznikoff's or Williams'. Further, there's often a sense that he's creating portraits out of minute details he's observed, that these are paintings imagined with rhythm. A note accompanying an exhibition of Hartley's drawings & paintings at Stieglitz's gallery (1916) says as much about his poems as his graphic work:

The forms are only those which I have observed casually from day to day. There is no hidden symbolism whatsoever in them; there is no slight intention of that anywhere. Things under observation, just the pictures of any day, any hour. I have expressed only what I have seen. They are merely consultations of the eye—in no sense problem; my notion of the purely pictorial.

This is an early version of Reznikoff's later & more succinct statement of objectivist theory: "Sometimes a fly is just a fly." Hartley's statement ducks the question of why he'd select a picture—that involves the business of emotional commitment or of wisdom to be gleaned from the particular scene—but the statement is nevertheless an adequate reflection of the *method* of composition, the stance one takes in presenting a picture or an image. In *Lewiston is a Pleasant Place*, Marsden lets you into the movie of his life without being sentimental, returning to "instances that are the basic image of my life as it now is":

Spring—
and myself walking with my father along the
edges of a cool clear stream, gather water cresses,
trilliums, dogtooth violets, and in
the fall—at times—mushrooms.

Often his poems are observations of others, playing the object scene off on the subject's interior inner monologue. This is especially true of *Park Avenue Baby in its Pram*. In *Daily Library Visitor*, we hear the author's own inner monologue surmising the scenes of an old man's life by the way he looks & the way he holds a book:

once it was anchor chains, probably, then it
was plows,
now it is just fixing things up around the
house,
now it is the quiet look of a mystic in love
with a simple theme,
for the beautiful mask is utterly unruffled,
and the huge hands seem to say, "we have earned
a little respite now, and can afford to hold
a book."

Hartley made several poems on war; the most successful, *American Ikon—Lincoln*, is a heart-rending portrait "watching the flaming horizon with calm." There are others where his anger at the senselessness of whole populations of young men butchering each other cannot be contained: *Laughter of Steel*, or the *Problem* of "what to do with them after they are done for," & the most tortured of these poems, *O Bitter Madrigal*:

Sing not O bird on my shoulder; I have
no ear for sense logic of peace; I am
broken in two; the world and the dream
split in two; the rags of them trailing over
my aching bones, my lips suppurate with
gall.
O merciless Madrigal!

Another aspect of Marsden's work is the bemused, satirical & yet tender look at people around him in the city. He describes his introduction to New York in *World—Passport Visa*:

Had I not escaped to the continent,
Joined the elephants and tigers and acrobats
of New York City,
Which is the greatest circus arena of the world,
I would be chopping twisted trees
to clear a space for calm,
persistent contemplation.

I think he was able to find that calm, persistent contemplation even in the city. The section entitled: *Gay World: City Vignettes* features, besides the passport poem, the Park Avenue baby, a proud, broken old woman in the park, the daily library visitor, a working girl—*Barbarella Tone*—who still manages to love beauty ("and gave the mop another squeeze, if you please"), Miracle Cary the flophouse saint, and a dialogue in limbo between an ice man & a garbage man. Hartley loved the city & its people; one of his characters, speaking in the first person, says one might find the city world and its troubled people "tiresome," but "I like 'em now very much and that will do, I'll say."

Among the other outstanding portrait poems that span his career, one should mention *Elias Gove*, the crazy man who was sure the second coming was at hand ("He could not, stand to see the things we see, and how—how do we?"), and *Jo Acton—Dwarf*:

Strange that a man's face could
be so beautiful
while the rest of him is so utterly
defeated—
muscles piled high in mystic
plentitude
with bone area so niggardly.

Many of his later portrait poems are among his most successful works—*Melville*, *John Donne in His Shroud*, *Marianne Moore*, & *Albert Ryder—Moonlightist* with its marvelous closing lines.

Marsden Hartley was a fine poet whose work should once again be made available for all of us. His poems are among the first of those using the movie scenario & focusing techniques based on attention to little details; at their best, his works stand well beside other modern masters of the objectivist tradition, including Reznikoff & Williams.

David Cope's second volume of poems, *On the Bridge*, is scheduled for publication by Humana Press of Clifton, New Jersey, in 1986.

A Selection of Hartley's Poems

American Icon—Lincoln

I have walked up and down the valleys
of his astounding face,
I have witnessed all the golgothas
I have climbed the steep declivities
of all his dreams
listened to the whickering of the wind
around them;
like a lilliput I have sat quietly
upon his haggard chin
looked up at the breaking rain
falling from his furrowed lids.
I have for once heard God calling
all things to order there.
I have seen infinite mercies
on his woman's lower lip
in the same way I have seen
determination
upon his man's upper.
Pity has poured out from between
these massive portals,
majesty of love has walked out
of them
clothed in amazingly decent garments,
the only voice worth hearing has sounded
great beauty in my ear.
Because I have walked where I have
walked
I have scaled the sheer surface of his
dignities
watching the flaming horizon
with calm.

Albert Ryder—Moonlightist

Moonlight severing his ancient mariner's
beard
and falling over the cliffs of his eyebrows
his lips fearing to touch what was no
longer available,
night streaming through his listless fingers
with the texture of impassable days to come
hanging like limpid moss from his prophetic
shoulders—
the beautiful man, suffering from the weight
of majesty of dream
because he had been denied substance of
any other truth—dream so sumptuous—heavy
with failures of death, radiant with shimmer
of new belief:
I am speaking of Albert Ryder moonlightist
as I knew him—
"I asked him to Christmas dinner," the lady
said to me, who had a long time known him;
"he said he would come; we waited two hours
for him, the party eager to see him; he did
not come."
Next time she saw him—"O we were so
disappointed you did not come."
"I was there," said Ryder, "I looked through the
window—saw the lovely lights. It was very beautiful."

Three Small Feathers

It was a yellow warbler that went
down the throat of the orange cat—
all but three little feathers—these fluttering
fringes clinging to lip of orange cat
shaken with a little strip of wind.
The limp opera singer—you have heard
the yellow warbler, haven't you?—could
no longer lift its head.
No song would ever turn the air to summer
dream again.
Not a note to lift a finger of the wind.
Three small feathers now lying on the ground,
not even echo of heavenly sound.



Painting Number 5
(Collection of the Whitney Museum)

Window Cleaner to Nude Manikin

He being the big thing he is
needs lots of room for his
cleaning window tricks,
So they made the window empty
though they didn't take the naked
dummy out, she with her nose quite
some in the air—
they often are so very debonair—
he wishing this way and that
with his window swiper,
he thought everything was very fine
when suddenly the naked woman
said—
"big boy, why are you so cold to me?"
"who's goofy now?" the big boy to the wax
woman said—
"this ain't no place for anything,
can't you see for yourself it isn't?"
Besides I got plenty to do.
I'm workin' for my cheese and bread,
my job's washing windows just now;
maybe later we could have a word
if things look so good."

Family Album in Red Plush

My father was an English Yankee who emigrated
from the Wuthering Heights section in eighteen-sixty.
He had very blue eyes and kept these his windows
washed clean; he watched the coronation parade
of plain virtues every day, and let his blue flag
furl out in fine ripples.
He came to Maine when he was a freshly marriageable
young man—to the English colony of Lewiston,
sent for my mother, Eliza Jane Horbury of Staylybridge
near Manchester, and in due time she came over in a
sailing vessel that took six weeks to make the port of Boston;
soon they were married in Victorian cloth and silk.
Nine children were eventually seen to be flocking about
the gateway, and of these I, the last, left to fumble the
latch, period now to a not too ravishing sentence.
I have polished that period with my sleeve to the best
of my ability—I still inhale the yellow Scotch roses,
the tansy down the path, the sweet alyssum and the bleeding heart.
My people were good, therefore they were good; that nobody
could deny; and being good, got a nice piece in the paper
when they went, and a sheaf of wheat with a sickle, with
letters of purple straw on a white satin ribbon.

My father was a dreamer—dreamed everything but the right
thing, leaving it to my mother to put his dream in order
and so she took shovel and pick and dug the ditches free.
My father was a cotton spinner from the Lancashire cotton belt.

Then he was bill poster for my cousin Horbury who owned
the local theater for forty years, who was an interesting but
thoroughly disliked man. He was handsome with red beard
and high red hair, rising from a stiff forehead.
I can still see him talking in front of the bank at the
head of the street with the three Ricker brothers of Poland
Spring, and we may sure they settled many local things—
they too with long beards looking Yankee Brigham Youngs.
So my father posted the long handsome bills for Joe Jefferson
in *The Rivals* and *Rip Van Winkle*, Margaret Mather in
Shakespeare—Modjeska, Januscheck, Booth, Barret, McCullough,
somebody Kean in *Nick of the Woods*, Ullie Ackerstrom in
Fanchon the Cricket—I can remember being thrilled when she
came through a window in rags with a real live hen under
her left arm, which as a little boy I thought was great acting.

My father was an average citizen—he voted Republican right
down to the sound of "earth to earth"—he loathed cigarettes
as an invention of the devil, smoked a pipe in the middle
of the night.

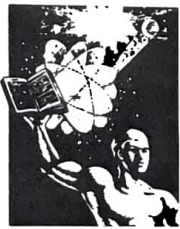
My father belonged to the street-cleaning squad to the
Royal House of Heaven,
and kept his brooms and brushes clean, polished highly his
name plate on them;
he did not sing hymns around the house but he acted them,
"my soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit—"
and my mother scrubbed many a sacred corridor in the Holy
House of the mind. They were excessively human—they
had an almost unnatural sense of bounden duty.
I have spent my life looking through their windows; I send
them flowers tied with severe ribbons in cosmic shades.

Once upon a time my father thought he could be a breeder
of horses, got as far as three, one of them a pet that tried
to get in at the kitchen door. He wore a horse's tooth in
his ascot when he went to be photographed, also a scrubby
moustache, browned in the middle from pipe smoking.
Once in my infancy he bought three bear cubs from a hunter
and put them to the breasts of Bess the Newfoundland, who
still needed to be relieved of her milk. They licked her
teats with a relish, and as they grew older, became unman-
ageable and were sold to a traveling circus.
I remember the Chickering rosewood piano, the red plush
family album on a marble-top walnut table, with the word
Album in metal Spenserian across the cover, and I remember
being obsessed with raising the word at the lower corner of
the letter A.
There was the horsehair furniture, two steel engravings of
Landseer in black frames edged with gold inside, one of
them *The Stag at Bay*—the other I do not recall—
we still possess the Duke of Wellington milk picher in copper luster.

I am the punctuation to this single sentence, no other to bear
the name—with me it goes out—my loss, my gain—
perhaps—foolish contention.

My father with his two strong wives lies in the family lot
on the banks of the Androscoggin,
he was clean-mouthed, clean-souled, proud of being honest,
avoided being conspicuous in any other way.
The finest people in the world are those who act in
the right way;
my mother and father were among them.

This Month's Events



November 4: **Open Performances & Readings** (Free).

November 6: **New Australian Poetry.** Lyn Tranter will introduce four major Australian poets to America; Poet/Novelist **Geoff Page**, Poet/Playwright **Dorothy Hewett**, Poet/Editor/Performance Artist **PI O** (as in the Greek pi) and **John A. Scott** Poet & Scriptwriter. Their first American tour is under the auspices of the Literary Board of the Australia Council. Lyn Tranter is a poet and publisher. Donation: \$3.00.

November 11: **Maroun Azouri, Chazz Dean/James Siena & Karen Finley.** Donation: \$3.00.

November 13: **Lois Elaine Griffith & Roland Legiard-Laura.** Lois Elaine Griffith is a native New Yorker. Her poems have appeared in *IKON*, *The Iowa Review* & *Confirmations: An Anthology of Black American Women Writers*. Her plays have been produced in the New York Shakespeare Festival, The Nuyorican Poets Cafe & elsewhere. Roland Legiard-Laura is a performance poet whose readings have been set on the Staten Island Ferry, in the Life Cafe, at the Museum of Modern Art & elsewhere. From 1978 to 1982 he organized "Words to Go" & "P.O.E.T." His poems have appeared in numerous magazines including *BOMB*, *Appearances*, *Me Magazine* & *Telephone* #19 among others. Donation: \$3.00.

November 18: **Eric Bogosian & Alison Rooney.** Donation: \$3.00

November 20: **Robert Gluck & Leslie Scalapino.** Robert Gluck, Poet and critic is the author of *Jack the Modernist* (Seahorse), *Reader* (Lapis, forthcoming) & *La Fontaine* with Bruce Boone (Black Star). Currently he is the Assistant Director of the Poetry Center at San Francisco State. His poems and stories have appeared in *Ironwood*, *this*, *The World, Social Text*, *Telephone*, *Christopher Street* & others. Leslie Scalapino lives in San Francisco where she taught at the New College. North Point Press has published two volumes of her poems: *Considering How Exaggerated Music Is* & the newly released *That They Were At The Beach*. Her poems have appeared in a wide selection of magazines. Donation: \$3.00.

November 23: **Saturday Night St. Mark's Theater Reading** hosted by **Elinor Nauen. To Be Announced.** Donation: \$3.00.

November 24: **Sunday Night St. Mark's Talks** with host **Charles Bernstein.** "Subject Matter: A Forum" with **Lydia Davis, Robert Gluck & Nick Piombino.** Donation: \$3.00.

November 25: A slide presentation by photographer **Larry Clark.** Donation: \$3.00.

November 27: **August Kleinzahler & Phillip Lopate.** August Kleinzahler is a critically acclaimed poet whose first major book, *Storm Over Hackensack* (Moyer Bell, 1985) is causing quite a stir. Originally a New Jerseyan, he grew up in New York City. His poems have appeared in *Kenyon Review*, *Sulfur*, *Art International* & *Harper's*. He is a 1983 recipient of the G.E. Foundation Award for Younger Writers. Phillip Lopate is the author of several books of prose & poetry including *Bachelorhood* (Arbor House), *The Eyes Don't Always Want to Stay Open* (Sun) & the influential *Journal of a Living Experiment* (Teacher & Writers Collaborative, 1979) which is a noted "bible" of the Poets in the Schools movement. He is currently an associate professor of English in the University of Houston's Creative Writing Program. Donation: \$3.00.

ALL PROGRAMS BEGIN AT 8 P.M.

Free Writing Workshops:

Tuesday Workshops with James Sherry; November 5, 12, 19. Workshop focuses on the reading of text and how that reading affects the writer's own work. 7 p.m. Workshop lasts two hours.

Friday Night Workshops with Susie Timmons. Workshop open to all writers. 7 p.m. Workshop lasts 2 hours.

Saturday Workshops 12:30 p.m. with Alice Notley. Requirements include "the completion of a book of poems during the course of the year."

Workshops are open to writers and are held in the Parish Hall. Contributions are welcome.

Submissions for The World #42 are now being accepted. The deadline is December 31, 1985. All materials should be accompanied by a SASE & addressed to: The World, Steve Levine, editor, The Poetry Project, St. Mark's Church-In-The-Bowery, 10th Street & 2nd Avenue, New York, New York 10003.

Submissions for the Spring '86 issue of B-City are now being accepted. Deadline: 12/31/85. B-City, Connie Deanovich, editor, 619 West Surf Street, Chicago, Illinois 60657.

Readings at The Poetry Project
with host John Fisk
Tuesday at 3PM & Wednesday at 11PM
WBAI 99.5 FM

Available to local radio stations nationwide via NPR satellite on channel 9 Tuesdays 3PM

A Festival of Japanese Poetry

The Committee for International Poetry will host two days of bi-lingual readings on Thursday November 7 & Friday November 8 at the Cooper Union's Great Hall of 7th Street & 3rd Avenue. The poets scheduled to read are Shuntaro Tanikawa, Japan's most popular poet; Kazuko Shiraishi, legendary performer & poet; Ryusei Hasegawa, Gozo Yoshimasu, Mutsuo Takahashi & Nanao Sakaki. A single evening's admission will cost \$6.00 while a package including both nights will cost \$10.00. For further information dial 718-855-3658.



BOOKS RECEIVED

Crossing Map by Liliane Lijn published by Thames and Hudson, 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10110. \$14.95.

The Iron Curtain of Love by Andy Clausen. Oratorical thunder out of the West via Bryant, Lindsay, Mayakovsky and Willie Nelson, published by Long Shot, N.J.'s best publishers. \$3.95.

Fatal Pleasure by Sam Hamill. A tough elegance reflects on loss and what clings to ruin. Breitenbush Books, P.O. Box 01237, Portland, Oregon 97202.

The Commander of Dead Leaves by Stanley Noyes with graphics by Fritz Scholder. Tooth of Time Books, 634 East Garcia. Santa Fe, New Mexico 97501.

Hidden Proofs by Bill Mohr. Bombshelter Press, 6421 1/2 Orange Street, Los Angeles, California 90048. \$4.95. "... his passion, dazzlingly apparent at every turn, imbues the whole with great strength." Dennis Cooper.

Water Burial by Jeanne Lance. e.g., a literary press, P.O. Box 3458, Berkeley, California 94703. \$3.00

Where The Island Sleeps Like A Wing by Nancy Morejon translated from the Spanish by Kathleen Weaver. "She is a woman from old/new Havana celebrating rebirth of the world that comes from redholes in chests, from dust storms in revolution wombs..." says Jayne Cortez. Black Scholar Press, Box 7106, San Francisco, California 94120. \$7.95.

Anarchadium Pan by Carl Watson. An appreciation of American Life in the guts of a sausage maker. A raw mauling this one, by a poet who can wield a cleaver with all the grace of a fencing foil. Erie Street Press, 221 South Clinton, Oak Park, Illinois 60302. \$4.95.

Critical Minutes by Mary Stewart Kean. The daily drudge transfigured by precise and dancing words. Kean writes with a clear, astute whimsy. Rocky Lodge Cottage Editions, 2227 West Nicholl Street, Boulder, Colorado 80302. \$5.00.

3 Zero: Turning Thirty edited by Jeff Wright and Elinor Nauen. Nicely designed commiserations and celebrations on becoming not that old; Codrescu, Notley, Rosenthal, Masters and a host of other adults. Hard Press, 340, East 11th Street/New York, New York 10003.

Poems 1959-1975 by Yves Bonnefoy, translated by Richard Pevear. Vintage Books, New York. \$7.95.

OUCH! We regret the following errors in **Tim Dlugos'** response to **Robert Anblan's** letter in **Issue 115 of The Newsletter**, 2nd paragraph, 1st line should read, "making me a partisan." 3rd paragraph, lines 7 & 8 should read, "as there have been in developing countries with many forms of government. But Arenas isn't disputing statistics about better dental care..." 4th paragraph, 5th line should read, "... mediates the experience of the people far better than political doctrine. Mr. Anblan disdains such inconsequential 'subjective truth' with the certitude of Roman Curial officers who declared for centuries that 'error has no rights.' That's why he insists..." Line 11 should read, "what is happening here and now. As someone who grew up Catholic I'm familiar with notions of objective truth." JR



By Mark Rogers

NOVEMBER'S

PRO

ET

RY

MON
NITE

PERFORMANCE/POETRY
HOST RICHARD ELOVICH 8 PM \$3

- 4 OPEN PERFORMANCES & READINGS FREE
- 11 MAROUN AZOURI, CHAZZ DEAN/JAMES SIENA & KAREN FINLEY
- 18 ERIC BOGOSIAN & ALISON ROONEY
- 25 LARRY CLARK

WED
NITE

READINGS
HOSTS EILEEN MYLES & PATRICIA JONES 8 PM \$3

- 6 NEW AUSTRALIAN POETS:
DOROTHY HEWETT, P/O, GEOFF PAGE & JOHN A. SCOTT
INTRODUCTION BY LYN TRANTER
- 13 LOUIS ELAINE GRIFFITH & ROLAND LEGIARDI—LAURA
- 20 ROBERT GLUCK & LESLIE SCALAPINO
- 27 AUGUST KLEINZAHLER & PHILLIP LOPATE

SAT
NITE

THEATER READING
HOST ELINOR NAUEN 8 PM \$3

- 23 "OUR VERSION OF HEAVEN"
BY BOB ROSENTHAL & JOHNNY STANTON

SUN
NITE

ST. MARK'S TALKS
HOST CHARLES BERNSTEIN 8 PM \$3

- 24 "SUBJECT MATTER: A FORUM"
W/ LYDIA DAVIS, ROBERT GLUCK & NICK PIOMBINO

WORK
SHOPS

5, 12, 19 **READING WORKSHOP**
JAMES SHERRY 7 PM FREE

1, 8, 15, 22, 29 **POETRY WORKSHOP**
SUSIE TIMMONS 7 PM FREE

2, 9, 16, 23, 30 **MASTER CLASS**
ALICE NOTLEY 12:30 PM FREE

SPECIAL
EVENT

- 3 **READING, CELEBRATION AND BOOK PARTY
FOR THE COLLECTED POEMS OF
PAUL BLACKBURN**
5 PM \$5

**THE POETRY
PROJECT**
AT
ST MARK'S CHURCH 2 AVE & 10 ST
NEW YORK
CITY 10003
212.674.0910

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BEYOND ABSTRACTION

BLOOMSDAY by Jackson Mac Low

Station Hill Press, Barrytown, NY 12507. 102 pages. \$5.95.

By Tom Savage

Wordstar processed words proofreading reading the truth Mr. James Joyce did or did not grow flowers separating words from their contexts to allow them to bounce against one another in a book traveling fast. The speed of light speeds into through and past a black hole, leaving some touches of gray along the way. Remembrance. Reminiscence. Each poem is difference. Each time you read the same poem again it's a different poem. Did the change happen while you were reading or while it appeared to be resting? How consciousness moves in and through and around words, changing them and leaving them the same. Even opacity registers in the end. When unconsciousness speaks nobody listens but somebody hears. The dictionary expands and contracts as it breathes in new words and rearranges old syllables to make even newer words since somehow we understand them without knowing anything more than their names. Moving into and out of meaning is a breathing we all go through. The plenum and the vacuum meet and intermingle after dancing. How one word absorbs another so that it cannot any longer be separated and still be the same. Prithee? Mountains have their feet on the ground and their heads in the clouds at the same time. Resist the business infection. Somebody's got to do it say Apocalypse Jones in his Cabbagepatch Hollywood Armageddon. What purity words have we owe to grammar payable in the present moment always spring where the boys are what great poem was every really "easy," anyway? the master's first disciples replace the henchmen at the palace gate. Read: superintendents intend to repair a store on the beach in fervent array the balm at the end of the mind: balancing unreal word worlds with the threat of war. A review may be a parallel text though not a skeleton key (agh!) when they have to give you a picture with the word, does that mean they can't explain it? To find or be found for a fugue of plants or plantings and machines a catena is not a kasina but could probably be used for such like ginseng toothpaste always the unexpected

You type an & and people don't think (or hear inside their heads) an ampersand, they think "and." It's only when you write out the word "ampersand" that people who know what the word means will respond mentally with an "&" selling the question to the answer there are different modes we can work in the uvula plays its role in pregnant song words per hour or words per page this harmony is a text/digestion in to get caught up in the game of time wouldn't you know if someone close to you were dead? a little cheese of a boat can the hunchbacked moon become full? Only in manifest and unmanifest sense of humor was Fletcher Christian descended from a priest who made arrows? Naughty boy the manticore's mandora swept around a trope off the Baleares what happens to the

word wilderness if you pronounce it merged with the word wild tonnes of /ha swallowing caged in vellum the little ox slides ouch! a cellular car phone when did that piano become a liana? Human beings are not yet out of style was used for bullets by the U.S. military in Madrid at least three burnt-out cars. Sever all financial ties with depression A review is a response somebody is listening although nobody hears there's a chance of rain tonight but think about that tomorrow as the saying goes so goes Chaucer's crossword alexandrines positioned against day's antimatter of just one more little mountain to climb a refreshment a tenement of rose breath where all of us live

A Degree of Hardness

By Mitch Highfill

Jackson Mac Low's endless exploration of form has often earned him the reputation of an abstract poet, devoid of content and accessibility. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, Mac Low is very concrete; that is, he deals with words as real, solid things, not as the abstractions of more conventional poets. For Mac Low, there lies a variety of meanings in each word. A sentence becomes the challenge of putting these powers in one place. Like all great poetry, the reader will come away from the poem with what he/she brings to it. In a poem like "We Just Stood Idly By," Mac Low states the case for this kind of writing:

Mixed clouds and sun tomorrow
will determine where what would have been
might have gone.

The lines coil around the "what" and the "where." The perception is not muddy, but just manages to stay this side of coherence. The entire poem teeters on the brink of meaning.

In various combinations
the explorers push their way through toxic
wastes. The sky was placed beside itself.

The explorers being the reader, the sky is both the word sky and the thing to which it refers. Decentralization. Mac Low conjures up the language Republican environmentalists use to convince their constituency of their desire to protect the very thing which they endeavor to destroy.

the organisms
found themselves beside the margin
though policies were otherwise.
It did not want to.

What it? The it? The sky? The policy? No, the language. One of the strengths of this book is that many of the poems expose the mechanisms of newspeak and the resultant apathy among those who watch the news and read the papers. What might words do to effect change in spite of official corruption? "We can get a degree of hardness."

Mac Low's poetry is different every time I come to it. The

vocabulary sends me to the dictionary, but not tediously, as if I were reading the works of a writer who wears out big words to show how smart he is. I go to the dictionary out of curiosity and delight. Mac Low works with the language as a living force, not as a dead horse; "Where to start senses birth." I get the feeling that these poems are reborn line by line and word by word. Keats' negative capability in action. When Jackson says, "I regard the prospect of being spied on/as an opportunity to teach," I reach for my binoculars. I read and reread "Various Meanings," finding the title to be true. Here there are no set rules, no easy answers, no stock phrases.

When read aloud the work forces the reader to enunciate very carefully. Sometimes the rhythms are delicate, as in "Cohost Provided," other times they are circular or repetitious, as in the catenas. Mac Low sounds Chaucerian in the narrative performance poems called "Winds/Instruments." In some of the poems, the lines are jagged and barely sensible, but in "The Psychological Aspects of the Threat of Nuclear War," Jackson talks in "plain speech."

Unlike many previous collections of Mac Low's work, *Bloomsday* presents a lot of narrative poems. These poems are strange in that they proceed in linear fashion, even though the subjects are completely unexpected. In one piece, Mac Low says, "Piano Treatment induces shoes." The story comes across without being metaphorical. The piano treatment quoted above is not a metaphor for something else, here Mac Low is referring to a piano treatment. Real shoes are induced. When Jackson talks about a family of otters in another poem, he means a family of otters. The narratives read as fact. The facts read as texture, "fearing whatever were weird." Through narrative, Mac Low gets at the difference between the so-called "inside story" and the actual happening. This is partly because the actual happening is within the world of language, "as the eyes are unsealed and the world flows in as light."

The caliber of this writing is demanding. One might expect difficult rhythms and obtuse lines from a poet who uses systematic chance operations in composition, but it is surprising to note that most of the poems in this collection were not chance-generated. In 1985, it is encouraging to find a poet who can break away from the conventional sentence; liberate meaning from the confines of officialdom, and who can still write great poetry. When reading this work, I suspend judgment. "Feet do your stuffy ziggags," says Mac Low, dancing on the edge of syntax. Nouns take on verbal functions: adjectives describe impossible pronouns; adverbs take on new powers. The poet takes on the federal budget, the military industrial complex, and the "earless newspaper office" with the same wit and integrity he applies to the sentence itself. Mac Low completely disarms the dogmatism usually associated with political poetry while writing explicitly political poetry.

Bloomsday is my favorite collection of Jackson Mac Low's work to date. There are so many different modes of writing represented here, several of which are composed systematically ("Antic Quatrains," "Converging Stanzas," and "Winds/Instruments"). A wealth of new projective forms point the way to an exciting future. The combination of Mac Low's amazing chance-generated masterpieces with his quirky lyrics is what reading-writing is all about.

I guess the most telling thing I can say about this book is that I always want to turn on my typewriter after reading it.

The Isle Of The Little God

by Mary Ferrari

Kulchur Foundation, 888 Park Avenue, N.Y.C. 10021
Paper \$3.50. Hardcover \$7.00.

This is Mary Ferrari's third book of poems. Two earlier collections are *The Flying Glove* (Adventures in Poetry) and *The Mockingbird and other poems* (Swollen Magpie Press).

The Isle Of The Little God features Mary Ferrari's poems from 1964 to 1985 more or less in chronological order. It is a beautifully written book, a great pleasure to own and read over and over again. Mary Ferrari is a strong poet who deserves to be widely recognized. Whether she writes about cigarettes or cities, children or fireworks, her poems have one thing in common, they are exciting. Each moves in several directions and has many layers; humor, paths, literal and political references as well as everyday occurrences. Although Mary Ferrari can be light in tone, she's not afraid to move in and out of shadows. And she takes risks. She's not afraid to get involved in controversial, political issues or to reveal what's deeply personal. Her poems are usually understated and always honest. Emily Dickinson and Chopin rub shoulders with the President, Cinderella and Mary Magdalene. And always in the middle of a conflict there is a touch of Mary Ferrari's brand of humor.

I hear a mockingbird
I hear a phone call from a doctor
The crazy magnolia blossom has turned brown turned senile
I'm no longer afraid of it
I tell the doctor I am fairly active
Sexually? he asks.
No, I'm visiting my mother.
Urologists are just as funny as psychiatrists
The magnolia looks innocent
as long as it stays on the tree
if you pick it it becomes the mad dog
that bit me on Holy Thursday.

(from "The Mockingbird")

Kenneth Koch has a definite influence here; so have the French surrealists, especially Apollinaire. At times Mary Ferrari writes intimate accounts of her experiences, but unlike Anne Sexton and other confessional poets she keeps a part of herself in another corner, and that part is able to philosophize and poke fun at any given situation. This head-on clash between tragedy and humor is what makes Mary Ferrari's poems moving and unique. There is a great deal of variety in this book, all the way from the lyrical "July at Dawn" to wild fantasies such as "A Woman in Black in Bomboola" in which

Nuns have become prostitutes in Bomboola
Sister Maureen, the principal of the only Catholic girls' school
in Bomboola has turned the school
into a house of prostitution
I am shocked
I am not shocked
I ask if I may enter
because all the bourbon and blood.
have ruined my gray madonna dress.

These poems are well crafted, full of surprising turns and vivid images. They never lapse into boredom or sentimentality. Although some of the poems take the reader to the far corners of the earth—places like Africa and Siberia—Mary Ferrari's writing is just as intriguing when it creates the mood of an ordinary day.

After Mark's talk I take a taxi to
the 125th street station and wait
for the 10:35 among some drunks and
a sober priest reading *The Post*
(at least I don't think it's *The Daily News*) I put my hand in my
pocket which is full of small smooth
beige acorns which John gave me
yesterday to keep forever.

—By Annette Hayne

(from "Wednesday, October 14th")

TWO BOOKS OF AUSTRIAN POETRY

AUSTRIAN POETRY TODAY
Edited by Milne Holton and Herbert Kuhner
Schocken Books, New York. Cloth \$25.50

THE VIENNA GROUP
Translated and edited by Rosmarie Waldrop
and Harriet Watts
Station Hill Press, Barrytown, New York. Paper \$6.95

Poets in New York and New Jersey share a common language. Just for fun, imagine that the other Atlantic states each have a different language, all very different from New York and New Jersey. Interstate 95 might allow these language groups to mix and to mingle, but New York would remain the dominant culture and language in the area.

Imagine further that in earlier times New Jersey was a large empire that covered the southern half of New York State, the mid-Atlantic states and more, but is now a small, independent republic, almost an appendage to New York, and serves as a crossroads to the northern and southern states along the Atlantic. Caught between the grandeur of its past and the present cultural dominance of New York, and the different languages of surrounding states, New Jersey makes the assertion that its poetic identity is distinguished from New York by its different use of their common language. Is such an assertion a case of exaggerated nuance? or is it a legitimate case for the unique sensibility of New Jerseyans, a sort of "negative capability" among the poets of New Jersey that defines them as a group.

These hypothetical complications exist in fact for Austria and its poets. With its grand past in the Austro-Hungarian Empire of the Hapsburgs, and its less grand past as an annex to "greater Germany," Austria established its stable political identity after World War II with a new constitution. But its cultural identity, especially seen from afar in America, still falls in the shadow of neighboring Germany. Sharing with the larger country its language, annoyingly called German, and its traditions, Austria is crowded into middle Europe by the Slavic languages, and Hungarian and Italian. Crossroads between East and West and the point of intersection for so many cultures and dialects, Vienna appears at times like some sort of cognitive Jacuzzi for Indo-European linguists. Nevertheless, Austrian culture, though seemingly eclipsed on all sides, draws character and charisma from these uncertainties and its best literature vibrates richly with *analytic* insight, mystical hope and gloom, and a warmth of exuberance and humor.

The anthology *Austrian Poetry Today*, edited and translated by Milne Holton and Herbert Kuhner presents contemporary Austrian poetry as a "separately viable tradition," whose singularity derives from the Austrians; "linguistic self-consciousness." One thinks of Frege and Wittgenstein, Fritz Mauthner, Musil and Broch, Hofmannsthal, Rilke and Trakl, and agrees. The so-called "Sprachkrise" or "crisis of language" at the turn of the century sent shock waves through the German-speaking world and beyond, and created new conditions for the imaginative use of language. One might say of German and Austrian literature in the 20th century, in a soccer analogy, that if Germany owns the field and the ball, Austria wrote the rules of the game and delivers some of the most subtle and adroit players.

The editors state their thesis and conclusion in one sentence, "Somehow... that autonomous Austrian literature has become an irrefutable certainty." Happily, they don't belabor the point, but instead let the poetry speak for itself. The anthology is an accomplishment of discretion and careful taste, designed for the "presentation of new poems" to an English-speaking audience. Divided into four generations according to birthdate, each poet receives only several pages. At first, one feels that such short selections won't allow the reader to get a sense of the poet's personal idiom, but at every clip one's curiosity and interest are piqued by the wit, insight, mood or meter of a poem, until one admires the ability of each poet, in his or her own way (and indirectly, the ability of the editors) to capture the reader into intimacy with a short poem.

The selection of poets ranges from the most famous, the internationally private Paul Celan, whose inclusion as an Austrian is not explained, to the little-known mystical poet "Christine Lavant," and from the traditional, edifying Ernst Schonwiese to the bad boy of Austrian-German letters Peter Handke, from Erich Fried's sharply analytic assault on complacency in his political poetry to the despair of the suicide Otto Laaber, from Josef Mayer-Limberg's vituperations in dialect to the cool typographical puns of Gerhard Rühm and Friedrich Achleitner. Roughly speaking, the poets align themselves in Austria either as "conservatives and traditionalists" or as adversaries and experimentalists; the tension of factional dispute underlies the collection and spans the chronological range of the anthology. The editors note each writer's affiliation in short biographical introductions.

The Austrian P.E.N. Club appears as a redoubt of conservatism, the bastion of what Gerhard Fritsch calls the "stylistic dictatorship of conservatism" in Austrian literature;

outside of P.E.N. we find the liberating experiments of the Vienna Group and Graz Group and different mavericks, whose sources and influences ignore Austrian borders while vociferously at home within them. The general alignment implies nationalism in poetry versus internationalism. The editors have us read a great number of very different poets in the context of their shared surroundings; the passions of principled commitment to a particular vision of poetry, whether conservative or experimental, animate the anthology, even within the P.E.N. Club. Compare for example Wilhelm Szabo's mock of the experimentalist as "the Dior of poetry," or his paeon to provincialism, "You, my friend, reserve a seat on the flight/to Canton, Tanking, and Nanking/.../But I,/A stay-at-home/console myself with words..." to Josef Mayer-Limberg's uncomplimentary epithets in his poem "Austrians," where he concludes: "eternally neutral/eternally/a smelly cheese."

Once beyond the ideological divide, one is free to enjoy a variety of poetic sensibilities: Jutta Schutting's friendly charm, titled "you laugh— and balloons descend from the sky"; Helmut Zenker's personal devastation "in poems/i hide behind/barricades made of words/because i'm speechless"; Peter Henisch's note on historical tragedy, "those who bear witness to darkness/are countless" Peter Handke's cliché-breaking taunt, "Hey, you on the corner/we already know/the story of the loneliness of modern man/So don't stand there all night/on that windy corner!"; Ernst Jandl's sensual sadness, "ourmouth/our hands/adieu / adieu!"; the olfactory surprise of Gerhard Rühm's bouquet, "the tulip shits on the lawn/the violet farts in the gardener's hand"; the excruciating delicacy of Michael Guttenbrenner's "Val D'Annivier": "A long swaying branch/spread above the chasm/dense/with hanging vil-lages/as if weighed down/by fruit./ Like grapes in green foliage,/they hang there:/ Chandolin, Vissoie, St. Luc,/St. Jean, Grimetz, Ayer,/high up, seething in light."

The translations are excellent, clear and never verbose. As evidence of their touch look at the editors' rendering of Paul Celan's soft, lipping consonant seductions in the poem "Erratic." My only reservation about the volume is the dull brown corduroy jacket, a mistake not made by Rosmarie Waldrop and Harriet Watts, editors and translators of *The Vienna Group: Six Major Austrian Poets*, whose electric red softcover and bright yellow inside flap set the tone for the lexical pyrotechnics within.

Compared to the breadth of *Austrian Poetry Today*, *The Vienna Group* focuses on the core of post-war experimentalism in the poetry of H.C. Artmann, Friederike Mayrocker, Gerhard Rühm, Ernst Jandl, Friedrich Achleitner and Konrad Bayer. Bayer's suicide in 1964 marked the end of the group after about a decade, but the others have continued to exert a strong presence in European poetry. Through dialect, dialog, collages, montages, manipulations, concretions, repetitions, associations, these poets wreck up language for its own good and for the fun of all. They explode their language at its precipice and let it avalanche across the page, or they erect from the rubble and rumble of daily usage an edifice of stolen semantics.

The Vienna Group is a romp through the best of Austrian poetry that excites the eye, frenzies the ear and titillates the cerebrum. *Austrian Poetry Today* will tickle your interest in a lot of individual poets and in the full range of Austrian poetry; *The Vienna Group* is the type of book you'll turn to for the luxuriant satisfaction of the localized itch.

—Neil Donahue

3 by Jeff Wright

Carrier

The longer I live,
the older I get,
the more ragged my colors
drawn before the sky
do drag through vertical
courts, ravaged by wind
of opinion and desire, hunger and lack of fresh air,
booze and smoke, kisses and smirks.
I am thereby become pure,
pure jade venom, emerald green
and deadly to all
save the divine immune
whom I love beyond blinding pain.

Proof

How resolutely I have become
otiose, selectively dancing inside.

In contrast we offer a proof,
committing this miracle.

Exposure alone makes an impression,
severely thirsty for what would

have been home; trusting only
prior justice. But you,

you need to travel horizontally.
The imposed pressure is a vessel.

Here we spy on the black sky
and spur our chargers past dust

having set out to surpass
the capacity of any serenity.

Fiddlesticks

I fear nothing
so much as my mouth
which I cherish
utterly for its shock.

Look up and see your new master.
Can nothing stop it?
You wanna drag?
I'll show you what speed's about .

Ultra Sound on.
Image sensors fixed.
I got a book for you .
Train Ride by Ted Berrigan.

Now we all know what it means
to be free, anchored to the sky.

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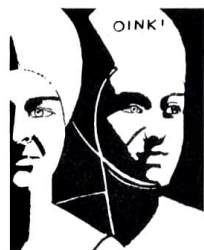
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James Ruggia, Editor

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"A cri de coeur
against provincialism"

—*Exquisite Corpse*

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MAGAZINES RECEIVED

Indiana Review, Vol. 8 #2. Editor Erin Mc Graw. Essays, Fiction and Poetry From Indiana University. 216 North Jordan Avenue, Bloomington, Indiana 47405. \$4.00.

Grain, Vol. 13 #1. Edited by Brenda Richards, Box 1154, Regina, Saskatchewan, S4P 3B4 Canada. The poetry of Guy Birchard stands out here. Hard and taut descriptions of the coal mines. \$3.00.

The New York Quarterly, #26. Editor William Packard. Poetry by Ginsberg, Bukowski, Dugan, Mac Low, Rukeyser & Sexton, among others. Issue opens with selections from interviews revolving around craft. P.O. Box 693, Old Chelsea Station, New York, New York 1113. \$5.00.

The Portable Lower East Side, Vol.2, #1. Edited by Kurt Hollander. This mag maintains a strong attachment to its neighborhood with work by Ginsberg, Savage, Kupferberg, Paley and others orbiting one of America's most powerful cultural dynamos. \$4.00.

River Styx, #17. Editors: Jan Garden Castro and Quincy Troupe. Interview with Susan Sontag. Poems by Gass, Clampitt, Hudspeth, Halpern and others. Fiction and photos. 1925 7th Avenue, H4, 7L/New York, New York 10016.

The Agni Review, #22. Edited by Sharon Dunn. Poetry, fiction and an essay on modern Irish poetry by Seamus Heaney. P.O. Box 660, Amherst, Massachusetts 01004. \$4.00.

Chicano-Riquena, Vol. 13, #1. editors: Julian Olivares and Jose Saldivar. Poetry reviews and Fiction of Hispanic America. University of Houston, University Park, Houston, Texas 77004.

Action #5, edited by Jim Cohn. As well as being a marvelous poet, Cohn is a terrific talent scout. #5 features Chan McKenzie, Wendy Low and Finvola Drury. 21 Sensualist Press, 47 Erion Crescent, Rochester, New York 14607.

Special Thanks to Denise Barbieri, Greg Masters & Wolfgang Lackinger for their invaluable help in putting together this issue. J.R.

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