

# THE POETRY PROJECT

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# Helsinki Diary

by Ron Padgett

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I go for my first walk in Finland. One block away from the hotel (the Hotel Vacuuna), a car pulls up and a man gets out and asks me, in what I assume is Finnish, "Where is the Hotel Vacuuna?" I point. He says something grateful and heads toward the hotel. I sit down and write this. I like Finland.

Helsinki architecture: stone and brick, ornate designs and embellishments, like old Stockholm (which I've never seen), with grotesque figures on façades that are 19th-century crypto-Egyptian, monolithic, graceful, heavy, and slightly sad, next to vooming modernissimo chic, with a little touch of downtown Reykjavik thrown in.

Reflected in a shop window, how Scandinavian I look.

On the menu: "Hot Finnish cheese with cloudberryes."

You keep feeling it's getting darker, but it isn't. The light just *stays* there.

6/20

On my hotel room balcony, I realize that a sudden blast of wind could tear the glasses from my head and hurl them to the pavement eight floors below. There isn't even a breeze.

Driving in from Helsinki airport yesterday, the trees — pine, balsam, fir, birch, poplar — had reminded me of Vermont, made me want to "be" with the trees there.

FINNAIR thin air.

Second-day air: It's that feeling of almost uncontrollable joy that comes over you on the second day in a new and attractive city. The blast of newness of the first day — buildings and language and where is the hotel coming at you so fast you can only fly through them — has worn off. Now you have a pocket full of money, your bags are out at the airport, the rest of the group has gone on to Moscow without you, it's not your fault your visa was lost, and you're free of all obligations on this beautiful early summer day, with clear, clean air and sunlight pouring over and around everything, the esplanade, the pink granite of the Nordic train station, the radiant face of the dark Finnish girl at the hotel desk, smiling at you slightly as you walk away.

Something happens to me every time I go into a really good bookstore in a foreign country. In Helsinki it's the Akateeminen Kirjakauppa (Academic Bookstore), which has a huge stock of books from around the world and in different languages. In Finnish the works of Dostoyevsky are displayed next to those of Victoria Holt. Here the books in English look so exotic that I am seized by the desire to read, for example, all the Penguin classics tonight. Medieval comedies in French. Cervantes in Swedish. Then my eye falls on the cover of the Swedish edition of Kathy Acker's new book, and next to it Paul Auster's, and my heart sinks. My work and the work of my old friends are not here, the work of the strange, excited, and now somewhat unfashionable young poets of the early 1960s. We came, and then we went. Some went all the way off the map of life, and some of us have continued to have it in our heads that we will just keep writing — despite our jealousy and self-pity — just as I am doing now, with people strolling past this park bench, extraterrestrial Finnish men and beautiful Finnish women, a nice little breeze at my back, and now a drunk staggering around as an old guy with an accordion squeezes the nineteenth century out into the air around us.

A few minutes ago a woman sat down next to me, folded her arms, and just sat. Her curiosity is aroused: what is this man writing, his brows "beetled," in that little notebook? Why doesn't he get a bigger one? She doesn't know that she has just entered these pages, complete with her red patent-leather sandals, especially the one on her left foot, rotating clockwise. Hello, shoes that William Carlos Williams would have loved — red toenails too. When I stand up to leave, I notice her blonde hair, make-up, and red plastic earrings; she's at least 70.

The intensity of young European intellectuals is gorgeous when it's leavened with a sense of humor.

This is the Europe that Valéry Larbaud wrote about in the "Sweden" section of his poem "Europe":



*Stromparterren, square where one drinks, at the water's edge,  
As if in the water, and under a bridge, with leaves overhead,  
In the evening, caloric punch. . . .*

In the window of the health food bar late at night: tray upon tray of sprouts standing straight up, exactly the same height, bright green crew cuts on display in perfect silence.

ESKIMOJAATELOA: Eskimo pie.

According to this map, there are no golf courses in Lapland.

6/21

Third-day letdown: It occurs to me that any last day anywhere is an erasure in progress, so why let this one bother me? One and a half hour tour of Helsinki harbor: nice to be on a boat moving over water, but the fellow tourists are more interesting than the sights, except for seeing Helsinkians washing their rugs by hand at the open-air do-it-yourself rug-cleaning area on the shore. "The sea water brightens the colors," intones the tour voice. Uh hunh.

Afterward, at the open-air market, I buy fresh strawberries and carrots and some pastries, and go sit on a park bench. As the smell of what must be the city sewer keeps wafting past, two passersby stop in their tracks to watch me eat. Then they approach, one a middle-aged woman with a glazed, haggard expression, the other a big rawboned guy about thirty wearing a T-shirt whose cutoff sleeves reveal brawny biceps and massive tattoos. He's drunk too. He mutters to me in Finnish, then English. I pretend I'm French, but he keeps looming closer and closer. As I stand up to leave, the two of them stagger away, and my eyes meet those of a tall, willowy lad loping along in khaki shorts and ragged tennis shoes. He is coated with several weeks of dirt. He gives me a deeply maniacal and angry glare and stamps his foot hard, and something in me snaps: I growl: "So fuck you."

By the time I get to the airport and manage to convince the FinnAir duty officer to "sticker" my ticket so I can use it on Aeroflot today, I'm winding down emotionally. Goodbye, Finland.

As directed, I check my bags at the FinnAir counter. The clerk tells me, "We'll take your bags, but we don't know when the flight will leave, or even if it will leave today. There's an air traffic controllers' strike in progress. It started an hour ago. I have no more information."

At this moment you are walking to work in New

York. I get inside my mind and shout, as loud as I can in there, "Happy Anniversary!"

A few hours later the strike is over and the Moscow flight appears on the departure board, but with no gate listed. The board goes clickety-click and says Moscow: A8. I go to A8. Airline woman says, "Stockholm only."

"But the departure board says gate A8 for Moscow. This gate."

"Sorry," she says, "go check the board. This is Stockholm."

I go back and check the board. Moscow: A8. So I hasten to the Information Counter, where the Information woman is being beleaguered by frenzied passengers. She tells me her computer is all backed up by the strike, and that I'll just have to listen for an announcement over the public address system. I ask her where the Aeroflot ticket counter is.

"There isn't one."

It takes a moment for this information to sink in: I'm flying with an airline that doesn't even have a ticket counter.

Endless airport *No Exit* time drags on, each minute longer than the last, with crazed passengers surging around me. There is a steady stream of announcements, each one in Finnish, then in Swedish, then in something like English. I thumb through a discarded copy of *Corriere della Sera*: crisi, violenti e brutale, etc. In the back of my mind, a voice asks, "Did she just say something that had the word *Moscow* in it?" I rush to the departure board. Yes, but now it's gate A7. I go to A7. Everyone there suddenly stands up and starts down some stairs. I follow. We board a bus that immediately pulls away, whisking us to what feels like the far end of the last runway, and there, before my very eyes, is a big jet plane, with AEPOFLOT across its side.

As I step inside the plane, I'm hit simultaneously with the smell of old cooking oil and the sight of the ugliest stewardess I've ever seen: bright blue circles around her eyes that seem to melt down into her drooping jowls. I look for my seat, 8C in non-smoking, but I don't see any numbers at all. I show the boarding pass to the other stewardess. She laughs and says, in English, "Just sit you like anywhere." I go to the back, which I have all to myself, and where, when this tin can goes down, I will have a slightly higher chance of surviving than the other unfortunates on this flight. ЖАСТЕГНУb PEMHN! ("Fasten your belts!")

As we take off, some upbeat synthesizer music comes on, but the engine noise is so loud that all you can hear is the rhythm track's *ch-ch-ch-ch*. In fact the whine of the engine is so shrill it hurts my ears — they forgot the muffler on this one. And because the stewardesses didn't bother to close the doors on the overhead compartments, some luggage in them slides out and crashes into the aisle as we take off. No reassuring chat from the pilot, either; he's too busy changing altitudes, up and down, up and down. Then the stewardesses return, but this time there are three of them, and the third one's a tall brunette with high cheekbones and pink cheeks. I mean, she's a knockout, and she



smiles! But "my" stewardess plants her face in front of mine and demands, "Wine, mineral water, joose" without the question mark.

"Joose."

She plunks down a plastic glass with a muddy liquid in it. I take a sip. It's prune juice. I think. Wait. Now I'm not sure what it is. Joose.

A little dinner tray arrives, with plastic Cro-Magnon utensils. As I try to cut into the turkey, I flip the pineapple ring right out onto the aisle floor. Meanwhile the pilot is still practicing going up and down.

"Coffee, tea," my stewardess states.

"Kofye," I answer, using a Russian accent.

She plunks it down, sans milk, and wobbles back up the aisle. I manage to get some of the foodstuffs from my tray into my mouth, but about half way through the meal, she returns, this time with a steward. Say, how many flight attendants do they have stowed away up there, anyway? These two stand next to me until I surrender. I hold out the tray for the steward, a gangly blond kid.

"You keep," he states.

"Spaseeba, nyet," I answer. "No, thank you."

Good thing, too, because now the plane is plummeting through the clouds. The words *final descent* take on new meaning. The sign comes on again: "Fasten your belts!"

Anything you say, babe.

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### Going to a Game with You

is even more fun than going to L.A.  
to see my words in her mouth  
or following your prelude & hankering for an interlude  
at a ballpark in Toronto New York San Francisco  
or Boston where Cousin Bip's crazy mom  
might take us to dinner & a miracle play  
where the blue of your shirt would blond up your smile  
so I liked looking at it and you  
liked baseball in a smoke-ridden nightclub  
in such a way that the windows roll down  
& curves blow through my head  
toolin' the prairie on a high summer night  
singing this field forever  
through concrete  
to the green  
of every ball park we approach  
from the dark to the day  
we drive  
somewhere  
it's always a game

And we are not cheated of experience or hope  
as we trace by starlight the roads where we played in the sun

And we are not cheated of anything to come  
for I can sing of it & you haunt the song

— Elinor Nauen

## Poets Theater Rules

by Bob Holman

*"IN GENERAL I CONSIDER THAT A CRITICAL STUDY IS QUITE OUT OF PLACE & THAT THE SMALLEST THEATRICAL EFFECT WOULD SERVE MY PURPOSES BETTER."* — André Breton

Drama is conflict.

In Poets Theater, the conflict is not between one character and another, but between Language and the capacity of Language to encompass the Imagination.

### Rules

1. One thing per!
2. Off book!
3. Short! like poem (commercial): "The further the metaphor is stretched the more dogmatic it becomes. / Tis meant to please, but if it should offend / It's very short, and soon will have an end." — *Chrononhotonthologos*
4. Call it a play & it is!
5. Gestus: essential gesture
6. Each play shall contain:
  - a. A poem
  - b. A dream
  - c. A play within a play
7. Never use a Thing when a Person will do!
8. Dare the Director!
9. Symmetries & rhythms, not principles!
10. Stage directions are part of the text

### Acting

1. Be the thing and get out quick!
2. Compassion to leave yourself totally, courage to return
3. Return abruptly (FREEZE!), or seamlessly
4. Except you must please keep head (yours) on body (whoever's)
5. Presence, not impersonation
6. Every act is a cerebral gunshot! (Tzara)
7. Verve nerve!

Today's Topic Is: Why there is no ' in POETS ' THEATER

*"ENTRUST THE STAGE DIRECTION TO THE SUBTLE INVENTION OF THE EXPLOSIVE MIND, SCENARIO TO THE AUDIENCE, VISIBLE DIRECTING, GROTESQUE PROPS. . . ABOVE ALL, MASKS & REVOLUTIONARY SHOUTS, THE EFFIGY OF THE DIRECTOR. BRAVO! & BOOM BOOM."* — Tristan Tzara

There It Is: Assignments for Bob Holman's Poets Theater

1. Write a play
2. Write a one-page play
3. Theatricalize a poem
4. Use VOICE as a character
5. Invent a School of Theater, i.e., "Theater of Something"
  - a. Write a play exemplifying that style
6. Write a review of a poetry reading



## REVIEWS

David Kalstone, *Becoming a Poet: Elizabeth Bishop with Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1989. Edited by Robert Hemenway, with an afterword by James Merrill. 299 pages. \$22.50 cloth.

The jury is still out on the reputation of Elizabeth Bishop. Harold "Anxiety of Influence" Bloom, in a brief essay in his *Poetics of Influence*, ranks her best work to be the equal of Wallace Stevens's short poems. Conversely, Clayton Eshleman, reviewing her collected poems for the *Los Angeles Times*, blames her for the poetry found in the *New Yorker* and the *American Poetry Review* and declares her work "a sinister and thorough lesson in Apollonian poetics: a view from the tower, distanced, sublimated, observational, tidy." And, jeez, even evoking her name can set some people off. A few years back, a friend and I were guests at a dinner honoring a certain New England poet famed for his series of book-length poems. When my friend mentioned the then recently deceased Ms. Bishop, the aforementioned poet began making long and loud puking noises until we had a concrete idea of what he thought of her poetry.

It might have been Chuang Tzu who said that truth lay between the oppositions, or it could have been Smokey Burgess. In any case, Bishop remains one of the only poets of that too-soon-dead, Best and Brightest, post-WWII poetry community -- that clubhouse including Robert Lowell, Theodore Roethke and John Berryman -- whose reputation has increased after death (more than ten years ago). True, most of her poetry appeared in the *New Yorker* and, true again, there are plenty of wretched poets out there with trust funds, private college educations, and heaps o' sensitivity, who report on the small details of this planet to the agony and annoyance of this reader. (Can you imagine if the Incredible Shrinking Man wrote Bishop-influenced poetry!) But if we had to lay hard time on Bishop, then we have to book Dr. Williams on the charge of malpractice for generating that group of versifiers who take "No ideas but in things" a tad too literally.

For the crowd attracted to the blood-and-guts literary life, Bishop is disappointing. No brawls, no jolt of electric juice to smooth out a fevered brain, and no sex tales of life behind the shut college-office door. The reticence in Bishop's subdued poetry mirrored a strong desire to keep her private life just that and she spent most of her adult life in a small Brazilian village to that end. She had a rough childhood, was a lesbian before gender preference could be a marketable commodity and had a lifelong drinking problem -- yet little of this entered into her poetry. Her rather small body of work reflects a mind that carefully chose what small private parts of one's self would go public.

David Kalstone's *Becoming a Poet* should not be mistaken for the recent spate of poetic tell-alls; poetry is spoken here, with the gossip left for others to pick through. Kalstone, who died of AIDS in 1986, was the rare contemporary scholar with real sympathy for poetry and poets. And unlike most scholars, he

did not think he was smarter than his subjects -- which is often the symptom of the *anxiety of influence* that many critics, self-conscious of their relative marginality in the creative process, suffer from. He was also, by most accounts, a great teacher and a valued colleague at Rutgers University. For a junior colleague taking over his classes because of his illness, Kalstone would call from the hospital with some encouraging words and a vote of confidence in his voice. This book is a small reminder of the loss that both academe and poetry have suffered with his death, at age 54.

*Becoming a Poet* is an unfinished book; a first draft minus a last chapter that Kalstone was working on at his death. It is to the credit of Kalstone's executors that they have chosen to allow this valuable and useful book to be published. Editor Robert Hemenway did a fine job of preparing this work for publication, collating the rough drafts and filling in and reconciling the gaps in the manuscript. However, be assured that this book is far from an assemblage from the shards of a career cut short -- it is a fine and highly readable work of scholarship.

*Becoming a Poet* focuses on the two crucial literary friendships that shaped Bishop's career: her long and complex relationships with Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell. Her apprentice relationship with Moore in the '30s, when Moore was a highly regarded Modernist and not yet the *New Yorker*-created eccentric chatting about baseball with Joe Garagiola, is unusual for a woman poet. Although a common trope in the history of American Lit is the younger poet clanking on the brass knocker of the Elder Poet (think on the many who rode the Erie-Lackawanna to visit Dr. Williams in Rutherford, or a young James Schuyler as W. H. Auden's house guest in Italy), it is rare that young women poets seek out their female elders. I'm not enough of a Freudian to figure this one out, or shout OEDI-PAL! in a crowded theater, but perhaps there is some truth in Carol Gilligan's argument that men tend to think in hierarchical terms and women think relationally.

Nonetheless, her classmates at Vassar called her "The Bishop" and she was a great chum of Mary McCarthy and these facts combined will tell you that we are not dealing with a genteel poetess. Bishop moved into a Charles Street apartment in the middle of the Depression with the intention of becoming a great writer, with the commitment to poetry stepping in a bit later. Though Moore was the only "celebrity" she ever sought out, her relation to the older poet was somewhat detached. After the first meeting, Bishop noted that Moore was "very impersonal," that she spoke in near whispers, but could "talk faster and use larger words than anyone in New York. . ." She then adds that Moore "is worth a great deal of study." The apprenticeship lasted for nearly a decade, with Moore writing careful critiques of Bishop's manuscripts and placing her poems with magazine editors where she could. During these years, Bishop wrote the poems that would appear in her first volume, *North and South* (1946), anthology pieces such as "A Miracle for Breakfast" and "The Man-Moth." How much of Bishop's renowned "eye" and attention to the incidents and objects in the daily world developed from Moore's own poetic practice? Oddly, when Bishop chose to honor Moore in her "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore" she chose to honor



Moore the spinster eccentric rather than the one woman poet that guy-Modernists like Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams held in utter respect. Perhaps, Bishop was indicating it was time to search out other options.

Bishop met Robert Lowell through the agency of Randall Jarrell at the beginning of 1947. It was an ideal time for lifelong friendship to take hold. Lowell was divorcing Jean Stafford and Bishop was in a continual and unsettling shuttle between Key West and New England. They were both enjoying the afterglow of successful first books, with both breaking from their respective apprenticeships and becoming unique and singular poets. And there was a different, more stable, Lowell on hand, far from the portrait of the later, Milton-glazed loon that biographers offer up.

They were never lovers, but the early part of their friendship had the aspects of an intimate relationship. "The tone was conspiratorial and flirtatious, yet full of the glints of the literary needs they were to satisfy for each other," noted Kalstone. And like Moore, Lowell used his considerable influence to help Bishop make her way in a career as a poet. He was instrumental in securing the 1949 Library of Congress poetry consultantship for her. He convinced her to give readings, though she was often too nervous to accept many of them. And through her years in Brazil, Lowell came up with the grants that kept her going. Lowell created a niche, in the male world of postwar poetry, for "Miss" Bishop, much in the manner that "Miss" Moore was accommodated in a previous generation.

Their friendship endured, in some ways, because of the distance created by Bishop's move to Brazil. Lowell's life would soon become a series of breakdowns, treatments, and long periods of institutionalization. He would remake himself poetically, as well -- exchanging the dense rhetoric of *Lord Weary's Castle* for the frayed Harris Tweed of the failed suburban nomad. For better or worse, Lowell kicked off the Confessionalist period in American poetry with *Life Studies* in 1959. Bishop, though she admired the book and Lowell's courage in writing it, maintained and deepened her poetry of precise particulars. In the end, they truly became the embodiment of the corny phrase "opposites attract." Lowell's poetry became a verbal state of emergency, poems revised constantly and sometimes between printings. In Bishop's poetry, he perhaps saw a precision and naturalness that were not beyond his grasp. As Lowell increasingly merged his art and life into an often confusing mass, Bishop continued to create poems that were splendid artifices that stood frozen in their moments.

Odd to think that, with both poets dead for more than a decade, Bishop has emerged as the more influential and, seemingly, permanent poet. The late-'50s shock of the patrician Lowell munching tranquilizer paté was soon subdued by an army of poets all too willing to put their head-lice under a spotlight. And although Bishop's admirers are plentiful — the most significant being John Ashbery — she seems a bit beyond imitation. As with that handful who are privy to the formula for Coca-Cola's mystery ingredient, "7X," only a few have managed to translate Bishop's delicate balance of craft and sensibility.

What is great and original in Bishop's poetry is wonderfully summed up by Kalstone: "For Bishop, the actual existence that lies outside the self — geography, other minds, the world as prior creation — are like life rafts, respite and rescue from guilt. And she insists on literal accuracy not merely because she believes it is "true" but because it is *literal* in the root sense — of the letter. The printed word asserts a frail bond between self and world."

— Joel Lewis

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### The Irony of the Ecstasy

In the bank I certify that I  
Am who I am to get the money  
To give to the lawyers to send  
To Miguel to get the building back

Cecilio. He comes in. What a guy.  
We did Chinese New Year's, the firecrackers  
Like birth, and now he's big, helping Miguel,  
Who's running out of gas, faster than I

Can write the poem. Well, that is typical,  
As the bank purrs, and spring turns  
Into new dough, smelling yeasty, Russian  
Baths, Cecilio, I am drifting, the blackened loaf

Is handed over, the goods, just as the Bronx  
Bomber (Miguel's '72 Caddy) drinks its last,  
And contentedly expires the tires. Hotfooting  
Down Canal for fuel, we talk fund-raising, state

Agencies, see belt-tightening low-tech poets, and  
Spend money to make money out of poetry, pipe  
Dreams, and plumbing realities. New York expounds,  
Flash of emergency as the Cafe reemerges, ecstasy's  
heaven.

— Bob Holman

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### MARY MAR

When I put my hand inside her  
there is a waiting room behind me  
filled with amiable travelers. When  
she comes they go and pass us by.  
One is a lanky guy — stringy  
hair to the shoulders. One is a quiet  
shuffler — always looks at his feet.

— Sarah Schulman



Janine Pommy Vega, *Drunk On A Glacier, Talking To Flies*; Tooth of Time Books (634 E. Garcia, Santa Fe, NM 87501). 84 pages. \$6, paper.

The poems in this book begin with survival.

*Hunched over vigil of 3 a.m.  
a cup of water without reflection  
we live alone and die alone  
isn't that what I said?*

(“Sad Song Without a Name”)

The vigil ends not in resignation but in moments of perfect, ecstatic clarity. This is a poetry of moments in which things shift suddenly in the light, allowing themselves to be seen with terrific clarity. The language is singularly exact, sometimes comic, and always intense.

*Where are you going  
sister fly?  
Don't get lost in that  
footprint  
I'd say  
lend me your wings  
but you can't  
How would you reach  
Jiri Shanka?*

(“Pasto Ruri”)

The universe here is not a universe of active will (“What does not change / is the will to change”), but a universe called into being through desire. (As it says in “For the Master Singer,” “What never changes, . . . / is desire.”) The deity in charge is not Apollo but the Great Mother:

*sensate elemental mother  
font of waters take me  
here I am.*

(“For the Master Singer”)

According to “Bread Vs. Poem,” the only thing growing in Aristotle’s garden is “bread.” Deuteronomy says, “Man doth not live by bread alone,” and “I can’t / live on that,” the poem echoes. In a world in which words are willed into place and shaped into theories (or Aristotelian recipes), the only things that “grow” are the things we make.

The response to that is to see things as they are. What matters is not ritual any more than it is theory and rules. The end must be genuine knowing, the world acknowledged and seen.

*There is a power in leaves  
the separate names of everyone  
in the forest  
the leaves change  
we change  
there is a power.*

(“Song for 5 A.M.”)

The vision that made these poems possible is so certain, so

exact that the poems themselves are perfectly constructed, exactly phrased and modulated. In “American Artists,” five stanzas modulate into the same tone by different routes, always with immense control.

But that control, which is found again and again in these poems, is never the control of the writer who puts the words in place as a typesetter would set type (or as Aristotle would shape an argument). The control is in the words themselves, arising from awareness and seeing, and the result is a precision that intention itself could never achieve.

These poems, then, are sacramental acts, not merely invocations. They do not arise from ritual any more than they arise from choice. They establish their own revolution, turning away from a universe of active will to that universe of ecstasy and desire, where

*. . . the heart of a poet reels drunkenly  
on a glacier, talking to flies  
the buried stone has become a flower  
and in its voice  
the wind sings, a bird is flying.*

(“Room on the Third Floor”)

— Ed Foster

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### The Room (1954-55)

from Philip Guston

When I stop thinking about ART  
I think about money  
a junk yard of my own  
where kids can take on the world  
in terms that are understandable.  
I know other people have secrets  
but mine are such a burden  
no matter how hard I try to reduce  
the load, more begets more, now it's  
winter and I'm in the process of drying  
out pounds of cheap paint, just to get  
the pigment onto the canvas drains  
a generation of jews.

— Basil King

(from *A Painter's Bestiary*)

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### THE TEN COMMANDMENTS IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER

3, 6, 1, 8, 4, 5, 9, 10, 7.

— Mike Topp



**THE NOTES ARE ENOUGH.** Harry Mathews, *20 Lines A Day*; The Dalkey Archive Press (1817 N. 79th Ave., Elmwood Park, IL 60635), 1988. 134 pages. \$20 cloth, \$8.95 paper.

My dream of the perfect novel is one that includes the author's (preposthumously published) notes and/or his or her journal during the time the book was written. To do this cleanly, to separate art and life and then marry them without the self-consciousness that that's what you were doing from the start, would be one way to demystify the already exhausted notion of author as objective creator standing on the outskirts of the work — looking on, as it were, in an attempt to make it great. The journal, as both attendant to and suitor of the novel itself, locates the author inside the work, living inside it, doing it from the center out. The placement of the journal inside the novel, were it to occur, wouldn't necessitate a battle of contrary impulses, but a truce. Part of the ritual of most novels is for the author to separate out his or her feelings and experiences from the text (as soon as you recognize your flaws you begin to pretend that you're not you: you invent characters who contain both flaws and fantasies, and then you do your best to keep them at a safe distance) and then allow them to enter as if by accident, by letting down your guard, by consciously choosing and limiting and manipulating and then seeing how much of what you repressed actually comes through. The magic of the revelation which the author experiences when he or she says something by mistake is the reader's reimbursement for knowing it's all a lie. Yet the level on which the author exists as a real person rarely becomes part of the novel itself (the appearance of a character named Paul Auster in a novel by Paul Auster is an attempt to dissolve the boundaries between identifiable types of writing, and maybe the process of demystification begins with experiments of this order). The merging of distinct novelistic and autobiographic impulses can only enlarge the possibility of what in the end might be described as "writing," or by a new name or no name at all. Maybe the perfect novel is when the notes are enough.

Even inside his journal, *20 Lines A Day*, Harry Mathews attempts to sabotage the autobiographical impulse. He invents a character named Billy Bodega who seems to stand in for the author when self-revelation becomes unbearable. It's always easier to talk about oneself through another person or medium (easier to write "I love you" to someone in a letter, than say it in person), and I wasn't sad to see Billy Bodega leave the journal early on. Mathews, I realized, had to invent this character in order to show that it was possible to fully erase the subterfuge (it's hard to give up the fictionalized version of oneself). Now I can stand on my two feet and talk about myself openly. I can speak, as he does so eloquently, about the anxiety of writing, of the heartbreak that occurs inside our self-conscious conversations with ourselves, how we let ourselves down only to revive and recover and move on, and how all this happens relentlessly every day.

Mathews started the journal as a series of warm-up exercises to prepare himself for his "real" writing, the completion of his novel *Cigarettes* (published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in 1987). Even as separate texts clinging to their own identities,

novel and journal cast a spell over one another, like ex-lovers flirting with the possibility of a future romance. Twenty lines a day is, after all, a pack of cigarettes. Mathews takes Stendhal's suggestion to write a specified amount every day "genius or not": and uses the journal as a way of getting over the anxiety of sitting down and writing anything. He presents himself as procrastinator, a person whose greatest pleasure is writing but whose greatest fear is not being able to do it. As long as you don't try to do it then you never find out that you can't. So "doing it," in this sense, means eliminating all restrictions, writing about not having anything to write about, or about the anxiety itself. Yet there are plenty of other sources of subject matter: memories, descriptions of place (based in a small French village, Lans-en-Vercors, Mathews travels in the course of the journal to New York City, Paris, St. Bart's, Venice, among other places), nature, the habits of animals, relationships (with children, lovers, and especially his close friend, the French novelist Georges Perec, who had recently died), dreams, music, physical ailments, overheard stories and conversations, daily chores. In the process he realizes that there's more than one narrative going on at any given moment — each journal entry takes on the form of a meditation and every subject carries equal weight — and that the need to unify our separate selves is sometimes a useless burden.

*I think (and only think, having only haphazardly reread these daily gigs) that what they lack is a sense of how much I love life. I'm afraid that when I sit down to write them, in the state of gentle trepidation that precedes "seriously" putting pencil to paper, I look for minor, self-deprecatory problems to discuss and explore. Even if full of enthusiasm for the day and for my work, I don't leap into the bath of exuberance (se jeter à l'eau attractively expresses such an impulse). No doubt I usually don't know where my little problematic subject will lead — I may end up with a glimmering discovery of possibility — but the subjects themselves do begin little, and the possibility only appears beyond them. It is as though I were determined to withdraw at the start to the edge of life: yes, it's all there, but first I must tidy up this junk. The junk generally isn't felt as an immediate burden. I have to look around for it, to find an excuse for not letting fly, for not letting myself fly. (A similar caution perhaps makes one commit oneself imperceptibly but instantly to the manner of another writer when one starts scribbling away in automatic writing.) This resembles my feeling, in response to Elizabeth Cowan's hypothesis that we absorb the life of the familiar dead, that what I must absorb is their weaknesses, their neuroses, their junk rather than their particular genius. It's as though there really were in "I" a little i that felt in danger of being wiped out, rather than above all the I who am us and you and the unguessed you: an infinity of infinitely powerful creators.*

Lans, 12/23/83

The sense of self-importance, inherent in the journal form, is absent here. The only other book I can think of that strikes a similar key is Roland Barthes's autobiography, *Roland Barthes*. Mathews conveys amazement at the discovery that writing about himself (not the English "one," but the American "I") is possible, as if up until now translating feelings into words had been a forbidden joy. The importance of this book,



beyond its therapeutic or liberating use, is its attempt to define the moment of writing in the present, to locate the author as a participant in a human community (a place where we will live), and to point out by way of contrast that all other writing is a denial of the present, an avoidance, an escape.

— Lewis Warsh

## Announcements

**Lannan Literary Series Videotapes.** The Poetry Project has received from the Lannan Foundation a gift of thirteen hour-length poetry videos. Produced and directed by Lewis MacAdams, each tape profiles one poet, interspersing segments of live readings with interviews. The poets profiled are Louise Gluck, Galway Kinnell, W. S. Merwin, Lucille Clifton, Philip Levine, Czeslaw Milosz, Octavio Paz, Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, Yehuda Amichai, and Victor Hernandez Cruz. The Paz tape is available both in English and Spanish, and there are two tapes ("volumes") of Gary Snyder.

The tapes are in VHS format (which is the format of most videorecorders) and can be borrowed for home-viewing from the Poetry Project. A \$35-per-tape deposit (refunded upon return of the tape) is required. Anyone interested in outright purchase should contact the American Poetry Archive at the Poetry Center, San Francisco State University, 1600 Holloway Drive, San Francisco, CA 94132.

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There will be a one-day workshop with Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman, which will take place within the context of a weekend Zen training retreat, May 11-13. The cost of \$125 includes room, board and tuition, as well as an evening reading given by the artists. Convenient transportation from New York. For further information, call Barbara O'Hara, program coordinator, at 914-688-2228.

\*

The concluding programs of the second season of the *New York Festival of Song* will be: on Sunday, April 22: *Total Eclipse: The Poetry of Verlaine and Rimbaud*, in settings by Debussy, Fauré, Delius, Britten, and Reynaldo Hahn, and excerpts from Christopher Hampton's drama about Verlaine and Rimbaud, *Total Eclipse*. Featured artists will be Rosemarie Landry, soprano; Kurt Ollmann, baritone; and Steven Blier, piano. And on Sunday, May 20: *New American Works*, a collection of first performances featuring a new song cycle by John Musto (commissioned by the Festival). Performers will include Amy Burton, soprano, Michael Barrett and Steven Blier, piano, as well as other artists to be announced. Performances will be held at the Greenwich House Music School in the Renee Weiler Concert Hall, 46 Barrow Street (South of Sheridan Square and West of 7th Avenue) at 5 p.m. Tickets: \$12. Contact Dan Tucker at (212) 242-4770.

## Theresa of Avila & The History of Psychology

Up to this point there has been activity effort & movement  
All our faculties are still in play  
Now however it becomes more than ever necessary  
"No longer to think much but to love"  
O woman in the mystical desert of Spain  
Ride your burro through higher air dimensions  
Over the endless bleak austere plateau of Old Castile  
Across the basins of the Duero the Tagus & the Guadiana  
Landscape ravaged by erosion & of climate severe  
As imaginal fields of your El Castillo Interior  
And let the bottom line fade & drift away  
Preparing yourself for escape into the Great Rapture  
The calyxes of the desert blooms have opened only halfway  
They have shed only their first perfumes  
Through these mauve air waves love moves in the first light  
of day

The being of man diffused in a stubborn material world  
To which you refuse much importance in your psychology  
Gray eyes sunken in crystal 500 years rise like dusty pearls  
While the pentatonic wind rises out of Africa  
The mistral from the Sahara radiates through the spirit world  
Theresa of Avila avid in receptivity & translucence  
The mistral from the Sahara of powerful love  
Confines itself into your intelligent listening flower  
Whipped by the hot wind of God as a flag of passion  
Made into turbine by the power of your mind  
Turned by your water metaphors like bubbling Castilian  
founts

In the first chamber you articulate your thought out loud  
While in the second it becomes inaudible like a flower's  
And in the third is clouded by a subtle shade  
And in the fourth is replaced by touch  
The senses which are still oscillating in chamber five  
Are frozen solid in the sixth chamber  
As the body grows cold & breathing stops  
And then in the seventh chamber a diamond drops  
Out of space & grows larger than the world

— Tom Clark

\*

### In the Dark

Using high-power technology, scientists  
are finding that there is more to the universe  
than meets the eye. About 95% is invisible.  
And nobody knows what it is.

Not only are 80 to 90 percent of all  
scientists who ever lived alive today, but  
all of them seem to be publishing.

— Dennis Barone



Meena Alexander, *The Storm*; Red Dust Press (PO Box 630, NYC 10028). 27 pages, \$3 paper.

For poetry, exile remains the key metaphor; the poet wanders, perambulating around the same places and themes, circling the same self, until the self is a circle. Having perhaps begun by imagining with Rimbaud that "I is elsewhere", and that this truth of necessity must be embodied in an actual movement elsewhere, one concludes... with the exact same thought. But also, in the experience of wandering the experience of despair, deepened with each turn.

Meena Alexander's *The Storm* partakes of this sense of exile, but also of a faith in the poem as the linguistic cup with which to catch exile's elixir. Born in India, educated in North Africa and England, now living in NYC, Alexander's life, as Susan Sontag said of Elias Cannetti, is "rich in displacements". *The Storm*, one long poem divided into five parts — "After the First House", "The Travellers", "Sita's Story", "The Storm", and "Aftermath" — circles for its entirety a town in South India, Kerala, the poet's birthplace, site of an ancestral house in ruins as well as of great Indian suffering and corruption, to which the poem returns again and again. But the heart of the poem is as much to be found elsewhere, in a poetry of exile translated into the most modern of terms:

*Consider us crawling forward  
in thunder and rain,  
possessions strewn through airports  
in dusty capitals,  
small stoppages in unknown places  
where the soul sleeps:*

*Bahrain, Dubai, London, New York,  
names thicken and crack  
as fate is cut and chopped  
into boarding passes.*

*German shepherds sniff our clothes  
for the blind hazard of bombs,  
plastique knotted into bras,  
grenades stuffed into a child's undershirt.*

*Our eyes dilate  
in the grey light of cities  
that hold no common speech for us,  
no bread, no bowl, no leavening.*

(pg. 9)

This is poetry of great power. The compactness of line and directness of statement in evidence here are stylistic constants throughout *The Storm*; the tone lightens, but only a very little. Perhaps a borrowing Alexander makes from Montale — "It is possible you know / to love a shadow, / we ourselves / being shadows" / — is most expressive of the mood here, conscious as it is of our ephemerality at the same moment in which it offers an affirmation.

Normally, the past is burden, the future, ultimately, release. Or, it can happen the other way around. As in her earlier book,

*House of a Thousand Doors* (Three Continents Press), this poem teems with the souls of relatives buried but not completely imprisoned. Rather, it is the poet who is imprisoned. Trapped in a realm between the dead ancestors who populate the Kerala hillside "with a life / utterly beyond recall", and an aftermath in which can be felt "a surcharge of live / vivifying a desire / through a time ever more about to be", Alexander's poem, located in the violent act of continuing to breathe, reminds us that exile is an impermanent condition, though indistinguishable from life. Yet there is also a moment in which "our living and dead / returned in lightning / and hail", a musical motion / of the damned / healed us of ourselves / all exile ended / the faces in lamplight, rejoicing." This music too is part of the storm, however brief the moments in which it is heard.

— Leonard Schwartz

\*

Hannah Weiner, *Weeks*; Xexoxial Editions, 1990 (1341 Williamson, Madison, WI 53703). \$8, postpaid. Audiotape: \$6. \$12.50 for tape and book.

If you want a useful playful adventitious advent of the structuralizing semiotic neo-everything including de-constructing plus re-deconstructing or vice versa of all (per Giordano Bruno), read Hannah's snazzy text (& who else's). We will find that we do not have to obey any rules. We do not have to obey any rules at all far from it we ignominy Trutan Tzara or Volume Two of a Journal about Venice then we will know there is an inquisitional anathema in a journal a work of centralized T.V. T.V. forms I say of but it is not of a journal a work centralized by T.V. it is made top heavy with T.V. It is work-centralized T.V. T.V. is not a journal brought to you by the philocyanotic world "outside" philoDOAishly pithily happened didn't it very fast then she said something then she did not they went to the poison well. Investigators said. She did not she was sort of exempt she sorted exempt why not be so why not write in hundreds of thousands of millions of undecodable weeks as overlaid transparency of the untranslatable ingot of the death well will we last to know did Aristotle tell us more accurately than non-competing Weiner. Leave out the H from now on. Religious & Frenc structuralist divagations make friends. Leave out those e's & h's. It's not ard. Wo ar w fooling? Tos wo compt or tos wo lov? And wat about trut wr ty tlling it? Wo says it cant b? Trs an idiot in all of us mayb. Wat I man to say is womn might know, tat is tis woman, a bit of xtra, sh drams btr wild bfor gradually laving vryting in t nw world wr vryting is lik a targt — you must admit I know you — you must admit you know m too. Trs littl tim lft dont you tink? Tis is wat anna's book might say. It's a gsturtxt.

— Bernadette Mayer



## WEDNESDAY NIGHTS

April

4 **SUSIE TIMMONS** has been living and writing in NYC for the past 15 years. Her new book *Locked from the Outside* is due in late spring from Yellow Press and is the first recipient of the Ted Berrigan Award. **MARTIN STANNARD** lives in Suffolk, England, is the editor of *joe soap's canoe*, and the author of *The Gracing of Days* (Slow Dancer Press).

11 **LAURA MORIARTY** is the author of *Like Roads* (Kelsey St. Press), *Duse* (Coincidence), and *Persia* (Chance Additions). She is the archivist at the Poetry Center at San Francisco State. **MEI-MEI BERSENBRUGGE** is the author of *Empathy* (Station Hill), *The Heat Bird* (Burning Deck) and *Hiddenness* with Richard Tuttle (MOMA). She is a contributing editor of *Conjunctions*.

18 **KEITH WALDROP** is the author of *The Opposite of Letting the Mind Wander: Selected Poems* (Lost Roads), *Hegel's Family: Short Prose* (Station Hill) and (forthcoming) *Shipwreck in Heaven: Transcendental Studies* (Awede) and is the co-publisher of Burning Deck Press. **CHARLES BERNSTEIN** is the author of 17 books of poetry including *The Sophist*, the forthcoming *Rough Trades* (Sun & Moon) and *The Lives of the Toll Takers* (Awede). His critical essays have been collected as *Content's Dream: Essays 1975-1984*.

25 **PETER ORLOVSKY** is the author of *Clean Asshole Poems & Smiling Vegetable Songs: Poems 1957-77* (City Lights), and *Leper's Cry* (Phoenix Bookshop) among others. **JOHN WEINERS** is the author of *Selected Poems: 1958-84* and *Cultural Affairs in Boston: Poetry & Prose 1956-85* (Black Sparrow), and *A Superficial Estimation and Conjugal Contraries & Quart* (Hanuman Books).

May

3-6 **ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM: POETRY FOR THE NEXT SOCIETY: ASSERTIONS OF POWER**

16 **JUAN FELIPE HERRERA** is the author of six books, including *Akrilica* (Alcatraz Editions) and *Zenjose: Scenarios*. He lives in California. **SIMON PETTET** is the author of *Lyrical Poetry* (Archipelago Books) and *Conversations with Rudy Burckhardt* (Vehicle Editions).

23 **DIANE WARD** is the author of *Relation* (Roof), *Never Without One* (Roof). *Crossing* will be published as an issue of ABACUS. **KIT ROBINSON** is the author of *Covers* (The Figures), *Ice Cubes* (Roof), and the forthcoming, *The Champagne of Concrete* (Potes & Poets).

30 **BILLY COLLINS** is the author of *The Apple That Astonished Paris* (Univ. of Arkansas, 1988), and has had work in *The New Yorker* and *Poetry*. **TONY TOWLE**'s last book is *New and Selected Poems (1963-1983)*, from Kulchur.

## MONDAY NIGHTS

April

2 **OPEN READING**

9 **FORREST GANDER** is the author of *Rush to the Lake* (Alice James), and co-publisher of *Lost Roads*. **COLE SWENSON** is the author of *New Math* and has recent work in *Onthebus*, and *Manoa*.

16 **BARBARA JORDAN**'s new book, *Channel* (Beacon Press) won the Barnard New Women's Poetry Prize and she has work in *Sulfur* and *The Paris Review*. **FRANK MURPHY**'s new book is *Paperclip, Historian, Coathanger* (Blue Star). He is co-editor of the *NYC Poetry Calendar*.

23 **JOSEPH LEASE**'s work appears in *The Paris Review*, *Temblor*, *New American Writing*, *Pequod* and *The Boston Review*. **JOHANNA DRUCKER**'s works include *The Word Made Flesh* and *Wittgenstein's Gallery*. She has appeared in *Ottotole*, *Temblor*, and *M/EI/A/N/I/I/N/G*.

30 **DODIE BELLAMY**'s *Letters of Mina Harker* appear in *Talisman*, *Ink*, *Acts*, and *How(ever)*. Forthcoming is work in *Poetics Journal*, *Gallery Works* and a book, *Feminine Hijinks* (Hanuman). **KEVIN KILLIAN** is a poet and the author of a novel, *Shy* (Crossing Press), *Bedrooms Have Windows* (Amethyst Press), and is the editor of *Mirage*. They live in San Francisco.

May

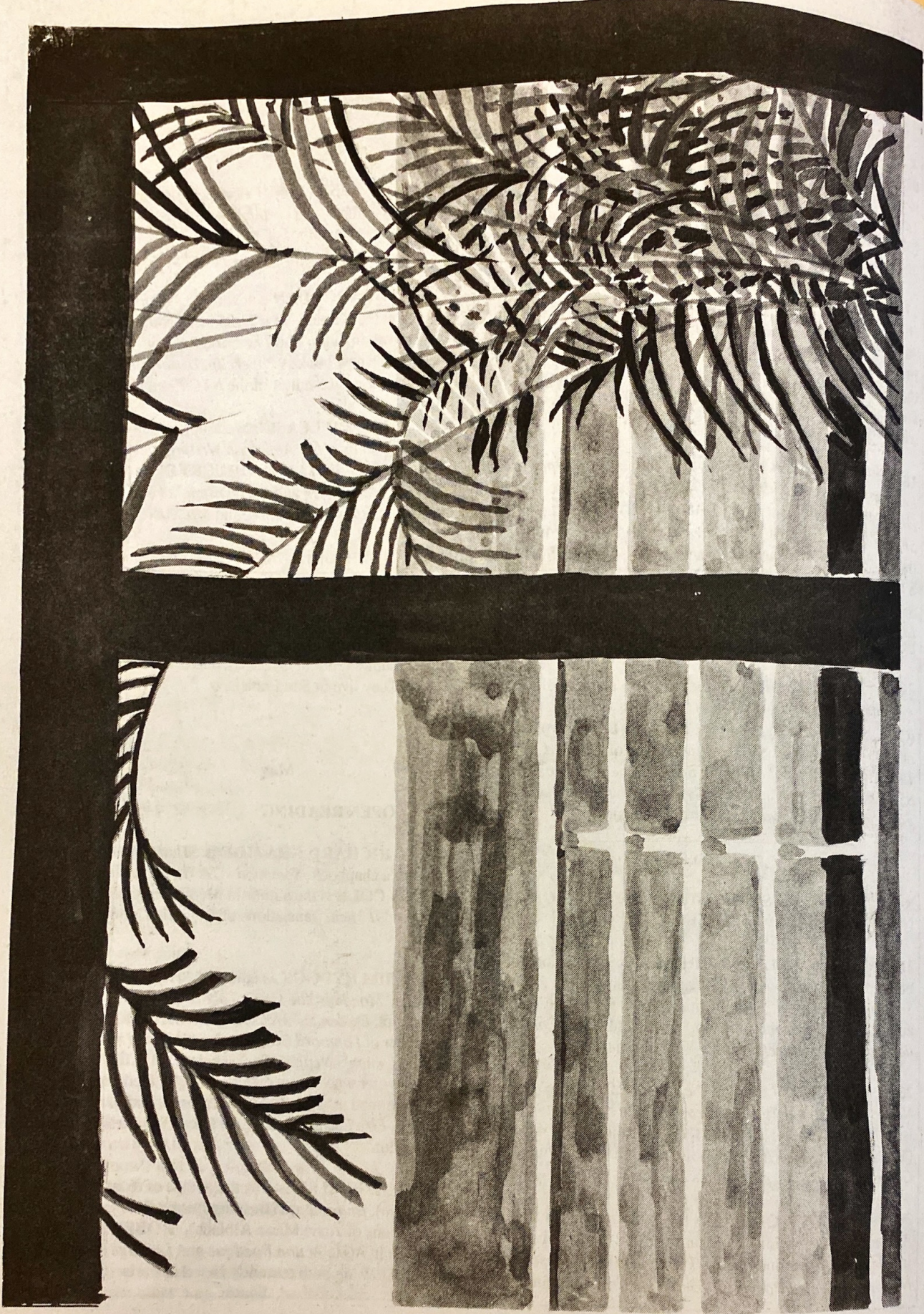
7 **OPEN READING**

14 **RICHARD GRAZIDE** is editor of *a k a*, and author of a chapbook, *Somebody Get Us A Ladder Up Here*. **NORMA COLE** is the author of *Metamorphopsia* (Potes & Poets) and *It Then*, translations of Danielle Collobert (O Books).

21 **JIM HYDOCK** is editor of *Brief* and author of *Out Side*, *Mondays You Can't Talk to the Fish*, and a new manuscript, *Epidemic*. **JACOB BURCKHARDT**, the filmmaker of *Landlord Blues* is showing new work: *The Frankie Lymon's Nephew Story* (video). **JULIE REGAN** is a prose writer who works collaboratively. Her piece *Pore* was performed at ATA in San Francisco, and her work in progress, *Fire Escape*, was in the Poets Theater Festival at Intersection.

28 **JOSEPH SIMAS** is the author of *Kinderparts* (paradigm), *Entire Days* (Burning Deck), & *Mezza Voce*, (translations of Anne Marie Albiach). **ROBERT KOCIK** has work in *AQL*, *Action Poetique* and *La Page du Collet de Boufle*. They are both currently based in Paris.







# THE POETRY

St. Mark's Church  
New York, NY 10003

# PROJECT

2nd Ave. & 10th St.  
(212) 674-0910

## April

- 2 Open Reading
- 4 Susie Timmons & Martin Stannard
- 9 Forrest Gander & Cole Swenson
- 11 Laura Moriarty & Mei-Mei Bersenbrugge
- 16 Barbara Jordan & Frank Murphy
- 18 Keith Waldrop & Charles Bernstein
- 23 Joseph Lease & Johanna Drucker
- 25 Peter Orlovsky & John Weiners

Lecture Series: Laura Moriarty, April 8, 7pm  
(See following pages for details)

## SPECIAL EVENT:

- 1 **A Memorial Reading and Tribute to Steve Carey.** The late Steve Carey will be honored with a memorial reading of his work and tributes by friends on Sunday, April 1, 4 pm in the Parish Hall, St. Mark's Church.

Events begin at 8 pm; admission by contribution of \$5. Programs subject to change.

## May

- 3-6 1990 Symposium: **POETRY FOR THE NEXT SOCIETY: ASSERTIONS OF POWER**  
(See following page for details)
- 7 Open Reading
- 14 Richard Grazide & Norma Cole
- 16 Juan Felipe Herrera & Simon Peffet
- 21 Jim Hydock, Jacob Burckhardt & Julie Regan
- 23 Diane Ward & Kit Robinson
- 28 Joseph Simas & Robert Kocik
- 30 Billy Collins & Tony Towle

Lecture Series: Vertamae Grosvenor, May 20, 7 pm  
(See following page for details)



## LECTURE SERIES

**April 8th, 7 pm:** Laura Moriarity will give a presentation entitled "Loose Talk: An Interrogation of Pleasure" on sources and tangents for her own writing, in particular a recent fascination with and study of end-of-the-century art.

Laura Moriarity is the author of three books of poetry: *Persia*, (which won the San Francisco Poetry Center Award), *Duse*, and *Like Roads* (Kelsey Street, 1989). She is the archivist for the San Francisco State University Poetry Archives.

**May 20th, 7 pm:** Writer Vertamae Grosvenor will talk about the South Carolina Gullah idiom and oral traditions; its influence on her own writing, and her work documenting Gullah culture.

Vertamae Grosvenor is the host of National Public Radio's series "Horizons." She is a poet, and the author of *Vibration Cooking or the Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl* and a "food folk opera" which was performed in New York City. She has received awards for a film documentary on Daufuski Island, South Carolina, and a profile of Zora Neale Hurston.

### *Poetry for the Next Society: Assertions of Power*

Thursday, May 3

8 pm Reading: John Ashbery, Lorenzo Thomas

Friday, May 4

1 pm Panel: *Poetry and Knowledge*, moderated by Chris Tysh, with others to be announced.

3:30 pm Panel: *Contemporary Latin American Poetry: Strategies for Power*, moderated by Roberto Echavarren, with Jose Kozer, Jacabo Sefami, Eliot Weinberger and Lila Zemborain.

8 pm *Poetry: The State of the Art*, lectures by Amiri Baraka, Kenneth Koch and others.

Saturday May 5

1 pm Panel: *The Poetry of Robert Creeley: Politics of the Subject*, moderated by Barrett Watten, with Susan Howe, and others to be announced.

3:30 pm Panel: *The New American Poetry: After 30 Years, Is It Still What's New?* moderated by Gary Lenhart, with Diane Di Prima, Ernesto Grossman, Barbara Guest and Lorenzo Thomas.

8 pm Reading: Diane Di Prima and others.

Sunday, May 6

1 pm Panel: *Reclaiming Power: Design for Continuing Discussion*, moderator and panelists to be announced.

4 pm Reading: Eileen Myles, James Schuyler.

## WRITING WORKSHOPS

**"Poem by Poem" Thursdays at 7 pm (February 1 through May 31).** Taught by Gary Lenhart. This will be a poetry writing workshop in which everyone will be expected to write. Workshop participants will also read and listen to many poems, talk about them particularly, and talk more generally about how we talk about poems and why we bother.

**GARY LENHART** is the author of *One at a Time*, a book of poems published by United Artists, and is the editor of *Transfer*. His poems and reviews have appeared in *American Book Review*, *Hanging Loose*, *New American Writing*, *Exquisite Corpse*, and others. His poems are included in two recent anthologies, *Broadway 2*, edited by James Schuyler and Charles North, and *Up Late*, edited by Andrei Codrescu.

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**"Beyond the Visual in Poetry" Saturdays, 12 Noon (February 3 through May 26).** John Yau will consider, with the workshop, the relationship between words, art and the nature of meaning. Reading assignments. Writing exercises, collaborations, and criticism of student work.

**JOHN YAU** is a poet and critic. Among his several books of poetry are *Radiant Silhouette* (Black Sparrow, 1989). He is a regular contributor to *Artforum* and *Art News* and he is a contributing editor to *Sulfur*. He has curated exhibitions and is on the faculty of Pratt Institute and the Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts, Bard College.

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**Poets Theater Workshop & Festival:** Homer, Aeschylus, Frank O'Hara, Gertrude Stein, Alfred Jarry, Jane Bowles, Kool Moe D, Pedro Pietri, and Kenneth Koch are some of the names festival director Bob Holman, and assistant director Elinor Nauen, will be looking behind at the Poets Theater Workshop this spring. "Return to Head to the Future," this year's Poets Theater Festival of original and existing plays -- directed, written and performed by poets -- will be held at La Mama's first floor theater May 11-13 & 18-21 and at the St. Mark's Theater ReGenesis June 1-3.

**BOB HOLMAN**, author of *Cupid's Cashbox*, did a Poet's Theater Residency for Intersection for the Arts, in San Francisco, in January. On Friday nights at 9pm, he hosts the Poetry Slam at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe, on Third Street between Avenues B and C in Manhattan.

**ELINOR NAUEN** has directed the Poetry Project Theater Series and her work was included in "The Rhythm of Torn Stars" produced at The Pink in Los Angeles.



*Bluestones and Salt Hay, An Anthology of Contemporary New Jersey Poets*, edited by Joel Lewis; Rutgers University Press (109 Church St., New Brunswick, NJ 08901), 1990. 236 pages. \$11.95 paper.

More than an anthology that characterizes a particular region, this book is valuable and fun as a collection of new poetry whose boundaries can't be contained within state lines. In attempting to represent the demographics of a geographical area that covers as much ground as New Jersey, the triumph of this book's editing is its inclusion of voices unrepresented before. "The afternoon is ablaze with ordinary people," as Stephen Dunn of Port Republic puts it. To define a character for the Garden State, every layer of its panoramic fabric is exposed. The sweep is as all-inclusive as the state's most famous poem, *Paterson*. I'm not so sure any clear personality emerges. What does come across is the great variousness. There's the mix of the placid rural life: grandpa on the porch, crows and magnolia trees, bread cooling on the windowsill, and the more assaultive toxicity of the urban sprawl: "Ruptured auto husks / shotgun sprayed, rot/under billboards" — James Ruggia. Though most of the poems touch on descriptions of the pastoral or urban New Jersey landscape, there's still plenty of room for these poets to stretch out.

The book opens with a warm, welcoming Preface by Anne Waldman and a fine introductory essay by Joel Lewis, which, despite a few grand, sweeping proclamations that offset the finely tuned particulars of the essay, nicely establishes both the breadth of seriousness and tone of liveliness to follow. The poetry begins, alphabetically by author, with a barrage from Amiri Baraka. Any expectations of a tame read the reader might have brought are immediately disrupted. We're engaged with the swiftness of Baraka's talk, a language so fast he speeds past a closed parenthesis. The editor culls a generous selection from Baraka's wide-ranging oeuvre — a hipster, Kerouac-flavored poem, a black street talker, and an address/attack to the establishment: "bourgeois poets yodel nonsense about boring absence / they think up funny ways for letters to sit on the page / concrete bullshit, arty dumbshit / they are safe as old toilet paper." So, conveniently, a challenge is laid out at the beginning to reorder your senses. Baraka's rallying cry and aggressive confrontation is incredibly persuasive in its force and sheer determinacy. I easily succumb to his fervent pitch against oppression and back his anger at the dumb way things keep remaining. But his aggressive attacks nix any chances for a dialogue. I don't like being told to fall into his paternalistic line though I always find myself applauding his efforts. He always changes the way I look at the world.

In a poem that begins with the time, location, destination, and a weather report, Joseph Ceravolo frames his suburban existential blues on the early AM bus to NYC, job-seeking and weary: "I really do feel / like wandering off forever / and stop looking for anything / while the wind / carries away the smoke / from Hoffmann LaRoche / Pharmaceuticals." It helps me to have airy thoughts placed in so specific a locale, cushioned by something familiar so there's something to grasp onto. I've passed by that plant on Route 3 hundreds of times so the hometown familiarity of that image is a pleasurable hit. But the

objectivity, the naming of the specific, is there for anyone to grab hold of and feel. This poet's peculiar stripped-down saintliness shines here. Ceravolo died in 1988 and the anthology honors him by including poems from an unpublished manuscript.

The anthology's strongest point is the Berlin Wall of specialized interests crumbling to allow the richness and variousness of all voices. Whitman's (who died in Camden) dream of an inclusiveness to contain the multitudes is here. We're not just offered a polite slice of pretty voices to affirm one's habits as those of society's as a whole.

If the romance of Cheryl Clarke's black lesbian characters Althea and Flaxie is treated as a defiance to the locals in her poem, as it surely must have been for the thirty years the ballad covers, the poem's inclusion in this collection is an acceptance. The dignity the characters would be denied in their time is here welcomed and embraced as contributing to the cacophony of human respectability.

As he does so well, Allen Ginsberg (b. Paterson) makes history personal, re-creating the scenario of how it was growing up in New Jersey: "It used to be farms / stone houses on green lawns. . . The communists picnicked / amid spring's yellow forsythia / magnolia trees & apple blossoms. . ." The planet's most effective herald/minstrel broadcaster then brings things closer to the present: "Then came the mafia, alcohol / highways, garbage dumped in marshes, real / estate, World War II, money / flowed through Nutley, bulldozers. // Einstein invented atom bombs / in Princeton, television antennae / spring over West Orange. . ." Ginsberg avoids the rose-colored, sentimental look back, cutting right through to the state of the state message as felt and eyewitnessed, with exacting national detail ("Oldsmobiles past by in front of my eyeglasses") to make it vivid.

The poets herein aren't into making myths. They don't ignore what doesn't fit their plot. They're realists and use the palette of the seen and encompassed. They're down-to-earth. There's meat on these poems. Ginsberg's game plan all along has been to use the local incident as descriptive of the collective. This graphic precision he picked up, of course, from the good Rutherford doctor/writer, William Carlos Williams (who supplied the intros to Ginsberg's first two books). While the majority of this anthology follows this school — details offered generously to fill in the colors against which ruminations take off — it is Ginsberg's selection, even more than those poets much younger and closer to my generation, that connects me most feelingly to my own experience of growing up in New Jersey. Other poets spend time in the malls ("Their hands stroke the shiny synthetics, the soft wools" — Penny Harter), call down the particulars from their seats and streets ("a sky the color of glue" — Jim Handlin), but my complaint would be that something of my growing up, in the '50s and '60s — Eisenhower crew cut, Kennedy Camelot, Beatles/Dylan upshot, student revolution — gets passed by here. Ginsberg's catalogue mention of Viet Nam is the only one in the book. The younger poets (30 to 40) seem to avoid dealing with the shared consciousness of these decades as if they hadn't come to terms



## A Disgruntled Reader Writes:

Dear Editor,

After three years of receiving impersonal rejection slips from you, this is my last shot — though, I think, my best. I'd like to see you do better. Aren't editors supposed to encourage talent? I'd like to see what you came up with if you worked behind a counter watching people eat eggs all day. Or if you had to argue with off-duty transit cops about whether a fork was clean or not (As if they knew how to use one!). Or if 30% of your clientele drove up with Head-of-Jesus decals on their highbeams.

But I am not an unreasonable man, nor an imperceptive one. I can detect an editor's preference and respond to it without necessarily diluting my own aesthetic standards. I just think an occasional forthrightness on your part would spare your readership a lot of uncertainty and a few stamps. If it's alleoliner autorimic quasi-spondaic monometer you want, why not flat out say so?

Yours,  
P. V.

### *Prime-Time Claptrap*

Willy-nilly,  
Sweetmeat  
murdered  
slopshop  
Fat Cat,  
forswore  
voodoo,  
kidded  
dreaded  
downtown  
bigwig,  
feted  
rich bitch  
redhead,  
bedded  
dreamteam  
polo  
hotshot,  
headed  
bozo's  
Mayday  
wingding,  
shredded  
London  
Hong Kong  
airfare,  
wedded  
wide-eyed  
true blue  
roly-poly  
nitwit.  
Teehee.

Boohoo.

with them. By finding a shared local identity I was hoping to be able to link up to the larger national identity. Eliot Katz, in his prayer to Whitman, points out the horrors of the day ("Camden, New Jersey, once Garden State, / now world's cancer capital.") and Mark Hillringhouse can do the same: "winos asleep in their army coats / outside the Evergreen Liquor Store," but these affecting urban portraits don't satisfy my desire for the opened file, the personal investigation.

That's not to say that there isn't plenty of eloquence. The editor's preference leans away from that nostalgic and sentimental trip and towards the poet's immediate surroundings and situations. There are a few clunkers of the too academic, fitted, workshop exercise variety. Reading the bios in the back, I noticed that the poets with the most awards write the least interesting poems. But most of this book offers up generous helpings from solid, delightful poets, 34 of them. In a bluesy poem, Pablo Medina soothes himself while inside "a landmark of grease / in the gut of Trenton." Sam's Deli on South Broad, where "you don't even get a napkin / with your hamburger," with his reverie of making love to a woman with his socks on. Or Elizabeth Anne Socolow's personal geography: "Here, people move quietly enough to respond // to a kitten strayed out from the barn." Two poets refer to Dina's bad back.

— Greg Masters

\*

Play chess for big money in your home.  
Wear little hats like at parties.  
Create a moment of transcendent order  
scarcely more godlike than real.  
Matching lips and fingertips  
rich with the smell of gasoline.  
Tease me. Show me the flag.  
Danny's Satellite Lounge.

— Sal Salasin

\*

### Found Poem

(from Phil Rizzuto)

Why would they have  
a seedless watermelon in a seed  
catalogue?  
They're trying  
to make watermelon  
extinct.  
I call it  
genocide.

— Elinor Nauen



## Books Received

Steve Benson, *Blue Book*, The Figures/Roof, 1988 (303 E. 8th St., NYC 10009). 221 pages, \$12.50 paper.

Abigail Child, *A Motive for Mayhem*, Potes & Poets Press, 1989 (181 Edgemont Ave., Elmwood, CT 06110). 96 pages, \$8.50 paper.

Beverly Dahlin, *A Reading 11 - 17*; Potes & Poets Press, 1990. 101 pages. \$8.50 paper.

Tina Darragh, *a(gain)<sup>2</sup>st the odds*, Potes & Poets Press, 1989. Unpaginated, \$8 paper.

Ray DiPalma, *Raik*; Roof Books, 1990. 100 pages. \$9.95 paper.

Larry Eigner, *Areas, Lights Heights*; Roof Books, 1990. 182 pages. \$12 paper.

Peter Ganick, *Rectangular Morning Poem*, Potes & Poets Press, 1989. One poem in 162 sections. Unpaginated, \$9 paper.

Michael Heller, *In the Buildd Place*, Coffee House Press, 1990 (27 N. Fourth St., Ste 400, Minneapolis, MN 55401). 116 pages, \$8.95 paper.

David Hilton, *No Relation to the Hotel* (Morning Coffee Chapbook #25), Coffee House Press, 1989. Unpaginated (hand-set type in an edition of 400). \$10 (from the publisher only + \$1.50 shipping and handling).

Bruce Isaacson, *love affairs with barely any people in them*, Zeitgeist Press, 1990 (One Kaiser Plaza, #2220, Oakland, CA 94612). 74 pages, \$5.95 paper.

A. Norman Jeffares, *W. B. Yeats, a New Biography*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1990. 370 pages, \$30 cloth.

Gil Ott, *Public Domain*, Potes & Poets Press, 1989. 62 pages, \$8.50 paper.

Ron Padgett, *The Big Something*; The Figures, 1990 (5 Castle Hill, Great Barrington, MA 01230). 64 pages. \$7.50 paper.

John Perreault, *Hotel Death and Other Tales*, Sun & Moon Press, 1990 (6148 Wilshire Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90048). 213 pages, \$16.95 cloth, \$10.95 paper.

Ira Sadoff, *Emotional Traffic*, David R. Godine, Boston, 1990. 81 pages, \$15.95 cloth, \$9.95 paper.

Leslie Scalapino, *How Phenomena Appear To Unfold*, Potes & Poets Press, 1989. 119 pages, \$9 paper.

John Yau, *Radiant Silhouettes*; Black Sparrow, Santa Rosa, Ca, 1989. 228 pages. \$10 paper.

## Magazines Received

*Big Allis* Issue Number Two (Melanie Neilson, 139 Thompson St., #2, NYC 10012, or Jessica Grim 140 Page St., #1, San Francisco, CA 94102). \$10 for two issues, payable to Jessica Grim. 67 pages. Includes Chris Tysh, Jena Osman, Bruce Andrews, and Lyn Hejinian & Carla Harryman.

*Brief6* (Jim Hydock, PO Box 33, Canyon, CA 94516). Unpaginated, no price mentioned, that I could see. Includes Robert Fitterman, Jack Collom, and Todd Baron.

*Brooklyn Review* #6 (Dept of Eng., Brooklyn Coll., Bedford & H Aves., Brooklyn, NY 11210). "Subscription Rate, five dollars"; 96 pages. Includes John Ashbery, James Schuyler, Eileen Myles, Tom Carey, Alice Notley, and many others.

*Exit 13*, No. 2 (Tom Plante, 22 Oakwood Ct., Fanwood, NJ 07023) 52 pages. \$5. Includes Joanne Seltzer, Nathan Whiting, and Charles Bukowski.

*Factsheet Five* #33 (Mike Gunderloy, 6 Arizona Ave., Rensselaer, NY 12144. 518-479-3707). 110 pages. Lists of small press magazines, books, etc., music and video reviews, etc. Call for subscription information.

*Freesia!* Winter 1989 (Words & Pictures Project, Box 213, City Island, NY 10464) 20 pages (oversize format). \$12 for four issues. Includes a photographic Celebration of the Male Form, with poems.

*Grand Union* "an Anthology of Great New York Writing" (White Lion Press, 225 E. 5th St., #4D, NYC 10003). 56 pages (no price mentioned). Barbara Barg, Carl Watson, Ken DiMaggio, Sharon Mesmer, Ravi Singh, Maureen Owen, and D. S. Sulaitis.

*The Ledge* Vol 2, No. 2 (Timothy Monaghan, 64-65 Cooper Ave., Glendale, NY 11385) 66 pages. \$3. Includes Jim Brodey and Alice Rosenblitt.

*Long Shot* Volume 9 (PO Box 6231, Hoboken, NJ 07030) 122 pages. \$5. Includes Jack Micheline, Julia Vinograd, Allen Ginsberg, Amiri Baraka, and Charles Bukowski.

*New American Writing*, Number 5: Censorship and the Arts (Oink! Press, 2920 W. Pratt, Chicago, IL 60645) 151 pages. \$6. In addition to poetry and prose, censorship section includes work by Peter Schjeldahl, Paul Hoover, Ann Lauterbach, David Shapiro, Anne Waldman, and Bob Perelman.

*We Magazine* Issue #12 (PO Box 1503, Santa Cruz, CA 95061) \$15 for 3 issues "etcetera" Unpaginated. Includes Allen Ginsberg, Lee Ann Brown, Ivan Argüelles.

*Writing*, 23/24 (Box 69609, Station K, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V5K 4W7) 88 pages. \$6. Includes Ray DiPalma and Charles Bernstein.



**Below are selected answers to the final seven questions of the 1989-90 Questionnaire.**

However, there was an erratum in the answers to the first five questions (Feb./March issue). Mr. Murat Nemet-Nejat pointed out that the answer attributed to him for the question, *What relation does your work have to the visual arts?*, (namely: It wants to be framed and hung in the Guggenheim.) was not his. He was of course correct; the answer was submitted by Rania Barber. Since I have not heard from her regarding this unfortunate error, it occurs to me that perhaps she thought that *someone else had come up with exactly the same answer*; since that was not the case, apologies to both of them.

**To whom in your work, besides yourself, do you generally speak?**

That's what I'm trying to discover. (Benjamin Friedlander)

Anyone who will listen. (Alice Rosenblitt)

You! (Edmond Chibeau)

I'm not speaking; you are. (Tom Raworth)

The others. (Steven Hall)

You, whoever that is. (Charles Bernstein)

A more generalized image of like-minded people. (Ingrid Hughes)

People with whom I'm on a first-name basis. (David Bromige)

Do I, as the question assumes, begin with myself? Do I — generally — "speak" in my work? (Dennis Barone)  
[You "tell" me. -- Ed.]

... I speak to everyone, no one, and myself. Is that enough? (Tom Savage) [That's plenty. -- Ed.]

Anyone who wants to listen. Anyone who pays the ticket and wants to have to think for a few hours. I never see their faces but when I meet them and shake their hands they seem like nice people. (Richard Vetere)

The characters of my work who people my inner work space. Often they fight for attention. Then the work talks to an audience. (Joy Walsh)

I try to avoid speaking to myself in my poetry, because that's the first sign of insanity. (Lydia Tomkiw)

Jim Wright, Speaker of the House, the third most powerful post in government. (Paul Muolo) [I knew Jim should have paid more attention to you. Let's hope that Tom Foley doesn't make the same mistake. -- Ed.]

To nobody. For anyone who will be caught up, pleased, maybe expressed — to merge with him/her momentarily and share adrenalin, bile, other bodily fluids.

(Peter Schjeldahl)

You, her, and him. (Eliot Greenspan)

Elvis. (Rania Barber)

**How do you feel about revision?**

I do it. (Dick Higgins)

It's necessary, obligatory, unavoidable, etc.

(B.H. Friedman)

I don't get much chance to do it but I believe in it greatly. (Joy Walsh)

Always cut the last two lines. (Bob Holman)

It's what the art of writing consists of. (Paul Schmidt)

After 7 drafts I either have a poem or I don't. (Ed Smith)

Spontaneity is overrated. (Stephen Stepanchev)

It's almost always necessary for me to scrape away the bullshit to get at the *blades of truth* under the manure. (Don Yorty)

I'm only understanding of it when the source lacks the ability to avoid detection. (Robert Watlington)

Fine. It is warfare against the Approximate, to be continued until the enemy is driven out. (Peter Schjeldahl)

I'd revise everything I've written if I wasn't so fucking lazy & if I didn't love writing first drafts so much. (Alice Rosenblitt)

It's like the 16-inning playoff game with Houston, where the tension mounts and then it all goes right. (Bob Hershon)

It's essential but you have to honor the person you were when you wrote the poem. (Ravi Singh)

If it ain't broke don't fix it. If you spend more time revising the work than writing it, maybe it wants to be another work. (Lydia Tomkiw)

The whole experience became some kind of bucolic mutilation. (Sarah Schulman)

Life is a re-write. I re-write all the time. I love to re-write. Re-writing is the one true essential in all things that you can be sure of. If you are happy with it the first time you must have a part of your brain that is not working.

(Richard Vetere)



FIRST REVISION BEST REVISION (Edmond Chibeau)

If you are in prison, it becomes necessary, just to fill up the day. (Sparrow)

I'd much rather read the paper, clean out the toilet, take out the garbage, join the navy, see the world. (Max Blagg)  
[Note: the revised version of this was crossed out. -- Ed.]

There isn't enough of it in this world. (Perry Souchuk)

Is this still a controversial issue? (Murat Nemet-Nejat)

**What are your favorite literary devices?**

Excuse me? (Peter Schjeldahl)

Devices? My usual device is to say what I have to say. (Ingrid Hughes)

Bookmarks (Tom Raworth)

Fraud. (Paul Muolo)

Visitation by ghosts. (Hilton Obenzinger)

Exaggeration and Understatement. (B.H. Friedman)

The trap-door metaphor and the concrete image. (Bob Holman)

I'm not sure what names to give them anymore. (Dan Foley)

I'm very fond of the one where I take off my glasses & suddenly everyone realizes, stunned, how beautiful I am. (Bill Kushner)

Black Bic pens. (Sparrow)

The most recent version of Microsoft Word. (Alice Rosenblitt)

Clamps and joints. (Charles Bernstein)

The cast of *Airplane* doing metonymy. (David Bromige)

Write illegibly, then go back and put in words that look something like the ones you can't read. (Perry Souchuk)

Writing down the obvious jokes so they don't pile up in the atmosphere and threaten the safety of the populace. (Bob Hershon)

You should have asked me this ten years ago when I was in school. (Richard Vetere)  
[I didn't know my last chance was my last chance.-- Ed.]

Depression, lust and an occasionally quiet mind. (Eliot Greenspan)

Concision. Aposiopesis. Jump-cuts. Anacoluthon. Quotes. Sadness. Acceleration. Euphoria. (Anselm Hollo)

Using participles to make that "vertical cut in time" . . . (Benjamin Friedlander)

I love them all. (Donna Brook)

**What was the best writing/advice you ever saw in a fortune cookie?**

Jump! (Edmond Chibeau)

Never answer the homophone. (Tom Raworth)

Go home. (Hilton Obenzinger)

You will never have another cavity. (Peter Schjeldahl)

Let the other guy pay for dinner. (Richard Vetere)

I do not think people should write inside food. (Donna Brook)  
[Was this what the fortune cookie said? -- Ed]

I'm going to cut your balls off. (Paul Muolo)

Chaqu'un à son mishagas! (Richard Elman)

Give me a break — that's a stupid space-wasting question. (You could have put a poem of mine here.) (Michael Schuval)

[How about some space-saving prose, instead?-- Ed.]

One cookie with two fortunes that said the same thing. (Dennis Barone)

[So your favorite literary device is repetition? -- Ed.]

A visit to a strange place will bring you new something or other. (Don Yorty)

No one is listening, but keep talking anyway. (Carol Jane Bangs)

**How is poetry different from writing?**

It's more personal, dummy. (Dan Foley)

It is less consciously purposive. (Dick Higgins)

It's less effective. (B. H. Friedman)

Easier and cheaper. (Mark Milstein)

numina (Edmond Chibeau)

It comes before it and after it. (Larry Eigner)

Poetry is too good for this world, or at least this country. (Sparrow)



You can do more in your head and, consequently, more on the page. (Danny Krakauer)

Poetry is writing — just as a conch is a seashell. If you want me to distinguish poetry from prose it will take longer. Maybe forever. (Carol Jane Bangs)

Absolutely the least words with the most thought fct. It's a lot of work. (Dan Yorty)

I can't think of an answer to this that doesn't sound pretentious to me, thus, I'll spare you. I'd be interested to know why you italicized the word "writing" in your question, maybe. (Tom Savage) [Well, if you're only *maybe* interested, I'm not going to *definitely* bore the other readers with my explanation. -- Ed.]

As love from sex. . . (Richard Elman)

I think it has to do with the *lack of intention* of poetry. (Bob Holman)

The same way a 3-minute music video is different from a daytime soap opera. (Lydia Tomkiw)

Someone once said that poetry differs from prose as dancing differs from walking. (Stephen Stepanchev)

Truth vs. lies. (Rania Barber)

Poetry is writing, distilled. (Perry Souchuk)

Not different at all. I'm suspicious of words in italics, especially if they are translations of French concepts of the last thirty years. (Murat Nemet-Nejat) [I said *writing* (écriture), not *text* (texte); or, to put it another way, that (unwritten) distinction itself was the (sub)text(e).-- Ed.]

The writing's *on* the wall. Poetry is *off* the wall. (Anselm Hollo)

Poetry is a dream of sound. Writing is the way the idiots remember it. (Paul Schmidt)

It looks better out of italics. It looks *different* out of italics. (David Bromige) [Even *I* looks better out of italics, if you'll pardon my grammar. -- Ed.]

### Describe your style in five words or less.

No. (Charles Bernstein)

Can't. (Peter Schjeldahl)

Concise fluidity. (Austin Alexis)

Good. (Mark Milstein)

Sympathetic perversity. (B. H. Friedman)

Personal jive etc. clarity etc. (Danny Krakauer)

Hard-edge, working-class, funny and angry. (Richard Vetere)

Each poem writes itself. (Tom Savage)

Truth story lies. (Hilton Obenzinger)

Fun, fun, fun, fun, fun. (Robert Wallington)

Rant, flail, stomp, agonize, fly. (Joy Walsh)

Fuzzy. (Paul Muolo)

It's strange to me that we're asked to describe our style in five words or less — could a visual artist describe his/her style in five images or less? (Lydia Tomkiw) [You might say though that an artist could at least *exemplify* his or her style with only one. -- Ed.]

Simplest and shortest possible way. (Murat Nemet-Nejat)

Playful, Jungian, what's up Doc? (Gary Williams)

Florid, engorged, indiscreet, self-propelled. (Max Blagg)

Acres of free parking. (Sparrow)

Unrequited, unpublishable. (Benjamin Friedlander)

Find form, fill it. (David Bromige)

### Feel free to make comments of a general nature in this space.

I wish I could feel free. (Charles Bernstein)

In general comments of this nature free a feel to make a space. (Gary Williams)

I'm glad to be out of Connecticut. (Sparrow)

There is 37% less leisure in '89 than in '73. (David Bromige)

It's easier to be specific than general. (Ingrid Hughes)

The worst thing about being a poet is the confusion you cause in those around you. It's like being the eye of a hurricane. You can be calm but the destruction caused around you runs up into the billions! (Richard Vetere)

This year's questionnaire is more useful than the last, except for the "fortune cookie" silliness. You've forced me to do some thinking about issues which I mostly prefer to run away from. (Tom Savage)



I feel the reason I enjoy poetry writing so much is that it . . .  
helped me to kick my substance-abuse problems fifteen  
years ago. (Robert Wallington)

Sorry not to see you in February, Ed. Long time since I last  
saw you, Tony: you're doing a good job with the newsletter.  
(Tom Raworth)

[Now you tell me, it's my last issue. -- Ed.]

Grant, Lee, Sherman, Jackson, Sheridan, Stuart, Meade,  
Johnston, McClellan, Beauregard, Burnside, Hood, Thomas,  
Longstreet, Banks, Bragg. (Peter Schjeldahl)  
[General, yes, but somehow relatively specific, as well as  
relentlessly Civil. -- Ed.]

I congratulate you on detecting the significance of fortune  
cookies. (Murat Nemet-Nejat)

Should nature be a general? (Dennis Barone)  
[Why not. It/she's clocked enough time in the ranks. -- Ed.]

I filled this out to amuse and please my husband, which  
makes me feel somewhat diminished as a feminist and  
author, but OK as a person. (Donna Brook)

The last three words you ever want to say to a Bill Kushner  
is "Feel free to. . ." because, believe me, you really don't  
want me to feel free to. You really don't. (Bill Kushner)

I love a parade. Why don't I ever get asked to join the fun at  
the Annual Raging Ego New Year's Face-Off?  
(Max Blagg)

I'm going back to sleep now that I've written a poem called  
"The Bone" and filled out this survey. Goodnight, Tony.  
(Cheryl Fish) [Goodnight, Cheryl]

\*

### Composition

More than the usual space:  
the room & the occupants;  
three, breathing space,

instead of tight in a box  
now tight in the larger  
air of that room.

— Dennis Barone

### CONTEMPT

I feel it rising within me —  
That which made great lizards rise  
To the trees and now, with wings,  
Sing sweet songs of withering derision.

— Steve Levine

## Letter

Below is a letter from Dana Gioia concerning the article by  
Marjorie Perloff that appeared in the Oct./Nov. 1989 issue  
of the *Newsletter*. It should be noted that when he wrote this  
letter, Mr. Gioia had not seen the exchange of letters on the  
same subject between Ms Perloff and Bruce Bawer (printed  
in the Feb./Mar. issue) — in which Ms. Perloff acknowl-  
edged the first point mentioned below, that Mr. Gioia did  
not have a Ph.D. However, although he has since seen the  
Feb./Mar. *Newsletter*, Mr. Gioia has chosen to let his letter  
stand. Ms. Perloff has chosen not to respond.

Dear Editors:

I am always pleased to be attacked, but I was disappointed  
that in her recent article ("An Inclusion of Vectors Inexpli-  
cable to Syntax") Marjorie Perloff ignored my many real  
faults and invented imaginary ones.

Prof. Perloff makes three statements about me. Unfortu-  
nately, all of them are false. She claims:

1. I have a PhD in English.
2. I have been unable to get a teaching job.
3. My chagrin at academic unemployment has caused me to  
attack "free verse" poets who have teaching jobs.

The facts are these:

1. I do not have a doctorate in English. I studied Compara-  
tive Literature briefly in grad school but left to work in  
business.
2. I have never applied for any academic job — *ever*. I have,  
however, recently been offered several academic positions,  
all of which I have graciously declined.
3. Since the factual basis of Prof. Perloff's pseudo-psycho-  
analysis is imaginary, her third assertion seems too silly to  
address. I must point out, however, that I have never  
attacked any poet for writing "free verse." What an insulting  
assertion! Anyone familiar with my published criticism will  
recognize her statement as pure fiction. Moreover at least  
half of my own poetry is written in free verse.

How ironic that in an article unjustly criticizing Bruce  
Bawer for factual errors, Prof. Perloff commits so many  
silly mistakes. Ill will is a poor substitute for research.

Finally, I know it will astound a born academic like Prof.  
Perloff to learn that not all writers are begging and whimper-  
ing for university jobs. I am quite happy working outside an  
English Department. At least for the time being, the  
academy is safe from my corrupting influence.

Cordially,  
Dana Gioia

\*



## Farewell Editorial Interview

*The following excerpts are from an interview I conducted with Tony Towle on March 1st in Sayville, Long Island at the home of John Lund, overlooking Great South Bay. —David S. Kelley*

**Q:** So how do you feel about not doing the Newsletter anymore after three years?

**A:** Mixed. I'll probably miss it this August when it's time to get the October issue together. When you edit something like this you find yourself taking great pains with other people's work and sometimes neglecting your own. On the other hand, it's a *great excuse* to neglect your own, because you're neglecting it for a worthy cause. Now I'll have one less excuse.

**Q:** What didn't you do in the Newsletter that you feel you should have done?

**A:** A lot of things. When you start something unfamiliar, it takes a while to get into a groove, which then quickly is in danger of becoming a rut. In general, when you do something one way it means you're leaving out a hundred other possibilities. I probably could've been more energetic in going out and being more aggressive in getting people to contribute. Although when I *did* try to solicit material I almost never got anything. The other thing is, when you ask someone specifically you're put in a position of maybe having to reject it, which, and quite naturally, causes bad feelings (at least it certainly has when it's happened to me!), so in a way you're freer dealing with unsolicited work or when someone asks if it's all right to send you something.

And you're really grateful when you get good poems and reviews out of the blue because you're really at the mercy of the contributors in a publication like this, because on the one hand you can't pay anything, but you still have to fill a prefixed number of pages with *something*, and you have to fill them by a certain date, because it has a time-dated list of readers — which, though it's the thing I'm least concerned with as an editor, because I don't do the scheduling, it's actually the *Newsletter's* basic *raison d'être*, in a way, the most important information from the Poetry Project's point of view, that's in it. With a little literary magazine you can add or subtract pages depending, and go to press whenever you feel the issue's ready.

**Q:** What kind of poetry did you try to publish? Were there any guidelines?

**A:** Anything that *fit!* No, I'm being facetious, but only partly. I had to like it, of course, but I felt the *Newsletter* was basically about reviews, announcements, books received, and so forth, and maybe certain kinds of offbeat prose, and not *necessarily* a showcase for the best poetry around, which, because of the format, you're probably not going to get anyway. But still, it's ironic that, considering it's the *Poetry Project*, you find yourself almost using poetry as filler, in a way, to fill up the nooks and crannies between the prose.

**Q:** What are your favorite things that you published?

**A:** That's tricky, for more reasons than having to name names. Basically, I thought of an issue as an ensemble; each issue should be made up of a lot of diverse items that work together, the-whole-being-greater-than-the-sum-of-its-parts type of deal. The contributors think of their works as individual, of course, but I had to think of them together, as being all of a piece.

I am fond, though, of offbeat little items you could never publish anywhere else, like the "Annie" publicity letter in the first issue I did [It was the second issue, #127 Feb/Mar 1988. —Ed.] Also, nutty little touches here and there that I'd throw in and that most people probably wouldn't even notice but that I got a kick out of. And the questionnaires, because I'd never dealt with anything like that before.

**Q:** The questionnaires. How did they happen to come about?

**A:** The first one was really Ed's idea [Ed Friedman, director of the Project]. I think he suggested it at the very beginning and I recall that I thought it was sort of silly. But when we were formatting the second issue at Ed's house on his computer — it was after midnight and the issue was late and it was an ordeal to be sitting there for so many hours, and then we found — to my absolute disgust and dismay — that I had miscalculated the contents and we were a full two pages short! I couldn't believe it! Ed, unflappable as always, calmly suggested a questionnaire, as I remember, and we made up the questions on the spot, to fill up the two pages. I probably still thought it was silly but when the answers started coming in the mail I thought, this is great!

**Q:** You don't publish them all, do you? all the answers?

**A:** No, of course you can't. You couldn't. There's no room. So what happened, at least the way it made sense to me, was that I found myself making a collage of the answers, with the individuals who sent them in becoming sort of unwitting collaborators in a kind of independent work. I arranged them to be read sequentially, even though the average reader probably doesn't read them that way (the same way you arrange your poems for a book, you arrange them in what you think is the optimum order but nobody ever follows it). So, anyway, you end up with an amalgam that was not in the mind of any one contributor. What gets put together is my sensibility of course, and anyone else would no doubt do it differently (some of the "outtakes" of the questionnaires are really incredible!), but I hope there was some value in thinking about the answers for those poets I didn't end up publishing.

**Q:** You stick in your own remarks after some of the answers.

**A:** Yeah, the temptation becomes irresistible. Believe me, I've shown great restraint! Although perhaps a good deal less so in this issue because it's my last. The power, not to mention pleasure, of being an editor, is that you can always have the last word. But I think by and large I've kept my own overt "editorializing" out of the *Newsletter*, and have from time to time been criticized for that around the Project. Maybe that's one of the things I should've done but didn't, but somehow it just



Catherine Murray

1919-1990

Catherine Murray died on January 10, after a long illness. She received the Dylan Thomas Award and the Bernice Kavinsky Isaacson Award at The New School for Social Research. Her poems and short works of fiction appeared in numerous publications, including *Angel Hair*, *Another World*, *Art and Literature*, *Bones 3*, *Intro 1*, *Poetry*, *Princeton Spectrum*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and *The World*. A collection of her poetry, *The Transatlantic Flight of the Angel Death*, was published by New Rivers Press in 1980. She gave a number of readings at the Poetry Project in the late sixties and the seventies.

Mary Ferrari  
Annette Hayn

\*

a short Poem

It's February.

There is a Christmas tree  
in the field across the way:  
the strength of shoulders  
on the back of the chair,  
your yesterday's shirt  
in the corner of my bedroom,  
new and fresh  
it was not there before.  
and in the dim light  
my old mirror shows my face young.

Catherine Murray (1965)

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ART FOR VALENTINE'S DAY READING: Lori Landes

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didn't seem the appropriate thing to do.

*Q: In the time-honored tradition of taking leave of something, is there anyone you'd like to thank?*

*A:* Oh, you probably mean all the *little* people who won't have to be nice to me anymore because I won't have any power? Seriously, though, Ed Friedman, for sure, who besides being a pleasure to work with, gently but insistently forced me to become Macintosh-literate and at a certain point abandoned me to the intricacies of Pagemaker, trademark of the Aldus Corporation, somewhat against my will but for my own future professional good. Kim Lyons, who is indefatigable and who, along with Lee Ann Brown (this year) have done their best to make aspects of the job easier for me, in spite of my middle-aged grumpiness as the deadline for each issue loomed up from the sea. And of course all the contributors — especially Joel Lewis and Tom Clark in the review department; they consistently gave me things I could use on poets and topics I wouldn't

have thought of. . . Ted Greenwald for his interviews the first year; Kenneth Koch, Allen Ginsberg, Susan Cataldo, Rudy Burckhardt, Bob Rosenthal, Maureen Owen, Larry Fagin, Ron Padgett, and a couple of people I'm probably forgetting, for pieces that were perfect for leading off an issue with. . . all the writers who let us print or reprint their Symposium pieces. . . and everyone else. I know I've left out specific names I'll regret, but it's getting chilly, the sun is going down over there, my voice seems to be trailing off, and it's probably time to wrap it up, the metaphorical fingers slipping gently from the keys.

*Q: What? What are you talking about?*

\*

Baseball Wife

she's thinking about him  
he's thinking about scoring

— Elinor Nauen



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