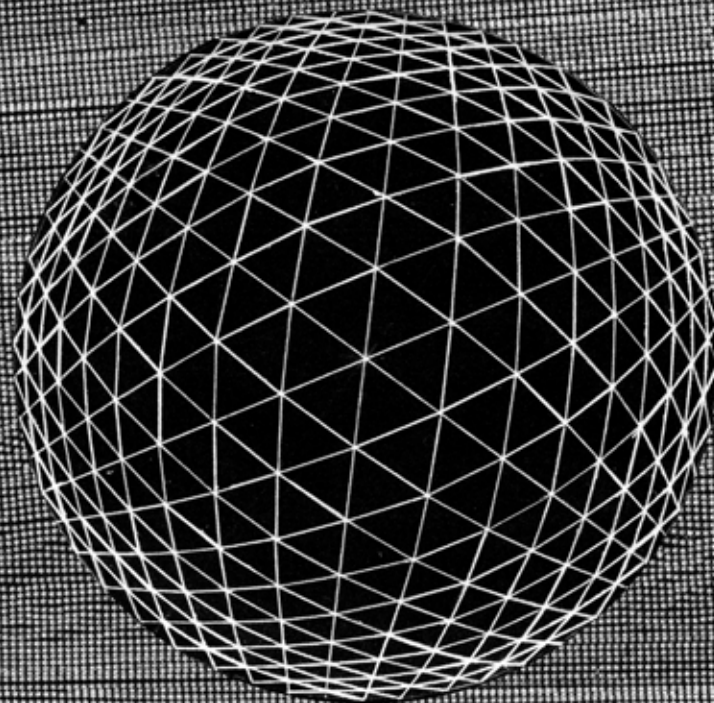


# THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER



\$5.00 #216 OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2008

# *New Books* from **Hanging Loose Press**

## **Tony Towle**

### Winter Journey

Raves from his last collection: Tony Towle is "one of the New York School's best-kept secrets." – John Ashbery. "Tony Towle's is one of the clear, authentic voices of American poetry." – Kenneth Koch. "Smart and sly, sure to disarm and delight." – Billy Collins. His twelfth collection.

*Paper, \$16. Hardcover, \$26.*

## **Indran Amirthanayagam**

### The Splintered Face: Tsunami Poems

"These poems both about those who died in, and those who survived, the Tsunami of 2004 memorialize with anger and beauty one of the most devastating tragedies of our time." – Jaime Manrique. "Indran Amirthanayagam's poems about tragedy and loss are woven with such fine irony." – Richard Rodriguez.

*Paper, \$16. Hardcover, \$26.*

## **Sharon Mesmer**

### The Virgin Formica

"At turns intimate or boisterously satiric, *The Virgin Formica* can gently detonate or erupt, carrying readers along on ripples or shockwaves." – Paul Violi.

Praise for previous work: ". . . beautifully bold and vivaciously modern." – Allen Ginsberg.

*Paper, \$16. Hardcover, \$26.*

## **Marie Carter**

### The Trapeze Diaries

First book from the editor of *Word Jig: New Fiction from Scotland*.

"Marie Carter's *The Trapeze Diaries* is a tour de force performance." – Maria Dahvana Headley. ". . . the lyrical tale of one woman's love affair with the trapeze. . . ." – Carolyn Turgeon. "This is a brave and heartwarming book." – Donald Breckenridge.

*Paper, \$16. Hardcover, \$26.*

## **Michael Cirelli**

### Lobster with Ol' Dirty Bastard

"Vital and eye-catching and new." – David Lehman. "Shows how hip-hop is the evolution of classic poetry." – Kanye West. "Tender, tough, revelatory...a voice that doesn't seem to have occurred before." – Patricia Smith. First collection, by the director of Urban Word NYC.

*Paper, \$16. Hardcover, \$26.*

## **R. Zamora Linmark**

### The Evolution of a Sigh

"Hard-as-nails love poems...made me laugh, made me envious...took away my breath" – David Trinidad. "Amazingly inventive and emotive poems...dazzling and intense." – Denise Duhamel. "Showmanship...shenanigans...pyrotechnics...and Beauty. Especially Beauty." – Kimiko Hahn.

*Paper, \$16. Hardcover, \$26.*

## **William Corbett**

### Opening Day

A large new collection of poems. Of past books: "Taut, precise...lucid and unflinching..." – Siri Hustvedt. "One of the few poets of our time who attends so well to the ear." – *Library Journal*. "Corbett is interested in the moment of clarity – revelation – and lets the force and nature of 'seeing'...generate shapes in language." – August Kleinzahler.

*Paper, \$16. Hardcover, \$26.*

### **And keep in mind –**

*Overnight*, Paul Violi, \$15, \$25  
*Cadenza*, Charles North, \$15, \$25  
*Doing 70*, Hettie Jones, \$15, \$25  
*Boy Drinkers*, Terence Winch, \$15, \$25  
*My Body: New and Selected Poems*, Joan Larkin, \$15, \$25

**Order from:** Hanging Loose Press, 231 Wyckoff St., Brooklyn, NY 11217. Enclose check or money order. Include \$4.00 postage for first two books, \$1.50 for each added title.

### **Hanging Loose Magazine #92**

HL 92 features an art portfolio by Brenda Goodman and exciting new work from Sherman Alexie, Robert Gregory, Sharon Mesmer, Michael Cirelli, Joe Elliot, Cliff Fyman, Helen Elaine Lee, Martin Steingesser, John Guzlowski, Beth Bosworth, Hilton Obenzinger, and many more, including our celebrated high school section. \$9.

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# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

I just had what may be my last hurrah of summer—an outing to Hermitage bookshop run by Jon Beacham and Christian Toscano in Beacon, NY. The five poets in my party managed to survey the shelves in the smallish room in a civilized manner. I didn't get to the Z's quickly enough for Zukofsky's *After I's*, but I picked up *Melville* by Jean Jacques Mayoux translated by John Ashbery among other rare finds. It's the most carefully selected, actually curated is the word, and exhilarating collection of American small press poetry, 1950s to 1970s, I've ever seen. I found that the experience eased me back into the mood for another season of poetry love.

The deadline day when the Monday, Wednesday, and Friday calendars merge into one calendar, this time giving us Fall 2008 and our 43rd season, is always gratifying for me as Artistic Director. It's the manifestation of a ton of work and many careful considerations by a curatorial team that aims to present among the most energetic, relevant, and diverse contemporary poetry being written today. Fall looks pretty good. I am especially pleased with the number of international poets we will be able to host this year, a crucial element of Project programming that was underrepresented in last year's schedule. The remaining months of 2008 will bring Tomaž Šalamun from Ljubljana, Slovenia, Alec Finlay from Byker, England, Isabelle Garron from Paris, France, and Gail Scott from Montréal, Canada—and I can promise more opportunities for international dialog into 2009. Another highlight this year is that we have resuscitated the Monday Night Talk Series, which will feature four talks per season.

Corrine will be relating some changes to our artistic support staff, but I want to personally thank board members John Yau and Hal Willner for their many years of service on the Project's Board of Directors. They will be moving to the Friends Committee as we welcome three new members to the Board:

Will Creeley, Jonathan Morrill, and Evelyn Reilly. Each of them brings the needed passion and skill to the table, and I look forward to working with them.

I also want to announce that as part of an effort to address increases in operating costs with as little burden to you as possible, as of 9/18 there will be small bumps to membership rates at the Supporting, Sustaining, and Donor levels as well as ad rates. An Individual Membership will still be \$50 (see back page for other rates). The admission prices for readings will be the same. The support of our members is, of course, essential to the Project's livelihood (and morale) and we appreciate your continued support.

I hope you all had a restful summer. As a relatively new New Yorker I never got why people wanted to leave in the summer, but this year I got it and got out on three different adventures. I'm feeling breezy and looking forward to getting back into the mix—poetry and bodies back in the Hall. See you soon!

- Stacy Szymaszek

## LIKE BILL MURRAY IN GROUNDHOG DAY (OVER, AND OVER AGAIN)

The seasons turn, turn, turn, and our 43rd is upon us. Stacy, Arlo, and I are back with the mice as the view from the balcony gets bleaker by the year (goodbye Angelo Fontana the shoe cobbler and 2nd Ave Deli; hello Chase Bank, Capital One Bank, real estate office, and another fucking frozen yogurt shop). Good stuff is happening inside these old walls, however, with some new blood on the masthead and a million readings on the horizon till next June.

The 2008-09 season will officially begin on September 22nd, with a few changes in the lineup. We'd like to thank Akilah Oliver for her thoughtful programming of the Monday Night Series. This year, Mondays will be coordinated by Kyle Schlesinger.

We are thrilled to welcome Kyle, who has written and lectured extensively on topics related to poetics, visual communication, and artists' books. Born in Providence, Rhode Island, he holds a BA from Goddard College and a Ph.D. in English from the University at Buffalo. From 2001-2005 he edited *Kiosk: A Journal of Poetry, Poetics and Prose* with Gordon Hadfield and Sasha Steensen. He is currently the director of Cuneiform, a literary fine press. He is the author of *Hello Helicopter* (BlazeVox, 2007) and *Mantle* (Atticus Finch, 2005 w/ Thom Donovan). His artists books include *Schablone Berlin* (Chax Press, 2005 w/ Caroline Koebel), *A Book of Closings* (2004), and *Moonlighting* (2005).

The Friday Late Night Series will be taken over by the formidable duo of Diana Hamilton and Nicole Wallace. Nicole and Diana, both former Poetry Project interns, have been invaluable members of our staff family for the past couple of years. Diana Hamilton sold you books at the Monday night series last season. She recently completed her BA in Comparative Literature at NYU, where she was the editor of *The Minetta Review*. An essay is forthcoming in Kim Rosenfield's new book, *re: evolution* (Les Figues Press), and her *Zoo* can be read at [forcefulfriendlyactivity.blogspot.com](http://forcefulfriendlyactivity.blogspot.com). She lives in Brooklyn and comes from Indiana. Nicole Wallace came to New York in the fall of 2005 to study music at New York University and graduated in the spring of 2008 with a bachelor's degree in poetry and independent publishing from NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study. Since graduating she's been re-learning the music she used to know while editing and publishing *To the Tune of Ignu in the Key of C*, a magazine of poems and poetry.

We're pleased to resurrect the Monday Night Talk Series, which was last helmed by Renee Gladman in 2006-07. Arlo Quint will curate four nights this season, beginning with Bob Grenier's talk on Larry Eigner (Oct. 27). When not assisting the program, Arlo crafts poetic gems. His work

can be found in current issues of *Satellite Telephone* and *Tight* and in *Photogenic Memory*, his chapbook from Lame House Press.

We hope to see your bright brains in our plastic chairs this fall, winter, and spring.

- Corrine Fitzpatrick

## COMING SOON I SWEAR

Four brittle words in fifty pairs. Those very nearly replaced this letter you fall. "Coming soon I swear." One here. Twelve there. Nothing in that inbox. "Where!" Nothing in that outbox. "There?" Then, as ever, "impossible[s]" morphed into doable two-a-days. Turning 37 in the minor leagues must be rough.

Seen a lot of this spider plant. Its midtown, two season, window shadow. Ralph Barbieri croaking "Little JTO," how you made sleep go away. Comfortable Creationism. My dear old ouch.

You patient staff. Always feels like writing a good home. Clay says I need to set goals. We agree. See you all in a week. Or a few

days. Or tomorrow. Depending on how this ship sails—sail it must!—even if we fill with seawater.

Each little smart quote remains a love letter "which will be supreme / and disconnected." Wasn't I writing last April that all summer long I'd be calmly couch bound? Rereading each issue. Catching up. Wouldn't I? Didn't I? No, no. Yes, yes. Wood ash all over this pause and that dash. And yet, my mean time always comes down wordily. And though sometimes I pretend I'd have it other ways, there's no doubt the pride and glamour in being smack-midst a troubled stream of dedicated truths. People who listen: all languages, everyone. I wish humility, awe. I wish common sense, active conscience. Your own sound bites, my friends, which are, here, here, and ever there.

- John Coletti

## REGISTRY OF BIRTHS AND MARRIAGES

Tracey McTague & Brendan Lorber present: Aurora Morrigan McTague Lorber.

Born at home, June 1st 2008 at 12:51 A.M., 7 pounds 12 ounces. Also, we are thrilled to announce that Joanna Fuhrman and Bob Kerr married on June 21st in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Congratulations to all!

## ASSISTANCE NEEDED

Bernadette Mayer and Philip Good need to raise money to pay for heating fuel. Already three months behind in monthly payments. People can send money to Giorno Poetry Systems (222 Bowery, 3rd Fl., New York, NY, 10012, United States); write "Bernadette Mayer Fund" in the memo.

## ONWARD

Farewell to our good friend Hanon Reznikov, co-artistic director of The Living Theatre. He will be deeply missed (look for a full obituary in Newsletter 217). We also take this time to remember Robert Rauschenberg, Rochelle Ratner, Aimé Césaire, and Jason Shinder.

# Burning Deck 2008

## DICHTEN =, No. 10: Sixteen New (to American readers) Poets

A magazine issue of German-language poets mostly in their 30s and 40s: Ann Cotton, Franz Josef Czernin, Michael Donhauser, Ute Eisinger, Daniel Falb, Hendrik Jackson, Marget Kreidl, Bert Papenfuss, Steffen Popp, Monika Rinck, Farhad Showghi, Hans Thill, Raphael Urweider, Anja Utler, Ron Winkler, and Uljana Wolf. Translated from the German by Andrew Duncan, Tony Frazer, Nicholas Grindell, Christian Hawkey, and Rosmarie Waldrop.

Poetry, 144 pages, offset, Smyth-sewn, ISBN13: 978-1-886224-92-6, original pbk. \$14



### Isabelle Baladine Howald: SECRET OF BREATH

[Série d'écriture, No.21; translated from the French by Eléna Rivera]

A suite for two voices — voice of one living, voice of one dying — in a race against death and toward death. Caught in a narrative frame and a landscape marked by war, snow, cold, speed, and separation, the voices, even while facing death, embody the approach of love. The secret of breath is as much a kiss as a last sigh.

Poetry, 64 pages, offset, Smyth-sewn, ISBN13: 978-1-886224-91-9, original pbk. \$14



## Recent Prizewinners:

Catherine Imbriglio, *PARTS OF THE MASS*: Norma Farber Prize for Best First Book of Poetry, 2008

Ulf Stolterfoht, *LINGOS I-IX*, tr. Rosmarie Waldrop: PEN Award For Poetry In Translation, 2008

## Dallas Wiebe 1930-2008

"Wiebe has always written with classical simplicity and power. His stories are smart, tough, elegant, and unsettlingly original: each holds your heart and mind in an unrelenting if compassionate grip."—Harry Mathews

"If you read this book, your life, not to mention your conversations, may become more interesting."—Charles Alexander, *Rain Taxi*

*Going to the Mountain* Stories, 192 pp., offset, Smyth-sewn, ISBN 978-0-930901-49-3, orig. pbk. \$14

*Skyblue's Essays* Fiction, 160 pp., offset, Smyth-sewn, ISBN 978-1-886224-02-5, orig. pbk. \$14

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# REMEMBERING MAHMOUD DARWISH

## (1941-2008)



PHOTO CREDIT: BLOODAXE BOOKS

Born in a village in the western Galilee in 1941, Mahmoud Darwish's life is itself a chronicle of the Palestinian journey. His death in Texas, after heart surgery in August, 2008, and the subsequent outpouring of public and private grief in Palestine and throughout the Arab world has even trickled into the US media, from major newspapers to poetry blogs. But back in the last century, any access to Arabic culture was not particularly easy to come by here. When I wrote about him in the 1980s, during the first Palestinian uprising and before the Gulf War, the handfuls of activists, artists and academics involved in finding space for contemporary Arabic culture were rather beleaguered, seeking spaces and venues for presentation in a hostile environment in which editors, curators and other gatekeepers all seemed to wear Zionist colored glasses. Then came the Gulf War, followed by 9/11 and the US invasion and occupation of Iraq: "suddenly" things Arabic, particularly in New York, started to become visible.

However one ultimately measures such things, Mahmoud Darwish must be considered one of the 20th century's great poets. For a poet so entwined with a particular history and language, as all great poets are, the difficulties for readers unfamiliar with those

elements is formidable. This is never simply a question of finding "better" translations but a question of how much work we are willing to do to reach that poet. This work entails, first and foremost, a realization of just how distant we might be, in political and historical consciousness and knowledge, in linguistic and cultural sensibility, and in so many other concrete and intangible areas. In the global village, where things seem to travel easily and all the labor involved in their transport is occluded, this is becoming increasingly difficult.

The complexities of Darwish's life are many; in some, he shares the fate of most of his contemporaries, except for the fact that he did not spend long periods in prison, a common fate for Arab writers in repressive regimes. His whereabouts and temporary places of residence—from his exile from Palestine for so many years to living in Moscow, Cairo, Paris, Beirut, and Ramallah—were dictated almost entirely by political circumstances. Throughout—from his rousing 1964 declaration in "Identity Card," stating "I am an Arab," to his prose masterpiece set during the unspeakable 1982 Israeli siege of Beirut, and his last poems, Darwish's words—whether recited by memory or set to music and sung—touched the heart, soul, and intelligence of all Palestinians, regardless of their diverse allegiances or affiliations. From there they moved throughout the Arab world and be-

yond, engendering an enormous influence through the "literature of resistance," an example that provided oxygen and lifeblood to peoples engaged in political and cultural struggle everywhere.

His own struggle only achieved a false resolution through death, though even after his death, the legacy of this struggle will surely be considered. It consisted of a split between his private and public consciousness, and the constant negotiation between the demands of the public and the intimacies of a narrative shaped, of necessity, by external events. He felt, of course, a sense of responsibility to both: to the deep desire to explore his own being in all its aspects, simply as a human who happened to be Palestinian, and to the need to declare himself part of a collective, and serve as a conduit for its voice. Ultimately, in his greatest work, these forces become one as individual desire is made evident in and as collective possibility. This is a remarkable feat: it allowed Darwish, in fitting irony, to write the Palestinian Declaration of Independence and then oppose the suicidal Oslo Accords; it also allowed him to be a poet of love and desire, as well as resistance, each aspect informing the other of what it might mean to be alive in this world.

- Ammiel Alcalay  
Brooklyn, NY  
September 1, 2008

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# REMEMBERING JONATHAN WILLIAMS

## (1929-2008)



PHOTO CREDIT: REUBEN COX

Millions of poets now living will never die. But generations are slipping away. Poet, publisher, and photographer Jonathan C. Williams (March 8, 1929 to March 16, 2008) arrived at Black Mountain College in the summer of 1951 to study photography with Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind. That same summer he encountered Charles Olson and claimed that it was Olson who turned him into a poet. He met his own generation and two previous ones on both sides of the Atlantic. Those friendships spanned the hemispheres that contain North Carolina and Cumbria.

The portraits he created as an amateur photographer have become iconic within living memory. Picture Robert Creeley as a Spanish assassin or Lorine Niedecker in blue winter hat and coat enduring the Milwaukee weather. He caught young Denise Levertov looking straight on, her arms crossed against a background of saturated black and burgundy shadows. (Her cigarette is cropped out at the bottom in reproductions these days.) A wisp of Pound in silent profile. There's a distance in his portrait of Jack Spicer climbing a tower of logs—some troublesome disguise. Williams made portraits of the markers and graves

of the people most dear to him who had already passed away. He memorialized those who had nourished him in his art.

Jonathan Williams felt that he had to “protect the Margins, because that is where he lived.” When Lorine Niedecker died at the end of 1970, it took nearly a month for Williams to find out. He cried foul on that, and he wrote a letter to the *New York Times* telling them how dim it was that not one of the major newspapers could manage to inform the public of so great a loss. He vowed to keep such work in print on both sides of the Atlantic and to keep it that way for a “small audience capable of telling real peony bushes from plastic hydrangea plants” until journals, critics, and readers become “re-cultivated.”

As publisher of The Jargon Society he published some of the most stunning volumes by some of the most cherished poets to come along after mid-century. So many were as yet unknown to their readers. Jargon published the first *Maximus Poems* and continued through the decades publishing the likes of Niedecker, Paul Metcalf, Thomas A. Clark, Thomas Meyer, and Joel Oppenheimer. The classic *White Trash Cooking* turned out to be an anomalous bestseller for the press.

Williams was fond of sharp adages and quoted them in his writing. He liked fierce limericks and clerihews. He mined the inappropriate with terrific humor.

### TUBER MIRAM

Ezra Loomis Pound  
bought a lb

of Idaho potatoes  
(the Hailey Comet always ate those).

\*\*

ADUMBRATIONS OF MEPHITIC  
PHANTASMAGORIA PRODUCED  
BY A ROADSIGN IN MILD &  
SUNNY KIRKBY LONSDALE

raised manholes  
for next mile

\*\*

AUTUMN COMES TO THE  
UPLANDS OF BRITAIN

it's quiet here  
and the only sound you  
hear is the occasional  
thud as someone else  
dies of extreme boredom

He wrote in meta-fours and invented forms. He made tight, symphonic lyrics. His imagination was always attentive.

### LE CONTE HIGH-TOP

under the rondelay  
the sun

into the wind and rain a  
winter wren

again, again—

its song  
needling the pines

The poetry is available in *Jubilant Thicket: New and Selected Poems* (Copper Canyon, 2005). *Blackbird Dust* (Turtle Point Press, 2000) is dedicated in part to new readers. It includes essays, occasional poems, memorials, and some photographic encounters shot between 1951 and 1986. Color portraits are available in two volumes: *Photographic Portraits* (Gnomon Press, 1979) and *A Palpable Elysium* (David R. Godine, 2002).

— Chuck Stebelton  
Milwaukee, WI  
September 4, 2008

# LORENZO THOMAS, AMERICAN

by Dale Smith



PHOTO CREDIT: A.L. NIELSEN

Of the cities one might live in, Houston, with its bayous and highway congestion, in part offers an experience of modernity rivaled only by the more recent transformations of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Like those mirage cities of the Middle East, Houston, grounded in the extraction and management of energy systems, remains close to the fossil sources of North American ease. And like those Emirates, Houston has made the banal from the improbable. Glass skyscrapers rise above suburbs that now occupy the subdivided remains of sugar plantations. Nearby, Bay City refineries prepare crude for domestic consumption. Companies in the Bayport Industrial District contribute essential chemicals that go into the making of plastic bags, cleaning agents, and antifreeze. It is difficult to think of this, however, when walking along the magnolia-lined street of Sul Ross. In this neighborhood—the Montrose—the Menil hosts a significant collection of surrealist art, and near it, the Rothko Chapel broods obdurately beneath the oaks.

In Houston you live either “inside” or “outside” the “loop,” a reference to Interstate 610, an artery that separates downtown “island cities” from the outer portions of Bellaire, the Memorial Villages, and the suburbs beyond. The Third and Fifth Wards, located within, have given Houston much of its vitality through the blues scenes long established there. The city’s cultural or spiritual orientation, too, is turned toward the Gulf; it is more trans-Atlantic than southern, mid-western, or Latin American. Something about the dazzling contradictions and puzzling spatial dimensions must have appealed to Lorenzo. Perhaps some-

thing about the sky and air there recalled for him his family background in the West Indies and Panama. The Atlantic meets there the black prairie of North America. This geographic confluence meant something.

Lorenzo, when I asked him once whether he lived “inside” or “outside” the “loop,” only said, “Outer Space,” and we laughed. We talked about jazz, his small car hurling through space somewhere, that day, “inside.” At Brazos Bookstore, he pointed out new work on Texas jazz, along with *Travois*, a 1976 anthology of Texas poetry. Line drawings by Houston artist John Biggers accompany Lorenzo’s poem. One drawing shows a West African couple. A woman approaches a man, her body doubled, as if an aura moved a slight step ahead of the actual body. In the other image they embrace, kissing. Their forms darken and their features flatten. An aura of light penetrates the space where their faces meet. Lorenzo’s poem speaks into these images. “I want you to dance / GET IT,” he writes. “[D]o you get it? / I want you to dance / light as air / like the water.” The question brings a kind of brooding self-consciousness to the poem. “[D]o you get it?” There is an urge here, and in much of his other work, to expose, and then reject, what he feels in order to arrive at the truth of the poem. He thinks through it to discover what it means to live in a kind of powerless situation, and in the poem he makes the heart account for what it so deeply desires.

Lorenzo Thomas was born in Panama and grew up in New York City. He served in Vietnam, moved to Houston in 1973, teaching first at Texas Southern University, where he edited the magazine *Roots*, and then later joining the University of Houston-Downtown. His participation in the Umbra workshops in New York in the 1960s significantly influenced his poetics. With David Henderson, Askia Muhammad, Larry Neal, Tom Dent, and others he began a study of poetry that was inspired by the racial, political, and cultural movements of the period. For Lorenzo, whose family came from the Caribbean via Central America, poets like Léopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire, appealed to his sense of identity as a black writer. Also, the African poets writing in Portuguese—people like Francisco-Jose Tenreiro and Marcelino dos Santos—motivated his work, along with Harlem Renaissance figures, to a lesser degree.

His study of twentieth-century African-American literature, music, and popular culture first came together in *Extraordinary Measures: Afrocentric Modernism and Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000), and, more recently, in *Don’t Deny My Name: Words and Music and the Black*





Their music is dying.” Moreover, “[n]othing happens. / More nothing and / The loss of the land hangs in the air / A rotten rapist.” “Dracula” remains an essential poem in Lorenzo’s work because in it he early on identifies themes that will return in different forms. And while an urgent demand for judgment seems to accompany his writing, his sense of “dissolving boundaries” allows him to create poems that withhold answers. In other words, he is brilliant at letting the poem undermine his own perspective so that others may form in an ambiguous and absurd half-light, where knowledge is gained.

“Framing the Sunrise” (1975) documents more than 20 years of U.S. social and political hostility. Channeled through a television set “where a magazine is thrown carelessly / by the sofa / Family Circle,” Lorenzo observes “solemn middle American words / about mortars and dyings.” The poem flashes with images punctuated by the refrain, “[the] state of the art is improving.” He writes:

remember the technical shakedown  
 Elizabeth Two’s coronation  
 the excellent march on Lam Son

surplus camouflaged maimed  
ARVN vets

the colorful Beefeaters  
Grant Park mounted police

Caroline’s jumper remember Selma  
the bridge

colorful b&w 8mm teargas clouds  
from Budapest

by satellite relay  
 bullets from Kent State Ohio

The “memory” here is also technologically manufactured by “satellite relay,” to enter the “solemn middle American” home. “[R]emember,” he writes, “the festive gold knobs / on the Magnavox of live assassinations.” He wonders how this mediation of atrocity filters through people—through himself. “We lived with this shit twenty years,” he writes, “and each became monsters / lazy unfeeling / brutally corrupted by our senses.” As in “Dracula,” this moral corruption figures significantly here and in later work. But despite the social and political sense of helplessness that often comes out through his writing, his fidelity to the imaginative agency of the poem provides a way to overcome the limited perspective of the individual in order to see a world more comprehensively—a world that can include a hard-earned optimism.

Tom Dent has observed that Lorenzo’s “sense of irony, absurdity, and his social awareness are very much a part of the shared concerns of contemporary black literature, despite his surreal influences.” Dent argues moreover that Lorenzo is “a critic of the Western world writing from the perspective of Afro-Amer-

ica, with inherited and acquired attitudes of an Afro-Caribbean.” This understanding of his work puts him, in part, with the company of Edward Dorn, another critic of the Western world. Their perspectives were informed by different social, historical, and cultural contexts, certainly, but they both used poetry to address their locations in the West. While Dorn turned to satire and the eighteenth-century Enlightenment to help in his understanding of the West, Lorenzo’s use of the surrealist lyric helped to deal with the absurdity and irony he experienced as a black American living in large urban spaces. Both poets offer ironic visions of American culture, but Lorenzo’s poems, charged with images of the social fabric, comment more on the suffering and voicelessness of individuals. Laughter results from the poetry of both men, but in Lorenzo’s case, the work is accompanied too with a sadness grounded in the perspective of his race and body of feeling.

In his final collection, *Dancing on Main Street* (2004), Lorenzo wrote of a “carnival of soft-spoken meanness” in America, noting this perspective in the fabrications of daily life. Here, as in *The Bathers* and *Chances are Few* (1979 / 2003), his lines float calmly while under them the horror of human fate with numb compliance registers diminishing prospects. “Main Street,” of the book’s title, for instance, refers to an office address of the University of Houston-Downtown where he worked. One can only imagine the dance, those necessary performances given to appease the mediocre expectations of a faculty:

Given choices, standing in the street  
 And shouting  
 Even for a worthy cause  
 The way we used to do  
 When we were young  
 Even for nothing  
 Is not choice

The world has changed.

There is an evident self-criticism here, for in his occupation of an office in Houston, compliant to university expectations, he had to perform at least partially in ways that ran counter to his spirit. This awareness of the complicity in our social obligations helps make these poems ultimately sympathetic, and potentially transformative.

Other poems look at the violence America aims at marginalized people. “Dirge for Amadou Diallo” addresses the 1999 police murder of a 23-year-old immigrant from Guinea. “We could blame chance / Or curse our earthbound ignorance / Vow to concoct new mythologies / That wouldn’t / Forge us such raw cruelties / Marching our hope / In coffles toward the grave.” “Coffles” casts an historical shadow over this “incident,” relating the violence between owner and owned, European and African.

“It is hard to have your son die / In a distant land,” echoes the refrain. “And harder still / When we can’t understand.” Another poem, “Psalm,” dated “Waco, Texas, 1993,” might not relieve the suffering of the Diallo family, but it indicts with sad mockery the export of weapons by “pro-life murderers,” “bombs and guns made in the USA.” As in “Framing the Sunrise,” the poem here registers, though more passively and sarcastically, the overwhelming failure of meaning generated by the images of evening news. He writes:

O Lord, I don't know what to do  
 I don't like watching what comes into view  
 I will narrow my eyelids  
 Till there is nothing in the world but You

Since moving to Texas in the mid 1990s, I could expect to see Lorenzo at least once or twice a year, often with my wife, Hoa Nguyen, and his partner, Karen Luik. It's about a three-hour drive from Houston to Austin, and he'd often arrive for the annual Texas Book Festival (hosted by Laura Bush), or come unexpectedly to pursue research at the University of Texas. I remember sitting with him at an open mike event in Houston once wondering where he got his enthusiasm for such things. His generosity was admirable, and I would try to absorb his kindness, to learn from it. Once we ate *Moros y Cristianos*—“Moors and Christians”—a Cubano version of black beans and rice, laughing

over the metaphoric capacities of the Cubans. He loved conversation, and I could always learn from him—especially through the way he pitched his thought—his elocutions somehow commenting on the words as he spoke them. But where do these words go? In my memory it's as though I retain certain sloughed impressions of the man—his gentleness and authority. I wasn't close to him in any kind of emotional or daily sense, though I appreciated deeply his attention. What I miss is the certainty of his presence, and my reassurance in his life and his labor. He had a head start in this marvelous adventure we call poetry, and there was much to learn from his perspective. He showed me how to inhabit a place like Texas—from the “outside.”

I think sometimes about the irony of his death on July 4th, 2005, amidst the numbing hoopla of celebration for a country cracking up under weight of its identities and violent contradictions. The date corresponds with something in Lorenzo—an appetite to read cultural patterns and, as a poet, to give shape to them. Such need to test what we are and remake that into something other strikes me as uniquely American. Maybe he would think so too.

*Dale Smith lives in Austin, Texas, with the poet Hoa Nguyen. His poems and essays have appeared in Jacket, Big Bridge, Mandorla, Best American Poetry, and other print and online journals. He publishes a poetry column each month for Bookslut.com. Susquehanna (Punch Press 2008) and Black Stone (Effing 2007) are his most recent books.*

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# WRITING WORKSHOPS AT THE POETRY PROJECT

## THE CREATIVE DIALOG:

### POEMS CAST BETWEEN CONVERSATIONS OF POETRY – MARTINE BELLEN

TUESDAYS AT 7PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN OCTOBER 7<sup>TH</sup>

"There is then creative reading as well as creative writing," wrote Emerson; and between the two, where reading and writing converge, exists spontaneous combustion. In our writing laboratory, workshop participants will experiment in this potent, liminal gap. Through concentrated readings of one author of their choosing, participants will write a series of poems (poetry defined in the most expansive manner) that converse, confront, conform, channel, chant, and concuss the poet and poetry of choice. Poems written in this workshop will employ extensive methodologies that will originate from a brainstorming session intended to cultivate startling structures and processes. **Martine Bellen** is the author of *Tales of Murasaki and Other Poems* (Sun & Moon Press) and *The Vulnerability of Order* (Copper Canyon Press) among other collections.

## MAKE NEW MISTAKES: A WRITING WORKSHOP FOR TEENS – CHRIS MARTIN

THURSDAYS AT 4:30-6PM: 5 SESSIONS BEGIN OCTOBER 23<sup>RD</sup>

While losing may be an art that's easily mastered, *mistaking* requires some experimental spirit. In this workshop, instead of just making it new, we will explore the art of making new mistakes through reading, seeing, hearing, rapping, and most of all writing. Along the way we will encounter the Ecstatic Truth of Werner Herzog, *How to Be Perfect* by Ron Padgett, the chromo-poems of CA Conrad, Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*, dispatches from the Spasmodic School, the MCs of Avant-Rap, and much else. Best of all, we will make many new mistakes together, through in-class collaborations, critiques, and performances. Young writers of any style, persuasion, interest, ability, and borough are all equally welcome. Let's stop pretending to be perfect and start writing poems that are alive and writhing. **Chris Martin** is the author of *American Music* and has taught young New Yorkers for the past six years. Open to high school teens. FREE.

## WRITING CHANCE: A RANDOM WORKSHOP ON PROCESS – TISA BRYANT

FRIDAYS AT 7PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN OCTOBER 10<sup>TH</sup>

If we are, writer Amina Cain suggests, mysterious seducers of experience, mapping our knowing of people and places into a rhizome of dark knots and clear threads, how do we allow for such human magic as we write through structures, constraints, intentions, politics and deadlines? How can we know the difference between force and feeling, or simply when to let the work go? In this workshop, we'll weigh our needs and intentions against the power of chance, to better observe and embrace our creative process. We'll work and share, inclusive of and across genres, and graze the works of Hannah Weiner, Samuel Beckett, Russell Atkins, Maya Deren, Jackson Pollock, Kirithi Nath, the Situationists, Fred Wilson, Miranda Mellis, and whomever you may bring. Consider coincidence as social encounter, with the desire to know as a means of triggering, from person and page, synchronic new modes of rigor and flow. **Tisa Bryant** is the author of *Unexplained Presence*, from Leon Works, and a founding editor/publisher of The Encyclopedia Project.

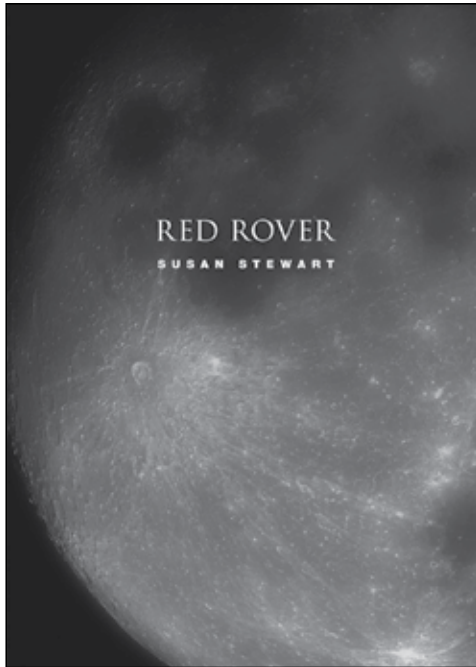
## (SOMA)TIC POETRY – CACONRAD

SATURDAYS AT NOON: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN OCTOBER 11<sup>TH</sup>

In this frantic, routine-driven world we need freedom from regimented poetry writing and a healthy dose of walking the space between Soma (spirit) and Somatic (body). Using gemstones, trees, and the city itself, we will create deliberate, sustained physical manipulations to generate language to write our poems. Everything is new every time we embark, and opening our minds to having that freedom in our lives everyday to write poems is what these workshops are about. Poetry is for everyBody, therefore everyBody is welcome! **CACONRAD**'s book *(Soma)tic Midge* (FAUX Press) was written after eating and living with a single color for a day. Poem samples, as well as a link to his monthly (Soma)tic Poetry Exercises can be found here: [www.CACONRAD.blogspot.com](http://www.CACONRAD.blogspot.com).

*The workshop fee is \$350, which includes a one-year individual Poetry Project membership and tuition for all fall and spring classes. Reservations are required due to limited class space, and payment must be received in advance. Please send payment and reservations to: The Poetry Project, St. Mark's Church, 131 E. 10th St., NY, NY 10003. For more information please call (212)674-0910 or e-mail [info@poetryproject.com](mailto:info@poetryproject.com).*

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# An Introduction to a Poem by Tim Dlugos

by David Trinidad



TIM DLUGOS, CIRCA 1982. PHOTOGRAPH BY JACK SHEAR

When he was alive, Tim Dlugos was a vital part of the St. Mark's scene. From the mid-seventies, when he moved to New York from Washington, D.C. (where he'd been an equally vital part of the Mass Transit poetry scene), until his death from AIDS in 1990, Tim was a distinctive presence at The Poetry Project: a reader of his own brilliant pop-lyrical poems, a rapt but discerning listener of other poets' work, an editor (1984-1985) of this very newsletter, and always (I don't think Tim would mind me saying this) a rather rabid socializer. Tim had his own special brand of effervescence. He was so thrilled to be in New York City—the center, for him, of all glamour—mingling with the artists and writers he looked up to and deeply admired. That thrill never wore off. It's there in the first poem he wrote as a resident of New York, the Ted Berrigan-esque "Thomas Merton Lived on Perry Street," written on July 6, 1976 in the top-floor apartment of Kenward Elmslie's house on Greenwich Avenue:

I break  
into a smile  
  
my cultural and spiritual masters  
as well as my political heroes  
all lived in this world  
and so do I!

And it's there in the gossip anecdotes in "G-9," written a year before his death. Tim reminisces about "the stories we would tell / the morning after [drunken revelry], best / when they involved our friends, / second-best, our heroes." And asks: "When I pass, / who'll remember, who will care / about these joys and wonders?"

In the process of editing an expanded edition of Tim's poems (the slim selected poems I compiled in the mid-nineties, *Powerless*, is now out of print), I've come across many wonderful unpublished poems. One of them, "Things I Might Do," is printed here for the first time. Tim wrote it on June 6, 1973 (he was, from the beginning, an excellent dater of his poems). Just twenty-two years old, he had that spring moved from Philadelphia (where he was a student at LaSalle College) to his parents' home in Arlington, Virginia. He would later, as he says in the poem, move to an apartment of his own in Washington, D.C. Dedicated to the poet Terence Winch, who at that time was the poetry book buyer for a store called Discount Books, "Things I Might Do" is, obviously, a Things To Do poem, though Tim gives it his own spin by making it things he *might* do. Typing his early poems, I learned that Tim had quite a crush on the poet Jim Carroll. Prior to this poem, he wrote a number of mash note poems to Carroll, none of them very good; it's doubtful that any of them will make their way into the book I'm editing. Joey (last name unknown) was an early boyfriend of Tim's, and a significant figure for him. He appears in many poems—as Joe, Joey, and by his nickname, Spinner. It took me a while to figure out that they were all the same person. Ten years after "Things I Might

Do," Tim would write the beautiful poem "Spinner" when Joe died of AIDS. Another thing needed figuring out: the reference to Geraud in the third to last line. I consulted Google. Could Tim be referring to the seventeenth-century philosopher Géraud de Cordemoy? That seemed unlikely. Then I thought it could be a typo: Tim might be referring to Gerard Malanga. I consulted Terence, who said he didn't think it was Malanga. A few days later, Terence called to say it had dawned on him: in the late sixties, St. Geraud was the pseudonym of poet Bill Knott. We were both excited. A little mystery, solved.

Tim wanted the people he knew and liked to know and like one another. He wanted all of us to be as excited as he was, writing and sharing new "masterpieces," brushing elbows with the famous, intoxicated by the stardust (as well as the endless cocktails, of course). Even though some of us already were excited, being around Tim simply intensified the high. There was nothing like having Tim's attention. When he expressed interest in you, you felt elevated, felt that he believed you could walk, just like him, in Frank O'Hara's footsteps. I could go on (I had a terrible crush on Tim in the early eighties). His wide, slightly slanted smile. His attractive preppiness (he wore the bowties, button-down shirts and blazers, and huge round spectacles like a costume). And his laugh. I wrote about it in my poem "To Tim Dlugos": "inimitable," "self-satisfied," "infectious." Thank God there are recordings of his laugh. When Tim said something witty and smart, he laughed at his own cleverness, and you laughed too, in appreciation (and in my case awe), and together you floated above Manhattan in a debonair bubble.

*David Trinidad's most recent book is The Late Show, published last year by Turtle Point Press. He lives in Chicago, where he teaches poetry at Columbia College. He's currently editing a manuscript entitled A Fast Life: Poems of Tim Dlugos.*

# THINGS I MIGHT DO

– for Terry Winch

Might write a letter to Jim Carroll  
this p.m., I finally found his address.  
Might get an answer; probably not.  
Might start crying when Joey calls  
tonight. Might wonder if he slept  
with Michael; probably won't ask.  
Some time might remember the name of  
the star that the statue on the fountain  
at the Circle resembles: not Leslie Howard,  
but that's pretty close. Might quit  
work today, might dream about my job  
again tonight, the 4th night in a row.  
Might lose something if I keep on  
working. Might forget to cash my check  
again. Might go out dancing  
with Billy whom I might call this afternoon,  
and might go to bed with when parents split  
for West Coast in just two weeks. Might  
look for an apartment. Might make  
a tremendous break and move to New York City.  
Might do the streets. Might get crabs.  
Might be missing the world's most beautiful  
boy by writing now. Might get a sunburn.  
Might go bald. Might fall asleep on the bench  
like some old bum. Might leave the Circle.  
Might check the poems out at Discount Books,  
find Joe Brainard, find Geraud. Might wave  
to Terry as I just walk past, his waving back  
a p.m. highlight and distinct possibility.

*Tim Dlugos was the author of Je Suis Ein Americano (Little Caesar Press, 1979), A Fast Life (Sherwood Press, 1982), and Entre Nous (Little Caesar, 1982). He died of AIDS in 1990, at the age of forty. After his death, two collections appeared: Strong Place (Amethyst Press, 1992) and Powerless: Selected Poems 1973-1990 (High Risk Books, 1996). In a twenty-year period (1970-1990), he wrote well over 500 poems. His work is, at the moment, completely out of print.*

# EVENTS AT THE PO

## SEPTEMBER

MONDAY 9/22

**MARCELLA DURAND & TOMAŽ ŠALAMUN**

**Marcella Durand** has two new books, *Area* (Belladonna) and *Traffic & Weather* (Futurepoem). Other publications include *The Anatomy of Oil*, *Western Capital Rhapsodies*, *City of Ports*, and *Lapsus Linguae*. She has been working on a translation of Michèle Métail's book-length work, *Les horizons du sol/Earth's Horizons*. **Tomaž Šalamun** lives in Ljubljana, Slovenia and occasionally teaches in the USA, where he was a Fulbright Fellow at Columbia University, a member of International Writing Program at Iowa, and a Cultural Attaché at the Consulate General of Slovenia in New York. His recent books translated into English are *Poker*, *Blackboards*, *The Book For My Brother*, *Row and Woods and Chalices*. \*This event was funded in part by Poets & Writers, Inc. through public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

WEDNESDAY 9/24

**BRENDAN LORBER & GILLIAN MCCAIN**

**Brendan Lorber** is the author of several chapbooks, among them *The Address Book*, *Dash*, *Your Secret* and *Corvid Aurora*. He ran the Zinc Talk Reading Series for ten years, edited *The Poetry Project Newsletter* for two, and continues to edit *LUNGFULL! Magazine*. **Gillian McCain** is the author of two books of poetry: *Tilt* and *Religion*, and is the co-author (with Legs McNeil) of *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (Grove). McCain is also collaborating with David Trinidad and Jeffery Conway on *Descent of the Dolls*, a book-length poem inspired by *Valley of the Dolls* (the movie) and *The Inferno* (the book).

FRIDAY 9/26 [10 PM]

**SLOVENIAN POETS: A BOOK-RELEASE CELEBRATION**

with the participation of the following visiting poets from Slovenia: **Primoz Cucnik**, **Ana Pepelnik**, **Gregor Podlogar**, **Tomaž Šalamun** and **Tone Skrjanec**. Readings by Slovene poets and their friends, a book signing for the second editions of Tomaž Šalamun's *Poker* and Tone Skrjanec's *Sun On A Knee*, plus a special chapbook featuring the work of all five poets in English translation come free with admission. This event is a collaboration between Ugly Duckling Presse (Brooklyn) and *Literatura Magazine* (Ljubljana) and kicks off a whole weekend of Slovene poetry in NYC.

MONDAY 9/29

**ALEC FINLAY & UCHE NDUKA**

**Alec Finlay** is an artist, poet, and publisher. His most recent books are *three estates renga* (platform projects), *what changes change* (Redfox), *Specimen Colony*

(Liverpool University Press), and *One Hundred Year Star-Diary*. Alec's most recent exhibitions are *thoughts within thoughts*, ARC (Bulgaria), and *sunbeams giving the air a kiss*, Millais Gallery (UK). **Uche Nduka** is a poet, essayist, songwriter, and anthologist. Born and raised in Nigeria, he is the author of seven volumes of poems, a book of prose, and is the editor of two anthologies of poetry. Winner of the Association of Nigerian Authors Poetry Prize for 1997, his latest volume of poems is titled *eel on reef* (Akashic).

## OCTOBER

WEDNESDAY 10/1

**JOHN GODFREY & KAREN WEISER**

**John Godfrey** has had nine collections published since 1971, including *Dabble* (1982), which is now available only from him. In August, Wave Books published *City of Corners*, made from poems 2002-06. **Karen Weiser** is a poet and doctoral candidate at the CUNY Grad Center in English. Her chapbooks include *Eight Positive Trees* (Pressed Wafer), *Placefulness* (Ugly Duckling Presse), and *Pitching Woo* (Cy Press). She has had poems appear in *The Chicago Review*, *The Hat*, *The Germ*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *The Recluse*, and elsewhere. She teaches at Barnard College when not caring for her baby daughter.

SATURDAY 10/4 [NOON-2PM, FREE]

**MEMORIAL FOR ROCHELLE RATNER**

Writer and editor Rochelle Ratner was the author of sixteen collections of poetry, most recently *Ben Casey Days* (Marsh Hawk Press, 2008). Please join her loved ones and colleagues as we take an afternoon to remember her and her work. Readers will include **Jane Augustine**, **Claudia Carlson**, **George Economou**, **Tom Fink**, **Dorothy Friedman**, **Daniela Gioseffi**, **Bob Heman**, **Burt Kimmelman**, **Basil King**, **Martha King**, **Sandy McIntosh**, **Stephen Paul Miller**, **Carol Novack**, **Sharon Olinka**, **Rochelle Owens**, **Paul Pines**, **Thaddeus Rutkowski**, **Jackie Sheeler**, **Mark Weiss**, and **Marie Ponsot**. A reception will follow. \*This event is in cooperation with Marsh Hawk Press.

MONDAY 10/6

**OPEN READING**

SIGN-UP 7:45PM,  
READING AT 8:00PM

WEDNESDAY 10/8

**STEVE MCCAFFERY, KAREN MACCORMACK & MARJORIE WELISH**

**Steve McCaffery** is most recently the author of *Slightly Left of Thinking* from Chax Press and *Paradigm of the Tinctures* (with Alan Halsey) from Granary Books. He is one of the founding theorists of Language Poetry and a founding member of the

Toronto Research Group and the sound poetry ensemble The Four Horsemen. Born in Luanshya, Zambia, **Karen MacCormack's** books include *Nothing by Mouth*, *Quill Driver*, *Quirks & Quillets*, *At Issue* and *Vanity Release*. She currently lives in the USA and teaches at the State University of New York at Buffalo. **Marjorie Welish** is the author of several books of poetry, including *The Windows Flew Open* (Burning Deck), *Casting Sequences* (U. Georgia), *The Annotated "Here" and Selected Poems*, *Word Group* and *Isle of the Signatories* (Coffee House), and a book of art criticism: *Signifying Art: Essays on Art after 1960* (Cambridge).

FRIDAY 10/10 [10 PM]

**VANESSA PLACE & STEVEN ZULTANSKI**

**Vanessa Place** is a writer, lawyer, and co-director of Les Fignes Press. She is the author of *Dies: A Sentence*, *La Medusa*, *Figure from The Gates of Paradise*, and the forthcoming *Conceptualisms: An Ill-Conceived Guide to Kinda Conceptual, Post-Conceptual, Extant and Taxonomical Writings, etc.*, with Robert Fitterman. Her nonfiction book, *The Guilt Project: Rape and Morality*, will be published in 2009. **Steven Zultanski** is the author of the chapbooks *Homoem* (Radical Readout), *This and That Lenin* (BookThug), and *Steve's Poem* (Lettermachine, forthcoming). He edits *President's Choice* magazine, a Lil' Norton publication.

MONDAY 10/13

**DAN FEATHERSTON & LUISA GIUGLIANO**

**Dan Featherston's** books of poetry include *The Clock Maker's Memoir* (Cuneiform Press), *United States* (Factory School), and *Into the Earth* (Quarry Press). He currently teaches as a visiting professor at Kutztown University. **Luisa Giugliano** spent the last seventeen years in a treehouse, teaching poetry to small mammals and yoga to objects. Her poems descended and on occasion proliferated in *The Germ*, *No*, *Kiosk*, and *Fourteen Hills*.

WEDNESDAY 10/15

**ELENI SIKELIANOS & JAMES THOMAS STEVENS**

**Eleni Sikelianos** is the author of six books, including *The California Poem* and *The Book of Jon*. A new book of poems, *Body Clock*, is currently available, and her translation of Jacques Roubaud's *Exchanges on Light* is forthcoming. **James Thomas Stevens'** books include *Tokinish* (First Intensity Press), *Combing the Snakes from His Hair* (Michigan State UP), *dis(Orient)* (Palmpress), and *Mohawk/Samoa: Transmigrations* (subpress). He is a member of the Akwesasne Mohawk tribe and holds an MFA from Brown.

FRIDAY 10/17 [10PM]

**MARIE BUCK, GORDON FAYLOR & EDWARD HOPELY**

**Marie Buck's** first book of poems, *Life & Style*, is forthcoming from Patrick Lovelace Editions. She co-edits, with Brad Flis, the small poetry journal *Model*



# POETRY PROJECT

*Homes*. **Gordon Faylor** presently serves as the Assistant Editor of midrib poetry and as editor of its chapbook series. **Edward Hopely** is the author of some chapbooks and ran the "Hammered All Around Their Nail Heads" reading series.

## MONDAY 10/20

### PATRICK DURGIN & BRAD FLIS

**Patrick Durgin's** most recent publications include *Imitation Poems* (Atticus/Finch) and *The Route*, a collaborative hybrid-genre book written with Jen Hofer (Atelos). He edited *Hannah Weiner's Open House* for Kenning Editions. **Brad Flis** is the author of the chapbooks *Health Pack* (Chuckwagon Press) and, with Steven Zultanski, *USA Equals Not Sees* (Nocturnal Editions). His book *Peasants* will be published by Patrick Lovelace Editions this fall. He co-edits the journal *Model Homes* with Marie Buck in Detroit.

## WEDNESDAY 10/22

### ROBERT GRENIER & AARON SHURIN

**Robert Grenier** says, "Right now, I'd like to: write more drawing poems (later); finish 'seemingly infinite' work on me-&-my-co-editor-Curtis's work on our *Larry Eigner Collected Poems* for Stanford; continue to make & distribute to the World At Large (!) prints made from selected sequences / 'arrangements' of notebook drawing poems..." **Aaron Shurin's** newest book is *King of Shadows*, a collection of narrative essays from City Lights. Recent poetry books include *Involuntary Lyrics* (Omnidawn), *A Door and The Paradise of Forms: Selected Poems*, both from Talisman.

## MONDAY 10/27 — TALK SERIES

### ROBERT GRENIER ON LARRY EIGNER

**Robert Grenier** looks forward to presenting an account of his relation with poet **Larry Eigner** & of his work over the years w/ LE establishing authoritative texts of some 1800 poems & editing 3 books, leading to RG's current project of editing (w/ Curtis Faville) a *Collected Poems of Larry Eigner* for the Stanford University Press.

## WEDNESDAY 10/29

### A HELEN ADAM HALLOWEEN

A celebration of the publication of *A Helen Adam Reader* (National Poetry Foundation, 2008) ed. by Kristin Prevallet. Songsters who will conjure Adam through her ballads are: **Anne Waldman, Edmund Berrigan, Dan Machlin & Serena Jost, Cecilia Vicuña, Julie Patton, Tracie Morris, Lee Ann Brown, Charles Bernstein, Susan Howe** and **Bob Holman**. \*This event is co-presented with Poets House.

## FRIDAY 10/31 [10PM]

TBA

# NOVEMBER

## MONDAY 11/3

### SARAH CAMPBELL & JANE SPRAGUE

**Sarah Campbell's** recent work appears in *Golden Handcuffs Review, Broke*, and as a poetry chapbook, *The Maximum* (Bonfire Press). **Jane Sprague** is a poet and publisher-editor of Palm Press. Her books *The Port of Los Angeles* and *Extreme Global: La Ciudad sin Extremo / Los Angeles* are forthcoming from Chax and Chain Links presses. Her pamphlet "Sacking the Notebooks" is forthcoming from eohippus labs later this year. She is currently editing *Imaginary Syllabi*, a pedagogical project.

## WEDNESDAY 11/5

### GARRETT CAPLES & DAVID MILLS

**Garrett Caples** is the author of *Complications* (Meritage Press) and *The Garrett Caples Reader* (Angle/Black Square Editions). He recently edited volume 59 in the City Lights Pocket Poets Series, *Tau* by Philip Lamantia and *Journey to the End* by John Hoffman. **David Mills'** work has appeared in *Callaloo, Rattapallax, The Pedestal magazine, Hanging Loose Press* and *Aloud* to name a few. He lived as writer-in-residence in Langston Hughes' landmark home and performs a one-person show of Hughes' works.

## MONDAY 11/10

### POETS FOR HEALTH CARE: A BENEFIT READING

Over 47 million Americans are without health insurance, and another 50 million are under-insured. More than 18,000 people die every year because they have no medical insurance. The Poetry Project is pleased to host this benefit for two of the leading health-care activist groups based in NYC: Healthcare-NOW and the Private Health Insurance Must Go Coalition. Featured poets, performers, and speakers include: **David Amram, Andy Clausen, David Henderson, Bob Holman, Eliot Katz, Rachel Levitsky, Akilah Oliver, Katie Robbins, Ajamu Sankofa, Stacy Szymaszek, Rodrigo Toscano, Anne Waldman** and others.

## WEDNESDAY 11/12

### ISABELLE GARRON & ROSMARIE WALDROP

French poet **Isabelle Garron** is the author of *Qu'il faille, Face devant contre* (Editions Flammarion), *Déferlage II* and *Le corps échéant* (Editions Les Cahiers de la Seine). English translations of her poetry have appeared in *Double Change, 1913: a journal of forms*, and *Versé*. The chapbook *Face Before Against*, in Sarah Riggs's translation, was released by Seeing Eye Books. She is a regular participant with Jean Daive in the France Culture radio broadcast, "Peinture Fraiche" ("Wet Paint") on contemporary art. She will be joined by her translator Sarah Riggs. **Rosmarie Waldrop's** recent poetry books are *Curves to the Apple, Blindsight* (New Directions), *Splitting Image* (Zasterle), and *Love, Like Pronouns* (Omnidawn). Her collected essays, *Dissonance (if you are interested)*, is out from University

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of Alabama Press. Her translation of Ulf Stolterfoht's *Lingos I-IX* (Burning Deck) was awarded the PEN Award for Poetry in Translation, 2008.

## MONDAY 11/17

### SUZANNE STEIN & ANN STEPHENSON

**Suzanne Stein's** chapbook, *Passenger Ship*, from Ypolita press, and *Signs of Life* from O Books are forthcoming this year. Former co-director and film curator at four walls gallery, she works currently as community producer at SFMOMA. Suzanne is editor and publisher of the small press TAXT. **Ann Stephenson** is the author of the chapbook *Wirework* (Tent Editions). Her manuscript, *The Poles*, was a finalist for the 2008 Bateau Press BOOM Chapbook Series. She received her MFA from Bard College and currently divides her time between Atlanta and NYC.

## WEDNESDAY 11/19

### BRUCE ANDREWS & CRIS CHEEK

**Bruce Andrews** is a performance artist, poet and founding co-editor of the journal L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, he is the author of over 30 books of poetry and a collection of innovative critical essays. Recent books of poetry are *Swoon Noir* (Chax), *Designated Heartbeat* (Salt), and *Co (Roof)*. Since the mid 1980s, he has been Music Director for Sally Silvers & Dancers. **cris cheek** is a poet, book maker, sound artist, mixed-media practitioner and interdisciplinary performer. His first solo book for some time *the church, the school, the beer* was published last year by Critical Documents. A major retrospective book and DVD is forthcoming from The Gig.

## FRIDAY 11/21 [10 PM]

### POETS' POTLUCK III

Natives and newcomers alike join the Three Sisters for a giving of thanks, foods, poetry, music, and autumnal beverages. A two-time staple of last-year's series, the night will again feature performances by many and food by all so inclined. Grab your canned pumpkin, plastic cool whip containers, and blue-lined notebooks, and pilgrim your way over.

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# BOOK REVIEWS

TISA BRYANT  
UNEXPLAINED PRESENCE  
LEON WORKS / 2008  
REVIEW BY MARCELLA DURAND

Tisa Bryant opens a chapter midway through *Unexplained Presence* with a quote from Émile Zola to Édouard Manet, discussing the latter's painting, *Olympia*:

To you a picture is simply a pretext for analysis. You wanted a nude, and you chose Olympia, the first to come along. You wanted bright, luminous patches, and you put in a bouquet. You wanted black patches, and you placed a Negress and a cat in a corner. What does that mean? You hardly know, and neither do I. But I do know that you have succeeded admirably at doing a painter's painting, the work of a great painter.

The quote illuminates forward and backward Bryant's investigations of artworks, films, and television shows that include black people for most often "unexplained" reasons. What are the black characters in films like *Le Samourai*, *8 Femmes*, and *L'Eclisse* really about? How about in texts like *Hebdomeros: A Novel* or *Orlando*? Or in a reality TV show like *Regency House Party*? Are these presences foils? Counterpoints? Or are they, as in Manet's *Olympia*, compositional elements? A character in Sembene Ousmane's great novel, *God's Bits of Wood*, says, "A black man isn't an object to be liked or disliked like an orange or a pear or a piece of furniture." So, then, is a black man, or woman, an object to be used in a movie or book or artwork like an orange or a pear or a cat and a bouquet?

The social implications of abstract composition is one of the problems for generations of poets-painters-musicians-filmmakers raised on *Art for Art's Sake*. Bryant undermines standards that depend on abstraction. Over and over, the question is asked: If the "dark" looks good there, what

defines it as "looking good" there? It's especially interesting when applied to movies, which are narrative, social, hooked into documenting culture whether avant-garde or trashy, high-brow or low. The black character(s) may add what's perceived as style, they may make a movie "hip," they may add a host of perceived qualities. How? Why? And what does the movie do for them?

*Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* is a movie I remember from the late '80s as being edgy, transracial, and starring who was at the time one of my major teen crushes, Roland Gift, lead singer for *Fine Young Cannibals*, as Danny Victoria. I realized to my horror reading Bryant's take that I had completely forgotten, as maybe I was meant to forget, "Violet," Danny's unnamed wife.

Were you too once a bigger idea on notebook paper: "Give Danny a girlfriend; create tension between her and Rosie; place couples in stark relief."

Bryant does more: she gives Violet a name, and subjectivity; she pulls her from her composed objectification. Violet in this alternate take has some provenance, a future, culture, family.

Bryant's prose is porous—the alternating lenses, the questions, even the sentence structures continually engage the reader. Her writing is not a wall, it is not opaque—but it certainly isn't conclusive. Each viewing is differently casual, plural, personal, or distanced. We are "invited" to "view history" through *Regency House Party* (and view it we do, although it's not the history the producers exactly intended), or a Younger Sister and Older Sister watch *8 Femmes*. But the movies, artworks, and texts are English, European. American culture still very much looks to the European, but how flawed its contributions are—for instance, Jane Austen, whose ivory façades are just about impenetrable to racial questioning.

But *Mansfield Park* the movie splits the façade open to include "black cargo," the commodity underlying the wealth of Fanny Price's guardians.

O, speak obliquely, if at all, of History and its slaves. Not Our slaves, but History's. It is wild, too wild. The mass cult of Austen wants it tamed. They roar from the jungle of classic books. The cult of England. And the United States. For there is no one alive now who can be held responsible for what happened then. For "it." No one alive now benefits from "its" existence. This is romance.

The last chapter on *Regency House Party* is particularly visceral, perhaps because it is the closest to our current viewing practices, namely, the reality show. Trouble right at the beginning: a pair of bronze "Negro and Negress" floor lamps at the doorway. As reality shows implicitly include the spectators—you too can apply to compete in *America's Toughest Jobs!*—Bryant includes us in the debacle. The show sports a Mr. Darcy-like host and various countesses, heiresses, chaperones, servants, wannabes—and Miss Tanya Ourika Samuel, a West Indian heiress who is "not passing, nor Jewish, but black." Her entrance into "History" perturbs, embarrasses, and antagonizes the other role-players—but not enough. Transracial attraction is defused by turning Miss Samuel into a "cause," a contemporary mutation of objectification. Another black character is introduced—to what effect? The two characters never appear onscreen together (no gathering of more than two shall be allowed...) and both effectively fade. Fin—or so it would seem, until Bryant, with irresistible force, challenges these obfuscations and failures, allowing silence to speak, and the story under the story to emerge.

*Marcella Durand is the author of AREA and Traffic & Weather.*

ANSELM HOLLO  
GUESTS OF SPACE  
COFFEE HOUSE PRESS / 2007  
REVIEW BY ELIZABETH ROBINSON

Anselm Hollo's most recent book of poems offers a varied tonal register, partaking—by turns—of irony, absurdity, tenderness, indignation, grief, even joy. The emotional range of these poems is, in other words, diverse, though the reader will feel in retrospect, that the book as a whole functions elegiacally. Hollo remembers deceased friends throughout, and mourns the sad, blundering destruction of our planet by “warlords” and “corporate greed heads.” But lest you fear that reading *Guests of Space* will lead you into bathetic ground, let me assure you that the emotionally disclosive gestures of this poetry are in continual (and fascinating) tension with Hollo's restraint and intelligence. Hollo's form of lament is intransigent and often hilarious; he may remark personal losses, but the “personal” here is nested in an astute reading of the social and the political. An incipient lyricism shows its face, “the wild apple tree's red blossoms / Give me shivers of joy,” but is countermanded by Hollo's stern self-injunction elsewhere: “Mawkish messages to the dear departed? No / That is not given to you to do.”

What is given to the poet to do? This question arises more than once in this collection, and it's a question that Hollo keeps aloft with some agility. Perhaps challenging widespread human solipsism and selfishness is the task he undertakes here, or

perhaps Hollo's more crucial focus is on recollecting and celebrating the contributions of poets and friends who transcended that solipsism. In either instance, Hollo launches his query as a fully committed (if often dismayed) participant in the human experiment. In the end, the poems emerge as an historical and ethical project, “The desire to record things as they are / For posterity” and “the desire to push the world / In a certain direction / Stagger on yes bloody well stagger on.”

Stagger on? Maybe not. These poems unfold with remarkable erudition. Hollo's range of reference runs from Ted Berrigan and Fielding Dawson to Ezra Pound, Eugene Jolas, and Malcolm Lowry, from the Dali Lama and Donald Rumsfeld to Harold Laski (a British diplomat from the early 20th century); he even references the newspaper serial comic Prince Valiant. Often Hollo's references lead him to put footnotes at the base of his pages, but these are devoid of the obfuscating quality of a scholar who wants to showcase his intellectual chops (and in some instances they are more in the manner of a reply the author makes to his own poem after a period of years, as when Hollo reflects on a poem written in 1999 with the hindsight of a person who has lived through 2007). Hollo's work of recording what *is* while opening the world to more felicitous options is modeled through the humor, inclusivity, and dialogue that these poems create. “Poetry can be so many more things / Than what people mostly believe it is,” Hollo writes, and then demonstrates

what else poetry can be. *Guests of Space* affirms that most vital of poetic resources, curiosity, by creating a site “where questioning every question / hasn't killed all questions / (at least not yet).”

*Guests of Space* is made up of informal sonnets whose relative terseness frames the poems well as they move through histories both personal and political. Hollo writes with a sense of mortality in the near background, yet there's a cantankerous wit and vigor continually animating his poems. After all, “Who needs to dwell more than half a second in Hades?” Time and human presence interweave in this poetry where “The past lies before us, the future comes up from behind.” This paradox might begin to trap us in “the hole punch / Of darkness,” but Hollo shows the virtue of humility and hospitality: he cites Pippin's query, “What is man?” To which the reply is, “A guest of space.”

*Elizabeth Robinson was a 2008 Foundation for Contemporary Arts Grants to Artists recipient. The Orphan & its Relations, a new book of poems, is forthcoming from Fence Books.*

ARACELIS GIRMAY  
TEETH

CURBSTONE PRESS / 2007  
REVIEW BY URAYOÁN NOEL

“Triangulation” has become a dirty word, tainted by the corporate shtick of political operatives and their media apparatchiks, but you can't tell the story of Puerto Rican poetry on the U.S. mainland without it (think colonialism, diaspora). Miguel Algarín's early collection *Mongo Affair* (1978) split the difference between the Poetry Project and his own Nuyorican Poets Cafe in its attempt to score a Loisaida-of-the-mind, and his essay “Nuyorican Literature” (1981) located a counterpart to Olson's projective verse in the survivalist poetics of the Puerto Rican barrio. There's a rich tradition of Puerto Rican avant-gardists on the mainland, from William Carlos Williams to Victor Hernández Cruz and Edwin Torres, who have formulated improvisational and constructivist poetics



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# BOOK REVIEWS

of dislocation out of a tangle of English, Spanish, and their endless performative recombinations. Then there's, "Put a triangle solo in your beatbox baby!" (the working title of this review). And, of course, there's the Bermuda Triangle (no shorts!), of which the island of Puerto Rico is a point.

A triangulation of a different yet complementary sort is at work in Aracelis Girmay's 2007 debut *Teeth*. Born in Santa Ana, California in 1977, raised in Southern California, and based in New York City, Girmay is of Eritrean, Puerto Rican, and African American heritage. Her book embraces the African diaspora in its plurality—or, as Martín Espada puts it in his foreword, as "a confluence of rivers" (xiii)—in poems that range from California to Africa to Nicaragua to Washington Heights, to the old urban hub of San Juan, Puerto Rico, powerfully rendered in the poem "Ride."

The diversity of locales in *Teeth* is matched by the diversity of styles and forms: from a bird-themed ghazal to a wonderfully quirky take on the sestina in the spirit of G.M. Hopkins ("Aunt Margaret Tree of Blackbirds, Tree of Oranges") to long, anaphora-heavy narrative lyrics like "Here"—"Here is the knot like a submarine in your small, red throat" (25)—and "Litany"—"& when we have studied the maps & learned the languages, / & prayed over the food, let us go back" (104)—that would work just as well in the MPJ (Mainstream Poetry Journal) of your choice as on HBO's *Def Poetry*. If some of the poems too easily betray their workshop origins (Girmay holds an M.F.A. in poetry from NYU) and/or traffic too self-consciously in the author's personal trajectory (aka "First Book Syndrome"), *Teeth* succeeds thanks to Girmay's ability to incorporate narrative modes, formal experiment, varieties of political poetry (poetry of witness, post-Black Arts, etc.), and the direct address typical of the multicultural performance-oriented poetics, Nuyorican and otherwise, that emerged in the 1990s (Girmay is also a Cave Canem fellow), while sustaining a substantive and self-reflexive lyric voice.

Girmay's command of the Nuyorican key is evident in the syncopated *bomba y plena* poem "Tucutu Tân," dedicated to Lorca and Espada, and in the translingual wordplay that buoys such poems as "Ode to the Watermelon"—"*Sandía, día santo!*" (12, italics in the original)—and the funny and bittersweet "For Estefani Lora, Third Grade, Who Made Me a Card," a staple of Girmay's readings.

There is a pan-diasporan (creolizing?) inflection to the book, as in "Zouk," where the iconic Loisaida summer street scene, in which "a bicycle-pack posse of dons & abuelos / rode smooth with their Boricua / flags & radios strapped" (51), is scored to the rhythms of the titular French-Caribbean music. Some of the best moments in the book are those when the plain-spokenness of the contemporary performance poet bleeds into a sensuous, otherworldly vernacular,

as in the final stanza of "Hyena, Hyena":

Crawl down, crawl down like this.  
Howl with me.  
We two be the stench of corporal light, yes,  
your tongue  
is reason  
for noise. (43)

Espada sees in Girmay's work a "fearlessness" that is "rare in an age when MFA programs train young poets to shun the expression of powerful feelings" (xv), and I might say the same thing about slam: Girmay's complex, detailed parsing of her many histories, landscapes, and allegiances ups the ante on more commercially visible multicultural performance poetics, with their tendency towards knee-jerk identity overstatement.

It remains to be seen whether Girmay's creative triangulation of page and stage (of poiesis and polis?) will prove to be a defining feature of her oeuvre or merely a stepping stone towards PoBiz crossover (the chops are there either way). What is clear from the range of formal and cultural commitments in her work is that there's more than prefab flow in our diaspora beatbox: for starters, a difficult beauty. "Beauty is *Teeth*, *Teeth* is beauty." Workshoppers and slammers alike, take note!

*Urayoán Noel teaches at the University at Albany, SUNY. His most recent book of poetry is Boringkén (Callejón/La Tertulia, 2008).*

EDMUND BERRIGAN  
GLAD STONE CHILDREN  
FARFALLA PRESS/MCMILLAN & PARRISH / 2008  
REVIEW BY SUSAN TIMMONS

Edmund Berrigan's recent collection is astounding and delightful for a multiplicity of reasons. While the poems are small in the amount of physical space they occupy, they are in no way economical nor do they feel dense; their psychic territory is vast. You will find this book perfect if you use public transportation a lot.

Reading through *Glad Stone Children* put me in mind of the fun you can have by submitting poems to close examination at various scales. A while ago, I had a running list, a close reading questionnaire of plus or minus 250 questions you could ask of a poem—utterly trivial questions, like, what colors are in this poem? Are there proper names? Which of the senses are utilized? Fricatives? Weather?

Speaking with a friend about my list, they contended that this sort of mechanical analysis undermines the overall magic of a work; no question a system of this kind fails the moment it attempts to set up

# BOOK REVIEWS

a blind hierarchy. After all, poems are not built of Legos. Nonetheless, what might be discovered in reading this way can be startling, and when you're reading something great, it becomes apparent that its power is unified throughout, regardless of scale of observation. In the past few years we've witnessed a revival of interest in the line. For me, the fundamental unit of the poem is the poem. But isn't the attention of the poet present to varying degrees at every level, or rather, throughout the continuum?

Susan Cataldo likened the experience of cocaine to being a word in a Robert Creeley poem. I wonder what it would be like to be a word in an Edmund Berrigan poem. Sometimes his words arrive as if on a ticker tape. Other times, they occur in swarms, or rise slowly, as if from the bottom of a magic 8 ball, or quickly, effervescing like bubbles in soda. If you were a word, you would see a lot of very similar words close by, like brothers and sisters, or imperfect impersonators; this might give you the clue that Edmund begins to find a poem by listening for something. The words would be rhyming off each other or alliterating shamelessly. Wild word party!

Corrugated Kentucky Welcome Mat  
doorstep split infant splint sucker

normal signet miniscule captives  
it is very supper

(from "Hey Kids")

wouldn't you like to have a fountain  
wherewithal, just a torpid  
structural withdrawal in bossa nova  
iowa iowa pelican rockets revile

(from "Equivocated Pony Run")

You really want to read the above works in their entirety. At times words are stuttered until they find their spot or verbs fail to agree in number. Not all of the words are okay. Sometimes they are defective, as if their rise to consciousness has damaged them. Or they've arrived before being fully formed. These bent, dented coinages can't be disambiguated; they allude to their meaning as suggested by context, and other words, and so, other meanings. These meanings resonate against each other and become 3-D.

When it comes to reading line by line, I feel I should put in a spoiler alert. Because, at first glance, as mentioned, the poems are modest on the page. But when you read them line by line, what



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# BOOK REVIEWS

happens is incredible! They behave as transformers, expanding with such dynamic force that it's surprising that a "whoosh" sound isn't audible. Suddenly you are totally engaged. The lines are perfectly spaced and read forward from one to the next with acrobatic elan. Whether they are generated as samples or thoughts, all are seamlessly integrated, so much so that to excerpt lines would be counterproductive. Sometimes tight word relations tie lines together. Other times, enjambment starts the meaning just before the full weight of the line arrives. Most frequently the work exists in some form of present, and there are references to such disparate artifacts as Corn Chex, Arcade Fire, and Ingeborg Bachmann. Dark, tough, and sad coexist with the most delicate lightness and a charming touch of vaudeville.

Three quarters into the book, a radical transformation takes place in the work. The sonnet, a family specialty, is hovering. Lines get longer, things get deeper, and statelier, the logic gets more complex:

*Neither Noir*

Some lispng agenda or in absentia brother/sisterhood  
Walks into ruts, flooding the short

but all a-factual, that convulse with glee.  
Nobody flowers in something alpha.  
The social roll down is sensor-activated  
& blooms internally. I mined the PEZ dispenser,  
a table full of diesel, & it became a future  
arrangement trying to run to a probable curb.  
Barbaric happiness probed the sinews inside  
transportation where I walk with a hand license,  
just off the stoop and prominently displaced,  
rapping on encounters & hazarding a face.  
I'm known as a part-time intelligence agent,  
often weaving brine with knotted flowers.

What makes a person write poems? There are poets who love to write, and the work they produce may be average, good, or excellent. Poets who write from necessity produce work that is either awful or great, but exists in a realm where taste is irrelevant, and produce isn't exactly the right word. Reading the second kind elicits a visceral response in me. There's some danger. Risk is present, and so is need. I think Edmund is driven by necessity. Not from a need for expression, or attention, but because he can't live without knowing what his poems have to tell him. Our entire cul-

## New Lyn Hejinian & Friedrich Hölderlin

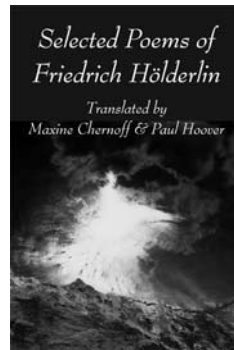


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# BOOK REVIEWS

ture is based on persuasion, and the act of listening is regarded as lame, which is one big reason why we're fucked. Because this work is devoid of polemic or didactic attitude, you are left with a sheer residue of intelligence. Edmund's book strikes me as incredibly intelligent, where the quality of intelligence is defined as kindness or generosity in an extreme form. Without that nagging persuasive element putting you on the defensive, you can remain neutral as you read. You are granted complete freedom to take the work as you please, and you get to be the listener as well. You get to share in hearing his discoveries. This is the soul of subversion. Technically speaking, you are disarmed, which makes the work—no matter how abstract—immediately accessible. Edmund is resisting limits, owning uncertainty. He's conduit for and courier of insoluble feelings, the kind we don't process, but which end up being incorporated into ourselves, becoming what we are, and/or living in poems:

*Who wilts keeps breath up*

Who wilts keeps breath up  
meets spelt from the speaker  
I am no longer inside this plastic parts  
stumble into my explorer  
I am colliding with my friends  
in hopes we will prove rooted  
but they move away to see how deep their root is  
I am not above anything anymore  
and trying to come back to it  
where are made skeleton fairies  
who don't do anything at all  
but are otherwise personally useful

*Susie Timmons is a poet living in Brooklyn. A chapbook, On the Daily Monument (1987-91) is due at any moment from First Poet in Space, & another chapbook of more recent work, Chickadees in the Snow, is due from Faux Press later in the Autumn.*

JAY WRIGHT  
POLYNOMIALS AND POLLEN: PARABLES, PROVERBS,  
PARADIGMS, AND PRAISE  
DALKEY ARCHIVE / 2008  
REVIEW BY PRAGEETA SHARMA

Jay Wright's *Polynomials and Pollen*, dedicated to and written for his wife Lois, is a strikingly heuristic collection, and, at the same time, a measured project with a determined sense of form and function. The title, *Polynomials* etc., aptly defines the arc of the project, whose numerous classifications, properties, theories, and taxonomies assist in a particular culling of language that facilitates an embrace of the abstract ideas that arise from a self engaged in a series of questions about duality and variability.

The book is, at times, an epistle; at other times, it is formal in rhyme. What is constant, ironically, is the sustained musing of the voice, which is both descriptive and systematizing: collecting flora and their humanized and mythical counterparts through sound and sense, often rendering tonal lines to convene meaning from sound. By connecting questions of being with habits of the natural world, Wright not only engenders new systemic concepts, but also induces reverie: "And this looks like the particle / syntax / we have cudged into being. / At times like this, / you might hear the lyrical Khepera, / and see the frugal light / of another sun / that articulates the river." The result is a rigorous metaphorical structured meandering (if this oxymoron is possible!) that exemplifies the aural nature of myth itself.

I am awed by Wright's prolific work (he has recently published two other notable books) and deeply moved by the scope and breadth of this extensive project. *Polynomials* is ideologically expansive and, without moralizing, essentially humble in scope. These poems are the modest explorations that result from necessary philosophic query: "I need to invent a reason / to address the circumferential." Beyond the address to an implicit beloved, there is also a larger address, one that attempts to locate the logic of spatial and metaphysical boundaries.

And in many respects the directives and metaphors of the natural world in Wright's *Polynomials* are reminiscent of Wallace Stevens. Wright remakes Stevens with a spare and rich, clairvoyant subversion in both line and content. For example, in Steven's "On the Manner of Addressing Clouds" ("their evocations are the speech of clouds"), Wright pursues the evocations—what was once the "funest philosophers and ponderers," are the "new folk clamber(ing) up the cloudscape," as if the speaker cannot afford to accept the sadness of the conditions in the Stevens' poem, unable to accept Stevens' "mute bare splendors" or a kind of narrow thinking that will lead to philosophical resignations; rather Wright's speaker (in section Sasa/Two) says in lines following the "clamber," "The sentential sentences that started us on our way / have long ago abandoned us." However, Wright does not abandon the modernist impulse, he diverts the intention(s).

In Sasa, section II of Jay Wright's book, the lines rhetorically ask, "What could / our turbulent lexicon, / served, if not provoked, / by the inventive tamarisk, / submit to the experimental / constraint,"—this "experimental restraint" emerges as the force of the book. Thematically and structurally, Wright explores myth through restraint in line; his drop lines and clipped lines punctuate; he adds erratic space in order to, as it were, create a "swelling paraplasm," an estranged, abnormal growth, in his case, to map out ideas connected to the study of being, reason, and knowledge.

# BOOK REVIEWS

(I use abnormal affectionately, sort of like a spurt of acquired logic needed for the poetics to keep going.) Wright's prowess and study, while framed in terms of ancient wisdom, functions a little like the "clinging eye" in Stevens' "Anecdote of Canna," which "observes and continues to observe," but rather than be a critique about the problem of consciousness and thinking (a critique of Descartes—and the origins of Western thought), Wright is more earnest about the concept of thinking as a noble or effortful endeavor connecting it to African and Mesoamerican myths of the 16th and 17th century.

And, again with Stevens, in the last stanza of "The Search for Sound Free from Motion" where it says, "The world lives as you live / Speaks as you speak, a creature that / repeats its vital words, yet balances

/ the syllable of a syllable." Wright, too, explores "the syllable of a syllable," with great measure, exploring the condition of the "world living as you live." And he is not interested in a sound divorced from motion, rather how the sound changes—precisely the moment of interplay between the two that amuses and engages and thus creates metaphor. In the last section of *Polynomials*, he speaks to the "transumptive direction":

A book like this  
grows from twigs and incense,  
The kinds of things you can buy  
In bunches,  
And never understand.  
Its lines get tangled  
In the transumptive misdirection  
of bird calls,

This is a book to be consumed, savored, and reread. Wright's dual mining of mathematics and flora is an imaginative demonstration of the fluid intersection of ancient concepts, the natural world, and the terms of a logician; as he writes: "the modal logic / of aspiration leaves / me breathless." We are breathless witnesses of his compelling poetic process, of classifying and assigning names both in science and art. By blending his subjects in a mindful churn of logic and myth, flora and the heart, Wright's particular nomenclatures elegantly elucidate and sing.

*Prageeta Sharma's most recent book Infamous Landscapes came out from Fence Books in December. She is an Associate Professor of English and Director of the Creative Writing program at the University of Montana in Missoula.*

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# BOOK REVIEWS

JOHN GODFREY  
CITY OF CORNERS  
WAVE BOOKS / 2008  
REVIEW BY KIMBERLY LYONS

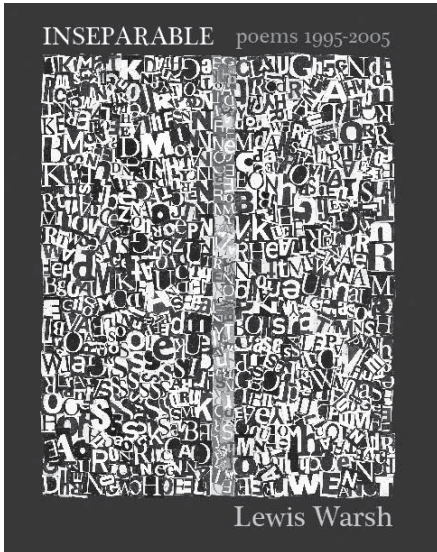
In the city, world, *City of Corners* makes and is made of, there is no dot.com bubble, no bullish real estate market. It's as though the destructive speculative conditions of an age and its systemic economic scams have passed through an inside world and, by the resultant friction, been stripped away of any emotional certainties with their spatial, material comforts: *Storefronts are dark in honor of / No one from Nowhere*. In *City of Corners* there is a post-catastrophic depletion *on the verge of rupture* and an exhausted calm of lived-with threat: *...the marvels that are forbidden*. The fact of *I know I'm in chains but the order is concise* in which *natural light has nothing to do*. Godfrey con-

tends with these contradictions: *there never were any heroic marbles / They stifle everything that hard* and *To listen everything's equally real / Acceptable only as another question*.

Yet, somehow, a reader may come to an enthralled recognition of the possibilities of meaningful, even ecstatic surcease as *a pleasure to uproot chaos and replete it*, and find fulfillment as *various insights maneuver*. Although *memory is an accident*, a presentness is continual ground in all the uses of that word: soil (soiled), orientation's horizontal, and a soul's ongoing pulverization. A reader is amazed at the Godfrey paradox: how can this poetry truly and exquisitely offer such a succession of breathless—not in tone, but in effect—packed instances of complex, thoroughly lived language and Being, *substantial and bleak in alive fraternity*. You might even say “rich” when you mean

moving, deep, and many; only to realize it's all made of *particles worn away*. So much *ablation of dust* made out of a bereft, scraped, suffering: this vein is exhausted, and insistently human healing: *dust lacks nothing*.

There are few, or maybe I mean not many, luxuriant nouns in Godfrey's poetic vocabulary. The Spicerean blocks, so to speak, are the ones he's been working with—and around—for a while. A landscape made of *Quadrangle's dirt* and *Plate glass mirror by streetlight curb, daytime net cast by bricks, and puddles shine*. In some poems, debris yields a sudden treasure: *snow weeps jewels on trash*. The body is a body seen in sometimes eroticized glimpses of hips, palm, jaw, belly, or *nipples indurated*. Not that Godfrey makes overly much of these sightings, unless contact is made and then, with slight, yet fervent graciousness, there is a reception.



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# BOOK REVIEWS

Not much punctuation here either. Godfrey's lines are layered, stacked with notations that swerve into his unmistakably characteristic lyric and swerve away. I don't think it's his aim, particularly, but Godfrey is one the foremost lyric poets writing in English. Shortened by care and urgency and a disinterest in elaboration, the integuments are made of renewed energy rather than periodic stops. Read it any way you want, the tone is insistently itself. The diction in Godfrey's collection is noir: *Look at cigarette / reply briefly*; Lower East Side: *Rafaelo aka Ralphie says / nobody knows but Lupe*; Cavalier and Troubadour. Reading this set, Ted Greenwald's poems, and Ange Mlinko's and Ron Padgett's, come to mind. Also Donne, Lorca. And Sappho's fragments. And Phillip Chandler. The most memorable review I've read of a book of poetry was Godfrey's piece on a book of poems by Bob Perelman. He reads far and near, but the poems live in a here that you would scarcely recognize. Yet we are brought there to that harrowing *wind against windows / that augments the specter*.

Very, very close. Sometimes too close for comfort, and that's a good thing.

The authorial voice, if you will, in these poems, is an undeniable personality that surfaces to take a brief, shadowed step. *I only hope a little bit and left with no other choice / we cross with the light*. It's admitted: *my wants multiply the particles*. Yes, there's need here saturating the mood. And in this particular set of poems, it's the feminine, frankly, the erotic, that galvanizes these works. Characteristically, Godfrey's poems observe, albeit with longing. But these are the imprints of exchange—of intercourse—and the fallout is possibly, subtly, shattering at the instance of cohesion. *I perish of my thoughts*. It is an unspecified her that moves consciousness along its path.

The poems in *City of Corners* are wildly figurative, although an argument could be made for an abstraction along a spectrum that *marginates the edgy*. Godfrey warns: *Suggest rather than decide / Don't trust depictions of Life*. And yet for that, the web of a telling, as resilient and invisible as a spi-

der's string, makes for a continuity. Each line remakes, restarts, the intentions that carry these poems through a far zone of implied enactments, experienced as transient, not fully understood; that turn on instance of a briefly illuminated disclosure. This has been Godfrey's mode over the course of several collections, as though his earlier propulsive, cadenced, hot prose poems broke into emotionally reserved lines that float alone, now held in a net of loosely meshed meanings. But in *City of Corners* there is a perceptible increase in temperature. Cool is cool, but it's the white ash cool of a live, burning coal.

*Kimberly Lyons' Phototherapique was recently published by Katalanché Press/Portable Press. New work is in The Recluse and OCHO magazines.*



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# BOOK REVIEWS

ISLAND OF MY HUNGER:  
CUBAN POETRY TODAY  
EDITED BY FRANCISCO MORÁN  
CITY LIGHTS BOOKS / 2007  
REVIEW BY MARIANA RUIZ FIRMAT

Walking along the Malecón in Havana last year, the city appeared defiant. It was not the same Havana that barely survived the Special Period of the '90s when Cuba was barely holding on, trying to sort out a post-Soviet economy coupled with a crippling US embargo. In 2007, Havana was in the infancy of a post-Fidel era, trying to rebuild its economy while maintaining a broken political system. The political discourse remained myopic with little deviation from the party line. Agree or disagree, this is the Cuba featured in the collection of poems, *Island of My Hunger*, published in

2007 by City Lights Books. This is a book of poetry written by Cubans on the island as well as the poets of the diaspora, painstakingly forming new language defined by the borders of poetry while defying the frontier of the ocean that surrounds them. In Germán Guerra's poem "The City and the Edge of the Island," he writes, "And here we are seated atop light and tedium, / dangling our legs over the edge of the island, / here we are, and we are so weary." Guerra captures the sense of isolation after-taste that recurs throughout these poems. Rather than a boring thesis on Cuban politics, *Island of My Hunger* is pure poetry—pure art—wherein narratives are explored through abstractions.

Exiled Cuban writer Francisco Morán, Professor of Latin American literature at Southern Methodist University, and editor

of *Island of My Hunger*, admits that this collection is, "chancy, make shift, made up of flights, of smears and corrections." Indeed it is a bumpy thread that links these poets. Thankfully this is not simply a survey of contemporary Cuban writers. There is nothing tame or tedious about these poems. Each poet writes as if they were tasked with creating and re-creating language out of necessity. In "Problems of Language," Rolando Sánchez Mejías writes, "When I discovered language / was a ladder to climb to things / (one is up / and doesn't know how to get down / one is up / and sorts things oneself)." Cuban poets here and elsewhere are trying to shake up the language machine—using poetry to knock the wind out of the static in order to replace it. They are resolviendo (problem solving, coping with dignity). What connects these poets isn't just location, it's love—love of words, of language, and, of course, love of country.

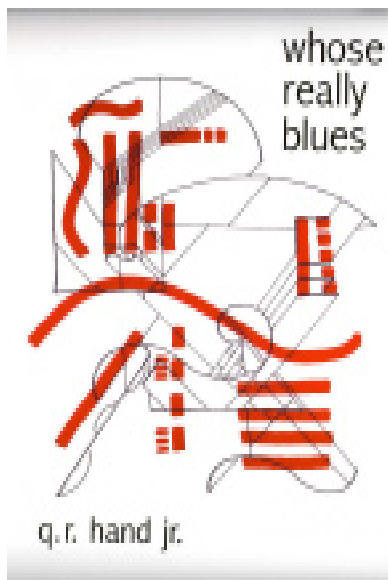
This collection is not uniformly abstract or narrative. Some poems are punchy, disjointed, lyrical pieces, while others are wickedly humorous and irreverent. Damaris Calderón's poems, for instance, exemplify the wonderfully strange music in this collection:

A caterpillar singing to a worm  
—the song of morphine—  
head gnawed away from within,  
the shiny stem connected to the  
[oxygen tube.

The sea like a cop car  
pressing at my heels.  
Thalassa thalassa.

(from "Two Sunflowers  
on the Asphalt")

The poems in *Island of My Hunger* serve as both cultural critique and prayer to literary antecedents. In the poem "Pure Subject,



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*whose really blues*  
q. r. hand jr.

As it steps from the stage to the page, the poetry of Q.R. Hand never stops testifying. That the poet has led and continues to lead a full life in a real world crammed with real ignorance as well as actual light these trembling pages make clear. . . Forever at play in the fields of the word, Q. R. Hand is a homegrown American original.

— Al Young  
Poet Laureate of California

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# BOOK REVIEWS

Subject in Pieces,” Omar Pérez begs the question, “Who wrote with the intention of doing damage, suborning / future generations...who wrote with the illusion of making enemies. / Who wrote with the intention of extorting from posterity / readers, pale or bronzed, erect (obscenely) / on top of cultural protocols or boredom’s protocols / and, again, boredom’s protocols.” Guidance from dead writers and artists comes in the form of poetic homage. In an effort to resuscitate a dying vernacular, the writers in this collection go back to those they trust—the brilliant artists who came before them: Marti, Guillen, Lezama Lima, Arenas.

*Island of My Hunger* provides snapshots of an unforgivable Cuba full of contradictions. We witness the Cuba that survived the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, and, specifically for Cubans, the nation that starved through the hunger of the Special Period. In “Day Care,” Angel Escobar writes,

still others serve  
as our protectors; but they’re somewhere else,  
where they tell us life is—  
modest creature that always stays outside—;  
and we don’t know what they’re doing there, being

[protectors:

we assume, just before we fall asleep,  
that the one who serves as Great Mama must  
[be watching  
soap operas,

utilizing irreverent language to mock paternalism. Sadly, not everyone makes it out of this post-modern period alive. The casualties reach far and wide in Cuba’s literary circles. Escobar foretells his own suicide in 1997 in the poem “Simple Paraphrase”: “When I’m afraid I think / like a simple Escobar / of the white knife that will kill me: I am black.”

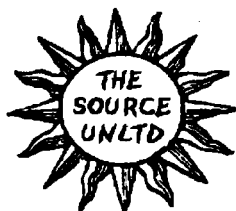
A vibrant, growing rhetoric here attempts to answer the looming question of what happens next. But that question is always placed within the darkness of uncertainty:

Nor those four letters I could  
pronounce like a magic spell or a salve  
will ever be my country again,  
though they appear on every official document and

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[to be born

there might have been  
sometime, for someone,  
an unspeakable celebration”

(from Jesús J. Barquet’s “Couplets for  
the Death of My Country”).

This book is for anyone who likes rebellious, fantastical poems full of risks that disregard form. These poets are well read—knowing all the rules and thus, how to break them. Studying these poems in both languages, I could explore their fullness. Many of the works are explosive, but there are certain moments that fall short—like in a narrative poem where the word in English just doesn’t have the same meaning in Spanish. Some moments are lost in translation (although the craft of the translators is quite good). Regrettably out of 17 poets, Morán includes only four women, muting their voices. But their very poems provide some of the most strident examples of experimentation.

Why do my hands tremble as I draw Cemi’s  
likeness and hide it in the severed head of Ferdinand the  
Seventh? Why here at the gates to the city museum,  
[not at 160  
Trocadero? It must be the girl who does that. The  
[girl who  
searched the waters of the bay for someone who  
[resembled her,  
the one who grips and pulls me down

(from Soleida Ríos’ poem “Z”).

*Island of My Hunger*, for all its beauty, ends too briefly. After finishing it I wanted more: more poems, more access to Cuban writers, more opportunity for Cuban poets in New York venues, more exchange between North American and Cuban writers. *Island of My Hunger* highlights the crisis that Cuban artists are facing, but as in most literary movements, writers use their craft to engage and transform culture. These writers are no different, agitating the written word in order to find themselves once again on the other side of the poem. In the final piece of the anthology, entitled “Leaving the Island,” Norge Espinosa surmises, “Listen up, towns of myself, island of my hunger, / still not satisfied: I’m leaving you behind.”

*Mariana Ruiz Fírmata is a poet and union organizer who lives in Brooklyn. Her chapbook Another Strange Island was published by Open 24 Hours Press.*

ANOTHER KIND OF NATION:  
AN ANTHOLOGY OF  
CONTEMPORARY CHINESE POETRY  
EDITED BY ZHANG ER &  
CHEN DONGDONG  
TALISMAN HOUSE / 2007  
REVIEW BY VYT BAKAITIS

China is near and looming larger, just to judge by the lavish scale of the recent spectacle the People’s Republic launched for the Beijing Olympics, or the concurrent stream of its economic vitality. And even though an increasing number of tourists may have made inroads to touch on its time-tested cultural colors and taste of its rich and varied regional cuisines, enough by the way to begin wearing down by their passing the stones piled up in the Great Wall, there remains at large an unvarying kind of inner intensity still to be reckoned with. This is the unifying alternate field announced in the title of this generous and gratifying collection, embodying as it does the currency of super-charged words.

You can forget the stereotype of venerable sage and scholar. The book shapes up as a bilingual presentation, in Mandarin and English, of two dozen poets, none of whom had reached the age of 50 at its publication. Each poet is well-represented, since the average selection comes to twenty pages, and the tone is lively overall, reflecting urban concerns, not only Beijing and Shanghai, but also New York and Stuttgart.

“Living correctly leads to incorrect mathematics” goes a line from Quing Ping’s “A Day in Our Life.” It is just one hint that things don’t quite add up, when taken along strictly ideological lines. But the wisdom applies even outside China, when the focus of address, here as in every good poem, stays local. So at the “invitation of dreams and books” (Jiang Tao’s “St. Valentine’s Day”) we get another true witness to join the lineage as a rare literalist of the imagination, whose notes will enhance “your journal on pig-raising.” Or, as Zhang Zao’s “Grandmother” puts it: “Into all that is invisible, inject a dose of resonance, / So that all windows on earth will open wide at once.”

Even the reader having no Chinese to speak of should find a doubled satisfaction in attending solely to the translated, right-hand pages. It was the case with me, and as a result I have only good things to report. Alterity does not have to be restricted to an accepted formula, or blindly categorized, either by being reduced to the exotic, or raised to the mounting heap of the “surreal,” and the editors have succeeded in engaging a collaborative team of good and gifted translators to stay alert to for-

# BOOK REVIEWS


eign nuances and impart the gist of their vigor in English. (There's a closing "post-face" attesting to the process in a series of scrupulous, even impassioned e-mail exchanges, including one the editor Zhang Er had with an unnamed translator who refused to participate and gave explicit reasons for his refusal.)

Maybe to underscore some similarity, or bruit a repercussion, Yang Jian's "Lost Way" is nothing less than a brilliantly run-on improvisation on the opening lines of Dante's "Inferno," but with "tigers, lions, and these ghosts of the heart / more vivacious, movie-like."

In her preface Zhang Er makes a brave, clearly elaborated attempt to sum up the structural disparity between the two languages that would seem to make an effective cross-cultural reconciliation of a Chinese poem with its English translation impossible. It remains to assess the results, one by one. While they are varied, none can be counted indifferent. Take the breezy, casual version Martin Corless Smith and John Balcom made, with Zhang Er, of Zang Di's longish "Summer Station" and set it for comparison against the elegiac meditation Charles Borkhuis worked out, with Chen Wei, of a series excerpted from "The Gate of Time" by Mo Fei; the contrast in effect points up a marvelously sustained effectiveness in each case.

Here is a grace note (the third and final quatrain in Mo Fei's "Deep Blue"), to end the consideration of otherness, that gauges by a traditional imagist scale what poetry can aim to achieve: "Now we have come to the age to talk of things past. What is / Is what is. What is not is not. / When I begin to believe what you believe, / The trees become so isolated from one another."

*Vyt Bakaitis, author of City Country (1991), also compiled & translated Breathing Free (2001), an anthology of 20th Century Lithuanian poets.*





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