THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

February 1983 #96 75¢

Free at the Poetry Project

Invocation

Evening brings subway madonnas
after so many steps
& powerless to affect
all instant love,
you now join the ranks
  of the truly dumb
boarding the Jackson Pollack car
  of the downtown #6,
reserved for you
  & anonymous lovelies,
fingers still cold, unflinchingly numb
Like some board of trustees
Faced with a new season in poetry,
O great sky singer of modest dreams
Give me yet one more winter of harvested content;
love's familiar mantle without pain —
  such tokens when they are due;
A hand reaching for the brush
  when all else fails.

—Tom Weigel

WEDNESDAY READINGS: at 8 PM, suggested contribution $3. *Hosted by Bernadette Mayer & Bob Holman.* February 2 - **Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge & Steve Carey.** Feb. 9 -**Marilyn Hacker & Hilda Morley.** Feb. 16 - **Tuli Kupferberg & Lois Elaine Griffith.** Feb. 23 - **Hilton Obenzinger & Chuck Wachtel.**

MONDAY READING & PERFORMANCE SERIES: at 8 PM, suggested contribution $1. *Hosted by Rochelle Kraut:* February 7 - **Open Reading.** Feb. 14 - **Bill Kushner & Susan Cataldo.** Feb. 21 - **Mary Jane Leach & Jana Haimsohn.** Feb. 28 - **Margaret Dunbar & Philip Dray.**

Lecture: **George Butterick** will speak on "Editing Post Modern Texts" on February 10 at 8 PM, $3.

FREE WRITING WORKSHOPS on Tuesdays at 7:30 with **John Godfrey** and on Fridays at 8 PM with **Jack Collom. A Children's Workshop with Steve Levine** is held at 11 AM on Saturdays at the Tompkins Square Library. And at noon on Saturdays at the Poetry Project, **Simon Schuchat**'s workshop in Chinese poetry "Poems from Yu-Yu Studio".

And on WBAI, 99.5 FM: "Readings From the Poetry Project" produced by John Fisk on Feb. 5 & 19 at 7 PM. Call for exact schedule.

Members of S-H-O-C-K-R-A-Y at More Party Than Arty, CHARAS (left to right: Lisa Egan, Jeff Wright, Doris Kornish and Kenneth King) Photo by Larry Cohen

More Party Than Arty

Saturday night, December 11th, 1982, sixteen acts converged on CHARAS in the East Village. There was the excitement of a club and the receptive quality of an opening or reading. There was dance and dancing. All of the sets were accompanied by sound and master mixer DJ Pan Ethnos (Ed Friedman) jockeyed between live congas and taped synthesizers. The range of acts was vast and yet connected in the networks of rhythm which made the event like a manifesto.

The evening was marked precipitously by Edmund Berrigan's awesome and cute debut reading from his book *Dinosaur*. Not to be forgotten was Elinor Nauen's controversial creation: MUD BOXING, with Jonhhy Stanton, Tim Milk and Rose Lesniak. Barg Barg, Elliott Sharp, Jim Brodey and some friends filled the stage with drums, reeds and poetry in a brilliant jam.

Other participants included Maureen Owen, Lori Landes, Bimbo Rivas, Ted Greenwald, Jeff McMahon, Lois Griffith, Bob Holman, Susan Yung, Peter Cherches, Kenneth King, Vito Ricci and Ann Rower.

It'll happen again on March 5th with Bruce Andrews, Charles Dennis, Miguel Algarin, Sally Silvers, Yoshiko Chuma, Greg Masters and more!!!

—Ray Shock

Other readings around town this month: at Prescott's, 353 Greenwich St at 3 PM, $2, 925-3545: 6 - Greg Masters, Lenny Goldstein, Richard Bandanza. 13 - Richard Nonas, TBA. 20 -David Rattray & Jeff Wright. 27 - Jack Collom & Rose Lesniak.

at the Ear Inn, 326 Spring St at 2 PM, $2.50: 5 - Alice Notley & Joe Brainard. 12 - Eileen Myles & Richard Bandanza. 19 -Ted Berrigan & Joe Ceravolo. 26 - Michael Lally & Simon Schuchat.

Yusef Komunyakaa is compiling an anthology of poems and essays exemplifying the influence of jazz, on an international scale, in poetry and poetics. Send work, published or unpublished, along with a paragraph or two discussing the nature of those influences to him at University of New Orleans, English Department, Lake Front, New Orleans, LA 70148. Deadline May 2, 1983.

Lyn Lyfshin is accepting memoirs (typed, double spaced, in duplicate, word count, 10 - 20 pages). 2142 Appletree Lane, Niskayuna NY 12309.

Ed Sanders wrote in to add his memories of Harry Fainlight: I remember him coming in at midnight to the cigar store where I worked, at 42nd & Broadway, in between rounds of cruising— for he made a little cash that way, being a fairly handsome flame-eyed young bard. After work we'd meet & talk verse in all night T. Square cafeterias.

And then the time he stood in a makeshift sheet toga—during one of the filmings of *Mongolian Cluster Fuck*—at my filmset pad in a back building on Avenue A—recently torn down.

And when we bought a real tarantula, mounted in one of those clear plastic lidded boxes, and pasted parts of spider poem on the back. Ahhh, Harry.

And there is another part of Harry's travails about which it's too difficult for me to write, though Allen I guess touched on some of it.

And from Carl Solomon: A cold Sunday in the Bronx and a fascinating thought comes to mind. To wit: You probably recall that the blade hero-martyr of "Ragtime" is named Coalhouse Walker. Now, do you recall the novella by Kleist entitled *Michael Kohlhaus*—also a story about an honest man driven to suicidal violence against the state by unfair treatment arising out of a minor issue? E.L. Doctorow is a well-read man and might not this be a very erudite and very private play on words?

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Greg Masters, editor

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The Collected Poems of Robert Creeley: 1945-1975 (University of California Press, 671 pp.)

Robert Creeley's *Collected Poems*, comprising all his work published in books and magazines between 1945 and 1975, is the full, careful account of a very discriminating intelligence tracking itself—both as autobiography and as art. With this poet, the two things have always been inextricable. As he put it some 30 years ago, his "form" and his "content" are merely mutual extensions, neither capable of standing alone.

Creeley's best known contribution to contemporary poetics is that dictum, *Form is an extension of content*, which today rings like some casual conundrum unless one considers the context from which it comes. A comparatively underprivileged New England chicken farmer, Creeley came of age as a poet in the 1950s, a time when a sort of social hegemony had overcome literary values. The predominant poetic mode in this country was then the imitation of elaborate verse-forms taken from previous epochs: a whole generation of American poets—mostly comfortably ensconced in the groves of academe—made poems like ships in bottles; the degree of difficulty, not the music or truthfulness, seemed to be the main criterion of excellence. These poets adopted such time-tested formal vessels as the sestina, the villanelle, etc., and then poured into them sentiments which often bore only an arbitrary of accidental relation to the form. The result was the building of many baroque edifices of language, sometimes admirably crafted, sometimes ludicrous, but rarely expressive of deep or direct feeling.

By suggesting that, conversely, the form of a poem be developed spontaneously or "organically" out of the urgency of the message it contains—with feeling, but without contrivance—Creeley was proposing a whole new set of priorities; direct speech, itself a formal act, was now to be presented in its original, stripped-down condition, rather than inverted or inflected to drape over a structure induced from outside.

The radical effects of Creeley's proposition can't be underestimated. Its first (and still best) examples were his own early lyrics, now collected here *in toto*. Each was, indeed (as the poet has said), a highly "compressed statement—even the spacing of lines shrunk to a small fist of words, defensive and altogether by itself." As tautly complex as strong emotion, yet as delicately musical as the songs of Thomas Campion (one of Creeley's major influences), these short poems were primarily innovative in their reductiveness and essentialism: only the absolutely necessary words were there; and there were rarely more than a few of them.

The upshot, historically, was an immediate demystification of the poem. No longer was it crucial (or even sensible) to invite your soul in fancy Augustan stanza forms or record your domestic life in shapes taken from classic odes. This opened poetry up to thousands of writers who'd been intimidated by a decade of poems that had simply looked too much like Grecian urns to be *true*. After Creeley, came a deluge of new, modest bards, very few with anything like his Puritan severity of mind or Elizabethan soundness of ear, but all working the same territory, creating a mass-democratic cottage verse that ushered post-war American poetry outside the halls of fading ivy, and in turn made possible a whole new generation of "post modern" academicism (not Creeley's fault, but isn't it always the way?).

What's ironic about this is that Creeley, for all his inventiveness, shows himself in the copious new *Collected Poems* (and in several recent chapbooks not included here) to be sort of traditionalist *manque*. Taken together, his poems reflect the obvious modern influence—D.H. Lawrence, W.C. Williams, Ezra Pound. But even more powerfully, they echo, and extend, a pure, compressed English lyric line: from the intense, yet desperately "courtly" obsession of the lover, as in Wyatt or Campion, to the elegiac, nostalgic quality, or the sober, wry realism, as in Thomas Hardy, their range is described by the past. Not bound by it, but not fully comprehensible without it.

Movements in literature come and go, even the most passionate of them. "Time passes/love in the dark." But this poet's achievement stands clear in the daylight, now, and will last.

—Tom Clark

Fireflies

Our backyard
is an ocean
filled with
yellow light
A tide that creeps
You barely
notice it

A mason jar
clutched firm
in my left hand,
the lid ready
in the right.

As if to hunt
easter eggs
we scour the yard
Some yell
others sing
and we
extinguish the life
of fireflies

June bugs shiver
safe
under porch light
Tonight I am
ten
maybe seven

—Amy Wilson

Pound/Ford: The Story of a Literary Friendship, edited by Brita Lindberg-Seyersted (New Directions, NYC, 1982 $22.95c)

> "Get the waiter at your hotel to write your letters for you; he will at least write comprehensible dog-English. Your 1892 O Henry stuff is wearisomely incomprehensible by now." - Ford to Pound, 1938

Was there ever a horse-drawn trolley? Do waves run in the valleys of a beach, or are they converted into surf or foam soon as they strike the pebbles? When you aspire to elucidate rather than obscure, such concerns are passionate and rousing.

> "It is only the minute crit. that is any good, or that prods one. First to rebuttals." - Pound

The arguments ensue through several letters. A fellow who shares these concerns enough to so argue becomes a valued ally. Ezra Pound and Ford Maddox (Hueffer) Ford weren't buddies. About most everything but writing they seemed to be at odds and saw each other rarely because neither went out of his way to do so, but they remained loyal to each other for more than 30 years. They shared news of jobs, possible outlets for material, "promising" writers, and literary feuds. They wrote reviews of each other's work and logrolled without shame. When Ford was strapped, it was Pound responded promptly with $100 check and cheery homily: "it-za cockeyed woild", "aint life just wonnerful." When the Cantos were unacclaimed and seldom read, it was Ford who drummed up *The Cantos of Ezra Pound: Some Testimonies*, wrote the prefatory note plus an article.

Both Pound and Ford bowed toward Flaubert for lessons in clarity and simplicity, though with characteristic sweep Pound called these qualities simply French. Pound recalled that as a young man in London he spent afternoons with Ford learning to render experience precisely rather than comment on it, and evenings with Yeats learning about symbols and associations.

> and for all that old Ford's conversation was better,
> consisting in res non verba,
> despite William's anecdotes, in that Fordie
> never dented an idea for a phrase's sake
> and had more humanitas
> (Canto LXXXII)

Probably from Yeats and surely from Dante, Pound learned also to distinguish between poetry and prose by the "musical component" which made verse intense. Ford demurred, skeptical lest the "musical idea" lead back to the verbose adornments of the 90s, although conceding that he probably understood something quite different as music. His own poems were vers libre, flat, expansive, often tedious. Compare the poems he composed before 1912, however, to those written by Pound or even Yeats during the same period, and you can appreciate Ford's directness and vigor. That Ford has his own ideas about the "musical component" in poetry is demonstrated by this 1932 review:

> *How to read* is in short the final—and first—passport to glory of the prosateur...The mere fact that all the writers there recommended must, by the Anglo-Saxons for whom it is written, be read in translation makes it a recommendation to prose. No translator ever rendered the verbal felicities and tricks of, say Guilhem de Cabestanh. Not to mention Confucius.

This though he thought *Cathay* "the most beautiful volume of poems in the world." Pound's hyperbolical account has Ford single-handedly reintroducing to England the notions that prose could be written in a living tongue, that poetry should be as well written as prose, and that prose was not "mere syntax."

Influence may be discussed, but in action it's nebulous. It would be neat if tracked from elder to junior, ponderable if passed from principal to principal. Reading this correspondence we find influence reciprocal. Vocabulary, texts, and acquaintances are shared. The differences were pronounced.

Pound called Ford "the father or at least the shepherd of English impressionist writers". Ford, who was 40 at the time (only 12 years Pound's senior) feared lest *les jeunes* dismiss him as old hat. Pound assured him:

> I take impressionism as the first necessary assault on Fanny B(r)awn(e) and the Folios.
> And certainly one backs impressionism, all I think I wanted to do was to make the cloud into an animal organism. To put a vortex or concentration point inside each bunch of impression and thereby give it a sort of intensity, and goatish ability to butt.

In a review of *High Germany* (1912), Pound wrote that Ford is

> making some sort of experiment in modernity...(The results) are more readable than the works of most of his contemporaries, because Mr. Hueffer fills in the lacunae between his occasional passages of poetry with doggerel instead of with dullness, rhetorical, heavy, ornate.

Ford thought Pound a too stern moralist, warned him that he could become a Plymouth Rock Puritan.

> Mr. Pound learned all that he knows of life and letters from in the first place, Flaubert. Tactics he learned at Altaforte at the feet of Bertran de Born who incensed the whole world with his libels. Of strategy Mr. Pound never heard, nor yet, though he sits at the feet of a statue of Columbus has he permitted his mind to be opened by travel. He reclines in a remote fragment of Coney Island that has dropped from the skies near Porto Fino.

The most significant dialogue included herein is an interview first recorded by Olga Rudge for an Italian magazine. The authoritarian Pound begins by trying to establish a canon.

> P. What authors should a young Italian writer read if he wants to learn how to write novels?
> F. (Spitting vigorously) Better to think about finding himself a subject.
> P. (Suavely, ignoring Ford's irritation) Well, suppose he has already had the intelligence to read Stendhal and Flaubert?
> F. A different curriculum is needed for each talent. One can learn from Flaubert and from Miss Braddon...
> Pestered the next day as to what a young writer ought to read, Ford groaned: "Let him get a DICTIONARY and learn the meaning of words."

The actual correspondence contained in this volume is sparse. Ford "detested" letter writing, preferring to talk. Pound wrote at length when it was "too god damn wettt to play tennis". Filling in are pertinent essays, reviews, reminiscences by the authors, and narrative by the editor. The bulk of this material is available elsewhere, but nowhere is it collected as conveniently or more entertainingly.

—Gary Lenhart

I'm not going to say
pardon my behavior
I'll be straight tomorrow
But you'll
be drunk
for the rest of your life.

—Rose Lesniak

The Border Guards: Poems of the Greek Resistance (1940-1946) by Anghelos Sikelianos, translated by Frances LeFevre (Rocky Ledge Cottage Editions, 1982, Box 125 Cherry Valley NY 13320 $5)

Last summer I received in the mail two small books: Frances LeFevre's translations of *The Border Guards* and Anne Waldman's *First Baby Poems*. I was moved by the fact that I had received poems linking four generations of one family. Anghelos Sikelianos was Frances LeFevre's former father-in-law and Anne Waldman is her daughter. Waldman's *First Baby Poems* includes a poem entitled "Baby's Pantoum," written in her son's voice.

Frances LeFevre introduced me to the poetry of the great modern Greeks, Cavafy, Seferis and Sikelianos. A few years ago she gave me copies of her translations, in manuscript, of these eighteen poems of the Greek Resistance by Sikelianos. When I told her that I liked them, she characteristically doubted that any American poet could. She knew that impassioned public poetry was not in style. I did prefer the more personal poetry of Cavafy and Seferis. However, rereading these poems by Sikelianos now, I find them relevant and inspiring.

Poems springing from a nuclear war will have to be written in advance in order to prevent it. To poets interested in finding ways to write anti-nuclear war poems, *The Border Guards* may offer important clues. Sikelianos' diction, his sometimes classical and biblical vocabulary, his clear cut dichotomies are not ours. Yet his poems represent fine examples of the fusion of a public and private voice. LeFevre's poetic and linguistic gifts enabled her to translate, or recreate them, with apparent ease.

In the first poem, "Stygian Oath," the poet assumes that he has had his visions and is ready to die:

> gathering my strength I prepared to hurl myself
> far beyond all the closed rhythms of the world,
> to claim my share of the darkness
> (a poet's full share)—

Then he asks himself, "Why, then, did I put off taking that great step?" Inspired by Greece's "immortal fighters," his heart becomes "both garden and burial ground" so that they may "dance the *kleftiko* and *syrto* there."

It is a ghostly poetry that is also social and intimate. Like the poetry of the 20th century Russians, Pasternak, Mandelstam and Akhmatova, these poems contain a suggestion, remarkable to Americans, that a country may urgently need its poets. In "Greek Memorial Supper," the poet has been invited by friends to a supper outside the city. "For a long time my friends had wanted/to hear new poems from my lips, fiery new songs..." During the dinner, a friend asks the poet to "put this night into words for us." The poet implies that that would be impossible because "this night...sets/a final limit for our souls and perhaps our silence." The poet then asks the souls of Greek soldiers to join them in a communion with Plato and Dionysus. The interior of the poem of the supper becomes exterior: "Then we all moved slowly/toward the open windows—the candles were going out/one by one—" The poet seems to have lighted up the impossible night of a country for his friends.

"Unwritten" contains the most stunning metaphor in the collection. The teeth of a stiffened, foul-smelling dead dog

> sparkle in the sun
> like hailstones, like a lily, beyond the
> corruption, a great promise, a reflection
> of the Eternal, but even more, the harsh lightning
> and hope of Justice!

The surreally titled "Dionysus in His Cradle," written on Christmas Eve, 1941, is reminiscent in tone of Akhmatova's "A Poem Without a Hero," also written in 1941, when Leningrad was under seige. In Sikelianos' poem the poet wants to see "sheperds' fires" on Christmas Eve but, instead, sees "snow shrouds." He combines a raging mood with a mystic search for "the cradle," emblematic of a rebirth of a civilization, rooted in both ancient Greece and Christianity.

The mourning in these poems seems joyful, perhaps, because the Greeks were resisting invasion and because Sikelianos, through writing, was also resisting the invasion of death. For Sikelianos, these poems represent an inspired change of plans, a triumph. For Frances LeFevre, who died last May, her perfectly clear, incandescent translations are a triumph too.

—Mary Ferrari

MON.

Of the 4 thoughts I had in the shower I can only remember one when i go to write them down: that you have to write everything down. Morning starts at midnight because the early calendars were based on farm life and things grow at night. Its raining. I know its fall cause im drinking again, and falling in love though probably im just hungover. Its already Monday. We both fucked up yesterday and didn't write our minute so we changed the rules to take sunday off, then changed them again to make it saturdays and wednesdays, the days we each teach, the days off only we took Sunday instead. O.K.? O.K. Harris is closed. So is jaime canvas because its Yom Kippur and I cant get my pictures back. Graffiti on Houston street reads Fiorucci made me hardcore. You make my love come down is still #1 this week on the disco and soul charts in billboard. Last year Bowles big hit was *Let It Come Down*. I was in New Morning and a woman came in looking for it. She didnt remember the title. Something about rain she said. Like the rain comes down. The guy helping her said Is it about Vietnam?

—Ann Rower

It Could Be You

What if it were you
eating split pea soup every Thursday.
Deep in the fridge, light glares
over macaroni wrapped in silver.
You feel a nervous giggle for her,
the ghosty nylons draped over the tub,
three dead bolts on the front door,
birthday cards spread like wings on the mantle.
Why are you laughing?
This could be you. But you were saved
By the man who works for the phone company,
he married you in Vermont
on their coldest recorded night.
Or was it the butcher who wore three wool sweaters.
You can always twirl your wedding ring
and watch her in the laundry room
sorting the lights from the darks.
She talks to her socks like they were her daddy.
She's mad at him for what he never said.
She watches the dryer like t.v.
with each spin she whispers:
you owe me, you owe me.

Carol Cellucci

by fire

Causes of Death on H.M.S. Sheffield,
Struck by an Exocet Missile in
the Falkland Islands War

Aluminum superstructure provided
inadequate shielding,
fragmented and burned

Fire control posts
insufficiently operative
or out of commission

Hydraulic lines burst, spraying
hot, flammable fluid

Carbamate foam bunk mattresses burned
releasing insecticide-like toxic gas

Polyester uniforms melted
on sailor's bodies, causing
napalm-like burns

The British Admiralty
has taken steps
to remedy these conditions

—Steve Fried

Joe the Engineer by Chuck Wachtel (William Morrow, NYC, 1983, $11.95)

Joe the Engineer is a 27 year old Vietnam vet meter reader in Queens who, for the first time in his life, is making some decisions. Unfortunately, his marriage is disintegrating at the same time. There's no murder, nothing sensational in the book, just a series of scenes in the life of a young unsatisfied man renting the third floor of a building in the neighborhood his grandfather came over to from Italy. The life isn't sensational but the writing describing it is. This book is so far away from most current popular writing yet it describes so carefully and with such regard the characters and supermarket normalcy of the popular culture. And it seems peculiar and is so precious in doing that. Precious as a can of Budweiser. Its the kind of book you wish could be available at the check out. That you hope can compete with the books of gossip and voyeurism and exploitation. Its ridiculous to have to say but its practically noble for choosing as its subject a normal couple, practically a random choice of a couple, whose struggles and days we witness. Its such a relief that the book doesn't resort to any extraordinary events to take it out of its loving narrative.

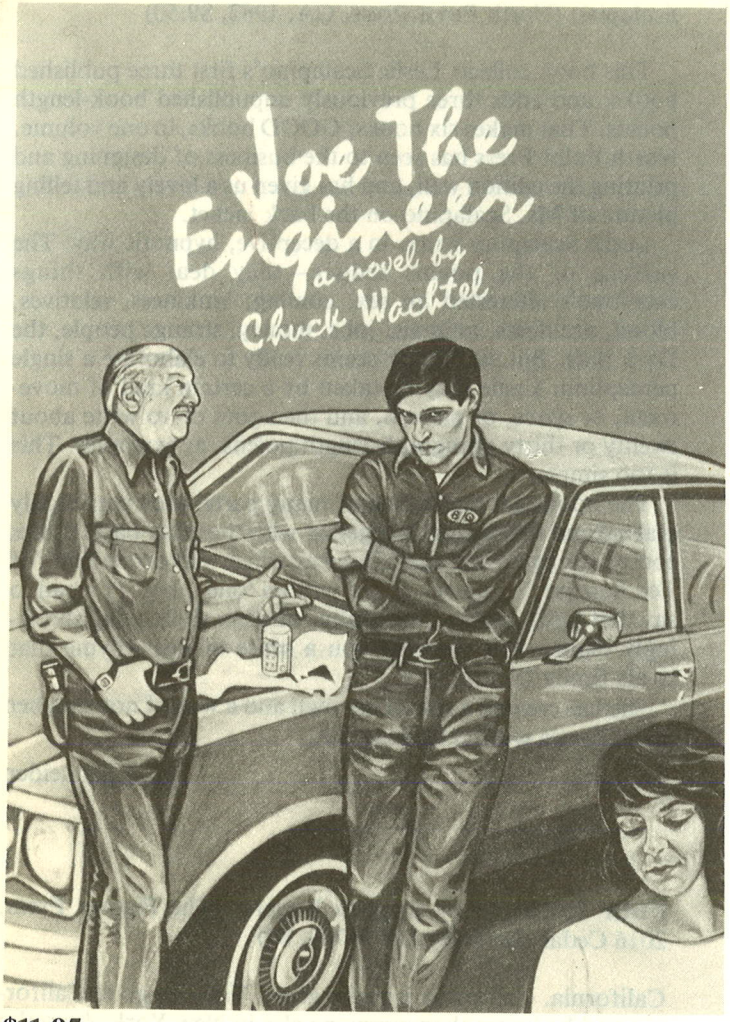
Through the course of the book we're with Joe the Engineer ("the Engineer" to distinguish him from all the other Joes in the neighborhood) in front of the Sunday morning tv watching *Hold That Ghost* with Abbott & Costello; on the job with his partner, Joe Flushing Avenue; in his local bar, Mary's, where a welcome home celebration was given him with the doors locked five years ago back from Nam; out with his wife and another couple to the east village of NYC to see a movie he doesn't understand and doesn't care to; through a couple of quick fucks that last as long for him as the pages which describe them, and on.

It is in these scenes that Chuck distinguishes himself as an extraordinary writer. Events and landscapes are described plain enough for The Daily News but with the added layers of texture and often surprising detail that create a subjective vitality and make these characters, local as any province, matter to the reader. "The sun is setting behind the Greek Orthodox Church behind Atlantic Avenue..." "...he noticed that the *Sell By* date on the milk container was the day they'd be coming home." "She leans forward, throws her arms around Joe's neck and kisses him. He resists for a moment in surprise, but when she opens his mouth with her tongue, he immediately comes to terms with the situation. They kiss for a long time. While they're kissing, the basketball players go home and the sun sets without them." In this last scene, Joe and a cashier from the A & P ("ever since that night at the A & P") are about to make love on an isolated handball court ("in the middle of the public night") through the big NYC blackout of 1977.

It's a great pleasure to be given so much from the ordinary and the desires of the daily. The kind of stuff you might think about when you're standing on a corner waiting for the light to change. What's remarkable for Joe the Engineer is a trip to a basement, whose meter he's to read, and finding a model railroad that takes up the entire basement and the gentle encounter with its builder, a retired man who had driven the NYC subway system and knew every inch of track on all current and former lines. Lemonade and a demonstration.

I've always liked Chuck Wachtel's writing, two books of poems before this, because he writes as a pedestrian with eyes wide open on a lunch hour. There's always this sense of fascination and curiosity which lose nothing in his interpretation, whether its a doorknob shadow or thoughts of the looters during a blackout. I recommend it as not only honest, unadulterated, true and searching, but because it was so enjoyable to read.

—Greg Masters



$11.95

Joe the Engineer
Chuck Wachtel

Ten years before this novel takes place Joseph Lazaro had acquired the name Joe The Engineer. When reading Thomas Hardy for a high school English class, he came across the word "engender," looked it up in the dictionary and still had no idea what it meant. He lost interest. His eyes wandered down the page and found the word "engineer." Engineer: one who designs, constructs and operates the structures, machines and other devices of industry and everyday life. That was it. Simple. A definition he could put on like a uniform. However, it was a definition he could never attain.

Instead, at twenty-seven, he is these things: Vietnam vet and husband, meter reader for Brooklyn/Queens Water Resources and resident of Richmond Hill, Queens, New York, the neighborhood in which he was born and raised. And by this time these definitions are rapidly losing the ability to contain the properties, the identity of *Joe The Engineer.*

This brilliant first novel is the story of Joe's striving for consciousness, of his search for himself and for salvation from a life of futility. Told with compassion and love, it is an engrossing story about a young man caught between the absurdity of life and his need to be significant.

"The movement of his story is inevitable as daily life, and that makes Joe's alienation seductive, powerful, contagious. . . . Through some alchemy of the ordinary [the author] turns the events of 1977, New York City, Borough of Queens, into a magic timescape."

—**Steve Katz**
Author of *The Exaggerations of Peter Prince, Saw, Creamy and Delicious, Moving Parts* and others

"This is a wonderful, remarkable and enjoyable book that is masterfully written. Chuck Wachtel obviously knows, and understands, the people in this book very well, and has a profound compassion for them, and their lives. . . . Chuck Wachtel is a remarkable artist, and he is to be thanked and congratulated for writing this book."

—**Hubert Selby, Jr.**
Author of *Last Exit to Brooklyn* and *Requiem for a Dream*

"Honest and clean, it's a marksman's shot into the pain and screw-ups of everyday life . . . the hand at the controls knows much about sadness, to the point where it's never imposed on the reader . . . this is a book that doesn't try to duck anything on the block."

—**Seymour Krim**
Critic and author of *You and Me* and *Shake It for the World, Smartass*

"*joe the engineer* is a strong, moving piece of work. chuck wachtel makes joe's world come alive without looking down on it or talking down at it. wachtel's precise and caring ear and eye are a joy in this world of half-baked caper and confession novels. i hope 'joe' gets the wide audience he merits."

—**joel oppenheimer**
poet, journalist and author of *at fifty, just friends/friends & lovers* and *marilyn lives!*

William Morrow & Company
105 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10016

Riddle Road by Kit Robinson (Tuumba Press, CA, 24 pp. $3)

In this small book of poems (Kit Robinson's fourth), "meaning" in the traditional sense of the term is something that on first inspection seems to come through only in occasional hints and snatches (a line mentioning the Bayshore Freeway, or another alluding to musician Charley "Bird" Parker), which create transitory referential moments in what is otherwise a purely verbal landscape.

In normal discourse, the flow of sense can be pursued continuously from one word and phrase to the next, much as in those series of Burma-Shave signs that used to line our highways. Here, however, it's as if the "signs" were blank, a series of empty billboards (non-sequiturs), whose only sense is discontinuous; all continuity must be supplied by the reader, who quickly comes to feel like someone traveling unfamiliar terrain in the dark with no batteries in his flashlight.

There's more to this, though, than just an obstinate desire to be difficult. Kit Robinson *is* difficult, but in a way that's quite intriguing; difficulty for its own sake is boring, one thing *Riddle Road* isn't.

The most elegant and accomplished specimen of Robinson's intriguing technique is "In the Orpheum Building," a poem written entirely in abruptly amputated lines. Its incomplete sentences hang in space, like cliffs above an abyss, Piranesi-esque bridges to nowhere. In sequence, such lines occasion a haunting sense of discontinuity that constantly flirts with discursive statement, but never really attains it. ("Single story two bedroom dwelling across from/Parts unknown and won't be back and hesitates/To hand over that strongbox...")

By building up an anticipatory expectation of meaning, then stubbornly postponing its fulfilllment, Robinson playfully manipulates the reader's involvement. Left hanging by his unfinished lines, our urge is to complete them for him: to meld non-sequitur, creating a new kind of sense. On our own, we make up an atmosphere of meaning to fill the vacuum in which the poet has abandoned us.

It's an invention he encourages by offering us, here and there in the poem, certain key lines that seem to carry a dominant weight—signposts looming out of the fog to tell us where we are. Such naturalistic fragments give us the reassuring feeling that the poem is finally coming into focus:

> with a background of factory stacks. Hopper's city.
> because the walls are brick and in the sun, so bright
> ("In the Orpheum Building")

These two lines, along with the poem's title, are clues that allow us—like archeologists hesitantly rebuilding a ruined city according to recovered fragments of its original architectural plan—to begin reconstructing the poem's absent "sense." With the fragmentary suggestion of an Edward Hopper cityscape as guide, other allusive details seem to lock into place, and the puzzling impenetrability of "In the Orpheum Building" breaks down as imagination comes into focus.

The quality of the poem lies in its ability to lead us through several such tentative approaches to comprehension, only to persistently deny us the comfortable certainty that we're on the right track. It's a poem of open-ended discovery, and as such remains both maddening and remarkably pleasing (for its teasing of the imagination is as pleasurable as it is elusive).

The mysterious final line of another poem, "Tree Vagrancy"—"I find in the world"—works as a sort of internal revelation of Robinson's procedure in this book. Kit Robinson "finds in the world" a brilliant conundrum, a riddle as intricate as the shimmering nets of suggestion that connect words and things.

Tom Clark

Considering how exaggerated music is by Leslie Scalapino (North Point Press, CA, 1982, $9.50)

This book collects Leslie Scalapino's first three published books, and adds three previously unpublished book-length poems. That makes six books, GOOD books, in one volume. North Point Press has seen to the business of designing and printing the edition well, and has given us a lovely and telling picture of Ms. Scalapino on the back jacket.

Leslie Scalapino writes in a deceptive, hypnotic way. The surface of the poems seduce—they deal with things everyone's interested in: sex, coming, kinkiness, relatives, blood, accidents, animals, jobs, money, strange people, the Dark Side. But each book seems really to elaborate a single perception. Leslie may be taken by a certain kind of movement, or space, or pattern, and then goes on to write about twenty or thirty paragraph-length poems, as examples. This is too simple.

The books are made then of many parts, each part highly crafted and fitting tightly together with the other parts. Lines come back again and again in a way which makes one think of Ted Berrigan's sonnets. (I had written 'one thing'.) I mean to say that Leslie writes beautifully, whether she's being shockingly blunt, or is showing you a sense of near-rhyme that rivals Emily Dickinson's.

She has created a sound her own and a way of noticing her own. That's worth checking out.

—David Schneider

Four Lectures by Stephen Rodefer (The Figures Press, 2016 Cedar, Berkeley CA 94709, $5)

California. California is really great. You can go to California and be better than everyone else in New York, & you're still only Steve Rodefer, busily writing the early works of Bill Berkson, in 1983. Better than Frank O'Hara, not as good as Jim Brodey.

—Ted Berrigan

HOCKEY

You live in the neighborhood?
I'm from the neighborhood.

There's Rene and fifteen others
having a good time

who take only the best out
of what's worst in me.

The odds diminish overnight if you want
what we leave behind

Absolut martinis and the daily double.
That gets close.

It all adds up.

—Paul Schneeman

CELEBRATING SUSANNE K. LANGER

Susanne K. Langer's prodigal achievements reach completion with the long-awaited publication of Volume III of her philosophical *magnum opus, Mind: An Essay on Human Feelings*, over twenty-five years in the making. Volume I appeared in 1967, Volume II in 1972, in superbly designed editions from the John Hopkins Press. The publication of Volume III commands a special celebration. America has no one like her.

Susanne Langer has long labored at the frontier crossroads of the arts and sciences. Ever since the publication of *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942) and *Feeling and Form* (1953) - she has been required reading in a wide range of courses in colleges and universities. Her instrumental emphasis is on language itself, as an expanded tool for a new cognitive methodology, after logical analysis, before semiology.

Mind is a gold mine of ideas, an expanse of conceptual breakthroughs and wide-ranging insights spanning disciplines, methodologies and working vocabularies. At the outset she fuses the philosopher-artist and aesthetician, then proceeds in Parts III and IV to demonstrate the veritable praxis of the philosopher-scientist. One discovers amazing, pivotal connections on every page, her formidable intelligence and synthetic vision spanning the entire spectrum of 20th Century advances, while making startling new ties in the main feeder cables of researches and disciplines usually compartmentalized, further pushing back system(at)ic and conceptual boundaries.

The writing itself is mindblowing—seminally synoptic, rigorously and imaginatively logical, persuasively eloquent, stylistically—*quintessential.* Philosophers of course need not be literary stylists, but this is precisely where Dr. Langer *begins*! It must also go (almost) unmentioned that she is one of our singularly rare lady philosophers, a fact she would quickly disregard as (co)incidentally if not incontrovertably irrelevant!

Ever since a crucial turning point in college (an aesthetics course where we read *New Key*) I've eagerly studied and followed the synthesizing and liberating luminosity of her mature work. (Instead of gurus: philosophers!) She is the only philosopher to seriously study the dance, and all the arts, as well as their unitive and assimilative processes. Volume II contains a provocatively brilliant theory on the origins of speech and vocalization, traced evidentially to the development of the motor activities generated by the ritual dance, that in turn catalyzed the frontal lobes of the brain, where language functions are localized.

She has long been a champion of modern dance too, foreseeing its growth and importance. Her philosophical excursions into the aesthetics of form, projection, quality, abstraction, virtual illusion, gradients, expressivity, import, etc., as well as the semantic (or linguistic) model of signal-sign-symbol are important for any prescientific understanding of the canons and mysteries of artistic creation. When she says that all the movements of a dance constitute the dance symbol, she seems to presage a new conceptual extension and continuum for the symbol itself.

The impact of her work inspired me to present in 1975-76 a multimedia Bicentennial dance tribute to her. *Battery* was premiered at The Cathedral of St. John The Divine with two groups of dancers, double screen projections, motio tableaux and an electronic score, setting up a virtual performance dialectic of continually shifting visual contrasts and kinetically relayed counterpoints. Versions were also presented at the Universities of Maryland and Wisconsin, and at Moming in Chicago. The concrete bridges between the discursive and non-discursive, language and dance, motion and meaning (the kinetic and mimetic) continue to be the mainstays of my own explorations.

During the past decade I have had the opportunity to meet, talk and correspond with Dr. Langer, and in the past few years to visit her in her enchanted, rustic home in Old Lyme, Connecticut. She's surprisingly gracious and disarming, straight-forward, indomitably perservering, patient, humorous and endearing. With her special sagely perspicacity she connects the realms of the arts and biological sciences around the axes of living forms, revealing how the elements and acts of an art work, entity or organism and the impulses of perception and conception build up "the inscrutable complexities" of knowledge and the world. "Art is the objectification of feeling, and the subjectification of nature."

Susanne Langer worked on *Mind* through her 85th year, managing to accomplish what she projected in the introduction—truly it is one of our "furthest reaches of thought." The magnificent and mighty magnitude of her contribution to the life of the mind ("the greatest of all such wonders of nature") promises to be harbinger and catalyst for future generations across disciplines, realms and specializations. *Mind* is also a great work of art!

—Kenneth King

Artificial Heart

Further evidence now is a more repressed era than a decade ago, more repressed than anytime since the 50s probably. Maybe the 20s. The people in my freshman english class write in their journals about going to church. That and blushing is back.. I started noticing it in school. Especially the day we tried exchanging curses and reading them aloud but i thought maybe cause they're so much younger. The people in this class were born in 1964. But now i notice everyone blushing everywhere. When I told them that B had brought over his dirty movie and asked me to splice it for him, V, M and R turned purple. It feels good though! transparent. They say its good for your circulation. Cools your heart too. Maybe thats why there were less circulatory problems in the victorian era. Contrary to what you'd imagine maybe repression has good side effects. When the Jonathan Miller program on the body thats on every Saturday nite at 9 on 13 I considered watching it until he announced it was on the heart. But the next morning someone explained Tibetan medicine to me. Its based on taking the pulses. There are 14 of them that they take and i realized that was the heart and i was sorry i had turned it off. I bet they'll soon be theories about right heart and left heart like right brain and left brain. Yesterday they had to replace the left side of the artificial heart. The artificial heart. Good title. I bet hysteria will be rampant again by 1999. I mean marriage is back in style. Only this time only men will get it.

—Ann Rower

ON THE ROAD: A BEAT CONVENTION

Things have changed a lot since Jack Kerouac sat down and typed out his most famous roman a clef some 30 years ago. Denver, for instance, was the fabled destination in that desperate book yet during the conference held last summer to celebrate the 25th anniversary of *On the Road*'s publication, the booming metropolis on the high plains was a mere side show for the venerable beat survivors who were taken from Stapleton Airport up to their lodge at Chautauqua, which looms over Boulder, almost, but not quite, like the Grand Llama's residence looks down on Llasa. All during the ten days of various on-goings involved with the **Jack Kerouac Conference**, I kept wondering to myself, what would Jack write or what would Neal Cassady say if they were still here in the flesh.

Fallout

Soon after my arrival in Boulder, a bystander reported that Stan Brakhage had phoned into a big Denver radio talk show to publicly express the load of annoyance he felt regarding the conference being hyped by the local media. His call apparently interrupted a live guest interview with poet Ted Berrigan. Brakhage claimed there were at least 7 mountains in Boulder County of loftier interest than the revival being promoted by the Naropa Institute. Not much was seen of Stan thereafter, but Ted, on the other hand, was one of the mainstays of the convention and helped "bring back Jack" by playing several funky old tapes of Kerouac ("Well, here I am, it's 2 A.M., what day is it?") for those who attended his workshops.

Following the official opening of the conference, Robert Frank (*Pull My Daisy*) showed his documentary film of The Rolling Stones' mid 70s tour of America, *Cocksucker Blues*, a depressed and brutally exposed behind the scenes document of rock star glitter.

The Deluge

In an article Kerouac wrote at the end of his life in 1969 which was syndicated by the press under the headline, *After Me, the Deluge*, one can read the last will and testament of the 'father of the beat generation' wherein he declared he was not a Hippie-Yippie. He told of his extreme displeasure with the then chichi radicals of the counter-culture and attacked Abbie Hoffman, Timothy Leary, the kidnappers of Neal (Merry Pranksters) and Allen Ginsberg for having become pernicious influences "who spawned a deluge of alienated radicals, war protestors, dropouts, hippies and even 'beats'."

Ironically enough, the first real big gala event of the convention was a panel discussion on politics featuring Barry Freed (aka Abbie Hoffman), Tim Leary, Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs before a packed house in the Colorado University Glen Miller Ballroom which was decked out for the festival. At the back of the stage hung a bright 10 foot banner with a huge painting of Kerouac by the Dutch expressionist Karel Appel which also bore the words 'Jack of Light' and 'All ye graves are open.' Over a thousand people, mostly young folks, came to witness the old avant-garde back in action.

Their discussion was staged so that each panelist sat in a soft chair with individual microphones, and Ginsberg started in by stating that the beat generation had struggled to create an atmosphere of fair-minded sexual openness in America. Then Burroughs, who seemed frail, offered some observations about how the very same abstract words mean different things to different people, e.g. 'democracy' and/or 'freedom.'

As Hoffman was introduced, he clapped right along with the audience just like Breznev did, yet even though Abbie had changed his face and his name, he could still please a crowd of neophytes with his 'fuck that shit' iconoclasm. In his talk he expressed some vague deference to Kerouac as a harbinger of the youth movement and cultural upheaval of the 60s, and as for the beats who survived, he said, they had their best works yet to come.

Leary, who had been sitting back with he beatific smile of a fatuous bishop, was next. Tim decided to make his pitch on his feet so like a frustrated rock star he grabbed his mike and pranced downstage whipping the cord around as he strutted thru a short impromptu speech. 'Turn on, tune in and take over' he encouraged the young on-lookers and reminded them that the post acid baby-boom generation would soon be in a position to take over society. When a young man from the audience posed a convoluted question about death, Leary retorted, "Don't worry about death, death is a thing of the past. Within 10 or 20 years the geneticists will develop a pill to double your life span."

As the night wore on I began to get a clear sense of how Jack's blues—now that he's gone, like a sad old candle—are so lonesome and foreboding.

Rodeo Literatti

One evening a couple hundred people flocked to a reception at the Boulderado. This elegant 19th century hotel built during the heyday of mining still thrives as a nostalgia item. A golden stained glass canopy rises high above the balustrade of the mezzanine to illuminate the lobby below, and the rich old west decor, with its plush carpets, marble topped tables and little stuffed chairs, has been restored. The party was (by Kerouac standards) a subdued affair as myriad stunned individuals ambled on the angular geometry of the stairway. The very anonymity of everyone was provocative.

Day to day coordination of the 50 or so different events (panels, workshops, readings, films, symposiums, speeches and press conferences, plus a few parties and a jazz concert) was managed by a handful of Naropa Institute administrators. They all seemed to possess the same business-like replicant gaze, presumably an affect of the Tibetan Buddhist training at the Institute, and they recruited 'ushers' (Dharma Security) to maintain what they called 'unperturbed space.'

Several women who had been close to Kerouac were invited to take part, but the enigmatic Stella Kerouac, his third wife who lived with him during his final years, would have nothing to do with the convention. However, Jack's daughter, Jan, whose unhappy life story can be found in her novel *Baby Driver*, showed up and gave a moving reading from her book. Jan met her father only twice.

Carolyn Cassady, Neal's wife, made cameo appearances on panels and didn't say much. In private, however, she reacted to what she thought was an overemphasis of homosexuality in the legendary relationship of Neal, Jack and Allen. She also mentioned that her husband's last years had been pathetically wasted playing court jester to Ken Kesey & the Merry Pranksters, and when Kesey, who drove in from Oregon for the Kerouacfest, showed a film shot in the 'electric kool aid' days back when Neal was driving the bus, Mrs. Cassady said that she couldn't stand seeing her late husband being depicted as a trained bear. "He was already dead by then," she commented bitterly.

Of the intimate women, the most flamboyant and the one who totally enjoyed the public circumstance was Edy Parker, the brassy 60 year old first wife of Kerouac. She told anecdotes of meeting him in New York during the war and of their subsequent years before they separated in the late 40s and he went on the road. "Jack was very shy," she said. Joyce Johnson, who was Kerouac's companion in the early 60s after he had become famous, gave a more abstract insight into his career, especially his attitudes and habits vis a vis herself and women in general. It seemed Jack was certainly sensitive enough, and women found him attractive because he wasn't a wimp.

There were several Kerouac scholars who were invited by Naropa to help cultivate the legend. However, the principal entertainment of the convention came from the writers themselves.

Gregory Corso, for example, showed that besides being

obstreporous and funny he has a wonderful ear for the cadence and melody of whacky human speech. Also, Robert Creeley gave a solid reading one night along with Ted Berrigan and Clark Coolidge; Anne Waldman, Michael McClure and Diane DiPrima turned in remarkable performances; and from the days of beatnik glory re-appeared John Clellon Holmes and Herbert Huncke, Ray Bremser and Jack Micheline, plus, of course, Burroughs and Peter Orlovsky; but the most noticable absence was Gary Snyder whose name kept appearing on the daily program as 'tentative'. The final reading was indeed a spectacle wherein Ferlinghetti, Kesey and Ginsberg took turns performing before an enthusiastic crowd in the Glen Miller Ballroom.

There were several informal readings and parties during the 10 day conference; there was even a marathon relay recital of *On the Road*, so that the whole scene became a massive display of beat and hip redux. Echoes of it were repeated each morning in The Denver Post and some of the action was picked up by the wire services.

Jack's Nightmare

One curious bit of literary fallout flew in with Tom Clark towards the end of the convention. Although he didn't take part in the official program of Naropa events, Tom read from his just completed Kerouac biography in a classroom hung with maps inside the Geography building on the C.U. campus and gave what was one of the most intense performances of all. Before reading from the text of his new work (*Writer: A Life of Jack Kerouac*), Tom mentioned that Kerouac had had a prophetic dream in 1957 which was recounted in the *Book of Dreams* about A BIG 'BEAT GENERATION CONVENTION'—

> ...everybody's there but they've erected a 300 foot tower of concrete which topples over & falls in the field, you see nimble workmen sneaking out of the wood board interior amazingly & some being run over as the tower is allowed to roll because they're letting the rabbits inside move it shifting their positions—I see Irwin & Simon [Allen & Peter] but I'm not sitting with them—On the way back to New York I'm with one of the Conference officials and when I ask him what he got out of the conference he says "O, I'm not interested in that, I just provided the concrete for the tower" and I realize he's just a gangster and he gets real mean and shows me how Frank Sinatra wallops guys on the jaw (holding my head and almost blasting me with his big fist)—I hate him—You next see F.B.I. men studying his accounts showing where a certain 'Gleason' received $6,000 in the phony concrete deal...

Clark's reading from the biography began with a close study of Jack's own memories of his childhood years as explained in the Kerouac oeuvre.

> I was the strangest creature of them all, he later wrote in a poem describing himself at six...

Next Tom read what he called a little montage shot entitled 'Jazz for Jack' portraying the wild 1949 bop era of Kerouac's life ('Braying woman mad/all night balls'). The final selection was the sad account of Kerouac's last year when 'past and present swam together in Jack's alcoholic mind.'

On the Road Again

The Jack Kerouac Conference closed its agenda with an event at which the distinguished guests delivered their own oracles. This was followed by an open reading where an endless stream of hopeful writers were allowed two minutes each on stage, but the list of their names was long and the audience had inexorably started drifting off so the alotted time was cut to a single minute. The oppressive ennui of the situation had been characterized earlier that day by William Burroughs—

> I'm afraid I've got bad news for you. The ship is sinking and it's every man for himself.

Nevertheless, the Naropa promoters reckoned the convention was worth all their efforts, as as far as the legend goes, well, when Kerouac was interviewed by Ted Berrigan (*Paris Review*, 1968) and was asked what his sense was of the influence he, Ginsberg and Burroughs would have on American writing, Jack replied:

> ...It beggars sense. And it's not important. It's our work that counts, if anything at all, and I'm not proud of mine or theirs or anybody's since Thoreau and others like that, maybe because it's still too close to home for comfort. Notoriety and public confession in literary form is a frazzler of the heart you were born with, believe me.

It was encouraging to discover the shadow of Jack Kerouac's restlessness still hangs over the pervasive social climbing of America in the 80s.

—John Daley

THURS.

Lunch with Maura today. Shes doing her independent studies project on the history of the torture of women beginning with greece, then the middle ages & witch persecuting by Christians, through DeSade down to the present S & M trend, the big picture is sex and life, no sex, sex and death. Brought an article from Ms magazine on it, only the article calls it D & S. Dominant and Submissive. I call it Dominant and Tonic says V. Music joke. I call it Vodka and Tonic. Still summer joke. Told Tommy about how they call themselves tops and bottoms. What do they say, he said after dinner, uppers and downers? Its sex not drugs tom. I know, uppers and lowers. Well, that's for the geriatric set maybe. No. Ill give you a hint. Think pajamas. I think Susan is black satin pajama top with invisible bottoms. Or was it imaginary. Thinking of trying famous Rons famous method of memorization for my songs: no alcohol and no sex. I dont have to start yet. Do I? Ill think about it tomorrow.

—Ann Rower

A Puff

To walk
through
the cold

Oh what
I care
about

air, you
&
a cigarette

sometimes
there,
dearly,

or sometimes
departing,
or daily

touching
lips
where

all those
fears
my cares —

the bluest smoke

—Steve Levine

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