

THE POETRY PROJECT

The Newsletter of The Poetry Project Ltd, at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery #136 February/March 1990



EDWIN'S LAST DAY

Rudy Burckhardt

Edwin Denby died a few days ago. It was his own doing. Katie had left for New York, Yvonne was visiting a friend in Portland. We were alone in our house in Searsmont, Maine. Is this a good time? Edwin asked. Yes, I said.

Edwin was eighty. His life had been prolonged three times by doctors and intensive care, sometimes against his wishes. His memory was failing and he hadn't been able to write for many years.

We talked about Dante's *Paradiso*. Edwin said he had just finished reading it for the first time. (He almost always carried a small edition in Italian and English with him.) He described the blessed ones who sit on narrow school benches there, listening to their favorite teachers. We read some Hölderlin in German, the amazing short, untranslatable poems he wrote occasionally, after he'd lost his mind and lived in an upstairs room in the house of a kindly carpenter and his family, with room and board being paid for by his mother.

I went into the woods where I had a painting in progress, but instead of painting I did something easier: with my camera I filmed some bright green ferns waving slightly in the sun.

Later Edwin and I took a slow walk up the road. He told me about an idea he had that I didn't quite understand; something about scientists and how once they gathered enough information, in ten years they would save the world from pollution. About a quarter of a mile from our house, Dino, our neighbor, and his dog, came up to us and we had an extremely pleasant chat in the middle of the road with no cars going by. (Later on, Dino told me we looked a gloomy pair indeed, slowly moving up the road, our heads bent, Edwin leaning on his cane, weighing matters of death and life.)

I cooked a small mackerel, sweet peas, and warmed up the rice from the day before. Then we lounged in the living room reading aloud more Hölderlin, some poems by John Ashbery, and listened to Wanda Landowska playing Haydn and Mozart on the. Edwin said he'd written a note, something about unaided and that it was so well-written he was proud of it. Yes, pride always keeps sneaking in, I said and we laughed. I placed a fifth of Bushmill's Irish whiskey with a jug of water and a glass on the grey table in Edwin's room. The pills, tiny white Nembutols in a small anonymous white envelope wrapped in pink plastic sealed with silver tape, had been given him earlier by an old doctor friend.

The evening was getting heavy. Reading the memoirs of Hadrian, I dozed off. Edwin was reading. We had nothing more to say. I wished I were far away. I heard Edwin rummaging in his room opening and closing drawers. He came back and said: I've lost the pills. I was annoyed. Okay then I'll have to take you to the dentist in the morning. Good night. As I passed him he gave me a slow, wide, complicated smile and said: thank you — thank you very much. I climbed the eleven steps to the upper floor, took two mild brown-and-yellow Restirols and crawled into bed. It was 11:15. Near dawn loud claps of thunder and orange lightning crashed through the room. King Lear, I thought and turned over in my sleep.

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That morning I gingerly descended the stairs and peeked into Edwin's room. The bed was empty. Maybe he walked into the woods to die. Nobody in the living room. In the kitchen, sitting on a chair, there was Edwin's body, small, white, very still, slumped over, the side of his face squashed against the table, three fingers of his right hand in a glass half full of whiskey near the almost empty bottle of Bushmill's, and two or three small white pills. Not messy, more like an image from a story by Mickey Spillane.

I called Neil Welliver, who said, so he did it, and called the sheriff in Belfast who then called me. I gave him directions on how to get out there and waited. The dentist's secretary called and asked why Mr. Denby hadn't kept his appointment. He died last night, he did it himself, I blurted. Oh dear, or something to that effect, she said. It was 8:40. I needed a cup of coffee badly. I put the kettle on, poured coffee in the filter and waited for the water to boil. With a dead man slumped over the kitchen table it wasn't easy.

Detective Lieutenant MacElroy arrived, a stocky man of about forty with close-cropped reddish hair and a pleasant manner. He looked around gravely. When did this happen? I don't know, I went to sleep about eleven and found him in the morning. No, I didn't know he had the pills. Yes, the bottle of whiskey was nearly full last night.

The phone rang. Cranky old Dr. Kenmare, the medical examiner, wasn't going to try to find the house but wanted to be picked up in Searsmont Center by MacElroy. A photographer arrived and then the local constable, a small rustic man of about sixty, too shy to come inside even as it started to rain. Phone calls to Jacob and George in New York. George called the New York Times who called me. I must have looked confused.

I didn't know what to say to people. Tell them Mr. Denby passed away, MacElroy said and I was grateful for his advice. I chatted with the constable about the dance hall or bottle club Mr. Aldous planned to open in Searsmont "as close to my house as from here to the woodpile." The others went about their important business in the kitchen. I didn't watch.

Was there a note? Nothing on the kitchen table except a crumpled white envelope it seemed the pills had come in. We looked in Edwin's room. No disorder, nothing lying around. Without thinking I opened the drawer of the grey table and there on a piece of blue-lined ringed note paper were two notes, one on each side, written with green ink, clearer, more evenly slanted and legible than Edwin's writing had been in years. Almost too perfect, and if I had been a detective I might have become suspicious.

Neil and Alex and Ada came over to see how I was holding up. A polite young man from the Camden funeral home arrived and they carried Edwin's body through the shed and barn onto a station wagon. Dr. Kenmare said he wouldn't drive all the way to Camden to examine the body, insisting it should be taken to Belfast first, which was nearer, but after MacElroy talked to him he changed his mind (he was getting paid only fifteen dollars for a medical examination). I said something about how many people knew Edwin in New York. Do you think they will contest my findings in New York, the doctor asked disagreeably. I stuttered something in reply.

We were all on the porch when suddenly the constable slapped the back of his neck where he had been stung by a hornet that had a nest nearby and decided the porch had become too crowded. Why did he pick the nicest guy on the porch to sting?

Everybody had left. I scrambled two eggs. Many more phone calls. It was 3:30.

Edwin's two notes:

To whom it may concern

No one is to blame if I should die

I brought with me when I came

the means to do it easily and unaided

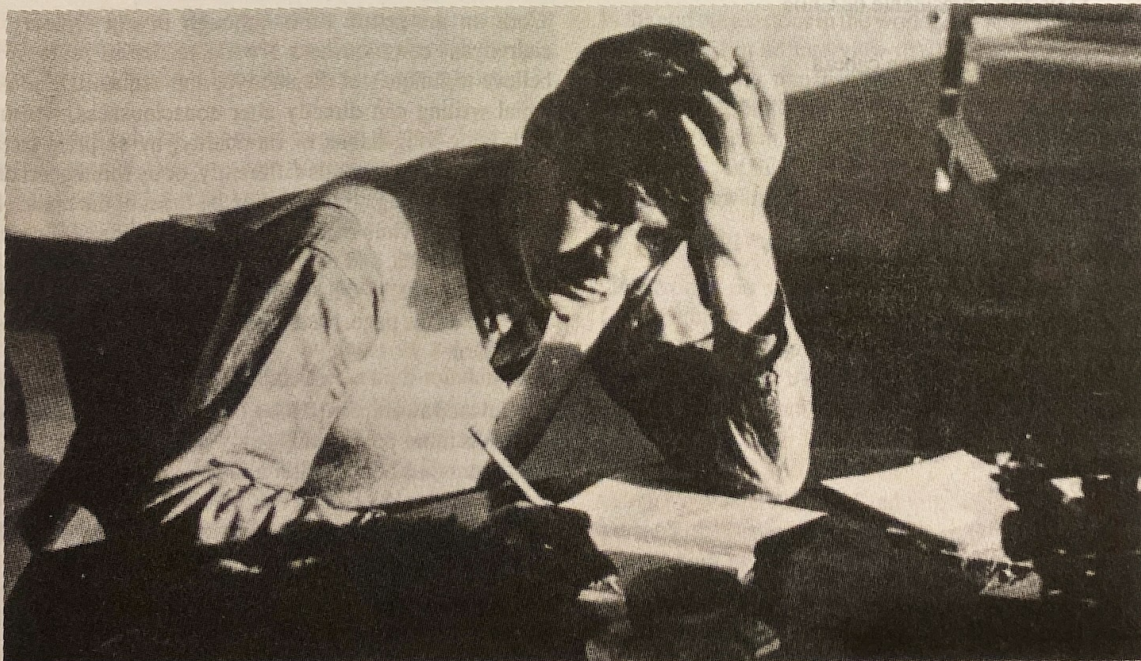
To whom it may concern

No one is to blame if I should die

I hereby declare I was not helped

by anyone, I apologize and for myself

I am happy to leave this declaration



(photograph by Rudy Burckhardt, circa 1937)

Remembering Love

Susan Cataldo

The week of hurricane Hugo, all my Lou Gehrig stamps got stuck together. Workers moved more slowly than usual and the common complaint was: Sinus Headaches. Everyone at work thought they were coming down with a cold. I was late every day; my arthritis slowed me down. It poured. I looked forward to the tail end of the storm.

I have a vivid memory of a hurricane from about fifteen years ago; Susie and I put on our big raincoats and sat on the very top step of the front stoop and watched the ginkgoes bend their thin young barks towards the buildings and worried that they would break. We took turns running from the house to the corner of 7th Street and Second Avenue just to see what it would be like to be whipped by 90-mile-an-hour winds; nobody but us on the street enjoying the pleasure of getting soaked; no mothers around to yell at us and tell us to come in out of the rain.

The first hurricane I remember, it was dark at 3 in the afternoon. My mother and I sat in the kitchen drinking hot chocolate, waiting for the rain to begin. Nobody else home. We love rain. All my life I've thought the best times I spent with her were standing behind the screen door watching rain soak the porch; having her tell me, every time, not to run under a tree when it thundered; having her call me home when it started to shower; yelling from the porch, "Come home, Susie, and we can watch the rain together."

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Si yo fuera presidente de Chile

No dejaría títere con cabeza
comenzaría por declararle
la guerra a Bolivia
acto seguido
me dispararía un tiro en la sien.

— Nicanor Parra ("Artefactos" 1972)

If I were president of Chile

I wouldn't leave a puppet
with its head on
I'd begin
by declaring war
on Bolivia
next
I'd blow my own head off.

(trans. Tim Pratt)

If Workshop

Hannah Weiner

Had notion to teach Ed said no write for newsletter went swimming all ideas went away but here they are back personal style writing and paragraph.

If you are a poet would you have the three obligations, work on yourself to become more conscious, work in the world to change it free and equal include ecological survival, and work in poetic forms that themselves alter consciousness.

As for work on the self many poets write to understand themselves, thus endless the subjective "I" a technique that belongs in our time more to the realm of psychoanalysis or meditation. Very few of us can add to anyone else's consciousness by repeating personal history. I speak also the opposite exceptions myself recording clairvoyant experiences and those who live in situations that need clarification before social change can be made. To anyone who insists on writing "I" would she concentrate on another and write that person's being and thought. It would shift to the other, still incorporating understanding problem of self. Are you telepathic you can do so the mind can be strong and have power be kind you can be felt.

Next paragraph the work in the world whether done actually in life by taking political action (and I would everyone would one time or another lend her power to social change it is a dedication consciousness obligates) or whether done in the writing here by exception I accept meaning political change can be accomplished at every level of consciousness and begin another say paragraph.

Work on the poetic form although in my ordinary, non-clairvoyant consciousness I write reader in sentence form believe techniques of disjunctive, non-sequential, non-referential writing can directly alter consciousness, whether by destroying long habits of rationality, by surprise tactics to which the brain responds differently, or by forcing a change to alpha level by engaging both hemispheres of the brain, choose your science. Thus would destroy meaning, as overproduced as capital goods, and concentrate consciousness on the letter, parts of words, word, phrase, or even the non-sequential sentence on the page. Messages come silently anyway to those who learn.

An elevated awareness (if the word consciousness is objectionable) has more power and is more politically effective, more intelligent thus better writing, include personal survival.

Look always for the work to be done. I also spell revolution without an r and poetry without a p. Class dismissed.

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Venetian Palindrome

A man, a plan, a canal . . . Canaletto!

— Billy Collins

John Berryman, *Collected Poems 1937-1971*, edited and introduced by Charles Thornbury; Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 348 pages. \$25.

Wearing his troubled psyche on his sleeve like a perverse badge of honor, John Berryman turned the purgatories of personal history into a poetry of brilliant black-comic desperation. His traumatic childhood marked by the suicide of his father, and the lifelong shame and loss which ensued from that event; his catastrophic alcoholism, several ruined marriages, and endless agitated combat with private demons; his late, willful attempt at religious conversion, short-circuited by the taking of his own life in the midst of great fame at the age of 57 — all these trials save the last became fuel for his verse. (And even his suicide was also fodder, in that his obsessive anticipating of it provided him many haunting poems.) *The Collected Poems 1937-1971* is evidence of the presence of a rare lyric gift among all those neurotic symptoms and manic intensities.

This was a writer who saw the life of the artist as a continual "moving towards annihilation — towards becoming a voice." The voice he made of himself — jagged, jumpy, nervously angular, self-consciously idiosyncratic in syntax and idiom — is one that will not soon be forgotten.

Berryman's later work — especially the final volumes collected here, the 1971 *Love & Fame* and the posthumously published *Delusions, etc.* (1972) — is chilling testament of a long, compulsive descent into self-destruction, with the pursuit of literary glory as its ironic subtext. Though he bemoaned the "almost insuperable difficulty of writing high verse in a land that cared and cares so little for it," in fact no poet of this land has ever accumulated such sheer weight of laurels (we're talking Pulitzer, Bollingen, Guggenheim, National Book Award, just for starters) as did Berryman in his years. An ability to manipulate the voyeuristic national craving for emotional self-exposure even while suffering through the dark nights of his soul was not least among his many talents.

A sophisticated scholar and critic as well as poet, Berryman possessed a special consciousness of our verse heritage. Apart from the protracted autobiographical epic "Dream Songs" (which is regrettably not included here), his most impressive attempt at a self-contained long work was the carefully researched 1953 "Homage to Mistress Bradstreet."

This 57-stanza "Homage" takes the form of an extended dramatic dialogue with Anne Bradstreet, a high-minded 17th-century New England Puritan woman who, as Berryman wryly observed, "may have been our first American poet but is not a good one." It is at once a peculiar long-distance love poem ("I fell in love with her," he later confessed, "and wrote about her, putting myself in it . . . it was a sort of extended witch-seductress and demon-lover bit") and an affecting statement of sympathetic affinity ("I did not choose her, somehow she chose me"). In what he perceived as their common condition of isolated aristocratic sensibility confronting a harsh and unreceptive environment, the contemporary poet found a surprisingly solid basis for this unlikely ecstatic bonding. "We are on each other's hand / who care," he exclaims to Anne at one

point, as though neither had anyone else. "Homage" remains a curious and moving experiment, still arresting in its urgent, expressive gesturing across barriers of gender, culture, and history.

Anne Bradstreet's personal battle between rebellion and submission in "Homage" parallels a conflict in Berryman's own poetic development. On the level of style, this conflict was manifest as a struggle between the gestural immediacy that came most naturally to him and the rhetorical restraint that was his reaction against it.

The latter quality of formality and control dominated his earliest mature work, of which the pivot and touchstone remains the masterly 1939 "Winter Landscape," first evidence that youthful influences of Yeats and Auden were about to yield to an original voice. This ominously somber piece, based on Brueghel's painting *Hunters in the Snow*, is, as Berryman once said, "a war-poem of an unusual negative kind," its emblematic figures trudging wearily into "evil history" suggestive not merely of hunters but of Hitler's brownshirts, the "poles" upon their shoulders not only spears, but guns. The poem's strength is its extreme understatement, its impact contained in a deliberately missing or misrepresented element — what the poet obliquely signals but carefully does not say about a violent world.

The consummate poise and sober restraint would give way over the years to a quirky, whistling-in-the-dark jocularly, as Berryman's poetry increasingly both tempted fate and courted his own demise. His own "life-suffering & pure heart / & hardly definable but central weaknesses" became his relentless concentration, in verse that painfully invested the whole world with self and was relieved only by a dark, self-mocking humor.

In the end the tensions in the work grew less and less mediated. He observed in an interview that "some of the best kind of writing is really transparent . . . you get no impression of viewing art." That became his own final artistic goal, achieved here and there in the terrifying compulsive candor of late poems like "Of Suicide" and "Henry's Understanding," where the glance toward doom is less sidelong and oblique than direct and frontal.

"Reflexions on suicide, & on my father, possess me," the former boldly opens. "I drink too much, my wife threatens separation . . ." The poem's cool, matter-of-fact tonality is a thin disguise over the horrors, its primary emotional effect a chilling shiver, a sense of watching someone dare himself to take that final dive.

"Henry's Understanding" adopts, then quickly sheds, the persona of "Dream Songs," betraying how little patience the poet had left by this time for disguises; the "he" of the first line has become "I" by the fourth, as understanding grows. The poem describes a suicide impulse experienced some 25 years earlier, in a vacation house on the coast of Maine — an urge to rise from bed, strip, enter "the terrible water & walk forever / under it toward the island."

It is impossible now to read such lines without remembering that within months of writing them Berryman had plunged to his death from a bridge over the Mississippi River. His verse had finally achieved that perfect transparency, becoming less poetry than talisman, and providing the reader little impression of viewing art, so vivid and immediate was the life-agony implied. One only hopes that after all his tribulations, Berryman found that island.

— Tom Clark

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biography

When i first started
i made friends with her back.
I poured myself some thoughts
to see what was new.
"She'd always whisper
of a true, but lovable
fifteen minutes,
the massage i'd offer,
a breakfast bran muffin
& her family's fortune."
Her father worked
for fifty-two years
as President to the powerful.
"Each morning after coffee
I'd stop by her desk,
she was knitting,
(tight with tension)
I'd even give her a pinch
& say, Feel any tumors?"
(with the harried hope
of a hypochondriac)
Fame was given to her
by the receptionist
of the Born Into's.
She sent out invitations
to 300 with no swimsuits
engraved on the bottom,
& lobsters from Sayville.
She was grand.
"I'd hire private seaplanes
so i could drop diamond links
& other trinkets into her pool."
She loved vanilla milkshakes.
Her toilet was silver.
He was intrigued she was from
a Good Family.
"We had good time."
Such fun.
Black leather took her cherry.
She broke enormous streets,
fainting front by night . . .

— gillian mccain

Elaine Equi, *Surface Tension*; Coffee House Press (27 N. 4th St., Ste 400, Minneapolis, MN 55401), 1989. 69 pages, \$8.95 paper.

When I was a student at the Naropa Institute, the Geordie poet Tom Pickard required that the students of his workshop had to memorize the poems they brought in "by heart." Pickard explained that the phrase "by heart" had its origins in an earlier presumption that anything that came from memory was truthful, i.e., from one's own "heart." However, being Naropa students (our Buddha, like Kerouac's, was called the "quitter"), we resisted our instructor's instructions, reading our poems off the page for the eager analysis of the "enemy talent."

It seems that the short or "skinny" poem has become today's ballad or Millay sonnet. Given that television (like the radio and cinema before it) has rearranged our perception to receive information in Veg-O-Matic bits, the short poem is ideal for today's inquiring mind. The short poem is oddly self-referential — no one quite takes what is written as being "honest" or "realistic," except in the context of the work itself. The short poem is also a *socially useful form*, as demonstrated by their continuing presence in this fine, Towle-hewn journal — filling in the dreaded white space and making a perfect diminuendo to the high pieties of reviews such as the one you are now reading. Now, I'm not talking about your hyper-intense academic-surrealist type short poem — whose intended affect is to have you slap your head in a "I shudda hadda V-8!" manner and mutter "Wow!" for the intensity of it all. W. S. Merwin and Robert Bly, main practitioners of the form, continue to quarry the already exhausted Imagist Poetry mine shaft, with the results showing what little can be refined from that ore.

Elaine Equi's *Surface Tension*, is a fine demonstration model of the health of the short or "minimalist" lyric. Ranging from punky "in your face" poems to oblique lyrics suitable for the magazine of the same (albeit phoneticized) name, Equi deftly handles the changes in the short lyric without falling into the stylistic traps of the form — these being too much or too little content. In "The Dairy Queen at Sunset," Equi states:

*After each private episode
one re-enters society anew*

which strikes me as a good underlying proposition for this book — little manifestos and manifestations from "under [this] heavy planet's influence." Or, to put it another way, what is poetry except all the good things we ate as children?

There is a "smart" political sense working through many of these poems that is built off living a life out loud in our Money Jungle rather than some armchair whoozits' pocket reification calculator. In "At The Mall," we are told that

*They
do the gathering
for us
take it all in
and give back
choices*

however limited.

And in a truth-telling worthy of George Oppen we are informed "Money is refreshing."

An interesting aspect of *Surface Tension* is Equi's exploration of the structuralist aspects of "St. Mark's Poetry." Equi's short lyrics have much in common with the work of poets such as Bill Berkson, Ted Greenwald, and Larry Fagin, inasmuch as her poetry eschews normative strategies and deploys stanzaic juxtapositions and displacements. Often, in Equi's poetry, the poems are mini-essays built around the title, as in "Puritans":

*There are no small ones.
All big-boned*

*men and women
without a hint of child's play.*

Equi has also revived the "Things to Do" list poem, which I thought had been worked to death (Ted Berrigan claimed that he had reached his own personal limit when he wrote "Things To Do In A Closet" and could only come up with the line "Kill Dog!"). But, lo and behold, Catholic school girl Equi has generated "Things To Do In The Bible:

*Join a tribe.
Listen to clouds.
Live in a tent.
Quit your job.*

which is just four of the 28 options listed. In addition to this list poem, the reader will find another Saint Mark's strategy — the compressed anecdotal (or "punch-line") poem:

Lesbian Corn

*In summer
I strip away
your pale kimono.
Your tousled hair too,
comes off in my hands
leaving you
completely naked.
All ears and
tiny yellow teeth.*

This, in a figurative nanosecond, offers multiple readings — a take-off on women-centered love poetry (cornball, perhaps, or even the possible misreading of *porn* for corn) or, perhaps, a goof on bad surrealist poetry (and Equi is from the capital of Bad Surrealism — Chicago).

Linking Equi's poetry with tendencies found in the Saint Mark's community is not intended to indict her as a slavish sub-original; rather, it is to point a way out of a cul-de-sac for those writing tendencies. At its best, Saint Mark's poetry attempted to fuse experimentation and populism as a strategy for writing. The swerve towards the extremes of deep gossip and mythologized personal lives in the mid-seventies (perhaps

typified by a Michael Lally poem called "Me"), shifted the work away from structural concerns and into an overwhelming concern with subject matter. Equi avoids this trap and has even gone beyond her earlier fascination with popular culture that threatened the work with a perpetual topicality (the Catholics call it Limbo).

I think this book is what a publicity department might call a "breakthrough" volume, that point beyond the rookie-year card when the promise of the earlier books coalesces and actualizes. And, for the health of the poetry's Big Picture, *Surface Tension* stakes out some territory in that middle ground between a homebody anecdotal poetry and the experimentalist writing of the far territories. And what should the label on the bottle read? Let the labels fall off the jars (you see, we recycle in Hoboken)! Or just call it: "the novocaine of pure adventure."

— Joel Lewis

Magazines Received

Another Chicago Magazine, #20 (Box 11223, Chicago, IL 60611). 168 pages. \$8. Includes work by (at least) three actual Chicagoans: Paul Hoover, Paul Carroll, and Maxine Chernoff.

Avec, Second Issue (PO Box 1059, Penngrove, CA 94951). 120 pages. \$6.50. Includes work by Etel Adnan, Jackson Mac Low, Leslie Scalapino, and Tristan Tzara.

Belles Lettres, A Review of Books by Women, Vol. 4/No. 4: double issue (PO Box 987, Arlington, VA 22216). 40 pages. \$6.75. A wide variety of reviews and articles.

Cuz #3, inimitably edited by Richard Hell (St. Mark's Poetry Project, 2nd Ave & 10th St., NYC 10003). 96 pages. \$3.95. Includes John Ashbery, Jerome Sala, Mitch Hyfill, and Larry Fagin.

Forehead, Writing & Art Journal, Volume 2 (Beyond Baroque Foundation, PO Box 2727, Venice, CA 90291). 150 pages. \$6.50. Includes James Laughlin.

Hanging Loose, #55 (231 Wyckoff St., Brooklyn, NY 11217). 72 pages. \$3.50. Includes Charles North, D. Nurske, Martin Espada, and Paul Violi; 9 drawings by Jean Holabird.

Instant Classics (The Prose and Poetry Postcard Project). Volume I, Fall 1989 (116 Thompson St., 3A, New York, NY 10012). Set of 11 postcards by 11 writers: including Ron Kolm, Eileen Myles, and David Trinidad. \$5. Plainly printed and unadorned, but the present editor of the *Newsletter* is known to like postcard projects.

Moody Street Irregulars, a Jack Kerouac Newsletter, "Memorial Issue" Nos. 20 & 21 (PO Box 157, Clarence Center, NY 14032). 48 pages. \$5.

FILL THE INSTANT. Douglas Oliver, *Poetry and Narrative in Performance*; St. Martin's Press (175 Fifth Ave, NYC 10010), 1989. 200 pages. \$35, cloth.

On page 76 of Douglas Oliver's remarkable and orderly probe into the sounds of poetry and their micro/macro contexts is a picture resembling, partly, a Basin-and-Range geologic study — rugged mountains in gracefully unpredictable runs, white lines blending the wayward and the regular, beneath a dark "sky" — and, below, the bit of poetry that breathed and hummed up this chart, Creeley's "drive, he sd, for / christ's sake. . . ." From it (with explication) we learn, having learned much else, that the long sibilant "maintains tension across a voicing gap" (and increases tension by revealing it), but that if it's held to the point that "s" becomes a sound for its own sake we lose the back-dating panicky/contemptuous connection with "for Christ" (and all that came before) and the anticipatory connection with "sake" and whatever admonition's not quite arrived. Little things mean a lot, as all good poets know. They constitute big things, and Oliver's work here moves innovatively, carefully along that scale.

There are many graphs in the book, derived from linguistics-machine hookups to vocal apparatus of various readers. Their free-form aspect, even for metered lines, is amazing. They provide an *empirical* basis for a poet (Oliver) to use and not use the advanced language of the literary philosopher in finding out what we at some point must somewhat know: what we're doing. Thus science, art, and criticism are united in a packed "atomic" study of the dance of the words.

The word PERFORMANCE on the cover impinges, via a pink oval, on John Martin's painting, *The Bard* (gray repro on a field of intense red), an insect-like figure wildly declaiming on and about great crags and tumbling rivers, with castle dimly perched in light behind. All this condenses itself into a happy definition of performance as *including* the silent reading of a poem. The scene's dynamism turns out to be the stuff of sound, in a lone moment, inside the head.

Let "moment" stutterstep us into the text. After politely remarking how little educational attention is given poetic sound (the self-expression, via "ideas," of professors fills the air above the poem); and modestly lamenting the deductive limitations of linguists; and mentioning that the old criticism, based on a wretchedly simple metrical scheme, was at least open to let art (or whatever) in; Oliver indicates he often finds the requisite blend of exactitude and ambiguity in what poets themselves say (yay!). The poet tends to realize that impossible drainages funnel into the moment, that variation *is* the field. "The poet cannot wait for the scientist." The moment cannot wait for interpretation.

And therein lies the central teaser of Oliver's thesis: *stress* works musically for us as a point but phenomenology keeps us from experiencing "now." Into the instant leaps duration, and into it we pour past and future. Present is an illusion, getting substance from memory and expectation. Stress and duration are paradoxical partners, "until time itself seems to slide." *Everything*, when you look closely enough, is an outrider and

yet, through space-time magic, may form a second reality. The quarks of poetry, too, leave and arrive without having revealed. In Oliver's explorations, thoughtful qualifications accumulate to a balance, accurately approximate, between math and mystery. A perfect recognition of imperfection.

The poetic stress, then, is like a fractal (my simile), and, once we sense how it's poised in paradox, we're encouraged to "perform" through it with that combination of respect and liberation one might feel on the edge of a low cliff. With dogged grace, Oliver adduces a range of precisely considered input from St. Augustine to Derrida, from throat machines to personal feeling, to see (hear) how all the imperfection is transcended by gesture. Not just any old gesture but that which heads the line towards simultaneity of emotion and rhythm, a squeeze only poetry exerts.

The graphs help establish a "neutral tune," vocal accuracy, decided by participant vote from an array of renditions. From this, all else may follow; i.e., interpretation's not only inevitable but good. The same occurs in instrumental music. The neutral tune is a field of exact (and inexact) study.

Sound comes first in poetry (and "only rhythm stays," says Pound — body melts down to skeleton). Within sound, Oliver finds an important rhythm, hitherto neglected, between voiced and unvoiced speech. Voiced intonations carry the main emotion/meaning load, and the unvoiced sounds punctuate, rhythmize, play with tensions, as in the Creeley example. Such intricacies form a field of care that can push toward the synchronicity of sound and import, the jamming, in effect, of duration into instant.

Eliot, for one, incarnates God as the intersection of time and eternity. If this term be unsatisfactory, if it bear untoward teleological assumptions, we can say magic, illusion, even approximation (OK because below our perception threshold). The 16th-century Jesuit Suarez found that things in time coexist with eternity but not with each other. Oliver, after much admirable time-wrestle, says, "I am in fact quite happy with this ambiguity, for on it the notion of artistic form depends." Language, while it can express a move toward stasis, can't get there — it can achieve a heavenly wedge in the vicinity, via stress.

In his eventual two-page revised definition of the notional instant of stress, Oliver gives its correlates and its sources (word-stress, syntax, semantic and emotional considerations, and, even in metrical verse, only in a minor way the pattern) and goes on to chat about proportions of deliberate confusion; then (still intra-definition) he brings in a new illumination, even debate, on the "hierarchical phrasal scanning" of one Cureton and how (in detail) it "does not seamlessly unite musical flow with the point-like occurrence of the rhythmic beat," basically leads to "too much emphasis on *reason* in poetry." As stress hauls in meaning from beyond, so the definition, after it's over, tosses back into itself more qualifying talk: "Whether the human mind's temporal operations are relativistic or whether it sniffs along like a bloodhound I have no idea." I find this excellent; balanced approximation is hip to

Uncertainty. The exactitude between exact and inexact. A portrait of a molecule must include some impressionism.

All this makes deconstructionism topological, "geometry on a rubber sheet." Other beauties and semi-side issues among this 4-D-ism of a linear rhythm abound and tempt. The frequent word "tap" as it notionally hits the beat seems to open up kegs of parallel speculation. Space restrictions keep me from more than pointing out that this all seems consonant with current senses of the indistinct nodes of energy in biological evolution and physics.

Oliver then devotes three dense chapters to fictional narrative (with examples that lean into poetry — Chaucer and Rabelais). He finds an analog to poetic stress in the moments of formal realization brought about by minute shifts in the point of view. That is, there are several layers of splits of authorial (and reader) entity; the "instant" leaps between variously imaginary and real aspects of "I" crystallized. This is form, and from it we derive telescoped info. Sound is not the linchpin of import; person is (in narrative). Certain poets (Blake, free versifiers) may also head this way.

The last chapter, "Emotion in Literary Response," synthesizes, and goes on to induce that it is poetry that can make thought and emotion coincide, that this "concord brings delight, like delight at truthfulness," that this then enables us to get to the tension beyond. And that's, by my extension, life. Near the end he employs the image of "bringing a concave mirror up to a pin"; reversal takes place (space, time), loss of coherence, then coherence, and, that fine thing, a closer look.

To prove my independent alertness, slight caveats: sometimes the logic is unclear through being cut to essentials; loudness is perhaps unduly dodged, ". . . tells us little of delicacy and is difficult to measure"; looseness of the "neutral tune" voting procedure; slippage of thoroughness into overkill; overemphasis on formally "tight" verse (the most restrictive "fault"). A few thoughts, such as a theory of widespread onomatopoeia, seemed naturally led up to but didn't materialize. But all this is really to say, I find the book so stimulating I want it to fill the poetic universe.

That art must *leave* attachment to "truth" in order to get at same is clearly shown throughout. We intuit this early on, as poets, but to have intuition laboriously brought into terms of a visual logic *not only* verifies that intuition *but also* lays groundwork for more. This procedural rigor has blossomed (aided by computers) in, for example, Chaos science, which is a realization in the physical universe of a psychic geometry poets knew all along. Now that "they've" borrowed insight from "us," we can borrow back methodology from them, and go further. Oliver's book is a marvelous crawl through such possibilities. He keeps the mysteries, welcomes ambiguity, doesn't insist on closure, employs the great and simple word "partly" in the midst of "white dwarfs" of learnedness. He does and presents his homework with incredible thoroughness, and then may say, "I don't know." And he limns a clear, new sketch, where he can.

— Jack Collom



The Poetics Program



New
College
of
California

The Program is dedicated to the critical study, closely integrated with creative practice, of fundamental questions about the nature of poetry and the social context from which it arises.

Besides the general education in poetry and politics, the program aims to provide the student poets with the means to develop not only their own "voice" (or voices) but *their own aesthetics and politics of poetry.*

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Printer's Error

"The happy dead"
inserted in the margin.
Just a thought doodled
outside the task
and forgotten by the next galley.
Typesetters don't read.

It slips somehow
through the second proofs
and the paragraph wanders off
into dada and libel
in 25,000 copies.
Just a thought
while talking to you on the phone.

-- Larry Zirlin

SINGING OF SEX IN A SEXLESS AGE. *Sung Sex*, Kenward Elmslie and Joe Brainard; edited by Lita Hornick, Kulchur Foundation (888 Park Ave., NYC 10021), 1989. 134 pages.

With inter-art collaborations springing up all over, this new book by Kenward Elmslie and Joe Brainard appears as the jewel at the top of the heap. With words by Elmslie and images by Brainard set to one another sometimes in harmony, sometimes in contrast, this book rewards rereading as well as reading. Positioned next to a Brainard drawing of pens, one lying flat on a table joined by others at semi-attention in a cup, is the following:

Media Madeleine

VCR pulsates
12 12 12nonstop nonstop
pee trek 4 AM

flick flashback, fleabag hotel
blind drawn, neon off on off

Aside from being the first poem this reviewer has yet seen about a VCR, this little jewel also demonstrates in a haiku-like style the permeating "Oriental" manner behind some of the poems here. After all, one of the Chinese dynasties was called "Sung" (pronounced Soong) wasn't it? If not, the reference holds, anyway. Combined with Elmslie's Hollywood-Surrealism, fans of his recent stage show, Palais Bimbo Spa, will find lines from that effort reintroduced into his opus here, as in "Boyfriend here and boyfriend there" on page 24. As the book progresses, the short Oriental-like poems give way to post-Finnegan's Wake, post-Burroughs, tight compressions of language in sharp, high-tech-conscious but also down-home-human blocks of words, expanding sometimes vertically, sometimes horizontally from page to page with Brainard's pictures depicting, in line-simple clarity, objects as diverse as naked men, flowers, mushrooms, and sneakers, and an occasional abstraction or near-abstraction, providing marvelous visual counterpoint as the reading mind goes along making its own pictures out of the words. Finally, at pages 90 and 91, we arrive at the title work, "Sung Sex," which turns out to be a forty-four-page-long picture-and-word chronicle of sex-through-the-decades, each section being a tribute to a particular decade's experience, Elmslie's verbal collages continuing in dizzying array next to Brainard's vivid images, enough to give old Jessie Helms a deserved heart attack and sure to be great entertainment for this poet's and this poet-artist's many fans.

As an example of what both old fans and new readers can expect from the title work, "Sung Sex," I quote the end of "The Seventies" (page 125):

*I open my mau-mau. LOVE U DARL, DARL LOVE U STI
CLOCK / IN MY MAU-MAU comes out. TH TH TH TH. The
situation is / back to normal. The shitflood recedes. The whole
world is / grateful. Everyone is singing and making love at the
same time:*

*Octogenarians, Marlon Brando, language experts,
bosses, defenestration personnel, beach boys,
Bed Gods, computer nightwatchmen, joggers,
officer cadres, construction workers, nuns,
starlight loners, mathematical geniuses,
studio musicians, sleuths, temp help,
housewives, seeing eye dogs,
corpses, beauticians, tots,
drop outs*

— Tom Savage

WHY I TEACH YOGA

I am seeing art in the dark.
When the lights go on
They fan themselves w/programs
And stare at red curtains
Descended from a secret sky.
Beautifully conditioned dancers,
Describe the contours of evening.
Perfect performance —
But we look and leave the same.
We need something to transform us —
A lever, a lover,
A reality we never knew.

— Ravi Singh

Uptown D

Says on this man's shirt "Wedding
Dept." No, "Welding Dept."
Defender Institute '88
man looks slightly
insane holds a
small box from some famed establish-
ment. Zaro's? Woman
with a fan in the heat, I mean
an old-fashioned fan in her hand, not
electric. The other
man has a pocketbook. Joe Cool Kid.
Oh Do Not Lean Against Door.
You read about Afghanistan
wag your broken finger
ride on to the grandness of
Grand Concourse, the Bronx.

— Ellen Carter

WEDNESDAY NIGHTS

February

7 Poet and filmmaker LEE ANN BROWN has had recent works appear in *Archeus*, *Brief* and *Cold Water Broadside*. She is the publisher of Tender Buttons press. JEAN DAY's most recent book of poems is *A Young Recruit* (Roof, 1988). In 1989, she received a Poetry Fellowship from the California Arts Council.

14 VALENTINE'S DAY READING (see below for details).

21 THOMAS M. DISCH is the author of a book of poetry *Yes, Let's: New & Selected Poems* (Johns Hopkins University Press). Rapp Theater produced his first play in the fall of 1989. Among KENNETH KOCH's most recent books are *One Thousand Avant-Garde Plays* (Knopf, 1988) and *Seasons on Earth* (Viking/Penguin, 1987). He will be reading from a new collection of stories.

28 TULI KUPFERBERG, poet and founding member of the poets' rock band, the Fugs, has recently released a new album, *Tuli and Friends* (Shimmy Disc). *Don't Make Trouble*, a collection of his cartoons and lyrics is due from Boomana. BILL KUSHNER is the author of *Head* (United Artists, 1986). A new collection, *Love Uncut*, is forthcoming from the same publisher.

March

7 MARIA GITIN is the author of *Little Movies* (Ithaca House) *Night Shift* (Blue Wind) and *The Melting Pot: A Multi-Ethnic Cookbook* (The Crossing Press). ROCHELLE KRAUT's poems have been anthologized in *Up Late: American Poetry Since 1970* and in the forthcoming *Out of the World*.

14 Born in Beirut and now living in Sausalito, ETEL ADNAN is a poet, prose writer and painter. Her books include *The Arab Apocalypse*, and *Sit Marie-Rose*, both published by Post-Apollo Press. DONNA BROOK is the author of *What Being Responsible Means to Me* (1988) and *Notes on Spacel Time* (1977), both from Hanging Loose Press.

21 Poet, fiction writer and critic DENNIS COOPER is the author of eight books, including *Idols* (Amethyst Press, 1989), *Closer* (Grove Press, 1989) and *Safe* (The Sea Horse Press, 1984). Poet, fiction writer, and librettist KENWARD ELMSLIE is the author of *Sung Sex* (with Joe Brainard), from Kulchur, and *26 Bars* (with Donna Dennis).

28 ARMAND SCHWERNER's *Tablets I-XXXVI*, recently performed in New York by the Living Theater, was published in 1989 by Atlas Press. STEPHEN RODEFER's books include *Emergency Measures* and *Four Lectures*, both from the Figures. He has published book-length translations of Villon and selections from Sappho and the Greek Anthology.

MONDAY NIGHTS

February

5 Open Reading

12 TED PEARSON has a new book out from GAZ: *Evidence: 1975-1989*. HARRYETTE MULLEN has poems in *13th Moon*, *Quarry West* and *Mirage*, and teaches English at Cornell University.

19 NATASHA recently published her translations of Joseph Guglielmi in *Série d'écriture*. SHARON SHIVELY is the author of *Mezzanine*, and a newly completed manuscript, *Inventory of Earlobes*.

26 HENRY WESSELLS has published poetry in *Exquisite Corpse*, and hosts WKCR's *Composed on the Tongue*. THAD ZIOLKOWSKI has had poems published in *Sulfur*, *Temblor*, *Caliban* and *The Washington Review*.

March

5 Open Reading

12 CAROLYN BEARD WHITLOW's poems have appeared in *Callaloo*, *Massachusetts Review* and *13th Moon*, and has a book, *Wild Meat*, from Lost Roads. CHRISTIAN MCKUEN is the editor of *Naming the Waves: Contemporary Lesbian Poetry* and works at Teachers & Writers in NYC.

19 VIDEO SHOW: Premiere of "What Nobody Saw", text by FANNY HOWE, visuals by JOHN GIANVIDO. Three figures: man, woman, and child, roam the grounds of a state mental hospital (15 min.); a new one-hour video-movie, "Spitting Glass" by ED BOWES, director of "How to Fly" and faculty member of the School of Visual Arts.

26 ELIOT GREENSPAN has one book, *Gazpacho Toenails* and poems in *Bombay Gin*, *We*, and *The Underground Forest*. JILL RAPAPORT has published in the *National Poetry Magazine of the Lower East Side*, *Pome* and *What Happens Next*.

VALENTINE'S DAY READING

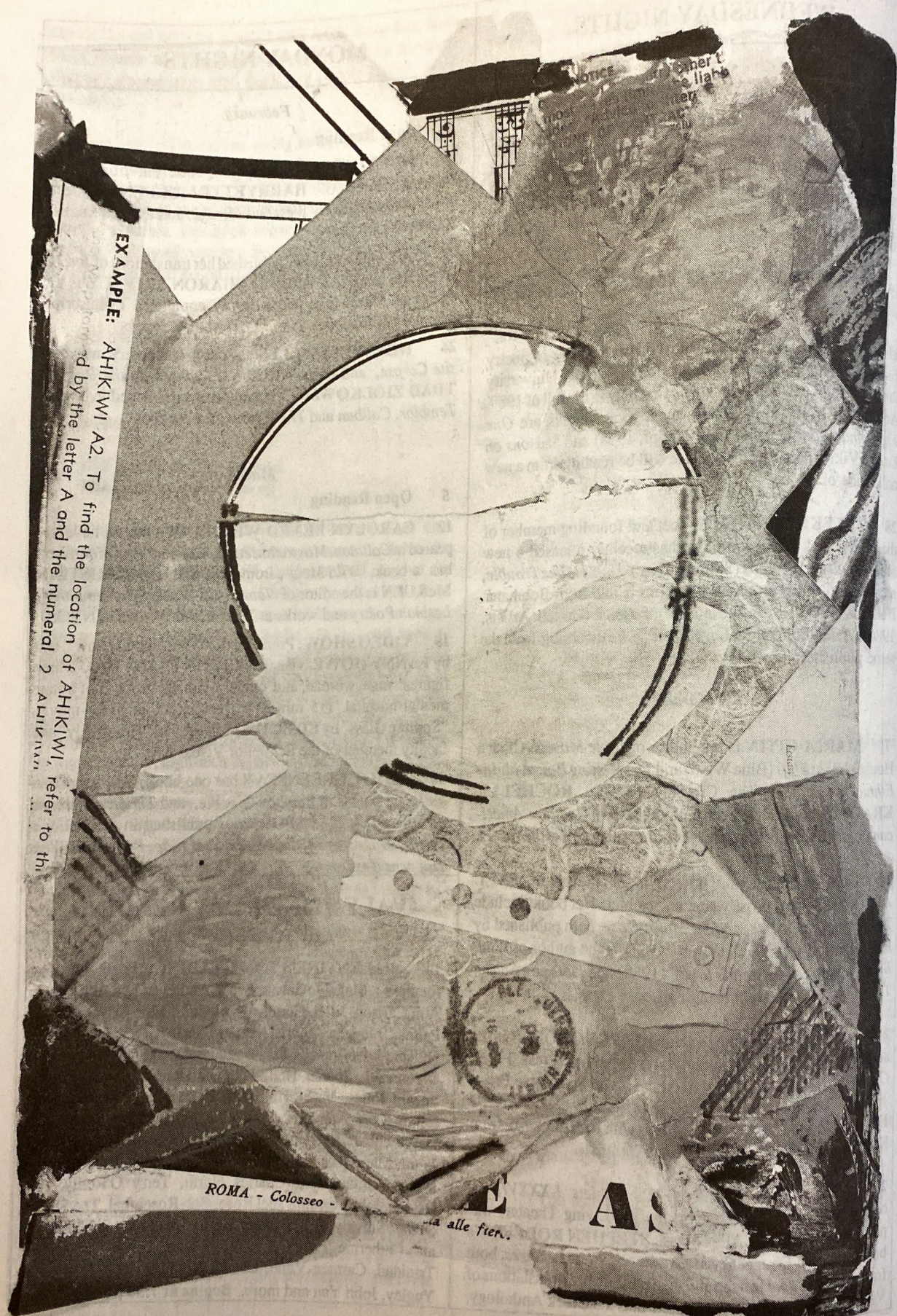
14 VALENTINE'S DAY READING: Poets and performers: Magaly Alabau, Bruce Andrews, Lee Ann Brown, Ann Carlson, Ellen Carter, Daryl Chin, Ellie Covan, Ray Di Palma, Maggie Dubris, Marty Ehrlich, Sandra Esteves, Fatisha, Luis Francia, Ed Friedman, Dorothy Friedman, Ted Greenwald, Steven Hall, Ishmael Houston-Jones, Patricia Spears Jones, Vicki Hudspith, Erica Hunt, Vincent Katz, Lenny Kaye, Ann Kim, Basil King, Martha King, Jose Kozer, Gary Lenhart, Steve Levine, Kimberly Lyons, Mabou Mines, Jaime Manrique, Frank Maya, Marc Nasdor, Elinor Nauen, Murat Nemat-Nejat, Charles North, Terry O'Reilly, Jena Osman, John Perrault, Joel Rose, Bob Rosenthal, The Shams, Sharon Shively, Sally Silvers, Lorna Smedman, Sekou Sundiata, Catherine Texier, Lynne Tillman, Diane Torr, David Trinidad, Carmen Valle, Cecilia Vicuña, Hal Willner, Rob Yagley, John Yau and more. Begins at 7:30 pm.

EXAMPLE: AHIKIWI A2. To find the location of AHIKIWI, refer to the

ROMA - Colosseo -

alle fier.

AS



THE POETRY

St. Mark's Church
New York, NY 10003

PROJECT

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

February

- 5 Open Reading
- 7 Lee Ann Brown & Jean Day
- 12 Ted Pearson & Harryette Mullen
- 14 Valentine's Day Reading 7:30 pm

poets reading and performers performing for LOVE: Magaly Alabau, Bruce Andrews, Ann Carlson, Daryl Chin, Ellie Covan, Maggie Dubris, Marty Ehrlich, Luis Francia, Ted Greenwald, Ishmael Houston-Jones, Vincent Katz, Lenny Kaye, Steve Levine, Mabou Mines, Jaime Manrique, Frank Maya, Elinor Nauen, Murat Nemat-Nejat, Charles North, Joel Rose, Bob Rosenthal, Lorna Smedman, Catherine Texier, David Trinidad, Cecilia Vicuña, John You and more (see previous page for details).

- 19 Natasha & Sharon Shively
- 21 Thomas M. Disch & Kenneth Koch
- 26 Henry Wessells & Thad Ziolkowski
- 28 Tuli Kupferberg & Bill Kushner

Lecture Series:

- 18 Ed Foster: "Poetry Has Everything/Nothing To Do With Where You Are"

(See next page for details)

March

- 5 Open Reading
- 7 Maria Gitin & Rochelle Kraut
- 12 Carolyn Beard Whitflow & Christian McKuen
- 14 Etel Adnan & Donna Brook
- 19 Video Show: Ed Bowes, John Gianvido & Fanny Howe
- 21 Dennis Cooper & Kenward Elmslie
- 26 Eliot Greenspan & Jill Rapaport
- 28 Stephen Rodefer & Armand Schwerner

Lecture Series:

- 18 Allen Ginsberg, Steven Taylor & Heather Hardy performing William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

(See next page for details)

Special Event:

- 17 COMMUNITY MEETING AND ELECTION, 4 pm, free

(see next page for details and voting procedures).

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

LECTURE SERIES

February 18th, 7 pm: Ed Foster will give a talk titled: "William Bronk, Susan Howe, Jack Spicer, and Poetry Has Everything/Nothing to Do With Where You Are." Orpheus and History. What Happens to Poetry When Historians and Linguists Say It Can't Do What It Always Did. Ed Foster is the editor of *Talisman*. He is the author of several books, including studies of the work of Richard Brautigan and William Saroyan. His critical study of Jack Spicer is forthcoming. Ed Foster is on the faculty of the Stevens Institute of Technology.

March 18th, 7 pm: Allen Ginsberg, Steven Taylor (vocal), & Heather Hardy (violin) will perform "Songs of Innocence and of Experience by William Blake, tuned by Allen Ginsberg." A full selection of updated arrangements of twenty-two of Blake's songs recorded by Allen Ginsberg on "William Blake Tuned" (1969 MGM) as well as additional material. Allen Ginsberg's new album of spoken poetry with modern jazz backing, "The Lion for Real" was issued in the fall of 1989. Distinguished Professor of English at Brooklyn College and co-founder of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, he was a recipient of the 1989 Annual Manhattan Borough President's Awards for Excellence and Service in the Arts. Steven Taylor, poet-musician, has collaborated in concerts and recordings with Allen Ginsberg for a decade. Lyric Poetics instructor at the Naropa Institute, he has collaborated on records and operas with Kenward Elmslie, Ed Sanders, Marianne Faithfull, Andrei Vosnesensky, et. al. He is the lead guitar for the False Prophets. Heather Hardy is the violinist for the False Prophets. She has also performed with the Fuxxons and is a graduate of Manhattan School of Music.

COMMUNITY MEETING/ELECTION

The Poetry Project, Ltd. will hold its annual community meeting on Saturday, March 17, 1990 at 4 pm in the Parish Hall of St. Mark's Church. The meeting is open to anyone interested in the Poetry Project.

Concurrent with the March 17th meeting will be the election, by written ballot, of one of the community-elected seats on the Poetry Project's Board of Directors. Voting in this election is limited to the Poetry Project's community; the "community" includes contributors and paid members of the Poetry Project, participants in Project programs (readers, workshop students, etc.) and the regular audience. *Mail-in ballots will be sent to all current members of the Poetry Project. Everyone else must be present at the meeting in order to vote.*

Nomination procedures: 1) All candidates must be self-nominated; 2) Nominations must be received in the Poetry Project Office by Wednesday, February 21, 1990; 3) Nominations may include a short biography—some version of which will appear on the ballot; 4) *Candidates should be aware of the duties of the Poetry Project's Board of Directors before placing their names in nomination* (the Poetry Project's corporate bylaws are available upon request).

WRITING WORKSHOPS

"Shaving the Text: Writing Reviews, Criticism & Essays" Fridays at 7 pm (February 2 - March 23rd) Taught by Joel Lewis. Does the ink freeze in your pen when you sit down to review a book that you think can change American poetry? Would you like to document your great ideas rather than have them float to the ceilings of your local bars, along with the cigarette smoke? No guarantees, but in this eight-week workshop we'll cover the craft of art/book/music review, the function of criticism in a poetry community, research tools for literary scholarship, how to map and organize an essay, and how to place your reviews with a magazine.

JOEL LEWIS is the editor of *Blue Stones and Salthay: An Anthology of New Jersey Poets* (Rutgers University Press, 1989). He is the author of *Entropy* and *Three Works*, both from Gaede's Pond Press. His poetry, essays, and reviews have appeared in *Sulfur*, *Transfer*, *Caliban*, and *American Book Review*.

*

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

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

*

"Beyond the Visual in Poetry" Saturdays, 12 Noon (February 3 - May 26) John Yau will consider, with the workshop, the relationship between words, art, and the nature of meaning.

JOHN YAU is a poet and critic. Among his several books of poetry is *Radiant Silhouette* (Black Sparrow, 1989). His critical essays have appeared in *Artforum* and *Art News* and he is a contributing editor to *Sulfur*. He has organized exhibitions at the Phyllis Kind Gallery, David Findlay Gallery and, recently, "Critic's Choice 1990" for the Washburn Gallery. He is on the faculty of Pratt Institute and the Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts, Bard College.

FORGETTING TO DIAL 911. Carl Solomon, *Emergency Messages: An Autobiographical Miscellany*; edited and with a foreword by John Tytell. Paragon House (90 Fifth Ave, NYC), 1989. 235 pages. \$18.95

Mental patients are the monks of this culture. They live communally in rural houses, are celibate, and observe our times. Carl Solomon, arguably the most famous mental patient of this century (oops, after Pound), has now chosen to speak.

Actually, he's spoken before -- in two small gnomic volumes for *City Lights*, *Mishaps*, *Perhaps* (1966) and *More Mishaps* (1968), and in sundry book reviews. I first read him in this periodical, in fact. "Gee, I thought he was dead, or fictitious," I remember musing.

In a *City Lights* book you can strike like the Eritrean Liberation Front and run off, but in 235 pages, you stand revealed. Here we see Carl Solomon, from age 8, quoted in the "pre-Dorothy Schiff *New York Post*" as "The Boy Baseball Sage of the Bronx," to age 59, a messenger on Wall Street, carrying a pair of spectacles for George Plimpton.

Mr. Solomon is now a reformed beatnik, and spends much time wondering if he should have jumped ship in Paris in 1947, at age 19, seen Artaud, become entangled in *Modern Thought*, and eventually demanded a lobotomy after stealing a peanut butter sandwich at Brooklyn College in 1949.

He met Allen Ginsberg at the Psychiatric Institute at Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital, introducing himself as "Kirilov." ("I'm Myshkin," Mr. Ginsberg replied.)

"Large reading, I suppose," the poet further commented laconically on their meeting, and soon they were composing a letter to T. S. Eliot together, which read, in part:

Certain literary dirigibles (we use the term figuratively) claim that you are a dictator. But these people have nothing to do with the main body of traditional literature, but these people are stinkers. Has a stinker ever occupied a famous place in literature, English or French? I am not speaking of Russians, as they have always been bolsheviks, even before you became a dictator.

Solomon claims "Howl" was taken entirely from his rants (and, admittedly, it differs in style from Ginsberg's earlier work). Several of Mr. Solomon's poems are in this compendium. Here's one:

NARY A LOUSE

*Oh, you don't find the louse in literature anymore
But I remember the days when you did
They added a certain roguish piquancy
To the work of Queneau
("The Skin of Dreams"), Artaud
(des morpions
de l'éternité), and Henry Miller
You see we took the advice of our critics*

*And took that all-important bath
Now there is only the surrealism of gleaming teeth
I haven't seen a louse in twenty years
But I am left with the feeling that their hideous presence
Once influenced our literature
And played a significant role
In producing those mid-century works
Of Despair and disgust
That we were weaned upon
And that we can never duplicate
Now that our romanticism has
Vanished in
A cold shower*

Solomon mostly writes one-page ruminating essays, and it is ironic that although he decries the "charlatanry and corruption of our age," he fits its attention span perfectly.

Now I will violate the Ethical Code of Reviewers and give away the best joke in the book:

VIVE LA DIFFERENCE

It must have been difficult for Chinamen and Japanese in Spain during the Civil War. When a Japanese said he was for the "Royalists" he was thought to be for the extreme right. When a Chinaman said he was for the "Loyalists," he was thought to be for the extreme left.

Note: As you know, Japanese pronounce "l" as "r" and Chinese pronounce "r" as "l."

Mr. Solomon doesn't have much of a taste for popular music, which is why he feels out of place in the '60s, '70s, and '80s, when rock 'n' roll — and more recently, Rap — replaced literature. He turns streetcorners, and thinks clamorous, intimate thoughts, such as:

*"Something about Ollie North . . . reminds of Kerouac."
and
"No such thing as prophetic humor."*

What keeps him sane, apparently, is baseball and fishing. He is, in fact, just the sort of timid, neglected seer one always hoped he was.

— Sparrow

* * *

DANCE FEVER

*I thought they were marvy & really fab
& I like the way he threw her around, he
Threw her around real nice, out of sight
& they had real nice haircuts, too; totally
Solid & totally groovy, so I gave them a 95*

— Bill Kushner

Below are selected answers to the first five questions of the third annual Questionnaire
(December/January issue):

Is content more important in your work, or style?

I think they find each other. (Etel Adnan)

If they want to fight, I can fight. (Paul Muolo)

Yes, style is important. But it is also important to be content, is it not? Oh, I can't make up my mind! (Bill Kushner)

Really, that's one for the *reader* to answer. (Anselm Hollo)

Let's forget "style" which reeks of "manner" and try "form" which is much more muscular. The human body is 98% water, but what keeps it from being jellyfish is bone and muscle. So which is more important? (Carol Jane Bangs)

[I already asked that question. - Ed.]

In my work -- content. In my work as *work* -- style. (Danny Krakauer)

They're equally important. Your question suggests schizophrenia, even if my reply suggests paranoia.
(B. H. Friedman) [We don't think that's true. - Eds.]

The two are hopefully intertwined, willfully bonded. (Cheryl Fish)

This question makes me so sad for our poor language, bloated with gassy abstract nouns, that I can't even start to think about it. Sorry. (Peter Schjeldahl)

Content (wool, latex and aluminum) is constantly wrestling with style (double-breasted coat, knickers). (Bob Hershon)

What's the transition that poetry is going through at the present moment?

Time. (Steven Hall)

A bad one. (Mark Milstein)

Too early to tell. (Danny Krakauer)

Interrogation. (Charles Bernstein)

Out of my head and onto the page. (Rania Barber)

Bad to worse? That might be progress: helpless to hopeless, which can be very poetic. Shit, I don't know.
(Peter Schjeldahl)

I don't even have a flip answer to this one. (Perry Souchuk) [I was hoping you'd say that. - Ed.]

Learning to work beyond the printed page. (Lydia Tomkiw)

I think it is struggling through a period of "mess and message." (Anselm Hollo)

It is finally & emphatically becoming Hellenized beyond redemption. (Benjamin Friedlander)

The present moment when you ask or the present moment when I answer or the present moment? (David Bromige)
[The present *moment*, of course. *Now!* - Ed.]

I don't know. . . the primary transition is enough for me. (Stacey Sollfrey)

Well, at the present moment I have just come out of the shower, my skin fairly glistening with light... (Bill Kushner)

It is moving slowly from the rock to the hard place. (Max Blagg)

Beats me. How can you know til later? (Ingrid Hughes) [Beats me. - Ed.]

What relation does your work have to the visual arts?

It's visual and it's art. (Charles Bernstein)

I don't work well with my eyes closed. (Eliot Greenspan)

A happy one. (Lydia Tomkiw)

People talking to people. (Mark Milstein)

It wants to be framed and hung in the Guggenheim. (Murat Nemet-Nejat)

I see a page as a space to be filled up, as I think a painter sees canvas as a space to fill. (Donna Brook)

A loving one. I married a painter. (Anselm Hollo)

Delacroix has inspired me never to put naked women in my poems. (Sparrow)

Wherever my dog lifts his leg I buy that rock and all the acreage around. (Paul Muolo)

Repeat the question please, I cut off the ear on that side. (Ravi Singh)

What relation does your work have to music?

Lyric. (Edmond Chibeu)

Incest. (Steven Hall)

Everything. (Paul Schmidt)

You can sing it in bars. (David Bromige)

That's too hard. I love music. (Benjamin Friedlander)

I have no ear for actual music and so attend to writers, from the Bible to Frank O'Hara, who do hear music. I hear them. (Peter Schjeldahl)

In poetry music is what is left after every temptation to be musical is resisted. (Murat Nemet-Nejat)

I studied the recorder briefly at age 9. The teacher had a faux English accent and rewarded assiduity with stickers of woodpeckers. When these classes ended suddenly, I was so relieved I became a poet. (Sparrow)

It has no relation to music: it is music. (Charles Bernstein)

Jazz is the hammer that sleeps in my heart. (Ravi Singh)

I can hear Roland Kirk in the background. (Eliot Greenspan)

What's outside your window right now?

Burnt trees. (Dick Higgins)

Nothing and Everything. (B. H. Friedman)

My reflection. (Mark Milstein)

Check cashing store, wish I had a check. (Edmond Chibeau)

A confused dying world. (Don Yorty)

No one's supposed to know where I am. (Paul Muolo)

A leafless maple tree, a wide swath of yellow-green grass sloping up to a red brick castle with turrets at the summit, backed by a row of concrete bunkers and a few fir trees. . . (Carol Jane Bangs)

Nothing. (Charles Bernstein)

I have no window. (Dan Foley)

Sound. (Paul Schmidt)

Squirrel ghost. (Steven Hall)

The universe, minus what's inside the skin of this building. What I see are three other buildings, one tree, sky. Light. Thank you for making me look. (Peter Schjeldahl)

The shade is drawn. (Dennis Barone)

Sky, trees, rooftops, the spinning seasons; the mask of reality which conceals a world of immortal desire. (Saint Annie) [Yeah, sure. - Ed.]

The sun setting between the towers of the El Dorado. (Rania Barber)

My landlord whose name is Tom & is a peeping Tom, who's peering in. (Alice Rosenblitt)

The tops of fir trees — & fog — & the flat roof of a house under deconstruction due to infestation (I can hear the workmen) — & the glow of light on clouds above the fog. (Benjamin Friedlander)
[The workmen wouldn't happen to be speaking French, would they? - Ed.]

Right now a couple of ladies of the night. Want a good time? (Bill Kushner)

*

*

LETTERS

To the Editor:

Before the reader goes on to the exchange of letters between Bruce Bawer and Marjorie Perloff printed below, regarding the latter's "An Inclusion of Vectors Inexplicable to Syntax" (delivered at the Project's 1989 Symposium and printed in last October-November's *Newsletter*) we would like to note the errata which unfortunately appeared in Ms. Perloff's article:

- 1) In the first line of the first paragraph Clark Coolidge should have been Clark Coolidge. Our apologies to Clark for backing him into an e. e. cummings mode.
- 2) In the second column, line 18, "and" should have been deleted.
- 3) Second page under *Memorable Characters*, second sentence, "one" should have been capitalized.
- 4) Second column, middle paragraph: delete "for" before "Paul Christensen."
- 5) Third page, second column, second paragraph: "will not service" should read "will not survive."

In "The Poetic Legacy of William Carlos Williams," an essay that I published in the September 1988 issue of *The New Criterion*, I criticized Marjorie Perloff quite strongly for her critical approach to Williams, in particular for what I considered to be an overly ingenious analysis of "The Red Wheelbarrow." I quoted this analysis at length and made a series of specific objections to it (pp. 21-22). If Perloff intended to respond seriously to my essay, she could have begun by addressing these objections. Certainly she has a right to her opinion of Williams, and a right to criticize, as forcefully as she can, what I say about him.

But Perloff has chosen another, less scrupulous course. In "An Inclusion of Vectors Inexplicable to Syntax," published in the October-November issue of the *St. Mark's Poetry Project Newsletter*, Perloff promulgates a series of outright lies about my piece on Williams, charging me with committing errors that I have not in fact committed at all, deliberately misrepre-

senting my views, and attributing my remarks on Williams to motives which she has invented out of whole cloth.

First, the "errors." Perloff says that "Bawer . . . seems to think that 'The Great Figure' and 'This Is Just to Say' were published in *Spring and All*." It's clear from my essay, however, that I don't think anything of the kind. I state flatly (p. 17) that "The Great Figure" is from *Sour Grapes*, and I give the date of "This Is Just to Say" as 1934 (p. 18) — long after *Spring and All*. The only place, in fact, in which the name of either poem is mentioned with *Spring and All* is in a passage (p. 20) which follows my appreciative discussion of the opening poem of *Spring and All*:

But much of the verse in Spring and All — like much of Williams' poetry in general — is of slender merits. A number of the poems I have mentioned, such as "The Great Figure" and "This Is Just to Say," fall into this category. At their best, such poems are snapshots, effectively recording stray moments, capturing small gestures, and calling attention to some of the more mundane moments of life.

The words between dashes are there precisely to indicate that I'm not just talking about the poems in *Spring and All*.

Perloff also writes that "No editor, it seems, has bothered to verify Bawer's spelling (e.g., *bete noir* for *bête noire*), his dating, his consistent errors." The misspelling of *bête noire* is not mine: it's part of a quotation from Paul Mariani, and is clearly marked as such. There are no other spelling errors in the essay, and if there are errors in dates, or errors of some other kind (which would hardly be surprising in a 7000-word piece of literary journalism, written to deadline and crammed with dates and factual details), Perloff doesn't cite a single one.

Perloff also cites as an error my statement that "Having entered his major phase with *Sour Grapes*, Williams spent the remainder of the Twenties concentrating on prose." She doesn't explain why she calls this an error: to me it seems a fair way of introducing the fact that Williams proceeded after *Sour Grapes* to publish a series of prose volumes, and that his poetry volumes of the period contain prose as well as poetry. Perloff might not choose to put the matter the same way I do, but for her to classify my statement as an error is simply dishonest.

To move on to her misrepresentations, Perloff describes me as "one of a coterie of very vocal young men and women who call themselves 'the new Formalists.'" Untrue: I've never called myself a New Formalist, in print or out of it (though when New Formalists have identified me as one of their own, I've taken it for the compliment that it is). The fact is that I've published both formal and non-formal poetry; and while I've written positively about such non-formalists as Gary Snyder and C. K. Williams, my one review of the most successful young formal poet of our time, Brad Leithauser, was sharply negative.

Nor does my piece on Williams constitute the blanket attack on him, or on free verse, that Perloff would have her readers believe. She asserts that it is my view that Williams's poetry "was, at best, 'of slender merits.'" Yes, I do use those three

words (see the above-quoted passage from my p. 20) — but it is absolutely clear in the context of my piece that the poems I describe as being "of slender merits" are *not* those that I consider to be Williams's best.

Perloff accuses me, moreover, of "name-calling" — but in fact my Williams essay was a serious, detailed, thoughtful, and (I believe) ultimately respectful examination of Williams's poetry and his influence, in which I made sure to provide ample support for any potentially inflammatory generalizations. I would've welcomed a specific response from Perloff to my specific criticisms of Williams's work — but she refuses to offer such a response. Instead, she engages in name-calling, tagging me a "Philistine" — because, I suppose, I admit that I prefer Eliot's poetry, on the whole, to Williams's. (T. S. Eliot, hero of the Philistines! Who'd have believed it?)

To support her contention that I'm a Philistine, Perloff quotes me as saying that Williams "did not join the exodus to Europe . . . because he didn't have the nerve to leave home." But look at the complete sentence in my essay: "To read Mariani is to appreciate the truth of Pound's observation, in a letter of the early Twenties, that if Williams did not join the exodus to Europe it was not because of any theory about American poetry but because he didn't have the nerve to leave home." The observation, in short, is not mine but Pound's. Does this make Pound a Philistine too?

Finally, with respect to motives, Perloff makes a bizarre accusation: if "these new young Formalists" disparage free verse, she writes, it's because they "can't get creative writing jobs at any university, even when, like Bruce Bawer and Dana Gioia, they have Ph.D.'s in English." Why? Because "[t]he good MFA jobs are all occupied by tenured [free-verse] poets of the previous generation." Fact #1: I've never in my life wanted or applied for a job as a teacher of creative writing; the very idea fills me with horror. Fact #2: Dana Gioia doesn't have a Ph.D.; he has an M.B.A. and enjoys a highly successful business career.

Having invented this motive for Gioia and me, Perloff goes on to write: "But understanding the venom of a Bruce Bawer is one thing; excusing it or ignoring it is another." Venom? Read my essay about Williams and read Perloff's screed, and tell me who's oozing with venom.

The fact that Perloff has chosen mendacity and slander over serious critical debate would seem to indicate a remarkable insecurity on her part about her own critical position. To read her lies is to be reminded that there's an essential difference between Perloff and me: she's an academic critic with a vested interest in Williams's reputation; I'm a poet and literary journalist whose only obligation is to communicate as lucidly as possible my sincere response to the work of whomever I happen to be writing about. I sympathize with her position, but I can't condone her irresponsible methods.

Sincerely,

Bruce Bawer

To the Editor:

In his indignant reply to my article (the printed version of my short talk at the "Poetry for the Next Society" Symposium held in May 1989), Bruce Bawer insists that his "The Poetic Legacy of William Carlos Williams" (*The New Criterion*, September 1988) contains no errors and that I have "deliberately misrepresent[ed]" his views. Evidently, I have done so because as an "academic critic" I have a "vested interest" in the reputation of Williams (to me, a comical notion, given my quite public criticism of Williams's later poetry), whereas he, "poet" and "literary journalist" that he calls himself, is simply putting forward his "sincere response" to the work.

But what use is "sincerity" on the part of a critic who can't get his facts straight and repeatedly ignores context? Consider the following:

Item. Mr. Bawer admits that he misspelled *bête noire* (his version was *bete noir*) but excuses himself on the grounds that he was merely quoting from Paul Mariani's biography. Has Bawer never heard of the word *sic*?

Item. Bawer defends his earlier statement that "Having entered his major phase with *Sour Grapes*, Williams spent the remainder of the Twenties concentrating on prose," by asserting that "it seems a fair way of introducing the fact that Williams proceeded after *Sour Grapes* to publish a series of prose volumes, and that his poetry volumes of the period contain prose as well as poetry."

But the original sentence remains hopelessly misleading. *Sour Grapes* (1921), we are told, ushered in Williams's "major phase" as a poet, but in this "major phase" he "concentrat[ed] on prose." What sense does this make? Further, the phase in question happens to include *Spring and All* (1923), whose 27 poems, published separately in the earlier editions, are among Williams's most famous works. And *Volume I* of *The Collected Poems*, which is the occasion for Bawer's essay-review, contains 40 more pages of poems from the twenties, including such celebrated lyrics as "Young Sycamore." These forty-odd pages are followed by *The Descent of Winter* (1928), which again contains a major sequence of poems, a number of them originally published separately. To say that Williams "spent the remainder of the Twenties concentrating on prose" is therefore simply *incorrect*. I don't know what else to call it.

Item. Bawer himself cites the paragraph about *Spring and All* which prompted me to say that he seemed not to know the contents of that volume. Look again. Bawer's paragraph comes immediately after a discussion of "By the road to the contagious hospital," which, according to Bawer, is a poem that has at least "some success." Having paid lip service to this famous anthology piece, Bawer declares, "But much of the verse in *Spring and All* — like much of Williams' poetry in general — is of slender merits." This is, if I may be so pedantic as to invoke the most basic grammatical rules, Bawer's topic sentence. The following sentence "A number of the poems . . ." would seem, again according to elementary grammar, to follow from the first sentence, providing an illustration for its

large generalization. Dash or no dash, the clear implication of Bawer's paragraph is that he is giving us examples in support of his thesis. But the examples are beside the point since they tell us nothing either positive or negative about *Spring and All*. In other words, Bawer pretends to give evidence where none is found, concluding that the *Spring and All* poems are no more than "snapshots . . . calling attention to some of the more mundane moments of life."

This cliché of Williams-bashing is one that no real reading of *Spring and All* would bear out since, whether or not one likes the poems, they are so patently *not* snapshots, not representational images of X or Y. But never mind: there is one *Spring and All* poem Bawer does cite in support of his thesis that "much of Williams' poetry . . . is of slender merits." That poem — Exhibit A for all those who, never having read any Williams other than the handful of anthology poems, want to make a case for his triviality — is of course "The Red Wheelbarrow." Bawer's denigration of this little poem proceeds along familiar tracks: "The Red Wheelbarrow," he asserts, doesn't "communicate much of anything" and has no "innate significance." The latter phrase evidently refers to subject matter which Bawer takes to be something that exists prior to the poem itself: red wheelbarrows and white chickens, it seems, have no "innate significance." The notion that *significance* occurs in language not in some prior realm — a notion that critics like Hugh Kenner and myself have applied to "The Red Wheelbarrow," "As the cat," etc. — is one that Bawer flatly rejects, citing my own reading of the poem as an example of "the sort of criticism [that makes one] wonder whether such a critic has ever had a genuine aesthetic experience." His objection to my reading seems to be that I discuss matter of sound and syntax and lineation; indeed, he rebukes me for daring to talk of such things when, after all, the first step would be to determine whether "The Red Wheelbarrow" is "a successful poem." But since Bawer never defines what a "successful poem" or a "genuine aesthetic experience" might look like, his "sincere" response to Williams's poems can have no value unless of course he is merely preaching to the converted.

Item. Bawer can't understand my objection to his contention that "To read Mariani is to appreciate the truth of Pound's observation, in a letter of the early Twenties, that if Williams did not join the exodus to Europe, it was not because of any theory about American poetry but because he didn't have the nerve to leave home." "This observation," says Bawer, "is not mine but Pound's. Does this make Pound a Philistine too?"

If Bawer had not relied so heavily on Paul Mariani's biography and had taken the trouble to read the letter in question (18 March 1922 in the *Selected Letters*), he might have understood that Pound was of course writing tongue-in-cheek, that the Europe-America debate was part of the ongoing banter between the two poet-friends, and that the mockery cut both ways. And further: that Pound's quite genuine wish to have Williams visit him in 1922 had a lot to do with his own malaise in Paris, a city he disliked and left soon thereafter, finding it too inhospitable toward his writing. To take Pound's teasing statement *literally* and *out of context* suggests a failure of discrimination that should not occur in an article like Bawer's.

What such gaffes suggest is that Bawer just doesn't do his homework. More important: he repeatedly makes value judgments for which he supplies neither evidence nor argument. Thus he writes of the prose works of the twenties (*Kora in Hell, The Great American Novel*, etc.) "these books are all sloppy, self-conscious, and inchoate" (p. 19). Period. Why is this the case? Evidently because Bawer says so. Or again, on his opening page, Bawer declares that "Williams proffered essentially uncomplicated ideas about poetry in a prose whose wordiness and lack of rigor often made those ideas seem confusing and contradictory" (p. 14). This may or may not be the case but *saying so* without supplying the slightest shred of evidence, is, I repeat, *name-calling* rather than *criticism*. It has nothing whatever to do with liking Williams or Eliot (I happen to love both), but with elementary modes of reasoning and argumentation. Thus, when Bawer refers to Allen Ginsberg, Charles Olson, and Robert Creeley as "At once tin-eared, uncerebral, and egomaniacal" (p. 25), one flinches, not at the "error" of Bawer's statement — how, after all, can one prove such statements? — but at its vulgarity.

The New Criterion, which prides itself on its rational discourse in an age of obfuscation, deserves better. But let me not end without an apology, both to Bruce Bawer (whom I mistakenly took to be someone who might not be averse to a university position; presumably when he first got his Ph.D he must have at least given a thought to this possibility!), and to Dana Gioia, to whom I wrongly attributed a Ph.D rather than the M.B.A. he actually has. *Mea culpa*.

Yours sincerely,
Marjorie Perloff

* * *

THE GREAT AMERICAN NOVEL, CHAPTER 5

After the note had sounded a full minute
all of Europe stepped off the train, pinched its brow
into a field that mirrored eyes and forehead
its single hierarchic movement spelling, "Take me
I'm yours!" Broken down by then into camps
displaced by gendarmes, whose rows of barracks
seemed to stretch and loosen from the Rhine to Naples
and beyond, we felt that inexorable meaning
we had thought would forever elude us, one whose capacity
to waste itself in pursuits
indeed harmless reaches
as the week unfolds clear to baby's first blocks, left
where she left them beside the unmade bed
whose bottom sheet needs a minute more on warm

— Stephen Ratcliffe

ARCHITECTURE

From Morris Lapidus, architect, we learn that less isn't
more — "Let's just say you like ice cream. Why have one
scoop of ice cream? Have three scoops."

— Mike Topp

Books Received

Lucian Blag, *At the Court of Yearning*, (trans. from the Romanian by Andrei Codrescu); Ohio State Univ. Press, Columbus, 1989. Poetry. 210 pages. (No price listed.)

Laura Chester, *The Stone Baby*; Black Sparrow (24 Tenth St.), Santa Rosa, CA 95401, 1989. Novel. 224 pages. \$12.50 paper, \$20. cloth.

William Fuller, *Byt*; O Books (5729 Clover Dr., Oakland, CA 94618), 1989. Poetry. 75 pages. (No price listed.)

Jim Gustafson, *Virtue and Annihilation*; The Alternative Press (1207 Henry), Ann Arbor, MI 48104. Poetry. Unpaginated (40 poems). \$8 (plus \$1 shipping.)

Marianne Hauser, *Prince Ishmael*; Sun & Moon Press (6148 Wilshire Blvd), Los Angeles, CA 90048. Novel based on the life of Caspar Hauser. 316 pages. \$11.95.

Sherril Jaffe, *Scars Make Your Body More Interesting & Other Stories*; Black Sparrow, 1989. Prose. 184 pages. \$9 paper, \$20 cloth.

Peter Dale Scott, *Coming to Jakarta, a poem about terror*; New Directions, 1989. 160 pages. \$16.95 cloth.

Charlie Smith, *Indistinguishable from the Darkness*; W.W. Norton, 1989. Poetry. 92 pages. \$17.95 cloth.

Nathaniel Tarn, *Seeing America First*; Coffee House Press (27 N. 4th St., Ste 400), Minneapolis, MN 55401, 1989. Poetry. 118 pages. \$8.95 paper.

Robert Vandermolten, *Of Pines*; Paradigm Press (11 Slater Ave.), Providence, RI 02906, 1989. Poem. Unpaginated. \$4 paper.

The Latest Theory

Where do poems come from?
Plants. Poems grow on
plants, which exhale them into
the ether. House plants are not
very good poets. That's why
you must leave your windows
open, even in winter, to
catch the poems blowing in
from Westchester, the
Adirondacks, and
Tompkins Square.

— Ellen Carter

LETTER FROM SAN FRANCISCO

Oct 20, 1989

Dear Eileen,

It's 3 p.m. Friday, which means we have 2 hours left in the "seismic window of opportunity", as a rather analytic refugee put it, who is staying (with her obnoxious cat) in our living room. That is, 72 hours after a large quake there is enhanced danger of substantial aftershocks. Yuck. So we're hanging in groups more than usual and watching lots of videos. Wednesday night it was "Revenge of the Stepford Wives". But it's not a party or a vacation or work. As another friend said, it's a phone fest. Everyone is calling everyone else because for once everyone has a story and they all relate! I think of it as good disaster practice because we will all suffer personal disasters or have already and for these one can't expect the busdriver or the mailman to relate. But this mess is something I'm going through with 5 million other people! On Wednesday for example everyone had to de-tox from adrenalin, that feels like the flu. Many of us including myself have earthquake nightmares, a terrible feeling that the ground is melting or liquefying which may be set off by actual aftershocks. I don't mean to exaggerate, no. But mention must be made of these features of naturally deformed experience. The storytelling we all seem to be doing makes the weirdness social — funny stories, horror stories, stories of lucky escapes. I've heard lots & lots. Like the woman who was jumping on her exercise trampoline when it hit. "I didn't know I'd put on that much weight," she said. Or here that is very funny. Or the guy who saw the Nimitz Freeway collapse in his rearview mirror. Or the woman in the parking lot who saw the cars start to bounce like popcorn. Or the guy who stepped out from his used furniture store and saw the fancy painted Victorian houses start to dance. My friend Ruby, another refugee staying here, had been laid up on her bed with a serious back operation. When "it" struck she was alone in her apartment, watching the World Series and eating a sandwich; then the television went dead and fell onto her bed, the plaster started cracking and falling in pieces from the walls, the bookcases fell over, the chandelier swung so hard it hit the ceiling, the refrigerator sprung out from the wall and dumped its contents, etcetera. Meanwhile the house was creaking as tho it were in death throes.

Not to mention the story my employer is telling the world. I read in the paper that my building, tho structurally damaged, was open Thursday a.m., with my employer generously providing four thousand employees with hard hats. Yeah, sure. . . The facility is actually closed until Monday at least. I can't imagine how the corporate p.r. office came up with that one.

For all this most of the city looks great. The Marina is a catastrophe but as the bad joke making the rounds goes, it couldn't have happened to a richer bunch of people. (My only justification for that crack is the psychiatric experts have said it is a typical post-quake reaction.) Another item: an adult bookstore had an earthquake sale — 50% off on all vibrating toys.

This is how it is: First, when you see someone you know, there is a sense of relief: one more part of the old world that can be put back together. Then you exchange stories, like shaking hands. When pieces of the ceiling were falling around the desk I was crouched under, I went thru hyper alertness straight up into hysterical prayer. Finally, "it" stopped. And I ran, tripped, hit the rug the way Angie dives for the bases when she's at the top of her baseball game. Then, yo, I was out in suburbia, land of traffic, and there were NO TRAFFIC LIGHTS. Truly, darkness was upon the land. The commuter hordes milled about at intersections. Somehow I got to my rented room in San Jose. There I stumbled in darkness over broken glass, broken appliances, toppled splintered bookcases — I couldn't even open the door to my room. No sign of my roommate, or of flashlight, matches, candles, bottled water. Oh well. More toxic adrenalin. Finally my roommate (that's Vera, the straight Republican I've written to you about) got thru to me via a neighbor's phone, and I went back out into the night, along back roads, to a poor Mexican neighborhood in San Jose where Vera's sister has a luxe, Very Portuguese, stronghold. No damage at all, just gilded crucifixes, plastic plants, and an elaborate burglar-alarm system. There Vera and I smoked like fiends, watching the horrible visions on the tube until, dazed, we began to tip over. Then she slipped off all her clothes and went to bed, inviting me along, and I thought what is this, wartime behavior? I needed sleep!

Love,

Camille

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Cover Drawing and Calendar for this issue by Sigrid Burton

Layout by Jean Holabird.

LETTER FROM ABROAD

Niamey, 1910

Mon Capitaine,

Having fired the servants I proceed down the River Niger in search of penicillin and Imperialist ideals. The Germans and the French have not been encouraging. Perhaps Papa and Mama and little Bibi were right: I was not destined to run a Chevrolet Dealership. I am sure my creditors will understand. A riparian shutterbug asked me to pose for this portrait* when we put ashore to patch the hull. The results have confirmed what I have always suspected: that I shall be a poet of consequence, one who rescued the art from the absinthe-drenched lay-about and their squalid symbolism — as soon, that is, as I learn to shift tenses more gracefully, and overcome my disgust of the whining, greedy plebians who now fill the cafés.

Yours,
M.

**Photograph enclosed but blurred beyond recognition. - Ed.*

Treasure of the Sierra Hudson

Dappled pony grey clouds
tumble the Hudson River
Water surface of a fast-swimming eel
Taupe lacking pink
An absence
the clouds suck in
As color, were it possible
evaporated in brilliant deference
to a rollicking winter sky

— Vicki Hudspith

Always

Happy, happy is the man
who can tap out
Happy is the man
on his new typewriter without
finishing the thought
yet feel all right about it
not depressed at all no
really, really.

— Larry Zirlin

Correction: In Allen Ginsberg's *Poetry for the Next Society* piece (Dec/Jan issue), there was a misprint in his quote from Jack Kerouac; the paragraph, in full, should have read: "From Kerouac, *If the mind is shapely the art will be shapely*, this in terms of spontaneous recognition of our own minds for form."

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