

# THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER



**SITUATIONAL AWARENESS,**  
oil on canvas, 14"hx22"w  
1991, **VALERIE PARKS**

THE POETRY PROJECT, LTD.  
AT ST. MARK'S  
CHURCH IN-THE-BOWERY  
VOLUME 145 JUNE 1992

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-Lynn Crawford

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# THE POETRY PROJECT



## JUNE

Drawing: *Dive In*, ©1992 Lori Landes

- 1 ANNA HOMLER & ANNE TARDOS**  
ANNA HOMLER is an intermedia artist who uses music, the spoken word and installations to explore her alternative languages. This "linguistic alchemist" has performed throughout the U.S. and Europe, collaborating with composer/musicians Steve Moshier, David Moss, the acapella vocal group Direct Sound and others. Painter, poet and computer artist ANNE TARDOS is the author of *Cat Licked the Garlic* (Tsunami Editions, 1992), a series of image and text works composed with a combined English, French, German and Hungarian vocabulary. Her paintings have been shown, among other places, at the Jack Tilton Gallery (New York), the Venice Biennale and the Museum of Modern Art in Bolzano, Italy. **Monday, 8 pm.**
- 8 BOOK PARTY FOR THE BERNADETTE MAYER READER**  
A party for BERNADETTE MAYER, celebrating the publication by New Directions of *The Bernadette Mayer Reader*. **Monday, 6-9 pm, FREE.**
- 10 STEVE LEVINE & LYDIA TOMKIW**  
STEVE LEVINE's books include *Pure Notations*, *Cycles of Heaven* and *To and For* (Coffee House Press, 1992). Pat Nolan writes of Levine's work: "The elliptical fades, dichotomous harmonies, startling segues, the American twang to the swing and sway of his lines, the compactness of the poetic units, all indicate a background rich in a solidly native style." LYDIA TOMKIW is the author of *The Dreadful Swimmers*. A U.S. contributing editor of the English literary magazine *joe soap's canoe*, her work appeared in the *Best American Poetry* anthology (Scribners, 1988). She performs with the group Algebra Suicide who have just released their 8th collection of poetry & music, *Swoon* (Body/Widely Distributed Records). **Wednesday, 8 pm.**
- 17 KIMIKO HAHN & PATRICIA SPEARS JONES**  
Founder of the Word of Mouth readings and workshops series in Lower Manhattan, KIMIKO HAHN is the author of *Air Pocket* and *Earshot* (Hanging Loose Press, 1992). Jessica Hagedorn describes Hahn's work as "a sensual maze of startling imagery." Poet PATRICIA SPEARS JONES is the author of *Mythologizing Always* and *Key of Permanent Blue* (Contraband Press, 1992). Her poetry has been anthologized in *New York: Poems* and *Black Sister* and published in such journals as *Hanging Loose*, *Callaloo*, *The Black Scholar* and *Heresies*. She is a former Program Coordinator of the Poetry Project. **Wednesday, 8 pm.**
- 22 ZHU CILIU & KENNETH KOCH: A TALK ABOUT TEACHING POETRY TO CHINESE SCHOOL CHILDREN**  
ZHU CILIU and KENNETH KOCH will discuss the collaborative teaching project they undertook in Beijing in 1984 and 1991. With Koch neither speaking nor reading Chinese, the school children's poems all had to be translated into English. The class sessions also involved translation: Koch's responses to the poems, as well as his teaching methods, had to be translated into Chinese. Zhu and Koch will examine the challenges inherent to such an demanding translation/teaching project and read examples from the students' work. Poet and translator Zhu Ciliu is Professor of English at Beijing Foreign Studies University. Kenneth Koch's widely influential texts on teaching poetry to young people include *Wishes, Lies and Dreams* and *Sleeping on the Wing*. **Monday, 8 pm.**
- 24 RAYMOND FEDERMAN & MICHELE WALLACE**  
Author of fiction and criticism, RAYMOND FEDERMAN's publications include *The Twofold Vibration*, *Smiles on Washington Square*, and *Now and Then*. With the theme of his work circling back to what it means to survive and write in a post-Holocaust world, Federman confronts the relationships between fiction and autobiography, narrative device and the emotional flow of the story, introspection and critical perspective. Combining the stylistic flair of a popular journalist with the theoretical rigor of a committed scholar, MICHELE WALLACE articulates the cultural and historical challenges which an emergent African-American feminism must meet. Published widely in national journals, her essays have been collected in *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* and *Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory*. **Wednesday, 8 pm.**  
*[Fifth in a series of national literary tour readings made possible by a grant from the Lila Wallace - Reader's Digest Fund.]*

Admission: \$5 (contribution), except where noted. All programs subject to change.

The Poetry Project • St. Mark's Church • 2nd Ave. & 10th St. • Manhattan • (212) 674-0910

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THANK ITS NEW AND RECENTLY  
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Founded in 1966, the Poetry Project, Ltd. at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery was the scene of the only joint reading by Robert Lowell and Allen Ginsberg and has been the site of historic memorials to poets Paul Blackburn, Robert Duncan, Charles Reznickoff, Frank O'Hara, Ted Berrigan, and Edwin Denby. Over the years, readers, lecturers and performers have included John Ashbery, John Cage, Sam Shepard, Alice Walker, Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), Virgil Thomson, Barbara Guest, Hugh Kenner, Adrienne Rich, Kenneth Koch, James Schuyler, Yoko Ono, Nicanor Parra, and Patti Smith. Staffed completely by poets, the Poetry Project consistently achieves an integrity of programming that challenges, informs and inspires working writers, while remaining accessible to the general public.

The Poetry Project offers a Wednesday night reading series, a Monday night reading/performance series, three weekly writing workshops, a monthly lecture series, a printing and distribution center, a literary magazine, a quarterly newsletter, an annual four-day symposium, a broadcast service and tape and document archives. For twenty-five years the Poetry Project has furnished encouragement and resource to poets, writers, artists and performers whose work is experimental, innovative and pertinent to writing that proposes fresh aesthetic, cultural, philosophical and political approaches to contemporary society. While being committed to the highest standards of artistic excellence and to preserving vital literary traditions, the Poetry Project has always encouraged the participation of new poets with diverse styles. In fact, each year one-third of the writers presenting work at the Project are doing so for the first time.

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**LYNN CRAWFORD: What are you reading now?**

**HARRY MATHEWS:** I just finished Gilbert Sorrentino's *Under the Shadows*, which was terrific. I've recently read a great deal of an Albanian writer of whom I'm very fond named Ismail Kadare. He wrote not at all flattering books about the Albanian regime while it was in existence and got away with it, by dazzlingly combining chutzpah and ingenuity. His books give you an idea about Albanian culture and history and contemporary life, all of which are much richer and more developed than we imagined.

**LC:** In your introduction to *Immeasurable Distances* you write: "In terms of the age-old poetic tradition of truth telling, writing the truth means not representation but invention."

**HM:** Clearly if people could transmit their own stories simply by telling them we would know a great deal about one another, but in reality we manage to know practically nothing. Here is where invention comes into play and formal procedures as vectors of invention: they coerce you towards the place you need to reach to be able to communicate.

A corollary of this is: You can have the most correct ideas, politically correct or theoretically correct, but that is no help in getting reality onto the page, because reality is in flux all the time. I don't want to suggest that concepts and politics should be left out, but it is in their impact on the procedure of writing (not necessarily on its content) that they can

say writing and rewriting. I for one cannot hang around to get things right the first time. I know it is not right, and I know I will come back and rewrite it. Sometimes many times. I enjoy rewriting, reworking, because there I can get the results I want. I can usually see what is wrong and, with luck, find a way to right it. My bias is a classical one: exclusion rather than adding anything new. Usually I can rewrite by tightening things up, and I like that process.

Then, of course, the book is finished and that is awful. Years have gone by when I've dreamed about the day this book will be out of my life and then when it is over it is absolutely horrible.

**LC:** Horrible because it is just gone?

**HM:** Yes. Just gone and it isn't mine any more. I don't have this thing to grapple with every day.

**LC:** Your novel in progress is titled *The Journalist*?

**HM:** Yes. It is not about a reporter, but about a man who keeps a journal. In this novel I've given myself much more leeway, meaning I knew more or less what was going to happen but I did not work out any of the details in advance which is different from the way I've written my previous novels. In the earlier books, most of what was going to be there, aside from the actual language, had been decided ahead of time, determined by whatever methods I'd set myself.

In *Cigarettes*, it had to be this way, because it

# A CONVERSATION WITH HARRY MATHEWS BY LYNN CRAWFORD AND "NOTES ON THE THRESHOLD OF BOOK" FROM IMMEASURABLE DISTANCES

productively involve the reader in an awareness of them. One brief example of what I mean. I remember noticing a book at a friend's several years ago: its title was *The Writer and Her Work*. The nifty shock of that possessive pronoun revealed more about my unsuspected assumptions about women, writing, and language than pages of the best feminist argument. That is the way political ideas, any kind of ideas, should manifest themselves in writing.

**LC:** You write both poetry and prose. Are these different processes for you?

**HM:** Yes, very different: I really write poetry for fun; the satisfactions of prose are different.

In poetry there is the feeling that what is happening in the line or the stanza of that particular poem really is what is happening. It is not dependent on things occurring 40 pages later or 200 pages earlier. It is not a part of narrative structure or some other large scale structure. The immediate poetic structure is one you can actually sink your fingers in and work with. This is why I say it is fun: it gives me a ready, tangible satisfaction, which is why I think that perhaps my poetry is often not as good as it might be—because of this pleasure I take in it. Not that there is anything wrong with taking pleasure...

I've written very few stories, and the stories I've written usually come out of a conceit. In both "Country Cooking" and "Bratislava Spiccato," I got an idea that had possibilities on a small scale and wanted to see what might happen with it. Sometimes in my poetry there is a conceit too, though in most cases it is a more formal one.

Although I've actually gotten to enjoy writing the present novel that I'm working on, *The Journalist*, generally, for me, the joy of writing novels is in their conception and their completion—the conception of the idea of what the whole book is going to be, and even the planning, which I usually have had to do and in this last book haven't had to do so much, and the details of how it is all going to fit together. Planning *Cigarettes* took me forever, but this planning is all gratifying because there again it is something you can manipulate more freely than you can once the actual work of writing begins. I should

was intricate, similar to a detective story. Not that anybody in particular was guilty, but that events were happening at very much the same time, the same months, the same day even. It was tricky getting that all into place.

From the beginning, I had the desire to portray a passionate friendship between two women. What happened afterwards was an extraordinary demonstration of the virtues of restrictive forms. The novel started as a shape, or a series of shapes in motion but empty. By looking at this puzzle I'd made up, the world began to invent itself. People I'd never imagining, things, events—these were brought into being by the problem I'd set myself.

The main thing for me was the exploration of relationships. If I had just sat down to write about this, I would have been paralyzed. Certainly I would not have come up with anything as interesting. The Oulipian servitude was, for me, in that case the path to freedom. On other occasions, of course, there are other paths.

**LC:** Is there something timely about the use of procedures now?

**HM:** Using formal procedures alone does not guarantee anything either, just as having the correct political ideas alone does not guarantee you anything on the page. However, constrictive forms can help one get over the idiotic idea, an idea we all have, of self-expression—that one can and must put oneself directly on the page.

This is especially true in America, where most writers don't even admit to doing what they are doing in the way of constructs because the propaganda pressure is so high to relate what you are doing to your special personal experience.

This notion of self-expression is a very recent idea. Emotion and experience were once elements used by writers in making their works, but the works were not really about them. The works were not justified by personal emotions.

What is interesting, of course, is the story we do not know about ourselves. That is our real story. That is what is hard to get to and what cannot be done by just calling it up and listening to what it



*Paper Doll Series: Stone*, oil on canvas, 60"hx48"w, 1990; Valerie Parks

says. It has to be lured out of the places where it hides, and any means to do that is fine.

**LC:** I find rigid Oulipian procedures can lead to writing that is subversive.

**HM:** Yes, a good point to make. A difficult, highly determined, formal procedure gives you something to fight back with whether it is fighting political correctness, or political incorrectness, or puritanical righteousness, or whatever. Furthermore, whatever one's views are, the procedures allow you to start approaching your material from a completely different side from the one where you live and breath and suffer and often imagine you have to force yourself to write.

Following procedures is like a game, like game playing as it was back in childhood. You can get excited by just the game, which to me—as you know—is not a question of prancing debonairly through life. *On the contrary. Game playing in the way kids play games, which is believing that nothing else matters at that moment; so it allows you to go back to those familiar grounds, familiar in the sense that you've always done it to some extent. We've all played games of one kind or another. But this game you are playing is not loaded, it is not weighted in any way which need frighten you. It needn't frighten you because of its political, psychological, or any other consequence. It is empty, it is light—the only force it has is you having to follow its rules.*

I don't think the Oulipo can ever be used as a vehicle for any kind of extremist thought because it undermines systematically the integrity of all works. Many Oulipian procedures turn texts that mean one thing into texts that mean something else, and I don't think you can have an authoritarian discourse that will survive this kind of process. Authoritarian bodies of thought would be totally blown apart by the Oulipian procedures. N+7 would have done wonders to Hitler's speeches, or Stalin's, and it is not that it does not do the same things to language we find more sympathetic; but authoritarian views depend on the absoluteness of what they are saying, its unquestionability, and as far as the Oulipo is concerned, language can never be taken to mean only what it says. For the Oulipo, all language becomes a great big banana peel.

Novelist, poet, essayist Harry Mathews was born in New York and has lived in Paris for many years. He is the sole American member of the Oulipo, a group of French writers described below by Mr. Mathews in his essay "The Oulipo," which also appears in *Immeasurable Distances*:

Oulipo stands for *Quivoir de littérature potentielle*: both "workshop" and sewing circle of potential literature—"sewing circle" in its old meaning of a place where well-to-do ladies made clothes for the poor. This word was chosen to indicate, with self-deprecating irony, communal, beneficial nature of the Oulipo's work. "Potential" was preferred to "experimental," because what matters to the Oulipo is the literature it makes possible rather than what it actually realizes.

## Notes on the Threshold of Book

In 1983 I attended the *Action Workshop* created by Fernando Flores and Werner Erhard. The workshop demonstrated the proposition that "performative speech"—speech capable of guaranteeing material results—necessarily uses only four kinds of statement: questions, promises, assertions, and declarations. In order to see what consequences this notion might have in written language, I decided to translate the beginning of Ruskin's *Stones of Venice* as an experiment in "performative writing." These constitute a prelude to the experiment and a rehearsal of it.

I declare that "I" is the name I shall assign myself as I write these exploratory pages. I declare that "you" is the name I shall assign myself as I read these pages.

I declare that writing these pages means a recording of the conversation I am having with you.

I request you read these exploratory pages.

I assert that in its form a book is a request: an unopened book is asking to be opened; an open book is asking to be read. (I point out to you that right now *The Stones of Venice* is lying beside your pad, opened, not being read.)

I ask you, why does a book have particular names attached to it (title, author, publisher, at least)? I ask you to consider my answer to the question. I suggest that the names attached to a book are meant to conceal the uniformity of the experience of reading. (I point out to you that the names people have conceal their likeness in a similar way—except that in our case, I must also point out that since our names refer to the same object, they reveal our likeness. I suggest this may be less apparent to readers other than yourself.)

I admit to you that we are not on an equal footing: you never have a chance to speak. Only I can speak—I can declare that absolutely. I realize that I could "let you speak" by attributing words to you, which would conventionally appear in quotation marks to show that a character (a not-I) is doing the talking. But I maintain that the quotation marks and the rest of my procedure will fool nobody, that as soon as you begin speaking you will become I. I talking to you—just what is happening now.

I suggest, as a consolation, that if I alone can speak, you alone can listen: as soon as I begin to listen I become, by definition, you.

I point out again to you that *The Stones of Venice* is lying open next to your pad, asking to be read.

Now, as I begin to read, or rather to look at the page that I am planning to read, I ask you another question: Do the opening sentences of a nonfiction book constitute a request or an assertion? Are the opening sentences inviting you to accept what you are going to read or telling us that such-and-such is so?

I suggest the following answer: An essay is a request that pretends to be assertion. I therefore accuse nonfiction by virtue of this lie to be fiction. But wait: I make a further suggestion to you, in the form of another question: Are assertions a false category altogether, being essentially requests inviting listeners to give their assent, agreement, or belief? I propose that every assertion can be rephrased as a request. Example: "Apples are often red" means "I request you to accept the proposition that apples are often red, since you can probably provide evidence to that effect or, if not, you can count on me to provide ample testimony for it."

I conjecture that this proposition, if it turns out to be true, will not affect my assertion that nonfiction is fiction. (I also point out that this assertion is consistent with my earlier one that the experience of reading is uniform.)

Now, another question: If a book is a request to you to read it, what do you ask of the book? I assume that when you begin reading, you are expecting—therefore requesting—something, which I have so far only called the experience of reading. What do you think that means?

I maintain that what you ask of a book is the possibility of learning—of knowing, in thought or feeling, something new, or something that if not new in substance will be made available in an unfamiliar way and so will be made new for you (be renewed). I suggest furthermore that since there is almost nothing that is truly new (and what there is will as soon as it is known become part of what is old), what you ask of a book is not learning as the acquisition of thoughts or feelings that you don't yet possess but learning as a process. I suggest that what you ask of a book, whether it be a book of poetry or a manual for the repair of air conditioners, is to be given the satisfaction of experiencing the process of learning—that without the satisfaction of experiencing the process of learning—that without this satisfaction any book you read you will reject as a waste of time. I assert that this is what is common to all books, common to your expectation of any book; I admit, too, that particular books must satisfy particular expectations as well—so that the air conditioner will keep working on this stifling Saturday afternoon; so that I can know what happens when Wallace Stevens uses the word *orange*.

I can now say that when you open *The Stones of Venice* you have the primary expectation of learning in itself, as a process, and perhaps another, particular expectation. So I ask you, is there a particular expectation?

Is there something in particular you want to learn about?

You want to learn about Venice and more particularly the *Stones of Venice*, stones here standing for building stones, or architecture.

I suggest, however, that what you have already started learning about (having read no more than the title, having just opened the book) has nothing to do with Venice or architecture and everything to do with a way of using language.

See above: "stones standing for."

"Standing for" instead of naming (I immediately add a more extended interpretation: stones stands for not only architecture but architecture considered as an important subject—stones being durable, heavy, and grave in sound; no doubt stones stands for much more than this.) I suggest to you that you already know that Ruskin's subject will not be architecture but its significance. Is this what you want to read about? I suggest that you already know that you will not get what you think you expect; or that by now you expect words to tell you something they are not saying—words will be standing in for other words. I insist you recognize that as soon as words stand in for other words nominal subjects dissolve, and what is written can be "about" everything and anything.

I propose that in the matter of Ruskin's success, which led him to complain that no one listened to what he was saying and everyone praised him for the way he said it, he was wrong and his readers were right: Ruskin spoke himself in every sentence, and what his readers loved was him, not his ideas.

A question: How can Ruskin have spoken himself in every sentence? Is this a subject open to stylistic analysis, or does the question demand bringing in matters beyond the text itself?

I advance the possibility that this alternative is a false one: Stylistic analysis can discover the intentions of the writer as he wrote, and at the same time I suggest that these intentions were not necessarily confined to being expressed through writing, that they did not require writing to exist (even if they required language), that they could have been given other forms, such as the designing of a garden or an engineering project. I consider the style of Ruskin to be the way he speaks himself in that it manifests his commitment to the possibilities peculiar to written language. That is why his subject matter and his message do not matter, and his style does. I contend that the real subject of *The Stones of Venice* is not Venice or architecture but the written word. I emphasize that in saying this I do not mean to portray Ruskin as ignorant of what he was doing, because I find that the results—the effects—of his writing are close to his explicit ideas; but while he demonstrated those ideas undeniably in the way he arranges words, the points he makes about architecture are always subject to argument.

Because I'm giving up the idea of using *The Stones of Venice* as a text for translation in performative speech, and because stylistic analysis is fun and worthwhile but irrelevant to my preoccupations at this moment, I conclude my comments on Ruskin's book with the first words you read after the book's title, which form the title of the opening chapter: "The Quarry." I point out that whereas stones stood in a particular, clear way for architecture, quarry remains to the end of the chapter it heads definitely ambiguous. You never learn whether it means the place from which stones are extracted, or if it means the writer's (and reader's) prey. I deduce that you are then not in a world of stones at all, but one purely of words.

I confess that today (9/8/83) I cannot be sure whether there is or is not a speaker present in written language. I admit that for years I have been telling you that there isn't, now I ask you, is there any more of one when the speaker is physically in front of you (since then, if you hear him, you are doing the speaking yourself)? If in written language there is a speaker, is he created by the reader, by you—one of the writer's tasks to give you materials and space to create a speaker as well as all the rest? When the American Express bill thanks you for sending money, and you imagine a printing machine doing the thanking—why not?

I suggest to you that this question (still unanswered) casts light on the nature of characters in fictitious works—which means in all written works. This morning I read of Unamuno's remark that "Don Quixote is no less real than Cervantes"; to make the point even more obvious, I add that Sherlock Holmes is much more real than Conan Doyle. I can deduce at once that in these explorations I am a character who by speaking according to certain rules enables you to imagine me as a person, the emphasis being on the *a* as signifying unity and coherence, what I could also call personality. Then "I" am that person, and what I-Harry Mathews think about who I really am has no connection with, or at least no effect on, the me whom you are creating out of the way I express myself in these lines you are reading. Can I now assert that in written language there is always a speaker who is a character created by the reader out of the materials at his disposal? I can furthermore insist that this speaker does not correspond to and therefore cannot be expected to represent the individual to whom the speaking voice nominally refers—Harry Mathews here, Benjamin Franklin in his autobiography, James Reston in the articles he signs in *The New York Times*. I suggest that not only must you the reader make up the speaker for him to exist, you cannot help doing so. You use the telephone book: Who is reading you that list of names and numbers? I suggest someone—or something—is.

I speculate that the genius of writing is to know how to let you imagine me as the speaker I assert myself to be, at that particular point, for my present purpose. I infer that the genius of autobiographical writing (I remind you that I find all successful writing to be autobiographical; here I mean what is overtly so) is to provide you with materials and space to create me in a way identifiable with my historical reality and with the way I assert that that historical reality should be read.

In any writing that alleges to speak in the first person mode, I suspect that you are always what you were defined as being at the start of these explorations (the name I give myself reading) and that I am always what I was defined as being (the name I give myself writing). Reprinted with Permission of Harry Mathews; © Harry Mathews, Appeared in *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 8, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 86-90; and in *Immeasurable Distances*, The Lapis Press (589 North Venice Blvd., Venice, CA 90291), 1991.

## THE POETICS OF THE MIND'S EYE: LITERATURE AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF IMAGINATION

Christopher Collins

University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991.

189 pages; \$13.95, paper.

Perhaps it is no more than a commonplace to say that Hong Kong films have been obsessed with depicting the relations between the living and the dead (generations), often schematized in startling imagery. In a remake of *Vertigo*, called *Double Fixation*, one such image stands out. The hero, a fashion photographer, is being stalked in a large, dark studio, which is only illuminated by blue spotlights shining on naked department store dummies. The viewer is watching wraith-like, insubstantial humans passing silently around powerful, shining effigies. It is as if the actors counted for little compared to the ponderous statues, or, better, given that the actors are Chinese and the dummies Caucasian, as if the effigies were cut from stills of the Hitchcock film through whose texture viewers and actors flit like ghosts.

I begin with this image to point up metaphorically the major concern of Professor Collins' book, which is how complexly a reader is subsumed by the poem she or he enters. We all know that a reader identifies with the characters (actors or speakers) in a poem in some way, but only Collins has delved into what this entails. To identify with a character, for Collins, means to assume that they have the same basal cognitive operations we do, operations that—here's the twist—we are not even aware that we put into practice in everyday life. In other words, a reader in identifying is not centrally engaged in using the character as a stand-in so she or he can experience her or his problems and their resolutions; but in asserting in reading that their (the readers') own foundational mental processes chime with those of the presented people's on paper. To clarify further, let me take one of Collins' illustrations. He notes that William Carlos Williams, like so many modernists, wanted to somehow freshen his readers' visions, compelling them to apprehend more authentically. What this involves, in Collins' bold interpretation, is that Williams would make his audience see by showing them how they saw, by constructing poems that mimed the mechanics of the eyes' agility. Since, even at its broadest range (that of macular vision), the eye can focus on only 15 degrees, and "since most objects that concern us overflow the perimeters of focal vision, we must use certain of our eye muscles to rotate our eyes in such a way that information about important portions of those objects is projected onto the macular region of the retinas." To see anything but a minute object the eye must shift focal points quickly to build up a multi-layered precis of the object. Through close reading of such Williams' poems as "Nantucket" and "By the road to the contagious hospital," Collins shows how the poet reproduces with syntactic and semantic means the underlying framework of eye motions.

(It can be seen, by the way, that in this type of demonstration, Collins has dismantled the shibboleth that reading a poem, a supposedly sequential activity, and seeing a painting, a supposed totalized action, are fundamentally different. He overthrows this belief by showing that, according to physiology, seeing any large surface is a composite that needs cumulative correlations as much as does reading.)

Williams in the mentioned poems sought as one of his projects to re-limn the processes of immediate perception, so that the reader, going into his verse, will imagine her- or himself noting the same weeds Williams' narrator calls attention to, but also be made aware of how Williams' persona takes in percepts from the environment, which is how the reader, though acting unconsciously, when not reading, sees weeds. Of course, we do more than look out at the world—we also remember, introspect, and perform other operations. Further chapters of Collins' masterpiece discuss how different poets, such as Stafford, Yeats, and Ginsberg, induce their readers to carry out

these sophisticated intellectual tasks through identification with their personae. Each discussion is as instructive as it is gracefully penned, but rather than enlarging further on this topic, let me end by drawing attention to another important feature: the book's feeling tone. All great critical texts are suffused with an emotion and Collins' is that of chastened, sober regret; not, let me hasten to add, at any missteps or misdeeds, but at the very fact that the past can never be retrieved. He writes sadly:

Never to know the meaning of 'now'—this is our fate ... We may never know till later ... the significance of a word ... A parent never knows what piggyback ride is the last ... Every surviving child will see a parent for a last time, but rarely is this last glimpse recognized as such.

Perhaps it is not merely space constraints that compel the book to stop short at mental processing of the future and only deal with the mind's outlook on the past and present. It may also follow from Collins' view being so closely tied to a loving evocation of bygone.

Every moment of our present, he argues, is filled with resurrected schemas and cognitions from the past. We might contrast this stress to Bloch's view. In *The Principle of Hope*, he writes, "Utopian consciousness wants to look far into the distance, but ultimately only in order to penetrate the darkness so near it of the just lived moment ... We need the most powerful telescope, that of polished utopian consciousness, in order to penetrate ... immediate immediacy, in which the core of self-location and being-here still lies."

Neither view takes precedence, but each is helpful in its own field of research. Let me say no more about temporal viewpoints, but merely recommend Collins' exploration with the caution that not only will the reader be given a plausible idea of how poems work, but the reader will often be deeply moved by both a wistful sense of loss (of moments abolished and ties sundered) and a feeling of quiet happiness in seeing how many irreducible, slipped moments have been placed in poems and encouraged to live forever.

-Jim Feast

## IMAGINARY INCOME

Maureen Owen

Hanging Loose Press

(New York), 1992.

47 pages; \$9.00.

Maureen Owen's strengths are obvious from the very first reading. Depth and clarity of expression, swiftness of verse, effortless, confident lyricism, honesty of emotion (not sentiment) and perception all qualify the poems of *Imaginary Income*. Her truth is found in the everyday, a disarming epiphany of the mundane. "I fold the blanket to end winter" she begins a poem, understanding the power of words, as well as the intrinsic nature of ritual. Something this simple and strong and intuitive leads into a maze of concerns as diverse as Cezanne, clocks, and the Babylon of the confined. Owen, at the center of her universe (the poem) extracts a subtle irony. Its ambiguity is the source of what is to come next, a quickstep heel and toe song and dance of exuberance.

Cezanne said// each part was as important as the whole (so) //I bought a clock because it had Mexico (stamped) on// the back

"Talking to distract the listener. or Hanging out with the Beloved equals a festival" rests, as do all of Owen's poems, on its many individual parts, its weave of past and present. It is as Philip Whalen said, "A continuous fabric (nerve movie?) exactly as wide as these lines." These poems offer a quick refreshing dip into an original poetic consciousness. They are fluid, delicate yet rough, passionate yet calm.

Owen's artistry is clearly evident in the shorter poems such as "No one ever eats the last of the grapes" where she can display her keen-edged humor and deft precision.

the Way the egret & the fish meet in  
the sky tide & rocks hold conversation  
wet greens from wetter blues  
I am not the spellbound water skier  
being lunged at random!

tho I notice I've written my list of ways  
to get through the day  
the vocabulary card called "dregs"

These shorter poems are contrasted throughout *Imaginary Income* with longer poems whose sustained lyric lines and accrued complexity explore mantric dimensions. A combination of repetition and variation propelled by sprightly language rolls off the tongue headlong into the realm of music.

was the reason he called the reason he called for  
was that// the reason// you find a line to answer  
the phone in the darkish kitchen children are  
calling they say here is how much money I need  
at some time or// gradually you stop talking to  
him about it you talk//to no one// when the  
phone rings it is children never him and you  
are// relieved// the children fill you with light//  
was he doing all right doing all right// it was  
then she found she liked organizing & construct-  
ing// she put the various together and felt  
stronger// she did it alone now she was  
( "untitled" )

Maureen Owen's work has always been unique, and unusual in its look; the poem moves across the page mimicking a player piano roll in the way it triggers the synapses. To read her poems is to play her melody. She can be compared to Bonnie Raitt in that she has a strong confident voice with earthy overtones. In some poems she echoes that pervasive American folk style, the blues, and blends it with classical lament.

I said "sometimes you don't know you  
don't know & so you don't know that you  
don't know" Abstraction can give you  
a grace that allows you to complain  
( "the bitter complaint" )

Owen's use of "narrative" titles as an introductory element for some of the poems, going beyond simply naming the work, is a device also familiar to Chiang K'uei, the Southern Sung *tz'u* poet. The title, rather than serving as a nameplate of identification, becomes a door, an opening to the verse that follows. Chiang K'uei's prose introductions to his poems were often quite long and elaborate but his innovation did transform the Chinese lyric tradition. Owen's are more caption-like and bristle with a remarkable, incisive wit. They are her own innovation and offer up the hope of transformation. For instance:

"Dashboard Idiot// or// Imbecility differs from idiocy. In idiocy the mind// is not developed; in imbecility it is imperfectly// developed. Idiocy is absence of mental power; imbecility is feebleness of mental action.// See Idiot// story of" or, "We// watch the swimmers intermittently decapitated &// reinstated decapitated & reinstated whole// headless whole headless" and, "Seeing him's like standing on a hot plate// the immaculate returning."

Through these openings, the poems are accessible though certainly not a walk in the park. Owen makes demands that are conceptual as well as syntactical, emotional as well as literate. She segues from one molecule of sense (or "non"-sense) to another with the practiced ease of an all night DJ. The domestic, the ordinary, the daily grind of dust to dusk have their tediousness stripped away to reveal the raw golden light of enchanted moments.

(continued on next page)

one night. Starry. A young woman trampled clothes in a stream no ordinary laundress// she or I to be bending// at the waist as night is elegantly bent. ("Tall white & densely fluid")

The poems in *Imaginary Income* strive for a reflective epiphany, a process of revelation arrived at with an off-handed and roundabout ease that is characteristic of Maureen Owen's work in her six other collections of poetry including *Hearns in Space* and *Zombie Notes*. Suddenly, you are there, transported on the wings of an evocative imagination, in a world that is enduring, maternal, endearing, sensual. The problem with *Imaginary Income*, if it can be viewed as such, is that its 47 pages leave the reader wishing for a more extensive sampling—it is a case of half a loaf being better than none at all. But ultimately, the poems in this slim volume are works of easy assurance and expressive clairvoyance with a tart quickness that closely resembles Dickinson's epigrammatic reflex. Owen's is a distinctive voice well worth hearing.

-Pat Nolan

### A FORM/OF TAKING/IT ALL

Rosemarie Waldrop  
Station Hill Press  
Barrington, New York 12507, 1990.  
90 pp; \$9.95.

Rosemarie Waldrop has written *A Form/of Taking/It All* in the spirit of quotation and called it a novel. Thus a new order, a new form, is proposed in this novel. The act of quotation in this text is that of rewriting as new writing. This work may be partially collage—words, phrases, sentences come from other places—yet these words are not just presented with their allusive qualities intact; instead they are appropriated and woven to create a new text. The source texts are wide. Waldrop switches from *Poetry Handbook*, several historical works about the Americas such as Prescott's *The Conquest of Mexico*, Stein's lecture on "Sentences" from *How to Write*, the *WPA Guide to Washington, D.C.* And the metaphorical comparisons that such a method produces are just as rich—parts of the body, European discoverers of the Americas, scientific philosophies, the act of writing are all in some way connected. Writing is muscle, is conquest, is gravitation and quantum physics. In other words, writing is exploration and the far reaches of thought. Waldrop explores these reaches by taking it (the word, the text) all from the world around us and mixing it together. Her text constantly questions forms—literary structures, human bodies, time and space. And it questions these forms in four different forms/views.

"A Form of Vertigo" is the most narrational of all the pieces. It has the female character (Amy) reading, her body existing in space, her mental space, the realization that "being real means having form. Metaphor, muscles, telescopes, travelers."

"A Form of Memory" is full of physical description, eyewitness reports, references. The muscle of Cortes, the muscle of Columbus, the muscle of von Humboldt are all ironically contrasted against the muscle that gives beautiful legs. Thus, "metaphor implies a relationship between two terms which are thus brought together in the muscle." Memory is a form of ironic truthfulness in this section, is history. Columbus, Bonpland, Cortes, von Humboldt all figure prominently as creators of description. "Even before Columbus," the text finds it necessary to remind us, "the earth turned on its axis to divide the day from night and afford a convenient means of measuring time."

In "A Form of Doubt," the novel turns on itself to write about the politics of life—women's salary inequalities, the way "it took the government over 10 years to find an unknown Vietnam War soldier to represent the 58,012 servicemen killed." And the politics of writing—"her place fixed, while language,

however afterward, has no limits, I am Cortes, the ruthless, I am everything I've ever read or written or thought, without substance or solar constant, without even gravity. I misplace words as well as things." Writing thus as the conquest of the Americas. And writing also as something that escapes gravity—something that even the explorers could not escape.

The last section, "Unpredicted Particles," escapes gravity and is structured on the page more like poetry than prose and addresses issues of movement and appropriation for "the limits of this field can never be exactly known. Only the discovery that certain phenomena can no longer be ordered by means of old concepts tells us that we have reached the limit."

These particles, the particles of text that create the poem, the particles of the historical that create the culture, the particles of quantum theory, are all rubbing against each other in this poem, breaking down writing into language.

-Juliana Spahr

### NO (WORLD VERSION)

Larry Price  
Zasterle Press  
(Apdo 167, La Laguna—Tenerife,  
Canary Islands, Spain), 1990.  
\$7.00, paper.

No is one of the basic words like yes. Yes meets No and they form a team, go into vaudeville, get a non-speaking part in the talkies, and then go for that role of a lifetime. Here it is—world version, parenthetically speaking. They have to be now, so the *No (World Version)* is a kind of a combination between a rap and the b-Side of a record, like the dance mix. Well, actually, like TV. TV goes to the world, and, unfortunately for some, TV is the world. Scary stuff boys and girls, considering anyone who can pay gets to play so to speak, a truth or dare kind of thing, and I dare you to cross this line in the sand kind of thing, a thing with all the lite beer you can drink.

"It's a lovely night. The gyre has never been tighter." TV isn't the only medium Price invokes here. I mean gyres haven't been the scene for 70 years since old Willie Yeats banded them about. The muse as medium as media. It's a strange story, a scene straight from the annals of Ripley's *Believe It or Not*. What percent of people read vs. what percent of people watch. Put that on *Wrestlemania*. Somebody might bet on the 100 to 1 odds. P.T. Barnum said...Price seems to say, "There's a sound byte every second, and these bytes are frying our brains." Just say No.

Freud is back in "the fully clothed excess generator" and he's mad as hell.

"Poetry is a precise set of oblivion." Or it would be if it could be reduced to only a symbol, only an image, that could be put on TV for our consumption, over two billion served.

Words appear, perform a function or two and disappear. Some words return. The re-runs of this version. The calvalcade of stars:

bat: "Only the bat has more stamina to colonize, while the 'mind with genitalia' never stops thinking."

Jack and Jill: "Jack and Jill go up a hill. But there at the bottom is the familiar red wheelbarrow waiting to collect and add us to the world."

Mr. Headless Moiey: "Click!" says the Headless Moiey. "I'm the parson."

noun: "But we know the noun is the ideal company man."

cloud: "The clouds are all the same cloud." ...and the envelope please. The only one who wins here is the one reading this book. Turn off the T.V. dagnabit.

### TOMATOES

A tomato is fragile as a glass of icicle water—The rime filled with life-water. Lovely. Kiss. Even your two tomatoes are really like two muscle hearts. I am lascivious.

Why do I say this to myself?

I nip for a tomato and cut it onto two halves.

-Juraj Sipos

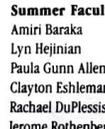
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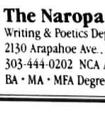
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If we were not careful we could be very depressed by the portrait painted, how metaphoric, of the Republic. But if we take the hint, we can write about it. One possible action. As long as Jack and Jill are excessively fucking (with attached drawings), I think, Larry says we will be okay. Or as he says, "Anything that can happen does." But then if we read this book we will head them off at the pass, so to speak.

-Avery E. D. Burns

## HOLOPHRENIA

I do not have a pretty appearance  
 I have big flat nose, big mouth and my hair is not very dark  
 My English standard is very poor  
 But I am happy and satisfied to live in such a home of tender love  
 Love. L-O-V-E  
 Everyone is always kissing me  
 Near the pansy bed  
 Over a scrabble game  
 While we unload the steamy dishwasher  
 Have I told you yet that my hands are like leather?  
 You'll find out  
 I'm going to be feeling you soon  
 But first let us imagine human beings who do not know anything  
 What could their minds be like?  
 What might they be filled with?  
 Do thoughts flow like mighty rivers?  
 No sir, it is impossible to read such a person's face  
 Disheartening references to an incident in early youth are met by polite uncomprehending stare  
 Compare notes on so far fruitless efforts to solve what may in no way be secret  
 We don't know what we have yet to imagine  
 It's like that even in "forward" countries  
 Carefully examining the items in a sunset  
 From the veranda of a planetarium  
 What features exist?  
 We cannot help but be constantly surprised by these people  
 To kiss them fervently and often  
 Or casually but non-stop

Once a donkey ran into a forest  
 Father advised his sons  
 And a farmer fell in her sickbed  
 Fragments of a song came into her head

And we pulled the car to the curb  
 Where coconut palms  
 Grow close together  
 Mingling their root systems

In short I have made myself  
 As utterly alluring as I know how

*Think moving not shrill*

*Tight squeezed eyes course deep*

*Automatically make me a ferry pilot*

*12 thousand flying cranes*

*Among airline men*

*Setting off a moon still*

*Frequently brought up on swings*

**-Ed Friedman**

## "ORGY-LOVES-QUICKIE"

MINIMAL-MOUSILY-MINNIE-KNEES-MICKIE  
 A-HICKEY-NECK-RICKY-KICKS-LUCY-LOOSE-GOOSEY  
 MOOSE-BULLWINKLE-LICKIE-GETS-A-WOOL-TRINKLE-WILLY  
 JUMPS-LOOSE-ON-POOR-LUCY-RICK-ROCKY-RIPS-JOCKEY-SHORTS  
 QUICKLY-KICK-RICKY-KA-BUKI-STYLE-NOOKIE-GOES-MILKY-WITH-COOKIE  
 BA-BUKI  
 BOO-HOO-BOBO  
 BA-BA-BALOOOOKI  
 POOR-RICKY  
 HE-LOCO  
 FOR-ROCKY  
 UN-POCO  
 WHILE-MINNIE  
 KICKS-MICKEY  
 FOR-HICKEYS-ON-LUCY

**-Edwin Torres**

## SING LIKE STEPHEN MILLER

Meaning Paul is the larynx,  
 possibly. Every night  
 before I go to bed I  
 twist it. The night air  
 Clears my throat. Then  
 even the birds sing  
 like Stephen Miller. Not  
 just the idea  
 of birds either.

Did you count every bird  
 who sang just like  
 me? A bird chewing  
 tobacco. A bird telling  
 a Canterbury Tale.  
 A bird writing a love  
 letter. A myopic, cussing bird.  
 I am the loneliest bird  
 singing like Stephen Miller.

These birds are the creation  
 of language but  
 one day Stephen Miller  
 will be a real bird

**-Stephen Paul Miller**



## SEEDS

Don't eat the core of the apple,  
 Mother said. You're supposed to throw it away. It  
 contains seeds  
 that are bad for you. I heard once  
 on the radio about a boy who kept swallowing  
 seeds, & then one day when he went  
 to flush the toilet he saw  
 all these leaves floating in the bowl,  
 & he knew it couldn't have been  
 from what he just ate, a cup  
 of cabbage soup, so his mother  
 took him to a doctor, who put  
 his fingers down the boy's throat,  
 & pulled the tree out by its roots,  
 & that boy doesn't eat apples, oranges,  
 watermelon or cantaloupe anymore.  
 Though if he craves some fruit  
 I heard that he snacks on seedless grapes.

**-Hal Sirowitz**

## PASTORALE

O tiny fly  
 You're so important  
 In this bleary  
 Old world  
 So neat  
 With your little  
 Art-deco wings

**-Daniel Krakauer**

## AN IDEA OF LOVE

I.

I have *plenty* of understanding. I guess I'm the cause of your sickness, too. A little smile. A cigarette lit. Inhaled. You're driving too close. The large semi, edging toward my shoulder. It is always like this going over the bridge in the daytime. Not always. Most of the time. One car after another, the motor, the bridge shaking. Exhaust. Hot sun. Approaching the city. The Greeks were so arrogant. We still are. I'll be your chauffeur. Smoke in my face. We are not going to run out of gas on the bridge, are we? No, we are not. The view under the semi, red brick projects, many windows. You're speeding again. Sit back, enjoy the music. Otherwise I'll have an accident listening to your idiocy. An alluring bone, this affliction, called love.

II.

I'm bleeding something awful. You'll be all right—I decided to order your meat rare. It tastes better that way. It's better for you. You'll feel much better. These people in here are morons. \$1.00 in the juke box and he still insists on playing mindless 70's disco. I agree with Stalin. I wouldn't flinch to eliminate all this. Mindless. Moronic. And I don't want to listen to your stupid and ignorant discourse about bodies and greyness either. Thinking was supposed to be a revolutionary act. The breath of life sucked in through my mouth.

III.

There it is—outside the window, behind the trees, the mountains, the creek. Take off the skirt and refuse to bow and perish miserably in autumn, the ebb and flow in a downright plain style. Melancholia results from an excess of black bile. So much to BE AT home, AT HOME where the wisest are not wise, surprised—I might miss something if I don't keep moving fast like this away from the white, blank wall, after wall, a glare, the buzzing of the television, holy and boring: Death begins as a rich escape into the future. For suppressed menstruation, take tea of wormwood leaves, pennyroyal, mugwort and ginger. Attempt to love, speak and act on desire, submit to blinking prose.

IV.

You are the most impatient woman I know. A criminal when it comes to self defense. The door to the bedroom and the basement are locked. Entry is forbidden. Emily Dickinson is the only poet I read. Break open the door, read his prose, back out frightened, throwing the keys into the lap of my grandmother slapped in 1910 for reading his mail.

V.

Thought comes after the cumbersome papyrus leaves are flattened and glued together, fragile, holding back the Nile. I stand on the stairs. To love is to accept defeat. He hypnotizes me anyhow. You are so nasty. A tyrant storming through my rooms. Everywhere we go, the talk is of other lovers, mother's untimely death, father's authoritarian structure. In the rocking chair, entombed in a blanket, laughter. Don't take the world too seriously, the poet of love writes the story much differently.

VI.

At the workbench, red plaid flannel shirt sleeves, rolled up, the muscles in his arms, a gold band on his finger, the darkness of the garage, hammering, cool damp air. A B C D E F G—hiding in the darkness, behind the clutter of tools and boxes, his arm flexed on the work table, the gold band, shiney opening over the maple tree, the lightening hole, a glimmer of blue sky, on the stool, reciting my acb's, the sound of pounding, diapers on the line, the station wagon in the drive, the gate won't open, on the floor babbling, a b c d e f g h i—

VII.

Quickly run through the yard, back to the house, the bullets in between: *Daddy I am here*, with a particular look, an uncanny glint travelling as if, as if everything depends upon me dodging the object, the adverb: to worship is to make something grow, a corpse, limb, skin, or guilty and impoverished landscapes. I weighed ninety-seven pounds when I lived at home. Home is the mouth talking backwards, a vulnerable opening. A thought entered Helen's mind once: drop into the wine the magic of forgetfulness, wipe away these bronze weapons with tender fingertips.

VIII.

God damn it, he says, open up your legs. You resemble the wicked queen in Snow White, my melancholy baby. The task is to conquer despair, to remember the invitation, the best thing in the world is serenity after a malignant illness, safety in his arms at 4:15am, postponed. I can't wait any longer. I can't wait. Furiously, brushing. In the bathroom. In his chair, smoking. You are so selfish, you always get what you want. I put my dress back on, climb into bed, he begins too late. You always get what you want. He pats my head, lays down and sleeps. In a state all over the room. Keep it out. Still it comes through the apertures, the pores. What a dear welcome thing life seems to children at times. Rub, stroke, born again into a world of action. Help, I'm born, I'm dying. You will be all right, he says. Overtaken with air. Stroke, curl up, moan. I grope around, blow my nose. A long sigh. God curse the race of Helen and cut it down. A serpent bit her ankle and she was gone.

IX.

I never give up my bed to anyone. You are my lover, aren't you. Yes, I like you. Gently between ribs, around his neck. Let me sleep a few minutes. I'll help you fix that if you let me do it by myself. Boring holes into the wall. Feet braced, shoulder length brown hair sucked like lightening into the machine. Smacked down. Unplugged. Carried to the mirror. I'll have to cut it, my face against his knee, looking into his cock. I hold on. Four long screws removed, my hair carefully undone. Has someone put an evil spell on me? Is it a crime my cheek against his leg. I am so happy, O mother, mother, happy in your husband.

X.

Throw open the drapes. The circle of the condom in the drawer. In the beginning, I was on the stairs, listening. There was snow. No snow. How long do I have to stay here and weep, a dirty liar. A B C D E F...A woman must continually watch herself, though, endure, never have children, they ruin your body. Know thyself always outside the living room composed long and narrow, the sewing machine, drama after drama unfolding into darker and darker...Rip away the drapes: snow and snow, a pinprick of light behind my back, and you, suddenly flood my body in headlight. Hesitate: gone again. Your voice hurtles me backwards, stuck in a pinprick, the sound of the furnace, the sun blinding my right eye. He is *not* my father. I want to sleep deeply, a woman, I want to sleep hardtimes in Detroit, Michigan, grandmother's dining room table, the sunroom, great grand old man in the arm chair, a dusty tabletop, the roomers entering and leaving, square and green, a body in each chair, our evening on video together before midnight, Daddy and me.

-Barbara Henning

## CHIMNEY

The organization of brick  
loses the forest for romantic  
warmth

(for Julie)

35 thousand feet  
10:30 eastward Ohio blue

The coffee won't be the same

wish could write  
a poem  
to see and like horses  
crushing sunglasses on sand

-John d. Greb

## WELCOME TO THE BARBECUE

Ron Kolm  
Low-Tech Press  
30-73 47th Street Long Island City,  
New York, 1991.  
48 pp. \$5.00

Ron Kolm has never gotten the attention he deserves. It's hard to say why, exactly, for he is a master of understatement, a writer whose eye naturally moves to the spaces that gather between moments and people, and his poetry and fiction, much of it a page or less in length, is dry, sardonic, and almost always right on target, lingering in your mind long after more substantial efforts have faded away. Over the years, Kolm's stuff has been collected into four chapbooks, the first of which, *Welcome to the Barbecue*, has recently been reissued in a newly revised edition by Low-Tech Press. Featuring forty short poems, *Barbecue* is, perhaps, the quintessential Kolm sampler, full of small epiphanies and bite-sized revelations, written with irony and a touch of sadness, not to mention an occasional taste for the bizarre.

So much of the writing here is so good that it's hard to know where to begin. My own favorites are the more personal poems, the ones that capture common domestic scenes in language clear and clean enough to break your heart. There's "Self Help," for instance, which reads in its entirety:

Thinking of ways//To improve his life//He  
enters his wife//Absentmindedly.

Or "The Geometry of Love," with its hauntingly vivid portrayal of mixed emotions:

"Take off your clothes//And come to bed, //She  
says.//I open a beer//Stalling for time//And I  
don't know why.

And then there's "A Nocturnal Admission," where Kolm describes the simplest of gestures—putting a pot of water on the stove for a late-night cup of tea—with words that shimmer like the "Brilliant drops of rain" he watches "Spray against the windows." These pieces work in a similar way to snapshots—reflecting moments that are universal, as much a part of our lives as they are of Kolm's.

Of course, not all of the poems in *Welcome to the Barbecue* function this acutely. Some, like "Philosopher At The Picnic" or "Neighbors," are basically humorous asides, and others, like "Death In Koln":

After the air raid//I buried my friends//Under  
bouquets//I rescued from//A burning church.

are based in the realm of the imagination, divorced from Kolm's own experience, but powerful and affecting nonetheless. Part of their success comes from the fact that nearly everything in this book is written from a first person perspective, giving the whole collection an immediacy and a directness it might not otherwise have. Even more important, though, is Kolm's timing, his sense of how to structure a poem and where to end it, his understanding of what his material is really all about. For again and again in these pages, he turns his phrases perfectly, startling us with the depths of his lucidity, and his copious revisions only serve to further compress what has always been a compact style.

-David L. Ulin

## ALONG THE RAILS

Elio Schneeman  
United Artists Books  
(POB 2616, Peter Stuyvesant Station,  
New York) 10009, 1991.  
\$6.00.

"A guy like you should go places" begins a poem in *Along the Rails*, "not just sitting on your ass//drinking beer watching the sun go down," ("Conversation").

So I sit on my ass, drinking beer by the kitchen table. The sun is going down, and I am reading Elio Schneeman's new collection of poems. Most of the poems are relatively short, averaging about 13 lines apiece. There is an elegance to them which is already known to those familiar with Schneeman's work. The line breaks are symmetrical, either ending the sentence or breaking it neatly in halves. Or so it seems at first glance. The poems are technically proficient, condensed observations, sometimes a little chatty; "noticing the resemblance of giraffes to Kenneth Koch" ("Morning Again"). Names are dropped. Some of the poems are a textbook examples of the New York School variety of everyday life poetry. Well written. It is always pleasing to read a well written poem. So what.

But first glances can be misleading. I come to a poem called "October," which closes with "The hole in your heart is sky//opening its heart to your mouth." Pause. Reconsider. Here Elio leaves the textbook behind in the tired workshop, and steps out into the real, which is the reason for this book. In this poem and others ("Song," "In the Valley," and "June"), the lyric emerges in conceptual twists and turns. "An idea turns our thumbs to winter." ("This Morning"). The lines are actually quite musical, and the music of the poem carries the reader into deeper waters: "when all night means//is defeat and you wear it like a reminder" ("Cave").

There is a powerful rendering of hell that surfaces in these poems "The furniture eats me//the walls are alive//between us" ("Black Wind"). A lesser poet might not have the courage to bite into such pain and fear. Elio fires these poems directly into the heart. No jokey post-modern evasions here; "I cannot escape through these open/windows." ("June")

It would be too easy to compare the lyrics to Eluard, "a trickle of silence//slips through the pater of entanglements" ("In the Valley"), or Nerval;

O dark night//put me at ease//amidst the city's  
mysteries//release me from terror//alive in a  
moment//beneath the throbbing planes//along  
the shattered boulevard" ("O Dark Night").

Schneeman evokes Berrigan, too. But to call this book derivative would be to miss the point. Schneeman stakes out his own ground, and finds himself above it, in the sky.

Several years ago there was a lot of talk about the New Romantics. Manifestos were published, and there was a reading series based on the *movement*. I looked and listened, but I couldn't figure out what they were talking about. Well, here it is. "Now I return//to your body in bed//and walk across/sheets of glass//in my dreams" ("1 AM").

Standing alone on the tarmac, Elio Schneeman is the New Romanticism. Tough, pained, confessional but not drippy, sometimes a bit too polished, but romantic as hell (in an older sense of the word). His heart is on his sleeve and his mouth is in the sky. This book signals an arrival. One of the best books of the year.

-Mitch Highfill

## VALUES CHAUFFEUR YOU

Andrew Levy  
O Books,  
(5729 Clover Drive, Oakland, CA 94619), 1990  
88 pp; \$8.00.

## DEMOCRACY ASSEMBLAGES

Andrew Levy  
Innerer Klang,  
(Charlestown, MA), 1990  
36 pps; \$7.50.

When the history of "the real twentieth century"—to borrow a phrase from "Capitalism," in *Democracy Assemblages*—is written, what will it look like? To some extent, the answer rides on how one is—or is not—to define "real": perhaps that is why Levy chose to put the phrase in square quotes in the first place. Nevertheless, the narrative structures informing these two collections of poems may provide a clue.

For most of the poems in *Democracy Assemblages*, the lines are staggered, but manage to cohere nonetheless. There is an odd crossing and diverging of ways. On the one hand, there is that detotalized totality of fragments that on the surface mimics the nearly all-pervasive voice of electronic transmission—the "social media/nearness and penetration" spoken on in "Dioxin and Other Pollutants." On the other hand—and this is beneath (undergirding) the surface—there is perhaps the most effective immovable counterforce, the guidance of "someone walking meditatively." This, the opening image of the aptly titled "Matter and Memory," sets the tone and will not quite go away.

The longer block-narrative of *Democracy Assemblages*' "Earnest Because There Are Alibi" marks a transition to (or from, depending on your order of reading) one of the climaxes of *Values Chauffeur You*: "From Indiana." This latter is a suite built up of lines and their various permutations, a mapping of variations onto recurring themes. Once again there is the feeling of convergence and divergence, of time folding back on itself in an effort to get ahead of itself. "From Indiana" is a kind of "Indiana Spleen," an utterance from which the sense of place will be reconstituted, certainly, but not asked to leave.

*Values Chauffeur You*'s other climax is "The Rumi Improvisations." Running throughout is a consideration of language's promise of an ideality built on breath, a promise that appears very different once investigation reveals that "inside language there is/only ourselves removed." But if language offers the temptation of a false intimacy, Levy reminds us that "the world is not intimate/softness before the tongue." And out of that disjunction grows the appeal of a language containing the traces of an ideal that is ideal precisely because it never was, and never had to be. Words change, of course, register shifts in meaning, come into and go out of use, but the word "shoe," for instance, cannot age and crack, scuff and disintegrate as can the shoes that we wear. "Shoe" is always new; our shoes—and us with them—suffer existence in time.

The world is not intimate, nor is the word, but the latter can pretend to apprehend the former sub specie aeternitatis, and that makes all the difference. In the end these are, as Levy observes in *Democracy Assemblages*' "Confirmation," "this sheets of Paradise/in the world/of assembled intentions."

-Daniel Barbiero

## SOMNAMBULENCY

A moon in a night dress  
dances near the stary gates.  
The light and fire smoulder...  
There burns another pyre  
and so forth.  
Even though I might be  
a little thirsty, no problem.

I'll get up and will walk  
outside. I will walk  
on building roofs.

I will be completely somnambulant.  
When there approaches a day  
I quickly return  
and shall disappear  
in another dream.

-Juraj Sipos

## PLAYING LADY OF FATIMA

After dinner Rose and Polly played Lady of Fatima. The living room was the clearing where the Lady, the Virgin Mary, appeared to three Portuguese shepherd children in 1917. Rose and Polly dashed and skid, moving the chipped mahogany lamp tables and cracked ottoman, their clomping shoes wearing thin the already worn-thin, colorless carpeting.

"Alright now, I'll put this towel on my head, I'll stand on the couch....where's mom's rosary? Here. Now I'll stand here, up here, and you can be one of those dumb kids that didn't know who she was. Now kneel down and make that noise. No, wait till I get up here! No, pretend like you're doing somethin' with the sheep, like you're tryin' to keep them all together...yeah do that..." Polly was making shoeing motions with her hand and running around the tiny living room. "And then I'll make that noise and then you hear it and fall down on your knees and worship the Lady."

"Okay!"

"Hey—did I tell you today that you're fat?"

"Shut up!"

"Alright, alright, don't whine about it already, c'mon let's go. Wait, first I wanna put these lamps down there so we can have some kinda weird lights, like for the miracle. Okay, I'm gonna start makin' the noise now: ...aaahhhhhhaaaahhhhaahhh...."

Polly stopped gathering in the sheep and listened attentively to the song of the heavenly angels. Then she turned around and saw that, against the ancient stained and peeling wallpaper and the oil-on-glass masterpieces purchased by their father from junk stores, a miracle was coming together (somehow, she didn't really know how). She fell slowly, reverently to her knees with a slightly open mouth, like Jennifer Jones in "The Song of Bernadette," as Rose, with a ripped bathroom towel veiling her shoulders, entered the room as if she were floating on a cloud. She ascended to the couch. Polly stared up at her, making the sign of the cross and saying the Hail Mary.

"Will one of you come out here and help with these dishes?" their father called from the kitchen.

"I have come to give you a message," said the Lady to the shepherd girl. "I have come to tell you that I will cure all people of their diseases. And there will be a miracle in the sky. The sun is going to spin all around and turn white and shoot out lots of brilliant colors, and this will be the sign, the sign that...um, I will cure all the people who are here. And I will cure you, too, my child. What is your sickness? Do you have leprosy?"

"Yes, Lady of Fatima, I have...um, leperzine."

"No! You ruined it! It's lep-ro-sy! Didn't you hear me? God, you're so stupid, just forget it. I hope you do get leprosy!"

"No! No! I wanna play some more! I'll get it right! C'mon! Please?"

"No! You don't know howta do it..."

"One of you better get in here and help your mother—NOW!" came the call again.

"Ooh, that's his Navy voice!" Rose said to Polly as she adjusted her towel. "He puts that on when he wants to sound tough, ya know. Don't answer him."

"Yeah. He jus' wants to sound tough."

"YEAH. Hey—can't you ever disagree with me for once? Why do you always have to say the same thing I say?"

"I don't always! See—I'm disagreeing with you now!"

"Oh brother...Listen, I wanna play something else. What should we play?"

"KIDS! GET OUT HERE—TH' BOT' O' YOUS!"

"We can't. We're doin' homework!"

"Homework my foot! Now get out here—NOW!"

The miracle of the sun would have to be delayed. As they clopped across the linoleum towards the dish-wiping scene, Rose thought maybe she could recruit the kids for playing Lady of Fatima as Lisa Crulikowski's big birthday party tomorrow. She imagined it, with herself as the Lady, and Polly couldn't mess it up. It would be fun.

-Sharon Mesmer



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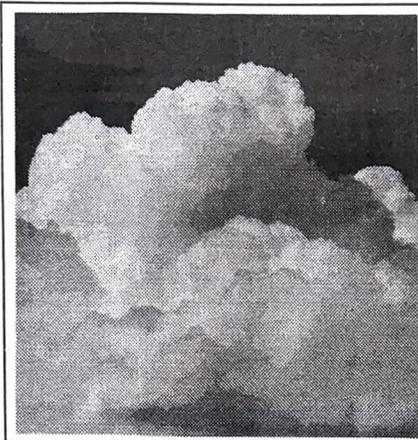
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**A FREE MAN**

Lewis Warsh  
Sun & Moon Press  
Los Angeles, 1991.  
349 pages.

I had an idea about Lewis Warsh's second novel, *A Free Man*, so I read a John Updike story in "The New Yorker." I was right. Warsh achieves effortlessly the naturalness Updike strains for. Updike's personal observations are great—don't get me wrong—and his endings pack a punch, but there is a predictability in how he sets up a situation; he clearly plans out the action before writing it. Warsh did some serious planning as well in his Byzantine tale of lower middle class New York lives, but more on the structural level. On the paragraph level, through ellipsis, parenthetical aside, and mental quotation of what so-and-so would have said, Warsh regularly achieves a stunningly lifelike thought process:

Making love before dinner had become a ritual. It erased everything that had happened—the boring job, the conversation with an ex-lover, the long ride on the subway (Sally always complained that men tried to molest her on her trips to and from work, and Rosemary, to whom this had never happened, but who rarely took the subway anywhere, wondered whether Sally was being overly sensitive: she could understand it happening once—you don't know what it's like—but not every day)—since they'd seen one another that morning.

Rosemary and Sally are a Lesbian couple that make up one of the stories woven into *A Free Man*. Other elements include Frank, a cop, and his wife, Gina, whose affair with her art teacher has put their marriage on the rocks; Max summoned back from California to deal with the murder of his mother in her Lower East Side apartment; Mickey and Benny, a young Puerto Rican couple trapped in a spiral of pills and poverty. Frank is investigating the murder, Rosemary is a witness, Mickey a suspect. But to delineate the plot in this way is to drain it of all the mystery and beauty Warsh so carefully constructs. The mystery consists not in the murder—we couldn't really care less who killed Mrs. Eckstein—but in what Alice Notley calls "The great cosmetic/Strangeness of the normal deep person."

The book begins with the murder of a mother, immediately bringing to mind another book that begins with the same motif—Camus' *The Stranger*. There is a similarity between the two works, one presumably initiated consciously by Warsh. Max seems unmoved by his mother's death. His mind drifts more to an affair he had with a Japanese neighbor while he was still living at home. As with the narrator of *The Stranger*, sex is the one aspect of their lives that is vibrant, glowing, memorable. The difference is that in *The Stranger*, murder also has an electric, alive quality, whereas in *A Free Man*, the murder is simply an expedient to gaining income.

This perhaps reflects the current value of life in a late-20th-century city, but nothing is made of it. Here is Max, back in his old apartment:

Occasionally an object in the apartment would catch his attention, the calendar on the inside door of the cupboard above the stove, for instance, held in place by a blue thumbtack, the top part of the calendar a child's drawing in bright colors of buildings, sky, people and clouds, with a flying saucer in one corner...The table was the same table where he'd sat with his mother didn't exactly make animated conversation, at least they took pleasure in what they were eating. A person, someone he didn't know, or so he assumed, had walked through the door and strangled her.

I realized, reading this book, that I had an intense pleasure each time I picked it up again. I became deeply involved, not so much with the story as with the book itself. It was something I hadn't experienced since, well, *Tender is the Night*. It is a rare experience to be enmeshed in reading a novel, and rarer still in one whose sentences you covet, whose words are like precious stones.

I've been a fan of Warsh's poetry for years (I especially remember prizing his *Dreaming As One* with its pretty Joe Brainard cover). He has a smooth line, nurtured on an Ashbery sense of abstraction, but with a gritty rock'n'roll-like quality to the observations. Philip Larkin intended to be a novelist in his early twenties, but the novels he produced then, *Jill* and *A Girl in Winter*, have the stamp of "a poet's novel"—in the best sense of the phrase—that *A Free Man* does. There is no grandeur to these works, no all-encompassing "conclusion" that *real* novelists seem to strive for. And yet, Larkin and Warsh also stay clear of the pretentious poeticism that forces most poets' novels to shipwreck. Warsh plays no obvious literary games. He's not a child with a new toy. Yet you are constantly aware of how his literature is manipulating you, playing with your head:

The voice on the jukebox reminded her of Joe; she could hear him singing "Georgia" to himself in the shower, and she wished she had played something else instead. She closed her eyes and rested her head on Harry's shoulder—"I'm drunk," she thought, "and happy"—until the song was over.

In the midst of Warsh's impressive grammatical precision and syntactical mastery (he constructs sentences Thoukydides would have been proud of), again and again we come across passages that seem to speak directly to our own lives, wherever we may live (though New York is lovingly represented here), and which yet remain foreign, distinct, inert:

She was watching herself cease to be the person who observed everything that was happening inside her, and now she was gradually ceasing to be the person who was aware that any changes were taking place at all. One could be

**THE WORLD 44**

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faithful only to the idea of cynicism that informed you that no one, not even the young women modeling clothes, was exempt from the harsh glare of the colored bulbs that encircled the world, and which made everyone's skin appear allow and unhealthy.

The next novel you read should be *A Free Man*.

-Vincent Katz

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THE SUN A STAR

The greenhouse flows entirely sun a liquid And I have a hat?	Cheese and apples and Sunlight is not an object Even a picture	The one to reject Taking a shower Yes as A matter of fact
Now when all is said Not exactly a flow but How are you today	What price Petals Who To get away or enter Depends on your point	We be diurnal And estivate wherever But still there are all
I'll be outside The Trees in action upon the Story you tell I	Viewpoints are dispersed World trade Taking a shower And if sunlight was	Sunlight and cider Everything has its price But it's not even
Throw away your mind A moment of pure liquid All I could remem-	The rocky coast of Maine A state! Happy happy Presents of the past	Question of desire The sun a star No never Do you have any
A paranoid dream This is too be real to be a All these people and	A vector means what You know Not story but charge Then again maybe	Literature on The Foreign Legion Note its Exclusive right side
And all around me And what about the sublime And all the cake I	In food and setting With music A child or two Why not A star A	Up feature Love is Not mentioned Not a critic- All pound No never
Or in the country A kind of experience Quelle surprise And with	Break in the action Or action like it should be Chairs table tree sun	We sat there for a While all the paintings hung there Wrapped iwth cloth and clay
Taking a shower Democrats Republicans Petals all over	Not picture today Vector America im- Age old iron rags	When an apple falls Know what forces are involved Hunger for motion
Quality motion Prepare the food and outside Women Or woman	You could even write Planets Mars cheese food up and Here now never not	What a happy dog Do you know what I think I Its free if you need

-Joshua Galef

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*Bibliographic Query*

For a projected bibliography of Kenward Elmslie, I would appreciate hearing from anyone with information on the following:

- 1) A one-shot parody of *Floating Bear*, circa 1966, which published the Elmslie/Brainard collab. "High Heels."
- 2) "Just Friends" magazine (?) or anthology (?) circa 1970; published "Gaps."
- 3) "Underwater Woman Fragment" (circa 1978), possibly in "Poetry Mailing List."
- 4) "New York Herald" from 1971, with theatre reviews, etc.

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