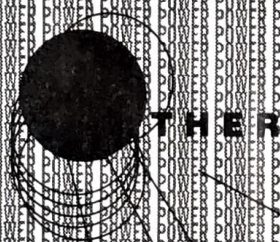


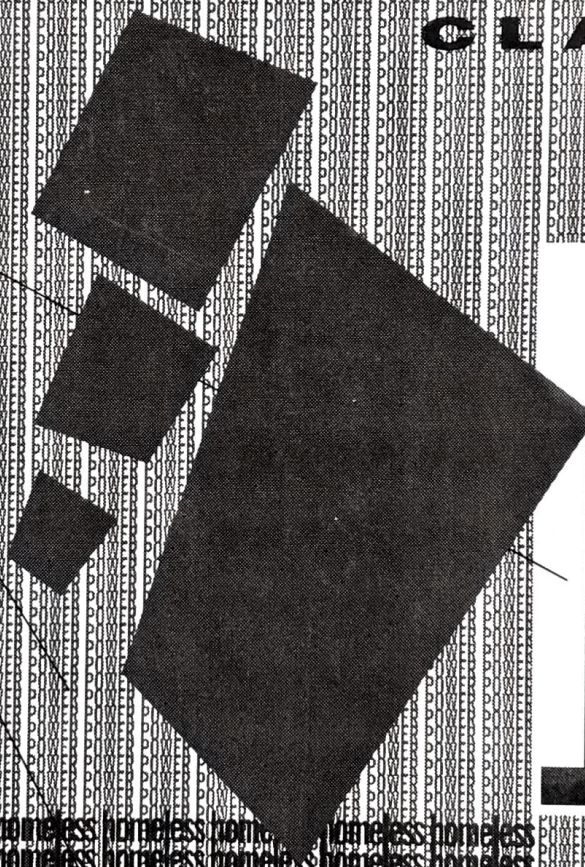
The Poetry Project

THE NEWSLETTER OF
THE POETRY PROJECT
LTD. AT ST. MARKS
CHURCH
IN-THE-BOWERY
140

REMEMBER
YOUR
CLASS



OTHER



POLITICS
POLITICS

FAILURE? DOUBT? NO! DOUBT IS A FAILURE

The Poetry Project

**THE NEWSLETTER OF
THE POETRY PROJECT LTD.
AT ST. MARK'S IN-THE-BOWERY
#140 FEB./MARCH 1991**

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THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF...

Michael Scholnick, Tim Dlugos, and Lorri Jackson, three fine poets we have recently lost.

A special section in memory of Michael can be found on pages 21-22.

Next issue will feature a section on Tim's life and work.

Catchword Papers announces a new book!

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SPECIAL SECTION: CLASS

EDITOR'S NOTE: I got the idea for this topic at last year's Symposium. It seemed odd that the wide range of discussions on "power" seldom mentioned "class". I began to wonder if the concept had lost its significance... had been repressed...or replaced by another term.

To find out, I gathered essays, reviews, and poems that addressed the issue. Here are some of them.

SOCIAL CLASS AND THE WRITER'S IDENTITY

Paul Hoover

In the United States, where the myth of a classless society is strong, it is considered bad taste to speak of class difference. However, it is obvious that literature, like real estate and fashion, is socially coded. Texts, whether poems or ads for cars, are mirrors in which we see our group's ambitions reflected. In short, we go to a piece of writing to be reminded of what we already know to be true. A writer's style can be determined to a large extent by what's on his driver's license, such as age, race, and residence. His ideal reader, a member of the author's social class, hovers over his shoulder during the act of composition, demanding praise and surrender. The muse is a cop.

I once wrote an essay called "The Reader's Egotism" asserting that each text is a secret appeal to identity. While appeals to gender and ethnicity are often overt and inherently "moral" due to the marginality of their groups, class appeal is usually subtextual and implicitly guilty of promoting one group's interests over another. This is especially nasty when the defended group is already powerful. In "Criticism and Class Consciousness" (*American Literary History*, Fall 1990), Mark Edmundson reads Roland Barthes' short essay "The World of Wrestling" as an implicit slur against the "non-intellectual lower classes." In interpreting wrestling as fascist spectacle, Barthes displays his upper-class fear of an aroused *volk*, thereby placing himself disdainfully above them. "Barthes' essay," Edmundson writes, "is a form of literary education. It teaches you to repudiate a kind of reading, and in doing so to repudiate a certain class." Poet June Jordan writes in *The Progressive*, "I am looking for an umbrella big enough to overcome the tactical and moral limitations of 'identity politics'—politics based on gender, class, or race. I am searching for the new language of a new political consciousness of identity." But her writing strongly appeals to identity, just as, consciously or not, everyone's does. All poetry is political poetry, teaching

the acceptance or repudiation of certain values.

The terms "highbrow," "middlebrow," and "lowbrow" are no longer in fashion, yet they explain a lot about artistic behavior. For instance, classical music is used for Lexus car commercials. Those with the money for tasteful quality cars are the upper middle class, the dominant consumers of art, who favor "highbrow" music. James Merrill's poetry has the elegance and refinement expected of this group. So does John Ashbery's. However, Ashbery's work is "democratic" in its unexpectedness of idiom and reference. Ashbery is the more Shakespearean of the two, eager to use the speech of low and high church. Yet they share elegance, charm, wit, and a sense of art as superior amusement. Wallace Stevens' poetry also had these French characteristics. Periphrasis, a major Ashbery device, is essentially an aristocratic mode. With a few exceptions such as Walt Whitman, major American poets have been of the upper middle class. William Carlos Williams was upper middle but acquired an idiom for his poetry that was comparatively proletarian. This willingness to move across code is morally attractive. In *The Wasteland* Eliot uses lower and middle class characters primarily for satirical purposes, deriding their social positions.

The middle-class desire for "transcendence" is code for its desire to rise in class on the wings of art. Bohemia is populated with middle-class kids pretending to fall in class. But their fashionable late Marxism (for example, performance art as dematerializing the art product) simply results in new art commodities. The performance artist's commodity, reputation, may be cashed in the form of ticket sales, college concerts, the book, video, gallery show, and other spinoffs. As Salvador Dali and Andy Warhol understood and Karen Finley now understands, art is the lubricant with which the arts class fucks money and influence. Every philosophical or aesthetic breakthrough is also a marketing triumph. It is an aristocratic tendency, by the way, to disdain commerce and "commodification." Art is supposed to be a sacred activity. In the aristocratic scheme, the artist needs to please only the

generosi, his or her patron.

This is a country in which even the leading proletarians, such as Allen Ginsberg, are at least middle-class, and some, like William Burroughs, are patrician. In fact, they are not proletarian at all, but rather bohemian, the hip bourgeoisie. The world of fiction may be slightly more forgiving. Raymond Carver's working-class stories have gained an acceptance that working-class poetry cannot. But once a person becomes an artist, to some degree he or she abandons working-class status. As Alan Lomax said of the Cajun musician Amadie Ardoin, "He was a poet, and like all poets he preferred making verses to working in the hot sun." Saul Bellow was raised in Chicago's Humboldt Park, a place not known for its social advantages. Shakespeare held no titles. This would argue that there is an aristocracy of talent that transcends class; that the greatest writers sympathize with the interests and idioms of competing groups. Bahktin would call this "heteroglossia." However, a multiplicity of voices is easier to achieve in fiction than in lyric poetry, which Bahktin considers "monologic." The recent return to the long poem is, I believe, an attempt to represent a breadth of experience and language. Despite its wariness about the narrative mode, without which there is no fullness of counterpoint, language poetry has made gains through expanded reference.

The avant-garde consists of high art puritans who see art as sacred but use "low" materials in creating it. The "height" of John Cage's work is its "low" perception that ordinary noise is music. But only citizens of privilege tend to allow themselves such lighthearted insights. A working class artist is generally too concerned with his or her economic life. The patronizing term "primitive artist" is also class-specific, used by bourgeois artists and critics to distinguish the presumed amateurism of "folk art." I teach at what is widely known in Chicago as a "working class arts college." In our culture, the expression is an oxymoron.

Like bohemianism, vanguardism has its history in capitalism and a self-confident bourgeoisie. The "advanced" (the term is class-specific) take pains to distinguish themselves from the "backward." With occasional setbacks, such as the important fact that "vanguard" and "avant-garde" are dated as terms, they manage to steer through historical or technological changes without the loss of their own class ideology. This often requires quite subtle adjustments such as conflating Marxism and aestheticism, each of which disguises the other. For instance, language poetry has helped prepare us for, if not defend us from, the age of the sound bite, remote control device, incessant

television viewing, and the cut and paste keys on our word processors. It understands the metaphors of electronic access—a blink speaks volumes—while maintaining rigorous literariness and exclusiveness. It can even be said that language poetry is a way in which upper middle discourse prepares to survive the decentralization of poetry culture. There is nothing wrong with this. All social groups seek to thrive and even triumph. It is also true that the vanguard, being small in numbers, has more to fear from the center than the center has to fear from it. I once attended a meeting of Associated Writing Programs at which Donald Justice, to the delight of cheering mainstream writers, summarily trashed the vanguard. The Black Mountain poets, he said, are "fascists"; Robert Bly is a "charlatan"; and the work of Kenneth Koch and John Cage is "infantile." I have never seen class (and regional) warfare so openly conducted by a presumed intellectual. It was done, of course, under cover of aesthetic difference. But aesthetic difference is social difference. Wallace Stevens wrote, "A change of style is a change of subject." I would add that a change of style is a change of social class.

Language poetry's battle with "voice" and the "metaphysics of presence" is class-related. Both are values of the middle and lower middle classes, whose chief means of expressing power is their physical presence, speaking voices, and sheer numbers. The middle prizes directness and clarity, often wrapped in a pink cloud of longing. Accustomed to the complications of power, its reversals and negotiations, upper middles are comfortable with ambiguity and irony, which look to the middle-class writer like treachery, obscurantism, and unnecessary displays of virtuosity. But hieratic privacy of language has been in existence as long as priests and sheep. When it becomes widely used, it is time for the priesthood to prepare a new code. Otherwise, the priesthood would be outmoded, and the mystery of "the poem" would lose its sacramental power. In the social context of the upper middle class, this power is primarily glamor; among middles it is self-expression. "The poem" is a rather pale commodity, but like classical music it has the allure of sophistication and tradition. What's in it for us? Learning to decode its mysteries, like playing squash, means we "got class." The vanguard's insistence that its codes are democratizing is simply a disguise for its height. Middle style insistence on what is "natural," "moral," and "of necessity" disguises its social climbing and will to dominance.

In its contempt for "the personal voice," recent vanguard poetry shares the aristocratic argument of T.S. Eliot against personality in poetry. The subjective



vehemently thinking this Jesus dude had been killed a week or so before I met these characters. I felt a terrifying fear that this mistaken placing of blame would disqualify me from my turn at being Child of the Day (the kid who got to carry the United States flag in front of a line of marching pre-schoolers banging on drums, triangles, etc.). In fact, that was the beginning of many experiences in the promised land that has rendered me incapable of hoisting the flag to this day.

Mrs. Turpin doesn't wrestle with Jews in her insomniatic stratification ordeal, but I've known many Mrs. Turpins. Jews (and Communists) are outside of class altogether. Class division is an internal Christian affair in Mrs. Turpin's world. I believe Zionist Jews stratify with the same ethnocentrism. (There were and are many red Jews, not that a lot of people remember that Jew and Zionist are not synonymous. Certainly Jews come in all classes, and they were all crammed in together in those cattle cars.) And what of Eastern Europe? After seventy years of class consciousness, nationalism and anti-semitism are still rallying points; the pre-Marx divisions do not so easily dissolve into class solidarity.

It was Marx's idea for the converted to go out and preach his gospel and reveal the elect unto themselves. It was also Marx's idea, as I read him, that one should own one's self, but not at the expense of an other (unless they were one's class enemy).

I have used Jew as the aclass example here, because my first conscious awareness of the absurdity of how humans grouped themselves was as a Jew, not a particular class member. "Others" might cite race, gender, literary theory, etc. (I never met a writer who didn't think he/she was high class).

I have no grand conclusions to draw here about what is to be done. I'm still doing my thing. Still writing from that sense of "other" — being pissed off at Terry Eagleton for only begrudgingly acknowledging issues of race and gender along with class. Right now all the classes, races, religions, genders are roiling and moiling around in my head. Perhaps I'll have more clarity tomorrow when I pick up my meagar paycheck.

Barbara Barg is the founder of J.P.D. (Jews for a Permanent Diaspora). She currently plays with Homer Erotic, a poet's band.

THE FACT OF A BOOK

David Sternbach

"Everybody is a star." Sylvester Stewart (Sly Stone)

Your poems are someone's example of bad taste. Your rebellion typifies your class origins. Your shoe choices have a lot to do with your level of education. Your manner of speaking, which you tried to shape as a teenager, sends a message to the waitress. Your denial of your class position is a class-determined position. Your pleasure is not my pleasure.

We look at each other with condescension and longing. Ten years of exaggerated divisions and ugly appropriations, and the others' tastes — rich chic, poor funk — are hilarious or unfathomable. But tempting, too.

Rejecting the notion of class, masking the real text of education and income, Jane and Michael Stern have written *The Encyclopedia of Bad Taste* (HarperCollins) a catalog of popular-, mass-, and sub-cultural production and styles that will earn the Sterns a bundle. Lest their book be taken, despite its title, as an affectionate paean to quirky American tastes ("A Celebration of Pop Culture At Its Most Joyfully Outrageous," as the publisher claims), the Sterns make clear in their introduction that they're talking about class, in a very "us and them" way: "For every GQ coverboy resplendent in bespoke suits and handcobbed shoes, untold numbers of guys waddle through life in velour jogging rompers, sweat socks, and Corfam sandals."

(Waddle? Are we also to assume that fitness and physical grace are attributes of the lucky, tasteful people?) At the end of the introduction the Sterns coyly dismiss the class issue by invoking the straw snob Clement Greenberg. By discrediting his outdated reification of the Popular and the Fine, they hope to show their own self-awareness, but fail. They still believe in an objective judgement of quality.

The Sterns, according to a loving profile by their natural allies at *The New York Times*, live in a big house appointed in authentic Chippendale (Chippendale!) furniture, but they've set aside a room for their collection of things. Bad-taste cultural artifacts. Things they don't like. But love. But don't like. Wouldn't live among, just in case you might make inferences about them on the basis of those things. Those *things*.

A house done up in Chippendale, with one skeletons-in-the-closet room devoted to the kitsch of lived culture seems like a rare acknowledgement of the



as Mingus, Monk, Miles, Coltrane, Sun Ra and Ornette). Quite a variety of formal information...and the results in our writings were equally diverse. Orthodoxy was just boring, like following the boss's rules at work. So despite the huge popularity of Dorn's *Gunslinger* in Motown over the past two decades, his stance on "language" writing (that it was ephemeral, could be ignored) was never taken seriously. Because as sons and daughters of the working class (the pure products of Detroit), we wanted to know and wouldn't be told what not to read. Reassessing Donald Allen's *New American Poetry* anthology today, its ethno- and phallogentrism stands out. In its place, we turn to Ishmael Reed's *Quilt*, Jerome Rothenberg's *Symposium of the Whole*, Nathaniel Mackey's *Hambone*, Charles Bernstein's *The Politics of Poetic Form*, and works by Kathy Acker, Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Joe Ceravolo, Clark Coolidge, Jayne Cortez, Victor Hernandez Cruz, Ted Greenwald, Jessica Hagedorn, Lyn Hejinian, David Henderson, Bob Holman, Erica Hunt, Bernadette Mayer, Ron Padgett, Bob Perelman, Pedro Pietri, Leslie Scalapino, Lorenzo Thomas, Barrett Watten, etc. etc. etc., all of it has mattered. As well as critical theory:

we see the backs
of heads of those
gone before us. what
were they really looking for?
bags of tools, books of rules.
we anticipate
the exposure of bone and blood.
we are telekinetic seeking
the source of authorship.
doo wop doo wow.
because of the odd meter,
the motion of the feet
is disjointed, unpasteurized.

This from a section of musician/poet Sadiq Muhammad's series "In My Addiction I Study Foucault." Or Thom Jurek's use of Bataille:

To be this terrorist I was born... I am not
a sick person/these are items... I am master
on my pages... or is darkness that deep...
that empty ego that it controls... Emotional
Terrorism... I am truly the victim here...

or Dennis Teichman's spin on Baudrillard:

All the world silicone humped.
Forget the symbols of revolution,
just keep spraying a fine film
on the screws of the meat chopper.
The ablest legislature hungers

you into their luxury. Too bad
the accompanying mob didn't
clinch the division earlier."

Visitors to Detroit are regularly surprised by the large multicultural audiences at readings and talks, but we are no longer surprised. We understand that our city's bad national rep is partly a function of fear, derived from a belief in the very concept of "race," an apprehension that what once might have been still thrives in our midst.

This system of who speaks
to what and what is said
is left undetermined

undermined
the restraining edge
desired

— Dorinda Ares DeLiso

Labor unions were once a bed of social intercourse that would bring workers of diverse cultures together. We note the xenophobic terror of intercourse, the middle class hatred of discourse.

Developing a local, home-grown poetics, rooted in our class experience of everyday life, has been our task at hand, and in new writing by Alise Alousi, Bill Harris, Lolita Hernandez, Kim Hunter, Trino Sanchez, John Sinclair, Mick Vranich, those quoted in this article and dozens more, the work goes on. Let the bad mouthing continue!

THE CAPITALISTS' TRINITY

One is the money.
Two is the show. Three is the
Power. Dontcha know.

—Kofi Natambu

Works cited:

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- Dennis Teichman, *V-8*, Past Tents Press
- Dorinda Ares DeLiso, Christine Monhollen and Mary C. Taylor, editors, *Triage* magazine
- Kofi Natambu, *Intervals*, Post Aesthetic Press

George Tysh is Assistant Curator of Education at The Detroit Institute of Arts. He edits In Camera and *Everyday Life*.

Pulitzer Prize. And, in that narrow land called American literature, he was a well-known and respected figure. Yet, he never could quite get far enough away from Martins Ferry.

In his most famous poem, "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio," Wright describes the ritual of high school football in a small Midwestern town. Wright thinks about "Polacks nursing long beers", the "grey faces of Negroes in the blast furnace" and "the ruptured night watchmen of Wheeling Steel, dreaming of heroes."

He then concludes this short poem with:

All the proud fathers are ashamed to go home.
Their women cluck like starved pullets,
Dying for love.

Therefore,
Their sons grow suicidally beautiful
At the beginning of October,
And gallop terribly against each other's bodies.

Oddly, the "therefore" of the last stanza is a non-sequitur. Does having an embarrassed pop and horny mom lead to either beauty or suicide? The giveaway of Wright's discomfort with this poem is found in the last line. After Polacks and herniated watchmen, he concludes the poem with a sweep of the Yeatsian cape. "Gallop terribly"? Not in Ohio. The last line strikes one as a sad attempt to redeem the content of the poem with a beautiful, "poetic" line. In one line, Wright tries to suppress the childhood he has recreated for his readers.

The attitude that Wright "dances" with throughout his poetic career is his sense of class dislocation. If he were born a decade earlier, Wright may have become a leftist poet in the mode of the early Kenneth Patchen or Kenneth Fearing. Unfortunately, a poet whose first book appears in Eisenhower's second term is not allowed the privilege/pleasure of class hatred. Wright's heroes are outsiders. He writes two poems about George Doty, an executed murderer. He writes about the "bums" of this nation, the solitary figures lingering over black coffees in the backwater bus depots of America. "The hearts of men are merciless" is how he concludes "Two Poems About President Harding" (a fellow Ohioan & a real loser) & I believe he wrote this line without an ounce of artifice. In Wright's nightmarish visions, the laborers of America are already half-dead, stumbling "upon the outside locks of a grave, whispering / *Oh let me in*". It is not surprising, then, that his most original & experimental book, *Two*

Citizens, was so reviled when first published. The strange mix of rage, sentimental & disjunction — poems that often change in tone from line to line — was, I think, Wright's attempt to empower the powerless he so often wrote about with their inarticulate speech.

"The trouble with me is/I worry about things that should be/Left alone." said Wright in a poem from *This Journey*. In some ways, what Wright was trying to "leave alone" was a way of articulating the worldview of the American dispossessed — that along with rage there could be a real longing for a glimpse of a blue spruce under full moon. That a recent large collection of mostly favorable criticism on Wright be published and not take up the issue of class relations (one critic even referring to Wright's fascination with "American Gothic") might explain the haunted quality of much of his work. As much as the desperadoes and isolattoes he wrote about, Wright, too, was lost "in the beautiful white ruins/ of America."

Poet, essayist and critic Joel Lewis is hard at work on a history of the Hudson Palisades.



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AMERICA

You wade through the stream, the dry fly negotiates a riffle. Large clouds pass across the water. Large moose walk with you in a dream. Think nothing of it. George and Martha enter the barn under cover of darkness. Across the river, Hessians and Redcoats are also getting laid. Commodore Vanderbilt walks down Wall Street, snow falls. You deliver the credit agreements to the closing in the Gold Room. You're made a junior partner. Herb breaks down and cries.

Michael Friedman



WORKING-CLASS HERO

Some days feels like
You wake up underwater
It isn't the humidity I'm talking about

Space folds on space. A blue ice house.
And every motion climbs into itself
A little man in someone else's overcoat

Some days are Sunday all day long
Below an empty sky that's eyeball blue
A slight wind curling round you like a vine

A day to put your bag on the conveyor belt
And walk on through

What kind of day today?
You could just say
I really didn't need something
To tell my grandkids

Lorenzo Thomas

MANIFESTO

The palm trees the bars
in my internalized sing
sing

A peon feeling meaningful
he's missing something

We are not fools
or terrorists
we are stooges

This is a movement
not a weakness of character

I will be a stooge in
order to survive
the coming pulsations of Class.

(1980)

Tom Clark



GRACE STREET

Storm blowing down the street, the doorbell ringing again with some stranger. He's hiding the gun to shoot up the walls, steal the babies. Of course I wanted to be rid of them. And you wanted a week in the sun. Too bad. It's not our earthquake. Nobody dead, all the buildings standing, what did you expect?

Then fuck you! and fuck you! How much clearer can it be?

Fortunately the company coming tonight will help us cover it up. When I break the next dish you'll look away, and I won't say a word about the "old days," skiing the frozen swamp, hot buttered rum, and all the time in the world to be rich. That's why the news is so important: the new president even looks like the old one, and when we read how that city was leveled, we feel such relief to be here. Who needs sleep. Halfway across the planet, the night descends, guns go off as they cry their garbled language. The pizza's for the neighbors, he just got the wrong door again. We couldn't be safer.

Barry Silesky

FEBRUARY READINGS

3 Memorial Reading for Tim Dlugos. Tim Dlugos died on December 3, 1990 of complications due to AIDS. His books of poems included *High There, Je Suis Ein Americano*, *A Fast Life* and *Entre Nous*. He was serving his second term on the Poetry Project's Board of Directors and was the editor of the Project's newsletter from 1985-86. 3 pm, free.

4 Open Reading

6 Poet, fiction writer and musician Jim Carroll is the author of *The Basketball Diaries*, *Living at the Movies* and *Forced Entries: The Downtown Diaries 1971-1973*. La Loca is the author of two books of poems, *Adventures on the Isle of Adolescence* (City Lights, 1989) and *The Mayan* (Bone Scan Press, 1988).

11 Xue Di (translations by Iona Crook and Keith Waldrop) and Bei Ling (translations by Lin May Lung) are poets from mainland China who have been in residence at Brown University since Tieneman square.

13 Robert Hershon is the author of *How to Ride the Woodlawn Express* (Sun, 1986). He is a co-editor of *Hanging Loose* magazine and press and is the Director of the Print Center. Gary Lenhart's two books of poems are *One at a Time* (United Artists) and the newly published *Light Heart* (Hanging Loose Press). He is the editor of *Transfer*.

14 The Poetry Project Lover's Raffle. See ad on page 16 for full details on this exciting event.

18 Jackie Johnson was a poet in residence at the Mac Dowell Colony this summer. Michael Weaver is co-editor of Seventh Son Press based in New Jersey, and has one chapbook out from paradigm press.

20 Poet William Corbett lives in Boston where he teaches at Harvard and Commonwealth universities. His books include *On Blue Note* (Zoland Books) and *Don't Think, Look* (forthcoming). C.D. Wright's books of poetry include *String Light* (U. of Georgia, 1991) and *Further Adventures with You* (Carnegie Mellon University). She is the publisher of Lost Roads Books.

25 Tom Ellis is one of the cofounders of The Dark Room, a reading center and writers' collective for Black Literature in Cambridge, MA. Gil Ott edits Singing Horse Press. His latest book is *Public Domain* (Potes & Poets).

27 Gregory Corso is a central figure of the Beat Generation. He has published eight major collections of poems including *Gasoline*, *The Happy Birthday of Death* and the recent volume of new and selected poems, *Mindfield* (Thunder's Mouth Press, 1989). Actor, performer, poet and superstar Taylor Mead is the author of *Son of Andy Warhol* (Hanuman Books). He starred recently in the movie "Buster Keaton's Bedroom."

MARCH READINGS

4 Open Reading

6 Sharon Mesmer's poems have appeared in *Semiotext(e)*, *New American Writing*, and *Downtown*. She was an editor and founder of Chicago's *Letter EX* and *B-City*. A native of Trinidad, poet and fiction writer Mervyn Taylor received a New York Foundation for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowship for Poetry in 1989. Junction Press will publish his *An Island of His Own* in 1991.

11 Cheryl Fish is the author of two chapbooks, *My City Flies By* (E.G. Press), and *Obliging Night* (Hurricane Books). Sigrid Nunez has been published in the *Threepenny Review* and was a recipient of a General Electric Award for Younger Writers. M.L. Liebler of Detroit is a performance poet and author of *Breaking the Voodoo*.

13 Miguel Algarín is the founder and director of the NuYorican Poet's Cafe. A collection of poems, *Bioethics*, was published by Arte Publico. A novel, *The Bi-Sexual Supermacho*, is forthcoming. Poet, playwright, critic, editor, activist and teacher Amiri Baraka's opera *The Life and Life of Bumpy Johnson*, with music by Max Roach, is being staged by the San Diego Repertory this winter. His selected writings are forthcoming from Thunder's Mouth Press.

14 poets/painters collaborations, a benefit sale for the Poetry Project, will open at Brooke Alexander Editions, 476 Broome St. in Manhattan (212-925-2070). Exhibition will include works by William Burroughs and Robert Rauschenberg, Alice Notley and George Schneeman, and many more. See ad on page 20 for full details. Through 3/30.

18 The poetry of Janos Gat read by Joe Bowie of Defunkt, and other surprise guests. Music by Lenny Kaye. Composer Jonathon Elliott and writer/filmmaker Susan Kougouell will present a new collaboration, a sound collage juxtaposing fragments of speech, poetry, and "concrete" sounds.

20 Poet, prose writer and critic Aram Saroyan's early volumes of minimalist poetry include *Aram Saroyan* and *Pages*, both from Random House. Among his recent prose works are *Trio: Portrait of an Intimate Friendship* (Simon & Schuster, 1985) and *The Romantic* (McGraw-Hill, 1988). Lewis Warsh's *A Free Man*, is being published by Sun & Moon in 1991. His books include *Information from the Surface of Venus* (poems). He edits United Artists Books.

25 Dennis Barone is the author of *Forms/Froms* (Potes & Poets) and *Coda* (Spectacular Diseases). Peter Ganick is the author of *Remove a Concept* (Leech Books) and is the editor of *ABACUS* and Potes & Poets Press.

27 Rae Armantrout is the author of, among other books, *Precedence* (Burning Deck, 1985) and *Extremities*. She is on the writing faculty of the University of California at San Diego. Poet and prose writer Fanny Howe chairs the Writing Department at the University of California at San Diego. Recent books include *The Deep North* (Sun and Moon) and *Famous Questions*.

THE POETRY PROJECT FEBRUARY/MARCH CALENDAR OF EVENTS

FEBRUARY

- | | | | |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 | MEMORIAL READING FOR TIM DLUGOS, 3 p.m. free | 13 | ROBERT HERSHON
GARY LENHART |
| 4 | OPEN READING | 14 | THE POETRY PROJECT LOVER'S RAFFLE, 7 p.m. |
| 6 | JIM CARROLL
LA LOCA | 17 | LECTURE; 2 TALKS ON TRANSLATION
by SHU SHUAI & NINA ZIVANCEVIC, 7 p.m. |
| 6-7 | FILM/READING: THE PERSONAL FILE
OF ANNA AKHMATOVA
8 p.m., \$10, Anthology Film Archives, 32 2nd Ave., NYC | 18 | JACKIE JOHNSON
MICHAEL WEAVER |
| 11 | XUE DI, translations by Iona Crook
and Keith Waldrop
BEI LING, translations by Lin May Lung | 20 | WILLIAM CORBETT
C.D. WRIGHT |
| | | 25 | TOM ELLIS
GIL OTT |
| | | 27 | GREGORY CORSO
TAYLOR MEAD |

MARCH

- | | | | |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4 | OPEN READING | 18 | JANOS GAT, read by Joe Bowie &
surprise guests, music by Lenny Kaye
JONATHON ELLIOTT & SUSAN KOUQUELL,
a sound/word collaboration |
| 6 | SHARON MESMER
MERVYN TAYLOR | 20 | ARAM SAROYAN
LEWIS WARSH |
| 7&10 | POETRY FILMS & VIDEOS, at Anthology Film Archives | 25 | DENNIS BARONE
PETER GANICK |
| 11 | CHERYL FISH
SIGRID NUNEZ
M.L. LIEBLER | 27 | RAE ARMANTROUT
FANNY HOWE |
| 13 | MIGUEL ALGARIN
AMIRI BARAKA | | |
| 14-30 | POETS/PAINTERS COLLABORATIONS
Brooke Alexander Editions, 476 Broome St., NYC | | |

The Poetry Project

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EVENTS BEGIN AT 8PM UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED: ADMISSION BY CONTRIBUTION OF \$5.00.
PROGRAM SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

WRITING WORKSHOPS

THE WRITER AS TRANSLATOR OF EXPERIENCE

Thursdays at 7 pm (February 7 - April 25)

Taught by Jaime Manrique. A workshop for writers who are interested in exploring in fictional terms the texture of their lives—what is commonly called experience. The participants will be asked to focus on some aspect of their preoccupations, and to explore them in fictional/memoir form to discover their unique voices.

Jaime Manrique is the author of several books of fiction, poetry and criticism in English and Spanish. In April 1991, Vehicle Editions will publish his epic poem *Christopher Columbus on His Deathbed*. He is currently Writer-in-Residence at the New School for Social Research.

EXPERIMENTS IN POETRY

Fridays at 7 pm (February 8 - April 26)

Taught by Bernadette Mayer. Experiments in poetry, including prose, exercises, rehearsals, practices, intentions. Limited to 20 students.

Bernadette Mayer is the author of numerous books of poetry and experimental prose including *The Formal Field of Kissing* (Catchword Papers), *Utopia* and *Midwinter Day*. She co-authored with Dale Worsley, *The Art of Science Writing* (Teachers and Writers, 1989).

THE VISUAL AND THE VERBAL

Saturdays at 12 noon (February 9 - April 27)

Taught by Susan Cataldo. A class for visual artists who write and writers who are also visual artists who want to write about their daily lives and their work. We will look at and discuss all forms of art. All types of writing (poetry, prose, journal writing and letter writing). The workshop will develop ideas about how to proceed with making a manuscript that represents a few months of work you want to talk about. Collaborations will be encouraged.

Susan Cataldo is a poet and photographer. She is the author of *Brooklyn-Queens Day* and edited *Little Light Magazine*.

REGISTRATION FEES

Registration for the workshops costs \$100: \$50 for a year-long membership in the Poetry Project plus \$50 annual workshop fee. Current members of the Project need only pay \$50 at time of registration, providing they renew their regular membership when it expires.

POETRY FILMS & VIDEOS

at *Anthology Film Archives*, 32 2nd Ave./477-2714

February 6-7: "The Personal File of Anna Akhmatova." A Russian film by Semyon Aranovitch. Benefit for the Poetry Project. \$10.

March 7 (8 pm) & March 10 (5 pm) Videos by Vivian Bittencourt based on Kenneth Koch's *1001 Avant-Garde Plays*. Interviews with Black Mountain poets. Films based on Zukovsky poems. \$5.

LECTURE FEBRUARY 17

TWO TALKS ON TRANSLATION

Sunday, February 17, 7 p.m.

Shu Shuai will discuss essential characteristics of Chinese classical poetry: brevity, pictorial quality, allusive elements and visual effects of text. Poems (from 3000 B.C. to 1101 A.D.) will be read in Chinese and English and diagrammed. Nina Zivancevic will discuss contemporary Yugoslav poetry and the challenges of translating poetry written in the Cyrillic alphabet; the influence of Mayakovsky, Akhmatova; and the work of Yugoslav poets Dusko Novakovic, Sinan Gudzevic, Snezna Minic and her own.

Shu Shuai is a poet and translator. He has taught American Literature at Hunan's Teacher's University and Sichuan Institute of Foreign Languages. A section of his translation of Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* has appeared in *Yunnan Youth in the Border Areas*.

Among Nina Zivancevic's books of poetry are *The Spirit of the Renaissance* (Prosvet) and *More or Less Urgent*. She is also the author of a novel, *As I Said Before*.

THE POETRY PROJECT

LOVER'S RAFFLE

Big Drawing on Valentine's Day 1991
Thursday, February 14, beginning at 7 p.m.

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*Contributions are tax-deductible to the limit of the law. Prizes worth more than \$500 will be reported to the IRS as income.

poets/painters collaborations

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MARCH 14-MARCH 30, 1991

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IN MEMORIAM

MICHAEL SCHOLNICK

1953-1990

Michael Scholnick died suddenly on November 5, 1990. He was 37 years old. The following is a memorial in his honor put together by the Poetry Project and his friends.

HEROISM

You chuckle alone throat beats
Blood that intensifies emptiness
Day as well wheel a hammer cleat
Spiked something moodless

Sure tramps walk gaining by
All the same you recognize a coat
What unknown territory is priestly
Germane vision your head promotes

Aloud engine in a shack
There's quiche in spotless heaven
And sack to trade and plenty of Gaelic
Though bodiless uneven

Death from Time and Love a sheet separate
Like you loosely wrapped nothing to do with it

IN MARCH

Bus routes intertwine
The managed surroundings,
A toxic environment
Allotted trees

Sweet month, convictions,
Cherubic sparrows instruct,
Impervious old folk
Purchase breads

Globe's ethno-centric
Civilities distress,
Laden with trends
And familiarity

Blessings in stride,
In mind to forefend,
Plant critical seeds,
Encourage sentiment

Two poems by Michael Scholnick

From the first Michael's poems were sharp, deep, dense. He was also very funny, ever ready with a witticism at the inappropriate moment. He never cut his cloth to suit the occasion. His marathon readings gained a fame all their own. I so much enjoyed hearing Michael read that I never noticed that he was overlong until people began to make their way toward the exit. Then I would squirm a bit until, touched by the stamina and resolve with which Michael would just put his head down and continue on his course, I could give myself over to the extraordinary moment.

Michael's bravery was manifested more significantly in his poems, poems that demand readers deal with them in the same uncompromising spirit in which they were composed. Michael thought that the worst thing you could say of a poem was that it was typical of something. His poems were not typical of anything. Like him, they were fresh, in every sense of the word. He had an innate dislike of the easy, even when the easy was easier for everyone. He was sharp enough not to confuse it with the graceful, which he chased unflaggingly. But there was something about Michael of the Hebrew prophets ("You soar, you continuously rage"). He was one of the most ethical people I've ever met. Maybe the easy just didn't strike him as righteous.

In his presence I always felt alert, awake. I don't think I'm the only one who noticed that for one so otherworldly, he was curiously ambitious for thisworldly success. He felt urgently a desire to share his vision with others, was intolerant of indifference in any form, and would take personal offense at those who took casually an obligation. Michael never failed to find it scandalous that artists, engaged with the soul's most intimate concerns, could be lackadaisical, impious, or as unscrupulous as politicians. He had a special talent for recognizing the inauthentic and insincere. I know of no one who lived every moment so determined to fully exercise every talent he was given. His gifts were rare, and those of us who loved his poems grieve that there will be no more of them.

Gary Lenhart 12/5/90



I'd like to speak about Michael as a poet and thinker. Michael had an intriguing mind. Michael always made surprising and unusual perceptions and connections. He'd say something that could spark, jolt you, make you blink. Those perceptions seemed so different I felt he was connected to some other world, not like left field, but really a higher spiritual sphere. There was something sphinx-like and enigmatic about him. I have to admit I didn't always understand what he said. But he spoke and wrote with such sincerity and conviction that I believed him and I was challenged by him.

I'd like to say something about Michael as a friend. It seems that when you have children, a part of your life, that life of family, expands continually while that part of your life as a poet and artist seems to shrink, and sometimes it seems that being a poet and artist becomes an increasingly private affair. But Michael was always there.....at our readings, always interested in what we were doing even when we didn't have readings. And he was interested in us as a family and enjoyed our children so that he helped bring that seemingly shrinking part into our larger life.

As to Michael's character, Michael was a person of the highest integrity. He was independent, solid and grounded to his principles like a tree. I could count on him to be honest and ethical. I never knew him to be mean, or small or petty. I never heard him say anything in bitterness though I know he had known deep sorrows in his life. Michael was the kind of person who could take a negative experience and look at it as something positive, something that gave to him instead of taking from him. He was philosophical that way and Nellie confirmed that for me when she told me he would often say to her that everyone has something good to offer and you look for that. He was accepting of what you had to give. Michael was a private person even to those close to him. He discovered great joy and fulfillment in his daughter Elizabeth now 21 months old. He pursued his personal goals. I admired him and he inspired me. He had just finished his Masters in English from NYU and he finally had the good fortune of finding a challenging position teaching at the Bronx High School of Science. After only a year there he had already touched the lives of many of his students. Michael had a quiet enduring presence. I feel that now. Michael had a noble spirit. He was a gentle and generous soul. He has left a big hole in my life and in Bob's life. And we're not the only ones.

Rochelle Kraut

The energy of Michael Scholnick's words on the page is visible and it's that action that's thrilling to me. I always thought of Michael as chiseling his words out of the granite of experience and observation. He sculpted his poems into new forms of matter that rearranged images and response into a startling new way of seeing and responding. Feelings drive his poems and feelings are released like sweat from the surface of every line and phrase. His craft was at the stage where he could give the physicality of words to his attachments in a way that transferred to a reader the fervency and blessedness he felt for those attachments.

Discussions with Michael were energizing because his passion was inspiring. He was able to infect you with his vitality. He wrote letters to the *Times*. He brought the same devotion to everything he was involved in whether it was the Mets; the students he taught English and health to at Bronx Science; listening to Lightning Hopkins; gaining his Master's degree; writing poetry, plays, art and literary criticism, stories; and above all his wife, Nellie and baby daughter, Elizabeth. He was a strong coffee kind of guy.

On a drive around not too long ago, he showed me the neighborhood in the Bronx where he grew up. He travelled to Puerto Rico as an all-star third baseman in that region's Little League. I first met him at Rutgers University when a mutual friend, Deborah Holland, introduced him as someone who loves Bob Dylan as much as you do. I remember connecting to his reading a poem to Billie Holiday in a basement bar then. The summer of 1975, he lived in the Catskills where I went to visit. I stayed, he moved into Manhattan leaving behind his VW bug for me and Barry Kornbluh to drive into the ground. He was living with Gary Lenhart on East 9th Street when I moved to Manhattan and I crashed with them for awhile. Friendship led to the three of us beginning *Mag City*. As an editor, Michael was sure of his choices and vocal bringing manuscripts to the discussion table. The great amount of time the three of us spent together was pure pleasure for me.

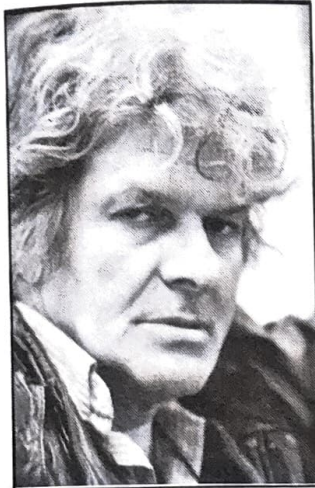
The intense response—surprise, shock, grief, and befuddlement—of his family, friends, students and colleagues at his passing was evidence of the affection and respect he'd earned from those various communities. His passing leaves a noticeable vacancy in my life.

Greg Masters

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REVIEWS

LEASES, by Robert Fitterman,
Periphery (c/o Noonan, 44 Powers St., Brooklyn, NY 11211), \$40
cloth;

AMONG THE CYNICS, by Robert Fitterman,
Singing Horse (P.O. Box 40034, Philadelphia, PA 19106), \$4 paper.

Short of the university, "Out of the Blue" is pretty much how a poem will reach us now, rounding the millennial clubhouse bend, if it reaches us at all:

OUT OF THE BLUE

and as tho
suddenly

she was standing
dead center of the room

naked, dripping
holding the bathtub

plug in her hand.

This is the initial poem in *Leases*, Robert Fitterman's first collection. It impresses by virtue of its downward rush into consciousness, as though a dancer had called attention to her hands raised to shoulder level, rapidly pushed them down toward the parallel floor, then moved her head subtly to recall the audience to her changed expression. In Fitterman's poem the gesture spotlights a curious combination of the banal and a traditionally loaded model. It also results in the presence of a poem and its poet. Not magic exactly, but akin to its pleasures.

Whitman says we should ask "what kind of temper and faith report" to us from within a poem. And surely it must mean something to have a skillful poet begin his career with the figure of a nude woman holding a bathtub plug in her hand. Is she the muse of a saving juice? (One thinks of Creeley's "Be wet with a decent happiness", for example.) The puller of its plug? Comfort? Threat? Emphasizing the appearance of the figure rather than his response to it, Fitterman lets muse image rest in all its abundant suggestiveness, unconcealed, center stage.

The best of the poems in *Leases* and *Among the Cynics* share many of "Out of the Blue"'s virtues. They are unobtrusively musical, impulses both to ground and subvert are kept at the ready, and Fitterman's love for the ordinary, specific grain of daily life and language are foregrounded. The temper is patient, modest, wary of larger claims. The poet's faith is in detail and particular human presence. Fitterman is best with a Blackburnian notation, evoking the complications of an apparently unextraordinary moment, as in "Hot in a Parked Car": "Scorching out/the cigarette in the dash-board, damn!/90 degrees if any-/thing, say/a line of

poetry/the mind stirs...//Rips in black vinyl/burns in the footmat/sweat races..."

The issue becomes, as always, how to update the means of notation, to make it commensurate with one's own perception rather than an inherited notion of the poem, regardless of how traditional or radical a poetry might result. As one of the freshest of the younger poets to appear recently in small magazines, Fitterman's work becomes something of a test case wherein techniques are examined for their ability to convey and create poetic value.

Among the Cynics sees Fitterman employing more recent models as he experiments beyond the visuals and simpler rhetorical devices of *Leases*. He stresses syntactic instability or slippage, often successfully, as in the following, from "A Tree Among Trees":

If I stay with you long enough
and believe me there is no passion

what burden you'd hold
the world upon your

limp branches
scrape the purpling

sky. It is a barren field the very
darkest maroon.

At other times the effect is of a general circumspectness, and one wishes for less syntax and more Fitterman. For all the wariness of emotion implied in the particular brand of syntactic disjunction practiced in these poems, the *Cynics* of the chapbook's title recalls Fitterman's stronger impulse, both more figurative and trusting in its attachments to the quotidian. Carried over from *Leases*, "Cynic" serves as the epigraph to the new book and embodies the poet's ambivalence with regard to the poem's ability to establish value: "the sparrow goes/only so far/into the yard//stops. resumes./following it take/flight gladly one//could say yes/the world sings/could say that/the bird sings/sent to men or/tricks!"

Is the cynic the sparrow who "goes only so far...or tricks"? Or is he among the "men," makers of language, confused in their enterprise? Is the sparrow diffidence? Health? A stronger irony might draw us in to these questions more fully than "Cynic" does, and in fact Fitterman's newest work, "Heaven and East Houston," recognizes the need for extension and moves toward a powerful synthesis of the conflicting impulses evident generally in *Leases* and *Among the Cynics*; but on the basis of these two books alone, Robert Fitterman establishes himself as a poet reporting directly from meaning's front, 1991.

Reviewed by Peter Cole

Feminine Hijinx, Dodie Bellamy,
Hanuman Books (P.O. Box 1070, Old Chelsea Station, NYC 10113, 1990),
154 pp., \$4.95., paper.

Dodie Bellamy is a storyteller for the information age. The two stories in *Feminine Hijinx* might well be called "dossier fictions." Her mode is to present a situation, a conflict, a matrix of characters, through various forms of data in a series of short paragraphs—observations, anecdotes, pronouncements, dialogues, lists, etc. There is a feeling of randomness at times, yet underlying it all is a very deliberate choreography. If this sounds like a rather cold approach well, it is and it isn't. Certainly Bellamy's investigations of sexuality & friendship & women & women & men & trust & betrayal have at their core the potential for the kind of overheated writing we are perhaps all too familiar with. But what we are given instead is an open form that allows us to construct our own versions of the stories, to draw our own conclusions. It is a kind of writing that doesn't draw us in, but rather haunts us well after we have put the book down.

The two pieces, "Complicity" and "The Debbies I Have Known," are of a piece. They are similarly constructed, share settings, and both feature Bellamy's fascinating sentences ("Dipping a Q-Tip in cheap baby oil, Debbie swears her grandmother killed her grandfather with carrot juice.") The narrator of each has a name — different ones — but both have the quality of the unnamed "I," and the same one at that. It is the narrator as investigator, both of the stories' ostensible subjects (or, more appropriately, objects) and, relentlessly, of the investigator herself.

It's difficult to give plot summaries of this kind of work, especially when plot is constantly refracted, interrupted and undermined. Indeed, plot itself might be seen as just another element of evidence (however unreliable) in Bellamy's work. Nevertheless, there are kernels of plot, and some that at least appear to be dominant. In "Complicity" it is the relationship of the narrator, Winnie, with a friend named Lizzie, whose shoplifting is a motif that anchors the piece. In a beautiful example of fiction imitating itself, Bellamy writes, "Lizzie wants to write a piece on shoplifting, to get it out of her system. I volunteer to help, suggesting scattered paragraphs, each one small enough to fit in your pocket, and nobody sure where anything comes from..." It takes place in the Bay Area, some of it does. Lizzie, a Chicago-born Latina, steals for Winnie. Winnie lives with a man named Jorge who asks that his name in the story be changed to Fire Hose. Winnie and Lizzie have shared beds, but not bodies. In Chicago, in the past, Winnie sleeps with Nance ("She was my lover

in high school and college. Really we'd been doing it since we were eleven but it had only been a year since we quit pretending to be asleep.") Winnie and Nance and Ralph are inseparable. Ralph shoplifts and he is their first man. Back in California, Lizzie has a low self-image.

"The Debbies I Have Known" could easily have been called "Duplicity." The "Debbies" are aspects of Debbie, the All-American girl from Michigan who the narrator meets in Chicago and remembers in San Francisco. In occasional interpolations, Oscar Wilde and Rosemary Hallward discuss photographs of Debbie. Rosemary, we eventually learn, is the "I" of the piece. This Oscar Wilde knows all about Castro Street. Among the other information included is *The Gospel According to Debbie* (sexual, that is, e.g. "Use deception at all times. That's the only way you'll get what you want.") The story chronicles Rosemary's friendship with and adoration of Debbie ("We never touched when we slept together. It didn't matter. I was delighted to be in her bed."), Debbie's hardening and eventual betrayal of Rosemary — or does Rosemary betray herself by trusting Debbie? And who, is Debbie? Are these Debbies Debbie's Debbies, or are they Rosemary's Debbies? Dodie Bellamy, fortunately, isn't telling.

Reviewed by Peter Cherches

MAGAZINES RECEIVED

American Letters & Commentary #3 (206 Windsor Pl. Brooklyn, NY 11215) Features Weatherly, Joseph Donahue, and Elizabeth Robinson. 116pp. \$5

Archive Newsletter #46, Fall 1990. (University of California, San Diego, The University Library, Mandeville, Dept. of Special Collections, 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA 92093). Features Eshleman, Silliman, Ratcliffe and Jessica Grim. 30 pp., no price listed.

Conjunctions #15 (P.O. Box 115, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY 12504). Special section: "33 Contemporary American Poets." 415 pp., \$9.95.

Hanging Loose #56 (231 Wyckoff St., Brooklyn, NY 11217). Features Tony Towle, Jim Gustafson, Joel Lewis, and Ferd Eggan. 80 pp., \$3.50.

Intent, Vol. 2, #1 (201 Crescent Ave., Buffalo, NY 14214). Features Tom Clark, Simone Weil, Diane DiPrima and Charles Bernstein. 23 pp., no price listed.

Salt Lick Magazine, Vol. IV, nos. 1&2 (1804 East 18 1/2 St., Austin, TX 78722). Features Sheila Murphy, Michael Lally and Creeley. (Beautifully produced!) 59 pp., \$6.

Transfer #5 (Attn: Gary Lenhart, 248 W. 105 St., Apt. 6-D, NYC 10025). Features Reagan Upshaw, Dick Gallup, Nina Zivancevic, Lewis Warsh, and the late Michael Scholnick on James Schuyler. 136 pp., \$5.

**LEAP YEAR DAY: NEW AND
SELECTED POEMS**, by Maxine Chernoff, Another
Chicago Press (PO Box 11223, Chicago, IL 60611, 1990), 142 pp.,
\$9.95, paper.

"A word for everything leaves/the door ajar in the fact"
...writes Maxine Chernoff in "Poised" one of the new
poems from *Leap Year Day*. "A word for everything"
might serve as the prevailing wish, the desire that drives
her poems and prose poems forward. Not "for" in the
sense of substituting or describing life with a precisely
rendered text with a word for everying, but "a word"
that springs the poem open, that jars factuality. The
subject of the poems, the personas that inhabit her
prose poems, are, finally, the words themselves:
"wistfulness," "the horizontal brigade," "blue shiny
plums," "suspuration humidior, revivify."

Throughout the changes in the shape of her work,
Chernoff is most concerned with, and curious about,
the potential and specific qualities of the individual
pieces of language. Almost as though she is
magnetically drawn to her vocabulary.

I thought the word adhesive deserves
more credit.

And in "Song"—

Clarity of insistence
gauche or gone
radiates a corner
sliced whole and small

...which implies the charged particulars of an instance
you might want to know more about. The consonance
(sympathetic vibration, resonance) of the sound
particles, though, orders the meanings here, not the
other way around.

As a poet, Chernoff has primarily been viewed as a
fabulist, a creator of charmed, odd fictions that share
ground with Max Jacob, and Russell Edson, among
others. I believe this book will focus attention on the
range of her writing. Certainly, the prose poems
selected from her early books, *A Vegetable Emergency*,
and *Utopia TV Store*, remain weird. Objects of
everyday life are volatile, moody, transgressive. Our
neighbors, Ben Franklin, Fred Astaire, fathers, are
impulsive sensation seekers, a mystery to themselves.
As likely to wear antlers to dinner as to "lie naked on
the water," where "the electric current traveled through
his body, setting his wooden teeth aflame." The
exuberance of "plain" American pop vernacular, and
Chernoff's ability to intimate a surrealist play of
elements, while avoiding contrivance, makes her prose
poems fun. Anti-lugubrious. To read them side by side
with the slender, vertical poems and more auto-
biographical pieces makes apparent the continuity of
her interests and obsessions. Despite her games with

language, the writing here is not whimsical.
These poems experiment with a variety of strategies
regarding death. "A lion won't attack if you have a
sense of humor;" "The mad bomber turns to his wife
and says, I'll give up my career for you. She pictures his
delicate bomb defusing, like scenes from a home movie
played backwards;" "What bliss when something
intervenes and a doomed letter, like a terminally ill
patient is saved."

Anxiety about giving birth, the strange social roles of
being a parent, being a child, a wife and a husband, are
present in her juxtapositions of scale. "Many characters
seem trapazoidal," she writes. And in "The Meaning of
Anxiety" she admonishes herself and us: "Try to relax.
List the potential murders, the disappearances. See the
globe become a blue balloon held by a schoolboy."

History, literary, personal and otherwise is an oblique
pressure and unfailing human predicament. She
acknowledges the impossibility of the modernist
scheme while admitting its allure: "the dumbness of
tradition/shoving me towards a sideways reckoning/
an imperative satisfaction."

There's always Paris, sure, but the American thing, the
juncture of immigrations where "Sunday drives down
Chicago streets. We'd pass the Cracker Jack Factory
with its giant Cracker Jack propped on the lawn," and
where...

we rode home
in my sister's Studebaker, the color of toast
with jelly, and my sister cried. I thought
shit fuck piss on JFK for making her so sad

...makes the texture of the writing new, responsive to
our freaked out landscape.

The prose poems work with elisions in logic. The
pressure is to edit vertically and extend horizontally so
that a lot is going to happen in a sentence. The poems
she writes from *New Faces of 1952* on, are wound up
ribbons of thought in which each line pivots from the
last, sailing on its own energy, then coiling back. In this
fast, controlled measure Chernoff gets a lot in.

You want a bowl of pears
whose contours never ripen,
some somber cannon smoke
reminding
us of loss. Controlled grief
to know our fingers touch
what we own separately
as if to say I crown you each
with logic, lengthening your shapes
to serve what I imagine

A few selections from the 1987 *Japan* are tucked inside
Leap Year Day. Chernoff and her editors did a fine job

THE YELLOW HEART, Pablo Neruda. Translated
by William O'Daly. Copper Canyon Press (P.O. Box 271, Port
Townsend, WA 98368, 1990), 109 pp., \$10 paper..

Art Taylor, the drummer, was on WKCR last week listening to recordings he 'd made as a teenager, with Charlie Parker. After "Love For Sale," he said, chagrined: "That was a *safe* drum solo."

William O'Daly performs a series of safe drum solos in his Neruda translations, here. Translation is mostly a choice between 2 words, and usually one finds, on O'Daly's side of the page, the poetic word, and on Neruda's (this is a bilingual edition) the *scientific* one. The best example is the end of "Enigma For The Worried":

And we will possess a satanic power:
to turn back or speed up the hours:
to arrive at birth or at death
like an engine stolen from the infinite .

Y dispondremos de un poder satanico
volver atras o acelerar las horas:
llegar al nacimiento o la muerte
como un motor robado al infinito .

"Engine" is a Miltonic word; "motor" is Pablo's.

Translating is a paradox like searching for the Perfect Master ("How can I know a Master is perfect unless I am? And if I *am* perfect, I don't need one.") A lesser poet can't translate a greater one, and a greater poet *needn't* translate a lesser.

O'Daly's versions, besides giving a homogenized feeling to the poems, often misplace their logic, so that the endings seem too sudden. Neruda's poems rely on a surrealist mathematics, where 4 ghosts equal one piano ("An Untenable Situation") or 2 swans equal 18 chrysanthemums ("Precious Stone"). The last line is the sum, and if the terms aren't exact, it'll be 369 instead of 362, and will sound dumb.

Luckily, Neruda's real *poem* is always on hand, and you can retranslate it yourself, using O'Daly as a guide. Bilingual books are the true anarchist literature.

I guessed these were late poems, by their softness and self-doubt, and in fact Neruda wrote them while he had cancer and Chile had the CIA, overthrowing its gov't. (1973). They form a crafty volume, like *Dead Souls*, which leads to a big, unexpected punchline, in "Suburbs." Throughout the book, the narrator is a cautious, middle-aged man, just like his neighbors, but in the last poem he suddenly speaks of those *outside* the suburbs (the homeless?):

...They seemed so much like us
until they were robbed of their laurels,
their medals, their titles, their names.

I felt this was not the book Neruda *wanted* to write. He'd preferred a headier, disputative book, but could only write the one he was given.

Here is the shortest poem:

Another

From so often travelling in a region
not charted in books
I grew accustomed to stubborn lands
where nobody ever asked me
whether I like lettuces
or if I prefer mint
like the elephants devour.
And from offering no answers,
I have a yellow heart.

Reviewed by Sparrow

BOOKS RECEIVED

Wanda Coleman, *African Sleeping Sickness: Stories and Poems*, Black Sparrow Press (24 Tenth St., Santa Rosa, CA 95401, 1990). 332 pp., \$13 paper, \$25 cloth.

Alan Davies, *Candor*, O Books (5729 Clover Dr., Oakland, CA 94618, 1990), 135 pp., \$9 paper.

Herbert Huncke, *Guilty of Everything: The Autobiography of Herbert Huncke*, intro. by William S. Burroughs, Paragon House (90 Fifth Ave., NYC 10011, 1990). \$19.95 cloth.

Eliot Katz, *Space and Other Poems for Love, Laughs and Social Transformation*, Northern Lights Publishing Co. (493 College Ave., Orono, Maine 04473, 1990). 160 pp., \$9.95 paper.

Jack Kerouac, *Safe in Heaven Dead*. Interviews compiled and edited by Michael White, Hanuman (P.O. Box 1070, Old Chelsea Station, NYC 10113, 1990). 125 pp., \$4.95 paper.

Dorothy Trujillo Lusk, *Redactive*, Talon Books (201/1019 E. Cordova, Vancouver, British Columbia, V6A1M8, Canada, 1990). 63 pp., paper. No price listed.

James Ridgeway, *Blood in the Face: The Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations, Nazi Skinheads and the Rise of a New White Culture*, Thunder's Mouth Press (54 Greene St., Suite 45, NYC 10013, 1991). 203 pp., \$18.95 paper, \$29.95 cloth.

Rosmarie Waldrop (in collaboration with artist Jennifer Macdonald), *Peculiar Motions*, Kelsey St. Press (P.O. Box 9235, Berkeley, CA 94709, 1990), 40 pp., \$9 paper.

Peter Wessel, *In Place of Absence*, Chestnut Hills Press (541 Piccadilly Rd., Towson, MD 21204, 1990). 63 pp., \$6.95 paper.

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