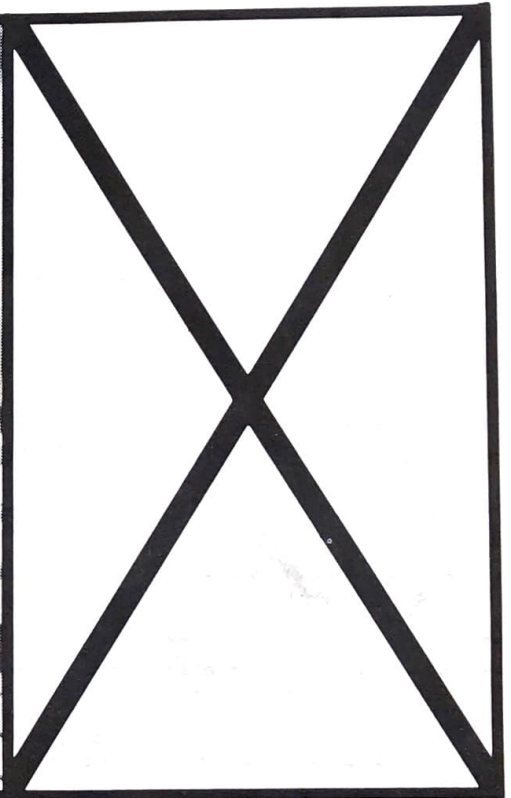
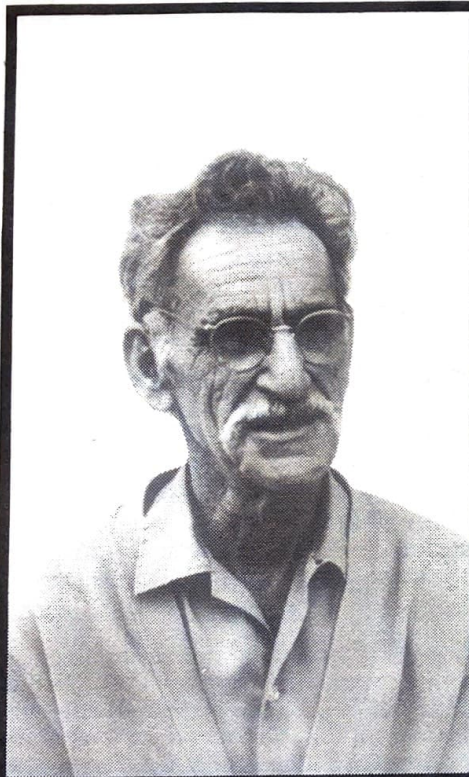


# POETRY PROJECT

The Newsletter of The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery

Issue 108, October 1984 \$1.00

ANNE RESOR LAUGHLIN, COURTESY OF NEW DIRECTIONS



*George Oppen—  
In Memoriam  
by Hugh Kenner*

*Red Grooms:  
An Interview  
by Anne Waldman*

*Censorship  
How Writers  
Can Fight It*

**NEW STAFF AT THE POETRY PROJECT \* NYSCA MONEY FOR WRITERS \*  
A FEAST OF READINGS & PERFORMANCES \* ART AGAINST APARTHEID**

**AND OUR EXPANDED REVIEW SECTION: DE LYNN ON DENNIS COOPER,  
DARRAGH ON BERNADETTE MAYER, FRIEDMAN ON BRAD GOOCH,  
GODFREY ON BOB PERELMAN, CLARK ON HOWARD HART,  
SAVAGE ON LORNA SMEDMAN, BRODEY ON CLARK ON KEROUAC**

# Editorial

One of the first things I did in preparing this, my first issue as editor of the *Newsletter*, was to climb the shaky ladder to the loft above the Poetry Project office, where ten file cabinets containing eighteen years' worth of history are crammed into a shallow crawlspace. From a drawer, I extricated Issue 1 of this publication, edited by Ron Padgett and misdated 1 December 1972 ("Obviously, the year is 1973" read the correction in the following issue). My favorite news item is appended to a list of Bill Zavatsky's projected publications for the year: "Zavatsky, whose apartment is directly across the airshaft from Lionel Trilling's, claims that Trilling dresses up in bizarre costumes and watches 'Let's Make a Deal' on television every afternoon."

Although the format of the current issue differs significantly from the two mimeographed pages of the first effort, the *Newsletter's* purpose is largely unchanged. We exist to provide news, information, opinions and reflections of interest and value to the poetry community and our friends.

That community has grown drastically in the past eleven years, to the point where The Poetry Project is now the largest and most active literary center in the United States. Some of our local heroes are now among America's most admired writers; others remain known mainly to the cognoscenti here, on the Lower East Side. But whatever has happened to individual literary reputations, more poets are writing more poetry—good, bad, and indifferent—than ever before. The clamor may occasionally make those who remember them long for the halcyon Fifties, when (as one veteran of the scene told me) the reason all the artists were at the Cedar Tavern was that there weren't that many artists. But mostly, the poetry explosion should be a source of gladness. It seems so twentieth century, so much the fulfillment of the sci-fi future we expected as children:

we're in a "hands-on" job working with pure energy, not of the atom, but of the American language.

Yet for all the activity, there are still few tangible rewards for poets. Publication by commercial presses is more difficult than ever, and financial problems have forced many small presses to close. Even writers whose work reaches tens of thousands find little in the way of material rewards—certainly when compared to even the youngest of successful painters, for instance.

Unless poets are utterly deluded, we aren't spending our time making poems for fame, for glory, or for money. We're doing it largely for the love of the work itself. We're serious about it; that's the only possible reason we're still writing. I perceive the *Newsletter* as a tool for the serious poet, providing information, critical acuity, and opportunities for professional growth.

This issue is intended to be a step in that direction. Here you will find an appreciation of one of the best American poets of our century—George Oppen—by one of the best critics of our time, Hugh Kenner. You will learn how you can participate in the citywide activities on censorship taking place this month. You will discover a possible new source of funding for your career. You will sit in on a conversation between poet Anne Waldman and painter Red Grooms, a longtime friend of the Poetry Project. And you'll learn what poets are writing, thinking, and doing in reviews, schedules of events, news stories, announcements, and—yes—poems, too.

I hope this *Newsletter* conveys some of the excitement we're feeling at The Poetry Project as the 1984-1985 season begins. And I hope you will be able to participate in our reading and workshop programs. They all exist for you.

This issue is dedicated to our Muse. She lives.

—Tim Dlugos

## Sorrento Alice Notley

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Z Press. Michael Friedman edited *Upstart*, the student arts magazine at Columbia University. He is currently studying law at Duke. His first collection, *Distinctive Belt*, will be published by Mary House early next year. Tom Clark's newest collection of poems is *Paradise Resisted* from Black Sparrow Press. *Tom Savage* is editor of *Gandhabba* magazine and of *Connaissez-Vous Maitre Eckhart?*, an anthology from the Poetry Project's spring translation workshop. Jim Brodey, poet extraordinaire, is inimitable.

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**POETRY PROJECT**, The Newsletter of The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery. Second Avenue at East 10th Street, New York NY 10003. (212) 674-0910.

The Newsletter is published monthly October through May. Subscriptions: \$7 a year for individuals, \$12 a year for institutions. Advertisers please write for rate sheets. Closing for November issue: October 12, 1984.

The Poetry Project Newsletter is published by The Poetry Project which receives funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council for the Arts, as well as from the Department of Cultural Affairs of New York City, the New York Council for the Humanities, and other foundation, corporate and individual donors, as well as support from its members.

Tim Dlugos, Editor

Marc Nasdor, Production Director

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### OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Hugh Kenner is the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of The Humanities at The Johns Hopkins University. His most recent book is *Cast a Cold Eye: Modern Irish Writers*. Anne Waldman is a former Director of The Poetry Project. She teaches at the Naropa Institute in Boulder. Her most recent collection is *Makeup on Empty Space*, published by Toothpaste Press earlier this year. Jane DeLynn is the author of two novels, *Some Do* and *In Thrall*. A chapbook of prose, *Via Negativa*, will soon appear from Primary Writing. Tina Darragh's book on the corner to off the corner was published by Sun and Moon Press. Her work has appeared in *The Paris Review*. John Godfrey's new book of poems, *Where the Weather Suits My Clothes*, will be out this fall from

# New Staff at the Poetry Project

The Poetry Project begins its nineteenth season with new faces in most of its administrative positions.

**Eileen Myles** is the new Artistic Director. She is the author of two books of poems, *A Fresh Young Voice from the Plains* (Power Mad Press, New York, 1982) and *Sappho's Boat* (Little Caesar Press, Los Angeles, 1982). A 1971 graduate of the University of Massachusetts at Boston, she has worked with The Poetry Project as a member of its Advisory Board (1980-1982), a writing workshop leader (1980), and coordinator of the 1982 reading series at the Nuyorican Poet's Cafe, which the Poetry Project co-sponsored.

Eileen has read her poems at the Museum of Modern Art, P.S. 1, and many other places in New York. She has also read her work and led workshops at Naropa Institute in Boulder and at the Beyond Baroque Foundation in Los Angeles. She was a recipient of a New York State CAPS grant in 1980.

**Patricia Jones** is the Poetry Project's new Program Coordinator. She is the author of *Mythologizing Always* (Telephone Books, 1981) and co-publisher of *Ordinary Women: An Anthology of New York City Women Poets* (1978). She was administrator of the *Heresies Women's Collective*, and Grants Programs Director of the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines. A Member of the Poets and Writers Committee of Artist's Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America, she also serves on the boards of The Writer's Community and Mabou Mines Experimental Theater Company.

Patricia was a 1983-1984 recipient of a New York State CAPS grant. She graduated in 1973 from Southwestern University in Memphis.

**Tim Dlugos** is the new editor of the *Poetry Project Newsletter*. A contributing editor of *Christopher Street* magazine since 1977, he was the first editor of Ralph Nader's *Public Citizen* newspaper. His most recent collection of poems is *Entre Nous* (Little Caesar Press, 1982.)

**Charles Bernstein** will coordinate the Project's monthly lecture series on poetics, St. Mark's Talks. Charles is the author of many books, among them *Resistance* (Awede Press, 1983) and the forthcoming *Content's Dream: Essays 1975-1984*. A founder of the groundbreaking magazine *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, he is coeditor of *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1984).

Returning for a second year as coordinators of the Monday Night Poetry and Performance Series will be **Marc Nasdor** and **Chris Kraus**. Marc, a former Baltimorean, also co-directs the Committee for International Poetry, and is a member of the Poets and Writers Committee of Artists' Call. Chris is a film and performance director. Her most recent work is the forthcoming film *The Age of Reason/The Golden Bowl*. She received a multi-media fellowship award from CAPS in 1984.

## A Message from the New Artistic Director

The Mad Reign of Pope Eileen? In 1984? Today I'm all for such splashy enticements as posters on the streets—Rah-Rah, Poetry Project—and moving the Wednesday series into the Sanctuary of St. Mark's—since we're in a church, we should use it. I'm not so opposed to academic poetry, but religious poetry would be really interesting. Being a poet is an odd, low-paying vocation like a saint. I think the most magnificent saints, in the course of doing it for themselves, found someone was watching. Shy poets will be found, but apologetic poets are an anathema. Poets-as-this, Poets-as-that. I'm really sick of being accused (or of accusing myself) of practicing a second-rate art



The 1984-1985 staff of The Poetry Project. From left: Marc Nasdor, Charles Bernstein, Tim Dlugos, Alice Notley, Eileen Myles, Patricia Jones, Dennis Cooper. Not pictured: Chris Kraus.

form, feeling obliged to do it to music, or in front of a screen so I can get people to look. They're looking, don't worry. I'm into poem essence; they'll smell it from the street and come in. And it might be interesting to see poets put their papers down, working with less rather than more, see how poems change if we simply knew our work rather than read it. I'm interested in how poems turn into theater, which Brecht and Shakespeare recognized as a valid transformation. So I'm wild about a new poets' theater starting here, which will happen in the fall. It's a fabulous time for New York Art and its guests—falling leaves, fellow poets, and those who really love to listen.

—Eileen Myles

## A Message from the New Coordinator

The Poetry Project means many different things to different people. To me, it means the place where experiment and tradition converse continuously in words, rhythm, mood, emotion. As Program Coordinator, I want to see that conversation grow to include poets and writers of color, feminists, progressive poets for whom politics and art have never been seen as mutually exclusive. The Project has often been accused—with some justification—of being closed to writers of color, to women writers, to those for whom *academy* is not a bad word. Previous directors and coordinators have slowly opened up the Project to poets outside the immediate East Village/metropolitan New York community, but there needs to be an even greater effort to include writers who have established reputations and those for whom *establishment* is a bad word. In my tenure as the Program Coordinator I want to continue to open up the Project to a variety of poets and writers and to always keep in mind St. Mark's greatest strength: the willingness to present poets who are just discovering their vision, developing their voices. Every conversation needs that "new kid at the table." St. Mark's must continue to make a welcome table for writers. And I hope to be able to always greet the new, the unexpected, and the absolutely necessary in contemporary poetics. Let the conversation continue!

—Patricia Jones

# Alice Notley, Dennis Cooper To Conduct 1984-1985 Writing Workshops

The Poetry Project's writing workshops for 1984-1985 will be led by two of New York's outstanding younger poets. Alice Notley is the author of twelve books of poems, most recently *Waltzing Matilda* (Kulchur Press). Two new books are about to appear: *Sorrento* (from Sherwood Press in Los Angeles) and *Margaret and Dusty* (from Toothpaste Press in West Branch, Iowa). She has taught workshops twice before at St. Mark's, and has taught at the Naropa Institute in Boulder.

Dennis Cooper's most recent books are *Safe* (Sea Horse Press, reviewed this issue) and *He Cried* (from Black Star Series in San Francisco). He has twice conducted the writing workshop at Beyond Baroque Foundation in Venice, California, where he was Director of Programming from 1979 to 1982. Dennis was Poet in Residence at the New Langton Arts Center in San Francisco this past summer. He is the editor and publisher of Little Caesar Press. His writings on visual art, film and music have appeared in the *L.A. Weekly*, *High Performance*, the *New York Native* and elsewhere.

Alice Notley's workshop will meet Tuesday evenings at 7:30, starting October 9. Dennis Cooper's workshop will meet Fridays at 7:30, starting October 12. Tuition is free. Both workshops will meet in St. Mark's Parish Hall.

## THE FRIDAY NIGHT WRITING WORKSHOP

The workshop is open to writers serious about writing, whatever their stage of development. Poetry, prose poems, and short prose (or short sections of prose) are the concentration. Expect the following: (1) Participants' work will be duplicated and read

aloud, followed by a brief group discussion. (2) Part of each class will involve the director's presentation of works by other artists which he thinks will be instructive. These may include a piece of writing (poetry, prose, theory), a work of visual art and/or performance, a piece of music, a contemporary issue which bears on the creation or appreciation of the written word, a related film or videotape, a guest artist who will present work and lend his or her expertise to the analysis of work created by class members. (3) Participants will also be encouraged to bring in outside work and ideas for discussion. (4) Occasional field trips. (5) Occasional assignments.

—Dennis Cooper

## THE TUESDAY NIGHT WRITING WORKSHOP

I expect my workshop will be similar to past Alice Notley workshops: same old format, assignments, xeroxes, forms, occasions, geometries, kinds of poems, speculations on and practice of the lofty and the silly. I assume I've learned a little more since the last time I taught, and that I've a little more to learn in the teaching. If not, boo hoo. Other possible issues: goofy works, "description," dreams (the new gen), school of Susie Timmons, rejuvenation\* of the "found work," the "line," how to be like Elinor and Maggie, how to cultivate inventiveness, strategies for dry spell, dictionaries, diaries, little plays, calligrams, titles, left-hand margins, how to get great theories and general self-improvement.

\*Tim Dlugos says this word should be "rehabilitation."

—Alice Notley

# This Month's Readers

Wednesday, October 3: *Alice Notley and Dennis Cooper*. Alice Notley and Dennis Cooper will lead the 1984-1985 Writing Workshops at the The Poetry Project.

Monday, October 8: *Jim Strahs and Nancy Reilly*. Jim Strahs is the author of *North Atlantic*, written for and performed by the Wooster Group last year. His novel *Wrong Guys* was staged by Mabou Mines at The Public Theater. Other works include the novels *The Sea Journal* and *Queer and Alone*, and a series of radio plays written in collaboration with Bill Raymond. Writer, performer and director Nancy Reilly has been an associate of The Wooster Group since 1982. She's written and directed two one-act plays, and the full-length *Hoodwink*.

Wednesday, October 10: *Alexis De Veaux and Brad Gooch*. Alexis De Veaux is a widely-published writer whose work has appeared in *Black Creation*, *Iowa Review* and *13th Moon*. She has published two books: the novel *Spirits in the Street* from Doubleday and *Don't Explain: The Song of Billie Holiday* from Harper & Row. She is founder of the women-of-color theater troupe Flamboyant Ladies. Brad Gooch's new collection of short fiction, *Jailbait and Other Stories*, is reviewed in this issue. His book of poems, *The Daily News*, was published by Z Press in 1977. His journalism has appeared in *GQ*, *The*

*New York Native* and *Christopher Street*. Brad teaches English at Columbia.

Monday, October 15: *Sokhi Wagner and Gary Indiana*. Sokhi Wagner is a Korean-born filmmaker whose Super-8 movie *Zone* "evokes Man Ray's filmwork with its animated live action and highly narrative quality." She will show film. Gary Indiana has written and directed eight plays in the past five years, and most recently has published essays on photography, film, painting and architecture. A collection of his short fiction, *The Role of My Family in the World Revolution*, will be published this fall.

Wednesday, October 17: *Bruce Boone and Erica Hunt*. San Francisco poet Bruce Boone's books include *My Walk With Bob* and (in collaboration with Robert Gluck) *La Fontaine*. His critical writings include a gay Marxist analysis of Frank O'Hara's work, and the essay "Power, Writing & Activity" in *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, published earlier this year. Erica Hunt's writing has appeared in *Vanishing Cab*, *QU*, and other magazines. Excerpts from her radio program *In the American Tree* from KPFA in San Francisco will soon appear as an anthology edited by Ron Silliman.

Monday, October 22: *Barbara Rosenthal* and *Nancy du Plessis*. Barbara Rosenthal is the author of artist's books *Sensations*, *Clues to Myself*, and *Homo Futuris*, all composed of journal entries, stories, quotations and photographs. She will "perform" her works with slides and live narration. *Nancy du Plessis* will perform excerpts from *Notes From the Moroccan Journals*, "an electrifying and moving performance that somehow makes the hair stand on end."—*The Village Voice*.

Wednesday, October 24: *Lapis: Voices from the Philippines*. Luis Cabalquinto, Linda Kalayaan Faigo, Luis H. Francia and Ninotchka Rosca are four writers born in the Philippines who are now living and working in New York. They will read their own work and that of poets still living in their homeland. Their poetic vision shaped by memory, nostalgia, rage and a desire for justice should bring renewed energy to those who struggle against political and artistic repression.

Monday, October 29: *Tom Weigel* and *Abbe Michaels*. The editor of *Tangerine* magazine, Tom Weigel is the author of

*Panic Hardware*, *Sonnets* and other books. He has published poems in *The Paris Review*, *The World*, and *Mag City*. Abbe Michaels's books include *When the Devil Says Goodnight* and *A Fault or Fortunate Thing*. Her play, *Quality Care*, was performed at the Gene Frankel Theater Workshop in the summer of 1983.

Wednesday, October 31: *Nina Zivancevic* and *Richard Hell*. Nina Zivancevic is a poet and performance artist from Yugoslavia whose readings and performances ranged across Europe. In 1982, she won her country's National Poetry Award. She came to the United States soon after. She has performed at 8 BC and the Limbo Lounge, where her works have included "All the Queen's Addictions" and "My Life in Hollywood." *Richard Hell* is a musician (the albums *Blank Generation* and *Destiny Street*), movie star (*Smithereens* and *Final Reward*), and journalist (in "Slum Journal," his column in the *East Village Eye*), as well as a mighty fine poet. Last season, he sermonized at Danceteria, so heaven knows what he'll do at the Church.

## This Month's Events

### MONDAY NIGHT PERFORMANCE/POETRY SERIES

October 1	Open Reading
October 8	Nancy Reilly & Jim Strahs
October 15	Gary Indiana & Films by Sokhi Wagner
October 22	Nancy Du Plessis & Barbara Rosenthal
October 29	Abbe Michaels & Tom Weigel

All events begin at 8 p.m. in The Parish Hall. Admission: \$2.00

### WEDNESDAY NIGHT READING SERIES

October 3	Dennis Cooper & Alice Notley
October 10	Alexis De Veaux & Brad Gooch
October 17	Bruce Boone & Erica Hunt
October 24	Lapis: Voices from the Philippines with Luis Cabalquinto, Linda K. Faigo, Luis H. Francia & Ninotchka Rosca
October 31	Richard Hell & Nina Zivancevic

All events begin at 8 p.m. in The Sanctuary. Admission: \$3.00

### SPECIAL EVENTS

October 21	Sunday Event for Art Against Apartheid with Wesley Brown, Lenora Champagne, Bob Holman, Duma Ndlovu, Akua Lezli Hope, et al.
4-6 p.m.	Admission: Donation—The Parish Hall
October 25 (Thursday)	<i>Politics and Language: A Forum</i> with Bruce Boone, Erica Hunt, P. Inman, & Jackson Mac Low
8 p.m.	Admission: \$3.00—The Parish Hall

### WORKSHOPS

October 9	Tuesday Night Workshops with Alice Notley—The Parish Hall*
October 12	Friday Night Workshops with Dennis Cooper—The Parish Hall*

All workshops begin at 7:30 p.m. Admission: Free.  
Workshops will be conducted on designated days throughout the  
1984/5 season.

\*Workshop space subject to change. Please call in advance.

## Information, Please!

If you need to learn how to write a grant proposal... want to learn about arts management... or want some help in finding foundations or other sources of funding for your latest project... the CENTER FOR ARTS INFORMATION is the first place you should look.

The Center is a non-profit reference service, with more than 6,000 volumes on arts administration, and extensive files on service and funding programs for writers and other artists. Located at 625 Broadway, the Center is open to the public by appointment, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, and Wednesday evenings until 7.

The Center also sponsors Cultural Resources Collections at eight other locations in New York State, to make its resources available to artists outside Manhattan. These satellite collections are located in the boroughs of Queens and Staten Island, and in Albany, Corning, Dunkirk, Plattsburgh, Poughkeepsie, and Riverhead. For more information, or to make an appointment to use the Center's library in Manhattan, call (212) 677-7548.

### ATTENTION CORRESPONDENTS

To revive the declining epistolary art and to raise hackles, a Letters to the Editor section will appear in these pages, beginning with the next issue. We look forward to hearing from you.

# George Oppen—In Memoriam

by Hugh Kenner

George Oppen, gentlest of men; Mary Oppen, shrewdest of wives; memory keeps them inseparable. His gentleness masked sinews of steel; her shrewdness, the encompassing care that could accept his sad last years (Alzheimer's). He knew me, that last time, because she'd told him; yet he didn't. His decayed memory stranded him in the obviousness of each moment, the menu, the bread, the way to open a door, the simple thereness of whoever was there. Liking corn cob pipes, he insisted I take away one of his. Later he was pressing another on me, the previous hour having slipped clear through his mind.

Yet when his faculties were intact, it was out of the transparent obviousness of the moment that he'd made poetry. Then, intermittently, in such moments as a poet lives for, the obvious had been a revelation.

## PSALM

*In the small beauty of the forest  
The wild deer bedding down—  
That they are there!*

*Their eyes  
Effortless, the soft lips  
Nuzzle, and the alien small teeth  
Tear at the grass*

*The roots of it  
Dangle from their mouths  
Scattering earth in the strange woods.*

*Their paths  
Nibbled thru fields, the leaves that shade them  
Hang in the distances  
Of sun*

*The small nouns  
Crying faith  
In this in which the wild deer  
Startle, and stare out.* [1965]

"The small nouns crying faith": such nouns as "deer," "grass," "sun," "earth," "fields," "leaves." He took a phrase from that poem to title a collection: "In This In Which." No noun there, just two prepositions and two pronouns, plotting points seemingly abstract as on a graph. But one of the pronouns jabs its finger toward the undeniable: "This."

That finger has been jabbed in America before.

Make of it this,  
This, this, this, this

wrote Bill Williams. Bill's emphasis, though, was on "make," while George Oppen preferred an emphasis on "this": what is here, without you, unmade by you, autonomous. "A reply to Greek and Latin with the bare hands"—another Williams phrase—would not have stirred him. The urge to make gestures of reply didn't lead to poems.

In 1966 he was telling a French correspondent how a poet is weakest when he "attempts to drive his mind in pursuit of emotion for its own sake, in pursuit of excitement in the conviction that all that is not excitement is insincere." But people, as Charles Tomlinson has noted, "prefer Berryman's self-parade." In the forties they preferred Tate and Ransom, the rhetoricians (dare one say, the Southerners?) And even Yeatsian

rhetoric can have a spieeler's ring. Oppen again:

*... How does one hold something  
In the mind which he intends*

*To grasp and how does the salesman  
Hold a bauble which he intends*

*To sell? The question is  
When will there not be a hundred*

*Poets who mistake that gesture  
For a style.* ["The Gesture," 1965]

"It is possible," he also wrote, "to be carried away little by little, to find oneself, quite simply, trying to deceive people, to be 'making a poem.'" Williams in the same vein once remarked how fatally compromised would be Villon did we ever suspect him of trying to be "effective." And though Williams stressed (correctly) that poems were made of words, Oppen insisted (also correctly) that "one cannot make a poem by sticking words into it: it is the poem which makes the words and contains their meaning." Lord of language? Bah. Treat language with awe. "When the man writing is frightened by a word," that's when he's getting started. Close enough to an elephant, you might take sudden fright from the word "elephant." Then there'd be hope for you, no thanks to the Dictionary.

Such remarks, however pithy, cannot communicate as the poems do. We've simply too brief a scale of terminology to keep every needful distinction clear at once, and the central truths are so simple as nearly to defy formulation. "Sincerity," "naturalness," those are American absolutes. Yet how to know them? Lately it's been easy to run mad after language, turning "problematic" into a noun for fondling. "Words, words, words," answered worrywort Hamlet, when Polonius asked what he read.

Hamlet's was a narrow sincerity. For blessed Oppen, sincerity lies *not* in acknowledging that we have only words; no, in acknowledging that there is non-linguistic experience; that a man can confront the small deer and find the words afterward. "The things he sees," wrote Carl Rakosi of Oppen, "feel like the gnarled bark of an oak tree. The tree is there too. You can put your weight against it. It won't give."

*Children waking in the beds of the defeated  
As the day breaks on the million  
Windows and the grimed sills  
Of a ruined ethic* [Philai Te Kou Philai]

That was one fact that wouldn't give, and drove him to 28 years' silence, before he could get it, or anything else that mated, into new verses. As the same poem says,

*and the myths  
Have been murderous.*

Myths plague you only after you've surrendered to language, to its glibness; after you've come to think you can talk your way out of anything. (English, said Eliot, needs writing "with a certain animosity.")

In his long life (76 years) Oppen wrote little prose and fewer

than 300 pages of verse. If we have more of him than we have of Catullus, it's not by much. He prized what took time, found the grain of materials, exacted accuracy. He'd been a tool-and-die maker and a cabinet worker. He once interrupted some blather about Biblical translation by remarking that what they needed for that job was a carpenter: no, better: "a Jewish carpenter."

**WORKMAN**

*Leaving the house each dawn I see the hawk  
Flagrant over the driveway. In his claws  
That dot, that comma  
Is the broken animal: the dangling small beast  
knows  
The burden that he is: he has touched  
The hawk's drab feathers. But the carpenter's is a  
culture  
Of fitting, of firm dimensions,  
Of post and lintel. Quietly the roof lies  
That the carpenter has finished. The sea birds circle  
The beaches and cry in their own way,  
The innumerable sea birds, their beaks and their  
wings,  
Over the beaches and the sea's glitter.*

It's after the bird of prey, and before the birds that circle and cry, that we hear of the carpenter's "fitting" and "firm dimensions."

... *Quietly the roof lies  
That the carpenter has finished...*

George Oppen's debility came on him slowly. So there may have been—anyone who knew him hopes so—the day of equilibrium when, incapable of further work, he could still admire how quietly the book lay that the Jewish carpenter-visionary had finished.

# From NYSCA: \$\$\$ 4 U

Gregory Kolovakos, Director of the Literature Program of the New York State Council on the Arts, wants to be more than an arts administrator. He wants to be a matchmaker. And already, his record at constructing happy pairs is an impressive one.

Kolovakos paired novelist Debby Mayer with the Upper Hudson Library Federation... historian Jonathan Katz with the National Gay Task Force... poet Allen Appel with the YMHA... and writer Constance DeJong with the Women's Interart Center.

He did it through one of NYSCA's least-known, most rewarding services: the Writers-in-Residence program.

Writers-in-Residence are poets, novelists, playwrights or non-fiction writers who are paid \$7,500 for a six-month residency with a community-based cultural or educational organization—a library, an arts center, a museum, even an activist group, somewhere in New York State. The purpose of the grant is twofold: first give the writer a substantial period to devote to his or her own work; secondly, to support the writer in organizing "community programming"—workshops, individual consultations, and readings for the institution to which he or she has been paired.

Last year NYSCA matched up fifteen writers with community organizations. This year, it hopes to find more. If you're interested, you don't have to locate an organization on your own; NYSCA has the names of places around New York State which are eager to have a Writer in Residence of their own. Any

## DYNAMITE IN YOUR MAILBOX

Your subscription to *The Poetry Project Newsletter* guarantees that you'll receive a year's worth of dynamite reading. Forthcoming: Barbara Guest on H.D., Jaime Manrique on Octavio Paz, Bruce Boone on Robert Duncan, Tim Dlugos on John Ashbery, Ed Friedman on Maureen Owen, Raymond Foye on the Beatest of the Beats, Eileen Myles on James McCourt, and more! and more!

Individuals: \$7/yr. Institutions \$12/yr.

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City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to *The Poetry Project, St. Mark's Church.*

published writer in New York is invited to apply. For more information, call Gregory Kolovakos at (212) 587-4536 or 4537.

### A Message from Gregory Kolovakos

The keystone of NYSCA's literary funding remains that of directing assistance to individual writers through various channels, including fee money for readings and workshops in all of the state's 62 counties; long-term and short-term residencies for writers in libraries, schools and other cultural institutions of the state; translation grants; and fees to writers published by NYSCA-supported literary magazines and small presses.

The Literature Program has attempted to respond to the field's needs by expanding its guidelines to include support for writers of non-fiction, for playwrights' residencies, direct support to magazines and grants to translators for work-in-progress. In the coming year, the important work done by editors of literary magazines and small presses will be recognized by a new category offering editors' fellowships.

While it is true that NYSCA can legally support only non-profit organizations, almost 60% of last year's budget of the Literature Program ended up as fees to writers. This year, with its budget increased to \$1,000,000, the program expects to continue its outreach to individual writers and poets throughout the state. Writers, prospective applicants and anyone interested in the work of NYSCA and its Literature Program should contact me at NYSCA.



Mother and children flee from police and dogs attacking Crossroads squatter camp, 14 September 1978

Photographer unknown

On Sunday, October 21, more than a dozen poets—black and white, men and women, American and African—will gather at St. Mark's Church for a reading to protest racist government policies in South Africa, and to benefit Art Against Apartheid, a national organization of artists and writers.

Many of South Africa's poets have been imprisoned or driven into exile because of their opposition to apartheid. They will be unable to join us for this reading. Here are poems by three of them, excerpted from *Somehow We Survive*, an anthology of South African writing edited by Sterling Plump and published by Thunder's Mouth Press.

#### Brief Thunder at Sharpeville

#### The Sounds Begin Again

(from *A Simple Lust*)

The sounds begin again;  
the siren in the night  
the thunder at the door  
the shriek of nerves in pain.

Then the keen crescendo  
of faces split by pain  
the wordless, endless wail  
only the unfree know.

Importunate as rain  
the wraiths exhale their woe  
over sirens, knuckles, boots;  
the sounds begin again.

—Dennis Brutus

Because one dead man does not make a summer  
there are black hands in the sky that clamour,  
faces that coolly stare from the concrete gloom.  
Of my kind are many willing and able  
to suffer the truncheon, to puzzle the jackboot.

Patrol this limbo day that swarms with people,  
I being one of them. Meanwhile the sky,  
grown grey with waiting, rumbles impatiently.  
Clouds steel themselves for battle, which is common,  
& clouds can never quarrel without weeping.

A squall of blobbing rain. Short argument,  
stuttered out like gunfire;  
So air is acrid with smoke & soil damp with blood.  
Dead streets I notice, & not with terror:  
I came out living. Of me there are many.

—Arthur Nortje

#### Where are they now

Where are they now  
My people surrounded by the waters  
At The Cape-of-No-Good-Hope  
The Lifers at Robben Island  
Whose words banned by order  
Travel in sudden choirs  
Of adolescent voices  
Raising apartheid death a dare  
Where the silenced ones  
At the back of whose eyes  
Years leap up  
Stand at attention  
Abandoning them  
In the rigid minutes of waiting

—Barbara Masakela

(All poems copyright 1982, Thunder's Mouth Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher. Photograph reprinted by permission of the International Defense and Aid Committee for Southern Africa, Cambridge, Mass.)



# Talking With Red Grooms

An Interview by Anne Waldman

**Anne:** Now say that again.

**Red:** I think that maybe in the 21st century there'll be a total reaction against the 20th century, and maybe the 19th century will be featured as a star.

**A:** Why would that be?

**R:** Out of perverseness. Pure perversity. I think that the 20th century condemned the 19th century until very recently, until the last decade—and only half of that. And just looking at it in this Bobby Rosenblum's book [*Nineteenth Century Art* by Robert Rosenblum and H.W. Janson], it looks terrific. First of all, it has emotion and sentiment which had largely been outlawed, and what's wrong with it? Nothing's wrong with it!

**A:** You mean the sensuality?

**R:** Yeah. Sensuality and sentiment.

**A:** How sentiment?

**R:** Romance close to insanity. Really, it's like some of the stuff you just can't even place into context from a 20th century point of view. There is certain psychological portraiture that looks so off the wall you really have to go back into literature very deeply. I wouldn't be able to even replace the parts. I think the two centuries are largely an antithesis of each other and the 20th century has been a reaction to the 19th but the 21st will accept that art. How about the acceptance of 19th century literature which may be even more difficult to take in some ways than the art or probably equally as hard?

**A:** Well, there are the geniuses: Whitman, Poe, Melville, Dickinson.

**R:** Right. But they seem to be modernists like Manet. The Impressionists and so forth seem to be modernists.

**A:** They're on the edge.

**R:** So I'm really talking about the more radical elements, the elements that were outside, that show the modernist elements of the century. For instance, Rosenblum introduces in this book in the back, modern paintings. And I personally feel they are a little bit out of place. They feel somehow not "with it" in a way, whereas the real 19th century sentimental stuff seems "right."

**A:** Why do you think that would be, because people are more in touch with experience?

**R:** I honestly think these trends are a perverseness of human nature.

**A:** Who starts that?

**R:** In the lifeblood of every civilization these trends seem to extend from the lively thinkers, people that are very alive and thinking about how things look or sound or read.

**A:** As a lively thinker yourself you seem to be encompassing quite a range of possibilities, sentimental and otherwise in the paint, ink and construction and film of this recent show (Marlborough, April 6-May 1), from *Geishas* to a *Yellow Pages* construction of Franz Kline to satirical political portraits of Arafat, or "Night of the Generals" which reminds me of Burroughs with its hard satirical bite. Could you talk about your "place" as an artist, how you see it?

**R:** Well, I thought that in order to get to a personal "voice" that I wasn't totally "with" the whole concept of modernism as it went on concurrently with—you know—current contemporaneity. And so that, looking back to any other time or to the 19th century (which were the first paintings I knew) was okay. I don't know what it was, but I had preferred that kind of offhand view to going along with the modernist line.



COURTESY MARLBOROUGH GALLERY

**"Buster Keaton and Friends" by Red Grooms.**  
Mixed media, 1980-1983.

**A:** But wasn't it more life itself? Like getting out and strolling down 14th Street, or experiencing a tragic jam. . .

**R:** Yeah! Yeah, that's right. Sometimes actual life. People don't necessarily look modern. They just look like a glob of humanity and they may not look slick and fashionable and if so, you have to respond accordingly. As neither does the ocean. The ocean to me looks very nineteenth century. It was probably painted best in that century.

**A:** Sometimes after a big dose of your work I'll walk onto 57th Street or whatever and I'm still in a Red Grooms world. Which is what happens when you experience any powerful visuals. Like Fellini, the work opens your eyes, stretches the imagination so you really see reality more intensely—the extremes which are not really exaggerations—facial expressions, a gesture, a wild hairdo. Your perceptions are brilliant, original but also *true*.

**R:** But you actually do see my work in it?

**A:** In the people most—in their gait, clothing, preoccupations, their colorfulness. Rudy Burckhardt gets some of those humorous qualities—human aspects—in his films.

**R:** Not I think that what makes me an impure artist or maybe not an artist at all, is that I'm totally fascinated with people, and I'm more into the personage than trying to make whatever it is—that sawdust-filled bag of bones or whatever. That's what interests me—that whole psychology. But I love art and I like the formalist stuff and everything of other artists.

**A:** Well, you have some of that, too.

**R:** But when I'm doing it myself I'm so magnetized by the human psychology. And I enjoy being a voyeur and I really like to try to figure people out and so forth. I've been totally knocked off track by other human beings. At any moment there are powers of persuasion that are overwhelming. In the New York works I've done I have tried to make it a kind of portraiture thing where I was really trying to get the texture of what I thought I saw, particularly in the neurosis of the population, and present it in context with the props—the mailboxes, fireplugs, any texture of the city. I took on certain projects like Bronx and Manhattan because I had a strong vision I couldn't help seeing, feeling.

**A:** The subway car is powerful—desperate and amazing.

**R:** I don't actually try to make things worse than I think they are. It often surprises me how strongly people react to it. It makes me see it differently too. Almost naively you make a distortion here and there and the impact is terrific on people.

**A:** I feel comfortable in the subway.

**R:** I always think about New York that it ranks as a world city probably because it an unselfconscious place and a place of great vitality. The ugliness is not controlled. It's really a sort of bile.

**A:** It's organic.

**R:** Right. Most American cities can't vie with that because for some reason or other there's a tendency in the States to clean things up. Maybe its proximity to the incoming migrant groups keeps it raw. They can't be over-digested. There's an urgency to life in the city. I live in Chinatown and at this very moment, I can't believe it, there are women out there wearing coolie hats! The tourists should come down and look at this! This is really

China, coming to the States, right at this very moment! Every day it's really something. And I think that's great because the worst is the whole prefabricated sort of phoniness where you go somewhere and they have to fabricate the color of the place. In New York you don't have to make that effort.

**A:** You talk of New York as being raw and the neurosis being obvious and yet there's a veneer or patina in how people adorn themselves, or hide or cover themselves and those choices too are incredibly interesting and wild and strange.

**R:** It's really the presentation of a true culture, a culture that has not really digested itself yet and is actually in the process of living. I've been to Paris and Paris is great and of course is a great world city and I'd thought at some point, some time ago, that I was too late, and then very much more recently I've and I looked and I saw, oh, it's fantastic. It's *now*. So I guess a city, an urban place somehow is the repository of humanity, is certainly the register of the culture. And I love Tokyo for the same reason.

**A:** Back to the recent work. How about the icons as contrasted to the man or woman-on-the-street characters—the new paintings/constructions of Keaton, Mae West? Are these key figures for you? They're so American and theatrical as works.

**R:** Well, it's interesting you call them icons because sometimes I think the only thing I'm interested in is the figure—the bust and head. You think you're putting a lot of imagination into something and basically it's just, as you say, an icon.

**A:** It's the contrast to the ordinary caricature.

**R:** This is more *still*. It's frozen. I did the Keaton because I was on Martha's Vineyard and I felt like I had "island fever" or something. I felt the lack of a bigger flow of events. We went to see some Keaton films and I did it.

**A:** So it would be that simple, seeing a film—

**R:** I saw Mae West, too. The bust of Keaton—the building part, the architectural part—had to do with the kind of gingerbread houses in a town called Oak Bluff that's on Martha's Vineyard. The other character in the piece—Ulysses S. Grant—had come there when he was President. I had seen a history book on the area and was impressed that a President had been in this funny town. He'd made a personal appearance or something. It had been a Methodist town, but it was also a blue-collar resort for Boston. I felt I should do something with the gingerbread and wasn't sure exactly what and that's what it turned out to be. That picture. I'd also been reading about Alexander the Great and that's his image on the medallion on the top left corner and Darius, the Persian King, is leading his hordes of elephants on the other side. It has some literary origins. Also I'd discovered a biography of Lauren Bacall which is why she's on there.

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#### **MAGAZINE SEEKS WORK ON DENBY, DUNHAM**

*Salome: A Literary Dance Magazine* will be publishing special issues on Edwin Denby and Katherine Dunham. Poems, essays, artworks and articles on both are welcome, as are all other dance-related materials. Submissions with SASE should be sent to *Salome*, 5548 N. Sawyer, Chicago IL 60625

#### **CONNAISSEZ-VOUS CHERYL FISH?**

Cheryl Fish wrote both the Spanish and the English versions of the poem "Guest to New York City," published in *Connaissiez-Vous Maitre Eckhart?* the magazine of The Poetry Project's translation workshop. The poem was attributed to Pablo Neruda. The magazine's editor, Tom Savage, regrets the error.

#### **OPPENHEIMER HONORED**

Joel Oppenheimer, first Director of The Poetry Project, has been named Caroline Werner Gannett Professor of the

Humanities at the College of Liberal Arts, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York, for academic year 1984-1985. He will be on leave from his position at New England College, Henniker, New Hampshire, for the year.

#### **ANTHONY HECHT MEETS WALT WHITMAN**

Anthony Hecht will judge the eleventh annual Walt Whitman Award competition, sponsored by The Academy of American Poets. The winning poet's manuscript will be published by Macmillan and the poet will receive a cash award of \$1,000. The Academy will receive submissions (50 to 100) pages through November 15, 1984. any citizen of the United States who has not yet published a full-length book in an edition of 500 or more copies is eligible for the award. An entry form and fee of \$5.00 are required with each submission. For rules and entry form, send SASE to: Walt Whitman Award, The Academy of American Poets, 177 East 87th Street, New York, NY 10128.

# CENSORSHIP: An Issue of Survival

For writers, censorship is murder... the slow death of our creations by strangulation. Although the most obvious forms of censorship that take place in totalitarian societies of the right and left are not yet popular in the United States, there are subtler, but just as effective pressures to prevent the words of writers from seeing the light of print. Libel suits against novelists... government news blackouts, as in the invasion of Grenada... banning of "immoral" texts by fundamentalists and other pressure groups... all have a chilling effect on the writer's freedom to be heard.

This month, one of America's brashest new literary institutions and one of its oldest, most respected ones—the National Writers Union and the New York Public Library—offer major programs on the issue of censorship. Both will provide critical survival skills for every writer. Here's the lowdown.

## "Censorship" Continues at The Public Library

The New York Public Library's major exhibition *CENSORSHIP: 500 Years of Conflict* will be open until November 5 in the newly restored Gotteman Exhibition Hall at the Central Research Library on Fifth Avenue at 42nd Street. If you haven't seen it yet, be sure you do. It's a sobering and important show for any writer to see.

As part of its focus on censorship, the Library is sponsoring panel discussions on varieties of censorship Tuesdays and Thursdays during the first two weeks of October. All of them sound terrifically interesting. The discussions start at 6 p.m. in Room 206 of the Central Research Library. Admission is free, but reservations are strongly suggested. Call 930-0855 for reservations and more information.

Here's the schedule:

**October 2** *Images of Women in the Media: Censorship and Construction.*

Panelists: Marcia Kramer, artist; Lucy Lippard, art critic; Linda Nochlin, art historian; Carolee Schneeman, artist. Moderator: Mary Ann Doane, film critic.

**October 4** *Sex Education: Are Limits Necessary?*

Panelists: Howard Hurwitz of the Family Defense Coalition; William Marra, philosophy professor at Fordham; Alfred F. Moran, Executive Director of Planned Parenthood; Susan Wilson, family life educator. Moderator: Rita Ciolli, attorney and legal affairs correspondent for *Newsday*.

**October 8** *Pornography and the Limits of Toleration*

Panelists: Susan Brownmiller, founder of Women Against Pornography; Irving Kristol, neoconservative; Harriet Pilpel of the National Coalition Against Censorship; Charles Rembar, the lawyer who defended *Tropic of Cancer*, *Fanny Hill*, and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in court. Moderator: Michael J. Sandel, professor of government at Harvard.

**October 11** *2500 Years of Exile: PEN Writers Read from the Literature of Exile and Imprisonment*

Joseph Brodsky, Elizabeth Hardwick, Richard Howard, Galway Kinnell, and Susan Sontag read the works of censored and persecuted writers.

At the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, there will be a discussion on censorship and the black communi-

ty on Friday, October 12. *Censored Works/Censored Community* will feature *Daily News* columnist Earl Caldwell and John Davis, the former editor of the *Amsterdam News*. The discussion begins at 6:30; admission is free. For reservations, call 862-4141. The Schomburg Center is located at 515 Lenox Avenue (corner of 135th Street) in Manhattan.

## Writer's Union Host Conference On Censorship and Culture

The National Writer's Union is hosting the first conference in its two-year history, a weekend devoted to Censorship and Culture, October 19-21 in New York.

The purpose of the conference, which will draw writers from across the country, is to expose various forms of censorship imposed by the government and the marketplace, and to help writers discover what they can do to combat it.

In a grimly ironic turn of events, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who was to speak at the conference, will be unable to attend, as the U.S. Department of State won't grant him a visa to enter the country because of his political beliefs (he's a Communist). Even without his presence, the list of speakers is an impressive one. Alice Walker, South African poet Dennis Brutus, Chilean exile Ariel Dorfman, Ed Asner, Ben Bagdikian of the Columbia School of Journalism, Tillie Olsen and Susan Brownmiller are among the participants.

The Conference will begin on Friday, October 19, at 8 p.m. in the auditorium of Washington Irving High School with a plenary session of "Censorship and Culture: How Can Writers Make a Difference?" Saturday and Sunday will be devoted to panels and workshops at The New School.

Among the topics to be discussed are censorship of the news, de facto censorship by publishers who suppress manuscripts because they don't conform to profitable formulas, the watering-down of magazine contents to avoid offending advertisers, the crisis in small press publishing, and strategies for fighting book bannings and libel suits. Poets and fiction writers will be encouraged to read their own work in a special reading workshop. The conference will also provide hints on finding a good book contract, magazine assignment, grant or literary prize, and word processor.

The registration fee for the conference is \$25 for members of the National Writers Union, \$35 in advance for non-members, and \$40 at the door. To make a reservation or for more information, call (212) 254-0279.

## St. Mark's Talks

Thursday, October 25th at 8 p.m. POLITICS AND LANGUAGE: A Forum, the first of nine monthly Thursday evenings of discussion. participants will be: **Jackson Mac Low**, whose *Bloomsday* will soon be out from Station Hill Press; **P. Inman**, author of *Platin* (Sun & Moon) and *Ocker* (Tuumba); **Erica Hunt** (recent essays in *Idiolects* and *Poetics Journal*); and **Bruce Boone** (recent essays in *Ironwood*, *Advocate*, and *Social Text*). Coordinated by Charles Bernstein.

# Book Reviews

**SAFE** by Dennis Cooper. The Sea Horse Press, 307 West 11th Street, New York, NY 10014. 110 pages. \$5.95.

*Safe*, Dennis Cooper's novella or linked stories, is composed of three sections, the middle one of which, "My Mark," has already achieved something of a cult status. As in most tales of obsessive love (where the love object is clearly not "worth" the more intelligent, sensitive, etc. narrator's attention), the focus is on the lover rather than the beloved. "Lover" in this case is divided into three parts, two of whom ("Rob" in the first section—writing a novel in which he is the character "Rick," whose over-inflated prose and attitude the narrator mocks—and the "I" narrator in the second, "someone important" whose persona seems closest to Cooper's) are writers. The third—"Doug"—albeit not an official creator, does attempt to "create" a new Mark, or the experience of himself *vis-a-vis* Mark, in every boy or porn image. All three muse about Mark in essentially the same fashion, so I assume the split is not so much about different points of view as a kind of meta-literary symptom of the narrator's failure to keep his promise to Mark at the end of Part II to "let this be it." The point is not just the narcissism of the obsession and almost vulturous use of it to fuel the creative act, which must, after all, wind its elaborations around some central content (as the narrator puts it, "Mark keeps me going"), but the ultimate, irreducible mystery of the Other. Given Rob's and the "I" narrator's writerly profession, I think it safe to consider *Safe* a parable of the inability of author as well as lover to fully "cage" (a common Cooper metaphor) his subject. Cooper's attitude towards this, I believe, is one of relief, that the writer is not, in fact, "God" (often referred to in this work, always encased in ironic quotes). "What's left behind is Mark's beauty, *safe* [reviewer's emphasis] in a sense, from the blatant front lighting of any true emotion, through it creeps in."

Mark himself, the very icon of a certain type of young male punkette (I'm not sure whether there is a female equivalent of the type), is not without interest, though he can hardly be called interesting. His emptiness, a blank waiting to be filled up by the lover/narrator, is both confusing and the essence of the matter. I kept expecting him to be meaner, as the objects of obsessions (in novels anyway) tend to be; but not at all a "blue angel," he is blank rather than cruel, confused and/or bored by the intensity of the narrator's emotion, trying to defuse rather than inflame it. His interests are wholly banal (sex, drugs, chic) but his embrace of this downside American dream is so passive as to seem ultimately subversive; he desires its products without being willing to do anything at all to get them (except, perhaps, sell his body for a high, which hardly counts). What is really "dangerous" (and, no doubt, appealing) about him is not is drinking/drugs/sex but the low expectations he has from them, which is what distinguishes him from the Lost Generation drunks or Beats or hippie dropouts. His highs promise neither transcendence nor insight into himself or his culture, only oblivion. Not caring about anything enough for one to be able to "buy him" (in any permanent sense), he is truly outside the social order. The oblivion he passively seeks he finds ultimately, in death—and even then his friends won't let him be; they keep trying to disinter him, like reporters do to celebrities.

As befits a novel about the observing eye, the book is written scenically, even if the "scene" is nothing more than a description of how a room or a person looks or feels. Sometimes these are movie-esque ("Cut to a rumpled bed"), usually merely present-tense statements ("Rob lights a joint," "Mark lies face

down") that often jump from one to another without formal transitions; a mode not much different from current acceptable short-story writing practices say, at *The New Yorker*. But Cooper's tone and language and descriptive strategy differ vastly from that of those chic neo-agrarians. Slangy (not just in words but shorthand modes of sentence structure), casual, correcting itself as it goes along to give the spontaneous transmission not of *thoughts* (which would be old-fashioned stream-of-consciousness) but of the ways in which we *talk* about things to each other, this is Cooper's great contribution to modern writing. His verbal shorthand embraces the rhythms of today, rather than creating some artificial "objective correlative" of this, as in the polished dead tones of Beatty, Carver, *et. al.* Examples: "This Tony person has money." "Sure, it feels peaceful, but after a few minutes that shit gets boring." "Then the blue tissue paper. Presto." Against these no-nonsense, colloquial descriptions, Cooper's often corny and almost always unelucidating metaphors seem particularly out-of-place: "... their *menage* had as much to do with real love as poster paint with heaven." "His ass may as well be a new best seller, the way the man thumbs to its dirty part." "They (Todd's eyes) contained mysteries great as those he'd glimpsed through now rusty telescopes." I'm not convinced these are intentional (even—or perhaps, *especially*, the brainiest poets seem prone to startlingly bad metaphors, particularly when they write prose); if so, I don't get the point. But this is minor caviling, easily corrected by the delete command of a word processor. The work is not just good but important, both in its style *and* content, not least because in the (some say repetitive) purity or his obsessions (asses, excrescences, "pale beauty") Cooper himself is as ultimately ineluctable as his subjects.

—Jane DeLynn

**UTOPIA** by Bernadette Mayer. United Artists Books, 172 E. 4th St., #9-B, NY 10009.

It's almost 1985 & in this reactionary climate/slant I find that my favorite way to read *Utopia* is backwards. First, the mock-blurbs on the back cover are *funny*, in the laugh-out loud department. Then there comes the surprise of a rough & ready index (created by Bob Holman), a poem in itself, followed by a wonderful list of books + some imaginary addresses. Thus fortified, we are ready to take on the central question of the book, posed in the epilogue.

here's a utopia 1984  
which is more a clue  
than a place or a book  
at which you'll look  
you haven't given up  
on a world have you?

Our communal question, the form all versions of Utopia—past and present, written and unwritten, acted or not acted upon, forgotten or remembered—now take.

So to go along with this notion of Utopia as a question (which includes but is not limited to its aspects of place and tense and style and business and theory and history), Mayer structures the book as one would a "discussion group" by juxtaposing a "journal of one week of living in New York" (p. 13) with other kinds of texts—poems, letters, notes, lists, instructions, plays, etc. Some of these texts are written by others and

express a yearning for a sort of discourse that could go hand-in-hand with changing our lives. "I love the idea of all these words. The words of peoples' delirium could be instructive." (p. 30) "In Utopia, we would have been different and would still be talking and kind." (p. 89) ". . . but all that's happened is that we talk a good show and live the same old way as before." (p. 90)

Mayer feels this too. In the introduction she remarks: "Everything you or I or anybody says always seems 100% wrong sometimes, unless you keep forcing it to be closer to the truth, kids have sharper memories till they learn to use the language well and then there is always all that prevaricating and the language begins to lie loosely once more: can I say this & I got very angry. . ." (p. 14). Then she goes on in a note to point out the ever-maddening contradiction between theory and practice (i.e., Marxists make the worst workers as Catholics have made the worst Christians as, etc.)

This contradiction is not a new problem and whether to give up on our world is not a new question, but the degree to which these two issues are related now is at best disquieting, making the desire for action that much stronger. Mayer ends her preface on that note:

"And this human being has the leisure utopic to turn over for ten more minutes of thought in bed a mattress on box springs with sheets on it, I cover my head with a blanket and feel a fear which makes me sick and a desire which makes me lie and I'm anxious to get out of bed and do something."  
(p. 7)

To me, this is the Utopian moment of the book: facing fear, knowing that she uses imperfectly a footloose language, she wants and needs to get up and out and act. Mayer gives us this book as a context for her elaborations on this desire, and in doing so provides us with a collection of approaches we too can use in case we'd like to follow suit.

—Tina Darragh

**TO THE READER** by Bob Perelman, Tuumba Press, 2639 Russell St., Berkeley, CA 94705. 32 pages. \$3.

This book of 17 poems impresses me a lot. Bob Perelman writes in the vertical manner, laminating contexts, the arbitrary, the diversionary, hopefully for them all to fall together in an "anti-context." They are not as confounding as they first seem, they derive legitimately from 20th-Century-modernist ideas of simultaneity, they are cousins to post-Beat wordspew, and they are at points so self-consciously smart as to verge on the supercilious. They do their work on the oblique march, with a touch of raunchy turmoil, aggressive to the point of gratuitous violence, reverently absurdist, and only at moments do these poems seem capricious in the way they confront the reader. Perelman very seldom confronts the reader directly, using TV imagery and TV everywhere as analogical chessmen. TV everywhere in poetry seems inevitably to lead to the weight of the world, and in Perelman's poems I find I value what I read as the weight of the self. These are moments of more conviction and resonance than the our-man-in-Beirut sequences. Relative to poetry, international politics and national guilt are so obvious as to require great wit and comic genius, not to mention brevity. On this slant I find Perelman a little graceless, and in his obscure personal insights I find him startling and all the parts right.

In a poem like "Excess" I find the focus sharp throughout. Vernacular phrases, immediate surroundings, even his body's dimensions enter an interior meditative groove. Similarly, "Paper" evokes a cool dreaminess in short lines, and one-line

stanzas with a mood of lostness and resignation. I think it's marred, however, close to the end by a stanza that rings off the 60's hit "Easier Said Than Done," and momentarily jumps the tracks. For five lines I think to myself that Perelman's judgment isn't as good as the preceding two pages of the poem had me thinking. In fact, in many of these poems I have similar reservations, always the matter of a few lines that seem to be in the wrong poem, and these lines seem particularly gratuitous when they are heavily assaultive. Then there is "Why Use Words?" with the first four stanzas driving and vivid, concluding with three stanzas that penetrate far less deeply and let me down. A fast start, and then lug in the stretch.

Perelman's ideas of poetry writing are very close to my own, and I admit I might be sentimental to insist that vertical-cubist-layered writing relate to personal depth, if not the soul, of the poet. It's just that I take my little fractional quibbles with his judgment seriously because I like *how* he writes poems.

—John Godfrey

### EXCESS

Sometime around midlife, wishes  
Gather to a locus (place)  
(Take off your clothes and *place*  
Them on the floor)

"Be vulnerable" skin softly  
Switching tense (anything but that)  
Go back to gather a locus  
(Remember who you are) but who

Is that white vegemetic on the counter  
Of the redone dream lover's  
Former mansion of a life?) Go back  
To gather to a locus (memory:place)

(Place your mind in the refugee camp)  
Go back to wishes gather  
To a locus and begin to deny themselves  
Nothing, not the slightest

Particles of certainty, vanity, face,  
A vast (18" wide) and towering (72" high)  
Perception (12" deep) of what is (there),  
an ocean (mind) enraged, distended,

Swollen upright darker and colder green  
Than tantrums or language. "I don't  
Know you," every rock on this tired  
Uterocentric earth of language

In place, wrong, and to be  
Read into the directions  
By continuous  
Approximate units of time.

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**JAILBAIT AND OTHER STORIES** by Brad Gooch. The Sea Horse Press, New York, NY. \$6.95.

"Russ, a not-*that*-young-anymore guy is walking down a dirt road," begins "Maine," the last story in *Jailbait and Other Stories*, Brad Gooch's stunning first collection of short stories.

What is startling about these ten stories is what is striking about Gooch's poetry as well: the language, which is shorn of all pretensions to "literariness." The language is so direct, casual and unaffected—so "obvious"—as to be evocative. The flat language is that of conversation, and in fact, *Jailbait* consists to a large extent of conversation, which Gooch has a remarkable ear for. In "Spring," teenagers Brad and Bobby decided to buy a coconut.

Brad: How do you eat it?

Bobby: You get a hammer and you open it. Then you eat the white meat and you drink all the milk. It's sweet.

Brad: (zeroing in on one point) And just where are you going to get this hammer?

Bobby: I'll use your head.

Brad: (smugly) My head is more like a coconut than a hammer for a coconut.

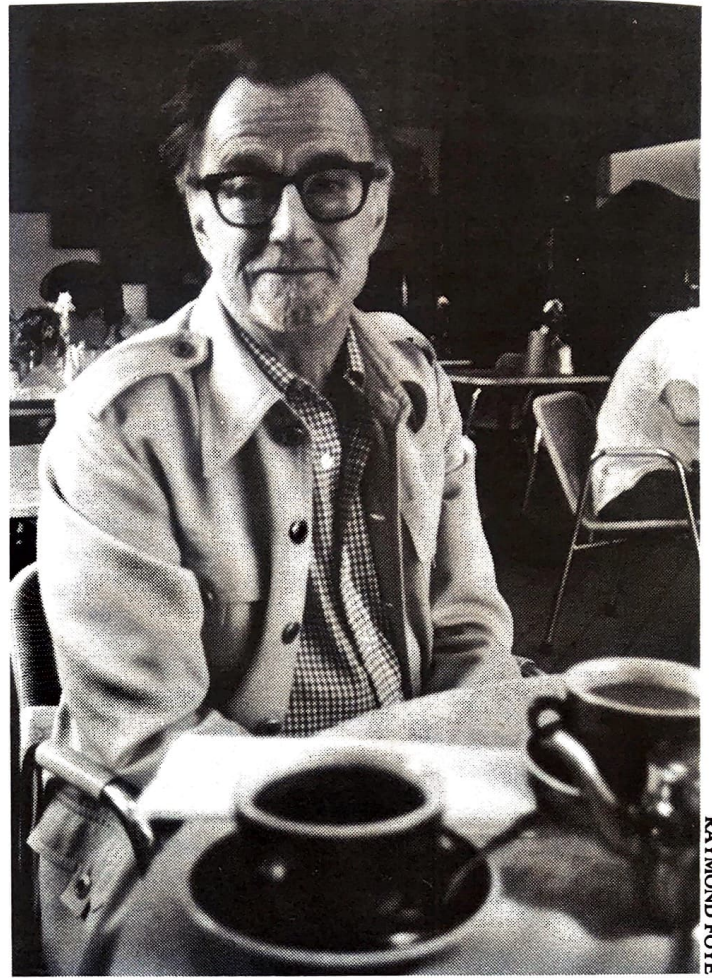
A witty, elegant reflexive formal play informs *Jailbait*: certain elements recur from story to story, setting each other off. Characters are flat and more or less interchangeable. The stories derive much of their force from Gooch's terrific deadpan-ironic handling of highly charged material, namely, sex, or more specifically, sexual encounters and pickups. In many of the stories the characters are brought together by what one character calls an "unusual meeting," improbable pickups which occur in an airport, a motel and a department store, among other places; these locations double as the titles of many of the stories. All of the stories revolve around twosomes or threesomes—heterosexual, bisexual and in one case homosexual—who meet and either have sex or at least think about having sex which is postponed to some indeterminate future date. In "TV" Doug decides to drop in on Yuki, a handsome stranger he has been furtively watching from his apartment across the street. Yuki's girlfriend Sally is suspicious. "Are you some kind of gay blade?" She asks Doug. A few stories later, in "Maine," Russ invites Jason, whom he's just met that afternoon, over for a drink. Jason brings his girlfriend Sharon. "Are you some kind of wild card?" Jason asks.

"Spring," the opening story and the best, is dazzling. In it Gooch evokes a wistful and mysterious adolescent longing, which he manages to combine with a wacky, equally adolescent sexuality. With Celine-like mastery Gooch takes us from delicate lyricism to outrageous comic hyperbole and back. "Spring" is as elusive in tone as its characters are to each other and as their emotions are to themselves.

—Michael Friedman

**SELECTED POEMS: Six Sets, 1951-1983** by Howard Hart. City Miner Books, Berkeley. 88 pages. Cloth \$12.50, paper \$6.95.

Twenty-five years ago Fred McDarrah, the *Village Voice* photographer, put together a book of his photos of the Greenwich Village hipster-Bohemian society of the 1950s. Borrowing a term made popular by Jack Kerouac, McDarrah called his book "The Beat Scene." The photos document a social epoch—skinny, unsmiling guys in beards and shades and sandals, serious-looking pony-tailed girls in tight slacks and turtlenecks, gathered together in coffeehouses or in coldwater flats with tacky mattresses on the floor, windows painted black, bongos, candles, Chianti bottles. The featured subjects in McDarrah's book are some 75 "Beat" authors, including a few who are still famous (Kerouac, Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti)—and many, many more who are now all but forgotten, their names reduced to mere historical footnotes fading away with time.



RAYMOND FOYE

Howard Hart, San Francisco, 1984

One of the latter is poet-musician Howard Hart, a slender young fellow in dark glasses who in McDarrah's book stands next to a caged parrot and casts a sidelong glance across the page at one of his poems.

Fame may have passed Howard Hart by for the past two-and-a-half decades, but now he's back—not as a historical footnote or the answer to one of those "where are they now?" trivia quizzes, but as a writer to be reckoned with. It turns out he's been making poems all along, and the best of them are gathered in this very impressive volume.

Hart came to New York from Ohio in 1946, at the age of 19, and began studying musical composition, theory and counterpoint with classical composer Charles Mills. Six years later he met and befriended the great jazz drummer Kenny Clarke, who along with Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk and Dizzy Gillespie had been in on the birth of bebop on at Minton's Playhouse in Harlem in 1941. Mills, Clarke, and another great jazz percussionist, Elvin Jones, were all powerful influences on Hart's work—not only his music, but his poetry, one of whose principal virtues is its distinction as sound and rhythm.

Howard Hart's own writing possesses the quality he attributes, in one poem, to Ravel: "a refinement of lyricism . . . bequeathed to you from Chopin perhaps, or Haydn." In Hart's case, the bequest evidently comes from the whole history of modern music, beginning with Mozart, descending from bop to beyond, as well as from the "tunes" of his fellow poets—foremost among them the American surrealist Philip Lamantia and that master of "spontaneous bop prosody," Kerouac himself. (Hart, Lamantia, Kerouac and musician

David Amram put on New York's first jazz-poetry shows in 1957-1958.) Many of Hart's best poems, indeed, seem to move like slow ballads played by an expert improvisatory jazz soloist: they establish a melody, linger to savor it, embellish it, vary on it, gradually build a whole new melody, and then end in an unpredictable flourish akin to a bop tag.

If the music of Hart's poems sometimes recalls Kerouac's *Mexico City Blues*, their wild range of sensory imagery often evokes the early surrealist work ("Ekstasis," etc.) of Lamantia. Just as Hart contributes his own intricate time sense and gifts of ear, however, he also introduces polychromatic tonalities of image that are absolutely singular. The choice of a vivid Tom Wesselman work for the full-color cover of *Selected Poems* is apt. Painterly color plays a central role in Hart's poems, serving as an intuitive emotional code à la Rimbaud. The poems also use color as a kind of para-logic, moving along on hinges of "black lacquer joined [to] peach," "blue trees," "pink fields," "black pearls," "an arc of sand coated with emeralds," "a sky of orange whispers." Hart's poetry does more than build a "fandango of images" (as he calls it), though; just consider the compressed expressive quality of a line like "the grey royalty in poor people's eyes."

All of Hart's abilities as musician- and colorist-in-language are apparent in his poem "Billie Holiday Four," which begins "I speak of a purple lady" and slides with strange subtlety through "Beethoven" and "innocence" to a moving statement that somehow ties in death, Freud and refrigerators—"Actually Freud and she could have created a masterpiece / Of lyrical grey and blue case history / But beige by Lady's skin pearls on mistletoe / Didn't work at all / Lady sang from the slow cavern of human grief / I hate refrigerators."

Howard Hart left the Village scene in the '60s, traveled around the world, worked as a musician and translator, settled in northern California in the '70s, and now lives and writes in San Francisco, where at 57 he's finally being published in the style he's long deserved.

—Tom Clark

**JACK KEROUAC** by Tom Clark. An HBJ Album Biography. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 254 pages. \$10.95.

How often when Jack's name comes up in uptown lit-sits or in journalism's playpen, how often the irritating and untrue line, like "Mailer's got Kerouac topped in every way: Jack can't cut Norman." That's the lie. Even so, Norman did top Jack; he's alive. And that's the only way that's gonna really happen. Nothing Mailer's done since those "raw semi-charging Army-camp-swept-with-rain" passages that appeared in *New World Writing* maybe thirty years ago could do it. He never touched Jack's vision of careening through America, as America really is. Dark night speeding through poems in a visionary's drunken brain.

No, Norman's never really been there. It's Jack's kingdom. And this is the book that puts it right. If you have only one Kerouac biography to cherish and ponder, make it this remarkable and readily entertaining, well-documented, almost scholarly, but somewhat chilling take on vision and defeat. It's the perfect great American epic of classic beings fucking up. When you're so far into creation that reality can only be a role-model for your own life which is the writing, then something's gonna snap. For Jack the snap took twenty years, but you can hear it when you read this book.

Given that Tom Clark and Jack Kerouac share an astrological sign, and that both endured classic American Catholic

educations, with all that implies, Tom naturally has the edge of over writers of books that go looking for "the real man" behind the writing. Clark writes from the view of a young poet who has had the actual experience of being there on the same brainbeam with his own poetry, and having its vibes down pat. Nothing pat about his *Kerouac*. It's a chilling tale for young poets just beginning to make their own music in words to check out before proceeding. It's a "courage" book, like O'Hara's *Early Poems* or *Gasoline* by young Greg Corso. Fuck those milksop bios of K, that make you shy away from his genius works.

The writing style herein reminds one of a less forceful Ted Berrigan. It's an upbeat from Clark's older Damon Runyon biography, which read uniformly flat. K's own words abound in quotations from his novels and non-fiction works, juxtaposed with the author's own reflective elaborations of them (a somewhat tighter, more journalistic approach to Jack's own "Spontaneous Prose Techniques"). This life is never a graceful one, whoever writes it, but Tom has rendered it into a flowing tributary full of the heights of Jack's visionary prose backed against a miserable lifespan filled with multiple addictions and fear of love. This book can give you a great read and/or a good cry.

—Jim Brodey

**DANGERS OF READING** by Lorna Smedman. Prospect Books, 500 E. 11th St., New York NY 10009. \$3.00.

It's a commonly accepted opinion that "purely" formal poetry in America seems to have exhausted itself. For a number of years now, we have seen processions of villanelles, sestinas, and even an occasional pantoum that seem to be merely exercises by the authors proving to themselves, and presumably the world that *they*, too, can write poetry with all the old strait-jackets that presumably provide enough tension to keep the reader, prospective or otherwise, from falling asleep midway through. All too often, however, these poems seem as if their author(s) had laid out a diagram for each poem and simply filled in the spaces. Usually the poems are so devoid of emotional content as well as context that the spaces involved seem even emptier than they were before they were filled.

Lorna Smedman's *Dangers of Reading* is the best small book of poems I have read this year. Why? It breaks with this trend and follows all the rules. Her villanelles, pantoums, and sestinas actually gain emotional intensity from the formal repetitions. They're right on the mark. They present a fully formed persona in each poem who both thinks and feels and has to sacrifice nothing in order to satisfy these two too-often opposing poles of mental activity. For a week now, I've been repeating over to myself parts of her wonderful villanelle with the repeating lines: "Sometimes the urge to cry is enough," and "Hard to call my heart's bluff." Sounds sentimental, doesn't it? But it isn't. Within the context of the whole poem, these lines work beautifully. I may be spending the next week reminding myself of the lines "It's tough/to unravel my own disguise" and trying to figure out how she manages to make *those* lines not only work but seem a completely new thought within the context of the same poem. The poem called "The Word and I" which ends the book seems as if she'd taken a few shopworn ideas and the form prevalent in greeting cards, and by putting the two together, created something completely new. Once again, she succeeds in a way that simply cannot be conveyed by reading quoted lines or by reading me. You'll simply have to read the book for yourself.

—Tom Savage

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Oct. 23 **Blockbusters; Ghostwriting; Novelizations; Celebrity Collaborations (panel)**  
Oct. 26 **Christopher Durang, Wendy Wasserstein, Leslie Lee, John Ford Noonan**  
Oct. 30 **Writing for TV and Movies (panel)**  
Nov. 2 **The Psychology of Being a Writer (panel/reading)**  
Nov. 9 **Robert Creeley and Denise Levertov**  
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## WEEKEND WEATHER

Whether in the course of  
and in my arms when that was  
the childish happiness of  
a mirror when that was  
was that of course happiness but now

Or now when all is course  
course of what we know now that  
life the new stranger embraced  
until dawn and familial and  
the new mirror ages

Still I, I and know of  
its veiled still I in the  
course of you and that all  
that courses through the  
mirror that opens to song  
as always as my love's cradled thought

—Alice Notley

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