

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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MAY 1986

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THE MAINTENANCE OF ILLITERACY

by Joel Lewis

How many times can you break a butterfly on a wheel? In the case of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), it's as many times as necessary if the 'butterflies' in question happen to be perceived as having leftist leanings or participate in "activities which would be prejudiced to the public interest." While the present government policy is to champion the rights of writers suppressed by Soviet-bloc nations, a contradictory policy exists that denies hundreds of writers access to face-to-face discourse with the American public by forbidding them travel visas to the United States.

The legal justification that the INS uses to exclude potential visitors who are deemed 'unfriendly' to American interests is the McCarthy-era McCarran-Walter Act of 1952. The most controversial section of the bill is Section 212, which gives permission to the government to exclude foreigners who were affiliated with communist, anarchist or terrorist groups. The INS maintains a "Lookout Book", which blacklists the names of tens of thousands of foreigners. According to Morton Halperin, director of the ACLU's Center for Security Studies, "The US is the only Western democracy that excludes foreign visitors simply on the basis of belief or association, without the allegation that he will harm the country."

Those considered to having 'harmful' effects have included three Nobel Prize winners: the late Pablo Neruda, Czeslaw Milosz and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. In addition scores of other writers have been denied visas at one time or another under Section 212: Graham Greene, Canadian nature writer Farley Mowat, Carlos Fuentes, the late Julio Cortazar and the Italian playwright Dario Fo.

Under the Reagan administration, McCarran-Walter has been used as a weapon in the battle for the heart and mind of Central America. "Most American presidents have resorted to ideological exclusion as a convenient tool but today, under the Reagan administration, it has become a purposeful instrument of national policy to control information," stated Steven Shapiro, an ACLU lawyer. Although left-leaning intellectuals from Europe freely enter this country (novelist Gunter Grass, poet Han Magnus Enzensberger and semiotician Julia Kristeva enter and egress this nation with ease), Central and South American intellectuals of similar persuasions are viewed as threats. It's as if a Monroe Doctrine For The Brain had been put into effect.

The best evidence of McCarran-Walter's essentially punitive function is the ongoing deportation case of Margaret Randall. Raised in New Mexico, and part of the Lower East Side art scene in the late 1950's, she left New York City for Mexico with her infant son in 1961. She soon became part of an American expatriate art community that included poets Philip Lamantia, Ray Bremser and her future husband, Mexican poet Sergio Mondragon. Together, they founded and edited one of the most influential avant-garde literary

journals of the 1960's, *El Corno Emplumado*.

On July 13, 1967, Randall renounced her American citizenship at the U.S. embassy in Mexico City. This action was taken for purely monetary reasons, in the belief that a Mexican national might have better job opportunities than an American expatriate. In retrospect, Randall realized that she did not comprehend the implications of her act. "I had no idea", she told a Denver Post reporter. "My lawyer says the embassy should have taken a deposition to show more clearly my intent. I had no desire to make a political statement."

The changing political climate made Randall's efforts for gainful employment unnecessary. In 1968, the Mexican government began a period of repression against the Left. Hundreds of students were gunned down while demonstrating and many activists were forced underground. Randall, prominent because of her magazine, sent her children to Cuba as a safety measure. After a brief period of hiding, she joined them in 1969.

During her ten years in Cuba, Randall was employed by the government's Book Institute. Through this organization she edited texts, conducted oral histories of Cuban women and translated American and Cuban writers. In 1970, she was a jury member for the Casas de los Americas literary prize, a rare honor for a North American. Randall left Cuba in 1979 and moved to Nicaragua, after accepting an invitation from Ernesto Cardenal to do a book on the role of women in the Sandinista victory (eventually published as *Sandino's Daughters*).

In 1984 she returned to the U.S. "I'm almost 50 and I have a tremendous desire to come home," she said. She settled in Albuquerque, New Mexico, near her elderly parents, married poet Floyce Alexander and was appointed professor of American and Women's Studies at the University of New Mexico.

On October 2, 1985, the INS denied her application for permanent residence. The ruling noted that Randall's writing went "far beyond mere dissent

or criticism of the United States." Randall responded on October 28th by filing a suit to overturn the McCarran-Walter Act. "What are they afraid of..." she asked one interviewer, "I'm just a middle-aged college professor who writes about dissent. I've never advocated the overthrow of the American Government, never engaged in terrorism or sabotage...is that so threatening?"

Since the initial INS deportation order, Randall has had to endure a series of hearings in order to stay and appeal the ruling. The irony of a native born American fighting to stay in her home land because of her political opinions and a decision she made for economic survival re-emphasizes the punitive nature of the government's action. Rather than persecute her, we should be glad that she has chosen to return to New Mexico, rare are her gifts in the various aspects of the crafts she practises.



Illustration by Herm Freeman

Lewis Continued

The Wishful Thinking aside, it is doubtful that the Reagen administration has much use for for yet another non-conformist writer. With the sub-verbal Rambo-icon bubbling under the body politic, it's apparent that we "lack a practise of political listening and attention" (Barthes). The current administration has taken full advantage of our political illiteracy by attempting a project of social engineering never before seen in this country on such a vast scale.

In judging levels of "permissible dissent", our government applies similar standards to foreign and domestic artists. As the INS makes a distinction between the Russian 'official' poet Yevtushenko and the Italian dissident playwright Dario Fo, the main arts organization in this country aligns itself in a similar policy. This is most evidenced in the NEA's literature program, particularly the poetry section. Recently, the amount of funding grants was slashed in half to three independent arts centers: The Detroit Institute, Beyond Baroque, in Venice, CA, and The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church. All three organizations have provided free writing workshops, a forum for poets outside the realm of "Official Poetic Taste" and access to inexpensive publishing facilities. Without

these funds, the above groups' futures are in serious jeopardy.

After the great proliferation of magazines and small book presses which marked the 1970's, we are left with the University Press as the Plate Umpire of Taste in the wake of the NEA cuts which put the majority of small presses out of business. With the notable rare exception of the University of California Press, most university presses are savagely earnest in their choice of mediocre talents and with the critical hegemony of the elitest Yale Critics, it seems that the noose will draw tighter about those writers whose style will not fit the approved 'canon' of literature. J. Hillis Miller, a key member of this school and current MLA president has stated: "I believe in the established canon of English and American Literature and in the validity of the concept of privileged texts."

Privileged texts for privileged people. Which is, at heart, the Reagen Age ideal of art. Tuxedos, a fine dry sherry and imported almonds at the Symphony Hall, the museum opening or at a poetry reading in the oaken Alumni hall. In this rarified air, art is a drug that conjures up the past or aestheticizes

the nastiness of the present.

Even the most benign forms of artmaking, be they Kenny Scharf's George Jetson homages or James Merrill's world of esthetes in Ouija-board land, is embedded within the discourse of power and hierarchy in this culture. As the late Michel Foucault noted, "One can understand nothing about economic science if one does not know how power and economic power are exercised in everyday life."

Indeed, Robert Smithson may have been a little clairvoyant when he said: "Art is dead, but the habit continues on"; the 'art habit' being an Art Apparatus that seems content to celebrate middle-class values and to hold up the mirror to critical text itself. The distance between deportee Margaret Randall and a Harvard Guide To Contemporary American Writing that ignores Gertrude Stein and Charles Reznikoff and only lists the names of George Oppen, Louis Zukofsky and Jack Spicer may seem wide, but it really isn't. And to support the repeal of McCarran-Walter, and other restrictive measures against foreign authors, while not questioning the encoding that determines art production in this country is to fail to see the totality of power that permeates our daily lives.

Selections from "The Floating Series"

by Leslie Scalapino

- 1
the
women - not in
the immediate
setting
- putting the
lily pads or
bud of it
in
themselves
- 2
a man entering
after
having
come on her - that
and
the memory of putting
in
the lily pad or the
bud of it first,
made her come
- 6
or her not
having
put it in - and
the man
coming on her
gently
lying on her
in that
situation
- people having
been
there - being
from
the city - already
- and
others not
aware of them
- 12
having the
high rents
with
an attitude that
they
shouldn't live in
this
place - who're poor
- 13
to foresee
the man's
response - when
the woman had
come - him not
having
done so - and
had
the bud of it in her still
- 14
the relation
of the public
figure
and
the death at
some time of
the person who dies from
age
- 15
and -
- an attitude that
they
should have
a job -
whether they've
means
or not
- 17
'told of
someone being
lower in social
value - that
and in
a setting which defined
us all - when
at that point
- their not
to have
a child
- as it happens
- and the bud of
the water lily
in her - when
they'd
been doing it
- 19
the crowd
returning when
the man - of their race, though
in the police - he'd
left the van
was immolated by them - on
a field
- myself or
a person
aging and dying when
that's seen by
a setting
from - that
of - when
we were young
- 21
and - their
sense of the
city - as some
ideal spot
and - where
we're
not going to
be able to live

RECEIVED

This Month's Events

Collected Poems of Stephen Spender 1928-1985. Spender knew Auden. Spender knew Graves & Pound & Elliot. Sometimes Sir Stephen can surprise you with a poem nearly as delightful as those his friends were writing. Westminster or Bust! Random House, New York, New York. Hardcover \$19.95, 203 pages.

Catching Bodies by Phillip Mahony. A poet cop prowling a beat which takes him through some of New York's toughest neighborhoods. Law enforcement offers the poet a real anvil to try his perceptions by, while the cop in Mahony seems to benefit greatly from the humanity inherent in poetry. A good read, this hybrid, though the lines often lack that tautness which divides verse from prose. Mahony's line is fueled almost entirely by his poetic & moral integrity, which is powerful indeed. North Atlantic Books/ 2320 Blake Street/Berkeley, CA. 94704. \$7.95, 71 pages.

Progress by Barrett Watten. This long & beautiful poem seeks to renegotiate Adam's linguistic covenant with reality. Watten's music is hauntingly reminiscent of Williams' greeny Asphodel. Watten's a bit of a snake charmer poet; even when the semantical meaning of the poem eludes our grasp his music manages to hold us close. What was it Gertrude Stein said about new classics being modern but smelling a tad ancient? Roof Books/The Segue Foundation/300 Bowery/New York, New York 10012. \$7.50, 120 pages.

The Golden Land by Arthur Knight. If Calamity Jane had been educated and lived through the Post War, she might write something like this. The Chinese refer to their Confucian Odes when they need to remember what it means to be Chinese, Americans should maybe go to Arthur Knight, Calamity Jane & old Civil War scared boy letters. A beautiful memoir-novel-memoir this, written in a Conestoga Ford about a married couple marvelously in love and wandering the mythical buck-skinned surface of the majestic land celebrated in our best poetry. O Pioneers.... Ellis Press/P.O. Box 1443 Peoria Illinois 61655. \$5.95, 180 pages.



May 5: JESSIE ALLEN & JIM NEU

May 7: TAMA JANOWITZ & CHUCK WACHTEL. Tama Janowitz has written a collection of short fiction entitled, Slaves of New York (Crown) and received the 1984 General Electric Foundation Award. Chuck Wachtel writes novels & poetry. His latest book of poems is The Coriolis Effect (Hanging Loose). He is best known for his novel, Joe the Engineer (Morrow, 1983).

May 12: MELINDA GOODMAN, NINA NEWINGTON & MARY SHANLEY

May 14: VINCENT KATZ & HARRIET SHORR. Vincent Katz is the author of Rooms from (Open Window Books). He plays with The Throbbers Band in Boston. Harriet Shorr paints and writes poems. Her poems have appeared in Tracks, Appearances and several other publications. She has exhibited her work at the Fischbach Gallery.

May 19: RICHARD ELOVICH & YVONNE MEIER AND CHRIS SULLIVAN

May 21: CHERI FEIN & BOB FLANAGAN. Cheri Fein is a prize winning poet & journalist. She has published her work in Ploughshares, The American Poetry Review, The World, Coming Attractions and This Is Women's Work.

Bob Flanagan is a Los Angeles poet who teaches at Beyond Baroque and is the author of the Slave Sonnets.

May 26: THE POETRY PROJECT SOUND SHOW; A BENEFIT DEDICATED TO THE PURCHASE OF NEW SOUND EQUIPMENT

May 28: JACK GILBERT & JOHN GODFREY. Jack Gilbert is the author of three highly acclaimed volumes of poetry and the winner of a Yale Younger Poets Series Prize. John Godfrey is a former workshop leader for the Poetry Project and a winner of the GE/CCLM award in 1984. He is the author of Where The Weather Suits My Clothes (Z Press, 1984) & Dabble: Poems 1966-1980 (Full Court Press, 1982).

May 31: Saturday Night St. Mark's Plays, "My Words in His/Her Mouth" Actors do poets. Poetry by contemporary poets read by professional actors.

HELP WANTED

Coordinator: The Poetry Project seeks an organized, dedicated, and maybe independently wealthy individual to coordinate programs here, assist director and learn about arts organizations and the world of poetry. Send letters and resumes to Eileen Myles.

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May 23, Jeanne Lance & Edmond Chibeu

May 30, Janice Bourdage & Elizabeth Ann Law THEATRE & DANCE / Excerpts from Beckett's FIZZLES

&

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All readings are Friday evening at 8 p.m. at 61 - 4th Avenue (at 9th St., 2nd Fl.) admission \$5

for more information call (212) 475-0212

The penury of poets is notorious & iron-clad, forming just those economic bars which Western societies (the East has its own methods) like to enclose their spiritually delinquent citizens in. So be it. Delinquency is delicious at any age, be it juvenile or senile. But don't be delinquent with your Newsletter. If you receive the Newsletter and are in arrears of your payments, please pay now for the 1986--87 season. With just a little more money, we can bring you an awful lot more. Subscriptions to the Newsletter cost \$7.00 per year. Make your beautiful checks out to: The Poetry Project/St. Mark's Church at 2nd Avenue & 10th Street, New York, New York 10003. Enclose the following form. Thanks!

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James Ruggia, Editor

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MAY'S

Monday Evening

P O E T R Y /
P E R F O R M A N C E

Host: Richard Elovich 8 p.m. *

- 5 Jessie Allen & Jim Neu
12 Melinda Goodman, Nina Newington
& Mary Shanley
19 Richard Elovich & Yvonne Meier (duo)
& Chris Sullivan

Wednesday Evening

R E A D I N G S

Hosts: Eileen Myles &
Patricia Jones 8 p.m. *

- 7 Tama Janowitz & Chuck Wachtel
14 Vincent Katz & Harriet Shorr
21 Cheri Fein & Bob Flanagan
28 Jack Gilbert & John Godfrey

Saturday Evening

S T . M A R K ' S P L A Y S

Host: Elinor Nauen 8 p.m. *

- 24 "My Words in His/Her Mouth +
Jack who Yawned"
by Daniel Krakauer

Sunday Evening

S T . M A R K ' S T A L K S

Host: Charles Bernstein 8 p.m. *

- 25 Bob Perlman on
"Close Readings of
Contemporary Poetry"

Workshops

P O E T R Y

Fridays 7 p.m. Parish Hall *

2, 9, 16, 23 Susie Timmons

Special Event

S O U N D S H O W

Workshops

P O E T R Y
Fridays 7 p.m. Parish Hall *

2, 9, 16, 23 Susie Timmons

Special Event

S O U N D S H O W
A Benefit for a New Sound System

26 Call for details

Events in June

4 W O R K S H O P
R E A D I N G
8 p.m.

*Suggested contribution
to events: \$4

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CHURCH CITY 10003
212.674.0910

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Points of Continuous Departures

CRITICAL MINUTES

by Mary Stewart Kean

Rocky Ledge Cottage Editions

2227 W. Nicholl St./Boulder, CO.

\$5.00

Mary Stewart Kean's first collection of poems, *Critical Minutes*, is an aptly titled and substantial sum of active intelligence at work. These poems are sharp and energetic, cutting back and forth through layers of flotation and awareness to some actual point, sometimes expressed in and dependent on a single word, that alters the picture. There's a sophistication in the way each poem begins, definite yet delicate; a point of departure that pushes the reader to the foreground, yet the lines don't race along at top speed urging everything and everyone out of their way. They're gentle and fluid as they cross back and forth onto each other, and an interesting relationship develops between the naming of objects and desire, and the accompanying manifestation of feeling--the actual 'it is here' quality that her description evokes. Straightforward discursive thought surfaces to present a clear picture of the way the mind works, and events and thoughts translate in a way that is inclusive and full of movement. Formal considerations seem to pull at the poems in an erratic fashion but Ms. Kean manages to not let these provocations stray too far from her intent. For instance:

The Critical Few Minutes

are shaping up.

So much inspiration has mired in soft mush
of muzak advice and rash decision.

Yet this very second stands
transfixed by the crucial past
and decisive future.

White sky cracks
like an angel with a sword
figment of peroxide
poised to pierce the heart
so nothing is forever the same.

This poem appears roughly 1/3 of the way through the collection, and the vision behind the next few poems that follow does change. Money Canzone begins with the line: "Contemplate birth, death, life, sex", Anatomy loosens and "My Body is a Modigliani" is positively sexy and sensuous, starting with the lines:

My body is a Modigliani, baby
apples and pears
apples and pears

and proceeding to the surprisingly
sober and incisive:

Some day all our hands
will curl like monkey paws

before settling back to the physical
moment of the poem.

Altogether these poems work because of the ideas behind Ms. Kean's choice of imagery and perspective. There is a thread of interplay between the self and the world that runs through these poems and magnetizes the language. The pacing overall in this slim volume is both imaginative and steady, allowing for some genuinely powerful and startling moments. These moments don't exclude the ordinariness of daily life and activity, and their inclusion effects a vision that is whole and complete.

by Laurie Price

Two By Elaine Equi

Things to Do in The Bible

Get Drunk.
Walk on water.
Collect foreskins.
Pluck out an eye.

Build an ark.
Interpret dreams.
Kill your brother.
Don't look back.

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

Take to the hills.
Report to the king.
Raise the dead.
Seek the spirit.

Reap what you sow.
Count your blessings.
Gnash your teeth.
Fish for men.

Grow a beard.
Wear a cowl.
Ride a donkey.
Carry a torch.

Sit by a well.
Live to a ripe, old age.
Remain a virgin
and speak in tongues.

These are the words of the Lord.

The Ezra Pound Cake

Composed in the "rag and bone shop
of the heart"
it rises, many tiered,
to uphold the wisdom of old men
by its bony Grecian columns.
They are adorable
when festooned with rags
(the men) but weary
oh so weary of the world.
Weary also are the guests.
Dreary the day Odysseus returned.
Solemn the suitors
that were turned away empty-handed.

DOMESTICATED HELP

The return of the Heart.
Sandy Berrigan seeking a fortune
(right livelihood) The return
of the native Lower East Side
Slum Goddess unlined and lively
Looking for work. Companion
Housekeeper She can cook too
To a musical or dancing family
Temporary house cleaning.
Put your life in order in her hands.
Polarity massage relax, it's cheap.
Make your life simpler let her sew
it up with simple stitchery.
Brighten your life Take a day off
from the kids. Get them a creative
Playmate. She's on a treasure hunt.
Oh Help!
Save her from despair.
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Sunil Ganguly (Bengali)
Amrita Pritam (Punjabi)
Gopalakrishna Adiga (Kannada)
Arun Kolatkar (Marathi)
Nabeneeta Sen (Bengali)
Nissim Ezekiel (English)

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A Language Unguarded in Memory's Theater

A FEW DAYS
by James Schuyler
Random House
\$8.95

Through the boredom and tumult of his days, Jimmy Schuyler continues to offer us poems of abiding pleasures and regrets. His most recent florilegium, *A Few Days*, continues to reveal his mystical awareness of everyday life. To see and impress upon us distinct mental images is Schuyler's gift, and through it he reveals the mind in its most divine state: perception. The four walls of his Chelsea Hotel room suffice to hold the drama, while a window overlooking a wrought-iron balcony hints at potential intrigues and entanglements. His poems are narratives of simple adventures, yarns spun in lilting, graceful language, telling of elaborate systems, devices, inventions, for getting through the next twenty-four hours. Deadly dramas indeed.

The best poems in this volume live up to Keats' dictum that a poem should evolve as naturally as a leaf on a tree. The apparent ease and naturalness behind these poems lends them a quality of inevitableness, as if they wrote themselves. Schuyler's warm and witty voice places no distance between himself and his audience: as readers, it is assumed we are trusted intimates.

The book is divided into three sections, each revealing a discrete aspect of the poet's persona. In his signature "skinny" poems that open the volume, we have Schuyler the Intimist, doggy and domestic. With the skill of a miniaturist he pictures the scene in greatly reduced form, without any loss of detail, depth or drama. Then there is Schuyler the Anglo-Irish balladeer, in a jaunty suite titled "The Fireproof Floors of Witley Court: English Songs and Dances." In lyrics of exquisite silliness, and rhythms that wittily spoof an Elizabethan giddiness, Schuyler shows himself a master of musicality, in poems so accurate to the ear as to suggest the actual dance steps of gavotte, pavane and saraband. Finally, we have Schuyler the long distance runner, in the title poem of six hundred lines.

A Few Days is Schuyler's best long poem to date. It is an ars poetica, a grand summation of a poet's subjects and skills. Schuyler's lines flow melliflously, as his tone ranges from the solemn opening lines, to the intimate, conversational, lyric and prosaic, concluding with a dirge-like elegy on the death of his mother. "A few days: how to celebrate them?" the poet asks. Of this task, Schuyler is the eternal optimist. *A Few Days* is a testament to self-renewal, which for Schuyler is a quality of mind rooted in appreciation of ordinary reality. "So much in writing depends on the superficiality of one's days," wrote Graham Greene, in what could easily serve as epigraph to the poem. (The key words here are "so much.") That which memorializes Schuyler's days is not the incident or object described, but the poetic nature deep within, exulting and transforming all that it touches. Few writers have ever achieved such a degree of self-unity, in so unprepossessing a way.

Since his *Hymn To Life* (1974), no poet has captured nature as joyously as Schuyler has, but *A Few Days* is a distinctly urban book, and we feel a degree of sadness for Schuyler because of this. On the few occasions when he escapes the city for a seacoast town, a gust of fresh air fills the poems. But invariably the weekend ends, landing him back in "stony-hearted New York." Yet in spite of his concrete confines, glimpses of the green world continually remind us of the harmony and regeneration to be found there. A bedraggled cluster of flowers in a shrimp-cocktail glass on a desktop--an image which seems to contain all of the suffering of urban life--reads not as pathos, but perseverance.

Expectations may fail him, but language does not. Often the restorative is as simple as the evocation of the names of plants and flowers, of which Schuyler's vocabulary seems endless. In the context of these poems, such names read as great and powerful spirits: alantus, begonia, forsythia, ginko, goldenrod, honey locust, lanceolate, lilac, paulownia, purple loosestrife.

Be the setting rural or urban, it is essentially the theater of memory that preoccupies Schuyler. How do the many slivers of daily incident edge toward that moment in the mind that elevates us above the dull blanket of experience? In the parlor-car to Southampton the painter Darragh Park reads Proust, but it is Schuyler, sitting next to him, who is in search of lost time, trying to recapture the color of rain-washed grass, or waking from yet another dream of Frank O'Hara.

Some less than generous readers have faulted Schuyler for several of the poems of teen-like fascination for young Tom Carey. Another editor might have deleted them. Yet what initially impresses one as slightness in this book reveals itself upon closer scrutiny as a kind of transparency of language. Schuyler's attitude to the poem is utterly unguarded. How many poets might claim the same?

by Raymond Foye

Not Such Populist Gustatories

TWO NOVELS

by Philip Whalen
Zephyr Press
13 Robinson St/Somerville, Mass.
\$9.95

These two novels are literary artifacts recording the manners, mores, attitudes, and conversation of the beatniks and their enemies, the squares, during the post-war golden age when such types flourished in America. Before supply-side economics were even dreamt of, when marijuana use was equated with people having "communist" tendencies--in short, of a period which one would think had never occurred unless one had encountered artifacts like these.

The first of the two novels called "You Didn't Even Try" is partially autobiographical and partly invention. Whalen has never married; but the novel is about the failed marriage of a poet-fuzzy-intellectual like himself. He is never realistic (down to earth) enough for the wife. He is always bumbling over some esoteric book or other and she is apparently ambitious and materialistic. They are continually arguing over minor household management matters. The post-war years, as I dimly recall them, were full of marriages of this type--none of which lasted for very long.

The roman a clef factor was always present in beatnik novels and for all I know one or two of these characters may be Gary Snyder (who was a friend of Whalen's) or somebody equally famous. There is an attempt at recreation of the memorable milieu. The characters always seem to be noshing and the author's knowledge of gourmet vocabulary rivals at the very least Joris-Karl Huysman's vocabulary of lapidary terms in *A Rebours*. Certain writers palp and savour recondite terms and Whalen is definitely one of these. Everything but the recipes. At times it gets a bit boring, but one should make allowances for a tour de force of this kind.

Anatole Broyard once wrote of Kerouac that he excelled in nothing so much as describing a man eating a can of baked beans. I get a similar impression or whalen, though his gustatory tastes are not so populist. The leading character is given to endless introspection and his hairsplitting, to his inner self, over the nuances of various phases of existence must be common among longevitied poets. If a poet, early in his life deals with the very basic problem of suicide, and then rejects it, there ought to be a lot of subject matter to concern him during the ensuing years. At times the protraction of existence or of thought among poets of this type seems even comic. What else but a waste of time? But why be genocidal towards poets?

I prefer the second of the two novels, written at a later date in Japan. There's a lot more action here and the wit of the characters seems sharper. One factor that bothered me in both novels is the fact that all of the characters, both male and female, seem to function on the same intellectual level, as though they were all members of a club resembling a slightly more modest Mensa. They're all adepts in psychoanalysis, existential philosophy, and "normal" sex. There is something a little too uniform in their loves and arguments when set up against the crazy-quilt of real life. But maybe these are the kinds of people that David Reisman used to write about.

The leading character, again a poet, finds life too Ubuesque after "two and three quarter world wars" and in thinking of Albert Camus, understands his "suicide" because of being forced to choose "between Karl Barth and Karl Marx."

The final section of the second novel, "Imaginary Speeches For A Brazen Head," is the high point of both books--a marvelous depiction of the short-lived beatnik rage--when the leading character is used as a kind of exhibit-curiosity at North Beach. The prose here becomes dazzling for a number of pages.

It was very common during those arty days for ambitious young writers to park on the doorsteps of established big literary names to profess their admiration for them and to establish a generational link. I remember Ginsberg and Burroughs visiting Celine shortly before the famous doctor passed on and I remember Corso and Bremser dropping in uninvited on Auden. This poet of Whalen's talks of dropping in on Robinson Jeffers. Pre-famous beatniks generally made a habit of dropping in on famous lostniks. For a recreation of beatnik theory and practise, one can't beat this second novel.

by Carl Solomon

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

Patricia Jones will be leaving at the end of the season. Her cheerfulness, good Arkansas sense & hard won New York smarts will be sorely missed. We wish her the best of luck.

Stickyhands of Great Affection

ZOMBIE NOTES

Poems by Maureen Owen
SUN/347 W. 39th St./NY, NY
\$7.00

I dly, I checked out the word 'zombie'. Derivation, Niger Congo nzambi (for lower case g, god); then: 'zumbi' (a good luck image); and then: Python deity in West African Voodoo; following that, a snake deity in Haiti possessing the power that re-animates a dead body; giving then to: 'willies' the speechless people who have died and been re-animated, a drugged or walking dead. A zombie is a dope, a queer. Moreover, in cold Canada, 'zombie' is slang for a home defense army conscript who is unwilling to volunteer for service overseas. Finally, of course, in current American, zombie is a cocktail served in the sort of resort Maureen Owen would not be found in: composed of 'several kinds of rum, liqueurs, and fruit juices, shaken and served over shaved ice, and decorated with mint and fruit and miniature paper umbrellas or plastic monkeys wearing tropical hats, also loaded with fruit, and sometimes labeled "Chicquita the Banana." Come to think of it, the writer of these poems just might be found at a bar that serves one of these, at least for once.

The writer of this book of poems shifts her weight. She is afraid the drug of her life moves her, and, o, it does--drug or the drag of necessity, speeding here and there. The zombie begins, drinking liberating tea, liberating what drives the thoughts: they escaped the fenced yard, scampering like winter hares (for this is a long way from the tropical resorts, this is New York/lower New England, temperate, diurnal, left-over farmland), they run over, beyond, zag-zigging the dry crust, a plain American artist in love with possibilities!

Maureen Owen loves Joseph Cornell.

Neither of them has ever been to France: both adore Tristan Tzara, Max Jacob, Mallarme. Both imagine themselves inhabiting an international art confederation: a real place on the plains of the mind. Ultimate sophisticates, they both announce their lack of formal education ruefully, pulling out racks of well-loved, acquired erudition: implying these are treasures we use respectfully, acknowledging we haven't quite the right to claim them. (As if four years of dutiful indoctrination would have altered their eccentric coordinates!)

On Utopia Parkway, Flushing, in a small paper theatre, literature and dance, architecture and history, natural science and daily life are cooked and rendered pure. Cornell takes as his guardians secrecy and seclusion: only what I can see through plate glass. Games and toys. Owen has a bulwark of labor. In a poem of ragged rhythms, she sticks her possessions together: the boys who bump broadside into her constructions, demanding a ride to the ballgame, needing laundry, clean paper, and attention: stickyhands of great affection, goat smells, her mailbox stuffed with detritus and with the news of friends. Owen reverses history; fond as Duchamp of the readymade, the fragment, the random group of fragments, which is a theme of modern life. Music by Schmiters, scrim painted by Satie. Chorus recited by punk rock kiddies.

Did Joseph Cornell want to make you laugh or did he shrink-- sad struggling man--from the unclean exchange of it? Cockatoos and nutpicks, tiny branch, that esoteric sliver of cellophane? Owen takes her irritants and her rage and uses them like any other elements; see for example, "Novembers or straight life", "Poems Without Names or your plane takes off"--many more.

It is, all the same, very clear why Owen loves him, though a proper scholar might make more in a review of all she learned from Frank O'Hara, both in her form and structures, and, even, one suspects, in a larger form and structure in which she made a way to write part of her life along with magazines, children, beans, friends, dead batteries, books, appointments, bills, rigging the broken stair rail, reading Emerson at 2 a.m., when the only other noise in the house comes from the late-night tv a man is watching in the front room downstairs.

A reviewer is supposed to run through a book like a one person academy awards committee, voting this the best for lighting, that for special effects, and choosing a first and a set of top five, exhibiting tiny squibs to spike the audiences desire to run out and buy more movie tickets. (And you should buy this book. The price is less than a movie ticket unless you live in a very quiet neighborhood.) I can't do it, which is most peculiar. For work celebrating fragments, I find the serial-ness of this book remarkable, and read these poems like a narrative, and with great pleasure. Excerpting seems a dreary thing to do to the book. But I will perform the reviewer's task by giving my answers to the two big questions: Why should you care? and what will you get if you follow my suggestion and spend your seven dollars?

You might be moved to care because there aren't many anywhere alive in all their edges. Don't turn down this chance. The mails are full of elegant words seeking to lure attention, in which the last emotion (and who knows how long ago that was) was a faint satisfaction in the high fashion of being so safely and so hiply dead. Owen takes out her theatre make-up, the kit came with instructions from Noh, and paints faces across what was a claustrophobic landscape.

What will you get? Owen's energy is going to ignore your garden gate, and park right on the porch, like a courting hound, thumping up the dust with his tail and convinced you'll adore him. What will you get? not a bag of hash, not a collage, not (in spite of all that francophilia) a surrealist excursion, for like Cornell, Owen is unredeemably a practical American, but something very serious about the trip we're on that takes in and challenges, that turns and moves, is driven by energy, driven by and uninhibited by its strong affections, by love, optimism, and dreams of wholeness and glory. You'll recognize respectfulness in its unsanctimonious nut humor, and, if you pay attention, you'll become aware of its skill, in the service of necessity (Europeans call us tinkers!)--and perhaps, returning again, you may dig at it, dig at it, dig it.

by Martha King

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