



December 1992/January 1993
Volume #147

Kenneth Koch

COMICS WITHOUT PICTURES

The Best Poetry In America Is A Joke

BELIEVE YOU ME

Reviews X-Travaganzarama

LESLIE SCALAPINO ON

THE SCARLET CABINET

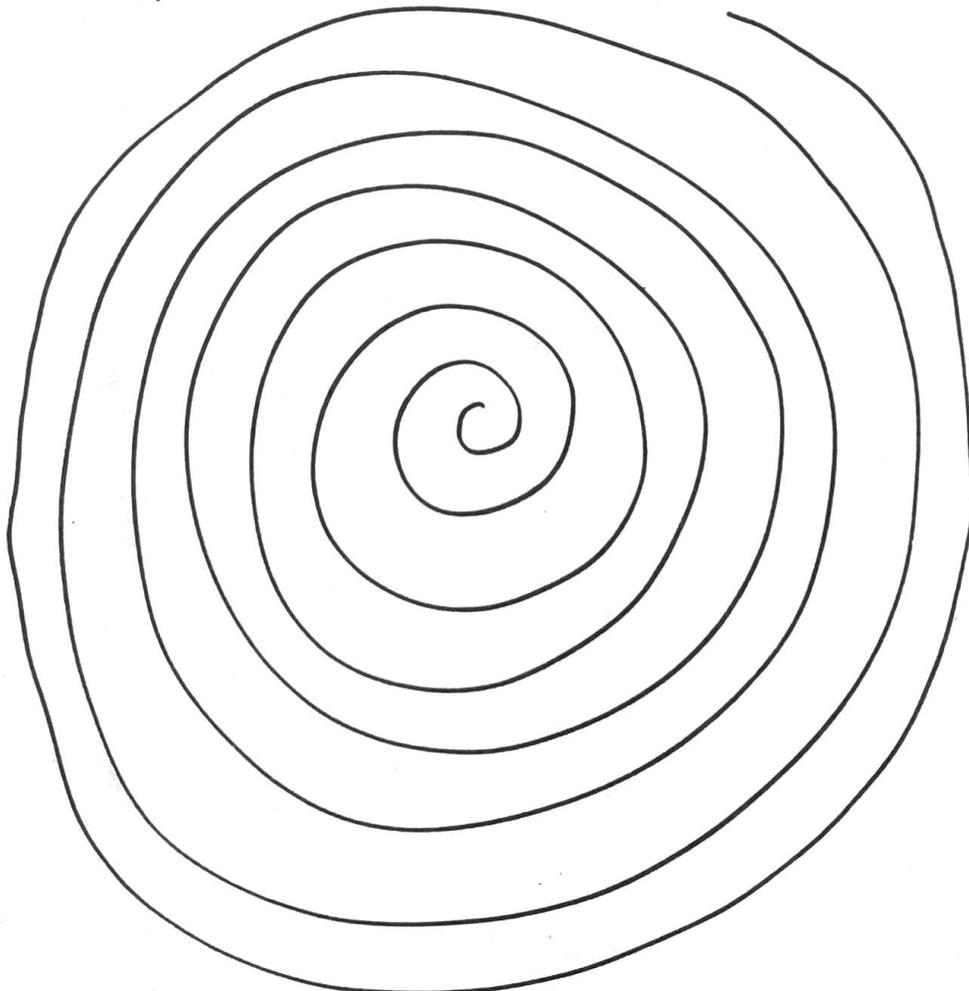
RAFAEL RUBINSTEIN ON JOHN YAU

GARY LENHART ON LARRY ZIRLIN

FIELDING DAWSON ON BEDFORD

HILLS AND HETTIE JONES

PUZZLE PAGE



FIND THE MOOSE



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12/92-1/93

Comics, Mainly Without Pictures

By Kenneth Koch
The poet and the comic are the same thing in *The Art of the Possible*3

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Cover: Kenneth Koch

OPENS January 7th

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1992 American Academy and Institute of Arts & Letters Prize in Literature.

SAMUEL'S MAJOR PROBLEMS

written & directed by
RICHARD FOREMAN

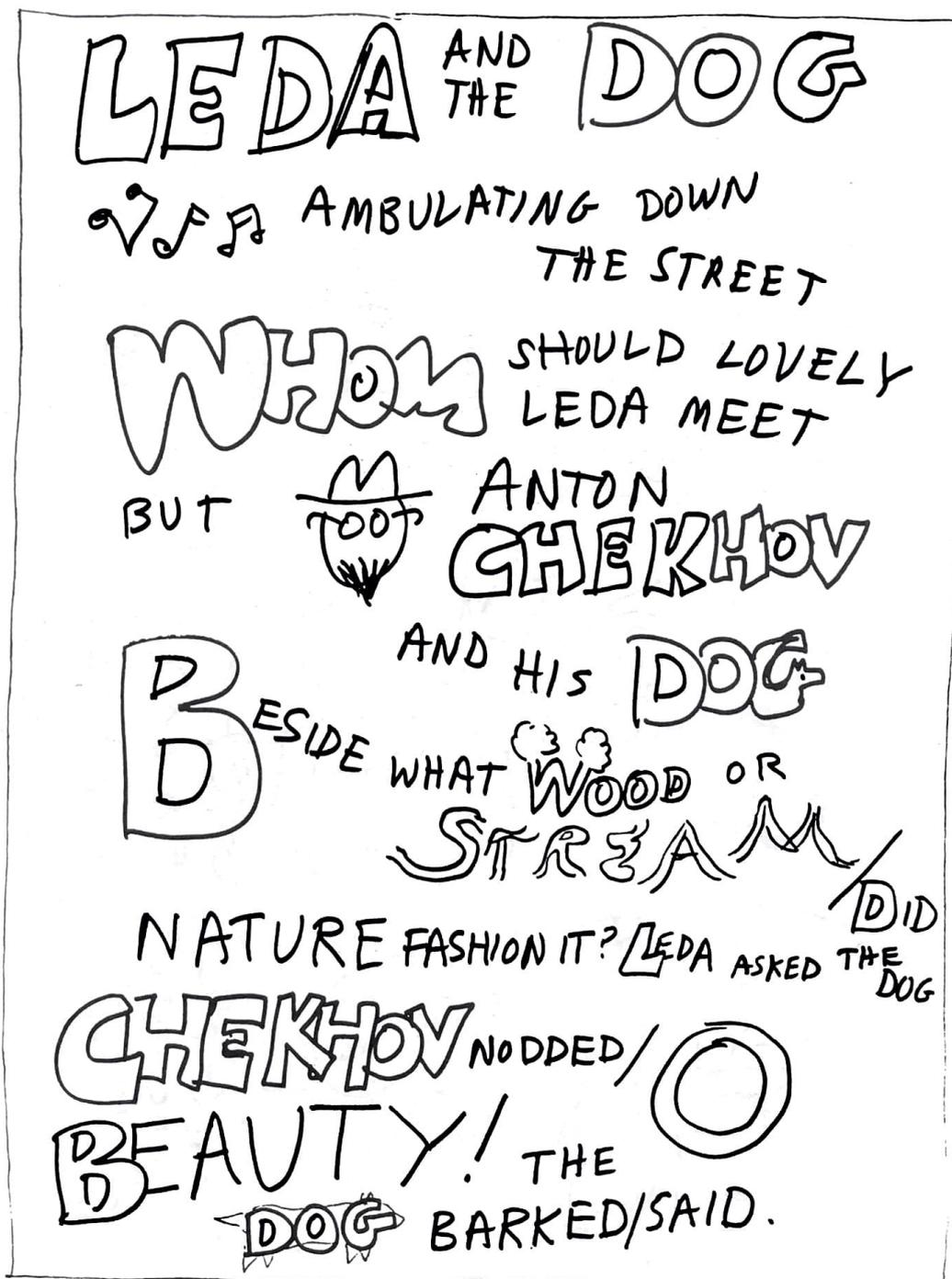
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The Art of the Possible

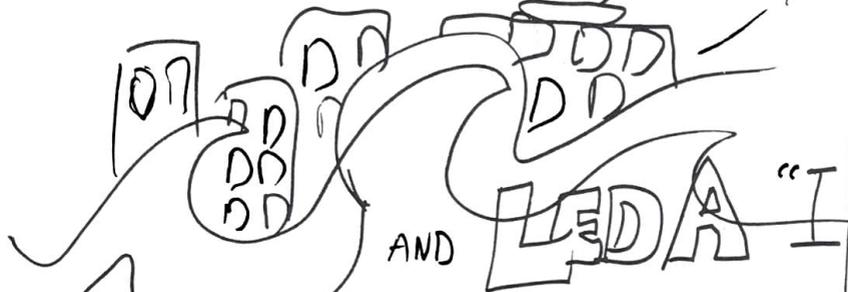
by Kenneth Koch

NOTE: I gave up my childhood ambition to make comic strips because of the problem of always drawing a character the same way—I was afraid my characters would be unrecognizable. Now, a long time later, I've had a different idea about how to do them. These comics of *The Art of the Possible* began as poems divided up into boxes instead of into lines; then I became interested in other poem/comics formats as well. These aren't "poetry comics" in the usual sense, because here the poem and the comic are the same thing and made at the same time.



LEDA AND

"ODESSA!" CHEKHOV SAYS



AND LEDA "I

AM GIRL OR GREEK,
VANQUISHMENT OF A GOD"

"WHAT CAN I SAY OR SPEAK
TO IMPROVE THIS AMBIENCE?"

ANSWERED THE

DOG



MEANWHILE -
WHERE WAS CHEKHOV?

INVISIBLE HE HAD
BECOME



INVISIBLE

INVISIBLE

LEDA
AND THE
DOG

INVISIBLE

INVISIBLE

INVISIBLE

I
N
V
I
S
I
B
L
E

INVISIBLE

BOSOM COMICS

NIGHT
AFTER
NIGHT

I
WAIT
FOR YOU
TO CALL

SAD ABOUT YOU

THE PAST	GOOD DAY	BAD DAY	GOOD DAY
BAD DAY	GOOD DAY	GOOD DAY	GOOD DAY
GOOD DAY	BAD DAY	BAD DAY	BAD DAY
THE PRESENT	BAD DAY	BAD DAY	BAD DAY
BAD DAY	BAD DAY	BAD DAY	BAD DAY
DEATH	IS NOT THE WORST	OF ALL	SORROWS

BIRTH COMICS

A BABY IS BORN	SHE IS NAMED "ANGELA"	THE MOTHER HOLDS HER	ANGELA WAVES ONE FAT HAND
THE MOTHER TAKES THIS HAND IN HER OWN HAND	ANGELA TURNS TOWARD HER MOTHER	HER MOTHER'S BREAST	ANGELA IS FED
THE MOTHER MEETS A MAN	WHO BECOMES THE FATHER	OF BABY ANGELA	"HELLO!" HE SAYS
HE DANCES WITH HER	THE PAIN IS INTENSE HE HOLDS HER HAND	THE PHYSICIAN: IT'S A GIRL!	NOW ANGELA FALLS ASLEEP
HER FATHER COMES HOME	HE KISSES HIS WIFE	HOW IS ANGELA?	HIS WIFE SAYS "SHE'S ASLEEP!"

YOU'RE AMAZING

YOU'RE
AMAZING!

Dirt

by Gillian McCain

Stood at the same bookseller's table with **Gary Indiana** near Astor Place where we talked about the genius of **Leonard Cohen's** novel *Beautiful Losers* (I was buying a copy for \$1.50). Gary wrote a great piece in the September *VLS* about **Rudy Wurlitzer** in their Save These Books section. Wurlitzer is a novelist/screenwriter living in Cape Breton who wrote the screenplay for **Robert Frank's** *Candy Mountain*.

Speaking of Nova Scotia, presidential candidate/poet **Sparrow** left an envelope on my desk. It said: "I am sure you will love this. P.S. I saved this four months for you."

It's this three page fanzine from **Rodney Leighton** in Pughwash, Nova Scotia called *IT'S jus' ME*. The nearest place to

photocopy is 55 miles away, and he's gotta go get his eyes tested there, so hopefully the whole thing will be mailed next week, depending on "how much money the eye doc wants and what the weather does." He uses words like *sushiessence* and talks a lot about wrestling. He's into trading fanzines, tee shirts, etc, but if you don't go through with the exchange don't be shocked by the wrath of Rodney. **Mike Gunderloy**, founder of *Factsheet Five*, is public enemy number one for not sending Leighton a FF tee-shirt. "Another hero dies ..." writes Rodney. Anyway if you want a phone buddy he welcomes callers and his number is 902-243-2882.

Hal Sirowitz is coming out with a new book called *Fishnet*

IMAGINE WHAT

The godfather's locked up
Swirls with other mopes
Orange through jumpsuit sun
Time hangs heavenly
In the hands a hero
Intergalactic parmesan sandwich travel
Delicious, fresh, homemade

In a window
A small dawn
A birch copse

Brings on those memories
Never were (or weren't)
Listen to asides
Across the way
A likeminded streetcorner vision
Mists the glazier's art
With a heading somewhere sense
Glowing, passed through freon

Results: stone heart,
Pebble eyes, driveway

—Ted Greenwald

Stockings (Appearances Press) which is all about sex and dating, and hopefully lots of Freudian stuff, too. **Ben Marcus** has a book of prose pieces coming out on **Knopf**. He's a waiter at John's Italian restaurant, a Brown MFA writing alumnus, and an acquaintance of mine from NYU years back. **Rebecca Moore** is currently the MC at the Performance Cantina at P.S. 122. Lookout for *Blind Sight*, a workshop production in December at La Mama by the **Yara Arts Group**. The dramaturge is our own illustrious **Wanda Phipps**. **Ed Morales** won a Jerome Foundation/Theatre Communications Group Fellowship to write about Chicano Theatre across the country for *American Theatre Magazine*. **Rania** and **John** met in **Bernadette's** class, fell in love in **Gary's** class, married at City Hall in September and are now **Mr. and Mrs. Rania and John Richardson**. Poetry lovers/restaurant owners **Doris Kornish** and **Phil Hartman** opened a new *Two Boots* at 74 Bleecker Street. Poets have begun to spring up on gossip columns in *The Post*, my favorite newspaper in the whole world. **William Norwich** devoted a fair amount of copy to **Rene Ricard** and his reputed feud with **Julian Schnabel**, who are ex-communicato. Nobody knows why they aren't speaking anymore, but Rene is taking \$5000 from Schnabel for his piece "The Radiant Child", about Jean-Michel Basquiat, who Schnabel is now making a movie about. I loved Norwich's line, [Rene] "needed the money, most poets without suburban parents do ..." When I told **Christian X. Hunter** about this, he thought I was talking about former tennis star **Renee Richards**, and told me about how she/he used to be his eye doctor.

Great *Long Shot* reading at Nuyoric on September 17th. Everyone rocked with really strong work, especially **Gavin Moses**. Surprise reader **Ric Ocasek** appeared like he had been reading poetry for years, even though he said that reading was a lot more nerve-wracking than singing. I read my epic *From the Unpublished Inter-*

view with Christ, Chapter One, and felt kind of bad seeing its about a pretentious rock star with artistic ambitions. Ric, the poem is based on an interview with **John Mellencamp** and my own demented imagination. I hope no offense was taken.

Excellent party in the parish hall for **Victor Bockris' Keith Richards** biography on October 16th. Guests included: **Marianne Faithful, Anita Pallenberg, Greg Masters, Allen Ginsberg, Taylor Mead, Lisa Krug, Ann Patty, Simon Pettet, Kim Lyons, Ken Jordan, Hal Willner, Vicki Stanbury, Janice Johnson, Legs McNeil, Mitch Highfill, Wanda Phipps, Darius James, Sparrow, Virlana Tkacz, India Hixon, Willy One Blood, Mim Udovitch, Todd McGovern, Steve Mass, Marcella Harb, Lenny Kaye, Noelle Kalom from the Scumwrenches, John Holstrum, Steve Hagar, Ira Cohen, Gerard Malanga, Duncan Hannah and many many more.** Victor gave his fourth annual Medal of the Arts Award at midnight. Past awards have gone to **Terence Sellars, Christopher Makos and Victor Hugo**. The fourth award went to **Anita Pallenberg** for her contribution to fashion. The next day Greg Masters got quite nervous reading the Keith Richards biography; he had flirted a little with Anita and hadn't been aware of what he might have gotten himself in for.

Famous Canadian **Neil Young** showed up for the **Ric Ocasek/Jeff Wright** reading. **Michael Carter's Red Tape** magazine came out in the middle of September and it's gigantic and delicious. Great **James Romberger** cover. Rumour has it that he got the eight grand to do it from some anonymous banker. Can we meet him? My favorite New York novelist in the whole universe has a new book coming out on **Serpent's Tale Press**. Her name is **Silvia Sanza** and her second novel is going to be called *Twice Real*. Please, if you haven't read it, pick up a copy of her first book *Alex Wants to Call It Love*.

See ya in a couple of months.

LONG NEWS

IN THE SHORT CENTURY

WRITING & ART

Stephen Barber. Martine Bellen. Nicole Brossard. Clark Coolidge. Lynn Crawford. Tina Darragh. Don David. Peter deRous. Johanna Drucker. Cola Franzen. Barbara Henning. Sadiq Muhammad. Harryette Mullen. Lou Nelson. Michael Pelias. Elio Schneeman. Dennis Teichman. Lorenzo Thomas. Chris Tysh. George Tysh. Lewis Warsh. Tyrone Williams. Saúl Yurkievich.

Christian Boltanski. Sophie Calle. Rick Franklin. Shigeo Honda. Maho Kino. Julius Klein. Katho Kowalski. Michelle Kwiatkowska. Miranda Maher. Rosemary Mayer. Kathleen McShane. Annette Messenger. Franc Palaia. Carolee Schneemann. Mario Sostre. Sally Young.

ISSUE #3

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Robert Grenier, \$24.00

A form of love poem in three parts, drawn as hand-written characters, xeroxed, and presented in a beautiful two-piece hinged box to enable the text to be read as unbound poems. Grenier's poems are drawings which are "drawn" as if from the other side of the paper. A little magic book, to bring the hand into the world.

Crowd and not evening or light

Leslie Scalapino, \$9.00

This is a poem with photographs by the author which "scatters literary criticism, drama and the photographic index across a wilderness of everyday language like love" (Susan Howe). "Leslie Scalapino's writing practice is a close and worldly work, 'the explanation of the explanation,' the unfolding implications of the intimate world of clauses and images, their orders: charged orders of the phenomenal world, the visual and verbal language becoming them" (Norma Cole).

The Quietist

Fanny Howe, \$8.00

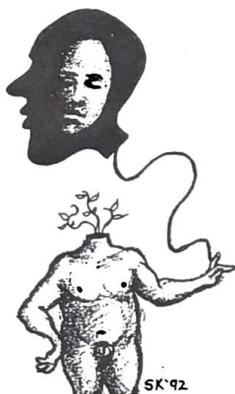
A book of poems illustrated by Italo Scanga. "Fanny Howe's writing is a form of active, attentive waiting. Rather than forcing meaning, her scrupulous vigil opens a clearing in which spirit announces and enunciates itself. Not vaporous metaphysics, but process and struggle which lead to space—'Pure equilibrium amounting to Enough'" (Elaine Equi).

Picture of the Picture of the Image in the Glass

Craig Watson, \$7.50

"In 'the silence between thought and / the sound of things undone' there is a rigorous calculus at work ... on the figure of the reflection of the always unattainable 'other.' In the last decade, Watson has emerged as one of our most original and compelling poets" (Ted Pearson).

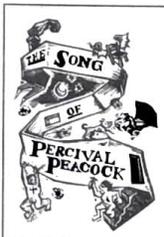
A SHEEP ON THE BUS



Frank King Wanda Phipps
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 Donna Ratajczak

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A New Literary Magazine

Double Issue #10/11

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Charles Bukowski Album

Alice Notley Interview



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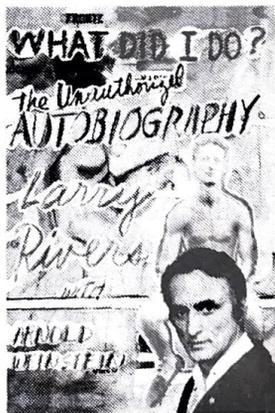
What Did I Do?

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 with Arnold Weinstein

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PUBLICATIONS

BOOKS AND MAGAZINES RECEIVED

BOOKS

Hotel Lautréamont, John Ashbery; Knopf, 1992. 157 pages. \$23.00 cloth.

Flow Chart, John Ashbery; Knopf, 1992. 216 pages. \$13.00 paper.

Fulfilment and Other Tales of Women and Men, Theodore Dreiser; Black Sparrow, 1992. 410 pages. \$15.00 paper.

According To Her Contours, Nancy Boutilier; Black Sparrow, 1992. 234 pages. \$12.50 paper.

Unravelling Words & the Weaving of Water,

Cecilia Vicuña, Translated by Eliot Weinberger and Suzanne Jill Levine; Graywolf, 1992. 154 pages. \$12.00 paper.

Flood! A Novel In Pictures, Eric Drooker; Four Walls Eight Windows, 1992. \$15.95 paper.

Filmmaking, Denyse Du Roi; Pantograph, 1992. 84 pages. \$8.95 paper.

"That" Goddess, Ivan Argüelles; Pantograph, 1992. 106 pages. \$8.95 paper.

The Cinnamon Peeler, Michael Ondaatje; Knopf, 1992. 194 pages. \$13.00 paper.

A Gilded Lapse of Time, Gjertrud Schnackenberg; Farrar Straus Giroux, 1992. 143 pages. \$19.00 cloth.

Postscripts, Daryl Hine; Knopf, 1992. 48 pages. \$12.00 paper.

ANNUAL POETRY PROJECT COMMUNITY MEETING AND ELECTION

Concurrent with the meeting (8-9:30 pm), will be the election of a community member to the Board of Directors of the Poetry Project, Ltd. All candidates must be self-nominated and must have some ongoing affiliation with the Poetry Project. Nominations must be made in writing. They should include a short description of the candidate's affiliation with the Poetry Project and the writing community, in general. Nominations must be received by December 21, 1992 in order for candidate to be placed on the ballot.

Current members of the Poetry Project, writers who have participated in Project events and all those who have demonstrated an ongoing interest in the Poetry Project are eligible to vote in the election. The election is conducted by written ballot.

An absentee ballot will be sent upon request to any current member of the Poetry Project. All completed absentee ballots must be received by 7 pm on the day of the election in order to be counted.

ADDENDUM AND ERRATUM:

The following excerpt by James Merrill was omitted from Vincent Katz's review in Issue #146.

These floozy fish...

*Are one by one hauled kisswise, oh
Into some blinding hell
Policed by leather ex-
Justices each*

*Minding his catch, if catch is what he can,
If mind is what one means—
The torn mouth
Stifled by newsprint, working still. If... if...*

*The little scales
Grow stiff. Dusk plugs her dryer in,
Buffs her nails, ruffles through magazines,
While far and wide and deep*

*Rove the great sharkskin-suited criminals
And safe in this lit shrine
A boy sits. He'll be eight.
We've drunk our milk, we've eaten our stringbeans,*

*But left untasted on the plate
The fish. An eye, a broiled pearl, meeting mine,
I lift his fork...
The bite. The tug of fate.
("The Pier: Under Pisces")*

It was Cynthia Nelson, not Cynthia Neilson, whose poems were enjoyed at last year's Angry Women reading.

WRITTEN ON THE DOOR

What modern poetry needs is a good beating

—Ron Padgett

I think what I like best about the unsightly anthology *The Best American Poetry 1992* ed. Charles Simic, series editor Poetry Villain #1 David Lehman, is how Li-Young Lee's poem "This Hour and What Is Dead" falls exactly at its center. Lee begins the 46th of the best 75 poems you are ever going to read with three mysterious lines:

Tonight my brother, in heavy boots, is walking
through bare rooms over my head,
opening and closing doors.

One could make comments on the poem (and, sure, the anthology) about bizarre efforts and futility. But bizarrer by far is the Columbia U. Press book of the 100 top poems of all time. I won't even tell you how they decided.

Elsewhere in the "Best," good guys Michael Palmer and John Ash write to Max Jacob, the way John Ashbery used to be said to write to the radio, or the tv—with it on in the background, brought in. But why talk about that kind of process anymore. Isn't it like talking about Madonna?

Speaking of Madonna, Amy Gerstler's "On Wanting To Grow Horns," is an interesting poem, page 53 (seemingly paratactic, actually only a little digressive, never dull:

For Christ's sake,
it was just a love bite.
Sponges
may follow the shapes of
rocks
over which they grow. You
can't
receive medical attention

at this facility. If a rabbit warren becomes too crowded, pregnant rabbits absorb their fetuses till there's more room.

and attendantly unsettling, like a good horoscope, or as Frank O'Hara says, "killingly funny") and Charles Bernstein's "How I Painted Certain of My Pictures" is too, even if "How I...Certain of My..." is a well-trained laugh.

Milk is the name of Gillian's new magazine, and Xyloid is the name of Wanda's. Xyloid will feature work by Monday night readers. Milk is a cool minimal-type name like "Dirt," another McCain project.

Overheard at the Nick Tosches/ Daniel



November 13

This damned head cold,
he said.
He sneezed;
his head flew off
and into my arms.

The sky cooled
as fortune tellers drank
on benches built for drinking
into the purple sun.

The fountain was broken and dry.
A cat chased a leaf
round and round its edge
until cat and leaf
swallowed each other
or disappeared.

The mirror lost patience
as silence struggled to keep up with the light
that came from beneath the door
into the carpeted room.

Two women argued over a length of cloth
until their children arrived;
they then began to sing.
Soon everyone was asleep
or suffering from the same drowsy illness.

—Max Winter (Cont'd on page 21)

Richler reading: "That bad boy stance is so dead." Perhaps, but you wouldn't guess it from Joseph Lease's essay on Rock Videos in *Agni 35*. I hated this essay because he called R.E.M. a band that tries to write poetry, and then said that such performers "are terrible poets and lousy rock musicians." On the other hand, I may have hated the frighteningly banal appropriation of the great/awful moment of "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" in the lines that follow:

Lamesters attract hordes of imitators: it's much easier to imitate a flamboyant asshole, a bully who gets by, essentially, on intimidating others, than to take the time to really learn what an art is, to really redefine an art for yourself, to learn a craft and find/create a voice.

How much of this is Lease in an Ashbery "mirror game" and how much of what I hear in the repetition of "really" is truly bullying? Pleas for authenticity are scary enough from true goons, but when as fine a poet as Lease ("Michael Kolhaas" as my evidence) starts preaching the so dead 70s dogma of "find/create a voice," put on your coat and head for the woods. I don't think this is just a young poet with a case of Influenza, denying his NY School roots and reading Frank Bidart out loud in parks. Maybe Lease is just bullying himself. I liked Thomas Sayers Ellis' "Hush Yo Mouf," which is for Bob Kaufman, and Ellis' "The Man in the Dark Room." Oh, speaking of the Presidential election, *Agni 37* will feature "Standing on the Verge," "a special section...focusing on innovative younger poets whose work has not yet gained national recognition and who have published no more than one book." Mark your submissions accordingly and send them before the end of

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THE CALENDAR OF

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SPECIAL EVENTS

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6: WRITERS FROM GRADUATE WRITING PROGRAMS:

Poet Heather Winter & fiction writer Joshua Sinel from Columbia; poet Elizabeth Lapin and fiction writer Timothy Martin from N.Y.U. (3 pm)

FRIDAY, JANUARY 1ST: 19TH-ANNUAL NEW YEAR'S DAY MARATHON READING

Featuring over 100 poets and performers including

Charles Bernstein & Ben Yarmonlinsky, Victor Bockris, Donna Brook, Yoshiko Chuma, Jordan Davis, Maggie Estep, Richard Foreman, Ed Friedman, Michael Friedman, Allen Ginsberg, Peter Gordon, Ain Gordon, Kimiko Hahn, Bob Hershon, Bob Holman, Gary Indiana, Janice Johnson, Joan Jonas, Vincent Katz, Daniel Krakauer, Bill Kushner, Peter Lamborn Wilson, Joel Lewis, Jackson Mac Low, Judith Malina & Hannon Reznikov, Gillian McCain, Legs McNeil,

Taylor Mead, Sharon Mesmer, Rebecca Moore, Gavin Moses, Elinor Nauen, Jim Neu, Maureen Owen, Simon Pettet, Wanda Phipps, Pedro Pietri, Poets 4, Jill Rapaport, Judith Ren-Lay, Reno, Ann Rower & Vito Ricci, Tom Savage, Elio Schneeman, Anne Tardos, Lynne Tillman, Tony Towle, David Trinidad, Cecilia Vicuna, Lewis Warsh, Jeff Wright, Christian X. Hunter and Emily XYZ and many more. Beginning at 2 pm. \$15, \$12 (Poetry Project members). Refreshments available.

MONDAY
8:00 PM

WEDNESDAY
8:00 PM

FRIDAY
10:30 PM

DECEMBER 1992

2 BARBARA BARG & JEROME SALA
Barbara Barg's books include the forthcoming *Origin of the Species*, from Semiotext(e). She is the lead singer of Homer Erotic. Jerome Sala's books include *Spaz Attack*, and *I Am Not A Juvenile Delinquent*. His work has appeared in *Shiny*, & many others.

4 UNCENSORED: WRITERS READ FROM THEIR JOURNALS:
Tyrus Corsi, Kimberly Lyons, Deborah Pintonelli & Edwin Torres.

7 OPEN READING
HOSTED BY WANDA PHIPPS
Sign-up at 7:30 pm.

9 KENNETH KOCH & LARRY RIVERS
Kenneth Koch will read from "The Art of the Possible, Comics Mainly Without Pictures." Larry Rivers, "Genius of the Vulgar," is the author, along with Arnold Weinstein, of *What Did I Do? The Unauthorized Autobiography* (HarperCollins).

11 WHITMAN'S LATCH-KEY KIDS
An evening of poets from New Jersey: Cheryl Clarke, Kathy Crown, Eliot Katz, Maria Mazziotti Gillan, Joel Lewis, James Ruggia, Ed Smith, Madeline Tiger, Hershel Silverman & Nancy Mercado.

14 JAMES GODWIN & MIKE OSTERHOUT
James Godwin is a performance artist who spent most of his childhood pretending to be Jacques Cousteau. Mike Osterhout is the Minister and co-founder of The Church of the Little Green Man and the religion editor for *Paper* magazine.

16 SIMON ORTIZ & CHUCK WACHTEL
Simon Ortiz is recognized as one of the most important Native American poets and storytellers of our time. Chuck Wachtel is the author of a collection of stories, *Here*, and a novel, *The Gates*, forthcoming from Viking/Penguin.

18 A READING OF THE POETRY OF VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY:
Poets read their choice of works by our favorite Russian Futurist: Ron Padgett, Larry Fagin, Maureen Owen and others.

OPEN READING
HOSTED BY WANDA PHIPPS
Sign-up at 7:30 pm.

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21 FLY & SHE LA

An evening with the women from *Gargoyle Mechanique*. Fly is Mistress of Ceremonies at *Sunday Night Open Mike* at *Gargoyle Mechanique*. She La, past partner of Toronto's Purple Institution, is now with *Gargoyle Mechanique* and publishes *Babble*.

4 OPEN READING

HOSTED BY WANDA PHIPPS
Sign-up at 7:30 pm.

11 PAMELA SNEED & KIMBERLY FLYNN

Pamela Sneed is a poet & performer who's just appeared in the one woman show *My Harriet Tubman*. Kimberly Flynn is a writer, performer and actress who has performed her solo works at La Mama, PS 122, Dixon Place and others.

18 JONES TWINS & KENTE SISTAHs

Stephanie & Suzanne Jones are the Jones Twins, Hype'r Real vaudeville performers who have been seen Up & Downtown. Christian Hays and Claude E. Sloan, Jr. are the Kente Sistahs, a duo devoted to Africanistic *switchin'* via poetic inspirations.

25 EMILY XYZ & PATRICIA LANDRUM

Emily XYZ is a performance poet who specializes in multiple voices. Her work has appeared in *A Day in the Life* (Autonomedia). Co-hostess at the Goddess Gallery poetry series Patricia Landrum has a new chapbook called *Sweet* (New Spirit Press).

31 BINA SHARIF & PENNY ARCADE

Bina Sharif is a performance artist and playwright whose work, *Empty Your Closets If You Want No Fire*, is upcoming at PS 122. Penny Arcade (aka Susanna Ventura) is the creator and star of *Bitch, Dyke, Fag Hag, Whore*.

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6 J.E. FRANKLIN & ROBERT GALINSKY LECTURE ON "RACIALITY IN LITERATURE."

J.E. Franklin, playwright, is the author of *Black Girl: From Genesis to Revelations* (Howard U. P.). Robert Galinsky's plays include *Live Axe* and *Bulletproof*. Organized by Cathy Taylor, owner of Mosaic Books.

13 ANNUAL POETRY PROJECT COMMUNITY MEETING & ELECTION

See page 10 for information.

20 TODD COLBY & MAGGIE ESTEP

Todd Colby is the Rambo Rimbaud lead singer of Drunken Boat, New York Press's Best Performing Poet's Band of 1992. Maggie Estep is a performance poet and lead singer of I Love Everybody. Her work has appeared in *Exquisite Corpse* and *Between C & D*.

27 BARBARA HENNING & JAIME MANRIQUE

Barbara Henning is the editor of *Long News: In the Short Century* and the author of *Smoking in the Twilight Bar* (United Artists). Jamie Manrique's first book of poems *Los Adoradores de la Luna* won the Columbia National Prize for Poetry.

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Poets read their choice of works by our favorite Russian Futurist: Ron Padgett, Larry Fagin, Maureen Owen and others.

1 NEW YEAR'S DAY READING (SEE ABOVE)

8 AL ARONOWITZ & ELLEN WILLIS

Al Aronowitz is the man who introduced Bob Dylan to the Beatles, the pop Proust who pioneered the New Journalism. Ellen Willis is a former editor & writer for the Village Voice, and the author of *No More Nice Girls: Countercultural Essays* (Wes. U. P.).

15 THE WOMEN FROM SASSY:

A reading by the women who put together the first post-modern magazine for teens: the mag where they refer to Al Gore as 'foxy' ... Kim France, Christina Kelly and Marjorie Ingall read from their own works.

22 UTOPIA READING

Writers describe their own Private Idaho: Peter Lamborn Wilson, Bhargavi C. Mandavi, Alan Davies, Sapphire, Tuli Kupferberg, Maggie Dubris, Eric Swenson, Sparrow, Leslie deFrancesco & more.

29 A GATHERING OF THE TRIBES READING:

"The multicultural magazine of the arts" celebrates its third issue with a potpourri of readers from across the country.

JANUARY 1993

REVIEWS

ALICE NOTLEY &
DOUGLAS OLIVER
The Scarlet Cabinet

Scarlet Editions, New York, NY; 1992,
\$14.95, 442 pages

The *Scarlet Cabinet* is a dual collection of the works of Alice Notley and Douglas Oliver, as such a most interesting idea as union of two minds.

Since the entire collection is large and varied, I will comment on only one extended poem, Notley's "Beginning With A Stain."

The writing, and probably also what Notley calls the "heart", is a series of continual starting points in which what was there wasn't prior; but always was there because at the same time it's the only existing point(s).

Somehow everything exists walking on water by being projected in a sense of time. It materializes.

*There was already somebody there, at the
beginning of creation, there's a great
calm though
with water to walk upon
....I'm going to love you, I
already do because I'm already
walking on the still, Oceanic Earth*

Similarly, the action of the heart which couldn't be prior to its object, is "born in beauty, born a loved one, before history" It knows without learning. We know things ordinarily, which are back to instinct, or flesh prior to being formed.

There are links between actions known without contemplating. "I will never make a sound, not have made a sound / I will ride this voice as I change, as always am"

This occurs between peoples. Memory is an action. The Cheyenne who are

suffering' occurs as memory in the writing. This constitutes knowing what one could not have known prior; but it's known objectively.

The action of the heart is as much time-fixed as the continual action of death; we only love in relation to starting points. Recognizing this continual openness is disrupting, as the recognition of it is itself the most precarious point.

Openness is more precarious even than the deaths (of those loved) the fact of which are the foci of this poem, "the part of the mind that wears no mask; and you".

Thus holding onto grief continually creates the observation, that is itself being the action of openness.

That openness is the tongued heart speaking. That's all there is (for everyone).

*first heart of. O human, your heart
must be that heart
Sail out this morning & look at your
city
I am afraid*

This is a hard criterion for existence. You're known as an entity, which is probably your multitudinous actions. "they know who you are in eternity / (one of the hells)"

One is emptied out by a relation to the Cheyenne, and to others ("I dreamed it to the bottom of myself").

Already coded and has happened, one lives backward through history and becomes original beginning.

I find this original beginning and openness occurring in much of the writing in this volume to be richer and more complex than the 'stance' of The Spiritual articulated as the territory of the authors in their introductions.

Why fix a territory as legitimacy while excluding from poetic concerns (which Oliver does) others' struggles with matters of gender, political/cultural ties, etc., which are the very extensions of one's unknown being?

The introductions say others are careerist. What does that have to do with writing which begins original? This is my one criticism of the conception of the volume, in that this view of others belies the real movement in the texts.

—Leslie Scalapino

JOHN YAU
Edificio Sayonara

Black Sparrow Press, 210 pp., \$12.50.

It is a paradox, yet also a sign of the uncanny justice to which poets are liable, that the more John Yau has opened his poems up to a disorienting linguistic instability, the more he has emerged as a highly distinctive writer. This "instability" is not the whole story of Yau's recent collection *Edificio Sayonara*, which also includes some of Yau's most straightforward and personal work since *The Sleepless Night of Eugene Delacroix* (1980), but it is perhaps the proper place to begin.

Throughout *Edificio Sayonara*—the name of an apartment building Yau saw in Caracas, Venezuela—we are constantly being offered alternatives. In the very first poem, "Proscenium," an already highly impacted narrative is further complicated by interruptions labeled "Version A," "Version B" and "Version C" which are then succeeded by the suggestion of "the version in which none of this happens." Similarly, in one of the six "Odes To My Desk" which immediately follow, the elements are constantly being split up and turned against each other: "someone/ is waiting / to separate you/ from your head/ the one that speaks/ when the other is silent" (Fourth Ode) or

*After consulting the list of rumors he
inherited from his father, he begins
painting orgies on the sides of caskets.
Some believe these are forgeries of a
world that never existed, while others
remember the morning the river set
out towards the sea never to return.
(Sixth Ode)*

This schismatic uncertainty is not limited to the narrative but also pervades the language itself. In the second section of the book titled "Giant Wall (a notebook)" Yau asks:

What about the pages behind the pages

What about the ones we have written and lost, renamed and renumbered

What about the ones orbiting above the dome or syllables we inhabit

A sense of the words behind the words pervades the 13 new "Genghis Chan: Private Eye" poems included in which the syllables in Chan's/Yau's "dome" start to go haywire: "the next shifter releases me/ from my solemn valves" (XI), "I received my certificate/ to practice being humus" (XII), "A crutch program/ gone soft in the lead" (XVI), "I was the wood doctor/ who made mouse calls/ ... I stuffed bullet boxes," (XVII), "Go easy on the turtle pie/ gored down/ at doom temperature" (XIX). Begun originally as satires of Hollywood pseudo-Chinese, the deformations in the Genghis Chan poems have taken on a life of their own. Not only are they frequently hilarious, but they also poke around at the truths proper language doesn't quite bring itself to say.

There is a side of Yau that would probably love to invent a new language; not an Esperanto or Volapuk, but something like what Anthony Burgess did in *A Clockwork Orange*. As it is, he is always looking for ways of joining words that have never cohabited before. This tendency is especially evident in another series of twenty-two "Postcards from Georg Trakl." Again calling on a stand in (this time the apocalyptic, hallucinatory Austrian poet), Yau plays with word combinations that seem stronger the longer you look at them: "mudguard music," "jackal incision," "reptile flash-

es," "pencil brawls," "movie but lounge," "wax shoulders," "brass radio." But gradually the focus of

this strangeness becomes clearer: not the language but the person speaking/writing. In "Postcard 16" we read "Something must have told me to say this." The poem suggests that the "something" could be "a rock of the memory of a rock/ falling towards the shadow it once owned" but the line also evokes the confusion of authors Yau has set up. This is not the simple matter of one poet taking on the voice of another, but of a deliberate confusion of identities. As "Postcard 19" puts it: "My pronouns are waiting/to be delivered to their proper slats."

In any work of literature, pronouns are of great importance, but poetry with

• • •

Why I Am Not A Writer

Am I a writer? I am
 Not a writer. I go over
 To Joe Whitsuntid's studio
 And he tells me to sit down.
 Joe's working on his eating—
 I say, "Joe, what's that you're
 Eating?" He says he's eating
 Sardines, and that they're
 Good. Those sardines sure
 Look good. I go back to my
 Apartment for a few weeks
 And eat an orange. Later,
 I drop in Joe's studio
 And find him still eating
 Sardines. I go back home
 And eat an orange or two.
 A few months later Joe and
 I meet by chance in an
 Expensive restaurant. Joe's
 Still working on those sardines
 And I ask him if they're good.
 "They're good all right" says
 Joe, "But it's not sardines"
 He says, "it's another kind of
 Fish." "Oh" I say. Two years
 Later I eat another orange.

—Loren Goodman



its history of the lyrical "I" has a special sensitivity towards them, particularly first person pronouns. Like a metaphysical film noir detec-

tive, Yau has recently been tempted to apply a third degree interrogation to the use of pronouns in his work. The first person pronoun in the book, in "Prosec-nium," is immediately followed by a weird disclaimer: "I (or someone who took my name)"

Yau, whose name itself is so close to another pronoun, performs with the speed and agility of the three card monte hustler when it comes to manipulating pronouns. Occasionally he will employ a relatively uncomplicated "I," as in the perfectly cast "Papa Inoa", part of the "Big Island Notebook" which recounts a couple's Hawaiian vacation, but by highlighting pronouns, particularly in one of the most powerful sections of the book, "Angel Atrapado," he keeps the reader in a state of productive confusion as to who is saying what about whom.

The 18 sections of prose that make up "Angel Atrapado," (Trapped Angel) again sketch a relationship against a tropical background. In contrast to what has gone before, the language shifts towards more straightforward description (perhaps because the reality of the locale is already so unreal), and immediately establishes a sense of place. (Yau's in writing-on location is even more evident in the recent *Big City Primer: Reading New York at the End of the Century*, which juxtaposes his poems about New York with photographs by Bill Barrette.) But despite the "burgundy" skies and unusual culture, the theme of "who speaks?" takes center stage again: "We divided the remaining pronouns into two groups, the impersonal and the unlikely...I was a moniker machine working the alley between the "you" and "I" we constructed in the garage." (Angel Atrapado II) One can't even say who the angel is in all of this. Is it the you/she?

Roaming alone inside that place inside herself. Smiling, eyes closed, head turned towards the sky on the other side of the white wall. Shape of ankles,

bones protruding, elegant
fragile strong. Skin's tight-
ness, hair's coarseness.

This certainly sounds like
an angel, but the text is also
a look back at the apparent prison of a
life left behind, so the writer too could
be the trapped angel, imprisoned with
the friends who "cannot help them-
selves, and think it is business" and the
"merchant who beat me across the back
with a pair of glowing tongs" and "the
cold one out there" and "the one lying
still or the one he never sees" and,
beneath it all, "the one who says."

Angels arrive, if one is lucky, to pluck
you from crisis, to announce deliver-
ance. In two of the last pieces in the
book, "A Story for Your Story" and "Pho-
tographs For An Album," it is as if the
arrival of the angel in "Angel Atrapado"
has resolved the chaos of identity that
until now had been the driving motor of
Edificio Sayanara; the pronouns have
been "delivered to their proper slats."
The resulting narratives plunge into
intractable problems of family, but in a
voice prescriptive rather than sympto-
matic, a voice calm at the proximity of a
long awaited victory. The labyrinthine
structures of the preceding pages set
into relief the wise candor of these tales.

For all its unstable masquerades, the
cumulative effect of this collection is to
establish a thoroughly distinctive con-
sciousness. However often Yau strays
into shadowy zones where pronouns
tend to get mugged and names stolen,
he can relax in the knowledge that
wherever he is his voice itself will
remain instantly recognizable.

—Rafael Rubinstein

JOEL LEWIS

House Rent Boogie

Yellow Press, Chicago, 1992. 62 pages,
\$5.95.

Joel Lewis' *House Rent Boogie*, which
won the second *Ted Berrigan Award*,
comes as a welcome reminder that all
good writing is done "on location." A
life-long resident of New Jersey, Lewis
navigates with the ease of a native
through Hoboken, Weehawken, and
Passaic: we smell the instant coffee



breeze from the
Maxwell House plant,
we hear the hiss of
passing cars on the
West Broadway

Bridge, and we watch as the arc lamps
of Giants Stadium transfigure the Hack-
ensack marshes. Lewis, who edited *Blue-
stones and Salt Hay: An Anthology of
Contemporary New Jersey Poets* (Rutgers
UP, 1990), has become something of a
guru for New Jersey poets and seems at
times rather bemused by this honor: "I
find myself still? here ... Mr. Garden
State/ trying to write it down/ with a
styro cup/ as divining rod." To live and
write in New Jersey is to be constantly
aware of how we construct the spaces in
which we live, how we speak from the
margins and watch from a distance:
"there is a city// at the end of my block,
past/ the river." Physical space no
longer lurks in the background of life
but is an animated agent in the fore-
ground of human action. Situated at
borders, terminals, bridges, and cross-
ings, these poems engage life in its pre-
sent moment, a place of simultaneous
arrival and departure.



Palatial Sum

I flirt
with the possibility
of having to clean out
my closet

but my closet
is as big as my beat
and I am the skeleton
that lives in it

my apartment
is so small
I have to go out in the hall
to change my mind

anyone
can navigate my apartment
just by speaking into
their telephone.

—Steve Malmude

The book negotiates the twin desires
to locate oneself both geographically
and poetically, to "claim this/ sinking
world as non-stop home." The paradox
of a "non-stop home" accounts for the
exuberance of this book, which insists
on the importance of connection and
rootedness to place without allowing at
any moment a slip into stasis, compla-
cency or sentimentality. Home in this
book is not the perpetual, individual
diaspora of the suburbs but a social
space fraught with tension and love—
there is the stratification of class, the
necessity of rent, the crossings of voice
mail, the thrill of woven cable strands
against the night sky.

These poems refuse to flinch in the
face of what seems to be the unassimil-
ably "real": a Chicken Holiday, a black
Chrysler, a White Castle, a snip of dia-
logue, a letter to a friend, cliches, slo-
gans and quotations. Subuniverses of
meaning confront one another, and
words appear not in order to evoke a
perfect unity and complexity of meaning
but for the sheer pleasure of words as
words. Place names and brand names (a
Brillo pad, Journal Square, Dom's Deli)
assume the three-dimensional quality of
bricks in space, laying bare the material
substrate of the poetic world in an
archaeological excavation of what the
poet calls "this chilled strate — our lan-
guage." It is a risky business; to speak in
this idiom and to court cliches is, of
course, to lose oneself in the common
place of language. As Maureen Owen
points out in the preface, the title poem
of this collection is perhaps the most
daring, for it trusts itself completely to
external voices, including those of John
Lee Hooker, Alice Notley, Erasmus and
the always elusive Michael Allen Rear-
don. In the best tradition of the com-
mon-place book, quotations boogie
across the page each voice an impro-
vised riff against the steady rhythmic
ground of a common (both shared and
ordinary) discourse.

The risk taking is rewarded, for there
are moments of brilliance in these
poems, when the sheer flatness of the
everyday idiom and the commonality of
the ordinary object turn to surprise us
with their hilarity and the extravagant
lyricism. Yet there are also moments of

urgency, found in the continual boogie of language and the necessity to keep moving, to make and renew commitments, to live in the moment of the realy now. "We don't need all those glances at our past," the poet writes, "all the Marvels are here and now, as I write, / in these real, terrible, beautiful days, / Good-night" ("The Audible Suburbs") Keenly intelligent and recklessly committed, the poems in *House Rent Boogie* challenge the reader to understand where they are "coming from," to see, literally, where the poet stands.

—Kathleen Crown

MEDBH MCGUCKIAN
Marconi's Cottage

Wake Forest University Press, \$8.95, 108 pp.

*I have grown inside words
Into a state of unbornness,
An open rose on all sides
Has spoken as far as it
can.*

—from "Open Rose"

With her fourth and latest volume, Belfast poet Medbh McGuckian has moved closer to the ambiguous ideal of abstract art. Her poems are simultaneously hermetic ("...like an actual/House I know, where everything was under a spell/And sure to form itself into a circle...") and far-reaching ("...I threw sand/As far inland in you as I could get...")—a difficult trick, dramatized in this first piece "View Without a Room," and sustained throughout this utterly involving collection.

McGuckian's work presents topics also explored in the work of Dublin poet Eavan Boland—both women share a fascination with thresholds of contact (between male and female, Anglo and Irish traditions of art). Where Boland is narrative, McGuckian is metaphoric; Boland has (deservedly) found herself an audience here while McGuckian, the first woman to be named writer-in-residence at Queen's University, seems to elude American readers and reviewers alike with the strangeness and seeming disjointedness of her imagery. Yet, for the reader prepared to let poetry be

poetry, these poems are an unforgettable experience; they proceed with the synesthetic logic, originality, accuracy, and startling familiarity of dreams.

Marconi's Cottage is named for the former home of the (half Irish, half Italian) inventor of wireless telegraphy, a two-room stone cottage above the sea in Ballycastle, now owned by McGuckian. She has said that the book creates within itself a kind of structure, and though its index is not exactly a floorplan, the one-sitting reading yields hints of an interior geography. For instance, most of the poems specifically invoking other artists (Rilke, Paula Modersohn-Becker, Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, Keats, "Emily," Gwen John, Tolstoy, and Lermontov) are placed near the beginning, along with several of what seem to be wedding or "maiden voyage" poems. The poem in the middle of the work, "The Watch Fire," is clearly about physical thresholds ("A strange ring/Gives out heat like a lit window...") and incipient pregnancy. The book closes with several poems dedicated to daughters. Like Yeats's volume *The Tower*, *Marconi's Cottage* poses the (im)possibility of retreat "in time of civil war," a consideration of ancestral influence, and a kind of analysis of the question implicit in the second stanza of her title poem: "Bitten and fostered by the sea/And by the British spring,/There seems only this one way of happening,/And a poem to prove it has happened."

The poet's ideas seem to lead the grammar around, so appeals to the grammar of tricky passages rarely yield explanations. However, McGuckian often employs a pleasing Yeatsian architectural periodicity: one long sentence makes one stanza, with the greatest tolerable ambiguity occurring somewhere in the middle, like the height of a gothic arch—straining vision, testing syntactical structure. Poems as a whole also seem (mercifully) "vaulted," with the final figure referring back to and thus buttressing the beginning.

A good example of this technique is furnished in "A Small Piece of Wood" (whose title translates "Choorka," a pet



name Tolstoy used for his daughter):

*On the secret shelves of
weather,*

*With its few rhymes, in a pause
Of blood, I closed the top
Of my lesson-filled inkwell,
A she-thing called a poetess,
Yoeman of the month.*

*In pale frock and raspberry
Boots, my waist the circumference
Of no more than two oranges,
I rode out to hunt, with my
White linen eyes and my lips
Cut out of a piece of red material.*

*On my left two rivers flowed
Together without mingling,
As though someone had unrolled
Two different ribbons side by side,
Or three-quarters of the sky, allowed
To touch, but not to mix, with winter.*

*The sweepings of my study
Seemed all spoiled remnants
In which the colour had run,
As if the hook of a clasp
Had got from eyelet to eyelet
Till it could unbuckle no further.*

*Pictures in my children's books used
To be painted in by children,
Each with a silent pen, a guide,
Seated round a table, each a colour
To himself, wherever it appeared,
No one child a whole picture.*

*While my numberless blues
Have neither end nor beginning,
Arranged like a tribe of lovers
In a circle—my headdress
A flaxen wig, a velvet bandeau,
A beaver hat, with a plume of feathers*

*Dropped from the neck and breast
Of a black-winged stilt:
Every apple is a feather-room
For seed's infectious star, and every
man*

*Who calls a woman 'Choorka',
For a hundred and eight ruled pages.*

This poem has a climate, the climate of the tropics of the body and of the body of the poem itself, as the riddle

sustained from first stanza to last reveals. First, standing together in the indeterminate relationality of prepositions, are "secret shelves of weather," "rhymes," "a pause of blood," a "lesson-filled inkwell," a "Yoeman" and a "Month." The rhythms of writing and of periodic bleeding seem invoked in the ribbons unrolled "side-by-side," parallel and possibly touching; that the poem refers to McGuckian's writing is clarified in the last stanza, where fertility seems defined in a surreal cluster of images culminating in "a hundred and eight ruled pages," which both recalls the "secret shelves," and forecasts the length of Marconi's Cottage. A drama of influence—who "rule[s] the pages—is staged in this poem, where tradition is figured alternately as an ordered game of Exquisite Corpse played in the present by children of the past, and as the gathered "sweepings of [a] study," texts somehow undone or swept up in the endless reds and "numberless blues" of McGuckian's work.

These poems are riddling, filled with shifts in the structure of address, the sex of the speaker. Yet McGuckian consistently explains what she is about:

*I drive words abreast
Into the interior of words;
It is murder or kindling when two
meanings
Rush together from such a distance,
No multiplicity can distress them.*

The image of "two meanings rush[ing] together from such a distance" recalls Lautréamont's theory of metaphor as chance encounter, as collision; it elucidates the poetic theory of a writer who must see the violence of such encounters on a daily basis. The function of the writer, and the reader, in such a chaotic zone is clarified in the description of poetry offered in "The Carrying Ring":

*Feelings are like colours, which cannot
hold
Fragments in place, but one experience
Can know another, and one part lean
on another,
Though experience leans on nothing.*

REVIEWS

For the reader, "knowing" within the context of McGuckian's poems often depends on recognition of similarity within difference, on an ability to close a circuit. This experience may be more readily available to those who are similarly "built." When I first read "The Watchfire," I immediately "understood" its most sublime image before I could translate it, not just because I was tracking metaphoric thresholds, but because of the fact of my own body:

*A strange ring
Gives out heat like a lit window:
Now it seems too large
For my finger, now it fits perfectly,
Its stone fizzes up in joy
And seems to give me
Some kind of answer.*

Confronting such an explicit image of the female body, in such a definite cultural and political context, leads me to wonder who defines this poet's obscurity, and why. As McGuckian puts it, sometimes "a sentence clings tighter/Because it makes no sense."

These images, many of them records from the cultural and political boundaries between Ireland and England, female and male, generation and generation, situate McGuckian's seemingly free-standing aesthetic experiment in context. And when she adds that "...all labor is to have/An awareness of one's being/Added to one's being, like a first daughter," I can say that for this reader she succeeds. Finding its audience, the poetry of this unusual daughter of Ballycastle will make something happen.

—Marisa Januzzi

PHILIP LEVINE What Work Is & New Selected Poems

Knopf, 1992

The tendency of fire, earth, bread, and the toil of surviving to be such apparently poetic images is no impediment to the effectiveness of Philip

Levine's poetry. *New Selected Poems* might have been published simultaneously with the new *What Work Is* simply to show that Levine's writing occupies and operates within a specific realm of basic words and elemental feelings. One doesn't notice the familiarity of the images that Levine sets down among his assertive, column-like poems as if he were setting the table and laying out salt shakers and pepper grinders, but rather one uses the images as Levine does—to dig for sweetness, sadness, and loneliness in the past and in the soul, and to squeeze out of a handful of dirt enough reality and meaning to live. Levine writes boldly and softly and always in affirmation of rich, deep feeling.

In his best moments, Levine avoids language as his primary tool. For a poet to do this is evidence of sincere effort, or else indication that he should be writing prose instead. Why would a poet shun the words, whether in meter and rhyme or arranged to fit the random patterns of a spinning radio dial? Why would he avoid also words' power to evoke things? Not, of course, Rilke's Things, but objects like sandwiches, rubber boots, boxing gloves, and inevitably cars. The answer, as I can figure it, points toward the reason why many people dislike Levine's poetry: Levine needs your imagination to make his poems work, but he needs it in a different way than any other writer needs a reader's vision. It is necessary for you to want what he will write about. You don't need to know anything about Wolfgang Iser, but you do have to imagine that a slab of bread is truly a slab. Levine could have written the line in "The Deer Hunter" when Robert DeNiro holds up a bullet and says, "You know what this is? This is this." His poems are about things and quiet events, in the faith that they will also become things and quiet events.

Of course, it's largely the poet's job to feed your imagination with words and images, but given the dangerously banal pitch of Levine's poetic vocabulary, and the infrequency of his refraining from certain constructions ("like so much sadness/water/etc." is

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his favorite) and certain objects, he needs you. You don't have to refresh his imagery—you need to forget it's poetry. Levine writes slabs of feeling. He writes to construct out of his own amazing imagination a state of feeling, built with solid words, prosaic lines (in both senses), and your participation in a need for feeling among the words.

—Sam Potts

LARRY ZIRLIN
Under the Tongue

Hanging Loose Press, \$9.00 paper

Of all the books of poems published this year, Larry Zirlin's *Under the Tongue* may be most contrary to those forces that turn life's tragedies into commercials for Tylenol (little tragedies) or John Hancock (big tragedies), life's pleasures (there's only one) into a commercial for Budweiser.

Zirlin's poems reveal an author who is irritable (claims he gets his sensitive nerves from his mother), mordantly funny, and amiably sentimental. This slim book is the first from him in awhile. It strikes me as hard-earned and amateur, in the sense that Williams and Stevens were amateurs. Zirlin works in the printing and graphics industry; he occasionally writes about his job. But by amateur I mean it's clear that the poems come out of the author's desire to make poems, not out of any professional responsibility to produce so many pages per year. As a result, the poems aren't made to bear any more than they can justify. Some of them are light and occasional. Most are so melancholy that, like Hamlet, they demand the constant play of a very active wit to transform them into objects that can be borne.

The book is carefully constructed, with foreword, epilogue, and four sections (or chapters) that illustrate different turns of the author's attention. They build to a dramatic climax, when the poet's life breaks in two "like a twig snapped/in half for no/good reason." The foreword is strangely an "Epitaph," with the wise guy tone and profound sense of mortality that are the heart of

the book. This hard-boiled melancholia is tricky business and at his worst Zirlin reminds you of a very good sports-writer. There are several fine poems about baseball and particularly the New York Mets, but I'm not talking about subject here so much as delivery.



sudden disappearance.

The second section, *Chronic*, is the most consistently engaging. Here are grouped poems about

Zirlin's family, about baseball, about summers on Cape Cod, and about his job—the subjects that allow his light to shine most characteristically. Occasionally, as in "Tisbury Pond," the melancholy threatens to break into despair. The tone of the baseball poems is expressed succinctly in the title of one, "All Dreams End With A Loss." In "Printer's Error," a poem about his job, he contemplates the damages consequent upon doodling "the happy dead" in the margin of a set of proofs. But it is the short prose pieces (seven of them in this section) that are the most remarkable. His account of his early adolescence in the suburbia of American myth ("Wallpaper") rings so true that you realize you've never heard it like this before. He is able to conjure one house from a tract that stretches beyond the horizon by precisely locating his father's fish tanks and attending to the poodles on the wallpaper in the half-bath. The eye for detail combines with glimpses of the family to refresh the genre. His parents are portrayed not as monsters in a teen soap opera but individual shadowed mortals who were once young and drove fast.

Another prose piece, "Major Zipper," is about time passing, the kind of platitude invigorated only by ample doses of memory and imagination. The Major was a tall Beefeater with a fly of flashing lightbulbs that opened and closed for passengers on the Pennsylvania Railroad. As a kid, Zirlin could see it atop the Conmar Building from his grandmother's window. Over the years, he occasionally saw it from a passing train. When he heard that the block where his grandmother lived was going to be torn down, he decided to visit the site. This is the kind of performance that could become nostalgia. But Zirlin's vision of things is always keen, his imagination connected to a tangible landscape.

All the book's sections are not equally successful. *No Wonder* is a miscellany of poems ranging from thoughts on the

First Baseball Dream of the Off Season

*I'm Stottlemyre standing
on the mound.
Gooden's in trouble.*

*He can't get his curve over.
He's dropping down
to three-quarters so*

*his fast ball's lost that good
pop. Dodgers
walk the bases*

*with their bats like a conga line.
"Sore arm, Mel.
Shoulder hurts like hell."
He wipes his face with his left arm
holding his cap by the bill
I gotta take him outta the rotation.*

*I can't stand the way
his new haircut
sparkles with sweat in the sun.*

The first section of the book, *NYC*, is a collection of snapshots that attest matter-of-factly to the city's capacity to devour its least fortunate inhabitants, and to the inevitable cost of living with explosive, pointless violence and

• • •

Fossil

*At the tip of the fern's arm
five fingers splayed
as if to say stop,*

*lie down in the muddy
Pleistocene
for a long, long sleep.*

—Elizabeth Cohen

art to political spoof. Despite my fondness for individual poems ("No Wonder" and "The Cloud Regatta"), these are the kind of "whirligigs" mature poets can't help but write once they know how. They are admirably crafted but less inspired than the rest of the volume.

REVIEWS

The book's fourth and title section, *Under the Tongue*, collects poems about the dissolution of Zirlin's marriage. Zirlin doesn't treat divorce as country music does—as the inevitable morning after—or as grist for the poetry mill. His is the drama of unfeigned sorrow, following the destruction of something that required an expense of soul to build.

In *Two Cheers for Democracy*, E.M. Forster asked where we might put our faith in a world ravaged by militant creeds and "rent by religious and racial

persecution." He suggested we start "with personal relationships." He added that "one must be fond of people and trust

them if one is not to make a mess of life, and it is therefore essential that they should not let one down." Zirlin is a gregarious poet, a man with rooted sympathies. His "faith" reminds me of Forster's. In a world rotten with suffering, he holds to the decencies. His gift is not to make it appear easy, but to impress us with the full weight of fate. There is never any going back to get it right, which is why memory is a moral responsibility. Larry Zirlin remembers vividly, and in his imagination the past, rapidly fading, is not yet obliterated. He places us in a history that doesn't exist if we accept the fiction that we are born anew every morning.

—Gary Lenhart

Vagaries

It's nothing specific
It's the accumulation
Like a recipe
The way the ingredients
Affect each other and
Make the whole
It's a changing whole
Not even a snapshot
Stops it
It's only a part
Taken up in the momentum
Of the moments gathered
Maps help only in the particulars
I'm vaguer than that
The calendar doesn't gauge
The yearning to contain
More than the information
And pleasures and pains
Of passing days
I want it tidy
Like compacted trash
All the fibrillations
Answering the breezes
Voices echoing, footsteps
Solid against the floorboards

It's in the air
That immeasurable substance
Alien and benign
Enveloping, porous and peculiar
A pigeon on the windowsill
We push a piece of strawberry
Out to, a three-year-old and I
It'd be so nice to have you
To come home to, a lyric
Suddenly played back on my
Inner frequency
Birds singing, that's been good
My friend next door on
Hearing me home knocks to
Borrow bleach for an ink stain
On a new white blouse
Maybe it'll work, I hope so
I doubt it, good luck, it didn't
This is a summation of its parts
That indefinable but urgent
Broadcast of convergences
There it is
Exactly as it has to be
Who am I to interfere

—Greg Masters

THE WRITING WORKSHOP,
BEDFORD HILLS

CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

More In Than Out

**Edited With an Introduction by
Hettie Jones**

This is a one-woman job from front cover to back cover. She's been teaching up there the past three years and, aside from the obvious (grim) routine—going in and out of that mole-brained 12th Century institution with its male and female guards, this collection is the first (I know of) such indigent publication (done at the prison), and selected, edited, arranged and presented—even the cover photo is hers—by not only the writer and poet that she is, but by as skilled and experienced an editor, copy-editor and proofreader that there is. She has some history, in publishing...copy-edited Franz Fanon's books, umm!

So it is with this clout and skill that *More In Than Out* comes as the most direct, creative publication of prison writing I've read and there are dozens each year. We don't know much about it, but those mags, newsletter and local publications nationwide are there. Often with good work.

Writing coming from the medium joints and houses of detention can be hit-and-miss because those are places of transition. The work that comes out of the big, maximum security joints—like Bedford Hills, Attica, Sing Sing, etc.—where inmates can stay for twenty years and more, means she's had a chance to work with her students, and you could say, like all great teachers, she's so proud of their work, she's gonna show us. Bedford is a prison for women, as two books by Jean Harris have informed us, but on the inside of the inside (of the prison), Harris is an elitist, is not to be trust-

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Introduction by

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ed—has manipulated one inmate...
Harris has also not come to Hettie's
classes.

Writing from prison that only shows
us how good the writing is, reveals edi-
torial (elitist) limitations, and innocence
of prison reality, just as those publica-
tions do that stress religion. The poetry
I love so much, but is seen with utter
contempt by academics and educated
poet-types is: the poetry and writing of
expression and feeling with very little
skill or form, and often in rhyme,
because it's in these we see yes the emo-
tion felt, but from between the lines a
loneliness, suffering, and pathos always
comes through. Poems that rhyme like
Hallmark Greeting Cards are scorned by
us but are the basic prison poem. A
woman's description of her cell, another's—
unstated—walk from her cell
(obviously in Solitary Confinement),
along a corridor to take a shower,
shines, brilliant. Poems from childhood,
of family, yes, you bet violence, in deep,
down deep, coming up and out in
words, with a lot of love, loneliness,
vulgarity. A collection of work by ten
women that shows once again what
those who teach inside can do with such
talent. Prison writing, like its writers, is

complex, reflecting
more than we antici-
pate. One example of
many: the title of the
book comes from the

title of the first poem in the book, which
is its first line—to begin, meaning the
editor is a poet, but is also tells a deep-
er story. Those of us who teach writing
classes inside learn what the title
means—after classes are over we go,
leaving our students behind, in there. I
die a little, as they gather round me,
talking about what they will write, or
thanking me, and saying goodbye, as I
depart, which they allow. Were it not
for my students, I would not have the
freedom to go, because they are more in
than out, and I'm not, nor is Hettie. This
is why in spirit and art, they come with
us to the door.

There is more to be said...but honest,
it's all good. It's a book, a honey.

—Fielding Dawson

DOOR (Cont'd from page 11)
December to:

Agni
Boston U. Creative Writing Program
236 Bay State Road
Boston MA 02215

• • •

The Sadness Which Is Greece

Ah sweet song of the bouzouki—
How you call to me:
Ancient song of Athens
How sadly you arrive tonight

Across this centuries of moonlit waves,
Across this table full of appetizers:
hummus, tzartziki, termousalata,
dolmades, keftedes, zaponika, spanakopeta—

How like a mirror in the sand
You are
Reflecting just the sun: so white
As to become invisible.

This is a toast.
I have forgotten what I wanted to say.
You will forgive me.
Greece.



Editors for the issue will be
Thomas Sayers Ellis and
Joseph Lease.

So, I'm walking down Avenue A when
Poetry Villain #2 Clayton Eshleman
pulls up and says "DO YOU THINK
SUCH SCRATCH-MY-BACK GETS BY
OUR EYES et cetera." And I say, "Hey,
Clay, I love *Sulfur* 31, always giving the
younger poets a place to get their work
seen." Of course, *Sulfur* would be a
great magazine even if it were just the
Noticings section, where correspondents
like Marjorie Perloff (who calls Max-
imus a "great" poem! this time), Rachel
Blau DuPlessis, Juliana Spahr, Eliot
Weinberger and Don Byrd get to just
say what they like and they don't like
lately. As it happens, *Sulfur* 31 has a fine
strange Saturday-Night-Live kind of
poem by Paul Violi. The Olson-Boldereff
letters confirm my long standing suspi-
cion: that Olson is a kind of poetic Nixon
(much more than Ashbery is, if you'll
excuse me Steven Paul Miller) who
taped himself and practiced a kind of
poeticpolitik but never managed the
Stalinesque stature of a Breton or an
Eliot.

The Sadness Which Is Bulgaria

Our three great teachers have been
Despair, ardor, and despair.
Ah happiness—
you speak to us in a foreign language

outside a train station
shut down and boarded up
for almost a century
of perpetual rain.

You speak to us in a glance
from a stranger
in a distant restaurant
nearing closing time.

You are what we would say
to the stranger
if only we knew how to talk
in the language of happiness—Bulgaria.

I may snore some while reading *Talisman*, but I still love the auteur format of the magazine, and any magazine that thought to do its first



a question.

Henry Hills' films at
Anthology Film
Archives were

they could switch. Black-Eyed Susan and Terry O'Reilly, those were the two actors. It did develop, after all, into a story. It was corny, but he played her like a violin. Something about a Chinese orchestra. Then the way they touched each other was weird. Gangster hoboes meet the offstage voice of authority, a spotlight and an electronic sign. "You have, Just. Committed. A Crime: A cheap Bribe Don't make another sound. I ACCEPT. The bribe. You Are Mine." Ruth Maleczek directed. She can be seen (along with DeRoberti's) in "In The Soup," as Steve Buscemi's mom who dances with Joe. She is also the voice of Mignon in the all-bug *Mahabharanta*. I thought Mignon's speech after she was crushed by the dinosaur of non-profit organizations, how she touched Antjuna's face, that was all right. The puppets were funky and beautiful. I Wayan Wija's galloping ant charriots and puppet voices were backed by a balinese orchestra. I was grateful for the Comic insect asides: "What is dramatic law?" "Don't cross on my line."

(Review by Anna Malmude and Jordan Davis)

Now. If *Cathay* is a Providence magazine it doesn't seem too obliged to drink pepsi, take valium, or crash. Barbara Guest gets to say "now now now/velvet monkey," and Lee Ann Brown starts a poem with the line "Very fast like a car or waterfall." Stephen-Paul Martin has one of his accomplished and apparently legally-threatened Superman stories, which also begins promisingly: "Superman is a verb disguised as a noun."

Of the interpretations of L=A=N=G in *Cathay*, I like John Byrum's best, better if he left the word "pixel" out. Might

issue on pre-owl Alice Notley and its tenth on post-Creeley Gustaf Sobin can't ever be thought dumb. The Nathaniel Mackey issue around now has a post-Malmude poem in quatrains by Gale Nelson, a bizarre translation of a little prose piece by Mallarmé, a Mike Topp joke (which I blow for you now—"A Fjord" ends with the word "chjeviolet"), good work by Stacy Doris, Bruce Andrews, Albert Mobilio, Joe Donahue, and the requisite Edward Foster interview with the hero of the issue. There's also an interview with James Schuyler.

Long News: In The Short Century Issue 3 matches Elio Schneeman with Carolee Schneeman. There are three more good new poems by Kim Lyons, and after a set of bad photographs, five poems by Chris Tysh for different people. There's some post- damage here too, with talk of "a red light impossible to photograph" and "xeroxed weather," but putting names in the titles is a good gambit (not unlike Michael Friedman's essentialist poems of Larry Fagin et al in *Special Capacity*), turning the poems into little magnetic zones of address and pronoun shift. Not so much in "Brain Noise For Bill Sanders" which Tysh ends "You tell us," but "Photo Opportunity For Joanne Leonard" which begins "not exactly burning, the room she slept in," and later goes, "You know the unsorted bric à bric of pet owners." Well I thought it was interesting. And Steve Levine, I didn't mean anything bad by the question "Who is Steve Levine?" I was in a Jeopardy-like rhythm of answering with

nowhere near as dubiously magnanimous as "Husbands and Wives," which was saved for me mostly by Galaxy Craze's cameo as Harriet, the deranged ideal woman, and catching which books writer/professor Gabe allowed himself to be photographed with (Harold Brodkey's *The Runaway Soul* dominated the coffee table, and the documentary interview shots with Woody's character were in front of a shelf of *The Paris Review*, with what looked like numbers from the 60s and 70s). Of the films in the Sunday night presentation, I liked best the first film, shaking tree-shots and wicked fast pans around lakes, and the collage of L=A=N=G folks Jackson Mac Low, Hannah Weiner, Bruce Andrews and others in a pre-Bush soundbite festival. I didn't realize Hills had done John Zorn's Naked City videos. I liked the film of bats in their milieu, but I was a little less sure of the juxtaposition of duck families and Bali parades in "Bali Méchanique." More Language films! More poet-filmmakers! Hills works with the Segue Foundation .

The Mabou Mines productions at the Church through November. Terry O'Reilly's *The Bribe*: "If you want popcorn, go to the movies." Humphrey Bogart meets Paul Simon. Getting to know the IRS. For some reason they were bag people, still being audited, it had to do with the 40s. Those aren't the nice things about it, though. The wash-buckets and they were re-dubbed in their own voices, did they always have microphones? And there was ventriloquism,

The Gladness Which Is Roumania

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—Jonah Winter

even have been like running into a tree, instead of hiding in the woods. But I don't want to be confused with the notorious editor of the *11th Street Ruse*, who added the line "Someday I will be Superman's slave" to the end of Jennifer Gundberg's poem "School Was Cancelled Today."

Gary Snyder! Anarchist buddhist! You are a fine poet! I am shouting so you will be able to hear me wherever you are! But I am very slow! What is your book, *No Nature*? It sounds too much like it needs "Is a Good Nature" or something hateful attached to it! It belies the brilliant berries-in-the-bear-shitness of your early work! The winsome qualities of your more recent, ecological work!

Nicholas Mosley! British novelist and son of fascist Oswald! I love the way you

reverse the expected punctuation for interrogatives and declaratives! Isn't it clever! You and Djuna Barnes are reason enough for Dalkey Archive Press to exist! Your book, *Hopeful Monsters* should be made into several movies!

Olive Moore! I love your novel, *Fugue*, in Dalkey Archive's *Collected Writings*! It is much better than the fugue in *Ulysees*! I have a hard time understanding your politics, though.

Thomas Bernhard's work is still being translated into English, the two newest arrivals being *Yes* and *Old Masters*. *Yes* is the most harrowing of Bernhard's obsessively evasive novels, which one anonymous critic said were "like Beckett, but with characters." In *Yes*, a cranky Aus-



trian person who loves music exhausts one or two topics of conversation and is saved by a strange foreigner of a similar temperament

whom he watches self-destruct. *Yes* ends like *Ulysees*, but different, okay? It's better than *The Loser*, which is about a cranky Austrian pianist who watches a cranky Wittgenstein-like Austrian pianist-friend shrivel up by comparison to their mutual friend, Glenn Gould, but not as good as *Wittgenstein's Nephew*, which is about a cranky Austrian person who is hospitalized in the same place as Wittgenstein's nephew. I haven't finished *Old Masters* yet, so I will only say that it is about a cranky Austrian art-historian and his cranky Austrian museum-guard acquaintances.

All this Poetry Villain and good guy characterization—what am I trying to do? Raise money? I would like to assure the community that if there is anyone who could be called a Poetry Villain, it is I. And if not, then I meant neither malice nor generosity.

My apologies to Vincent Katz, whose Merrill review last time was truncated. The companion texts are on page 10.

Wry indeed are Rafael Alberti's poems in *Los 8 nombres de Picasso/The Eight Names of Picasso*. Translated by Gabriel Berns and David Shapiro, with a foreword by Picasso biographer John Richardson, the poems are luxuriously printed by Gas Station Editions. There are as one would hope several illustrations by Picasso. The least coy of the poems is "Peace," about Picasso's late doves. It closes with a question, and I close with it:

*Of all the doves, one went forth
into the world.
Even now,
she is circling the sun
in time with the earth.
Flight without leader, always at
risk.
Will it return again
to the old dovecote it abandoned
one day?*

—Jordan Davis

Wise Proposal

I found the message on the back of a bag of Wise Potato Chips:

"We are so confident that you will like the crispy, robust taste of Wise Potato Chips, if for any reason you are not completely satisfied, we will send you a refund for the purchase price plus postage. Simply mail this empty package and the reason for your dissatisfaction to:

Wise Potato Chip Guarantee
Department-W
P.O. Box 4658
Monticello, Minnesota 55365-4658"

So I mailed them the package, plus this letter:

"Dear Wise,

The reason I am not completely satisfied with your potato chips is that I hate capitalism.

Your friend,
Sparrow"

I await their reply.

—Sparrow

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Yes I wish to become a member of The Poetry Project. Here is my tax-deductible membership gift:

\$50 \$75 \$100 \$250 \$500 \$1000

No I do not wish to join at this time, but here is my tax-deductible contribution of \$_____.

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