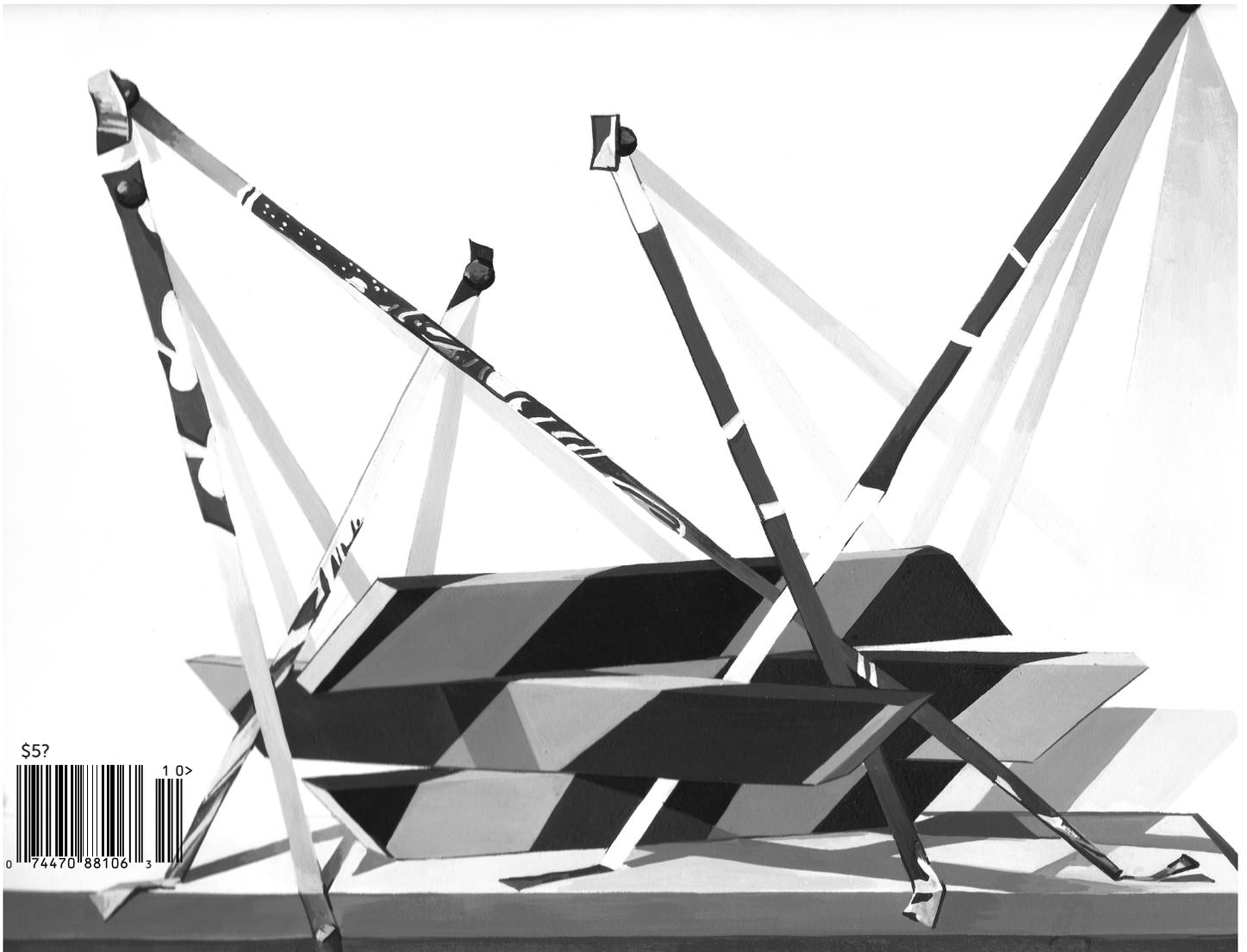


THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

www.poetryproject.org

FEB/MAR 10 #222

LETTERS & ANNOUNCEMENTS ESSAY ULJANA WOLF ON ILSE AICHINGER PROSE ILSE AICHINGER TRANS. ULJANA WOLF & CHRISTIAN HAWKEY BARBARA HENNING INTERVIEWS HARRYETTE MULLEN POEM NATHANIEL OTTING CALENDAR EDMUND BERRIGAN REVIEWS AMANDA NADELBERG, LEWIS FREEDMAN, AARON LOWINGER & JONATHAN SKINNER MARGARITA SHALINA REVIEWS MARJORIE PERLOFF & CRAIG DWORKIN LAURA HINTON REVIEWS EMMA BEE BERNSTEIN & NONA WILLIS ARONOWITZ STAN MIR REVIEWS MICHAEL GIZZI JILL MAGI REVIEWS M. NOURBSE PHILIP THOM DONOVAN REVIEWS RACHEL ZOLF



THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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ON THE COVER: "Shelftop Fort"
by Stacie Johnson.

Stacie Johnson is a painter living in Brooklyn. More information on her work can be found at www.staciemayajohnson.com.

LETTERS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Out of this world

1. from the director

I began the week leading up to the 36th Annual New Year's Day Marathon Reading feeling nonchalant and feeling worried about how nonchalant I felt, but after we got through the first few organizational hiccups, I realized the uncomfortable feeling was that of confidence. I knew this year was going to be extraordinary and indeed it was. The performances were electric (Miguel Gutierrez's dance harnessed the off-the wall energy of the day) and the community response was enormous. I have never seen the Sanctuary so thronged with people. As the great poet Sparrow wrote to us the next day, "The new was new, and so was everything else." And, wow, we raised over \$18,000 this year, which is about \$5,000 more than the customary amount. These funds, as you know, allow us to pay the rent, continue our programming and plan for the Project's future. Thank you for every dollar you spent on admission, food, books or Membership that day.

I made some opening remarks that invoked words written by Allen Ginsberg in his introduction to *Out of This World* about St. Mark's being a culture church and a place where many people have been coming for decades to tap into the great accumulation of granny wisdom about poetry, familiarity and gossip. Ah, the true meaning of New Year's Day! We hope that 2010 holds much promise for each of us and for the state of the world. We appreciate your devotion to our celebration and thank you, again, for being part of the Poetry Project.

Z poważaniem,

Stacy Szymaszek

2. from the program coordinator

FELIZ ANO NOVO Y TAUSEND DANK DEAR FRIENDS

In the five years I have been working in the office, I have never met a marathon quite like Number 36. By 3PM we had over 300 people come through the door. The official head count of 1,250 exceeds recent memory, as does the profit...over \$18 grand!

Needless to say, the marathon was and never is possible without the generosity of time and spirit given to the Poetry Project by you, our community-at-large. To the 150 "acts," 80+ volunteers, dozens of food and book donors and to the attentive and lasting crowd of hundreds, we say thank you! We love you! High-five! Big hug!

Volunteers: Bob Rosenthal, Don Yorty, Douglas Rothschild, Betsy Block, Nick Morrow, Sue Landers, Natasha Dwyer, Christa Quint, Joe Elliot, Diana Hamilton, Eddie Hopely, Elinor Nauen, Will Creeley, Mina Pam Dick, David Kirschenbaum, Ian Wilder, Kim Willder, Gary Sullivan, Nada Gordon, Joanna Fuhrman, Donna Brook, Tom Savage, Jennifer Keane, Vincent Keane, Van Zimmerman, Kendra Sullivan, Simone White, Barry Denny, Paolo Javier, Greg Fuchs, Jacob Burckhardt, CAConrad, Laura Elrick, Evelyn Reilly, Adeena Karasick, Safia Karasick Southey, Sophie Prevallet, Phyllis Wat, Gail Tuch, Stephanie Gray, Michael Scharf, Bill Kushner, Steve Rosenthal, Patricia Spears Jones, Ed Friedman, John S. Hall, Edwin Torres, Erica Kaufman, Paul Foster Johnson, Ana Božicević, Amy King, Geoffrey Olsen, Kimberly Lyons, Lo Gallucio, Akilah Oliver, Laura Jaramillo, Dixie Appel, Lauren Russell, Nicole Wallace, Thomas Seeley, Will Edmiston, Jim Behrle, Todd Colby, Gillian McCain, Kelly Ginger, Nathaniel Siegel, Jeffrey Perkins, Eddie Berrigan, Kathleen Connell, Corina Copp, Brett Price, Evan Commander, Chris Martin, Dee Dee Thompson, Jeremy Hoevenaar, Alice Whitwham, John Coletti, KB Jones, Mariana Ruiz Firmat, Derek Kroessler, Douglas Piccinnini, Erica Wessmann, Ivy Johnson, Dustin Williamson, Kari Hensley, Lisa Ozag, Geoff Mottran, Brenda Iijima, Rachel Levitsky, Nic Veroli, Frank Sherlock, Nicole Peyrafitte, Miles Joris-Peyrafitte, Pierre Joris, Robert O'Haire, Lakyrkhumal Sylem and whomever else I may have forgotten!

Books: Wave Books, Meritage Press, Nightboat Books, Bootstrap Books, Ugly Ducking Presse, Libellum, BlazeVox Books, Belladonna Books, Futurepoem, Karl Gartung, George Albon, Ted Greenwald, Giovanna Frene, Federica Marte, Tracey McTague & Brendan Lorber, Larry Kearney, Narrow House, Gina Myers, Richard Hell, Rachel Zolf, Ryan Murphy, Natalie Lyalin, Matthew Thorburn, Susan Mills, Pierre Joris, Nicole Peyrafitte, Anselm Berrigan, Amanda Deutch, Simon Pettet, and day-of donors!

Food & Services: Amy's Bread, Momofuku/Milk Bar, Porto Rico Importing Company, Grand Daisy Bakery, Magnolia Bakery, S'Mac, Two Boots, Veselka, Curly's Lunch, The Source Unltd., Christa Quint, Gillian McCain, and Nicole Peyrafitte!

Davids: I would like to especially shout out the names of David Vogen and Dave Nolan, the two tireless gents hunched over the sound board all day (and night) long. Heroes! Champs! Enablers of sound!

Cheers to the dawn of a new decade.

Love,

Corrine Fitzpatrick

LETTERS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

3. from the editor

Dearest, it was fruitful and wise and abundant; more fruitful than a productive group of common interest has been, and wiser than a productive group of intelligence would generally make a room so; and abundant in its synchronicity with C-R-U-M-B-L-E on one hand (in a purple leisure suit with oranges sewn thereupon, perhaps goes in the fruitful part) and on the other, hand that is, babies who wake before I do and attend with their parents the beginnings of New Year's parades of larks and conjecture and alliteration and affection and hereforthwith might dig through the old boxes and find a newsletter or two, or an old mimeo, maybe with a poem from mom or pop; and maybe glimpse the community at hand, as I said, which was clearly marked in its letters, and maybe Sophie or Sylvie or Aurora or Lucas or Coco or Beatrice or Begonia or Harriet or Lucy or Dan the oyster man's daughter will trade in a machine for a page or a weak one, the lost one, a prompter, for a REAL poem or an Ilse Aichinger poem in fact, or a Nathaniel Otting _ _ _ . I am so grateful to know you all and to edit this paper giantess from a one-room library, today in any case, in an eight-person town on the west coast of Washington state! I saw the ocean today and it was grey, misty, and ridden with driftwood and clamshells, just like the minds of the preserved heads of Danton, who I love, especially when looking through a huge glass diamond filled with water, as it seemed, albeit in sand, where I scratched "hi mom" with a stick; and humble goes that incident of life. This issue should prove fluidly in line with what I never wrote, but why should an editor's letter be about me it should be about Happy February and March!

Oysterville,

Corina Copp

CONGRATULATIONS

We are overjoyed to help announce and herald Keith Waldrop as the 2009 National Book Award recipient for his book *Transcendental Studies* (University of California).

WITH REGRET

We regretfully note the passing of Rachel Wetzsteon, Dennis Brutus and Ruth Lilly. They will be missed.

DANSPACE SAVE-THE-DATE

GALA 2010, April 27: Danspace Project will honor **Philip Glass**. For details, visit www.danspaceproject.org/support/gala.html.

• • •

ESSAY

A Werldly Country: Ilse Aichinger's Prose Poems

ULJANA WOLF

When Hans Werner Richter—initiator of the “Gruppe 47” meetings which helped shape much of Germany’s postwar literature—visited the young writer Ilse Aichinger in Vienna in 1952 to invite her for the next meeting in Niendorf at the Baltic Sea, another, younger woman was sitting shyly on the sofa. Her name was Ingeborg Bachmann, and Richter had never heard of her. After reading her poems a few days later, he promptly invited her, and—upon her request—extended the invitation to another rather unknown poet, “a friend of hers from Paris.” Thus, not only Ilse Aichinger but also Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan took part in the group’s next meeting, which—even though Celan’s reading of the *Todesfuge* was, according to its members, famously ill-conceived—stood for a paradigm shift away from neo-realist to more complex forms of literature. Yet while Bachmann and Celan have through numerous translations become known as two of the most important writers of postwar German poetry, Aichinger has remained somewhat drastically overlooked in the English-speaking world.

Born in 1921, Ilse Aichinger survived the Second World War with her Jewish mother in Vienna. According to the Nuremberg Laws, her mother was protected as long as she lived in the same household with her minor daughter—a “first-degree half-breed.” Many of their relatives, including Aichinger’s beloved grandmother, were deported in 1942 and died in concentration camps. In 1945, Aichinger published the prose piece *Das vierte Tor* (*The Fourth Gate*) about the Jewish cemetery in Vienna; this text was the first to mention the Holocaust in Austrian literature. In 1948, the year that saw the appearance of Celan’s *Der Sand aus den Urnen* and the disappearing of “Third Man” Orson Welles in Vienna’s underground water tunnels, Aichinger’s first and only novel *Die größere Hoffnung* (*The Greater Hope*) was published by Bermann-Fischer/Querido-Verlag in Amsterdam. Portraying the life of Jewish and persecuted children in Nazi Vienna, the novel established Ilse Aichinger as a major figure in postwar writing, and the literary critic Richard Reichensperger noted, without exaggeration, that “Ilse Aichinger is the beginning of postwar Austrian literature.”

Back to the 1952 meeting: At the end of the readings, Aichinger was awarded the “Gruppe 47” prize for her *Spiegelgeschichte* (*Story in a Mirror*), a narration of a woman’s life from death onwards, backwards, which earned her the somewhat problematic nickname “Fräulein Kafka.” In an earlier piece, Aichinger had proclaimed that the only possible way of narration that was left was “from the end and

towards the end”—the experience of fear, death and nearly complete destruction became the starting point for a new narration, a new kind of writing.

One year earlier, in his 1951 acceptance speech for the Bremer Literature Prize, Paul Celan had said: “It, the language, remained un-lost, yes, inspite of all. But it had to pass through its own answerlessness, pass through dreadful silencing, pass through the thousand darkneses of lethal discourse. It passed through and gave no words away for what happened. Passed through and was allowed to surface again, enriched by all this.” Both Celan and Aichinger experienced this process of “Sprachwerdung” as a strong and irreversible estrangement and foreignization of and in their languages. At the end of the 1960s, Aichinger started to work on short prose pieces that can only be described as long prose poems marked by a radical poetics of resistance and an unassuming, often startling beauty. The prelude to this most interesting part of her work is the 1967 text *My Language and I*, beginning with the words: “My language is one that tends toward foreign words. I choose them, I retrieve them from far away. But it is a small language. It doesn’t reach far. All around, all around me, always all around and so forth. We advance against our will. To hell with us, I sometimes say to it.” The story that follows describes an absurd picnic with “my language” as a real presence that refuses to talk to the narrator, constantly loses things, and prefers “cold food rather than hot.”

Surprisingly though, the words used here are not very foreign. Foreignness, rather, seems to be a fundamental relation between self and language that enables another kind of speaking, one that bears witness to the “silencing” without falling into silence itself, and which instead functions as a constant documentation of falling, and failing: “Writing is learning to die,” Aichinger noted elsewhere. To get the attention of her estranged and seemingly disinterested language, the narrator constantly takes up a knife and lets it fall from a high distance onto a plate. Foreignness here is also a site—a picnic that takes place near the border-crossing station of another country. “The fourth country has ended, I shouted in its ear, the fifth is already over there,” is how the narrator tries to choose a spot for the picnic. Yet the agents of domestication, in this case “customs officers,” always loom in the background. In pushing these literal and literary boundaries, Aichinger’s writing takes up civic responsibility by refusing to accept old notions of the self and the body, or of language, power and be-

longing. Derrida: “I have only one language, and it’s not mine....Language is something that doesn’t belong.” In his book *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida reflects on his language experience as a French Jew in Algeria—a time marked by a three-fold linguistic and geopolitical experience of distance, borders, and bans imposed by the dominating but far-off mother country, France. In contrast, Aichinger’s monolingualism—her one language—is “of the other” because it is destabilized from the inside, forever foreignized by the memory of the time when language “gave no words away for what happened”—memory kept alive by distrusting and deconstructing notions of logic, cohesion and coherence.

These poetics of resistance culminate in the 1976 prose poem collection *Schlechte Wörter (Bad Words)* in which the narrator proclaims: “I now no longer use better words.” All systems of meaning and referring are being rejected: “No one can demand that I make connections as long as they’re avoidable.” What we normally think of as reality is disposed of in these prose texts, or rather, it’s taken apart and left to consider in a language that uses only the “second

best words,” as the title-text proclaims. The style of these texts is matter-of-fact, yet they offer neither facts nor matters in ways we’re used to. Doubt is the only certainty, and the focus is always on minor things or second-best objects—stains, balconies, “apple-rice.” The protagonists of those pieces—the drooling ones, the lost ones, the weak ones, “prompters and opera glass manufacturers”—are Beckett’s heros, turned Austrian.

Aichinger’s constant effort to remain incorruptible and uncompromising toward herself and the reader, and her wish to leave behind false promises about the coherence of the world and its “better words” lead to a language deploying only “bad words”—bad because they have been stripped off their misleading certainties, opinions and ideologies. It is through the deployment of carefully chosen “inexact” words that Aichinger enables her language to survive and reinvent itself over and over again: “Werld would be better than world. Less useful, less skilled.” Language, foreignized by its will to be radically inadequate—only to reclaim it for the purposes of poetry.

BackinStock

Renee Gladman**Newcomer Can’t Swim**
PROSE, PAPERBACK, \$16.95

“Let them sleep for in a matter of hours new events will replace these old ones. The nice breeze blowing in from the sea will grow stronger and send them all scrambling for their things. A lush gray will efface the now blue and pass its hand over them, bringing rain. The city will suddenly appear on the beach, first crowding, then displacing the beach-goers. Its intrusion will be unthinkable.”

— Renee Gladman, *Newcomer Can’t Swim*

In languages of elegy and splintered consciousness, the book recreates life for the twenty-first century flaneur in urban America, where, amid a confusion of aims and identities, being attuned to different frequencies also means being lost.

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NewNewNew

Bhanu Kapil**Humanimal**, a project for future children
POETRY/NONFICTION, PAPERBACK, \$17.95

“When I developed the film in New Delhi, the x-ray of a marine skeleton was superimposed upon her left arm. Her elbow as thick as a knot. I said it was cartilage—the body incubating a curved space, an animal self. Instead of hands, she had four streaks of light. An imprimatur, she saw me and flinched.”

— Bhanu Kapil, *Humanimal*

Kapil’s “prose document” enacts a kind of body mapping/fieldwork across personal and historical scar tissue that stretches notions of the body in pain, of physio-social constraints (in class, architecture, and linear time), and also of the human-hybrid potential.

Susan Gevirtz**AERODROME ORION & Starry Messenger**
POETRY, PAPERBACK, \$17.95
(FORTHCOMING SPRING 2010)

“It is well known that brevity is essential to any discussion of the sky. Thus for the sake of brevity we will divide the sky into its fractions: the Ptolemaic sky, the afternoon sky, the weatherless sky, the seared sky of summer, the skewered sky of winter tree tops, brother to the Titian sky, sister to the drawn-out sky, Father of the perspectival sky, Mother to the smoke-stacked skyline of London in 1870.”

— Susan Gevirtz, *Starry Messenger*

“The sky, more depthless and wider than the sea, has been a field of imagination, not of trespass, long before the Pleiades were painted on the wall of the Chauvet cave 30,000 years ago. Only 150 years ago Hölderlin could call it the “eyes blue school” and wander it at will. Now it is a situation, not a field. Now, Susan Gevirtz says, we are always inside it.”

— Susan Thackrey

PROSE

ILSE AICHINGER

TRANSLATION BY ULJANA WOLF & CHRISTIAN HAWKEY



ILSE AICHINGER. FOTOGRAFIE: STEFAN MOSES. PHOTO COURTESY OF ARCHIVES OF S. FISCHER VERLAG.

Bad Words

I now no longer use better words. *The rain which pounds against the windows.* Previously something completely different would have occurred to me. That's over now. *The rain which pounds against the windows.* That's sufficient. By the way I just had another expression on the tip of my tongue, it wasn't only better, it was more precise, but I forgot it, while the rain was pounding against the windows or was doing what I was about to forget.

I am not very curious about what will occur to me during the next rain, whether light or heavy, but I suppose one turn of phrase will suffice for all types of rain. I won't care whether one can say *pound* when it only gently touches the window panes, whether that wouldn't be saying too much. Or too little, when it is about to shatter the panes. I'll leave it at that now, I'll stick with *pound*, the rest is for others to care about.

To drag the downfall in front of oneself, this also occurred to me, it's certainly even more indefensible than pounding rain, because you don't drag something in front of you, you shove it or push it, carts for example or wheel chairs, while other things such as potato sacks are dragged behind—other things, certainly not downfalls, those are transported differently. I know this, and again the better phrase was just on the tip of my tongue, only to escape me. I don't mourn its loss. *To drag the downfall in front of oneself*, or better *the downfalls*, I won't insist on this, but I'll stick to it. Whether one can say *I decide on it* is questionable. Up to now standard usage doesn't allow for a decision where merely a possibility is at stake. One could discuss it, but I'm fed up with these discussions—mostly held in taxis on the way out of the city—and I make do with my indefensible expressions.

Of course I won't be able to use them, but I pity them just as I pity stage prompters and opera glass manufacturers—I'm beginning to have a weak spot for the second and third best, in front of which the best hides quite shrewdly, if only with regard to the fourth best, since to the audience it shows itself often. You can't resent it for that, the audience expects it after all, the best has no choice. Or has it? With regard to the audience couldn't it hide, and show its face instead to the weaker possibilities? One has to wait and see. There are enough adequate rules—things that are hard to learn—and if I'm relying on the inadequate, that's my problem.

I've also become cautious about making connections. I don't say *while the rain pounds against the windows we are dragging the downfalls in front of us*, but I say *the rain which pounds against the windows* and *to drag the downfalls in front of oneself* and so forth. No one can demand that I make connections as long as they're avoidable. I'm not indiscriminate like life, a better designation for which also just escaped me. Let it be called *life*, perhaps it doesn't deserve better. *Living* is not a special word and neither is *dying*. Both are indefensible, they disguise instead of define. Perhaps I know why. Defining is close to undermining and it exposes one to the grip of dreams. But I don't have to know that. I can avoid it, I can very easily avoid it. I can stand aside. Certainly I could say *living* to myself so often I'd get sick of it and would be forced to switch to another expression. And *dying* even more often. But I don't. I reduce and observe, this keeps me busy enough. I also listen, but this has certain dangers. One can easily be subject to ideas. Recently it was said, *collect the downfall*, it sounded like a command. I wouldn't want that. If it were a request, one could

consider it, but commands frighten me. That's also why I switched to the second best. The best is commanded. That's why. I don't let myself be frightend anymore, I've had enough of that. And even more of my ideas, which aren't mine anyway, because if they were they'd have a different name. Perhaps *my errors*, but not *my ideas*. Oh well, it doesn't matter what they're called. We've experienced this often enough. Very few can defend themselves. They come into the world and are immediately surrounded by everything that is insufficient to surround them. Before they can turn their heads, and beginning with their own name, incorrect designations are imposed upon them. You can see this already in lullabies. Later it's even worse. And I? I could defend myself. I could easily keep track of the best instead of the second best, but I don't. I don't want to attract attention, instead I like to quietly blend in. I observe. I observe how each and every thing is given its sudden and incorrect name, lately I even join in. But the difference is: I know what I'm doing. I know that the world is worse than its name and that therefore its name is also a bad one.

Collect the downfall—this sounds too good to me. Too sharp, too precise, too much like late bird calls, and a better name for pure truth than pure truth is. I could attract attention with that, I could be lifted from my humble position in the ranks of namers, which I worked so long and hard to attain, and lose my observation post. No, I won't do that. I'll stick with my rain pounding against the windows, close to oft-quoted old wives' tales—and so if downfalls, then those you drag in front of yourself. This last part is almost too precise, perhaps one should leave downfalls out of the picture altogether. They're too close to what they stand for, silent decoys circling around the norm. Norm is good, norm is in any case inexact enough, norm and the rain which pounds, all first and all last names, it goes on forever, and you remain the silent observer you want to be, watched approvingly from one direction or the other, while you leave your hands in your pockets and the downfalls to themselves, leave them out, leave them be, that is good. To leave be, again, is almost too good, absurdly good, no, get rid of the downfalls, they attract unwanted precision and do not occur in lullabies.

The rain which pounds against the windows, here it goes again, we'll leave it, it leaves everything in its imprecise radius, we'll stick with it, so that we will remain we, so that everything remains what it is not, from the weather to the angels.

So this is one way to live and one way to die, and those who think this is not imprecise enough can just continue on in this way. There will be no limits for them.

Hemlin

Come on down, Hemlin, guess what I have for you. Come down further. You'll never guess. Just don't disappear behind your humble figure, you don't need to do that, let it come to a stop. Let it come to a stop, I say, don't drag. One of your feet always lags behind. Do you understand me? No idea, but I think you are muttering against the sun, you're becoming stubborn, that leads to nothing, doesn't lead, right? While you're at it, bring me a basket of soap Hemlin! There he goes.

Hemlin in the state of Jackson has a red-haired population, it never snows there. Hemlin can't be traced back to an estate; it evolved with its citizens. Hemlin owes its openness to its careful fishing industry, Hemlin will be the pride of its descendents, it has few short-term inhabitants.

Hemlin was sketched by Veronese. She stands facing the window, amidst her maids. She seems to be listening, trying to distinguish the sounds of the morning, and contemplating her own absence before she departs. Her right arm is angled, the hand slightly raised. The maids appear busy, almost afraid. Far behind them a door stands open. The maids, the door, Hemlin, nothing other than the sketch is known. Veronese didn't execute the painting, presumably he declined the commission after this sketch.

Hemlin is a letterhead. With an address, P.O.B., the usual, no bad address. Also no effort. The printing is unassuming, it doesn't jump out at you. Before they came to this trade the ocean wind had stiffened the heads of the predecessors. A clear thing, reliable. The pride of the young apprentices is obvious. I come from Hemlin. They like to run errands. That's understandable.

Hemlin, a kind of unreasonable joy due to occasions which are in themselves reasonable. Well-known characteristic signs are found principally at the northeast or more precisely east coasts. Birdlike laughter, spilling growth, the joy to speak through one's teeth and so forth. All this, described to the point of tedium even before Lawrence, has its origin in the human inclination to underestimate occasions. These underestimated occasions grow secretly, then break out. We'll spare ourselves sources here.

Hemlin, Hemlin, where are you. Come on Hemlin, they are drowning you, the sources are growing.

Hemlin must be a monument, round, makes trouble.

Hemlin.

A note on the translations: *The original German texts are from "Schlechte Wörter". Copyright © 1976. Courtesy of S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main.*

Uljana Wolf is a German poet and translator based in Berlin and Brooklyn. She is the author of two volumes of poetry; translations of her work can be found in *New European Poetry* (Graywolf, 2008), *Dichten No. 10: 16 New German Poets* (Burning Deck, 2008), *Jubilat* and *Chicago Review*. *Together with Christian Hawkey* she has translated a book-length selection of Aichinger's prose.

Christian Hawkey is the author of *The Book of Funnels* and *Citizen Of* (Wave Books, 2004, 2007). His new book, *Ventrakl*, is forthcoming from Ugly Duckling Presse (Spring, 2010).

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Educating Minds and Hearts to Change the World

INTERVIEW

A Conversation with Harryette Mullen

BARBARA HENNING

With Harryette Mullen's dense, layered and playful poems in *Sleeping with the Dictionary*, there is often a subtle question, almost present but not quite present, a riddle-like structure that leaves the reader wondering: How did she make this poem? As a prep for an MFA course I was teaching at Long Island University in the summer of 2009, and as a project I knew I would enjoy working on later, I decided to ask Harryette if she would be willing to talk to me about each of the poems in this collection, and then I would share sections of the interview with the class. This interview would be in the spirit of the Oulipo artists who reveal their experiments and constraints and catalogue them in their library in Paris. No secret mysterious inspired "writer-self," but instead a writer who is seriously inventive and willing to share her methods and approaches. It was very curious and enlightening to the students to discuss and then hear some of the writer's intentions, context, and the way she had constructed the poems. We of course weren't searching for "meaning," but instead aiming to help writers expand their own repertoire of tools for writing and to think about the reasons writers write the way they do.

For the most part, the interview follows Harryette's alphabetical structure for *Sleeping with the Dictionary*. Other excerpts of this interview are available in current or upcoming online issues of *Jacket* magazine and *Not Enough Night*.

E-M

BH: "A stout bomb wrapped with a bow." That's how you start "Ectopia," this poem addressed to a "you" who can't be trusted but whom we must trust.

HM: "Ectopia" means something is misplaced from where it should be. It began when I was thinking about ectopic pregnancy, something that happened to one of my college friends.

BH: A tubal pregnancy.

HM: It's very dangerous. My friend had to go to the hospital because she was hemorrhaging. I was remembering what happened to her. Several words in this poem are derived from the letters and sounds of "womb" and "uterus."

BH: I thought the poem was about politicians, about not trusting your government.

HM: It could be the politicians too. It's the authority figures, the leaders. Again, it's the people in charge, whoever they are. It could be a doctor, a boss, a politician. They tell us everything will be all right as long as we do what we're told. We rely on their judgment, but we know they're not infallible.

BH: I was thinking about the masses too.

HM: Trust your leaders and put your life in their hands.

BH: First you took the words "womb" and "uterus" and you made up a list of words, and then you sort of played off them.

HM: There's a refrain throughout the poem: "You tear us," which could be heard as "uterus." I was also thinking of that time in life when you're sexually inexperienced and your partner says, "Everything is fine. I know what I'm doing. You don't have to worry." It's still true in many cultures that the male takes the lead and the female is expected to follow. The poem's title sounds like "utopia" but "ectopia" means out of place and "utopia" is no place.

BH: It could also be about a relationship where trust has been betrayed. There's definitely a betrayal here.

HM: Right, it's the idea of misplaced trust.

BH: It's interesting how you make a list of words and a poem evolves, a logic that may or may not have been there when you chose the central words, "womb" and "uterus." In the process of writing the poem, did the logic shift from what you initially had in mind?

HM: At first I was struck by the sound of "You tear us" in "uterus." That's how the poem began. I was thinking of what girls and women go through, with our "female troubles." That's when I recalled what had happened to my friend. It was an example of what it means to have a female body.

BH: In "Elliptical" you start with the beginning of statements and all of them focus on a "them." And you don't let any of the statements end and so we are focused on the way we talk about groups of people.

HM: Yes. It's the "us and them" language that everyone uses. No matter who we are, we are in the position of being one of "us" and also one of "them." It's how we human beings think. We can't avoid it. But we can be aware of its effects.

BH: The other and the self. It's another way of excluding, separating the other from you.

HM: It could be any division. It could be race, gender, age, class, religion, nationality or anything else that divides us.

BH: It could be the color of your hair, your educational status . . . It can be misused, categorizing people, putting them into boxes but then again it can be useful having categories for talking and doing any intellectual work.

HM: The title "Elliptical" refers to something missing or omitted, and also something defective. What's often missing in our "us versus them" conversations is our empathy for those others.

BH: "European Folk Tale Variant." You told me once that you were inspired here by something in Toni Cade Bambara's story, "Blues Ain't No Mocking Bird." I read that story this afternoon. Such a great story. I'm going to use it in one of my freshman classes.

HM: I teach her work in my survey course. She was a magnificent storyteller. Her sto-

ries often have frames inside frames, so the storytelling happens at more than one level.

BH: I was thinking about how your work inspires people to become readers. There is some clue to the riddle that is going on and you want to find out what it is. So here it is reading Bambara and the fairytale, "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." What do you want to say about your variation on the fairytale?

HM: Bambara taught a workshop in the 1970s with inner city students. She gave them the assignment of writing black vernacular variations on classic fairy tales. My idea for this poem was inspired by the stories she collected from her students. In readings of her work, she used to perform a black vernacular version of "The Three Bears." My poem takes that idea in a different direction, with jargon and euphemism, periphrasis and circumlocution, using the language of realtors, sociologists, and law enforcement to explain the behavior of Goldilocks, the wayward child.

BH: And you call your bears bruins—"the platinum blonde delinquent took a refreshing beauty nap in the bruin family's bedroom—just like she thought she was a guest at a cozy bed and breakfast inn."

HM: I had a lot of fun with it. I wasn't sure at first what I was doing or why I was doing it. I was just playing with her ideas and then I saw it going in a certain direction. In Bambara's black vernacular version of the folktale, she said, "This girl broke into their house and messed it up." [Laughter] "If we did that, we'd be in jail. But she ran back to her mama, talking about some bears chasing her." I used the dictionary and thesaurus, as well as my own ear for language, to shift the diction of this story from the storytelling language of the traditional folktale to a more contemporary tale of errant youth.

BH: Let's move on. In the myth, Eurydice and Orpheus are in love, but she is bitten by a snake, dies and is then taken to the underworld. Then Orpheus grieves and sings so sweetly that Hades gives him a chance to have again, but as he climbs out of underworld, he disobeys Hades and looks back to make sure Eurydice is there. When he doubts, instantly she is taken away from him. Here in your poem, "Eurydice," though the

devil, a version of Hades, seems to be her friend. He warns her to keep her keys.

HM: Yes, this is told from the perspective of the woman. I wanted to see this story from her perspective, as the one who had to go back to the underworld. So many stories are about a girl or woman in peril. Usually she is rescued by a father, a brother, a husband, a suitor, or a woodsman with a sharp ax. Occasionally there is a Eurydice who doesn't get rescued. Of course, in reality, a lot of us don't get rescued, or we have to rescue ourselves.

BH: And you wanted to give her a way out of her coupling, Eurydice who is moving between two men. Do you want to talk more about the process here?

HM: I didn't use any particular procedure here, except that in my imagination the story of Orpheus and Eurydice was mixed with a folktale that Zora Neale Hurston collected, about man, woman, and the devil. I imagine Orpheus and Eurydice as beautiful black lovers ever since I saw the film *Orfeu Negro*.

BH: Then we're at "Exploring the Dark Continent," no I mean "the Dark Content." Automatically, I read that as "Continent." This poem is a short riddle.

HM: That's what I like about puns and word-play, the instability of language in motion.

BH: Until I did some research, I didn't realize that cowrie shells were used in the slave trade as money for the exchange.

HM: Yes, cowries were currency valued especially in the interior, where most people had never seen the ocean. The first time some of those captive Africans ever saw the ocean was when they were boarded onto slave ships. I was thinking about the idea of Africa more than the actual continent. Somehow I'm African, although I've never been there. "The map is not the territory." I know that as a quotation from Gregory Bateson, who was quoting someone else.

BH: "The map is not the territory" and now you have "A poem is not the territory."

HM: I can work things out, or play them out, in the poem. It doesn't necessarily change anything outside of the poem, but it might change how I think about it.

BH: "It hurts to walk barefoot on cowrie shells." It hurts to read it. And besides the slave trade it can refer to anytime someone is oppressed by economic exchange, but especially when you are the exchange.

HM: I like "Afro turf" though. That was my favorite thing in the poem.

BH: "Carpeted with Afro turf. / In the dark some soul yells. // It hurts to walk barefoot/ on cowrie shells." So this would be Afro grass.

HM: The turf or territory that belongs to black people, or just hair on the floor of the barber-shop. [Laughter]

BH: It is a dream and then "in the dark some soul yells." I like this poem a lot. Do people talk about it at all?

HM: A few have discussed it in terms of black tradition, or what is expected of black writers, or as a variant on the theme of "what is Africa to me?" I try not to think of my identity or cultural background as a label that determines what and how I write. I don't have to limit myself to traditional styles or subjects and I also don't have to avoid them. I try to approach conventions and traditions in a way that's both critical and creative.

BH: As long as you don't define yourself in the box.

HM: Right. You can always get out of the box if you use your freedom. But if you are a slave, you're in a box that's hard to get out of.

BH: But if you are in the prison cell and you are always thinking I'm in a box, you're in a box. Even though you are in a prison cell, if you have that little mental space and you start doing other things with your mind and you witness yourself there, in a way you are not in the box anymore. Just as Frederick Douglass began to discover the context for his world—he suffered more but he discovered openings.

HM: Your imagination, your mind doesn't have to be in a box. They can put your body in a box but they can't keep your imagination in a box. Even in slavery, there was Henry "Box" Brown, who managed to escape in a box.

BH: Some of your poems are like trick boxes with lots of openings that some readers may not be able to see. . . . With the poem "Fancy Cortex," I think you said you were doing a variation on an African praise-type poem about Jayne Cortez and her writing.

HM: Her work is powerful in the way she focuses on the body. Sometimes it's a beautiful, sensual, jazzy, bluesy, soulful body, and sometimes it's a disgusting, abject body that represents the failure of the social, political body. This poem was interesting to me because it's about a woman's brain. Usually we hear about her other body parts. How many poems are written in praise of a woman's brain? I thought this might be the first. [Laughter]

BH: Did you bring words from somewhere else? Did you use any words from her poems?

HM: If I borrowed anything, it was her reliance on anaphora, which is reminiscent of Césaire. I didn't use her extravagant surrealist imagery. Some of my similes are like analogies a scientist might use, although they start to get a little looser toward the end. I'm not even sure this started out to be about her or her work. The scenario I imagined at first was a strictly rational reader confronted with the intuitive intelligence of a poet. I had pictured the speaker as a male scientist or mathematician reading the work of a female poet, the situation I imagine in Szymborska's "Evaluation of an Unwritten Poem." I had accidentally discovered, in another context, that the ethnocentric software of my computer's spell checking program would suggest as corrections changing "Cortez" to "cortex" and "Jayne" to "Jane." Then I decided that the speaker in the poem could be me at my most prosaic, thinking like a computer. How would I make sense of her surrealist images in the tradition of the Negritude poets? There's nothing about her that's "plain Jane." Once I set up "my plain brain" versus "her fancy cortex" then every line that followed was a reiteration. I also broke the rule that poets should prefer metaphors rather than similes because similes are weak.

BH: I think in a mainstream creative writing workshop, you might hear that type of rule.

HM: That's the kind of advice I see often in poetry handbooks. I tend to think of meta-

phor and simile as two expressions of the same figure of comparison. But similes also work here because the speaker in this poem has trouble understanding metaphor. For a strictly rational thinker, “as if” is a useful signal of the shift away from literal meaning.

BH: When you started, you must have also worked with the dictionary a bit to come up with all these words.

HM: Well, since everyday language is full of metaphor and metonymy, we have an intuitive sense of how words and concepts are connected through image, association, and sound. So often, with the dictionary, I’m confirming my intuition and trying to extend a network of associations and images, connecting one to another. I already knew that words we use to talk about the mollusk in its shell are also used for the brain and skull. Not only words like conch and conk, but also cortex, mantle, and pallium are connected, and so are chalk and calculus. Then of course there’s a kind of coral that resembles a brain, and in Spanish cortex is “corteza.” That sent me off on a series of images related to the idea of voyaging and exploring that also connects to the computer software that’s called “explorer.”

BH: “And then the prosaic mind.” Could you talk a bit about how this relates to African praise poems?

HM: I didn’t write a traditional praise poem. I liked the idea of a poem of praise, which exists in traditional African cultures, and also in many other cultures, including the poetic blazon in European literary traditions. Instead of sonnet form, I used anaphora, which I associate with oral cultures. I’m praising a black woman whose poetry combines sensual imagery, rhythmic intensity, and critical thinking about power and oppression.

BH: It sounds scientific with the empirical language from the dictionary.

HM: Some of it is, because the images refer to the function of the brain and the cortex. Or the language relates to the ways we extend our brain power with computers and technology. Within the text there is a hint of the kind of dichotomies that we often use to divide the world into male versus female, explorer versus indigene, rational scientist versus creative artist, technology versus poetry,

or even left brain versus right brain. There’s the idea of exploring and extending our perceptive powers, whether it’s by means of travel, computers, literature, or imagination.

BH: I think a lot of Oulipian work sounds empirical, especially when they are strictly following a constraint and working with the dictionary. But then in your writing you almost always improvise and go off in another direction.

HM: I’m open to that serendipitous moment when something goofy happens.

BH: In “Free Radicals,” there is a play on words even in the title. My mind wavers between “freeing political radicals” and those atoms that are loose in the body causing all kinds of destruction. How does that work in the poem?

HM: In this case, the title came last. This was plain journaling that I started with no particular idea of where it was leading. Some friends had invited me to a potluck Seder where we sang folk songs, spirituals, labor union and protest movement songs, along with traditional Passover songs. “Seder” means order and I think the idea of the Seder or Passover gave order to the rest of the poem. The Passover meal, which was also the “Last Supper” in the New Testament, is a model for the Christian mass or communion. In the Seder everything on the table has a symbolic meaning, with songs, prayers, readings, and discussions that go with each course of the meal.

BH: The “she’s” refer to different people, don’t they?

HM: I used third person, but I was the “she” in this poem. It’s a list or collage of what I was doing in the month that I wrote this poem. I’d been writing in my journal about all the food I’d eaten with different groups of friends, and our conversations during the meals. Around that same time, I also participated in the Kimchi Xtravaganza that my artist friend Yong Soon Min organized for the Korean American Museum. A theme of the exhibition, which included artists of diverse backgrounds, was the cultural significance of traditional foods, and what happens to tradition in a changing environment. What was so striking to me, as a recent arrival to Los Angeles, was the sharing of traditional foods and meals with

people from different cultural backgrounds, because all of these people opened their doors to me and invited me to join them. So the poem refers to what was happening, including my poet friends who got into an argument in a restaurant, where I felt like the referee. But it started with the potluck Seder, when I was asked to bring a salad and a jar of horseradish.

BH: So you “brought the radish for the horses but not a bouquet for Mother’s Day.” It started with your experience but it gets transformed as you go on with your playful spectacle. While “Free Radicals” has a collage-like structure, with a surreal effect, “The Gene for Music” is more of a narrative, about a relationship that doesn’t quite work. It is very different from the Oulipo riddle like poems in the book.

HM: Yes, this was a piece that started as journal writing about a relationship.

BH: I thought so. I think I wrote “your husband” in the margin! [Laughter] It seems to be about a disjunctive relationship, but one where each person brings something to the relationship. From her point of view, she brings her body and her basic needs and he brings his energy and solitude—“two airplanes flying at different angles.” The narrator migrates from first person to third person. Do you remember how you wrote this?

HM: It started out as a free association, first just observing the trees and squirrels where I was sitting outdoors in the yard with a couple of airplanes flying overhead, then exploring the relationship of the couple. The shift from first to third person indicates a certain distance when the speaker begins observing the behavior of these characters. I thought of rewriting it completely with first or third person, but I decided to keep that obvious break when the narrative point of view changes.

BH: “Hitched to a Star” seems like a remedy for the sadness at the end of “A Gene for Music,” when the relationship ends. Now there is this riddling and a turning toward fortunetellers and home remedies.

Quantum mechanics fixed my karma wagon
Gypsies want to hold my hand
Dr. Duck recommends
soap and ream therapies
With remedies like these
who needs friends?

HM: Well, this seems to be a skeptical response to alternative therapies and quack remedies offered for a variety of physical and emotional afflictions. I think the sardonic tone comes through because of several encounters I'd had with strangers who approached me on the street with leaflets touting the miraculous powers of psychics and fortunetellers, or holistic practitioners offering services like aura cleansing and colonic therapies. I was sure this happened so often because I spent a lot of time walking alone, and that made me a target. I must have looked like a perfect mark, a lone black woman. But then again, Nancy Reagan was known to consult astrologers. I tried to imagine who would be interested in visiting a palm reader or getting a colonic treatment after being accosted on the street in this way. There was one woman in particular who approached me as if we were old friends, to get me to slow down for her sales pitch. My immediate thought was, "With friends like these, who needs an enema?"

BH: Here we are back again and now we are at K, "Kamasutra," the ancient Indian ABC on sex.

HM: I was thinking of the story that the Buddha found enlightenment and then left his wife behind. It seems to be a pattern of male spiritual leaders.

BH: They leave their wives and family and go off

HM: I was trying to put it in basic human terms—that conflict of flesh versus spirit.

BH: Referring to the guy finding his sexual satisfaction and leaving the woman behind.

HM: In the poem it's not necessarily an actual Buddha or Bodhisattva. It could be the man leaving his partner behind, or any of us who believe we have advanced so far beyond the others that we're above being merely human.

BH: Sometimes we're separating out part of human life. When I was in India I read some transcripts of discussions between devotees and Rama Krishna. He warned them about the dangers of lust, and lust was always a "she." The men had to go away from women in order to be meditative. "The Lunar Lutheran" seems to be about separation, too,

the way people set up their separation from others by privileging their religion and you are sort of making fun of that idea here, aren't you?

HM: That was one of the titles for unwritten poems I'd collected in my notebook. I decided to use the title itself as a model for the entire poem, which is composed from a list of religious denominations and their anagrams. I think the anagrams, which are somewhat arbitrary and whimsical, allowed a playful attitude toward language that distanced and distracted me from the usual serious discussion of religious differences.

BH: And yet it seems as if you are focusing on poverty. I was thinking that you were making fun of religious piousness. It reminded me of an Oulipo thing I did. . . well I didn't actually do it. . . in the novel I wrote, I had a character get up and take the Lutheran Apostles Creed and transform it with N + 7 and then perform it in a club in the east village. I was reading yours and I thought oh this sounds similar. [Laughter]

HM: To my mind, all the religions are trying to do the same thing, more or less. It's the people who keep messing up. Most of us have ideals that are hard to put into practice in any consistent way. Our practice doesn't make us perfect.

BH: "A Baptist was able to stab a pit bull when the sun hid behind some Hindus." It's so ridiculous the things we do in the name of religion and you're pointing to that ridiculousness. "To fan a mess, I write manifestos." Then we come to—"Mantra for a Classless Society or Mr. Roget's Neighborhood."

HM: This was written originally for an internet art project, a collaborative work called WOMENHOUSE, created by a group of artists, architects, and writers in the Los Angeles area. I worked in partnership with my friend Yong Soon Min, a visual artist who lives here. My text is an edited entry from the thesaurus, encompassing a range of synonyms and antonyms associated with the words cozy and homey.

BH: And it ends up making a political statement, starting with comfort and ending with despair, starting with money and ending with homelessness: "cozy comfortable homey homelike/sheltered protected

private concealed covered" and then at the end "upsetting awkward ill-at-ease/nervous self-conscious tense." With "Mr. Roget's" are you referring to the children's television show Mr. Rogers?

HM: Roget's is *Roget's Thesaurus* and the show is *Mr. Roger's Neighborhood*, which was parodied by Eddie Murphy on *Saturday Night Live*. His comedy routine underscored the social and economic forces that affect conditions in different neighborhoods. Mr. Rogers died several years ago. My nephew loved that show when he was little. The real Fred Rogers designed his program to make children feel safe and accepted, although to some adults he seemed a bit creepy. It's still sometimes difficult for men to be in nurturing roles.

BH: This mantra certainly demonstrates how one's sense of well-being is connected to having and not-having.

Harryette Mullen is the author of *Tree Tall Woman*, *Trimmings*, *S*PeRM**K*T*, *Muse & Drudge*, *Blues Baby*, *Sleeping with the Dictionary*, and *Recyclopedia*. She teaches American poetry, African-American literature, and creative writing at UCLA. Her poems have been translated into Spanish, Portuguese, French, Polish, Swedish, Turkish, and Bulgarian.

Barbara Henning is the author of three novels, seven books of poetry and a series of photo-poem pamphlets. Her most recent book is a novel, *Thirty Miles from Rosebud* (BlazeVox, 2009). A collection of poetry, prose and photos, *Cities & Memory*, is forthcoming from Chax Press. She teaches at Long Island University in Brooklyn, as well as for the Poetics Program at Naropa University.

POEM

from THE WRONG BOOK

NATHANIEL OTTING

Once I wrote all the books
it wasn't too weird to read them.

I can't go in there all the time. But
Nietzsche did. He went in there all the time.
Another time it was a record of the time.
After Nietzsche came Walser, but only
Walter Benjamin came back. Don't you
think someone American danced on top of
his slow passage over the low mountains.

The wrong _ _ _ _ , for all time, has been opened.

I can go around any more
or any more than this. And
I can no more go to movies
than all around in circles. But

I can anyway in that I bet
I can. Harvesting the muse that
I can. Whatever she can't do,
I can too. HMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM,

'cause when you say so
I can suddenly feel all fallen.
Better _ _ _ _ _ the books but
I can either burn them.

On time, sure, but of many
bedtimes I'm of one mind.
The Scoobyat of Bruno S.
stands for against us. Still
sullenly, but sunrising. What
part of water into wine don't
you stand under. Or I guess if
_ _ _ can't walk on it, just part it.
Modern angel power is my sea of gold
oh: also my pot of tea. The bee's tea,
too. And the knee's pajama out from
under Gogol knows. What.

Cats have nothing to do with it.
We all came out from under some W
but what about Gogol's double O
overcoat. Out from all the world's only
caterpillar came the world's first what.

Fine, cat. I thought it would be funny if I named my cat Nat. What's
better than that, another better thought thought. Then another
better thought thought better. It thought, it would be funny if Nat
did. If you did it would just be, Damnation, hello to that cat. A total
cat. What a cat, a cat. How a cat can help it, I can't consider, how it
can help that. Won't you take a cat like that. Now belong to my cat.

To wit by dint of is an unfairness
not to be emblazoned readily:

Lept out of us taller than hair
Leaps angels | Do you mind a
Pit of dreams | Dreams everywhere
Aspects of this in part odds upon us
All the while fun everything

No dickering _ _ _ _ _ b l a n k e t s
_ _ _ _ _ for everyone.

Father him nothing froth
Hello brain bedpan
Armory get all army on my
Expected spectre hold
Blanket lift our child
It is not too late enough
For more good field
Crops can't stop us
Clouds can

Two tales for William Tell and one tall one:

Untangleable, I'm sure. And why not
all those rows, those rows of snow.
You know, well, you know alright
snow by day is now ice by _ _ _ _ _.

If'ns you may as well, then I
might, as well. Also, but not we.
More of them than one of us:
two if by sea none if by bus.

I'll start with a scary one so
small I won't be scared at all.
Then you go long, go very long:
gone all along, gone all wrong.

Antigonal surprise:

Some diagons are trying too hard.
It's almost entrapping, but then at
once you aren't in motion any more.
Here goes: Hard Core, Dead Calm,
Bank Shot, Deep Probe, Dark Yak.
Back on the necrotron, Thomas
hardly is going to fast. Sound
suddenly bends him. This one is over.

Death Shipless:

Ghosts are dogging you, no picnic.
An atlas of the Waffen S.S. isn't
all you need, and it's closing in on
your insides. Soon they'll be out.

All this _ _ _ _ , well, problem
in one night! I mean, frightful.
Don't we all guess or understand.
Tell me about it no times.
The leisure of long lines
nowhere is this more lost nowhere is this more luck nowhere is this more gone.

All suddenly and quickly it's so very sorry and _ _ _ _ .

Intelligenceless is one loud religion.
Old, all the time. What's nicer is
Winter seeks captain, and that's
Lordlier, new gloryer. Amen.

A poem by Josh _ _ _ _ _

Nice white pages for good families
homes for the good freedom.
Only greener for you're a
genuine engineer. Black
sleeping beauty is also what
you are. Off your feet soldier
now sweep her up then away
with all _ _ _ _ . Striving is bluest
shrovetide less brown, living yellow is
orange, look there's red plus purple
pansies for prose thoughts. What's
left is never, maybe, homestead grey.

A person by a poem

If you're unlucky one brain is
so much fun it's never forgotten.
Quite can be changing, but already
I forgot to winter kill over
to your place and get gamely.
When the carriage depletes the plan
there are many among you: save them.
It costs all memory to treat your _ _ _ _ _
so fill in to shift breaks on
them breaks on them: we are whittled.
Who can words understand,
long they (the wrong they) have
curtailing when there should be no space.
Dioramas in space, this scene of this book.

On top of circulars waits a second.
Sentences stop to talk out of turn.
Finches of Cincinnatus, are you
ripeness enough. It's all. Feathers,
I'm asking all of you. If now, not
what are the doings. OK assembly,
time time and again time and again
again net what loss. Trendentalism will
pass but it will only catch on pass by
catch up pass back catch all
pass over and out catch
everything as (_ _ _) catch can and
(don't you think you know) pass on.
Everybody comma here comes one.

What time isn't it for ten pages.
Isn't there almost there. Foot
fall or shoe spring, yes or no.
All Good Things Deserve (Only)
Better. Once you're attended
by school children, you can't
precisely go swimming, period.
(Or is it utterly otherwise)
I won't know until I (only)
find out. When won't you.
We have that much in common
if much else: we're both winking.
Pigments are just little colors,
little elselets. Big trouble is
here begetting to be _ _ _ _ .

Beginning untenably is just right.
But already no counting. Numbering
is fine. If if your ears are
burning someone somewhere
is talking to you
then why aren't they.
Lovers are uncontrollable
if you say so
why don't you.
Puzzle is what we were
looking for before it
found us. Hiding before
counting is also allowed.
Oh yeah: writing is only
BEST BEFORE READING

<1

Why start now when start here. How, all over, there, someone's book, where's the book, start over, that is, over and over again.

This _ _ _ _ is over, it's still the wrong book, it's not starting, or fretting, or slowly. Or where it is going.

Where is it going!

Fret slowly, then crack the rusty book.

<2

This book. God. A-H-G-H. What for, this, a book. What for a book. Where for this one.

I don't like to see a book get like that. All ahwagah. Dogged all the corners. That one did. Who did do that like that. And now some is rusty. The book is. Take one last look at this.

There, _ _ _ _ , there's another one, not rusty, pick it up, don't drop it or dust it. Can't put it down.

Why all over us now, why all for it, why not for one. For all of us, let some of us go.

Go hushing, go getting quite quiet, come rather quickly. For the getting: fret slowly.

For get her. Let got her. God's only daughter. To get her together. *To get together with her.*

Still reading ever. Not over ever. Nor ever over. Still. Ever reading. Wait/ not reading yet.

<3

Don't you think Rusty _ _ _ _ can't stop thinking in the mountains. Going all atop the mountains. All sliding down the mountains. Running around the mountains. Rounding the mountains. Sound mountains. Oh the tons of mountains in the mountains.

No wait, hey nonny, over the mountains.

Oh onward. More: no mountains. No rusty book. Née Rusty Book. Hay for the old guy with the fox. Who went all wire with the fox. Who pennied children with the fox. Who knew why owls with the fox. The children did, they knew why owls with the fox. The old guy too knew why owls with the fox. They all knew why owls with the fox. Even the owls weren't at odds with the fox. On time with the fox. Anon with the fox. Once more with the fox. No more mountains with or without the fox.

Now yes, nay, aye, you may shut the rusty book.

POETRY PROJECT EVENTS

2/1 MONDAY OPEN READING Sign-in at 7:45pm

2/3 WEDNESDAY Jalal Toufic: Two or Three Things I'm Dying to Tell You about *The Thousand and One Nights*

Jalal Toufic is a thinker and a mortal to death. He is the author of *Distracted*, *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film, Over-Sensitivity, Forthcoming, Undying Love, or Love Dies, Two or Three Things I'm Dying to Tell You, 'Áshûrâ': This Blood Spilled in My Veins*, and *Undeserving Lebanon*. Several of his books are available for download at jalaltoufic.com. He currently teaches at Kadir Has University in Istanbul. Reading will be followed by Q&A.

2/5 FRIDAY (10 PM) Nick Tosches & Andre Williams

Nick Tosches is the author of three novels, eleven books of non-fiction, and three volumes of poetry. His latest, *Never Trust a Living God*, is a collection of poetry illustrated by Gravier. He lives in New York City. **Andre Williams** was born in Bessemer, Alabama in 1936. From his start at Fortune Records in the 1950s, he went on to work at Motown with Stevie Wonder, Mary Wells and the Contours. He has composed several-hundred recordings and continues to be one of the most widely collected and respected of original soul and rhythm & blues artists. *Sweets (And Other Stories)* is the debut fiction volume from 73-year-old Williams.

2/8 MONDAY Mina Pam Dick & Franklin Bruno

Mina Pam Dick is a writer, artist and philosopher living in NYC. She received a BA from Yale and an MFA in Painting as well as an MA in Philosophy from the University of Minnesota. Her philosophical work has appeared in a collection put out by the International Wittgenstein Symposium. Her first book, *Delinquent*, was published by Futurepoem. **Franklin Bruno** is the author of two chapbooks, *MF/MA* and the recent *Policy Instrument*, as well as a critical monograph on Elvis Costello's *Armed Forces*, published in Continuum Books' 33 1/3

series. His essays and critical writing appear in *The Nation*, *The Believer*, and *Oxford American*. As a musician, he has released a dozen albums of original songs since 1990 as a solo artist and with the bands Nothing Painted Blue, The Extra Glenns, and (currently) The Human Hearts. His most recent CD is *Local Currency: Solo 1992–1998*. He holds a PhD in philosophy from UCLA.

2/10 WEDNESDAY Jim Carroll Memorial Reading

Poet, autobiographer and musician **Jim Carroll** (1949–2009) was a consistent and brilliant presence around the Poetry Project since he first read here in 1968. We will never forget his kindness, his generosity or his humor. Please join us as some of his closest friends pay tribute to him. With **Bill Berkson, Anselm Berrigan, Richard Hell, Lenny Kaye, Patti Smith, Anne Waldman** and others TBA. *This event is free and will take place in the Sanctuary.*

2/15 MONDAY Joel Bettridge & Geoffrey Olsen

Joel Bettridge is the author of two books of poetry, *That Abrupt Here* and *Presocratic Blues* as well as the critical study, *Reading as Belief: Language Writing, Poetics, Faith*. He co-edited, with Eric Selinger, *Ronald Johnson: Life and Works*. Currently he is an Assistant Professor of English at Portland State University. **Geoffrey Olsen** is the author of the chapbook *End Notebook*. He lives in Brooklyn and works at Cooper Union.

2/17 WEDNESDAY Reading for The Whole Island: Six Decades of Cuban Poetry

Join us as we celebrate this landmark volume of Cuban poetry edited by **Mark Weiss**, *The Whole Island* (California, 2009). It makes available the astonishing achievement of a wide range of Cuban poets over the past 60 years. The translations, almost all of them new, convey the intensity and beauty of the accompanying Spanish originals and constitute an essential source for understanding the literature and culture of Cuba, its diaspora, and the Caribbean at large. With poet **Lourdes Gil** and translators **Chris Brandt, Mónica de la Torre, Jason Weiss** and Mark Weiss. See bios at poetryproject.org.

2/22 MONDAY Sean Cole & Wendy S. Walters

Sean Cole is the author of the chapbook *Itty City* and a collection of postcard poems called *The December Project*. Sean is a reporter for public radio and lives in Arlington, MA. **Wendy S. Walters**'s work resides at the intersection of the poem, essay and lyric drama. She is the author of *Longer I Wait, More You Love Me*, a chapbook, and *Birds of Los Angeles*, both published by Palm Press (Long Beach, CA).

2/24 WEDNESDAY Joanna Fuhrman & John Koethe

Joanna Fuhrman is the author of three collections published by Hanging Loose Press, most recently *Moraine*. Her new book, *Pageant*, has just been released by Alice James Books. From 2001–2003, she was the Monday Night Coordinator at the Poetry Project. She teaches creative writing at Rutgers University and in public schools and libraries. **John Koethe**'s most recent book is *Ninety-Fifth Street*. He was the first Poet Laureate of Milwaukee. His collection *Falling Water* won the Kingsley Tufts Award. *North Point North: New And Selected Poems* was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize. He is currently the Bain-Swiggert Professor of Poetry at Princeton.

2/26 FRIDAY (10 PM) Forrest Gillespie & Ellis Isenberg: A Play* (with music by Exceptor)

This play involves physical therapy, nutrition, and the afterlife. This will be the final work of a trilogy exploring the coordinated mutation of subcultural language spheres. Music by Exceptor. **Forrest Gillespie** works in the non-profit environmental building industry in New York and writes about a play a month. **Ellis Isenberg** is from Minneapolis. He has written two plays: *Csepian Tec Is Going Public* and *Enormous Sun Group Therapy*.

3/1 MONDAY (6PM) Urban Word

12th Annual Urban Word NYC Teen Poetry Slam Prelims. Come support some of the top teen poets in NYC as they compete for a chance to make it to Harlem's world-famous Apollo Theater. Free for teen performers/\$5 teens/\$7 adults. For more info or to sign up, visit: www.urbanwordnyc.org.

3/3 WEDNESDAY**Tina Darragh & Tyrone Williams**

Tina Darragh has been writing poetry in the D.C. area for over 40 years. Her most recent work is a collaboration with the poets Jane Sprague and Diane Ward, published as the belladonna* Elders Series #8. *Deep eco pré*, her collaboration with Marcella Durand, has just been published as an e-edition by Little Red Leaves. **Tyrone Williams** teaches literature and theory at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. He is the author of three books of poetry, *c.c.*, *On Spec* and *The Hero Project of the Century*; and several chapbooks. He recently completed a manuscript of poetry commissioned by Atelos Books.

3/8 MONDAY**Andrew Zawacki & Mairéad Byrne**

Andrew Zawacki is the author of *Petals of Zero*, *Petals of One*, *Anabran*, and *By Reason of Breakings*; and is co-editor of *Verse* and *The Verse Book of Interviews*. A former fellow of the Slovenian Writers' Association, he edited *Afterwards: Slovenian Writing 1945–1995* and edited and co-translated Aleš Debeljak's *Without Anesthesia*. His translation from the French of Sébastien Smirou's *My Lorenzo* is forthcoming. **Mairéad Byrne**'s books include *The Best of (What's Left of) Heaven*, *Talk Poetry*, *SOS Poetry*, and *Nelson & The Huruburu Bird*. She is an Associate Professor of Poetry + Poetics at Rhode Island School of Design.

3/10 WEDNESDAY**George Tysh & Stephanie Young**

In Paris in the sixties, **George Tysh** edited *Blue Pig* with David Ball, and collaborated with conceptual artists Christian Boltanski and Sarkis. From 1980 to 1991, he directed *LINES: New Writing at the Detroit Institute of Arts*, and (with Chris Tysh) edited *In Camera*, a project devoted to works of the sexual imaginary. His latest collection, *The Imperfect*, completes a sequence that includes *Ovals* and *Echolia*. **Stephanie Young** lives and works in Oakland. Her books of poetry are *Picture Palace* and *Telling the Future Off*. She edited *Bay Poetics* and her most recent editorial project is *Deep Oakland* (www.deepoakland.org).

3/12 FRIDAY (10 PM)**Heather Christle & Andrew Dieck**

Heather Christle grew up in Wolfeboro, NH. She is the author of the poetry collection *The Difficult Farm*, and a portfolio of her poems and other documents

recently appeared in *Slope*. She is a Creative Writing Fellow at Emory University. **Andrew Dieck** is originally from Philadelphia. He now lives in Tivoli, NY where he works as a personal assistant. He has a BA from Bard College. His poems have appeared or will appear in *The Bard Papers*, *Gerry Mulligan*, and *The West Wind Review*.

3/15 MONDAY TALK SERIES: Steve Evans on the Poetics of the Phonotext: Timbre, Text, and Technology in Recorded Poetry

In the mid-1980s, **Steve Evans** did a serious stint under the headphones, listening to, cataloging, and transferring the decaying reel-to-reel collection that the Archive for New Poetry at UCSD had acquired from Paul Blackburn. Ever since, he's been following and, when possible, contributing to the ongoing conversation about the analysis and interpretation of poems not just as printed texts but as voiced structures whose meaning can be "sounded" as well as seen. In this talk, Evans will share his recent thinking on the topic with special reference to Paul Blackburn's practice as devoted "audiographer" of his age. Steve Evans teaches poetry and poetics at the University of Maine, where he also coordinates the New Writing Series and does projects with the National Poetry Foundation. He has tended a website at www.thirdfactory.net since 2001.

3/17 WEDNESDAY**Rae Armantrout & Norman Fischer**

Rae Armantrout was a National Book Award finalist for her most recent book, *Versed*. *Next Life* was chosen as one of the 100 Notable Books of 2007 by *The New York Times*. Other recent books include *Collected Prose*, *Up to Speed*, *The Pretext* and *Veil: New and Selected Poems*. Armantrout received an award in poetry from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts in 2007 and a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2008. She is Professor of Poetry and Poetics at the University of California, San Diego. **Norman Fischer** is a Zen priest. He is a former abbot of the San Francisco Zen Center, and the founder and teacher for the Everyday Zen Foundation. A graduate of the University of Iowa Writers Workshop, his Zen comrade and poetic daddy, Philip Whalen, compared his work to "a Baccarat crystal paperweight, a smooth clear ball of glass containing intricate designs in many brilliant colors." The latest of his many collections is *Questions/Places/Voices/Seasons* from Singing Horse press.

3/22 MONDAY**Form Free Form—Steve Benson, Carla Harryman, Jon Raskin Quartet & Konrad Steiner**

Performing in various combinations, three short pieces will be presented: a structured improvisation for text and voice (**Carla Harryman** and **Steve Benson**); a free improvisation (**Jon Raskin Quartet**); and a scripted, live film narration piece on two scenes featuring French actress Jeanne Moreau (**Konrad Steiner** and Carla Harryman). A larger ensemble piece will follow. Jon Raskin Quartet: **Jon Raskin**, reeds and electronics; **Liz Allbee**, horns; **John Shiurba**, guitar; **Ches Smith**, drums and percussion. See bios at www.poetryproject.org.

3/24 WEDNESDAY**Janet Hamill & Margaret Randall**

Janet Hamill is the author of *Troublante*, *The Temple*, *Nostalgia of the Infinite*, *Lost Ceilings*, and her most recent collection, *Body of Water*. She has released two CDs of spoken word and music in collaboration with the band Moving Star. *Genie of the Alphabet* (Not Records 2005) featured cameos by Lenny Kaye, Patti Smith, Bob Holman and David Amram. **Margaret Randall** lived for almost a quarter-century in Latin America. When she returned to the U.S. in 1984, the I.N.S. ordered her deported because of opinions expressed in some of her books. She won her case in 1989. During the 1960s, out of Mexico City, Randall and Mexican poet Sergio Mondragon published *El Corno Emplumado / The Plumed Horn*. She has also done a great deal of translation from the Spanish. Among Randall's most recent books of poetry are *Where They Left You For Dead*, *Stones Witness*, and *Their Backs To The Sea*. *My Town* will be published in 2010.

3/26 FRIDAY (10 PM)**A Similar But Different Quality Magazine Reading**

A Similar But Different Quality (asbdq.com) is an experimental text-based journal unaffiliated to any genre. The sole parameter is that the work is text, which opens us to the surprise and poetry of language that is everywhere. Published occasionally.

ALL EVENTS BEGIN AT 8 PM UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED. ADMISSION \$8 / STUDENTS & SENIORS \$7 / MEMBERS \$5 OR FREE
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THE POETRY PROJECT IS WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE WITH ASSISTANCE AND ADVANCE NOTICE. SCHEDULE IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

SPRING WORKSHOPS AT THE POETRY PROJECT

SIMPLE TEXT(S): POETRY IN AND AROUND PROSE – SHARON MESMER

Tuesdays 7–9PM: 10 sessions begin February 9th

You've heard it before: why is it that poets can write prose, but prose writers can't write poetry? Maybe it's because prose writers haven't fully explored the places where poetry and prose effectively come together—the textural artus points that hinge and pivot to access the strengths of both forms. In this workshop (open, of course, to poets who want to bring narrative intentionality to their work without sacrificing imagery), we will look at prose that blends narrative with idiosyncratic language (Clarice Lispector's *The Hour of the Star*; Elizabeth Smart's *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*), prose that includes poetry (Ki no Tsurayuki's *The Tosa Diary*), prose vignettes (16th and 17th century Chinese "hsiao-p'in"; Fernando Pessoa's *Book of Disquiet*), prose-poem essays (Nelson Algren's *Chicago: City on the Make*) dream stories (Kafka's *The Bucket Rider*), flarf fiction and cut-ups. The above texts and many others will serve as examples for beginning, extending and finishing hybrid poem-stories.

Sharon Mesmer has published several books of poetry and short fiction and teaches both forms at the undergraduate and graduate levels at the New School. She is a two-time NYFA fellow in poetry, and a member of the flarf collective.

LONGER POEMS, OR THE PRESENT AS ILLOGICAL COMPLICATION – ANSELM BERRIGAN

Fridays 7–9PM: 10 sessions begin February 12th

This workshop will focus heavily on the reading and discussion of longer poems and the visible and invisible strategies for creating and sustaining shape and momentum evident within their reading. "Longer" may run anywhere from ten to fifty pages, as things move, but there can be exceptions on the shorter side depending on a work's density. The aim on the writing side will be to initiate a process through which one may develop a longer work, while asking a hopefully expansive set of questions about what there may be to know through the experience of reading and writing longer poems. We will read a selection of longer things by, among others, Douglas Oliver, Harryette Mullen, Allen Ginsberg, Kevin Davies, Philip Whalen, Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Stephen Rodefer, Claudia Rankine, Alice Notley, Will Alexander, Ann Lauterbach, Robert Fitterman, and Marcella Durand. The starting point in most cases will be to read the work aloud in the church and go from there. Bring your throats and stamina.

Anselm Berrigan is author of four books of poetry, the most recent being *Free Cell*, published recently by City Lights. Works of his which fall into the longer range include *Have A Good One*, *To Hell With Sleep*, *Zero Star Hotel*, and possibly *Trained Meat*.

POEM AS PROJECT: PROJECT AS POEM – DAN MACHLIN

Saturdays 12–2PM: 10 sessions begin February 13th

When poets or artists create work as part of some greater artistic or social project, this context dramatically impacts the way that we read or perceive their work. In this workshop, we'll look beyond individual poems and examine writing that exhibits a strong project-based sensibility. We'll read and try experiments based on diverse writing projects such as Ted Berrigan's *The Sonnets*, Brenda Coultas's *The Bowery Project*, Jill Magi's *Threads* and Dodie Bellamy's Vampire-inspired epistolary novel: *The Letters of Mina Harker*. We'll also look at examples of projects from other genres—Chris Marker's film *La Jetée*, the work of artists Sophie Calle and Robert Smithson, and playful endeavors from the world of music like Sufjan Stevens's Fifty States Project. By inhabiting other artists' projects, we will strengthen our own. We will compose or refine existing project statements for our own work, begin to write poems to populate those projects, and map out new directions and possibilities for our projects both on the page and beyond. Guests for this workshop will include Brenda Coultas and Jill Magi, plus other surprise guests. *This workshop will be held next door, at 232 E. 11th Street.*

Dan Machlin is a native NYC poet, performer and publisher. His books include *Dear Body* (Ugly Duckling Presse), *6x7* (Ugly Duckling) and *This Side Facing You* (Heart Hammer). Dan is the founder and senior editor of Futurepoem books.

The workshop fee is a great deal at \$350, and includes a one-year Sustaining Poetry Project Membership and tuition for all spring and fall classes. Reservations are required due to limited class space, and payment must be received in advance. If you would like to reserve a spot, please call 212-674-0910, email info@poetryproject.org or register online at www.poetryproject.org under "Get Involved."

BOOK REVIEWS

CHAPBOOK ROUNDUP

REVIEWS BY EDMUND BERRIGAN

01. *Building Castles in Spain, Getting Married*Amanda Nadelberg
(*The Song Cave*, 2009)

Amanda Nadelberg's *Building Castles in Spain, Getting Married* is a traveling poem in windowish fragments separated by stars in which the he's and she's speak in muffled allegiances to emotions drawn by preconceptions of marriage from a bride-to-be. The responses of those personal pronouns often seem slightly jarred from their comfortability. "Lightning arranges, just call / him, this lawyer ..." "she finds her / car, drives a road invisibly." "A beautiful street, she's / very impulsive..." The proposed marriage is contemplated positively: "Marriage as the pooling / of a couple's talents, wallpaper as / this truth..." before—well I don't want to give away the ending, so here's a further description of the method: "Invisible streets forming / ideas, impatience as a way / to take the train..." There's something of a stuttered density charm at work but the worker behind the story may have always had her own plan, considering how politely she stands away from the ending, which you'll have to read to find out.

02. *The Third Word*Lewis Freedman
(*what to us (press)*, 2009)

Open space is a factor in *The Third Word* by Lewis Freedman. There are no titles, but italics for the first couple of words on most pages and occasional shorter lengths give a feel of individual poems that can also be read as one long work. Freedman's remarks are airy enough to hear the wind carving through them: "how heavy / to let a breeze off the hook / for interest" and in that offering glimpses into encounters: "when I reach / up / your arms / I discover archives". Where Nadelberg travels geographically in discovery, Freedman is floating observations on empty space of the quiet power kind, with a knack for certain kinds of turns of phrase: "they stole stops / and pauses / add till the house / hold / is air hold / updance / cause / is crooks as a matter of / business". There are a few cracks here and there, an occasional showing of the hand, a hand reaching for a muskrat, say, but all that open space gives those moments to rest as they may. There's also soundscape: "fate of desert / what to us / by us / as is us / a request pointed / to the fingerless / of us / tree as one / of us / I in a tree I / to furtively unstring / the ground below". This is quite the elegant little chapbook, gaining power in rereadings.

03. *guide to weeds*Aaron Lowinger with Becky Moda
(*House Press, Buffalo*, 2009)

I would never be one to say poetry is impractical—it's got that narrow fog that keeps the sense of an ethereal spirit hovering just outside our beloved mortal coil of woe. But if you were thinking of adding a little something something to that, *guide to weeds* by Aaron Lowinger might just be the work you were vaguely grasping for. Complete with illustrations by Becky Moda, *guide to weeds* contains several works whose titles are the common name of weed (*Bull Thistle*) and the species classification (*Cirsium Vulgare*). The various homages directly and indirectly fruit their flower with many a bon mot of plant-kingdom content; take "Lonely blue sailors bed feral grass" or "waspy irreverent stalk transposing light" while others sail away: "hamburgers are being eaten across flat plains / no more salt for the fruit of meat". Lowinger employs a lot of noun-stacking to get tight musical flourishes, and with a solid flow, as in the end stanza of "Tree of Heaven/*Ailanthus altissima*": "bigger than ever crickets sing infinite / sonatas to river rats rock mink / repair alliances to dust water ash travel / sheen destroyed rockets glare touch / unending grasp towards perfection".

Lowinger's dive into the world of weeds offers a musical appreciation through nature that can cozy up alongside a kind of urbanity that a mid-sized city like Buffalo offers. One is never removed from nature of course; there's nothing else, so really, language poet, flarf-ist (flarfloremew?), action poet, New York School—nature poets the whole lot of them! But not as directly examining from the inside/outside as Jonathan Skinner's *With Naked Foot*.

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BOOK REVIEWS

04. *With Naked Foot*

Jonathan Skinner
(little scratch pad press, 2009)

"Birds of the Holy Lands" is the opening poem, in which somebody named I listens through violent news reports from Jerusalem for the songs of sparrow and notes that there are "forty instances of tzipor, Hebraic chirping or twittering / in the Old Testament, and two / strouthion (sparrows) in the New". But can you dance to it? You can try to a later stanza that yields many a fabulous bird name: "Clamorous Reed Warbler, Crested / Honey Buzzard, Lappet-faced Vulture". Nature holds a prominent place in the composition of these poems, with titles like "Snow Ecology" and "Carrion", but Skinner will reach for any number of places and is a poet's poet. Here are some lines from "On Reading John Donne At The Farm": "'tis year's midnight and the day's / humming of fridge, stove pops / coyotes whistling on the hill / listen for the cock's crow / heading back down the ecliptic / time to groom the medicine wheel / an utter blackness, just dark / the world's whole sap is sunk / the sole stress lies on the night / dog stretched out by the stove / cats on top of one another / getting ready to sleep tight". Okay, well that was the whole poem, but I think Skinner has an elegant way across a poem, and offers an updated set of movements on a valuable resource: the nature poem. He's also asking interesting questions when he's asking questions: "am I poor enough?" and "am I without port" (from "Midway"), and "when I state I create / the word, a world that / creates me, do I / contradict myself?" ("from Not If but When"). *With Naked Foot* is only about 30 pages, from little scratch pad press in Buffalo.

Edmund Berrigan is the author of *Disarming Matter* and *Glad Stone Children*.

*The Sound of Poetry/
The Poetry of Sound*
Edited by Marjorie Perloff
and Craig Dworkin
University of Chicago Press, 2009

REVIEW BY MARGARITA SHALINA

After a certain age, each poet is responsible for his or her voice.

—Charles Bernstein (after Camus)

If only there were a CD that accompanied *The Sound of Poetry/The Poetry of Sound*, providing a second layer, an aural layer, to the text and each exploration of language referenced therein. It would be a glorious sampler. Luckily, there is PennSound. Keep the online browser of your choice cued to <http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound> and reference it freely while reading. Those who dare go it alone are in danger of falling into a haze of self-imposed experimental reading, looking and thinking at the text without immersing themselves in the aural effect of the verse itself. It's plainly true that listening to Christian Bök read an excerpt from "Mushroom Clouds" in the *Cyborg Opera* is not the same merely reading:

you bring

a dang kangaroo to a gangbang

ongoing boing boing

of a long bedspring

your gang

ogling the oblong bling bling

In Bök's essay, the reader will be informed that this is a sound poem, a "faux aria" and "a sequence of nonsense, inspired by the acoustic ambience of the videogame *Super Mario Bros.* by Nintendo," but will have no way of appreci-

ating the delivery without listening to the poem, which sounds like a mix of drum and bass rave-culture music married to a soundtrack that is the tiny moustache-clad animated character's theme of videogame board domination. While it in no way poses a closed and declarative opinion regarding the relationship of poetry to sound, what *Sound/Poetry* is attempting to relay is that text and sound coexist, embracing one another in a graceful symbiotic ballet of infinite variables where separation is the hallmark of their togetherness.

Sound/Poetry is divided into three sections and begins with "Translating Poetry," where Susan Stewart's *Rhyme and Freedom* establishes the "aural pleasure" of rhyme in verse. But sound in poetry is fragile, as is evident when the funhouse mirror of translation is introduced to the equation. In "Translating the Sound in Poetry: Six Propositions," Rosemarie Waldrop posits: "it is impossible to translate the sound in poetry because the union of sound/sense will not be the same in any other language" so the only recourse is "[t]ranslators are forced to kill the original—and then to try to resurrect, to reproduce, recreate it." While I find the notion of calling any text untranslatable to be shortsighted and unimaginative, one must stop and wonder at the translatability of Bök's drum-and-bass aria. Would it lend itself well to a tonal language with inherent vocal highs and lows? Would German with its stereotypically harsh consonants present the answer? Does the piece not require translating at all as the meter and rhythm contain a musicality and music is a universal language in and of itself?

The next section, "Performing Sound," enters a realm where the body, with its strengths and weaknesses, constructs and performs verse. In "The Stutter of Form," Craig Dworkin casts Pierre Guyotat as a poet. Quoting Stuart Kendall, "Guyotat does not write novels; he writes epic poems that must masquerade, however ineffectually, as novels in today's marketplace." Next, Dworkin references Guyotat's childhood stammer as a driving creative pathology, supporting this "disability aes-

BOOK REVIEWS

thetic” with a reference to Jordan Scott, whose poetry collection *blert* willfully utilizes aspects of pronunciation which exasperate Scott’s own stutter. Where Guyotat manipulates language through the use of neologism and an idiosyncratic grammar laden with a heavy dose of literary pornography, Scott practices masochism. These corporeal fingerprints on the language of their bearers illustrate a second symbiotic relationship inherent in the cohabitation of poetry and sound. As Yoko Tawada states in “The Art of Being Nonsynchronous,” pertaining to reading text aloud, “[w]hen this is a text written by someone else, it becomes mine when I read it aloud. When it is my own text, reading it aloud turns it into something separate from me.” In effect, Guyotat and Scott are liberating themselves by placing the stutter into the reader’s mouth, or eye.

In the final section, “Sounding the Visual,” Johanna Drucker opens her essay “Not Sound” by stating, “The origin of poetry may well reside in sound and song. But the transmission history of poetry depends upon the visual forms.” Where the collection opens with translation, then thoroughly explores transference, it concludes with transmission. Drucker will focus on the ways in which meaning changes with visual presentation—line breaks, fonts and sizes, the placement of text on the page. By questioning the relationship between sound and visual text, *Sound/Poetry* reiterates the symbiosis that exists between the poem as sound and the poem as a visual structure, in effect coming full circle.

For me, the perfect sound poem is Aram Saroyan’s minimalist “Cricket”. It’s the illusion of the actual cricket produced by the repetition of the single word that makes me happy. *Sound/Poetry* closes with a nod to this illusion. As Kenneth Goldsmith states in his “Postlude”: “If every word spoken daily in New York City were somehow to materialize as a snowflake, each day there would be a blizzard.” And then, “...the blizzard of the evanescent.”

Margarita Shalina is the Independent Press Buyer at St. Mark’s Bookshop.

Girldrive: Criss-Crossing America, Redefining Feminism

Emma Bee Bernstein
& Nona Willis Aronowitz
(Seal Press, 2009)

REVIEW BY LAURA HINTON

Gaze out the window. Notice the velvet black cows grazing on the ochre cornfields of Nebraska, snow capping the icy blue grand Tetons of Wyoming.... Pull over to gawk at the swirls of evergreen trees dipped in the brightest autumn hues, frosted with Montana mist. Every turn of the car brings a new excuse for dreamers. This is the rush of the road, seeing the highway stretch out endlessly and flipping it the bird. —Girldrive (21)

Jack Kerouac reading and writing the road? No—it’s a young feminist named Emma Bee Bernstein. And she is not claiming a masculine road identity as some declaration of independence, poetically musing upon the mountain turns of western American interstates. Instead, Emma, with her best girl, Nona Willis Aronowitz, drives better than a crazed Dean Moriarty; and the two are wanderers with a project.

Indeed, they may be the daughters of legendary New York City artists, poets and intellectuals (Ellen Willis and Stanley Aronowitz, Susan Bee and Charles Bernstein). But, on the road in *Girldrive*, we glimpse only Nona and Emma at the wheel—gal-pal-ing up for the road trip of their life. The result is a conceptual art project that is collaborative, not solitary, driven, even if wonderfully “lost.” *Girldrive* is a book composed of a set of interviews with other feminists (mostly young women of their generation) around the country, as well as a stunning mosaic of photography. *Girldrive: Criss-Crossing America, Redefining Feminism*, as the book is officially titled (Seal Press 2009), makes its reader step into the Michelin-soled shoes of the Beat road warrior as she turns the mythic gendered paradigm around. Women take on the quest motif here. And this book’s central question—how we are

“redefining feminism”—inhabits and displaces all previous road maps.

“I’m insanely jealous I didn’t think of it first,” writes Anna Holmes on the blog *Jezebel* in a review of *Girldrive*. I felt the same way reading this book—and not. Because...we *did* pave our own roads in my “feminist generation.” All striving women have their “journey.” As Nona, the journalist of this book writes: “feminism is hopelessly intertwined with figuring out who you are and what you truly want” (*GD* 24). Feminism is the road and the journey to the difficulty of a woman’s “self”—one that is fractured by the otherness of those, too, on the road, riddled with bumps and potholes in a patriarchal landscape.

Emma is the “dreamer.” In her introduction, Nona recalls that her friend and collaborator, who tragically died before the *Girldrive* volume was complete, “battled with depression that ultimately killed her, but that cannot overshadow the fact that she was, at core, a fervently idealistic soul” (signed, “Nona, spring 2009,” *GD* p. xv).

Emma’s suicide in December 2008 shook the poetry and art world in New York, as well as the young feminist community that knew her to be a stunning photographer. But the dream of the dreamer has not died. In her provocative essay on poetic language, called “Strangeness,” Lyn Hejinian writes of “the dream” as if it, too, is a road trip, what Hejinian calls a “journey.” Like the dream, writes Hejinian, the writing of “journeys” will inevitably present “problems of framing.” Hejinian is riffing on William James’s “radical empiricism,” and what Hejinian seeks in a poetry practice that places “The emphasis on the experiencing of transitions”—a poetics of “strangeness.” Poetry is not rhymed verse vs. free verse. Not “poetry” vs. “prose.” Not past emotion caught in some Wordsworthian moment of “tranquility” (as if the mind was ever in that static and removed place). Poetry is an address of “sensible realities”—examining “the arbitrariness, unpredictability, and inadvertence of what appears,” says

BOOK REVIEWS

Hejinian. Emma says (again): “Pull over to gawk at the swirls of evergreen trees dipped in the brightest autumn hues.” Poetry is the language of experience in a moment/written. In the journey, the text, the “details may have been lost in the instability of the dream terrain or in one’s own forgetfulness” (Hejinian). Yet “forgetfulness” is a mode to forge new byways—to push against the tired concepts and forge new cartographies.

In a language newly gesturing, what is the cartographer’s best map? This book asks, in Nona’s introduction: “What do twenty-something women care about? What are their hopes, worries, and ambitions?”

Such navigational questions open *Girldrive* but do not cease as the book progresses. Nona describes a project dreamed up by the two graduating college seniors over a spring-break brunch in New York, ordering the proverbial “eggs and Bloody Mary’s” (GD xii, xi). The result is “poetry”—but without genre or traditions of “poetic form.” At first glance, the book’s glossy full-color cover and pages are slick enough to seem as if a high-production scrapbook made by these sophisticated “twenty-somethings” who possess a good camera and a Photoshop application. Yet the book is so much more. A conceptual “poetic” work, *Girldrive* is a multi-media ensemble and “inter-genre” manifesto as well as memoir, art photography, and interview print journalism. And what makes the book truly innovative is not just this porous format but the brave interviews with young women, most relative strangers to the authors, who replicate what appear to be American young women’s doubts, fears, cultural condemnations and hopes and innovations on a feminist “movement,” it turns out, that is still moving—moving beyond that of their Baby Boom mothers (like myself).

There is Krystal of Flint, Michigan, who declares in her interview: “I witnessed my mom go through a lot of chaos and confusion and abuse, and I remember thinking I couldn’t be that way” (GD 15).

There is the Chicana feminist Martha Coter and her daughter Maria of Ypsilanti. There is Shelby of Jackson Hole, who lives in “the ‘equality state,’ the first state to grant women’s suffrage (Wyoming), and yet it is a state that still coddles the men-folk who “‘drive trucks, shoot guns, and marry women for the cooking” (GD 24).

In Sioux Falls we go to the Top Hat dive bar for cheap drinks, meeting a single welfare mom who rejects both the falsity of knowledge through a college degree and a bartending job (“‘You’re a vagina behind the bar.’”) What are the options for young women, this book, this road trip, makes us ask?

There are no answers in *Girldrive* to that question. Yet there is Jerlina, a Berkeley doctoral student of the African Diaspora, and Starhawk, a pagan spokeswoman and ecofeminist. They show us new road maps, new directions. There is Joanna Frueh, an art historian in Tucson who makes the “breezy admission that sex is central all through a woman’s life, not just her youth” (GD 77), dispelling age bias against women. And there is Szoke, a New Yorker transplanted to Denver, a waitress who admits: “Male waiters are more respected. There are always going to be those people who get off on the idea that a woman is serving them.”

In Tulsa, we meet Melody and Mana; in Austin we go to a burlesque show with Florinda (“‘playwright, artist, activist, singer educator”’—and all of 29). A photograph of the fulsome Stephanie in front of a red curtain stares back upon our gaze. So does the pink-dyed head of Cait, the buxom pose of Raine (in appropriate burlesque costume). And Elsa, Laurie, Carmen, Erika—we see them sit in rockers and in beauty-shop hair-dryer chairs; we see them standing in front of activist bulletin boards and in kitchens. In Baton Rouge we meet the “street urchins” Charlotte and Angie. Says the latter: “I don’t know if I’m a feminist. I believe in equality.”

These mostly younger women generally report that they still feel silenced and objectified by male counterparts in

their various regions of the U.S. They are professional women, working-class women, college women, unemployed women. These articulate women—particularly, women of color are well-represented in this volume—state that they are betrayed by the falsity of American democratic culture. Yet they show their knowledge and their strength.

I don’t know what “feminism” is—although I teach something called “feminist theory.” Every semester at City College (CUNY) in these so-called “women’s studies” classes, I ask my students a question I have no answer for: What is feminism? Of course, my students don’t know the answer either. But a good conversation usually ensues. *Girldrive* is a porous text that makes us ask that question again and again, in the way Hejinian describes poetic language itself—as a mode of “inquiry.” Frankly, I don’t know what “poetry” is either—except that I like what I perceive to be its “strangeness.”

For all the questions it raises about feminism and art, *Girldrive* is clearly an ambitious mutational amalgamation of both. It is a road book and a textbook-primer for feminists—and not just the feminists of the present generation, but of the future and past. Thanks to Nona’s startling courage in seeing this unusual book finished, Emma’s shade is with us. Both “girl-drivers” lead us not toward a momentary destructive path, that of the youthful tragic, but toward something inspiring, the future.

Laura Hinton is a Professor of English at the City College of New York, where she teaches feminist theory and contemporary women’s poetics, film and media culture. She is the author of the poetry book *Sisyphus My Love* (BlazeVox), among others.

BOOK REVIEWS

New Depths of Deadpan
 Michael Gizzi
 (Burning Deck, 2009)

REVIEW BY STAN MIR

Back in October, Michael Gizzi and Craig Watson were in Philadelphia for a reading, so Carolina Maugeri and I hosted them for a night at our apartment in Germantown, in the northwest of the city. At one point during the visit Michael and I were sent on an errand to find rosemary. I mentioned to him that many houses in Germantown are built with Wissahickon schist, the predominant bedrock of the Philadelphia region. I suspected—hoped—that the confluence of thick syllables would interest him. They did. I would've been disappointed otherwise. Over breakfast the next morning, Michael asked for a pen and how to spell "that stone you mentioned yesterday." I looked over Michael's shoulder as he wrote on a napkin: "Wissahickonschist." Like a

dolt, I pointed out that "It's two words, not one, Michael." He replied: "I know, but I can do it this way." For Michael, language is malleable bedrock, though it can prove elusive, as "About Face," a poem in *New Depths of Deadpan*, Michael's most recent collection, demonstrates:

No sooner am I out the door than I want
 to be home reading.

It was written on high I'd have thoughts in
 my head but no
 words to express them.

Eight hours ago my face was a full-grown
 narcissus. I cut off my
 nose to identify myself, strung all the
 hands I ever held around
 my neck and expected them to do their job.

I must spend a night under the enormous
 rock I associate with
 childhood.

It's not going to happen.

I love being busted in the mirror.

Then someone opens an eye in my head.
 Murmur of subtitles.

So, language makes experience malleable. It also depicts anxiety derived from self—"my face was a full-grown narcissus"—and society—"strung all the hands I ever held around / my neck and expected them to do their job."

Michael traffics in irony, or rather Michael has found that it is the world that traffics. In his poem "Arbor Day" there is:

An armory with no army
 which every summer leaves obscure.
 Call it a respite. Say a train wreck
 dreamed it,
 a purchase in the blur.
 Was there a split in the arborist?

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BOOK REVIEWS

A shame we ignore the same words.
Sap becomes shellac.
A hand goes up, flanked by magicians.
A tale told to pigeons.

Sonically, "Arbor Day" is Michael Gizzi through and through, with its layers of "r" and "it" sounds. Semantically, this poem knocks my socks off with "leaves" meaning both "abandons" and the plural form of "leaf."

Given that Michael worked as an arborist in the late 1970s, "Was there a split in the arborist?" is a central question to this book. In an interview I conducted with Michael and Craig Watson in June 2006, I asked Michael whether he was working on anything that he was excited about at the time:

I'm not excited about anything particularly, but I'm in the process of getting excited. Actually, Burning Deck asked me to give them a manuscript in 2008, but I don't really have anything that I want to give anybody. I could give them poems I've written, but I want to take a bigger turn, maybe write some prose or something, I don't know.

He goes on to say that his prose would be more like "poetic prose" than fiction. I don't know if *New Depths of Deadpan* is the book he was speaking of/turning towards, but this book seems to be split, as the arborist wonders, between poetry and prose. In fact, in the poem "At Go Figure Farm" Michael writes: "Verse is out of the question." There are two ways to take this line. One, verse is not an option. Two, verse comes from questions. It seems *New Depths* casts a skeptical eye towards verse even though there are many poems within the book that look like verse.

Michael's skepticism isn't strictly formal; it's also semantic, like Ashbery's or Ceravolo's. In "Only You Know What This Means," he plays with his readers' potential attachment to meaning:

I'll tell you about it, what each syllable says.

Doors opened. You must have been in there.

We halved the distance,
lost in a weightless environment.

One hotel contained a clipper ship. We
must have been aboard.

The only heroic thing was a dot, emerging
in the sky.

A still from a silent movie about the sea,
a towel by the edge of the sink.

The title assures "you know what this means," yet the speaker insists he'll "tell you about it," though it's not the poem or the words he'll discuss, it's the *syllables*. We don't tend to think of syllables and meaning. Syllables mean sound. To speak is to mean syllables. Michael's not going to tell us meaning; he's going to tell us sound. After that, "only you know what this means."

Shortly after the geological-lexicography lesson over breakfast, Michael, Craig, and I left for the airport. I asked Michael what he intends to do with his new compound word. Making a gesture towards the Wissahickon Creek, he said, "I suppose I'll do something like: Wissahickonschist and the Kid. Whaddya think?"

Stan Mir is the author of a chapbook, *Flight Patterns* (JR Van Sant), and two forthcoming collections, *The Lacustrine Suite* (*Pavement Saw*) and *Song & Glass* (*Subito*).

Zong!

M. NourbeSe Philip, as told to the author by Setaey Adamu Boateng (*Wesleyan Poetry*, 2008)

REVIEW BY JILL MAGI

At times I am uncomfortable with both poetry and history, but then a book like *Zong!* comes along and reminds me how the lyric can shake up history's limited logics and history can shake up poetry's occasional evasive sheen. Philip's project, which she calls "hauntological," assuages the fear that documentary projects must sacrifice complexity to didacticism. And while Philip

states that "the poems approximate language poetry," *Zong!* explicitly critiques "the European project" and may therefore expand what counts as experimental.

Philip's book tells "the untold story" that "cannot be told yet must be told, but only through its un-telling," of the 18th century slave ship *Zong*, whose captain murdered 150 slaves by throwing them overboard in order to collect insurance monies. The case, heard before a jury in England, was decided in favor of the captain and the shipping company, thus rendering the human slaves as less than human—as property. Philip is a lawyer and poet, and the legal case is the seed of the project.

I think of *Zong!* as a work of documentary poetry, and I believe it is exemplary in the documentary mode because Philip asks not only how, but should this story be told. In a culminating extended essay, Philip explains her journey to Ghana to request ancestral permission for her project. I take Philip's approach to be quintessentially postmodern in that she not only critiques the law's "ratio of logic," but also because she critiques Enlightenment values that would bypass spirit-world considerations when writing history. Philip posits that "knowing" is sometimes sacred, involves divination, and despite our appetite for the documentary (root word: *docere*, to teach), knowledge acquisition is not neutral and pre-approved.

In his study of documentary film, *Representing Reality*, Bill Nichols writes, "Documentary convention spawns an epistophilia. It posits an organizing agency that possesses information and knowledge, a text that conveys it, and a subject who will gain it." He continues, "Knowledge...becomes a source of pleasure that is far from innocent." I agree. However, Philip does not assume that the subject matter is hers for the taking. She also establishes contemporary relevance; her essay makes connections to contemporary African-Americans who still find themselves outside of "being" with regard to the law and language

that most often positions the white subject as the norm.

Therefore, the language of the first section of poetry necessarily revolves around “to be.” Philip repeats “is” but often leaves out any predicate nominal or adjective. This outlines the central problem/question: who “is” and how, when some are property? Section one asks what crime is actually committed—murder or deception? The answer is both, and for both crimes, language failed the Africans on board. In Black English, then, it is no coincidence that “to be” is a verb manipulated, forging richer connotations than the logic of grammar and historical time will allow.

Philip also places West African names at the bottom of each page of the first section, literally “grounding” the narrative. There is no process by which the Africans can be exhumed, and contemporary African-American subjectivity, as well, must be exhumed from language mistakenly thought of as universal: the rationality of law. In her two-part pages, Philip employs a necessary fiction to honor the dead, but she also inscribes, in the poetry above, the failure of justice that presses down on those named persons. Such simultaneity is rarely enacted in public memorials.

What is notable in section two is the inconclusiveness of the language, with “any many two” repeated. This section uses the open field of the page—words and syllables are dispersed all over, wildly. Language is reduced to sounds, many pages beginning with “w wa,” evoking the process of learning to speak. The fragmentation continues, and as the pages go beyond one hundred, I am under water, and I am sure this is intentional. I feel the failure of language, the seeds of the postmodern lyric. The mix now is between many languages: English, Spanish, Latin, Portuguese, Yoruba, Shona, Dutch, Arabic, others. Some language is typeset and some remains closer to the body: handwriting.

Inside this breakdown of language, its hybrid remixing, and the rising up of sound from “the black Atlantic”—a site that Paul Gilroy argues, in *The Black Atlantic*, as being central to modernity—I read as if I am deciphering code. Parts of words construct this: “can all that remains are words I do not own they tread water” which speaks to this state of being whole and partial, through and because of language.

The final section is printed in grey ink, lines overlapping each other. Philip explains that a printing error first produced what she calls “crumpled” pages. It is cacophonous, but the grey indicates a lower register—a willful whisper and inevitable multiplicity.

I find echoes in Susan Howe’s practices and it is interesting to think of these two women walking in the same garden. But Philip’s project is loud, her pages are drastically full, urgent. *Zong!* eventually insists on song, rather than the sculpted silences and static that Howe finds in many of her white forbearers who were never so directly sanctioned by “to be.”

As if offering a hand to the reader who has come through the poetry, *Zong!* concludes with a glossary, a fictional ship manifest, Philip’s essay, and a reprint of the legal case. This testifies to “the book” as a more desirable medium, at times, than film. Reading, we may always flip back to the source document. This is not unlike life. Racism and injustices persist even as we move through and read the world. We never leave our subjectivities at the avant-garde gate, *Zong!* reminds us. History precedes and follows every project of poetry, even if the sources are spectral. Book as document of resistance, scored lament. I think this is how history, thankfully, demands poetry.

Jill Magi’s recent text-image works include SLOT (forthcoming, Ugly Duckling Presse) and Poetry Barn Barn! (That let it roll where you want it.) (2nd Avenue Press). She is the author of Threads (Futurepoem) and Torchwood (Shearsman).

Neighbour Procedure

Rachel Zolf

(Coach House Press, 2010)

REVIEW BY THOM DONOVAN

It is not as if an “I” exists independently over here and then simply loses a “you” over there, especially if the attachment to “you” is part of what composes who “I” am. If I lose you, under these conditions, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who “am” I, without you? —Judith Butler

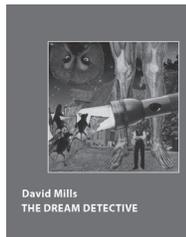
Write open and unbounded gap

Undone by the seal of the other

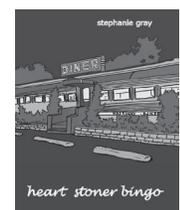
You are what I gain through this disorientation

—Rachel Zolf

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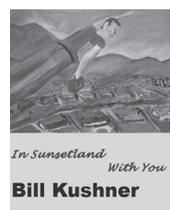
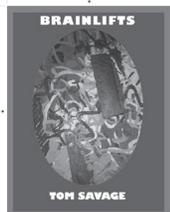


David Mills, *The Dream Detective*



and Lydia CORTÉS, Tom SAVAGE, Stephanie GRAY, Bill KUSHNER, Valerie FOX

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BOOK REVIEWS

Rachel Zolf's second full-length book, *Neighbour Procedure*, unsentimentally reconnoiters in perhaps the most loaded socio-political conflict of our time: that of Israelis and Palestinians. By doing so, Zolf advances a poetics that reaches deep into a radical Jewish tradition of exploring ethics and politics in tandem, and that seeks to deepen a readership's senses of responsibility in relation to the conflict.

Zolf begins her book through a meditation on the grieveability of those disavowed by geopolitical conflict in the Middle East. Zolf's investigation of grieveability takes inspiration from the American philosopher and cultural critic Judith Butler, who acts as a kind of guide and fellow traveler in *Neighbour Procedure*. Through Butler's book *Precarious Life*, the philosopher turned her attention to the fates of others on the front lines of post-9/11 geopolitics: detainees in Gitmo and Abu Ghraib; Palestinians in Israel-Palestine; diasporic and stateless people throughout the world. In her book, Butler pursues crucial questions, which Zolf extends through her own: "Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? [...] What makes for a grieveable life?" (Butler, 20)

It is of course those invested with power who are ultimately "grieveable," thus also capable of being symbolized within cultural-historical narratives. In the first section of *Neighbour Procedure*, "Shoot & Weep," Zolf foregrounds disparities between the political and cultural status of Palestinians and their Israeli counterparts. In the case of Palestinians, it is their names that are being forgotten, unrecognized by the greater part of the world. Likewise, Palestinians risk losing their sense of shared history and identity with Arab Jews with whom their names are often confused, as Ammiel Alcalay's seminal work on historical confluences between Jews and Arabs in the Levantine brilliantly shows. Yet, as Zolf and Butler also realize, grieveability—a politics of grieveability—forms conditions of possibility for transforming the politically and culturally incommensurable. From a shared sense of vulnerability, and from the recognition that loss forms a virtual

ground for being numerous, some hope that understanding may eventually prevail persists. This shared sense of vulnerability and loss forms what Zolf calls, citing Butler, a "tenuous we" (Butler, 20).

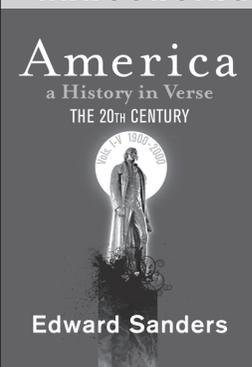
There are many ways that poets and artists have approached the subject of Israel-Palestine. Etel Adnan, Adonis, Mahmoud Darwish, Emily Jacir, Walid Raad, and Jalal Toufic comprise but a few of Zolf's Arab contemporaries who have attempted to make sense of the cultural disasters of the Middle East in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Zolf approaches her subject, as she also did in her 2007 book *Human Resources*, through a documentarian's sensibility (Zolf worked for years as a documentary filmmaker before trying her hands as a poet) selecting, cutting, and rearranging language in order to reveal texts as sites of contested cultural meaning. Zolf's book also involves a considerable amount of research. The book was started in 2006, but became a research-intensive investigation following a trip Zolf took to Israel-Palestine in late December of 2008, of which Zolf writes: "I'm not sure if I ever can or want to put into words what happened during my time in Israel-Palestine. Instead, I have inserted some of the journey's mad affects into this book." (Zolf, 79)

Using source texts as raw material, Zolf chips away at language, articulating ideas

and "mad affects" inchoate within her materials. Zolf is overwhelmingly successful in this mode, whereof she remains remarkably faithful to her affective content—an achievement appropriate poetics too often fall short on. By various textual and hermeneutic strategies (Gematria, search-engine collage, exegesis, one-act play, erasure, scoring for voice), Zolf investigates the stakes of Israel's relationship with its neighbors, and its principle neighbor, Palestine. What is at stake here concerns those who struggle with Israel as a nation versus Israel as an historical and culturally specific notion of ethical-political struggle—"If Israel is not Israel" (Zolf, 7). It is also about reading the conflict in Israel-Palestine non-fatalistically—"If some are a community of fate" (Zolf, 9)—against the many reactive forces now operative in Israel and among Israel's most persistent allies. How to recover historical truth from myth "if catastrophe becomes a passion"? (Zolf, 7) "If you are Hamas" and "one is Israel" (Zolf, 9) how to reconcile a collective sense of belonging with the polarizing forces of national autonomy and ethnic essentialisms?

Zolf's book approaches various indiscernible points and ambivalences of the Israel-Palestine conflict. In "L'éveil" ("The awakening" or "the vigilance" in English, though "éveil" obviously resembles evil and veil), Zolf reappropriates news cov-

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BOOK REVIEWS

erage from the *Globe and Mail*, *Lebanon Daily Star*, *New York Times*, and *Jerusalem Post*, partitioning news content via a Cartesian grid/four square. Doing so she draws out the various ways that conflicts in the Middle East are represented by popular news agencies, thus revealing the “fourth estate” as an apparatus of state coercion conditioning geopolitical strategy. The poem, “L’amiral cherche une maison à louer,” chronicles the Dadaist, Marcel Janco, who in 1953 established an art commune in Palestine, changing the name of the Palestinian town where the commune was located from the Arabic *Ein Houd* (“Trough Spring”) to the Hebrew *Ein Hod* (“Glory Springs”). Similarly, the poems “Messenger” and “Mixed crowd” demonstrate the vicissitudes of translating Koran passages between Arabic, Hebrew, and English. Such hermeneutic demonstrations mediate a conflict that is not only political, but historically rooted in encounters between Hebrew, Arabic, and English languages. Insistently presenting the cleave of translation—the place where words both cling to each other and split apart—Zolf allegorizes the difficulties of bearing across cultural difference to produce communication, understanding, and equality. In the cleave one locates cultural incommensurability and difference, but also discerns the mark of cultures upon one another.

Yet the fact remains. Jews and Arabs are not equals in Israel-Palestine because they are not yet able to properly “stand together”—a phrase that the Israeli curator Galit Eilat recently used in conversation with myself and the Canadian-Israeli curator Chen Tamir this past September to describe the problem of any possible coalition for social justice among Arabs and Israelis in the region. One of the main impediments to standing together are the strategies of the Israeli military, which prove time and again a disaster for Palestinian civilians. Zolf’s title, *Neighbour Procedure*, in fact describes a military procedure by which Israeli soldiers use Palestinian residences as a means of gaining access to adjacent residences. By this procedure, whereby Israeli Defense Forces soldiers

literally walk through walls, Palestinians become complicit with the capture of their neighbors. Ironically, this tactic derives from post-May ‘68 cultural theorists such as Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, and Henri Lefebvre as the work of Israeli military scholar Eyal Weizman, cited in the notes to Zolf’s book, demonstrates.

Post-Structuralist guerilla tactics, too often regarded as sacred among Leftist artists and intellectuals, even prove disastrous adapted by a national military against a stateless people. While Zolf’s book mourns the suffering of Palestinians at the hands of Israelis, it also points to aspects of the conflict that haunt postmodern thought, the appropriation of Post-Structuralist thought for military domination being yet another aporia from which Zolf’s book draws the strength of its critical-poetic investigation.

Yet, if there is a principle aporia of Zolf’s *Neighbour Procedure*, it issues from the writer’s apprenticeship with the complexities of the conflict, and from the writer’s personal sense that to “progress” towards an understanding of the conflict requires that one admit “epistemological mastery is an uncloseable wound” and that “the first stage is not knowing at all” (Zolf, 6) as a means towards disavowing one’s alibi of non-responsibility; what Emmanuel Levinas discloses as the self “at home” with itself, supposedly free in its “being.”

In her notes to *Neighbour Procedure*, Zolf calls her experience of writing the book “the progress of [her] *unknowing*” (my italics). By foregrounding her own epistemological non-mastery—*unknowing*—Zolf calls upon her reader to also attend to the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and correlate them with other genealogies of force of which everyone is culpable and complicit. Such a recognition is hard won through a dynamic assemblage of lyrical, documentary, and appropriative poetic forms and techniques. Zolf’s *Neighbour Procedure* is a bold challenge both to those who would claim poetry cannot be socially or politically invaluable, and to a world that by and large does not believe responsibility can be taken for civil rights beyond national borders.

Work Cited:

Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: the Power of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso Press, 2004.

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