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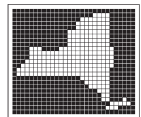
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ANNOUNCEMENTS

FROM THE DIRECTOR

I was just at the Facing Pages Literary Convening & Conference that took place in the Adirondacks. I got to talk about the Poetry Project with other nonprofit arts people and learn about their organizations, collaborations and aspirations. I enjoyed some very competitive late night games of ping-pong with Laurie Dean Torrell of Just Buffalo (shout out to the game room crowd) and avoided encounters with black bears other than the many talismanic bear wood carvings that were placed around the cabins. A lot of people approached me after I talked about the Project and wanted to tell me about the 1st time they had attended a reading here or that they had gotten married at St. Mark's Church, or some bit of ancient Project history. Sounds like I should start yet another notebook.

In the letter from the Program Coordinator you will find information about our biggest and most beloved fundraiser and community event, the 34th Annual New Year's Day Marathon Reading. If you are in New York City what better way is there to bring in the year than with massive amounts of food, poetry and community, all while participating in the good cause of helping the Poetry Project defray our operating costs for the coming year. In an effort to assuage any hurt feelings I just want to remind people that there are a finite number of spots to read or perform, and that each year we are committed to including a good number of poets and performers who are absolutely new to the line-up. The bathtub water overfloweth. If you are sitting one or two out you are still actively participating in a very arduous and wonderful process.

Love,
Stacy Szymaszek

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PURCHASES THE POETRY PROJECT'S ARCHIVES

On June 29th 2007, after years of planning and negotiating, the Library of Congress



PHOTO CREDIT: STEVE CLAY

sent a truck to St. Mark's Church to pick up their latest acquisition, the Poetry Project's audio and document archive 1966 through June 2005. The necessity of finding a not only safe but prosperous home for our archive, certainly not provided by the basement of the church, was on the minds of all the Project's Directors. The search process and sale was initiated by Ed Friedman, carried through by Anselm Berrigan and is now being attended to and trumpeted by Stacy Szymaszek.

The Library of Congress is the largest library in the world. The collections include more than 32 million books and other printed materials and 59.5 million manuscripts. It holds the nation's largest public collection of sound recordings, 2.8 million, and represents more than 100 years of sound recording history. The Library of Congress will undertake the hard work of restoring damaged media, preserving documents, digitizing sound files, and bringing public accessibility to 39 years of the Poetry Project's poetic and cultural production. This includes recordings of readings going back to the earliest days of the Project as well as creative and administrative correspondence and other documents that, when made available to the public, will make the impact of the Poetry Project and its community on contemporary writing more fully representable.

There is certainly much more to say about this monumental event, and more questions to answer. We are working on an in-depth article about the Poetry Project's archive and the sale to the Library of Congress for the March/April issue of the Newsletter.

34TH ANNUAL NEW YEAR'S DAY MARATHON REARS ITS FESTIVE TENTACLES, BEHOLD

Here in the office we are filling our GHG prescriptions and upping the calisthenics regiment in preparation for the longest day of our administrative year. From 2 pm till 2 am on Tuesday, January 1, 2008, we will sparkle and shine with poetry, performance, food, drink and a room full of books. So far about one hundred participants have confirmed, and it's looking to be a terrific line-up of first-timers, every-timers and scores between. Poets, musicians, dancers and writers will burn the midnight candle in the Sanctuary while the Parish Hall makes its annual transformation into rare book shop/neighborhood café/luminous green room.

The ballast of this here crazy boat is comprised of cherished volunteers. We could in no way pull the yearly madness off without the 75+ beloved friends who eschew their hangovers to become book sellers, food servers, hand stampers, chair stackers, sign makers and otherwise saintly jacks-of-all-trades in 2-hour blocks from morning till morning again. If you are interested in volunteering this year, please email Arlo Quint at info@poetryproject.com. Let him know if you feel more helpful pre-noon or post-twilight; tell him your task preference if you'd like. Start the new year with the intoxicating buzz of poetic altruism!

Soon we will begin the hefty task of securing food donations from our comrades in local restaurants and bakeries. If you own or manage such an establishment, or know someone who does, please let us know. Last year we welcomed first time donors S'Mac, Café Brama, Buttonbox Catering and Grey Dog—we would love to add even more restaurants to our "food court" array.

We are also now accepting donations of books, chapbooks and other printed or recorded matter. Each year small and not small presses (and some individual authors) offer wares in good-condition to be sold in the Parish Hall. Please contact us in order to arrange drop-offs or shipments. We thank you in advance!

As much as we like to grumble about the work, we are all looking forward to this long-standing community event, and to the delirium fun that comes with utter exhaustion after half-a-day of sensory upload. Hope to catch you there.

-Corrine Fitzpatrick

PERPETUAL SPRING?

Well, I'll be. Is this a firm breeze and not some moist/misty form of broiler vapor I see before me? Tomorrow will be the first of November, and here I thought we had made it all the way back to July again—nary an upturned collar to be seen. So so glad am I because while poetry moves irresistibly forward my own mind and appended social skills have been firmly set on reverse decline until I finally felt that air all a'chatter with unjustly green and red leaves. Swedish fish in Rome? Alas. So, when will those letters, missives and adulations commence? I think you ought to ask us some questions. Maybe I should ask you some. Tim Dlugos wrote a marvellous questionnaire some years back that I may have to reprint in a coming issue if the staff doesn't hear from you. In the meantime: what's working/what's not? Do you miss what has arbitrarily left you? Do you need a vacation? Do I? How do seasons affect you and your writing? Silent baskets of kittens or interfering bar throngs while editing? Tell me who, and I'll tell you why. That air in front of your mouth is finally listening.

-John Coletti

DIVING INTO THE TEXT

"If it be true that this feeding of a stranger goes through all nature as something having the character of a general law then many an enigma would be solved." Goethe, quoted in Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*, quoted in Mayer's *Mutual Aid*.

CHANGE OF PLANS

Due in part to renovations at the Red Hook Pubic Library, the First Tuesdays Poetry Discussion group has been discontinued. Look for a Red Hook project in early '08. For further information, contact Michael Scharf at harrytankoosbooks@gmail.com.

WOMEN, THE NEW YORK SCHOOL AND MAGGIE NELSON

Congratulations to Maggie Nelson on the publication of *Women, the New York School and Other Abstractions* (University of Iowa Press). Poets House will be having an event to celebrate the book, Tuesday, November 13, 6:30 and 8:00pm. See poetshouse.org for more info.

LENORE MARSHALL POETRY PRIZE

Congratulations to Alice Notley who received the Academy of American Poets' 2007 Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize for *Grave of Light: New and Selected Poems 1970-2005*. The Award recognizes the most outstanding book of poetry published in the United States in the previous year.

REMEMBERING SCOTT COHEN

Desolated to hear of Scott Cohen's passing, though sadly I'd been out of touch with Scott for too many years. But these days that goes for everybody. Haven't seen Scott since the long ago days when he came out a few times to visit Angelica and me on Nymph Road in Bolinas, must have been 1970 or so—a mild, sweet-mannered, slim, darkly handsome long-haired young man who'd just arrived in California from New York City. My first reaction upon seeing him was an inner double-take: I thought we were being visited by Alain Delon. I liked Scott's style and loved his poetry, which strikes me in retrospect as the smartest and funniest totally sincere wise-naïf culturally-sensitive pop art verse of the hippie period. Scott's "list" poems, masterpieces of anaphora, fulfilled Dr. Johnson's dictum about what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed, though Dr. Johnson was probably never slightly high, as I always supposed Scott to be when he was writing his poems. (Come to think of it, Dr. Johnson probably was). I published three of Scott's poems in *The Paris Review*—"Loneliness," "Coke," and "Good Sam." The titles tell the story. Also, in my capacity of sports editor of an amazing brief supernova of a neo-tabloid known as *Bean News*, I was privileged to publish what I still regard as the classic ode to the forgotten art of smoking, Scott's

"Marlboros Are Full of Flavor," which says, among other things:

Marlboros are good when you're driving or on a greyhound bus

Marlboros make the time pass quicker if you're waiting for somebody

Marlboros make a difference when you're low

Marlboros are good after sex

Marlboros are good before sex

Marlboros are good during sex

Marlboros are good if your girlfriend's not around, or if she doesn't want sex

Marlboros are satisfying

Marlboros make you look like James Dean or Brando or Brigitte Bardot, even tho nobody wants to look

like James Dean or Brando or Brigitte Bardot any more

Angelica and I hitched a ride down to Berkeley one bright sunny day in that lost world of nearly forty years ago to visit Scott and his lovely, equally unassuming female partner of that time, in their tiny unadorned apartment in the maze of crooked streets down around Gilman. 'Twas the last time I ever saw him. Much later, in '84 or so, when we were in Berkeley, I got a call from Scott, who was editing for a rock magazine—*Spin*, was it? He very kindly assigned me to do an interview with the Popol Pies. I never managed the interview, but it was entirely swell to have a phone call from Scott, and to talk briefly with that charming man—whom I will always think of as young—for what now turns out to have been the last time.

-Tom Clark

GOODBYE TO SOME WORD WORKERS

Bill Griffiths (1948-2007): British poet, scholar, translator, pamphleteer and publisher. Herschel Baron (1913-2007): poet, poetry organizer, engineer, defender of the 1st amendment. Mary Rising Higgins (1944-2007) poet, former public school teacher. Thank you for your work.

READING REPORTS

A Flash Review of Larry Fagin and Charles North, The Poetry Project, October 3, 2007

Larry Fagin started the evening off by reading a list of the 4 cardinal sins of any poetry reading—and then proceeded to break every one of them. His poems are rascal-infused aphorisms mixed in with snatches of vaudevillian narrative—all of it delivered with perfect timing and witty dryness. His poems have always made me laugh in that way that hurts a bit but is more pleasurable than an ordinary laugh. I remember wishing I'd written the line "orange soda blows in the wind." from his poem "Landscape" long ago when I was a student of Larry's. It's helpful to think of his poetry as formal mischief, darting to and fro through the tattered landscape of now. Larry is a treasure. Hopefully he'll give another reading in NYC before another 13 years go by.

Charles North exudes a slightly disheveled yet crisp elegance and his reading style matched the poems perfectly with his quick wit and clipped delivery. There's a world weariness in his voice, but his poems still embrace the absurd humor at the frayed ends of the day. His work resembles Beckett's in some respects: by finding loopholes in logic and letting it all flap around a bit inside perfectly constructed sentences. The fat is trimmed from his poems so they're all lean and lyrical like muscle on muscle. At one point Charles mentioned that both he and Larry shared a cinemagraphic element to their poems and it was certainly evident in the richly visual landscape that each poet created. It felt good to be in the crisp and witty company of these men. -*Todd Colby*

Cathy Park Hong & Mark McMorris, The Poetry Project, October 17, 2007

Wednesday night's reading began with poems from Cathy Park Hong's second book, *Dance Dance Revolution*. The listener got the sense of the poems panning in their circular revolutions through the aisles and rounded halls of the book's fictional casino. The tall socks and binocular stars of a great desert dystopia. The running lights of the slots, the barking language of advertising sopped up in gaudy rugs. Cathy Park Hong's mythic setting was a desert siren for language, the pidgin words that travel across the desert to the sedentary hostland and pollinate to and from guest and worker. Vaudeville backdrops, curtains stuffed down in and muffling the shots of the "non-Sinatra cannon." Words as blips on the map, walking in their quietly mutating revolutions....Place served a similar function in Mark McMorris' poems. McMorris led us to a tropical warehouse by the sea, an island entrepôt (from the Latin Interpositum, to be placed between). Here, birds and ships gathered around the comings and goings of the poem, a bonded customs house, a halfway point for the traveling sea, a place to drop off unwanted cargo and by picking up more pallets, flat transport is the endless redirecting of a real commerce of image. Embedded in the phrase, "the circle that becomes a wheel," concept has preceded function, "a no-win of dueling insomnias." Doldrums in the cafes, trade winds carry supply and news of the war, the letters we wait for. -*Joe Robitaille*

Matthew Henriksen & Rachel Zolf, The Poetry Project, October 17, 2007

A sort of June/October cocktail, the smell of fresh pavement sticking to the Parish Hall. Matthew Henriksen reads first, reads a long poem of walks, Chicago (his accent rising up), Los Angeles, the J in a store sign. Then speaks of how hard it is to read a long poem at the beginning of a reading. And so reads another long poem. Yellow shirt with paramesium pillars of blue, sleeves rolled up, slight bop and raises his left foot to stand toe to floor. The second part of his reading features poems from his horse less press chap of 2006, *Is Holy*. Most are a page, tender, soft but loud enough to be heard over the street construction that consumes 2nd Avenue. Reads a poem about a nuclear explosion in New York in "The New Surrealism" but both he and his wife Katy end up OK. He reads for under 20 minutes total. After the break Torontoite Rachel Zolf reads from *Human Resources*, a tangle of numbers, advice to writers, genitals and bad words delivered at a speed just a tad slower than current record holder Miles Champion. Pink shirt with a dog of some kind printed about the left clavicle. Cola-colored rectangle frames for her eyeglasses. She booms through the mike at warp 6. The street construction seems to fold away. Her second set is "new stuff." Slower, more political: Palestine & Israel. She takes an almost sigh and tumbles into a chorus of "carbomb carbomb carbomb carbomb suitcasebomb carbomb carbomb carbomb." An audience member puts her hand on her mouth as if to gasp. Another is watching her. She begins to strand her hair deliberately. There are other kinds of -bombs, beltbombs, truckbombs. Almost 30 attend, many luminaries. - *Anonymous Mysterian*



AN EXPLORATION of the compatibility of human desire with personal ethics is at the heart of *Infamous Landscapes*, whose voices work with and against a perceived Wordsworthian innocence. In these poems Sharma turns away from Romanticism with a disconcerted, feminine shame, one that finds her peering through an enculturated, gendered lens.

"This season, the language is most green and wet in Prageeta Sharma's *Infamous Landscapes*—brand new shoots of insight and contemplation, where fields of association and wit were thought once to be intractable and dry. . . . This is 21st century poetic thinking: sensuous, pellucid, and yearning."—**MAJOR JACKSON**

"Sharma cultivates mindscapes, scrutinizing the self in the midst of blooming and shifting guaranteed to exhilarate the reader."—**LISA JARNOT**

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An Interview with Ted Greenwald

by Arlo Quint

I got together with Ted Greenwald in September for lunch and an interview. I was particularly interested in talking to Ted about his poems, his methods of writing, and the New York City poetry scene. Ted did not disappoint. What follows is a series of excerpts, loosely arranged by topic, from the much longer complete transcription.

The Poetry Project & the NYC Poetry Scene

AQ: Since this is for *The Poetry Project Newsletter*, and you've been associated with the Project for such a long time, I want to ask you about how your relationship with this place started.

TG: I've been around here basically from the beginning. When I was going to school at Queens College, Lorenzo Thomas and I used to come in and read at The Metro, and that's how we met Ted, Ron, Joe and Dick, and it was sort of on from there . . . basically, there was a scene. In terms of the Project it basically drifted into the scene. Anne Waldman and some other people were running it early on. First it was Paul Blackburn, and I knew him. It was all a part of that Lyndon Johnson stuff—The Great Society or something like that. It was a place to read, and a lot of really good poets were hanging out.

TG: You have to make the scene. It's the energy of the people involved and the quality of what they're doing. Early on at the Project, if you weren't any fucking good, and you didn't have the goods, and you got up here and read then you were gone and that was it. For life. Finished! . . . I'm not kidding you. And that was why everyone was getting pissed off about the Project. That was the edge.

TG: Look. In this age of the Internet which is one of the great levelers of all time . . . it's basically this piece of hardware that makes everyone think they're an artist. It's only doing now what video did in the 70's, and everyone thought it was this great thing, but it's just a piece of hardware. It's a hammer. I believe that there should be a democracy of access, but there's not a democracy of skill. Some people are better at things than others. Period. Some people figure it out differently. Some people figure out how to do it for 10, 15 or 20 years at a high level, but then there are people . . . it's like watching a guy play saxophone on a beer commercial . . . maybe that's what he does for his whole life, you know? He plays those six notes and makes a living. The main thing is bringing the edge back in, making this the place to be. Making this the place young poets can get published. *The World* was important for that. You had *Mother* magazine with



PHOTO CREDIT: KYLE SCHLESINGER

Peter Schjeldahl, you had *C Magazine*. There were all these fast come and go magazines—Johnny Stanton's *Siamese Banana*. There was always stuff coming out. Plus you had the people that we didn't hang out with. The Judson Church people who were putting out a million magazines . . . sort of like the anthropology type. Jerry Rothenberg, David Antin . . . those guys were doing something really different. It's really a question of giving people access to publication. It doesn't matter, they don't have to have . . . I'm not going to identify people but there's a whole generation of poets that have now reached a certain age where they waited to have \$2000 books, and they blew it because that's not the point. You showed me your books, and they're side-stapled books. That's all you need. I did a book with my daughter, a collaboration, a number of years ago. We did the drawings and I took 'em across the street to the copy shop. The books were made and that was it. Speed. Get in and out fast. Get the people wanting to be in things. What we used to have when the magazines were being published . . . you would have a collating party. There would be like 20 people there, and when you were done you'd be left with the book. It was a scene. You had the poetry aspect of it, and then it sort of drifted off into the social aspect . . . people who were living on the lower east side . . . people who were hanging out with Ted [Berrigan]. Ted was a great poet. Ted

was a literary man . . . he required a certain level of attention. And then there was that whole other scene . . . quality became social. Shit, I didn't live in the neighborhood so, you know . . .

AQ: And now all the poets live in Brooklyn.

TG: There's no scene in Manhattan at this point. The worst thing that ever happened to the United States was making Manhattan real estate expensive because you can't get young people here. So now it's gonna be someplace else, and it's like a great deal of other things in this country—it's just not good for the overall culture.

TG: The art world, through the 80s, started to become very expensive. It started to become very expensive just to hang out. It wasn't cheap to be on the scene, and all of the sudden it costs a lot of money just to have a drink. A lot of these chic places you're paying 12, 15 dollars for

a fucking ridiculous martini! All that is ridiculous. I don't drink anymore but, let me tell you, I've had my fair share over the years of lots of things and there's no way I would pay \$12 for a martini. I'm not cheap either. It costs a lot of money just to walk down the street here. I'd hate to be young and coming up here now. I think that you'd have to be very cunning nowadays to figure out where a margin is to operate on and make a living. The margin is just not so visible. And to do it legitimately without selling drugs or some other crap like that.

Poetry & Competition

TG: The key is, you know, how ambitious are people? Do you all think that you're the most important poets who are alive at the moment? Now, if you feel that way, then you're gonna have a scene. If you don't feel that way, if you assume you're just another poet, then you might as well hang up your cleats right there.

AQ: I think that feeling might be missing now.

TG: That's because a lot of people discourage competition. Sometimes competition is not a half bad thing where you sort of, somewhere in your head, compete with someone who you think writes really well and you would like to write as well as them. Shakespeare or Frank O'Hara . . .

AQ: O'Hara thought he was writing the best poems around.

TG: And generally he was . . . other people around him were writing pretty interesting stuff but not quite as good as him.

AQ: Who were you in competition with?

TG: It's all long past . . . and as I've gotten older I've learned to be extremely diplomatic (laughs). But what I'm really talking about is people whose work you like. You read a nice piece, and you go home, and you've gotta write a piece. That's the competition.

AQ: I think poets now tend to imagine themselves in competition with the people

whose work they don't like—an "opposing camp" or something like that.

TG: No, No—you've gotta respect the competition. Why would you wanna compete with someone you feel is an inferior? . . . unless you're into "non-hierarchical thinking" which is another layer of bullshit in the culture now.

AQ: One type of competition in poetry you have now is, you know, competition for jobs and that sort of thing.

TG: In that case you're not gonna be . . . well you might be some sort of a superstar with your "great poems" published on the front page of *The New York Times*, or maybe you'll have academic credentials with a Ph.D. and articles published in critical journals . . . but your poems are gonna be worth shit. You're not going to be interested in your poems. You'll only be interested in them insofar as they add up to "fame and glory" in the academic world. Who cares? I mean . . . an MFA? Look, I did graduate level work. I'm sort of an ABT, but when I did my paper for my master's degree I had a guy who said "you gotta rewrite it," and I didn't want to rewrite it, so I never got my master's but I did all this fucking work, and I passed all the exams. I actually wrote the thing. I even wrote 25 pages of a doctoral dissertation, and I had set up a theory that I was going to operate from. Then I said to myself, "Geez, why am I wasting my time doing this? I might as well take all this secret knowledge that I'm coming up with and just write some great work." That's sort of the way I was thinking.

TG: If you go back to the 60's there was only one MFA program in the country and now there's zillions of them. And the academy has so tremendously usurped . . . has placed itself as the mediator of taste in the art . . . and it's just horseshit. It's utter horseshit. The standard is that poems have passed through the hands of a Ph.D. somewhere or something resembling that.

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Early Publications, Collaborators, and Editors

AQ: Can you tell me about your first book, *Lapstrake*?

TG: I just knew Aram (Saroyan) from around. I sent him work for *Lines* magazine, and then when I moved into the city after I graduated from Queens, I was living uptown. I was going to graduate school up at City College, and one day I came home and there was a postcard from Aram, and he said, "I'd like to do a book of yours." So I quickly put together the book, and it's called *Lapstrake*, and he published it very quickly. Then, shortly thereafter, he did a book by John Perreault and one by Clark (Coolidge), and he might have done one by Dick Kolmar. I'm not sure. And we were friendly for a while. I haven't seen him in a number of years . . . he moved to the coast and drifted away. He's a terrific poet. His new collected book is very nice. So that's how I got the first one. I got on the scoreboard very fast.

AQ: How old were you?

TG: I was 21 or 22 or something like that. It meant that I could sort of relax a little bit so the next book that came out, *Short Sleeves*, was a little letterpress book that, my then wife, Joan Simon printed. She was learning printing up at Cornell when I said, "Well, here's a book—do a real book," and so she did it. I had another one intervening around that time called *No Eating*. That was put out by *Blue Pig*. George Tysh and David Bell had this terrific magazine in Paris, and I went there in '68 and lived there for about six months. I met George and David there through Michael Brownstein who was there on a Fulbright. Michael is old friends with some very old friends of mine from Queens—guys named Jerry Hiler and Nick Dorsky—they're filmmakers and they live in San Francisco—legendary people! They're really old friends.

AQ: That was around the time you did *Somewhere in Ho*, right? The collaboration

with Ed Baynard.

TG: It's amazing if you even found a copy of that!

AQ: I've got a photocopy.

TG: Ed was a friend of mine, and around 1969 I was spending a lot of time down in Soho. I would go up to Cornell to see my first wife at school; she had met Gordon Matta-Clark up there, and Gordon and I were friends, and then he moved down to New York before Joan graduated. I worked with him on some pieces, and then an old friend of mine, Manfred Hecht, worked with him on a lot of pieces. Manfred was basically a mechanic, so he worked with him on *Splitting* and some of these other things. We all hung out together and at that time Gordon did a construction job at 98 Greene St. which was being put together by Holly Solomon . . . it was really the first alternative space down in Soho. The second one was 112 and the first one was 98. It was through her that I started running poetry readings, and I got interested in doing art shows, and that's sort of how I got into that world. Through Holly Solomon. Ed Baynard was a friend of Holly's, and we all became friends and hung out together, and then Ed and I got together and did the collaboration one day. It was around the time we were reading that stupid book on . . . *Subliminal Seduction* it was called. It's a book on advertising . . . how in strange ways advertisers write sex into everything.

TG: *Short Sleeves* is only like 12, 13 poems. This is where I think people get it wrong when they say they're waiting for some bigger thing. Take what you have and say that it's an important work. I don't make any distinction between chapbooks and big books because, to me, when I have twelve pages I make a book of twelve pages. Basically I'm modeling it after an L.P. record—there's 12 cuts. It's a real book. Everything should be a real book if you're gonna do it at that level. It shouldn't just be a throwaway where you waste time and energy and money . . . everything

should be worth something. If you yourself don't think it's good, how the fuck are other people gonna think it's any good?

TG: This book (*Common Sense*), the only way I could get that manuscript—it was edited by Curtis Faville. I tried that manuscript a hundred times and couldn't get it and Curtis did it. Curtis really did an absolutely great job. He really . . . I could not have done it if he hadn't done it, I'm telling you that flat out. He said he was interested in doing something—he had L Press at the time—and he gave me a page limit. I sent him a bunch of things, and then he sent me a letter where he said, “Now listen, I want you to send me all the work” because I was holding back work or not thinking of work that he was aware of. So that's what I did and we ended up doing it bigger.

TG: I've been lucky. My first wife was an editor. I had Curtis. I did *Making A Living* with Larry Fagin who's a terrific editor. Bill Berkson is another one. I've been lucky that, in the course of putting together books, I've worked with good editors. I was able to get good things out of the work, and it wasn't me—it was them. I mean, I produced the work but they sort of . . . until you get yourself to the point where you can be really hard on yourself and less self-indulgent you need a good editor. And sometimes it's important just to get the work away from yourself and have someone else look at it. I mean somebody who knows what they're doing, not just someone who happens to be there and wants to be involved. I'm talking about someone with real skill in editing whose judgment you respect. And have a few of them. I've been lucky to have a few people that have been helpful that way.

TG: The only person who knows if you're full of shit is yourself. It may look great to everybody else, but you will know you're full of shit on some level because you

know what's wrong with it. Everybody says, “This is fabulous” and you go “Oh yeah, right—little do you know!” It's like being a magician to some degree—you don't want to give away the trick.

Methods & Forms

AQ: You've been writing for a long time and have published a lot of work with a huge formal range . . . the really short lyrics in *Short Sleeves*, narrative work like *Smile*, and eventually the really long poems like *Word of Mouth* . . .

TG: First of all, I didn't want to be limited. Sometimes a piece came out as a prose piece. I've been doing it for 45 years; that's why there's a lot of it. The other thing is, after I published *Lapstrake* and the work in *Lines*, I sort of set up . . . I had started around 1964 writing the first of *The Licorice Chronicles*. Basically the way I laid them out for myself, in some sort of half-assed way, was that each piece was gonna be as much as I knew about poetry at the time (I didn't know enough about poetry). Each one of the sections I figured, at that date, that was what I knew, and I wasn't writing stuff in between. And it went on until 1969, and when I did the last one that was it. And that lead me to the first work where I figured something out. The big work in one sitting. The first work of that type was *Makes Sense* and then I did others like that . . . *You Bet*.

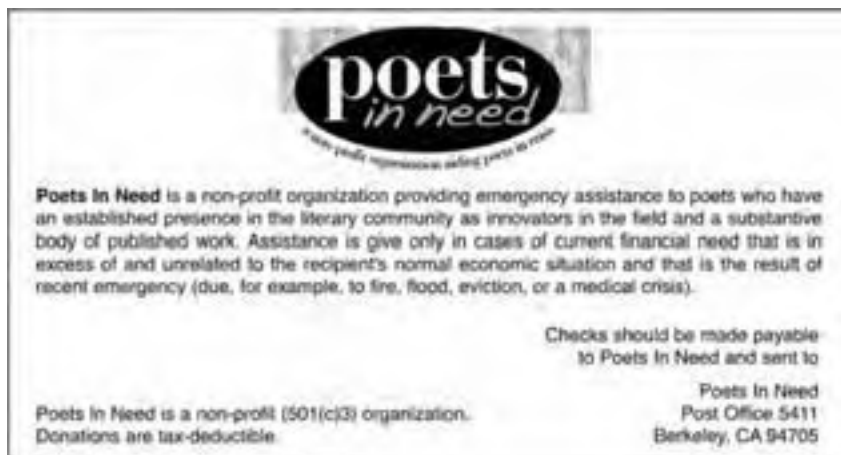
AQ: *You Bet* is one sitting?

TG: Yeah, I did it in one day—one shot.

Then *Word of Mouth* is approximately the same thing everyday at the same time for about a month . . . under the influence of the same drug. It was like a fall poem . . . it was written in October. I like the idea of writing in one sitting or the illusion of one sitting. I let my mind do the organizing, you know, use my mind like a hammer. In other words, not put a structure over it but let the structure just sort of arrive. And it will. Your mind will organize it for you, and it saves a hell of a lot of time and sweat.

AQ: So you set up something like a loose compositional method . . .

TG: I work a lot. I work every day. Like, right now I've been working on something for about three years, and I don't quite know what I have. I haven't got to the point where I'm going to edit it or put it into a bigger form. I gotta see if that works. Some things are sort of worked up to like *The Up and Up* . . . that was sort of worked up to in a certain way. I found one thing at a certain point when I started doing those repeated lines. They started with a book called *Exit the Face*, and then there's a book that's never been published called *Going Into School That Day* along that continuum, and then there's a work called *In Your Dreams* which has never been published. What I was basically saying to myself is “What's the difference between poetry and prose?” Generally poetry organizes itself line by line and generally prose organizes itself by paragraph. So, let me just go line by line. What



that does is . . . you don't get into the issue of how to turn the line, so then you get a whole different other kind of shape happening. Every poet in the world, once you get to that turn, then it turns prose-like in the second line. That first line is poetry, the second line is always prose if you continue that particular thought. If you stop the thought and let that thought go out that way and do another line, another thought or something . . . whole other thoughts, whole other lines, and you move along that way and see where that goes.

AQ: What do you think about the prose poem as a separate form?

TG: Well, you know, it's applicable. Historically, it refers to something French. It's cool. But, you know, generally what makes poetry poetry is line by line. Even if it happens to be by paragraph it still should be line by line. Once I stopped writing without caps on the left flush line—that wall to work from—as soon as you don't use those caps you don't have a beginning you're just dealing with a bunch of words floating all over the place, and it's very amorphous and very confusing. I just found it was very helpful for me to shove the whole poem flush left because then I didn't have the excuse of using the location on the page as a way of saving a bad line. You know, when you get involved in projective verse which is basically a theory of how you write poetry on a typewriter . . . which is pretty much what it is . . . I handwrite so, you know, as soon as you get flush left you can see when the line sucks. There's a lot of things that show up when you're flush left that you can't get away with. And when I edit, I edit with a

dark black pen so I can never see that line again. I don't want it saved . . . it's over. Once it's gone, it's gone. Let the poem go through it.

TG: I tend to read a lot, and writing is the flip side of reading. Really, if you read a lot you should write a lot. I also steal a lot—the things that catch my eye or catch my ear. The way I work through a poem is with my ear. When I type it up I use my ear and my eye. Generally, if it doesn't look right, it's not right but . . . how does it sound? The one reason that I'm not particularly a Language poet is very simply that I'm more interested in spoken sources and spoken material than I am in written material. I read a lot, but if I'm going to mine things that I'm reading I'm going to look for things that are "spoken nuggets" as it were. I think that the most interesting thing in the language is the noise. You can't have any communication without it. In any communication channel you have to have a minimax of noise, and what interests me is the noise. If you can't communicate without it—you gotta have it—you might as well see what it does. I like things that would be noise or something that you wouldn't even notice. I sometimes say to people that I know the poem is really good if you dream about it.

The Poetry Reading

TG: You have to have a sense of delivering the work in public. A competitive sense. You don't have Ethan Hawke to do your fucking poems in public . . . or Madonna. How do *you* deliver the work in

public? And despite all their fantasies about it, rock and roll singers are not poets by any stretch of the imagination. The day Bob Dylan does anything very good without a band is the day that hell freezes over. He can't do anything without a band, and he sometimes barely gets slightly close, but it's all still just four four four four four. If you put it on a page, it's ridiculous.

AQ: I love Bob Dylan!

TG: I like him too. He's a wonderful songwriter; he's not a poet. I've said this a million times to the point at which I bore myself when I say it: poetry is the only thing which hasn't been called poetic. You're sort of functioning in public. Part of the competition or part of the tradition is, over the years, the tradition of programming competitively. You would get the people that hate each other and put them on the same program and see what happens. Or you get two people who like each other, but they're competitive. A great case in point once was Ted Berrigan and Dick Gallup reading. Ted read for what must have been an hour and a half and then there was a break and poor Dick had to follow that. Ted was very good at that kind of crap (laughs)! That's the kind of thing you know—you have to take care of some of your business in public. You're gonna read with somebody, you know? A lot of times I don't like to read the same thing twice, and so I go ahead and write new stuff for the reading . . . try it out in public, give it a test run, see what it sounds like. The situation has to be available to that. You can't throw in people that have been doing stuff for forty years with people who have been doing stuff for two years. A lot of times that's not gonna work.

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The other thing is that as people get older, they have a tendency to want to introduce their own work, which I find tedious. I don't think that work should be introduced. Tom Raworth, who's an old friend, and I are of the school that you get up, you do your shit, and you go home. That's it! You lay it out. I don't want to discuss how I wrote this. I don't want to give these little historical notes. Just let the work have it's own air! But I also have never been a teacher. A lot of people have made their living in the academy, so they end up learning how to deliver their work in front of a class.

Last Five Minutes

AQ: Do you consider yourself a mystic?

TG: No, but there are ideas in the poems that appear to be mystical. I think that poetry is special. I don't want to turn it into some variety of religious experience. There are moments when things are going really well when you're channeling something else. But, you know, it's just that you're really into it. And, finally, it's not a question of mysticism but it's, "Where do you put the work?" It's only in the 16th and 17th centuries that you had biographies of artists that were very well known, or a circumstance where a lot of that kind of information about somebody's life was desired. It seems to me that the ideal situation is Shakespeare's, where all you have is half of a document and a name, and that's it. The rest is make believe. It's impossible in the 20th and 21st centuries for that to be the case because there's all sorts of residual information—there's all sorts of other crap around—there's interest in ephemeral documents, so that's never gonna be the case anymore. But it seems to me that you want the work out in front. The work should be what people look at.

Arlo Quint is the author of Days On End (Open 24 Hours Press) and Photogenic Memory (Lame House Press). When he's not writing poems he's working at The Poetry Project.

LAST FIVE MINUTES

The long and the short

Of it is

I have to keep pushing

I feel myself

Pushing against the

Lead-in to beauty

And take a hunch through

With me

Into the halls

Where the everyday

Seems like eternity

There's no fooling around

About something

As serious

As it is beautiful

There's no match

For the feeling

That gets there

When I get there

And absolutely no sense

Of duration

And no telling

How everything turns out

Ted Greenwald was born in Brooklyn, raised in Queens, and has lived in New York City his entire life. During the course of a career that has spanned some 30 years, he has been the author of numerous books of poetry including Two Wrongs (Cuneiform Press), his recently published collaboration with the artist Hal Saulson.

Toward an Ethic of Freedom: Some Poems by Hoa Nguyen

by Farid Matuk



PHOTO CREDIT: DALE SMITH

I'm not overstating the point when I say Hoa Nguyen and those gathered around her in Austin, Texas at the time—her husband poet and critic Dale Smith, the poet Susan Briante, the poet and publisher Scott Pierce, the painter Philip Trussell, and a small band of others—saved me. From what, I'm not sure. I know I was sick to my stomach from standing around MFA parties with intelligent young people. The talk we made smelled like plastics burning. I'm lucky now to teach with the artist Max Wood. She tells me she loves her husband because he is really stupid. What do you mean, Max? She says something about being able to look at crickets mating for a long time. Philip once talked to me about letting my eye go dumb, letting it wander a space without agenda or intelligence. I think these are heavy-handed ways of saying something about being receptive. Do you need me to tell you receptivity is undervalued, if not wholly abhorred? Do you need me to tell you this is so because we are a people of phallic order who fear women, queers, and our own national orifice—the Mexico/US border—for allowing ourselves the wanton pleasure of penetration? I've never seen Hoa Nguyen afraid. I tell you Hoa Nguyen is not colonized by panic. It's nice to be around. So I guess what I learned from Hoa is that it's good to hold back a little, turn inward and thereby create a space for reception.

Hoa tells me that etymologies, worries over ecological depravity, and Charles Olson's *Maximus* were all received into the folio of poems from which the two published here were taken. As has been her practice for some time, Hoa reads a poet aloud with students in her private workshops. Over the course of the year that these poems were made it was Olson they put into their mouths. Nguyen and Olson share a curiosity about big ideas and don't hesitate to pitch the stakes of a poem toward geo-historical questions. But when Nguyen

asks "O who exactly chopped down the last tree / Easter Island" she strikes a note of play that's hers. "Easter Island" offers itself as both a referent of location and of address ("Can you tell me, Easter Island, who chopped the cherry tree?")—the echo of young George Washington is dear and, given the poem's progress, damning. I'll resist the temptation to continue close readings of these poems so as to leave that great pleasure to you.

Hoa's poems, at least since the publication in 2005 of *Red Juice* (Effing Press), have been cutting a path in the woods where we can hear an ethic resound. In 1973, sometime after publicly joining the struggle of the Black Panthers, the French prose genius, Jean Genet, clarified his take on how art and revolution might relate. He said:

It is the duty of the revolution to encourage its adversaries: works of art. This is because artistic work...tends to contemplation, which, in the long run, may turn into the destruction of all values, bourgeois or otherwise, and their replacement by something that will more and more come to resemble what we call freedom.ⁱ

I've held onto Genet's hope of radical freedom for a long time because being bi-racial, bi-sexual, bi-cultural, bi-lingual, poor, and not so smart, leaves me with little trust in the iden-

tity markers and intellectuals around which progressive politics have coalesced from the sixties on. But I'm getting older and I find I'm not French enough for an absolute freedom that would take subjectivity to the edge of legitimacy. I just can't hang with all that. And yet I can't quite muster the optimism it takes to work for a cause. Hoa offers no cause. Hoa's ethic is in her modus and it is a modus that advances much more like Schuyler, Buson, or Kyger than like Olson. Her attention to the world is a commitment to register/receive impressions and yet, like Genet, Hoa proceeds with a hunger to register whatever, whenever without program or prescription. Is this finally an ethic of freedom? Maybe. Elsewhere in a recent Nguyen poem Olson turns up again saying, "Love the world stay inside it." I suggest to her this might be a statement of her own poetics and ethics. She says, "It gets clearer to me all the time, not to separate, that it is lived, one's poetics, and that it requires complete attention and devotion. And maybe to fail that constantly and feel effed up from it but try anyway."

Farid Matuk is a poet, translator, and teacher. His first book, Is it the King?, was released by Effing Press in 2006. Poems and translations have appeared most recently in Origin and Bombay Gin. He lives in Dallas, Texas with the poet Susan Briante..

ⁱ Levi-Straus, David and Daniel J. Martinez. *The Things You See When You Don't Have a Grenade!* Small Art Press, 1996.

O WHO EXACTLY

O who exactly chopped down the last tree
Easter Island

Go for supplies

Alan buys extra bullets to store in his garage
You buy seeds

Inca dove Is that what I mean
for love Love of a tree
made smaller but more clear
maybe vased-shaped
and growing dollars
I mean catching dollars

dangling dollars like plastic handled shopping bags

MONSTERS IN THE MYTH

Monsters in the myth swallow you
as I was swallowed and disgorged or chopped in two
and you who do not shit the toxic taxoplasma gondii parasite
and thus kill the North American Otter

Slits in the belly
whole and unharmed human emerging again

Come the parasite
from run-off water

Rain and tiny ants that invade our kitchen counter
Rain washes eggs from shit into
waterways ocean

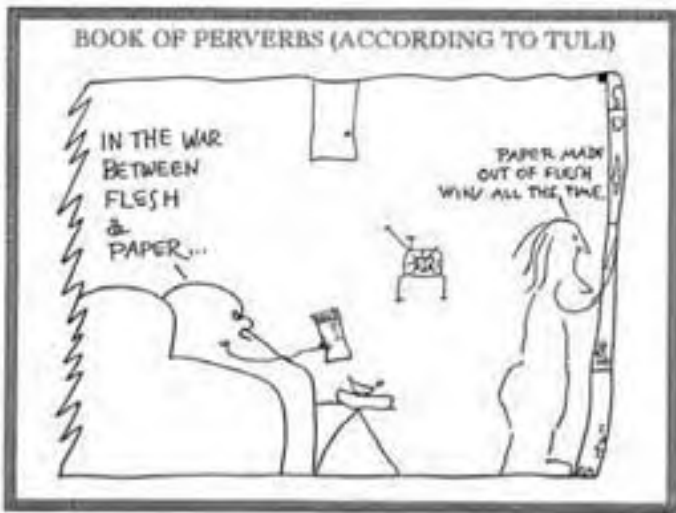
Sprayed with full-strength
vinegar

Stars say: time of scales hated by Dale
equinox move into Libra

The Yoke or Beam of the Balance
All that's left is scales

Born in Saigon in the year of the Fire Horse, Hoa Nguyen was raised in the DC area, attended New College of California in San Francisco and currently lives in Austin, TX. She is the author of Dark (Mike and Dale's), Parrot Drum (Leroy), Your Ancient See Through (Subpress), Add Some Blue (Backwoods Broadsides), Red Juice (Effing), and Poems (Dos). Hoa co-edits the Skanky Possum book imprint with her husband, poet Dale Smith, and curates a reading series. If you were to spell her name phonetically, it could be written as "Hwa Win."

EVENTS AT THE



DECEMBER

MONDAY 12/3

BIG EYE; LAND AT CHURCH CITY; BOYS; LEMON TREE—NEW WORK BY THALIA FIELD, RICK MOODY & LAURA VITALE

An evening of sound work and text by Thalia Field, Rick Moody and Laura Vitale in collaboration with others. The four pieces will run consecutively, to be followed by a Q&A with the artists. **Thalia Field's** books include *Point and Line*, *Incarnate: Story Material* and *Ululu (Clown Shrapnel)*. **Rick Moody** is the author of four novels, three collections of stories, and a memoir. His most recent publication is *Right Livelihoods: Three Novellas*. **Laura Vitale** has been working in radio production and sound design for four years. Her work has aired on WBEZ and appeared at the Third Coast International Audio Festival.

WEDNESDAY 12/5

NORMA COLE & SIMON PETTET

Norma Cole is a poet, painter and translator. Among her books are *Collective Memory*, *Do the Monkey*, and *Spinoza in Her Youth*. Forthcoming is *Natural Light* and *to be at music*, a book of essays. **Simon Pettet's** most recent book is *More Winnowed Fragments*. His *Selected Poems* is also still in print. He is the author of two classic collaborations with photographer-filmmaker, Rudy Burckhardt, *Conversations About Everything* and *Talking Pictures*, and he edited for Black Sparrow the *Art Writings* of the poet, James Schuyler.

FRIDAY 12/7 [10 PM]

THE THEATRE OF A TWO-HEADED CALF'S DYKE SQUAD PRESENTS — ROOM FOR CREAM: A SOAP OPERA

Dyke Squad (a branch of The Theatre of a Two-headed Calf) is a queer collaborative writing

and performing team made up of **Jess Barbagallo**, **Laryssa Husiak**, **Brooke O'Harra** and **Laura Stinger**, directed by Brooke O'Harra (with many amazing guest performers, including Lucy Alibar). Dyke Squad is pleased to present **Room for Cream**, a live lesbian soap opera series

which will run at La Mama, every Sat. at 5:30pm beginning January 2008. **Dyke Squad** came together in order to write and perform queer theater and provide a solid venue to involve and engage queer women in the community. . . or perhaps to have some not-so-clean dyke fun. Please visit twoheadedcalf.org and poetryproject.com for performer bios.

MONDAY 12/10

MENDI AND KEITH OBADIKE & LYDIA CORTES

Mendi + Keith Obadike's projects have been featured on radio stations, in periodicals (including *Art Journal*, *Black Arts Quarterly* and *Tema Celeste*), and survey texts including *New Media Art* (Taschen) and *Internet Art* (Thames and Hudson). A series of their media works are featured in the recent anthology *re: skin* (M.I.T. Press). **Lydia Cortes** is the author of *Lust for Lust*, a collection of poetry. She also has an unpublished story collection, *Park Avenue, Brooklyn*, about a Puerto Rican child and her family in the 1950's neighborhood of Williamsburg.

WEDNESDAY 12/12

LEE ANN BROWN & ABIGAIL CHILD

Lee Ann Brown's books include *Polyverse*, *The Sleep That Changed Everything* and *Nascent Toolbox* (with Laynie Browne). She is the author of a song cycle, "The Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time," a live performance of which is available for download from PennSound. She divides her time between NYC and NC. **Abigail Child** is the author of five books of poetry, among them *A Motive for Mayhem* and *Scatter Matrix* as well as a book of critical writing: *THIS IS CALLED MOVING: A Critical Poetics of Film*. An award-winning filmmaker, Child pushes the envelope of sound-image and text-image relations with humor, liveliness and complex montage. Please visit www.abigailchild.com.

MONDAY 12/17

CAROL MIRAKOVE & MAGED ZAHER

Carol Mirakove is the author of *Mediated, Occupied*, and, with Jen Benka, *1,138*. This year, working with The Collective Task, she is producing a myth called *Love Kills Hate*. **Maged Zaher** was born and raised in Cairo, Egypt and came to the U.S. to pursue a graduate degree in Engineering. His English poems have appeared in magazines such as *Jacket*, *New American Writing* and others. His collaboration with Pam Brown was published as a chapbook called *farout library software*. He translates contemporary Egyptian poetry and lives in Seattle.

JANUARY

TUESDAY 1/1 [2 PM–2 AM]

THE 34TH ANNUAL POETRY PROJECT NEW YEAR'S DAY MARTHON

Ring in the new year with: Rich O'Russa, David Mills, Jenny Smith, Joanna Fuhrman, Erica Doyle, Dan Machlin, John Godfrey, Cat Tyc, Jessica Rogers, Renato Rosaldo, Stefania Iryne Marthakis, Rodrigo Toscano, Yoshiko Chuma, Elinor Nauen, Frances Richard, Phyllis Wat, Ed Friedman, Christina Strong, Stephanie Gray, Evan Kennedy, Lydia Cortes, Kim Rosenfield, Azareen Van Der Vliet Oloomi, Shanxing Wang, Lauren Russell, Marcella Durand, Marc Nasdor, Brendan Lorber, Alan Davies, Gina Myers, Stephen Motika, Bob Rosenthal, Susie Timmons, Eliot Katz, Maggie Dubris, Peter Lucas Erixson, Eve Packer, Chris Stackhouse, David Kirschenbaum, Bill Kushner, Tom Savage, Rob Fitterman, Cliff Fyman, Tara Betts, Jennifer Coleman, Allison Cobb, Jill Magi, Gillian McCain, Emily XYZ, Todd Colby, Elliott Sharp, Paolo Javier, Eileen Myles, John Giorno, Steve Earle, Donna Brook, Bob Hershon, Jen Benka, Carol Mirakove, Tim Peterson, Lenny Kaye, Anne Tardos, Sharon Mesmer, Greg Fuchs, Douglas Dunn, Wayne Koestenbaum, Renato Gomez, Rebecca Moore, Michael Cirelli, Joe Elliot, Tracey McTague, Jess Fiorini, Murat Nemet-Nejat, Vincent Katz, Merry Fortune, David Vogen, Geoffrey Cruickshank-Hagenbuckle, Jackie Sheeler, Penny Arcade, Michael Lydon, Filip Marinovic, Yuko Otomo, Steve Dalachinsky, Adeena Karasick, Barbara Henning, Tisa Bryant, Bruce Andrews, Sally Silvers, Corrine Fitzpatrick, Arlo Quint, Stacy Szymaszek, CAConrad, Keith Roach, Daniel Higgs, John S. Hall, Maggie

THE POETRY PROJECT

Estep, Michael Scharf, Wanda Phipps, Leonard Schwartz, Miles Champion, Citizen Reno, Jaime Manrique, Dael Orlandersmith, Uche Nduka, Laura Jaramillo, Nathaniel Siegel, Jim Behrle, Anselm Berrigan, Dustin Williamson, Macgregor Card, John Coletti, Amelia Jackie and more TBA.

MONDAY 1/7

OPEN READING

SIGN-UP 7:45PM,
READING AT 8:00PM

WEDNESDAY 1/9

JOEL LEWIS & CHRIS MARTIN

Joel Lewis' latest book, *Learning From New Jersey*, is an all-NJ hejira that saves the reader tunnel and Turnpike tolls. Previous books include *House Rent Boogie* and *Vertical's Currency*. He has edited the anthology of contemporary New Jersey poets, *Bluestones and Salt Hay*, along with the selected poems of Walter Lowenfels and the selected talks of Ted Berrigan. **Chris Martin** is the author of *American Music*, recipient of the Hayden Carruth Award and published this year by Copper Canyon Press. His poetry has appeared in *Jacket*, *Cannibal*, *Aufgabe* and *Lungfull!*. He is the editor of *Puppy Flowers*, an online magazine of the arts.

FRIDAY 1/11 [10 PM]

FILIP MARINOVIC & ARIANA REINES

Fil Marinovich lives in New York City and would like to thank his friends for living there and elsewhere too, we do love challenges don't we, he says. **Ariana Reines** is the author of *The Cow* (Alberta Prize, Fence Books 2006) and *Coeur de Lion*. Writing has appeared in *Skanky Possum*, *WebConjunctions*, *Soft Targets*, *Action*, *Yes*, *tema celeste*, etc. A book of stories, *THANK YOU*, is forthcoming from Mal-o-Mar, and a translation of the carnet noir of Grisélidis Real is due sometime in 2009, from Semiotext(e).

MONDAY 1/14

JENI OLIN & JAMES HOFF

Jeni Olin lives in Manhattan where she rages in posh isolation with her Maltese "Good Times." Jeni received her BA and MFA from Naropa University. Her first full-length book *Blue Collar Holiday* was published by Hanging Loose in 2005. **James Hoff** is the author of *About Ten*

Poems and *Ten More Poems* as well as a myriad of sound poetry projects under the name Airport War. He was also co-editor of Vito Acconci and Bernadette Mayer's *0 To 9: The Complete Magazine* in 2006 and Aram Saroyan's *Complete Minimal Poems* in 2007.

WEDNESDAY 1/16

ROBERT ASHLEY & KENNETH GOLDSMITH

Robert Ashley is known for his work in new forms of opera and multi-disciplinary projects. Ashley wrote and produced *Perfect Lives*, an opera for television widely considered the precursor of "music-television." Staged versions of *Perfect Lives* and *Atalanta (Acts of God)* and the monumental opera tetralogy, *Now Eleanor's Idea* have toured throughout Europe, Asia and the United States. His latest, *Concrete*, was seen at La Mama ETC in January 2007. **Kenneth Goldsmith** is the author of nine books of poetry, founding editor of the online archive UbuWeb, and the editor of *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews*. A documentary film about his work, "sucking on words: Kenneth Goldsmith" premiered this fall.

FRIDAY 1/18 [10 PM]

ROBIN COSTE LEWIS &

AZAREEN VAN DER VLIET OLOOMI

Robin Coste Lewis writes poetry, essays and fiction, and is completing a poetry collection titled *Pleasure & Understanding*. She holds a Masters of Theological Studies degree from the Divinity School at Harvard, where she concentrated in Sanskrit and African American Religious Literature. Other writing is forthcoming in *The Encyclopedia Project*. **Azareen Van der Vliet Oloomi** is pursuing her M.F.A. in fiction at Brown University and is the 2008 National Small Press Month Co-ordinator.

WEDNESDAY 1/23

ERICA HUNT & JAMES SHERRY

Erica Hunt has written three books of poetry: *Arcade*, with artist Alison Saar, *Piece Logic* and *Local History*. She is currently president of The Twenty-First Century Foundation. **James Sherry** is the author of ten books of poetry and criticism. He is the editor of Roof Books and runs the Segue Foundation in NYC. For the past 10 years he has been writing extensively on the subject of poetry and the environment.

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STUDENTS & SENIORS \$7
MEMBERS \$5 OR FREE

MONDAY 1/28

JEE LEONG KOH & ADA LIMÓN

Born in Singapore, **Jee Leong Koh** completed his Creative Writing MFA at Sarah Lawrence College. He recently published his chapbook *Payday Loans*. In 2006 the Singaporean government banned the reading of one of his sonnets, because "it promotes the homosexual lifestyle." The ban makes Jee Leong Koh out to be more dangerous than he really is. **Ada Limón**, a graduate of the Creative Writing Program at NYU, has received fellowships from the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center and NYFA. She is the author of two books of poetry, *lucky wreck* and *This Big Fake World*.

WEDNESDAY 1/30

JEN HOFER & DAN MACHLIN

Jen Hofer's publications include *lip wolf*, a translation of Laura Solórzano's *lobo de labio*; *Sin puertas visibles: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry by Mexican Women* and a book-length series of anti-war-manifesto poems titled *one*. She is a member of the Little Fakers collective which creates and produces *Sunset Chronicles*, an episodic drama populated entirely by hand-made marionettes (www.sunsetchronicles.com). **Dan Machlin's** first book-length collection of poems *Dear Body*: was published by Ugly Duckling Presse. Previous works include *6x7*, *This Side Facing You*, as well as *Above Islands*, an audio CD collaboration with singer/cellist Serena Jost. Dan is founding editor and publisher of Futurepoem books.

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BOOK REVIEWS



PHOTO CREDIT: MARY KITE

JOANNE KYGER

ABOUT NOW: COLLECTED POEMS

NATIONAL POETRY FOUNDATION, ORONO, MAINE / 2007

REVIEW BY SIMON PETTET

Phenomenology. Consciousness. Existence. Who is this “I” that experiences—and what does it experience (what is it experiencing)? What is the relationship between the “inside” (note quotation marks) and the “outside” (note harmonious parallel, and further quotation marks), what’s really “important?” (again the qualifying rabbit ears, revealing the strictest attention to *language*, in the futile (it would surely seem to be?) practice to capture (register?) attention and awareness in this continually shifting (floating? dissolving?) world).

How might one *be*? How might one *act* (being and action being acknowledged as integral, one and the same, perhaps?)? What would one possibly need to *say*, or write, (given the truth, spiritual or otherwise, about the illusory nature of our perception of time and space)? What might this mean, then, a “Buddhist poet-ics,” (a life-and-poetry, a life *in* poetry)? Radical simplicity. Personal integrity. Non-invasive traces. The long-awaited publication of *About Now*, Joanne Kyger’s *Collected Poems* provides an exemplary demonstration. This is a beautiful (because recognizable, human) collection, a gathering, a life lived (could there be, is there ever, anything else?).

The literal title provides the key—the momentary, the present tense (the accretion of moments providing a narrative—an illusory narrative, it’s true, but, enough—a unifying, expansive, sympathetic, consistent, portrait). The *discipline* of writing, like the discipline of meditation (it *is* the discipline of meditation), permitting a natural, organic, growth (since the “now” is each and every time experienced (*re*-experienced) as new). It’s easy! You simply practice every day.

Dailyness, the quotidian, is Kyger’s patch, that is, it is the enviable grounding and *locus* of the poems (allowing the poet (mind) to range high and low, far and wide, without further need to justify, apologize, explain, etc. (all, derivative, secondary, acts)). Indeed, juxtaposition of the cosmically profound and the gloriously matter-of-fact (even, on first glimpse, the seemingly banal) is at the very heart of these poems, something of a signature trope. It is a laudably open-minded, truly democratic, stance towards “phenomena” that we see here, recognizing the primacy of the local, the immediate, the domestic (ah! Bolinas, California! ah! the world!)—of friends, visitors, the weather, of the fine art of deep gossip.

Sentience—we’re all breathing, we’re all feeling, we’re all experiencing (thus the thrill, the delight, not at all shock, of recognition). A good Buddhist, a good pantheist, Kyger recognizes the *numen* in all things—birds, trees, *flora* and *fauna*, the landscape, the ocean, even so-called “inanimate objects” (kitchen utensils?—Carl Jung used to greet his, she informs us, each morning (“Good morning frying pan—hello cup”). Kyger approaches the world, and the poem, in the same (respectful, reverential) way).

This attitude of mind, a graceful cohabitation with all things, allows for an extraordinary transparency in the poem as poem—the attainment of a seemingly autonomous free-floating *thing*, vivacity, pure *surface*. Objects (attentions) are *seen*, unimpeded—and instantly transmitted as seen, (as is the poet herself, a distinctive presence), with a charming intimacy. The analogue might, indeed, be Zen brush-work. The particular skill here is focus. It’s—it’s true—a kind of magic.

Could be anywhere
on Earth and Time focused completely
 focused
 on chopping
 the tomatoes, chillies, and onions.

In another poem, she makes this analogy direct:

Stroke of brush in painting
Pitch of tone in writing

Such ease and grace (such *deftness*) manifests itself (also) in a complimentary (exquisite) attention to both music (her ear, her poetic ear, is pitch-perfect), and the formal presentation of her carefully-scored breath-line (see, for example, in the lines quoted above)—or this, (from the last stanza of an early 2000 poem, written in Patzcuaro, Mexico, home-away-from-home for Kyger for

many years now, "I Can't Help It:"

There you go again

Awakening The pure three note

song really listening

Look I'll do it for you once more

To WAY wheet wheet

Here's another Patzcuaro notation. The entire poem reads:

It's so quiet
you can hear
the wasps sipping water
in the courtyard fountain

"Time and measure make up your voice / So keep it sparse to parse it." I have refrained from quoting at length from Kyger, because, quite simply, each poem in this embarrassment of riches that is the *Collected Poems* has lines eminently quotable (whole stanzas, whole poems, whole sequences, in fact). She is adept at the miniature, but, as one of the original students of Jack Spicer (not forgetting her unofficial apprenticeship to Robert Duncan and, pre-eminently, Philip Whalen), she's no slouch with the "serial poem" (*Collected Poems* is, I've been arguing, one big serial poem). Among the many remarkable long (longer) sequences included here are *Joanne* (1970), her "novel from the inside out," *Up My Coast* (1980) (a redacting of Native creation myth)—

First, there were the First People
and the First People changed
into trees, plants, rocks, stars rain, hail and
Animals
and then Animals made Our People

Light comes from Sun Woman. Whose body
is covered
with shining Abalone Shells....

—the legendary *Dharma Committee* (1986) (witness here, but indeed throughout the book, her coruscating wit!) and several remarkable biographical-historical examinations—*Some Sketches From The Life of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky* (1996) (on Madame Blavatsky) and her distilled life of the Buddhist poet-saint, Milarepa's teacher, Naropa (sweetly dedicated to Ted Berrigan).

These poetic peers and antecedents, this lineage (poetic and spiritual) is a central fact of Kyger's work—reverence for the seekers, reverence for the ancestors (a further generative accumulation). Consciously, but humbly and gratefully, she takes a walk (writes) in their path (sic—the *tao*), in their footsteps. Simultaneity of time and space means that she's right there, alongside them.

You know when you write poetry you find
the architecture of your lineage your teachers

The book ends with a typical piece of sympathetic magic. Queen Lili'okalani, "the last Hawaiian Queen," is evoked (in a kind of *ars poetica*)

"a soft rustle of bamboo
quivering with the wind's touch"
A tear, a sigh
sure sounds
like poetry to me....

Her aspiration is Kyger's too

"The expression of my thoughts
in music as natural
and easy as breathing..."

I have neglected to remark on the groundbreaking early work (*The Tapestry and the Web, Places To Go*—wrestling with male hegemony—*always* wrestling with male hegemony!). Likewise, the great (truly great!) explicitly political later work (*The Distressed Look* (2004), originally published by Jim Koller's Coyote Books, is one of the most clearly-articulated expressions that I know against the evils, twin evils, of Bush and global capitalism

... Corporate capitalist oligarchies own the war
Feel terrified? The "war"

Can go where it wants, when it wants
with bizarre expansions

Endless war fear hysteria Great

There is never an end to profit. There is never enough
There are no "acceptable losses"
when it means more "money" ...

and this, (from a poem, "Whatever It Takes")

... Didn't foresee
the horror of free
global trade
terrorizing innocent patches of mahogany hillsides

—the tyranny of the shareholder
is foremost—

So far from the Tao
planes need to spy
to check the profit margin

Oh do me a favor
and don't rile me ...

BOOK REVIEWS

Long-time Kyger scholar Linda Russo provides a thoughtful, intelligent, and useful introduction to this volume (kudos to her), and mention should also be made of John Bryan's (La Alameda's) gorgeous and utterly-apposite cover-design (by the great Japanese wood-block master, Shiko Munakata, a pleasant first for these NPF *Collected's*, yes?—usually, for all their immense value, dour, mildly forbidding, functional tomes—this (and the rest in that estimable series), of course, having no need for elaborate window-dressing).

What's this I hear about them only printing 750? That *can't* be true! That's a serious *under*-estimation! Make sure you have one of the 750. Order yours now. This here, Joanne Kyger, she's your sister! This is an *essential* book. I cannot (and she need not!) say it more plainly.

Simon Pettet, author of Selected Poems and More Winnowed Fragments from Talisman and editor of The Selected Art Writings of James Schuyler (Black Sparrow), reads this month (December 12th) with Norma Cole at The Poetry Project.

JOCELYN SAIDENBERG

NEGATIVITY

ATELOS / 2006

REVIEW BY CAMILLE ROY

Abjection in visual art can have a certain rakish charm. Visual perspective is organized distance, and so this is often abjection at a remove, posed for an observer. Abjection in Jocelyn Saidenberg's new book, *Negativity*, has a different relation to the reader: the words move inside, into the echo chamber of the self: the words that make the self change itself from within, with a trajectory of undoing, unmaking, destroying.

But not alone: in corrosive romance.

I'd like defilement to be your preferred fantasy as threat from being rotten, the poison I carry for you with an unswerving loyalty.

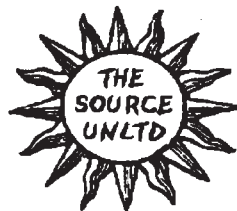
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BOOK REVIEWS

perceiving that my eyes were
floods only makes me hungrier.

(‘Dusky’)

Negativity enters more deeply into the estrangement between word and being than any poetry I know. It refuses to heal this estrangement with meaning and instead strips it down into mischief and shame.

...And out of
contempt for contempt, disgust for
disgust, shame for shame. I place
myself lower than dirt, will keep dig-
ging, filthy, hands taught, in darkness,
all in order to not. [Infer: that I like it]
Here in the dirt I am an inductor, I
attract and gender myself in accor-
dance with my habit, attraction,
unheeding steadfast-ness that wants
only to weep over itself, limping fur-
ther along, in the poured concrete
cage, weeping over itself it sheds
attraction, ridding and taking its
shape dreaming again, that lull. “I am
as you find me.”

(‘The Crave’)

There is a sense in *Negativity* of a sky that has folded softly into murk, enclosing a self, a voice, which is collapsing, whimpering, floundering. In a sort of theatre of incommensurates, the friction of intimacy (without self, closure, or satisfaction) is organized by craving (“the little thing’s personhood”) and subject to recurrent ecstasies: “Fucked gladly....never to be absorbed.” (‘The Bible’). An almost anti-imagistic work, *Negativity* is infused with the sense of touch. The body is repulsive and yet tenderly present in its alien suffering and dumb persistence.

a dusky air spread out a dusky slope
at the outset sped along at the first
moment that I grieved for suspense
and caused the breast to shy by love.
I move and speak and body stiffens

deep and wild by exhaustion. Body
enters on the roadway.

(‘Dusky’)

Saidenberg’s *Negativity* is the most satisfying poetry I’ve read in a long time. It undoes our refusal of the abject by entering it. It enters a refused real, an entrance marred by catastrophe and shame but also a gateway to mischief and impure delights. Yet something more is at stake: the book has resonance as discourse at this moment. The brutality of American self-regard is located in the relation of self to self, and that is exactly the relation that *Negativity* disrupts. The scope of Saidenberg’s intimacy is so small it includes death, with the precision of a scrape: “The sparrow congeals into disintegration in release.” This language is shock to the relentless flattery of our culture. It reminds me of this quote by poet Jacques Dupin on the work of Maurice Blanchot:

"His speech yielded a conductive wire of an extreme delicacy....how to master the turbulence and the proliferation, of the forces of dislocation that exhaust the text, that strangle the voice."

One effect of the influence of theory on poetics has been to empty out the personal as subject. Sometimes this has led to an emotional and sexual dryness in the field of contemporary experimental poetry. Once the theoretical edifice has been constructed, it can be entered without risk. In fact, what “risk” is needs to be redefined and rediscovered. To this conundrum, this book is an astonishing response. *Negativity* maps those soulful edges over which the self plunges—edges of sex and intimacy, as well as language itself.

Camille Roy’s books include Cheap Speech, a play, from Leroy, and Craquer, a fictional autobiography from 2nd Story Books, as well as Swarm (two novellas, Black Star Series).

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BOOK REVIEWS

TIM ATKINS

HORACE

O BOOKS / 2007

REVIEW BY MILES CHAMPION

Across the Malvern rather than Sabine Hills comes Tim Atkins' *Horace*, shuffling adroitly between the makeshift sets of Augustan Rome and Gorb's Britain with the shipwrecked gait of Monty Python's "It's" man. (Horace was, for Auden, the "adroitest of artists.") These 70-odd short lyrics—bounced primarily off Horace's four books of Odes but with quick nods to the earlier Epodes and later Epistles—are the freshest poems to have blown through this borough in quite a while, and make for perfect watching-the-leaves-turn reading.

In his introductory essay, Atkins makes a strong case for the social and structural similarities of the literary circle cultivated by Octavian and Maecenas in Rome (circa 40 BC) and the so-called "linguistically innovative" poetry scene of west-central

London (circa 1995 AD), before launching into an extended analysis of just why it is, exactly, that there aren't any photos on Upton Snodsbury's tourist website. Okay, I made that up. What Atkinus actually does is waste no time in introducing us to his Horace (still a punishable offence in parts of the West Midlands) in three quick stanzaic spurts, managing, somehow, to squeeze nobbers, minge, spunk, pamphlets, halitosis, sailors and KY into 18 short lines. Formal introductions dispensed with, we turn the page to confront Atkins' respray of the first Ode: "Gong-tormented bogs / I once lunched in // Fulgent without / Remuneration..."

It might not be too much of a stretch to claim that, as a translator, Atkins combines Beckettian concision with the Dagenham *drôlerie* of Pete and Dud. Viz. Ode i.19 ("Glycera"):

The pitiless mother of all the amorini,
And Bacchus, Semele's son, and the

[lascivious

Goddess Licentia, all of them, all,
Bring back to me all at once the for-
[gotten loves

That was Horace in David Ferry's translation of 10 years ago, which Atkins renders thus:

Cupids and Bacchus

Have given me carpet burns

Here's Horace/Ferry again (from Ode ii.6):

There someday you will mourn
At the grave of him who was
A poet, and your friend.

And Horace/Atkins:

when I am dead
my dole card
will get you into any exhibition

An *en passant* allusion to Rodefer in Ode iii.4 is apropos, as Horace refracted through



Tendrils

by Bin Ramke

120 pages \$14.95

ISBN:

978-1-890650-26-1

★★★Publishers Weekly Starred Review ★★★

"In this mature work, Ramke remains... a stylist very much of his own invention. And amid dizzying references, brilliant points of emotional clarity and depth shine through."

"Bin Ramke's poetry presents itself as the product of curious research on many different topics... He leads us down 'a path metaphoric, a path of mind, a way unintended' to a surprising-and dark-enlightenment.

Tendrils is an extraordinary book." —John Ashbery



A Semblance

by Laura Moriarty

224 pages \$14.95

ISBN:

978-1-890650-27-8

★★★Publishers Weekly Starred Review ★★★

"Moriarty, who is the deputy director at Small Press Distribution, studied with Robert Duncan, and is closely associated with Bay Area poet Norma Cole (who provides an introduction). She has the former's baroquely elegant turns of mind and the latter's searching fluidity, but her subject matter—roughly, how one's self-perceptions form a language that one is always comparing to one's experiences—is all her own, and her lines have a tensile gorgeousness unlike anyone else's...."

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Atkins reads, at times, like a neutered Jean Calais or a teetotal Villon, albeit one whose liver isn't any pinker. Like Calais, Atkins understands that forms are there to be honoured just as they are there to be broken, and what he chooses to retain from the original are Horace's sudden shifts of scale and tone and his pleasure in the small-scale everyday, flavouring these with the not-quite-belief that the unexpected in life doesn't always have to be terrible, but that one should be especially on one's guard when things appear to be going well.

The persona that emerges—from out of the Severn or Tiber, it's hard to tell—is one of engagingly benign perversity. Atkins' self-deprecating humour runs alternately dry and warm while allowing for the occasional pause in which to take a well-aimed potshot (always genial, never mean). Those accustomed to the livelier pleasures of non-assigned reading will recognise some of the strands in Atkins' weave—both *Lapstrake* and *Name* are clearly signalled—and those who have enjoyed (or toyed with) ground meat of a post-Ab-Ex vintage will immedi-

ately feel at home in his poem-surface, with its splashes of red here and not-red there.

David Ferry has made the point that Horace's proscribed world of the expected (we all die, taxes have to be paid, today's raging beauty is next week's bag of last week's bananas, etc.) would, in lesser hands, come across as complacency. Readers considering laying this charge at Atkins' door—on the hasty assumption that every mention of “golden locks” is, as a matter of course, deflated by one of “platform shoes”—should stop to consider just how delicately aquiver the play between deadpan/gruff and poignant/touching really is. Atkins has gone back to the gaps and fissures of his earlier *Twenty-Five Sonnets* and filled them with himself, and this particular buveur de l'opium is happy to drink deeply. The composite yet frank humour of *Horace* is such that the poems might have coalesced of their own accord out of an animate pile of John Mason's primo jottings; indeed, so available are they (in at least three senses of that word) that several lines have already worked their way into the language and can

regularly be heard in head shops and massage parlours from Reading to Hereford (even Lady Wilmot knows what “too mauve for the Flymo” means).

At a time when so many poems read as unnecessary and under-motivated by-products of decidedly other careers, the guilelessness, amusement and scantily clad affect of Atkins' *Horace* is both a balm and a tonic. If Atkins *were* Horace, someone (Harry Gilonis? Chris Hamilton-Emerly?) would have given him a villa well over 20 years ago—if, that is, he'd made it back from the Falklands intact. His birthday's in August, ragazzi. It'd be a lovely gesture. Any takers?

Miles Champion's chapbook, Eventually, is published by A Rest Press. A full-length collection is forthcoming from AIP.

BARBARA HENNING
MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY
UNITED ARTISTS BOOKS / 2007
REVIEW BY BILL KUSHNER

As she explains in her foreword, Barbara Henning's *My Autobiography* began as a collaboration with the artist Miranda Maher. “Miranda clipped off the corner of 999 of my books, for an installation, entitled 999. Then I constructed the poem by taking a word, a phrase, or passage or two from each of these books.” So, from out of her 999 books, ranging from Henning's vast collection of poetry to writings on art, yoga, philosophy, psychiatry, and then into her kitchen for her cookbooks, Henning has produced 72 excellent and adventurous sonnets. These sonnets are truly Objectivist creatures (Henning dedicates her book to Louis Zukofsky). What's most interesting about these poems to me? Woven, as they are, with the raw material of language I think they are often funny, and they give a picture of our times and poetics in a weird way. Take her sonnet “28” (the only titles to these poems are numbers) with 14 lines credited to such poets as Charles Olson, Maureen Owen, Ovid, Gary Pacernick, Grace Paley, Patchen, Perec, Pessoa, Pettet, Wang Ping, and Jayne Anne Phillips (Henning obviously working from those of her books arranged alphabetically):

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28

born December 27, 1910

to be alive is to be a great noise

no man could swim in air, no man could breathe
but—this much you can do—give in as if

you're a beatup Mercedes
maybe it's my age, prime of life, you know

no, no, I am not mentioned
with the print of a million moving feet

fear would deface & topple
finish up as a jackal's lunch

a butterfly through the window
walking back up the street, momentarily

mother's voice now full of irritation
I mean I would sort of appear

This poem, with its traditional themes of life, death, and sheer accidental existence, immediately reminded me of Ted Berrigan's sonnet "LIX," which touches movingly on the lives and deaths of Marilyn Monroe, William Carlos Williams, and Joe Brainard. But where Berrigan becomes a very powerful poetical presence in his by now historical and masterful sonnets, Henning herself only appears in person once, in her sonnet "44," in lines taken from, of all exotic places, the *East Detroit High School Yearbook 1966*:

Barbara Henning: "east Detroiter" staff 2; pit and
balcony drama

Nostalgic, fitting, yet funny, eh? It's our poet at quite a remove. I also like very much these three bumpy transitions she takes from various biographies of Ezra Pound, in her sonnet titled "31":

they both became pupils of Buddha
I don't care a fried_____about nationality
what's normal, makes him ab-normal

A too brief but perhaps apropos history of the man. It's stuff like this that refreshes the language. It's language giving back to language the beauty of the unexpected. I like how sonnet "35" begins with Shakespeare and yet ends with a delicious line from Gertrude Stein:

little sales ladies little sales ladies little saddles

or, how another line of Stein's in "36" makes you want to rush back to the source herself:

five and no more five and four four and four

It is the sonnets taken from Henning's books on yoga that have an interesting existence on their own. How sonnet "50" ends:

nothing you wish is impossible
in the avenue leading to the water

Or, the very real, very weird beauty of how "51" ends with this couplet:

a pain in my back becomes
corpses of large birds, corpses of small birds

I strongly urge more readers to take *My Autobiography* in hand, and find your own favorite passages in this most challenging and adventurous book.

Bill Kushner's latest book is In Sunsetland With You (Straw Gate Books, 2007).

ARA SHIRINYAN
SYRIA IS IN THE WORLD
PALM PRESS / 2007
REVIEW BY DIANA HAMILTON

Syria Is in the World, insists Ara Shirinyan's first book, but the answers to questions like where, how to get there from here, or how to confront the map are not so clear. This is a not-for-nationalists citizen's guide that employs/steals a range of styles and sources to match the similarly large range of national identities necessary for the book to finally come to Syria, the name of which only appears 70 pages in. This book would throw off the "perpetual country on my back" by examining the very claims that let place of origin become identity. For all those who find themselves victims of the "captured culture cultivated through / collection word strings," Shirinyan comes prepared with some word strings of his own that would threaten the forced identity of nationality by distorting its own verbal claims.

The book begins with "Expatriates," a "strictly confidentially" letter full of misspellings, Soviet acronyms, and Freudian state complexes, written from a government official to an unnamed citizen with the information that the recipient's mother is a secret informer. The poem's title lets us know the letter's receiver (and the book's author) may be distant from its source, but the book sticks with the USSR for a while, including pages of pronoun-laden blurbs of soviet praise for unspecified Russian poets before moving to a series of eight-line poems comprised of descriptions of various national flags. The poem "East from Here" then reminds us that we're still stuck in the USA, or at least someplace decidedly Western; we know what direction to travel to find Syria, but we've still got some distance ahead. That's when the flags start waving again, but this time without the line-breaks for breathing room, twenty margin-to-margin pages of triangles, stripes, symbolic crosses, God, country, and "red fimbriations with a white crescent moon," phrases like "the flag of the US is used" showing up to remind us about that still-flying flag of imperialism. This is Shirinyan's globalism: the world's flags ripped apart and sewn back together, a text where treason meets symbolist nationalism, and where detail is the means of deconstruction.

After we get past the flags, we're back on the road to Syria, and we're getting closer: a stop in Georgia gives a chance to check out the national poetry scenery, when maybe the poet's own relationship to the state begins to look a little more suspicious. Unlike the

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section on Russian poets, where the problematic values forced on the writer are portrayed through critical blurbs, here we get the picture from the opposite perspective, an image of Georgian poetry given in verse. The first of the “Georgian Poems” gets the section off to a good start: “I shall not speak of sun / or Georgia or treasures / but the treasures / of Georgian poetry.” This kind of claim—that “Georgia is a land of poetry”—puts the poet into the position of the cultural force-feeder; when poetry somehow becomes an inherent part of the strange thing known as national identity, lines of crafted verse, it turns out, may be as dangerous a representative of nationhood as the carefully equal stripes of a flag. While the Russian poets earlier in the book are lauded for their being “firmly rooted in real life,” for their ability to accurately describe the people, Shirinyan suggests that the poet who inherits propaganda espousing the notion of “a land of poetry” may be serving that culture machine just by writing. “When winced we trade world with word / ...sure is the hill and pain below” now appears as a warning against poetry.

And suddenly, “Syria has been.” The country finally enters the text by reinserting itself into the earlier pages retroactively, a feat accomplished through a series of extremely edited summarizations of Syrian history that highlight the bizarre nature of historical claims by stripping them to their grammatical essentials. The isolated line, “Syria was recorded,” implicates the roll recording plays in the construction of these myths. One of the many methods of reproduction that Shirinyan uses is the replacement of words with their dictionary definitions, so that the phrase “Every person has two homelands” becomes “All possible individual personalities in human beings hold in possession one more than one areas set aside to be a state for a people of a particular national, cultural, or racial origin.” This sort of cut-up is interesting not because of how much the inclusion of the definition adds, but because of how little: the reiteration here only obscures the original meaning. A definition, whether applied to a word or an individual, is often left to navigate the boundaries of what it would describe, or worse, to define those very boundaries itself. This becomes even more evident when the same claim is rendered in its original form: “Every person has two homelands: his own, Syria,” for which a cursory Google search finds the source on a website for Middle-Eastern hotels.

“You are interested in monuments.” *Syria is in the World* is too, but in laughing at them, and in knowing that that laughter is somewhat serious. This is no “montage tower of the represented,” but a montage landscape of the representers; it points at what, for all too long, has been pointing itself at people.

The poem “Copy and Cope,” along with a few others in the same section, offers a way into the text from a different direction than the rest of the book provides. It no longer seems to be a filtered reappropriation of the sources it confronts; instead, it offers the book itself as a cure for what it would diagnose. While this affords lines that make comprehension somewhat easier, that may work counter

to the book’s intent, potentially rendering lines like “culture forms land values” as overly-explanatory as the mottoes that characterize some of the flags described earlier. But Shirinyan resists this tendency himself by including certain warnings:

we can able become more bad.
self reflex more decording.
then thing.
reap-rise early, to wed one book only.
to know this impact that there’s
bad here smell it out clumsy. begin
more ands.

When he points out that “there’s / bad here,” he is also highlighting writing’s ability to “smell it out.” When he suggests in “Copy and Cope” that “writings damaged and danger an outside another thing,” a tension between that claim and the title arises, asking whether this book is just a terrifically built coping device for the horrors of nationalism or a serious threat to the problems it presents. No matter the answer, he leaves you options: “If our information to you indifferent ignore her.”

Diana Hamilton is a Poetry Project intern and the editor of the Minetta Review.

BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER
THE MISSING OCCASION OF SAYING YES
SUBPRESS / 2007
REVIEW BY BOB PERELMAN

The Missing Occasion of Saying Yes gathers together, in rather chaste form, poems from Benjamin Friedlander’s early books and chapbooks (1984-94). The selection process seems to have been stern; for instance, only a little more than half the original pieces in *Time Rations* (O Books) appear in this new collection. For the most part, the talkier poems are gone—though “talky” is a relative term in the case of Friedlander’s poetry. The result is a very well edited, designed and produced pocket-friendly book (4 1/2” x 2 1/2”) that fits about 150 poems into fewer than 200 pages, quite legibly. To quote Catullus, it’s really a “neat little book” (*lepidum libellum*).

But the poems themselves are not neat. They are compact—almost never more than a page and often no more than 20 or 30 words long—but any sense of minimalism or modernist compression vanishes upon reading. Instead, we are thrown outside the binaries that so often structure literary maps. These poems are not particularly innovative and certainly not mainstream; they do not call us to cast our thoughts on higher things, nor are they principled refusals of ethical decorum. They show us there’s a lot of territory between “What thou lovest well remains” and “Chicks dig war.”

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COME AGAIN ANOTHER DAY

lawless passivity
stuttering
her billy-goats-gruff-
speak

stepped out
of the stream of pity
and the tears
kept flowing

down
the gun-metal grey of the sky
bottled

by a sniveler [139]

This poem does not issue from anything like Niedecker's condensery. The poetics here are in fact rather sprawling. There are large gaps between "passivity" that then is "stuttering" what turns out to be "billy-goats-gruff- / speak," etc. Friedlander's "lawless passivity" lets in sentimentality, uncharged language, cliché, and a hint of abjection amid verbal exactitudes, unpredictably scattered. The subject is thoroughly unfashionable: the rain, as in "Rain rain go away, come again another day." Ignore the beginning and the end, focus on the pity and flowing tears, and you might start to read this as a late 20th-century cover of Verlaine's "It rains in my heart / like it rains on the town."

But the poem is much more gnarled. As is the case with most of the pieces throughout the book, there is normative syntactic here, but syntax won't unperplex. Friedlander's taste for reversal is constant (Cf. the beginning of "Skulker": "I'm going to hurl / the hill / from the stone" [157]; or "teasing out a cork / to seal the wine" [169]). The frame of "The Billy Goats Gruff" can be applied to the first half of the poem, but it will need considerable twisting. In the fairy tale it's the Ogre who emerges from the stream; here it seems one of the Billy Goats Gruff (who's now a she). The Ogre should, in fairy tale logic, be lawless, but not passive. In the second half of the poem the fairy tale falls away. If the "pity" in "the stream of pity" arises from anything in the beginning of the poem, I suppose it's the first and last letters of "passivity" in the opening line. Perhaps "pity" has also been lurking sentimentally and anthropomorphically in the implied rain of the title.

Once the pity/rain scenario is activated subject and object blur: the stream is pitying, and the sky is crying. But the end reverses course again. Sky and stream may be all watery emotion, but the figure of the poet emerges as one who objectifies and contains all the liquid feeling, bottling it. At the final word the poet figure becomes a crying child, though Friedlander, with his aforementioned taste for abjection, sullies any fairytale sentiment, using *le mot juste* "sniveler," with

its inextricable combination of tears and snot.

But I feel I've been overly explanatory. The poems continually entice such construal but present tonal and semantic conundrums that fatigue the decoding intelligence, pushing the reader close to unframed sound:

the apennine of tooth
I rend to love thee
is thy
spontaneous reach

sleep-slackened time swale
awl hole, owl-all night

these differences
assume our proportions

loss-abiding, stray-footed, dad [80]

Friedlander is consistently vigilant in avoiding any consecutive stretches of poetic uplift. ("The occasion for saying yes" is "missing," I suppose.) But if one has had the pleasure to read his criticism, it is clear that he possesses one of the sharpest and most nuanced senses of 19th-century, modernist, and contemporary American poetry of anyone in his generation. In the light of this, the burls, gnarls, and quick sprawls that make up his poetry can seem to be a *via negativa* negotiated by a writer who cares for poetry all too fiercely. In his critical tour de force *Simulcast* (Alabama UP 2004), which was written just after the period collected in *Missing Occasion*, Friedlander sheds some interesting light on his early poetry. One section of the later book uses some Poe journalism as a will-o-the-wisp template for insightful, often mean, unpredictably reliable essays on contemporary poets. (Poe's "Literati of New York" becomes Friedlander's "Literati of San Francisco.") One of the harshest portraits is of "Benjamin Friedlander," where Poe-channeled-through-Friedlander accuses the poet Friedlander of being overly influenced by Dickinson and Celan (240).

INSOMNIA

Walking in the rainfinite.

Is it permitted—am I?
—to lag along the fennel track,
episodic?

We, the drenched combines of yore,
depleted,

gather up the war *repeated* in the clenched kiss
proffered at the door.

He—blemishes—our souls

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replenishing the stream
whose icy crystal pours across
a broken length of dream. [*Missing Occasion* 72]

Blending self-critique with Poe's acerbic condescension, Friedlander informs us that he does "not appreciate the 'clenched kiss' of such a word as 'rainfinite,'" and that "there is a little taint of self-dramatization in the passage about 'drenched combines of yore.'" But the "inexcusable sin of Mr. F. is mimicry—if this not be too mild a term. Emily Dickinson is his especial favorite. He has taken, too, most unwarrantable liberties, in the way of downright plagiarism, from... Paul Celan" (*Simulcast* 240-1).

In detouring Poe to accuse yourself of plagiarism there's more wit than confession. It's hardly the case that Friedlander's poetry comes close to anything remotely resembling plagiarism; but once Celan comes to mind, it's not hard to see his presence throughout *Missing Occasion*. There are the markers and references: the poem "Flag Drop (After Celan)" [91]; compound words ("rainfinite," "ashswept" [47]); the presence of the Holocaust ("stuck inside / my worthless head / are ovens full / of human ash" [43]). And in one of the relatively talkier poems from *Time Rations* I mentioned earlier, Friedlander writes, "maybe we are in a post-holocaust modernism insofar as our facility / with technology put us back, horribly, in our imaginations" (*Time Rations* [12]). But more fundamentally, Friedlander's poetry from this period is pervaded by a sense that history has made the normal usages of language unusable:

I've forgotten how to
Right, the wrong,
The light, the long-
Winded

Fair weather
Passions fled,
The fleeing mien,
The Cain

[*Missing Occasion* 120]

The poet has forgotten how to write; he can't use the right word; he can't right any wrongs. This poem ends with the Biblical initiation of murder; but Friedlander is not trying to be Celan. This is not black milk at daybreak. *The Missing Occasion of Saying Yes* was written in a much less deadly context, *entre deux guerres* (more or less), with American armies relatively quiescent (at least until the first Iraq invasion, which doesn't seem to have registered in the poems). But one consequence of making Celan a lodestar is that Friedlander's "post-holocaust modernism" seems to be free of avant-garde desire.

In *Simulcast* he uses Poe (and other, equally distant sources) to describe Language writing in ways that simultaneously effected his position, not as post-Language, but as out-from-under-Language. Using Poe's witty, opinionated (nasty) prose as a shield, he slew that dragon with nuance and unpredictable humor. The poems collected in *The Missing Occasion of Saying Yes* strike me as the initial stages of the process. In them Friedlander was saying no to any avant-garde posture by casting the poet as sniveler, skulker—different from the poet as bad boy or bad girl. The recalcitrance of these poems is brilliant.

Bob Perelman's most recent book is *Ilfife (Roof, 2006)*. He teaches at the University of Pennsylvania.

LEWIS MACADAMS

THE RIVER: BOOKS ONE, TWO, AND THREE

BLUE PRESS / 2007

REVIEW BY PATRICK JAMES DUNAGAN

In the late nineties, Lewis MacAdams became involved with efforts to work towards returning the Los Angeles River to a more natural state, and *The River: Books One, Two, and Three* is the poem which continues to evolve as an organic outgrowth of his labor. With the finest turnings of line, *The River* is a masterpiece of American poetry that places MacAdams directly in the line of descendants from William Carlos Williams, securing his place in the upper ranks of poets writing for and of place. In this later work, MacAdams' skill shines forth. *The River* deserves to be placed in the company of other American epic poems grounded by location. Williams' *Paterson* and Olson's *Maximus* are obvious forebears, but MacAdams' precision of day-to-day documentation also borrows partially from Lorine Niedecker. Her focus on the relationship between herself and her immediate environment, interactions she has with the water surrounding her and her Wisconsin neighbors, grounds her poems in a similar immediacy of locale. MacAdams continues the concerns of these earlier poetic projects (several years long commitments of the poets) and further explores the possibilities of poetry engaged with effecting change in the world about.

He has dedicated his life, and not coincidentally his poetry, to figuring out solutions to problems faced by the communities in which he lives. At the present moment, it is the disappearing flow of the Los Angeles River: "There used to be / enough water to / irrigate with / nearly all year-round / round here. / Where did it go?" *Book One* of *The River* documents MacAdams' journey towards becoming active in the public fight to change the custodial role of the city of Los Angeles towards its waterway; the poem captures his first experiences of getting down to the riverbed past the fences and away from the traffic zooming past along the endless maze of Los Angeles asphalt. Most striking about MacAdams' progress on *The River* is that

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it has continued to grow. *Book One* led to *Book Two* (both published as a chapbook by Blue Press in 1998) and here is *Book Three*. Within the editions that have appeared so far, MacAdams hasn't as yet made any declarations concerning the development or direction of the poem. He's letting it gather organically, each of the books taking on its own tone in relation to events of his life and the success/failure of his efforts on behalf of the river.

Book Two opens with a direct, strong aligning of MacAdams' ongoing commitment to the river with his life's dedication to poetry: "I belong to the smoke / from a wood fire, / to the river bending south, / to the hills of earth, / and to the imagination." The river yields metaphor even when MacAdams doesn't turn to it. Everywhere he looks it is, in its constant flow, a part of all he witnesses, trigger for the beauty of all living things: "I recognized you the minute I saw you— / something about the way you wore your jeans / and talked about your kids, / something in the way storm waters / slid together, their confluences / sluicing in and out of each other." In this song for his lover, the river shares her place for him as a constant muse, guide, and companion. To speak of one, for him, is to address the other. Every page of *The River* shines with the freshness of new love, having discovered the river as his subject, MacAdams nails the poem down throughout *Book Three*, line by line. He stands forth as a fully matured poet with something to say and the skill to release it in subtly clear song.

His poem lifts up and speaks for the continuance of the river's health, a plea for an accord with natural orders in the heart of a city at the center of 21st century sprawl. It is to be hoped that it does not go unnoticed. "At the center of itself / the river is silence, / and that's where I come in: / with the sounds in my head / and the words in my heart."

Patrick James Dunagan lives in San Francisco and works at the library of USF.

EILEEN MYLES
SORRY, TREE
WAVE BOOKS / 2007
REVIEW BY GREG FUCHS

At the risk of sounding bold, lazy, or worse, uncritical, let me state emphatically that *Sorry, Tree* by Eileen Myles is a complete success insofar as a book of poems can be.

All of us, artists and poets included, are looking over our shoulders to see who is gaining on us. Who is succeeding, who is failing, who is publishing, and who is performing? Really, all that is gaining on us is time, the physical ability to sustain our work. Most good work goes unsupported and unrecognized in our cultural scheme.

Yesterday evening a doula provided Alison and me with a three-hour long consultation on the pros and cons of having a natural, drug-free, vaginal childbirth within the bureaucratic context of a hospital. As she left I thought of the amazing disparities in life.


The doula, who is a keeper and giver of ancient biological knowledge, earns on average a less than sustainable wage while friends and colleagues that spend most of the day talking on their mobile phones, advising titans of industry on financial deals literally earn millions of dollars in fees. Like poets, doulas are supposed to accept this disparity as part of their vocation.

In a bar on St. Mark's Place a few months ago where many poets gather after Poetry Project readings *Sorry, Tree* by Eileen Myles appeared. One of the poets, whom I love and admire, who is often contrary, commented in response to seeing *Sorry, Tree*, that Eileen has been writing the same taut poems for decades. He wishes that she would bust out a great work. I assume he meant one that defied her accepted style, one that had longer lines, was less colloquial, less concerned with the emotional, everyday, mundane, and psychological.

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BOOK REVIEWS

I hate great works. Consciously trying to write a great work is too much the work of some young fart either spending all of her time as a couch potato dreaming about writing the great American novel, or worse yet, some other more connected, privileged, well-educated young fart actually spending her days writing, then plotting the publication of the new great American piece of literature. Writers do it, publishers promote it, and readers crave it. I do not get it, like I do not get the disparity between the doula and the financial advisor.

Eileen Myles thankfully has never wasted her time writing a great work. Instead she has simply written a great many works consistently for more than three decades. A wealth of criticism, fiction, journalism, a libretto, and poetry are the fruits of her labor. She is a great writer and deliverer of her own work, having kept the idiosyncrasies of her New England accent as well as her thought patterns. One thing to remember, which may chasten Eileen's eager young critic, is that in our cultural scheme, women generally do not write great works, at least not the sort that are products of the puff-out-your-chest great American hero ethos. Yet on the contrary, like a great many others, women are writing great poems and stories, making some of the best art and music of our times.

Please take this into consideration: I am a biased reviewer. One of the highlights of my life in poetry is having shared the stage with Eileen in a crowded bar in Philadelphia. We rocked the house, and much of the enthusiasm is credited to Eileen's ability to attract legions of punk-infused young women, queers, and experimental poets. She is a light to us all, offering the realization that we can influence culture. Dig her poem, "Culture," "It accepts all / marks or none / So I'll just write / into it..." That poem also happens to be in an experimental documentary that I made a couple of years ago. Obviously, I really like it. Recently, Eileen wrote some encouraging praise for my new book of poems, which is

being published by a hip young queer woman who has totally been inspired by Eileen's chutzpah backed-up by grace. I admit I am a biased reviewer.

Sorry, Tree does do all the things for which Eileen is known. Most of the poems except the demi-manifesto, "Everyday Barf," are built with short lines and direct imagery, like barf on a ferry. The book's title, *Sorry, Tree*, a successful poem in two words, is an apology to a tree for giving itself to house this poetry; an eloquent recognition of the subservience in which mankind has positioned nature. Neil Stuber's cover-artwork acknowledges and comments on the history of female expression being relegated to the decorative, the construct of the feminine. It is a perfect book: great font, paper, and typesetting. It is also not too long, a book one can digest if one so chooses in an afternoon. However, you will find yourself returning, which is the hallmark of interesting poetry. You will enjoy holding the book in your hands, contemplating lines like, "I desire a big book about / this not better / than them but / their friend."

Time is not gaining on Eileen. Though a great many poets of her milieu evaporated, that is a habit better left to activists, outlaws, and rock-n-roll musicians. Poetry should be a field in which a writer can explore for decades, slowly improving, coalescing a lifetime of knowledge. Do not accept the meaningless marketing copy and public relations that Eileen is the last New

York School Poet, or the first punk rock poet. Instead, read her new book; it is not a misapprehended particle of modernism.

Greg Fuchs is an artist living in the Bronx whose work intersects activism, documentary, journalism, photography, and poetry.

IVAN BLATNY
THE DRUG OF ART
EDITED BY VERONIKA TUCKEROVÁ
TRANSLATED BY MATTHEW
SWENEY, JUSTIN QUINN, ALEX
ZUCKER, ANNA MOSCHOVAKIS
& VERONIKA TUCKEROVÁ
UGLY DUCKLING PRESSE / 2007
REVIEW BY DANA WARD

I'm a fortunate poet. By some coincidental grace along the way my name found itself among the elect who receive complimentary copies of Ugly Duckling Presse books. Various in size and weight, texture and content, one could arrange them side-by-side and form a handsome skyline. Among the alluring neighborhoods in the UDP metropolis, the one most consistently astounding to me is the Eastern European Poetry Series, now fifteen volumes deep, and alive with everything from the sweet parataxis of Lev Rubenstein to an intimate and sparkling new Mandelstam. So it was with great excitement that I opened the series' most recent installment, Ivan Blatny's *The Drug of Art*.

Blatny's work has barely appeared in English. In fact, he and his entire oeuvre led



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something of a fugitive life. Born in Czechoslovakia in 1919, Blatny's early years as a poet were spent in his hometown of Brno, absorbing the works of local and international modernism, and commiserating with fellow young writers. In 1942, the gorgeous sequence *Brno Elegies* would appear. It is the book that would make his reputation at home, and, translated here by Justin Quinn, suggests a more sanguine Baudelaire, attending the duel enchantments of the city and the wood:

...

A black rain trundled by and left a thread
Of rails that glinted in the rainy light.

And everywhere this wicked cold progressed
Though beauty rose and rose amazingly.
Its fluent glow: a building, yards, an alley!
Pickaxes rang out. I looked toward the west.

Blatny would do more than look. Yet for the time being he would continue to practice his art in his native country. Three more books would appear in the few years following his debut, one of which, *This Night*, bears features uncannily similar to the poetics of "dailiness" that would become so familiar in post-war America:

Thursday 8 pm. On the table:
Matches, cigarettes, tobacco, knife, and lamp.
My tools.
You already know my music from five or six things,
You already know my music from five or six things,
My little song.

Phrases such as those quoted above repeat throughout the sequence. The effect is of an oddly mellow fugue. The fact of mortality beckons throughout, and the poems are infused with the nostalgia of the young (Proust provides an epigram along the way), as one comes to realize for the first time the burden that memory must bear in the preservation of things and feelings held dear.

Nostalgia, in its original sense of homesickness, would soon play an operative part in Blatny's life. By virtue of a coup d'état, Czechoslovakia would come under Communist rule. Unable and unwilling to abide the new government, Blatny, under the auspices of a cultural exchange program, left for London. He intimated to the English press that he did not intend to return to his homeland, adding among his comments harsh words for the new regime. His citizenship was revoked, and thus he found himself in England stateless. It is here the narrative of his life becomes hidden behind the interwoven shrouds of archival paucity and mythmaking.

Motivated by the fear of deportation, and suffering from the mental illness such persistent terror engenders, Blatny took refuge in a series of mental institutions. He wrote little in the 50's and 60's, but the decades to follow would see his art move in astounding directions. "Old Addresses" (1979) is a poetry of reminiscence focused on imaginary futures. It is full of both devastating loneliness and an embittered sort of hope. The poems include many heartbreaking

daydreams in which dead or distant friends come through for a chat, and plans are drawn up for a new life begun again in Brno. Yet for all their looking back, the poems render both subjective and historical time oddly warped, so within the space of a few lines one is both in some future, impossible Brno, looking out on the grounds of the institution, and staring at the door of an old, beloved apartment, awaiting the arrival of a friend.

Next to be composed is "The Bixley Remedial School," a strange and singular work quite unlike anything I've ever read. Listening closely to the overlapping sounds in several languages, Blatny creates a poetry of intra-linguistic phonemic play, and the results are both dryly funny and terrifying:

You must scrub the floor of the lavatory all naked
On your hands and knees
Even melody.

"Even melody." Wow.

The Drug of Art is, I hope, only the beginning of our access to Blatny in English. The book provides generous excerpts from all of his works, but I'd love to see the individual volumes find their way into English in their entirety. I'm deeply grateful to the translators for the work they've done here. Many of these poems existed only in samizdat editions, or in manuscripts ferreted away by old friends, so the assembly of this collection was no easy task. The story of the poet's (and poems') survival and vitality amazes. The poems amaze even more so. So here's to this very first Blatny in English, and here's to more Blatny in English to come.

Dana Ward is the author of Goodnight Voice. He lives in Cincinnati and edits Cy Press.

JOSEPH LEASE BROKEN WORLD

COFFEE HOUSE / 2007

REVIEW BY ANDREW JORON

Here is a book of broken-off prayers appropriate to a broken world. Lease's poems petition a transcendental absence, offering up the lament of a temple cantor who also has assumed the role of Cantor (the discoverer of bad infinity). Trying "to be a man,...to heal the night or day," the poetic subject bewails its exilic condition, lost amid the soulless profusion of the American night, where "the word for light / is *nothing*."

The title of Lease's collection refers most obviously to the ethical imperative of the Kabbala, namely, to "repair the world" (*tikkun olam*). The world, according to this tradition, may be likened to a vessel designed to hold the light of God. But the human part of this vessel contained sinful impurities which weakened it, causing it to shatter. The divine light then dispersed, leaving "*nothing*" in its place. It is incumbent upon the human community to repair the vessel by performing good deeds, so that the world will be filled once again with holy brightness.

BOOK REVIEWS

But for now, “*brightness falls*”—Lease’s deliberately ambiguous phrase serves as the incantatory refrain of the book’s title poem, indicating that the divine spark, at present, falls to earth but only to fail. The broken world, “*blank as glass*,” is not yet ready to receive this light. “America equals ghost,” a ghost in a machine whose systems of oppression and alienation can only put “The word of God / in a plastic bag.”

And yet Lease’s writing of the disaster results not in a deadening, but an enlivening of language: the formal brightness of these poems appears to oppose, if not redeem, the darkness of their content. Coming quickly, urgently, often in recursive patterns, their lines are delivered with a passion that at times approaches joy, and with an improviser’s impetuous sense of rightness: “my soul is like a green used car: / / my soul is like a dancing bear, / an old drunk king, a patch of ice.”

The beat of these poems at first sounds almost Beat, but in the end their rhythms and rants are derailed by distinctly postmodern doubts about the construction of language, self, and world. Caught in a liminal space between enthusiasm and skepticism, the poet announces that “we need to know why voices fall apart,” then challenges us to—in the same motion—“believe in the moon, believe / in Andy Warhol—”.

Voices fall apart, even as things fall apart—so that the broken world finds its counterpart in the broken word, in the delegitimation of meaning (“the sky betrays you when you say / the sky—”). Does Lease here resurrect the dilemma of Eliot’s “Waste Land” by using poetic techniques of breakage to lament the breakage of world and word? Or can Lease say, with Hart Crane, that “I entered the broken world / To trace the visionary company of love”?

The flush of anger and anguish in Lease’s work certainly distinguishes it from the pallor of Eliot’s despair. For Lease, a voice that falls apart can still lay claim to the power of negativity. Where Crane’s “crystal Word” evokes “What I hold healed, original now, and pure...” to finally “lift love in its shower,” Lease’s lines (dedicated to a friend who died of AIDS) record starkly that “You are with me / and I shatter // everyone who / hates you.”

“Shatter,” of course, serves as one of the keywords of Lease’s *Broken World*: “like anyone else, we had our shattered selves—like anyone else—we owe ourselves and all we are to death...” A broken world necessarily becomes a world structured by death, by the limitation and isolation of its elements. Instead of progressing into the future, time is reduced to a series of negative instances, reiterations of stoppage: “Won’t be a year. Won’t be a song. / Won’t be a beginning. / Won’t be forward. / Won’t be on the way,” etc.

Because the constitution of “self” is essentially a temporal project, the shattering of time produces an obsessive-compulsive self, condemned to endlessly reflect its own reflection, “singing hymns for no reason: and, and, and, and, and—I, I, I, I, I—” Each part of the

poem-cycle “Free Again” (which comprises half the book) is also entitled “Free Again,” documenting the atomized self’s obsessive-compulsive drive to free itself from the bad infinity, the abysmal mirror-regressions of its own identity. As Lease puts it in “I’ll Fly Away,” “compulsive repetition usually implies a lack of / resolution between self and space,” leading to an existential irresolution that is characteristic of neither the subject nor the object, but the *abject*.

The space of the abject (as defined by Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*) falls between the categories of subject and object, and is therefore situated beyond the symbolic order. Yet this is the space, not only of trauma, but also of the unsayable—that is, of poetic possibility. “We are ourselves because this is the world’s first morning, and we are ourselves because it is not, and we are also not ourselves,” as Lease declares in “Free Again.” In the service of the unsayable, the language of *Broken World* shifts between multiple planes of discourse, most notably those of metaphysics, social critique, confession, and song. Indeed, Lease’s practice answers the critic Robert Kaufman’s description of “song singing the impossibility of song.” Lease’s *Broken World* is a tragicomic, oddly triumphant book of poetry that transforms even the darkest places of the American psyche into the placeholders for a missing, messianic light.

Andrew Joron is the author of several books of poetry and most recently, of The Cry at Zero: Selected Prose, a collection of prose poems and essays (Counterpath Press).



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