

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER



\$5.00 #214 FEBRUARY/MARCH 2008

The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics

Summer Writing Program 2008

Weekly Workshops • June 16–July 13 • Boulder, CO

WEEK ONE: June 16–22

The Wall: Troubling of Race, Class, Economics, Gender and Imagination

Samuel R. Delany, Marcella Durand, Laird Hunt, Brenda Iijima, Bhanu Kapil, Miranda Mellis, Akilah Oliver, Maureen Owen, Margaret Randall, Max Regan, Joe Richey, Roberto Tejada and Julia Seko (printshop)

WEEK TWO: June 23–29

Elective Affinities: Against the Grain: Writerly Utopias

Will Alexander, Sinan Antoon, Jack Collom, Linh Dinh, Anselm Hollo, Daniel Kane, Douglas Martin, Harryette Mullen, Laura Mullen, Alice Notley, Elizabeth Robinson, Eleni Sikelianos, Orlando White and Charles Alexander (printshop)

WEEK THREE: June 30–July 6

Activism, Environmentalism: The Big Picture

Amiri Baraka, Lee Ann Brown, Junior Burke, George Evans, Bobbie Louise Hawkins, Lewis MacAdams, Eileen Myles, Kristin Prevallet, Selah Saterstrom, Stacy Szymaszek, Anne Waldman, Daisy Zamora and Karen Randall (printshop)

WEEK FOUR: July 7–13

Performance, Community: Policies of the USA in the Larger World

Dodie Bellamy, Rikki Ducornet, Brian Evenson, Raymond Federman, Forrest Gander, Bob Holman, Pierre Joris, Ilya Kaminsky, Kevin Killian, Anna Moschovakis, Sawako Nakayasu, Anne Tardos, Steven Taylor, Peter & Donna Thomas (printshop)

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#214 FEBRUARY/MARCH 2008

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4 ANNOUNCEMENTS

6 READING REPORTS

7 WRITING WORKSHOPS

8 ANNE TARDOS'S ELEGANT SOFTWARE

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN ANNE TARDOS AND SUSAN LANDERS

14 POEMS BY JOHN GODFREY

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY EDMUND BERRIGAN

16 EVENTS AT THE POETRY PROJECT

18 BOOK REVIEWS

RENEE GLADMAN / RON SILLIMAN /
BORN IN UTOPIA: AN ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN
AND CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN POETRY /
BRENDA COULTAS / JULIE PATTON / RON PADGETT /
LAURA ELRICK / HELEN ADAM / DAVID TRINIDAD

32 JOIN NOW

VISUALS

COVER ART: JONATHAN ALLEN
CALENDAR ART: TULI KUPFERBERG

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

FROM THE DIRECTOR

I love Black Bears (*Ursus americanus*), those master dozers. I just had 2 free days to winter down and read about them, but mostly I slept after an event, I think, well-done. We had a fantastic New Year's Day Marathon Reading, and raised over \$13,000 for the Project across the eleven hours of readings and performances. Somehow we went from being 45 minutes behind at one point to ending on schedule, with me, reading 150th and feeling quite humbled. The list of thank yous will follow, but I want to particularly thank: the readers, performers, musicians and dancers who made it the dynamic and reverberant event that it was, the 100 volunteers that kept potential chaos at bay, especially the kitchen crew (next year, we'll procure chafing dishes), the 95 people who were there at 2pm and the 85 people who were there at 1am and everyone in-between who decided to listen to poetry at the church on 1/1/08, and finally, thanks to sound and stage engineers David Vogen and Dave Nolan, and to Arlo and Corrine, for thinking of everything. To rip off a saying from the guy who had this job before me, may 2008 be less evil than 2007.

- Stacy Szymaszek

FAMILIAR FRESH FACES

On New Year's Day, when many of us feel rather, ahem, open to the world around us, the marathon remains, for me, among the greatest reminders of what it means to be an available human being. And being near dear friends' new children on such a day gave me all the resolve I needed for the coming year. Resolve and availability seem to me two of the most essential characteristics of poets and poetry. Thanks to you all for your constant reminder (miss you JF).

- John Coletti

THANK YOU TO ALL AND TO ALL A GOOD NIGHT

Thanks to everyone who worked toward, performed at and came to the 34th Annual New Year's Day Marathon. The staff sustained itself on cactus tacos (thank you Thom Donovan!) and Cutty Sark (thank you church basement!), which, in true church mice fashion, we nibbled and sipped during our round-robin four-second jaunts to the office. Seeing as none of us could utilize language or

motor skills by 11pm, it's a damn good thing that we had over one-hundred volunteers keeping the dream alive. Those on kitchen detail did a particularly breathtaking job.

Thanks as well to the neighborhood restaurants and individual chefs and bakers for the cornucopia of culinary delights. Thanks of course to all of the presses, editors, publishers and authors who graciously donated their printed matter for our smashing once-a-year bookstore. We love you like you've never been loved before.

VOLUNTEERS: Allison Cobb, Anna Calabrese, Bob Rosenthal, Christa Quint, Don Yorty, Douglas Rothschild, Jennifer Coleman, Joe Eliot, Kaitlyn Fitzpatrick, Natasha Dwyer, Susan Landers, Nicole Peyrafitte, Diana Hamilton, Eddie Hopely, Elinor Nauen, Emily XYZ, Jeffrey Perkins, Jennifer Robinson, Jill Magi, Kathleen Connell, Lisa Ozag, Nina Karacosta, Phyllis Wat, Stephen Rosenthal, Wallis Meza, Dre Herrera, Adeena Karasick, Akilah Oliver, Carol Mirakove, David Kirschenbaum, Donna Brook, Dorothy August Friedman, Ed Friedman, Evelyn Reilly, Ian Wilder, Jen Benka, Joanna Fuhrman, Kimberly Wilder, Mitch Highfill, Peter Bushyeager, Stephanie Gray, Todd Colby, Bill Kushner, Brenda Coultas, Christina Strong, Dixie Appel, Emil Bogner-Nasdor, Evan Kennedy, Gillian McCain, Greg Fuchs, Jess Arndt, Jennifer Robinson, Jim Behrle, Joel Lewis, Kim Lyons, Miles Champion, Nathaniel Siegel, Rachel Szekely, Sandy Fitterman-Lewis, Tom Savage, Brendan Lorber, Cliff Fyman, Erica Kaufman, Erika Recordon, John Coletti, Katy Henriksen, Matt Henriksen, Merry Fortune, Nada Gordon, Pam Brown, Thom Donovan, Tracey McTague, Ben Malkin, Benjamin Tripp, CAConrad, Chris Martin, Dustin Williamson, Frank Sherlock, Kari Hensley, KB Jones, Macgregor Card, Sara Wintz, Erica Wessmann, Shannon Fitzpatrick, Jess Fiorini, Eddie Berrigan, Laura Jaramillo, Michael Scharf, Diana Rickard, Paolo Javier, Martha Blom and her sons, Stefania Iryne Marthakis, Jessica Rogers, Carlton Ward, Jennifer & Vincent Keane (Lucence Photographic), Amelia Jackie, David Vogen, Dave Nolan & Miranda Lee Reality Torn.

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FOUNDATION FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS ANNOUNCES GRANTS TO INDIVIDUALS FOR 2008

The very worthy recipients of FCA grants (for poetry) are Charles North, New York, NY and Elizabeth Robinson, Boulder, CO. Congratulations! More info at www.foundationforcontemporaryarts.org.

TEN FINGERS, TEN TOES

Welcome to our youngest Poetry Project members, Sylvie Beulah Weiser Berrigan, Lucas Raphael Collins-Fuchs and Ian Ezekiel Papillon Cameron. And wishing many good naps to their parents!

NEW NEIGHBOR

Our fellow arts project Danspace announced the appointment of Judy Hussie-Taylor as their new Executive Director. She officially assumed her post on January 2nd. Congratulations Judy!

GOOD TO BOOG

The Portable Boog Reader 2: An Anthology of New York City Poetry is out and some of it is readable as a pdf here: <http://welcometoboogcity.com/boogpdfs/bc47.pdf>.

It features 72 NY poets lovingly compiled by Laura Elrick, Brenda Iijima, Mark Lamoureux, Christina Strong, Rodrigo Toscano and David Kirschenbaum.

PASSINGS

A lot of people we care about have passed recently: Henri Chopin, Sylvester Pollet, Iranian poet Jaleh Esfahani, Vietnamese poet Chinh Huu, Kansas poet and former editor

of Tansy Press John Moritz, Gloucester's poet laureate Vincent Ferrini, Berkeley Renaissance poet Landis Everson and painter Michael Goldberg. There will be a memorial here for Everson on February 22nd and a longer reminiscence on Goldberg in the next issue of the Newsletter as well as a memorial on March 1st (see calendar for details).

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

My good friend Greg Fuchs, while I love and respect him, DISTURBED me with his review of SORRY, TREE by Eileen Myles in the last issue of THE NEWSLETTER. I too was present for the incident at The Grassroots Tavern he refers to where another poet was dismissive of the life's work of Eileen Myles and said that she "has been writing the same taut poems for decades." That bit of stupid bar gossip was barely worth remembering, and it certainly didn't belong in a review celebrating her latest book, which is without a doubt one of the best books of poetry of 2007!

Frankly I would rather shit broken glass than write literary criticism, but I FEEL the need to speak up here! When "the poet in the bar" first made that statement I shook my head in disbelief. Was it the beer talking? With very little effort ANY reader sitting down with all of her books would see, hear AND FEEL the line break breaking in the later work to stutter our breathing, hone our attention, FAR BETTER, FAR WISER, and lovelier, in the later poems, especially in SKIES, ON MY WAY and SORRY, TREE. The brain will not let go of her insistence for LIVING in this world differently, and how necessary it is to live it differently, and soon, like NOW! What an awful, stinking time this would be without the poems of Eileen Myles. AND LET ME SAY TOO that she ranks among the rarest of the rarest in that she is a poet who also writes novels whose poems are ACTUALLY GETTING BETTER! Poets writing novels make me nervous, but not where Eileen Myles is concerned (at least not anymore, meaning I must admit that after her first novel came out I was anxious for the next book of poems, but then when that came out a VERY BIG dance came out of me as it was clear SHE WAS BETTER THAN EVER!).

ALSO in the last issue of THE NEWSLETTER Arlo Quint interviews Ted Greenwald. It seemed great, for a little while, and I even thought, "I'M IN LOVE WITH THIS OLD MAN! IS HE QUEER? IS HE SINGLE? I HOPE HE'S QUEER! I HOPE HE'S SINGLE!" But then Greenwald says,

"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." I ANSWERED OUT LOUD YES! YES WE ARE! YES WE DO! But Arlo answers with, "I think that feeling might be missing now."

WHAT!? "I think that feeling might be missing now." HOLY SHIT! Arlo's sentence was a gunshot to the gut. How could he possibly FEEL THIS WAY!? Some of his friends are my friends, AND I KNOW WHAT GENIUSES THEY ARE SO WHY DOESN'T HE!?

When I was a boy learning to Love poetry and Loving to learn poetry (because you can't learn poetry without Loving IN SOME SENSE OF LOVING!) many of the poets I was reading at the time were dead, SOME OF THEM DEAD FOR CENTURIES AS A MATTER OF FACT! January 1st, 2008 is my birthday, and I turn 42. And I'M TELLING YOU that my favorite poets at 42 ARE MY FRIENDS! This is not some fancy notion, THIS IS NOT SOME GOD DAMNED FANTASY I TELL YOU! My friends show me their latest poems and I'm in awe, I'm in Love! I'm in the middle of a magic spell, but Arlo says "I think that feeling might be missing now."

Dear Arlo Quint, your own poems are poems I have eagerly read IN FACT I HAVE ALWAYS EAGERLY AWAITED THE NEXT BOOK to read! But if you don't feel there is much to it, then why should I? I'm devastated by what you think might be missing. There are others, that if they said what you said I'd simply say, "AH, WHAT AN IDIOT, YOU JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT THE HELL YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT!" But it's you, and I expected YOU TO KNOW BETTER.

- CAConrad
PhillySound.blogspot.com

Hey CA,

I never said I wasn't in love or "in the middle of a magic spell" as you put it. That sounds about right to me. And a lot of my favorite poets are my friends. I just don't think that the poets I know and love are particularly concerned with defining who's "the most important." And I'm pretty happy about that. I don't think we need to do that to generate a "scene." We aren't starting off in a void—there's a lot happening here. There are so many poets and so many separate and overlapping poetry scenes in New York City now that I think it would be difficult to figure

out who would get to be a part of the "we" in "we are the most important." I prefer the simple Rodeferian program: to surrender to the city and survive its inundation.

- Arlo Quint

CA,

Hey, John Coletti just sent me your letter to the editor. He asked if I wanted to respond in print. I don't see why it's necessary. I wrote the review. You wrote a great response. The main reason I like writing prose in journals is to instigate discourse. I think it's time the discussion moved back to the bar. Anyway, all I have to say is rhetorical device. Of course you're right, but without the rub what am I gonna do? Simply say how great Eileen is? Well I guess I could have, but I wanted a little action to jump start the piece.

- Greg Fuchs

This morning I was reading The Poetry Project Newsletter in the bathroom, and I noticed that John Coletti asks a number of questions in the "Announcements" section, such as "what's working/ what's not? Do you miss what has arbitrarily left you? Do you need a vacation?" For some reason, I began answering these questions, and now have written a small essay:

I never seem to get anything accomplished. On the other hand, I'm writing this. But what is this? A reply to a mumbled questionnaire in *The Poetry Project Newsletter*, which will probably never be published. And how important is being published? It can't be essential. Otherwise, I would've noticed by now.

Yesterday a poem of mine was published in a newspaper founded by Walt Whitman himself! (The name of the paper: *The Long-Islander*.) All thanks to the gracious poet George Wallace. My poem is a sonnet; unfortunately, they misspelled the title. It came out "Circu Advice." (It's supposed to be "Circus".) But today I like their version better.

My sonnet seems pretentious, now that it's published—right next to a small photo of Walt Whitman, in a column titled "Walt's Corner"! (Do you know that white-haired image of Mr. Whitman, where he's leaning on his left hand and looks mildly boozy?) The worst line in my sonnet is "the bored knife-thrower hurls his / deadly steel blades, drooling with apathy"—as my friend Steve Kronen, who's a *real* sonneteer, pointed out in a brutal e-mail. Actually, as time progresses, I look more and more like Walt Whitman. (All right, a Jewish Walt Whitman.)

- Sparrow

READING REPORTS

Hannah Weiner's Open House, The Poetry Project, November 28, 2007

No one night could encapsulate the life, the times and the sly, wondrous strangeness of the poet Hannah Weiner—nonetheless, a Weiner Roast was definitely due her and turned out to be a fitting way to warm a late November night in the Parish Hall. Billed as an Open House just a few blocks away from her old apartment, it was a night of many readers assembled to celebrate the release of *Hannah Weiner's Open House*, fresh from Kenning Editions. After some introductory remarks from the editor, things started off with a bang as Laura Elrick and Rodrigo Toscano took up the roles of Romeo and Juliet, performing one of Weiner's "Code Poems," using walkie-talkies and sometimes moving left and right to speak directly over the audience. Nuanced performances ensued and were frequently delightful. John Perreault described a sequence of Weiner's street performances (one included a meet-up in public with other women named Hannah Weiner). With two semaphore flags, Perreault performed a few of the poems Weiner had written with them. One of the flags was half-off the broomstick and swirled half-limp. Readers of poems included James Sherry, Anne Tardos, and Andrew Levy who read a rant-like prose poem called "Radcliffe and Guatemalan Women" which was the most political work of the evening. Also an academic paper from Thom Donovan which got grunts of approval from the Bernstein row. Carolee Schneeman ended the set with a slideshow which included some shots of Ms. Weiner and herself with their cats. She addressed Weiner directly as she looked out at the audience, in the present tense, as if it were just the two of them. And she told a ghost story. After a refreshing break, Emma Bee Bernstein, Susan Bee and Charles Bernstein read from *Clairvoyant Journal* in 3 parts, something between a Greek Chorus and the Carter Family. With zeal and great energy. Kaplan Harris broke up readings from Lewis Warsh, Lee Ann Brown and Jerome Rothenberg with a look at Weiner's life as a designer of lingerie. He presented from a Radcliffe survey Weiner had answered, half-shouting when all the words were capitalized (which Weiner used to depict the words she saw). Many light moments. Barbara Rosenthal ended the evening with some home movies she'd made with Weiner. Some spooky technical difficulties were taken as a sign from the beyond. The first two films were shown twice, but the third was, perhaps, the most affecting: Weiner in a bird-loud meadow moving semaphore flags up and down, the wind gusting. Between 100 and 120 attended, many luminaries, including some friends and close colleagues and many who were perhaps hearing Weiner's work read aloud for the first time. - *Cyrus K. Foldingchair*

Carol Mirakove & Maged Zaher, The Poetry Project, December 17, 2007

New worlds were born at the Poetry Project on December 17, 2007. The poets Maged Zaher and Carol Mirakove melded software code, ants, Love, and rainbow shoelaces to conjure alternatives to the facts of our warring reality. Such feats of imagination are critical, as Carol once noted in an interview quoted by reading curator Akilah Oliver: "I think the act of practicing new structures can suggest the structures we have aren't the only deals." Maged launched the reading. A poet who moved from Cairo to that most technological of cities, Seattle, Maged works in the computer industry. The language of technology infects his poetry, which he writes in English, his adopted language. He uses the lyrical tradition of Egyptian poetry to satirize first-world technological culture and the vast and violent apparatus that sustains it. "Now I smell like sweat, but I have my sexy laptop. I'm a good slave and I'm happy today." "Colonialism's a poetic strategy. Did you get my voice message?" And "It is so scary to age in a capitalist world." Maged read from an unpublished manuscript called *Portrait of the Poet as an Engineer* and from *Farout Library Software*, a collaboration with Australian poet Pam Brown. He also read two Egyptian poets in translation, Ahmed Taha and Osama El-Danasori. His readings made me feel the poverty of my own knowledge about poetry written in other languages. I am grateful for him, and others like him, who are translating the work of their contemporaries. Carol also is interested in a global view of poetics and politics. As the poet CAConrad has pointed out, she has a particular skill for weaving together the personal, national and global to expose how one affects the other in infinitely complex ways. One example: She read a "ridiculous and true" story poem about the character "Muriel" trying to quit smoking, a prosaic setting through which Muriel transforms into a karate champion roller skating queen ("the goddess of circulation") in rainbow shoelaces. The piece accelerates in its outlandishness and then slams on the brakes with the line "World Bank, watch your back," a breathtaking non sequitur that brings the entire globe into context. Carol read from her recent book *Mediated* and from new, unpublished work, including the epic "Love Kills Hate." Carol never lets us forget our complicity, but she also never abandons her faith in the transformative power of the imagination, and the beauty of language. Her lines echo long after they've passed: "the human body shook the concept of country awake," "we are the cause of hunger, your mouth is right and pins down my uncertainty," and my favorite, from the last poem in *Mediated*, which Carol read accompanied by her partner Jen Benka on guitar: "time is only / certain / & yours / to lose in the next / hello, you are / bursting with dawn." - *Allison Cobb*

WRITING WORKSHOPS AT THE POETRY PROJECT

INTRODUCTORY POETRY WORKSHOP – FRANK LIMA

TUESDAYS AT 7PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 12TH

This workshop will engage you with poems of the New York School, in addition to some South American poets such as Neruda and Vallejo. You'll receive weekly writing assignments that aim to expand your range and encourage you to take chances, from writing sestinas to more contemporary approaches. Vigorous attention will be placed on editing your poems. Guest poets will visit the workshop from time to time to discuss their work. **Frank Lima** was born in New York and studied with both Kenneth Koch and Frank O'Hara. He is the author of *Inventory*, among other titles, and has written two opera librettos.

POETRY AND THE VISUAL ARTS – VINCENT KATZ

THURSDAYS AT 7PM: 5 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 14TH

Poetry has had a long and fruitful symbiosis with the visual arts; this workshop will examine some of the relationships and ways that a deeper understanding of the visual arts can enhance one's writing and understanding of poetry. We will look at collaborations between visual artists and poets, the effect of the visual on modern and contemporary poets, and Pound's division of logopoeia/melopoeia/phanopoeia and phanopoeia's possible meanings. Poets who have worked as art critics and poets who have been alive to visual art's stimulations whose work we will discuss include Baudelaire, Apollinaire, Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, Robert Creeley, Ron Padgett, Anne Waldman, Bill Berkson, Ted Berrigan, Joe Brainard, Eileen Myles, John Yau, and Carter Ratcliff. **Vincent Katz** is a poet, translator, art critic, editor, and curator. He is the author of nine books of poetry, including *Understanding Objects*.

KNOW YOUR PLACE: EXPERIMENTS IN THE ECO-SPHERE – LISA JARNOT

FRIDAYS AT 7PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 15TH

What is or what can be a writer's relation to space and place? In what ways are ecology and environment intrinsic to creative awareness beyond the stereotypes of mytho-poetic tree worship? How does one transform the particular flora, fauna, and detritus of the domestic into vibrant art? These are the questions we'll ask as we plot a course deep into our own "environments." Weekly readings will be complemented with exercises, experiments, and on-site writing. We'll move through Zukofsky's New York, Olson's Gloucester, Allen Ginsberg's apartment, Hannah Weiner's sink, Berrigan's Cranston Near the City Line, Juliana Spahr's Dole Street, and C.S. Giscombe's Giscome Road. **Lisa Jarnot's** fourth book of poems, *Night Scenes*, is forthcoming from Flood Editions in early 2008. She has taught at Naropa, Bard College, Wesleyan University, and Brooklyn College.

THE POET IN THE LIBRARY: RESEARCH AND IMAGINATIVE WRITING – JILL MAGI

SATURDAYS AT NOON: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 16TH

Is there a role for research in imaginative or creative writing projects? Sure! In this workshop we'll combine prior knowledge with curiosity, creating opportunities to "stumble upon" interesting language and images. We'll develop research questions to accompany our intuitive and imaginative writings; search for materials in books, historical documents, articles, newspapers; take field trips to public archives, libraries, and historical sites; experiment with using found text; explore ways to structure a long poem, including the possibility of creating a hybrid text, and a text that includes visuals. All along, we'll take a look at works by Susan Howe, Gale Jackson, Claudia Rankine, Juliana Spahr, and others, and the visual/text work of Mary Kelly, Lorna Simpson, The Atlas Group, and others. **Jill Magi** is the author of *Threads* and *Torchwood*. She runs Sona Books.

The workshop fee is \$350, which includes a one-year individual Poetry Project membership and tuition for all fall and spring classes. Reservations are required due to limited class space, and payment must be received in advance. Please send payment and reservations to: The Poetry Project, St. Mark's Church, 131 E. 10th St., NY, NY 10003. For more information please call (212)674-0910 or e-mail info@poetryproject.com.

Anne Tardos's Elegant Software

A Conversation between Anne Tardos and Susan Landers



PHOTO CREDIT: THOMAS D. HUMMEL

In the sequence “The Letter: A Bloodbath” Anne Tardos asks, “Have you noticed my eloquence? // My elegant software / My healing-plants” to which I would respond with a resounding yes. Tardos’s forthcoming book *I Am You* (Salt, 2008), is a deeply personal and meditative collection narrating a self (or, better still, its many selves) encountering, alternatively, human connection and solitude.

SL: I read *I Am You* with a deep appreciation for your openness and generosity. In speaking so frankly about loss, desire, and the act of writing itself, you have invited your readers into a realm of great intimacy and vulnerability. I actually found myself in tears at different points—the language serves so effectively as a raw expression of pain. Can you talk about the experience of sharing such personally-driven texts with the public?

AT: Your question brings up the age-old question of whom we write for. Do we write with the reader in mind? Do we write for ourselves, or maybe for someone specific, who is likely to read our text? I suspect it’s all of the above.

The personal-seeming poems are often based on reality, their sentiments rooted in actual emotions, but since identities and subjectivities are endlessly shifting, they rarely point to any one specific person, even

if sometimes they do. The title *I Am You*, a line from “Letting Go,” confirms this.

As for privacy, I see it diminish every day—my emails for everyone to see, my archives becoming public. It’s over. (In my neighborhood, there is a lawyer who has met the issue head on: his office is in a store front. You can just stand there and watch him do his filing. His life has become a public performance. Envious, if you think about it.)

And secrets tend to be festering things, dangerous and burdensome. I certainly didn’t write this new work with the purpose of

After so many non-syntactic and polylingual works, I wanted to be less abstract, and most of all, I wanted to be better understood. This would indicate that I do write for others, after all, at least to some extent. Even when I use normal syntax to convey meaning, I’m still the same writer, insofar as we are ever the same.

Moving from polylingualism to unilingualism is not a regression, in my case, it’s a progression. I’m one of those artists who, in order to keep awake, needs to keep moving, try different approaches, take huge risks. I trust myself to catch and correct serious

In letting go of you I let go of unmistakable happiness

— from “Letting Go”

At the end

I told him that I felt I owed him my very life

And he said

“I feel the exact same way about you.”

— from “The Letter: A Bloodbath”

pouring out my heart just for the sake of relieving myself—a regrettable approach, in my view. I’m forever searching for new forms of thought, new to me, of course, since everything under the sun has been said and done a million times before.

SL: I was struck by the predominance of English in these poems, as opposed to the more poly- and neolingual style of your previous books. Can you describe the significance of having written this book largely in English (and a pretty standard English at that)?

AT: This English sentence-driven approach is, as I said, new to me, which may have been the attraction. But, as you quote from “Letting Go,” where I say about returning to syntax: “It can happen.” It’s no big deal.

missteps. In any case, mistakes are not such a big deal either. You make them and move on to the next thing. I always encourage young writers to write those horrible poems they’ve kept themselves from writing, so they can move on to better ones.

Lately, I’ve been focusing on the evolution of the English language as it unfolds, as I become part of this process of grounding. I didn’t grow up anglophonically: born in France, growing up in Paris, Budapest, and Vienna, in New York since I was 21; I’m to this day, constantly being reminded of not being a native speaker.

SL: Beyond their spoken/written languages, how do these various cities figure into your practice?

AT: Inevitably, I was formed by the culture of these various places, as I grew up in them. I actually have four mother tongues, if you can imagine such a thing. I am one of these rare modern-day linguistic phenomena, growing up in different cultures, belonging to all of them, more or less equally. I have a slight accent in every language I speak and I never developed that sense of national affiliation that's been known to elicit certain types of emotions. I have lived in New York most of my adult life, and this is, without a doubt, where I feel the most at home. But if you drop me off in Paris tomorrow morning, I become French within minutes. My

gestures, the pitch of my voice, everything changes. Born during the Second World War to Jewish communists, a Hungarian and an Austrian, who met in the French Resistance, on the run from the Gestapo, aside from fear and anxiety, I must have absorbed a strong sense of survival, early on. But I would be speculating on how all this affects my practice, so I won't even try. As an artist, I feel very flexible. I'm able to work in several media, visual, verbal, musical, without any certainty that this flexibility might be attributed in some way to my background. My multilingual writing is most definitely due to my having grown up in different countries, but my artistic flexibility may or may not be rooted in personal historicity.

SL: In an interview you spoke of not writing with intention. ("No intention and no purpose.") I'm wondering if that is true of this book, which is elegiac. Did you go into writing any of these poems with the intention of "letting go"?

AT: The only intention in *I Am You* lies in its form. Lately, I've been finding poetic forms of greater importance than before. In writing *Uxudo* in 1999, I gave myself a lot more freedom in making rapid and intuitive decisions as to which word or phrase should follow next. In fact, the freedom went as far as not even deciding beforehand which language I would use. These days, I seem to need more specific guide-

lines in which to work. In *Dik-dik*, you can even find clerihews, limericks, etc.

The forms I rely on in *I Am You* are minimal and simple. In "Letting Go" (a 100-page poem, in which each page begins with the phrase or concept of "letting go"), and "The Letter: A Bloodbath" (a 50-page poem where each page begins and ends with a question), I was able to follow these simple rules that connected the units and formally serialized the poem. This minimum of a self-imposed

privacy—as opposed to secrecy—can provide the mind a kind of necessary freedom akin to the way formal poetic structures or elements can, conversely, feel liberating to the artist.

AT: We seem to be using the term privacy differently. The privacy you speak of, the one that offers you comfort is of course, not to be glib or tautological about it, a private matter. That sense of privacy is best maintained whenever possible. I would go as far as saying that it's a given, because of our natural isolation from one another.

I was thinking more of

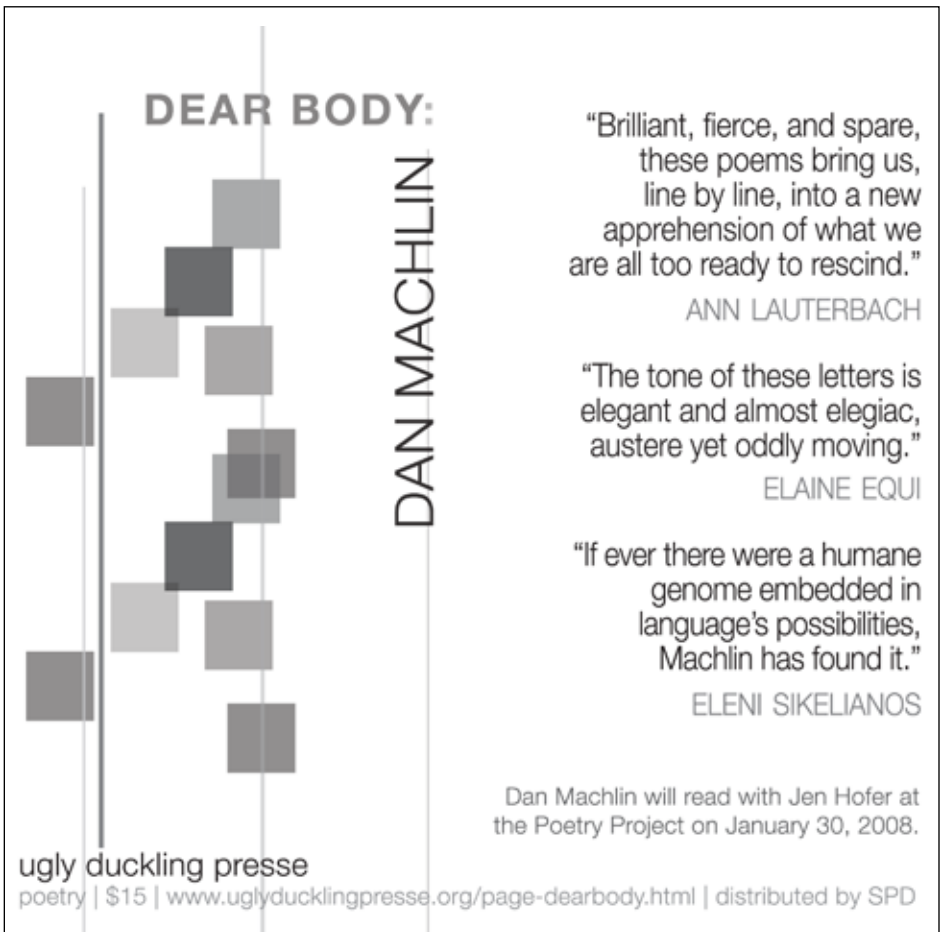
a sense of privacy that whispers into the writer's ear "don't worry, sweetheart, nobody is going to read this, go ahead and say whatever you want," and so on. The notion that what happens on the page will stay on the page, as it does in Las Vegas,

So it's back to syntax, is it? Letting go of experimenting with language and returning to meaningful sentence structures? It can happen.

—from "Letting Go"

form, this representation of intention, gave me the freedom to proceed.

SL: I want to go back to something you said earlier about privacy. I'm curious about the blurring of privacy and secrecy. I think



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DAN MACHLIN

"Brilliant, fierce, and spare, these poems bring us, line by line, into a new apprehension of what we are all too ready to rescind."
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Dan Machlin will read with Jen Hofer at the Poetry Project on January 30, 2008.

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is an erroneous one, in my opinion. Even if you plan to shred the paper as soon as you have written on it, there is still the undeniable fact of it having existed outside yourself, apart from you. At that point, the thoughts on that paper are no longer yours. I don't believe it's possible to think of something as private once you have put it to paper or carved into light. Once you give birth to an artwork, it will have a life of its own, outside of you, even if it's to be destroyed.

It could be that the intimacy you mentioned earlier, intimacy as a form of privacy, the terms on which we are with our work, is what we should be looking for.

SL: I love the beautiful, gentle use of repetition in "The Aim of All Nature Is Beauty," parts of which are further repeated/repurposed in "The Nature of This Lecture Is by John Beauty." Obviously, repetition is a wonderful tool for re-inscribing a poem's central ideas, emotions, or music while simultaneously morphing those elements over the span of a piece. In your mind what role does repetition play in these poems?

AT: I wrote "The Aim of All Nature Is Beauty," which appeared

in *Conjunctions* 48, shortly after the death of my husband, Jackson Mac Low.

It's a nakedly literal elegy, a fairly emotional one at that, and the repeated phrases in section II, "now that you're gone," serve as a kind of refrain, as do the various grammatical forms of the phrase "going away" in section IV. I'm not surprised to hear you cried at certain passages, so did I, you can imagine, while writing them.

"The Nature of This Lecture Is by John Beauty" was written in response to an invitation by Tracy Grinnell to a handful of poets, to base their contributions for

her journal *Aufgabe* on Norman O. Brown's lecture "John Cage." My poem collages elements from Brown's lecture and from my then recently completed "The Aim."

Yes, repetition is called for in certain forms. I'm just looking at some villanelles and pantoums, where the repeating lines are key. They are what it's all about. "The Aim" was literally built around those repeating lines. They were the armature. (Lyn Hejinian and I once

The writer lets go of intention and considers the alternatives

She is thinking about writing about thinking

**Her imagination goes for a walk, along with her intentions
Arm in arm, the two walk around the block to get some exercise**

—from "Letting Go"

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devised a form we used to write a collaborative poem ["I Will Write Two Lines"], which included repeating lines in its pattern.) Something inevitably lyrical about repeating lines, isn't there, which would be one reason to use them sparingly. Repeats in music, the repetition of the credo, the drumming in, letting the message sink in. It's how we function.

SL: What about the use of visual imagery in your work, particularly that of animals? *I Am You*, while illustrated, appears to have fewer visual elements than your other collections.

AT: Lately, I've been using images I find on the Internet, or elsewhere, not necessarily my own creations, frequently of animals, often of the simian persuasion. In fact, I'm not too sure about the right to use some of them, as I often don't remember where I found the image in the first place, let alone who the photographer was. This could be one of the reasons I use fewer images, but I suspect that the true reason is that as soon as I add an image to a text, I find my text transformed in a way I can't explain, but I know that changes need to be made. It's as if I knew what I was doing, while having no idea what I'm doing.

Images are more powerful than words, more readily noticed, more quickly absorbed, and therefore the associated text, I always find, needs to be altered, defended, reinforced, or done away with. In a sense, the illustration undermines the poem. It's a huge struggle to find a balance between the two, and maybe in *I Am You*, I was more interested in other aspects of the page.

SL: One of the qualities I enjoy about your writing is the way you will include glosses—either through providing translations (literally or phonetically) for something not written in English, or, as you have done in *I Am You*, by including introductory text describing the formal tactics the poems employ. What is your interest in this kind of transparency? And, if you would indulge me, I'm

so fascinated by the couplet "Vegan phone harangue / Manufacture villainy" in "The Letter: A Bloodbath." I'd love to hear your gloss on these lines and learn more about how they came to be/mean.

AT: "Vegan phone harangue" is a completely free-associative, language-as-music, automatic writing that comes from who-knows-

they bear witness to one's reading habits. I think what she means is that I acknowledge the reader's needs, counting myself as one, as I keep changing incessantly, changing not only my tastes, my ideas, but also my intentions, my purpose, my direction. It's easy to get lost with so much movement, so I think a clear idea of what you set off to do is just helpful.

What happens now can only be the result of everything That has preceded this moment

This moment, the present, can only be seen as something That's very close to what has just been happening

The immediate memory of the just elapsed moment Is the closest we come to experiencing the elusive present

Immediate memory allows us to notice what our mental Processes have just been, and thus, becoming includes being

Now that you're gone

—from "The Aim of All Nature Is Beauty"

which recess of my consciousness. This kind of writing is often described as liminal. But then let's not forget the editing process. In my case, it is huge. I go over the text relentlessly, until it sounds and looks clear to me.

Transparency is as helpful to the writer (helps her to keep track of what she is doing) as it is to the reader. The methods in composing "Letting Go" and "The Letter" are intrinsic to those two poems, and as Marie Buck put it in her introduction to *I Am You*,

outright dictionary. Translations, transformations, transliterations serve as another view of the same object. The annotations in *Uxudo* were an afterthought, whereas the predetermined form of "Letting Go" and "The Letter" served more as a constant reminder to myself as to how to proceed.

In *Dik-dik*, there are several poems with annotations, notes that are more like appended poems. For example, in the serialized poem "Four Plus One K," the title of which refers to

In making *Uxudo*, I was compelled to help out the reader who did not share my knowledge of French, German, and Hungarian. I was afraid that the combination of neologisms and foreign languages could lead to serious confusion, and the poems would come off as obscurantist. I saw that footnotes were needed. In fact, a poem with footnotes, is an odd-looking bird, but it was necessary to give the reader a hand, without holding up an



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**Much to let go of still
We're not at the end yet
This could be a beginning
In which I would have a voice
I would be heard and listened to
A beginning and a continuation in which I would be taken seriously
and believed and listened to and heard and understood and
trusted**

—from "Letting Go"

the quatrains contained within, followed by a one-word line, a word beginning with the letter *K*, the notes are meant to clarify certain phrases: "One person family / Triggerfish mango / Everyone different / Humble existence // Keyboard." And the footnote reads: "A triggerfish mango is simply a triggerfish's own, personal, mango fruit."

SL: What are you reading and working on these days?

AT: Since I've been invited to teach at Naro-

pa next summer, I was asked to provide a course description and came up with precisely what preoccupies me these days: "Creating an atmosphere in which to create new work. Considering the flexibility of subjectivities. Listening to oneself. Observing the expanding parameters of artistic discourse."

I'm reading various books on sex for a new work I'm calling *E-rotica*. In addition to the generous resources of the net, I'm also using Jackson's enormous library, a veritable goldmine.

What interests me to no end about English is how it lends itself to terseness. No other language I know allows such smooth elegance devoid of superfluity.

Susan Landers is the author of Covers (O Books), a selection of cover songs of Dante's Inferno, and 248 mgs., a panic picnic (O Books). She is co-editor of the journal Pom2.

Poet and visual artist Anne Tardos is the author of several books of poetry and the multimedia performance work and radio play Among Men. Her books of multilingual poems and graphics include The Dik-dik's Solitude: New and Selected Works (Granary, 2003); A Noisy Nightingale Understands the Tiger's Camouflage Totally (Belladonna, 2003); Uxudo (Tuumba/O, 1999); Mayg-shem Fish (Potes & Poets, 1995); and Cat Licked the Garlic (Tsunami, 1992). She edited Thing of Beauty: New and Selected Works, by Jackson Mac Low, University of California Press, 2008.

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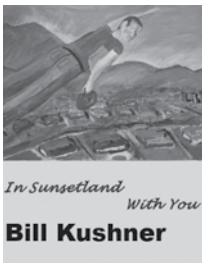
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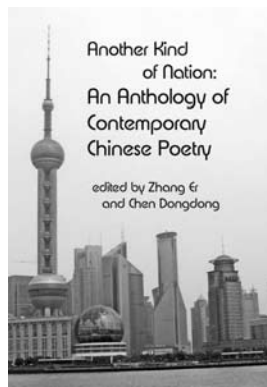
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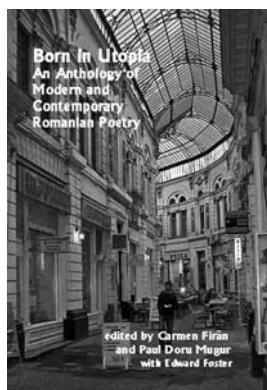
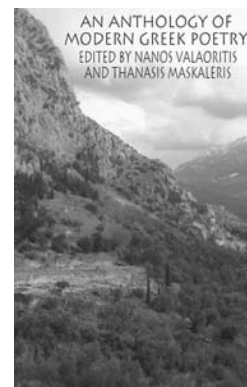
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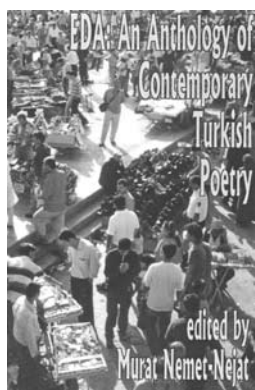
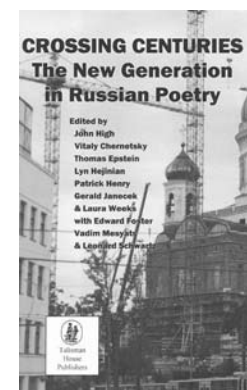
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An Introduction to Two Poems by John Godfrey

by Edmund Berrigan

While I was attending Purchase College in the mid-90s, I would often come to New York City for readings or to visit various friends. At some point I bumped into John Godfrey and ended up showing him some of my poems while we chatted in his apartment. He graciously let me read some of his as well. He read through mine and gave me a lot of commentary, which I was thrilled about. When I read his I felt the need to do the same, but I only really knew how to repeat the kind of things my mother would say to me when I showed her poems. The workings of his poems were beyond my grasp, but I managed to earnestly point out a line or two as seeming “vague” to me (ha-ha). I saw him again, perhaps the following weekend, and he told me that I had said a bunch of “smart-alecky” things to him about his poems, but that when he looked closely I was somewhat right. I got lucky I guess. Here’s hoping that lightning strikes twice.

Typing up John Godfrey’s poems is an experience on its own, beyond attempting to write an introduction to them. For one, I can hear his voice in my head speaking the lines. It’s got a low tone and his phrasing is matter-of-fact, or maybe just seems economical given the short lengths of vowel and consonant sounds that fall on his measured speaking patterns. For another, I get caught in every turning of the line, which can be a jarring experience:

Violet in the sheen
I never want the earth
to be inside the moon
I got to stick a move
She locks up her hair

This poem, “Inside the Moon” is riding on a feeling whose shift you can pick up in the first line: “Spell your name uniquely.” It doesn’t come off as a command but as a recitation in a portrait. A few lines down, “Your adversary is smithereens” gives a nod of romantic fatalism, but that tone seems just an accent. The portrait continues but never completes, instead magnifying into a disappearing act with the closing lines: “A millionaire buys less / The science it takes / Infinite infinite particles / The beatings of the heart.” The cumulative effect is gorgeous, but the best service to the poem is just to read it.

“Dispelling Face” is a different type of portrait, focusing again mostly on a “she,” who is probably an older woman. Her identity is never that specific. The phrase that hits me most comes at the end, “Hip things to do / in captivity,” which ought to be the title of a movie. There’s a hint of reference to the economic transformation over the last twenty-five years of the East Village (and most of New York City now), Godfrey’s stomping ground. But the line’s function at the end of the poem only requires a shade of that read for its portrait of this woman, whose situation is metaphysical, or at least not quite site-specific.

“Sometime granma looks good.” The “d” in “granma” is grinning as much as the phrase is, though the voice behind the grin changes upon contemplation. Is it an outsider’s view, an overheard street remark, or an amused self-reflection? “She signs with a snake / three times of the neck / the communal letter of odium.” That’s gonna hurt in the morning, if not forever: “Voluptitude that never resolves / Seems always snookered.”

As to shape, the punch of the phrases doesn’t require a strong sense of beginning or ending. Those occur obviously, but not in a heavy,

self-conscious way. The last line plays the role of summation for the “she” of the poem, whose age and fate are shifting and murky. The beginning lines are foreboding and are not returned to. “Mirror boy mirror girl / Never can you tell / in the mirror world / contradiction from ambiguity.” The characters, or somebody, have been set up, and by the end are trapped, or maybe held, and aging.

Edmund Berrigan’s Glad Stone Children is forthcoming from Farfalla Press in 2008.

DISPELLING FACE

Mirror boy mirror girl
Never can you tell
in the mirror world
contradiction from ambiguity
Alliteration of tires at noon
Inconsistencies of the equal
and the functions they suggest
Axis pass through one
dispelling face
The prices she pays in life
I watch through the veil
When she’s ready you
know there’s no replacement
She signs with a snake
three times of the neck
the communal letter of odium
Reverie comes hard
Sometime granma looks good
Voluptitude that never resolves
Seems always snookered
three feet from the well
Back of the hand
large with veins
Eyelid gleams lavender
out of shadow
Sundry things she
wears at her waist
Hip things to do
in captivity

INSIDE THE MOON

Spell your name uniquely
To see your clothes
is to see your body
All burdened and unrighteous
Your adversary is smithereens
A river called by music
Something to tap into
when you feel hokey haute

The look of a satin doll
Sweet forget-about-it
I see the bounded spell
of her face it comes
out at night
Violet in the sheen
I never want the earth
to be inside the moon
I got to stick a move
She locks up her hair
Water on both sides
A bridge too close
Turns the light up
on that corner too
Fills the ville with scent
No more lil bitty baby
Corner of Garvey and Amazon
A millionaire buys less
The science it takes
Infinite infinite particles
The beatings of the heart

John Godfrey, born in Massena, N.Y. in 1945, was hipped to the East Village and poets there by Lewis MacAdams, when both were at Princeton. Godfrey settled in the far East Village in 1969 and has been around The Poetry Project for all this time. In 1974-75 and 1982-83 he led workshops at The Project. His collections are: 26 Poems (Adventures in Poetry, 1971); Music of the Curbs (Adventures in Poetry, 1976); Dabble (Full Court Press, 1982); Where the Weather Suits My Clothes (Z Press, 1984); Midnight on Your Left (The Figures, 1988); Push the Mule (The Figures, 2001); and Private Lemonade (Adventures in Poetry, 2003). In the Fall of 2008 Wave Books will publish City of Corners.

EVENTS AT THE



When beauty barks
I heel

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**ANNA JOY SPRINGER &
AZAREEN VAN DER VLIET OLOOMI**

Formerly a singer in the bands, Blatz, The Gr'ups, and Cypher in the Snow, **Anna Joy Springer** has toured the U.S. and Europe being a wild feminist punk performer, as well as with Sister Spit. Author of the illustrated novella *The Birdwisher*, she is finishing her first "novel," *The Vicious Red Relic*, Love. She received her MFA in Literary Arts from Brown and is an Assistant Professor of Literature at UCSD. **Azareen Van der Vliet Oloomi** is pursuing her M.F.A. in fiction at Brown University and is the 2008 National Small Press Month Coordinator.

MONDAY 2/4

TRACY K. SMITH & SARAH ROSENTHAL

Tracy K. Smith is the author of *The Body's Question* and *Duende*. She is the recipient of a 2004 Rona Jaffe Writers Award and a 2005 Whiting Award. She is an assistant professor of Creative Writing at Princeton. **Sarah Rosenthal** is the author of *How I Wrote This Story*, *sitings*, *not-chicago* and *Manhattan*. She teaches Creative Writing at San Francisco State.

WEDNESDAY 2/6

**THE COLLECTED POEMS OF
PHILIP WHALEN**

Join us for a celebratory reading for the publication of *The Collected Poems of Philip Whalen*, a collection that rightfully places Whalen among the foremost poets of his time. With **Ron Padgett, Anne Tardos, David Meltzer, Anselm Berrigan, Suzi Winson, Jim Koller, Ammiel Alcalay, Wanda Phipps, Lewis**

Warsh, John Coletti, Simon Pettet, and Michael Rothenberg.

**MONDAY 2/11 [6-9PM,
\$5 teens, \$7 adults]
URBAN WORD NYC**

10th Annual Urban Word NYC Teen Poetry Slam, preliminary round. For more information go to

www.urbanwordnyc.org.

WEDNESDAY 2/13

MICHAEL GOTTLIEB & JESSICA GRIM

Michael Gottlieb's newest book is *The Likes Of Us*. He is the author of over a dozen books and chapbooks, including *Lost and Found*, *Gorgeous Plunge*, *The River Road*, and *New York*. Before he had to shave every day he was one of the editors of Roof Magazine. **Jessica Grim's** most recent book is *Vexed*, online from ubu editions. Other books of poetry include *Fray*, *Locale*, and *The Inveterate Life*. She co-edited *Big Allis*, a magazine focusing on experimental writing by women, from 1989-96.

MONDAY 2/18

ERIC ANDERSON & SELAH SATERSTROM

A contributing poetry editor at the Denver Quarterly, **Erik Anderson** also edits, with Anne Waldman, *Thuggery & Grace*. He is a graduate of Naropa and is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Denver. An excerpt from his land-art project, *The Poetics of Trespass*, is available at www.parceljournal.org. **Selah Saterstrom** is the author of *The Meat and Spirit Plan* and *The Pink Institution*. She co-curates SLAB PROJECTS, an artist/writer-curator initiative concerned with exploring the gaps between decay and reconstruction in ruined or abandoned landscapes.

WEDNESDAY 2/20

ALISON KNOWLES & JEROME ROTHENBERG

In the sixties **Alison Knowles** created *Notations*, a book with John Cage, and *Coeurs Volants* with Marcel Duchamp. With Fluxus she made the *Bean Rolls*, a canned book that appeared in the Whitney's "The American Century". *The Big*

Book (1967) followed, a walk-in book with 8-foot pages, as well as *The House of Dust*. Poet, translator, anthologist and founding figure of ethnopoetics, **Jerome Rothenberg** is the author of over 70 books of poetry. New Directions has recently published *Triptych* which presents his three long series poems in one volume: *Poland/1931*, *Khurbn*, and *The Burning Babe*.

FRIDAY 2/22 [10PM, FREE]

LANDIS EVERSON MEMORIAL

Please join us as we pay tribute to the life and poetry of **Landis Everson**. Readers will include **Bill Berkson, Bill Corbett, John Hennessy, Matthew Henriksen, Katia Kapovich, Mark Lamoureux, Ben Mazer, Stephen Sturgeon, Jason Zuzga, Mark Schorr, Brian Henry, Ethan Nosowsky, Stacy Szymaszek** and **Andrew Zawacki**.

MONDAY 2/25

**SUHEIR HAMMAD &
ROGER BONAIR-AGARD**

Suheir Hammad is a 2007 Copeland Fellow at Amherst College. Her books are *Born Palestinian*, *Born Black*; *Drops of This Story*; and *ZaatarDiva*. **Roger Bonair-Agard** is a native of Trinidad and Tobago, a Cave Canem fellow, and co-founder of the louderARTS Project. He is a two time National Poetry Slam Champion and co-author of *Burning Down the House* (Soft Skull Press 2000).

WEDNESDAY 2/27

JEFFREY JULLICH & ROD SMITH

Jeffrey Julich was horoscope columnist for the magazine *Vice*, librettist for the opera *American Lit: (Queer Theory) The Hawthorne-Melville Correspondence*, and editor of the journal *Logopoeia*. His first book of poetry is *Thine Instead Thank*. **Rod Smith's** most recent book is *Deed*. He is also the author of *Music or Honesty*, *The Good House*, *Poèmes de L'araignées*, *Protective Immediacy*, and *In Memory of My Theories*. He is currently co-editing *The Selected Letters of Robert Creeley*, he edits the journal *Aerial*, publishes Edge Books, and manages Bridge Street Books in Washington, DC.

THE POETRY PROJECT

MARCH

SATURDAY 3/1 [1PM, FREE]

MICHAEL GOLDBERG MEMORIAL

Friends and colleagues of painter **Michael Goldberg** (1924-2007), including **Klauss Kertess**, **John Zorn**, **Jeremy Gilbert Rolf**, **Per Jensen**, **Ellen Phelan**, **Janet Coleman**, **David Shapiro**, **Linda Benglis**, **Lucio Pozzi**, **Larry Osgood**, and **Phong Bui**, among others, will gather in the sanctuary to commemorate his life and art. More details tba on www.poetryproject.com. Co-sponsored with **Knoedler & Company**.

MONDAY 3/3

OPEN READING

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

WEDNESDAY 3/5

LAYNIE BROWNE & STEPHEN RATCLIFFE

Laynie Browne's most recent publications include *The Scented Fox* (recipient of the 2007 National Poetry Series Award), *Daily Sonnets*, and *Drawing of a Swan Before Memory*. With others she helped to found the Ear Inn reading series in New York and is a member of the Subtext Collective in Seattle. She lives in Tucson. **Stephen Ratcliffe's** most recent book is *Real*, a 474-page book of poems written in 474 consecutive days. Previous books include *Portraits & Repetition*, *SOUND/(system)* and *Listening to Reading*, a collection of essays on contemporary "experimental" poetry. He lives in Bolinas, where he surfs every day and publishes Avenue B books.

FRIDAY 3/7 [10 PM]

LIL' NORTON

Lil' Norton is a publishing "collective" (actually not a collective) so far including the magazines *Model Homes*, *President's Choice*, and *The Physical Poets*. This reading will showcase some of the authors featured in the mags, including **Anne Tardos**, **Kevin Thurston**, **Laura Elrick**, **Patrick Lovelace** and **Steven Zultanski**.

MONDAY 3/10

ORLANDO WHITE & RONALDO WILSON

Orlando White is Diné (Navajo) from Sweetwater, Arizona. He is of the Zuni Water Edge People and born for the Mexican Clan. He

received his A.A. and B.F.A. in creative writing from the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, N.M. and is currently in the M.F.A. literary arts program at Brown. **Ronaldo V. Wilson** is a Doctoral candidate at the Grad Center of CUNY. He is the recipient of the 2007 Cave Canem First Book Poetry Prize. His book, *Narrative of the Life of the Brown Boy and the White Man* will be published in Fall 2008.

WEDNESDAY 3/12

SHERWIN BITSUI & BOB HOLMAN

Sherwin Bitsui, Diné (Navajo) poet, is the author of *Shapeshift*, his first poetry collection, and a recipient of the 2006 Whiting Writers' Award. **Bob Holman's** latest collection of poems is *A Couple of Ways of Doing Something*, a collaboration with Chuck Close; his new CD is "The Awesome Whatever." He is currently Visiting Professor of Writing at Columbia School of the Arts as well as at the NYU Tisch School of the Arts, and the Founder/Proprietor of the Bowery Poetry Club. He is presently working on a documentary on the poetries of endangered languages. **This event was funded in part by Poets & Writers, Inc. through public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.**

FRIDAY 3/14 [10 PM]

POETICS ORCHESTRA

Drew Gardner's Poetics Orchestra is an ensemble of poets and musicians conducted using hand signals and rhythmic forms to shape collective improvisation. Past musical participants have included many avant-jazz players, rock musicians, and the contemporary chamber orchestra Alarm Will Sound. The aim of the ensemble is to reunite poetry and music in a collaborative, improvisational spirit.

MONDAY 3/24

MARGO BERDESHEVSKY & EVIE SHOCKLEY

Margo Berdeshevsky currently lives in Paris. Her debut poetry collection is *But a Passage in Wilderness*. Her *Tsunami Notebook* of poems and photographs was made during and following a journey to Sumatra in Spring 2005 to work in a survivors' clinic in Aceh. **Evie Shockley** is the author of a *half-red sea* and a chapbook, *The Gorgon Goddess*. She guest edited "QUEST~": a special issue of *MIPOesias* as well as *jubilat*. She is at work on a critical

ALL EVENTS BEGIN AT 8PM
UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

ADMISSION \$8
STUDENTS & SENIORS \$7
MEMBERS \$5 OR FREE

book, a study of race and innovation in African American poetry that attempts to redefine "black aesthetics."

WEDNESDAY 3/26

POET IN NEW YORK

Join us as we revisit **Federico García Lorca's** *Poet In New York*, newly translated by Pablo Medina and Mark Statman and published by Grove Press. Written during Lorca's nine months as a student at Columbia University at the beginning of the Great Depression, this is widely considered one of the most important books he ever wrote, and one of the greatest books of poems ever written about New York City. With **Ron Padgett**, **Jaime Manrique**, **Bill Zavatsky**, **Jane LeCroy**, **Pablo Medina**, **Mark Statman**, **Iraida Iturralde**, **Aristedes Falcon** and flamenco music with **Roman Diaz** on cajon, and other musicians tba.

MONDAY 3/31

ELLEN BAXT & MARTHA OATIS

Ellen Baxt's first full-length book is *Analfabeto / An Alphabet*. She has four chapbooks: *Since I Last Wrote*, *Tender Chemistry*, *The day is a ladle* and *Enumeration of colonies is not EPA approved*. She teaches writing, dance and theater in New York City public schools. **Martha Oatis** is the author of *from Two Percept* and two unpublished manuscripts, *Forest Trace* and *Metaphysics Continued*. She recently began studying Traditional Chinese Medicine at The New England School of Acupuncture.

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BOOK REVIEWS

RENEE GLADMAN
NEWCOMER CAN'T SWIM
KELSEY STREET PRESS / 2007
REVIEW BY JULIAN T. BROLASKI

In Renee Gladman's new book, *Newcomer Can't Swim*, the porous body elides with its landscape: "The mouth is blue. It is as though the sky. Opened like so and waiting. She recognizes what it is—the sky" ("Untitled, Park in City" 1). A few pages later, someone lies bleeding on the street after being struck by a car. She is contiguous with the pavement, almost melts into it, bleeding somebody else's blood in an intimate second person: "the blood you are losing belongs to M." ("Untitled, Woman on Ground" 14). As readers we are not only party to a confession of someone on the verge of death, but grammatically implicated in the address. "You" starts to feel like it might be us, and a sense of our own parameters dissolves. The (textual and actual) body is emphasized as a meandering between subject and object, but the ease of Gladman's prose makes the assemblage of parts seem natural. Reminiscent of the grotesquerie of urban wandering in Baudelaire's *Paris Spleen*, the characters (people and dogs) severally suffer from the problem of differentiating one from the other:

When the stranger entered someone sighed heavily. Until now, I figured it was I. But in seeing them move toward each other, shoulders collapsing becoming one, heads starting to merge, I've revised that conclusion: it was she.

("Texts for Moving" 34)

This is a group of pieces about how questioning bodies move through time and space, imbibing spleen in place of knowable facts. As Gladman remarks, "I see the sentence as this thing you are moving through. You encounter words and punctuation the same way you would see a building or turn onto a street."¹ When the "newcomer" goes in search of her lover's apartment in "Deflected Streets, On

Course," a man tells her she will see the sign "Unchour." She sees a sign E-N-C-O-R-E but does not make the aural connection. The characters dwell in only proximate awareness of their identities and whereabouts. Language is never a direct path to knowledge—the lost woman is aware of the map in her back pocket the lover has provided but refuses to look at it.

Gladman's subjects negotiate the epistemological continuum—well, badly, in the absence of stable identity and geography. And hilariously, the dog is a person too in the tragicomic "Kingdom in 3 Panels, Street and Cello":

Precisely that, the rain, makes the day impossible. The sky that impossibly hangs; she feels like a fish. And Louie feels like a dog, tied to this leash. The day is strange. Their pace is remedial. "Pick it up Louie." "Slow down Eva." They say to themselves. (47)

Her indeterminate cityscape is a place where personae morph and "the person you're with has a hard time focusing on you because you appear to be between forms" ("The Day, the Day" 73). Following Gertrude Stein's argument against the notion of narrative progression: "[k]nowledge is not succession but an immediate existing..." (*Narration* 20), Gladman's prose occurs moment by moment, in a continuous present that allows for readerly interpolation, as a poem proceeds syllable by syllable and infects its listener's memory.

Though Stein proposes a simultaneity of action and understanding, "time is regardless" in Gladman's zone of unknowing (or coming to know) and vexed by elusive intelligences. As Brent Cunningham writes of Gladman's *Juice*, "Gladman focuses most closely on the subtlest level of meaning and sequitur"²—the idea of what follows logically is constantly at play: "[t]he shade makes her dumb" ("Untitled, Park in City" 2). As if making a literary practice of absurd etymology: a *lucus* a non *lucendo*, literally a dark grove (derived) from not giving light, i.e. a

dark grove (*lucus*) is so named because it does *not* shine (*lucere*). The absurdity of deriving etymology or any kind of knowledge from homophony is explored in the narratives: [unchour] is not "encore"; when the host in the restaurant calls "Gladman, party of two" the newcomer knows it isn't her and her lover—but must be some other Gladmans, "a different sort of folk" ("Untitled, Colorado" 25). After they are seated, they have a quick fuck in the bathroom (A. screams "Re...!"), and are later called "nigracious"³ by the waiter. A coinage of Gladman's as far as I can tell, an inversion of ingracious which slips homophonically (and homophobically) into a haughty comment that implies a racial slur: "These women have been nigracious since they entered" (30).

Via curious sequitur Gladman establishes the relationship between similitude and reality: things both *are* and *are like* what they are: this tautological problem is the basis for the limits of knowledge in the book, whose narratives have the look of truth. Metaphor stands on par with reality such that Eva "feels like a fish. And Louie feels like a dog." Eva is drawn to the sound of a violin, but Louie knows it's a cello. She leaves him in the rain (and walks into a threesome) and distinction is quickly undone, Louie cannot remember the details of the owner who abandoned him or the narrative of their life together. For Louie, he is he because his person knows him, but he is apart from his person. Then he goes back to his own city in "Louie Between Cities," where his family are not dogs but not not dogs; they have doggish qualities and are "tied down" and patted. What does it mean to be a dog or a person? "I am I because my little dog knows me" (Stein) and Louie insists "[i]t's obvious: the wind that blew me out of town is the same one that blew me back" (65). These prosaic petrarchisms are a delight; one feels for Louie.

Language is one way of expressing truth but in language credibility and incredibility look the same: "'birds,' thus birds" (98). In "Zone," as Gladman makes a lovely and

terrifying ekphrasis of the post-apocalyptic world of Andre Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, one envisages logics collapsing (i.e. if sequiturs unravel, who's to say what's a person anyway?). Tarkovsky's characters are in search of a room where all wishes are granted. Just as the protagonist collapses at the threshold of the room in *Stalker*, the newcomer starts to cramp and bleed in the "Museum of Birds" and proclaims "the body I have struggled to decipher abstracts from its musculature;" (103) she hallucinates birds or really sees birds and passes out: the prose dilapidates stone by stone into a thin column of words that imitates the "fracas of birds— / the blurs / called 'birds'" (104).

Newcomer Can't Swim is a wellspring of epistemological inquiry that imagines the limits of desire and form, a daring, pleasurable philosophy, a highly readable and compelling little book filled with mystery, sex, violence, rich disconnects, and flexibility of space-time—what more could you want?

¹ <http://www.brown.edu/Administration/News/Bureau/2006-07/06-016.ah.html>

² In a "Letter from the West Coast" concerning "Recent Bay Area Writing": <http://www.centerfor-bookculture.org/context/no6/cunningham.html>

³ Perhaps from Latin *nigrescens*, -entis, ppr. of *nigrescere*, to grow black. In an earlier iteration Gladman uses "negracious": <http://www.conjunctions.com/archives/c41-rg.htm>. Not on OED, but also used on a "Best NFL Offenses and Defenses" website: "Vikings are the queerest. I hate Culpepper and his stupid nigracious arm roll he does after every TD pass" <http://www.clantt.com/vb/archive/index.php/index.php?t-6484.html>. Nigracious is also a character name on a World of Warcraft General Discussion site: <http://www.clantt.com/vb/showthread.php?t=5980>

Julian Brolaski lives in Yorkville, NYC.

RON SILLIMAN
THE AGE OF HUTS (COMPLEAT)
NEW CALIFORNIA POETRY / 2007
REVIEW BY ALAN DAVIES

The Age of Huts (as a phrase) is nostalgic.

•

Ketjak engenders itself – of course that's the appearance that it gives to itself / that it's made to give to itself. Sentences sprout between sentences – other sentences lengthen with added phrases and clauses. This is

the world making room for itself – (something which politically ours does not (any longer) tend to do). The sentences both inhabit and create a world – they inhabit the world they create / and create a world to inhabit. This (in a lingering sort of way) keeps us alive.

The sentences sort of graze through reality / they accumulate because they have to – they add up to (they add up to (add up to)) a world – they don't exactly narrate it (at least not in the older senses of what a narrative piece would be like) – although they create a text that is sturdily modern in the way that works of Beckett and Robbe-Grillet are. They go on.

The sentences have a bare simplicity about them. They're fairly declarative (for the most part) – they tell us stuff about what the author (we presume that) sees / and by doing so they tell us about seeing. For Ron to see is to write. This work is about that in a large way – what can be stated without being told (or narrated) – what can be made of the (simple (simple?)) facts / what they can be made to say of and as themselves. It's a kind of softening proof that the world only exists because we see it.

Wittgenstein said that – *The world is all that is the case*. – and Ron keeps proving it a sentence at a time. Perhaps the world is not all that is the case – but it's an utterable fact that we can make it what it is – at least we can say so (and perhaps that's all it is (or ever will be) to write). We're hampered by reality – writing lets / gets us around that somewhat (or creates a parallel illusion in which it is possible to do so). *A white bowl of split pea soup is set upon the table*. – Eat.

There's something rather placid and flat about the sentences (in (in?) them?). This is enhanced – or perhaps exacerbated – by the fact that as the text grows many sentences and phrases and clauses get repeated. But it is also a function of the fact of the repetitiveness of declarative sentence after declarative sentence after declarative sentence after. And perhaps what is seen is more likely to excite the senses than it is to excite the sentences.

There isn't much feeling expressed in this text. Everything is seen. This absence of feeling in a certain way amplifies our experience

(being readers) as voyeurs – (in other words) the absence of feeling accompanying the experiences leaves us in the position of being able to only look on. We are not so much implicated – as tolerated-into-the-equation-of-the-writing.

•

Sunset Debris is a single paragraph (a chunk) of language. Every sentence ends with a question mark.

What does it mean to live in a world of questions? We're all inhabited by them / all the time. The major questions (Who am I? Why am I here? Why is there suffering? Why will I die?) turn into spiritual practice (or religion) for many / into therapy for some / into art for a few.

We might say that life is a question – and art is one of its answers (one of its persistent answers). So – to answer it with questions? – what could be more honest in a way (and more thorough – in what is perhaps another (and in what is perhaps the same) way)? We all go the way of the (big) question – in the end – don't we?

The questions don't form the basis of anything. They (just (justly)) form the basis of questioning. As if that's as far as there is to go – these are the quotidian questions of someone (of Ron who wrote them) – but also (apparently) of any number of people (in that they don't cohere as the personality (say) of "a narrator" or "a protagonist"). They make a moment – they don't describe (or descry) it. In fact – they are quite accepting – they are accepting of what they state (of their state).

Have you any further questions?

•

The Chinese Notebook. What distinguishes this text from the two previous ones (structurally) is that it doesn't have the same kind of ongoingness (of unstoppingness) as the previous two. And there is a slightly greater tendency toward the ruminative / the philosophical – as in –

This is not philosophy, it's poetry. And if I say so then it becomes painting, music or

BOOK REVIEWS

sculpture, judged as such. If there are variables to consider, they are at least partly economic—the question of distribution, etc. Also differing critical conditions. Could this be good poetry, yet bad music? But yet I do not believe I would, except in jest, posit this as dance or urban planning.

In this text we feel that Ron is going after something – more than just getting it down. It is as if because he has taken notes (as it were) he must be pursuing some understanding / some truth / some moment(s) of truth (I always use the word truth (ill)advisedly). Here he has marked his path – he has numbered his steps – he has notated the length of time he has spent at each spot. And – although there is little to connect them (at least linearly) – this numbering gives them a kind of unity that they wouldn't otherwise have. Each has its reference point. This numbering of the thought episodes is also an indication (a reminder) that thinking takes time.

And there are statements (here) that reflect upon this text's own project (and upon those already encountered) –

What of a poetry that lacks surprise? That lacks form, theme, development? Whose language rejects interest? That examines itself without curiosity? Will it survive?

But these specific statements don't apply equally / or unilaterally to this text (or to the others). My own take would be this – it does lack (for the most part) surprise / it doesn't lack form (structure is almost an obsession) / theme is treated with as much permission as possible / development is only addressed (or hinted at) for moments (and then abandoned) / it doesn't reject interest although it certainly doesn't encourage it in any of the manifold ways typical of many literatures / it does examine itself with curiosity. *Will it survive?* Read on.

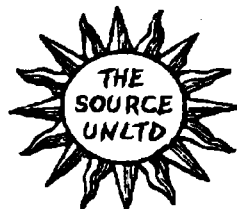
96. The assumption is, language is equal if not to human perception per se, then to what is human about perception.

This statement should be starred / underlined / italicized / and memorized – by anyone wanting to understand Ron's work. It speaks his own understanding of that work most fully – in it he (shows that he) knows what he's doing. For authors to understand with considerable accuracy the nature of their own work is actually a fairly rare thing – and might be what separates (as an attribute) poets (and a few philosophers) from those harvesting in other fields of language and thought (forgive the redundancy (it's implicit (implicated) in the profession (in what we profess))).

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BOOK REVIEWS

2197 is a collection of thirteen poems – which nonetheless limit themselves to the use of three alternating structures.

Note 81 from *The Chinese Notebook* has some bearing on the openness of these poems – *I have seen poems thought or felt to be dense, difficult to get through, re-spaced on the page, two-dimensional picture plane, made airy, “light.” How is content altered by this operation?* We could read the poems in 2197 as an effort to answer this question (at least thirteen ways (or is it – at least two thousand one hundred and ninety-seven ways?).

For the first time in *The Age of Huts* these poems allow space for types of elision and inconclusiveness that hadn’t happened before. Sentences can get truncated – and (thereby) left more open. But the sentences are often compacted by their having been folded back upon (or into) themselves – a density erupts. The statements are permitted to be calculatedly elusive – *Seal as form, as loss of gun-tower*. And (as a result) particularly in the looser of these formulations – more feeling intrudes (impedes) than had previously been the case. The poems are (most simply) more lyrical. These are more wind-swept (more mind-swept?) – more taken with spaces beyond the attentive eye. They speak (therefore) more back at themselves. They don’t so much utter – as be utter.

These poems are the most exiting things in the book (me speaks) – the most excitable. They furl over / and into themselves – they are a kind of quake – a mouthing of moments worth asking – the shrill (shrilling) keep of a stance. They wake us – they wake us up. This means no offence to the other texts – but these flake – and thereby allow more felt in (and out) – and that (that too) is a / means a lot. There is more of a furor here – more life gets engendered (not just spoken of) / given out / where it takes root.

Make words world.

Ron has appended to (or included with) these four texts – two that are shorter and that he calls *Satellite Texts* – Sitting Up, Standing, Taking Steps; and, BART.

The first is (for the most part) a list of discernable objects. But there are also phrases like *Pornographic motherhood* that themselves step outside of any conceivable description unless we take as implicit to it the mind of someone inside it (the one describing it?). And then (e.g.) *In a heliport by the sea wall in the fog* takes us well outside the room in which we might have imagined ourselves – and either through reverie or memory (relative to that room) allows us some other elsewhere. What one is left with reading this is a kind of swift-

ness – phrases almost falling over themselves as they find their way out of the author’s mind.

BART (the Bay Area Rapid Transit system where Ron lived when he wrote it) – is a single twelve-page-long sentence with phrases separated by commas – and is a description (variously posed) of a day he spent as flaneur within it. There is room for thoughts of other sorts than sense impressions – memories and comments of the author to that self. In this text the authorial presence is made uncharacteristically strong by the presence of the I (the I / eye) throughout. It’s a kind of a mad dash of a way of ending the book – and of reminding us that we’ve been invited along from the start.

Alan Davies is the author of RAVE, NAME, CANDOR, and SIGNAGE, among many other books. His BOOK 5, part of a long ongoing work, was recently published by Katalanché. This review is part of a longer essay.

BORN IN UTOPIA: AN ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN POETRY

EDITED BY CARMEN FIRAN AND PAUL DORU MUGUR

WITH EDWARD FOSTER

TALISMAN HOUSE / 2006

REVIEW BY ELINOR NAUEN

you were so highly evolved, such a flirt, a charmer and
[a skirt

that even the adam’s apple at your neck had descended
from the apes eons and eons before I found myself

[here....

you’ve revealed the universe to me: a handful of mint

[drops and spinning tops

a humdrum bit of dust, plants and gnawing animals,

[some thrumming whirligigs

with your little muzzle you’ve bitten my cerebellum in a kiss....

“Bebop Baby (‘Cause Tonight You’ll Be Mine),”

Mircea Cartarescu 1956–, trans. Adam J. Sorkin

and Ioana Ieronim

In 350 pages, *Born in Utopia* presents 66 poets, born from 1880 to 1974, along with thorough (and slightly giddy) biographical notes, an introduction (by Andrei Codrescu) and two afterwords addressing the history, future and poetics of Romanian poetry. Some of the poets are well-known, although perhaps more so as French (Tristan Tzara), American (Codrescu) or German (Paul Celan). Readers who are familiar with Celan in German or translated from German will be particularly interested in this early work, written in Romanian. (And a shoutout to Ed Foster and Talisman House, for bringing so many international poetries to Americans and English speakers.)

BOOK REVIEWS

Can one take an interest in these poems without knowing the history of Romanian poetry? without having heard the famous local saying: “scratch a Romanian and a poet bleeds”? without keeping in mind that for 45 years Romania was a Communist country, where poetry was the illegal tender of subversion? Well, can you enjoy any poetry without knowing biography? It’s up to you to decide, but these are thrilling poems, no duds, period.

This work makes you want both to get an education and to “drink to forget what no one knows” (George Bacovia 1881-1944, trans. Liviu Georgescu). That’s neither contradiction nor paradox. Welcome to surrealism! It has never seemed more seductive.

Now, maybe what I take to be staunch surrealism is Communist-era slyness. “Blaga’s exile consisted in an acute yearning for the very place where he was,” Codrescu wrote in the introduction to his translations of Lucian Blaga’s *At the Court of Yearning*. My friend Liza told me that when she was in Bucharest in 1995, “It was full of amputee orphans and kid-led gangs/families, and there were bullet holes in all the buildings. One of the most amazing things were all these huge construction projects Ceaucescu started, and the cranes had been frozen in midair since his execution.” Get near Romania and it’s bebop baby, everyone! “It might be that you exist / in this

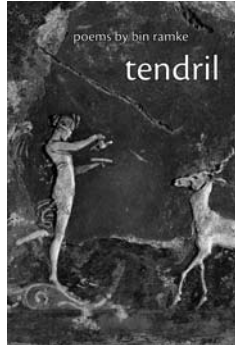
very night, in a bullet fired into the flesh of memory” (Traian T. Cosovei, 1954–, trans. Sorkin and Liana Vrajitoru).

if i hadn’t been told over and over that I’m immortal
maybe i wouldn’t have died, maybe
i would have found another death

(Ioan Es. Pop, 1958–, trans. Nathaniel Smith, K. Shaver and Ion Cretu)

Now, translation. As a Romanian non-speaker (and this isn’t a bilingual book), I accept that poetry is untranslatable—quoth Nina Cassian, “And the raven goes, ‘whatever’”—but also that what’s here will have to do (and do brilliantly). Quite a few of these poets either live in the United States (Codrescu, Firan, Cassian) or have spent significant time here. I don’t know what I’m missing but I’m getting plenty.

These poems, stuffed with sensual delirium, dreams, nightmares, are old-fashioned in the most modern possible way. They’re not charming, not folkloric, in fact are stones and bullets and biting memories. That old dream of finding another room in your house. An alt-universe to English poetry, or as Nichita Stanescu’s “Chiding of Euclid” has it, a simultaneous world:



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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BOOK REVIEWS

I cross the street.
in the simultaneous world a wall breaks down.
in the simultaneous world, a different one, they are
[just conquering
the tower of Malta
and in the other simultaneous world
a bomb is blowing up.
and in the world other
than the other
the ocean is still and windless,
so that when I cross the street
and step on things with my sole,
in the simultaneous world,
like Jesus I walk upon the waters.

Note that Stanesco—a Nobel nominee—died in 1983, so another simultaneous world is that of time. The wall comes down in his future, and the poems tumble into our present. “Because Time himself should have an organ / A bisexual one / As he penetrates us with equal pleasure” (Adrian Sangeorzan, 1954–, trans. the poet with Maurice Edwards).

I have to say I almost didn’t get this piece written—every time I dipped into the book, the poems had morphed, twisted, grown, met and mated. Half the lines in the book could serve as title or epigraph for a review: Death is the first memory (Stanesco), There’s too much November (Ioan Flora), another shot of misfortune (Mariana Marin), fright in aspic (Carmen Firan), an old, old twilight (Ruxandra Cesereanu).

If the lines I’m quoting make the poems seem similar, maybe the titles won’t. A random sample: The Image of the Glass Shivering, At the Virgin’s Breast, the Adventurous Life of Her Legs (1. We’re her legs’ pimps), I Am the Spirit of the Deep, If You Were a Seamstress, Zero, King Crypto and Laplander Enigelle, The Werewolf and Chlotild, Lawyer with Swordfish.

Are a few titles, lines and 800 words enough to convince you of the necessity of Romania? Yeah, baby, bebop!

Elinor Nauen co-hosts (with Martha King) the Prose Pros reading series, first Thursday of every month at the Telephone Bar.

BRENDA COULTAS
THE MARVELOUS BONES OF TIME
COFFEE HOUSE PRESS / 2007
REVIEW BY BERNADETTE MAYER

Dear Brenda,

The Marvelous Bones Of Time is one of those books. I’m putting it on the part of my bookshelf reserved for one-of-a-kind books, along

with *Anecdoted Topography of Chance* by Daniel Spoerri, *The Mind Of A Mnemonist* by A.R. Luria and Dante’s *La Vita Nuova*. Every book could be there but not if you think this way. It’s good to have a book and a movie you can read or watch whenever you want. My movie used to be *Gorillas In The Mist*, my book *Moby Dick*. I did the Sortes Coultasiana with *The Marvelous Bones* before I went to the East Greenbush library book sale. I got “a poet who is moving,” I bought George Carlin’s *When Will Jesus Bring The Pork Chops?*

To become part of world history via the self is no mean task. And, you are nothing if not protean. Anybody who accuses this book of being a memoir need only consult the last line: “The city dump is my memoir thus I never lose sleep knowing these objects will never leave the earth.” However there are ghosts and weird presences; we hope everybody feels them, but I know they have already left the earth unlike stubborn memories. What makes me not me? Don’t I embrace everything I know about? Or what? Replace embrace with become. This book is on the brink; it’s a tad risky. Every time I turn the page, I am surprised. It’s as if computers could record everyone’s every thought; here they are edited for us readers. I’m happy; I wish everyone would do this. Brava!

In admiration,
Bernadette

Bernadette Mayer is the author of Scarlet Tanager (New Directions 2005).

JULIE PATTON
NOTES FOR SOME (NOMINALLY) AWAKE
PORTABLE PRESS AT YO-YO LABS / 2007
REVIEW BY CORINA COPP

In Amiri Baraka’s poem “Y’s 18,” he asks: “What are / these / words // to / tell / it // all?” Throughout Julie Patton’s new composition, *Notes for Some (Nominally) Awake*, she answers his question, and goes further. Baraka is invoked and defamiliarized; a profusion of plays with his name and legacy orient the book so that we might return to him (and her) more intently. The words are go-betweens for the oral and literary traditions, scored on the page for performance. Holding the impassioned paper, with its switching red and black typefaces, font sizes, and formats, the work is the clearest representation of presence on paper I’ve felt in some time. At first, I think Patton would prefer to handwrite her pieces for publishing (she’s mentioned before that handwriting is so close to drawing, and that “gesture comes with handshaking words out of skin”). I imagine it’s much more fluid than transcribing such myth-breaking articulations through typography—this current mode of visualizing sonic and vocal structures. Undoubtedly, however, Patton has as much fun integrating her notes with graphics as she would wielding a fat marker. A loose-cannon energy propels the book; and the parsed and striking historical-political engagement (“levee joins no

BOOK REVIEWS

more f / ire our aim”), 19th-century ship-speak, bird caws, and talk reversal all stem from a person much alive to the world.

Before you reach the heart of the matter, *Notes for Some (Nominally) Awake* invokes the Persepolis Twin Lion, which, as declared, “ = Twin aspects of your soul that split when you enter 3D.” So it seems a three-dimensional Julie Patton takes from the visible earth, and upends, various sources of discourse: the issues of slavery and racial injustice, the indignant founding of this country, immigration, colonialism, folklore, nursery rhymes, jazz, the English alphabet, TV Westerns, commercialism, U.S. policy, and African, Islam, Jewish, and Native American cultural narratives. Skewering the idea of a melting pot being itself a frontier of ignorance and oppression, so exists in this book an enactment of the gap between the multiple sources that make up “AMERICAUCASIA” and their images/sounds now in Western society. The poetry acts as a decolonization of the mind, stylistically embodied, penned (“deep pens”), and reattached to the earth; a piece of paper was a tree, and I’m sure Patton is thankful for it. It’s also written for us (not her deserved sensual performance environment, but alack, individual readers), with language and dialectical verities anew.

From Cherokee-African-Creole-American folklore have come the stories of Br’er Rabbit, for instance, tales of whom have evolved (and been skewed) over the decades. Julie Patton links them to a broken Old South vernacular (“Br’er Rare Bit, Chitlin”), further recognizing the historical mistreatment of black human as abject animal, as meat, but to emerge from the other side provocatively, as here: “L anguaJ links / ‘Oink’ ink // ‘Like a newspaper of bleeding meat’ // Am i riB, a rack O lamb / Baa Baa Black... // More than you can / ‘chew’— off // d’ pigs / smoke signL’s...” A page like this (among many others) implicates the political and commercial misuse of language as well as its facile consumption; and as Aimé Césaire has written, “the colonizer...tends objectively to transform *himself* into an animal.” So the boomerang effect takes place in Patton’s work. The poetry is performative, active; it not only engages us visually, with its disjointed movements and colors, but as Holland Cotter said about Kara Walker’s recent exhibition at the Whitney, “Once you’re in it, you’re really in it. You can’t just stroll through.”

Patton’s engagement with slavery, the American historical and current treatment of race, and current undids like “Le War!” splashed across the page like the yang to *Gone With the Wind*’s “SHERMAN!” amidst roiling fire, are topics that extend intimately to society’s well-worn fear of the Other, that which falls “outside.” Hinging *Notes for Some (Nominally) Awake* is a retyped, unassuming AP News blip from 2006 about a black bear, who, lost in the urban wilds of Newark, NJ, was shot and killed by police in a backyard after it “appeared ready to charge.” As Baraka wrote in his poem “Heathens,” section nine: “They believe everything is better / Dead. And that everything alive / is their enemy.” Patton wrote, similarly: “If they weren’t read as ‘Indian’ in the first place... /

Wouldn’t be blood in d’ / END.” End being struck through addresses the unending nature of racism (and the dangers of naming); much of Patton’s work drives this home. These notes, so content-rich and readily analytic, are placed artfully—an attempt to reconstruct the way we view and consume poetry images. In this imaginative domain, it seems life and art are defiantly, jointly composed.

Corina Copp lives in Nashville, TN, where she is working on poems and ruining her need for a vehicle. Her latest feats have appeared in Denver Quarterly and 6x6.

RON PADGETT
HOW TO BE PERFECT
COFFEE HOUSE PRESS / 2007
REVIEW BY TOM VEITCH

The soul materializes in the form of an echo and says
“I’ve been following you.”
“But you are a shadow and only a shadow!”
“Only in the dark am I a shadow,” the soul replies.
“In the light I am a very good lightbulb!”
“You are a big nothing something,” the soul says.
The light changes and I start across.

(from “Everybody and His Uncle”)

•

it’s interesting not to know
something that everyone else knows.

(from “The Swiss Family Robinson”)

•

In 1654, in Delft, Holland, the painter Carel Fabritius died at the age of 32 in an explosion of 80,000 pounds of gunpowder. The day before he died, he finished painting the cover of Ron Padgett’s book, *How to Be Perfect*, which manuscript, having lain hidden for nearly four centuries, has recently surfaced from Coffee House Press of Minneapolis.

The cover painting is called “The Goldfinch.” According to “art experts,” the goldfinch in Fabritius’ painting is a symbol of Christ’s Passion, which, if you are an expert, sort of complicates how you will read Ron’s book. Fortunately, about two pages past the table of contents you feel like you are washing dishes on LSD, and all thoughts of Fabritius have flown out the window. But the goldfinch, who is tethered to its perch, tries in vain to fly out the window after your thoughts. Unable to break its tether, the goldfinch remains forever linked to solemn religious symbolism, poor little bird.

Fabritius was possibly a teacher of Vermeer, which further complicates the reading of this book. Ron’s teacher was Kenneth Koch,

BOOK REVIEWS

who also died in an explosion of 80,000 pounds of gunpowder. Does that mean that Ron is Vermeer? No, it means that Vermeer's painting, "Girl with a Pearl Earring" looks very much like Ron's wife, Patricia, as I remember her in her youth. And that, I think, is all that needs to be known about the cover.

Now, on to the poems of Ron's finest book.

•

God hates you
which is why he created the world
and put you in it
and gave you the power to realize
that you're here
for a while
and then poof

(from "Why God Did What He Did")

•

...I had been waiting my whole life
to be wherever I should be at any given moment,
a ring around not anything.

(from "Everybody and His Uncle")

•

Ron Padgett (whom I have known since 1960) is at once impulsive, spontaneous, carefree, and given to religious ritual. His mind forever explores the unexpected delights on a meandering road to nowhere. But he never forgets to make his bed neatly and brew good morning coffee, or to mow the grass just right, or to make sure his pickup truck has tires that will see him through the Vermont winters. His poems are deceptively harmless, but extremely dangerous. Some lines sound like stand-up comedy (à la Seinfeld)...

I never quite understood who
the Swiss Family Robinson were.
The inversion of their name
confused me at an early age,
just as the name of Mary Baker Eddy
sounded as though she started out
as a woman and turned into
a guy named Eddy.

(from "The Swiss Family Robinson")

...but it is a comedy routine where at the end of the show you find you are no longer sitting in an overheated nightclub but on an ice-flow in a fast-moving river, and a strange man in wild furs is shooting at you from the riverbank.

At their best and at their worst, Ron's poems are the perfect expres-

sion of one mind collapsing in on itself. These easy-to-read poems are—it goes without saying—meant to disarm the reader by making the reader relax his or her inner monologue; then to seduce the reader into following Ron's inner monologue to its transcendent irrational conclusion.

You may try to run away from Ron's poems—but you invariably end up loving them, and chasing Ron across the borderline and wrapping your arms around the poet just as he disappears. Is he evading your love on purpose? Is he in rebellion against your cliché-riddled brain? Why...no. There's just a plain sweetness here, and understatement, and sentiment, and lots of pain and regret...all the verities of traditional poetry. And yet halfway through this book your mind has shifted up to an unknown gear, and miraculously you are going 600 mph down a strange road while your V-6 engine is thrumming contentedly at 1800 RPM.

....The hippopotamus
sits on you with no sense of pleasure, he doesn't
even know you are there, any more than he takes notice
of the little white bird atop his head, and when
he sees you flattened against the ground
he doesn't even think Uh-oh he just trots away
with the bird still up there looking around.

(from "The Absolutely Huge and
Incredible Injustice in the World")

•

Is Ron's mind free of its tether? Or is he toying with assumed shapes before returning to his true home in the formless vacuum of space? Something like that, I think. But there's also a brilliant awareness of language in these poems. Ron is never less than the perfect poet. To top it off, the brilliance is constantly subverted, as if Einstein came out on stage to give a lecture on Relativity only to spot a banana peel on the floor. The peel was dropped by the previous speaker, Niels Bohr, who always ate bananas as he lectured to his students on quantum physics.

With impeccable timing, Einstein steps on the banana skin, his legs fly into the air, his body executes a marvelous pirouette, and he grimaces gleefully as he lands with a bone-crushing exactness on his rear-end. The crowd, at first shocked and confused, cheers wildly when they notice Einstein give them a broad wink. Then the old physicist stands up and takes a well-earned bow.

•

...ninety-nine percent of every beautiful thing you
ever knew
escaped and went back out into the world
...it doesn't matter because you started out a man
and ended up a pile of leaves in a different story.

(from "Method")

BOOK REVIEWS

•

Ron Padgett is always deconstructing himself before the void. That about says it. Everything in the body and the mind is unstable atoms, and only an Einstein could know that, in the brilliant light of the moment after his shoe-leather hits the banana skin. (Niels Bohr knew it as well, and that he could facilitate the unfolding of Einstein's remarkable genius with something as simple as a banana.)

The language of these poems is meant to disorient you...no, more than likely it is meant to orient you to feeling comfortable in disorientation. This is not the "official poetry" of poets laureate, but more like real poetry than anything so portentous as an "official poem."

No bullshit, in other words...and utterly subversive of the ever-glamorous societal role of "the poet" (wink). In *How to Be Perfect* the ego of poetry is noisily deflated, all solemnity shattered, but true poetry and true solemnity emerge from the wreckage of the poem like the ghost of Fabritius from his flattened home in Delft. Having broken his tether in the explosion, the passionate spirit of Fabritius rises to the heavens, chuckling softly.

•

From Chuang Tzu, quoted by Ron Padgett in *How to Be Perfect*:

Using an attribute to illustrate the point that attributes are not attributes in and of themselves is not so good as using a nonattribute to illustrate the point. Using a horse to illustrate the point that a (white) horse is not a horse (as such) is not so good as using nonhorses to illustrate the point. Actually the universe is but an attribute; all things are but a horse.

(excerpt from a terrific piece called "Slight Foxing")

•

Now, I am required to ask this: is Ron always meaning to point obliquely to meaning, in the neoclassical manner? Sometimes, yes, but mostly no, not.

I think rather you can compare him to certain Zen poets, those who attempted to use poetry to stop the mind so that illumination can enter unbidden. On the one hand, a bad Zen poet such as Bodhidharma felt compelled to tack on a rather heavy-handed message about Buddha and liberation. On the other hand there is the irresistible Ryokan, he with the lightest touch, who often neglects to put a moral at the end of his poems. He doesn't have to:

Though frosts come down
night after night,
what does it matter?
they melt in the morning sun.

Though the snow falls
each passing year,
what does it matter?
with spring days it thaws.
Yet once let them settle
on a man's head,
fall and pile up,
go on piling up—
then the new year
may come and go,
but never you'll see them fade away

—Ryokan

•

Padgett is the great American Zen poet. The other American poets don't know this, but the Carnegie libraries filled with their thousands of poetry books, pamphlets and broadsides know this, and the covers of the books are turning green with envy. But there I have gone and told the secret. Or have I? I see I am still tethered to my perch!

Reading Ron is like browsing in a wonderful bookstore. Over here is a whole shelf of flashy and sparkling works, over there a dark patch, here a row of shelves with beat-up old-timey novels suitable for grist. Around the corner is a nice selection of the French classics, well-translated and bound in calf-skin with gilt-embossed decorations. We sit in a comfortable chair and thumb the glossy paperbacks as we sip an espresso. Then, drunk with coffee, we stumble upon the old bookseller's secret alcove, where he hides his private stash of rarities. This is not a metaphor. It's about a feeling: I always feel great after reading a Padgett book of poems. Not wanting to steal the book, of course, I take it to the front desk, pay the cover price (plus tax) and watch as the beautiful young clerk slides the book into one of those awful plastic bags as delicate as dragonfly wings. Putting the noisy bag under my coat (next to a book by Ted Berrigan I forgot to pay for), I step out into the sunlit morning. It's a glorious day in Montpelier, Vermont. High above the two-story buildings and the maple trees, I see the brilliant flash of a tiny Goldfinch, a bit of string dangling from its leg, chirping happily as it rises free of the mind's fetters toward 17th century heaven.

Here's one of Ron's poems in its entirety. It's one of my favorites in the book:

It Is Almost Unbearable

that people are so different from us
whenever we lift the veil

on which lilacs are shifting

BOOK REVIEWS

and their eyes are still there

among the gyrations and flattened
slantings of their spirits, as if

spiraling upward through time
until they hit us and our cups

runneth over, though clear
is the liquid and bitter its taste

to our narrow tongues. And
we rejoice for only a moment

and joke for the eternity in which
we know we will never dart about

happily, for the veil we lift is
our own skin, a tarp in wind.

Tom Veitch is a writer.

LAURA ELRICK
FANTASIES IN PERMEABLE STRUCTURES
FACTORY SCHOOL / 2005
REVIEW BY COLE HEINOWITZ

The first line of Movement I in Laura Elrick's *Fantasies in Permeable Structures* is a quotation from Wordsworth's *Prelude*, "Both of the object seen and eye that sees..." Here is the context in which that line appears, closing Book Twelve of the 1805 edition,

I seemed about this period to have sight
Of a new world—a world, too, that was fit
To be transmitted and made visible
To other eyes, as having for its base
That whence our dignity originates,
That which both gives it being, and maintains
A balance, an ennobling interchange
Of action from within and from without:
The excellence, pure spirit, and best power,
Both of the object seen and the eye that sees.

The new world that Wordsworth sees here is one in which that "within" ("the eye that sees") and that "without" ("the object seen") engage in an "interchange" that equally exalts both. Elrick's book pays homage to this Romantic ideal of permeation between self and world. But more importantly, it "cherish[es] the shadows / of eyelids," offering a sumptuous and jarring acknowledgment of the limits of that Romantic ideal.

As Elrick states in her preface "To the Reader," "each 'fantasy' acts as a conceptual anagram of the selves through which the plotted language of institutions permeates." The presumed subjective primacy, the self, of Wordsworth's "interchange" has shattered into "selves." And that once-coveted "interchange" has become a battle zone in which "the object seen" will not sit passively, waiting for engagement with "the eye that sees," but thrusts itself upon and through, inevitably structuring and restructuring one's selves. Nor are the fragmented selves innocent in this transaction; they cannot but retrace the blows of the aggressor,

...See what of me
more or less remains is but a habit
of language. Built on necessity, built
but changing over into that which builds
necessity, caught as we are...

The speaking "me" here (or rather, selves) "is but a habit / of language," the residue left by plotted structural penetration, the mode of recognition we adopt as a means of survival within worldly structures. But Elrick's "me" is by no means a languishing victim of arbitrary power. With the uncanny dialectical insight that shapes all the poems in this book, Elrick quickly adds that although language is "Built on necessity" it seamlessly transforms, through use, "into that which builds / necessity." Recognition of one's inevitable complicity with history, and the ensuing struggle within and against that complicity frame the challenge and the pleasure of this book.

Fantasies in Permeable Structures stages a face-off between dialectic and reification. Elrick's use of the past progressive phrase "having left" in the first lines of Movement I ("Both of the objects seen and eye that sees..." / or neither, having left aside the process / that reshapes and *is* the thing"), posits that it may already be too late to parse out causes from effects. But the ellipsis she appends to Wordsworth's quotation suggests something other than dialectical stoppage. Faced with the limits of a Romantic mode of inquiry, Elrick enacts the temptation to shift to a reified present and accept "the thing" as it "is," but the lines that follow show that any such reification can only be provisional. If the lyric voice itself may be taken as one such reified "thing," giving rise to euphonic lines like "Each / through each flung forms anew," then it will have to contend with mutilated utterances that belie its unity: "still / what's checked. kept. ingest shift. life?" In such ways, these poems fling themselves (are flung?) back and forth between lyricism and suspicion of the lyric's ideological baggage. The effect is precisely *not* to leave aside but to tear open and expose "the process / that reshapes and *is* the thing."

The 32 poems that form the book elaborate and politicize this ricochet between habits of language. And yet there are thematic through-lines that make me suspect that Elrick's "Fantasies" take their cue from the musical form that introduced improvisatory,

BOOK REVIEWS

more “permeable” structures into composed music during the Romantic era (“Unnatural... Improvise,” Movement VII begins). One of these through-lines, fittingly perhaps, is the Romantic poetic canon. In a nod to Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan,” for instance, Elrick transforms the famous imperial “pleasure-dome” of Xanadu into a site of outsourced labor, “Will— / if (glasswork from China) image / a Pleasure Palace.” But while drawing attention to the “Cheap death / sweating luxury,” the Palace’s globalized “free trade” conditions of possibility, Elrick also addresses both the false consciousness, stateside, that accompanies this mode of production (“the off-hours sweet solitude talking box / *delighted* corporate habits”) and the American sentimentalizing of poverty (“Hunger, in her window, / is urban song. Light-footed along / a high-rise dump”).

A similar re-rendering and rending asunder of the Romantic canon occurs in Movement XIII, Elrick’s dismantling of Wordsworth’s “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey.” Both poems are located at the shoreline, whose reflective surface seems to galvanize a personalized historical reflection. Wordsworth recalls,

...like a roe
I bounded o’er the mountains, by the sides
of the deep rivers and the lonely streams,
Wherever nature led...

By contrast, Elrick writes,

...under mid-century bridges I would run
through grated shadows, briefly cool, til out
into searing heats where streaming sun-rays
shocked the eye, and a vague terrain of weeds
half-swallowed garbage, leaving all the blur
in glares.

To Wordsworth’s “deep and gloomy wood,” Elrick brings “battery fluid,” “fuming greenish scents,” and “human feces.” But beyond the demystifying urbanization afoot here, Elrick is questioning the Romantic privilege of self-scrutiny, since “the mind,” as she puts it, “‘once’ was served up to make an ‘is’ of it—to be / a static verb.” Somehow the writing subject has not only been shattered, it has begun to change places with its object, such that the word “mine” in the line “on a field (*mine*) mining by a dark shore” comes to designate both ownership of a landscape and the imminent leveling of that landscape/self by corporate developers. As Elrick aptly comments, “It’s way too true / this incorporation of all that moves.”

The point here is not that the Romantics were privileged idealists and we are radicalized materialists. As Elrick points out, “It wasn’t I / even two hundred later, it was *never* / I it was suspended.” And there is no resting point, no solid structure for this suspension. After alluding to the sexed labor of piecework in which the masterly gaze is reduced to dress fabric, “Eye to eyelet,” the poem cattily interrupts itself, “*Where’s my purse?*” How to contain this disjunction between female market subjugation and female ideological subjugation? Ostensibly looking for the purse, Elrick continues,

...It sank to sea-bed their supply.
Containers. sustain. containment. Stormed off
the deck of a Liberian flagged vessel called
The U.S. Hope. And still a Guatemalan
residue if you look close with ‘knowing eyes’
Feeding far subtler soldiering cues, traces
of her in the rhetoric. Pieces. Spool.

We are not far here from the gaping “O!” of Romantic apostrophe. There is something hollow in these containers of product and of affect, something missing in the ease with which a self or selves can still make “complex tiles from such dust,” and an ever-keen attention to the programmatic emptiness of the writing selves “as extended / the metaphors stand up and walk off,” neglecting even their conventional punctuation.

There is an ebb and flow to these poems, what Elrick calls “Slack rhythms,” between revolutionary excitement (“a breathing life / through city’s buildings on our terms / terms of life fashioned *by* us not imposed”) and the “structural gale” that “rushed / the streets swept us outward towards ourselves / only to dissipate... and recommend the intellect / again.” In some ways this evocation looks back to Shelley’s insoluble conundrum of the material and the ideal,

The everlasting universe of things
Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—
Now lending splendour, where from secret springs
The source of human thought its tribute brings
Of waters,—with a sound but half its own

But in Elrick’s poems “the mind” is largely left outside, something rushed toward, elusive, never met. Movement X closes,

...Cars whiz by and I’m trying
to reach her—kisses thrown over roads
at the vanish point of our Friday night not
at all significant. Not to presage.

“Kisses” are “thrown over roads,” not at the *vanishing point* of painterly perspective, but rather at “the vanish point,” itself already partially vanished. This is a book struggling against its own structures (“(What / is form.) Straitjacket of pensive pleasure”) and against its own erasure, elegantly. Imperialism, Wobblies, New York bars, Thatcherism, Black Panthers, Womanists, and poetic discourse itself—these are among the uncontained speakers of the “plotted language” permeating the selves of Elrick’s *Fantasies in Permeable Structures*. They represent, as Elrick suggests in Movement XIV—countermanding her own injunction “Not to presage”—a “presage to revolution,” while at the same time they acknowledge the ephemerality and recursivity of struggle.

Cole Heinowitz’s most recent chapbook is The Rubicon (The Rest, 2007). Heinowitz teaches literature at Bard College.

BOOK REVIEWS

HELEN ADAM

A HELEN ADAM READER

NATIONAL POETRY FOUNDATION / 2007

REVIEW BY MICAH BALLARD

A Helen Adam Reader, ed. with notes and an introduction by Kristin Prevallet, follows Joanne Kyger's collected poems *About Now* released this year by the National Poetry Foundation. Separated into sections with appendixes, Adam's verse is conjured from various collections such as her early dictated poems in *The Elfin Pedlar and Tales told by Pixy Pool*, the wondrous facsimile of *Ballads* written nearly forty years later with illustrations by Jess, *Turn Again to Me and Other Poems*, and even lyric scripts for her film *Daydream of Darkness*. Besides unpublished verse and excerpts from *Songs with Music*, with transcriptions by Carl Grundberg, the book also includes collages, correspondence, interviews, photographs, and posters for both the S.F. and N.Y. productions of *San Francisco's Burning*. Ending with biographical notes on the poems and a DVD which includes Adam singing her ballads, one feels her grue, that "spine-tingling shudder that happens when a person opens body and mind to the unknown." Or as Robert Duncan noted in his preface to *Ballads*,

That other "Scotland," the invisible World and Its phantasy, is the proper scene of these passion-possessed lovers and haters of Helen Adam's lore as it was the proper scene of those others who sought their hideous rapture in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Long ago? and far away? So all the old stories say it. But the dolls and mirrors, the stricken children and monstrous consorts of these poems, these sorceries of desire, are as near to the real as they ever were.

Similar to her contemporaries, whether it be Jack Spicer's "dictation" through ghosts, or as far back as Robert Browning's "dramatic monologue," Adam speaks through projection of astral spirits and such celestial intelligences as the souls of the dead, demons, fairies, or even friends as seen in "Initiation to the Magic Workshop." Composed for Spicer's Poetry Center class in 1957, this verse drama, save for being posthumously printed, has since yet to be seen. Nevertheless, the community of fellow initiates that Adam summoned her whole life, rather of past or present states, from this world or the next, all have their chance to chant.

Let me come in. Let me come in.
There's somebody coming who wears no skin.
The velvet ones are close at my back.
And a wolf just crawled through the keyhole crack.

Whether the voice of a contemporary or that of a spirit, Adam's arias are visionary haunts that reveal the unreal by speaking beyond and outside the self. They are mortal testaments of reality where both the living and dead communicate not only through her but to her.

I will not falter in this fatal hour,
Nor name the abysses where I learned my power.
Enough to mention, and I do not brag,
That the window will open when I wave the flag.

Able to restore the traditional Scottish Ballad to its "malleable form" by linking ancient traditions to her own interpretations of reality, Adam brings back the violence and revenge once found in older ballads to the well-sung "Cheerless Junkie Song"

Let rats and roaches bury me.
They'll bury me in state,
As they march from Verrazano Bridge
Down to the Golden Gate,
Clear across the continent.
Yonder let me lie,
In the gutters of Haight Ashbury,
To freak the passers by,
Till all the tourists gape, and say,
"Brother! He died high!"
Let rat tails write my epitaph.
"Brother! He died high!"

As much as Adam finds guidance outside this world, she is as much a conveyor of messages from the physical one around her. Unlocking the doors between these two allows her to relive events as well as reinvent them. As Prevallet notes, Adam's work often deals "with forms of *ibbur*, in which there is a sudden inhabitation of the body/mind of a living person by the soul/will and personality of another." By remaining a host to these visitors, Adam is able to live a life within the lines of her ballads both on and off the page.

Like her ballads, *A Helen Adam Reader* is meant to be sung, chanted so the spells she casts may enter into all. By allowing the poem to write her, not her it, Adam is able to make the unknown known, the invisible visible. Thanks to Prevallet we are able to experience Adam's grue as never before, or as Adam told the *New York Quarterly*, "I have always liked an old saying that seems to me to express the real awe associated with the Scotch world of the supernatural: If a man tells you he has seen the fairies, look if he be shaken. If he be not terrified, be sure he has not seen."

Micah Ballard lives in San Francisco. His most recent books are Bettina Coffin and Evangeline Downs.

DAVID TRINIDAD

THE LATE SHOW

TURTLE POINT PRESS / 2007

REVIEW BY ERICA KAUFMAN

I used to think *The Late Show* was that mysterious network television phenomenon that my parents never used to let me stay up and watch as a kid—a riot of clips, music, parody, and guest stars. As an adult, rid of the confines of bedtime, I eagerly tuned into *The Late Show* and it turned out to be kind of a bummer—bad music, unfunny jokes, movie stars I didn't like. David Trinidad's new book has reclaimed the genre. His *The Late Show* is a montage of elegies (both for people, places, and things), a vividly colored visitation of historical pop (toys, lip gloss, films, stars), and above all a graceful and detailed re-engagement with things past.

BOOK REVIEWS

In “Some Remarks on Narrative and Technology,” Samuel R. Delany writes, “the model that contests with the narrative model, however, sees the world as a series of poems.” Trinidad’s work proves that this model of composition is elegant, moving, and enables the writer to embrace all facets of society as poetry. *The Late Show* begins with the title poem, a litany of scenes starring icons of the past—Joan Crawford, Natalie Wood, Shirley Maclaine. However, Trinidad’s line breaks and phrasing turn the cinematographic into the lyric—bridging the space between stanza and movie still. The reader is then greeted with a rhymed tribute to old toys, where “all the coloring books streaked with gold,” is followed by a moving recounting of a boy’s love affair with lip gloss. This poem (named after the gloss itself, “Slicker”), as well as “Gloss of the Past,” remind us that even makeup names are important—“Person-to-Person Pink,” “Frost Me Pink”—word combinations that teach even the youngest users the appeal of alliteration, the image a single word can produce.

As Frank O’Hara writes in “Meditations in an Emergency,” “It is easy to be beautiful; it is difficult to appear so.” And Trinidad takes on this challenge in writing poems that are sensationally rife with emotion and loss, while never losing sight of the craft of the work itself. In “From the Life of Joe Brainard,” he writes,

but
when
result
disap-

points
him,
moves
again.

This conclusion to a tender account of a Brainard moment shows the attention Trinidad pays to line breaks in even the most “daily” of his poems. Note the stanza break between “disap” and “points”—this allows the word to be read as “disappears” in addition to “disappoints,” further complicating the poem in its requiring the brain to read at a pace slower than it wants to. The result is a reader who remembers the pleasures that details give.

The Late Show also marks the publication of Trinidad’s masterful crown sonnet, “A Poet’s Death,” a series of eight interlinking sonnets that pay tribute to Rachel Sherwood. The sonnets move through the beauties and complications of friendship yet also represent a certain claim over mourning. I’m reminded of Tim Dlugos’ poem, “At the Point,” which closes with

walk into the empty parlor, sit down, and
play the only song you know by heart.

“A Poet’s Death” is like “playing the only song you know by heart,” in its disclosure of an intensely meaningful friendship—one in which “We both wanted to look like Patti Smith” and “you were more alive than the complacent / suburbanites I despised” and “she liked Byron, Rod Stewart, Waugh, Poe, / Keats, the Cars” and “The first time we talked was on a rooftop.”

In this volume, Trinidad also includes several elegies for his mother that are, as Anselm Berrigan writes, “strong, forthright, courageous statements of love, with all of that feeling’s time-addled shimmering complications and joys uncovered with searching care.” The book as a whole is dedicated to his mother and this echo of both reminiscing and “letting go” reverberate throughout the book—the reader witnesses a man’s journey from “boyhood to manhood,” simultaneously looking forward and looking back. In “Sonnet,” Trinidad writes,

When she placed the last ring in the last cup,
she looked up at me and said, “We never
have enough time to enjoy our treasures.”

And, in writing this book, it is as if Trinidad is allotting himself the time to spend with his own “treasures” or memories. To quote “Classic Layer Cakes,” “a rerun of *I Love Lucy* was also medicinal.”

The closing long poem of *The Late Show*, entitled “Poem Under the Influence,” is a litany-esque collage of moments in a life—beginning with Barbie, traversing the color pink, many cities, relationships, and finally the autograph of an elementary school substitute teacher. Only David Trinidad could write a poem of this length and pack so many seemingly unrelated moments into long line after long line, and yet never lose the reader’s attention. His visual, vibrant wordsmithing is at its best here. I am not sure what “influence” this poem is under, but I do know that the reader falls “under the influence” of the poem instantly. An example,

I met Joe Brainard. I remember standing with him,
both of us awkward and shy,
and glimpsing through the crowd, Martha Diamond’s
blazing skyscrapers.

Trinidad is the master of placing his reader in the moment of the memory of the poem. The reader’s eyes become his eyes, and I can’t think of a better way to see.

Or, what better way to let go than to do it in color?

In closing, I remember the first time I read one of David Trinidad’s poems. It was the late 90’s. I was in my college bookstore. The kitschy psychedelic flowers and tie-dyed cover of *Answer Song* (High Risk, 1994) beckoned to me from the shelf of an otherwise bland poetry section. I remember reading the first poem in the book “Pleasant Street.” I remember the poem’s ending lines:

The best years
of your last life
glide by like

someone whistling
your favorite song.

I remember reading *The Late Show* cover to cover this fall and feeling as though I’d finally heard my favorite song, in the form of a culture-embracing, lattice-framed, emotion-laden, formalist triumph. Or, more simply put—*The Late Show* is one of the best books of the year.

Erica Kaufman lives in Brooklyn.

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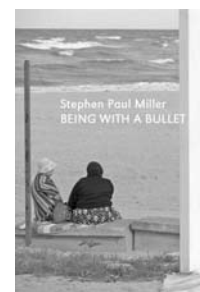
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