



THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER



\$5.00 #219 APRIL-JUNE 2009

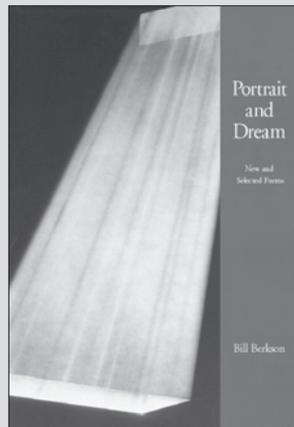


New Poetry from Coffee House Press



Portrait and Dream: New and Selected Poems

BY BILL BERKSON



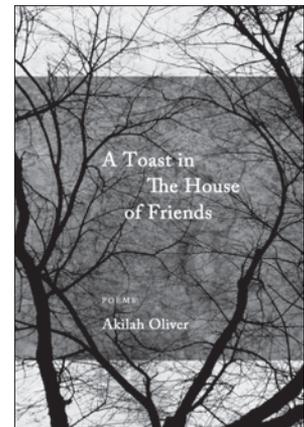
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The major work from Bill Berkson, “a serene master of the syntactical sleight and transformer of the mundane into the miraculous.” (*Publishers Weekly*)



A Toast in the House of Friends

POEMS BY
AKILAH OLIVER



ISBN: 978-1-56689-222-3

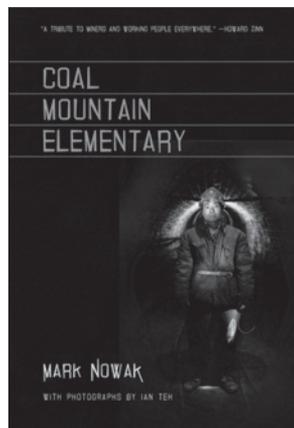
“A Toast in the House of Friends brings us back to life via the world of death and dream . . . Akilah Oliver’s book is an extraordinary gift for everyone.”

—ALICE NOTLEY



Coal Mountain Elementary

POEMS BY
MARK NOWAK
WITH PHOTOGRAPHS
BY IAN TEH



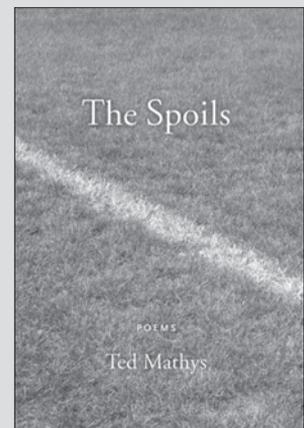
ISBN: 978-1-56689-228-5

“A tribute to miners and working people everywhere . . . [*Coal Mountain Elementary*] manages, in photos and in words, to portray an entire culture.” —HOWARD ZINN



The Spoils

POEMS BY
TED MATHYS



ISBN: 978-1-56689-230-8

“Reading Mathys, one remembers that poetry isn’t a dalliance, but a way of sorting through life-or-death situations.”

—*Los Angeles Times*

COMING SOON

Beats at Naropa, an anthology edited by Anne Waldman and Laura Wright
Poetry from Edward Sanders, Adrian Castro, Mark McMorris, and Sarah O’Brien

Good books are brewing at www.coffeehousepress.org

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NEW YORK NY 10003
www.poetryproject.com

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#219 APRIL-JUNE 2009

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Welcome to the Spring issue of the Newsletter. We three of the office are in a February slump, or it's our lousy chairs contorting our posture. Arlo started "stretch time," but it doesn't seem to have stuck as a daily habit. We're trying to work our computer mice with our left hands because we heard it's good for you. That's about all from our Ergonomics Committee.

While sedentary, we've been working on making a lot of exciting things happen. The Poetry Project launched its **NEW WEBSITE** at www.poetryproject.org! Yes, the .org is finally ours. Please visit it when you are finished reading your Newsletter! It has a lot of interesting content to supplement the Newsletter, a

blog, photo galleries, and useful features that will help us keep in touch. We will treat the site as an ongoing project and eventually develop a robust online presence for our supporters everywhere.

I also want to encourage people to come out in May for the series of three consecutive readings that will serve as our Spring fundraiser (the art auction will return in 2010). John Giorno will give a solo performance, and his first Project feature in over a decade, on Wednesday May 13th; John Ashbery will give a solo reading on Thursday, May 14th; and there will be a panel and reading for *My Vocabulary Did This to Me: The Collected Poetry of Jack Spicer* on Friday, May 15th. Editors Peter Gizzi and Kevin Killian will be present as well as Samuel R. Delany, Jennifer Moxley, George Stanley, Rod

Smith, Dodie Bellamy, and many more. Please see our centerfold calendar for the details.

I would be remiss if I didn't thank John Coletti for his two years of good work (my highest praise!) as Newsletter Editor. Zero more issues, man! Love to you. The next special being in the editorial hot seat will be Corina Copp. I'm relieved to report that Corrine and Arlo have agreed to stay on for another year of doing what we do here at the Poetry Project.

- Stacy Szymaszek

GOODBYE FOREVER

"Shit, I'm busting out of this mill! / Yes, I am! Getting out of this burg! / Leaving! Quitting the place! Splitting! / Making my beat! Making tracks! Hauling out! /

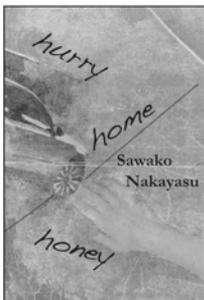
Burning Deck 2009

Michael Gizzi: *New Depths of Deadpan*

Should the two archetypal masks that represent Comedy and Tragedy pass through each other (imagine a total eclipse), might not their overlapping intersection be an expression of deadpan? Or does the almost reckless declarativeness of these poems show a mind's weathering both the antic and the intimate, both merriment and distress?

"Razor sharp but also rich and generously compelling, Michael Gizzi's poetry lambastes as it celebrates"
—John Ashbery [on *No Both*]

Poetry, 72 pages, offset, smyth-sewn, ISBN13: 978-1-886224-96-4, original paperback \$14



Sawako Nakayasu: *Hurry Home Honey*

10 years of love poems, unusual for their sense of moving between cultures, their awareness of physical space as intersection of humans, the land, and architecture. Love itself is now game, sport, speed-time, dance, performance, now contract, conflict, failure, but always a shifting structure of relations.

"An extraordinary voice — an ease that thinly covers a swirling anxiety, a well-honed knowledge of how things turn out; and yet an unending romance with the process of romance, only rarely referential (and never explicit) to the act or state of satisfaction, sexual or otherwise. A sense of possibility."—Craig Watson.

Poetry, 80 pages, offset, smyth-sewn, ISBN13: 978-1-886224-98-6, original paperback \$14

Anne Portugal: *Quisite Moment*

[Série d'Ecriture Supplement, No.5; translated from the French by Rosmarie Waldrop]

For Portugal, "poetry is first and foremost physical." Here, she truncates words to give rise to new rhythms, puzzlement, and sheer fun. "Anne Portugal's exercise in aphaeresis is itself 'quisite!'"—Andrew Zawacki

Poetry, 24 pages, offset, smyth-sewn, ISBN13: 978-1-886224-95-7, saddlestitched \$8



Keith & Rosmarie Waldrop: *Flat With No Key*

An abecedary that ranges from "no stone unturned" to the motion of galaxies.

Poetry, 32 pages, offset, smyth-sewn, ISBN13 978-1-886224-93-3, saddlestitched \$8

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www.burningdeck.com



Heading out! Hauling ass! Heading elsewhere! / Vacating the premises! Bent on all points other! / Vamoose, I! Picking them up and laying them down! / Following the sun! Moving out! Moving on! / Making for more clement climes! Hauling / These bones out of here! Avanti! Away, me! / Me, I'm fading! Fade me! Changing / My whereabouts! my tune! Relocating! / Taking it on the lam! Beating my feet! / Taking the path of least resistance! / Cashing in my chips! Making a fresh start! / Cutting my losses! Tending west! Heading east! / Packing up my old kit bag! Pulling up the stakes! / Draggin'! Cutting loose! This kid's history! / Watch my smoke! I'm breaking my contract! / Keepin' on keepin' on! Emigrating! Moving / My cookies! Changing the record! Making haste! / Going on the run! Read truckin' / For wistfully sprinting! shipping out! / Sailing with the tide! Saddling up! / Mounting my nag! shimmering off! Departing! / Dissembling! Blowing this joint! Disappear! / Making myself scarce! going off! Remaining not! / Otherwise traipsing! Trotting off! Tripping off! / Shifting off! Wandering off! oiling out! / Evacuating! Vanishing! Taking myself elsewhere! / Relocating! Generally resettling! Picking up / The Pieces! Casting my fate to the wind! / Setting sail! Setting out! Setting off! / Turning my back on all that once was! / Burning through! Breaking through! Breaking off! / Shuttling forward! Shuffling off! Cutting the cord! / Jumping bail! Shifting my load! Putting in / For a transfer! Taking it on the road! / Otherwise disposing of myself! Replanting! / Jumping ship! Emptying the coffers! Closing / All accounts! Once since gone! One presently absent! / Aspiring to be no longer among those present! / With us no more! Literally vacuous! / Elsewhere Represented! Fervently without! / Desirous of other office! Sprung! Soon to be / In frequent correspondence with those now present! / Keen maker of the heart grow fonder! Gone / Like a cool breeze! A.W.O.L.! Becoming / Dim-pictured! No longer at this address! / Gone but not forgotten!

Author of this goodbye! / Poof! What I'll do is leave! Though known, / Now vague! Obscure! Abstracted! A nameless haze! / I'm packing it in! Tossing my lot! Casting off! / Cruising through! Disporting anew! Newly moved! / The new hand! New kid on the block! Prominent loss! / Mr. Tootle-oo! Go-go bozo! I'll be shoving off! / Shifting gears! Shagging out! Taking off / For parts unknown! In fact, taking off! / Flying the coop! Taking care of a few last details! / I'm the one winkled away on or about this day! / I'm out of here! Kicking up dust! Dearest, I wish / You the best of everything and shall watch your future career / With considerable interest! Off I go! Skeedaddle! / Flying away! Grabbing a cab! Giving up my chair! / Gone globe-trotting! Soon to present a letter / Of introduction! Sending love to his and her people! / Presuming significant distance! Doing a bolt! / Conspicuous in my absence! Having a wonderful time! / End of transmission! Sayonara! Adios! / Au revoir! Aloha! So long!" ("Goodbye Forever" by Steve Carey).

I've been planning on using that poem here since Winter 2008. Stacy, I'm glad you cajoled me; it has been a journey. And for you faithful proofreaders, future favors. Cori, welcome.... And so, and so, the cape is passed. XOXO.

- John Coletti

FOUNDATION FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS GRANTS FOR 2009

Good news for poets John Godfrey of New York, NY, and David Meltzer of Oakland, CA. They were both awarded FCA grants for their exceptional work. We couldn't agree more.

ONWARDS

We are sad to note the passing of James Schevill (b. 1920) and Inger Christensen (b. 1935).

LITMUS PRESS

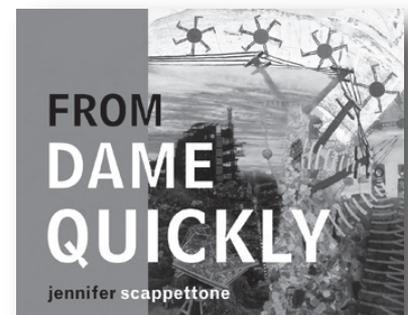
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Hyperglossia

Stacy Szymaszek

ISBN: 978-1-933959-07-8 \$15 US



FROM DAME QUICKLY

jennifer scappettone

From Dame Quickly

Jennifer Scappettone

ISBN: 978-1-933959-06-1 \$15 US

Aufgabe #8

Featuring Russian poetry and poetics guest edited by Matvei Yankelevich

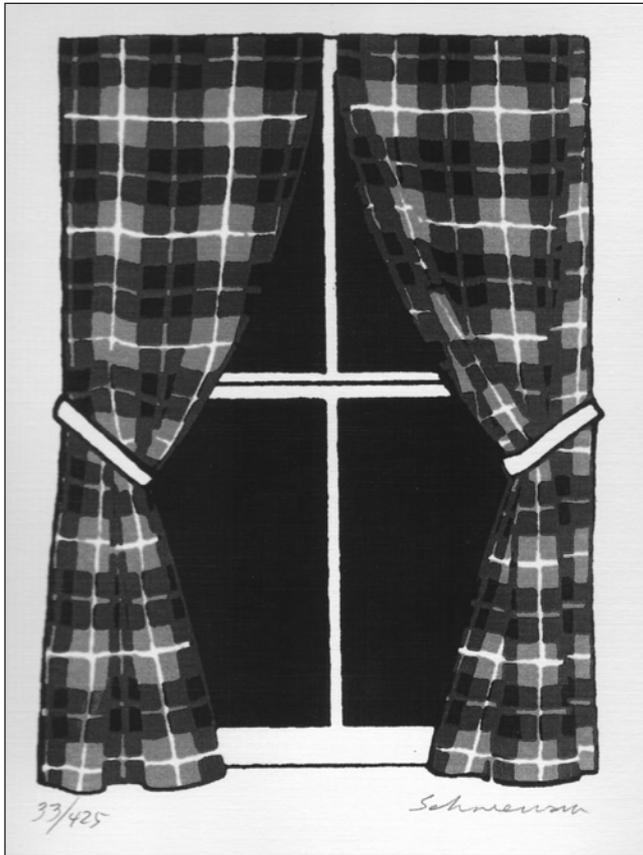
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GEORGE SCHNEEMAN: "I'M THE SKY" (1934-2009)



SILKSCREEN BY GEORGE SCHNEEMAN

The 2009 Schneeman calendar hangs in pride of place on many walls. It shows a piazza in Asciano, Italy. A mysterious and stately beauty emanates from within this enclosure, saying I am empty/full, empty/full. The colors are just right, the unseen human hand of the artist is just right. The sky is perfect. I want to go there.

George Schneeman was one of our heroes. His ethos of modesty never wavered. He did things without fuss, with a shapely and elegant economy, with an alert animalized spirit that sprang from a wiry compact body. George was a force. He could explode, enraged by injustice and stupidity. He even wrote letters to the Metropolitan Museum of Art advising them how high to hang a particular favorite of his or encouraging them to get certain works out of their storage! His favorite painting at the Met is a stunning rose-cheeked, yellow-clothed St. Catherine of Siena painted by Pietro Lorenzetti, who died in the Black Plague in 1348.

George painted extraordinary pictures—they go transcendent on you—of his family and friends. And the paintings of his three sons—Paul, Elio, Emilio—solo or in various combinations—are especially poignant because they represent an angelic surface of calm and ease. They are child-guardians of a secret truth that you are ever in the shadow of. If I could only just...BE that...INHABIT that...generous space. They come at you but are uncannily still, static. They seem to lack for nothing. You want this moment to last and it does,

even as you reach for it. The child, the bird, the cup, the flower, the chair. Although silent, the figures and objects are engaged in a kind of "sacra conversazione," as if they've finally arrived in heaven, or maybe they haven't even been born yet. We pass through the mess and wear of the human realm. It's over. We communicate and expand without speech to one another and to you O troubled gazer. You will be made gentle, happier by this. The spirit in these works is less about redemption than a possible, pleasurable state of existence beyond suffering. No pious apologies. Ron and Ted, 1968. The poets in striped pants of Ted, flowered shirt of Ron, are communing over coffee, and the collage on the wall behind them says, "I'm the Sky."

There are the luminous frescoes and portraits, as well as the Tuscan landscapes from where he and his beloved wife and muse, Katie, lived half-time in recent years: San Giovanni d'Asso. The hundreds of collages crafted and then copied as paintings are surreal visual poems of odd shape, wit, and color, made of pieces of old advertisements or sheet music or images from a children's book on grooming from India; human bodies made subtler by their attachment to a rooster. The collages with poets are legendary—lush, rough, elegant, lyrical, often hilarious with the words and the sensibility of the particular poet. George wrote some of the words too: "As long as the poet is providing energy, that's all I need." And the pottery and clocks and furniture. The list is long. He kept at the work always with a rare intensity, with little financial remuneration or public glory. In addition to the many covers and drawings for poets' books, he drew scores of fliers and posters for events at the Poetry Project. He was the unofficial activity-demon-artist-in-residence-saint, and now emeritus artist-saint, of its widely extended community.

George Schneeman was erudite, a lover of Dante, the *Pisan Cantos*, and Leopardi. He could quote lines in Italian and English. There was always something going on in his studio at 29 St. Marks Place. And in that buzzing brain of his.

His unexpected death left us stunned because he was the ordinary magic in our lives. We won't be seeing George on his bicycle in the neighborhood shopping anymore; he won't be playing Scarlatti on the harpsichord he masterfully assembled anymore; he won't be hunkered down over a collage or at easel, then standing back to see if something "works" (his quick eye). But the work, in all its variety and honesty, remains strong and clear, and there will be time to explore its intricacies and nuances in the future. It still breathes.

We're heartbroken. The calendar hangs in my son Ambrose's room in San Francisco, on a child's wall in Boulder, with friends in San Giovanni d'Asso, and on Alice Notley's wall in Paris. The calendar is on the wall at Emilio's in L.A., on Gian and Rita's wall in their warm kitchen in Venice, and high on the Poetry Project office wall, here, now.

- Anne Waldman
New York City, NY
January 30, 2009

FROM DANTE

for George

I.

Guido, I want you and Giorgio and me
To dig a ditch just by singing
And mess around in a boat, which at every wind
Goes flying o'er the sea to your wish and mine.
Bad Luck, laughing all the while,
Cannot throw big rocks at my feet, but
Ouch! it hurts always living by your talent,
To stand always inside a crescendo!
And the moonlight hits two mountains
Like the number 50 coming in for a landing
And shining with our great songs,
For I have a reason to love you always,
Each one in his ditch contented,
As I think we all soon will be.

II.

From that lady I see a gentle shiver
Go through all the passing saints
And our almost springlike snow
Falls like daytime on a broad lake.
From her eyes a light shines out
Like a little squint of flames
And I grow red hot like a cherry
And look—now I'm an angel.
On the day you say hello
With a piano in your kind attitude
You'll stab us to the heart with virtue
And the sky'll open up like a soprano
And your gaze will come across the earth
With the closeness of wind.



SCHNEEMAN AT WORK, NEW YORK CITY

III.

One day Melancholy came back to me
And said, "I want to stay with you a while."
And it seemed she had brought along
Grief and Rage as company.
And I said, "Go away!"
And she fell upon me like a Greek
And raged in my great head,
Made me look at Love arriving
Dressed again in that black curtain
And on her head a little chapel
And certainly pure glass tears
That made me cry, "I too have one bad thought
That, sweet brother, kills our love and makes us die."

- Ron Padgett

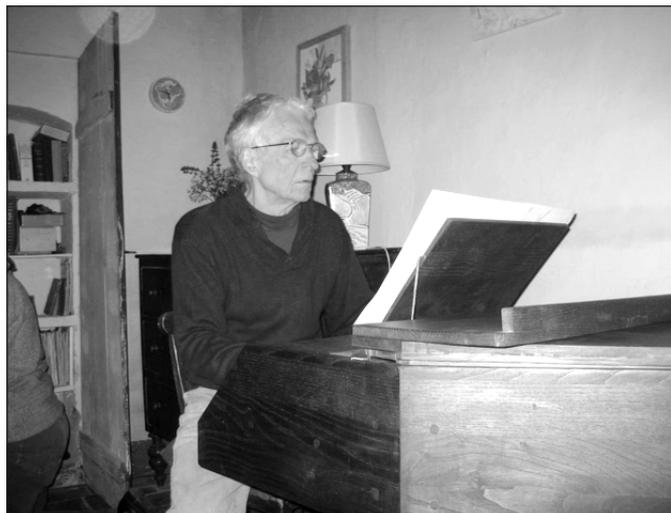
ELYSIUM

Listening to Orfeo
Trying to get his wife out of Hades
("Che puro ciel, che chiaro sol")
I think of George
and how we're his lantern
a ghost a din
You want to get the person back
Go back & dispel the tears
I said in the Bardo hearing the last
sense to go and Katie shouts out
George come back!
& George everywhere the walls
we see with new gaze
happy endings
"closing time" sign at the funeral home
Look back look back
& there's a big bright Venus in the sky
forward
what is our love,
I digress...
"Che faro senza Euridice?"

- Anne Waldman
January, 2009



FRESCO BY GEORGE SCHNEEMAN



SCHNEEMAN AT HIS HARPSICHORD, SAN GIOVANNI D'ASSO. PHOTO: GIANANTONIO POZZI

THINKING ABOUT GEORGE

for George Schneeman

Thinking about George in
January in California
The sinking sun lights a few late
Streamers of cloud with faint blooms
Like the distant inklings of
All one remembers

Under the bare plum tree
A white cat sleeps on a chair
And squirrels chitter in the ivy
Audible for once in the vacuum
Created by traffic's absence
All one remembers

Returns in a moment and
George is present in the mind
And we are alive in the light moving
Into the darkness of all that is lost
To fill the emptiness of the day with
All one remembers

- Tom Clark
January 2009

L'ULTIMO OGGI

ti corro incontro
lenta e senza suono
sei fermo nella curva del prato
eterno nel silenzio del campo
presente
dove la luce chiama le cose per nome
leggero vaso etrusco
clavicembalo
terra secca, orizzonte di cipressi
profumo di erbe cotte, carne e zuppa
spartito di Scarlatti
la noncurante grazia dell'argento
polvere e silenzio
il minimo indispensabile
frequentazione della bellezza, nuda

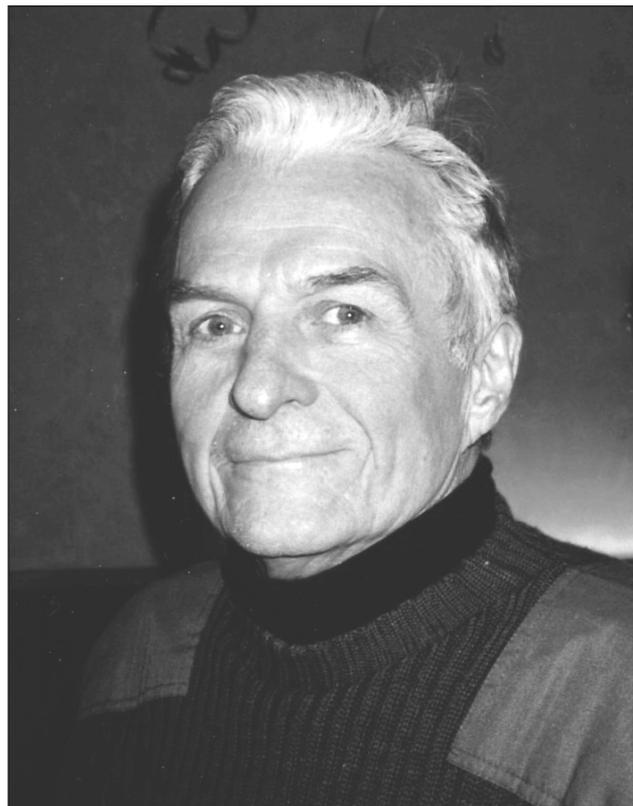
...atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale

THE LAST TODAY

I run toward you
slow and soundless
you're still in the bend of the meadow
eternal in the silence of the field
present
where light calls things by their name
light Etruscan vase
harpsichord
dry ground, cypress horizon
smell of cooked herbs, meat and soup
Scarlatti's score
the nonchalant grace of silver
dust and silence
the bare minimum
attendance of beauty, naked

...atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale

- rita degli esposti
January 2009



GEORGE SCHNEEMAN AT TWO BOOTS, NEW YORK CITY

JESTER

If I should
ever cease
to be that
illustration
of wooing . . .
of falling
into:
Life is physical loving
& death is too: to
get closer & closer to that
body that . . .
riding a river of stars
between the thighs,
I mean, legs.

- Alice Notley
Written on a drawing
by George Schneeman
September 8, 1982

AN INTERVIEW WITH EILEEN MYLES

by Greg Fuchs



PHOTO CREDIT: GREG FUCHS

Eileen Myles has been writing for 40 years. She began while attending the newly formed, non-traditional, and urban U. Mass (Boston), in her hometown, at the end of the 1960s. Yet, Myles really hit her stride when she entered the legendary scene of the inchoate Poetry Project of the early 1970s.

In these four decades she has achieved a distinct style, so economical as to be almost invisible, that has verisimilitude yet is able to destroy our socially constructed realities, giving a reader ample opportunity to reevaluate his assumptions of life. Myles has reached deftness in poetry, fiction, criticism, journalism, drama, even libretti. This eclecticism reveals her bravery, born of curiosity and necessity, to regularly risk the unfamiliar.

From 1984-1986 Myles was the Artistic Director of the Poetry Project. Her tenure was short but significant. During her time the Project matured. It received 501C(3) status, the legal recognition by the Internal Revenue Service granting a not-for-profit institution exemption from federal income tax. A board of directors was formed. A greater diversity of performers and audience was built. Myles played a major part in setting the Poetry Project on a course for longevity.

Myles' working-class Irish Catholic roots, enhanced by her identity as a Lower East Side gay poet, provide her with a perfectly well-informed point of view to examine the contradictory significance of the American dream. Throughout her career Myles has explored, in an autobiographical style, the complicated act of reclaiming the American dream from the very language and values that have made it historically exclusionary. In her first book, *The Irony of the Leash* (Jim Brodey

Books, 1978), the poem "An Attitude About Poetry" exhibits the heteroglossia consistent throughout Myles' oeuvre:

My attitude about poetry is somewhat
this, I should be doing something
that pays more money.
I love comfort, bright things for myself
and the ability to splurge on people I
like, to be able to dislike
people who have bucks.

That is the poetry of money.
Money is a friend,
a comfy chair when you need to sit,
free walking. Buying rides.
Zoom in on this one.
Avoid that one in a helicopter ride
around Australia. Bury
my sorrows in an incredible meal.
You like that star. I buy you that car.
Never drunk but gliding on the
ethers of everyone's
drunkenness.
It trips me up,
my lightweight love of cash,
it clicks on my teeth.
My words jingle.

Thirty years later Myles continues to explore the play between spoken language, idea, and meaning. Soon to be released by Semiotext(e)/MIT Press is Myles'

The Importance of Being Iceland: Travel Essays on Art, which covers more than twenty years of encountering art, culture, desire, aging, alcoholism, poverty, then relative comfort. In the piece titled, “Live Through That?!” she sews a tale of redemption with dental floss. Myles writes,

Incidentally I am 57. I just want to say something different has happened about living in the past few years. Not only am I not “self-destructive” nor am I ambivalent about wanting to live, nor am I unaware that this, all the time I’ve spent telling about toothbrushing, this is actually my life, my time. One’s life is literally that, their duration. And I’ve seen friends die young, much younger than me, and they keep dying my friends and one day I will too. And how I feel right now about that is a little sad because now I want to live so much and have all of my time and do so many things. So I have to attend to the thing in front of me because I am not focused I can get overwhelmed by my desire to do everything STILL, yet as they say the clock is ticking and I won’t get to it all, I can’t. And the impossibility of that choice, of the everything when I was youth, that choice made me a poet because I could have some purchase on everything and do a little bit of it all the day. Just chipping away. And it’s essentially the same now and I’ve made the same choice again, when I decided to do what’s in front of me but I probably can do other things too and I will. I just don’t need to talk about them here.

Myles and I arranged to meet to discuss her life and work at Veselka, the popular Ukrainian restaurant on 9th Street and Second Avenue. She is a writer that I have long admired. I’ve been lucky enough to perform and casually talk with her, but this was a very special meeting for me. The opportunity to interview someone for whom I have great respect and admiration was thrilling. I was a little nervous because the more I prepared, the more I realized how little we really know about anyone.

Veselka was the perfect place to meet. Not only is it one of my favorite places in New York, it has long been a meeting place for artists and writers. Veselka is the Ukrainian word for rainbow—diversity, hope, and inclusiveness were on our side. Myles, just like in her work, immediately made me feel like I was right there with her on her journey through life.

GF: Thank you for being tolerant of my wealth of correspondence and false starts leading up to this interview during the past month.

EM: First can I tell you what I did today? Moved the car. Rode my bike to the Cooper Square Post Office. I sent books to people. I met Peggy Ahwesh. She’s a filmmaker. We’re doing a talk next week at CUNY. I visited Joe Westmoreland. You know him? He’s a great writer. He wrote *Tramps Like Us*. He was my campaign secretary. His partner is Charlie Atlas. In fact, I am Joe’s literary executor. You should always have a healthy executor. Maggie Nelson is my executor. Went home to write recommendations. Got back on my bike and rode to Veselka. Hi Greg.

GF: When did you first know you were a writer?

EM: I suppose in college when I got a certain response from professors. I realized that something that seemed easy to me was actually a skill. I kept a journal of responses to things we were writing. Hawthorne was really moving to me when I was 18. Thoreau.

I went to U. Mass (Boston), not Amherst. The Boston campus was new. The school was built for the Boston kids. Some of the teachers were working-class lefties. Idealistic. Others were sometimes too excited about teaching “less educated” students like us. A teacher there inspired my novel, *The Inferno*.

GF: What did you write?

EM: Mostly poems, and I guess a lot of a kind of imaginary journalism pieces. I always wanted to be a journalist. Going to the Saint Patrick’s Day parade in Southie [a nickname for the Irish section of South Boston] during busing. Seeing the strange, intense responses people were having towards their local politicians. I always loved the city. The city, Boston being the first one, made me want to write.

GF: In *The Importance of Being Iceland* you mention how you really need an assignment to write prose. How were you able to write these imaginary journalism pieces?

EM: They were never finished—notebooks, beginnings. The unspoken thing is that the poetry comes from somewhere else. It’s as if I am commanded to write the poetry.

GF: When did you come to New York? Why?

EM: It felt great here. It always did. The place flowed. It was full of millions of different kinds of people. It seemed anonymous and personal at once. You could get lost here, be excited. It was so full and fast.

GF: How did you get to the Poetry Project? When?

EM: Initially I came because I was a grad student at Queens College, and a professor was doing a study of the East Village in 1910. I was his research assistant, and the Church was on the map, so I went in.

Later, I met Paul Violi at a reading at Veselka, and he told me he was doing a workshop. I had gone to someone’s for about a second the year before, but I totally didn’t get it. I couldn’t figure out what this place was. It seemed cavernous and cultish.

I dropped out of grad school. I didn’t want to be out in Queens. New York was like a big school, a laboratory. Amazing performances right on street corners. Patti Smith was performing poetry.

GF: Did you feel immediately welcomed into the Poetry Project?

EM: Sure. I was living in SoHo and did a magazine called *doggems*, which were like bumper cars. Aesthetics as bumper cars, all different styles bumping into one another. I was reading quantum mechanics. Trying to understand randomness to figure out the avant-garde.

GF: How and when did you become Artistic Director of the Poetry Project? For how long?

EM: 1984. Two years, close to three. After I left the Poetry Project I stopped living in poetry, the poetry world, for a while. The Project had been my home. When I left I started performing, writing plays.

GF: Describe the milieu of the Project at the time.

EM: I'd rather talk about when I just hung out here in the 70s. It was a mess. It was so great. You could smoke and stomp your cigarettes out on the floor. It felt like our institution. But there were big readings then too. Lowell and Ginsberg. History. Robert Duncan. Denise Levertov.

When I worked at the Project my first reading was—well it was Alice [Notley] and Dennis Cooper. The second season was Audre Lorde and Diane Di Prima. The third was David Rat-tray, George-Therese Dickinson, and John Wieners. I initially ran it with Patricia Jones. We were two firsts.

The place really opened up I think. Funding was getting cut. The NEA was downsizing, but we had an art auction. Maybe, no definitely, we expanded the notion of who read at the church. Not so straight, not so white. People were mad. I think it was a generation shift at the Poetry Project, which was long overdue. It was fun. I loved being able to think about a whole institution. Maybe I wasn't so in love with the culture of poverty that attaches itself to poetry so easily. The neighborhood was full of excitement at that time, and we were part of it.

GF: How does it compare and contrast to the current scene?

EM: We were breaking out of something entrenched, and the place is just less entrenched now. But it's hard maybe not to have something to break out of. I wonder how people feel. We should ask people how it really feels in the current scene. I think everyone is haunted by institutions, the academy, these days. It's harder to be outside—if there even is such a thing. It seems like combinations; what's next to what has replaced the idea of an inside or an outside.

GF: How did you come to work for James Schuyler? What can young poets today learn from Schuyler?

EM: Oh they should just read him.

GF: Describe becoming friends with Ted Berrigan?

EM: I loved Ted and Jimmy, but I'm way too alive to want to spend this conversation talking about them.

GF: What is your definition of New York School?

EM: Wayne Koestenbaum was teaching a class on it and he asked me that question. I wrote this in my notebook:

They are poets
involved in
the history
of the present
the school is still open.

GF: What do you think about being described as the last New York School poet?

EM: Generally, and I'm excepting you from this, when someone wants to talk about me as a New York School poet it means he considers himself a LANGUAGE poet and that's how he gets to say it. People really don't like to say they are this or that. They like to say what you are, though. I'm a literalist. I truly did grow to be a poet and an intellectual here.

I feel largely created by the city of New York and the institution of the Poetry Project, at least for the first 10 years I lived here. But that demolishes the fact that I'm really from Boston. There was a cool book that came out about 10 or 12 years ago from the ICA [The Institute for Contemporary Art] in Boston called *Boston School*. In the 19th Century, the Boston School was a bunch of painters who did realist work. In the 20th Century it was largely photographers—Nan Goldin, Jack Pierson. A kind of romantic, punk, realist approach, a kind of using everything sensationally, large, then maybe close and intimately. It was about a very contemporary kind of scale. Pictures. Cameras. There's so many more things to say about any of us than schools of poetry.

I mean now it seems that if you aren't mainstream you're a LANGUAGE poet. Even John Ashbery gets called one. That mainly means that LANGUAGE poets got a foothold in the academy like no other experimental school of poetics has yet. Sometimes the work is not that different from other work. Except that there's a very obvious commitment to identifying with each other in that endeavor. They recommend each other. I recommend my friends too, but still, as a gay poet it was always something else. There was a really interesting transition that happened in the 80s when a lot of poets started writing prose. New Narrative is that. It's the same people who didn't become LANGUAGE poets but really wanted to talk about sex. And language. I mean Kathy Acker's that. Bob Glück. Dennis Cooper. I did start writing prose too, but part of it was being a poet writing around people writing fiction, non-fiction. People writing about art.

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E magazine never had any pictures. It was a little stern. I always had a cool photo on the cover of *dodgems*. Who doesn't like pictures? I only did a couple of issues. I was broke. *Little Caesar* [Dennis Cooper's] was a much more interesting magazine—so permissive, filled with pictures. For a while there was an interesting social flow between all the various groups. I like to say I'm not not a LANGUAGE poet. But AIDS changed everything.

So there was a whole scene of poets from the 70s and 80s, some stopped writing poems, some kept going, but there was a feeling that there might be more space in prose. More room to do things. To make an interior model of a culture. So I think

the poetry school thing really misses the point of movements that are both bigger and smaller than the groups we either assign ourselves to, or get described into. The New York School or the Boston School, or the School of Fish, are about a way of being in reality, using technology, desiring things, people, having a body. No school.

GF: Respond to being described as a rock star of modern poetry, the first punk rock poet and cult figure to a generation of post-punk females forming their own literary avant-garde?

EM: Now you're talking about the tyranny of the web. A little bit of information becomes unstoppable. I had some nice things said about me in the *New York Times* in 2000 when *Cool For You* came out, and I put it into my bio on my website. Then, when I published my next book of poems, I got these reviewer guys saying Myles is a punk poet. She's from the slam scene. Blah blah blah. Everything goes on for years now. What sounds nice once sounds really horrible nine years later. I have to change my website.

GF: What is the difference between poetry and prose?

EM: Prose gives you a chance to describe a culture. I've written a novel about everything I'm saying. There's no better way to say how the worlds move than in prose. I love poetry because it's naturally incomplete.

Historically, it sometimes feels like LANGUAGE poets love poetry. I don't love poetry. I want to destroy poetry, writing. Destroy it with glee. Smash it, take it all the way out, push it as far as possible until it is unrecognizable then bring it back. Destroy the frames.

At the very least make it kind of invisible, that it's art. To me that seems like a challenge. When I say destroy I might mean barely doing it at all. Hardly art. I mean because I use language in the service of other kinds of vision, looking for connections.

GF: You've written poetry, fiction, libretti, journalism, blogs; why do you like to write in so many genres?

EM: I'm a Sagittarius. I don't belong anywhere. Every form takes you somewhere else. Writing a libretto made me understand something that theater never did. A libretto is like an allegory, in the way animation is. The music makes the words move, and you see them in a whole other kind of possibility. It's like the words' second life.

I usually feel burned out by whatever I just did. I know one should do this towering, phallic thing in their career, but I like having a wide, dilettantish, female career.

Poetry's like the root, like a cutting. Also, I thought that's what writers did. You write reviews, essays, plays. You try it all.

GF: When did you meet Jim Brodey?

EM: Jim Brodey is who you got to hang out with in 1978. He published my first book. He had no electricity or even water. He was kind of like this weird star. He had sex with everyone.

GF: I want to edit a book of Jim Brodey's rock-n-roll writing for Subpress, like Greil

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

— Bhanu Kapil, *Humanimal*

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

— Susan Gevirtz, *Starry Messenger*

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

— Susan Thackrey

www.kelseyst.com

Marcus's Lester Bangs book, *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*. Do you think that's an interesting idea in 2009?

EM: Well anything is.

GF: How did you become such good friends with Tom Carey?

EM: It was a largely straight scene. I mean this neighborhood exactly. We were both middle children. We sort of got each other immediately.

I went to a reading and there was this guy in a coat and tie playing guitar and singing. He was with Neil Hackman. I wanted to be friends with Tom. He was gay. Also, he knew Brodey from California.

Later he became a Franciscan, which has fostered a way for me to be near and around religion, always a moving danger. I went with Tom to George Schneeman's funeral, which was a Catholic mass. Very moving. I took communion. My mother would not be happy; she is a strict Catholic.

GF: I always take communion. I believe I did enough time in Catholic school. Anyway, there is a moment in the mass when you ask God for forgiveness, which is technically all you have to do to receive communion.

EM: My mother wouldn't buy it.

GF: As a former presidential candidate, what are your predictions for President Obama?

EM: I hate his economic team. That's all I can say. He feels great. I love more than anything his daughter taking pictures at the inauguration. That was stunning.

GF: Talk about feminism. Where do you situate yourself in the history of feminist discourse?

EM: I don't know what that means. I'm biologically female, but I've often felt like a man. But when you think about the place of rape in the history of the world, of the kind of mundane enslavement of women that's part of the history of the world.... I have no idea what feminism means. It feels too small for responding to that large an offense.

I mean that in the average woman's gene code there's a story of being taken from your home and brought to another land repeatedly for hundreds and thousands of years.

Hey buddy. Goin' somewhere? Bring some women!

It's hard to really think about what it means to be female in the history of the world. Slavery is our history. All I can ever imagine doing is describing with my male-female eyes what it's like to move with this body and these ideas in this life.

GF: Why do you write about art?

EM: I made art as a kid. All kids make art. At some point when I was no longer sad that I didn't make art I could really let it in how wonderful the things people are making are.

It moves your mind around. When you learn to read your brain actually changes. I think all art, really interesting, good art, and who knows what that is, it just picks up everything you know and throws it.

GF: How did you get to the University of California San Diego?

EM: They offered me a lot of money.

GF: Why did you leave?

EM: They couldn't offer me enough. I wasn't bred by that institution. You're in a constant power struggle with people who don't really understand what you do. I think artists really need a new kind of institution to give teaching the dignity it deserves.

I love to teach, but I think I should be able to get health insurance from it, and a stipend and an opportunity to plug into art and teaching institutions all over the world.

The academy is pretty good for academics but kind of stifling for artists. I was lucky to get in and get out.

I created the MFA program. I did everything but start it. I guess I wrote it. The building itself now is actually making people sick. It's in the news.

GF: West Coast versus East Coast?

EM: I love the West Coast. Great for writing. Giant. Tons of waiting in cars.

San Diego was a small town like Boston, so in some ways I was a little too comfortable. L.A.'s great. Good art, wonderful neon, and you get to live in a house. But I grew alienated very easily. I like getting slammed by encounters the way New York City operates. I would like to live maybe in Europe or South America for a while.

GF: Why is it so hard for some to write for a living and seemingly so easy for others? Is it a class issue?

EM: Which people do you mean? I think anyone can write for a living. It's which living, though, that is the question.

GF: How do class issues come to the surface in a classless society?

EM: Is that like a zen question?

We're like the alcoholic, classless society. What elephant? I don't see any elephant.

Everything's class. Sex is class. Gender's class.

I think one is supposed to assimilate. And anything other than that is considered sentimental or masochistic. So you'll have someone like Philip Levine or Charles Bukowski considered working class writers because of content. But not say Ron Silliman or Rae Armantrout or Amiri Baraka. One could be called a political writer or a feminist writer but not an upper class writer. Most of us have really complex class relations.

GF: Do you have any advice for writers?

EM: Yeah, have an interesting life.

When I was a kid my mom would give me a nickel to put in the collection plate at church. One Sunday upon returning home from mass I reached into my pocket. The nickel was still there. I wanted to give it back to my mother, so I threw it up the stairs toward her bedroom. The nickel went up through the spindles of the banister, landed on her nightstand, on its edge, flickering. It's actually been interesting ever since. That's the thing I'm interested in, the thing that's teetering. What will it become?

GF: What are you reading this week?

EM: *Marco Polo: From Venice to Xanadu*. Robert Walser's *Jacob von Gunten*. CA-Conrad's *Frank Poems*.

GF: Do you read the newspaper?

EM: *The New York Times*. A lot.

GF: Watch television?

EM: Not at all.

GF: Listen to the radio?

EM: If I'm driving. NPR usually. I hate it.

GF: What do you think about a poet having a day job?

EM: What's a day?

GF: Can you describe the 'zine *Caveman*?

EM: It was based in laughter. We would have these small private ideas of strikes we could make on the poetry community. You know, like two or three people would come up with something that all three would laugh at. We'd either write fake missives from people, lists of who someone would like to have sex with, or had. Then a few real documents would be dropped into the mess. It was like a private joke gone social. They're very odd-sized. Hard to know where to put a caveman, ever.

GF: I simply loved reading *The Importance of Being Iceland*. Can you describe the process of getting that book deal with Semiotext(e)/MIT? The editing process? What was your selection process?

EM: I've had such a book in the works for a long time. They asked for it and suggested I get one of those Warhol grants, and I suggested they do it for me. And I got it, strangely. I think I shouldn't be allowed to write my own grants.

It's been hard. You know, somewhere in your 50th year you hit this archival moment where everything seems to make you reach deep into your file cabinets. It's like a root canal. It's like being dead. So, though I dredged all this stuff, mostly only the art things are in it now. Some talks, some essays.

It's murder once you start assembling stuff because immediately there's too much, and you have to make criteria for

what's in and what's out. I decided it was two books, and that's helpful, but it's really three, so they are wanting the book to be shorter, and I can't let go of this or that at this point.

It's been murder, but I'll be happy to see it out and in the world.

GF: I've read many of your poems, your prose, fiction. I admire you and your work. I loved your opera, *Hell*. Thanks for being terrific. You are inspiring. What does anyone know about a writer? Why do we look to others for inspiration?

EM: I think we just don't know how to start, and someone puts something together that's recognizable, but not how you ever imagined anything happening.

GF: What writers do you admire?

EM: God so many. Bob Glück and Dodie [Bellamy]. Jimmy [Schuyler]. Renee Gladman. Ariana Reines. Her play is astonishing. Gail Scott. Juliana Spahr. Rae Armantrout. Steve Benson. Susie Timmons. Tisa Bryant. Tim Peters. Kim Lyons. Joanna Fuhrman. Roberto Bolaño. CAConrad. Chris Kraus. Fanny Howe. Halldor Laxness. He's the greatest. Always John Wieners. Always Christopher Isherwood.

Jonathan Lethem. Chip Delany. Can Xue. Pasternak. Alice Notley. Reb Anderson. Zizek.

Bruce Chatwin. Kerouac. Henry Miller. Violette Leduc. Yes, I love Henry Miller. Rosebud.

You know the story of Rosebud? Rosebud Pettet. She was friends with Allen Ginsberg. She wrote an account of Allen's death, when everyone was in his loft right before he died. I tried to get it published in *Harper's*. They were seriously considering it, then rejected it by telling me we don't do biography. I loved that categorical denial.

Rosebud's piece was brilliant, like an Isherwood piece. She happened onto this intense scene, and her eyes opened like a camera.

GF: Describe your experience working with magazines. Why *Vice*?

EM: The magazine world is contiguous with ours. People work in one place, and you have a relationship and they go someplace else, so then you go there too.

My friends at *Vice* used to be at *Index*. Magazines are fun because you kind of have to be shameless. If you want something you have to hound them, and you have to keep doing it in a non-angry way. It's sort of a good practice. Anything I can be that way about I have to keep doing.

GF: Do you think regular people can get ahead in life without being jerks?

EM: No, but you can go someplace else.

In the 70s it was possible to break out beyond the poetry community, and I mean that in a good way. I mean you didn't think you were writing for just us. I think all of the writers around thought they could do what Michael Ondaatje or Lydia Davis did. I mean even get rewarded for being weird. No, but I'm saying something larger than that—that we ought to write for openings that aren't there. That we change the manner of our reception by writing for how we receive the worlds we cross to know ourselves.

Peoples' careers are as differently shaped as they are. The question remains, do you have the courage to have the career that you want, which is generally the one you already have? It's not so horrible to be here.

GF: Maybe you should write a self-help book.

EM: I'd like to. I've had the idea to do so.

GF: What is your Lower East Side?

EM: A place of deep convenience and old history.

Eileen Myles is the author of more than twenty books of poetry and prose, including Chelsea Girls, Cool for You, Sorry, Tree, and Not Me, and is the coeditor of The New Fuck You, an anthology of lesbian writing. Myles was head of the writing program at University of California, San Diego, from 2002 to 2007. Most recently, she received a fellowship from the Andy Warhol/Creative Capital Foundation. Myles ran for president in 1992.

Greg Fuchs is the author of Came Like It Went, Metropolitan Transit, New Orleans Xmas, Rolling Papers, and Temporary. He is a member of Subpress publishing collective. Fuchs is co-editor of Open 24 Hours, which publishes poetry in the spirit of the mimeo-revolution of the 1960s. He serves as the President of the Board of Directors of the Poetry Project.

EVENTS AT THE

MAY

MONDAY 5/4

DOROTHEA LASKY & KRISTIN PALM

Dorothea Lasky is the author of *AWE* and *Black Life*. Her chapbooks include *Tourmaline*, *The Hatmaker's Wife*, *Art*, and *Alphabets and Portraits*. She studies creativity and education at the UPenn. **Kristin Palm** resides in San Francisco. Her writing has appeared in *LVNG*, *Bird Dog*, *Boog City*, *Chain*, *There*, *Dusie*, and the anthology *Bay Poetics*.

WEDNESDAY 5/6

ARTHUR'S LANDING

Please join us for a special performance by **Arthur's Landing**, a band formed to celebrate the musical genius of **Arthur Russell**. Members of the band are all friends of Russell's who worked closely with him: **Steven Hall**, **Peter Zummo**, **Ernie Brooks**, **Joyce Bowden**, **Mustafa Ahmed**, **John Scherman**, **Bill Ruyle** and **Elodie Lauten**. A booklet of Arthur's lyrics called *Service of Mind* will be printed especially for this event. Seminal avant-garde composer, singer-songwriter, cellist, and disco producer Arthur Russell is the focus of the feature length 2008 documentary *Wild Combination* from director Matt Wolf. A biography, called *Hold Onto Your Dreams* by Tim Lawrence, is due out this year.

*This event will be held in the Sanctuary of St. Mark's Church.

MONDAY 5/11

SIMON CUTTS & NANCY KUHL

Simon Cutts is a poet artist and editor who began Coracle in the early 1970s. The Coracle Press Archives are held in the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. A recent book of essays, *Some Forms of Availability*, was published last year. **Nancy Kuhl's** first full-length collection of poems, *The Wife of the Left Hand*, was published in 2007. She is the author of *The Nocturnal Factory* and *Means of Securing Houses &c. from Mischief by Thunder and Lightning*. She is co-editor of Phylum Press and Curator of Poetry of the Yale Collection of American Literature at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

WEDNESDAY 5/13

JOHN GIORNO

John Giorno was born in New York and graduated from Columbia University in 1958. He was the "star" of Warhol's film *Sleep*. He is the author of *You Got to Burn to Shine*, *Cancer in My Left Ball*, *Grasping at Emptiness*, *Suicide Sutra*, and has produced 59 LPs, CDs, tapes, videopaks, and DVDs for Giorno Poetry Systems. He founded the AIDS Treatment Project and is an important force in the development of Tibetan Buddhism in the West.



MONDAY 4/20

TALK SERIES-

AMMIEL ALCALAY, WRITING IN TONGUES: PLAIN LANGUAGE & THE POLITICS OF PRINT

In this talk **Ammiel Alcalay** will explore some of his experiences in the realm of literary and political activism, as a writer, translator, interpreter, and member of vari-

ous groups and organizations, particularly in relation to issues regarding Israel/Palestine and ex-Yugoslavia. His books include *After Jews & Arabs*, *Memories of Our Future*, and *from the warring factions*. A new book of essays, *A Little History*, is due out and a major new project, *to write a republic / The Poetics of Political Memory*, is in progress.

WEDNESDAY 4/22

BILL BERKSON & NORMA COLE

Bill Berkson is the author of sixteen books and pamphlets of poetry, including *Serenade*; *Fugue State*; a volume of his collaborations with Frank O'Hara, *Hymns of St. Bridget & Other Writings*; and the portfolio *Gloria* with etchings by Alex Katz. *Portrait and Dream: New & Selected Poems* is just out with Coffee House Press. **Norma Cole** is a poet, painter, and translator. Among her books are *Collective Memory*, *Do the Monkey*, and *Spinoza in Her Youth*. *Where Shadows Will: Selected Poems 1988-2008* will appear in April 2009.

FRIDAY 4/24 [10 PM]

LAWRENCE GIFFIN & NICO VASSILAKIS

Lawrence Giffin is the author of *Get the Fuck Back into That Burning Plane*. A member of the Lil' Norton, Giffin is the series editor of *The Physical Poets Home Library*. **Nico Vassilakis** is a curator for the Subtext Reading Series in Seattle. His vispo videos have been shown in exhibits of innovative language arts. He is the author of *Text Loses Time* and the forthcoming *Disparate Magnets* and *Protracted Type*.

MONDAY 4/27

SARAH MANGOLD & RYAN MURPHY

Sarah Mangold is founder and editor of *Bird Dog*, a journal of innovative writing and art. Her books include *Household Mechanics*, *Parlor*, *Picture of the Basket*, and *Boxer Rebellion*. **Ryan Murphy** is the author of *Down with the Ship* as well as the chapbooks *The Gales*, *Ocean Park*, and *On Violet Street*. He is an editor for Four Way Books.

WEDNESDAY 4/29

80TH BIRTHDAY READING FOR KENWARD ELSLIE

Help us celebrate the great poet and librettist **Kenward Elmslie** at 80. Friends and collaborators will assemble to read their favorite Elmslie poems, sing their favorite Elmslie songs and pay tribute to the master showman. With **Bill Berkson**, **Maxine Chernoff**, **Bill Corbett**, **Ann Lauterbach**, **Chip Livingston**, **Ron Padgett**, **Ned Rorem**, **Michael Silverblatt**, **Steven Taylor**, and more to be announced.

APRIL

WEDNESDAY 4/1

DOLORES DORANTES & LAURA SOLÓRZANO W/ JEN HOFER

Dolores Dorantes's books include *sexoPUROsex-oVELOZ*, *Lola (cartas cortas)*, *Para Bernardo: un eco*, and *Poemas para niños*. **Laura Solórzano** is the author of *Boca Perdida*, *Lobo de Labio* and *Semilla de Ficus*. **Jen Hofer's** latest book is *The Route*, with Patrick Durgin. She will read her English translations of the work of Dorantes and Solórzano.

MONDAY 4/13

OPEN READING

Sign-in 7:45 PM

WEDNESDAY 4/15

RUXANDRA CESERAENU & ANDREI CODRESCU

Andrei Codrescu and **Ruxandra Ceseraenu** read from *The Forgiven Submarine* their book-length collaborative poem. **Ruxandra Ceseraenu** is one of Romania's best-known poets, the author, among other books, of *Gradina Deliciilor*, *Zona Vie*, *Venetia cu vene violete*, and *The Crusader Woman*. **Andrei Codrescu's** most recent books, in addition to *The Forgiven Submarine*, are *Jealous Witness: New Poem* and *The Posthuman Dada Guide: Tzara and Lenin Play Chess*.

FRIDAY 4/17 [9:30 PM]

A NIGHT WITH HERETICAL TEXTS VOL. 4

Heretical Texts is an ongoing Factory School book series that aims to test old assumptions about the political efficacies of poetic texts. Since 2005, Factory School has published twenty titles under the *Heretical Texts* series banner. Volume 4 includes books by Jules Boykoff, Brett Evans, Erica Kaufman, kathryn I. pringle, and Frank Sherlock. Readers include Kaufman, pringle, Sherlock, and Bill Marsh. **Erica Kaufman** is the author of *Censory Impulse* and co-curates *Belladonna. **kathryn I. pringle** is the author of *Right New Biology* and lives in Durham, NC. **Bill Marsh** has co-directed Factory School since its founding in 2000. **Frank Sherlock** is the author of *Over Here* and the co-author of *Ready-To-Eat Individual* with Brett Evans. A collaboration with CAConrad entitled *The City Real & Imagined: Philadelphia Poems* is forthcoming.)

THE POETRY PROJECT

THURSDAY 5/14
JOHN ASHBERY

John Ashbery's *Notes from the Air: Selected Later Poems* won the 2008 Griffin International Prize for Poetry. *The Landscapist*, his collected translations of the poetry of Pierre Martory, was published in 2008. The Library of America published the first volume of his *Collected Poems* in fall 2008. This will be his only solo reading in the NYC area during winter/spring of 2009.

*This event will be held in the Sanctuary of St. Mark's Church.

FRIDAY 5/15 [6:30 PM / 8PM]
MY VOCABULARY DID THIS TO ME: PANEL & READING FOR THE COLLECTED JACK SPICER

This special event is to honor seminal West Coast poet **Jack Spicer** (1925-1965). *My Vocabulary Did This to Me* (edited by Peter Gizzi and Kevin Killian) is a landmark publication of this essential poet's life work, and includes poems that have become increasingly hard to find.

*Co-presented with Poets House.

6:30pm: Panel in the Parish Hall with **Dodie Bellamy, Samuel R. Delany, Peter Gizzi, Kevin Killian, and Jennifer Moxley.**

8:00pm: Reading in the Sanctuary with **Dodie Bellamy, Anselm Berrigan, Julian T. Brolaski, CA Conrad, Samuel R. Delany, Larry Fagin, Peter Gizzi, Kevin Killian, Basil King, Douglas A. Martin, Deborah Remington, Harris Schiff, Rod Smith, George Stanley, Lewis Warsh, and Karen Weiser.**

MONDAY 5/18
TALK SERIES—CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN
ON MYSTERIES OF THE ICONOGRAPHIES

Carolee Schneemann is a multidisciplinary artist who has transformed the very definition of art, with work encompassing painting, film, performance, and installation. *Correspondence Course* is forthcoming from Duke University Press. In 2002 *Imaging Her Erotics—Essays, Interviews, Projects* was published by MIT Press; previously published books include *More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Work and Selected Writing* (1979, 1997) and *Cezanne, She Was A Great Painter* (1976).

WEDNESDAY 5/20
PAUL LAFARGE & LISA ROBERTSON

Paul LaFarge is the author of three books, *The Artist of the Missing, Haussmann, or the Distinction*, and *The Facts of Winter*. He has written essays on Hannah Arendt, phrenology, and the game Dungeons & Dragons, among other topics. **Lisa Robertson's** *Lisa Robertson's Magenta Soul Whip* has just been published by Coach House Books. She is currently artist in residence at California College of the Arts. She is the author of *The Men, The Weather, and Occasional Works* and *Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture*, among other titles.

MONDAY 5/25
THE RECLUSE 5 READING,
FOR GEORGE SCHNEEMAN

Join us for our annual spring reading by contributors to the Poetry Project's in-house magazine, *The Recluse*. Issue 5 is dedicated to the artist **George Schneeman** (1934-2009). Contributors include **Anselm Berrigan, Edmund Berrigan, Lisa Birman, Todd Colby, Corrine Fitzpatrick, Cliff Fyman, Steven Hall, Vincent Katz, Michael Lally, Pamela Lawton, Elinor Nauen, Maureen Owen, Gary Parrish, Will Yackulic**, and more t.b.a.

*Please note that there will be a formal tribute to George Schneeman on November 11, 2009 in the Sanctuary of St. Mark's Church.

WEDNESDAY 5/27
POESIA ULTIMA / ITALIAN POETRY NOW

Join Jennifer Scappetone and Carla Billitteri as they present four Italian poets for an evening of poetry and translation. **Maria Attanasio** is the author of five collections of poetry and four works of historical fiction. **Giovanna Frene**, alias **Sandra Bortolazzo's**, books of poetry are *Immagine di voce, Spostamento, Datità, Stato apparente*, and *Sara Laughs*; and, as Federica Marte, *Orfeo e morto*. **Marco Giovenale's** books of poetry include *Il segno meno, Double click*, and *La casa esposta*. **Milli Graffi** has produced works of sound poetry and four poetry collections, most recently *Embargo Voice*, as well as a novella called *Centimetri Due*. She is editor-in-chief of the journal *Il Verri*. **Carla Billitteri's** translations of contemporary Italian poetry have appeared in *Boundary 2, How2*, and *Fascicle*, among other journals. A selection of her translations of Alda Merini's *Aphorisms* is forthcoming. **Jennifer Scappetone**, guest-editor of *Aufgabe 7*, is author of *From Dame Quickly* and of several chapbooks, including *Ode oggettuale*, a bilingual edition out from *La Camera Verde*.

FRIDAY 5/29 [10 PM]
PHILLIP DMOCHOWSKI & STEPHEN MCLAUGHLIN

Stephen McLaughlin and Phillip Dmochowski are the editors of Principal Hand Publishing Series. Stephen is a poet/programmer whose first release, with Jim Carpenter, was *Issue 1*, a 3,785-page e-chap. Stephen edits the podcast "PoemTalk at the Writers House," and is a contributing editor at PennSound and ubu.com. Phillip is an artist, DJ, and director of DNA Gallery in Provincetown, MA. His first book, *Indian Method*, documents a systematic disfiguration of rare books and is forthcoming from Patrick Lovelace Editions.

JUNE

MONDAY 6/1
CARLOS T. BLACKBURN & BETSY FAGIN

Carlos T. Blackburn, author of *Portraits* and *The Selected Poems of Hamster*. Born at the New York Infirmary for Indigent Women and Children, 1969; raised in Brooklyn. Work as a soccer coach, bike messenger, roller coaster operator, collegian (anthropology), fishmonger, copy editor, demolition worker, bartender, and teacher all form a part of his résumé. **Betsy Fagin** is the author of *Belief Opportunity, Rosemary Stretch*, and *For every solution there is a problem*, as well as a number of self-published chapbooks.

ALL EVENTS BEGIN AT 8PM
UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

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

WEDNESDAY 6/3
STEVE CAREY BOOK PARTY

Edmund Berrigan and Anselm Berrigan co-edited **Steve Carey's** *Selected Poems* for Subpress. The book will be available for the reading. Carey's books include *The California Papers* (United Artists), *Gentle Subsidy* (Big Sky), *Smith Going Backwards* (Cranium Press), and *20 Poems* (Unimproved Editions Press). Carey passed away in 1989. Readers will include **Anselm Berrigan, Edmund Berrigan, Tom Carey, Peggy DeCoursey, Marion Farrier, Greg Fuchs, Eileen Myles, Elinor Nauen, Simon Pettet, Harris Schiff**, and others.

MONDAY 6/8
SPRING WORKSHOP READING

Come and hear what the writers who took workshops with **Larry Fagin, Sparrow, Jeffery Conway, and Susie Timmons** have been up to! Workshop leaders will be on hand to introduce them.

WEDNESDAY 6/10
TINA BROWN CELONA & MARC NASDOR

Tina Brown Celona is a graduate of Brown University and the Iowa Writers Workshop and the author of *Songs and Scores, The Real Moon of Poetry and Other Poems, and Snip Snip!*. Currently working on a Ph.D. in English at the University of Denver, where she is studying Edwardian novels, Renaissance poetics, the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and prosody. **Marc Nasdor's** most recent book is *Sonnetailia*, published by Roof Books. He is currently working on a new series of poems, *Insurgentes*. He also spins global party music in the Lower East Side under the name DJ Poodlecannon.

FRIDAY 6/12 [10 PM]
POETS' POTLUCK IV

Come on by and celebrate the beginning of the summer and the end of poem season with **Diana Hamilton & Nicole Wallace** as they bring to close their first co-curatorial run. Make sure to bring yourself & something to share, like shortcake or sangria. Participants t.b.a.

THE POETRY PROJECT
IS LOCATED IN
ST. MARK'S CHURCH AT THE CORNER
OF 2ND AVE & 10TH ST IN MANHATTAN
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SCHEDULE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

An Introduction to Two Poems by Steve Carey

by Maureen Owen

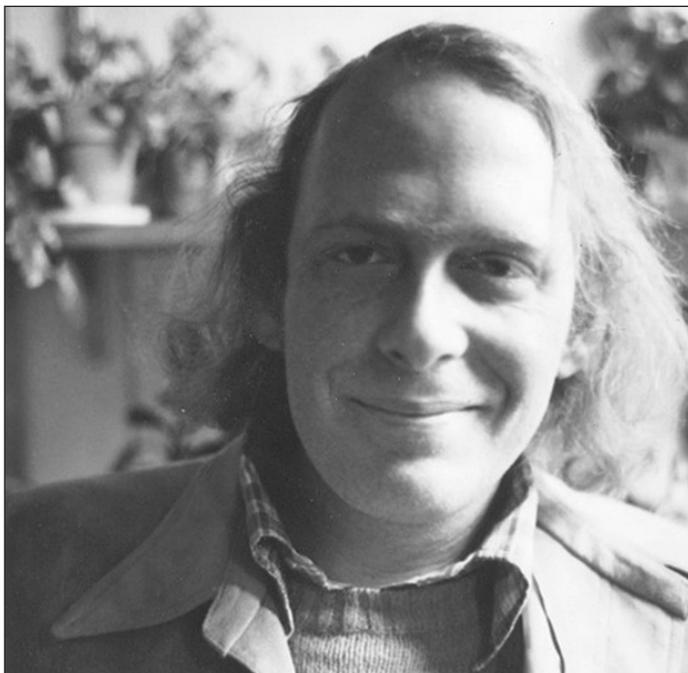


PHOTO CREDIT: ESTATE OF STEVE CAREY

I first read Steve Carey's "Poem" in the staple-bound mimeograph 1987 edition of his collection *20 Poems*. Casting about in my semi-organized bookshelves, I find two copies of this gathering of works. One is on regular, inexpensive 20-pound copy paper with two short staples in the upper left hand corner, both of which barely make it through the pages to tuck over on the back cover, which, like the front cover, is on the same 20-pound stock. Turning that cover page, one is directly in the poems; no title page or publishing information. I can't recall if Steve handed this prized pamphlet to me while running into each other, on 2nd Avenue perhaps, or if Alice Notley gave me an early copy before producing the more extravagant version she published in conjunction with Unimproved Editions Press, composed in 11 point Bembo by Ira Ungar—the second of my cherished texts. This second, more book-like version has heavy card stock on both front and back covers, a title page, an official copyright page, and inside pages on an exceptional stock that is more like opaque drawing paper—weighty, slightly off-white, a texture substantial to turn with the fingers. Both versions have a quick-handed brush and ink cover drawing by Alice Notley of what could be a street pigeon startled into flight or that rare bird, third person of the Trinity, dwelling within the human soul; the spirit moving "upon the face of the waters" in Genesis. Could this drawing be the poet's evocation to his poems?

Almost immediately we encounter this airiness of oddly spiritual mystery folded between layers of physical movement in "Poem":

She holds the bird a minute to her lips
Before returning it, weary, home:
Something signal and fine
With more than a bit of the randier ads

Who is this "She," a chance happening the poet comes upon of an actual person in scenario or a cardboard ad herself? Either way she is of the stuff of wondering along that thin line where the refined abstraction of the image can achieve more physical connection and attrac-

tion than the more obvious corporeal/sensual. The poet's perception is what is on the move here. Carey's fluid lyric develops and draws on connections we don't see coming. Pronouns shift as the poet's "I" transmogrifies into "we" and "our" and then back to "she." Exploring the boundaries of his images, he sets them to resonate against one another, creating rigorous enjambments of meandering. The structure of his pace excites and engages without demanding the participation of the reader. A music emerges from the colloquial energy generated as the poet speaks/sings directly into the poem:

"Bitchin' kamikazee ingénue" is right
(singing, "Do wah diddy, diddy dum diddy do")

And in this rhythm meter moves as eclectically as confronting actions through Carey's lines. Walking and halting beats stutter out the finely formed coherence that emerges from what at times seems a paratactic structure, but what proves to rely on the absolutely sequential choices of play the poet has woven with his disparate associations. Brilliantly the poet has designated his lines to create a narrative out of abstract localities rebounding emphatically as we join our heroine from the beginning line, "Turning her face to her sources."

In a similar self-reflecting sense, Carey's "The Old Enthusiast" depicts the circular nature of the poet's use of associations; something constantly recreating itself and other cycles beginning anew as soon

POEM

She holds the bird a minute to her lips
Before returning it, weary, home:
Something signal and fine
With more than a bit of the randier ads
And hence, as I dreamed it, a sense of people
Having died in the name of the sentiments
They contained. We have forfeit
The requirement of our consent.
We begin to hear more than we'd wished.
Now, again, she is damned and appropriate.
"Bitchin' kamikazee ingénue" is right
(singing, "Do wah diddy, diddy dum diddy do")
Like the guys who followed the birds south
Laying down a railroad along their path –
Stunts recalling amphetamines' exacting perfidy
(Now grown sweet) or even, more recently,
Engaged in locating subatomic deities,
Perhaps merely standing, greatly, by.
From a walk to a halt to a walk –
What it amounts to. And so
Back out into the customary air
Turning her face to her sources.

as they end. Carey appears to presuppose the idea that certain contexts have existed or persisted in a collective human past and that these continue in the present. Through the alchemy of language he is trying to pin them down. Calling up the shadows and mirrors by the names of age and wisdom and dying, he places them simultaneous in his day. While this poem doesn't take place within the confines of a single day, it does focus on the singular fashion of what can be misplaced or found in that cycle. Carey's day expands, gracious and searching for meaning. Describing "Life by a sea you can't live in" in heart-rending disappointment that this is no longer possible, "and a death neglecting the tutored heart," he presents an "entire congregation" looking, "Where is it?"

This piece has a lot of space happening and the poet is at home in it. He relaxes there between the language and the pronouncements. Gracing his realizations with an emphasis on doubt that anything can come of "age and wisdom" he cites the frailness of complaints, whether about the weather or things more real. We sense his existential dilemma of living in this world. Surveillance and observation have endowed him with the power of portraying his viewpoint through poetic consternation, but he knows it won't halt the Ouroboros-like state of our being.

The last four lines of this poem are of the most beautiful and powerful I have ever read. Here the poet reflects on the harsh reality of the situation, but unlike Dylan Thomas' rage "against the dying of the light," Carey uses the intimacy of his truth to lay out the desperate vulnerability of our acceptance. It seems to me the last two lines of this quatrain sum up the whole of our lives by presenting them not as a tragedy or as a breakthrough, but as the way we go forward into our own quotidian as that "Old Enthusiast," so full of existence and the beauty around us where "everything matters!":

you think, you sense, you feel –
[everything matters!–
you do so much – and then you go to
[bed again.

That's poetry.

Maureen Owen is the author of ten poetry titles, most recently Erosion's Pull from Coffee House Press, a finalist for the Colorado Book Award and the Balcones Poetry Prize. She currently teaches at Naropa University both on campus and in the low-residency MFA Creative Writing Program and is editor-in-chief of Naropa's on-line zine not enough night.

THE OLD ENTHUSIAST

Doubts of plastic certainty – age and wisdom –
an automatic ivy one of many reasonable shades
trucking its applicability and mouthing hands
far over the horizon at the farthest fence and morning –
never memorable in a mirror or a shadow
but possibly summoned by surprise in a similar dying
sometime that day.

The constantly new darks.

Later – life by a sea you can't live in,
and a death neglecting the tutored heart
Where is it? –
and the entire congregation ceases in its seats at once,
some looking.

Here comes the echo – an accusation.
The question itself is evidence –
the slogan is lifted, you see, from its dilemma
and taken as contribution.

Sleep, it seems constantly there,
like a pocket or childhood impervious to brown
and the day-long sunsets it inherits
no matter the weather
nor the real complaints.

You are the journal of yourself – dying –
spending not indulging, trying not alive;
you think, you sense, you feel – everything matters! –
you do so much – and then you go to bed again.

Steve Carey (1945-1989) was a poet, based in San Francisco and then in New York City from the late seventies until his death. He published seven books of poetry in his lifetime, including Gentle Subsidy (Big Sky, 1975), The Lily of St. Marks ("C" Press, 1978), and The California Papers (United Artists, 1981). The Selected Poems of Steve Carey, edited by Edmund Berrigan, is forthcoming in Spring 2009 from Subpress.

BOOK REVIEWS

BARBARA GUEST
THE COLLECTED POEMS OF BARBARA GUEST
WESLEYAN POETRY / 2008
REVIEW BY ANDREW JORON

Looking through a retrospective catalog of Kandinsky's art, one is invariably struck by the painter's early period of transition between figurative work and abstraction. The metamorphosis occurs rapidly, every turn of the page demonstrating, in living color, an inexorable flow toward some visual Absolute.

A similar, albeit much slower, metamorphosis can be witnessed when turning the pages of Barbara Guest's volume of *Collected Poems*. The same pull toward the articulation of some—in Guest's case, verbal—Absolute is present here, with all the unwrapping and unmapping of the medium that such a goal demands. Guest's commitment to the opening of new aporia, new appearances, new priorities within language only grew stronger as she grew older.

Guest was never content to rest on her laurels—partly, it may be, because the laurels were so late in coming. Guest's pursuit of the New (an indication of the modernist, rather than postmodernist, nature of her practice) was nothing short of ferocious. Guest's poetic sensibility was formed, of course, in the milieu of the New York School, and she is rightly regarded as one of the founders of that school, though her contribution often has been minimized. Yet none of the other poets central to the New York School ever underwent such wrenching turns in a search for new modalities as Guest manifested in her middle to late period—the period, I would argue, in which she produced her best work.

The break with New York School poetics in Guest's work was never definitive or complete, but occurred by slow increments until, finally, mystery superseded irony, and a “necessary idealizing,” as she put it in *Fair Realism*, at the turning point in her practice, became “part of the search.” At this turn, Guest practically founded a American tradition of abstract lyric (comparable to, but independent from, the earlier European tradition exemplified by Celan or Albiach), bringing lyric sensuality and abstract conceptuality to an almost perfect, necessarily dissonant accord.

There's no question of dismissing Guest's first, New York School phase in favor of her later work: the forces of Guest's imagination were active at all phases of her career, and the publication of her *Collected Poems* serves to remind us of this. Nonetheless, Guest's work before *Fair Realism* looks to be very much of its time, emerging from and energized by her engagement with the postwar scene of poets and painters in New York. (The importance of Guest's friendships with O'Hara, Brainard, Schuyler, and the rest hardly needs to be reiterated here.) The poetry of her first phase is addressed to that scene, while her subsequent work, once she became “envious of fair realism” and began to transcribe “[t]he darkened copies of all trees,” is addressed to the unknown.

It suffices to compare “Parachutes, My Love, Could Carry Us Higher” (the iconic poem of her New York School phase) with “Leaving MODERNITY” (a poem from her later phase) to witness the radicality of her metamorphosis: the wager of the later poem, with each line poised on a precipice of white space, places the very

act of writing at risk. Proceeding into vastness, the voice of the poet here assumes an almost hieratic whisper. Guest's work, which once derived from a specific, social-historical context, finally would move (as genius must) to create its own context, to draw its life from sources beyond the sayable.

Yet Guest's metamorphosis was facilitated not only by some private dialectic within her thought and practice, but by certain external factors as well. The rise of feminism in the early 70s and, somewhat later, the advent of LANGUAGE poetry both affected Guest (in spite of her own resistance) deeply. While remaining ostensibly (even notoriously, in the case of feminism) aloof to both movements, Guest claimed for herself, in her own way, the zones of permission—of poetic opportunity—that each offered. When Guest left New York in the 80s to return to California (where she was raised), the shift in her writing practice was fully underway.

It was this late, great shift that led to the full flowering of Guest's poetry, not only in terms of originality but of productivity. As Garrett Caples has pointed out in regard to Guest's *Collected Poems*, “nearly half the collection was written in the last ten years of her life.” During these years, the magnitude of her achievement began to be recognized by the poetry world, even as Guest herself became increasingly isolated from that world. At once triumphant and tragic, she now inhabited a world of her own making.

This new world, as richly resonant as a symbolist forest, might best be described as haunted: a place of abruptly broken lines and dazzling white space, where she wandered as if lost in a frightening fairy tale. An eerie perspectivism now invaded her words; everything, even the most ordinary thing, in this new scenery seemed to point away from itself, toward some distant, dissonant state of being.

Adorno, in his *Aesthetic Theory*, defines “dissonance” as “the truth about harmony,” adding that “harmony presents something as actually reconciled which is not.” In her post-NY phase, Guest often went searching, unsystematically but avidly, through Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, and found much to confirm her own insights about the unreconciled nature of poetic being (“Poets,” she once said to me, “are chained to the impossible”). The title of Guest's poem “Dissonance Royal Traveller” could stand as a slogan for the aesthetics of her entire late work: here, dissonance is identified as a “royal traveller,” a gothic knight who travels, as the knight on the chessboard does, in nonlinear leaps, sideways across the squares of conventional discourse.

In other respects too, “Dissonance Royal Traveller” is paradigmatic for Guest's late work: the text is suffused with an air of gothic mystery, describing as well as enacting the broadcast of dissonance: as “sound opens sound” (an axiomatic, autopoietic assertion), the reader learns that “something like images are here / opening up avenues to view a dome // a distant clang reaches the edifice.” With each step, the poet pushes perception toward the uncanny (emphasizing that not even the “images” are what they seem to be). The poem finally reaches a pitch of fear and elation, witnessing “in the stops between terror / the moon aflame on its plaza.” This distinctly gothic sense of the uncanny comes to be the defining feature of much of Guest's late work.

New Books from Hanging Loose Press



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His tenth collection “reveals all his wit, his wayward charm, and the innocence that allows him his shocking honesty.... I recommend this delightful poet to the world!” —Edward Field. Of his last book, *The New York Times* wrote: “Jack Anderson’s prose poems gracefully evoke a sense of wonder.”
Paper, \$18. Hardcover, \$28.

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The legendary lineup poems now appear all together for the first time, showing why the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The Village Voice* have called them “brilliant” and why James Schuyler called North “the most stimulating poet of his generation.” With vibrant, witty art by Paula North and an introduction by William Corbett.
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Elizabeth Swados The One and Only Human Galaxy

Novelist, composer and director Elizabeth Swados’s first poetry collection is “a strange and beautiful book.... A must read,” says Harvey Shapiro. A reflection on the world of the entertainer, as exemplified by Harry Houdini, the book is “a triumphant debut,” says Honor Moore.
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Dick Lourie If the Delta Was the Sea

The poet and sax player, author of *Ghost Radio*, explores the Mississippi Delta’s history and music “with irony, humor and honest insight. This is a poet who fully understands the burdens and the blessings of history.” Martín Espada. “A rich, spacious book...a genuine delight.... Lourie has an impeccable ear...and an acute eye.” —Ha Jin
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Sherman Alexie Face

In this first full collection in nine years, Alexie’s poems and prose show his celebrated passion and wit while also exploring new directions. Novelist, storyteller and performer, he won the National Book Award for his YA novel, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. His work has been praised throughout the world, but the bedrock remains what *The New York Times Book Review* said of his very first book: “Mr. Alexie’s is one of the major lyric voices of our time.”
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The Evolution of a Sigh, R. Zamora Linmark, \$16, \$26
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Hanging Loose Magazine #94

Art portfolio by Albert York. New poems and prose by Kimiko Hahn, Harvey Shapiro, Ron Padgett, Vincent Katz, Erica Miriam Fabri, Chuck Wachtel, Hayan Charara, Elizabeth Hershon, Robert Hershon, Page Dougherty Delano, Philip Dacey, Jeffrey C. Wright, Gerald Fleming, and many others. \$9.

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BOOK REVIEWS

It can't be said that dissonance (even in the Adornian sense, as a critique of false reconciliation) was absent from Guest's early, NY-period work—but it was of the sort associated with ironic wit, i.e., a relative rather than an absolute, a common rather than a royal dissonance. "The Türler Losses," for example, is a masterpiece of archly ironic writing. And many readers still take such über-irony to be the primary aspect of Guest's style. Nonetheless, the arc of the *Collected Poems* allows us to see how Guest's poetic purpose moved slowly—within a continuum where no part of her style was abandoned but only raised to a higher power—from the registration of irony to the evocation of Mystery, with a capital M. (Her ironically titled essay "Mysteriously Defining the Mysterious: Byzantine Proposals of Poetry," written at the time of the phase-shift in her work, underlines this movement.)

Certainly, the fractured-fairy-tale quality of Guest's imagination was present from the beginning (giving her a space of her own, one that accessed something like a song of innocence in the midst of the New York School's song of experience). This quality would persist into the late work, notably in *Stripped Tales* and in *The Confetti Trees*, her nostalgic fairy tale of Hollywood. But in the most important work of her post-NY phase, this fairy-tale quality gradually deepened in the direction of gothic estrangement.

Guest's commitment to the mysterious and uncanny was evident when she returned to New York to give a talk at the Kouros Gallery in 1986. There, she declared that she had grown up "under the shadow of Surrealism." Residing in New York in the fifties, Guest had watched surrealist painting develop into Abstract Expressionism in the work of such artists as Gorky and Motherwell. And in light of her New York School connections, Guest's poetry is often interpreted in terms of Abstract Expressionist art. Yet I believe the influence on Guest of not only surrealist art but also surrealist literature—with its valorization of the gothic—proved to be more lasting.

Still, throughout her career, Guest conducted NY-School-style collaborations with artists, including Joe Brainard and Richard Tuttle; and this symbiosis with art and artists makes itself felt in the pictorialism of all of Guest's poetry. She herself was a consummate collage artist. (Unfortunately, it was not feasible to reproduce the interweavings of the poet's words with artwork in the *Collected Poems*.) At the same time, Guest did not hesitate to see her poetic practice reflected in music (weaving poems around the figures of both Coltrane and Schoenberg) and even sports (where she discovered poetic relations first in surfing and later in ice skating).

In the end, however, the mystery exceeded any metaphor, leaving her mapless—but not directionless. Barbara Guest constructed her own instruments and played them according to her own tuning—encircled by friends and collaborators, yet magnificently alone. Her *Collected Poems* (edited by Hadley Haden Guest, with an insightful introduction by Peter Gizzi) is not a closed book, but something more restless, something not the same as itself.

Andrew Joron's latest collection of poetry, The Sound Mirror, was published by Flood Editions in 2008. Force Fields, a collaborative chapbook with text by Joron and charcoals by Brian Lucas, is forthcoming from Hooke Press.

SIMON PETTET HEARTH

TALISMAN HOUSE / 2008

REVIEW BY EDMUND BERRIGAN

Simon Pettet's new collection, *Hearth*, is deceptively inauspicious. A simple image on a white background composes the cover, with only the name and title otherwise. Only a brief mention on the back cover alerts us that this is Pettet's collected, or "the complete poems—so far." It is also extremely readable—one hardly notices that it's 178 pages. The poems themselves are in on it—rarely do they surpass more than page's length, more often than not they do not come with a title.

Yet this is the collected poems of Simon Pettet—a British-born poet who attended Essex University in the 70s around the time that major poets Ed Dorn and Ted Berrigan were teachers there and fellow British poet Douglas Oliver was a student. Pettet immigrated to New York shortly thereafter and has since resided in the Lower East Side, writing poetry and living the life of a poet on the economic model of the 60s generation of poets—back when poets and artists could afford to live in New York without working 60-hour weeks. Pettet has also been on the pulse of many of the major American poets over the last quarter-century or so, editing the art writings of James Schuyler and conversing with Rudy Burckhardt, as well as associating with poets Robert Creeley, Ed Dorn, Joanne Kyger, Allen Ginsberg, and international figures such as Anselm Hollo and Tom Raworth—to name a few. Pettet hasn't disappeared either—he's still actively in dialogue with the recent generations of poets coming out of New York.

So, Pettet comes to his practice in a full conversation with contemporary art. And yet, Pettet's poems are not grandiose gestures, are not the poems of the war-torn survivor, and are not attempting to raze the ground before or after them.

What we have with *Hearth* is a collection of lyric poems of intense (but with an eye on that) feeling, with philosophic and romantic reflection, whose idiosyncrasies (or decisions, rather) display a deft understanding of the formal function and create innovations through a kind of negative capability. The slow accumulation of moments and decisions involved in the reading (or crafting) of this book is also a glimpse of the block-by-block, day-by-day experience of city life, though without an enforced specificity.

Here's an untitled poem in its entirety:

There is a cruel, messianic, dim, tribal intransigence

That gains you nothing

There's a bull-headed childish baby-tantrum

That can unleash untold consequences

I am appalled by the darkening of the sky

I watch my love

It is always my love that I watch.

This is a recent work, from *More Winnowed Fragments* (Talisman, 2005), and perhaps a certain post 9/11 feel could be drawn from it.

BOOK REVIEWS

Yet it isn't trapped in any particular period—this could easily be a 30s era Russian poem about Stalin (thankfully for Pettet, it isn't). As with many of Pettet's poems, a title wasn't found necessary—the poem is precise in what it represents without any such particulars, and a title would only cast a shadow upon it.

Pettet's readings over the years have incorporated repeat performances of individual poems. Sometimes the poems themselves contain the repetition. Here's part of a titled work, "July On Horatio Street":

JULY ON HORATIO STREET

Last night I spied
the great bard naked
I begged his pardon
For my crass intrusion
I meant to tell him
I loved his work
I'm not a creep
I don't think he heard me
(He didn't not hear me)
He was just otherwise engaged
With this complicated process of extinction

A separation appears next as a line of asterisks, followed by the same text replicated with the male personal pronouns replaced by the female. The poem, a dream likely, expands in the retelling, drawing a different sense of intrusion (shame) and awe based on the identity of the poet, whose story's double telling creates real, possible characters beyond the device of gender switch.

Pettet often keeps his observational eye grounded in the third-person singular, which he utilizes effectively in portrait poems such as "She":

She
is the very picture of fortitude
and on her head wears one of several
floppy hats,
drapes her form in glorious scarlet
and is at ease,
when bending down and calmly placing
either one or both her hands
upon the stormy animal's mouth

Or in more scathing poems, such as "Indictment":

He snarls at the multiplicity of the world
He dissembles
He wishes to drink up the sea

What stays with me about *Hearth* is that for the sense of constancy created by the scale of the poems, there's a mad tinkerer working on

both the inside and the outside of the poems: chiseling off the titles or removing them to the three-quarter mark of the poem; winnowing the lines bare of all but the most precisely necessary details in order to keep the feeling permanent but unpinned; unhinging the perspective somewhat but keeping patterns and scales reflexive. Pettet's craft is intricate and available.

THE SENTENCE

It is as though he were telling us
that this small space
contains the pattern for
all eternity.

Edmund Berrigan is the author of Disarming Matter (Owl Press) and Glad Stone Children (Farfalla Press) and editor of the forthcoming Selected Poems of Steve Carey (Subpress).

BERNADETTE MAYER POETRY STATE FOREST NEW DIRECTIONS / 2008 REVIEW BY ERIK SWEET

There are moments in *Midwinter Day*, Bernadette Mayer's epic long poem from the late 70s, where it feels like the poet has transported you to Lenox, Massachusetts, and is speaking to you. She weaves thoughts and snippets of information into intimate and essential questions; it is this constant stream of thinking that keeps her writing so vibrant, warm, and challenging.

She continues this tradition in her new collection, *Poetry State Forest*. It opens with "Chocolate Poetry Sonnet," a poem describing the economy of chocolate, children, and silence. For her young children, chocolate bars helped make poetry readings "palatable or / more interesting or so they'd / be relatively quiet..." Longer readings became "two-chocolate-bar" events.

There are several other sonnets (and many other poetic forms) in *Poetry State Forest*, but "Chocolate Poetry Sonnet" sets the tone for the rest of the book with the following: "poetry is as good as chocolate / chocolate's as good as poetry." It is this balance of humor and wit that makes this collection so enjoyable.

To get a sense of her playfulness and originality, just see her famous list of experiments, which have been inspiring poets for decades: http://writing.upenn.edu/library/Mayer-Bernadette_Experiments.html.

The *Poetry State Forest* that is mentioned in "Summer Solstice 2006" is also in Mayer's imagination, entwined with the sticky fingers of her kids, changing seasons, spent seeds, biting dogs, and interlocking giraffes. She is masterful at employing a variety of styles in the space of a poem or book, and she does this with agility. Her new book contains sonnets, serial pieces, lists, and short two-line poems: "I traded these sonnets / for a wrought-iron candelabra." She even includes an interview with her house, "Conversation with Tsatsawassa House":

H: There you go again, speaking of beauty. And even truth.

B: That's what makes my politics unpopular.

BOOK REVIEWS

come from some of everywhere to speak for the country
[position. keep
it right there in another country-ass country. revamp fugues
[for tore up
buildings. raise them up from bloody knees. groove to act out
all them secret urban plans. articulate the newly made country-ass
[class
position. roll back the cover. shade! good god, it's a raid.
[double up the
superimposition by broken singles. have subtitles for the full
[enjoyment. (67)

Here, the urban(e) assumptions that propel and enliven the title poem, inviting a kind of lax enjoyment of Moten's good-natured, tragicomic sensibility, are driven out. Moten forces us to acknowledge him as an implicated *observer* (interested, pained, but an observer nonetheless) and *translator* of a "country-ass" experience (most recently revealed in images of persons and places ravaged by Hurricane Katrina) none of us really wants to know about (h-e-l-l-o). "can't pass the people" is just one exceptional example of Moten's masterful use of a rarely written, resonant, and specific idiom, an unofficial language of reflection that feels entirely new.

Somebody is going to tell you that Fred Moten is a jazz poet, a blues poet, that Fred Moten inherits the mantle of Amiri Baraka and Nathaniel Mackey after him, and that he belongs in that tradition/canon/pantheon. Then you will read "μετοικε." I think Moten's poems occur in an anticipatory space—he would say "cut"—where unimaginable freedoms (the freedom of, for example, "them / impossible domestics" who "always be talking about Cedric / Robinson" [18]) erupt beyond the haunting/haunted original Crenshaw where so much, so many remain confined. In these poems, gentleness and awe (as in his "Stefano and Truculent," stuff that fills in "the world between blue and good" [24]) enlarge our understanding of what the language of blackness will be.

Simone White lives in Brooklyn.

KIT ROBINSON
THE MESSIANIC TREES:
SELECTED POEMS 1976-2003
ADVENTURES IN POETRY / 2009
REVIEW BY KYLE SCHLESINGER

I'll be honest: I'm not a big fan of selected poems. About two years ago, I was weeding my library and made a decision to get rid of most of them because they tend to fall between the cracks, lacking both the authority and finality of a collected poems as well as the context of the publication's occasion embodied by first editions. When I like a poet's work I'm inclined to read it all, book-by-book, cover-to-cover—what's the use of sending a lifetime of well-made books to a poetic chop shop? I did, however, hold on to a few because I was either particularly interested in the editor's selection or because they are the only available representation of texts otherwise long out of print. Like anthologies, selected poems are perhaps most useful in the classroom because they are compact, affordable samplers ideal for introductions. But once in a while, a special selected comes along that casts the poet's work in a new light,

reminding longtime admirers of the breadth and depth of a poet's oeuvre, while simultaneously exuding the potential to inspire a new community of readers. Kit Robinson's *The Messianic Trees: selected poems 1976-2003* is just such a book. It is the first substantial retrospective collection within the poet's dynamic body of work, a body that is still very much in process, getting better all the time.

Clocking in at 305 pages (the longest book published to date by the magnificent Adventures in Poetry), *The Messianic Trees* possesses the elegant (not ungainly) heft of a respectable collected, covering just over the first quarter century of work by this major American poet. The cover of this generous gathering of poems resembles a university press edition (cool palette, dynamic grid, and clean sans serif display fonts) while maintaining the refined personality and sensible attention to detail that I admire in the books published by Adventures in Poetry. *The Messianic Trees* doesn't look like a selected poems. In fact, it's easy to miss the qualification, "selected poems 1976-2003," that appears in discreet white letters and maroon numbers against a dark grey backdrop just beneath Hélio Oiticica's painting, culled from the *Metaesquemmas* series on the cover. It's worth noting that "metaesquemmas" is a neologism coined by Oiticica that combines the Portuguese words 'meta' (beyond vision) and 'esquema' (structure), because it comes very close to describing Robinson's keen negotiation of discursive images and formal experimentation. The monochrome shapes described as "obsessive dissections of space" by means of color" remind me of the signature tension between the poems' prismatic, composite surface and the ostensibly simple, often colloquial, language.

The Messianic Trees comprises selections from 13 books that have appeared in fairly regular two-year intervals since the publication of his second book, *The Dolch Stanzas* (This Press, 1976). *Chinatown of Cheyenne*, the author's first book, published in 1974 by Michael Waltuch's legendary Whale Cloth Press, and his collaborations with Alan Bernheimer and Lyn Hejinian, were not included. The organization of *The Messianic Trees* is practical; the table of contents divides it into 13 sections marked by the title of the book (and happily, the year) in which the poems first appeared. Although there has been some shuffling of poems within each section, the order is chronological. Once you're in, there are no title-pages dividing sections, allowing the poems to seep, reflect upon and mingle with one another in unexpected ways that reveal an impressive array of forms (consistently pleasing to the eye) tempered by a remarkably alert ear ("The right note out of time is far worse than a wrong note in time" is the old adage he quotes in *The Grand Piano: an experiment in collective autobiography*, Part 5 (Mode A, 2007)).

The Dolch Stanzas alone far outweighs the price of admission. Long out of print, and republished here in its entirety, this seminal work was championed early on by Michael Gottlieb in $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$, and has, more recently, become a source of inspiration for a new wave of procedural and conceptual writing practices. In part 7 of *The Grand Piano*, Robinson notes that, "*The Dolch Stanzas* follows a standard form for the modernist lyric adopted early on by Mayakovsky and Williams, the three-line stanza or tercet. The advantage of the tercet is that unlike the quatrain, it does not tend to produce resolution, but rather thrusts the attention forward from one stanza to the next." He goes on to explain the method of constraint employed by *Dolch* in this chapter, as does Barrett Watten in his generative analysis that appeared in the first chapter of *The Constructivist Moment*, where he calls the poet's work "a demonstration of a theory of meaning that begins with the way poetic vocabulary at once constructs and interprets interlocking frames of language and experience."

BOOK REVIEWS

What follows is a perpetual reinvention of perception. Many of the poems demand speed, then urge us to stop and smell the flowers. They're agreeable, like the author, willing to stop cold, throw it into reverse, and pause to look, and look again, at the flickering particulars rolling by. What moves moves us with remarkable clarity. The strabismic minimalism in the sequence of one-word-per-line structures in "Ice Cubes" gives the illusion of slowing down movement by increasing the duration between one image (word) and the next, while long and winding prose poems like "A Sentimental Journey" sound like the script of a New Wave film:

DELTA LINES

camera strap

Guy does pull-ups from branch of tree. Guy leans on parking meter. Other guy climbs tree & straddles limb. Hangs by one hand, drops to sidewalk. Knocks street sign w/ half-full beer bottle. Gets in car with buddy, drives off. Guy splits, bicyclist splits.

門 STRAW GATE



Whose Place Lydia Cortés

Lydia Cortés, *Whose Place*



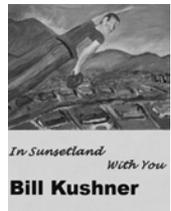
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heart stoner bingo Stephanie Gray



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In Sunsetland With You Bill Kushner



The Rorschach Factory Valerie Fox

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Wide awake and peppered with meaningful irony, dreams, linguistic follies, magic, choppy undercuts, postmodern sobriety, humor, sensual observations, ease, non-nonsense wisdom, bizarre juxtapositions, and elusive patterns, these poems come to us from a forest of messianic trees, a school without walls.

Kyle Schlesinger writes and lectures on topics related to poetics, typography, and artists' books. His books include Mantle w/ Thom Donovan (Atticus Finch, 2005), Hello Helicopter (BlazeVox, 2007), The Pink (Kenning Editions, 2008) and Look (No Press, 2008).

PRAGEETA SHARMA INFAMOUS LANDSCAPES

FENCE BOOKS / 2007

REVIEW BY KAREN KOWALSKI SINGER

Prageeta Sharma's *Infamous Landscapes* invites the diligent reader on a map-tour of landscapes populated with voices exploratory, self-investigative, lyrical, and sometimes whimsical. This collection, her third, is concerned with a relationship to language and poetry ("All those etched poses neatly joined: / Mastery, hierarchy, witchcraft and shamanism")—as well as with the messier complexities of navigating the channels of love, romance, and relationships in the contemporary world.

The opening poem, "Candor," invokes Wordsworth: "of candor in the grass, / feelings can disqualify future feelings." So saying, she moves beyond "emotion recollected in tranquility" to plot the uneasy footing of a poet concerned with the transformations of language and the intricacies of expressing them in poetry that is new in form and strategy. She acknowledges her debt to George Oppen and Barbara Guest, as well as

Wordsworth, and some poems nod to poets Katy Lederer, John Ashbery, Heather McGowan, and dramatist Ruth Margraff.

The landscapes encountered in those poems are not Romantic or painterly. We view such landscapes from a distance and imagine ourselves inside them. In Sharma's poems, we see occasionally and vividly the tree, the bird, the flowers, the clouds of the Romantics, but they appear, displaced and transformed, landscapes perceived schematically through such technological tools as the lensatic compass or topological maps—not new technology certainly, but put to new uses in these poems. She employs these modes of perception to position herself—or to locate her position in the 21st century, as a woman, a person of Indian descent, a poet post-Romanticism. Sharma's schematic landscapes cut an opening through the traditional visual and imagined views. Employing juxtaposition, conflation, and syntax that, while fully connected, is nearly surrealistic in its leaps, she exposes slices of the background and foreground: the thought, philosophy, art, technologies, commerce, and relationship dynamics that make up a self and a world it moves in and against, so that we see infrastructure or topology—not just the way things look, but history, underpinnings, and connections. And still, the tree, the bird, the "bare ankle entwined" pop up with a vividness that locates us squarely in the physical world.

The book documents the poet's attempt to define her position and locate her power, both sexual and artistic. "Here and here" reads as a description of desire, frustration, and the search for fulfillment. In "Off Year: Several Hopes and Health Games": "You are not really a master! / I just invented this



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BOOK REVIEWS

to control my own longings.” “We are off the cuff, and were not that kind of feminist,” says the narrator in “Silent Meow.”

Among Sharma’s poetic strategies are indeterminacy and vocabularies that draw from many levels of experience, from Romantic poetry to finance, philosophy, and military surveillance. Pronoun referents are ambiguous: “A purchase of futures was at the edge of all this” she writes in “Inner Weather.”

Are you inside this moment with me?
[I had wished it so but couldn’t
recollect
a time when anyone was. We all
[looked up and caught a sense
of it as it almost coughed or sneezed,
[but it was inanimate.

Words and sounds are transmuted through incremental changes: grief/gold/guild/gesture; fussy/fuzzy; indigo/indigent; “You say marred, I say martyr.”

While these poems retain some of the lyricism of her earlier collections, (“Onward to careless valentines, situational and loveless / hysteria, mismatched enthusiasm with a bare ankle entwined”), they are sharper and dryer, concerned with boundaries and edges.

The historical tree through which one falls in the opening poem is seen as modern: “blustering, agile, and ambitious.” It is realized in “Blowing Hot and Cold” as “the cherry, the maple, the shagbark hickory.” The bird, the ankle, the images that are clear, Romantic, true to the observation of nature that is the hallmark of Romantic poetry, still appear, surprising and vivid, but we see them now through a different, distancing lens: “a bird chirping in a dead branch.” The bird becomes a perhaps self-referential “Indigo bunting” (*Indikos*, from India).

The poems seem to lay bare the complex mind of the poet. A great strength of the writing is that of conflation: while writing of her relationship

to language, poetry, and philosophy, she is at the same time speaking of male-female relationships, human relationships. To do both things at the same time in a single poem or even a single line, she employs vocabularies that seem unmatched in register and tone, yet at the same time are perfectly and surprisingly in tune. The sentences move from one realm of thought or activity to another, sometimes surrealistically so: “I am in a thatched Tudor, on a spiked road / overlooking madness.”

Underneath all of this is divulged a desire for love, romance, personal power, connection. There is a person and a life described and revealed by the topology, and by the multitudinous contradictions that focus into a single, unified view.

Karen Kowalski Singer received her MFA from University of Southern Maine’s Stonecoast Program. Her poems have appeared in Slipstream, Common Ground Review, Reed Magazine, Triplopia, and Blue Fifth Review.

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PERCIVAL EVERETT
 ABSTRAKTION UND EINFÜHLUNG
 BLACK GOAT BOOKS / 2008
 REVIEW BY TIM W. BROWN

Abstraktion und Einfühlung by Percival Everett is the latest offering from Black Goat Books, an imprint of Brooklyn's Akashic Books. Needing an English translation of the intriguing title, specifically "einfühlung," I consulted my German painter friend, Laurentz Thurn, who informed me that it meant "empathy." He additionally steered me to a 1908 book with the same title by German art historian Wilhelm Worringer. Published at the dawn of Modernism, Worringer's book became widely influential among expressionist artists, laying theoretical groundwork for Modernist abstraction in the plastic arts, which he claimed was "the outcome of a great inner unrest inspired in man by the phenomena of the outside world." Reading a little Worringer helps in appreciating Everett's book.

Essentially, a three-voice conversation is going on within *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*. Everett reproduces the debate between abstraction and empathy explored by Worringer, who saw an antithetical relationship between abstract or "geometric" art associated with African, Asian, and

Egyptian cultures and classical or "vital" art associated with Ancient Greece and Renaissance Italy. The first presents an inner, subjective truth, whereas the second involves an outer or objective truth. Per Worringer, Everett views these opposing artistic poles dialectically, positing a third way that attempts to reconcile the two into one "comprehensive aesthetic system."

Thus, each poem in the collection consists of three sections: a proposition, a discussion, and a coda. The number three permeates the arts symbolically: it occurs repeatedly in myth and literature, ranging from the three-way relationship among Adam, Eve, and the Serpent, to Christianity's Holy Trinity, to Dante's tripartite arrangement of hell, purgatory, and heaven in his *Divine Comedy*. It likewise calls to mind notions of artistic form, for example, triangular composition in classical paintings, the Cubist depictions of Picasso and Braque, and the three color fields found in Mark Rothko's abstractions. This is neither idle speculation on the reviewer's part nor an accident on the poet's—Everett refers to visual artists throughout *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, including Léger, Duchamp, Cocteau, Manet, Warhol, Gauguin, and Van Gogh, all of whose artworks exhibit the tension between abstraction and realism.

The proposition sections in Everett's poems explore the gulf separating art and meaning. He decries reductive, political interpretations of art: "Painting once again political, left to be gelded, / art discouraging its way back to irrelevance by / word churning / over the possibility, the meaning of the possibility / of stance / rather than the stance itself" ("A Spanish Myth" 25). The discussion sections debate these propositions, grappling with stark, uncomfortable truths. In "Pure Form?"

Everett acknowledges that "Some things can't be said. / Not an inadequacy of language, / but a failure of speaking. / Not a bankruptcy of words, / but a rupture in thought" (49).

The coda sections of *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* attempt to defy language's limitations by repeating earlier lines phonetically, resulting in short snippets that resemble Joycean puns. Thus, "hide along / the edge of this river" becomes "hyde / aling / the hedge / dove / thist / ryeveer" ("Bathers" 33-34). The intention here is two-fold: to emphasize language's pure physicality and diminish its descriptive utility. As in the Garden of Eden, troubling questions about existence are introduced only when a third character enters the picture and stresses the relationship of the first two—arguably to their betterment by making them more fully, if messily, human.

Abstraktion und Einfühlung recalls poetry titles published by James Laughlin's New Directions Publishing. The poems are cerebrally challenging, formally innovative, and awash in white space. Everett's work reminds me specifically of Robert Duncan's, which was heavily influenced by visual arts theories and abstract poetics. As a reflection of modern aesthetic methodology, the book succeeds admirably. Yet, sometimes, the poems are perhaps too brainy: "A equals A. / X equals X. / f(A) equals f(A)," writes Everett in "The Truth" (17). Such lines neither delight the ear nor warm the soul, no matter how well they may capture the modern condition.

Tim W. Brown's most recent novel is Walking Man (Bronx River Press, 2008). He serves on the board of the New York Center for Independent Publishing, and he is a member of the National Book Critics Circle.

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CHARLES NORTH
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 HANGING LOOSE PRESS / 2009
 REVIEW BY ELINOR NAUEN

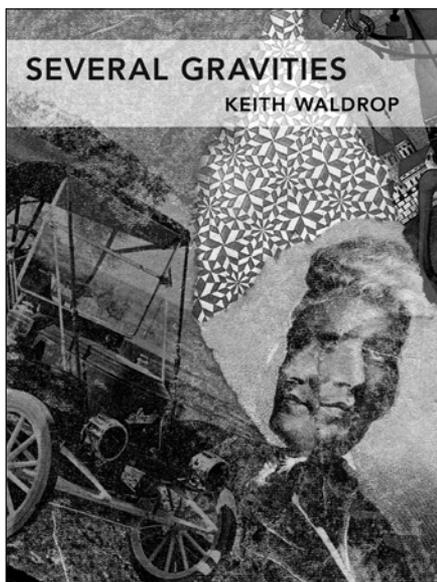
- 2b Transcendence
- lf Decency
- cf Wit
- 1b Heart
- 3b Erudition
- rf Romance
- c June
- ss Sparkle
- p Utility

CHARLES NORTH
 CADENZA
 HANGING LOOSE PRESS / 2007
 REVIEW BY ELINOR NAUEN

- ss "The tone poem left the door open.
 Well, close it."
- lf "the eyebrow colonials"

- rf "Then someone stirs
 in the next room and it is as though the roof fell in,
 as far as the writing is concerned."
- 1b "the ghostly traces of mind that hover
 over whatever is in the process of being constructed"
- 3b "brilliant October blue at the dome and only slightly
 withered at the rim, dropping off into grimy pendentives"
- cf North never uses a careless word or one he doesn't know the
 meaning, etymology, and poetic history of. At the same time,
 never pedantic.
- c Is "thoughtful" (still) a forbidden word to use about poetry?
 Isn't "thoughtful" the new "gripping?" It is in North's work.
- 2b Mind at work, mind at play, mind engaged, mind married.
- p "North to Reznikoff"
- ph "The Frank Gehry buildings really did move;
 but the reality in that case was the dream.
 Still, the dream involved ideas."

Elinor Nauen continues to churn out poems from her tenement on the Lower East Side. Elinor Nauen is happy because less work = more poems. Elinor writes poems, articles, and occasionally books.



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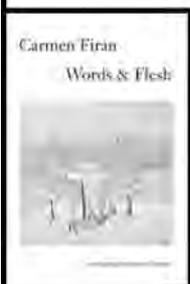
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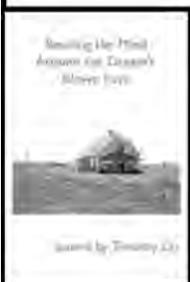


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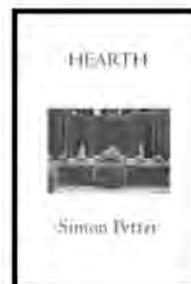


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