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CAROL COOPER ON THE GREATER GOOD OF HARLAN ELLISON



LOST THINGS: THE POETRY OF DANA GOIA BY DOUG BEARDSLEY

BILL PEARLMAN REMEMBERS
JACK HIRSCHMAN'S CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY

HILARY TURNER ON DANIELA ELZA AND
PATRICK FRIESEN

NEELI CHERKOVSKI SEES DAVID MELTZER

GREGORY CORSO'S POETICS
BY LEN GASPARINI

LENORE KANDEL'S PLACE IN POETRY
BY JUDITH ROCHE

JAMES SCHUYLER'S COLLECTED POEMS
REVIEWED BY RICHARD WIRICK

PLUS: NEW YORK LIVES, LEW WELCH, ALLAN GRAUBARD,
PAUL THEROUX, GARY GEDDES & SAM HAMILL



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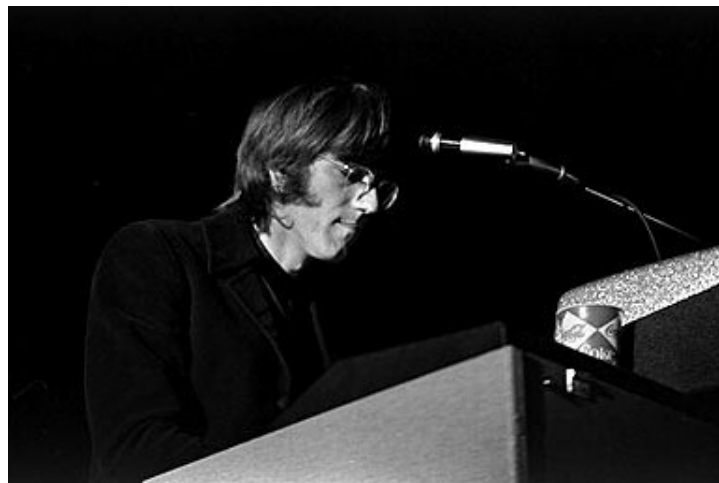
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IN MEMORIAM

Ray Manzarek

1939 - 2013



You know the day destroys the night
Night divides the day
Tried to run
Tried to hide
Break on through to the other side
Break on through to the other side
Break on through to the other side, yeah

We chased our pleasures here
Dug our treasures there
But can you still recall
The time we cried
Break on through to the other side
Break on through to the other side



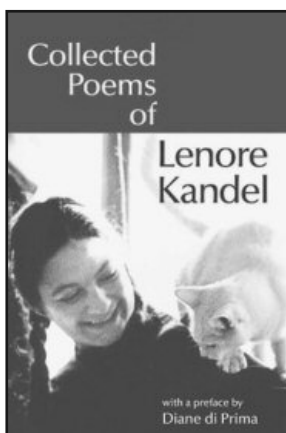
REVIVING A PLACE IN POETRY FOR LENORE KANDEL

Judith Roche

Poet Lenore Kandel was a literary bridge between the sensibilities of the Beats and those of the '60s counterculture. Other observers may say "hippie Era" but I specifically don't because "hippie" is a media made-up epithet. If you were there – at least where I was "there" – you didn't call yourself a "hippie." Maybe a *freak*, maybe *hip*, certainly *counterculture*, but "hippie" was a media-made shorthand to denigrate the movement. Since then, in the media, it has become even more denigrating, denoting a superficial and stoned set of values bent mostly on "chilling."

"Chilling" was not what we, as I knew us, or Lenore Kandel, as I read her, were interested in. I never met her, but I've had a well-worn copy of *The Love Book* on my shelves since about 1967, when someone gave it to me and I read the words of a woman on holy fire with being alive. Not "cool," a complex word that has, as I read it, a certain hipness in it with a kind of bemused detachment. Rather, Kandel's ecstatic poems come from a very engaged consciousness, alive and responding to life, art, her body and her spirit. I'm very pleased to have her *Collected* in my hands now, thanks to Richard Grossinger and Lindy Hough of North Atlantic Press. It includes published work from 1959 to unpublished work, some, much later and I'm assuming towards the end of her life in 2009, though the unpublished poems are not dated in this edition. The published memoirs generally state that, though she had become "reclusive" she continued to write until the end of her life.

Kandel was born in New York City in 1932 and died in San Francisco in 2009, where she lived most of her adult life. According to the bios, she became interested in Buddhism and world religion at age twelve. Her first published works were presented in 1959 by *Three Penny Press* in Hollywood and are included in this *Collected*. In the early '60s she became friends with Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Lew Welch (one of her lovers), Michael McClure, Diane di Prima, Anne Waldman and others of that exclusive mostly-boy's club called *the Beats*. Kerouac wrote her into his novel *Big Sur* as "Ramona



Collected Poems of Lenore Kandel
North Atlantic Press,
2012, 242 p.
US \$35, Canada \$41.



Lenore Kandel

of lost loves, of children and abortions. The men dropped in with barely hatched dreams for a new society, with manuscripts and music, weapons and possibilities." Later, "All the power of that time is in these poems." And that time included the Diggers, the anarchist guerilla street theater group of the emerging counterculture of the Sixties, who gave free food to people in need, with whom Kandel was intimately associated, and the drugs dropped, casually or not, as di Prima makes clear in her essay. These poems are a picture of the place and the times.

Poems from *The Love Book*, first published 1966, shimmer with ecstatic sexual energy. Kandel mixes spirituality with sexuality to make Tantric prayer out of love-making, ... "we were the temple and the god entire..." "To Fuck with Love," a long poem in several parts, reaches for the divine but also stays firmly rooted in the very physical body in a striving to make the two one. This is the chapbook police seized from City Light bookstore and put on trial, a trial, which would drag on for years. Kandel claimed the book was "holy erotica," the prosecution claimed it porn with no redeeming social value.

In the meantime, sales went up. Finally the claim was overturned, sales continued and Kandel had the last laugh by thanking the police for the free publicity by donating 1% of profits to Police Retirement Fund. But it was *Word Alchemy*, her full-length collection of 1967, where she came into her fullest, most nuanced, voice. In her introduction she says, "Poetry is never compromise. It is the manifestation/translation of a vision, an illumination, an experience. If you compromise your vision you become a blind prophet."

Word Alchemy opens with several on-edge circus poems spangled with loud-looking words in all caps. Okay, that was a style at the time, and seems dated now, but the images stay strong. From "Invocation and Clown Dance Of The Bareback Riders:"

eye of newt and heel of brandy
champagne wine and hashish candy
shock of love and touch of madness
demon's tear of final sadness
pulse of vision, blood and stone
kiss of witches, mandrake moan
fear of heaven, bead of dreams
Everything is what it seems

Oh! the clowns! but they're beautiful
the ringmaster is clothed entirely in black owl feathers...

From "Freak Show And Finale"

Expose yourself!
Show me your tattooed spine and star-encrusted tongue!
Admit your feral snarl, your bloody jaws

(continued on page 22)



1967 Love Book press conference with Lenore Kandel, 2nd from right

Schwartz," calling her "a big Rumanian monster beauty." She is identified as a Beat poet, though not one as often anthologized with the rest of them. In 1970 she was involved in a serious motorcycle accident that left her permanently, though not completely, disabled, and she slowly dropped out of the scene. Though, say people who knew her, she kept writing, if not publishing.

This collection offers a preface by poet Diane di Prima, the woman writer who is most identified with the Beats. di Prima writes of staying in Kandel's house in 1969, while she was on San Francisco on a reading tour. di Prima gives us a vivid picture of life at that time, in that place: "Some days I would sit beside her and watch and learn. The women of her tribe came by to bead and to mourn, to cook or sew while they talked

POETS ON THEIR TRAVELS

Hilary Turner

Unfamiliar places have a way of crystallizing a person's thinking. Travelers, strangers, and visitors often stumble upon new versions of themselves even as they are absorbed in the nuances of a landscape, language, or culture that is not theirs by heritage. This sense of rediscovery cannot be new to Daniela Elza. Born in Bulgaria, she came to Canada by way of Nigeria (where she grew up), England (where she taught), and Athens, Ohio (where she studied linguistics). In her second published collection, *The Weight of Dew*, she explores the BC Interior with the eyes and ears of a traveler who is familiar with the unfamiliar, and who cannot wait to try out the sound of words in spaces where they will resonate differently, or where geography may impose a grammar of its own.

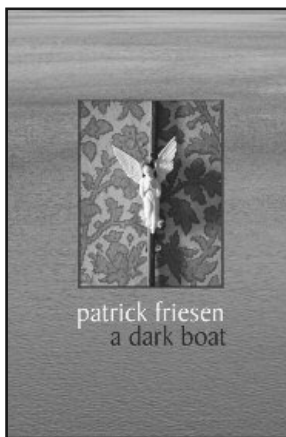
The case is somewhat different with Patrick Friesen whose latest of more than a dozen esteemed works, *A Dark Boat*, is set in Lisbon and Granada. Perhaps because of the antiquity of the culture, perhaps because he is there partly in quest of the spirit of Garcia Lorca, or perhaps because these places are so steeped already in the songs, prayers, and lamentations of whole populations who have come and gone, Friesen seems poetically more tentative and more alienated by his surroundings. Though hardly an innocent abroad, the speaker of these poems maintains the stance of one who is outside looking in: he is not silenced, but respectful; he does not declaim so much as ruminate; and he fans his slight disquietude into a "defamiliarization effect" that subtly permeates the whole collection. The book's epigraph from Blas de Otero—roughly, "doors, doors, and more doors"—suggests equally the possibility of being admitted and of being shut out. The tension between these opposites makes the poems oddly suspenseful.

They are visually gripping as well. Nine of Friesen's photographs, in the still-life tradition, but sometimes with living figures poised in moments of potential, give context to the collection. Many poems resemble snapshots themselves, enclosed in tight frames that prevent a subject from being seen in a more than fragmentary way, and often with mere body parts compelled to speak as eloquently as they are able. Here, for instance, is "Diver":

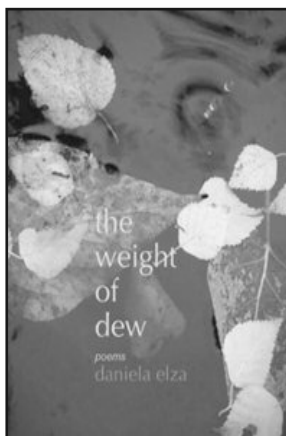
*knife in hand
something to slice
open the water
a boy in the river's tree
groping through weeds
and memory
rising to his wedding day
to light and laughing
one arm raised from the dead
alive he shouts
erupting with strands of hair
clinging to his face*

A lengthy story is compressed here: past (boy), present (laughing), future (wedding day)—all unknowable. The reader wants more, but is constrained by the transience of the traveler's connection to the place. This fleetingness is even more pronounced in "Goya's Playground," a four-line glimpse of a tiny action, the sort of thing one might glimpse from the window of a passing train:

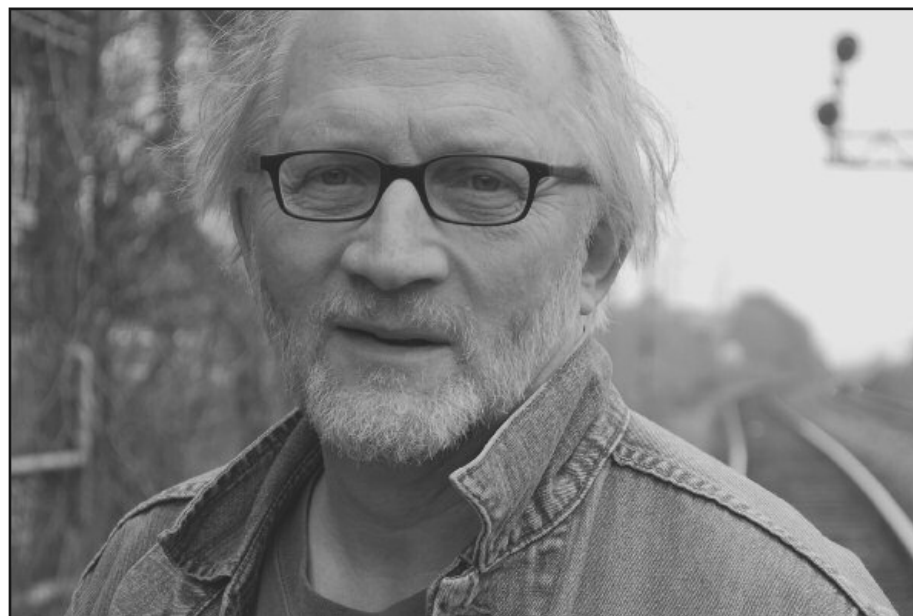
*an old man on a swing
kicking his spindly legs*



A Dark Boat
Patrick Friesen
Anvil Press, 2012



The Weight of Dew
Daniela Elza
Mother Tongue, 2012



Patrick Friesen

barefoot and grinning at the top
of his flight

For the most part, Friesen's style is unostentatious: he writes free verse, unpunctuated, lower-case, observant, meticulous, patient. He relies on ideas and images more than on ornament to arrest the reader's attention. Many of these are aphoristic: "nothing is counting your life down / but your own wrist;" "the room wants / to leave through / the open door." Some resemble haikus: "you in the pale light of your summer dress / so light it flutters when the air stills." Out of filaments such as these, Friesen composes not so much a semblance of the place, but a semblance of how it felt to be there. The distinction may be fine; but it is evidence of good poetic judgement that he makes no pretence of "giving" us Grenada, in all its strange complexity, between two paper covers. Preferring to offer a series of impressions rather than a full-length portrait, Friesen achieves a delicate and unified commentary on the experience of being a stranger in a strange land.

Emptier of both people and history, and a stranger to war, the landscape of the BC Interior supplies a very different poetic canvas. Its vastness and unearthly silences are the materials for Daniela Elza's more expansive, almost extravagant, depiction of place. To be accurate, the journey that takes place here is bookended by a section of poems set mainly in Vancouver ("gather here") and by another at the end ("still words"), which is a short adventure in epistemology, though in no way abstract or attenuated. Still, the heart of the book is a sequence of poems that take the reader on a physical expedition "past Hope," and "through the Okanagan valley," pausing "in Os-oyoos" before venturing "on the Crowsnest Highway" to relax "in the arms of Kootenay Lake."

Because this is such a "mappable" journey, and because the poems are so firmly anchored in the physical landscape, Elza earns the right to execute great loop-the-loops of language and thought. She experiments with typography, with a broken line, sometimes lining up her words in parallel columns; she leaves parentheses unclosed, and stretches syntax out on the page so that reading becomes both conceptual and spatial. Indeed, it is the relationship between thought and space that is the true subject of these poems:

<i>and once we have crossed</i>	<i>we are truly here</i>
<i>(re- cognize this</i>	<i>(know it—</i>
<i>this wondering</i>	<i>among the trees.</i>
<i>this mingling of thought</i>	<i>with leaves.</i>

This intersection of thought with physical space cannot be easy to convey; perhaps it can only be done obliquely. For this reason, *The Weight of Dew* makes much use of word-play, to the extent that I began to think of the book as *The Weight of "Do"* (or even *The Wait of Due*)—for it is word-play of a specific kind that interests Elza. As

(continued on page 12)

ON GREGORY CORSO'S POETICS

Len Gasparini

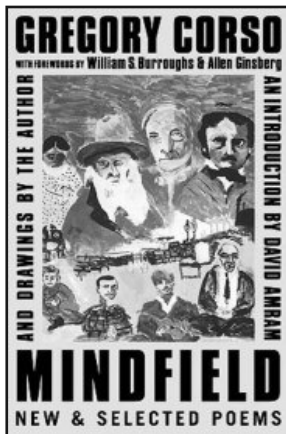
The last of the Beats, the last of the “Daddies”; the Shelley of his age. He died in 2001. He was 70. I never met Gregory Corso but I’ve known his poetry since 1959, when I first read *Gasoline*. Poems such as “Italian Extravaganza,” “Birthplace Revisited,” “The Last Gangster” rocked me around the clock. This was poetry that had bite, rhythm, juice, imagery. His lyric sound was new, like Elvis Presley’s moves. It was the “nifty Fifties,” a decade marked by contradictions: the Cold War, political conformity, cornucopian prosperity; a time when the Beat Generation and the rock-and-roll generation were socio-culturally on the same page.

Three critical books and a monograph on Corso’s work have been published to date. Their titles apostrophize him as a “doubting Thomist,” an “exiled angel,” a “clown in a grave.” Why resort to epithets that bespeak Catholicism? Because Corso was American-Italian? Did he believe in God? Who knows? He juggles his metaphysics. Was John Crowe Ransom a Protestant? I like Wordsworth’s—“I’d rather be a Pagan suckled in a creed outworn.” But I’m digressing. As a poet, Corso is in the tradition of (to use a 19th-century phrase) *poetes maudits*—from Villon to Chatterton, Rimbaud, Genet. Corso’s early background is comparable to something out of *Oliver Twist*. He was an orphan, a thief, a jailbird. How he became a poet at all merits a biography. FLASH! (I heard tell that Canadian actor Nick Mancuso is writing a screenplay on Corso’s life.)

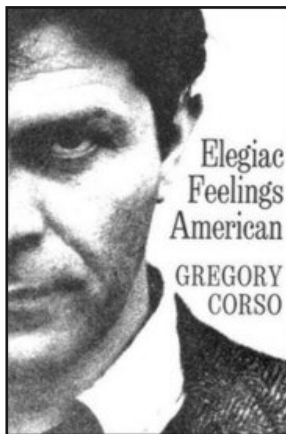
Allen Ginsberg called Corso a “great word-slinger,” and praised his sound. To achieve that sound, Corso employs archaisms, idioms, neologisms, surreal metaphors, mythological allusions, nouns-as-verbs, abracadabra. Of course these devices are the property of poetic diction. Among his contemporaries Corso’s diction appears the most individualized, infused with fresh vitality. He sometimes inserts unexpected end-rhymes into his free-verse poems, or counterpoints regular melodic lines with disrupted syntax, as in the fourth section of “Clown”: “I grieve to futures a fishy grin,/for as I am I gloom of history.” The sound is consonant-alliterative. Contrary to Gerhart Hauptmann’s pontification on poetry being “the art of causing the Word to resound behind words,” as though language was God-given, Corso’s philosophy has more in common with the Heraclitean logos. “Clown” not only encompasses all aspects of a clown, but brings to mind Red Skelton’s circus clown and Leoncavallo’s tragic clown in *Pagliacci*.

Despite being labeled as a “Beat” poet, Corso—a romantic symbolist at heart, avoided the anxiety of influence that binds American poetic schools together, viz. Black Mountain. Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs promoted Corso’s work. More importantly, they were surrogates for the family Corso never had, especially since they had no families either, though Kerouac had his mother. In any case, it was a fortuitous alliance.

Corso was streetwise, well-read, and self-educated. He learned to make poetry by trial and error. Along the way he fashioned his own patchwork aesthetic and asserted his poetic credo: “I love poetry because it makes me love/and presents me life.../it does tell me my soul has a shadow.” The tentative, groping poems in his first book, *The Vestal Lady on Brattle* (1955), gave little indication of the mythpoeia and metaphorical energy that burst forth a few years later in *Gasoline* and *The Happy Birthday of Death*. The voice is now Corso’s own—direct, and free of imitation. Many of the poems are triumphs of form and content, like “Puma in Chapultepec Zoo.” In “Botticelli’s Spring,” rejuvenescence occurs only when “Botticelli opens the door of his studio.” The pictorial “Uccello” poem is a tour de force whose heroic theme, texture, and imagery approach the classical spirit of Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” Time is again slowed to eternity. But this time the scene, rendered in glorious colors, is the painter’s *Battle of San Romano*, where “You’d think it impossible for any man to die/each combatant’s mouth is a castle of song/each iron fist a dreamy gong...” The poem is half the length of Keats’s, yet its loose stanzaic form, its alternating iambic-based pentameter and hexameter lines with well-placed caesuras produce a resounding martial rhythm.



Corso's Mindfield



Corso's Elegiac Feelings American

Corso’s two signature poems are “Marriage” and “Bomb.” He himself stated that he earned thirty grand from 1958 to 1988 for “Marriage.” “And to think I wanted to call it EPITHALAM- MIUM.”

“Bomb” is unlike any poem ever written. For sheer verbal pyrotechnics and cosmic exuberance perhaps Hart Crane’s “Cape Hatteras” comes closest. It’s surprising that no composer (Stravinsky? Shostakovich? Bernstein?) was inspired to musicalize it.

I’ve always liked “I Held a Shelley Manuscript.” Its opening lines sound incantatory:

*My hands did numb to beauty
as they reached into Death and
tightened!
O sovereign was my touch
upon the tan-ink’s fragile page!*



Gregory Corso

Corso represses an urge to steal the page. “What triumph is there in private credence?” The poem ends metaphorically with the poet’s imagined entanglement with unreality and his deliberate obfuscation of proverbs involving reaching and grasping and spilled milk. Whatever the type of ambiguity, it’s a beautiful, well-made poem.

“On Pont Neuf” is another poem that begins memorably:

*I leave paradise behind me
My paradise squandered fully
What dies dies in beauty
What dies in beauty dies in me—*

What prevents this quatrain with the same rhyme sound from sounding excessive is its abstractness and its trimetrical third line in a tetrameter pattern. Few poets can pull off a pure spondee as smoothly as Corso does. The rest of the poem crescendoes line by exclamatory line to the poet’s self-abasement beneath an equestrian statue.

It’s been said that Lawrence Ferlinghetti detected fascistic leanings in Corso’s “Power” poem. Corso told him that he wanted to change the old meaning of power and give it a new meaning—his meaning: Life, Love, and Poetry. Ferlinghetti refused to publish the poem, and his refusal caused a rift between them. Consequently, Corso dedicated “Power” to Allen Ginsberg and published his next four books with New Directions: *The Happy Birthday of Death* (1960), *Long Live Man* (1962), *Elegiac Feelings American* (1970), *Herald of the Autochthonic Spirit* (1981).

There is a slight but noticeable decline in the quality of work in *Long Live Man*; specifically a slackness of style and structure in poems that are topical, social-minded, or impressionistic. Energy and spontaneity are lacking. Many of the poems seem forced, though “Halloween” is a beautiful treat. There is still insight, paradox, irony, and vision; but their appearance is sporadic. In “Writ on the Eve of My 32nd Birthday,” Corso takes stock of his situation. Something crucial has happened. In “Danger,” he confesses: “Be-



Corso, Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs in 1961

(continued on page 21)

“A LITANY OF LOST THINGS”: THE POETRY OF DANA GIOIA

Doug Beardsley

In the beginning, in fact the first word, the first line in Dana Gioia’s first book, published by Graywolf Press of Saint Paul, Minnesota, is a sign, an indication of the direction his poetry might take through *Daily Horoscope* (1986), *The Gods of Winter* (1991), *Interrogations at Noon* (2001), and the recently published *Pity the Beautiful*. The poem is “The Burning Ladder” and the first word, the first line, is “Jacob.”

Contemporary readers may be disappointed to discover that this does not refer to a clothing store, Hollywood film, South Park episode, folk toy or the ‘ultimate fitness experience’ but, rather, the dream-vision of the ladder to heaven that serves as a bridge between two worlds that the biblical patriarch Jacob has at Haran, as given in the Book of Genesis. One first century interpretation by Philo sees the ladder as the path of the human soul. In distress, angels pull the human soul up, while, in compassion, they descend, illustrating the ups and down of life. Gioia (pronounced JOY-uh) makes reference to “the impossible distances” and — given human limitation — concludes that “gravity (is) always greater than desire.”

This Formalist poet’s faith is not merely a foundation, it is the formation of sensibility out of which he brings order to our chaotic world. Is that why all four of Gioia’s books are divided into five sections? Whatever, it is not the reason why the subject matter in the majority of the poems in “Daily Horoscope” shifts from the divine to a more earthly, pastoral California landscape mode, with ominous scenes from ordinary life “to the modest places which contain our lives.” As “In Chandler Country,” where “quiet women in the kitchen run/ their fingers on the edge of a knife/ and eye their husbands’ necks.” The last line seems redundant.

Thematically, the book seems uncertain of itself, somewhat scattered, going off in several directions. The poems pour out from everywhere, not surprising for a first book. The occasional line in “Insomnia” and “In Cheever Country” goes on too long, and doesn’t sound quite right. Often it is difficult to discern who is speaking, who the “I... you., he/she...his/her...” “we” or “our” refers to. And so we are led “up and down” — Gioia as Puck perhaps? Or Wallace Stevens? Like Stevens, Gioia, in his mid-30s, comes to us fully developed, as Stevens did in “Harmonium”.

“An Elegy for Vladimir de Pachmann,” a classical pianist who died in Rome in 1933, is a harrowing, dramatic narrative that brilliantly explores the thin line between genius (“confined to so small a planet/ as the earth”) and a madness that caused the Pachmann to relearn “his repertoire at sixty-nine/ using only the fourth and fifth fingers/ of one hand.”

The following “Lives of the Great Composers” explores the exploits of eight nineteenth-century composers who compose “such harmony! We cannot hear it.” A third poem, “God Only Knows”, is an imaginative lyric about the effect of Bach’s greatest work on the burghers in the pews. And the poem to Bix Beiderbecke is a fully-felt homage.

“The Gods of Winter”, published five years later reads like an extension of Gioia’s first book. Keeping with the tradition, it opens with “Prayer”, and “All Souls”, then shifts abruptly to personal narrative about his uncle, and a poem about the family “Planting a Sequoia”, “a promise of new fruit in other autumns.” But this poem reeks with images of loss, “a lock of hair, a piece of an infant’s birth cord/ All that remains above earth of a first-born son.” It is the transplanting that is so important in this elegy, the transplanting and the attending ceremony to honour the child who has died. How to deal with such loss, such incredible grief? This is one way. A remembrance of things past. But it is clear that the loss is overwhelming and will permeate all that the poet makes from now on.

And, “Speaking of Love”, lost love of another kind begins to make itself felt in “the harsh and level language of denial... (where) words were only forms of our regret” and “there is nothing left unsaid.” The grief of unrequited love is overwhelming. Such loss should evoke compassion but the reader feels only sadness and hurt. It is not a pleasant experience.

Poems about dead children continue, with references to the “assembled dead.” There are also several poems “from the Italian of Mario Luzi,” a modern poet who was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature and became a Roman senator, and one influenced by Nina Cassian, a Romanian poet who was granted asylum in the U.S. in



Dana Gioia

1985. Bartolo Cattaui, a Spanish-Italian poet, is also a mentor. And then there is “The Homecoming”, an audacious 14-page narrative told from the point of view of a murderer. Only a craftsman of considerable formal richness would even dare to attempt such an undertaking.

However, Gioia’s last line in the book returns the reader to the poet’s central concern, the litany of lost love that has begun to grow like a cancer. Gioia ends the book with a question: (How to) “turn the corner back into our lives?” It is difficult for the reader to be optimistic.

“Interrogations at Noon”, published in the second year of the new century, offers little respite from the gloom and melancholia of Gioia’s world. Everything he touches turns into a “requiem for the dead for the living”, even the California landscape. (Indeed, I felt reading Gioia’s work was a little like watching four full-length episodes of Wallander, one after the other. Or emerging oneself in Holocaust studies, as I have done.

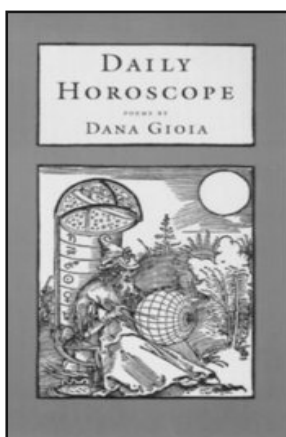
The title poem is concerned with the interrogation of self that takes the form of a whispering inner self who reminds the protagonist of “...the better man I might have been,/ Who chronicles the life I never led.” In “Pentecost”, written “after the death of our son” the language is brutally factual: “Death has been our Pentecost,/ And our innocence consumed by these implacable/ Tongues of fire.” “Outward signs of human loss” such as this, are often only obliquely referred to, as if too painful to be faced. This is understandable and it seems to be the condition inhabited by the poet, at least until his “Pentecost.” With a very different, collective subject matter in mind, the Israeli novelist Aharon Appelfeld once evoked the comparison of not being able to look directly at the sun.

“Interrogations at Noon” ends with the unspoken “Unsaid”:

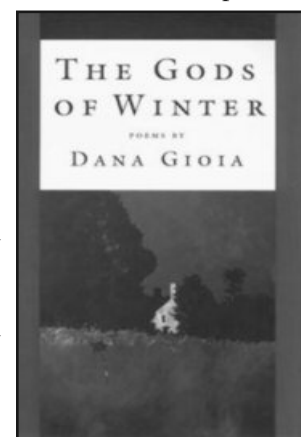
*So much of what we live goes on inside —
The diaries of grief, the tongue-tied aches
Of unacknowledged love are no less real
For having passed unsaid. What we conceal
Is always more than what we dare confide.
Think of the letters that we write our dead.*

“Pity The Beautiful” has just been published, after a decade of poetic silence. The book is dedicated “for Morten Lauridsen, The necessary angel.” Lauridsen is the Amer-

(continued on page 21)



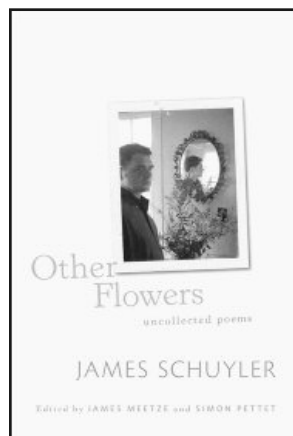
Daily Horoscope



The Gods of Winter

WHAT IS THERE: JAMES SCHUYLER

Richard Wirick



Other Flowers: Uncollected Poems

James Schuyler
Farrar Straus Giroux
240 Pages

James Schuyler was the best of what has come to be called the “New York School” of poets, the most accessible and passionate and direct. John Ashbery was the cerebral conjuror, a radio tower drawing in pop and rococo frequencies from every location, every periphery. Kenneth Koch was straightforward enough, but never entirely fused the pictorial with an inner “felt life.” Frank O’Hara was playful, cool, conversational, and unquestionably pictorial — the “poet among painters” as Brad Gooch put it — as he charmed and seduced and walked away with the lonely listener’s heart. But Schuyler, “Jimmie” to his friends, was the most American of the New York Poets, the most plain-spoken and universal, the constant hunter and gatherer of the vernacular.

Schuyler always told us exactly what he saw, and dressed it in so thin an art that its presence, though never its effect, was nearly invisible. His lines were “like gold to airy thinness beat,” in the words of his beloved Donne. As with Ashbery, the range of his vision was never static — he included, to the extent it built up the little comic frames of his stanzas, “whatever is moving.” (The phrase is from

an essay on Schuyler by Howard Moss, *The New Yorker*’s long-time poetry editor, in a book he so titled.) My mother-in-law, a friend of Moss’s, claims he never stopped talking about Jimmie, greeting each new poem with hands in the air, fingers extended, like a blind man given a sudden stroke of vision.

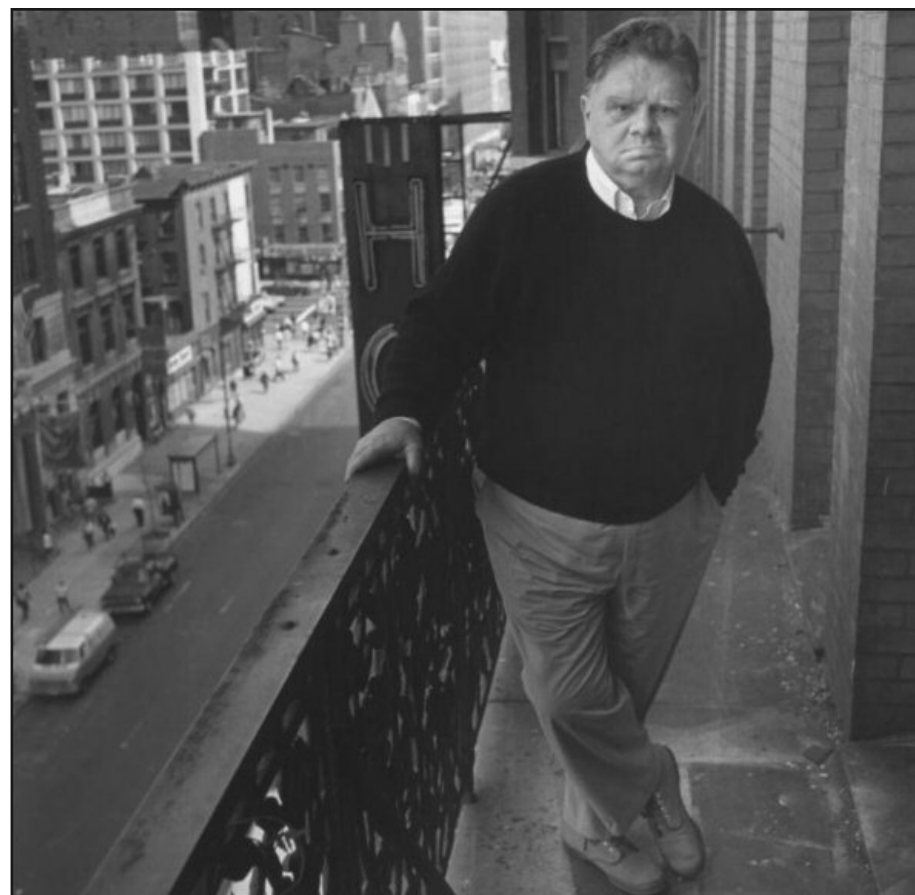
The easiness of his lines and cadences were never trite or contrived. Though he arrived with an offbeat, startled surprise at the described object or situation, his expression was as gripping, elegant, and emotionally layered as any effect created by formalists. As idiomatic and offhand a poem as “A Heavy Boredom” plunges us through the ravaging emotional registers the seasons bestow, suddenly and without pity:

*I had sooner go bare
than sit pent in a business suit
O how this chafing burns me!
not even Johnson’s baby powder
soothes: my soles are creased and my
pits are cranky and damp and sticky.
For is Summer come
the lucky ones are sportive,
from Maine to Key west
I like Southampton best
or perhaps a tourmaline lake
like a tear in the heart of Vermont.
Too many skeletons. Scribble,
the trees grow thin,
won’t winter come, Coppelina?*

Another lovely weather poem is a simple quatrain: “The wheeling seasons turn / summers burn / then all fall fallow / in ripe yellow.”

Schuyler’s immense emotional resonance roils like smoke across the “collected uncollected” poems of *Other Flowers*, just out from FSG. One commentator calls him the supreme poet of articulated consciousness (Dan Chiasson), and remarked that Schuyler’s “blood brother” Ashbery once said that Jimmie “made sense, dammit”: not a virtue in itself (plenty of simple-minded poets make sense), but when joined to a mind this multifoliate, subtle, and searching, proves something akin to a miracle. Chiasson saw him as “the poet of ingrown courtesy, gossip in a vacuum, remembered friendship, and the one-on-one encounter.”

And it’s true. Schuyler reaches out for companionable hearts in order to understand — and portray — the uncertainties and dreads of *any* heart. Like O’Hara, who claimed anything he wanted to do in poetry could be accomplished by picking up the telephone, Schuyler needed to extend his mentalism to someone as flailing and stunned as himself for it to come into focus. And what focus he gives it! The poem “Help Me” (from Vincent Price’s *The Fly?*) starts out:



James Schuyler at the Chelsea Hotel, c. 1989
(Photograph by Robert Giard)

*Help me
find the paradox I look for:
the profoundest order is
in what’s most casual, these humped and cat-
ty cornered cubes, the wind,
so you’re planning to be sad
or casual
as a hat
off a yacht,
afloat
in a cove.*

If poetry is “emotion reflected in tranquility” (Wordsworth), Schuyler can only reflect with a companionable ventriloquist’s dummy on his knee. He is pulling the string of his mind’s odd twin, a yammering, downtrodden Chatty Cathy. He was frightening when in his manic swings (see “The Payne Whitney Poems” in the *Collected*), and when ebullient, was inseparable from his valiant but impatient patrons. Incapable of solitude, his verse and his very viscera were an extended, lifelong, late-night set of eerie duets.

Sometimes Schuyler’s speaker and his Other switch places, dream-morph into one another, fuse and separate and trick the reciprocal companion, all of it working up a slapstick of droll chatter and passing perceptual traffic:

4N
*The hospital’s elevator is very slow;
it stops at every floor. Finally,
four. You knock on the battered
metal door of Ward 4N. A nurse
unlocks it and you ask to see
your friend. “I don’t know if
he can have visitors today. Sit
here.” She vanishes. The shabby
room is all too familiar (I’ve*

(continued on page 8)

been there myself). Time passes. “Got a light?” a patient asks. The light is given. Someone is Running. It’s my friend, saying my name. I call to him: he doesn’t hear. He’s trotting, all bent over. Then he goes back: to his bed, I suppose. “You see?” the nurse says “He can’t have visitors today.” “Is there any point in my coming back tomorrow. “You might. He might snap out of it.” She unlocks the metal door. That damned elevator takes forever. In the street it’s hot and humid and I sweat, and people walk freely; going about their business.



19-year-old James Schuyler while enrolled in the U.S. Navy’s Fleet Sonar School, 1943

Articulated consciousness and emotional interiority are here pressed outward onto minimalist characters — like Beckett stage figures — and given enough action to form a stoic comedy.

Feats like this take us ultimately to Schuler’s treatment of inanimate “things-in-themselves,” his still lifes, the “natural object” as the only permissible symbol Pound would permit the poet. And here once again, his touch was so delicate and true as to be nearly photographic, hyper-real, letting the seen thing sustain its own textures and hues and substance, irrespective of the knowing subject. The poet’s transformation is so subtly detached that the object almost seems to throw it off, making its own claim on time and significance. Like the Christ in the frescoes of Raphael, things seem to say *Nolo me tangere*: I do not require a perceptual field for my sustenance. The poet concedes in “Dandelions”:

Hooray
for a change
I’m letting the sky
stay as it is
tomorrow the sun may come out
besides what’s wrong
with gray



Frank O’Hara, John Button, James Schuyler, and Joe LeSueur watching television, ca. 1960
Archives of American Art. Smithsonian Institution

you can almost put it
and shape it
smoke and dulled
lights hovering in it
like clay

The classic “Schuylerian detail” thus lets things stand almost on their own. Its scrupulousness was a tremendous experiment, a ravishing frontier for poetry to pass into. “No ideas but in things,” said William Carlos Williams. Schuyler seems to have it that the thing itself *is* the idea, though the addition of mental constructs adds an elevating, honest sheen, a newly necessary dimension.

To paraphrase Chiasson, if durable verse could be fashioned from mere flotsam and jetsam, things plain and unadorned, then poetry’s potential had become, in a very new way, almost infinite. This poesy of diffidence and near-indifference was groundbreaking. Its tricks of perspective and concern were successful, and beautiful, and will last until time breaks down all things but the beautiful.

Richard Wirick is the author of the novel *One Hundred Siberian Postcards* (Telegraph Books). He practices law in Los Angeles.

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JACK HIRSCHMAN'S CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY

Bill Pearlman

My first great influence in the Land of Poetry was Jack Hirschman, who was a professor and poet-in-residence at UCLA when I started there in 1961. Jack was a performer, a sage, a poet of wonderful dimensions. I wrote this in the mid-sixties—

*It was his vigor struck me first
Elvis dancing to the tune of Rilke
But the kindness of a poet (father of the good word)
wins the everlasting emblem:
smiling praise of the young....*

Jack was a kind of star in those days. He collaborated with other artists, published many books, some with Asa Benveniste's Trigram Press in London.

His lectures and poetry readings were electric with his own vast energy. He loved reading aloud—Yeats, Rilke, Dylan Thomas—always with a wild though exacting vocal intensity—Jewish, New York, a beat and a lefty (later all-out communist) sound that gave him a truly full voice. But as Vietnam escalated into a madness none of us could bear, Jack began to grow (as did many of us) increasingly angry and dismayed. (I took a year off from UCLA in 62-3 and traveled around Europe). On returning from Europe I told Jack about the trip, which included seeing JFK in Berlin in the summer of '63. Jack said he wasn't surprised at the reception Kennedy got in Berlin, which he said had Catholic roots and Kennedy sounded like a world-class orator, much beloved by Germans.

Here is one of Jack's lyrical poems from the 60s:

Two

*In the beginning I was soused with words, the page wasn't wide
enough to hold my spillover, I ran and ran and the puns and
brashbrandy flew out of my mouth slant rhymed.
In time I looked at her. The lines
broke. Look at mine, look at hers. And neither died of it.
That Irishman, they say, sang best
at seventy-seven.
It isn't easy
to write the word, love,
and mean it
to speak open.*

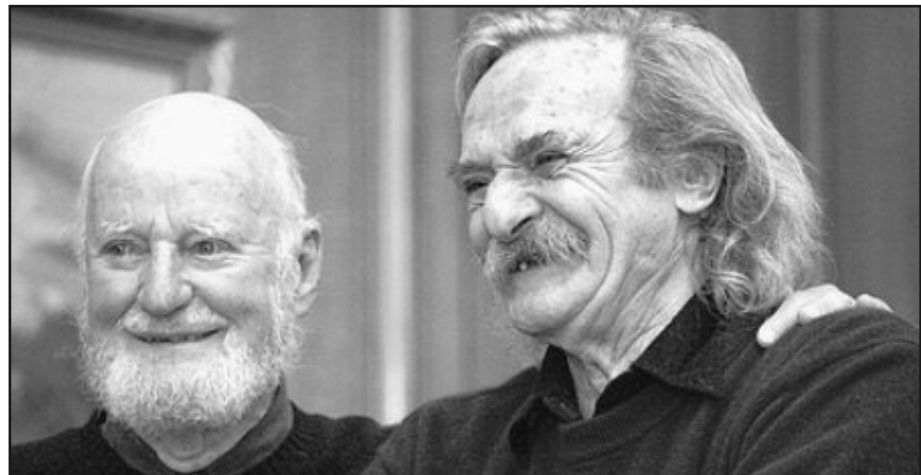
From *Black Alephs* (Phoenix Bookshop/Trigram Press, 1969)

As the 60s advanced and LSD and anti-Vietnam protest began to grow strong culture-wide, we all entered a no-man's-land of anti-establishment outcry. Hirschman started to come unglued with his growing rage at the war and Johnson's escalation of it after Kennedy's murder. Jack started to appear in the classroom quite mad, incoherent, straddling a style invoking King Lear on the Heath and John Cage with his strange improvisations. I remember one class that was cleared out by a posse of TAs, and Jack just went on with his rage as the large room was evacuated. Before long, and, after deciding he would give the young men students nothing but A's for deferment purposes, Jack was let go just before tenure, and he started his life as a street poet and communist. His wife Ruth, who had been the NPR affiliate station manager at KPFK in L.A. and later at KCRW in Santa Monica, eventually divorced Jack after his job loss.

In semi-retirement in Venice, Calif., Jack continued his poetry and grew further to the left. He also had a period of deeply felt involvement with mystical Kabbala and collaborated with David Meltzer for the magazine *Tree*.

At some point, somebody set up a reading with Jack and Jim Morrison who was becoming a star with the Doors. When we were both UCLA students and admirers of Hirschman (The Doors were film students); Morrison would sometimes stop by my Venice Paloma St. apartment with crazy Felix Venable, one of the wildmen in the Venice in those days. Morrison would quietly leaf through my poetry collection, rarely speaking, passing the joint, dinking a beer. The reading with Jack and Morrison turned out to be a disaster according to Jack, who had praised him before (especially for an album called *LA Woman*), but apparently at the reading a drunk Morrison did his best to trash Jack and ruin the reading.

Jack eventually moved to San Francisco in the early 70s. He moved from one cheap



Jack Hirschman and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, on the occasion of SF Mayor Gavin Newsom's naming Jack as San Francisco Poet-Laureate, April of 2006. Photo: Luke Thomas.

hotel to another, barely surviving. He had a couple of women artist/poets (including Kristen Wetterhahn) and was a real presence in North Beach. Ferlinghetti and others of us helped as we could, and Lawrence published a Selected of Jack's work, *Lyrilpol*, in the 70s.

Jack's work became increasingly polemical and Stalinist as time went on, and he wrote and drew thousands of agit/prop American/Russian posters that he would give away at readings. His work appeared in magazines and in chapbooks around the world. He has been especially well-received in Italy, where the Communist Party remains strong. As Jack's poetry became a sort of shout from the street, the sound came hard, as in this 90s poem:

A Woman Gives Food for Sarah Menefee

*A woman gives food to a hungry hand.
The law says that it is contraband.
That law must fall, must lose its teeth,
must gum along the desolate streets
and come to the line where blessed soup
is smuggled in between the lips,
and know subversion for what it really is
and how this mean-lawed land is dead without it.*

From *Endless Threshold* (Curbstone Press, 1992)

For several years, Jack has been with the artist and poet Aggie Falk, whose late husband (and early childhood friend of Jack's) Asa Benveniste published collections of Jack's work earlier on. In 2006, San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom named Jack poet laureate of San Francisco, and, in 2007, Jack hosted (backed by the city and various funding agencies) an international poetry festival in The City. Poets from all over the world read and mingled with others; the readings were translated on a giant screen behind the podiums.

Here's a recent poem of Jack's which is still in the strong grip of revolutionary ferocity, but with also an underlying lyrical feeling:

Who Cares

*But the Nothingness he meant,
which now is planetary, isn't negative,
rather an aperture, an opening
to the other side of actual self,
to the process of hearing light,
not unlike yourself when you bring
all that in your everyday seems drifting,
evermore ungraspable and transient,
where all values beyond money*

(continued on page 23)

HARLAN ELLISON®, FOR THE GREATER GOOD

Carol Cooper

Blend the socio-economic concerns of Dickens, the grim speculations of Poe and the ironic racial perspective of Nella Larsen and you might come close to the creative sensibility of Harlan Ellison®. But he has always done things no other writers do. The way Ellison uses volcanic emotion to enhance plot is his own invention, and as such is perhaps the best reason for his fiction to be added to our mainstream literary canon. The only real obstacle to such “canonization” appears to be the lingering perception of Ellison as a niche author, whose most popular works fall into categories variously tagged science fiction or fantasy. And yet it would be as unfair to judge Ellison’s talent only by his science fiction as it would be to judge Shakespeare’s only by his comedies. And if Shakespeare’s substantial creative interest in supernatural and mythic themes were used to marginalize his writing as often as Ellison is marginalized for similar interests, Shakespeare’s existing body of work may never have been preserved to the present day.

I was only nine or 10 when I read my first Harlan Ellison® short story. I remember sitting in the sunny reading room of the Newark public library while tears streamed down my face at the deceptively simple request Ellison’s protagonist makes at the end of “Blind Lightning”: “Show me a star...”

This was back in the mid-1960s, long before huge omnibus collections of Ellisonia like 2001’s *Essential Ellison* existed, and before Susan Ellison strategically trademarked her husband’s name to facilitate profitable re-issues of out of print classics. But from that time to this the emotional insight so crucial to Ellison’s fiction and teleplays has moved me to tears more often than I’d like to admit.

He can do it with a single impossibly elegant sentence:

Her eyes were a shade of grey between onyx and miscalculation.
— From “On the Downhill Side”

It might have been simpler, had he been a good man.
— From “Daniel White for the Greater Good”

Three of us had vomited, turning away from one another in a reflex as ancient as the nausea that had produced it.
— From “I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream”

Twenty-three, and determined as hell never to abide in that vale of poverty her mother had called purgatory her entire life; snuffed out in a grease fire in the last trailer, somewhere in Arizona, thank God no more pleas for a little money from babygirl Maggie hustling drinks in a Los Angeles topless joint.
— From “Pretty Maggie Moneyeyes”

A Harlan Ellison® story never promises you an easy read, only a brutally honest one. This gift for pushing people’s emotional buttons is Harlan’s signature trait in life as well as on the printed page. His memories of being a bullied kid, then a frequent teen runaway from Painsville, Ohio are always close to the surface of Harlan’s tales of revenge and hard knocks. The hardscrabble ambition of Ellison’s younger self is part of what drives the aspiring rockabilly star in Ellison’s neo-realist novel *Spider’s Kiss* (1961) and similarly motivates the homicidal sentient computer AM in “I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream” (1967). These tales are convincing in part because Ellison knows as much about what it takes to be a villain as about what it takes to be a hero, and can be equally unsentimental about either role. Experiential knowledge of human nature can make one cynical and Ellison is nothing if not an astute student of human nature. Critics would be right to notice that many of his protagonists are deeply flawed and unlikable people. But the point Ellison is making is that even the biggest fuckups can sometimes find the inner strength to make an ethical choice.

And insofar as his nonfiction, whether he’s talking about marching with Dr. King in Alabama, time spent infiltrating street gangs, or his personal brand of atheism or feminism while working the college lecture circuit, Harlan never wants to inspire indifference or neutrality. As author, mentor, and cultural gadfly, Harlan forces you to love or hate him. This is a mixed blessing for his career legacy, for although his refusal to be less polarizing wins him awards and defenders, it also attracts a steady stream of criticism, lawsuits and enemies.

I, however, aim to take a more positive look at Harlan’s reputation as editor and wordsmith; simply boiled down to his lifelong support of emerging talent, and his own proven ability to describe the darker aspects of our modern world with economy of



Harlan Ellison

structure and unanticipated beauty. I first met Harlan Ellison when he taught 27 of us aspiring writers during our third week at a Clarious Writer’s Workshop hosted by Michigan State University in 1974. As his colleague Samuel R. Delany likes to say, it is hard for anyone who was not a part of Science Fiction fandom in the 1970s—as a creator or a consumer—to understand the amount of genre leadership and influence Ellison had accrued by that time.

His 1967 invitation-only anthology *Dangerous Visions*, successfully changed the hitherto accepted thematic and stylistic limitations of science fiction and fantasy. It won every sort of award, and thereby made its diverse contributors members of a de facto literary vanguard. By the time *Again, Dangerous Visions* appeared in 1972, it was clear that Ellison wasn’t only crusading for fresher subject matter for SF, he was also seeking fresher, younger more, culturally diverse authors. Some stories he bought for *A, DV* were first time sales, and launched careers.

Himself rooted in the collegial environment of 30s pulp and comicbook fandom, he started teaching amateur writers in formal workshops or convention feedback sessions, helping the best of them get published. Octavia Butler and Bruce Sterling are only two of the most influential iconoclasts he mentored.

As I remember from Clarion, Ellison’s teaching style was intense, highly anecdotal, comprehensive, and constructive...although getting past harsh roundtable critiques to the constructive part could be tough! Yet many professional writers emerged from those sessions. Often Ellison would teach by example, writing or rewriting his own new story during the workshop and offering it to the roundtable process. My year at Clarion he wrote the oddly compassionate pro-vasectomy story “Croatoan.”

That Harlan was willing to play nursemaid to raw wannabes while still writing his own fiction; making endless public appearances, engaging in political activism; editing the five-novel Harlan Ellison Discovery Series; and writing teleplays, series pilots, obits, introductions, journalistic essays and magazine criticism, is a tribute to his unwavering dedication to creative excellence. Consultant stints on a revived *Twilight Zone* and the series *Babylon 5* took him through the early 90’s, but a 1994 earthquake and heart surgery in 1996 served to slow Ellison’s world-famous roll a little bit. High-profile activities plus the provocative nature of his professional persona saw him fighting—and winning—court battles large and small, always to protect a creator’s ownership and autonomy over his own work. First AOL then Gary Groth of *Fantagraphics* and the *Comics Journal* succumbed to Ellison’s relentless legal pursuit. But nowadays, most readers would rather Ellison redirect energy spent on big corporate battles, WGA picket lines, and playing whack-a-mole with websites that pirate his work towards new editing, writing or teaching projects.

Having won a Nebula Award for his 2010 short story “How Interesting: A Tiny Man,” and amazed (as he recently told WBAI-FM interviewer Jim Freud) by favourable new reviews for his fifty year-old *Sex Gang* excerpts, Ellison, now 78, is at an interesting crossroads. A penchant for combining social realism with myth and fantasy was always the hallmark of Ellisonian style whether deployed in an *Outer Limits* episode like

(continued on page 22)

SEEING DAVID MELTZER

Neeli Cherkovski

It was in Donald Allen *The New American Poetry* that I first came across David Meltzer's poetry. His were the last poems in the book, and he was the youngest of the poets represented. I was sixteen at the time and felt a natural affinity for someone not much older than myself. Those poems took on an iconic meaning. They stuck. And when I came to know David well, decades later, I had to resist reciting his lines back to him, though I probably did mention that those four works were stored in my memory. The first lines of "12th Raga / For John Weiners" were easily my favorites, "An overdose of beautiful words/keeps rushing inside my mind/but won't relate to thought or talk." A avid reader of Charles Bukowski and Allen Ginsberg at the time, these words seemed a relief. I had also been looking through R. H. Blyth's *Haiku*, and was getting used to mind play. And, closer to home, Emily Dickinson's words kept pushing me deeper into my own mind, searching for a new language, a new way of seeing. I took that thought of "an overdose of beautiful words" along with me as I paled around with Bukowski in nearby Los Angeles (I was living in San Bernardino at the time). My mentor was getting drunk on words, tough street words that came crushing down on the type-writer keys. Meltzer was elsewhere, dreaming of jazz and all those great modernist poets who still seem so modernist and great, the likes of William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound.

Fifty years after reading David's first poem he was published in the *City Lights Pocket Poets Series*, number 60. That's a good number. It's the right one. The Meltzer years will continue despite the book's title *When I was a Poet*. The writing is much like those first poems I read, witty and welcoming. There are no barriers to entering the heart of the poem.

I have to wonder if David meditated on that enticing title before deciding to go with it. It is part of his playfulness, which is one of the things that makes his writing so attractive. He is the same way in conversation, quick with a gentle, humorous rejoinder, and always immediate. No one can pull the past into the present like Meltzer at his best. Homer is just around the corner.

The ancient Chinese poets await us at the cafe, just down the street. David is forever kidding with this past tense title. He remains in contact with realms of being that only come along on the back of a poem, but promise immediate contact. Everything is touched. All things are revealed. He is the once and future poet. It is not possible for him to depart from the poem, and if he does, it would snag in in the future. The title poem, "When I was a Poet" actually does travel to many places, just like David's mind, which is always in the process of examining something, picking up something, turning things around. No wonder I have a game I like to play with him, finding a book he has not read or doesn't know about. His notion, when I was a poet, is an opening to a sense that time ripples, bends, awaits us always, leaves us and then finds us again. At the end of "Prayer wheel 12" in the Allen anthology, we get this: "Love begins. The poet begins/to examine the dissolution of Love./The sea continues. We continue./talking, growing nervous, drinking too much coffee."

There it is. No matter where this studious poet goes with his deep thinking, his keen "ear" keeps the music going, but almost always in subtle gestures, coming down to a common theme like "drinking too much coffee." He has told me, "You're thinking too much," even as he roams the past, picks at its mysteries, takes himself to improbable ports. I have called David a rabbi. That makes some sense for me, knowing that he spent years reading Kabbalah, following the leads, tracking down ideals, playing with words as if they were worlds, just as the Jewish mystics did. His interest in Kabbalah came from early in his 'poet-hood,' when he lived in Los Angeles in the mid 60s, before trekking to San Francisco. Wallace Berman, a leading contemporary artist in Los Angeles was turning Hebrew letters into boulders and iconic images, rattling at the doors of tradition while "making it new". Over time, David would read *The Zohar*, the writings of Abraham Abulafia, and Yitzak Luria, encountering a spacious wisdom literature that transcended philosophical discourse and entered the more wild lands of the poetic. It was precisely their poetic, a visionary one, that attracted Meltzer and his friend, the radical poet, Jack Hirschman. Abulafia's world has a Blakian feel to it, not bad for a man from

medieval times. "The three warriors pursuing one another are three kings who will rise." Abulafia danced with letters. He felt their power, their influence. He saw that you could play with them in your mind and possibly re-create the world.

In the same way, David has lived with music all of his life. His parents were musicians on the East Coast, and he became enamored of jazz and the blues, much like Bob Kaufman and Jack Kerouac, poets more associated with those musics. His book-length *No Eyes: Lester Young*, has the feel of the hipster about it as David's poems sneak in the back door of a jazz club and team up with Young's long, mind-shaking riffs. The poems spar with the tempo of Young's music. It is no surprise that David, along with other poets and musicians, has had his own band and that he loves performing. He participated in the poetry and jazz performances at The Cellar in SF's North Beach in the late 50s, made popular by Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Kenneth Rexroth. Reading *Jazz* is an anthology David edited with the same fervor he brings to his poetry. One may pick it up and find reviews and commentaries going back to the early 20th Century. So much is bridged in the selections, the muted beginnings of jazz, the tracing of lineage to earlier

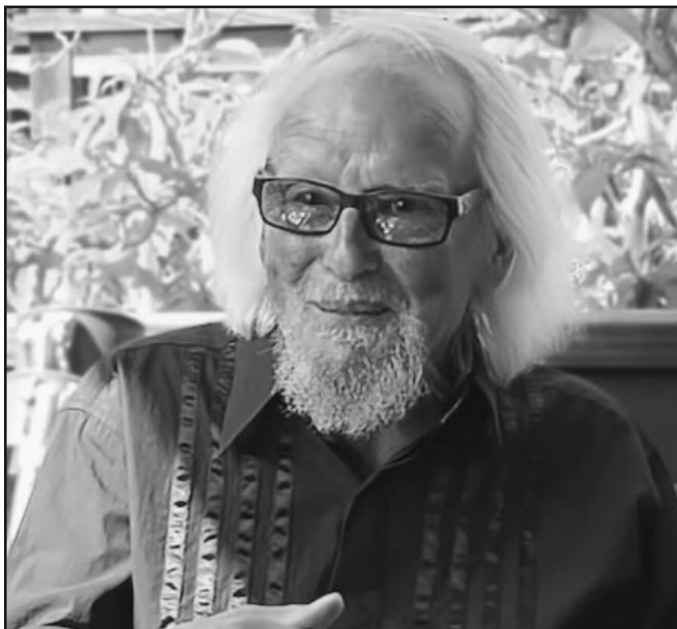
traditions, and the rise in popularity of the music itself. The *Lester Young* poem is a social document, much as is David's *Beat Thing*, another book length poem that, when I first read it, reminded me of the "Camera's Eye" sections of John Dos Passos' *U.S.A.* David kaleidoscopes the "feel" of the 1950s, how Beat culture and popular sentiment inter-mix. There is a deep seeing attention to the 'world out there,' beyond a workroom or a studio. The poet has turned his typewriter into a video camera and the reels keep rolling. So, in the end, David Meltzer's mind is a gathering-place for poetry, kabbalah, and jazz. On a closer look, however, it is much more than that.

I came to know David as a teacher when I joined the faculty at New College of California. Through the years, the Poetics faculty included Robert Duncan, Diane Di Prima, Tom Clark, Duncan McNaughton, and Lyn Hejinian as teachers. Here, as elsewhere, David was a star, pleased to be in a community of his peers and happiest of all to be giving of himself to younger poets. His classes were alive with talks on William Carlos Williams, the world of the mythopoetic, Emily Dickinson's metaphysics, and, of course, the poetry of jazz. For the under-

graduates he offered a popular course in "Kid Lit." and also gave many hours of personal time to their enrichment. One might say he was a teacher twenty-four hours a day, establishing ongoing friendships with his students, developing, over time, his own idea that you are always learning, probing, testing, what it means to do the poet. Students visiting David at his home in Oakland would tell me, "You should see all the books. Man, the whole place is filled with books, and with CDs." The inveterate writer is also the consummate reader. He is forever on the lookout for that new young poet who shakes up the language or the clear thinker who delves deep into the questions we all bare.

David Meltzer — He smiles more than not. A dinner is not complete without a few good drinks. At a Japanese restaurant it will be sake. For Italian dinner, a good red wine.

And there is coffee — always coffee — and a cigarette out on the deck or in front of the locale where he is giving a poetry reading. For me, David will always be "the poet, now, then, and tomorrow. I have to say that he has given me so much, that he has touched me quietly with his intellect and song. One day at New College he asked that I sit-in for one of his Poetics sessions because he had to be out of town. I obliged and had a good time. then he invited me to talk about Walt Whitman, my old graybeard father. It turned out that we both felt that the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* was Whitman's finest achievement. We talked about that after class. It wasn't much later that I asked David's advice about a long poem soon to be published. We walked to a nearby cafe where he went over the poem while sipping on his Turkish coffee. When was done marking it up I thanked him. "No, thank you," he said. And that exchange speaks to 'The Meltzer Method.' Generosity is at the center of his philosophy of teaching. Not a few San Francisco poets, graduates of the Poetics Program and otherwise, talk of that quality when they've encountered David. Like Philip Lamantia, the great American Surrealist, David is generous with his time, intrigued by the younger writers, pointing to



David Meltzer

all the ways they might travel as time goes on.

I’ve come to know David as a friend, not just a poet colleague. A few years back we taught a class together at San Francisco’s Bird and Beckett Bookstore. Our ‘show’ went on for six evenings over six weeks. We had a good attendance and a lot of dialogue with those who came to learn. I found out that David kept me on my toes — and I mean this positively — as if we were a poetic Laurel and Hardy. It worked to create more excitement and students saw more dimensions of us than if we had simply agreed on everything. And the experience showed me how passionate David can be when thinking of ‘the tribe of poets.’ We’d plan our class in order to push forward all these different poets, singing the praise of their many contributions. When queried, I would find myself listing twenty or more poets in answer to a simple question of influences. At that time we were awaiting the publication of Robert Duncan’s H.D. book, and we would talk about him and his amazing abilities as conversationalist. “Duncan could talk,” David said, with his own brand of real poet talk.

My most memorable moment with David, aside from being part of the team that performed the marriage ceremony between him and the poet Julie Rogers a few years back, is the time he popped-up unexpectedly in a Poetics class where I was taking his place. He looked good, this trim figure with white hair and a wispy white beard. “I’ve had laryngitis” he announced, “And now I’m better.” Yes, we could see that and hear it as well. I put William Carlos Williams’ Paterson aside, as that is what we had been discussing, and David began to talk about not being able to talk. It didn’t take long for me to bemoan the fact that there was no way to record him on the spot. One gem after another came out - he was making spontaneous poetic sense, but not about poetry. David was making a roadmap into the unconscious, even though he knew that you can’t actually go there. It sufficed just to reach it’s outer edges. The container of sound had been shaken, the poet who speaks no longer had a voice, the conversationalist could not get a word out. Sound. Sound. Yes, what is and what was sound? What is voice? These questions came up as David described how he was led inward, ever deeper, beyond the ‘ear.’ In letting himself go, many of his previous formulations about language were being challenged. He stepped deeper and was forced to listen to an expansive space he had not truly sensed before. His mind was speaking, all he had to do was surrender, sit back and listen. As he talked on, I glanced at the others in the room. Obviously, they were as mesmerized as I was by David’s rapture. As time went on my pleasure deepened in hearing a poet talk about silence. We all understood the silence between words and even letters, but it became clear that David was going somewhere else, a silence beyond silence, a maddening place to be when you cannot use your voice box, when you are stymied that way, and your mind demands that you find the energy to take you to another place. Yes. It seems to me that that is what happened. David made that clear. Perhaps it didn’t induce visions, but it made a lot of things clear. I wrote on the other side of silence. Are words futile? There is a poem that will not be written down. There is an expansive, articulate voice deep inside of us. We don’t know how to listen to ourselves. After nearly forty-five minutes, David paused to take a deep breath. Then he went on. He said some things about language, building language not out of words but out of neural impulses. We cannot speak to others, but we can create these immense dialogues from inside of ourselves, from an ocean of emotion and imagination. Finally, he re-emphasized that he was compelled to move to the interior self, otherwise he’d be even more immobilized and mute. The poem will not release David Meltzer. It holds him in its grip. He takes his words, his radiant single letters, and he blows a wondrous horn. When he is a poet, which is all the time, the sounds rise, fall from his fingers and his lips, from his mind and from a wild and wise imagination.

David Meltzer has gained new readers with the publication of When I was a Poet. Along with his partner, Julie, he gives many public readings. They are salted with his humor and his poet’s wisdom. Over time, he has become a treasured resource, not only for his own poetry, but for the idea of a life lived as a creative venture. We may be living in an age when the book as we have known it is disappearing or transforming into something else, but David’s library seems a living, breathing thing. He has written a large body of work over six decades, some of it as mentioned above, is epic in scope, but I’ll leave this piece with a passage from Revelation,” the first of David’s poems in The New American Poetry:

*The haiku will come later
After dinner &
a Havatampa cigar.*

Neeli Cherkovski has resided in San Francisco since 1975 where he is known as a poet and memoirist. His books include Leaning Against Time and Elegy for Bob Kaufman.

POETS ON THEIR TRAVELS (continued from page 4)



Daniela Elza

Wittgenstein famously said, “words are deeds.” Elza concurs, and adds that they can be objects too, both animate and inanimate. The plainest example of her use of this complex device occurs in “alternate grammars” where the speaker discovers “a stylized calligraphy” in the grass of a hillside and uses this script not merely to write her name, but to become the thing she has written:

<i>I have come to learn after I have sat here each curve of my name only</i>	<i>how the grass rises straightening each letter until (I am eleven stalks of grass</i>
--	---

In a similar fashion, the act of naming or recognizing a given place (the act of writing the poem, that is to say) in a curious way *becomes* the place. Sometimes the agent of transformation is located in nature:

<i>shifts the borders of teeming with the small life of prepositions. in the definite article of knowledge is always revised.</i>	<i>the wind my nouns this place being</i>
---	---

On other occasions, the metamorphosis is brought about by language, thought, or the agency of the poet:

<i>poetry is how</i>	<i>this attempt these words</i>	<i>to know become a shoreline we can stand on.</i>
--------------------------	-------------------------------------	--

As a shore is a kind of a line, and as a line (of verse) can shore up our knowledge of a place, these poems render their setting all the more palpable for their attention to the effects of language upon experience. The paradox is one that has preoccupied modern philosophy at least since Nietzsche, and Elza is a most philosophical traveler, leaving the place she has visited not untouched but illuminated.

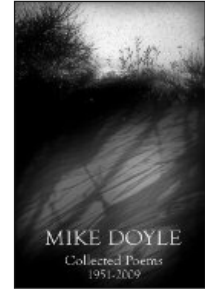
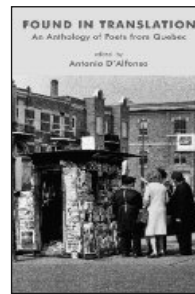
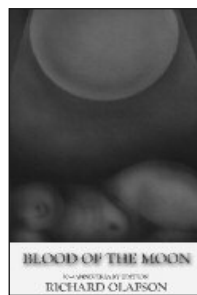
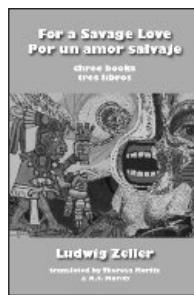
Hilary Turner teaches English and Rhetoric at the University of the Fraser Valley.

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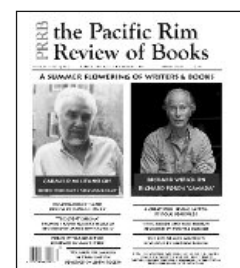
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LEW WELCH REVISITED: A “BRIGHT-EYED BARDIC SPIRIT”

Colin James Sanders

“It’s better to burn out / than it is to rust...” – Neil Young

At times, poet Lew Welch (1926-1971?) has been referred to as the least well known of the Beats. Yet as a poet he is always engaging and his *oeuvre* worth knowing, as attested by this new, expanded edition of *Ring of Bone*. Originally published in 1973 by Don Allen’s Grey Fox Press in Bolinas, this exquisite new collection will assist in securing Welch equal footing alongside the more public Allen Ginsberg, or with such well known, still living Beats as Gary Snyder and Michael McClure.

What was Welch about? Welch’s old friend, poet Joanne Kyger, to whom at least two poems in this volume are dedicated (“For A Kyger Known by Another Name”; “Dear Joanne”), has noted that he hoped his work would be “accessible and simple.” Building on this, fellow Bay Area poet David Meltzer has remarked, “...all Lew wanted was to have people in the bar understand his poetry...” Gary Snyder, in the Forward to this new edition, notes, “Lew was a handsome, talented, and charismatic man who spoke eloquently on many topics,” and refers to Welch as a “bright-eyed bardic spirit”.

In his essay “Language Is Speech” that is fortuitously contained in this edition, Welch notes, “If you want to write you have to want to build things out of language and in order to do that you have to know, really know in your ear and in your tongue and, later, on the page, that language is speech. But the hard thing is that writing is not talking, so what you have to learn to do is to write as if you were talking, and to do it knowing perfectly well you are not talking, you are writing.”

Welch drove cab in the late 1950s, and the poetics of his practice is reflected in the poem “After Anacreon”, the first of five poems from his “Taxi Suite”, in lines such as: “When I drive cab / I am moved by strange whistles and wear a hat. / When I drive cab / I am the hunter. / My prey leaps out from where it hid, / beguiling me with gestures. / When I drive cab / all may command me, yet I am in command of all who do. / When I drive cab / I am guided by voices descending from the naked air”. In conversation with poet-musician Meltzer, Welch remarked that when he read this poem in its entirety to his cab buddies in a pool hall “...they said: Goddam, Lewie, I don’t know whether or not that is a poem, but that is the way it is to drive a cab.”

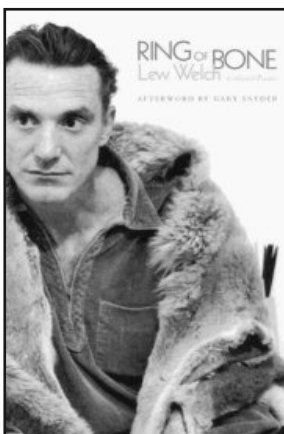
Welch espoused a public poetry, a poetry that would speak to common folk, a poetry that did not require a dictionary to read. In this tribal spirit, as noted above by Snyder, Welch was “bardic.” Welch informed Meltzer, “I had the privilege of seeing a poem of mine pasted in the No Name Bar window. I was asked by the owner of that bar to partake in a small demonstration to protest against the misuse of the beautiful area that the city of Sausalito is... So we had this demonstration, and it was really touching to me, and a source of great gratification, to be asked by an innkeeper in one’s own village to partake in such a thing because of the fact that I am a poet.” Here is the poem:

Sausalito Trash Prayer

Sausalito,
Little Willow,
Perfect beach by the last Bay in the world,
None more beautiful,
Today we kneel at thy feet
And curse the men who have misused you.

Again, in the spirit of service to community, on Feb. 25, 1967, Welch performed his long poem, “How To Give Yourself Away: The Sermon of Gladness” at San Francisco’s Glide Memorial Church. In this poem, Welch writes:

Love can never free us, is only the
natural state we live in as soon as we



Ring of Bone: Collected Poems

Lew Welch
Foreword by
Gary Snyder
City Lights/ Grey Fox
Press, 2012



Gary Snyder, Phillip Whalen and Lew Welch

give ourselves away.

Drugs will never free us, are only ways to
find the intimations of
how it is to give ourselves away.

And all Temptations, in this wild age,
to live more wildly (even than this)
are only that: temptations.

For Welch, the poetic concern is “The need is for plain-ness. / To live more plainly (even than this)”. This way of being is captured in one of Welch’s “Hermit Poems”, poetry he wrote while living alone in a shack in the Trinity Alps country, California.

The image, as in a Hexagram:

The hermit locks his door against the blizzard.
He keeps the cabin warm.

All winter long he sorts out all he has.
What was well started shall be finished.
What was not, should be thrown away.

In spring he emerges with one garment
and a single book.

The cabin is very clean.

Except for that, you’d never guess
nyone lived there.

In an evocative, contemplative poem published as Welch’s first book, *Wobbly Rock* (1960) dedicated to Snyder, Welch writes, “On a trail not far from here / Walking in meditation / We entered a dark grove / And I lost all separation in step with the / Eucalyptus as the trail walked back beneath me”, asking the question, “Does it need to be that dark or is / Darkness only its occasion / Finding it by ourselves knowing / Of course / Somebody else was there before...”

Perhaps these lines and others in this sparkling new edition point toward his enigmatic end. Following college, and working in Chicago from 1953-1957 for the advertising firm Montgomery Ward & Co., Welch apparently penned the familiar ad, “Raid kills

bugs dead”. What he desired was to be a poet though, not an ad man, and having continued to correspond with friends Snyder and Philip Whalen from Reed College, Portland, he relocated to Oakland in 1957 in order to participate in San Francisco’s poetry scene. The next year, he performed his poetry publically for the first time at one of Jack Spicer’s weekly poetry nights in North Beach. In a piece written around this period, “Chicago Poem”, Welch is already concerned about ecological issues, and struggling with anguish and against despair, writing:

*Driving back I saw Chicago rising in its gases and I
knew again that never will the
Man be made to stand against this pitiless, unparalleled
monstrosity. It
Snuffles on the beach of its Great Lake like a
blind, red, rhinoceros.
It’s already running us down.*

The poem ends with lines suggesting Welch was already considering ways to exit this life.

*You can’t fix it. You can’t make it go away.
I don’t know what you’re going to do about it,
But I know what I’m going to do about it. I’m just
going to walk away from it. Maybe
A small part of it will die if I’m not around
feeding it anymore.*

Besides a love of poetry and language, like Spicer, Welch had an affinity for alcohol. In “He Writes To The Donor Of His Bowl”, he gathers mushrooms with a friend and speaks of returning “...to the car for a pull on the wine-jug”, and in a poem from around this same early-Sixties period, “Orange Take”, writes, “I’ve destroyed my brain, part of it, / deliberately, partly, partly, with / booze with age with carbon monoxide (inadvertently, / in Fishing Boat) with city-din with / bachelor food with fasting”. And in “Inflation”, says,

*At 50 cents
I can buy my second drink
with change from the first.*

*At 60 cents
I have to wait for my third drink
before I can buy it
with change from the first two.*

*At 70 cents
I have to wait for the fourth drink
before I can buy it with change.*

*You have left me penniless,
and drunk.*

In “Whenever I Make a New Poem”, another piece from “Hermit Poems” (1960-64) he reflects, “Let them say: / “He seems to have lived in the mountains. / He travelled now and then. / When he appeared in cities, / he was almost always drunk.” This all seems confirmed when in a letter to Ginsberg a month after Welch disappeared, Snyder advised, “Keep an eye out in the city. Maybe he’s monstrously drinking.”

On the evening of May 23, 1971, Snyder, went outside to call Welch for supper. Welch had vanished, leaving a suicide note in his vehicle. Welch had recently come to the San Juan Ridge region to build a cabin on land co-owned by Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder. Snyder gathered some forty neighbours from the vicinity and they spent several days searching for Welch; to date, his body has never been discovered. Apparently, he had in his possession at the time a Smith & Wesson .22 calibre revolver. Decades later, Snyder proclaims, “Lew’s memory and mystery lives on.”

Before he disappeared, Welch wrote marvelous work, poems that epitomize what one of his mentors, Charles Olson, intended when he wrote, “...the poem itself must, at all points, be a high energy-construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge.” In “He Praises His Canyons & Peaks”, Welch observes:

*Driving out to Callahan, you get the setting for it all:
Cloud-shrouded gorges!*

Foggy trees!

*I can’t see the ridges anymore!
River?*

*Big Sung landscape scroll a
mile high and*

longer than I’ll ever know!

It was Michael McClure who once tellingly remarked, “I prefer to read a book of poems, a larger piece of consciousness.” This new and expanded edition of *Ring of Bone* represents an evolving scroll of Welch’s consciousness, his struggles, his anguish, his despair, and the ways in which he negotiates the snares and nets of *samsara*. Until he disappeared, Welch struggled to make meaning amid suffering and pain, and to do so with acceptance through the ways in which he moved through anguish, despair, loneliness and solitude. Again, as he wrote in an essay, “...the business of living has so many barbs in it” (“The Language Of Speech”).

Bioregionally-alert readers will note how Welch’s mind was attuned to the particular, to the specifics of the Pacific coastal and related rural environments and bioregions, and to the commonplace. At the same time, there is erudition in his writing and always an appreciation, on his behalf, of “mind.” Again, as Snyder notes in his Forward, Welch “spoke eloquently on many topics”, and his erudition extended back to a familiarity with Shakespeare, Shelley, Milton, Pope, Dryden, Donne, Whitman, Mayakovsky, Crane, Eliot and others.

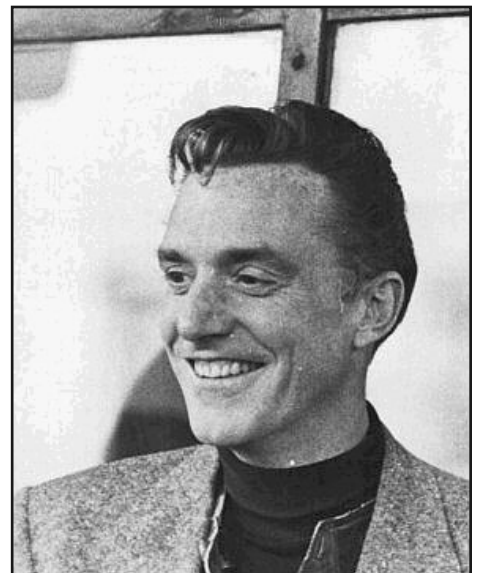
“There is clearly something special about the way we bring words to Mind when we write”, Welch explains in “Language Is Speech” and “The words come to Mind through the whole history of whatever tribe you learned your language in. The words come to Mind through all the private history of how you’ve lived your Human Being”.

My reading of Welch’s mind, as represented by his poetry, is that a middle way between solitude and navigating social relations eluded him. Welch’s poetry indicates that he was comfortable in the backcountry, and upon the ridges, and he was also conscientious of community, and was a person who understood gratitude, acceptance, and compassion. We see this in the way he dedicates numerous of his poems to other poets, friends, and mentors. Readers of this new edition of *Ring of Bone* will note these dedications include a roster of familiar counter-cultural names, including], Rock Skully, manager of The Grateful Dead, to whom the poem “Song of the Turkey Buzzard” is dedicated, with such evocative lines as, “Praises Gentle Tamalpais/Perfect in Wisdom and Beauty of the/sweetest water/and the soaring birds/great seas at the feet of thy cliffs” and others.

This new edition collects Welch’s poetry for us and additionally contains his essay “A Statement of Poetics”, as well as a succinct chronology of highlights regarding Welch’s life, and a useful index of first lines. City Lights is to be commended for this, as is Gary Snyder for persevering in sustaining the words and memory of his bardic friend, whom he visualizes “... still wandering and singing on the back roads – I imagine – at the far edge of the West...”

This far edge of the West was understood all too well by Welch, and in “The Song Mt. Tamalpais Sings” (again to Meltzer, Welch claimed, “...I have taken Mt Tamalpais as my goddess in a very real way, like a priest takes a vow”) is explained as “...the last place. There is nowhere else to go.” But “go” he did, leaving behind his words, this articulation of his mind.

Colin James Sanders lives in Chinatown/Strathcona, east Vancouver. The B.C. Director of Master of Counselling Programs for City University of Seattle in Vancouver, his “Beat Scene Interview” with Robert Duncan appears in A Poet’s Mind: Collected Interviews with Robert Duncan, 1960-1985, edited by Christopher Wagstaff (North Atlantic).



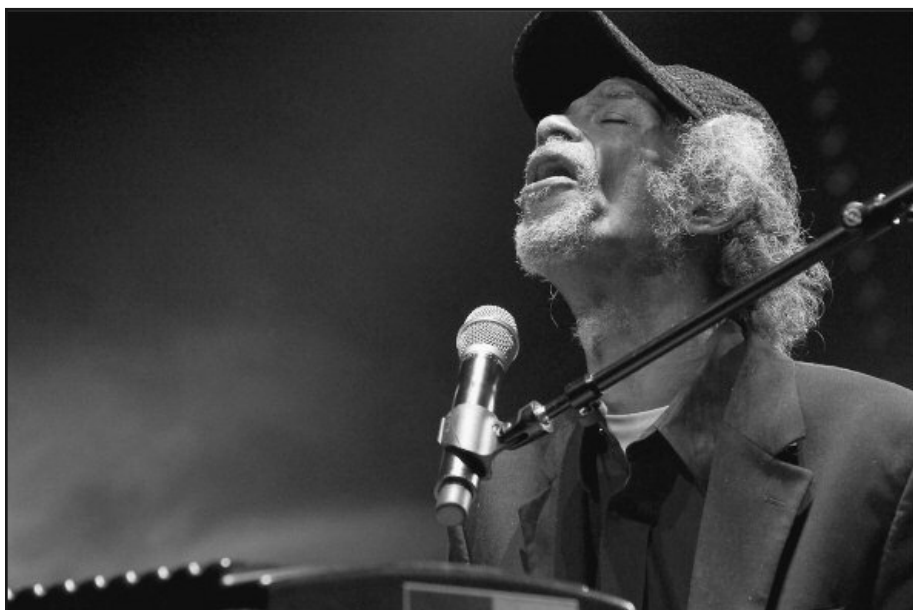
Lew Welch

NEW YORK LIVES

Joseph Blake

These three autobiographies offer searing, epic portraits of three musical lives during revolutionary times. Each is well-written. Each paints a vivid picture of New York and the larger American culture on fire. Each is a flawed, but honest, important book.

The Last Holiday was published after Gil Scott-Heron's death. His editors have produced a well-crafted depiction of a great artist's tragic life. Public Enemy's Chuck D and Eminem are among the rappers who credit Scott-Heron's seminal roll in hip-hop culture. His 20 albums featured spoken word poetry that inspired rap. Singles like *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, *Home Is Where the Hatred Is*, *The Bottle*, *Johannesburg*, and *We Almost Lost Detroit* established Scott-Heron as rap's godfather, but he was much more as the writing in *The Last Holiday* attests.



Gil Scott-Heron in 2010

Abandoned by his pro soccer-playing Jamaican father, Scott-Heron was raised by his grandmother in rural Tennessee. He help desegregate his junior high in 1962, and when his grandmother died moved to New York with his mother and attended the prestigious Fieldstone School on a full scholarship. After his freshman year at Lincoln, a black Pennsylvania college, Scott-Heron dropped out to write his first novel, *The Vulture*, and a book of poems, *Small Talk at 125th and Lenox*. He recorded the poems on an LP in 1970. Scott-Heron got an MA in writing from Johns Hopkins University in 1972, just before his music career took off.

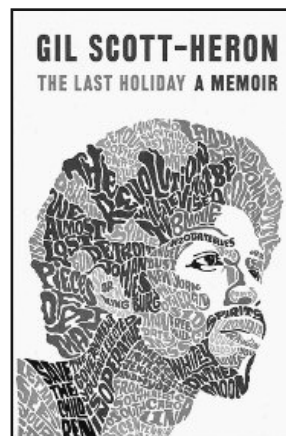
This hip, fractured narrative captures the musician's life with a jumpy, spirited warmth. His beautiful descriptions of life in Tennessee are some of the best writing, but my favourite line is the musician's funny criticism of performing in Madison Square Garden.

"When you played there you sounded like the Knicks," he writes as the book builds to his spot replacing a critically-ailing Bob Marley on Stevie Wonder's historic "Hotter Than July" tour in support of Martin Luther King Day. Lots of personal life including three decades of drug addiction, disease and arrests are left out of the book. It builds to his 1980 triumphant tour with Wonder and ends on a story of revisiting his mother's home and a heartbreaking message to his children and their mothers. Strong stuff.

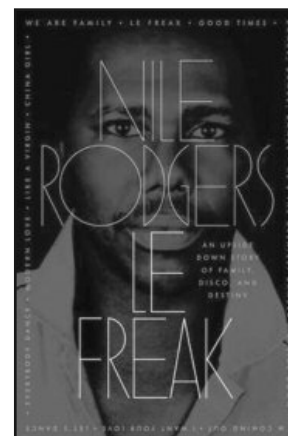
Nile Rodgers' autobiography, *Le Freak* is a strong book too. Living with his heroin-addicted family, a young Rodgers thinks it is normal behavior for adults to fall asleep on their feet. His description of his teenage black mom, Jewish bohemian



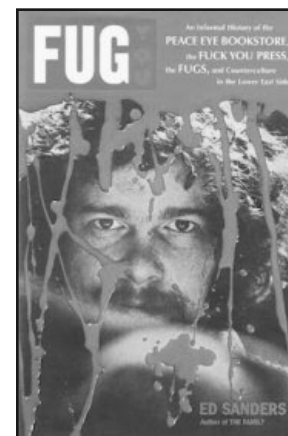
Niles Rogers



The Last Holiday: A Memoir
Gil Scott-Heron
Grove Press
318 pages, \$25



Le Freak
Nile Rodgers
Spiegel & Grau
318 pages, \$31



Fug You
Ed Sanders
DaCapo
424 pages, \$31.50

step-dad and their addict friends as human trees standing around young Nile is haunting. The asthmatic child lived through this beatnik life to create his own Uptown-Down-town life of drink, drugs and sexual indulgence, as his musical career grew from *Sesame Street* road show performer to jamming with Jimi Hendrix and performances at the Apollo with Screamin' Jay Hawkins. With his band Chic and the 12 million-selling *Le Freak*, Rodgers helped birth disco music. He also wrote *We Are Family* for Sister Sledge and *I'm Coming Out* for Diana Ross before producing *Let's Dance* for Bowie and *Like a Virgin* for Madonna. His resume also includes stints with Dylan, Michael Jackson, Prince and Duran Duran.

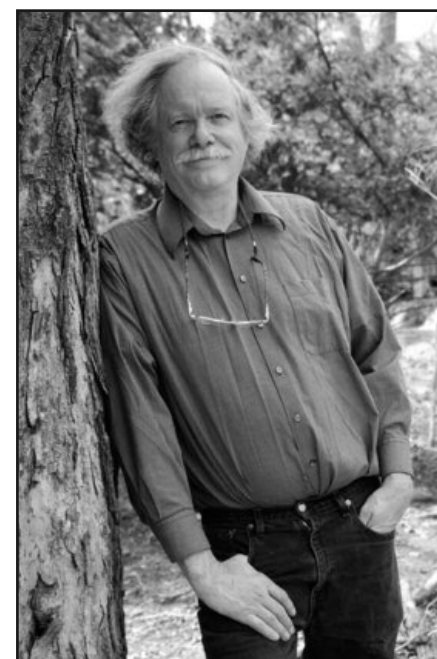
Le Freak proves Rodgers a fine writer too. His descriptions of disco-era Club 54 madness are some of his finest, most honest work, as is his dissection of the inherent racism beneath the "disco sucks" movement that torched Chic's career and musical reputation. This sets the record straight in fine style.

Ed Sanders' autobiography, *Fug You* is another honest, self-described "peace creep's" view of the turbulent politics of the 1960s. Early in the book Sanders tells the story of writing *Poem From Jail* on toilet paper during his incarceration for trying to swim aboard a nuclear sub. That protest tale was published by City Lights Books and helped launch the writer/musician's career "daring to be part of the history of the era."

Sanders published *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts* and established the Peace Eye Bookstore, an East Village landmark during the Vietnam protest years. Sanders advocated free speech, sex and drug freedom, and cultural revolution from the soul-dead '50s. He also sought the rock and roll dream and attendant fame and fortune with the Fugs, his provocative band of satiric rock anarchists. For a few years, Sanders and the Fugs toured the world and raised hell before he left the stage to write his acclaimed epic depiction of the Manson clan and the hippie era, *The Family*.

Through it all, Sanders has stayed married to his wife of 50 years and remembered enough of his drug-addled experiences to write this playful, self-effacing memoir of a very exciting time. Dig out your old records and enjoy all three of these fine books.

Joseph Blake is Music Editor for PRRB.



Ed Sanders

EXULTATION AMIDST THE RUINED WHISPERS IN THE GRAND SPECTACLE OF EXISTENCE, ALLAN GRAUBARD STRIKES IT RICH

Jeffrey Cyphers Wright

Long associated with Surrealism, Allan Graubard unspools imagery coated in pregnant signifiers and loaded codes. His latest book is elegant, evocative and quite polished.

Surrealism as a mode of poetic expression, never really caught fire in English. The startling inventions of Andre Breton, Robert Desnos, and company were bypassed in favor of more rhetorically conventional narratives.

There is a potent strain of Surrealism though, that has been nurtured and developed in North America, especially in San Francisco with its Renaissance where Robert Duncan pioneered esoteric themes.

Later on the the Beats in general were so iconoclastic that they incorporated some Surrealist imagery in ironic ways. Think: “Reality Sandwiches” by Ginsberg. A Beat/Surrealist, San Franciscan Philip Lamantia’s confrontational spirit is echoed in Graubard’s brutal examinations. And San Franciscan Bob Kaufman’s improvisations were akin to automatic writing. The same “visionary lyricism” (as Jack Micheline describes Kaufman’s work) also illuminates Graubard’s writings.

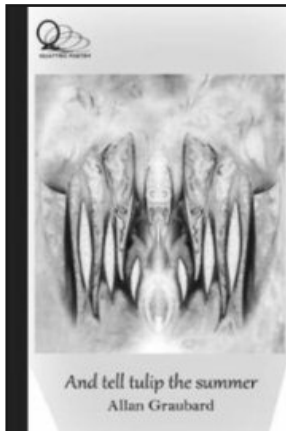
When the Hippies came along they picked up on the Beats’ interest in ancient cultures and religions. *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* and the *Bhagavad Gita* got mixed into the literary canon along with Tarot cards, shamanism and psychedelia. The poet Ira Cohen bridged generations and continents with his wild images and expansive juxtapositions. He was good friends with Graubard and there is an exquisite poem dedicated to him in Part VI.

Another San Franciscan, Ronnie Burke infused “exultative” language with re-configured pantheism, something Graubard also does. And Anne Waldman still conjures spectral choruses in her transportive rant-mantras. Graubard finds much in common with her lexicon and cosmic inflection.

Currently Surrealism remains mostly absent from mainstream or alternate poetry. Virtuoso practitioners do maintain staunch bastions of radiance. On the west coast, Will Alexander and Micah Ballard are creating amazing, unique poems. In New York City Valery Oisteanu has re-rooted his Dada-istic Rumanian heritage to produce cosmopolitan litanies that scintillate with innovative impressions. And in the heartland, John Bennett rings out with his experimental texts and typographical disjunctions.

Allan Graubard is one of the tribe’s luminaries. His latest book of poems, *And tell tulip the summer*, is a varnish-peeling blowtorch that strips the dross off language to reveal its stunning nucleus. Patterns emerge like blobs of molten magma rolling in heat convections . . . scrollwork . . . filigree . . . brocade . . . nebulae and webs appear and subside as Graubard tempers the poem in a fire of finely chosen words.

Walking a tightrope between nature and myth, Graubard balances biology and imagination. “Bats fattened on nectar” keep the “phantom words” company.



*And tell the tulip
summer*
Allan Graubard
Quattro Books, 2010



Allan Graubard

Behind the mundane detail looms the grand pronouncement.

The collection is presented as nine groups. The first poem is a bold prediction: “All Those Who Drink from This Fountain Shall Return.” The title is more of an introduction to the poet’s method and resolve than to any unnecessary bravado. Owning up to its boast nevertheless, it is a remarkably lyric poem, full of assonance and internal rhyme.

*where tiny trains carry shards of thistles
and brief scars burn on feather beds
portable gold leaf mirrors.*

Cascading images are draped over the persona in “*What is it that rises . . .*” Graubard constantly pushes this poem forward by elaborating on the condition of his subject. In one of his ongoing metamorphoses, “a thin door made of the frail silhouette of kisses,” changes when he touches it. It dries “into a bowl lapping with fresh ashes of a falling night.”

The cadence is sure as the ever-evolving image spirals onward. Graubard’s control over the mesmerizing effect seems to magnify as the book proceeds over a decade’s course. In “Old Drawings” we are likened to sketches that will be “hanging from walls sheared from vandalized echoes.” The pitch is heightened and carries an uncanny, jarring note . . . a transcription of some eerie dimension carved out of millennia from our species’ collective unconscious.

In Part IV, a series of prose poems, Graubard continues to cover repetitive structures with his signature transmogrifications. This strategy serves him well and allows him to stack layers of disparate imagery that remain unified in their relation to one subject. The conceits often reach an astonishing zenith.

“Together we walk alongside the quay, gazing at our reflections in the sluggish iron gauze of the river.”

Here, Graubard pulls off one of the main goals in poetry — the ability to commune with a reader — and to convert that reader into becoming the muse.

The charged location — a quay — is loaded with metaphoric and transportative import. A quay is a place of arrivals and departures, a conduit and a hub. It is a place of excitement and possibility, which translates into the energy of the poem itself.

Inviting the reader to gaze “at our reflections” activates a double associative phrase. This ability to conjure alter-loci is territory Graubard can claim as his own and represents a sophisticated advancement in Surrealism.

Astro-planing between seams of arcane argot, biology, dreamscapes, romance, shamanism and homage, Graubard assembles a grand procession. His potent process of re-configuring linguistic DNA unleashes hybridized imagery that lifts us off the lotus pad.

In the poem “Modette” each phrase begins with the same refrain, “you came.” After each of these openers Graubard goes on to startle us with a twisted vision, stringing together his trademark chimeras.

*You came without a word
holding the flame of your skirt in your hands
above the endless slumbering cities
of shadowy engines
You came with crossed eyes of dawn and dew . . .
You came with arms runneled with ink . . .
You came with your glyphs of buried dolmens
to barter for vials of painted sweat.*

A dolmen is a prehistoric stone structure thought to be a tomb and a portal. Graubard’s funereal metaphors are classically Surrealistic in tone. But the visceral physicality of “painted sweat” is gut-felt and here he breaks new ground.

A kind of black and white scrim tints the work throughout, as if it carried the weight of a time capsule. Graubard should be more rigorous in resisting easy tropes. I counted the words “wind” and “shadow” in too many poems. And his reliance on the preposition

(continued on page 22)

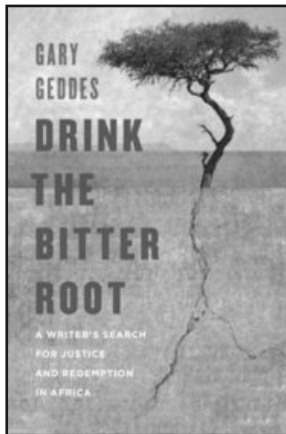
TO THE PAINFUL HEART OF AFRICA

Ralph Maud

This book represents an earnest attempt to get to the painful heart of Africa, the hurt of its many civil wars and their chief product, the refugee. Geddes takes with him his own sensibilities:

When my mother died, I felt I had been orphaned. My father lived thousands of miles away, married to another woman. There was talk of family friends adopting me, but my father showed up soon after with the intention of taking my brother and me to live with him. I sat at the piano, having had only twelve lessons, but desperate to play well so my father would not change his mind. At the time, I felt I was playing for my life. (p. 166)

It is with such sensibilities that, descending on central Africa by jet plane, one tries to escape the accusation of “voyeurism”. This is the word used by Emmanuelle from Lyon, a child protection officer of “Save the Children,” working in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, after years in Chad, Yemen and Darfur. Gary Geddes does not say how he countered her, but he makes clear to us his readers that his answer was there in his laptop computer: the image of the bludgeoned face of Shidone Arone, the boy who had slipped into a Canadian camp in Somalia, and after hours of brutal torture died, “the perfect symbol of what the west had been doing to Africa for almost two centuries.” Geddes had delib-



Drink the Bitter Root: A Writer's Search for Justice and Redemption in Africa
Gary Geddes
Douglas & McIntyre
2011

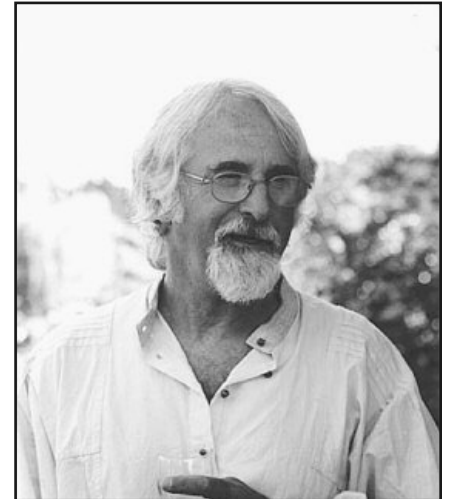
erately brought that image with him to “help clarify my purpose and steel my resolve” (p. 7). As a Canadian he felt tainted, and his trip was to be a cleansing of sorts.

What astonishes me is that one man in our time can feel that he could and should—like Herodotus of old—go and find out for himself, not really to experience a war—not that kind of frontline journalism—but to hear firsthand from those who had, and then to write it up for us. I’m not saying that Gary Geddes is the only one to have done this, but he is ‘our’ Herodotus. And who else has begun such a trip with a week in The Hague, visiting the International Criminal Court? It’s that kind of move at depth that clinches the moral point.

Geddes gets to his heart of darkness soon after leaving Emmanuelle and meeting thirty-two-year-old Mbede, “slumped onto the couch, arms wrapped around her in a self-protective embrace”:

“There was a knock on the door,” Mbede said slowly, each word hauled reluctantly into the light. “Who are you?” my husband demanded. When he opened the door, eight soldiers burst into the room.” She hesitated, as if the effort to recall was more than she could manage. They killed my husband. All but one

(continued on page 20)



Gary Geddes

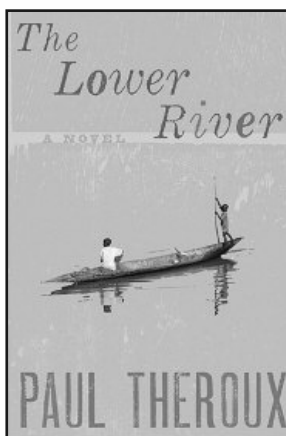
PAUL THEROUX'S AFRICAN BLUES

Eric Spalding

Paul Theroux initially captured interest through his travel books: *The Great Railway Bazaar*, *The Old Patagonian Express*, *The Empire by the Sea* – I like them all. He’s skilled at describing landscapes and people and he’s honest about his feelings. He doesn’t hide it when he hates a place or when he’s lonely and miserable. As for the novels, they work best when they’ve resembled the travel books with a solitary narrator like Theroux himself lost in some foreign locale. In *My Other Life*, one of my own favourite novels of his, the narrator’s name is none other than Paul Theroux.

The Lower River is in the category of those novels where the protagonist, Ellis Hock, could be Paul Theroux under another name. There are resemblances: both the real Theroux and the fictitious Hock were in the Peace Corps in their early twenties and spent a few years teaching in a remote village in southeast Africa. Much later, both of them returned to the village only to feel disappointed at its dilapidated state. They notably regret what has happened to the building in which they taught.

Compare the travel book and the novel. In *Dark Star Safari: Overland from Cairo to Cape Town*, Theroux writes: “The school was almost unrecognizable...The trees had been cut down, the grass was chest high. At first glance the place was so poorly maintained as to seem abandoned: broken windows, doors ajar, mildewed walls, gashes in the roofs, and only a few people standing around, empty-handed, doing nothing but gaping at me.” In *The Lower River*, he writes: “The windows gaped, the roof was gone, the doors were splintered but still attached to hinges. Hock mentally scythed the grass, roofed the school, imagined it with a coat of paint, laid out gravel pathways.”



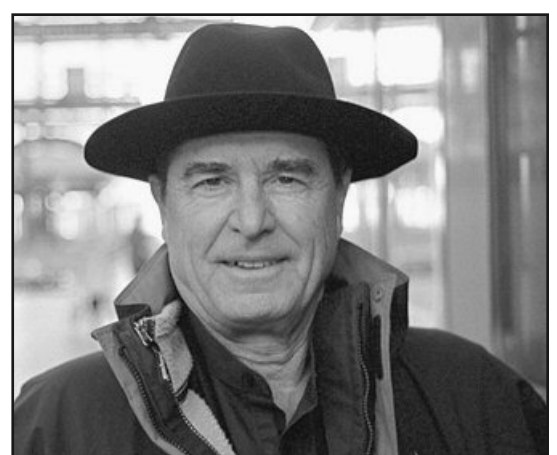
The Lower River
Paul Theroux
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
2012), 336 pages

The opening chapters of *The Lower River* are set in Theroux’s own hometown of Medford, Massachusetts. Hock, a man in his sixties, newly divorced, shuts down the clothing store he has operated for thirty years and ventures off to the small, isolated Malawi village where he had been happy decades before. He has great ambitions to assist the villagers, through teaching and other forms of aid. Will the glory of these long ago days return forty years on? The drama of the novel arises from the fact that the short answer to this question is no. The small village on the shores of the Lower River, which Hock had seen as so full of promise years before, is impoverished, with its hungry inhabitants eking out a meagre living in a sun-parched land.

In telling his story, Theroux comments upon the gap between the white visitor and the native. Indeed, a middle-class American like Hock appears wealthy in the eyes of Africans. This inequality, in the author’s view, leads some Europeans and North Americans towards arrogance. The latter wrongly believe that Africans can accomplish nothing for themselves. Aid organizations in particular come off badly in the novel. Their comfortable distance from the people whom they’re supposed to be helping blinds them to the latter’s real needs. Their donations do nothing to alleviate deep-rooted problems.

In moving the narrative forward, Theroux explores what happens when everything goes wrong for his protagonist. There are parallels for this approach in his own travel

(continued on page 20)



Paul Theroux

BORDER SONGS

Peter McDonald

If you want to know what not to read, visit your local Barnes & Noble poetry section and browse. Charitably one might want a few new doorstops, Jack Gilbert's *Collected Poems* comes to mind, and more recently, Louise Gluck's gravestone-sized collected. Other than these, and some reissued classics, the rest of the shelf space is almost certainly filled with the endless MFA graduates who seem to have prize-winning collections each. On a cheerier note, a book you won't find there, burning brighter by far, is Sam Hamill's new collection of 22 mordant poems, *Border Songs*—out on Paul Lobo Portuges' unassuming Word Palace Press. Now that's something to crow about.

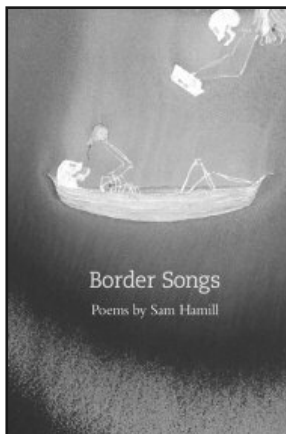
Hamill, of course, is a prodigious poet, with over forty books under his belt, including poetry, translations, essays and edited works. Indeed, a good many of the finest poets in the land owe him a debt of gratitude for his tireless years as founder and editor of Copper Canyon Press, and for publishing them. Who but Hamill had the ear to rescue Hayden Carruth from the oblivion of the New Directions remainder bin, or edit Rexroth so luminously in *The Complete Poems of Kenneth Rexroth*. His departure from CCP was a sad day for poetry.

Lucky for us, *Border Songs* is some of his finest work in years. The poems are by the whole short, some at a page, the longest, "Body Count" stands at four and a half. The work opens with a paean "To My Muse" in a voice anyone who knows this poet will be familiar with. It is tender, almost pleading, an overture to weary lamentation:

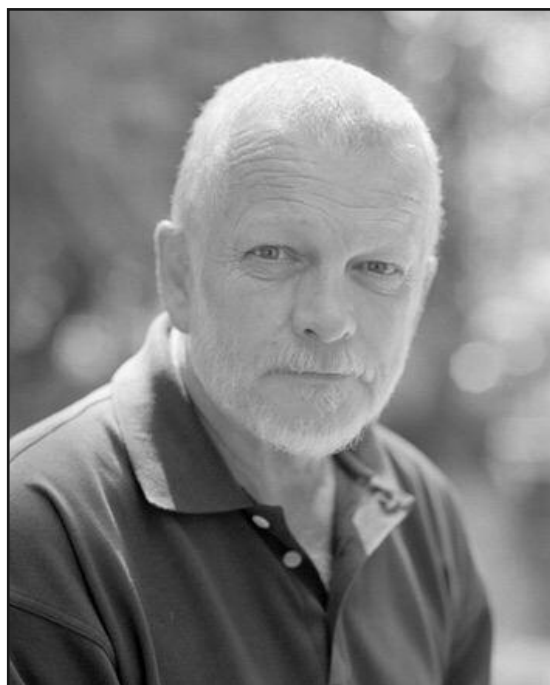
*I'm no longer dazzled
by philologists
arguing the subtleties
of antiquities. I'm baffled
by poets who succeed.*

No envy here, though literary success, at least measured by national book honors, has eluded Hamill, much as he has deserved them. Poets Against War may have put him squarely on the Bush-era zeitgeist, but it doubtless did little to shortlist him for any major literary prize you might mention. Partly because the man is nothing if not a contrarian, the poems in this slim book cry out with a poignancy and anguish at the madness of this world that write wrongs in the crosshairs of Hamill's characteristic, if Buddhistic, wrath. Two poems in particular stand out as indictments, "Children of the Marketplace" and "Body Count" whose list of the dead and dying is like a Poundian incantation of iniquities: "We are Darfur. We are Medellin. / We are Mutanabbi Street in Baghdad." One admires at once the strident cadence and honesty, but these two poems, in the end, are such a catalogue of injustice, one is tempted, quietly, to turn the page for a calmer quay.

Then suddenly, the clouds part, the scent of an Argentinian Malbec wafts up, and Hamill writes us a love poem of an evening in the city of Buenos Aires just months before his wife Gray died, a poem of such tenderness and lonely regret, that it is truly and



Border Songs
Sam Hamill
Word Palace Press
2012. Paperbound.
\$19.95 48 pages



Sam Hamill

stunningly a heartbreaker. For anyone who knew Gray Foster, an artist muse who died of cancer in 2012, "Another Love Song" is a sun-dappled eulogy of a life shared in struggle and consensual creativity. Here is a man still madly in love after so many years, sharing penury, and cheap wine, unstinting in his pained revelations.

*It is almost solstice. In El Norte,
winter storms howl in the trees.
Friends have drained the pipes in our
Port Townsend house and prepared it
for a lengthy freeze. Here,
my wife and I return to find relief,
to heal a little from the assaults of age
that in the end no one can escape.*

For a slim book, this is a work of a master craftsman. Like a tocsin, it calls us to a higher understanding of our frail place on this battered earth. A point of praise is due, and a few minor quibbles. The cover, a frame from a larger painting called "Farewell to Yin Shu" (after Li Po) by the inventive book artist Ian Boyden is both delightful and macabre, a skeleton drinking wine in a skiff upon coal black waters. But to publish a poet like Sam Hamill, arguably the finest hands-on letterpress printer of the last 25 years, to go to press with mistakes in editing and lazy typography. Really now. The title page, sadly, seems downright slapdash. And the title poem in the table of contents is mis-numbered as to page throwing the rest off too. These are unnecessary errors.

In the end, though, this wafer-thin book has something of the holy repast in it. A counterbalance on the scales of justice that extols us to act against the vile ignorance of the arrogant and the powerful, a light in the darkness, if you will, to those of us adrift on this pearl of a planet shattering even now in imbalance.

Peter McDonald is the Dean of Library Services, California State University, Fresno. He is a published poet, writer, and publisher most recently on "First Light: A Festschrift for Philip Levine on his 85th Birthday" published by Greenhouse Review Press (in collaboration with The Press at California State university Fresno). He is the director of the Fresno Poets Association.

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GARY GEDDES (continued from page 18)

of them raped me.”

I asked if she recognized the soldiers or knew what faction they represented, but she was no finished recounting her story.

“I lost my whole family. The rest fled into the forest and my parents died there. I don’t know what happened to my brothers. I had to take care of their six children, but I had no home, no work, no food. How could I keep them from stealing to stay alive? I tried to have strength. One of my nieces went away to be a soldier ... A woman in the village had a room she let me use and a sewing machine. Seven of us in one room. I could not imagine this kind of thing happening to me. Then it happened again. Two more soldiers raped me ... They were Rwandan soldiers, CNDB, FDLR, what does it matter? I suffer high blood pressure, headaches. I’m afraid all the time.” (p. 117)

Geddes is left to wonder what difference it would make to Mbema if the Congo and Rwanda war criminals were convicted at The Hague with life sentences, “eating three good meals a day, sleeping in a warm bed, watching a twenty-seven inch television screen and playing Ping-Pong with Radovan Karadzic.” All he could finally do was to make sure that a sewing machine would be given to Mbema when she left the hospital. What else could a visitor from British Columbia do?

Drink the Bitter Root ends with a sense of limited accomplishment:

From my third-floor balcony at the National Hotel (in Addis Ababa) I watched the last rays of sunlight gild the tops of distant buildings. Near at hand, everything was in shadow. All week, I’d felt swamped by a tsunami of need; the stories I’d listened to were red-hot branding irons searing my conscience. Yet when I was confronted by the belief, the gratitude and, yes, the hope in some of those faces, a strange peace had settled on me. I’d come away laden not with guilt, but with the sense of having been blessed and challenged. Maybe I’d learned something, too; that there are moments when it’s more important to tend the wounded than to report the casualties (p. 168).

But it is something, too, to report the casualties. Writing an important book is something, and Gary Geddes has done that.

Ralph Maud is an author, editor and professor emeritus at Simon Fraser University. He is the founder of the Charles Olson Literary Society.

PAUL THEROUX (continued from page 18)

writing, as the author has certainly reflected on the risks involved in visiting certain countries. For instance, in *Fresh Air Fiend: Travel Writings*, he remarks: “I had always felt that my exit would be made via an Appointment in Samarra, and that I would go a great distance and endure enormous discomfort in order to meet my death.” Disconcerting events do torment Theroux in places like the Sudan, but happily for him, nothing is as bad as what he puts his protagonist through early on in *The Lower River*. Hock, unmoored from his cozy life in Massachusetts, quickly begins to feel isolated and lonely. He also feels ineffectual at helping the villagers. Reading this novel, I had the impression that Theroux was purging himself of his anxieties about travel. Perhaps by making Hock suffer, he wouldn’t have to. Or perhaps by imagining the worst that could happen, he could remind himself to be cautious in his own travels.

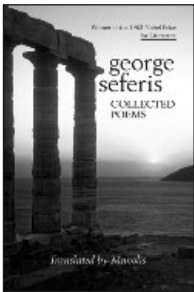
While not of the top rank among Theroux’ novels, *The Lower River* is an enjoyable read. If some of its scenes seem far-fetched, on the whole the novel works and there is dramatic momentum. Theroux’s talent in creating vivid characters and his ear for dialogue are all displayed, and his skill at depicting the Malawi village and its environs gave me the sense that I was physically there myself. It’s a novel that leaves one wanting to know what happens next.

Eric Spalding writes from British Columbia’s Fraser Valley where he teaches Communications and Media Studies. He is a regular contributor to Pacific Rim Review of Books.

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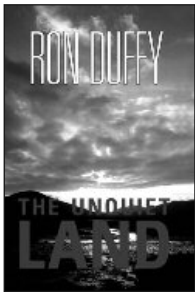
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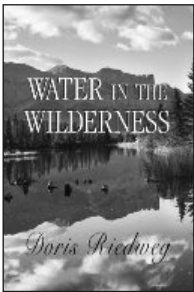
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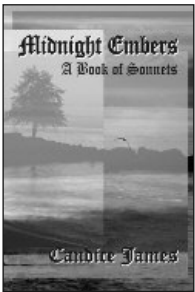
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cause of me narcotics are—/there is no out, there is only in.” He is on the nod.

For eight years Corso was adrift in “a Rimbaud-like silence,” as one critic said. He penned a few poems, but it was evident that “horse” had replaced Pegasus as his inspiration of choice.

Jack Kerouac’s death in 1969 motivated Corso to write “Elegiac Feelings American”—a rambling elegy in verse paragraphs that says as much for himself as it does for Kerouac’s memory. The title poem has sweep, but its repeated use of the word “America” (72 times!) is more distracting than unifying. This elegy and a trio of poems (“The American Way,” “America Politica Historia,” “Mutation of the Spirit”) record Corso’s own Dantean journey and his vision of modern life—a vision that wavers between eschatology and history, the sociopolitical and the religiophilosophical. What with the Vietnam War and Richard Nixon’s inauguration, he is lamenting the fact that America hasn’t lived up to its democratic ideals. The result is a welter of spiritual generalities. The form is all wrong; the subject might have been better served as a verse drama, like the choruses in T.S. Eliot’s “The Rock”; but without Eliot’s religiosity. Perhaps Corso’s poetic reasoning would have benefited from Robert Lowell’s dictum that each generation leads the same life, the life of its time; and that no one in the present is wiser or more foolish than those in the past or future.

The most unusual poem in the book and one that displays Corso’s use of neologisms, macabre humor, and atmospheric effects is “Of One Month’s Reading of English Newspapers,” with its sinister refrain: “Girls of one to ten/Beware of Englishmen.” English playwright Joe Orton would have concurred.

A decade of silence preceded *Herald of the Autochthonic Spirit*. A weird title, as though written from the beyond. Or is it an allusion to Dostoevsky’s “underground man”? Kerouac’s “subterraneans”? Whatever, this slim volume—part confession, part testament—darkly heralds the passage of time, the sadness of aging, the inevitability of death. Corso’s lines are looser, and his metaphors softer. There are poems about childhood, aphorisms about the necessary lies we abide to survive, and the middle-aged poet’s guilt and regret for his misspent youth, his heroin addiction. In “Columbia U Poesy Reading—1975,” he cries ruefully: “There is yet time/to run back through life and expiate/all that’s been sadly done...sadly neglected.” Sadly, there isn’t. And yet his seemingly spontaneous poem “For Homer” is a banner of Leibnizian optimism.

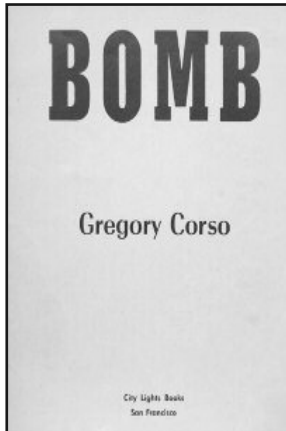
Compared with Corso’s earlier, loftier, zanier flights, the overall tone of this collection is low-keyed, almost resigned.

Mindfield: New & Selected Poems (1989) was Corso’s last book. It contains twenty-three previously uncollected poems. More than half were written during the 1960s. Were they rejects or surplus? Who knows? Some are exceptional: “Rembrandt—Self-Portrait,” “A Bed’s Lament,” “St. Tropez, Early Morning,” “Vermeer,” “The Doubt of Lie.” An eye-catching title is “Poet Talking to Himself in the Mirror.” It’s a loaded image but not original. (Sergey Esenin has an hallucinatory dialogue poem about his reflection in a mirror.) Symbolically, the mirror is an allusion to Narcissus, from which the flower *Narcissus poeticus*, and the word *narcotic* derive. But Corso’s soliloquy is a study in self-contradiction—“It’s the mirror that changes/not poor Gregory”—as he confronts his own mortality and questions his poetic faith—“Now I see people/as police see them.” This distich establishes the short run-on lines that conclude with the poet telling himself to “stay close to the poem,” as opposed to getting a literary agent to pimp his Muse.

Corso’s commitment to poetry rings true. For most of his life he lived a hand-to-mouth existence; and despite periods of self-doubt and escapism, he is one of American poetry’s most puckish messengers of the spirit.

Poetry was Gregory Corso’s salvation. Were it not for poetry and a chance meeting with Allen Ginsberg in 1950, this 20-year-old *enfant terrible* fresh out of prison, with a suitcase full of poems, might have ended up as a hood on those “all too real Mafia streets” of New York City.

Len Gasparini is the author of numerous books of poetry and five short-story collections, including When Does a Kiss Become a Bite? (Ekstasis) and The Snows of Yesteryear (Guernica).



Corso's Bomb, City Lights Books



Gregory Corso on the cover of Beat Scene

ican composer of the stunningly beautiful “O magnum mysterium”, among other choral works. He teaches in Los Angeles and has a summer cabin up here nearby Victoria on Waldron Island. As well, I can’t help mentioning that “The Necessary Angel” is the title of a formidable book of essays by Wallace Stevens. Dana Gioia leaves nothing to chance.

After a decade, the poet is still full of “faith’s ardor” — and steeped in loss. The cover photo is “Angel, S. Minato, taken in Florence. In the second poem, “The Angel with the Broken Wing”, concludes:

*There are so many things I must tell God!
The howling of the damned can’t reach so high.
But I stand like a dead thing nailed to a perch,
A crippled saint against a painted sky.*

It is important to note that the angel is broken — but still beautiful. And, indeed, may even be more so. But this is not what Hopkins meant by ‘beautiful things’. Gioia’s is not a sacramental vision. The image mirrors something closer to Nietzsche than Hopkins.

The apologetics of beauty is one way of articulating the Catholic faith. However, in this book, singing the praises of beauty becomes a dirge, the beauty of Creation transformed into a contemporary wasteland. I confess I had high hopes that “Pity The Beautiful” would illustrate how the poet had overcome his long grief, but it is not to be. The gloom is unabated, the dark air filled, not with van Gogh’s crows, but with question marks. “Where was it he had meant to go, and with whom?” is a reoccurring theme throughout Gioia’s work. There is even a ghost narrative, shades of Coleridge’s ancient mariner, or the best of Henry James. Who said the worst is to suffer and remain alive?

Gioia’s central theme brings to mind Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener” (“I would prefer not to”), or James’ brilliant novella, “The Beast in the Jungle.” And the section opens with a quotation from Dylan Thomas: “And the lovers lies abed/ With all their griefs in their arms.” It is a most appropriate epigram.

Poems like “The Present,” “The Angel With The Broken Wing,” “Prophecy,” “Prayer at Winter Solstice,” (which adds up the dead) ... “The Seven Deadly Sins” yield no life-affirming joy but only reveal the overwhelming emptiness of our soulless, secular society. Indeed, “Prophecy” is identified as “the first inkling/ of what we ourselves call into being.... The gift is listening and hearing what is only meant for you.” One’s faith seems to have been tested — and temporarily found wanting.

The title poem is bitterly ironic. The tone is easy to miss, and reminded me of a similar problem I initially experienced when listening to Shostakovich. Gioia lists the dolls, dishes, babes, pretty boys, hunks, Apollos, golden lads, hotties, knock-outs, tens out of ten, drop-dead gorgeous, great leading men, the faded, bloated, the blowsy, and the paunchy Adonis who pass for the “gods no longer divine.” This is what passes for beauty in the modern world, but it is beauty separated from goodness and truth. Other lyrics, like the song-like “Reunion”, cry out to be set to music.

Poems like “Shopping” (“I enter the temple of my people but do not pray”) are secular hymns written for the pagan “gods of the mall and marketplace.” “The Freeways Considered As Earth Gods” is addressed to “the gods of California” with the admonition that we must “worship them.” Inevitably, every attempt to affirm one’s life in pagan society becomes simply “another venture failed.”

Gioia brilliantly captures the dis-ease of indifference, the ennui, the deception, the self-inflation, the sheer exhaustion, the “sensuous lack of purpose” of contemporary society. The modern world is hell and we are all dead souls in it. The poet’s vision is terribly depressing. But true. “Pity The Beautiful” is Dana Gioia’s Wasteland, his California Comedy. Under these circumstances, it is not easy to remember that though it is a fallen world it is a good world.

With the final poem we return to the death of the young child. “Majority” imagines a child of three reaching “six/ or seven, of ten”, then reaching the age of majority. It ends: “Finally, it makes sense/ that you have moved away/ into your own afterlife.” For Gioia, it seems the most we can hope for.

The content of these four books bear little or no relation to the back cover bump and smiling photos of the poet. That said, I feel there are signs here that the poet is on the sharp edge of something truly great, a poetry that may open to the infinite, to a beauty and truth that goes beyond the ordinary. If Dana Gioia lives up to his name — and can bring together the visible reality with the possibility of the infinite in a Jacob’s ladder of beautiful poems that elevate the soul, — well, we can only eagerly anticipate and await his next book.

All four of Dana Gioia’s books are divided into five sections. What does this mean, I am tempted to ask, but it is a question for a M.A. student to explore.

Doug Beardsley is the author of eleven volumes of poetry. He studied at Sir George Williams University where he came under the poetic tutelage of Irving Layton, with whom he corresponded until Layton’s death in 2006. He lives in Victoria.

LENORE KANDEL (continued from page 3)
concede your nature and reveal your dreams!
each beast contains its god, all gods are dreams
all dreams are true

Underpinning the circus trope in these beginning poems is the repeated idea of the holy beast in all of us, that the beast is bloody, holy, and we are it. “no man intransigent/but shields the animal within/were-wolf never died/but sits beside you...”

There are more “divine lust” poems in this collection but Kandel’s sights have widened to include more of the human experience in these poems. Exuberant as these poems are, they visit the depths as well as the heights. In “First They Slaughtered the Angels” we read of the torture of the angels, “opening their silk throats with icy knives,”...” tying their thin white legs with wire cords” and “they have wiped their asses on angel feathers...” This poem has been read as a lament for friends dying of heroin and other drugs at the time, but, given the times, I imagine she is including those innocents dying in Viet Nam, on the streets of poverty and want, all of the innocents who suffer. She does include a poem quite specifically for those brothers and sisters suffering from drug addiction later in the volume: “Junk/Angel,”

I have seen the junkie angel winging his devious path over cities
his greenblack pinions parting the air with the sound of fog
I have seen him plummet to earth, folding
his feathered bad wings against his narrow flesh
pausing to share the orisons of some ecstatic acolyte...

And more explicitly in “Blues for Sister Sally,”

moon-faced baby with cocaine arms
nineteen summers
nineteen lovers

And in “Small Prayer for Falling Angels.” “Too many of my friends are junkies,” which turns into a prayer to Kali Ma, Indian goddess who wears a necklace of skulls, to “remember the giving of life as well as the giving of death...”

Lenore Kandel lived when she did and where she did, and recorded her experience

with honesty and beauty. She was definitely a product of her times, but more, Lenore Kandel has been a voice for love, for light and in her words, the “ecstatic access of enlightenment. My favorite word is YES.” She was not a self-promoter and due to her later reclusiveness, her legacy is somewhat shadowy. Perhaps this fine collection will rightfully revive her place in the world of poetry.

Judith Roche is a poet and the author of three collections of poetry. Wisdom of the Body won a 2007 American Book Award.

ELLISON (continued from page 10)

“Demon with a Glass Hand” (a foundational text for James Cameron’s Terminator franchise), or in short fiction like 1987’s “Soft Monkey, a tale of crime and homelessness in 1980s New York.

“City on the Edge of Forever,” an episode Ellison wrote for the original Star Trek series, took viewers back to depression-era America then broke our hearts with its simultaneous contemplation of a thwarted romance and a thwarted alternate history in which World War II might have been averted. If mainstream entertainment is finally ready to appreciate a more sophisticated brand of emotion-driven hyperreality, Ellison may find himself sitting on a gold mine of important source material.

Carol Cooper is a freelance culture critic at the Village Voice. She is the author of Pop Culture Considered as an Uphill Bicycle Race. She lives in New York City.

ALLAN GRAUBARD (continued from page 17)

“of” is a classic Surrealistic trap. Otherwise, I find Graubard to be mesmerizing.

Always lofty, never snickering or tittering, mirrored panels reflect ciphers from an otherworldly atmosphere. Magritte, Dali and Breton would be comfortable here.

Graubard faithfully and incisively inscribes his charred porticoes with “instantaneous forbidden revelations.” Within a churning universe of super-charged totems, he articulates equations that emit lyricism and meaning — which is what poetry is all about. If you have a soft spot for Surrealism, these serious, sensuous and masterfully gilded anti-solipsisms will whip your ride.

Jeffrey Cyphers Wright is a poet, artist, critic, impresario, eco-activist and publisher living in New York City. His latest book of poems called Triple Crown.

The killers on our side are men of peace. Nothing is heard ever of contrition for crimes measured by their absence. We are the king’s sons, the clamour of boots and tongues, the story that a story makes. Content and form are of equal importance in the destruction of one then the other, establishing both.

Very troubling. To speak is to say exactly nothing.



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HIRSCHMAN (*continued from page 9*)

seem rootless and on the wane,
bring them along with your crumpled body
in the darkness, and afterward,
because sex is of the animals
and the stars, is in fact happily
the animals and the stars,
find that point outside the window
(ancient grit of wall, or tree or lichen)
and gaze at it, enthralled, fixed,
as if nothing were ever so radiant,
meditative, informative, attuned,
like a computer window in a world
of “cybernetics,” he said, speaking of
the future some thirty odd
years ago, of this visual
listening to light
just below the surface of things,
this planetary All in you, constructed
of holocausts and ecstasies, the snail’s inch
and the worker’s steel, demonstrations and
monotonies, golem and robot, opens to receive
most stumblingly, hungrily, desolately, authentically
sounds from deep within the wilding stillness
and there, when five small human bones tug
at your sleeve of skin, the question-mark
falls away and you know who cares.

(From the journal *Left Curve*, no. 21)

Universalizing his themes, ‘hearing light’ and ‘All in you, constructed/of holocausts and ecstasies’ ... ‘sounds from deep within the wilding stillness’ and then the hand that reaches flesh and proves the great theme of who cares (as the question mark falls away). There is an elegiac power in this piece that is graceful as well as deeply true to its careful conclusion which takes us back to that human concern that is a basic element of Hirschman’s political imagination.

Jack Hirschman has been a strange phenomenon in American Poetry. He has been spokesman for the masses of homeless and the poor, as well as a force for change in American life and letters. And he has been a prolific translators of poets from all over the world. Jack has seen this as a way for comrades to share intimate visions. His earliest translations in the Artaud Anthology which was published by City Lights, became a manifesto for a kind of enthusiastic wail in poetry. (I performed a one-man piece based on the Artaud Anthology in Berkeley, 1970 at Live Oak Park). Hirschman is a poet of real integrity and you only need to sit with him for a while or hear his impassioned readings to know he is somebody who truly believes he is on a mission.

I spent a day with Jack and a group of poets including Allen Ginsberg in the vicinities of North Beach in the mid-90s. Jack admired Allen greatly, and saw him as a sort of mentor, (even though he saw Allen’s move to Trungpa & Naropa and Buddhism as a step backward). I remember that day buying Allen a beer and we all sat at a table in the

front room of Vesuvio’s, next to City Lights. Jack read a poem; I don’t recall the content, but Jack’s voice was clear and strong. ‘Good poem,’ Allen said and we were all pleased. Poetry was alive and Allen and Jack, New Yorkers hanging out with a bunch of us Californians were celebrating the poem in the far west. I’ll let Jack finish the piece with this celebration of universal brotherhood, delivered in that jazz-inspired vocal tone that is Hirschman’s legacy:

Likeunto
for Matt Gonzalez

what comes out of the cool
blue of a sky-need
reaffirming
and resonant to years
before it was dirtied up
by hoods of the klux-headed,
deaths-headed sort,
as well as hoods of
the criminal state
of things now,
when a brother, part of
brotherhood
out of the, or certainly when,
blue in the cool
dawned with warm
words
ringing true among human beings,
developing
one me,
thus you.

Likeunto (FMSBW, 2000)

Besides his poet-laureateship, Hirschman has received awards for his many translations and this lifetime achievement award which has a terrific statement by Jack’s old friend David Meltzer:

The Before Columbus Foundation presents Hirschman with an *American Book Award for Lifetime Achievement*, 2002. The citation, written by David Meltzer, reads in part: “Jack Hirschman is an immensely present yet hidden figure in the cultural politics and life of American poetry. Amazingly prolific – on the highest levels of committed artistic and activist involvement – his work is generous, open, and penetratingly critical. His critique is not just sung or hectored in the easy one-d too much political poetry is neutered by; it is of immense depth and profundity. We are honored to give recognition to his work and life, as he honors and challenges our work and lives.”

Bill Pearlman has published several volumes of poetry, including *Brazilian Incarnation: New & Selected Poems* (1967-2004). He divides his time between California and Mexico.

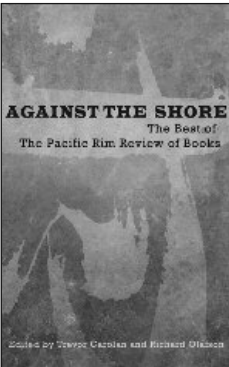
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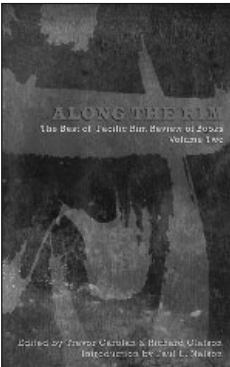
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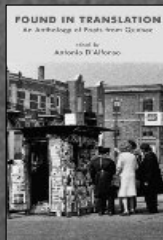
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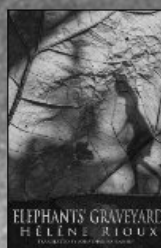


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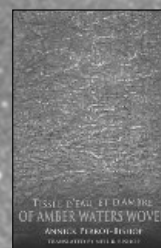


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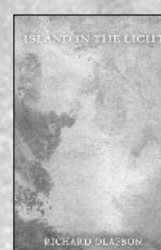
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