

Selected Poems of Post-Beat Poets

Also by Vernon Frazer

POETRY

Bodied Tone (Otoliths 2007)
Holiday Idylling (BlazeVox 2006)
IMPROVISATIONS (Beneath the Underground 2005)
Avenue Noir (xPress(ed) 2004)
Moon Wards (Poetic Inhalation 2003)
Amplitudes (Melquiades/Booksout 2002)
Demolition Fedora (Potes & Poets 2000)
Free Fall (Potes & Poets 1999)
Sing Me One Song of Evolution (Beneath the Underground 1998)
Demon Dance (Nude Beach 1995)
A Slick Set of Wheels (Water Row 1987)

FICTION

Commercial Fiction (Beneath the Underground 2002)
Relic's Reunions (Beneath the Underground 2000)
Stay Tuned to This Channel (Beneath the Underground 1999)

RECORDINGS

Song of Baobab (VFCI 1997)
Slam! (Woodcrest 1991)
Sex Queen of the Berlin Turnpike (Woodcrest 1988)

ANTHOLOGIES

Selected Poems by Post-Beat Poets, Editor
(Shanghai Century Publishing 2007)
2: An Anthology of New Collaborative Poetry (Sugar Mule 2007)
The Poetry Readings by American and Chinese Poets
(Hebei Education Press 2004)
THOMAS CHAPIN-ALIVE (Knitting Factory Works 2000)
THE JAZZ VOICE (Knitting Factory Works 1995)

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edited by

Vernon Frazer

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Selected Poems of Post-Beat Poets is dedicated to the late Wen Chu-an, who made its existence possible, but didn't live to see its publication. His work as translator of this anthology and his historic role in making Beat Generation literature available to Chinese readers deserve much acknowledgment and appreciation.

I would also like to thank my friend and colleague Professor Zhang Ziqing for his role in translating the work into Chinese and for his persistence in finding a publisher for it. My friend, poet-editor Chu Chen, deserves thanks for working with Prof. Zhang to find a home for the anthology. Limin Lei, almost a "silent partner" in the production of this book, also deserves thanks for assisting in the translation of the work.

Without them, the publication of *Selected Poems of Post-Beat Poets* would never have appeared in print.

Post -Beat Poetry in China:

Preface to *Selected Poems of Post-Beat Poets* in Chinese edition

If Wen Chu-an had never attended the 1997 Lowell Celebrates Kerouac Festival, *Selected Poems of Post-Beat Poets* would not exist. While a visiting professor at Harvard University, Wen encountered the Post-Beat phenomenon at the Festival's Small Press Fair, where writers ranging in age from thirty to sixty sold books of poetry they had published through small presses or by themselves. While my wife, Elaine Kass, and I were selling my books and recordings at our table, Professor Wen introduced himself and told us he was translating Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* into Chinese. Impressed with his ground-breaking, I invited him to talk with Elaine and me at our table. Over the next hour, possibly two, we discussed the Beat Generation and its successors at great length, and agreed to remain in contact.

After Professor Wen returned to the West China University of Medical Sciences in Chengdu (now merged into Sichuan University), where he is a Professor of English, we continued to communicate by e-mail. In addition to discussing the work of Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, we discussed the difficulties I experienced in finding publishers, distributors and reviewers for my work and told him I wasn't alone, that the American literary establishment had overlooked virtually an entire generation of writers who continued to advance the work of the Beat Generation's founders. Impressed with the work of Post-Beat Generation poets that I sent him, Professor Wen interviewed me about the Post-Beat writers. His interview, "Beneath the Underground: Post-Beat Writing In America," appeared in *Contemporary Foreign Literature*, accompanied by poems from five of the twenty-four poets who appear in this anthology. After its publication, Zhang Ziqing, editor of *Contemporary Foreign Literature*, discussed publishing an anthology of Post-Beat poetry with Professor Wen. Professor Wen approached me about editing the anthology, which I readily agreed to do.

The first problem I faced in editing an anthology of Post-Beat poets was establishing a definition of Post-Beat. Defining Post-Beat poses a challenge similar to Wittgenstein's discussion in *Philosophical Investigations* about the difficulties inherent in defining a game. Wittgenstein said, We do not know the boundaries because none have been drawn.

The boundaries of Post-Beat literature have never been drawn. Unlike the Beats, the Post-Beats never existed as a literary movement, or even a closely-knit network. They emerged spontaneously throughout the United States. Some were social contemporaries of the original Beats, others encountered them peripherally. Many only read about them. A significant number of Post-Beats came of age in the 1960's. Lacking a marketing genius such as Allen Ginsberg to work behind the scenes on

their behalf, they worked their way as individuals through a literary landscape whose homogeneity had dissipated, in part because the influence of the Beats extends far deeper into American literature and culture than many Americans realize. Kerouac's work did more than launch the rucksack revolution he described in *The Dharma Bums*; his Spontaneous Bop Prosody influenced the New Journalism of Tom Wolfe and Hunter S. Thompson, and the Language Poetry of Clark Coolidge. His recordings of prose and poetry with jazz accompaniment anticipated the Performance Poetry currently practiced in American Poetry Slams and the contemporary mixed-media genre known as Performance Art. William Burroughs' exploratory literary techniques influenced much of the experimental fiction that has emerged since the 1960's, ranging from Avant-Pop and Metafiction to aleatoric texts, as well as several younger generations of science fiction writers. Through its frank discussion of his homosexuality, Allen Ginsberg's poetry broadened the range of subject matter deemed acceptable as literature. Without Ginsberg, as poet and social activist, the fields of Gay, Lesbian and Feminist literature might never have developed. In today's heterogeneous literary landscape, many of the writers influenced by the Beats write in genres whose existence the Beats inspired, but which are not considered Beat. Moreover, since the corporate takeover of the publishing and bookselling industry that began early in the 1970s, most major publishers only print the work of rock stars, former presidents and other media figures whose occasional poetry, regardless of quality, guarantees profits.

Nevertheless, a loose network of writers throughout the United States designates its work as Post-Beat. Although not a school or movement, they inhabit the alternative culture that now exists in almost every American city of moderate size. They publish their work in micro press magazines, which publish fewer copies of each issue than the small press publications that receive college and government funding. Some of the micropress editors publish books by writers within their network, while other writers publish their books by themselves. For purposes of this anthology, Professors Wen and Zhang and I agreed to focus on this *ad hoc* network, whose work visibly extends the achievements of the Beats into new poetic and narrative techniques, as well as issues of lifestyle, social justice and spiritual questing. Many of the poets selected for this anthology recite their work in public, frequently with jazz accompaniment. Several of the poets in this anthology studied at Naropa University, arguably the closest thing to a Post-Beat academy.

With few exceptions, such as Anne Waldman, who serves as Director of Naropa's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, the Post-Beat poets have not received public or critical recognition for their work. It is hoped that this anthology will bring their work to a literary culture that will appreciate the fresh and unique poetry they offer the world.

— Vernon Frazer

Lawrence Carradini

Born April 18, 1953, in Queens, New York, Lawrence Carradini holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Zoology and a Master of Science degree in Vertebrate Reproductive Physiology and Physiological Ecology. His poems have appeared in magazines such as *Bouillabaisse*, *The Boston Poet* and *The Cafe Review*. His poetry has also appeared in several anthologies: *Dialogue Through Poetry -2001*, *Concept #3*, and the Barnes and Noble Anthology, *Poetry Showcase*. He has recently had poetry translated into Chinese in the journal *Contemporary Foreign Literature*. A collection of his poetry, *BURNING HEADS*, is published by VB Documentation Enterprises. He read from Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*, with original Kerouac musical collaborator David Amram at the July, 2000 opening of the two month exhibit "Kerouac's Northport." A resident of Lowell, Massachusetts, Carradini is the President and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Lowell Celebrates Kerouac! He is a senior staff member of the Massachusetts Biologics Laboratory (now part of the University of Massachusetts Medical School). His biographical sketch is listed in five Marquis *Who's Who* publications, including: *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who in the World*, *Who's Who in Science and Engineering*, *Who's Who in Medicine and Health Care*, and *Who's Who in the East*.

After The Talking

It's the jitters that get me
mostly,
 in the back jointless
 nest
 behind the
knees.

The rumped stilt skins of my long legged
youth
 now abandoned.
 Me?
 Making ends
that never.

I go from one same thing to some other.
I go from one (same thing?).
I go from...
I
 go.

Jiggle the tank
handle.
This!
This is the last front before exit.

Now, age is the toll
 collector.
I cannot run from another star.
The explosion will outstrip me.
The bullet is caught between
my teeth
 for one last time.

I am not old.
I am lonely!

I am not going to take this
lying.

One more night and I will have it settled.
One more refrigerator door.
One more outside cat.

One more fluffy at the unbitten end of a candy.

Get out of here, you shadow!

Flexible Head

dedicated to Han Shan

Small cans of vinyl,
This cup,
And beans.

Sing - Sing - Sing -

A lover,
Bones on the carpet,
Read me.

Los Angeles is not.

San Francisco -

River bends.

River bends.

Just Above Freezing

I am fainting.
I am wondering why the birds
fly south
when it is seventy-nine

degrees
of wonder, why it is warmth
of wonder
that keeps me
questioning
if -

I am fainting. If
I am holding
on
To simple things
I am wondering
why?

I am wondering why it is that
something
that should be

as simple as

love
creates convolutions
twisted
pathways crossing
brain-loops
cross-hemispherical
cross-
wired
wireless
mix

mastered
and slashed
on some vinyl
of the
needled mind?

I am wondering

why
the needle breaks -

the skin
 is thin
flakes
 surrounding
 the drifts.

We are snowmen melting.

We are puddles
 after bonds

broken,

we are left

The Dog.

Without
 a cat.

Each bird
 a dream.

I am fainting;

blurred,

it looks as if

all

the birds

 have
 flown.

Out

There where horses run
in air
are windows
and
unnumbered tables
Cranes and trees bend
knees are crossed
No dot above my eye
(another spice)
No-one is shattered
By my desire
One hand clapping
 one
Over

and

Over

And Again

Our Mocking Bird is back.

I have been waiting.

She

like me,

sitting on the antennae;

Squaw Bird score held, loosely, in her
left

hand.

If ever there were a reason

to believe it is time to renew our love
of life,

it is

now

A Second Look

It was
a Cormorant
I
thought,
but large I looked, and saw
a
Loon.

Terra Cotta Pater

Claypot familiar,
an army moves
on its
feet. You've let
moss grow
beneath. Let that
be a
lesson. Dry socks.

A woman moves through her own
fire. Find your own
spark.

Erin Fly'n

Screen

Gems,
She sees

Screen

Gems,
shimmering
dance-like the way she moves
across

The Fantastic's
minds...

Aye!

Such Pirate

thoughts.

Steve Dalachinsky

Steve Dalachinsky was born in 1946. His work has appeared in *Long Shot*, *AlphaBeat Soup*, *Xtant*, *Lost and Found Times* and *Blue Beat Jacket*, as well as in the anthologies *Beat Indeed!*, *Downtown Poets* and *The Outlaw Bible of American Poetry*. His most recent poetry collections are *Subway Assemblages* and *A Superintendent's Eyes*. An avid performer, he has recited his work at Cornelia Street Cafe, St. Mark's Poetry Project and the Vision festival. His 1999 CD, *Incomplete Directions*, features him reciting poetry in collaboration with improvising musicians such as William Parker, Thurston Moore and Vernon Reid.

Post - Beat - Poets (We Are Credo #2)

- *"Now's the Time" - Charlie Parker*

we are the post beat poets we are the t.v. generation
we are the true light of dope sex & profanity
we are the afterthoughts of post war experimentation
we are the results of a nation in turmoil & change
we are the ultimate over 30 crowd
spoiled seasoned & prejudiced
we are the Atom bomb Anathemas & the LSD Corruptors
we made pot a household word
and caused our parents to rebel
we have tried to make clear
all the knowledge that has been put down before us

we are the post-beat poets
inspired by tigers
queers
wife killers
yage eaters
bookshop owners
freedom fighters
junkies
priests & jazz.

we tried the coast on advice of holy word
and read the holy zen scripture
on lonely beaches
with wine and music
in lonely forests
awake on pills
& settled back slowly into city lights
where hearts have always seemed
to once again return.

some of us have families
& work hard
while some take it easy the hard way
some of us lived in the open like Jack
& now spend hours in front of the tube
angry & anti our former liberal selves
but we all still write our words their words all words
for our SELF & everyone

we get crazy drunk like Corso yet sweeter flowers never grew

& holier-than-thou like Ginsberg
we get satirically surreal like Burroughs
adding up time like so many star ship stereo ghosts
we shot it too
& watched it too
drawing those demons in the chelsea hotel
we've become chroniclers of each others' lives
sifting styles & stealing moonbeams
as we sit with mother earth between our toes
swooning

we go off to monasteries to worship the fat man
& write the haiku
we never forget our friends

occasionally one of us disappears
into the karmic mists of forever
never to return
& others just remain silent & musical
growing more profound every year

we are the post beat poets
becoming more certain & proud of our immediate heritage
while discovering the cool night eyes of the honey-colored cat
lying lazy on the carpet near the color t.v.

hip & classless
very primitive 20th century
very well informed
we all have our specialties
our meanings
our personal styles
our beliefs
always changing & always the same

we all have our time & our time has come.

Empire

the rain has stopped for us today
the sun comes out at sunset
the wind brays sweetly
thru the now pale onion flowers
open to a new diversity

the sounds of equivalence & rhyme

but it is still
and always will be
true

Columbus never stopped here.

something (for Cooper-Moore)

he screamed something
or sang something
about the agony & the dream
& his flesh like keys depressed
slid open imperceptibly
& light of early night seeped thru
reprinting "no" words
from a book before books were written

dancer
here before the light
spun the world into chaos
& toothaches
began
stood on one leg
on the downside up of the world
& rivers
began

i wake up spinning
& still don't know
where i am.

rear window 1

she's in her underwear
she's fixing the curtain
she just took a shower
she's vacuuming the house
she's talking on the phone
finally that stool is occupied
she smokes with her left hand
does the dishes with her right
she has a tattoo above the left cheek of her arse
she has blond hair
dresses well
has a bicycle
stays up late it's hot it's august the room is empty

rear window 2

the girl across the sunlit alley
stands ½ naked by her window
most mornings

....the sparrows are elongated & aggressive

it's late afternoon she's wrapped in a towel
the curtains are fluttering
she rests the towel on the window ledge
the towel says ***LUCKY STRIKE.***

rear window 3

up early. clouds. downpour. clouds.
vacuuming. washing the floor. making love almost an hr.
biting. fingering. playing around. torturing exasperated breasts.
i tell her to keep her clothes on. i naked.
she more orgasms. wine.
me thrusting gently into her wine filled mouth. naked i rise.

the girl across the way is drying her hair in the sun.
she's been to the beach. somewhere warm. no rain.
she sips her coffee. shakes out her towel. sniffs her duffel bag.

our love making has cleared the sky.

overcast (for Gregory Corso)

you look like

Artaud

Louie

all thin days

& ghastly nights

grey & rain threatening

maybe Geronimo looked like this

not unseen sunsets

or forgotten years

the red white & blue flag drooping

& slowly unfurling in a soft cool wind sheltered yet vagrant

you say "i can't breathe" your back hurts badly i mean badly

"please" you say -

you look like

the old pale brick across the way

these white walls of your room

the grey carpet filled with cigarette burns

your ashen skin filled with tracks

the small red & blue tattoo

the brightest thing about this fairly airy room

your long still perfect fingers she holds

"NO MORE STOMACH" you say yes it's still there she assures you rubbing it

your eyes roll up toward your brow

then down toward the cold glass of water

as it approaches you

you look like Socrates if he would have lasted this long toga intact

or any fallen hero with an attitude

who might have been able to make it to the end of the line -

the end of the line

where is it? / chair / bed / unicorn / "MY BACK" you say "MY BACK"

the sky says chicken little the sky.....

written at Gregory Corso's bedside in his apt. on Horatio St. NYC 7/24/00

Enid Dame

Enid Dame was born June 28, 1943. She received her B.S., from Towson University, her M.A. from the City College of New York, and her Ph.D. from Rutgers University. Her publications include the poetry books *On the Road to Damascus, Maryland, Lilith and her Demons, Anything You Don't See* and the forthcoming *Jerusalem Syndrome*. She co-edited the anthology *Which Lilith? Feminist Writers Re-Crete the World's First Woman* with Henny Wenkart and Lilly Rivlin. She co-edits *Bridges*, a Jewish feminist magazine, and *Home Planet News*, a literary tabloid, with her husband, the poet Donald Lev. She teaches full-time at New Jersey Institute of Technology and part-time at Rutgers, where, in the recent Wintersession, she introduced a wonderfully receptive class to the work of Allen Ginsberg.

The Woman Who Was Water

The woman who was water
lived on the edges of rooms,
knew when to withdraw.

The woman who was water
came to Brooklyn,
and filled every basement.

The woman who was water
left all of her lovers
clean.

The woman who was water
insisted no one understood her,
saw herself gentle as mist,

a rain-pearly morning, a sweet lilac fog.
So, when she battered at shingles,
gnawed through foundations,

burst out of pipes,
she knew she was offering love.
Why didn't people want it?

The woman who was water
was not analytical.
She knew three things:

They couldn't pass laws against her.
They couldn't declare her harmless.
They couldn't exist without her.

The woman who was water
could power a city
or drown it.

Riding The D-Train

Notice the rooftops,
The wormeaten Brooklyn buildings.
Houses crawl by,
each with its private legend.
In one, a mother
is punishing her child
slowly, with great enjoyment.
In one, a daughter
is writing a novel
she can't show to anyone.

Notice your fellow riders:
the Asian girl chewing a toothpick,
the boy drawing trees on his hand,
the man in a business suit
whose shoes don't match.

Everything is important:
that thin girl, for instance,
in flowered dress, golden high heels?
How did her eyes get scarred?
Why is that old man crying?
Why does that woman carry
a cat in her pocketbook?

Don't underestimate
any of it.

Anything you don't see
will come back to haunt you.

Night Shift

You hang up the phone
and drop
out of the world.
I feel you out there
pushing your taxicab
around its orbit.

Most of the men
I've known well
have worked the night shift:

come home
uneven mornings
half-asleep

never hungry
for ordinary meals
leaving notes making love
in odd corners of time.

The problem with lovepoems:
all of the words
have been spoken already.
I try to find new ones
in little-used places:
under my desk,
behind the shower stall
on the other side
of the skylight.

At midnight
at one AM
I'm still at work.

Perhaps you'll call me
later between fares
from a diner beside a highway
somewhere.

Meanwhile
my space piles up
with paper scraps
torn envelopes

a magnifying glass.

There's somewhere
I have to
get to
tonight
without leaving the room.

Dream Wedding

The poet's widow
plump blonde middle-aged self-possessed
showed up at your dream wedding,
loaned you her body--a rite you couldn't refuse--
but wouldn't buy you a drink.

You made love in a fade-out.
You didn't want to hurt me.

The dream bar wasn't familiar.
Everyone wore elegant clothes.
You ordered Chardonnay
even though it made you cough.
Your old friend, the youngest Beat Poet
was wearing a wooden throat,
a wooden protruding handle.
You asked, How does that feel?
He sighed, I got my life, I still got my life.

When you woke up, you were cold.
You needed a blanket, a throat lozenge.
I curled around you, a thick quilt.
All that morning still unmarried we kept falling
in and out of sleep.

Beach

Sept. 14, 2001

When my city is damaged and broken,
I go to the beach.
It's a city beach down at the edge of Brooklyn
hemmed in by a subway on stilts a block of apartment buildings.
But it smells of real salt and seaweed.
The sky above it is clear.
It sees all the way to Europe.
I glide through my ritual steps
In the shadow of fishermen
whose rods bend like saplings
over the promising water.
A gray-haired man darts by with his graying spaniel.
His friend jogs slowly, reading a Russian newspaper.
A woman raises her arms as if in prayer,
or is it an exercise?
Jellyfish gleam on the sand
like glassy paperweights
holding everything down.

And here is a Monarch butterfly
brave black and orange
down at the rim of the ocean
sipping water from sand grits
as if they were flower petals.

as if it were not out of place
as if it were not in danger
as if the city behind it
were not in need of mending.

Bulbs

For Patricia Fillingham

You gave me six daffodil bulbs
to plant in my upstate front yard
letting each one stand for an unrescued name
entombed in the Tower wreckage.

I carried the box to my mountain,
set to work with a shovel.
It proved slow going
that ungiving October day.

One of the bulbs had split:
two bodies joined at the stem.
I thought of those mythic co-workers
who held hands before they jumped.

My shovel kept finding rocks
or pieces of Catskill bluestone.
Finally, I grubbed out six holes.
I propped one bulb in each cavity.

Then clawed at the compost heap,
hoping to strike riches:
black earth busy with slick worms,
mother's moist fudgecake batter.

But luck wasn't with me that day.
my yield was a thin brown
mix from a grocery box.
I trickled it over the bulbs,

thinking of other gravesides:
the ritual shovels of earth
jaggedly hitting the casket,

our last conversation
with our well-known dead.

I thought: I'm burying six people
I probably never knew,
their bodies unfound their names amputated.
All we'll have is six flowers,
if they actually bloom next Spring,
if we're here to see, to remember.

The Space Between

Coming in from the country to teach a poetry class,
the bus paws through sky
an hour and twenty minutes blank and golden
a page waiting for images
to chew at its corners,
a pool where animals
gather and drink.
My thoughts collect.
They are curious,
but not unfriendly.
They let me touch their noses.

I left a dark house:
hurt ceiling man with an aching foot
two unfrozen roses in aspirin water.
My life: which will keep on moving without me
another twelve hours.

The sun pulls the bus into deeper morning,
into the tunnel into the city
where everything starts at ten.

The space between here and there
is luxurious
as a sudden shower of yellow leaves holy
as a clean desk seductive
as an empty room.

ENTERING THE CLASS

Wintersession 2002, Rutgers-Newark

I enter the class like a house
which I do not own,
extracting the key from the flowerpot.
I enter the class like a child
re-enters the womb.
I enter the class like a confident swimmer
dives into the layered ocean,
knowing its floors are littered with treasures:

jungly blossoms and salty nutritious vegetables
pocketwatch eyes flicking open
shipwrecked weapons transfigured machinery
bones washed clean of their memories
dulled jewels that suddenly flash
when we thumb them to life.

I enter the class like a sleeper
enters the dream
that will subtly shift her life
a few degrees in an utterly different direction.
I enter the class like a waker
enters the morning
knowing that something will happen
within the walls of its light.

Motherdream

In the wintry Pittsburgh light,
in the small, darkening room,
she sits on her wedding bed,
folding a bedspread
down into smaller parcels.
till it's a squat pillow.
It's medicinal green tufted
as a stubbled used-up field:
nothing she would have purchased
or made for this room, when she lived here.
She tells me she's made a mistake.
She says she has to get rid of
everything she's acquired.
Yes, even a few things of mine.
A pile of fabric appears:
a litter of small tumbling animals.
I beg her to let me keep
the aquamarine Indian cloth
I'd bought at Azuma
when I first moved to the Village,
breaking away from her house.
Its color felt suave and distant,
a Gauloise cigarette tipped at a rakish angle
a cup of espresso
sipped at a sidewalk café.
Then the dark tangled pile of denims!
"I need these memories," I insist.

The sky outside
has recovered its light.
It fills the room unblinkingly.
Her eyes hard as snow,
she relents, "Yes,
you may keep one or two things.
Since you need the memories.
But don't try to take more."

Miracles 101

Here is a grain of sand.
Work it into a pearl
That is your first assignment.

Think carefully about your approach.
We do give points for the process.
Be elegant, if you can.
(Points are deducted for sloppy work.)
Originality
is always encouraged,
though not required.
(You won't get extra credit
for a squared-off shape or
glass-green hue.)

Extensions are granted
on certain occasions
if requested beforehand.
But all work is due by the last day of class.
We do not give Incompletes.
We have standards to maintain.

If you must withdraw, do so
by the designated date
which is stated on your syllabus.

Withdrawals will receive a grade of W.
The one impossibility
Is receiving no grade at all.
Everybody receives a grade at the end.

Remember: this is not high school.
Remember: no one forced you to take this course.
Remember: failure
is also an option.

Jack Foley

Jack Foley's poetry books include *Letters/Lights--Words for Adelle*, *Gershwin*, *Exiles* and *Adrift* (nominated for a BABRA Award). Foley's *Greatest Hits 1974-2003* (2004) appeared from Pudding House Press, a by-invitation-only series. His critical books include the companion volumes, *O Powerful Western Star* (winner of the Artists Embassy Literary/Cultural Award 1998-2000) and *Foley's Books: California Rebels, Beats, and Radicals*. His radio show, *Cover to Cover*, is heard every Wednesday at 3:00 p.m. on Berkeley station KPFA and is available at the KPFA web site; his column, "Foley's Books," appears in the online magazine, *The Alsop Review*.

An Epithalamium for my Son Sean and his Bride, Kerry Hoke

epithalamium: epi (on, upon) thalamus (bedroom): a song in honor of a bride and bridegroom

What does it mean to be lonely?

What does it mean to be one—that longing?

The world

explains it

as desire for a mate:

find someone get married reproduce consume as much as possible die

and if you have problems, solve them

What does it mean to be lonely? Can it be held to

the way one holds to faith or to a marriage?

Is there a lifelong loneliness which no mate can solve

but which nonetheless

animates

and extricates

love—

and

joy.

(What does it mean to be lonely?) There is

another kind of loneliness

which appears initially

to be

sexual

but which cannot

be resolved

by sexuality.

(What does it mean to be lonely?)

There is another kind of loneliness

which is nothing less than

the search for self

a search which is finally

fruitless, frustrating

because selfhood

can only be created

not found

and so uncreates

itself

continually.

It is the search for the self

in the other

the search for the other

in the self

which transcends
the task of pleasure.
What is a marriage?
It is not a union
of two
so that one dissolves in the other
but a constant conversation
among equals
a constant
interruption
of
loneliness.
It is the creation from two
of one
relationship
It is the search for the self
in the other
the search for the other
in the self
a search which goes on
endlessly
and which fails
endlessly
It is not the end
of loneliness
but the
beginning
of a loneliness
which is like a letter
from a stranger
which suddenly
penetrates
your being
and makes you say: "I'm not alone"
What is loneliness
but the realization
of selfhood in another
of otherness
in self
which is the beginning
of consciousness
the beginning
of love
which has so much
of selfhood
in it

The ring
is an endless circle
It does not signify
the end of loneliness
but the beginning
of a new, conscious
being-in-the-world
It signifies
love
which goes out
and comes back
like a letter from a stranger
which, received
is answered
"With all my love."
How can I
say anything
to a son
I have loved
and treasured
throughout his life
except:
be well be conscious be loved
don't take
anything I say
too seriously
To Sean
and Kerry
we give
whatever we can
of love
and a life lived
as well as we could
Words—
There is no end of loneliness
There is no end of love
May your children
give you the joy
that you gave
us

The Temptation of Sixty

Story about a mad scientist whose fear of dying impels him to invent a pill which reverses the aging process. On his next birthday, the scientist gets one year younger, not one year older. The difficulty here is that he is still approaching death, only now from the other direction. He knows exactly how many years he has left; he knows the exact day and hour at which he will "die." His new problem is to invent a second pill which will reverse the effects of the first pill and start him aging again. As he ponders this problem, he crosses the street against the light, is hit by a passing truck, and dies immediately. The obituaries list his age inaccurately as 61; he is in fact 59.

the temptation of sixty
is to believe
that everything
is possible
and not to believe
that anything
has changed
the temptation of sixty
is to justify
behavior
by
delusion
and to justify
delusion
by
need
to justify
everything
by
fiction
the temptation of sixty
is to believe
anything

so here we are in Oakland
where it's beginning to rain
(east side, west side?)
in this vast state of California:
some little that we hoped for came about
something weathered

the deep transitions
and adjustments
the anger
of displacement:
some dear thing
lingers in consciousness
too many people die
such fury
beckons
I slide down
the years
one of those American Flyers from 50 years ago!
where is
the mortician on the corner?
where the Elks Club?
here is a rose for it all
here is a stick
I touched in 1949
it was a sword
oh, god, do we get it all back
including our discontent?
your hand (absent)
touches
my hand (absent)
your voice--
do we live the whole thing over?
these absences these
vanishings these utter--
are how we hold
to life

Ginsberg At The Mall

I saw him first eyeing me from Radio Shack
pretending to look over electronic equipment
but really wondering what hot stuff he might haunt
Since dying, he'd become a chicken hawk

At the DVD store I "accidentally" brushed against him
He was surprisingly solid
"Excuse me, Mr. Ginsberg," I said,
"I thought you were dead."

"Young man," he answered, "I am dead"
and then he laughed a big laugh
"You expect me to haunt supermarkets? Or book stores?
I try to keep in style.

What's a nice poetic young man like you
with a copy of On the Road in his pocket
doing in a place like this?
Wanna see me change?"

What I had seen was the old Ginsberg of the 90s
hunched over, professorial, and with that funny squint
in his eye. Suddenly he was Hippy Ginsberg
of the 60s—loud, funny, dominant, bearded

He began to sing—badly
(death had not changed that)
until I was afraid that people would notice us
but actually no one turned around,
it was as if we couldn't be heard by anyone

"Hare Krishna!" said Ginsberg, ha ha ha
"How about it, kid,

Wanna get laid? You look a little like Neal Cassady

or at least some of you looks like some of him.
How about it, you wanna have sex?"

"I don't think so, Mr. Ginsberg. I've never had sex with a ghost."
"Nothing to it," he answered,
and suddenly my clothes were off
and I had an erection

and I was coming as I'd never come before.

Ginsberg hadn't touched me,
and he was still standing there fully clothed, laughing.

"How did you do that?" I said.

"It's just a trick we ghosts have. Pleasure is heaven. Heaven is pleasure.
You get me? The Beat Generation, Kerouac said,
that was just a bunch of guys trying to get laid.
In heaven we do it all the time."

"You're in heaven?"

"Well, I'm somewhere, and I call it heaven. Even the CIA is there,
and all the people they killed. We all get on pretty well together."

Suddenly he was Professor Ginsberg again. "Same multiple identity,"
he said as he vanished
"into air, into thin air"

In my hand was a book whose title was The Posthumous Writings of Allen Ginsberg
but as I tried to open the book
its pages withered and vanished.

"You'll have to wait for that volume," said Allen's voice
and he laughed again. "Wouldn't you like to have that book?
You'll have to write it yourself—"

Courage teacher, old poet, have you become an owl of wisdom, a hawk of power, a
swan of beauty, a sunflower, a leaf, a bit of sunlight, a worm burrowing in the
earth?—

Have you become
—immortal?

Vernon Frazer

Vernon Frazer was born October 2, 1945. He received a B.A. in English from the University of Connecticut and briefly attended graduate school at Simon Fraser University. Frazer's poetry and fiction have appeared in numerous magazines, including *AlphaBeat Soup*, *Blank Gun Silencer*, *Blue Jacket*, *Bouillabaisse*, *First Intensity*, *Lost and Found Times*, *Moria*, *Nebo*, , *Plain Brown Wrapper*, *Poetpoetzine*, *Shampoo*, *Tempus Fugit*, *Xtant* and many other magazines. An interview with Wen Chu-an and several poems were translated into Chinese and appeared in the international journal, *Contemporary Foreign Literature*. Frazer's books of poetry include *A Slick Set of Wheels*, *Demon Dance*, *Sing Me One Song of Evolution*, *Free Fall* and *Demolition Fedora*. Frazer has released five recordings that fuse poetry with jazz: *Beatnik Poetry*, *Haight Street 1985*, *Sex Queen of the Berlin Turnpike*, *SLAM!* and *Song of Baobab*. He appeared as guest artist on the late Thomas Chapin's *Menagerie Dreams* CD, *THE JAZZ VOICE* , a compilation of jazz vocalists and poets, and *THOMAS CHAPIN--ALIVE*, a CD-box set of Chapin's recorded work. *Stay Tuned to This Channel*, Frazer's first collection of short fiction, finished as a finalist in the 1996 Black Ice/FC2 Fiction Contest. His newest novel is *Relic's Reunions*. Frazer introduced *IMPROVISATIONS (I-XXIV)*, his most recent book of poetry, when he read in the Established and Emerging Artists Series at The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in Manhattan January 17, 2001. A former program developer and evaluator in the field of human services, Frazer now works as a free-lance writer.

Nice People

They're out there.
I can hear them
chirping like birds
at the feeder.

Day after day
they have only good things
to say

Jennifer's job
Jason's school play
aerobics

class, the MBA
program to help them
stay ahead

like nice people.

Here
in my troglodyte's cave
I rave because

they're out there.

I can hear them
gibbering, gerbils nibbling
their giblets

like nice people.

The smattering
that starts them chattering so
brightly slights

my appetite.
How unsightly my
hunger must

seem to them.
I'm surly? Surely.
I'm not
like nice people.

I'm strange to them
for wanting & finding them
wanting

for not wanting
to test the festering flesh
a life-grip

beyond
the modest morsels they claim for themselves
like nice people

as they block
the way to my hunger
just because

they're out there.

The Sex Queen Of The Berlin Turnpike

"coulda been
Little Miss Rich Bitch layin' on my yacht"

but claimed her father left
his inheritance behind
when the Mob's hitmen climbed

his trail. So,
she's the doe-eyed darling of the clipjoints

on the Strip. She flashes
her tits for tips from bikers
& lonely old men

in glasses
steamed with dreams of what never was.

Her nectarine nipples
tease me, her buns swing the breeze
that sucks up my buck

on her wake
of chestnut hair. She feeds my fantasies

the way I feed her lost
wealth---what I can afford to give.
But she still lives bitter,

broke, strung out
on coke in neon turnpike motels

& runs out on the rent.
While I listen to her story
to escape from my own

she pays back
the memories of her father.

The Boy With Green Hair

My earliest memory,
at three: crying after this movie
because I wanted green hair.

But I couldn't remember
why the story made me cry
with envy. What would I see
when I replayed the cable
connecting me to

the Boy With Green Hair?

A parallel destiny?

Or just a kid dreaming his own
uniqueness, his follicles shrieking
to bloom some favorite color from days
so black & white then, so colorized now?

The dyed green hair I'd cried to have
was brown, nearly black, & thick, nearly
like mine. But a sheen, an aura, even
a halo hovered above it.

The Boy With Green Hair

shunted from family to family
while his mother and father rescued
World War II War Orphans
overseas & finally

to Charlie, a caring guy
who couldn't dull the razors
of ridicule slashing

the Boy With Green Hair

on the playgrounds or,
worse, the wound of discovering
his parents had died helping
children now just like him.

The Boy With Green Hair

transformed my flicker of memory
into some small foreshadowing of destiny.
A domestic war destroyed my family.
For years I shunted from mom to dad,

an afterthought wishing for
an Uncle Charlie while the kids
in school tore at the aura
my head fluttered and jerked.

The Boy With Green Hair

became a poster boy
for War Orphans. Forty-six
years after crying at three
a diagnosis makes me

the Boy With Green Hair

of Tourette Syndrome
& a role model for the other
untouchables in America's
classless society.

The dye will look
greener against my gray,
anyway.

A Sporting Affair

One & the same to me,
she said,

knowing the hold she had on me.
I tried

again, tried to explain the boxer
throws real punches, knows real pain
---but keeps his dignity in defeat

while the wrestler fakes his holds,
fakes his pain---but takes
humiliation as his beating.

I tried
to make her see the difference

between us. But her crossed arms
blocked the cross of my pride.
She choked my bleating

throat, pile-driven my heart
into my head & threw me out
of the ring. Bleeding,

I cried,
You just proved you like wrestling better.

One & the same to me,
she said.

A hipster's hipster

born and bred
in his mirror's glance
Brooke fled

to Paris
to peddle his ass stuffed with phalluses
of hash

through customs
to prove he could move
with Burroughs

the Great Beat Legend.

He came home
to flaunt his vicarious fame.
He came home

to fold
his master's voice into the great
first novel

strangled
on Old Bull's cold umbilical
and peddled

his ass
to the Aircraft,
a phoenix

of the factory underground.

Shana's Going To Disney World!

blast the banners swarming past me,
pinker than the St. Louis dawn,
pinker than the ruffles
on the five year old bouncing
out of place in the Terminal.

Who cares who's going where
when you've gone two days without sleep!
Who cares about this Queen
for a Minute the Network Wagon Train
circles to save for the Six O'clock News!

She'd be a princess at twenty, anyway.
Her joy overflows the cameras
that try to contain her. And her
few blond filaments---how few,
I notice---raise the morning gold.

I reach back, remember my cobalt-bare scalp,
remember the last roots of life
salting my mother's chemo-stripped crown
and the hospital's coast-to-coast call
last night. The dike of my voice

cracks with tears and a shutter.
I can't tell Shana's mother why
I pay her my five-dollar tribute
to the sun cheated out of noon.

A Slick Set Of Wheels

We kill time on the curb
across from the club with our slow J,
watching life pass us by

like a slick set of wheels,
like the slick set of wheels parked
here to parade its owner's fast pace:

V-8 with virgin pink lacquer,
the corners and gritting the teeth
of tread sneering fresh.

We wonder if the polished dude
so proud of it wears a turtleneck,
a medallion & manicured nails.

What a place to park his boast,
so close, so bravely in our faces.
We kill time on the curb

long enough to watch old beer-bellied
T-shirt sag near our feet, crank up,
change into old tires & burn out.

The Sane

are always
with us, the poor

bastards
that we are.
The sane

appease us,
try, to please us,

their patience,
our patience.
The sane

try their balanced
lives to balance

the rage
with which we eat
our skins.

Their
condescending kindness

is the madness
we measure with
our attacks.

The sane
are always
with us, the poor

bastards.

Kirpal Gordon

Kirpal Gordon was born March 14, 1952. He graduated magna cum laude from Fordham University, receiving a B.A. in Philosophy and Religious Studies. He earned an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Arizona. At the Naropa Institute in 1978, he did a summer poetry apprenticeship with Allen Ginsberg. His most recent books of poetry and fiction include *Love in Sanskrit*, *Poems 2001-1978*, *Jazz Tales from the Ghost Realms* and *Because the Jewel Is in the Lotus*. He works as a writer and a literary consultant.

Puberty/Colonialism/Spring

In the beginning it was only a puppy: eager, awkward, anxious to please.

But denial carried a tight collar. Hard luck & weird fears threw but a few scraps. Still it swelled. Pressures folded its virgin skin into a bitter mockery while the bark of its posed heroism revealed the whip's clumsy stump, a hesitation hammer's stuttering.

Only after the blood-clot, tongue-twisted cover-up & broken-boweled final hope snuffed out that the animal locked inside might ever breath deeply its adulthood, the weeping of defeat became teeth whose flood no muscle nor mental maneuver could restrain: teeth to rip out the guts that held it back for so long in simpering obedience & crying out loud at its own birth confessed its confusion to its master *why do you treat me like this?*

I only get bigger.

Turning the Curved World

When edges in a summer bedroom soften & curvaceous shapes wound round an eye like a mast that sailor was lashed to while sirens sang the sorrow of the sea, watch him wonder why the woman he's just kissed goodbye remains within him.

From a cabin's oval window in a birch grove she waves but when he retreats to a backyard chair she's there before him saying *see how every seen thing bends & rolls*. Reels of hills hum & beyond shaded pine limb, something falls, a call into the woods & he hears how every sound folds within the hollow of his earlobe. Even when he reckons elk across the low mist love calling, they're invisible. Coitus has turned the curved world inside out.

On the oak deck he left behind him: pant of bloodhound, patter of cat paw. Dancing at meadow's edge sound's imperceptible body surrounds every intrusion---shot of gun, whoosh of wings---sewing his eardrum into an open lesion, like the woman before him saying *let's go round again*. Into the forest then: flicker of laurel leaf, silk of spider web, fountain & mountain flowing in reverse direction. Like the knowledge of being here for thousands of years meeting the sound of falling off the edge of the world, a scream muted by the lull of sunlight in a clearing: every hole in space fills in with space!

How can he admit the terror? The whole world is feminine.

Appearances

At the threshold of enfleshment no one need remind us: Osiris gets ripped apart to be born again. So we're putting in a few appearances, swirling in the whirlwind, seeking out Great Round's rickety rattle of rock-scissors-stones, ghosts & old bones, scat-rattlin' earthquake's shakedown to a trail underground.

When club lights dim our mistress of ceremonies begins & as she opens the curtain we see for certain the soul's seven bodies. We know whatever's left of us is making pilgrimage to Benares or Luxor, a turn toward Mecca or the Other Shore, the shining grace of our original face we may no longer be able to recall.

So we lit our last incense stick when we saw that naked woman's shadow slip through a door in the garden's old adobe wall, the smoking wicks of our votive candles carrying in their wake the smell of autumn leaves ablaze to remind us the circle's complete, even if we struggle with the coat's fur lining.

Though we can't forget the ones we've loved, how sun shafts slid through woods to fleck their flesh in leafy shadow, fire's consolation sings the truth we finally are: error burned up, embers' witness to the spin of a small planet, *scarecrow & a yellow moon, pretty soon the carnival on the edge of town; king harvest has surely come.*

Big Ol' No One

The mystics have long insisted that God is not an-Other Being; they have claimed that he does not really exist and that it is better to call him Nothing.

---Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*

Because water reveals the Way in its race downhill as it cleaves to decay, draws on its rush to the sea grief to free the element of rust sleeping in every wintering thing, who knows god's a Big Ol' No One & the sorrow that hides in the folds of her flesh, sorrow that shakes free when she sings, tells us the Fat Lady is the Grim Reaper indeed.

Because life & self are up for grabs---why we got it or it's got us, who can say?---but to hear the call to prayer across the conquered plain, the longing to belong fills us with a Great Big Nothing. We know the finale's scripted in before we begin, that time tricks us into the quest to become only to end up betraying the joy just to be.

Because death is no surprise guest but waits around every corner & cliché this no-count neighborhood offers, we wish not to list the men on corners packing pistols, but to say instead to No One *have mercy, please*. As snow falls & earth hardens we can still hear his skin bursting through the love she shared with him in April gardens.

Because in ecstasy names of gods may have escaped his lips, he's glad she's never held it against him.

How Paint Peels: Petals on a Wet White Wall

The apparition of these faces in the crowd, / Petals on a wet, black bough.

---Ezra Pound, "In a Station of the Metro"

From a second story window a garden wall in the woods could be mistaken for a gray December sky but for its border of black framing this fast approach of dusk. Spots of white on a dust-gray coat mean a starling, mean winter's coming, the arrival of night. He opens the window to throw pellets of bread, landing around birds like flakes of snow---white against white in the trance of twilight---drawing the paint peeling off that partition into apparitions of the faces he has loved, petals flying in memory's dark sky until they dawn on that wet, white wall. *Woman* he wants to say *birth me a form to know the real you in, a me free of framing your impression, a you beyond my hallucination.* Having kept each woman waiting until only their memory remains, in memory alone they remain: a fallen snow, a starling's broken wing, a layer of white that washes into a wall. Chilled, he closes the window to let birds do what birds will while he turns a paperweight upside down to rain that miniature Manhattan world with snowflakes as pleasing as a lost lover's laughter.

Could he enter that bubble he'd know love has no end but to lie with love again, his own passion blasting everything glass encases outward in jolts of no-wall, just-sky, pure-snow & let-fly: bricks & mortar will follow like row houses claiming the skyline (mine mine mine) to repeat how stubborn the struggle & how layered the washes as his fingers peck at the mirrored pane. Lost within his own mistaken notions, he can't

tell push from pull, up from down, the face of a lover from a wall in the woods; a bird in
hand from two in the bush, obsession from a determination steadfast as any sun's winter
address: to begin again.

Enrich Your Vocabulary Now

Busted

What's *bum* but a word the mouth casts out, spoken without the need of teeth or tongue. *Bum*: a hole in a human face only a bottle can reach.

What's *homeless victim* but a double trochee, a lyric phrase to separate them that got from them that not while keeping expanding catastrophes at bay.

Homeless: an off rime to *Om, Jesus*. *Victim*: an in-road to *system*.

What's *rat* but ribs & grease, antenna nose, little pink feet whose offspring squeeze through the tunnels humans leave when the city they've built begins to decay. *Rat*: a fink; or *raton*: what's left when a species starts to eat its own.

Broken

Betrayed by his own anatomy, William would be Ms. Billie. Sweet like the night, a gardenia, 'cause prison's rule book needn't spell it out: a rule requires an enforcer, "did you say force her?"

In my solitude he-she sings sick & trembling, voice quivering.

You taunt me as protection waits to be paid stammering in State-issue green rage.

With memories of getting locked out, boxed in, knocked up, head bleeding.

That never die. The birth of the blues is a woman behind bars weeping.

Open

Polysyllabic. A well kept secret. Like the man said, it can ruin your whole day. To get there at all you've got to be looking. You won't find *Arthur Kill Correctional Facility* easily. The only road out there first has to pass the largest landfill dump in the world. Breathe deeply. Inside *Arthur Kill* the women who work up front chew gum & worry about their weight. Though prison encircles them, issues about race gender poverty & class haven't caused a violent reaction yet. They're (nouns) *civil servants* overworked, understaffed, grade 5 state salary (what the inmates call chump change), an hourly rate that begets forgetfulness & keeps certain facts away--like let's say after they (verbs) *punch out, make dinner* for the kids, *phone* their ex for the check never sent---they *go back* the next morning to (nouns in the plural) *800 men* whose lives of crime they file & re-file 8 hours a day, 50 weeks a year, 20 years 'til tired, dead or retired. Those (nouns in the singular) *men* get lonely for love.

Once in awhile worlds will collide. A convict on the porter crew, just a kid doing a skid bid (down long enough to worry about the softness of a woman's skin) looks up from his mop & pail. In the accident that two panicked glances make (beyond the fear thatharm-hatred-shame-&-blame will be exchanged), there by the copy machine, they pause that extra second to witness (adjectives) *the same, slow, tender, undeniable* need to love & be loved in a face beneath a busy bee-hived, beauty parlored hair-do, in a face below an ordered corn row concealed by a red du-rag.

Arthur no one knows who Arthur is, was or will be.

Kill (verb) or in Dutch a stream though there is no stream, only factory

backwater, ancient hulls rising when the tide ebbs.

Correctional (euphemism) implying a moral order somewhere.

Facility exactly what is taken away.

Meanwhile barges of garbage warm up in the sun, waiting to break open an engineer's idea of how much waste can be contained. Strike out for love? Poison the air? Locate what we've been told isn't there? Let's just say *dying* to enrich our vocabulary.

Schuyler Hoffman

Schuyler Hoffman was born May 8, 1947. He attended Bard College and the University of Massachusetts at Boston, where he received his B.A. He holds a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology from the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology. He has published two chapbooks of poetry: *Words In A Foreign Language* and *The Spaces Between*, and has recorded a compact disc, *Sacrifice*, in collaboration with the musician Richard Atwood. Magazine publications include *Coast2Coast* and *The Cafe Review*. He performs his poetry around eastern Massachusetts and lives in Gloucester, Massachusetts.

Figures Within Figures

--- Red Painting by Therese Kovach

Two Figures Many Figures

Figures within figures

Lakes within Oceans

Green within Blue

Purple Jazz in Background

Orange sunset nocturnal

Playland Prism

Fragmented Fragments

Purple and Green

Within You Hold

the Frame and

Dance while the

Piano plays balladlike

in background and

the ceiling fan

scent of fog

spins through

Pale Blue center

water reflecting orange-

hued sunset purple

charcoal clouds and

seagulls call
the colors shadow
the figures
as they stand
multiply
dialogue
with each other
thought balloons
prismatic reflections
a NeoCubist
Experience!
filtered through
Pollock's pourings
the shifting
images
effervescent
in the mind's
eye and
heart soul
song
as the music
extends time
into eternity

Now

Blues for Jimi

feet planted
the bass beat
drops down

under the tears
never cried
Lord Lord Lord

one with the music
riffs fly circle
and spin back

a hollow sound
emptiness inside
the music

sway gently
feel down
the beat steps

into the where
nothing is
inside

the music circular
returns repeats
the Hallelujah

devotion
only angels
can afford

DOUBLE VISION

SEE DOUBLE RED BLUE IN THE LIGHT OF ANOTHER YELLOW GREEN REFLECTION

ROCK PAPER SCISSORS

BLUE RED

LOST WORLD

PARALLEL LINES THE BALL BOUNCES BACK AND FORTH

LOOK AT THE MOON

PURPLE CAROM VIOLET BLUE THE WAVELETS OFF THE WALL

TWO FIGURES RUN ACROSS A FIELD

CLEAR GREEN YELLOW OUTLINE GOLD SHARP SHARD

ONE IS THE SHADOW OF THE OTHER

EVERYDAY OCHRE BROWN RUSSET AS DEFINED

A HAWK SWEEPS CLOSE TO EARTH

ORANGE RED BLURRY ROSE DEFORMED

STRIVES TO JOIN THE OTHER IMAGE

FUZZY MERGE PINK VIOLET CERULEAN SOFT AND COLORFUL

ROCK PAPER SCISSORS

LOOK AT THE MOON

ULTRAMARINE READ AQUA OLIVE FOREST

ROOTED

THE SIGNS THE WORDS

LOST VIRIDIAN

APPARENCIES

COBALT BLACK IN THE LIGHT OF SIENNA THE ETERNAL

THE DAY APPEARS OCHRE FORMED

WAIT

KNOW THEM

SEPIA VERMILION

I WALK THROUGH THE TUNNEL IN THE HILLSIDE

CARMINE TABLES LAUNDRY ROSE RED

AND THERE YOU ARE COMING TOWARDS ME

FOCUS SHUTTER YELLOW GREEN CADMIUM

FEELING SOFT AND COLORFUL

I CANNOT READ THE SIGNS

LEMON CANARY

THE LIGHT

SUBWAY ORANGE PINK

ROCK PAPER SCISSORS

HARD RED AT THE EDGE

AMONG QUALITIES

SCARLET BODY PERCEPTION

IN LINE REFLECTION

LAVENDER PURPLE REACH THROUGH ROSE

LOOK AT THE MOON

THE LAYERS BLUE BLACK

THE THOUGHT BOUNCES BACK AND FORTH

THE FLESH FIELDS GREEN
ONE MERGES WITH ANOTHER
SEPARATE WHITE
ROCK PAPER SCISSORS
AM I BLACK
LOOK AT THE MOON
PURPLE OR MERGED
ROOTED
BEIGE PROTRUDING
THROUGH WHICH
SEE DOUBLE
WALK
RED BLUE
UNSTABLE
IN THE LIGHT OF
ON BALANCE
ANOTHER MOVING ANIMAL
YELLOW GREEN REFLECTION
MOVING ACROSS THE TERRITORY
OCHRE BROWN RUSSET AS DEFINED
REMEMBERS HOME

In Motion out of Time

dream lover flourish
stepchild dance back
belong

forever and ever
now and one piece of ass
one piece of ass

dancing out of time
in motion / emote
thrill pace chop and chill

up and down the spine
rivulets run
high stepping sun

under the sun another one
to be born lovelorn
and forgotten

dance / stop
emotion to
hillside valley mountaintop

ocean
she is a star
dark as sin cathedral

trance touching dignity
forsake not
one more time dark eyes

not one more time
ripe thighs not one more time
will she come to me rippling

waters pour out
splash down stone stairs
and dance

chance meeting
surrender to
where there are and more

ripple cranked in / to
volcano baby
trash bin

triple heap header
and pipe dream
Flanders fields

across the water
darkness reigns

Beyond the Curve

in memoriam Jackson Pollock

peering thru

grey

shock

of

sick green

puke yellow

rents in

fabric

cover

wavers

remnants

sing

black hawk

fish eye

unformed image

stops

the music

wavers

on threshold

of dream world

where are we
in the rippling
strange attractor
rattle death vibrato
steel gray battleship sky
wall of sound wah wah pedal
feedback screams gawky rhythmic horn
solo review of past life flash forward
instantaneous polaroid porn print courage
fast car fuselage insane with alcohol
haze maniacal drive fast forward into eternity
already beyond the curve the darkness no longer
afraid still driven moon crescent figures contend
converge from all over space into habitation paint
musical chorus loving thick viscous glue boat sails
onward dark gray sea gray blue gray black gray white gray
bubbles float effervesce on water pouring down all at
once cascade dance foot to hand to eye to guitar to
waves of paint gray clouds torn reveal organs flesh
anatomy of fear dream crash clash of chaos crescendo
scream ultimate apotheosis vision everyday chime
resolved vertiginal

Zombieville

I live for long stretches of tundra time in Zombieville - sleepwalking down the commuter highway - I want I want - I need I need - there is no conclusion until whatever ends - ends - the highway seductive in its glissando anomie - numb voiceless and errant - the errors proclaim - emptiness triumphs like stacked sheets of paper waiting to be Xeroxed - it's all being copied and recopied replication DNA and RNA sexual couplings in test tubes there is no fertility in the fertility rites the children are murdered before they can be conceived - we are - what we are - what are we but cannibals - feeding off the lost souls who wander through our offices - who wander thru our selves who do not wander but plod mercilessly - the human realm reduced to machine robotics hyper cyber spaces that don't exist anywhere we have entered the mind of electronic quanta - we are herded by shepherds of awesome technology - we have been handed platitudes and hunch - we are nowhere not even here - the person fictive I believe I am is not anything but illusion a shimmering conception like conceptions of space as Space - it doesn't exist there is no there there or here here where it all falls in on itself and collapses into maudlin sentimentalities of oh poor me self pity and racking tensions in my neck and throat - I speak in platitudes - in monotones - I speak in echoes in reverberations like a shadow cast by the voice of my interlocutor - I do not exist as Rimbaud said I is other - I am not my self or A Self I am fiction the pain is real is momentary passes like a truck on the highway to cyberspace information is a tidal wave consuming the whole civilization like a giant garbage dump there is no difference between one thing and another plug in tune on tune out the real is a fiction nowhere is here where we are and we can't grasp it it is our own condition we can't see it because we are lost in a woods of words and images reconstructions of the machinery of repression of manufacturing ideologies and mass entertainment the big land grab has transformed itself into a media pyramid the pharaohs sit at the apex with their blind A-seeing eye and gorge themselves with the wishes and aspirations of all the children to be just like them to grow up to be Cindy Crawford or Michael Jordan or Madonna of the crossroads there is no way out of the madness we are all possessed by and mostly deluded into the worst madness of all believing we are not crazy that nothing is wrong that suicides happen because of chemical imbalances that the brain is the seat of the mind and there is no difference my headache has moved into my neck and my whole body is about to vomit out civilization I don't believe in anything anymore there is no hope there is no illusion there is no such thing as human understanding or love is just a four letter word my teenage dreams die hard I'm fifty years old and still trying to grow up to see things the way they really are and it seems impossible because it just keeps changing mutating and getting appropriated by media moguls so we stand on shifting sand for a limited time and wonder when and if there's any more to it than what we see thru veils of illusion the webs of Maya the Maya of iconic sadness music masterpieces of ecstatic longing pain and unbearable grief the colors of paintings we gaze at for a few minutes before lapsing back onto the highway of living death thru Zombieville

Bob Holman

Bob Holman was born March 10, 1948. He received his Bachelor's degree from Columbia University. He studied poetry with Ted Berrigan and Alice Notley at the St. Mark's Poetry Project, and studied acting at the Neighborhood Playhouse and the Open Theater. A tireless poetry advocate, Holman's many activities included serving as Co-Director and Slam Host at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe, and producing the PBS series *The United States of Poetry*. His most recent books of poetry are *Beach Simplifies Horizon* and *The Collect Call of the Wild*. In addition to promoting and supporting numerous activities that increase the public's awareness and appreciation of poetry, Holman teaches Writing and Integrated Arts at Bard College. His internet web site is www.bobholman.com.

We Are the Dinosaur

Blast open the gates to kingdom come
Whoops what happened to everyone
Planted a seed -- Grew into a gun
Dum de dum dum dum dum dum dumb

Life is a riot livin in a cartoon
Ice-age in a dumpster - that's our living room
Set fire to your roof - get a better view
Global warmin is a warnin - toodle-oo

We are the dinosaur
We don't live here anymore
We got what we were askin for
Follow the dinosaur

Ho ho homo sapiens
Ain't so smart
Ka ka kamikazi, Friend
Which way is the ark?

The world is dialin 911
The don't walk sign just changed to you better run
What we are waiting for has long since come
Dum-de-dum dum dumm dum dum

Cross the scorchin sands with my big fat feet
It's hard becomin diesel fuel with nothin to eat
Better catch us quick - we're outta here
We're pre-winged birds & tend to disappear

We are the dinosaur
We don't live here anymore
We got what we were askin for
Follow the dinosaur

Hurry, disappear! Back to the Past!
Did you really think the Future was gonna last?
It's endin with a bang so let's have a blast
Let's dine cannibal - it makes a nice contrast

Chauffeured ambulances race to the prom
Santa, please bring me a neutron bomb
Recycle the planet before the earth is a grave
But please excuse me -- I gotta get back to my cave

We are the dinosaur
We don't live here anymore
We got what we were askin for
Follow the dinosaur

FIRE: Friend or Foe?

Once
A long long time
Ago
Once upon a time ago
As a matter of fact
Just a second ago
In the beginning
Back to the beginning
Just before the beginning
It was shhh
I'm a-talkin quiet and peace
A riot of quiet
Can you hear it? C'mon try it
You can't hear it? Well that's quiet
Shh Mmmm Bzzz
Didja hear that? In the distance
The insects were buzzing
A language of verbs
& I'm talking
I'm a-talking
I'm a-talking talking bzz-bzz
Little mosquitos
In the ear bzz
Verbosely verbing
Bzzing? Amazing!
Re: "verb"-erating
Suddenly yet subtly
A luminous lucidity
In the inner inner ear's inner sanctity
The bzz gives way - something's trying to say
The bzz clears
& now you hear

Fire! Fire! -
Fire: Friend or Foe?

A friend (& I use the term advisedly)
A friend once remarked
(Which is rare, in that friends
Usually remark twice --
(Sometimes I think that's the mark of a friend --
The second remark...
Sometimes I think that's the mark of a friend --
The...))

Fire! Fire!
Fire: Friend or Foe?

These days with Death so fresh
So deep, so near-at-hand

You feel infected as a Youth
As if there's no Future
That's not polluted
No Past but what's retributed
Nothing to say
Cept "Throw it away!"

Add it to the Great Garbage Heap
Where we sit so gently, my Love
& I, discussing the Forms in the Sky
& like as not, as our toes get toasty
& we look below at the roly coasty

Lands ablaze like a big gas barbecure
Searing the flesh o' the earth
Well, that's when we start to reflect on
Such as this:

Fire! (we start) Fire! Fire!
Fire: Friend or Foe?
Fire! (yes, that's how we start) Fire! Fire!
Fire: Friend or Foe?

Because really we don't know
And as we thus sit thusly
Awaiting the returns of civilization
To answer our small queries
Concerning the Nature of Nature
And Harnessing Destruction and Alternative Alternatives
Until our red hot lips meet
And we make all kinds of passion
Sweet, nasty, hasty, taster,
Floozy & wicked, bastard prick and
Putting the left-overs in a Tupperware container
Of course because we know nothing lasts forever
Anyway, except nothing lasts forever
Even the thought of Fire, even Fire itself,
Even Fire: Friend or Foe?

Love Poems

I love poems

Principal Reason

I am in love with you
I want to rub feet in bed
Please invent beds

Because of You

Everything is you
Especially our children
Please pay the rent

Night Fears

Everyone is in love
Except you

**Levitating in Levittown
(Rock'N'Roll re-Revival)**

Start with a virgin Bloody Mary & a French toast Host
Breakfast w/ Champions & the Holy Ghost
Holy guacamole & a Papal Bull roast
Get on yr knees so yr disease can be diagnosed

Don't slosh it w/ the sherpas to some Himalayan height
Visit our heavy-hittin' Tibetan, his 3rd eye's out of sight!
Be careful yr not blinded by his clear white light
On a toot w/ the Absolute? The price is right!

Levitating in Levittown
All the gurus are getting down
Get a mighty holy high from a roly-poly holy
Gonna save yr soul! Gonna steal yr dough!

Brethren & Cistern!

You only live once, so why not make it forever?

Yes! It's always Sunday at the Levittown Holy Hallelujah Rock'n' Rollin' ReRevival
Cathedral Spa!

Thrill to personal appearances by: the Three Kings, The 10 Commandments, the 12
Apostles, the 2486 Bodhisattvas & for one night only - the 9 Billion Names of God!

Come on down to our Holy Hallelujah Hell of Fame & see all-time Champ Jesus Christ
Himself defend His Crown of Thorns against that promising young heavyweight, Elvis
the King...

Yes, act now & receive absolutely free for 15.95 postage & handling costs, a rare
psychedelic relic: a genuine Plastic Splinter from the Cross; you'll also receive a
thrilling
3D Holy "Winking" Hologram of the Lord (autograph only 2.95 extra); as an added
bonus we'll include the Amazing Resurrection Plant - you can't kill it, no matter how
hard
you try! &, for a limited time only - Readers Digest Condensed Books present in fifty
pages or less: The Bible!

& for your late-nite ecstasy, get way down at our Traditional Holy Hop, a moment of
shared experience in the flesh with all your favorite gurus, Mother Superiors & Father
Inferiors, the Flock's in the Foal for God's Rock'n'Roll -

So Rev it up, reverend - saving your Soul has never been so Goddamn much fun -
& remember - it's never too late to start all over!

It's Soul-a-matic Time! A chance like this may not come your way for another 2,000
years -
So bring the whole family & slouch on down towards Levittown!

Amen Awomen & a one two three...

Gotta rock'n'rolling holy rolling re-Revival
Born Again Again! Born Again Again!
Gotta rock'n'rolling holy rolling re-Revival
Born Again Again! Born Again Again!

After Li Po

No oar but this magnolia
No boat but this spicewood
Carve a jade flute, make it gold
Make it beautiful as this bottle of wine
Make the bottle a woman
Make me a king on an empty hill
I'm so full of wine and poetry
Laughing, my pen falls down,
Ending this poem

Now it can bring me wealth and fame!

Dream of Allen Ginsberg, Oct 15, 1997, Berlin

Allen has red hair, I can't tell if it's dyed or a wig. We're sitting in a cozy farmhouse in the Alps, talking and drinking tea, talk talk talk.

We go out to set up highway cones behind the house in a clearing up the mountain a bit. The highway cones are Uncle Sam hats and American flags.

Back to the house, more talking. Then, looking up, a Volkswagen van drifts by, banks, lands, using markers as a landing field.

An older couple gets out, greet Allen warmly. They ignore me, so I slip into the van. The man leans in and says to me, "It's a boat, too."

Mikhail Horowitz

Mikhail Horowitz was born in 1950 and attended the State University of New York at New Paltz. He has performed his poetry and comedy at the Village Gate, the Taos, New Mexico Heavyweight Poetry Championships and at numerous colleges and clubs. He is the author of *Big League Poets* and *The Opus of Everything in Nothing Flat*. His poetry has appeared in small press journals such as *Exquisite Corpse*, *City Lights Journal* and *Long Shot*. A selection of his poetry appeared in *The Outlaw Bible of American Poetry*. His performance work is available on two CDs, *The Blues of the Birth and Live, Jive, & Over 45*, and is excerpted on three anthology CDs, including *Bring It On Home*. He currently works as an editor in the publications office at Bard College.

September 11, 2001

Moon dust patinas an abandoned police car. A search dog collapses, overwhelmed by the stench of so much flesh. Gleaming for just a moment in morning sunlight, a man and a woman hold hands as they drop from the 80th floor. What's left of a wheelchair smolders; what's left of a face is shrouded by faxes. Miles away, a blizzard of trading sheets papers the streets of Brooklyn. On CNN, Yasser Arafat donates blood. And two days later, at the bottom of a crushed pile of rubble, a cell phone continues to ring.

Entombed in debris at the bottom of this bad dream, someone answers the phone. The caller is a multitude—a weeping ghost of Hiroshima, a walking skeleton of Auschwitz, a starving girl in an African refugee camp, a Belfast mother who's lost both sons to car bombs, and two dead schoolboys, one Israeli, one Palestinian. They all begin talking at once, yet every word is clear as a flowing stream.

T'ang Fragment

to be clear *and* crazy, like
those ancient Taoist sages, those
wild Chinese minds in hairy mountains
—feisty as crows, abrasive as
cicadas, fording the roar in
muddied garments, brushing
impossible peaks & riled skies
with deceptively simple poems,
honking back to wacky geese &
happily guzzling plum wine—

the return

separated from the larger cycles
by economics politics religion even art

it is thus a bittersweet blessing
to watch these battered pacific salmon thrashing

reseeding degraded beds
to the shrill threnody of gluttonous gulls

& the immemorial gloom of giant cedars
towering trunks impossibly thick with listening

Wood Flute

& after he's blown it

it's driftwood

gnarled & polished by his channeling breath

notched by longing

scored by loss

weathered by echoes of distant places

relic of a voyage not its own

Miles High

Miles high, they sip coffee, read Newsweek Fortune Times ignoring
clouds
But not so the woman in 15E, seated next to me
She's reading The Watchtower, and every so often sighs, looks up,
looks past me, out the window into radiant cloudscape
Somewhere over Michigan she has to pee
Gets up, meets my eye, deliberately places the 'zine on the seat
between us, nods, & heads for the head
But I'm engrossed in Peter Ackroyd's biography of William Blake, so
she's wasting her time in *this* neck of forever
And as I read that *every Space smaller than a Globule of Mans blood
opens into Eternity of which this vegetable Earth is but a shadow*
I look out through the eye into the clouds, and they are water in its
Spiritual form: not tyrants crown'd but great Cerebral treetops;
the Thoughts, multifarious and giant, in Blake's head
And I take her copy of The Watchtower, tenderly return it to her seat
And *God, so long worshipp'd, departs as a lamp without oil*, or this
tablet of Alka-Seltzer into froth.

Return Flight

Lifted in an instant, exalted over all these other lives
Permitted to rove where grounded eye cannot
Delving into junipered ravines, wending endless roads engraved in
dust
Bronchial arroyos, synaptic canyons
Miles of bleached highway veining ancient ceramic landscapes, leading
to isolate clusters of tiny houses
Specks of domesticity as lonely as burial stones
Sun makes of gray lakes a sudden efflorescence, alchemical gold
Skein of illuminated lakes, the strewn jewelry of tribal giants
Drinking water from a plastic cup, looking at clouds through plastic
window
And clouds in right eye: the streamers of blood imposing their dance,
a fluctuant sarabande, upon the sky
So dancing eye a part of what it sees
Not separate from the uncountable dots of fire, eyes of gazing lakes
& watchful ponds
Every particle of dust, wrote Blake, breathes forth its joy
Baby across the aisle, prominent blue vein in pink head, a river in
Terra's head now seen from sky
And black businessman, his dozing noggin on shoulder of passenger
next to him
Dreaming, *The white man's finally learned to fly*

spider flies united

is that really a
spider at 37000 feet
on flight 90 out
of portland, navigating
the various tactilities
of carry-on luggage,
hungry mote of hairy
sunlight, ticklish
intelligence on the
octagonal qui vive?
same spider, perhaps,
who spun them skeins
below, those intricate
threadings of riverbed
& interstate, webs of
tillage & linkage
of steeple & tree,
observing her work
through curves of a
pressurized window,
strung out on her
own ingenuity —

Poem

after the endless
snowfall, at blue dusk
in a sky pale gray at its
western edges, the

evening star

so icy & imperishable, an
earring for the seraph of
pure silence, or the last
flake, never to fall

One Treasure of Imperial China

Metropolitan Museum

4 / 5 /96

what I most cherish

about the wild cursive script

of the loopy monk

Tuai-su

is how his drunken

black characters

vibrant & vigorous

so thoroughly overwhelm

the faint official seals

poem & commentary

1.

sit, monk,
at brink of the falls

breathe the peace
engendered by this violence.

2.

The falling water is no more "violent"
than the breathing of the monk is "peaceful."
These are useless distinctions, more distracting
than the cataract. Sit. Breathe. The brink is where
you are, at any given moment. Laugh or cry, you are
already swept away.

Arthur Winfield Knight

Arthur Winfield Knight was born December 29, 1937. He earned an M.F.A. with Honors in Creative Writing at San Francisco State University. He and his wife Kit were co-editors of *The Unspeakable Visions of the Individual*, a highly-regarded journal of Beat Generation literature and scholarship. His recent publications include the novels *Blue Skies Falling* and *Johnny D*. His most recent collection of poetry is *Outlaw Voices*. He is a free-lance writer.

The Mysteries of the Universe

Middle-aged men
in tattered T-shirts
line the street,
dead leaves fluttering
down on them.
They peer beneath
the upraised hoods
of their pickup trucks,
their obscene bellies
bulging. Bent over,
they cannot hear
the terrible voices
of their wives.
It is a form of prayer.
A kind of penance.
They have spent
half a lifetime
in this position.

Wild Turkeys

They arrive at dawn,
coming in groups of 10 or 20,
hovering beneath the white birch
in the gray light. We throw them
ragged chunks of white bread,
delighted. The birds coo.
“I used to think they gobbled,”
my wife says. The females
lean forward, pecking
at the bread, at the hard earth.
Balance is all.
The silly males preen,
spreading their wings.
We can see the birds' nests
in the great oaks
behind our house. Each night
the turkeys levitate
into the highest branches,
reappearing at dawn.

The Hitchhiker

I hitchhiked to Reno the first time I came west, then I caught a ride on a slow freight. It was spring and the aspens were turning yellow as we crossed the Sierra-Nevada Mountains. Everything was bursting into bloom and I knew my life was going to be different, that I was going to open up to experience in new ways. There was something magical waiting for me in the Golden Land, and I waved at people wearing red and green lumberjack shirts as I passed through little towns like Truckee and Emigrant Gap and they waved back madly. I sat there in that boxcar, my legs dangling over the side like a dippy doodle as the train swooped down into the Great Central Valley. We crossed a huge elevated trestle west of Sacramento. Down below, the rice paddies were flooded, and you could see the clouds reflected in the water like great finger paintings. It was dusk when the train piled into San Francisco. Neon signs winked on across the city as if they were welcoming me, and I did a little dance, jumping up into the air and clicking my heels together like a beat Charlie Chaplin, as I skipped across the railroad yard in the purple twilight. I knew I was finally home.

James Dean: Walking on Water

I tell people
"I can walk on water,"
then I leap into the air,
pumping my feet madly,
hovering over the pool.
It's a mad world
I seem to be
walking across water
for a second, two seconds
but it's an illusion.
Magic. People shout,
"Jesus, Jimmy,"
needing miracles.
Me, too, sinking.
Like a lost pilgrim,
I beat my way back
toward the surface.
Toward the light.

James Dean: Bullfrogs

My father tried to raise
bullfrogs with six legs,
but nobody bought them.
They were strange creatures
with gelatinous bodies
and watery yellow eyes.
No one had seen
anything like them.
Our Baptist neighbors
claimed they were
an abomination to God
and they'd sneak
into our yard at night,
stomping on the frogs.
In the morning we'd find
their bloody guts everywhere.

James Dean: Hollywood

I like to drive into the copper colored hills at dusk, past the huge letters that spell out HOLLYWOOD, as if people would be lost if the name weren't there to remind them where they are. Many of them are lost anyway. You can see old men and women sitting on their faded stucco porches, watching the sun go down, their feet stretched out before them in the burnt-sienna sunlight. The rich are getting ready to have cocktails in Beverly Hills or Brentwood, but there are no cocktails for the poor. No dinners at the Villa Capri. The poor drink cheap wine or unsweetened iced tea out of old jelly glasses, their hands shaking. They might have dinner once a week at some flyblown Italian restaurant where the sidewalks out front are cracked and huge dandelions grow out of the concrete. There are a few cheap hotels where nobody but people named Smith and Jones sign the register, and there are some cheap apartment houses for aspiring actresses, but most of them have faces like stale beer by the time they have been here a year. The lucky ones make it back to wherever they came from. Hollywood almost looks beautiful from the observatory at Griffith Park as the sky deepens, turning ocher, but it's an illusion.

Nude Photographs

Jan lies on a blanket, nude
next to a small waterfall.
We made love minutes ago,
but the sky's still a blur
through the eucalyptus leaves.
Jan's breasts seem huge
in the dappled spring light.
I stand over her, also nude,
as I adjust the lens
and shutter of my Leica.
Jan looks at me nearsightedly,
smiling, without her glasses.
Nearsighted, too, I try
to focus on her nipples.
It's difficult. Oh God,
it takes forever to focus,
and everything's burgeoning.

Sirens

You don't like to hear
sirens at night
you tell me, as we
hold each other.
The ambulance goes by.
Outside, it's raining.
As we lie in bed
I can't help thinking
about Frederick Henry
and Catherine Barkley
when she's ready to die.
It's raining then.
I want to tell you:
I understand death
better than any character
Hemingway ever invented,
but I don't. I say,
"Everything will be
all right," although I don't
believe it. You hold me
even more tightly
as we listen to the rain
and the sirens
and the faint cooing
of the pigeons
in our eves. You say,
"Hold me, hold me,"
and I do.

Scars

An eight inch scar
curves across
your right leg,
and somebody else's bone
is where your kneecap
used to be,
grafted there.
At the lower corner
of your left lip
there is a smaller scar, barely noticeable,
the only
facial evidence remaining.
The plastic surgeon's art
hides the rest.
After nine years
you look up
the name of the driver
who hit you— Beam—
but he isn't listed
in the phone book any longer.
It is as if
he never existed,
but at night, especially,
your leg still throbs.

Imagining the Dead

Strange fish with no eyes
hover at the bottom
of the prehistoric lake.
Paiutes believe the spirits
of Indian children murdered
more than a century ago
rise from the blue depths,
where they sleep eternally
beside the cui-ui fish,
on moonlit nights.
The Paiutes build bonfires
beside Pyramid Lake, watching.

I can feel the heat rising
as I cross the saltflats,
imagining Marilyn Monroe,
imagining Gable and Monty,
imagining Marilyn's aborted
babies, imagining all
the dead. It has been
40 years since *The Misfits*
was filmed on these saltflats.
The stars are all gone now,
but the cui-ui fish still hover
on the bottom of the lake
and the Indians watch, waiting.

Kit Knight

Kit Knight received a B.S. in Communications from California University of Pennsylvania. She has published more than 600 poems in magazines such as *Poetry Now*, *The Louisiana Review*, *Caprice* and *Poetry Motel*. She co-authored *A Marriage of Poets* with her husband, Arthur Winfield Knight. They also co-edited the Beat Generation journal, *The Unspeakable Visions of the Individual*. Kit Knight also published *Women of Wanted Men*. Her forthcoming collection of poems is *Women of War*

Trying Desperately

“What do you know about it?”
he sneered. “You’ve never
worked.” He added, “Unless
you’re gong to count
those four months you worked
as a telephone solicitor.”
My eyes narrowed. “Three,”
I said, “it was only for
three months.” I added,
“Work is what you do
when everything depends
on what you do.” Calmly,
I listed my qualifications:
“Nine weeks in a coma,
seven months in hospitals,
five operations,
two crushed knees,
brain damage that resulted
in a stroke, seven pelvic
fractures—and I still
carried a baby to term.”
Quietly, I added, “I work more
in an hour than you do
in a day. Trying desperately
to stay on my feet. Trying
desperately not to snarl
my words. Trying desperately
to be normal.”

Invisible Strings

Two of the group
were from Pittsburgh,
three were from San Francisco
and the sixth was born in
Rhode Island. The couple from
the Steel City were showing
the out-of-towners
their city. The tour included
a ride on the Duquesne skyline,
a stop in a jazz joint
that was too loud and smoky,
and a drink in one of those
trendy, upscale bars with
hanging ferns. The barmaid
correctly identified me as
a perfect white wine drinker
and I watched her smile
when Michael ordered
a Black Russian. I almost
heard her murmur,
“A man’s drink.”
When the musicians took
a break, I made it a point
to tell them I enjoyed
listening. Artists need
encouragement. As the group
sauntered between places
of interest an outsider
wouldn’t have been able to tell
which three men belonged
to which three women, even though
the couples had been paired
for years. The group walked
and conversations went in threes.
The group shifted again,
and three new conversations
began. We moved together,
as a school of fish glides.
But the easy movements
weren’t as fluid
as they might have been
because five of the group
made subtle and

not-so-subtle changes
to accommodate the blonde Yankee
who limped.

Spirit of the Skies

(my own war)

As I lay dying,
the radio was tuned
to a top 40 station.
The theory being
stimulation is good.
A priest gave me
Last Rites
in the emergency room;
I wasn't expected to live
through the transfer
to a larger hospital
with a trauma unit.

I was a senior in high school
and disgustingly average.
I don't remember the priest,
I don't remember the E R
and I don't remember
being hit by the car.
Or flying 42 feet.

Toward the end
of my nine-week coma,
every time I drifted awake
"Spirit of the Skies"
was on the radio. It was 1970.
Now, I hear that song
on oldies stations
and with knife sharp clarity
my transfused blood,
multiple scars and
the new bone the bone bank
gave me— my own knee
was too pulverized—
all remember
the pure bewilderment.
I was in combat
for years; I still limp
and I still can't use
my right hand. I know
one of the reasons I write
is because artists never die.

And it isn't an accident
I focus on women
who've lived and grieved
through war.

Private Grief

Anna died last month; I never told my mother-in-law any strengths my husband has came from her and not my father-in-law whose leading trait is meanness. Last night I found the handkerchief I'd begun to embroider for her six years ago. Somehow, it never got done. But I did write a novel and hundreds of poems. I did keep her son company and helped guide her grand-daughter. I smoothed the lace meant for edging and for hours I sewed tiny Xs while thinking, I don't even know her favorite color. Smiling, I know she would say, "You choose; you always do everything so well." Yellow—I'll use yellow thread in honor of her soothing, honey-soaked voice. Anna could even calm her husband's rages when he'd slam his fist on the table and roar, "I'll do the thinking around here!" Then Anna would just barely get a crushed-petal look and say – privately, softly– "He has a bum head." Only once, in 23 years, do I have a clear memory of my mother-in-law not smiling. "It was horrible," Anna said when I asked about the mental institution her mother died in. Last month my mother-in-law died. Anna's

granddaughter–my daughter–
is coming home for Christmas
in two months. The handkerchief
will be passed on.

Walt Whitman Sees the First Women of War, 1861

Yankees say the Civil War began
with the 33 hour cannon duel
over Fort Sumter. But no one
died then. Southerners call it
The War Between the States
or The War of Northern
Aggression. All Dixie wants
is to be left alone
with their fierce allegiance
to states' rights and
their belief in slavery.
The Brooklyn *Standard* sent me
to Washington to report on
this first battle. We called it
The Battle of Manassas. And
because of our industrial
might—New York alone
has more factories than all
of the South—we expected
a Union victory. Both armies
were shockingly unprepared.
Soldiers go into battle, but
not till blood is spilled
do they understand
wounds and death. Manassas
Junction is on Virginia soil
and the defenders of home
won. I watched the beaten
and bewildered men in blue
limp into this soggy
silent city; cheering crowds
watched these soldiers leave.
Now, we have over 1,000 men
bleeding. More than 400 dead.
As the tattered remains
stagger in, two aged ladies
—beautiful—stand by
a plank table handing out
bread and making kettles
of soup. The rain continues,
all day, and the ladies continue,
all day, silent, white-haired,
giving food as tears
stream down their cheeks.

Jenner in the Rain

The sun's rays were poking
through the fog and gave
the crashing waves a fierce
quality; the air was so damp
I could almost squeeze it.
On the café's radio
a cowboy was singing
"I'll Love You Forever"
and artificial flowers bloomed
in a beer bottle
on the table. I watched
an old tabby cat
sit in the weak sun;
when he stretched
his movements were slow
and radiated stiffness.
The air was so damp
I could almost squeeze it.
On another trip to Jenner
it was a bright day;
sheep were scooting
across the road and it was
a day of high adventure.
My daughter and I
climbed and sat on
the dead trunk
of a eucalyptus tree
that was as wide as
a school bus. I swiped
daisies from a restaurant
and my husband warned me
the caretaker was named
Hulk. I stole daffodils
and wisteria from another inn
and laughed at the danger.
We met a Pomo Indian who played
"Happy Birthday, dear Tiffany"
for my daughter
by blowing through
a bay leaf that was
fresh, moist,
alive. That day
the air was no so damp

I could almost squeeze it.
That day was not
Jenner in the Rain

Annie James, 1943: The Same Screams

I was eight when the War
Between the States began and
I remember the screams
of my brother as I cleaned
his chest wound. I remember
the screams of our mother
—on her knees—as our home
was torched. We couldn't find
my brother's grave
once the Yankees allowed us
to return. The train whistle
wailed—almost a scream—
when I eloped with Frank
James. My father would never
have permitted me to marry
an outlaw. Frank already had
\$2,000 on his head and
seven years later, my husband
was worth \$15,000. After
Jesse was assassinated,
Frank was the most wanted man
in America. It was time.
Our son was five and Frank
desperately wanted
peace. He surrendered to
the governor of Missouri and
underwent two trials. Everyone
knew he'd robbed those trains
and banks. But 25 years
in the saddle is worth
something and everyone knew
Frank fought on the right side
during the War. He was
exonerated. Forgiven.
World War I came and he said
the screams of the dying boys
in Europe
were the same screams
he heard echoing
all through the South,
years ago. Now, I'm 90
and Frank is long dead but
another war rages in Europe

and the screams
of Polish women as they watch
their homes burn
are screams I've heard before.

Donald Lev

Donald Lev was born May 15, 1936 in New York City and educated in public schools in the Borough of Queens and at Hunter College. He has supported himself by working as a dishwasher, cab driver, messenger, in a newspaper wire room, and in news circulation, while publishing twelve collections of poetry. His most recent title is *Enemies of Time*. Lev's poetry has appeared in such anthologies as *Do Not Go Gentle... Poems on Death*, *Ten Jewish American Poets*, *A New Geography of Poets* and *Downtown Poets*. He has had fiction published in *A Day In the Life: Tales from the Lower East Side*. Since 1979, he and his wife, the poet Enid Dame, have co-edited the literary tabloid *Home Planet News*. Film connoisseurs will also recognize Lev's portrayal of "the poet" in Robert Downey's 1969 classic underground film *Putney Swope*.

Devolution

i am a frog sitting on a rock by the river euphrates
(you have to start somewhere)

the earth is so fragrant and the river so full of life!

i am almost ready to march
as soon as i
can alter persona
not an easy thing to do
even in a poem there is much
twisting anguish

but i am a man now
in combat boots
ready to defend
my earth, my river

from whom? the insect, of course
who invades every
peaceful stream with his
noisomeness

we have just fired off our cannon
there is a fragrance in the air of gunpowder

we have been misled we know
but we must follow step with step

to alter again is perhaps to find greater regret.

Waiting. . .

for what?
for the other shoe to drop?
for the tide to rise or fall?
for the image of the Void
to reproduce itself beneath my breast bone?

i have waited for happiness,
for surfeit of pleasure,
for surcease of sorrow.
i have waited for robins. i have waited for snow.

i wait for you now
so i won't have to wait alone.

Thoughts On Allen Ginsberg

the uncle sam hat
above the face
that bore his name
like a national banner:
was his language the same as longfellow's?
shakespeare's? robert e lee's?
ezra pound's?
i've been writing poems since 1958
not much like his my lines few,
jagged, scattershot with rhymes and assonances
but he for me somehow was always a permitting presence.
i'd scan the universe for hints on how
a jewish dropout in america, reluctant to leave Queens,
makes poems:
the way ads read, ferlinghetti's lines, dylan
thomas' resonant consonants, the way things
looked stoned.
and his occasional pronouncements: e.g.,
on the size of one's notebook.
he was candor incarnate.
i am oblique, subterranean, but i hope still truthful.
his kaddish, to me, is the greatest american poem, pure candor
a type of work i couldn't begin
but today we--all--like and unlike--write
in the light of him.

Literatus

There was a trained intelligence!
Words flew out of his bright blue eyes.
Sentences raged like static electricity from his wild hair.
Paragraphs rolled over his ample belly
Like a long wide flowery necktie.

How he made the rest of us sweat!
Even the gamblers in the next room
Cashed in their chips and began to take notes.

Even my mother's parakeet chattered his praises
And refused to have its cage covered
Till the master had bidden all goodnight.

I found myself breaking out in a cold sweat
And racing into the chilly street.

What I didn't expect was to hear his footsteps behind me,
And his voice, crisp as a silver dollar moon beam,
Warning me.

Scene From A Marriage

So precarious!
Two tipsy piles of books
At the edge of her dresser,
Her reading glasses tucked
In between them.

On my side,
An even tipsier pile
Threatens from the night table.

John

john would be sitting at the end of the bar saying nothing.

john was nonverbal like a cat

or a cloud.

i miss john

i have no one to not talk to.

**A Bar Is So Much Like A Woman,
Sometimes I Worry**

good smooth wood, and
tantalizing lights glancing off
bottles of stuff that make the head feel
moments something like our moments
i lean my arms against
i lay my hands upon
i ask for and receive
i stay there and
love
as if drink were love
which it probably isn't
sometimes i worry
my fellow piglets, pups, kittens
nursing with me,
loving with me
we grow mellow together
basking in her liquids
a bar is so much like a woman
sometimes i worry.

The Human Condition In Brighton Beach

Did you see the salt shaker?
It has been carried away.
And the onion that lay in slices on this very table only yesterday
is likewise mysteriously vanished.
And the lace curtains that moved so gracefully in that window
are gone also.
And the porcelain pitcher from Mexico, I'd never think to miss it,
but I see it's not in its usual place on the bookshelf.

What has happened to the independent clutter about me?
What tricks are occurring, and why?
There was a third left to that stick of butter only just a moment ago.
Where is it now?

It's not madness. I am sure of that. I am sure of that.
Madness is such an oldfashioned idea and it would never apply to me.
My friends would have told me by now. They hold nothing back from me.

I think I'd better go for a walk. I'll take an umbrella.
I'll walk over to the beach to have a look at the sea,
or I'll go up to Coney Island Avenue and buy a knish.
A kasha knish, maybe, with a cup of very light coffee.
Then I'll go to the post office and buy some stamps.
Just so I can stand on the line and grumble together
with everybody else and watch how the wily Russians
sneak to the front of the line. But what did I do with my key?

This is beginning to get to me. I can't leave the house without my key.
And obviously, if I stay here, I'll go crazy.

Twilight

Dearest. The rainbow collapsed today.
No one had been riding it thank goodness.
I have negatives soaking in my darkroom
in a solution of tears and acid
that is no solution and will beget
no positives. In one of these negatives
you may be said to be silhouetted
against an empty sky. We shall see.

Don't dread anything. From point of view
of nothingness even vision farthest
back in the mind is no starting point.
Red letter days come and go to be sure.
Our transports seem to flow, but are mostly bleak
the photos show, & recede like winter.

Receding. A hair line. A shoreline.
A breathline. A heartline. My palms turn upward,
then backward to cover my eyes. It is
a gesture the meaning of which I
am uncertain. There are no thoughts behind
the covered eyes when I do this. Only
a sense like the sound of a river
entering an unquiet harbor.

Listen. You can hear laughter in the waves
as being is transformed into memory;
as when a father dies or a wise word
is recorded for posterity.

The Courier

i ran all the way i almost
slipped on the gravel path i want-
ed to be first with the news i
had learned before anyone what
it was everyone wanted to
know i knew i wanted to tell
i wanted to watch everyone's
eye's light with wonder and satis-
faction or shut tight with fear and
melancholy i wanted to
see their jaws drop and their feet stamp
when i told them what they must hear
i wanted to feel their joy and
their wrath their misgivings and mis-
understandings when i addressed
each in his own tongue i couldn't wait
so i ran all the way the ho-
rizon kept receding but my
message and my knowledge urged me
on the skies were darkening street
lamps were beginning to come on
lights were being lit in the cot-
tages on the hills the villa-
ges i was racing to reach be-
fore it was too late to be the
first with the news but the hills kept
receding and i kept running
and kept running and keep running

Lyn Lifshin

Lyn Lifshin was born July 12, 1949. She received her B.A. from Syracuse University and her M.A. from the University of Vermont. Known as the "queen of the small press world," Lifshin's poetry has appeared in numerous literary magazines. She has published over one hundred books of poetry. *Before It's Light*, her most recent book, won the Paterson Poetry Award. Her poetry can be read on the Internet at www.lynlifshin.com.

My Mother Straightening Pots And Pans

"I can't see why you
keep so many coffee pots
with cracked handles"
she frowns as if looking
at a police line up
where all the faces
were lovers who'd
slid thru my arms
"you've got a lot of
junk but nothing
to make something hearty
You need pots that
would last a life.
They don't make pots
or men as they used to"

My Mother Wants Lamb Chops, Steaks, Lobster, Roast Beef

something to get
her teeth in,
forget the shakes
cancer patients
are supposed to
choose, forget
tapioca pudding
vanilla ice
she wants what is
full of blood
something to
chew to get the
red color out of,
something she can
attack fiercely.
My mother who never
was namby pamby
never held her
tongue never didn't
attack or answer
back, worry about
angering or hurting
anybody but said
what she felt
and wouldn't
walk any tight
rope, refuses the
pale and delicate
for what's blood,
what she can
chew even spit
out if she
needs to

The Daughter I Don't Have

jolts up in the
middle of the night
to curl closer than
skin, pink tongued
in a flannel dress
I wore once in some
story. I part her
hair, braid her
to me as if to
keep what I can't
close, like hair
wreathes under
glass in New
England. Or maybe
pull the hair into
a twist above the
nape of her neck,
kiss what's exposed
so wildly part of
her stays with me

In My Mother's Last Hours

I write titles for
poems I'll never
write while she's
living in a note
book, shaking as
her eyes roll back
and I feel guilty
I sat on the out
side stoop this noon
while the nurse's aide
changed her. Mama
my mother calls out
only a few weeks since
we took the ambulance
down here thru black
eyed susans and she
wanted muffins,
coffee, wanted to
smell the air on
the lake. Her skin
the nurse says is
already mottled. Lyn,
she gasps, take
me home

**Early Friday I Wondered, Suddenly, Was Cab Calloway
Living, Was He Dead**

leaped to the Boardwalk where my mother had us
waiting in line for a chance to see his
crinkly Hi De Ho laugh tho my sister and I
wanted to feel the salt wind lick us like
sailors' eyes, safe in the leash of our
mother's sighs no matter how tight my sarong

dress of aqua and jade leaves like one my
mother would pick out when she couldn't
still walk, let alone think of shimmying to
Minnie the Moocher, only got it after making
me try it on saying she couldn't even be buried
in it. Salt wind and lights like rhinestones

and diamond as unlike the room she left when
she was hostage to my sister's bossiness, her
perfect body, tiny and blonde as we grew like
flowers my mother over-watered, wild to make
sure nothing died, now spreading beyond even her
biggest clothes as she plotted to keep the sun

dress she could never wear that July when she
helped my mother out on an ambulance ride south.
But that June we were teens, my sister wrapped
in dreams of races and jockeys like Willie Hard
Tack and I in my even smaller sleek clothes
were herded in to hear this man who wiggled as much
as Elvis. Our mother's hair, black fire shaking, maybe
46 or 47-- too old we figured then to be so taken by Cab's
flirty eyes, his scat hinting at what our mother couldn't
imagine we were sure, let alone want

The Birds Like A Radio On All Night

There, in the dark.
You can't touch
what's closer than
the sheets but a

presence wraps you
deeper. It was after
12 when their wings
and honks stirred

the lake. A skid
of webs, flutter
in black silence.
The moon revealed

nothing. I shut the
light off, floated
under blankets like
eel grass, the radio

low, waiting for their
cries like a woman
listening for a child
in the next room

In The Rippled Ebony Cove

Temperatures falling.
Moon slivers on the
rolling skin of water.
Geese in half light,
armada in feathers.
Wind blows them closer.
One silver band glows.
Their onyx, black flame
in a night fire

Geese At Midnight

as if a feather
quilt exploded,
a white you can't
see in the dark
but breathe, a
wind of white
rose petals,
wave of fog
in the shape of
flying things.
Like radio
voices on
the pillow,
lulling, keeping
what's ragged
and tears at
bay, the geese
pull sky and stars
in through glass
are like arms
coming back
as sound

Like A Dark Lantern

I move thru the first
floor at 3 AM past
the cat who is curled
in a chair half made
of her fur, turning
her back on air
conditioning, startled
to find me prowling
in the dark as if I was
intruding on stars and
moon and the ripple
in water that spits
back the plum trees.
Grass smells grassier.
The clock inches slowly
toward the light. A
Creak of wood and the
soft scratch on the blue
Persian rug the cat claws
gently merge with some
night bird I've never
seen like a poem that
goes along and suddenly,
at the end, like a banked
fire, explodes into the
wildest flame that finishes
everything that has
come before it perfectly

Relieve

for the moment, my
cat, who turned her head
at chunks of just
cut beef, now is nuzzling
nearly empty cat food
tins, purrs thru the
night. Limp as rags,
for a week under the
bed, she claws the
rug in the sun. I say
nothing, just listen
as I do to her crunching
food, lapping water
at 2 AM. In stillness
the sound comforts
like bells or words in
Spanish or French
I don't understand. Her
chewing, like pearls
or amber warming to
skin soothes though it
is as untranslatable
to me as the nuances
under chatter in
the streets in Montreal
or Paris. Still, for
the moment, like music
or Paris. Still, for
the moment, like music
or velvet, her paws on my
eyelids are a relieve,
like June, or roses
or lilacs in early light
before anything scorches,
goes limp or loses
its rouge, while morning
glories are a necklace
of amethyst, exotic as
gracias, si, bon, merci

Dan Nielsen

Dan Nielsen is 54 years old and is a lifelong resident of Racine, Wisconsin. His poems have appeared in *Tight*, *Pearl*, *Bouillabaisse*, *In Your Face*, and many other small press magazines, as well as in anthologies such as *The Random House Treasury Of Light Verse*, *Stand Up Poetry: The Anthology*, and *Created Writing: Poetry From New Angles*. A film-maker as well as a poet, his latest cinematic productions are: *What Don't I Love You For? I Don't Love You For Instance*, and *Something To Look Forward At*. For many years he edited *Blank Gun Silencer*, a literary magazine that published many post-Beat writers, and, on occasion, the Beats. Recently laid off from a factory where he worked for thirty-five years, Nielsen is receiving government training in the communications field.

The Swami Sky Dives

thoughts while waiting
for the parachute to open

thoughts after realizing
the parachute will not open

reflection on how circumstance
affects thought

I Woke Up One Morning

and I couldn't remember
my name

or anything that had ever
happened to me.

I thought it might be
amnesia.

I went to see a doctor.
He gave me a series of tests.

He said, "The good news is
you do not have amnesia.

The bad new is
you don't have a name

and nothing has ever happened
to you."

Earliest Memory

I remember
my first
birthday —

It struck me that finally
I was being treated
as I deserved.

I Bought A Home Security System

My big mistake was
trying to install it myself.

Now, whenever
I go outside,
I'm arrested.

I Was Looking For My Wallet

My girlfriend and some guy
I'd never seen were lying on the couch.

She said, "It's over
between us."

I walked over and there it was —
between them on the couch.

The Only Possible Explanation

All night long
there's this scraping sound

as my appliances move slowly
across the kitchen floor.

The woman across the hall
collects refrigerator magnets.

Fame

If you want your name
to be remembered
long after you are dead,

find young people
with excellent memories
and tell them your name.

What Am I Working On?

I'm writing a book
about a movie
about a man

who does not
want to be
in a movie,

but instead,
wants to be
in a book.

Two Proven Facts

People who say
there is a method
to their madness,

and

people who feel
alone in a crowd
are crazy.

Which Proves My Point

A friend of mine
became a very famous,
though in my opinion,
vastly overrated
novelist.

After he died,
he channeled a novel through me
and no one liked it.

Michael Rothenberg

Michael Rothenberg has been an active environmentalist in the San Francisco Bay Area for the past 25 years. His books of poems include *The Paris Journals* (Fish Drum), *Monk Daddy* (Blue Press) and *Unhurried Vision* (La Alameda Press). Rothenberg is editor and publisher of Big Bridge, www.bigbridge.org. He is also editor of *Overtime*, *Selected Poems* by Philip Whalen (Penguin), *As Ever*, *Selected Poems* by Joanne Kyger (Penguin) and *David's Copy*, *Selected Poems* by David Meltzer. He is presently working on the selected poems of Edward Dorn (Penguin, 2007) and the *Collected Poems* of Philip Whalen (Wesleyan University Press, 2007).

ANGELS SLEEP IN PEACE!

Angels sleep in peace!
Devils stay past midnight

listen to Paganini
Pretenders, King Of America, Heartless Liars

Have you heard them playing 8-ball while reading *Ziggy's Dream*?

Did it matter when the Army closed
imagination's terrifying halls to Strategists of Art?

No, it doesn't make sense to matter
No explanation needed for transfer of funds

from one pocket to another
For those Charlie Chaplins entering data, boiling nouvelle shoe leather soup

Supping on Valentine's Desires and Therapeutic seasonings
It makes sense

Angels sleep in peace!
Devils stay past insomnia

& possum scud across the roof
Listening to accusations of the trite and trivial from Fashion Fascists

Reveling in accusations of the ideal & naïve

soaked in gross dependencies & mother

Have you heard them in their drunken dance
on granite floors,

in the rhythm of Sisyphus?

Would it matter if Superman
disappeared in his glacial fortress and forgot about Lois Lane?

No, it doesn't make sense to matter
No explanation is needed for the transfer of sperm

from one pocket to another

For Cryogenic Automatons taking surveys & grants, boiling eclectic dialectics
Gorging on Cornish hens & Sweet & Low

It makes sense

Angels sleep in peace!
Devils stay past gunshot

& sweat soaked orgies
& tender whisperings

Have you made up your mind,
in those white silk gowns,
hair loose on freckled shoulder,
licking your own nipples,
raising your naked ass to four impossible walls?

That I should be persuaded by repressed exhibitions of genitalia
Does it matter when crisis rings

the death of a poet & saw-grass fires kiss his naked guilt?

No, it didn't add up to verse, or wake the angels to salve the clawing innocent
No, it doesn't make sense to matter longer

No explanation needed for the transfer
of one fish from one

Amazon to one aquarium
on a bookshelf on one hill above Pacific shoreline

For Game Hunters tracking down genuine tears & renderings, boiling conceptual logic
Mounting vanquished language of invisible jaguars & hornless rhinos

On walls...

It makes sense

For those lazy drifters beneath the stars

2/21/98

THE JET IS NOW PERCEIVED

The jet is now perceived as a weapon
The boat is now perceived as a weapon
The house, a weapon
The car, a weapon

The tree
The toy
The air

Vehicles for poison, explosives
Film, magazine, song, propaganda

What can't be used for killing is frivolous

One drop of water is one holy jihad

Seeds of love in your enemy's heart
Walk away!

Security is perceived as a weapon
Fidelity is perceived as a weapon

Prayer, a weapon
Goddess, a weapon
Vegetarian cuisine
Yoga, a weapon

Art & religion in the hands of a villain is black magic

Orgasm, a weapon
Nation, a weapon
The tribe, the hive, location is a weapon

Now I've got the money to travel beyond time
But no place is safe the weapon is mind

KATRINA

Despite day after day of appearance
by President Bush aimed at undoing

talk about corpses

*After Hurricane Katrina
blew through Hollywood, Florida*

the political damage from
a poor response to Hurricane Katrina,

talk about toxic soup

Palm fronds

the White House has not been able
to regain its footing,

talk about mama drowning

Cane splinters

already shaken by the war in Iraq
and a death toll exceeding 1,880.

talk about suicide

*Mango branches
on the lawn*

The administration on Tuesday struggled
to deflect calls for an accounting

talk about rotten stench

*In New Orleans
hungry mortality*

of who was responsible for a hurricane response
that even Bush acknowledged was inadequate

talk about nothing left

Provolone,

mushroom, bacon omelette

Even as Katrina was bearing down
on the Gulf Coast that Sunday night

talk about being lost

A biscuit at Grandpa's Diner

and early Monday, Aug. 28-29,
and the national hurricane center was warning

talk about losing everything

Skip dinner

Shell a bowl of peanuts

of growing danger, the White House
didn't alter the president's plans

talk about too much talk

Wake late, check news

New Orleans destroyed

to fly from his Texas ranch to the West
to promote a new Medicare prescription drug benefit.

talk about corpses

Why aren't there

ten thousand rescue helicopters

flying into New Orleans?

By the time Bush landed in Arizona that Monday,
the storm was unleashing its fury

talk about toxic soup

Why can't an administration

that says it can rebuild Iraq

protect it's own people?

on Louisiana and Mississippi.
The president inserted into his speech

talk about mama drowning

Don't answer

only a brief promise of prayers and federal help.
He continued his schedule in California,

talk about suicide

It's a race, class issue
"Boots or books" issue

and he didn't decide until the next day
that he should return to Washington.

talk about rotten stench

Iraq issue, troops issue!
Food or security issue?

But it took him another day to get there,
as he flew back to Texas to spend another night

talk about nothing left

"It's human nature!"

at his home before leaving for the White House.
Once the president was in Washington,

talk about being lost

Babies sheltered w/ cardboard salvaged
from wreckage of "policy"

the criticism only intensified.
In a television interview, Bush said - mistakenly –

talk about losing everything

Platitudes

that nobody anticipated
the breach of the levees in a serious storm.

talk about too much talk

Factoids

Even Monday's trip to the region was a redo,
hurriedly arranged by the White House. . .

Father says, "A Thousand Points of Light"

Son says, "The Armies of Compassion"

Bush raised eyebrows on his first trip
by, among other things, picking Sen. Trent Lott, R-Miss. –

talk about mama drowning

Even as we speak. . .

instead of the thousands of mostly poor
and black storm victims – as an example of loss.

*Bicycling medicines
from pharmacy to catastrophe*

That they would be refugees

...Bush gave FEMA chief Brown – the face for many
of the inadequate federal response –

Aliens in their own country

Because they're poor, black, poor, white

a hearty endorsement. "Brownie,
you're doing a heck of a job," Bush said.

talk about too much talk

*"Making their own situations
in a dog eat dog world"*

Later in Biloxi, Miss.,
Bush tried to comfort two stunned women

talk about too much talk

"Refugees"

wandering their neighborhood
clutching Hefty bags, looking in vain for something

talk about too much talk

“Evacuees”

to salvage from the rubble of their home.
He kept insisting they could find help

talk about too much talk

“Flood victims”

at a Salvation Army center down the street,
even after another bystander informed him

talk about too much talk

talk about corpses

it had been destroyed.
And at his last stop that day,

talk about too much talk

“It’s time for Bush to go”

at the airport outside of New Orleans,
Bush lauded the increasingly desperate city

talk about too much talk

whine, whine
go away
come again another day

talk about corpses

maybe ten thousand corpses

talk about too much talk

too much, too much

I look outside
Crows in the mango tree

August 28- September 16, 2005

Leslye Layne Russell

Leslye Layne Russell was born in 1946. She received her Bachelor's degree in English from California State University, Chico. She did post-graduate work in Religious Studies at CSU, Chico, and in the arts and Religious Studies at Naropa Institute, Boulder, Colorado. While at Naropa, she was on the first editorial staff of *Loka*, Naropa Institute's journal. Her poetry has appeared in the following magazines: *Poetry Now*, *Free Cuisenart*, *In Sublette's Barn*, *Poetic Express*, *A Little Poetry*, *Open Mike*, *Art Speaks: Tibet*, *One(Dog)Press*, *Minotaur Press*, *Baker Street Irregular*, *The Dickens*, *Poetry Repair Shop*, *Fish Dance*, *In the Grove*, *Disquieting Muses*, *TADS*, and *Blue Moon Quarterly*. She is a non-denominational minister who specializes in writing and conducting wedding ceremonies. Three of Russell's poetry collections, *Into the Dark Mountain*, *Last Visit* and *A Quiet Place*, are scheduled for publication in 2002. Her poetry can be read on the Internet at <http://www.whiteowlweb.com>.

death in the meadow

intimated a week before
now the message scored in my
morning body
at the edge of the bed

am I ready then
to die

yes

journey to northwest Sierra
Butte Meadows
wait without waiting
breathe green mountain moments

night
a Tibetan lama in red robes and light
wakes me in the cabin loft
a silent vision of
joy and imminence

precisely under sun
next day
by the creek
feet in deep grass
I sink into the white
see the meadow through white veils

I sink

make it to a fallen pine
can't sit
lie on my back
arms fall out to sides
and hang in summer air
life in the body
wanes
suddenly I know
this is
the death

give

inside

white
racing white
warp speed white

focus

hold focus

light light light

surrender

light

consumed
light
energy of being
light

no one

light

how long

suspended sky time

how long

the white

how long

the lifeless body lying

no I

only is

is

(then first)

hearing

water upstream

down down down

closer closer

louder louder

(second)

body molecules

slow resurface of feeling

wake

yet no movement

(last)
eyes
slowly open
to straight up blue sky bright
mid the circle of pines
blue green radiance

a finger moves
hand
the other
slowly slowly

my body on the log
the log
take time
no hurry
what is it all
but light
in form
in color
(*but light*)

oh

here again
nothing different
nothing the same
all light

light

I sit up
slowly
walk through afternoon meadow
back to the tiny cabin

grass how soft
under bare feet
cool
each step

light everywhere

how alive it all

is alive

merge

I arrive
after rare May snow
sun gone
behind the west range

in the white last light
of Mt. Shasta
the dream dreamed
before the journey
finds me

the mountain stands
in a moving gauze of mist

I move into the dream

air of cloud surrounds
smell of pines
and damp earth

great peak above me
I bow to the earth
life
spirit
head to holy ground

I move into the dream

I move into the mountain

gravel in my palms
wet knees
five times I bow

time moves into time
place into place
my breath into breath

I move into the dream

I move into the mountain

I move into the movement

question for the bodhisattvas

how big the heart
how big to hold and
love this world
where after a party on
Halloween
still in costume
a kind boy of twenty
stabbed stabbed
left dead on the tracks
the train hits his sacred body
and all the world

(is changed forever)

sax

a Vancouver poem

slept with the saxman
when you left town
he was so tall

notes of ribbon
blown close and round
I the dancer

empty hall of hardwood floor
we wove form and sound and air
no audience

later his converted storefront
windows filled with Yew Street light
artist's dream

high in the loft
tangle sweet and kind
laughter after

down the ladder
bakery bread and butter
played me his shenai

sun through glass
says afternoon
walked the 13 blocks back

when you returned
I told you
even more than I had known

morning classifieds
third floor attic
sixty-five dollars

french windows to the sea
took it
moved that day

windows opened wide
water and clouds
gulls across the sky

Nagarjuna

you've got to hand it to Nagarjuna
putting it all together
taking it apart
telling us it is
it's not
it's both
showing us how samsara equals nirvana

not bad
considering he lived right here
in the midst of the is and not
just like all the rest of us

spring blanket

beneath a light spring blanket
we lie on our backs

bodies touching
all
the way
down

our arms cross
his hand on my thigh
my hand on his

I listen to his breathing
mine

night voyagers

our bed floating in the
dark room

Ferlinghetti on the lawn

1967

Chico State

I lie with Nancy

tummies down on towels

bikinied

in deep June grass

Ferlinghetti open

in my hands

opens me

a Coney Island of the Mind

indeed

page after page

the ninja poet's lines

dance and pierce

I look over at Nancy

she's now face up

eyes closed

under Chico sun

her white blonde hair flows

across a sky blue towel

listen to this

"Beauty stands and waits

with gravity

to start her death-defying leap"

wow

she says softly

and looks over at me

hand shading her

pool blue eyes

Ravi Shankar

Ravi Shankar is Associate Professor and Poet-in-Residence at Central Connecticut State University and the founding editor of the international online journal of the arts, *Drunken Boat*. He has published a book of poems, *Instrumentality* (Cherry Grove), named a finalist for the 2005 Connecticut Book Awards and co-authored a chapbook with Reb Livingston, *Wanton Textiles* (No Tell Books). His creative and critical work has previously appeared in such publications as *The Paris Review*, *Poets & Writers*, *Time Out New York*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Fulcrum*, *McSweeney's* and the *AWP Writer's Chronicle*, among many others. He has taught at Queens College, University of New Haven, and Columbia University, where he received his MFA in Poetry. He has appeared as a commentator on NPR and Wesleyan Radio and read his work in many places, including the Asia Society, St. Mark's Poetry Project and the National Arts Club. He currently serves on the Advisory Council for the Connecticut Center for the Book and along with Tina Chang and Nathalie Handal, is the co-editor of *Language for a New Century: Contemporary Poetry from Asia, the Middle East & Beyond* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2008). In 2007, he taught a class in the Shandong Province and ganbeid with some of China's foremost poets and scholars.

How the Search Ended

Before the bus flattened me,
I was searching for a scent
Never to be remembered
Until it was smelled again.

My fault not the driver's:
I had stopped to stare at a girl
Undressing in her window.
I was too far to smell her.

Earlier, I had visited a palm reader,
Not to trace my lifeline, merely
To discover where to buy
An oversize neon hand.

On the way home, my head jangled
With a premise: Life is either more or less
Serious than I imagine it to be.
And then came the bus.

One Stone to Samadhi

Back in the room, it's as if we never left:
A cone of frangipani gradually charring,
And Clair de Lune, overlaid with whale song,

Piping through tweeters in the background,
Plastic folding-chairs filled with disparate frames
In similar postures: back straight, palms open

Upon thighs, eyes closed, muscles relaxed,
The flicker of thought, in principle, sacrificed
To the rising and falling of breath. Still a fleck

Of peripheral self can't help but remain, temporarily
Unhooked from memory's flux and grapple,
Yet attendant in some form nonetheless,

A watchfulness impartial to inclination,
Though to speak of it is like pointing a finger
At the moon. Suffice it to say that, eyes closed,

The crest on passing time's ongoing wave
Perpetually furnishes the mind with vista,
And back in the room, it's as if we never arrived.

Oyster

Gnarled as cliff-face, two shells suctioned,
one snug in another to shape a rocky pear,
bluish, held together by a dark protein hinge,

content once in spatfall on a piling, changed
from free-swimming to inert life filtering
plankton from water, beating cilia. Dredged

firmaments of bread and brine now on ice
with lemon wedges in a fish stall window.
Soft, protandric pulsations in mantle skirts

made liquid to itself, turning males female
and back again, telling secrets that require
a knife to pry open and vinegar to serve.

Dragonfly

Darting blue shard the length of a toothpick
with enough nerve and agility to mate in midair,
to snatch midges from a hovering swarm

faster than the purple martins will snatch it,
each blip in its fractal flight an insect eaten.
Compound eyes made from thousands of eyes,

motion in all direction, pale soft naiad bodies
hardened with exoskeleton, grown into wings
that shimmer afternoon with rapid translucence,

turning the planked boardwalk along the lake
into a darning needle's sketch of cross-stitches.
In time, they'll sew shut your eyelids and lips.

The Dark

Ten minutes ago, there was gray in the sky,
now there's none, not a splotch of contour
and when I walk, I listen for gravel to crunch

underfoot so I don't end tooth in bushes.
Darkness in New England has a flavor close
to anise, a texture plush as peat moss, fills

the ear with cricket chirps, creaks with trees
amending their branches, smells like inside
a new shoe when there's still tissue paper

crumpled in the toe, feeds full on paranoia,
bloats the walker with blind urge to run
summarily offset by the necessity to grope.

Language Poetry

Yea, it was pundit debunking, sage with newness,
Meaty ruse, elaborate masquerade of unmeaning,

Stage where words pose counterpoised to signification,
Where rummy syllables string along kinks of syntax

And gum of virgules jimmies together clauses
To devise a monument of fistulous happenstance,

Subverting address for free play—
Rare vestiges pitched headlong in stochastic

Eddies, dreaming a livelong laterality,
Polygons alongside tapirs in grammar-shorn dance—

Slithered mid-speech an intention a seam
The color of politics, even the furthest minutia

Run on dollars, come what cannot until (s)pace
Breaks into half itself &

Music the bramble where bare verbs rabble,
Seeking the iota behind the bestial bars

That proves no forged lattice girds the mind
With predicates efficacious as prison searchlights—

Senses slip the faster usurps fate from syntax
How kowtow to solipsism or preset a page?

Blues Beneath the Blue Mountains

Mi haffi grief di passing oda porridge man,
him feed a whole heap a wi pickney—

not jus porridge, but ackees, cod, cho cho, juice fro cane—
Mi waan smaddy teck ten bwoy stead

dole man help raise mi frum Spanish Town
to a purah ting, shiny purl inna Jah's earlobe.

I'n'I seen livity downpress pon mi head...
Why dem ginnal baldheads play a card pon mi?

A way ya know, ya bumbo claat ragamuffin!
Dey ken even teck yuh steada him! Gwine!

Ten Truisms and a Lie

Spatulas make passable flyswatters.

On average, double coupons mean twice as much.

To make a monkey a man, offer a cigarette.

Orange is the new pink; pink was the new black.

Punk rock panders.

Sour cream and onion sells more than salt and vinegar.

Some prefer bromides to platitudes.

The phrase, irony is based on misrelationship discovered
by the 'I' between existence and the idea of existence, is plagiarized.

Aristophanes meant well when he put Socrates in a basket.

Even the mullet has risen!

Blue Circus, Oil Paint on Canvas, 1950

“Mine alone is the land
that exists in my soul
I enter it without a passport
like I do my own home”
-Marc Chagall

Polymorphous saturation

oh blue
space, river without banks
speculum mundi
there's a cock in the corner
banging a drum
fish with a sly eye
head a bed for supple coupling
horse in green, coquette
lovingly decapitated
by cerulean shadow
mane preened
cooping up a man
delirious moon on violin
flecked orb, yellow orchestral
depthless dancing
to horn, cello, accordion
ring-wrangling Mediterranean nymph
oh blue
lumière liberté
in a diagonal swath
a trapeze-artist swims
upside down, rouged
peacock crowned
belly round, breasts round

like purest prayer
it all ends in laughter

Holiday

On airwaves, feigned faces sell
Dental floss, stimulants in capsules,
Geriatric aides, disposable blades,

An opprobrium of leather and lather.
Execs on a boardroom broadloom
Stitch the sounds of glossolalia:

Threads of jingle hemmed in scheme
To brand the comet, market fizz,
Deprive the noon of pimply faces.

Diapasons spun on monitors outfit
The eye in polymerized angoras—
Implants, enamels and radial belts—

While seamlessly the acquisitive eye
Tailors its tailor's worldview
To be worn everywhere like a veil.

Leaden attention to razzmatazz.
Pack the rental, head for live hills,
Disembogue a stream of elan vital.

Meg Smith

Meg Smith was born in 1966. She holds a Bachelor's degree in English and Psychology from the University of Massachusetts at Lowell. She lives in Lowell, Massachusetts. Her poetry has appeared in *The Lowell Pearl*, *The Cafe Review*, *VFC*, *Pulse*, *Pegasus*, *Blue Violin* and other small press magazines. She works as a newspaper reporter for the *Sentinel & Enterprise* in Fitchburg, Massachusetts and has been named for an award from the new England Press Association. She is a member of the board of directors of Lowell Celebrates Kerouac! She is also a Middle Eastern dancer and a staff writer for *Jareeda*, a trade magazine of Middle Eastern dance, and for *Celtic Beat*, a publication dedicated to Celtic music. Her most recent poetry chapbook is *The First Fire*.

Lisa And All Her Kin

The Children's Crusaders rise
from Lisa's belly.
When murder or heavy footsteps come,
they bandage her eyes and put her to bed
in the water, until they have forged a clearing
with their wooden swords.
She wakes to see the murders and heavy-footed
cut down around her, in red stumps
like crude gelatin deserts.
She's holding the little wooden swords
like a poker hand.
Sometimes, the Children's Crusaders
pull up the sheets around her
and wake up Silence, her blind brother.
He opens his eyes and it is still night.
Sometimes, though, when Lisa sleeps,
Silence and all the others put down their swords
and nestle around her, leaving the day's battles
to two dragons.
Their names are Mother and Father.
Like any dragons, they tread lightly.
There is nothing in Lowell that one snort
can't make fit for an urn.

Master of The Flood

Geoffrey baptizes.
He climbs the chain link fence
and steals a fish
from our compost heap.
He plunges it into
a rain-filled barrel.
When the water does not
force breath through its gills,
he presses the fish to his chest
and sobs.
In his sleep, he herds the fish
through gutters
and oily puddles with
rainbow sheen.
He stops and kneels
to drink the rainbow,
knowing it is God's covenant
never again to destroy
the earth with water.

One Morning, Four Vistas for Ed Dyer

1. Lowell Heritage State Park

Like most of 2 a.m.,
the wharf floats,
rickety and pleasantly drunk,
playing the dark water
and its secret skin.
Not so secret are the Perseids,
out like cigarettes tossed from cars.
We take away with us
handfuls of sparks.

2. The Rourke Bridge

Now, we walk the caged
archway of the bridge,
a strange cathedral.
Overhead, the spiders swing
in their home-made halos.
They gather here, knowing dawn
lies to the east bank
and night to the west,
and the darkest blood
somewhere in between.

3. Lowell Cemetery

Your first days were
spent in death and so
you have come to call it, mother.
She is green with age, and draped.
In her outstretched arms she holds
a weighty fabric: your young life.

4. *Christian Hill Reservoir*

When the light comes,
we test it by walking
the caged wall around the hill.
The sky presses us to the bars,
and the wind keeps our hands dry.
We prove nothing by doing this
except what runs
in our family.

For The Blue People

The Guedra is a dance performed by the Blue People, a nomadic tribe in Morocco. It is a trance dance in which the performer emerges from a black veil, to symbolize her journey from darkness into enlightenment.

Open the tent and there is only smoke.
The stones dissolve,
at least for us.
Our anklets ward off snakes.
Our woman, on her knees, regards the joints of her fingers
and moves from the gauze of night
into this thing we call day.
We are awake.
We are blue, after all.
No henna stain,
No spoken word,
Only, sky.

Front Street

My first and last stop was here,
a town of railroad crossings and
slate skulls with wings.
A cloud, blue and purple
with blemishes, dissolves
is this thing you call twilight.
Now is not the beginning.
Now is a decade in which you
have turned to water.
There are small houses with pointed rooves.
There are corn fields and stalks of barbed wire.
An unspent ordnance lies in a silty mound.
A goose skirts the Oxbow swamp.
This and more is true.
You have found your pulse,
your long weekend,
your rusted bed frame.
This and more is true.

North Station

What it takes to get to you
dreams of the nod, or
newspapers slipping out their
secret skins.

The stops are points known only in sleep
a concrete plant where rubble runs
yellow into the drain pond,
and a kingdom of yellow grass
gurgles up a call and response.

At the next stop is a house with a slanted roof,
and bright plastic toys in the yard.
there is no man here, yet he is faithful,
and believes he is the past.

From stop to stop, there's
never a lack
of rail cars overturned,
like mummies pilfered,
and as much the smirking history.

All stops are clean, and rid of me.

Even you.

You are full of football and shamrocks
and hunger

and good advice. I do not sleep,
but sit awake and half-read,
for

all of it, all of it.

But the biggest heart is due north further still,
and I cannot drag you home.

Mermaids off The Coast of Greenland

We chorus with dark fins walloping the black,
bouying our churlish barks like those of seals.
We leap to mid-air, cushioning our falls on blubber,
slaty on the back, pearly on the belly.
Here come the Norse and the flat teeth of their oars.
Here come their flimsy scaled suits,
and their hands that want to coddle
our breasts like the earth's curve
and our bellies like the line of the dawn sky.
We want to know their lips full of sharp inland summer.
We want to capsize
their stupid two-footed lust.
We want to have them for real:
clutching them to our bellies
as we leap as one school, shooting like harpoons
to the icebergs with overbites of frozen shelves.
We want to keep them there,
we want them to keep.

Cheryl A. Townsend

Cheryl A Townsend was born May 21, 1957. Her poetry has appeared in magazines such as *Amelia*, *Atom Mind*, *Bogg*, *Chiron Review*, *Slipstream*, and *Zen Tattoo*, and in anthologies such as *Erotic By Nature*, *Scream When You Burn*, *Between The Cracks* and *The Coffeehouse Poetry Anthology*. She has published twenty-five chapbooks, the most recent of which are *Landing On My Feet* and *Blah, Blah, Blah*. She is the editor of *Impetus* magazine and one of the founders of the Underground Press Conference. She is Co-Founder of W.A.R.M. (Womens Art Recognition Movement) and was the owner of Cat's Impetuous Books in Kent, Ohio, until she was "forced out of business by a corporate-minded city council."

Those Men Between My Thighs Like Love

or mostly just
a deterrent definition
How many lies
have I shared
for the moment
How many reasons
came 100% proof
The silky lust
of gossamer need
and if a heart
was ever broken
how can I be to blame
This body
only protects
what can not be taken
No moonglow vow
embraced the sun's reminders
I have tasted
the sweat and cum
and yielding
My own surrender
almost tempting
but always again
there would be nothing
And maybe there
is nothing more than this
Every one taking
to my depletion
Sharing something
something like love
something that is all

The Things We Do For...

As if I were to
run off in to a dream
for you
with you
This fantasial expectancy
I say "Listen man,
I am married!"
but you just bow
to my estrus
and I relent
Appesials, I call them
see, I make up words
like you do us
because I like the way
they sound
because you like the way
we feel
You tell your friends
I tell editors
and we all wonder
if any of it's real.....
pages white as fantasy

Under The Rain

The street light
pastes purple
against the alley wall
In my bones
there are memories
of peppered youth
old lovers seep through
consciousness
like bad roofing
There are buckets
to catch them in
but I can't find them
Sleepless nights scratch
like hot sand
Static fuzz
misconceptions
curl like hair
into melancholy
How many men
does it take
to fill a raindrop?
How many raindrops
does it take
to hide a tear?

We Are

our own ghosts
walking this earth
with a life facade
of deja vu at every
corner behind every
door under every
sheet that lifts to
reveal skeletal lust
and blows the ashes
of malcontent out
the window left open
by hope We don't live
reality but our own
fantasies enmeshed
with scenarios inserted
by innocent bystanders
bumping into their own
shadows in the clinging
darkness we confuse
for day believing the
stars actually shine
and the wind is not
our own breathing
Our eyes focus on R.E.M.s
and we think of rainbows
Day to day is nondescript
fluid leaking like drool
from sleepy mouths onto
cotton pillows that stain
an imagined memory and
tomorrow just never comes
like a watched clock like
too many cooks in the
kitchen like the check in the mail

Grasp

Molest my hair
with lascivious fingers
Expose the lust of vampires
innocent
Lips but pretend
but I offer you my life
just the same
Your hands feel
sighs escaping
you give freedom
to everything within
and simplicity confesses
languid completion
Contentment
Yet hardly denies
further sacrifices
of desire
In your hands
in your hands
Stalk the flesh
of my surrender

Relativity

It is midnight
or later
outside but in here
time has
stood still
Sleep
is a dream
I remember
like Deja vu
there is
too much coffee
in my cup
and not enough
reasons to be
alone
I never expected
to be believed
as much as
I was
My promises
haunt me
like curses
indeed
like curses

Gray Poems

The gray outside falls into my mood
Falls like Erie rain in December
Falls like tears on a broken love
and smells of cold earthworms
My flesh ripples the chill and
memory of sadness and solitude
I find poetry in the clouds
Thick and heavy like pregnant
breasts Gray like sorrow like
ache Like death Death is not black
but gray and untouchable Smog
over cities Ghosts across buildings
and bridges Gray Gray Hair of age
Decomposer at the bottom of a
lake Ashes in Southern California
Areas of uncertainty Negative
beliefs A whore's bedsheet
A junkie's vein
A suicide

Analese

The tarot reader told me
I would have a daughter
and that I should name her
Analese
This she promised
would ensure her health
and happiness

Analese came to me in the fall
drunk with lust and Absolut
Her presence was immediate
Pelvic insomnia and tears
It was the wrong man after all
and no explaining
could make him right

Analese could have been
my mirror
an inheritance of what
I am
A woman today
my daughter
Analese
in some other hands

I drove so many hours
in the secret of the night
and changed a promise
to just another day
Analese is just a memory
of a fantasy of my youth
and every fall the leaves
mimic her hair and dance
in the wind of her laughter

Analese
you were meant to be
but time was not mine
to give you
Analese
Virgin prayer
Amen

Under A Gossamer Dream

Moonlight strobed through
dense pine and birch
A flashdance of flesh
breast
abdomen
thigh
From a quiet distance
his vision inhaled
the perfume of her shadows
Barefoot
like a river
through the mulch
of virgin forest
her dress
the ripples
teased by night air
And his ache
to drink in her coolness
To float in the cradle
of woman
To be born
in the night of her soul
To die
in the forever
of desire

Whims

my latest passion
is beatnik boys
I like their look
and the way they use
the topics they choose
to converse
Tall lean and darkly attired
drinking coffee and scarcely eating
late night boys
who don't really carouse
but merely observe
and document movement
Smile at them
and they will make you Aphrodite
and tell you the secrets
of yr own soul
They will read you poetry
and hide you between the lines
They will let you break their hearts
all for the sake of the muse
Leaving their testaments
taped to yr bathroom mirror
or in the drawer that holds yr stockings
and scream yr name in poetry cafes
and alley ways with a steady beat
of their bongo pulse

Sweet Sorrow

Take your dark love
and your rainy promises
Take your reasons for tomorrow
They're rusty and leak
coppery stains on my
front steps
You can have back
all your memories
I won't want them
anymore
Take it all when you go
when you leave
when you stay

Janine Pommy Vega

Janine Pommy Vega was born in 1942. She has authored 15 books of poetry, including *Mad Dogs of Trieste: New & Selected Poems* . She has worked for twenty-five years teaching poetry to children in New York State public schools, and to prisoners in the New York State prison system. Vega is the Director of *IncisionsIArts*, an organization of writers working with people behind bars. For the last several years she has been performing her own work with and without music in Italy and Germany.

Mad Dogs of Trieste

(for Andy Clausen)

We have never been in a war like this
in all the years of watching
the street at 3 a.m.,
kids lobbing cherry bombs into garbage cans
the last hookers heading toward home

It used to be, stopping in Les Halles cafes
after a night we could find the strong
men from the market
and the beautiful prostitutes
resting in each other's arms
Le Chat Qui Peche, Le Chien Qui Fume
alive with Parisian waltzes, his hands on her ass
We could pick up raw produce from discard bins
and have lentil stew for tomorrow

Things have never been like this.
Cops square off against teenagers in the village square
take the most pliant as lovers, and re-rout the rest
into chutes of incarceration
The mad dogs of Trieste
we counted on to bring down the dead
and rotting status quo, give a shove here
and there, marauder the fattened and calcified order,
have faded like stories

We used to catch them with their hat brims
keeping most of the face in shadow
and sometimes those voices
one by one
turned into waves
like cicadas in the August trees, whistling
receding, and the words crept under
the curtains of power, made little changes,
tilted precarious balance, and brought relief

Those packs don't crisscross the boulevards
now in the ancient cities, no political cabal
behind us watches the world with
eyes entirely
cognizant

the lyrical voices rainbow bodies
your friends my friends nobody left
but the mad dogs of Trieste as we
cover the streets.

Blueberry Pancakes

(for Erin Black, Brenda Frazer, Eila Kokkinen)

Bonnie, Eila, Erin, Janine.

I can see us in the dark wet streets
of New York City, 1959, 1960, 1961
kicking over the traces
of Union City Washington, Chicago
young hot women heading toward a dawn
eager for the romantic life
where everything would turn out fine

Now Erin wears a hat
she holds an armful of blooming catnip
Bonnie in her dress and work boots looks
a woman in the 1930's, her fine boned face
from a dustbowl American landscape
she has brought a ripe melon
Eila those days with manuscripts, in the company
of admired men, brings blueberries

all of us grown into selves
eccentric to the world
Keeping a pig in your basement?
Painting for years in rural America
without a car? Living in shady woods with deer
and raccoons for company?
Holing up in the office without answering
the door, the e-mail, postal mail, or phone?
And here we are.

What of the others?
Inez, Ayesha, Barbara, Michelle
we weren't many, we knew each other:
women in a world predominantly male
who leapt off the edge with the same intent
that has brought us here, the same earnestness.
We walk around and take each other's picture
We tape the talk. We are reaching back
like sisters, call it love, to the time
we were that becomes us

touching as we pass
each other,
four
ladies in a garden.

Allen

Raking the yard I realize
you are everywhere now
I went down to the river
broke a coconut for you, threw it
into the white water spring flood
so like you
sun behind the tree, the flesh of the coconut
bobbing in the water
like a skull in the breeze

I remember that poem you saw us
walking away from the boat
with our skulls, white coconut meat
Your infinite grace in connecting people, I never
saw you miss somebody's name, making
introductions, leaning in with thumbnail
sketch of personal accomplishments,
a vast networking consciousness
in you, all the writers

and reporters, all the teachers and
musicians-- you were the hub, the axis
A sixteen year old kid in a parking lot
stops me last night, he loves your work
and the men in the prison workshop ask for
your book, that mugging poem they especially
like, no one these days untouched
by your unswerving politics
your heart compassion

Mark Twain, born with Halley's comet
left on Halley's return
Hale-Bopp enters, brightest
emissary we will ever see from the stuff
of creation
and fittingly you take it out
like the F train from Second Avenue
Don't be sorry, you said, speaking
of your death,
I've been waiting all my life for this

I remember the gallon jug of death vine

ayahuasca you brought from the Amazon
you were the first to speak about
the radiance I believed in
A timeliness in your actions, running
for the news, creating another
possibility: bare knuckled
warrior poetics
Pack a small bag & hit the ground running
rushing like a river with a coconut rolling
bobbing in the water

My last dream of you, you were thin
you were sitting on the floor
Peter brought me to see you
you were singing to somebody's guitar
you ran out to the corner for news
and returned
to a room filling up with love,
of people past and people present
Hey Allen, everywhere now!

Please Look Both Ways Before Crossing

The Desert Storm we raised in Iraq
was a terrorist act. We called it retaliation.
The killing of tens of thousands of teenagers
dressed as soldiers was, we said, a casualty of war.

We tried out the marvelous flares and bombs
and watched the pyrotechnics safely six thousand miles
from the action in privileged seats. Six days of televised spectaculars.
We made bull's eyes with Saddam Hussein at the center.
He's a bully, we said. He has to come down.

The invasion of Grenada was a terrorist act.
We did not like the island president speaking
so loudly about his brand of socialism
so close to our door.

To threaten invasion of Colombia, Peru, Bolivia
because they insist on tending the coca Yaguar Huaca
gave them to withstand tiredness, hunger, thirst, and cold,
and that we insist on buying and selling
is a terrorist act
no less than Sendero Luminoso's gouging the eyes out
of CIA agents, and leaving the bodies in fires on a hill.

Acts of terrorism hurt people. Blow up bridges, skyscrapers,
hospitals, villages, naval fleets, schools, places of worship,
and you will hurt people.

Please took both ways before crossing.
We export principally garbage and weapons of war,
we stay well fleshed on the work of others.
Flexing the military capitalist muscle, the 'My God
is bigger than your God' muscle, will not bring us home.

Women know it. We dress the dead. We sweep up
the mess, we make our way back to the fields
and re-plant. We put food on the table, we survive.
Modesty is not such a bad hat. It's certainly lighter
than armor, and cheaper to care for.

"Are you locked down?" the ABC newsman asked Governor Pataki
after the Twin Towers shattered. A jailhouse term,
invented by jailers for locking all cells when trouble strikes.

In the air bristling with fear and hate, are we locked down?

Are we safely back in our cells, accepting partial information as fact,
believing the President will punish the guilty, forgetting
it was our CIA who trained Osama bin Laden in the 80s,
and our arms dealers who backed Hussein? Are we locked down?

Please look both ways.

The genuine desire for peace and freedom
held in the heart of American hearts
is the same in every heart in the world. It does not require
victory, empire, subjugation, retaliation, or arrogance.
It will not survive there.

The thousands buried as the Twin Towers crumbled, the heroism
of ordinary people, the selfless service of hundreds of firemen,
policemen, rescue workers, the enormity of their sacrifice,
let them stand for this: that we live in one world, a small one
to hold all the souls we are today,
and any striking out will hurt more people.

America, please look both ways.

We can't point everywhere with blame and forget
ourselves. Terrorist acts, like the pigeons on tenement
rooftops, the sport of kings on the Lower East Side,
always come home to roost.

Mt. Morris, NY, September 12, 2001.

Any Number of Them

(for Bob Hausrath)

In the vestibule of a prison
civilians I've indicted to myself surprise me
speaking of the woods, how beautiful in summer,
"I could spend my whole life in there."
A woman reflected in lobby window
walks ghostlike into the trees

The hunters, gatherers, farmers, woodsmen
circumscribed by diminishing land and loss
of jobs are the new jacks
a great rushing in at ten to eight
like the door on a factory morning

"48% of prisoners who leave come back,"
he says, "but only 24% of the college grads do."
Up a hill at the side of a road, hidden by
blackberry canes from traffic
is Attica's graveyard

A century of numbers marches
over the hill on uniform headstones
13987,5677,3429
in 1982, eleven years after Attica uprising
they started putting in names

A grasshopper over V Cruz, 98G0370
outside the walls
in the earth who knows him
by feel, touch, grace of laughter
and rage of fists

12306 was someone
who laughed wept sickened and died
2342 the crickets are singing 1357
300 regulation tombstones
stand by the highway in the hot autumn sun

Like a war fought inside
another country, armed men exacting
revenge against poverty violence drugs
the same seven neighborhoods
illiteracy, despair, 0 unforgiving nation!

19924, 911090, no year no born no died
no name-- forbidden perhaps
to carve the name, the later ones
with dates tell us they didn't live long
age 48, 37, 41. Was it AIDS?

Were the first ones buried in common graves?
The AIDS patients in disaster bags?
5154, 5677, ancient maples
witness the unholy commerce:
dig up the earth, put in the numbers

like the old time cash register receipts
told you not what item but
how much you paid
23B481, 22717
cabbage moths, red fruited sumac

Someone regularly mows the lawn
military style like the Arlington
Here's R. Morin, on staff
at the college, who seriously proposed
to at least one woman every day

No praise or blame
the shame of a village
blind numbers over the hill.

Gregory

I

Cleanshaven, cleared away, like a baby
tucked in bed with undressed eyes
a cold drink from a deep well
to see you
first friend in early teenage years
in New York City,
Paris, San Francisco, London
friend snatched back from the bony doorway

jewel at the heart of a room full
of people, rose on the pillow
I'm reading your poems again
twisty pronouncements, singing lines
words that float like birds on the water
how much you've changed the language
& the premise of speech

how without hesitation, all these years
you jumped in first, not
testing the waters
but to see
if the waters were ready for you.

Horafio Street, NYC, August 17, 2000.

Gregory

II

Someone said your ashes should be scattered
over Shelley's grave, someone said
you wanted to be buried in Potters Field
because nobody goes to see those folks
Irvine says you're all together now, the whole crew
you Jack Allen Huncke Neal
Jack Micheline Ray Bremser

You were the one who brought me into that
circle of men
from whom I gathered
what I did
you were the one who gave up your time
who shared your readings, who
insisted I learn Roman history

you taught us the usage of *my*
as though everything of consequence
sprang first from the poet's lips
calling Gilgamesh Gil Baby
calling Roger & Irvine's apartment
my old neighborhood, calling
Allen my Allen; Andy, my Andy

I was planning to fly out and
see you, to stay at your house
there were two modes
I knew you in: loving and ruthless
we met in both camps
through years of bad boy sacred clown
shout-downs, dozens of readings

on Horatio Street surrounded by friends
you were glad of time left, I told you
the story of Fernando in Paris
after his paintings were hung in Musee
de l'Homme, and you wildly disagreed
with one corner of the painting, how he
snuck in with a paint bucket, and changed it

at exactly the moment you died
I was planning my flight out

to see you, so perhaps
we were meeting, my messenger
at the gate, my mentor, my partner
in crime, my Gregory
my friend

Anne Waldman

Anne Waldman was born April 2, 1945. She received a B.A. degree from Bennington College. An internationally known poet, performer and editor with links to the Beat Literary movement, the New York School and the experimental strands of the New American Poetry, she has authored over thirty books, most recently *Vow to Poetry: Essays, Interviews & Manifestos*, *Marriage: A Sentence* and the 20th Anniversary edition of *Fast Speaking Woman*. She was the director of St. Mark's Poetry Project and is a Distinguished Professor at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, which she co-founded with Allen Ginsberg.

Verses for the new Amazing Grace

The grace of all the bards who pen
Their words do transport me
Sweet vowels & consonants strengthen
Goddess Poesy's legacy

Heart-pearls roll off the poets' tongues
Who chant in praise of love
Troubadours blest with hearty lungs
Esoterics zapped from above

Sappho's bite & Shakespeare's wit
& Dante's musical climb
Dickinson's rhyme, bearded Whitman's breath
Are etched in genetic spine

And if the planet cease to spin
Sad universe go silent, dark
Ancient poetry's echoes will make a din
Rekindle the primordial spark

O I bow down to Christ's thorny crown
All sacraments meant to heal
The Buddha's smile, old Yaweh's frown
And Allah's consummate zeal

But poetry's a goddess sent
To save a wretch like me
She strums the strings of life's desperate edge
With her haunting melody

To the Censorious Ones

(Jesse Helms & others. . .)

*This chant accompanied by a chorus of women flexing their muscles.
First performed at the Naropa Institute*

I'm coming up out of the tomb, Men Of War
Just when you thought you had me down, in place, hidden
I'm coming up now
Can you feel the ground rumble under your feet?
It's breaking apart, it's turning over, it's pushing up
It's thrusting into your point of view, your private property
O Men of War, Censorious Ones!
GET READY BIG BOYS GET READY
I'm coming up now
I'm coming up with all that was hidden
Get ready, Big Boys, get ready
I'm coming up with all you wanted buried,
All the hermetic texts with stories in them of hot & dangerous women
Women with lascivious tongues, sharp eyes & claws
I've been working out, my muscles are strong
I'm pushing up the earth & all you try to censor
All the iconoclasm & bravado you scorn
All the taunts against your banner & salute
I'm coming up from Hell with all you ever suppressed
All the dark fantasies, al the dregs are coming back
I'm leading them back up now
They're going to bark & scoff & rage & bite
I'm opening the box
BOO!

Writing

And putting my hand to a body examine a body. And putting it thus to a body examine a body. I stroke the top of my head from the part down. The hair is asymmetrical. It stops short on one side like a boy's, and on the other it bobs out. I put my hand to a body examine a body. And putting it thus to a body examine a body. Underneath, near the neck the hairs are dyed black, they're wiry. I caress my neck, skin soft under the chin. I pull at my earlobes, chilled to give them back life. I place both hands over my face as if to apply water, apply cream. I bite my fingers to feel alive. Then my face feels my fingers, my hands, slightly rough. And putting a hand to a body examine a body. I touch my lids, what eyes look back through my touch?

I can't stand to feel this desire at attention, at desk.
I lie down. I touch myself between the legs. You imagine the rest.

I return. It is the same. Ah, the desire, ah the writing, the fulfilling of the writing.
At desk, the writing
Ah the writing
At bed, the desire
At desk, the desire Ah the desire,
Ah but the writing.

Desire, ah writing
& putting my hand to a body examine a body
I never get out of writing but getting out to desire,
It was an arrival from desk to bed & back
Ah the desire
Ah the writing

I touch my breasts, yes, I touched them. Imagine the rest.

Jack Kerouac Dream

He's talking speedily about the evil of the feminine but he likes it. O Bitter tones of the demon feminine. He's in a repressed New England Winter room, but oddly it's like the old whorehouse in Eldora with bats inside the walls. There's peeling wallpaper of gold fleur-de-lys pattern on green on the far side. And his "coat of arms," or rather "his mother's arm coat (arm chair?)" is close by. It looks like a shrunken deer's head, size of a rabbit's foot with French letters crudely scrawled on a wooden plaque beneath, "est peur" (translates "is fear" but cognate to, or sounds like, "espoir"---hope). He's shivering in an old camel's hair coat, smoking ---Chesterfields? Old Golds?---in front of a raging fire. He's wanting to "hunt and gather," he says, but it's too cold. Where can we go to forage now that "all the skies are broken"? I am thinking if only I were born earlier I could love him, take care of him. Close to his face Now, I see its raging corpuscles in the dancing firelight. Intricate aborigine designs tattooed on a remarkably pristine visage. "It's a drift, flesh and bone, mortification, deadpan, life's a raked field," he mumbles. I'm part of a Buddhist plot to get him to be reborn to "liberate all sentient beings." I'm inviting him to give a reading at The Academy of the Meticulous Future. But what may I offer? "I tried calling your phone was dead was why I came." "Ummm." He's off somewhere else, his eyes moist and glassy.

Glass Hymen Rite

& smash a glass

I smash the glass

O smash the glass

I enter the tent & smash the glass
& smash a glass I smash the glass

break the seal & smash the glass
& smash a glass I smash the glass

& smash a glass
I smash the glass
& smash a glass
O smash the glass

Credo

I want to live the state of "co-emergent wisdom," an old Tantric notion resembling "negative capability." Yet out of that same eye comes research and conviction. I could sing & dance it, the ambiguity of "both, both." The hallmark of our linguistic revolution this century & beyond is that meaning is not simply something "expressed" or reflected in language but is actually PRODUCED by it. I live inside the language of my making, of your making. I'm not interested in the tongue of discursive mind that tides itself against the beautiful increments of experience. I'm interested in the phones & phonemes of experience, the language moment to moment, not the concept of my experience. Or yours. Immediate concerns are love---*bodhicitta* (or tenderheartedness) and *prajna* (knowledge---the experiential kind). As female, I am forever adorning empty space. Dressing & undressing. Putting it on & taking it off. Form & emptiness. "Life doesn't seem worth living unless one's on the transforming of energy's side" (Gary Snyder) vibrates for me daily. A **body poetics & politics**, right now. Every syllable is conscious. So enjoy possibility of being alive in the work & as performer of it & with others in community of like-minded-in-body practitioners. We Need more instruments of discourse, regular convenings of the tribe. Demons inside need to be expelled as well as terrorists in Washington, or wherever. Global poetics. By all accounts this is only the beginning of the post-modern Dark Ages, *ergo* more light! More poems! More light!

Barry Wallenstein

Barry Wallenstein received his B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. from New York University. He is the author of five collections of poetry, *Beast is a Wolf with Brown Fire*, *Roller Coaster Kid*, *Love and Crush*, *The Short Life of the Five Minute Dancer* and *A Measure of Conduct*. He has made four recordings of his poetry with jazz collaboration, the most recent being *Tony's Blues*. A professor of literature and creative writing at the City University of New York, he has coordinated the college's citywide Annual Spring Poetry Festival for the past twenty-eight years. The festival includes student poets as young as second graders, as well as faculty and guest readers. He is also an editor of the journal, *American Book Review*.

Tony The Pothead

Tony reads the news
smokes a joint
bites his lip hard, spins
and goes out to see the stylist;
have his hair turned red.

--It's about time
his inner voice sings.
--Why so dull for so long?
He doesn't hear a thing.

Walking with a new head
within the city's tendrils,
he's a bobbing red flame,
an aspect; electric boots and
a belt that shines have him flying.

In all this
Tony forgets what he's read:
the left hand column of print
fades to blue;
the right hand column
too fades to blue.

But a memory on page 7
holds him like a damp finger
on fresh ice.
Images of waste unconfuse--briefly:
nuclear mountains in the suburbs
waves of poison overflowing
his stash obscured, even his charm
by the images, cold and funny
as in Death.

Smoke drifts by from around the corner
lifting Tony, slightly, wafting him home.

Fundamental

A man's spine is his best friend.
The heart too cares a lot
and shouldn't collapse when bending,
spoilng the friendship.

The toes, the feet, even the hands,
lost, let's say in a flood of nature,
are but distant cousins—played with,
sucked on, scratched—
hardly as fundamental as spine
and heart and (I almost forgot) brains

and lungs:
suck it up and
pass the brandy & Benzedrine.

The Drain and the Cherry Tree

1.

You empty your bladder
& you purge your bowels,
you empty you purge,
empty, purge.

You do it.

Then one dark night
bright near its height
you stop—
the years let go of you
down the drain.

2.

But there's love:

the boy by the cherry tree
picking lightly the reddish bark
imagining carving a heart
with an arrow in it
and a name his love could spell,
but some qualm about
caging her name in wood
drops his knife.

He shouts her name to the air
and wipes his blade on the grass.

The Butcher

The butcher moves closer to the hog;
so mild and certain is he--the butcher,
that the hog knows nothing about music,
candlelight, or cutlery--
but rather leans towards ritual,
the excitement of a church fair
with the grill getting ready,
after someone has cleaned the spit.

It's a bright summer's day
and the butcher's blade, unsheathed,
proves its practice.
The pig squeals briefly
and then it's a snake line of people
at the outdoor buffet,
a heaven of smells
and chatter and smiles
from greasy mouths.

As for the butcher,
he does have a home life:
his daughter is a Vegan,
his son has no interest in butchery
and his wife collects stuffed animals,
small bears, rabbits and a little pig.

My Understudy

The young man, shot twice
and painfully,
had been on earth long enough
(not too long sway the flowers)
to know the difference
between lambswool and polyester,
pain and an upward stare into nowhere.

He'd choose the former
in both cases ordinarily,
but on this day,
out of a wilding world,
there came two missiles, errant
hot strangers to his shape,
tearing into his back and side.

Bleeding in public
and fighting sleep, he fell awake
as into a state of babyhood,
where each moment swells
to yards of cushioned time and desired speech;
but the sharp burning holes
kept him croaking in his speech.

Besides, from where I stood
I could hardly hear
above the shrill mill of gawkers.
Did he say "no, wait" or "it's late"?
He seemed embarrassed
as if his accident
were a finger pointing at us.

And then the crowd came closer;
the police cars whirred and stopped.
Increasingly, there was less to see
or feel. Alone,
I pulled the feelings home,
as if on a weighted leash.

The Killers

The slick man in a suit, shot at,
spins, catches the bullets
in gloves of steel,
and the deafening sound
sends the shooters scurrying
their ears ringing,
the gathered crowd cheering
for such a fine looking fellow
who, beyond surviving, vanquishes
terror.

Those lost on a trigger-wish
skulk off now, their hearts thumping,
their heads aching.
Huddled, do they make eye contact?
A back alley or the edge of some wood
will hold them till dark.
Improbable error--
having run into some kind of marvel--
won't stick; their narrow, terrible brains
will forget everything.

In the Board Room

Satan smiles in a satin gown
and the board members agree
he's a prince, a lollipop,
a lick of fire,
a taste worth keeping
high on a shelf
or deep in a pocket
till hunger calls up
or reaches down--as into a pocket--
and pulls that devil out.

That delicious intelligence,
all satiny and rose, sighing like a baby
lounging on a plate,
would be a morsel worth having
could it be so, but no,
it's eternity
spitting in their eyes,
a spoiler of more than vision.
The board diminishes
while those alive swoon.

Devil off the plate now--
he slides around the room
touching the light hearted shadows,
and then vanishes
taking with him what's already forgotten;
leaving behind
the famous sulfurous afterglow.
The smiles, when they appear,
seem stolen.

The Job

Sometimes this air I'm in
is so sulfurous, thick and unworthy,
I need to take much shorter breaths
to widen the zone of gasping.

My odd job is
to remember and write down,
with pencil not pen,
the most recent names
of the ones disappeared,
then I hand the papers back
to the state.

I'm not very good at it all
and soon expect a reprimand.
I confuse Joe with Josephine,
Michael with Michelle,
Sally with Sally--gender errors.
And, on occasion, I reverse the truths
of their expirations.

Stupid me.
They all went quickly I report.
The few law suits die in court.
When the air is really bad
we all lean westward
and curse our jobs.

But if I lose this assignment
I may have to push buttons again,
as during that sorrowful time
melting by the Equator,
counting children;
that was not a job to talk about.

Blues

I've had my life
 and I've heard the thunder
yes, I've been right there
 and heard the thunder
rains came sometimes
sometimes thirst and hunger.

The load I carry
 feels like a stack of bricks
the load I carry
 may feel like a stack of bricks
and then there's feathers in my mind
money and a run of tricks.

Some men do fret
 and Lord knows they do frown
some women too do fret
 and wear that wrinkled frown.
I say relax your face
and turn them blues around.

I like a place where the dancing's slow
 and no one knows tomorrow
I like a place where the lights are low
 and no one sees tomorrow
The Devil's had a long run;
I shall not bend down in sorrow.

Some folks want to dope it
 and some want only to play
Some folks want to dope it
 and some only want to play
I spend my time with favors,
doing my thing in the natural way.

In my life there's been days of weary
 nights of pleasure too
I can sing about days of weary
 late nights of pleasure too.
80 years I look for.
There's a chance I'll find 'em too.

Postmodernism

Zero winks--easing around the corner,
his black brim showing,
fire falling about his shoulders
burning close before cooling.
He survives every time.
He's a paid fist
on somebody's side.

If you think Zero's bad
check out Minus,
the post-modern freak,
reclining, a claw beckoning,
the middle digit on his right hand
curling, little spasmodic scratchings
in the air.

Minus is colder than ever.
Look in his mouth.
If Zero is modern,
this monster is post.

Don Webb

Don Webb was born in 1960. A prolific writer, his books have won the Fiction Collective Award, and his poetry has won the *Georgetown Review* Award. His fiction has appeared in numerous literary magazines. His poems have appeared in *Borderlands*, *Licking River Review*, *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, *Inspirations* and many other magazines. His first book of verse was *Annubis on Guard*.

Musa

Why is she this way?

I have won my shares of loves,
But the love as sweet as my own mind to me,
I win not.

I am ready for her.
The gray rooms of my brain
Freshly censed in frankincense
The paper ready
The hourglass full.

I could sing of rage,
Or the importance of truth
Or he, who first from Trojan shores . . .

I could tell you of the best minds of my generation
Or of dreamtigers
Or the goat-footed balloonman

I have an orderly library in my mind,
A life filled from both jars
Feet that have scaled cliffs and St. Paul's

I have sung to the moon
To stars
To garbage cans buzzing with flies.

But today she will not sing to me.

Mercury

Mercury is a planet for simpletons.
Mercury one face hot
one face cold.
One light
One dark
is a planet for simpletons.
All people with strong moral codes
go to Mercury
when they die.
The gods hope they'll be bored
learn something
and leave.
Some have been there a long time.
Mercury is a planet for simpletons.

Venus

Venus is dreadful hot.
It just don't get that hot here.
And pretty near we never have
hot sulphuric acid rain.
They say the clouds are pretty
to watch
If you lay back on the hot rock
and let the acid rain
eat away everything
but your sight and your soul.
Then you can watch them clouds
And dream that it is cool up there.
It ain't.
Venus is dreadful hot.

Earth

I never did cotton to Earth,
sure I know it's got
tourist attractions
but as the old saw goes,
"It's a nice place to
visit but would you want
to live there?"
I wouldn't have stuck around
except I fell in love
with a native girl
and that complicated matters.

Mars (LaMesa, Texas)

When the wind blows the red sand
in the spring
It might as well be Mars.
I'd drive in the spring in my white pick up
when the red sand crossed the road
obscuring the lines.
Making the blue sky go away.
I'd drive and imagine
It was Mars.
I'd wanted Mars all my life
wanted to breathe the Martian air
to take great leaps
across the stony surface
or watch the glittering of the ice caps.
I'd wanted Mars, Ares, Nergal, Tyr.
I'd wanted Mars
and I wanted a lover who wanted Mars.
I drove my pick up a lot
in the spring.

Jupiter

Big and wonderful and
everything done on a big
and wonderful scale!
A hell of a planet.
Why they've got a storm
going on there
that's been going on for
three hundred years.
Three hundred years!
Now there's planning.
We don't even remember
to bring the marshmallows,
and they've got a
storm that lasts three hundred years.
Kinda makes a sentient life form
feel small.

Saturn

I'm not going to say
a damn thing about the rings.
The rings get all the damn press.
"Come see our rings!"
the flyers say.
"Excellent view of the rings!
Cable TV! Hot tubs!"
Coffee cups with rings,
T-shirts with rings,
Holographic hairstyle with rings!
Rings! Rings! Rings!
I say if you don't
care about the people
don't come.

Uranus

Older than time

he is.

So old you can't see him
with the naked eye.

So old you don't feel bad
about making fun of his name.

So old he ain't seen you yet.

Neptune

The other gas giants make fun
He only has six moons.
Jupiter has fifteen
Saturn at least seventeen
Even old Uranus fifteen.
Neptune had more moons once,
but there was that little incident.
That time he thought
it was OK to discuss religion
at dinner.
It should be
a lesson to us all.

Pluto

Sunlight's more of a rumor here
than a fact.
In fact there's been discussion
about whether sunlight exists at all.
Most are inclined to disbelieve.
What's the sun ever done
for them?
You can't even see the moon.
And if you could see it --
if one day it was light enough
The planet would melt.
Not much use for the sun.
Let's vote against it.
Just a rumor anyway...

Extending the Age of Spontaneity to a New Era: Post-Beat Poets in America

by

Vernon Frazer

PREFACE

I'd like to begin by saying that I'm speaking from the perspective of a poet and editor, not a scholar. A considerable amount of this discussion of Post-Beat writers comes from my observations as a writer who reads the literary magazines in which his work appears, and from editing *Selected Poems by Post-Beat Poets*, an anthology that introduced me to a number of exciting poets whose work, I believe, deserves more attention than it's received.

INTRODUCTION

The years following the end of World War Two launched an Age of Spontaneity that transformed American culture so markedly that a person living in 1950 would barely recognize the United States of 1970. Charlie Parker's fleet-fingered improvisations on "Ornithology" replaced the somnolence of Glenn Miller's "Moonlight Serenade." Jackson Pollock's improvisational techniques produced the abstract expressionistic paintings that shocked an art world accustomed to visual representation. Elvis Presley's raucous renditions of rhythm and blues replaced Frank Sinatra's relaxed stylings as the dominant tone of popular music. And a handful of writers known as the Beat Generation authored a body of poetry and fiction that elevated the importance of spontaneity in literature, transformed the lives of young adults in the mid-fifties and launched the "rucksack revolution" of the 1960's.

If the Age of Spontaneity has passed from the public eye, its spirit remains alive in the generations of artists that have succeeded the innovators of the era. Rap has nearly replaced Rock as the popular music of young, rebellious people. While bop adheres to conventions established by Parker and his colleagues a half-century earlier, the umbrella term "jazz" now covers, in addition to bop, the new and continuing developments within free improvisation and jazz-rock, as well as the eclectic fusions of musical idioms that happen regularly. Literature has incorporated idioms such as

Magic Realism, Language Poetry, Slam Poetry and Visual Poetry into a multi-cultural canon that is still forming. If the Age of Spontaneity has passed, a Culture of Spontaneity continues despite a lack of critical and public attention. One of the groups that explores the artistic terrain of the new era acknowledges its debt to the exploratory spirit of the Beats. Although most of its writers eschew labels, a number of them use a descriptive shorthand that acknowledges their past influences while pointing toward the next cutting edge. They call themselves "Post-Beat."

IMPACT OF BEATS ON AMERICAN CULTURE

If you were to conduct a "Man in the Street" interview today about the Beat Generation, the person you stopped would very likely dismiss it as a 1950's phenomenon. The Beats generated remarkable controversy when *On the Road's* exuberant chronicle of living outside the cultural norms appeared to challenge the *Ozzie and Harriet* values of mid-fifties America. In their search for kicks and beatitude, Kerouac and the other Beats captured the undercurrent of alienation and discontent that existed in America after the end of World War Two. Much of what people considered shocking at the time the Beats made it public we take for granted today. Consequently, we can focus on the Beats' accomplishments instead of their notoriety.

The Beats continued a centuries-old literature of human discontent aspiring toward transcendence, continued an alternative American literary tradition, opened the subject matter of literature to previously forbidden lifestyles and contributed to mixed-media experimentation in the arts. They drew insight and inspiration from a tradition of underground writers living in other countries and other times, including Celine, Rimbaud, Dostoevsky and Blake. In addition, they were a homegrown product that Lawrence Ferlinghetti once described as "a continuing tradition in American writing, going back to Walt Whitman and Poe and Jack London, beyond the Beats, who were only one phase of this literature, continuing today in new outsiders."¹ (Madden 334) A number of these new outsiders are Post-Beat writers.

While continuing the traditions of underground writing, Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs extended the range of subject matter acceptable in literature. In launching the rucksack revolution he later disavowed, Kerouac launched a generation of writers whose roots, like his own, lay outside America's ethnic, cultural and financial aristocracy. Their writing reflected their origins as well as their lives in the counterculture that developed as an alternative to the American mainstream. The graphic homosexual content of "Howl" helped to bring a formerly taboo subject out of

the closet, in life and literature. Burroughs' outlaw lifestyle tapped the veins of restlessness and rebellion in younger generations of writers and readers, and shot them up with visions of more exhilarating lifestyles and techniques for portraying them. Opening the range of acceptable literary subject matter opened a corresponding range of forms, which both widened and narrowed the options for the generations of writers that came after them.

As a group, the Beats revived poetry—and fiction—as oral forms, often reciting their work in a mixed-media context. Jack Kerouac's reading his prose to jazz accompaniment with a musician's timing represented an early form of the performance art that has evolved since the 1960s. Reading poetry to jazz, while not a Beat invention, has become a legitimate component of Beat and Post-Beat expression. Late in his life, William Burrough's Spoken Word recordings became popular among a younger generation. Ginsberg premiered "Howl" at the "Six at the Six" reading that launched his career and brought wider attention to San Francisco Poets. The Poetry Slam competitions that emerged in the late 1970s continued the Beats' revival of the oral tradition and increased public awareness of poetry. The Slams are, at least in part, a Post-Beat development.

In the Age of Spontaneity, the Beats weren't the only artists drawing lines in the cultural sand. In the early 1940's, jazz aficionado Kerouac frequented Monroe's Uptown House and other clubs where Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and other innovators improvised the then-revolutionary music known as bop. The pulse and phrasing of bop later became the basis of Kerouac's Spontaneous Bop Prosody. The Beats' coast-to-coast shuttles brought them into contact with Michael McClure, Philip Whalen, Gary Snyder, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Lew Welch, West Coast poets who shared the Beats' poetic, spiritual and environmental concerns. Black Mountain poets such as Robert Creeley and Charles Olson socialized with the Beats. In Manhattan, the Beats spent time at the Cedar Tavern on University Place, also a gathering place for the New York School of poets and avant-garde painters such as Pollock and de Kooning. Talk of artistic change charged the air, fueled by the camaraderie among some groups and the tension between others. The Beats' exposure to artists working in other disciplines enabled them to incorporate extra-literary elements into their works. The extra-literary elements contributed to the Post-Beat modes of expression that developed in the 1960's and continue developing today.

FRAGMENTATION AND CONGLOMERATION: A GENERATION OF TRANSITION

By 1961, the media had reduced the Beats to a phenomenon perceived as passe while kept on life support by "beatniks" playing bongos and folk guitars on college campuses, on television shows and in humor magazines. The times, to paraphrase Bob Dylan, were changing. As the cultural cocktail of Rock and LSD opened the doors of

bohemian perception to the young adults of the 1960's, the media replaced the Beats with the Hippies.

While the literary bohemians coming of age in the sixties developed their craft, commercial forces developed that would hinder their attempts to bring their work to the public. When Rock became the medium through which the younger generation voiced its personal and social concerns, journalists who previously would have sought John Updike's opinion on Civil Rights or the Vietnam War were more likely to seek Jim Morrison's. In the American marketplace, the writer became a devalued currency.

In the early 1970's, conglomerate corporations purchased book publishers and changed the nature of publishing. Before the takeovers, independent publishers would risk losing money on literary works they considered culturally important. Since the takeovers, corporate-owned book publishers have risked less money on titles that might have cultural significance because sales of prospective bestsellers don't always earn back the multi-million dollar advances given to the authors. For related reasons, literary magazines such as the ones that introduced sophisticated readers to new and innovative authors in the 1950s and early 1960s seldom appear on bookstore shelves.

The nature of marketing books also changed. If the work of the Beats helped increase awareness of Gay Rights, Feminism and other social issues, the corporate publishers developed a "niche market" for any special interest capable of generating a profit. University-based literary developments such as metafiction, surfiction and avant-pop fiction created their own academic niche markets, which fragmented the younger generation of authors whose work built upon the "black humor" of Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, Joseph Heller and Burroughs , narrowing their audience while targeting it. Even the Beats became a lucrative niche market.

In a literary world composed largely of a commercial mainstream and numerous niche markets, a number of authors who might be considered Post-Beat have published in areas that aren't considered Post-Beat. A gay Post-Beat writer might write strictly for a gay niche market, whereas Ginsberg's work integrated his sexual orientation with the rest of his life and his concerns with the world around him. A Post-Beat feminist would face a similarly restrictive publishing option. The fragmentation of the literary world diminished the likelihood that Post-Beat writers could find outlets for their work because the major publishers focus on popular poets or public figures who write poetry. The less-celebrated poets sought publication in the university presses, the small presses or, more recently, the micropress with vary degrees of success.

Despite the fragmentation, Post-Beat writing didn't develop in isolation. Some Post-Beats partied, read and published with their literary influences. Those closest in age to the original Beats published in Beat journals while the others published their own magazines, eventually, with the help of the youngest Post-Beats, using computer technology to publish their work in cyberspace.

The evolution from Beat to Post-Beat includes a number of transitional figures, most notably Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman. Ginsberg shared his knowledge generously with younger poets. His continuing interest in innovation often led him to

explore the same artistic terrain as his Post-Beat successors. He co-founded the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics with Anne Waldman at Naropa University, perhaps the closest thing to an institution that supports and advances the work of Post-Beat Poets.

Anne Waldman has affinities with several literary “camps.” Her association with Beat writers and her role as Director and co-founder of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics place her solidly—but not simply—in the Beat camp. As the former Director of the Poetry Project at St. Mark’s Church, she could be considered a member of the New York School. Yet her chronological age qualifies her as a Post-Beat. The scope of her work attests to her ability to incorporate the varieties of literature reflected in her experience into a singularly powerful mode of expression. At Naropa, she has supported writing that extends beyond the Beats to the varieties of literature that have developed in recent decades. Two poets whose work appears in *Selected Poems by Post-Beat Poets* have studied at Naropa.

DEFINING POST-BEAT: A PROCESS IN PROCESS

Defining Post-Beat poses a challenge similar to Wittgenstein’s discussion in *Philosophical Investigations* about the difficulties inherent in defining a game. Wittgenstein said, “We do not know the boundaries because none have been drawn.”

(Wittgenstein 33)

The boundaries of Post-Beat literature have never been drawn.

Unlike the Beats, the Post-Beats never existed as a literary movement, or even a closely-knit network. They aren’t so much a movement as a presence that emerged spontaneously throughout the United States after the Beats had stamped their imprint on American culture. They’re a diffuse and diverse group that numbers in the hundreds, perhaps even the thousands. Although they don’t exist in a formal network, they encounter each other far more frequently than the customary six degrees of separation would allow. Many of them came of age in the 1960’s, some are a decade younger than the original Beats, and others a decade or two younger than the Baby Boomers. Some Post-Beats are in their mid-twenties. While many live in the major urban areas, just as many live in smaller cities across the United States, anywhere a trace of alterative culture exists. Their geographic diffuseness and their lack of an advocate such as Allen Ginsberg has exacerbated their attempts to find places for themselves in today’s publishing industry.

The Post-Beats are an extension of Beat philosophy and writing into new generations. As Post-Beat poet and fiction writer Kirpal Gordon wrote in a recent e-mail concerning the Post-Beats, “they are carrying it further rather than carrying it on.” The Post-Beats consider the original Beats their inspiration, and, in some cases, their

mentors. Insofar as the Post-Beats don't seek to imitate work of the Beats but to advance it, they continue the underground literary traditions of Europe and the United States as the latest literary voices outside the socio-cultural mainstream.

Writers in the alternative culture's literary circles began to use the term "Post-Beat" around 1980. Steve Dalachinsky's 1980 poem, "*Post - Beat - Poets (We Are Credo #2)*" portrays the differences between the Beats and the Post-Beats:

Post - Beat - Poets (We Are Credo #2)

- "*Now's the Time*" - Charlie Parker

we are the post beat poets we are the t.v. generation
we are the true light of dope sex & profanity
we are the afterthoughts of post war experimentation
we are the results of a nation in turmoil & change
we are the ultimate over 30 crowd
spoiled seasoned & prejudiced
we are the Atom bomb Anathemas & the LSD Corruptors
we made pot a household word
and caused our parents to rebel
we have tried to make clear
all the knowledge that has been put down before us

we are the post-beat poets
inspired by tigers
queers
wife killers
yage eaters
bookshop owners
freedom fighters
junkies
priests & jazz.

we tried the coast on advice of holy word
and read the holy zen scripture
on lonely beaches
with wine and music
in lonely forests
awake on pills
& settled back slowly into city lights
where hearts have always seemed
to once again return.

some of us have families

& work hard
while some take it easy the hard way
some of us lived in the open like Jack
& now spend hours in front of the tube
angry & anti our former liberal selves
but we all still write our words their words all words
for our SELF & everyone

we get crazy drunk like Corso yet sweeter flowers never grew
& holier-than-thou like Ginsberg
we get satirically surreal like Burroughs
adding up time like so many star ship stereo ghosts
we shot it too
& watched it too
drawing those demons in the chelsea hotel
we've become chroniclers of each others' lives
sifting styles & stealing moonbeams
as we sit with mother earth between our toes
swooning

we go off to monasteries to worship the fat man
& write the haiku
we never forget our friends

occasionally one of us disappears
into the karmic mists of forever
never to return
& others just remain silent & musical
growing more profound every year

we are the post beat poets
becoming more certain & proud of our immediate heritage
while discovering the cool night eyes of the honey-colored cat
lying lazy on the carpet near the color t.v.

hip & classless
very primitive 20th century
very well informed
we all have our specialties
our meanings
our personal styles
our beliefs
always changing & always the same

we all have our time & our time has come.

Dalachinsky's poem describes the affinity of the Post-Beat poets with their Beat ancestors, then takes the reader through the social upheavals of the sixties ("we are the ultimate over 30 crowd") to the present day, where the Post-Beats live diverse lifestyles, some as edgy as the original Beats, others "discovering the cool night eyes of the honey-colored cat/lying lazy on the carpet near the color t.v."

The Post-Beats differ from the Beats because the America they inhabit has changed as dramatically as it did during the 1950s and 1960s. If the Beats listened to jazz, the Post-Beats listen to bop, free jazz, Rock, Punk, and the crossovers and permutations that have evolved within the musical idioms. Their writing retains the questing spirit of the Beats, but reflects the influence of other writers, other art forms, new technologies and the times themselves. As an example, the picture poems of Kenneth Patchen, along with the Concrete Poetry that originated in the 1950s, have evolved into Visual Poetry using animation and other devices that can only be created and viewed on the computer. Unlike the Beats, with the exception of Burroughs, much Post-Beat writing reflects the hard-edged view of people who watched a cultural revolution fail in the 1960s and currently survive under a right-wing administration whose practices threaten to restrict their freedom of expression.

Whereas the Beats lived in bohemian fashion for much of their lives, many Post-Beats enjoy financially secure lifestyles. While many of them have lived on Manhattan's Lower East Side, traveled the country, and partied in after-hours joints, the cost of living in today's world makes the Beat lifestyle of the 1950s and 1960s virtually impossible to maintain for an extended period. Nevertheless, the American Dream remains more nightmare than idyll to the Post-Beats, who enjoy the exotic culture and cuisine of millennial America's coopted Bohemia but resist the complacency ascribed by Ann Powers to the generation she portrays as *Bobos in Paradise*.³ (Powers 1999)

Nevertheless, many Post-Beats maintain more than a casual interest in spiritual development. Some meditate in Buddhist monasteries or take classes that fuse Eastern disciplines with Western psychology. A significant number, on the other hand, have immersed themselves in the post-Huncke world of kicks, an area of Post-Beat life and literature shaped in part by the belated emergence of Charles Bukowski, a major influence on many Post-Beat writers.

Bukowski, early in his career, turned down an invitation to appear in a Beat anthology. From the early 1970's on, however, his work influenced a number of Post-Beats. A hard-drinking loner who worked at dead-end jobs in factories and mail rooms, spent days at the racetrack betting on horses, and slept with women as dissolute as he was, he portrayed his freewheeling trek through the furnished rooms of Los Angeles in a no-nonsense style that appealed to many Post-Beats, especially those working at similar jobs or in the service sector. Whereas Kerouac emerged from his blue-collar background in certain respects, Bukowski immersed himself in his. Bukowski's influence extended the range of Post-Beat poetry and prose to include a more direct

style of writing and a range of subject matter that rarely found expression in any generation's Bohemia.

Bukowski's influence, along with the Beats', informs the Poetry Slams that gained popularity in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Poetry Slams offer reading venues for a variety of poets, some of them Post-Beat. The poems tend to be autobiographical and the recitations frequently include an element of performance. Some slam venues, such as the Nuyorican Poets Café in Manhattan, feature poetry with strong urban grit.

Post-Beat writing, like Beat writing, can immerse itself in the urban underbelly of the American Dream, seek Dionysian release or mystical understanding, or all three at the same time. Barry Wallenstein's "My Understudy" faces contemporary urban reality head-on:

The young man, shot twice
and painfully,
had been on earth long enough
(not too long sway the flowers)
to know the difference
between lambswool and polyester,
pain and an upward stare into nowhere.

He'd choose the former
in both cases ordinarily,
but on this day,
out of a wilding world,
there came two missiles, errant
hot strangers to his shape,
tearing into his back and side.

Bleeding in public
and fighting sleep, he fell awake
as into a state of babyhood,
where each moment swells
to yards of cushioned time and desired speech;
but the sharp burning holes
kept him croaking in his speech.

Besides, from where I stood
I could hardly hear
above the shrill mill of gawkers.
Did he say "no, wait" or "it's late"?
He seemed embarrassed
as if his accident
were a finger pointing at us.

And then the crowd came closer;
the police cars whirred and stopped.
Increasingly, there was less to see
or feel. Alone,
I pulled the feelings home,
as if on a weighted leash.

Wallenstein places us at the urban core of Post-Beat America, a world in which shootings border on the commonplace. "Wilding," a term used to describe assaults that took place in Manhattan's Central Park in the late 1980's, becomes a metaphor for today's world, whose violence seems more explosive and gratuitous than what Norman Mailer's White Negro experienced in 1957.

Yet Post-Beat retains the Beats' urge toward transcendence, as in Layne Russell's "Death in the Meadow":

light light light

surrender
light
consumed
light
energy of being
light
no one
light

how long
suspended sky time
how long
the white
how long
the lifeless body lying
no I
only is

is

Russell's poem seeks the mystical understanding that occurs when being surrenders itself to non-being. Her quest as non-quest occurs with a tranquility seldom found in

Ginsberg's visionary works, in which immersion in the *via negativa* of American life leads to oneness with ecstasy.

In "Putting in a Few Appearances," Kirpal Gordon, aware of the *via negativa*, experiences the spiritual with one streetwise eye turned toward apocalypse:

At the threshold of enfleshment no one need remind us
how Dionysus got torn apart by strange desires in his wild forest
den.
Nevertheless we're putting in a few appearances
at least before it all goes up in smoke
swirling in the whirlwind called *participation mystique*
shaking down the Great Round
seeking out the rickety rattle of bones
our rock-scissors-stone of alchemical alteration

His vision, darkly humorous, represents a kind of playful dancing on his own grave, a reinterpretation of Kenneth Patchen's title phrase "Hallelujah Anyway!" One could describe Gordon's mix of irony and mysticism as Post-Beat because of its existing awareness of a vision's realistic underpinnings, as well as the Beat awareness of the visionary state itself.

In Post-Beat America, urban living involves greater risk than in past eras. If the level of material comfort level is significantly higher for many people, it is dangerously lower for many others. Comfort doesn't guarantee security. As Wallenstein's poem indicates, continued exposure to violence alters one's sensibility from a Romantic-era lament for the loss of an innocent soul to a feeling of loss tempered by a "shit happens" resignation. Gordon's seeking conveys a sense of knowing his quest has existed before him, and that he's part of an eternal replay.

Gordon's and Russell's work reflect the use of the poetic line as a visual entity, employing "composition by field," a tool used by a number of Beats, as well as Charles Olson and his Black Mountain colleagues, to enhance the meaning of language by placing words in a specific location on the page instead of running them from left margin to right.

Although a number of Post-Beats employ composition by field, many also adhere to left-margin writing, an indication of Bukowski's influence. The following poem, which I wrote, reflects the left-margin style of Bukowski and offers a sample of the kind of subject matter found in the work of his Post-Beat successors:

The Sex Queen Of The Berlin Turnpike

"coulda been
Little Miss Rich Bitch layin' on my yacht"

but claimed her father left
his inheritance behind
when the Mob's hitmen climbed

his trail. So,
she's the doe-eyed darling of the clipjoints

on the Strip. She flashes
her tits for tips from bikers
& lonely old men

in glasses
steamed with dreams of what never was.

Her nectarine nipples
tease me, her buns swing the breeze
that sucks up my buck

on her wake
of chestnut hair. She feeds my fantasies

the way I feed her lost
wealth---what I can afford to give.
But she still lives bitter,

broke, strung out
on coke in neon turnpike motels

& runs out on the rent.
While I listen to her story
to escape from my own

she pays back
the memories of her father.

The language of the poem reflects the environment it portrays. It's Beat in the sense of "beaten down" instead of "beatific." The poem also reflects the resignation that one encounters more frequently in Post-Beat writing than in Beat writing. The beatific visions of the 1950s that led to the optimism of the 1960s have become devalued currency in today's American social economy.

Yet the Post-Beats aren't devoid of hope. Their experience of a failed cultural revolution and the emergence of an oppressive political administration has tempered their questing sensibilities, but hasn't stopped them. The Post-Beats' use of language represents a form of questing in itself. In the following passage from his poem "Double Vision," Schuyler Hoffman splashes words on the page in a manner reminiscent of Jackson Pollock:

SEE DOUBLE RED BLUE IN THE LIGHT OF ANOTHER YELLOW GREEN REFLECTION

ROCK PAPER SCISSORS

BLUE RED

LOST WORLD

PARALLEL LINES THE BALL BOUNCES BACK AND FORTH

LOOK AT THE MOON

PURPLE CAROM VIOLET BLUE THE WAVELETS OFF THE WALL

TWO FIGURES RUN ACROSS A FIELD

CLEAR GREEN YELLOW OUTLINE GOLD SHARP SHARD

ONE IS THE SHADOW OF THE OTHER

EVERYDAY OCHRE BROWN RUSSET AS DEFINED

A HAWK SWEEPS CLOSE TO EARTH

ORANGE RED BLURRY ROSE DEFORMED

STRIVES TO JOIN THE OTHER IMAGE

FUZZY MERGE PINK VIOLET CERULEAN SOFT AND COLORFUL

ROCK PAPER SCISSORS

LOOK AT THE MOON
 ULTRAMARINE READ AQUA OLIVE FOREST
 ROOTED
 THE SIGNS THE WORDS
 LOST VIRIDIAN
 APPARENCIES

The words splashing the page like paint achieve a cumulative effect as their colors overlay each other until they create an exalted reality.

Some Post-Beat poets have extended the Beats' explorations of Language into the seemingly arcane realms of Language Poetry, as evidenced by proto-Language Poet Clark Coolidge's work and some of my own. Kerouac's Spontaneous Bop Prosody informs such Coolidge works as *The Rova Improvisations*, a series of poems written while listening to recordings of the avant-garde Rova Saxophone Quartet.

In poem "II" of my *IMPROVISATIONS* series, I've used Jack Kerouac's Spontaneous Bop Prosody to explore improvisation as a tool of composition, foregoing literal meaning for the flavor and flow of language itself:

Octavian leaps across triads of former ingenuity & temper (dis)

scaling wisteria with columnar cries

leaps hysteria ties	his stereo bleeps	its area steep
strategies of systems	incremental cryonic	tonalities its wisdom,
histrionic intent to	weeds risen grounded	doubt imprisoned
viscera, songs of hob-	long guts nailed-down	in bursts of certainty
nailed keys to fingers	booty bopping senses	flailed against airy
<u>plumbing pummeled</u>	leap all minds en-	<u>tonalities clustered</u>

ears inventing nuance	dowed with media	dense with evidence
bionic increments leap	enchantments of	deep in its tangents
to full intensity, flour-	Medea's remedial	of myriad focus
ish or perish sour fools	spell soars cherished	median stripped of
clinging to nose rings	in the Euro sings its	roads clinging to
of media'd minds en-	ancient cradles en-	horses labeled en-

tranced, chanted, hanced

meat products of the mind
 fleshed in measured burst
 triumphant in the iguanas

mind the products of meat
 bursted in measured flesh
 iguanas in the triumphant

polytonal appliances electric
 songs of the co-dependent id
 embittered on native roots, the soiled
 assumptions grated

If Kerouac's improvisational approach to writing was rooted in bop and the single-note lines of Charlie Parker, my improvisational approach has evolved toward the multi-textural layering of free jazz, an idiom Kerouac admired but never recited with. The poem challenges the traditional assumptions of how one should read the page. I've placed the words on the page in columns so that the reader can perceive them as multiphonics, i.e., multiple notes played simultaneously on a single instrument, or as lines of polytonal counterpoint that flow between consonance and dissonance as they build toward an expression of glossolalic ecstasy.

The musicality of Post-Beat language finds further expression in the fusion of poetry with jazz. Often dismissed as passe, the fusion of jazz and poetry has experienced a resurgence in recent years, in large part because of Post-Beat poets. Although the Beats received credit for the fusion, it emerged decades earlier, when Langston Hughes and Kenneth Rexroth performed it. Kerouac synchronized the rhythms of the American vernacular with the rhythms of bop in masterly fashion. Yet bop's tightly-structured compositions have inhibited the expression of poets who weren't rhythmically equipped to fuse their language with the flow of the music around them. Post-Beat poets such as Barry Wallenstein, Steve Dalachinsky and I have performed and recorded with members of the jazz avant-garde, whose open-ended music allows poets to exercise more freedom in their linguistic expression.

Although Post-Beats such as Wallenstein pioneered reciting to the newer forms of jazz, Allen Ginsberg worked in the same area late in his career. In spring, 1988, I released *Sex Queen of the Berlin Turnpike*, an album of jazz poetry featuring several respected players in Manhattan's downtown music scene. Within a year, Island Records released Ginsberg's *The Lion for Real*, whose musicians were part of the same contingent.

Wallenstein, one of the few Post-Beat poets ever published by a major publisher, ranks as one of the very best at fusing poetry with jazz. He began reciting his poetry to jazz as a teenager in the 1950's and continues to record and to perform with first-rate jazz musicians in Manhattan. His incisive poetry brings a hipster's sensibility to the phrasing of the written word. His choice of avant-garde musicians such as the late saxophonist Charles Tyler identifies him as a Post-Beat practitioner of the form.

Today, a number of poets routinely perform with bands, including Janine Pommy Vega, Wanda Phipps, Gabrielle Zane and Tracey Morris. Not all of them write in a Post-Beat vein, but their fusion of music with poetry advances the tradition that began with an earlier generation of bohemian poets and continued through the Beats to the present day. Moreover, the Post-Beat poets haven't restricted themselves to working in the jazz idiom. Zane and sixties icon John Sinclair regularly read their poetry to a rock band's accompaniment.

Other Post-Beat poets have advanced the work of the Beats into areas the Beats never explored. Mikhail Horowitz, for example, doubles as a poet and stand-up comic, sometimes wilfully blurring the distinction between the two, as in his hip-hop parody of Homer's *The Odyssey*. He combines the word-drunk enthusiasm of Allen Ginsberg with the laugh-a-second humor of a latter-day Lord Buckley. Bob Holman's "We Are the Dinosaur," which appears in *Selected Poems of Post-Beat Poets*, employs the rhymes and rhythms of hip-hop to engage contemporary readers.

Kirpal Gordon's poetry and prose reflect a dedicated extension of the Beat vision. His poetry embraces the spiritual concerns of the Beats while addressing contemporary issues such as homelessness, sometimes using composition by field in a manner that hints at John Donne. His richly imaginative fiction fuses the conceptual sophistication and extended realities of Magical Realism with jazz dialect and rhythm.

Since *Selected Poems by Post-Beat Poets* offers a representative range of poets, not a comprehensive compilation, I'd like to mention one poet whose important contributions point toward a working definition of Post-Beat: Michael Rothenberg. A close friend of Philip Whalen, Rothenberg edited *Overtime*, Whalen's Selected Poems, and Joanne Kyger's Selected Poems. A longtime resident of the Bay area, he knows many of the San Francisco Beats personally. He is one of the few poets to experiment with using the journal as a poetic form, inspired by Ginsberg and Kyger to some degree. His most recent books include *The Paris Journals* and *Unhurried Visions*. He has performed and recorded with musicians. He edits *Big Bridge*, an online magazine that publishes the original Beats, the Post-Beats and other innovative writers in a

fascinating, eclectic mix. In today's fragmented literary world, he is a master of networking who expands publishing opportunities for writers.

In attempting to define the boundaries that distinguish Post-Beat from Beat, I've attempted to draw distinctions between the two, while recognizing that overlaps exist in many areas. Nevertheless, changing times and changing art forms have given the Post-Beats new concepts and new material to work with. Since the Post-Beats continue the line of underground writing that has existed for centuries into a new era, they continue to express the concerns of their predecessors while advancing the forms of expression emerging in their times. Nevertheless, defining Post-Beat remains as knotty as any attempt to challenge Wittgenstein's statement about boundaries that haven't been drawn.

Although the boundaries of Post-Beat haven't been drawn, they appear to be expanding.

THE FUTURE OF POST-BEAT POETRY

In 1998, when Professor Wen Chu-an of Sichuan University interviewed me on the subject of Post-Beat writers for *Contemporary Foreign Literature*, I was less than hopeful that Post-Beat writers would receive recognition for their accomplishments, even though a number of them have compiled bodies of work that warrant critical consideration.

Lacking the support of major publishers or university-based literary magazines with substantial circulations and adequate operating budgets, the Post-Beat writers have struggled in much the same way that the Beats did before *On the Road* made them visible to the American reading public.

In the 1950s the Beats published magazines like *Yugen*, *Kulchur* and many others. Excerpts from Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* first appeared in *Big Table*, which broke off from an academic publication because of the controversy surrounding Burroughs' work. In the 1960s the term "mimeo revolution" described the proliferation of literary magazines that occurred when photocopy machines and other inexpensive printing devices enabled writers to publish work that more conservative magazines would reject. Many of these publications were Beat or early post-Beat, such as Ed Sanders' *Fuck You/ a Magazine of the Arts* and *Entrails: the Magazine of Happy Obscenity*, which published writers who were at the cutting edge of literary experimentation in the mid-1960s.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the "desktop publishing revolution," which coincided with the proliferation of Creative Writing Programs in American universities, further reduced the cost of publication, enabling writers and editors to produce professional-

quality books and magazines at out-of-pocket prices. But lack of venues for sale and distribution of the work compelled them to issue smaller print runs than the Beats did. The smaller runs, sometimes under 100 copies, gave rise to the term “micropress,” in comparison with the small presses of the 1950s and 1960s, many of which had the financial backing and distribution to print runs of 1,000 or more copies.

From the 1970s to the early 1990s, a number of print magazines throughout the world published Post-Beat writing. In the 1980s, Jef Bierkens published *Tempus Fugit*, a diverse collection of post-Beat poetry and fiction, in Belgium. *Tempus Fugit* published the innovative poet Michael Basinski, whose work ranges from Post-Beat to Language and Visual Poetry. In the 1980's Yusuke Keida published *Blue Jacket*, a post-Beat publication, in Japan. I believe he still publishes the magazine on an irregular basis, under the title *Blue Beat Jacket*. *The Café Review* in Portland, Maine and *Heeltap* in St. Paul, Minnesota, are also excellent post-Beat publications. A number of other quality magazines publish Post-Beat literature. Almost all of them operate out of the publisher's pocket, which limits the amount of material and the number of copies that can be published.

An increasing number of Post-Beat writers have turned to self-publishing because they have no other outlet for their work. In the late 1970's, Kathy Acker, whose fiction bears the stamp of William Burroughs, self-published several of her novels. Grove Press re-published them and published her later work. Many contemporary poets self-publish their own books with no hope of a university or commercial press republishing them. Despite the stigma currently attached to self-publishing, a roster of self-publishing authors reads like a Literary Hall of Fame: Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, Gertrude Stein and James Joyce self-published their work at one time, or most of the time. Lawrence Ferlinghetti's *Pictures of the Gone World* was a self-published work, issued under his City Lights imprint.

The Post-Beat poets who fuse jazz and poetry have seldom seen their recordings released on an established record label. In the music business, however, self-producing work carries less of a stigma than in the literary world. Since the mid-1950s, innovative jazz musicians such as Sun Ra have produced their own recordings. A number of them eventually achieved recognition, even stardom, for their work. For self-producing jazz poets, distribution remains the largest barrier to public recognition.

The problems of sales and distribution have limited the ability of Post-Beat writers to present their work to more than a marginal audience. Given the entrenchment of niche marketing and demographic audience targeting, they aren't likely to break through the profit barrier that blocks them from Publishers Row and the chain bookstores. In this respect, the Beats gained an opportunity that remains inaccessible to most Post-Beats.

Despite these barriers, a source of hope exists, one whose importance I underestimated even at the same time that I was using it: the Internet.

The emergence of the Internet has enabled writers from many schools to find audiences for their work. Since the mid-1990s, electronic publishing has fostered a

growing alternative literary culture that thrives outside the world of commercial publishers and chain bookstores. A number of Post-Beat magazines, such as *Literary Kicks*, *Jack Magazine* and Rothenberg's *Big Bridge* have become online publishers of an encyclopedic range of Post-Beat authors and styles. Their online magazines and chapbooks reach many more readers than a magazine or book with a print run of 100 copies. The younger generations of Post-Beats, who are more computer-savvy than those who came of age in the 1960s, add new magazines to the internet on what seems like a daily basis.

Editors such as Rothenberg recognize the importance of electronic literature as an alternative to the print outlets that have proved inaccessible to the Post-Beats. Discussions of how to make e-books more available and attractive to readers are taking place daily. In addition, Post-Beat Poets working in the jazz-poetry fusion can place their recordings on the internet through MP3 and other new recording techniques.

Electronic publishing gives the Post-Beats their best opportunity to reach the audience that needs and craves exposure to the independent voices that express human discontent and the quest for spiritual advancement in the face of social and political repression. A growing online presence might one day motivate publishers to issue print books by Post-Beat writers.

POST-SCRIPT: A POST-BEAT METHODOLOGY

Selected Poems by Post-Beat Poets, while a printed work, owes its existence to the internet. In fact, it's an example of the ways in which the internet can advance the work of the Post-Beats and other writers working outside the cultural and commercial mainstream.

When I met Professor Wen Chu-an of Sichuan University at Lowell Celebrates Kerouac in Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1997, we spoke for at least an hour, discussing his work, the first Chinese translation of *On the Road*, and my books and recordings. Staying in touch by e-mail, our continuing discussions led to "Beneath the Underground: Post-Beat Writing in America," his interview with me which *Contemporary Foreign Literature* published several years ago. We conducted the interview by e-mail over a period of several months, contacting each other on a daily basis when necessary.

A year after its publication, Zhang Ziqing, the editor of *Contemporary Foreign Literature*, expressed an interest in publishing an anthology of Post-Beat poetry to Wen Chu-an. Wen Chu-an suggested the idea to me and I agreed to it. I e-mailed the best poets working in a Post-Beat vein that I knew from my own reading, contacted other poets they recommended, and requested submissions for the anthology. Only scratching the surface of Post-Beat writing in America, I received more first-rate poetry than the anthology could contain. Once I compiled the manuscript, I e-mailed it to Wen

Chu-an, who translated the work. The entire process of editing, translating and preparing the book for publication was conducted by e-mail.

Wen Chu-an and I don't know if this is the first time a book has been put together by people e-mailing from opposite sides of the planet. At the time, we felt that we might be the first people to use the internet to bridge the cultural gap that exists between the United States and China, so that we can increase our understanding of each other. We recognized the technology as an integral part of the times we live in. And given the rise of Post-Beat literature on the internet, we might say that Wen Chu-an and I produced the anthology using the methodology most likely to bring recognition to Post-Beat writers.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Madden, Andrew P. *Beat Writers at Work*. New York: Modern Library, 1999. P. 334.

² Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1953. P. 33.

³ Powers, Ann. *Bobos in Paradise*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.