

Spring 1983 Joe Soap's Canoe  
Summer  
[#8]

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JSTNYC

(special)

# JSC

*New York poetry issue*

*Edited & Published by  
Martin Stannard*

*jsc publications  
90 Ranelagh Road  
Felixstowe  
Suffolk  
England*

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*Publication date: Spring/Summer '83*



*This issue of JSC is devoted in its entirety to poetry and prose from New York.*

*To place the poetry within a current geography (for the benefit especially of British readers) a message went out appealing for an essay on "the current New York poetry scene." What came back was Charles North's "Short Form", the genesis of which is best described by Paul Violi: "North and I sat down with a tape but I could say nothing worthwhile, let alone write an essay. So Charles put it together in this format, a sort of questionnaire to me, which I left unanswered. In other words, it's all his, and besides he puts the answers in the questions." So: "Short Form", which opens this selection.*

*The compilation of this issue would have been impossible without the help of Paul Violi, to whom go special thanks. Thanks are also due to all the contributors, most of whom had never heard of JSC but reacted to this special project with enthusiasm, encouragement and, most notably, great generosity. To them all - thanks.*

*The only regret an editor of a selection such as this can have is that, by necessity, more writers have had to be excluded than included. One can only hope that in time such omissions may be remedied, and that JSC will be on hand when it happens.*

*Martin Stannard  
May 1983*

Charles North

THE N.Y. POETRY SCENE / SHORT FORM

*Addressed to Paul Violi*

Why are we doing this?

What does "scene" mean?

Seriously, if scene means "where it is" and the "it" is poetry, does that mean the reading spots (projects, institutions, coffee-houses, bars, clinic), bookstores that do and don't stock big- and small-press poetry, quarters (Lower East Side, West Village, Upper West Side, Soho), etc.? Or does it mean something vaguer, something like The State of The Art -- which would conceivably have little to do with the aforementioned venues (which could, conceivably, exist in an ironic relation to them, i.e., maybe those are precisely not where it really is).

To what extent does one's perception of the scene depend on one's aesthetics? A. A great deal.

What is poetry?  
(Just kidding, I know you know.)

If "scene" has something to do with health, vitality, quality, and opportunity, characterize the New York Scene.

The N.Y. Scene is clearly a number of scenes, most of which have little to do with New York per se. As we all know, the "New York School" tag which everyone associated with tries to snip off (with only moderate success and properly so) has to do with a state of mind, a sense of Europe, and the sense that the world is mad, rather than with this oceanic city.  
(Not a question.)

Name some parts of the N.Y. Scene. Which of those, e.g., "original" N.Y. School, St. Mark's, etc., have additional parts, e.g., 2nd and third generations, splinter groups (Bollinas, Naropa), etc.?

Is it logically possible to make any meaningful generalizations about the N.Y. Scene?

How parochial is your view of things (anyone's)? For example, what do you know about the Brooklyn poets apart from the redoubtable Bob Hershen and the Some Mag crowd?

Apart from those I know you'd mention -- So, I'll mention them for you: Larry Fagin, Jamie MacInnes, Joe Ceravolo,



John Godfrey, Yuki Hartman, Martha LaBare, Jim Brodey, Eileen Myles, Michael Brownstein, Bill Zavatsky, Anne Waldman, the St. Marks Legions, John Yau, Barry Yourgrau, Tony Towle, -- who are some of the interesting NY poets, keeping in mind that you can't remember all of them at any one point and are likely to offend many? Do you think in terms of "movements" or factions?

Do the large venues, the 92nd St. Y, the Guggenheim Museum, the Academy of American poets, have anything whatsoever to do with the NY Scene?

Why is there a sense that the best lack all conviction while the worst are full of polemical intensity, that things have somehow gone awry, and that NY's fabled energy is more fable, or rather more mere energy, than formerly, or is that only my sense, bound up with my own limited perspective and efforts at selfhood?  
(Choose two.)

Do any of the following apply to any, few, or all of the scenes and portions of scenes described (by you, one hopes) above? world-weariness, careerism, art-world madness -- speaking of which, when we tried to do this on tape and failed miserably, we did seem to agree that the current state of the Art World, always in the picture for NY poetry at least since the golden-haired fifties, has something to do with what's wrong in the poetry world, something like, the loss of "quality," the overpowering of literature by performance (notwithstanding the rightful claims of that brightly lit power-puncher), the much publicized and boring, the excellent and retiring, etc. etc. If I seem to be grinding an axe, that is because it is somehow continually being handed to us at the zenith of dullness.

What is your perception of the national perception, if such a thing can be considered, of the N.Y. Scene? (I have in mind the ridicule in varying degrees received by the N.Y. School Poets, St. Mark's, etc., over the years. Has this changed?)

Here's an interesting one. Do you think John Ashbery together with his acclaim has had a positive or negative effect on attitudes to New York and its poetry? I can see several sides to that. What about the "meteoric" aspect of his rise up the versified heavens?

There are, as I think we said on that selfsame dismal tape, loads of poets in NY who aren't very different from poets elsewhere, as I think is probably the case always. The bus-iness of the "prevailing style," the common idea of aim and effect, tone and language, grants and nepotism (just kidding). Could you characterize that style and give some idea of how many poets it applies to, and what all this has to do with NY?

No? Then I guess it's my own idiosyncratic and simplistic way of bringing order to chaos.

How important is St. Mark's City-wide? Nation-wide?  
(Descriptive linguistics.)

Does big-press publishing, centered in NY, producing a limited number of poetry books each year which appear in most of the bookstores, have nothing to do with the NY Scene (whereas Sun Press and Full Court Press do)?

How would you change the NY Scene, if you had 3 wishes?  
(Short answer.)

Is NY still the center of the universe?

The "language"-poetry bunch has one foot in NY, which seems proper, the latter being the modern-day Babel. As a lot of us have flirted and more with that sort of writing and continue to be as interested in language as we are in the striving depicted world, would you feel it proper to comment on those of our colleagues in NY who have given themselves over to language with fear?

Is "criticism" a part of the NY Scene?

Is the NY Review of Books? The NY Times Book Review? NY Magazine?

Is the continuation of gentrification, "sliver" buildings, condo and co-op conversion, and cynical design?

Speaking of criticism which is a sensitive and important issue, does whatever you said above about it constitute a plea for a more informed and aware response to what some of us are doing, a profound disappointment at the missed opportunities in the widely read organs, missed opportunities for Poetry is what I mean, its health, distribution, and ability to excite?

Do you ride the subways to work? how many taxis do you take in a month? do you believe in commuting? do you walk to poetry readings? are there too many readings in this area so that the idea has lost something essential? can there never be enough readings? should poets be helped to produce poetry? do you believe in poetry on the page? Is it significant that Schuyler wasn't noticed nationally until well into his 50's? do you think there will be, or is there currently, an Ashbery backlash? is O'Hara likely to go down in history as a Major poet? Does the New Yorker emanate secretly from Connecticut? does what poets in NY do to earn \$ say anything significant about the NY Scene? does anyone in England care about any of these?  
(Answer in order.)

What about Third World Poetry in NY?

I keep having the feeling that this scene business is fundamentally elusive, essentially so, that it looks different to everyone who looks at it. It probably has to do with age as much as poetics. When you're starting and come here from



the midwest (or the New School) it's one thing, when you've sat through a thousand readings and resented a thousand bookstores for not stocking what you think is important, it's another. Let's title this Disillusionment of the Eighties. I know a lot of people don't feel that way. It's interesting, Frances (Waldman) really was someone in a position to have an overview. We should dedicate this to her. I didn't entirely go along with her taste, of course, it was somewhat over on the conventional side in spite of everything, but she was properly removed from each specific scene and somehow clearly saw it as well. This is off-topic. The question is, to what extent does commenting on a poetry scene produce that scene which, until that point, didn't quite exist?

Is this too long already?

Let's return to the Art world/poetry world connection. I assume everyone gives lip service to that. Name some real ways in which the NY poetry scene is as it is because of the way the NY art scene is (not necessarily direct influence, such as, though it's certainly true for some, having painters for friends and lovers causes one to see things in other ways, try to do similar things with words -- though not to paint with them). Jimmy (S.) titled his short prose piece for the poetics section of the Allen anthology Poet and Painter Overture, Ashbery's the art critic and writer of masterpieces such as "Self Portrait in a Convex Mirror," O'Hara wrote, curated, mentioned, hung out with, adored; Koch was and is extremely close to Edwin Denby, Barbara Guest similarly. And of our "younger" poets, Berrigan, Padgett, Ratcliffe, Schjeldahl, Yau, Yourgrau, Towle, Shapiro, Welish, Greenwald, me, you, and others. Writers have married painters, gone on vacation tours with them, enjoyed a cool glass of beer on a sweltering day in front of the NY traffic while talking about everything under the poetic sun. John Yau was and for all I know still is a housepainter. So in one sense, one (rather large, it's true) group keeps alive the poetry/painting connection. Oops, forgot the other way around too, Rivers, Katz, Motherwell, Dine, Freilicher, Winkfield, Bluhm, Guston, (Paula North), Dash, Jean Holabird, etc. etc. What about other groups? This isn't what I mean. I mean what Schuyler was, essentially, talking about: the air we breathe. I see it for better and for worse, worse meaning, these days if not before, the Business of Art, the Business of the Meteoric, as well as those other problems tossed off above; better meaning the desire of every poet to do something as beautiful as some of the paintings we see around us every day. And the sense that art is important, part of the scheme of things, easy, or easier, for painters to feel nowadays -- the actual importance if any of Schnabel, Salle, et al being a whole other issue -- than for poets to feel. Or is that a wild understatement. So Art, art acts as a kind of emotional resource, the business management side of the Muse, as well as whatever it performs in the way of specific and general cross-influences, inspirations, and the like. What was the question?

Would you like to reject those questions you feel are too frivolous? Does frivolity have something essential to do with the NY Scene?

For, we know that some poets from more rural, or less frenzied, areas of the country think that New York poets (by which they mean, more or less, the amplified NY School) are, by virtue of being in the grip of the "artificial and curtailed life," subject to a decadence that forces them to the peripheries of life, poetry and the American Way. Don't we?

Why isn't music, NY being a "world-class" concert hall, more important to the NY poetry scene than it is? Or is it? Consider rock, punk, Cage, Thompson, poet/instrumentalists, aspirations towards the condition of music, the poetic equivalent of Muzak, the Drones, hymns to intellectual beauty.

I'm running out of gass, in case you hadn't noticed. Time to end, or go to your questions, or get my typewriter, the manual, fixed. It broke after page 1 of this, and I see now that the questions got less coherent after I switched to the electric portable, some sort of comment on technology, which brings up a slew of further considerations regarding the influence of environment upon city attitudes, like winter sunlight on an otherwise disengaged scene.

What about "subject matter?"

Be sure to reread your answers.

Charles North  
January 1983



Tim Dlugos

CLOSE

for Brad Gooch

Spring peaks: the third of May, the feast of Love.  
Cherry flowers old, magnolias new.  
Peahens chase tots in the cathedral close.  
We share a therapist, up there three stories.  
I'm here to recollect, and recollect I shall,  
but first let me get over this amazing blue

of sky between new green leaves and blue  
of polyester running shoes. I love  
to think it's something absolutely new,  
this light and weather, like my summer clothes,  
but it predates us both, say histories.  
Pretending it's the first time is a shell

game. Can't beat Demon Time, they say, though Shelley disagreed. The rains came, the winds blew and swamped his tiny boat. I'm not in love with impiety, just with youth. The new world is a-comin', old draws to a close, a row of vignettes pasted on a story-

board by young go-getters with success stories and salable today, beneath the sheltering deciduous to kids in blue-jeans, teenaged like the leaves, amazed by love that sprouts like sudden flowers on their new embarrassed shapes. Their childhood's at a close,

a time they thought the doors would never close behind them or before them, as in stories on Time Tunnel or Twilight Zone. They shall learn differently. It used to make me blue to think of it, but now it makes me love great days like this one with a giddy new

intensity. It is completely new, this light, this five-year-old with his fat close-mouthed nurse, that roof of petals three long stories above my head, where you are. And they shall never be quite the same again; the blue sky either, or you, or I. That's why Love

"makes all things new." Beats history. This blooming close opens my shell to Love, to you.

Venus Day, 1982

Tim Dlugos

WHERE IS ART?

Georgia Brown in a dingy  
period costume in a dingy  
Soho room in a faded  
photo of a Broadway stage,  
asking in a melody  
in a rhyme on a scratchy  
LP, where is what she cares  
about the most, and it's the first  
image that springs (spring  
forward, fall back) into my mind  
when I wonder, where is what  
I used to care about the most,  
the art of it, not artifice  
like sweeteners I despise  
but a thing I cared about,  
care about losing touch with  
enough that when the adjective  
"artful" provokes an unsavory  
image (Artful Dodger) I wonder  
if that's the kind of art I was  
making all along, clever and evasive,  
like framing the question in lines  
that fit too easily into what appears  
to be a poem, as if to write it  
that way were enough, when what  
it needed was philosophy, the love  
of wisdom (where is love?) and something  
behind the words when emptiness begins  
to pass as profundity, to fill up  
the heart when a dearth of energy  
starts to pass as openness to love  
and I'm running on nerves alone  
and I think that's "romantic", compounding  
the vulgar interest in a cheap facade

there is language behind whose clarity  
stands the masterpiece that Malevich  
never got around to painting and  
there is the rococo church behind  
which is all the alcohol and caffeine  
of the past ten years

\*



Robert Hershon

AN OCCASION

*for Susan Levine*

The house is filled with its family  
Mothers and daughters pass each other  
on the narrow stairs  
Fathers watch what their sons are drinking  
Who will go for the ice, who's got the keys?

In the exchange of gifts some boxes  
are filled with smaller and smaller boxes  
a high school joke that will not go away  
even though the principal has been dead for years  
They named a short street for him  
and I've been meaning to walk over there  
and spit on it

The sophomores race into the dark locker room  
even as the seniors peel off their dripping clothes  
and throw their coats on the bed  
No one leaves the party early  
The pile of coats reaches the ceiling  
bursts through the roof  
all the hats talking at once  
They say: this is what you got me?  
Who the hell needs this?

So if I saw that teacher now  
maybe up ahead on the checkout line  
he'd be a hundred and ten years old  
and I'd still want to knock him down  
But I studied too long for that test  
so grab your coat and get your hat  
leave your childhood on the doorstep  
just direct your feet la lala la la  
lala la

Robert Hershon

POSTER

in 1961 my apartment in north beach  
had split-rattan blinds and kandinsky  
posters scotch-taped to the walls  
and a table made from a door  
and a bricks-and-boards bookcase  
and a mattress on the floor  
and almost everything was painted  
flat black except the little yellow  
desk i bought from good will  
and i wrote my first poems sitting there  
watching cars wiggle down lombard street  
with dick partee lying on the couch  
behind me reading the chronicle  
and rehearsing on his invisible alto  
hey man, am i bothering you  
no dick, that's okay, it's 1983 now  
play some more

\*

HAND TO EYE COORDINATION

the dart heads for the board  
a hand reaches out from dead  
center and pulls it in

when it's going good  
i can't remember how  
it ever went bad

when it's going bad  
the bartender pulls  
the dart from his forehead  
and falls dying into  
the ice machine

shit he says  
i hate poems about  
poetry

\*



PHOTOGRAPHS OF US TOGETHER

There we are in a bar in New York.  
I'm smoking a cigarette  
and you're looking out across the room.  
Your hair is swept back. It's a summer afternoon.  
We're dressed casually.  
I'm looking at your breasts.

In this one we're on a bus.  
It's crowded. I'm standing and you're sitting down.  
A man is looking at you  
but you haven't noticed him.  
You seem angry.  
I'm looking out the window.

We're coming out of a small restaurant.  
I'm wearing a suit, you an attractive blouse and skirt.  
Behind us you can see your father and mother.  
I look nervous, you seem distracted.  
We were missing the third game of the World Series  
when this picture was taken.

This one has me in a taxicab.  
You're waving and squinting in the sun.  
I'm grinning or winking and  
trying to look like I've been riding in taxis  
all my life.  
The driver is amused.

The last one is of you and me in an airport.  
I'm waiting for my suitcase  
and you're standing behind me with a puzzled look on your face.  
It suits you.  
Several people have commented on  
how pretty you look in this picture.

\*

A HISTORY OF THE COLOR BLUE

In the distance a man is walking  
past some mountains or a desert.  
Observe more closely:  
a little blue paint on a brown shoe.  
Observe more closely:  
radiant energy of wavelength, approx. 475 nanometers.  
Observe more closely:  
a color in the iris of a Rembrandt eye.

\*

THE AIRPLANE

You wake up and there's an airplane.  
You don't have to go to work anymore.  
You feel like Man Ray.  
You feel like Bob Cummings.  
The airplane is also a car.  
It's a fast car and there are attractive women.  
You are in different places,  
for instance, California.  
There are other cars and you like them.  
There is a swimming pool.

\*



Charles North

DESCANT

O the sheer beauty of a street lined  
with tire irons, verse that uses psychosomatic  
details to instill a sense of wonder  
into our unclarified condition, buildings  
that grow from nothing up, canceling  
almost all the light from the east  
(formerly the park with its trees)  
and first editions of critically  
acclaimed critical works, that serve  
to embolden the universe of discourse  
to its real pursuit, much as when heroes of  
old slogged through fable after fable.  
Domination of cadmium yellow light, the calligraphy  
speeding up (along the river and also along walks  
which don't define it) like the attention to folds and  
scorings,  
the rapid rise of interest faraway and not that long ago.

\*

DESCANT

Piano and hedges  
and more piano  
and sometimes the piano wins.  
And sometimes the taxis are movie locations  
set apart from the double  
vision of the city elevatedly  
affixed to see. From storefront  
to riverfront, and from  
middle-income housing mismanagement  
to the unstabilized, stable  
poor. The bits of piano  
coating the hedges, turned  
with only an occasional cloud to spill,  
to fix the objects that would be there if  
they weren't; powder blue and vertical  
rather than one limit in a vast evening field.

\*

Charles North

FOR DOROTHY WORDSWORTH

After an early breakfast we hoisted sail, preferring to  
confront the falls in better weather. Within the space of an  
hour it grew black and thundered so mightily we thought the  
surface of the water would crack! We took refuge at the  
Singing School....There were students everywhere at work  
and at play, some at instruments, some at their song, the young  
in one another's arms, like birds in the trees, entirely unmin-  
dful of our presence. Lunch was pleasant, we were given a choice  
of fish, flesh or fowl. William had mackerel....The dishwasher  
was the sort to pass unnoticed in a crowd, nonetheless he caught  
our attention. For he had hung his tattered coat upon a stick  
and sang to himself, every so often clapping his hands and  
singing louder as he saw us watching him, as if to say, A man,  
is a paltry thing! unless he have music in his soul. Over the  
fireplace hung an inexpensive tile fashioned to look like gold  
mosaic. The fire danced, gyrated, inexpressible; in its move-  
ment it seemed to create objects of air, and then to retrieve  
them, as one might replace gold jewels in their box. As we sat  
by the fire, I couldn't help feeling that if I had had the  
control of my destiny, like a lord or a lady the "emperor of  
my body," I might have remained in that sensual atmosphere all  
summer long....The evening passed pleasantly, among reflections  
on the day, the past few days, and the days that were to come.

\*



ANOTHER POEM (NEW YORK REVISITED)

Spirits fill the spirit of the classic air -  
 one is Jeremiah Towle's perhaps,  
 in my walking tour of the air,  
 through columnar mythic puffs in the Grecian Steam  
 lining the flights of stairs  
 turned to stone for the daylight,  
 and one crests on the details standing by,  
 one of them today, standing by,  
 and looming in modernity. I can tell from here  
 it isn't going to work. Just skip it,  
 turning to tomorrow; it turns away  
 taking lyric utterance with it,  
 receding like pages from the ocean,  
 or entering the lips of the ocean, which is nowhere  
 considering the size of the ocean,  
 which is turbulent today, the way  
 I like it, trimmed with shadowy temptations  
 and the vacuum standing by; life after forty, mostly  
 in my head, sitting by in restive slumber  
 as you differentiate your tenants, Aphrodite,  
 in their fields of built up stones,  
 the moon-lit with your heated gaze  
 which strains my voice, which still  
 urges me to go nowhere, since everywhere has its charm,  
 or "its" charm, or its "charm", elusiveness  
 that is Mercurial, if that  
 is what the helmet, little wings and rushes  
 of wind mean to me, and by neither of us actually  
 being there; for my part my legs  
 having taken me from one to another  
 mess, and they look it, bruises and veins  
 in profusion, examples of maturity as the time fly  
 through the giant cedars and hemlocks of the city,  
 collecting the answers  
 for New York's therapy of questions,  
 while from half way around the previous year  
 I lie and bake in the sun.  
 "Or roasted?"  
 I'm not famous enough, I answer,  
 though I did get pretty boiled the other night,  
 or thoroughly scrambled, in the saucepan of conviviality.  
 I think you're probably hungry,  
 or your brains got thrown out  
 among the hardened leftovers of the evening.  
 At any rate I'm still not done; half a cup  
 of remaining sky, too many clouds of mayonnaise  
 on the fading dinner of sunlight,  
 until a breakfast of dawn  
 which comes through the skylight  
 or through the window one uses

to turn around and look at sleep with,  
 to separate it from the noise  
 my waking answers are going to be;  
 as the pining air  
 historically runs its fingers through the park  
 as business fills the day. Jeremiah Towle's  
 was the survey of an 1830's New York  
 as it is unofficially mine to do today. I could survey his  
 house

at 421 East 61st Street  
 which was taken over in 1909 by the Colonial Dames of  
 America,

none of whom was Aphrodite,  
 except that possibly all of them were; I hope  
 they enjoyed themselves,  
 heavily raised among the sleeping lintel harmonies,  
 and present at the termination of classical New York  
 which separated its noise from the answers.

"Are you done?"

Though if I had something else to say  
 I should know what it's going to be;  
 but I have an inclination to not go on with the conversation,  
 which is why I turn to another of the thousand directions,  
 on clouds of anything that moves; and now I see myself  
 separating from that part of the rest of the past  
 until from the cage of voices  
 one voice remains - but nonetheless I direct it,  
 to such a tiny pinnacle.



RECAPITULATION

Wild Assyrian armadillos  
 couldn't drag me away from this place -- Just stop it! Just  
 stop that kind of talk! The music builds,  
 raising the lid, until it is off;  
 Jean's cousin is sleeping over tonight, which I mention  
 because I seem to be in a different literary tradition tonight,  
 sort of a 'Write till you puke' school though that usually takes  
 longer than it should; anyway, I continue: Jean is painting,  
 small canvases, and I'm writing, small poems, and I have both a  
 glass  
 of wine and a glass of rum, why limit yourself  
 if people think you're an alcoholic, in the important  
 decisions. Part of an incredibly complicated dream last night,  
 was that Jean went out and bought cough drops, an incredibly  
 ordinary  
 fact, considering that she has a cough. "Camels" I say, and point  
 out  
 that when Frank, Frank O'H. gave up Camels for Marlboros back in  
 '64  
 or was it '65 he lost most of his cough pretty quick but of course  
 little  
 good that did him, I mean it wasn't what did him in. Part  
 of Jean's dream last night, or so she told me and why  
 should she lie about it, was that I had invited Joe and Eunice  
 Fearer  
 and Joe and Marjorie Singer to Jean's grandmother's  
 house in Chicago, with whom I don't get along, the grandmother not  
 the house and the city falling somewhere in between; I guess the  
 reason  
 the Singers and the Fearers were there is that they have bought  
 prints from us, though Jean knows them hardly at all but I've  
 known them for years; and in addition to this, in the dream, Jean  
 was introduced to someone who turned out to be someone else, who  
 then sat down next to her on the sofa and had it out, jerking off,  
 trying to come on her, and I was there too, apparently, and was  
 being  
 absurdly nonchalant about it, which is maybe in the right direction  
 but  
 that would be beyond even me, far beyond, like these vinyl iris  
 placemats  
 I'm nowhere near ordering, though if you're interested they're  
 four-fifty  
 apiece and 18 by 12-inches; metrics haven't really caught on yet,  
 at least with my particular poetic self: "And kilometers and kilo-  
 meters to go  
 before I watch TV..." There could be other reasons  
 why that doesn't work, but there's no point in me  
 criticizing my own materials, since someone else is almost sure  
 to. At  
 Ted Greenwald's wedding not too long ago I opined, or, rather,  
 rhetorically (I thought) asked what would become of the New York  
 School of Poetry (having noticed a number of the other guests) if

somebody blew up the building (probably by someone who hadn't  
 been invited) and a poet within earshot said that it would be  
 improved.  
 Now, eliminating the building as a possibility for "it" "it"  
 occurred to me that my work was included in this appraisal,  
 but on the other hand he was also including his own, which of  
 course  
 is self-effacing but also, considering the guests, being much  
 more eclectic  
 than the implications of my original remark, and since the  
 building  
didn't blow up I am here thanking you for your patience and co-  
 operation;  
 but I've never let a mere appraisal stop me anyway, though a  
 ground-steel  
 point on a wooden handle would probably do the trick. The wine  
 is beginning to taste acidic, I'll stick to the rum while Jean  
 is still painting and while her cousin, Martha by name, is  
 presumably  
 asleep, and while the television carries on with its endless  
 entertainment  
 and the music indicates that Frederick March's wife is dying.

\*



FABLE

Not that long ago, in the rocky mountains north of New York, there lived a kid who would not drink his milk. At first, Mother Goat and Father Goat were patient, but not for long; he refused to touch cauliflower, too, and rice, yogurt, and meringue, and feta, mozzarella, and cream cheese. Wonderbread left him unawed. "What does this kid have against white food?" they asked themselves in the dark hours, already picturing his breakfast plate ...the yoke gone, the eggwhite lying there cold. In the spring, when the doctor was most likely sober, they paid him a visit. "He's just a rude kid," Doctor Bear explained. "Don't worry about it. Here, have some absinthe." But Mr. and Mrs. Goat remained convinced that their youngest was unbalanced, if not batty. At every meal, they goaded, they negotiated, they threatened, they badgered, they raved; but the kid out-foxed them every time. At his first communion, he clammed up just as the bishop was about to lay the wafer on his tongue; a nun twisted his ear and warned him to stop horsing around. Tension and embarrassment took their toll: "Where did we go wrong?" "He got it from your side of the family." "This place is a pig sty!" "There's stuff in that refrigerator that I wouldn't touch with my bare hands!" Then one Sunday they dined on bean curd that was so rotten they all sickened and died. The kid, of course, hadn't taken a bite. After the funeral, the weasel lawyers rushed to tell the kid that besides inheriting all his family owned, he remained -- and he thought there was something fishy about this -- the sole beneficiary of a ludicrous number of life insurance policies. He sold everything immediately, high-tailed it to the city, bought a building on MacDougal Street, converted it into a restaurant and painted the facade white.

Inside, the carpeting, the ceiling, the walls, the furniture, everything was white, and albino waiters served only white food. Chez Blanc was a success; so much so, that the kid had little else to do but watch his clientele arrive in limousines, sluggish gypsies mostly, who drove white cadillacs, wore white plastic belts and shoes under ankle-length ermine coats, and fauned over each other's pinky rings during dessert. Kid Blanco, for that was his new monicker, usually sat at a corner table, where he stroked his goatee, used the sugar bowl for an ashtray, kidded the female help, called everyone, regardless of sex, Blanche, and placated crabby customers with a free cup of vichyssoise. Watching them wolf it down in such an odorless, formal place made him happy as a lark, even if he had to duck out and buy his meals elsewhere. Journalists insinuated that he was a cocky lush; friends and acquaintances, however, ventured that he was neither shrewd nor slothful, that wealth could no more disturb him than fame. As he himself admitted to the janitor one night, "Happiness is a strange feeling, Blanche, stranger than you could ever imagine." He poured another cup of milk on the rug and added, "The secret is knowing that it doesn't depend on much. No, not much at all." He poured another cup of milk on the rug and added, "The way to stay happy is to make others happy." He poured another cup of milk on the rug and added, "Keep the faith. If you distrust this world too quickly, you'll doubt the next too soon." He poured another cup of milk on the rug.



Paul Violli

NOMADICS

for Tony Towle

The Great Kagan laughs  
When Magyars, Kazars, and Ghuzz  
Bow low before his gates.  
The merchant fleets of the Rus,  
The caravans from Blughar and Sarkel  
Bring him dried fruit, honey, slaves,  
Gems, furs, salt, and wax.  
And what do they take in return? Fish bladders!  
Bishop, Caliph, and Khan,  
All pay him a twelve percent tax,  
But not me. I spit in his milk.

The Great Kagan, pride of the Asena,  
Likes to watch birds peck at the vanquished  
Until they look like thimbles.  
Weavers of the Salor, Tekke, and Youmet  
Work without rest to make the sacks and carpets  
That carry his booty and hide his brides --  
25 brides! each the daughter of a king.  
The Burtas, the Bulgars, the Pechenegs,  
Even those splendid Syrians act like Galoots  
Once inside his silver pavilion.  
But not me. I shit on his beard.

Sultan and Pope send the Great Kagan gifts.  
He splits their emissaries in half,  
Pees in their slippers and sends them home.  
Ah, you wonder, will the Great Kagan die?  
Does a cat have an ass? Already his mausoleum  
Rises like paradise behind a sunset:  
20 graves in 20 chambers hung with silk brocade,  
Floors covered with stone dust and pitch.  
And which will hold him and his treasure?  
Every eunuch and quacksalver wants to know.  
But not me. I'd rather hang rats.

Clouds flood the stars, wind covers my tracks  
Quicker than it steals my thoughts.  
I crossed a frozen river tonight  
And happened to see my soul.  
It's only a bubble in ice, or  
So the Great Kagan would say,  
But when I am Nowhere, this is my moon.

Anne Waldman & Larry Fagin

HALLOWEEN HAIKU

Bulbous-headed man like Dogon clay person  
rings bell "trick or treat"  
mouth like cave of silence, perpetual "O"

Sparkles, rouge & all attendant body work  
of the 8th Street drag queens  
tattered shadows of the imagination

3 am costume ball floating next door -  
Buzzer - "Why it's the President Kennedy brothers!"  
on the cold stair



SAVONAROLA SESTINA

to the brook across the road. Drifting  
as in a dream, drifting as in snowdrift on a mountain  
side. Will there always be a Savonarola or Pound to set the words  
for an era? Are we part of one too? Is this era immortal?  
Questions for the vortex, more ego-centric magazines arrive,  
tragic fire fate  
announced & a new kind of panda-mouse is discovered under China's  
sky

I sit because I'm wing'd with awe  
I sit because the poetry scene got sour in America in 1980  
I sit because Milarepa did  
I sit because Padmasambhava buried the Bardo Thotrol in the Gampo  
Hills & gave endless transmission to discover how death is  
liberating  
I sit because Yeshe Tsogyal appeared in a dream & showed me her  
cunt like an ocean  
I sit because the Dakinis dance over my forehead  
I sit because thoughts chase thoughts  
I sit in Puri they won't let me in the Hindu temple  
I sit in Bodnath under the 8 eyes of the great stupa  
I sit in Calcutta like being in Preta realm  
I prostrate 1000 times under the descendant of Buddha's bodhi tree  
I sit like a frog on Cherry Valley's poetry farm  
I sit by her hospital door, breathe in mother's eyeball pain  
I sit like an agent provocateur on the Orient Express  
I sit like a cow in Farmer Lang's meadow  
I sit inside the body of a nursing mother  
I sit to scandalize  
I sit because I won't take it lying down  
I sit to test old friends & lovers  
I sit because passion burns me up  
I sit because I'm a paranoid speed freak  
I sit because I deserted the poetry wars  
I sit to be exile from Ego's land.



TWO NOZZLE RELICS

especially if you sing it accurately with smiles  
 "quando ti risponda fiocchetto e piano"  
 (while I amuse you in Italian, all weak and speaking low)  
 How many poets before him sang, why they sang their lives away!  
 Baryshnikov began with a mild flirtation  
 of owls & cuckoos, asses, apes & dogs  
 who only stand & wait to dance  
 like Saturn's soft splendor, ocean's deep  
 I love you child of quiet when we have the last dance  
 You say it's 1983 & I say "No war!"  
 I'll dance on that, but do not forget belly relics  
 Live, prosper, die, & go broke  
 & dare a final bound  
 I dreamed I was at a party with all the girls  
 They like to dance to any Motown record from 1965

2

A tree stump whispers me ancient messages  
 "It's her turn up front", it insists  
 Ambitious young men & baccalaureates whose  
 shadow-families sleep by the moon prefer  
 five new tables clip this: baby relics  
 Who settles a private life boiling the brick  
 stomped scissors & I stopped them  
 in a room on a Sunday afternoon  
 To hold the bite of the spirits back since  
 conceiving of moving the rhubarb is useless  
 Raincoat sleeve indicates: which is a wind is not rain  
 or fetch me a cognac from under yon couch, please  
 Splash eggs, pinball machines & other dimensions  
 For years now the girls are rolling the carpets out to dry

\*

TALK

A man develops a highly sophisticated way of communicating. It's a language of arcane and inspired symbols, dedicated to the art of being witty. It has exquisitely abstruse features. No one can understand the man, but that doesn't perturb him. He goes for long walks, and then sits in a scenic area of the park and tells himself cunning, subtle, utterly brilliant little jokes at which he chuckles and wipes his eyes and shakes his head, knocked out by his own genius.

One day a tubby black and white dog follows the man into the park. It watches the man settle himself onto his bench and begin murmuring his witticisms. The dog laughs and tells the man he doesn't have a bad sense of humor at all. The man sits frozen on the bench. Then slowly he turns and looks at the dog. Disbelief gives way to horror. "Nobody in the whole world can understand me," he thinks, "except for this dog? How clever does that make me and my language?" The dog sits wagging its tail, looking on pleasantly. Then it grins. "You little bastard," the man hisses.

That night the man stays up until the crack of dawn, tinkering feverishly with his linguistic complex. The next afternoon, haggard, he makes his way to the park. The dog comes trotting in after him. He takes his seat on the bench. His hands are shaking. He sits on them. He looks down along his shoulder at the dog, which is seated nearby on the grass, its head cocked and uplifted in a parody of solicitous attentiveness. The man glares at it. Then he shuts his eyes and launches pell-mell into the spectacularly funny and convoluted fruits of his night's labours. He finishes, gasping. There's dead silence. The dog looks up at him blankly. Finally it says, "That's funny?" The man's head reels. He grips the bench with white knuckles. His whole career swims frenziedly before him. "You pompous little mutt, let's see you do better!" he snarls. "Okay," says the dog, and it hops onto its haunches and tosses off a series of Noel Coward-style drolleries on contemporary themes, all linguistically polished up like a batch of rare gems in a velvet box.

The look of horror turns sickly on the man's face. "Stop it, stop it!" he blurts out finally. "Those aren't funny," he adds, in a stiff, miserable voice. But it's obvious they're all killers, every one of them. For a long time the man sits staring wretchedly at the dog. The dog wags its tail quietly, looking off discreetly. Finally without a word the man rises and wobbles off slowly towards the exit of the park, his head sunk down between his shoulders. The dog gets up and follows at a distance for a ways. But then it stops; it leaves the path and goes over to a tree and raises its leg; then, smiling to itself, it trots off in another direction.

\*



Barry Yourgrau

THE JOKE

By way of a joke, a man puts on a disguise. He goes to visit his mother. His mother is also in a jovial mood; she also is in disguise. Unprepared, both of them get a shock at the front door. Neither of them says anything about it through the afternoon visit, which is strained and cautious and overly courteous. Privately each of them thinks the other is well on the way to cracking up, given the get-up, the paint, the tufts of coloured hair. Their hearts are heavy and sick when their customary TV show ends. It's with great unease that they look over at each other, that they finally stand to say goodbye. As the mother watches her son go down the garden path, a tear bubbles along the humpy contour of her papier mache nose; it is absorbed by a huge nostril. The man waves from the gate; behind his fun-house glasses, his eyes are misty. He walks all the way home, head bowed beneath its bobbing rubber antennae.

Nothing like this dismal, mysterious episode occurs again; but subtly it haunts their relationship for years to come.

Bill Zavatsky

ON THE RAINBOW

Once the rainbow meant something.  
Promise after the storm.  
Now I see its emblem sewn  
to the jackets of street kids  
wandering, smashed on angel dust,  
who must be hoping for something  
as they stagger toward Times Square.

I still believe in the rainbow.  
I wore a pretty button with a rainbow  
in the 60s, when everyone wore buttons.  
Probably I have it tucked away somewhere.  
I even remember what the button meant:  
the "rainbow coalition" which saw hope  
in the coming-together of people of every race  
--all the colors of the human spectrum--  
and how the decade ended in terrible strife  
among those of us who should have joined hands.

London, summer of 1971, I caught on film  
a rainbow overarching the whole city.  
Several years later, sitting outside at a cafe,  
my French friend Serge and I looked up to see  
another rainbow over the Empire State Building,  
flowing bannerlike across the midtown skyline.  
And at that moment he leaped up crying "Bill!"  
leaving me nonplussed, and ran to greet  
a passing friend. I thought he cried my name,  
transfixed by some revelation of the rainbow.

But it was another Bill, a poet whom by chance  
I was then writing or had just written about  
and didn't want to meet. And so I sat, sipping  
my beer, studying the sky as did others  
sitting or strolling. Maybe the point of this  
is that no one knows when a rainbow is coming  
or what it may bring in its wake.  
"Wake" as in death, the end of aspiration;  
or as in "Wake up!" -- Wordsworth's cry:

My heart leaps up when I behold  
A rainbow in the sky.

Which shows that when a poem is heading  
nowhere, you can borrow stripes  
from a poet of higher rank and stitch them on.  
Maybe that's what the kids feel,  
stumbling out of the Port Authority Terminal,  
bright rainbow insignia over their hearts,  
eating their street dinner, staring at all the lights.



FROM A TRAIN WINDOW

Only the moonlight sees.  
Only the eye of the traveler by moonlight  
turns to these poor things  
as the train crawls from the station.  
Beside the railroad tracks they struggle  
to lift themselves above the clutter  
of papers, cans, worn-down tires,  
boards nobody wants any more.  
The stark unconscious of our daylight business  
swarming to life in the moonlight.  
The ghosts of little trees,  
stalks lopped back a hundred times  
by rail gangs' tools, chastened  
by express train winds. Like wrists  
reaching out for hands to wave  
at the traveler by his window  
they poke upward, row after row.  
Or like families of blinded serpents  
frozen in the moonlight  
as the trains speed by.  
The smooth surfaces shine  
where they have been severed,  
glinting like a hundred blinded eyes.  
They hover on the raw edge  
that can't be smoothed, the ragged border  
of our greed, holding themselves erect:  
patient, benign. But growing,  
growing even as we notice them  
or fail to see. Alive  
with the knowledge that what they seek  
will not be withheld from them  
forever.

THE CONTRIBUTORS -

TIM DLUGOS lives in New York. His latest collections of poems are *ENTRE NOUS* (Little Caesar Press, Los Angeles) and *A FAST LIFE* (Sherwood Press, Hollywood). A museum exhibition based on his poems is due to open the 1983-84 season at the Grey Art Gallery of New York University.

BOB HERSHON is co-editor of the *Hanging Loose Press* in NYC. His eight books of poems include *A BLUE SHOVEL* (Hanging Loose) and *A PUBLIC HUG: NEW AND SELECTED POEMS* (Louisiana State University Press). He is also Director of the non-profit Print Center in NY that specializes in printing poetry books.

FLEMING MEEKS comes from Vermont but now lives in New York City. He used to edit a magazine by the name of *Original Sin*, and his poems have appeared in such periodicals as *The Washout Review*, *Sidelines* and *The World*.

CHARLES NORTH lives in NYC and teaches writing and literature. His books of poetry include *LINEUPS*, *ELIZABETHAN & NOVA SCOTIAN MUSIC*, *SIX BUILDINGS*, *LEAP YEAR* and *GEMINI* (collaboratively with Tony Towle). He also edited (with James Schuyler) *BROADWAY, A POETS AND PAINTERS ANTHOLOGY*.

TONY TOWLE's most recent books are *AUTOBIOGRAPHY, AND OTHER POEMS* (Sun/Coach House South), *WORKS ON PAPER* (Swollen Magpie Press) and *GEMINI* with Charles North, also from Swollen Magpie. Past awards include the Frank O'Hara Award in 1970, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in 1979 and an Ingram Merrill Award in 1982. He has also collaborated with artists such as Lee Bontecou & Jean Holabind and written extensively on the visual arts.

PAUL VIOLI will be known to those who keep up with jsc, who published his poetry in jsc5 and his book *AMERICAN EXPRESS* in the Spring of 1982. His other books include *IN BALTIC CIRCLES* (Kulchur Foundation), *HARMATAN*, and most recently *SPLURGE* (both from Sun). He has been granted fellowships by the National Endowment for the Arts, the NY State Council on the Arts and the Ingram Merrill Foundation, and is currently chairman of the Associate Council Poetry Committee at the Museum of Modern Art.

ANNE WALDMAN will be well known to many readers in the U.K. Her most recent books are *FIRST BABY POEMS* (Rocky Ledge Cottage Editions) and *CABIN* (Z Press) with *MAKEUP ON EMPTY SPACE* forthcoming from Toothpaste Press. She has just released a single in NYC entitled "Uh Oh Plutonium!" and also recently collaborated with poet Reed Bye on a text for Douglas Dunn & Dancers entitled *THE SECRET OF THE WATERFALL*.

BARRY YOURGRAU has a book of prose poems and stories out through Whale Cloth Press called *THE SADNESS OF SEX*, and his work has appeared in, amongst others, *The Paris Review*, *Poetry* and *The New York Times*. He has also written for *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Village Voice* and *Art In America*.







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## FEATURING:

*Tim Dlugos*  
*Larry Fagin*  
*Bob Hershon*  
*Fleming Meeks*  
*Charles North*  
*Tony Towle*  
*Paul Violi*  
*Anne Waldman*  
*Barry Yourgrau*  
*Bill Zavatsky*

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*jsc, 90 Ranelagh Road, Felixstowe,  
Suffolk IP11 7HY*

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POEM FOR SALE

*I am trying to write the poem,  
the short poem of the well-known  
magazines, where my work never appears.  
The poem where flower names blossom,  
the poem which sits like a little  
vase against the wall of the page.  
Some white space with a splash  
of brightness to color the prose  
of background, a respite for the eye  
among the lines of the wallpaper.  
The poem with flowers stuck all around,  
so I can get published in one  
of those magazines. Unfortunately  
this isn't one of those poems  
or one of those magazines.*

- Bill Zavatsky

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