



**LA-BAS**



LÀ-BAS: EXPERIMENTAL POETRY & POETICS

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POETRY/FICTION

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Armand Schwerner  
James Sherry  
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COMMENTARY

James Van Aken: "The Spit and Image"  
(on Michael O'Brien)  
Ted Greenwald: "Tunes" (on Lewis Warsh)

New Books/Magazines

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WHATEVER HAPPENED TO PROSOPOEIA?

pushed the curtain aside to go somewhere  
where dreams are dreams. And who is that butterfly  
anyway? Confusion is delightful for the  
customer licking his baclava  
in a blinding light of illusion, que  
los sueños sueños son, my son  
the night adventure in broad day.  
Started out talking to himself and kept right on,  
changed his name, or lost it.  
Now after hours of effort the picture  
(a hooded figure in great pain)  
seemed clear enough. He said  
que los sueños sueños sueños he  
lost his life, or found it.  
Sleeping, he ground his teeth down flat

Sleep will get the better of you  
Speech will get the better of you  
like mr typhus dolores I'll be right back  
or whatever other  
onomasia, or disappearing act

-David Ball

## THE BAD DREAMS

i

The wind makes the dream move  
only the foot of the angel was left

\* \* \*

He could feel them down there, prowling  
Which would jump up & grab him by the throat?

\* \* \*

dreaming about telling my dreams  
(they are not interested)

the house (our house)  
dreaming of dreams

ii

the bad shopping

bougies = boogie

("she was afraid

of his strange boogie woogie")

steak haché = chompmeat

melon, tomatoes = francs

pain = pain

-David Ball  
été 77 - winter 77

FALSCHE BEWEGUNG

The door was not right.

It led aside

to a room, not

in. Let's have a fight

let's make it

in the windings, let's

just go. This

two-faced face, is it

beginning, wrong, end?

Help, he said.

Was wrong,

in the wrong language

-David Ball

## THE GREAT CANON

Is there a great epic poem anywhere?  
will the alert rodent survive the hawk?  
will the drilling stop? the fat man  
push his way into the bus? the  
mountains are there, in front of you, so is the fat  
bus, the drilling, the third crumby slice  
of Sunbeam, the words "great epic poem  
concerning the adventures of the Trojan" but.  
"There" they are, the blue mountains, but  
you have to work hard to keep them there:  
otherwise they almost disappear  
or it all goes out of control  
legless Aeneas rolling & fucking  
(& there it is, my favorite line  
four beats to the nine) like  
looking for a hospitable spot  
in the canyon to write these lines  
far from the yapping loud  
those hawks flying over the cliffs make me dizzy  
Where did crazy Maro make that offer  
bowls of new warm foaming milk & so forth  
wheeling bubbles somewhere like  
the rodent from Porlock eke  
Coleridge or was it Keats on his poetic walk  
along the cliffs, or in Van Gogh's chair  
(you know, the one that is there)  
swivelling or was it reading around I  
fell into a hole

[continued



you might say of non-being. But "I"  
stops where? where "hole"? or  
"where"? "Here" moves into "there"  
& keeps moving. Like in these lines, like words into  
things. I think  
"the birds that goes round" has  
"a classical sound" or was it clouds? or  
clouds or  
hole within hole within no  
unstoppable foaming  
bubbles & "me" in the hole

-David Ball

#### STRONG COFFEE

in the soup garden  
the heart beats faster  
everything is clear  
children were running through the black fire

-David Ball

from LEGEND \*

1. Perfect impressions give you lessons in etiquette.
2. Lies perform another function altogether.
3. People were laughing at him behind his back.
4. I asked him when his balloon was going to land.
5. He blinked and went right on talking about himself.
6. When the phone rang I knew it was him asking for something.
7. At 34 he had got a lot of distance out of his semi-literate take on the world.
8. The phone rang and it was him asking for something less than a minute later.
9. Prophecy is a big pain in the ass.
10. I was always ready to do him a favor.
11. People weren't laughing at me behind my back.
12. A lot of people were afraid of me.
13. I thought it would be a good idea to work in the afternoon.
14. I thought it would be a good idea to get rid of the telephone.
15. He figured it might be a good idea to get away for awhile and think things over.
16. Very few people could even talk to him.
17. He thought he was charming.
18. He was an asshole.
19. She was fed up with the whole situation.
20. She had a big ass and smooth skin.
21. It's been a very busy time for these crowds.
22. Hap got his nose busted in Detroit.
23. I walked out onto the steps and waved to the blonde across the street.
24. Her eyes were glazed, and she held a fan half across her face.
25. The bugger was desperate in that phone booth.

26. He picked up a rusty shovel.
27. I'll use this to wipe out all trace of sin.
28. Come here, Randall, and look at this fuckhead.
29. Duke and me are very mean.
30. You could see them tilting across the dance floor with a beer bottle in both hands.
31. Me and the Owl pulled the liquor store job in Des Moines they wrote about in the Daily News.
32. Believe me it's not all happening in the zoo.
33. Who is this dumb sunofabitch?
34. He ran real fast so we called him Lope.
35. Hand me that guitar behind the chair will you.
36. You've got a way of making me puke.
37. There's no such thing as a faggot that aint a predator of some sort.
38. You know what I mean when I say I get scared in those bars.
39. Let's buy a box of bandaids.
40. It was the same old song and dance.
41. Have we ever had the filets like this?
42. I think I can see it moving.
43. The fresco looked like it was painted by a bunch of coons with nosebleeds.
44. Pour me another cup of java will you Ruth.
45. Get mad go on get mad.
46. They tortured the dog to make it learn to do things.
47. It is the shape of our alphabet that is rigid.
48. A few weeks later the dog had a nervous breakdown.
49. Just after it was over he came in and wanted to know what had happened.
50. Everybody brought people.

[continued]

51. For every complicated problem there is a solution that is short, simple, and wrong.
52. His attire was terrific.
53. We never go anywhere.
54. I am a man of conflicting inclinations.
55. Would you mind telling me who sent you?
56. She had an uneasy laugh that still could fill a room.
57. He walked to the mirror and shoved a candle in front of his face.
58. I reject most of it.
59. He contented himself by ejaculating in a somewhat lower key.
60. He came back with his hands folded.
61. I'm blind and I see everything there is to see.
62. He was a weak and crooked little man.
63. He handled the books for half an hour then went home.
64. It only takes a minute if you know what you're doing.
65. I've known her for a long time.
66. I wouldn't worry if I were you.
67. You just missed her by a cunt hair.
68. Try this spear next time.
69. His features weren't regular and his complexion was bilious.
70. Did you let her pick your pocket too?
71. The work you saw is merely a study.
72. I was in a state of inward exaltation.
73. He loved to push her around because she was stronger than him.
74. This page of numbers is your retainer.
75. I think the scene took place in the country.
76. We spent the last hour listening to Wagner.

77. I know what you need.
78. I don't know anything about your position.
79. He was too preoccupied to eat.
80. This was the end of it.
81. He was eager to match him insult for insult.
82. We watched him slowly put his life in order.
83. She was getting very worried about her looks.
84. Today my happiness depends entirely on the perfect functioning of my body.
85. I took off my sandals and showered under a waterfall.
86. I'm not ashamed to produce such ordinary risks as these.
87. He was entitled to call them that.
88. A great sea wind swept the clouds.
89. On Monday I sail for Tunis.
90. The only writing that interests me is my own.
91. I went into the orange grove, half weeping, half laughing, and completely drunk.
92. I give up and lean forward.
93. He liked to warm his milk over a candle.
94. He had every possible phobia.
95. You aren't so stupid as all that.
96. Personality asserts itself by its limitations.
97. He enjoyed certain of his deprivations more than he let on.
98. She never got out of bed before noon.
99. I should write a who book on this subject.
100. I have a hat, a necktie, and a change of linen.

-Ray DiPalma

transformed him

red  
yellow  
blue  
redgod  
yellowgod  
bluegod  
red  
yellow  
blue  
godred  
godyellow  
godblue  
red  
yellow  
blue

i can hear all the colors  
can i color all i hear?

-Dick Higgins  
new york city  
april 8, 1976

transformed for richard

-ish!

walking towards the tennis court  
she felt a global fish in her  
hurting  
she felt a global fish in her  
walking towards the tennis court

-ish!

-ish!

hurting

-ish!

-ish!

walking towards the tennis court  
she felt a global fish in her  
hurting  
she felt a global fish in her  
walking towards the tennis court

-ish!

-Dick Higgins  
milwaukee  
may 23rd, 1977

two confederate flags  
for rayjay

stars and bars  
bars and stars

more stars than bars  
more bars than stars

it was a day when  
certainly it was that yes

stars in the bars  
bars in the stars

-Dick Higgins  
milwaukee  
may 21, 1977



from THE SONNETS

11.

See denim melt. Keys turn brighter  
Dentist stuns cell damage:  
these stoles, a certain sweeter  
terrain trades a tragic dinner.

Is night so jagged and bandaged  
that cynics design its nature?  
Wagons wend past docks, stand high.  
White noise. A dive into cinders.

Have sins eyes? A mine leads  
notched, tin wedged in a tune,  
nameless children seated fission, tried

out the garnish-forbidding light.  
Potions frying while a nun  
skates the globe. Jazz contests.

12.

Call them guests, their names were  
written in water, in columns of liquid figures.  
Admit the clearing script: a gentle  
naming answers each stroke of the clock.

O neon! Warm plates seek their  
fame, handled with chemical force.  
Their antennae were other antennae.  
The day leered, ferns on the rug.

The Queen spat up. Crafty music!  
A dirge, the last catch, sticking.  
Jade stores a gallant wonder:

soupy farmland. The Power  
sat knee-deep in summer ferment,  
reined in the animals: dirt, earth.

20.

Dear cobbler, hair that was wished  
turned us, showing fins, glare...  
Fine weathered heights varnished  
abbot's scenery, in truce inferred...

A rumor of dwarfdom shivered the alley  
tenders order, vessels are gold-flocked,  
home detached wheezes lean to rally;  
trees shrugged seeing manna defrocked,

hemmed in a clock of louvered mutes,  
biding robes, grabbing an eminent gallop,  
we spring to kill the desert's flutes!

The fuel of waiting, going up!  
The blood hunter hoards--steam, sage and crease.  
foreign hymns guess low.

Sign filled: white seas.

23.

Worst done, mend a fugue,  
wish meerschaum signed  
words in the river's clearing,  
split, stitched a homemade world.

Human lightning profiles  
holsters, dust and clang,  
leaving the wind a silver dial,  
richer, shrunken and swank.

The first one reins in woe,  
wax apparitions,  
knobs and stoles,

a bird, hoops, twin  
engine delight, connects  
a water scene, produces flight.

-Robert Long

Palm

asking do I remember  
into the cut (now you are  
gone--

polished to a round by what miracle?

Then back after too much  
perfume or a dash of Indian?)

Is it for the dead the limbs shore  
in summer? ifs color shapes,

(perhaps restlessness--

the beginning & end)

lives afterward  
still to be possessed  
(hips too narrow to)  
the apex of pursuit,

the pull of glass

out of sense,

each taken to comprehend no details

but a step out of lot

Look the surface dwarfs to relax!

slipping

slipping

because the body the wind  
cools

-Douglas Messerli

AGH! FRAGONARD

the

it is

too few

is

line sharper

beyond

flesh

are by force assume

so night

no one

steel

naked & masked

day out & then

sea by

but lips is

between

edge

rigid

a cold wind

appearance

to homage

to witness

go crazy

" "

" "

the world

of laughing

and touch

Agh! Fragonard

lu la lu la

that waits

precise

of the night  
deep petals

waiting

to obsolete within

is permanently

beside

without thought

AY DI MI

to track-----

the quotidian

of machine

the sea

glassy

encore!

a yesterday

gasping coral

& sepculchre

country

are words

summer sound

the lights

even A...

as ascertainable

outer voice

garden flow

bright

(Corot is

ay di mi

to share

corrupting reverie

it seeks

intent aflame

-Douglas Messerli

SIX DEATHS IN SEARCH OF A CHARACTER

Elvis  
Groucho  
Robert  
Leopold  
Zero  
Maria

Elvis Presley	Leopold Stokowski
Groucho Marx	Zero Mostel
Robert Lowell	Maria Callas

(all died late-summer-early-fall, 1977)

Elvis and Maria were singers.  
Leopold conducted music.  
Robert wrote poems.  
Groucho and Zero were comics.  
5 men, 1 woman.

2 clowns, 2 singers, a poet, a conductor  
or, 4 clowns, a singer, a conductor  
or, 5 clowns, a singer  
or, 6 clowns.

Two Jews, a proper Wasp, a Redneck, a Greek and a Polack.

(Who made the most money?  
(How as it spent?  
(What was left?  
(How was it left?

Partners:

Elvis & Robert		Elvis & Maria
Groucho & Maria	or	Groucho & Leopold
Zero & Leopold		Robert & Zero

Maria Callas rates her 5 lovers:

- 1) Leopold
- 2) Zero
- 3) Groucho
- 4) Elvis
- 5) Robert

ham - conductor - ham  
diva - bard - rox tar!

baton - quatrain - cigar  
leer - aria - guitar!

3 had weight problems: elvis, maria, zero  
3 did not: robert, groucho, leopold

Only 2 were old . . . 4 died young.

The cocktail party, on the patio outside the pearly gates:

Leopold and Maria stand in the center, talking music, trying to avoid interruptions from Elvis . . . Groucho and Zero stand aside, leering, exchanging one-liners, talking shop . . . Robert is in a corner, aloof, out of it.

St. Peter is in black face and white jacket, circulating martinis, and as the liquor flows, Maria bursts into song, Leopold conducting: he interrupts her, they quarrel viciously about the timing . . . Elvis snarls, smirks, flirts with Maria, makes dirty body movements . . . Groucho and Zero mimic the others, dead-pan and limber - two sets of athletic eyebrows - the comedy deliberate and broad . . . Robert, grumpy and morose, passes out on the chaise, his legs stretched to the middle of the terrace.

Anagrams:

Elvis: LIP-REVELS - YES!

Maria: A SMALL CRI! . . . A . . . A . . .

Leopold: O, LOOK: PLOT! KISS! WED!

Groucho: "GO ROAR MUCH" (X)

Robert: LT., OR LOW REBEL?

Zero: ZERO'S MOTEL

ZERO MOLE ST.

-Paul Metcalf



## SURRFAUZATION OF DREAMS

I'm afraid of such progress  
and the urge to speak against the rust is gone.

I'm afraid of science  
afraid to point my head north  
that the one-sided guinea pig will die.

I'm afraid of the streets at night  
that a landslide of barking grease will  
chase me past the carbon copy of the blue light.

I've seen the ads flash past subway windows  
and parts of aircraft jettison in space  
I take them to bed with me  
put them beneath the covers  
and release them one by one.

-Charles Plymell

SUBWAY

for Guy Waid

In confined space  
unlit tubes  
descend the vertigoes  
behind the eyes

While wavey thought trains  
of someone's days,  
or hours, or histories  
speed up to their eyes  
and exit like a blur  
of a blue graffiti engine,

The lusty chewing gum of Sunday  
clacking like the sound of rails.

An ad from back of magazines  
pops to life, standing in the isle.  
Familiar fireflies in unison.

I can very easily go insane  
on the D train.

-Charles Plymell

---

Opal drifts

The turn of your side  
Indulging to remember  
The sheets spread rough

In multiple foliage of plants  
And multiple shadows from triads of light  
The hour of the blue lake  
Vaporizes into a grace of wandering

The glass of the car  
And the fast trees affirm

Arms behind the invasion of chance and plan  
The persistence of a patch of business

Coached by ephemeral thirst  
Untwisting of the ache

Body of mind, of essence held  
Wrappings undefined

Body of roots come out at night  
Propeller cells magnetic and are blind

Set to lie on a cotton parapet  
The circle of my love to come

To fall beside your silver  
Revolving to soul, speechless branches

-Donald Quatrale

A GOOD LAY IS A GOOD PERSON

lost the camel O Babes  
representatives of N.Y.  
judy's end of the rainbow  
retentive eggwhite  
business earache  
I could not kill the cockroaches  
or the monogamous poor  
by blackphone or credit card  
or chino poems

Home TM Power Elite  
believes religion is a muscle trick on the shag  
pours itself two or three fingers  
locus of control, to warmup:  
missionary position

-Donald Quatrale

## MAIDEN ELECTRIC

Already they know her  
Cool fluorescence  
Moth flutter play  
Toward tubes  
Bards of interest  
Dance on the light of  
Their heads, whorl  
China wings  
Air pudding in jars  
They break the panes, all quarters  
They let themselves come  
Leaping street lights  
From studded tent cloths  
Thousand filaments flute  
Blind green night, though hope  
Sideroads of power

-Donald Quatrale

NUDE

I dress right when I write  
CONTROLLED FROM THE RADIOSHOW

That's way WILL is  
I like it dead like intercom

No need to narrow sensual reference but does

I pray to God

I find myself

Thinking

Reembodied

Teething

-Donald Quatrale

BROWN THIGHS

at Walden Pond

Water catches peach  
Fuzz  
Filene's cotton wipes  
A vigorous print draws breath  
Umber of irregularities  
The estimate of the heart  
Of a workout  
The lure of blankets cupped  
Rectagonal placings dilate  
Fleshpressings  
The emphasis is on possible time  
Close so warm certain puff  
It's lying in earshot  
Fanning the glycerin, smoothing a certain  
Finance, waxy with amergris

-Donald Quatrale

## MEDLEY

Because he was repressed and lucky he rarely ventured into the real world. He avoided even the misty confines of the small town he lived in. You can hear her sobbing. You can also see this woman huddled at the end of her driveway adjacent to the doghouse. A solid mass of being like the jo davidson sculpture of Gertrude Stein. An immovable clearly defined lumpy presence. There are plenty of lonely kids looking for friends hoping someone new and great will suddenly move in. And yet when strange kids ever do appear the loneliest kid darts quickly back to his property and hides behind protective hedges, anxious for the invaders to be off. The wife headed the local day care center and ran it so efficiently along complex federal state and local guidelines that every independent audit proved her efficiency and sound cleverness. She too well paid for cleverness. An annual inheritance kept his bills in check. His own writing kept the family in need of nothing. She sobs and shakes. The next day she is gone. That is back in her house the windows sealed and the blinds and drapes glued to the glass. Piles of cardboard boxes and plastic bags packed with litter pose on a street corner waiting to be carted away. The lonely boy steps out from the hedges onto the empty forlorn street and scans the corner for a new playmate. Whistles plaintively. He won a National Endowment, came in second in the O. Henry awards and had a collection of stories in galley. She sobs like a small hurt child. At least for many years he had remained untouched and never edgy. An old house being cleared out by its bright-eyed dew-skinned couple with two toddlers. Woman sits huddled at the end of her driveway. Optimistic owners hoping to purge memories. The lonely boy creeps out from the hedges and scans



the corner for playmates and whistles plaintively. A woman huddled adjacent to the doghouse. She sobs and shakes. So money was no responsibility and he had eluded all others. At least for many years. Sealed windows and drapes glued to glass. Optimistic owners rushing to purge memories. Neat litter a day too early for village pickup. There is a stop sign. Cars dawdle. You can hear her sobbing. The next day she went back inside. He won a National Endowment and was repressed and lucky. She wasn't terrific looking but she really got him fantasizing then believing then doing, loving her. Again and again. A wife well paid for cleverness. All audits validated her salary and executive position. Always fantasized he naked and vulnerable and willing. But that's ok that's all right the neighbors are delighted the new homeowners are so compulsive and anxious to set up good house-keeping. Just as swiftly things fell apart. A sunny day when he began walking. Just as swiftly things fell apart. There are plenty of kids, of lonely kids looking for friends. Next day she was gone. Neat litter a day too early. For many years he had remained untouched and never edgy. Sunday day turned fierce and dark. Clouds blanketed the sun. She wasn't home. He avoided the misty confines of the town he lived in. Why? She had asked and hung up. An old house being cleaned up by young compulsive owners. Bright-eyed too. Then the sun burned through and hailing stopped. But the snow continued. She wasn't home. Wife headed the local day care center. Money was no responsibility. He had eluded the others too. Late love, he said to the house. Her empty house. Cars dawdled at the stop sign. The wife was well paid. He won a National Endowment. That's all right, that's ok neighbors are delighted. She had hung up. Why? Late love. The kid whistles plaintively. Drapes and blinds glued. The doghouse adjacent to the

driveway. Neat litter. He scribbled the best letter of his life the most honest page of his career. A collection would be out soon. A solid mass of being. He couldn't stop fantasizing about her. Never edgy. The real world. Always lucky. Late love, he began the letter. Hoping someone new and great will move in. No longer a sunny day. Snowing in fact. Then sunny again. But no one home. Hiding behind protective hedges. The next day she was gone. Avoid the misty confines. Never edgy. Untouched. With each passing day. Finishing the letter and putting it on mantelpiece. Fantasized making love then did make love. And loved. She sobs and shakes. Letter is gone. The funny sound as if it were being mailed. An old house being cleared out. She sobs like a small hurt child. Piles of cardboard litter. Terrifying skidding sound. Steps back out on an empty forlorn street. Crack in the mantel where wood has separated. Gone. She sobs and shakes. Funny sound as if it were being mailed. Fault in the mantel as letter slowly slides deep into the bowels of the house. Vanishes into the foundation, nestling nestles at the bottom. Deep sigh of broken plaster cement and dust. Why? No longer a sunny day. A private mailing slot. He was repressed and lucky. Why? Second in the O. Henry awards. Litter waiting to be picked up. House purged of memories. He didn't try any more. Protected by hedges. Just once. With each passing day. And nothing touched him. But that's all right that's ok. The neighbors are delighted.

-Henry H. Roth

the courthouse

he lets the boat drift.

I've longed to imitate a rower who has shipped  
his oars totally inhabit my spinal process, me so devoted so soft-  
voiced yes

--his small-keeled boat; lake-bounds  
eating at the shoreline--

When the Watcher disappears, he answered

--black

earth eats blackened deer--

must it be

again always hemorrhage

into revision I'm worn by this red greed

for release, did he was it matter was he said death

is a medicinal root and had he seized upon the pierced deer  
as teacher? disappearance,

the monastery

violence of what overrides sensation, no one knows

what makes a good school, picture of a boat picture

a green boat, word Boat, predicate classBoat, imitate a rower?

a rower

who lies on his back, stretched, head down in his green boat

he sees nothing but sky

the penguin-dance of the grebes out of peripheral

apprehension, monastery Regent, and who could bear that?

-Armand Schwerner

Eat

for Ray DiPalma

Eat

oh well I just

Noodle Good

Tartare Good

Semolina Good

Totem rational Good

thanks it's just that

EAT this good

mmmmmm

and you will take

grams and pounds

oh thanks I'll just

picante and saxifrage

asparagus supreme

as in em

mousse aux fines fungi

and culinary debouches

bouffes and

thanks of lot

one seed

and lots of water

-James Sherry

I Make Certain

Until no chance  
    none?  
not that blocked  
sureness  
    surliness?  
some say it  
assured  
    except  
assuredly accounted  
    no human hole hath  
just yours  
I made sure  
I made certain inquiries  
and found you perfect  
and you were  
\*

-James Sherry

Yoj

typed

leg fur

zoid

crescent

census

Zipperstein

All the king's

help

long term rational sensibility

Help

you call? You give?

What you want

I?

Want?

Yeah

But...

I? Want?

Well, well, well

Certainly

And of course then

A word beginning with the letter

What letter

What letter?

What you want

What ever

whenever

just call I'll be

Now Me Here

allow me to consult

moonad

noiq

heh

-James Sherry

The Jimmy Song

present

dent in shell

let us in

but all the irregulars  
of which we

now, well  
consider the lilies  
our words reap

I'm sure  
nothing

Well we'll  
you and us more likely  
considering

let us do  
this us is them

yes yes  
will then

but but

-James Sherry

Bra

for Bob Perelman

We fix

fill out

as fingers see

not ill, aile

you can enjoy

on so small

anything more than

enough, a touch

when you ring

we drive fast

-James Sherry





For All The

what made myself (thus  
(this) advent to no  
                  where, or that the mixing  
(version, say)           of the truth  
with equal parts of fabrication  
(harmony w/ nature)  
                  could cause such frequency  
                            of laughter -  
I mean this now -  
                  that there is always more  
                  that waits, ready, as if somehow  
it could imagine alternations  
of the future           (past becoming present then)  
looking not for something  
gone before it even has a chance,  
possibility then  
                  as anxious as its  
                            histories,  
or what we make of them  
or is made of our own volition,  
& the meanings  
                  pass beyond our grasp  
(just as) we imagine their presence -  
so much fervor in the wish  
to make it real  
                  but never quite as full -  
so let it roll  
(on)ward into history (we love)  
that depth, it makes us music

-David Wilk

6.14.78

FITS AND STARTS

The ghosts have abandoned ghost towns.  
The streets are ants foraging around

The hills of a half-eaten sandwich.  
A brand new monotonous little song

Is poised among the dying unkempt grass.  
One star is shining, the sedate flight

Of a candle in pursuit  
Of work with ascending blossoms,

And restrained by the variety  
Of approaches winter possesses.

-John Yau



## THE SPIT & IMAGE

Michael O'Brien brings to poetry an intense, mercurial personality, which he expresses with ingenuity and wit. Representing at least a decade of his personal and poetic growth, Blue Springs offers a selection of many Michael O'Briens, as well as original translations from the writings of several other poets. All this variety has been sewn together with care, so that the whole assemblage comprises a work of art.

Among the various poems in the book, my favorites are also assemblages--congeries of images and voices, concisely or even elliptically transcribed. These poems are an adventure to read, and a challenge. There is something especially important that this poet knows about language, and the reader must discover it too in order not to be left behind. It has to do with the fluency that can underlie the most fragmented verbal surface. Even when every break between lines brings an abrupt shift, a subtle continuity can flow across the changes, and make the poem a whole. O'Brien marvels at this:

What moves upon these changes? In Schubert's  
    German Dances  
the viola plays across the grain of the music,  
    fostering the  
progress by its own countermotion.

the wind's breath: you did not hear it begin

We have cause to value such continuity highly, since it has become rare. O'Brien complains of the fragmentation of present-day life, both within the individual ("the balkanization of the emotions & its proceeds"), and at the level of society:

the crazy sun  
all our lives singular  
(rhymes like shadows)

The problem is to respond as an entire, sincere person.

Everyone is crazy, trying hard  
to be fluent & ordinary  
honest dranged men

Shadowy rhyme, along with reason, is a symbol of the order and coherence we do not quite find in our lives. Rhyme is absent from O'Brien's poetry as well; it is as dispensable as the rules of grammar when a deeper fluency brings words together. This poet does not hide from the fragmentation of modern life, and he does not acquiesce in it either. His writing is a poetry of resistance.

At the same time, it is true that poetry is a way out; and O'Brien thinks it a sublime one.

voices, an instant of doorways  
fragmented words of the perfect poem, like a  
second of singing,  
windblow.

Without the flight of imagination in poems as in dreams, reality would become intolerably confining; it might be symbolized as a phonebooth, an inadequate space for expression, "a cage of need." We need the spaciousness of poetry.

a chain of cities  
where death is like algebra

I dreamed of a poem  
spacious enough for your grief to take place

Poetry is a place where genuine emotions stand a chance, and where we can hope to find the threads of continuity that elude us elsewhere.

Many of the poems in Blue Springs are intimately personal: poems about love, separation, a lapse of inspiration, the suffering of the poet's mother, the marriage of friends. On such occasions, O'Brien portrays his feelings with uncommon vividness, often without any loss of humor, as in these grumpy lines:

I come out, see my shadow, go back to sleep  
What does summer know?  
Odalisques without hands or feet  
"Lady, walk through that revolving door again"

Other poems contain more philosophical statements, which sometimes sustain themselves on cleverness and conviction, but usually partake of strong feeling. With great vehemence, for example, O'Brien protests over what contemporary mankind has lost ("give me

back to the Indians!'), namely: Eden.

locking her door, she remembers an image,  
tells herself stories, over & over  
a child's garden of Gertrude Stein.  
fantasy. parable. no garden. no sanctuary.  
he fucked her unmercifully.

This loss means, among other things: violent crime, conformity in place of scruples ("terminal conscience nose-job"), the pace of life ("78 rpm's, all the time"), lies, and mass-produced emotion:

some perpetual jukebox of the feelings

Blue Springs is also about renewal, a process in which we must imbue reality with imagination.

"I made it out of a mouthful of air"

there is never a total scandal    life turns into life  
the salad chef started out as a boxer  
you don't have to dust the sky

Significantly, this poetry involves a kind of recycling. Scraps of language, found on the street, in old books, anywhere, have been picked up and put to new use.

In this review I have barely touched on much of the contents of Blue Springs: the exquisite early pieces, the experiments, the translations, and (yes) the occasional disappointments. Worse, I have falsified the poetry by reproducing it in tatters. Let me rectify this last fault by concluding with a complete poem, which I read as a statement about contradictory responses to violence--fascination and horror--and the easy transition between them, and the inadequacy of cool reason in this state of affairs.

reason & evening: a phonebooth.  
summer. commerce. the long knives.  
the pornographic fix.

syllogism, ergo riddle.  
We are all junkies.  
Hell is paved with images.

"Was it attempted robbery?"  
"It was attempted murder."  
There is no rhyme.

crux: (jukebox)  
"You make me feel brand new"  
"You make me feel bad news."

they put on a show in Washington.

-James Van Aken

BLUE SPRINGS/poems, Michael O'Brien. Sun, 1976, 90pp., \$2.95.

## TUNES

About five years ago, finally got all stuff I'd left in various places together in one place. Was going through. Spent two weeks or so looking over each this and that piece of paper. Try to figure out from where. Throw stuff out after examining (forget about it)

College papers, year books. Letters from actual lovers, more from near-lovers. Extended correspondence with high school friend who went in army (no longer friend). Stories and poems written since junior high school. School magazines (leaf through)

Surprise to see one of them (Promethean) from CCNY, from first year of graduate school, contains poems by myself and Lewis Warsh. Didn't get to know Lewis till after that when he lived on St Mark's Place, me in midtown, hanging around (now and then) downtown

A few weeks ago, Lewis (now lives in Lenox, Mass) sent me a copy of a new book called The Maharajah's Son. Compilation of letters from friends 1960-1965

This book comes out at an interesting time. Main interest: right now (last few years) gossip, conversations, etc question of what is the 70s. is the 60s really over (?) What's totally interesting about speculation is, the 60s people talk about (my guess, 66-71) isn't the 60s I knew (and sometimes look back on, thinking about). That 60s one from when Castro won in 59 to Revolver in 65 (?) The Maharajah's Son's about my 60s

What's in it: letters over four or five years between four or five friends; middle class, smart, college material, very romantic, starting out self-consciously penning ultra-self-conscious epistles to one another filled with cinemascope epistolary feelings and emotions about one another (initially awkward, by end of book so smooth as to be almost produces of minds of characters in various favorite novels who've gotten to know each other over the years, write)

What goes on: travels, attending school, summer vacations, near-meetings, terrible crackups, success, failure, intimations of social and political causes, love affairs, marriage, abortion, dope, living together and abrupt leavings, sex-life



sortings out, struggles to get it all down on paper, make some sort of mark

Especially: have the one person to whom these letters are addressed, Lewis, budding (not aspiring) writer beginning to make his mark with early (flawed says one character, who's off studying English) long novel and group of poems (The Suicide Rates) that actually (another character says) corroborates these lives and their time, recognize each person as as special as he obviously sees himself

#### Some Cusps

"I will be leaving the 24th and it is the prospect of that departure that is making me happy. I have had some pretty weird experiences during the past week. I don't know whether to tell you now or wait till I see you.

I'll wait. They are still dreamlike in my thought. Not that they will ever leave that hemisphere but probably after I give them more thought they will become clearer.

Two nights ago as I was brushing my hair (It's getting longer, aren't you glad? I am) I heard all of a sudden on a distant radio a Mozart piece which I especially love. I went tearing around the house and found the radio just as the girl who owns it was going to turn the station. I was so thrilled. I made her leave the room (She thought I had gone nuts) and I locked the door. The piece "Eine Kleine Nacht" reminded me so much of everything and then POW right in the middle of a measure the announcer breaks in with the news: And Mozart was never again heard in Logan, Utah. It must have been some sort of mistake as I haven't been able to hear any classical music since I left N.Y. I miss everything. This wasn't one of the experiences. I just mentioned it because I happened to remember it as I was writing."

(Allegra, 1960)

"I start this letter with a complete blank in my mind as to what I am going to write. As i have lost all sense of time I don't know whether it seems to you that I should have written before this, but I have sat down a few times to write but just couldn't get started."

(Richie, 1961)

Letters in 62, 63, 64 denser looking (more type)

"In a way I can't imagine 125th Street being frightening after this staircase!"

(Allegra, 1965)

"When I first came here I was going out with an Indian Maharajah's sons but despite his millions and his gorgeous Ferrari I couldn't maintain an interest -- Maintenant c'est fini -- Have not met The Beatles although I did meet Brian of The Stones -- comme ci, comme ca. And Sandie Shaw -- very nice, at a party last weekend. Those are the glamorous aspects of my life and as you know I love glamour -- but it seems spiritually I cannot afford it -- when I stop to try to talk to someone there is nothing, nobody there -- even when drunk or high there is no means of bridging the barrier...."

(Allegra, 1965)

Comparison: captures center of gravity and wired energy of the time as well as Erje Ayden's Confessions of a Nowaday Child (plus other novels of his) captures the "art world" of the 50s Captures exactly how Aram Saroyan's The Street misses the point and follows the glamor image nostalgia de vie manqué (the boy who almost became The Graduate), The Maharajah's Son breaks you heart with lidless self-awareness

Question: these real letters? "Fiction"? Conclusion: no matter

Another question: Lewis' letters interesting? Or was he just a very good ear? Conclusion: no matter

Another question: these people still friends? Conclusion: no matter

The semi-looney Allegra is everybody's rainbow (Sgt Pepper, LBJ, and Vietnam -- pot of gold) She and Richie, who can never get together no matter how hard or how easy they try, people time's passing rapidly, never quite able to get their shit together (either singly or in groups)

-Ted Greenwald

THE MAHARAJAH'S SON, Lewis Warsh. Angel Hair (Box 718, Lenox, Mass. 01240).

## NEW BOOKS

Tom Ahern, The Capture of Trieste (Burning Deck/Windfall).  
Bruce Andrews, Film Noir (Burning Deck).  
Alan Axelrod, Records of a Chance Meeting (ad hoc Press).  
Rochelle Bijou, Entrance to the City (Buffalo Press).  
Reed Bye, Some Magic at the Dump (Angel Hair).  
Tom Clark, How I Broke In & Six Modern Masters (Tombouctou).  
Loris Essary, Stele (Noumenon Press).  
Curtis Faville, Stanzas for an Evening (L Press).  
Dick Higgins, Thirteen Serious Considerations (Dick Higgins).  
Lou Horvath, Vu (La-bas Press).  
Tapa Kearney, Cuba (Angel Hair).  
Art Lange, glee i song (ad hoc Press).  
Bernadette Mayer and Anne Waldman, The Basketball Article (Angel Hair, second ed.).  
Frank O'Hara, Selected Plays (Full Court Press).  
Bob Perelman, 7 Works (The Figures).  
Armand Schwerner, Bacchae Sonnets (Pod Books).  
John Stehman, Space Dictation (La-bas Press).  
Ron Silliman, Sitting Up, Standing, Taking Steps (Tuumba 17).  
Tom Veitch, The Luis Armed Story (Full Court Press).  
Rosmarie Waldrop, The Road Is Everywhere or Stop This Body (Open Places).

I'll be glad to provide addresses for any of the above presses.

## MAGAZINES

Bezoar XII, 1 (April 1978) (Box 535, Gloucester, Mass. 01930)  
(Paul Kahn, Fred Buck and Thorpe Feidt, eds.) Erich Obermayr  
and Douglas Woolf  
XII, 2 (April 1978) Lyn Hejinian and William Corbett.  
XII, 3 (May 1978) Dale Herd, from Dreamland Court.  
XII, 4 (June 1978) Jonis Agee, Janet Rodney/Nathaniel Tarn,  
David Wilk, Paul McDonough and Paul Metcalf.

E pod #1 (April 1978) (3022 Abell Avenue, Baltimore, Md. 21218;  
Kirby Malone & Marshall Reese, eds.) "CoAccident/Texts and  
Scores," works by Chris Mason, Marshall Reese, Kirby Malone  
and Alec Bernstein.

A Hundred Posters #29 (May 1978) (P.O. Box 415, Kenmore Sta.,  
Boston, Mass. 12215; Alan Davies, ed.) Michael Brownstein--  
excellent selections from his Oracle Night.

Interstate III, nos. 2 & 3 (1978) (P.O. Box 7068, University Sta., Austin, Texas 78712; Loris Essary and Mark Loeffler, eds.) Poetry and other works by Bruce Andrews, Charles Bernstein, Loris Essary, David Gitin, Richard Kostelanetz, Robert Long, Douglas Mendini, Opal L. Nations and many others. The best issue yet of this always interesting magazine. One of the few good publications open to younger and/or previously unpublished "experimentalists."

Koff, no. 2 (1978)(Consumptive Poets League, 27 First Ave. #9, NYC 10003; Elinor Nauen, Maggie Dubris and Rachel Walling, eds.) Work by Yuki Hartman, Elinor Nauen, Bill Kushner, Jim Moser, Chris Kadison & others. This issue's Mr. Koff is Lewis Warsh.

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, April 1978 (464 Amsterdam, NYC 10024; Bruce Andrews & Charles Bernstein, eds.) Bob Perelman on Barrett Watten, Barrett Watten on himself, Craig Watson on Heissenbuttel, Michael Lally on Donald Quatrate, Diane Ward, and Carole Korzeniewsky, Ron Silliman on Korzeniewsky, Charles Bernstein on Laura Riding Jackson, William Corbett on Michael Palmer, Susan Laufer on photograms, Bruce Andrews on Ernest Robson, Michael Gottlieb on Kit Robinson, Steve McCaffrey on "Repossessing the Word," Ted Greenwald, "But I Won't," Barbara Baracks on Jackson MacLow, Jackson MacLow on himself--and more.

June 1978, Bernadette Mayer on "Experiments," Rosmarie Waldrop on herself, Keith Waldrop on Anne-Marie Albiach, Lyn Hejinian, "If Written Is Writing," Nick Piombino on "Writing and Self-Disclosure," Douglas Messerli on Loris Essary, Ray DiPalma on "Tying and Untying," Charles Bernstein, "The Alphabet of Stride," Bruce Andrews on Michael Tolson, James Sherry on "The Politics of the Referent," Peter Seaton on "Signification."

In an earlier issue of Là-bas I called L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E the most important and interesting new magazine to be published in years. I think just a read through the above contents should indicate why this magazine is so significant. My only complaint is that sometimes the critical language used to discuss certain poets and their works is far from illuminating. But, at least, in L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E there's a commitment to searching for new critical languages. And when these expressions are successful--as they often are--L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E shines. It's hard for me to understand why any poet interested in the issues of poetics (and what sincere poet isn't?) would not want to subscribe.

Parnassus, Fall/Winter 1977 (Herbert Leibowitz, ed.). If you can wade past all the other stuff, Calvin Bendient's review of Ashbery's Houseboat Days and Thomas Mayer's review of Marjorie Perloff's Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters and Frank O'Hara's Early Writing and Poems Retrieved are entertainingly perplexing--and irritating.

Partisan Review, XLV, 2 (1978) (John Ashbery, poetry editor), poetry by Art Lange, Berandette Mayer, Gilbert Sorrentino and others.

XLV, 3 (1978), poetry by Marc Cohen, Ray DiPalma, Ted Greenwald, Lois Moyles, Paul Violi, Anne Waldman and Brian Swann. The quality of poetry in Partisan Review has greatly improved since Ashbery began as poetry editor. But some choices are puzzling.

Roof, VI (The Segue Foundation, 300 Bowery, NYC 10012; James Sherry, ed.) Bruce Andrews, Charles Bernstein, William Corbett, Alan Davies, Ray DiPalma, Ted Greenwald, Robert Grenier, P. Inman, Jackson MacLow, Eileen Moyles, Nick Piombino, Phyllis Rosenzweig, James Sherry, John Yau & others. This issue is as excellent as its line-up of contributors, which is to say that Roof continues publishing some of the best poetry written today.

Sun & Moon, no. 5 (Fall 1978) (4330 Hartwick Rd. #418, College Park, Md. 20740; Douglas Messerli & Howard Fox, eds.) Works by Bruce Andrews, Peter Frank, Loris Essary, Kenward Elmslie, Bernadette Mayer, Charles Bernstein, Tom Clark, Theodore Enslin, John Yau, Allan Kaprow, Ted Greenwald, Donald Quattrale, David Lehman, George Deem, Ronald Vance, Dick Higgins, Pat Nolan, Phillip Lopate, Barry Alpert, Sandra Braman & others. Objectively speaking, this handsome publication continues to surprise & delight. I suggest everyone buy a copy! Only \$3.00 at poetry-oriented bookstores.

Tottel's 17 (1978) (Ron Silliman, ed.) Lynne Dreyer, Bob Perelman, Lyn Hejinian, Alan Davies, Charles Bernstein & Ron Silliman. Tottel's is still one of the most important little magazines. Lynne Dreyer's work is--as always--outstanding.

United Artists Two (February 1978) (Bernadette Mayer & Lewis Warsh, eds.), Works by Alice Notley, Bill Berkson & Barrett Watten, Lewis Warsh, Clark Coolidge, Ted Berrigan and Bernadette Mayer.

Three (June 1978) Work by Ron Padgett, Bernadette Mayer, Clark Coolidge, Harris Schiff, Lewis Warsh, Kenward Elmslie & Paul Metcalf. Lewis Warsh & Bernadette Mayer have long been known for their outstanding publications, and UA is no exception. Everything published in UA is simply superb writing. What else needs to be said. Just buy and read it!

