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fiction

Pagan Babies

by Mary Fujimaki

I nearly break a molar on a Jordan almond when I hear Norman Robichaud's mother say I should go ahead and get an abortion. I should have known that's the way she'd feel about it. Norman is sitting across from me on the sofa and I try to get him to look at me. I clear my throat and cough and scratch my heels across their Egyptian carpet, but he keeps his hands and their white chubby knuckles glued together in a counterfeit echo of the hands of the statue of St. Joseph down at the church. He might be asleep or a voodoo doll or even dead except that the skin below his acne is hot pink and marbled. The dead don't look like that. I've seen them.

The curtains at the window lift for a second time and the air feels watery and warm. Some kind of bird begins to chirp in the nearly naked bush outside. It is singing and I smile inside. It must be great to live a life so copacetic when the world is so wild.

"My son does not love you. Cannot possibly love you. He's to finish college. My God, he goes to Yale. You are nothing to us. Isn't that right, Norman?" she says.

Norman says nothing.

"Well, I have to go and get ready now. It's almost time for the four o'clock mass. I hope this will be a lesson to you, Lorraine, and if there's anything I can do, let me know. Anything at all."

I look at her and say, "I could use some money if I'm to go to Boston."

"Anything but that," she says and walks out of the room, neatly dodging the coffee table and its covered milk glass candy dish of almonds. Norman and I are alone in the room and I go over and sit next to him on the sofa. I get right up close to him and try to get him to look at me. I reach up with both arms and try to hug him, in a gesture that has never come naturally to me, but he takes my arms and puts them down between us.

"Leave me alone," he says.

I smile at him. "Shall we go for a walk?" I say. "Can't we go out for a walk?"

"Stop it, Lorraine. No," he says and then he, too, leaves the room.

A book I recognize is leaning against a crewel work pillow beside me on the sofa. The design on the pillow is of a twisted blue flower of unknown species with leaves that poke holes through each other. I open the book up to page one and try to read. There

are lines and a series of black spots criss-crossing the page but I can't focus and fear I've turned dyslexic. I close the book and lay it face down. Then I lay face down on top of it. It is certain no one is watching me. The spine of the book bites across my chest in a hard straight line. I find I am able to identify the peculiar musty smell that permeates the room. The ancient overworked maroon horse-hair sofa reeks of dust and the sour odor of microscopic bits of shed human skin.

I have known Norman and his family for ages. The first time I remember seeing him is in the sacristy at St. Joe's. I am sitting in the pews back there with my little brother, Paul, and Norman is behind us struggling to find his altar boy cassock in the closet. Mass has already started and he is yanking out robe after robe, but they are all too long. The wire hangers swing and clang like any rude alarm clock as a mountain of silky white stuff begins to pile up in the last pew. When he finally finds one that fits and rushes out onto the altar, he looks to me like some sort of chubby golden cherub, passing around the golden goblets and ringing the small golden bell. But, I sense that he is no angel.

At school, the nuns tell us that we each have a guardian angel who walks behind us, whose job it is to keep us in line and keep the devil in his place. I let this guardian angel stick around for a long time. I rarely forget that he's there.

Another story they tell us is the one about the pagan babies. They tell us that by giving small amounts of money to them each week, we will be able to save the souls of pagan babies living in Asia and Africa. The certificates they give us upon personally reaching a sum of two dollars shows several small children of different colors, kneeling and praying with folded hands. They have haloes. Does this mean that once saved, they die? I don't know.

There is an intense competition over who will save the most pagan babies in Sister Reginald's fourth-grade class. I begin sneaking into Dad's top dresser drawer and taking money every week. I become top pagan baby buyer in the class. It is a crime and I have been told that it is a sin, but I believe that my guardian angel is on my side, for don't the pagan babies wear haloes, too?

The Robichauds are big in the pagan baby business. I see Norman and his sisters have several,

legally bought, certificates hanging in the hallway between the bathrooms on the second floor. These certificates are pointed to proudly, as examples, by the nuns.

A couple of years later, Norman and Paul become friends. Paul comes home from Norman's house and talks about the great meals he has over there. He makes everything going on over there sound altogether foreign and exciting.

After listening to him, I start noticing Norman's mother, Mrs. Robichaud, at the Shop 'n Save, wheeling around a cart full of things like whole legs of lamb or gaudy green bunches of broccoli and pointy endive fingers. I believe she shops every day. We see her walking the streets of Hooterville, pulling one of those two-wheel wire grocery wagons. Everyone else in town always drives the two or three blocks to the neighborhood shopping center. Some days, Mrs. Robichaud is the only pedestrian in sight.

Mom shops for food once a week. She has been working at a paper mill on the Kennebec since Dad died, and is always too tired to cook. We live on things that keep well. Canned string beans and frozen fish sticks. Boiled mackerel and cold vinegared beets. Ketchup.

The contrast is alarming.

Paul isn't hanging around with Norman much in high school. During our four years at Hooterville High, Norman and I pass each other silently in the halls. I think he knows who I am, though. He acknowledges me with his eyes. We are in the same algebra class one year, but we never speak to each other. I blame it on the Hooterville caste system.

After graduating from high school, I manage to attend an art school in Brooklyn for three years. While there, I meet and live with a pagan baby whose father owns three of the tallest buildings in Hong Kong. When Mr. Hong Kong returns home without inviting me, my nerve fails and I decide to return to Maine.

Mom has died while I am away and I miss her a little, but get over it.

I find Paul out on China Lake living in a camp he has borrowed from some friends for the summer. He seems glad to see me again, although we don't have much to say to each other.

"Nice hair, Lorraine."

"Thanks."

"How you been?"

"Pretty good."

"Busy?"

"Not now."

"How was New York?"

"Pretty bad."

"Yeah? . . . Been back long?"

"Just today."

"That your car?"

"Yep."

"Need a place to stay?"

"Yep. I do."

"You can stay here, I guess."

I go out to the car and retrieve my one suitcase and gym bag. We've never had much. It's better to have nothing. Nothing cannot be lost.

We sit out together on the porch facing the lake. It is the first time in three years I have seen so many stars. The night sky of Brooklyn is not known for its celestial pulchritude.

"See much of your old friend, Norman?" I ask Paul.

"Yep. They were all out here yesterday."

"How's he look? I can't imagine. It's been a long time."

"Oh, the same. Older."

"Did you get to talk to him at all?"

"Yep."

"He in college?"

"Nope. Never went. Was in Boston or someplace in a monastery. Went to Israel on a kibbutz."

"Yeah?"

"Yep."

I wonder about this. In the three years I've been in Brooklyn, he seems to have been traveling. But a kibbutz? The Robichauds can do whatever they want, I suppose.

I think about the absent moon and how it travels, too, across the sky and then, about how it has been violated by those fluffy white space boots lightly leaping in the dust. I don't have the same feelings for it that I had before the first lunar landing.

Banishment of the moon leaves me one from my trinity of familiars. The second was my guardian angel and I haven't seen him since Mom died. So my last tutelary is the little red devil of the canned ground ham Mom spread across bread ends for our lunch bags. It is he who is riding me most often, clinging to my back with his pointy nails, gripping his trident and whipping his long arrow-tipped tail around in the air, belaboring me.

The moon has failed to rise again in my life and my guardian angel has vanished without a trace. The red devil is in the saddle and I must like it like that because, most of the time, I let him stick around. But he seems to have been blackballed from my life out here at the lake.

Paul and I spend most evenings studying the night sky and the lake storms that approach in a gray lined sheet like some sort of heavenly cow-catcher. It happens that for several nights in a row, I awaken to a silence that first startles, then calms me. I immediately know where I am and whose bed I am in. I listen for the panicked cries of the birds before rising to boil our tea water. It is a kind of prayer.

On a Saturday, we are sitting out on the dock when Mrs. Robichaud appears in a white bathing suit with a large red rose emblazoned across her stomach. With her are several women in black

skirted bathing suits. The women all have short hair; one head is golden blonde and curly. They all hold towels around their waists until submerged.

"Paul, who are they?"

"Nuns."

I look at him.

"Yeah. Mrs. R invites them out from the convent. That thin one is not too bad looking."

"No, she's not."

I stay with Paul until the end of August. He is working in town and is gone for most of the day. I spend my time lying on the dock and swimming. Sometimes, I take the Robichauds' canoe when they're away, paddle it out to the middle of the lake, then lay down with my head on the seat and let myself drift in to shore. The wind and the currents carry me along until we stop, rubbing against budding cattails or locked in amongst a tangle of reeds and water lilies. Dragonflies dive-bomb around me. Water striders race around the canoe. The reflections below their bodies add volume to their shape. They become glass beads that are drifting in space, weightless.

Paul comes home early sometimes. He parks the car and hops down the steps to the door. I can see him from the kitchen where I am washing up.

"Saw Mr. Monroe today."

"Monroe?"

"The librarian."

"Oh. Yeah?"

"He asked how you were."

"Oh."

"I told him you were here. You ought to go see him. He wants to see you."

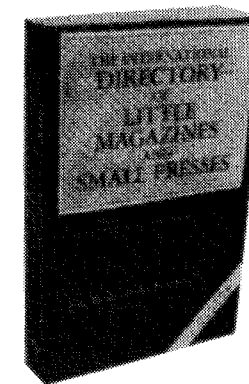
"Okay."

The job at the library is welcome. I borrow from Paul for a security deposit and find an apartment. It is on the third and fourth floors of an old house. There is an outside stairway and an inside stairway and then another stairway that curls up to an attic room. A large diseased elm tree grows outside the windows of both rooms and spreads its spindly branches over the roof and sides of the house. I can stretch my arm out the windows and stroke the bark of it or pick the veiny leaves that I lay out in patterns on the windowsills and floors. With the sunrise, the tree begins to whisper. This early morning susurrantion overshadows the first unmistakable signs of the red devil's return.

Some of the library's employees have been there for twenty years. I hope this is where I'll be in twenty years. Except for the warming presence of my demon, everything is beginning to feel full and safe. Round.

I begin work on Monday and meet Norman on Tuesday. I have been told that he is working here, but I am surprised when I see him.

I don't recognize him at first. I am behind the circulation desk being shown how to check in the



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mail, when a rather stout, rather pale and pimply person comes through the door. He is wearing baggy khakis and a faded T-shirt that has several tears and holes in places. He smiles at me. "How's Paul?" he says. These are the first words he has ever spoken to me.

We start sleeping together at my tree house right away. I can tell he is no virgin and I remember things I've heard about life on a kibbutz. I don't really like sleeping with Norman, but my devil does, and I can easily imagine he is someone else. He is heavy on me, and if I feel that I will not be able to take another breath, I hold the one I have. He keeps his hand over his mouth at the best parts, to keep from crying out, I suppose, and once tells me my hair is "so beautiful, so black." It isn't me he is with then. I keep my hair bleached white and it's very short. But we go on with it anyway. He exudes a peculiar musty odor I find offensive, but I understand that my happiness depends on how much of him I can stand.

He rushes out to go home at about one o'clock every night. The alley is full of echoes and I say good-bye to him at the top of the outside stairway, then watch him as he becomes a shadow. It hurts to have him leave like that, but he says he doesn't want his mother to know what he is up to. I don't mind. If Paul ever questions me about this or asks me what I think I am doing, I will say that Norman is a Robichaud and now I am a part of them. I will say that, through them, I will have a family and friends. I will say that I will lose my loneliness and

with it, perhaps, the final member of my guardian trinity.

I ask Norman what he would do if I got pregnant and he said, "Why, I will give you all the money I've got." I figure this is better than nothing. So, it will have to do.

Fall comes and everything stays the same. Norman comes over, then leaves early and we rarely go anywhere other than my tree house. The leaves turn a putrid pale brown, then fall. It is becoming quieter and quieter in the branches and up in my bed.

In November, Norman comes over with good news.

"I got accepted at Yale."

"Great. That's wonderful. When will you be leaving?"

"In early January."

"Yeah?"

We don't say anything for a few minutes. He looks at the floor.

"Lorraine?"

"Yeah?"

"Will you come to see me?"

"I might."

"I'll have my own apartment. I'll be able to cook tuna sandwiches and tomato soup for you. Mother is down there now, looking for a place."

"Great. That would be really great."

I force myself to keep my voice light. I would hate to go all the way to New Haven to eat tuna sandwiches and tomato soup. I was raised on tuna sandwiches and tomato soup.

I wish Mom were still alive so I could talk to her about Norman. But I know what she would have said. The same thing I'm thinking, "Dump him."

"You know, Lorraine, I wanted to become a priest." He says this to me one night in bed.

"It's a little late now, isn't it?"

"No. It's never too late."

"Go ahead then."

I can feel myself getting pretty irritated with the whole business. I have to get out of it. It should be easy enough to do. Wait until he leaves, then drop it. It has to be me to do it, though, and soon. He'd be cruel enough to keep me hanging on. In limbo.

I overhear some of the local musicians discussing the Robichauds in front of the card catalog.

"They'll be working on several things from the *Messiah* for the Christmas festival."

"Aren't they wonderful?"

"Isn't it great that they take the time to help out so much at the church?"

"They are truly blessed."

Truly.

At times, I feel as if I'm dressed in patent leather Mary Janes and white bobby socks again. At other times, I feel like some sort of heathen

Amazon, ruthlessly wallowing in the jungle, swinging through the trees in a G-string, while the Robichauds walk in single file below me, hands clasped, eyes rolled heavenward.

On January 10, Norman leaves on the Greyhound. He says good-bye to me the night before.

"Norman, you will write, won't you?"

"Of course, I will. Don't worry. I'm going to miss you."

"What time does the bus leave?"

"In the morning. I don't want you to come. Don't."

"Why not? I want to."

"No. Mother and Dad and everyone will be there. It will be too public. You'll get clingy."

Clingy? *Moi*?

I have never been clingy in my life. Not with Norman. Not even with Mr. Hong Kong. The idea of it shocks me into shutting up.

I write to Norman the next day demanding an explanation and nearly every day after that. I put a lot into those letters. I tell him what I am doing but am careful not to say anything that might sound possessive or scary. I've decided I can't afford to frighten him away.

I never hear from him.

The moon is still waning, my guardian angel is gone and the red devil is laughing at me, for sure.

It is getting on to spring. The colors of the grass are changing. Everything is beginning to look different and the days drag along behind me like the subspecies of a guilty conscience. The tree outside my window is beginning to bud and I have seen some sparrows bouncing around from branch to branch chasing bugs. I think they might like to come into the room and I leave the window open, inviting them. It would be nice to have a pet. Something to take care of.

I realize that Easter vacations are beginning and Norman will certainly be coming home. Perhaps he had been too busy to write. I'll talk to him.

By Good Friday, I am beginning to feel really ill and decide I must be pregnant. He will have to help me. He will have to contact me and do something about it. He will be too ashamed not to. He might even marry me. I'll be a Robichaud. I can hear the red devil laughing loudly.

I get out early on Saturday afternoon and start to drag myself home after one o'clock. It is easy enough to take a stroll by their house, to try to catch Norman in the window or the garden.

There are no shapes moving through the rooms and the garden chairs are empty. It is a warm day. The earth is fully thawed and smells rich and fertile but the birds are silent in the trees. One small bee is dancing around an early forsythia spray below the living room windows.

When I arrive at my apartment, Norman is waiting for me on the stairs. We go into the kitchen

and he immediately starts unbuttoning everything and has me on the sofa. Just like that. It isn't very pleasant, the upholstery is a scratchy coarse tweed, but I am used to thinking about someone else while we are doing it and so is he. I stare at a crack in the ceiling, tracing its many highways and back streets.

After he is finished, I tell him.

He starts buttoning everything right back up. Then he leaves. I hurry and follow him down the street.

"Norman," I say, "you have to talk to me. What are we going to do? If you don't do something or say something, I'm going to go to your mother."

He keeps walking and doesn't even turn around. He tries to keep me out of the house by slamming the door in front of me. But he hasn't locked it and I let myself in. It is the first time I have entered their living room, though I have seen it through the window from the street. From that perspective, everything in it had seemed ancient and gray. The true colors assault and annoy me. Deep red, gold, white.

His mother is sitting in a fat white armchair in the corner, surrounded by bookshelves. On the wall over her head are several sepia-toned prints of priests and nuns, family photos no doubt. Bits of palm from last Sunday's services curl around the right arm of a crucifix. Several objects I recognize as Greek icons are hanging over the bay window opposite me. She is knitting and reading a book at the same time. She puts everything down and sits and listens to me until I have finished my story. Then, she adds parts to it of her own.

She tells me she knows someone in Boston who can do the abortion for me. For us.

I know all about abortions. Women I knew had them and then had to force themselves to live with it. On the other hand, I have seen plenty of small children loose on the streets, abandoned and abused, in every city I have seen. And I know how it feels to be unloved. And I know how I feel: full and, at the same time, kind of empty.

So, here I am on the Robichauds' sofa.

I can feel the sepia fathers sneering at me. With my right hand, I stroke the Egyptian carpet which spreads in an oscillating pattern across the floor.

The pointy nails of my demon are digging deeper and deeper into the pale skin covering my shoulders, but I know the air outside is clean and quick and clear.

I turn my head to the side and take a deep breath away from their dust.

The above version of "Pagan Babies" was shortened slightly from the original. Mary Fujimaki is the organizer of the Chiba Writers Workshop. She grew up in a funeral home in the State of Maine. She believes in reincarnation, Konishiki, and the imminent arrival of battalions of hostile life-forms.

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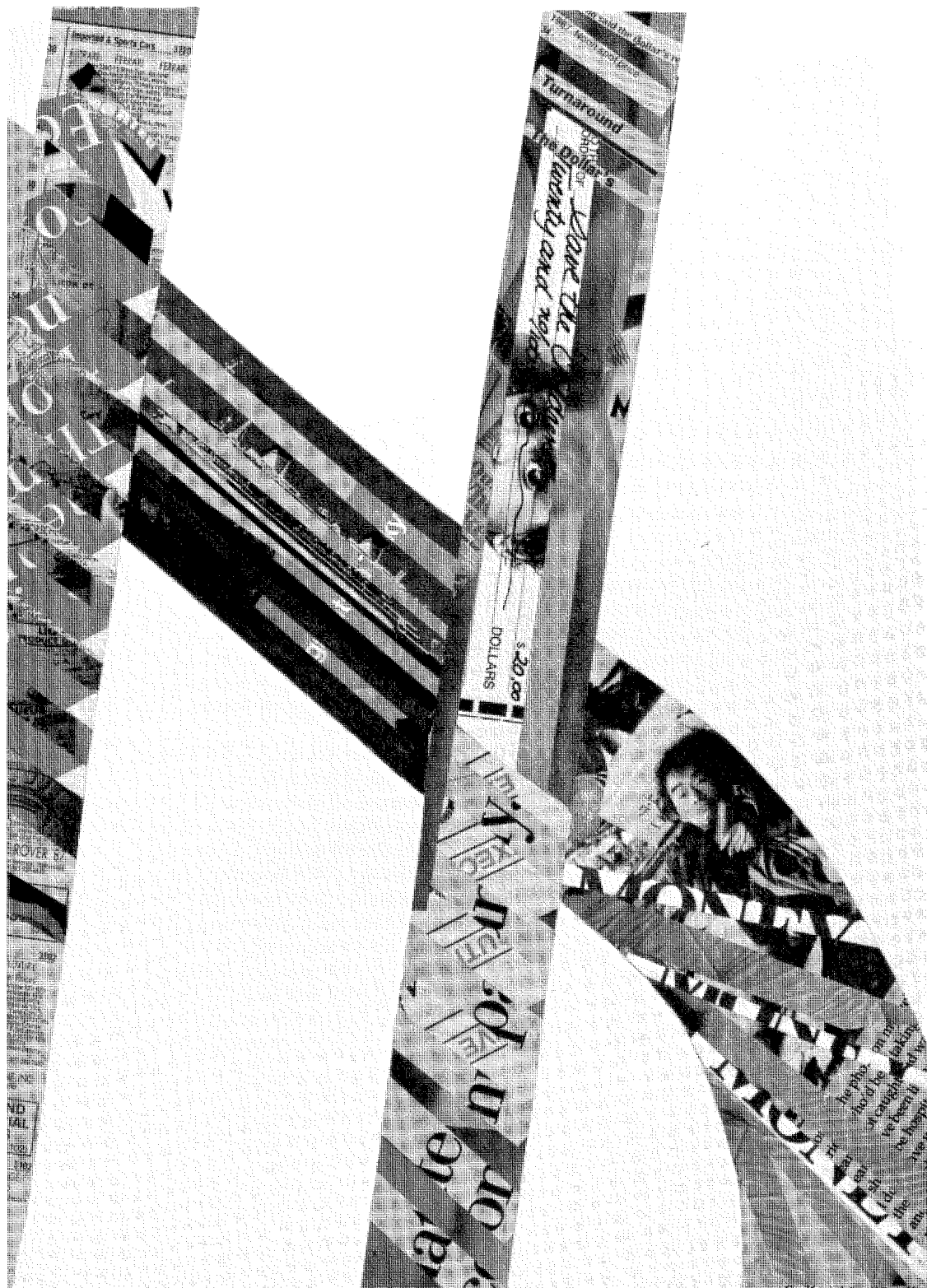
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collage by Kirby Ian Andersen

Karl Young

strike a match in the dark

the hope that keeps you awake all night
is the same that wears you out through the day

the flame can't keep from rising

the room I see for a moment
remains in the dark

from **Milestones IV**

while Mary Ann checked out leads
among politicians inside the circuit
of the capitol building the hub of the city
defined by a street in the shape of a wheel
I spent the day in special collections
at the University Library using their copy
of Codex Colombino in my reconstruction
of the original manuscript completely absorbed
in the two awesome pages where 8-Deer Tiger-Claw
the Mixtec hero conquers the sea
its great circular heart a mighty wheel
resolute and aggressive spinning off globes
commanding its waves to form their ranks
in stately towers fixed by the spear
of the victorious warrior its stern simplicity
softened and broken by mineral paints
that have chipped off and faded leaving in places
only clues of the original image
I try to restore— we laughed through supper
at the screwy antics of a State Representative
stuck in a rat race he built himself
getting his claws caught in its mesh
pulling him round through the circle powered
by the speed he built up throughout his career—
at the movie we saw before heading home
missing flakes of Colombino
flashed in my mind and disappeared
before I could grasp them— now in the car
as we glide through the silence I can see the page whole
under the circuit of stars that turns the car's wheels

Karl Young began Milestones, a classic open-ended long poem centering on cars in American life in the spring of 1970. The Colombino poem here appears around the 20th birthday of the series. Milestones, Set 1 was published by Landlocked Press in 1987. Other recent titles by Young include Five Kwaidan in Sleeve Pages (Chax Press) and Days and Years (Membrane Press). The Seafarer, a Milestones cognate, should be out from Tailin books as we go to press.

On The Beach

there is a long curved
plank of driftwood (per-

haps it is from a wrecked
ship) I find it whenever

I walk along the shore
the tide dictates its

ambulations it rides up
the sand with one wave

then slides down into
the sea on the next

only a great storm will
carry it beyond the tide-

line so that it will be-
come a permanent part of

the literal landscape
then someone can drag it

home for cutting up into
firewood my moods are

like the plank up& down
up& down being burned

may be painful but it
will bring a kind of rest.

Out In The Pasture

the sheep have formed
a nibbling ring around

the old horse all they
do is munch grass but

it's like a conversation.

&

two newborn lamb twins
have lain down near the

mother ewe they're tired
from sucking because she

keeps pulling away from
them as if she were bored

with them three white
stones against the green

field one big one and
two small ones like those

stones in the Kyoto garden.

James Laughlin's New Directions Books has published so many poets over the years: Pound, Duncan, Olson, H.D., Rexroth, Ferlinghetti, Borges, Paz, Snyder, Levertov, Corman, McClure, not to mention Williams—both William Carlos and Tennessee. His Selected Poems (City Lights) displays his own skills as a poet. His most recent books are The Bird of Indian Time (poems) and Random Essays (MoyerBell, 1989).

Fishhook

First he tried to cut it free himself,
then held out to me his pocketknife
and hand, the fishhook deep in my father's thumb.

A little sheepish and amazed, he pointed
where I wouldn't have to cut
very far to free the barb. He wasn't bleeding
much; I felt my face turn white.

I couldn't remember holding his hand before,
not as a child, nor as I did then
with the awkward tenderness
we both ignored.

Stalling, I cleaned his knife
with the flame of a match. "Hurry,"
he said, getting stern.
I could have used the moment
to remind him of the only time

we caught shiners together from a dock.
I was nine. I watched how quickly
he baited tiny hooks as the green smell of ocean
wet the wind. How easily he tore
them from the mouths of fish
as they struggled.

If I were brave, I would have held
my breath and cut quickly through
his skin. More familiar than callouses,
the palms full of lines, was their smell—
always his hands have smelled of turpentine,
metal and fish. The simple ingenuity
of fishhooks would have struck me
then, how they cannot be removed
without first hurting deeper.

But I am not brave, and he told me so
as I drove him to Emergency instead.
It's the blood, I told myself,
I'm afraid of. With his other hand,
he lit his pipe, tried
the radio for news.

Father, if I were brave,
I would ask you why
I'd never held your hand before,
why it took a fishhook in your thumb
to remind me of the waterfront, the shiny fish,
the sting of briny wind in my face.

Tina Koyama lives in Seattle and has published in many journals and anthologies including The Forbidden Stitch: An Asian-American Women's Anthology (Calyx, 1989). She received both her BA and MA degrees at the University of Washington.

fiction

Going out for Bread

by Kearn Schemm

Bob Dylan was on the record player, his nasal voice stating for the tenth time that morning that “you were just one too many mornings, and a thousand miles behind.” The record had been played perhaps a thousand times since its purchase, and it crackled like a recording of Roosevelt’s voice. It skipped now and then, but Gerry was not bothered by the crackling, by the skipping. He sat slumped over a pair of Florsheim shoes, applying ox-blood polish to them. The leather was cracked and there was a hole in the right sole, but as he spit onto the polish and rubbed with all his strength, a slight glimmer arose from the tired cowhide. He hummed along with the record as he polished.

It was hot for May. The shades were up and the sun was streaming into the room. Gerry had on a V-neck Fruit of the Loom T-shirt. Since he washed his coloreds with his whites, the collar seam was pink, the rest of the shirt an undefinable gray. His jeans were torn. His sandals showed his too-long toenails and their black cheese. His hair was unkempt and thin, his beard unkempt and thick. His humming, deep and resonant, even if a bit off-key.

The song made him think of times past. Of days when he had polished his shoes for blonde-haired girls with pert breasts, when the time after class was filled with discussions about the war and minority rights, and when sex was a sure thing.

Her breath smelled like the ox-blood gunk he was smearing on the Florsheims. Her breasts sagged and she didn’t always give. He was not enthused about his relationship with her, but at least she had given him shelter from the storm that his life had become.

Shelter was the apartment next door. Apartment 209. She also gave him occasional physical favors, a compliment to be sure. He wondered what she was doing at the moment. Probably daubing her shoes with ox-blood polish, he thought, and smiled at the mental picture of her sitting in her apartment, in a slip, toenails uncut, like a mirror image of himself.

The record ended. His shoes gleamed at him like they hadn’t since his last date with 209. He realized that he was hungry and thirsty. He went to the kitchen, past the cabinets that he and Michelina had painted enamel navy blue on a drunk urge days or years before. He opened the refrigerator, only to remember that he was out of bread, out of most

anything edible. There was a half-full bottle of Krakus pickles, a bottle of ketchup, a desiccated bit of cheese wrapped in cellophane, several beers and a bottle of vodka. “Time to buy some-fucking-thing to eat,” he said, to the ghost of his dog, to the spirit of departed, but not dead, Michelina.

Although he was only forty, he moved with the slow imprecision of a man over eighty. He shuffled to a chair that stood next to the entrance doorway. He took a seat, put on his moccasins, took a light jacket off the brass coatrack. He checked his money. Twenty dollars, enough to buy his food, enough not to anger a possible mugger waiting on the streets outside. With such thoughts they all lived in that rotting neighborhood.

Bloomfield Avenue was bright and warm. Brighter and warmer than he had expected. Pedestrians were out in force. He felt good about that—it meant that there was less chance the feared mugger would become a reality. Buses and cars zoomed up and down the street, whizzing people from better areas to worse and vice-versa.

He was unmistakably in a good mood as he walked up the avenue. He saw Minnie Menucci, the fat lady from the fourth floor. “Hey Menooch, how ya doin’?” He flashed her a smile and lifted a hand in greeting.

“How ya doin’, Gerry,” she responded. “Want a nipper? I just got a eight pack at Dicky D’s.” She extended a tiny bottle of beer to him.

“Not now, Minnie. I’ll catch ya in a half an hour for a nipper, right now I need some bread.” He walked on, happy at being recognized, at being offered a free beer, at being on the street instead of in the apartment polishing his worn-out shoes.

His first stop was Calello’s Bakery, near the water tower. They had the only brick-oven baked bread left in Newark, at least his friend Joe the baker told him as much, and Joey worked for the Calellos. There was a line as he entered the place, which was typical; their bread was really good. A young boy in front of him ordered, saying, “Gimme four long loaves and a country bread.” The gum-cracking woman behind the counter gave him four baguettes and a round loaf of white bread. Although Gerry was fifth in line, he could already tell from the smell that the bread was fresh from the oven, warm and moist.

The woman in front of him looked vaguely fa-

miliar, so he started to talk to her. “You like long bread or country bread better?” The opening was not exactly brilliant, but he had a nice smile and he had found that what you said to a woman was not so important as how you said it.

“I like rolls, if it’s any of your business,” she answered with a hostile glance.

“I think I know you,” he said, as the next customer left the counter, tearing off the end of a long loaf and stuffing the still steaming bread into his mouth.

“A lot of people say they know me, but I’m not from Newark originally.” Her eyes, like Gerry’s, followed the masticating man as he left the shop. “I’m from Bloomfield. I just moved here a couple of months ago.”

She had pretty, blue eyes and a little nose. “You Irish?” he asked.

“Nah, I’m Polish,” she said. “Polish and Scottish, if you can believe that mixture.” She smiled for the first time. She had good teeth. Gerry hated women with gaps in their teeth.

He didn’t want the conversation to die, so he told her his nationality. “I’m German and Irish, so I guess that makes us neighbors on both sides.”

She laughed at the none-too-funny joke and showed her teeth again.

“You married?” she said out of the blue.

“Nah, how about you?”

“Divorced, one kid,” she said. “The kid’s half wop, that’s why I buy the bread here, for the kid.” It was her turn to order. “Two long loaves,” she said to the gum-cracker. “I was lying about the rolls,” she laughed to Gerry.

She fumbled with her money to give him a chance to order. He had only wanted a round loaf, but the smell and the sight of the fresh baguettes were too much for him. “A sliced country and a long,” he said. He got the bread, tore off the warm heel and jammed it into his mouth. It tasted great. He pointed the remainder of the loaf at her like a pistol. “Want a bite?” he said. “It’s fresh outta the oven, best fuckin’ bread in Newark, maybe alla Jersey.”

She took a piece delicately, and placed it in her mouth in a sensuous manner that reminded Gerry of the film *Tom Jones*. “Only thing about fresh bread is that it makes you thirsty,” he said, shaking his finger and stating a fact that wasn’t one.

“You’re right,” she said, falling for his bait.

“You feel like a beer?” he smiled. “The 322 Club is right down the street.” He didn’t wait for an answer, he just started to walk toward the three neon numbers blinking their message out to the world: 322, 322, 322.

The barkeeper, “Nicky High-Pants,” was busy when they reached the two empty stools at the bar. The inside of the place was dark, it smelled of stale beer and cigars. The black plastic covering of one of

the seats was cracked, showing some gray stuffing underneath. Gerry took that stool to prove his good breeding. He pulled out the second one, the one without cracks, for the blonde.

“So, Polack, what’s your name?” He smiled at her, a sincere smile that neutralized the ethnic insult.

“My name is Yolanda,” she said. “Yolanda MacIntyre Santucci.” She smiled at the sound of her own name.

“I’m Gerard Mayer, but you can call me Gerry. Can I buy you a beer?” He noticed that he was looking at her a bit too intensely, and put it down to the fact that she was so pretty, such an improvement over the babe in apartment 209.

“Only a small one, please,” she said. “I get terrible acid from beer.”

Nick was still busy. He was slicing a chunk of provolone from a cheese that hung in a net behind the bar. The cheese was ripe, Gerry could smell it from where he was sitting. Yolanda seemed to read his thoughts. “Smells good, don’t it?” she said. They watched as High-Pants sliced some tomatoes to go with the cheese and then added the final touch: a couple of pieces of fresh Calello’s bread. The bartender slid the plate to an old man at the bar and turned to the two. “May I be of help to you gentlepeople?” he said. He smiled at Gerry and winked at Yolanda. “A cognac perhaps, or a fine French wine from our cellar?” He wiped the top of the bar as he spoke. “Or would you like a beer, Herr Mayer?” He smiled at Gerry again. “Where you been, Ger? I haven’t seen you in weeks.”

“We’ll take two beers, Monsieur LePants,” he said. “A large one for me, in a chilled mug, and a small one for the lady.” As an afterthought he added, “she gets *agida* from beer.”

Nick turned around and poured the beers, waiting for the foam to go down a bit to fill the glasses completely. “I think we want a provolone, too,” Gerry said.

They ate and drank and talked to Nick until they didn’t smell the cigars and stale beer anymore. During their third beer they kissed for the first time. It was a long wet kiss. During the fifth beer they swore eternal love to one another and had the barkeeper testify to the fact that they were a dream couple. The afternoon faded into night painlessly. At 6:38 the blonde looked at her watch.

“Oh, shit. The kid will be back any minute.” Her left eye twitched nervously. “He was with his father this afternoon,” she went on, more nervous than before. She started to get up from the stool. “I got to get to the apartment and fix him some dinner. His father’ll kick the ever-lovin’ shit outta me if there’s nothin’ on the table for him when he gets home.”

“Christ, Yolanda, I don’t want you to go,” Gerry

heard himself saying in a voice that was half child and half horny old man. "Can't you call the father and tell him to meet us here? We'll get the kid a plate of provolone for dinner."

She tried to smile but only a sad, distorted kind of lip movement manifested itself on her face. "You gotta understand, Ger, I gotta talk to Santucci, I gotta see if he can see his way clear to give me some more money." There was an intensity in her eyes that showed that she was telling the truth, and that nothing Gerry could say would make a difference. "When he's gone I'll come back with the kid, I swear to God." She turned to go, he stretched his hand out and lightly ran the tips of his fingers along her behind. She tensed a bit, felt the electric shock that he did.

"Give me your telephone number, just in case you can't get back."

She looked tired and a little drunk. "Sure, it's 481-3268." She turned and walked towards the door. He followed her. An old man came in the door just as they reached it. A breath of fresh air blew into the place, just enough to make them both realize that it was warm outside and that the bar smelled of beer and cigars. She walked out the door with him following her. He watched her disappear up Bloomfield Avenue and into the Newark night as above him the neon lights blinked out their message: 322, 322, 322. Damn warm for May, he thought as he finally turned and went back into the club.

Hours passed in the bar. Nick spoke encouraging words. The light flashed its message to passing cars, the net-enclosed cheese was sliced smaller and smaller. The last of the twenty dollars in Gerry's pocket went to an end and Nick ran a tab for him.

At twelve he realized that she wasn't coming back, gave up and walked out the front door and across Bloomfield Avenue. He noticed the crumbling curbs, sniffed the diesel fumes pumped out by a truck which barely missed him. Since he was drunk he risked the shortcut across Branchbrook Park. No one in the neighborhood took it anymore, not since the State Trooper had been shot there the summer before. As he walked down the taboo path into the park, he heard the rumble of the Newark City Subway, that streetcar with a glorified name, as it accelerated on its way to Belleville. He turned around in time to see the sparks where its runner touched the electric wires above.

No one was in the park, despite the warmth. No muggers, no neighbors, no Minnie Menucci with nippers. A piece of gravel found its way into the hole in his shiny Florsheim; he didn't bother to shake it out. He ignored the danger of crime, the broken glass, the dog shit hidden in the grass. He felt himself climbing the stairs, inserting his key into the lock, pushing the door open.

As he opened the door, as he looked at the numbers 2-0-8 on the door, the door to 209 swung open. A woman with a scowl looked out, her eyes bloodshot and filled with anger. "Where the hell you been?" she snarled.

He lifted the white paper bakery bag that contained the remains of the round loaf and the long loaf. "Just out to buy bread, that's all." Mayer shook his head. "Just out buying bread."

Kearn Schemm is a lawyer and journalist from Newark, New Jersey. He lives with his wife and daughter in Vienna, Austria, where he works with a refugee program.



artwork by John Yapp

Bob Lucky

Love Polysemous

Love polysemous
Cocks its head and crows
I want the hint of dawn eternal
Rubescent and expectant
The oaks to bow when I walk by
The weeping willow laugh
Or else let it be dark
Except for milky moonlight
Afloat in air that's scented
With a whiff of sweat
Let lanuginose raspberries
Tickle my nose
And tulips tiptoe to kiss me
Of course
There's more
There's always more

Bob Lucky is an anthropologist by training. He is interested in popular culture, especially Indian popular cinema and Hindi travel literature. Recent publications include a poem in Kyoto Journal and a piece on Hindi travel accounts of Japan in Winds. He lives in Hokkaido.

Antler

Happenstance

She paraded naked before him
to tantalize and tease him.
Plant roots follow paths blazed by worms.
Worms eat their way through the soil.
Children sleep like river in their beds,
dreamflowing.
Two snowflakes touch as they fall.
Creekgurgle and lakelapping
in an old man's ears.
Old woman senile in nursing home
humming jingles from
long-ago TV commercials.
A single granule of jackpine pollen
floating at 2000 feet
among tumultuous cumulous.

Debussy daydreaming the girl
with the Flaxen Pubic Hair.
Jail being built across the street
from Walt Whitman's house.
Porcupine alone in treetop
swaying in the wind
nibbling young maple-leaf shoots.
Backpacker discovers fawnskull
beside Memengwa Creek.
Millions of dead leaves
pierced by millions
of green grass blades.
A 10-million-year-old fossil raindrop impression
in a museum.
Listening to a conch shell in a spaceship
on your way to the moon.

Antler's most recent book, Last Words (Ballentine), contains his epic poem "Factory" among others—highly recommended. He has won a number of prizes, most recently the Madeline Sadin Award for the best poem in the New York Quarterly. At present, he and Jeff Poniewaz (EDGE, Summer, 1989) are on a reading tour of the East Coast, USA. This summer, they'll join Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, Anne Waldman, and Ed Sanders at Naropa Institute's Poetry and Ecology Conference.

Sylvia Kantaris

Lost Property

I'm on this train, you see, somewhere abroad,
 heading north or south perhaps. Outside it's dark.
 You panic when you've lost all your effects
 including passport and visas, and forget
 what your name was. I study my reflection
 in the glass. Is it mine or someone else's
 or a ghost? And then this man in uniform
 demands some document to prove that I exist?
 No use protesting when it's obvious I don't
 since the evidence has vanished with my face.
 When he looks, he can only see himself
 and says who are you kidding when I point it out.

What happens next? I have forgotten everything
 except a grey, furred umbrella. Would *that* pass?
 'Lost Property' the stickers indicated
 in a lot of languages I couldn't read.
 You don't ask questions when you're dispossessed.
 So here I am, then, clinging on like death
 to somebody's umbrella, but I lose my grasp.
 Trains don't normally have floorboards, I thought,
 as the sad old thing went down between two planks.
 Funny how you kid yourself you'll "suddenly wake up"
 travelling light in a fluorescent anorak,
 crossing every border on the map without a permit.



Before You?

Well, there was only one whose back is still
 disappearing round the same corner
 thirty years ago now. How should I know
 how many faces I've grown through and out of since?
 A few stayed fixed, in photographs. I think,
 "I loved him—only once, or thought I did"
 but can't feel how it felt. It's like
 trying to remember hunger after a feast.

This time it's different, it's real. I know it
 by the emptiness I feel in your absence;
 the way you won't yet shrink into a photograph;
 by my fear of blind spots, disappearances
 round corners—and above all our connivance
 in the act of growing faceless to each other next.

Sylvia Kantaris lives in Cornwall, England. She is the author of five solo collections and co-author of two verse fictions, the latest being The Air Mines of Mistila (with Philip Gross; Bloodaxe, 1988) which was the Poetry Book Society Summer Choice. Her Dirty Washing: New & Selected Poems was published by Bloodaxe in October 1989. Both volumes are available from the publisher (£4.95 and £6.95, respectively). Signed copies are available, post-free, from the author (14, Osborne Parc, Helston, Cornwall TR13 8PB, U.K.). "Lost Property" is a new poem; "Before You?" was first published in Stand, Winter 1989-1990, and is from a new book-length sequence tentatively entitled Lad's Love.

William I. Elliott

Dream

I took a fair stick and as I found
 The dark a cold fiesta made the moon
 A fat piñata, and I tried to smack it.
 When the flailing failed I threw a shoe
 That hit, and cleaved the thing in two.

Comets angled out like mown clover.
 I dropped the singed stick, an utter loon,
 And sang that the visceral racket
 Of the guts spilling out of the moon
 Should shower me in the black clover.
 Comets sank in the gulp of the Dipper;
 Others turned to fireflies and flew.

I wakened naked though I had been gowned
 Swatting at the pillow with a slipper.

Evolutionary Blunder: Imagination

Imagination burrowed,
 poked its snout
 up through the grass.

Bent on nothing,
 it serves no purpose
 but to make us discontent.

With it
 we conjure up an ideal:
 God, Heaven, Hell—

Perfections we can only
 pretend to
 and never attain.

Isn't the silkworm luckier?
 Lacks nothing,
 eats, and spins real silk.

History Versus Herstory

Here's how the legend goes:
 another age—the Heian—
 the inner chambers hushed,
 the air awash with plum—
 she took her well-worn brush in hand
 and 'I wet my sleeves with tears,'
 she meekly brushed.

The fact is, when he returned—
 the lady then aflame
 with rage (O, how she burned!)—
 she took her parasol in hand
 and she whacked him on his ears,
 him and his stupid, lame,
 lame excuses.

And the next day when he sends
 his servant on his knees
 to make profound amends,
 she holds another lord in hand:
 'Say she's gladly in arrears
 to another; say she's
 amortizing.'

William I. Elliott has been a professor of English literature at Kanto Gakuin University in Yokohama for 16 years. He is co-editor of Poetry Kanto, and director of the Kanto Poetry Center. His most recent books are Poetry: Forms and Contexts, 1987, and the translation of Shuntaro Tanikawa's Floating the River in Melancholy, 1988. Also in 1988, he won the Charles William Duke Longpoem Award with "An Essay On Criticism And The Art Of Poetry."



woodblock print by Sarah Brayer

fiction

Two by Yasunari Kawabata

translated by P. Metevelis

Sundown

In the court of the local post office a near-sighted woman is in a flurry writing a letter postcard. "train window. . .train window. . .train window," three times she writes then erases. "the present . . .the present. . .the present."

The postal clerk at the special-delivery window is scratching his head with a pencil.

In the kitchen of a large restaurant a waitress has the cook tie the strings of her new apron.

"You're going to make me tie it behind you? Behind is where the past is. Let me tie your breasts from the front."

"Heh!"

A poet is buying sugar! The apprentice at the sugar shop jabs the scoop into the mound of sugar.

"You know, I think I'll give up the idea of going home and frying *mochi*. If I put the sugar in my pocket and walk down the street, I might get a white inspiration.

Then the poet mutters to the throng of people he encounters going the other way, "Say there, people, you're headed for the past. I'm walking toward the future. But then, what about the people walking the same way as me? Are they going toward the future? . . .God forbid!"

The children's bicycles at the post office are doing circles around the near-sighted woman.

"Hey! Hey!"

"Dear me, I'm forgetting that I'm nearsighted. I can't even see the pure-white mound of sugar at the sugar shop. It probably just looked like he was riding in the train window with that other woman! He cares for the present me after all. . . .Excuse me! Special Delivery Clerk!"

The poet and the waitress at the restaurant are grinning.

"It's a new apron isn't it? Show me the rear. I see a white butterfly has alighted on your back."

"Hey, come on. Don't look at my past."

"Don't worry. I just happened to come up to you while I was walking toward the future."

Just then the sun, which for a while had been caught on the roof of the pawnshop's storehouse at the west end of the street, silently slipped down.

Ah. . . .All the people walking in the street release a slight breath and slacken their pace for a moment. But they have no sense of doing so.

The children who have been playing at the east

end of the street face west; each bends his legs and makes ready, then leaps into the air. They are trying to catch a glimpse of the sunken sun.

"I see it!"

"I see it!"

"I see it!"

They lie. There's no way they could see it. . . .

Sea

A party of Koreans was migrating along July's white mountain road. By the time the sea came into sight, they were already pretty tired.

They had built this road across the mountain. It had taken some seventy coolies three years to open the road as far as the pass. But they were not permitted to carry their work on to the other side of the mountain, because another contractor was responsible for the work there.

The women had departed from the mountain village at daybreak. When the sea came into sight, a sixteen- or seventeen-year-old girl doubled over, her face as white as paper.

"My belly hurts. I can't walk."

"That's too bad. Rest awhile; you can come later with the men."

"Will they come later?"

"They'll come. Like a running river." Laughing these words, the women headed down to the sea, carrying their trunks and *furoshiki* bundles on their backs.

The girl let down her trunk and squatted on the grass.

About ten coolies came along past the girl.

"Hey, what's the matter?"

"Are any more coming?"

"Sure."

"My belly hurts. I'll go later."

When she looked at the summer sea, her head reeled. The droning of the cicadas infiltrated her body. The coolies, who left the mountain village whenever they pleased, would call out to her each time a group of four or seven or two passed by her.

"Hey, what's the matter?"

"Is anybody else coming behind you?"

"Sure."

A young coolie came out of the cryptomeria woods shouldering a large willow-trunk.

"Say there. Why are you crying?"

"Is anybody else coming?"
 "Coming. . . ? I deliberately stayed until last; I hated to part with my woman."
 "Are you sure nobody else is coming?"
 "What?"
 "Are you sure?"
 "Say there, don't cry. What's the matter?" The coolie lowered himself down beside the girl.
 "My belly hurts, and I can't walk."
 "I see. I'll put an arm around you to help you walk. Be my wife."
 "No! . . . Father told me, 'Don't marry on the land that killed me. Don't become a bride to any fellow who comes from the homeland. Go back to Korea to marry.'"
 "Hmph! That's why your father died the way he did. Just look at your clothes."
 "This?" She looked down at her *yukata* with its pattern of autumn grass. "It was given to me. I wish I had train fare and Korean clothes."
 "What's in your trunk?"
 "Pots and tableware."
 "Be my wife."
 "Isn't anybody else coming?"
 "I was the last. If you wait three more years, no Korean will pass along this road."
 "Are you sure nobody will come?"

"You won't marry me. And you can't walk, can you? I'll just have to go on by myself."
 "Are you sure not one more person will come?"
 "That's right. That's why you should listen to me."
 "All right."
 "Good."
 The coolie wrapped an arm around her shoulders and stood up. They both shouldered large trunks.
 "Are you sure not one more person will come?"
 "Cut it out!"
 "Then please take me down a path where I won't have to look at the sea."

Yasunari Kawabata was born in Osaka in 1899. His literary reputation began even before he entered university in 1924, and throughout the 1920s and 1930s his short stories appeared in numerous magazines and newspapers. Kawabata went on to establish an international reputation and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1968. He died in 1972.

Born in 1943, P. Metevelis graduated with MAs in history and religious studies. After studying as a foreign student at the University of the Ryukyus in 1974 he went to work as a research fellow at Kyoto University in 1975. With principal academic interests in historical folklore and computer science he is currently a professor at Tokoha Gakuen College in Shizuoka.

Words Like Torn Leaves

by Alan Booth

Setsuko's working name was O-haru, not a particularly distinguished name, but one that suited her since she was young and fresh in all senses of the word. She was fresh in appearance and completely fresh in her attitude to what was required of her at work. The owner of the restaurant that employed her complained loudly and on more than one occasion that her heart was not in what she did; to which O-haru retorted in the sweetest of spring voices that, since time immemorial, the profession to which she belonged had had no truck whatever with the heart.

By the time she arrived for work early in the evening O-haru's fingers had been skinned practically to the bone by the blistering strings of the shamisen on which she was obliged by the codes of her profession to practice for four hours each afternoon. It was, then, something of a blessing that her lowly ranking at the restaurant did not require her to entertain the customers with shamisen performances. She was merely required to sit beside them, serve them sake from the restaurant's slender un-

commodious flasks, and say clever things to them when they tried, inadroitly, to say clever things to her. It was, she often remarked to her friends, not much of a living, but it was better than working for McDonald's, since the restaurant supplied her with elegant and very expensive cherry-patterned kimonos instead of cardboard hats conspicuously marked 'Trainee'.

Though low in rank, O-haru had a particular gift which the owner of her restaurant much prized, and this was the gift of improvising verse. Not many of her customers had this gift, and few enough of her contemporaries in the profession. So O-haru was often called upon to display her gift, especially at the formal parties that concluded the formal meals that followed the formal meetings at which formally-dressed businessmen consigned yet another restricted technology to the receptive bosom of the Leningrad shipyards or one more Southeast Asian forest to the enthusiastic attention of the chopstick-makers. Never one to deny her talents an airing, O-haru would pretend to think for a moment with her

fresh spring-like head tilted to one side and then deliver an exquisitely-crafted, though often disturbingly unconventional, gem of poetry to the flushed and attentive assembly:

Softened to silver by a jungle moon,
 The fractured teeth of a chainsaw.

It is, of course, essential that occasional verse be suited to the occasion, and this example was addressed by O-haru to a party of Komatsu executives who had just signed a contract with two Malaysian-Chinese businessmen for delivery of one hundred heavy-duty bulldozers to the tropical forests of Sabah. It is also in the nature of occasional verse that it lend itself to participation by the assembly, and so O-haru's gem received this reply from Komatsu's senior sales director:

The jungle moon lights the path
 To a future of prosperity.

To which O-haru, entering into the spirit of the game, replied before two seconds had passed:

The cicadas are silent, the moon wanes:
 Words like torn leaves.

Often, after the second or third of O-haru's poems had injected a contemplative lull into the restaurant's conversation, the owner of the restaurant would appear in person with a fresh tray of uncommodious sake flasks and praise the sales director for his enlightened contribution to the nation's—and the restaurant's literary heritage. The sales director would wave both arms above his puffed face like a man drowning in a gesture intended to convey self-deprecation but, after a little sake and a little persuasion, he would often write his composition with brush and black ink on a square board of exquisite hand-made paper that the restaurant would hang on the wall of its lobby. The restaurant did not hang O-haru's contributions since she was, after all, an employee, but this does not mean that they went unvalued by the owner. On the contrary, the owner regarded them rather as the Komatsu executives regarded the sale of heavy-duty bulldozers—as sure signs that, whatever the moon did, business would continue to prosper.

If the owner suffered any fleeting doubts, she put it down to her own lack of a poetic education. To be honest, she told one of her senior employees, she didn't fully understand much of what O-haru said, whether it came out in the form of poetry or not. O-haru was definitely a 'new-style person' the owner felt, untroubled by the application of that sinister term to a member of one of the country's most conservative professions and the admired practitioner of one of its most traditional arts. When news of

this judgement reached O-haru, her response was, typically, an exquisitely-crafted poem on the owner's chosen profession of restaurateur:

The heads of sliced carp,
 Surprised by the rasp of
 Wind through small cracks.

And when, in turn, this poem reached the ears of the owner, it caused her to stand for a second or two in the lobby of the restaurant, sucking her teeth and gazing vaguely up at the wall where, two days before, she had hung a beautifully-framed poem composed during a long session in the Plum Room by the East European sales director of the Toshiba Machine Co. How she wished she had cultivated a poetic sensibility. 'New-style person' or no 'new-style person', O-haru was a definite asset. Oh, yes . . . "Wind through small cracks. . ." Mmm. . . It was definitely a cut above McDonald's.

London-born Alan Booth has been living in Japan since 1970 and writes for various publications in Asia. He is best known for his books The Roads to Sata (Penguin, 1985) and Tuttle's Illustrated Guide to Japan (Tuttle, 1988).



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 —George Butterick

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Takeshi Suzuki

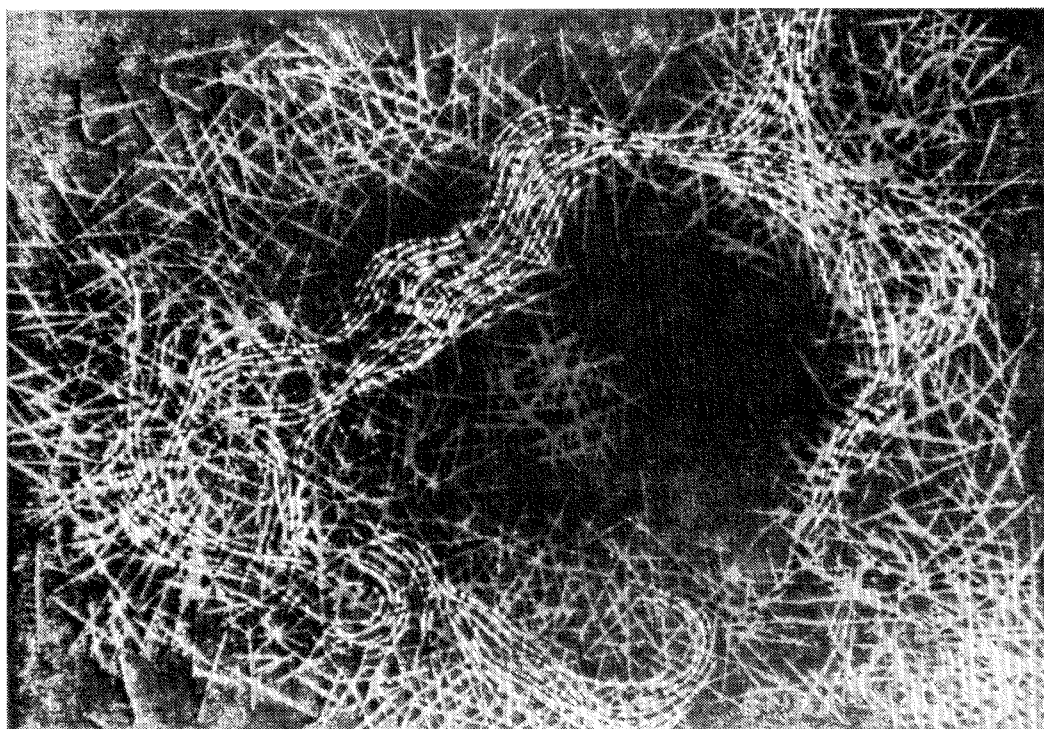
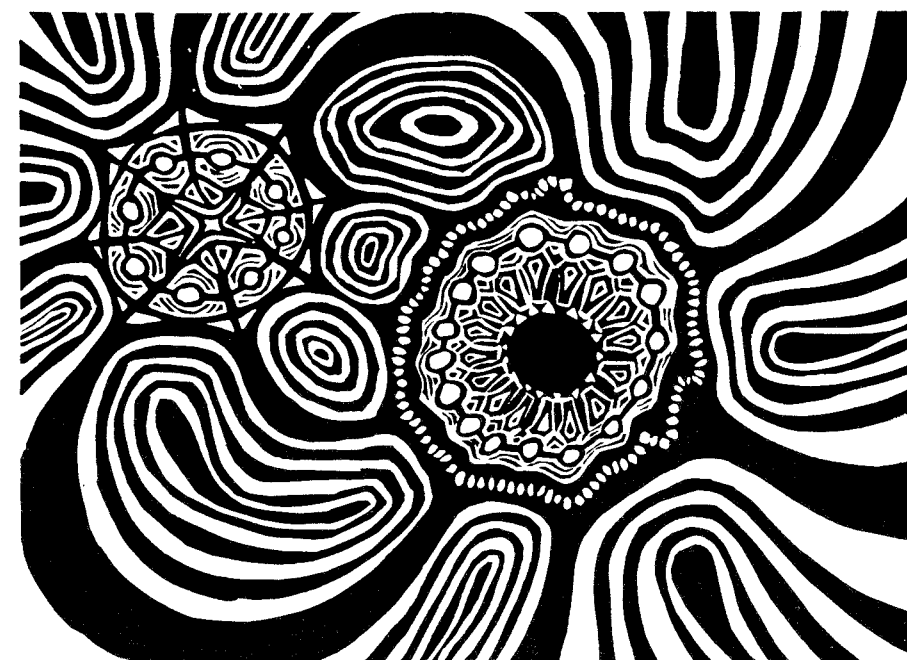
Star Conversation

translated by Michael Corr

say there are still stars in the night sky
 Shizuko, please come out and look
 those stars are all golden stars
 one or two fall finely, like rice bran
 fall, and forgetting a difficult livelihood
 with laughter
 visions become clear
 the stars are mysterious
 poor people are also mysterious
 the stars have captured the mysterious
 homes with their mysterious poor
 reduced to numberlessness

associating oneself with a night sky star
 like rice grains
 one by one the stars become visible

who is it that can
 stalk out the mysteries
 of this vision world

*woodblock print by Michael Corr**woodblock print by Michael Corr*

Akimura Kato

Snow Thaw

translated by Michael Corr

proudly
 in a snow thaw by a roadside log
 a pumpkin blossom looks like a farmer's baby's
 belly button—
 such is the nonsense of the graying wives
 as they sickle barley in the evening dampness—
 because of which the rice sheaves on the drying
 racks will not exceed 100—I think with
 such field gleanings
 the rice merchant's rice bag stabbing tube
 will show us a dear price for rice

Takeshi Suzuki wrote a poem protesting conscription in 1931, just prior to being drafted into the Taiwan Regiment of the Imperial Japanese Army. The poem here was written after he was injured in China in 1939 and subsequently interned in hospitals in Hankow, Shanghai, Hiroshima, Toyohashi, and Tokyo. On release, he convalesced in Shizuoka. He was known with several other farm-poets to be interested in anarchism and was also a Christian. He wrote in the poor farmer's rokotsu-na direct language.

Akimura Kato was mobilized ca. 1944, and on demobilization was a leader in farm cooperatives in Fukagawa City, Hokkaido, or thereabouts. He was author of at least two books including Kanrai (Cold Thunder) where this poem appeared. He was patronized by the Japanese Department of Justice as well as Fukugawa City.

Michael W. Corr, PhD, is a poet, translator, scientist, and wood-carver (see the cover of Gary Snyder's Turtle Island). He began his translations from the farm poets in 1975 as a faculty research associate with the Kyoto University Research Institute for Humanistic Studies. Three of his own poetry collections have been published; most recently Cape Alava (White Pine Press, 1981). He lives in Nagoya, and will be a featured poet in a future EDGE.

cynosure

Featured Poet: J Yarrow

Takhoma . . . Breast of Milk-White Waters

on maps called Rainier

Clouds bundle through the sky,
ocean's children:
northwest eternal rain
and clouds going inland
 going inland
 going
grey and gray boiling and churning
blue and brown, yellow
swirling against her feet, *Takhoma*
 Takhobah
 Dahkobeed

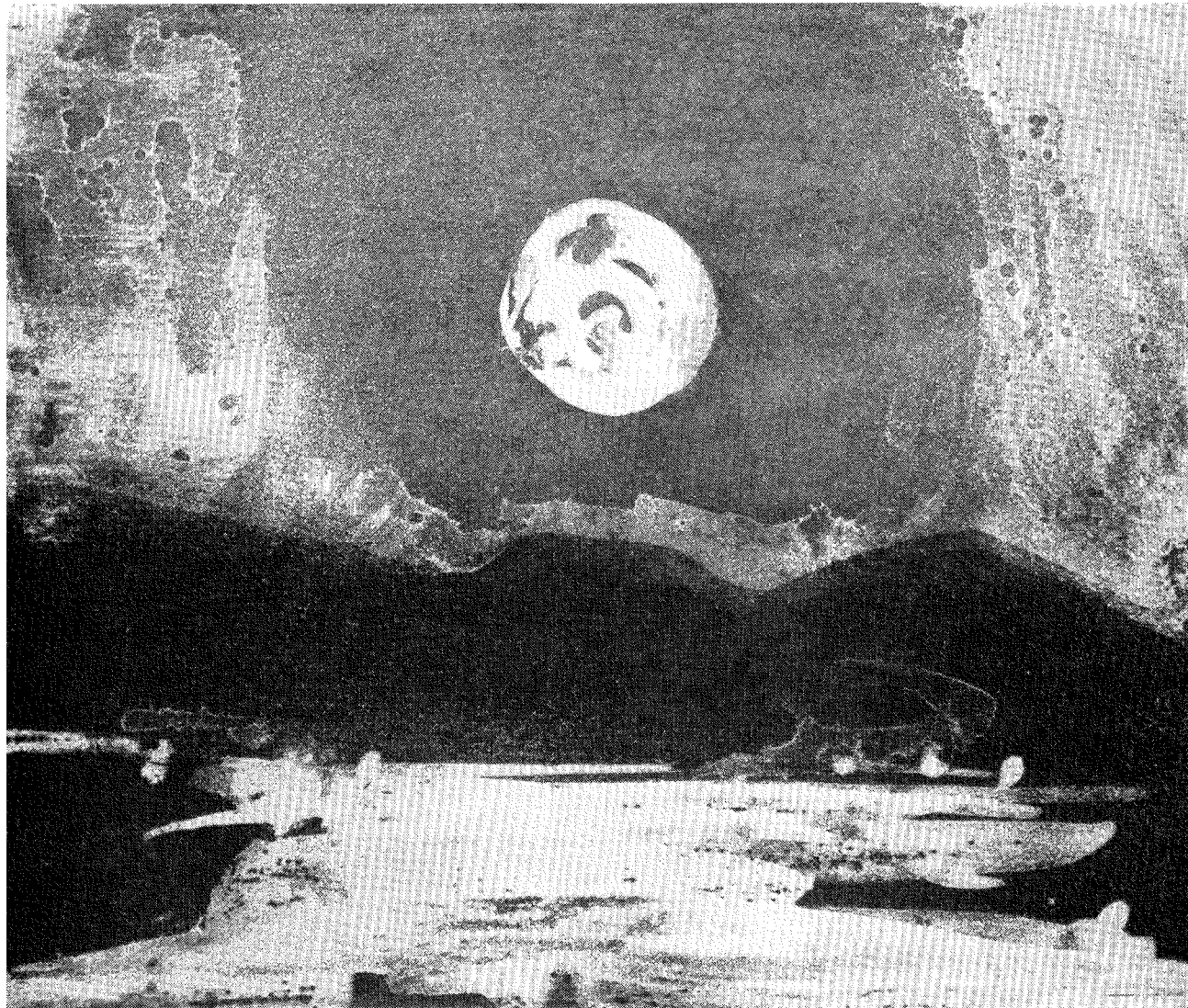
She drinks them down, spouts
glacial rivers, milk-white
streams and rains the rest
on all her roots and berries

Ocean calls his sons and daughters
his children who do not come home
they leave and do not return:

Ah' tah lah' tah lah'
Come home come
Ah' tah lah' tah lah'

Takhoma silent, glazed, draws
her trees up her slopes
sends her waters through the hills
in white streams, green rivers. The children
answer:

yes we come
we come



etching by Sarah Brayer

The Immigrant

He came, an immigrant, my father's father,
to these lush valleys, marshlands, streams,
the hills glacier-scraped to subsoil
glacier-covered with stones, gravel and silt.
On land grown over with fur and alder, he found
timber for house and barn, wood for cooking
in the dark mornings and long, dark afternoons
of rainy winters, green and damp as any
Norwegian spring, a paradise.

With work

and luck, a lot of work—and luck is what you make it—
a man could raise a family here, build
a farm to last through all the generations.
No more beatings at the hand of the sea, no more
renting land, no more logging for the bosses.
A wife, children, beds filling room
after room, and neighbors near
enough to help but not to crowd.

A man could live a life

and forget how things change beyond calculation:
children grown, and gone, the barn slowly
melting into the earth of its timbers,
family and farm both long altered,
his hard-shelled dreams now gone to weed,
though he'd find traces still of what he planted.

Forest Boulders

Bamboo's a delicate dance of leaves;
the forest itself's a dialogue:
rough rufous bark and smooth-skinned green
each define their slender lengths,
point and counterpoint, in clusters;
and above it all's the hulk of this old tree,
twenty-eight hundred years they say,
God Tree, still alive though hollow to the top.
We stand inside like hearts, beating
with amazement.

At its foot lies a rocky pool
rimmed with moss and ferns, green, and full
of black pollywogs waving their tails.
The boulders, head-high and more,
their moss-splotched grey hides,
bulky shoulders turned, lurk among red
thin-trunked cedars. They pause, heads
half-raised, as if in the middle of their grazing.
In their own slow time they'll return to it.

Fish Story

He's a fisher, watching the fleet die away.
She's developing a resort, first summer.
He stops in to fuel up on his run
down from Alaska. It's been a long season.
They're both hungry.

He invites her on a side trip to
"check out the fishing." They're making love,
—dusk and a little rain, the sportsline
overboard for one of those Pacific
white-sided flounders (i.e. illegal halibut).

They're coming, both of them,
and the line sings out.

A pause,

"Ah, it's just the boat swinging," he says.
They continue. So does the line.

Finally, he has to get up and check on it.
He was right, just the boat swinging,
but all around the boat the herring
jump and dart in the dark water,
phosphorescent blue sparks in the void.



J Yarrow, from Seattle, Washington, USA and now working as a copy editor in Tokyo, has been published in Poetry Seattle, New Mexico Humanities Review, and The Writer, among others.

Sometimes Rain

On the wall hangs a faded painting,
perhaps it's by Wang Wei, perhaps
by old Tao Yuan, no matter.
That cloud-viewing mountain
in the broken distance beckons,

and the small pavillion nestled
beside a silver cascade
hints of fragrant tea brewed
from pure spring water, a full moon
rising at the hour of poetry,

and a poet there to praise it.
Could we not go there for awhile
and savor the uncertain profound
pleasure of the stoney stream,
the hesitant sky, the kissing mist,

and a friend's deep-hearted company?
Rain descends, the kettle burbles,
the brazier warms our wrists.
Nearby a night bird calls.
Its quick trilling notes fall

to the water and rush away.
The wind scrapes against the roof,
painting the dark night tight about
the eaves, and moves on to scumble
moonlight across the moss wet rocks.

Statue of Liberty Suite

by Joe Cozzo

I. Humble Beginnings

It's hard to believe that Statue of Liberty started out as a milkmaid in Minnesota. Nowadays, with all the publicity and glitz surrounding her life, the realization is hard for her too. But those memories are there, in the dimmest stirrings of her memory, when she was a little girl toting pails from the barn. Even though she has her own island now, and minions to attend to her, she has never forgotten her humble background. She has never forgotten looking out over the land in the palest hues of evening, a milk bucket in each hand, thinking: "So much land for the wind to whistle over."

II. Swinging

Statue of Liberty loves to swing like a carefree blue-eyed girl of the South on her swing, the one strung between the Chrysler Building and the Empire State. Her robes trail after her, and her crown wobbles on her head. She's grinning. We don't often get to see her grin, but she's grinning. Onlookers below, standing on Fifth Avenue gawk up in wonder. "Look, up in the sky!" "It's a bird!" "It's a plane!" No, it's our marble girl swinging through the air and causing tall buildings to shudder with the wind trailing off her voluptuous statu- esque thighs.

III. Career

Statue of Liberty paid her dues. She did her apprentice work as an artist's model. She had to pose for this crazy Russian sculptor. He was a crude bastard. "Kick 'em off," he'd command, and she would have to lay her robe and crown and torch aside. She would gaze at them longingly, as he forced her into the most obscene poses. But she still held her pride, moving with deliberation, trying not to reveal her stretch marks (not as young as she used to be) caused by giving all those millions of births. How the poor dear shivered in that cold artist's flat with holes in the skylight letting in the cruel winter. But she had to model. How else could she make ends meet?

IV. Working Girl

Statue of Liberty was all worn out. She was exhausted. There were just so many poor and tired she could attend to. "How can you care for all of those yearning to breathe free?" she complained. "I'm tired of all this volunteer social work. I need a breather myself. And that goddamned torch! I

know everybody has her cross to bear, but she doesn't have to hold it over her head twenty-four hours in the goddamned day. I think Dame Justice definitely has better duty. I'd like to buck for her job. Sure, she has to wear that silly blindfold, but she doesn't have to hold her scales over her head like a ninny."

V. Debut

Statue of Liberty made her debut. She was a silly little filly when she came out. Almost unrecognizable in her gown of white crinoline, she was such an ingenue. But the gown did have that familiar empire waistline, and you could already determine the familiar sturdiness of her body, of her form, accentuated in the face by a strong aquiline nose. That night, however, she was the belle of the ball. Her French origins were advertised in a cool, flirtatious manner that was *bien francais*. "Oh, Mr. Beau- regard," she would croon, "Ah do believe you definitely know how to compliment a lay-dy. I definitely believe you have given my heart a pit-a-pat. What's a girl to do with such pahl-pi-tay-tions?" After the band played "Dixie," she waltzed the whole night long and wore a hole clean through her slipper.

VI. Rape

Statue of Liberty got gang-banged. The gang was the worst of their kind: Angelo "Gutsie" Fugazzi, Hideo Hakama of the Japanese yakuza, Sid "The Yid" Gorman, and among others, Pedro Gonzalez, known member of the Mexican Mafia. It was difficult finding a jurist who would try the case because of all the ties to members of the Senate who had dealings with the defendants. Lawyers for the defense stalled the trial until all of the marks and bruises on Statue of Liberty had healed, and then they capily argued enticement. "I mean, you know, man, like there she was," claimed Gonzalez, "big and blonde." "Yeah," added Gutsie Fugazzi, "we was only gonna have a little fun, ya know what I mean? And she was for it!" "Yeah, yeah," the others assented. "Youse see her now, all dolled up inner robes. But that wasn't the way she was dressed that night when she strolled into Mike's Pool Hall. Youdda swore she was a hooker. How was we ta know she was hoity-toity?"

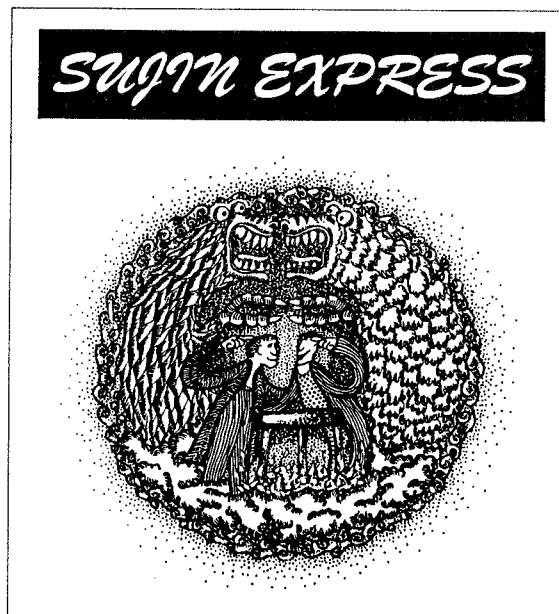
VII. Academy Award

Statue of Liberty got the Academy Award. Talk about your gala evenings. . . . The whole scene on

the street simmered under the glare of spotlights and neon and diamonds and shiny black limousines pulling up to disgorge the Beautiful People into a horde of screaming fans. The cops had their problems, and it almost got out of hand when Statue of Liberty's entourage arrived. The moment she stepped out of that limo, it was the most police could do to keep the fans from tearing the robes right off her. Only the intervention of her press agent and friends kept the fans from snatching and shattering her crown into a thousand precious souvenir fragments. But the great moment came later during the ceremony when she accepted her Oscar for Best Supporting Actress. Monroe, Taylor, Hayworth: they were all sluts beside her. Her stride upon the stage was royal. Her voice husky with emotion, she thanked her park director, her legislature, her president. When she reached the thanks to her mother, there wasn't a dry eye in the house. Hell, I cried. If you were there, you would have too. If you don't think you would've cried. . . . Well then, fuck you.

VIII. Love

Statue of Liberty fell in love. It wasn't the flashy love-at-first-sight bit, or any of that hokum. It was the deeper, more lasting relationship built on a long-term mutual acquaintance. She fell in love with the Staten Island Ferry. She loved him from rudder to bow. She loved the equilibrium of his decks, as he strode across the waves. She loved the strong, masculine timbre of his deep, resounding horn. Everything about him was magical. Even the people he carried weren't so odious. They didn't go crawling all over like insects the way her people did, up through her middle and to the top where they would hang like monkeys on her crown and say, "Gee whiz!" His people stood at a distance and



admired her because she was such a looker. She knew it made him feel proud too.

But people couldn't mind their own business. All the busybodies spoke condescendingly about mixed marriages. They said it wouldn't last. But what did they know? The canaille would never be able to estimate a love of that size. So much for your rabble! She and her lover were of the same magnificent cut—both waiting above the waves for The Day. She had the grandeur to hope. She had the scope to wait it out, waiting for that one fateful inevitable day when he would forsake his dreadful route and stop at her dock. She would proudly mount his deck, and he would carry her out past the tugs and garbage scows, past the skyline which had become so dreary to her. They would sail for the open seas in the direction of the rising sun. They might settle down in some out-of-the-way place like Ibiza or the Maldives. Then let the rabble flock to some other place for their tourist jollies—like Washington's place or Philadelphia.

Joe Cozzo grew up in the central valley area of Modesto, California, has been a social worker, restaurant owner, and builder, and is now teaching in Tokyo.

events

For the Earth II

The roof got raised again at Crocodile in Shibuya this past February 10 as musicians and poets gathered for the second For the Earth poetry reading and concert. An overflow crowd came to hear such bands as The Addicts, Voice from Asia with Minami Masato, and the Joshua Popenoe Group, and to listen to Alan Booth and Friends (the "friends" included Dan Furst, Doreen Simmons, and Elizabeth Handover) read from ecological-consciousness-raising work by James Dickey, Ted Hughes, and other earth-tuned poets. There was a moment of hesitation after Alan's Booth's intense reading of a passage from *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie, followed by an outburst of applause and shouts of "Freedom for writers!" Proceeds from the event, which was organized by Alan Kidd, will be donated to environmental groups in Japan.

—Richard Evanoff



Dan Furst boogying to fifties' rock at For the Earth II
photo by Paul Takeuchi

Chris Mosdell and Shuntaro Tanikawa

from **The Oracles Of Distraction***Tanikawa in italics, translated by Sherry Reniker*1. THE GREAT MORNING OF THE VIOLIN
HUNTERSLegend Boy said: "She lay bare beneath
The mica sheets, whisper-long and perfect."*distant drums repeatedly beating
tomorrow at dawn the women
will be hunted down*

63. LAUGH EATERS

Rain scars, swamps entomb; in this
Monsoon's hand the hennaed earth, the
Scent of eucalyptus and quassia
In our spiced hair*croquettes hot from the oven
50 yen a thin-faced swindler goes
to his teacher's grave eating one*

12. IKONIC

Burn the Gong Cinemas and the Trance Halls

*pulling off the mask speechless
unimaginable beauty of vast prairie
beyond a transparent face. . .*

7. EVERYTHING DEAD TREMBLES

Mouth once more the stripheart
Stories, the rumble poem, the
Junk-psalms and all those
Bird-woven prayers*forgetting koans, roshi chased
a butterfly. . . white ants eating
the pillars of the zendo*

25. OUT OF OURSELVES INTO OURSELVES

Every nude room, blade-bed, blonde-
Life; the rape of blue electric dusk
Through the curtains*the manroot repulsive
yet somehow adorably sweet...
causing mouths to utter the word "love"*

61. THE SNARL CAFES

Eyelids kohn and antimony; small
Heart-hunters smoking thin cigarettes
In The Eldorado Arms*pigs about to be butchered. . .
their pink noses stuck out triumphantly
into the sacred darkness*

23. THORNHAND GIRLBOYS

Through darknose streets they juggle
Human fire, animal gold; their crumbling
Apartments hung with dance shoes, sex-o-phones
And weeks of unwashed language*soldiers watching sardine-clouds
reflected in ricefields
what's the use of a local war?*

3. BALLETTTE RAIN

Mud (the 5th element) soothes
Terror with beauty; the limb-
Dancers grow in the fields,
Their arms giving prayer*hands of the tableclock unchanged
for 70 years. . . a rose bud blooms
light red on a dry plate*

77. HAVING TO FIND A NOBLE LANGUAGE

The waiters serve helleborus, dolphin-
Arc and Rhythm Drugs:
"I will live forever."*only a rabbit standing
atop Devils Mountain
fading gold sunset*

Chris Mosdell has lived in Tokyo since 1976. His lyrical collaborations with Yellow Magic Orchestra, Ryuichi Sakamoto, and Eric Clapton are legendary. In 1984, his lyrics won the Gold Prize at the Tokyo Music Festival and he won the Yuki Hayashi-Newkirk Poetry Prize in 1987. His most recent book is Laa. . . The Dangerous Opera Begins (1988, Soseisha, Tokyo).

Japan's best known contemporary poet, Shuntaro Tanikawa is not averse to working in popular genres and media. The bilingual edition of his book Floating The River in Melancholy won an American Book Award last year.

international

Language Poetry:

by Momoko Watanabe

What is "language poetry"? Who are those so-called language poets? As we all know, the idea of a school (like the Black Mountain Poets, the Beats, and the New York School) is a fiction, but a very useful one serving as a platform for getting a hearing. According to Lee Bartlett, one of the earliest critics to introduce the "school" of language poets, the first use of the term "language poetry" appeared in *Alcheringa* (new series, 1, no. 2) in 1975. In that issue Ron Silliman, a poet and sometimes-spokesman of the school, introduces the work of nine poets with the note that they are poets "whose work might be said to 'cluster' about such magazines as *This*, *Big Deal*, *Tottel's* . . . [and are] called variously 'language centered,' 'minimal,' 'nonreferential formalism,' 'structuralist.'"

For the past fourteen years this new generation of poets has been producing work seriously and vigorously, though the majority of academic critics and reviewers have often been unaware of their writings because they have been published by non-commercial, independent small presses and distributed mostly among those who are not inside "official verse culture." Yet with the publication in 1986 and 1987 respectively of two important anthologies of language poetry, *"Language" Poetries* and *In The American Tree* (giving an overview of the movement and featuring the work of poets such as Bruce Andrews, Charles Bernstein, Clark Coolidge, Tina Darragh, Lyn Hejinian, Bob Perelman, and Hannah Weiner), it was inevitable that language poetry should be recognized as the most concentrated avant-garde movement in American poetry to emerge since the "New American Poets" of the sixties. In his introduction to *"Language" Poetries*, Douglas Messerli, the editor, proudly states that "since 1976, poets associated in one way or another with this group [i.e., the language poets] have published over 150 books of poetry and criticism—demonstrating a resourcefulness and energetic rethinking of the nature of poetry both in social and aesthetic terms."

What I'd like to do here is to introduce a few major aspects of this group of poets and their writings, which anyone who is interested in contemporary American poetry should know about.

Though it is an arduous task to find some definition which applies to all language poets, some of the poets themselves have undertaken that task. Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews, co-editors of *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* (compiled from the first three volumes of the annual journal,

What is it?
Who's doing it?
How are they doing it?

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, which began publication in 1979 and continued for four years), remark in their introduction that language poets are those who "have emphasized a spectrum of writing that places its attention primarily on language and ways of making meaning, that takes for granted neither vocabulary, grammar, process, shape, syntax, program, or subject matter." Douglas Messerli further notes in *"Language Poetries,"* that these poets "have all foregrounded language itself as the project of their writing. For these poets, language is not something that *explains* or *translates* experience, but is the source of experience. Language is perception, thought itself; and in that context the poems of these writers do not function as 'frames' of experience or brief narrative summaries of ideas and emotions as they do for many current poets."

In other words, language poets oppose the poetic assumptions of "mainstream" American poetry (so-called workshop poetry and autobiographical short lyric poems drawing their imagery from natural or domestic life) in which language becomes, in the words of Bernstein and Andrews, "transparent, leaving the picture of a physical world the reader can then consume as if it were a commodity." Silliman, Steven McCaffery, Barrett Watten, and some other language poetry "theoreticians" find this typical conception of language wrong and politically problematic. In their essays, they analyze the issues of authority and economy implicit in "mainstream" American poetry and make the neo-Marxist element of their project explicit. James E.B. Breslin has written in the *Columbia Literary History of the United States* that the autobiographical short lyric has become the mainstream of American poetry today "with the dissidence of 'language poets' . . . on the left bank and, on the right, a New New Formalism attracting much attention if not all that many adherents."

Language poetry also requires new methods of reading. But what should that be? Here is the beginning of Silliman's *Paradise*:

Words slip, does type, hand around the pen a clamp, a clip. Visible breath against constructivist past. The shed crowded, write in a sweat. We celebrate the agreement of a new year, the head shrouded, bright in a knit suit. Loop conceived in a line, the spine with its regions, reasons. On another, sweaters hang by the wrist to dry. The list is sweet. You lie. The eye

Finding Another Voice

Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day* (Faber and Faber, 1989), 245 pages.
Reviewed by Hiro Kanagawa

None of us in Japan who are interested in literature can have failed to have noticed the career of Kazuo Ishiguro. Born in Nagasaki in 1954, he emigrated to Britain at the age of six and has lived there ever since. He has written two acclaimed novels set in a realistic, but what he calls "very private Japan": *A Pale View of Hills*, which received the Winifred Holtby Award for 1982, and *An Artist of the Floating World*, which won the Whitbread for 1986 and was short-listed for the Booker that same year. Now, with *The Remains of the Day*, last year's Booker recipient, Ishiguro has achieved a momentary and ironic fame here as a kind of literary Konishiki in reverse. (As with Konishiki, there is a sense that Ishiguro has breached some invisible racial barrier; this is at the crux of the Japanese interest in him.) The reaction has been hard to gauge in a typically Japanese way. You'd think that in Ishiguro, the Japanese would find their dream of internationalism. Yet the most common reaction I've heard is a dismissive: "Oh, he's a *nisei*." Meanwhile, *The Japan Times* has happily announced "the birth of the Anglo-Japanese novel."

The racial identity of *The Remains of the Day* and its author can only matter to those who have not read the book. Soon after beginning it, the reader forgets there is an author at all. There is only the voice of Stevens, a grand old English butler, and the narrator of this slim and beautiful memoir. It has already been widely stated that this "voice" is the book's major achievement and I must agree; in an age when so many writers are so famously reclusive (their egos defy concealment), it is refreshing to have an author disappear from his own book and leave us to read in peace.

We join the butler, Stevens, as he prepares to embark on a six-day "expedition" to the West Country, his first such vacation in many decades of service at Darlington Hall. For Stevens, it is a time of introspection. Lord Darlington, the great lord to whom Stevens has dedicated his life, has died a disgraced man. Under his new American employer, Mr Farraday, Stevens has only a skeletal staff of four, and much of Darlington Hall is dust-sheeted. Still, Stevens begins to believe he is overworked; he is disturbed by a "series of small errors" he has made in recent months. Compounding matters, Mr Farraday bewilders the butler with frequent "bantering remarks," and Stevens is plagued by worries that he is expected to reciprocate with banter of his

own. But what really preoccupies his mind is a letter he has received from Miss Kenton, housekeeper at Darlington Hall during its heyday, suggesting that her marriage is failing and that she yearns to return to the great house. Stevens' own nostalgia for those halcyon days is stirred by the letter. And so he sets out on his "expedition," ostensibly to visit Miss Kenton and rehire her as housekeeper at Darlington Hall.

Along the way, Stevens recalls a triumphal career in the service of Lord Darlington, and digresses into discussions of such issues as: The Nature of Dignity, What is a Great Butler? (And Why is He, As a Rule, British?) What is the Best Silver Polish? and, What Makes the British Landscape the Greatest in the World? As he travels deeper into his memories, he eulogizes his father ("the embodiment of 'dignity'"), defends Lord Darlington from the "nonsense" which has sullied his name, and proudly recounts "events of a global significance" in which he, as butler, played a small role.

This may sound like tame material, but don't be deceived. True, the greatest violence done to Stevens' person is the muddying of his trouser turn-ups, and the worst experience he must endure is spending an evening chatting with people he calls "broad and agricultural." The word "amateur" is the foulest language encountered in these pages, and the only mention of something as messy and un-British as procreation occurs when Lord Darlington asks Stevens to explain "the facts of life" to a godson, soon to be married. But one is enthralled. Indeed, one admires the book all the more for being funny, startling, suspenseful and heart-breaking without resorting to the 8 million variations on sex, violence, and schizophrenia which infest even the best of our modern literature.

This is not to say that *The Remains of the Day* is merely a pleasant entertainment. Its juxtaposition of Stevens' ideas of dignity, loyalty, and duty, with the attitudes which lead to fascism, racism, and class inequality are disturbing and damning, all the more so because we, too, are implicated. When faced with the huge social injustices and problems of our day, we have all asked ourselves: "What must I do?" and most of us have found a way to justify doing very little. But if you are honest, you will find recognition in these pages, and that recognition will shame you.

Of course, no book is perfect and, to be fair, this book is flawed by the inexplicable absence of any

mention of Stevens' mother. Stevens tells us about his adoration and emulation of his father, and even mentions an obscure brother killed in WWI. It seems unbelievable, then, that his mother's presence in his life would be so negligible as to merit no mention. It is to the book's credit that one actually finds oneself blaming Stevens, not Ishiguro, for this omission. Still, if Stevens has deliberately ignored his mother, I, for one, would like to know why.

A more serious problem emerges if one views *The Remains of the Day* in relation to Ishiguro's previous effort, *An Artist of the Floating World*. The two works are, in fact, almost the same book, addressing virtually identical issues and themes, at the same pace, in the same digressive style, in what are, unfortunately, virtually identical narrative

voices. Stevens' voice is perfect in *The Remains of the Day* but, remarkably, it is also the voice of the Japanese painter, Ono, narrator of *An Artist of the Floating World*. I read *The Remains of the Day* first, and found it impossible to enjoy *An Artist of the Floating World* afterwards. I wonder, then, if someone who is already familiar with the earlier book will be distracted by an English butler who sounds remarkably like a Japanese painter.

These issues aside, *The Remains of the Day* is near-perfect as it meanders along to its quiet and melancholy epiphany. The last few pages, indeed the last paragraph, when Stevens achieves a realization about "this whole matter of bantering," is as perfect and breath-taking a culmination as one could wish for. We read for moments like this.

events

Reimagining Beckett

Samuel Beckett, the Irish playwright and writer, died recently and the opening words for his theatrical tour de force *Waiting for Godot* have come true: "Nothing to be done." Or so it seems. What remains to be done, however, is the flurry of study and appreciation that will continue to appraise Beckett's role as one of the major forces of twentieth century literature. And fortunately, performances of Beckett's theatrical pieces will continue to delight and mystify viewers in their daring and creative disregard for convention.

One such performance was given this past December at the Amurt Cultural Center in Tokyo. One of Beckett's shorter, unknown prose pieces, *Imagination Dead Imagine*, was presented as an audio-visual performance. Experimental music and slides of collages were created by Herman Bartelen, who also provided, along with Nada Gordon, the haunting yet powerful reading of the piece itself.

Imagination Dead Imagine is a somewhat ironic portrayal of the beginnings of the universe. "No trace anywhere of life, you say, pah, no difficulty there, imagination not dead yet, yes, dead, good, imagination dead imagine." From here, the piece spirals through visual images that range from "diameter three feet, three feet from ground to summit of the vault" to Beckett's vision of a pre-creation world "all white in the whiteness." Eventually the whiteness is filled with rotundas and "ground, wall, vault, bodies, no shadow." In a combination of bizarre imagery ("the head against the wall at B, the arse against the wall at A, the knees against the wall between B and C . . .") and scientific terminology ("freezing point," "semicircles ACB BDA," "arcs"),

Beckett offers a stirring of life in the great existential void. Not one to offer easy explanations, Beckett merely dwells on the uncertainties and the ambiguities. He points out the incapability of science and literature to adequately define the creation of this vast universe. What remains are the calls of a human voice in a silent and essentially unexplainable, Beckettian void.

The musical background was a blend of angelic-like choruses, minimalist percussion, and plaintive strings. Male and female voices counterpointed lines and sections, overlapped words and phrases, leaving the listener to sort out the barrage of images being hurled out. The first set of slides were a series of Dadaistic collages which included cut-up versions of the prose piece itself. The second set were strong, visually attractive wire-and-paper creations which captured the bleakness, yet also the beauty, of the almost untenable language. One began to feel both the uselessness and the inescapable necessity of trying to define what Beckett himself called the great "emptiness, silence, heat."

Despite the acceptance that one is powerless to truly name the unknown, the combination of Beckett's obscure and obtuse language with a multitude of corresponding sounds and visual images managed to suppress for a brief interlude that ever-constant human desire for instant understanding and meaning. The performance created a deep silence that Beckett himself would have appreciated. One walked away, not with a greater hold on reality, but rather with an understanding that art, in its desire to give meaning to existence, often mystifies and puzzles.

—Kurt Merzen

Copies of the pre-recorded tape *Imagination Dead Imagine* can be obtained by sending ¥1,000 to Herman Bartelen, Kopo Fuji 205, Kichijoji-minami 4-3-11, Musashino-shi, Tokyo 180.

NETWorks:

selected "Language" little magazines

"Language" poetry (called by Robert Creeley "the most decisive exploration of poetry's resources and premises since the 1950's") is extremely hard to define—witness the nearly self-contradictory statements of its poetics. The easiest way to achieve something akin to an overview of "language-centered" writing is via several ongoing little magazines, which together give a fair idea of the outlines of the "project" and insights into its continuing development.

Abacus, Potes and Poets Press, 181 Edgemont Ave., Elmwood, Connecticut 06110 USA. Edited by Peter Garrich; published every six weeks throughout the year; \$2.50/issue, \$17/year from the publisher. Each issue features the writing of one person in a sampling of 12 to 18 pages. The backlist includes issues for such well-known "language" writers as Charles Bernstein, Susan Howe, Bruce Andrews, Ron Silliman, Carla Harryman, Barrett Watten, and Hannah Weiner along with such predecessors to the movement as Theodore Enslin, Cid Corman, and Jackson MacLow—in addition to a very fine list of newer writers. Kathleen Fraser: "Abacus is at the heart of innovative necessity in current American writing practice."

Avec, P.O. Box 1059, Penngrove, California 94951 USA. Edited by Cydney Chadwich; \$6.50/issue. The first issue was in 1989 and featured an excerpt from the "Lost Chapter" of *Naked Lunch* by William Burroughs, plus poems and prose by Leningrad poet Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, Lyn Hejinian, and many others. Language illuminates the setting here—with friends and skeptics as guests in a comfortable room.

The Difficulties, 596 Marilyn St. Kent, Ohio 44240 USA. Edited by Tom Beckett; single issue: \$10. The current Susan Howe issue fills a particular need for an intelligent combination of discourse, interviews and forums on the "language" generation of writers. Beckett is a master of the interview—allowing the reader practical participation in conversations with poetry's most active practitioners. The new issue features interviews with Susan Howe, along with critical responses to Howe's work.

Everyday Life, c/o Small Press Distribution, 1814 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley, California 94702 USA. Edited by George and Chris Tysh in Camera, Detroit, Michigan; \$3.50/annual issue. The writing explores the erotic, intimate possibilities of language. The first collection featured Bernadette Mayer, Jessica Hagedorn, Maureen Owen, Chris Tysh, Laura Chester, Lyn Hejinian, Kathy Acker, Rae Armantrout, and others.

Jimmy & Lucy's House of K, Jimmy's House, 3816 Piedmont #6, Oakland, California 94611 USA. Edited by Andrew Schelling & Benjamin Friedlander; \$6/single issue; \$15/three-issue sub to the editors. Writing in the current issue (#9)—the "Poetics

of Emptiness"—was generated from a colloquium presented at Green Gulch Zen Center in April 1987. Included are written statements from Gail Sher, Steve Benson, Philip Whalen, and Gary Snyder, along with transcripts and additional writings from Cid Corman, Nathaniel Tarn, Leslie Scalapino, Charles Bernstein, and many others.

Hambone, 132 Clinton St., Santa Cruz, California 95062 USA. Edited by Nathaniel Mackey; \$6/single copy, \$10/two-issue sub. Appears irregularly, but each issue amounts to an anthology. In music, free jazz intersects with free improvisation—though each from quite separate traditions. *Hambone* is an instance of that radical meeting in literature. #7 contains writing by Edward Kamau Braithwaite, Clarence Major, Honor Johnson, Jay Wright, Susan Howe, Christopher Dewdney, Gustof Sobin, Beverly Dahlen, and many others. This magazine is among the most important, anywhere.

Temblor, c/o Small Press Distribution, 1814 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley, California 94702, USA. Edited by Leland Hickman; \$12.50/back issue, \$8.50 for single copy issue #10. Complete in 10 issues. *Temblor's* first issue was in 1985. By the final tenth issue in 1989, Hickman has achieved a virtual anthology of the best "language" writings of the decade, along with reviews, interviews, and writings of such exemplary poets of the previous generation as Jackson MacLow, Jerome Rotherberg, Robert Creeley, Duncan McNaughton, Clayton Eshleman, and Clark Coolidge. This magazine is historically essential.

Tyuonyi, Institute of American Indian Arts, St. Michael Dr., Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501 USA. Edited by Phillip Foss; \$6/single issue, \$12/two-issue subscription. *Tyuonyi* is a Keresan word meaning "the meeting place." In the 150 pages of issue #4 the meeting includes Mei Mei Bersenbrugge, Charles Bernstein, Kimiko Hahn, Joy Harjo, Linda Hogan, Elizabeth Robinson, Gustof Sobin, John Taggart, Keith Waldrop, and Matsuo Takahashi among others. This is a handsome effort, durable.

Thanks to the folks at the Woodland Pattern Book Center for compiling this issue's NETWorks column. All of the magazines mentioned (plus many more) are available for the listed price plus postage and handling from: Woodland Pattern Book Center, P.O. Box 92081, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202 USA.

Marginalia:

notes on Japan and abroad

Sujin Express, a new magazine being published in Kyoto, solicits work in the following areas: poetry, literature, music, art, comedy, photography, architecture, automobiles, technology, political, historical, environment, social issues, places to go and not to go, good deeds, and scandals. The magazine is free, but readers are invited to join the Sujin Express Club for a nominal fee of ¥500. Write to: *Sujin Express*, 453 Tsuboya-cho, Oike-sagaru, Ogawa-dori, Nakagyo-ku, Kyoto-shi 604.

Renaissance Artists and Writers Association (RAWA) invites poetry and prose submissions which offer a positive or inspirational view of life for the 1990's. A magazine will be compiled from the best selections and printed in May, 1990. The deadline is April 30. Copyright remains with the author in all cases, and authors published in the magazine will receive free copies. For further information call 03-383-6322, or write to: RAWA, 101 Cozy Heights, 5-23-3 Yayoi-cho, Nakano-ku, Tokyo 164.

Deadline for the 2nd annual Wingspan short story competition is April 5, 1990. Prize: two 1st class tickets on All Nippon Airways. Stories should be 1500 to 3500 words in length and have some connection to Japan. Submit to: ANA Wingspan Fiction Contest, Advertising Division, All Nippon Airways Co. Ltd., Kasumigaseki Bldg., 3-2-5 Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100.

Sober Minute Press, conceived by Shaunt Basmajian and Brian David Johnston, aims to promote and publish experimental, non-conventional and/or visual poetry and collage, but will consider "the unpublished works of yet-to-be discovered geniuses now domiciled in the sewers and gutters of the world." Currently resides at Class Productions, P.

O. Box 822, Adelaide St. P.O., Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5C 2K1. Shaunt is also founder of the Canadian Poetry Association, which can be contacted at the same address.

Poetry from New Zealand! EDGE recently received copies of the following titles, all of which can be highly recommended: *Provisions: A Selection from the 1988 New Zealand Poetry Society Competition*, edited by Harry Ricketts and David Drummond (NZ\$17.20); *Winter's Blossom*, a collection of international haiku, edited by H. Ricketts, D. Drummond, Yoko Beard, and Makoto Tanabe (NZ\$17.20); *Coming Here* by Harry Ricketts (NZ\$16.45), and *The Transfer Station* by Russell Haley (NZ\$17.95). Order from: Nagare Press, P. O. Box 934, Palmerston North, New Zealand. You can also get two issues per year of the new magazine, *Poetry NZ*, for NZ\$25.00 from the same address.

Rilke's Sonnets to Orpheus, in a new translation by Paul Wadden of Kyoto, has just been published by Dawn Press. Order from: P.O. Box 3, Ouda-cho, Uda-gun, Nara 633-21.

The first international Japanese-English conference is being held May 26-27 at Hakone Highland Hotel (2 hours from Tokyo). Eight sessions cover all aspects of translation (including poetry and fiction, business and finance). For registration forms and other information contact Japan Association of Translators, 202 Wacoal Mitsuzawakoen, 55-13 Miyagaya, Nishi-ku, Yokohama 220 (phone: 045-314-9324).

Networking info and news items for the Marginalia column are always welcome (published free of charge at the editor's discretion). Deadline for the Summer 1990 issue of EDGE is April 3, 1990.

Biodata on Artists

Joseph Daniel Fiedler was born in 1953, and since 1987 has been living in Tokyo, where he works as a freelance illustration and graphic designer. His artwork has appeared in a large number of exhibitions and been featured in a great many major publications. A frequently used medium of his, as in the image on this issue's front cover, is alkyd on paper.

Kirby Ian Andersen moved from Canada to Japan two and a half years ago and has been exhibiting his collages in various galleries and phone booths around Tokyo ever since.

John Yapp, originally from England, has lived in Asia for the past 10 years. John and his work were recently featured in a BBC documentary.

Sarah Brayer is an American artist, originally from New York, who has been living in Kyoto since 1979. Working in the media of etching, woodblock, and paperwork, her whose work has appeared, among other places, Winds and Kyoto Journal.

Rag Winners Announced

Winners have been announced for the 1989 Rag Fiction Contest, sponsored by the Chiba-based *Abiko Quarterly Rag*. First prize of ¥30,000 went to Thomas Bradley for his story "Kara-kun." Thea Caplan's "Runners" won the ¥10,000 second prize. "The Hammer" by John Perkins won the third prize of ¥5,000. Steven Levi's "The Candle" and Robert Red-Baer's "William" received honorable mentions. Other stories receiving special mention were "Errantry" by Tom Melchionne, "A Legacy of Guilt" by Beijing York, "Getting Out" by Thea Caplan, "Cat Lady" by Michael Sznajderman. Judges included EDGE Fiction Editor Michael O'Rourke and Dave C. Paltor, Fiction Editor of the *Abiko Rag*.

Happenings

Kobe

Writers meet monthly to discuss fiction and poetry. For info call Alan Fisher at 078-821-6527.

Chiba

Informal workshops for writers in the Chiba area are being held regularly. For details contact Mary Fujimaki at 0472-57-9308.

The James Joyce Parlor meets on the first Sunday of each month from 4:30 to discuss *Finnegans Wake*. Join them at 8-1-8 Namiki, Abiko. Phone: 0471-84-7904. The group also has info about the International James Joyce Foundation and the upcoming Joyce Symposium in Monaco June 11-16.

Anna Livia Plurabelle's Rag Party gets together for literary discussion and socializing the third Saturday of every month from 6 pm. All are welcome! For directions, call 0471-84-7904.

Kyoto

Poets meet with Cid Corman on a regular basis to discuss their work. More participants are welcome. For details contact Barry MacDonald at 075-712-7445.

The Shadow Project 1990

Shadow Projects—art exhibits, concerts, guerrilla theater events, etc., mourning those who died in the first nuclear holocaust at Hiroshima and protesting further use of nuclear weapons—have proliferated around the world during the last decade. An exhibition of mail-art was mounted in Milan by Ruggero Maggi in 1988. The project has now been passed on to Karl Young [EDGE Contributing Editor], who feels it is appropriate to turn it into a show that splits every year and gathers new material before splitting again. Karl is dividing the San Deigo show into two parts, half going to Montevideo, the other half forming the base of a show in Milwaukee. The Milwaukee show will open on June 17, and will end with readings and performances on Hiroshima Day, August 6, 1990. The show will be divided and sent to two other cities for exhibition in the summer of 1991. If division and replication continues, most of the world's major cities should have its descendants by the year 2000. Work submitted will not be returned to the artists but passed on to the next show. Send submissions or direct inquiries to Karl Young, P.O. Box 4190, Kenosha, Wisconsin, USA 53141. Deadline: June 1. The ultimate evil is not inevitable. Even in 1990, you can make a difference.

Oita

Writers in the Oita area held a second poetry reading this past March 4 and are planning more activities. For more info write to: Jeanne Belisle, Beppu Daigaku Shokuin Jutaku 12, Sakuragaoka 4-kumi, Beppu-shi, Oita-ken 874.

Tokyo

Rock for the Rainforest IV dance party will happen at Lazy Ways in Koenji on Saturday, April 14 from 7:30 pm. Bands lined up so far include The Addicts, Sheep Dip, and Kuma. The ¥2,500 admission price will be donated to JATAN, the Japan Tropical Rainforest Action Network.

Tokyo Writers' Workshop meets at the Shinjuku Bunka Center every second Sunday of the month. Poetry from 1-3 pm; fiction from 3-5. For directions call John Evans at 044-987-4337.

The Renaissance Artists and Writers Association recently had its first "Writer's Night" featuring poetry by Herman Bartelen and others. RAWA sponsors a variety of activities related to literature and the arts. For a current schedule contact Dada Jitendrananda at 03-383-6322.

The Leading Edge

In response to our research into "language poetry" for this issue, we received an illuminating letter from the editor of Paper Air, an excerpt of which follows:

Dear EDGE:

... Beyond a few unique theoretical statements from specific individuals, the Language group is indistinguishable from several other important vectors in the contemporary US avant-garde. Unfortunately, the American academy has bought into the term as a means of consolidating and therefore avoiding the more radical proposals of the broader avant-garde. The result, over the past decade or so, has been the emergence of a handful of opportunist "radical academics," who profit by introducing this circumscribed group to their professional peers, and a gradual movement of the initiated Language poets toward the academy. This threatens what I and many others in the US thought to be the original, revolutionary intent proposed by L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E magazine and its adherents; it is exclusionary, and it is commodification. . . .

Gil Ott, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

EDGE is interested in hearing from its readers and welcomes letters relating to all aspects of the magazine and its contents. Letters for The Leading Edge will be published at the discretion of the editor and may be edited for reasons of space or clarity.

EDGE

1990 FICTION CONTEST

Second Annual Competition Featuring Two Categories: Short Stories and Translations

Deadline: April 30, 1990

Winners announced: July 31, 1990

Contest Rules: Short Stories

- Length not to exceed 5,000 words
- 2 copies of each entry, typed, double-spaced
- Author's name, address, & phone number on title page
- Self-addressed envelope with sufficient postage to be included if author wishes return of manuscripts at end of contest
- Only previously unpublished stories; all rights revert to author after publication
- Entry fee of 300 yen in postage stamps per story
- No limit on number of entries
- No theme, subject, or content requirements

First Prize: 25,000 yen (donated by Tokyo Weekender)
 Second Prize: 10,000 yen (donated by EDGE)
 plus honorable mentions

Contest Rules: Translations

- Previously unpublished English translations of published modern Japanese short stories only
- Length not to exceed 5,000 words
- 2 copies of each entry, typed, double-spaced, and at least 1 copy of Japanese original
- Translator's name, address, & phone number on title page
- Self-addressed envelope with sufficient postage to be included if author wishes return of manuscripts at end of contest
- Entry fee of 300 yen in postage stamps per story
- No limit on number of entries
- No theme, subject, or content requirements

First Prize: 25,000 yen (both prizes donated by Winds,
 the in-flight magazine of JAL)
 Second Prize: 10,000 yen
 plus honorable mentions

The first prize-winning story will be published in *Tokyo Weekender*. The winning translation will be considered for publication in *Winds*. Other entries will appear in *EDGE*.

Send entries to: Michael O'Rourke, Contest Coordinator
 2-37-10 Maihama
 Urayasu-shi, Chiba-ken
 Japan 279

(Tel. 0473-55-3136)