JOHN BURNETT PAYNE

EMILY AND WALT, WALT AND EMILY







JOHN BURNETT PAYNE

THE POET'S PRESS Providence, RI Copyright 2006 by The Poet's Press ISBN 0-922558-19-1 Also published as an e-book in Adobe Acrobat (PDF) format

> This is the 161st publication of THE POET'S PRESS 65 Hope Street/ Providence, RI 02906 www.thepoetspress.org

CONTENTS

Lines/Lives — A Foreword by Dennis Barone 7

EMILY AND WALT, WALT AND EMILY

Walkers in the Citv 11 The Poet as Firehouse Dalmatian Waiting for the Alarm 13 The Ways of Love 17 The Lathe of Heaven 19 Group Sex 22 Doubles 24 It's Such A Good Problem 26 The Summer Anthropologist 28 Over Danish and Coffee 33 Off the Hook 34 Charley Potato 36 A Poltergeist Grows Older 41 Emily and Walt, Walt and Emily 44 Arkapenko, Tawdry Violets 49 O Camus 51 The Rest Is Never Silence 52 Five Hundred Novels 54 For You, Moon Gaffney. And Kindred Spirits 56 Another Ramapoe Mountain Ghost 59

AT THE CORNER OF THIRD AVENUE AND 14th STREET

At the Corner of Third Avenue and Fourteenth Street 65 Tell Me That You Love Me, Con Edison 75

GHOSTS SCARE TITO ROSA

Ghosts Scare Tito Rosa 81 Pepe Is Remembered in Ponce 83 If Paco Walks the Streets of Morovis After Dark 85 Late Afternoons, Early Evenings, On My Block 87 To Count the Cats in Zanzibar 91 Valdez 93

Afterword by Brett Rutherford 97

LINES/LIVES

John Burnett Payne once wrote a poem called "Another Ramapoe Mountain Ghost." It is John's imagined view of one New Jersey family at home and the return of the eldest son, my brother, Bruce. In the poem we have a dog, a collie. We never had a dog, though.

John and I were friends, but, nonetheless, as so many writers have asked, how deeply can one person know another? I am indifferent to whether or not John could have captured in verse lines my family with more accuracy, but I do wish I had known him better, better than our lives permitted, for he was a wonderful man, a man of East Twenty Six Street, New York, New York, but like Emily Dickinson and her home in Amherst, Massachusetts, a person part of the world far beyond, too.

"... who in this world can give anyone a character? Who in this world knows anything of any other heart – or of his own?" so Ford Madox Ford's narrator muses in *The Good Soldier*. But I dare say, to appropriate that narrator's voice for a moment, I dare say John Burnett Payne through his conversations out on the stoop, his letters and gifts of books sent through the mail, and his poems published in many magazines and several chapbooks provided immense assistance to others in their discoveries regarding their very own hearts – including one young poet from the hills of northern New Jersey.

Though John is gone now so many years, his poems survive and through them we can recall or come to know this (simple, complex?) man and also better understand ourselves. For example, "Charley Potato" could have been a poem of the labor movement in decades past and it can tell us something indirectly of John's Kentucky origins or his academic interests in the author of *The Williamsburg Trilogy*, Daniel Fuchs, a writer who is just at this moment undergoing a re-evaluation. How right time has proven John's estimation of this author.

The poem can also tell us about ourselves. How do we feel now that we've been downsized through best practices and change management? In the process of creating business teams, we find ourselves or our best friend at work – perhaps his name is Charley – sidelined and not a part of the team, i.e., out of work and unemployed in the twenty-first century, a century where employee fulfillment has come to mean a continuous state of joblessness.

John's poems evoke a simple glory in the ordinary world: "inside the barricades [of a block party],/ intoxicated by community, / the revolution postponed,/ we are assaulted by more music,/ drumming,/ know the words of all the songs/ and find our anguish steady." Brett Rutherford mentioned to me in an email message: "Now that the gritty New York has been replaced by Disney and Euro-tourists, perhaps the gritty New York seems better now." It is, at times, a gritty New York that much of John Burnett Payne's work describes. Although that New York is gone and email is here, the poems provide us no sense of the easily nostalgic. They are narratives that still manage to bring us a truth that we need.

—Dennis Barone



EMILY AND WALT, WALT AND EMILY



WALKERS IN THE CITY

He needs a shave, a bath, a clean shirt, a new pair of pants. His shoes are badly scuffed. Sometimes he asks me for a specific sum of money, a cigarette. Frequently he passes me as if I were not there. Encountering him, I can estimate the time he will need to circle a city block. We will meet again exactly where we met before. He is propelled by his own dislocation. He flings words at the street. at people when people are there, assaulting them, the street, language, meaning, undermining what faith I still have in incantation. He wants new language, appropriate to his terror and despair.

I sometimes catch an isolated coherent phrase.

His use of language tells me that all of us are fragile, vulnerable, rarely capable of saying whatever we want to say. I hoard my words, saving them, weigh them, assuming that rhetoric will cloak and mask my own despair. I want to keep my words long enough to turn them into poems. I walk wounded with unfinished poems, incantations I mistrust. the riddles posed by a nameless man, walker in the city with me.

I miss him, miss a part of myself, when he vanishes from the faces of my block.

THE POET AS FIRE-HOUSE DALMATIAN WAITING FOR THE ALARM

Robert Kelly '...is a man who in fifteen years of writing poetry (He is about thirty-five) has probably averaged a thousand poems a year....where do you get an editor who can read through 15,000 poems and make books of them?'

— Diane Wakoski in a review of Robert Kelly's Songs, in Poetry, September 1971.

Eric Berne of *Games People Play* says that one can function with three words: yes, no, wow.

Hey, Louie! It could be yes, no or wow, a sometimes yes, sometimes no, sometimes wow. Whatcha doin'? We still live in one world most of the time, Robert Kelly and us. Yuh along? Some of us are led down the garden path more quickly than others. Didja feed the cats? When any noble expedition is in the offing some volunteer. Didja eat yourself?

Who is ever asked how he feels about pastrami or warmed-up rice? What didia eat? Some of us detour before we even get started. How vuh feeling? Poetry's the old mulberry bush we don't always want to go around. Any beer left from the six-pack? I have cigarettes. Didia phone Marie? We can wait on the stoop for her. We always wait for her. There's something wrong with the old swimming hole when we don't want to play the skinny-dipping game. Is it Marie? I have a very important timely and significant matter to discuss with you: THE POETRY OF ROBERT KELLY. Like sometimes ves, sometimes no, sometimes wow. He's a big-time winner/loser. All over the place. Highly esteemed. Maybe we've turned off that hard gem-like flame, Louie. and Kelly's still on fire. Happy and well-adjusted Dalmatians are just waiting for his next conflagration.

Maybe I've been thinking about and doing too many other things. I spend my days standing in lines, petting dogs. shopping for old ladies, running errands. reading Yeats. Eliot and Pound. planning to read poets from Paterson and Black Mountain. answering letters, thinking about engaging in a little political action. Today I stood for a long time in a telephone booth where absolutely nothing was happening. Sometimes, I stand in the street, like I'm doing right now. Louie. velling up to you, while that Kelly is off somewhere writing poems, like three a day on the statistical average. Nobody here's seen Kelly: he's busy writing poems. Not every primal scream is a poem. But neither, for that matter, is any philosophical conversation with Marie's grandmother. Is Marie writing love poems on the sly? My credit cards for some Manhattan cantos that I can call my own.

My City diploma for a memorable fuck. When does Kelly turn off? Revise his poems? Take his dirty skivvies to the laundromat? Sometimes it is always yes, always no, always wow! Fifteen thousand poems! Wow! Sometimes it is never yes, never no, never wow! Why didn't we start collecting Kelly a decade ago when he published the first of his twenty books? Why can't I write with glorious compulsive abandon and forget about the absence of grass, the ripped-off typewriter. prison riots. friends in jail for 'possession'? Come on down, Louie, like fast. I've got lots of things to discuss with you, including my newest poem written about six weeks ago.

THE WAYS OF LOVE

(For Barbara A. Holland)

In her ultimate bed Griselda rots, the grey girl run to ground, fleetingly mourned, buried with her bloody patience.

Enraged by failures within her highly contended bed Helen flees her man-destroying mystique (who among us isn't haunted, rendered impotent, by the loveliness of her face?) and turns to a Jungian analyst anxious to divorce herself from everyone's racial memory, everyone's clumsy performance.

From the south of Dallas Cressida writes, much as she has from Frisco, New Orleans, Santa Fe, taunting ambittared tout

taunting, embittered, taut,

complaining, petulantly, of fickle cowboy lovers, swift in booted flight,

faithful only to leather, mother, pony, bike and Texas.

Roused from memory of sleep with Jocasta, shaken by the necessary recognition, I write passionate sonnets to Stella in Dublin, to Vanessa in Seville, to Miranda in Bayonne,

the closest, most threatening, the one most likely to reply, imploring swift return.

Any insomnia-inspired inventory is only an inventory, even of lovely ladies, mistresses all, departed, over-accessible, exiled, lamented, lusted for sometimes again; far more certain to set my blood whirling turbulent is the prospect of a glorious new Christabel, her inevitable successor, and hers.

THE LATHE OF HEAVEN

For Rita Rinaldi

"'History evaporates....'" (Judith Riven)

If we concede that history evaporates. we run the risk of ambushing memory, recall, responsibility, allegiance. We are one with the schoolbov overburdened with dates. anxious to forget them. the history teacher struggling too hard to establish causality and pattern. When past and present are more than we can admit to. our memories become sieve-like. Old fascists and new slip through the colander. Old legends and new turn sour. lack drama. until liberals in Greece in a time of oppressive colonels find that two hundred dollars will buy a passport, save a life. Julia becomes more than pentimento from another time of autobiography, bravery. Anti-fascists may still be saved. the stance renewed.

In a time of despair (I never promised you a rose garden) we are outfoxed by games we play with ourselves. We become our own victims. done in by our indifference to the utilization of others, ourselves. Why is the therapist so fearful of promising anyone, herself most of all, a rose garden? Terranova. brashly driving in his pick-up truck, disregarding no parking zones, collecting his rent. forgets an older brief alliance with beauty (his boyhood was profuse with marble and roses) when he denies that roses grow only when they are planted, nurtured, replaced when they die. A city block may blaze suddenly with Portland roses, large, old-fashioned, tough as weeds, flowering pink on thorny stems.

Recognizing the inevitability of more Nixons (can roses grow in San Clemente?) we need roses, beautiful, healing, to flower against the next wave of villains.

We need rose gardens, tough enduring Portland roses, brave, regenerative, persisting, persistent, not at all likely to evaporate, to flower for fascists, therapists, men and women of good will.

GROUP SEX

Nothing is wrong between sixteen people who love each other...." ("Group Sex," a short story by Ann Arensberg.)

I wish I knew and loved fifteen people well enough to embark on such a venture. We could quietly book a suite at the Waldorf. But how soon would it be before we found ourselves with a chairman, a supervisor, a curator, an historian, a choreographer of the ballet of affable and meaningful group sexual expression? How long before a commissar would want to expel, recruit? Would there be inadvertent consequences? The risk of infiltration. people from Masters and Johnson. the Kinsey Foundation, ordinary interlopers with hidden cameras, recording equipment, secret less-communal sexual needs, anxious to document it all. including their own participation? Many of us despair of fulfillment with the single partner, the gavotte of sequentiality, the occasional third person in a bed.

What would joy/ecstasy/liberation/love with fifteen others do to all of us? How long before we freeze in ritual, codification reminiscent of Pompeii. become statistics. a slide-rule dimension. and sense the muting of nuance, gratification? Will all of us run the risk of turning apolitical, less creative. no longer contentious in any of the ordinary social forms. whirling as we well might, the sixteen of us, in our own delight? The only numerologist I know is unable to provide information about the sexual magic of sixteen. I wonder if it hurts, unduly, to fall out of love with fifteen people. Perhaps we should find out. "Nothing is wrong between sixteen people who love each other...."

DOUBLES

For Eleanore Prokop

"....wanton kittens make sober cats." Julia O'Faolain in Women in the Wall.

Doubles. kittens wanton well beyond their rightful chronological time, her Millav, my Mondrian, both altered toms. have not met. Separately resisting sober maturity, they have a special parallel affinity for perversity, almost like twins converging from remote points hell-bent on new madness. mysteriously triggered by some shared single impulse. At three or four in the morning when night people have exhausted fantasy, grateful for distance from compelling reality, and reluctantly succumbed to Freud-ridden sleep, these cats in basement apartments, separated by a narrow hall, come alive.

They run; they race; they indulge in leaps which would embarrass an alpine goat. When a cat storms past me in bed late at night, faster than any driver in the Indy 500. I know which cat it is. Objects fall, break. Books are suddenly somewhere else. There is havoc here, havoc across the hall. Explicit, accurate, I vell, "Mondrian!" From across the hall Eleanore yells, "Millay!" I anticipate no swift maturing of either Mondrian or Millav. They may age before turning sober, stuffy; if and when they do, it will become time for Eleanore and me to regress for them, into their present state of wantonness, let Mondrian and Millav experience the dismay we now feel.

IT'S SUCH A GOOD Problem

For Tom McNamara

It's such a good problem — Eskimo power richly cogent, immediate, so much at hand: and we can think about it. troubled, trembling. from our distance. and wonder just what those Eskimos are up to the wives available and quivering in anticipation of greater opportunity for being shared, for even more glorious largess, as blubbery and as optimistic as housewives in Riverdale where. credit cards for travel notwithstanding. few visiting Eskimos, power-elated, muscle-flexing, hell-bent on one world, even come knocking to establish the inevitable power dynamics,

interrupt the dreary game of mah-jongg played out so ruthlessly and steadily on a weekday morning, anxious to play the special guest, entitled to the honor of the house in the name of Eskimo power.

THE SUMMER ANTHROPOLOGIST

Immediately after the snows of June he comes, the summer anthropologist, his Morgan loaded with tools of trade: typewriter, tape recorder, movie cameras. He has some fuzzy notion of my language, its sounds, structure, tonal shifts.

I tell him about the new coin Xerox at the reservation p.o.

He looks at my Morgan, quickly, analytically, estimating the unpaid balance, outstanding repair bill, both so very close to his.

In love with Morgans, we are briefly brothers.

He comes with his precognition showing, certain that I am paranoid, fragmented. He wants to explore my pathological fear of bodies, burial, cemeteries. I bluntly admit to a military tour of duty with graveyard registration. I am less paranoid than weary, experienced, over-exposed to the shapes and forms of death.

He wants to eat my time and space, talk through and bore into it, turn it all into a book of wisdom to warm and sustain his urban winters.

What does he know of ancestors, legend, steadily preempted graves? Who in his tribe first lied to him about ceremony? Where has he stashed his racial memory? Why must mine serve for both of us?

Seeing him, I realize that I've made up no stories during the long winter in anticipation of his coming so swiftly after the last snows of June.

Where is his great oral epic? What fertility-creation yarns has he to swap with me? He is no god, no mechanized messiah, wound up to run through summer, vanish with the first heavy snow of September; no rainmaker with records of torrential downpour in his book of triumphs. What crops have grown for him? And where? He knows no more, no less, than I about acts of love, fatherhood, turbulent tribal coupling, sand painting, the hunt, the need for ethnic lie.

I become a noble savage, taller, intuitively wiser than he, photogenic, more into the universe, bigger than his department chairman.

How can I punish him by repressing dreams? How dare I refuse to talk about still continuing primordial dance? Is there a dance of death, so immediate, frightening, healing, that I, absent coward, have danced out for me by surrogate tribesman while I tinker with my Morgan? I must know more about the coming of age of all my sons, nephews, splintered selves than I will reveal.

Racial dreams of mine, elemental, primeval, fleeting, steadily give way to dreams of quarrels with wives, living, imaginary, dead; I dream of besting a summer anthropologist in a race of Morgans.

Would he believe that when I scan the Pleiades my anger erupts, spills into dreams, time and space, souring meditation: I never find the configuration of the single star leading me to the good, trustworthy mechanic in tune with the vagaries of my Morgan.

I have never believed in ghosts, uptight, proper, impotent, bumptious, nor thought to encounter a god figure. I remember hippies compulsive to worship my gods with me, angry when our vibrations jangle; missionaries unnerved by their awareness of several worlds, trembling with the ambiguities of faith, hoping that I have singled out a sure thing.

Why should he expect the healing legend he has never found, needs so badly among the artifacts of my culture?

How can he hope to grow with the sum of my knowledge when he so ruthlessly eats my time and space, so briskly denies that both of us are men, capable of mediating with the wisdom and love we require?

OVER DANISH AND COFFEE

Over Danish and coffee, their breakfast in the automat, he held her hand, declaring his love, and said, "More than anything I can think of, or wish for, I'd like to see an atom bomb explode."

OFF THE HOOK

For Laurene Whiton

When a sleeping poet dies, the moment his secret, we share the time of dislocation, uncertainty. The metrics of his dying, our disquiet, are not for scansion. Grandfather clocks run to the nursery for safe haven; stop-watches whirl themselves into galactic fragments; metronomes of sorrow, self-pity, explode.

While a sleeping poet dies, time wobbles, perversely, gladly, conspiratorial partner.

A dying bed, fixed, offensive, hospital sterile, by force of poet's will, is suddenly any happier bed of love. In death-rattle fantasy-embrace, who shares that altered bed? What other beds are swiftly invaded? Are new statements, burning the already burning throat, intended, with the usual compulsion, hypothetically for transcription tomorrow?

The poet charts his private route to boneyard, procrastinating, glad to extend another deadline.

In any stage of becoming, being, dying, death, a poet is his own best guardian angel.

Confronting forces, inner, outer, hastening or slowing down the transition from flesh to spirit, the poet balances contradictions, plays with caesuras, the braking, accelerating, knows when he can securely die, letting himself and waiting friends off the hook.

CHARLEY POTATO

For Joe Mejias

Wake up in the morning when the alarm clock rings. Monday is no different from Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday when you're Charley Potato roused from nightmare sleep knowing why work is *dejà-vu*.

Tossed from the sack where Idaho Charley dreams bravely of ambushing the cattle thieves, saving the herd, riding into Pocatello to rustle up a pretty little cow-girl, the rancher's daughter, to call his own, sleep-walking, I face my Charley Potato day.

Wish I knew, wish I cared, wish I could remember if I come from Idaho, Ireland, Maine or Long Island. Wish it mattered if I did. What is this racial memory of which the analysts speak, this ethnic thing, when all the Charley Potatoes of the world fall from one sad bag into another?

I have had the dreams of Captain Charley, pride of Maine, master of the whaling fleet, sailing off for Java Head, leaving the little woman to walk her widow's walk.

But I am Charley Potato, the spud who's served at the stroke of nine when time-clocks eat us all. ambushed at the water-cooler. hijacked during the coffee break, bypassed in the policy-making conclave, lost in the vast corporate files; and I am vomited out. spent, torn, tired. at the time-clocks' stroke of five, never believing that I've been consumed. digested or that anyone even suspects that I am alive.

Anonymous, bland, numb, square, an impersonal component in the larger machinery, unfixed in tables of organization,

I am lost in the company potato salad with co-working peers who act, look and *are* absolutely like me.

Where are the dreams of Killarney? The rose of Tralee? Fighting songs and I.R.A. militancy?

Half-baked, well before noon, by a half-baked boss, lost in the ranks of middle management, a Mr. Potato, scrubbed, faceless, blocking on my name, suspecting that any Charley Potato is replaceable, predictable, usually pretty much the same, loved only by Household Finance.

Exiled from Long Island when potato farms were plowed up for Levittown, wary of Maine, well shut of Ireland where famine
never made a revolution, I don't "merit" a job description.

I am statistically mashed among figures untallied and not for tally, occupying a dingy cell within the edifice of the corporate structure, punished for no crime I ever committed, envious of murderers, rapists, cattle thieves, con artists, the white-collar criminals who have been legally caught, apprehended.

Gummy, sticky, I'm so bound to the job that I'm likely to be glued to walls by the end of the day.

I have been blinded in the performance of duty by the potato cutter of the corporation, my eyes cut out, quietly, rapidly, efficiently; and I never get to see or enjoy the splendor of the reproductive act; that green shoot of a new potato growing elsewhere, eventual replacement for me, is simply another corporative exploitative fact. It really doesn't matter if I come from Idaho, Ireland, Maine or Long Island. Waking from Charley Potato nightmare sleep, one with job, I know why nine-to-five is *deja-vu*.

A POLTERGEIST GROWS OLDER

For Evan Heyman

In childhood there are glories undreamed of by Wordsworth: gentle levitating of grandpa's long-johns to the suddenly present strains of "The Blue Danube" shrieks, moans, Gothic wails and broken crockery voices mysteriously raised in four-letter words when the parson comes calling.

Almost wholly baffled but neither admitting or denying the presence of a superior force, the man from psychical research picks up his umbrella dons his jaunty bowler and departs quietly leaving as commentary on the larger scene a snapping turtle in the toilet bowl. Naturally blamed for the snapping turtle, a poltergeist grows older wondering just whom puberty is a joke on.

Mature, there is happy remembering of childish things, the merry prank, the mischief of summer, the outfoxing, up to an anal point, of the gentleman from psychical research.

Unlike the childhood *diabolo*. the terror of the tract development. the adult discovers rivals galore. Open in his admiration for others who have not put aside childish things, he sits while a kindred spirit. middle-aged. rambunctious. pot-bellied. sees to it that the martini-filled carafe dances, whirls and spills into the lap of the chairman of the board meeting. A poltergeist, ageless, unreformed, can still over-enchant a séance with unplanned vibrations, unscheduled emanations of the living dead.

Older, knowing that menopause is simply the next-to-last joke on witches, warlocks, middle America, the Babbitts who are left, the poltergeist, with access to data-programming, moves an entire year of astrological predictions a cusp and a half ahead, maliciously playing havoc with usual occupants of houses, and waits for yips, acquiescence and yowls from the faithful and trusting.

Lightly in a season of nostalgia recalling emotional experiences with some degree of tranquility, the poltergeist wonders whatever happened to the joker from psychical research.

How is he coping with maturity? Is he up-to-date with his burial society payments? Does he ever ask himself how Lazarus did it?

EMILY AND WALT, WALT AND EMILY

Cross-town buses run each way To and from the open poetry reading, Bearing Emily and Walt, Walt and Emily.

Emily stands at the foot of the pier. Contemplating the Hudson, Jersev, A city which isn't hers. Inward, shy. Wary of the afternoon sun, Bombast. The naked ego on display, Emily turns and hastily catches Her cross-town bus. Eastward bound. Thinking of her sandalwood box, An inward private special place for poems; And she rides. Happier with private lyricism. With increasing distance, Counting each block Away from the open poetry reading As liberative of community. Others.

Cross-town buses run each way, To and from the open poetry reading, Bearing Emily and Walt, Walt and Emily.

Westward riding Walt, Riding into the setting Jersey sun, Hails Emily from his cross-town bus, Yelling: "Why aren't you coming To the open poetry reading?" And Walt rides on. Impatient, Turned outward. Turned on. Loving cross-town streets, Uptown-downtown streets, The pulse and heart and promise of a city, The world. The prospect ahead, All a delight to anticipate, Joyously excited, Bucked up by the contemplation of all the ego-bombast, The shared, the real, the enlarged, All. himself. One's self, the blade of grass. An empire city, The self and city and words of others. Strengthened, multiplied By the multiple statement/sound.

And Emily, Briefly secure in flight, Thinks How dangerous To give your heart to public rhetoric,

How perilous To run the risk of love, The risk of loving or being loved, And then she thinks of Walt, Outward loving verbal Walt. A sandalwood box is not enough. We wear too many masks of privilege and privacy Turn too often from the sun of reality Deny too often the heart Without or with its Pascal reasons. And Emily, lonely on her cross-town bus, Continues eastward, Thinking of Walt, Vibrant in his courage, In his involvement.

And Walt, Loving Emily even in her flight, Thinks How dangerously not to love, Fully, rapaciously, World-embracing, world-embraced, Rhetoric-fucking, rhetoric-fucked; And he is impatient with the blocks Which still intervene As cross-town buses run their way Closer and closer To the open poetry reading.

Counter-transference can occur When cross-town buses Bearing Emily and Walt, Walt and Emily Pass, With Walt yelling Out of bravado and conviction and need to Emily. Walt, Nearing the end of the westward line, Asks himself: "When did I, Like Emily, Last have a glorious introspective private moment?"

A weathervane, A cross-town bus, Any vibrant authentic poet, Can spin and turn At the line's end.

Walt spins and turns, Whirling with thoughts of Emily, And he rides back east in search of self.

Emily, Riding vibrantly, Passionately, Preciously alone, Thinks again of Walt, Engaged poet, Taking his chances With the whole fucking universe, And stays on her bus At the end of the line To ride westward Into the setting Jersey sun To wave and yell at Walt On his cross-town bus Passing hers: Why aren't you coming To the open poetry reading?

ARKAPENKO, TAWDRY VIOLETS

Arkapenko, tawdry violets have their own identity and no longer remind me of you any more than violence or violins. Rather when I see them I simply see violets as tardily irrelevant as the violence; evolving much like the music of violins a trifle unstrung less than resolutely anywhere.

Tardily I violate your name Archapenko having but a single hostile inadequate reference book at hand.

There is no image of profile or cross-allusion leading to violets or from them in any tawdry or tardy state any more than violins, muted or violence, less muted, nor is there a convenient variant spelling illuminating or placing some moment of time or love. The violence trembles alone unioined, unfaced with any name. Perhaps Artapenko as it may well have been in those brief moments before the violence surfaced and achieved its own identity before there were the less tardy interruptive thoughts of untuned violins one borrowed viola or of violets more gentian-like perverse bluer than any purple or violet and confusing only in the tardy triggering of nothing.

But was it Arkapenko Archapenko or Artapenko? My memoirs will smack of fabrication in the absence of helpful clues in reference books in the violence dangling privately much like the steadily deteriorating violins the violets, Arkapenko, however tardy.

O CAMUS

(For Christian Friedlander)

What do you do with the cat that nips at your knees while you're taking a shit?

Well, you pick him up, risking the scratching of well-nipped knees, delay the shit, pet him, proceed to tell him about existential choice, the myth of Sisyphus, authenticity; and ask the pivotal question: would his behavior have been different had you named him Sartre?

THE REST IS NEVER SILENCE

(For Betty Hamilton)

The rest is never silence. Silence only occurs when love is going well. I think of the dust which is God blowing across the Carquinez Straits and coming down on conversation in the Cedar with a collector of objects. I had hoped that we would talk of love. make it. Between doubles he tells me. "Spanish bayonets and glass paperweights are becoming increasingly scarce ... " I refuse to ask how many glass paperweights he already owns. "I had a first edition once," I say "of Stephen Vincent Benet's Spanish Bayonets. My cleaning woman walked out into the West Village sun with it under her arm and I never saw either her or the book again. I wish that I could wish her joy in her acquisition, her escape.

More recently a friend of mine had a Spanish bayonet with a superb Toledo blade stolen along with fifty sweaters with the price-tags still on them. Her despair was near total. The police retrieved her Spanish bayonet and three of the fifty sweaters." The collector listens. remembering first editions which have been stolen from him. I know what he is thinking. He doesn't seem to care what I may be thinking. We go our separate ways. The rest is never silence.

FIVE HUNDRED NOVELS

(For Dan Isaac)

There is no formula for Catcher, Seize the Day, Player Piano, Drive, He Said, Walden, Moby Dick, the unwritten novel about the Hebrew Union student, latter-day Huck, considering the route of a goy, contemplating a suitably reformed raft with which to explore the Ohio of middle America.

Give or take a few, five hundred novels have been written about Chicago, studied, compared, entered in the bibliography of a learned dissertation.

The Windy City coexists, with appropriate indifference, recognizing, as it were, a kind of Roy Eldridge sound and silence.

No one in his right mind wants to write in the voice of Farrell, Sandburg, Halper, Meyer Levin, Studs Terkel or Harriet Monroe.

The good Chicago novel, brawling, harsh, abrasive, anarchistic, is always the next one.

Baldwin wrote against the strains of Lady Day and Bessie; and Styron wrote, the overtones of conversation with Baldwin still reverberating in his skull.

Roy Eldridge, freshly, thinks, feels, sound and is Chicago.

In silence and its statement Beckett and Wiesel commune: somewhere in this absence and denial of formula we find lonely students of the Talmud in Cincinnati, Portnoy, Chicago, the brothers Singer, Roy Eldridge, ourselves.

FOR YOU, MOON GAFFNEY, AND KINDRED SPIRITS

For you, Moon Gaffney, and kindred spirits, too numerous for casual invoking, lonely in Brooklyn and elsewhere. lost in and out of time. ill-informed, believing romantic poets. teachers of literature. the boys at the candy store. tabloid makers and shapers of horoscopes, the lunatics who walk your Williamsburg streets. here it is, the real right thing, appropriate solar distance, wise detachment, duly bequeathed to you with affection, no strings, no hands, better by far than any plated or blessed amulet. the most heady and intoxicating moonshine from Kentucky hills. better than the excited animation of nursery rimes, with Walt Disney goosing a happy cow right out of her pasture, egged on by a cat and fiddle, suicidally playing, non-union, most likely, the pact enforced by sheer guts, better than learned astronomers at Williams Bay or Palomar (what can they know of Moon?). Here is the earth Baedeker

which you so sorely need to place alongside of Mina Loy's Lunar Baedeker as you hang out of your Brooklyn tenement window, pillow beneath your elbows, window opening naturally on the world. and you, mooning, watch the moon over the Paramount. contemplate the stars, including those of Hollywood, hopelessly confused by now with your own Catholic navel. dream up a Moon-probe which others might confuse with self-analysis, conjure up an eclipse without realizing that the eclipse of Moon is already in the making as you weep over the lost departed chick who had her own dreams of the man in Moon and briefly and recklessly thought that you might do. that you were the one, before she discovered you were facing a lunacy hearing scheduled for almost any day or hour now with presiding judges, doctors and other learned men

tending to look (how high is Moon?) rather far a sky, Moon-wise, for appropriate causes as do rueful cops on certain nights or keeps of tidal ebb and flow while you worry about the next creative writing assignment,

the paper Moon, papering Moon,

with frantic and inevitable questing for rimes for June

in the great Hollywood-Tin Pan Alley tradition: and consider the androgynous chance of being got with child by an alien yet fertile moon inseminating Moon, Moon Dog descending in a flying saucer to cause the unorthodox havoc. Yours, Moon, is a dark and sexually multiple persona. Jung has said so and it must be true, and you must be wary of the inseminating moon, Moon, with your sum moon = round face

with your own moon=round face,

mirroring the moon=you, ebbing vulnerable,

given to seminal tides

of incredible surge and urgency,

feminine complement to your earth-wise

stalwart masculine Brooklyn cock.

So, here it is, Moon, for you and kindred spirits, too numerous for casual invoking,

a legacy, lovingly tendered, for what it may be worth,

your earth Baedeker, guide to Brooklyn and related earthly terrain, your prick, you yourself Moon.

ANOTHER RAMAPOE MOUNTAIN GHOST

for Dennis Barone

Sometimes one Ramapoe Mountain ghost may be confused with another. A desk clerk in the Dayton Howard Johnson motel reports renting a room to Alice and his rattlesnake only to have both vanish before dawn. He knows about wily shape-shifters, having minored in the occult while studying hotel administration at Cornell. Curators of the Huntington Library in San Marino are baffled by an empty peanut butter jar found on top of a glass display case containing drawings by William Blake. Members of the Church of the Second Coming of William Blake in New Harmony. Indiana. share a religious experience when a Blake-appearing figure turns up in the middle of an otherwise dull service. passes out copies of a monograph on Blake

as if they were hymnals, and then recites from memory long passages of Blake's apocalyptic writing.

Later, the beadle of the Church wonders if the young man could accidentally have dropped his worry beads in the collection plate.

Simultaneously, a quiet household in Ramsey, N.J., is shaken by the apparition of an older son. returned far too soon and implausibly from California. his immediate presence hard to reconcile with reported sightings in so many other places. His knapsack full of copies of his scholarly monograph on Blake remains where he dumped it on the living room floor. With Andy Hardy affection he greets the family collie. The dog is too dignified to bark at any ghost of Mickey Rooney. For a Ramapoe Mountain ghost, his appetite is excellent. He has lost none of his zest for peanut butter.

He is playing Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band with all of his usual corporeal affection for the Beatles. He is making long distance calls to friends in the Berkshires lonely in communes. He is writing love poems. He believes his heart is broken. He may be turning into another ghostly lover. His father finds communication with the ghost

about as smooth and easy as talk with any older son has ever been. His sister and his brother simply laugh. glad to see him, whatever shape he may be in, however fragmented. They are willing to share a brother with all of America. a ghost, if necessary. with members of the Ramsev household. His family understood when he said he had to split. They knew what graduate school, involvement with William Blake, could do to any young man, son or brother.

They remember his boyish love for dog stories by Albert Payson Terhune, his accelerated graduation to Blake and apocalyptic visions. They saw him leave, outwardly intact, a tiger willing to burn bright, risk the shattering of fearful symmetry, on secondary roads in Jersey in December. He took off with a beloved rattlesnake skin, worry beads, eleven dollars, *The Songs of Innocence and the Songs of Experience*,

his knapsack filled with copies of his scholarly monograph on Blake and a jar of peanut butter.



AT THE CORNER OF THIRD Avenue and 14th Street

At the corner of Third Avenue and 14th Street vou can be blown square into the past. in and out of time, geography, history (History and its denial are Henry's myth. his making, not mine: I want no part of any production line not when shale oil rumbles quietly beneath the indolent mesas of Wyoming and the pheasant. bemused by ground flurries, is run down by a motorist. bemused by the double-feature lying ahead ...)

Always, the appropriate blue jeans, dressing-up, role-playing, the illusion of spring coming on forever while you holding a lantern in your hand look hopefully for an honest trick ... You can stand with the Jefferson Theatre (Astor and Irving celebrating) well in view; and one fixed western star, frequently extinguished smogged out by Con Edison, sometimes shines down, inviting considerations of polarity, parable, paradox, position, power, presence.

You are the elevator operator, pocket full of number slips, one hand nursing a hard-on, gandy dancer, historian of little old New York, as each, or all, weaving lonely in collective walk-path, taking a snaky curving arching route, archly considering swift convergences of pheasant/shale oil/mesa, time/place/history merging with the sometimes near unbearable now at the corner of Third Avenue and 14th Street:

porny house where nudity covers up love, tenderness, loyalty, firm passion; make-out movie house near infinite in its cinematic variety: Jefferson movie palace where an American artifact Rip's ghost still sleeps believing sometimes that he is an illustrious American actor. pretending sometimes that he is Washington Irving. more often than not confusing himself with any hibernating bear or ground-hog knowing no insomnia. haunted by no calendars of ever. bare-bereft, now-evading iust hoping to get through another cold winter bypass the writing out of the already written-out land (TV can fill him in. historically, with perspective, detachment, insight, on whole decades: silent, glorious, protest-loaded, while he snored and slept...)

Always there is Rip, the old Rip, the bad boy of America remembering adolescent mischief, a snotty nose, a Marboro country_man, raw-rough-unshaven, a clapped-up bloody prick; all images, images. frozen, arrested. secure in the nostalgia of pubescence. shy and demure with the historic safeness of distance. Rip, sometimes historian. more often sleeping celibate. voveur when roused while America fucks. actor. alone. afraid of living. afraid of death. sleeping on in his movie palace while the quick and fast and promiscuous make out around him: scared of the shrew he left behind fearful of the aging one he knows he'll find if he ever returns warv of the busy aggressive Bowery whore gingerly lifting her dirty skirts in a Bowerv doorway for a quarter, thinking, sometimes, of sleep elsewhere in another myth/another legend: now and then I lav myself down to carnal sleep at the site of Fennimore's winter town house and there are Hollywood dreams

of Casev frozen in his waltz with the strawberry blonde while the juke-box plays on; fringed gentian, fingered genitalia making commentary on Freneau as they flower in Yellowstone among predatory tourists and bears: the dream of gentian. of larkspur lotion. of genitalia. redder than the rose. intense, briefly vibrant, pulsating, rising anew (spring can come on forever) when assaulted by an anonymous, faceless, ego-less cock-sucker.

In the neon-montage confusion of seasons/Americana coming attractions promise a Cheyenne autumn burgeoning on the Third Avenue marquee.

And Rip, if he wakes at all, wakes to Spanish movies at the Jefferson movie palace, to other languages, other tunes, the boomerang of imperialism, the smells of the tamale factory, popcorn, the sounds of La Paloma, Valencia ...

(Once on San Juan Hill Americans thought they'd shot the buffalo right out of the nickel, and they had; thought they were pissing up a storm, conquistador vanquishing, and ended with a small sad smelly trickle.) Do I wake or sleep? Is there an analytical appointment which I may break or keep?

Once upon a time (I must tell my analyst) Tiny Alice, to the delight of each and all, fell right through the glory hole.

Pony boy, pony boy, who will suck your cock?

Are you waiting for your French trader to return from Canada with new treacherous tricks inviting new traitorous connivance? Dropping my jeans, my faded jeans, achieving the top of Old Smoky, banging the Bowery whore, I remember you.

Sometimes, in Manhattan, in Wyoming, ground flurries whirl, spin and spur the snow and the wayward indecisive gandy dancer, elevator-operator, historian-actor, publicist for the trade, has too many roads for the taking, too many movie-houses before him at the corner of Third Avenue and 14th Street in which to shop for bargain basement wounds.

NOTES

Manhattan has changed so much since John Burnett Payne wrote the preceding poem that some annotations now seem necessary. The seedy movie theaters that Payne wrote about are all gone; two neighborhood theaters, the Jefferson and Variety Photo-Plays, were immortalized as locations in the film *Taxi Driver*.

The 1,885-seat Jefferson Theater at 214 East 14th Street was originally a vaudeville house. It opened in 1910, and was renovated in 1947. Its architect was George Keister. By the 1970s the theater was no longer listed in newspaper movie ads, but it remained open, showing double bills of Kung-Fu, and, later Spanish-language films. The building was demolished in 2000.

Although he does not mention it by name, Payne certainly knew and was almost certainly alluding to the notorious Metropolitan Theater, the sleaziest porn house in Manhattan. Several views of its marquee were featured on the cover of the poet's chapbook. This 14th Street theater was frequented by men of all sorts, including NYU students and cadets from the nearby Police Academy. Not much attention was paid to the low-grade hetero porn on the screen, as the balconies, stairwells and a very damp basement were a non-stop all-male orgy. Imagine, if you can, a tangle of police cadets, frat boys, gay hippies, construction workers, and maybe an Episcopal priest or two.

This theater opened far more respectably in 1914 as The New 14th Street Theater. Later it was called The Arrow, and finally, The Metropolitan (habituees laughingly called it "The Met.") Every detail of architect Lorenz Welher's original design was intact because nothing was ever altered or repaired, including the suggestively stained red damask wall coverings. The theater was closed in 1988 and subsequently demolished. An apartment building now stands on the site, and its tenants probably have no idea what memories stir in the cellars.

The largest theater on the block was The Academy of Music at 126 E. 14th Street, famed for its later incarnation as The Palladium, a rock concert venue. It was built in 1927 after the demolition of the original 1854 Academy of Music across the street. Thomas Lamb designed this 3,200-seat wonder. At the time Payne wrote his poem, one could still see the fading brick wall billboard offering "Two Features, Cartoon and Newsreel" for five cents. This kind of pentimento of decades past contributed to a real *film noir* atmosphere, especially on foggy nights.

Payne's reference to Con Edison is to that power utility's 26-story Renaissance Revival skyscraper at 4 Irving Place at 14th Street, built over the site of the original theater and opera house, the Academy of Music (1854-1926). The building's tower, with four clocks and vivid illumination, was then one of the most brilliant parts of the night-time Manhattan skyline. It was completed in 1926.

Around the corner from the block Payne depicts in his poem stood Variety Photo-Plays, one of New York's first movie houses, a small one with only 594 seats. It opened in 1914 and was renovated in 1930. It was used as a location in *Taxi Driver* and it can be said with assurance that no one went there to see a film. Drunks and junkies slept in the seats because of the cheap admission price, and those who went looking for cheap thrills of another sort found them in the restrooms, almost non-stop from some accounts. The movie theater closed and struggled for a few years as an off-off-Broadway theater. Despite its historic landmark status, it met its destiny with the wrecking crane in 2005, torn down to accommodate the ever-rapacious real estate needs of New York University.

Payne's reference to Rip Van Winkle is also based on a neighborhood association, in this case a spurious one, but well worth the telling. The house at 49 Irving Place, at 17th Street, was long believed to be the Manhattan home of author Washington Irving, and a brass plaque on the building has long assured passers-by that this was so. Christopher Gray, in *New York Streetscapes: Tales of Manhattan's Buildings and Landmarks* (2003), explodes this myth. The house was built in 1849, and the street had been named after Irving in 1833. It turns out that a lesbian actress and interior decorator named Elsie de Wolfe first parleyed the Irving claim. Her partner, literary agent Elizabeth Marbury, represented George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde, and their famous salons made the house a literary hotspot in the 1890s. De Wolfe gave out the Irving story in a newspaper interview, and a Manhattan myth that will not die easily, began.

As Rip Van Winkle dozes away in one of the gone-to-seed theaters, Payne employs this urban legend in a wistful way, sending Irving's character out into the neighborhood. America's first professional author would have been very amused to learn about Elsie de Wolfe, and her legend-spinning may have been a back-handed compliment to the liberties Irving took in his own highly-imaginative Knickerbocker's History of New York.

—B.R.

TELL ME THAT YOU LOVE ME, CON EDISON

Someone's in the kitchen with Dinah plugging in a highly amplified guitar. Tell me that you love me, Con Edison, and will keep me and sustain me and that with the ample volume-trajectory of my sound I can blast hell out of affable people living two blocks away.

Somewhere in the only room at Basement East a highly sophisticated poet cat in his lap sits at his hot electric typewriter listening to its warm mellow reassuring whir listening to the non-electric warm mellow reassuring purr of his cat eye on his electric clock

thinking of fellow poets on Gansevoort Pier and the appointed time for free open Sunday afternoon poetry readings. Tell me that you love me, Con Edison, and will inspire me and guide me
and that the power and the glory and the clean energy which are yours for the giving will richly, completely and wholly be mine.

Mother's busy with the electric mixer, consulting cooking with electricity for best results, mixing up some of that summer's delight called mother's love. Tell me that you love me, Con Edison and will keep my ever-loving cake from falling.

I went out and bought an electric toaster strobe light xerox a neon sign washer, mangle and drver psychedelic toys power saw movie projector electric shaver electric railway electric oven-kiln pencil sharpener vacuum-cleaner air-conditioning unit ordered a third princess phone a special electric blanket

for those unbearable winter nights when I might be sleeping alone a faster-than-your-eye can-opener a dazzling refrigerator a shimmering thermostat stereo-high-fidelity tv/radio/record-player with tape-recorder.

Had to throw out two hundred books an action painting an old oaken bucket one little brown jug an old spinning wheel a hand press the head of a moose iunk sculpture anonymous art letters from a lady novelist dangling with misplaced modifiers of devotion a Morris chair a player piano a hook rug a wash board family portraits a double-wedding-ring quilt an abacus the manuscript of a novel in progress six critical essavs a set of oil paints two easels one drafting board.

And now I'm simply aching to have you prove the steadfastness of your devotion to me. Tell me that you love me, Con Edison. There must be other things which I can discard. There must be other gadgets which I can buy in my total readiness for your technological love.

A power shortage would be un-American, tantamount to heresy, impotence, infidelity, a harsh gross crass incredible social breach.

So tell me that you love me, Con Edison, and that all of my gadgets lovingly purchased with you in mind will turn on and whirl forever with the beautiful electrifying cosmic orgasm induced by your sublime power fuck.



GHOSTS SCARE TITO ROSA



GHOSTS SCARE TITO ROSA

Ghosts scare Tito Rosa. He thinks about them, talks about them. Fearful of the dark, afraid at night, he sleeps with lights on.

Once in Puerto Rico, walking home, kilometers and kilometers from San Juan, well past the last highway, turning into a narrow footpath leading to his mother's house, he remembered stories of the bride ghost in her white wedding gown.

In near-dawn terror he was certain that she was walking toward him, there to block his way, haunt him, scare him.

Which girl? Which bride? Waiting at what altars of conscience for Tito? But Tito's ghost was a pre-dawn worker dressed in white: a man raking leaves from the irrigation ditch where Tito caught catfish, swam and bathed when he was a boy.

Ghosts stories of ghosts new fears of old ghosts are all more frightening than childhood and adolescence.

Ghosts scare Tito Rosa. He thinks about them, talks about them. Fearful of the dark, afraid at night, he sleeps with lights on.

PEPE IS REMEMBERED IN PONCE

Pepe is remembered in Ponce: the hard-drinking goat, the delight of the plaza, a stumbling, sprawling, smelling bum of a goat, drinker of rum, famous for standing on his own two hind legs and letting a bartender know that he wouldn't settle for the mere taste of labels, that he wasn't to be satisfied with inferior merchandise.

Pepe, spirited as Pan, was killed; wantonly murdered, done in by a hostile Puritan, loving no one, loved by no one, offended by the rampage of four-legged pleasure, Pepe intoxicated in Ponce.

The killer was jailed; no one in Ponce could decide what constituted appropriate punishment for the murderer of Pepe. Eventually , the killer was released: he fled Ponce, taking the guilt and shame, belated regret he came to feel for killing Pepe.

Wherever he is, the murderer of Pepe has sleepless nights, hearing the hooves of Pepe, spirited as Pan, clattering, drunkenly, through the plaza of Ponce.

It is Pepe who is remembered in Ponce.

IF PACO WALKS THE STREETS OF MOROVIS AFTER DARK

If Paco walks the streets of Morovis after dark, walks past its fifty-three houses, he does not whistle *La Paloma*.

Not Paco of the six sisters dead father stepfather godfather who vanished in the nights of Ponce.

Not Paco whose mother tells him in whispers, with fingers at her lips, intent in her warnings, wanting Paco to hear the sure sound of coming wings, three doves flying overhead, flying over Morovis, demon-white, black devils in disguise, ready, certain to descend.

Not Paco whose mother tells him of a father, son, godfather; how bitterly, disgracefully, they quarreled; how they were punished, those three,

punished for their betrayal of one another, turned into doves, demon-white, black devils in disguise.

And Paco, with only a stepfather to reluctantly honor, listens to his mother and trembles.

Did they quarrel over beer and dominoes? Was there an abrupt crash of card-tables in the plaza with table, beer cans, dominoes, bitterness, loose change, recrimination, the flash of knives, all swept up to vanish with father, son, godfather?

LATE AFTERNOONS, EARLY EVENINGS, ON MY BLOCK

Late afternoons, early evenings, on my block Pancho and Paco drive by in a blue Dodge van and a Buick Wildcat, looking for parking places.

Pancho is the captain of the two-car operation. Paco is the solid second in command.

Sometimes they are assisted by friendly volunteers.

Dodge and Buick are often double-parked. Motors running, they may stand parallel while Pancho and Paco talk back and forth, waiting for the block miracle when two big cars will move out.

Pancho and Paco jockey back and forth between Dodge and Buick, swapping places with no apparent reason other than that it seems something to do. Parked or circling the block relentlessly, they wave with delight to friends. The friends join them, eager to ride or sit in either car, share the waiting time, the conversation, the bottles of rum.

Sometimes, a small son, Pancho's more often than Paco's, joins them. Squarely at six in the evening, whatever the parking situation, just as the Metropolitan Life Insurance tower clock is striking, he is sent home to eat the hot meal which will be warmed over for Pancho, if he is sober enough to eat by then.

Girl friends, less enchanting than parking problems, find them. They stand outside Dodge or Buick with shopping bags, tossed dyed hair, high high heels. They have just stopped by to pound on quickly raised windows and scream at Pancho and Paco for neglecting them. Wives, a little weary, stop by to visit husbands whose macho is strengthened by distance from them, girl friends, sons and daughters.

On a Saturday or Sunday, whole families, including a grandmother or so, visitors from P.R., join Pancho and Paco to sit with dignity in parked Dodge and Buick.

Pancho and Paco like their late afternoons, early evenings; they like the time of drinking, conversation, the company of one another, the steady eluding of their women.

Sometimes, as late as eleven or twelve, the Buick Wildcat in a place which will be good through tomorrow, Pancho, abandoned by Paco, almost ghost-like, tearful, bemused, no longer quite so joyous, still wheels the blue Dodge van around the block, circling once again, and again, determined to find a parking place. And when he does, he may be too rum-sodden to maneuver the Dodge into it.

New York is full of blue Dodge vans, often battered, cleaned only when they are rained on. Seeing them, I think of late afternoons, early evenings, on my block. I think of Pancho and Paco, the necessary pride they take in parking games they play.

TO COUNT THE CATS IN ZANZIBAR

"...it is not worthwhile to go around the world to count the cats in Zanzibar." William Zinnser, "Who I Am and What I Believe")

I am not likely to split for Brooklyn, Staten Island or Jersey, but I am intrigued with the idea of going around the world to count the cats in Zanzibar.

I consider methodology, suitable approaches, doubts which might arise about the accuracy and value of the tally.

How many of the cats is one expected to pet, remember by name?

And then, suddenly, far too late at night, El Gato, sad, drunk, his topcoat lost, his keys misplaced, uncertain where he's parked his blue Dodge van, completely unable to explain how he got his nickname, stumbles in, looking for a place to sleep; and my six cats, three grown, three kittens still, run in six directions.

On such an occasion the domestic inventory of cats is paramount.

Someone else must make that trip to count the cats in Zanzibar.

VALDEZ ...

for Gary Livingston

Bevond the barricades of the block party juke boxes and transistor radios rape and mock the night with love songs. Inside the barricades. intoxicated by community, the revolution postponed, we are assaulted by more music, drumming. know the words of all the songs and find our anguish steady. From beyond the barricades I believe I see approaching a beard. handle-bar moustache. Zapata bandit-style courtesv Hollywood: and tremble at the joke upon myself. I consider guerrilla warfare. its sensuality. as you engage in it. Why do we never have the real battle? Only in skirmishes with an apparition,

the analytical postmortems (where was Valdez?). the deploying of energy, angst, only in your stormy infrequent coming, Valdez, is the climax momentarily dialectic and revolutionary illusion. The perimeters of your battlefields shift steadily. mercurial, as unreliable as your fantasies of triumphant victory. Your absence from twenty villages and communes. barrios beyond counting. is more neatly choreographed than any of the dancing on the block. Who are you fucking? And where? How are the rice-paddies of sex? Chamade of drum invades high-rise buildings. saving exactly what is necessary about volatile explosions within your hamlets of love, vour conquistador range in choice of beds, stairwells, alleys, roofs. Why itemize entrances. exits? Catalogue retreats, expedient withdrawals? What are you doing, thinking of when you vanish (or never appear at all) so precisely. so effectively,

with such overwhelming sullenness? When are you sobered, even briefly, by the memory or prospect of love?

A Polaroid shot of you turns into brown vagueness. The military swagger is going. Sometimes I weep for you and Che all at once, the quick so dead, the dead so quick.

Beauty without the beloved is only beauty without the beloved, another switchblade to the heart, as unmanageable as the fiction of love, the movement myth of revolution, the mystique of street fighting. We can't remember who wrote the poem, made up the rock-group, drew up the manifesto, acted in the film, first turned counter-revolutionary in a carnal bed. Bolstered by the turbulence of the drumming at the block party, knowing your stormy infrequent coming, Valdez, I vibrate between the beat of missing you, the thump of feared confrontation, see ourselves as losers, whether you show or not.

AFTERWORD

I scarcely knew John Burnett Payne. He was a kind correspondent who encouraged my more lyric modes of writing: I would send him a score or more of new poems and he would comment on every one, often suggesting obscure poets and novelists it would do me good to read. He seemed to have access to an endless supply of paperbacks, and he gifted me a small shelf of wonderful and apt books. Although I saw him time and again at readings and featured him at my own venues, I can't remember breaking bread with him. I never saw the inside of his apartment (the mysterious "Basement East" he used as his return address), nor did I meet any of his many cats. I *did* run into him once in one of the dank and dark theaters he writes about in "At the Corner of Third Avenue of 14th Street," but let us assume that we were both there doing "research."

John worked as a reader for Avon, Lancer, and Popular Library, so it is safe to say that some prestigious editors for paperback houses trusted his judgment and taste. Born in 1919 in New Mexico and raised in Kentucky, he had taught at universities in Missouri, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Michigan, and at Wayne University, before coming to New York to teach at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, an art school.

At readings, John did not talk about his academic credentials: he had quit teaching in 1965, and lived solely off his editorial work. He was poet first and foremost, as keen a listener and judge of other poets as he was a diligent craftsman in his own work. He was omnipresent at open poetry readings in Manhattan. He had a deliberate pace of reading aloud, which often made his poems seem longer than they were. In the 1970s, short poems were the rage, and I can recall some of us being a little impatient with some of John's poems. He probably became self-conscious about discursiveness as a result. My own poems have become longer over the years as I have come to appreciate the joys of embellishment, so now I see John's instincts as spot on. "Emily and Walt, Walt and Emily" seemed to plod in John's Southern, polite oral reading, yet on the page it accomplishes exactly what it sets out to do in just the number of lines and words required. We were young then, and in such a hurry to get to the final line.

I don't remember whether I bought At the Corner of Third Avenue and 14th Street (Interim Press, 1970) or whether John pressed it upon me. I remember wincing at its vulgarity and at its revelations about things done but not politely spoken of. In retrospect I see the long poem as a brave effort at realism - not a confessional of what John was and what he might have been *doing* in those places, but a slice-of-life of place, people and time. I had an equal distaste for the film Taxi Driver, parts of which were filmed in the same gritty locale. The poem is unlike almost all the other poems in this book, and I perceive that John veered back toward the lyrical after this Petronian plunge. I would certainly not have imagined that I would be republishing this piece all these years later, but here it is. And I even felt compelled to do a little research about the history of those grubby theaters, which I added as an annotation to the poem. John did not blush to write it, and the admission is free...

Another of John's chapbooks, *Ghosts Scare Tito Rosa* (Banjo Press, 1977), represents a different aspect of poetic naturalism. Its main purpose is to depict the poet's Latino neighbors on or around East 26th Street. At a time when most New Yorkers wished that their Puerto Rican and Cuban immigrant neighbors would simply "go back where they came from," John approached them with absolute acceptance, respected their culture, and attempted to make the

reader see New York City through their eyes. Although only the title poem found its way into the manuscript for this book, I restored all the poems from the original chapbook and cast them as a cycle, exactly as John originally ordered them. The poem "Valdez" first appeared in *The Mouth of the Dragon*, a gay poetry journal, so I am guessing that the title character was the real or imagined object of some personal affection. It has the air of thwarted passion about it, perhaps.

In 1972, Payne produced a black-and-white chapbook with a single poem, *Tell Me That You Love Me*, *Con Edison*. Dennis Barone provided a photocopy of this rare item. The poem has been added to the 14th Street section of the book. The poem's culminating line comes from an era when it was still shocking to hear a cultured, white-haired gentleman utter the "f" word.

My last contact with John was in 1986. He came to me with an enormous manuscript — his collected poems. He said it was time to publish it all. I read it, loved it, and wanted to publish it, but I had no means to produce something that enormous, nor did I envision that my starving-poet reader base would be able to afford the volume if I did produce it. I proposed a "selected poems" volume. To my surprise, John grew agitated and said that it had to be "all or nothing." Sadly, I turned away the project. What I did not know what that John had been diagnosed with a terminal cancer, and that this was "all or nothing" because it was his literary tombstone. He died December 17, 1986.

Sometime after John's death, Dennis Barone approached me about a memorial volume. Sadly, The Poet's Press was at a financial nadir and I once again had to decline. I kept a copy of the "selected poems" that Dennis Barone had assembled after John's death, though, and it was Dennis who shepherded some of them into a memorial tribute in the tabloid poetry magazine *Home Planet News* in December 1989.

John's papers went to Temple University, and there, presumably, the rest of his poems await discovery and publication. This belated volume gathers the poems to which Dennis Barone and I have access: the "selected poems," the chapbooks, and other poems published in magazines. If we find more, this volume can be expanded in successive printings. One of the joys of digital and Internet publishing, is that this book, like Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, can expand as more poems come to light.

A true New Yorker, John Burnett Payne knew how to celebrate *what is.* I am delighted to be able to bring his work back into circulation so that his empathetic and gentle voice, confronting the stark and the transcendent, can be heard again.

> — Brett Rutherford Providence, February 2006

FROM THE POET'S PRESS



BARBARA A. HOL-LAND RETURNS WITH THE 30th ANNIVER-SARY EDITION OF CRISES OF REJUVENATION!! The complete poetic cycle, Crises of Rejuvenation, originally published in two volumes in 1973 to 1975, is now expanded and annotated by Brett Rutherford. These strange and wonderful poems, most in-

spired by the paintings of Surrealist Rene Magritte, were a vital part of the open poetry reading scene in Manhattan during the 1970s. They are reprinted here for the first time in years, complete, with notes based on interviews with the poet. Available from our on-line bookstore.



JOEL ALLEGRETTI'S FATHER SILICON. One of the most startling books of poetry since Baudelaire. Joel Allegretti, author of *The Plague Psalms*, has been up to no good since his first book, and this new books goes darker and deeper still, delving into such delicate topics as The Juggernaut, Mother Julian of Norwich, Eurydice as Greta

Garbo, Nico, spiders, the Gallows Tree, the horrors of 9/11, and "Billy the Whore: An Encomium in 9 Infections." This 72-page paperback book is now available from our online bookstore for \$13.95.



BRETT RUTHERFORD: THE GODS AS THEY ARE, ON THEIR PLANETS. This huge 208-page new collection of Brett Rutherford's poems can be ordered for \$19.95 from our on-line bookstore. The Providence-based poet has included in this book all the poems he has written and revised since his last big collection. Poems from Providence. More than 150 poems, new and revised. cover the gamut from supernatural whimsies to love poems and political satire. Rutherford has been called "equal parts Poe, Shelley, Lovecraft and Bradbury" but he is also something unique, a true neo-Romantic. Sections of the book include 11 new autumn poems in the ongoing Anniversarium cycle; nine new graveyard poems, a clump poems inspired by the fall of the Berlin wall: major revisions and expansions of the poet's early Pennsylvania poems originally published in the 1973 collection The Pumpkined Heart: 17 urgent and odd love poems; and a half-dozen poems based on myth and legend, including a new scene written to be inserted in Sophocles' Oedipus Rex. The book also includes 18 pages of notes about the poems.

WHIPPOORWILL ROAD THE SUPERNATURAL POETRY. Here is the expanded third edition of Brett Rutherford's landmark poetry collection. This extraordinary 250-page paperback contains all the poet's supernatural poems, including more than 40 pages of new poems since 1998. Praised by Robert Bloch and Ray Bradbury, these poems may be the best supernatural poems of the 20th century. Order the print edition for \$19.95 from our on-line bookstore. This book includes the poet's complete "Things Seen in Graveyards" cycle, along with major poems embracing most of the familiar monsters: Dracula, mummies, werewolves, Gorgons, and a hilarious autobiographical poem by Fritz, the demented hunchback assistant from Frankenstein. Ranging from hilarity to stark horror, the book also includes all the poet's work related to horror master H.P. Lovecraft. Notes about the poems round out this major collection.

NIGHT GAUNTS: AN ENTERTAINMENT BASED ON THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF H.P. LOVECRAFT. Brett Rutherford's biographical play about H.P. Lovecraft has been given staged readings in Providence, a radio production in Boston, and a fully-staged production in Heidelberg. Here is the complete revised script, with an author's introduction and a number of "ceremonial" poems written to be read at H.P. Lovecraft's grave in Swan Point Cemetery, Providence. Order the print edition for \$14.95 from our on-line bookstore.

www.thepoetspress.org/bookstore