Late Spring, Once Again

As the Ozu film (Late Spring) suggests, this is the season for both reflection and anticipation. Each issue of this magazine causes me to reflect upon the season just past and to realize that what we publish here is but a portion of the whole, a mere indication of the range and breadth of activity that continues to make New York the cultural center of this troubled nation. As with each previous issue, so with this one: we are never quite satisfied. There is a lot more work out there to see, and a lot more thinking to be done about that seeing.

But I remain encouraged. This issue continues the policy of the project: a forum has been created. So, anticipation does accompany reflection, anticipation of continued growth through continued discours. Once again, let me thank all of those who have participated in this project, and let me encourage others to do so.

R4E

In composition I do not think second thoughts are best.

Lord Byron

Editor and Publisher: Raymond Foery
Editorial Assistance: Cynthia Hollis, Tracy Farrell, Joyce Jeslonowski, Stephanie Leligston
Associate Editor: John Pruitt
Arts Editor: Scott Cook

Published by New England New Media
Norwich, Vermont 05055

Subscriptions: $12/yr., $20/2 yrs. Advertising rates on request

All articles © 1980, The Downtown Review Unsolicited manuscripts welcome

Cover: Carl Martin
(from “Nine Views of the World Trade Center, February 1979”)

The Downtown Review

Volume Two, Number Two
Spring 1980

Table of Contents

3 Independent/Avant Garde Film Dissemination and other issues: a critique of two recent texts ........ Jonas Mekas

film

11 The films of Adele Friedman ......................... Nora Jacobson
13 Harry Smith’s Number 18 ......................... John Pruitt
18 Stan Brakhage: Recent Directions ................. Robert A. Haller
20 An Ode to Max Linder ............................... Joyce E. Jeslonowski
21 Notes on Recent Cinema and the Logic of Style ........ Tom Brenner
24 Ken Jacobs: The Impossible, Chapters 3, 4, and 5 .... Tal Yarden
26 One Sense of the Seventies ......................... Raymond Foery

dance

27 Videotapes by Peter Campus ......................... David English
29 A Self-interview: ..................................... Amy Greenfield

literature

32 Notes on Dana Reitz ................................. Martha Haslanger
33 Jones and Zane: Bauwelt Mountain ................. Cate Mlodini
34 Yoshiko Chuma ...................................... Cate Mlodini

letters

35 Many Times, But Then ............................... Carl Little
37 The Cruise of the Peary .......................... John Pruitt

39 ......................................................... Dr. Bish
crept among them like smoke in autumn leaves making everything once again pertinent. Uncle Bill was alarmed and Aunt Pris dreamed that night of something genuine.

"This is no time for flags," proclaimed their son at breakfast, and so it was not.

In the distance they could hear the sound of spooking as if the old windmill on Main Street had started, after all these years, up.

By virtue of its syntactical quirikiness, the last line recalls the penultimate line of John Berryman's "Dream Song 29": "Often he reckons, in the dawn, them up." In both cases the syntax gives the line and the poem an interesting twist. At times, Lauterbach could exploit her poetic syntax a bit more. As Max Jacob wrote: "I used to collect syntactic formulas: you can never have enough at your disposal."

In Lauterbach's best poems, the reader is often witness to what has already been described as a process of searching for a new, perhaps truer, definition of her life and life in general. Take the concluding lines of "Then Suddenly":

She told me what comes to mind is "then suddenly," an icon for which she is neither prepared but always knows. I was trying to get at it, the way it goes awkwardly forward on the pavement until it takes its place, in the flow out of the drive across the bridge lights strung ahead in intimates of sudden knowledge.

These lines present a splendid marriage of closely-watched language with a relaxed but gradually heightened thought process. The unfolding of the lines is enticing: we, too, end up "trying to get at it," borne along into the final vision of the bridge lights. A similar but more direct confrontation with language occurs in the final poem of Many Times, But Then, "Gardienia":

There is "corduroy" and there is "long brown hair" and they could be the beginning. After all it helps, if you describe, to make the tactile real. Then there is the concept of "crave," how it goes down and stays down like an anchor to longings and the pulleys on which the pail ascends chafes against the mildew and the rock. If I give you "crave" will you trade water running in the sink where I placed the gardenia? As in "Then Suddenly," a certain word or phrase takes on the importance of an icon in the speaker's life. Words can not only make the tactile real, they can also, perhaps, be traded, as if one might exchange the word "crave" with all its suggestion of longing and frustration for the lovely image of water reviving or sustaining the flower in the sink.

"Gardienia" is well-placed for it returns us to the initial longing found in "Poem," though ending the poem (and book) with a direct question implies the possibility of something beyond, a solution perhaps, to the longing itself.

Other poems in this volume are not so well-positioned: some of the best are in the last third of the book: "Last Night It Rained," "Romance," "East River Barge," "Many Times, But Then," and "The Green Scarf." These poems also happen to be some of Lauterbach's most recent, and so merit a more focal placement in the book. Instead, we must wade through a long early work, "Chalk." Content-wise, it is self-indulgent in the privacy of cotton and imagery, while technically it doesn't hold a candle to Lauterbach's more mature work. It is for the most part poetic shorthand: "Days lengthen into twilight Magrittes," for example, is a singularly unconvincing line. But "Chalk" (like "Words To Assuage" and "Chappapa Revere") does provide an interesting contrast to the newer work, for it too is an attempt at definition.

Lauterbach began and ended her reading at the Museum of Modern Art with poems written and/or published since the appearance last year of Many Times, But Then. At first hearing, the initial group of lyrics she read seem to be further explorations of some of the themes found in her book, several of them among the best she's written (perhaps because they are, as the poet herself notes, a bit less abstract than those in Many Times, But Then). On the other hand, the poem she chose to end on, part of a longer sequence of poems begun this past Fall and still in progress, is in many ways a departure for Lauterbach, a departure with the promise of something new and exciting.

Ann Lauterbach has a very good sense of her own work: the poems she read from Many Times, But Then are some of her finest, well-chosen and well-read. One of these was "Last Night It Rained," whose final lines manage to sum up many of the characteristies of her poetry:

The month had changed overnight: now the season would not let go, the air stubborn and clear and cold, like an invitation to definition.

But some things had become impossible. It was impossible to wait or to sew on buttons. We could, however, move out of the house into a tent with a very old doll, and nobody would stare, or wave so long.

The narrative that follows is fantastical, even dreamlike, but not, as the rear cover asserts, "enigmatic." Nevertheless, any attempt to pull out the storyline is a hopeless reduction of the whole. But perhaps it will serve a purpose as a rough guide.

The first-person narrator is a bishop caught between a celibate clerical career and an intense sexual yearning. This temporarily wandering of the ocean liner, Hill of Pnyx, is the setting for most of the story, reflecting the Bishop's ineffective grappling with his dilemma. Hefloats back and forth in a private purgatory. Most of the comedy stems from the Bishop's energetic verbosity. Like Browning's nameless bishop in "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church," Kelly's narrator reveals a talent for eloquently describing the allure of something he is by profession supposed to deny:

The jogging one recurred.

Lili in Pumas, her body in cotton sweatpants and raincaps, what a lonely dismal way to use her thighs.

I raised my thoughts to high refusals.

I could control my sex by not knowing her name.

Desire specifies.

The Bishop despises one of his fellow passengers, August Schwefel, a devil/procuress, who continually tempts the Bishop in the direction of the sensual life. When asked what his religion might be, Schwefel replies:

"The small words of language, particles, pronouns, affixes, lexemes, huzzahs, conjunctions. These are the sexual parts, the flowers of language & I love them.

They make language work, begin to move the dreaded status of noun & verb."

Apparantly Schwefel is at no loss for words either, but the real joke is that this satanic, "tubby figure," resembles the author himself.

Since the Bishop's flow of words never halts, when the liner suddenly blows up, he is interrupted in mid-sentence. In an hilarious though poignant close, we discover the survivors as prisoners in a revolutionary republic, though the term "counter-revolutionary" would apply just as well, for the surrounding political order seems innocent, nothing more than a meaningless bantering about of slogans. The local god is "Camazott, the Death Bat," who kills his victims, the prisoners, with a sharpened stake. We get all this information from the nervous radio broadcast of the Bishop, who dishes out the official news, the party line, but tells us what he is really thinking and feeling when his guards aren't looking. He mentions a sexual encounter with his wife on the beach, an effervescent moment amidst the dull routine of the
prison. The Bishop has found himself at last. It is
the outside world which has gone mad, which now
drifts arbitrarily. The Bishop's broadcast ends in
typical Kelly fashion, with wordplay, puns on
"news" and "stakes" as the prose gives way to a
final lyric moment:

But there's a war out there. What is the war?
What are the stakes?

Sharpened
to pierce
what breast
with what news?
Here
is the news.
Be new.
The natural wood
sharpened
by conscious skill
heated hard
in a fire of will
drilled
now into
my lazy heart.

As a postscript, Kelly produces an effective
argument for the innovative typographical form of
the work. For example, along with the prose
portions of the text, set within the two recognizable
uniform margins, and the lyric portions, set with a
uniform left margin and a so-called "rag-right,"
there is a form neither wholly poetry nor prose set
with a rag-left and a uniform right margin. Though
I would be the first to agree that the tone of *The
Cruse of the Pyx* hovers between poetry and
prose, I am not so sure that this is necessarily
reflected in the typographical solution. Something
in me hesitates to reduce Kelly to such an obvious
technical quirk. But this is not to deny Kelly's
assertion that computerized composing machines
may allow writers to control how their words fall on
the page with greater precision and variation.

I don't recommend that any reader coming to
Kelly for the first time begin with *The Cruse of the
Pyx*. One would do better to start with a fine
collection of lyric, *The Mill of Particulars* being one
of the best in print. Only from there would a reader
get a good grip on Kelly's delightful comic mode.

John Pruitt

---

Your information center
for non-theatrical film:

Incorporated in 1943 as a national non-
profit membership association, EFLA's
primary purpose is to stimulate the use
of film and other audio-visual ma-
terials for educational purposes.

Who belongs to EFLA?

- Public Libraries
- Colleges and Universities
- Schools
- Museums
- Religious Groups
- Community Service Agencies
- Distributors
- Equipment Manufacturers
- Film Teachers
- Filmmakers
- Writers
- and many others

What does EFLA do?

- INFORMATION SERVICE: Members may call or write for assistance in locating or
  using films
- EVALUATIONS: Critical evaluations of newly released films, published ten times a year
- SIGHTLINES: A quarterly magazine
- PUBLICATIONS: Books and pamphlets to aid in film selection, evaluation, and utilization
  (complete list available)
- LIBRARY: A reference collection of books, periodicals, catalogs
- WORKSHOPS: Occasional seminars or workshops on topics of current interest to members
- AMERICAN FILM FESTIVAL: EFLA sponsors the major non-theatrical festival in
  the United States, held annually in New York City.

Please send more information about EFLA:

Name ____________________________
Institution/Company ____________________________
Address ____________________________

EFLA
Educational Film Library Association
61 West 61st Street, New York, New York 10023 / 212-364-4533

-38-