

ZAZIL 2

art, education, and poetic activity :: : san diego, september 2003, no.4 :: : free

:: : now the official newsletter of the San Diego Poetry Guild :: :



About Zazil2 & SDPG

The San Diego Poetry Guild is a local collective of poets, writers, artists, video-graphers, dancers, and other creatives who come together to pursue common goals, share experiences, and combine resources. Anyone interested in learning more about the Guild should email us at guild@factoryschool.org. You can also visit our website at: <http://sandiego.factoryschool.org/guild>. Zazil2, now the official newsletter of the San Diego Poetry Guild, began printing in June, 2001 in collaboration with our local sponsor, Factory School. Focusing on art, education, and literary activity in the Baja-Cali region, Zazil2 continues in that capacity under the banner of SDPG. All work presented in these pages is by Guild members. Back issues of Zazil2 are available in .pdf format through our website. At this time, Zazil2 does not accept unsolicited work. For more information about the Z2 project, visit the Guild website or go directly to www.factoryschool.org/zazil.

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Guild Notes : Signs...

The Guild actually began as a plain-old group about a year ago, in August 2002. Three poets convened one warm night to discuss the possibility of an informal “poetry group” to function as a way for all of us to keep “sane” (yes, that was the word) through regular, focused poetry discussions and sharing sessions. The group was born out of that wish and that urgency. One of our early meetings (by the end of the year the group totaled about six regular participants) yielded the idea for an “assignment” to write (or draw, or compose) something having to do with **signs**. The following question acted as a rough guideline: What signs do you live under, or describe/circumscribe you, now, or in the past? Some of the works printed here in Z2#4 are results of that early call to literary action. ¶ The Guild concept emerged in the first weeks of 2003 primarily as a means for us to get a handle on what we were all about. In truth, the name sounded good so it stuck, but we are also sincere in imagining a network of creative people (all apprentices, no masters) who share and collaborate to everyone’s individual and collective benefit. While many of those pesky identity questions remain either loosely answered or not answered at all, we have over the months settled on a few shared perspectives. Our goal is to gather people together who love poetry and other forms of literary action (as performance, publication, distribution). We use the word “poetry” loosely and think of it as one avenue for artistic expression and a bridge for other forms. We strive for diversity (male/female, old/young/in between, different nationalities, languages, and artistic predis-positions). We endeavor to go beyond institutional frameworks and to coordinate practice and theory, campus and community, individual and collective, etc. Our goal finally is to recognize and resurrect historical voicings and activities that have been systematically muted or crowded out. In brief, we meet as artists to consolidate resources and experiences in order to promote our own and other’s creative activities. Beyond that, we grow and learn, watching the signs as we go.

Bobbie : West

SALVAGING BROTHERWEED

brother brother
of cattails & tadpoles, brother enraptured
with weed-wisps & seeking.

he---natural homo-male---swims,
becomes one with
greenthings & otherbeings.

{ whistles } { bird-calls }

he greens. his several fingers sprout out
inquisitive penetrations, furthering beyond.

behinding. into.
grows among tangle-vines
kudzuing life's reach,
inter-crevassing human cracks.
of social, or soul-bereft, "others".

one caring. *to care.*
he taps in. becomes. he enters.
is entered. as
homo, nature's brother, seeking.
being found.

{ pines sigh } { a tree falls in the forest }

O Brotherweed!
salvaging othermen, their blossoms, their fruits,
making elderberry wine.

in memory of Larry West, 1954-1993

Carlos Conrad

WHY I DISLIKE THE LAFAYETTE TAP ROOM, LARRY

This caucasian arrhythmia's got me down, man,
these grossly mistimed gyrations vex me.

These are urban visitors

come to gawk
at the superimposition
concocted by their
condominium minds
upon the graffiti,
the dilapidation,
and the seedier clientele—

come to rub
their lotioned elbows
with an alternate reality
while their leather divans idle
in sanctimonious suburban safety
and mediocre blues bands
play at funk and groove.

8/22/2003

Ricardo Guthrie

SIGNS

*La Strada,
Costa del Sol,
Haciendas Sur...*

the names evoke
beautiful worlds --
"pastures of plenty"
-- playgrounds for the rich.

Cordero, Rancho Santa Fe, Phase II ("...Now Open!")

hilltop fantasy-land
brown-hued emerald cities with every convenience
within their gated confines
("Oz" reborn...
somewhere under the rainbow)
right here, in our midst
as migrant workers bend and
stoop in the blistering sun
plucking today's fruit,
succulent vegetables, and
radiant crops to feed
the hungry denizens of
"America's Finest City."

we pass, fly by, while scores
of gathered workers wait
their turn by the dusty roadside
eyeing me ... and you ...
hoping to be
picked

Mixtecano,
Oaxaqueño
Salvadoreño...

--cast-off laborers, survivors of a
long-lost
conflict
lining the ancient canyons
like warriors for hire,

--now hemmed-in by
green-rowed acres
and terra-cotta villages
sprouting through the valley,
like rusty teeth zippered across the landscape,
nestled in storm ravines and deep, dry riverbeds,
once home for kumeyaay, coyotes, horned toads, roadrunners,
the gray fox and running deer
--now disappeared, gone
forever.

and we: trapped by mindless consumption,
scorning tattered soldiers, warriors,
callused hands, bent knees, aching legs and backs
upholding our walled,
gated, stuccoed
paradise.

Bill Marsh

COUNTERMOVE

the shine is in the detail, but the crime is in the take-over

he pulls a shotgun across the sky and takes it to the nation

he winds a ribbon around his finger and plots the next invasion

so i need help

i need to develop a different rally point, many generations,
much blur, and then:

"the poem is doubt itself made evident"

i don't know — i imagine you can build a whole career out
of that kind of *evidence*, but check the facts

30 percent depleted, the rest on the way, inhaling the particulate punchlines of a dozen-odd suits and swash-bucklers

the world of intelligence has a name for that kind of statement: *easy pickins*

"to practice. that is, to choose"

alright, now we're getting somewhere, but we have sidestepped the problem of guilt and responsibility, truth and consequence, party and party-consciousness
the goal is to roll everything out like pastry dough on a cutting board floating on quicksand

and so the target, once contaminated, must become a homestead

and a home, once bankrupt, must open out into the forest
and the forest, now razed, must lie about in shadows,
leaking its secrets

busy cells, recreational eugenics, powder genocide, all filed
away for summer

nearby, a tray of fat indulgences

Octavia Davis

MAPLE LEAF RAG

At my Gran's house, there was a piano. It stood tall and thin, like my uncles, more up than out by a long shot. Down where your knees go, you could find the fair-haired names of my mama and her brothers. Sofora, John, and Jerry. Those names weren't written in Mama's grown-up handwriting. The scratched letters, bright against the dark wood, jerked up and around like kittens just learning to walk, telling us our mama was bad, real bad when she was little, sitting in the dark under that piano carving her name.

When I was ten, Gran sent the piano down out of the mountains to our house in the heat. Uncle Jerry hauled it in the back of his pickup, and it took about an hour and three six packs for him and Dad to get it against the wall in the living room. Mama wasn't working back then, so when I came home from school, there she'd be, sitting at that piano playing Methodist hymns out of the Cokesbury hymnal. This was one of Gran's favorites, she'd say to no one in particular then she'd bang out Holy, Holy, Holy. That piano was loud, especially when it was my turn and Dad was home from work wanting some quiet time.

A month later, Mama was ready for something other than Cokesbury. So she went out to the garage and picked through boxes and black widows until she found her old sheet music. About that time, my great-uncle Rudy showed up on his way to visit Gran and Grandfather. You couldn't get to Gran's mountains from Texas without taking the 70 off the I-10, and we lived right by the junction, so relatives passed through every so often, rumped and tired from the road. Uncle Rudy usually just spent a night or two, but when he saw Mama's piano and that box of old sheet music sitting on the floor, he unpacked his bag.

Get some sheets on the bed for your uncle, Mama said, so I left her and Rudy at the piano looking like they were about to steal something. Then laughing and heavy sounds, poundings and rippings and thuds. Plinking, light and skipping sounds, and when I came back into the room, I found my Uncle Rudy playing at that piano, every bit of his stiff old self young and dancing, his eyebrows, black-framed glasses, and shoulders all bouncing in time to something bright and dangerous he was doing with the keys. Ragtime, Mama said looking smug. This is ragtime.

Carlos Conrad

LENDING AN EAR, SORT OF...

The idea of specifically seeking out a poetry reading and attending has long been somewhat foreign to me. This despite the fact that I have considered poetry to be one of my most consistent and important interests over the last half of my 36 years. Save for a reading of Poe's *The Raven* by my 8th grade English teacher, my experience with listening to poetry had been characterized by embarrassment. Through television I'd seen segments of the a/courant SLAMMs. I'd heard a cassette tape of one of my favorites, TS Eliot, sounding so enervated and artificial that I had to laugh aloud, absolutely astonished at perhaps the most unnatural voice I'd ever heard. To love poetry so dearly while this was what poetry looked like "live," what it looked like to others who are indifferent or whose exposure to it has been minimal or absent, made me feel abashed and ashamed. Inwardly, I cried "This is NOT poetry! This is missing the point en-TIRE-ly! This is absurd! This is not what, in some modest degree at the very least, has changed my life and moved me deeply..." ad absurdum. However, during the past three years I have relented on my once unshakable position of never attending readings and dragged my ass to a couple. And I mean precisely a couple—two. Well, first I'd primed myself by listening to one on the radio about a year earlier.

The two readings I've attended ought to be classified separately. The first was at Claire De Lune in the North Park area of San Diego, their regular Tues night gathering, with Michael Klemm as the headliner. The second was at the Malcolm X library and featured Amiri Bakara following two locals and Quincy Troupe. The radio spot that I'd tuned into was in Buffalo, one reader only, Robert Creeley. These three are all poets with whose names I was familiar, who are respected in their respective circles of wildly varying diameter, but whose work was still, for the most part, an unknown quantity.

Chronologically...

Prelude: The radio spot broadcast from SUNYAB

Like many of Creeley's poems, his reading was a host of short lines. An old pro, he was confident and had a voice as clear as a bell, and he also provided some not-too-lengthy background info on the poems. He read in something close to a monotone and inserted an almost full pause after each line. The sentences sounded a bit stumbly and were almost completely shorn of lyricism.

1 : A Tuesday eve at Claire de Lune

There were young poets (early twenties or even late teens) who read their stuff nervously and seemed unaccustomed to the sounds their own vocal chords made, but whom I liked simply for the bravado that I certainly lacked at that age. Their poetry, unfortunately, did not move me whatsoever. One elderly gentleman rose from the crowd reciting some Macbeth when his turn came—a nice touch. Mr. Klemm, a member of the SD SLAMM team if I am not mistaken, read last and he didn't gesticulate ridiculously as I'd wincingly witnessed on the tube. His voice was sure and confident. Some of the longer pieces featured an undulating rhythm which I found pleasant, despite what I felt to be the slight affectation of a noticeable So Cal accent. The subject matter of the poetry was diverse, and Klemm managed to be witty quite often, with catchy lines peppered throughout. I do not recall being moved beyond a few smiling nods and some honest chuckles at the witticisms. I liken his reading to what I would call quality pop music.

2 : Malcolm X Library

The reading was slow getting underway, owing, or so it seemed, to the unexpected number of attendees attracted by the opportunity to see and hear a living legend—Amiri Baraka. The first reader was a local graduate student who wrote one longish piece especially for the occasion. His reading was sprinkled with the staccato cadences which seem to be favored in SLAMM type readings but also contained lengthier and lilting sequences.

His performance was followed by another local poet who brought on stage a cd player and danced about to music before she began. Hers was a fairly raw urban voice that also took the time to directly jab at the current free-market consumer culture.

Quincy Troupe followed this with a series of poems that ranged in voice and length. The first was a New Mexican, indigenous meditation of some length read at what seemed too fast a pace for the complexity of the composition. A bit later on he read a hilarious rant against the renowned racist Tom Metzger that had the whole crowd laughing aloud.

Amiri Baraka began with a long piece that dealt primarily with the shedding of his former naiveté. His reading was truly exquisite, the early sections were extremely modulated, read almost sotto voce, often nostalgic, but as the piece unwound itself he would then turn on a dime into a humorous, self-effacing, self-lacerating sarcasm. There were sections that reminded me very much of the adventurous wordplay common in Cummings' work. Later on he began a series of short, short poems which he "lo-ku" because though short he didn't bother counting syllables. Most of these were witty, or tried to be. During this section he also preceded many of the poems with a scat of jazz riffs which he knew and loved. His enthusiasm was irrepressible, and I didn't find this method of introduction too distracting. This section, appropriately, had the flavor of short classic jazz, which is enjoyable but not quite beautiful to me. He closed the reading segment with a meditation on the happenings of September 11, 2001 which had caused a bit of a stir when he first made it public.

None of the pieces which I heard were known to me, save the Macbeth quotes, and I have not read any of them since. Had I been more deeply affected by what I was exposed to I believe I would have sought out the work and purchased it.

Ex Post Facto...

My apologies to the above mentioned poets—I do not claim to have been able to give my heart fully to the endeavor, though I certainly did my best. Nor do I claim to have remembered to a high degree of accuracy the entirety of their readings. The synopses above are merely crude impressions.

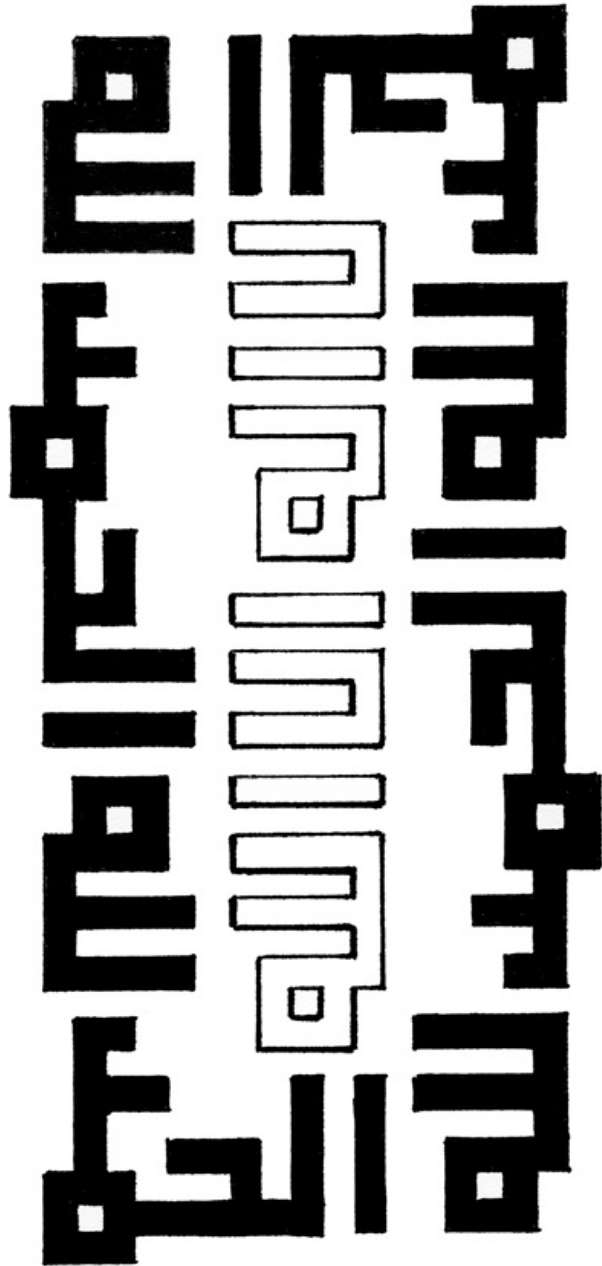
That I am biased towards reading is obvious, notwithstanding the fact that recitals are consistent with the origins of the poetic tradition. The word was spoken or sung or grunted or shouted before it was ever written. This presents itself to me as an essential contradiction from which I cannot quite escape. I love poetry but avoid readings. I realize this is strange and may be even referred to as closed-mindedness. My ears seem to operate just fine even though no one is speaking when I am alone with a book scanning lines. It seems to me that I am hearing the intonations and rhythms. MS Merwin's sonnets without punctuation were at first very foreign to me, yet now I seem to pause naturally where (I think!?) I should. It is useless for me to attempt to mask what I feel is a rather obvious form of snobbism. While I can accept that poetry cannot always aim at the sublime (Eliot's *Cats* makes me wretch), I tend to prefer that it stay away from Warhol's whorish 15 seconds. Somehow or other, I have simply always found it hard to bear some of the too common, overly theatrical aspects of poetry readings, yet never for a second will I deny the poetical genius present in some theater—Chekhov and Shakespeare come immediately to mind and have, in their turn, raised many a goosebump.

"Tonight I'm not fearing any man!"—MLK on the eve before his murder: This is poetry to me. The intonation alone is poetry to me. Amiri Baraka's nostalgic piece was quite moving and far superior to anything else I have ever heard live. It moves into the regions of what I'd call high art. However, this last also stood out as the exception, a

most welcomed and brilliant one at that, but since it was among the first poems he read its effect was severely diluted by what followed.

Poetry reading seems to me a subtle form... where inflection reigns supreme. Perhaps TS Eliot and Robert Creeley would have benefited from some experience in acting and the SLAMM readers seem far too often to be exercising a brand of personality promotion, a caricature of theatre or a stab at amateur mesmerism from which I instinctually recoil. All the gesticulating seems more appropriate for rap performers—some of whom I enjoy—see Chuck D and LL Cool J.

Though I cannot claim to have been converted into an enthusiastic attendee of readings, it is entirely likely that I will no longer avoid them purposefully. There is plenty of poetry to be read and readings to attend within San Diego's literary community. Beauty is to be found here and there among the two. William Carlos Williams wrote, "One or two moves are made, the rest is repetition." It is these moves that my ears long for, the arrows for which I keep my heart continually exposed.



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