

Steve Evans
Field Notes, October 2003–June 2004

“Red as the *Daily Worker* and twice as sore,” just like Barbara Stanwyck’s tonsils in the screwball comedy *Ball of Fire*, issue three of *The Poker* hit the mails—the bookstands being denied it by the corporate behemoths that monopolize the delivery of print culture in our time, freezing out small publishers while eroding the nonprofit model of freely disseminated literacy proposed by public libraries—in the last week of October 2003. Since that fall issue, much more has transpired—in the world of poetry, in the world at large—than can be adequately addressed in the following pages, but a quick and partial treatment seems to me both possible and, given the medium, desirable. For while books and anthologies seek to arrest time—or better, to abolish one temporal register (the non-literary quotidian) so that another, textually immanent one, can be inaugurated—journals take time as their medium, unfolding within it episodically and creating thereby a kind of percussive temporality consisting of beat (new issue) and interval (the time between).

But how are the activities of the interlude between the last *Poker* and the one you hold in your hands now to be measured? How does one proceed in the attempt to sound out such an interval? There are many ways to answer, but for this first effort in what is projected to be a regular *Poker* feature, I’ve chosen four dissimilar strategies that range from the essayistic, on one end of the spectrum, to the baldly deictic, on the other. I consider, first, the question of what happens to poetic value when we delink it from a “scarcity model” that ill fits our time of hyperproductive plenty. Next I offer a kind of chronoscopic or kaleidoscopic account of the past eight or nine months in which fragments of a lover of poetry’s discourse mix with social and geo-political memes bearing the time-stamp, in sum and however fleetingly, of “the present.” There follow a half-dozen “constellations” of poetry titles that mark the changing state of my own, all-too-limited, sense of which recent works have been particularly interesting to think with and about. And finally I present, for the sense it might offer of all that is out there, a long list of poetry titles recently reviewed in several tuned-in venues. At a time when negative or even ambivalent judgments seldom provide the impulse to a reviewer’s action, what a work’s presence on this list says at a minimum is that *someone* found value in its

pages. It is my hope that, together, these strategies allow at least a glimpse into the times we are with as *Poker 4* goes to press.

I. On Value, Appetite, Taste, and the Outsourcing of Judgment

As evidence for the “hyperproductive plenty” mentioned above, let me first point to the more than two hundred (208 to be exact) volumes of poetry—brought out by more than one hundred (105) different publishers and carrying a combined retail value of about \$4200—that received reviews between October 2003 and June 2004 in four venues that regularly attend to the genre, *Publishers Weekly* (with its monthly “Poetry Forecasts”), *Boston Review* (a bimonthly that regularly runs feature-length as well as capsule poetry reviews), the *Poetry Project Newsletter* (also bimonthly) and *Rain Taxi* (a quarterly review organ). If one figures, as it seems reasonable to do, that for each volume reviewed at least one other flies under the radar, we’re talking about a publishing clip of about fifty new full-length volumes of poetry a month.

I could likewise point to the fact that between November 2003 and June 2004, the magazine *Poets & Writers* documented the distribution of more than a million dollars in prize monies—a shade less than the cost of a single Tomahawk missile—to about two hundred different poets.

A more particular, and perhaps idiosyncratic, measure is arrived at when I look back over the catalog of works received on my website, *Third Factory/Notes to Poetry*, where I count more than sixty-five full-length volumes of poetry—most of them published within the year—that have made their way to remote Orono, Maine in the past eight months, along with thirty-five or more chapbooks, a smattering of broadsides, and numerous magazines of every imaginable format and publishing rhythm.

Taken together these numbers only state the obvious: namely, that there is much more poetry released into the circulatory systems of the commercial and gift economies than any one non-bedridden person can hope to read even once with care. What interests me about this obvious fact—call it the fact of poetic overpopulation, long-ago established and ever ready to serve as pretext for the most idiotic of dirges, rants, and handwringings—is that it puts pressure on our conception of value by getting back behind the question of “taste” to its precondition in “appetite.” It drives us to ask, prior to any discussion of poetic value: “but how much of it do you want? One good new book a century? A generation? A decade? A year? A season? A month? A week? Each morning?” Once again the question is

one of interval—of the stipulated rhythm whereby the poetic “good” is to be credibly shared out amongst such readership as poetry has.

Thinking of various friends and acquaintances, I can put different faces to each one of the answers sketched above, and I can readily imagine the persuasive reasoning as well as the characteristic delusions that would accompany whichever answer was advanced, perhaps because I myself have held each position (delusion and all) at different times and in the context of different conversations with others and with myself.

On the whole, though, I find that with time, and not without a great deal of ambivalence and self-doubt concerning the development, I have moved as a reader, and am trying to learn how to move as a “critic” (that is, someone who commits to the strange work of *writing* out of the experience of his or her *reading*) from an emphatic model of value—in which good work is by definition scarce, concentrated in just a few texts, and of an order discontinuous with ordinary existence—to a model that delinks value from scarcity and links it, instead, to a concept of a distributed productive plenty that defies or sets aside zero-sum logics and envisions good work as, potentially at least, common in its occurrence and continuous with the plane of this-worldly experiences.

The proliferation of points of poetic agency, the fact of our being numerous in an open field, hasn’t—as initially it looked like it might, and as some quite ardently hoped it would—stripped the “name of the author” of its function, which is to crystallize in synecdochic form past experiences of poetic value and to allow the projection on that basis of future experiences. The attempt to organize poetic value around alternative figures (anonym or heteronym, collective network or assembly line) hasn’t yet succeeded, and seems to me unlikely to do so. But the multiplication of names—the sense that it may well be necessary to carry around fairly sophisticated pictures of two- or three- hundred poetic projects—articulated over many years and manifesting in diverse forms—marks a sea-change from the days when a cluster of a half-dozen names (be they Lowell, Bishop, Jarrell, Berryman, Schwartz, and Plath, or John, Jimmy, Frank, Kenneth, and Barbara) could pass for working knowledge.

This shift from scarcity and concentration to plenty and articulation, with its attendant shortening of the interval between experiences of (positive) poetic value—in other words, the banalization of the poetic good—is, I would contend, an accomplished but still quite unsettling fact, one that continues to awaken lively resistances in most of us with any stake in the

conversation about the contemporary in poetry. The rhetoric of the exception—a firmly entrenched holdover from the scarcity model—remains the obligatory rhetoric of nearly all blurbs (I find especially egregious the ones in which a poet’s elder, and usually his or her mentor, deems the ephēbe the only good writer of his or her generation: David Shapiro on Joseph Lease comes to mind as a particularly absurd example of such a claim) and the majority of reviews. From the other side, the practice of making determinate judgments within the untotizable field is rendered more difficult by the predominance of a vacuous pluralism that tends to vacate the responsibility of serious analysis, distinction making, and position-taking, and to mystify power relations within the poetic field and within society at large. As I’ve argued elsewhere, it is the latter mode that reigns at present, and while the soft dominion of the eclectic is certainly easier to take than were the hard lines of the doctrinaire (and mostly patriarchal) absolute, it still represents—to my mind at least—an intellectually lazy response to problem of poetic value as we face it today.

Lazier still, and not unrelated, is the tendency to allow poetic value to be dictated by pseudo-objective mechanisms such as book prizes and foundation grants, which together with the MFA system constitute the institutional framework within which a poetry’s field-specific capital (the recognition a poet’s work has earned from other poets, critics, scholars, publishers, and readers) can be converted into ready cash and/or a steady salary. That career success within this matrix, and the middle-class existence that it purchases, bears no necessary relationship to poetic ability—and may even index that ability inversely—used to be a more widely-shared assumption than it is today. If I cling to it in the face of a barrage of statements, public and private, printed and proclaimed, that equate prize-winning poetry with interesting poetry, it is because I so seldom find the equation to be borne out in the act of reading. Strangers to poetry, college deans, family members: I can understand their being impressed by a prize, for it serves their interest—which is precisely *not* to have to read and determine for themselves the value of a poem or book of poems—but those who read the stuff and know its history? I can imagine such a person saying: “Poets one knows to be interesting sometimes win prizes. It is not unheard of.” But anything more credulous than that would seem to betray either weakness of mind or extreme narrowness of experience or both.

Speaking of extreme narrowness of experience: as someone who spent the first decade or so of a life in and around poetry without devoting five consecutive minutes of thought to the prize structure, I’ve tried of late to

put a dent in my naïveté by analyzing the roughly 1800 awards documented since 1997 in the pages of *Poets & Writers*. It's too early to draw firm conclusions from the data, but I have formed a few impressions that I want to share here. One concerns the "ideal type" of the prize winner; another the pattern of asymmetrical rewards that I think gives the lie to claims that in recent years avant-garde and experimental writers (the aggregate of whom Stephen Rodefer sarcastically refers to as "the AG&E") have begun to rake in prizes and other tokens of recognition with something like the same alacrity as their mainstream counterparts.

If a portrait of the ideal type of the prize winner emerges from the lines of my crassly explicit Excel spreadsheet, it is perhaps that of the Cambridge-based poet Frank Bidart, born in 1939 and much in the news last year when his long-delayed edition of Robert Lowell's *Collected Poems* finally appeared to more-or-less common mainstream acclaim. The author of three volumes of poetry prior to his *In the Western Night: Collected Poems 1965-1990* (published by FSG in 1990), Bidart had already by 1996 won the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Foundation Writers Award, the Poetry Society of America's Shelley Award, and the American Academy of Arts and Letter's Morton Dauwen Zabel Award. Between 1997 and 2003, the period covered by my research, Bidart received something in the neighborhood of an additional \$238,500 in prize winnings, including several small awards (between \$1000-\$10,000) for his 1997 volume *Desire*, a Lannan Literary Fellowship (\$75,000), and the Academy of American Poet's Wallace Stevens Award (\$150,000). What intrigues me about the outsized sum Bidart has thus accumulated, roughly a quarter of a million dollars in seven years, is not that it has been deposited into the bank account of a talentless writer, for Bidart's competence strikes me as manifest and the pleasures of his work quite genuine, but rather that the money accumulates toward a claim that his ultimately quite modest body of work strains to make good on: namely that anything much distinguishes Bidart from several hundred equally talented writers of his day.

Bidart's is not of course the only portrait that hangs in the gallery of well-patronized poetics. Other poets approximating to the ideal type include Ellen Bryant Voigt, winner of more than \$150,000; Louise Glück, whose name appears most often on my list and who won in excess of \$100,000; and B.H. Fairchild, author of *The Art of the Lathe* and also a winner of more than \$100,000 in prizes. Only slightly less well-rewarded are Mary Jo Bang; Lucille Clifton; David Ferry, especially for *Of No Country I Know*; Nick Flynn (in excess of \$75,000); Diane Glancy; Terrance Hayes, especially for *Hip Logic*; Daniel Hall (recipient of a Whiting and a

Guggenheim); Anthony Hecht; Christine Hume; Major Jackson; Sue Kwock Kim; Yusef Komunyakaa; Dana Levin, especially for *In the Surgical Theater*; W.S. Merwin; Ruth Stone; Mark Strand; Larissa Szporluk; Liz Waldner; Charles Harper Webb; C.K. Williams; and Charles Wright, especially for *Black Zodiac*.

To the twenty-four names in the previous paragraph compare the following five: Robert Creeley (winner of in excess of \$250,000, most of it from a Lannan Lifetime Award in 2002), John Ashbery (winner of \$150,000 Stevens Prize in 2002), Rosmarie Waldrop (recipient of approximately \$145,000), Alice Notley (in excess of \$50,000), and the late Kenneth Koch (about \$22,000). If these names stand out, it is because they belong to a sector of the poetic universe otherwise very poorly represented among the prize-winners—namely, that large and internally-diverse cohort whose work Paul Hoover anthologized in the Norton anthology of *Postmodern American Poetry*, Douglas Messerli chronicled in the thousand-plus pages of *From the Other Side of the Century*, and Pierre Joris and Jerome Rothenberg concentrated on in the second volume of their *Poems for the Millennium*. I mention these three anthologies not because I think that their collective, often overlapping tables of contents offer an exhaustive census of significant living poets—they certainly do not—but because together they represent a substantial and considered, if not exactly concerted, counter-canonical effort that sought throughout the 1990s and early years of the present decade to tell a more various, and perhaps more adventurous, story about the US poetry of the past fifty years than the standard academic anthologies had to that date done. Whatever conquests in legitimacy this tradition has lately made, however many syllabi it has shown up on, however many actual readers it may claim (and that number certainly equals or exceeds the audience for a mainstream poetry that remains mesmerized by the phantasm of the “general reader”), however many young poets it has excited and influenced, however many academic positions have been landed, or seats won on the Academy of American Poet’s board of chancellors, one stronghold of the Dominant Poetic has proven impregnable, and that’s the one where the cashbox is kept.

Such is the larger story, at least as I am beginning to tell it to myself, but what of the shorter term? As I mentioned earlier, since the third issue of the *Poker* appeared in late-October 2003, about a million dollars of prize money has been distributed to individual poets in the US by non-governmental organizations (though some of the organizations themselves receive support from the NEA and/or state arts agencies). The roughly 190 awards involving money (a few, like the Yale Series of Younger Poets and

the Iowa Poetry Prize do not) ranged from \$300 (usually for a poem or cluster of poems in a magazine venue) to \$150,000 (in the case of the Academy of American Poet's Wallace Stevens Award, most recently awarded to the 83-year old Richard Wilbur). By my count, there were more than a hundred \$1000 prizes (most linked to book publication), five \$5000 prizes, and roughly twenty \$10,000 prizes (the Hellman/Hammett grants given by the Human Rights Watch can be as much as \$10,000). Overall, men and women won contests in comparable numbers, though I've not yet looked to see if they walked away with comparable piles of money. About seventy of the prizes were linked to book publication, and at least a dozen of those were set aside for debut volumes.

Along with the Stevens Award, the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize at \$100,000 and the Griffin Awards at \$40,000 in Canadian currency (equivalent to US\$29,000) carry potentially reputation-consolidating payouts: a relative unknown, Kay Ryan, won the Lilly in June; Toronto-based Margaret Avison (born 1918) and Paul Muldoon won the Griffin's Canadian and International categories respectively. Among the higher-paying grants and fellowships, Li-Young Lee received an Academy of American Poets Fellowship worth \$25,000; Eamon Grennan received the same amount when *Still Life with Waterfall* won the 2003 Leonore Marshall Poetry Prize; Major Jackson received a \$30,000 Whiting; and three poets—Linda Gregg, George Evans, and Chris Abani—got Lannan Literary Fellowships valued at about \$60,000 each. The Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts—one of the few foundations to regularly recognize writers of a more experimental stamp, including, since 1998 or so, Lorenzo Thomas, Alice Notley, Erica Hunt, and Ed Sanders—made a \$20,000 grant to Rosmarie Waldrop.

Most of the smaller scale awards, especially those in the \$1000-\$3000 range that also confer publication, follow a model of transfer whereby the judge is familiar by name and the winner as-yet unfamiliar. At this end of the spectrum are clustered the many aspirants to a career in poetry, who in addition to being writers of poems are also lickens of stamps and readers of contest guidelines and signers of entrance-fee checks. It looks, from the standpoint of a community-based, more or less DIY, model of poetic apprenticeship that collects many psychic "dues" but few explicit cash payments, like an alienated way to get started in the art. But for a number of people, this model has come to seem as natural and immutable as shopping at Borders and carrying a cell phone. It must feel wonderful to win, and to the winners the mechanism of their own election must come to feel "legitimate." But the system is predicated on pyramidal structures whereby

a large number of small-time losers front the money eventually collected by the slightly-less-small-time winner in the form of a purse and a book (and perhaps an advertising and/or limited reading tour) budget. It's a statistical recipe for resentment, and a website like the recently launched "Foetry"—which seeks, rather erratically it must be said, to expose fraudulence and nepotism in the judging of the prizes, but doesn't seem to consider the prize-system itself as inherently flawed and/or fraudulent—is only the visible tip of a network of nursed grudges that sours the poetic air wherever competitors meet and size each other up (AWP, MLA, the MFA circuit, online listserves).

I want to close off this inconclusive meditation on the spoils of poetry by citing in its entirety one of the more startling paragraphs I've read in book of poetry lately. It is taken from the "Funder Acknowledgments" found at the back of a recent title from the Minnesota-based Coffee House Press.

Coffee House Press is an independent nonprofit literary publisher. Our books are made possible through the generous support of grants and gifts from many foundations, corporate giving programs, individuals, and through state and federal support. This project received major funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency. Coffee House Press has also received support from the Minnesota State Arts Board, through an appropriation by the Minnesota State Legislature and by the National Endowment for the Arts; and from the Elmer and Eleanor Andersen Foundation; the Buuck Family Foundation; the Bush Foundation; the Grotto Foundation; the Lerner Family Foundation; the McKnight Foundation; the Outagamie Foundation; the John and Beverly Rollwagen Foundation; the law firm of Schwegman, Lundberg, Woessner & Kluth, P.A.; Target, Marshall Field's, and Mervyn's with support from the Target Foundation; James R. Thorpe Foundation; West Group; the Woessner Freeman Foundation; and many individual donors.

What fascinates me about this paragraph is the swiftness with which the rhetoric of autonomy ("Coffee House is an *independent* non-profit literary press) disappears behind the tangled network of funding agencies and mechanisms that underwrite that autonomy. The composition of Coffee House's patronage network—blending private capital (the Foundations, Firms, and Corporations) with state and federal support—is familiar, of course, from experience with other arts that have been unable to turn a profit on the commercial market, but until recently such a demonstration

of coordinated financing would hardly have seemed necessary to bring some books of poetry into the world.

II. A Thousand Blurred Words on the Times We Are With*

Time of the Bush Administration's occupation of the United States, and the US's occupation of Iraq. Time of the looters, the mercenaries, and the assassins. Time of the outsourced job. Time of the fabulists and anti-realists in poetry and politics. Time in which 12% of Americans live below the poverty line. Time of obesity. Time of the breaking ice shelf. Time of Lula in Brazil and Caetano Veloso on the US music market. Time of Lyn Hejinian's *Happily* and William Fuller's *Sadly*. Time of missiles fired into wheelchairs as overt state-ordered assassinations of Hamas and other Palestinian leaders continue in Israel. Time of Benjamin Hollander's *Rituals of Truce & The Other Israeli*. Time of Governor Schwarzenegger. Time, again and at last, of seductive book design in poetry. Time of militarized monotheism. Anechoic time of the monolingual mind. End times. Time of "mad cow" disease, massive outbreaks of avian flu in Asia, resurgent polio spreading from Nigeria to neighboring African countries, SARS in China, and forty-one million people worldwide HIV-positive. Time of Fallujah, Nasiriya, and Basra. Time of Mars landings and the defunding of Hubble. Time a search engine will spend deciding who wrote *My Life*. Time of the WTC memorials. Time of the videotaped decapitation. Time of the neo-Surrealists. Time, perhaps, of the dismantling of Jewish settlements in Gaza. Time of Omnidawn, Krupskaya, and subpress. Time of the "handover of sovereignty." Time of the traceless touch-screen vote. Time self-harm and suicide for children unwisely prescribed adult anti-depressants. Time of death for 521 soldiers, 499 contractors (between October 1, 2003- June 16, 2004), and at least ten-thousand Iraqis (since March 2003). Time of DeLay's redistricting in Texas. Carceral time. Time of the Levertov-Duncan correspondence; time also of the Williams-Zukofsky letters. Time of the headscarf ban in France. Time in which sixty prominent scientists denounce the Bush administration's "systematic distortion of scientific facts for political gain." Time of theorist Bruno Latour's renunciation of scientific relativism. Construction time for the massive concrete security barrier in the West Bank. Time of *Fence*, time of *Verse*. Time of Shevardnadze's fall in Georgia and Putin's jailing of Russia's richest man. Time of "possible links to al Qaeda." Time of the

* **Section II Sources:** David Hodge's "Weekly Reviews" for *Harpers* online; the "Week in Review" pages of the *Economist*; miscellaneous news-clippings and print-outs, especially from the *New York Times* print edition and *The Guardian* website; personal experience of the poetry infosphere.

Office for Soft Architecture. Time of Aristide driven from Haiti. Time of Google, time of Flarf. Time of total surveillance. Time of major terrorist bomb blasts in Istanbul (November), Madrid (March), and Riyadh (April). Time of *Crayon 4*, *Skanky Possum 9* and *10*, *Factorial 2*, *Insurance 3*. Time of the sabotaged oil line. Time of Milosevic's trial for war crimes in the Hague. Time of MoveOn. Time of the *Cahier critique de poésie*. Time of the fraudulent Medicare bill. Time of profiting from the sale of body parts at UCLA. Indefinite time of the Guantanamo detentions. Time of the translator. Time of the \$400b defense budget, *excluding* the cost of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the \$521b projected deficit. Time of prolific output by Lyn Hejinian, Rosmarie Waldrop, and Fanny Howe. Time of the \$40 barrel of oil and the \$2 gallon of gas. Time of the leaked Pentagon report on the geo-political upheavals that will accompany drastic global change. Time of Aznar's defeat in Spain and the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq. Time of the anglo-neo-OuLiPo-eans. Continuous time of Creeley's articulate presence of mind. Time of the edifying and stupefying blogs. Time Ronald Reagan's corpse lay in state. Time of *Sal Mimeo* and *Monkey Puzzle*. Time of Gore's endorsement of Dean, and Kerry's carrying of the primaries. Short turn around time of print-on-demand. Time of Salt Publications and the big-tent catalog. Time of Perry Anderson's brilliant political analyses. Time of Henri Lefebvre's endlessly amazing catalog of "les Unités Perdues" in the Marseilles-based magazine *If*. Time of Saddam Hussein's capture in a "spider hole" (December). Unaccounted for time between May '72 and May '73 when Bush served, on paper, in the National Guard. Time of the moderate Republican Senators (all four of them). Time of reading Proust. Time of *Tis of Thee* by Fanny Howe and *Of Thee I Sing* by Timothy Liu. Time of constitutional debate in the EU. Time of massive trade deficits in the US. Time of the Peter Gizzi student. Time of blown cover for a CIA agent whose husband dared criticize the Bush government. Time after the demise of Black Sparrow and Sun & Moon. Slow time of the modem download. Time of near-weekly attempts on Pervez Musharraf's life (December-January). Doing time for editing texts produced in Iran, Cuba, Libya, or North Korea. Time of the Stevens imitator and the ubiquitous tristich. Time of the kickback and the overcharge at Halliburton. Time of gay marriage (and divorce). Time of Qaddafi's rehabilitation. Time of mourning for Gil Ott, Steve Lacy, Ray Charles, and Carl Rakosi. Time of the class-action suit for female employees of Wal-Mart. Time of torture and humiliation for prisoners at the mercy of US soldiers, intelligence agents, and military contractors at Abu Ghraib. Time of the digital camera. Unrecorded time of Bush and Cheney's testimony before the 9/11 Commission. Time of Jordan Davis's 1,161st poem (as of 16 June). Time of the

earthquake in Bam, Iran, that left thirty-thousand dead. Time of total porn. Time of Tinfish chapbooks. Time of NATO's inclusion of former Soviet-bloc states. Airport time. Time it takes to read George Stanley's perfect poem "A Tall, Serious Girl." Time of the leak and of the further delegitimation of Bush's unelected, corrupt, plutocratic, and war-mongering administration by, among others, Paul O'Neill (January), David Kay (January), Richard Clarke (March), Bob Woodward (April), General Anthony Zinni (May). Time of OutKast's apotheosis. Time of the toxic salmon. Total time spent gossiping about who would get the job Charles Bernstein left behind in Buffalo. Time of \$1.5b budgeted for the defense of heterosexual marriage. Time of the Guardian Council in Iran. Time of *Music or Honesty* (Rod Smith) and *Music and Suicide* (Jeff Clark). Time of the strong euro and the weak dollar. Time of the first non-Hindu prime minister of India, Manmohan Singh. Half-time of the exposed breast. Time when *Publishers Weekly* abolished its monthly "Poetry Forecasts" (June). Time of Amazon.com's first posted profit. Time of truce in one of Sudan's civil wars but of genocide and mass displacement for non-Muslim blacks in Darfur. Time of the recall petition in Venezuela. Phase-out time for "supersize" orders at McDonald's. Time of Barack Obama in Illinois. Time of the 30% rise in annual poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, already the supplier of three-quarters of the world's opium. Time of Hugo Chavez's support for Iraqi insurgents. Time of *The Fog of War* on DVD and *Fahrenheit 911* in theaters. Time sixty years after D-Day, one hundred years after Bloomsday. Time to beat Bush.

III. Reading the Present: Six Constellations and Some Commentary

The "constellations" of poetry titles below represent my compromise with the ubiquitous "best of" list, our culture's default mechanism for sifting cultural plenty and signaling value without actually arguing for it. As with frames in a film or paragraphs in Stein's *Making of Americans*, these constellations articulate new information only slowly and against an inertial background. Snail-paced, seldom altering by more than twenty percent from one week to the next, and often remaining static for months at a time, they document the changing of one mind a little at a time, until, as with the vessel *Argo*, nothing original remains except a name (my name, my mind—alas) and a form (the mind being, as Creeley put it: "a form / of taking / it all").

I've included four constellations that originally appeared on the *Third Factory* website in the months since *Poker 3* appeared, and I've added two others—from June 2002 and June 2003—that make leaps across larger

intervals. I follow up these lists with some all too hasty and all too brief comments on many—though not all—of the titles listed. My hope is that these “quick takes”—constrained to shift topics with nearly every sentence and to telegraph judgments at an unwarrantable pace—will be good to argue with and against. If they remind *Poker* readers of their own experiences with the books mentioned, and thus help maintain that healthy state of disagreement without which literary culture collapses, they’ll have been worth the effort.

Bloomsday Constellation, 16 June 2004

George Albon’s *Brief Capital of Disturbances*. Pierre Alferi’s *Oxo*. Beth Anderson’s *Overboard*. Rae Armantrout’s *Up to Speed*. Mei-mei Berssenbrugge’s *Nest*. Daniel Bouchard’s chapbook *Sound Swarms & Other Poems*. Jeff Clark’s *Music and Suicide*. Geoffrey Dyer’s *The Dirty Halo of Everything*. John Godfrey’s *Private Lemonade*. Rodney Koeneké’s *Rouge State*. David Perry’s chapbook *New Years*. Marjorie Welsh’s *Word Group*.

Ides of March Constellation, 10 March 2004

Rae Armantrout’s *Up to Speed*. Mei-mei Berssenbrugge’s *Nest*. Kevin Davies’s *Lateral Argument*. Geoffrey Dyer’s *The Dirty Halo of Everything*. John Godfrey’s *Private Lemonade*. Andrew Joron’s *Fathom*. Rodney Koeneké’s *Rouge State*. Deborah Meadows’s chapbook *The 60s and 70s*. K. Silem Mohammad’s *Deer Head Nation*. Ted Pearson’s *Song’s Aside*. Cedar Sigo’s *Selected Writings*.

New Year’s Constellation, 7 January 2004

Rae Armantrout’s *Up to Speed*. Mei-mei Berssenbrugge’s *Nest*. Kevin Davies’s chapbook *Lateral Argument*. Geoffrey Dyer’s *The Dirty Halo of Everything*. Graham Foust’s *Leave the Room to Itself*. Jean Frémon’s *Distant Noise*. Peter Gizzi’s *Some Values of Landscape & Weather*. Lyn Hejinian’s *The Fatalist*. Susan Howe’s *The Midnight*. Andrew Joron’s *Fathom*. Rosmarie Waldrop’s *Blindsight*.

Poker 3 Constellation, 4 November 2003

Marie Borel’s chapbook *Close Quote*. Kevin Davies’s chapbook *Lateral Argument*. Susan Howe’s *The Midnight*. John Latta’s *Breeze*. Kate Lilley’s *Versary*. Erín Moure’s *O Ciudadán*. Jerome Rothenberg’s *A Book of Witness*. George

Stanley's *A Tall, Serious Girl*. Brian Kim Stefans's *Fashionable Noise*. Rod Smith's *Music or Honesty*. Elizabeth Willis's *Turneresque*.

Early Summer 2003 Constellation, 24 June 2003

Lee Ann Brown's *The Sleep That Changed Everything*. Stacy Doris's *Conference*. William Fuller's *Sadly*. Drew Gardner's *Sugar Pill*. Fanny Howe's *Gone*. Julie Kalendek's *Our Fortunes*. Kate Lilley's *Versary*. Kit Robinson's *The Crave*. George Stanley's *A Tall Serious Girl*. Brian Kim Stefans's *Fashionable Noise*. Elizabeth Willis's *Turneresque*.

Early Summer 2002 Constellation, 24 June 2002

Beth Anderson's *Hazard*. David Antin's *Talking* (reissued). Rae Armantrout's *Veil: New & Selected Poems*. John Ashbery's *As Umbrellas Follow Rain*. Louis Cabri's *The Mood Embosser*. Heather Fuller's *Dovecote*. Emmanuel Hocquard's *ma haie*. Joanne Kyger's *Again: Poems 1989-2000*. Pascale Monnier's *Bayart*. Geoffrey G. O'Brien's *The Guns and Flags Project*. Lisa Robertson's *The Weather*.

Emmanuel Hocquard's *ma haie*—part hedge, part thicket, part labyrinth—is a vast (550 pages plus apparatus) and endlessly thought-provoking collection of essays, letters, interviews, photo-novels, poems, and generically-unplaceable texts; published in 2001, and as yet untranslated, it is to my mind the most substantial volume of poetics so far this century. • Rae Armantrout has steadily quickened both her wry wit and her publishing rhythm since setting out in the mid-1970s; with her two recent volumes from Wesleyan, *Veil: New and Selected Poems* and *Up to Speed*, she's also become something of a consensus poet, valued by the AG&E, where her precise, subtly contestatory, intricately sounded poems have long stood as a benchmark of lyrical practice, and newly championed by the idiosyncrats and ellipticists of the rejuvenated Dominant Poetic as well. • In this regard Armantrout is like her former colleague at UC San Diego, the poet, novelist, essayist—and recently filmmaker—Fanny Howe, whose excellent collection *Gone* (U Cal) joins two other recent books, *The Wedding Dress: Meditations on Word and Life* (U Cal) and *On The Ground* (Graywolf) in a rapidly expanding oeuvre the driving force behind which is a ferociously oppositional Catholic faith. • With *O Ciudadán* (House of Anansi) the Montreal-based Erin Moure brings to an unprecedented synthesis themes and devices that feel familiar from the work of others (Robin

Blaser, Lisa Robertson, Nicole Brossard) but that have never been fused so articulately into a single book-length project; equally impressive, though absent from the constellations above, is Mouré's hilarious "trans-e-lations" of Pessoa, *Sheep's Vigil By a Fervent Person* (also Anansi). • *Pierce-Arrow* may turn out to be a book many of us will find ourselves re-reading a few years from now, surprised to find our ambivalent first impressions falsified in the fresh encounter; whether or not that proves the case, Susan Howe's *The Midnight* (New Directions) seems like a return to form—or rather, to many forms; as Dodie Bellamy writes in *Bookforum*, the "jumble of prose, poetry, and photographs, deceptively documentary, abandons daytime logic to enter into a dreamlike world in which the act of associating runs free." • Lyn Hejinian's *A Border Comedy* stands with Howe's *The Midnight* at the top of a short list of brilliant and demanding works published in the past several years. *The Fatalist*, published by the exceptional new press Omnidawn, unfolds at a different, less demanding, scale, but as Chris McCreary notes in a *Poetry Project Newsletter* review the "questioning process" unleashed in its 83-pages is self-sustaining: "What is a good poem? The tempo increases / as one's friendships, one's / solitudes, one's interest / in insects, one's reading / of Aristotle, one's ability / to concentrate, one's tolerance / for insults, one's attention / to film (and loss of interest / in plot), one's collection / of recipes utilizing leeks, one's willingness, one's / horsemanship, / one's suspense begin to bear / fruit" (48). • I read *The Fatalist* on the same November day, traveling between Orono and Tucson, on which I first opened Rosmarie Waldrop's New Directions volume *Blindsight* ("a term...used by the neuroscientist Antonio R. Damasio to describe a condition in which a person actually sees more than he or she is consciously aware"). This volume and the simultaneously released *Love, Like Pronouns* (Omnidawn) show Waldrop continuing to experiment with unforeseen phrasal modulations (using periods to interrupt syntactical figures in the opening section *Blindsight*, "Hölderlin Hybrids," or converting declarative sentences into interrogatives in the Omnidawn collection's "Impossible Object"), using collage to splice together dissimilar discourses, and evoking contemporaries and antecedents through a practice of dedication that juxtaposes the particularity of the proper name with the "abstraction" of the common noun. • Indeterminacy finds itself ensconced within the intimate registers of the amiable and the familial in Mei-mei Berssenbrugge's Kelsey Street volume *Nest*, where we also encounter the proper name, but in its more casual incarnation, as "Susie, Kiki, Annie" (as one section is called), or "Maryanne," the name of a newly-made friend: "The event of friendship opens, making afterward a field of possibility from which to begin, tenderness pre-existing" (43). • In *Nest*, experience crystallizes within "an

unframed, regressive series of lyric spaces in a raw interior” (52); in Lisa Robertson’s third full-length collection, *The Weather*, the drive is to the outdoors and an ambient wordscape one might in fact associate with early collections by Berssenbrugge (*Empathy* comes to mind). Forbidding herself access to the anthemic, hyperbolic, and libidinally-charged rhetorics that drove *Xeclogue* and *Debbie: An Epic*, Robertson does retain her long-standing fascination with the pastoral, here taken to an extreme as shepherd(ess) and pasture find themselves sensually enveloped by every imaginable species of fog, mist, and cloud. • I was unable to get traction with *Thousands Count Out Loud*, the beautifully-designed book of poems George Albon published with Lyric& in 2002, but *Brief Capital of Disturbances*, his 2003 volume with Omnidawn, with a striking pair of Richard Tuttle paintings on its cover, makes for compelling reading as dialectically-paired blocks of non-narrative prose amplify the “hum” of “the infrastructure” until it is audible everywhere: “What I think I hear sounds like a daydream. This time out the traditional brass band of the funeral procession is vocal, marchers singing a single but exotic line, in unison, open-mouthed, strident, distant, compelling” (88). • David Perry’s chapbook *New Years* (sections of which first appeared in *The Poker*) is another work of non-narrative prose poetry that impresses with its carefully-honed sentence rhythms and its whimsical sense of careening through quotidian experience with an eye peeled for the absurd and the adventurous: “We didn’t know enough to keep the new kid away and he kept coming back.... He turned out to be one of *them*. The fire was set so smoke us out, but we were unable to jump into the stream and evade the hounds and the flames. But we couldn’t shake the new kid. How I ended up alone in a Kum & Go buying a Slurpee at 4 AM remains a mystery for the ages. But it worked, and I woke without physical harm, though I experienced the usual guild for having lost you in the confusion. It’s a gift, if I unwrap it right, that redeems lost time, though not without pain” (16). (The Proustian trope of the redemption of lost time also supplies Lyn Hejinian with her closing lines in *The Fatalist*: “Is memory a halt? Is the dream / not an orifice belonging to sleep? The sun that lights the obvious / oblivion cannot stop it. That’s what fate is: whatever’s happened / —time regained.”) • Albon is a more politically attuned observer of contemporary experience than Perry—who favors, as the excerpt above shows, an absurdist, somewhat adolescent frame of reference—but Kevin Davies, in his major new long poem *Lateral Argument* (available as a limited edition 27-page chapbook from Baretta Books in Brooklyn), takes things to another level by saturating his restless, open, poetic forms with the kind of politically radical consciousness that has dwindled as the politically-deskilled children of Bush-Clinton-Bush come to dominate public

(and poetic) discourse with their reflexive neo-liberal positions and attitudes. • Two other poets who share a similarly caustic take on the unsurvivability of the socio-political present, but who work in tightly constricted forms that contrast to the ranging projectivist proclivities of Davies, are Graham Foust and Ted Pearson. In Foust's *Leave the Room to Itself* (Sawtooth), history has seen to it that the human subject is beyond forgiveness and the only hope—in a situation where, as one poem puts it, “hope makes torture / possible”—is the Adornian one of knowing the absolute worst about oneself and the vicious species to which one is fated to belong. Foust's rigorous equation of the grim and the true is at once sobering and curiously one-sided. For instance when he writes, in “The Rain Equation,” that “Each demolished inch /of winter / starves alike, / collapses closer — // wound-tone, / a skin of grass / the look of shit / in water,” one hears Dickinson, Celan, and perhaps even Foust's *Lagniappe* co-editor Benjamin Friedlander, but the dreariness seems at least partially self-imposed, less a truth of the world than a truth of a stunted, and perhaps peculiarly masculine, form of consciousness. Still, Foust's habit of listening for the “wound-tone,” his attempt to write into a space of quotidian atrocity without succumbing to the complacencies of the “poetry of witness,” is impressive, especially in a writer still in his early 30s and just two books into a serious and difficult poetic project (*As In Every Deafness* came out from Flood at roughly the same time as Sawtooth released *Leave the Room to Itself*). Also committed to a poetics of condensation—though of a more topical, metrical, vernacular, and macaronic cast—Ted Pearson's *Songs Aside* (published by Past Tents in Ferndale, Michigan) gathers a decades worth of work in his characteristic quatrains (see *Evidence: 1975-1989* from Gaz and *Planetary Gear* from Roof for earlier efforts in this mode). Section twenty-two of the thirty-six part “Parker's Mood”) gives a taste of what Pearson, a too little discussed poet who has set up shop at the intersection of Oppen and Langston Hughes, is up to: “Acceptable losses / actuarial bliss // Myrmidons sprung from / blood on demand // half-mad have-nots / half in love with // the whips and chains / of command.” • In *Private Lemonade* (Adventures in Poetry), John Godfrey hasn't gone monogamous with a single stanza form as Pearson has with the quatrain or Kit Robinson did with the three-lined stanza in *The Crave* (though if there is a default stanza in *Private Lemonade* it is the tristich, set either flush left or stepped à la WCW). Godfrey does however make a marked shift from the prose momentums of *Push the Mule* (The Figures, 2001) toward a more mercurial, endstopped and caesura-laced short lyric: “To be learned / from but not / to believe // Influence / surroundings / demonically // Even your / sarcasm shows / you loyal // Twelve strings / Sympathetic / yellow jello // Your hand

brush / ashes from / my eyebrows // That is just / horrible / Have a seat” (“That Place Anymore,” [19]). • Both John Latta’s *Breeze* (Notre Dame) and Peter Gizzi’s *Some Values of Landscape and Weather* (Wesleyan) remain in dialog with lyric intensities of lexis and affect while licensing longer durations for their poems. Indeed, the discursive middle-distance of the Stevens-Ashbery line (in the metaphorical sense of lineage as well as the literal, stichic, sense) taken up by Latta and Gizzi is arguably the single most seductive and productive site of poetic production these days, as Marjorie Welish’s *Word Group* (Coffee House), Beth Anderson’s *Overboard*, Geoffrey G. O’Brien’s *The Guns and Flags Project* (U Cal), and many less successful projects—Joshua Corey’s *Selah* (Barrow Street) comes to mind, as do the poems favored by a journal like *Jubilat*—all in their different ways attest. Of the poets I’ve just named, Gizzi is the hungriest for emotional communion with his reader, which puts him at risk of mawkishness at times, and he is the most prone to falter in his rhythmic and linguistic control, but his mournful sifting of “lyric history” nevertheless often succeeds in its self-assigned task of “laboring to rescue / real time”; Latta draws nearest to Hart Crane with his lush rhythms and his relishing of the extravagant or unfamiliar word; Welish works in a space adjacent to conceptual art, and is the most meticulous in her arrangements; Anderson has mastered the prosody of the expanded measure (though her lines often max out the horizontal capacity of the printed page at thirty or more syllables, they still strive to be rhythmical units distinct from the prose sentence); O’Brien’s restaging of Stevensian tones, moods, and conceptual moves is perhaps too immediate to permit speculation as to what future, less imitative work by him will look like, but my guess—based on his skillful working-through of this initial transference—is that it will be good. • Stevensian reverie shades into neo-surrealist trance in works like Andrew Joron’s *Fathom* (Black Square) and Jeff Clark’s *Music and Suicide* (FSG), where the figuration of unconscious drives and desires, a fascination with death, and a belief in anagrammatic word magic lend a superficially transgressive air to the fictions, supreme and otherwise, circulating in the quasi-Gothic spaces where reason and realism spectacularly fail. Through his Orientalism, sensualism, and stagey decadence, Clark folds surrealism back into its precedents in French symbolism (at one point a character in a poem is said to have “cum in a lily cup”: the fusion of jism and lily here marks, rather comically to my mind, the appointed rendezvous between the two movements Clark most frequently ventriloquises in his work), while Joron favors the Dada strains of all-out-negation (tempered by a philosophical bent not unlike Breton’s own). *Music and Suicide* is—deliberately, I think—looser, sloppier, and more self-indulgent (in part and paradoxically because no check against self-

indulgence remains once a certain skepticism about the ego has been converted to dogma) than Clark's first volume, *The Little Door Slides Back*, and it doesn't fare well next to Joron's more varied and substantial follow up to *The Removes* (Hard Press), but it constitutes more a minor disappointment than, in Ron Silliman's words, a "debacle" (Silliman's Blog, 26 May 2004). • Surrealism offers a large repertoire of techniques for outwitting the "little me" of capitalist rationalism, including a starter kit of procedural manoeuvres that was later taken up and radically expanded, in France by OuLiPo, and in the US by writer/composers like John Cage and Jackson Mac Low. Writing within explicitly stipulated constraints, writing "through" tutor texts (as Cage did through *Finnegan's Wake*, Mac Low through *The Cantos*, and Bruce Andrews most recently through Dante), and using computer programs to generate fixed lexical sets have all by now been used to generate large corpuses of work by many hands, to which may now be added Pierre Alferi's numerologically-constrained *OXO* (seven sections of seven poems composed of seven lines containing seven syllables), the first published fruits of Deborah Meadows's writing through of Melville, "The Theory of Subjectivity in *Moby-Dick*" (twenty "chapters" of which appear in chapbook format from Tinfoil in Hawai'i), and K. Silem Mohammad's *Deer Head Nation*, an early demonstration of the poetic uses Google can be put to. In Cole Swensen's able translation, Alferi's book (named after a French brand of bouillon cube) gets on—and stays on—the right side of the text-to-gimmick ratio, in part because of its brevity, in part because of the clever improvisations the Zukofskian constraint (think late "A") goads Alferi into performing. At chapbook length, the Meadows likewise succeeds in holding one's attention independent of any cross-checking against the pilfered original (my reading of which is sadly outdated), though having been utterly defeated in my initial go at Andrews's massive *Lip Service*, I do worry about my stamina heading into the project as a whole (*Representing Absence*, which includes the opening twenty chapters of the project, arrived from Green Integer as I was writing this chronicle, so I'll soon have a chance to confront my worries). As for the "flarf" (a term no one can accuse of working too hard to be liked) of *Deer Head Nation*, I was pleasantly surprised by its socially-tensed polysemy through the first fifty or so of a hundred-plus pages, and though the social-semantic charge decays fairly rapidly thereafter, as pattern lock settles in and the "deer head" sightings grow tedious, on the whole the book is smarter and more critical than the procedure alone could have predicted for—which I take to mean that we have cause to be grateful to K. Silem Mohammad for some modicum of old-fashioned authorial decision-making and information-shaping. (I'm reminded of Jackson Mac Low's note to his brilliant, post-aleatoric series "HSCH": "Words were

modified, added, deleted, etc., as needed. Everything was tampered with”).

- I’ll close with two first books that I look forward to re-reading: one of which, Cedar Sigo’s slim *Selected Writings* (Ugly Duckling), I’ve hardly got a handle on beyond noticing that it reminds me (as very little contemporary work does) of early John Wieners, and the other of which, Rodney Koeneker’s *Rouge State*, calls to mind Frank O’Hara’s hectic early poems like “Easter” (“When the world strips down and rouges up”), “Hatred,” and, from a little later, “Rhapsody” (“portal / stopped realities and eternal licentiousness / or at least the jungle of impossible eagerness”). Koeneker’s fifty titleless poems are fast, aggressive, thickly referential, and perpetually scene-shifting: they’re also more than a little out of control, which in this case makes them even more interesting (one could say the same of Chris Stroffolino’s poems). Three of the four titled poems that make up Sigo’s twenty-one page debut volume (if I’m in fact counting correctly the eccentrically laid out and unnumbered pages) are just a page or two in length. They defy thematization but seem sexual and devotional in places (“Thoughtfulness now / Behind a bruised mouth / And behind eyes, Why // Do you hold your / Lips that way? Because / I know it looks adorable”) and reflexively curious about what poems are and can do. The longer “O Twist No Inferno” switches between prose poem, epistolary address, veiled dream journal, and variously shaped verses: images of violence, including a disturbingly intimate knifing, recur throughout the loosely-stitched piece and panic, furtiveness, despair, are its characteristic moods (“I am thrown into / Absolute panic. The words / Are appearing with such speed / I can never care about sounding / Innocent”). I don’t yet quite get it, but then poetry is to make sure that I and everyone else never quite do?

IV. Overview of Recently Reviewed Titles

To get a look at the present-day poetic field from a last perspective, one less beholden to my own tastes and preconceptions, I surveyed 232 reviews appearing in the four journals mentioned above—*Publishers Weekly*, *Boston Review*, *Rain Taxi*, and the *Poetry Project Newsletter*—between early October 2003 and mid-June 2004. Of those reviews, which I list in alphabetical order by title below, ten went to Norton books, nine dealt with volumes by FSG, Graywolf, or Verse, eight were devoted to New Directions titles, and seven each went to Coffee House and Wesleyan. Five reviews were of Knopf titles and five others—perhaps more surprisingly—went to Krupskaya books. Flood, HarperCollins, Kelsey Street, Penguin, and the University of Georgia each received four reviews apiece, and fourteen presses had three reviews: *Adventures in Poetry*, Copper

Canyon, Faux, Green Integer, Harcourt, Houghton Mifflin, Library of America, Post-Apollo, Subpress, Tuumba, Ugly Duckling, and the university presses of California, Chicago, and Pittsburg. Twenty other publishers received two reviews: Alice James, Apogee, Atelos, Avec, BOA, the Center for Literary Publishing, Coach House, Fence, Four Way, Futurepoem, Marsh Hawk, O Books, Overlook, Pavement Saw, Salt, Skanky Possum, Soft Skull, Third World, Tinfish, and Tupelo. The remaining fifty-four reviews went, one each, to presses as diverse as Yale and Edge, Harvard and Dalkey Archive, MIT and Roof, Princeton and Hanging Loose.

Titles Reviewed

9:45 by Kit Robinson, *"I AM": The Selected Poetry of John Clare*. • *A Beaker: New and Selected Poems* by Caroline Knox, *A Burning Interior* by David Shapiro, *A Green Light* by Matthew Rohrer, *A Handmade Museum* by Brenda Coultas, *A Painted Elephant* by Jill Hartman, *A Table of Content* by Dorothea Tanning, *Acts of Love* by Edgar Gabriel Silex, *All Around What Empties Out* by Linh Dinh, *American Incident* by Brian Henry, *Americus: Book One* by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *Anabrach* by Andrew Zawacki, *Apprehend* by Elizabeth Robinson, *Arrondissements* by Douglas Oliver, *As Ever: Selected Poems, 1964-2001* by Joanne Kyger, *As in Every Deafness* by Graham Foust, *At an Intersection* by Michael Ruby, *At Port Royal* by Christopher Edgar. • *Big Back Yard* by Michael Teig, *Bivouac* by Laura Solomon, *bk of (h)rs* by Pattie McCarthy, *Black Dog Songs* by Lisa Jarnot, *Blindsight* by Rosmarie Waldrop, *Blipsoak01* by Tan Lin, *Blue Hour* by Carolyn Forché, *Blue Suburbia: Almost a Memoir* by Laurie Lico Alb anese, *Borders My Bent Toward* by George Kalamaras, *Bright Turquoise Umbrella* by Hermine Meinhard, *Buffalo Yoga* by Charles Wright. • *Calixto* by Robert Desnos (new translation), *Carved Water* by Zhang Er, *Cascade Experiment: Selected Poems* by Alice Fulton, *Child-and-Rose* by Gennady Aygi, *Chinese Whispers* by John Ashbery, *Cocktails* by D.A. Powell, *Collected Poems* by Chinua Achebe and Ted Hughes and Paul Auster, *Columbarium* by Susan Stewart, *Crop* by Yedda Morrison, *Crystallography* (reissue) by Christian Bök, *Curious Conduct* by Jeanne Marie Beaumont, *Cuttings from the Garden of Little Fears* by Lisa Bourbeau. • *Dancing on Main Street* by Lorenzo Thomas, *Departure* by Rosanna Warren, *Deposition* by Katie Ford, *Design* by Sally Keith, *Destruction or Love* by Vicente Aleixandre, *Distant Noise* by Jean Frémon, *Distracted* by Jalal Toufic. • *Echoes of Memory* by Lucio Mariani, *Ecstatic in the Poison* by Andrew Hudgins, *Enough* edited by Rick London and Leslie Scalapino, *Equivalence* by Shin Yu Pai, and *Every Bird Is One Bird* by Francine Sterle. • *Famous Americans* by Loren Goodman,

Father Said: Poems by Hal Sirowitz, *Figment* by Rebecca Wolff, *Final Girl* by Daphne Gottlieb, *Fire: Selected and New Poems* by Louise Erdrich. • *Generations* by Pattiann Rogers, *Ghost Girl* by Amy Gerstler, *Goldbeater's Skin* by G.C. Waldrep, *Gone* by Fanny Howe, *Graft* by Brian Henry, *Granted* by Mary Szybist. • *Hammertown* by Peter Culley, *Haze: Essays, Poems, Prose* by Mark Wallace, *Hazmat* by J.D. McClatchy. • *Immanent Visitor: Selected Poems* (in translation) by Jaime Saenz, *In Montgomery and Other Poems* by Gwendolyn Brooks, *In the Hairy Arms of Whitman* by Bill Kushner, *In the Room of Never Grieve* by Anne Waldman, *In the Salt Marsh* by Nancy Willard, *Incretion* by Brian Strang, *Indiana, Indiana* by Laird Hunt, *Insomnia Diary* by Bob Hicok, *Instan* by Cecilia Vicuña, *Into Stillness* by Cheryl Palland, *It's Go In / Quiet Illumined Grass / Land* by Leslie Scalapino. • *Last One Out* by Deborah Rogers, *Letters: Poems 1953-1956* by Robert Duncan, *Living in the Past* by Phillip Schultz, *Lost and Found* by Michael Gottlieb, *Love, Like Pronouns* by Rosmarie Waldrop. • *M-a-c-N-o-l-i-a* by A. Van Jordan, *Macular Hole* by Catherine Wagner, *Million Poems Journal* by Jordan Davis, *Mixed Plate: New & Selected Poems* by Faye Kicknosway, *Music and Suicide* by Jeff Clark, *My Life in the Nineties* by Lyn Hejinian, *My Mojave* by Donald Revell, *My Paris* by Gail Scott. • *Nest* by Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, *New and Selected Poems: 1974-2004* by Carl Dennis, *Nice Hat. Thanks* by Joshua Beckman and Matthew Rohrer, *Nine Alexandrias* by Semezdin Mehmedinovic, *Notebooks 1965-1978* by Danielle Collobert, *Nude Siren* by Peter Richards. • *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture* by Lisa Robertson, *Of the Mortal Fire: Poems 1992-2002* by Christopher Middleton, *Of Thee I Sing* by Timothy Liu, *Oklahoma Tough* by Ron Padgett, *On the Ground* by Fanny Howe, *Ostinato Vamps: Poems* by Wanda Coleman, *Ovarian Twists* by Anyssa Kim. • *Peripheral Light: Selected and New Poems* by John Kinsella, *Phoebe 2002: An Essay in Verse* by Jeffrey Conway and others, *Platform* by Rodrigo Toscano, *Poems and Translations* by Ezra Pound, *Poems of the Masters* translated from the Chinese by Red Pine, *Poker* by Tomasz Salamun, *Pollen Memory* by Laynie Brown, *Portraits and Repetition* by Stephen Ratcliffe, *Private Lemonade* by John Godfrey. • *Radish* by Li Bloom, *Rampant* by Marvin Bell, *Reported Missing* by Lewis Warsh, *Reproductions of the Empty Flagpole* by Eileen R. Tabios, *Rhythm & Booze* by Julie Kane, *Rivers and Birds* by Merrill Gilfillan. • *Sad Little Breathing Machine* by Matthea Harvey, *Savoir-Fear* by Charles Borkhuis, *Scratch Sides* by Kristin Prevallet, *Search Party: Collected Poems* by William Matthews, *See Though* by Frances Richard, *Serious Pink* by Sharon Dolin, *Skincerity* by Laura Elrick, *Sky Lounge* by Mark Bibbins, *Slave Moth* by Thylia Moss, *Slowly* by Lyn Hejinian, *Smoking Lovely* by Willie

Perdomo, *Soft Sift* by Mark Ford, *Somebody Blew Up America and Other Poems* by Amiri Baraka, *Souvenir Winner* by Macgregor Card, *Structures of Feeling* by Hung Q. Tu, *Swallow* by Miranda Field, *Swoon* by Victoria Redel. • *The Beautiful: Collected Poems* by Michelle Tea, *The Blaze of the Poui* by Mark McMorris, *The Book of Motion* by Tung-Hui Hu, *The Bundle: Selected Poems* by Steve Malamude, *The Collected Poetry of Nikki Giovanni*, *The Cradle Place* by Thomas Lux, *The Cure* by Sarah Gorham, *The Dirt She Ate: Selected and New Poems* by Minnie Bruce Pratt, *The Dirty Halo of Everything* by Geoffrey Dyer, *The Escape* by Jo Ann Wasserman, *The Face* by David St. John, *The False Sun Recordings* by James Wagner, *The Fatalist* by Lyn Hejinian, *The Frequencies* by Noah Eli Gordan, *The Girl with Bees in Her Hair* by Eleanor Rand Wilner, *The Long Meadow* by Vijay Seshadri, *The Midnight* by Susan Howe, *The Miseries of Poetry* by Alexandra Papadistas and Kent Johnson, *The Monster Lives of Boys and Girls* by Eleni Sikelianos, *The Nerve* by Glyn Maxwell, *The Opening Question* by Prageeta Sharma, *The Pisan Cantos* (new edition) by Ezra Pound, *The Poems of Marianne Moore*, *The Rest of Love* by Carl Phillips, *The Self-Dismembered Man* (new translation) by Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Shadow's Horse* by Diane Glancy, *The Singing* by C.K. Williams, *The Sleep of Reason* by David Gewanter, *The Soldiers of Year II* by Medbh McGuckian, *The Strange Hours Travelers Keep* by August Kleinzahler, *The To Sound* by Eric Baus, *The Voice at 3:00 A.M.: Selected Late & New Poems* by Charles Simic, *The Wedding Dress: Meditations on Word and Life* by Fanny Howe, *The White Eyelash* by Susan Kinsolving, *The Woman I Kept to Myself* by Julia Alvarez, *The Yellow Hotel* by Diane Wald, *To Tell the Lamp* by Lisa Lubasch, *Torn Sky* by Debra Nystrom, *Translating Mo'um* by Cathy Park Hong, *Trapeze* by Deborah Digges, *Tristimania* by Mary Ruefle, *Trouble in Mind* by Lucy Brock-Broido. • *Under the Sun* by Rachel Levitsky, *Up to Speed* by Rae Armantrout. • *What Is This Thing Called Love* by Kim Addonizio, *What Narcissism Means to Me* by Tony Hoagland, *Wild Civility* by David Biespiel, *Winter Poems along the Rio Grande* by Jimmy Santiago Baca, *Winter Sex* by Katy Lederer, *Women of America* by Charlie Smith, *Word Group* by Marjorie Welish.

Acknowledgments

Over the years my friend Douglas Rothschild has had a lot to say about the problematic of poetic overproduction and the banalization of the good. He'll doubtless argue with what I say here, but then what are friend for? The talented poetry critic John Palattella gave up part of a weekend afternoon last August in order to help me better understand the role private foundations play in funding contemporary poetry. That such assistance should not be taken to signal agreement with my thoughts and tentative conclusions on this topic should go without saying.