

; Or,
How We Stopped
Warming Up
for 20 Years
and Learned
to Exit
the Green Room

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VARIOUS AUTHORS
POETRY ARCHIVES 1993–2013

Curated and Edited by Leah Angstman



Alternating Current Press
Boulder, Colorado

*; Or, How We Stopped Warming Up for 20 Years
and Learned to Exit the Green Room*
Various Authors
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Letter from the Editor

LEAH ANGSTMAN

In 1993, I was a pre-teen, cutting and pasting together newsprint zines and photocopied chapbooks in a sprawled-out chaos on my parents' living room floor. The story of how this printing venture started is old now, as are a lot of the teen-written first publications that launched this publishing house—some cringeworthy outdated and childish. But some of them are the good, solid pieces that defined the zine era at the turn of the millennium and captured the “outlaw poetry” scenes of Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, and the Midwest. With the norm being submissions by snail mail and purchases by trade, it was the age of advertisement swaps, handmade broadsides, penpal friendship books, add-on and pass-on sheets, zine-exchange chain letters, pop-up poetry readings, open mics, and book festivals plopped unannounced under tents on the corner without a permit. A lot of it was worth letting go, but the good stuff is worth preserving and revisiting.

This collection is the good stuff that kicked off our press, preserved and archived here for more than the literary scholar or the nostalgically curious—it's presented here because the work is truly worth revisiting. We didn't republish *everything*; we cut what needed to be cut from the middle-school opinions and freshman first-love poetry sagas, and we emerged with the pieces that came from those who, at the time, were adults peddling their refined wares in the marketplace of zinedom whose work deserves to be read. You'll see some of the same names over and over again, from the self-proclaimed *of bearded bard* John Binns to the erotic, sexual, and über-fem-when-it-was-mightily-frowned-upon Laura Joy Lustig—those who were prominent in the scene and provided us with new material year after year—and you'll see a couple of one-poet wonders, who have since gone the way of pre-email long-lost and long-moved-away and no-longer-in-college-dorms mailing addresses. This is what survived the archival file fires, what we're proud to have captured, and what we're proud to pass on.

While this anthology comprises several early editions, this is the first time these pieces, previously only found in out-of-print photocopied chapbooks, newsprint zines, and disappeared social-profile blogs, have ever appeared in paperback print and entirely together. The anthology combines photocopied books without ISBNs, spanning from 1997 to 2007, with single straggler pieces from various projects spanning from 1993 to 2013. The included publications, now in paperback for the first time, with their pieces published in the order they were originally published, are: *Crackrock #1* (November 1997), *Crackrock #2* (August 1998), *Real-Life Poet* (January 1999), *The Literature Collection* (July 1999), *Punctuation* (2002), *Broken Livers & Broken Lives* (1996–2006), *Avenues & Parking Lots* (2006), and the Myspace online netzine *Medusa* (2006–2007). All of those are long-gone and will never be republished as they once were (you're welcome, I promise)—this is now the only place that you can find these fantastic archived publications and pieces.

These were our beautiful, (funny), humble beginnings. This is why we started this whole mess. This, *this*, is why we're still here. Because it's something worth revisiting, every time.



“We shape our buildings;
thereafter, our buildings
shape us.”
—Winston Churchill

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This collection is dedicated to
the ones we lost along the way:

Christopher J. Kranz

1980–1997

Giovanni Malito

passed on October *19*, 2003

Karl Chamberlain

passed on June *11*, 2008

Bad Blood and Bittersweets

IRIS BERRY

This is for all of you
all the x-friends
friends that never were
and x-boyfriends.
For all of you
whom I don't speak to
and who don't speak to me.
For all the hurt feelings and broken hearts,
parking tickets unpaid,
and monies unreturned.
Apartments trashed
and cars crashed.
Windows broken and memoirs stolen.
Evictions and aborted infidelities.
Skipped bail and unanswered mail.
All the black-eyed, bloodstained
dirty laundry,
all the times I pissed you off
and you me.
This is for all of you,
all the broken souls and poked holes.
Well, I can't be your voodoo doll,
and you can't be mine.
I've closed my eyes,
and it didn't go away,
there wasn't a day that went by
where I didn't feel,
and the nights I lost sleep
for every one of you
and you me.
And we know it.
And we live with the ghosts of the still-living,
ghosts with unused telephone numbers.
Yet we don't call,

we don't try,
and we don't say,
and it's not the tragedies that tore us apart,
it's what happens after that keeps us away.
And maybe if there were a crisis,
we'd talk
and say how we wasted so much time
and how we're sorry.
And we are just that,
so sorry.

Where's the Woman At?

JIM DEWITT

with everyday life just dragging along
she feels like a piece of wheat
at a rice convention
and long ago ceased doing what had helped
in past-memory years, now simply licking
a finger to hold up
to see which way the wind is

her today's state of mind coming from
former wifeness is
am I just good for picking over
in the marketplace of a downtown bar?
going there for emotional refueling
every once in a while
like searching for that skinny gigolo
quick fix on Florida Keys beaches

hear tiny faraway voices saying
watch out watch out you'll just end up
red meat meant for the beasts' appetites
pass oh please pass
you concrete-slab-colored days

yes she is willing to wait it out
till finally big old nature
decides to pay her a special visit
to dapple her sky the way she likes best

Pray to the Cherries

LAURA JOY LUSTIG

marvelous—
if cherries were answers
to universal contemplations.
and pits—
unanimous explanation
for such inquiries.
they'd give realization
to wasted time
presuming s/thing greater/
insulting simplicity.
—first mistakes are looking.
often too many greats
go unseen.
the cherries are inside.
small.
modest.
mistaken for grapes
& stomped with feet
looking for greater
on top shelves
of lonely aisles
w/ empty
dust/
academia
beside.

See Stray Dragoons in the Hollow

JIM DEWITT

“drudgery is the first law
of the universe” sayeth the whitemaned sage
scarfing a mouth-to-full with catfish
& not even pierced ears
can convert blokes
into dreamers of sorts, so the sensation
of straight gin on non-rocks
won’t puncture one’s workaholic sleep
sure as the North Pole’s really
a red & white spiral ...
but “do tote that barge, savior”
for the mostest relief omen becomes
a muscle massage
& then it’s a quick chuga beer
for the road because your econobox car
is just itching to meet
that-there oak in a faceoff

An Exit Waiting to Happen

IRIS BERRY

I've hung from the rafters
and swung from the chandeliers
bounced off the walls
and been thrown down the stairs.
I've been
banned
canned
shammed
and damned.
86'd
thrown out
and thrown against the wall.
I've been under the table
and overthrown.
I've left out the bathroom window
the back door
and been asked to leave
at gunpoint.
I've lost just about everything
I ever loved and cared for
had it smashed to pieces
or thrown out of 4th story windows
at 4 a.m. in the rain.
My specialty,
dramatic exits.
My problem,
not knowing
when it's time to go.

Return to Six One Nine

PINGUINO

My wallet fluctuates in weight
The ever-present chain dragging along
Digits in my account decrease
We're dragging each other down
Days away from hitting concrete
Harsh reality smacks us around
Scrambling to salvage our lifestyle
We gather our meager possessions
Losing sleep while racking our brains
A week is spent in scurried packing
Our options dwindling down to one
Return home and admit defeat
My personal goals hardly obtained
A slave to comfort, tied to age
My hope lies within a creative venture
Winding through the printing press
My savings the responsibility of others
As I wait for my production to release
My creation lets me prove myself
That advertising has taught me much
Pride from my friends and family
Is a key element that I seek
To unlock confidence hidden within
Yet I know that even if I returned
Empty-handed, devastated, and alone
That I would still be loved and accepted
And that's what defines my home.

An Ash Can Burns at the Feet of Christ

JULIAN GALLO

Through the iron bars
beneath the paint-stuck windows
along littered dirty streets
amongst the rat-infested playgrounds
there is a voice crying out
a voice being heard but not
listened to
a voice in pain
an incantation lost in the howling winds
of apathy and indifference
verbal regurgitations bathed in streetlight
and cloaked in maniacal laughter
There are eyes looking through those
grimy windows
looking down at the wasteland
of human endeavor

In the back alleys of Jerusalem
a prophet lies naked
drunk and covered in sick
pissing against a brick wall
and gazing at the stars
which seem dim over the skies
of New York City
but bright in the hearts of every man
woman and child who still has hope—
a cheap dime-store dream
washed down with a glass of water
scooped out of the East River

The prophet snores through the
immolation of desires
immolation of lives
immolation of dreams
where pint-sized Al Capones
draw their guns, deal their dope
and crush the dreams of children
who sit on sandstone stoops
and rusted fire escapes
counting the stars they see
as blotches on their future

Whores fuck and pimps are getting paid
Whores dance among the orgasms
and suck off the lonely men
who wander the asphalt desert in search
of a meaning
In the dark alley, an ash can burns
at the feet of Christ
and His shadow shimmers on the wall
amongst the graffiti
and scriptures of the urban prophets
too hungry or dopesick to
give a shit about the clouded jewels
on His crown of thorns

And I hear your voice in the
night, a whisper
faint and sweet
and I feel your presence
in my heart and see
your eyes in the dark
feel your pumping heart
and loving hands
opening the window to my soul

And despite the scenery outside the window
you are the shining light that illuminates
the world

Martinique

ZOE A. JAIMOT

If you are white
living on this island
is like drifting away
on a happy lilypad painted
by a drunken french impressionist
all about pastel feelings
hiding in the make-believe
easy currents of a blue-green world ...

If you are noir
being on this island
is like learning to speak
la langue française those
extra letters and accents
hang on every word
which kicks and caresses you
strangling tongues with controlled cliché ...

Le Sel Noir—the black salt

ZOE A. JAIMOT

*Venus and Serena Williams win the
French Grand Slam Doubles Championship
at Roland Garros Stadium, Paris, June 6, 1999*

Two sleek Black bodies dominate this center court.
Barriers, even gentle mesh tennis nets, that divide sides

are never benevolent. Chip and charge. Volley and serve. Back and forth
these dark women, beads jangling from long rows of flying hair—

which look like amulets: small bones, shiny precious stones,
charms woven in braids to protect both from evil. These women

streak across an artificial surface as if their body muscles
flowed and contracted like free-flowing African rivers.

Two proud young women, taking life by the throat with the aid
of tremendous serves and syncopated movements as coolly choreographed

as any by Bojangles Robinson—these women who would have been
just trophies for Ebo warriors in another continent of time,

worth many heads of cattle, chickens, arable fields not like
in this civil society where both will never have to worry

just where their next pair of sneakers or the next new Mercedes
is coming from. While TV commentators lob praises like warmup hits

between teens who battle for unbeatable forehands from polycarbon
racquets as youth passes when minutes tick by in matches measured

by shouts of “Fault,” “Doublefault,” then “Out” echoing from judges.
Murmurs passing through the crowd about unforced errors and sins

of the fathers visited on daughters as passionless officials wearing
designer sunglasses sit high in chairs judging what was up until now,

a game dominated by ponytailed opponents with perfect tans.
White girls outfitted in sweatbands, color coordinated with pastel

towels as they blot perspiration from soft skin while their youth passes.
Minutes ticking away in matches measured by blurring overhands.

All these women to keep loose before a return swaying and then bounce
away from riots transferred from rap CDs on drug-infested streets as if

bigotry could be eliminated through sweaty effort. Undoing our geometry
of sameness in this unforgiving dance of adolescents playing the match.

Listening to these two Black women occasionally shriek and wail bringing
back shouts from a different era of mothers crying for babies ripped from

protective bodies when slavery and subjugation was an accepted game.
These two Black women staking out their claim to not mere equality.

Delivering meaner strokes slashing inside lines which cut as sure as
hateful words. The N-word and worse, which are said under breaths

flicking net tape to drop forlornly as hope from lives of these girls
trapped in adults' ego to win endorsement dollars and top-seeded rankings.

But two Black women, defy our bias, knocking back what appear to be
sure winners with crushing ground strokes that do more to improve

perception than all the trash-talking of activists espousing political
agendas to please followers who measure life's achievement in court control.

Two young Black women, like all the rest of this legion of tennis girls,
systematically leap on left legs to wallop crushing serves as severe and

deadly as any act from a female Medici. Committing acts of service and
conquest to please family, friends, and countless fans. Winning matches

but only accomplishing momentary draws against prejudice. For to some,
their very presence here rubs and stings the wound of racism raw.



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