

א.ה.ת.ש.נ"ו

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א.ה.ת.ש.ל.א

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ACTION

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Wendy Low Chan. McKenzie Finvola Drury

shot
by Mr.
Jon Hockenbury.

Message From The Editor

Somebody threw out the term revolution. It was loosely stated to categorize a sense of what we were collectively aiming for in a city that does not yet know that we exist. My first reaction to the statement issued was, let's not get too dramatic about this honey.

We are pouring poetry out all around you, we are starting something big and yes we are going against the structure, but please ya'll, let's not call this a revolution.

There is no argument that there were others before us whose very words have changed the way that people perceived the poet, and the poetic statement, certainly we can not deny their impact or their validity. The problem is that we do not hold to the old images any longer, we have seen poetry gain a monkish reputation. By being silent we have allowed others to claim expertize of the art form and make it all so elitist that we ourselves are debatable before we've even completed the phrases.

What we are saying now is poetry or at least the poets I've met are trying something different. Without effort or conscious intent, we are speaking today's words and talking about today's situations. We are speaking in familiar voices and saying something real here and there is precious little of that anymore.

So what is this that you are venturing forth to read right now. This gem is called ACTION, a word I can live with, thank you Jim. We have agreed that we will not be trite and call this a woman's issue, cause damn we are so tired of the structure you know.

No one will tell you that these words are meant to mean something other than what you think they mean, no one will correct your perceptions or rap you on the knuckles, or make you stand up before class and do recitations.

Between these pages is poetry born of a moment in a place where one of us got a feeling and wrote it down. We are just a few of the poets living and writing in Rochester. ACTION is one of many ways we will be reaching for you.

Chan. McKenzie

:: WENDY LOW ::

You're talking to my hand
I'm talking to the frost on the window panes

You're looking over lives
I'm looking over wildly frozen water

Sometimes it's years between seeing you
but nothing changes.

Hilltop and Woodhill were my streets
and they met
with a yield sign
and a fire hydrant
and a cherry tree
and a schoolbus stop
and my house was a cape Cod
and my neighbors had swimming pools
and below us the creek ran
where the boys all got soakers

I remember the seasons

Raspberry

Rhubarb

dandelion

cherry

maple leaf

Easter/ Egg

Christmas/ Tree

Halloween/ Mask

You who guard the underground
I am old enough to be my mother
and I'm coming in
with shock troops
and bazookas
and blasting caps
and bazooka joe
and cap guns.....
Oh, DAMN it, damn it,
not again.

Male poets are getting to be a sad puritanical lot:

↓
performing the act

↓
but refusing to enjoy it.

Mother spent all her days
doing diagramless crosswords
and playing solitaire
It is thus that she knows so much of
language and culture
both popular and obscure;
and of the pale, indifferent hand of luck.

To Earth

"April is the cruelest month"

Today we lower you to earth

"a little rain must fall"

Recall the waters of your birth

Recall your struggle toward the light

The warming sun and the sun that seared

The gentle rain and the rain that drowned

The uplifting wind and the wind that flayed

The restful dark and the dark that sucked all heat away

Recall the bloomings and the droughts

And never doubt

That from this fruitless seed shall spring

A thousand more mad mysteries

When writers write because
the page is white
like those that mounted Everest first
they are the violators.
They die. And what if noone follows?
Beware; for whiteness
swallows.

Women of my generation
do you know where are your mothers tonight?
and where were your mothers on the nights
they conceived you?
Your souls are drive-in movies
I love you.

:: CHAN. McKENZIE ::

You Don't Love Me

You don't love me
cause if you did,
when I said
I'm leaving
you would have said
Fool Stay.

You don't love me
cause if you did
when I said
I can't take no more
you should have said
there ain't
Fool Stay.

You don't love me
cause if you did
when I said go you
would have said stay
and when I said no
you would have said yes
But of course you didn't
cause you don't love me
else,
you wouldn't have
been so willing to
take the blame
and be done with it.

Conflict

Can't talk to you
Can't try
Though I want to
I can't cause
I don't want to
want to
but I do
so I can't
and I hope you understand.
I must try to
do without you
because I know I have to
because I know that I can't have you
because I know that I will always
want to, and
because I know that I never will.
So I can't call you
and I can't see you
because I do love you
and I can't love you
though I want to love you
I won't let myself love you
because I know
that merely loving you
would never be enough to
keep me satisfied.
Life's a bitch when
you have to compromise
when you don't want to
and you do
when you could
but you won't
cause half enough
ain't good enough
and just as hard as
dealing with
none at all.

INQUISITION

Does it bother you
that I still need to
flirt with you?

Does it make you smile
or
Just upset your inside.

I'm not asking
so I can
take advantage.

I need to know
cause if you don't like it
I will stop.
But if you do,
I got more.

TURN UP THE MUSIC

I did not intend to become responsible
for anything or anybody
let alone myself.
The plan (loosely speaking)
was centered around
hassle free existence
I was born to live
for the next party.
And if the party didn't come
I would be a party all my own.
Then I fell in love
and got religion
Now it's nine to five
no time for drinking.
The taxes are due in 14 days
I just made the car payment
and the man is coming today to collect
the rent.
There's a stack of bills labelled to pay
My mama wants to know when I'm
gonna fly down her way.
My sweetheart tells me
I'm not much fun, and my loving
just ain't what it used to be
I got my head in my hands chile
wishing hard that somebody would turn up the music.

Ain't It

I know what is mine
and I can tell when it feels different.
I know that what I had
and this semi involved affection
are not one and the same.
Somebody has been inside our spaces.
Somebody has spent time here.
Before I left
I could tell by your breathing
that you loved me
Now pretense is all around you.
Something is not right
Someone has rearranged the way you look at me.
Something has made you question
where you want to be.
This is not the love
I left behind
a little while ago.
I know what is mine
how it feels
how it fits
and this my dear
definitely ain't it.

Bar

Hi

Hi, oh hi how ya doing
good, how are you
good what's happening
oh nothing much, what's happening with you
oh you know same old thing
yeah me too.

(pause)

god it's crowded in here
yeah it sure is
have you seen _____ in here yet?
fill in blank
yeah over by the door
oh yeah, listen I'll catch you later
yeah take care
good to see you
yeah, same here.

Lil'Diddie

Your fire
burned hot
all night
and the smoke
finally drifted
past my nose.

Yes
I guess
I do notice
your cunning attraction
Honey I
see you now,
Say, what?

Don't

Don't force me
to let you know

Don't push me
to tell you so.

Don't ask me
unless you
really want to know.

Don't do it

Don't do it

Don't

Don't

I can't stand to hurt you darlin'

but you squeeze old truths
between every night time confessional.

I am naturally inclined to
spill my guts

and you can't
handle it

so

don't ask me.

You are trying to answer a bigger question
this one being
are you right or wrong
about everything.

We are trying to answer a bigger question
can we make it together
or will this
go wrong too.

I am trying to answer a bigger question
are you the meaning
of my life and if so
are you sure
and if true
babe what should we do now?

GREATEST HITS

With the flip of a switch
they take a horse
and shove it insistently
into Billie's arm.

Then
in throaty slow murmur
she rises to semi-consciousness
to force a song
to sing itself, knowingly.

While
Lady Blue
sits on my lap
cross-legged
a perspiring lover
full of obese pain
blowing smokey rings
made of near perfect sadness
across the creases on my forehead
hummm
"Gloomy Sunday".

:: FINVOLA DRURY ::

Sheet Music

for Alfred L. Bailey, Jr.

Rochester-based, a number
on a drive in Chili, they said,
is where you set out from

and died on an Arizona highway,
at twenty-six, still looking
to make it big: on the road

since fifteen. That's a long
time, not to know what you are
or what you're doing; that's

many a mile to go, pretending
sometimes you're Greek, some-
times Italian. Maybe you knew

and maybe you didn't, but a lot
of us have been over that territory,
even called from that phonebooth-

just no truck got everybody,
that's all. Plenty of us look
up when they pull that word

dreamer out, as in Beautiful;
he didn't have anything to go on,
either, selling those songs

for a quarter and dying alone
in a flop-house. The newspaper
clipping is yellow now, like

a telegram, when we used to get them, and I've got it almost down. It was pretty good

as a piece of writing, although they never should have called you a "nomad". I know what they mean

by that, they mean that you were not a man. Well, traveller, neither am I.

The Fuzz

"Drifts of crocus
on the edge of the law (sic)
will add a touch of the 'Wild'
to contrast with the regularity
of walks, drives and structures
which are so common to the 'City' garden."
The Detroit Free Press

"It's when the fuzz comes,"
my mother was saying, "that
you have the trouble."

Mother? What did you say?
The Fuzz?

"You know," she said,
bifocals in hand,
"the part that comes
after the flower,
on the dandelions,"
and waved me on.

Two women out walking,
just to get a little air,
to pick up a little something
for supper,
walk now through doors that say
PUSH or PULL,
under signs that say
BREASTS and THIGHS
and CUT UP PARTS-
two women wandering
in a daze
of Maples overhead,

of wings underfoot-
past the just
ripped-off branch
of the National Bank of Detroit,
past the empty house
of the almost-murdered girl
saved by a stitch,
here in the walled-up village
of Detroit-
bordering the cities
of Southfield, Warren, Grosse Pointe-
abandoned,
the storm coming in out of the west,
and another summer behind it-
here we are,
surrounded by Fuzz,
and drifting like crocus,
towards a touch of the wild,
here,
on the edge
of the law.

At The Vietnam Veterans' Memorial

A woman knew
didn't she?

that big open
V

in the earth,
black granite

with all those
names on it,

nothing phallic
about it-

they died too young
delivering one another,

now there's nowhere
to put the odor

of birth
in the air

American Beauty

"The more ugly, old, vicious
I become the more I want to take
my revenge by producing a brilliant
color, well arranged, resplendent..."

as the rich,
magnificent figure
walking up south
on University
at four in the afternoon-

what had he been seeing
to make him wear
that broad-brimmed panama,
the exact shade
of his double-breasted coat
which fell
to just above the knee
of his flashing jeans,
one leg resplendent
with the Playboy logo-
his jeweled boots
striding to keep up
with the single long-stemmed
American Beauty rose
he carried in cellophane
before him?

but I saw him long enough
to make a habit
of my having seen him-
to feel like VanGogh writing
to his sister,
"We are in need of gaiety
and happiness, of hope
and love."

A Date in Phoenix

Linda Ault
stayed
out
too late
one night.

Back at the ranch,
her parents lay a-bed
and fornicating
thoughts
jumped in their head.

Next day
they handed her a gun.
"For punishment, go out
and shoot your dog,"
they said.

But she,
being thoroughly bad,
dishonored them-
went out
and shot herself

instead.

Naked At The Beineke

for Hilda and Joe

I

When E.P.
cut her name
in the tree

he used only
initials
and to this day

she's hardly
read,
though she is

adored-
now there's news
we'll see her

nude
in a literary
center-

fold; me,
I prefer
the photo-

graph
by Man Ray-
her collar

pinned
shut, her
hands sunk

deep
in the pockets
of her smock-

it makes you
drunk
with the shock
of pulled punches.

II

Van Vechten
caught the poetry
of that face,

the melancholy
power
of "The Brown

Bomber"
and heavyweight
champion

of the world-
I heard him
win

his title
on the radio
the summer

my grandfather
died- nobody
he ever fought

resembled
him
so much

as this woman,
or her, him-
each of them

finding
the way back
to first

place,
before we dreamt
in color,

or closed or open

An Interview with Fin Drury

Finvola Drury was born the same year as Robert Creeley, Frank O'Hara, Paul Blackburn and Allen Ginsberg. It had been an enormous year for Woolf and Yeats as well. Fin Finvola Fionnuala: from the Gaelic; daughter of Lir, Father of the Waters. Her step-mother changed her and her brothers into swans to wander up and down the waters of Ireland. The "Song of Fionnuala" ('white shoulders') by Sir Thomas Moore was Joyce's favorite. Published in POETRY (Chicago) early 50s, heard Williams read there. Chaired the Miles Modern Poetry Committee, Detroit 60s. Received her M.A. from State University, Buffalo, in American Studies, 70s. This talk took place 18.V.85., at her studio (see cover photo).

Jim Cohn: I have some questions, but actually they're just starting points. They aren't really questions at all. I know...there's that whole question about why write ...and that going back to that Williams' statement "Poetry, if it's unchartered, is mediaevalism capitalized." Would you agree with that?

FD: I think there are two parts to that question, as I look at it. The why do you write, why does one write, why did I write -- what was I doing when I wrote, and why do I write, now. I gave a reading a couple of years ago in Chicago and a childhood friend came to it. She lives in Chicago. I called her up before the reading and told her about it and she came, and afterwards we were talking, and I've known Mary Jean since we were in the fourth grade together, and her memory of me is that I always wrote, and that I was always a writer, and that I always wrote poetry. I remember writing, the first time I can remember feeling like a writer, as opposed to a student or someone who had just fulfilled an assignment, was in the eighth grade. I had a teacher named Sister Delphine, which always makes me feel good about her because Charles Olson also had a teacher named Sister Delphine whom he mentions in one of his essays, I think. In fact, I was home just a couple of years ago, George sent me a tape of Olson talking, and he mentioned all of a sudden the words "Sister Delphine" coming out of the tape and I could hardly believe it. Anyway, Sister Delphine assigned, you know, an essay. We were supposed to write an essay on a subject in nature. So, we all handed them in, and then she, she selected two out of the class. Two, to read, and I was one. I had written about Lake Erie, and so I had written about a storm over the lake, and she read it to the class, and then

she started talking about it. And I couldn't really believe it. You know, I, it was mine. I knew that I had written it and, but I almost heard it as another person, you know, through the way she was discussing the imagery in the essay. And then the other person was a friend of mine named Thomas Perfile. Tommy had written about the stars. And he'd written about Orion and although I couldn't reproduce either of those essays I've never forgotten them, either of them, nor have I ever forgotten him. And that's the first time I ever felt as though writing were something, you know, I knew, as I said, I had been writing, but then it became a rather discrete thing -- so, when we're talking about something that you've been doing for a long time, it's interesting, too, that the first revelation that I would have about writing is really about, would be in the context of a schooling where it was always important, but where it was also in a kind of hierarchical design, so that it would be second. It would always come in second. I mean religion would come first and everything else would be lined up. Now science, of course, comes first and everything takes second place -- there's always fighting for the position which was vacated by something else. And so, it was important for me that it happened, first of all, that it happened in public, it was a classroom, and that it happened in that particular place, and that it also, it didn't happen just to me. I mean, there was somebody else in the class with whom I shared whatever this kind of sensibility was because the other student was a kind of an outlaw kid, and, very much a trouble to himself, and to his teachers, and it surprised me at the time that Sister Delphine would select him. I was too, we were both problem students, although being the girl, I wasn't under the kind of pressure that he was under. Maybe I was under more, but he got more. He got rougher treatment than I did.

JC: What kind of pressure? Why would you be under more? Why are you under more?

FD: Why am I? Well, because any kind of that kind of particular behavior, particularistic behavior, because the norm, the biggest sin in the religious life is what is called Singularity, and if you are singular -- I think it's the biggest sin in political life, now. I think, if you are exceptional in any kind of way, what is the degree of exceptionality that's going to be tolerated in you? How far are they gonna let you go. What are you going to have to encompass, besides this, to get along with them.

You know, they keep shooting everybody, so, there must be some reason. There must be some reason why people with somewhat similar kinds of talent get sifted out and one person will go up and the other person disappears and you don't even really always know why that particularly happens. So the pressure to be a good student without being particularly unusual. You know, to be unusual enough to do well, but not to go overboard. It seemed to me that day, you know, the kind of overboardness of it got recognized as being legitimate and I was really surprised that she would feature us, and particularly Tommy, who was always in trouble. All of a sudden this kid who was just always in trouble had written this very beautiful thing. Actually, I've wanted to do justice to him for a long time. He joined the Air Force and became a decorated hero and he died. He was killed in, his plane went out of control in an airshow over France. This is after the Korean War, in the 50s. I'm reading William Butler Yeats' poem "Among School Children", he goes back in his sixties to visit a school, a Montessori classroom in Ireland, in Waterford, and he confronts the classroom and the children and the nuns, and he talks about how both nuns and mothers love images, and then he talks about -- what mother if she could see the man with sixty winters on his head could really stand that this is what she had gone through, you know, that there was some, something that sent him into the sky, you know, when he should've been kept down here. So what became of the two of us since we were the class artists, and I'm still alive and he isn't, and so, the need to conform, how do we each handle it. He went into the military -- and the whole notion of being decorated. My friend was decorated, and I don't think he was meant to be decorated. I think he was meant to do the decorating himself.

JC: Do you feel like you've been continuously writing that poem?

FD: I think I've been continuously writing several poems, but that, that is another part of the answer to your question -- why do you write, and then the other question is why don't you. Why don't you deal with this. That was interesting to me -- the inconclusiveness of American poetry. Matthiesen, in his book, The American Renaissance, quotes an American critic, Mary Austin, as isolating that as the most important aspect of American work, its inconclusiveness. Its not-finishedness. On the other hand, whatever you don't finish you carry around with you and so there's

only so much that you can really carry around. I think there are a lot of things about the life of the writer, particularly the life of the poet, that people who know something about writing don't know much about. Don't know anything about. So, that while you might have been chosen, or your work might have been recognized, and might have helped you see yourself as a writer, then nobody's there to tell you particularly what that entails, and what you better do next. In other words, it seems to be that you've been given a job to do and you don't know particularly what it is, yeah, and the fact that it doesn't go away I think is the most significant aspect. The other problem is that you think, since you're a person who's, again, exceptionalness is not to be, you think everybody's going around like this. Honestly, I swear, it's the truth. I thought this for, until just, I wouldn't even tell you how recently.

JC: How recently?

FD: Well, in just the last-

JC: Yesterday?

FD: Yeah, just like that.

JC: But you probably knew that also back then, but you probably-

FD: Yeah, but it seems to be a normal function of the mind, for one thing. I mean, how do people function if they don't do this? See, so they must be doing it. And then, it's clear that they're not. So, I think what Whitman and Williams were trying to do was to both show, to be very exact about what they were doing and very exact about their relationships to other people's capacity to deal with this, but as Williams says at one point, people say to me "How do you do it?" and they just betray a kind of complete ignorance about even the human nervous system, how things come in, how they form. So, in trying to think of an art in a democracy, or a democratic approach to a work of art, or the work of a poet, it's one of the painful things, not so much that the work is hard and difficult, but that the, what Williams says -- what's beauty but a fly-blown putrescence unless the ecstasy be general -- so that there's always that feeling unless everybody's in on it, then there's not much point. It turns foul. It stinks. He couldn't be more clear,

like a rotten potato. Nothing worse.

(Wendy Low, who has just come in, asks the following:)

WL: Do you get this sense sometimes that it's kind of a vocation and you've been called and the people around you, to an extent, encourage you to be that poet, to be there, and then once you're there it's kind of like, well, we don't know how to deal with that so you be over there and be that?

FD: It becomes representative, in the family, in school and every place. If you can express what people are feeling and thinking, up to a certain point, then you're the expressor, and they're grateful to you. And then, all of a sudden, I mean, nobody's particularly asking the class mathematician to come forth and represent them, you know, because he or she, they're lucky if they can talk. You know, some can and some can't, but you're taken for granted that you can talk and do these things. Then all of a sudden the chemists and the mathematicians and the physicists are out in front and not that they don't have their problems -- and I suppose people ultimately know as little about real math, real science, as they do about poetry, but that's not the way things look. In other words, all of a sudden, something that was very precious is not prized. It's not prized, it's not treasured. There's no advancement. All of a sudden, what are you going to do for a living, or you're not just studying that are you, what are you going to study to fall back on. In other words, you're seen as being part of a magnificent order-- first, it's cosmic, and then it's cut down to the needs of a very small group of people. So, I think, you have a classical, or a romantic view of the poet, and then you have a very modern view of life, of how people live, get on in the world. And if you have this kind of person around, you're constantly trying to put the two of them together.

JC: Do they go together?

FD: Oh, why not. Sure, other cultures don't bypass the poet in the needs of the community. They don't bypass his wisdom or her knowledge. Somebody's got to make those decisions, I guess.

JC: And that's it, do poets make decisions? They're not seen as decision-makers. We don't make decisions.

FD: A poem is a decision a second. There are so many decisions in a poem. A tremendous amount of work

involving endless decisions or decisions with an end. Obviously, if it was endless, you'd never get a poem. I think that needs to be remedied, but, well, nobody's even close to the problems they're trying to solve. The poet has to stay close to the problems, in many cases, that he has set for himself, or she has set for herself. There's a marvelous series on China now, and 1500 years ago -- the Yellow River, in China, is called "The Sorrow of China" because it causes so much trouble with the flooding and it's very destructive -- and at one point, they have a beautiful sculpture there, built to an engineer who built the largest engineering construction ever in the history of mankind, and as the commentator said, we know about the Great Wall, but we don't know about this. Everybody just studies the Great- see, this is what I mean. What do we even study? Even in the engineering feats, what do we study? We study a wall that was built to keep people out and as a symbol of war instead of a wooden, like a dike, which he built to relieve, reverse- I mean, he just managed where the water goes -- with these beautiful ancient maps showing how he created islands that people could actually survive on instead of a great mass of land that would just be inundated- so, that's beautiful. That takes your breath away, and we ought to honor the person who did that, and poetry would have the analogue of how do we survive the fact that this thing that's supposed to be wonderful and could enrich us is gonna drown us, and all of a sudden, somebody comes and sets up the mechanism by which we are not overwhelmed and the flood tides are redirected and we survive. So, whether it's the engineer who does that or the poet who does that, this is the extraordinary work for us.