

Greetings from
Camp Bathos



Bathos Journal #2
1998-99

Bathos Journal
#2

1998-99

Chicago, Illinois

Edited by

Daniel S. Mosher

Michael A. Staples

Bathos Journal is published (somewhat) annually by Bathos Publications, an Illinois not-for-profit corporation.

ISSN: 1096-2700

Bathos Journal is distributed privately. Single copies are available by mail for \$5. Submissions are accepted from January 1 through June 30.

Bathos Journal
Daniel S. Mosher
810 West Lakeside #108
Chicago, Illinois 60640
USA

BathosJour@aol.com

Copyright 1999 © Bathos Publications. Rights revert to authors.

Your Camp Counselors

Kathleen Ossip	7
The Wonder	
Confidential	
The Genius	
David Trinidad	10
The Love Machine	
Connie Deanovich.....	12
Bigfoot	
Movie Nun	
Elaine Equi	15
Karaoke Poem	
Hayan Charara	17
Camp Dearborn	
Antler	19
Everything is Different Now	
Your Honor	
Dale Smith	21
They Have Wanted Love	
They Want Love	
Sour Love	
Rita Hawn.....	24
Across the Yellow	
Little Michael	25

The Prime of Miss Tippie Hedren

Charles Hall	27
“Where is my mother?”	
Daniel S. Mosher	28
Swamp Connie	
Tom Clark	30
Strangers on a Train	
Lines for a Noir Heroine	
Featured Poet: Maureen Seaton	33
Found Liturgy 2	
Found Liturgy 3	
Fragments:	
I Leonetta	
II Notes	
III The Letter	
Gregg Shapiro	41
Interview with Maureen Seaton	

Kathleen Ossip

The Genius

Such Christian copacetic babblings!
What comes after postmodern if not
your peculiar brand of Greek-key rave?
Your spaniel Duchamp, now a phantom,
romps in fields of quinona, so you write.
Such Buddhist pheromones. And this from
a goddamn genius. How reticent!

The Wonder

So you say you're getting off on the
genital haze of frying mushrooms.
Sisterly, you take the steps between
us two at a time. Please halt right there:
You'll be turning me into Daphne,
or Isabel Archer spun sideways.
Nothing stops at the top of *your* head.

Confidential

Here a facility, there a facility.
Girls in cigarette slacks strolling
arm in arm and boys strewing 'tude.
You have a gift for assonance.
That's phat. That's
a career move.

Kathleen Ossip, a freelance writer in Hastings-on-Hudson, NY, received an MFA in the inaugural class of the New School's program. Her poetry has appeared in *No Roses Review*, *Columbia Poetry Review* and *The Cream City Review*, among others.

The Love Machine

Robin dug blondes, clean and bright, slim and hard.

“Only cows need boobs!”

But her breasts *were* sagging and her thighs were
getting loose.

It was so bad it was almost high camp.

No wonder the poor bastard couldn't come.

“She's living up to her title: the Celebrity Fucker.”

“Then stop shooting the breeze up my ass about
sentiment.”

“Oh, the title is real, but she's a broad.”

“No, not even a broad — you're a rough, no-talent cunt.”

“Eager to make love to you,” he said.

Well, she was a good-natured nympho — and he sure as
hell couldn't hump her more than twice a week.

“And she turns out to be the worst double-crossing cooze
around.”

“Sashaying off and leaving me in the crapper.”

“They even hint there's something funny going on
between them — you know: Queersville.”

He had personality problems but he was not a fag!

“*Everything*, darling — orgies, and also that he's AC-DC.”

“Luv, you may *just* have to have an affair with me
and get me back to being a happy well-adjusted
homosexual.”

“Okay, now dive.”

Valentino had outdone himself on this one: the silk blouse
buttoned down the front, nothing had to go
over the head, and she had those marvelous
individual false eyelashes — no worry about the
stripped ones coming off.

Everything she wore was designed for her trade.

“My real feat was learning to hold the lipstick without
letting my hand shake.”

A transvestite.

Chuck was a golf pro, twenty-eight, blond.

“He likes to dress like a woman and go out cruising to
pick up a *guy*.”

It was safer to get a hooker for sex or even jerk off.

“No tits!”

“Everyone has their own kind of loneliness,” Robin said.



David Trinidad's *Essay with Movable Parts* is just out from
Thorngate Road. He lives in New York City.

Bigfoot

Bigfoot works in an Albuquerque egg factory
carrying the eggs from where the chickens lay them
into a frigid truck marked *Bob Walkoff's Egg Farm &
Cheeses*

The little unfertilized eggs are as white as his huge body
which is covered in fur the color of Trinity sand
Bigfoot's passion is for people to love him

To name a pizza after him is not enough
He wants to be taken for a ride into No Man's Land
to share in the romance sunset here creates

On Saturday nights Bigfoot bathes in a sarcophagus
then pops out from behind birch trees
to see the sweaty neckers on Love Mesa

Their fuzzy dice on fur-lined mirrors
is an image erected to the passion of hope
but it cannot stop love and youth from fading

To catch a glimpse of Bigfoot
is thought to bring bad-witch luck to heavy petters
who often mistake him for an escaped mental patient

But Bigfoot only wants to hop in the back seat
and observe the workings of love
which can result in unwanted children

The children created on Bigfoot's nights on Love Mesa
often grow into spectacular elusive and lucky oddballs
who live quite successfully in remote sections of the globe

Movie Nun

If I were a nun in a movie
I'd want to be the one
eating cottage cheese intellectually
the one with keys to the pool

“Coins *never* rot,” would be my motto
and I'd leave Greek weddings
carrying a plateful of feedback

For a fund raiser
I'd write a wartime screenplay
where monks eat diamond biscuits
they later “deliver” to the French Resistance

If asked to direct
I'd show how a complicated nun
holding a simple wooden fork
prepares you to accept that starvation
in a fever jungle
hides within a lengthy and watery hymn

In the corner of despair
I raise my fist

The sun is rotten
the way it *illuminates* the convent kitchen
starving nuns of the joys of shadows
improvements eliminated leaving every fang

Connie Deanovich is a recent recipient of a Whiting Writer's Award, author of *Watusi Titanic* and of poetry included in *The Gertrude Stein Awards* anthology 1995-96.

Elaine Equi

Karaoke Poem

All day
I mouth the fantasies
of someone else.

I see it
and say it.

Ask for a tall cold one,
a red hot one.

Ask for the hunky guy
on the calendar
splayed over a rock.

All day
I move like a woman
possessed.

Move my hips
to get into a groove.

My hands
like a nervous Judy Garland
shooing flies.

In my prep school drag,
in my bondage and discipline
drag,

how long,
how long have I waited

for that moment
(there are only a few)

when I could turn

like a record,
like Sinatra —
my coat draped
over my shoulder —

when I could turn
and walk away.

Elaine Equi has recently been published in *No Roses Review*, *lingo*,
Sugar Mule, *The Boston Book Review* and *American Letters &
Commentary*.

Camp Dearborn

The bathrooms had no toilets.
The lakes were man-made
and in September, five days
after Labor Day, they were drained,
the muddy floors sprouting
mufflers, broken bottles
and eight-track tapes.
There were vandalized trailers
and police patrolling the fishing dock,
used condoms behind the cafeteria,
bird shit everywhere.
The camp was not even
in Dearborn.

Some of us lived there all summer.
We smoked pot and cigarettes,
lit matches to torch garbage cans
heaped with paper plates
or hid in the stalls and watched girls
hold their breath under the showers
to see their breasts swell.

Near the waste dump
a dam plunged the river,
the water thudding off the rafters.
We climbed barbed wire fences
and disappeared over the edge,
bobbing up in the stream,
levitating our hands in praise
of gravity.

When the *Herald*
reported a boy from Milford
drowned at the bottom of the dam —
his neck crooked, his stomach
bloated — they staked a sign
that read: Keep Out - Danger.

That summer we visited the dam
every Sunday, bragging
about how many times
we went over, about the seaweed
that nearly kept us under.
We imagined the sight
of the mother's face staring at the casket,
the father who stood outside
the funeral parlor, and cried.
We knew something bad had happened,
we knew a sign would not keep
boys from dying.
We stood in line, hesitant,
until someone shouted "pussy"
or "chicken-shit"
and we knew what we had to do.

Hayan Charara lives in New York and publishes *Graffiti Rag*.

Everything is Different Now

Everything is different now,
Now that I know that octopus penises detach
 and wander alone through the Ocean
 seeking a mate,
So that right now, and throughout
 all human history,
 and millions of years before
humans were even at
 the tree-shrew level,
Octopus penises wandered alone
 without eyes or ears or noses
 through vast vastnesses
 of Ocean
 searching for a lady-love.

Your Honor

Your honor the orchid deflowered me.
Your honor the tree-shade fondled me indecently.
Your honor the summer morning forest smell
 after a rainy night
 assaulted and molested me.
Your honor the caressing wind gave me a boner.
Your honor the sun abused me through my wet swimsuit
 as I lay sunbasking
 so when I got up everyone stared.
Your honor the moonlight jacked me off
 when I went camping.
Your honor the moonlight moonlight I swear it moonlight
 spurred from my moonlit dick.
Your honor I swear on this Blowjob Bible
 the clouds exposed
 their buttocks and breasts to me
 more than Yahweh exposed his buttocks to Moses.
Your honor the spectacular sunset beat me up
 on my way home from work
 and stole my work ethic and identity cards.
Your honor the night stole the daylight
 from my house.
Your honor my loved ones are keeping me prisoner
 in a coffin underground just 'cause I'm dead.
Your honor these maggots are eating my dead body
 without my permission.
Your honor don't corpses have any rights?

Antler, Milwaukee author of *Factory*, *Last Words*, and *Ever Expanding Wilderness* has poems in the recent anthologies, *Reclaiming the Heartland: Gay and Lesbian Voices from the Midwest* and *Prayers to Protest: Poems that Center and Bless Us*.

Dale Smith

They Have Wanted Love

Romantic desire
embellishes the love
of the land
in that ideal movie
about a cowboy named Stet
and his girl Rhetta
who fight city brokers
for a higher price
to the 'old place.'
Once sold, they move
to the city, rent videos.
End of movie.

They Want Love

Around them
their world falls apart.
A patrician childhood
crumbles into an urban reality
of mortgages, children and
car payments made with jobs
in the computer chip industry.
The television, the videos,
the night clubs and vacations
to Puerto Vallarta seem
to have fallen between them.
Rhetta wipes her eyes.
She says she has
 always loved him.
The mirror repeats
 those words,
then the face grows still
 in the silence.
Later that night
Stet comes home
with a bottle of Cap Rock.
The kids go out, conveniently.
After the Friday Night News
 Rhetta turns off the tube
while Stet locks the doors,
 turns out the light.

Sour Love

Stet finally stuck it
up his ass this time.
Rhetta found a note
or a condom
(pick your own trope).
She screamed, he cried,
kicked a hole in the sheet rock.
He blamed her for letting
love slip away
and accused her of betraying his dreams.
But Rhetta countered
with the rude fact of their brood
who she raised while he
diddled and screwed.
She slapped him as he started the truck,
which soon stalled in the drive way
and he lowered his head to his arms
cradled on the steering wheel.

Dale Smith edits *Mike and Dale's Younger Poets*. These poems are from his work in progress, *Texas Crude*. He lives in Austin, Texas.

Rita Hawn

Across the Yellow

This distance
between dead fish
and half smoked cigarettes
that black June
blue light
I could see through
the girl
who wore all the red
in the world

You in your
drip daisy
half cocked
ego stance
rejecting offers
like insects
the boy who should be
King

I lost myself
in that place once
brick resuscitations
broken door jamb
and all

Rita Hawn is a writer living in fabulous Las Vegas.

The Prime of Miss Tippi Hedren

an Aston-Martin
convertible driven
like the leader

of the trend parade
while scarf and
sunglasses wave

to her fans reassuringly
as men become subjects
in her court and bow

to legs for days
and doors open
as she floats by

on gravity defying
butt plugger heels
in royal robes of sea

foam green and two
love birds in a cage
a romantic misconception

as her fear
of uncaged birds
a fowl nuisance

like memories of mother
but daddy's golden rule,
love's an achievement

Little Michael wears many hats.

Charles Hall

“Where is my mother?”

The nice people (look at them!)
Out walking under the carnival pink swirl
This sky you wish your mother could see
(She doesn't leave machine messages)
The hypnosis lasting barely longer than a red light
And then the awful anemic blue takes its turn
Makes its death wish before the stars and light-up cars
The bang-up brass section and the bad people
(Watch for them!)
Selling tickets for daylight

Charles Hall is a founding member of *Erratica*, a performance group currently workshopping productions in Chicago, L.A., and Washington D.C. Charles is currently working on his second play and works as a florist by day.

Daniel S. Mosher

Swamp Connie

Hang glider, sugar glider
queen of machines
and watery mambo

dreadlock alligator
under the Okefenokee
swampful of moon

Eartha Kitt — *purrr* —
with a cotton gin
martini olive

or maybe more
appropriately an extra
spicy bloody mary

the slithery queen
of boas and shimmy
shake baobab trees

Beware the crawdad
army — delicious creole
protectors of

virtue and gender
within the Spanish
moss midnight

Only the best of
crawly insects and
other suitors

may approach the
uncommon queen
perched alone and

satisfied with rice
and beans
and chicory

Daniel S. Mosher is most recently published in *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Mike & Dale's Younger Poets* and *Graffiti Rag*.

Tom Clark

Strangers on a Train

Like gold lamps in a green shade the colored
Lights of the Hitchcock amusement park glow

In the dark the murdered girl wears those Buddy
Holly hornrims talisman of a time

Throttled by a fist of brilliant stars
That close in on the location shooting

Death masquerading as Eros in shadows
Strikes a variety of lying poses

Knowing how to bring out the worst in you
He hides in the shade of a decent motive

Which spreads its opportunistic arms
Out over the night sky's dark branches

Falling away like so many second skins
The handsome stranger's false kindness drops

Heavy as a predator to the dark
Unfathomable bottom of the harbor

Lines for a Noir Heroine

All through Ed? Don't remember me huh?
I was just lying here a moment ago
I didn't go to China no that's life
Sticks out a foot and trips your extended
Green picture of George Washington
Can you deliver? Before you go to bed
Cat's in the bag bag's in the river
Gators have the right idea eat their young
Crawl out of sewers into dark corners
Think they've come up in the world like pals
What are you trying to forget? I'll tell
Gilda I flipped a coin heads Malibu
As you grow older you'll discover life too
As if I didn't know what's on your mind

Tom Clark's latest volumes of poetry are *White Thought*, and *Empire of Skin*. He lives in Berkeley, CA.

Featured Poet

Maureen Seaton

Maureen Seaton is the author of four books of poetry, most recently, *Furious Cooking* (University of Iowa Press, 1996), winner of the Iowa Prize for Poetry; and a collaboration with poet Denise Duhamel, *Exquisite Politics* (Tia Chucha Press, Chicago, 1997). She has been the recipient of an Illinois Arts Council grant, an NEA fellowship and the Lambda Literary Award. Her poems have appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Paris Review*, *The Atlantic*, *New Republic*, *The Pushcart Prize XX* and *XXII*, and *The Best American Poetry 1997*.

Found Liturgy 2

(beginning with lines by Charles Simic)

*Lots of people around here have been taken for rides in UFOs.
You wouldn't think that possible with all the pretty white churches,*

but nevertheless, look at them, they're scarred initiates, stumbling
and glassy-eyed for weeks while concerned neighbors thumb

through scriptures to find a cure. Here's one: Place the possessed
in a field of young oaks, a prairie of punks, and keep them distracted

until the type of electrical storm that only occurs in the bible belt—
forked lightning, sheet lightning, vertical, horizontal, ball—sparks

sense in the demoniacs. Offer prayers during the procedure, stay
back, of course, possibly building a crude chapel of shelter

for yourself and whatever folks have generously donated their time
to coax the wayward back to earth. Think: It's not their fault.

Mercy Smyth, for example: One day she's fluting a pecan pie
for Sunday supper, the next she's off in a pie-shaped spaceship

undergoing shock treatments and gazing into the Satanic eyeballs
of extraterrestrials. Then—back in her own kitchen, loony.

The flesh is so weak and looking for excitement. Remember
you once burned holes in yours with the cigarette butt that glowed

on the dashboard of your old pick-up? How you parked in bluestem
behind your dad's barn and shot the heads off the mourning doves

roosting in the rafters—that was your first gun—then grabbed the light and seared your arm, their bodies still kicking? Filthy pigeons.

If the first cure doesn't work on the stubborn trekkies, here's another, not fool-proof, but guaranteed to raise hairs on a heathen's neck:

Snakes. You can simulate a plague of vipers à la Old Testament, or one hungry rattler strategically placed might do it. Trust

your instincts on this one. If you need spiritual support, however, sacred indignation, read Revelations in its entirety, how weird

the world's getting in these final days, the Signs and Portents, the Money-Changers, the Golden Calves, the Happy Homosexuals.

Your friends have been to Mars and back. Keep yourself safe.

Found Liturgy 3

(beginning with lines by Charles Simic)

*What has been fated cannot be avoided. Even this boiled potato.
This fork. This chunk of dark bread. This thought too . . .*

that if I'd married the gentle young man with the hair lip instead
of the vacarious bohemian with the propensity for leather-gloved

violence, I'd have strolled along in a kind of sublime serenity
instead of rumbling through my maiden phase like the Howard

bearing down on North and Clybourne, that turn in the tracks
where the conductor says *Whee* and we're expected, faithful

congregation, to lean left and continue whatever religious rites
we practice on subways: prayer beads, bible, clawing, dreaming.

Or that one day I might have departed for a bluer warmer place:
the Keys! pointing to the ocean like fingers of a kind of country.

Moved away from this country altogether, to Mojacar, Spain,
with its nude beach, its *playa naturista*, and fat buttery

mujeres who laugh (*ha!*) at the scrawny models in *Cosmopolitan*
while their *hombres* remember the sweet fucking of the night before.

Even the thought—goofy, apocraphal—that had I been able to choose
which body I'd prefer to inhabit as I waited in the universe

beside others restless to incarnate, I'd have chosen black woman,
white man, I'd have chosen soprano, green thumb, flautist,

old wealth, size B, rock star, Tahitian, or a healer in Sedona.
The thought that someday we will all live together on the
head of a pin

or fly to the uninhabitable moons of Jupiter to experience options
of antioxidants and uninhibited youth. Everything I've ever thought,

I *had* to think, think of it, every synapse, every charged neuron
tingling along its DNA, every scarlet image, every note I've plucked

in *A* or *D* or *B*: predestined as the ascendancy of America.
I love the word *kismet*. I love throwing it into the atmosphere

to see what it brings back. Once it brought back a child who landed
in my lap in the key of *G*, a key I instantly recognized and sang:

Melancholy Baby, Sweet Adeline, O Holy Holy Night.

FRAGMENTS

I Leonetta

1. Should I be caught in, say, a stray bombing and killed
before I kiss her again I will
2. Dear Bitch dyke,
3. homos from the Christian Church—quite successfully. You
have become too blatant
4. Christian Church
5. me. So, before I move on to wherever I'll be painting my
own bones
6. to resign from the Christian ministry. Your kind of people
do not belong in the
7. And may God bless your soul!
8. dildoes coming after you.
9. This is not a hate crime as we are commanded by our Lord
and Savior Jesus
10. poltergeist you.
11. Dear Chicago Branch of
12. 1. Resign from the Christian ministry. 2. Be killed after
13. Christ to love you. It is a righteous act of love.
14. your ass.

II Notes

In August, 1997, a Chicago lesbian minister received a letter promising to kill her after September 15 if she refused to resign from the ministry. Section I of this found poem combines the letter fragments of the Christian hate group and a woman responding to the letter under the pseudonym Leonetta. Section III is the actual hate letter in its formal entirety. Only the addressee and sender's signature have been omitted. It is Monday, September 15, 1997.

III The Letter

Dear Bitch dyke,

This is to inform you of our decision to give you until Sept. 15, 1997 to resign from the Christian ministry. Your kind of people do not belong in the

Christian Church

After Sept. 15 we will then remove you from the Christian Church and living. This is not a threat—it is a promise that we will keep. We have removed other

homos from the Christian Church—quite successfully. You have become too blatant in your “orientation”.

This is not a hate crime as we are commanded by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to love you. It is a righteous act of love. But we hate your sin.

You have two options: 1. Resign from the Christian ministry
2. Be killed after Sept. 15.

And may God bless your soul!

Exquisite Poet

An interview with Maureen Seaton

The night before the ninth annual Lambda Literary Awards ceremony (held in Chicago, where I live), I met Maureen Seaton at Foodlife for dinner. She was excited about her impending trip to New York, to see her daughters and our mutual friend Denise, for which she was leaving by train the next day. I still couldn't believe she was actually leaving town on the very day of the Lammy Awards, considering the fact that her book of poetry, the Iowa Prize-winning *Furious Cooking*, had received a Lammy nomination. However, she was so convinced that her book wasn't going to win a Lammy Award that she didn't even consider changing her plans. At dinner, we talked about writing, and her plans for the summer (which included teaching a workshop at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown) and I had to restrain myself from begging her to postpone her travel plans for one day. That's how sure I was that she would win the Lammy Award.

When Kris Kleindienst, the presenter in the category of Lesbian Poetry, read off the list of nominees the next night, I held my breath. When she said that the Lambda Literary Award was going to Robin Becker for her book, "All-American Girl" (one of the two books Maureen had predicted would win in the category, in which she was also nominated), the disappointment I felt had begun to gel. Then Ms. Kleindienst said, "Wait, it's a tie," and she announced Maureen's name and the title of her book.

I wanted to jump up, right then and there, and run

to the pay-phones in the lobby and call our friend Denise in New York, and tell her, so that she could call Maureen's daughter, Jenny (Maureen's first stop on her arrival in New York) and tell her the news. However, I couldn't do that, because I had to wait until they announced the winner in the next category, as I might have to go to the podium to accept the award on Kenny Fries's behalf, as he had asked me to do. As soon as Lawrence Schimel (whom I had the honor of being introduced to for the first time that evening) read Rafael Campo's name as the winner in the Gay Men's Poetry classification, I ran to the phone to call Denise. We were both gleeful over the news, my voice echoing with laughter throughout the hotel lobby. I was sure that Maureen, whose travel was delayed by several hours after the train she was on experienced problems, and was forced to take a bus into Manhattan, would also share in our happiness for her, after she got some rest on Saturday and had the chance to let the good news sink in a bit.

Less than six months later, Maureen Seaton's latest book, *Exquisite Politics* (Tia Chucha Press, Chicago, IL, 1997, \$10.95, 71pp), which is a collaboration (her first) with the aforementioned poet (and mutual friend) Denise Duhamel, has just been published, and looks to be the kind of publishing event that will garner further accolades for both of these well-loved and increasingly popular poets. I recently had the chance to sit down with Maureen, who, in addition to writing, is currently teaching at the Art Institute of Chicago, here is what we talked about.

Gregg Shapiro: *Tell me a little about your life before writing.*

Maureen Seaton: (laughs) You mean in utero?

GS: *Not quite that far back.*

MS: Okay. You mean before I started writing in my early thirties? Because I had been writing up until I was

eighteen. As a child, I wrote, like “most of us” (laughs). I wrote short stories, and a novel when I was nine, and poems all through high school. And then I got married. I was married for ten years and didn’t write a word the whole time. When I was divorced, I began to write again, and they came out as poems, rather than prose. I wanted them to be prose, because I wanted to be able to support my kids (two daughters) writing, but that didn’t happen (laughs). I tried. Sorry kids. So, before writing, I was kind of just stuck. Writing unstuck me.

GS: How did you express yourself creatively before poetry?

MS: I didn’t express myself creatively for the ten years of the marriage. As a kid, I did visual art, I played several instruments, in addition to the writing. Once I got married, that was it. I mean, it was only ten years, but at the time, it was my entire twenties, I did nothing. I mean, I had two children, which was a fairly creative thing to do. However, it didn’t really feel like a very creative outlet for me, because I was not doing all those things that would have felt creative. It was a good thing to do, I don’t regret it at all. But that wasn’t why I didn’t write. It had nothing to do with my kids. It was more the rest of my life. Being in suburbia, with a Wall Street husband.

GS: Was there one impetus that compelled you to begin writing?

MS: My divorce.

GS: Do you feel like you’ve encountered a supportive community of lesbian and gay writers, either here in Chicago, where you’ve lived since 1991, or in New York, where you lived prior to coming to Chicago, to whom you could turn while stalled on a poem or other writing project? And if you’re not getting that from the community, where do you get that sort of feedback.

MS: I’ve only worked with Denise (Duhamel) for

any feedback since 1991. For other kinds of emotional or social needs, I feel like the community's been there for me, but I haven't really used a community (for writing). It's just been a community of two (laughs). Me and Denise.

GS: *Can you describe the process of assembling a book-length manuscript for publication?*

MS: Poems are written over a period of years. I usually begin to think about assembling them about three quarters of the way through them. I allow them to start taking shape and then the momentum has begun. I've been lucky because that's easy for me. The manuscripts seem to form themselves, and when they're finished, they're finished. I do a lot of culling. After a few years I'll have many more (poems) than I need and I'll take out twenty pages or something. That's how I do it.

GS: *Each of your first three books was published in conjunction with winning a poetry prize (1991's Fear Of Subways won the Eighth Mountain Poetry Prize, 1992's The Sea Among The Cupboards won the Capricorn Poetry Prize, and 1996's aforementioned Furious Cooking won the Iowa Prize). Can you tell me about why you submitted these manuscripts for consideration to contests versus sending them directly to a publishing house?*

MS: The very first time I ever sent a book (manuscript) out (to a contest), I didn't know about anything but contests (laughs). And I won, and I got money. Then I started to realize that there were other ways of publishing. I really didn't know, in 1988 or '89, when I first thought about this. (Poetry publisher) Norton doesn't solicit (poetry) manuscripts in (the magazine) *Poets & Writers* (where many contests are advertised). And it was nice to get some money because some of my friends who were submitting (manuscripts) to university presses and getting published weren't getting any money at all. It also seemed like the award books get a little more publicity, (although) I don't

think it matters all that much. My idea was to try those (the contests) first. Then, if that didn't work, I would have gone to other publishers. With my fourth book, *Little Ice Age*, which hasn't been published yet, I only did a couple of contests, maybe two. I did the National Poetry Series, and one other one I can't remember. Then I started sending it to commercial presses, because I'd never even considered them before. That's still out there.

GS: *Was the manuscript a finalist for the National Poetry Series?*

MS: Yes.

GS: *It's not really fair to talk about your latest book Exquisite Politics, which is a collaboration with poet Denise Duhamel, without having your collaborator here with us, but could you, maybe, say a few words about the collaboration experience?*

MS: Well, Denise and I have given each other permission to talk about the book whenever one or the other wants to, and even read poems from it, whenever one wants to. This is a really good subject. We started writing together when I lived in the Bronx and Denise lived in Chelsea. We started over the phone. We got along really well, and we started to show each other our poems.

GS: *You met at Sarah Lawrence?*

MS: We met at her graduate reading and we got to be friends pretty quickly. We discovered that we had very similar motivations for writing and a sense of aesthetics, although I don't know if it's aesthetics so much as it is our reasons for why we write seemed so similar. We thought that we could bring our different sensibilities to the writing and it might be interesting. We decided to try one and it was the most fun thing. I don't know if I'd ever had so much fun in my life. Maybe with her since. It is truly one of the most rewarding things I'd ever done. I mean I love writing, by myself writing a poem. But, it's like doubly wonderful

when you do it with someone like that. It's a real blessing... stupid word...but...we can hardly wait until the next time we're into the project or the poem. It's a wonderful feeling. She would say the exact same thing.

GS: *The poems "A Crown Of Spells To Ward Off Susans" and "Litany of the Fathers" have a religious, mystical...*

MS: "Mystical?"

GS: *The spells are mystical. Nasty mystical, but nevertheless mystical.*

MS: Denise actually calls them mean-spirited, actually (laughs).

GS: *Mystical...mean-spirited. They both have this classical, formal feel to them. They're like chants.*

MS: Invocations.

GS: *And they assume a form. Is there anything you'd like to say about either of them.*

MS: Well, we almost took "Litany..." out, that's one thing. We had to think about it for a few months. I mean, really give it some thought. Denise was afraid that it would effect my chances of getting a teaching job if we left it in. It may be true, I have no idea, we'll see.

GS: *Who was it a threat to?*

MS: Probably the existing order. The poem is pretty acerbic. It's pretty angry. We're angry. Supposedly, that doesn't make it good art. We're going to read it at Smith College in December. It'll be the first time (we read it at a reading). We're not sure if we'll have the audience do some of the responses, or if we'll take turns with them. We want to see how it goes over. Obviously, we decided to leave it in. I don't know if I would have left it in my own book.

GS: *It's the kind of thing that you wanted to write, you needed to write, and once it's written, where do you put it?*

MS: Yeah. I've written things like that before and

they haven't gone into my own books because they're too angry. I've already been called "a poet with an agenda," as a negative. I don't think that that's right. I think it's okay to have an agenda once in a while. Even if it's transparent. Maybe propaganda isn't as good a transformed art, but every once in a while, why not have a few pages of propaganda. That's all it is, "Litany Of The Fathers," is bashing the church and bashing men. The other one, "A Crown Of Spells To Ward Off Susans," is much more personal. We were angry at a couple of women who were flirting with our spouses, and we decided to have some fun (laughs). That one's more transformed. They're in the form of sonnets. The "Litany Of The Fathers" is definitely a litany. We took it right out of the *St. Joseph Daily Missal*. That's the way litanies are set up in the Catholic Church. So that makes it a form of literature, I suppose. "A Crown of Spells..." is set up as sonnets with the octave and sextet. They're really fun. Audiences like those.

GS: *Two more poems that were linked, for me, were "What Are Homosexuals For?" and "The Femme Diaries."*

MS: Butch/femme stuff.

GS: *Right. Do you have a preference for one or the other?*

MS: I really like "What Are Homosexuals For?" That's one of my favorite pieces in the book. I think that we allowed ourselves to explore our own homophobia, our own non-PC feelings about all of it. I thought that Denise was really brave to do it, and she thought the same of me. We tried really hard to be non-self-conscious. That's what we did with "Litany Of The Fathers," too. We decided to only say our truth. The book is very much about our truth, but that piece ("What Are Homosexuals For?") in particular... there were some things as I was writing them, I was thinking, "I don't think lesbians are going to like what I'm saying, but I really feel this way, and I'm a lesbian."

GS: *After the book was put together and you submitted it to the publisher, was the introductory dialogue already a part of the book?*

MS: We actually thought we'd like someone else to write an introduction, and we asked someone to do it, and then the press said they didn't want anything by way of introduction. So we just dropped the whole idea. Then, the (book's) distributor, Northwestern University, just totally flipped out over the book, and they wanted an introduction. They thought what we had done was so fascinating, they thought people would want to hear something from us.

GS: *Aside from your three books and your collaboration with Denise, where else have you published your work?*

MS: Magazines and anthologies? *Paris Review*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *New Republic*, *Poetry*, and lots of anthologies...a couple of Pushcart Prize anthologies, a new one, *Every Woman I've Ever Loved: Lesbian Writers On Their Mothers*, just came out from Cleis Press.

GS: *You're also in Leslea Newman's My Lover Is A Woman anthology...*

MS: I am (the) most anthologized in lesbian anthologies. I was revising my resume today to send it out and there was something like six lesbian anthologies in 1996 and four already in 1997.

GS: *Do you foresee your writing branching off into directions other than poetry, say fiction or creative non-fiction or plays, for example?*

MS: I tried to write a novel over the summer, but it's hard (laughs). My life is so chopped up, that even doing the novel, I had a month, and I kept thinking, "I only have a month," and by the time I get to do this again, it will be next summer. I mean, that's okay. Projects can take years. I think I'm the kind of person who likes completion.

GS: *It's easier to sit down and write a poem, even if*

it takes a week to write it, there's less of a time commitment.

MS: Right. I wouldn't mind the time commitment, if I had it. If I never had to work again, I'd start right in on the novel. I also don't think I'm suited to writing prose because I'm so picky about every word that I don't do what you're supposed to do, which is to write a draft, and then go back.

GS: *You're revising each word as you go.*

MS: It's excruciating. That's how I write papers, too.

GS: *What do you enjoy most about teaching?*

MS: I guess I really love watching my students grow in self-confidence and self-knowledge. That's probably my main reason for liking teaching. By the end of any semester, I see huge, huge, huge changes in my students. Unbelievable, I think. And all it takes is for someone...a facilitator...and I'm a very light-handed facilitator, and I give a lot of approval. I really believe that people work well under those circumstances. Most of my students just take off and go places that they never imagined they would go. That's rather rewarding for me.

GS: *What do you enjoy least about teaching?*

MS: I guess I have the hardest time with my own inability to not worry if that process isn't happening, and I see that it's not happening for someone, to just not get intense about it, and...I go overboard sometimes worrying and trying to think of a way to reach each person. It's a little ridiculous. It's like the way I write. I have to see the transformation in each student, or else I'm not happy. Lots of times, that's impossible. I can't control all of that. If I'm just planting a seed, that's fine. That's the only thing I really don't like about it, my own inability to relax.

GS: *If you weren't a poet, what would you be doing?*

MS: I'd be a scientist, definitely. I'm not sure which kind. Probably a physicist.

Thanks a Million!

Bruce Curtin
David VanAbel
Steven Toushin
Brian & Pat Osberg
Earl & De Mosher
Bill Gossage

Bijou Video
1363 North Wells
Chicago, Illinois 60610

Everyone who attended our Spring 1998 Fund Raiser!

Extra special thanks to Kenward Elmslie for the back cover blurb couplet:

Kenward Elmslie's *Routine Disruptions, Selected Poems and Lyrics* has been published by Coffee House Press. *Lizzie Borden*, an opera for which he wrote the libretto, music by Jack Beeson, will be revived on March 6, 1999, at Lincoln Center by New York Opera, for six performances, and will be televised by PBS (Great Performances series).

Bathos Journal #2

New Poetry By

Kathleen Ossip
David Trinidad
Connie Deanovich
Elaine Equi
Hayan Charara
Antler
Dale Smith
Rita Hawn
Little Michael
Charles Hall
Daniel S. Mosher
Tom Clark

Featured Poet

Maureen Seaton
Interview by Gregg Shapiro

**For a fizzy high, a soupçon of *Bathos*
Beats a loop-the-loop on top o' Mt. Athos.**

—Kenward Elmslie