

## Kate Braverman

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**JJ:** Yeah, and for millions of other people in California, L.A.

**KB:** Really! To me, though, what Joyce and Conrad and Faulkner had to say is completely viable. I don't see any reason to not want to be part of that spectrum of thought. To me, it's the thought that reforms this century. You know what I love? I just read a Nora Joyce biography. Did you read that one called *Nora*? It's wonderful. I was thinking, this century began with this Irishman in exile, in Zurich, writing about Jews in Dublin, ending with a Jew in internal exile in Los Angeles, writing about Mexicans. And I had this sudden flash of incredible affection for the English language, in this century. How far, geographically and in terms of sensibility, it's gone. I love being a writer in a tradition. I don't have a problem with that.

**JJ:** We've talked about the poetry scene in Los Angeles, not your connection to it, in fact your non-connection to it, and the performative aspect of what's happening down there. What about performing, your work yourself, as I've seen you do before? Is reading your prose an entirely different experience than reading your poetry? Does a more performative aspect come in when you read your poetry?

**KB:** I'd like to say this about a gig I did at the Anti Club, when I feel asleep on an amp, and I went on at three in the morning. I made it backstage in all the cigarette smoke... I was talking to a friend of mine who's got a band, and, "Remember the day you fell asleep on my amp, backstage?" I did. I made eleven bucks at the gig. I always did a lot of that. And I always did it because I always needed the money. If I made \$8, I needed that \$8. I read at the punk clubs before there were punk clubs. First I read at the rock clubs, and then later they called them punk clubs. I liked the sense that writing is not something that occurs in a library setting. I like the idea that writing has a kinetic component. For years I would edit my poems at readings. Because your audience never lies. You can hear where they're fading out. You know what works, because you feel an intake and outtake of breath. I love doing that. That's one reason I write everything for the ear. I would much rather be led along by the sound of something than by the logic of something. I think that's a great discovery I made. But that comes from the fact that a writer my age comes out of the rock-and-roll tradition. Now, a writer a little older than me, I think the great innovations that would have affected them would be cinema — flash cuts, and flash forwards, and the image, and the different manipulations that could go on with images. For a writer coming out of the sixties, it certainly seems to me that the art form that would inform our work, on a subliminal level, has certainly gotta be the drive and cadence of rock-and-roll.

**JJ:** I think you've put your finger exactly on part of the reason why your prose feels so poetic to me. Because I can hear it in the voice, and so many times, when your characters have a reverie, or they're in the grip of a memory — it's a poetic cadence they hear. And you really hear it. It's not a static description.

**KB:** Yeah, there's that. And I'll tell you something else. In terms of this performance poetry, now that you've got me on the subject, Laurie Anderson did this forever ago. And Patti Smith did this, forever ago. And in my opinion, Jim Morrison did this. We're talking now, more than twenty years ago.

So what blows my mind is — what is there new in this concept? It's been going on forever, these people. First it was rock bands; then it was punk bands. So the idea of using words, of taking the word off the page and giving it a new vitality of some kind, or a search for vitality, is just something, in my opinion, that's been going on; we're into at least the third decade of this. Actually, when you think about it, isn't that what the Beats were doing, with bongo drums? I mean, what is new in this? It goes back to the fifties, anyway. And starting to work with jazz. Every season there's a brand-new discovery. This is just a popular art form, really.

**JJ:** I think it's the rising fad, for want of a better word, or trend. It's a recognition of something that has been happening, and it is a tradition. I think that's so obvious. It's an extension of something that's been happening since the San Francisco Renaissance.

**KB:** Absolutely. It's been going on since then. And I'll tell you something about the late forties. Something in this that I like is the idea that the poet is still a romantic figure in America. He's unread, you know; he's not invited anywhere, etc. But in some way in the collective consciousness, the poet is still a romantic figure. That a TV star who could pretend to want to be a race car driver, to pretend to be anything, would want to pretend to be a poet, that it could still have that sort of stature, in the American imagination. I must tell you, I find something charming in that.

**JJ:** What strikes me is that it's almost evidence of poetry's usefulness. It's coming back into the popular mythology, out of the collective unconscious, which gives me hope for literature, as a whole, in some, perhaps not very linear,

sense. But it gives me hope for the aesthetic or poetic sensibility, and the survival of poetry as something that can be a force in the world, when it gains recognition, even as a popular mythology. It's been such a rare occurrence that poetry has received any credit or notice at all. I think for some years it just dropped out of the popular mythology.

**KB:** That's true. You know, it's been interesting to me to be a woman poet. I think that people treat a woman poet very differently from a male poet, in the romantic mythology of it. One new theory I have is the 'sound of one hand clapping' is a woman with a baby in one hand and a pen in the other, keeping the world on axis. You've got your baby and your briefcase in one hand, and you've got a pen and a notebook in the other. That's one hand clapping.

**JJ:** You said in that *Time* magazine interview; it's a classic quote now, you're "trying to make a world of women inhabited by women." And that's really clear in your prose, and in your poetry.

**KB:** Get them out of the ghetto that they live in. Yes, I'm doing that.

**JJ:** Let's talk about "Squandering the Blue" the story, not the entire collection. It is a deeply moving story. As a single mother, poet, divorced person, myself, it had a lot of resonances for me. Are we part of your constituency, part of who you wrote the story for? Women alone, young women poets?

**KB:** I don't know if you read the story where the woman, her husband is always threatening to divest her of everything. And she has to go out looking for apartments. And she sees that there are no dining rooms anymore, when she leaves her big house. There are just living rooms. Because we don't eat as families, together, anymore. We just stand; we grab food out of refrigerators, or we sit on the floor in front of television. It's a world where you don't need a dining room, 'cause you don't cook and you have no families. It's just a world of women, alone with children.

It's about the legacy of the sixties. I had no idea that the kind of stamina and integrity that I was going to need to be a true woman writer was going to have the cost that it has had, in my life. And that to build the new world that we talked about building, in Berkeley, in the sixties, was going to have to be built with your fingers bleeding, by yourself, under an abscess of moon. I didn't know it was going to be like that. I think that my characters have some of that residue. So there is that sense, I think. Are these my people, women alone with children, who read books? Women who write poetry? Women who live in Northern and Southern California? Women who have loved mad hippies, like the Derek character — mad, mad, drug-addict, drug dealer, alcoholic, hippie guys smelling of the jungle. Oh, I think that's part of my constituency. I think that all these women are incarnations of all of us, and that what I wanted to do in this book was write about everyday women. These women were not supposed to be brilliant women, like my sorceress, in *Palm Latitudes*. These are the women I know, [who come] out of the collective mythology of AA, out of the collective mythology of my experience as an American woman. What interests me is the resistance that there is to this, to the times in which we live. I think there's a lot of denial.

**JJ:** I think that we should wrap up now. I wonder if you'd like to say more about what it feels like to be here. How does this tour feel?

**KB:** This tour is incredible. I was watching a sunset from the 40th floor of my hotel room last night, and the first thought was, "Who did I mug? Did I mug somebody in a blackout?" And my second thought was, the incredible, rare alchemy of the poem. That the poem could have transmuted my physical reality, so that I was there with my Room Service, looking out at the three-bridged view I had from there. And I had such a sense of the eternal sorcery of writing. □

Joyce Jenkins is Editor of Poetry Flash. A taped portion of this interview was recently aired on KPFA FM in Berkeley on Bay Area Arts.

## Some Information

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disturbing trend. Mr. Speaker, why is it that we subject funding for creativity to such harsh scrutiny, when we are so profligate when it comes to funding weapons of destruction?

Mr. Speaker, this debate also points to the need for increased funding for arts education. The more our children are taught to have a fuller appreciation of artistic expression, the easier it will be for Members to support the arts in Congress.

Spoken like a true Congresswoman. As Emily Leider points out, Nancy Pelosi should have the ear of the literary community.

Another NEA item: New Langton Arts of San Francisco have received one of thirteen major grants (\$40,000) to support innovative work by up-and-coming artists. This grant is support jointly, virtually dollar for dollar, by The

Rockefeller Foundation. The grant is intended to support the work of lesser-known artists whose "original work challenges artistic conventions." (*Whose conventions?*) By congratulations are in order to New Langton Arts.

Juanita Bourns, of Millbrae, California, a regular read at the Minotaur Reading Series at the Burlingame Public Library, died suddenly at the end of August. She was a generous and enthusiastic person, who supported other writers. The Minotaur Series especially will miss her very much. "First a stirring toward love/ then snow — touch on tip of flame/ wind, moon/ Sun/ slants into winter/ Sparks seed fire/ beneath the snow" (from "In Snow," by Juanita Bourns, *Minotaur* 19)

Galileo High School's Creative Writing Club in urban San Francisco has been producing an accomplished multicultural calendar for eight years, and an anthology of student work since 1979. Co-edited by Judy Bebelar and Katherine Harer, this year's calendar theme is John Lennon's "Come Together." The purchase of one of these calendars, *And Still It Moves*, filled with student poems and birthdays of heroes will affirm for these kids, many of them struggling with poverty, racial tensions and drugs, that they can do and be something good. (Teachers and directors of social programs take note — kid to kid, this calendar and/or anthology might be inspiring in your classroom or site.) Calendars are \$10, plus \$3 postage for one, \$1 additional; Calendar and the student anthology a \$15 each, plus postage same as above; student anthologies are \$5 each plus \$1 postage. Make check payable to Galileo Creative Writing Club, Galileo High School, 1150 Francisco Street, SF 94109, attention: Judy Bebelar.

- The Nevada City Literary Guild invites fiction, non-fiction, poetry, short stories, and essays from local writers for a forthcoming creative writing journal. The Literary Guild's journal will be produced by the writer group which meets on a weekly basis. Send with SASE to the Nevada City Literary Guild, c/o 10262 Cedro Rd., Nevada City, CA 95959. For more information about the journal or the Guild call (916) 265-5252 or 265-0608.
- The Student Union for Ethnic Inclusion (SUEI) at Naropa is now accepting applications for minority scholarships for the 1991 Naropa Summer Writing Program. SUEI was formed in 1989 by Naropa writing students who wanted to bring more students and writers of color to Naropa. Last summer, five students attend the summer program on full or partial scholarships. Deadline for next year's application: April 1. For information, write: SUEI c/o Department of Writing and Poetics, Naropa Institute, 2130 Arapahoe, Boulder CO 80302.
- *The Amarant Review* is now accepting submissions for the Spring 1991 issue. The editor is looking for poetry (no length restrictions) and short fiction (3,500 words or less). The publication tends to the eclectic, but Native American issues and "The Environment" are themes of this issue. Poetry and fiction guidelines are available for a SASE. Sample copies: \$5.50. One year subscription: \$10. Payment in copies. Dana L. Yost, Editor, *The Amarant Review*, P.O. Box 56235, Phoenix, AZ 85079.
- *The Amarant Review* is also sponsoring a "Spring Edition" Poetry & Short Fiction Contest, with \$75 for the best poem (any length), \$100 for the best short story (under 5,000 words), other cash prizes, plus two copies and publication in the spring issue. Open to all categories of fiction and poetry. All entries must be unpublished, original works. Entry fees: \$2 per poem, \$1 per short story. You must send with an SASE to *The Amarant Review*, "Spring Edition Contest," P.O. Box 56235, Phoenix, AZ 85079.
- Bumbershoot, the legendary and huge annual Labor Day arts festival in Seattle, otherwise known as Rain City (bumbershoot is an old name for umbrella), has announced its application schedule for 1991. If you would like to exhibit at the bookfair or compete to perform at the Literary Arts events, write immediately Bumbershoot 1991, P.O. Box 9750, Seattle, WA 98109 for a form, or call (206) 447-9730. Deadline: February 15.
- *The Southern California Anthology* announces its Fourth Annual Ann Stanford Poetry Prizes. First prize \$750; second prize \$250; third prize \$100. Jean Valentine will judge. Send up to five poems with \$10 payable to *The Southern California Anthology*. Poems must be unpublished. Include a cover sheet with name address and titles, and an SASE for contest results. All manuscripts will be considered for publication, all winning entries will be published, and all entrants will receive a free issue. Deadline: March 15, 1991. Mail to Contest Entry, Master of Professional Writing Program WPH 404, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90089-4034.
- *Coffeehouse* is a cassette tape poetry and short fiction magazine which is seeking submissions from California. Just read your poem or story onto a standard 60 min tape. The best will be dubbed together to produce a master tape. Those with accepted work will receive the submitted tape back, dubbed with a copy of the master