

OPEN MIC SHOWCASE: JANET KUYPERS & JASON PETTUS, BY MICHAEL G. SPITZ

An outstanding example of open mic mastery was Janet Kuypers and Jason Pettus' series of alternating readings at the Aloha Cafe, right off Lincoln near Montrose. Covering all the bases from Janet intercepting a call from the Founding Fathers to a lavish tale of beads and striptease in New Orleans. Sure, Janet's got four books published and a literary magazine up and running, but the whole point is that such evenings create an opportunity for anyone to go up there and strut their stuff.

ELLEN SHULL, EDITOR, PALO ALTO REVIEW

I forwarded (poem "everything was alive and dying") to all of the readers. They all say it has power and persuasion.

RYAN MALONE, WRITER (ON "SULPHUR AND SAWDUST")

I'm enjoying the copy of **Suphur and Sawdust**, which came in the mail yesterday. The design is phenomenal. Stark, sleek, brilliant, impressive. Very refreshing. The small lines of text running sideways down the pages? Very cool. This is really, well-done, classy looking anthology.

THE REMAINS
Sulphur and Sawdust

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***Sulphur
&
Sawdust***

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Second (Stripped) Edition

I had a dream the other night
I was walking down the street in the city
and a man came up to me
a skinny man, he lost his hair
and he walked right up to me
and told me no one cares anymore
and he took my hand
and asked me to care about him
“I’m not supposed to be like this” he said
“I’m not homeless, you know
I have AIDS”
and I wanted to tell him that
someone did care,
that he didn’t have to die alone,
but you know how sometimes
you can’t do things in your dream
no matter how hard you try,
well, my mouth was open, wide open,
but no words were coming out

you know, I’m afraid to go to sleep tonight
I’m afraid that a pregnant woman
will come up to me
and ask me for a hanger
and I’ll tell her there has to be another way
and she’ll say this is the way she chooses

janet kuypers

people’s rights misunderstood

I'm afraid a woman will come up to me
and tell me she doesn't want to live
because she's just been raped
and her world doesn't make sense anymore
and I'll tell her that she can make it
that one in three women are raped in their lifetime
and they all make it
and besides, the world doesn't make sense
to anyone
and she'll say that doesn't make me
feel any better

and I'm afraid that I won't be able to
walk down that city street again
without it looking like a Quentin Tarentino movie
where everyone is pointing guns at each other
yes, Mr. NRA
you are right
I feel so much safer
knowing everyone out there has a gun
that there are more gun shops than gas stations
and that everyone is so willing
to do the killing

*This poem was also published in the book *Close Cover Before Striking*.*

my phone rang earlier today
and I picked it up and said “hello”
and a man on the other end said,
Is this Janet Kuypers?
and I said, “Yes, it is, may I ask
who is calling?”
and he said, Yeah, hi, this is
George Washington, and I’m sitting here
with Jefferson and we wanted to
tell you a few things. And I said
“Why me?” And he said Excuse me,
I believe I said I was the one
that wanted to do the talking.
God, that’s the problem with
Americans nowadays. They’re so
damn rude. And I said, “You know,
you really didn’t have to use
language like that,” and he said,
Oh, I’m sorry, it’s just I’ve been
dead so long, I lose all control
of my manners. Well, anyway, we just
wanted to tell you some stuff. Now,
you know that we really didn’t have
much of an idea of what we were
doing when we were starting up
this country here, we didn’t have
much experience in creating
bodies of power, so I could understand
how our Constitution could be
misconstrued

the state of the nation

Janet Kuypers

and then he put in a dramatic pause
and said,
but when we said people had
a right to bear arms
we meant to protect themselves
from a government gone wrong
and not so you could kill
and innocent person
for twenty dollars cash
and when we said freedom of
religion we included the separation
of church and state because freedom
of religion could also mean freedom
from religion
and when we said freedom of speech
we had no idea you'd be
burning a flag
or painting pictures of Christ
doused in urine
or photographing people with
whips up their respective anatomies
but hell, I guess we've got to
grin and bear it
because if we ban that
the next thing they'll ban is books
and we can't have that
and I said, "But there are schools
that have books banned, George."
And he said Oh.

This poem was also published in the book Close Cover Before Striking.

I

I had a dream the other night
I walked out of the city
to a forest
and there were neatly paved bicycle paths
and trash cans every fifty feet
and trash every ten

and then a raccoon came right up to me
she had a few little baby raccoons
following her, it was so cute, I
wish I had my camera

and she spoke to me,
she said, thank you
thank you for not buying furs,
I know you humans are pretty smart,
you have to be able to figure out a way
to keep yourselves warm
without killing me

and I said, you know they don't
do it for warmth,
they do it for fashion, they do it
for power. And she said I know.
But thank you anyway.

II

Then I walked a little further
and there was a stray cat
she still had her little neon collar on
with a little bell
and she walked a few feet,
stretched her front paws,
oh, she looked so darling
and then she walked right up to me
and she said thank you
and I said for what?

And she just looked at me for a moment,
her little ears were standing straight up,
and then she said, you know,
in some countries I'm considered
a delicacy. And I said how
do you know of these things?
And she said
when somebody eats one of you
word gets around
and then she looked up at me again
and said, and in some countries
the cow is sacred. Wouldn't they
love to see how you humans
prepare them for slaughter, how you
hang them upside-down
and slit their throats
so their still beating hearts
will drain out all the blood for you
and she said isn't it funny
how arbitrary your decision
to eat meat is?
and I said, don't put me
in that category, I don't eat meat
and she said I know

III

And I walked deeper in to the forest
managed to get away from the
picnic tables and the outhouses
that lined the forest edges
the roaring cars gave way to the
rustling of tree branches
crackling of fallen leaves
under my step

when the wind tunneled through
the wind whistled and sang
as it flew past the bark
and leaves

I walked
listened to the crack of dead branches
under my feet
and I felt a branch against my shoulder
I looked up and I could hear
the trees speak to me,
and they said
thank you for letting the
endangered animals live here amongst us
we do think they're so pretty
and it would be a shame to see them go
and thank you for recycling paper
because you're saving us
for just a little while longer

we've been on this planet for so long
embedded in the earth
we do have souls, you know
you can hear it in our songs
we cling with our roots
we don't want to let go

and I said, but I don't do much,
I don't do enough
and they said we know
but we'll take what we can get

IV
and I woke up in a sweat

V

so tell me, Bob Dole
so tell me, Newt Gingrich
so tell me, Pat Bucannan
so tell me, Jesse Helms
if you woke up from that dream
would you be in a sweat, too?

VI

Do you even know why
we should save the rain forest?
Oh preserve the delicate balance,
just tear the whole forest down,
what difference does it make?
Put in some orange groves
so our concentrate orange juice
can be a little cheaper

did you know that medical researchers
have a very, very hard time
trying to come up with synthetic
cures for diseases on their own?
It helps them out a little if they can first
find the substance in nature.
A tree that appears in the rain forest
may be the only one of its species.
Or one like it may be two miles away,
instead of right next to it. I wonder
how many cures we've destroyed
to plant more orange groves.
Serves us right.

VII

You know my motives aren't selfless
I know that these things are worthwhile in my life

I'd like to find a cure to these diseases
before I die of them
and I'm not just a vegetarian
because I think it's wrong to kill an animal
unless I have to

I also know the excess protein
pulls the calcium away from my bones
and gives me osteoporosis
and the excess fat gives me heart attacks
and I also know that we could be feeding
ten times more people
with the same resources used for meat production

You know, I know you're looking at me
and calling me an extremist
but I'm sitting here, looking around me
looking at the destruction caused by family values
and thinking the right, moral, non-violent decisions
are also those extreme ones

VII

everything is linked here
we destroy our animals
so we can be wasteful and violent
we destroy our plants
we destroy our earth
we're even destroying our air
we wreak havoc on the soil, on the atmosphere
we dump our wastes into our lakes
we pump aerosol cans and exhaust pipes

and you tell me I'm extreme

and these animals and forests keep calling out to me
the oceans, the wind

and I'm beginning to think
that we just keep doing it
because we don't know how to stop
and deep inside we feel the pain of
all that we've killed
and we try to control it by
popping a chemical-filled pain-killer

we live through the guilt
by taking caffeine, nicotine, morphine
and we keep ourselves thin with saccharin
and we keep ourselves sane with our alcohol poisoning
and when that's not enough
maybe a line of coke

maybe shoot ourselves in the head
in front of the mirror in the master bedroom
or maybe just take some pills
walk into the garage, turn on the car
and just
fall asleep

in the wild
you have no power over anyone else

now that we're civilized
we create our own wild

maybe when we have all this power
the only choice we have
is to destroy ourselves

and so we do

*This poem was also published in the book *Close Cover Before Striking*.*