

The National Book Critics Circle Journal



Volume 13, Number 2

April 1, 1987

President's letter

Dear Members,

The events of Jan. 29 at New York University are something of a blur in my mind – but such a roseate blur! The annual meeting was lively; the PPA lunch delicious; the afternoon panel stimulating; the reception convivial (and also delicious); the awards ceremony sometimes funny, sometimes touching, consistently interesting.

Thanks to all in the NBCC and at NYU who helped. But special thanks to Selma Shapiro and her staff and to programs VP Morris Dickstein. They pulled all the pieces together and made it work.

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With this issue, the Journal gets a new editor, Mark Feeney of *The Boston Globe*, who is replacing the weary Bill Robertson. Bill's done a splendid job the past few years. Our gratitude to him and our best wishes to Mark.

Attached to this Journal you'll find a couple of returnable forms – one for updating your listing in the membership directory and the other a combined pay survey/ethics questionnaire that we hope will be the basis for some useful discussions.

At the Jan. 29 membership conclave, the awards voting procedure continued to be the subject of much discussion and contention. Some suggestions that came out of that meeting will be taken up at the next board meeting on March 16 and, I hope, will be put into effect soon thereafter.

As in recent years, we're planning to have some kind of NBCC gathering at the ABA (Washington at the end of May). We'll let you know the details as soon as possible.

–NINA KING

Editor's note

The past few months have seen a series of momentous editorial changes in American journalism: Abe Rosenthal stepping down at *The New York Times*, William Shawn at *The New Yorker* . . . and now Bill Robertson at the Journal (though, thankfully, not at *The Miami Herald*). Like Max Frankel and Bob Gottlieb, I have big shoes to fill; also like them, I have an astute and sophisticated readership to satisfy. Unlike Frankel and Gottlieb, however, I do not have the resources of a large and expert staff to draw upon. That's where you, the membership, must come in.

The Journal will always carry NBCC essentials, of course: schedules, reminder lists, ballots, awards results, and the like. If it is to have more than that, if it is to better serve, edify, amuse and (maybe once in awhile) anger its 500 or so readers, it needs to hear from those readers. From you. Letters, columns, opinions, rants, complaints, praise, the occasional nonsense. You send it, and I'll run it.

This is not a publication in the standard sense of the term. Rather, the Journal is the National Book Critics Circle. We don't have sweatshirts or coffee mugs or bumper stickers or a union hall. We're a low-tech, far-flung, scattershot operation, more like a Trotskyite cell than a professional organization, with the population density of a tundra. The Journal is what makes this organization an organization: it binds us together, keeps the blood circulating, spreads the word.

If you have something to say (and we all have *something* to say, or we'd have been sensible and gone to business school instead of getting involved in something as foolish as book reviewing) send it along to this address: NBCC Journal, Book Dept., *The Boston Globe*, Boston, MA 02107. The Journal, as well as its readers and editor, will be vastly the better for it.

–MARK FEENEY

Letters

To the Editor:

Tikkun, now a bimonthly Jewish review of politics, culture, and society, has begun a book review section. We are looking for reviewers on all subjects – not just Jewish themes – with an intellectual bent. We pay reasonably, not a lot, but not low either. Please contact Alan Wolfe, Department of Sociology, Queens College, Flushing, NY 11367

To the Editor:

I was just composing a letter to the NBCC about the awards election process when I came upon Michael McFee's eloquent complaint, which pretty much voices my sentiments.

As someone who lives in an urban "power center," I find the December 1 election deadline so frustrating that I may as well reside in the most distant outpost of the empire. Imagine my chagrin to discover Larry Heinemann's masterful post-Vietnam novel *Paco's Story* with a December 1 publication date. Talk about stymied! Should I assume that I can nominate Heinemann on next year's ballot, or does he just fall between the chronological cracks?

I would like to see next year's deadline moved up to Dec. 31, 1987. That's only fair. Otherwise we lose at least six weeks of worthy nominees, and the NBCC's claim to selecting the "best" of the year's crop is patently invalid. I suspect many other members are similarly frustrated. One hesitates to participate in a skewed process. The low 1986 general membership voting turnout may well reflect this discontent as well as the sense of voting futility Mr. McFee justly likens to that of political elections.

The Oscars come out in the spring. Don't we owe ourselves as much space for reflection as the movie industry takes? Let's see a *March* awards presentation in 1988.

Sincerely yours,
Judith Wynn

To the Editor:

I find it instructive that eight members of the NBCC cast ballots for Richard Howard's *No Traveller*, which then was given 24 weighted votes in the poetry category.

Mr. Howard is a fine poet, as we all know.

But while the book did appear on the Reminder List, it was not published in 1986. In fact, Mr. Howard has yet to turn in the manuscript to his publisher, who prematurely listed it in a fall trade advertisement.

It might not be out of line to suggest members vote for only books they actually have read - at the least, for books which exists.

Sincerely,
Robert Phillips

(Editor's note: the following letter was sent to Vice President for Awards John Blades.)

As a member of the NBCC, I want to register my formal complaint regarding the obvious elitism the organization's governing principals have built in. There seems to me no defensible rationale for cutting us "general" members out of the awards voting process - the awards being the single most (the only?) visible presence of the organization in the general media - and leaving the selection to an elite panel whose very selection we general members have only limited influence in. Yes, I understand how our votes for the awards are counted: not disregarded entirely, but in practice, so watered down by the rather baroque tabulation process that they are effectively "neutralized." (How many of this year's winners were also choices of the general membership? Is there some reason we general members are less qualified to choose? Do we read less? are we somehow less fit?)

In fact, I'm hard pressed to think of much tangible benefit for my membership dues - a directory listing of members, some chatty newsletters - I hate to think the best thing I'm supporting is other people's lunches at the

Algonquin, where they conduct business I'm not important enough to participate in.

Given this blatant elitism, can you think of a reason I ought to continue my membership another year?

I'd appreciate your raising these issues to the appropriate scions. I'd be interested in hearing their answer. . .

Best,
Barry Silesky

To the membership:

As your new Vice President for Programs West (a subcategory of a subcategory), I'd be happy to serve as a clearinghouse for any western-regional activities people come up with. This includes publicizing events in advance, helping you get the names of their NBCC members in your area, summarizing your activities in a report to the newsletter, and anything else you think I can do to help. So if you're planning any kind of NBCC activity for the near future, please let me know c/o The Threepenny Review, PO Box 9131 Berkeley, CA 94709. (A useful hint: if you note on the outside of the envelope that it contains NBCC business, it will be less likely to get lost among the unsolicited manuscripts.)

At the moment, Jack Sullivan and I, with Joel Conarroe's help, are planning an NBCC panel for the December 1987 MLA Conference, which will take place in San Francisco. I'm also hoping the San Francisco Bay Area members can have at least one meeting prior to the nominations board meeting so that we can discuss possible books for nomination. Any other ideas for this particular subregion?

I look forward to hearing from you.

All best,
Wendy Lesser

NBCC panel on book reviewing

As part of the Jan. 29 meeting, Morris Dickstein arranged for an NBCC panel that afternoon on "Authors as Reviewers / Reviewers as Authors."

The panel consisted of four eminent Tiresiases: Robert Towers, head of the Writing Program at Columbia's School of the Arts, author of three novels (*The Necklace of Kali*, *The Monkey Watcher* and *The Summoning*) and frequent fiction reviewer for such journals as *The New York Review of Books* and *The New York Times Book Review*; James Chace, an editor of *The Times Book Review*, former managing editor of *Foreign Affairs* and author of such books on foreign policy as *Endless War*, *Solvency* and *A World Elsewhere*; Max Apple, author of the short story collection, *The Oranging of America*, and two novels, *Zip* and the recently published *The Propheteers*; and Gail Godwin, whose published fiction includes such titles as *The Perfectionists*, *Violet Clay*, *The Odd Woman* and *A Mother and Two Daughters*.

The panel, as panels tend to do, spoke for the most part extemporaneously. Fortunately, however, both Morris and Gail Godwin prepared statements; they follow below. They make for an illuminating study in theory and practice: Morris' introduction raises many vital questions, even for those of us whose experience of authorship may extend only to reviewing; while Godwin's "encompassing" description (to employ her own useful modifier) of being reviewed, reading reviews, and writing reviews, is one all reviewers can derive lessons from.

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NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Morris Dickstein

There's always been a school of thought, led by writers themselves, which holds book reviewing in very low esteem. Virginia Woolf, who had written many hundreds of reviews, finally, in a long 1939 pamphlet called *Reviewing*, pronounced the whole enterprise futile and worthless. (The pamphlet itself, by the way, got a bad review in the *TLS*, where she had published most of her own pieces.) On the other hand there's a school which has been quiet for a while, which reared its head in John Gross' book *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters*, that reminds us that much of the best of modern criticism arose not from Platonic or Aristotelian theories of art, and certainly not from university scholarship, but from a series of heated encounters between authors and their reviewers in the great 19th-century journals like the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly*, that the book reviewer has played a significant mediating role between the modern writer and his audience, and that journalistic criticism, though often written against tight deadlines, to fit inadequate space, deprived of the long perspective that time affords, has again and again proved itself more passionate, more immediate, more viscerally engaged with the problems of writers — as opposed to the pet notions of critics — than its academic cousin based in university departments.

But there's one more detail that academic critics would just as soon forget: the best critics have usually been writers themselves — not just the great poet-critics from Dryden to Eliot, but recent NBCC honorees in criticism like Robert Hass and Joseph Brodsky, who will receive the award later today. The present panel is based on a similar if more modest tradition to which Virginia Woolf herself belonged — that of the author as book reviewer . . . or reviewer as author — it works both ways. Three of our panel participants are fiction writers who are also veteran members of the NBCC. The fourth has written and reviewed many books on politics and international affairs besides being a working editor of long standing. The questions I posed to them, merely as potential subjects for discussion, went as follows:

— When your own books were reviewed, how much help were these notices to you as a writer? After being on the receiving end, was your own approach as a reviewer deeply affected? Is there something especially difficult for reviewers who are themselves authors, besides the problem of knowing personally some of the writers they might be asked to review?

— Have reviews declined in quality in recent years? Have they become merely part of the promotional apparatus of book publishing? Alternately, is there a new seriousness in some reviewing organs? How have the large changes in the publishing scene altered the place of reviews and reviewers? What is your ideal objective in a review? What function should it serve?

— Is book reviewing perhaps a dying technique, as more newspapers go under, as those that survive give more space to their *Style* sections, and as magazines increasingly prefer *People*-ish profiles and behind-the-scenes stories about book deals and personalities? Where do we go from here?

Gail Godwin

Regarding the subject of reviewing, I see myself as a three-pronged creature: a writer who is reviewed, a reader of reviews, and a reviewer.

Most of the time, I am a writer, so I'll begin with my observations from that vantage point. The least I expect from a reviewer is that he or she read my book — all of it — in a reasonably sober state, and then make a conscientious attempt to describe what is in the book, how it is written, in what ways it delights or impresses — and where it falls short of expectations. The ideal reviewer would be a well-read person, a lover of books, someone beset neither by haste nor too many pre-conceptions, who would be able to savor and absorb rather than skim, and then hold forth in an interesting and readable way on the book's essence, its memorable moments, and its overall design. This ideal reviewer should be neither a detractor nor a close friend, nor someone who wants something from me badly enough to compromise the review to flatter me, nor someone whose literary taste are hostile to the kind of work I do. No writer enjoys a negative review, but I am made unhappy in *different ways* by a responsible negative review and an irresponsible one. The responsible bad review sets me to question how I might have made my book better: the irresponsible, self-serving, or silly review only arouses my rage and frustration and a desire to get even. Once, in revenge, I named a female dog-catcher in one of my novels after a stupid and malicious reviewer, but as I never finished the novel the offender remains unpunished — at least by me.

Now some thoughts on the art of reviewing from myself as a frequent reader of reviews. I enjoy reading a skillful, perceptive review in the same way I enjoy reading good essays and criticism. I often buy books because of a review I have read, and not necessarily because the review was favorable. If the subject and its presentation sound attractive, and if it has sufficiently engaged — or enraged — the reviewer, I'll take my chances. The review I most admire is much more than a book report. It goes to meet the book, engages with the book, then encompasses the book. An encompassing reviewer is able to see the book's architecture, and then go on beyond that to add some background landscape: no book exists in a vacuum: it comes out of a tradition, a place, a time, a particular personality. I like a review that puts all that in, as well.

The reviews I find embarrassing or downright detrimental to the art of book reviewing are the gushy, the careless, the ill-informed, the petty, the show-offy, or the malicious. We can all think of examples of each. Here are some more, specific, instances I recall: the review in which the reviewer uses his space to indulge at length in his own piques and preferences about a certain subject, and neglects to tell us much about the book; the one in which the reviewer announces that she has a problem in her personal life and this book, a novel, did not solve it; the review that judges a work of fiction by how faithfully it expresses current political and sociological fashions; the review that lauds one novelist to the skies by running down another, whose work isn't under consideration; the review in which the reviewer spent four paragraphs out of his allotted eleven discussing his own reactions to authors' photos on their book jackets; the "computer-researched" review, from which the reviewer as thinking, opining individual seems completely absent.

About myself as reviewer. I find writing what I consider a competent review to be time-consuming and *hard*. That is why I don't do many reviews a year. If a book is sent to me and I can't get into it, or find myself hating it or temperamentally unsuited to its style or story, I send it back. I don't like to waste time reading things that irritate or bore me, and I don't get kicks from gratuitous destruction. If I do become involved with the book, I jot down the pages where significant things happen, or which contain quotable passages. I may go and read other works by the same writer. I try to immerse myself in that writer and what she/he is trying to do. After I finish my reading, I sometimes think about the book (or books) for several days. When I begin to write, I often have trouble getting started. The better and more complex the book is, the more I wonder whether I will be able to do it justice: what if I leave something out? But of course I must leave something out! The art of reviewing is knowing the right things to put in.

When I am in the act of writing the review, I try to address the reader of this review. I imagine a reader not unlike myself. What will this person want to know about this book? At the same time, since I am a writer, I care about giving my review a shape and perhaps even a theme. But the theme shouldn't elbow out the book under consideration. (I remember how a reviewer once subjugated a long novel of mine to her "menu" theme: different aspects of the book reminded her of different courses of a meal!)

But the whole time I am writing the review, I am also imagining the feelings of the writer when his/her editor or agent phones to read it - or when the writer opens the newspaper or magazine in which it will appear. This occupational sensitivity on my part definitely makes reviewing more difficult, but it also prevents me from taking potshots. Nevertheless, I care enough about good, true writing to come down hard when I have to on the fuzzy and false. Doing a substantial review can take as much as three weeks out of my life, but I keep saying "yes" again, I suppose, because I'd like to be the kind of reviewer I want to review my books. I like Henry James' description of what the critic should be: "the real helper of the artist, the torch-bearing outrider . . . the interpreter . . . the brother."

The acceptance speeches

Here are the acceptance speeches by the winners of the National Book Critics Circle Awards for the best books of 1986. Neither John Dower, because of a prior commitment, nor Reynolds Price, for reasons of health, was able to attend; while their presence was missed, their generous remarks did much to compensate for their absence. In the past, a tape recording has been made of the awards proceedings. Regrettably, that was not the case this year. As a result, the speeches of Joseph Brodsky, Theodore Rosen-garten and Reviewer's Citation winner Richard Eder are not included below.

John W. Dower
(General Nonfiction)

War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War / Pantheon

I deeply regret being unable to join you this evening, for to receive this National Book Critics Circle award is a great - indeed, a triple - pleasure for me.

First, it is of course a great personal honor.

Beyond this, however, it is especially gratifying that a book such as "War Without Mercy" can evoke a positive response in its readers. I say this because I, myself, sometimes despaired in the writing of it. The subject is a harsh one - being about hatred, racism, and unbridled violence as seen from all sides of the Pacific War - and yet it was always my feeling that we should and could emerge from such an inquiry with a more human, and humane, understanding of the past.

There is a saying most of you must know: that authors never really finish their books, only abandon them. It was almost exactly a year ago that I abandoned this manuscript; and now that I have a certain distance from it, I find myself trying to analyze what I have been up to as a historian. In a certain respect, I suspect I have been moving against the grain.

History has always been the most catholic of disciplines, the bridge between the humanities and the social sciences. Recently, however, historians have tended more and more to move away from the humanities into the world of models and hard jargon. I like some of the models myself. Or perhaps more accurately said, I find much pleasure in seeing meaningful patterns. But models come and models go; and if history is indeed to become living memory, we must continue to treasure those literary and humanistic traditions that have fallen out of fashion in so many academic circles today.

Why is this so? What do these traditions reveal to us that the so-called "hard" social sciences neglect? They reveal tragedy and ambiguity, as well as simple emotions. They show how language rules our days, myths envelop our lives, symbols and metaphors give order to our world - or to our many worlds. The humanities deepen our sense of history by cherishing what the hard models can never accommodate: grief, for example, and remorse and charity.

In the end, perhaps, that is what happened, unwittingly, really, in writing "War Without Mercy." I learned what mercy is; and that sentiment remains - for others, too, I hope - even after details on the page are forgotten.

That the book has been well received by you encourages the hope that we can indeed bring the humanities and social sciences together; and that is the second pleasure I take in receiving this award.

Finally, it is a special pleasure to share this honor with Pantheon Books, whose support over the years has been everything an author could desire. Writing is such a solitary pursuit that we often forget our immense dependence on the whole community of publishers, editors, booksellers, reviewers, and readers which enables us to write seriously about subjects that move us.

To Pantheon, to the National Book Critics Circle, and to all of you: thank you.

REYNOLDS PRICE
(Fiction)

Kate Vaiden / Atheneum

Those of you who have written narrative fiction will understand when I say that, however pleased I am to accept an award for the novel *Kate Vaiden*, I feel genuinely out of place in doing so. I hope it's not absurd to say that Kate herself should be here like, say, Loretta Lynn at the Country Music Awards in Nashville. Kate would have invested in a knock-out dark-blue dress and come on the arm of her newly-reconciled son, and she'd have worked at least to charm your socks off. In short, she'd be delighted. So am I.

For I did write her story. In the spring months of 1983 when I was casting around for the voice of a young male, to tell the story of a novel I hoped to write (my first novel in

the first person), my mind or ear kept meeting a wall of silence. The voice of a man would not come.

For whatever unfathomable reasons, the spirit of an entirely fictional woman kept insisting, like a talk-starved ghost at a high-class seance. After a few days of pointless resistance, I surrendered to the force of her need. And in the notebook I was accumulating at the time, I began my usual next step – the search for her name.

It seemed crucial, as it always does for me, to name her. And in a few days I got it – Kate Vaiden. "Kate, not Katherine," as she says on page one. And *Vaiden* to rhyme with *maiden*, an uncharacteristic but helpful rhyme.

Once I'd uncovered that central clue to her nature, I'd tripped a floodgate. In a way I'd never remotely experienced before, I immediately discovered that the rest of the book was almost written. Once I knew my woman's name, her life was almost invented, her story almost told. I needed only time and strength. I had only to take down the dictation that her character delivered to me faithfully all of the days I pressed her. If I seem to be mystifying or myth-making in the interests of concealing labor or of pretending to a fancy-dan perfection of footwork that I've never possessed – no, I'm not.

I'm glad to be able to say that very seldom in my thirty-three years of serious fiction-writing have I suffered the agony that many novelists describe. My own tolerance for suffering is by no means heroic enough to have seen me through the awful decades that many of my colleagues describe.

On the contrary – but without wanting to sound like a born-again aerobics instructor – I'd have to say that I've worked through most of those years with an intense day-by-day pleasure in what I do. It is, in the end, all I can do with any hope of lasting reward.

But *Kate Vaiden* came to me with even more ease and delight than any previous book. It wanted to live. The character of Kate herself – once conceived – simply *kept coming*, with the beautiful steadiness of natural childbirth. And finally, after two years, when she stood whole and free of me, I watched her walk off with decidedly complicated feelings. As always, I was greatly relieved to have finished. Also as usual, I felt real sadness at watching a child – a brave and laughing comrade, even a friend – turn with no lingering smile and leave my room, if not my life.

All the more delight then to have her called back now for your generous praise and the chance your praise will give her to tell, again and again to many more readers, her hypnotic and (I hope) useful story. Warm thanks.

EDWARD HIRSCH

(Poetry)

Wild Gratitude / Knopf

W. H. Auden once said that poets tend to write chiefly as Ariels or as Prosperos, as poets of style or of content. But the poems I care most about – and the ones I have tried to write – combine the values of both Ariel and Prospero. I want poems that are propelled and informed by passion, that speak with what John Keats called "the true voice of feeling." Emotion in poetry is the touchstone that transmutes and endures. But the deepest feeling may also show itself in restraint, and the sign of our sincerity is our commitment to craft and technique, the struggle to articulate and create experience in language and form. Our passion is art and art represents our passion – even as the personal and the familial may be our index and connection to the social and the historical. We live not in a transcendental realm but in history, and we write out of the inner lives we actually lead. We write to keep the spirit alive in America, to establish and recuperate our losses, to

transform our darkest and most painful experiences into something well-made, beautiful, lasting. Poetry is character articulated in language. It is the goal of poetry to disturb and console, to descend and to rise, to give us despair and jubilation, restraint and exhilaration, the rapture and the dread, the deep inner turmoil and the wild gratitude of being alive.

The winner's review

Richard Eder's entry for the NBCC Citation for Excellence in Reviewing comprised reviews of John Updike's *Roger's Version* (Knopf), the late Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector's *The Hour of the Star* (Carcanet) and Robert Stone's *Children of Light* (Knopf). The Stone ran in The Los Angeles Times Book Review of March 23, 1986.

By Richard Eder

Gordon Walker writes florid movie scripts and acts *King Lear* on the stage. He belongs to the Southern California beautiful-and-damned set. His life is a mess, his children are a mess, his wife has left, and he is off to Baja California to look up Lee Verger, a former beautiful-and-damned playmate, who is starring in a film based on one of his scripts.

But every time Gordon does something emotional, he needs to stop for a hamburger. Before he makes love: a hamburger. When he sets out for Baja: a hamburger. When he spots Lee, wreathed in glory and hallucinations: a hamburger. When he trails her on a final unhinged adventure, he ducks inside for: still another hamburger.

Well, of course it's not just hamburgers. "Children of Light" takes very expensive people at their own level of self-indulgence. So it's cocaine and alcohol. But it might as well be hamburgers. This painfully bombastic novel is very largely about what people ingest and how it makes them feel. Gordon is a bottle. Filled with white powder, he turns white. Whiteness is his romantic agony.

Stone, as he showed in "Dog Soldiers" and "A Flag for Sunrise," is a writer of considerable force. He can lay out death, particularly death of the soul, in a couple of lines. He is all high-tension wires; and here too.

But in the other books, he was dealing with large subjects. His characters were defined more by their taut and twisting emotions than by their natures, but we heard them even if we didn't especially feel them.

"Children of Light" – its title announces its ambition – aims to be a searing portrait of decadence. But for the "damned" to matter, the "beautiful" must matter too. Neither Gordon, nor the alluring and demented Lee, whose real name is Lu Anne, nor the whole squalid pack of film makers amounts to very much.

For Gordon, living on the point of crack-up, the trip to Baja is a pilgrimage of a sort. His agent, who represents reality – Gordon doesn't seem to have friends – wants him to straighten up, dry out, and take steady jobs to hold himself together. Clearly, he is heading into danger. He is trying to re-create the druggy exaltation of his younger days in the company of an old lover who herself is on the fringe of madness.

The agent argues with Gordon, and the agent's young assistant sleeps with him; but to no avail. He will have his last fling, though he takes the precaution of stopping at a doctor's to get some downers to offset the cocaine/alcohol cycle. Alice-like, nibbling alternately on the growing and shrinking sides of his mushroom, Gordon advances into wonderland.

It is a despicable place, populated by Nathanael West locusts. In its isolation, its artificiality, and its self-absorption, a film location is both a convenient and a well-worn way to symbolize a decaying and alienated society. The collection of monsters that Gordon encounters are all too familiar. There is Drogue, a talented but corrupt director, and Drogue's father, a goatish and cynical man who was once a celebrated director himself. There is a revolting journalist, a demented PR man who tries to blackmail the production, a shadowy producer with mysterious money behind him, a blank and sexy starlet.

They work, drink, snort, scheme and quarrel. Stone is very skillful at suggesting the murderous tensions and pressures among the company. Outside, of course, lies Mexico; rather like Malcolm Lowry's volcanoes, and with a similar estranging effect.

In this murky aquarium, Gordon and Lu Anne are the shiny and poisoned fish. A radiant product of the Yale Drama School, she, like Gordon, has been through the twin burnouts of chemicals and fantasies gone bad. Her burnout is worse, though; she is attended by imaginary creatures with lacy wings whom she calls her Long Friends. They make her scream suddenly, or mistake the figure on a crucifix for a martyred cat.

Lu Anne, nearing 40, sees in the film she is making a last chance to save herself. She refuses the medication prescribed to hold madness down, because she wants to shine. As old Drogue puts it: "She has a way of being crazy that photographs pretty well." Clearly, her last chance will be her death warrant.

She and Gordon withdraw into each other for days of drugs, sex and hallucinations. Finally, Lu Anne snaps. She hauls Gordon out to climb a mountain. On top, in a thunderstorm, she strips, daubs herself with mud, and lacerates herself with flints. The couple end up pelting each other with pig manure. Other things happen afterwards, but this is the book's climax: it's a blistering one.

Stone, who had managed some tight writing, dissolves along with his characters. The mountain is called Mount Carmel, and the whole episode, self-inflicted stigmata and all, becomes a hokey mystical vision. The dialogue is a ludicrous melange of the hip and the holy. Here is a bit, on the way up, starting with Gordon:

"There's to and fro. There's back and forth. There's up. Likewise down. There's taking care of your feet."

"And the small rain," Lu Anne said.

"And mud. And gravel and sand. And shit. And wet rot and dry rot. And going over fences."

"Can you look back?"

"Never back. You can look down. You have to see where you're going."

"But is there a place for art?" Lu Anne asked with a troubled frown."

Not really. Stone's efforts to make a touching and sardonic parable out of Gordon, Lu Anne and their bottles amount to a classical definition of melodrama; the application of grand emotions to trivial subjects.

The minutes

NBCC Board of Directors Meeting
Algonquin Hotel, New York
January 12, 1987

PRESENT: President Nina King; vice presidents Elliot Fremont-Smith, Genevieve Stuttaford, Morris Dickstein, John Blades, and Alida Becker; board members Constance Casey, Joel Conarroe, Mark Feeny, Timothy Foote, Doris Grumbach, Ann Hulbert, Richard Locke, Greil Marcus, Larry Swindell, Brigitte Weeks, Robert Wilson, and Dave Wood.

President Nina King called the meeting to order at 10:15 and conveyed the regrets of several board members who couldn't be present.

AWARDS CEREMONY REPORT: Much admiration was expressed as Morris Dickstein announced a program of events that seems to be proceeding without any major difficulties. The caterer has been signed up, a phalanx of coat checkers added for the evening at the NYU law school, and arrangements made to rope off a part of the auditorium so that the audience will not be dispersed into quite so many shadowy corners. All the nominees and citation finalists have received personal invitations to attend, as have all the nominees for the past five years (more than this, it was decided, would have been an unmanageable task). Richard Locke has agreed to consult a day or two ahead of time with the calligrapher who is preparing the award scrolls in order to avoid any hasty last-minute corrections. And, finally, Morris Dickstein unveiled what promises to be an all-star panel for the afternoon symposium featuring writers who are also reviewers: James Chace, Robert Towers, Max Apple, and Gail Godwin.

TREASURER'S REPORT: Elliot Fremont-Smith presented a brief accounting as of the end of the year: \$4,713.54 in the savings account; \$6,041.89 in the checking account; \$5,000 in a certificate of deposit. According to his rough estimate, the journal publication is running at a cost of about \$1200 per issue, with the last directory logged in at about \$500. The meeting expenses (when the Algonquin gets around to billing us) average about \$200 for the room and refreshments and \$1,000 for travel, although the airline and railroad receipts tossed in Mr. Fremont-Smith's direction at this meeting will undoubtedly boost that figure.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT: Genevieve Stuttaford announced that the paid-up membership is at an all-time high of 509 people (a figure that includes 4 members whose checks seem to have vanished in the mails somewhere between Ms. Stuttaford and Mr. Fremont-Smith). In addition, she gently chided two unnamed board members who had yet to make their latest payments. After a brief discussion of when the matter of the board award might be tackled, Nina King announced that she had devised a mysterious but completely logical sequence of voting for the various categories, which she promised to reveal gradually as the meeting progressed. This turned out not only to be true but to be wonderfully efficient.

CRITICISM:

After an initial straw vote, the results were:
Joseph Brodsky, *Less Than One* 12
Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown* 3
Rene Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism* 2

At this point, it was unanimously decided that Joseph Brodsky would be awarded the prize, a vote that the late-arriving Bob Wilson missed by just a few seconds. In the aftermath, the board award was debated, and it was generally agreed that this was a matter that ought to be considered over the course of the next year rather than at the last minute amidst the press of the yearly awards. After discussing various possible candidates, the degree of enthusiasm that ought to be evident for their accomplishments, and the possibility of launching an on-going conversation, via the mails, along with a recommended reading list, it was resolved not to give a board award this year. Instead, the board members will do further reading and thinking, consult with each other on the various names that have been suggested, and deal with the whole question at greater length (and greater leisure) in the spring and fall.

GENERAL NONFICTION:

The first tally yielded the following votes:
Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams* 2
Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West* 9
Jonathan Evan Maslow, *Bird of Life, Bird of Death* 2
John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy* 5

After a free-flowing discussion that touched on historians' techniques, the telling of anecdotes, ice, reading under pressure, and the merits and deficiencies of extended works of journalism, it was moved that the second round of balloting be restricted to the top two vote-getters. This was unanimously approved and the results were:

John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy* 11
Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West* 7

A move that the Dower book be named the winner was seconded, then unanimously approved.

POETRY:

A remark that the proceedings were going remarkably smoothly and might perhaps be concluded before lunch-time was greeted with murmurings of disbelief by the more superstitious members present (or perhaps by those who were merely getting hungry). Forging swiftly onward, a straw vote in this new category emerged with:

Irving Feldman, *All of Us Here* 5
Brad Lettshauser, *Cats of the Temple* 2
Timothy Steele, *Sapphics Against Anger* 2
Anne Winters, *The Key to the City* 2
Edward Hirsch, *Wild Gratitude* 6

Immediately, it was apparent that this was where the voting process would begin to slow down. Discussion around the table included an extremely eloquent abstention from one member, who prefers to look to the past for poetic thrills, and an unashamed announcement from another on his lack of qualifications for judging poetry. Other members chewed over such topics as self-love, "Grecian urn-ism," trick playing, what was described as the ability to be "suspiciously readable," and the exhilaration one might expect from an outstanding book. This resulted in another vote, between the Feldman and the Hirsch:

Irving Feldman, *All of Us Here* 2
Edward Hirsch, *Wild Gratitude* 14
abstentions 2

It was then unanimously agreed that the Hirsch book would be given the poetry prize.

REVIEWER'S CITATION:

In a surprise move, this category was scheduled before the break for lunch, which might have had something to do with the frequency with which Richard Eder's hamburger imagery in his Robert Stone review was mentioned during the ensuing debate. Other members mused on a reviewer's taste in choosing what to review, differences in the scale of reviews, and whether glibness should be considered an occupational hazard in certain spheres of criticism. Others pondered "Hilton Kramer imitations" and the shorter reviewer ("How tall," quipped one listener, "Is Dick Eder?"), as well as the vast and rather ill-defined topics of pyrotechnics and good judgment. After an initial ballot failed to give one semifinalist a majority, a second was taken. This time, Richard Eder emerged as the overwhelming favorite and was awarded the reviewer's citation with 17 votes and one abstention.

FICTION:

After a brief recess for lunch (no hamburgers), a straw vote in the next category yielded:

Peter Taylor, *A Summons to Memphis* 5
Louise Erdrich, *The Beet Queen* 1
Reynolds Price, *Kate Vaiden* 7
Thomas Williams, *The Moon Pinnacle* 4
John Updike, *Roger's Version* 1

One member opened the discussion by asking a number of questions about one of the books under consideration, resulting in a round of talk that, as another member observed, was a veritable minefield of book reviewers' clichés ("cardboard characters" and "head and shoulders above the competition" being only two of the most obvious). This was cheerfully agreed to, but was not allowed to stem the very lively talk about voices, "sleepers" and surprises, and the pigeonhole of "sensitive fiction." Others noted that the debate seemed to take on a rather gloomy tone when it hovered around certain fictional characters, a mood that brightened considerably when a board member viewed one of these characters through the prism of her own experience with a similarly flawed boyfriend. After a long consideration of what precisely was dividing the various factions (different kinds of craftsmanship? the definition of "old-fashioned" writing? what constitutes an "air of poetry"?) another vote was taken:

Thomas Williams, *The Moon Pinnacle* 7
Reynolds Price, *Kate Vaiden* 10
abstention 1

A motion was then made that the Price book be declared the winner. This was unanimously approved.

BIOGRAPHY/AUTOBIOGRAPHY:

Now energetic in the home stretch, the board members settled into a straw vote:

Jonathan Brown, *Velazquez* 2
Theodore Rosengarten, *Tombee* 9
Art Spiegelman, *Maus* 2
Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes* 4
abstention 1

After agreement that this category contains many of the strongest candidates of the year – and some reminiscing about the debates that accompanied the separation of biography/autobiography from the general nonfiction category some years ago – the discussion evolved into a mini-testimonial to the virtues of the Rosengarten book, which was described by one member as "the happiest surprise" of the 25 finalists. It was no surprise, then, that the second vote emerged as follows:

Jonathan Brown, *Velazquez* 1
Theodore Rosengarten, *Tombee* 15
Art Spiegelman, *Maus* 2

The Rosengarten book was then unanimously declared the winner. Amid much shuffling of papers and downcast looks, the question of who would write brief descriptions of the winners for the press release - and who would give somewhat longer speeches at the ceremony - was addressed. After many modest remarks about reluctance to speak in public, the winners were paired with the following presenters:

Theodore Rosengarten, *Tombee*: Tim Foote
 Reynolds Price, *Kate Vaiden*: Larry Swindell
 John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy*: Morris Dickstein
 Edward Hirsch, *Wild Gratitude*: Joel Conarroe
 Joseph Brodsky, *Less Than One*: Elizabeth Hardwick
 Richard Eder: Richard Locke

Nina King doublechecked this list with the board. Then Eliot Fremont-Smith, gliding toward the coat rack, moved that this impressively smooth-running meeting be ended. His motion was seconded by Joel Conarroe and the proceedings were concluded at 2:00.

Respectfully submitted,
 -Alida Becker

NBCC Annual Meeting
 Loeb Student Center, New York University
 January 29, 1987

President and chairman Nina King called the meeting to order at 10:35, announcing that the members, who'd effortlessly transformed themselves into an enormous, noisy coffee klatch, would be provided with name tags next year so all this cordial networking could be made even easier. She then introduced the board members in the audience, read a schedule of the day's events, and passed out ballots for the board election. These were carried off by election inspectors Robert Wilson and Ann Hulbert, who retired to count them with NBCC lawyer Carol Rinzier while the general meeting proceeded.

In her opening remarks, Ms. King noted the great progress that's been made in the past few years in trying to serve the membership, citing as examples the reviewer's citation, the pay survey, the revision of the voting procedures for the awards, the membership directory, and the on-going debate over a code of ethics. Her greatest concern, however, was that not enough regional activity was taking place, and that because of this the members were missing many opportunities to participate more fully in the organization. Noting that local NBCC groups in Boston and Washington were meeting on a regular basis and presenting regional programs, she suggested that there be some discussion later on in the meeting on how to encourage similar groups in other areas of the country.

Moving to an issue in which she's taken a particular interest, Ms. King announced that she and fellow board members Carlin Romano and Eliot Fremont-Smith had agreed to act as an informal committee to survey the membership on what they see as the ethical issues of book reviewing. Although she granted that it might be extremely difficult to formulate a set of guidelines in such a volatile area, Ms. King observed that the survey would, at the very least, provide a basis for informative discussions. Other continuing projects mentioned by Ms. King were Carlin Romano's updating of the reviewers' pay scale and the publication of the yearly membership directory. In conjunction with this latter, she wondered whether the members might also find it useful to have a directory of book editors that would list their needs, readership, rates of payment, and so on.

SECRETARY'S REPORT: Alida Becker being, as usual, preoccupied with keeping paper, pens, and thoughts in reasonable order, there was no report. On being reminded by Ms. King of her parliamentary obligations, Ms. Becker requested that the membership formally accept the minutes of the last general membership meeting. This was so moved by Curt Schleier, seconded by Ms. King, and passed by a voice vote of those assembled.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT: Genevieve Stuttaford announced a paid-up membership of 510. This includes 60 new members and reflects the elimination of 117 old names from the rolls. These delinquents, Stuttaford pointed out kindly but firmly, have been dropped after numerous reminders for nonpayment of their dues.

PUBLICATIONS VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT: Bill Robertson encouraged the membership to use the journal as a forum for discussing ethics and other issues. Now published at least quarterly, the journal would, he suggested, provide a fine way of allowing all the members to participate in and comment on the group's activities. So far, alas, not very many have shown much inclination to do so.

TREASURER'S REPORT: "A funny thing happened on the Bruckner Expressway," declared Eliot Fremont-Smith as he suddenly appeared at the back of the meeting room. The snarl of traffic did not, however, prevent Mr. Fremont-Smith from delivering his customary detailed accounting of the group's finances, which is attached to this report.

PROGRAMS VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT: With the absent Digby Diehl adopting a Garboesque silence, Morris Dickstein, Vice President for Programs/East, gamely shouldered the discussion of both halves of the country's activities. After reminding the audience that the board would gladly help coordinate any local efforts, he urged those present to direct more of their energy toward the scheduling of regular regional meetings (at least one in the spring and one in the fall), placing particular emphasis on timing some of them to feed into the general balloting for awards in the fall and the board's subsequent deliberations. Mr. Dickstein announced that Sallie Bingham had agreed to assemble reviewers in the Louisville area, as had John Blades in Chicago. There were reported to be signs of organizational life in San Francisco and Denver as well, although no definite information. This situation will, it was hoped, become clearer after the election of a new programs vice president for the western region. Mr. Dickstein noted that it would also be useful for regional planners to think about co-sponsoring events with other groups, citing as an example his own plans to coordinate some New York activities with the graduate center at City University.

At this point, after a question from the audience about NBCC meetings at the American Booksellers Association convention in Washington next May, a torrent of conversation was set forth. Nona Balakian asked about the possibility of having extended reports printed in the journal to let everyone know what's gone on at various regional meetings. Kay Prokop inquired about any kindred souls from southern California. Jack Sullivan wondered about reprising NBCC participation in a panel at the Modern Language Association meetings in San Francisco in December. Shirley Horner inquired about the difficulty of providing a geographic break-down of the membership - which Genevieve Stuttaford thought one of the various board members' computers (and certainly that of our mailing service) ought to be able to handle. Morris Dickstein also wondered how individuals could be encouraged to vol-

unteer to organize regional groups and turned for advice to the most successful of these volunteers, Michele Souda of Boston.

Michele Souda, although modestly disavowing Nina King's description of her as "ever energetic," proceeded to demonstrate the truth of this by outlining her most recent activities, including a symposium last fall on drama criticism that was co-sponsored by the NBCC and the Harvard Writing Program. In discussing the constant problem of rounding up adequate funds to launch this kind of gathering, she suggested bookstore participation as one good option, reporting that the reception for the drama symposium had been provided in just such a fashion. She also speculated on what might constitute a fair entrance fee, adding that she'd been encouraged to boost her usual nominal charge of \$1 per person to \$5, a practice she may institute at the next symposium this spring (which will focus on reviewing science books for the public). In addition, Ms. Souda observed that a symposium is also an excellent gathering at which to recruit new members for the NBCC. She has made it a practice to send invitations not only to NBCC members but to others she knows to be regular reviewers, many of whom may be under the impression that the NBCC is a rather exclusive crowd (much amusement here from the audience, and an emphatic "of course" from Nina King) that one must be formally asked to join. On this note of mildly populist enthusiasm, attention turned to a subject where discussions of democracy vs. imperialism customarily erupt.

AWARDS VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT: John Blades expressed his mystification and disappointment over the fact that out of roughly 500 members only 133 chose to cast ballots for award-worthy books this year. He attributed the fact that only four finalists were nominated by the general membership to this surprisingly light turn-out.

In response to Mr. Blades' report, a discussion that incorporated both familiar and unfamiliar elements ensued. Shirley Horner suggested that the board appoint a committee to look into alternative ways of addressing the "informed board/uninformed masses" debate would be to have a single vote that would weight the votes of the board more heavily - to which Bill Robertson added a proposal that the board make all the nominations for finalists and the general members choose the winners. This prompted Luther Sperberg to draw a comparison to the Academy Awards, noting that the NBCC could use the expertise of people who see and read more books but that voters might be asked to limit themselves to categories in which they had actually read a fair amount.

Larry Swindell countered this trend of discussion by observing that Bill Robertson's proposal, although it sounded good, was in his opinion actually fairly cock-eyed. Mr. Swindell noted that although the board was capable of being quirky, it was also a forum in which it was extremely difficult to pull off the trick of pretending to have read a particular book. Recalling the spirited debates that go on at their meetings, Mr. Swindell testified to the integrity of his fellow board members and wondered how, without being confronted with the prospect of defending an opinion face-to-face, one could expect those who were filling out fairly anonymous ballots to feel a similar obligation to actually read the books they were voting on.

Inspired by Mr. Swindell's phrasing, John Blades proposed what he described as another possibly cock-eyed idea: that at least two of the finalists must be nominated

by the membership. This was followed by a flurry of somewhat unrelated comments, including a query about having the awards given later in the year (Jay Tolson); a remark on the extreme unlikelihood of inducing publishers to participate in any arrangement that would make possible award candidates' books available for inspection by the general membership (Nina King); anecdotal evidence of the wisdom of the present system as illustrated by the Louise Erdrich award (Larry Swindell); a proposal that the criticism category be split into two categories devoted to the popular and scholarly works (Anna Balakian); a question about how well the voting members understand the present system (Richard Eder); and further testimony to the responsibility felt by the board members during their deliberations (Eliot Fremont-Smith and Joel Conarro). Bill Robertson also mused on the possibility of discussing why people run for the board in the first place, offering the opinion that they do so primarily because they wish to have more influence over the awards. A conciliatory tone was introduced when Tom Disch expressed his objection to the nondemocratic aura of the awards, even while seeding the point of Larry Swindell's argument. Mr. Disch added that he would be comforted by having the opportunity to share his feelings about his favorite books and suggested that enthusiastic readers be encouraged to commend their views to the board and their fellow members. In response, Nina King mentioned Wendy Lesser's letter about some good books she'd run across, printed in the fall issue of the journal, which had been intended to induce other members to follow suit. Myrna Lippman then suggested that volunteers be solicited from the membership at large to form committees that would draw up recommended reading lists in coordination with the board - a plan that, as John Blades noted, would mesh well with the committee structure for keeping track of award-worthy books that already exists on the board. Returning to an earlier suggestion, Jodi Daynard endorsed the idea of having either a column in the journal devoted to members' recommendations (with brief blurbs provided by the members) or a separate newsletter composed of collated excerpts from letters sent in by the membership.

A bit of testimony from Alan Wolfe and Arnold Isaacs on why they hadn't voted this year (lack of enthusiasm for this year's books; lack of time to read enough of them) was launched by Curt Schleiter's observation that perhaps the low numbers in the voting were due to some factor we weren't aware of. Judith Wood also expressed frustration with the December 1st deadline for voting, to which Nina King responded with an observation about the value of the NBCC being first off the award-giving blocks in the new year and a reminder that December is traditionally a month when very little is published and that good books published in the late fall are usually available, either in galleys or in hardcover, well before the deadline.

Ms. King also cautioned the audience that radical changes in voting procedures ought to be seriously considered only after we have made every effort to strengthen the present system with more input from the membership. Diane Cole agreed with this by pointing out that the members already have the ability to fill 3 of the 5 finalist slots in every category, and that they have so far, for a variety of reasons, failed to avail themselves of that opportunity. Eliot Fremont-Smith also noted that since we are all writers as well as readers and since the journal is available for us to use as we like, we ought to employ our skills there in order to alert others to books we feel strongly about. In addition, Frances Koestler remarked that we should recall,

in thinking about the awards procedure, that we still have a democratic process through which the membership can vote for the board members who perform the actual award selection.

Which, through only a slight juggling of the actual sequence of the meeting's activities, becomes the perfect place in which to insert in these minutes the results of the latest board elections, as determined by the 116 ballots cast by mail and the 57 ballots cast at the general meeting (which constitute a quorum according to the 25% minimum of the membership rule adopted at last March's board meeting):

Nicholas Basbanes 62
Bruce Bawer 62
Alan Cheuse 61
Leon Edel 108
Elliot Fremont-Smith 124
Malcolm Jones 84
Nina King 152
David Lehman 85
M. Mark 90
Valerie Miner 57
Carlin Romano 118
Larry Swindell 110
Dave Wood 91

The election inspectors thus declared that the eight candidates elected to three-year terms were: Leon Edel, Elliot Fremont-Smith, Nina King, David Lehman, M. Mark, Carlin Romano, Larry Swindell, and Dave Wood. Malcolm Jones will serve the one-year term created by the resignation of Elizabeth Hardwick. This yields the following new NBCC board:

Terms Expiring in 1988:

John Blades (Chicago Tribune)
Constance Casey (San Jose Mercury)
Joel Conarro (freelance critic)
Timothy Foote (Smithsonian)
Ann Hulbert (New Republic)
Malcolm Jones (St. Petersburg Times)
Brigitte Weeks (Washington Post)
Robert Wilson (USA Today)

Terms Expiring in 1989

Alida Becker (freelance critic)
Morris Dickstein (Partisan Review)
Mark Feeney (Boston Globe)
Doris Grumbach (National Public Radio)
Wendy Lesser (Threepenny Review)
Greil Marcus (freelance critic)
William Robertson (Miami Herald)
Genevieve Stuttaford (Publishers Weekly)

Terms Expiring in 1990

Leon Edel (freelance critic)
Elliot Fremont-Smith (freelance critic)
Nina King (Newsday)
David Lehman (freelance critic)
M. Mark (Village Voice)
Carlin Romano (Philadelphia Inquirer)
Larry Swindell (Ft. Worth Star-Telegram)
Dave Wood (Minneapolis Star-Tribune)

On being reminded that they were in danger of appearing quite late for the very spiffy lunch that awaited them, the general members adjourned their meeting at 12:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
-Alida Becker

NBCC Board of Directors Meeting
Loeb Student Center, New York University
January 29, 1987

PRESENT: President and chairman, Nina King; vice presidents Elliot Fremont-Smith, William Robertson, Genevieve Stuttaford, Morris Dickstein, John Blades, and Alida Becker; board members Dave Wood, Malcolm Jones, David Lehman, Robert Wilson, Ann Hulbert, Joel Conarro, Larry Swindell, and Carlin Romano.

Nina King called the meeting to order at 12:30 with a request that a blanket resolution be passed to ratify the actions of the previous board. This was so moved by Bill Robertson, seconded by Elliot Fremont-Smith, and unanimously approved by the members present. Nina King proceeded to the matter of replacing Digby Diehl as vice president for programs for the western half of the country. Bob Wilson nominated Wendy Lesser (who had previously indicated her willingness to accept the position), Joel Conarro seconded the motion, and Ms. Lesser's appointment was unanimously approved. Much heartened by this burst of efficiency and accord, Ms. King moved immediately to the discussion of another position for which a willing but absent candidate had been located. This was the editorship of the NBCC journal, left vacant now that Bill Robertson has regretfully decided he can no longer squeeze it into his schedule. At this, Bob Wilson proposed a proclamation of thanks to Mr. Robertson ("Just buy me a drink," pleaded the recipient). It was resolved that it would be a pleasure to do both.

After Bill Robertson nominated Mark Feeney to replace him, Larry Swindell seconded the nomination and Mr. Feeney was unanimously welcomed to the position. Elliot Fremont-Smith then urged that we consider either having more than four journals a year or that we publish a separate awards newsletter. Morris Dickstein agreed, suggesting that, in order to keep the work load manageable, the latter might be more like a flyer or a gossip column, possibly even typewritten. He also observed that it would be good to get started on the reminder list earlier this year, perhaps with a preliminary list as early as the next issue of the journal.

Nina King then very regretfully announced that Morris Dickstein had decided to step down from his position as Vice President for Programs/East. In an effort to persuade him to change his mind, Elliot Fremont-Smith slyly wondered if Mr. Dickstein (who had indicated he'd keep on coordinating the activities of the New York group) might consider some imaginative geographical rearrangements. Since this seemed physically impossible as well as unfair, the discussion proceeded (after eloquent and prolonged thanks to Mr. Dickstein) to the matter of a successor. Bill Robertson then nominated Ann Hulbert, who was seconded by John Blades. Ms. Hulbert graciously accepted and her nomination was approved unanimously.

As the final matter of business, Nina King proposed that the board have an organizational meeting some time during the spring, prior to the briefer meeting that usually takes place at the American Booksellers Association convention in late May. After a spirited conversation about eccentric plane schedules (won by David Lehman, who reported that a query to his local airport about the time of the day's departure elicited the response, "When can you get here?"), it was decided that the next meeting would take place at 2:00 p.m. on Monday, March 16, 1987, at the Algonquin Hotel in New York. The meeting adjourned at 1:00.

Respectfully submitted,
-Alida Becker