

Good evening. We are John and Janet Haney from PoetrySlabs, a local project group dedicated to putting poetry on pavements and walls in West Norwood. We're the people behind the two lines from Tennyson – in place since last April – now overlooking the Bzz Garage garden on Ernest Avenue. When David Dent, the director of this festival, offered us the opportunity to host a poetry-related movie – we figured it had to be *Paterson*, a remarkable film that takes the audience inside the mind of a poet, into poetry as a way of life. I was also drawn to the film because almost all the poetry it references – that of the first and second generations of the New York School – was something with which I became pretty familiar during the thirty years I spent in publishing in Manhattan.

These wild and crazy guys and gals were to poetry what Hunter S. Thompson was to sober journalism. They overlapped with the Beats in chronological terms but didn't particularly fraternise with them. It was a matter of different visions. Their style tended to be sardonic, sarcastic, playful, absurd, and eccentrically erudite. They were somewhat influenced by literary surrealism (Dada is somewhere in the mix as well) and by painters like Pollock and De Kooning. They've also had a lot of staying power. Not too many American poets nowadays are seeking recognition as Ginsberg 2.0 or Gregory Corso Mark VI – but a lot of them are noticeably inspired by the New York School (just like Paterson, the bus driver in the movie).

So who were these people? I'll give you the big names – the ones you'll see whenever the camera pans across Paterson's bookshelves.

Frank O'Hara, gay Navy veteran of combat in the Pacific, curator at the Museum of Modern Art, and maestro of the 'lunch poem' (ideally written in thirty minutes while killing a plate of meatloaf and a pint of watery orange juice in a surly 42nd Street diner). James Schuyler, shamelessly confessional layabout who spent much of his life raiding his friends' refrigerators and commandeering their sofas but nevertheless deservedly won a number of big-name literary prizes. Kenneth Koch, a gentle academic and envelope-pushing absurdist who wore his learning and his lunacy lightly. (Jim Jarmusch attended his courses at Columbia.) John Ashbery, yet another academic, whose oblique yet strangely seductive poetry one could easily spend a lifetime attempting to understand. Ted Berrigan, a majestic misfit who mastered the art of the earthshaking bender and wrote a series of oddball sonnets that wouldn't sound out of place in the mouth of Fritz the Cat. And then there's Ron Padgett, whose entire output out-Kochs Koch and reads like an endless practical joke.

And now for three poems, two by 19th-century poets referenced, for good reason, in the film – the highly reclusive Emily Dickinson wrote hundred of super-short poems whose crystalline intensity has never been matched; Paul Laurence Dunbar was the most popular and prolific black American poet and writer of his generation – and one by Frank O'Hara, the most famous (and unquestionably the wittiest) of the New York School poets ...

You'll find extracts from the work of other New York School poets attached to the film notes for this screening.

And now, without further ado – Paterson.

EMILY DICKINSON

1830-1886

'UNTITLED'

A narrow Fellow in the Grass
Occasionally rides —
You may have met him — did you not
His notice sudden is —

The Grass divides as with a Comb —
A spotted shaft is seen —
And then it closes at your feet
And opens further on —

He likes a Boggy Acre
A floor too cool for Corn —
Yet when a Boy, and Barefoot —
I more than once at Noon
Have passed, I thought, a Whip lash
Unbraiding in the Sun
When stooping to secure it
It wrinkled and was gone —

Several of Nature's People
I know, and they know me —
I feel for them a transport
Of cordiality —

But never met this Fellow
Attended, or alone
Without a tighter breathing
And Zero at the Bone

PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

1872-1906

'THE POET AND THE BABY'

How's a man to write a sonnet, can you tell, —
How's he going to weave the dim, poetic spell —
When a-toddl'ing on the floor
Is the muse he must adore,
And this muse he loves, not wisely, but too well?

Now, to write a sonnet, everyone allows,
One must always be as quiet as a mouse;
But to write one seems to me
Quite superfluous to be,
When you've got a little sonnet in the house.

Just a dainty little poem, true and fine,
That is full of love and life in every line,
Earnest, delicate, and sweet,
Altogether so complete
That I wonder what's the use of writing mine.

FRANK O'HARA

1926-1966

'AUTOBIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA'

When I was a child
I played by myself in a
corner of the schoolyard
all alone.

I hated dolls and I
hated games, animals were
not friendly and birds
flew away.

If anyone was looking
for me I hid behind a
tree and cried out 'I am
an orphan.'

And here I am, the
center of all beauty!
writing these poems!
Imagine!

EMILY DICKINSON

1830-1886

'UNTITLED'

A narrow Fellow in the Grass
Occasionally rides —
You may have met him — did you not
His notice sudden is —

The Grass divides as with a Comb —
A spotted shaft is seen —
And then it closes at your feet
And opens further on —

He likes a Boggy Acre
A floor too cool for Corn —
Yet when a Boy, and Barefoot —
I more than once at Noon
Have passed, I thought, a Whip lash
Unbraiding in the Sun
When stooping to secure it
It wrinkled and was gone —

Several of Nature's People
I know, and they know me —
I feel for them a transport
Of cordiality —

But never met this Fellow
Attended, or alone
Without a tighter breathing
And Zero at the Bone

PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

1872-1906

'THE POET AND THE BABY'

How's a man to write a sonnet, can you tell, —
How's he going to weave the dim, poetic spell —
When a-toddl'ing on the floor
Is the muse he must adore,
And this muse he loves, not wisely, but too well?

Now, to write a sonnet, everyone allows,
One must always be as quiet as a mouse;
But to write one seems to me
Quite superfluous to be,
When you've got a little sonnet in the house.

Just a dainty little poem, true and fine,
That is full of love and life in every line,
Earnest, delicate, and sweet,
Altogether so complete
That I wonder what's the use of writing mine.

FRANK O'HARA

1926-1966

'AUTOBIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA'

When I was a child
I played by myself in a
corner of the schoolyard
all alone.

I hated dolls and I
hated games, animals were
not friendly and birds
flew away.

If anyone was looking
for me I hid behind a
tree and cried out 'I am
an orphan.'

And here I am, the
center of all beauty!
writing these poems!
Imagine!

KENNETH KOCH

1925-2002

FROM 'TAKING A WALK WITH YOU'

I misunderstand the words 'After Departure,'
I misunderstand nothingness;
I misunderstand the attitude of people in pharmacies, on the decks of
ships, in my bedroom, amid the pine needles, on mountains of cotton,
everywhere —
When they say paralytic I hear parasite, and when they say coffee
I think music ...
What is wrong with me from head to toe
That I misinterpret everything I hear? I misunderstand:
French: often;
Italian: sometimes, almost always — for example, if someone says,
'Fortunate ones!' I am likely to think he is referring to the fountain
with blue and red water (I am likely to make this mistake also in English).
I misunderstand Greek entirely;
I find ancient Greece very hard to understand; I probably misunderstand it;
I misunderstand German about 98% of the time, like the
cathedral in the middle of a town;
I misunderstand 'Beautiful Adventures'; I also think I probably
misunderstand *La Nausée* by Jean-Paul Sartre....

JAMES SCHUYLER

1923-1991

FROM 'HYMN TO LIFE'

So much messing about, why not leave the world
alone. Then
There would be no books, which is not to be borne. Willa Cather
alone is worth
The price of admission to the horrors of civilization. Let's
make a list.
The greatest paintings. Preferred orchestral conductors. Nostalgia
singers.
The best, the very best, roses. After learning all their names — Rose
de Rescht, Cornelia, Pax — it is important to forget them. All these
Lists are so much dirty laundry. Sort it out fast and send to laundry
Or hurl into washing machine, add soap and let 'er spin.
The truth is
That all these household tasks and daily work — up the street
two men
Install an air conditioner — are beautiful. Flowers and
machines that people
Love: the boy who opts for trade school while white-collar kids
Call him a greaser. I wish I could take an engine apart
and reassemble it.
I sincerely wish I wanted to. I don't....

JOHN ASHBERY

b. 1927

FROM 'THE INSTRUCTION MANUAL'

As I sit looking out of a window of the building
I wish I did not have to write the instruction manual on the uses of a new metal.
I look down into the street and see people, each walking with an inner peace,
And envy them — they are so far away from me!
Not one of them has to worry about getting out this manual on schedule.
And, as my way is, I begin to dream, resting my elbows on the desk
and leaning out of the window a little,
Of dim Guadalajara! City of rose-colored flowers!
City I most wanted to see, and most did not see, in Mexico!
But I fancy I see, under the press of having to write the instruction manual,
Your public square, city, with its elaborate little bandstand!
The band is playing *Scheherazade* by Rimsky-Korsakov.

...

How limited, but how complete withal, has been our experience of Guadalajara!
We have seen young love, married love, and the love of an aged mother for her son.
We have heard the music, tasted the drinks, and looked at colored houses.
What more is there to do, except stay? And that we cannot do.
And as a last breeze freshens the top of the weathered old tower, I turn my gaze
Back to the instruction manual which has made me dream of
Guadalajara.

TED BERRIGAN

1934-1983

'WHITMAN IN BLACK'

For my sins I live in the city of New York
Whitman's city lived in Melville's senses, urban inferno
Where love can stay for only a minute
Then has to go, to get some work done
Here the detective and the small-time criminal are one
& tho the cases get solved the machine continues to run
Big Town will wear you down
But it's only here you can turn around 360 degrees
And everything is clear from here at the center
To every point along the circle of the horizon
Here you can see for miles & miles & miles
Be born again daily, die nightly for a change of style
Hear clearly here; see with affection; bleakly cultivate compassion
Whitman's walk unchanged after its fashion.

BERNADETTE MAYER

b. 1945

'BOOZE TURNS MEN INTO WOMEN'

A sip of Coors makes children be
Nuclear power plant contractors
Wild Turkey turns men into deer
Molson's Canadian Beer makes
The people fear laundromats
Stolichnaya turns women into Rolling Rocks
Men turn women into oatmeal stout
Jack Daniel's turns men into Queen Anne's lace
Triple Sec turns men into margaritas
The Budweiser juven often undoes mein leben
Grand Marnier turns women into ancient mariners
Crème de Cassis creates
Child toxic waste entrepreneurs
Watney's weakens warriors
A taste of jeniver turned Beatrice into a T-square
Martell's makes men Mooseheads
Heineken dimwit God couscous miracle elf
Gin turns men into safety pins
Chivas Regal makes men sewing needles
Blackeyed Susans turn men into Jack Daniels
Women wake from highballs as walnuts
Cocktails alienate communalists and
A glass of Schaefer'll
Make your kid a general

ALICE NOTLEY

b. 1945

FROM 'THE PROPHET'

It's not a good idea to be a taxi driver if you don't drive
at all well. However
You can probably manage to do so for some months, before you
finally quit,
Without killing yourself or anyone else. It is not remarkable
that you are
Still alive since so far you have always been still alive.
It is not
psychologically significant that you nearly perished, & scared your
customers shitless dozens of times
While driving cab. You were not self-destructive, you were sane
& dumb.
You were perhaps being a burgeoning poet. Four months driving
cab is part of your
Story, whenever you remember it, whenever you seem to need a story,
And not just be in the explosive impressive present. It is always
time to
Defrost the refrigerator. Or wash the dishes, if you so choose.
Perhaps a copy of *The Sophist*. Collect some Gracie Allen jokes.
If your child says, 'When Mom dies we'll see her come back here
& be a ghost,'
Don't indulge in being spooked. Be amused. If you're reading
Plato, the part
Where he seems to say women are a lesser order of beings than
men, don't
Stop reading. A character is speaking ...

RON PADGETT

b. 1942

'POEM FOR EL LISSITZKY'

Bgawk!
There goes that Polly again!

The big storybook closed
and it was bedtime for real ...
all little children go to bed now,
and sleep you well inside your pajamas,
and let your dreams rise softly
as the bubbles on the decal
over the headboard

by which you sleep your wooden sleep,
little wooden children
with ragged edges
that must be sanded.
Time is the sandpaper—
isn't that original?

'Time is the sandpaper,'
I said, as the housewife
opened her door to me.
I was selling vacuum cleaners door-to-door.
Once they let me in
I sweet-talked them into the bedroom,
where once again I said,
'Time is the sandpaper.'
This time they swooned.
Never did sell many vacuum cleaners, though.

ANNE WALDMAN

b. 1945

'ART BEGINS WITH A LIE'

Art begins with a lie
The separation is you plus me plus what we make
Look into the lightbulb, blink, sun's in your eye

I want a rare sky
vantage point free from misconception
Art begins with a lie

Nothing to lose, spontaneous rise
of reflections, paint the picture
of a lightbulb, or eye the sun

How to fuel the world, then die
Distance yourself from artfulness
How? Art begins with a lie

The audience wants to cry
when the actors are real & passionate
Look into the footlight, then feed back to eye

You fluctuate in an artful body
You try to imitate the world's glory
Art begins with a lie
That's the story, sharp speck in the eye

FRANK LIMA

1939-2013

FROM 'HECKYLL & JECKYLL'

Crows have relatives everywhere.
Human warfare moves across the sky

Making more room for them to fly.
We're just a meal in the next world.

We're the hole in the sky.

Crows are legends and instructors of grace.
They are the dots in the fog,

And the flight of the uterus.

Crows are the printed warnings
Of a wasted life.

They will never leave or abandon us.

When we take our last breath,
Navigating through our mistakes and lies,

The crows will take our last word.

We are the last citizens of a pale race of crows,
Rearranging the furniture in the mind of God.

Crows turn the planet on its axis when we die,
And do nothing to the body we'll remember.

Our souls are their meal of the day.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

1883-1963

FROM 'PATERSON', BOOK V, PART I

In old age
the mind
casts off
rebelliously
an eagle
from its crag

— the angle of a forehead
or far less
makes him remember when he thought
he had forgot
— remember
confidently
only a moment, only for a fleeting moment —
with a smile of recognition . . .

It is early . . .
the song of the fox sparrow
reawakening the world
of Paterson
— its rocks and streams
frail tho it is
from their long winter sleep

In March —
the rocks
the bare rocks
speak!

— it is a cloudy morning.
He looks out the window
sees the birds still there —

Not prophecy! NOT prophecy!
but the thing itself...