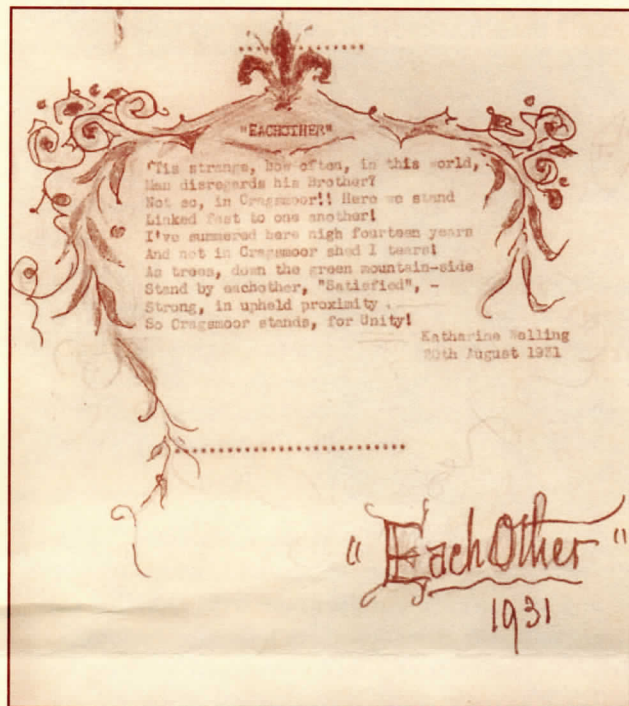


Cragsmoor Historical Journal

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Cragsmoor Poetry Society Revival Party

Painting, sculpture, music, theater, pottery, poetry. All have been and continue to be pursuits of the creative community in Cragsmoor. Of these artistic forms of expression, poetry may be the most private. Without galleries and stages designated for presentations, poetry often remains hidden on dusty shelves or lost in cyberspace.

From 1929 to 1942, however, poets did have a public venue for their work through the annual meeting of the Cragsmoor Poetry Society in late August or September. The society was led by Miss Katherine Welling, who served as its president through most of its years. It was she who illuminated the poems in pastels and ink and kept them in a large book, which is in the collection of the Cragsmoor Free Library.

The Poetry Society met only once a summer, at various homes and at the Inn. To participate in the gatherings one had to bring an original poem to read in traditional form; free verse was not permitted. Since it was a social as well as a poetry event, the quality of the verse varied considerably. Some poems were written in elaborate French forms; some were imitations of popular ballads or literary classics; others were simple rhymes written merely to gain admission. During the early years, Miss Welling determined that the poems had to be concerned with an assigned subject. In 1929 it was "Goldenrod;" 1931, "Each Other;" 1934, "Cragsmoor;" 1935, "Summertime;" 1936, "Clouds."

In 1989, forty-seven years after the last meeting of the original Poetry Society, Norman Oakes, noted poet and Professor Emeritus at the Pratt Institute, and Maureen Radl held a rather informal meeting of the Society in the Library. They read selections from Miss Welling's collection of the poems from earlier meetings and several of their own. No original poems were required from the audience this time, and everyone appreciated this opportunity to peek into the mindscape of former poets through this window into the past.

Since then, the poets of Cragsmoor have continued to express their thoughts and feelings about life and death, art and music, politics and pastimes — all aspects of the human condition — whether they have had an opportunity to read them in public or not. We are pleased to present articles by or about three Cragsmoor poets in this issue. In Norman Oakes's case, friends and family were often an inspiration, as can be seen in "Harriet Gone," a tribute to his close friend, Harriet Woodruff, on the day of her death. For Milton Resnick, no day was complete without painting *and* writing poetry. The life of a poet is not as easy as one might suspect, however, as Tom Gale reveals in his poetic commentary on the topic.

To provide poets the opportunity to be heard once again on the mountain, a Cragsmoor Poetry Society Revival Party will be held on Sunday afternoon, August 29, at 3 PM. Tom Gale has generously offered to host the event at his home, Hillcrest, and in case of rain, the Stone Church, next door, will be available. Poets are invited to bring copies of an original poem or two to post and to share with others as they read. A booklet of the poems will be compiled and kept for the record at the Historical Society. Non-poets also may want to bring one of their favorites written by another, but everyone is invited, with or without a poem. Refreshments will be served and donations will be accepted for the Cragsmoor Historical Society Building Renovation Fund. Info at 845-647-6487, 6384. **MR**

HARRIET GONE

You left about four one rainy Wednesday
in late August, not waiting for dinner.
Squash rampaged in the garden;
the apple trees hung heavy in the wet.
We knew your journey would be far,
farther than we would want to go,
but you had been preparing long
and could not wait. You had no choice, in fact.
We wanted you to go when at last you could.
But still we feel all kinds of subtraction
and fear the cool absence standing
where your firm, fine laughter stood.

My Father the Poet *by Ken Oakes*

As we get older, we often wonder how completely we know even those who are closest to us. Think of a fellow human being as one of those loosely crocheted afghans we have all seen. From a distance, there is enough woven structure that we think we are seeing a completely filled-in picture. But as we get closer, we realize that there are lots of empty spaces between the solid sections of crocheted yarn. I think that this is in part what my father was talking about in his poem "All About Papa."

*Nobody knows where papa's been.
Nobody knows what papa's seen.
And papa himself will only say
he's going to hell in his own way.*

Norman E. Oakes was a resident of Cragsmoor, NY, from the early 1960's until his death in 1990. He taught English and History at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, NY, beginning in 1947, until his retirement in the mid-1980's. It was a fellow Pratt professor by the name of George New who first introduced the Oakes family to Cragsmoor. Over the years, several other Pratt professors followed them to the mountain, including Harrison Bounds and Sherwood Weber. At one point, in a case of Pratt imitating Art, three Pratt professors occupied homes that had originally been part of the Kinaloha Co-op, a creative workshop for the arts and crafts that thrived in Cragsmoor (specifically the Lenape Lane area) during the early part of the 20th century.

Norman grew up on a farm in rural western Pennsylvania during the Depression. In some ways, his extensive gardening in Cragsmoor later in life was a way for him to return to his farming roots (pun intended in remembrance of the many Oakes family dinners which devolved into competitive pun-fests). He met his future wife, Dorothy, during his undergraduate years at Penn State. They were married and settled in New York City following Norman's service with the US Navy in the Pacific during World War II. He loved New York and had a special fondness for Brooklyn; late in his distinguished teaching career at Pratt, he taught a course about Brooklyn and its history. He also, of course, loved Cragsmoor and was often involved with events at the Cragsmoor Free Library, including poetry readings and the annual Library Day and Birdcage Party. Dorothy served as librarian there from 1979 to 1985 and also undertook the task of indexing the Cragsmoor Journal (a small paper which recorded community events on the mountain between 1903 and 1916).

For me, some of my father's poems serve to illuminate the unshared experiences of his life while others reinforce the cherished memories of our family events. In the poem "The Falling Stars," Norman relates a story from his youth about experiencing his first meteor shower waiting in a car while his farmer father was, literally, horse trading. *"I child alone in terror cowered. The stars were falling and no father there."* In another poem, an observation about the farm animals he grew up with: *"In the pig pen always such contentment until feeding time, then grunt and push and tumble to get at the swill in the trough."* From the poem "An Incident of War, Iwo Jima, February 17, 1945," when land comes into view from the deck of his ship, he notes, *"That's where the enemy is and the great guns on the great ships send metal roaring toward his blood."* About the fear experienced during those days he muses, *"you want to escape, but where can you go? You're no Jesus and the water's deep."*

The centerpiece of Norman's life was his teaching at Pratt. I vividly remember him retiring to his study after dinner in our Manhattan apartment, the desktop radio tuned to classical station WQXR while he used a red pencil to evaluate the blue examination booklets of his students. In Norman's own words, *"Neatly he anxuates the young in tidy space and tidy time to inksay back and grandify his teachery"* and *"Behinding at the piles of uncorrect, the professor from his tidy ebbs, so far from young he tries to forget."*

Outside the academic world, Norman found inspiration for his poetry from his family. Describing his late night walks in lower Manhattan with his young, insomniac son Chris: *"The roustabouts in the wholesale market came to expect us in the middle of the night when their barrels of fire flared the streets of apples, pears and plums."* Reflecting on his marriage, *"We cursed love, talked it, moaned it, each to each, until the years taught a better craft-- to say more and more in less and less."* I am sure that my brother and I must have been in our annoying teenage

years when he penned these lines from "For My Sons": "I labor to be father, and you glum to son. But, O, the waltz of our capability, if we could but learn to dance." And from the poem Norman wrote in Chris' honor following his painfully premature death at the age of 34 in the spring of 1988, "You crossed from dread to surrender and left for us the tulips dimmed in empty April."

Toward the end of his life, as the cancer which he knew would end his life spread from his prostate into his bones, Norman wrote "Late Songs":

*Sing then,
we could then.
Dawns came easy.
All that laughter.
No more.
Wars intruded.
Children clamored.
More and more dying.
Cancers and hearts.
Songs gone,
Laughter gone,
we listen now
behind doors.
Hear outside
other laughter
in other dawns,
new songs,
not ours,
but just as young.*



Norman Oakes and his grand-daughter, Eleanor

Milton Resnick – Artist, Poet *by Tim Driscoll*

Milton Resnick was a part-time Cragsmoor resident for over 30 years, where he and his wife, companion and fellow artist, Pat Passlof, lived in the Peanut Shell on Lenape Lane.

Born in the Ukraine in 1917 of Russian Jewish parents, he and his family emigrated to Brooklyn in 1922. Born Rachmiel (nicknamed Milya) Resnick, he returned home after his first day of school and announced that his teacher had given him a new name... Milton. His teacher's choice was prophetic, for Milton — in addition to being an accomplished painter — was to become a prolific poet.

Noted by critics and art historians as a pioneer abstract expressionist known for lush, lyrical, large-format paintings that were fierce, poetic, and filled with energy, Milton would undoubtedly have objected to these terms because his work defied comfortable or easily definable characterization.

A member of The American Academy of Arts and Letters, Milton's work appears in most major museum collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, MOMA and many private collections.

Milton often spoke of his deep love for Pat and great esteem for her work. He and Pat breathed art, and he sometimes spoke with

me about his life and work, politics during the 30s, his WWII war experiences and encounters with other painters.

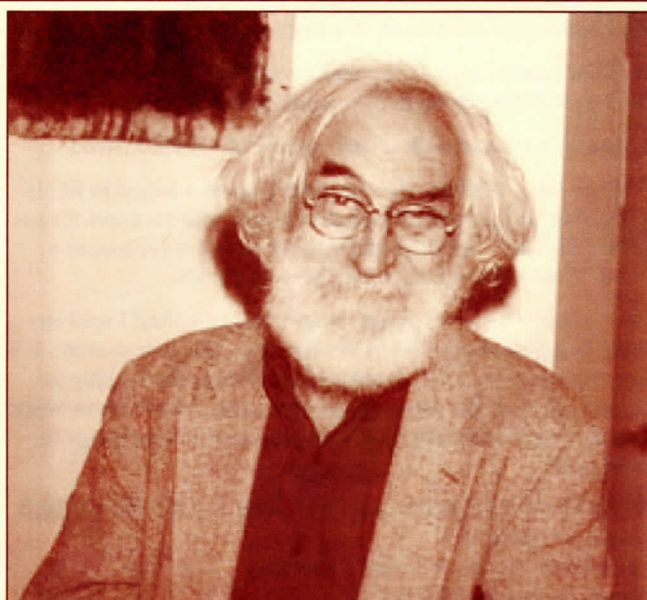
Milton read widely: Greek and Russian classics, and a broad range of philosophers and poets. We always spoke about what he was currently reading — among the last being Henry Adams's *The Degradation of American Dogma* and Aeschylus's *Oresteia*.

Milton was one of the very few people who could make the classics come alive for me. When he spoke about the rage of Oedipus or Homer on the Trojan front, it was as if the story had just been reported in *The New York Times* — it became real and immediate. "Read the Greeks," he said, "it's all there."

To me, Milton's life and work were inseparable. I can't recall any topic of conversation wherein art didn't enter in some way. Most of all, I recall his patient responses to my endless unschooled questions. "Just look," he would say, "nothing is hidden." That was Milton; nothing was hidden. To one such series of questions, after many explanations, he finally said, "Just take it on faith." After years of these conversations, I began to look at art more patiently and carefully. My imagination began to kick in: Was the work provocative, engaging? Did it attract or repel me? Did it cause me to rethink, reexamine?

Like his work, Milton was always engaging — provocative in the

con-fon-p-y



Milton Resnick

most positive sense. His curiosity, perception, imagination, powers of observation and analysis were never dimmed by age.

Just as he painted every day, he also wrote daily, filling journals and publishing four volumes of poetry. The following are excerpts from *Milton Resnick 1917-2004*, a compilation of memories and comments by friends to celebrate his life, and assembled by Pat Passlof.

Ed Rudolph recalled exchanging letters with Milton for a number of years. "Mostly they were poems in envelopes." Rudolph speculated that Milton felt more than most people can bear to feel. Attempting to illustrate this hypersensitivity, he quoted one of Milton's poems:

*I promise nothing but
loss of happiness
And sometimes mind
A gloomy art without light that
favors image
The line to hold the broken thing like
a mother
God will have nothing to finger
Also left to die the bending of colors that
advertise the sun
Sometimes I detect a radiance that cuts
through the clothes and scratches*

Nathan Kernan noted that in Milton's poetry, "one sometimes got the feeling that his abrupt shift in syntax, imagery and context were ways of using words in the way that he claimed to use colors — as tools to reveal what language does, as color became for him, 'What pigment does.'"

my past

*my past is old-sweet
I claim you why not
your everything pattern
your breathing*

*I loved New York signal
her shadow green
I saw windows shut everywhere
that shut
I loved naked girls who powdered
in warm smoke
her red train of smells
and the future unity dawns
there is my poem
it is
I claim abstract*

[from *Up and Down Poems*, NY: Pandemonium, 1961]

Poet Jerome Rothenberg recollected that he was deeply moved by Milton's poetry, and published a group of his poems in the magazine he was publishing, *Poems From the Floating World*. Rothenberg wrote, "I had an idea, even then, of the ways in which certain artists had crossed or blurred the line between poetry & painting...- Arp, Picabia, Kandinsky, Ernst... & Picasso. In Milton's four small books — *Up and Down*, followed by *Journal of Voyages, 1, 2, & 3...* — I found an equivalent shift from one genre to another. It was not a question of mixing genres, ...but of carrying the intensity he had lavished on painting into a new medium — that of words. That he did it instantly & with equivalent grace & fury astonished me, as did the natural & credible assumption of the poet's... voice:"

*I release my poems upon cities
upon cities
a human soul circles
towers of smoke
lance of sky*

Rothenberg also quoted lines of Milton that illustrate the place of anxiety shared by many a poet/artist as they begin a work:

*yellow fingers scratch showers of sweat
I make a noise in my throat
black be blacker be feared
fear teaches poetry
whose double pin hooks deep into all of us*

Rothenberg concluded by noting that Milton will be remembered for the beauty and reality that his art brought into the world, and "in my mind at least he will remain a *real* poet, a *fellow* poet, as he was when I met him back in some mutually vanished past."

A SLANT LIFE TO TELL / A CRAGSMOOR POET by Tom Gale

A Cragsmoor poet lives a great life of betrayals. He (she, I) has a subtle breath of double curses. There is the Mother Nature curse and the Wallace Stevens curse. We whisper in our poems to MN that she is the one we live with. On our walks through Cragsmoor we toss our words to her: *melic* Iris, *clair-voyant* Daisy. We thank MN for giving us the subjects that moults our language with romantic curtsies. At the same time we mimic the structured sounds of WS that may or may not be the abstract whistles that parallel words we mean to utter as human objects of nature. We are left between dramatic sound and severe figures. Every poem is a choice of this *or* that. Every poet is trying for effect of this *and* that. The tumult in the mind conjures a stomach of gas. That is why we may suspect so many to be making a fresh poem to recite to the Cragsmoor air.

We poets all have techniques for settling the nausea of making a poem. Generally the technique involves a form. Choosing sonnet, tercet, percept, generally steadies the nerves. We add individually choicy bits to our makings. I find a sequence of poems keeps my choices open until I achieve exhaustion. I will now display and annotate my technique. The following three-part sequence of poems replicates a standard rhetoric of ethos, logos and pathos. The notes indicate the adjustments I make between the poem makings to make a poet's life-at-ease in Cragsmoor.

WHAT BECOMES ME IS WHAT I WRITE
The thing that beauty is denies its being
To its form, the fear-provoking thorn
That warns of joy that terror weaves the dream.
I lie in bed with swords in hands detached.
No blood, no order, no meaning but being thatched

To exist with beauty that watches me in fact
Of acting me in hilariously in the face of being
That existential freedom from humiliation.
Easily I risk the thorn to eat
The blackberry, ignoring the snake beneath the bush

That will not strike if I do not provoke it
But instead behold it worthy thing beholding me
That nothing I am to its existence until warning
No Thing It I Deny
But my idea of formal being, my pride.

Note: There I've done the thing again, turned it into me. I will have to write more poems to write me out then write me in again with humiliation. A novelist wouldn't have to do that. Fiction is excusable as a poem is inexplicable. Am I hiding the language from hiding in the language? Give me a grip of simple fact. I can't defend this. What do you think? No, don't think about this. It is only metaphoric blood. I spill it on me all the time. You notice. I make more of it all the time even as I read it. It's a game, my only game. Come play with me. I promise I will make something playful next.

DWINDLING PRESENCE TO SOUND MIND
A pond I make of it to walk and sound

Completely attentive to its walking around me
As I notice bird-song death in a smell.

A cloud I notice above the water's mind of white-whipping
And dark sliding its thigh over a puff ball pulling apart.

I came to walk and walk it best with mind's leash in hand.

Note on note: Wallace Stevens always found a sound to fit his gong. But he flat-jambed a silent sentence into his notes for supreme fiction, "...perhaps the best we do is a walk around a pond." Bested breaching mind, there do it mute.

Note alone: This is too slight. I can't read this. And I read anything to get attention. Fire in the beer tap. This is important. It's important to play. I like to strip naked. Remember? I play in nature. I play in the natural noise of a poem. I don't know when I'm playing in what art. That's for all remembering things to raise again.

IN PATHOS THE BILL: EACH CLAIM A LIFE NO OTHER
I have not declared
For Mother Nature or Wallace Stevens
As yet, as usually happens.
My ethos, my logos, how have they fared?
Must I think them repaired?
Of course, But then, It all depends
On how I make amends.
I have feathers. I have tar. I am prepared.

A poet in Cragsmoor is doomed.
Not Stevens, but Nature is assumed.
The fun of hoopla is done.
I will not tuck my tail and run.
I can live like a termite
Undermining what I write as I write.

Note: This is a tribute from me to an audience I have no claim to. It is special because of all the nothing I can claim the Stevens emplaced for me to find before I was born. When I snap my fingers you will awake and be free from the word I fear of freezing you in naked cold.



Tom Gale "at work"



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Cragsmoor Historical Journal

Summer 2010

End of Summer Social Event and CHS Fund Raiser

Cragsmoor Poetry Society Revival Party

Bring a Poem to Share or Just Come to Listen

Sunday, August 29 at 3 PM

**Hillcrest, 274 Henry Road
To right of Stone Church**

**Refreshments Will Be Served
Donations Accepted for CHS Building Restoration Fund**

**Officers of the Cragsmoor
Historical Society**

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