

JAMES SHERRY

SUMMARY

James Sherry is the author of 10 books of poetry and prose. He is editor of Roof Books and president of the Segue Foundation, Inc. in New York City. Born in Philadelphia in 1946, Mr. Sherry graduated Reed College in 1968 with a Woodrow Wilson fellowship. In 1976 he began Roof Magazine and started Segue Foundation in 1977. He worked for several years as a freelance writer and in 1980 began working in technology for IBM and various Wall Street firms. In 2011 he joined the Occupy Alternative Bank subgroup and remains active in that group. He lives in New York City with his wife, Deborah Thomas, publisher of Extra!, the magazine of Fairness And Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR). They have one son, Ben, 21 years old.

BOOKS

- Four For* (Buffalo, NY: Meow Press, 1995), poetry, 20pp.
- Our Nuclear Heritage* (Los Angeles, CA: Sun & Moon Press, 1991), prose, 262pp.
- Doscapade* (New York: Hot Bird 1991), poetry, 10 pp.
- The Word I Like White Paint Considered* (Windsor, VT: Awede Press, 1986), poetry, 20pp.
- Lazy Sonnets* (Hartford CT: Potes and Poets Press, 1986, originally published by Gibraltar Press, 1971), poetry, 26pp.
- Popular Fiction* (New York, NY: ROOF Books, 1985), prose, 82pp.
- Converses* (Windsor, VT: Awede Press, 1983), poetry, 72pp.
- Integers* (New York, NY: DTW, 1980), poetry 12pp
- In Case* (Los Angeles, CA: Sun & Moon Press, 1980), prose, 52pp.
- Part Songs* (New York, NY: Segue Press, 1978), poetry, 30pp.

ANTHOLOGIES:

- Annual Survey of American Poetry: 1986*, editorial board (Great Neck, New York, Roth Publishing, 1986), 279 pp.
- Boundary 2*, vol. xiv #2, Winter 1986, Binghamton, NY.
- Consequence of Innovation*, ed. Craig Dworkin (New York, Roof, 2008), 331pp.
- 49 + 1 Nouveaux Poets Americains*, ed. Emmanuel Hocquard et Claude Royet-Journoud (Royaumont: Bureau Sur L'Atlantique.Action Poetique, 1991), 340pp.
- From the Other Side of the Century*, ed Douglas Messerli (Los Angeles, Sun & Moon Press, 1994), 1100 pp.
- In the American Tree*, ed. Ron Silliman (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1986), 628 pp.
- The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, ed. Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 428pp.
- Language Poems*, trans. Yunte Huang and Ziqing Zhang (Chengdu, P.R. China, Sichuan Literature and Art Publishing House, 1993), 178 pp.
- Language Poetries*, ed. Douglas Messerli (NY: New Directions, 1987), 125pp.
- "Language Sampler" in *Paris Review*, #86, 1982.
- Out of This World*, ed. Anne Waldman (Crown, NY, 1991), 690pp.
- The Poets' Encyclopedia*, special issue of *Unmuzzled Ox*, vol. 5, 1979, New York, NY.
- "Realism: An Anthology of 'Language Writing' in *Ironwood*, 1983.
- Patterns / Contexts / Time*, ed. Phillip Foss & Charles Bernstein, special issue of *Tyonyi*, (Santa Fe, NM, 1990), 236 pp.

INTERVIEWS

-*Jacket 39* with Stan Apps: <http://jacketmagazine.com/39/iv-sherry-ivb-apps.shtml>. Analysis of the interview from Mark Wallace: <http://wallacethinksagain.blogspot.com/2010/02/james-sherry-on-environmental-poetics.html>

-*Brooklyn Rail* with Farnoosh Fathi: <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2004/10/books/james-sherry-with-farnoosh-fathi>

And more than 100 magazine publications (Poetry & Prose).

James Sherry's writing dates from 1970 when he wrote *Lazy Sonnets* in Tangiers, encouraged by Paul Bowles. It was convenient to devise a form that both avoided the hard work of adhering to a tight structure while addressing that very subject.

In the summer of 1976, Sherry attended Naropa Institute where he met the leading poets of the day: Alan Ginsberg, John Ashbery, Robert Duncan and others. With poet Tom Savage, he collected writing from those major poets and the other students and in the fall published the first edition of *Roof*. While in Boulder, he also met Alan Davies. The magazine would run quarterly for 10 issues with associates changing from Savage to Vicky Hudspeth and then to Michael Gottlieb who co-edited six issues.

After the first issue, Sherry decided that the older poets wanted to encourage him to follow their styles, but his interest in poetic form attracted him to an emerging group that later became known as language writers. In rapid succession starting in late 1976 he met Charles Bernstein, Bruce Andrews, Hannah Weiner, Nick Piombino, Ray DiPalma, Steve McCaffery, Michael Gottlieb and later Ron Silliman, Rae Armantrout, Lyn Hejinian, Bob Pereman, Kit Robinson, as well as writers from Washington, DC such as Rod Smith, Diane Ward and Lynn Dreyer. The fuller list of writers is reflected in *Roof's* subsequent issues and in Silliman's anthology *In the American Tree*. During this period he became a regular participant in various reading series around NY especially the Ear Inn series started by Ted Greenwald and Charles Bernstein and ultimately taken over and subsidized for 30 years by Mr. Sherry. While the first issues of *Roof* were being published, he became reacquainted with his college friends, Mei-mei Berssenbrugge and Leslie Scalapino with whom he has maintained a close relationship.

In 1977, Sherry published *Part Songs* with Brita Bergland's Awede Press, a series of drawings in words written on programs during musical concerts. Most of the concerts included his brother Fred, a cellist and proponent of modern music through his group Speculum Musicae. The drawings established another method of easily generating vocabularies, this time from associations with music. As a result of his association with musicians and composers, he wrote words for several songs that were performed at Lincoln Center a few years later.

In 1977, he started The Segue Foundation that initially helped fund the magazine and later became a broader arts services organization that supported two book series, poetry presentations in prisons, dance, theater, music, film, The Ear Inn reading series that moved to The Bowery Poetry Club in 2006 and to Zinc Bar in 2012, and in collaboration with the City of New York, an artist housing complex on the Lower East Side. As of 2012, Segue has produced or supported more than 10,000 events.

In 1979, *Roof Magazine* stopped when Sherry decided that he needed to publish longer works of the poets he thought were developing new writing. That same year *Roof Books* published Charles Bernstein's *Controlling Interests*. Since then *Roof* has published over 150 titles of poetry and criticism.

In 1980, Mr. Sherry published a postmodern mystery with Sun & Moon Press called *In Case*. In this newsprint book with a noir cover by Diane Ward, an unnamed detective fails to solve a crime that goes away in this prose poem about human effectiveness and entropy.

That same year he collaborated with dancer Nina Weiner to produce the dance piece *Integers* performed at Dance Theater Workshop. The strategy of the piece was to find analogs between dance and writing, other than sounds like or looks like onomatopoeics, using such structures as duration, word order and the number of words or syllables compared to the numerical values of dance. In the program notes of that piece he published the first instance of the 100 most common English words used as a poem.

The collaboration with Ms. Weiner led Mr. Sherry to publish *Converses* in 1983, a book of two voice / two column poems. The book is an attempt to establish the largest number of words that can be spoken at the same time and still all be heard and understood. This piece about density focused on the experimental aspect of innovative writing was performed many times in the years subsequent to its publication by Awede Press.

During this period Mr. Sherry became friends with a number of the leading minimalists. He became fascinated by their unswerving devotion to an analytic art and in 1985 published *Popular Fiction*, a series of poems focused on building a synthetic, accumulative writing. *Popular Fiction* exemplified by the poem "Plus Twelve" marks the beginning of his efforts to develop a form and theory of writing that would reflect the complexity of our world rather than continuing to only analyze its parts.

Sherry's move toward synthetic poetry resulted in two major documents of short prose and poetry. *Our Nuclear Heritage* was published in 1991 by Sun & Moon Press. Presaging the conflict between Christian and Muslim cultures, the book begins to document how an environment of language gets created around a core of human requirements and builds cultures that end by conflicting at their peripheries.

In 1993, Mr. Sherry traveled to China with poets Hank Lazer and Yunte Huang to celebrate the publication by Sichuan Art and Literature Publishing House of *Selected Language Poems*, an anthology that also included Charles Bernstein along with Lazer and Sherry, translated by Yunte Huang and Zhang Ziqing. Mr. Huang went on to be the celebrated author of a book on Charlie Chan and Zhang Ziqing became the leading translator of American poetry in China. While in China the poets were introduced to many individuals and groups of poets representing the diversity of approaches to poetry writing in the PRC.

In 1993 as a result of conversations with environmentalist Jessie Ausubel, the leading force behind the marine census, Mr. Sherry also started writing the second of his two major works, *Oops: Environmental Poetics*. The issues and approaches addressed by theoretical ecology matched Mr. Sherry's predilection for avoiding the simplification of our complex world. Environmental poetics focuses less on saving baby seals and more on how humanity can use other planetary processes to create energy, govern itself and write poetry. Many essays and poems from this work have been published in literary and cultural journals such as *Post Modern Culture*, *EcoPoetics*, and *Critiphoria* and *Jacket2* but the book as a whole remains in manuscript.

The Segue Foundation: <http://www.seguefoundation.com/>

Roof Books: <http://www.roofbooks.com/>