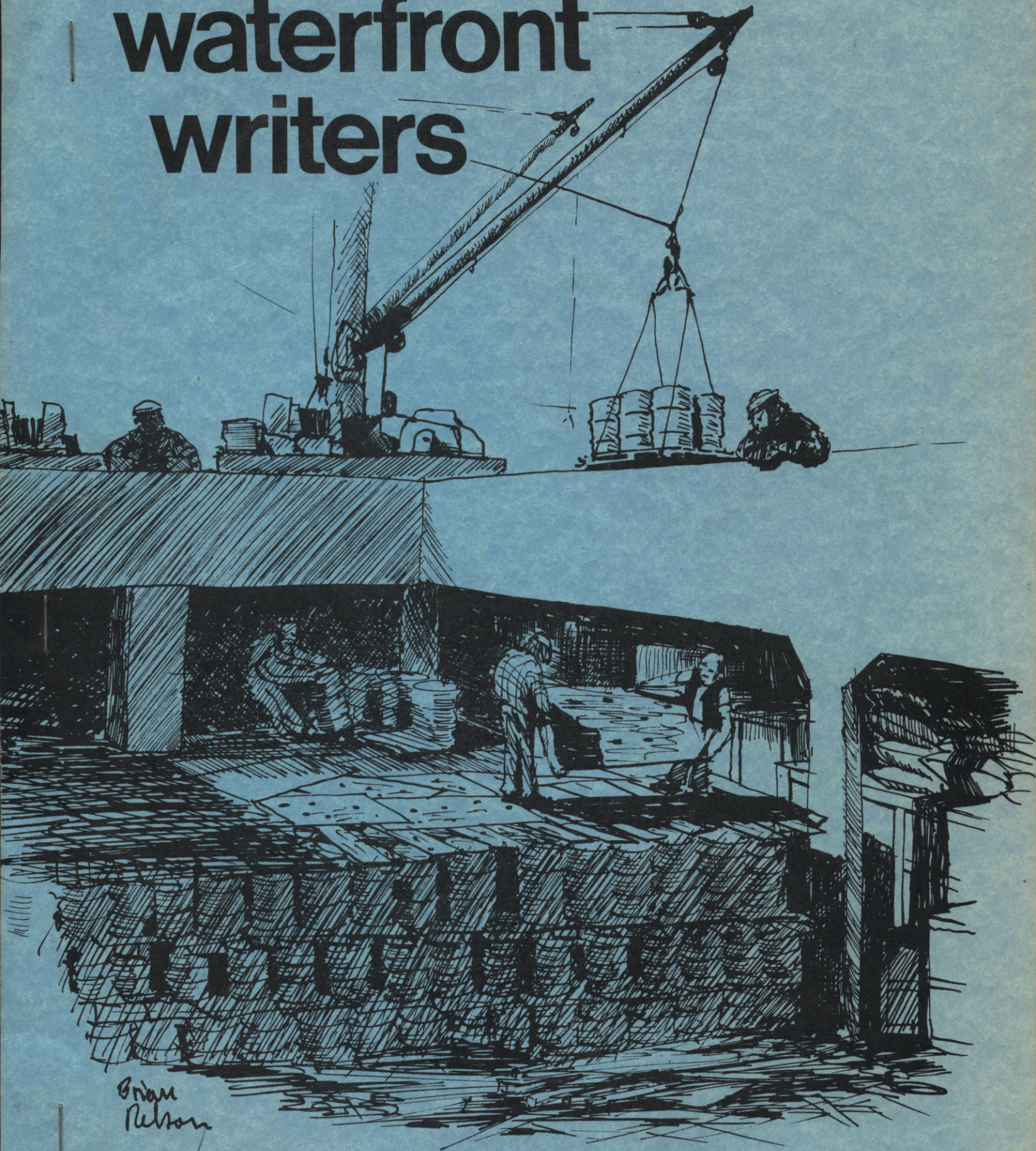


# waterfront writers



Brian  
Nelson

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## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE WATERFRONT WRITERS

On September 17th, 1977, a unique event took place in San Francisco. For the first time West Coast Longshoremen gave a literary reading from their own works. Media coverage was plentiful -- they saw good copy in the seeming incongruity of longshoremen as poets. The audience and media found a wealth of new insights into Art, Work, Workers and the larger world we all share. A new perspective was shaped to take a place in American Letters. As worker-artists the intensity and scope of their readings smashed the brutal hardhat image of the American workman.

The longshore readers brought depth and diversity to their works as a result of favorable historical and artistic conditions. They drew from a union tradition reaching back through a series of social-political stands to the General Strike of 1934 (one of only two such strikes in U.S. History). Because of their position in international trade, longshoremen often see the world's political crises heating up by observing the flow of cargo.

The lure and lore of the sea, preserved by an ongoing oral tradition, is upheld by the Waterfront Writers. They stand at the junction of a dramatic shift from a colorful past to a mechanized future. Their experience as workers, thinkers, and artists is a distillation of the experience of Society at large. The Waterfront Writers are forging a fertile, evolutionary literature for a culture struggling to maintain the worth of personal insight and feeling under the dehumanizing onslaught of automation and computerization.

These worker-artists vigorously contradict the notion of the artist in America inhabiting some ivory highrise or garret isolated from mundane living, a mere observer of his society. As workers, the Waterfront Writers help to produce, maintain and change the society they inhabit, and as writers they bring us to fuller understanding of that society.

The essay and poems in this booklet will bring the reader to a better understanding of the problems of men trying to hold on to and use their creative talents in a dehumanized and automated environment.

Bob Larson



## HERB MILLS

### "The Routinization of Work" \*

Conventional longshoring routinely entails widely varying and constantly changing operational circumstances. This being the case, the efficiency with which a conventional operation is conducted is fundamentally dependent upon the initiative and ingenuity of the longshoremen, both individually and collectively. A wide range of skills is routinely called upon. The "bank" of one's experience is repeatedly brought into play; there is an on-going and vital need for cooperative innovation. In a word conventional longshoring requires a very broadly defined decentralization of initiative and must proceed as a collective and cooperative enterprise.

Circumstances of this order allow the individual longshoreman to take pride in his work. So also may a gang of men enjoy a collective sense of pride. Because conventional longshoring must proceed as a collective and cooperative enterprise, each man can express and concretely "embody" his sense of community and union with his fellow workers via his on-going contribution to the operation. One can simultaneously earn the reputation of being a good longshoreman and a good union man.

As compared to the work associated with conventional operations, modern longshoring is utterly routine. There is very little variation of operational circumstance.....The range of skills and experience which routinely comes into play has been drastically narrowed. By the same token, circumstances which require a collective and innovative approach on the part of the men are all but unknown.....

.....Thus.....the operational circumstances which for many years allowed the San Francisco longshoreman to enjoy his work, to take pride in its performance, and to thereby express his sense of community and union with his fellow workers have been almost completely eliminated by a new technology.

\* Reprinted from Urban Life  
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GEORGE BENET

The End of the Blues

I have four bottles of ballerina vodka  
two bottles of royal gate gin  
tragic magic  
the windows are taped with  
black friction tape  
difficult to pour drinks in the dark  
drinking direct from the bottle  
thinking of direct suicide  
casing out  
a half gainor from the bridge  
going out in frisco jeans and a hickory shirt  
yesterday on my trip to the store for the tape  
a young man on the corner bible in hand  
exhorting the way of jesus  
a heaven of no sorrows  
no tears, no heartaches  
no pain, no wars  
would that it were so  
the sweats, the vomiting  
the inner rush of terror  
on the ceiling the rats and the little girl angels  
were back again  
the girl angels speak  
    they say  
        the wind has been murdered  
        and all flights are cancelled.

The Return of Vaudeville

My son Jason said...success at sixty  
the stage is dark  
the curtain is down  
the audience has gone home  
the lost, the beat and the hippy  
generations have vanished  
and a little fat man  
smoking a short cigar  
and carrying a handful of poems  
comes onto the podium.

Building a Raft

    in my basement  
I have 30 cases of scotch  
    1400 cans of chili  
2000 hydropres pills  
    1000 libriums, insulin  
7000 Optimo cigars  
    18 pairs of sunglasses  
with my son and daughter  
    and an attractive young  
nurse  
    Isabel Coco Bustamante  
and on my birthday  
gonna set sail  
find the Lost Continent.



GENE DENNIS

A Workman's Compensation

I didn't know the price  
My partner had to pay  
When he got hurt  
Last year at Pier 50-B

Until one day  
He stood a certain way  
And I could see the toes  
of his shoes were empty.

(Untitled)

Sometimes  
I play handball  
By myself  
Against a wall.  
Thump.

KEN FOX (cont'd)

Pier 80C

80C is a letter and a  
number to you - to me  
it's a job - it's people -  
it's a whole world of  
trucks and ships, and  
silks and satins, cashews  
and boredom, coffee and  
hernias, cotton and death,  
and just plain people

Who talk about  
silks and satins, horses  
and boredom, ball games  
and hernias, and who

Died over  
the weekend!!  
that's Eighty Cee See!

A Sketch of New York

Me On The Piano and  
Perry Robinson on the  
Clarinet.

Rondo

A scooby blue down beat  
Whiffles round the side  
of my index  
finger

Causing me to point to  
a seventh

When the man on the horn  
Rides up to where my  
finger is

Just in time - to join me  
and my finger  
in a

Round, Down, Sound  
Causing a Riff from  
Sapphire velvet up-on a rise  
to a

Baby Blue view of the Cosmos  
in 4/4 (that's time to you)

A moment of Tran-scen-den-tal  
Me-di-ta-tive Bliiiiisssss  
causing

a slide down to  
a scooby blue down beat  
Whiffles round the side of my  
Index Finger-----

KEN FOX

Parallels Merge

Who are you?

Am I!  
In my  
Life?

Am I!  
In your  
Life?

Am I!  
or  
I am

Who you are!

I am  
In your life!  
I am

In my life!  
I am  
and

you are  
each other!  
in  
our lives!!



BOB CARSON

Lew Welch

Turkey gullet. Gaunt aesthetic face.  
Stubble and shadow offset his eyes.  
Gael waiting for the gale  
to ride him out.  
Brazen Wings.

I remember him.  
Hickory shirt, hair turning gray.  
Passing time in our casket cold workplace.

Warm, wine flushed, he gave me a copy  
of his poems titled "Courses."  
Stopping me on the Embarcadero  
he made a masterful production out of  
the giving and choosing of gift.  
He'd been making many such donations  
for no declared reason.  
I didn't know it was our last exchange.

His words winding endless spaghetti strand thoughts,  
he'd look towards North Beach, leaving our work  
at his back. Thoughts in flights of poetry there.  
His adam's apple punched out as he swallowed  
remembrances whole.

We went to a bar. Discussed new dimensions  
for the writing of words and making of books.  
Shuffled thoughts like cards, and suddenly  
he threw the deck out.  
"We're still building pyramids for the Pharoes."  
He was getting weepy. I looked where he looked.  
New buildings going up, old crumbling piers.  
Men hauling lines and rigging gear on ships.  
A huge crate was landed on deck.

"Still building pyramids," he flew on.  
He downed another drink, popped a pill for  
his stomach and joked from the tension and  
incongruities of working for a wage, working as a poet.

Sky falling into the bay.  
Buildings contradicting the heavens.  
He took another pill.  
"Man," he said, rolling his eyes, swilling a drink,  
"I must be the only hippie in the world  
who has to take anti-acid pills."



