

LITERARY ArcticFront

Toronto Invasion: Kemeny Babineau, John Barlow & Rob Read

> BY KEVIN THURSTON



In what is hopefully not the last influx of Canadian poets before the U.S. constructs its great fence around the borders, John Barlow, Kemeny Babineau and Rob Read (pictured) come to town for a reading at **Big Orbit**, sponsored by Just Buffalo's Orbital Series, **tonight (Feb. 23) at 7pm**. All three readers represent various facets of "small press" poetry. Generally speaking, small press poetry incorporates a do-it-yourself publishing model that allows artists the freedom and ability to connect with their audience with a level of intimacy that larger publishers simply cannot offer. One could draw parallels with indie-rock.

John Barlow has been a fixture in and around the Toronto poetry scene for more than a decade and currently edits and creates the collage zine *Psychic Rotunda* (zine is a generic term that essentially means "magazine" but often lacks the desire, and/or funding, to produce a four-color glossy). Barlow's tastes are expansive. His zine publishes everything from visual poems, photographs and e-mails. Since releasing three trade books—*Safe Telepathy*, *ASHINEoVSUN* and *ASHINEoVSUN II*—with Exile Press in the mid-to-late '90s, Barlow has kept an eye on that world, but has left it for the freedom to do whatever it is he chooses to do.


Kemeny Babineau has self-deprecatingly written "I'm a poet who likes nature and lives in Canada." His newest book is called *The Incomplete Tree Guide*. Babineau, who lives outside Toronto in Mt. Pleasant, is the proprietor of Laurel Reed Books, of whose publications the zine *Chief Tongue* is perhaps the best known. As the title of the zine suggests, Babineau often focuses on puns that seem to be moving slowly but actually accomplish a great deal in a confined space. His chapbook—often a book of 15-20 pages, stapled on its side, perhaps the most common form of dissemination in the small press world—*HUE MANITTEE* focuses at times on individual words and then moves to larger

treatments such as "Blind Poem":
 blind alley blind drunk blind rage blind side blind
 fold
 blind eye blind date blind love colour blind
 blind justice blind profit blind auction snow blind
 blind spot blind luck blind ambition
 blind pass blind drive blind ice blind out

Rob Read is the youngest of the three writers and is currently on quite a roll. Having just published *O Spam, Poams* with Toronto publisher Bookthug and recently reading in Buffalo in support of the *Shift and Switch* promotional tour, Read still finds time to produce his daily treated spam (<http://www.bookthug.ca/ospam/>). A recent graduate of York University, Read points to SUNY-Buffalo's new Poetics chair Steve McCaffery as someone who has helped shape his work. Read also publishes books with frequent collaborator AEM through *Produce Section*. Their most recent venture, *Atone Neither Overflowing Clause*, was made in Read's kitchen and has the novel design of being shaped like a guillotine's blade replete with reflective metal paper and "blood."

These three poets serve as a great introduction to the various approaches, concerns and interests of contemporary poetry—small press or not—and what the small press mini-series within the Orbital Series hopes to accomplish: bringing citizens together and perhaps leaving with a broader perspective.

Orbital Series
Big Orbit Gallery, 30D Essex St.
(883-3209)
Thursday, February 23, 7pm



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