

Writers' Bloc

A couple of years back, droves of writers descended upon New York one week and hammered out the tentative framework for a National Writers Union. The sorry politics of contemporary authorship, it was announced, had gone far enough. Writers had to organize, take matters into their own hands.

Representative delegates were drafted. Regional chapters were formed. The two most densely populated of those smaller caucuses belonged to the metropolises of Boston and New York. On the West Coast, the membership of the Santa Cruz chapter was exceeded only by that of San Francisco.

"I'm much more encouraged about the prospects than I was a few months ago," says chapter president James B. Hall. "For a while it looked like the whole thing was going to be used solely as a political platform. But I confirmed that a constitution is scheduled to be drafted next Spring and it's clear people are serious about it."

Hall believes the hoopla and publicity surrounding the inaugural convention detracted from the crucial nut-and-bolt topics addressed. "Essentially, the basis for such a union is security. What I call 'porkchop issues': finances, authors' rights, educational outreach programs. There are quite simply some practices in the publishing industry that need to be corrected."

At the moment, the National Writers Union is in a holding pattern. Still, it has already proven valuable within the context of Santa Cruz. Not only were the raw numbers of contributing members remarkable, but the diversity of those involved reflected impressively on the local reservoir of literary concerns. The high percentage of journalists, periodical and technical writers that participated also confirmed that the definition of "literary" within the bounds of Santa Cruz should not be confined to the pens of poets and novelists.

"American writing has always been regional," Hall claims. "It's just being noticed more now that there's not as much money to go around."

There is still the tendency, however, to discount literary tides on the scale of Santa Cruz as being inconsequential. That Santa Cruz is located just about as far West as the country goes, doesn't help matters much. Literary weather remains monitored by Eastern sensibilities and interests.

William Everson, in his fascinating essay, *Archetype West*, refutes this premise and argues for the regional viability of literature. Though he is speaking for the entire Western landscape, his statement of purpose is specifically relevant to Santa Cruz as well: "I believe that the impress of place on man's artifacts is something not only authentic but absolutely ineradicable, and in affirming it I have sought to isolate the energy shaping the specific Western experience."

Take on the monumental task of cataloging what keeps local writers in the Santa Cruz environment and you probably wouldn't get the same answer twice. That's as it should be. Concentrations of writers are not like string quartets or lacrosse lineups, where fluidity and progress hinges on strict communication and carefully designated roles. Connections cannot be wound too tight.

The writers of Santa Cruz, like writers anywhere, would be easier to keep tabs on if they moved in more obvious circles or entwined themselves around the same emotional poles of reference — but that's not what writers are for.

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