



John Moritz (1946-2007)

John Moritz attended the University of Kansas during the late 1960s and remained in Lawrence the rest of his life. He founded Tansy Press and Tansy bookstore. Steve Bunch remembers: "With his "Putpenny Pomes" you could put a penny in a jar and take away a small folded mimeographed poem." Moritz was no capitalist. And through his advocacy of cutting-edge poetry, he advanced the direction of American poetics. Among the writers he published are Ed Dorn, Kenneth Irby, Alice Notley, Paul Metcalf, Joanne Kyger, and Robin Blaser. In the 1980s he sponsored a poetry reading series that featured some of these authors, and a broadside for each.



Moritz promoted poetry in every possible way; he was himself a fine poet (I remember urging him to focus more on his own writing). Reviewer Richard Owens notes his connection to Black Mountain writers: "The writing leads back to [Charles] Olson via Dorn." Focus on natural flow of language itself rather than traditional forms is apparent in Moritz's work. Also, his verse has a lyrical emotional tug. He attunes to place as well as to literary tradition.

The poem "Omaha" has almost no punctuation. It illustrates Moritz's concern with wedding his imaginative impulse to solid reality. The poem begins as a journey through neighboring Nebraska, where he turns an urban scene, 12th Street, into a western overland trail. But this quest ends at a restaurant, not the Missouri River ("Big Mo"). He finds a gar, a trash fish, imprisoned in a decorative pond. Its displacement resonates with "meat packing plants"—what hunting has become within a city landscape. At the end, as Moritz turns his thoughts to poetry—Dante and Ezra Pound—he connects movement of consciousness to the gar's thrashing: all fight against confinement.

Omaha

**The drive south on 12th is on an hispanic artery
pumped by the meat packing plants
lots of mom and pop comidas
but we were questing
catfish at the end of the trail**

**while waiting to be seated
a gar circles a ceramic pond counterclockwise
in fresh water, clear enough to see the coins
tossed for an aimless wish, the gar circles
out of its water which would be the Big Mo sludge**

**fishermen who snag a gar reeling in their line
take out a vengeance with a knife or boot
but this particular gar circles and thrashes
like Dante's fornicators or late Pound
circling Language with one foot nailed to the floor.**

Education: John Moritz was born in Gary, Indiana, graduated from high school in Chicago (1964), and resided in Lawrence since the late 1960s. He attended the University of Kansas.

Career: Moritz was a poet, publisher, printer, and bookstore proprietor. He had poems in *First Intensity*, *Skanky Possum*, *Black Rain*, *Damn The Caesars*, and *House Organ*. His recent books include: *Mayaland/Catfish Frenzy* (First Intensity Press 2007) and *Cartography* (First Intensity 2002). (See http://homepage.mac.com/firstintensity/books_fi.html).