

*Outrider: Poems, Essays, and Interviews*

By Anne Waldman

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Anne Waldman has had a prolific and eclectic career, having been associated with female Beat writers, as well as with the second generation of New York School poets. As co-founder along with Allen Ginsberg and Chogyam Trungpa of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa Institute in 1974, Waldman is also part of the Outrider tradition, which her new collection, *Outrider*, 2006, makes clear. This volume gathers together poems, essays, and interviews, along with an Outrider manifesto and history, providing an important introduction to this tradition and its lineage.

Outriders are dedicated to “crazy wisdom,” “wild mind,” and “poetic freedom,” according to the volume’s first selection, a free association prose-poem manifesto. This is followed by a more explicit historical overview in “Outrider: The Pedagogy.” Here Waldman explains *outrider* as “a term some of us adopted early on at the inception” of The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics “to define the lineage, pedagogy and view of a burgeoning poetics program that was increasingly seeing itself outside the official verse literati culture academic mainstream” (39). She goes on to explain that the term was originally used by Dick Gallup in a class he gave at Naropa in reference to the New York School; the term also holds overtones of Naropa’s Western orientation and location in Colorado. One might consider *Outrider* then to be an introduction for those unfamiliar with Naropa’s poetry lineage.

This more didactic information about Outriders is followed by “Rhizomic Poetics,” an interview with Waldman herself, which fleshes out her own Outrider identity especially in relation to Buddhism and her recently published book, *Structure of the World Compared to a Bubble*, a long poem that acts as a kind of spiritual biography according to interviewer Matthew Cooperman. *Outrider*’s final selection, “Show You Out the Door,” sums up many of the Outrider’s concerns: how to bring poetry, truth, and beauty together with activism against all forms of government sponsored cruelty and inhumanity, thus underscoring the Outrider tradition’s political agenda. The last lines ask, “How can we be a walking academy of trees / when we are tearing them down?” in an allusion not only to the current ecological crisis, but to Beat poet Philip Whalen’s own thoughts on the academy from his statement on poetics, “Since You Ask Me.”

Much of *Outrider* is an exploration of this tradition’s lineage, wide-ranging and all-inclusive with many forebears, both male and female. Since Naropa was founded by Tibetan Buddhist teacher Chogyam Trungpa, along with Waldman and Ginsberg, one would expect the Outrider tradition to have Buddhist roots, as well as a rich Beat connection, the latter made clear in the essay entitled “Beat Roots.” One of the last selections in the book is “Premises of Consciousness: Notes on ‘Howl,’” describing Waldman’s on-going relationship with “Howl” and its continuing relevance today. Tracing the Outrider feminist ancestry, Waldman alludes to such figures as Lorine Niedecker, Gertrude Stein, Mino Loy, H.D., Kathy Acker, Eleni Sikelianos, Joanne

Kyger, Diane di Prima, and Alice Notley. The short poem “Matriot Acts” (its title a take-off on the Patriot Act) asks that Lorine, Mina, Hilda, and Gertrude “touch me with crenellated beauty now” (147). Outriders also cross physical boundaries, as her inclusion of interviews with Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal or Syrian-born Arab poet Adonis makes clear.

One critique of *Outrider* is that the volume is primarily Waldman’s version of the tradition, and aside from interviews, she doesn’t give other perspectives. Conversely, readers may also want to know more about her own work and development as a poet, aside from the Outrider tradition. They should turn to *Vow to Poetry*, 2001, her first collection of essays, interviews, and manifestoes, rich with insight and commentary on her body of work. In addition, Waldman’s prose pieces here outshine her poetry which seems somewhat prosaic, the strongest poem being “Show You Out the Door.” This may be because an aspect of the Outrider tradition, according to Waldman, is its hybridity: “Hybrid forms include the blurring of distinctions between prose and poetry” (58).

This volume also seems somewhat slanted in a masculine direction, although one could counter that Waldman includes an essay on Niedecker, poems dedicated to Stein and Acker, and another poem, “5 Female Poets Next to a Block of Ice,” which alludes to fellow outriders Kyger, di Prima, Notley, and Sikelianos. In “Feminifesto: Olson,” her homage to Charles Olson, the feminine aspect of his poetry is brought out, her claim being that “the goddess is everywhere in the field of Olson” (160). Perhaps it is just that the male figures mentioned throughout *Outrider* seem to outnumber the female, or that the very term *outrider* has somewhat masculine overtones. This is particularly evident in the manifesto section where Waldman states that the Outrider is a “warrior of change.” However, in addition to linking male poets such as Ted Berrigan or male figures such as Robin Hood with the tradition, she claims, “Patriarchal poetry might be withstood. Patriarchal Poetry or peace to return to Patriarchal Poetry or pieces of Patriarchal Poetry” (33). Ultimately, for Waldman, what the Outrider tradition strives to do is acknowledge the essence of the female in the male and vice versa.

Despite these few criticisms, for those not directly associated with Naropa, *Outrider* is crucial for an understanding of this school and tradition. Since it is apparent that the Beat Generation is intertwined with the Outrider tradition, if not synonymous with it in some ways considering the many Beat writers who have been part of Naropa over the past thirty-three years, this book seems of particular interest to Beat Studies. Perhaps most importantly, Waldman has here provided a call to readers to take heed, give attention, and wake up to the possibilities of joining others in the Outrider tradition to make a difference to oneself, poetry, and the planet.