

# Bios for Poetry Reading

## MODERATOR:

Valerie Van Isler

**Valerie Van Isler** has been an international journalist for many years, covering issues and developments in the Middle East, North Africa, Western and Eastern Europe, Russia, the freedom struggles in South Africa and Namibia, Central and South America, and the Caribbean, especially Haiti, Jamaica, Grenada and Panama. She has worked for the Pacifica Foundation at WBAI Radio in New York and her mission has included covering everything from popular revolutions to civilian massacres, from illegal invasions to full scale wars, from failed policies to heartbreaking assassinations.

Before going into the world of journalism, she did graduate work in education and media at Columbia and then taught and directed several programs for the education of minority young people especially in the African-American and Latino communities

In the Fall of 1989, she went to Panama to investigate and report on the escalating tensions between the George Bush Sr. administration and the government of Manuel Noriega. Two months later, the U.S. launched a midnight war on the country by air, land and sea that firebombed urban neighborhoods and killed thousands of civilians. Although the fighting lasted for weeks, the occupation lasted for years. Six months later, she returned to Panama to report on the charges of human and civil rights abuses, violations of international law and to document the firebombing attacks by the U.S. military that had killed so many men, women and children, and then had dumped their bodies in mass graves. While covering this part of the story, she got access to secret documents about the US invasion and brought them back to the Commission of Inquiry on the war. Her work is included in the film "The Panama Deception" by director Barbara Trent which won the Oscar- the Academy Award - for Best Documentary Film in 1993.

One of the lasting contributions which she made as General Manager of WBAI Radio for many years was to help create, sustain and defend the national news program developed in 1996 called "Democracy Now" hosted by Amy Goodman and Juan Gonzalez. That project is now an independent, global radio and tv news program with an audience of millions across the country. As it celebrates its 26th anniversary this year, it has helped change the history of community and public broadcasting around the world.

Since retirement, she lives in Downtown New York City.

# POETS

## Andrea (Neiman) Jackson

After Swarthmore, **Andrea (Neiman) Jackson** received a law degree from Yale, a Masters in Tax Law from Washington University in St. Louis, and, after retiring from law practice, an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Missouri - St. Louis. Her poetry and fiction have been published in many journals, in print and online. She has received two Pushcart nominations and one nomination for the Best of the Net Anthology. In 2017 she published *Who Am I and Where Is Home? An American Woman in 1931 Palestine*, which is based on her mother's correspondence with friends and family during the year she lived in pre-Israel Palestine, and was described by *Small Press Bookwatch* as "an absolutely fascinating, deftly crafted read from cover to cover...an extraordinary, candid, engaging, account of an inherently interesting woman in an inherently interesting time."

Andie lives in St. Louis with her husband of 56 years. They have two children, one living in Virginia and the other in Israel.

## Lise (Waldman) Menn

**Lise** was a math major and linguistics minor at Swarthmore. She got her master's degree in mathematics from Brandeis University (1964), where she met and married fellow graduate student Mike Menn. After their children Stephen and Joseph were both in elementary school, she returned to graduate work, earning a doctorate in linguistics from the U. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1976. She specializes in psycholinguistics, including the study of language acquisition and aphasia, and is the author of the textbook *Psycholinguistics: Introduction and Applications*. She has co-edited several books and written fifty years' worth of papers on language development and on aphasia.

After working at the Aphasia Research Center of the Boston U. School of Medicine, she was hired by the Linguistics Department at the U. of Colorado at Boulder (CU/Boulder), teaching there from 1986 until her retirement in 2007. During and since that time, she has also held visiting research and teaching posts at UCLA, the U. of New Mexico, Dokkyo U. and the Tokyo Metropolitan Institute for Gerontology in Japan, Åbo Akademi U. in Finland, the U. Federal de Santa Catarina in Florianopolis (Brazil), National Yang-Ming U. in Taipei, and the U. of Hunan in Changsha. She is currently Professor Emerita of linguistics CU/Boulder, and a fellow of the Linguistic Society of America and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Lise has been writing poetry since she was seven, most of it quite bad, but she became serious about the art after meeting UCLA linguist and poet William Bright, whom she married in 1986. Some of her poems were published in the series of books of poetry by linguists co-edited by Emily Rando and Donna Jo Napoli. William

Bright died in 2006; Lise's poems about grief started coming about a year later. Several of them appeared in *The Widows' Handbook: Poetic Reflections on Grief and Survival* (Kent State U. Press 2014), which she co-edited with Jacqueline Lapidus '62. Her late-life partner, poet and film historian Bruce F. Kawin, Prof. Emeritus of English at CU/Boulder, has warmly encouraged her writing and editing.

## David Swanger

**David Swanger**, Professor Emeritus at the University of California, Santa Cruz is the author of seven books, two on poetics and aesthetic theory respectively, three volumes of poetry and three chapbooks.

The most recent of his poetry volumes, *Wayne's College of Beauty*, won the John Ciardi Poetry Prize and was named one of the year's best books by Forward Magazine.

Other awards include a poetry fellowship from the N. E. A., the Foley Award from *America* magazine, and several fellowships from the California Arts Council. He has published more than one-hundred poems in literary magazines, had poems featured on *Prairie Home Companion*, was the editor of *Quarry West*, and Poet Laureate of Santa Cruz County.

As laureate, David taught in the County's Homeless Shelter for four years, and throughout his career has given readings in schools and at civic events. He has also lectured and read his poetry in England and Canada. Laureate and otherwise, David sees himself as an ambassador on behalf of poetry.

Lastly, in addition to seminars, etc. David taught one of the largest courses offered at U.C.S.C. (300 plus students) and won awards for teaching and counseling students.

On March 22, he will read from his book [Wayne's College of Beauty](#), available from Amazon.

## John Wright

**John Wright** is an Indiana University Ph.D., an N.E.H. Fellow, John Evans Professor Emeritus of the Latin Language and Literature at Northwestern University, and, perhaps most importantly in his life and that of his family, a Fellow of the American Academy in Rome. This Rome Prize Fellowship enabled the Wrights to live in Rome from 1966 to 1968, with a follow-up year (1973/74) supported by the N.E.H. Fellowship. This was Rome before mass tourism and the European Union, when economically and sociologically the city was still living in the nineteenth century and an impecunious American student could live a very comfortable life. During this period Wright worked on various Classical projects, meanwhile developing a side interest in Romanesco, the Roman dialect of Italian. He ended up translating and publishing *The Life of Cola di Rienzo*, an anonymous

contemporary account of the fourteenth-century revolutionary hero who briefly became Tribune of a “restored Roman republic,” as well as some episodes of the Romanesco-laced *Avventure in città*, a sort of “Talk of the Town” column published daily in a Rome newspaper.

*A Spinney of Sonnets*, a collection of his original poetry, is available from his local bookstore, [bookendsandbeginnings.com](http://bookendsandbeginnings.com). (Put Spinney in the search line when you get their webpage.)