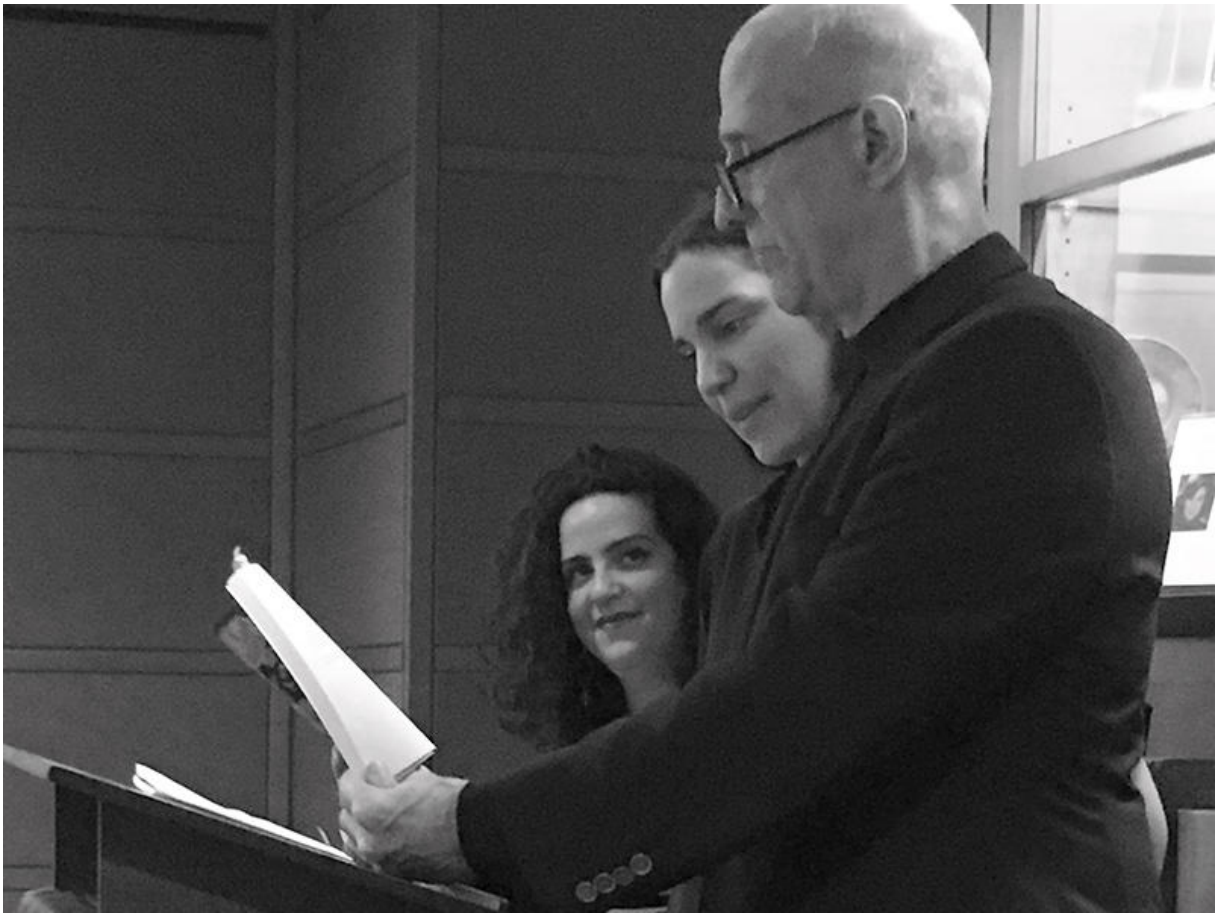
Arts & Humanities

Poets Play Ball at the Alumni Center

A multigenerational reading throws some curves.

By
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Harry Bauld, Lizzy Straus, and Kimi Traube (Jerome B. Kisslinger)

Harry Bauld ’77CC, batting third, had a hard act to follow. Not that poetry readings in the Alumni Center on West 113th Street are a competitive sport. But even Bauld, who played shortstop for the 1976 Ivy League champion Columbia Lions, and who teaches English at the Horace Mann School in the Bronx, may have felt butterflies at

hearing the two younger poets who preceded him.

The first was Lizzy Straus ’09CC, ’14SOA, who began by saying, “I never read and I’m really nervous,” and then, in a voice poised and knowing, declaimed: “I’m only watching shows / Where the serial killer is hot / So don’t try to tempt me / With the daytime lineup. / I don’t turn on for natural causes.” The poem, “November, If Ever,” ended on an image of a female cop standing over a girl’s body. “I watch a lot of TV,” Straus explained.

Next was Kimi Traube ’08CC, ’14SOA, whose prose poems of dying love contained passages of a sensual piquancy seldom heard in the wood-paneled confines of the Alumni Center lounge. “I felt your kiss like an impact, and I was bleeding, but I yielded to you, as I always did, back then, when I loved you,” went a line from “Post-Dated to the Day of the Dead.”

And then Harry Bauld, whose name, as Bauld often notes, is an oxymoron, stepped to the plate. Bauld, who is bald (that would be an aptronym: a name apt to its owner), held a copy of *The Uncorrected Eye*, his new collection of poems. Dressed in black, he named his obsessions — baseball, jazz, painting, boxing — and rhapsodized on the “state of blur” that comes without eyeglasses.

He then read “Ball,” in which some boys chase down a torn baseball and with a thrill of discovery strip the hide and unroll the blue-gray yarn, “a quarter mile wound tight / as *terza rima* into the most compressed possible / argument around a nucleus that sang *jump* // from a fugue of clarity and cork.” To finish, Bauld called on Straus to assist him in a poem for two voices. Straus seemed reluctant, even peeved at Bauld’s insistence. What was their relationship? Had she been his student in high school? Straus finally submitted and read her part with zest.

Afterward, people snacked on hors d’oeuvres. WKCR jazz host Sid Gribetz chatted about Lance Hayward, the house pianist at the Village Corner, where Bauld, as a freshman, first heard live jazz. Nearby, a small throng, including an editor from the *New York Review of Books*, formed around Straus, who was praising the value of readings. “Reading feels good. It feels centering. You hear your own work in a new way when you read it to new ears —”

“I didn’t know you were his *daughter*!” a woman broke in, addressing Straus. She had just come from the table where Bauld was signing books. “I had no *idea*!”

Few would have connected the dark-haired Straus with the bare-pated Bauld, but yes, Straus said, Harry was her father. Straus used her mother's last name. As the woman shook her head, Traube drifted over. So did Joe Cosgriff '78CC, a baseball writer and former Lions pitcher. "You guys came out strong," Cosgriff told the poets. "I could have listened for much longer, and that is not always the case."

Over at the table where copies of the *The Uncorrected Eye* were for sale, Harry Bauld, spectacles on his nose, took in the sight of his family, friends, and students. Everyone agreed that "Ball" was a hit, but on this night, it was lines from "The crowd at the ball game," by Horace Mann alumnus William Carlos Williams, that captured the light in Bauld's corrected eye:

> So in detail they, the crowd,
> are beautiful

This article appears in the Spring 2019 print edition with the title "Between the Lines."

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