

Bookstore Reading, Telegraph Ave, Berkeley

by Jerry Ratch

There's someone in the audience who is immolating himself
Cutting his own leg over and over with a pen knife
And groaning: "*Oh God, oh God*"

And all I can think from up at the podium is
This guy must absolutely hate these poems

I'm reading from *Puppet X*, the first time in public
My long 60 page
Admittedly somewhat depressing
But very funny (if you give it a chance)
Book-length series of poems

This guy must be ready to retch
Right in the bookstore
He hates it so much
This is all I can think

I am mortified
I didn't think it was
That bad

This is Berkeley, mind you, 1973, Telegraph Ave
Anything can happen, as the war in Viet Nam
Keeps raging on
And our brains are getting
Taken away on stretchers
Every day

