

# Brooklyn's latest literary corner is getting packed with poets

By Aaron Short

Poets and writers in North Brooklyn have found a welcome place to share their latest work now that the Bushwick Avenue Branch of the Brooklyn Public Library has launched a reading series on the second Saturday of every month.

The increasingly popular series, which will hold its third session on Feb. 14, is the brainchild of East Williamsburg-based poets Parker Phillips and Niina Polari and Bushwick Branch librarian Nate Hill, who wanted to create a forum for new writers and authors living in East Williamsburg and Bushwick.

"A goal community organizing perspective is to get folks moving to Bushwick to go to the public library and take out books," Phillips said. "I'm networking in whatever way I can through friends and others living here."

Hill, in charge of the library's adult programs, requested to come to this branch in order to have an opportunity to create programs for the neighborhood's diverse population and fill the library's underutilized basement space. As the demographics of East Williamsburg have changed, Hill has tried to institute programs that bring together different groups of people while reflecting the interests of the community.

"This reading series is about people coming together," Hill said. "The diversity of people at this branch is very different from any other public place in this neighborhood. I don't see it happening anywhere else."

For the past two readings, four writers have been featured, reading poems, fictional and nonfictional stories, essays, and other excerpts of their work. Each writer reads for fifteen minutes and must submit a list of five books that have influenced them as a writer.

"The book lists and shelf that we have is one of the more exciting aspects of the reading," Phillips said. "It makes available writing and literature that would not ordinarily be in circulation at that library."

Hill has been seeking out these books within the Brooklyn Public Library system and putting them on display during the reading. The books remain on hold for one month in the library's collection so that writers can see what others are reading and discuss the works.

"What I'm finding is I have to get a lot of

books from the Central Library," Hill said. "What's happening is we're getting a user defined collection because of their requests, which to me is what librarianship is all about. We're listening to what people want for materials and having it there for them."

Polari has been pleased that the series has been helping local residents engage with their neighborhood library branch and readers have remarked how great it is that the series is taking place in a nearby library.

"Everybody has a bizarre library story when they were a kid," Polari said. "People would go to a library to make out with a girl when they didn't want to go home. Everybody has been bringing them up, it's really cute."

Paul Rome, a fiction writer who read an excerpt from his novel at the first reading, enjoyed the experience of reading for a receptive audience that came out to listen to literature on the weekend.

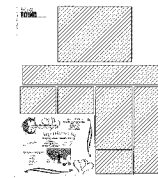
"It was a good change to read to a caffeinated and sober audience," Rome said.

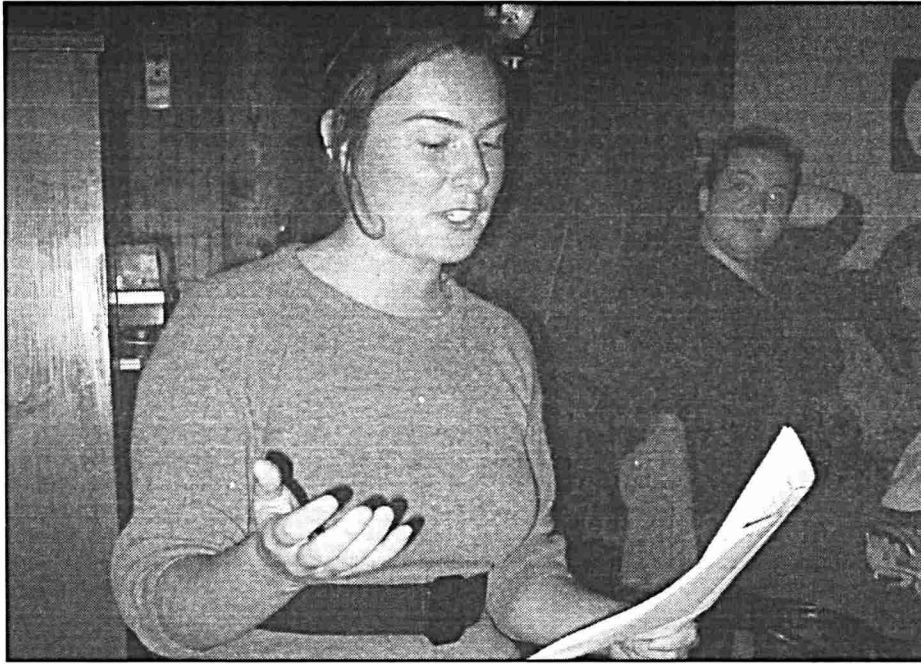
Last month featured a poet, two fiction writers, and two writers who have been working on a collaborative piece that Phillips described as blurring the line between fiction and non fiction. For February's Valentine's Day reading, the series will focus on works revolving around the themes of sex and love, though not necessarily both. So far one fiction writer has been confirmed, though others have not been scheduled by the time this article went to press.

A discussion after the reading where writers and audience members can mingle and talk about their work has followed both readings, which the participants have enjoyed. The library closes at 5 p.m., and Hill and Phillips have discussed holding an afterparty at Boulevard Cafe, which has been donating coffee to the event, or a nearby bar.

"We're kind of learning as we go," Hill said. "We're getting more organized each time."

The next reading series will be at the Bushwick Branch of the Brooklyn Public Library (340 Bushwick Ave) on Feb. 14, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, visit [www.bpl.org](http://www.bpl.org) or [bushwickreadingseries.org](http://bushwickreadingseries.org) or 718-602-1348.





**Parker Phillips reads an excerpt of a short story**

Photos by Aaron Short

Printing imperfections present during scanning