

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

No. 35

1 May 1976

Ted Greenwald, editor
St. Mark's Church, 2nd Avenue
& Tenth St. New York 10003.

Yes. The Wed readings for May are May 5 James Laughlin & Carl Rakosi, May 12 Mary Ferrari & Diane Wakoski, May 19 Charles Henri Ford & Tennessee Williams, May 26 Barbara Baracks & Charles Stein. The Mon night programs are May 3 Open Reading, May 10 Hannah Wiener & Tom Ahern, May 17 Joanne Brahinsky & Bob Holman, May 24 Beth Anderson, May 31 Rochelle Kraut & Nick Piombino. All workshops meet at 7:30 pm Tues (Paul Violi), Thurs (Bill Zavatsky) and Fri (Ted Greenwald). The Newsletter is partially aided by a CCLM grant and a grant from NYSC on A.

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Danspace at St. Mark's Church, May 25, at 8:30 pm Simone Forti.

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READINGS: Sbossek's, 6th St & Bowery, every Thurs at 8 pm in May Open readings, at 10 pm May 13 Ron Padgett & Fanny Howe. . . English Pub, 900 7th Ave (57th St), 3:30 pm Bill Duckworth, William Kushner, Robin Messing, Yuki Hartman, Michael Slater, Guy Gautier. . . Chumley's Sat 2 pm at Bedford & Barrow, May 1 Barbara Holland, Brett Rutherford, Shirley Powell, Claudia Dobkins, May 8 Robert Kelly, May 15 Tom Savage & Martin Steingesser, May 22 Stephen Stepanchey. . . West End Bar, Bwy & 113th St, May 2 Michael Benedikt & John Eskow, May 9 Ellen Kahaner & Leslie Black, May 16 Richard Davidson & John Raymond, May 23 Jorie Graham & Robert McDowell, May 30 Eve Olitsky & Larry Bailey, Sunday 2 pm. . . Sojourner Truth Festival of the Arts, May 9 from 6 - 7:30 pm at Women's Interart Center, 549 W 52 St. Alice Walker, Jodie Braxton, Ntozake Shange, Patricia Jones, Audre Lorde, Charlotte Carter, Info 246-6570.

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NEW READING SERIES? (A REVIEW)

First night @ Sbossek's: open reading series (hopefully) begins I arrive, place nearly empty, see the organizers (Neil Hackman & Cynthia Genser) at table with some others I don't know, slightly recognize sit down wonder if waitress comes to table, waitress comes to table: 1 bass, ham N cheese, another bass. people drift in, gets crowded. another reader arrives, Michael Lally, with bunch of people I all know say hi they sit etc. Wonder what it is. Numerous people walk in--bar is nearly crowded. I as C.G. when its gonna start they're up there her & N.H. they look worried where's Kathy Acker, fourth reader? well & why doncha start anyhow? so after some phone calls C.G. gets up, a few sound problems I can't hear you then do hear & then am sitting sitting in back (peanut gallery?) C.G. gets up & announces "This is gonna be (hopefully) a reading series, an open reading series &c) A few sound problems) first Neil Hackman personal poems about not eating meat & walking in the street & playing with that Kaballa beat, then Cynthia Genser long works of short lines with lotsa rimes & excellent presentation of the sort whats unlike the presenter when they at home. Break. Milling. Milling minions of poetasters or genuine fill in the blank. Too soon to tell. (Too shook to cook, me.) Genuine fill in the blank previously described to me I read about it in books I'm much too romantic so I'd like to think yes well I guess. During break Garrett List playing long sad notes on long sliding shiny metal instrument in memory of Jimmy Garrison who the night before somewhat ambiguously phrased killed himself. End break. Michael Lally reads poems with sex politics emotion & a little geography. Asks in one poem And is Samuel Beckett still writing? a question of much

wit & no tact. Well I guess. (Kathy Acker had finally arrived long before) Kathy Acker begins with brilliant delivery of hard-ass rap re getting into Noh plays & translating or writing her own a really stupid idea she says winningly. Noh play is funny & if memory serves a real Noh play, with dying bums & aging sluts for wraiths & spirits, has wonderful chorus about X-T-Z. Piece is delivered by 4 count em 4 people. End with Kathy Acker revealing herself "I'm Kathy Acker, the former sex queen of Brandeis University!"

Now it was not, obviously, the greatest reading I ever been to but it bodes well & I thought it was all great. What's of course most innnnnnarrreessssttttinnng to me is that it'll be an open reading series you remember those corny parades of a million poets who you thought were idiots then for three minutes you got to read and for three minutes your friend got to read and you were disgusted pissed off except for the times when only your friends the good poets showed at which time it was wonderful right? Therefore, O.E.D., if it gets going Sobosek's might be an active center of some kind of poetic activity, which I allus thinks a good idea the problem being it has to an active center not just poetic activity which is the current situation, the center cannot hold (is the Church a viable institution or is that a contradiction in terms youth wants to know) but like Bobby the D once said, if all us folks what think alike...to end with a commercial announcement if it does happen again (place wuz filled but some folks walked out on they checks) dont be too proud, come & read & listen & guzzle & gossip & just participate in the agglutination of a community of the sorts they allus told me thuh artistes allus wuz & we'll make this great wide land of ours a better place to live.

Yr opening night Co-respondent, Elmer Fudd (Simon Schuchat)

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An Hardness Prompts Literature

John Wieners, BEHIND THE STATE CAPITOL OR CINCINNATI PIKE, The Good Gay Poets, Box 277 Astor Sta., Boston, MA 02123, 1975, \$4.95 paper

Additional quotes from: ACE OF PENTACLES, James F. Carr & Robert A. Wilson, 1964; ASYLUM POEMS, Angel Hair Books, 1969; NERVES, Cape Goliard/Grossman, 1970; The Lanterns Along The Wall, Other Publications, 1972; WOMAN, The Institute of Further Studies, 1972.

John has lived behind the state capitol, on Beacon Hill, for three years. The writing in this book covers that period, and reaches back into notebooks and magazines in his apartment to locate work which continues to contribute to the present fabric. The title page contains this list: "Cinema decoupages; verses, abbreviated prose insights." The decoupages were constructed by John of pieces taken from magazines and tabloids; there are also photos and parts of photos reproduced. The prose works are about movies, movie stars and celebrities, John's childhood and family, his youth, Charles Olson, murders in New York, gay attitudes, monied people and money, madness and incarceration, political power, his travels.

The first poem sets a tone of hopelessness, the mind clogged with volumes of memory always there. It is difficult for the poet to survive the world dominated by reason; the mass of memory does not permit reason, or it blots it out. He says, "Sort of Greek canapes color my memories." Pieces of memory obscured by crackers! His memories have been "naimed occasionally", broken into by sadness or guilt, any thing contributing pain to any memory. He said in The Lanterns Along The Wall "that each man does have his own language, particular to himself." That language cripples as it perfects. The poet finds himself broken in his life; he cracks the language to get through.

Sensations clean the mind of will. Recalled sensations--bits of reading, incident, feeling--are permitted as poetry to reenter the poet's life, after regaining his attention. Through the poetry, to perhaps get more to the present; getting possibility without, simply, repetitions.

Poetry comes out of the body. It is a sexual thing, something the poet spends years learning to erect. It is his passion. As such a force "it isn't always what one says as content in his work" that matters. For John what finally matters is a quality of diction, language never as refuge, always performance into and out from the poet, publicizing the ego.

The book is autobiographical in two ways: it strenuously keeps record of the poet's emotional

life, and it reflects the emotional life of the state. He sometimes thinks through the mind of the wealthy and famous, also through memories of a poor classless life. The wealthy and famous and powerful are objects of fascination, as they are a magnet to the poor, but they are also objects of scorn. "Enforced biography serves as a boon, respect in terms or regard that youth, in the future, who speaks without knowing." His main intent is not to be a conscience; he takes it as responsibility to leave personal record so others will speak from more than their own knowledge.

Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Billie Holiday Alida Valli Barbara Hutton Lana Turner Marilyn Monroe Mata Hari Jennifer Jones. There are persons that recur; voices from which he addresses repeatedly. THE ACE OF PENTACLES (1964) was dedicated FOR THE VOICES. In WOMAN he says, "Wealthy born, I aspire to Marlene Dietrich, Judy Garland, Garbo and Lana Turner, all multi-millionaires and male-oriented." Also: Benjamin "Bugsy" Seigel John Giorno Robert Creeley Charles Olson Allen Ginsberg Frank Sinatra Elizabeth Monroe Barbara Stanwyck Dante Greta Garbo Simone de Beauvoir Bette Davis Joan Crawford Virginia Valli Ailsa Mellon Bruce Françoise Sagan Virgil Saint Bernadette Marlene Dietrich Blessed Virgin.

Texts he mentions are also a sketch of the scape of his mind: Enquirer; Whitman's poems to MANHATTAN; The National Examiner; "After the Pleasure Party" by Herman Melville; A Curriculum of the Soul, WOMAN, Fascicle Three; Time; The Spy Who Came In From the Cold; The Looking Glass War; ANONYMOUS DIARY OF A NEW YORK YOUTH; Vogue; Across the River and Into the Trees; To Have and Have Not; Les Pavillions.

And, to accompany the stars, some movies; The Miracle of the Bells, The White Mountain, Third Man, Weep No More, Sweet Bird of Youth, Cass Timberlane, Jonny Eager, The postman Always Rings Twice, A King's Story, The Two Ms. Carroll's, Mr. Skeffington, If I Die Before I Wake, Flamingo Road, The Flower Thief, Queen Sheba Meets The Atom Man.

The movie writing is sometimes camp (he calls Barbara Hutton, "Babs"). In places, mingled with language that jumps hectically from angle to angle, it produces a zany and laughable humor, particularly when John gives a reading.

The most sustained work of camp has Greta Garbo interviewed by Simone de Beauvoir. It ends:

GG: I dunno. It's gone beyond.

SdeB: Desire? (A long, as usual awkward pause, generated by the unmentioned escort reimburses the tacking of these relations.) S O B E R, H A Rried and T-continent.

GG: Fruitlessly.

SdeB: You've been too kind. Over simplifications aligns aspersion, a good jostling now and again never hurts anyone. I receive first hand how you've gone shopping incessantly around Town in two years of all the things bought, which do you favor? or prefer? Consider post-operation four

GG: Automobiles, Tens, a Sunny afternoon, hostess.

These famed people get to be a little tacky. It's a form of criticism also, part of the poet's world; his attention breaks fragments from these personalities, and the result is funny.

Even reflected from the lives of others, his attitude returns to himself. His article about Lana Turner, A LIVING LEGEND'S INTIMATE MEMOIRS, is as accurate about himself: "Lana Turner today is not the Lana Turner of yesterday. Still beautiful, yes but very much her own woman, in control of her own life." or "Mine has been called a Cinderella story, but to me it's destiny." He is serious about it.

About forty pieces of John's decoupage, including cover and frontispiece, stand with the writing. These are details of attention; there were images around the house that demanded control.

Half are photos or clippings torn to a valued isolation. He gets rid of waste space; focuses. One is cropped so just nose to chin of a woman remains, attention forced on the smiling mouth, the row of teeth. He gets rid of all but the major form, its details thus amplified.

The others involve collage. We see evidence of folding and tearing, pieces are overlaid, and tape has been used. In the collaging, nothing is distorted, but things are partly hidden.

In the preface to Selected Poems he wrote "Visual order obeys gravity, but genuine shimmering substance cognates more than complacencies of common worth."

The images are mostly from media, some from books, where the images were accompanied by much that distracted; the first premise is to reduce to what holds attention, a small mass of visual fact. The original subject is made visually striking, by being isolated or by being combined with other images.

The frontispiece is composed of John's highschool photo with snaps of Lana Turner, and scraps of writing, over it. The poet sees through, and is speaking from behind, some other person. He absorbs their language, the facts of their lives and, in the decoupage, images of them. The page-size collages and photos are of women, or of gay men. One has prominent headline words: MR. FLOOD'S PARTY Watergaters TRANSVESTITE Bikini. Where legs protruded from pantys, John put a low table so its legs come out of the bikini briefs. By making it over, the collages criticize the world.

The decoupage is evidence of his thinking-writing method. It is a force back of some texts, having served as visual stimulus and support of the writing. It is a way to make visual, exterior, the mind. The writing is mostly for the ears; his decoupage goes to the eye, stops bluntly then stays as residue in the mind, where the words are also a kind of visual residue. The collages provide visual sense of the way he cuts up words and memories and texts, to produce the writing. By the "soundless permeation of madness upon sanity" the mind is broken open and fragments are kept as desirable, as poems, language kept as collage also. It reminds slightly of surrealist-dada techniques of automatic writing or the cut-up of prior texts. But the language remains subjective, sensual, the strong lyrical push and voice through the words.

He quotes the idea that "one perception must directly lead / to another!" That is his practice, pushing the perceptions, hether present as memory or insight or image, closer together. He brings together phrases which would usually be separated by pieces of language supposed to connect them. The language is made present without being asserted in the usual senses. There is no room left for argument. There would seem to be room only for understanding or misunderstanding, for apprehension or ignorance. But his cutting technique dissolves the question of a split between understanding and misunderstanding; licence is granted by implication that each reader cuts further, as reading inevitably modifies and re-creates. This makes any reader, this reviewer for instance, reluctant to insist in any passage on any one meaning, where it does exist, is always beside the point of language and captured intent.

Y O U R S T O T A K E

There's a certain type of men
born to suffer as women
the worst kind
who never marry and play around

with their own kind. Murderers
no, although as journeymen, taskmasters they themselves
have been slain by women.
Somehow, in the loneliness bottleneck they get back

Who can say, what committed
this antagonism. It's the women
who have struck out in their suffering.

Bitter to get caught behind
their attack. Mourning we go moribund
with such offense. Enjoying them

up to a point, but it's men who
maintain release for a degree,
who can know, it's too soon

to say

"It's the women who have struck out in their suffering. Bitter to get caught behind their attack." Does this mean: women have somehow failed in their suffering, it makes the poet bitter to bear their attack; or, women have gone out ahead in suffering, it's too bad to get left behind the force of their attack? My interpretation: women are blamed for destroying some men, for making them suffer as women. But the language permits meaning beyond the ones I suggest. A piece of language is cherished because occasionally it can mean more than one thing at a time. Often we can't make a literal interpretation of the writing. The language reaches in more than that one direction. On some things it settles more strongly, for longer, but the grasping is primary attribute. The poet may have felt himself to be speaking a thing; we don't experience that thing, we experience the poet speaking it. With the poet through physical and metaphysical and political (metro-physical) concerns, we see each thing he touches toward, and must judge from the language the strength of each attachment or contact.

While cutting into memories, the words and phrases also get severed. He distorts spellings to gain additional meaning, or to gain a sound parallel to particular meaning in the mind. He also cuts words at the line end without hyphen, and uses parts of words left after cutting (for instance SSIS, from ONASSIS), to suggest earlier meaning already in the mind; the cut word seen after tearing it on the page in collaging, or after cutting in his mind. He controls our reading of the words, the speed of our apprehension, and he gains emphasis, by stretching words out on the page, running them together, varying the distribution of capitals (part of the word in caps, part small), and by putting part of a word vertically down the margin then ending it on the usual horizontal line. Many of these changes preserve qualities of speech: speed or hesitation, sloppy and graceful movements, awkwardness or surety, sadness or humor.

Some typing errors were preserved in the text; and when the forms of some works were altered in setting the book, John left them as changed. Some alterations buried, in the body of the language, the feminine endings of lines. He holds that the inspiration of the writing is principal and should survive beyond formal consideration. Errors are a sign of human activity, perhaps inspiring trust and sympathy, instead of misunderstanding or derision.

Collage language uses the plastic fluid quality of language, which the poet solidifies only briefly, line to line. As collage method breaks both verse and prose, it breaks distinctions between the forms. "Prick any literary dichotomy", with the result he ignores or eradicates barriers, he locates through his mind the lesions that exist in all minds.

John was developing aspects of collage language before this book. Clogged, solid diction is already evident, for example from W W written 1967, "Two splits of casino libation husband? retrieve one midnight Essex." This language the poet has worked so the reader must. He also split words for effect, "under what insult / account with drawn / on sorrow's bank"; he constructed new words and, therefore, new meaning, "the absolute inde- / prudence of youth"; he composed complex images of pieces that don't quite connect but can be made to in the mind, "much in the same manner of industrial complexes / covering the rising cigarettes of patriots." He broke the language to locate some new thing; he found it in the breaking and preserved it in the writing.

The writing is often difficult. Particularly the newer poems must be taken a line at a time if the reader wants to understand. The lines do not always follow one to the next, but there is a cumulative sense, and this sensibility is grasped if each unit of understanding (line, phrase, piece of phrase, cut word, paragraph, whatever) is taken and placed among the rest, exactly as the poet has given them. In THE WINDOWS, in Ace of Pentacles, John writes of Apollinaire's poem that he sees "each line in his poem as a poem, entire to itself, a sound and an end in itself, without periods. There are no connections. And yet, look how each one of us is hooked."

It all coheres in some fashion in the mind; why not have it cohere, without change, outside the mind too. This often leaves the words raw, difficult as memory is to contain or make sense of. He says "over simplification aligns aspersion"; things placed too simply, injure, by being much less than adequate, by hardly even tending to approach the complex difficulty.

Composition proves: FALLOW verbs, projective grammatical syntax and an opposition both of cosmic generosity to timidity of an original sort, leave a course, diffi-

cult to pilot. This book in its writing is the record of one, stylized and self-conscious, it behoves to haphazard twinkling bushes on the phosphorence, and sore throats.

The beacon is solid and twinkling, but it requires work to get there.

An hardness prompts literature, unspoken terms of forfeiting daily routine, to surrender never in the face from derangement. I know men work for statement, avowal as well -- predictable to hospitalize various qualities, commodities upon the counters of literary mountings. Maybe two men realize society more fully. These terms consistently re-occur in annals of eternal KULTUR. A definite respect out words from patriarchal legacy.

His method produces beautiful verses and amazing prose; at points he comes out of the difficult, almost vague, masses of language, to a clear statement about (say) city government. He leaves the effect of a voice rushing over itself to some conclusion which is reached only in the activity, which we only partially approach. From John's point of view, the difficulty is perhaps a defense.

Reading then rereading the work, you can feel where the language has been folded and torn. Each word holds a small amount of a certain emotion, in its use; when it is set on the paper, or taken up, the feeling is let out. And when the words are torn, or torn from each other, or handled vigorously, a larger volume of the feeling is radiated. (Alan Davies)

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BOOKS: Sitting Frog, ed. by Rachel Peters & Eero Ruuttila, Blackberry Press, Box 186, Brunswick, Maine 04011. . . Tom Raworth, Logbook, Poltroon Press, 2315 Carleton St, Berkeley, CA 94704 (\$15) and The Mask, same address (\$5). . . Ferry Press, 177 Green Lane, London SE9, Eng has a special \$1 offer on books by Ackroyd, Bland, Chaloner, Jonas, Riley, Temple, Warsh, & Wayte. Write! . . . Two Hands News (Newsletter), 1125 W. Webster, Chicago, Ill 60614. . . From Cherry Valley NY 13320: Joshua Norton, The Blue and The Gray (\$2), Mary Beach, Electric Banana (\$1.50), and Claude Pelieu, Coca Neon / Polaroid Rainbow. . . From Black Sparrow, Fielding Dawson, The Man Who Changed Overnight and Other Stories (\$4) and Mohammed Mrabet, Look & Move On (\$4). . . Bruce Andrews, Vowels. O Press. c/o Lally, 138 Sullivan St, NYC 10012 (\$2). . . Rose Lesniak, 76 Sexuality, 5548 N. Sawyer, Chicago, Ill. 60625 (\$1).

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Theatre Genesis presents the Ouena Company in Blue Heaven & Technocracy, May 2 thru May 23. Thurs - Sun 8:30 pm at St. Mark's Church. For info 533-4650.

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LETTERS HOME (Sylvia Plath) Harper & Row \$12.50

That most of these letters were written to her mother naturally tempers what is transmitted. The mother-daughter thing is much too complicated to be ignored. However they do confirm what was already known: 1) she worked arduously, 2) was highly motivated toward recognition and monetary success and 3) had a low tolerance for disappointment. Having found Ted Hughes was an end-all. She wanted to believe in Prince Charming and living happily ever after even when she wasn't. She often bit off more than she could chew and then suffered deep depression, illness, fatigue. Happinesses expressed were colored by knowledge of her eventual suicide. Obviously this book is a "must" for anyone caught up in Plath. A cultural phenomena she is - a great poet I doubt. What she might have been is up for grabs. Unfortunately this book (compiled by her mother, pruned by Ted Hughes) rarely transcends magazine prose and does nothing to clarify the issue. (Verlaine Boyd)

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ALL THIS EVERY DAY by Joanne Kyger (Big Sky Books)

Joanne Kyger can leap from a universal identification with the romantic, and of the romantic, to the particulars of the specific person in ordinary time and space with the grace of an Olga Korbut. Plus her work has incredible integrity. She short circuits the self-consciousness of the performer or entertainer in the poet (though her work is "entertaining" in the best sense, and she does "perform" in it) to get at the secret contradictions in being in, not just of, "this time and that place."

"Enough to have all this happening or none of this happening / I tell you sometimes I wish my body / I mean I hate it when I get tired / Like I like to see th whole world and the universe / and heaven and all human beings from before now / and forever more, and Everything all at once at / every single instance that never stopped or ever began, / Did I say it all? I mean there is nothing that is or isn't / and outside of that too, / and underside also / that I'm not. / All of it, all of it. / That's why I want to go downtown tonight. Just in case. / But first I'm going to take a shower and wash my hair. / Then I'll see what happens."

As has been pointed out by other poets too, she sure knows how to handle, work, vowels!
This is a tough, sexy, successful book. (Michael Lally)

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COUNTRY PLEASURES John Gill Crossing Press, Arumansburg, NY \$4.95 PB

Gill's poetry is a successful grafting of rural imagery onto city roots. One senses he moved TO the country, not away from the city: "He saw two fat blackbirds sitting in a pine tree/ like smug shopkeepers in their shop," or "a male pheasant skitters through deep falling snow... with whom will he eat?" He talks of death, "and those tiny bones/on a nest of pine needles/ deep in the evergreens/where the sun never comes;" of his dying mother, "and what she's given are strokes/so indelible and patient;" of the land's history, "great fires were built to clear the fields/then stumps were pulled like rotten teeth;" of radishes, frogs, lusty old men, murderers, his wife and of a neighbor, "He embraced a stone once/loved its stony smoothness/ its non-life so cold to the touch/what agonies of indecision and of fire/held him I don't know/ but I listen when he talks/his talk so full of emptiness/as if he'd crackt the stone/and climb- ed in to sleep/his arms around the whole world." It took three readings for COUNTRY PLEASURES to crack my city resistance but it happened on the A train during evening rush hour.
(Verlaine Boyd)

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MISC: See May ish of Ms (with Louise Lasser on cover) for Ron Padgett article on Poetry in the Schools. . . May 1 - 28, Fairfield Porter, His Last Works 1974-75, Hirschl & Adler, 21 E. 67 St. . . May 2 - mid June, "A Celebration of Life Below 14th St," fotos from 1946 - 76 selected by Ed. Baynard, Floating Foundation of Photography, 79th St Boat Basin, weekends only. . . Women-in-Writing Conference, Aug 7-8, 1976 for info Hannelore Hahn, 1628 York Ave, NYC 10028, (212) 737-7536.

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SONNET

I dont like to mess with inspiration
memory
across the radio
each time Spring breaks our heart breaks
open again for business
and in this way word follows word
a chorus of Hollywood magic
voices tell me
too high to hear
but I'm not nasty
I'm nice guy receptive
so all good things come to pass
everyone knows I cant resist a lovely ass
and nobody dies of it

Michael Lally

THE POETRY PROJECT
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First Class Mail