

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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

This is the last Newsletter until Oct. The deadline for all Newsletter material is the 15th of the month for the month following. I would like to thank all the Poetry Project staff particularly Rochelle Kraut. And of course CCLM & NYSC on A for partial grants. The Poetry Project itself is running into financial problems and any ideas for raising money, please forward. Anyway, we will have summer programs. The Monday night readings and performances are July 5th Open Reading, July 12 Bruce Andrews & Michael Newman, July 19 A play by Bob Holman and Bob Rosenthal Bicentennial Suicide, July 26 Paul Brown & Terry Swanson. Beginning Wed July 14 and continuing through July & Aug, Ted Berrigan will teach a poetry workshop (8pm).

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READINGS: Check your favorite listing for summer programs. At Sobossek's 3rd Ave near 6th always open reading at 8pm Thurs, indiv poets read 10 pm (info Neil Hackman 260-1677). July 1 Charlotte Carter & Terry Swenson, July 8 June Jordon & Sara Miles, July 15 Susan Howe & Ray DiPalma, July 22 Yuki Hartman, Maggie Dubris & Rachael Lee Walling, July 29 Constance DeJong & Hannah Weiner, Aug 5 Simon Schuchat & Regina Beck.

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ANNE WALDMAN: MYRIAD WOMAN, Part 2

(Space considerations have forced the Newsletter to edit the number of quoted sections in this second part. The ready availability of most of the works should make up for this -- we hope not rude -- editing. T.G.)

Life Notes, published in 1973 by Bobbs-Merrill, contains poems written between 1971-1973. As I have said, many have observed a deepening of the tragic sense in this volume. Like the author, I feel, however, that there is a strong continuity in theme and style between this book and the earlier books, There is humor, there is joie de vivre, there are the amazing lists, there is the same power to evoke ordinary experience. Love is still a prominent theme, as in "In Spanish" (p. 26).

The long title poem (pp. 34-72) reveals a sensitivity to man in the midst of nature not so apparent in the earlier work.

Man is Alone
but he has nature around him

&

if he doesn't
he's through (p. 51)

Another new note sounded is a deepening sense of time and of the past:

I was trying to remember coming up for air 6 years ago
when another wave knocked me clear across my past
& back again. (p. 14)

The celebrated poem "Pressure" (pp. 3-10), with its repeated refrain "no way out", has been hailed by many as the manifesto of a new angst in Waldman's work. It is, however, one of her characteristic lists, in which a great range of images jostle each other, the everyday competing with the remote.

The poem in Life Notes which strikes a really bitter note is "Holy City" (pp. 112-113). A feeling of cosmic aloneness contrasts with the frustrations of everyday life. Life in NYC is now presented as the nightmare it sometimes becomes. The poem ends on a tone of tragic awareness.

Fast Speaking Woman contains poems written between 1973-1975. It plumbs poetic depths less evident in the earlier work, particularly in the long title poem, Waldman's most important poem to date. My page references in this essay are taken from a xerox of the original manuscript.

Union with all beings is sought in "Battery" (p. 21). "Musical Garden" (pp. 27-29) is a list of things the author cannot give up for the New Year; the tone is anguished.

"Light & Shadow" (pp. 34-39) is a list of things touched by light and shadow. The images are sometimes literal, as in the earlier poems, but much more often metaphorical. Much is drawn from travel, real or imagined; and many historical heroes are evoked. The range of associations is as broad as ever, but the context has deepened and poets from a former time make their appearance.

In "Fast Speaking Woman" (pp. 1-18) Waldman spreads her wings. The form of the poem is one of her characteristic lists, but magic and the worlds above and below are the substance. It was begun in South America, continued in NYC and later in India, and keeps growing. It is intended to be read aloud. In the poet's own words:

"Fast Speaking Woman" indebted to the Mazatec Indian Shamaness in Mexico guiding persons in magic mushroom ceremony & is a reworking & coincidence of same for all wandering spirits.

At all times, however, the poet is speaking as well as the shamaness, their identities merged in one myriad woman. The form, best comprehended when read aloud, transcends the list to become an incantation. Throughout the poem, with some variations, run two repeated refrains of great beauty:

water that cleans
flowers that clean
water that cleans as I go

that's how it looks when you go to heaven
they say it's like softness there
they say it's like day
they say it's like dew

In a few short years AW has covered the whole range of poetry; beginning with what is most familiar, she has advanced to what is most profound. From an incomparably fresh account of the daily life of a young poet in NYC, she has proceeded to an exploration of the extra-terrestrial worlds of magic and the life of the spirit. She is indeed a myriad woman.

(Lita Hornick)

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EDWIN DENBY: COLLECTED POEMS

I have these disordered notes about Edwin Denby's COLLECTED POEMS all over my maroon notebook with the two thin gold stripes, one thing I don't want to do is systematize them in any way.

Poets can't write criticism because what they understand about a poet they adore is what they themselves do or would, it is visceral--death to analyze? critics can't write criticism because they never are knowing. Phil Ochs committed suicide yesterday, he was a singer, artist, of civilization

Nearer, merer and slower, fear is before
Always, dear always is, fear increases more

More civilization people make for fun; few
Are anxious for it; though evil is immense
The way it comes and goes makes jokes; about love
Everybody laughs, laughs that there is enough

So much imagination that it does hurt
("Snoring in New York--An Elegy")

Everything hurts; evil unfashionable word is immense; where is the love? In the perfect works of Edwin Denby, partly, whose life is dedicated to being civilized; his works are themselves, they are beauties, companions, masterpieces, artifices, designs; they have moral urgency; and one must try to write this piece. For Edwin Denby survives, his works in this volume show themselves increasingly "mild" and masterful.

I think perhaps I'm like inside one of Edwin Denby's sonnets right now
in this room it's night
but the walls are white and the bulbs 200 watt to see, a baby not cat tugs, works on wall are friends and friends' works, a now getting worndown terror-anxiety in stomach, Katie and Madonna and Coleus and that newspaper Obit. one gives them overlapping attentions, one is one, by the way, the way one's in; friends were seen earlier and the day's weather could hold us and the April green trees and itself equally and as one and as now this one now that one. My room contains all this. You'd think it a square or a rectangle then realize you can't say its shape exactly, a wall slides into an extra little wall--I'd say it has 4 walls but the ceiling has 5 sides--except where the defunct fireplace oh dear. We know it's a room, it has 14 (13?) lines after all, and quatrains of planes, how many planes can a quatrain? the 4-lines defined by rhymes and the syntax somehow progressing sliding further down the poem like a square become contained in a rectangle in a rectangle (there are possible divisions down the middle). Planes are taking off and landing.

Writing poems, an employee
I lived here at nineteen, who I?
Current boys nineteen, their beauty
Of skin, all I can recognize
On this passport, soft vague boy's smile
Recalls few facts, does, his horror
Scale's abyss, void becoming real
A heart's force, he was going mad
Which I?--surviving forty years
Schizophrenia of a goof
I remember his savage tears
The kind reproof, kind reproof
Vague-faced boy, he faced what was it?
A white old man, approved, I sit

(p. 139)

In his introduction to THE COLLECTED POEMS OF FRANK O'HARA John Ashbery speaks of O'Hara's "freedom of poetic expression which, together with other attempts at technical (Charles Olson) and psychological (Allen Ginsberg) liberation, has opened up poetry for today's generation of younger poets." It was, I believe, contact with Edwin Denby's later sonnets which broke the ice for me psychologically; and psychological liberation could only be technical liberation--syntactical freedoms in particular which mysteriously enabled me to say myself. Interesting

how syntax frees one's psyche into being specific about oneself, an experience, the inner and outer world of the person; into new shapes of words, new joinings--and the joinings are true and poetry. To be female about it, it was Edwin Denby rather than O'Hara or William Carlos Williams who made me conscious of the most domestic and mundane elements of my day, their possibilities in the poem: in Denby's form any thing or event or detail is as dense as it is, and combines into the giving however deep and expansive.

Awakening, look into sweet
Beast eyes, nightmare dispelled, cheerful
I feed cats, me, do chores; the great
Day waits then for heroism
Exhausted, I get myself out
Store, gallery, chat, have coffee
Heroes, heroines abound; hope
Who trusts it, but it's contagious
Back upstairs, poetry I try
Alive by chance, civilian I
Chance roommates, you cats and roaches
You have cultures purer than mine
Of yours I shelter the success
And at mine's failure don't repine (p 153)

I've been re-reading the second group of sonnets from IN PUBLIC IN PRIVATE ("A Sonnet Sequence") actually to try to discover if they were too despairing to be born (it had been so suggested to me), and have experienced something of another liberation. As if I were too young for them before but now have need to compare experience with them, whose artistry is also undeniable and comforting: the tightness of Edwin Denby's form demands absolutely accurate (to the experience) selection. The sonnets of the second sequence are totally self-absorbed because self-absorption, painful and near-constant self-knowledge, which makes for self divided, is their subject matter. Many seem like incredible swollen sculptures, existing, finally, objectively in space--not simmering in the soup even if that's what they're about. The sequence of the poems seems very important; the "person" becomes progressively more objective about this experience of loving and hating other and self--the poems perhaps more masterful machines--Denby masterpieces creep in, e.g. the "Whistler's Mother" sonnet and "Thin air I breathe..."--and in the last he is anonymous, there is no I, a realizing by him and us that this was everyone

So a million people are a public secret
(As night is a quieter portion of the day)
These are their private lives tearing down the street
Stepping past mouldings and past 'Special Today.'

Running they see each other without looking,
Love has not stopped, has not started by fucking.

What the self does to itself life makes it do, what is called "loss of innocence" is inauguration into self-torture as well as anything else, which is part of assuming the weight of the world's evil, since one is of the world. Through being repulsed by a specific lust say, through "So much imagination that it does hurt." Imagination shames, too, and horrifies.

As I cracked a pane I thought how I would like it
If I were cracking the convex pane of your eye (6)

The last 2 lines of that particular sonnet:

Horror that's held in the tidbit of an eye
And these disjointed thoughts, love will deny.

One is saved by love (regardless of the double edge of those lines), a sort of savagery a nour-

ishing by being insulted by "the human part" in nature (9), pride and punning wit (art)

Proud of this world, eyes look at it and shut
Holding the vast inside firm as a nut (9)

and dailiness "what an man naturally does, as I mostly had" (12).

It's common to be weird but not weird to be common. We are all partly our own peculiar imaginations. Or, file everything under "human".

I think it's when, going through COLLECTED POEMS chronologically, I get to MEDITERRANEAN CITIES that Edwin Denby really seems about the most avant-garde poet ever. The sonnet spaces (e.g. between quatrains) have closed, typographically; each word is very thick the words clustery on the page densely as a city. Rhymes become echo whispers: kisses/hot/possessing/begot/fingers/proud/tingle/bed/olives/dome/seethes/untamed/plain/blaze: the end rhymes of "Florence". The way words fit together is shifting

That male in their joint green dusk yield Rome the odds ("Trastavere")

or

Ravenna of fleets, silent above the cows
A turnip plain and stagnant houses floats
Exultance of sailor hymns, virginal vows; ("Ravenna")

In "Via Appia"

And freaking the grass undercut heaps of brick
Turdlike shapes of fungoid, that are tombs by name

a word like "turdlike" has no shock value, is a word, an exactly descriptive word, among equals. Through the obscurity one hears the American

Cold poor town, more beasts live in it than people
Was their joke as the young priest showed us paintings
Who when I urged a hot-water bottle giggled
And took us to the cafe where all was wanting

This piling up of clauses each containing its own anecdote and you have to pause a moment to think who or what was previous to the present referent, reminds me of me telling a story; and also, say, of Gertrude Stein writing in the voice of Alice B. Toklas.

I've become rather obsessed with the personifications in MEDITERRANEAN CITIES. Cities of course are traditionally "she's", so the second sonnet (the first after the dedication) with this beautiful line opens: "She opens with the gondola's floated gloze"; she is Venice (and "gloze" is shiny scum on the water, is an archaic word meaning "flattery or deceit", and as a verb means "to shine", as you can hear. Wonderful!) The Acropolis and the island Delos are also she's, in "Olevano Romano" Spring is a she; though Sicily "Lifts to a father's mouth lips opening in caressed sleep" ("Taormina"), and in "Paestum" the sea is the he Poseidon. There are also Mary's and Jesus's in these sonnets. Gods in nature ancient gods of the Mediterranean, which is Catholic territory "Returning with the night into primeval realms" ("Trastavere"). I looked up "personification" in A DICTIONARY OF POETRY AND POETICS (editors? I've gotten the book hopelessly lost): "a means of taking hold of things which appear startlingly uncontrollable and independent...according to a theory now current...personifications replace mythical figures when rational attitudes supercede the primitive imagination. This theory had an ancient presentation in the Stoic doctrine that abstractions in the form of personifications express demonic force." Abstractions are not involved here but demonic forces are, both ways, daemonic and demonic (as expressed in a later sonnet "Landscape threatens, no matter which/ Caveman's

faith"), and holiness.

On her picture, comes forward like a heaved bell
The fat pearly Son frowning into the surf-beats
Of my heart, till where an overwhelmable shore lies
Cities, in almond-blossoming foam, deep-sea selves rise ("Siena")

At a palm, cleft-suckled, a god he first came
Who hurts and heals unlike love, and whom I fear;
Will he return here? ("Delos")

MEDITERRANEAN CITIES are the poems of a religious person--in "Snoring In New York--An Elegy" Denby calls himself "white-haired, ferrety, feminine, religious"--a religious person who despairs (a sin), which despair he would resolve in the mildness of art. Such a sensibility seems to need a form like the sonnet to keep his equanimity--one acutely sensitive to every syntactical and verbal (and every) ambiguity and possibility, loves to see words shift between opacities and lucidities--without sonnet or stanza form might go on endlessly the product unencompassable, uncivilized, useless.

And now how can one ever thank Edwin Denby enough for writing those works called LATER SONNETS? His perfect ear to street and livingroom, head and psyche has produced a group of endlessly ponderable masterpieces in a language a mix of everything current, old--like when we wish we could get it all in like the Shakespeare of the plays.

Inattentively fortunate
Have been pausing at lunchcounters
While what I most like, art that's great
Has been being painted upstairs
No homebuilder, even goofy
To virtue have been close as that
It I love and New York's beauty
Both have nodded my way, up the street
At fifteen maybe believed the world
Would turn out so honorable
So much like what poetry told
Heartbreak and heross of fable
And so it did; close enough; the
Djin gave it, disappeared laughing (p 154)

Edwin Denby, COLLECTED POEMS, Full Court Press, 1975.

(Alice Notley)

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BOOKS MAGS ETC: Open Window, Spring 1976 (Paul Schneeman & Vincent Katz, ed.) no address, no price, amazing! get one...From Sun Books, 456 Riverside Dr, NY 10027: Ron Padgett, Toujours l'amour (\$2.95), Phillip Lopate, The Eyes Don't Always Want To Stay Open (\$2.50) and The Daily Round (\$2.95), Michael O'Brien, Blue Springs (\$2.95)...The 432 Review #1, Simon Schuchat, Box 1030, Peter Stuyvesant Sta, NYC 10009, \$1...From Four Seasons Foundation, PO Box 159, Bolinas, CA 94924, Philip Whalen, The Kindness of Strangers (\$3) and Lew Welch, Selected Poems (\$2.75)...From Sand Dollar, 650 Colusa, Berkeley, CA 94707, Leslie Scalapino, The Woman Who Could Read The Minds of Dogs (\$3.25) & Theodore Enslin, The July Book (\$3.50)...Credences #3, 150 South Mantua St, Kent, Ohio 44240 (\$8 for 3 issues)...Brilliant Corners, #3, c/o Art Lange, 1372 W. Estes #2N, Chgo, Ill 60626.

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BICENTENNIAL SPECIAL: Independence was voted on July 2, 1776. The Declaration of Independence published the results of that vote on July 4, 1776. With the local bookshop approach to Amer-

ican literature for the reading pleasure of the "thousands and thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries" while watching the armada of sailing ships from foreign lands visiting our shores to sail up the Hudson on July 4, 1976, let me recommend Jorge Luis Borges, An Introduction to American Literature, Schocken (paper), 1973. Our distinguished cousin from Argentina is the friend in class who lets us see his notes (which we find puzzling), and the funny, accurate descriptions he's passed the time with between names and dates. On Emily Dickinson: "She was pretty and did not stop smiling; she sought refuge in epistolary friendships, in dialogue with members of her family, in the faithful readings of a few books -- Keats, Shakespeare, the Scriptures -- in long walks in the country accompanied by her dog, Carlo, and in the composition of brief poems, of which she was to leave about a thousand, the publication of which did not interest her. Sometimes for years at a time she never crossed the threshold of her house." (p. 42) From the brief chapter on "The Oral Poetry of the Indians": "It is probably to be regretted that the best anthology of this poetry in English, The Path on the Rainbow, edited by George Cronyn, dates from 1918, the date corresponding to the diffusion of the imagist school. The influence of this school upon the translators seems to be evident, except that we can also postulate a retrospective influence of Ezra Pound on the Indians. Be that as it may, to translate a poem is to transfer it not only to a different idiom but also to other historic circumstances and to another culture." (p. 89) And in the chapter "The Expatriates" the description of Ezra Pound gives one pause in light of the above: "It was his custom to appear in literary circles dressed like a cowboy in order to call attention to his American status. He also came armed with a whip, which he cracked every time he got off an epigram against Milton." (p. 57) Borges remarks on how many different jobs American writers usually have held before and after deciding to be writers: farmers, printers, journalists, sailors, and bricklayers, to name a few of the many. Altogether, Borges, in this fast, good, and slender read, has done a good job described us (our books) accurately if ever so briefly. (Ted Greenwald)

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BOOKS MAGS: David Drum, Facade (a bunch of poems), O Press, c/o Lally, 138 Sullivan St, NYC 10012 (\$2)...Mati #3, 5548 N. Sawyer, Chicago, Ill (\$1.50)...Bed #4, Flaming Tales of True Romance, #11-2295 West 1st Ave, Vancouver, B.C....Arthur & Kit Knight putting out poem-postcards 25¢, Box 439, California, PA 15419...Rochelle Ratner, Pirate's Song, The Jordon Davies Press, 215 Thompson St, NYC 10012 (\$3.50)...The Spirit That Moves Us (Vol 1, No 3) mmess Press, PO Box 1585, Iowa City, Iowa 52240 (\$1)...The City Moon, Vol 10, No 1, 50¢, Box 842 Canal St Sta, NYC 10013...The Works of Erje Ayden are all available at Chritopher P. Stephens, Bookseller, Inc, 325 W. 38 St, NYC 10018, always hard to find always worth finding...Hills #3, 60 Kinnaird St, Cambridge, Mass 02139 (\$1)...David Bearden, So Long At The Fair And Down At The Palomino Club, Rosace, PO Box 700, Larkspur, CA 94939.

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The Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colo. will have many poets reading and teaching among them: Whalen, di Prima, Veitch, Brownstein. Second session starts July 19th. For information write Naropa Institute, 1441 Broadway, Boulder 80302.

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Poets Theatre: Bicentennial Suicide a comedy poetry play by Bob Holman & Bob Rosenthal shooting for July 4th opening, exact time or place not known yet (watch the papers, etc.) In July will be appearing in Hyde Park, NY and Woodshole, Mass. See it Somewhere!

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Three babies born: Julien Ball Apr 20, 1976; Peter Granville-Smith Apr 29, 1976; Tofa Borregaard Apr 25, 1976. Hi, Kids!

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The Loring

"And that's that" said Ralph Bonley, watching his aunt jolt down the muddy road towards the railway station two miles away. "She's a good specimen, and the authorities ought to be pleased."

"First time I've ever assisted with the packing of a relative" grinned his partner Jack Denton. Jack was a newcomer to Birmingham and for reasons of health had decided never to wash. Ralph and he had struck up a great friendship and the pair had put their capital into a cave near Cardiff. They were doing well, and up until now had no need to sell relatives, but the presence of such a fine female specimen had proved too much. An impromptu but successful sale resulted.

Later that evening Ralph was indoors polishing a cousin when he began to hear the humming of great crowds of people out in the gardens and surrounding hills. Grabbing a flashlight he went upstairs to the front bedroom and threw open the windows. Facing the hills and directing the flashlight's beam onto his forehead he cried out into the night "Relations!"

Glen Baxter

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