

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

No. 39 Nov 1 1976

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

Take a look at our refurbished (inside and outside) church. Monday nites (8:15 PM) are Nov 1 Open Reading, Nov 8 Concert Ned Sublette, Nov 15 Sara Miles & Susie Timmons, Nov 22 Paul Kahn & John Yau, Nov 29 Tom Bowes & Robin Messing. Wednesday nites (8:30 PM) are Nov 3 Philip Lopate & Rudy Burckhardt film, Nov 10 Tony Towle & David Rosenberg, Nov 17 Frank O'Hara Memorial Reading, Nov 24 Laurie Anderson & Joan LaBarbara. Workshops (7:30 PM) are Tues Paul Violi, Thurs Bill Zavatsky, Fri Alice Notley. Thanks to CCLM and NYSCA.

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READINGS & ALL: Locale, 11 Waverly Pl., Sun 2:30 PM, Nov 7 Maureen Owen, Pat Jones, Charlotte Carter, Robin Messing (see other schedules for last-minute changes). . . Nov 13 at Kornblee Gallery, 20 W 57, Works by Glen Baster. . . Nov 1, 8 PM Columbia, Maison Francais, 560 W. 113 St & Nov 4, 4 PM, CUNY Grad Center, 33 W 42 St, Edmond Jabes reading from The Book of Questions (Rosemarie Waldrop reading English). . . Dr. Generosity, 73 St & 2nd Ave, Sat 2:30 PM, Nov 6 Nathaniel Tarn, Nov 13 Toby Olson, Nov 20 Keith Abbott & John Eskow, Nov 27 Open Reading. . . West End, Bwy & 113 St, Sun 2:30 PM, Nov 7 Richard Price & John Califano, Nov 14 Frank Lima & David Unger, Nov 21 Diane Stevenson & Marjorie Welish. . . Chumley's Bedford & Barrow, Sat 2 PM Nov 6 James Story & Jean Walling, Nov 13 Rodrigo Villegas & Sharon Thomson, Nov 20 David Ignatow & Harvey Shapiro, Nov 27 Chuck Sullivan & Burton Rosenburgh. . . Anthology Film Archive, 80 Wooster, Sun 3:30 PM, Nov 7 Carol Muske & Mark Rudman, Nov 21 Thomas Lux & James Reiss. . . Gogenschein Vaudeville Placenter, 293 7th Ave, Sun 4 PM, Nov 14 Dick Higgins, Nov 21 (9 PM) My Room, Off & On, A Play, Nov 28 Jay Clayton.

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F.T. PRINCE

We usually tend to think of rhetoric as a pernicious vice, and we also usually mistrust something written yesterday in a 300 year-old style. That is, we mistrust the academic. But we don't mistrust the rhetoric (euphuism) in Shakespeare, or the style of Spenser. The result is that it is easier to overlook the good works in that area--and we expect much more of traditional verse; Williams told Ginsberg, of G.'s imitations of Wyatt, perfection in this mode is the starting point.

F.T. Prince is an English professor of English literature at the University of Southampton. He's one of the foremost contemporary Milton scholar, although in his verse his personality seems often closer to Shelley. Most of his poems are based on received forms---his longest (& maybe greatest) is written in a "five lined stanza...suggested by Shelley's in Peter Bell the Third, so much more lively and flexible than Wordsworth's in the original Peter." That is, he's an academic poet. In my opinion he is also (along with Bunting) the finest living "English" poet.

Prince is a scholar of Renaissance literature, specifically the Renaissance in England--Wyatt, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton &c. When I first read Prince I was completely blown away by "Epistle to a Patron," the first poem in The Doors of Stone, his selected poems 1938-62. The source for the poem was a letter Da Vinci wrote while looking for work. In my mind the poem relates to the Renaissance the way The Seafarer relates to the Anglo-Saxon. The rhetoric of the poem is its great beauty. The rich, complex syntax drapes around the vocabulary and unfolds like the ladder of a fire engine through long enjambed lines, inversions, subjunctives--every trick of ornate & exuberant language Prince can come up with. The poem is in love with architecture, its own as well as the buildings it mentions: "A hundred and fifteen buildings/Less others less complete: complete, some are courts of serene stone / Some the civil structures of a war-like elegance..." (Civil structures of war-like elegance! What a

lovely oxymoron!) Since poems are buildings, as words are bricks, and the nimbus of intentionality around a poem is light, the poem is in love with language and poetry, of course: "I live by effects of light, I live/To catch it, to break it, as an orator plays off/Against each other and his theme his casual gems..." The overt text of the poem completely suits the rhetoric; the poem is a piece of flattery & begging through self-flattery & the poet, inflating (that is, elevating & expanding) himself, consequently ennobles the language he uses.

The idea of nobility is perhaps a little out-dated. But Prince can write "The Stolen Heart," the monologue of a once-courageous knight, his telling of how "the witch came to my rest,/And with her bony hand laid bare/And stole the brave heart from my breast:/She took the knight's heart beating there,/And left me another, the heart of a hare." He can write it because he enters into the conventions of the situation as naturally as Frank O'Hara entered into the conventions of a quick midtown lunch. & who gives a fuck if it was written in 1960 or 1660? The poem is as masterfully written & beautiful in effect when the spelling & punctuation are 20th century standard.

Unfortunately, the poetic wars of the 50's & 60's gave rise to the notion that it couldn't be done anymore, or that it wasn't worth doing these days. This is fine when you're talking about Wilbur or Snodgrass, but its terrible if it allows you to ignore a poet like Prince. All poets work with received forms, whether you (they) like it or not. Whitman isn't a stunning deviation from English tradition, he's the first to coalesce the American tradition & he stands firmly in a tradition of--not poetry, but public use of language which he made poetry. Or, for another example, Frank O'Hara didn't invent the action poem, he tells you that, he says Williams. (Williams, I think got it from his intensive study of Keats; "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is the chronicle of the creative act that produced it---of course Williams made it American.) But also & more importantly, these traditions, the received forms poets have to work with, are culture specific & can only be so to speak renegotiated into another culture, not carried over wholesale. Wilbur, Snodgrass & write colonial poetry---they took English forms & applied them to American culture. (Whether English & American are different languages might be argued; that they represent two different cultures is indisputable.) But Prince is an Englishman & for him to write after Shakespeare is as logical & proper as for Ginsberg to write after Whitman or Creeley to write after Dickinson.

In any case, Prince seems to be moving away from his initial style, or rather moving out from it, out & up from the density of "An Epistle for a Patron" to the clarity of Memoirs in Oxford & Drypoints of the Hasidim, the long poems which are his only poetic publications of the last 14 years. This kind of movement is traditional for a great artist, right? Lee Harwood has already had the first, obvious word on "Memoirs in Oxford;" "...it is The Prelude 1969." For over six hundred lines (a length analogous to Wordsworth's colossal effect, considering the electronic age & our limited attention span for verse) Prince sustains a serious conversational tone in 5 lined rhymed stanzas of generally four beats to the line. I have read through the poem in the last few days twice, once emphasizing the metric, once emphasizing the breath. The two readings coincide to an almost frightening extent. As with The Prelude, the subject is the growth of a poet's mind. Taking as touchstones the physical appearance of Oxford, a few photographs, & a remark of Plato's about the heavenly city, Prince has created an honest, clear & moving picture of the growth of a (poet's, but more importantly, human's) mind from a sensitive romantic isolate into a calm, self-assured & witty mensch. Harwood describes it as "a very deep and thorough memoir, also a very clear one and as near objective as anyone can be." Right.

Prince's next poem, Drypoints of the Hasidim, differs greatly from Memoirs in Oxford. The poem comes not from personal experience and English/European tradition, but from the work of Buber, Scholem & other modern scholars of Hasidim. (The Hasids were the chiliastic, ecstatic branch of European Jewry.) There are very few Hasids left & anyway Prince, lacking the Jewish education, approaches them from an oblique angle; the poem is indisputably the work of a scholar. Nonetheless, Prince is a good scholar who enters into rather than envelops his subject, & the poem doesn't read like scholarship, it just contains a lot of information. It moves with its own speed, doesn't bog down in carping & rests, "not heavily," on the beams of the various anecdotes, which are, as has been often noted, essentially the same as any tales of Buddha or the Zen Masters: it's the same cosmos. Technically speaking, here's a brief passage about a king's son who has run away from home:

'And after years
 His father sent a messenger to find him
 And be reconciled, and promise anything--
 Anything he could think of as a gift
his dearest wish.
 'And the man found him dressed in rags
with bare feet
 Dancing among the peasants; gave his message.
 And the young man wept, and said he would be happy
 'If his father were to send a pair of shoes'

This isn't metric & it isn't free verse; it is beautifully balanced verse, using syntax, punctuation, diction & the space of the page to give each word its delicate & proper weight.

Prince is equally at ease with thick, ornate language & with the clear bright light of plain speech "lovingly" ordered. I cannot see how anyone could fail to be impressed by his poems, if not fall hopelessly in love with them. His influence, especially in America, has been negligible in terms of numbers but considering the specific poets affected by him-- O'Hara, Berrigan, Ashbery, Notley--it must be taken as considerable in terms of quality. He is a master of English verse and the English language, deserves wider recognition, and I mean by this everyone should read his poems. At present all this is easily available in a selection in the Penguin Modern Poets (#20, with John Heath-Stubbs & Stephen Spender), although Drypoints of the Hasidim can be obtained for 65 pence from The Menard Press, 23 Fitzwarren Gardens, London N19 3TR, England. However, Sun Press will be publishing a new long poem, Some Words On Rupert Brooke, around Xmas, & there are rumors of a collected poems. Such rumors are reason to rejoice.
(Simon Schuchat)

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BOOKS ETC: The World #30, St. Mark's Poetry Project, (Anne Waldman, ed. -- This is a giant "criticism" issue with long interview with Philip Whalen, Clark Coolidge on Jaws, Bob Rosenthal on Wednesday night readings, Bernadette Mayer on Nathaniel Hawthorne, plus much more). . . Susan Howe, The Western Borders (Tuumba #2), Tumba Press, P.O. Box 1075, Willits, CA 95490, \$1. . . Michael Lally, ed. None of the Above: New Poets of the U.S.A., The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, NY 14886, \$4.95. . . From Toothpaste Press, 626 East Main St. PO Box 546, West Branch, Iowa 52358: Allan Kornblum, Threshold and Steve Levine A Blue Tongue. . . From Miracle Press, c/o E. Hartmann, 4014 Graustark, Houston, TX 77006: Bob Rogers, Sitting in the Hunger of the Sparkling Beast (\$1.50) and Evalyn Hartmann, Notes Found in the Gutter at Shepherd & Alabama. . . Eric Felderman, Garden Street, Holmgangers Press, 22 Ardith Lane, Alamo, CA 94507, \$2.95). . . Paranoids Anonymous Newsletter, 29 John St, Rm 1606, NYC 10038 (75¢). . . Big Deal #4 (Barbara Baracks, ed) PO Box 830, Peter Stuyvesant Sta, NYC 10019, (\$3).

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AT MALIBU (Poems), Tom Clark, Kulchur Foundation, 888 Park Ave., New York, NY 10021, \$7.00 ha., \$3.50 pa.

The one thing you learn real fast reading AT MALIBU is that Clark's language is uncompromising and there's never a wasted word (the pun excepted). He has Ed Sanders' breezy, vulgar tone in the decidedly Beach Boyesque California poems such as "Hot Lunch", "Beach Party", "To Kissenger", and the title poem, "At Malibu", and offers a remarkable synthesis of sci-fi and hot rod magazine jargon fused to a no-jive syntax you'd hock your little Deuce Coupe for. It's the pared down language of radio spots, rocknroll, and Jack In The Box. The kind of thing they don't teach you in school, the real American grafitti. These conditions give Tom Clark's poems a tough, sinewy feel, athletic, Spartan almost.

You big donkey made out of orlon!
 Spirochetes et yr Mom!

(from "To Kissenger")

Clark's poems are pragmatic, they make no pretense and this is the beauty of their stark qualities.

Alice Notley, in her review of AT MALIBU in Brilliant Corners #2, playfully names Clark "The worst poet in America" and she isn't far from wrong. I'm sure the many who ride the traditional trail would find his work downright "anti-poetic." His terms are culled from contemporary culture (jazzrocknroll, pro sports, science fiction, new journalism, TV, and radio) rather than the tradition of literature. On the one hand. On the other hand, Clark is the master of the sober truth in poems like "Japan", and of lingering understatement in poems like the sonnet sequence, "Suite."

The poem "Japan" is actually the crowning achievement as you near the end of this 128 page book and is dedicated to Pierre Reverdy.

You
Like Jonathan Jackson
Were a righteous dude

But the poem's style, its bob and weave down the basketball court of the mind is reminiscent of old numero uno of the Paris Cubists, none other than Bill Apollinaire. "Japan" is worthy of an essay all to itself. Like a well-edited film, it guides you to a carefully orchestrated climax and beyond.

Edited is a key word when looking at AT MALIBU (and other Clark books). Clark has an editors touch, deftly shuffling the poems into an order that makes the most of them. Starting off with a little "raunchoid deluxe", he then thumbs his nose at literature with "My Hanky":

Time to put index finger
over one nostril
and blow hard
out the other --

out comes
my gift
to the world
of literature

and goes from the world of Dixie Cup culture (the "Beach Boy" poems) to the world of pro sports with such poems as "Baseball & Classicism", "And There You Are", "Interesting Losers", "Son of Interesting Losers", and so on. The titles are slick ("To Catch A Thief", "To Pop-eye & Co."), the poems slicker ("The sandpapery candor of Bobby Dylan. . ."; "Donald Duck might like it here. . ."), and swim in a milieu of cliché. (But Clark, like "Bobby Dylan", has the knack for recycling those tired old phrases). There's also the lean and hungry imagery of the love poems ("I Was Born To Speak Your Name", "Fucking", "A Youthful 30", "Every Day") that get right to the point, no messing around.

Tom Clark's poems are alive with ambiguity and originality. They employ a truly contemporary and spoken idiom whose force is in its drive forward to where what is next is said. It is a greatly spontaneous and improvisational kind of work. The poems have a wide range of appeal and an eminently accessible surface whose success could (and should) ultimately culminate, as Tom puts it, by "having Burt Reynolds bring out a copy of my latest book/ On t the Johnny Carson Show."
(Pat Nolan)

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V.R. LANG POEMS & PLAYS WITH A MEMOIR BY ALISON LURIE, Random House. \$10.00.
CHANTING AT THE CRYSTAL SEA, Susan Howe: Fire Exit, 9 Columbus Square, Boston, Mass. 02116

Bunny Lang, a founding member of the Poet's Theatre, died in her early thirties leaving a sizeable body of poetry, two plays and a Langslide of memorabilia. Mining their freindship

with the assurance of a Leakey, Alison Lurie reconstructs out of choice anecdote and vivid description, a vital loving portrait. Dominant and ambitious, Lang at times irritated and used; but that she mostly fascinated and charmed is evident throughout the memoir. Lurie readily admits that Lang was more than she could keep up with: she had many faces (cosmetic as well as social) and costumes galore. Whether surrounded by homemade hubbub or during a bout of seclusion when extracting a play, Lang's intense presence permeates this dazzling evocation.

Lang's verse plays are her real triumph: the language is fresh, the characterization symbolic and the point still relevant. "I Too Have Lived in Arcadia" is set on an island off New Foundland where Chloris and Damon (Lang often used Greek names) go to live a simple life raising goats. Phoebe arrives, a former lover, and entices Damon, an ex-painter, back to the city to seek fame and fortune. The fourth character, Georges, a poodle, speaks mostly in French, (shades of Rosalyn Drexler?).

In "Fire Exit," a Langianized retelling of Orpheus, a famous musician (Orpheus) marries Eurydice, offering her a lifetime of lonely hotel rooms and benign neglect. Eurydice eventually flees. When Orpheus finds her she is a chorus girl in a shabby night club. Preferring this hell to the one with him, Eurydice doesn't budge when he pleads for her return. It is a longer play than "Arcadia" with a flock of characters including a cat and dog, both dead, who speak English.

While reading Lang's "Fire Exit," I received the April issue of FIRE EXIT (a monthly publication out of Boston) devoted entirely to Susan Howe's (daughter of Molly Howe, member of the Poets' Theatre, p. 25, Memoir) "Chanting at the Crystal Sea." A generation has passed since the Lang/Eurydice message and Howe exits from her room in step with Orpheus. As poets, Lang works toward the universal through specifics while Howe uses a montage of specifics to deal with the universal. At times, however, their syntax and imagery are similar:

Lang: "Our faces turned to smoke/Our eyes peeked through. Like pebbles under snow."

Howe: "I saw a woman swimming along under the ice/the language of her lips was Mute/her children learned to speak by eye/I imagined that when she lived in Eden/migrations of immense flocks of redeemers darkened the sky."

Lang: "By my dry tongue,/she learned in words that I had taught her/Fear that made me strange to her. I told her,/Sunday I'll come always, but the sea grew small,/The shore turned black, and the tide flew out in a torrent."

Howe: "O we survived
A low dark room
a crazy chair
cloud cobweb
cold as marble.
I told them fairy tales
dragon and devil.
Until I looked up and saw a pale horse
pale rider hunting earth and sky."

Lang: "Protect him from
Violation
Bogs not creep,
Bugs not come,
Burrs not fall,
Crows fly white,
Caves not cackle not beckon,
Let him keep his Three Noses
Save him from the malevolent harms of
Spiders but do neither throw him to the swans"

Lang: "Standing at the threshold of the Great Gates/by the Ice Lakes where only the cruellest children/your assassins go on skating, bright and Murderous Pique-Dame, listen."

Howe: "Warriors wait/hidden in the fierce hearts of children"

Lang wrote: "Poetry can never be much more than a commentary." A commentary is always a commentary - read Lang and Howe for much more than. (Verlaine Boyd)

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BORN ON THE FOURTH OF JULY by Ron Kovic, 208 Pages, McGraw-Hill.

A very frightening (true) first/second/third-person document-account of what it's like to be

one of those discarded young American half-body numb hulks who got the shit blown out of them over in Nam.

Kovic is obviously not a very likely literary person, his really fastpace narrative reads like he talked it all into cassettes and had a bunch of editors splice it together afterwards. On the other hand maybe just types fast. In any case I cried twice on the IND Independent subway, throw-up off my porch in Woodstock a few times, and spent alot of time wonder where the fuck I was while this man was going through all his agonies.

It's a non-stop express rocket via his real-live-and-in-the-same-room-talking-right-to-me prose beginning at the exact second all spray of machinegun bullets splash his spine, to a field hospital of blind endless screams and a priest giving him last rites soggy with horror and deaf ears, to the stateside V.A. Hospital where his shot-away body-self begins to regain consciousness amidst the whole array of zombies and ineptly run routines, to a thousand endless nights of no feeling below his chest, pissing through a tube, aching to dissolve into the softness of a woman just one time again and knowing that'll never happen ever. Just tremendous pain and plenty of vivid dreams.

Ron does a few wheelies in and out of every Mexican whorehouse he can, he battles loneliness's drunken brawls with himself, buries himself in going back to school in his wheelchair and just wanting to be invisible. But finally he does cleanse his agonized soul and becomes involved with radical shit like The Vets Against The War and gets teargassed and slowly evolves into the heaviest spokesman in that movement and appears on hundreds of tv talk shows, and goes and gives his message to lots of school kids, and brings the war back finally in the snug livingrooms of his fellow Americans. He gets punched-out by angry policemen, and thrown out of a political convention by the Secret Service and the FBI. And finally gets on national tv again, only this time because he shouted down the then-Pres Richard M. Nixon at King Creep's acceptance address that year in Miami.

The narrative of this book slashes away any facade the reader even subconsciously has erected like to cop to "War Is Bad!" or just "John Wayne sucks!" Although I hope no dick-suckers think bad of me for using that as an example.

This book will jolt you. It carries a recoil that's so unflinching with total realness that it'll stomp right into your heart and tear out the usual wiring.

"The Red Badge of Courage" was written originally, created as a fiction, to prove a point. Ron Kovic's BORN ON THE FOURTH OF JULY is that point!

The war that Kovic perceives is still on, although the Vietnam War is over as far as the Six O'Clock News is concerned. But the war here is on, it's the war on control. It's the prime struggle for our age. Do not limit your own effectiveness. Read this book, wake up America! The hard rain has already begun to fall.

(Jim Brodey)

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LITTLE REVIEW

Ron Padgett was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1942. That I think explains why Mr. Padgett is one year younger than my sister (though, Sue, I think many may still say the opposite) As a poet Mr. Padgett does not don the trunks of a heavyweight although he is not out of the metaphoric ring, Padgett is a referee between two unseen heavyweights. One represents the corner of dark swirling gyres and miserable gloom self-satisfied and absorbed in the secret knowledge of the universe. The other boxer comes out of the more finite camp of a bowl of rash strawberries swirling in milk inside a coconut. I think coconuts grow in Tulsa. The recent acquisition by the Cable Library

of Mr. Padgett's fourth grade notebooks seems to bear out the direction I'm taking; for example, "There is a dark cloud over Miss. Cumulus' head. This is the second week of our meteorology unit." and just weeks later in the young Padgett's notebook, "Nashville!" This obscure jotting throws tremendous light on Mr. Padgett's other profession as none other than Kris Kristopherson. Dear readers and country fans, if you do not believe this is true, check out the picture of Mr. Padgett (a.k.a. K.K.) on the back of his most recent collection of poems entitled Toujours l'amour. It is a wonder that the poet side of Mr. Padgett which is already subdivided between the two major themes unexpressed in his works ever finds the time to breathe between the flowering of his occupations.

But Sunday Morning Coming Down for Kris is Sunday afternoon watching the ballgame for the lanky bard and if New York wins Padgett may have composed some verse. Padgett the Poet writes!

"my mind is wonderful
so is your body"

this mostly accounts for why Padgett's poems look like poems and yet everytime one enters the safe regular poem that looks likely to purge the soul and wash the feet and eyeballs soon one discovers that Padgett gives nothing away in other words I always feel more like an idiot after I've read Mr. Padgett than before. (It must be the millions he draws as a famous entertainer that allows him to be so hard hearted and cruel in his poems) To return to the metaphor of Padgett as referee between the twain incredible forces, Padgett also seems to be the detached sports reporter wiping the ringside blood off his face.

You see in all this a man who never tries. For instance, in The Music Lesson there is not a single attempt to be funny and yet I do not have to remind myself that this is funny instead I just start laughing and then subsequently cursing like after the ten count the prone figure states, "I never saw it coming!"

What is more infuriating is the fact that Padgett has no sense of humor. His poems employ the humor of a hundred dead men

and a few who are still living, too.
This kind of laughter

(I did laugh out loud on page 46)
not only leaves one wondering, "Why wasn't I purged?"
but also removes the staging on
which this question is asked.
Mr. Padgett is the distillation of no questions
and no question marks Yea as Mr. Kristopherson
is the distillation of cowboys and pinto
beans. Not the truth of humor
but the more horrible and startling
humor of truth! Padgett
in Indian means "The Plainly Invisible".
Look to the sun Toujours l'amour.

(Bob Rosenthal)

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from STRAMBOTTI

I wish there were a passage underground
That led by magic to your house and bed,
So I could be beside you at a bound,
When I had made the journey in my head.
Then I should disappear and not be found,
And neighbors be persuaded I was dead;
But I should be with you in Paradise,
Where I could laugh, and kiss your face and eyes.

F.T. Prince

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