

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER
No. 49 1 November 1977
Frances LeFevre, editor
St. Mark's Church, 2nd Avenue
and Tenth St New York 10003

AT THE POETRY PROJECT: Wednesday Night Readings at 8:30 (contribution). Nov 2
Ed Friedman & Hannah Weiner, Nov 9 Bonnie Bremser & Janine Pommy Vega, Nov 16 Ted
Berrigan & Bob Rosenthal, Nov 23 Victor Coleman & Douglas Wolf, Nov 30 Kenward Elmslie
& Brad Gooch. Monday Night Performance Series at 8:15. Nov 7 (at 7:30) Poetry Pro-
ject Community Meeting, Nov 14 Fresh Paint (anthology) reading, Richard Bandanza,
Bob Holman, Carol Slaughter, Marjorie Welfsh, John Yau, Nov 21 James Sherry & Terry
Swanson, Nov 28 Workshop Reading. . . Danspace at 8:30 (\$3 contribution) Nov 15 & 17
Kenneth King. . . Free Writing Workshops at 7:30. Tuesdays, Jim Brodey: Thursdays,
Simon Schuchat. Fridays, Frank Lima.

ELSEWHERE: Readings: At Dr. Generosity's, 2nd Ave & 73rd St, Saturdays at 2:30 PM.
Nov 5, Nathaniel Tarn, Nov 12 Paul Zimmer, Nov 19 Joe Ceravolo & Paul Violi, Nov 26
Eric Cheyfitz & Michael Heller. . . At the Cooper Union, 51 Astor Place, NYC, Nov 2
at 8 PM, Kathleen Fraser & Honore Moore. . . At St. Clement's Church, 423 W 46th St,
NYC, Nov 7 at 8 PM, Marguerite Harris. . . At the "Y" (Lex Ave & 92nd St, NYC) Nov 14
at 8 PM Andrei Voznesensky, Nov 28, 8 PM, Nadine Gordimer & Grace Paley.

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AROUND THE EDGES

Last month's Newsletter announced the Poetry Project Community Meeting on
Monday, November 7th, at 7:30 PM in the Parish Hall. This will be the first event
of its kind, and all interested persons are urged to come.

In its eleven years the Project has gone through changes and has expanded
considerably, but its basic structure is much the same as when it began as a govern-
ment-funded experiment.

St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery has an association with the arts that goes back
at least to the 1920's, when William Guthrie, its then rector, scandalized many
proper Episcopalians by allowing dance performances there. Some actually left his
parish.

In 1966 the Office of Economic Opportunity, a federal agency, decided to set
up a pilot program--with a large grant--that would explore ways of helping dis-
advantaged persons through the arts. Lower Manhattan was chosen as the site. Since
Theatre Genesis was already established at St. Mark's and a group of poets were giv-
ing regular readings there after the Café Metro, their former spot, closed down,
Michael Allen, the rector, offered the facilities of his church. (Incidentally,
the late Paul Blackburn was intensely involved in organizing those early readings,
and he may be considered the spiritual father of the Poetry Project.) The program
was set up for a year, with St. Mark's and the New School sharing administrative
responsibility, and the old municipal courthouse at 2nd Ave and 2nd St was rented
for offices and poetry/film workshops. Readings and other activities took place
at the church. There were three divisions: Theatre Genesis, the Film Project, and
the Poetry Project. Joel Oppenheimer was made director of the Poetry Project, with
Joel Sloman as his assistant and Anne Waldman as executive secretary.

From the beginning, readings by invited poets were held on Wednesday evenings
and open readings on Monday evenings. As many as seven workshops a week were given
at times--the number varied.

The OEO grant requirements specified the production of a literary volume, and

The Journal of Silence was published. Around the same time The World, a mimeographed poetry magazine, was founded, and it proved to be a great deal more appropriate for the Project and its resources. To date there have been thirty issues and two anthologies assembled from their contents, THE WORLD ANTHOLOGY (1969) and ANOTHER WORLD (1971).

An amazing number of poets turned up to give readings, listen to them, attend workshops, help with collating and cleaning up, even do guard duty. They still turn up for these--the Project has always been an energy center. Practical ways of doing things had to be worked out. Mistakes were made. One particular notion that was tried had to be dropped in a hurry: somebody thought poets could/should type their own stencils and send them in to be mimeographed for The World; the stencils were provided, with cardboard rolls for mailing. But everything that could be done wrong was done wrong: pads were torn off, poems were inverted, the typos were endless. More serious trouble came from vandalism at the old courthouse and security problems.

The federal grant was extended for a second year, but after that things were touch and go for a while. Joel Sloman left after the first year, Joel Oppenheimer after the second; Anne Waldman became director. But there was no more money. According to her, it was only the poets' enthusiasm and energy that kept the Project going then. They could not bear to let it go, and Father Allen decided to give them a permanent home at St. Mark's. His successor, The Reverend David Garcia, has maintained the same highly productive relationship. Over the years, financial help has come from the New York State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Co-ordinating Council for Literary Magazines, several foundations, and generous individuals. But without the concern and dedication of the participating poets themselves, the Project would not have survived.

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MEMORY

The mind's made up with clouds
Blowing through the night
Where little fingers clasp the sky
Finding life between the stars

CHILDHOOD

I'm beside you in the world of before
Eyes going back to see you
Where you are now
Passing colors through your heart
Resting where I get smaller

--Jonathan Cott

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SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS: Rosco, an upstate Country/Rock band (whose members, formerly known as East Hill, played last year at St. Mark's for a Save The Dolphin benefit, has just issued its first 45" record, "Say What!" All original material. (A. Mackie, J. Perkins, B. Ulmer, C. Waldman.) \$1.00 ppd. Available from Rosco, Box 125, Cherry Valley, NY 13320. . . Michael Horovitz, English jazz-poet, is touring East Coast end of Oct, then across the continent and back East mid/late Nov eager to hear from anyone who might want him to visit/read/play/sing/rap - has new 'BIG HUGE' reunion NEW DEPARTURES & sequel to CHILDREN OF ALBION anthology under way - please write to him c/o Stansfeld, Clark Nelson, 1014 Madison Ave, NYC 10021.

Jim Brodey's Tuesday workshop will be nine sessions devoted to filling the gap between a poet's need for expression and the blank page; locating personal sources of inspirations; and building up an arsenal of inexhaustible techniques to overcome the recurring problem of "having nothing to say." Members of this workshop are urged to bring along plenty of writing materials, as most of each session is devoted to actual writing. An ongoing knowledge of current American poetics would be useful, but is not strictly a requirement. There are periodic in-class guests. Poets should be able to read their own works. This is strictly a poetry writing class, other kinds of writers be advised. Beginners as well as advanced students are welcome. . . Simon Schuchat's Thursday workshop will deal with the occasion of the poem, ie, why (in particular, not general sense) the poem is written, and the technical aspects of the question --how the form of the poem is a function of its occasion. There will be hand-outs to read, assignments to do, some in-class writing, and an exam. Poets of all levels of accomplishment, from the neophyte to those whose attainments exceed those of the leader, are welcome. Dress Warmly.

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WASHINGTON SQUARE AS OPERA

Last month the New York Lyric Opera, now in residence at New York University, presented the East Coast premiere of "Washington Square," a new work with music by Thomas Pasatieri and libretto by Kenward Elmslie. The production was highlighted by strong singing from a young, attractive cast, and engagingly naturalistic direction by David Alden. Elmslie's libretto, a masterful blending of dramatic event with lyrical moment--not to mention touches of true comedy--also casts a new light on the ambiguities of the Henry James novel of the same name, on which it is based. In the opera, Catherine Sloper, the heroine, is not consumed by the spiritual holocaust created by overbearing father and fortune-hunting lover. Instead, she triumphs through it, emerging in a brilliant last-act aria as a woman not lonely but alone, not the spinster but the survivor.

--Gerrit Henry

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FOR GERTRUDE STEIN

Gertrude Stein looked
Out of the windows
Of French museums
And went to sleep
On the long red benches
Of Italian museums.
She went on
Sleeping and dreaming
In front of the Mantegnas.
The paintings were painting themselves.

--Alexandra Anderson

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BOOKS RECEIVED: Love is a Dog from Hell by Charles Bukowski, Black Sparrow Press, Santa Barbara, CA 93105, \$14, ppbk. \$4.50. . . Time of the Playback by Marguerite Harris, Damascus Road (Series II, #6), Wescosville, Rt. #2, PA 18090, \$2.50. . . Rapid Eye Movement by Emily Leider, Bay Books, San Francisco, CA 94118, \$4. . . Continental 34s by Annabel Wood Levitt, Vehicle Editions, 238 Mott St., NYC, \$4. . . Eat Me. Drink Me by Barbara Moraff, B. Alonso, Strafford VT 05072, no price listed. . . Job Speaks by David Rosenberg (translated/interpreted from the Hebrew Book of Job), Harper & Row, New York, \$7.95. . . The Embodiment of Knowledge by William Carlos Williams, edited with introduction by Ron Loewinsohn, New Directions, New York, first ppbk. issue, \$3.75.

ANTHOLOGIES: The Actualist Anthology, edited by Morty Sklar & Darrell Gray, The Spirit That Moves Us Press, Iowa City, Iowa 32240, A. Kornblum, C. Kornblum, Hollo, Mattingly, others, cloth \$8, paper \$3.50, . . . Fresh Paint, edited by Wuki Hartman & Michael Slater with introduction by Ted Berrigan, Ailanthus Press, 200 W. 83 St, NYC 10024, \$3.95, Baracks, Dubris, Kochan, Kushner, Myles, Rosenthal, Schuchat, Welish, Yau, others. . . New Directions 35, edited by J. Laughlin, 333 Sixth Ave., NY 10014, Abish, Brownstein, Ford, McClure, Toby Olson, Schwartz, David Shapiro, Snyder, Sontag, Sorrentino, others, cloth \$12.95, paper \$3.95. . . The New Women's Theatre, 10 Plays by Contemporary Women, edited by Honor Moore, Vintage Books/Random House, NY Childress, Howe, Jacker, Kraus, Lamb, Merriam, Molinaro, Moore, Russ, Wolff, \$5.95.

MAGAZINES: The British Columbia Monthly, Vol. III, 6.7, Box 48384, Vancouver, B.C. Canada, works by Canadian writers including Victor Coleman, Duncan McNaughton, Opal Nations, \$30 for 10 issues. . . Mag City #2, edited by Scholnick, Masters, Lenhart, works by Anglada, Brodey, Friedman, Generelli, Heilner, Kallet, Lozier, Notley, Sanders, Violi, \$1. . . Two Hands News 11, Cavafy Issue, 1125 Webster, Chgo, Ill on request. . . New Wilderness Letter/The Poetry of Number, edited by Jerome Rothenberg, 365 West End Ave, NYC 10024, no price listed.

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PUBLIC ACCESS POETRY

Drama, games, documentaries, variety shows, music, films, and advertising now enter people's consciousness through television, that electric box. Now there is poetry on the tube. Public Access Poetry is aired live every Thursday on Cable TV, Channel D, at 11:00 PM.

Since last spring we have had many friends and fellow-artists on PAP: Algarin, Barg, Berrigan, Brodey, Godfrey, Holman, Lesniak, Levine, Myles, Notley, Rosenthal, Scholnick, Schuchat, Schiff, Timmons, Violi, Wright, Yau, and others. While there is no unalterable format, the usual fare is two poets reading their own work for the time allotment of half an hour. Occasionally, there are special performances such as Kushner & Friedman's "Hat Show," or a musical extravaganza by Carey & Band.

The show is slated to continue indefinitely. A video tape of individual programs is made for documentary purposes, as well as for the viewing pleasure of those not having Cable TV. Rochelle Kraut directs the camera crew. PAP is co-produced and funded by David Herz, Daniel Krakauer, Gary Lenhart, Gregory Masters, and myself. We welcome queries and comments. Write to Public Access Poetry at 270 E. 7 St., NYC 10009. --Didi Susan Dubelyew

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ALTERNATIVE ARTS ACCESS

A program on radio WBAI every Tuesday at 6:15 PM, hosted by Joe Cuomo, lists poetry readings in New York and Long Island, plus small press news such as manuscripts wanted, grants offered, contest deadlines, and other items of interest to writers.

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IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Houseboat Days by John Ashbery. New York: Viking Press, 1977. \$7.95 (simultaneous Penguin Books paperback at \$2.95).

Ted Berrigan told me that after he read Houseboat Days he wrote in his notebook "another terrifying book from John Ashbery." Two nights later I was talking with John Godfrey and he was telling me that in Houseboat Days all of Ashbery's recurring imagery, which has persisted from Some Trees to this day, like the stars and the night and whatnot, has finally resolved itself and now J.A. stands clearly before us as what he is, a great romantic poet. And Godfrey thinks the best is yet to come. And, also, everyone tells me the publication party-- which I missed, having to work--was the best Gotham Book Mart party ever, and I can believe it.

Be all of that as it may, now we have Houseboat Days. It is the best book Ashbery has ever written. It is terrifying: not because it is formally so astounding or because it has such a conventional surface when read, in terms of perceptions and actual structure, as more avant garde (to use that tired term) than anything else around; it is terrifying because it is "about" terrifying things: old age, the dubiousness of love, fame, the now more than ever apparent disintegration of a world which Ashbery, of all the poets in the 1960 Allen anthology, was most willing to accept on its own terms, vide A Nest of Ninnies or The Vermont Notebooks. And if this book is not cause for joyous celebration, then no book of poetry is.

My favorite platitude is a marginal notation of Blake's in his copy of Wordsworth's poems, which goes "In the Kingdom of Heaven all are equal; so must it be in poetry." This book is there. If Some Trees was the most beautiful first book since Harmonium or White Buildings, surely Houseboat Days is not merely as beautiful, but as profound and moving and terrifying and inspiring as, not just The Auroras of Autumn, but The Pisan Cantos or The Wedge, or, dare I say it, I do, Four Quartets.

Is that extravagant? But "Street Musicians," "Collective Dawns," "Wooden Buildings," "Loving Mad Tom," "Business Personals," "Wet Casements," "The Lament Upon the Waters," "And Ut Pictura Poesis is Her Name," "The Wrong Kind of Insurance," "Friends," "The Ice-Cream Wars," "Valentine," "Syringa," and the other 26 poems are so tremendous! You could think of Ashbery as a very charming and amusing man who has been continually borrowing money from you, always promising a return on the investment and, indeed, keeping up with the debt service (if Rivers and Mountains or half of the poems in The Tennis Court Oath can, even for rhetorical purposes, be considered in such a light.) and now, finally, he has paid the debt a million times over, We are all rich!

Some months ago I wrote an essay on Ashbery for VORT, in which I expressed various doubts about his work, centering around his use of the first person plural and the second person as an apparent evasion of the "I"; an evasion of the responsibility of a major poet. I would like to...well, as they say in China, "I have a self-criticism to make." I was wrong, The we's" and "you's" were totally accurate. These poems speak for everyone, from our most important places. "The feeling is a jewel like a pearl."
--Simon Schuchat

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TRY A LITTLE TENDERNESS
(for Otis Redding)

In the corner of this loft
There's a candle lit in memory of you
I used to sit like this one floor below
It was the same space
But now I'm listening

--Jonathan Cott

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Poem To A Bass Player

the eye of the blender Joe.
watch it. all that jazz just
moving around in there with
such harmony man, it would
make you cry.

The contour of the instruments song sweeps
the room together into a pile. Delinquent
notes move the air around bodies making sky
inside feverish like wind too hot to stand
still.

Impolite noise bashes up against a door
torturing itself out of a room, needing
night and hunger to fly.

On the rim of sound sleeps music. Waking up
it's a discourse more hoarse than pure tone.

Nicaragua was never a place for you--
it was always a sound you wanted to play
someday.

--Lisa Nunez

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WHY DO WE BOTHER WITH BEING GOOD LOOKING?

Ten Years After: The Selected Benedetta Poems by Gerard Malanga. Santa Barbara:
Black Sparrow Press, 1977. Cloth \$15, paperback \$4.

Ten years ago, twenty-three year old Gerard Malanga was a charter member of the just emerging caste of "beautiful people." The only poet actively involved in the Pop art scene, he was one of Andy Warhol's original "Superstars," a precursory punk sporting platinum blond hair and black leather jackets, acting in the classic Chelsea Girls and dancing (with a whip!) when the Velvet Underground performed at Warhol's Exploding Plastic Inevitable. Benedetta Barzini, also twenty-three, daughter of millionaire novelist, Luigi - The Italians - Barzini, was one of New York's foremost beauties, regularly gracing the covers of Vogue and Town and Country. Their brief though much publicized romance was the source of inspiration for these poems, almost all written between 1967 and 1968.

The collection, Malanga's third Black Sparrow book, is his most intimate. As it begins, his love-affair with Benedetta has already crested during an idyllic

holiday in New England. The poems trace, often in unadorned diary-like style, the slow break-up of the relationship.

Running parallel are the poet's observations on his growing disillusionment with the Pop scene, by the late sixties also on the decline. He writes lyrically in "The White Shirt," one of the opening poems:

All the beautiful people
Are full of the will to win
At any sport; bare bodies
Behind rocks on the beachfront,
Acquaintances ending in nakedness;
Angelic, graceful, sensuous

but observes later in "LSDLove"

The appalling thing about the beautiful people is that
They're not all that beautiful
Inside. The friends give themselves up
For lost all around us.

He complains of "transparent relationships," reminding us that the period he describes as the "Age of Beauty" was also an age of put-on, put-down and plastic. There are repeated references to drugs ("The young boy's looking for a remedy for his head"), and despite the glamorous trappings of his social surroundings, he finds himself spaced-out, isolated; his life infected with boring sameness.

Opposing this is Malanga's idealized vision of Benedetta as his salvation. He identifies her on several occasions with Dante's Beatrice and with the natural beauty of the New England countryside. Wishing they could escape from the chic world, he wonders: "Why do we bother with being good looking?"

If she would be free
From her personality spread across the full-color centerfold high
Fashion spread I would be free also.

But fame and fortune are too compelling, events moving too quickly for Benedetta. Bitterly, the poet is forced to agree with Luigi Barzini: "Somehow, a well brought-up young lady naturally desires in a man exactly the qualities that will improve her family's fortune."

A decade later, many aspects of the lifestyle he describes seem as remote as the "mod" hairstyle and dress worn by Miss Barzini in Richard Avedon's 1967 cover photo, but Malanga's simple, well-told narrative poems in Ten Years After provide an enjoyable, melodramatic perspective on the Pop scene, and are themselves a unique product of these times.

--Jeff Goldberg

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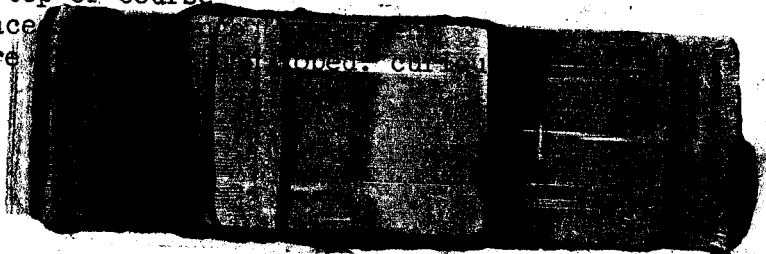
DEAR MOZART

While walking along patchmake st. one day last week
near its intersection with fowlpiece rd.
i was waylaid by a poorly appointed wretch
his face covered in orange fur
who begged of me my hat which
is, as you know, a stetson i prize
it having once belonged to mr. robert penn warren
who lost it to a sudden gust of gulf breeze
it wheeled & spun & came to rest

(no stanza break)

at the feet of a man named lejeune
who wagered it in a game of stud and lost
to my three kings
mais je m'egare...
the man with the wool
like a belgian sheepdog's it was and orange
declared he was helpless without my hat & would pay
three pounds for it
three pounds is not enough i thought & told him so
it's all the money i have he skulked
alternately screwing up his face & casting his eyes wildly
up toward pliny's bone
unless you would accept in exchange a lock of my fur
which one day will count for a lot
i believed him
he yanked the lock from above his cheek
& though i don't recall a bald spot there after
i took it home tied in a bundle
& place it in a shoebox of small things

As to why the man wanted my hat he didn't say
though i suspect it was to afford a measure of disguise
from the rear or top of course
the fur on his face
as he left he more
what



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