

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER
No. 50 December 1977
Frances LeFevre, editor
St. Mark's Church, 2nd Avenue
and Tenth St New York 10003

EVENTS AT ST. MARK'S CHURCH: Wednesday Night Readings at 8:30 (contribution)
Dec 7 Eileen Myles & Joe Ceravolo. . . Dec 14 John Love & Bill Knott (with
George-Therèse Dickenson). . . Dec 21 Herbert Huncke & Peter Orlovsky, intro-
duced by Allen Ginsberg. . . Dec 28 Anne Waldman & John Girono. . . Monday
Night Performance Series at 8:15 (free) Dec 5 Open Reading. . . Dec 12 Tom
Johnson & Bruce Andrews. . . Dec 19 Steve & Gloria Tropp. . . Dec 26 Workshop
Reading. . . Free Writing Workshops at 7:30 PM: Tuesdays Jim Brodey. Thurs-
days Simon Schuchat. Fridays Frank Lima. . . Danspace at 8:30 PM (contribu-
tion \$3) Dec 13 & 15 Joan Jonas. . . Special Jazz Concert (contribution \$2.50)
Dec 3, 8-11 PM by Eddie Jefferson, legendary neo-bop scat singer, with Rich-
ie Cole on alto sax & band. Co-ordinator Harris Schiff.

READINGS ELSEWHERE: Academy of American Poets, Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave
at 89 St, NYC Dec 6 John Ashbery, introduced by David Shapiro. . . Dr. Generos-
ity's, 2nd Ave & 73 St, Saturdays 2:30 PM: Dec 3 Daniela Gioseffi. . . Dec 10
Harry Lewis & Armand Schwerner. . . Dec 17 Madeline Bass, Sharon Olds, Marlene
Rosen. . . Dec 24 Open Reading. . . Dec 31 To be announced. . . Placenter, 293
7th Ave, 10th floor, Dec 8, 8 PM Charles Bernstein. . . West End Café, 2911
B'way (near 113 St) Sundays at 2 PM: Dec 4 Walter Abish & David Shapiro. . .
Dec 11 William Kushner & Frank Lima. . . Dec 18 Yuki Hartman & Ted Greenwald.
Contribution (\$1.50) goes to poets. . . YMHA Poetry Center, Lexington Ave &
92 St, NYC Dec 5 Robert Creeley & Donald Hall. . . Dec 12 Irving Feldman &
Edward Field. . . Dec 19 John Cheever.

OTHER EVENTS: Paula Cooper Gallery, 155 Wooster St, NYC Dec 10-Jan 5 New
Works by Robert Wilson of the "Life & Times of Joseph Stalin," "Einstein on
the Beach," etc. . . Lerner/Heller Gallery, 956 Madison Ave, NYC, Dec 3-23.
Giant angry woodcuts by Nicholas Sperakis.

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AROUND THE EDGES

Best news of the month is that THE WORLD, the Poetry Project's literary magazine which has been in limbo for over a year and a half because of lack of funds to cover costs, is going to be published again next spring. This will be its 31st issue and it will very likely become a collectors' item like all the back issues. 20-year-old Steven Hall will be the guest editor and is already at work reading submissions. All contributors must be less than 30 years old--that is, they must not have reached that age before the deadline for manuscripts, March 1, 1978. Poetry & prose (fiction & non-fiction) will both be considered. Stamped and addressed return envelopes must accompany all manuscripts, which should be sent to THE WORLD, c/o The Poetry Project, St. Mark's Church, Second Ave & 10th St, NYC 10003.

As Philip Whalen said during the 1964 panel interview transcribed in Bread & Poetry (reviewed in this issue by Keith Abbott), "...we have successors." It's a good thing for the health of poetry that we do! The new WORLD will be the work of some of them, and there's already a small anthology put out by a group in their teens, Hit Singles, published at St. Mark's. (Several of this

group are the children of artists who have always been close friends and supporters of the Project--lucky people, lucky for us.) Fresh Paint/an anthology of younger poets edited by Yuki Hartman & Michael Slater, with an introduction by Ted Berrigan, might also be mentioned here. Most of the poets in the book attended the Project's workshops at one time or another.

An interesting fact that came out of the discussions at the November 7th Community Meeting (attended by about 60 people during torrential rainstorms) was the variety of the meanings the Project has for different persons. Some see it as a monolithic power structure, some as a "school" (still!) committed to a few particular styles of poetry, some as a "scene." None of this was hostile--the audience were just questioning and expressing their own needs. Allen Ginsberg summed up the Project best when he said he's always considered it simply a place where poets meet. They go on from there to poetry-related activities, like reading it, writing it, listening to it, publishing it, sharing it the way Whalen expressed it (again, see Abbott's review). The Project is not doctrinaire or tightly organized, but it is dependent on the hospitality of St. Mark's Church, the responsibility of the poets who keep it going, and the money that has to be raised for its maintenance.

The Project has always had a few non-friends (usually the same bunch, names on request) who for one (self-serving?) reason or another occasionally try to hurt it in print or otherwise, valuing, revaluing, devaluing poets associated with it, or accusing them of "elitism" or of treating poems as "art objects" (these are bad?). Nobody pays much attention--"we only try to do our best/de gustibus non disputandum est," etc. But the latest attempt is so ridiculous that it should be shared: "St. Mark's...in our time has probably spread its wings over more bad writers than any comparable building in the world." No need to point out the tricky word probably and the fact that there is no comparable building in the world. It's the opposite that is true: St. Mark's has indeed spread its wings over more good writers--several hundred of them--than any other building, anywhere.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Poets & Writers, Inc. has revised its application requirements. A poet is eligible to apply for listing in its Directory of American Poets if 10 or more poems have been published in 3 or more literary magazines, at least one of which must have appeared since 1960. Publication of a book of poems is not a substitute for this requirement. A fiction writer is eligible for listing in its Directory of American Fiction Writers if one book-length fiction has been published or 3 short fictions have appeared in 3 different U.S. periodicals. All applicants must be U.S. citizens or permanent residents of the U.S. Work may be written in English, Spanish, or a native American language. Vanity press and high school publication not accepted for the publication requirement. For more information and application forms write Poets & Writers, 201 W. 54 St, NYC 10019. . . Duncan McNaughton, mentioned as a "Canadian writer" in the November Newsletter's listing of the British Columbia Monthly, requests a correction: he is an American writer, having been born in Boston. Sorry, Duncan! . . . Neil Hackman will be teaching a Yoga class for poets and interested others Saturdays at 12 noon at 280 Lafayette St, NYC, Apt 6D. No experience necessary. Donation. Please bring something to lie on. Telephone 260-1677. . . Bruce Andrews & Charles Bernstein announce their new bi-monthly newsletter L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, first issue January 1978, available by subscription only from Charles Bernstein, 464 Amsterdam Avenue, NYC, 10024, \$4. It will emphasize "that spectrum of work that places its attention in some primary way on language, ways of meaning that take neither 'form' (syntax, grammar, process & program, shape) nor 'content' (vocabulary, information, subject matter) nor their relation for granted." One of its editors' aims is to "break down

unnecessary self-encapsulation of writers." They are also planning a mini language collective with Rcn Silliman. . .A reminder: This newsletter receives partial help from The Co-ordinating Council of Literary Magazines, but it still needs all the contributions readers can make towards postage...Brief pieces-- comments, reviews, poems--are welcome if they have stamped return envelopes. Editor reserves the right to do minimal editing of prose. Poems are left as submitted but please make sure mss. are perfect.

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BIG SHOT

I'm lying here on the couch
trembling a mile long & listening
to the heavy breath of the old
dog whose youthful predecessor
has already been imagined & named
It's the only way to go, with the breath-body
of a lion & the genitalia of a Princess
or the other way around when it's time
to make a move I'll move on you
light & powerful with the speed
of a sure sign

--Cindy Shelton

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GREENWALDANIA

Native Land by Ted Greenwald. Washington, DC: Titanic Books.

There's no good reason for talking about one Ted Greenwald poem over another. I've got favorites myself but find his poems most unique in the ways they remind you of one another. He's got a system in the works recognizably along the lines of neon sculpture, the nervous system or what someone might randomly do with laser beams if they were sitting at home in their favorite chair. Ted Greenwald generally feels like a domestic poet, most poems beginning there at least...you'll get a self-contained title like "Airy Rushes Punch" which changes context inside the poem: "Airy rushes punch my shirt/ Through a window of sunset dirt" leading into a narrative involving halos, mist, borrowing sugar from a naked neighbor, finally "eating down into the big dipper." But it's not fantastic, it's completely ordinary, since Ted Greenwald's poems ease you mechanically down the page with all the grace of a teleprompter.

Each poem has a rigid left-hand margin or spine, it seems. Poems are double-spaced and generally end at the bottom of the page. Seems slightly tyrannical, but it makes the trains run. Ted Greenwald's in gradual movement, each line being a small gesture building on the previous one, a sort of minimalist theatre. As a result his poems feel private and external at the same time, what you see is what you get: "What a wonderful dinner/ I really enjoyed myself/ The food couldn't have been better/ I liked everything/ You saw the way I ate..." Or look at the photo on the back of the book: Ted Greenwald posed arrogantly in typical flannel shirt, extending towards you a series of snapshots, possibly of Ted Greenwald, but what's apparent is 5 shots running vertically down a strip of photographic paper, you know, photo booth stuff.

--Eileen Myles

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BOOKS RECEIVED (poetry if not noted otherwise): In the Future Perfect by Waitchi Abish (short stories), \$3.95. . . Apocalypse & Other Poems by Ernesto Cardenal, \$3.45, both New Directions, NYC. . . Clear the Range by Ted Berrigan (novel) Adventures in Poetry/Coach House Press, NYC npl. . . Fire Under Water by Miriam Dyak, New Victoria Publishers, Inc, Lebanon, NH, \$3. . . Virtue Can Take Shape as Anapaest by Hal Eskesen, Soap Box, Box 737, Stamford CT. . . North of the Temperate Zone by Guy Gauthier, Midnight Sun, NYC. . . The Great American Belly Dance by Daniela Gioseffi (novel), Doubleday, Garden City, NY \$6.95. . . Soujourner Micro poems by Anselm Hollo, Blue Wind Press, Berkeley CA, \$5.95. . . Hot by Joe Johnson, Telephone Books, NYC, \$1.50. . . Are You a Kid? by Charles Plymell, Cherry Valley Editions, Cherry Valley, NY. . . I, Leo (unfinished novel) by Lew Welch, Grey Fox Press, Bolinas CA. . . Hit Singles (anthology), poems by Kate Hammer, Vincent Katz, Steven Hall, Elio Schneeman, Simon Schuchat, Bob Rosenthal, John Yau, Paul Schneeman. Published at St. Mark's Church by Open Window, npl.

MAGAZINES: Heresies/a feminist publication on art & politics, Heresies Collective, 105 Hudson St, NYC 10003, \$4 for 10 issues \$3 per copy. Issue 2 contains magic songs from Africa, collected by Anne Twitty, and poems by Ann Lauterbach & Estelle Leontief. Issue 3, subtitled "Lesbian Art & Artists," has poems by Cynthia Carr, Carole Glasser, Judy Grahn, Melanie Kaye, Irena Klepfisz, Jacqueline Lapidus, Joan Larkin, Adrienne Rich, Susan Sherman. This magazine features prose more than poetry, most non-fiction. Illustrations excellent. . . Hills 4, c/o Perelman, 1220 Folsom, San Francisco, CA 94103, \$1.50. Poems & prose by Kit Robinson, Larry Eigner, Barrett Watten, Ray DiPalma, Ted Greenwald, Carla Harryman, Ron Silliman, John Thorpe, Alan Bertheimer, Steve Benson, Bruce Andrews, Bob Perelman, David Gitin, Anselm Hollo, Norman Fischer, David Bromige, Douglas Woolf, Fanny Howe, Dave Morice. . . The 4 3 2 Review, Box 1030, Stuyvesant Sta., NYC 10009 \$1 per copy, \$10 subscription. Works by Bob Rosenthal, Bernadette Mayer, Simon Schuchat. . . The Unmuzzled Ox, Vol IV, No 3, Box 840, Canal St Sta. NYC 10013, \$2.25. Works by John Ashbery, Margaret Atwood, John Cage, Ted Berrigan, Robert Dash & James Schuyler, Paul Goodman, Christopher Knowles, Rose Lesniak, Michael McClure, Bernadette Mayer & Lewis Warsh, Pat Steir, Paul Thek, Y.U. Puck.

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POEM

Snow holds the whip hand
 the open notebook is winged
 until my eyes are sore, stung
 another side to my heartbeat
 it is meaningless to complain

--Bill Corbett

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SOMEHOW SPECIAL

On Bread & Poetry/A Panel Discussion with Gary Snyder, Lew Welch & Philip Whalen edited by Donald Allen. Bolinas, CA: Grey Fox Press, 1977. \$2.50.

It's Philip Whalen who comes to the point towards the end of the discussion: "I mean the three of us are sitting here like we were embalmed or something--but I wanted to say...I made this list before we came...to tell you all that we have successors."

This book is a transcription of an interview done with Whalen, Welch, and Snyder before a big reading in San Francisco in 1964. Its value is historical, even though its publication is a kind of embalming. From the viewpoint of 1977, what these three poets have to say still applies, and how many transcriptions of panels on poetry can you say that about?

What comes across strongest is the commitment to the life of poetry. Not because you can drag down \$40,000 a year from grants and fellowships and 3-month tweaks in the pocketbook from the writing factories, but because it makes your life better to be able to think "Hey, Yeats said something about that."

The pleasure is in talking to your predecessors, your peers, and your future friends in the medium of poetry. So this is what Whalen's driving at, by listing the people who are carrying on what he's doing and what other poets are doing. It's humane and it's touching, and as Whalen says, "Admit these pleasures/ Ordinarily unseen, I accept them/ demand more." And that's what's been happening since 1964; lucky for us, thanks to them, the demand is up, and we're on stage too.

--Keith Abbott

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ED SANDERS

Down the butterfly road, the
lives of poets, a fertile
field, get more half-truths
from weirdoes, they say. The
poet strips & you get ten
facts--a footnote dangle
shimmeringly off-page--like the
cat made the Gutenberg Bible--
fucked everybody up, centuries.
Each cluster like a high-energy
factor grid. Byron, the world's
greatest, I say, why not? No
need to crumble, the secret-
police sellout. Why let some
coffee-drinking phone-freak get
the money? Pressure on poets:
cool 'em up, calm 'em down. To
face the terror, get knocked
down & get up. The basic method:
to write everything down, dis-
tilled intensity, like Sappho
data kernals, make it sound.
Love & persistence to it. Words
in my jail cell, well, I didn't
have anything else to do. Laser
verse-gardens, dig & explode
exhaust one place, one man/woman
& then you're in forever, you're
going one on one with reality, all
the secrets I'm gonna give out
exquisite Ovid, a blind guy with a
lute & listening, listening all thru
night! Very deeply, I feel, history
I'll babble it out quickly, my epic
poem, the underpinnings of, I'll
chant next year

--Bill Kushner, 10/20/77

Sanders workshop, Poetry Project

Queen of Darkness by Celia Gilbert. New York: Viking Press, 1977. \$6.95.

Celia Gilbert, an editor and publisher of a good magazine, Woman/Poems, has had, in her forties, a first book of poems published. It is a strong book, filled with a variety of masks behind which the poet hides as she circles her targets. Her aim is excellent.

Since Gilbert thinks before she writes, most of the poems have clearly determined themes. As I read the book her subjects seemed to me to form a triptych, the central panel being the male/female relationship and the side panels parent/child and a woman alone. In her many versions of the central theme her poems are also interesting as social documents.

Gilbert sometimes uses mythological metaphors, perhaps as a way of distancing herself as poet from the reader and from her own reactions to experience. The myths make the poems less confessional, more symbolic. "Queen of Darkness" refers to Persephone, daughter of Demeter, the Greek goddess of fertility. She is kidnapped by Pluto, king of the dead, and becomes his queen, returning to earth each spring. In some poems the two roles are distinct: the Queen of Darkness is the married woman and Persephone is her lost daughter. In the title poem becoming a bride means being brought to a blind world where she loses her shadow, her only possession. Her husband has less vision than she: "Their eyes are false," I said./ ...But you assured me/ they see as well as you/ or I." She sees her new husband "dwindle," adding "but there is power in you..." The poem ends with a paradoxical triumph for the confused bride: "In my room I queen it./ My abdomen grows thick/ ...What fills me/ is none of my doing." Ironic that a person can become important through loss of individuality and will. Gilbert's technique in this and her other poems is as disciplined and concise as that of her sister poets, Plath, Sexton, and Rich, whose work, like hers, shows the influence of having lived at least part of their lives in New England. She allows no self-indulgence, unless a use of social satire can be conceived of as such.

All women should be feminists; also, all men. However, Virginia Woolf wrote that the androgynous personality, which fuses masculine and feminine into one spirit, creates the best art. Woolf had to struggle with this, knowing it is difficult for a woman to put her grievances behind her. Gilbert, an active feminist, sometimes exploits grievances for poetic purposes. When she presents male doctors as cruel captors and seducers she is rather close to Woolf's satirization of two such men in Mrs. Dalloway. Her treatment of doctors is very effective in "The God in Us Wishes to Live":

Somewhere in darkened rooms women lie
gnarled as roots.
The doctors whisper, "Sigh, sigh,"
and they sigh.
"Breathe, breathe,"
and they breathe. Over and over.
Needles pricking the old grooves. Scream!
Uncoil. "Give it to me, give it to me.
Give."

The insidious repetitive commands dramatize the extreme inequality of the relationship. These men could be priests, husbands, professors.

"On Refusing Your Invitation To Come To Dinner" is a fascinating period piece. The situation is one of women's being ignored by men at a conventional dinner party. The occasion produces in the woman speaker a sense of total isolation: from the men, obviously, but also from the other women, who continue to play the role assigned to them by the men. I like the poem but it ends on a

... false note: the speaker's tone, previously anguished, becomes artificial as the men's attitude. Speaking of the men, she says, "Those strange ones, / those Ghosts-in-the-bush / who never bleed." Clever, but it's hard to believe this is the same woman who was going to weep, earlier in the poem, if she had to say "How interesting" one more time.

Gilbert ingeniously compares a man and woman to various household appliances in "We Are." The woman is slightly diabolical, not a victim: "And I / am the washing machine / pretending to clean / those stains / but secretly fixing / them in forever." Another poem, "The Death of a Revolutionary," concerns Trotsky and his wife in exile in Mexico. It's not a political poem, though, except in its use of the male/female theme. It is mostly a wildly absurd dialogue between Lev and Natasha. Trotsky says, among other things, "All our children dead thanks to me." Natasha is more perverse, saying, "Forgive me / for loving our exile- / ...for blessing the locks and the bars that held you in for me." At this point in the plot she has a premonition that her husband will be assassinated, so this is an extraordinary final statement. She prefers a dangerous, ultimately fatal situation. She is with her man, she can rule. I guess that's what a Queen of Darkness would want.

Frank O'Hara once said that he disliked dishonesty more than bad lines because he didn't think there is such a thing as a bad line if it's true. From this point of view there are a few bad lines in this otherwise interesting book, especially in a couple of coy, contrived poems at the beginning. For instance, "Everyone we know today is an astronaut / It is a very popular profession / If you like machines." Or the fake rhetorical question, "There's no asking why the haystacks / Huddle like monkeys..." And, "Here's the cathedral remarkable / as a saint's knuckle." This can't be a truthful reaction to anything. The off-rhyme does not suffice to make it interesting.

Several of the finest, most powerful poems in the book are about the death of a child. In "Persephone Departs" the opening metaphor is overwhelmingly simple:

Merely turning her back
she goes
down the street.

There's an intimation that the young daughter has willed to die, since she is the goddess of death, Persephone, who directs the Furies. Then:

I shut the windows against the rains,
keeping indoors, ravished,
like the great maple out there...

The last stanza contains a human powerlessness that is universal:

She goes
farther than I would have borne her:
out of reach of my dreams. Now
in these haunted rooms
my rage whips the bare, stripped world,
I wheel, the sky closed down,
eclipsed.

Here Gilbert's depth of sensibility is not constrained by satire. Perhaps at the end the Queen of Darkness is the eye of the storm. She, the queen mother, whips the world; her rage is the rage of Lear against fate and nature, a rage for which there is no successful weapon or triumphant answer.

--Mary Selby Ferrari

WIRES

The inner landscape is blurred
After 12 hours the outer landscape is blurred
Check your nose: glasses still there
No fog, mist, rain or atmospheric miasma
A glance inward shows your brain is still missing
And the large psychic object you were trying to lift
Is still anchored in concrete
The pain begins in one place and ends in another
Between in a white line
Is the voice you hear while you write
Tracking you down as you back into the past
Which is overweight and has a busy signal.
When you pick up the house phone
All the lights go on
Congratulations!
You are now the Thane of Blurdom.

--Dick Gallup

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THE POETRY PROJECT
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First Class Mail