

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

No. 51 January 1978
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)
Jan 4 Patricia Farewell, Thomas Masiello & John Yau, introduced by John Ashbery
...Jan 11 Steve Carey & Allan Kaplan...Jan 18 Maggie Dubris, Rachel Walling, &
Michael Lally...Jan 21 Ann Lauterbach & Michael Slater...Monday Night Performance Series at 8:15 (free) Jan 2 Open Reading...Jan 9 Jim Brodey & Jayne Nodland
with Richard Hell, Tom Carey & Band, George-Therese Dickenson & Band, Foreign
Image, & guests...Jan 16 Tom Savage & Susan Dalglish...Jan 23 Barbara Barg &
Joel Chassler...Jan 30 Didi Susan Dubelyew & Greg Masters...Free Writing Work-
shops at 7:30 PM: Tuesdays Johnny Stanton (prose)...Thursdays different guest
writers in turn...Fridays Mary Ferrari (poetry)...Danspace at 8:30 (contribu-
tion \$3.00) Jan 10 & 12 Wendy Perron & Susan Rethurst.

READINGS ELSEWHERE: Academy of American Poets, Guggenheim Museum 5th Ave at 89
St 7:30 PM Jan 17 "Education of the Poet," David Ignatow with Harvey Shapiro;
Donnell Library Center 20 W 53 St 6:30 PM Jan 26 "The Story-Teller's Art," Jim
Harrison...Dr. Generosity's 2nd Ave at 73 St Saturdays 2:30 PM Jan 7 Helen
Adam...Jan 14 Hugh Seidman & Michael Perkins...Jan 21 Judith Johnson Sherwin &
Kathleen Spivack...Jan 28 David Ignatow...West End Café 2911 B'way (nr 73 St)
Sundays 2 PM Jan 8 Steve Carey, John Godfrey, Alan Davies, & Bob Perelman...
Jan 15 Mary Ferrari & Eileen Myles...Jan 15 (re-scheduled from Dec) Walter
Abish & David Shapiro...Jan 29 Charlotte Carter & Catherine Murray...YMHA
Poetry Center Lexington Ave at 92 St Jan 9 Bernard Malamud...Jan 23 Anthony
Hecht & James Merrill...32 Cooper Square c/o Stuart Math 8 PM Jan 6 Bob Perel-
man reading, with a performance by himself & Francie Shaw. Information 799-4477.

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AROUND THE EDGES

Happy New Year! A good time to take a look at some highlights of 1977 at the Poetry Project. Not that everything happening here is not interesting or notable in some way--it's bound to be so, what with all the energetic people around and their various commitments. But time, space, and the limits of attention demand a certain amount of selectivity, and no comparisons good or bad are intended. All readings in both the winter/spring and the fall sessions had plenty of variety and quality, and so did the other activities--to single out some is hardly to put down the rest.

The Allen Ginsberg/Robert Lowell reading at St. Mark's Church February 23, their first one together, was a historic occasion, made even more memorable by the fact of Lowell's sudden, sad death in September. The Steven Hall/ René Ricard evening was unforgettable because of the strange undercurrents and love/hate tensions as they read. During the spring, Kathy Acker read from "Blood & Guts in High School," Simon Schuchat read poems that were later to become a book, Light and Shadow, and Harris Schiff gave his first New York reading in years.

In October Fielding Dawson, reading short stories from his two new Penny Lane books (Black Sparrow), and Robert Creeley opened the Wednesday Night series for the fall. Creeley made an unexpectedly moving gesture when, after reading

his fine poem "For René Ricard"--with considerable applause--he walked over and embraced his old friend. Ed Sanders followed his forceful reading (which included Sapphic chants) with an equally forceful workshop the next evening.

Around this time the readings began to be scheduled in the Parish Hall instead of the church on account of the ongoing reconstruction in the latter, a move which had the effect of making them easier to fill and therefore more intimate. Janine Pommy Vega and Bonnie Bremser came from different places in upstate New York to read--Woodstock and Cherry Valley--and although they are not like each other, nor is their poetry similar, both brought a fresh quality, a suggestion of invigorating country air, perhaps. Ted Berrigan and Bob Rosenthal gave of their best, as usual, and when Kenward Elmslie read he overwhelmed his audience by bursting into song with his last few poems, in marvelous voice and with great style. Brad Gooch, who took his place at the lectern afterwards, protested this order of things, but he need not have worried--he held his own very well with his tight, tough, striking works. Another particularly successful evening was that of the Eileen Myles/Joe Ceravolo reading, which delighted a capacity audience of old and new admirers of both poets.

Then there was the 1977 poetry publishing picture. At least two close friends of the Project brought out lists of which every volume was a highlight, Kenward Elmslie with his Z Press in Calais, Vermont, and Bill Zavatsky with SUN in New York. From Z, Selected Declarations of Dependence (delightful permutations) by Harry Mathews, with illustrations by Alex Katz, and the newest Z anthology, the 6th, or ZZZZZZ; from SUN, Ameriki by George Economou, Selected and Collected Poems by Bill Knott, "Autobiography"... by Tony Towle, Harmatan by Paul Violi--all these books from both presses should have special praise, all should be read. Fresh Paint, the recent anthology of younger poets edited by Yuki Hartman & Michael Slater, must be mentioned too. Maureen Owen says it makes her "breathless with surprise and delight." Most of the poets whose work it contains came to the Project individually and got together through attending readings and workshops. When the book came out it was celebrated in a series of readings/parties, one a week for several weeks, each time in a different place. All the poets read in turn from their work at these events, the last of which was held at one of the Poetry Project's Monday Evening Performance Series.

So what's coming up? At the Project, the new (31st) issue of THE WORLD is being assembled, with a March 1st deadline. Steven Hall is the guest editor. (Submissions with SASE are invited from all writers under thirty, both poetry and prose.) Also eagerly awaited is the Homage to Frank O'Hara issue of BIG SKY from Bill Berkson in Bolinas. And most important of all, Ron Padgett has arrived to take his new post as Poet/Director-in-residence at the Poetry Project. His resume was requested by this editor, but it turns out to be 5 pages long and can't be fitted in here. Too bad, because it covers a wide spread of books, lectures, awards, and editing and teaching achievement, and is interesting reading. But it's hardly needed to confirm the prevailing opinion that he's one of the poetry world's finest. Hello, Ron!

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Maureen Owen, the Poetry Project Coordinator, has ended her maternity leave and is resuming her duties at St. Mark's. She was never very far away and kept in touch faithfully, but just the same it was a pleasure to be reminded of her during her absence by Barbara Baracks' magazine BIG DEAL 5. The entire issue is devoted to Maureen's poetry, including her No Travels Journal, which had been out of print. Obtainable from P.O. Box 830 Stuyvesant Station, New York, NY 10009...The new Workshop instructors are Johnny Stanton, Tuesdays at 7:30 PM and Mary Ferrari, Fridays at 7:30 PM. Mary, who will teach poetry, is the author of The Flying Glove (Adventures in Poetry). Her statement about plans:

"If only suicidal women show up, we'll read Virginia Woolf aloud and then write. If only suicidal men show up, we'll concentrate on John Berryman's dream songs, especially the posthumous ones. If no one shows up I'll read Gertrude Stein's Lucky Life to myself." Johnny, the author of Slip of the Tongue (Angel Hair) is factual--he will teach prose writing, concentrating on "principles and techniques of the short story with reference to the students' own ideas and aims. Assignments will be developed as the class proceeds."...Hot from Boulder, Colorado is the big new BOMBAY GIN (#4), guest-edited by Anne Waldman & Larry Fagin and reflecting the energy and eccentricity around the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics. All the contents are pretty sensational and too many to be listed here, but interested potential buyers may be glad to know that there are 4 great Corso poems, 3 from Jim Carroll, 3 of Allen Ginsberg's songs, an astounding prose piece by William Burroughs, another by Ed Sanders, a Clark Coolidge piece, and so on & so on...in other words, a real line-up. A bargain at \$2. Order from editors Bonnie Shulman & Cindy Shelton, c/o Naropa Institute, 1111 Pearl St, Boulder, CO 80302, or here at the Poetry Project...The regular listing of books and magazines received will be postponed until the February Newsletter.

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AS IF

Clearly it is as if. Nothing else except

choice of spoons, how they sound

next to forks (spoons and forks) and

pages of a glossy magazine.

A whole day of things set in place

with the prestige of speech,

like that morning we woke

as if we had stared into each other's sleep.

--Ann Lauterbach

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BOBBING ALONG

Kenneth Koch has made what he calls "a very loose adaptation" for the stage of his fascinating, free-wheeling novel, The Red Robins (Random House, 1975), and it will be presented in a continuous 3-week run at St. Clement's Theatre, 423 W 46 St, NYC, with previews January 10 & 11 and an official opening for the press January 12. Curtain time is 8 PM throughout. Don Sanders is the director. Artists who designed the sets are Jane Freilicher, Red Grooms, Vanessa James (who also did the costumes), Alex Katz, Katherine Koch, Roy Lichtenstein, and Rory McEwen. There are 25 different scenes full of yearning and mystery, in which the cast of 20 roams all over Asia speaking in the author's inimitable neo-Shakespearean blank verse. Larry Rivers may or may not be among the actors, but Taylor Mead has committed himself to lots of parts,

especially Nishu and Mike the Tiger. Brian Glover plays the Easter Bunny, villain of the piece, and its corporate hero--a group of aviators known as The Red Robins--includes Marty Maniak as Bob, the principal pilot, Kate Farrell, Steven Hall, and several others. Do come one, come all, for excitement & fun. Information & reservations: 675-5000.

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FOR MARGUERITE HARRIS

The Poetry Project people send affectionate greetings, with admiration for her great bravery and spirit during a serious illness, to this fine poet. Marguerite Harris has been a longtime friend and supporter of countless other poets through the readings, workshops, and other poetry events she has organized for years at Dr. Generosity's in this city and the summer colony in Woodstock, New York. Ed Sanders, in his review last September for the Woodstock Times of her latest book, Time of the Playback (Damascus Road Press, Rte #2, Wescosville, PA 18090), praised the "seriousness...fantastic energy...and sharp intellect that characterize her writing." The lines below are from a poem in the section of her book called "Passionate Attitudes" (about poets and other creative persons), entitled "Samuel Johnson: A Portrait":

His learning was prodigious.
At his firm 'Sir' reputations
toppled, or were made.
Just, and a paradigm of wit,
he was the Rock of his time.
But I love the man

who went down to Lichfield
to stand all day
in a pouring rain
where once, as a boy,
he'd left his father's
bookstall untended.

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HIGH-SPEED WORDS

Poems by Paul Violi. Putnam Valley, NY: Swollen Magpie Press, 1976. \$2.

Paul Violi loves things. Strange things--a "Morbid Blonde," a "Queasy Phantom," a "Squeaked Aorta," a "Dream Helmet,"--as they appear in a strange poem, "Exacta," a horse race virtually without verbs. He collects weird objects with the lust of a grizzly bear hot to fuck butterflies, leading a reader who worries about butterflies to demand more than the usual result. What do you do with a race won by "Pigs in Moonlight??

There's a risk here--such exuberance can turn desperately cute--but he uses music so deliberately, choosing a saloon called "Baby Moon's," a "Gold Tooth Hotel," a hymn to the "Intimate Ultimate," and titles to waltz to: "Big Daddy," "Buckeroo," "Snowblind to Banquet." (In "Upstate" he even beats time: "Edna St. Vincent Millay.") Sometimes it seems too much, or too modest, an acrobat advertising that he uses a net.

"Triptich" is what you paid for: Violi will prove that you threw a poem into the trash yesterday. What looks like a TV guide becomes his argument, that the way America understands progress--Charlie's Angels ends at 11:00 but Johnny begins at 11:30--is, of course, the Eternal Explanation: 4:00 (4) JUMPING JESUS ...6:30 (4) a cow with a harelip...10:30 (9) some misquoted Homer...and at

midnight a balanced summation: (9) WATERLOO. Napoleon loses because he has hemorrhoids...(11) "A cloud floats up to the moon and stops." It is all logical--Buster Keaton explaining a catastrophe.

Violi creates "Splurge" from his list of names for the same wine in different countries: Daggerwing, Lingering Twilight, Star Diver--the more you read the drunker you get. Von Humboldt said different languages are not different designations for the same thing, they are different views of it, and the complex aftertaste of "Splurge" leaves you so high you can see around corners.

Each poem dares to be coherent, a rare enough attraction. Violi seldom sticks things together with "I." If he were not so scrupulous, you would approach "The Tramontane Sonata" like an invitation to "Gotterdammerung" with a blind date. His narrator, while lazily describing a Jewish South American composer destined to record his country's history in musical notation, is translating the notes back into the composer's voice. The old man remembers a revolution: "they executed / the musicians of the National Orchestra/ too, replacing them, each one, with a / shopping cart stuffed with ice cream/ and wheeled these into position around/ the plaza...47 flavors in all."

Dead musicians into shopping carts into ice cream: the strange power of words! What a lust to collect only things that will change, ridiculously, into wonders! Violi gets laughs with terrifying skill, makes you doubt your eyes, yet believe: that cloud is in the exact shape of a bear. Or is that a butterfly?

The last poem is "Index," appropriately--the accumulated life of the artist "Sutej Hudney" reduced to highlights and page numbers: "Childhood 70, 71...Marriage 95...Paints Starved cat eating snow 145." If you appreciate the fact that numbers are the only pure things, you feel the closing joke like a tombstone: "Last words 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190" --Kevern Cameron

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POEM

autumn's ex-

foliate heroes
bow down
before the sun's
last rays

as septem-
embering breezes
flutter
their children

down
to ground
level

these
abbreviated
days

--Michael Horovitz

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Not at all to be nationalistic (the reason why I left the place), and not to blow the trumpet for one or all, though maybe for some of them: English poetry these days is "a vortex...powerhouse." I think Lee Harwood said that, or maybe Eric Mottram (the truest critic we have), or maybe both of them. English poetry is different/the same--money is scarce and the poets are friends; reviewers review reviewers, ignore the small presses where the action is; there's necrophilia in schools and colleges. If they only opened their eyes. Are you serious? You mean you really want to read Peter Porter?

You know Harwood and Pickard and Raworth, perhaps. Mike Horowitz. The Penguin Book of Modern Poets. You're not a virgin. Our Father Bunting. F.T. Prince (who read at St. Mark's, I'm told) is dearly loved. Hugh MacDiarmid, does he count, being a Scotsman?

Want you to know all (impossible task). Want baseball with you and cricket with us and all things simultaneously and everyone to know. Don't want to hear about problems of distribution.

Writing this is hard, not knowing where to begin. With THE bookstore, perhaps, COMPENDIUM, 240 Camden High Street, London. There, beside the American imports, are Allen Fisher's Place (distributed in the U.S. by TRUCK), Iain Sinclair's Lud Heat (Albion Village Press), Chris Torrance's Magic Door (AVP too)--three books of love and craft knit tight to their environment. Place in its broadest sense being a major concern right now, I can only mention names. Bill Griffiths (is he known here? One step from the East End of London to the Lower East Side), Barry MacSweeney (Black Torch on the Tyne), Colin Simms (a naturalist too, he wrote a wonderful book, now out of print, Lives of the British Lizards).

Poetry seen as performance--inevitably orgasm, primal theatre. Paul Buck should give a reading at the Poetry Project, and the jgjjgjjgjjg group, and another daddy (to many) and howler, Bob Cobbing.

Doug Oliver is living in Brightlingsea and writing terrific works about boxing. Ralph Hawkins watches too much TV, but his poems are great. Ken Smith is gritty Northumberland and drinks a lot. Carlyle Reedy is the best of our (so few) women writers. And David Tipton, and David Chaloner--I'll stop, I'll go on. Opening a magazine like Spectacular Diseases and coming across work by this young guy Rod Mengham is like cocaine or an open door. --Simon Pettet

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THERE'S NOTHING IN THE GRAVE

Journals: Early Fifties/Early Sixties by Allen Ginsberg, edited by Gordon Ball. New York: Grove Press, 1977. \$10.

I worked one week at a used-book store on 4th Avenue where, recently, they filmed Strand scene for "Annie Hall." I remember a book there by Andre Gide, Corydon. Looking reticent, instant--nerves of lusty passage--Idea of Greekness, Beauty--Jack Kerouac, in a letter to Don Allen February 11, 1958, points out Ginsberg's "considerable prose ability" and mentions the phrase "homosexual prose descriptions." Ginsberg & Burroughs are, like Genet, new cock masters of what seems to me not a genre but a sort of Cosmic "Magic Asshole" Workshop Skill.

In Journals, on 15th Street "the blue attic," New York City, June 17, 1952. The day before there, there was a "peyote euphoria" on Washington Square. "A boy came out of Shelly's...carrying 2 glasses of red liquor...the length and strength and paleness of his arms in the darkness as he balanced his way brushing slightly drunken against the granite of the building with his arm." This "just another momentary sadness of unobtainable common beauty" reminds Ginsberg of "A project which I have meant to sketch for several weeks." He unwinds. "In Houston, 1948--" "...Outside the old Union Hall, walking down the street, a Latin animal, Cuban, Spanish, black hair curled wildly, looked impossible for

him to live in society...he was perhaps 22 or less...a tense potent walk, dungarees, powerful legs, not too tall, blue shirt opened several buttons on chest, black hair curling sparsely on chest...I never in my life saw a more perfect being--I couldn't conceive of him speaking English...Who could resist him? He must have taken any weak body he needed or wanted. Love from such a face I could not imagine, nor gentleness--" "...he disappeared up the block & around the corner scattering the air in spiritual waves behind him. I couldn't believe he was human. He had thick features, black eyebrows, almost square face, powerful chest, perfect freedom of walk."

As for the sexism within Homosexual Literature, it might be true that one is either Faggot, Racist, or Baptist. Here is the evidence. Here are the secrets. Ginsberg was friend and arbiter for Kerouac. He epistled conspiratorially to Corso, he's disciple & quasi-promoter of Burroughs' precious Time. His pursuit of categorical Authority unites the beat generation historically. This circumstance has always been the given in acceptance of "Contemporary" (Jasper Johns) Poetry into duckhead Society.

The complete poems entries in Journals are of a kind in being all previously unpublished. "Straining to hear the Ahad Haam in the Music," their range is the exorbitant take-it-all-in let-thyself-be-influenced quotient Ginsberg dashed himself into. Like Yeats with the bolts pulled:

"What is old age like?"
"In days of youth when every limb
played a savage part,
and blood sprang up and filled with joy
leg and brain and heart..."
in my sleep.

Where Ted Berrigan indexes 5:03, Ginsberg is a dynamite mad Judaeo-Christian of Wisdom:

THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON (CARL)

They censor words not the things they denote
It would create less of a stir to drop a piece of shit
on Grant's tomb
than to write it out in white paint.
Because people recognize that's what memorials are
for--old bums & dogs to shit on

Act boldly, think with caution--even timorously

Some notable pen-sketchings, too: "Mediterranean Sun," "Fragment of Marra-kech," "Clownish Mandala," "Oedipus at Work," and "Skull in Cigarette Ash Tray." Oct 7 evening 1960--"Kerouac on Ayahuasca" is a miracle transcription of Kerouac's "brutal" consciousness.. "Dostoyevsky/ Dostoyevsky come here/ sit down on this bed/ with Allen lay yr/ \$10 ass here--". The Haikus composed in Berkeley while reading Blyth's volumes are mostly exceptional. The "hydrogen jukebox" how-to laws of "Objective images written down outside mind" attached to the Haiku make them invaluable, documentary.

There's confusion, vision, ("space is solid"), experimentation & delight. It's difficult reading, the mix of prose styles and syntax probes, but noble throughout, flowing and sharp. Ginsberg's ingestion of peyote in Paterson is classic, embodiment of a deaf Central Jersey, passionate, grasping the sweet. There's a fixed eye on T.S. Eliot reading at the YHMA Poetry Center in New York, lines comparable to Lowell's portrait-sonnet-walk in History. I like the political ravings "Policewomen looking up the tragic brown ass of Billie Holiday" and the contemplative "I could issue manifestoes." And of course:

"I have founded the Church of Poetry."

--Michael Scholnick

OLD MOON

I can't sleep walking through walls
taking pleasure in nothing of either of us
losing shape in room clock lamp air
heavy & the inverse who now may see desire

hovering over the body, lifting, diminish
down into oversize misshapen head-size, inside
thin down to the fine bright line of white light
across under distant locked door too far for human feet

although your face stays, while I can will, & perform
in the same way that this is performance
you give it body, that fact, and it is your body
it is yours & makes my own return

marks my own return striped with red, eyes, and lashes
that are stretch-marks breathing against your lashes.

--Ted Berrigan

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