

PROJECT PAPERS

Volume 1 Number 33

©1988 The Poetry Project, Ltd. 2nd Ave & 10th St. New York, NY 10003

RON PADGETT

OBIT BACKLASH

Today I read
in the paper,
the New York
Times, that
author James
Baldwin had
died,
of cancer, in
France, at
his home,
and
I thought
of sitting
in an apartment
rental office
twenty-seven
years ago
and watching
the agent,
a suspicious
gent, ask a
guy if
he were a
"friend"
of James
Baldwin, or
did he just
know him,
or had he
heard of
the basement
apartment
through him

or any of
his friends,
and the guy
hesitated and
said Well
yes sort of,
and the agent
said Get
out of this
office right
now, turned
to me and said
Jesus Christ
How may I
help you?

MY TRIP TO ITALY

And the white silk blossomed and bloomed and blew out into the room over the white
bed in the hill town that flew each night over all of Italy to see that all was well and it
was,
And it was wonderful, actually, in place, straight up and down, with curves, and ideas,
such as where is my old friend now, old friend now who is never aging here or there,
such as there, such as *ecco mi qua*, give me that money, and out I go into the sunlight,
as a star goes out into space and becomes a stove, bing! tac!
And those rays of light you see everywhere, that traveling stigmata that sets fire to a little
patch of forehead, oh! ouch! hey! I don't want to be a saint, get off my forehead,
Because I have a red fire engine and a red fire of my own, two yellow dogs go woof, one
in each of my ears as I enter and the walls slide to and fro a little, I get scared, I'll
never take an airplane again! and so
I do, one with curtains decorated with a cherry motif and a border of little blue ducks
because this is a children's airplane drifting o'er the clouds be-smashed with radiant
pure gold across the stratosphere and, ah, the service, the in-flight rhumba and the
rum punch, knocked silly, sideways, enormous tears in your eyes.