THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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

~~The Poetry Project Newsletter~~ begins 1976 with a request for $2.00 to cover postage. Please send money orders, checks etc. addressed to The Poetry Project.

The full run of programs continue after we all recover from the Thurs Jan 1 NEW YEAR'S BENEFIT. The Wednesday night readings are Jan 7 Bill Knott & James Tate, Jan 14 David Ignatow & Stephan Stepanchev, Jan 21 John Wieners, Jan 28 Hugh Seidman & Harvey Shapiro. The Monday night readings and performances are Jan 5 Open Reading, Jan 12 Ed Friedman Terry O'Reilly, Dale Wasley, Jan 19 Ellen Saltonstall, Wendy Rogers, Joyce Morgenroth, Jan 26 Barbara Einzig, Neil Hackman. The three writing workshops (free) are scheduled for 7:30 pm: Paul Violi (Tues) Bill Zavatsky (Thurs), Ted Greenwald (Fri).

READINGS ETC: See your favorite listings ... plus ... THE TIN PALACE, 325 Bowery (corner of E. 2nd & Bowery) Jan 3 Nuyorican Anthology Reading, Jan 10 Reading of Translations by Translators, Jan 17 Amazon Poetry Anthology Reading, Jan 24 Reading for Sun --Bill Zavatsky, host, Jan 31 Mark Weiss Presents . . . The Holly Solomon Gallery, 392 W. Broadway, Paintings by George Schneeman (Wonderful!). . . The deadline for all newsletter info etc is the 15th of the month . . . . . The Poetry Project Newsletter is partially supported by a grant from CCLM . . . Maureen Owen & John Giorno Jan 11 at The West End. . . Works by Brendon Atkinson opens Jan 8 6-9 pm thru Jan 18, 405 E 13 St.

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ENORMOUS CHANGES AT THE LAST MOMENT --Grace Paley --Farrar, Straus, Giroux (Short Stories)

For starters, a woman is returning two books to the library overdue for thirty some years. In the process she meets her ex-husband. They reminisce, agree that the reason their marriage failed was because she had never invited a certain couple to dinner. He recalls lovely breakfasts together when the sweet smell of bacon wafted into their apartment from the neighbor's kitchen. She returns the books, immediately checks them out again, hoping she has become the sort of person who will return them on time, realizing she is better known for other attributes.

Midway we find "Faith (mother of two) in a Tree" deciding to come down from her branch and enter the world of humanitarian involvement, leaving behind her the "sexy playground" of her present life. Another story, (written to please her father), fails to please him. He is old and dying. She retells it, elaborating generously, failing again in her father's eyes because she always turns tragedy into a joke.

In closing, a middle-aged woman says good-by to her sons and lover, dons sneakers and sets out to see the world on a run. Eventually jogging into her old neighborhood, she spends time in the apartment where she had grown up (the present tenant is a black woman with several ADC children), gets kicked out and returns home a bit wiser.

The end: almost nothing has happened, yet it is a collection about everything truly important. I would love to be able to write like Grace Paley. She has an ear for what's ethnically good, a wit for all reasons and a quirkiness that whisks the mundane into some of the best moments I have ever read. (Verlaine Boyd)

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Gilbert Sorrentino, If One May So To Speak, Flawless Play Restored, Black Sparrow Press, 1974.

There is no plot or action, thought there is comic movement from HOPELESSNESS TO HOPE. The talk ("crabbed bark!") is everything, and ranges to cover usual topics of conversation: love, sex, baseball, religion, nationalities. But though lines are spoken in dialects interesting to the author, nothing new is said; themes don't much affect the play. "It's easy to see that he's interested in the possibilities of the language, folks!" but his interest only rarely even amuses us. Although he insists "Somehow in its own dark, peculiar way, this is -- literature!" he seems only interested in demonstrating that "The fawkin' greaser kin talk good American, by Christ!" It's obvious that good American must be several things, but none of this settles enough to give the play continuance, or even controversy. "A babel-like din issues forth from the shells, which is understood to be interesting conversation." Not so. (Alan Davies)

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Jaguar Skies. By Michael McClure. New York: New Directions, 1975. 87pp. $1.95 in paperback.

One of the things we must realize about ENERGY is that it is very easy to become hypnotized by its WONDEROUS glow. It is also important to distinguish between GENERATIVE ENERGY (the biological pulse of creation and destruction) which is central to all life and matter and DECADENT ENERGY which is the glow of the flame without the heat (maybe a warm charge/but no real fire).

I have always looked forward to a new collection of Michael McClure's poetry because of the ENERGY with which I know it will be charged: wonderful love poems; the love of nature and natural functions (the animal of us). BUT I realized on reading Jaguar Skies that it is an ENERGY which hypnotizes and that McClure believes in that DECADENT ENERGY as if it was the GENERATIVE force that sets us and keeps us going. McClure is a good writer and his work is charged. That in itself is exciting and can be a great relief given the static quality of s so much that we are given to read, hear and see at this point in time. It changes, however, when you get into what he is saying. As I came against what he is putting forth in these poems I found myself writing poems in RESPONSE:

RESPONSE/ 1.

"Finally
we know
beauty
is truth.
(And the past
is the actions
with which we feed
ourself and learn that
it is not our gloomy
nemesis.)"
-- Michael McClure/ from
THE GLOW

do we?
and if
we do
is it ever
that neat?
what do we
so with it
once we've
packaged it?
do we put

RESPONSE/ 2.

"WE
DO
NOT
BELIEVE
that all of the oil that is burned
and the mountains of food
to be consumed
or the construction
of the huge ceremonial
vehicles
will broaden
our knowledge
of
poetry!
We ask for the rainbow
and
the keys
to Elf Land
Keep your fucking war!
-- Michael McClure/ELVES

but
I believe

it in our
books? do we
hold it up
to be
admired?
do we look back
on it? say
that's
beautiful? that's
a simple
truth? do
you really
feed on
that past?
does it
satisfy you?
the past

is never more than
a ghost
that sometimes
entertains us with
what we mistake for
beauty. that ghost
more often
than not
haunts us
whispering
truth into
our ears
when we
are off guard.

it does broaden
our poetry
cannot
be written
for elves.
we burn
oil. we
eat. some of us
love
motorcylces
fast cars
trains. some of us
fight
wars
even as
we condemn
other wars. I have
no desire to live
in Elf Land
or write poems
that are pretty
and tasteless
like cookies
made by elves.
rainbows are
a passing
fancy
rainbows will not
seal us off from
"their" wars. they
will not keep
their wars
to themselves.
our knowledge
of poetry
is broadened
by
this world
we each live in.
if you want
my home
in Elf Land
I'll sell it to you
cheap.

(Harry Lewis)

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ELSEWHERE: CHICAGO: Body Politic Readings for Jan are: Jan 5 Peter Schjeldahl & Art Lange, Jan 12 Benefit for The Yellow Press, Jan 19 Philip Whalen . . . BOSTON: Sam Abrams will read at Boston Center for the Arts, 539 Tremont St, Jan 30.In Cambridge, Cora Brooks will read Tues, Jan 20 (8:15) at Grolier Bookshop, 6 Plympton St. Blacksmith House readings (Brattle St) Jan 12 Stratis Haviaris, Jan 19 readers from Grist magazine, Jan 26 readers from Alice James books . . . In November, in Vancouver, Opal L. Nations read at Art Cause Art, S.E. corner of Railway & Rose (by the picturesque Plaza Hotel). . . DETROIT: The Detroit Writer's Coop is doing a bi-monthly reading series at the Kelley Williams Gallery. . . For bookfinding service David Sharbrough, Sharbrough Books, 2 N Nashville Ave. Ventnor, NJ. . . SOUTH CAROLINA: Believe it or not! George Feneman of the old You Bet Your Life Show was born in Peking, China.

Actually true! . . . In S.F. Intersection keeps on doing reading and printing amazin' posters.

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On Roy Rogers, one line poems, Bill Zavatsky, ed., Winter 1974.

One line poems are better than two line poems. Two line poems are perverse, implying more than can be managed, even in reversal. And three line poems take the place of haiku -- too ambitious.

One line poems are also one line essays.

(Alan Davies)

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BOOKS ETC: From Gallimaufry, 359 Frederick, S.F., CA 94117: Don Cushman, Jim and the Evil ($2); David Fisher, The Book of Madness ($2); Laura Beausoleil, Autograph ($2). . . John Perlman, from The Hudson: A Weave, Jordan Davies Press, 215 Thompson St, NYC 10014 ($3.50). . Dodeca, Vol 1, No 7, 11 Broadway, Rm 933 NYC 10004. . . . D.H. Melham, Rest in Love, Dovetail Press, 627 W 113 St, NYC 10025 ($2.95). . ... Lawrence Lance, Cruelty, Fat Chance, 4734 N. Kenmore, Chicago, Ill. 60640. From the same address "Here it is" magazine going into #3. . . . Alan Davies, slough cup hope tantrum, Other Publications, 68 Downer Ave, Dorchester, Mass 02125 ($2). . . From Good Gay Poets, POB 277, Astor Sta., Boston, Mass 02123: John Wieners, Behind the State Capitol or Cincinnati Pike ($4.95 paper, $14.95 hard); and in a combined volume ($2.50) Orange Telephone by Salvatore Farinella and Nuestra Senore de los Delores by Charley Shively.

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BASIL BUNTING

Basil Bunting is a living English poet whose work few people seem to have encountered. Bunting is now seventy-five yearsl old and lives in South Wylan-on-Tyne, Northumberland. I hope the English consider him a living national treasure, though I doubt he is much discussed there either, and I am puzzled that I have never heard a word about him or his poems in any course on "The History of Modern Poetry", since both his poems and his literary friendships make him an important figure in 20th century poetry. But Matthew Moynihan (who works at Gotham and is a passionate collector of Bunting material), without whom I still would know nothing more about Bunting than what the jacket copy on his "Collected Poems" conveys, tells me that only a handful of graduate students know much about Bunting. Combine them with a few poets, poetry addicts and literary archeologists and you have "a poets' poet" -- a figure whose name is familiar to a few and whose work is almost totally unexposed.

Bunting's "Collected Poems", published by Fulcrum Press in 1968 in England, never published here, contains nearly all the poems printed in six earlier, smaller volumes. Bunting is a perfectionist; a stern surveyor of his own work. His output, as we know it from what is published, is under 70 poems. As he said to Ginsberg during his 1967 New York visit, "All I wanted to salvage were the good lines." He told Ginsberg that he ahd cut his long, autobiographical poems, "Briggflatts", from twenty-five thousound lines to seven-hundred and fifty, and had thrown the edited lines away. "I throw away everything." Including, Ginsberg discovered, over one-hundred letters from Ezra Pound, (see "Allen Ginsberg In America," pp.141-145, by Jane Kramer, Vintage Paperback, for the Bunting-Ginsberg encounter.)

Bunting published his first book of poems, "Redimiculum Matellarum" in Milan in 1930. His next published book of poems did not appear till 1950, when a character called Dallum Flynn put out "Poems, 1950" under "The Cleaner's Press" imprint, in Galveston, Texas. (Flynn had been publishing Pound's economic and political tracts which were to be primary evidence in Pound's trial.) Bunting wrote no poetry between 1949 and 1963, though his work had been printed sporadically, mostly in the '30's, in "Poetry" magazine. "The Spoils" (1965),

"Loquitar" (1965) and the autobiographical long poem "Briggflats" (1966) are his most recent works included in "Collected Poems". All except "Collected Poems" are out of print and registered collectors items.

The best method of tracking Bunting's career is through the "Basil Bunting Bibliography" compiled by Rodger Guedella. His appearances in print, in both prose and poetry are recorded as are essays and reviews dealing with Bunting's work. (The Bibliography is published by Norwood Editions in 1973 and can be ordered pre-paid from Gotham).

Bunting's poems are not what anyone could call confessional. Any references to his own life (the personal details) come through metaphors from his experience, (personal and literary) and not through first-person revelation. So the information informally gathered in Jonathan Williams long interview, "Descant on Rawthey's Madrigal" (gnomon Press, 1968) as Williams and Bunting talk, or rather Williams gently prods Bunting to talk, is the fullest account around of Bunting's personal history and long fight to be recognized as a "professional" poet. Bunting was a C.O. in World War I. He stood by his Quaker background and went to prison when he was 18. Those prison experiences are interwoven among the lines of his first long poem "Villon" (1925). After the war, he briefly tried the London School of Economics. He tells Williams that he was interested in Eliot's poem "Preludes" since it attempted to employ musical forms, something Bunting does throughout his poems. He met Eliot then but only knew him several years later. In 1923, Bunting went to Paris and was secretary and general gofer for Ford Maddox Ford and his "transatlantic review." (Hemingway was his successor, just for history.) He returned to London, where he worked on the periodical "The Outlook" (something like "The Nation" here) for several years, becoming their music critic for one year in 1927. In 1930 he came to America, travelled, met Zukofsky, who has always admired his work (and who included him in the 1930 objectivist issue of "Poetry" magazine), and also married a girl from Wisconsin. It is typical of Bunting that he nowhere reveals more than bald facts about his family, his two wives or his personal emotional adventures. He met Ezra Pound in Rapallo first in 1924, but became closely involved with him five years later when he returned to Rapallo, living there at intervals till the early 30's. Yeats was in Rapallo at this time too, and Bunting remarks that he and Pound were called in one day to witness Yeat's will one day. American heiress, Margaret de Silver gave Bunting some money in the late '20's which enabled him to spend that time in Rapallo, writing. When Rapallo got too expensive, Bunting took his family off to live in the Canary Islands. In the late '30's, he lived on a 6-ton yacht called "The Thistle", which he moored off the Devon coast. During World War II, he served in the R.A.F., first in a balloon squadron and then, serendipitously, on large yachts requisitioned from millionaires for military defence duties along the English coast. The War took him to Persia as a squadron interpreter; a job he finds humorous since he knew ancient, not modern, Persian, which he had learned with Pound as they endeavored to read the Persian poet Ferdosi, and had run out of the French translation. After the war, and after another attempt at being a London journalist, Bunting settled in Northumberland, where he remains. (He came to America in 1967, when he read at The Guggenheim in New York and also spent time in Santa Barbara. He came again in 1971 to teach a semester at the State University at Binghamton, and an attempt at raising enough money to bring him back to this country this spring is being organized now.) This is the evocative biographical skeleton of a poet whose work bridges an impressive number of cultural traditions and whose language remains new.

Bunting is an inheritor of the bardic tradition. His poems need the voice. The Northumbrian intonation runs through his work, as do references in form and alliteration to early Norse and Old English poetry. Reading the "Collected Poems" made me head for "Beowolf", only to find I didn't own a copy. Read this small passage from "Briggflats" and you'll hear it.

"Who sang, sea takes
brawn brine, bone grit.
Keener the kittewake.
Fell forget him.
Fathoms dull the dale,
gulfweed voices..."

Though his poems are often composed within strict rhyme schemes, it is their rhythm that carries them. Bunting says, "Poetry like music, is to be heard. It deals in sound -- long sounds and short sounds, heavy beats and light beats, the tone relations of vowels, the relations of consonants to one another which are like instrumental color in music. Poetry lies dead on the page, until some voice brings it to life, just as music on the stave is no more than instructions to the player. A skilled musician can imagine the sound, more or less, and a skilled reader can try to hear, mentally, what his eyes see in print; but nothing will satisfy either of them till his ears hear it as real sound in the air." ("The Poet's Point of View," published in "Descant on Rawthey's Madrigal".)

Bunting, like Pound, subscribes to the position that the writer should represent as much of human culture as possible, though he has claimed "I take care not to write anything I don't bloody well know." So, he made it his business to know Villon's voice and Villon's forms, the various Latin Philosophers and poets from Catullus and Horace to Lucretius He himself names his influences as "Wordsworth and Dante, Horace, Wyatt and Malherbe, Manucheri and Ferdosi, Villon, Whitman, Edmund Spenser, ...Pound and Zukofsky."

Not on this list are the composers who have consistantly inhabited Bunting's imagination. His involvement with music comes far back from his early childhood when he remembers an aunt who played piano for him. He works with a sense of musical form, describing at length the form of "Briggflats" as a parallel to Scarlatti's "B Minor Fugati Sonata". In stanza IV, he brings Scarlatti into the poem as the concise singer, the perfector of musical content:

> As the player's breath warms the fipple the tone clears.
> It is time to consider how Domenico Scarlatti
> condensed so much music into so few bars
> with never a crabbed turn or congested cadence,
> never a boast or a see-here; and stars and lakes
> echo him and the copse drums out his measure,
> snow peaks are lifted up in moonlight and twilight
> and the sun rises on an acknowledged land.

This sense of the composer, the musician as the master of expressive form is seen throughout Bunting's work, both in his constant musical metaphor, his vocabulary and his direct references to different sounds and kinds of music. His early poems are often elaborate, with their references to esoteric poets from other cultures, languages and histories, his borrowing of their forms and phrases (he resembles Pound in his interpretive translations from other poets). But his poetry turns steadily more colloquial and direct, even prosiac in tone. He uses abbreviations and flat slang side by side with a sometimes maddeningly erudite vocabulary. "Personal Column" (1927) is an experiment in a straight newspaper ad form: (It's one of the smallest and most frivolous of Bunting's poems.)

> ...As to my heart, that may as well be forgotten
> or labelled: Owner will dispose of same
> to a good home, refs. exchgd., h.&c.,
> previous experience desired but not essential
> or let on a short lease to suit convenience.

I have now read Bunting's "Collected Poems" seven or eight times, and I keep coming back to "Briggflats", "Villon" and his two books of Odes. The sense of poetic control, of absolute clarity of language and image gets stronger and stronger, the arcane (at least to me) references become less intrusive and each poem appears as the most skillfully made mosaic of words and sounds. I think that Wallace Stevens must have read these poems and recognized their music. Bunting's control sometimes makes his poems feel a little didactic and dusty, but his stern and lyric character eventually breaks through, especially in his longer works.

I keep realizing how much I can learn about making poems from his poems and I can only urge everyone who is fascinated with that activity to beat the woods and bushes to get hold of his work. So let's all get together and make loud noises about why his works are not republished

in America. His poems should be available to everybody and I hope he does arrive this spring, making his voice accessible too. (Alexandra Anderson)

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ETC: Unmuzzled Ox, Vol III, No 2, Box 374, Planetarium Sta, NYC 10024 ($7.50 for 10 issues special otherwise 4 ishs for $8). . . Mulch #6, Vol 3, No 2, Mulch Press, PO Box 426, Amherst, Mass 01002 ($3). . . John Duffy, Down Worn Forgotten Streets, Cymric Press, Box 474, Planetarium Sta, NYC 10024. . . The End of the Year 1975, Western Haiku Issue, ($2), The End (& Variations Thereof) #9, Box 798, Monte Rio, CA 95462 (Not to be missed, nope). . . VORT, Vort Works Ink, 1708 Tilton Dr, Silver Springs, Md 20902 (Critical mag devoted to usually poets in pairs, $7.50 a year 3 issues). . . The Painted Bride, Quarterly, Vol 2, No 4, 527 South Street, Philadelphia, Pa. 19147 $1.50).

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Dear Peter Z. Hujar,

Last week you asked me if I would come out in print. Well, this is print and I'm out. You see, there is this normalization process that is running rampant through the city, the country, the world, and let us remember the universe -- it too may be normalized before long. When I was a child I used to wonder if my life could have meaning because of what I might do with it. Now, at thirty-five I will never forget because I might forgive too easily. I am glad that you asked me a difficult question.

Your friend,
Ed. Baynard

* * * * *

Freighters, Lee Harwood, Pig Press, Newcastle Upon Tyne, England, 1975, $1.50.

Lee Harwood treats his life exactly where it is, some sense of it as the freighters moving on the sea. Brighton is the name of the town; a small map of the area is given, a geological map, a cross-section of the land, reproductions of two days newspapers clippings of shipping activity in Sussex harbor, and on the cover are drawings of five freighter types. The scene is sketched from each angle, his life moving among the sadness of other lives, as he says

"there are no answers" he said, too easily

At the same time there is this spacious distance: he looks at the land and he speaks about it, an eye and voice perhaps from on the sea, no interference, just a clear sighting and a clear report. The sea is almost befriended for imparting a sense of freedom, the quiet of living there. This book, "the soft mist over the town", touches around us when we read it.
(Alan Davies)

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Congratulations to Bernadette Mayer and Lewis Warsh on the birth of Marie Ray, 8 lbs. 21 in.

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The strike of 1931 revolved around readers in the factory. The workers themselves used to pay twenty-five to fifty cents a week and would hire a man to read to them during work. A cigar factory is one enormous open area, with tables at which people work. A platform would be erected, so that he's look down at the cigar makers as he read to them some four hours a day. He would read from newspapers and magazines and a book would be read as a serial. The choice of the book was democratically decided. Some of the readers were marvelous natural actors. They wouldn't just read a book. They'd act out the scenes. Consequently, many cigar makers, who were illiterate, knew the novels of Zola and Dickens and Cervantes and Tolstoy.

And the works of the anarchist, Kropotkin. Among the newspapers read were The Daily Worker and the Socialist Call.

The factory owners decided to put an end to this, though it didn't cost them a penny. Everyone went on strike one morning and found the lecture platform torn down. The strike was lost. Every strike in my home town was always lost. The readers never came back.

(Jose Yglesias, in Studs Terkel's HARD TIMES, Pantheon, NY, pp.109-110)

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QUIET TIMES

Surrounded by a group of "in-coolies"
impeccably staring inward
eyes white as diapers.
Otherwise, naked. Naughty, holy
and nice. Utter partygoers without gossip
we like to dance. We like to in-
sert a joke.
We like to smoke.
A picture of natives, one carries
the other in her arms.

Jamie MacInnis

THE POETRY PROJECT
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