

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

No. 44 1 Apr 1977
Ted Greenwald, editor
St. Mark's Church, 2nd Avenue
& Tenth St. New York 10003.

Good month for St. Mark's to have new floor. All invited to come over and take a walk on it. The Mon nite (8:15 PM) readings: Apr 4 Open Reading, Apr 11 Performance Reading, Barbara Baracks & Tom Johnson, Apr 18 Performance, Jim Brodey, Dave Burrell, Didi Susan Dubelyew, w/ Mike Sappol, Apr 25 Performance, Phill Niblock w/ Armand Schwerner. Wed nite (8:30 PM) readings are: Apr 6 Barbara Guest & Susan Howe, Apr 13 James Merrill & Richard Howard, Apr 20 Victor Bockris, Lecture Talk, Slides on Poetry/Australia, Apr 27 Lewis MacAdams & Ted Greenwald. On Sat, Apr 23 (7:30 PM) Denise Levertov will read.

Free writing workshops are (7:30 PM) Tues, Jim Brodey; Thurs, Bill Zavatsky; Fri, Frank Lima. The Poetry Project and the Institute for Art & Urban Resources cosponsor a workshop on Sat, 10:30 AM at P.S.1, 21-01 46 Rd, L.I.C. with Tony Towle (Take E or F train to 23 St--Ely Ave).

ON APR 9, SATURDAY, AT 8PM, THERE WILL BE A BENEFIT FOR THE POETRY PROJECT AND DANSPACE. WE ARE REQUESTING DONATION, CONTRIBUTIONS OF MINIMUM \$5. SOME TO APPEAR: MERCE CUNNINGHAM, DOUGLAS DUNN, JOHN CAGE, WILLIAM BURROUGHS & HELEN ADAM. OTHERS. FOR RESERVATIONS CALL 674-0910 between 2 PM and 6 PM, MON APR 4, WED APR 6, FRI APR 8.

* * * * *

THIS & THAT, & BOO BOOS: Patricia Jones, Fay Chaing, Sandra Esteves, Sara Miles are planning an anthology of young women poets from NY. Would like mss of not more than 10 poems, deadline May 1. Address to WOMEN'S ANTHOLOGY, c/o Basement Workshop, 199 Lafayette St., New York 10012. After Harry Lewis' article on anthologies last month we listed Roof as being editorless. It is not. The two editors are Tom Savage & James Sherry (Co-editors). Some additional anthologies: The World Anthology & Another World both edited by Anne Waldman. The Gist of Origin, 1951-71, edited by Cid Corman. See Phillis Gershtor's A Bibliographic Guide to the Literature of Contemporary American Poetry, 1970-1975, for huge section on anthologies, with annotations. AND Young American Poets, edited by Paul Carroll! . . Apr 4 (Bill Zavatsky, Lewis Warsh, Ted Berrigan), Apr 11 (Joe Ceravolo, David Shapiro, Frank Lima), Apr 18 (Jennifer Bartlett, Jim Dine, Brigid Polk reading Andy Warhol) at Museum of Modern Art, 6 PM, Founders Room. . . Reading at P.S. 1 (21-01 46 Rd, Long Island City: Take E or F to 23 St-Ely Ave) Sun at 3:30 PM Apr 3 Yuki Hartman, Apr 17 Terence Winch, Apr 24 Anne Waldman. . .At Washington Square Church, Benefit for New Wilderness Foundation, Thurs Apr 21, 8:30 PM, 135 W 4th St, with Jackson MacLow, Spencer Holst, Armand Schwerner, Hannah Weiner.

* * * * *

Disjunctive Reflections on Bernadette Mayer

The Hunger Artist

Kafka's hunger artist makes his living by performing long fasts in public. He dies of starvation performing in the side show of a traveling circus. Before he dies he sees his 'billing' slip, playing to an ever increasing dearth of crowd most of whom have gone to see the circus' newest acquisition, a muscled, glistening, black panther. His deathbed words spoken in vain to an audience of himself were that he wished he could tell them all how easy it was to fast, how it had been the easiest thing in the world to do, for simply he had never found a food that he had like. A physician's explanation would be that the man had died form anorexia nervosa. Naming the culprit disease a method of magic to keep the disease entity at bay, over there, in the other man's body and not in our self. The fallacy in that is that the famine is here, and not over there but rather in us where our poet Ms. Mayer, like Kafka,

finds it for us. "Studying Hunger" in the most well-fed nation in the world? And sex? "Only eat among trusted friends..." "No one sees me eat." "Listen, the world becomes progressively less edible." "My hunger creates a food that everybody needs." Disjunctively met by: In ancient times in certain parts of the world families with children did not have sex. And heading into the locus from an obtuse angle, Blake's concept of desire denied leading to "pestilence," The poet will create, and recreate desire. She eats sparsely, selectively. She goes to hell. She goes to doctors. A disease: "which occurs predominantly in white middle class adolescent females with perfectionist tendencies. Their solution to intense guilt induced by any sensory pleasure is to deny themselves the pleasure of eating" (Definition of anorexia nervosa in Amer. Fam. Physician). One approach to treatment is to force feed the patient. The poet resolves instead to the "sexual etiology of the child." The child endows all creation with the ability to speak...as a child might address the grass of a tree in conversation. A condition of faith. While bravely not eating she attempts to create a love in the world through the magic of language. A task of shamanistic dimension updated and 'uptown' from the famous "Coyote," where death, in words of Isaac Singer, is perhaps just "sexual amnesia." Statistically, the world as we know it, has been given notice. Imagistically our poet does not shrink from this information internalizing the options in her feminine strength surprising us with modes of theatrical cannibalism as a black widow might devour her successive mates. On the other hand, and perhaps more predominantly, a self-devouring tendency. "I can eat the self-devouring cake." (Gloria Frym). Can you, can anyone? These diseases are generally more common among women, where the body identifies a part of the body as not-self and destroys it. In passing, our poet mentions systemic lupus (wolf) or "Flannery O'Connor's Peacock Disease" (actually 'butterfly rash'). Modernity: Can you tell the tale and live? (Elie Wiesel). See: "Rage hums in the chest, where it stays, resides, you see, you do not see. Before valium was invented." When and if she beat up her psychiatrist did she effect a cure? Was it rape? Luckily a bit of Jaggar, 'cause' ideas come into her "prostitute's" head like "Fuck Jesus." It's a passionate Rimbaudian Christmas, an upsidedown Lourdes...in the wisdom of get your ya yas out.

"Poe, Poet"

"...Yet the thought strikes him that by certain involutions and parentheses this anger may be engendered..."

from The Imp of the Perverse, Edgar Poe

Rage. Her language goes toward rage. Her love goes out to the world. "For once a white woman flies like a crow." Singing as she gives birth. The pain may have pushed her to song, but as spur is incidental to the movement and in that way she is transcendental. Her je-jeune line "if someone does not change into an animal we won't be saved," is perhaps later and best answered by herself in her primitive impulses (in the language) in the midst of civilization (and her most civilized self) transcends the current Occidental entrapment.

Just the Alchemical Backlog Which May Boil Down to Instinct

She is a difficult poet whose language is "personalist," but at times almost so private as to be the language of schizophrenia. "I am was that schizophrenic." She deals with the shibboleths of psychoanalysis, but she does not submit. Her language, her private language engenders kinetic, personal magic. The general readership will probably never forgive her or rather grant her her method. But for every sense of her as a child lost in the woods, there are a thousand adult ambiguities she plays absolutely straight.

The Lovers' Cross

1. "I am sorry to cover my images out of fear but please believe me there are things you cannot write." Studying Hunger
2. "The consuming ones, then those who are ready to be consumed, who lay themselves out on the table and wait, a cross poem, Simple Complications

Studying Hunger and The Love Poems move (speaking a might broadly) from 1. to 2. and take us with glory however intimately or painfully attained. The greatest feat a poet can

perform, (but perhaps 'service' is a better word than 'performance' and 'glory' is a better word than either) is to go slowly through hell and to come out with love intact. For her friends, lovers, and now family. "This is mere writing built on paper./The mysterious help from our friends/transcends this all." --Joanne Kyger. "And learn as one great poet wrote in grace/That hell is a condition not a place." --Gus Blaisdell. (Charlie Vermont)

* * * * *

VARIATIONS ON A THEME BY SHELLEY

1

We live in an opal or
crystal ball. The sun's
an eye, against it clouds
crowd like Spanish castles
on a mountain. Everywhere
colors dampen cling and from
our heat slide into the sky.

2

The shifting roses
of brick and iron
bleed the earth as
we erect trellises
ladders and trees.

3

I don't want my poems
lisped on the numbered
tongues of children. May
they be part of the world
and sight by which we
become the eye and defy
questions with our beauty.

Frank O'Hara

* * * * *

The inexplicable joy of being able to do your own thing, in the night. Yesterday, we all went to hear Allen Ginsberg. He's just another man, but it was fun to hear him chant and not-so-chant. We all looked up to him like he was our friend, and shouted back in the middle of Lowell's reading. I liked it.

Corso spoke in applicable terms in the joint of the room. He overpowered the conductor and we all said "Nay."

In response to this star-gazing in a newly applied Church room, the hens and chickens chattered their joy and amazement at the sometimes somnambulant atmosphere.

All in all we spoke together after the readers managed to declare. (Regina Beck)

* * * * *

FOR MAX JACOB (translations/imitations) by Andrei Codrescu, Tree Books, Box 9005, Berkeley, CA 94709 \$1.50.

Codrescu's apprehension of the poet is astute, correct, his debt immense, but hardly as huge as the one most of us owe to the cosmopolitan wit, continental charm, whimsical outrage-

ousness, and droll mysticism of Max Jacob. Here is the truly neglected poetic genius of the century!

Ah, yes! The little man laughing behind barbed wire is the same man crying between quotation marks!

And Codrescu's tribute is an important piece of missionary work. He has captured the irreverant syntax of Jacob in the translations, and has synthesized same in the imitations, called "Jakobines", in this slim 20 page volume.

We met at the house of X for a crying party that was to last three days and three nights. Instead we ate goose and laughed most of the time.

The academic translators and fussbudgets Francaise might find the translations a little looser than they like, but what do they know -- too much, I'll wager. However, no one can fault Codrescu's exquisite imitations for they contain the spirit of a modern poetry, that of the prose poem, whose genius is Max Jacob.

Ah, yes! The Japanese also meet for sleeping parties at the beach which last for three days and three nights!

The cover, incidentally, bears the familiar sketch of Jacob by Cocteau; on the back cover there's an eye -- that eye stands for Andrei. And the piece quoted here is from Andrei's dedication which ends thusly:

Everywhere we turn, Max Jacob, there is a party in progress and your holy lights are on it.

(Pat Nolan)

* * * * *

LIMBO/DREAM

I can't afford
a passport
to Paradise
but
I wouldn't refuse it
if someone
gave it
to me.

as if
in that dream

I wasn't hanging on
with no idea what Paradise is
and coming out of it
what I see is

we all hang on such dreams
you turn to the window at the end of
a Spring day

and there
at the same moment
is snow

sun
rain
and afterawhile
you don't question it
but watch it fall.

Harry Lewis

* * * * *

Nolan, Pat. Fast Asleep. 1977. Z Press: Calais, VT.

Leaving FAST ASLEEP to lay around among the Canada Dry bottles and the match books has paid off for good. I picked it up there from the table this morning and read it over again while I watched AMERICAN BANDSTAND. The inklings of a Saturday hangover were gone by the middle "I think he's in love with her/but I might be old fashioned" & by the end

turned trees riot with
color steaming roofs
and smoking chimneys
as I live and breathe

I was bouncing around the apartment thinking about chores and Arkilikos. Not bad for a short selection of poems that could pass for pure whimsy if you couldn't read too well. Whimsy, sure-- "Just as I stood up/I sat back down/again forgetting/what I stood for" but behind that mannerism lies one of the most careful and clear talents I've encountered on the West Coast. The quiet precision of "Long Distance" makes the picturesque perfectly sublime--quite an accomplishment when you consider the stark commonness of the language.

I smoke a cigarette

and gaze out
at the blue blue
above the hills

Nolan brings this kind of plain talk into a sequence that compels you to follow it nowhere till you realize where it's leading--right to the bamboo in the wind, the light switch on the wall. And it's not as simple as it seems. He twists around his syntax to reveal remarkable things about what we mean when we say

...off

the beaten track take all
the normal pleasure and shove them
off the path drop everything

Drop everything! but have a look at Nolan's book. There is gripping commentary about his 20th Century American life ("Buy a Little Time") as well as tender affirmation of it ("Bed-time Story", "Oakland")--in poems that are so casual as to appear trivial until you find yourself in an expanse of small things--none of which are insignificant. He applies all the tricks on purpose, with the agility and ease of Billy North stealing second. They make it look easy but nothing can be overlooked, nor should be. Four stars. (Steven LaVoie)

* * * * *

BOOKS, MAGS, ETC: Michael Stephens, Still Life, Kroesen Books. . . Paul Violi, Some Poems, The Swollen Magpie Press, 68 Sleepyhollow Rd., Briarcliff, NY, \$2,00. . . Shell 2/3, Jack Kimball, ed. 362 Waban Ave, Waban, MA 02168. . . Grace Schulman, Burn Down The Icons, Princeton Univ Press, Princeton, NJ 08540, \$3.95 (paper), \$7.50 (cloth). . . Barrett Watten, Decay, This, Serendipity, 1790 Shattuck Ave, Berkeley, CA 94709, \$1. . . Janine Pommy Vega, Morning Passage, Telephone Books, Box 672, Old Chelsea Sta, NYC 10011, \$1.50. . . La Fusta, Dept of Italian, Rutgers Univ, Rutgers, NJ (\$1) an interview by Richard Vetere with Gilbert Sorrentino on The Writing of Serious Fiction. Also, Vetere article on Ferlinghetti, in Identity, #3, 420 Madison Ave, NYC. . . "Beat" Postcards, from Unspeakable visions of the individual, PO Box 439, California, Penn 15419, 10¢ ea., min order \$5/Ginsberg, Solomon, Holmes, McClure, etc. . . Lois Freefield, Miscarriage in Vermont, The Land Press, Box 14a, West Glover, VT 05875, \$1.50. . . Out There #11, Women's Issue, edited by Rose Lesniak, 6944 W. George St., Chicago, Ill 60634. . . Bezoar, (Vol, #4, Jonathan Bayliss: from PROLOGOS) (Vol v, #3, Jonathan Bayliss: from PROLOGOS) (Vol v, #whatever), Douglas Woolf, Ed Dorn. . . From Andrew Hoyem, Printer, 566 Commercial St, San Francisco, CA 94111: Jim Rosenberg, Notes For The Foundation Of A Theory Of Meter, \$1.50; Broadside -- Andrew Hoyem, The First Poet To The Moon, James Broughton, Going Through Customs, N. Scott Momaday, The Colors Of Night, all \$2.50. . . Flora Danica #2, edited by Tod Kabza & Brita Bergland, Ann Arbor, Mich. . . Thanks for partial support to NYSCA & CCLM.

* * * * *

A PASSEL OF D.C. BARDS

This is a short introduction to some interesting, budding young poets. Most of them are already represented by little books which they have done themselves. In keeping with the time-honored practice of poets publishing themselves. I am not attempting to make a case for them as a whole new "school," for they each have very distinct individual qualities that distinguish them from each other. It's only that they are writing in the same city, and without exception, know each other quite well.

The best known of these Washington D.C. poets are Michael Lally and Terrence (Terry) Winch. Lally currently lives and writes in the highly media-conscious poetry community of New York City. "In The Big Time," so to speak. His basic style is almost prosaic. He excels at autobiographical writing. Usually in very long, tight, formal poetic structures of free (blank) verse. His nearly-epic length poem, "My Life," is an extraordinary example of this style in action. He is most successful when working in this straight forward frontal assault. His subject, therefore, is most usually himself. And one finds the tone quite in contrast to the usually French intonation of the NY School of writers, with which Lally has closely identified himself. His poems, are dry, unconcerned with much (or any) improvisation, giving one the feeling that he always knows where his poems are going.

Winch, is as much a musician as a writer so his structures show a bit more freedom in their use of verb-direction and noun-spirit. His best collection, to date, has as much to do with the flexibility of the middle period Auden, as with the more obvious inspiration of Surrealist ideals. "Luncheonette Jealousy" divides it's 22 works unevenly between prose-like adventures (the best of which are "Fear Itself," "Honky Tonk," & "Loss" which is really fascinating), and more-difficult-to-read poems, which seem at times to be both an extension of Williams's basic variable foot and certain common concerns of the NY School. Of these works, "Excuses" is a brilliant example.

Winch carries his poems off wrapped in lavish self-hatreds. He shows definite signs of being a splendidly repressed romantic. Lally on the other hand, can move with a tightness that bespeaks more than just a working knowledge of how a poem moves in narrative style.

P. Inman and Tina Darraugh are the most experimental of the D.C. poets. Inman's "messages" are wrapped-up tightly in short variation-like passages. Which deal as much with the rhythm of what is being passed from his finger-brain to our mouth-ears, as in the usually punctuation-less structures that he deals with. There are tender coherences that momentarily flash before our eyes when we've been wised-up enough to correctly decode them. One can catch definite flashes of lyric sensibility.

Miss Darraugh has a style that is at once easier to deal with. She writes her poems like grocery notations. It may take a bit longer for one to get used to their rhythms. Her pages look quite sparse, words are arranged looming in separate places on the page. How we "read" them is solely up to us. There are far less literary considerations here. In contrast, Inman's structures are written always in oblong line blocks, more frequently the way Western writers do it, looking like prose paragraphs. Neither of them are visually as complicated as, say, Clark Coolidge, or Bruce Andrews (both of whom have a quite different visual style, and "meaning.")

Miss Darraugh has a sound heart of the provincial daisy, whose written outbursts explode in coherent mass exodus through the eyeball. (Incidentally, these two poets are married to one another. Which doesn't mean much to the ear, I don't think).

Lynn Dreyer, Doug Lang, and Bernard Welt (his real name) have distinctly different styles. Miss Dreyer writes about her personal life in a just-distorted-enough style that comes across like a verbal maniac. Her multiple worded surfaces conceal rare clarities beneath. She has all the delicate perception of a newly risen Lorca, momentarily soaked with words, spinning like a flaming pinwheel, faring with odd coherences from some invisible absentia. With all the stunning layers of twisted verbs, there is a natural sexiness here that is just frightening.

Doug Lang, Welsh-born, writes his poems with a directness that is sheer beauty to the tongue. His indepth puzzles, of decidedly French-American tense, makes for a talent that just won't quit. Like Inman, one of Lang's chief inspirations, is Modern Jazz. His various odes attest to some lessons that the rhythms of this music have instilled in him. Likewise, Lang is like an administrator for the D.C. crowd. He runs the chief series of readings, from the Folio Bookstore, every Friday night. Pairing major out-of-towners with the D.C. mob.

The last poet here, Bernard Welt is also the most advanced, and therefore, the best. He has a rare sensibility which resembles no one's more than John Ashbery's, with just the merest dash thrown in of a young budding Frank O'Hara. It is to his eternal credit then, that while his work is so engaging, and incredibly clear and very lyrical in his own form of complexity, he does not ape Ashbery's style. Only his quality. Welt's forms are very traditional, as in O'Hara's more mainstream works, and the best of Auden and Denby. His own self-music is so beautiful I was bowled right off my ear lobes. I cannot recommend him enough! He has no books that I am aware of, so editors take note. There is a rare bud in D.C., publishers scarf him up.

These poets attest to the continuing vitality of the regional dance and advancement of poetic forms as art. As praise is the nutrition of poets, these writers should be constantly enthused to keep on with their work. They will anyhow. Now, only time will tell. (Jim Brodey)

* * * * *

The Countess from Minneapolis by Barbara Guest, Burning Deck, 1976

the COUNTESS FROM MINNEAPOLIS. That's how the title appears on the inside of the book. Rather like a ransom note. Who's been kidnapped? Certainly not the Countess. She's more of an exile. And she's begging her beloved Eofirth not to abandon her in Minneapolis, same time being shocked at his activities: Tax Fraud! How absurd.//...Seduction, yes, and domination./ But as for cheating! And money! Apparently the Countess' image of an "artiste" has been shattered.

The woman leads a quiet, countesslike life, visitors arriving, random messages suggesting she acquire a "sophisticated cat", she likens her own curling papers to emptied silos, she is continually blending into her surroundings, her climate: "This street reminds me of scarceness, even loss like/searching for hen's teeth in the rain," murmured the/Countess to herself as she picked her way slowly down/Hennepin Avenue. Linguistically looped the Countess of course becomes her own language, becomes the river, becomes the city itself: Minneapolis persistently nagged by the unreasonable/river that both gladdens and disturbs her heart. It's some sort of transitional place to be, peopled by incoming university professors intending to enlighten students with color slides of the wonders of ancient Rome, winding up instead charmed by the "Vikings," big beer-drinking, peanut-crunching types who bear a striking resemblance to the "barbarians" who conquered Rome. Is Rome being conquered again and is that what the Countess is all about?

Following a discussion concerning the future of art, containing the either awful or great maxim, "less is Mores", John Graham, taking his leave, calls to his companion, "Remember, deterioration is embarrassing." And there's this neat vignette of Ford Madox Ford: The desk in the Minnesota twilight that edged in through/each window a light the color of the lemony moustache/of Ford Madox Ford. From here a simple old view.//In the galaxy of apprehensions present tonight restrain-/ing oneself from adding to what should remain simple.../leaving Madox with its single 'd'.

It's this kind of leanness she (Barbara Guest, who is not the Countess of Minneapolis.) seems to be steering towards. Structurally the book begins as minimally as possible, a poem consisting of serial words: "splice rapid brown slow turn", moves on poem-like, stumbles into a prose-piece, "Musings on the Mississippi", goes back into poems, prose pieces start to emerge, then dominate, a stray poem arises out of the text, a few terse two or three liners, a poem, more prose, a wonderful poem (No.34. Only about half the poems are titled.), the List of Activities, a minimal poem, into the galleries, chinese art, and finally Tony Smith, the last poem being his "Amaryllis", "A piece of art that through a collector's whim had come to dwell in Minneapolis."

Finis. And quite a trip. The poems earlier in the book seem most "Guest-like," though less airy, almost statements, and arranged in a somewhat rigid manner. I had a great time taking a series of lines, 4 of them, and unfolding them like a zig-zag ruler into one long line that didn't work at all that way. Especially since a fifth line underneath was an outright "No one knows why they are in Minneapolis" which would've been totally robbed of its strength without the four-line architecture above it.

Finally, though, I found the prose pieces fresher and just better than the poems. They move on from her earlier poems in Blue Stairs and Moscow Mansions more expansively, allowing the broadest field for her most visual logic of the New York poets, James Schuyler in tandem.

A good doorway to this book is the "Byronic Signatories" from Moscow Mansions. Those were the snap-shots, these are the paintings.

(Eileen Myles)

* * * * *

The Ice-Man

The ice-man he come
in his walk-in truck
and you in the front yard
makin clay-pies

and he chip off a piece
you just don't
beg so hard and---watch out!
for the pick

cause he know what he doin
but a chink fly off and
freeze you dead
it that cold!

You wrap it up good
with red clay round the bottom
you can suck it all the way
till he come back

from round the house,
M'dear hollin at him,
"Be sho'n' come Satday,
I'm makin ice cream!"

Cynthia Henderson

THE POETRY PROJECT
10th St & 2nd Ave
NYC 10003

FIRST CLASS MAIL