

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

No. 48 1 October 1977

Frances LeFevre, editor
St. Mark's Church, 2nd Avenue
and Tenth St New York 10003

AT THE POETRY PROJECT: Wednesday Night Readings at 8:30. Oct 5 Robert Creeley & Fielding Dawson, Oct 12 Carol Rubenstein, Robin Messing, Susie Timmons, Oct 19 Ed Sanders & Richard Price, Oct 26 Otis Brown & Marty Watt. . . Monday Night Performance Series at 8:15. Oct 3 Open Reading, Oct 10 Reading by Rochelle Kraut & Simon Schuchat, Oct 17 Concert by Rhys Chatham & Robert Appleton, Oct 24 Performance by Lenny Goldstein & Daniel Krakauer, Oct 31 Reading by Janet Hamill & Annabel Levitt. . . Writing Workshops Oct 25 Jim Brodey, Oct 28 Frank Lima. Simon Schuchat's workshop begins Nov 3. Special Workshops: Robert Creeley Oct 6, Ed Sanders Oct 20.

ELSEWHERE: Art Exhibitions: Oct 15-Nov 9 Jennifer Bartlett, Paula Cooper Gallery (155 Wooster St NYC), Oct 22-Nov 9 George Schneeman, Holly Soloman Gallery (392 West Broadway NYC). . . Opera: Oct 13 Washington Square (based on the Henry James novel, the first of 7 performances) with libretto by Kenward Elmslie and music by Thomas Pasatieri. For information call Lyric Theatre 730-0323. . . Readings: At the "Y" (Lexington Av & 92nd St) Oct 10 Elizabeth Bishop & Howard Moss, Oct 24 Richard Eberhart & James Wright. At Dr. Generosity's (2nd Ave & 73rd St) Oct 1 Andrew Glaze & Edwin Honig, Oct 8 Mark Rudman & Loren Shakely, Oct 15 George Economou & Rochelle Owens, Oct 22 none, Oct 29 Translators Charles Hazeloff, Frances LeFevre, Sonia Raiziss reading poets Rilke, Sikelianos, Moro, Montale, and others. New York Book Fair '77 (Bryant Park at 42nd St between 5th & 6th Avenues) Oct 21, 1-7 PM, Oct 22 & 23, 10 AM - 7 PM.

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AROUND THE EDGES

The Poetry Project is under way for its 12th season, full of energy and bounce. The tremendous rehabilitation of this old landmark church by the Preservation Youth Project, while not yet completed, has reached a point where we can look around and see how it's going to be. Our new performance space is superb.

The Newsletter will come out on the first of every month October through July and will be sent to anyone who requests it. Contributions--the larger the better--towards its cost will be greatly appreciated. If you can, please send us at least a dollar or two for postage for the 10 issue, which travel by first class to over 1,000 readers. Money is an overwhelming concern for the whole Project--though when hasn't it been? When we have any we must plan with extreme care in order to use it effectively; when we haven't, we must beg for it. At present the Newsletter is partially funded by a grant from the CCLM, but we always need more help.

Items of interest to poets and the poetry audience will be welcomed for consideration. Reviews and comments should be brief. Our space is limited and we can use only a portion of what is sent in, but everything will receive attention. If you wish your submissions to be returned when they can't be used please include a stamped and addressed envelope. Regrettably, we can't afford to pay authors, but they have our lasting gratitude.

The same issue of the New York Times in which Robert Lowell's most recent collection of poetry, Day by Day, was listed under "New Books" carried on its front page the story of his sudden death the day before, on September 12 at age 60. It was not quite seven months since he had read at St. Mark's for the first

time, with Allen Ginsberg on February 23. The Times had referred to the reading in advance as a historic event that would bring together two poets "from opposite ends of the spectrum," and Lowell mentioned this with the comment that they were rather "from opposite ends of William Carlos Williams." He and Ginsberg had selected poems to read that evening whose themes were similar--memories of their fathers, reflections on age and dying. The audience, a capacity one (many were turned away) was obviously moved by the occasion and listened to both poets with great concentration. Elsewhere in this issue Ginsberg describes his own encounters with Lowell. We are deeply sorry to have lost this new friend, whom we'd been counting on to come back to St. Mark's to read for us soon again, and often.

A delightful and illuminating interview with Ted Berrigan in CITY 6 (Fall 1977, \$2, available at literary bookstores and from CITY magazine, English Dept., City College, 138th St. and Convent Ave., NYC 10031) settles the question once for all time, we hope, of how the name "The New York School" originated and what it really means (or doesn't) as applied to poets. Ted also speaks of his approach to writing poems and teaching poetry workshops. A MUST--read it!

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On The Arm of a Dumb Marine

You sleep with me
Because I am here
I feel I could sleep with no-one else
For the rest of the year.

Down the ladder to sleep.
Alone on the last rung I wonder if maybe
I couldn't find something better, but what
That is not what I define all else by?

You grab me by the scruff of the neck
Push my head onto your shoulder
Where I whisper into your ear
The Military Police is here.

--Steven Hall

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SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS: The Kulchur Foundation announces that Turn Again to Me by Helen Adam, with collages by the poet (\$7, paperback \$3.50) will be published on Monday, October 24. That afternoon a publication party for Ms. Adam will be given from 5 to 7 at the Gotham Book Mart Gallery, 41 West 47th Street, New York. Readers of the Newsletter are cordially invited.

Under the eaves of a Victorian turret tower in San Francisco, overlooking Carl and Stanton Streets, a monthly literary salon is being held to discuss works-in-progress by participants. Current topic: a biography of choreographer Maurice Bejart by Pamela Gaye; future topics: Molly, a play by Dick Moore; The Mallet of the Galley Master, a novel by Milly Hurlimann. Guests, suggestions welcome. Next salon early October. Telephone 415-564-1004 for information.

On Monday, November 7, the first of what we hope will be a series of Poetry Project Community Meetings will take place in the Parish Hall at 7:30 PM. All those who are interested are urged to attend. The purpose of the meeting will be to encourage thinking, as a community of writers and artists, about the Project and its various programs. We want to know: 1) what you think we've been doing well; 2) any ideas you have for new programs; 3) ideas for improving present programs. Please take some time between now and that date to think about the

Project as a whole (the readings, workshops, performances, and newsletter) and come let us hear what you have to say.

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STRANGE INDEED

Strange Days Ahead by Michael Brownstein. Calais, Vermont: Z Press, 1975, \$3.50. The title of Michael Brownstein's most recent collection of poems has proved to be self-prophetic. Published almost two years ago in an attractive and reasonably priced edition, containing masterpieces big and small by this daring and accomplished poet, this important book has been greeted by a critical silence that has by now grown deafening. Rather than go into the question of why such a fine collection has gone unheralded, a question that continues to vex me, I would simply like to call attention to a few of the obvious marvels of Strange Days Ahead.

It follows the inimitable Brownstein tradition of Highway to the Sky, his first big collection of poetry (which won the 1969 Frank O'Hara Award), the witty and mysterious prose tales of Brainstorms, and the stupefyingly funny insanity of his novel Country Cousins. Strange Days Ahead has the mobile intelligence, the spiritual zip and zap, the mercurial wit and heady boldness of his earlier books, with a wonderfully austere and admirable didacticism, spiced with invective, that seems new to his work. The same taste for magic and beauty is there, with a stronger, more mature voice behind it, the voice of a man able to look about himself afresh and wonder what is going on, and to present the questioning intellect as something that it in fact is, an asset to life and good writing. Michael Brownstein is a very good writer, salubrious to read.

I said masterpieces big and small. Big: "Geography," "United at First," "Outside," "Unmasked at Last," "The Good Humor Man," "Dinner Music." Small: "The Trumpets Are Coming," "Triplets," "The Sidewalk," "Furniture Music," "Streets and Sheets," "Strange Days Ahead," "Garden City Jitters," "43 Cents a Quart," "Les Lésions en Espace." Lines such as "Butterfly struck by cedar waxwing shadow," "La vecelle roulant ses seins bopées sur l'enfant," and "Glassine envelopes trampoline the pigmeat into a final awakening," leap off the pages in this book, which seems to me to have been so carefully constructed that the movement from poem to poem is as crucial as the movement from line to line and work to word, all "lucid intervals/ Of screw-loose transcendence." --Ron Padgett

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THE NAROPA (BOULDER) REPORT

The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado, offered a full summer of poetics lectures and workshops, poetry readings and performances, group and individual consultations, parties, picnics, jam sessions, swimming, hiking, bird watching, & liaisons dangereuses. Some of the highlights: Ed Dorn's exegesis of how he writes when driving-- "flywheel poems," including "101": that great naught between parallels"; Margaret Tapa Kearney's reading from her collages "Cuba" and "Climb"--an elegant discourse between two characters as they scale a mountain; Michael Brownstein's (or was it George Jessel's) artistry as roving ambassador, fund-raiser, and toastmaster at readings. Allen Ginsberg taught a history of his own beat generation to a class of 100+ and, in an astonishing display of demonic indefatigability, spent most of one day dashing off spontaneous haiku "portraits" of an equal number of persons at \$1 a throw to bring in much-needed Naropa funds; Peter Orlovsky yodeled his way into everyone's heart; Joanne Kyger introduced ethnic tribal source material to her Visiting Poetics Class and read beautifully from new work; Ed Sanders pulled off a real coup with some of his students who prepared an exhaustive investigative report on the W.S. Merwin/Robert Bly/Chogyam Trungpa/N.E.A. controversies, clearing up a few raging rumors along the way; Dick Gallup (the "new,"

more public poet, as opposed to the hermetic scholar of Mongolian psycho-history), exuded warmth and confidence en route to writing a new group of love (and hate) lyrics; Bill Burroughs, Jr. read and sang from his dynamic Pakriti Junction; Burroughs the Elder conducted a workshop on film script writing and fished for trout; Gregory Nunzio Corso alternately--and often simultaneously --terrified and delighted one and all with his "Socratic Poetry Rap" (Gilgamesh, The Bacchae, Celine, Kerouac, et al.) in and out of the classroom, broke hearts, punched noses, wrecked cars, read poems, fried shoes; Max Orpheus Corso was everybody's favorite baby; Michael McClure, suave as ever, presented a selection of new and old works to a rapt audience; Clark Coolidge lectured on W.C. Williams' early poetry, his own work, and modern keyboard music, and gave a stunning one-hour-long reading of his new major opus, "American ONes"; Anne Waldman taught Auster, Dickinson, Sappho, Stein, Djuna Barnes, Jane Bowles, Bernadette Mayer, Sei Shonagon, and others, and chanted and strutted and read as Barbara Dilley shook and wiggled in accompaniment; Larry Fagin harangued and wheedled and coddled and needled his (and other) students while covering a period of 800 years of art and literature; Philip Whalen's first class assignment was "Read all of Shakespeare"; Jack Collom (who would have fit perfectly into all the John Ford westerns) delivered his erudite lyrics in a Klondike-like lilt; Dragon Lady Simone Lazzeri ran a free writing workshop for the faithful; poets such as Jim Carroll, Andy Clausen, Bonnie Schulman, Antler, Lisa Nunez, Rebecca Wright, Victor Coleman, Reed Bye, Steven Rodefer, Barbara Weier, Tom Savage, Phoebe MacAdams, Ellen Zweig, Cindy Shelton, Sam Kashner, and Bobby Meyers, popped in and out with alacrity. For the fall, poetics doings include classes with Dick Gallup and Jack Collom, and the certificate program starts up again in winter/spring 1978 adding Joanne Kyger, Michael Brownstein, William Burroughs, Jr., and Allen Ginsberg to the roster. Catalogues are now available from Naropa Institute, 1111 Pearl Street, Boulder, CO 80302. STAY TUNED.
--Butch Cassidy

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Postscript to the above, from a friend in Woodstock, NY: After Ed Sanders returned from Boulder to his home here he enlivened Marguerite Harris's local poetry scene considerably by giving a joint reading with George Quasha during which he read some of Sappho's poems in the original Aeolian Greek. He also participated in the fabulous Dylan Thomas Evening. Helen Adam & Fatisha were big hits with local poetry buffs.

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BOOKS & MAGAZINES RECEIVED

BOOKS: Journals: Early Fifties/Early Sixties by Allen Ginsberg, Grove Press, New York, \$10. . . Neal in Court by Jack Kerouac, broadside with a drawing of Kerouac by Carolyn Cassady, produced by Arthur & Kit Knight, PO Box 439, California, PA 15419, \$5. . . I'm tired of being misunderstood by Dick Higgins, Famous Last Words, Oakland, CA, \$1. . . The Afterlife by Larry Levis (the 1976 Lamont Poetry Selection of the Academy of American Poets), University of Iowa Press, no price listed. . . From Burning Deck, 71 Elmgrove Ave, Providence, RI 02906: Dissolves by Debra Bruce, \$2.50; projections by David Chaloner, \$2.50; Trial Impressions by Harry Mathews (first read in its entirety at St. Mark's last season), \$2.50; 6 troubadour songs by W.D. Snodgrass, \$2.50. . . From Cherry Valley Editions, Box 303, Cherry Valley, NY 11320: Vibes of the South by Paul Grillo, \$3.50; In Memory of My Father by Charles Plymell, with a recording of the poem read by Rod McKuen, \$3.00. . . From SUN, 456 Riverside Drive, NYC 10027: Ameriki: Book One and Selected Earlier Poems by George Economou, \$2.95; Selected and Collected Poems by Bill Knott, \$3.50; The Sun Placed in the Abyss and Other Texts by Francis Ponge, translated by Serge Gavronsky, \$3.50; How I Wrote Certain of My Books by Raymond Roussel, with 2 essays on Roussel by

John Ashbery and translations by Trevor Winkfield and Kenneth Koch, \$3.50; "Autobiography" and Other Poems by Tony Towle, co-published with Coach House South Press, \$2.95; Harmatan by Paul Violi, with drawings by Paula North, \$2.50 . . . From Tuumba Press, 2639 Russell Street, Berkeley, CA 94705: No Sleep by Barbara Baracks, \$2; Recipe by John Woodall, \$2. . . From Viking Press, New York: Houseboat Days by John Ashbery, \$7.95 (simultaneous Penguin Books paperback at \$2.95); Queen of Darkness by Celia Gilbert, \$6.95.

MAGAZINES: BEZOAR, Box 535, Gloucester, MA 01930, contribution. Current issue (August) has new work by Beltrametti, Koller, MacAdams, Whalen. . . Bombay Gin, Bombay Gin Editions, Boulder, CO 80302, \$2. Works by Brownstein, Corso, Davies, Gallup, Lazzeri, Nolan, Waldman, and many more. . . Northeast Rising Sun, a small press review edited by Charles Plymell and Pamela Beach Plymell, Cherry Valley Editions, \$1.50. . . Traveler's Digest, Vol. I, No. I, a literary quarterly published by Jeff Goldberg, 22 East 22nd St, NYC 10010, \$2 per year. Works by Acker, Berrigan, Bockris, Burroughs, Christopher Knowles, Malanga, Weatherly, and others. This magazine is a new incarnation of Contact, which Jeff edited. Not to be confused with any other publication of that name, whether it's 1, 2, or 3.

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DAYDREAM SUGGESTED BY A PROFESSOR'S REMARK

I am the Duchess of Luria,

I have blue eyes:

The Duke wears yellow silk garters

And a look of surprise.

His father is old, and a lecher,

The Queen works a tapestry

Of a great and ugly unicorn

Devouring me.

--Catherine Murray

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ABSTRACTION AND ELIZABETH BISHOP

Geography III by Elizabeth Bishop. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977. \$7.95. It seems to me that the poet who chooses to stay outside the "international modernist" movement of the past 125 years has to be awfully good to succeed. Elizabeth Bishop is an interesting case in point. The poems she writes mostly appear in The New Yorker. They look conventional on the page and they employ conventional strategies, surrounding (and epiphanizing) objects, people, and situations. But though she looks to be a member of a vast and persistent Academy, she has managed to set herself far apart from poets who seem to be doing the same things.

There are many reasons for that, some of them well-documented. Her eye and ear are terrific. What she chooses to notice is invariably interesting. She has an uncanny gift for raising the conventional to the sublime, a special sublime, graceful and muscular, colloquial and tight as a drum. It is this muscularity,

this toughness of both mind and language, that keeps her landscapes from either clutter or preciousness. Moreover, certain qualities that are as much a part of the poet as of the poetry come through steadily: curiosity, caring, tolerance, gentle amusement, humanity.

Two qualities which I find especially interesting, and important, in her poetry verge on abstraction--surprising in one who virtually stands for concrete particularity. The first is a homogeneous tone and movement in certain of her best poems--what in painting is called an "allover" surface. Although poems such as "Florida," "Cape Breton," and "Over 2000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance" appear to develop, they don't really go anywhere. A resonant question or statement at the close, together with the general treatment of spatial details as temporal ones, gives an illusion of movement. What these poems do is make statements, relentlessly. The statements follow from one another, in general, but each is curiously discrete also, as if it were trying to establish its own identity apart from the poem. Everything looks connected ("by 'and' and 'and'") but the connections are at least as magical as rhetorical; the voice is the glue. With the relentless building up of details, of all kinds and on all levels, phrase piling on phrase, appositive on appositive, a very special resonance occurs above and apart from the "meaning." Even those poems that have a "plot" have this incremental music. When a transition comes, it's so rare and so unemphasized that the effect is quietly dazzling ("Entering the Narrows at St. Johns..."; "Thirty or more buzzards are drifting down, down, down...").

The other special, semi-abstract quality has to do with individual words. Certain fastball pitchers are said to throw a "heavy ball." It has always seemed to me that Elizabeth Bishop's words weigh more than other poets' words. Or they're lit from behind. Or they occur naturally in 20-point type but our eyes have been magically clouded. There is a presence to her language in and of itself. In part, the words refuse to be read with the eyes alone. But they also refuse to be swallowed up in their referential duties: they're physical, stubborn; they stay words. I suspect this has to do particularly with sound--with consonant strength, line breaks, cadencing. (I think she is virtually peerless when it comes to all three.) The lines break in such a way that you're forced to remember that poems are words, which may be combined to form lines, statements, images, and so forth. There is a blockiness--almost an awkwardness, as they must have felt about Wyatt as compared to Surrey--in the way sounds jam up against one another, within the lines and around the bends and breaks. And there is a clarity that shines through.

Bishop is not, of course, an abstract poet. Along with poems that evince these hard-to-pinpoint components, she has always written poems that narrowly skirt the anecdotal/conventional/sentimental) and that are transformed--at least as often as not--by dint of her marvelous sensibility. Those disappointments I have are almost always related to this anecdotal "strain." In her successes the resonance and the rest of the magic seem to grow naturally out of the attention to particulars, subtly and without any modernist fanfare--which places her in the position, as far as I can see, of being appreciated and underappreciated (by those who prefer their originality sounded more loudly) for the wrong reasons.

I like her new book, Geography III, very much. The force operating is perhaps not as intense as in some earlier work, and a few of the jewels, e.g., the parentheses closing both "Five Flights Up" and "Night City," don't seem quite sufficient to carry their settings. As those fastball pitchers say, after losing a no-hitter in the seventh inning: What do you want? "The End of March," a lovely poem that achieves an eloquence out of all proportion to its conventional setting, and "The Mouse" (whose central epiphany, perhaps perversely, I like less than the rest of the long poem) are vintage Bishop. "12 O'Clock" is a clever tour de force--but see "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics" in her Complete Poems! As usual, there is the feeling that she knew exactly what she was doing, everywhere. I can't think of anyone, except James Schuyler, who does so much with observed details. There are a handful of poets whose every poem is

worth attention, and Elizabeth Bishop has been in this category for over 30 years.
--Charles North

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GINSBERG ON LOWELL

The Thursday before Lowell died I spoke with Frank Bidart about the possibility of his coming out to teach at Naropa next summer--I felt he would be friendly towards young experiment and bohemian humor, and Frank said he thought he'd just love it if he went. Lowell and I had met originally in 1959 when Peter Orlovsky, Gregory Corso, and I read at Harvard. We had tea with him before going to the reading in the Sanders Theatre, which Charles Olson attended, and he met Lowell then.

I got interested in him in the early 50's because William Carlos Williams told me he liked him. Lowell had gone to see him and I could tell that pleased Williams. He said to me, "Although he writes in English meters, with rhyme, the lines are put together like Inca stonework." Williams urged Lowell to give more shape to speech in his things--I believe this must have influenced his later work.

In 1961 I went to see him in New York with Timothy Leary. He and Leary took a small amount of psilocybin and we sat and talked. As we were leaving I said to him at the door, "Omnia vincit amor!" He said, "I'm not so sure." I reminded him of this the last time I saw him and told him I thought he'd been right. Now I'd say, "Awareness conquers all."

Soon after our reading together at St. Mark's last February we were having lunch with Bidart in Cambridge and Lowell asked me how much is known about Whitman's homosexual life. I didn't feel he had any particular reason for bringing that up except just wanting to understand.

Before we went to St. Mark's the evening we read Lowell came to my place for dinner--my mother, Edith, cooked it. He'd just come from Cambridge and seemed subdued and tired--had some trouble with his breathing--was heavy-lunged. He rested, then ate. He sat at the kitchen table talking to Gregory, who was there too--they played and joked together. When we were getting ready to go I asked him if we should be formal and get all dressed up. He said, "Middle." I started to put on a tie. He opened his leather bag--it was full of books and clothes--took out a bunch of ties and offered me one. I chose a blue and red striped one he liked--he said he'd bought it that day at the Harvard Coop.

After the reading he came to my place again with the rest of us--said he'd have to leave early, but he stayed for 2 or 3 hours. We hadn't meant it to be a party, but people heard he was there and came by, crowding into the small apartment, filling the kitchen where we sat talking. I remember he said to Gregory "I'm sorry I yelled at your baby--I just wanted to get on with the poem." referring to a disturbance during his reading. He didn't leave till one o'clock.

--Allen Ginsberg

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I rest with the dogs across the feathers of birds
departed for Winter

I hear thinly colored dew forming beside me, eyes vacant
In the stupor of redwood fog
Sweat and shattered hair down my forehead
Like boneless fingers of children from home

As if I were among those wounded at war
Left across an open courtyard
in a village far from Paris or Milan

Hearing the small voices of women in love.

--Jim Carroll

BREAK GLASS

Blood bells yawn
The mind itself
Turned over and
Gone doesn't mind
Nothing recognizing
The natural condition
Of the world and
Its air conditioning
It looks
Like it's raining
(Ho hum) What can
I say There's nothing
In air worth grabbing
In case of

--Ted Greenwald

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FIRST CLASS MAIL