

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER
No. 53 March 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)
Mar 1 Franz Douskey & Johnny Stanton...Mar 8 Michael Palmer & Bill Corbett
...Mar 15 Taylor Mead & Tuli Kupferberg...Mar 22 Joanne Kyger & David Shapiro
...Mar 29 James Koller & Franco Beltrametti & Harry Hoogstraten...Monday Night
Performance Series at 8:15 (free) Mar 6 Open Reading...Mar 13 Co-Accident
(poetry/music/performance) Alec Bernstein, Kirby Malone, Chris Mason, Marshall
Reese, with Mitchell Pressman, Tom Stansbury & Allen Ware...Mar 20 Bob Holman
& Rose Lesniak (reading/performance)...Mar 27 Sara Miles & Douglas Kenny
(performance novel)...Free Writing Workshops weekly at 7:30 PM: Tuesdays Johnny
Stanton (prose)...Thursdays (except Mar 23) Bob Holman (poets' theatre)...
Fridays Mary Ferrari (poetry)...On Thursday Mar 23 Joanne Kyger will give a
special poetry workshop at 7:30 PM...Danspace Concerts 7-10 PM (contribution
\$3.00) Mar 2 Erica Meyers...Mar 13 & 14 Jill Becker.

READINGS ELSEWHERE: Academy of American Poets Donnell Library Center 20 W 53
St NYC Thursday evenings at 6:30 (free) Mar 9 Larry Levis & Stan Rice...Mar 16
Judith Johnson Sherwin & Jane Shore...Mar 23 "Education of the Poet": Denise
Levertov...Manhattan Theatre Club 321 E 73 St NYC 8 PM (\$3.00) Mar 7 Richard
Howard & Joan Moore...Mar 21 Edith Konecky, Cynthia MacDonald & Alicia Ostriker
...Viridian Gallery 24 W 57 St NYC, 8th floor 6:30PM (\$2) a new series:
Mar 9 Shelley Kraut & Nick Piombino...Mar 23 Michael Benedikt...Mar 30 Maureen
Owen & John Yau...West End Cafe 2911 B'way (nr 113 St) NYC Sundays at 2PM
Mar 5 Spenser Holst & Thomas Masiello...Mar 12 Michael Lally & Charles Bernstein
...Mar 19 Barbara Barg & Dennis DeForge...Mar 26 Sara Miles & Pat Jones
...YMHA Poetry Center Lexington Ave & 92 St NYC 8 PM: Mar 6 John Logan & Diane
Wakoski...Mar 13 Audre Lorde & Alice Walker...Mar 27 Bill Knott & May Sarton...
NOTE: Radio WBAI (FM) 99.5 will present Maureen Owen in an interview & reading
produced by Susan Howe, Mar 18 11 PM to midnight...For information about readings
at Dr Generosity's 2nd Ave & 73 St NYC call 861-2230.

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AROUND THE EDGES

In the previous issue this column touched on the fact that although poets need to write poetry--many feel this is what they were born to do--it's virtually impossible for them to support themselves with it unless their skills can be tied to a more "practical" profession which society accepts and will pay for. Teaching is one, hack-writing another, and publishing still another, though a publisher, to make money, has to produce books that sell and poems don't. Even if they sell they may not be read too often. Tom Veitch, in a recent letter, tells about a West Coast librarian who faithfully stocks the works of well-known poets and others not yet known (like the Yale Younger Poets), but to date not one book of poetry on his shelves has been taken out. If it were, the card-holder would probably be a poet too, since the only real audience for poetry is other poets.

Yet this situation in itself provides some basis for action, since there are many more poets out in the open than ever before, and they can't be ignored. The Alliance of Literary Organizations, an advocacy group, was recently formed by fourteen smaller groups, of which The Poetry Project is one. The others are The Academy of American Poets, Columbia University Translation Center, Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, Poetry Series at the Manhattan Theatre Club,

New York State Poets-in-the-Schools, New York State Small Press Association, Poetry Society of America, Poets & Writers, Inc., The Print Center, PEN American Center, Teacher & Writers Collaborative, The YM-YWHA Poetry Center, and Open Studio, Ltd. All will maintain their established identities and programs but also work for common aims: "To make public an assertive, collective voice for a private, solitary craft; to stimulate...support for individual writers through organizations committed to sound artistic policy and public responsibility; and to demonstrate the...importance of literature to...public and private funding sources." Very apt, though the last aim may be a tough one. At least it's being recognized that poets should have a place in the sun. More power to all who work for it.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS: The deadline for the next issue of THE WORLD (#31, for poets under 30) has been extended to April 15...The second Poetry Project Community Meeting will be held in the Parish Hall on Saturday, March 11, at 1 PM. All persons who are interested in poetry and The Project and its current/future/potential activities are invited to come and speak out...The Project staff wish to express their gratitude to Larry Rivers for his gift of a portable sound system--a much-needed improvement of our facilities for readings; to The Presbyterian Senior Services' New York office for sets of Books in Print: 1976-1977 and Whitaker's Five-Year Cumulative Book List 1966-1972; and to Tom Savage and Neil Hackman for the considerable volunteer work they've done in recent weeks...The Newsletter continues to welcome submissions of poetry and reviews. The 15th of the month preceding an issue is the deadline for announcements only. Minimal editing of prose will be done if space and clear communication require it, but poems are not edited and mss. should be checked for errors before they are sent. Many thanks to our growing list of subscribers for their interest, and also to everyone who has contributed towards postage costs. Every bit helps... If you want to know more about readings in this city than can be mentioned here, the monthly NYC Poetry Calendar carries a complete listing. It is distributed free by City Geese to bookstores and poetry centers, where you may pick one up unless all copies are already gone. To avoid frustration, simply subscribe at \$5 a year. Address: 437 Washington St., NYC 10011.

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UNDER ALL

the minutes are fading into a rain
like you bend to brush
your hair
dumb and confident
like a tree felled
or a weed-eater attacking your children
well dressed the drab opens his bag of morning
everyday the thermometer returns
the will of the blank is to sound
not kill or maim
or torture or
find sicknesses now we must name them
and hold them ever closer to us
closer and closer til
thunder of angst and lightning schizes
the stairwell to the street
they are sounding as they sound
they will not sound much today

--Bob Rosenthal

BOOKS RECEIVED (poetry unless otherwise noted): from Angel Hair Books/Songbird Editions edited by Anne Waldman, 47 Macdougall St NYC 10012: Some Magic at the Dump by Reed Bye, \$2.00; Cuba by Tapa Kearney (poetry & prose), \$1.00...from Jim Brodey Books, 437 E 12th St NYC: "when the sunset smelled like red zinger" by Didi Susan Dubelyew; Personalities by Tom Savage (satiric monologues of film stars) \$2.00 each...from The British Columbia Monthly, Box 48884, Vancouver, Canada; Clearing by Penny Kemp; The Story, She Said by Daphne Marlatt (prose) both npl...from Hanging Loose, 231 Wyckoff St Brooklyn, NY 11217: Notes on Space/Time by Donna Brook, \$2.00; Animals that Stand in Dreams by Harley Elliott, \$3.00; Driving at Night by Sam Kashner, \$3.50; Anima by Dick Lourie, \$3.00; Ethiopia (prose) by Eric Torgersen, \$2.50; Rocks and Chairs by Robert Hershon, \$1.00...from Z Press, Calais VT 05648: Three Plays by John Ashbery (satiric treatment of theatre conventions & cliches). Cloth, limited edition of 500 copies, numbered, \$10.00, paper \$4.00; 29 Mini-essays by Joe Brainard (epigrams), \$2.50...Nothing Happens by Victor Bockris (photos of Andy Warhol & Muhammed Ali full of visual wit), Nadada Editions, Bockris, 106 Perry St, NYC 10014, npl...Drawing.Music.Poem by Kirby Congdon, Cycle Press, 18 Warren Pl, Brooklyn NY 11201, \$10.00...Goldy Dances by Martha Haslanger (illustrated) Artichoke Ink, 156 5th Ave, NYC 10010, npl...Mothering by Judith Karman (prose poem), Alleghany Mountain Press, Olean, NY 14760, \$4.00...The Dove in the Aca-cia by Stephen Stepanchev. Bi-lingual edition with Serbo-Croatian translations by Rasa Popov. Knjizevna Opstina Vrsac, Trg Save Kovadevica 11, Vrsac 26300, Yugoslavia, npl.

MAGAZINES: 4-3-2 Review, the 7th and last issue of this lively magazine edited and published by Simon Schuchat at The Poetry Project. 27 contributors, all Project favorites. \$3.00 per copy from Box 1030, Stuyvesant Station, NYC 10009. Back issues available. Better read it now while you still can...Gay Sunshine #35, with an article on Frank O'Hara and his work by Rudy Kikel, \$1.50 ...Parnassus: Poetry in Review Spring/Summer 1977 (double issue, just out). Theme: The Reviewer as Poet, with poems and reviews by scores of writers; also A Tribute to Virgil Thomson on His 81st Birthday: illustrations, music, and comments by friends. \$7.00 from Parnassus, 205 W. 89th St, NYC 10024...Shell #4 : The Long Poem. Works by Michael Lally, Andrei Codrescu, John Yau, Ted Enslin, George Quasha, Rando, Anne Waldman, Kirby Malone, Alan Davies, Franz Kamin, Bruce Andrews & Charles Bernstein, Lewis MacAdams, Bernadette Mayer. 4 issues \$12.00, from Jack Kimball, 362 Waban Ave, Waban, MA 02168...Little Caesar #4. Interview with Gerard Malanga plus portfolio of his poems. Also works by Jim Carroll, Joe Brainard, S. R. Lavin, Marcus Grapes, and others. \$1.50 from 3373 Overland Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90034...United Artists One, works by Bernadette Mayer, Lewis Warsh, Clark Coolidge, \$2.00. Box 718, Lenox, MA 01240.

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DUO

A dark borelo, and a bottle of tequila;
of the sobriety in the sand: a muted
croissant, the grabby fruits.
To this, to this fabulous estate you come forth?
You see the moist smoke, a horse rearing
but not quite; look up, look up, you idiot.
And the man is flowing out of the woman, just in a nick
of fabulous landslide, and on top of that, a delta.
Challenge me to this moon, and I will have you
adio, lightning bolts of divine intervention:--
adio, this wee-gee board of poetry:--
suddenly clarity surrounds each of my toes.

--A collaboration:
Vicki Hudspith & Yuki Hartman

"YOUNG AND A WOMAN AND OUT OF MY MIND"

Ciao Manhattan by Rebecca Wright. New York: Telephone Books, 1977. \$1.50.
Box 672, Old Chelsea Station, NYC 10011.

I address no real man. I address a hope
a love,
I implore Dear Sir:
 beyond longing I have no real address
I call and a thousand lovers bring me into being again
but I don't exist and I travel the continent undefined.

The process of self-extraction from male dominion--or "love"--has seldom been so profoundly analyzed as it is in these poems by Rebecca Wright. A tortuous ungluing from hope, need, and expectation of domestic happiness is her theme. In her new book she writes in a kind of trance induced by the fever of suffering. Yet she uses long lines which strain to the logic of prose, without resolution. No order, no justice.

Sudden details remind you of the presence of the external world ("the cleats on the shoes of a man walking past") but then the shade drops and you are alone with the writer. Her breaking away from Manhattan and the domestic ideal is only given common significance by the act of writing it down. Without the act of writing, the act of moving would not exist. This writing, then, takes courage.

...if I hadn't been raised to socialize
 with dogs
to believe in the infinite preference of humility
I might be rid of this self-consciousness.

The craving for a mental vacuum is the affliction of the enslaved. To be anonymous is bliss. This is the paradox of fleeing from slavery. But Rebecca Wright, modest to the point of disembodiment, has an historical memory. The literary voice seals and protects her. Her words reverberate with associations, phases born of other phrases ("from November into the frozen grave of December and binding one to icy death"). She is saved by her real love, language.

This book, then, flies ahead of the better-known writings by women pursuing autonomy. For it has style, and style is all. In Ciao Manhattan writing is the Way. Towards the end of the book the shade begins to be lifted and we catch glimpses of "the masses" outside; the poet's personal achievement becomes more generalized and generous. Elusive Continent, her beautiful first book of poems, is bright with such glimpses. To make the next leap may be difficult, but the ability is all there. And we need someone like her who can do it.

--Fanny Howe

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FAMILIAR FACES

Alex Katz's recent paintings are being shown at The Marlborough Gallery, 40 West 57th Street, NYC, through March 25. A series of 14 cut-outs, entitled "Face of the Poet," have as their subjects Ted Berrigan, Kenward Elmslie, John Godfrey, Ted Greenwald, Michael Lally, Ann Lauterbach, Gerard Malanga, Alice Notley, John Perrault, Carter Ratcliff, Rene Ricard, Peter Schjeldahl, Tony Towle, and Bill Zavatsky. There are also portraits of Rudy Burckhardt and Yvonne Jacquette, John Ashbery and David Kermani, and others, and a large painting of the Laura Dean Dance Company in their performance of "Song." Totally superb and a lot of fun to see.

LANGUAGE MIXMASTERY

The Last of the Moccasins by Charles Plymell. San Francisco: City Lights, 1971, \$3.00.

I was impressed by Charles Plymell's two books of poetry published in 1975, The Trashing of America and Blue Orchid Numero Uno, but I've just finished reading his earlier novel, The Last of the Moccasins, and my judgment of him has leaped a couple of parsecs.

The Beat association of the book is easy to make. To look at it, though, as just another novel of that period like J.C. Holmes's Go or Kerouac's On the Road and The Subterraneans is to de-emphasize its importance very unfairly. Moccasins becomes a casebook/textbook, a model of contemporary style that Americanizes Joyce, Genet, Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet and even "explicates" the whole dizzying language-stance of Naked Lunch Burroughs. The only "beat" novels that even approach its stylistic stature are, in fact, Naked Lunch and (to a much lesser degree) Kerouac's Doctor Sax.

"You wanna smiz zoke a jiz zoint of griz zass"--here's Plymell's link to the Big Rebellion (I mean Hugo Ball, Tzara, Breton, MacLow/Cage/Higgins). Only, instead of being overwhelmed by smiz zoke a jiz zoint of griz zass for its own (nonsense) sake, as if mixmastered language was a kind of dirty joke that existed in a dirty-joke world of its own (all or nothing-at-all "experimentatiob" solely on its own theoretical terms) Plymell tames technique in the service of narrative. This is what I mean by "Americanizes." The European experimentalist does it another way (a difference Cage/Higgins, Ltd. seem not to learn). By considering the experimental art/music/literature world and the non-experimental non-art/non-music/non-literature world as two separate entities, he's in effect paying homage to the Straight and saying that neither he, his message, his technique, nor his world view has any universal validity. Plymell, by mixing the two, shows very neatly what the avant-garde really is, a destroyer of the lines between crazy and sane, normal and deformed, centric and eccentric, bourgeois and "beat." He has universalized whole chunks of madness. Not "There but for the grace of God go I," but "I'm already there--under the surface of my normative pose." And in this universalizing of madness he does the same for a variety of experimental techniques: Everyman's a Head, ergo his language is easily, "naturally," Head-Language.

Plymell both "mythologizes" San Francisco and "everydays" its myth:

S.F. Golden lights of the Golden Gate through the purple fog . . . of steaming spiritual cunt. San Francisco is an ethereal city. It's closer to the liquid energy from which all man's essence springs than any other city. Its aura must be grayish purple tonight boiling around the red blue and orange green liquid signs of neon. Like spiritual liquid its energy comes on and off like a neon sign, electrical ecstatic. . . .

You find a little of the same thing in Kerouac, Miller, Burroughs, but never anywhere is it done any better--the bringing to bear of the whole English word hoard in one multiple-associated semantic barrage, anthropomorphically expanding a place into the dimensions of the mythical super-person. Throughout The Last of the Moccasins reality isn't captured/re-created, but created for the first time. Plymell is not--as too many critics have supposed--portraying the Beat or the Hippy eras. What he is doing is creating his own Word-Beat/Word-Hippy worlds. He's not a Realist but a "Wordster" who uses everything that the whole complex of European and American existentialists can give, in order to tame a small province of his own Kansas Vortex imagination. Charlie, isn't it time for the next in the Series?

--Hugh Fox

THINKING ABOUT THE CITY

Up here the snakes are asleep
until around April Fool's Day.
When the snow comes down in the city
i want to hail the slush
on Second Avenue,
listen for a bell to ring
from some church,
bite on a slice of pizza,
look into the eyes of some woman
i may never see again
on our jaunt St. Mark's Place and she
just could be visiting from Woodstock--
be my neighbor--we might have listened
to one another on the radio from Kingston.
But she has gone by to another slice
out of life
gone to see an old lover, that's why
she was in New York City.
"Such a fucken pity," says my heart.
But i am in the city to find
something i can later think about
over a winter fire
over 100 miles up the hill.

--George Montgomery

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POETRY, ANYONE?

Psyching Up For Tennis by Jack Leedy, M.D. and Mort Malkin. New York: Basic Books, 1977. \$8.95.

A warning: This book is not just about tennis or just about psychology, or merely a tasteful mixture of the two. The authors are both steeped in the kind of thinking that governs poetry. Dr. Leedy is the pioneer psychiatrist in poetry-therapy, and Dr. Malkin is an established poet who uses poetry to take the horrors out of dental surgery. (May Swenson wrote an excellent poem about taking coffee in a city cafeteria after an extraction.) That this should be so is no surprise: the Argentinian tennis champion, Guillermo Villas, is a poet well-known throughout Latin America.

What Leedy and Malkin have done is to make tennis a poetic image. The whole book is a metaphor about that game and the lesser games people play. All of these involve give and take from one side of a net to the other and back. All require strategy, centering, agility, follow-through. The writing of poetry does this too, whether the poet is serving to a backboard--that is, preparing to write the kind of poetry that dares the reader to work out the details for himself, or whether the reader is expected to return the ball as an indication that he has perceived exactly what the poet wants him to. More specifically, when two people are matching poems back to back as this reviewer has done with an incarcerated poet, the images and phrases are served and parried on either side of a wall, bars, opaque glass, or whatever, though there is little hope that anything like a triumphant leap over the net will be achieved. At any rate it should be fun to apply the tennis metaphor to other situations.

-- Barbara A. Holland

"Autobiography" and other poems by Tony Towle. New York: Coach House South/
SUN Press, 1977. \$2.95.

The charm and grace of this book's cover painting by Robert Motherwell parallel through a sort of literary osmosis the extended mise-en-scene of these poems, works which stand on their own but are also part of a larger one. For a particular strength of this collection is its single-minded sense of direction. There is an interior variety visible between the lines of the individual poems but they are all of a piece, chronicling a man in the 20th century--a sequence of color slides (not snapshots, being too formal in construction; not a film, each poem existing as a separate frozen still-life) concerned with carefully articulating the story. When read from beginning to end, the poems move forward continuously at a comfortable pace, almost a promenade through a garden within a museum--if bushes with mirrors instead of leaves could grow out of canvases.

Towle is a poet who recognizes the responsibility inherent in being one, taking Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" to heart, realizing that the past is the present, and thus being able to write poems about Swinburne and Li Po without really doing so. In addition, many of the short lyrics here accept a Donne-like metaphysical conceit as easily as donning a coat, most obviously in "Lines for Clinton Hill":

A man sits under a tree,
in effigy under numerous trees,
tending the cattle of observation,
pursuing the world in a distant system.

The tree is the storm and the wind
and your painting, as I walk across town,
is a silver image of life,
and a river to a reflective person.

The majority of the works in this collection contain a subtle passion, balanced by a clarity and a straightforwardness which tell us exactly what Towle has on his mind. But at the same time the poet's craft, his effective use of language's inherent ambiguities, tends to thicken the plot. The thoughts, ideas, and associations which set off his poetical musings are finely orchestrated with an inventive, meticulously mellifluous quirkiness a la Prokofiev, sans angst.

The title poem is an ambitious 620-line work which stands as a direct descendant of Wordsworth's "The Prelude" in tone and attack, stance and style. Towle treads sure-footed through its twisting intricacies, not seeking justification but explaining his position in a wind-swept word environment:

applied in phrases built up like brush strokes,
but apprehended in a sequential structure, like music;
there is very little left for poetry itself,
it is only the core,
on which to hang the mountainous array of information,
and which is not gathered from the anguish of life exactly,
although it is that very word which has sometimes shaken my heart.

and the ultimate result, after much contemplation, perception, and invention, is, like Wordsworth's poem, a "characteristically positive emotional statement."

This is a book which, once you've finished reading it, makes you go and pick up Towle's North and read that again, then his Lines for the New Year and read that again, and then you wish there were more.

BIRTHDAY BAND PLAYING

see her preparing . . .

to step into her car

with eyes

full of blue & visions

of small swabian mountains

eyes drowning in the sun

a single bird

he sings:

a world rent

the purple heart

laid bare

to weather

--Josephine Clare

THE POETRY PROJECT
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First Class Mail