

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

No. 38

1 Oct 1976

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

Back again. Mon nite (8:15 PM) readings and performances hosted by Ed Friedman are Oct 4 Open Reading, Oct 11 Art Lange & Yuki Hartman, Oct 18 Jamie Dalglish & Campbell Bavenci, Oct 25 Rose Lesniak & Leonard Neufeld. The Wed nite readings hosted by Maureen Owen are Sept 29 Peter Schjeldahl & Jennifer Bartlett, Oct 6 Reza Baraheni & Joel Oppenheimer, Oct 13 Clayton Eshleman & Robert Kelly, Oct 20 John Ashbery & Kenneth Koch, Oct 27 Sotere Torregian & Harry Lewis. The workshops (7:30 PM) are given by Paul Violi (In Baltic Circles) on Tues; Bill Zavatsky (Theories of Rain, editor of Sun) on Thurs; Alice Notley (Phoebe Light, Incidentals in the Day World, 24 Meeting House Lane, editor of Chicago) on Fri. Thanks to CCLM and NYSCA.

* * * * *

READINGS: The Anthology Film Archives, 30 Wooster St., Sundays 3:30 PM, Sept 26 Anselm Hollo & Joe Cardarelli; Oct 3 Alice Notley & Peter Frank; Oct 24 Ted Berrigan & Simon Schuchat. . . West End Bar, Broadway & 113 St, Sun 2:30 PM, Oct 3 The Talking Band, Oct 10 Armand Schwerner & Janine Vega, Oct 17 Robin Morgan & Louise Bernikow, Oct 24 Barbara Holland & Vera Lachmann, Oct 31 Kid's Reading...Locale, 11 Waverly Pl, Sun 2:30 PM, Oct 3 Seymour Krim, Irving Stetner, George Nelson Preston, Oct 10 Russell Edson, John Love, Thomas Lux, Philip Petit, Oct 17 Jim Brodey, Lileen Myles, Paul Violi, Richard Bandanza, Susie Timmons, Michael Sappol, Oct 24 Reading for Mulch 8/9 Martha King, Richard Elman, Brian Breger, etc, Oct 31 Quincy Troupe & Harry Lewis. . . Chumley's, Bedford & Barrow Sts., Sat 2 PM, Oct 2 Ted Greenwald & Charles North, Oct 9 Richard Bogart Smith & Barbara Holland, Oct 16 Bruce Weber & Ken Robinson, Oct 23 Frank Murphy & Jim Nelson, Oct 30 Fred Bauman. . . Gegendstein Vaudeville Placenter, 297 7th Ave Sun 4PM, Oct 3 Henry Korn, Oct 10 Phil Demise. . . Franklin Furnace, 112 Franklin St, Fri 8:30 PM, Oct 22 Neil Hackman, Rose Lesniak, Janet Hamill...A listing for reading is being put together. Send info to NY Poetry Calender, Susie Timmons, 52 E 7 St, NYC.

* * * * *

CHAMPAGNE AND BALONEY. The Rise and Fall of Finley's A's, by Tom Clark (Harper & Row, \$10.95 cloth, 342 pp. with drawings by the author, photos and index). Non-fiction.

This is an eminently likeable and occasionally brilliant quick read. On the surface a detailed account of the Oakland Athletics, it is also an exposition of the author's affection for baseball and writing. And, for me, it is always interesting to follow a good writer into a genre that is new for him. Not that there aren't some rough spots. The first half of the book sometimes reads like a mechanically fleshed-out box score. Clark also has attacks of Favorite Word-itis ("egregious" strikes 10 or 15 times). But as the book rolls on, the author relaxes, his style limbers up, he throws more change-ups, and his funniness whacks a couple of anecdotes right out of the book. Some scenes are depicted with such clever and almost snotty strokes that I fell out of my chair onto a cloud in heaven. By then the question "Why pay so much attention to a despicable figure such as Finley?" had faded into the virtual irrelevancy it came from.

(Ron Padgett)

* * * * *

Reopening Michael Palmer's BLAKE'S NEWTON (Black Sparrow Press, Los Angeles, 1972)

With some poems in Blake's Newton there can be no difficulty --- the haiku freshness of

sweet showers last
soft grey, light,
winter's passed

the airy quality of

This cat and
my lady
are unkind to me
asleep when
I'm awake
then speaking
by the bed.

the narrative-plus-comment of

Allen says we let in no light
here, the windows face walls
the floors and walls covered with books
and we don't dance enough
which is true, make love enough
not true and write difficult poems
which is also true at times.
This time it isn't true
as anyone listening or
reading will notice.
There are friends here
sitting or standing.....

He admits he writes difficult poems at times; those poems which are simple and gestural, but 'staying', move us to those more difficult. I am not even sure what difficult can mean here where language stands most alone, but if it means we read a poem several times to grab the thread then there are such poems.

Perhaps his intention can be taken from ITS FORM

But to begin a procession
or a succession of lines
replacing the elms whose warps
and curves are called contradictions.

Contradiction will only be followed/seconded by diction. Words themselves will have to be held and taken, solid certainly as elms. His lines will not go around a thing (or event) to hold it, through a thing to take from it, or back of a thing to see it. The lines, energetic and plastic, "turning corners", can be only what they grow into and from, collection not re-collection, their own instance. A MEASURE, for example, creates the moment of waking, the struggle into wide-awake, that time's pre-occupation, even the mind of the waking man, the drama in his mind, and out of it, so that we are taken from his body into the rest of his day; in four short lines. It is no over-simple condensation; there is so much apparent in the opened effect of the poem.

It fulfills what he says elsewhere about possibilities for expression

Actual memories mostly
the length of an arm;
a social art, things known
written down.

One word generates others, so rhyme returns naturally to poetry, and even larger syntaxes give birth to what follows them

PROSE I

Today I woke up and it was the following stage. I lost the color from one eye and my way of hearing changed. In the mirror nothing was the same. The building next door was gone and things grew there in its place. My sense of smell returned for the worst. An old man smelled like a telephone booth. A hitch-hiking girl wore perfume. One of the plants in the living-room died. Another one left town. I changed my name not to be recognized. I changed it to John, or Wanda. A wand chair is wicker. A wandering dune has moved. It passes the fixed stars in an ancient catalogue. It's gone too soon. Too little to choose. To you it all seems silly. But there once was a fiddler called Wandering Willie.

But the language is not introspective, that would not be possible where coming out of and generation from are the order. The diction is simply as it should be, wild at finding itself alive in the world.

Under examination the poems which seemed most difficult give themselves away. Knowing "gammadion" in FIGURE is the German swastika, and "Gegenschein" is of German origin, allows new resonances to a poem otherwise perhaps obscure or pedantic. The poem FOR L.Z. is easier after some understanding of Zukofsky's Bottom: On Shakespeare, a book which examines Shakespeare's concern for what the ear hears and eye sees. These same concerns help explain "EXCESS OF EYE OR" in which each line has its separate life, giving the poem a vertical thrust and making it harder to catch.

Helpful to any untangling are SPEECH (ACROSS TIME) and SPEECH (AGAIN). The first forces our attention to speech by having it noted as: "The tract of voice", "Relative energy", "A stream of sound", "Spectrum/of harmonics", the effect of one sound on another following, and the interest of several pronunciations for one vowel. In SPEECH (AGAIN) he returns us to the human voice as source, its affinity to music, the choosing of words in new contexts and times, and ends comparing speech to the natural sound punctuation of rain leaving eaves for water on the ground.

The poems exist on their own surface, cutting through what we may think they're about to what they are. Wittgenstein tells how these poems must be taken when he says a word's meaning is in its use. Each poem is more than an open toolchest; it is the tools at work. They work not only in the games of syntax, they work in the world as a totality of what there is. The poems aren't only between Michael Palmer and us. They move among themselves and other things of their kind --- perhaps a line of elms held in the wind, in the mind. There is no limit to these poems because each only suggests a limit, each is a segment of some larger and more varied circumstance and syntax.

(Alan Davies)

* * * * *

BOOKS ETC: Fanatic #2, Joy Publications, Postbus 2080, Amsterdam - C, Holland (also from same: Certain Radio Speeches of Ezra Pound, ed. William Levy, \$5 (Internat'l Money Order Only). . . Dodeca (review of poets & poetry), 11 Broadway, NYC, 10004, 50¢. . . Gay Sunshine, PO Box 40397, SF, CA 94140, \$1 (Summer/Fall 1976 ish filled with poems etc, Kenward Elmslie interview, Edouard Roditi interview). . . This #7 (Barrett Watten, ed), \$2 (Serendipity, 1790 Shattuck Ave, Berkeley, CA 94709. . . Attaboy #1 (Linda Bohe & Phoebe MacAdams, eds) 3874 N. Broadway No. 8, Boulder, CO 80302. . . Primer #2 (Ron Wray, ed) 502 E. 38 St, Apt 14 E, Indianapolis, IN 46205, \$2. . . David Gitin, Ideal Space Relations, 2740 Ransford Ave, Apt 8, Pacific Grove, CA 93950, 50¢. . . Lynne Dreyer, Stampede, eel press, 3314 Mt. Pleasant NW #2, Washington, DC

20010. . .Michael Lally, Charisma, O Press, c/o Lally, 138 Sullivan St, NYC 10012. . .Lewis MacAdams, News From Niman Farm, Tombouctou Books, Serendipity, 1790 Shattuck Ave, Berkeley, CA.

* * * * *

Ron Padgett, Toujours l'amour, Sun, \$2.95.

TOUJOURS L'AMOUR is a breath of fresh air from the first poem to the last. It's a pleasure to finally see this latest collection by Ron Padgett in print. Some of these poems are of course already familiar, but organized and assembled in book form lends new insight, strength and energy.

That poetry does not exist to instruct is a maxim adhered to by many groups of people.

O Poetry, who leads us away and brings us back, Ron Padgett writes in SIDES. True enough. But it's also the poet who leads us away and lifts us from the prose of day, if you will. Ron's sense of the ridiculousness, his outright silliness, is one of his most appealing and attractive traits. We share one zany, colorful adventure with him after another. Take, for example, his ODE TO STUPIDITY. which on close reading, is far from stupid. Or THE STORY OF SAINT-POL-ROUX. which captures the essence of poetic inspiration in more ways than one. It's hard not to giggle while reading this book. It's like letting your hair down, or defenses. B But, this kind of writing is tricky because it's deadly serious. One wrong move and ... It's "going on your nerve," having some fun along the way, yet being fast enough to make all the necessary connections on get off the page. See THE MUSIC LESSON, THE MOST BEAUTIFUL GIRL I HAVE EVER SEEN. and ODE TO CLEMENCE LAUREL.

In CRAZY OTTO he writes:

and you can't get through to a foreigner
by simply speaking your own language

and again in SIDES:

... No wait, don't hide
behind another language! Your own is camouflage enough.

Ron Padgett as poet does not hide behind another language and it's precisely this that makes his work so wonderfully accessible and delightful to read. He's always talking to us in our own language, even in a poem titled LADIES AND GENTLEMEN IN OUTER SPACE. He never talks at us, or over us, or is obscure. He's right there whether he's writing about hamburgers, Archangelo Corelli, poetic imagination or women. And he manages to hit all the right nerves in the process. Never do I get the feeling of being crowded--there is always enough elbow room for the reader.

Another charming aspect to Ron's work is his egotism. I'm not exactly sure if that's the right word--perhaps it's sheer poetic license that enables him to sound off about himself.

Whatever it is, though, he gets away with it and it comes across as adorable, not brash. In the very first poem, POST-PUBLICATION BLUES. he writes:

Unfortunately, I am a very bad poet and
the book is no good.

Like hell! And in JUNE 19, 1942 (his birthday?) he asks everyone to "pity" him, for five pages, because he is a "miserable dumbbell." In VOICE he hopes never to find his own, poetically speaking, so he can remain a "phony" the rest of his life. How many people can get away with this? In a strange way his self-humor serves as one other identifiable link to the reader by virtue of its humanness.

WELL US. JOSEPHINE is the last poem in the book and one of my favorites. It's a very, very smooth poem but slippery, because if you don't work with each word and turn of phrase, it breaks rhythm and you miss the point. It's hard to get back on the track. Note the last four

lines:

Behind it the man and the girl from Martinique are
parting and evaporating
And as they do your ignorance parts and evaporates and
you remember: you are a pilot

And here I'd like to turn something around. The poet is a pilot, always, and we, the readers, are passengers along for the ride, in his hands, at this direction. With Ron Padgett as pilot a purity of spirit pervades the air. The trip is never boring, there are no stopovers and we are never bumped from flight. It's a great trip all the way. Hats off. (Rachelle Bijou)

* * * * *

Nothing In Moderation: A Biography of Ernie Kovacs by David G. Walley. Drake Publishers (NYC). 247 pages. \$9.95 (Hardbound).

Ernie Kovacs was an experience from The Fifties. When everybody else was trying to tap the public pulse with their pinkies, he had his foot up America's ass.

... full decade before either Frank Zappa or Viv Stanshall (Bonzo Dog Band) and other serious zany rock n' roll maniacs unleashed their mighty amplified arsenals of rhythmic cultural shocks, and danceable punchlines: Old Ern was busting things wide open on The Boob Tube.

With a visual sight-gag time sense which would've made A.J. Poyt nervous, and a brain bursting with truly absurd spontaneous skits and black-out situation scenarios, Kovacs strewn his tv programs with galloping innovations that stand easily today untouched by either time's vacant chill or the dribbling mute fodder we get increasingly in slow 25th carbon copy Laugh-In imitations.

Way back there in the nineteen fifties, Milton Berle ("Mr. Television") used'ta dive for leaky fountain pens in a giant champagne cocktail, Jerry Lewis made like a mutant busboy, Martha Raye goosestepped around and got locked in discarded deep-freeze cabinets, and Sid Caesar led a weekly repertory excursion into rib-tickling urban mirth. It was the media's infancy, and nobody laughed on any news program.

Unlike today's standard video tape waxworks of canned laughter and robot audience response, the shows back there were played to real people before the snickering crews and their humming cameras, who were just as unprepared for any sudden inspirations or lengthy fuck-ups. One of Kovacs' major fortes was his ability to ad-lib to a peak, improvising and bending his original material, then allowing it to pass down the tubes of America's mechanical third eyeball. And you'd sit there basking in those magic glows, of that nine inch flickering screen, bathed by his endless surreal suspended grand laugh-warp. Sit there, just waiting for Ernie to come to the end of his tether, and explode. Gushing forth new routines that were so outrageous, or just beyond even the comprehension of his regular viewing fans.

One good dose of Kovacs made lifetime fanatics out of even the most casual of knob-spinners. And he had his imitators too. He was very gifted in that area. Some reigning personalities among them. Like Steve Allen (himself a tremendous tv innovator), who hosted the original Tonight show on NBC. And against whom Ernie's late night shows were pitted in several time-slots. And of all the routines that Allen boosted from him, The Question Man, was the most famous, and it still survives in Johnny Carson's own version today.

Kovacs came up the tubes from radio, living with his mother in Trenton (New Jersey), and an early doomed marriage which gave him two kids to take care of, and some real incentive to succeed.

His journey, it's secrets, and loads of other people's intimate memories and stories stuff the chapters of this unique and entertaining book. It's a reverent tribute to Kovacs that the majority of it's telling is left to his own words via long skits and routines he originally thought-up and used on his various tv programs, series and specials. There's a wealth of well-documented information, self-writ prose, poetry, and program stills.

Among the included sensations one can find "Cowznowski," which Mad Magazine stole and transmuted into their own Melvin Cowznofski (forerunner to their likeable spokesman, the original What-Me-Worry kid, Alfred E. Newman).

There's also The Two-Headed Calf Owner's Manuel, and two novels, Zoomar, and Mildred Szabo. Surprises abound, as we travel from television's guts to a Frank Sinatra-dominated Holly-

wood scene, wherein Ernie became legendary for his all-night poker and gin parties. A self-confessed insomniac, jacked-up on the quickening pace of his movie successes, his marriage to shapely Edie Adams, and a life-style he'd memorized a thousand times in daydreams from Trenton to Tinsel City itself.

Theres the sudden short-circuit, when his first wife crops up and kidnaps his children. The three-year search, and final discovery of her hideout in Florida.

And the government was yelping at his heels. He owed them \$400,000 in unpaid back taxes. Movin' on up.

He had radio shows, television shows, guest-spots on quiz shows, and then too, there were the films. He'd been type-cast as a military figure (army, navy, secret police), as a two-bit chiseler, and twice as a writer.

The money flowed like water, and gambling was such a great relaxing release for him, too.

Then suddenly, SMACK POW into a telephone pole in an early morning drive home on Santa Monica Blvd., in L.A.

Nothing In Moderation is crammed with the telling of this fascinating guy's story. An excellent tribute to this authentic and original American personality's life and times.

Like author Walley points out early in his material, "Rather than scripts, he preferred visions no one was immune." (Jim Brodey)

* * * * *

BOOKS, MAGS, THIS AND THAT: David Rosenberg, Blues of the Sky, Harper & Row, \$6.95. . . Big Deal #4 (Barbara Baracks, ed) PO Box 830, Peter Stuyvesant Sta, NYC 10009. . . James Koller, Poems For The Blue Sky (\$4) & Nathaniel Tarn, The House of Leaves (\$4) from Black Sparrow Press, PO Box 3993, Santa Barbara, CA 93105. . . Diane diPrima, Selected Poems 1956-1975, North Atlantic Books, Route 2, Box 135, Creamery Rd, Plainfield, Vt, 05667, \$57. . . Sotere Torregian, The Age of Gold, Kulchur Foundation, 888 Park Ave, NYC 10021, \$3,50 (party at Gotham Book Mart Oct 25, 1976). . . La-Bas #1, (Douglas Messerli, ed) Box 509, Hollywood Sta, College Park, Md 20740. . . Paintings by Ed. Baynard at Willard Gallery (29 E 72 St) from Oct 23. . . Alan Davies, Split Thighs, Other Publications, 68 Downer Ave, Dorchester, Mass 02125. . . From Toothpaste Press, PO Box 546, West Branch, Iowa 52358 The Actual Now and Then (Newsletter, ed by Cinda Kornblum) & Allan Kornblum, Threshold, \$1.50. . . From Ditto Rations Chapbook Series, MATI, Effie Mihopoulos, 5548 N. Sawyer Ave, Chicago, Ill 60625, Renate Lewin, Intermittent Release; Tom Raworth, Energy Gap; Kessoe T. Ellison, In The Running; Cynthia Gallaher, Pretend It's All A Movie; Arnold Aprill, More Never Again; Art Lange, On Impulse; Alan Axelrod, Conclusion's From Memory; Karla M. Hammond, The Unicorn's Choice; Neil Hackman, Ode To Jack Spicer.

* * * * *

FACADE by David Drum, O Press

I first encountered David Drum's poems in Alice Notley's magazine Chicago, where they extravagantly stood out from the other contents. I liked them alot. Michael Lally has recently published a small collection, FACADE, more or less making Drum available to all comers. FACADE (a bunch of poems) consists of 9 poems over 38 pages. Though Drum works in narrative with subjects that don't lend themselves to haiku, he's admirably concise. PROMETHEUS: THE POEM OF YOUTH is a mythological story about aspirations & defeat: "I will go to Athens and die, or collapse/I will go to Athens and lay flame in their laps./I will go with dandelions." THE BLUE TRAIN is a set piece: if these poems are generally episodes cinematically organized, it is only a few frames, but extremely busy ones. When I say cinematic what I really mean is the impressionistic, prosaic method of describing mental landscapes through observation & responses thus evoked, like a movie novelisation. GRAND CANYON SUITE is about an half-Indian jumping into the Grand Canyon. The myth of the west runs through the poem like a headache, especially for the protagonist. If GRAND CANYON SUITE derives from the western, ETERNAL LIFE (OR, THE BRIDE OF JESUS) comes out of science fiction movies, as seen on TV. Television narrative is another correlate to Drum's method, especially in his use of small open field passages to bridge from one block of long lines to the next: a tumbling impression separating linear musics, the way straight line late show coexists with rapid flash commercials, each nurturing the other. TYPHOID MARY is a wonderful poem. On the last page are these lines: "You may

think I am writing this poem for you, this one here,/ And you are absolutely right if you have continued this far/ Because poems are written for people with patience and eyes your color/And if you will look close you can see me pulling the strings/There are strings everywhere and why shouldn't I pull a few with my hands." If you work in scope & narrative you can step out for an aside, which will show your skill & heart clear & true. SOUTH is Gone With The Wind, as it were, completely different & as cynical & sentimental as the original in the space of 8 pages. (Vide above on concision.) I don't mean that it has the same plot, but that it is the same story. PORTRAIT V is not epic, but a fairy (decadent folk) tale, about Cinderella, gathering the faggots in the evening before the 3 wicked stepbrothers take their turns sharing the nookie, & her brief liaison with the village idiot. THE ALCHEMIST is also a fairy tale & reminds me some of the cartoons I watched as a kid, as do a lot of Andre Breton's poems. The last poem, THE OLD CASTLE. OUI, is a personal address, the only one of its kind in the whole book, but still a "story." The recipient of the poem ends up in a German castle and so we pass from literature into romance, in the literary (not perjorative) sense of the word.

Drum's poems are different in scale & purpose from most other poems produced today; he seems to be working at bringing "epic" & "narrative" back into common or current usage. Scale determines his repertoire of effects & images and forces some of his sentimentality upon him. The more one puts in (in a small space) the simpler one's diction & images need to be. Drum's colors are primary. The most common is white, not a color. His poems are generally melancholic in tone & have a prosy wit that mitigates the sentimental. Maybe only a comic epic is possible these days. His poems are quite funny & reminiscent of the lighter works of such noted academics as Howard Nemerov (whose LOT LATER comes to mind) or Reed Whittemore. This is isn't a put down (I like to read that kind of poem) but rather a reminder of who has been working this field most recently, before persons such as Drum began chopping cane. The best is, of course, Kenneth Koch, long may he wave. Along with Koch in The Art of Love and Richard Snow in The Funny Place, Drum is reacquainting territory from the academics & the past & shows signs of producing an interesting & original body of work which may well prove to be as necessary an oeuvre as that of any young poet today. I commend him to your judgement, which will be just.

(Simon Schuchat)

* * * * *

THANKS, BUT NO THANKS

After I left you
I went into Brooklyn
To pay my respects

At my mother
My uncle comes over
To see her new car
And tells me
(As long as I'm there)
He met a very nice man
He'd like me to
The six year old says
They're five now not six

In the morning
They tell me
One of the boys
From the crowd

Died
In a car accident
And on the way to the train
An old friend tells me
She just had her third

Back home
I write two poems
And line them up

Rachelle Bijou

THE POETRY PROJECT
St. Mark's Church
2nd Ave & 10th St
NYC 10003

FIRST CLASS MAIL