

1972

Words for Joanne Kyger

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WORDS FOR JOANNE KYGER

19 November 1971

Dear Joanne,

happy birthday, love! "May you be 'happy in the wintertime, & in the summer, too; & may the weather play you fair, & make you happy every day.'"

Nothing is very new here. Alice just said, "I wish I had some side slits right now. I am wearing big rubber boots with yellow laces because of the rain and the mud."

Adrienne & Ned (I don't think you know them) are not here right now. God knows where they are. But we are, and I, especially, am thinking very hard of you. (Alice is too.) Of is my favorite word often, because it tells what (*the verb*) means. Thinking.

I've been living so seriously with your birthday (almost like living with you, but you off on a trip), that the other night I woke up from a sound (valium) sleep, maybe 3 a.m., & wrote these words down. I forgot them completely til today when the piece of paper they are written on fell out of HOKE CITY, a book I'm currently reading. These were the words:

JOANNE, a fragment

Joanne is not always amused by poetry readings
not always amused by poems, not even (not always)
by poets.

Like all terrific people, she *is* easily amused: but
since she is so much a poet, poems, poetry & poetry
readings (by poets) often seem to make her walk around
in little circles, muttering, or, look under the chair
constantly, if she is sitting down.

**

Isn't that something? No girl has ever made me do *that* before. Alice says that Tom Clark once said that when the Lonesome Traveler had to give a public talk to lots of men & lady schoolteachers, "he can find it in his heart to spare them the truth." One lady liked the whole thing, wrote with spirit, & was fine. Another hated Robert Frost because Frost used women as sexual objects (presumably in his poetry). This lady left after the first session to never return.

Adrienne also assigned the class a movie to go to, called *Ramparts of Clay*, & they all talked about how it differed from *Claire's Knee*. (Alas, I had seen neither, & didn't want to, either, so, haven't.)

Adrienne assigned the class many books from which to read pages here & there, books such as "The Art of Poetry" by Valéry, & astounding others. (Happily, I had read lots of these books, just in case.) She also had the class read poems by Wallace Stevens, which were then discussed. I think, from her diaries, that she had the teachers write a sort of paraphrase of at least one of Stevens' poems.

Her idea, she wrote, was to get them away from the idea that a poem had one fixed paraphrasable meaning. Adrienne seemed to like her sessions, & the teachers, so, I gathered, had liked her. About Ned & his reciprocity I couldn't tell (from his diary).

Now, here I am, at the Society. Up I go to room 514. It's 3:15, so I am early. There are about eight people, both sexes, ranging in age from maybe 25 to 100 (no, make that over 60), waiting. One man introduces himself. "I am Howard Schlock (or something)," he says. "I blank blank blank for the Academy." "That's fine," I say, "nice to see you. Do more people show up?" "Oh, yes, lots more," he says. "Good," I say. "We'll wait."

I drink about six cups of delicious coffee. The room is a fine spacious airy room, very pleasant, everything nicely prepared, chairs in a circle with a big Samuel Johnson chair for me at the top of the circle.

By 3:40 about 22 or 3 people are there, tho I notice most don't sign in. I sit in my Dr. Johnson chair, wearing my Allen Ginsberg hair & Charles Manson beard, & say,

"Hello. It's nice to see you all here. My name is Ted Berrigan, I'm a poet, I'm sure you've never heard of me, but I don't know you, either, so, let's do something about that." I give them my who I am routine: 36 yrs old, Korean vet., married 2 children, taught at Yale, Michigan, Iowa, etc., taught 8th grade once, read in High & Jr. High's all over God's creation, have 5 books published, blah blah. Then I say, "Who are you? How many teach school?" Nearly all do. OK. One is a young black student, 18 or so, there with his teacher. One lady who just wandered in likes poetry & wants to save the trees in Central Park by handing out a poem she is writing right now, that is, writing it right now, but handing it out next week, on Tree Day, in the park.

The teachers are all open, friendly, seem interested in the whole proceedings. I tell them of my various experiences rading to High School & Jr. High kids, "How how brig brig the damasked roses" and all like that. You've been through it all yourself many times I'm sure. Well, the main thing is to get through the days.

**

I'm beginning to feel delirious. & all because I wanted, in fact, *had* to write you, on *this* day. *Your* day in my life, though you are *in* my life for all my days,

"more than you know, more than you'll ever know. . ."

& that's how it goes (a song) for me & for you.

Go well, stay well,

love

Ted