

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

No. 30

1 Dec 1975

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

The Poetry Project wishes everyone a good holiday and happy new year. Beginning with the January 1976 issue the increase in postage and other general expenses forces us to ask readers to send in \$2.00 for the year (U.S.A. and Canada) and \$5.00 (Europe).

The Wednesday 8:30 pm readings for December are: Dec 3 Michael McClure, Dec 10 Carter Ratcliff & David Shapiro, Dec 17 Michael Lally & Tom Weatherly, Dec 24 No program, and (Thurs) Jan 1 NEW YEAR'S BENEFIT. The Monday night 8:15 pm reading series has Dec 1 Open Reading, Dec 8 Annabel Levitt & Rhys Chatham, Dec 15 Sharron Mattlin & Marcia Lind, Dec 22 Ellen Saltonstall, Wendy Rogers & Joyce Morgenroth, Dec 29 Melvyn Freilicher & Tom Bowes. The three writing workshops (free) all scheduled for 7:30 pm are given by Paul Violi (Tues), Bill Zavatsky (Thurs), and Ted Greenwald (Fri).

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READINGS: THE TIN PALACE 325 Bowery (Corner of E 2nd & Bowery), Sat 3-6 pm, Dec 6 Tuli Kupferberg's Magic One Man Show, Dec 13 Michael Andre presents Unmuzzled Ox Reading, Dec 20 Rochelle Ratner Soho News Poetry Reading . . . DR. GENEROSITY 2nd Ave corner 73 St, Sat 3 pm Dec 6 Michael Dennis Browne & Siv Cedering Fox Dec 13 Spencer Holst, Dec 20 Jackson MacLow, Dec 27 Open Reading . . . Remember other reading's at The Fugue, Chumley's, The Book Gallery, The Y . . . Check your papers for listings.

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BOOKS: Bill Berkson, Saturday Night: Poems 1960-61, Sand Dollar, 650 Colusa, Berkeley, CA 94707 (revised & expanded) . . . Dale Herd, Diamonds, Mudra Press . . . CHARLES OLSON READS FROM MAXIMUS & THE MAYAN LETTERS (Produced by Barry Miles, Folkways FL 9738) . . . Gegenschein Quarterly 1112 from 350 E 9 St, #5, NYC 10003 (a joint issue of large sections from Joe Brainard and Herm Freeman notebooks) is out after running into weird difficulties with LithoCrafters, Inc., 7101 Jackson Road PO Box 1266, Ann Arbor, Mich 48106 who turned back the job saying "Unfortunately, we at LithoCrafters are not going to be able to produce your title, GEGENSCHWEIN QUARTERLY 1112, due to the context matter of the book. // It is of our opinion that this type of book is something we do not wish to venture into. Therefore, we are forced to reject this title." (from a Letter of Aug 22, 1975 from Patty Mitchell, Customer Service Rep) LithoCrafters, Inc. has one hell of a nerve acting as editor! The Poetry Project Newsletter recommends that anyone having any present or future business with this company withdraw it and refuse to give it. The less of this shit the better! . . . Spring/Summer issue of Parnassus: Poetry in Review contains fine Charles Ives section, contains the Hard Man of 1975 award-winning review by Vernon Young . . . From Frank Hallman, Box 246, Cooper Sta, NYC 10003, Thom Gunn, Jack Straw's Castle (\$3.50) and Michael McClure, Man of Moderation (\$3.50) . . .

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Bill Zavatsky. theories of rain and other poems. Sun, New York, 1975. Paper \$1.95.

we are faced with possibilities and pressures in so many directions that sometimes it is hard to see and hear. the poem too often these days becomes a precious object -- a matter of style. yet, a poet that doesn't deal with these possibilities in an open encounter is locked into a

limited voice with a fixed language. it seems less a question of where a poet comes from than how open he or she is to how to record honestly what they see and hear. the point is how much faith the poet has in following his own eccentricities rather than a particular literary fashion. does the poet follow out his or her obsessions? all this then is by way of how I come to my reading of theories of rain, Bill Zavatsky's first full collection of poems. this is a first collection in the best sense of that place. it offers the dynamic of a poet testing his faculties. it locates for the reader (and I suspect for the poet himself) where the poet is coming from, working now and testing for the future. the poems in this collection that are most vulnerable (i.e., Ode, You Look Like, Seven Twenty Seven Sixty Seven, Time, Memory, Disclosures) are, for me the most fulfilling. The weaknesses come when Bill makes beautiful and skillfully designed objects (i.e., Real Bullets). But when that concern for the surface (the playful manipulation of language) is pushed, as in the long poem "Theories of Rain" or in a short love lyric like You Look Like, deeper and deeper into the heart of the matter what is made is a poem which demands its own location. this book records the struggle for that space and that it a pleasure. (Harry Lewis)

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Excerpt from Letter to Allen Ginsberg about recent Robert Creeley reading.

May I say a few things about the three capacities of Bob Creeley as I kept thinking about them when I listened to him. He warmed himself and the audience up to the standard of becoming receptive to the highest level of sense of humor in speech and avoided the two traps which generally speakers and poets fall when they try to be humorous. These two traps being impudence and clownishness. He was spontaneous and avoided both. This much for his conversation with the audience in between the poems. He had the ability of being totally extrovert in the Tooth-teeth poem which reminded me of Bergson's conception of the element of repetition being solely responsible for the creation of ironical effect, and also of Beckett's Watt which is actually based on Bergsonian conception of repetition. Irony is not something to make us laugh, it is there to make us conscious of the absurdity of our human relations. Irony is the meaning of absurdity. Creeley succeeds in exploring the inner capacities of this meaning. But he really shows his greatness somewhere else, when his words turn into a very skillful punctuation of silence in his more sombre poems, such as the one he read at the end of his reading. In great poetry, there is more silence than speech. The background of meditation in silence acts like the sea and the words appear like the waves. In Rumi's words: "The words of my poetry show only the color of my blood, not my blood." Creeley's approach to the sound system in poetry is so genuine that one could easily forget his language, that is his English -- which could be called a surface structure for sounds -- and think of a sound system rising to dance with its partner, namely, silence. Please kiss him for me. (Reza Baraheni)

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Kenneth Koch, The Art of Love, Vintage Books, 1975, \$1.95.

There are seven poems in The Art of Love.

In THE CIRCUS he admits he is unsure about who he is, he questions the value of writing a poem and of reflection, though he does both.

THE MAGIC OF NUMBERS is sentimental about growing up and getting in love.

ALIVE FOR AN INSTANT, a tremendous love poem to his life, is strong with the twisting repetitions and recognitions of Vallejo; it amazed me.

In SOME GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS he sits us down at the drugstore lunch counter and gives us a lot of mostly trivial advice from all aspects of his thinking, but the thoughts and advice are a close portrait of all he detects in more American heads than his own.

THE ART OF POETRY catalogues obvious and mostly accepted advice about writing, poetry and the life of doing so. "Poetry is the mediation of life."

He caresses beauty with his mind in ON BEAUTY, producing soft flat words that roll delicately in the ear, a sense of many hillocks of understanding and contemplation.

The title poem describes aspects of sexual conquest and bondage, with some mild sadism

delight; it contains as much as he could stand to tell in one poem, about sex and his person and the feelings that thrive around them.

Mr. Koch likes to give advice, but not too seriously. The language is flat but enriched -- each poem undulates and modulates along a flexible line, from start to finish; read the poems for that. (Alan Davies)

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Poetic Income

One of the things that occurred to me after I had the good fortune to receive a CAPS Fellowship in 1974, was that the sum which I was to receive, \$4000, probably came close to doubling the total amount of all the money I had previously received for my work.¹ My next thought was that therefore the value of the work itself had doubled. It was a rather pleasing prospect, I must admit, and I decided to go into the matter in more detail.

The money I had received for my poems, or my poetic income, fell under one of three headings: A) Grants, Prizes, and Awards; B) Readings; and C) Royalties and Publications.² The first category, though the most remunerative, I could actually compute from memory and no extensive research was necessary. For 'B' and 'C' I consulted the careful lists I have kept of my readings and publications, so with these to prod my memory, plus receipts for those for which I had actually been paid, I compiled the following results:

A) Grants, Prizes and Awards:	\$ 7,050.00 ³
B) Readings:	2,419.00
C) Royalties and Publications:	<u>880.00</u>
Total	\$10,349.00

The total for 'B' is not as accurate as I would like, due to estimating from memory the amounts of a number of pass-the-hat situations from many years ago, and the necessity of calculating the monetary value (as well as the quantity) of the drinks received as payment at Dr. Generosity's and Chumley's.

Also, regarding the Readings, I had to consider the justice of deducting a small fee for my personal effort, in appearing, to supply the poems my service as reader in orally transmitting them - as opposed to when they do their own work, by sitting on the page waiting to be read by others with no personal inconvenience to me. I finally decided to let it pass, as a charitable or cultural contribution (and I intend to investigate the ramifications of this generosity before next April 15th).

Another serious question raised itself concerning the accurate total of 'C', the Royalties

¹Beginning with \$50, the Gotham Book Mart Avant-Garde Poetry Award, at the Wagner College Writer's Conference.

²I decided to omit the income received for teaching the St. Mark's Church poetry workshop in 1969-70, as it was not really for my poetry, regardless of the fact that, had I not written any, my position as teacher would no doubt have been untenable.

³Although the CAPS Fellowship included \$800 worth of "Public Service" --which in my case was \$150 for a reading and \$650 for corresponding with people in prison who wrote poetry-- I felt that this was a device to get money to the Creative Artists (the first two initials of the acronym) and so I included the entire sum in 'A'.

and Publications. Two of the checks I had received, from Random House and McGraw-Hill respectively, each in the amount of ten cents, I had never cashed. Thus it was income I had received, but since I had not spent it, or deposited it in a bank, I could not really be sure if I could count it as income. I have included them however, partly, I suspect, from the vanity of enlarging the total.⁴ In the meantime, the checks themselves have taken on a visual interest so that it would be more difficult than ever to part with them, as with any works of art.

At any rate, this Poetic Income averages, over the twelve year period, to \$796.08 annually, or \$15.30 per week, or \$2.18 per diem. I think I would have taken the second alternative, and once a week used the fifteen dollars and change for a pleasant dinner in a restaurant with my wife or a friend.⁵ But what I was interested in was knowing the financial worth of one of my poems, not my wages for laboring over them, and at first this seemed quite simple. I counted the number of poems I had written beginning with 1963 and it came to a neat, even 200; which would make the going rate for any one of them \$51.74 (and a fraction, which I dropped).

But of course the next logical question I put was: was the poem "January", of one line, worth as much as "Autobiography", which is 628 lines? Probably not. And then there were those 198 others in between. The line lengths varied too of course, so the fairest way to do it was to ascribe the income proportionately, by the number of words. My accountant, or his assistant, is presently at work on this project, and I am awaiting the results. (He flatly refused to do it by letter, which would have been ideal.)

That sum will enable me to know the value of any particular poem on an overall basis --but in the meantime other factors have begun to occur to me. For example, poems written after receiving a particular Grant or Award should obviously be ineligible to use that money to help establish their value. The poems of 1963-64 could split up (Proportionately by number of words of course) the \$1500 award from the Poet's Foundation (received 12/31/64), but the poems from 1965-69 would have to wait until the Frank O'Hara Award for anything really substantial, and then it could be divided among only those poems actually in the manuscript "North", as that was the nature of the Award.

In the case of the CAPS Fellowship itself I had to make a hard decision (in addition to that explained in note 3): I had to submit 15 poems with the application! But after much thought I came to feel that this award was in recognition of one's entire opus, and I would feel obliged to distribute it this way (that is to everything written prior to April 1974)-- thus snatching an incredible bonanza from the submitted 15 poems!

At this stage in my calculations, readings presented another problem as, except for several recent ones which I have on tape (out of 63), I simply could not remember with complete accuracy which poems I read. My current sessions under hypnosis are helping to unearth some of this information, but for much of the remainder I fear I will have to depend on the (characteristic) probability of reading those poems most recently completed at that time (always remembering that the income must be divided among the poem proportionate to the number of words, or their "mass").

Assigning income to individual poems in the Publications category, on the other hand, is quite easy: there they are, in black and white. If only one poem appears then the income generated belongs to it alone.

In general, one can see that early works have a distinct advantage financially over recent ones (this can of course help to make up for esthetic deficiencies). Also, in the Readings

⁴Actually, in both cases I came very close to sending my own check back, in the amount of three or four cents change, for reasons which are too complicated to go into here.

⁵Until about 1972, when I would have had to begin dining alone.

category one tends, somewhat artificially, to raise the value of a few favorites by reading them again and again. There may be any number of other poems with perfectly acceptable literary qualities, but merely because they don't seem (to you) to lend themselves to being read, they turn out over the years to have very little "real" value (readings being the most likely form of poetic income). A series of benefit readings for these poems (we all have them) is an idea that needs exploring. Perhaps a group of poets could apply for a grant, etc., etc.

These are only the first, and tentative, thoughts on a subject of vast cultural importance, which is the value of American poetry in our time. My personal dilemma at this moment is, that with no further income in sight, how can I write my 201st poem and consciously lower the value of the twelve years of all my previous efforts? (Tony Towle)

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THE MEANING OF MEANINGLESSNESS:

THE POETRY OF JOHN ASHBERY (EXCERPT)

Ashbery's poems are unclear; they are mysterious and seem meant to be so. The banal, the given, and the arbitrary are large elements in Ashbery's "new realism." His use of prose, dream logic, collages from popular sources, and drastic dislocation constitute a revitalization of American poetry. A dictionary of cliches is not a cliché.

Ashbery's early work is a limpid employment of surrealist dream imagery, glamorous diction, and intimate scale. The early work lacks the power of the later, prosier meditations, but is crystalline and witty.

In The Tennis Court Oath, and particularly the extended poem, "Europe," Ashbery successfully presents a new, disjunct collage method. Popular sources invade a fragmented poetry with great effect. The theme of private and public defeat and torpor prevails.

In Rivers and Mountains, the poet modulates to a new style of constant parody. "The Skaters," the masterpiece of this book, is an opaque study in witty uncertainty. The poet rejects all pieties, literary and theological, and concludes with a paradoxically "perfectly arbitrary" order: a man-made collage-parody of the old "starry heavens." Never before has limpidity been used so continuously in the service of the themes of discontinuity and opacity.

Three Poems presents Ashbery's mature prose meditations. It is a sequence describing failure in love, and the tendency is toward a solipsism in which private art alone is finally affirmed. The diction is a constant stream of pietistic cliches, mercilessly parodied. The structure is deliberately monotonous, with some song-like interpolations, and its opacities reflect the poet's theme of loss of logos.

The seeming "nonsense" of Ashbery's techniques of collage, discontinuity, and dream logic, is a sensible exploration of a universe of moral and physical uncertainty. As critics have explored and "rescued" the genre of pornography, so one must attempt to re-value the neo-Dadaist works of Ashbery, by stylistic analysis, metaphrasis, and interdisciplinary analogues. One finds that his techniques of dissociation, his use of the banal, the anti-poetic, the discontinuous, and the arbitrary all yield clues to possible states of potential wholeness. I view the late work, moreover, as the extreme attempt to escape from the bleaker aspects of "the unacceptable" in "nonsense" and to calculate the possibility of a conversion to the heavy requirements of love and belief, which are however mercilessly parodied.

One might take the famous catalogue of I.A. Richards and C.K. Ogden¹⁰ and disrupt their definitions of meaning to indicate what a palette of "meaninglessness" might be, and how congruent this is with the central theme and style of Ashbery. If "meaning is an intrinsic property,"¹¹ meaninglessness in Ashbery's work is conjured up by an utter denial of intrinsic logos, by his lacerations of any such pathetic fallacy in his "colorful indifferent universe."

If meaning is "a unique unanalysable relation to other things" (Meaning, p. 186), then

¹⁰The Meaning of Meaning (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1923), pp. 186-7.

¹¹Ibid., p. 186

meaninglessness in Ashbery is evoked by the constant scrutiny to disrupted rapports, and the loss of any coherent relation between "nature", "man", "divinity." If connotation is meaning, then Ashbery's poetry, like Gertrude Stein's, attempts utter meaninglessness by attempting to strip the word of any of its usual configurations and connotations. Zero degree is hot.

If meaning is an "essence," then Ashbery like Sartre presents an absurdist impasse without essence. If meaning is "an event intended" (Meaning, p. 186) then Ashbery takes from the world of blank contingency, funny and unfunny unexpectedness.

If "meaning" is the place of anything in a system, Ashbery evokes a world where "the system" is almost an utterly unsystematic stream, in which usual places, indeed any locus, is seen to be deprived. Only an absence of locus remains, as in the astronomer's newer concept of an extremely weighty black hole.

If "meaning" is "practical consequences" (Meaning, p. 186) then Ashbery by dint of non sequitur tends to shatter any sense of causality. The fallacy of post hoc propter hoc is ridiculed endlessly, and seen to lead only into a world of old-fashioned sentiment and false coherence.

If meaning is "emotion aroused by anything," Ashbery's flatness attempts an affectless pose and poise to lance the sense of any arousal or emotion. If meaning is "what anything Suggests" (Meaning, p. 187), Ashbery often attempts paradoxically to suggest "nothing," to present a blank configuration of words in which any interpretation may be an over-interpretation, and the circumference of meaning is either seen to be zero or practically infinite.

If meaning is "that to which the User of a Symbol refers," Ashbery is peculiarly evocative of meaninglessness when he tries to employ words without a seeming concern for the referential, as in his collaged bits and fragments. The white spaces between his words seem to remain as suggestively referential as the words themselves, and the whole pointing mystically, or insidiously, nowhere.

If meaning is that "to which the user of a symbol ought to be referring," then Ashbery mocks the reader into a meaninglessness of an antinomian bent, by consistently employing a theme that tends against any but the most chaotic obligations. Experimentalism, metrical betrayals, betrayals of syntax: all go to show that Ashbery rejects this category of "meaning."

If meaning is, finally, "that to which the interpreter of a symbol either refers, or believes himself to be referring, or believes the User to be referring" (Meaning, p. 187), then Ashbery's "puzzle pictures" lead maddeningly into a labyrinth of possible denotations, and possible lack of denotations.

These are some of the meanings of meaninglessness. In Ashbery's poetry, there is much confidence in a new threshold for incoherence and randomness, leading to positive consequences of affirmations of freedom. The poet avoids any transcendental defense for his usages of contingency, but in his work order is wilfully and painstakingly rescued from disorder. Conventional orders and meanings are parodied sharply and starkly.

What induces one to reject a new poetry is often its complexity, its seeming opacity, or its central lack of old symmetries. As a matter of fact, Ashbery deliberately chose to leave a derivative, early limpidity and purity of diction and structure for less melodious quantities: bleak collages, parodies, ironic prose pieces. The sense of beauty in Ashbery's work includes a sense of the degraded coherences, which must be expunged.

Ashbery's defiant and humorous employment of a fertile formlessness as theme and style is the main burden of his self-reflexive texts. His poetry deals with the opacities of a context that seem to contrast only with silence. The darkness in Ashbery is rather clear, pointing to the breakdown of causality in our thought and art. He has extended his insight into the territories where the form of life itself seems disorderly or inappropriate and the linguistic content peculiarly empty or hermetic. While the function of philosophy may be to expunge nonsense, the function of poetry is to use it. That is one of the "meanings of meaninglessness," and Ashbery's poignant privacies affirm our elaborated sense of the certainty of uncertainty. Here, practical criticism may begin. (David Shapiro)

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JOHN ASHBERY. / A COMPREHENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY by David Kermani, Garland Publishing Inc., 545 Madison Ave, NYC 10022. 244 + pp. . . . complete description of all books . . . extensive annotations on sources, influences, and circumstances of publication drawn from unpublished

letters & interviews, from conversations with Ashbery, his friends, and associates . . . illustrations include photographs & unpublished artwork (!) by Ashbery . . . \$20. . .

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From Big Sky Books: All This Every Day by Joanne Kyger; Blues of the Egyptian Kings by Jim Brodey(w/liner notes by Clark Coolidge & Cover by Greg Irons). Due in January: Polaroid by Clark Coolidge; Studying Hunger by Bernadette Mayer. Orders and inquiries to Serendipity Books Distribution, 1790 Shattuck Ave, Berkeley, CA 94709 . . . And (whew!) from Full Court Press, 249 Bleecker St, NYC 10014: Edwin Denby, Collected Poems; Joe Brainard, I Remember; First Blues: Rags, Ballads & Harmonium Songs, 1971-74 by Allen Ginsberg, all books (\$3.50 paper, \$7.95 cloth). . . From Z Press, Box Z, Calais, Vermont, 05648 (Add 40¢ for handling): Michael Brownstein, Strange Days Ahead (\$3.50 paper); Kenward Elmslie, Tropicalism (\$3.50 publ jointly with Unmuzzled Ox); John Ashbery and James Schuyler, A Nest of Ninnies (\$3.50); Kenward Elmslie, The Orchid Stories (\$3.50); Keith Abbott, 12 Shot (\$2.50); Joe Brainard, 12 Postcards (\$2.50); and ZZZZ, an anthology of poetry, fiction and art, jampacked (\$2.50).

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I just wanted to add a footnote to Allan Kaplan's interesting and thought-provoking observations on the poetry of David Schubert, which appeared in the November issue of the Newsletter.

I remember Frank O'Hara mentioning to me in conversation that he had been very inspired by Schubert's work, and he suggested (in fact almost insisted) that I get a copy of Initial A which, I am happy to say, I did. (It was exceedingly obtainable in 1964.)

However it was not until several years later, when it was too late to ask Frank about it, that I noticed the striking similarity in tone following two poems, the first stanzas of which I quote:

Farewell, O zinnias, tall as teetotalers,
And thou, proud petunia, pastel windows of joy,
Also to you, noble tree trunks, by name
Elm, with your dark bark in the dark rain, couchant
Like comfortable elephants. And you
Mailbox colored robin's egg blue on the poor
House, shy, set back (a poor gentleman but
Irreproachable), with your shutters robin's egg
Green. You, street, striated with rain like a new penny,
And houses planted by arbor-vitae trees,
By miniature pines that lean against you for
Support, --Hail and farewell!

(The Happy Traveller --David Schubert)

Not you, lean quarterlies and swarthy periodicals
with your studious incursions toward the pomposity of ants,
nor you, experimental theatre in which Emotive Fruition
is wedding Poetic Insight perpetually, nor you,
promenading Grand Opera, obvious as an ear (though you
are close to my heart), but you, Motion Picture Industry,
it's you I love!

(To the Film Industry in Crisis --Frank O'Hara)

In The Happy Traveller Schubert shifts, in the three stanzas that follow, to a more intimate and quiet tone, while O'Hara maintains his serio-comic grandiloquence to the poem's glorious conclusion.

It is a rather specific instance, I think, of art proceeding beautifully from art. (Tony Towle)

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Terence Winch, Luncheonette Jealousy, The Washington Writers Publishing House, 1346 Connecticut Ave, NW, Room 1013, Washington, DC 20036 (\$2) and The Beautiful Indifference, O Press, 138 Sullivan St, NYC 10012 (\$1) . . . Richard Elman, The Man Who Ate New York & Other Poems of Manhattan and Ossabaw Island, New Rivers Press, PO Box 578, Cathedral Sta, NYC 10025. . . Also from New Rivers, Nathan Whiting, Running (\$2.50 paper, \$6 cloth). . . The Poetry Project Newsletter is partially supported by a grant from CCLM. . . Scree #4, Duck Down Press, Box 2307, Missoula, MT 59801. . . akwesansé notes, (a journal about native americans), Mohawk Nation, c/o Roosevelttown, NY 12683 . . . Bill Bissett, The Fifth Sun, blewointmentpress, Box 48870, 85a Bentall, Vancouver, BC, Canada. . . Joanie Whitebird, Bootstrap Chronicles, Triton Press, Boulder Creek, CA. . . Tina Darragh, My Hands to Myself, Dry Imager Press, c/o Darragh, 3314 Mt. Pleasant #2, Washington, DC, 20009. . . Richard Friedman, Straight, The Yellow Press, 2394 Blue Island, Chicago, IL 60608 . . . Stroker #3, 129 2nd Ave, NYC 10003, (\$1.50). . . Jonathan Williams, ed., Madeira & Toasts For Basil Bunting's 75th Birthday, Jargon 66, The Jargon Soceity, Elm Street, Millerton, NY 12546 (Festschrift available only to patrons of the Jargon Society and those who request copies specifically). . . Michael Lally, Dues, The Stone Wall Press, Box 889, Iowa City, Iowa 52240, (\$7) and Catch My Breath from Salt Lick Press, PO Box 1064, Quincy, IL 62301.

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SOMETHING HAPPENED, Joseph Heller, Ballantine, \$2.25.

It distrubs me (unexplainable) to read in reviews or on jacket blurbs that at last we have so and so's long awaited book when I haven't been part of the (seemingly) vast horde of long a-waiters. However, when reading Heller's new book I was constantly reminded of how much I had in fact enjoyed the precision, humor and humanity of Catch 22. Fortunately, (for me), this novel isn't about World War II. Instead, it is one man's analysis of his place and relationship to the world (work, family, self -- past and present). Anyone who has ever done time in an office will be awe-struck by Heller's on-target bombardiering of office positionings and politics. His later scrutiny of marriage/wife (hackneyed at times) son (whom he adores, fears and frets over) and The Teenage Daughter (confrontation with Total Enigma) is 75% fantastic. Around the core of his life is the youngest son (retarded since birth) almost never mentioned but a presence like margins on a page. Something finally happens in Something Happened. It is cruel and tragic (outrage): the point where Heller's humanity and genius fuse -- blows circuits from the bowels of gut cliches -- erases forever from my repertoire of convenient pigeon holes the category of middle (class, age, of the road) man. (Verlaine Boyd)

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Dear Sir or Madam,

I would like to be the ticket taker at your Pornographic Movie Theater. If you could help me to secure this position it would be greatly appreciated. I understand that I am unqualified for this job. I hardly ever go to the movies. The few porno films that I have seen have bored me after ten minutes. But, I can count money and giving tickets to your valued customers would not be difficult because I do not have any interest in either the Porno movie or the customers satisfaction. I understand that you get a mixed crowd. That is perfect as I have, since I was a child, believed in Democracy. All I want to do is sell tickets and read books. This book reading in a ticket booth suits me fine as I have a defined need to see the world from a protected place.

I remain,

Ed. Baynard

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To Be Read with New York Times Book Review of Nov. 23, 1975, The Collected Books of Jack Spicer, Robin Blaser, ed., Black Sparrow.

Jack Spicer's poems come from some very human feeling, including bewilderment, disorganization, confusion and occasional blearyness. He's like a man running down a hill to chase a red rubber spalding bouncer he can never quite get into his grasp. Spicer's effects are sometimes breathless, or out of breath. He lacked cool. He would trip on his own feeling sometimes, and on feeling words. The scholar of linguistics couldn't always write as if that stuff were at his fingertips. He knew more than he could feel. Felt more than he had words to express his feelings. He had rages. Asserted a lot: "People who don't like the smell of faggot vomit will never understand why men don't like women..."

"The ocean does not mean to be listened to," he writes in *Language*. Spicer does. As Robin Blaser, his closest friend, and the editor of this loving volume of posthumous books points out, Spicer insisted "...the mind resided in the heart because it is so tied to speech and breath. An opening of the mouth..."

Blaser reminds us that Spicer was always writing "at the edge of a disclosure..." He declares Spicer's aim was to take "ordinary" language and reinvest it with his special experience until "the word's meaning tears at a sense of life, and it is the nature of such tearing that it may lead to rage, and terror, as it does throughout Jack's poetry..."

Blaser quotes Spicer's dying words "My vocabulary did this to me. Your love will let you go on."

Something of Spicer's attitudes and moods was in keeping with a San Franciscan mood during Fifties and Sixties around the King Ubu Gallery, in The Fillmore, among verbal and visual artists. It was particularly reminiscent to me of the paintings of my old friend, Keith Sanzenbach, a suicide, who sometimes used such disparate materials as shit and semen as the mediums for making large abstract-expressionist mandalas that are now considered to be among the formalist masterpieces of California art during the period.

This was, of course, crazy art, play art, the holding forth sort of thing, the holing up thing. A scene. Some of the sites are now famous: Mike's Pool Hall, Foster's Cafeteria, the Co-Existence Bagel Shop; and also some of the occasions, such as one that Spicer, characteristically, seems to have had something to do with called "Blabbermouth Nights."

Well I guess it all goes back to Whitman and *Song Of Myself*, but also forward in time, too, because these artists were announcing they believed it was possible to try and have a good time and fuck the product the process was everything. Spicer, after a while, declared one poem after the other; he dictated whole books, including a book of magazine verses for magazines such as *Sports Illustrated* and *The Nation* which he knew they'd never print because they were just memorable and striking pieces of utterance.

As in Stanza 20 of Whitman's song, Spicer's aim was to be "hankering, gross, mystical, and nude," and, like Whitman, he asked a lot of questions: "Where is the poet?" "Who carries his dreams on his back like a packet?" "How motherfucker can I sing a sad song when I remember Zion?" One based almost entirely on questions is #6 in *Language*. Spicer contemplates the sensation of a candle flame on his finger and asks a lot of questions about the flickering: "Or does the flame cast shadows?"

At Hiroshima, I hear, the shadows of the
victims were as if photographed onto concrete
building blocks.

Or does it flicker? Or are we both candles
and fingers?

Or do they both point us to the grapheme
on the concrete wall--
the space between it

Where the shadow and the flame are one?

This must have been a pretty painful way to contemplate one's experience. There's a lot of pain in Spicer's work. Much quiet, and suffering:

The hermit said dance and I danced
I was always meeting hermits on the road

Who said what I was to do, and I did it or got angry and didn't
Knowing always what was not expected of me.
She electrocuted herself with her own bathwater
I pulled the plug
And there was darkness (the Hermit said)
Deeper than any hallow

Spicer's stuff is sometimes so good, and sometimes its windy and awful. He wasn't writing perfect poems. He was catching things on the run, to give a sense of life to the poems he wrote serially, giving his subjects the importance he attached to them. The stuff was there, inside him. Why couldn't he always get it out?

How did he feel about what was going on all around? I guess, the poems seem surprised, startled at times, and sometimes there's a mood of bitchy-bashfulness. He was a singer. Almost a crooner. This is from Holy Grail:

That's it Clyde, better hit the road farewell.
That's it Clyde better hit the road.
You're not a frog you're a horny toad. Goodbye,
farewell, adios,
The beach reaching its ultimate instant. A path
over the sand.
And the toad-frog growing enormous in the shadow
Of fogged-in waters. The Lady of the Lakes, Monstrous.
This is not the end because like a distant bullet
A ship comes up. I don't see anybody on it. I am Merlin
imprisoned in a branch of the Grail Castle.

When I included some of Spicer's indecorousness in a review of his work for the Times they said I was a bad boy and cut me back to under 1000 words. They seemed to be saying, as usual, that Spicer deserved to be straight-jacketed. Maybe so. He was trying so hard to be unmannered and unfashionable he sometimes peed on the rug. From the evidence of this book, Spicer was a trial and error poet. I guess that, more than anything else, is what serial means. He didn't mind looking too bad once in a while. He knew he could be formally perfect about the things he loved (see his Rimbaud poem called Chapter IV, for example, in The Heads of The Town); but he had so many other moods, and very little good time when he wasn't drunk, or talking. Spicer seems to have been an extraordinary boaster, wit, stand-up comic, and maker of one-liners. "To define a metaphor against a crowd of people that protest against them. This is neither of our businesses."

Was he so great? I wish I could do some of the things he did with his mind and live to write a novel about it.

Spicer provided us with a number of his own epitaphs. He said death wasn't final, only parking lots. He wrote: "Nothing but the last sun falling in the last oily water by the docks

They fed the lambs sugar all winter
Nothing but that. The last sun
falling in the last oily water
by the docks.

Read 'em and weep... (Richard Elman)

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HERE AND THERE: BOSTON/CAMBRIDGE -- Readings continue at the Blacksmith Coffee Shop on Brattle St in Harvard Square. Mon Dec 8 at 8:15 pm the Irish poet John Montague will read. The 100 Flowers Co-operative bookstore has readings every Wed at 8:15 at 15 Pearl St in Central Square, Cambridge. Those interested in readings should submit mss to the collective. Nikki Giovanni reads Tues Dec 2 at 8:15 at First Parrish Church in Harvard Square. In Boston, the Beacon Hill Free School sponsors three weekly poetry workshops. Jack Powers coordinates a workshop Thurs at 8:30 at the Stone Soup Gallery, 313 Cambridge St. Rando Bottasto and Will

Bennett lead a workshop for experimental poetry, discussing published work of known authors and the work of participants, every Mon at 8:30, apt. 7, 23 Irving St on Beacon Hill. And Tues at 8:45 Jack Kimball leads a workshop also at Stone Soup. . . A new series at Boston Center for the Arts, 539 Tremont Ave organized by Philip Hacket. NEW HAMPSHIRE -- The Portsmouth Public Library and NH State Arts Commission are sponsoring a series of readings. Expecting a widely expanded program by Fall 1976. . . AUSTIN/HOUSTON -- The Austin poets Theatre recently did shows in Houston and San Antonio. Voices are Robert Grant Burns, Jeff Woodruff, Sandra Hutchins, and too many other poets to mention. The Houston Poets Workshop has started their autumn series, and poetry activities continue at the Houston Contemporary Arts Museum which is doing readings, putting out a new mag called Travois, and starting a poets-in-the-schools program. . . Arthur Knight has asked me to inform the poetry community of the death on Oct 29th of Glee Knight, coeditor of The Beat Book. . . SAN FRANCISCO (from L. Hand) -- Lewis MacAdams is really pouring erg & volt & brain-sweat into reading at S.F. State, thus producing high-quality memorable combo-performances, such as: Dawson & Thorpe (both sustaining long and powerful monologues), Hawkins & Herd (two unique studies in the frontal sublime) -- Dale Herd's first public reading anywhere, a muffler of low-keyed steady diffidence, but delivering the works, hard-focus for live detail like that of Robert Altman, very "razor" and profound. . . Same day, after dark, Ed Dorn, the Fred Astaire of the lectern! read Book IV of G'slinger as part of Jack Shoemaker's promising series at the S.F. Museum -- such an admirable presentation, courtly, magnanimous, & earning remarkably exact (solid pitch & cut) applause. . . Pianist Samuel Peoples was arrested on the S.F. State campus while he was on the campus preparing to perform with the West Coast Gangster Choir. Norman L. Heap, Vice President of the University in a memo dated Oct 24, 1975 came to "WHA?" Police right/Peoples wrong! . . . CHICAGO -- Body Politic Readings in Nov were John Giorno, Jack Collum, Richard Friedman, Ted Berrigan, Keith Abbott, Barret Watten and Don Cameron. Dec 1 Caroline Rodgers and Dec 8 Etheridge Knight. At Amazing Grace in Nov was Charles Bukowski. Rose Lesniak is starting an open reading series at Northeastern Ill. Univ.

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MISC: "The Sohm Archive" -- Selections from the Fluxus Section, Clocktower, 108 Leonard St (thru 12/13). . . Starting, Dec 1, Ties and Pies (Tom Schmidt, Jerry Jones, Bob Kushner) Holly Solomon Gallery, 392 W. Broadway. . . Joe Brainard, Fischbach Gallery, 29 W. 57 St. starting Dec 16. . . Carll Tucker, 60 E 9 St NYC 10003 is beginning a small press column in The Village Voice and would appreciate copies for review at that address. . . From Dec 6-27 Scott Burton will be showing 2 chair pieces at Artists Space, 155 Wooster St. . . Starting in Feb Daniela Gioseffi will teach a woman's poetry course at NYU, for info call 212-598-2173. . . Bill Zavatsky has won L.O.O.G.S. award for 1975. . . Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa Institute is starting again in January. For further info write 1441 Broadway, Boulder, Colo. 80302. . . Rolling Thunder Review continues to roll through New England heading towards French Canada, playing terrific music and shooting thousands of feet of film. (Quiz: Operation Rolling Thunder was what battle in what recent war?)

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Learned Hand respectfully submits: THE STEAM PIG (South African "tec" by James McClure); Mohamed Hamri's TALES OF JOUJOUKA (Capra); THE GLORY OF GABRIELI (E. Power Biggs et al in resonance of San Marco); "Dashiell Hammett's San Francisco" (CITY magazine, Nov 4); Gerry Mangione's THE DREAM AND THE DEAL (history of WPA Writer's Project, featuring Harold Rosenberg, Joe Gould, &c., and generously graced by a number of Alice Neel's spellbinding portraits); Rouge Et Noir cheeses from Petaluma ("My favorite word!" -- Rene Ricard) Ca.; Herрман's Salads; Bass Ale; Sgt. Gustafson's banana-flavored Bhang; IMAGE IN FORM by Adrian Stokes; Eschenbach for new conductor of the San Francisco Symphony; JEAN GENET IN PANGIER by Mo' Choukri ("You seem sad today, I said to him. I'm always sad, and I always know why, he replied. I accepted his sadness and did not press him further. I have my own sadnesses."); F.T. Prince's beautiful new long poem DRYPOINTS OF THE HASIDIM (Menard Press, U.K.); Olmstead's indispensable CENTRAL PARK (M.I.T. p'back); Giorgio Morandi; BIRTH WITHOUT VIOLENCE by Frederick LeBoyer; THE FREELING OMNIBUS (Gollancz); George Kuchar's latest THE DEVIL'S CLEAVAGE: any state/city/county guide produced under WPA; Herbie Nichols back in range via

BlueNote (January); & finally! rinse your lapses synapses with Kenneth Koch's THE RED ROBINS -- octocaramel caramba (with nuts)! but seriously, the best book of its kind since ELECTIVE AFFINITIES. Don't squeeze the shaman! (L. Hand)

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MORPHOLOGY OF GOODBYE

This afternoon I wrote "goodbye"
on the blackboard. I wasn't going anywhere.
But in my self-appointed role
as History of the English language
a pleasure like none I have ever experienced
flooded my whole body.
I laughed a bit maniacally
as I crossed out
the letter e.

"You see how a word changes, eh?"
I said to my students
who quietly stared from their desks.
"The e in 'goodbye' is going.
You see it spelled the old way less and less.
What once meant 'God be with thee'
has lost some of its history
since I was your age in school."

Unbelievably, the children
did not fall to the floor
dead in horrible positions.

(Bill Zavatsky)

THE POETRY PROJECT
St. Mark's Church
Second Ave. & Tenth St.
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