

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER  
No. 55 May 1978  
Frances LeFevre, editor  
St. Mark's Church, 2nd Ave.  
and 10th St, New York 10003

EVENTS AT ST. MARK'S CHURCH: Wednesday Night Readings at 8:30 (contribution)  
May 3 Eliot Weinberger & Tom Lowenstein...May 10 Harry Mathews & Bobbie Louise  
Hawkins...May 17 Rachelle Bijou & Bill Berkson...May 24 Benefit for Poetry Project  
(call 674-0910 for information)...May 31 Tom Veitch...Monday Night Performance  
Series at 8:15 May 1 Open Reading...May 8 Eric Bogosian & Bill Hogeland...May 15  
David Herz & Peter Seaton...May 22 Alice Notley & Harris Schiff...May 29 Reading  
by members of Prose Workshop...Free Writing Workshops at 7:30 PM Tuesdays Johnny  
Stanton (prose)...Fridays Mary Ferrari (poetry). (See ANNOUNCEMENTS column below  
regarding May 12 & 25)...Danspace Concerts (contribution \$3) May 2 & 4 at 8:30 PM  
David Woodberry...May 11 & 12 at 8:30 PM Sara Rudner...May 16 & 18, 2 performances  
each night at 8 & 10 Andy DeGroat...June 1 Meredith Monk... Special Event Tuesday  
May 9 at 8:30 "A Night at the Opera" featuring Kenward Elmslie & Thomas Pasatieri.  
(See ANNOUNCEMENTS for details.)

EVENTS ELSEWHERE: Academy of American Poets Guggenheim Museum Fifth Ave & 89th St  
7:30 PM \$2 May 9 Mark Strand...Bragr Times 165 Duane St at Hudson, 2 blocks north  
of Chambers, May 1 at 7:30 PM Hannah Weiner & Charles Bernstein...Manhattan Theatre  
Club 321 E 73 St May 16 at 8 "Tribute to H.D." with Marilyn Hacker, Charlotte Mandel,  
Adrienne Rich, Avra Petrides, plus film "Borderline" starring H.D. & Paul Robeson  
\$3...Viridian Gallery 24 W 57 St at 6:30 PM May 11 Ann Lauterbach & Michael Lally  
...May 18 Phillip Lopate & Diane Stevenson...May 25 Diane Ward & Doug Lang...West  
End Cafe 2911 B'way (nr 113 St) 2:30 PM (contribution) May 7 Bob Holman & David  
Bromige...May 14 John Yau & Laura Kramer...May 21 Helen Adam & Robert Herschon...  
May 28 Shelley Kraut & Bob Rosenthal...YMHA Poetry Center Lexington Ave at 92 St  
\$2 May 8 at 8 PM Discovery '78/The Nation.

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AROUND THE EDGES

Should The Poetry Project be more political? The criticism that it is not political enough was made at one of the community meetings, and interested readers are invited to express their opinions on this question.

By "political" is meant, speaking broadly, directing one's energies and the content of one's work towards the solution of social problems before everything else, and specifically taking a public stand on the latter. St. Mark's Church--clergy, staff, and parishioners--is well known for its activity in the past against the Vietnam War, currently on behalf of civil liberties among Puerto Rican groups, and at all times against discrimination in every form. The Poetry Project helped to organize the "Angry Arts Week" of protest in 1967, at the height of the war, and many people associated with it now are politically active, though as individuals.

Whether the content of artistic work can be consciously political without becoming less than art is another matter. The Poetry Project was begun and it continues on the sole ideological premise that poetry is important in itself and poets should have an opportunity to develop it. Mario Vargas Llosa, the controversial Peruvian novelist, said in a recent interview in the New York Times: "...I believe that each person reading a poem or a novel or seeing a play feels pleasure, discovers a way to know himself better, as well as a stimulus for living, and doesn't ask literature to justify itself with religious, philosophical, or political reasons." Any takers? Or objections?

## TRAFFIC JAM

My friend Charles, the mathematician, says  
The world can be deduced by pure thought:  
One can predict it and even such anomalies  
As the malfunction of a heart or a prison riot.  
Sweating, he unrolls his topological charts.

My problem is I can't deduce pure thought  
From the fevers of matter, the garrulous traffic  
Of a larded and freckled life. Night trumps  
Every ace of day. The news reports  
On the car radio trick me into anger  
And an assent to murder: "Kill the bastard!"  
And now a sexy woman steps into the street  
To confront the male tanks of the world  
With their metal treads diffing up the street.  
What's that tremblor? Why do I shake?  
Yes, it's the seismograph of lust again,  
Measuring seven on the Richter scale.  
"One of these days I'll get killed."

--Stephen Stepanchev

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS:

In Mary Ferrari's absence May 12 & 26 her Friday evening workshop will be conducted by Bill Kushner, who plans to discuss "collage" poems and also offer some techniques for reading before audiences, with useful tips. Another topic will be the relation between anxiety/pressures and poetry. In class, inspired writing; bring tools...Tuesday, May 9, at 8:30 PM The Poetry Project will sponsor "A Night at the Opera," or How an Opera Gets Written in the 1970's, when composer Thomas Pasatieri and librettist Kenward Elmslie will talk about how they do operas together, from the birth of an idea to the finished production. Singers Constance Barnett and Judith Christin will perform arias and duets from "Washington Square," the Pasatieri-Elmslie opera staged in New York last October. The event will feature the world premiere of "The Verandahs," an Elmslie poem recently set to music by Pasatieri. Suggested \$3 contribution for admission...The date of the next Poetry Project Community Meeting is Saturday, June 3 at 2 PM in the parish hall...More about Naropa Institute: additional participating writers June & July will include Imamu Baraka, William Burroughs, Diane DiPrima, Audre Lorde, Kate Millet. Catalogs available at The Poetry Project or from Naropa, 1111 Pearl Street, Boulder, CO 80302...The First National Poets for Poetry Rally will be held Saturday May 6 (if rain, May 7) at the Plaza Fountain, Fifth Ave & 58 St, NYC 11 AM to 8 PM, perhaps later. Readings and speeches by representatives or poetry groups from New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut will protest the neglect of poetry by the public, the publishers, the bookstores, the governing powers, and the media. For information call Margaret Leong (212) 765-7275 evenings...The St. Philip's Performing and Fine Arts Center at 207 W. 133 St, NYC, will host and present an International Women's Poetry Festival May 21 beginning at 1 PM. General admission \$2. For information & registration call Ms. Currelley (212) 926-6281/0283 weekdays..."A Festival of Poetry and Arts" Saturday, May 13, at Great Falls Park, Paterson, New Jersey, will honor William Carlos Williams in an all-day free event beginning at 10 AM. Allen Ginsberg, David Ignatow, and the winners of the Great Falls Poetry Anthology competition will read. Open readings are scheduled also. Call C. Jurewicz (201) 790-3653/881-3848 for details...Michael Horowitz, jazz poet from England, will give a poetry performance along with Richard Price at the Studio for Creative Movement, 60 W 25 St, NYC Sunday May 14 at 8 PM. Here through May, he can be reached c/o Clark Nelson, 1014 Madison Ave, NYC, 10021, tel. (212) 628-1200...This Newsletter is sent to anyone who requests

it. Donations for postage are always needed and appreciated since the funding we receive does not cover our costs. Submissions of poems, reviews, and comment (all preferably brief, with SASE) are welcome. Editor reserves the right to edit minimally for space & clarity...Bill Berkson's BIG SKY Homage to Frank O'Hara is here at last, a superb production. Look for it at the Gotham and 8th Street bookstores or order from BIG SKY, Box 389 Bolinas CA 94924. \$4.

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BOOKS RECEIVED (poetry unless otherwise noted): Andiamo by Franco Beltrametti, Harry Hoogstraten & James Koller, Great Raven Press, Box 813 Fort Kent ME 04742 \$3...How I Broke In & Six Modern Masters by Tom Clark, Tombouctou, Bolinas CA 94924 \$3...Cesualdo by Lyn Hejinian, Tuumba Press, 2639 Russell St Berkeley CA 94705 \$2...Shaping: New Poems in Traditional Prosodies, An anthology edited by Philip K. Jason, Dryad Press, P.O. Box 1656, Washington DC 20013 \$3...The Night Traveler by Mary Oliver, Bits Press npl...Big Jewish Book: Poems & Other Visions of the Jews from Tribal Times to Present edited by Jerome Rothenberg, Anchor Press/Doubleday \$12.95...False Blues by Ron Schreiber, Calamas Books, Ithaca NY npl...Guilty Bystander by Lauren Shakeley (Walt Whitman Award Winner 1977), Random House NY \$4.95...Blue Heaven by Lewis Warsh, Kulchur Foundation, 888 Park Ave NYC 10021, cloth \$7, pbk \$3.50...From New Directions, NY (pbk prices): Hello: A Journal February 29-May 3, 1976 by Robert Creeley \$2.95; Antechamber and Other Poems by Michael McClure \$2.95; New Directions 36 edited by James Laughlin \$3.95. Annual international anthology of prose & poetry. Works by Paul West, James Purdy, Allen Ginsberg, Breton Breytonbach, Delmore Schwartz, Coleman Dowell, Anne Waldman, Octavio Paz, others; Seasons of Sacred Lust by Kuzuko Shiraishi, translated from the Japanese by Ikuko Atsumi, John Solt, Yasugo Morita, & Kenneth Rexroth. \$2.95. First book in English of this young woman's work.

MAGAZINES: # Magazine. Un-numbered first issue of new monthly edited by Brian Breger, Harry Lewis, Chuck Wachtel. Works by Blackburn, Crouch, Greenwald, Oppenheimer, Sherman, others. % B. Breger, 86 E. 3rd St, NYC 10003. Donations...New Wilderness Letter Vol 1, 3-4, includes a play "Range War" by Michael McClure, and also "takes up the role of poets as technicians of the sacred." New Wilderness Foundation, 365 West End Ave, NYC 10024 npl...Northeast Rising Sun edited by Pamela Beach Plymell, Box 303, Cherry Valley, NY 13320, \$1.50, reviews small press books and in this issue (Vol 2 #10-Vol 3 #11) questions current funding policies of CCLM, NYSCA, Poets & Writers, Inc. Provocative...Not Guilty #3 edited by Derek Pell, Box 2563, Grand Central Sta, NYC 10017, \$1.75. Prose, some poems: James Drought, Patti Smith, Opal Nations, Ed Sanders, Tuli Kupferberg, Roberta Gould, others...The Poetry Mailing List, 858 Tenth Ave, NYC 10019, sends you a poem, or several poems, or a critical essay, by one or another of the exciting young writers around these parts. \$10 for 20 issues. Edited by Kenneth Deifik & Stephen Paul Miller...Precisely: One, new critical journal edited by Richard Kostelanetz, Box 73, Canal St. Sta., NYC 10013, and Stephen Scobie. \$2 per issue, \$6 for 4 issues, \$12 for 8...Pursuit, the intriguing quarterly journal of The Society for the Investigation of the Unexplained. Scientific but open-minded and imaginative. \$10 for membership, which includes subscription, from SITU, RFD 5, Gales Ferry, CT 06335...Sparrow 66 features "This Will Kill That" by Gerard Malanga. Black Sparrow Press, Santa Barbara CA 93105, 75 cents...The Spirit That Moves Us, Vol 3, #1-2, Box 1585, Iowa City, Iowa 52240, \$1.75. Poems and a few prose works by 41 writers, both old friends--one or two very old--and new, mostly new. Wide geographical span.

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The Poetry Project wishes to thank CETA, and especially Madeleine Keller of the literature program, for making possible the workshop in poets' theatre given by Bob Holman, which recently concluded with two evenings of sensational productions and performances by its members. Thanks to Bob, too.

Mammotocumulus by Josephine Clare. Seattle, Washington: Ocotillo Press (2429 First Avenue, N.), 1977. Paperback \$5.00.

--When will you die  
they asked  
when they were small  
out of fear yes a wish to know  
but too: the waning of my powers  
to know the point in time  
when they would  
come into their own  
their freedom  
to find  
    & to become  
the source  
    of their existence  
their own  
    & the powers be theirs

--Jim Hanson

\* \* \* \* \*

the song of the two rich old hooded figures walking  
slowly up a mountain  
dark on its white & tan rough shallow slopes  
the song says the wind  
hit them quickly - one  
was quickly: tatters flipping in a gray sky & a long grainy note  
while the other kept stepping up  
to eventual restaurant on top where it stopped  
inside the Polynesian Room, did a couple steps  
cast off its garb  
& nothing was there  
then song divides  
& it curls up

-- Jack Collum

## COMEBACK

Blaise Cendrars: Discovery and Re-creation by Jay Bochner. University of Toronto Press, 1978. \$22.50 cloth.

Slowly but surely the work of Blaise Cendrars is making a comeback on this continent. Translations of his poetry have been cropping up more frequently since the mid-1960's; several of his novels have appeared (in edited versions) in English for the first time. Fifteen years ago "Cendrars" was more often than not simply the name of just another French writer, whereas now it's practically a household word. And now the first major study of his life and work has been published in English.

One could not have wished for a more intelligent beginning. Jay Bochner treats first the life, then the work, with frequent cross-references. He has certainly done his homework. The biographical section brings together a mouth-watering wealth of factual material, much of it previously unavailable in English. He attempts, with reassuring reasonableness, to distinguish between the demonstrable facts and the colorful legends concerning Cendrars' life, arriving at the conclusion that in this case the facts are sometimes more amazing than the legends. Bochner's chapters on the work are written not from the point of view of one more professor bent on proving another ho-hum thesis--he teaches at the University of Montreal--but of a highly literate and believable man who is alive with the desire to understand his fabulous subject, and to communicate to the reader the marvelousness of that subject.

Though obviously not a book for the general reader, it should be a cause for rejoicing among Cendrars fans, and a pleasure for those who love modern writing and know some of Cendrars' work. It will be less of a pleasure for those unable to read quoted material in French and/or unable to afford the irritating price, despite the volume's detailed and wonderfully long bibliography.

-- Ron Padgett

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### DEUS EX MACHINA

Easily led, easily misled  
It's difficult  
To arrive at simplicity

The military are everywhere  
On the river where  
The trouble is

The world is getting louder  
Our local franchisers in their Kentucky-fried uniforms  
Seeing these fractions of space

And the mock-up of the latest defense plant  
As I said depending so much  
The temperature fell twenty degrees

Your heart attacks  
It wants your death  
Beneath the layer of dark there is a glowing serf

This particular day contributing to world peace  
Luminous tears, a son, and the decision  
To save yourself or die

--Rebecca Wright



## AIR & VARIATIONS

Trial Impressions by Harry Mathews. Providence: Burning Deck Press, 1977. \$3.50

Harry Mathews is one of the most original writers anywhere. His best known works are three wildly comic novels: The Conversions, Tlooth, and The Sinking of the Odradek Stadium. These books include characters such as a dental assistant schooled in a technique that employs an odd mix of everyday psychology and philosophy, devices like a moon-clock powered by herring that live and reproduce within special confines to ensure perpetual operation, and even a love-making episode that is censored by phonetic manipulations. But these fabrications represent only part of Mathews' abilities.

Reviewing the novels in The New York Times, Edmund Wilson pointed out an important aspect of Mathews' work, "the tragi-comedy of human ingenuity, which insists upon interpreting the facts of experience even when they are senseless, baffling, or banal." This adeptness at elaboration also informs Mathews' latest book, Trial Impressions, which is based on a Jacobean air, "Deare, If You Change." The original is structured on two six-line stanzas, each having a remarkably well-ordered pattern of imagery, and expresses the speaker's extreme devotion to and dependence on his lover. From it Mathews forms twenty-nine poetic variations.

Some of his procedures are basic. The first line of the air, "Deare, if you change, Ile never chuse againe," is transformed by such means as parody, "If you break our breakfast date, I'll go begging in Bangkok"; sound associations, "Deep, if you charge, I'll never chug again/(Deep, if you chant, I'll never chip again)"; and imagistic expansion:

Dear, if you, who are more pole-star than pole-cat, change,  
I'll never, when confronted with life's many-paged  
bill-of-fare, choose any dish, no matter how succulent,  
again.

In other instances Mathews simply uses ideas implied in the original as a basis for his own fancies or lyric expressions. These lines, while derived from notions of constancy and change contained in the air, are essentially his own:

These dandelions in the short pasture grass, these violets  
at the wood's edge  
Will later in the year give way to fireweed and cow wheat;  
Efficient gardeners meanwhile will have established a  
consistency of chosen flowering.

But of all the procedures in Trial Impressions the most innovative is the recasting of elements from the original into different literary forms, sometimes quite specific ones, as is the case with variation VII. Here Mathews adapts Sidney's sonnet from Astrophel and Stella, "Who will in fairest booke of Nature know." Retaining the initial word from each line in the sonnet and almost all grammatical constructions within the lines, he substitutes key words from "Deare, If You Change." For instance, Sidney's first two lines, "Who will in fairest booke of nature know,/ How vertue may best lodg'd in beautie be" become "Who will in dearest love of Beauty change/ How wit may sweetest chosen in faith be."

In all, Trial Impressions represents one of the finest and most ingenious examples of poetry employing transformational techniques. The source is well-chosen, its implications are well understood, and the variations skillfully worked.

--Ray Ragosta

(Reprinted by permission from East Side, Providence, Rhode Island.)

## WHEN I WAS ALIVE

When I was alive  
I wore a thin dress bare  
shoulders the heat  
of the white sun

and my black thin  
dress did envelop me  
till I was a shell  
gladly and breeze

ruffled and filled  
against good legs  
the translucent fabric and my  
heart transparent

as I walk towards Marion's  
and Helena's as my  
skirt fills empties and fills with  
cooling air

--Alice Notley

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## WITH A SENSE OF A WORD

Lateness by David Shapiro. Overlook Press, Woodstock, N.Y., 1977. \$6.50

No one writes poetry with more verve than David Shapiro. This has been so for years, and it is only natural that the exceptional thirty-one-year old Columbia professor, noted for his improvisatory brilliance, should now be honing his compositional approach. Wisely, he has worked this normal aspiration into poetry with a monumental and lasting ring:

Leaves are falling in schematic folds  
The tongue of a conquered hero protrudes slightly  
The face is long with battered surgace  
Inscriptions we engraved on our thighs  
A leaf falls from your lips and I am in love with my lot.

This is more than writing, it is meta-writing, enough in itself to sustain a feeling mind. Shapiro advances beyond Mallarmé's oft-quoted statement that poetry begins with a word. Poetry may now be said to begin with the sense of a word and end with the word embodied. We need only compare the fine and dazzling breadth of Shapiro's achievements to the insipid self-confinements of those process poets and concrete poets who still cling to dead words and set theories, to feel that Mallarmé's once incise truism has outlived its pragmatic value. Shapiro's poetry abounds with the residue of process:

The world said, "That's what they said."  
("The Devil's Trill Sonata")

Only meta-mathematics can answer the question of how many finite points are on a straight line, and it takes a poetry which transcends process to articulate it. Shapiro treats language as his essential unit. He does not break it into component parts to effect experiments with no effects. Rather, he enlivens every sound and word and turn of thought in his poetry--that is, every conceivable "component part," with a sense of how language uses them because they make language possible. His virtuosity is the fruit of intense, continuous awareness of all the facets of language. But his work is both more and less than the (often cheap) imitation of language we expect from most poets nowadays; it surpasses even Roman Jakobson's definition of poetry--that which unveils language:

The parts of speech got tangled up  
There need be no order and no questions  
and no players guessing which quiet game is fun  
no map of the world or outline of your face  
as memory of you is a bad master

--Stephen Paul Miller

## HEROISM

You chuckle alone throat beats  
Blood that intensifies emptiness  
Day as well wheels a hammer cleat  
Spiked something moodless

Sure tramps walk gaining by  
All the same you recognize a coat  
What unknown territory is priestly  
German vision your head promotes

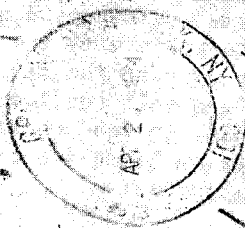
Aloud engine in a shack  
There's quiche in spotless heaven  
And sack to trade and plenty of Gaelic  
Though bodiless uneven

Death from Time and Love a sheet separate  
Like you loosely wrapped nothing to do with it.

-- Michael Scholnick

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FIRST CLASS MAIL



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