POETRY PROJECT

The Newsletter of The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery
Issue 113, April 1985 $1.00

ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE

Kathy Acker

Female Trouble:
NEW WORK BY ACKER AND PEACOCK

by Eileen Myles

ON BEING AN EXPERT

by Robert Glück

MICHAEL SCHOLNICK ON THE PROPER INTRODUCTION

THE NEW SMALL PRESSES OF PARIS

AND: BRIAN LEMNA ON BOBBIE LOUISE HAWKINS, BARRY SCHWABSKY ON CARTER RATCLIFF, AND POEMS! NEWS! ANNOUNCEMENTS!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Tim Dlugos,

I really got a lot out of Charles Bernstein's review of Mary Shelley's book *Frankenstein*. I was also quite pleased to see that Amy Clampitt has been awarded a fellowship. I for one shall never be entirely freed from the inspirational brilliance of her great raw ballad "Hills of Beverly": "...then up from the ground come a bubblin' crude..."

Susie Timmons
New York

Dear Tim Dlugos,

I read with interest Mr. "Fee" Dawson's letter on Maureen Owen's *Amelia Earhart* in the Jan.-Feb. issue of the Newsletter. I find I am unable to agree with his appraisal of this book, both in terms of this particular poetic sequence and the general principle that "forcing a familiar voice to carry all" is a "distinct limitation." Mr. Dawson tells us "we know the voice, irrespective of the beauty, and the voice hasn't changed. No matter how good the work, the voice is the same." Can't this complaint be made about Ashbery, Creeley, Olson, Stevens, Eliot, Yeats, Whitman—need I continue? Is it possible that Mr. Dawson prefers the poet as ventriloquist? Is he making a hidden plea for the revival of the dramatic monologue? (Not that Browning's masks don't usually sound like Mr. Robert Browning.) Perhaps it is only the individual qualities of that "familiar voice" to which he objects, or on the other hand could it be the gender of the voice?

However there is another, more important problem for me with Mr. Dawson's oblique attack, to wit, the "historical background," the omission of which he taxes Ms. Owen with and which he presents in the fourth paragraph of his letter. I would like to call to the attention of those interested in Mr. Gore Vidal's article "Love of Flying" in the January 17, 1985 *New York Review of Books*, specifically the paragraphs beginning the second column of page 19. To quote:

> If Amelia had been on a spy mission for the American government, as is still believed in many quarters, [FDR] hadn't been told about it. Years later, Eleanor Roosevelt used to talk a lot about Amelia. When I asked her if she had been able to find out anything, she said no. More to the point, since Mrs. Roosevelt had been devoted to Amelia, if there *had* been a secret mission, Mrs. Roosevelt would have certainly revealed it after the war, and demanded all sorts of posthumous recognition for her friend.

Vidal ascribes Amelia's disappearance to the fact that her co-pilot and navigator Fred Noonan was a drunk, rather than Japanese perfidy. By contrast, Mr. Dawson's scenario sounds like the sort of inside, suppressed story so often heard on Third Avenue at about 3:15 in the afternoon, when the level sunlight comes through the window of the Blarney Stone and shines a mellow red on the faces of the eager conversationalists. In any case, I trust Vidal's account of what happened to persons with whom he was (although still a fledgling) personally acquainted to Dawson's blandly asserted version of "reality and truth."

Of course, to task Ms. Owen with failing to mention *any* version of the "historical" Amelia Earhart is an egregious misreading of her excellent book.

Simon Schuchat
Harvard University

Dear Tim Dlugos,

Fiona Templeton, Ellen Phelan, Joel Shapiro and I were among the many people who were unable to fit into the hall on the occasion of John Ashbery's and Annie Lauterbach's reading. We were not late, it just wasn't big enough. Nor was it possible to hear Ann once she started reading on the almost non-existent sound system.

The woman who introduced Ann Lauterbach said that "if we had more money" it would be possible to use the space and sound system of the main church!!!! Since when does it cost any money to give a poetry reading at the Church? Is it necessary to *rent* the space? The Poetry Project invented St. Mark's as a place for Art, and it should not be a question of money if the Poetry Project wants to use the Sanctuary.

Frederick Ted Castle
New York

TIM DLUGOS RESPONDS: It's not a matter of money. In fact, the initial Wednesday night readings this season were held in the Sanctuary, but a large percentage of the audience was unable to hear the poetry. The problem is a combination of the redesigned Sanctuary's difficult acoustics and the lack of a sound system sophisticated enough to compensate for them. So back we went to the Parish Hall, where the work can be heard by virtually everyone (unless, as Ted Castle points out, you're caught in a traffic jam at the back door). At the crowded Ashbery-Lauterbach reading, the choice was between accommodating all comers who then would be unable to hear the work, and seating fewer in a space where the poets would be audible. Our apologies to Mr. Castle and to all who experienced inconvenience as a result of our logistical dilemma.

POETRY PROJECT, The Newsletter of The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery. Second Avenue at East 10th Street, New York NY 10003. (212) 674-0910.
The Newsletter is published monthly October through May.
Subscriptions: $7 a year for individuals, $12 a year for institutions. Advertisers please write for rate sheets.

The Poetry Project Newsletter is published by The Poetry Project which receives funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council for the Arts, as well as from the Department of Cultural Affairs of New York City, the New York Council for the Humanities, and other foundation, corporate and individual donors, as well as support from its members.

Tim Dlugos, Editor
Marc Nasdor, Production Director
Brian Lemna, Editorial Assistant
Ken Schwartz, Production Volunteer

FEMALE TROUBLE

by Eileen Myles

Last night I watched Divine get the electric chair as she thanked all her fans who made this possible, etc. In the course of the movie (*Female Trouble*) I watched her strangle her daughter, cut her friend's hand off with an axe and shoot wildly into the adoring audience who had come to her opening night. *Female Trouble* is one of the funniest movies I know and I sat watching it with a number of people, laughing hysterically, we turned off the Betamax: "God, that was disgusting," then going home.

Let's try to be clear. The Sue Coe cover of Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School* (Grove Press, $7.95) is miserably electric, oily, leatherette, with perfectly bloody thoughts etched onto black avenues in the sky, etc.

> I had to drop out of everything. It's hard to drop out of a night club filled with teenage hoods and teenage bums, but that's what I did. I roamed the streets of New York. The streets were black and filled with garbage. I ROAMED the streets, not WALKED the streets because I was a cat. Cats adore being loved, but they don't want to be in prison.

She shifts to upper-case—ROAMED—which is loudness, turning up the volume, yelling at you. Someone beating you up out of boredom. DEFIANCE...DEFIANCE SCORN BLOOD. It doesn't build, it leaves. Janey, the heroine of *Blood and Guts,* originally dwells in Merida, the main city in the Yucatan. " 'No one,' a booklet says, 'really knows anything about these ruins, and yet they raise human energy more than anything else.' " I was in an art museum the other day and the wall captions faithfully said of each piece of sculpture: "It energizes the space around it." Post-modern art is not the thing to dwell on, what is?, we are. The museum goers, the skulls who line the road to the ruined city, or live in the "live one." Janey's portrait of *The slum where she chooses to live* a) makes me wonder if all those people really died in a fire when I pass McDonald's on First Avenue, and, b) is already dated. "I don't have to do anything, everything lives."

All the keys are in the work. Freedom is the key issue in literature today. How do you get in, how do you get out? Kathy Acker strews roadsigns throughout which effectively encourage some, discourage others. "A scholar is a top cop 'cause he defines the roads by which people live so they won't get in trouble and so society will survive." So the ins and outs of this culture belong to the terrorist, not the critic. Who remakes the space. She (Janey) goes to Tangier and meets Genet. Janey and Genet take walks. She concludes: "Genet doesn't know how to be a woman. He thinks all he has to do to be a woman is to slobber. He has to do more. He has to get down on his knees and crawl mentally every moment of the day." Now, there's a frightening way to characterize the CONDITION OF WOMAN. Acker lets fly a stream of "goo-goo," "ga-ga," "piss," "shit," "fuck," that I often can't fathom. Nor am I intended to. This is not language I am supposed to like. Scholars can't (or won't) follow and even Genet has his illusions. This writing (Acker's) is a getting out, not a getting in. Literary terrorists have NO LOCKS she seems to be saying. It's a survival technique. "You think in a locked room there's sanity *and* (my emphasis) insanity," she asks.

> I walked into this large white room. There must have been fifty other girls. A few teenagers and two or three women in their forties. Women lined up. Women in chairs nodding out. A few women had their boyfriends with them. They were lucky, I thought. Most of us were alone. The women in my line were handed long business forms: at the end of each form was a paragraph that stated that she gave the doctor the right to do whatever he wanted, and if she ended up dead it wasn't his fault. We had given ourselves to men before. That's why we were here. All of us signed everything. Then they took our money....An abortion is a simple procedure. It is almost painless. Even if it isn't painless, it takes only five minutes. If you MUST have it, weak stupid things that you are, we can put you to sleep. The orange walls were thick enough to stifle the screams pouring out of the operating room. Having an abortion was obviously just like getting fucked. If we closed our eyes and spread our legs, we'd be taken care of. They stripped us of our clothes. Gave us white sheets to cover our nakedness. Led us back to the pale green room. I love it when men take care of me.

Someone else is still writing beautiful and sexy poetry. How odd. Read these jottings some maniac left in the margins of my book: "Kathy is cerebral, she stirs there, and this measured woman (Molly Peacock, author of *Raw Heaven,* Vintage Books, $6.95) is really sensual, wildly so & expresses taming in her timing. What does Kathy hate but her body?" Well, I feel less prudish now, and *Janey* has every right to hate her body. It's hers, isn't it. Anyhow, I'm sure female misogyny is societal, not congenital.

Molly Peacock takes on Dying and Civilization, rather than Death and Culture. She seeks a death-like oblivion in the earth and sexuality, and espouses a rarely expressed female desire for a return to the womb. Corny as it sounds, she is specific rather than imaginary. In "A Face Regresses," she suggests "the sulfuric smell of snuffed candle and/ vegetable rot that is aged desire," and (from "Sweet Time") "Do you know what sin is? Sin is something/pried out before its time, unresolved readiness."

It reminds me of a recent article about the unfortunate Truman Capote. He was being interviewed and spoke at length on the ways of "the rich," their strange penchant for undeveloped little vegetables, tiny fowl, calves ripped prematurely out of the womb. It was the haste of "the rich" he deplored. Peacock writes in old poetic language. I won't count the sestinas but they know they're there. I find myself studying the last word of each of her poems, trying to uncover its nature, seeing if it works. When writing in traditional verse form, "unburied" is a good word, so's "stormed." She sometimes errs in closing her poems with too loud a snap, and all that intrigued you as it was going on now resembles window-dressing. It seems a traditional poem can't bear too much resolution. The film director Carl Dreyer went on about how you have to strip artifice with artifice. Maybe that was true when movies were new. Kathy Acker causes me to wonder if people were burned out of a

building on First Avenue so that McDonald's could rise from the ashes. Molly Peacock continually fights the frostbite of traditional poetic forms and should never close her poems with "Bosk" because it leads me to a dictionary, which is deeper in, not out. Both women's work leads me to question (actually, "junk") the term "feminism." Doesn't it just mean women's writing. Can a woman write outside the context of being a woman, or not champion women by simply writing? Isn't it messy to designate some women writing to be "feminist," others not, isn't it like being frisked before you go in the door, isn't it rather insulting? "NEO FEMALE SLUT SCUM!" (Acker) Let's get back to Molly Peacock.

THOSE PAPERWEIGHTS WITH SNOW INSIDE

Dad pushed my mother down the cellar stairs.
Gran had me name each plant in her garden.
My father got drunk. Ma went to country fairs.
The pet chameleon we had was warden
of the living-room curtains where us kids
stood waiting for their headlights to turn in.
My mother took me to the library where ids
entered the Land of Faery or slipped in
the houses of the rich. My teacher told me
to brush my teeth. My sister ran away.
My father broke the kitchen table in half.
My mother went to work. Not to carry
all this in the body's frame is not to see
how the heart and arms were formed on its behalf.
I can't put the burden down. It's what formed
the house I became as the glass ball stormed.

(Molly Peacock will read at The Poetry Project on Monday, April 29, at 8 p.m.)

COME TO A MEETING

The Poetry Project's annual Community Meeting will take place Saturday, April 20, at noon in The Parish Hall of St. Mark's Church. All interested in the future of the Poetry Project and who desire to contribute to it are encouraged to attend.

COME TO A PARTY

Kulchur Press and the Gotham Book Mart invite you to celebrate the publication of Anne Waldman's new book, *Invention*, a collaboration with the painter Susan Hall, at a party on Monday, April 29, from 5 to 7 pm, in the gallery of the Book Mart (41 West 47th Street).

BARTHELME LIKES GOOCH

Writers' Choice, a project of The Pushcart Foundation, is "a monthly listing of the best in contemporary literature as selected by today's outstanding writers from hundreds of titles published recently by independent literary presses." Donald Barthelme, one of the current "outstanding writers," has selected *Jailbait and Other Stories* by Brad Gooch (Sea Horse Press, $6.95) as his choice for the honor. Barthelme's selection will be announced in space ads in the *New York Times Book Review*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Publishers Weekly*, and other leading publications followed by book people. Congratulations Brad.

WHO SPEAKS FOR US: BEING AN EXPERT

by Robert Glück

I'm teaching the Writers on Writing class at San Francisco State this spring. Writers come in and talk about their work, and I was struck by a common theme. Many writers talked about a "child" in them. The image: an ideal child, the creative life of the artist, constantly distracted, besieged, and hemmed in. The image interested me because it seemed so peculiar to here and now. What would it have meant to Dante or Shakespeare, to whom being a child mostly equalled small understanding, undeveloped faculties? And how does it tally with the maladjusted children we writers probably were?

So I thought about it, helped by Philip Aries' *Centuries of Childhood*. Aries is one of a group of French historians who chart the history of subjectivity. I learned that in earlier times play was integrated into our lives to a degree we can hardly imagine. I came to the conclusion that when these writers said "child" they meant flexibility and open-ended play, resistance to uniformity, "a promise of bliss," polymorphous utopia. The distinction between child and adult is recent and only recently has play been relegated to children as their special province. Like other books on the history of subjectivity, *Centuries of Childhood* maps out the dolorous transition from an integrated society to one that specializes. Childhood itself is something of a specialization, and our ability to be flexible—playful—is reclassified as a child quality:

> In 1600 the specialization of games and pastimes did not extend beyond infancy; after the age of three or four it decreased and disappeared. *From then on the child played the same games as the adult, either with other children or with adults.* [p. 71]
>
> In the society of old, work did not take up so much time during the day and did not have so much importance in the public mind: it did not have the existential value which we have given it for something like a hundred years. One can scarcely say that it had the same meaning. On the other hand, games and amusements extended far beyond the furtive moments we allow them: they formed one of the principal means employed by a society to draw its collective bonds closer, to feel united. [p. 73].
>
> It is important to note that the old community of games was destroyed at one and the same time between children and adults, between lower and middle class. The coincidence enables us to glimpse already a connection between the idea of childhood and the idea of class. [p. 99]

These separations inform our models for art and writing. Flexibility, resistance to uniformity, are hallmarks of twentieth-century art. Literature doesn't look modern unless its surface is messy, or playful, or constructed in some way that resists commodification (as a limit: a "language without discourse"). Nineteenth-century Naturalism and its descendants have come to be associated with work. The charge leveled at modern art by a self-righteous working world has always been "a child could do it." This is rightly threatening, and the accusation underscores the connection between childhood and art.

So most experimental writing has an adversary relation to professionalism, to work-ethic mentality, a resistance to fetishing the "expert" or whatever is authoritarian. I'm also thinking of performance art—a kind of art that says "no experts"—where we find flexibility, spectacle, and the child emotions of awe and fear.

But when the avant-garde talks about itself, it becomes extremely professional. If the language that addresses experimental writing has any charm, it is often based on difficult syntax and terms that want to be technical, associated with science. Maybe this expertise validates play—makes it look like work and so appear accessible; and this may be just another separation into parts (in this case the analytical and spontaneous) that characterizes late capitalism.

I think when we say public speaking, whether actually spoken or written, we mean setting or reaffirming or challenging the terms that legitimate discourse, and ultimately legitimate writing. The expert sets terms, an act of will that calls for a lot of footwork because it's difficult to marshal ideas—they seem to prefer disjunction. A new set of terms brings codes to bear on each other. It legitimates new work and at the same time creates the native soil of future writing. We move toward or away from a given set of terms, but we are rarely indifferent. (This is a mixed message regarding the role of the expert—it's born of mixed emotions.)

"The diegetic function of this sequence is thoroughly incommensurate with the hyperbole of its presentation." I lifted this sentence from an article in *October*. To my mind it says, "I am an expert." It's long on terms, short on discourse. If we rewrote this sentence—"The diegetic presentation of this hyperbole is hardly commensurate with the fluctuation of its sequences"—would its effect be altered? But these very terms carry an urgency—they are a language that constitutes a community. (In the case of *October* the community might resemble a faculty club.) Of course the terms will be simpler for a wider community.

For example, gay male discourse usually carries some perfunctory citation to sex. We often see ourselves and are seen by others as purveyors of sex. So any gay journal, whether literary or simply a newspaper, has lots of sex in it. Sex is the terms: if it's not in the text, it's in the visuals. In these terms we invest our subjectivity; they invoke group activities that are gay related, and in general they reaffirm our attraction to one another. In this way gay men recognize that a given journal or newspaper pertains, and certainly these terms carry an urgency that has more to do with directing one's subjectivity than emptying the libido. These images invite and exclude much the same as the semiotic vocabulary of experimental writing.

An article by Dennis Altman in *Socialist Review* illustrates the cross circuiting of discourses. The article was called "Sex: The Front Line for Gay Politics" [*SR* No. 65, pp. 74-84]; it was flanked by a sexy Joe Brainard drawing and an ad for Gay Sunshine Books. One book in the ad was *Meat: How Men Look, Act, Talk, Walk, Undress, Taste & Smell.* Many of the readers' subsequent attacks tried to delegitimize Altman's essay based on the drawing and the ad. "We emphasize that we consider the pronographic advertisement that follows Altman's article to be offensive, politically incorrect and damaging to *SR*" [*SR* No. 67, p. 124]—that from part of the *SR* collective itself. And another letter: "However, what bothers me most of all is the concluding frame of the article—the ad for 'Gay Sunshine Books.' To my mind this ad is completely irrelevant to *SR*'s political concerns and purposes, and I find its appearance in *SR* as poor judgment *in the extreme*" [p. 125]. Here two kinds of discourse meet. Naturally there is resistance. One group's terms can be the exact formula that invalidates another group's terms. What would happen if you belong to both? *SR* is not friendly to experimental writing, and would not consider semiotic analysis, so what happens if you belong to three hostile groups? I suppose the answer is that you have a pretty average writer's life, but that does not make public speech any simpler. Unless you are motivated to connect the dots, to make these codes inform each other.

Although earlier models persist—romantic, aristocratic, ivory tower—experimental writers want to be the edge of the new. Newer than new: in fact, critiquing the new. In post modern development, we are self-consciously critical of the various technological vocabularies. The most rewarded expert produces the most insights—the best commodity—by de-expertizing the other experts, by giving their partializing codes the lie. He finds common codes or brings one code to bear on another, and shows us to what extent writing, sex, and other "last bastions" of subjectivity are permeated by commodity life. So, in the case of the *SR* controversy: I might use the terms of the Left to portray the gay ad as a commodification of sexuality, but then I would turn the tables and say that commodification of sex is part of a community as it exists—and use that notion to critique the Left's blindspot in the terrain of sexuality, community, and the production of desire. In the end I will have played the part of technician with dexterity, producing an insight larger than either set of terms.

Then it's not surprising, historically speaking, that experts create a maximum power imbalance. In horror movies, after all the lyrical supernatural events (transgression, awe, flexibility, spectacle, fear), we meet the expert, the scientist with a stack of books who says, "Yes, these events really happened."

To claim that events happen, you must have confidence in your perception. But there is a second kind of confidence based on physical safety. A speaker feels physically safe in the world, or deals with fear of physical harm, urgency to speak tipping the scales. And there are different ways to speak. When I was a kid, adult men all seemed to be experts. They talked politics with authority. The basic message was authority; it was tedious and frightening. The women were more tentative, ironic; still, they exchanged information and, as opposed to the men, all the women talked. Both groups reaffirmed their friendship, the terms of their community, but the women were more socialized and a lot more fun. By now you are getting the idea that I'm introducing the theme of gender. Because the experts tend to be men, and there are objective reasons why men feel physically safe in the world. (How much better, then, to be without a body completely. The moral of *Donovan's Brain,* for example, is

that without a body we would seek limitless power fueled by limitless arrogance.)

When I start to speak, when I think about starting to speak, I am confronted with a cliff, vertigo, to jump or not to jump. Here I am a child again—but in this version of childhood, speech abides by the absolute verdict of a fairy tale, one wrong word and you're out. As I get used to speaking there is a psychic cost, some restructuring. Going from an object to a subject—whether as an individual or as a movement—first I experience the urge to account for myself completely. So now I occur in language. I master techniques to claim the audience, physical techniques and the going vocabulary. What comes with practice eventually becomes part of me. I must know how my presence is felt—in fact, it becomes part of my bag of tricks—an expert's bag of tricks. If I send it out into this room—a warm presence, jewish/gay, with a subtext, not too buried, saying "don't hurt me" —and I master projection of this presence, then I gain something to manipulate but lose something integral. (That's why we resist being described—it limits us.) As a second option I could junk my personality and opt for scientific objectivity, arrogant, blank as a TV test pattern. What I gain from all this is that I become part of other people's psychic lives. That's power. I set the terms that will govern their imaginations, shape their subjectivity. I also create for myself more elbowroom in my own writing. I will no longer be afraid to speak, but the audience will be afraid of me. And rightly. I will be an expert who represents oppressed minorities. After all, when there are power inequalities favoring one side, like racism and sexism, inequalities of other kinds often gather round the other side.

In an ideal community I would be reciting the terms the community gave to me. The greater the power differential and the more I am fetishized as an expert, the greater will be the distance between me and my audience. That's why movements and communities are wary of experts. (The Right prefers "common sense." The Left criticizes "elitism.") And the more I turn my audience into a classroom, into children, frightened and bored, the less chance there will be of any real community. One way to open the discourse—if that is a goal—is to arrange for more people to feel a personal stake. In a community of writers, a bottom line will be which kind of writing, *whose* writing, is taken seriously, written about, discussed. Enlarging the canon would expand the terms. Finally, if we want more people to engage in our discussions, then we must pay attention to what is physically threatening—body language, tone of voice, and other expressions of power imbalance.

[This article is excerpted from *Writing/Talks,* an anthology edited by Bob Perelman, published by Southern Illinois University Press.]

APRIL IN PARIS... AND SMALL PRESSES ARE BLOSSOMING

by Julie Guettinger

Paris is the hub of many wheels. But for the English-speaking expatriate literary community, it is a nucleus of special significance. For it is here, in literary publications like *Transition* and *The Transatlantic Review* in the Twenties and Thirties that names like James Joyce, Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway first became known. The small press sprouted in Paris as a result of American censorship.

Paris was and is a natural habitat for the expatriate writer, and through the wars and years has produced a tradition of outstanding Anglophone small press reviews.

In the last couple of years, though, the small press in Paris has experienced a tremendous and unparalleled revival. The latest entries to the small press scene are *Paris Atlantic, Paris Exiles, Frank,* Handshake Editions, *Paris Magazine,* Moving Letters Press, and *Sphinx.* Among their visions there are as many variant as common threads. The primary element that ties them together is a decision to be Paris-based.

"Basing *Frank* in Paris prevents it from getting lost in the tidal wave of literary activity on both coasts of the U.S.," says David Appleyard, *Frank* editor.

Michael Lynch, editor of *Paris Atlantic,* explains, "In Paris, you can publish an international review. *Atlantic* is establishing itself as multilingual, and Paris is the ideal place."

Jim Haynes of Handshake Editions emphasizes the tradition of the Paris anchor. "Paris has a noble tradition of small press. It has played an unbelievable role in English-language literature. After all, many of the greatest American writers were published first in Paris."

About the Presses

Moving Letters, a quarterly gem guided by Joseph Simas, has a circulation of 500. "For a small press to be vital," he explains, "it doesn't have to appeal to an enormous audience. One or two hundred dedicated readers are all that are necessary." Simas usually works each 24-page issue around a single writer or a single work. The most recent issue, which appeared in December, features the work of French poet Anne-Marie Albiach, and includes interpretations of her work by a sculptor, a painter and a choreographer.

Besides the quarterly, Moving Letters Press prints a couple of chapbooks each year. Its current project is a book by San Francisco writer Steve Benson called *Briarcombe Paragraphs.*

Paris Exiles, co-edited by J. G. Strand and Randall Koral, currently features the first excerpt in English from Edward Limonov's new novel *His Butler's Story,* as well as a segment from *The Age of Improvidence,* the memoirs of Edouard Roditi, the 74-year-old dean of expatriate writers in Paris. In addition, *Paris Exiles* features *My Death,* a play by Kathy Acker. Richard Foreman, who is staging the play in France and Italy, has written an introduction to the text.

Says co-editor Strand, "*Paris Exiles* is a magazine of new fiction, poetry, images and ideas from Paris and the world flowing through it. We hope to revive and continue the great Paris tradition of expatriate literary publications in English. We want to show how much interesting new work is being

done again in Paris by writers and artists from all cultures."

Paris Exiles is the latest project of Handshake Editions, one of the older "new" small outfits at the age of 5. Its editor Jim Haynes calls Handshake Editions "the world's smallest publisher." But it has served as a launching pad for new writers. Handshake publishes six or seven books a year.

Haynes calls his distribution system "haphazard and idiosyncratic. It's mostly word of mouth, but the word gets around and I get requests from all over the world for publications like our *Homage to Henry Miller.*"

David Applefield, editor of *Frank*, takes a more commercial approach. He distributes 2,000 copies of his magazine in 60 bookstores internationally. *Frank* began in 1983 at Boston University. It comes out twice a year, in an 80-page format. The forthcoming issue features Stefan Brecht, Kathy Acker, and other leading poets.

Another recent addition to the literary scene, *Sphinx*, was created by Carol Pratl. "With the literary revival in the Anglophone community, we felt the time was propitious for a new kind of women's review," she explains. She describes *Sphinx* as "culturally-oriented, diverse, and equally interesting to men readers."

Although *Sphinx* is an international women's magazine, it is neither feminist nor traditional. "The women's movement in its old form is dead," Pratl insists. "Today's woman is more dynamic and optimistic in her outlook, in her creative endeavors. This is the perspective *Sphinx* embraces, without alienating men, who through their writing are an integral part of *Sphinx*."

Sphinx's first issue includes an interview with Marguerite Duras, work by Limonov, and translations from Greek, Spanish, Chinese and Russian writers.

Paris Atlantic, sponsored by the American College, began two years ago. It does not solicit material, but its editor Michael Lynch now receives thirty to forty manuscripts a week. Its current issue is an International Women's Issue. The *Atlantic* is starting up a Young Writers Award for poets under 35, and plans to publish chapbooks by the winners of the award.

Finally, George Whitman of Shakespeare and Co. has reappeared, after seventeen years, with the second issue of *Paris Magazine*. It features reportage of Hemingway's Paris, as well as works by Roditi.

St. Mark's Talks

On Friday, April 26 at 8:30, St. Mark's Talks presents NATHANIEL MACKEY on *Sound and Sentiment, Sound and Symbol*. The talk will explore senses of music in Mackey's own work and that of others. "I was...struck by the point the book makes...that polyrhythmic drumming implies an absent, additional rhythm, a furtive beat one's listening supplies or one's dancing echoes...It's as though the beat that goes without sounding made the heart pound harder, as though each gap were only an endlessly altered fit." Nathaniel Mackey edits *Hambone* from Santa Cruz. His books of poetry include *Four for Trane* (Golemics) and *Septet for the End of Time; Eroding Witness* is forthcoming from Southern Illinois University Press. Recent work has appeared in *Conjunctions, Code of Signals, Alcatraz* and *Callaloo*.

READINGS BY SATELLITE

New York radio audiences are already familiar with *Readings from the Poetry Project*, the weekly half-hour program which broadcasts each Wednesday night at 11 on WBAI-FM. Now listeners across America can hear the same program on their local National Public Radio station. John Fisk, director of the Poetry Project's broadcast service and producer of the show, informs us that *Readings* is beamed across America to NPR stations every Tuesday at 3 p.m.; stations can tape the show then and broadcast it later in the week. Call or write your local NPR station and ask them if they air *Readings from The Poetry Project* already; if not, demand that they begin immediately! Already this season you may have missed hearing readings by John Ashbery, Robert Creeley, Anne Waldman, Gregory Corso, Lorenzo Thomas, Wendell Berry, Maureen Owen, and a dozen other terrific poets!

THE ART OF INTRODUCING A POET

With dozens of poetry readings each week in New York, and scores more across the country, a new art form has begun to develop among those involved in bringing poets to live audiences. It's the art of the introduction. What does one say to set the stage for a poet with whom an audience is unfamiliar, or (even more difficult) for a poet facing a hallful of devoted fans?

Poet Michael Scholnick, the host of last summer's reading series at the Ted Greenwald Gallery, has devoted much thought and energy to turning his introductions of readers into something special. "I chose to speak meaningfully of the poets' work and not merely to publicize books, give a brief biography, etc.," he writes. "I wanted to set the stage and, to that extent, control the collective focus. I figured in being personal and contributing in this regard I'd derive the utmost pleasure from the six events. As a readings curator at an art gallery, this approach seemed particularly acceptable.

"I wrote my aggressive little statements knowing that I deserved manna from Heaven for each sentence. I sometimes walked a fine line between observation and effusiveness. I didn't hesitate to include fanciful poetic considerations and critical generalities, my thoughts related to, and inspired by, many intelligent texts. Also, the routine had its built-in effects producing symmetries of perception, playful echos and far-fetched allusions."

And now, some Scholnick introductions:

TONY TOWLE

Lightning erupts, and soon the countryside is drenched. The insects go wild.

A sense of urgency equivalent to hunger is at the core of Tony Towle's poems. They are immediate in tone, but of course friendly, inclusive rather than impressionistic, depicting a liberated, tactful mind. His lyrical skills are potent, to which he adds the anchor of much study. Indeed, his poems are exalted, achieving their high seriousness in shifting moments of candor, information and surprise.

His influences and mentors are several. New York in general, its Schools and Boroughs, Hart Crane, Whitman, Pope, Li Po, Keats, Milton, Shelley, Matisse, perhaps even Alain Robbe-Grillet. But Tony remains a separate figure, even an aloof one, in this self-imposed glamour of time's productions. He shares with Ingmar Bergman a dependency on television for entertainment. He's melancholy with a vengeance.

Think of a scrupulous self-portrait. The final hypnotic touches are added to the background. Infinity is suggested counterbalancing the period costume. Thenceforward the thoughts of onlookers are stirred.

Tony Towle's the adventurous champion of the "curious outdoor world," celebrating his muse's perfume. His *New & Selected Poems*, recently published by the Kulchur Foundation, covers 20 years of creativity. Also look for *Gemini,* a brilliant book of collaborations done with Charles North and published by Swollen Magpie Press.

STEVE LEVINE

There's the obsession with clarity, first of all, that's so calming about Steve Levine's poetry. Radiance, the precise weight of certain words, what he calls the "irreducible elements of speech," establishing a multitude of effects on the page. The striking phrase, something colloquial inverted to sheer prosody, and a complex yet stern line movement, both are mainstays of Steve's poetry. And then these expert arrangements are being matched and raised by what Steve says, its literal value. His comic flair, intellectual tensions, intimacies, day-to-day dealings, make in his work for that most powerful of beauties: an imagination sacredly wishing.

Steve Levine's the author of *A Blue Tongue* and *Pure Notations,* both issued by Toothpaste Press which also printed *Three Numbers*, his poetic collaboration with Jim Hanson. Steve's worked in theater and playwriting too, collaborating with Chris Kraus on *The Cycles of Heaven* in 1982. Also, he edited and published a splendid series of mimeographed books under the banner of Remember I Did This For You and in conjunction with Power Mad Press.

Steve's unwavering professionalism is an inspiration and a great benefit, I might add, to his many friends. For me, it's always a resonant pleasure and wonder to hear him read.

STEVE CAREY

Casual, vibrant, empathic, Steve Carey's a literary knight-errant. But he observes language: a pretty woman chatting, disconsolate hills, the questions and insane radios of childhood; all pure and coherent. A white car turns to the left entering the Smith's driveway which is shaded by leaves turning brown. Accustomed to libraries and to gaffs shrill with passion, Steve presents unmitigated ideals, combinations in letters, putting cosy charm back into the poisonous air. Determined not to be awed, things "become mutual in the eye." Thus a rare sort of courage is derived inviting reflection. Feelings progress to an epiphany. And the writing has lots of significance and character.

Among his published books are *The California Papers* (United Artists), *The Lily of St. Mark's* ("C" Press Publication) and *Gentle Subsidy* (Big Sky). A major opus, entitled *AP*, is forthcoming from Archipelago Books. I'm aware of at least one other book-length poem as well, *Some Los Angeles Apartments,* still unpublished.

An actor and musician, he's also memorized the first Jack Kerouac LP recorded with Steve Allen. His ancestors landed on Plymouth Rock or, at the very least, were kin to England's Henry the Eighth, via the ruined Anne Boleyn. He'll read tonight from a slew of new poems.

EILEEN MYLES

The poems of Eileen Myles are remarkable for their precision. And she's damn eloquent. Experience and her interests in language mingle, the trained intellect's penned. Her poetry. The pages love incessantly, sighing and concluding. Also hate, distress, sombre thoughts of revenge, are nothing strange. Mainstream. In fact, subsumed in Eileen's angelic idiom, these reactions to life are supremely refreshing. It's not mere contradiction; she's making beauty plausible. She's got a natural and gambling regard for form; bridges that never preclude directness. It's the reader becomes self-conscious in the face of so much accord. Worthy and solemn poet, everything remembered.

Her books: *The Irony of the Leash* (Brodey Books); *A Fresh Young Voice from the Plains* (Power Mad Books); *Sappho's Boat* (Little Ceasar); and *Polar Ode,* a long collaboration with Anne Waldman published by Dead Duke Books. *Dinosaur Park,* recently performed after midnight at a new club on First St., and written with Elinor Nauen, is her newest thespian venture. Thankfully, her work never ends.

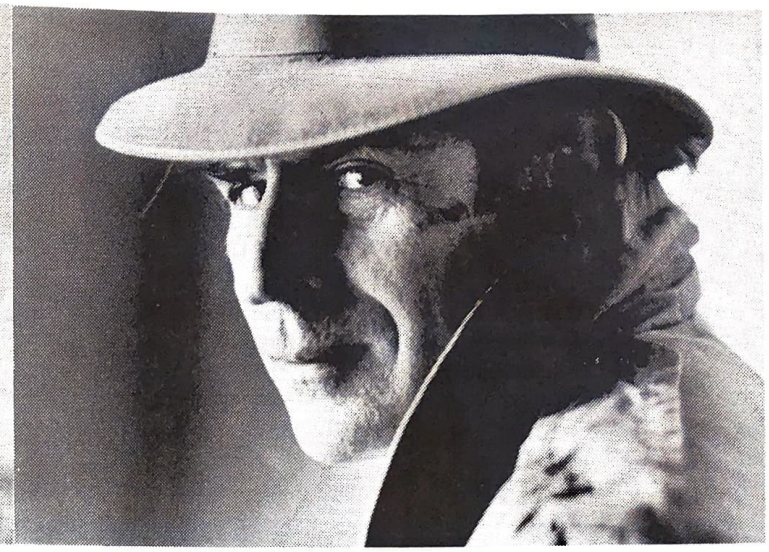
As you may know, Eileen Myles is the Director of the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church.

Ghosts

In the rain falling on her.
In wide open space I think of.
I wake up without you, smoking
a cigarette, without a moment.
I have no names.
The street without looking.

I am awake. I get done in a day.
I try to remember your faults.
The ghosts are covered with footsteps,
without memory, that open like
editions of Vogue in the small room
without you where you see everything
without her, without emptiness
without turning to someone in bed.

—Terence Winch



DEBBIE BOWIE

BOARD ELECTS NEW MEMBERS

The Advisory Board of The Poetry Project has selected two distinguished writers as its newest members. Paul Schmidt is a poet, translator and playwright. The first volume of his translation of the complete works of Khlebnikov will be published this fall by Harvard University Press. His musical play *The Beautiful Lady*, a collaboration with composer Elizabeth Swados, opens in August at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles. His own poems have been published in *Shenandoah*.

Thulani Davis's new collection of poems, *Playing the Changes*, has just appeared from Wesleyan University Press. Her plays include *Shadow & Veil*, produced at the New Heritage Theater in Harlem. She is a writer and editor for *The Village Voice*. For more of her accomplishments, see "This Month's Readers."

Book Reviews

ONE SMALL SAGA: A Novella by Bobbie Louise Hawkins. Coffee House Press, c/o Bookslinger, 213 East Fourth St., St. Paul, MN 55101. $8.95.

ONE SMALL SAGA is the story of a young American artist who marries a man she's known for two weeks. He takes her away to exotic locales, introduces her to boorish government officials and their neurotic wives, drags her through a hurricane while she's pregnant, and cheats on her, in front of her, every chance he gets. As she says, "One thing made clear to me in the past year is that I had married a ladies' man. Axel thought of it as if he raised the value of the time passed. As if he were a social resource. As if he ranked along with the music and drink."

Our heroine (since this *is* a saga) idealizes her husband's philandering and her own reasons for marrying him in the first place. She consciously models her attitude toward his infidelity after a film character: "Elsa Lanchester was a society wife in a movie that glittered with clothes and jewels and attitudes. She told her friends that she couldn't bear Reggie when he didn't have a nice little flirtation going. He became too dull to talk to and spoiled the look of the furniture." This woman is fooling herself, but is not totally unwilling to admit it.

Later, as she realizes what she's been putting herself through, she gives in: "When Axel showed up as my loophole in a tattered condition I didn't see myself as ruined and on the run. I saw myself as an artist enroute. Things like Axel happen to people like artists, who lead full and interesting lives. I left home so my presumptions could be aspirations."

What becomes telling in this novella is Ms. Hawkins' illumination of the ideals people build to escape difficult situations, and the pain they experience when they finally realize the difference between their ideals and what they're left holding in their hands.

Our young heroine accepts her marriage on a trial basis. She's not in love, and she's aware of her uncertainty from the beginning. She really wants to be an artist; but since being an artist is such a socially precarious position (and she can't finish paying for her education anyway), she feels pressure on herself as an artist and as a woman to succeed. In the face of this, why NOT get married? How much harder could it be to be Elsa Lanchester? Why shouldn't she take a stab at romance and see if it works? If all goes well, according to popular myth, she shouldn't need to be an artist. She'll have bliss. "In love or not it was romance. The desires of the heart do rise up at the least jogging. The heart stands high and looks for miles at the least excuse."

Ideals and the ways people bend themselves around to reach what would be ideal are exposed here in passages written with humor and an extraordinary understanding of the pain desire and compromise evoke in ordinary life. The challenge Ms. Hawkins points out is to realize the difference between compromise and the deflation of overworked presumptions. If everyone could face this challenge with the broadmindedness and graceful insight of the heroine of this saga, then that might truly be ideal.

—Brian Lemna

GIVE ME TOMORROW by Carter Ratcliff. Drawings by Alex Katz. Vehicle Editions, 238 Mott St., New York, NY 10012. $24.00.

Carter Ratcliff's first book of poems, *Fever Coast* (Kulchur Press, 1973), remains one of the more interesting unknown books of the seventies. Its best poems ("Cherry Red," "I Walked with a Zombie," "Hippolytus II," and "In Her Solitude," along with the magnificent prose aria cum ars poetica "The Comma," which works rather differently from the kind of poem I am about to describe) are among the rare American works to attain something of the mysterious radiance of the Cubist poems of Pierre Reverdy. Reading them we feel that an emotionally complex moment has been fragmented into inexplicably charged verbal atoms, creating the sense of a poetic architecture at once static or timeless and delicately measured out, extended in time. We might speak of a purposeful drift—though not, to be sure, upon Rimbaud's *"clapotements furieux des marees,"* for their rhetoric is pitched at a gentler level, and yet

> Thought was like foam
> rising to the surface of the water
> .....
> I breasted the foam
> to rinse out my mind
> in the hush

Perhaps Wyatt's "galley charged with forgetfulness" is more to the point here: *Fever Coast* is essentially a book of love poetry, and not without echoes of the Renaissance's Petrarchan/pastoral allegorization of desire's obscure—and, by a kind of structural necessity within the phenomenology of love, narcissistic—object, nor lacking in the touchingly shameless pathetic "fallacy" (everything in art is fallacy) of the Arcadian shepherds.

In the decade since the publication of *Fever Coast,* Ratcliff has published a handful of poems in magazines—just enough to keep us hoping that he had not entirely abandoned poetry for the art criticism by which he makes his living. At least one of these poems, "A Mansion in Zion," published in 1979 in *The World* #32, was the equal of any of his previous work, a witty but moving meditation on the paradise/paradox of poetic figuration:

> He who is faithful in very little
> is also faithful in much.
> And he who is faithful across the board
> is unfaithful, too. That is so
>
> because of the board.

All the more reason, then, for those who have waited ten years for Carter Ratcliff's second book of poems to be disappointed with *Give Me Tomorrow*—and yet to mistrust that disappointment.

The new collection contains just four poems (two of them in prose) along with reproductions of thirteen portrait drawings by Alex Katz. Ratcliff seems to follow Katz's modish superficiality in making stylization its own message here. Of course, there's something a bit gauche about criticizing anyone can write, as Ratcliff does in the title poem, "I like the one who said I was verbose and unintelligble, empty and cluttered all at once. That about sums me up, I guess." But then Ratcliff knows that, and that knowingness is precisely what I hold against him.

As Ezra Pound once noticed that the poetry being written around him was not as well-written as prose, and set about to remedy that, so Frank O'Hara seems to have noticed that the poetry being written during the fifties was not even as well-written as movie dialogue. That does not mean he set about writing poetry that sounds like movie dialogue, which is what Ratcliff does in this book, running changes on the smart-ass, hard-boiled style of, say, *Double Indemnity.* The idiom is not without poetic potential. The opening lines of the first poem, "Nicky Arnstein," are promising:

> He was the first
> to take the fifth
>
> Now everybody does it.
> You walk down the street
>
> and you want to cry out, but you don't.
> You don't want to incriminate yourself.

The lines are clean, well-constructed. The distichal one-two punch provides a firm counterpoint to the three-line measure of two-sentence sense units, giving just enough extra weight to the sixth line. But then the poem begins to wander, and you begin to wonder whether it isn't Ratcliff who's afraid to incriminate himself. Having established a certain tone of voice, Ratcliff maintains it as long as he can, where it might have been more interesting to let it show just where and how it breaks down.

The problem, I think, might be described this way: in his earlier poems Ratcliff posited the otherness of the object of desire, making her thereby the object of both knowledge and ignorance, and thus of an ever more richly inclusive obsessiveness. But the new poems introject their (now male) objects, and all that narcissism becomes part of the poem's structure, which now seems to depend on how much it excludes (among which is that always invigorating sexual tension). The most interesting of the new poems, "Narrative Thrust," appears to be a kind of justification of the change in its author's poetics. Its first sentence informs us, "This, the way I am now, isn't the way I always was." Like "The Comma," it is a reflexive commentary on its own structure. But the structure of "The Comma" was expansive in its attempt "to rescue the ideal sentence from itself," an ode to non-identity. The reflexivity of "Narrative Thrust," on the other hand, is a narrowing one, a search for the tautological vacuity in which "THE END means just what it says: THE END."

Perhaps "Narrative Thrust" isn't as programmatic as it sounds. Four poems are not very many to go on. One would like to see a full-length collection of Ratcliff's recent work, to see whether "he who is faithful in very little is also faithful in much," but for now it must be said that Ratcliff's poems in *Give Me Tomorrow* do not seek to surpass themselves, and that is a shame.

—Barry Schwabsky

Erratum

The disadvantage of writing contributors' notes in the wee hours of the morning is brought home by what my freshman Latin teacher used to call "an egregious boner" in the January-February issue. Bruce Boone's collaboration with Robert Gluck is called *La Fontaine*; it's published by Black Star Series (16 Clipper Street, San Francisco CA 94114); it costs $5.00; and it's a marvelous piece of collaborative prose. My apologies to Mr. Boone and to his publisher. **—T.D.**

Naropa Summer Institute '85

Culturefusion

SUMMER WRITING PROGRAM JULY 15 - AUGUST 10

A Celebration of World Writing & Poetics

Amiri Baraka
William Burroughs
Gregory Corso
Allen Ginsberg
Bernadette Mayer
Simon Ortiz
Jerome Rothenberg
Anne Waldman
Philip Whalen

A month-long intensive where faculty and students come together to study, exchange ideas, mix informally, and refine writing and performance skills.

Our summer brochure is available on request. Please write to NAROPA INSTITUTE, Dept. *PPN*, 2130 Arapahoe Ave., Boulder, Colorado 80302 or call us at (303) 444-0202.

This Month's Readers

Monday, April 1: Open Reading. Free.

Wednesday, April 3: **Lyn Hejinian** and **David Trinidad.** Lyn Hejinian's books include *My Life, A Thought is the Bride of What Thinking*, and the recent *Redo*. She lives in Berkeley, where she publishes the provocative chapbook series from Tuumba Press and co-edits *Poetics Journal*. David Trinidad lives in Los Angeles. Two collections of his poems have been published: *Pavane* and the new *Monday, Monday*. He is publisher of Sherwood Press.

Monday, April 8: **Ellen Zweig** and **Suzan Cooper.** Ellen Zweig is a writer and performance artist from San Francisco whose pieces often combine film, slides, tape and live performance. Suzan Cooper will appear in "Electric Gumbo," a performance picante directed by Alex Kinney.

Wednesday, April 10: **Michael Lally** and **David Wojnarowicz.** Michael Lally has written 19 books of poems, most recently *Hollywood Magic;* edited the anthology *None of the Above: New Poets of the USA;* and has recently been living and working in Los Angeles as an actor, appearing in *Berrenger's, Cagney and Lacey*, and (onstage) in *Balm in Gilead*. David Wojnarowicz is a poet and painter who is one of the leading figures in the East Village art explosion of the past three years. His book *Sounds in the Distance*, published in 1981 by Aloes Press of London, will soon be reprinted by Semiotext(e).

Monday, April 15: **The Tinklers** and **Steven La Voie.** The Tinklers (Chris Mason and Charles Brohawn) are "the greatest performance group anywhere," according to Marc Nasdor. They hail from Baltimore; this is their second appearance at The Poetry Project. Steven La Voie lives in Iowa, where he is Grand Pooh-Bah of the Black Bart Poetry Society in Exile.

Wednesday, April 17: **Barbara Guest** and **Vicki Hudspith.** Barbara Guest's books of poems include *The Countess from Minneapolis* and *The Location of Things*. Her most recent book is *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and Her World*. Vicki Hudspith is the author of *White and Nervous* and *Fresh Roasted Peanuts*. She edited this Newsletter in 1978 and 1979.

Monday, April 22: **A.A. (Antonin Artaud)**, two events celebrating the French writer and dramatist. David Rattray will present "To Pass Final Judgement on God," a slide and tape show featuring Artaud's voice pirated from a suppressed French radio program. "I Talked About God with Antonin Artaud," a new play by Chris Kraus and Sylvere Lotringer based on interviews with Artaud's psychiatrist, will receive its world premiere performance.

Wednesday, April 24: **Thulani Davis** and **Lynne Tillman.** Thulani Davis is the author of the newly-published *Playing the Changes* and *All the Renegade Ghosts Rise*. She recently finished the libretto for *X, The Life and Times of Malcolm X*, a forthcoming opera with music by Anthony Davis. Lynne Tillman's books of prose include *Living with Contradictions* and *Weird Fucks*. She is also a filmmaker whose work appears in the current Whitney Biennial.

Monday, April 29: **Molly Peacock** and **Matilde Daviú.** Molly Peacock's collection of poems *Raw Heaven* is reviewed in this issue. She lives in New York. Matilde Daviú is a short-story writer from Venezuela; translations of her fictions have appeared in *Nimrod* in this country. She will read in both Spanish and English.

All readings take place in the Parish Hall of St. Mark's Church at 8 pm; admission donation, $3.00. Your poetry hosts and hostesses: Eileen Myles and Patricia Jones on Wednesdays, Chris Kraus and Marc Nasdor on Mondays.

The Poetry Project's free open writing workshops continue. Alice Notley leads the Tuesday Night Workshop; Dennis Cooper leads the Friday Night Workshop. Workshops begin at 7 pm, and meet in the Parish Hall.

And don't miss **Nathaniel Mackey's** talk on "Sound and Sentiment, Sound and Symbol" on Friday, April 26 in the Parish Hall. Charles Bernstein coordinates St. Mark's Talks. $3.00 admission.

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS

ROBERT GLÜCK is the author of *Elements of a Coffee Service* (Four Seasons Foundation). JULIE GUETTINGER recently moved to Spokane after spending a year as a writer for the *Paris Free Voice*, from which her piece in this issue is excerpted. BRIAN LEMNA writes fiction; he is editorial assistant of this Newsletter. EILEEN MYLES is Artistic Director of the Poetry Project. MICHAEL SCHOLNICK ran last summer's reading series at the Ted Greenwald Gallery, 181 Mott Street. BARRY SCHWABSKY is a poet and art critic living in Brooklyn; his second chapbook, *Fate/Seen in the Dark*, is forthcoming from Burning Deck. TERENCE WINCH lives in D.C.; his collections include *Luncheonette Jealousy, Nuns,* and *The Attachment Sonnets.*

St. Mark's Church In-The-Bowery
THE POETRY PROJECT
10th St. & 2nd Ave.
NYC, NY 10003
ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

NON PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
New York, N.Y.
Permit No. 605

R. AARON
242 ORTEGA ROAD
SANTA BARBARA, CA. 93108