

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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Ted Greenwald, editor

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

The Poetry Project is having money problems. Very serious. We've had to cut back some of our programs in order to continue others. But even the ones that still go may not be there if people don't come to our aid. This isn't a matter of a dollar here a dollar there. We could use tens, hundreds, and thousands. Lots of people have enjoyed our programs over the years. Now's the time for people to say to themselves, "I got mine. Now let me help some others get theirs." All contributions are tax-deductible. Please be as generous as possible. Our future depends on you.

There will be no workshops in June. The Mon nite, 8:15 PM programs are: June 6 Open Reading (25 readers only), June 13 Charles Bernstein & Nick Piombino, June 20 Peter Seaton & Jeff Wright June 27 Jane Sherrill & Caryl Slaughter. Wed nite 8:30 PM readings are: June 1 Walter Abish & Rosalyn Drexler, June 8 Bruce Andrews & Rebecca Brown, June 15 George Stanley, June 22 Ruth Altmann, Pamela Barrios, Eugenie Eersel, M. Labare, Bob McDonnell, Thomas Savage; June 29 Kathy Acker & Jackie Curtis.

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READINGS ETC: Thanks to CCLM & NYSCA for partial support. . . Tiffany Carolyn Knight born to Arthur & Kit Knight, Apr 26, 1977 (Hi!) . . . The Haiku Society of America will have its annual Brooklyn Botanic Garden Poetry Reading on Sun, June 26 at 2 PM.

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Terence Winch is one of the best poets to have come out of the 1970s. He was writing poetry, and publishing it as well as articles and reviews (in The Village Voice, The East Village Other, etc.) in the 1960s while still living in his native New York. But around the time the 60s became the 70s he moved to Washington, D.C., to join his brother Jesse's band. When the group broke up not long afterward, Winch decided to stay in D.C. and became more actively involved in the poetry scene there, writing more and better work and having his first collection published.

In all Winch's work there is an honest and obvious concern with form, but always in such an unobtrusive and unlabored way that many of his fans make the incorrect assumption that he begins with "talk," as though his poetry were merely an extension of his famous Irish gift for story-telling, and no more. (His essays, articles, and reviews are usually formally correct, though also often innovative -- recently in The Washington Post he ended a review of Kenneth Koch's latest book, The Duplicators, with an 8-line stanza in the same rhyme and metric scheme as Koch's poem, and Byron's Don Juan.) In fact, in Boning Up, his first book (1972, unfortunately out of print), Winch demonstrated an uncommon command of various rhyme schemes ("The Pipoff"), meters ("The Ambulance Men"), invented forms ("Alibis"), and variations on contemporary forms ("Six Apples"). But in most of the poems in that book, as in Winch's poetry in general, there is a deliberate though seemingly offhanded use of understatement as the controlling force; it is this that often sets the tone of his work, misleading those who don't read closely or carefully into accepting the author's manner as his technique -- i.e. "offhand" -- when in fact it is the opposite that is true: he attacks the poem with an intensity that is also ambitious yet almost always under control.

In his second book, Irish Musicians (also o.p. but to be published with its sequel American Friends -- some of which as appeared in ZZZZ and Big Sky magazines -- in 1978 by Capra Press), again understatement is in control and is really the key to the construction of this serial poem. One of the indications of this is the titles to the individual poems; most are taken from

the poems themselves, but usually from passages seemingly remote from, or least integral the "point" or "highlight" or "gag line" of these usually humorous but nonetheless poignant anecdotes. All the poems in this series are anecdotal memoirs about the older men, the Irish musicians, who inducted Winch, the son of Irish immigrants, into their profession. Each poem as vignette or character sketch, is connected to the others by the Irish-American milieu the characters were involved in -- but more intimately and structurally connected by the flatness of the voice describing the people and the happenings, a voice whose vocabulary and syntax is so controlled it creates the illusion of a perfect surface tension (perhaps the perfect expression of the times and atmosphere Winch describes in these poems) unmolested by "the imaginative" (i.e. the most obvious and extremely self-satisfied expression of "the poet"'s imagination: the startling image, so common to the works of Winch's contemporaries, and in fact found in some of Winch's own work.

In the work collected in Luncheonette Jealousy (1975, available at some book stores or through me -- Michael Lally, 138 Sullivan St., NY, NY 10012, \$2), Winch employs a wide range of poetic effects and devices. But the book opens with a work that is an extension of the understated title device of Irish Musicians, only this time the titles are in the work: the entire "prose-poem" is devoted to a rapid discussion of a list of titles which for the most part seem to represent important emotional and psychological events in the life of the poet or his persona but avoid the cliché of picking scabs or flashing wounds as credentials for "meaningfulness" by using often humorous and always ludicrously abrupt (and again understated in tone) descriptive summaries. Here's a sample: "This one is called 'shit' and is about a man who goes for eight days without taking a shit. Finally he does shit, but there is blood on the toilet paper. 'Just Friends' is about two people who once loved each other very much but no longer do. They are trying to be just friends.. In 'Hello' you say hello to someone, trying to be nice. They do not respond." The whole piece is entitled "Fear Itself" -- a typical stroke of Winch's brilliant wit (a gift that only seems to draw serious attention or consideration when displayed as scholarly irony, or, in more recent years, as urban camp). The wit is in the use of a clichéd phrase, (familiar but overblown and therefore suspicious despite its political overtones) as the title and introduction to an entire work based on the personal realities that generate clichés.

Winch is constantly "quoting" the rhythms, if not always the actual phrasing, of familiar contemporary word structures from advertising or popular, and not so popular, music. This is a device common to jazz -- especially in earlier periods -- where during improvisations musicians would refer briefly to a musical phrase from a commercial or popular tune as part of the articulation of their own interpretation of the chord changes and melody they were improvising on (and unlike the Beat or New York School use of brand names and proper titles or references to movies and songs and whatnot, Winch, like the jazz musician, refers by assimilating the rhythms and textures of the vocabulary and structure into the improvisation, not by naming or describing or merely capturing the tone). For instance in the poem "Inside My Hello," (where he again shows his grasp of traditional formalism, a grasp he can express in person by quoting endlessly from Chaucer or Shakespeare or various other eminent "traditionalists;" and expressed superbly in the sestina that introduced another out of print book, The Beautiful Indifference, one of the stanzas leads into another with this "quote" from a 1950s hit by The Platters: "so real//Is this feeling of love believe." That cliché of teenage existence takes on the demands of adult responsibilities when juxtaposed with the grown-up clichés of other lines in the poem, like "not realizing till too late what I've//lost."

Luncheonette Jealousy is probably the best introduction to the variety in Winch's work (it is also the only book available except for Nuns, another fine serial work similar to Irish Musicians, only with fewer poems -- it has a great cover drawing done especially for it by Edward Gorey, and can be ordered for \$1 from Wyrld Press, c/o Gotham Book Mart, 41 W. 47 St, NY, NY 10036). L.J. includes a Winch classic called "I Am Dressed As A Gondolier" in which personal experiences of growing up and dealing with an expanded adult world become the universally compelling material of a half-comic, half-tragic, but generous and insightfully human, monologue. It also includes the "story-poem" called "Honky Tonk" about "The Nose," "Full Deck," and "White Mouse" who "could bowl a good game once but his eyes had almost closed up from squinting too long in too many dark places." The narrator of "Honky Tonk" not only successfully parodies the Hemingwayesque style of tough prose but even the attitudes it usually expresses (and yet Winch directs it all in a way that convinces you those attitudes are as well-founded

personal realities as the cliches they evoke), as when the narrator expresses his intention to avoid becoming "just another bum in the doorway counting the assholes of pigeons." Then there's the small but beautifully realized poem -- "Little Things About You" -- in which Nixon's famous departing line is improvised on until it becomes the resonating metaphor for love's frustrations: "She told him that her mother/would never have any books written/about her, but she was like a white/bird lost in a department store." Another poem in this collection is so successful, several imitations and one direct ripoff have surfaced in the years since Winch first started including it in readings: "excuses" is a refinement of the poem "Alibis" from Boning Up.. Where "Alibis" was lyrical and indirect, "Excuses" is insistent and matter-of-factly to the point -- a list of personal, but universally recognized, excuses, like: "I don't feel well I've never done this/before My eyesight isn't too good...I don't have much money ...The phone/was off the hook I can dish it out/but I can't take it...I can't do any heavy lifting...I'm expecting company...I'm fucked up/I was fucked up...I don't know how" etc. In sequence, all tightly packed together and rhythmically compulsive, the list is poetry at its most basic and original.

Not as well known as some of the others poems in Luncheonette Jealousy is "Forgetting." Dedicated to Joe Brainard it is an obvious response or take off on Brainard's tour de force "I Remember." But again, Winch's use of the cliché as understatement (and thereby infused with new meaning causing a double take on the originally intended meaning) removes his much shorter list from the linguistic and formal concerns of Brainard's poem, while still producing a complete and completely successful work. "I cant remember things anymore/I cant remember your face exactly/when I said to you I love you/and you said a few moments later/I like you a lot." Maybe the best thing about Winch's work, or much of it, is his ability to share the lessons of his experience and common sense (lessons often so full of wisdom they would be described as "profound" were it not for the vocabulary and sense of humor) without losing sight of the never ending process of relearning that shapes most of our lives. (Michael Lally)

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MAGNETISM

We are traveling to and forth on the sound
 Going and moving and coming
 That is the science of sounds
 Said with love. Heard with care
 That is me saying and singing
 O the beautiful coils of your name!

Ssss

Lorenzo Thomas

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BOOKS MAGS ETC ETC: Bobbie Louise Hawkins, Frenchy & Cuban Pete, \$3.50, Tombouctou Books, Serendipity Books, 1970 Shattuck Ave, Berkeley, CA . . . A Decade And Then Some (Intrepid 25-35) ed. by Allen De Loach, PO Box 1423, Buffalo, NY 14214. . . Salome #1/2, ed. by Effie Mihoupoulos, #2, 5548 N. Sawyer, Chicago, Ill 60625. . . Mag City #1, ed. by Michael Scholnick, Gregory Masters, Gary Lenhart, 342 E 15 St/#30, NYC 10003. . . Marianne Wolfe, The Poem You Asked For, \$1, A The Spirit That Moves Us Book, PO Box 1585, Iowa City, Iowa 52240. . . Gerry Gilbert, Grounds,

Talonbooks, 201-1019 East Cordova, Vancouver, B.C. V6A 1M8, Canada . . . Fritz Hamilton, Redn
is Redman's Mommy!, Downtown Poets Coop, X-Press, 524 Henry St, Brooklyn, NY 11231. . . Opal
L. Nations, The Strange Case Of Inspector Loophole, \$1, Vehicule Press, 1000 Clark St, Montre-
al P.Q. . . . Josepha Gutellus, Rapt Meat, Omneb Verlag, distrib by Schmidbaur, Peissenbergstr.
4, D-8900, Augsburg, German. . . Eugene Reynolds, Enlightenment, Amen-Ra Publishing Co., PO
Box 481, Parkchester Sta, NYC 10462. . . From Black Sparrow, PO Box 3993, Santa Barbara, CA
93105: Mohammed Mrabet, The Big Mirror, \$3.50 & Milton Hindus, Charles Reznikoff, \$3.00.

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Our attitudes change; but
it's the same life.

Our opinions are nothing.
This opinion

But I've still got this
little machine that prints
these out.

Alan Davies

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LOCAL COLOR

I'm not going to tell you about the older "young" writers presently active in the vague ideological and social community centered around St. Mark's, like John Godfrey, Alice Notley or Michael Lally, because I presume you already know about them. Or if you don't, you will without any help from me. Instead, I'd like to draw your attention to 10 genuinely obscure writers who seem to me to possess considerable talent, already realized, as well as a high degree of serious integrity about their work. Here we go:

KATHY ACKER is a novelist, working in the conventions of pulp fiction & cheapo porn. She has also experimented with the concept of serialisation, with her self-publications (i.e., The Adult Life of Henri Toulouse-Lautrec). Her work takes place on the dividing line between hysteria & high camp. It operates by isolating tendencies in the mind, heightening them to present them as objects: there is no moral question involved with the Black Tarantula, despite the quizzical objections of academic reviewers (see recent Chicago Review). Her most recent work, the unpublished Kathy Goes To Haiti, combines black despair with slapstick comedy. The test of a great mind is the ability to hold 2 contradictory ideas without cracking. Ms. Acker braves collapse & comes up laughing.

CHARLOTTE CARTER writes "short stories!" She works inside her mind, in an intimate style with an air of confidences already given, now understood, so not needing mention. This is not cagey, but rather insinuates a sympathy between the voice & reader. Her book, Sheltered Life, contains at least 2 jewels of urban consciousness: "this to be told in the manner..." which very neatly epitomizes the individual amazed in the city by a sense of gentle doom; and the remarkable "Parts of a Mystery," a technically brilliant exposition of the cinematic tale of detection. It retains the mystery throughout & satisfies without pat explanation. It has negative capability.

BOB ROSENTHAL has distinguished himself in theater (3 plays written in collaboration with Bob Holman--2 produced, one published) & prose (Cleaning Up New York, which I have already reviewed for these pages). His poetic accomplishments exceed these--he is probably the most "achieved" poet of this generation. He has assimilated the conventions of the past & gone on to grapple with the world--poetic apperception of reality, informed by intelligence. What more can you ask? His ear is clear, his wit is sharp ("the message in the bottle is the cork") & he has an intuitive sense of structure that is a delight. His poems are very active, & he has the ability to jam two perceptions into the space most poets need for one. His poem STAR WITNESS, in particular, is utter genius.

The poetry of STEVE LEVINE displays a formal intelligence exceeding that of most poets of any age. His poems proceed word by word (care) & yet move very quickly (confidence). His

diction might be compared to George Oppen's, if Oppen made use of Kenneth Koch's vocabulary. His poem "Epistle" is a moving marvel, & his poem "The Best of Friends" a.k.a. the weird names poem, is a highly attractive tour de force. He is the most painterly of these poets--his composition is balanced, in the unexpected way. He is also a visual artist, whose drawings, tangentially reminiscent of Leger & DeBuffet, display his corrosive wit in a manner parallel with, but not redundant to, his poems.

STEVE HAMILTON, on the other hand, is the most literary of these younger poets. His work skirts the academic, with grace & detachment, but as his sensibility is in no wise academic, he seems in no danger of falling into the pit. When he writes, "You see, when I said you were beautiful/I meant you looked like a truck" or "To know him is to avoid him" I have to laugh. He is very sharp. The real reason his work is saved from academicism is that his sense of how a poem has to proceed down through the lines is unique--although it would be possible to produce the precedents. So far, he has taken as his turf the vast space between the coastal ears of America (he is originally from Indiana) & when the mood takes him, he relentlessly defends his natural dignity against the wide open.

JOHN YAU is the most traditional, rather than literary, of these poets. His works project high energy under glass. His poem "Robert Herrick" opens with a vision of Herrick owning & operating a gas station in the hinterlands, goes on to produce the poem which Herrick, if alive today, would actually write--a triumph of sensibility & sympathy over time. It is the kind of poem Donald Davie believes is meant by Pound's injunction to "Make it New;" the recitation of the sublime art of poetry. His parody of Milton is also tremendous, highly commendable. His sensibility, actually, is uniquely late-Imperial America: The scholar-gypsy really is a familiar part of the local landscape. What is most clear in his work is the passion of the identification with the subject at hand, & a subject is, after all, merely an occasion.

SUSIE TIMMONS, likewise, is a passionate poet, of discovery & realization. Her works take all things seriously, as themselves, with the least prejudice of preparation, candidly, with an intelligence life has not yet violated. Serious does not mean dull and unviolated does not mean innocent; I mean her poems are generous. Two catalog poems, Flamenco Dancers of These Myriad Cities and Sunrise Over Madagascar, display that intelligence which intercepts everything it possibly can. Would Emily Dickinson have written Crossing Brooklyn Ferry? & why not. Her humor is genius: "the sun set like a giant golden rat."

Energy and humor characterize the work of EILEEN MYLES, too. It is curious that, while all of these writers are eminently conscious of the tradition around their individual talents, none of the above seem to want to skewer near contemporaries. Ms. Myles, fearless, has done this in numerous works. How apt a description is this: "A Charles Simic moon. A tall glass of milk." Her poem to Philip Lopate is hilarious & one of the deftest low blows it has been my pleasure to read. One trembles at the thought of her essaying a "Dunciad." Her field of attack is not merely literary, of course. "Three Things" is a scathing putdown of the self complacent bourgeois male.

ED FRIEDMAN's work ranges over a wide ground from C & W songs to post-Mayer elliptical narrative. His most recent accomplishment, the performance piece Chinoiserie, is a remarkable tour-de-force. Beginning with the superficially insane conceit of presently 4 people playing Mah-Jong for 2 hours, working from sources such as Vogue, House Beautiful, & movie magazines, all the while sticking to the classical unities--the evening essentially opens with a question & closes with its answer--the result is a wonderfully mild, yet encompassing satire of American (specifically Southern Californian) insulation from life through plush language.

The problem of writing dreams is that what is really great in dreams are not so much the substance--the images--but the sense of juxtaposition, the associative grammar of the dream. Circus Babys, ROCHELLE KRAUT's book of dreams literally swings. "I'm sitting in a chair made of poodle. It's crunchy." That is a precisely amazing statement. The flotilla of sleep advances on the waking mind, its cargo the marvelous, as always. Ms. Kraut's dreams are as interesting as anyone else's, & they are as well-written as Kerouac's, Burroughs', & Schjeldahl -- if not more so. She has also written journalistic works, one of which, "Love, Power, & Truth: A Lecture" was read on a Monday night last year, & which makes me, at least, wish she would assemble even larger structures out of her many pages of apothegms, aphorisms & observations. They are like Montaigne on the telegraph.

Looking back over these notes, I don't see a school of writers, although they are united in their seriousness, intelligence, & the fact that they are all a pleasure to hear & read.

I notice I used "wit" alot: I mean by it the sensation of intelligence cloaked in grace, n mere cleverness. There is plenty of poetickal activity around here today, emerging or coming into its own strength, I could have mentioned at least 10 others beyond these, had I the strength & space. Not many of the abovementioned writers' work is easy to find--the following list is incomplete & restricted to titles in print: Kathy Acker: The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula, Viper's Tongue Books; Charlotte Carter: Sheltered Life, Angel Hair; Bob Rosenthal: Cleaning Up New York, Angel Hair; Steve Levine: A Blue Tongue, Toothpaste Press; Ed Friedman: Black Star Pilgrimage, Frontward Books; Rochelle Kraut: Circus Babys, Frontward Books. Try Gotham or 8th Street. Also, the following magazines (either out or expected soon) include works by these writers, as well as others active in the area: 4 3 2 Review, Dodgems, Hero, Roof, Slit Wrist, March Magazine, & finally, Michael Slater & Yuki Hartman's as yet untitled anthology will include work by many of the above. (F.G.)

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PERFUMED CLOUDS

Along Hsi-ling Lake under the cypress trees
slender bamboos grow by the window
a tung tree overhangs the gate
I watch the red buds turn to green leaves
and examine my pomegranate flower dress
heavy mist envelopes the pines and cypress
yellow birds flutter through the red maples
the mandarin ducks fly to their roost
the red buds of the plum trees have cracked
flower shadows lie heavy by the garden gate
I put on my new quilted robe
the willows are soft in the thick mist
suddenly fine rain falls on the yellow plum orchard
the wind blows down from the emerald sky
I become speechless and forget every word
as an egret descends on still wings

from OBVIOUS FORGERIES
poetry with an oriental slant
Pat Nolan

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FRANCE AND SHERWOOD ANDERSON, Paris Notebook 1921, Michael Flanning, c 1976; WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS, Poet from Jersey, Reed Whittemore, c 1975; A MOVEABLE FEAST, Ernest Hemingway, c 1964; THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ALICE B. TOKLAS, Gertrude Stein, c 1933.

Three of the writers about/by whom the above books were written visited 27 rue de Fleurus, and of course Stein lived there. I shall let the writers/written about tell the story.

Stein: "Once when Hemingway wrote in one of his stories that Gertrude Stein always knew what was good in a Cezanne, she looked at him and said, Hemingway, remarks are not literature." (p. 77) "He (Hemingway) had added to his stories a little story of meditations and in he said that The Enormous Room was the greatest book he had ever read. It was then that Gertrude Stein said, Hemingway, remarks are not literature." (p. 219)

Hemingway: "When I got home...I said to my wife, 'You know, Gertrude is nice, anyway... But she does talk a lot of rot sometimes.' 'I never hear her,' my wife said. 'I'm a wife. It's her friend that talks to me.'"

Sylvia Beach took Anderson to meet Stein. Beach's account: "This meeting was something of an event. Sherwood's deference and the admiration he expressed for her writing pleased Gertrude immensely. She was visibly touched. Sherwood's wife, Tennessee, who had accompanied us, didn't fare so well. She tried in vain to take part in the interesting conversation between the two writers, but Alice held her off. Alice had strict orders to keep them out of the way while Gertrude conversed with the husbands."

Stein: "For some reason or other I (Alice) was not present on this occasion...at any rate when I did come home Gertrude Stein was moved and pleased as she has very rarely been... Sherwood Anderson came and quite simply and directly as is his way told her what he thought of her work and what it had meant to him in his development. He told it to her then and what was even rarer he told it in print immediately after. Gertrude Stein and Sherwood Anderson have always been the best of friends, but I do not believe even he realizes how much his visit meant to her."

Anderson: "The woman (Stein) is the very symbol of health and strength. She laughs. She smokes cigarette. She tells stories with an American shrewdness in getting the tang and the kick into the telling...Years ago when her work first fell under my eyes and I was startled and profoundly stirred by its significant I made inquiry concerning her. Strange stories came out of Paris. She was a fat woman, very languid lying on a couch, people came into the room and she stared at them with strange cold eyes..."

Stein: "Gertrude Stein and Sherwood Anderson are very funny on the subject of Hemingway. The last time that Sherwood was in Paris they often talked about him. Hemingway had been formed by the two of them and they were both a little proud and a little ashamed of the work of their minds...They admitted that Hemingway was yellow...he looks like a modern and he smells of the museums. But what a book, they both agreed, would be the real story of Hemingway, not those he writes but the confessions of the real Ernest Hemingway."

Hemingway: "When I first met her (Stein) she did not speak of Sherwood Anderson as a writer about spoke glowingly of him as a man and of his great, beautiful, warm Italian eyes and of his kindness and his charm. I did not care about...his eyes...but I liked some of his short stories very much...Anderson's stories were too good to make happy conversation. I was prepared to tell Miss Stein how strangely poor his novels were, but this would have been bad too because it was criticizing one of her most loyal supporters. When he wrote a novel finally call Dark Laughter, so terribly bad, silly and affected that I could not keep from criticizing it in a parody, Miss Stein was very angry. I had attacked someone that was a part of her apparatus...She, herself, began to praise Sherwood lavishly after he had cracked up as a writer."

Stein: "In the meantime and sometime before this Mina Loy had brought McAlmon to the house and he came from time to time and he brought his wife and brought William Carlos Williams." WCW via Whittemore: "She (Mrs. WCW) didn't like Gertrude Stein because Stein once told Bill that writing was not his trade."

In summary, Stein: "They (none of the above, but apt for all including herself) told exactly the same story only it was different, very different."

Unfortunately the WCW bio has been short-changed in this exchange. Here's an extra plug - it's an excellent book. Whatever it is that drives one to write was with him until the end when, partially paralyzed, he typed his last books using only his left hand. Although Stein & WCW seemed not to have much to say to each other, they had much in common, only it was different, very different.)

(Verlaine Boyd)

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From A Childhood #101

"You think the world
revolves around you."

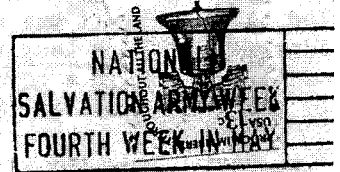
I do.
Therefore, it does.

Had there been a piano in the room,
I would have studied it.

Bill Berkson

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