

Archive for New Poetry sponsors conference on poet George Oppen

May 8, 1986

A two-day symposium on the life and work of the late Pulitzer Prize winning poet George Oppen, will take place on May 15-16 at the University of California, San Diego. The symposium, called "The Pleasure of Being Heard," is being held in conjunction with UCSD's Twenty-fifth Anniversary Celebration.

The symposium, organized by UCSD's Archive for New Poetry, will include three panel discussions of Oppen's work and two poetry readings. Each of the evening readings will feature a videotape of Oppen reading from his work, and visiting poets reading their work. The participating poets are: Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Temple University; Stephen Rodefer, UCSD; Michael Davidson, UCSD; John Taggart, Shippensburg University; and Ron Silliman, Institute for Integral Studies, San Francisco.

Oppen (1908-84) was one of the Objectivist poets, a group of writers which formed during the early 1930s and included, most notably, William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, Charles Reznikoff and Carl Rakosi.

Oppen's first book, "Discrete Series," was published in 1934, with an introduction by Ezra Pound. His fourth book, "Of Being Numerous" (1969), won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry.

During the years after 1934, Oppen worked as a political activist in New York State, and later served as a private in the U.S. Army during the Second World War. Because of his political affiliations, Oppen removed himself and his family to Mexico City, where he remained until 1959 during the McCarthy investigations of the 1950s.

In 1962, Oppen published "The Materials," followed by three more volumes. In 1975, New Directions published his "Collected Poems." His last volume, "Primitive," appeared in 1978.

The Archive for New Poetry, part of UCSD's Mandeville Department of Special Collections, acquired Oppen's papers in 1984. The collection is considered to be the major holding of his papers in the world.

The papers include manuscripts of published and unpublished poetry, notes on various subjects, and letters sent to Oppen over a 30-year period. Zukofsky, Reznikoff, David Ignatow, James Laughlin, Harvey Shapiro, Robert Hass and Ron Silliman are a few of the writers represented in the correspondence. A selection of Oppen's papers will be on exhibit in the Central University Library (second and eighth floors) during the conference.

The conference schedule will be: Thursday, May 15, 2 p.m., at the UCSD Center for Music Experiment (CME): Opening remarks by Stephen Rodefer, Curator of the Archive for New Poetry. From 2:30-4 p.m., there will be a panel: "Oppen and Politics," with members: Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Donald Wesling, Peter Mortensen; respondent, Robert von Hallberg; and chair, Roy Harvey Pearce.

At 8 p.m., a poetry reading will be held in the North Conference Room of the Student Center, including a George Oppen videotape, and poets Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Stephen Rodefer.

On Friday, May 16, from 10 a.m.-noon, there will be a panel: "Poetry as a Form of Thinking," at CME, with members John Taggart, Michael Davidson and David MacMillan; respondent, David Antin; and chair, Kathryn Shevelov.

The third panel, "Oppen and Contemporary Poetics," from 2-4 p.m., will also be at CME, with members: Alan Golding, Ron Silliman and Brad Westbrook; respondent, Marjorie Perloff; and chair, Stephen Rodefer.

The final poetry reading will be held at 8 p.m., May 16, in the North Conference Room. Poets will be Michael Davidson, Ron Silliman and John Taggart. Part II of the George Oppen videotape will be shown.

All events are free and open to the public. For more information, contact the Archive for New Poetry at 452-2533.

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(May 8, 1986)