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## Jackson Mac Low, 82, Poet and Composer, Dies

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**J**ackson Mac Low, a poet, composer and performance artist whose work reveled in what happens when the process of composition is left to carefully calibrated chance, died on Wednesday at Cabrini Medical Center in Manhattan. He was 82 and lived in Manhattan.

The cause was complications of a stroke that he had last month, according to the Academy of American Poets, which announced his death.

The author of more than two dozen books of poetry, as well as musical compositions, plays and multimedia performance works, Mr. Mac Low was a seminal figure in the American experimentalist movement of the 1950's and after. A founding member of the avant-garde group Fluxus, he collaborated frequently with the composer John Cage. In recent years Mr. Mac Low often worked with his wife, Anne Tardos, a poet, artist and composer.

What united Mr. Mac Low's output was a fascination with randomness and with the limitless combinatorial possibilities of language.

"The sense of words as being primarily in a circumstance that's limiting - sentencing them to sentences - he did not take kindly to that," the poet Robert Creeley said in a telephone interview yesterday.

Mr. Mac Low's poems, like his musical compositions, did not so much blur the boundary between language and music as render it invisible. He prized words not simply for their meaning (he worked as an etymologist as a young man) but as movable fragments of pure sound.

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Anne Tardos

Jackson Mac Low

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Sprung from their sentences, shuffled and reassembled, Mr. Mac Low's words became layered acoustic collages, meant to be performed aloud. Constantly shifting, always evolving, rarely the same twice, his poems laid bare the machinery of poetry-making itself.

In Mr. Mac Low's work, structure depended on chance. He composed some poems by shuffling index cards containing words and phrases. For others he used random-number tables and, in later years, computer programs.

Some sprang from a roll of the dice. "7.1.11.1.11.9.3!11.6.7!4.,a biblical poem" was the first in a cycle, begun in the mid-1950's, that was rooted in the Hebrew Bible. The poem comprises not only words (spoken aloud by one or more performers) but also rhythmic silences (represented by "/\_\_ /").

Mr. Mac Low prefaced the poem with two pages of instructions describing the various possibilities for reading it. (The title represents the number of words and silences in each line, which he determined with dice.) When read aloud by multiple performers, each going at a different pace, the poem evokes the wash of murmuring of Orthodox Jews at prayer.

Jackson Mac Low was born in Chicago on Sept. 12, 1922. After receiving an associate's degree from the University of Chicago in 1941, he earned a bachelor's degree from Brooklyn College in 1958. He was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1985 and in 1999 received the Wallace Stevens Award, which carries a \$100,000 prize, from the Academy of American Poets.

Mr. Mac Low's first marriage, to Iris Lezak, ended in divorce in 1973. Besides Ms. Tardos, whom he married in 1990, he is survived by two children from his first marriage, Mordecai-Mark and Clarinda, both of Manhattan, and one grandchild.

His other work includes "Two Plays: The Marrying Maiden and Verdurous Sanguinaria" (1999), "Pieces o' Six: Thirty-three Poems in Prose" (1992) and the CD "Open Secrets" (1993).

In a 1999 lecture, Mr. Mac Low described what he called his "ways of working."

"They are almost always ways in which I engage with contingency, and in doing so I am often, to a large extent, 'not in charge' of what happens while I do so," he explained. "They often surprise me, and they almost always give me pleasure and seem to give pleasure to others."



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