

TCR

THE CAPILANO REVIEW



just tell,
know your century
for its wickedness and
tell the love of it
don't take it with you, tell,
tell whose fault was it,
tell what can I do
to forgive it!

—"bb gun," ROBIN BLASER

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The Capilano Review is published by The Capilano Press Society. Canadian subscription rates for one year are \$25 GST included for individuals. Institutional rates are \$30 plus GST. Outside Canada, add \$5 and pay in U.S. funds. Address correspondence to *The Capilano Review*, 2055 Purcell Way, North Vancouver, BC V7J 3H5. Subscribe online at www.thecapilanoreview.ca

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The Capilano Review gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance of the British Columbia Arts Council, Capilano University, and the Canada Council for the Arts. We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Magazines Fund toward our editorial and production costs.

The Capilano Review is a member of Magazines Canada (formerly CMPA), the BC Association of Magazine Publishers, and the Alliance for Arts and Culture (Vancouver).

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NUMBER 40063611. RETURN UNDELIVERABLE
CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO CIRCULATION—TCR, 2055 PURCELL WAY, NORTH
VANCOUVER, BC V7J 3H5

ISSN 0315 3754 | (Published October 2009)

Printed in Vancouver, BC, by Hemlock Printers.



BRITISH COLUMBIA
ARTS COUNCIL
supported by the Province of British Columbia



The Canada Council
for the Arts
Le Conseil des Arts
du Canada

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Photograph of Robin Blaser at Mike's
Pool Hall, San Francisco, April 1965</p> |
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Remembering Robin Blaser (1925-2009)

In a heron riding the jade river, on a waterlogged nursery for passing seeds, I saw him, his back hunched in concentration. He glanced our way and returned to what absorbed him.

He is back at work, I thought.

Robin Blaser died in Vancouver on May 7th, 2009, a few days short of his 84th birthday, halfway between the coldest winter and the hottest summer on record. Outside the window, lilacs planted when the old house was built were bathed in morning light and bent with blooms, “...with heart-shaped leaves of rich green, / With many a pointed blossom rising delicate...”

Robin’s early vow as a poet was to “tie a reader to the poems, not to me,” thereby prying open a door through which the entire world began to flow. His scholarship called us to companionship. His poems offer us a vocabulary, hard fought-for, with which to address and contend with the visible and the invisible worlds. Acutely sensitive to the polyphonies on which they soar, these poems are alive to the responsibility to think, to see, to speak, to love, to leave nothing out.

There is no better preparation for the 21st century than Robin Blaser’s poems. Keep a copy of *The Holy Forest: Collected Poems of Robin Blaser* and *The Fire: Collected Essays of Robin Blaser* on your shelf. The opera for which he wrote the libretto, *The Last Supper*—a collaboration with composer Harrison Birtwistle—is a major work of contemporary music drama and central to Robin’s art. It premiered in Berlin in 2000 with Daniel Barenboim conducting and was performed again as recently as this past summer in Vienna. We await a Canadian production.

In 2006, *The Capilano Review* published Robin’s poem “bb gun” (2.49, Spring 2006). At this point, only the imperative would do. “bb gun” might serve as his credo. Those who knew Robin will recognize his passionate voice holding nothing back.

I’ve had 80 years
of this century never
forget what you know
say it over and
over –

A reminder, in plain song and with love, not to give up, ever.

—Colin Browne

ROBIN BLASER / Suddenly,

for Ellen Tallman

I live in a room named East
on the map of the West at the edge

near the door cedars and alders
mix and tower,
full of ravens first thing each morning,
whose song is
 a sharpness

we quarrelled so
 over the genius
of the heart
 whose voice is capable

they come on horseback
in the middle of the night,
two of them, with a horse for me,
and we ride, bareback
clinging to the white manes
at the edge of the sea-splash,

burst open,
 to divine
the hidden and forgotten source,
who is transparent
where the moon drops out of the fog
to bathe,
but not to us

the retied heart
 where the wind glitters

Suddenly

Dedicated to Heather Thomson Price

for Soprano, Flute and Piano

Text: Robin Blaser
Music: Lloyd Burritt

$\text{♩} = 56$

Piano

5

S. Sud - den - ly, I live... in a room named East on the map of the West

Pno.

9

S. at the edge... near the door ce - dars... and al - ders mix and tow_____

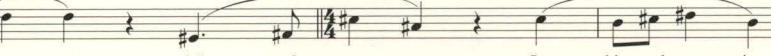
Pno.

poco rit.

poco rit.

Text from *The Holy Forest: Collected Poems of Robin Blaser*, revised and expanded edition, ed. Miriam Nichols.
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13

S. 

Pno.

16 **accel.** **poco rit.** *optional

S. song is *click click click click a

Fl. **accel.** **poco rit.** ** optional *fz* 4 *fz* 4 *p*

Pno.

19 **Steady** ♩ = 52

S. sharp-ness We quar-relled so o-ver the ge-nius of the heart... "whose voice is ca-pa-ble"... they

Fl. *mp* *mf* *pp*

Pno. **Steady** ♩ = 52

Mysterioso *pp* *sotto voce* **poco piu** *mf* *ord.*

* Raven click - snap tongue against hard pallet while dropping jaw. Place lips forward into "oo" position for a dark hollow sound.

** Play if singer chooses not to "click"

Suddenly

3

Brightly ♩ = 72

24

S. come _____ on horse - back

Fl.

Brightly ♩ = 72

mf

Pno.

27

Steady ♩ = 66 - 69

S. in the mid-dle of the night, two of them, with a horse for

Fl.

Steady ♩ = 66 - 69

Pno.

32

♩ = 72

S. me, and we ride, bare - back,

Fl.

♩ = 72

Pno.

9

35

S. *cling-ing to the white manes at the edge of the*

Fl.

Pno.

38

S. *sea - splash, the sea - splash burst o - pen, to di- vine_*

Fl.

Pno.

sub. p

sub. p

sub. p

42

molto rit. Misterioso ♩ = 52 pp sotto voce

Gently ♩ = 66 p ord.

S. *the hid-den and for-got-ten source, who is trans-pa-rent where the moon*

Fl.

Pno.

molto rit. Misterioso ♩ = 52 Gently ♩ = 66

p

p

Suddenly

Mysterioso
poco rit.
pp sotto voce

5

46

S. drops out of the fog to bathe, but not to us

Fl.

Pno.

Mysterioso
poco rit.
pp

a tempo ♩ = 66

50

S. the re-tied heart where the wind, wind glit ters, the re-tied

Fl.

Pno.

a tempo ♩ = 66
mf

54

S. heart where the wind, wind glit ters, wind

Fl.

Pno.

poco rit.

poco rit.

Suddenly

58

S. *p*
glit- ters... the re tied heart... where the wind glit-ters... re tied...

Fl.

Pno. *p*

62

S. *ritard.* *p*
heart...

Fl. *p*

Pno. *ritard.* *p*

Robin Blaser and Harrison Birtwistle

In 1998-1999, Sir Harrison Birtwistle and Robin Blaser collaborated on an opera, *The Last Supper*, commissioned jointly by Glyndebourne Opera, Deutsche Staatsoper, Berlin, and the Royal Festival Hall, London. Described as a series of “dramatic tableaux for 14 soloists, small female chorus and chamber orchestra,” *The Last Supper* received its world premiere at the Deutsche Staatsoper on April 18th, 2000, directed by Martin Duncan and conducted by Daniel Barenboim. Alison Chitty designed the production; the principle roles were sung by Thomas Randle and William Dazeley with mezzo-soprano Susan Bickley as Ghost.

The Last Supper was subsequently performed by the Glyndebourne Touring Opera in fall 2000, at the South Bank Centre in London in January 2001, and at the Glyndebourne Festival in the summer of 2001. It was recently performed in Vienna by Neue Oper Wien in co-production with Osterklang Wien 09 at the Atelierhaus der Akademie der bildenden Künste. Opening night was April 4th, 2009.

Of the original production, the reviewer for *The Observer* wrote that it was “...a magnificent and enthralling work...Birtwistle has created a powerfully melancholic sound-world, at once richly lyrical and hieratic.” Robin Blaser’s libretto, written in both Latin and English, was praised for being “rich in allusion and magpie borrowing from Christian liturgy, the metaphysical poets and other sources ancient and modern...in the theatre it worked with astonishing clarity and good sense, a model libretto with barely a word in excess and most of it audible, especially when it mattered most.” The reviewer from *Die Welt* was enthralled: “What hardly seems like musico-dramatic material is transformed into an utterly gripping uninterrupted two hours of music theatre thanks to a compelling libretto by Blaser and the unyieldingly riveting music of Birtwistle. *The Last Supper* is a natural musical and theatrical heir to the greatest works of the century which explore major Judaeo-Christian themes....A premiere of enormous stature; a complete triumph for all concerned.”

Sir Harrison Birtwistle’s *Pulse Shadows*, a meditation for soprano, string quartet and chamber ensemble on poetry by Paul Celan, won the 2002 Gramophone Award for best contemporary recording. *Theseus Game* was premiered in 2003. Productions of *The Io Passion* and *Night’s Black Bird* in 2004 were followed by the premiere of his opera *The Minotaur* at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden in April 2008. Two new chamber operas, *The Corridor* and *Semper Dowland semper dolens*, opened the 2009 Aldeburgh Festival. Birtwistle was made a Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 1986,

awarded a British knighthood in 1988 and made a Companion of Honour in 2001. He was Henry Purcell Professor of Music at King's College, University of London (1995-2001) and is currently Director of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music in London.

Poet, librettist, and teacher Robin Blaser died on May 7th, 2009. The following telephone interview was broadcast on CBC's *Saturday Afternoon at the Opera* on May 9th, 2009. We acknowledge and thank the composer, Sir Harrison Birtwistle, author and broadcaster Bill Richardson, and CBC producer Rosemary Allenbach for their assistance and for their kind permission to reproduce this brief interview, which was preceded by the voice of Robin Blaser reading his poem "Suddenly" in Berkeley in 2008.

Bill Richardson: Robin Blaser came to Vancouver from the US in 1966. That was a rich time in this city's history, a time that saw the arrival of people from the States and from Europe and from Asia who would shape this city's artistic and cultural life. Robin Blaser taught for many years at Simon Fraser University, and he was very well regarded as a teacher and as a writer. He was an extremely elegant presence, always with his beautiful white hair and perpetual cigarette. Smoking is said to cause wrinkles, but not in his case, I have to say; he kept his boyish mien, as you'll see if you take a look at the YouTube recording of the reading he gave last year in Berkeley (that's where the poem you just heard came from). Last year (2008) Robin Blaser won the Griffin Poetry Prize for *The Holy Forest: Collected Poems of Robin Blaser*, and in 2006 he received a Lifetime Achievement prize from the Griffin Poetry Foundation. There have been some marvellous and moving tributes since his death, by Stan Persky and Judith Fitzgerald among others, but perhaps not enough mention has been made of the work Robin Blaser did with the English composer Sir Harrison Birtwistle. They collaborated on an opera that was given its premiere in Berlin in 2000—*The Last Supper*, it's called—and it's written both in Latin and in English. Robin Blaser was a skilled and devoted classicist.

The meeting between Robin Blaser and Sir Harrison was brokered by a former student of each of them, and when I spoke to Sir Harrison earlier this week (he kindly took my call), I asked if there was something in Robin Blaser's poetry that had made him think that here was an ideal collaborator for the project he had in mind, the opera *The Last Supper*.

Harrison Birtwistle: Well, I don't know, because what it turned out to be—as opposed to what...with a libretto, with a text for a piece of theatre—is very different from his poetry. In the beginning I wasn't sure...because the whole game of collaboration is a very difficult one. But it worked out really terrific in the end.

BR: Was it clear from the beginning that *The Last Supper* would be in Latin and in English?

HB: Well, the Latin was his idea, because they become meditations, the Latin, and in a sense the Latin is like a meditation. It's like *aria* in music. My understanding of *aria* is a place where music takes the stage as opposed to the narrative action. And that was his thing. He also contributed something else which is wonderful—there's a person in it called Ghost, who's like a sort of angel character, who speaks on behalf of us now. And he's in a sense like a sort of chorus, like a Greek chorus, but in the singular though. That was his; that just sort of happened from him.

BR: When you began thinking of the idea for *The Last Supper*, did it proceed from a place of faith or from a place of dramatic investigation?

HB: Oh, dramatic investigation. I wanted to see and find a way of doing this...and also it is connected with the turn of the millennium; that was the other thing. The idea was that these people were introduced to, came back to the place of the Last Supper—they'd been invited to come back, not knowing who else was coming. And you see then that becomes a dramatic situation. So Peter is the first to arrive....

BR: Can you talk to me a little bit about the evolution of your collaboration with Robin Blaser as it progressed? Did you often meet face-to-face over it?

HB: No, not a lot. It was in the days of, what do you call it...?

BR: Fax.

HB: Fax, yeah! I've still got it all—miles of it. And my system of doing it is to condense it and then ask them to elaborate it and then make it more like itself. So, you know, the essential moment doesn't change, but the way that the shadow is cast on it or the way that the light is cast on it tends to change. But in the end it's got to be a text for music. And that certainly turns out to be that.

BR: How important is it, do you think, in the choice of a librettist, that it be somebody who is, if not a practicing musician, then at least musical—does it make a difference?

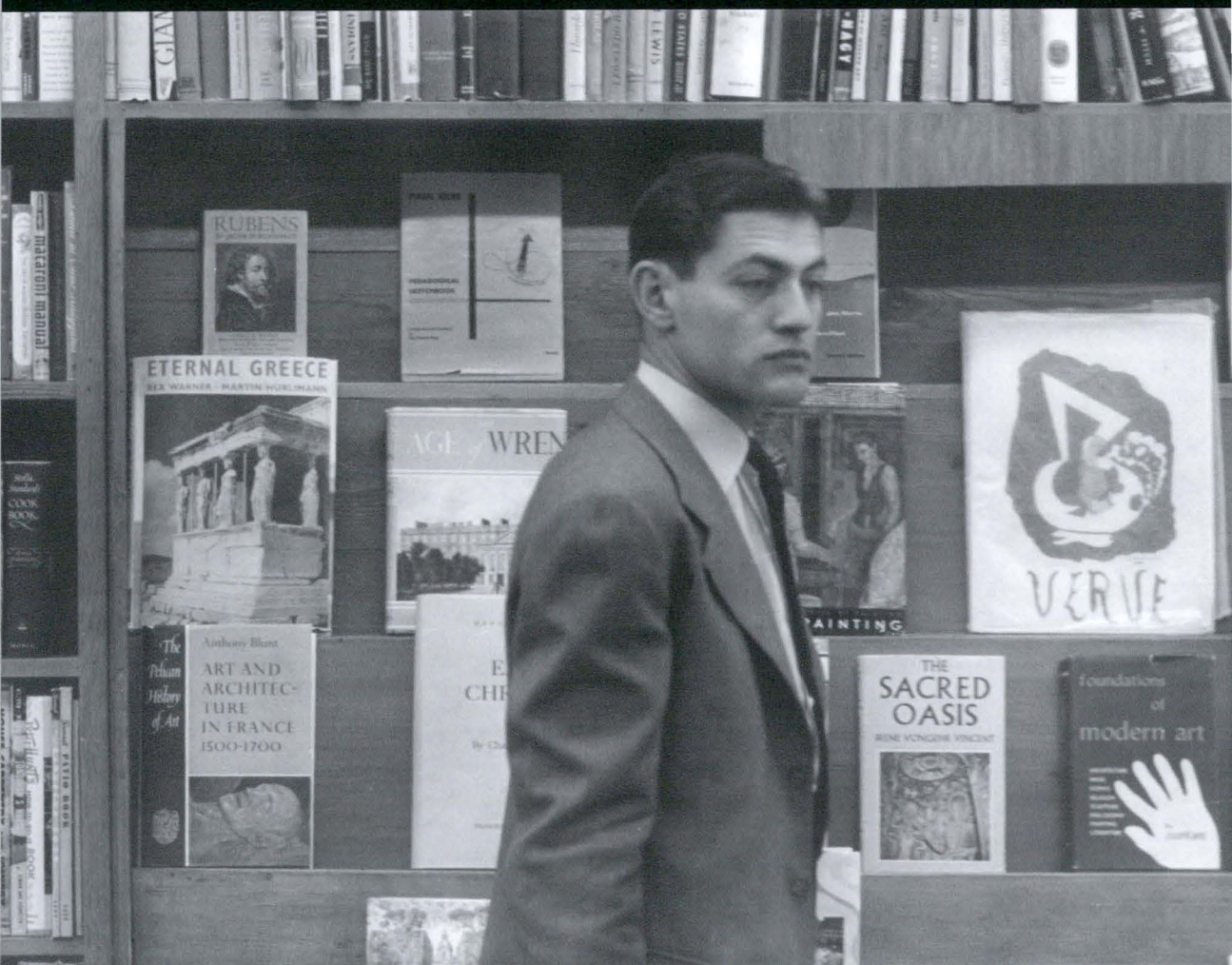
HB: No, I don't think it does at all. The person that I've collaborated with a lot is not a musician, he's just a very good poet. I think the music side of it—that's the ingredient that I try to put into it. I mean, there are certain words that give you imagery, musical imagery, and there are some things which simply don't. Robin had a wonderful sort of innocence, an endearing innocence, particularly to do with Europe, and specifically England. And I remember him in the rehearsals being somewhat emotional where the realization of the words becomes something else through music. I don't think he'd had any experience at all about that; in all of his life I don't think he'd had anything to do with the theatre. You know, the presence of the people on the set and the set itself—I think he was amazed by it. I introduced him to a lot of things; I remember I took him to Wells Cathedral, I took him to Stonehenge. And I live in a limestone country and there's a lot of flint—he got very interested in flint and the idea of, you know, what prehistory did with flint in order to make it into tools. I remember him being very fascinated by that.

BR: Did you stay in reasonably close touch once the project was done?

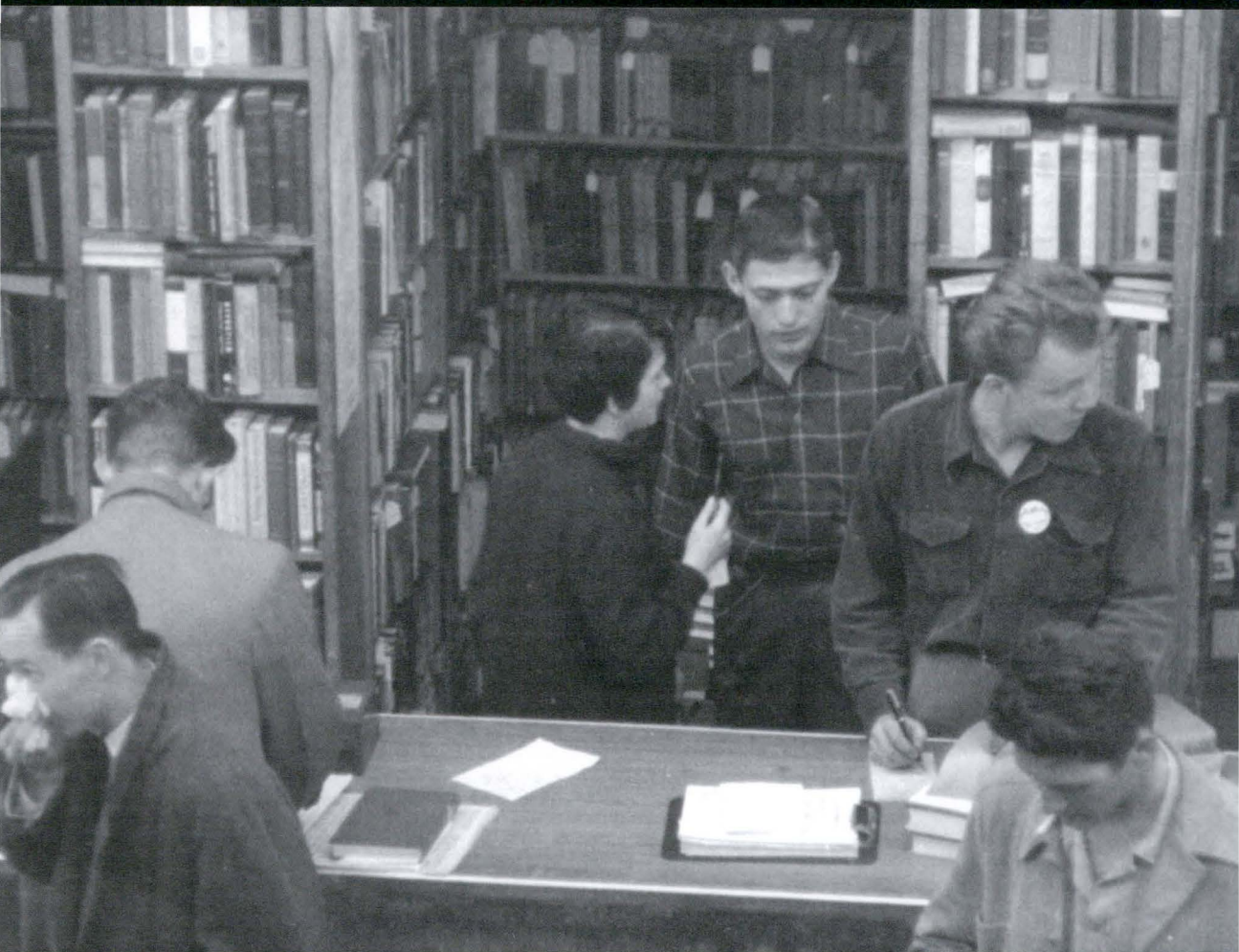
HB: No, alas, alas. No, I used to call him from time to time. One thing I remember is that when I called him in Canada, there was always an answer phone and I used to call out, "Robin, are you there? Are you there?" Because I think he had a setup where he didn't particularly answer the phone, and I used to have to think that I had to shout loud enough and then he usually came. We became very close in a funny sort of way. But the distance... he just sort of disappeared from my life.



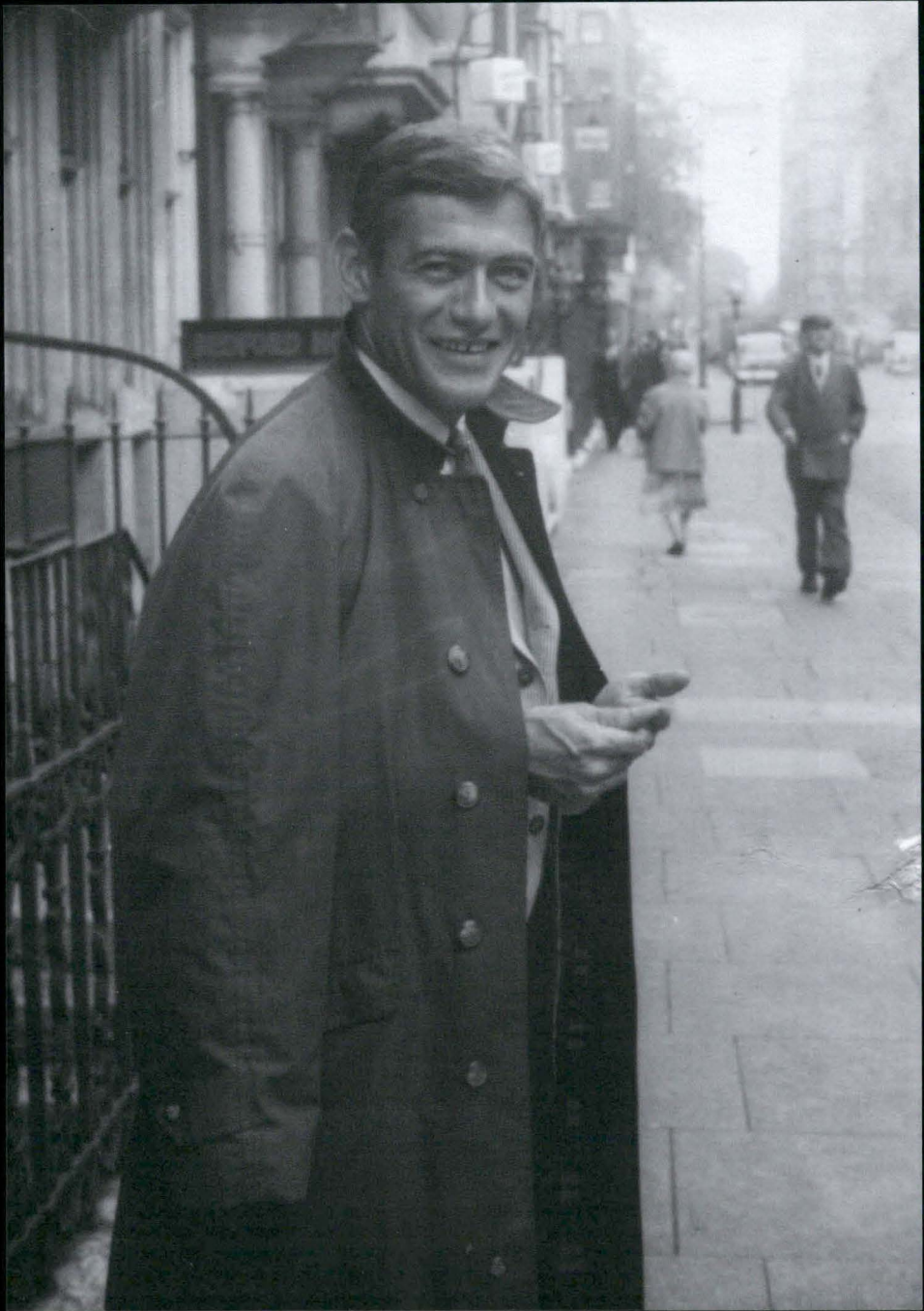
Robin Blaser with Frances Schweickhardt in Berkeley, 1944.
She was a former school friend from Twin Falls, Idaho, who had encouraged him to come to Berkeley.



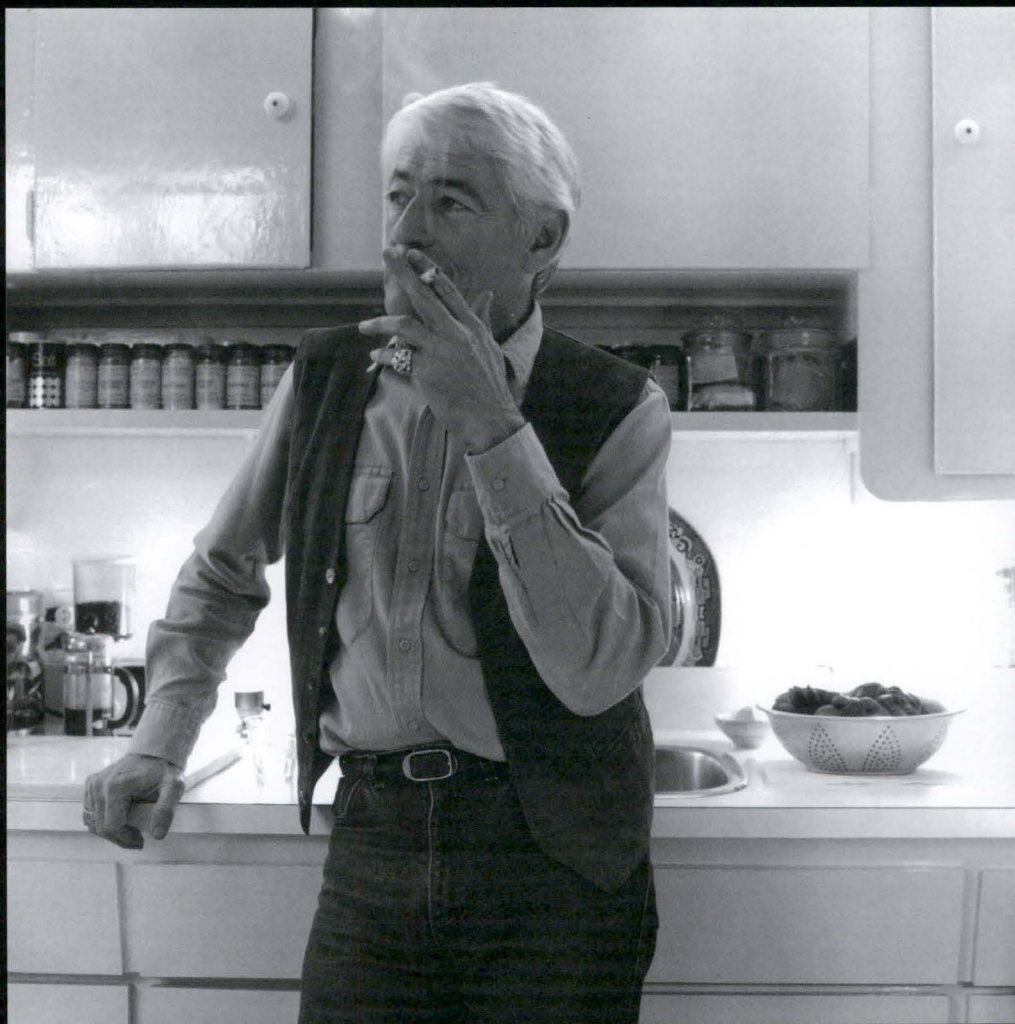
Robin Blaser in the Campus Textbook Exchange, Berkeley, late 1940s.



Robin Blaser, Assistant Librarian in Cataloguing, Widener Library, Harvard University, late 1950s.



Robin Blaser in London, 1959.



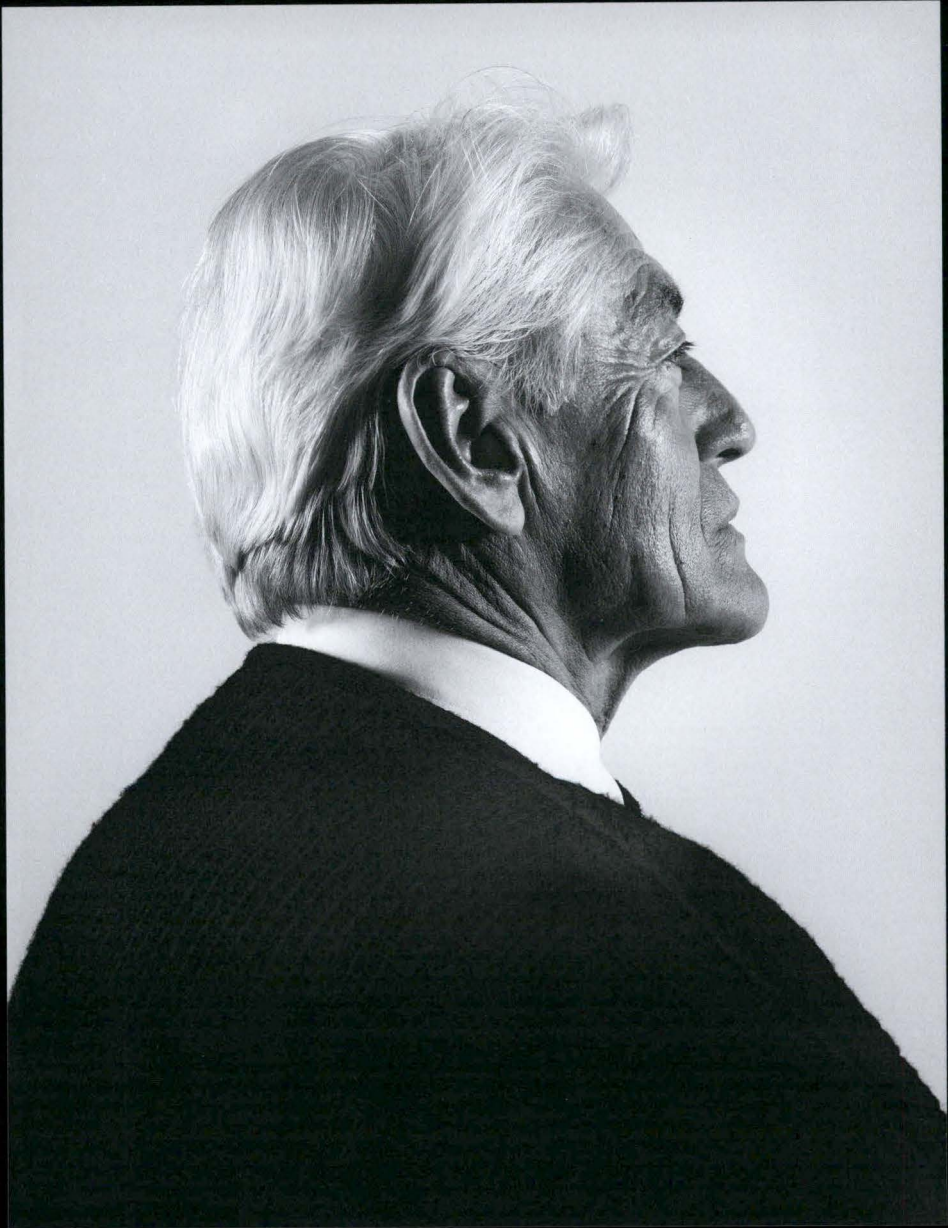
Vancouver, 1983.

Photo credit: Kenneth S. Taranto.





Vancouver Poetry Conference, 1963. From left to right: John Weiners, Robert Duncan, Robin Blaser, Allen Ginsberg, Robert Creeley.



Recovery of the Public World Conference, Vancouver, 1995.

Photo credit: Christos Dikeakos.

STEPHEN COLLIS, TONY POWER & JASON STARNES / An Interview with Ralph Maud

Ralph Maud is Professor Emeritus in the Simon Fraser University English Department, founder of the Bennett Library's Contemporary Literature Collection, and a leading scholar on poet Charles Olson. Author of Charles Olson's Reading (Southern Illinois University Press 1996), an edition of Olson's Selected Letters (University of California Press 2000), and Charles Olson at the Harbour (Talonbooks 2008), Maud has assembled a replica library of all the books Olson is known to have owned (in the same editions, and in some cases the original copies), as well as numerous archival documents and copies of Olson's manuscripts. These interviews took place in the Kitsilano office where Maud has worked on his archive for a number of years. In 2010, the donated Charles Olson Library will be opened in SFU's Special Collections, Bennett Library.

Part One

March 29, 2006

Tony Power: We thought we could talk about the beginnings of your Olson collection and SFU Library's Contemporary Literature Collection, hear about its origins—shrouded in the mists of time now. It goes back almost to the beginning of the University, was it 1965?

Ralph Maud: Well yes, but it goes back to '63, when I met Olson in Buffalo—at the State University of New York, formerly the University of Buffalo, which used to be a nice place! I came from Harvard to Buffalo to do the Dylan Thomas notebooks. Buffalo had the best modern poetry collection because the librarian, Charles Abbott, was a Rhodes Scholar at the time that Auden and Spender and C. Day-Lewis were at Oxford, and he got the idea that he would collect manuscripts of these and other living authors. Nobody had thought of that! In the fifties, Yale stole William Carlos Williams away from him. But Abbott got the notes for *The Sea and the Mirror* from Auden, and many, many interesting things, including Dylan Thomas's notebooks, for

which he paid—well, he wouldn't normally pay for manuscripts, because he didn't want people manufacturing them for payment, so he refused to pay—but there came an offer from Bertram Rota in London, and it came through the wires during the war, and they had a big conference and ended up paying for them, £5 apiece for these notebooks. Big decisions involved here! And Dylan Thomas in a letter to somebody said, "I've just sold my notebooks for the price of a packet of Players' cigarettes." Then something happened in '63, which was suddenly this nice, private little university that depended on the city of Buffalo... well, one of the duties of the younger faculty, the male faculty, was to accept invitations as the "extra man" at dinner tables downtown at the various houses of the rich of Buffalo, just to go and be extra men and be witty and charming, because the funds for the university depended on you! So this was one of those duties I kind of liked. Then in 1963—it wasn't even sold to the state, there was nobody to sell it, but it just sort of *changed* into the State University of New York. Weird. But one of the consequences was that there was suddenly plenty of money, and suddenly all kinds of sharp career people started coming in and changing the atmosphere. But one of the great things that happened was Olson came. As you recall, the summer of '63 was the conference in Vancouver, which was prepared for by Creeley, who Warren Tallman had got to come to UBC for the whole year preceding that so they could get things organized, and they did a summer school, and they had, as you know, Ginsberg and Duncan and Levertov and a few others, and it changed Canadian poetry forever. All the young poets like Bowering and Kearns and Wah were around and they couldn't help but be influenced; they'd done *TISH* before, and Warren Tallman had got the thing going—his university within the university. Now Albert Cook became the new chairman at Buffalo; he knew enough that as soon as he heard about Olson teaching at UBC for a summer he phoned him and said, "I've got an offer you can't refuse, come to Buffalo for one semester"—ten thousand dollars or something. And Olson said gee, my wife is having tooth troubles, I gotta pay for a dentist, so yeah, I'll accept it. He hadn't worked since Black Mountain College in '57. He'd just been in Gloucester, experiencing Gloucester and doing *The Maximus Poems* and not giving himself out as a teacher. So he was ready—his arrival in Buffalo was full of a tremendous energy. But I wasn't at all prepared because I was in the academic school of poetry: I'd come up through the "New University Wits" of Britain, Kingsley Amis and Philip Larkin and all those people, and I'd come to North America and got in with followers of Robert Frost. There was that anthology that Donald

Hall did, *New Poets of England and America* (1957), which contained none of the poets that Donald Allen had in the *New American Poetry* (1960). The two anthologies were entirely separate, but I knew the Donald Hall people!

Stephen Collis: Was Allen's anthology a direct response, do you think, to the Hall anthology? There wasn't much time between them....

RM: Well, as the editor of Don Allen's letters I can say that it wasn't *really* a response. But he was representing a real-life division, and I always remember hearing Robert Frost around that time, visiting Harvard and so on, saying, "I get a lot of poetry books, you know, and if they have regular metres and rhymes and stanzas, I keep 'em; if they've got long lines and no rhymes I send them to Carl Sandburg." And so I was a part of keeping the stanzas and the rhymes.

SC: How did you move from the Hall to the Allen?

RM: It was an issue of Olson's personality. You can't meet a genius without being affected by it. I found this just before you came—a little magazine I edited at Buffalo, for which I got somebody to review Donald Allen's anthology. John Simon, who of course is a hatchet man, he just made fun of it completely. Right at the end he says: "Oddly enough, there are even a few true, well made poems in the anthology...but as far as the majority of Mr. Allen's poets, these are kids who took up poetry the way one takes up marijuana, Buddhism, switchblade knives, wife swapping, or riding in boxcars, neither more nor less seriously than other kicks. As poets they are neither born nor made, except possibly by one another." John Simon became a reviewer in New York, had a career of tearing down things. When I finally met Don Allen, I had the embarrassment of wondering if he'd remembered this review, and I think he did; but he was a very polite guy, he didn't bring it up. Well, my meeting with Don Allen is interesting—it's an anecdote which I think sums up a lot. I was still doing my Dylan Thomas work—the notebooks were out from New Directions and they even got reviewed in *TIME* magazine. I thought I would take a copy out to Olson—I'd met him a couple of times; I was impressed. The first time I was really impressed; somebody came rushing in saying you've got to meet this new poet, he knew Woody Guthrie! That was how Olson came on the scene—he knew Woody Guthrie. Well, you can see the mindset we were in. I must've been ready for a change—that's been proven. But

I was lucky that I was the first person that Olson saw when he arrived on the Buffalo campus. I was driving down onto Main Street in my open Morris Minor, with my pith helmet on. And Olson saw my round face and remembered it. It was a kinship.

SC: He had the same kind of helmet, maybe.

RM: Or he had the same kind of mother, maybe. Harry Keyishian came down and said to me, "You gotta meet this new poet! He knew Woodie Guthrie!" We were left-wingers; with Woodie Guthrie, there was a real bridge to Olson. And we were fighting the Feinberg Certificate at that time—where you had to sign that you hadn't been a communist. And if you had been a communist, you told the president of the university about it. Very funny. Some people signed and some didn't. Four hundred people signed it and five didn't. And Harry was one of them and I was one of them. And we went up to the Supreme Court—you can look it up, it's "Keyishian v. the State of New York." We let Harry's name be up there because he had the most to lose—he was just starting out. That was the first issue: when I met Olson, I must have given the impression that because he knew Woodie Guthrie, he wouldn't be signing the Feinberg Certificate. But he went home and typed out three single-spaced pages of answer to me, which he never sent.

SC: Have you ever seen the document?

RM: Oh yeah, it's at the University of Connecticut library. I could show you a copy of it.

SC: What was his response, then, about the Feinberg thing?

RM: *What is real political action?* he's asking. That sort of hurt, when I finally read it. *Where were you all the years when the Feinberg Act was on the statute books? You're now protesting it? In 1947 it went on. Are you living in a kind of polis where you're aware and making it something you can really live in, or are you just responsive to events?* And this was quite telling, of course. He accused us of "thin" politics. And in those pages he talked about his own political action. In the letter he did send, there were only two questions: "My dear Ralph, What is a civil liberty? And what is the party of your affiliation?" Ahh. And I didn't reply for a year.

TP: So not much contact at all?

RM: Not much contact. That is, it built up during that year in public appearances. The first meeting where I got the measure of Charles Olson—it follows his own career. He began with Melville, and could've become a scholar of Melville if he'd wanted to be. And Lyle Glazier had a student who was doing a Ph.D. on Melville, and Lyle had the idea that the dissertation defense could be a public event where Olson responded to it. And lots of people turned up—sixty or seventy people—and it was a marvelous evening. And the young man, who didn't know what he was getting into really, told us what his thesis was about, and I can still see it. When Olson was called upon, he stood up near the back of the room and started walking down the aisle and talking about Keats returning from the Christmas party and writing a letter about...

SC: ...negative capability?

RM: Negative capability, right. And Olson got to the stage and I thought, Gee, this is something—making leaps between Keats and Melville.

SC: He'd probably already seen Melville's copy of Keats, no?

RM: Right, and he'd also written about it. So it wasn't as impromptu as it might've seemed. But I loved him as an intellectual. He was a great intellectual—he could imagine solutions and astound you with his knowledge. And then he did a few faculty seminars, you know, the *crème de la crème* kind of thing. So by the time months passed I came to know him, and I've forgotten how I replied to the letter but I know I did, eventually.

SC: Where was Olson living at the time?

RM: Wyoming, New York, which was an hour out of Buffalo. Olson got a very good deal—it was a country house with this little guest cottage. Well, he got the guest cottage—it was a millionaire's estate. I don't know...poets know how to live, right? I got there—I didn't announce my arrival, but I thought, 2:30 in the afternoon on a Sunday would be alright, you know, I'd just go for a ride. It was probably apple cider time—lovely cider mills outside Buffalo—we'd go get some cider, just drop in, casual enough. So Betty was in the kitchen, and Olson was there with Donald Allen, who I didn't expect, and we met and he just sort of disappeared, not in any bad way, he just seemed to disappear. But there was something a bit strange about it because, well, the fireplace was full of ashes. The fire had just died down. And it dawned on me

that, of course, they'd been up all night. This is the way Olson lived—he'd been up all night talking to Don Allen. Later on I did have my own all-night session with Olson. But that was it: I was coming at breakfast time after an all-night session—no wonder Donald Allen disappeared, he couldn't meet anybody at that point. But Olson had this recuperative power. "Come on, we'll go for a walk"—and we did, we walked down the field. And that was the occasion on which he stubbed his foot into a ploughed rut—"Indians," he said, "they're my people." The Seneca Indians. And that's what got me onto Charles Hill-Tout and the Salish people, and all the work I've done here. I mean, that's called teaching—when in a phrase you can just open up a whole world to somebody. So that's what I mean by "genius." But I didn't catch on right away, of course... I was deep in the other world. I was newly married, and so I didn't stay out all night. Jack Clarke was the one who got close to Olson in Buffalo. Jack was a wonderful person—a Blake scholar. He'd been a jazz pianist in bars in Toledo, Ohio; he'd gone through Bowling Green University on the basis of playing jazz piano. So he'd stay up till 3 or 4 in morning, drive around a bit till 5 just to come down off the high. This is what he and Olson did in Buffalo.

Then I came out to Simon Fraser in 1965. Ron Baker, the academic planner for the whole thing, was marvelous. And he couldn't find anybody better than himself to be head of the English Department, and in a sense that was true enough. He was marvelous because he made us all feel that if we put our shoulders to the wheel, we could get what we wanted out of this place. Fred Candelaria wanted to edit *West Coast Review*, and he got to do that. Stanley Cooperman got a chance to show off with these big classes—two hundred, three hundred people...

TP: I was in one of those. English 102 with Stanley Cooperman.

RM: Well, there you go! What more could a show-off want than what Stanley got? Well, I got the Contemporary Literature Collection. I said I wanted to record what was happening right now, what I had discovered in Buffalo.

TP: I heard there was at first just a bibliography?

RM: Well, once I decided I was going to teach Olson when I got to Simon Fraser, I was reading *The Maximus Poems* a lot—I didn't understand them at all—so I bugged Olson two or three times. I was the one asking him specific questions—what did *that*

mean? what did *that* mean? And he'd come up with the answers! Nobody seems to have done that—they were all too scared to indicate that they didn't know what the poems meant, I guess, or they thought it was beneath his dignity to answer simple questions. But he liked it. And when he knew that I was coming out west and I would make a detour to Berkeley, for the Berkeley conference in July '65, he said, "Do you want to be my scholar?" Each of the principal people performing at Berkeley were given an extra ticket for somebody; in other words, they could each bring a scholar. Well, I was Olson's official scholar.

SC: Don't leave home without your scholar!

RM: It's even down there as Olson's "Scholar"—I've got the ticket somewhere. And, you know, you get in free, and you have a kind of status, and of course it was just another example of Olson...which he did for everybody...he treated them in the way in which they would want to be treated if they were living at their best. I mean, if you're living at your best, this is the way you would be and this is the way somebody should be treating you, acknowledging who you really are and who you wanted to be. And it's a real wonderful gift. So he made me his scholar. And here we are. So I did turn up at Berkeley. I heard the "Causal Mythology" lecture and lots of other things; he gave a series of seminars. What I didn't hear was the long Berkeley reading, and I think I'll put on record the reason I didn't—it's because I had to get to Salt Lake City where my wife and son were. My son was having his fourth birthday party, so I drove all night to get to it. And I guess that was worth it. What it meant was that I had to leave before the big reading, and I didn't care much about it—I thought, Oh, he'll just read the poems, you know! But Olson that night I missed did something remarkable. He opened his arms to being a public figure; but he didn't read so everyone could admire him. He said at one point, "I want to abandon my powers." He was a very powerful figure. In high school and college he was a master debater. He won all his debates. And he went into politics with Franklin Roosevelt. He was persuasive in political situations, in the back rooms, knocking on doors and everything. A very persuasive, powerful guy, but he knew that was only one part—it was the right hand, and he was interested in the left hand as well. How can somebody this powerful not be powerful, especially before an audience? Well, he proved how to get that other value in, and he sort of fell on his face, as it were. And this is where Dorn and Creeley and a few others, Duncan—well, Duncan left halfway through—Creeley stayed, Dorn

stayed, but they were embarrassed and they expressed that, and they fueled Tom Clark's book with that embarrassment... as if Olson had somehow failed, become a pathetic figure. And I believe that's because they didn't understand what he was doing, and in fact listening to that tape, as I've done a hundred times, I kind of hold the feeling that there's a human being who is showing us how to go into the future, where domineering power is not what we're after anymore.

SC: It was more performative—more about the performance?

RM: Well, it was revealing parts of the psyche that you keep to one side when you're in your public persona, but he wanted to bring out everything.

SC: So after that July in Berkeley, you're on your way up to Vancouver, your first semester at SFU...

TP: Did you arrive with the idea of starting a collection of Olson and the New Americans?

RM: Sort of! I picked up, at Cody's Books in Berkeley... Cody's put out a little pamphlet which contained the books of all the principal poets at the Berkeley conference—a bibliography for the occasion. When I arrived here I went over to UBC and looked in the catalogue and none of them were there. None of them!

SC: Even with Warren Tallman there?

RM: Well, I went to Warren—I said, "What have you been doing?!" He said, "Oh, I gave up long ago on the librarians... they wouldn't get these books, so," he said, "what I did is I got them in my home and made it a lending library for all the young poets in Vancouver who wanted to come be part of this!" And that's what happened! That's what I always said—a university within a university, that's what Warren did. But what an opportunity, in that case—UBC absolutely ignored all these people who were rising. So SFU gave them a chance.

TP: Well, Allen, in his preface to the anthology, talks about how hard to come by, how unpublished these writers were. They were being published in the anthology without being published elsewhere. It sounds like at the time the stuff was just not readily available.

SC: Even with Duncan, his first trade paperback book of poetry was coming out at the same time as the anthology. For twenty years he'd been publishing with small presses.

TP: There seems to be such a schism there—on the one hand the “academic” and on the other, whatever you call them, the New Americans. They seem to be on complete opposite poles.

RM: Well, this is my particular attribute. I'm a trained Ph.D. at Harvard and I have published widely in academic journals not only in the modern field. So when I take up the “madmen,” then at least I can get away with it a little bit—people say oh, there must be something to it! In other words, I applied the prestige of “academia”...and I was able to command a budget of \$10,000 a year—part of the library's budget just for the CLC—which I spent!

TP: Your starting point was to collect around the *New American Poetry* anthology, wasn't it?

SC: And around the Berkeley Conference?

RM: It was, indeed, but when I told Olson what I was planning to do, in a letter, that I would start a collection with Black Mountain people in it, and so on...he wrote back, again one of those insights: “Ralph, I think you'd be better off sticking with me.” And he was absolutely right—I have been like a two-person machine. I did Dylan Thomas and then I switched to Charles Olson. I have not been an authority in my field—I've been a scholar of particular people. And there's a total difference. Literary criticism requires you to be an authority in your field. Well, sure. That's one thing. A scholar is somebody who knows everything about a few things. So I took that as permission to just make Olson the centre of this collection.

Part Two

July 1, 2009

SC: When did you begin trying to reconstruct Olson's library? What spawned that? What brought you to a project of this scale?

RM: I'm just wondering if I actually knew how much Olson had done with Melville's source books. I must have had some inkling of that—so I was just imitating Olson, as I've done all along. I can't think of anything I've done that I didn't borrow from Olson, that didn't imitate him. Just a simple consequence of what he proposed. We looked at *The Maximus Poems* together, Olson and I, a couple of times; I caught him at breakfast—2:30 in the afternoon, he'd be having breakfast before he went down to his seminar at 3:30, having been up all night—and I asked him some specific questions, terribly easy questions like "What is spelt?" Well, we all know what spelt is now, but I didn't know what spelt was. And I'd ask about the exercises he did when he was training to be an actor in the Gloucester summer theatre. And he told me the answers in a straightforward way, but of course this led immediately to his sources, and I could see that once you knew what he was talking about this was very, very simple poetry. This was denotative; this was telling you about things. It wasn't metaphorical; I was used to puzzling out metaphysical poetry by the methods of New Criticism. I could spend some time telling you what it was like *before* Charles Olson—there was Philip Larkin in England, and Kingsley Amis, and I began a little magazine at Leeds in 1953 through 1954, called *Poetry and Audience*.

TP: You have a run of it in your bathroom, I just noticed.

RM: It's not there for toilet paper, you know, old chap! It's just...my files have crept into the bathroom. Then when I came to Harvard, back to graduate school, I curtailed the name to *Audience*. I can't resist publishing little magazines—my latest one being the *Minutes of the Charles Olson Society*. And who was around? The great figure was Robert Frost, then Richard Wilbur who was on the staff at Harvard—a beautiful poet. I mean you don't have to knock these people just to propose that they're lacking something else. And Richard Wilbur right now is writing beautiful, graceful poems like he always did. And Donald Hall was there, coming out one day from his study excitedly saying, "I found a way to use the word *transubstantiation* in a poem!" These

are the kinds of goals that you have if you're a university wit! I'm trying to figure out in my mind at what stage this was, but as soon as you knew that you had to know what Olson was talking about, then you had to have the source books. And so I naturally, in Buffalo, began doing that. And then it became an obsession, and the book *Charles Olson's Reading* grew out of the collection. I couldn't have written on Olson's reading without having the books to refer to. What's here is not in libraries, a lot of it. You had to have picked it up in obscure bookstores. I suppose the crowning moment for me was when Merton Sealts—he's the one who did what Olson was going to do before Olson decided to be a poet instead. He tracked down Melville's source books, the actual books that Melville owned, and wrote up his report for the *Harvard Library Bulletin*, and then published it separately with the University of Wisconsin.

SC: He acknowledged Olson's work in that field too, didn't he?

RM: Well, not enough. After the fact, years later, when he did the *Pursuing Melville* book, then he published his correspondence with a lot of *mea culpa, mea culpa, mea culpa!*—"I should've known this, I should've beaten the Brooklyn library people over the head until they let me look at the stacks and check up on Olson." Olson had gone to the Brooklyn Public Library and got out Thomas Wharton and a few other likely things, and they were Melville's copies that'd been dumped! On a hunch. Sealts failed to follow up on that.

SC: Olson even went to one of Melville's nieces, I believe—knocked on her door and said, "Got any old books?" and recovered about ninety of them that day or something.

RM: The two granddaughters, especially the one in Orange, NJ, where he found Melville's Shakespeare...

SC: ...the goldmine.

RM: He was attached to Harvard at that point, as a graduate student, so he naturally said to her, "You'd want to donate to Harvard, I expect," and she said, "Yeah, you can give them to Harvard once you've got what you want out of them." So he did donate them to Harvard with a clause of exclusive use for himself for ten years. Which they respected, with a little bit of clownish aberration at the end, which I write about. This all gets very complicated, I can tell you!

SC: It does! It was a simple question...

RM: I had the greatest pleasure of being complimented by Merton Sealts when he said, about my book on Olson, which I did try to make into a narrative of how the books were used—it was an intellectual biography—and Sealts said, “I wish I’d done that. I wish I could’ve gotten it together to do that for Melville.” He just lists books.

TP: It sounds like gathering Olson’s books was a natural product of your scholarship, but did you have a moment where you thought, Aha, I will reconstruct this to the absolute best of my ability and actually obtain Olson’s books? Or did it just evolve?

RM: Well, to complete it as an object in and of itself, yeah, I think that sort of focused itself on maybe getting the chance of buying Olson’s home, 28 Fort Square, in Gloucester. So the idea was that if you had a replica of Olson’s library you would restore 28 Fort Square with fidelity to what it was like when Olson was there. And that was in my mind for quite a few years.

SC: I’m interested in the whole issue of *use*—you were saying that it might not have been much use sitting in a museum in Gloucester, whereas up at SFU it can hopefully be of a little more use. And one thing that connects to that is the fact that you’ve not only carved out a facsimile library, but you’ve got a facsimile archive. You’ve got all these binders with all this material in it; you’ve got a mini facsimile Storrs archive here.

RM: Well, not only Storrs but other libraries that have Olson material. This is it—it’s all there in three-ring binders—and that’s the issue, you see. If people ask me what I’m doing these days, I just say, “Oh, I’m clearing my desk.” There’s a lot on my desk; it’ll take me years. And the main effort—and I want to have you as my witnesses—my main effort is to put these three-ring binders, which contain the letters that Olson wrote, the photocopies of letters and poems and prose and ephemeral things, in chronological order. I’ve got to make it seem as though it can be used by other people besides myself. It’s not on a computer, folks! Can anything today that’s not on a computer be taken seriously? Three-ring binders? Nah, we’ll toss ‘em. Well, you’ll toss them at your peril, Power!

TP: I think at worst they might get scanned...but not tossed.

SC: Here's something else I'm interested in, Ralph. Going back over your trajectory of Olson collecting, you started CLC with Olson at its centre, but then you sort of broke off your relationship with that project at some point, more or less.

RM: Just a lovers' quarrel.

SC: Exactly. And in researching the book on Olson's reading, you began assembling this incredible facsimile archive, but in a very non-institutional space. You've got it in this little apartment that you rent in Kitsilano, the basement of a large, old house; you've got a room that contains this library. It's not an institutional space—it's a private space. It's been of use to you and your scholarship; you've allowed some people to come do work in here; I came in when I was working on my Susan Howe book and used Olson's Emily Dickinson books.

RM: And that was so nice! That was almost the first time it's been used by anyone other than myself, and it was very gratifying!

SC: Gratifying for me too! But now it's moving back into an institutional space. How do you feel about it going back now to SFU, back into that institutional space and becoming a kind of archive that a wider community of scholars can use for various purposes and ends?

RM: I don't think there's an issue there, Steve. It's just gratifying to know that it's going to be used. That's the main thing.

SC: That's very Olsonian of you—to say that you want it to be of use.

RM: Well yeah, of course it is! I suppose there was another stage where it was going to go to the Cape Ann Historical Association, and those were people I was worried about, in terms of security. I feel more confident about Simon Fraser University than anything else that's come along, if that's an answer to your question.

SC: To follow this archival line along, I'm going to quote you something from Ben Friedlander, who wrote this little piece also around 2006, around the time we last met with you. It was called "Olson Now," and it was before the website *Olson Now*...anyhow, he has these four categories he goes over briefly: OLSON'S LEGACY, OLSON'S PRESENT USE FOR POETS, WHAT THE SCHOLARS SHOULD BE DOING, and WHAT NEEDS TO BE SET ASIDE IF WE ARE GOING TO ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING OF

VALUE. And I'm going to quote from Friedlander here: "In his final years, Olson abandoned the book as ultimate horizon and worked instead to produce an archive. Poems and essays, yes, but also notes, notebooks, correspondence, marginalia in books, the books themselves, files of articles, maps, and recordings of readings, lectures, and interviews." So he's suggesting how dispersed Olson's reading was, how he was working on so many different fronts and if you want to sum up Olson's work in the later period you've got to look at the entire archive. You can't point to a single book, even though *The Maximus Poems* is sort of a putative archive itself, isn't it? I'll go on a little bit with Friedlander—this sets up his question about what the scholarship should be doing, and he suggests the scholarship should be reading the archive: "...because it is only by taking the measure of this material that we can recover a description of Olson's practice, which is only partially discernible from his discrete works." In some ways I think you've already answered—but I'm still hovering around this question of what scholars should and can be doing with Olson and what this archive should allow. To turn this into a specific kind of question, do you still think that we're in need of a full, blow-by-blow, traditional biography of Olson? Or have the ways that you've approached Olson's biography, via his reading, via your blow-by-blow countering of the Clark biography—are we still in need of a fully-fleshed biography?

RM: Oh, we'll get one. And there's a need for everything—there's even a need for literary critics.

SC: Heaven forfend!

TP: Is there one in the works, that you know of?

RM: Oh, there's been a few. You've got to make a fuss—if someone like Olson comes along, you've got to make a fuss of him in whatever way you can. It takes me back to the editing of *The Maximus Poems Volume Three*, you see. Charles Boer and George Butterick had the archive, but all they could think to do was to make... oh, what I called a forgery. That is, to make it like *Maximus Poems IV, V, VI*—include longer poems interspersed with shorter poems, make it the same size, generally give it the same effect. But I called it an *allowed* forgery because Olson had asked them to do it. And he didn't give any further instructions—just take as a basis what had already been published and do it. But I think the great contribution that Olson was making, like Friedlander is talking about, is all the disparity. It's a day-by-day process; you move

from one thing to another and you don't constrain yourself that much. He wasn't constraining himself; he was just doing what he had to do and he knew his time was short. He just moved in on whatever. And it's that kind of adventurousness that I thought should have gotten into *The Maximus Poems Volume Three*—an adventure of day-by-day stuff, whatever it is that came up. You don't edit it to make it tidy. And this, of course, defies normal scholarship because we tidy up! But I think Olson's last five years in Gloucester were a step forward into some new thing that we haven't got the means to portray properly. Yet.

SC: So you don't think it's strange that he didn't give more specific instructions? You think it's more in tune with the process of writing the latter parts of *Maximus*, which were incredibly dispersed, daily, going in multiple directions. There would've been no way to envision or think of a kind of, you know, Here it is, sum it up, guys—go ahead and tidy it up for me.

RM: I'd be suspicious of any instructions he'd given, because he was so mischievous. He would just shake people up. Jason and I have been looking at misprints in *The Maximus Poems*, things that should have been corrected, and the reason there are such things is mainly because Butterick was so scared of Olson that as an editor he couldn't correct simple names, like "Richelieu," which Olson didn't know how to spell and didn't bother to look up. Any editor would correct an historical personage's name, but Olson sort of scared him by this mischievousness. He once submitted something to the *Niagara Frontier Review*, which had the word "Marx" mistyped as "Mrax." And they asked him, "Should we correct this?" What would you say if you were asked? He said, "No! Of course not! Leave it the way it is."

SC: It's the scholar's job to get it right.

RM: We've got to come in and impose our standards, but at the same time with terrific respect for what is actually happening. And there is something to be said for the fact that in our time, Marx has become Mrax; I mean, he's been turned all around! He's done a pratfall in the Soviet Union! These accidental things, synchronicity, it happens all the time to people who are living in a certain way, on a certain seam of invisible universe.

TP: I was just recalling you yourself agonizing over whether to remove the -ums and -ers from the '65 Berkeley reading (or non-reading) transcript.

RM: Absolutely. Transcribing tapes is something in itself; I mean, if it's a real event where there's something at stake or something being created in the middle of muddle, you've got to get it all there. You can't skip anything. And the -ers are part of it. But maybe when you think it over there's enough hesitations—you don't need to put *all* the -ers in. There's enough uncompleted sentences. Just a little guidance there, folks! I am not Charles Olson, of course...let's understand that. I'm not creating here a thing that will have beauty forever. I am a servant of the master, and this is the way it gets done. If you die too soon, Olson, you end up leaving it to people like me! And we can approach it with great respect, but we're not you...we're not up to that.

Jason Starnes: So we've heard about the founding of the CLC, and we know the history of the first forty years of that collection and some of the uses that the material and your own library and archive have been put to. And I'm wondering, following on the ideas of use that kept coming up, use of the collections that you've gathered....You have mentioned in the past a list of things that have yet to be done on Olson's work—editorially or in terms of the brand of Harvard scholarship that you've brought to Olson studies. I'm wondering what you would like to see happen in the next forty years of the collection and the next forty years of Olson studies?

RM: Well, maybe we don't have to be so quick. You know, Jeremy Prynne has annoyed me tremendously by not sending me the letters that Olson wrote to him. I saw them when I went to visit his study in Cambridge; they were all on a lower shelf, all neatly xeroxed. He believes in three-ring binders too. And I thought we'd had a meeting of minds, but he is deliberately thwarting me on principle. The principle being that we've got to leave something for people a hundred years from now, when they may be better equipped in some funny way—maybe they'll have three eyes by that time, I don't know. But Prynne, a marvelous, tough guy intellectually, ruling the roost there in Cambridge, sending some of his students over to Olson in Buffalo—Andrew Crozier, chiefly—but the way he got people interested in Olson was not by lecturing on Olson. He once told me, "My method is to teach Fulke Greville and bore them so much with the minor Elizabethan writers that if I mention something in passing about Charles Olson, they'll just run off and read Charles Olson." His method seems to have worked. He did acknowledge, however, when he came here—he was one of our very first people to give a formal lecture at SFU, which is transcribed as one of the few acts of literary criticism that Prynne has allowed into print. He told me on the side, "Well, Ralph, I can see"—I

mean, this was on very little evidence, but he must have got the feeling that our audience at Simon Fraser was not as highly selective as the one that was placed in front of him as the tutor at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. He said, "I can see, Ralph, that you might have to lecture on Olson to get it through, because if you just lectured on Fulke Greville, it wouldn't do, it wouldn't work." So he knew...he understood that North America was a different problem. But I may be coming around a bit. Oh, people can do what they like, you know. Time will pass and it'll build its dome, somehow or other.

TP: Something that's related—Olson's reputation and his literary stock. It seemed to me, as a student in the mid-70s, that his stock then was very, very high. Nowadays you see someone like Jack Spicer, whose stock seems to be rapidly rising. Literary reputations go up and down. Olson's has dipped somewhat since then. Do you see it coming back up—some sort of revival coming about?

RM: The job now is for someone to go to Cambridge [Massachusetts]—maybe Jason will do this—but to go and wine and dine Helen Vendler and get her to change her mind. I tried—it was just a brief lunch...well, it was a long lunch, actually. And maybe there was wine...no more than a glass, though.

TP: Change her mind about...?

RM: About Olson. Helen Vendler left him out of the *Harvard Anthology of Modern Poetry*, and people have taken that cue ever since. So we can do a lot of dancing around, if we like, but her recalcitrance—she said "What should I read? what should I read?" so I told her what to read—I said read the whole of the *Selected Writings*, read as much of it as you want to...Creeley's selection is just as good as anything I can think of. And I said to begin with, "As the Dead Prey Upon Us" and the "Mayan Letters," and so on. And ten months later she came back...she said, "I still don't get it." If there was enough fuss about Olson I think she would've gotten it, but there hasn't been. So we're waiting for a new Helen Vendler to register Olson. Richard Ellmann put him in the *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* without any struggle.

SC: Maybe I could piggyback a question here...looking toward the future, and to the near future with this Olson conference we've got coming up. What do you hope to have come of this event?

RM: I don't know—I don't even know if I'll come to this one! It's painful, in a way. It's painful to hear other people talk about someone who you know so well and they haven't got it quite right. Or they're just making it fit into some categories they've created in order to make a career out of categories. That sometimes happens. I mean, maybe you should appoint me commentator on every paper? I can be the litmus paper?

TP: Maybe the same feeling that writers have when conferences are held on their work. I've heard it can be quite painful, though gratifying or flattering on one level...

RM: Well, your emotions are involved in ways which are maybe not justified; it's like if you're watching some close relative making a fool of themselves in public, or about to. I think immediately of the Berkeley reading—it caused disaffection in close people like Creeley and Dorn. They were so close to Olson that they took that event, where people walked out and Olson said things about them walking out—from some people's point of view it was all rambling on. They were embarrassed; they felt it very strongly. It was a crucial thing, that event. And the drama of that could be written from several points of view. Duncan actually left for intermission and didn't come back after intermission. The loyal ones came back, but it was an embarrassment. Yet when you listen to the tape, you don't feel it; it's just because they were close and they were having to go through that moment in real time. And so maybe I'll be better off if I listen to recordings of these sessions.

SC: It can be arranged.

RM: Then I won't have to call from the back of the room—"Check your facts!" "What do you know!"

SC: You can be the official heckler.

RM: I mean, you don't have to do that. You can just keep quiet and be confident in your superior knowledge!! It's okay. Don't worry. A conference is a very limited, lame thing! But I wouldn't do without it, either. There isn't an expectation of any single thing happening, like even being moved, for instance, by something—this might happen or it might not. This is what we can do, and we do it because we can. And that's my commendation to you.

THE CENTRE FOR CAPITAL, LINGUISTIC AND ALLUVIAL EXPENDITURES (CCLAE) / Field Notes

Location #1 Tsawwassen

An alluvium of beastlike hopefulness sifted words of faith, submission, and revolt. Their faith therefore was typo. Tongues to wash against habitat.

Notes towards slack. Here we find the idea of reading in a more primordial sense than reading words. The hunter on the track of game is a reader of signs as is the shaman who interprets the symptoms of illness. The imprint of feet in the mud is the first writing of intentional existence.

We set off; long walks or cagey stumbles. Set across, set need, set sextant. Each minute apparatus orients thrown crustaceans. We can find their placement by flutter logarhythms before sunk.

Here we find beachcombing for washed-up invertebrates as a performance of lexical harvest. On any given day we can see children (or men and women of every age) parading these spaces for treasure. Not sustenance, no, not anymore! But a trounce for prize, a chorus of: "look what I found," or "can I take this home?" It seems we interact with these tidal flats as submerged vocabularies: exotic, mysterious, gutted mouths for our pleasure and wonder. But what of this harvest? The child stuffs pockets and buckets not for potlatch but for display windows on suburban lawns: "This is what I got"—pointing to the drying starfish on the lawn. Is this kind of beachcombing then not a replica of waste and expenditure in tongue and breath? What a collision! What a tangle! This flanerrie atop a tidal space that otherwise has such determination and purpose. Is it a wonder that the Chinook lexicon was forged on these alluvial flats? That this hybrid and crude language which originates solely from, and exists to serve, the structures capital (*how can we trade? Your English? My Salish?*), found its echo in these places of so much awkward death?

Or perhaps this bucket and pocket full economic is nothing more than a reaction to the ecosystem itself. The child who prowls the tide line witnesses a whole earth in spasm and flail—a space rife with the smell of rot and slow failure. The child never stays to watch the sea return and the logic unfold.

But does this urgency of harvest, of *take take*, not also ignite a politics of rescue? What happens when we decide not to ‘take the lexicon home’ but return it?

Last year, my family and I were vacationing in Tsawwassen British Columbia. This part of the world boasts miles of fertile coast line—soft shores—marked by wild and vast tides. One August afternoon I observed a group of children harvesting the shore line for alphabets of a once submerged world. Predictably, most of the children dug and plucked at these creatures for gross innards and alien squirms. Once the bucket was full, each child carried mounds of species back to their parents who lounged on towels and chairs far from the shore line. I could hear the children’s gasps, songs, and cries as they ran inland. At first, each symphonic burst seemed to come as a surprise to their own mouths. They seemed to struggle with their own throats and glottal stops—pulsing out sounds which grew louder in mimicry and fervor. But there soon came to be something rehearsed about these belt-outs. As the children became more comfortable with these alien orbs in their palms, so did their grunts and calls exhibit uniformity. The children, these harvesters, had an anthem, a quickly developed lexical strategy to deal with the waste they stumbled across.

It was while recording these anthems that I noticed another child still ankle deep in the sea. This child had his bucket full but was reaching into it with careful calculation, with an exactness reserved for clinicians. This child was returning the invertebrates to the sea—tossing them back in what I could only describe as a politics of rescue. So what of this child? What of *his* harvest? So much labour expended in *take take* and the silence of his plotted return. What language was he was throwing back into the depths? Would these exiled urchins, sandollars and clams not disrupt the text of the underneath?

Splay palms and graph return. Insertion linguistics. Crustaceans do not need the sun. Biologists found “as” an aid. Made up vibrations to migrate from mirror to water.

Location #2 Fraser Delta

Notes, flood: a rip in the thistle.

Re: naming—"Capital, Linguistic, and Alluvial Expenditures."

In what sense I wonder "expenditure"? "Expending or laying out." Often meaning "waste." Also consumption: using up, consuming. Or expending any reserve of energy (thus depletion, exhaustion?). A river's energy is renewable, sustainable—it keeps shouting its text into the sea, dragging the silt tonsil of earth with it. Language's expenditures are also inexhaustible, sustainable: my saying something doesn't prevent you from saying something. There is always more to say.

I put my canoe in the water. The current isn't too strong. Ladner it is named after some European founder—who made expenditures and reaped profits. I settle into the glass bottom, curl out towards slim current.

"Capital expenditure": expenditure from which benefits may be expected over a relatively long period; expenditure on capital or fixed assets (like buying a canoe for trolling the estuary, or pens and paper for composing its flows). Capital expenditures are seen as necessary (under capitalism), but must be compensated for (via profit). Overhead. Operating costs. Extra to but a condition of "making money." Whether we seek profits or not, we all constantly expend—energy, money, capital. What will we get back? What will sustain us?

Pollen from trees in clouds blows onto river surface and disappears towards the sea. Some becomes gummed on the cream side of my canoe. Along the blade of my paddle. I drift into channel, pry and draw towards reedy banks. Expend energy to fit form.

This connects to "potlatch." Is the expenditure mentioned here the same as in potlatch—as in gift economies? So—not "take take" but flooding out—alluvial—into the world. Giving it all away knowing we will reap in turn. Expenditure in and of itself does not mean capitalism. All life is calculations of expenditures (usually of primary energies) that will then hopefully lead to a return (of the gift). We

are everywhere given by the world (crabs in the reach, sweet grass, wild berry, a salmon cool in shallow shadow). What do we have to give? A language to the world. Consciousness of and for things, attention to the untended, words—throwing our vocal energies out so the world will be spoken. Like plants hold the river bank in place (for a time), and the river waters the plants—we speak the world that feeds us.

Say salal say squid say sumptuary say season say synthetic say salmonberry say sapien say sedge say satellite say sea say season say sea.

Of “waste and expenditure in tongue and breath”—there is no waste of words or breath. All language swathes the living. We gather, naming, not to keep but to collect—composing the world—a surplus activity, we tell ourselves, narrating our actions as we expend everywhere, feeding story where we empty muscle—not to accumulate or profit, but to encounter the world—to meet it and say it—to gather and give away (potlatch)—which is what language is, pure expenditure, steam coming off working muscle, sweat falling from brow to river.

I am close to shore close close I pry I draw the boat alongside some island it is here banks and birch tress we will gather and gathering encounter what words will flood out between us here rivering what we say surrounded saying.

Cclae. Clay. The name banks something can flood through. I can live with that. A “(de) Centre for Capital, Linguistic, and Alluvial Expenditures.” A potlatch.

Location #3 Unknown

Reflections of McCaffery—Robbin' the Hood: taking meaning from the Author-Gods and empowering the proles (but the proles ain't taking their newfound liberation well).

By resituating the site of meaning-formation to the reader, attempting to give the reader the tools to form meaning that were formerly the sole property of the author (Barthes' author-god from D.o.T.a), McCaffery turns a voyeur, a passive node, into a participant singing its location in the matrix of ideology. The act of reading a text with no clearly prescriptive purpose has the potential to reveal more about the reader than about the author or poem. This has always been the case, but with a carefully regimented and widely accepted method for content-delivery we were able to hide in the critical distance behind 'objectivity (egads)' and fidelity to the author's intent.

Poems used to be written in words we knew, about things we knew, in a manner that we found familiar, but recently the top has come off that pandora's box known as the community. What becomes clear, and has already been demonstrated, is that to understand something that seems as easy to understand as the sitcom three and a half men requires a whole nest of assumptions that disappear if you are in the community that birthed that show (namely the entire western world [sic]). The same is true for anything that can be 'read.' The first and silent annunciation of understanding (even if the understanding is in an attempt to lead to refutation) is a great big wave to say "I'm here! and I get it!"

Protest at the gates of meaning.

Not addressing the fact that language and capitalism are intertwined, such that the acquisition of language is a precondition for consumerist behavior and acceptance of a duty to produce, consume, and organize is tantamount to pretending there is no poverty in the world.

McCaffery's writing is perverse. It celebrates the desire for meaning by pointing out the inability of language to reliably convey meaning. I should clarify that understanding language is not simply the receiver's ability to link abstract concepts

and words to concrete things. Every time someone understands something, they silently affirm the entire system that plays into the ability to understand, meaning the social, political, economic, what-have-you systems that all participate in forming the armor around their 'identity,' that all allow for a pointing to them to occur, that all act when a person understands something like a giant red flag that loudly proclaims I am here and I support this system. The problem is that even pointing out that this is the situation, invokes the situation and McCaffery's poems are perverse for enjoying that paradox!

Christine Stewart said:

Partly McCaffery's 'manipulation' reveals the mechanics of the machine of lyric poetry (its traditions, assumptions etc.) and exposes to the reading reader the extent and intensity of their own investments in that machine and their own complicity in its functions.

from:

<http://journals.sfu.ca/poeticfront/index.php/pf/article/viewFile/11/9>>

It is no wonder people are trying to make the act of writing political again when content and meaning have been almost totally corrupted by the capitalist drive to production, where object, where content and meaning are produced to be decoded, read, rationalized... whatever. If we can find a way to frame writing as political before content is understood by a reader, then it is capable of circumscribing the totality of capitalism's territory, captured as it will be in a moment of paralysis before it spins off again, de-territorialized by its own sense of necessity.

I write of capitalism as an enemy, as a localizable force into a body that I can attack, even if that body is made of words, because it belies the fact that capitalism is an immanent axiomatic that bends every flow to its will. However, its will is non-localized because it is experienced as the voice of the father, as a command from within our own heads driven by fear and fuelled by its intertwined relationship with our survival as an individual and as a species. That is capitalism's masterstroke (making us believe in the correctness of masterstrokes and locking us into the desire to reproduce them ourselves to approach correctness, i.e., success).

Location # 4 Twin Island, Indian Arm

*There is always more to say. Our tussle, our muscle, brings warm saliva to an edge: lava.
We feed the story where we empty. Verbal flow to graphic marks, visions for algae scrawl.*

The Twin Islands, such as the South Sandwich Islands, are Oceanic Islands. These islands are “originary, essential islands. They emerge from underwater eruptions”—a vivisection of deep Pacific anatomy. What is below bloats surface, dislocating salt pastures and fracturing tides. Some of these islands rise slow, mimicking the turtle herds that lounge in ash forms. Some disappear and return as vocal miscues in orb yanked liquid. There is no time to annex these spaces, no high ground for girders, and no bedrock for concrete. Considering the characteristics of these Oceanic Islands, the memory I have of these islands perhaps expresses less the want of an actual island but for an upchuck or vocal, a gut pool of slang and patios. That islands are aggregates of interiors (lava, tectonics), that they are fragile geographical bulwarks invaded by lap and current, that they (sometimes) disappear in tide, all lead me to believe that this reverie is more about speech, specifically, of my own expenditures.

one

That islands cannot be relied upon; that islands are sites of waste and expenditure; that it was night and I was camping with strangers again.

two

So oral was our desire to reach this place of clog that we rung the mainland with yells, hoots, and muses of the coming paddle. However, I knew in that moment, as I know now, that those vocal patters would dissipate in ocean current and turbidity, that our fervour to reach Twin Island (no matter how many times we licked the shore) would remain part of the mainland. Although I puffed and whooped atop tectonics, I knew that access to this island would be equivalent to washing the mouth out with soap—vocal erosion—a forgetfulness of the disruption and inflection that hived in

my own mouth. This is not new, this voyage to place, and nor is the fixation of hull and lips to sea. Perhaps though, lusting to forget my own tongue on tephra deposits signals a desire for interiors—to spelunk through the noise our mouths expend and lantern lungs and guts—where eruptions epicentre.

three

Nylon shoals pock this place of drown. Our bodies lie together, their worn trysts flirt the massing palps. “This isthmus floods”—swills between our cavities as we pass barnacles from tongue tips, each to each, secrete to accrete, tic tac rattle and moan until octopus pad our lungs, suction and grapple the prattle of our moontide blather. I archive in atoll. Munch cerebrum as coral. *Almost drown* appears as hieroglyphs: that of vocal bawl to that of flipper puncture. Pastel drenched mouths or legs blotched with heavy passes. We hush and crinkle against the slow salt creep, our thoughts dampen and shamble:

I take a boat to you, archipelago, my only tracks: wake. If I swim, only flail and tread muffle against your turquoise bellow. Cartography forgets my mouth. Legend tattoos mouth as stitch. You have survived the absorption that once contained you. Irked nations with longitude creeps. I slick towards your pillow lava. Desire your fixed geography, your annex and floral anthem, the ability to count your species, to always fear flood and dream now of slow erosion. Of sleeping always in your middle, hoping to wake afloat.

four

It is virtually impossible to examine such a memory, so fraught as it is with lust and geographical formations, with epidermis and minute species. However, the basic scaffold of the memory is that I was camping, many years ago, with a group of boys and girls from a nearby summer camp. Our destination was Twin Island and an ill-advised camp on the tidal isthmus which began to flood late into the night. The need to seek direction from such a reverie will always be disrupted by the fact that dreams, like memories, are closer to hieroglyphic texts than that of verbal speech. Think of this memory as the stain spit leaves on the pavement rather than the actual

chatter before mucus. In other words, we must get down on our hands and knees to examine the splatter before it dries. No longer can we rely on the noise of speech for recollection. Rather, it is the scar; what is expended, the body in tumult which wriggles amidst our synapses.

Perhaps we can even add ecology to this supposition of *memory by expenditure* by examining the Chinese myth about the origin of writing as recounted by Chang Yen-Yaun in the *Li Tai Ming Hua Chi*: "The K'uei star with pointed rays is the Lord of Literatures on earth and as Tsang Chieh, who had four eyes, looked up into heaven he saw images dropping down from the star and these he combined with footprints of birds and tortoises."

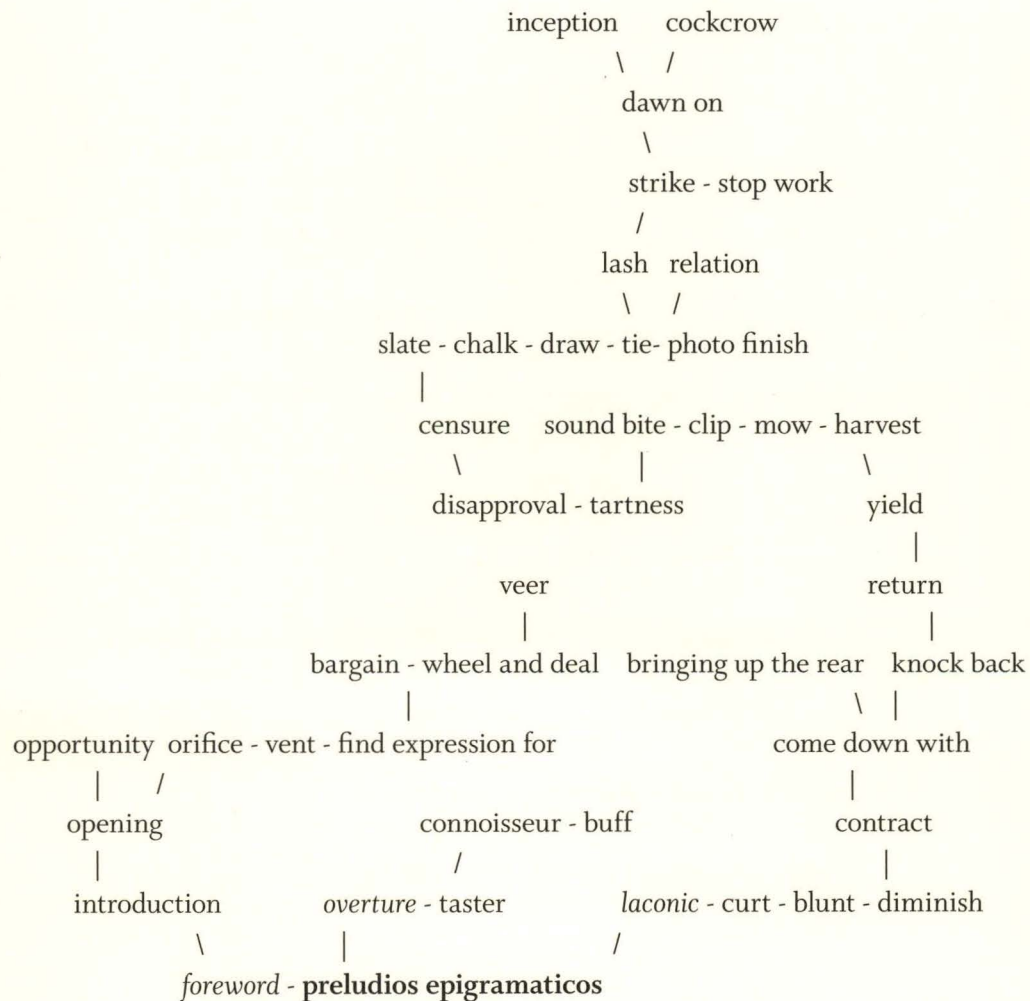
In this myth, writing, image, and the visible mark are all linked by movements of outflow and expenditure: Images *drop*. Footprints are *left*. Writing is *detritus*. What then can we say about memory? Perhaps memory, like writing, is the midden heap full with hunks and chunks of sense, pleasure, pain. Again we find ourselves on our hands and knees, desperate to reconcile the visible with our image, rummaging for mussel shells from May's harvest, for one lover's hair or bones from meals. So then it is possible to examine certain reveries, but only by crawling and sniffing through what is *left*. But how to recall an event that took place on an island? A space that is hemmed in by vicious borders; a space that risks its earth for tide; a space that only has so much room for crawling.

ROBERT SWEREDA / Arpeggiations

arpeggiation 2

score - scratch - mark of respect - tribute	frisk - inspect - check - try out - obtainable
worship - adoration - exaltation - <i>eulogy</i>	<i>skip</i> - cut - saw - aphorism - cliché - facile
elogio de la danza	
obligation - appreciation - approval - <i>praise</i>	<i>caper</i> - jape - trick - skill - flair - gift
graffiti - lettering - scribble - hand - applause	prance - flounce - storm - gale - tempest

arpeggiation 3

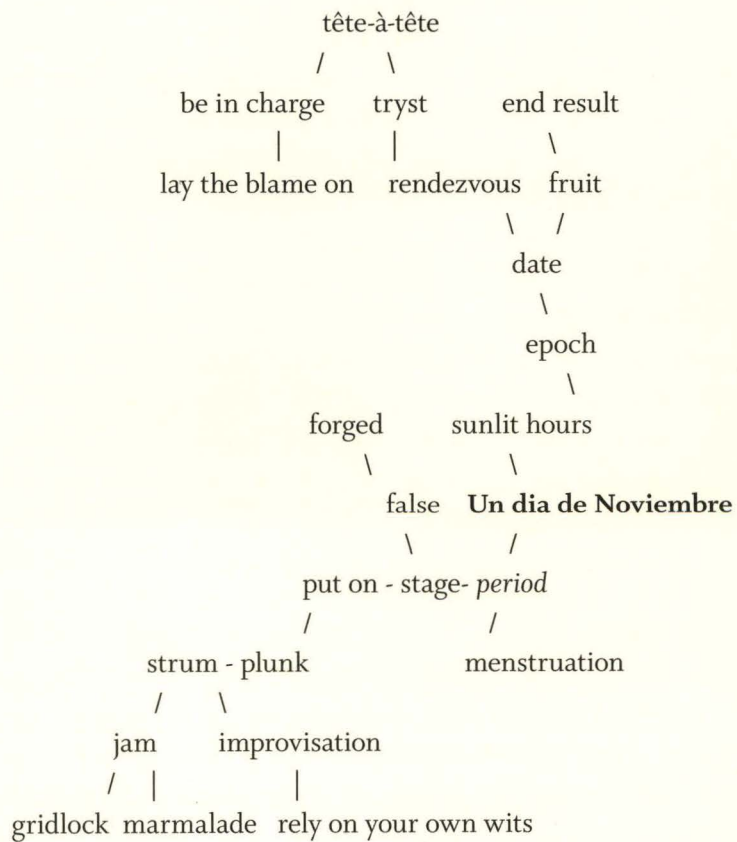


arpeggiation 4

Rito de los Orisha

stomach.
 / \
 gut. bear out.
 / \ \
 intuitive. ransack. verify. - support. - assistance. chain. pattern.
 / |
 immobilize. mold.
 / |
 arrest. mildew.
 / |
 coarse. - gross. take in for questioning. growth.
 / |
 abrasive. probe.
 \ |
 brusque. explore.
 / \ |
 lose the thread. - wander. edge through. get the drift. - see the sights.

arpeggiation 7



JONATHAN BALL / An Ode and a Short Story

That Most Terrible of Dogs

Waiting. Waiting to catch the drift. Waiting for the ration of rainwater to decrease and the run-off to increase. Waiting for this to carry soil. Waiting for something empirical and wise. Waiting to be bushwhacked by a few of them. Waiting to read all the info and be impressed with everything they say. Waiting to determine whether Nick is Hemingway. Waiting to find out who is speaking at all times. Waiting to be either of the two. Waiting for it to turn. Waiting to find out it's really great and that my life has changed. Waiting in the material world. Waiting for all that exists in the world of forms to be perfect. Waiting for the collision of two plates to produce larger forces. Waiting for triggers and hairy delirium. Waiting for denial and magpies. Waiting to be conversant in veal. Waiting for acrimony as a literary device. Waiting to stagger antagonistically to an ejection. Waiting for my car to humanize and tap reserves. Waiting for a solution that is less final. Waiting for warlords to decide. Waiting for my immunization and for the exhibition to begin. Waiting to pole vault over bookmakers. Waiting for compensation. Waiting for the files. Waiting for waterproofing. Waiting for improvement in terrorism. Waiting for a boost to being underrated. Waiting to adopt a panicky creed. Waiting for the theatre of the tabloid. Waiting for phrasing with nitrogen. Waiting for colour bites. Waiting to teem. Waiting to cleverly make contact with the myth. Waiting to counteract the haste. Waiting to recur. Waiting to effectively use the existing infrastructure in the best possible manner. Waiting to see the real war while the public sees only the nationalism and the patriotism. Waiting to become even more involved in the stories. Waiting to be whatever I want to be if I am willing to work for it. Waiting for my work to be unlike others. Waiting to market my resilience. Waiting for the empire to mount its tenants. Waiting for the violence of the megaton. Waiting to thrive on the wiretaps. Waiting to glow and decay. Waiting for inspiration, surreal and corrosive. Waiting to be involved in a third-rate gallery love affair. Waiting for the resistance to break the hunger strike. Waiting for your sneaking blush to grey. Waiting for a modernized voting booth. Waiting for provisions to show me the way. Waiting until they quantify the results. Waiting to love the aggravation and drudgery. Waiting for my area code to stand in for my abdomen. Waiting to test my hypothesis, for the best man to become a heavenly

windbreaker. Waiting to speak to the creator of society and grapefruit. Waiting for a torrent on the patio. Waiting to embarrass those bourbon federalists. Waiting for the adultery to haemorrhage. Waiting for the period at the end of the outboard motor. Waiting while yonder a credit card gleams. Waiting for my posthumous guarantee. Waiting to fasten my principles to cynical schemes. Waiting with the impartiality of a counterfeiter. Waiting for my luck to bygone. Waiting, glorious in insomnia. Waiting for the anniversary of the fetus overcome. Waiting for a series of vicious courtships. Waiting, boastful and rectal, quoting panhandlers. Waiting to vigil with Virgil. Waiting for the affirmative, to tar the feathers, short circuits, implement nausea. Waiting to resign on corruption charges. Waiting for rheumatism, lumbago, and other complaints. Waiting for the plain fact that it was my heart. Waiting with my pennants for eternity. Waiting to discover the full extent of my lawn. Waiting for the deportation of all these saccharin products. Waiting with the other parishioners for the generalized entity. Waiting to take the shortcut, the barrel. Waiting to pervert it all. Waiting for exoneration, alleviation, dislocation, to be rephrased. Waiting for my generation to generate. Waiting but for nourishment, thus nonchalantly, for the cheetah to stripe. Waiting in homeroom for more monkeys. Waiting to increase my vocabulary with an adventure safari. Waiting to appeal to the working class literati. Waiting, succinct. Waiting for it to be unusually hot, and to tire easily. Waiting to face the increasing gap between rich and poor, the huge international debt, and the need to redistribute those responsible. Waiting for actions and events that occur around me to go beyond my control. Waiting not with science, but religion. Waiting to avidly study the Bible, seeking truth, in religious fervour. Waiting for what constitutes jade. Waiting in a non-violence quandary. Waiting to be misread. Waiting for the intense retail reality of the hornet shopkeeper buzzing around its pie charts. Waiting in studied irreverence. Waiting to deflect openness, to deforest anarchy. Waiting to nurture the apolitical. Waiting as an enraged post-artisan. Waiting for the athletics to be tastier. Waiting to steamroll over the palaeontology of ice. Waiting to condense after a series of trials. Waiting, confident in my ascetic. Waiting on the on-ramp to extinction. Waiting while imperilled by billiards. Waiting in homage. Waiting incongruous with the voyage. Waiting literal and figurative. Waiting and indulging my inner sociopath. Waiting to be educated by billionaires in drag. Waiting for readable authorities. Waiting drunk and not sure which fork to use. Waiting, in the jaws of Cerberus, that most terrible of dogs.

Salvador Dali Lama

I am the Salvador Dali Lama, shake my hand
marvel at my power, shake my hand
let lobsters now be telephones, wave my hand

invite twelve more for dinner, I will be the thirteenth
the betrayer, for that is my great genius
mixing religions with metaphors, mixing oils
slick back my hair, stroke my moustache, where's your wife
she will die and be reborn as mine, my Gala Lama

you didn't look her in the eyes, I see nothing else
I barely see her breasts, look at her eyes
I will put her in a painting, edges blurred
but those eyes sharp, tigers leaping from fish

I am the Salvador Dali Lama, shake my hand
all dogs are Andalousian, wave my hand
let all ages be golden, wave my hand
in robes of shadows, melted watches on my chest
pulling me down, from melted trees, dripping earth

in eggshell worlds, on the backs of elephants
legs all the way to Heaven, virgins break
I will be reborn as nothing, will be made perfect
ants crawling out of my head, freed from want

I am the Salvador Dali Lama, shake my hand
the world is made of nightmares, take my hand
all of the faces are mine, or my mother's
all of them laughing, all at different things

The Woman Who

Brushing hair from her eyes, she thought she might go to the country. She could rent a cottage, a modest one, by a deep lake around which arcs and winds a walking path. Along this path she would stroll through afternoons, watching how the shadows of trees bristle with so many shadows of leaves, moved by the shadow of wind, as invisible as the shadow of light. In a notebook she would write that down, shadow of wind, shadow of light. This might be a small notebook, the kind that fits in one hand, or even a fairly large one, with all sorts of cuttings and pictures pasted into it, a promise of some future project, who knows. The locals might think of her specifically as the woman with the notebook or maybe the woman who walks around the lake all the time or simply the strange woman. She wouldn't mind. She did not go the country, however, because she didn't really care for the country, and eventually she died.

News Item

The 911 call was placed at exactly 12:17. By the time emergency vehicles arrived, however, it was too late. A witness claimed to having heard strange noises, "like an engine," moments beforehand. The local sense of betrayal may well have serious political ramifications. "This isn't what we expect in this neighbourhood," said one tearful woman who used to do occasional babysitting. "You just don't expect it at all. This isn't what we're about." Hours of hard rain have quickly made forensics work more than usually difficult. Managers were willing to state only that there were certain irregularities in the financial records. Police are asking for help from the community.

Rebel

My father is the leader of the rebels. With cause he is greatly feared by the militia. For his own safety, he has no name, and I am unable to identify him. He is one of the tribe but which one I know not, though of course I have made guesses and have preferences. I have even, I am shamed to say, laid a few snares to try to trick someone in the tribe into telling me which one is my father, or even to disqualify someone. My mother died two seasons ago, and even on her deathbed she would say nothing, or would give only the answer she always gave: the tribe is your father. Her breath became shorter and shorter and no name in any of them, even the last, not even mine.

It is not what we call things and persons that matters but what they do and how we treat them. This wisdom was given me by a tribesman, a compassionate man who may have been my father. He is dead now; almost the entire tribe is gone. With my assistance it will not be long before the militia gets them all, and I will at last know something of my father.

Next

When the missionary translated the tragedy of Christ's crucifixion to them, the savages waited and asked what happened next. The missionary told them in their own language about the miracle of Christ's resurrection, and the savages asked what happened next. Trying not to become cross with them, the missionary tried to impress upon them the depth and scope of this tragedy and that miracle, and told them of the divine promise that Christ will come again. Then what, asked a muscled savage who was very handy with his spear. Then, explained the missionary, everyone shall rise from the dead and all who believe in Christ shall rise and go to Heaven. Then what, the missionary heard and with an eye on the able spear he said as gently as he could that there was no then what. Then, piped in one of the young girls whose first menstruation had been recently celebrated, Christ takes everyone for a swim in the river. The missionary smiled, but she went on to tell of Christ's meeting the king of the fish at the bottom of the river, of how they sang together until the moon dipped beneath the water to hear them, and Christ caught the moon in a net. The missionary heard himself ask what happened next.

PETER QUARTERMAIN / Disturbing Poetry: Robert Duncan's Early Work¹

I want to compose a poetry with the meaning entirely occult, that is—with the meaning contained not as a jewel is contained in a box but as the inside of a box is contained in a box.

—Robert Duncan²

At birth, Duncan was named Edward Howard Duncan after his father, but his adoptive parents renamed him Robert Edward Symmes when they took him into their care;³ Duncan kept that name until, as he recorded in a notebook in 1941, “I have changed my name and disowned my family completely. Now, Robert Duncan” (Notebook 4, CU-BANC). Yet it would be more than twenty-five years before he legally changed it, on 16 February 1967, to Robert Edward Duncan. The circumstances of his birth and adoption appear more than once in his writing, and questions of identity, self, and the person permeate his notebooks, his reading, and his work. On 23 April 1967 he wrote to Robin Blaser of “the contrast between the authentic in poetry (you) and the derivative (me)” (“Returning” 60).

His mother, Marguerite “Daisy” (Carpenter) Duncan, died within hours of his birth on 7 January 1919 in Oakland, California, and his father, a day-labourer, soon put him up for adoption. On 1 August (Lammas-day) Fayette Harris Philip (who would become his Aunt Faye) told her sister about him, and on 4 August he was taken into the care of Edwin Joseph Symmes (an architect) and Minnehaha Harris Symmes. In their quest for a child the Symmes, both theosophical Hermeticists, had sought the guidance of astrological charts provided by the Oakland Hermetic Brotherhood, and they returned to that guidance in 1920 when they adopted another child, who

1 This essay is a preliminary version of the “Introduction” to *The Collected Early Poetry and Plays of Robert Duncan*, edited by Peter Quartermain, to be published by the University of California Press, probably in 2011.

2 From a letter to James Broughton, recorded in Notebook 5 (CU-BANC). Duncan gave this notebook to Robin Blaser as a 1952 birthday gift.

3 For much of the biographical information on Duncan's early years I am deeply indebted to Lisa Jarnot, whose *Ambassador from Venus: Robert Duncan*, is indispensable. I also draw on Ekbert Faas, *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet as a Homosexual in Society*, to whose data Jarnot frequently supplies correction.

they named Barbara Eleanor Symmes. “I was adopted by astrology and as an infant I understood I was of the last generation of Atlantis,” Duncan said in 1982 (“Wind and Sea” 67). Household talk would at times turn on such questions as whether or not there had been aeroplanes in Atlantis, or the date and nature of the impending destruction of the New Atlantis which they believed America to be. Duncan’s childhood, even before he could read, was filled with story, not only of Atlantis but of demonic possession and darkness as well as benign inspiration and light: “Greek, Hebrew and Germanic myth, along with family lore of early pioneer days in the West” (TLM 2). Along with Andrew Lang’s “coloured” Fairy Books, Frank L. Baum’s Oz books became lifelong companions, and the world of the Symmes, conventional in most respects, was a world suffused with hidden meanings, ancient lore, signs and wonders, matters occulted from ordinary view. In such a world, books like George MacDonald’s *Lilith* and *Phantastes* were to be read as coded truths from the world of the eternal, stories written not for children but for the child-like: “What can it matter that neither you nor your child should know what it means?” MacDonald asked in *The Light Princess and Other Fairy Stories*: “It is there not so much to convey a meaning as to wake a meaning.” Such stories, “speaking,” as Duncan later put it, “from the realm of lost or hidden truth” (TLM 8), were a source for recurrent discussion and analysis in family conversations, a practice echoed in Duncan’s own poetics: “I study what I write as I study out any mystery. A poem, mine or anothers, is an occult document, a body awaiting vivisection, analysis, X-ray,” he wrote in 1953 (“Pages” [2]), and from 1947 and even earlier his notebooks began intermittently but persistently to devote much space to exercises in phonetics and extensive reading in linguistics, to close phonological analysis of poems. “I’ve got to have the roots of words,” he told Denise Levertov in 1958, “the way the language works, at my fingertips” (Duncan/Levertov 120).

The practice of poetry, both writing and reading it (for Duncan the distinction was largely artificial), was a natural extension of his family’s occult interests and practice; his own childhood experience vividly fed his insistence, in the first place that much of the world is in fact hidden and calls out to be discerned—“things and events strive to speak” he would say in 1961, writing *The H.D. Book*—and in the second that the child’s vision is free of the impediments of adult habits—“Can a child,” he scornfully asked, “be a banker?” (“Pages” [3]). His deep distrust of such “adultery,” as he sometimes called it, informs his later political interests and activity—his

passionate opposition not only to the Korean War, for example, in *Faust Foutu* (1953), but his outraged offence at “the Roosevelt panacea for the ills of the profit system, the Permanent War Economy” (“Introduction,” *The Years As Catches*). His own inner conflict, which saw the power of the State as related to his own power as poet, “but turned to purposes of domination, exploitation and destruction,” is part and parcel of his necessity to find disturbance at the heart of the poem. All this inflects his attitude toward childhood, which cannot be seen simply as an instance of Duncan as a Late Romantic (which in most respects he is), nor can it be construed simply as a matter of taking all experience, including reading and writing, as a great adventure (which Duncan did). It is also a perceptual habit, almost perhaps a family trait, somewhat forcefully reinforced by a childhood accident. In 1922 at Yosemite, where the family sporadically but constantly lived (Edwin Symmes had a long-term contract there), the three-year old Robert fell, running across the snow, the sun-glasses he was obliged to wear (because he was snow-blind) broke, and—as he says in “A Sequence of Poems for H.D.’s Birthday” (collected in *Roots and Branches*)—“that explains how I was blinded and came to be cross-eyed....the vertical and horizontal displacement in vision that later became separated....One image to the right and above the other.” Occasionally, in later years in public readings or classes one eye would be fixed on the page, the other disconcertingly roaming. Such an overlay of images deeply inflected his poetry. In later poetry (most obviously in *Bending the Bow*) the poem began to be split, caesuras dividing the line left and right. But more importantly, that “double reminder always” in his vision peopled his daily world with presences, the child having to learn how to “point to the one that is really there.” At the same time, what with the household myths that were always before him in family conversation, the child had to learn also to heed those superimpositions, recognise those visible “signs and wonders, felt presences or nearnesses of meaning, where we must follow in trust” (*TLM* 2). So, inevitably, when in 1953 he heard Helen Adam reading Blake, he would instantly recognise a kindred childlike spirit in both.

By the time the Symmes family, following horoscopic advice, moved to Bakersfield in 1927 when Duncan was 8, he had started writing poems; by the time he left Emerson Junior High School in 1932, when he was 13, he had learned to fit in, joining the Dramatic Club and thereby acting in plays written by his class, writing for the school’s monthly magazine *The Emersonian* and becoming its Chief Editor, and officiating at what Ekbert Faas calls “most leading functions” (35) at the school—but none

of them athletic. At the very much larger Kern County Union High School (1932-1936) he once again took part in the Dramatic Club's productions, and contributed to the school newspaper *Blue and White* and its literary magazine *The Target*. But, as Duncan reports in *The H.D. Book*, the family, respectable in the closed community of Bakersfield, kept a low profile, quiet about its Hermeticism, its conversations about Atlantis, its discussions of the Kabbala. At school, it was no secret that he was gay though he never declared it,⁴ but despite the wide range of his activities and his mild popularity, he was more the outsider than he had been at Emerson; as he said in an interview in 1980 "It was clear even in high school, that I wouldn't have a second profession, and that I would be just a poet" (Cohn/O'Donnell 520). Such nonconformist ambition found encouragement in Edna Keogh, whose English classes in his final year of high school, 1935-1936, became (as he put it in *The H.D. Book*) "a realm of expectancy for me" as she pushed a select group, "set apart from the mass of those attending high school," into "our own explorations." Under her tutelage the sixteen-year-old Duncan read a range of modernist avant-garde work emphatically outside "the matter of a prescribed course," including Lawrence's *The Man Who Died* and Woolf's *The Waves*, poems by Ezra Pound and H.D. His homosexuality, of course, set him further apart. On one occasion in the fall of 1935—after his father's death from heart attack that September—a young man attacked him (perhaps after their sexual intercourse, the details are obscure) and beat him so badly about the head that he briefly ended up in hospital, the police quizzing him about his assailant. It would not be until Duncan entered the University of California as a freshman in 1936 that he could, clear of his mother's watchful eye and her skeptical opposition to his determination to be a poet, enter homosexual relationships more securely.

Duncan's at times intense engagement with politics, which started almost as soon as he arrived at Berkeley, would mesh nicely with his writerly ambitions. Joining the staff of *The Occident*, run by the English Club at Berkeley, he joined too the American Student Union (more radical than the Young Communist League), became editor of its news-sheet *Campus Review*, and with Trotskyist Viriginia Admiral started a little magazine, *Epitaph*, which only lasted one issue. In the process he discovered how to join as well as tap networks of little magazines, and how not only to publish his work but to maintain *complete* control over its publication—a principle he could not stead-

4 I owe this and related information to Ken Hooper, who as archivist at Bakersfield High School has examined pertinent papers and also spoken with some of Duncan's classmates.

fastly follow until after the publication of *Bending the Bow* in 1968, when he began to publish his own work privately. At Berkeley he read the work of T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound—*The Cantos* enthralled him—and he was active in literary as well as student political life both on and off campus. But in December 1938 he left Berkeley for Philadelphia to join his lover Ned Fahs, who had got a job teaching at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, thus beginning a somewhat peripatetic existence which began with a Christmas visit, along with Ned, to James and Blanche Cooney at The Phoenix Community and Phoenix Press on Maverick Road in Woodstock, N.Y.—where he met Anaïs Nin. He would spend the summer at Phoenix after he broke with Fahs in April or May 1940, but also spend much time in Manhattan, part of Nin's circle along with Henry Miller, Kenneth Patchen, George Barker, Edgar Varèse. Over the next few years his itinerant existence included three months in the army (at Fort Knox) which ended with a dishonorable discharge on 25 June 1941 as a "sexual psychopath." Working as a typist was his fall-back position, but he also worked as a dishwasher in Provincetown, as well as on a farm run by the Cooneys in Ashfield, Massachusetts, worked as a stockman in shipyards back in California and as a travelling salesman for Dell Books in Boston. Knocking about is perhaps the best way to summarise a life marked not only by a brief army career but by an almost equally brief marriage to Marjorie McKee in 1943—he called it "my graduating degree in psychoanalysis" (letter to Robin Blaser, 14 November 1955 CU-BANC), and recorded something of its flavour in his short story "Love." In those years he enthusiastically developed his interest in the world of painting—here he was helped both by Nin and her circle and by Virginia Admiral—but devoted most of his energies to his writing, working on his novel *The Shaman* as well as many poems. In 1942, with a covering letter by Nin, he submitted two poems to *Poetry*—his first publication in a widely circulated magazine—following this up with a review of Patchen in *Accent* (Autumn 1942) and, in 1944, with his controversial essay "The Homosexual in Society" in Dwight Macdonald's *Politics* (August 1944). That essay, which he later characterised as an attempt to "insist...upon concern for the virtues of a homosexual relationship" (67), in its insistence that the necessity to conceal a homosexual life both dishonours Love and betrays public trust, so disturbed John Crowe Ransom that after he had accepted "An African Elegy" for publication in the influential *Kenyon Review* he refused to print it.

In New York, and then in Berkeley, Duncan increasingly came to see that the poem should be a direct record of the actual process of writing it—he later referred to it as “testimony,” like William Carlos Williams perhaps, or like the Pound of the *Pisan Cantos*, refusing to separate the poem from the life, the poet from the man. In the long term this would lead him initially to reject his inclusion in both the now-famous “San Francisco Scene” issue of *Evergreen Review* (1.2 [February 1957]) and Donald M. Allen’s pioneering and highly influential anthology *The New American Poetry: 1945-1960*, angrily expostulating that both ventures did nothing more than pander to a destructive careerism: “I want to write as the universe sings,” he wrote to Robin Blaser in exasperation after he had agreed to take part, “not for appreciation, but in appreciation; not in order to be admired, but to admire; to love, to celebrate” (30 April 1957 CU-BANC). As he somewhat ruefully admitted to Blaser almost a year later, when Allen was putting the finishing touches on the anthology, “I have myself an ambitious shade that can disturb the roots of creative spirit” (2 September 1958 CU-BANC). His literary activities and interests, his struggles with his own ambitions as a poet and his struggles to clarify his own poetics, meshed nicely with his growing political awareness, his renewed attraction to Anarchism. Meeting André Breton in New York refreshed his interest in a by-no-means-apolitical Surrealism, if indeed it had waned, and with Jackson Mac Low and Paul Goodman he more-or-less regularly attended Anarchist “discussion meetings,” a practice he would continue after he returned to California in September 1945 to lodge with his old Anarchist friends Mary and Hamilton Tyler, who farmed chickens in Guerneville, Sonoma County, at Pond Farm. When the Tylers moved to the 80-acre farm Treesbank in Healdsburg, Sonoma County, in January 1946 Duncan went with them, writing the “Treesbank” sequence of poems (in *Heavenly City, Earthly City*) while there.

The Tylers shared many of Duncan’s literary views, encouraged Duncan’s writing, and were active in literary as well as Anarchist circles; both Pond Farm and Treesbank were a frequent meeting-place for writers and Anarchists. Regular visitors included Kenneth Rexroth and Philip Lamantia among others; William Everson (“Brother Anoninus”) came to Treesbank on release from his internment in Waldport, Oregon, as a conscientious objector—he was an Anarchist and pacifist. In this environment Duncan wrote the first of the poems he would print in *Heavenly City, Earthly City*. In the summer of 1946, he moved back to the city (Mary Tyler gave birth to her first child, Brenda—for whom Duncan initially wrote *The Cat And The Blackbird*—in

July), working as a typist at the University of California, meeting Jack Spicer at an Anarchist meeting and through him Robin Blaser, and setting himself up as a kind of poetry entrepreneur by organising a series of poetry readings, discussions and informal lectures at a somewhat tumbledown boarding house on Telegraph Avenue. The lectures, when not given by Duncan, were by friends like Kenneth Rexroth or sympathetic faculty like Thomas Parkinson, on *Finnegans Wake*, Lorca, *Paterson*, Gertrude Stein, Eliot's *Four Quartets*. Between them Spicer, Duncan and Blaser talked of themselves as starting a "Berkeley Renaissance" (which later became a foundation for the San Francisco Renaissance of the 1950s), and discussed the writing of poetry in terms of magic and magical practice. "We called ourselves the Berkeley Renaissance," Duncan said much later; "we meant that our poetry was really a Renaissance poetry: that Ficino would come into it; that questions of Dante and Petrarch would underlie it" (quoted Ellingham/Killian 79).

The intense literary conversation and activity of this period scarcely diminished when, in January 1948, Duncan joined Spicer and Blaser as a student in the "Civilization of the Middle Ages" programme in order to study with Ernst Kantorowicz (Spicer had enrolled in the Fall of 1947). The aristocratic and muscular dandy Kantorowicz, the great scholar of what he would call "medieval political theology," had been a member of Stefan George's largely homosexual inner circle, the *Georgekreis*, consisting of aesthetes devoted to preserving the highest essence of traditional art and beauty, and which saw Beauty (Poetry) in more or less theological terms as an Office to and for which the Artist (Poet) was responsible. His influence on the three poets was lasting, and profound: in the words of Michael Davidson, they "extended the lore of medieval and renaissance culture into their own lives, creating a spiritual and artistic brotherhood out of shared homosexual experience, occultism, and the reading of modern literature" (40). Kantorowicz's notions of the Office and Person of the King (which he later elaborated in *The King's Two Bodies*, 1957), and of a society ruled by a hierarchical spiritual aristocracy, especially fed Duncan's notion of himself as "a coterie poet not a regional one" (letter to Blaser, 18 June 1957 CU-BANC).

By the end of 1948 Duncan had been corresponding with Ezra Pound for two years, Louis Zukofsky for eighteen months, and William Carlos Williams for just about a year, had been visited by Charles Olson in April 1947 and had visited Pound at St Elizabeths in Washington D.C. that summer. It can be no surprise that Duncan viewed the English department with impatient suspicion, in an undated manuscript

probably from 1948 calling it "this Forest Lawn of the intellect" ("Berkeley Miscellany—A Venomous Note" NBUU). By the end of 1948 he had also published his first book. *Heavenly City, Earthly City* signalled that his poetic apprenticeship was drawing to a close: he would not print or reprint any of his earlier work, written between 1933 and 1946, until he published *The Years As Catches: First Poems (1939-1946)* almost twenty years later. In shaping *Heavenly City, Earthly City* by carefully selecting the poems from a larger body of work but preserving their chronological order of composition, Duncan adopted a pattern which two years later informed *Poems 1948-49*. In his unpublished "Introduction" to that book (CU-BANC) he described it as "a year's work and a year's record," but the record is selective, not complete. All of Duncan's subsequent books consistently maintain this pattern, some with but minor variations in the chronological order: they are all, that is to say, carefully shaped.

The intense reading, learning, conversation, and indefatigable writing, combined with a turbulent and frequently anguished love-life, made Berkeley, especially in 1947-1948, a vigorous forcing ground for Duncan's poetry. Three works in particular reveal his growing confidence in his developing technical skills and in the serviceability of experimentation and exploration; they clearly mark the opening stage of Duncan's mature writing life: "Medieval Scenes," written in February 1947 but not published until 1950; "The Venice Poem," written over several months in 1948 and published in 1949; and "The Effort," begun in October 1948 and completed some time in the Spring of 1949 when it was accepted for publication; it would not be published until 1989. In a 1977 draft of the "Preface" to the 1978 reprint of *Medieval Scenes* Duncan called it "the first poem in which I knew what I had to do from the dictates of the work itself and where I sat down to follow its course" (NBUU). Other than knowing that he would sit down and write a poem and then read it to his companions on ten successive evenings, Duncan did not know ahead of time what the poem would do; it thus took on the qualities of a dictated poem, and at the time he wrote it, February 1947, Duncan likened its writing process to a séance in which nothing was known ahead but at the end of which everything would—by virtue of being in the poem in the first place—be connected: a paratactic sequence over the meaning of which the poet had relinquished control. "The actual is riddled thru with rimes," he would say in about 1958 (*As Testimony* 14). *Medieval Scenes* was significant in Spicer's eyes as a preliminary form of the serial poem which became, as Michael Davidson put it (141), "a dominant compositional mode" for Spicer and Blaser. Duncan would later (from

the late 1950s on), in *Passages* and *The Structure of Rime*, himself take up and develop much of the practice he worked out in writing *Medieval Scenes*: "Writing is first," he would say in "The Structure of Rime 1" (written in 1955), "a search in obedience." Long before publication, *Medieval Scenes* rapidly became much talked of —Duncan gave public readings in 1947 and 1948—and perhaps because of its general unavailability (it was published by James Broughton's Centaur Press in an edition of only 250 copies) it acquired a somewhat legendary status in its way comparable to that accorded William Carlos Williams's sequence *Spring and All*, which after its 1923 publication was because of its equal scarcity talked of but seldom read.⁵

In 1975 Robin Blaser described the serial poem as "like a series of rooms where the lights go on and off. It is also a sequence of energies which may burn out, and it may, by the path it takes, include the constellated" (*The Fire* 119). That "constellated" neatly points to the non-hierarchical and multiple nature of the series' meanings. Joseph Conte characterises it as "more atomistic or molecular than plantlike.... The discontinuity of elements in the series... disrupts any internal development or progression of its materials.... There is no initiation, climax or terminus precisely because there can be no development" (*Unending Design* 22-23). The poem becomes a containment, and a release, of energy. Yet Duncan nevertheless insisted on the essential contribution of any part to the whole, telling Blaser in a letter dated 18 Aug 1957 (CU-BANC) that

In an articulated poem... every part must contribute to the movement. The only reason for greater articulation is to set words, phrases, breath groups, lines into a more complex movement. To provide gasps, sighs, periods of the meaning of the poem.... Each line is a proposition of the total structure.

Articulated: distinct words, intelligibly sequenced. But jointed or joined, as a skeleton might be.

Throughout his mature writing life Duncan insisted that his principal concerns as a poet are formal, at Black Mountain College in 1956 outlining his course as working towards "above all our own concern with this thing call'd FORM" (Notebook 19, 4 April 1956 NBVV). His notebooks and letters repeatedly come back to the question, on 2 July 1959 somewhat ruefully telling Blaser that "I am all but back where I was (1950) or so: isolated by my demands for 'form' from the fashions of the day"

⁵ The complete text of *Spring and All*, initially published in Paris in an edition of about 300 copies, was not reprinted until Harvey Brown's Frontier press issued about 500 copies in paperback as *Spring & All* in 1970.

(CU-BANC). When in 1948 he was writing "The Venice Poem," he noted in a review of Stravinsky's *The Poetics of Music* that "Poetics is the contemplation of the meaning of form" ("Poetics Of Music" 53); "The Venice Poem" explores the formal potentialities of symphonic structure to handle thematic complexities. Duncan adopted themes, materials and strategies ahead of time in this long meditation and exploration of contrasts and personal conflicts arising from the jealous rage and shock of a lover's betrayal. It draws on Williams's *Paterson*, Pound's *Pisan Cantos*, and H.D.'s *Trilogy* to weave a complex structure—what in an unpublished "Introduction" to *Poems 1948-49* he called "development by variations and counterpoint (an idea tone coming in counterpoint to the lingering tone previously introduced...)" (CU-BANC). Structured overall after Stravinsky's "Symphony in Three Movements" (with an added coda), the poem contrasts the contemporary world of his own experience (Berkeley, failed love affair and so forth) with worlds of which he has only indirect experience: lantern slides of Venice, a photograph of the Venus of Lespuges, historical and art-historical accounts of Byzantium, Shakespeare's *Othello*, and so on. Perhaps the poem was written toward what he did not know.

Duncan's assessment of *Medieval Scenes*, in 1978, is helpful here, and is equally applicable to "The Venice Poem": "curious, not learned; written in a certain glow of imagining the world of the poem untainted by such knowledge as might have raised any questions of belief or disbelief" ("Preface," *MS78*). The matter of "belief or disbelief" is significant, for in these (and other) poems of these years he was struggling to formulate his ideas about the truth-value of poetry, recognising—as he reiterated throughout his writing life—that the Poet is Maker: the poet makes up the poem, and in making up the poem makes up the world. Hence he would play, especially after writing *Letters*, with etymologies (whether false or true) of *make-up* (cosmetics), *glamour*, *gramary* (witch-craft, magic) and *grammar*. In a similar vein, he somewhat impatiently protested in a 1958 workshop against those who claimed to see "no meaning where I myself saw meaning" in two poems, by Harold Dull and Joanne Kyger:

I have my obsessions; and where my spirit feeds, where there is that other mystery of orders that I find in poetry, I am a fanatic not an aesthete. I can no more adjust myself to *like* or *dislike* here than I can *appreciate* the universe. I am in-bound to the event and suffer with the event in its disregard. I cannot get the perspective where there are levels shifting that these are effects or devices only;

for effect and device where various meanings begin their dance become The Effect, The Device, whose creature I am. (As *Testimony* 7)

"We must," says a line in "The Venice Poem" quoting Ezra Pound, "understand what is happening"—not, that is, judge and find unworthy.

The third crucial poem of 1948-49, "The Effort," both explicitly theorizes his own poetics of process as discovered and refined in his reading of Pound, Edith Sitwell, Williams, and Zukofsky, to whose work—none of it at that time at all generally read or "respectable"—the form of the poem pays homage; and at the same time explicitly identifies an artistic and musical avant-garde with which Duncan identifies. The inclusion of painters like Bonnard and Renoir suggests something of the importance Duncan attaches to the shifting ephemeral qualities of light; the inclusion of a composer like Satie along with Bunting, Sitwell and Whitman suggests something of the importance Duncan attaches to the fleeting impermanence of sound. Following Pound's advice (which he quoted in "The Venice Poem") to "be vitally aware of the duration of syllables, of melodic coherence, and of the tone leading of vowels," in 1948 he published "A Note on Tone in Poetry" in order "to indicate how in the trained ear variations will be played upon a vowel sound which introduces the poem"; with detailed examples he proposed that "An initial tone once sounded carries over in the mind as a bass tone thruout the time of the poem. Much of the pleasure of the poem lies in the echoes and reiterations of this sound" (14); in *The Truth and Life of Myth* some years later he spoke of vowels as "soundings of spirit upon which the form of the poem depends" and commented that "they are the least lasting sounds in our language; even in my lifetime, the sound of my vowels alters." In "Towards An Open Universe" (1964), looking back on the breakthrough poems of 1948-1949, he said "I began to be aware of the possibility that the locus of form might be in the immediate minim of the work, and that one might concentrate upon the sound and meaning present where one was, and derive melody and story from impulse and not from plan" (87)—a principle already apparent in these lines from "The Effort":

the language resisting
one's imperfect counsels but
having within it an endless
perfectability of forms (265)

These three poems, two of them the longest Duncan had written to date, mark a shift in his work. They announce what is clearly the first period of his mature work,

a period which, with the writing (1953-1956) of the poems in *Letters* (1958), segued into Duncan's great middle period, which saw *The Opening of the Field* (written 1956-1959, published in 1960), *Roots and Branches* (written 1959-1963, published 1964), and *Bending the Bow* (written 1963-1967, published 1968). In April 1960, with a grant of \$1,000, Norman Holmes Pearson commissioned Duncan to write an extended essay on H.D.; he had already started in 1959. This became *The H.D. Book*, an enormous project on which he consistently worked for nearly five years—until the pressures of *Bending the Bow* came to possess his imagination—at his death in 1988 it remained unfinished. *The H.D. Book* is a major summation of Duncan's poetics as well as of the origins and course of early modernist poetry; as an intense gathering of energies it deeply informs the poems and plays of Duncan's middle period, and is deeply informed by them.

There can be little doubt that the mature and assured exploration, experiment and accomplishment of Duncan's work after 1950 owes much to Duncan's initial meeting with Jess (who had attended a reading of "The Venice Poem" in 1949). In January 1951, the two exchanged marriage vows, and their shared enthusiasms propelled them over the following decades into a remarkable range and variety of collaborative work, from the production of *Boob and Fragments of a Disorderd Devotion* in 1952 through *Caesar's Gate* (1955), which they produced together during a year (1955-1956) in Mallorca, *A Book of Resemblances* (1966), *Names of People* (1968), and beyond. All five of these publications, along with *Writing Writing* (1964) come from Duncan's extremely prolific years, 1950-1956. In 1952 through 1954 he was (while doing other work too) especially engaged in a long series of Stein imitations. These constitute a major breakthrough in Duncan's work, and *Writing Writing*, which he finished putting together in 1955, played as significant a role in Duncan's writing life as *Kora In Hell* did in William Carlos Williams's. In imitating Stein Duncan found a means to put away his accustomed notion of *intent*, to relinquish authorial control—as Lyn Hejinian observes, "sometimes it is art's task not only to query the picture but to queer it."⁶ In the "Preface" to *Letters Duncan* put it in the form of a question: "to work with a constant excitement at play? this is when compositions appear as possibilities of movement. So I pursue a process of re-vision and disorganization to keep creation of the poem and consciousness of the poem in interplay." Throughout his writing life, almost from the beginning, Duncan sought disturbance at the heart of the poem, and wrote to Levertov of the excitement

6 Lyn Hejinian, "The Femme Fatale and the Schoolyard" (*The Grand Piano* 8 [2009]), 11.

of deciding, “on the instant,” between “the word that is surrounded by possible meanings, and the word that limits direction” (Duncan/Leverlov 120). The Stein imitations loosened his imagination; by installing disturbance at the heart of the writing process they freed his syntax from habitual constraints, opened up language as *source*—not, then, as medium of expression, but as agency. “If I can see where it’s going,” he told Cohn and O’Donnell, “so can the readers, so we won’t go there” (*Credences* 109). Thus, tensions between networks of possible meanings, between readers’ expectations and textual actuality, energize Duncan’s subsequent work: fields of possibilities resistant to conclusion, resistant to closure—the poem as open form.

Duncan’s correspondence with Creeley (begun in 1952), and his and Jess’s close company with him in Mallorca, contributed to Duncan’s increasing practice of poetry as discovery—“How will I know what I think till I think it?” was a favourite Creeley question; “How will I know what I write till I write it?”—the poem, then, as a *means* of thinking. Some years later, in *The Truth and Life of Myth*, Duncan would elaborate: “I evolve the form of a poem by an insistent attention to what happens in inattentions, a care for inaccuracies; for I strive in the poem not to make some imitation of a model experience but to go deeper and deeper into the experience of the process of the poem itself” (34), to embrace error and “be true” to it (48), for “a mistake is a mutation altering the life of the spirit” (34). What Duncan thus learned from his Stein imitations was crucial in his rejection, in those years, of his early work—he would not reprint or publish any of the work written before *Heavenly City, Earthly City* until 1966. He discusses his retrieval of that work in the “Introduction” to the republication, *The Years As Catches*. He turned his back on it because, as he wrote in his notebook in 1954, “My concept of a fruitful life is to be possessd rather than to be self-possessd” (Notebook 14 NBVV); in his “Sunday meetings” at his Haro Street apartment in 1957 he insisted that “The poem is a reality inviting you to enter, nothing to do with your personal ‘self’,” and hence (as he would come to see) not accessible to judgment. Assessing his early poems in 1969 (after he had re-admitted them “into my life’s work”—*The Years As Catches* xi) he commented that most of them “record personal episodes as poetic resolves or pretensions. Empty, or, rather, cloudy pretensions.” He favoured *Medieval Scenes*, where “flesh and love [are] projected as realities of the poem, the poet himself a voice of the poem, not a claim of the poem” (Notebook B, CU-BANC).

While Duncan was writing the poems in *Letters*, the pace did not let up. In Autumn 1954 he ran a creative writing workshop at the San Francisco Public Library,

through which he met and became lifelong friends with Helen Adam, whose enthusiastic persistence writing ballads reintroduced him to the ballad form, in the process reviving and strengthening in him his long-standing devotion to the uncanny and the occult. Completion and preliminary publication of an acting script of *Faust Foutu* in 1953 led to its performance in January 1955 and the completion—after his long stay in Mallorca and visits to Spain, France and England, March 1955 to March 1956—of another play once he got to Black Mountain College for the Summer of 1956, *Medea at Kolchis*. That Fall he became Assistant Director of the Poetry Center at San Francisco State College, setting up public readings for poets from across the U.S. Along with Blaser (who in 1956 moved to Boston and opened an intense correspondence with Duncan), he began working through the five volumes of the Soncino edition of the *Zohar* (1934). Its aim, to instruct Man in that which is occulted, its highly associative style, its detailed multiple exegeses of a biblical text word by word, syllable by syllable, and indeed letter by letter, chimed exactly with Duncan's own predilections (and the interpretive analytical habits fostered in his childhood by his parents' dinner-time and other conversations). By the time he put *Letters* together, he was roughly halfway through the second volume, and some time probably in April 1956,⁷ *Letters* almost complete, he commented on its title: "These LETTERS are the ones between Alpha and Omega who attend our works, the ones from A to Z, our building blocks" (Notebook 19, NBUU). He wrote the poems specifically for the projected book—a new departure which set the pattern for books which followed; from this point on, he would not (as he had for *Heavenly City*, *Earthly City* and subsequent books) trawl his notebooks for poems to put in his books of new poetry, though he would do so in compiling volumes of selected and collected poems. The poems in *The Opening of the Field*, *Roots and Branches*, and *Bending the Bow* (the three books which open *The Collected Later Poems and Plays*) were written specifically for them.

⁷ This "Statement on LETTERS" appears on a fresh page in the middle of Duncan's draft of his lecture "An Introductory Proposition," which he was preparing for his course at Black Mountain College that summer. He began the draft on 4 April. Duncan habitually, when an idea or the line of a poem took his attention, simply grabbed the most convenient piece of paper at hand to record it—sometimes, a blank page in the notebook he was working in right then, sometimes the nearest notebook coming to hand.

Sources and Abbreviations

I am deeply indebted to two major archives of Duncan materials, at the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley (CU-BANC) and in the Poetry Collection, State University of NY at Buffalo (NBUU). I thank both for their great and generous help. It also draws quite extensively on the work of Lisa Jarnot, installments of whose forthcoming biography, *Robert Duncan: The Ambassador from Venus* have appeared in various journals, and on Ekbert Faas's *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet as a Homosexual in Society* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow P, 1983). I have silently incorporated Jarnot's useful corrections to Faas.

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MICHAEL BOUGHN & VICTOR COLEMAN / from the Introduction to *The H.D. Book*

When Duncan began *The H.D. Book* much of the literary history that he recovered had been lost to the official protectors of Literature. His concern, especially with the work of the women who were so central to High Modernism, was unprecedented. The writing of Edith Sitwell, Laura Riding, Djuna Barnes, Mary Butts, and Dorothy Richardson, had largely disappeared into the mists of time, ignored by the almost entirely male cohort of professors who collected anthologies and wrote literary histories, patrolling the boundaries of Literature. That history was part of the occult content he sought to bring to light. And while his discussions of the work of Pound and Williams, of Yeats and Eliot and Lawrence were a significant contribution to the criticism of High Modernism, his focus was not on the literary, but again on those aspects of the work and its context that were considered out of bounds by the strict moralisms of the New Criticism.

The H.D. Book is not fundamentally a work of literary criticism or literary history. Nor is it, as some have proposed, an attempt to articulate a literary theory. In fact the book is deeply anti-literary in just about every way possible. In the same vein, although it delves into the thinking of various esoteric cults including Theosophy, Hermeticism, Rosicrucianism, Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, and Psychoanalysis, it is neither a Theosophical nor a Hermetic nor a Psychoanalytic text. Duncan's concern throughout was to create a space into which the hidden, the occult, could emerge. Long before the wave of post-War European philosophies crashed into the Halls of Academe in North America, Duncan was already exploring the significant moves they were to make to reopen the world to the multiple realities foreclosed by Modernity's singular Real. The indeterminacy of meaning, readerly texts, the diversity and multiplicity of the truths of the world, the fluid boundaries of "time" and "space," the fictionality of the subject, all these openings into those dimensions of the world rendered occult by the disciplinary institutions of Modernity, were the playgrounds of his thinking.

His goal there was straightforward—to discover a poetics. For Duncan, the idea that poetry could arise from a theory—be it a theory of linguistic production, a theory of economic production, or a theory of psychic production—was not only ridiculous, it was profoundly damaging to the spirit of poetry. Poetry for Duncan was always inextricably implicated with What Is, his designation of the world's plenum. And that plenum was fully determined at any given moment only with the admission of what was outlawed, repressed, excluded, ignored—of what was hidden. This is the occult reality that defines the unfolding engagement of *The H.D. Book*. No theory can approach that. Instead, a poet, a maker, must find/forgo a methodology that allows What Is to emerge, to find forms. Just as there is no singular Truth that can be theorized, there is no singular methodology. Each poet must find her/his own way into that process. “The poet and the reader,” Duncan wrote, “who if he is intent in reading becomes a new poet of the poem, come to write or to read in order to participate through the work in a consciousness that moves freely in time and space and can entertain reality upon reality.” *The H.D. Book* is a unique and stunning record of such a journey.

ROBERT DUNCAN / from *The H.D. Book, Book Three*

dreams

Is it of dream itself that Helen speaks then in the opening where “the old enchantment holds,” where:

The potion is not poison,
it is not Lethe and forgetfulness
but everlasting memory—?

It may be. Where

the breathing and breath-taking
climb and fall, mountain and valley

betray the oceanic being of the Sleeper, the ground itself of the dream. The dream itself that Achilles sees as also the veil of Cytheraea may be the Amen-temple, where

Sept. 4th / Helen tells us she is alone:

yet in this Amen-temple,
I hear their voices
there is no veil between us...

and the Dreamer, in the opening measures of the poem (it is the “Do not despair”), is presaged in Helen’s sense that:

Amen (or Zeus we call him)
brought me here;

fear nothing of the future or the past,
He, God, will guide you,
bring you to this place.

In God, in the dream, there is no veil between us. As in *The Walls Do Not Fall* there was:

and beyond thought and idea
their begetter,

Dream,
Vision.

and the Dreamer could appear there as:

Ra, Osiris, Amen appeared
in a spacious, bare meeting-house;

he is the world-father,
father of past aeons,

present and future equally;
beardless, not at all like Jehovah

[T]here was in life a Presence, as in Love a Master. We recall in the first so-called "Imagist" phase of H.D.'s work, in the poem "Pygmalion," published in 1917, the questions asked by the mask of the sculptor as artist engaged with the divine:

Now I am the power
that has made this fire
as of old I made the gods
start from the rocks?

am I the god?
or does this fire carve me
for its use?

•

In poem after poem H.D. (as during the same brief period Lawrence and Pound also were speaking in personae) spoke in the persons of Chorus, nymph, prisoner, priest of Adonis, Pygmalion, Eurydice, and then Demeter, Thetis, Circe, Leda. From these poems we begin to see that the "Image," the "intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time," was not simply an invention of the poet to convey vividly his impressions or sensibility in things but a form in poetry of trafficking with the daemonic and beyond the daemonic with the divine, the "swirl upon swirl of light?" of the poem "Pygmalion".

I

We learn in the novel *Bid Me to Live* that there had been an exchange in poetry between D.H. Lawrence and H.D. in the period of "Adonis" and "Eurydice" to which "Pygmalion" belongs, and an exchange in the dream. "You said, next morning, you heard me singing in a dream and found your face wet with tears," Julia writes Rico: "Is that true? How could you say that casually, while Elsa washed the breakfast things behind the screen?"

•

We are inhabitants of our dreams, and to wake is not to escape from the Dreamer for he remains to haunt us. These are the orders of the imagination: The poet in his imagination comes into a dimension beyond his invention or calling up where the imagination is received. In *Bid Me to Live*: "She felt curiously this room had been invented for her. It might have been said of her, from the moment of her entrance to this house, that she had felt the same of every room in this house. Every door, every shallow or steep step, every irregularity of passage-way, of door-sill held is peculiar and intimate reality. There was a charm over the house, of that she was certain." This is a realm in which the dream is most real and what we daily view as objects are subject to magic invasion. "The words themselves held inner words, she thought. If you look at a word long enough, this peculiar twist, its magic angle, would lead somewhere, like that Phoenician track, trod by the old traders." H.D. continues in Julia's delirium or reverie: "She was a trader in the gold, the old gold, the myrrh of the dead spirit. She was bargaining with each word."

•

As we in the course of this book, *likarsē*, have followed the lead of words or trying them to find a lead, “bargaining with each word—” “She brooded over each word, as if to hatch it” H.D. tells us of Julia-H.D.

But what we follow here is the lead of another time, twisting the “room” to tell us of this room as dream. “But I thought if you wanted me, you would ask me to come up to your room,” Julia writes Rico: “How could I climb those stairs, not knowing what you wanted?”

... “You said, next morning, you heard me singing in a dream and found your face wet with tears.”

•

“But I am aware of your spider-feelers, I am not walking into your net. I am not answering your questions,” “What room have you? What room has Vanio?”

We are in the realm of magic now, what the psychiatrist or psychoanalyst calls the psychotic: “This house caused you no anxiety. It was easy to block in, the whole thing was familiar. I, a familiar would be drawn literally into your picture. How could I walk up those stairs?” It is trafficking in dreams. She furnishes one more key as to how it is done: “Once a Dakota poet I knew said systematic starvation was a sort of dope. I don’t mean we starved actually. But doing without non-essentials leaves room, a room. I walked into it here.”

•

The great effort in the therapeusis of Freud was to avoid the psychotic possibility, to exorcise the room, to protect the integrity of the psyche against thoughts of invasion. The case histories of psychotic disorders carefully documented by orthodox Freudians are directly related to the particulars gathered by the Inquisitions in case histories of witchcraft: there was evidence in some of daemonic possession, but there was a wider practice in which human psyche invaded human psyche. Lawrence and H.D., Mary Butts or Yeats document in their work illnesses of a dangerously experimental course of the psyche. And Ezra Pound’s late *idée fixe* upon the perversion of the monetary exchange in the practices of usury and profit-commodities may have a hidden ground in his brief exposure to the increases and depletions of the “image” game.

•

Just as in magic men manipulated the harmonics of the divine to produce disturbances of harmonics in what we call fascination; or disturbances of the divine correspondences to weave a net of circumstantial evidence, to “pull strings” as we sense it, playing with influences; so men cast spells. Poets cast images. And in this Lawrence’s magic of casting the room or dream in *Bid Me to Live* is located as a drawing: “You made it all up, Elsa’s work-bag on the floor, the cups and saucers, the branch out of the window, when I thought you were writing. You were writing or you were painting rather, a branch out of the window, with the window-frame one side and the folds of the blue curtain the other. You drew the fanlight over the door, downstairs.”

•

This is evil; “Old English yfel,” the O.E.D. tells us: “usually referred to the root of *up*, *over*.” Where in the orders of the universe the services of craft or art become masterful in craft, crafty as artful; and the ease is dis-eased or mal-eased, we may pose as the Dreamer of our own dream or another’s; man, beast, angel, god may pose as the creator of Creation and appear to have power over things.

•

Helen struggles with the true state of what is, as often we do in dreams, in terms of her own art in letters: In her magic exchange (involvement with) Achilles, she traffics also in a magic claim (power) over Achilles:

I said, “there is mystery in this place,
I am instructed, I know the script,
the shape of this bird is a letter,
they call it the hieroglyph.”

•

(Writing on the Wall)

Freud, as H.D. tells us in *Tribute to Freud*, had viewed just this writing on the wall as “dangerous.” “We can read my writing,” she tells us (she is speaking of the writing that appeared on a wall to her in a vision, but it is also her own writing):

We can read my writing, the fact that there was writing, in two ways or
in more than two ways. We can read or translate it as a suppressed desire for

forbidden 'signs and wonders,' breaking bounds, a suppressed desire to be a Prophetess, to be important anyway, megalomania they call it—a hidden desire to 'found a new religion' which the Professor ferreted out in the later Moses picture. Or this writing-on-the-wall is merely an extension of the artistic mind, a *picture* or an illustrated poem, taken out of the actual dream or day-dream content and projected from within (though apparently from *outside*), really a high-powered idea, simply over-stressed, *over-thought*, you might say, an echo of an idea, a reflection of a reflection, a 'freak' thought that had got out of hand, gone too far, a 'dangerous symptom.'

•

So Helen tries to confess the truth about letters:

I said, I was instructed in the writ,
but I had only heard of it,
when our priests decried

papyrus fragments,
travelers brought back,
as crude, primeval lettering –

[W]hat saves her, what saves H.D. is the "Do not despair" that whatever the art, it is "as if God made the picture"; by magic, by violation calling forth violence we try to read:

no, I was not instructed, but I "read" the script,
I read the writing when he seized my throat,

•

And in Helen we learn that not only she, but other inhabitants of the Dream, have a magic and seem to dream each other's dreams. To communicate at all, creature to creature, creation must be used as meaning; interpretation itself is a power over things. "I can not 'read' the hare, the chick, the bee" H.D. Helena must confess for her own salvation. Here "the Sun, / hidden behind the sun of our visible day" is the Dreamer, Creator-Uncreated. "The invisible attunement is superior to the visible," Heraclitus tells us.

•

The dream may be the veil of Cytheraea, and the veil the fabric of Maya, and the Dreamer-Creator Brahma. For wherever in Western thought this dream in which we are dreamed appears as the world, we feel the Hindu influence.

In the years following the War Trilogy the theosophical and esoteric elements which had begun to operate in her poetics there increase. We are not on the wrong track to follow from Greece and Egypt to India:

you may ask forever, you may penetrate
every shrine, an initiate,
and remain unenlightened at last

she tells us:

How does the Message reach me?
do thoughts fly like the word
of the goddess? a whisper—

she asks.

(my own thought on the thought of another?)

.

So in *Palinode*-seven—Proteus, “the legendary King of Egypt, reveals the future, the mystery or the legend.” His is the enactment; “Nameless-of-many-Names he decrees.” He is “Sun behind the sun of day,” we learn in *Eidolon* 1:3, *Formalhaut*. Is it *formalhaut*, highest-Form? Is it the star *Formalhaut*, the month of *Pisces*—*Christos*? Helen hears “a voice to lure, a voice to proclaim, / the script was a snare.”

II

Helen in Egypt is a dream-fiction; it belongs not to the orthodox Freudian interpretation of the dream where the content speaks for the subconscious or the collective conscious; but the Dream of Helen-in-Egypt if the Dream of Alice-in-

Wonderland, of consciousness that admits other consciousness. It is the situation, as James pictured it in 1901: “as an interaction between slumbering faculties in the automatist’s mind and a cosmic environment of *other consciousness* of some sort which is able to work upon them.” Formalhaut or Farmalhaut is the Red King.

•

Lewis Carroll is playing games of the psyche, we sense in Alice. Yes:

The dream-child moving through a land
Of wonders wild and new,
In friendly chat with bird or beast—
And half believe it true

—we’re only, of Helen too, half to believe it true. “From a Fairy to a Child” Dodgson wrote sending his work:

Lady dear, if Fairies may
For a moment lay aside
Cunning tricks and elfish play,
‘Tis at happy Christmas tide.

•

It is not only for the Star, the Dreamer of the Dream, that Helen seeks to read the script—but she searches too for the Child: the Euphorion of the poem.

O Child, must it be forever,
that your father destroys you,
that you may find your father?

•

It is along another line tho that I want to trace the relation between the work of Lewis Carroll and the work of H.D. [quote H.D. from *Writing on the Wall* page 80] For they have, we find, a common element in the fairyland-dreamland lore of the nineteenth century, that makes it seem so childish or childlike to grown up minds.

TEXTS:

1. Éliphas Lévi, (Alphonse Louis Constant), *The History of Magic*. quote: pg 141 from "The Romans...were great observers of dreams"—
2. *Esoteric Buddhism* 1888
3. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*. I. pg 279, I 309-10, I pg 691
4. Lewis Carroll 1893. Preface to *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*. pg 463-464
5. George MacDonald 1895. *Lilith*. pg 349 thru to conclusion.

•

Sept. 11 The dream or trance if the summons of God where:

God's plan is other than the priests disclose;
I did not know why
(in dream or in trance)

God had summoned me hither
until I saw the dim outline
[grown clearer]

We are concerned in *Helen in Egypt* with the operations of the dream:

"Zeus be my witness," I said,
"it was he, Amen dreamed of all this
phantasmagoria of Troy,

it was dream and a phantasy";

Dante's vision and the dreams of the *Vita Nuova* give background to the tradition of phantasy we follow here: the revelation at nine years old, childhood being the locus and the child the secret person then: "He commanded me many times that I should seek to behold this most youthful angel: wherefore in my childhood often did I go seeking her..."; the power of the poet being that of an *alta fantasia*; the world in the Dream being the Divine World or Other world of the Dead in one—the testimony is Orphic and Shamanistic.

•

But it is more directly to certain dream workers of the nineteenth century—to Lewis Carroll, to George MacDonald and to theosophical fantasists. Here the dream in its movement resembles more closely the associations of Helen-in-Egypt. H.D. has no actual reference to Dante. Pound and Eliot may have, in their so authoritative Danteism, turned her aside, as she seems everywhere to have sought routes to experience outside the recommended charts. [She would, we surmise, have followed, had she read Dante, the alternate readings, to search out the curious heresy or more than Christian possibility in the imagination of Amor and Beatrice.]

It is to the heterodoxy of *Alice-in-Wonderland* (or *Alice's Adventures Underground*) and of *Phantastes* then that we would turn. Not because H.D. read here and was “influenced”—but because in the light of certain nineteenth century works, we may see Helen in Egypt with special emphases.

•

In the syncretic teachings of Éliphas Lévi, the revelations of Catholic Christianity, poetic testimony and magic tradition have a common ground in the Astral Light.

“There is a composite agent,” Levi writes in his *History of Magic*:

a natural and divine agent, at once corporeal and spiritual, a universal plastic mediator, a common receptacle for vibrations of movement and images of form, a fluid and a force which may be called, in a sense at least, the imagination of Nature. By the mediation of this force every nervous apparatus is in secret communication together; hence come sympathy and antipathy, hence dreams, hence the phenomena of second sight and extra natural vision.

A particular phenomenon occurs when the brain is congested or overcharged by Astral Light; sight is turned inward, instead of outward; light falls on the external and real world, while fantastic brilliance shines on the world of dreams; even the physical eyes experience with a slight quivering and turn up inside the lids. The soul then perceives by means of images the reflection of its impressions and thoughts.

But this light in which we now see “the source of all apparitions, all extraordinary visions and all the intuitive phenomena peculiar to madness or ecstasy,” where “it may be understood in a day to come that seeing is actually speaking and that the consciousness of the light is a twilight of eternal life in being,” is, Lévi insists, “the

word of God Himself,” the “*Fiat Lux*”; for “the soul enamoured with the pageantry of universal beauty, and fixing its attention on that luminous script of the endless book which is called things manifest, seems to cry on its own part, as God at the dawn of the first day, the sublime and creative words: *Fiat Lux*.”

•

Carried over into the schools of *Esoteric Buddhism*, where theories of evolutionism after Darwin and of the ultimate wisdom of the Vedanta were added to the syncretic essay, the Astral world appears as the Kama Loca. A.P. Sinnett, in 1884, pictured this astral realm, not as Lévi had—as the ground of high revelation—but as a lower *soul* ground contrasted with man’s spiritual reality.

“The individual consciousness, it is argued, cannot be in two places at once,” Sinnett writes in *Esoteric Buddhism*. “But first of all, to a certain extent, it can. As may be perceived presently, it is a mistake to speak of consciousness, as we understand the feeling in life, attaching to the astral shell or remnant; but nevertheless a certain spurious semblance may be reawakened in that shell, without having any connections with the real consciousness all the while gaining in strength and vitality in the spiritual sphere.” “The consciousness even of the lower principles *during life* is a very different thing from the vaporous fleeting and uncertain consciousness, which continues to inhere in them when that which really is the life, the overshadowing of them, or vitalization of them by the infusion of the spirit, has ceased as far as they are concerned.”

•

What *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* in 1865 with its “cunning tricks and elfish play” and then in *Through the Looking Glass* in 1872 where “*though the shadow of a sigh / May tremble through the story...*

*it shall not touch with breath of bale,
The pleasance of our fairy-tale.*

What in these works of Carroll had shown in the operation of the story-book—the pluralistic universe where Alice, Red King, and Kitten too share in the identity of the Dream—now in the “childish” deliberations of theosophy shows again.

•

“Language cannot render all the facets of the many-sided idea intelligible at once any more than a plain drawing can show all sides of a solid object at once,” Sinnett writes: “And at the first glance different drawings of the same object from different points of view may seem so unlike as to be unrecognizable as the same; but none the less, by the time they are put together in the mind, will their diversities be seen to harmonize. So with these subtle attributes of the invisible principles of man—no treatise can do more than discuss their different aspects separately. The various views suggested must mingle in the reader’s mind before the complete conception corresponds to the realities of Nature.” Sinnett and his mentor Madame Blavatsky presented an effort absurd in its dogma but admirable in its sense of the play of man’s realities; the letting things mingle in the mind was the creative genius of theosophy. Éliphas Léir had taught that Dante had triumphed over hell by inverting its dogma: “thanks to the pagan genius of Virgil, Dante emerges from that gulf above the door of which he had read the sentence of despair; he escapes by standing on his head, which means by reversing dogma.” And Blavatsky in turn would play Humpty-Dumpty with the official orthodoxies of Church of England and Science of England alike. She labored the absurd, as Carroll played with it. Blavatsky questioned every establishment in the light of every heterodox dogma. Carroll, George MacDonald’s son tells us, “the shy, learned mathematician who hated inaccuracy, loved to question the very multiplication-table’s veracity.”

•

Blavatsky delighted in correcting unverifiable spiritualization-tables. “The Earth was in her first Pûpa,” she writes in *The Secret Doctrine*: “the essence of which is the Âkâshic Principle...that which is now known as, and very erroneously termed, Astral Light.” Léir should have added, she tells us, that the *Lux* “is the body of those Spirits themselves, and their very essence”—here she is speaking of the Elohim. “Our physical light is the manifestation on our plane.”

•

In the teachings of theosophy this Astral Light was dreamland; but it was also fairyland or Wonderland. Outside whatever formed reality was an unseen lower and higher real, or (so that the Astral Light was thought of as the primal Egg of Leda from which Helen or the Moon, regent of dreams, was born) a globe or shell. “Our planet (like all we see)” —so the theosophical teaching went—“is adapted to the peculiar state of its

human stock, that state which enables us to see with our naked eye the sidereal bodies which are coessential with our terrene plane and substance, just as their respective inhabitants, the Sorraus, Marhaus and others, can perceive our little world." The Earth belonged to a "Chain" or "String"; it was a note in a scale of planets. But if one could change the scale, that was the constant theme of theosophy, if one saw a "terrene" Mars in the String of Terra, in the String of Mars other planets, another earthly reality could appear. "If he," Sinnett is told in *Esoteric Buddhism*: "would perceive even the dim silhouette of one of such 'planets' on the higher planes, he has to first throw off even the thin clouds of astral matter that stand between him and the next plane."

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The prospect delighted Carroll, where in his "Preface" to *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* in 1893 we find him posing his humor in theosophical terms:

It may interest some of my Readers to know the *theory* on which this story is constructed. It is an attempt to show what might *possibly* happen, supposing that Fairies really existed; and that they were sometimes visible to us, and we to them; and that they were sometimes able to assume human form; and supposing, also, that human beings might sometimes become conscious of what goes on in the Fairy-world—by actual transference of their immaterial essence, such as we meet with in 'Esoteric Buddhism'.

I have supposed a Human being to be capable of various psychical states, with varying degrees of consciousness, as follows:

- (a) the ordinary state, with no consciousness of the presence of Fairies;
- (b) the "eerie" state, in which, while conscious of actual surroundings, he is *also* conscious of the presence of Fairies;
- (c) a form of trance, in which, while unconscious of actual surroundings, and apparently asleep, he (i.e. his immaterial essence) migrates to other scenes, in the actual world, or in Fairyland, and is conscious of the presence of Fairies.

I have also supposed a Fairy to be capable of migrating from Fairyland into the actual world, and of assuming, at pleasure, a Human form; and also to be capable of various psychical states, viz.

- (a) the ordinary state, with no consciousness of the presence of Human beings;
- (b) a sort of "eerie" state, in which he is conscious, if in the actual

world, of the presence of actual Human beings; if in Fairyland, of the presence of the immaterial essences of Human beings.

He proceeds to tabulate passages from the two volumes of *Sylvie and Bruno* where "abnormal states occur."

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"And also, in the hope of suggesting, to them and to others," Carroll had written of his first *Sylvie and Bruno* volume and its child readers: "some thought that may prove, I would fain hope, not wholly out of harmony with the graver cadences of Life." The effort in theosophy too was to bring into harmony the seeming conflicts that appear between the graver cadences of Life that were orthodox in Christianity and other cadences of Life in other human religions.

•

The eerie voices of the Looking-Glass world do seem out of harmony with orthodox possibilities, but the key to its authenticity (and to the mis-take that parodies of Carroll must make is that it does belong in its humor, not among trivial farces, but to the graver cadences of the human spirit in its heterodox possibilities. The cult of Childhood, in the work of Lewis Carroll and George MacDonald, as a realm bordering upon Fairyland or Wonderland and likewise upon the Kingdom of Heaven, the Child as revelation of the divine self and the Dream as revelation of the divine World; and in the Romance, the shifting impersonations of a faërie or phantasy mode: these orders reappear in our work by H.D.

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Sept. 17

[T]he proposition of Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*: "The individual consciousness, it is argued, cannot be in two places at once. But first of all, to a certain extent it can," appealed, in a period when belief in the Christian world was newly challenged by developing sciences of geology and biology, to a childish make-believe in *Sylvie and Bruno*, the belief in the fairy world and the belief in the divine world stand in the same need of a child-like innocence of mind. The graver cadences more and more, like the fun of an open and inventive phantasy, must be carried by the imagination.

For the theosophists, Wonderland, fairyland, dreamland are one in the realm of the Astral light. For Carroll, as a churchman, there is on the one side the letting go of the serious imagination where "God has become a myth, and heaven a poetic fancy" so that "the light of life is gone." More and more the reality of God seems to belong to the reality of dreams and child-like make-believe. Unless you become like little children, you shall not see the Kingdom of Heaven, took on new meaning. "Heaven" too was an "other" world.

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So in MacDonald's *Lilith*, written in 1890, child, dream, sleep, being two places at once—and above all the imagined or fictive real—are keys to its structure.

•

"You see that large tree to your left, about thirty yards away?" [asked the Raven] 'It stands on the hearth of your kitchen and grows nearly straight up its chimney. That rose-bush is close to the lady at the piano. If you could but hear the music! Those great long heads of wild hyacinth are inside the piano, among the strings of it, and give that peculiar sweetness to her playing.' Pardon me: I forgot your deafness!"

"Two objects," I said, "cannot exist in the same place at the same time!"

"Can they not? I did not know. I remember how they do teach that to you. It is a great mistake—one of the greatest mistakes ever made! No man of the universe, only a man of the world could have said so."

•

Sept. 21

Back of *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. tells us, lies Stesichorus of Sicily's Palinode and Euripides' Helen in Egypt with the word of a phantom Helen at Troy and of the illusory reason for the War then. But Helen in the play of Euripides is not a magic power, we know nothing there of the real Helen's complicity in the War. The phantom is a thing of air, cast, not in Helen's desire, but by Hera out of the vanity of Menelaus and Paris. Helen's hubris is in her deranged matronly propriety: against the memory of Aphrodite's singing with flute and drums that once had changed the grief of Demeter, and against the passionate orders of the Great Mother Herself; and then, so the chorus accuses Helen, against the abandon, "the whirled course of the wheel in the air."

The Helen of H.D.'s phantasia takes from this ancient tradition her other Helen, but she is a complice of that wraith at Troy. She was at once in Egypt and at Troy. The scene of Euripides' play, no more than Egypt before the house of Proteus, no more than King of Egypt, in H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* has become likewise complex: for Egypt is dreamland and Proteus is the agency we find of the dreamer:

This is Formalhaut's temple,
not far from Athens,
not far from Eleusis,

yet Egypt; not far
from Theseus, your god-father,
not far from Amen, your father

but dedicated to Isis,
or if you will, Thetis;
not far from the blessed isles,

the Hesperides, or from Amenti;
not far from life-in-death,
another portal, another symbol.

•

From the second century we hear news of another Helen. One Simon, who claimed to be an incarnation of "the Great Power," according to our legend, had learned a magic in Egypt and had found in that magic a Helen or *the* Helen. The Church Fathers said that Simon's Helen was a prostitute he had picked up at Tyre. But in the Gnostic circles, where thought moved not towards orthodoxy and dogma but towards a multiplicity of meanings and imagination, this Helen was not only a prostitute, she was the Moon, not only the Moon but also the World-soul; A.E. Waite in his edition of Levi's *History of Magic* tells us that "it is said otherwise that she was Helen of Troy in a previous incarnation. This Sun-Logos-Simon and this Selene-Anima-Mundi-Helen were persons in magic of a charlatan and a prostitute. This magic, so the rumor went, was practiced in sexual intercourse, was something "known" in each other.

•

G.R.S. Mead in his discussion of Simon Magus tells us further there was something about a Fire and a Concealment; the spark and the veil of H.D.'s poem may have their origin in the Graeco-Egyptian Hellenistic world where after the conquests of Alexander a border upon India had been opened. It is the expansion of empire beyond the confines of "western" civilization—in the time of Alexander when the Greek world was exposed to the Indian world and in the time of Victoria, again, when the English world was exposed to the Indian world—that borderlines, not only of race and national character, mix, but religions too, wherever thought is not rigidly defensive, fuse. The Alexandrian Helen of Tyre and the Helen of our text come to life and multiplicity of being not only out of the Egg of Leda but also from the sphere of Kama.

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[note in margin]

from Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*: "And in a magical papyrus of the second century we find certain Hindu beliefs mentioned; Isis is compared to Māyā, name and personification of the Buddha's mother and also of the Great Illusion."

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The Simon Magus of Hellenistic Gnostic legend may have known something of the Kama Loca and sought along the lines of an erotic magic in a proto-Kamasutra to find his apotheosis, his ascension, to become a star. In the *Acts of Peter* Simon gets high, or flies higher than the Saint.

•

And is brought down, deflated in Christian legend, to Hell, to be Simon the Magician. Where Helen is finally only a shadow. For in the rule of orthodoxy, the restrictions of truth between the fourth century and the breaking up of the Holy Roman Empire, all other thought and feeling existed in the extensions of falsehood. Gods became daemons, heroes became ghosts, priestesses became witches, magi became magicians. False faces and false names appear everywhere. If the magic is white you look into a crystal; if the magic is black you look into a mirror. We think of them now as doors to the future, "fortune telling," we call it. But the mirror-world is the world of *Through the Looking Glass* and of MacDonald's *Lilith*. What we see there is an illumination of things. "Of a familiar type," Edith Butler notes in *Ritual Magic*, "is the one in which a pure lad of

about ten who has been born in wedlock looks into the stone whilst the Cabalist prays to St. Helena, the mother of Constantine, who was said to have rediscovered the cross of Christ."

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For in the mirror one might have seen, not St. Helena, but Helena of Troy.

The Faust, we know, called up a wraith of Helen, "Spirits in the shape of Alexander the Great, of his paramour, and of Helen of Troy," the *dramatis personae* reads in Marlowe's play. "Be silent, then," Faustus says: "for danger is in words."

"[Music sounds, and Helen passeth over the stage]"

.

Is there some hint of the Helen of the shadows, the familiar of the Kama Loka, in Marlowe's phantom? "To glut the longing of my heart's desire—" Faustus says he would have Helen for his paramour.

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It is from this first Helen of our English tradition that H.D. draws certain themes. "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships?" is immortal as "And burnt the topless towers of Ilium" somehow is not. And later in the same speech Faustus-Simon cries:

"Oh, thou art fairer than the evening air
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars"

.

So "the legions lost" in H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, "the host," "the holocaust," are numbered. In *Palinode* II.2 "the thousand-petalled lily; / they are not many, but one;" in *Palinode* II.4 "all the thousand petals of the rose," but "the thousand sails," "the thousand darts / that speed them home." In *Palinode* III.2: "can one weigh the thousand ships / against one kiss in the night?" We recognize in passing the Thousand and One Nights of Shahárazád, "City-freer" Burton notes, told to rescue her sister Dunyázád, "World-freer" or Dinázád "Religion-freer."

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"Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss," Faustus demands or requests.
[Kisses her.]

Her lips suck forth my soul; see where it flies!—
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
Here will I dwell, for Heaven is in these lips.

•

This kiss, and the dwelling in a kiss, is a wisdom of the Kama sutra. Or the eroticists or “kamatist” were wise to it. The tongue searches in all adult kisses for an electricity that a child’s kiss has, or “thrill” that floods the body. Sexuality may feed upon this thrill, but—this is our concern here—Heaven feeds there too. We remember the passage in H.D.’s romance *Bid Me to Live* where the Hesperides, the *paradiso* is the locus or the presence of the husband where: “she faced the author of this her momentary psychic being, her lover, her husband. It was like that, in these moments. She touched paradise. He too. But he did not think of that.” Had he thought of it, paradise would have touched her. The kiss, the touch, the coming together sought some ultimate exchange or reciprocity.

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“He’s looking for another book—the *Hesperides*? he’s wandering. He’s not here. No, he wasn’t there. It was almost better when she was alone.

“All of the Hesperides was there, nearer than the table, than the mantelpiece...”

•

“This star in the night” Helen calls it. Achilles springing forward in the spark of his anger, or is it pain of death?

mine, the one dart in the Achilles-heel,
the thousand-and-one, mine.

Is there some rumor that in a thousand spermatozoa one may be magic, or as we call it, fecundating, one may be hers? He “covers her” we say of birds; Achilles was no longer Achilles but from the realm of fathers, the *pitaloka* the Hindus called it, the Father. Zeus then. “This is the spread of wings,” and the eternal angry or blood-reddened Fatherhead giving up into the mothering womb its semen.

I read the writing when he seized my throat,

this was his anger,
they were mine, not his,
the un-numbered host;

mine, all the ships,
mine, all the thousand....

That one strike, that one come home to Leuké, the white island, the egg—sphere
or prayer, the quickened circuits of the child.

It is the burning ember
that I remember
heart of the fire,

Helen tells us.

Is the “hieroglyph, repeated endlessly,” that Helen tries to read the code-script of the
chromosomes? *My legions lost*, the father cries;
the flower of all-time,
of all-history,
my children, my legions”

The “arrows” of Eris and then of Eros, the thousand, and the one that strikes home,
brought me back the to Kama-Loka of the theosophists to the Kama-Loka of the
Hindus, as Zimmer in *Philosophies of India* told of him, Puspa-bāna “whose arrows are
flowers,” lord of the flower-shafts.

In Palinode III.4—the thousand is “a cloud in the night,”

must I tell him again their name,
the one name for the thousand lost,
Eros, the Hawk Horus.

We begin to realize that the veil is the thousand and the spark that strikes is the
one. “A touch in the dark,” it is called in *Palinode* III.5. The veil, itself, may here be
what we call “coming” in crude vulgar speech, more true to poetry than the scientific
“orgasm” or “ejaculation.” But “orgasm” had something to do with our spark of anger,
and ejaculation with our throwing of the thousand and one arrows.

•

In VII of *Palinode* the Image of Eidolon of Thetis ["It is Thetis," H.D. tells us "(Isis Aphrodite)"] says:

A woman's wiles are a net,
they would take the stars
or a grasshopper in its mesh;

The stars, the Galaxy, we learned earlier, are the thousand. And, like an echo here or a resonance from an untouched octave, we realize there was one star too.

what unexpected treasure,
what talisman or magic ring
may the net find?

fishing for a clue or a child or particular star. Proteus reveals to Helen, the shape-shifter to the immortal face:

when they reach a certain degree

they are one, alike utterly,
though Achilles woke from the dark
and her Lord was cast

into the lowest depth—

•

Is Achilles, the mate, Simon the Magus, Faustus the Magician?

"Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years," Marlowe's Faustus asks, and then for the thousand-and-one: "and—at last—be saved!"

•

yet even Cimmerian embers,

H.D.'s Helen seems to reply

burnt out, extinguished and lost,
will flame anew if God
wills to re-ignite the spark;

•

God may be the Thousand-and-one. In *Palinode* VII.6:

I have talked with Proteus—or—

another (whoever he be,
he manifests variously);
Nameless-of-many-Names he decrees

that *Helena* shall remain
one name....

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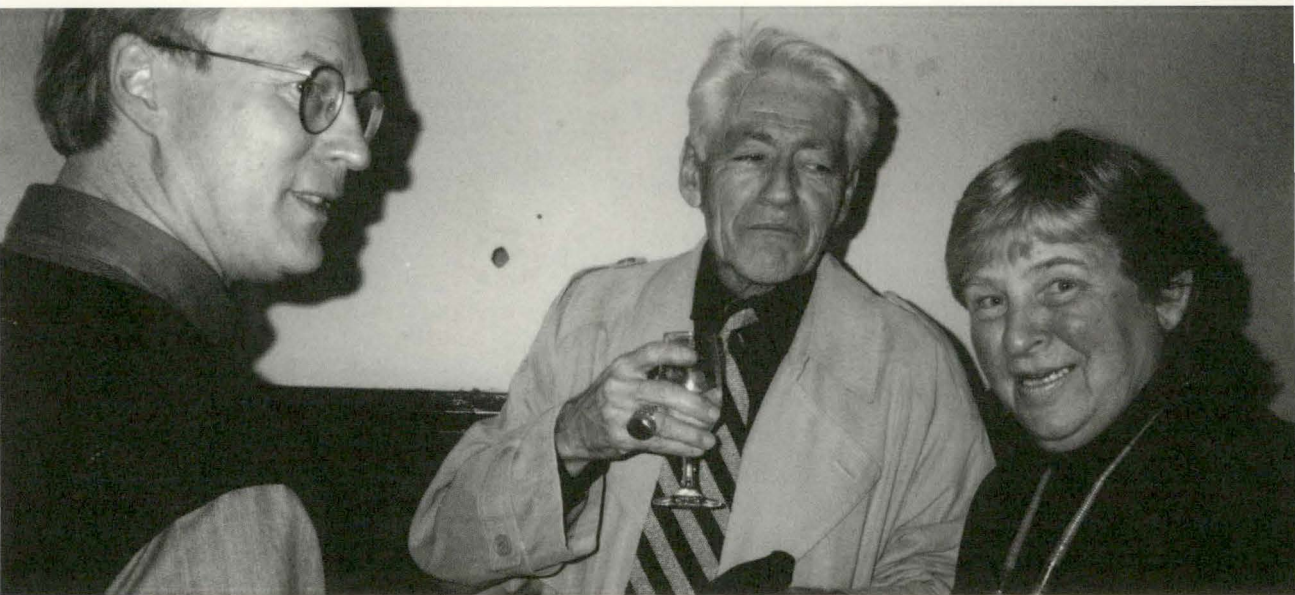
H.D. was familiar with all this; as an initiate of Freud's in psycho-analysis, she knew that the "lover" could be read everywhere in the "higher." There was an encoding in the dreamscript that revealed something going on in a realm of sexual phantasy.

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The old teaching was that "as above so below" might mean also the orders of the stars could be read in the spermatozoa, the anima mundi might be a common whore in the port-town of Tyre, the logos could be found in any word anywhere. Christ was not selective when he said the Kingdom is within you, or that we were gods. "Ye are gods," He said to the crowd. Now we begin to see galaxy upon galaxy, there may be as many suns as there ever have been men.

•

(Paris said, why must you recall
the white fire of unnumbered stars,
rather than that single taper
burning in an onyx jar)



Robin Blaser with Ellen Tallman and David Farwell at the Western Front,
Vancouver, 1993.

STEPHEN COLLIS / “overturning the furniture”: An Interview with Ellen Tallman

This interview took place at Ellen Tallman’s house on April 25, 2005, several weeks after the Kootenay School of Writing hosted a Robert Duncan symposium, at which Ellen read her paper “My Robert Duncan Stories.” Ellen first met Duncan in Berkeley in the mid-1940s, where they both attended Wednesday night anarchist meetings hosted by Kenneth Rexroth.

Ellen and Warren Tallman first came to Vancouver in the mid-1950s, to teach at the University of British Columbia. Drawing upon their California literary connections, they began bringing innovative poets such as Duncan and Robert Creeley to the city to read, lecture, and teach—often in the Tallman’s own living room. In 1963 they organized the landmark Vancouver Poetry Conference, at which leading figures of the Black Mountain, San Francisco Renaissance, and Beat movements—including Charles Olson and Allen Ginsberg—read and gave workshops for three summer weeks. It is difficult to overestimate the Tallmans’ influence on Vancouver—and in fact Canadian—writing.

Stephen Collis: In the 1970s and ’80s, there was some tension around the issue of an “American invasion,” spearheaded by the Tallmans—something of a backlash from Canadian nationalists. What are your memories of this and how did it affect you and Warren?

Ellen Tallman: It was a real shock, when we moved here in 1956, how anti-American Canadians seemed to be. And we thought we were anti-American, always cynical of the US, and pacifist, and so on. Warren had been drafted but he got out of basic training by going to a psychologist. But here Warren was immediately caught up in Canadian literature—it was like a new land to explore. I think the both of us always sort of thought of our lives and experiences as West Coast; if it was anything, it was a west-east split.

SC: I agree. Still.

ET: Right. So it was quite surprising when students would make fun of my accent. But at the time there was an influx of Americans, and many Brits were being hired right at that time.

SC: Still today, I find when I go to Washington, Oregon, even California in a lot of ways—it feels less foreign to me than going to Toronto or Ottawa or the eastern United States, which feels quite different.

What was your and Warren's relationship with the UBC English department like? I'm particularly interested in your dealings with figures like Earle Birney and Roy Daniels. Did any UBC faculty take an interest in the poetry events happening at your home?

ET: Well for the first couple of years we lived in faculty housing out on campus and we were surrounded by English people, which made us miss Seattle even more. We had our friends here and our weekends in Seattle. And of course our department at UBC, as many departments are, was political. Warren was really interested in the Creative Writing department and what was happening there, and it just turned out that Esther Birney and I became good friends. And Esther was always on the outs with Earl, so she would run away and come here. So this didn't make things easier for Warren—they did try to keep all these things separate, but . . . Earl must have helped somehow in getting Creeley here. As far as people in the department sharing Warren's interests—it was more people in other departments who were interested, not the English department. And that was true during the 1963 poetry conference. I don't know if you know anything about Norman Epstein, he's in the Chemical Engineering department, and he's an anarchist. So he was at everything. George Knox was head of the Fine Arts department and he was very interested in what was happening.

SC: It's fascinating to me that Norman Epstein and George Knox and people from other departments—actually, it seems typical to me when there's a sense of an avant-garde, or any new movement in the arts, especially in literature, and it's not often the literature people themselves who are interested. It's often someone in another discipline.

ET: Well, you wanted to talk about anarchism. An anarchist is someone who denies authority and fights against it. The whole “authority” thing was a huge issue in the English department. Other departments didn’t seem as authority-bound, or anti-authority, as the English department was. At times I’d think, everybody in this department has an authority problem that they’re trying to work out with each other. And Warren was definitely anti-authority—he didn’t take well to authority at all. He was very un-authoritarian as a teacher—a terrific teacher, I thought. But other people, even friends John Hulcoop, thought he wasn’t enough of an authority figure. Always finding out what the students thought and then weaving in it. In that sense he’d be called an anarchist....

SC: I’m curious, then, as to how much anarchism was something that the two of you thought about, read about, discussed with other people.

ET: Only with George Woodcock, who we saw quite a lot, then later when Robert Duncan would come up, we’d always go over to Woodcock’s. Otherwise, since we were both teaching and had two little children, we weren’t involved in any political groups. We started a school for our children, hung out with Norman Epstein, people like that. So we never exactly talked about anarchism but it was always at the edges of things.

SC: As it so often is, I think. You started a school?

ET: Yes, we started something called the New School for our children. And then when they got to be high-school aged, they started their own school called K-N-O-W Place. Knowplace. And it was a little further out than we would have had it, if we’d had our say in it, which we didn’t. They’d go to school every day but this would happen after. Other children would come too. In the sense that anarchism is about social change, is always about social change, I think it felt comfortable in the beginning to talk about being an anarchist. When all your colleagues are using the word “esoteric,” you’re not talking on the same level. This reminds me—my mother, when I called from Seattle to tell my parents that I was going to get married, my mother flew up to Seattle. She wanted to meet him. So when I met her at the plane she said, “Okay, just tell me, is he black?” No, I said. “Is he a communist?” No, I said, he’s an anarchist!

And she said, "Oh, that's just literary." She said wonderful things—she was a great person. How did she even know it was literary?

SC: That's fantastic. You must have introduced Warren to Duncan, right? For some reason I have the sense that the Duncan relationship was key for Warren (more important, ultimately, than even Olson or Ginsberg). Is this so, or was the Duncan connection more yours?

ET: Right. I'd known Duncan. But he and Warren didn't really become close until he started coming up here all the time. What it seemed like then is that Warren's relationship with Robert, starting in 1959, was information. What Robert came with was a total opening of the field. What he came with was books about everything. Since he was interested mainly in teaching, he was teaching Warren everything and it was Warren's chance to learn from someone whose attitude was one of a co-respondent. They were co-responding to each other's work. And in this case, mainly all the Black Mountain—the painters, the writers, everything. Just with a swoop everything came down from Duncan, non-stop. He never gave you the chance to get out of it, to not be involved. It was incredible. With Creeley, too—I remember the first time I saw him, I thought, this is the hippest man I've ever seen. He was just in on every conversation, picking up and knowing and connecting. He was just amazing. But mostly in those days it was a lot of heavy drinking and drugs, you know; they would've leave the house until you pushed them out, till every drop was gone. And Bob had a lot of anger; one side of him was absolutely the dearest, kindest, most polite New Englander, and the other was just—for no reason at all that you could see, he'd be smashing someone's window, overturning the furniture, carrying on.

SC: And Duncan came so often because Warren took a particular interest...

ET: Well, he had a community up here. Once he had given the initial lectures, he had a whole community of students and they adored him. He'd read in classes and talk in classes, and Warren would always set up readings at some place or another. Robert liked it up here. We took care of him and it was fun.

SC: Would it have been through Duncan or Creeley that you and Warren found out about Olson?

ET: Initially from Duncan. When he first starting coming up here, he'd bring all the Olson stuff. Actually, before Duncan, the *New American Poetry* anthology. Warren used it as a textbook; we were all using it. We'd have our Sunday afternoon poetry gatherings, and several people were studying Projective Verse. That was really at about the same time that Robert was coming up here.

SC: And what about your own teaching? Your own work?

ET: I taught for seventeen years at UBC, from the time we came up here, but I just had a B.A. from Berkeley. I'd been doing my Master's in Creative Writing at the University of Washington, but I had my children and I was working full-time while Warren finished his Ph.D., and somehow I didn't finish my degree—I finished everything but the thesis. So at UBC I was teaching English 100, but then I started teaching Arts One, which I did for eight years, and that was really interesting. Arts One was an alternative course for freshman; it gave them 60 or 70 per cent of their arts credits, we'd meet every day of the week, we'd have big lectures, there'd be a hundred in a group and six of us faculty, mostly from English, and we'd figure out a theme ahead of time. We had lectures from outside and all over, and we each had fifteen to twenty kids and met three times a week in these smaller groups. Very intensive reading and writing. The themes tended to be things that included Freud, lots of philosophical work, even Einstein, as well as *War and Peace*, you know. It was the perfect course to be teaching when all the poets were coming because I could just bring them in there to the big meetings. Kids wouldn't have heard of Allen Ginsberg, wouldn't have heard of Gary Snyder, but there they'd be, teaching for a couple of hours. And then we had stuff at the house.

SC: An alternate university, wasn't it?

ET: It was. Someone would bring in a Cocteau movie, you know...it was just so much broader and richer than you could ever make it in an actual university. At some point, then, I got involved in training to become a therapist. So I shifted over into another field and I quit my job at UBC. I worked for a place called Cold Mountain, a growth institute, for ten years. I was up at Cortez Island doing three-month programs; I'd bring Duncan up there; I could bring anyone I wanted to the programs that I gave. But I also taught for the next nine years at Antioch College, through Cold Mountain,

teaching the basics therapy to M.A. students, then did some supervising at SFU through the Clinical Psychology department.

SC: Duncan had his interest in psychology too, from Freud (he called himself a Freudian) to Hillman. He wrote a poem in response to James Hillman (it's the last of his "Passages" series—"Whose"), and he gave a talk on Hillman ("Opening the Dreamway")...

ET: Hillman was out here a few years ago, actually. That was great. Robert and I had a great time talking about dreams; he was always encouraging me to have dreams about my clients, and they have dreams about me, and then we bring the dreams together and work on that. I'd say oh God, Robert, we'd need you for that. He was wonderful in his classes when he talked about using dreams in relation to poetry. I use dreams a lot in my work; the clients I work with often send their dreams in an email a few days before we meet. They're just so useful in so many ways; for one thing, they really seem to show where the person is already and available emotionally to deal with stuff. If it's in the dreams, it feels safe enough to deal with it. It's a way into traumatic areas; once it appears in the dream, then there's a kind of safety.

SC: When you were at Washington, what were you writing or wanting to write?

ET: I was writing short stories at the time—that's how I got to know Warren, through my writing. Then Warren and I would visit Kenneth Rexroth and Marthe Larsen in the early days, up until 1953 I guess, we'd spend the summer up there. But Kenneth would go into the mountains every summer, so we were there with Marthe. Kenneth was working at the post office, and I was babysitting Mary, their oldest child. Marthe was working. And when Kenneth came back from the mountains, Marthe and Mary were really happy, we'd all had a nice, easy time. Then Kenneth got it into his head that I was Marthe's lesbian lover, so he kicked us out of the house at five in the morning. From then on, he was jealous of Marthe's friends; he was very paranoid and jealous. So we would see him after that until Marthe was trying to break away from him and she'd come and stay with us. I think Warren was writing her letters to support her leaving Kenneth and going to Creeley; she did that while he was away. Then Kenneth found the letters from Warren. So he wrote a letter—Warren was evil incarnate and he'd have nothing more to do with us. When he and Marthe split, he moved

to Santa Barbara and taught there, wrote a column for the *San Francisco Examiner*, and had another woman taking care of him.

SC: What did Marthe do after that? Where did she go?

ET: During all the terrible stuff with Kenneth, Kenneth was trying to get custody of the children, saying Marthe was crazy, sex-driven, drug-taking...all lies, really. So her lawyer said she had to have a psychiatrist back her up. She went to a psychiatrist, Steve Shelton, and they fell in love, and he left his wife and five children and he brought her two children and they lived together. I still see Steve quite a bit—a fascinating psychiatrist. He was one of the early psychiatrists to be using LSD with patients. She and Steve were together for five or six years, then he moved down to Palo Alto, and lives in San Francisco now. We talk on the phone all the time.

Actually that was another place I saw Duncan a lot, at the Rexroths'. Robert would come over for dinner a lot, Kenneth cooked. Kenneth was amazing in many ways—when he had his radio show on KCFA, he was indeed amazing. He had all sorts of great guests, and it was radio like you've never heard because he would belch, he would fart. I'd love to get the tape sometime. He had Jack Spicer on there...various people.

SC: What are your memories of Phyllis Webb?

ET: Well, she...I'll free associate: a beauty, exotic, dazzling, brilliant—that's what she was when we first got here. I didn't really get to know her. I would see her at Jane Rule and Helen Sonthoff's, and on other occasions, but I sort of felt like a dowdy faculty wife around her, she was so exotic. She was great. Gorgeous big rings...

SC: Long hands...

ET: Oh yes! And if I said something, I remember her saying, "Oh *really*? Do you feel *that* way about it?" And I sort of felt, oh, I don't know—she was very sophisticated. And I don't know what Warren thought of her poetry; I know he had a great respect for her, and by the time I was aware of what poetry was happening, I sort of thought she was *the* woman poet in Canada. She certainly was interested in the poetry and the poets who were here, and in fact it was Duncan who told me of her interest in Kropotkin; I didn't know anything about that from the poems that were out. I think

in the early days she was sort of under a black cloud, suicidal. Other than admiring her work and person, I didn't really feel like I was in the same world with her, in a way. I think she was the favourite of many people, of many men, of many women. And doing fascinating things.

SC: Some people seem to have a sense of there being a division between the TISH poets and the "downtown poets" (bill bissett, Roy Kiyooka, etc.). Do you remember Warren's sense of this, or how he saw the TISH poets fitting in locally, nationally?

ET: The TISH poets were Warren's students, they lived in our house, slept on the floor or the couches sometimes... there were always readings, study sessions, hanging out. George and Lionel and Gladys and Fred and Pauline were sort of like family; the others were more distant, Dan McLeod and Jamie Reid who was a Maoist at the time. Warren was much into giving them their own authority. It was so different from most academic settings. And when we'd go to Berkeley, Fred and Pauline would come down with us. We had friends who had great places in Berkeley—my close friend in Berkeley was Kate Mulholland, and they had a huge house. They let us stay there; we held a lot of the '65 poetry thing there. Heady times, you know. So Warren's relation to the TISH group was both overseeing and generous. And I guess we weren't particularly talking about poetry; we were talking about stuff that we were involved in at the same level, just learning it together. I remember saying to Warren after he'd been talking to Duncan, after Duncan had been talking to him—I said, "Did you understand what Duncan was saying?" He said, "No, no, but it'll come. It'll come."

And bill bissett, by the time we got here, was already his own being—he was painting, he was a poet, he was a performer. And Warren was his sponsor—we supported bissett. We put a mortgage on our house to get him out of jail. That was a very different kind of relationship with bill. And Roy Kiyooka was a close friend of Warren's; he'd bring his family over, and our house was full of his paintings at the time. It was almost a gallery of his. Roy was just in on everything, was his own authority on things. Much more authority-bound than other of our friends.

SC: And what about Robin Blaser arriving in Vancouver?

ET: I think Robin was in Boston—he wasn't here for the 1963 poetry conference. Robin was a close friend of mine at Berkeley, in school. Don Allen was another

friend. Warren and I could go down to Berkeley for the summer, so all of us would get together. I know Warren brought Robin up here to read, and he read at a gallery downtown. And that was when he was living with Stan Persky, so he and Stan came up on the bus. Then Warren tried to get him a job at UBC, but that didn't work; but they hired him at Simon Fraser. Then he and Stan came up again together and lived with us for two months. And they changed our lives for the worse—they introduced us to martinis! Before then, Warren and I had only been drinking this homemade sake that Frank Davey made. But when martinis started, neither of us were ready for this big shift. Stan became my marker in Arts One when all the political stuff was going on on campus. I saw him in Berlin and he said, "Someone came up to me in the street and said, 'You were Mrs. Tallman's marker!'" So Robin was teaching at SFU, and he and I spent a lot of time together.

SC: It almost seems that there was a shift around then in terms of where the innovative poetry was happening—first at UBC, with Warren, then with Robin and George and Lionel at SFU. Maybe by the '70s.

ET: Warren was doing readings at the Italian Cultural Centre in 1979. He was still in that mode—he didn't feel all that connected to UBC; his students had moved on by then. He just wanted to keep the poetry going. We were separated by then; we separated in '71. I think that Warren stayed on with the Olson/Creeley/Duncan; I don't know that he took in everything else as much. He was drinking a lot, but we did an intervention for him and took him down to Betty Ford. And it was great—it was fabulous. Of course he *hated* the thought of it, but in the end he loved it! He had a fantastic time there. He was a big storyteller, and at one point we had to go down for group therapy with him—and we discovered he'd been writing other people's biographies for them. They all had to write biographies, so they all came to him. And he was having a wonderful time. He quit drinking for three years, and Bob got him a job at Buffalo and he lived there, across the street from Bob and Penelope.

SC: This is the '80s now?

ET: Yes, and after that he went to Toronto and taught there. But he started drinking again. So I think the politics and poetry, and the politics *of* poetry, around that time were a bit beyond his being able to deal with it.

SANDY POOL / L'oiseau

adapted from J. Michelet's L'oiseau (1867)

(i) L'aile.

Cri de la terre entière,

du monde

et de toute vie;

celui que toutes les espèces

poussent en cent langues

diverses, la voix qui sort

de la pierre même et

du monde inorganique;

Des ailes! nous voulons

des ailes, l'espoir

et le mouvement.

(ii) Migrations

Mais celui qui n'a pas le nombre et qui n'a pas la force,
le solitaire, que fera-t-il? Le pauvre petit musicien?
Que feras-tu, pauvre rossignol isolé, qui doit, comme
les autres, mais sans appui, sans camarades, affronter
la grande aventure? Toi, qui est ton ami? Une voix.

(iii) L'orage et L'hiver

Non. Il me faut partir. Il faut que je revoie ce ciel
éblouissant, ces ruines lumineuses. Il faut que je
me pose sur mon premier amour, sur la rose d'Asie
que je me baigne de soleil.... Là est le mystère de la vie,
là, la flamme féconde où renait mon chant; ma voix,
ma muse est la lumière.

(iv) Le Chant

C'est la fille du jour.

Dès qu'il commence, quand l'horizon s'empourpre
et que le soleil va paraître, elle part du sillon come une
flèche, porte au ciel l'hymne de la joie.

Sainte poésie, fraîche comme l'aube, pure et gaie
comme un Cœur enfant. Cette voix sonore,
puissante donne le signal aux moissonneurs.

Il faut partir, dit le père; n'entendez-vous pas
l'alouette? Elle les suit, leur dit d'avoir du courage;
aux chaudes heures, les invite au sommeil,

Sur la tête penchée de la jeune fille à demi éveillée
elle verse des torrents d'harmonie.

(v) Éclaircissements

Aplatissement du cerveau.—Le poids du cerveau est, relativement au poids du corps, pour

Autruche.....	1 : 1200
Oie.....	1 : 360
Canard.....	1 : 257
Aigle.....	1 : 160
Pluvier.....	1 : 122
Faucon.....	1 : 102
Perroquet.....	1 : 45
Coq.....	1 : 26

DANIELLE LAFRANCE / from **branding the species**

Untitled Lady #34

only exile rooms
wards, and lonely bedrooms
nail lacquered strips, splinters dig my finger

please, do want some impatience?
pull my wool with a hole to peak

to be a human
is soft

Untitled Lady # 64

my feminist nemesis
makes it difficult to breathe
between my thighs

the blast outside
reminds me of poppy gardens
exsiccation and sleep

breath is hard
in order to modulate my voice

Untitled Attila #38

Mandolin margarita *baggin' bags galo*
euphoria in a chalice *steps fill a glass of monotony*
urchin dancer's pressing chant *pink striped ladies gonna getcha*

urgency *lacks colloquy*
cum jump bones *three sunken eddies*
with your naked agitation *dahlia fragrance*

a nipple twitches, it's all bare *pale and puckered*
bend it 'til it fucks 'er

mired elk's hover, fortune finds you here

Untitled Lady # 83

lady doll stuck in a glass jar
wide enough to hide a smile
disrobe the hand knit fabric
il faut savoir

loose, polka dot blouse
add the fury of internment
capillary veins; see coarse and network
smooth the fine wrinkles

small chamber, low joy
gotta get gone to get some
bang bang, non plus
bang bang, il faut refuser

Untitled Lady #87

I want to be married
but I don't want to die

I want to love you
so I can forget you

what eclipses are these?
I'm sunk, I've sunk
without finding

you like my mouth
because it is open

Untitled Blind Lady #15

I will drown in the South
head deeper, seethe through the latch

all just sitting
trying to remember

water ballet, all to become air
the performance of a lifetime

deduce, still, no matter how you hurt me
beyond the vulva of the South

KIM GOLDBERG / Two Poems

Creation Theory #17

When they come it will be with butterfly nets

And we will be lazy head-bake sunning on a chest of splintered drawers left
curbside for free pick-up

And the sky will be chicory blue with a hint of custard off toward Vancouver

And the Northern Hawk-Owl from the evening news will hold an open house in
her cheese-puff heart, but we will be too busy to come

And we will wonder (but not for long) about all the toppled recipes behind the
stove, wrestling with dust motes and petrified cookie crumbs, defending their
reductionist logic to the bitter last

And we will watch ambulances bolt down a cherry-scream path to the riverside
park, load frozen éclairs into a see-yourself-shiny vault and speed off

And we will taste cinnamon bark with our prehensile tongues then sharpen pencil
stubs and begin to write

And we will likely not notice when the gossamer drops over us

And we may only subliminally regret that we did not at least try to attend the
Northern Hawk-Owl's party

And we will shape a suet pie homunculus for uses to be determined later

And if a mood should fall in a forest without making a sound, we will sop it up
with super-absorbent paper towels

When spiders dream of non-attachment

Truth is just a constellation
pinpricks yearn for mind's frail join
we're shooting stars inside a barrel
stump remains when tree is gone

pinpricks yearn for mind's frail join
come view the legless refugees
stump remains when tree is gone
send sacred cows to plough the field

come view the legless refugees
waiting, swelling, keening, lasting
send sacred cows to plough the field
stickpin our hopes to spent messiahs

waiting, swelling, keening, lasting
what happens when the stars fall out
stickpin our hopes to spent messiahs
then build more telescopes to watch

what happens when the stars fall out
we pity penguins fouled with warmth
then build more telescopes to watch
how spiders burn their tapestries

we pity penguins fouled with warmth
for distance makes the eye grow sharp
how spiders burn their tapestries

while vastness shrinks the pixel count

for distance makes the eye grow sharp
and tree trunks stand till axe cleaves bark
while vastness shrinks the pixel count
let's leave the universe ajar

and tree trunks stand till axe cleaves bark
we're shooting stars inside a barrel
let's leave the universe ajar
Truth is just a constellation

Contributors

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CCLAE conducts research with the goal of connecting language to natural and social systems, discovering accumulation in the tidal pools and recording cultural attitudes that get swept along the riverbed. By nature a diverse crowd of voices, the researchers of CCLAE participate from various locations around the world.

VICTOR COLEMAN's most recent publications are *MAL ARME* and *ICON TACT* (both available from Book Thug in Toronto). He is a founding editor of both Coach House Press and Coach House Books. He is currently toiling in the halls of George Brown College Chef School.

STEPHEN COLLIS is the author of *Anarchive* (New Star 2005)—nominated for the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize—and *The Commons* (Talonbooks 2008), both of which form parts of the on-going "Barricades Project." He is also the author of two book-length studies, *Phyllis Webb and the Common Good* (Talonbooks 2007) and *Through Words of Others: Susan Howe and Anarcho-Scholasticism* (ELS Editions 2006). His new book, *On the Material*, is forthcoming from Talonbooks in 2010. Long a member of the Kootenay School of Writing, he teaches American literature, poetry, and poetics at Simon Fraser University.

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DANIELLE LAFRANCE's poems, reviews and critical work have been featured in *House of Tilt*, *West Coast Line*, *The Liar*, *Memewar*, *The Lawn Chair Soiree*, and the *Montréal Review of Books*. Poems are forthcoming in *Matrix* and *Inter/tidal*. "Untitled" appeared in a Montréal based exhibition titled *Que estamos esperando, montados en el foro?: Functional/Canonical Documents*, organized by Vaca Sagrada Del Secreto Projects.

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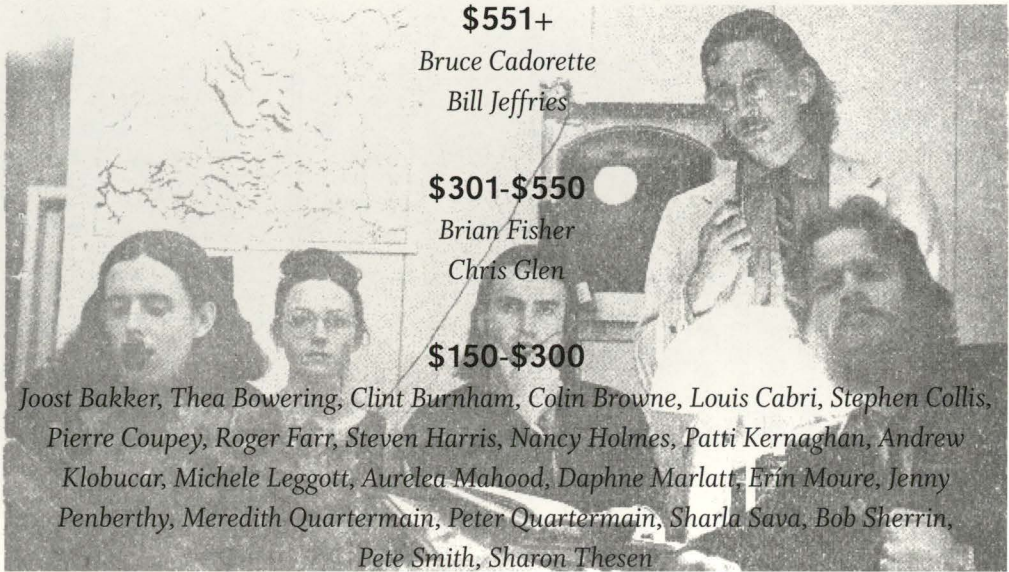
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