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spring 1983

line

number one

a journal of the contemporary literature collection

Simon Fraser University

spring 1983

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We greet with pleasure the inception of Line: A Journal of the Contemporary Literature Collection. Almost as old as the University itself, the Contemporary Literature Collection began in 1965 under the care of Ralph Maud, a charter faculty member keenly interested in new American writing, who recognized this field of collecting as particularly suitable for the library of a new university. By the seventies the Contemporary Literature Collection had expanded into its present quarters overlooking fir trees and North Shore mountains. Over ten thousand published items are held--small press books, little magazines, broadsides, tape recordings --and the collection of manuscripts and original sound and video recordings grows steadily. Three triumphs have marked the eighties: a SSHRC grant to purchase the Ezra Pound-Willis Hawley correspondence, a second SSHRC grant awarded to the Contemporary Literature Collection as a resource of national significance, and now the beginning of Line, a forum for the study of contemporary writing.

Gene Bridwell  
Head Humanities Librarian

## PREFACE

---

Nearly two years back, during the summer of 1981, Simon Fraser University hosted a six-week programme called Contemporary Poetry and Prose in British Columbia, its unofficial title the line, "the coast is only a line." Two courses on B.C. writing were featured, one offered by Warren Tallman, visiting from the University of British Columbia, and another by Eli Mandel, visiting from York University. Numerous writers--too many to list names here--appeared on campus at rhythmical intervals from week to week, giving readings, visiting classes where their works were being read, meeting with students, and otherwise stirring up an almost endless run of conversation. Half-way through the programme, a weekend conference/festival of panel discussions on the poetics of contemporary writing drew more writers and readers from across Canada. It was in the midst of those long hot summer days that Line got its initial impetus. There was a persistent pattern emerging as talk kept returning to the reading act as a critical gesture entwined with the writing act: reading as the inevitable twin of writing. The interview with Eli Mandel, taped in the final week of the programme, provides a glance back to this theoretical concern which, as it turns out, prefigured the intention to publish criticism and scholarship that encourages and discloses an active readership for contemporary writing and its modernist sources.

As a journal of the Contemporary Literature Collection, Line will reflect in its content the range of the collection. The materials it plans to publish--archival items, interviews, essays, review/commentaries, and bibliographies--will be related to the line of post-1945 Canadian, American, and British writers whose work issues from, or extends, the work of Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, H.D., Gertrude Stein, and Charles Olson.

The editorial board encourages the submission of manuscripts, though a brief letter of inquiry preceding a submission can prevent needless disappointment. Comments by readers are also welcome.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS: Tom Grieve is writing his Ph.D. dissertation on Ezra Pound; Eli Mandel has had two books published recently, Dreaming Backwards: The Selected Poetry of Eli Mandel from General Publishing, and Life Sentence: Poems & Journals: 1976-1980 from Press Porcepic, new writing based on his travel journals; bpNichol won the 1982 Pulp Press annual 3-day novel writing contest for Still, forthcoming from Pulp this fall, and

writing contest for Still, forthcoming from Pulp this fall, and Coach House has just brought out The Martyrology, Book 5; Stephen Scobie, in collaboration with Douglas Barbour, has published The Pirates of Pen's Chance with Coach House, his latest book, and is now working on Expecting Rain, a new selection of poems; George Bowering has had two books of criticism published almost back to back, A Way with Words from Oberon, essays on Canadian poets, and A Mask in Place from Turnstone, essays on North American fiction; Peter Quartermain has published many essays on 20th century writers, including Louis Zukofsky, Basil Bunting, and Robert Creeley; Percilla Groves works as a Librarian for the Contemporary Literature Collection.

RM  
April 25, 1983

TOM GRIEVE

---

THE EZRA POUND/WILLIS HAWLEY CORRESPONDENCE

---

"ONE of the INconveniences of  
beink of lunATik and incarcerated  
is purrcicely that one CANNOT git  
into the goddam print shoppe and  
keep a gun on the printers."

The above is a representative example of one of a number of personae--that of grambing grandpa full of self-irony and cracker-barrel dialect--who appear in the correspondence, recently purchased by The Contemporary Literature Collection at Simon Fraser University, between Ezra Pound and his sinological advisor, decoder, and printer, Willis Hawley. The correspondence--90-odd letters from Pound to Hawley, 85 carbons of Hawley's letters to Pound and to James Laughlin, 18 letters from Laughlin to Hawley, and 14 letters from Dorothy Pound to Hawley--spans the dozen years (1946-1958) of Pound's confinement in St. Elizabeth's and thus nicely complements the Collection's other two letter archives of the same period: The Pound/Denis Goacher correspondence and the Pound/Agnes Bedford correspondence.

The letters from Pound (over 140 pages) are of interest for a number of reasons in that they give a full and wide-ranging record of Pound's concerns and obsessions during the period, sinological and otherwise. Of foremost importance, however, is the light the correspondence sheds on the printing and production of Pound's translations of the Confucian classics during the St. Elizabeth years (The Confucian Odes and Confucius: The Unwobbling Pivot, The Great Digest and The Analects) and the information it provides on the welter of Chinese ideograms in the late Cantos (Section: Rock-Drill and Thrones).

Willis Hawley is an amazing fellow. I met and talked with him in August, 1981 at his home/museum/library/printing shop that hangs on the edge of Laurel Canyon in Hollywood. My tour of his



collection of Oriental art--17th c. Samurai armour, 13th c. porcelain, jade--was interrupted by the arrival, from the binders, of the revised edition of his dictionary of Japanese sword-makers, the standard reference text in the field. With the help of a wheelbarrow, we trundled about twenty boxes of these handsome heavy tomes down a steep dusty goat path to a storage shed in back of his house. I was exhausted. Mr. Hawley, a trifle winded, had hardly broken a sweat. My god, the man is in his eighties!--but keen and vigorous as if time had only wound his spring tighter.

The tour resumed through the most impressive of rooms: walls of burnished copper (they have been covered with hundreds of pieces of the foil-like paper that used to be used to line boxes of Chinese tea), floors covered with time-softened sapphire-blue silk carpets, bronzes and tables carved from ivory. On one wall was affixed an idyllic Chinese mountain scene, with its intricate figures, pagodas, ox-carts, the bounding lines of mountains, pines and streams carved in jade, and the whole framed in reed-thin pieces of ivory. On another wall stood a bookcase full of vellum-bound volumes of rice-paper rubbings. Buddhas and dragons stood guard on numerous carved ebony tables. Des Esseintes in an opium dream would be at home here.

Then upstairs to rooms full of Chinese dictionaries (he has, he thinks, the world's largest collection) and down to the basement print shop with its presses and banks of Chinese and Japanese fonts. On to his pine-lined study--its walls covered with ancient flintlocks and the less-valuable Samurai swords, a Chinese typewriter (wonderful gadget) in a nook in the corner, bookcases full of sinological lore--where he told me of his first fascination with Chinese characters on his strolls through L.A. Chinatown in the twenties--the beginnings of a single-minded passion for things Oriental that, sixty years later, is still in full career.

Hawley's interest first centered on books, particularly on dictionaries and on commentaries on the Confucian classics. By the 1930s, he was a major supplier for the Oriental collection of the Library of Congress. Pound's enthusiasm for the ideogram, as is well-known, began a decade earlier than Hawley's. His receipt of the Fenollosa manuscripts in 1913 led him, circuitously enough, to the same library in Washington, D.C. In 1946, shortly after his incarceration in St. Elizabeth's, Pound began to borrow books from the Oriental collection for his continuing research on his translations of the Confucian Odes. And thus the correspondence begins with a letter to Hawley from Dorothy Pound (Nov. 22, 1946) inquiring after a translation of Z.D. Sung's Symbolism of the Yi: Text of the Yi King (the I Ching, that is).

Hawley got the Sung text and a few other books for Pound; in

addition, he sent Pound copies of his handsome charts of the radicals of the Chinese character, Chinese emperors, primitive seal script, archaic symbols, etc. At this point (October, 1948), Pound himself begins to write, inquiring specifically for information on different type faces for the printing of his translation of the Shih Ching (The Confucian Odes).<sup>1</sup> Hawley responds with samples and advice on printing and calligraphy. Such technical concerns (layout, type and size of font, printing costs) and matters relating to translation (queries over editions, dictionaries, renditions of difficult ideograms) are the mainstay of the correspondence for the next ten years.

Yet underlying these practical concerns is the shared zeal of two initiates to the mysteries of the ideogram (who, by the way, were never to meet). Pound continually draws on Hawley's extensive files (52,000 entries: "a card file of every character that ever existed," Hawley told me) in his search for "le mot juste" of translation. Hawley has Pound decoding the inside address (in Chinese) on his letterhead. Hawley makes a seal for Pound, with Pound's name translated into ideograms, after a series of letters wrangling over the most accurate and telling phonetic rendition. They finally settle on "pao-en-te" (pronounced pao-n-dah), the ideograms for which yield "protect [and] favor virtue," although Pound still fancies "p'ao-ti," an earlier version, one of whose meanings, "an enclosure for stray animals," seemed to him especially appropriate (see letters 8 and 10).

Given even the remarkable verve and crotchety idiosyncrasy of Pound's epistolary style, the decoding of obscure Chinese characters and arguing over type face will not provide the most scintillating entertainment for the casual reader. But the correspondence holds important information for the Pound scholar. The exchange of letters over the production of Pound's Confucius: The Great Digest & Unwobbling Pivot (New Directions, 1951), which forms the major portion of the correspondence, offers valuable sidelights on Pound's poetics and reveals much about his attitudes towards translation and publication. Pound's argument for a system of "musical" notation in the layout of The Confucian Odes (see letter 2) and his demand that his readers be given a reproduction of the original stone classics for his translation of The Unwobbling Pivot (see letters 3 and 4) testify to the importance, within Pound's poetics, of the visual and the original.

Even though the printing and layout of the stone classics edition are a result of Hawley's painstaking work, the insistence on such quality--an insistence that reached the point of some rancour--was Pound's. Pound first became fascinated with the idea of a new edition of his Confucius: The Unwobbling Pivot and the

Great Digest (New Directions, 1947) when Hawley sent him, as a sample of Chinese calligraphy, a photographic reproduction of a page of his set of rubbings (one of the few extant) made from the T'ang dynasty stelae in which the Confucian classics had been carved. Hawley's offset negatives are indeed striking, with white ideograms sharply defined against a black background--so striking, that they no doubt played an important part in nurturing Pound's sense of a magical iconography within the ideogram. But his enthusiasm came with a price. Various misunderstandings about the fitting of the English translation to Hawley's Chinese text plagued the correspondence through the better part of 1950 (see letters 3 and 4). James Laughlin, editor and publisher of New Directions (or "nude erections" as Pound has it), which was to do the actual printing, entered the fray and further complicated matters. In September Pound laments: "grampaw's blood pressure wunt stand much more, and I dont want it to be a centenary celebration or even more mildly posthumous." And Dorothy, forecasting that Pound's demise would be the result of the numerous delays and miscommunications, threatens to drop the whole project as soon as she is widowed.

The basic problem was that nobody but Hawley understood Chinese well enough to know when the English stopped translating the Chinese characters on the facing page. Furthermore, Pound, who was always, when it came to Chinese, translating translations, had based his rendition on a text (most probably that provided in James Legge's 19th c. translation) that did not conform exactly to the one Hawley was providing. Hawley showed remarkable patience and perseverance in the face of Laughlin's confusion and Pound's outraged cries for authenticity. His "mutilation" in the photographic reproductions of the rubbings, as he carefully explains to both Pound and Laughlin, was required to rectify some errors, flaws and omissions in the rubbings themselves and to make up for minor discrepancies between the rubbings and the text Pound had translated from. The upshot of all of this was the "magnificent" (see cover photo) stone classics edition and some interesting printing history: the 9th c. T'ang stone monuments in which were carved the Confucian classics; a rubbing made from this original; carved boards made from these rubbings which duplicated the stone carvings and which were then used to make further rubbings (Hawley's 120 volumes being one such set); and, finally, the photographic reproductions of Hawley's rubbings (which may have been scrambled slightly centuries ago when they were assembled in book form), with minor cut and paste corrections to make them consistent with later editions, which appear in the 1951 New Directions edition of Pound's translation. As with The Cantos (the

Poundian will recall Divus' translation of the Odyssey, Sigismundo's mailbag, or Provençal editions of the Troubadours), another of Pound's books comes to us wearing its history on its face.

Throughout the correspondence, but most notably in that part of it (1954-1959) that bears directly upon the Chinese in the late Cantos, we are given illuminating evidence on the strange mixture of poetic licence and wilfulness in Pound's treatment of the ideogram. Hawley cautioned Pound early on: "All you get is trouble if you try to analyze characters from the modern forms. The farther back you can go the better, preferably to the Shell & Bone forms and their contemporary Shang Bronze forms" (January 22, 1950). His advice was salutary in that it did direct Pound's research to more primitive ideograms where his by now infamous practice, that of treating all elements of a character as constitutive of meaning, was less prone to error. Yet by 1957, Hawley still found it necessary to try to disabuse Pound of his misguided notions: "Your chief trouble seems to be trying to make sense out of all parts of a character when for 75% of them, half is only phonetic selected because it had the desired sound and wouldn't interfere adversely by meaning" (March 21, 1957). Pound's rejoinder is categorical, and it is the only statement from Pound himself that I know of which clearly reveals that design, and not ignorance or whim, was behind his procedure:

yes damBit . the phonetik , NO intellectual interest  
save for comparativ philologers of sumerian , egyptian  
Rebuses etc. (March 26, 1957)

Pound's interest in recovering (or discovering) more original poetic meaning in the ideograms of the Confucian classics and in disseminating the wisdom of these books through a language that could grab hold of the modern reader took precedence over strict philological accuracy. Speaking personally, it is satisfying to have my conjectures about and justification for Pound's poetic procedure with the translation of the ideogram given such support from the man himself.

I did a good deal of work on the Chinese in Pound's late Cantos (particularly in Section: Rock-Drill, New Directions, 1956),<sup>2</sup> and no one knows better than I how much time this correspondence could save one trying to identify and understand the hundreds of ideograms in this part of the poem. The information is all here. Pound, searching, as usual, for the gist, would find particularly salient ideograms in his reading of the Confucian classics; he would look them up in Mathews' Chinese English Dictionary, noting the number of the entry, and would then write to Hawley requesting

proof copies (see letters 6, 7, 9 and 10) of the characters which would later turn up in The Cantos. Pound's listing of Mathews' entry numbers in his letters to Hawley (only rarely does he provide these numbers in The Cantos) makes finding the English equivalent in Mathews' an easy business. It would have saved me countless hours of searching through lists of radicals and counting the number of strokes used to form a character in order to find the entry. I find solace in the knowledge that Pound too spent countless hours doing the same and that the omission of Mathews' entry numbers from The Cantos is yet further evidence of his consistent effort to goad his reader's curiosity and industry. As he explains to Hawley (see letter 1), "I am (after all) workin fer them as wants ter learn."

And so, as he confessed to me, Hawley thought Pound did "miserably" as a translator of the Confucian classics: Hawley considered that Pound had taken the Chinese, the rich allusiveness of which "Pound had no way of knowing," for it is the study of a life-time for a gifted native speaker, and had "dumbed it down" so that "the average reader could understand." At least, Hawley conceded, Pound had succeeded in "stirring up enough interest so a lot of people read Chinese." Was such promulgation, then, the reason for his involvement with Pound? No, that wasn't it. Pound had come to him with the reputation of being "the greatest living American poet" (Hawley's epithet), but as Hawley explained in a lovely anecdote about his sideline vocation as an interior decorator, through which he had met numerous movie stars, he was not impressed by fame. Was the cause of poetry, especially Pound's poetry, the reason? No, he liked poetry alright, but "poetry that, well, rhymes--and his didn't." And money was hardly the object. Hawley might have made, at the outside, \$200 for all his work for Pound. He received but \$150 for the negatives of his rubbings and all his work on The Unwobbling Pivot. What motivated Hawley was uncomplex: he has a passion for the Chinese written character and was only too willing to help anyone who shared his fascination. That, and a job well done. For all its admittedly recondite subject matter, what struck me most about the Pound/Hawley correspondence is the quality, energy and humanity that was born out of a shared enthusiasm.

---

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Pound and Hawley were still writing about such an edition ten years later, and in 1957 Harvard University Press wrote to Hawley, inquiring whether he could provide offset negatives similar to the ones he had made for The Unwobbling Pivot. Hawley responded, quoting prices and explaining the complexities of the project. Harvard University Press dropped the matter. A stone rubbings edition of the Odes never did appear.

<sup>2</sup> "Annotations to the Chinese in Section: Rock-Drill," Paideuma, 4, nos. 2 & 3, pp. 361-508.

Draft

220 poud


JAMES DONEK II III

Many Parts = I shd very like to see photo of stone classics page.

Also of the block print will <sup>take</sup> circles = which help the iggurunt; I am (after all) workin' for them as wants ter

learn not for the Swine who can only make a livin' keepin' others more iggurunt than they are.

Das goes for all the  
— logues who hv.  
sabotaged Fenollisa &  
Frobenius for 40  
years.

can you find Frobenius recognizing  
stone class — 

etc.

Can you print  
in black INK  
not gray pink??

Danks again

 P.



①  
The big Legge takes 643 pages, chink, eng/ and notes.

The little Legge 485, no notes.

I suppose one wd/ hit somewhere between that size /  
but a computation cd/ be made by quaderni, i.e 16 pages.

let us say 560 pages PLUS two or three more 16s.

//

maximum of 64 ideograms per page /  
same number of 7 point italic approx/phonetic signs,

and sixteen lines of english verse /

Ist, draft about one word where ~~English~~ L/ uses three, and  
later let us say a proportion of one to five.

and I suppose 16 pages of introduction and postscript.

I favour the font used on Hawley Romanization of Chin /

I do NOT favour calligraphy / look at that eminently  
skilled mandarin scrip in my Pisan cantos (Canto 77 / on  
table on p. 54)

500 years culture, and ALL the pictographic value kapUTT.  
whereas in my barbaric yawp or ~~scribble~~ scrawl on p. 32  
(sincerity, the perfect word) you can see the blighter running  
and the words floatin out of the mouth.

all vurry un<sup>r</sup>othodox.

Yr. font permits identification of ~~bird~~ and horse and distaff,

Damn calligrapher might be O.K. but wd/ prob/ have his own ideas  
AND feelings.

Calligraphy on front page of pirated Legge 4Books. *William*  
magnificent. but unobtainable. *Shang*

And no amount of moral persuasion will persuade me to REWRITE  
the whole damn thing in any other phonetic approx's than  
wot I have already typed out and putt tone numbers on /

NObloodyBODY whatever will know anything about the actual  
sound of Chinese without going there and hearing it SUNG,

I doubt if dear Karlgren knows God Save the King from Pur Dicesti  
or the Red Flag ~~for~~ Maryland ~~by~~ Maryland OR Voi che sapete.  
from

If this aint clear I will clarify.

2

Yourapein' moozik as distinct from AAYrab is writ on staves with perpendicular line divisions. Space between the perpendics supposed to indicate identical lapses of TIME.

thus.



a similar division of time can be indicated to the eye & NOT the brain hell , ONLY the brain of a trained musician and a good one , gets the real meaning of the bar lines ANYHOW. ) parenthesis.

a similar division of time can be ~~BE~~ conveyed to the cognoscenti by writing syllables in evenly spaced columns.

Ch'ing <sup>1</sup>	jen <sup>2</sup>	tsai <sup>4</sup>	P'eng <sup>2</sup>
ssu <sup>4</sup>	chieh <sup>4</sup>	p'ang <sup>2</sup>	p'ang <sup>2</sup>
			4926.14

the last numerals ~~NUMBER~~ referring the STEWD/dent to Mat's dic / so he can foozle round and see whether Ez' is drawin on accepted error or on his wild fantasy.

///

The next sap's edtn/ can use japanese phonetics, or ALL Hawley's seven systems , or Wade, or Waddle , or Trot , of the french jesuit spelling.

I am teachin a few young potes and componists to count up to four on their fingers, and add an occasional variant , such as | one two | three three-and a half | FOUR.



and anybody who dont like it can , with my full consensus IMPROVE ont. In some special cases , where the fish tails are flapping with notable onomatopoeia ( oh VERY crudely ) like when the OWL

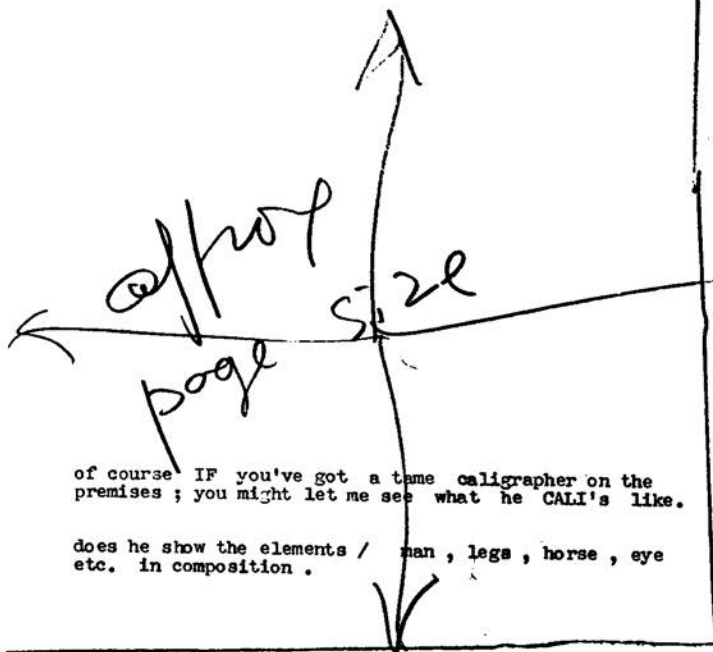
7 hoots I might even concede one of Karlgrens incomprehensible archaic forms.

trusting this will not leave you in even deeper darkness.

Basic fact / prob/ most difficult to convey is that I know nothing about Chinese but do know something about the ODES.

Luchini ( vide brochure ) merely consulted for the Italian NOT for the meaning.

"Gawd" said his chief : ( he will hold you up three quarters of an hour for the matter of a semicolon. )



of course IF you've got a tame calligrapher on the premises ; you might let me see what he CALI's like.

does he show the elements / man , legs , horse , eye etc. in composition .

God double damn and BLAST it NO !!!

W H

ONE chinese page, the SIZE of your sample  
and half ~~a~~ page or less of english.  
God damn sideways on page.

Whole point is to have the chinese as it was in your  
photo

and let the new printer arrange the english to fit.

whether it leaves half a page of fat or NOT.

One is not trying to save fifteen cents, but  
to make a decent. book.

You may have gone off  
because of a phrase in an earlier letter, saying I wd/  
like a ten cent edition/

BUT this edition is for  
the STONE

ten cent reprint, can occur in i 1970.

//

WH

You dont seem to get the fact that J.L. accepted the proposal to do a bilingual to LOOK LIKE the Stone page 6 cols/ of ten characters / <sup>per col</sup> ( as per <sup>le</sup> same from WH/ and circulated from /to/from/ etc.) and disturbance of THAT idea may mean DELAY , and how.

I do not care the underdone side of half a spewed damn whether it costs \$20 more or less one way or tother.

and nothing is easier than to CUT the english page across the middle ( IF it is a plate ) where the 60 th ideogram's meaning stops. ( if it is to be new set , it is even simpler. )

The interest ( or my interest ) in the edtn/ is to get the stone page as it stands. pages as they stand  
of the general cite etc. <sup>^</sup> didn't mean photos of the detail, but however ef them aint, them aint.

benedictions

PPH P/P/P/ SS. just heard from Jas. the english is to be newly set/ so no possible excuse for mutilating the stone text , its arrangement, original appearance etc.

another copy of the Pharos edtn/ has been sent yu , I spekk yu got the 1st/ one propping up the pyanny stool.

ANYhooww I dumt care a DAMN wot the english looks like s'long as the chinese looks like that sample page wot wuz six cols/ of ten kerraktarz.

ThankKKG gordd and Mr W.H.

( with DEEP gracherhood) have ARRIVED  
photos of the STONE in time to save grampaw from compleAT  
dissolution /

and no difficulty about reading gramp's english  
and seeing M when the chinkeese stops being translated by it.

But phWATT in the name of seven apostles and the nine  
constipated coons of Ballymiklegumbo OCCURS in the  
stone where W.H. has cut his photos into bits ?

GorDDDDDammit , amn't I fer weeks squaling like a stuck PIG  
that I want to know WHAT is on the stone ,

about my trans/ or Legge's text ( L/ a Xtn. ANYhow ,  
inferior lion-fodder ) nothing sacred

Ta HsiesQQQ ( or owever yu wantt spill it ) everything O.K. till  
Hawley page 133,  
where he starts slicin .

WHY ????

per BaccoBungo WHY ?

IF the text differs from Legge , the  
whole POINT is to know where, and what ,

AZ in the stone, Stone classics edtn/  
not doctored to fit something else

Up to now)ND wishper of a hint as to WHAT WH. is cutting  
or WHY ??

Damn it all I had 86 ms/ for the Cavalcanti.

If the Stone and the Legge differ , why not lets admit it.

But highly unscholarly to offer the bleeting reader

STONE wot aint stone, or stone expurgated to meet  
requirements of Comstok committee or WHATTSEHELL it does  
meet.

at any rat grampaw wantz to know WHAT

no desire to spol WH's pleasure ef he likes to do a lot  
of work. but wantZ ter know WHAT wolk he iz doink.

anyhow, deep grat/ fer gittin the fotos here  
somehow ( hid , hid in mist-ery. )

in nother words WHAT happens when yu fotograf the stone  
WITHOUT cutting up the fotos ?

incidentally the straight edges look better for book than  
the wiggly margin.

still no idea whether whole thing is solid on a wall or  
on separate slabs , or what the actual size of the original.

? reduced one third in fotos ? or woteLLLL ?

i repeat in deep gratechood fer  
gittin the stuff here somehow.

\*\*\* P.S. does the ref/ to Li Chi ( Lee Gee , Li Ki ) mean  
that the stone text corresponds to that used in Cuvier's  
tri-lingual edn/ of the Bk ov Rites ?? goIRAMit / & and that  
W.H. haz been trying to cut it to fit that of the Chu Hsi-  
Legge , so az to fit Ez-version of latter ??

AND whom are yu telling ?

Oh Willis ( masc/ of Wallis ? )

Wd/ I hv/ got the ital-chin edtn/ printed AT all , if I hadn't been in print shoppe / or the Cavalcanti. TO see the demstuff actually screwed onto the press. proofd , and LOCKED in place/ NO trust to any intermediary .

Will ask J.L. to send yu copy. Thought he HAD. He wrote that he had , or else my memory is kerflookd TOTAL .

Acc/ Fangs latest . L. thinks Kimball really off his rocker / OR at least Fang THINKS L. think that K/ is etc.

\*\*\*

ONE of the INconveniences of beink a lunATik and incarcerated is purrecicely that one CANNOT git into the goddam print shoppe and keep a gun on the printers.

Sending also cheap edtn/ IF yu hv/ sample foto of wot yu call the mos' beeyEWteeful kalligraph in deh wold I shd/ like to see it. Probably take a decade , but one HOPES fer a bloody Bilingual edtn/ of Analects SOMEadamDAY \*\*

Fang is doing something re/ Odes AFTER three bloody years time lag/ Not Fang's fault. Possibly not anyone's fault but certainly NOT the fault of yr/ 'anonymouse friend.

How come yu never signed yr/ name CLEARLY? I thought it wuz wilyamm.

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LETTER 8: January 31, 1957

31 Jan -57

To the rev/ W.H

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28 Nov. Mr W.H. ( vide Shakespear First Folio, etc. )

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LETTER 10 : December 30, 1957  
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TALKING WEST: AN INTERVIEW WITH ELI MANDEL

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The following interview was taped on August 10th, 1981 at the Rainbow Motor Lodge. Eli Mandel was staying there during the six weeks he taught at Simon Fraser University where he and Warren Tallman were guest lecturers in Contemporary Poetry and Prose in B.C., a special Summer School programme in the English Department. Together they offered two interlocking courses on contemporary writing in B.C. The programme was winding down in its final week of classes, and Mandel kindly agreed to an interview through which he would try to sum up his thoughts as a visiting writer/critic.

Throughout the interview--and this is characteristic of conversations with Mandel--numerous references to books and articles are mentioned in passing. In the case of published books, titles and names of authors provide sufficient bibliographic information to identify a given reference. Articles, on the other hand, are a different matter, so for the convenience of readers who may want to follow through on certain aspects of Mandel's comments, a list of these references follows the interview. It's also helpful to bear in mind that the discussion of Tish poets relates primarily to the first phase (1961-1963) in the history of that now infamous poetry newsletter, a phase that the reader can re-enter through Tish No. 1-19, ed. Frank Davey (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1975). After the first nineteen issues of Tish, the core of its original editorial collective dispersed as new urgencies led

them to divergent places.

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ROY MIKI: Eli, you've been here living a daily life on the West Coast for six weeks, and you've been immersed in a programme devoted wholly to the exploration of writing in B.C., as it's now going on. First of all, I'd like to ask you what impact this kind of teaching experience has had on your view of your own writing, or of contemporary Canadian writing, or of contemporary Canadian criticism.

ELI MANDEL: I'd want to answer that first of all by talking about the impact it's had on my view of contemporary B.C. writing--well, maybe Canadian writing too. I think one of the astonishing things that has happened here this summer--I was thinking about this earlier today as a matter of fact--is my awareness that there really is an extraordinary kind of poetic awareness, poetics, here which you could call B.C., West Coast, Vancouver, or whatever; it's here and you become aware of it. I think it centres around people like George Bowering and Gerry Gilbert and Daphne Marlatt and, well, as we discover, also those who came in from the outside, or from the inside, that is to say, Fred Wah from the interior of B.C. and Bob Kroetsch from the prairies, and a few people like that. This is writing that has changed radically the poetics of Canadian criticism, and I think we're going to hear about that. I think the "long poem" thing which begins with an anthology edited by Michael Ondaatje [The Long Poem Anthology], then turns into an essay by Kroetsch ["For Play and Entrance"], and apparently there will be an essay by Frank Davey ["The Language of the Contemporary Long Poem"], and probably an essay by one or two others as well, will tell us something about this new poetics. Now, it's not a new poetics in the sense that in fact it emerges from Warren Tallman's "Wonder Merchants"; that's the first statement. But Warren Tallman, if you look closely at the way things are happening now, is really talking out of the '60s and out of the whole historical movement of what Ekbert Fass calls Toward a New American Poetics, a title which sums up the kind of powerful poetics which came from the States and began to affect the Tish group. But the present writing in B.C. is something rather different from that. It's not simply "open form," "projective verse," and so on, it's a new poetics. So that's the first thing I've become aware of.



RM: I noticed that you seemed to be making a distinction between the American poetry that was being written in the early '60s as being very affirmative, or at least holding forth a lot of possibilities, and then the Tish poets being affected by that American movement, and yet in some sense maintaining its own identity.

EM: That's right.

RM: Were you aware of this kind of, whatever it is, it's not a division--what would you call it?

EM: Well, I think it's a kind of division that George Bowering insists on very stubbornly whenever people talk about the "Black Mountain" poets; for example, he has written this very funny piece on the "Brown Mountain Poets" ["Tish Tectonics"]. What George is saying, and he is anxious to keep the record straight on, is that Tish was not a Black Mountain group, and one becomes aware of that talking to him here and talking to various people here. It was the Canadian poetics that developed out of Olson's projective verse, open field poetry and things of that kind, so that to talk about Tish as "Black Mountain" is incorrect. That is just a tag name that has been fixed on to the whole thing, in so far as George is concerned, by the Eastern establishment; he's quite right, the movement is more complex than that. The complexity of it has been traced out, I think, by Warren Tallman. But Tallman is talking about the '60s.

RM: What do you think the relationship is between the Tish group of poets in the 1980's and the poetics of "New American Poetry"?

EM: Okay, you have to say one other thing. It's now clear to me that you have to be fairly specific about who it is you are talking about if you are talking about the Tish group. You are not talking about everything that's happening here now because everything that is happening here now is something else that we will come to later on--the contemporary poetics, whatever we're going to call that, including people like Bowering, including people like Frank Davey, is different from the kind of thing these people were concerned with when they were the Tish group. The Tish group is of a fairly specific, precise historical moment in writing and it consists of Bowering, Lionel Kearns, who didn't want to be part of the group officially but was part of it, Fred Wah, Davey; and at the fringe to begin with, certainly Daphne Marlatt and a couple of others who rarely get mentioned. I was quite interested to hear the other day just after we had talked about this, almost by synchronicity, as it

were, George promptly mentioned Jamie Reid the next day in class. And you had said he hasn't mentioned him for a long time, but the next day he did mention him in class. And so Reid was part of that, and there were others. Now, I think, that if one were to describe the Tish group in a single term, which would be difficult because there are many many things involved in that, but the major impetus of it was that this was to be local writing. It was a local pride. It was to be writing that emerged out of a sense of these people being able to talk about their place. The "open field" thing was not the key though it was there, very much there, but that was what everybody fastened on. They said, well, you know what characterizes Tish, and this was used against them initially, was the short line, the short breath, because it was a short line; what quite deliberately Layton called "the republic of poetry" as opposed to the "imperial rhetoric of poetry," I think a beautiful distinction that Irving made, and which I picked up in an introduction to his poetry and have done since in the major introduction to his poetry.

RM: Then what you are saying is that the Tish poets were simply--

EM: No, I wouldn't say simply, I am just saying, one, they ought to be thought of as local poets. They ought to be thought of as poets who understood that they were writing out of a particular place, places like Abbotsford, like Vancouver and so on, that they were not poets of American poetics; they were poets of Vancouver. Two, I think one should say that they were young poets; that's the simple part if you want to qualify it. They were young poets and therefore Tish represents in a kind of way an apprenticeship. There are obviously less effective moments there, for example in Davey's poetry, than you get later on. Davey has emerged as an extraordinarily fine poet and you don't sense that earlier. I think he wants to drop some of the earlier poetry. As I understand it, he doesn't want it to be part of the canon so far as he's concerned.

\* \* \*

RM: I am going to get you to go on, Eli, about something that we've talked about over and over, the relationship between Canadian criticism and B.C. writing, if there is any relationship.

EM: This is the big question, the one that has to be thought out most carefully, most precisely. In one sense you are asking me to give you a history of Canadian criticism, which I simply can't do

right now, it would take hours and hours. But I can point to the main concerns, the main lines. This kind of thing involves Frank Davey for one, it involves George Bowering very strongly too, it involves me, and it involves Northrop Frye and so on and so on. The point is this: I argued this summer, and I have argued before, that in fact thematic criticism, which has been the major criticism in Canadian writing until 1972 at least, or until Frank Davey's attack upon it in From There to Here (1974) and in "Surviving the Paraphrase" (1976)-- thematic criticism was the dominant form of Canadian criticism. However you interpret thematic criticism, and that in itself is a very important point--

RM: Could you give a brief interpretation?

EM: I will in just a moment, but first of all, however you interpret it, one of its functions, one of its imports, one way in which it works, is simply to centralize Canadian writing; that is, to think of the centre of Canadian writing as being in the metropolis, in Toronto, in central Canada, and to have its heart and life there. This brings me to the interpretation of that kind of criticism. As I understand thematic criticism, which is of course the work of Frye in his review of A.J.M. Smith's The Book of Canadian Poetry in 1943--that great summation of what modern poetry in Canada was by A.J.M. Smith who articulated its presence, and then the great summation of what "Canadian" writing had been up to that date by Frye in his review. Frye articulated for us the view of thematic criticism. And then that was followed by Doug Jones's Butterfly on Rock (1970). There were many other things that came before, and in between that; for example, James Reaney, whom I didn't talk about, wrote a piece ["The Predicament of the Canadian Poet"] which is part of the history of this. One really has to go through this in some detail, but the key stages that I trace are Frye, Jones, and then Margaret Atwood. Atwood's Survival (1972) was phenomenal. It changed the history of the way we thought about poetry in this country.

Now, the theory that Frye was advancing, which we call thematic criticism, was that Canadian writing derives from the impact of a vast indifferent and apparently sinister natural force upon the writer; nature, the wilderness, and the writer's response to that, which he then internalizes, and which becomes a kind of symbolic image for him of the internal wilderness which Frye calls the riddle of the unconscious. The significance of this historically and culturally is that the wilderness is northern Ontario; it's essentially the country seen from central Canada. It is not the country seen across the whole length of it, it's not the country seen

regionally, it's not the country seen in its parts, it's not the country seen from particular angles. The country is seen centrally, and the way in which it is seen centrally is of course that first of all that is where the writers are, as the interpretation goes; and secondly, the theory of the impact of the wilderness upon writers in this particular way derives from what is called the Laurentian theory of Canadian history, which is a major historical interpretation of the development of the country by Harold Innis and Donald Creighton and other historians like them.

RM: They too thought of the Canadian wilderness in the same way as Frye?

EM: What they thought was this: that Canada exists because of its geography not in spite of its geography. That is to say, the lines of communication in this country run from east to west, that the movement into the country, to use Frye's own image is: as you come down the St. Lawrence you enter the body of the Leviathan, this giant whale, and you go to the centre of the continent, and therefore you are at once in the labyrinth itself because that is what entering the Leviathan means--it means being inside the labyrinth, inside the minotaur's lair. Frye actually says this.

RM: Where do the images come from?

EM: They came from the Bible, and they come from the mythological interpretation of literature, from Frye's reading of the Bible. They also come from a number of other sources. Oddly enough Marshall McLuhan enters into this too. They come from Harold Innis's theories of communication and the relationship between communication and the development of society. Therefore, from his point of view, believe it or not, the codfish are more important to the history of Canada than virtually almost anything else because it's the codfish that pulled the settlers gradually in; it pulled the fishermen in, then it pulled the settlers in. So Innis's great history, The Fur Trade in Canada (1930), develops this interpretation of Canadian history, and in the conclusion, which is about the history of codfishing, he really says: The real lines of communication in this country run east and west and therefore the country will develop east and west. There is a kind of logic to the development, an historical logic to the development of Canada, and the historical logic is that the metropolitan centre will be in Montreal and Toronto and the hinterland will be the West. Now, you can begin to see what this means in the cultural development of the country as well, because

that means that the West will always be a colonial appendage to the imperial centre which is the establishment in Toronto itself.

RM: So what you are saying is that this larger structure of cultural and historical and social metaphors influenced Frye too. They were part and parcel of his vision of Canada.

EM: Oh yes, Frye interpreted Canada in this way too. He took, for example, the Group of Seven as the central painters, and there are many many artists who would differ with him on that point. That is one of the most common images of the country, that the Group of Seven is the first group to give us a vision of ourselves—which is the landscape, which is the North, which is northern Ontario in fact. And then they move further north. There is an awfully interesting aspect of this which hasn't been fully explored yet because it's also Rosicrucian and mystic. Lawren Harris, for example, was a mystic, and his vision of the movement north was "ever North." But that hasn't been fully explored. I wrote an article on him called "The Inward, Northward Journey of Lawren Harris," which was making this same point. But yes, essentially Frye said, The cultural centre of this country is the vision of the North, and that statement really comes down to a version that the centre of Canada, as a writing centre, is eastern Canada, and therefore the West will always be a colonial appendage, which becomes more colonial as you go further west; and so western Canada, meaning the Prairies, is one aspect of it, but the coast becomes an even further appendage.

RM: Why has thematic criticism the term "theme" attached to it?

EM: Actually it's a very odd thing—I'm not quite sure. I'd have to do some very close--

RM: Themes are more real or more important or more significant than the works themselves?

EM: Well that's the argument against it which you get with Frank Davey when he says: There are many reasons why we have to take issue with thematic criticism, and one is that it's concerned with theme, and therefore it's not concerned with form; it's not concerned with structure, it's not concerned with the language, it's not concerned with the whole problem of language, which becomes the major problem now, where the post-modern writer in fact has moved into the idea that poetry is about language itself and not about themes or ideas or whatever. It's a kind of puzzle which I have never worked out satisfactorily myself, why we call it

thematic criticism, because Frye himself is talking about an image, and he is talking about a great image, the image of the North. Atwood may be the one who popularized the term because she calls her Survival a thematic study of Canadian literature, or words to that effect. So she may have given it the stamp, I am not sure. Or perhaps Doug Jones did, I am not sure. I've never really worked out the history of that particular language. Frye is really talking about forms, cultural forms, and I have to think this through as to what the meaning of that is in Frye, but the historical development is clear: that what began as a version of the historical process through which Canadian writing went, became a thematic account after a bit. Atwood was so enormously influential.

RM: A great trust in generalization--that generalizations actually reveal structures that are self-evident in the world?

EM: Right, and therefore a means by which it became possible to talk intelligently about Canadian writing.

RM: And a great deal of trust, I suppose, in critical terms then, and the power of the critic.

EM: Therefore, the teacher of English and the student and the whole educational centre and the university itself could say: But there is such a thing as Canadian writing and we can talk about it; it does have a coherence, it's got a centre, and the cohering centre is its theme(s). That gave it a kind of authority, and of course, Frye himself being a critic of enormous power, of international stature, gave the whole proceedings a kind of stamp of authenticity by virtue of having his name associated with it. He not only wrote that review, of course, he also reviewed Canadian poetry for 10 years for the University of Toronto Quarterly, and Frye's reviews were among the most influential reviews we've ever had during that 10 year period. It would be very interesting to assess those reviews and find out who it is that he said would become important as writers, and what his choices were, and what actually happened.

RM: How then does Eli Mandel fit in with thematic criticism, which is so obsessed, in a way, with generalization? You were, were you not, educated in thematic criticism, or is that a false thing to say?

EM: That is a false thing to say. One of the myths, one of the peculiar stories is the association of myself with Reaney and Jay McPherson as a member of the group of Frye. A lot of jokes are made about that. First of all, I was not a member at all; secondly,

there wasn't such a group.

RM: Where did the rumour come from?

EM: Well, in the '50s when there wasn't that much poetry being written, indeed the poets all did tend to write what we call "mythopoeic" poetry, but the reason for that was the dominant influence of Eliot and Yeats, particularly Eliot I suppose, and not Williams. Of course you realize that's a key distinction that I am making, because Williams represents a totally different line, and there was a different line besides the mythopoeic. The mythopoeic line consisted of people like Wilfred Watson, Douglas LePan, P.K. Page, myself, James Reaney, some poets of extraordinary force, Reaney being one, and Ann Wilkinson who died; all that was mythopoeic poetry out of the Eliot line--the "modernists"--the real modern line, that is, before the post-modern line, what we then called "modern" poetry. But there was another aspect of modern poetry which was from Pound and Williams, and Louis Dudek who was a member of the Pound-Williams axis, fought against Frye who represented the Eliot critical influence and who therefore defended the mythopoeic poets. His critical work has been published by Frank Davey in Open Letter [Louis Dudek: Texts and Essays, 1981] because it embodies that opposition. It's a revisionist's history, if you want.

RM: So where was Eli Mandel in the '50s when Frye was writing his summations of Canadian poetry?

EM: Well, I was a graduate student at the University of Toronto and I was studying Christopher Smart, and I was beginning to write my poetry. There is no question at all that I thought of poetry then as that which gave myth its authentic sense of existential reality. You made myth existentially real--that was one of the forms of mythic writing. But I wasn't thinking of Frye, I was thinking of Eliot, or people like that. Those were the sounds in my head, if you want. I knew also that I was interested in all kinds of other things. I always have been. I think the key point to your question about me can be answered if you think not about the '50s, where I'm the young poet trying to find my voice and I write two books of poetry, "Minotaur Poems" [in Trio, 1954] which is a mythic book, and Fuseli Poems (1960) which is a mythic book, I wouldn't deny that, but then in the '60s I write a book called Black and Secret Man (1964) which is quite different and really signals a change in my poetry, and that change is picked up in the criticism that I write as well. Now that's interesting because Frank Davey, of all people, in his Preface to

From There to Here says: Aside from the thematic critics there were two other people writing during this period and they were Marshall McLuhan and Eli Mandel, and these people were concerned with two different things; McLuhan was concerned with the impact upon poetry of technology, of the media, and Eli Mandel was concerned with the fact that we had to move away from a structured criticism to a highly subjective criticism. Which is true, I said that in my little book [Criticism: The Silent-Speaking Words] for the CBC in 1966. In fact, what I was thinking about--I didn't have the terminology yet--I was thinking about phenomenological criticism, I was thinking about Agee, I was thinking about all the opening up of the field. And at the same time as I said that in criticism, I was beginning to do it in poetry, because then the next book in 1967 was An Idiot Joy which was an open field book. George Bowering knew that because he wrote a review of the book called "Irving and Eli," in which he put into opposition Irving Layton and myself, pointing out that I was moving toward another kind of poetry from Irving's.

So where does Eli Mandel fit in? Well, my criticism has been so much at odds with the "great tradition" from the beginning that Roy Daniels said of me in his review of my book [Criticism]: A man who knows the tradition so well and says what he says, my god, is like Augustine welcoming the Huns to Rome--which is exactly the point: that is, in 1966 I was saying, Our tradition in criticism is structure and order and closed form, and the ferocity--what's the marvellous term that Kroetsch uses [in "For Play and Entrance"]?--the ferocity of closure, the tradition is that, and I was saying at that time, No we've got to go another way. What happened was that I went to my next critical book which was more specifically Canadian, in 1977, Another Time, but given my usual tactics that has been only partially understood so far, because I tend to work by, I suppose you would call it paradox, or something like that; that is, I tend to take the opposition position and then move it toward its paradoxical difference. But the later book does have a section on Regionalism. So where does Eli Mandel stand? He stands as a Western Canadian writer who understood from virtually the beginning that, though he had been writing Eastern poetry in the sense of establishment poetry and in the sense of mythic poetry, he also quite clearly understood that there was some other profound pull--in my essay on Western Canadian writing I called it "Writing West: On the Road to Wood Mountain." I chose the term as I make clear in my article, "Writing West," from an imitation of Bill New's book, Articulating West, and I meant to indicate by it that the Western writer is not the writer who's located in the West--this is very important--any more than he's the B.C. writer located in B.C.;



he's the one who is moving there, or whose direction moves there, his compass needle points there all the time, his heart points there all the time. That's necessary and I can't avoid it. I've gone back to the West many many times, and I think that should be said. It's important to know I've taught at Banff for five years in the summers; I've taught several times at Western universities here, as I told the class at the beginning. I've taught at the University of Victoria, U.B.C., and Simon Fraser, all three universities. I've spent a year as Writer-in-Residence in Regina. I've taught twice at Fort San with Bob Kroetsch, the writing school for Saskatchewan. So there has been this paradoxical thing that though I live in the east and though I think I am to a certain degree, as people would say, a Toronto writer, it's nonetheless true that I have always been moving West in my writing increasingly.

I think it's important for me to say that not only have I been writing West in the sense of gradually becoming aware of the Westward moving of Canadian writing. I've done an important interview ["Where the Voice Comes From"] with Rudy Wiebe, for example; I've written an important article ["Romance and Realism in Western Canadian Fiction"] about Bob Kroetsch; I've done the Introduction to Bob Kroetsch's new book of poetry [Field Notes, 1981]; I think my article on "Writing West" was one of my best articles, and I'm going to write about B.C. writing now. But also this whole direction has gotten me involved with Western writers, so that Bob Kroetsch who is a friend of mine and Andy Suknaski—not only has Andy Suknaski been a figure in my writing, I'm a figure in his writing. He wrote this wonderful thing, which I think for the record we should take note of, for Brick (which is a very interesting review magazine), an article called "Borges and I, Mandel and Me," about our being doubles. It is a very fine article on what doubles are and the use of the double in literature.

RM: One question Eli, sticking with the criticism for a little while longer, does the term "formalism" mean anything to you?

EM: It doesn't mean much to me. The contemporary terms that mean a great deal to me are "phenomenology"—and I think probably I've got some claim to being one of the early Canadian critics to write about it quite seriously in the sense that I was writing about James Agee in Criticism: The Silent-Speaking Words--and "structuralism," which I've written a fair amount of. Some people have noticed that in some of the early Prairie writing, and of course in my theory of strange loops in my article called "Strange Loops," which will appear in the Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory. There is [in this article] a full development of the theory of

regionalism as voice or as structure, a particular kind of linguistic style which has to do with strange loops and which comes from Bob Kroetsch.

RM: The term?

EM: No, the style. Kroetsch is full of those paradoxes which I call strange loops, in other words doubles in various ways.

RM: Could you elaborate?

EM: A strange loop is a self-referring, self-reflexive linguistic paradox. For example, this isn't a classic one, but it is a good one, when Groucho Marx says, "I would never join a club of which I was a member." That's a strange loop and that's the kind of thing you get in all of Bob's writing. Bob's Sad Phoenician is full of strange loops, hundreds and hundreds of paradoxes, linguistic paradoxes which turn in on themselves in funny ways; and the way in which these become doubles is very interesting. A double is a strange loop because a double is the appearance of--it's a self-reflexive image and therefore it's a strange loop. And of course Bob's strange loops, his linguistic paradoxes which he loves to play with, almost always have to do with doubles. Gone Indian is a perfect example. He even uses the device of the tape recorder on which the so-called thesis the guy is unable to write is being recorded, which is being sent back to the fellow who is recording it; that's always the situation, that there are two minds at work. There's the one person who is doing the biography of the other person and the biographer is at the thick centre, and the person whose biography is being done goes racing around the countryside being as wild as could be. He is the id figure while the superego works from the thick centre, yet they are images of each other. Put together, they are strange loops. That's what I mean by this. That's what I call regional writing: it's a means of defining the region by saying nothing about it.

\* \* \*

RM: Getting back to West Coast writing, Eli, did you read Warren Tallman's criticism before you met him?

EM: Oh well, that's of course where the story which Warren told his class comes in, which is a story about my wife Ann. The point was

that--this is necessary to tell because Warren made a point about it in the course this year--when Ann came as a graduate student to B.C., in her second year here, she went into Warren's class. She wrote me letters then about Warren, so I heard about Warren in 1964, and I heard all about the great conference [1963 U.B.C. Poetry Conference] which had been here. Most of us had heard about it anyhow, but I heard about it, and I think she told me about hearing the tapes and she told me about all these young poets who were here. That's when I first became aware of the B.C. school, so I became aware of it through the woman who has become my wife, and through Warren Tallman, literally. Now, during the year Ann came to do her PhD in 1966 at Alberta, she said, Eli we have to go out and see Warren. So I came out with her to see Warren Tallman; that is when I first met him. Now he tells the story of knowing that he was meeting this Frygian critic, this Frye critic from Alberta, and he wasn't particularly fussy about meeting him with Ann, whom he liked very much, until as we met he suddenly felt, My goodness, I've missed the whole point. This is not just a couple who have come out here to see me; these people are in love with one another, and I've missed the whole thing. And Warren points out that this is a very significant way in which one thinks about the world, because he asked me to come to his class. I said, I'll come if I can lecture on Hart Crane's "Voyages" and he just about had a fit because he loves that poem, of course. And he said, Oh all right, you lecture on "Voyages" and I want you to do one of your poems and I did "Listen, The Sea," one of my own poems. So we knew one another, yes, through Ann. So oddly enough she figures largely in the story of the contact between the various critics. And she herself is, of course, a very important critic who has written a terrific article ["Uninventing Structures"] on Kroetsch.

RM: Does your essay "Modern Canadian Poetry" fit into this period?

EM: It's about 1969, so it doesn't derive from this period. It was an essay I was asked to do.

RM: Was that an important statement at that time?

EM: I think that was my great summation, from my point of view, of where I stood in respect to Canadian poetry. There are two things to be said about this. One is that I had begun to teach a course called "The Canadian Experience," an humanities course, and a lot of the writing that I did over this period derived directly from that course. I was thinking about Canadian writing a lot; in other words, up until then I had been thinking about other things, and not

Canadian writing. Now I was asked to not only lecture on Canadian writing but to lecture on it from a special point of view, developing theories of it, and so on. So that's where that essay comes from, and it's a version of the way in which I was beginning to work out--it is also in some of the publishing I was doing because I edited Five Modern Canadian Poets (1970), or was publishing it around that time, and the structure of that anthology comes a lot from that time.

RM: Can you remember what you were thinking about West Coast writing at that time? Because that essay reads like a discovery, that somewhere recently you had thought about modern Canadian poetry and suddenly realized certain things. You start with Earle Birney and talk about writers who are haunted by history. And you turn to Leslie Fiedler and then to Charles Olson. In the section on Olson you point to the West Coast. This is 1969.

EM: That's right. The key there is Fiedler because Fiedler had written a book [The Return of the Vanishing American] about the way in which the Red Indian is going to come back. You know how that essay ends--it's a great study of the id figure in modern American writing--it ends with a section on West Coast Canadian writing, and there are two or three figures who enter into it. I mean, there is the Tish group and there's Leonard Cohen's Beautiful Losers, and Cohen and the Tish group are the ones who appear in that essay; you see Fiedler was the clue, the guy who, oddly enough, clued me into this. But I must tell you something else. You know George Bowering never never fails to send me a postcard when there is a particular mention made. He sent me a postcard about my article ["Modern Canadian Poetry"] when it appeared and he said in the postcard, Eli you're wrong about Black Mountain poetry; we are not Black Mountain poets. I think he might have said, We are Brown Mountain poets, I don't know. At first I couldn't figure out what he was saying. I thought, okay, well, he can be fussy about it but the general term is clear enough to me. I think I used the term "Black Mountain," but what he meant was, what I began with, which is to say that it's wrong to think of the Tish poets as simply "Black Mountain" because that is not it; it is much more complex than that.

RM: This is maybe by the wayside, but it seemed to me that you were saying that the obsession with history was an obsession of the Canadian poet to try to find a cultural form that the poetry can thrive in and be at peace in, and that it was really the end of humanism that you were reading in the obsession with the wilderness.

EM: That's right.

RM: Back in some readers' minds they might also think of the end of Frye's fear of the wilderness.

EM: I think the essay is, in a certain way, today, readable as part of the poetics of our present moment. I would certainly want to revise, if I were to do that again, the end and talk about the kind of poetics which we have here because I'm just beginning to clue into what that poetics is, that it's open form, and so on, but that is not enough. There is no hint of the long poem, of the serial poem, of the continuous form, of the writer who is into language itself rather than theme of any kind--there is no hint of that. There is a thing at the very end which is prophetic because, if I remember correctly, the essay says: There is a name for the kind of poetry that we're now reaching and this kind of poetry is named by Susan Sontag. Then I name a lot of figures who name this kind of poetry, and I say it is a poetry of chance, magic, open form, and so on, and that is where I go to Cohen. And I think that's quite an insight. So I had obviously begun to sense that we were moving into a new phase, and one of the arguments of the essay which is very important is that there's a different kind of poetry coming that will take this shape, and that poetry will not be out of the usual tradition, which is the tradition of history and the East. The poetry of the West, I suppose. Yes, that's there.

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RM: Eli, in the last part of this interview we will turn to recent criticism and get your sense of what's going on in criticism now, what changes are going on, and what you think the future of criticism is in Canada.

EM: I think that's an important question for a number of reasons. First of all, there is an extraordinarily efficient kind of critical apparatus being built up and that consists of things like the ECW group, the Essays in Canadian Writing people who are churning out these books of critical studies, of bibliographies, of studies of various kinds, and so on.

RM: You mean that we are being inundated by criticism?

EM: Well, there is that, and then there is the kind of thing that you get with Douglas and McIntyre's continuing series which just had

Frank Davey's study of Dudek and Souster [Dudek and Souster], and then you have Davey's Open Letter which is a continuous series of studies. And all of that is one thing. But if I were to try to say where Canadian criticism is now, I think you have to say that Frank Davey is, without question, going to begin to occupy very much the centre of the thing with his approach, probably with his essay on the long poem, with his collected essays which will be published by Turnstone very soon--I am going to do the Introduction to that--and so on. I think that probably we'll have a book of criticism by Bob Kroetsch and that's going to be important, because Kroetsch is one of the most original critical minds that we've got and he brings to the foreground all this contemporary thought about critical theory which is lurking around the essays of the younger people, you know, deconstructionism, and so on and so on, and he will give that a very nice shape and form. In other words, I think Frye, or anybody who represents Frye, has well passed the moment where they can take over the field again; they can't. So thematic criticism is gone and a form of criticism which Frank talked about and which Bob Kroetsch is talking about has appeared, that is to say, genre criticism, linguistic criticism, phenomenological criticism. Those things are being done. There are a few other people around still. John Moss keeps churning out books, and I don't think that they are very good, but nonetheless there he is. Certainly from the West too you'll hear more of some people. Keith has published his book on Rudy Wiebe [A Voice in the Land, ed. W.J. Keith], and so on. So there is a much broader perspective of criticism across the whole country. There will be a re-thinking of what region means because Frye's political definition of regionalism I don't think is adequate; I've argued that before and I think some of my comments on that will be published. And people like George Bowering who are dynamic in everything are going to publish critical works as well, which I think is all to the good. If you think about the United States or England, and you think about the poets there, you know that every good poet has got his own book of criticism; that's never, never considered a bad thing at all. Randall Jarrell, for example, had a marvelous critical book, as well as his poems, that kind of thing. Berryman had a beautiful critical book published in his lifetime.

RM: And Williams, and Pound?

EM: Of course, Williams and Pound. The notion of the distinction between the poet and the critic which is so often made is really not important at all. The real distinction people are trying to make is between the poet and the reviewer, and the reviewer is not a critic.

RM: What does criticism do for writing, if anything?

EM: At the present moment, what it does for writing is a very important thing which Bob Kroetsch talks about: that the writer in his writing is a critic, and the critic in his writing is a writer. That is, writing is about the act of writing now, and any serious writing for Bob Kroetsch is not about meaning, that's for him the structure that you have to deconstruct. That's one of the major points he made when he was here; writing for him is not the act of making meaning. It's the act of finding out what writing is about, and that's a critical task, a task for the writer and for the critic. They go together in that sense. I began by talking about this kind of establishment of, or apparatus, of publishing we now have, which is going to publish all the bibliographies of all the writers, and all the biographies and all the critical studies--those don't matter a damn. What matters is the theory of criticism. Just as Stevens always said: Writing is the theory of writing, and that's true. The theory of criticism is the theory of writing, is writing, and we are now finally, finally in this country reaching the point where that is so.

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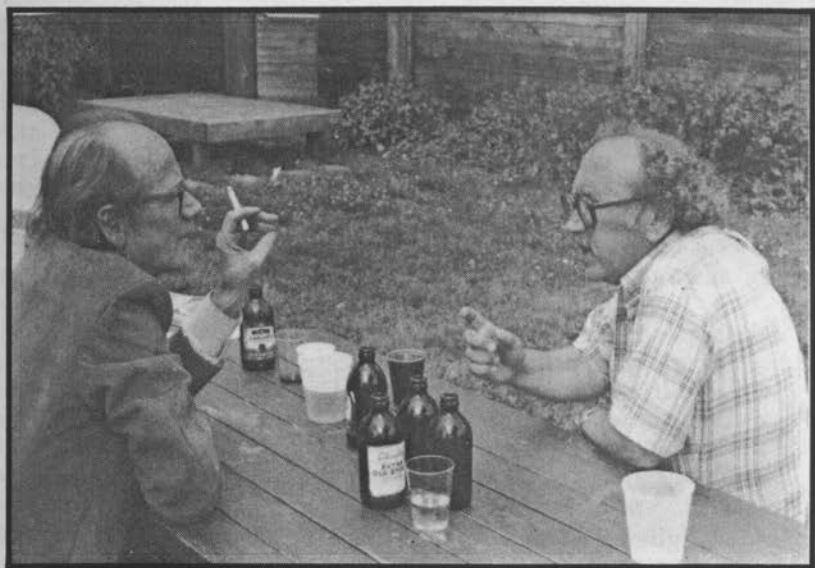
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Warren Tallman and Eli Mandel



Warren Tallman and Sheila Watson

WHEN THE TIME CAME

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I

An Entrance Monologue

- bp: My original ambition was to take the first chapter of *Ida* & go thru it with you step-by-step, showing how the construction of Stein's sentences & paragraphs is twinned to what it is she is saying; how, in short, her saying says. I'd thot 'first chapter' because in an earlier essay ("Some Sentences, Paragraphs & Punctuation On Sentences, Paragraphs & Punctuation") I'd gone into the first page of *Ida* fairly thoroughly, albeit from a different point of view, & the sheer symmetry of moving from the first page to the first chapter definitely appealed to me. The reality of what I'm going to do today has turned out differently from its intended reality largely because of the approach I elected to take, which is to say the approach I elected to try (& I'll put the emphasis there--I'm going to try)--to deal thoroughly with the first five pages of *Ida*. I want to deal with Stein's writing in its real context which is the flux & flow of her actual texts. I don't want to extract her meaning so much as slow your reading of the text down thru the use of that ancient & beneficent device, the extensive commentary, forcing you to linger over the deliberateness of her craft & show you how, tho she was whimsical & had a highly developed sense of play, the whimsy & the play were part of an over-all & continuous strategy of engagement with some of the central issues of any writer's writing: the role of the I; the relationship of the role of the I to the function of narrative time; the whole issue of narrative time in general. I confined myself to five pages because I decided finally that what I was interested in was developing a

general strategy for reading Stein, trying to convey to you the excitement I feel when I read her & why I feel it, & given that, that I was more interested in doing a few pages carefully, at a pace we all could absorb them, than doing a whole bunch of pages hastily. I'd also like to emphasise that I include my own I in there when I say 'all', because my guide was the feeling in me after five pages that that was a hell of a lot to absorb, & why didn't I leave the next few pages for another lecture, or another critic even, but leave off at a point where the I & the we could both see clearly what was happening.

When I was much younger than I am now, chronologically speaking, but about the same age mentally, tho without the experience I've accumulated since then, I started writing a book on Gertrude Stein's theories of personality as revealed in her early opus The Making of Americans. The general scheme was to go thru & extract the many & very clear things she'd said about personality types & demonstrate both the consistency & accuracy of her particular classification system. This is easy to do; it would just take a gross amount of time--say two years or so if you were working at it full tilt. I finished two chapters of the work, sketched out an additional four, even published the initial two, & then abandoned the project. It took me awhile to see why I'd abandoned it, but the why is very important to what I'm going to talk about today, so it's worth taking a moment or two to talk specifically to that point. Now you'll have noticed I said 'talk' when here I am rather obviously reading to you from some prepared notes, prepared sentences in this case, so right away you're grasping the principle of a real-time fiction. The writer is finally a writer. She/he is not a talker. Even tho this is only the third time I've presented these words to an audience, I am presenting them--virtually the same ones as in the other times--I am not talking/creating in any spontaneous sense. Tho it's clearly this I addressing you, this I is using words the I managed to write down in its hotel room on English Bay one late November afternoon (tho of course right now, in the time of the writing, it's today on English Bay & I'm imagining a you which is tomorrow & other days in the future & me saying, or you reading, these words). Therefore I say, & I just said (whether in an oral or a print sense), this whole talk is a kind of fiction. And it's precisely this borderline between the real life of the I & the I's existence in narrative time, any narrative's time, that was one of Stein's central concerns. She was exploring the continuous present & she wanted writing

to occupy a continuous present. She very specifically asked us all in her Geographical History of America (p. 157): "Oblige me by not beginning. Also by not ending." I.e.—continue. Continue continuously. Give the text the reality of its existence as an object & let that object be continuously present to you—timeless in that sense. So how could I continue extracting? I was violating Stein's text when I did that, the very spirit of her text, & I was, of course, proving the validity of Heisenberg's Principle of Uncertainty as it applied to literature. By extracting I was bringing the text to a dead halt & we were no longer observing it as it was & therefore our observations ceased to have any validity. We're in danger of that even in what we're going to do today but at least in this case I'm going to encourage you to, if you feel like it, read on ahead of me & just let what I'm saying drift in & out of your own relationship to the text. Don't let me stop the particularity of that relationship. Just let me help if the help's helpful. That was one of the things that struck me in Grade 8 when Miss Nethercut, our English teacher, would be reading from Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist & we weren't supposed to read on ahead, we were supposed to stay with her & she'd stop every few minutes & say "Barrie" or "June" she'd say "where am I?" & you'd have to have your finger on the correct spot. Don't keep your finger on the spot. It doesn't matter if you miss what I'm saying because it's what Stein's saying that's important. I'm going to be insisting the same information in different ways because that's what Stein did & you'll get the real flux of the definite particles if you simply read away. Okay. Here we go. This is a reading of the first five pages of Ida entitled "When the Time Came."

## II

### The Definite Particles



Resist the temptation to jump too far ahead in terms of knowledge. i.e. Let the net of information arise mainly from the text at hand. Read the book you're reading.

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This is the announcement of what Stein proposes to deal with, that the self, the Id(e)a of I, + tI me, are inseparable, but that the I exists beyond notions of sIngularity.

THERE was a baby born named Ida. Its mother held it with her hands to keep Ida from being born but when the time came Ida came. And as Ida came, with her came her twin, so there she was Ida-Ida.

The mother was sweet and gentle and so was the father. The whole family was sweet and gentle except the great-aunt. She was the only exception.

↑  
But the exception becomes the rule. Stein allows us some foreshadowing here by implication.

This whole opening is very rich + dense. What is being dealt with is the notion of "self-consciousness" + the idea that the "self" also births the "not-self", that those who never confront the I/I remain sweet + gentle, that only the great-aunt, who bore twins + buried them under the pair tree, the one who faced the **issue** of a doubleness, is different, + makes others feel funny.

This is the reannouncement of the "two", picking up from the opening page's Ida-Ida twins theme + echoing the pun on pair as where the two's been buried. These types of punning, underlinings + recapitulations are underlined in the grandfather's statement about trees— "tree" is always the same (repeats itself) but then "In a little while" you come to see how each "tree" is unique (insists itself) + "a cherry tree does not look like a pear tree". Stein is drawing on a natural model to once again insist her distinction between repetition + insistence.

This figure of the old woman becomes oracular precisely because she is old + has, therefore, knowledge of what both young + old mean.

The cherry tree can be taken as a pun on "cheery" + hence "sweet + gentle" + hence, too, "innocence" in all its senses which loops back to "cherry".

An old woman who was no relation and who had known the great-aunt when she was young was always telling that the great-aunt had had something happen to her oh many years ago, it was a soldier, and then the great-aunt had had little twins born to her and then she had quietly, the twins were dead then, born so, she had buried them under a pear tree and nobody knew.

Nobody believed the old woman perhaps it was true but nobody believed it, but all the family always looked at every pear tree and had a funny feeling.

The grandfather was sweet and gentle too. He liked to say that in a little while a cherry tree does not look like a pear tree.

It was a nice family but they did easily lose each other.

So Ida was born and a very little while after her parents went off on a trip and never came back. That was the first funny thing that happened to Ida.

The days were long and there was nothing to do. ←



Here we expect the word "trees" to occupy the fourth position but instead we find it buried in the word "streets". "trees" become "streets" even as a "cherry tree" does not become a "pear tree". In each insistence of a thing some transformation must take place. Otherwise it is simply a repetition.

She saw the moon and she saw the sun and she saw the grass and she saw the streets.

The first time she saw anything it frightened her. She saw a little boy and when he waved to her she would not look his way.

She liked to talk and to sing songs and she liked to change places. Wherever she was she always liked to change places. Otherwise there was nothing to do all day. Of course she went to bed early but even so she always could say, what shall I do now, now what shall I do.

Here is part of Stein's theory of narrative + her theory of personality. The I (da) is always changing places. And indeed in this story each time an Ida is mentioned you are never sure which Ida. Each recurrence is not a repetition but a fresh insistence + hence a fresh revelation.

Once you realize + accept that Stein is dealing with insistence, not repetition, then it's clear that two different "now"s are being pointed to — two different time periods. The comma between them is used to mark the time shift, to underline the time shifts any narrative contains.

And thus arises this entire paragraph, a commentary on time.

Thus also the following paragraph's insistence that Ida is not idle but is as a day is — "always the same day". Yet it is important to remember that Ida is Ida, & that the now now structure parallels the day day & Ida, Ida samenesses & differences. Each is a discrete unit of time & being, tho they have the same name. Ida is not idle but she is Ida & these are not exactly the same.

Some one told her to say no matter what the day is it always ends the same day, no matter what happens in the year the year always ends one day.

Ida was not idle but the days were always long even in winter and there was nothing to do.

Ida lived with her great-aunt not in the city but just outside.

Ida was not idle, & in fact, as the earlier sentence made clear, "always could say, what shall I do now, now what shall I do." Which of course is a graphing of the I in motion, the I insisting Itself.

Here we see how the exception becomes the rule, becomes the ruler of Ida's life, as the great-aunt, who is linked to Ida-Ida thru the pair tree, becomes the one who raises Ida & Ida, the one by whom her days are ruled.

Everything is transformed. Things become like other things. Each thing/episode/experience has its separate existence + is transformed within it. This is the notion "insistence in narrative", that as you move forward + encounter the same words/ideas in new constructions + configurations they are different + have a new existence. It is this very difference in each moment that must be conveyed if one is to have a complete description.

She was very young and as she had nothing to do she walked as if she was tall as tall as any one. Once she was lost that is to say a man followed her and that frightened her so that she was crying just as if she had been lost. In a little while that is some time after it was a comfort to her that this had happened to her.

She did not have anything to do and so she had time to think about each day as it came. She was very careful about Tuesday. She always just had to have Tuesday. Tuesday was Tuesday to her. They always had plenty to eat. Ida always hesitated before eating. That was Ida.

She has time to contemplate the natural insistence — each day as it comes. And these days, as we have seen, are I days, the discrete units of the I's existence. They are also Ideas.

to do.  
Tuesday, which is, of course,  
Two's day or Ida, I day which is also  
the "They" that opens the next paragraph (+ each is the graphing of that pair Ida/Ida). "Tuesday was Tuesday to her"; the same + different each time she encountered it.

Stein makes use of the doubleness of this little logic loop. Everything here is not Two, yet is Two + yet, too, is one. Really, of course, it is 1 plus 1. But it is not Two.

Indeed here is a third 1 who restates the theme of I + I's desire to dialogue with self. I talks to I. Thus for any of us there is an experience within self of "I?" "da?". Q + A.

One day it was not Tuesday, two people came to see her great-aunt. They came in very carefully. They did not come in together. First one came and then the other one. One of them had some orange blossoms in her hand. That made Ida feel funny. Who were they? She did not know and she did not like to follow them in. A third one came along, this one was a man and he had orange blossoms in his hat brim. He took off his hat and he said to himself here I am, I wish to speak to myself. Here I am. Then he went on into the house.

Ida remembered that an old woman had once told her that she Ida would come to be so much older that not anybody could be older, although, said the old woman, there was one who was older.

Orange blossoms were + are associated with marriage (my mother's wedding ring had them clustered on it) + thus a third fruit/tree/sexual+or romantic word is added (i refer here to its associational net + not some private symbolism of Stein's). The "or" of "orange" (part of the "either/or" two term formulation) is also important.

This reiterates a point Stein made in THE MAKING OF AMERICANS, that we are never to ourselves as anything other than young men + women in our consciousness of self. That the idea of "older" is something only the "old" can convey to us. This is underlined later in the text by Ida's growing older leading to her being sixteen. It is those for whom time is almost over that the concept "old" is fully revealed to.

Ida began to wonder if that was what was now happening to her. She wondered if she ought to go into the house to see whether there was really any one with her great-aunt, and then she thought she would act as if she was not living there but was somebody just coming to visit and so she went up to the door and she asked herself

→ is any one at home and when they that is she herself said to herself no there is nobody at home she decided not to go in.

That was just as well because orange blossoms were funny things to her great-aunt just as pear trees were funny things to Ida. ←

Here the theyness of the she is drawn out as is indeed the whole question of whether anyONE is in the house with the great-aunt. The I's continual strategy of creating a not-I, another self which comes to visit the house in which the I lives, & then abiding by its judgements, is sketched.

And only a few paragraphs earlier we'd heard how the orange blossoms in the one person's hand "made Ida feel funny". Since they are funny things to both Ida & her great-aunt we are pointed back to that sense of how the one has the potential to become more than one. One pair-agraph about pear trees &/or orange blossoms, the potential for more than one in one. Particularly when we remember it is one of the two who come in one-by-one (one bi one (hence two)) that has the orange blossoms, & the man who wishes to speak to himself.

The other point here is that "orange blossoms" are not "orange blossoms" when they mean "marriage": i.e. "When is a door not a door? When its a jar." This is a transformation that happens thru the is-ness of multiple meanings (i.e. NOT symbolism).

The one-bi-one pun leads us into this whole statement about, specifically, sexual choice +, more generally, the notion of what constitutes choice (as in the earlier choosing to be *Ida Ida*, or *I/not-I*). Love is blind, + blind to the issue him or her. Determinist + absolutist psychologies do not allow for that. Love is born blind. Age has nothing to do with it. (It is also worth remembering Stein's aphorism: "I am I because my little dog knows me". There is the notion that in the twinning, the recognition of the other, the not-I, is what brings the I into its true existence. And what is Love but that recognition, that blind sighting.)

And so *Ida* went on growing older and then she was almost sixteen and a great many funny things happened to her. Her great-aunt went away so she lost her great-aunt who never really felt content since the orange blossoms had come to visit her. And now *Ida* lived with her grandfather. She had a dog, he was almost blind not from age but from having been born so and *Ida* called him Love, she liked to call him naturally she and he liked to come even without her calling him.

It was dark in the morning any morning but since her dog Love was blind it did not make any difference to him.

It is true he was born blind nice dogs often are. Though he was blind naturally she could always talk to him.

This is Stein's statement of pronominal choice (a continuation of the one-bi-one), that some she's quite naturally want to call him she, that Love, that dog, is blind to the categories people would place on it... "it did not make any difference to him."

(I'll pause briefly simply to point out that this line is also an injunction to the reader + as such reinforces the approach we are taking to the text here.)

→ One day she said. Listen Love, but listen to everything and listen while I tell you something.

Yes Love she said to him, you have always had me and now you are going to have two, I am going to have a twin yes I am Love, I am tired of being just one and when I am a twin one of us can go out and one of us can stay in, yes Love yes I am yes I am going to have a twin. You know Love I am like that when I have to have it I have to have it. And I have to have a twin, yes Love.

The house that Ida lived in was a little on top of a hill, it was not a very pretty house but it was quite a nice one and there was a big field next to it and trees at either end of the field and a path at one side of it and not very many flowers ever because the trees and the grass took up so very much room but there was a good deal of space to fill with Ida and her dog Love and anybody could understand that she really did have to have a twin.

She began to sing about her twin and this is the way she sang.

On a "One" day she says to him  
"now you are going to have two."

Here there is the double notion that the self has selves (six I's in three Ives) + that in love we are twinned ("yes Love yes I am yes I am"), that the beloved is a twin I (en-twin-ed). Love is the twin ("I have to have a twin, yes Love.")

There both is + there isn't space. It is a question of point-of-view. Point-of-view is itself a means of transformation, the "given" in translation.

Stein is also playing here with the whole notion of description + its inaccuracy on the level of language. Even as she moves out to describe the house her description keeps contradicting itself... "the trees and the grass took up so very much room but there was a good deal of space to fill..."

This is the opening theme restated, that time enters with the I, & here the additional complexity or notion that it enters with the death of the not-I. The possibility of the not-I is born with the I & inside time is not-I whereas +time is I.

Following on the heels of the earlier "I have to have a twin" (the anticipation), we have the birth & the contemplated death of ~~Ida~~ Ida.

Oh dear oh dear Love, that was her dog, if I had a twin well nobody would know which one I was and which one she was and so if anything happened nobody could tell anything and lots of things are going to happen and oh Love I felt it yes I know it I have a twin.

And then she said Love later on they will call me a suicide blonde because my twin will have dyed her hair. And then they will call me a murderess because there will come the time when I will have killed my twin which I first made come. If you make her can you kill her. Tell me Love my dog tell me and tell her.

This is a rather complicated play on "love me, love my dog" but the dog is love & in love the I is twinned & the instruction is to both I's & to the I that is other, that love must flow both ways, that tho she made her she didn't make her. The I must love the other I

But there is also a warning not to take this as autobiography ("tell me and tell her") because in fiction (& IOA is a novel) you create all kinds of not-I's. A little later on in the novel she says: "Little by little she knew how to read and write and really she said and she was right it was not necessary for her to know anything else." Everything she or you or I could want to know is there in the writing. The writing is, in that sense, self-contained.



Thru all the punning + word play we are constantly reminded that there is nothing funny about Ida but that funny things do happen to her, + certain things give her, + other people funny feelings. This constant emphasis on the meanings of the word "funny" points to the doubleness of all the play. Stein knows the doubleness of her entendres but she is not trying to be funny ("There was [is] nothing funny about Ida [the novel, in this case] but, funny things did happen to her." Serious punning.

This is ryme, a reassertion of the issue of sexual choice, + a play on the classic palindrome "a man, a plan, a canal - panama".

Like everybody Ida had lived not everywhere but she had lived in quite a number of houses and in a good many hotels. It was always natural to live anywhere she lived and she soon forgot the other addresses. Anybody does. There was nothing funny about → Ida but funny things did happen to her.

Ida had never really met a man but she did have a plan. ←

That was while she was still living with her great-aunt. It was not near the water that is unless you call a little stream water or quite a way off a little lake water, and hills beyond it water. If you do not call all these things water then there where Ida was living was not at all near water but it was near a church.

It was March and very cold. Not in the church that was warm.

↑

By this point in the narrative Stein is playing with the language of description. Each assertion is followed by its flaw if considered as a logical statement + the useless generality + hence uselessness of most description (precisely because it is inaccurate on the level of language) is pointed to.

Similarly in her discussion of where Ida lived, Stein asserts that in the flow of life (+there is an equation here to the flow of reading) one quite simply forgets one's former address. You are moving on + "it was always natural to live anywhere she lived." So in reading, as you move on you are forgetting things addressed to you as reader +, unless you are going to extract plot, this is natural.

### III

#### An Exit Monologue (& some acknowledgements)

There is no conclusion to all this which is exactly as it should be since what we have been dealing with here is a beginning. Indeed I have found that each time I do this with a group of people additional meanings emerge. In a recent presentation Marlene Goldman pointed out how, when Stein says (or has Ida say) "I am going to have a twin yes I am Love, I am tired of being just one and when I am a twin one of us can go out and one of us can stay in . . .," she is also addressing her own shift away from the autobiographical works & back towards fiction. She is precisely interested in the interface between the authorial I & the fiction's I (the I of *Ida* &, as a contracted statement, "I'd'a done it if I had time" shows us how the I of the character is the I of "I would have," the I of the conditional phrase, the phrase in which we express the fictional possibility). Kris Nakamura also pointed out how the *Ida* in the first Random House edition is decoratively glyphed at the top of each page as follows:

I<sup>D</sup>A

In this way both the I & the A achieve their singularity & the D is brought into question. She proposed it as the first letter of a two letter configuration viz:

I<sup>D</sup>A<sup>L</sup>

where D is Death (& one condition of the not-I) & L is Love (another condition of the not-I). These exist at this moment simply as thots stirred by that most recent talk. There are more. Obviously I do not agree with critics like Marianne Hauser who said in her review of *Ida* at the time of its first appearance: "To look for an underlying idea . . . seems as futile as to look for apples in an orange tree." Once you accept that everything in Stein is deliberate gesture, forms part of a consistent & evolving whole, Stein makes sense, an almost perfect sense.

As a final note I would add my thanks to the people at Simon Fraser I first delivered this lecture to, & particularly to Juliet McLaren & Barry Maxwell who helped me clarify the business of the orange blossoms.

bpNichol  
Toronto  
October 1982 thru February 1983

STEPHEN SCOBIE

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ISLAND WRITING SERIES, 1981

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BRIEFLY: THE BIRTHDEATH CYCLE FROM "THE BOOK OF HOURS" by bpNichol

HERE & THERE by Daphne Marlatt

OWNERS MANUAL by Fred Wah

GIVEN ISLANDS by John Marshall

BETWEEN THE RIVER AND THE SEA by Tim Longville

All books published by  
Island, Box 256  
Lantzville, B.C.

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"Here, I wish to say that it is not  
language which is the source."

This line from Robin Blaser's "The Fire," quoted by Daphne Marlatt at the mid-point of *here & there*, stands for me as an ambivalent epigraph to the ISLAND WRITING SERIES. Marlatt's placing of the quotation--in a poem concerned with sources, birth, underwater caves--appears to endorse its statement; and her own work, with its very acute sense of place, and of the phenomenological surround, owes its allegiance to a totality of experience which comes to her from the "outside" world, and to which her language responds. Yet much of the work associated with Marlatt, and with bpNichol and Fred Wah, has rightly been described as "language-centred." To say that language is not the source is thus to raise troubling questions

about how the role of language in the work of these writers should in fact be regarded.

My first questions arise from a wariness, post-Derrida, around the very word "source." For Derrida, "source" is a myth in which he chooses not to believe, and any attempt to locate a source is a naive yearning for primal authority, an unwillingness to accept the uncertainties, the responsibilities, the open-ended play of language's endless deferral. Language is not the source because there can be no source: but language is, nonetheless, the only medium in which even the concept of its own supplementarity can be stated. Thus the whole discussion may be caught in a vicious circle (a not uncommon effect of applying Derridean concepts): if everything we know, and certainly everything we write, is necessarily mediated by language, then the nomination of any other "source" becomes pointless.

Derrida's position is an intellectually stimulating one--and, given its premises, a difficult one to refute--and it certainly accounts for some of what I feel about writing, both in my own work and in the work of many authors I admire. I mean the sense of language as all-pervasive and yet undefinable, unpredictable; language as a condition whose vast uncertainties leave the writer totally (and yet playfully) responsible for his or her own performance. At the same time, as Christopher Norris acknowledges, it is a position which cannot be held to always and absolutely: Deconstruction, Norris writes, is "an activity of thought which cannot be consistently acted on--that way madness lies--but which yet possesses an inescapable rigour of its own.<sup>1</sup> Even if we admit that Derrida's account of language is "true," we must also operate, most of the time, on a pragmatic basis, as if it were not true: as if, that is, there were a world of experience which hypothetically exists unmediated by language.

Blaser's "The Fire" posits such a world: "I believe there is a reality," he writes, "which . . . is neither conceptual and systemized . . . or imageless." That reality is "outside"; it is "everything that comes into me" (my emphasis), such as emotion. Poetry is the attempt to create a "record of the meeting" with that reality, and for this attempt language is not the source but the medium. "Language is given to us and in the most insidious way it controls sight, sound and intellect, but it is also the medium which can be shaped."<sup>2</sup>

However, any attempt to locate a source outside of language reduces language to a subsidiary role, asserting the power of the author's will to control writing. No doubt we all feel this, that we can indeed "shape" our medium, that we can work and polish and revise and strive to be in "control"--but do we not also, honestly,



& then the first  
born  
    bairn

no longer barren  
(coz we was bare in  
the bedroom)

The compulsive punning could be read here as an expressive device: expressive, that is, of an emotion which pre-exists this verbal manifestation, namely, the poet's exuberant, uncontrolled joy at the prospect of fatherhood. This joy bubbles over indiscriminately into bad jokes ("bare in / the bedroom") as well as into that profound sense of the human community ("on into we") which underlies the whole of The Martyrology. But the punning is not in fact confined to this expressive purpose: it is, rather, the linguistic condition which determines the nature of the poem.

Much earlier, at the end of Book II, Nichol wrote of "only the words you trust to take you thru to what place you don't know": a line which directly ascribes the direction of the poem to "only the words" rather than to authorial intention. But I choose this quotation precisely because it rebounds against itself. The line as I have just given it is from the first edition of Book II: in the second edition, Nichol revised it to read, simply, "only the words you trust to take you thru." Now, it seems, he knows where he's going.

In the thirteenth hour, "Unlucky thirteen," the elegy for the stillborn baby's death, the language is stripped bare, down to an elemental dignity of grief. "briefly / the heart does break." In the face of the human tragedy recorded in these lines, criticism seems impertinent. Yet one can still note that "briefly" functions consciously as a rhyme to "grief," and that its status as a free-floating adverb in the open syntactical structure allows it to qualify the life-span of the dead child, the duration of the grief, and the length of the poem. Formally, the exquisite simplicity and nobility of this elegy are generated by that single word—but to say that is not to deny two other, simultaneous statements: first, that the poem also depends upon an actual, tragic event in the "real" world; and secondly, that the poem also depends upon a certain kind of sensitivity in bpNichol (response? or control?) which enables him to realise that formal potentiality.

The reader's response is complicated by the degree to which he or she is acquainted with the "real-life" author. It is probably impossible for me to distinguish between my response to this poem as a text, and my response to my personal knowledge of Barrie and

Ellie. My very reading of the printed text is largely a memory of listening to Barrie speak it in front of an audience—which brings us back to voice. Nichol, in fact, challenges Derrida's divided categories, for his voice, truly, permeates his writing. Even the trickiest letter and word transformations, which look as if they could only work on the printed page, are scored for his vocal reading. Listening to bpNichol, it becomes very hard to maintain the Derridean strictures against the illusory "self-presence" of speech or to resist the use of "voice" as a criterion of value.

As, for instance, to say that among these five chapbooks, I respond most positively to the Nichol, the Wah, and the Marlatt precisely because I can hear them--the intricate, careful convolutions of Marlatt's prose; the oblique, enigmatic declarativeness of Wah's poetic line--as voices fully in command of their own medium (there is the metaphor of control again), voices as completely identifiable as a painting by Braque or Cézanne. Such identity, as Gertrude Stein knew, arises from repetition: and my difficulty with Tim Longville may simply be that I have not read enough of his work to recognise him. With John Marshall, I sense an almost deliberate refusal of voice: his poetry is so impeccably but impersonally crafted that it seems, indeed, ego-free, devoid of the intrusion of an authorial will. It is a singularly pure writing--writing, that is, in the sense that Marlatt uses the term, two pages on from her quotation of Blaser, "not it is written, it writes." This notion was stated by Roland Barthes in his essay, "To Write: an Intransitive Verb?"<sup>4</sup> and more recently, in delightful form, by Italo Calvino in If on a Winter's Night a Traveller:

Will I ever be able to say, "Today it writes," just like "Today it rains," "Today it is windy"? Only when it will come natural to me to use the verb "write" in the impersonal form will I be able to hope that through me is expressed something less limited than the personality of an individual.<sup>5</sup>

Calvino's claim (or, to be precise, his character's claim at a particular moment in a complex narrative) is that this impersonal writing will be able to express "something less limited than the personality of an individual": it is a classical ideal, and Marshall's writing has a classical feel to it. So is it merely a romantic nostalgia to re-invoke, within the field of such writing, the notion of personal style as a criterion for value-judgements? Clearly, Derrida describes a situation in which the author is challenged to

take responsibility for his or her own writing, faced with the indeterminacy of language conceived as an endlessly shifting series of deferrals, devoid of any ultimate source or sanction of meaning. Language becomes an existential universe, and style takes on the morality of existential choice: the writer is identified by the authenticity of his or her response. The tendency to equate such personal authentic style with "voice" may indeed be, as Derrida says, a hankering after a metaphysics of presence, an unconsciously metaphorical homage to the prestige of speech--but is such an equation not also, in the aesthetics of modern poetry, a major component of our response to Pound, to Williams, to Olson, to Nichol? "imagine mountain giving birth to speech," writes Marlatt. "imagine! she sinks smiling under water language / our horizon (o breath) & medium." That "o breath" may be an invocation, as to a Muse; it may also be a nothingness (breath sinking under water), or as Barthes phrased it, a zero degree of language, a source.

This is where we came in: Marlatt's writing tightens to a condensed wordplay strikingly reminiscent of Nichol. "(h)it, here we come, past these faces, facets i've come / to recognize in passing certain aspects of the way we head into it, / sentient, sensing our way thru, sand, send, sent in the sentence." There is, etymologically, no connection between the Germanic "send" and the Latin "sentence," any more than there is between "on we" and "ennui": both authors are allowing the accidents of language to determine the direction in which they will send the sentence.

It could of course be argued that any good poet exploits such accidental properties of language. Rhyme, for instance, is an arbitrary feature of language: words that sound the same have no necessary semantic connection. Yet good poets can use the opportunities afforded by such limitations; it is only the poor or lazy writer who allows the rhymes to direct the poem, who always follows rain with pain, and love with dove. From this point of view, the final sentence of the previous paragraph is not praise but censure. The critic who believes that the writer controls language, rather than vice versa, would argue here that what Marlatt is doing is recording, in an exceptionally agile and flexible syntax, the darting movements of her own perception. The source is not language: language is just a part, an inescapable part, of the phenomenological reality to which she responds. And that reality is, for all pragmatic purposes, a common one: the reader can react with a shock of recognition to the opening flashes of a car crashing, or to the humour of this caustic observation: "department of highways distinguished between a concrete / median barrier & a guardrail, always lower they said. you go off / the road that's your choice, not as crucial as driving into some-- / one else." This is,



obviously, a "well-turned phrase," and part of the pleasure comes from the concision, i.e., the control. Marlatt is also capable of creating a purely romantic image--the midnight freight train that "rolls on into no one's black heaven"--which records not fact but the product of the imagination. Such effects are achieved in the medium of language, in those "ranges of word syntax flares," which Marlatt controls? intuitively? revises? obeys? Whatever, it is not an automatic response. Marlatt's is a writing which appears to submit itself to experience, but which in fact submits that experience to the control of writing--or of voice.

Marlatt's writing remains open to as much of the phenomenological surround as it can register; Fred Wah's, by contrast, remains reticent and enigmatic. The format of Owners Manual is that of an instruction book (though even that is impeded by the title's omission of the apostrophe on "owner's"). This format establishes a tone for the speaking voice (there we go again) of the poems: impersonal, imperative, not always as helpful as it could be. The key instructions for the book's various projects are always to "imagine it," "Dream about it," "think about it / ahead of time / think about it / afterwards," "Wake up / and consider it / a serious possibility." That is, actions in the outer, physical world--hunting, farming, reading a map--always begin as mental images: "places to find again / or discover / i.e. imagine." These images are realised in a language of incomplete specification<sup>6</sup> that is, a writing which retains a certain opaqueness, a sense of itself as an object for itself, not merely a transparent vehicle for signification. The first poem of Owners Manual is entitled "How To Do This," and it begins, "If you only do it once / you will remember that / so it becomes a river." The reference of all these pronouns--this, it, that, it--remains unspecified: one may speculate that they all refer, in some way, to the process of writing and/or reading the poem, but the words remain opaque, yielding significance as grudgingly as did the pictograms of Wah's earlier work. This condition persists throughout the book--though to say that is to deny neither the playful flashes of wit nor the concreteness of many of the images. These images are held, however, within a general field of linguistic indeterminacy. Wah's instructions hover mid-way between the practicality of a back-woodsman and the koans of a Zen master: the virtue of his writing is that it enables him to hold that balance while still insisting on its own density as writing.

John Marshall is also concerned with "the modes of writing / adopted in our regions," and he records the difficulty of a native Indian for whom the "myths and legends . . . can't be understood // when they are translated out / of our language." Both of these quotations testify to the link between language and place; whereas

Marlatt quotes Blaser, Marshall quotes Robert Kroetsch, "how do you grow / a poet." *Given Islands*, described as "the opening sequence of a longer work-in-progress," seems to me exemplary of these modes of writing: it is a perfectly crafted use of the short line, of the hesitant breath, of the clean image. What holds me back from it is the sense that it is too clean, too exemplary: that in its classical impersonality it is missing some essential spark of life.

Tim Longville's Between the River and the Sea seems to me to stand apart from the other four books in the series, to work out of a slightly different aesthetic. It is a lyric sequence which plays elegant variations on a few key images: music, a ship outside a window, "Georgian songs." As with Wah, there is a certain haziness about the emotional or referential centre for these image-clusters; but unlike Wah's, this vagueness does not seem inherent in the writing, but rather a deliberate aloofness by the poet. If I say that I feel the need to place this poem in a wider context of Longville's writing, I am not sure whether that indicates a shortcoming in my reading or in his text.

In conclusion I should admit (what will be obvious to the reader) that my approach to these books has been a highly personal one, resulting from, first, the way my attention snagged on that quotation from Blaser, and secondly, from my attempt to reconcile my tentative understanding of Derrida with my admiration for certain kinds of writing. The ambivalence with which I began remains at the end: to say that the source of writing is not language is to use language to deny itself (which is what it does all the time, anyway); even if there is a source outside language we can know it only through a language which tells us that there is no source; language controls us even when it provides us with the (necessary) metaphors through which we claim to control it; voice is the style of that authentic choice by which the poet affirms the supremacy of writing over voice; writing is opaque, declaring nothing, but it is all we have, revealing everything.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Norris, Deconstruction: Theory and Practice (London: Methuen, 1982), p. xii.

<sup>2</sup> Robin Blaser, "The Fire," rpt. in Poetics of the New

American Poetry, ed. Donald Allen and Warren Tallman (New York: Grove Press, 1973), pp. 235-246.

<sup>3</sup> Phyllis Webb, "Foreword," Wilson's Bowl (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1982), p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Included in The Structuralists, eds. R.T. and F.M. De George (New York: Anchor Books, 1972).

<sup>5</sup> Italo Calvino, If on a Winter's Night a Traveller (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1981), p. 176. Calvino goes on to ask, "And for the verb 'to read'? Will we be able to say, 'Today it reads' as we say 'Today it rains'?"

<sup>6</sup> I take this term from Harold Osborne's Abstraction and Artifice in Twentieth Century Art (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979). Its application to the fields of sound poetry and homolinguistic translation is discussed in more detail in an article I am currently preparing for Canadian Literature.

PETER QUARTERMAIN

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GUY DAVENPORT: WRITING AS ASSEMBLAGE

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THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE IMAGINATION: FORTY ESSAYS  
San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981

TATLIN! SIX STORIES  
Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982;  
reprint of 1974 edition

DA VINCI'S BICYCLE: TEN STORIES  
Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982;  
reprint of 1979 edition

ECLOGUES: EIGHT STORIES  
San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981

All by Guy Davenport<sup>1</sup>

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"... the link between these fragments is not that of grammatical logic, but of an ideographic logic culminating in an order of spatial disposition completely opposed to discursive juxtaposition.

... Clearly, it is not narrative. It is the opposite of narrative, since narration is of all literary genres the one which most demands discursive logic."  
(Gabriel Arboin, June 1914)<sup>2</sup>

When Guy Davenport gave the Thirty-third Distinguished Professor Lecture to his colleagues at the University of Kentucky on 8 March 1978 on "The Geography of the Imagination," the audience included the entire geography department, a Jungian analyst, and some physiologists working on the brain. The lecture was about Poe, O. Henry, and Grant Wood's well-known painting "American Gothic." "An ambiguous title," he wrote to me afterwards, "can do wonders." The poopsheet handed out at the door has a picture of Guy Davenport at his desk on which sits, among other things and next to a pine cone, a specimen bottle that once belonged to Louis Agassiz. The prose accompanying the picture tells you that he has written "twenty-one contributions to books of essays and poetry" (such as Stan Brakhage's Film Biographies, Ronald Johnson's Radi Os, or—though this is later—Roy Behrens' Art & Camouflage); "sixty-six articles; 207 reviews; eleven papers read before learned societies" (including the inaugural lecture at the Center for the Study of Ezra Pound at Yale University in 1975); "and fifteen short stories" (six of which had been gathered in Tatlin! in 1974), in addition to his translations of Sappho and Archilochos (some of which have been set to music by Lukas Foss and by Richard Swift); his "study-guides" to the Iliad and the Odyssey; his long poem Flowers and Leaves (which Thomas Merton once read, all 114 pages, to his class at Gethsemane: it is a lesson in aesthetics), and his numerous illustrations. In his kitchen at home there is a saucer of sugary water for the wasps and ants, free to come and go as they please for he likes them in the house (wasps figure centrally in the story "Au Tombeau de Charles Fourier"). A family of snakes lives under his porch, and each spring he faithfully reports their stirring from winter's long dullness. "Can you imagine the deliciousness of the sun to snakes, after four months of freezing?" (2 April 1979). There is no evidence that the geographers, the analyst, or the physiologists, were disappointed by the lecture.

"Guy Davenport went round in a dream the day he learned the Greek alphabet," he says (8 January 1979). And he was a late starter. "I couldn't read until very late. I began the first grade aet. 7 (being thought retarded) . . . I wasn't a bookworm, and didn't begin reading with any real interest until 13, when I broke my right leg (skating) and was laid up for a wearisome while" (9 April 1979). But the reading stuck. Some four years later, in 1944, he quit High School to study art at Duke University and ended up with a B.A. in English and Classics and a Rhodes Scholarship to Merton College, Oxford. An attentive man, who as a child was "taught how to find things" (G, 366) in a family that devoted every Sunday afternoon to

hunting for Indian arrows, who remembers everything he's seen or read, and who reports what he has found, he sees for himself; his complete unconsciousness that this is unusual turns those reports into conversation. In response to a remark that structuralist criticism is a disguised utilitarianism which hates literature, he comments that all literary critics "are shameless scavengers. They babble Freud (who is on paper the most inept critic ever to have come out of Europe: I mean, his interpretation of Da Vinci, based on a novel which he thought, poor sod, was a biography, and if this wasn't ruinous enough he psycho-analyzed Leonardo, using his one dream (in which a grackle swoops down and touches his lip with its wing) and being so unhandy with Italian that he thinks it's a buzzard sticking its tail in L Da V's mouth, and then drags in the Egyptian for buzzard, which is mut, which he says is the root of 'mother' (it isn't, not by forty miles), and ends up a prize ass" (9 February 1980). His speciality as a critic is, as he says, "finding out how things break down into components" (3 July 1979). Listening to Guy Davenport break down the components of Poe's "To Helen" and of Grant Wood's "American Gothic" is unlikely to have bored the geographers, the analyst, or the physiologists of the brain.

In less than ten minutes of that lecture they would have heard what we can now read in two pages: that Nice was a major shipyard in Roman times, where Marc Antony built a fleet; that classical ships never left sight of the land, and that sailors could smell orchards on shore (and that perfumed oil was a major industry in classical times; ships laden with it, too, smell better than ships laden with sheep); that the raven was the device on the flag of Alaric the Visigoth whose torch at Eleusis marks the beginning of the end of Athena's reign over the mind of man; that Lenore, a mutation of Eleanor which is a French mutation for Helen, is a name that Sir Walter Scott imported from Germany for his horse; that in 1809, the year of Poe's birth, Herschel discovered and explained binary stars (the spectroscopic double Beta Lyra and the double double Epsilon Lyra); that Poe's mother played the first Ophelia on an American stage, in a city (Boston) not only where Poe was himself born but also where stands (still! really there!) a House of Usher. And they also learned that Poe's Russian translator, Vladimir Pyast, went stark raving mad in a St. Petersburg theatre while reciting Poe's "Ulalume" (Davenport got this tidbit from a poem by Osip Mandelstam). The lecture enacts a version of the Herakleitian insight that (to quote Davenport's own translation, H, 18) "the most beautiful order of the world is still a random gathering of things insignificant of themselves," by retrieving for our delight the forgotten or (which is nearly the same thing) holding up for our attention the familiar. For we all

know--we learned it in school--about Attar of Roses, a perfumed oil; and at the very least we might guess about orchards. Which is why the schoolboy Poe could write "perfumed seas," a phrase which has been called silly. "What I do," Davenport is fond of saying, "is very simple." He is an attentive reader who trusts the writer to know what he is doing. One of his specialities is to take up the well-known or the unfashionable, and look at it again, afresh, clearly: he is an unprejudiced reader. In The Geography of the Imagination he has an astonishing little piece on Joyce Kilmer's "Trees."

After hearing the lecture, it may have come as a surprise to read, in "Finding," of Davenport's "severe compartmentalization of ideas" as a child: "school was school, as church was church and houses were houses. What went on in one never overflowed into any other." And the habit persists: "To this day I paint in one part of my house, write in another; read, in fact, in two others: frivolous and delicious reading such as Simenon and Erle Stanley Gardner in one room, scholarship in another" (G, 361, 363, 364). The inhabitant of this highly compartmentalized house specialises above all else in making connections; many of his essays and pretty well all of his stories proceed the way poems or collages proceed--through apparently random and arbitrary juxtaposition. "The House that Jack Built," his 1975 Yale lecture on Pound, juggles Ruskin, Joyce, Williams, Olson, Yeats, Tchelitchev, Zukofsky, Queen Victoria, the Wright Brothers and the history of early flight, Henry James, Brancusi, Homer, and--at last!--Pound. With characteristic disingenuousness, Davenport says "my best hope was to keep lots of chaff in the air all the way through" (21 May 1979). In fact it proceeds by ideogrammic method, careful juxtaposition making comparison possible; it is analogous to the methods and shares something of the aims of the Annales group of historians (of whom Fernand Braudel is the best known). "Every evening I freak out on Fernand Braudel. Last night I understood, really understood, what the Baroque is. By page 800 the elements for understanding are all there. Lordy, what a book!" (14 October 1977). In the ABC of Reading, Pound called this the "method of contemporary biologists" and cited Louis Agassiz.<sup>4</sup> Guy Davenport's first published book is an anthology with commentary of the writings of Louis Agassiz. It came out in 1967 and is (predictably) not only scarce but expensive.<sup>5</sup>

Making connections. The habit and impulse of Davenport's mind is to knock down barriers (it has, then, a strongly sensual element), and the questions he asks cut across the ones we are used to. They drive towards particulars: how many great works were made by someone over eighty? which English poets had bad eyes? They are versions of the Herakleitian question (Davenport's version,

H, 28): "Except for what things would we never have heard the word justice?", which strikes at our assumptions about the world and forces us to go and look at it closely, to go and find out. It is a teacher's question. He is alert to pun, overlap, similarity and difference, minute detail. "Have you ever noticed the words eye and ear overlapping and dissolved in the second and third words of Hugh Selwyn Mauberley?" (21 December 1978). And he enjoins us to be the same. Da Vinci's Bicycle, by Guy Davenport: Rhymes.

There used to be a quiz programme on English television (perhaps there still is) in which viewers sent in artefacts which a panel would then "read" and identify: this kind of mark can only have been made with a steel chisel, feature X is a result of Y technology, hence there was Z knowledge. It is a skill such as archaeologists as Marshack especially cultivate. Ezra Pound thought "an expert, looking at a painting . . . , should be able to determine the degree of the tolerance of usury in the society in which it was painted"<sup>6</sup>--an awesome feat, even to the initiated. The expertise would tax a team of experts. Looking at Guy Davenport tackle Grant Wood's "American Gothic" is awesome indeed: it is as though, if not that team of experts, then at the very least someone like Braudel were examining not a society but a cultural iconology; Pound's injunction is being taken seriously, and I would call it a tour de force did not that label so easily imply a one-shot performance. The Geography of the Imagination--the whole book, not just the lecture--made up as it is of writings for a variety of purposes and for different audiences and occasions, is a model for those who would like to know what skills are required. At the risk of sounding laudatory, let me list them, for they tell us something of Davenport's resources, just as the essays and stories tell us something of his passions and concerns, just as the form of his writings tells us something of his habits of mind and perception.

Obviously, a good memory. And, with it, good lists: Davenport characteristically works out of up to eight journal-notebooks. Otherwise how can you discern that the temptation of St. Antony has its place not only in a discussion of Joyce but of Eudora Welty as well; how else can you briefly sketch literary and graphic treatments of the subject from Flaubert through Tchelitchev and beyond? Hence, and closely related to memory, a knowledge of history. Or rather, of histories of all sorts. Who stayed in what hotel; what was the first painting of a man wearing spectacles; what is the first English poem to mention Cro-Magnon polychromatic paintings (it is a sonnet, by Wordsworth); what was the first American factory and who built it where, with what knowledge; who made shirt-buttons out of Mississippi fresh-water mussels. There is a succinct history of



symbols and symbolisme on G, 262 to bolster an aside that Joyce is the first writer since Dante whose symbols are transparent on the page; of the lute and its transformations in cubism, in Conan Doyle, in Rilke and de Nerval, to illuminate a remark on G, 25 about Roderick Usher; and of the egg-and-dart design, on G, 15, from the Biblical Edom to the American middle-west in the 1930s. The Geography of the Imagination, from one end to the other, points to or traces the movement of objects, ideas, and myths across geographical and cultural boundaries (hence its title), and takes in its purview the history of everyday objects, design, art, mythology, literature. So, too, the resources included etymology (which is another form of history), called upon for example to explicate "solicit" in an essay on Joyce, and natural history ("a boar is never 'at bay'--he attacks from the beginning") to assess a translation of Homer. And throughout, there is the matter of rhymes.

Davenport has a keen eye for recurrences of one sort or another: "funerary chaos among American men of letters" for example (G, 81), or the Hotel Albert, where Albert Pinkham Ryder painted in poverty upstairs whilst (according to one of Ford Madox Ford's anecdotes) Walt Whitman downstairs begged for a dollar. "American culture," comments Davenport, "has the eerie habit of passing itself, in narrow corridors, ghostlike" (G, 77). Or (and this is from his Notebook, as recorded in Vort), that the machine-gun which killed Gaudier-Brzeska at Neuville-St.-Vaast on 5 June 1915 also killed the young De Launay, "the anthropologist who had begun a brilliant study of labyrinths." Such rhymes often form the basis of his fiction, where they become rather more speculative. In "1830" (T!), for example, a story which takes at face value Poe's claim that he went to St. Petersburg to enlist with some Russians in the fight for Greek independence, "the room where the Prince of Tavis was talking with Poe, who does not identify himself because he had no identity at that time, is the room where Lenin met the first Communist Congress after the Revolution" (Vort, 9). Here the rhyme has a thematic function, though it also serves, as such rhymes customarily do in his fiction, a structural purpose. "The Aeroplanes at Brescia" (T!), Davenport's first story since undergraduate days (written when he was 43: as I said, he is a late starter), rhymes the events of a single year (1909) when Kafka published an account (his first story, and hence another rhyme, this time with Davenport. That Kafka's account was factual is irrelevant) of the air-show at Brescia, which Wittgenstein might well have gone to, working as he then was at Glossop air-station on the torque of the propeller. "History is not linear," Davenport says (G, 67), and he collects such data, and especially dates, much as others collect baseball statistics. In proposing that Kafka saw and

nearly met Wittgenstein early in this century, before either of them was anybody (they had no identity at that time), Davenport is sounding a recurrent motif. "The Trees at Lystra" (E) recounts the story (Acts XIV: 6-20) of Paul and Barnabas, taking part in a myth before it was a myth, while it was still going on and hence before either of them was anybody. The protagonists of such stories act entirely without pretension, wholly un-selfconsciously (a fact which tempts the careless reader to see the stories as slightly precious), and we are reminded through such fiction of the factual everyday world out of which myths arose, and in which their materials originated. Such stories (and indeed much of Davenport's fiction) work like little essays which re-introduce to us the familiar and taken-for-granted world of cultural beliefs, and make us see it new.

These stories, and the elements making them up, are given to the reader with great panache; Davenport is above all an enthusiastic enquiring man, possessed of gusto and wit. He can pack what his accurate eye observes into a single adjective ("the unresonating mind of Edmund Wilson"); he can acutely characterise the work of Robert Lowell in a sentence which every student of American poetry should be forced to read: "He is a thoughtful, serious, melancholy academic poet; if he is representative of anything beyond himself, it is of a broody school of professor-poets whose quiet, meticulous verse is perhaps the lineal and long-winded descendant of the cross-stitch sampler" (G, 133). The paragraph before the one in which this sentence occurs is devastating, as is the passionate essay from which it comes, "Do You Have a Poem Book on E.E.Cummings?" (I might add that "The Anthropology of Table manners from Geophagy Onward" is simply hilarious.) Sometimes the writing approaches aphorism in pointing to a rhyme: "Ovid studied men turning into animals; Darwin, animals into men" (G, 245). Davenport is a student of metamorphosis.

To say this is to point to one of two threads that run persistently through The Geography of the Imagination: the historical and geographical metamorphosis of myth--myth which is a pattern rather than a script, where "divergent and unsuspected features . . . fit in the same contours" (G, 263). The clearest statement of this theme is in the title-essay, and in the essay on Eudora Welty, "That Faire Field of Enna," which George Steiner has called "one of the finest analyses available of Miss Welty's guarded but compassionate art." The other thread is the theme of the archaic: "if we have had a renaissance in the twentieth century, it has been a renaissance of the archaic," he says (G, 20); "what is most modern in our time frequently turns out to be the most archaic" (G, 21). Davenport proposes that "irrevocably alienated" from the past, "we romantically suppose man to have lived more

harmoniously and congenially with his gods and with nature," and that the best artists of our time are those who performed "the great feat of awakening an archaic sense of the world" (G, 27, my emphases).

There is at times in Davenport's prose an impatience, crustiness, and cynicism reminiscent of the Diogenes he has translated so well: "Nothing characterises the twentieth century more than its inability to pay attention to anything for more than a week," he says in one of four essays devoted to Ezra Pound (G, 172); and in one on Osip Mandelstam he calls it the "most miserable of ages since the Barbarians poured into Rome" (G, 306). In the New York Times Book Review (6 September 1981) Hilton Kramer, conveniently ignoring those words romantically and sense which I italicised, attacks Davenport for appearing "to share with the master [i.e. Ezra Pound] an implacable hostility to modern society and a corollary myopia in the realm of politics." He completely misses the point. Davenport's hostility is a lament for the death not simply of the city (we are "all gypsies and barbarians camping in the ruins"--G, 19) but of the idea of city, a local place where men and women gather in sanctuary, rest after Odyssey, live in families; where flower is married to stone, and where in harmony one mind may share its understanding with another; a place of sensibility and education, where one lives in and is aware of an order; the home of civilisation and culture, the centre of historic continuity. He calls it "the unit of civilisation" and reminds us that the ancients depicted their cities on their coins as a goddess crowned with battlements (G, 19). Davenport's hostility arises from the perception (which was also Louis Agassiz') that the notion of human progress is (to put it mildly) "a complex, self-deluding idea" (G, 354): "Man, it would seem, does not evolve, he accumulates. His fund of advantages over nature and over the savage within is rich indeed, but nothing of the old Adam has been lost; our savagery has perhaps increased in meanness and fury; it stands out more terribly against a modern background" (G, 67). Ours is an age which neglects its artists, and denies that there is such a thing as a life of the mind.

Hence, Davenport's praise of "an archaic sense of the world" (which I take as distinct from "the archaic world"): archaic man lived in "a world totally alive, a world in which one talks to bears and reindeer, like the Laplander, or to Coyote, the sun and moon, like the plains Indian" (G, 26-27). In "The Symbol of the Archaic" he points to "the bisque-coloured, black-maned prancing tarpan of Lascaux, the very definition of Archaic painting," which was painted "in the deep dark of a cave by torchlight, an uncertainty to the man or woman who painted it" (G, 22).

In 1957, lecturing at the National Gallery of Art in

Washington, D.C., Siegfried Giedeon equated the end of the paleolithic era with man's declaration of himself as master of the universe, and noted that a dominant sense of the vertical then replaced the "absolute freedom of direction" in archaic art: "The space conception of primeval art is perhaps the most revealing trait of the conception of the oneness of the world: a world of unbroken interrelation, where everything is in association, where the sacred is inseparable from the profane."<sup>8</sup> To the untutored eye, such paintings are crude, flat cartoons, mis-proportioned, perspectiveless, incomplete. Our sense of completeness demands the separation of one object from another, one experience from another, their isolation from the continuities of time and space; perspective demands a focus of attention on hierarchies of values. Together, they assume that the universe is not only knowable but known. Louis Zukofsky once attacked Shakespeare's critics for claiming to know more about Shakespeare and his intentions than Shakespeare did. As Davenport puts it in "Narrative Tone and Form," "perspective commits itself to one point of view" and "finishing involves a stupidity of perception" (G, 312). Davenport, like Zukofsky, knows better: no order in the universe can finally be seen order to it, and we must keep our options open. The logical mode for the expression of such ideas, the form, is collage, for collage resists finality, resists categories and the notion of completeness; it resists, that is to say, any theory that does not keep open the possibilities of meaning, and always keeps a firm eye on the world of perception before it heeds the erring brain.

This is a theme Davenport sounds again and again. "There are several maturations," he says in his essay on Agassiz (G, 244), "not one final fructification." He is determined to resist any stasis of a systemic or more importantly a systematic articulation, for as he says "the way we live" is "an incoherent buzz of experience" (G, 265). Following Wittgenstein (and Olson) he avers that the meaning of the world is outside the world (G, 268). But we are in it, our knowledge is necessarily incomplete, and it is essential that the mind remain curious.

Perspective and completeness demand a linear-mindedness, and linear-mindedness reduces the world to simple equations of cause and effect, value and money. Davenport's hostility to the twentieth century arises from his perception that in an industrial and technological age and culture the sciences "explain the mechanics of everything and the nature of nothing" (G, 27), sundering the wholeness of the world into linear compartments. "The nineteenth century . . . put everything against the scale of time and discovered that all behaviour within time's monolinear progress was evolutionary" (G, 151). As he told Catherine O'Neill in

1979,<sup>9</sup> "no-one is monolinear," and it is a distortion of attention to treat them as if they were. The writers Davenport admires are like Joyce, whose "correspondences are not linear parallels; they are a network" (G, 290); like Pound, whose "restorations of relationships now thought to be discrete" close such gaps as those between mythology and botany (G, 151); and like Olson, who saw that "a shift in attention allows the jungle in" (G, 87). Civilisation is at the best fragile: man's "advantages over his fellow creatures are all mechanical and therefore dependent on the education of each generation: meaning that an intervening generation of barbarians destroys all that has been carefully accumulated for centuries" (G, 19). The line of distinction has been misdrawn, he says. "Redraw it to zone sensibility from barbarity" (G, 238).

So the main activity of the writing is to shift the attention back again, to keep the jungle out. If metamorphosis and the archaic are two threads of The Geography of the Imagination, the prime activity of the book is retrieval: to restore what has been forgotten, to join what has been divided. To teach.

"I consider all my writing as extensions of the classroom," he told Contemporary Authors in 1973; much of it clears the ground, shifts the focus. The essays and stories alike are acts of foraging, seeking connection: "it is the conjunction, not the elements, that creates a new light" (G, 194). So Davenport proposes an idyllic world in the deep archaic past, which rests on attention, alertness, and unselfconsciousness. As Davenport draws him (and as we see him revived in the Adriaan van Hovendaal sequence of stories) archaic man was not the self-declared master of Nature, but a part of it, unreflective and un-selfconscious; he owes something to the Samuel Butler of Erewhon, and he owes something to the notions of Charles Fourier. And above all, he is the figure of the artist. "Art is the attention we pay to the wholeness of the world," Davenport says. Ancient intuition went foraging after consistency. Religion, science and art are alike rooted in the faith that the world is of a piece, that something is common to all its diversity, and that if we knew enough we could see and give a name to its harmony" (G, 270). An insistent note through the whole book is that the world is knowable if we but look, and imagination is but a way of seeing the world; metamorphic, "it makes up nothing" (G, 193). It is no coincidence that Davenport's first published book was an anthology of writings by Louis Agassiz, who at the end of his life said that the ability to combine facts is a much rarer gift than to discern them, and whose knowledge was what Whitman sought for himself, encyclopaedic.

To summarise the book like this is to do it grave injustice. The Geography of the Imagination is a book remarkably free of

theoretical statements and of theories and systems, whether of art, writing, history, or culture. Like other Romantics of our time Davenport seeks to change the way we see, to redeem our vision, but he does so through practice and example, not through theology. His language, marked though it may be with what George Steiner calls a "baroque, precious, crazily inventive" vocabulary, is completely free of fashionable jargon. Not only does he point to what he sees, but he does so in a way that resists generalisation, that avoids conclusions, and that echoes no critical schools or scholarly catch-phrases. His essay on Olson ends approving Olson's refusal to "articulate images and events which can be left in free collision" (G, 99).

Hence, the form of the writing is an enactment as well as an embodiment of vision; among other things it demolishes customary boundaries, between fact and fiction, essay and story, picture and language. "The Aeroplanes at Brescia" started out "as a research essay on Kafka. The story 'Tatlin' itself was originally . . . a kind of plan for a history-of-art book" (Vort, 3). The first sentence of "Au Tombeau de Charles Fourier" (DaV'sB) is a drawing of Gertrude Stein at the wheel of her T-model Ford, and the last is a drawing he identified in a letter as the earliest known mask of Dionysos, from Hauran (3 July 1979). It is the earliest-known example of the actor's mask. Reviewing Alexander Marshack's The Roots of Civilization Davenport observed that "when language emerges, the verb to draw is the same as to write" (G, 64); all his stories are written as though they were drawn, and hence call attention to themselves as made works. The drawings which accompany the stories and are to be read as part of the text are often copies of photographs and are to be understood as quotations, as pictorial allusions rather than as pictorial facts, as quotations of ready-mades. So a note in Da Vinci's Bicycle tells us that the final paragraphs of "Au Tombeau de Charles Fourier" are by Gertrude Stein; a note in Eclogues that "The Daimon of Sokrates" is a "kind of translation" of Plutarch, with added quotations from other sources. These are erudite and bookish stories then, and they have been assembled or composed as much as they have been written. "My writing unit is such that I start literally with scraps of paper and pages from notebooks," he told Barry Alpert. "Every sentence is written by itself; there are very few consecutive sentences in my work. . . . The actual writing of any of the stories in Tatlin! was a matter of turning back and forth in a notebook and finding what I wanted" (Vort, 5). Even the sentences themselves, indeed, are assembled. "A Field of Snow on a Slope of the Rosenberg" (DaV'sB), for example, opens with one of Davenport's extravaganza sentences --these sentences meant, he told me (3 July 1979), "to be what Ives

called the God Damns in his music." It is worth quoting in full:

For a man who had seen a candle serenely burning inside a beaker filled with water, a fine spawn of bubbles streaming upward from its flame, who had been present in Zürich when Lenin with closed eyes and his thumbs hooked in the armholes of his waistcoat listened to the baritone Gusev singing on his knees Dargomyzhsky's In Church We Were Not Wed, who had conversed one melancholy afternoon with Manet's Olympia speaking from a cheap print I'd thumbtacked to the wall between a depraved adolescent girl by Egon Schiele and an oval mezzotint of Novalis, and who, as I had, Robert Walser of Biel in the canton of Bern, seen Professor William James talk so long with his necktie in the soup that it functioned as a wick to soak his collar red and cause a woman at the next table to press her knuckles into her cheeks and scream, a voyage in a hot-air balloon at the mercy of the winds from the lignite-rich hills of Saxony Anhalt to the desolate sands of the Baltic could precipitate no new shiver from my paraphenomenal and kithless epistemology except the vastation of brooding on the sweep of inconcinnity displayed below me like a map and perhaps acrophobia. (DaV'sB, 149).

Davenport's speciality as a critic is in finding out how things break down into their components, in noticing how they are put together. This sentence, he told me (3 July 1979), is built thus:

image of candle burning in water: from Ernst Mach (a dream he had, opining on waking that it was a profound meditation on the unbelievable fact that water is two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen, gasses that love to burn)

Lenin in Zürich: from Valentinov's memoir of Lenin (who wrote a book against Mach and Avenarius, whom, as he admitted, he had not read: purest idiocy--Valentinov was a Menshevik; his study of Mach must therefore, by political argument, be anathema to Bolsheviks, and Mach is still banned in the USSR)

Manet's Olympia: from a newspaper feuilleton by Walser Schiele and Novalis: put in as likely by GD, a guess

Wm James and the soup: made up

the balloon trip: described by Chris Middleton. Note that bubbles in line 2 have become one big balloon bubble.

Davenport's prose is crafted as carefully as verse, as carefully as his drawings. In this long ideogrammic sentence, built like the opening of an epic with its long delay of the main clause, the details whilst we wait for the main point are so many, crowding one after another in subordinate clause after subordinate clause, that our experience reading it is very like that of reading a list--almost a lyric catalogue. It is entirely in keeping with the idiom and syntax of poetry in our time: though the subordinating (hypotactic) syntax is perfectly straightforward, leading to "the voyage could precipitate no new shiver" as the main clause, and culminating in the bathetic "acrophobia," the subordinated matter is as important as the main clause, if not more, and thus ceases to be subordinate, and the overall syntactic effect is paratactic: the syntax of juxtaposition. Playing on our expectations, the anticipated climactic "I, Robert Walser" is appositionally related to the "who" of the first line and hence subordinated to the voyage--and this, though the preceding hundred or more words point to the speaker as centre of perception--and its climactic effect is diffused by the paratactic addition of apparently incidental details. The data in the sentence is held in the mind in an equivalence of value; the relations of cause and effect are suspended, replaced by the experience of addition, and we are thereby enjoined to contemplate the writing as surface, as a writing texture, rather than as a vehicle of conceptually ordered information or as narrative. It is a form of writing closely analogous to the surface deployment of objects, images, and materials in collage (or more precisely, in assemblage), and occurs on the larger scale of the whole work, as well as in the sentence.

"Au Tombeau de Charles Fourier," for instance, appeared in the Georgia Review (Winter 1975) divided into thirty-three unnumbered sections which ranged in length from one paragraph (a fourteen-word sentence) to twenty-four or more paragraphs, all indented; each section treats or draws upon a single subject matter: wasps, the early history of flight, Dogon cosmology, Gertrude Stein in Paris, whatever. When he prepared the typescript for Da Vinci's Bicycle, however, Davenport re-ordered his materials (sometimes, especially in the last half, extensively), cut, expanded, compressed, and recombined portions of the earlier version into a sequence of 255 unindented paragraphs, divided among thirty numbered sections. Except for section X, which is one paragraph long (the same fourteen-word sentence of the earlier version: "What works in the angle succeeds in the arc and holds in the chord"--which sounds like and probably is a bit of Fourier's



calculus), and the final section, XXX, (which is two paragraphs long--the second is one sentence), each section of the story consists of nine four-line paragraphs. When the typescript was first sent to Johns Hopkins, all the lines in each paragraph were the same length, so that the words on the page looked like a series of bricks, each the same size and shape, each approximately the same (visual) texture. The shift from typescript to print changed that, of course (since the paragraphs were no longer the same length), but the overall effect—a series of building blocks, evenly spaced—persists in the published version. It is a device Davenport has used since, notably in "Fifty-Seven views of Fujiyama" (*Granta*, No. 4, 1981, pp. 5-62) and in "On some Lines of Virgil" (*E*, 147-238). Among other things, it draws attention to the writing as a made thing, and to the manner of the making. Here is a paragraph from section XXVI of "Au Tombeau de Charles Fourier" as it appears in Da Vinci's Bicycle:

The center of the earth is the crabgrass seed. Balance of quinces, basket of oranges. Alice, tell me, tell me, Alice, how so settled a soul as I can be so giddy about la gloire. About what? says Alice. La gloire. You have it, says Alice, whatever it is.

In the Georgia Review the first of these sentences finished up a section devoted to Dogon cosmology, and "Balance of quinces" began the next, devoted to Gertrude Stein. The effect in the revised version is to dissolve the boundaries between the two: the quinces and oranges can easily enough be read as part of the Dogon material, and to read it thus would not be a misreading. For the visual uniformity of the surface, making everything equivalent in the pattern of the composition, not only distances the reader from the materials themselves and their customary significance, but also dislocates the narrative. The juxtapositions of which this text is built are thereby rendered both obvious and yet fluid, uncertain, ambiguous. One text merges with another in no identifiably causative way, for the uniformity of surface renders the perception of cause—which in more conventional work is heralded by the conventions of paragraph and chapter divisions--irrelevant even if possible. It is a visual flattening of surface, and it renders that surface opaque, and thus the writing draws attention to itself as writing, as medium, in a manner directly analogous to that of cubism. Cubism, art historians are fond of remarking, drew attention to the opaque surface the painting actually is by placing pictorial elements (such as line, colour, plane, texture) on a two-dimensional surface. In the words of Robert Rosenblum, cubism obliterated depth by asserting "the radically new principle

that the pictorial illusion takes place upon the physical reality of an opaque surface rather than behind the illusion of a transparent plane."<sup>10</sup>

Such attention to surface emphasises that the objects or elements of this composition have been lifted out of their ordinary context and are, in Max Ernst's phrase, "on a plane apparently not suited to them."<sup>11</sup> There are sixteen pen-and-ink drawings in "Au Tombeau de Charles Fourier," each of them a sentence in the text, thirteen of them taking up a whole page, many of them apparently random groupings of images. Pen, and ink. Writing materials. Rosalind Krauss has remarked that Picasso's reliefs do not present "a moment of organisation that lies beyond the surface of the object. . . . He insists that there is a logic immanent in that surface and that conception arises with experience rather than prior to or apart from it,"<sup>12</sup> a comment analogous to Davenport's that "the contemporary is without meaning whilst it is happening" (G, 56). The flat opacity of surface in stories like "Au Tombeau" draws the reader into the immediacy of the composition, and at the same time reminds the reader that much of the material, removed from its customary or anticipated context (an essay, say, or a textbook) is quotation. David Antin has observed that in putting "real" objects in collages, moving them from "normal" contexts, Cubists created a visual space that "no longer yielded an iconic representation, even of a fractured sort, though bristling with significations."<sup>13</sup> Conception (and hence, perhaps meaning, i.e. the possibility of meaning) arises with experience; but it is an experience of dislocated objects, each carrying its contextual residue, in juxtaposition; an experience, if you will, of quotations; and it is this that makes the work seem at times bookish, even precious on occasion. Certainly the residual context carried by the "real" object, by the ready-made, by the quotation, has an effect in fiction similar to that of the Cubist "interplay between pictorial illusion and pictorial fact."<sup>14</sup> The writing demands both alertness (and hence thought) and recognition (and hence memory).

In a characteristically disingenuous response to a question about the form of his fiction, Davenport told Barry Alpert:

If you're a teacher, you're constantly working with diverse materials. You may get up in the morning and you've got Keats' *Odes* to take some sophomores through, and you've got a chapter of *Ulysses* for your graduate students, and the mind gets in the habit of finding cross-references among subjects. This is the best way in the world to make my assemblages, as I call them. I don't think I've ever written a story. . . . [But] it

looks pretentious to call them assemblages, which is a French word and taken from art history. (Vort, 3)

If my description of "Au Tombeau de Charles Fourier" is at all accurate, then we must take Davenport at his word; it is indeed an assemblage. "Au Tombeau" started out as an attempt to get into English the information (about the Dogon) in Griaule's Le Renard Pâle, and from this he took a single idea, that "man is a kind of forager in an unknown universe." The other materials clustered around this central notion. "Nature's great forager is the wasp" (Davenport had been reading Spradbery's book on wasps<sup>15</sup>); Gertrude Stein riding in her T-model Ford is "something like a wasp out foraging"; Picasso is a kind of forager, "a kind of wasp as it were." Reading a book about the Wright brothers he "realized that what the Wright brothers had done was make a mechanical wasp, or bee. It's an insect, not a bird." All the elements in the story are examples of foraging: "Ogo the desert fox, which the Dogon feel is the very essence of the universe." And finally, as Davenport told Alpert, "there's the figure 8 to hold things together: everybody moves in a figure 8 the way a wasp flies. . . . I put them together without any hope that anybody would see this, or see how it fits together" (Vort, 6). So what does it all mean? Like Ezra Pound in Gaudier-Brzeska, Davenport rejects "an ascribed or intended meaning";<sup>16</sup> as he wrote to me (3 July 1979), "What I'm writing about (you make your guess) is a pretty question. I trust to my instincts, but will find out one of these days." Conception arising with experience, then, and writing/composition as discovery.

Assemblage as a term in art-history was devised by Jean Dubuffet in August 1953, to distinguish this kind of art which fits together parts and pieces, from collage (literally, pasting, sticking, gluing), a term he would reserve for the work of 1910-1920. What is most striking about assemblage (besides--frequently--its three-dimensionality is that its raw materials are often associationally powerful, almost always ready-made, and identifiable (nails, doll's eyes, photographs, dried flowers, old wood). That is to say, they retain much of their previous history (their contextual residue); it is also to say, in the words of one critic, that "its ultimate configurations are so often less predetermined."<sup>17</sup> The interpolation of "non-art material," indeed the exclusive use of such material, provides what art historians have come to call a "frame," by means of which no attempt is made to represent anything, but the actuality of "the world" is permitted to erupt within the environment of the work, and the boundaries between objects, categories, activities, dissolve. As Leo Steinberg has observed of the painting of Robert Rauschenberg, "the painted surface is no longer the analogue of a

visual experience of nature but of operational process," and the work ends up "as a verification of its own experience."<sup>18</sup>

Davenport told Contemporary Authors in 1973 that his politics are "democrat and conservative." "It will be the business of literature and the arts to contain and transmit what culture survives the century. If any," he has said.<sup>19</sup> A tall order. Collage and assemblage are means of making art hold more different kinds of reality, and Davenport's contribution to the art of fiction may be that he has found, in assemblage, a means of informing the reader--in-forming the reader. Characteristically, he calls himself a "primitive." Yet the intelligence which drives through the writing, and which indeed makes the writing at all possible, insists--and here is the conservative--that one work within one's limitations, work with what one's got. Georges Braque once remarked that "cubism . . . is a means . . . of putting painting within the range of my talents." It is not, I think, pressing too hard to say that assemblage is a means of putting fiction within the range of Davenport's.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In my text, these titles are abbreviated respectively as follows: G, T, DaV'sB, E. I also have occasion to refer to Barry Alpert, "Guy Davenport--An Interview," Vort, No. 9 (1976), pp. 3-17, abbreviated Vort; and Herakleitos and Diogenes, translated from the Greek by Guy Davenport (Bolinas, California: Grey Fox Press, 1979), abbreviated H.

<sup>2</sup> "Devant L'Ideogramme d'Apollinaire," Les Soirées de Paris, No. 26 (July 1914), pp. 383-384. "Gabriel Arbouin" is probably Guillaume Apollinaire.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Peter Quartermain, 11 March 1978. In what follows, quotations from letters are identified by a date in parenthesis, and are copyright © 1983 Guy Davenport.

<sup>4</sup> Ezra Pound, ABC of Reading (New York: New Directions, 1960) p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Guy Davenport, The Intelligence of Louis Agassiz: A

Specimen Book of Scientific Writings, foreword by Alfred S. Romer (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963). Pound would no doubt enjoy (?) that irony.

<sup>6</sup> Ezra Pound, Selected prose 1909-1965, edited by William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 323.

<sup>7</sup> George Steiner, "Rare Bird," The New Yorker, 30 November 1981, p. 201.

<sup>8</sup> Siegfried Giedeon, The Eternal Present: A Contribution on Constancy and Change (New York: Bollingen Foundation), I, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Catherine O'Neill, "An Alchemist of History and Invention," Chronicle of Higher Education, 2 April 1979, p. R4.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Rosenblum, Cubism and Twentieth-Century Art (New York: Abrams, 1961), p. 80.

<sup>11</sup> Max Ernst, Beyond Painting, and other writings by the artist and his friends (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1948), p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> Rosalind E. Krauss, Passages in Modern Sculpture (New York: Viking Press, 1977), p. 48.

<sup>13</sup> David Antin, "Some Questions about Modernism," Occident 7 (Spring 1974), 21.

<sup>14</sup> Rosenblum, p. 101.

<sup>15</sup> J.P. Spradbery, Wasps: An Account of the Biology and Natural History of Solitary and Social Wasps, foreword by O.W. Richards (Seattle: University of Washington), 1973. From a conversation with Guy Davenport in November 1978.

<sup>16</sup> Ezra Pound, Gaudier-Brzeska, A Memoir (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 86.

<sup>17</sup> William C. Seitz, The Art of Assemblage (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1961), p. 25.

<sup>18</sup> Leo Steinberg, Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art (New York: Oxford University, 1972), p. 84.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted by John Shannon, "Dianoia," Margins 13 (August-September 1974), 21.

GEORGE BOWERING

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MODERNIST LIVES

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THREE ON THE TOWER: THE LIVES AND WORKS OF EZRA  
POUND, T.S. ELIOT AND WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS  
New York: William Morrow, 1975

by Louis Simpson

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When I was a schoolboy, T.S. Eliot was the big cheese, and Pound and Williams were two "other poets" the teacher said we might check on in our own time. Now those latter two are the fathers of Twentieth Century verse, and people are thinking of T.S. Eliot as a poet who deserves a revival. It is pleasant to see one's minority opinion, underground opinion, even (in the university, remember) justified later, but it does make one quail to see what legions of scholars and teachers are leaping out of the ivy to overkill the Pound era.

Simpson's three short biographies are directed toward readers who are not very familiar with the lives and ideas of their subjects--readers of Auden and Frost, for instance--who want to find out quickly what the fuss was. Simpson employs a simple structure for each section, describing family background and schooling, then the intellectual influences on each poet (e.g. for Eliot, Laforgue, Babbit and Bentley). There follows a sequential discussion of major works and critical pronouncements, and finally a lyrical narrative of the period just before death, but not the death. Perhaps this is Simpson's way of saying what Whitman said for himself, that in hearing the poems made by these three largest poem-makers of our century, we are encountering yet their ongoing lives.

The title comes from one of Simpson's favourite authors, William James: "Our spirit, shut within this courtyard of

sense-experience, is always saying to the intellect upon the tower: "Watchman, tell us of the night, if it aught of promise bear'." The tower, it appears, has three windows (and a bricked-in wall, where we might place Charles Olson, a pick-ax in his hands?), so Simpson titles his three sections "Ezra Pound: or Art," and "T.S. Eliot: or Religion," and William Carlos Williams: or Experience." Neat it is. The subject becomes: how did these three, after World War I, go on where the short Imagist poem was not enough, when the clarity of the senses was not enough?

There is not much here for the reader who is familiar with these poets and their work. Newcomers are offered descriptions of Imagism, or the use of the persona, or the fact that Ford Madox Ford's name was once Heuffer. What may amuse experienced readers is the weight that Simpson places on the personal lives in his discussions of the makings of the poems. For instance, he says that critics have made the Fisher King do too much of the work in "The Waste Land"; the poem is more a deflection of the way Eliot felt about his own life after the Great War. The lady brushing her hair on the other side of the chess set is Tom's first wife, and when he cannot get an erection for her, he says, "I think we are in rat's alley / Where the dead men lost their bones." The approach is amusing, but it can lead the critical biographer to suggest that political positions and esthetic stances are results of failed crushes or cruel teachers. In fact, Simpson has it that Williams's tub-thumping for American street language against British reserve resulted from the wish to strike his reserved British father. Of Pound he says, "taking up a cause or writing a poem will not rid a man of his affections." To which I can only reply that if the cause or poem is good enough, it can so, and it does so.

One gets the feeling that Simpson admires the nerve with which Hugh Kenner takes his fliers, and so once in a while he makes a jump of his own--Mauberley is Rupert Brooke, Conrad was an Imagist, Kandinsky was the great theoretical influence on Williams's work. These forays are amusing, too, and offer relief from the familiarity of the stories. Less pleasing are the passages of free psychoanalysis: "[Williams's] need to write a poem went back to the times he sought to please his father and mother by being perfect. The feeling of repression forced the poem into its necessary form as it escaped."

In regard to the work, Simpson takes pains to make a balanced report, showing Pound's industry and seriousness that unnerved the gentlemen literati of prewar London, approving the object/method of the *Cantos* versus the subjective and descriptive systems of the Georgians (and later of the psychiatrists--we remember that while in St. Elizabeth's, EP would not see the shrinks). But Simpson also

agrees with Basil Bunting, who told Pound, "You allude too much and present too little." About the allusions and quotations in the epic, Simpson says, "If the reader doesn't know the passage he has to look it up, by which time he is far from poetry . . . they are impossible to read with pleasure and therefore they teach us nothing." There are, fortunately, not many such gaffes per chapter. Finally, Simpson seems to want to remain neutral on the question of Pound's greatness, as if the idea of Pound as an also-ran were still there somewhere. I think it does lurk among a few professors of retirement age, perhaps old friends of Maxwell Geismar, putting in a last semester or two at South Dakota State.

When he gets to Eliot, Simpson feels more at home, so familiar with the subject that he can make little friendly disparaging jokes about the fussy social climbing of Tom, etc. He is presented as an outsider trying to get into the centre—a Southerner at Harvard, a Northerner in St. Louis, a Unitarian who wanted to be a Catholic, an American in the City of London; always looking for a civilization to fit into, made nervous by the sound of little feet running over something brittle in the dark alley. His family had always been founding universities, writing histories, making civilization in the U.S. If he learned from Bradley that the mind is not separable from its objects of thought, then the mind rushed toward tradition, and not only because the Bradleyan idea offers the disappearance of the ego.

As in the Pound story, Simpson entertains the most common objections to Eliot's criticism. Then he tells the tale of the making of "The Waste Land," always returning to the importance of the poet's personal feelings as material for the verse. He sees correctly that they do not interfere with the idea of Eliot the classicist, that classicism is as always a matter of style, that it usually involves a striving for the new in form. It is romanticism, from Wordsworth to present-day Marxian poets, that relies unquestionably on standard versification to present ideas about a new order. "Eliot's satire," says Simpson, "was intended to amuse, not change society."

In telling his story of the making of "The Waste Land," Simpson waxes his most lyrical and most narrative. He likes it here. We see, thanks to Yale, how Ezra Pound was clearly right with his suggested excisions; he was removing the second-rate, the merely parodic, and the descriptive. He was now not just writing but also editing the modern. Finally Simpson is convincing in his agreement with Eliot that the poem is not, as lecturers have it, despairing, but rather commensurate with Eliot's Christian belief:



Only a cock stood on the rooftree  
Co co rico co co rico  
In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust  
Bringing rain

A Christian poet. "In every phase of his poetry Eliot has been dying and being reborn," we read, and we see that.

Eliot's lines, I think, are the rhythm of a master constructing a poem. Pound's are a man speaking a poem. Williams's are the dance of one man's knowing.

Here we are told that Williams the American had a Tom Sawyer childhood, made a little exotic by the Spanish spoken in the house, and by the seances conducted while father was away. He lived a careful life but always admired the total darers and even the interestingly bad. He makes a figure to contrast to the total .. poeticals, H.D. and Pound. His daring and rebellion were to be acted out in his poetry, while he, responsible, reared sons and kept wife and mother with his medical practice. He called himself "the core of the onion."

I have always wished that someone would write a monograph on the importance to Williams (and Olson) of John Keats. Keats had his Ezra Pound, too; his name was Shelley. Williams the medico wrote early in imitation of Keats the medico. Simpson sees well into the connection, but pressed for space, not extensively. When Williams hit his theme of the local and marred, he jettisoned Keats's sense of beauty, in both poetic subject and poetic form: "We have discarded beauty; at its best it seems truth incompletely realized."

An even larger part in Williams's poetical life was played by Eliot, who, Williams said, sold American poetry down the Thames River with the writing of "The Waste Land" and later works. As usual, Simpson traces the reason for the antipathy not to Eliot's work and Williams's thought, but to Williams's personal life. It began when Williams's old college friend Pound started declaring Eliot the great promising American poet, and continued through the growing of Eliot's fame during the long period of Williams's obscurity.

That obscurity, says Simpson, was bought by the poet's greatest dare. Sincerity, he says, was Williams's longest suit, his style. "For this he gave up nearly everything else and was obscure." Furthermore, "to understand Williams's poems we must understand his life. This is not true of Pound and Eliot whose experiences passed through a process of dramatization before they issued as art." Simpson is neat but not without contradiction.

Throughout this book one senses an impulse to explain the

makers of modern poetry as simply as taste will allow. That is probably a function of the fact that it is published by a commercial publisher. But Simpson, I think, goes a little too far--he not only simplifies the ideas, but reduces them to a position of less importance than dear old poetry. Of the three men he says: "If they were to be judged for their opinions, we would not be thinking about them at all. But they loved poetry all their lives."

Pound and Williams were judged for their opinions, by various branches of the U.S. government. I may not totally agree with their opinions, but I will defend to their death the right to keep them from being removed from the poems.

## PERCILLA GROVES

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### ARCHIVAL SOURCES FOR OLSON STUDIES

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The Contemporary Literature Collection holds a substantial collection of Charles Olson manuscripts and materials related to his work. This checklist of holdings is intended to guide the researcher to works of interests and to provide basic information about the extent of the materials.

Entries are arranged by manuscript groups, with theses and individual tapes and transcriptions described in separate categories.

Explorers in the extensive archives of Coyote's Journal, Open Letter, lo, Frank Davey and Michael McClure will doubtless find other letters discussing Olson and his work, and their contributions to a revision of this list will be welcome.

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#### CAPE GOLIARD PRESS FILE

Olson, Charles. Letters to Barry Hall, editor at Cape Goliard Press. 3 November 1967 - 28 August 1969. 11 handwritten letters, 4 notes.

Olson, Charles. Maximus Poems IV, V, VI, as submitted to Cape Goliard Press. Typescript, photocopies of typescript pages and published poems, a few carbon copies and handwritten pages. Some pencilled corrections and directions to printer. 191 pages, plus title page, copyright page and note re typesetting. Galleys consisting of printed copy pasted on cards.

## COYOTE'S JOURNAL ARCHIVE

Olson, Charles. "The Advantage of Literacy is that Words Can be on the Page. A Bibliography on the State of Knowledge for Charles Doria." Photocopy of typescript with notes to the typesetter. 9 December 1963. 3 pages. Coyote's Journal, No. 1 (1964), pages 55-57.

Olson, Charles. Letters to Edward van Aelstyn, editor of Northwest Review. 7 March 1964, 15 April 1964. Handwritten letters. 8 pages. Earlier letter reproduced in "Some Recent Comments About Northwest Review." Ditto copy, probably edited by van Aelstyn, 1964.

Olson, Charles. Mayan Letters. Galleys, headed "Northwest Review." 50 galley sheets. Projected Olson issue<sup>1</sup> of Northwest Review 7 was never published.

## DAVEY ARCHIVE

Olson, Charles. Note to Frank Davey. 25 April 1968. Typed note. 1 page.

Davey, Frank. Letter to Charles Olson. 21 August 1967. 1 typed letter with 2 enclosed leaves of typescript.

Davey, Frank. "Review of Maximus Poems IV, V, VI." Manuscript. 1 page. "Review of Poetry and Truth: The Beloit Lectures and Poems." Carbon of typescript. 3 pages. "Five Readings of Olson's Maximus." Manuscript. 3 pages. "Black Mountain Poetic Theory. Chapters I, II, III." Carbon of typescript. 102 pages. "Black Mountain in Canadian Poetry." Manuscript. 5 Pages. "An Introduction to Charles Olson." Corrected typescript of first and second drafts. 78 pages.

Davey, Frank. Theory and Practice in the Black Mountain Poets. 3 manuscript notebooks. 283 pages. Typescript. 22 pages. Diss. University of Southern California 1968.

## Jo ARCHIVE

Olson, Charles. Letter to Richard Grossinger. 4 December 1968. 1 page with envelope heavily annotated in Olson's hand.

Enclosed manuscript: "WHAT'S BACK THERE." 2 pages.

Olson, Charles. Note to Richard Grossinger. 19 April 1969.  
1 page with envelope. Includes manuscripts of "1st Addition, after some slight studies into present scientific understanding of 'gravity,' to The Animate versus the Mechanical, and Thought," and "The enclosed, hopefully will also push the discussion another inch or two." Io, No. 6 (Summer 1969), page 103.

Grossinger, Richard, Editor. An Olson-Melville Sourcebook. Volume 1. the New Found Land. North America. Io 22 (1976). Volume 2. The Mediterranean. Eurasia. Io 23 (1976). Original and photocopied typescripts of the articles published in these issues of Io. Camera ready copy for both issues, photographs, proofs.

Correspondence files included:

Byrd, Don. Letters to Richard Grossinger. 27 August 1973 - 1 postcard. 2 typed letters. 2 pages.

Callahan, Bob. Letter to Richard Grossinger. Undated. Typed letter. 2 pages.

Doria, Charles. Letters to Richard Grossinger. 6 January 1973 - 13 August 1976. 1 note, 7 typed letters. 9 pages.

Dorn, Edward. Letter to Richard Grossinger. Undated. Typed letter. 2 pages.

Kandel, Lenore. Letter to Richard Grossinger. Undated. Typed letter. 1 page.

Potts, Charles. Note to Richard Grossinger. Undated. Postcard.

#### LEROI JONES FILE

Olson, Charles. "The Americans." typescript, with annotation in Olson's hand. 1 page. Floating Bear 17 (1961):7.

Olson, Charles. Letters to LeRoi Jones. 23 July 1958 - 13 August 1964. 6 typed letters, 3 handwritten letters, 5 notes, 3

postcards. 14 pages.

Duncan, Robert. "Preface to Charles Olson's 'Proprioception'." Typescript. 4 pages.

#### McCLURE ARCHIVE

Olson, Charles. Photocopies of letters to Michael McClure. 25 January 1960, 3 June 1961. 2 pages.

Olson, Charles. "A PRETTY SERIOUS POEM." Photocopy of typescript with corrections in Olson's hand, and signed note to Michael McClure. 1 page. Poem and note published in "Symposium on Michael McClure." Edited by John Jacob. Margins 18, No. 3 (1975), 47.

Olson, Charles. "/Wash.'s birth; a CHOCK." Photocopy of manuscript. 1 page. Poem published in "Symposium on Michael McClure." Pages 42-43.

McClure, Michael. Letters to Charles Olson. Undated, but written circa 1961. 13 handwritten letters, 7 typed letters, 4 postcards. 43 leaves photocopied from originals held in the Olson Archives, University of Connecticut, Storrs. Poems and fragments in typescript and manuscript include "COURAGE COURAGE COURAGE" with marginal note in Olson's hand and "For OLSON," dated 25 November 1958.

McClure, Michael. "Scratching the Beat Surface. The Gray Lectures, 1980: in memoriam Charles Olson." Typescript of first lecture, "Scratching the Beat Surface," corrected. Photocopy of typescript of second lecture, "Hammering it Out," corrected. Photocopy of typescripts of the series of lectures as delivered at State University of New York at Buffalo. Scratching The Beat Surface. San Francisco: North Point, 1982.

#### PACIFIC NATION FILE

Olson, Charles. "A Comprehension." Typescript with annotations in Olson's hand. 4 pages. Pacific Nation 1 (1967), pages 42-44.

Olson, Charles. "to get the rituals straight." Typescript with

handwritten note to Robin Blaser. Galleys. 4 pages. Pacific Nation 1 (1967), pages 58-59.

Olson, Charles. Letters to Robin Blaser. 18 May 1966 - 16 July 1966. 3 typed letters. 4 pages.

#### ED SANDERS FILE

Olson, Charles. Letters to Ed Sanders. 28 May 1962 - 8 November 1966. 3 handwritten letters, 2 typed letters, many notes and fragments, including some on envelopes, 3 postcards.

VANCOUVER POETRY CONFERENCE. University of British Columbia. 1963.

#### Tapes

Creeley, Robert; Duncan, Robert; Ginsberg, Allen; Olson, Charles; Whalen, Philip. "History." 29 July 1963.

Creeley, Robert; Duncan, Robert; Ginsberg, Allen; Olson, Charles. "Polis." 31 July 1963.

Avison, Margaret; Creeley, Robert; Duncan, Robert; Ginsberg, Allen; Levertov, Denis; Olson, Charles. "Induced Hypersensitivity." 5 August 1963.

Duncan, Robert; Ginsberg, Allen; Olson, Charles. "Duende, Angel, Muse." 14 August 1963.

Olson, Charles. "Reading of Maximus IV, V, VI from a Manuscript." 14 August 1963.

Olson, Charles. "Reading of Maximus IV, V, VI from a Manuscript, Followed by Some Earlier Poems." 16 August 1963.

Creeley, Robert; Ginsberg, Allen; Duncan, Robert; Levertov, Denis; Olson, Charles. Five Poets. Interviewer and narrator, Phyllis Webb. Toronto: CBC Programme Archive, 1963, 1964.

Tallman, Warren. "The Vancouver Poetry Conference." 9 August 1978. Paul Kelley, Charles Watts, Shelley Wong, interviewers.

## Transcriptions and Indexes

"A Footnote to Maximus "Letter 23." Transcription of extracts from "On the Subject of History." 29 July 1963. Transcribed by Ralph Maud. Typescript. 5 pages.

Tallman, Warren. "Notes to Tapes of Vancouver Poetry Conference." Photocopy of manuscript. 39 pages.

"Indexes to tapes of Vancouver Poetry Conference." Prepared by Paul Kelley, Charles Watts, Shelley Wong. Typescript. 36 pages.

## Manuscripts

Olson, Charles. "There are really two poetry, life systems ..." Manuscript. 2 pages.

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## NOTE

1 "NWR Notes," Northwest Review 6 (Fall 1963), p. 131.

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