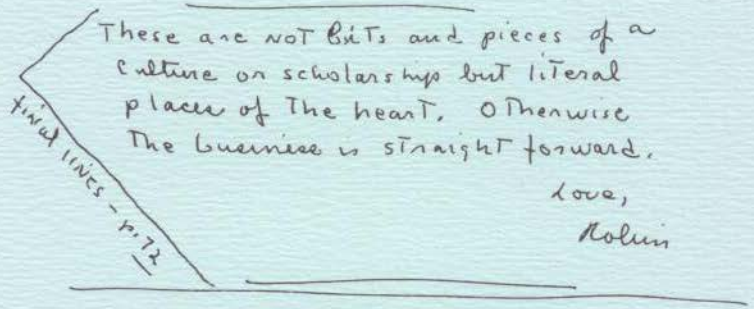
line

number three

I'll endeavour to make this the last addition to the ms —

On page 72 - the last page, add this sentence, just before the last sentence:



OK? That's it - it's early morning and somehow that literal place of the heart has to be said. I am, of course, hoping you'll like the book

spring 1984

line

number three

A Journal of Contemporary Writing
and its Modernist Sources

Published with the Co-operation of
The Contemporary Literature Collection
Simon Fraser University Library
Simon Fraser University
Burnaby, British Columbia

spring 1984

Line is published twice a year, spring and fall. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope and Canadian postage to ensure return. No poetry or fiction please. Subscription rates: $12/year for individuals; $16/year for institutions; single copies $8. Donors of $25/year or more will receive a complimentary annual subscription and an official receipt for income tax purposes.

Address all correspondence to:

Line
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The photographic work for this issue was done by the Graphics Department, Simon Fraser University.

Cover: excerpt of a letter in the Contemporary Literature Collection from Robin Blaser to Andrew Crozier concerning the publication of Image-Nations 1-12 and The Stadium of the Mirror (London: The Ferry Press, 1974).

ISSN 0820-9081

contents

from the Preface to Line, Number One, Spring 1983:

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

As Line moves into its second year, the financial resources for the publication of criticism and scholarship continue to shrink. In the face of these constrictions which threaten the life of any journal in these post-modern times, it has been a great relief to receive a number of supporting comments from readers. Perhaps Line is beginning to make its way through the critical labyrinth.

We are pleased in this issue to feature James Laughlin, whose New Directions publishing enterprise helped shape the literary history of this century; "The Art of Publishing," a lengthy interview of Laughlin has recently been published in two parts by The Paris Review, numbers 89 and 90 (Fall and Winter issues). Warren Tallman's Godawful Streets of Man, a collection of essays published by Open Letter (Winter 1976-1977), is still required reading for anyone interested in modern writing. Douglas Barbour's The Harbingers is available from Quarry Press, and NeWest has just published his Visible Visions: The Selected Poems of Douglas Barbour. Daphne Marlatt's How Hug a Stone was published by Turnstone Press; her "Postscript to Steveston" was written for a new edition of Steveston scheduled for publication this fall by Longspoon Press. Sheila Watson and the Double Hook, a collection of essays on Sheila Watson edited by George Bowering, is forthcoming from Golden Dog Press. Lionel Kearns's latest book, Convergences, is available from The Coach House Press. Sharon Thesen's most recent book of poems, Holding the Pose, is also available from The Coach House Press. Miriam Nichols wrote a study of Robin Blaser for her M.A. thesis; she is working on a Ph.D. in the English Department at York University. Shelley Wong is a promising graduate student in the English Department at Simon Fraser University.

Line

three

Pacific

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for

RB

* * *

A

Charles Olson

Miscellany:

Selections

from the manuscripts of

Maximus IV, V, VI

in

The Contemporary Literature Collection

* * *

Note on type-setting,

The problem here is the disparateness of the whole work: the book depends upon these kooked balances throughout.

Each poem needs to be set individually for itself on each page, irregularly though that may seem, and going against normal justifying.

I have in as many instances as possible included or had xerox'd my original mss. so that all spaces both between words as well as between lines - as well as location on the page may be followed.

Ok. Thank you. It will save us all a lot of trouble on proofs.

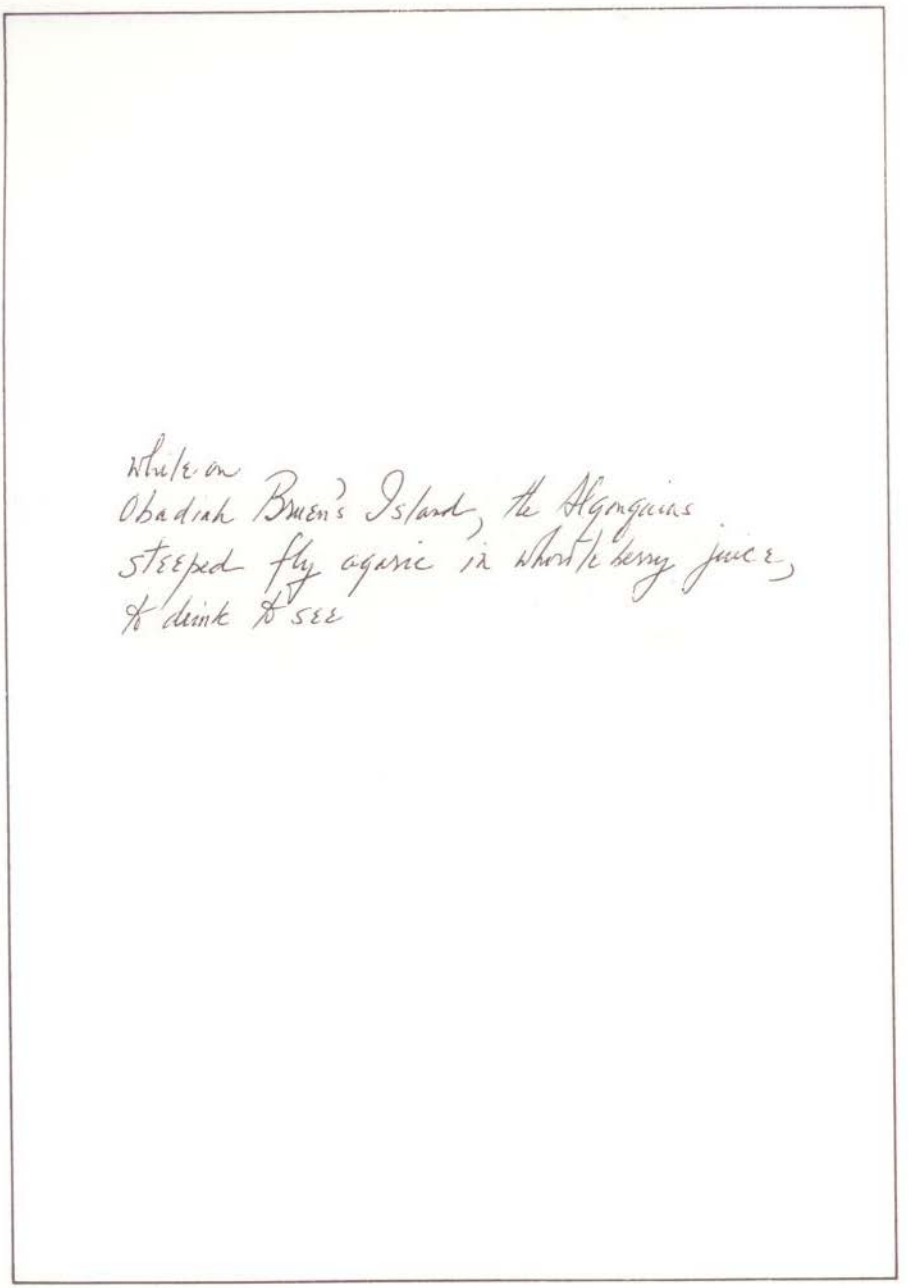
Charles O.

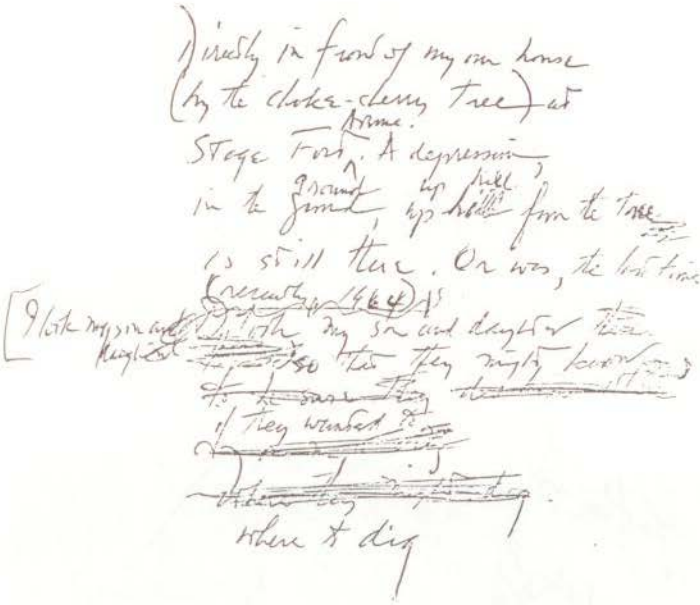
December 4th, 1967

Bk ii chapter 37

1. Beginning at the hill of Middle Street the city which consists mostly of wharves & houses reaches down to the sea. It is bounded on the one side by the river Annisquam, and on the other by the stream or entrance to the inner harbor. In the Fort at this entrance

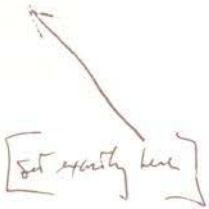
are the images of stone and there is another place near the river where there is a seated wooden image of Demeter. The city's own wooden image of the goddess is on a hill along the next ridge above Middle Street between the two towers of a church called the Lady of Good Voyage. There is also a stone image of Aphrodite beside the sea. 2. But the spot where the river comes into the sea is reserved for the special Hydra called the Lernean monster, the particular worship of the city, though it is proven to be recent and the particular tablets of Poseidon written on copper in the shape of a heart prove to be likewise new.


While on
Obadiah Bruen's Island, the Algonquins
steeped fly agaric in whortleberry juice,
& drank to see



Directly in front of my own house
(by the choke-cherry tree) at
Stage Fort Avenue. A depression,
in the ground, up hill from the tree
is still there, Or was, the last time
(recently, 1964)
I took my son and daughter
so that they might know
if they wanted to
where to dig

I set out now
in a box upon the sea



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JAMES LAUGHLIN

ON NEW DIRECTIONS AND NEW DIRECTIONS WRITERS

* * *

James Laughlin at English Bay, Vancouver

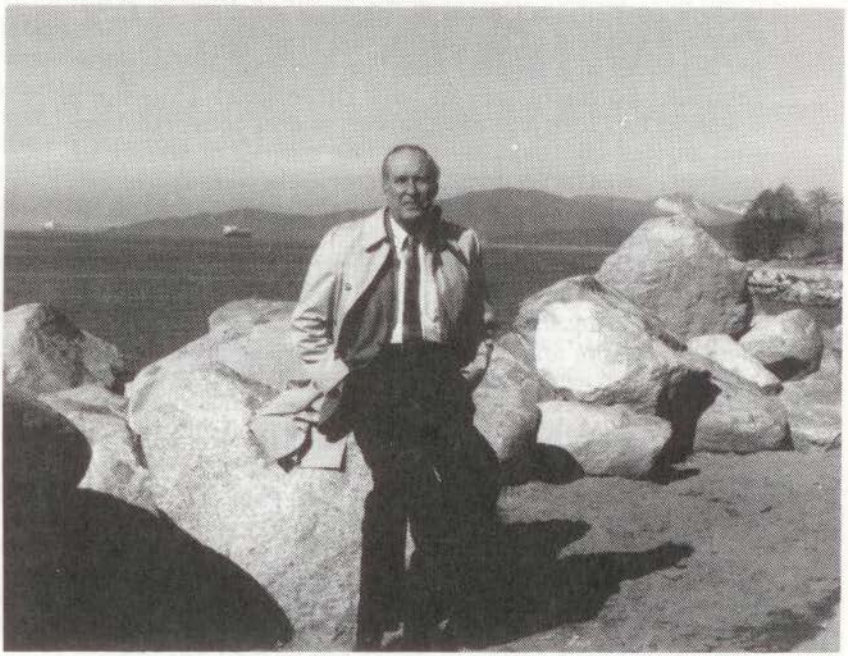

photo by Miki

JAMES LAUGHLIN

ON NEW DIRECTIONS AND NEW DIRECTION WRITERS: SELECTED COMMENTS FROM A VISIT TO SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

EDITED BY ROY MIKI

James Laughlin visited the West Coast, a guest of the English Department at Simon Fraser University, for a three-day programme, March 16-18, 1982. He gave a lecture on William Carlos Williams, a seminar on Ezra Pound, a reading of his poems, and graciously participated in a lengthy question and answer session focussing on the history of New Directions. Laughlin is a wonderful, free and easy talker, and in conversations that shifted continuously from one subject or writer to another, he offered invaluable stories arising from his life as a major publisher in touch with nearly all the import avant garde writers of this century. And these stories, given the vitality of his critical perceptions as reader and editor, were inevitably accompanied by sharp and penetrating insights into the publishing world of modern writing and the work of writers, such as Pound and Williams, who shaped the direction of New Directions.

Part I of what follows is excerpted from the session on the history of New Directions, March 17th, which Robin Blaser helped moderate. Part II is taken from an informal interview on Williams conducted at the Sylvia Hotel, March 18th, where James and Ann Laughlin stayed. The tapes of these two occasions, in length about three times the amount selected, were transcribed by Karen Leach. All the Laughlin events at Simon Fraser University were recorded by Curtis Vanel. The tapes are located in the Contemporary Literature Collection.

* I *

ROY MIKI: If you're interested in reading more about James Laughlin, there have been two interviews, one in The American Poetry Review for November/December 1981, and another one in The Art of Literary Publishing: Editors on Their Craft, edited by Bill Henderson; there is also his selected poems from City Lights Books, In Another Country, and the first issue of Conjunctions, edited by Bradford Morrow.

JAMES LAUGHLIN: Otherwise known as conjunctivitus.

RM: This issue of Conjunctions is an inaugural double issue, and it's devoted to James Laughlin. There are statements and works by Creeley, Fitzgerald, Snyder, Paz, Sorrentino, Mary de Rachewiltz, Tennessee Williams, Eva Hesse, Rexroth, Levertov, and so on--many, many writers. And we could add to the list, Lorca, Cocteau, Eluard, many of the most important Surrealist poets of this century, besides Williams and Pound, of course. The number of writers that have passed through New Directions is really phenomenal. I was trying to think of a metaphor to begin a discussion of New Directions, and Pound provides it, I think, in his sense of a vortex as a particular centre for a lot of foci; the vortex offers a meeting point for them and makes visible an entire sequence of relationships and inter-relationships. When Pound suggested that Laughlin start New Directions, and Laughlin went back to Harvard and decided, okay, I'll be a publisher, he began soliciting manuscripts from many writers who weren't in print at the time. He also began a really monumental project, the New Directions Annuals. In the first twelve issues, Laughlin used the first three or four pages to make pronouncements about the state of American culture, the state of American and European literature, the relationship of publishing to the economic order, and he proposed all kinds of sweeping changes in the existing state of publication, so that at some future point it may even be possible for literary publishers to survive without becoming merely commercial.

I was trying to figure out where we should begin, and it's just occurred to me now. I love this statement by Michael McClure in Conjunctions, because it's closer to my sense of New Directions and not to that of someone living, say, in 1936. McClure says this:

> I visited the library and found the shelf with cummings on it. The book made bright stripes and stars in my

mind. When I returned it I combed the U.S. poetry section. I think I took home Eliot and Pound. Later, when I brought back The Cantos, the librarian pointed and asked, "Do you understand that?" I said sure and walked out with William Carlos Williams in my hand. It didn't occur to me that there was anything to comprehend but the music and the experience--the being--of the poem.

I began combing the stacks reading modern poetry ranging from Auden to Viereck and Yeats. Soon I was reading Rimbaud, and Gertrude Stein, and James Laughlin, and the sets of the New Directions Poets of the Year, and Kenneth Rexroth, and Kenneth Patchen, and Rilke's Book of the Hours. It became clear that the books I cared about most of all were published by New Directions. It became an obsession to read the poetry and criticial works about poetry published by New Directions. I searched through the New Directions Annuals for more poems or short plays by Lorca. I read Kafka's Amerika, and Djuna Barnes' Nightwood, (and in my first year of college Nausea by Sartre). These New Directions works were making new niches in my mind--stages with giant fantasies enacted upon them, new places, new loves, new thoughts, huge visionary faces, and areas of darkness, light, and color that had never existed before.

I'm not sure what time McClure is talking about, but Robin might be able to help.

ROBIN BLASER: McClure is talking about the mid-fifties. What I find so striking is that all of us with any vintage, when we say anything about New Directions, immediately want to say what it was like to run into the New Directions material. I'm glad Roy used the term "vortex" because one striking thing that shows up in the festschrift, the double issue of Conjunctions in honour of Laughlin, and throughout the history of New Directions, is that it wasn't simply a school. The fact that my interest and that of many here may fall on Williams, Pound, and Stein is that New Directions, James Laughlin at the centre, really drew to its publishing world a whole range of the interests of modern writing in the U.S., without its becoming eclectic in that bad sense, what we're used to in university magazines, for example. It was always quality, but it was broad so that you got Delmore Schwartz, and so on. Donald Hall, who from where I stand seems to me to come from the other side of the tracks, has done an invaluable job in a little essay in Conjunctions, reprinted from the New York Times. It's just lovely,

the information, so I'm expressing my gratitude to Donald Hall. He opens his remarks with "I was fourteen when I found the New Directions series Poets of the Year," and then explains the wonderful story I hadn't heard about, the Book of the Month Club suing to make you, James, change the title of the series from "Month" to "Year." This discussion is supposed to be informal today, and it really is for the audience to talk, but I wanted to take my example: I'm not fourteen, instead I'm twenty; I come out of Twin Falls, Idaho and when I get to San Francisco and meet Robert Duncan and Jack Spicer and New Directions, the ground of it all, I'm still worried about Hiawatha and Evangeline, and the most modern voice would be Vachel Lindsay in what I think is still a marvellous poem: "'How, how,' he said. 'Friend Chang,' I said, / San Francisco sleeps as the dead--/Ended license, lust and play: / Why do you iron the night away?"--"The Chinese Nightingale." Anyway, I came unprepared to deal with the twentieth century. And since it's my view that poetry deals with the history of everything, and that was the whole job of learning, New Directions was the ground of that learning, including the stuff I like so much, the Pound, the Williams, the Stein.

So I think we have an extraordinary opportunity to talk to James Laughlin today about the way in which New Directions started. If you don't like this question, James, tell me and we'll just move right along, but I read somewhere that a great majority of men of achievement somehow always have an older woman, not their mother, behind them, and it's often a grandmother. Well there happens, in snooping around about James Laughlin, to be an Aunt Leila. So I wanted to open simply with that, to see if you'd talk about that wonderful woman, and the way in which she actually, in some sense, guides New Directions.

JL: She was a wonderful woman. Her only problem was that she was such an executive that she should have been born a man. She lived in a beautiful house in Connecticut where she took me in when I got tired of my native city of Pittsburgh. I lived there for many years, and when I married, she built a house for me across the road. She was a woman of extraordinary, and sometimes almost oppressive, spirituality. It was her general practice to get on the telephone every morning at 7 o'clock and call up all the cousins in the family to tell them what they were to do that day. I was summoned in to her sitting-room after breakfast, and I would sit there for about two hours listening, chiefly to family history, and to the traditions of this glorious bunch of bourgeois profiteers, from which I spring. I wish that tape recorders had existed then; I could have stuck one under my chair. It was really so great to hear these fantasies about one's own background. But she was very sympathetic; she had no child of her own and I was named for her

father, so she spoiled me outrageously. She was the one who, along with my father, put up almost all the money for starting New Directions, which never made a dime for the first twenty-five years. Of course, she didn't ever read the books. All that she knew about them was what her so-called friends would tell her on the telephone. They would call up and say, "Leila dear, have you seen the latest book James has published? I really hate to bring it up, but. . . ." Yet her affection was great enough that she rode over these little difficulties. I would give her copies of the books and they would just get stacked up somewhere in the house. She never really interfered, which was the wonderful thing. I think the only big row that we ever had was over Henry Miller, when she did actually read a few naughty pages and got pretty upset. She told me, "James, this sort of thing is not what your family stood for!"

But she continued to support and to indulge me. She had an unusual helper in this endeavour, an angel in Heaven named Lester. She communicated with Lester through a medium in Pleasantville, New York, who did automatic writing. She would send her worries about me and my career to Lester, and then the answer would come back in wonderful automatic writing produced by the medium, saying, perhaps, "Dearest Leila, do not worry about James. He means well and is basically a good boy. If you are patient, he will stop doing some of these things that bother you, and he will end up all right." This consoled her. I still have the letters in a shoebox at home, and they're terribly touching; Lester was probably, I suppose, the best friend I had to keep New Directions going. And I'm afraid that I have not changed my ways over the years. I have continued to publish the kind of books that I liked, or that my friends liked, without regard to whether they were written by communists or fascists, or any kind of other beast; if I liked the book, I published it. And that is the way we have got along.

But I should put in that so many of the books I have published have come through suggestions from other writers on the list. New Directions has thus become over the years, in a strange way, a kind of a writers' family publishing outfit. So many of them have suggested good books. I think particularly of Henry Miller who kept recommending books, and who suggested Herman Hesse's Siddhartha. Henry had received a manuscript of a translation of this book from an English lady. He liked it very much and sent it to me. He said, "You've got to publish this." I read it and I thought it was a nice book, but it seemed to me a once-over-lightly about Buddhism, with sugar coating. So I said, "Well, let's wait Henry, let's wait a little bit." But Henry kept writing me. He would end every letter by asking, "When are you publishing Siddhartha?" So finally, to humor him, I published Siddhartha. The first year it sold 400 copies; the second year, I think was about 700 copies. Then the Hesse boom in the colleges began, and it mounted and mounted. In

the end we were selling a quarter of a million copies a year of Hesse's Siddhartha; it still sells about 75,000 a year. So this is why I say New Directions is a family business, not my own family, but the family of our writers. Kenneth Rexroth suggested so many good writers to me, people such as Denise Levertov and Gary Snyder and others, and Bill Williams suggested various writers whom we published. It's always been that way. Snyder himself has suggested writers. So I think of it as a kind of a family writers' endeavour. It's not a co-operative; they don't get anything out of their kindness, except a few copies of the book, but it is a family writers' endeavour, and that's the way I intend that it should stay.

RM: Could you talk about your decision to become a publisher?

JL: The decision to become a publisher came from Pound. I had left Harvard after my freshman year, where I was quite bored, and got leave of absence to go abroad to try to be a writer. Well, I didn't get to be a writer, but I did meet some wonderful people. I worked for a month for Gertrude Stein, if you can believe it, trying to write press releases for her American lecture tour. If you have ever tried to boil down twenty pages of Steinese into one page of American journalese, you'll know what a task it was. But after I left her, I went down and studied with Pound in what he called his Ezuversity, which was a sort of a free academy for anybody who wanted to listen. The lectures took place at meals in what he called the Albuggero Rapallo. He carried on for at least an hour, sometimes longer, a continuous, fascinating monologue on every possible subject. It would usually begin with a discussion of the morning's mail, which could have come from any place in the world and be about anything. Then he would go on to things like poetry, history, economics, the anthropology of Frobenius; you name it, he was interested in it, and he was very brilliant on all of it. The other good thing about the Ezuversity was that there was no tuition, so a student could stay there for some time. And then he would lend us his books from his personal library. The best part of the books were the marginalia, sometimes scathing, when he was reading some text from Palgrave's Golden Treasury which was his bête noir.

I was, at that time, trying to write poetry; I'm afraid it was a pathetic imitation of Pound's work, the less good elements in his work. He crossed out almost everything in the poems I showed him. After I had been there six months or so, we faced up to it. He said, "Jas, you're never going to make a writer, you haven't got it." And I said, "Well boss"--I used to call him boss--"what am I going to do?" "Well, you might try to be useful." And I said, "Well, what's useful?" "Well, you might try to 'assassernate' Henry Seidel Canby!" For those of you who are young, I should explain that Canby was the editor of the magazine [The Saturday Review] that

Norman Cousins later ran, who proved in one essay that there was no character development in Ulysses. Then we thought a bit about how we were going to do away with Canby and how I was going to get away with it. Finally he said, "You can't do it, you're too dumb!" So we thought about second choices. He ruminated and said, "Well, you might be a publisher." This was an idea that had never struck me; I didn't know anything about publishing. But that's what we decided it was going to be. He said, "You go back to Harvard and finish your course and get that sheepskin. Then your family will be so pleased that they'll give you some money to become a publisher." That's just the way it worked out. I went back--I didn't do very well; I didn't work very hard; I spent most of my time doing things which we should not discuss, but I did get the diploma. And when I got the diploma my dear father, God bless him in Heaven, presented me with a cheque for a hundred thousand dollars, which I invested in blue chip securities, and which lasted me in publishing for eight years. Ezra did his part by writing to his friends who needed a publisher. Now, it might seem odd in that period that these good writers--people such as Williams, Kay Boyle, Bob McAlmon, Cocteau, various others--should need publishers, but they did, because of the Depression. This was 1936, and the New York houses still were not taking any risks in publishing the wild, experimental, highbrow writing that these people were turning out. And they, all of them, had good manuscripts. So I wrote around to them, and they were very generous in sending me things. They didn't seem to mind that I was only 21 and had never published a book. They just sent me stuff, and we wrote simple contracts saying that any wealth would be shared and off we went. I learned the whole publishing business, really, from the printers--I never went to publishing school--and from bookstore people, and from librarians. I would go around and talk to the buyers in bookstores or talk to librarians, talk to printers, talk to binders, and they showed me how to do everything. We made our little mistakes; for example, in the first number of the New Directions Annual, I forgot to number the pages, which was a little odd, but gradually one learned. And one also learned patience, because it was a very hard push at first. I used to go out on the road in my car during what was called the "reading period" at Harvard, when you didn't have any classes, and I wasn't going to do the reading anyway. I would go off in my car and drive as far west as Omaha where there was a scary woman named Mrs. Matthews in Matthews' Bookstore. She would say, "Are you back here again with your crazy junk?" "Yes, Mrs. Matthews, I have several very important new books by Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams." "Who the hell are they?" "Mrs. Matthews, I did tell you about them, last year." "Oh yes, I guess you did. Well O.K., I'll take one of each." So one gradually learned, slowly things got better and sales began to build up. And

God bless Frances Steloff of the Gotham Book Mart in New York. They should put up a monument to her and to that place because she, from the very beginning, was stocking the early books of William Carlos Williams, even though nobody would buy them, and from the very moment that I started, she would carry my books and put them in the window. Just that exposure began to get them known a little bit. Then there were various early reviewers who were kind, and a great many who would make terrible fun of the books, or would simply ignore them.

The first New Directions book, done by the printer for The Harvard Advocate in Vermont, was called Pianos of Sympathy. [Blaser had earlier surprised Laughlin by showing him a copy of this first New Directions book.] It was written by a classmate of mine in Harvard called "Montague O'Reilly," but his real name was Wayne Andrews and he is now a very eminent professor of cultural history at Wayne State University. He had grown up in Paris with his family, and had gotten to know some of the Surrealists. He wrote a delicious little story about an old gentleman who had a very strange coupling of fetishes. The two fetishes are the strings in his piano and girls with long hair, who would lean their hair into the strings in his piano and then he plays it. (Wayne is going strong; New Directions will publish his book on Surrealism soon.) That was my first effort, and you can imagine the impression it made in the Laughlin and Carlisle homes. But then I went on to do much more serious things. My first really serious book was the poetry of Dudley Fitts, the great Greek translator who had been my master at Choate; that was a very beautiful, fine book and got good reviews and I think we actually sold out 400 copies of it. And then I went on to Williams's great novel, White Mule, which is the first volume of his Stecher Trilogy, the story of his wife's family who were really named the Hermans. They were a German and Norwegian couple living in Rutherford, and Williams did the anatomy of their lives through three generations. His wife, Flossie, is born on the first page in a wonderfully poetic passage. I don't suppose there has ever been such a good book about childhood.

* * *

ON EZRA POUND AND THE BOLLINGEN PRIZE

AUDIENCE: I would be interested to hear Mr. Laughlin's view of the Bollingen Prize controversy with Ezra Pound.

JL: That's pretty sticky. I think that unquestionably

the Pisan Cantos was the most distinguished book of poetry of that year, no doubt about that, and the board of judges who selected it, which included Eliot and Tate and MacLeish and others, were perfectly correct in making the award. On the other hand, I can, without sympathizing with it, understand the public relations feelings of the Library of Congress, which was the administrator, when they had a torrent of abuse in the press because a prize had been given to a man who was under indictment for so-called treason. Of course, Ezra was never a traitor. In his Rome broadcast, he really was, as he announced, only trying to preserve the U.S. Constitution. You could spend a lot of time tearing apart the ridiculous arguments of the people who attacked the decision; you can question the arguments of the people who defended it, who said that there is a complete separation between an author's attitudes, even his content, and his poetic product. Personally, I have never been very much upset by Ezra's so-called Fascism, or by his anti-Semitism because, working with him and keeping in touch with him over the years, I understood the reasons for both of those things. As you know, some time in the 1920s he came under the influence of A.R. Orage, the editor of the New Age in London who was very much interested in Social Credit, which was the theory of Major C.H. Douglas. I won't attempt to analyze Social Credit--it's a bit complicated--except to say that it is an economic concept of credit rather than debt. And I may say that I'm probably the last remaining member of the Boston Social Credit party. In my better days, I used to go in the Boston subway handing out leaflets about Social Credit and directing the recipient how he could get a pamphlet on the subject. I am still a Social Crediter; I still believe that debt of almost any kind--I mean, this whole business of the government running up a trillion dollar debt on which the taxpayers pay enormous interest, this whole mess of businesses being financed by borrowed debt, lending money to Brazil so that bankers can make millions in interest--I agree entirely with Ezra that this is all nonsense. We should have a credit system in which money, as Ezra used to say, would be a ticket, the right to issue these tickets being reserved in the Constitution of the U.S. Congress and not run by a semi-autonomous body known as the Federal Reserve Board, or any bloody bank in the country that wants to issue money. Very few people realize that a bank can create money ex nihilo--out of nothing. You think that if you go to a bank and take out a loan, you are borrowing the money that somebody else has deposited there. This is not true. According to the banking laws, the bank may issue about ten times their deposits in credits which they enter on their books as, believe it or not, deposits. This was what used to make Ezra boil and why he wanted to see Social Credit reform. He also felt that wars were made by international bankers who loaned money to the armament makers on both sides.

One reason that Pound became entranced with Mussolini was that he read something Mussolini had written which led him to believe that Il Duce was on to the bankers. I remember Ezra saying to me, "He's on to the bankers." He hoped that Mussolini, being a dictator, would have the power to federalize credit and that something like "social credit" would develop. He was also interested in Mussolini's ideas about a guild system for labor. Of course, Ezra's fascism was a fantasy. Mussolini wasn't going to do anything about any of this. But the time when Ezra went to see him was rather interesting. After much supplication, Ezra finally got an appointment. He marched down that long hall and into the huge office that Mussolini had, and there was the great man sitting in his uniform, and some secretary had carefully placed on the corner of the desk a copy of the Cantos. Mussolini picked it up and said, "Ma, questo è interresante." Ezra was in seventh heaven. He thought: today poetry, tomorrow Social Credit! Mussolini played along with him for ten minutes, or whatever the appointment was, got him to autograph the book, and then thanked him for coming. The following week Mussolini had a big shuffle in his cabinet. Ezra read about it in the papers and he picked out a name, I think it was Polizzi, and said, "Ah, Polizzi, he's my man." But, of course, nothing ever happened. Things went on as before; the Italian bankers continued to run the system and promote the Ethiopian war and the Spanish war, so that they could go on financing what were called, in a book Ezra gave me to read in the Ezuversity, the Mercanti di Canoni, the Merchants of Arms.

If that explains how Ezra fell for Mussolini, who can blame him? He was such an idealist. He was a hopelessly childish idealist. He thought that he was going to save the world, and he thought that it was a poet's function to save the world. He would work for his paradiso terrestre. He thought he was going to do it through his advocacy of Social Credit and through the parts about economics that he put in the Cantos. I sympathized, though I knew it was hopeless.

As for the anti-Semitism, that had begun a little even when I was with him in Rapallo in 1934. But then it took the form mostly of jokes, jokes about Sir Montague Norman, who was the head of the Bank of England, or other bankers. It was pretty innocuous. But then as his paranoia developed, especially through his sufferings during the war, his anti-Semitism increased. I discussed his case very fully with Dr. Overholser, the head psychiatrist of St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, where Pound ended up when he was declared "of unsound mind," after being brought to this country to stand trial as a traitor for having made the really obnoxious Rome broadcasts. Overholser told me, "There's nothing we psychiatrists can do for him. He is too old, he is too set in his ways, he has become a custodial case. The typical paranoid picks out a

scapegoat, be it his wife, or someone else--someone on whom he can blame his failures and his troubles. You must judge him medically not morally." In Ezra's case, the scapegoat was the Jewish banker. He was always very pleasant--you know the old saying, "some of my best friends are Jews"--to Zukofsky. He had many Italian Jewish friends. He saved the life of, and looked after, the sculptor Henghes, whose real name was Heinz Winterfeld Klusmann. There were many others whom he helped. It didn't do any good to point out to him that, statistically, there were more gentile bankers than there were Jewish bankers. He just couldn't see it because he had blinkers. I've always felt about the anti-Semitism that, regrettable as it was, one can, as Dr. Overholser said, look at it as a medical case, rather than a moral case. I used to argue with Ezra about it when I first went to Rapallo. His answer always was, "Jas, how can a man whose name is Ezra be an anti-Semite?" Or he would tell me, "Go read the Book of Ezra." Actually, he was a little off there because I think the part about usury is in the Book, not of Ezra, but of Nehemiah. He persisted in these errors to his own great sorrow; they hurt him, no doubt about it. They hurt him particularly in the Bollingen controversy. But I've always agreed with Dr. Overholser that one must look on his aberrations as a medical situation. Paranoids have their scapegoats.

I did make efforts at various times to combat the anti-semitism. In "Canto LII" there are big black bars. This is because Ezra had written a violent attack on the Rothschilds, calling them the "Stinkschulds." I found out that there was, living in New York, a member of the family, who was a fine woman, a patron of the arts. I decided I would not get into a libel suit with her. So I used the black bars. I cowardly blamed it on the printer; I said, "The printer was afraid that he would be sued for libel." Then there was another case where there was some pretty strong anti-Semitism in a new book and I wrote to Ezra, "How would you feel if we put in the contract for this book that there would be nothing anti-Semitic in it?" I got a wonderful card where he said that he did mind; he did not think it was a "pubber's" (a publisher's), duty to tell the author what to write, but that if there was to be a prescription against any one particular religion, there would have to be a prescription against all religions. Thus there would have to be a prescription against Mennonites, Muslims--he had a whole long list, and he said, "even Calvinists." You couldn't get the man to be serious about the problem. It was a blind spot.

* * *

AUDIENCE: You have so many good writers coming out of New Directions, but which writers are you sorry you missed?

JL: My big miss was Beckett. I had a good chance to get on to Beckett because my friend John Slocum, a college friend, had sent me Watt with great enthusiasm. Beckett hadn't yet signed up with Grove Press. For some reason, I don't know, I was going on a trip or something, I didn't read it right away, and by the time I got back, Beckett had signed up with Grove and is, of course, permanent there. I didn't publish Lolita, although I was great friends with Nabokov and his family, because I felt that the effect of Lolita on my Aunt Leila would not be, shall we say, salubrious. I missed out on Tom Merton's Seven Storey Mountain because I went skiing for the winter. The agent sent it in and I thought, this looks pretty heavy to go in my suitcase, so I just left it sitting on the desk, and by the time I returned she'd gotten peeved with me and sent it to Bob Giroux. But I think in that case it was just as well that it was published by Harcourt because it was a book that required a lot of special promotion to put it across. I came out of it perfectly well because Tom and I had become friends when I did his Thirty Poems, at the behest of Mark Van Doren. Tom wrote so many books that he really needed three publishers, let alone two. He gave me many books: Seeds of Contemplation went through eight printings. He was, with Rexroth, one of my very dearest friends. I went down to the monastery in Kentucky every year, and because I was a source of income, Father Abbot, who was a graduate of the Harvard Business School, would let me take Tom out for the day in a rented car. As soon as we got off the monastery property, Tom would shuck his robes and put on bluejeans and a sweater and a little beret, and we would tear around the bars of the countryside. I have never seen any man who could consume more beer without any visible effect.

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ON NABOKOV

JL: Nabokov was introduced to me by Harry Levin at Harvard. He called The Real Life of Sebastian Knight to my attention, which I loved immediately, a beautiful novel. I also did the book on Gogol, which Nabokov says contains, though I have never found them, four or five leg pulls about me. He was a great jokester, in complicated jokes that probably came from his passion for chess. I got to know him well. I once had a ski lodge out in Utah, and he came out one

summer to collect butterflies. We had some hair-raising adventures climbing over the mountains in pursuit of rare butterflies that he knew were there because a French lepidopterologist had been through the region around 1870. We did find most of the butterflies he wanted, but why we weren't killed, I don't know. We would go up snowfield to the peaks and then the snow would freeze as we started to come down. We were wearing sneakers and we would start to slide. One time we were up on Lone Peak and we slid faster and faster, and down below was a great chasm we were going to drop into. Volya, always the master of any situation, holds out his butterfly net and with it catches a piece of rock, and the rock holds. I grab hold of his feet and pull myself up to the rock. He breaks off part of the handle of his butterfly net, and we cut steps in the snow all the way down the snowfield. We got home to the lodge at about dawn the next day.

* * *

ON THE NAME "NEW DIRECTIONS"

JL: I think that Gorham Munson thought it up. Pound had put me in touch with Gorham, who had a Social Credit magazine called New Democracy. He said Gorham should give me a couple of pages an issue for literary material, and he did. I always thought that it was Gorham who had invented the name, "New Directions in Prose and Poetry," which was the heading for these pages in the magazine. Then some scholar who was studying the Munson papers at Wesleyan reported that wasn't so, that I thought it up and Gorham approved it, but I have no recollection of anything except that it was Gorham's idea. It seemed suitable for what we wanted to do. We wanted to present new kinds of writing. But of course there have been plenty of jokes about it. We get letters addressed to Old Directions. Ezra, in his letters, refers to it in two ways, either as Nude Erections or as Lewd Directions, but I don't think we have ever been really very efficient pornographic publishers--not that I have anything against good pornography, just haven't had the chance to break through. I mean, Lester might not have liked it.

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AUDIENCE: You make it sound like the most natural thing in the world that you would have gone to see Stein and Pound in, what,

1932 or earlier. What was it that put you on to those writers?

JL: Dudley Fitts at Choate had started me reading them. He introduced me to Eliot and to Williams and to Pound and to Stein. He had all the books in his room and he used to let me come up and read whatever I wanted. He was a great man--a great teacher. He was also a fine poet.

* II *

ON WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

RM: Let's begin with your first meeting.

JL: I'm bad on dates, but it must have been about 1936. I came back from Rapallo to Harvard in the fall of 1935. I wrote to Williams that winter--Pound had already written him about me--and Williams wrote, "Come on down to Rutherford, I'd like to meet you." I took the bus from New York out to Rutherford walked to Ridge Road, the main street of the town where he lived. I came to a very simple little wooden house where it said, W.C. Williams, M.D. on the door. He had his office in one half of the house, and his living quarters in the other half. I rang the doorbell and this nice lady, Floss, answered the door. "Oh, you must be Jim Laughlin. Come on in, I'll get Bill out of the office as soon as he's finished with his next patient." Soon he came into the parlour and we took to each other immediately. He was a man of great charm and amiability. He loved people. I used to call him--I made up a phrase for Bill--the "non-cutaneous man," the man who had no skin. There was never anything between him and the person he was talking to; there was no embarrassment, no pretension. And this could be a person of any class of society. I've always had the feeling that this wonderful, open quality that he had he may have inherited from his mixed blood, particularly from the Spanish ancestry--Spanish people are usually very open. He was very easy to talk to; he asked me what I was doing at Harvard, why I wanted to be a publisher, what books of his I had read. We talked on in an easy fashion and became very friendly. It was agreed that as soon as I could raise the money he would let me publish his novel White Mule which was finished and had been shown to several New York publishers, who had all turned it down. I had great help in the preparation of the book from the poet and printer, Sherry Mangan who was a friend of John Wheelwright's. He lived in Boston, working at the Plimpton Press in Norwood as a designer. He designed the book and gave it its

beautiful format and decided on the white cloth binding because the book was called White Mule. Of course, White Mule, as you know, was the name of a famous whisky--I believe it no longer exists--and Williams chose that name because he said that White Mule gave him a kick and that his wife gave him a kick, and the book was the story of her life and her family's life, beginning with Floss being born on the first page.

RM: Before you went out to Rutherford, did Williams, for you, have any reputation in the Unites States?

JL: He had a reputation for me because Dudley Fitts had put me on to reading some of the early books of poetry. I knew who he was, but I think he was very little known to the general public. He was known to the writers and painters with whom he associated; he was known to people like Marianne Moore and the group connected with The Dial and The Little Review who followed advanced writing. When I began going around the country in my car selling White Mule, I found that none of the bookstore buyers knew who William Carlos Williams was--or very few of them.

RM: Though the novel was, in quotation marks, a "success?"

JL: In a modest way, it was a success. It had some excellent reviews. The one that I remember best was Alfred Kazin's. It had a number of other good reviews and the first edition which was, I think, a thousand copies sold out in a few months. Then Bill got rather panicky because I was off skiing in New Zealand and he didn't know what to do. He got a hold of my father who said, "Well, print some more." Bill said, "Well, how am I going to do that?" So my father called up the printer and guaranteed that he would pay for the job.

RM: Was White Mule a turning point for Williams, a movement away from being an underground writer?

JL: Yes, it certainly was. It was the first book of his that got around. People began to realize that there was this baby doctor in New Jersey who wrote good books. Stylistically, of course, it was a big reversal from the complexity of the Improvisation books, though there had been in between, stylistically, two transition points: there had been In the American Grain, which is still a little bit like the Improvisations but tells more of a story, concrete stories, and then there had been the novel, A Voyage to Pagany, which was published by Macauley, a firm that went out of business. This is straight narrative, the story of his trip abroad when he took a year off and wandered around Europe seeing things and people.

* * *

RM: Why do you think Williams is so important to twentieth century writing? What distinguishing quality of his writing, to you, makes him utterly unique?

JL: There are several things. You have, first of all, a wonderful imagination at work; he had as fine an imagination as anyone. You have the freshness of the writing, the getting away from trite kinds of expression both in poetry and prose. And you have the dynamic of this terribly strong-minded man who was obsessed with words and language. There, when you start using the terms, "words" and "language," you come close to the central Williams. He was one of the first--others have done it since--who decided that you did not, when you started out to write a book, plot out what the book was going to be about, and write. You started with some language or an idea, and then you let that language and that idea shape the form and direction of the book. I like to think that he turned the faucet on, and let the water run. It was the word, and the concept of language begetting language, language creating language, which informed the best of all his work in both poetry and prose. You see this right up to the end.

RM: That's right. And you see that theory of writing being built up in the Improvisations. The Improvisations would be a kind of testing ground?

JL: Yes, with the Improvisations he began to experiment with the ideas that he picked up from Gertrude Stein and from painting, and although I can't find the books in his personal library, I think that he was reading some of the Dadaists, probably Tzara and others. I think he was familiar with their work, though I'm unable to prove it: I can't find the books at the Penn Library; I can't find the books in his house; I can't find the books at Buffalo.

RM: I would think a good project would be to track down in detail his trip to Paris.

JL: Yes. When he was in Paris he got to know Sylvia Beach. Sylvia would have had in her library, in her shop, or her friend Adrienne Monnier, who had a French bookshop across the street there on the Rue L'Odéon in Paris--either one of them would almost certainly have had Dadaist books. Bill could have borrowed these books. And from his autobiography we know that he met Philippe Souppault,

who would have had Dadaist and Surrealist books.

RM: How would you define the difference between Pound and Williams?

JL: One big difference is that Pound drew on the past much more than Williams. Williams's only real excursion into the past was the historical essays of In the American Grain, whereas Pound was constantly going back to the Greek, going back to the Latin. He spent twenty years going back to the Provençal. His early poetry derives from Browning and Rossetti and a little bit from Swinburne. Pound goes back into Chinese, into the world of the Adamses and Jefferson. For me both the Cantos and Williams's Paterson are mosaics, in which fragments are put in perspective and opposition. Pound was constantly recreating scenes from the past, mixing them with the present, mixing them with his own memories of what he had experienced himself. The poem is a mosaic by a man who is trying to establish a whole personal world culture, going as far back as the Chinese.

RM: And Williams?

JL: Williams used the past in In the American Grain and, of course, in the historical clippings in Paterson. Williams makes his mosaic with detail from the local, with what "Dr. Paterson" encounters in the New Jersey life around him. Pound is international, Williams is local. I think that is a very profound distinction. Metrically, also, there is a great difference between them. So much of Pound's early work, and particularly his translations from the Provençal and the Italian, constantly use archaic language. You have to go to the OED to find out what some of the words mean. Whereas Williams, once he had gotten out of his Keatsian phase, what he was writing at Horace Mann School and Penn, used strictly contemporary language. Reading Paterson, you don't have to look up much; they're all the words that we all use. This is his obsession with "the American idiom," American speech as it is, and particularly American rhythms. His ear heard the stresses in the speaking around Rutherford. In the correspondence Pound is continually urging Williams to come to Europe because the literary past and the "action" are in Europe. But Williams insists that the important thing is place--the place where the poet lives, the place where he knows the people, the place where he hears the people talk, and where he is writing about things that he daily sees, daily knows and daily hears around him. In that sense they are very different kinds of writers. You could say that Williams undertook Paterson to emulate the Cantos, to write his own long poem, but the poems in their structure are so very different.

RM: Yes, the distinction you make is beautiful; that's good. Was Williams a difficult writer to work with, from your point of view as a publisher?

JL: No, he made no fuss at all. In fact, the only problem with Williams was to get him to look over his manuscripts, after he had had them typed by Kitty Hoagland, who was one of his friends in Rutherford. Bill did his own original typing on the machine in his roll-top desk. In the early years he used that miserable yellow paper. You've heard the story; when he married, Papa Herman gave him a ream of this terrible yellow copy paper which is now decomposing in the Buffalo library. Bill would type out his stuff on these sheets, but he wasn't a very good typist--this shows in his letters--and then, when he wanted to assemble a book, he would give them to Kitty Hoagland to do on white paper with a better typewriter. The problem was to get him to go over them. He wouldn't proofread them or check the order. As a result, the chronology of the collected poetry volumes is often odd. Nor did he always keep carbons when he sent poems to magazines. "Lost" poems are constantly turning up.

RM: So once Williams gave you a manuscript he just preferred to see it in print?

JL: Yes, that was it.

RM: He didn't phone you, or write to you and say, "perhaps this . . ."?

JL: Oh, occasionally he would find some poem in his desk that he had forgotten about and send it in, but there was no fussing at all. The books came out and he would give me a few suggestions, maybe of reviewers to send them to, or something of that kind, but he wasn't demanding. We did occasionally give a party for him, but he never expected anything. It was a pleasure for him if it happened. He wasn't like Delmore Schwartz who would, during the production of a book, write in every day with some strategem saying, "Now, we want to get so-and-so to review this book, so you write to him, and you tell him this . . .," or, "You send him such-and-such a book and then maybe he will review my book." This was constant with Delmore.

RM: That's what I was thinking about, whether Williams did this kind of thing.

JL: Bill didn't do that. He might keep a list of people he had met who had shown interest in his work, and suggest that books be sent

to them. He never demanded anything. Writing and doctoring were his business and publishing was my business. Of course, there did come the time when he switched over to Random House, imagining that more advertising and promotion would get him wider sales, but that didn't work out. Random House sold about the same number of copies that we sold. Now that may have been because the people at Random House weren't really interested in him, I think they probably weren't--but he was not difficult.

RM: I would like to get your memory of the composition of Williams's final book, Pictures from Brueghel.

JL: The final book he picked out with one finger on the typewriter after he taught himself to type again following a major stroke.

RM: Did he ever talk about this final book in terms of his entire work?

JL: I think that the last book--"Asphodel, that Greeny Flower" was in it, and some other very great poems--meant an enormous amount to him because he felt by then that he had gotten the metric and tone that he had been looking for all his life. He developed a crush on Brueghel. He had a big volume of Brueghel's paintings and, as you know, the book begins with ten scenes from Breughel, where he puts the paintings into words in an almost Objectivist way.

RM: Did you have any conversations about the relationship between those poems and the paintings?

JL: I remember his showing me the Brueghel book and saying, "Gosh, isn't that wonderful; wasn't this guy marvellous?" And I said, "Yes, I always loved Brueghel." He said, "I'm going to write a little series of poems about these paintings," and I said, "Great, do it!" But there are so many other perfect poems in that last book. He was a doctor and he knew it would be his last book. This would be his final statement. It's just a shame that he died before they gave him his Pulitzer Prize. He had had some prizes, but he never really had, until the 60s, the recognition that he deserved.

RM: Is there one Williams text you published that you are particularly fond of, or that is particularly vivid in your mind?

JL: My favorite is the "Asphodel." It's a glorious poem. I agree with Auden that it is the finest love poem of the century. It's so fluid and it modulates so beautifully. It covers so many themes in his life and his life with Floss. She comes through so strongly. He had really made it, you see, and he knew he had made it; after all

those years of uncertainty, when he was always doubting if he was on the right track. He kept telling me: "The language, the language, how am I going to find the right language, and make it work?" There was so much, not torment, because I think he was, except for his illness, a pretty happy man; he loved his practice, he loved his family, but he had so much lack of confidence about his work over the years. He would send me something and he would say, "Is this any good?" He wasn't sure. But then, I think at the end, he knew that he had found his way and he had hit it, and the ship was coming into harbour.

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WILLIAMS AND POUND

When you come back to the comparison of the two men, I think one of the strangest things was that they were able to remain close friends all their lives, except for the period when Bill was giving Ezra hell because of the broadcasts. Bill was waving the flag and said, "I have two sons in the Navy and this son-of-a-bitch is over there making these broadcasts and I can't stand it, I'm going to kick him in the teeth." Otherwise, they were very good friends, although they were continually arguing. Ezra told Bill to come to Europe to live, and Bill told Ezra to come home and find his roots. Things like that. When Ezra was put in St. Elizabeths, at first Bill wouldn't go down to see him. He said, "Naw, that bastard, I'm not going to see him." But then he began to remember all the good times he had had with Ezra in Europe, and their letters, and the fun they had had as students at Penn, and he gave in and he went down and he saw him, and I think he made a couple of visits to the hospital. Then, when Ezra was released, and was to take the ship back to Italy, Bill invited him to come to Rutherford for their last reunion.

WARREN TALLMAN

NEAL'S SCHOOL

From a talk given at the Jack Kerouac Conference, Naropa Institute, Boulder Colorado, celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the publication of On the Road (July 23-August 1, 1982).

Walt wrote out that song of taking to the Open Road, "afoot and lighthearted," and occasionally in his long lifetime he did, New Orleans, the Mid-West, Canada, but not all that often, the trains were terrible in those days--big spitoons--so mostly Walt didn't. It's easiest to imagine him on train trips down from Brooklyn and Mannahatta to Washington D.C. and back, beard wrapped around his ears, trying to get some sleep. And Mark Twain has Huck all set, one of the more famous American thought/ impulses to "light out for somewhere." But Samuel Langhorne Clemens never did get around to sending Huckleberry on such a journey, possibly because he found it increasingly desirable when another adventure began to stir in his Mississippi River head, to climb into bed, place where Proust more or less lived. Stevenson's magic land of counterpane. Thomas Wolfe is a much closer predecessor, those train-whistle blues in the night of the big wind and the high sky, from Natches to Mobile . . . as is Wolfe's big-voiced, OUTGOING writing style, a variety of ENFORCED prose freedom, you can't go home again. There is an obvious difference and gain in Jack's prose, so much more flexible, indigging and INDWELLING, you can't leave home ever. Or, let us say, had Jack his pappa's penchant for poker, the cards would have been close in against the chest, tip that full house a downward glance. Full house.

In which, hi Maw. Home. As anecdotes accumulate moving Jack's legend into binding biographical assumptions he is increasingly seen as somehow in thrall to mémêre, particularly those times she supported his writing habits, and some others, shades of Bernard Shaw's "I didn't throw myself into the struggle for existence. I threw my mother," Jack's mémêre down at the shoe factory, though not exactly afoot or lighthearted, except perhaps in the kitchen, hungry kids, apron strings and deep dish apple pie. So, in ways, it's true that the attachment is more excessive than ordinary, Freud lives, but in other ways it ain't necessarily so.

Take, for instance, a smaller than usual French Canadian family in New England, only three kids, and soon enough, too soon, only two, Ti Jean sole son and heir; Catholic of course, cathedrals, choirs and confessions, weight of the world; not to be forgetting nickel and dime depression-years closenesses, unfair weight of empty pockets on the mind; never to forget death of the father including death agony promises to pa of an always home for mémêre. It is not likely, taking these for all in all, that the excesses would be natural, including a natural confusion with regard to women in a Catholic world where Ma and Mary are both contrary. So . . . one might guess that the problem was not Jack's attachment to his mother. The problem may have been simply his mother, her disbelieving belief in her son's writing quest; her small-town, ethical suspicions of the hair-scarey companions he dutifully shepherded in through reluctant screen doors, her own and only living son himself getting hairier and hairier, scarier and scarier, goodness, gracious, sakes alive, had Allen Ginsberg been her boy, Ti Irwin, she probably wouldn't have let Jack into the house, you bad boys you.

There is also, as his biographers haven't yet quite sorted out, glimpsed everywhere in the wings of great broken-hearted house Jack built, his oh so sentimental (that's an American journey), his naive, his independent, gregarious, outgoing, irascible, his, you know, dad, pa, pop, father, Leo, Coeur De Leon, out of olden Canada, even France mayhap, Leo contending in the lists: with fate for undeserved unkindnesses to the Kerouac clan, bad luck followed by worse, mark this well Ti Jean; with city hall for keenly-felt, vaguely particularized indignities and injustices, no liberty, no equality, no fraternity in frogtown bastilles of Lowell factory brick; and closer still to home, with hit list authorities, coaches and athletic directors from high school track and football days on through to Fleur de Lis Columbia, arch villain Lou Little, Libble, Lout, for failures to recognize the prowess and indubitable pre-eminence of Coeur de Leon's sole surviving son and heir, Ti Jean, the dauphin lives, not simply good better best but great, greater, and oh, American immortality, THE GREATEST, mark this also well, singing all time, minding no time, mark this well. A paternalistic heavy heavy hanging over a young son's dreaming head, do you believe in magic in a young boy's heart. In D.H. Lawrence's world mamma is the activating force for son's dream of human life, his dad passive, down at the Sun & Moon tavern. As the house that Jack built comes into clearer focus I think it likely that Leo will loom up as active force and mémêre as more nearly like a dozen million other American mothers, all wondering, "where is my wandering boy tonight, down at WHICH lighthouse saloon?" Denver, Mexico City, Chicago, Seattle, New York, San Francisco, Cheyenne.

Jack's flute on the Cody tapes in Visions of Cody, his

preoccupation with Neal's hobo, wino dad. Surely a high point on the Cody tapes Jack and Neal, Dulouz and Cody, blasted out of their minds, reading letter Neal's dad wrote to Neal's sister inquiring whereabouts of son Neal, brains waving in the California dawn of the human mind itself as sixth sense, Mind as Agonistes, athlete to the cause. And very soon on the tapes one of the funniest moments as Jack--is he being sly?--wants to phone everyone and whomsoever in Denver, locate Pop Pomeray at once, get him on a bus instanter, Jack's marvellous remembering mind, true Agonistes, scrambling for names, streets, house numbers, as Neal backpeddles furiously, knowing his dad isn't Jack's dad, knowing his wino dad's habits, last thing in the world he and Carolyn need, THAT DAD, not Jack's, landing in midst of their domicile.

In high school, at Horace Mann, and, for a frustrated while at Columbia, Ti Jean was a scatback, 5'10", fast piston legs, say 160-170, who probably had field vision, Charles Olson territory, composition by field. Should an excited teammate inadvertently touch a scatback on say his shoulder as a running play begins, chances are that back will be 20 years down the field, stride running, as teammate's inadvertent hand hovers in the air or vacuum just created, scat. Football fields are 150 feet wide, 300 feet long, in all 45,000 square feet of space. Pour in 22 players, and several officials enforcing a lot of rules, you have a kind of pressure-cooker containment of diverse physical forces. In which cooker the athlete gifted with field vision has certain advantages. He, for instance, can take in the location and movement of all other persons on the field at a glance, a gestalt kind of eye, as he heads toward an opening that will not have occurred until he arrives, down the nights and down the days. It's a little like being able to forecast an immediate future. The touchdown is scored even as the run begins, a Zen sort of thing.

But at an even more active and important level the athlete with field vision, able to locate the other 21 players on the field instantly, experiences an ingathering confirmation of his own physical presence and force in that field. The glance by which he takes them in simultaneously pulls him into the field of force at play, way Henry James is said to have entered rooms in his elephantine age, all of him, at a stride, into the field of force at play. In Jack's instance, one man with the strength of 22. Well, not quite, since 11 of the others are an opposed force. And football fields in the 1930's and 40's could be problematically lumpy and frequently wet, at which times the ankle mechanism can turn Achilles to the runner's cause, chin skids on blades of autumn grass. Likewise, the other 21 players who do dumb unexpected things, stumble, slip, fall down in front of you, all asprawl, fly through the air, chin again, more blades of grass. Then come the referee and head linesman, making mistakes, huge whistles in their

mouths, Lou Little a great recruiter of athletes to Elysian fields of Columbia, but not as coaches go, let's face it, one of the brightest. Frustration sets in, a chill at knee height, injuries follow, his heart in hiding, hears Beethoven one fine spring 194_ day, da da da daaa, and so long Lou, you Lout, ta ta, I'm off to the writing races. Gets lucky. Meets Cassady, meets Ginsberg, meets Burroughs from over yonder on the river, St. Louie woman, deep down a gambling man.

First Neal, a new athlete in our western world. The track oval, basketball court, football field, baseball diamond, hockey arenas, all these begin to become museums of the athletic arts with university regents, chamber of commerce princes and wild card entrepreneurs as the curators, collecting athletes, Steinbrenner prowling the black market. Somewhere in 1st 3rd Neal tells one of the all-time sandlot tall tales, hurls a forward pass so sky high, 70 yards say, gives him time to scurry on down Groucho Marx fashion, having thrown it, also catches it. Huck lied a lot too. But a tale that would have tickled Jack's fancy. To participate in the organized athletic arts you do have to kinda, dammit, go to school, which wasn't Neal's style, business administration 100, business administration 200, business administration 300, straight A's for Mohammed Klutzowitz until some halfback from Pennsylvania, stove in his head, coach, why have those cash registers stopped ringing in my ears, don't ask me Klutz, ask your agent. During which era, Neal, the nonpareil, graduates with mile-high honours from parking lot 100, yeah team, car borrowing 200, on the dean's list there, city driving 300, police scholarships galore, and crosscountry driving, 17 hours from Denver to Chicago on the trail of the lonesome cadillac. Nice thing about Neal's league, the cheer leaders get to play too, co-educational drive-in theatres, restaurants and motels, times out in lovers' lanes, Professor Cassady will now present his demonstration lecture on the integration of fraternities and sororities. Enter Jack and remember, remember. Remember Mark Twain, the scaredy-cat tagalong apprentice to the great, greater and greatest Mississippi river pilots. Remember too that however adept Ti Jean may have been in his football days, he too becomes the scaredy-cat, admiring Neal's driving genius. Remember too that chronologically one of the first great poems to emerge from this era is not Ginsberg's 1955 Howl but his 1953 "Green Automobile" which, if it wasn't one of Neal's cars, should have been and probably was. And Allen's driving abilities are such that one wonders, in a wistful sort of way, if he's ever driven one at all. It's true in 1965 he did acquire a volkswagon van, make a house a home, but kept Gary Snyder or someone around to do the driving. And legend has it that Burroughs inclined to drive cars, automobiles if that's what he called them, as though they were horse drawn, some kind of a surrey, fringe on top. Remember Walt crossing Brooklyn ferry, all 1200 feet or years

of it, one of the great journeys; and Twain's Mississippi, all 1200 miles or more. Gives way to Neal's high octane rushes, Denver to Chicago, San Francisco to North Carolina, North Carolina to New York and back, Mexico, San Francisco again, Denver, Chicago, New York. Pony express, one car gives out, little exhausted there I'd say, grab another. A main reason Neal's legend lives, simplest things last, millions of American kids still do now in the 1980's look to their dad's, their own, someone's car as the one sport which still does offer liberty, equality, fraternity and lots of sorority, in a world where the organized sports have been stolen from them by their greedy elders. As with Walt's horse cars and ferry boats, Twain's Mississippi, Neal's Huckleberry driving, is gone forever, still here today, sure sign of a classic, 55 miles per hour.

But it isn't simply Neal's driving genius, the Jackson Pollock of cars, that caught Jack's fancy. As he could drive, lickety-split, so could he talk, shifting the conversational gears into as many forward directions as needed at any deliciously mad moment, let's talk all night. Given the redeeming mindlessness of the athletic arts at their best, Neal carries that secret over, and certainly it's one of Creeley's secrets too, a mindlessness of conversation in which the only interest is in IT, the thing itself, IT. Literature makes for strange bedfellows, such as T.S. Eliot's great take on Henry James, "a mind too fine to be violated by ideas." Neal violated by human life itself, human life, turkey tossed into silences of jailhouse—it takes a heap of Heaven to make a jail a home--reading, reading, reading, Schopenhauer, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Kafka later, the new wave French revolutionaries. Contrast here is crucial. See several million middle class American kids, good as gold, good as Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher, practising the organized American University Intellectual Sports, countless thousands of English Department Lou Little—professors--"but what does it all mean," opposite Neal, Kafka manifested, sweat-wise on his glistening brow, and that supreme anxiety gesture Jack captures so well, his broken, bandaged, Freudian thumb uprist, as the hand circles clockwise and counterclockwise on the belly, direct solar plexus knowledge of time, yes now, ahem, ahem, ahum, Dostoevsky you say, yummy, yummy, yummy, I've got Proust in my tummy, well, well, well. Somewhere in LONESOME TRAVELLER Jack arrives where he was perhaps always headed, when he realizes mind as the 6th sense, began perhaps with Keats's realizing that those lovers, that silence on the urn, were inside his own skull, "and I will be a priest and build a fane in some untrodden region of my mind."

Mind itself as a 6th and perhaps most important sense. In realms of male North America, Walt-style homoerotic love, as between one young man and another, strong arm draped over strong shoulders, buddy-buddy, Jack's love for Huckleberry Neal will

always be I'm sure exemplary, quote, "Yes he's mad, and yes, he's my brother." In realms of mind, beyond the cars and the conversations, Neal rushes Jack forward into another mind dimension, New York jazz, Chicago jazz, San Francisco jazz during those gone-gosling days, middle of the century, and waves of snazzy black men, most of their names lost in legend, blowing their brains out, their brains I repeat, horn down in the cellars of America, then on up through the roof, the ITNESS of the mind, mind itself, Neal's own eyes in a fine frenzy rolling. I think Allen Ginsberg is right to emphasize the importance of the tape passages in the middle of Visions of Cody, the great companion volume of On the Road, Neal flipping records, now hear this, hear this, and oh yes this, the ITNESS of the jazz as powerful then in an awakening America as Lorca's Duende was powerful in blood-soaked Spain, Neal and Carolyn feeling very mellow and lonesome, Jack with some kind of toy flute tootling some little tweets, leans and lies reclined, no longer interested to be a halfback at Pennsylvania, a quarterback at Yale as well, sly Jack, well aware he has his own brand of IT, his own fine writing frenzy to take place in a land of heart's desire somewhere beyond Neal's Huckleberry house. Reading Mark Twain we realize that Huck will lose out, it's Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher who will go off to college just because they are NICE kids, turn into Tom and Daisy who aren't quite as nice to Gatsby, turn into Scott and Zelda. So Neal's athletic genius in realm of cars, in realm of conversations, in realm of jazz, the Grecian profile, gives way to that realm in which Jack proves out the superior athlete, the writing game, American style.

GEORGE BOWERING

CUBAN LETTER FROM LIONEL KEARNS

For two decades, wherever I have lived, Calgary, London, Montreal and Vancouver, I have had a Cuban poster on my wall. It measures 84cm x 58cm (33.5ins x 23ins) and is black and yellow with b&w photographs. One photograph shows bombed or shelled structures, and the other, larger one shows an old Black man carrying a wounded girl in his arms. Large white letters proclaim: "cobardes: este pueblo jamás será vencido" (cowards: this people will never be defeated). At the bottom of the poster is the information that it was promulgated by the "comisión de orientación revolucionaria de la dirección nacional del PURSC Mayo 1964." Recently somebody brushed against the hoary document and tore it into two pieces, so after a while I took it down.

And re-read the back of the poster. There Lionel Kearns had filled the space with a letter written in ballpoint. Though I have always remembered nearly everything said in that letter, it was a pleasure to bring it back into a seeming present.

31/8/64 / 21 Rapsey Street, Curepe, Trinidad (and strangely enough Independence Day)

Well Dammit George ole soul and of course Ange and then again if there are any young Bowerings on the way well hats off to them and my best wishes to boarders, visitors or even burglars.

But especially to you ole George, friend and compadre, lone waiter in 4 AM Mexico gloom wow what a great encounter and then 2 days later you end up the foreign scourge of the mustachioed Airport traffic control--too proud to pay bribe, demanding if not a severe prison term at least deportation, and that's the last I see of you, the cop disappearing with a screw-driver in one hand and your licence plate in the other mumbling no comprendo and you're


cobardes
este pueblo
jamás
será
vencido

[illegible] (21 [illegible] Sheet. Cuba. [illegible] and [illegible] Independence day)

Well [illegible] George ole [illegible] of course [illegible] and then again if there are any young [illegible] on the way well [illegible] there and my best wishes to [illegible] – where [illegible] But especially to you ole George, [illegible], [illegible] in [illegible] Mexico [illegible] what a great [illegible] and then 2 days later you and [illegible] the [illegible] of the [illegible] Consort [illegible] – [illegible] to pay the bribe, demanding [illegible] at least deportation, and [illegible] to the last I [illegible] of you, the cop disappearing with a [illegible] in one hand and your [illegible] in the other [illegible] and you're following him [illegible]. It [illegible] me at the time as [illegible] especially when taken with the earthquake of the night before and sure enough it was an ill omen because as you know [illegible] I left all my underwear at your place and thinking that you would [illegible] for when I got back (and you didn't you bastard) I managed to [illegible] through 2 weeks in the [illegible] with only one pair – actually from time to time I borrowed a pair from Chris [illegible] – but [illegible] for a man who is [illegible] to "[illegible]" I was – a bad way.

But perhaps better to [illegible] loss of underwear than [illegible] plane or other major misadventure – actually not much chance because [illegible] planes – and after you and [illegible] folks have lost track of one another they are putting me and the rest of the group through the mill CIA style with questions and big Cuba stamps and photographs [illegible] with numbers under your chin along with desperate revolutionary looking characters who actually turn out in the end to be like anyone else who goes to Cuba and sees for himself, desperate revolutionaries. (As I am now, and as you will be [illegible] after you've been to Cuba) So finally we all [illegible] rickety old Cuban [illegible] which soon is rattling away to the promised land and aboard [illegible] big juicy Cubana airline stewardess, the first real Cubana I have encountered (and they should be encountered whenever possible) who is talking a strange kind of Spanish like through her nose and [illegible] off "s" and giving out great [illegible] full of delicious liqueurs (3 different colors) free, as many as you like and [illegible] cocktails and [illegible] the already [illegible] [illegible] in our [illegible] and perhaps its true, but damn good to eat. And [illegible] George when you want this big stewardess to come rushing down the aisle to [illegible] of comfort guess what you call her – not [illegible] or anything like that but Compañera, and in Cuba it's always like that, everyone "compañero" or compañera, [illegible] or [illegible] or [illegible] or [illegible] face – and that is really convenient [illegible] to get around, and everybody calling you compañero [illegible] and that makes you feel pretty good.

Well after a great meal (even the plane) the first of many [illegible] as we are [illegible] the coast of Yucatan and [illegible] out over the [illegible] Caribbean – [illegible] actually knowing what is the score over there in that Cuba place – remember our discussion the night before [illegible] wanting to stay in Mexico (and [illegible] wouldn't trade a month in Mexico for a day in Cuba) however, feeling at that time somewhat apprehensive thinking everybody [illegible] in Cuba – [illegible] will they imprison me in [illegible] for having this bulge around my stomach? But soon enough the old [illegible] is in sight and everyone gives a great shout of joy which to some extent is relief and the pilot, Compañero [illegible] as a matter of fact, is announcing over the loudspeaker that sure enough we're in sight of Cuba Territorio Libre de América. This last phrase not making too much sense at the time but meaning plenty later – right now meaning a [illegible] lot and I will have to tell you – my god I got a lot to tell you – but back to my story there is the [illegible] earth [illegible] tops green with mountains & little green [illegible] that turn out to be (naturally) palm trees when we get closer and roads and settlements and then I whip on my new glasses that give me (as you remember) super telescopic vision and pick out traffic moving along all the roads – mostly big trucks it looks like – By the way those same new glasses I lost 3 weeks later in our baseball game in Santiago de Cuba with Fidel up on the mound [illegible] the old [illegible] of me squatting down behind the plate – first time I'd played ball since you & me [illegible] going [illegible] around the vacant field in front of your house in Oliver – [illegible] anyway this was [illegible] it strikes me now, by your address in Mexico [illegible] in true Trotskyist fashion – they are always up to something – ask anyone – gave them to [illegible] the mad Trotskyist who was actually a rookie umpire in the [illegible] Major Leagues and is now a PhD psychology candidate in University of Western Ontario. [illegible] is a pleasant chap he couldn't get into the game and so threw my glasses away for spite. This is what is known as a [illegible] conspiracy. But I got that guy marked and after our revolution we'll see what revolutionary justice does for him. But back to the flight in and the old plane is just bumping down at [illegible] airport and everybody piling off among hords of news reporters and photographers and T.V. camera-men and pretty little Cubanitas rushing up with bundles of flowers which were sticky & awkward in the heat & if you remember I left Mexico with my suit on so I was [illegible] and [illegible] & the place in first [illegible] compared to Mexico and me thinking look at all these soldiers with guns & [illegible] in uniform with hip pistols and rifles – what I'm not aware of at this time is that everyone in Cuba has a gun & is [illegible] to carry it [illegible] duty and that all the buildings are guarded by militiamen all the time and that the members of the [illegible] have all sorts of [illegible] military [illegible] and so are at first mistaken for soldiers. So anyway with [illegible] red tape [illegible] at customs & immigration (actually none) and a few brief speeches by the President of the Cuban University Students and a [illegible] to the money changing counter where you get 1$ U.S. for 1$ Cuban (this was a shock) we are finally roaring through the hot Afro-Cuba night toward Habana at [illegible] miles an hour in our 2 [illegible] streamlined Czechoslovakian buses, the drivers [illegible] comparable to the maddest 3rd class Mexico bus drivers, except instead of playing the radio these ones sing at the top of their voices (though [illegible]) and whenever they hit a pedestrian they cry "Patria o Muerte" which immediately absolves them from any blame because implying that the victim is a gusano anyway.

– [illegible] time for a new paragraph I would say with [illegible] still drawing closer to surprise the Hotel National remember I sent you a postcard and which was for me the highest week of living I have ever had in my life, the place crammed with celebrities like me and "[illegible] of the mountains" (South [illegible]) and Che slipping through the lobby one night to attend the [illegible] day of the independence of [illegible] [illegible] food served by waiters who had known better days and said so, but all this was to come later and [illegible] but to finish, here we are still approaching the place through a city of sky-scrapers (little [illegible] with students) with solitary neon signs saying things like Paz con Dignidad – no commercial advertising [illegible] especially by ICAP to show us up and fill us in on the good points of the Revolution – ICAP being a wonderful organization [illegible] actually paid my [illegible] all the way to London) – full [illegible] Cubans [illegible] con los Pueblos and when they say amistad they mean amistad furnishing [illegible] with every comfort he could possibly want – that is the exemplary young dedicated revolutionary [illegible] – I'll admit they [illegible] for some of us [illegible] from the degenerate Western World, but a fine organization anyway. For example these [illegible] who are now coming along for the ride & will soon [illegible] accompany us to the nightclub in the Hotel where we will have [illegible] dinner & be free [illegible] to [illegible] (Afro Cuban orchestra & hordes of naked dancing girls with acrobatic bums doing the Mozambique (and Cuban women the [illegible] [illegible]) & [illegible] plunking down as many bottles of Bacardi (and Bacardi) as we can handle (at [illegible] a bottle if we were paying) – but remember I started to give you these girls (on the bus) as examples – of course not really concerning me at all because being old & married anyway – and everybody young in Cuba because I think they had to get rid of the old people in order to make their revolution). But it was a concern for these young fellows because these babes all turned out to be [illegible] – in fact [illegible] of the university students in Cuba are becados – getting free room board books clothes plus pocket money – all [illegible] getting at least free tuition – and the [illegible] & [illegible] although they usually do voluntary work in [illegible] – but [illegible] the becados never do anything that would endanger their beca. That's what I'm told, having no first hand experience with such matters. By the way that's called Socialist Emulation and it works [illegible] [illegible] and the kind of [illegible] but that's about all of it really very [illegible] Revolution. [illegible])

following him shouting obscenities. It struck me at the time as an ill omen, especially when taken with the earth-quake etc. the night before, and sure enough it was an ill omen because as you know damn well I left all my underwear at your place, and thinking that you would leave it at Sergio's for when I got back (and you didn't you bastard) I managed to sweat through 6 weeks in the Cuban tropics with only one pair--actually from time to time I borrowed a pair from Chris Farnhi--but even so for a man who is prone to "cossack's crotch" I was in a bad way.

But perhaps better to omen loss of underwear than gusano bomb aboard plane or other major misadventure--actually not much chance because gusanos love planes--and after you and me & folks have lost track of one another they are putting me and the rest of the group through the mill C.I.A. style with questions and big Cuba stamps and photographs grim-face with numbers under your chin along side desperate revolutionary looking characters who actually turn out in the end to be like everyone else who goes to Cuba and sees for himself, desperate revolutionaries. (As I am one, and as you will be one too, after you've been to Cuba.) So finally we all stagger aboard rickety old Cubana Airliner which soon is rattling away to the promised island and aboard which is big juicy Cuban airline stewardess, the first real Cubana I have encountered, (and they should be encountered whenever possible) who is talking a strange kind of Spanish like through her nose and leaving off "s" and giving out great beakers full of delicious liqueur (3 different colors) free, as many as you like and shrimp cocktails and caviar--oh ho already the Soviet influence we are saying and perhaps it's true, but damn good to eat. And listen George when you want this big stewardess to come rushing down the isle to lend some kind of comfort guess what you call her--not Señorita or anything like that but Compañera, and in Cuba it's always like that, everyone is compañero or compañera, no B.S. or fuss about who to call Señor or joven or Captain or fuck-face--and that is really convenient when one starts to get around, and everybody calling you compañero too and that makes you feel pretty good.

Well after a great meal (even on the plane) the first of many eaten as we are skirting the coast of Yucatan and heading out over the white-capped Caribbean--no-body actually knowing what is the score over there in that Cuba place--remember our discussion the night before me actually wanting to stay in Mexico (and now I wouldn't trade a month in Mexico for a day in Cuba) however, feeling at that time somewhat apprehensive thinking everybody starving in Cuba--austerity etc. will they imprison me on Isle of Pines for having this bulge around my stomach? But soon enough the old isle is in sight and everyone gives a great shout of joy which to some extent is relief and the pilot, Compañero Mondragón as a matter of fact, is announcing over the loudspeaker that sure enough

we're in sight of Cuba Territorio Libre de América, this last phrase not making too much sense at the time but meaning plenty later--right now meaning a lot and I will have to tell you--my gosh I got a lot to tell you--but back to my story there is the solid earth under our wing-tip green with mountains & little green tooth-picks that turn out to be (naturally) palm trees when we get closer and roads and settlements and then I whip on my new glasses that give me (as you remember) super telescopic vision and pick out traffic moving along all the roads--mostly big trucks it looks like--by the way those same glasses I lost 3 weeks later at our baseball game in Santiago de Cuba with Fidel up on the mound whistling the old pelote at me squatting down behind the plate--first time I'd played ball since you & me & Willy & yr young brothers were out slammin them around the vacant field in front of your house in Oliver--well anyway this was omened too, it stikes me now, by your address in Mexico the only calle beisball in the world, well anyway I couldn't wear the glasses under the catcher mask so gave them to Hans the mad Trotskyite who was actually a rookie umpire in the Major Leagues and is now a Ph.D. psychology candidate at the University of Western Ontario. He gave my glasses to compañero Muñoz, another of our group, whose only claim to fame is that he spiked Raul Castro on second base, but he gave my glasses to someone else who was pissed off because he couldn't get into the game and so threw my glasses away for spite. This is what is known as left-wing factionalism. But I got that guy marked and after our revolution we'll see what revolutionary justice does for him. But back to the flight in and the old plane is just bumping down at José Marti airport and everybody piling off among hoards of news reporters and photographers and T.V. camera-men and pretty little Cubanitas rushing up with bundles of flowers which are sticky & awkward in the heat & if you remember I left Mexico with my suit on so I was sweating sweating and damn tired & the place on first impression very drab compared to Mexico and me thinking look at all these soldiers with guns & even babes in uniform with hip pistoles and rifles--what I'm not aware of at this time is that everyone in Cuba has a gun & is encouraged to carry it when on official duty and that all the buildings are guarded by militiamen all the time and that the members of the Rebel Army have all sorts of non military offices to perform because of the manpower shortage. And so in a day or so one gets used to it (also some students wear same kind of military clothes and so are mistaken for soldiers. So anyway with minimum of red tape at customs & immigration (actually none) and a few brief speeches by the President of the Cuban University Students and a visit to the money changing counter where you get $1 U.S. for $1 Cuban (this was a shock) we were finally roaring through the hot Afro-Cuban night toward Habana at 90 or 100 miles an hour in our 2 streamlined rattling Czechoslovakian buses, the

drivers comparable in daring only to the maddest 3rd-class Mexico bus-drivers, except instead of playing the radio these ones sing at the top of their voices (though sweetly) and whenever they hit a pedestrian they cry "Pátria o Muerte" which immediately absolves them from any blame because implying that the victim is a gusano anyway.

About time for a new paragraph I would say with us still drawing closer to surprise the Hotel National remember I sent you a post-card and which was for me the highest week of living I have ever had in my life, the place crammed with celebrities like me and Nup, "hero of the mountains" (South Viet Nam) and Che slipping through the lobby one night to attend the second birthday of the independence of Outer Mongolia, and delicious food served by waiters who had known better days and said so, but all this was to come later and I suppose I'll have to find another poster but to finish, here we are still approaching the place through a city of sky-scrapers (little known then, but many of them filled with students) with solitary neon signs saying things like Paz con Dignidad--no commercial advertising at all, and also lo and behold who has got on the bus but all these little Cubanitas who were at the airport and turn out to be invited especially by the I.C.A.P. to cheer us up and fill us in on the good points of the Revolution--I.C.A.P. being a wonderful organization (having actually paid my flight all the way to London) in full Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos and when they say amistad they mean Amistad furnishing an invitado with every comfort he could possibly want--that is the exemplary young dedicated revolutionary invitado--I'll admit they seem a bit puritanical to some of us expatriates from the degenerate Western World, but a fine organization anyway. For example these babes who are now coming along for the ride & will eventually accompany us to the nightclub in the Hotel where we will have immense dinner & be treated to great swinging Afro Cuban orchestra & hoards of naked dancing girls with acrobatic bums doing the Mosambique (and Cuban women the loveliest in the world too) & waiters plunking down as many bottles of Bacardi (real Bacardi) as we can handle (at $18 a bottle if we were paying)--but remember I started to give you these girls (on the bus) as examples--of course not really concerning me at all because being old & married anyway--(and everybody's young in Cuba, because, I think, they had to get rid of the old people in order to make their revolution), but it was a concern for them young fellers because these babes all turned out to be becadas--in fact 3/4 of the university students in Cuba are becadas--getting free room board books clothes plus pocket money--and all others getting at least free tuition--and this includes a month's paid vacation although they usually do voluntary work or teach--but the becadas never do anything that would endanger their beca, at least that's

what I'm told, having no first hand experience with such matters--and by the way that's called Socialist Emulation and it works at every level or at least it's supposed to and it's kind of scary but that's about all I can really say against the Revolution. K.

In the summer of 1964 my wife and I were living in Mexico City, having driven there from Calgary after the end of classes at the university there. Lionel Kearns, who had just finished his "Stacked Verse" thesis at U.B.C., stayed with us for a weekend before going to Cuba on a student work tour. Kearns had lived in Mexico before, but this was his first visit to the country in seven years. I met him at the deserted airport in the wee hours, with some Mexican beer in my car, and he immediately suggested a guided tour of the city, which we accomplished, though I had difficulty convincing him not to hire a mariachi band in Garibaldi Square at that time in the morning.

The earthquake was a big one, lasting for a few minutes. It cracked the national treasury building and the Hilton Hotel, knocked out 70% of the capital's power, and was thought by many residents to be an omen concerning the national election held the following day.

"Gusano" literally means "worm," but in Cuba is the term for an enemy of the revolution.

Although Mexico City was the only airport in the region that was continuing service for Cubana Airlines, U.S. pressure was sufficient to make the Mexican officials identify all passengers who left for Havana.

Sergio Mondragón was co-editor with his wife Margaret Randall of El Corno Emplumado, the bilingual journal that was one of the most important organs of the poetry renaissance of the 1960's.

"Willy" is William Trump, the old friend to whom my first novel is dedicated. He was a non-writing friend of the Tish crowd.

We lived in a barrio in which the streets were named after sports. I had the great fortune of renting a small house on Baseball Street (Calle Beisbol).

Kearns, like all of us constantly learning revolutionary language, no longer uses terms such as "babes."

"Becadas" means scholarship students.

Kearns flew from Cuba to Trinidad, and thence to Britain, where he enrolled at the School of African and Oriental Studies, London University.

* * *

A NOTE BY LIONEL KEARNS

I stayed in Cuba eight weeks. At that time there were students from all over the world, invited by the Cuban government to see first hand how their revolution was working. The other Canadian students and I spent two weeks wheel-barrowing cement on a school construction site in the Sierra Maestra, and then travelled around the whole of the island. I speak Spanish, so I was able to encounter and converse with a great number of Cuban citizens, including a number of Cuban writers. My translations of various Cuban poets appeared in the 1968 anthology Con Cuba, edited by Nathaniel Tarn.

My Cuban experience was not entirely the fun fest that this letter implies, as can be seen by my various other writings that testify to these events. It was, however, a very important episode in my life.

DAPHNE MARLATT

DISTANCE AND IDENTITY: A POSTSCRIPT TO STEVESTON

In 1974, the first edition of Steveston appeared with two distinct narratives: that told by Robert Minden's photographs in the first half of the book, that told by my poems in the second. In 1984 we have gained some distance on that book and see its story as a single narrative told in two distinct modes that wind around each other. One either wants to establish distance between two separate identities as that necessary space in which to see them, or one wants to close the distance between them in an effort to experience what they share. Ten years ago we wanted to highlight the difference, the distance between our two "takes," although we had been working very collaboratively for over a year and despite the fact that both photography (as its name asserts) and poetry are forms of writing, one with light, the other with words. Certainly both register, through the photographer's "eye," the poet's "ear," the imprint of place or person on the "taker's" imagination. We had spent weeks, months haunting the docks and streets of Steveston, one taking photographs, the other taking notes, and all the while we were equally "taken" by the place.

We shared a common sense of being outsiders and were fascinated with the inside-outside reversals this took. In a fishing town with a largely Japanese-Canadian population, we were clearly outsiders who knew nothing about fishing, nothing of the language we heard around us, and very little of the culture we saw in many homes. As white middle-class Canadians, we represented a mainstream they had felt very much on the outside of, particularly during the war when they were forced out of their homes as "enemy aliens" and sent to camps in the interior. We had our own experiences of being outside--Robert with his Toronto Jewish background, me with my childhood experience as an immigrant from Malaysia--and we identified with them in ways which surprised us as much as it must have surprised them. There was something in Steveston which drew us, over and over again, and which our work attempted to enunciate--something under the backwater quiet, the river hum of comings and goings, the traffic of work, that was "shouting" at us to tell it.

How we told it was very much the result of differences in our sensibilities and modes of working. Robert was drawn primarily to

people, to specific people who, like messengers, announced themselves to his camera. Only with effort did he photograph the place. I was drawn to the river, to the tidal town at the Fraser's mouth where it pours into the sea, as much as to the people who had spent most of their lives in this place. As I pored over historical photos of Steveston and listened to life-stories of fishermen who had started fishing with their fathers, the place I saw was superimposed on the place as it had been. Yet the poem, like the river, is constantly seeking to arrive in the now, bringing all of the past it has passed through with it, while the photograph takes us back into the moment of its taking, specifically then.

Each of the photographs in Steveston radiates "presence," conveys the actual presence of its subject in a way that is immediately apprehendable: a sense of identity, declaratively present, a face (a lifetime) crystallized in an instant. Susan Sontag in fact calls photographs "maps of the real" because "a photograph is never less than the registering of an emanation (light waves reflected by objects)--a material vestige of its subject."[1] The poems have verbal vestiges of their subjects embedded in them (their own words) but they do not shimmer with this sense of actual presence and are not located in time as a photograph is. They range through layers of time, levels of meaning, they gather narrative momentum and disappear into their own conclusion.

The photos, and this is the gift of their suddenness, thrust up into our mutable present with the definitive reality of fossil moments lifted from a time and place we can never go back to. In the photograph, the subject, always somewhere/someone else, looks out at us from a distance we try to bridge by looking back into the frame. But the poem is not lifted from a time since gone, it exists in continuing time, because, in the time it takes to read it, we re-enact the forward-streaming of its sentence or sentences, its thought, all that it touches upon. In its associative weight spilling over linebreaks, in its rhythms that breathe the rhythms of its original speaker's coming to "see" (understand), the sentence (and the reader-listener following the sentence) spills out of separateness as one sentence spills into the next and a river spills into the sea: the erotic flow of issuance, arrival in the connected here-and-now, is re-enacted in each reading. Differently, the photograph, in fact its very poignancy, "holds" us in the distance between the photographer's look at the subject and the subject's look back, "caught." A still photo: a disjunction: a still life in possession of itself, is only for an instant. Or as Roland Barthes puts it: "a kind of Tableau vivant, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead,"[2] the that-has-been. In its presentation of identity (this person, this place) standing before us, the photo is incontrovertible, while the poem, less presence than presentiment, runs in a sort of controversy

between what can be identified and what remains nameless, what has been said and what is yet unsayable.

So it is startling for me to see the black-and-white evidence of the ground of a poem on the page beside it--and arbitrary, in some ways, that this is the image, rather than some other. Ten years later, I cannot remember or imagine the instants on either side of the instant that is pictured here forever. The poem, running into its imaginal world, carries bits and pieces of that ground with it, driftwood I bump up against (names, outdated prices) but it gathers in a momentum of thought beyond that ground. For the ground remains that which underlies the poem, gives rise to it, as the subject, no longer subject, walked out of the frozen instant of the photograph-taking into the momentum of her or his life.

In the narrative of the book as a whole, photographs and poems punctuate each other. If the photo stands as a period, a crystal moment in the flow of the poem, the poem surrounds the photograph with commas, with what is ongoing. As two forms of writing preoccupied with imprint, both the photos and the poems can be read as traces of the literal "scratching" place or person (subject) make on the (writer's) imagination, yet this doesn't quite account for the imprint or inscription writing itself is, the I-was-here scratched on a rock, a page, a negative. So Robert selects what the shutter release takes, and crops ever closer to the image he recognizes as essential, just as I gather this detail or that, editing the drift of a poem closer to what I recognize as "meaning." Lost in the multiple phenomena of all that is "out there," we find ourselves in what we recognize in the photograph, the poem--a double take that is both "us" and "them." In this volleying between subjectivity and subject, taker and what is taken, the distance between our two narratives closes. And in the startling alternation between the already-taken presence of a subject and the escape of that subject into the ongoing and nameless lies the point at which this double narrative begins.

NOTES

1. Susan Sontag, On Photography (New York: Dell, 1977), p. 158.

2. Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981), p. 32.

DOUGLAS BARBOUR

LYRIC/ANTI-LYRIC:SOME NOTES ABOUT A CONCEPT

en hommage à Robert Kroetsch

A shortened version of a paper first read January 18, 1984 in the Faculty of Arts General Interest Series at the University of Alberta

I

M.H. Abrams's definition of "lyric" in A Glossary of Literary Terms seems simple enough: "Greek writers identified the lyric as a song rendered to the accompaniment of a lyre. The term is now used for any fairly short, non-narrative poem presenting a single speaker who expresses a state of mind or a process of thought and feeling." But there are many contemporary poems which interrogate the form and concept of lyric even as they apparently display them, and others which seek to transcend aspects of the lyric imagination without fully denying the lyric power of language.

Perhaps one entrance to the literary/critical concept of "lyric/anti-lyric" can be made via a comment of E.D. Blodgett in a "dialogue" with Rob Dunham, in CVII:

> DUNHAM: Speaking of Orpheus, I note that most reviewers tend too easily to identify your work as lyric poems and you as a lyric poet. Do you regard yourself as the writer of lyric poems?
> BLODGETT: No. I regard myself as someone who speaks one word and then another. I can't think of anything less lyrical than that. The very conception of the poem, to me, is how to move from word to word. This is present in "phoenix" when I talk of "the awful the of beginnings." It's difficult to know how to begin, and how to end. The problem is to use a lyrical form and not to be lyrical. You were quite right in talking about "breath" and "wind" as being creative signs in these poems, but in order to see those words as signs one has

to cease thinking of Orpheus as a lyric poet. He is a guide with signs.
DUNHAM: But he is the lyrist.
BLODGETT: He is the lyrist, but what is his song? His song is a song about silence. That's the ambiguity of the non-lyric.
DUNHAM: The term, "lyric," has been reduced by making it merely the personal voice. I wish there were some way that we could recover the sense of lyrist as you have just described what Orpheus is.
BLODGETT: When one adopts the use of Orpheus in a poem, one has already abandoned one's self as a particular individual.

Elsewhere in this conversation, Blodgett speaks more fully of his deliberate and increasingly successful attempt, during his first three books, "to strip himself of his empirical self," that is, to rid himself of the lyric ego. That he has not been alone in this endeavour is one of the themes of much of what follows.

II

In his recent Poetry as Discourse, Antony Easthope argues that the English tradition, from Sidney's time to Eliot's, forms a single discourse, one of the signs of which is the attempt in poetry to deny the enunciation (the speech-event) as much as possible in order to raise to an almost perfect presence the enounced (the narrated event, which could be the act of speaking of a specified speaker), an activity designed "to offer an absolute position to the reader as transcendental ego." Whether or not one agrees with Easthope's Derridean poetics, his points invite stimulating argument. He suggests that the poetic discourse of the fixed and transcendental ego began in the Renaissance, and offers a medieval ballad as an example of a floating or unfixed I/eye. At the end of his study, he examines Pound's poetry to show how, in the grand attempt "to break the pentameter, that was the first heave" (Canto 81), Pound also broke from the transcendental ego as fixed centre of the poem's universe. And, with this break, if we turn again to Abrams's definition of modern lyric with its "single speaker who expresses a state of mind" etc., we see that Pound's "heave" was determinedly anti-lyric, even in what we might still call lyric: say his famous haiku-like poem of 1913:

"In a Station of the Metro"

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
> Petals on a wet, black bough.

Easthope contrasts this poem with Eliot's "Morning at the Window." In Eliot's poem, though "signifiers are given licence to 'float' in their own autonomy," it is "only so they can be correlative to an incoherent state of mind. In Pound the effect is always more radical." Although Eliot's poem undermines "the referential effect" and is therefore evidence "that language can no longer be treated as a transparent medium through which the represented speaker knows a supposedly external reality," there is still a single speaker who lyrically 'recognizes' that "subject and object [can] no longer [be] represented as reciprocally held in place." That is to say, although certain (Easthope would say "conventional") aspects of "the referential effect" are undermined, "the poem still represents a speaker, an 'I' aware of itself and its feelings, even if these cannot be confidently assigned between external sensation and internal thought." How, in contrast, is the effect more radical in Pound's poem?

> Three phrases, the title being one, are juxtaposed without verbs. They are not unified as expressions of a state of mind and the reader is led to consider how these faces in the crowd are like--and unlike--petals on a bough, not to identify with a speaker represented as seeing things that way. With this poem Pound is well on his way to the theory of the ideogram. Though idiosyncratic, this outlines a programme for a complete break with the inherited poetic discourse.

And, one might add, a break with the conventions of lyric, even if the acute perceptual imagism of the poem still seems lyric to us. (And, parenthetically, I would not want to be misinterpreted as arguing that Pound, or any other modern or contemporary poet, has broken entirely with either traditional discourse or with lyric as a poetic possibility. The power of lyric in its myriad forms is too great; it tends to revive and renew itself in every generation. Pound continued to create lyrics after he wrote "In a Station of the Metro," but he also embarked on projects which transcended lyric--the Cantos--or subverted it--Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, which is, I believe, a set of anti-lyrics. Seeing them as such, containing what Easthope calls a "shifting 'I'" when it appears in the Cantos, is another way of comprehending them without making what Donald Davie calls the common misreading of them "as if H.S. Mauberley

. . . is no more than a transparent disguise for Pound himself."

Yet the lyric impulse remains strong, and sometimes the idea of lyric, as a voice still to be contended with or recognized for its own sake, appears in the Cantos, that massive collection of voices and eyes ('I's). "Canto 75," for example, opens with seven lines of mixed rhetoric, in which, as Easthope remarks of "Canto 84," there is neither "a coherent enounced" nor "a consistent narrator or representative speaker":

> Out of Phlegethon!
> out of Phlegethon,
> Gerhart
> art thou come forth out of Phlegethon?
> with Buxtehude and Klages in your satchel, with the
> Ständebuch of Sachs in yr/ luggage
> --not of one bird but of many

The seventh line points one way into what follows, but the staves and notes signal, equally clearly, the pure lyric cry, for when music is unheard (and Keats, you will recall, told us in one of his greatest lyrics that "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard/ Are sweeter" ["Ode on a Grecian Urn"]), it is nevertheless present, by implication, in the concept of lyric; and when what is printed is only the sign of music in the text of a poem, surely we are meant, certainly we are able, to perceive or conceive 'lyric' at that moment of the text. Especially when that music, as Pound says in Guide to Kulchur, is "out of Arnaut (possibly), out of immemorial and unknown, [and] takes a new life on Francesco da Milano's lute." In various ways, then, our foremost pioneering modern poet held 'lyric' up to question in his various writings, and that's one way of creating lyric/anti-lyric.

III

As I have suggested, one way of avoiding the conventional confines of lyric is to seek larger forms. Yet, for many poets, this desire is not allied with a desire to create epic or dramatic poems. This is especially true if we accept William Elford Rogers's definitions of the three genres, in his study, The Three Genres and the Interpretation of Lyric, as "modes of relation between the mind of the work and the world of the work." According to Rogers, in drama "the mind of the work" is given only "as the effect wrought by the world of the drama as it unfolds before us"; in epic, "the mind of the work tells instead of showing" and "we are given the things and events of the world not as self-subsistent entities, as in

drama, but as thoughts in the mind of the narrator." In lyric, however, the signal "relational concept" is "community or reciprocity," which is to say "that it is impossible for the lyrical mind to present itself as detached from the lyrical world in the way that it is possible in drama or epic." I have over-simplified Rogers's complex argument; yet I think his version of the differences among the three genres is suggestive and potentially useful.

In his essay, "The Fire," Robin Blaser points to a new kind of long poem, even calling it a narrative of sorts (which in Abrams's terms is definitely non-lyric, but in Rogers's terms is not):

> I'm interested in a particular kind of narrative--what Jack Spicer and I agreed to call in our own work the serial poem--this is a narrative which refuses to adopt an imposed story line, and completes itself only in the sequence of poems, if, in fact, a reader insists upon a definition of completion which is separate from the activity of the poems themselves. The poems tend to act as a sequence of energies which run out when so much of a tale is told. I like to describe this in Ovidian terms, as a carmen perpetuum, a continuous song in which the fragmented subject matter is only apparently disconnected. Ovid's words are:
>
> to tell of bodies
> transformed
> into new shapes
> you gods, whose power
> worked all transformations,
> help the poet's breathing,
> lead my continuous song
> from the beginning to the present world
>
> "In nova ferat animus mutatas dicere formas
> corpora: di, coeptis (nam vos mutastia et illas)
> aspirate meis, primaque ab origine mundi
> ad meo perpetuum deducite tempora carmen!"
>
> The sequence of energies may involve all kinds of things--anger may open a window, a sound from another world may completely reshape the present moment, the destruction of a friendship may destroy a whole realm of language or the ability to use it--each piece is in effect an extended metaphor (another word is probably needed), because in the serial poem the effort is to hold both the correspondence and the focus that an image is,

> and the process of those things coming together--so that the light from a white linen tablecloth reflects on the face of one's companion, becomes light, fire, and the white moth which happens to be in the room is also light in the dark around the table, and is thus both the light and the element of light that destroys it. I ask you to remember that every metaphor involves at least four elements--which are a story, and the bringing them together is an activity, a glowing energy if stopped over, if entered. If the joy one feels in the sunny morning comes out as: the boat on the fire of the sea moves slowly to burn out--the story is of a boat on the sea--the fire is the sun on the water and the movement is of the boat, of the flow of the sun, and of the passing of the sun toward night. The joy of the movement is held a moment, then unfolds the story of the four elements, the boat and where it is, and the sun and what it is doing.

Blaser's final remarks here seem to hint at precisely the reciprocal relation between the mind and world of the work of which Rogers speaks.

Blaser argues that "such poems deconstruct meanings and compose a wildness of meaning in which the I of the poet is not the centre but a returning and disappearing note." This is certainly true of his The Moth Poem, in which, though often in larger blocks than the shifts of focus in, say, Pound's Pisan Cantos, the reader's sense of a "speaker" is continually subverted. So one of the purposes of such a poetic form is to rid the poet of "the lyric ego," a persona perhaps too powerfully conventionalized through four hundred years of English poetry to have much that is new left to say.

And yet, if one of the signs of lyric is, as W.R. Johnson suggests, its alignment with music, either by being written to be performed to music or else by being full of allusions to music, then The Moth Poem almost self-consciously insists on its lyric connections (even if the music alluded to is closer to that of John Cage than that of Fredric Chopin):

> 'The Literalist'
>
> the wind does not move on
> to another place
>
> bends into,
> as in a mirror,
> the

breaking

the moth in the piano
will play on
frightened wings brush
the wired interior
of that machine

I said, 'master'

The I/eye/s of this, the second poem in the sequence, watch what cannot be seen--one kind of absence-in-presence--and hear (barely) what can only be magic music issuing from the unlikely encounter of nature and machine; a 'speaker' enters the poem clearly only in the final line, and then only to deny his normally privileged position by announcing the 'other' and its power--which is perceived only in the unseen and the almost unheard. Nevertheless, I think most readers would 'hear' lyric in this section, and in the other sections of The Moth Poem, if only because we conventionally call a short poem full of physically apprehended details of perception and sensuous rhythms by that term.

What do we have in such a serial poem, then? Lyric straining against itself, perhaps, and a poetic discourse very much of that modern "heave" against the consolidations of what "the pentameter" stood for. Lyric/anti-lyric.

IV

In his quick overview of modern lyric in the first chapter of The Idea of Lyric, W.R. Johnson argues that what has gone wrong with lyric in modernist literature is the loss of "a speaker, or singer, talking to, singing to, another person or persons, often, but not always, at a highly dramatic moment in which the essence of their relationship, of their 'story,' reveals itself in the singer's lyrical discourse, in his praise or blame, in the metaphors he finds to recreate the emotions he seeks to describe." As he sees it, two kinds of poem have replaced this pure form of lyric: meditative poetry, "in which the poet talks to himself or to no one in particular"; and a poetry "in which the poet disappears entirely and is content to present a voice or voices or a story without intervening in that presentation directly." One thing is obvious here: Johnson's notion of the person in the poem is precisely that which Easthope in Poetry as Discourse seeks to call in question. However, whether or not we perceive the person in the poem as a fixed or a constantly shifting entity, it is possible to see the meditative poem, which Johnson associates with the Romantics through to Eliot and his

inheritors, as having changed the grounds by which "lyric" was judged.

Johnson does not deny that lyrics of the "I-You" type he prefers have continued to appear, but he seems to feel they are in a distinct minority and appears unaware of recent developments, looking backward instead to the creation of a "fiction of the singer and his audience" in the poems of Yeats, and to the self-conscious death of lyric in the poems of Delmore Schwartz and Sylvia Plath. He does not seem to know the poetry of pure speech which arose as anti-lyric to the confessional speech of poets like Plath, Lowell, and Schwartz.

It is in this context that the often savagely honest poems of Robert Creeley or John Newlove, for example, might be treated as lyric/anti-lyric. Yet one of Newlove's toughest such poems deliberately calls attention to the lyric qualities it simultaneously denies and affirms. It continues "the old pronominal forms of solo lyric" and insists that it is song, yet its "songs" are, one might say, atonal, deliberately flat, denying the conventional 'music' of traditional verse. The personal emotions it expresses are anger, frustration, despair, and, of course, the lyric emotion, desire.

"No Use Saying to Whom"

No use saying to whom these
four songs are addressed.

1. Even being near her eases me;
away I am distraught and sick,
useless.

2. All my friends are my enemies,
they want her to stay with that man,
knowing nothing.

3. No use blaming them, because they
do not know what is happening
in this house.

4. When you are gone my face falls
into its natural frown; you are
the bitterness left in my mouth.

No use saying to whom these
songs are addressed; you know.

In fact, the first three "songs" try to maintain a distance from

Johnson's "old pronominal forms" by insisting on the third person of both friends and lover; but the final "song" and the coda, a near-repeat of the opening lines, focuses the pain which has suffused the whole.

The next poem in Moving in Alone seems to follow up the hints of illicit love in "No Use Saying to Whom." Of course, illicit love has been a moving force in lyric poetry from time immemorial, and at least from the Troubadours to modern Country & Western music (and the question of popular music's lyric qualities is an important one, although pop song lyrics are not usually studied as examples of poetic speech). Illicit love is given something of a new, and anti-lyric, twist in "Nothing Is to be Said," where intensely physical sensation crashes into the poem leading to a series of recognitions on the speaker's part, the final one of which is savagely, painfully, comic, and brings into focus a figure usually kept out of such love poems:

> Everything ends once
> and cannot be recovered,
> even our poor selves.
>
> Your tongue thrusts into my mouth
> violently and I am lost,
> nothing is to be said. I am plunged
> into the black gap again.
>
> It is not to be endured
> easily, unthought of, never
> to be dismissed with ease.
>
> What can I do. My hand
> shakes on the page. Knowing
> I am criminality, there is
> nothing I dare do.
>
> Ah, I can't go home
> and make love to her either,
> pretending it's you.

Both these poems are lyric by either Abrams's or Johnson's definitions—or are they. What distinguishes them and other poems like them from what we have conventionally taken to be lyric is their refusal of so many of the traditional rhetorical properties of verse--especially the various tropes. Aside from Newlove's obvious delight in flouting lyrical thematic conventions, the minimalism of

such poems clearly asserts their anti-lyric nature, and yet, in their "measure," as William Carlos Williams uses the term, they achieve, for me, a real and often intense musicality, not attached to metre but to the flow of the large rhythmical unit of the stanza, or the verse paragraph. As in this poem by Robert Creeley:

'The Language'

Locate I
love you some-
where in

teeth and
eyes, bite
it but

take care not
to hurt, you
want so

much so
little. Words
say everything,

I
love you
again,

then what
is emptiness
for. To

fill, fill.
I heard words
and words full

of holes
aching. Speech
is a mouth.

As Thom Gunn points out, Creeley "has gone beyond, or behind, the classic twentieth-century split between image and discourse: he does not attempt sharpness of physical image, and the discursive part of the poetry is more aptly termed 'assertion'." The real course such a poem follows "is that of the mind, wandering, but

at the same time trying to focus in on its own wandering and to map a small part of its course accurately and honestly, however idiosyncratic that course may seem to be—idiosyncratic in its pace, in its syntax, even in its subject-matter. In attuning our voices to that mind, in paying our full attention to the way it moves and shifts, we become part of its own attentiveness and can share in 'the exactitude of his emotion'." Is such idiosyncrasy lyric? Anti-lyric? Yes, and no. It is the kind of poetry I had in mind when I first thought of this topic, and it still seems to me to fit the concept. Moreover, Creeley is but one of many contemporary poets who have subverted the modernist aesthetic of separate persona and who must be read, at least in part, as speaking for themselves, however 'open' and 'free-flowing' those selves may be. If "modernist lyric" is what Johnson perceived it as, a form of poetry without an "I" which speaks directly to a "thou," contemporary lyric in poems like Creeley's insists upon the poet's speaking self. And in their retrieval of the poet's self as poetic speaker, such poems attack the idea of a modernist lyric.

V

In his essay on the contemporary Canadian long poem, Robert Kroetsch re/calls a poem whose lyric intensities seldom fail to impress the reader/listener, and whose affinities to the passionate lyrics of the greatest woman poet of Greece are not hard to trace.

> Our interest in the discrete, in the occasion.
>
> Trace: behind many of the long poems of the 1970s in Canada is the shadow (Jungian?) of another poem, a short long poem.
>
> 1965: Phyllis Webb, Naked Poems.
>
> A kind of hesitation even to write the long poem. Two possibilities: the short long poem, the book-long poem. Webb, insisting on that hesitation. On that delay. On nakedness and lyric and yet on a way out, perhaps a way out of the ending of the lyric too, with its ferocious principles of closure, a being compelled out of lyric by lyric:
>
> the poet, the lover, compelled towards an ending (conclusion, death, orgasm: coming) that must, out of love, be (differance) deferred.

Kroetsch is, of course, pursuing his particular poetic passions here. Webb is simply pursuing passion, to speak or sing it as clearly as possible. I am interested in what he says about her poem because he points to its lyric/anti-lyric aspects. Naked Poems is (in my opinion) a serial poem of sorts, but though it breaks away from lyric (love) song in its final three sections, the first two "suites" are exquisite in their (sometimes literal, always deliberate) mouth music. Yet, if the voice of these two "suites" is fairly stable (while in the final three it disappears or dissipates into a chorus of possible "I"s), it can be tenuous in the extreme. This isn't "Sappho" pleading; just a body (in time) timelessly speaking/making love:

AND
here
and here and
here
and over and
over your mouth

The merest abstractions, except for the final word: a conjunction; an adverb of place(ment); an adverb expressing temporal repetition, yet also figuring its other meanings of height, and "in excess" or "beyond what has been said"; a possessive pronoun (carefully unfocussed insofar as nowhere is the second person ever identified any further) expressing by this point in the poem an extreme possession--but on whose behalf; and one noun, very physical, yet with the implications of speech (indeed, the specially privileged speech of love/making) definitely there. That one concrete word is itself abstracted in the music of this poem. Like all the other terms it tends to float free of signification, to become pure signifier-in-action. All the words in this poem are things-in-themselves, and, as Antony Easthope would argue, the enunciation, the speech-act, becomes far more important than the enounced, the narrated event. Or rather, the narrated event exists only in the speech-act, this intensely physical fragment of broken song which is not simply song but dance. Indeed, I have always felt that the first two suites of Naked Poems were a series of exquisitely turned gestures, which is surely one possible definition of dance. Many of these gestures could be defined as "lyrical," of course, but their appearance, here, in the midst of a series of fragmented moments of perception and insight, that is, in the midst of a continuing serial narrative of enunciation, makes them something else as well. Still the central movement of the following section of "Suite II" surely deserves the adjective:

In the gold darkening
light

you dressed.

I hid my face
in my hair.

The room that held you

is still here.

In this tiny pas-de-deux, the focal gesture is one lovers would recognize at any period from at least Sappho's to our own.

In "Non Linear," Webb shifts focus and, in a typical post-Cantos move, floats the "I," the putative speaker, so that from fragment to fragment no particular voice speaks. The same is true of "Suite of Lies" (the title of which once again alludes to music), which is gnomic in the extreme as it moves to this ambiguous finale:

the way of what fell
the lies
like the petals
falling drop
delicately

In "Some Final Questions," Webb seems to offer us a duet and therefore two 'fixed' voices, but there is music on only one side and that is part of the lyric/anti-lyric point. Moreover, who, precisely, speaks? The questioner is legion; the respondent is any poet; and since to question poetry's impulses is to deny the possibilities of poetic speech, only one voice achieves lyricism here, and it finally seems to disappear in silence--or do "we disappear" instead, "in the musk of [the Priestess of/ Motion's] coming," as the text prayed earlier? Either way, Naked Poems is, for me, not only the poem in whose shadow so many later Canadian long poems stand, but also the poem which taught us once again how we might write (sing) love without being trapped by what Kroetsch calls the "ferocious principles of closure" of the conventional lyric.

VI

An instance of what might be called "specific intertextuality"--that is, what a number of contemporary writers have agreed to call "homolinguistic translation" ('translation' by a variety of methods from one language into the same language)--definitely denies the lyric impulse as we generally understand it, even when the results may appear lyric, upon first reading. This denial of lyric is especially obvious when the original text is a lyric.

Steve McCaffery has given us a series of homolinguistic translations of Mary Barnard's Sappho (which is itself a 'real' translation from another language) in Intimate Distortions: a displacement of Sappho. His number "Fifty" has a lyric feel which some of his other ones clearly deny, yet the very fact that its 'voice' emerges from some point intermediate to Barnard, McCaffery, and, yes, Sappho, means that that 'voice' is no longer truly that of a lyric individual but rather that of a contemporary deconstructive process:

50 But you, monkey face

Atthis, I loved you
long ago while you
still seemed to me a
small ungracious child
(Barnard)

Same's not similar

& long ago
is now

in this remembering.

i'm remembering
your childhood &
i'm facing that in you

facing you
facing your face

as then i did you did so

long to come to be

come now.
(McCaffery)

In their much more stringent refusals of traditional lyric modes, "Twenty Three" and "Sixty Two" achieve an even greater distance from both their originals while simultaneously providing a contemporary commentary on them:

23 And their feet move

Rhythmically, as tender
feet of Cretan girls
danced once around an

altar of love, crushing
a circle in the soft
smooth flowering grass
(Barnard)

in crete
dis crete

con crete
indis crete

in crete

on crepe

dis crete
con crete

in crepe

(McCaffery)

62 The nightingale's

The soft-spoken
announcer of
Spring's presence

(Barnard)

nightingale on
P.A.

M.C. of
bud-break.

(McCaffery)

In "Sixty Two," McCaffery plays wittily with contemporary connotations of English words. His "Twenty Three" is much more radical in both form and playful wit. It insists on the concrete-presence-as-enunciation of the words on the page; it plays with both English idiom and Greek and Latin echoes in the words. I find these poems delightful in their lightly born iconoclasm, but they make lyric itself no more than a trace of original texts, to be detected, if at all, only as literary artifact, ingeniously "artifantasized."

Somewhat similar in effect, though in intensity much closer to what we expect from lyric, is the following poem by one of Canada's foremost experimental writers, Christopher Dewdney. As its title implies, it too exists between voices: as the speaker is only the "Poem using lines spoken by Suzanne" (my italics), so too the "you" of the text floats free from particular signification, or else is no more than an absolute signifier, trapped forever in the dream of language which is the poem:

'Poem using lines spoken by Suzanne'

What you feel as your body
is only a dream. The mind also
is a slave. You are asleep.
You are asleep, what you feel
as your mind is only a dream. The
dream also, is only a slave.
You are a dream, what you feel
as your slave is only a mind.
The body also is a mind. You
are asleep
in the gentle theft of time. (time)

"Boreal Electric" is more a 'standard' Dewdney poem, if such a term can be applied to his work. Here the epigraph (significantly a graffito, as if to say, only on walls will we now find a conventional

lyric speech of any sincerity) recycles the lyric ego and his suffering, but the text itself, though it contains some "I"s and some "she"s which could possibly signify people or voices, is an extreme case of self-conscious enunciation swallowing all of the possible enounced:

'Boreal Electric'

For my lady, keeper of my wound.
GRAFFITI

She is the twilight intangible, a thin instruction
burning within the envelope generators. Alter
sublime in the cenozoic asylum. And
I am case-hardened. Natty causal an
auto-facsimile. Denoting cold fire.
There is nothing sentimental
about these rocks. I am
the envelope generator growling
in the shifting code facsimiles of night.

Zone traces. Indigo.

I would have her mouth the words
'statutory rape' slowly. Arrested
for intent to denote this line.
This lodestar being visible only
to the discerning eye.

The disconcerting eye.

As these examples demonstrate, and I could find many more like them in contemporary Canadian and American poetry, the outward forms of lyric are infinitely capable of what McCaffery calls distortion and what I might call formal subversion: lyric/anti-lyric in another of its guises.

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MIRIAM NICHOLS

ROBIN BLASER'S SYNTAX: PERFORMING THE REAL

> Olson said, "I'd trust you
> anywhere with image, but
> you've got no syntax" (1958)
> this comes to mind out of the
> night and morning, rebelliously
> reading Eckhart, today,
> to put together in order the
> simplicity, the wings[1]

As his readers will know, Robin Blaser has made syntax an issue central not only to the poetics of his latest book, which composes one long answer to Olson's comment, but also to the thinking of the earlier poems and essays. Blaser has always questioned the poet's right to order language in a continuity reflective only of his own fictitious conception of a completed Self--which language can then be made to express. The slippages, gaps and juxtapositions which characterize Blaser's syntax function as limitations on the authority of the Self, and they constitute a performance of the instability of language as it doubles the processive and discontinuous nature of being. In "The Stadium of the Mirror" (1974), Blaser comments on the syntax of the Image-Nation poems:

> The first Image-Nations began a movement that became a consciousness. A reversal of the consciousness I did not believe, but had been taught--the ownership of the poet, the transparency of the language, the imposition of form upon the real, the cogito. Form is alive, not a completion of the heart or of the mind.[2]

"Form is alive": it is a potentiality which can disturb the closure of a discourse. Ironically perhaps, in view of the comment Blaser records, it is Olson who talks of image as "a winged and perfect sexual creature."[3] Quite simply, Blaser's syntax is loosened to open a space for the flightiness of form as it is constantly re-forming

itself in a

> . . . movement that
> prevents the fixing of the meaning of the thing,
> visible or invisible, and makes arise indefinitely,
> beyond the present given, the latent content of the
> world ("SM," 55)

Syntax retains this dynamism, and it also extends the question of poetic form into a general presentation of political and (anti)metaphysical problems of order and authorship.

Poetry, Blaser says, is a "composition of the real" and the "real," in this century of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle and Freud's unconscious, has come to mean more than the continuity consciousness seems to be. In his American Hieroglyphics, John Irwin suggests that the concept of the Self as an "internal psychic unity" comes from the perceived unity of the body.[4] But it is a truism of physics that the body's "unity" is composed of so many 'somethings' which can be described either as particles or waves, depending upon the conditions of the experiment. As Olson put it,

> Right out of the mouth of physics one can seize the condition Keats insisted a man must stay in the midst of.[5]

--that is, "uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts." On this matter of the "uncertainties" (from which the idea of a unified Self is abstracted), Keats's maxim has found new expression not just in modern physics, but in psychoanalysis and deconstructive criticism, too. In her extended Preface to Grammatology, Gayatri Spivak summarizes the importance of Freud to Derrida:

> . . . Freud . . . established that the workings of the psychic apparatus are themselves not accessible to the psyche. It is this apparatus that "receives" the stimuli from the outside world. The psyche is "protected" from these stimuli. What we think of as "perception" is always already an inscription. If the stimuli lead to permanent "memory-traces"--marks which are not a part of conscious memory, and which will constitute the play of the psyche far removed from the time of the reception of the stimuli--there is no conscious perception. "The inexplicible phenomenon of consciousness arises [periodically and irregularly] in the

> perceptual system instead of the permanent traces." There are periods, then, when the perceptual system is not activated and that is precisely when the lasting constitution of the psyche is being determined. It is only the periods of its actual activation that gives us the sense of time. "Our abstract idea of time seems to be wholly derived from the method of the working of the system . . . and to correspond to a perception on its own part . . . of that method of working." In the "Note," Freud undermines that primary bastion of selfhood--the continuity of time-perception . . . our sense of the continuity of time is a function of the discontinuous periodicity of the perceptual machine and, indeed, a perception of nothing more than the working of that machine . . .
>
> Nietzche had undone the sovereign self by criticizing causality and substance. He had indicated our ignorance of the minute particulars involved in a "single" human action. Freud undoes the sovereign self by meditating upon those minute particulars. . . . Freud speculates that the very mansion of presence, the perceiving self, is shaped by absence . . .[6]

I have quoted Spivak at length because I wish to emphasize the fact that Blaser's syntactic performance is not only rooted in a literary tradition, the delineation of which would be an essay in itself—Emerson's "man thinking," Mallarmé's evocation of chance and the "plume solitaire éperdue," Olson's[7] understanding of "all creation as motion," Spicer's poetry of dictation, come immediately to mind. It is also, very literally, grounded in the nature of being as it has come to be understood in this century. The many quotations and bits of graffiti which appear along side of Blaser's "own" writing are an obvious peculiarity of Syntax. Blaser has often used quotations in his poetry, but the higher incidence of these in Syntax dramatizes his point that discourse (and the quotations do mostly account for the "discursive" quality of the book), like consciousness itself, does arise "periodically and irregularly"--and not necessarily from the "author."

That these fragments are there, however, is a reminder that any syntax, however uneasy, does belong to consciousness. As Blaser says, "Poetry always has to do with consciousness. Its restlessness is what we have called the unconscious, expecting the past and future from the present" ("SM," 56). This means that there are two tensions working in syntax. As speaker, the poet does assume a certain authority. He takes responsibility (also a response-ability) for a "composition of the real," and the

composition is a kind of conscious activity. On the other hand, the composition, as Blaser speaks of it, must also include an acknowledgement of its order as incomplete and conditional; of the "elsewhere" of its origins. If the poet fails to account for this "restlessness," he risks the "perjury" (Blaser's word) that there is only a Self in language, that the composition can be "fixed" or made to express a fictive absolute. The "I" is there--the voice that orders—but "I" is, also and simultaneously, an other. And so Blaser says,

> Through the arrangement of words (parataxis), there is a speech along side my speech, which allows a double-speech. A placement. The Other is present and primary to our speaking. There is no public realm without such polarity of language ("SM," 59).[8]

Blaser's concern with "a public realm" accounts for a certain urgency in the tone of Syntax. A polis (and a politics) are at stake in this question of order and authority. To spell out the implicit assumption, syntactic performance, involving authorship and order, doubles order and authority in the "public realm"--the real is a composition, and the composition is real. Most importantly, Blaser insists that problems of authority are bound up with the nature and function of "the sacred." The "subject" of Syntax is the sacred as it is active within a language which, in turn, performs the real. Blaser is fully aware that the sacred, if it is to be considered seriously by contemporary readers, requires redefinition. In a quotation in "Diary, April 11, 1981, he says,

> he lived in a time of the
> end of a culture and, as
> Charles Fair has pointed out,
> at such a time language
> is lost and the very meaning
> of "soul" is lost (S, 33).

Formerly, the sacred inhabited language as an absolute--the ultimate "meaning" absent in our culture. As such, it is no longer available. Blaser acknowledges this, but he argues that the sacred cannot, therefore, be discarded. The disruptions he allows in his syntax bring the sacred into the poems in that they function as circumscriptions of the I-voice, interrupting it, cutting it off, implying a beyond to that voice. In this way, the sacred is

redefined negatively. It is (indefinably) Other, not-Self, silence, absence. In "Lake of Souls," in the quotations from René Girard, the sacred is also redefined in anthropomorphic terms.

In Violence and the Sacred, Girard says that primitive cultures protect themselves from endlessly reciprocated acts of violence (and the threat of extinction by such acts) by substituting a sacrifice for the act of revenge. The violence of the community is thus polarized and expelled through a victim from whom there will be no functional possibility of reprisal. Girard goes on to say,

> Men can dispose of their violence more efficiently if they regard the process not as something emanating from within themselves, but as a necessity imposed from without, a divine decree whose least infraction calls down terrible punishment.[9]

He then suggests that violent activity is characterized by a loss of difference between participants--in Bacchic rites, for example:

> The "Dionysiac" state of mind can and, as we have seen, often does erase all manner of differences: familial, cultural, biological, and natural. The entire everyday world is caught up in the whirl, producing a hallucinatory state that is not a synthesis of elements but a formless and grotesque mixture of things that are normally separate (VS, 160).

The terror ot this spectacle of sameness is, paradoxically, given form in images of extreme difference--monstrous and/or divine.

> This transformation of the real into the unreal is part of the process by which man conceals from himself the human origin of his own violence, by attributing it to the gods (VS, 161).

In other words, the Same or the One rises from the heart of the community, from its latent potential for that violence which can erase all differences (literally, the Many). When the transcendent, incomprehensible, or "outside" quality of the god is lost, the community opens itself to unlimited violence. In our own society, the judicial system serves as a legal form of vengeance and its

authority, Girard says, is rooted in religious thought:

> In the same way that sacrifical victims must in principle meet the approval of the divinity before being offered as a sacrifice, the judicial system appeals to a theology as a guarantee of justice. . . .
>
> Only the introduction of some transcendental quality that will persuade men of the fundamental difference between sacrifice and revenge, between a judicial system and vengeance, can succeed in by-passing violence (VS, 23, 24).

Girard's thesis of the origins of the sacred resembles the idea of the "outside" as it comes through in Blaser's discussions of the "Other" and in Spicer's comments on dictation. "Whether it's an id down in the cortex--which you can't reach anyway," Spicer says, "it's just as far outside as Mars."[10] What is inside and inaccessible can be described, functionally, as what is outside. The crucial function of the transference is to limit the authority, and potential violence, of the "I"--and to check any tendency to make "mere opinion" absolute.

In political terms, the "Other" acts against totalitarianism, in which man has assumed absolute authority. "The thought of totals, the original totalitarianism," Blaser says, "is a rooted dissimulation and turns the present into the past or into the already thought" ("SM," 61-2). Completions evoked by the individual or the State hide a claim to divinity—a claim to the totality of truth ("man catapulted to a false-divinity," Blaser says in "further"). Completions, in other words, misrepresent the finite and processive--the conditional--nature of being. In the passage Blaser takes from Bernard Henri-Lévy, Lévy says that "the crisis of the sacred is primary and decisive" because its disappearance leaves the world "without a point of reference"--without an "outside" (S, 49). The State which recognizes no other, or no indeterminacy in itself (this non-recognition enacted as suppression of difference), has declared itself unconditional and without relation--terms which Thomas Aquinas used to describe God. Blaser writes:

> this thought of the end of the end is the modern sweetness and terror, but it simplifies to terror alone--this societal dream of itself as absolute reality, then practiced as uniformity and barbarism, is the oily turntable of the round-house where we

> repair the engine again and again--it is the absolute humanism that is repulsive--reason darkened in the Enlightenment, . . . (S, 37).

The humanism he refers to here is that style of thought (implicit first in Hobbes, for example) which claims that the rational Self (the ego), is all, and that all must conform to it.

Blaser's argument against this kind of reductive humanism is located between the twin tendencies toward either resolving otherness in anthropomorphic explanations or retreating to orthodoxy. This is the balance Blaser reaches for in Syntax. On one hand,

> The sacred consists of all those forces whose dominance over man increases or seems to increase in proportion to man's effort to master them. Tempests, forest fires, and plagues . . . may be classified as sacred. Far outranking these . . . stands human violence. . . . (S, 49).

On the other hand, locating the sacred in nature or within the psyche does not really explain it away either. Writing of Spicer's "insistence upon an outside," Blaser quotes the rope trick from "A Textbook of Poetry":

> The Indian rope trick. And the little Indian boy climbs up it. And the Jungians and the Freudians and the Social Reformers all leave satisfied. Knowing how the trick was played. There is nothing to stop the top of the rope though.[11]

This is not an argument for transcendence in the old sense of that word. Rather transcendence, as Blaser redefines it, is

> . . . not a position somewhere else, but the manner of our being to any other (Merleau-Ponty). A co-existence ("SM," 59).

"Other" can also mean "any other." The consciousness which begins by limiting the violence the Self can be with the recognition, "Je

est un autre," leaves room for others--a "public realm."

Such are the definitions. The sacred is imagined in Syntax as it has always been imagined, "with all its faces,/fiery-footed" (S, 39). It is "aurora" in the opening poem, "a restless disappearance" whose "glittering look" leaves behind a "brightness." In "alerte d'or" it is a fondness for "the chimera'd." Scraps of a Christian universe remain in the delirium of the enthusiast who stands "by Hudson's Bay" with a crucifix around his neck in "blindly visited," or in the Nicene Creed, quoted in "Lake of Souls," which 'dreams' of "peoples, far places and nations." Here, the Creed represents religion in the original sense of "religio," a "binding" to the world. What has no form, and the sacred is formless both as a violence and as the "infinite" of tradition, can only be envisioned as poly-morphous:

> God is day and night, winter and summer
> conflict and peace, fullness and emptiness;
> but he takes various shapes, just as fire,
> when it is mingled with aromatic herbs, is
> named according to the scent of each (S, 52).

This act of imagining the sacred is part of the form giving activity of poetry. In the Norse myth from which Blaser extracts "a footnote," the Wolf Fenrir (the devourer), is restrained with a thread made of six imaginary things, when the gods discover that chains which are merely strong won't hold him. The Wolf is a key figure, not only because he suggests the violent nature of the sacred which can only be "bound" in image, but also because that which binds can become another kind of wolf--a syntax of self-expression. Tyr, god of battles, loses his hand in the taming of Fenrir. The wolf is tied because Tyr is too. Syntax, Blaser says, "is a violence/or a love" (S, 43). As a violence, it can be used to exclude whatever is "out of the picture not in the frame" of the Self (S, 14). The small boy who spells out "F U / C K" on the window of the bus is told by his mother that the word does not exist (S, 17). The janitor at the St. Rock Museum, telling of an incident in which the "O" from "Hollywood" rolls down a hill and cuts a station-wagon in half says "'It would've been/better . . . if it'd been a Honda Civic./Front-wheel drive would let you go on driving.'" (S, 13). Front wheel drive syntax carries on even when it loses the rear half of the vehicle, ignoring whatever is not in its direct line of vision.

These five incidents belong to "The Truth is Laughter" poems of Syntax, the title of which is at least partly informed by Hermann Broch's Death of Virgil, a book Blaser was reading when he wrote The Moth Poem (cf. "Invisible Pencil" in The Moth Poem).[12] In The

Death of Virgil, laughter inhabits "form fixed and mute" as the perishability of the materials of form. Laughter, Broch says, is the recognition of the god of his destructibility.[13] It is an eruption of what seems to be "out of the picture." Just so, the "I" is a shadow made of the materials of its own dissolution (chance and periodicity); the polis is a structure which survives by virtue of the misapprehension that its foundations are somewhere else; the sacred is that which is at once too close to see and immeasurably distant--"always the opposite and companion of any man's sudden form" (SM, 55). This is the laughter hidden in the simple coherence of many of "The Truth is Laughter" poems; an immanent dispersal of the uni-directional order syntax is taken to be:

a radiant finger points  (S, 26)

Enacted as love rather than violence, syntax is "radiant"--light and vector(s). Merleau-Ponty's discussion of 'rays of the world' offers an analogy to this "operational language" as Blaser calls it.

> . . . the memory screen of a yellow-striped butterfly . . . reveals upon analysis a connection with yellow-streaked pears that in Russian call to mind Grusha which is the name of a young maid. There are not here three memories: the butterfly--the pear--the maid (of the same name) "associated." There is a certain play of the butterfly in the colored field . . .[14]

I have been discussing the importance of indeterminacy and discontinuity in Blaser's syntax. Within the poems, antecedents are frequently ambiguous, as in this passage from "art is madness":

> now new lightnings over again
> the endless game of it fresh
> in this stillness which is after all
> infinitude as we can
> come by it (S, 9).

Either "stillness" or "endless game" or both could be construed as "infinitude." Alternatively, there will be a series of images, as in "Image-Nation 15," which are juxtaposed but not causally connected. Often there are interruptions, which come in like Anna Russell's voice in "Lake of Souls." Yet as the poems are arranged in the syntax ("a certain play") of the book they form a serial which does offer a "colored field." Things recur, though frequently in altered form. The recurrences make the serial poem familiar--a geography the reader can come to know and move within.

There are a number of ways to approach serial syntax. Like the movie serial, it is always to be continued. Or to borrow a phrase from Merleau-Ponty, it is a "symbolic matrix" the implications of which are always incomplete. Blaser speaks of "moving from one room to another a shocked,/resilient heart, owning nothing . . ." The rooms belong to the same house, but nothing is owned or held. Serial poetry does have much in common with serial music. Atonal music has no centre. Each musical note is of equal value, and holds no meaning extrinsic to the tone row. The nature of the tone row, or the image in a serial poem, is revealed in the course of the composition, as it is presented in different positions.

Images of light and darkness form one major "tone row" of Syntax, doubling the syntactic act which is at once articulation and silence; sense as it arises from and returns to non-sense. The "brightness" which accompanies the passage of aurora in "art is madness" recurs in "lately, my mind is dark," in which the dark mind "stands there/talking of the light river." The contrast is repeated in "Moving from one room," where "in the depths of the eyes," there is "the latest/image held of a shimmering city" "Image-Nation 15" offers "the fire in the lacquer house," which 'burns up' the record of Pascal's conversion. Pascal referred to his conversion as a fire, and thereafter carried with him the note Blaser mentions:

> "Certitude, Certitude,
> Sentiment, Joie
> Paix" (S, 20).

"The point is transformation of the theme," Blaser says in this poem. The lacquer house of language ("the shimmering city") burns in the wake of the mind in motion. The fire follows "certitude." The "clear glass cross," and the illumination of Pascal turn up again in "Image-Nation 16" as "so many 'Guesses at Heaven'"--("we come upon them/now and again"). The candles and shadows of "A Ceremony," in the context of this book, belong not just to the Catholic Tenebrae, but to the definition of syntax itself. More

accurately, that ritual held, for a time, an authentic relationship with the sacred. "A ceremony" reappears in the quotation from Geoffrey Hartman in "Lake of Souls." "Natural diction," Blaser-Hartman says, is as "contaminated" as the "nonnatural," "lucid artifice" of the old poetic language. Contaminated because all form is artifice and stain. A ceremonial language acknowledges itself as artifice, and that is its claim to truth. (The composition must declare its limits.) "Lake of Souls" ends with just such artifice, turning the light and dark imagery of the book (the "polarities" of syntax) into a ceremonial performance:

> the emerald day
> with its shepherd of the black light
> and the eternal mothers of the black milk
> turn
> in the acts of light (S, 53).

This final passage of "Lake of Souls" forms a complete sentence. It is immediately preceded by the reappearance of the aurora borealis, the image which opens the book. What prevents the circle from closing is the movement to "further."

Included in the epigraph of Image-Nations 13 & 14 (1975), is this sentence: "Being moves from behind us into its place in which we stand." One of the contradictions of Orpheus, Blaser says in "The Fire," is that he "has the power to bring Eurydice back from the dead, at least metaphorically, but cannot look at her."[15] Whatever recognitions are made in the serial poem remain behind the poet. The author, the authority of the text, is always missing. What definitions the text offers are simply the record of the passage of 'something.' The fictitious 'body' always escapes:

> The ultimate of my languages or yours--or the culture's--is missing. The terror that I am spoken rather than speaking (Lacan's phrase) is present in their heartlessness. Their broken voice is not meant to be another comfortable grief ("SM," 63).

Just so, says Opal Whitely, recorded in "further" in the midst of her eccentricity. Elizabeth Barrett Browning "will grow up to be a lovely cow."

. . . Her
mooings now are very musical, and there is
poetry in her tracks. She does make such
dainty ones. When they dry up in the lane, I
dig up her tracks, and I save them. There is
much poetry in them . . . (S, 55).

* * *

There is much I have omitted in this survey of Syntax. There is Blaser's quarrel with "un-art and mere literarity" for example, which surfaces in "Diary, April 11, 1981." "Un-art" pulls down the imagination, triumphantly, in its "recognition" of the culture's abandonment of the super-natural. This kind of "de-construction," "Boorman's arthurian/realism," misses the point, substituting an absolute of the ordinary for what is considered "spiritual ketchup" ("alerte d'or"). As "deconstruction," it isn't. I have also passed over the quotations from Joe Panipakuttuk, which catch the laughter and amazement of a mind trying to give definition to something it has never seen before:

when you see musk oxen for the first time
they have a huge back on them (S, 27).

The difference between a Boorman and a Panipakuttuk is recorded in the ironically eloquent "Tombstone" which testifies to the cordiality of Chief George Capilano in welcoming Captain Cook in 1782.

. . . He advised his people
to follow his example in welcoming
the adventurers (S, 18).

The tombstone says more about the cultural syntax of the visitors than about Capilano.

Syntax arrives at a time of universal political uneasiness. "World is living on precipice" says the headline in the Toronto Star. At such times there is a pressure on the artist to address the "issues," to speak out against inequity and the violence which may become total. "Τὸ καλόν" (as Pound complained), is irrelevant, and the sacred, I've been told, is a dead duck. Both are marginal to the

serious social and political problems. "They say I have no right to speak of it,/spoiled and thoughtful" Blaser says in "Departure." Yet the Beautiful and the sacred may be the only means we have of imagining a "public realm" which is not founded on the suppression of difference--on the standardization and commodification of people as well as things. Syntax is not a particularly optimistic book. It does not offer a program for social reform. Blaser simply says that "the good is our own composition" (S, 54). There is a qualitative difference between "the good" and goods. The latter implies ownership, and the attendant privilege of disposing of what is owned. A composition of the good, as Blaser presents it in Syntax, has to include the marginal--what is not in the frame, and what is not subject(ed) to an all-consuming Self or State. That is an argument for a changed consciousness--and perhaps for a redefinition of what it means to be human.

NOTES

1. Robin Blaser, "Diary, April 11, 1981," in Syntax (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1983), p. 33. Hereafter quotations from Syntax will be cited as S.

2. Robin Blaser, Image-Nations 1-12 & The Stadium of the Mirror (London: The Ferry Press, 1974), p. 54. Hereafter cited as "SM."

3. Charles Olson, The Special View of History (Berkeley: Oyez, 1970), p. 57.

4. John T. Irwin, American Hieroglyphics (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 132.

5. Olson, Special View, p. 39.

6. Gayatri Spivak, Preface in Of Grammatology by Jacques Derrida (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, 1976), pp. xl-xli.

7. I am emphasizing similarities between Olson and Blaser: obviously there are differences. In "Dreams, January 1981" Blaser says "Olson's ring/. . . was far too/big." There is too much of Maximus in the poems.

8. Blaser's "my speech" would probably be put "under erasure" by deconstructive critics. Blaser retains a more experiential view of the Self, and he also wishes to emphasize the polarity of Self and Other for reasons which I hope this essay will make clear.

9. René Girard, Violence and the Sacred, trans. by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 14. Hereafter cited as VS.

10. Jack Spicer, excerpt from The Vancouver Lectures in Caterpillar 12, 3, no. 4 (July, 1970), p. 176.

11. Jack Spicer, quoted in "The Practice of Outside," an essay by Robin Blaser in The Collected Books of Jack Spicer (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), p. 276.

12. Broch reappears in "further,"

> The light eagles glide on the air
> where the shadow there is language (Broch)

13. Hermann Broch, The Death of Virgil, trans. by Jean Starr Untermeyer (rpt: San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983), p. 127, 130.

14. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 240.

15. Blaser, "The Fire," in Caterpillar 12, p. 20.

A ROBIN BLASER CHECKLIST

Compiled by Miriam Nichols and Charles Watts

POETRY

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Les Chimères (translations of Nerval for Fran Herndon). San Francisco: Open Space, 1965. Reprinted in Caterpillar 12 (Vol. 3, No. 4, July 1970), pp. 2-14.

Cups. In Locus Solus I (1961), pp. 136-151. Reprinted San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1968.

"The Faerie Queene, Part One." In The Nation, December 30, 1961. Reprinted in A Controversy of Poets, eds. Paris Leary and Robert Kelly. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965.

Harp Trees. Broadside. Vancouver: Sun Stone House and Cobblestone Press, c1977.

"The Holy Forest Section from The Holy Forest." Caterpillar 12 (Vol. 3, No. 4, July 1970), pp. 24-47.

Image-Nations 1-12 & The Stadium of the Mirror. Green Lane, London: The Ferry Press, 1974.

Image-Nations 13 & 14, Luck Unluck Oneluck, Sky-stone, Suddenly, Gathering. North Vancouver: The Cobblestone Press, 1975.

Image-Nation 11 was issued as a broadside in 1973 by Saint's Day Press. "Image-Nations 12" was reprinted in Island 7 (1980), pp. 17-31. Image-Nation 13 (the telephone was first published as a broadside in Vancouver, by Talonbooks, 1973. "Image-Nation 14" also appeared in Imago (twenty) (1974), pp. 48-49.

Image-Nation 15 (the lacquer house. Broadside, folded. Vancouver: Barbarian Press for William Hoffer, 1981.

Kimm. Broadside. Prince George, B.C.: Caledonia Writing Series, 1977.

The Moth Poem. San Francisco: White Rabbit Press, 1964. Reprinted San Francisco: Open Space, 1965; and in The Long Poem Anthology, ed. Michael Ondaatje. Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1979.

Of is the word love without the initial consonant. Broadside. Vancouver: Slug Press, 1979.

"Origin," "Luck Unluck One Luck," "Suddenly." In The Capilano Review, No. 6 (Fall 1974), pp. 30-34.

"Out of the Window." In The Pacific Nation, No. 1 (1967), p. 6.

"The Park." In Locus Solus III-IV (1961), pp. 49-57. Reprinted in A Controversy of Poets, eds. Paris Leary and Robert Kelly. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965, pp. 28-33.

"Pindar's Seventh Olympic Hymn." Translated by Robin Blaser. In Caterpillar 12 (Vol. 3, No. 4, July 1970), pp. 48-53. Reprinted in Episodes in Five Poetic Traditions, ed. R.G. Barnes. San Francisco: Chandler, 1972.

"Poem by the Charles River" and other poems. In New American Poetry 1945-1960. Ed. Donald Allen. New York: Grove Press, 1960, pp. 138-141. "Poem by the Charles River" was published with "The Hunger of Sound" in Junge Amerikanische Lyrik, eds. Gregory Corso and Walter Höllerer. München: Hanser, 1961, pp. 110-127.

Suddenly. Broadside. [North Vancouver]: The Cobblestone Press, [1974].

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Tumble-Weed. Broadside. In Six B.C. Poets, compiled by Roy Miki for the B.C. Heritage Poetry Festival. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1978.

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ESSAYS

"Afterword." In Imaginary Letters, by Mary Butts. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1979.

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"Particles." In Pacific Nation, No. 2 (Feb. 1969), pp. 27-42.

"Πτκος ὸ καὶ Ζεύς," in The Writings and the World of Mary Butts. Program for a conference at the University of California, Davis, February, 1984.

"The Practice of Outside." In The Collected Books of Jack Spicer. Ed. Robin Blaser. Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1975, pp. 269-329.

Review of Great Western Saltworks: Essays on the Meaning of Post-Formalist Art. By Jack Burnham. Criteria, 1:2 (November 1974).

"The Stadium of the Mirror." In Image-Nations 1-12 & the Stadium of the Mirror. Green Lane, London: The Ferry Press, 1974, pp. 52-67.

"The Violets: Charles Olson and Alfred North Whitehead." In Line No. 2 (Fall, 1983), pp. 61-103.

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The Collected Books of Jack Spicer. Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1975.

Pacific Nation. Nos. 1-2, 1967-1969; no. 2 co-edited by Stan Persky.

Particular Accidents: Selected Poems. By George Bowering. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1980.

TALKS

"The Metaphysics of Light." In The Capilano Review, no. 6 (Fall 1974), pp. 35-59.

OTHER WORKS

Boston Poems 1956-1958. Published in an edition of one copy which has disappeared.

Transparencies. A longish poem (1958) published in a small edition, which was destroyed.

SHARON THESEN

FINDING THE WORDS

COLOUR OF HER SPEECH by Lola Lemire Tostevin (1982).
SPLIT LEVELS by Judith Fitzgerald (1983).
MATINEE LIGHT by Diana Hartog (1983).
LOST LANGUAGE by Maxine Gadd (1982).

All books published by
The Coach House Press (Toronto).

It's been heard frequently of late: that the "really interesting" writing, that which is breaking "really new" ground, is being done by women. Many of these writers are Quebecoise whose ties to the French theorists and writers are profound and linguistic, but much of whose work is yet to appear in English translation.[1] Some of this writing not only cancels genre and subverts "content," but also refuses the conventions governing publishing. Hélène Cixous, in France, outdoing even the heydey of Blew Ointment Press, tries to publish continuously a continuous writing. Writing goes on almost as do the biochemical and thinking processes of the body and is seen as being just as essential to vitality and identity. This amniotic flooding of the market repudiates the male-dominated disseminatory tradition of publishing and of "the book." One might well ask, is it art? Or does it even aspire to art? I don't know, or I doubt that it does. Really, one can say nothing about it, not by way of politeness but by way of analogy, as Kristeva asks us, what can one possibly say about a pregnant woman? This is a spectacle that makes dumb the observer, the reader, the Father. And this dumb-founding may or may not be a determination of the writing itself, as in a turning of the tables, etc. These writers just write. And write and write. Cixous is a knockout in an ermine coat. Just thought I'd mention it.

Four books of poetry recently published by The Coach House Press give us a sample of the range of writing being done in English Canada by women. Each of these books is carefully edited and organized so that each constitutes a passage containing passages: in Tostevin, the excision of (female) tongues, the forming of her

own speech, birth; in Fitzgerald, transience of place and meaning; in Hartog, the calibration of gestures, seasons, conversation; in Gadd, the trips, the rides, the journeys. It is Gadd and to some extent Tostevin whose work most closely approaches the fluidity of writing mentioned earlier, though it is Tostevin who cites Kristeva, Derrida, and others as vital to her own operations in language.

In Color of her Speech, Tostevin cleanly disorganizes the linguistic formulas of relationships ("The Silent Treatment/old syntax to articulate/what can't be shaped"), not least of which is the poet's relationship with speech itself. These are poems which meditate speech, poems in which each word thinks; much as love poems vitalize a consciousness of the beloved, these poems revitalize a woman's consciousness of who she is (what she becomes) at any moment that she speaks. Tostevin has the advantage of English-French bilingualism with which to further probe a feminine-masculine bilingualism. Anxiety about the loss of childhood French is also anxiety about the loss of self in a masculine linguistics, when speech itself becomes a process of translation out of the truth ("you could say/she comes to you bearing/false witness"):

awake
each moment translates
like a clock
measures
the present
angle of vision
temps
into time
tic
into toc

The most remarkable poem in the first section of the book is a description of the surgical excision of the tongue. To her credit, Tostevin presents us only with the thing itself and doesn't belabor the point--and the poem is exactly the central metaphor of the book. "Gyno-Text,"[2] which shortly follows, is a healing series of poems, a linguistic tracing of conception and gestation in which the one-word lines have a brilliant and moving physicality:

oral
pit
spits
yolk
spins

spine

The literal en-gendering of this series seems to settle the query and drift of the surrounding poems, none of which are titled but each of which is also made of the same intelligence.

Judith Fitzgerald's Split Levels works on similar principles of linguistic intelligence, but within more obviously narrative structures. Fitzgerald handles with bright dexterity both events and the word-play events are. Split-level is a form of architecture, also a way of perceiving (probably the only way). The psyche itself is split-level. Fitzgerald creates a grammar of events by conjugating their particulars, by making us aware of the levels of consciousness and power that inform them. By means of phonemic translation, puns, sound play, rhymes, and idiomatic "mistakes" (e.g., "something the weak/of heart repulse to"), Fitzgerald asks us "to live in the listening fiction" and by so doing, to hear all its meanings, none of which is stable. The sliding surface of these poems reveals layers of ambiguity and treachery in syntax, usage and cliché:

> it's all out in the open, open
> season for opening up, hearts forced
> into habit through the force of habit
> of gravitational earth. Let's part
> strangers derangers, not get caught
> in open thought. My heart's an open book
> you learned by heart, open country
> of rag-and-bone shop art.
>
> ("First Persona Regular")

The vocabulary of linguistics is often employed as a structuring device: a way of naming poems, naming lives, as in the "First Persona" series. Emotional tension is similarly evoked through names of verb tense, such as "He turned over and fell out of my bed, my past," or, "Mostly our reading consisted of each other's face for a hint of what was to continue." A series entitled "Past Cards" deals with the poet's past, each poem identified by a date or an address. As in nursery rhymes, the rhyming devices in these poems distance the horrors they disclose:

> mary had a little lamb
> in 1958, the daughter
> is dyslexic and can't

write letters straight
the daughter goes to kindergarten
and is sent home one day
grandmother scours away at her skull
to scare the lice away

("Past Cards 7, 510 Church Street")

In Split Levels, Fitzgerald's emotionally raw material is never an embarrassment for the reader. Her writing impulse might be described as "not to interpret roses/but to accelerate/breathless art."

In Matinee Light, Diana Hartog's strong lyric voice makes poems that are sensual, witty, poignant. Less language-referential than Tostevin and Fitzgerald, Hartog's poems are essentially formalist in spirit and startling in imagery:

the girl rocking naked in her special chair
curved to the shape of Nabokov's lap. She squeezes its
muscled walnut arms--"Tell me a story!"--
but helpless with love the chair can do nothing more
than stare at the nape of her neck

("Nabokov's Lap")

The book includes several surrealistic prose-poems that are probably the poet's dreams, and that correspond to the perceptual tone of much of the work: the incongruent image, the just-out-of-reach, the unspoken word, the unexpressed (or inexpressible) emotion. The world of these poems is one of flickering but very sharp images, much like the moving pictures of her California childhood, the afternoons of matinee light. She confronts a world of already-created images and potential images, of past loves and future loves, between which the business of the poem must create itself. She speaks of "something I was going to say," of "something I meant to say," of her thoughts scattering "right at the last second," of "a point out of sight: a speck of kite I strain to imagine." Hartog's vision is peripheral and penetrating. She presents, for example, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers: "her taffeta skirt, his white spats, their smiles/their tiny mistakes." And a really charming poem about a toaster salesman:

Its chrome gleams, the slice of whole wheat
sinks out of sight as the man adjusts

light to dark and the elements

hum and glow

and I'm left with a bed full of crumbs
and cords snaking off, straining towards outlets--
my hair standing on end.

Hartog's poems have a fine, fluid movement of mind and line. For all the temporariness and ineffability of subject matter, the poems are on solid ground and are filled with the life of persons, places and things.

While Fitzgerald and Hartog write erotic poems, and Tostevin's language is in itself erotic, Maxine Gadd, in Lost Language speaks against a world that kills the troublesome erotic in everything. These numerous poems, ranging from 1958 to 1980 and painstakingly edited by Daphne Marlatt and Ingrid Klassen, are dense, energetic, anarchic and thick with surprises and beauties. These are poems that sing, chant, wail, rail and mourn. They occur all over the page and all over the place, encompassing myth, neighbours, politics, geographies, dreams, visions and word-play. At times they resemble French symbolist poems, with their schizophrenic logic, derailments of syntax and sensuousness, and at other times they have the rhythm and voice of the Beat poets: "I have seen Christ come in pastel illusion of kindergarten dreams." Neither "political" nor preoccupied by personal relationships, Gadd's is a unique voice that persists in its individuality. Indeed, throughout the poems runs the story of an individual in, out of, or fighting the repressive structures of The System, whether syntax, patriarchy, politics, money or B.C. Hydro. A graffiti-like critique energizes many of the poems, which insist on being out of control, on the move:

where i was born the aristocrats were everywhere, out
pumping gas to make the world go up in flame while the
ignoble hid in the cellar with their kids
sometimes singing

it all passed to another continent
this sweet air
with its roses
is rising thru a radiant strait the rocks are covered with
dogs everyone look at yr fingers when the moon ascends
fall into the cream

("astral advice from sir edmund hillary")

The radicalism of Gadd's writing and preoccupations is probed in an interview at the end of the book. Perceptive and articulate, the interview helps establish a context for the poems and for Gadd's concerns in writing. To a question about the imagination of French surrealist poets, Gadd replies, "that's just because they had lots of cheap hash from Algiers." But concerning composition, Marlatt asks Gadd about the verbal improvisations she calls "scrambles" that frequently occur as her poems come to a close. Gadd replies,

> It (improvisation) operates when I lose the god. Or sometimes the god takes over and says this is all nonsense, listen! Then I guess I'd call it a daemon . . . When I want to find the god I'll do it deliberately, try to destroy rationality, so then I must destroy logic, every grammatical structure . . . . I feel that it's a breakdown.

"Lost language," the title of Gadd's book, could very well stand for the search of each of these books, for each writer is in the process of uncovering a language as "female" as it is "male," at once personal and formal to varying degrees, and without a tendentious feminism as content. This is work whose point is not, as Cixous says, "to take possession in order to internalize or manipulate," but rather, its impulse is "to dash through and to fly." She adds, "A feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic . . . . the chaosmos of the 'personal.'"[3]

NOTES

1. Translations of the Women and Words conference proceedings, readings and papers are now being negotiated through various publishers and should be appearing in periodicals next year.

2. The full text of "Gyno-Text" has recently been published by Underwhich Editions in Toronto. I highly recommend it.

3. Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," in New French Feminisms, eds. E. Marks and I. Courtivron (New York: Shocken Books, 1981), p. 258.

SHELLEY WONG

ANIM YOL/NIMA LYO/IMNA OLY

THE LAST LUNAR BAEDEKER
Highlands: The Jargon Society, 1982

by Mina Loy

". . . literature is one of the saddest roads, leading everywhere." (André Breton)

Margaret Anderson, Walter Conrad Arensberg, Djuna Barnes, Natalie Barney, Sylvia Beach, Maxwell Bodenheim, Kay Boyle, André Breton, Mary Butts, Jean Cocteau, Malcolm Cowley, Arthur Cravan, Harry and Caresse Crosby, Robert and Sonia Delaunay, Mabel Dodge, H.D., Marcel Duchamp, Ford Madox Ford, André Gide, Marsden Hartley, Jane Heap, Ernest Hemingway, Eugene Jolas, James Joyce, Alfred Kreymbourg, F.T. Marinetti, Robert McAlmon, Marianne Moore, Giovanni Papini, Francis Picabia, Man Ray, Erik Satie, Gertrude Stein, Alfred Stieglitz, Tristan Tzara, Paul Valéry, William Carlos Williams--the milieu.

John Ashbery, Basil Bunting, Hayden Carruth, T.S. Eliot, Denise Levertov, Octavio Paz, Ezra Pound, Kenneth Rexroth, Williams Carlos Williams, Yvor Winters, Louis Zukofsky--some of the writers who have admired her work.

Joseph Cornell, Edward Dahlberg, Marcel Duchamp, Walter Lowenfels, Thomas Merton, Henry Miller, Gertrude Stein--some of the writers and artists who have confessed their artistic debts to her.

For the last fifty years, Mina Loy's writing has existed more as an object of private memory, testimony and conjecture than as an extant public oeuvre. While the various anecdotes, appraisals,

and criticisms of her work remain present to us through the scattered letters, notebook entries, reviews and essays of some of the figures named above, the poetry itself has remained markedly inaccessible until the recent appearance of The Last Lunar Baedeker, the first comprehensive collection of her poems and prose writings. The inaccessibility can partly be attributed to Loy's unwillingness to usher her own poems through the publishing process. Much of what did appear in various little magazines was either submitted by friends or solicited by persistent editors.

In the introduction to The Last Lunar Baedeker, Roger Conover retraces some of the publication history of these poems. In 1915, Alfred Kreymbourg and Walter Conrad Arensberg were preparing to launch a new poetry magazine to lead the revolt against Harriet Monroe's Poetry. The magazine was to be called Others. For their inaugural issue, they realized that they needed the kind of poetry that would give the magazine its necessary revolutionary quality--they chose Mina Loy's first four "Love Songs." They weren't disappointed with their choice; the appearance of those poems earned the magazine even more notoriety than they had hoped for. Two years later, an entire issue of Others was devoted to the completed cycle of "Love Songs." In 1923, Loy's Lunar Baedecker [sic] was among the first six Contact Editions issued by Robert McAlmon's expatriate Contact Publishing Company. Two other works in that series were Williams's Spring and All and Hemingway's Three Stories and Ten Poems.

For the next thirty-five years, there were the scattered appearances in various magazines--the "Exile" issue of The Little Review, the Waste Land issue of The Dial, the "291" issue of Camera Work. As the appearances began to dwindle, so too did the readership. In a 1944 essay called "Les Lauriers Sont Coupés," Kenneth Rexroth came forward to argue the case for the restoration of Loy's work to the public imagination. (The Last Lunar Baedeker is dedicated to Rexroth for his untiring efforts over the years to champion her work.) He ended the essay with an exhortation to James Laughlin, the publisher of New Directions Press: "Mr. Laughlin, the 'Five Young Poets' are still Eliot, Stevens, Williams, Moore, Loy--get busy." It wasn't until 1950 that one of Loy's poems, "Hot Cross Bum," made it into one of Laughlin's anthologies, New Directions XII. In 1958, after some consultation with Rexroth, Jonathan Williams and Jargon Press put out a slim, 60-page volume of Loy's poems called Lunar Baedeker & Timetables; it included, by way of prefatory remarks, part of the 1944 Rexroth essay, and two short pieces by William Carlos Williams and Denise Levertov. Since then, a few of her poems have appeared in anthologies such as Hayden Carruth's The Voice That Is Great Within Us, and Jerome Rothenberg's Revolution of the Word.

Of the two volumes of poetry published in her lifetime--the

first in a run of approximately three hundred copies and the second in a batch of five hundred copies--both went out of print almost immediately. That her work has since been generally unavailable goes without saying; that her work was considered tremendously important has been said over and over again. It was important enough and innovative enough to prompt Pound, in 1918, to extend his two-part classification of poetry--phanopoeia and melopoeia--to include yet a third term, logopoeia:

> poetry that is akin to nothing but language, which is a dance of the intelligence among words and ideas and modifications of ideas and characters . . . that is to say, it employs words not only for their direct meaning, but it takes count in a special way of habits of usage, of the context we expect to find with the word, its usual concomitants, of its known acceptances, and of ironical play.[1]

But Pound's enthusiasm for Loy's work (and the entire Others phenomenon) wasn't shared by everyone. There were the dissenters, like Harriet Monroe: "Calling her 'an extreme otherist,' and designating Loy 'one of the long-to-be-hidden moderns,' Monroe wished on her a spell that still sticks."[2]

* * *

One aspect of Loy's writing that Monroe found particularly reprehensible was the lack of punctuation. But what place could punctuation--as borderguard of prescribed boundaries of thought--possibly claim for itself in the pages of a "lunar baedeker"? A lunar baedeker offers the "systematic illumination of hidden places, and the progressive darkening of other places, the [map of a] perpetual excursion into forbidden territory."[3] This isn't a guidebook for daylight sightseers. These poems bring information about the other side of that reality, in-formation that, of necessity, changes with the changing phases of the moon.

In writing, Loy sets out to map the energies of poesis. Along the way, she recognizes that she's not the only moving thing on the landscape. The journeys are also the journeys of objects and things, of light and sound; the poems are the records of "a traveller who thinks not of [her]self but of the voyage."[4] Only from that perspective could she see and then pace her attention to the movement of minute elements in the language. The trick here was to keep company with the divers routes of an unpredictably shifting

language. The mental agility that was sometimes called for could be characterized as a quantum leap. The analogy to particle physics is appropriate given Loy's frequent forays into the vocabulary of nuclear fission. In 1928, The Little Review sent out a questionnaire to its contributors and one of the questions asked was: "What do you look forward to?" Always determined to discomfit banality with originality, Loy replied: "The release of atomic energy."[5] In this century, the crossings-over between science and poetry have been acknowledged on both sides. Was it any more presumptuous for Loy to speak of atoms than for Niels Bohr to say that "When it comes to atoms, language can be used only as in poetry."?[6]

Fission, then: the splitting of an atomic nucleus resulting in the release of large amounts of energy. In the poetry, words continually break open to release the energies of sounds which then compose other words. It comes as no surprise that in a poem called "Gertrude Stein," Loy should dub Stein the "Curie of the laboratory/of vocabulary." The same epithet could be applied to Loy whose own experiments with language were as radical as Stein's. Sometimes, the results were bewildering but, for Loy, that would have been preferable to a "clarity bordering on stupidity."[7] Other times, as in the following poem, the result was an involved and complex clarity:

THE SONG OF THE NIGHTINGALE
IS LIKE THE SCENT OF SYRINGA

Nightingale singing--gale of Nanking
Sing--mystery
of Ming-dynasty
sing
ing
in Ming
Syringa
Myringa
Singer
Song-winged
sing-wind
syringa
ringer
Song-wing
sing long
syringa
lingerer

In this poem, no sound or word ever remains itself--if "self" is

taken to mean a completely realized entity. What I'd liken this poetic process to is an anagram in perpetual motion, where phonemes and syllables split off from one word only to immediately realign themselves with other sounds. The dispersed sounds continually recall and anticipate other sounds. You can hear in the first two lines the beginning of a series of such interchanges: "Nightingale singing" is erratically echoed in "gale of Nanking/sing." While the syllables have been altered or re-arranged, the syllable count remains the same. The most radical departure is from "Nighting--" to "Nanking" where suddenly, in the charged space of a changed syllable, a quantum leap is made--unseen but not unheard. The nocturnal bird singing calls on a rather different kind of bird to sing—a Chinese wind ("gale," after all, comes from O.E. galan which means to sing). In that invocation to an outside, between the extremes of a here and a there which for the West has traditionally found its locus in China, a geographical and imaginative distance has been mapped by sound. No punctuation will detain this flight of sounds. The anagrammatizing re-arranges letters, phonemes, syllables, words and phrases, bursting open forgotten interstices of entrenched meaning. What had previously been regarded as merely interstitial or parenthetical becomes, in short order, a largeness of possibility.

The serial anagrammatization is the mechanism which makes possible a systematic illumination and darkening. It functions to make knowledge local, instead of total or encyclopaedic. As bpNichol puts it: "Knowledge is to know the ledge you stand on,"[8] thereby acknowledging the precariousness of the place where you stand, and the necessity of knowing the nature of that ledge as the projective edge of a world, the place from which language and consciousness are always extending. In the process, all that was seen on the previous ledge is no longer immediately visible but, nonetheless, remains an active element in the composition of the world. If knowing has always the character of a partial penetration, then it is fitting that Loy should stand "mystery" at the edge of a line that takes up the extremities of knowledge and desire; "mystery": a truth known to man only by way of revelation, and one that is never fully understood. A complete understanding would mean that the thing understood already belonged to what was already clear, making it a mere repetition of the known. For Loy, the artist or writer is always "seeing IT for the first time; he can never see the same thing twice."[9]

So the ear with the mind's speed chases down the sounds of "Sing—mystery" to "Ming-dynasty"; the enchantment that is part illumination, part darkening runs over into another sense of luminosity in the word "Ming," which means "brightness or luminosity." But it is a luminosity that is decidedly other than what is here. Loy used the word more than once in her poetry, and it is

almost certain that she would have known this meaning of "Ming." What she might not have known, however, is that the ideogram for "Ming" is comprised of the two radicals for sun and moon 明.[10] Also, "Ming" forms the basis of the Chinese compound words meaning "understanding" and "intelligence." In this compounding of orders of illumination, understanding is simply the ability to exercise the intelligences of day and night. What is understood manifests itself as the object of a surreality of vision, a darkly luxuriant blend of the possible and the impossible. The objects of this intelligence are the nexûs of mutually implicated orders of visibility. In this poem, the objects are the nexûs of sounds which are implicated in each other and gathered up in song. The poem is thus "sing/ing" and also exhorting the reader to sing "ing," to sing the multiplicity of journey-ings that compose the world.

What follows is more than just a running play of sounds--it's also a play of etymologies. The "Syringa" is more commonly known as the mock orange. The name of this fragrant shrub comes from "syrinx" which refers to the vocal organ of a bird. Back of that, there is the mythological reference: "Syrinx" was the name of an Arcadian wood nymph who one day came under the amorous eye of Pan. In order to protect her chastity from Pan, the Naiads transformed her into the bunch of rushes from which the god then made his panpipe. He called it a "syrinx" in honour of the nymph. "Syringa" finds a rhyme in "Myringa" which refers to the tympanic membrane in the ear. The one, then, is apparently instrument while the other is receiver or transmitter; and desire is a singing wind. But in actuality, "syringa" and "myringa" are each equally the "instrument of novelty for the other," and together constitute the two poles of a "creative advance into novelty."[11] And the advance should be a sustained effort--"sing long" the poem says, continue these ringing contours of flight. And so "lingerer," the sounding figure of desire and memory, hovers at the edge of the poem, departing but never quite departed.

The conscious matter-of-factness with which the sunlight world fixes a name to an object results in what André Breton called "the paucity of reality."[12] Or, from another angle, Stein once said "a name of anything is not interesting because once you know its name the enjoyment of naming it is over."[13] The business of a lunar baedeker is the continual informing of reality; it lends names to the unconscious shadows and the half-formed objects and places of an undefined world. In this world, words and sounds are lured into tentative associations, a situation characteristic of Loy's "Love Songs." The poems in that cycle contain a large number of words signifying the conditional: should, would, could, ought, may, maybe and might. In the place of those poems, objects and relations are never settled.

In the satirical poems, the definitive name is again disrupted

by anagrammatization. In this case, the actual names of prominent members of the international modernist movement--including Loy's former friends and mentors--are re-arranged with results like "Gabrunzio" for D'Annunzio; "Raminetti" or the not-so-affectionate diminutive "Ram" for Marinetti; "Bapini" or "Bap" for Papini; and "Nima Lyo" or "Anim Yol" or "Imna Oly" for Mina Loy. The movement itself--Futurism--becomes "Flabbergastism." The ostensible motivation for the use of anagrams is the wish to avoid direct accusation and confrontation. However, retreating delicacy and cowardice were never major movers in Loy's writing. The transposing of letters functions again not so much to disguise as to expose. And what she exposes is what she saw to be a set of unwieldy and authoritarian theories about art and life, theories which their proponents came to see as congenial to fascism. By this slight gesture of putting a wrinkle in their names, she begins to subvert their oppressive machismo with laughter.

The profound wit in these poems excoriates smug solidity, tearing away its pretensions to reveal nestling incongruities, exposing it for the shape-shifter it really is. The resulting irony treats the phenomenal world as plural and fissiparous--requiring constant naming. But inside that plurality, there is a coherence. In lines that echo the "creative advance into novelty," Loy writes: "The Eternal is sustained by serial metamorphosis/even as Beauty is//Metamorphosis surprises!"[14] Potentiality finds its truth in actuality; and "Beauty diffuses itself, not through acts of efficient creation, but through its infinite evocation of novel instances of itself."[15] Of the poems collected in this volume, it's the long poem "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose" that presents the strongest indictment of those individuals, institutions and cultural practices which thwart the play of metamorphic energies and, in the process, cripple consciousness and disfigure the real. In the terms of the poem, those individuals are the pusillanimous

> . . . people
> who know not what they do
> but know that what they do
> is not illegal

The poem evolves as part autobiography, part mythology, part statement of poetics. Mina Gertrude Lowy (she changed it to Loy in Paris in 1903) was born December 27, 1882 in London, England to Sigmund Lowy, the son of a Hungarian Jew, and Julia Bryan, an "English Rose." In 1903, Loy married the British painter Stephen Haweis whom she had met while studying art in London. In 1917, after having already been separated from Haweis for four years, her

divorce was finalized. In the same year, while she was still in New York, she met the proto-dadaist Arthur Cravan (Fabian Avenarius Lloyd) whom she was to marry in 1918. In the poem, the following correspondences can be made: "Exodus" (which functions as both first and last name) is Sigmund Lowy; "Ada" is Julia Bryan; "Ova" is Mina Loy; "Esau Penfold--the infant aesthete" is Haweis; and "Colossus"--the enfant terrible is Cravan.

Exodus: the road out. Ironically, instead of offering the road out, the parental "Exodi" do all within their power to impose closures. This is particularly true of Ada, the "Rose of arrested impulses," for whom "all form is the same nought," and for whom all surprises are merely inconvenient and foreign. Like others of the "tepid . . . uni-conscious islanders," she is fervently nationalistic, ethnocentric--and resentfully bored. Anything outside the quotidian boundaries of "suburban . . . middle-class Britain" is to be outlawed. But in spite of the myriad restrictions and maledictions, this "child of Exodus [in her "mongrel" nature, she has already violated the bounds of acceptable form]

> with her heritage of emigration
> often
> 'sets out to seek her fortune'
> . . . . . .
> trusting to terms of literature
> dodging the breeders' determination

The writer or artist is held up as an exemplary figure on the far side of the quotidian. In an earlier poem called "Apology of Genius," the various figures of genius are seen as "Lepers of the moon/magically diseased" coming amongst us "innocent/of their luminous sores." They bear the dis-ease that wracks complacency and their luminous sores are the troubling illuminations of a ruptured world. The rawness of their visions leaves them ostracized, on the outside, regardless even of the chances of birth:

> Our wills are formed
> by curious disciplines
> beyond your laws
>
> You may give birth to us
> or marry us
> the chances of your flesh
> are not our destiny--

They neither belong to nor are to be possessed by the ranks of the "uni-conscious." There can be no trusting to the terms of one-dimensionality, to the thoughtless terms of the "censor's scythe" that would cut down "A delicate crop/of criminal mystic immortelles."

But neither are art and artists exempt from this kind of tyrannizing. There are the aesthetes like "Esau Penfold" who

> trains
> the common manifestations
> of creation
> to flatten
> before his
> eyes
> to one vast monopattern

and

> who absorbs the erudite idea that
> Beauty IS nowhere
> except posthumously to itself in the antique

For Ova, on the other hand, beauty is "ever a surreality that perturbs our response with the indefinite extravagance of a dream"; it reveals itself in "the prismatic sun show/of father's physic bottles," in the mysterious new words that diffuse themselves in the child's forming consciousness:

> in her ear
> a half inaudible an
> iridescent hush
> forms "iarrhea"

This "iridescent hush" is the space of potentiality and givenness, the changeful face of beauty. The poem is

> A
> lucent
> iris
> shift[ing]
> its

irradiate
interstice

to catch and gather the refractions of established meaning, a revisioning that makes even excrement yield beauty.

* * *

Harriet Monroe, though unimpressed by Loy's writing was, nevertheless, intrigued by her person:

> In one of her Chicago columns, [Monroe] described the sympathetic company she found at the Stryx on her first trip to Paris. Beginning with Ezra Pound and Tristan Tzara, she saves the poet she found 'too beautiful for description' to last:
>
> "Perhaps a great deal of this gayety and color aforesaid was due to the presence of Mina Loy. I may never have fallen very hard for this lady's poetry, but her personality is quite irresistable [sic]. Beauty ever-young which has survived four babies, and charm which will survive a century if she lives that long, are sustained by a gayety that seems the worldly-wise conquest of many despairs—all expressed in a voice which . . . is rich with all the sorrows of the world. Yes, poetry is in this lady whether she writes it or not.[16]

When she did write, the poetry was a prism held up to both personal and public despair, an energy dispersing despondency into a spectrum of poetic vision. When she wasn't writing poems, plays or polemical tracts, she was either painting (she had been considered a precocious talent in the art world before she had ever started publishing her poetry), or acting, or designing lampshades, hats, dresses, costumes, stage sets and magazine covers. Her diverse accomplishments were not to be eclipsed by any monopattern of expression. Neither did she allow national boundaries to dictate her movements. A chronic traveller (like many members of the international avant-garde), she moved freely between London, Munich, Paris, Florence, Mexico, New York and finally Aspen, Colorado.

An itinerant of the mind and the soul, she was eventually

given a "literary home" by Pound and McAlmon who claimed her as one of their own, "a native artist" producing something "distinctly American in quality."[17] In the opening editorial of Contact (a magazine McAlmon had founded with the help of William Carlos Williams), McAlmon characterized that quality as an "essential contact between words and the locality that breeds them, in this case America."[18] The prime objectives of these artists and of Contact itself were, in Conover's words: "to make sturdy contact with the objective immediate world, to record first-hand experience, to revolt against the lyric enthusiast's occupation with traditional literary subjects."[19] Not surprisingly, Loy was to set the tone for Contact, as she had done earlier for Others. The following lines from "O Hell" appeared in the first issue:

> To clear the drifts of spring
> Of our forebears' excrements
> And bury the subconscious archives
> Under unaffected flowers

Loy had certainly done her part in fomenting the "revolution of the word."

If she is to be placed at all (it certainly wasn't one of her major concerns. In fact, once, when Carl van Vechten was about to write a profile of her, she remarked to him: "Can't you write about me as a hidden wrinkle—the only woman decided enough to forego easy success--uninterrupted by the potency of beauty?"), then perhaps the ranks of American modernism are fitting enough. If that placement is necessary in order to bring her to the attention of readers once again, so be it. Though, ironically, there seems always an insistent restlessness in her writing, a foot tapping impatiently at the borders of thought. Only an anti-tradition could begin to plot that itinerancy.

NOTES

1. Ezra Pound, cited in the introduction to Mina Loy, The Last Lunar Baedeker, ed. Roger Conover (Highlands, N.C.: The Jargon Society, 1982), p. xxxvii. The latter part of the quotation is from Pound's Literary Essays, ed. T.S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 25.

2. Roger Conover, Introduction to The Last Lunar Baedeker, p. xxxiv-v.

3. André Breton, Second Manifesto of Surrealism, in Manifestoes of Surrealism, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982), p. 137.

4. René Crevel, cited in André Breton, What is Surrealism? Selected Writings, trans. David Gascoyne, ed. Franklin Rosemont (U.S.A.: Monad Press, 1978), p. 126.

5. Mina Loy, The Last Lunar Baedeker, p. 305.

6. Niels Bohr, cited in Edward R. Harrison, Cosmology: The Science of the Universe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 104.

7. André Breton, Manifestoes of Surrealism, p. 6.

8. bpNichol, The Martyrology, Book IV (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1976), n.p.

9. Mina Loy, "The Artist and the Public," in The Last Lunar Baedeker, p. 285.

10. Loy might well have been familiar with the image of this ideogram through Pound's use of it in the Cantos--especially Cantos LXXIV and LXXXIV as presented in the first Faber edition.

11. Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality (New York: The Free Press, 1969), p. 411. The phrases are taken from the chapter "God and the World," and the particular reference is to the passage discussing the relationship between permanence and flux:

> Creation achieves the reconciliation of permanence and flux when it has reached its final term which is everlastingness—the Apotheosis of the World.
>
> Opposed elements stand to each other in mutual requirement. In their unity, they inhibit or contrast. God and the World stand to each other in this opposed requirement. God is the infinite ground of all mentality, the unity of vision seeking physical multiplicity. The World is the multiplicity of finites, actualities seeking a perfected unity. Neither God, nor the World, reaches static completion. Both are in the grip of the ultimate

metaphysical ground, the creative advance into novelty. Either of them, God and the World, is the instrument of novelty for the other.

12. André Breton, "Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality," in What is Surrealism?, p. 17.

13. Gertrude Stein, "Poetry and Grammar," in Lectures in America (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), p. 231.

14. Mina Loy, "Ephemerid," in The Last Lunar Baedeker, p. 220.

15. Elizabeth M. Kraus, The Metaphysics of Experience -- A Companion to Whitehead's Process and Reality (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), p. 161.

16. Harriet Monroe, quoted in Introduction to The Last Lunar Baedeker, p. xx.

17. Robert McAlmon and Ezra Pound, cited in the introduction to The Last Lunar Baedeker, p. xxiv.

18. Robert McAlmon, cited in Introduction to The Last Lunar Baedeker, p. xxiv.

19. Roger Conover, Introduction to The Last Lunar Baedeker, p. xxv.

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