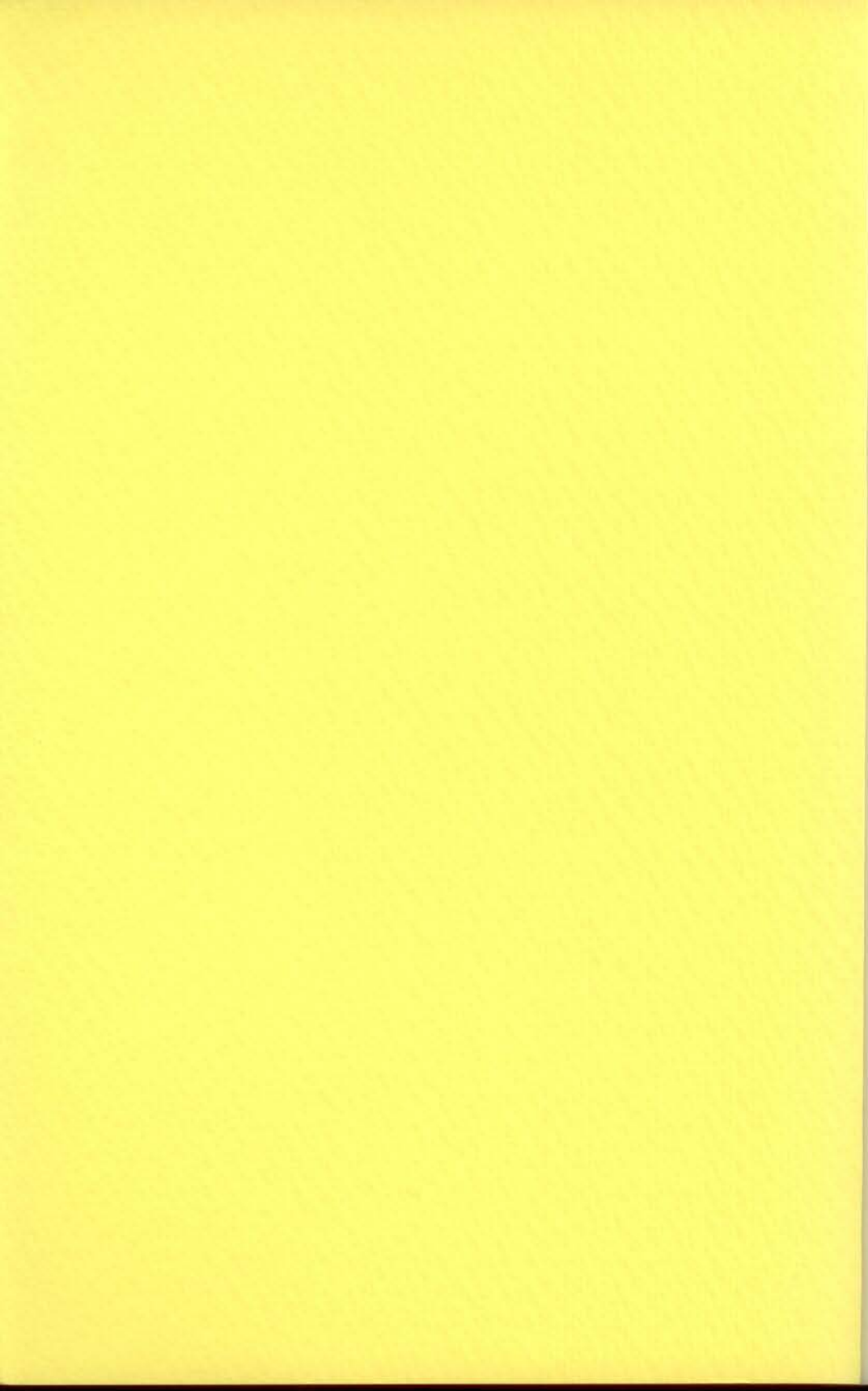


line

number twelve



fall 1988



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A Journal of Contemporary Writing
and its Modernist Sources

fall 1988

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bpNichol

30 September 1944 — 25 September 1988

All of us at *Line* were deeply saddened by the sudden death of bpNichol, Barrie Phillip Nichol, whose writing and daily living—and daily caring for others—carried the very heart, consciousness and energy of the most vital literary practice going on in this country. bp, always the first to welcome and encourage new literary ventures, wholeheartedly supported *Line* right from our beginnings. His visual commentary on Stein's *Ida* in the first issue still stands out as a thoroughly engaging reader's approach to a writer who meant so much to him. Our own critical involvement with his long poem *The Martyrology* led to *Tracing the Paths: Reading ≠ Writing The Martyrology*. This special issue (Number 10, Fall 1987), co-published with Talonbooks, brought together new critical writing on *The Martyrology* and new writing by bp. It was the kind of collaboration between readers and writer that only bp, always game for a challenge, could transform into an exciting venture—a companionship. Barrie was a dear friend and a poetic genius. His gift for words was utterly magical. God, we will miss his playfulness, his seriousness, his "puncertainty," his curiosity, his voice—speaking and writing—and his humanity.

death you enter the poem as you always do
— disruptor

whatever the order or structure
we must reckon you in
a sum

cuts across
some vision of perfection we cling to
(from *The Martyrology: Book 6 Books*)

* * *

For this issue *Line* features two essay/commentaries, Judith Roche on H.D., and Miriam Nichols on Jack Spicer, Robert Duncan and Robin Blaser . . . Roche's "Myrrh: A Study of Persona in H.D.'s *Trilogy*" is a shortened and revised version of her M.A. thesis written at the New College of California . . . Nichols' "A Poetry of Hell" is from her Ph.D. dissertation "American Orphic" completed at York University; her limited edition chapbook *Common Pathologies* is available from Fissure Books (#1-441 McLean Drive, Vancouver, B.C., V5L 3M5).

Fred Wah sends us further installments of his continuing series of critical meditations. Numbers 1 - 69 were published in *Music at the Heart of Thinking* available from Red Deer College Press; his *Waiting for Saskatchewan* from Turnstone Press received the 1985 Governor General's

Award for Poetry . . . Lola Tostevin's most recent book *'Sophie* was published by Coach House Press . . . Bruce Whiteman's *The Invisible World Is in Decline, Books I-IV* is forthcoming from Coach House Press . . . Benjamin Hollander and David Levi Strauss have collaborated on a number of editorial projects for their journal ACTS, among these an impressive issue on Jack Spicer, *A Book of Correspondences for Jack Spicer* (Number 6, 1987) . . . Robin Blaser's latest book of poems *Pell Mell* is available from Coach House Press . . . Louis Dudek sent us selections from his *Notebooks* only a few days before we went to press (watch for more selections in the next issue); two books of his have just been published, a selected poems, *Infinite Worlds* (edited by Robin Blaser) from Véhicule Press and *In Defense of Art: Critical Essays & Reviews* from Quarry Press.

The forthcoming issue of *Line* will feature a major section on the writing of Daphne Marlatt, guest edited by Shirley Neuman and Smaro Kamboureli.

New Year

RM

AS IF BY CHANCE

the Private Sector worries me
it can, the ubiquitous "they" say, solve—that is, clear up—

the economy, which, at the upper level called economics—that
is, confused science and confused theology prancing around
together as usual, is under the cultural, like oil or gas
under the hood or roof, and unpredictably disappearing
from under us

and the political, which, by manipulation, is over the stunned
polis, in order to manage production, distribution and
consumption of wealth, becomes political economy—thus,
what is under becomes what is over, and *vice versa*, to
define a reality without earth or sky which are cultural
habitudes

and the cultural, which—not limited by high, low or middling—
is conflict around the creation of reality, and may be
invisible as thought is, and is neither formulaic—bonded
like chemicals—nor nostalgic which is a dangerous and
transcendent condition, having forgotten that
transcendence like ourselves is historical, even in dreams

and the social, which is struggle against dominations and powers,
the society of which is recently made up of those who
were not previously there

and mass culture, which is new, misunderstood and ungenerous
about historical consciousness, mirrors privacies that
dissolve in soap, and is jubilant from which sorrow may
learn

and democracy, which is recent, unAthenian, unPeriklean,
incomplete, and by nature unstable and creative

and the sexual, which is the passionate body of all chemicals

and our *ethos*, which is the behaviour of one to another, near and
far—many to many defines character—and *is* visible—
not, as the dictionary tells us, "the moral, ideal, or

universal element in a work of art as distinguished from that which is emotional or subjective"—[WOW! dissolve that and *ethos* becomes action—which is to say, character for the sake of the action—and *pathos* is there among kindnesses]

and the universal, which is absent from twentieth-century thought, according to the *poesis* afoot

and technology, which has wild arms, and is human nature unaware of itself

and the angels, who become 'isms and hierarchies to materialize the real of things we're thrown against as we become startled sub-jects—to which I ob-ject

and religion, which, dismissed from the plain of thought, gathers godhead in small envelopes of cement, where on the postage changes

and human survival, which, with all its adjectival ironies, proposes a social inheritance

and the good, which we know as Goodness!, an expletive, something added to fill up the whole that has nothing to do with it, and which is fragile and our own composition

and love, which is true attention to whatever and sometimes some one

and friendship, which is guidance in every attention

the Private Sector economizes hither and yon, as it was past participant in bereavement and deprivation, as it is now a relationship between privies *with the exception of an infinitely distant point, as mathematicians say, the world as such*
(from Castoriadis)

INTERLUNAR thoughts

"Advertisizing tells us who we are" and
"presents a completely integrated culture"

in the interval between the old moon and the new
when the moon is invisible, one hopes

the moon will show up:

*capitalism, racism, consumerism,
homophobia, sexism — all of them systems
of signifiers detached from spirit so
the governing soul goes
numb*

(a voice on CBC and words by
John Wilkinson on John Weiners)

the smile of public art—only a possibility—and its curious
frowns delight in the dissolution of a public world and
yes, there are academic and private difficulties, each one
thinking of ownerships, specialties, furnitures as publicities
in a public world—these, alongside popular arts which disappear
into kissables and similar rhythms still, one and another
do think of it, not quite outwitted by the dissolution of

IMAGO MUNDI
SCULPTURED THOUGHT

and dear mundane images

Duchamp thought of a
large glass, its transparency tinted by bachelors and
bride, wasp, sex cylinder, desire-magneto with
artificial sparks, at the horizon where her clothing might
be put on or off, according to the juggler of gravity—the
most necessary character who does not appear because he is
unpainted—and the boxing match just to the right of the
scissors, drainage slopes, sieves, oculist witnesses,
pump, chute, weight of holes, planes of flow,
splash, falls, dins, crashes beside a chocolate
grinder, and above it all a climatic blossoming
and milky way

we see through a window cut
out of the wall for this occasion a pause or *bedazzlement*,
just where *the word modern has run out scarcely as long ago*
as yesterday form opens, space opens and time
dapples this public *ritual of absence* turning on itself to become
a necessity of meaning, the *eros* of chances among things and
their *signs which are movable parts of the syntax*

dazed

in the circularity of desire and thought

we see through

and Brancusi thought of it, surfaces which are depths
brought to light and shadow, Eve and Plato flickering
side by side they are likely thinking eternity, which
is to say indefinable and he placed an *Endless Column*,
a *Gate of the Kiss* and a *Table of Silence* in Roumania for
the simple reason that he was born there birthplace is his
intermingling
of what is ours and what belongs to the world

sur-face,
over and under the form time and space are a vulnerable
love, a project of thinking *something whose very nature
is to be in need* we have called this abstraction, merely
a style to rebel against the obedience of definition, but
archaeologists remind us that the arts encompassing Homer's
logomachia were abstract his word-fight to the finish
and small line-figures soon to appear around the neck of
an amphora,

willingly thinking from indefinition

and Isamu Noguchi, d. Dec. 30, 1988, thought of it—*Time*
magazine headlines the "passing of a purist"—pure from
what? as he sought the *truth of materials* *The Great Rock
of Inner Seeking* stands there at the entrance in
Washington, an *invasion of a different time* into the
space of the rock—inner and outer bare to the rock—
craving a certain morphologic quality of anti-monuments

which, in this picture-show, flashes us back to the sights of
an-other worldly study of how to shape realities where he began
with Idaho-born Gutzon Borghum who carved the Presidential
heads on Mt. Rushmore—Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln
and stopped with that hoot Teddy Roosevelt who in New York
is on horseback with a black man and an Indian on either side,
walking, of course, bronzed to the core, before
coming to squalor and us

"My first sculpture," he said, "was Oscar Wilde's Salome, then I
did Jesus Christ. I would say I was extremely facile." and then
flash forward, in the midst of the question of images and watching
Brancusi, "It became self-evident to me that in abstraction lay the
expression of the age"—"to ignore man as an object of special
veneration"—not a mere characteristic of modernism, but to work
by "this reversal the unthought" truth of materials and Buckminster
Fuller talked him into painting the disused laundry room silver—
floor, walls and ceiling—freeing the distinctions and Martha Graham
said, "It is not abstract except if you think of orange juice as an
abstraction of an orange—He's caught up in the happenings of the
universe."

strolling through the darkness, the earth, the playgrounds,
the white marble garden at Yale, the flowing pool of heaven
in Tokyo, the sunken garden (Chase Manhattan), the bridges
in Hiroshima, by the rejected, though he was in a "relocation"
camp during the war, memorial for the *atomic dead*, called by
the small Radio Nurse, bakelite and commercial, among Akari,

mulberry paper and bamboo illuminations at floor level, through
the UNESCO garden, East and West sparkling in Paris, the whoosh
and splendour of the Detroit fountain, the tipped red cube, which
he said was "man's fate," right there in front of the Marine Midland
Bank, the magic circle, never closed, Persian travertine, so it is
endless, ah, Double Red Mountain, and nearer to home, across the border
the Black Sun (Volunteer Park, Seattle) to look through

and outward
marigold, daisies and broom anti-monuments

towards a greater chaos
and a new equilibrium art is an element in asymmetrical
flux no isolated object

all function, all linkage

to our birthplace and back again

WHO'S THERE?

the room talks to itself

coloured Persian

and wraps its thinking-

lights around

the man bent over

a drinking-fountain

who is black

and white

who transliterates

into one couching

over his book

of loose pages

and another clapping

his hands and pointing

his toe

playing musical chairs

and chances

among deep-seated minds

whose laughter counter-

points the razzle

of crows outside

cawing down the chimney

as if to enter between

firecat-andiron's

serious, childish, jasper eyes

the room talking to itself

The Poetry of Hell: Jack Spicer, Robin Blaser, Robert Duncan

1. American Graffiti

In American literature, the open road promises "grace of the imagination" and a bridge between what Emerson called the "me" and "not-me"—Whitman's "long brown path" or Crane's "inviolable curve" stretching between now and then, here and there, or the inside and outside of things. By the 1950s, however, when Berkeley writers Jack Spicer, Robin Blaser and Robert Duncan were in the process of developing a poetics, the end of the road had already been announced. As Spicer observes of Whitman,

In his world roads go somewhere and you walk with someone whose hand you can hold. I remember. In my world roads only go up and down and you are lucky if you can hold on to the road or even know that it is there. (ONS 81)

Just five years before Spicer published *Heads of the Town Up to the Aether*, Jack Kerouac had run his beatnik heroes all the way to the road's end in the Pacific Ocean and back again to Time Square in New York City. The Whitmanic dream of going somewhere—to "the ragged promised land, the fantastic end of America" as Kerouac puts it—ends there, along with the American text as such, whether conceived as manifest destiny, or as an apocalyptic vision of "the pit and prunejuice of poor beat life itself" (70, 164). Without faith or vision, Kerouac's beatniks can only look forward to "the forlorn rags of growing old" (254). In *Heads of the Town*, Spicer takes the only road left to him, the one that can go up, or down to an underworld. As he says in *A Textbook of Poetry*, "It was the first metaphor they invented when they were too tired to invent a universe. The steps. The way down. The source of a river (182)."

It is this vanishing point, where the road turns into a verticality and hell becomes a real possibility for poetic life in San Francisco, California, that Robert Duncan would redeem with a mythology of language. In his 1955 Preface to *Caesar's Gate*, Duncan defines hell as "a forfeiting of the goods of the intellect. It is all that is not terror: the nostalgias, sophistications, self-debasements here, that are the voice of a soul-shriveling, the ironies of mediocrity" (xlv.) Hell is the absence of vision. Duncan's struggle in *Caesar's Gate* is with "the desolation of the

uncreated"—or to use the metaphor which inspires the title of this book, he sees in American culture an Asian wasteland to be conquered. Duncan follows the road up, to a mythical life in language that saves him from the "forlorn rags" of an exhausted imagination. Life and language are analogues in Duncan's organicist poetics, and once beyond the impasse of *Caesar's Gate* the field opens. In the Preface of 1972 which accompanies the Sand Dollar version of these poems, Duncan looks back on this book, *Letters* and *The Book of Resemblances* as

... works of a phase in Poetry fearfully and with many errors making its way, taking up fear and error as its own terms, seeking every rumor, every superstition, every promise of its own existence as it journeyed into the continent of that existence, seeking to regain a map in the actual to come to know, part by part, the transformation of a continent into life. "So that there is a continent of feeling beyond our feeling, / a big house of the spirit," as it came to me in the poem "Apprehensions" some ten years later. (xii)

Duncan's roads always exist within a "made place," and this fictional language field "restores / health to the land" (*OF* 10). There is no poetry of hell because poetry is that which gets the poet out of hell.

For different reasons, there is little in Robin Blaser's *oeuvre*, either, that could be called a poetry of hell. When he speaks of his poetics in cosmological terms, Blaser draws upon the metaphysical tradition of light. In his "Metaphysics of Light," he discusses the analogy between light and intelligence as a way of imagining the doubleness of being. Light is intellect, but it is also a physical substance: the *mundus* is within the mundane. From Dante, Blaser takes the idea that light mediates between matter and consciousness:

The positive is something like the nature of light, the opposite of which would be the sheer negation of darkness. Second, as the fundamental form of body as such, light is the substantial form of the universe and provides the universe with its principle of continuity. And third, it is the noblest of corporeal things and has an intermediate place between body and soul, matter and spirit, and we are back with the three, the trichotomy. When you get the cosmology going in Dante, it turns out that light is the central principle that works for that intermediate thing. (57)

Light is a bridge, and Blaser's roads are two-way streets. The position he favors is neither the hell of the sheerly material, nor the mythical paradiso of the text, but an intermediate world that must not be conceived in terms of an "either/or" but of "both/and." Explaining the significance of light as a metaphor (and he says, "with the interiorization of

language, experience in language . . . the metaphor becomes real"), Blaser argues the worldliness of the term:

But the business of using a visible light and not differentiating a light that is other than the visible light means that you've turned the world into God. And my vocabulary moves toward this all the time . . . (59)

In this discussion of light, Blaser locates Spicer within the same metaphorical structures he uses to describe his own poetics. However, Spicer's preoccupation with the *experience* of desire ("he is our greatest love poet," Blaser says), leads him into a different kind of bridge game. As Spicer plays it, there *seems* to be "something" at either end of the bridge, a "something" withheld by the sentence we must suffer. The road should go somewhere. That is what roads are for. The language should give us what it promises: it should represent, make visible real objects, transubstantiate matter into words. The metaphor should do its job of bridging the gap between visibilities and the world of intelligence, memory, the "X" of the future. In *Billy the Kid*, "The roads going somewhere. You can almost see where they are going beyond the dark purple of the horizon (79)." Almost. But Spicer adds, "Not even the birds know where they are going." Where the road disappears, into the surf breaking in Aquatic Park at the end of North Beach in San Francisco, the gulls scream their hunger.

In his Vancouver Lectures, Spicer says that the three books of *Heads of the Town* (*Homage to Creeley*, *A Fake Novel about the Life of Arthur Rimbaud*, and *A Textbook of Poetry*), correspond to the hell, purgatory, and heaven of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, but he adds that "through the whole book runs the business of the pathway down into hell" (186). Given Spicer's post-Saussurian linguistics, the way down can occur anywhere on the vertical (paradigmatic) axis of language, where pronouns are shifters and language becomes a system of differences. On this axis, identity cannot be conceptualized as a thing in-itself. Spicer knew this long before he wrote *Heads*, but in *Homage to Creeley* he performs the recognition. "For example," he says, in "They Came to the Briars . . .," "The poem does not know / Who you refers to" (123). And in the "commentary" to this poem (*Homage* is literally divided into an above and a below, a text and a commentary), he adds, by way of explanation, "In hell it is difficult to tell people from other people."

The tension in *Heads of the Town* comes from the intersection of this vertical road, with the horizontal (syntagmatic) axis of language. Conventional syntax seems to offer an order, define relationships, distinguish subjects from objects. But to be a subject is to be subjected to the entire code, its vertical hell as well as its lucid paradiso. Or in Spicer's terms, the paradiso merely conceals a hell of nonsense, where syntax falls apart and meaning disappears into the Whorfian machinery of the system. The distinction Spicer makes between language and its speakers,

or living organisms and "dead" subjects, finds its best figuration in "The Territory Is Not The Map":

What is a half-truth the lobster declared
You have sugared my groin and have sugared my hair
What correspondence except my despair?
What is my crime but my youth?

Truth is a map of it, oily eyes said
Half-truth is half of a map instead
Which you will squint at until you are dead
Putting to sea with the the [sic] truth. (122)

The concept of truth is itself produced by the system, and yet this truth is ours insofar as consciousness involves an internalization of linguistic structures. This is the sweetness of language in which we may be trapped ("You have sugared my groin . . ."). The lobster protests his innocence in vain. His crime is precisely his "youth," or what Spicer calls the "absolutely temporary" (ONS 45). The lobster is up against a system which, to borrow Blaser's vocabulary, is "older and other than ourselves" ("SM" 61). The live, fleshy territory that the lobster would like to appear is as unmarkable (and unremarkable) as the sea. "Oily eyes," whose gaze slides off the surface of things because the "reality" behind appearances cannot be brought to light, is adamant. If truth is a map, then a half-truth is half of a map. No amount of squinting at the map will reveal the territory.

In his commentary to this poem—and the "commentaries" of *Homage* parody those of traditional hermeneutical exegesis—Spicer says, "This is a poem to prevent idealism—i.e. the study of images" (122). For Spicer's Imagist predecessors (Pound, H.D.), an image was a condensed complex of meanings (a vortex), closer to Duncan's allusive mytho-linguistics than to Spicer's insistence on the formal properties of language. However, the poem cannot prevent idealism because the Poet (capital "P") still thinks of himself as "oily eyes." He can't escape the image, and images turn out to be another form of the nomination that "subjects" him. What the poet can do, though, is dispel the misconception that the image tells the truth about the "absolutely temporary." On roads that only go up and down, the car, supposedly designed to traverse the impossible distance between territory and map, actually goes nowhere.

Spicer's *Homage to Creeley* is exactly that—an homage—and not just to Creeley, but to an entire line of American thought. The irony of this tribute lies in Spicer's implicit opposition to his literary masters, an opposition which comes in part from his rethinking of metaphor. Michael Davidson has noted the similarity between Creeley's "I Know a Man" and Spicer's "Dash": both poems are metaphors of metaphor. The

problem for Creeley is how to drive and retain an awareness of the vehicle at the same time:

... John, I

sd, which was not his
name, the darkness sur-
rounds us, what

can we do against
it, or else, shall we &
why not, buy a goddamn big car,

drive, he sd, for
christ's sake, look
out where yr going (38)

The tension in this poem, Davidson says, comes from "producing abstract solutions to problems having mortal consequences" (110). Contemplation of the car prevents the poet from seeing where he is going. Creeley frequently occupies himself with the gap between reflection and perception: his poems move toward a perceptual mode in which the pre-determinations of conceptual thought are left behind. In "Robert Creeley's Epistemopathic Path," Harald Mesch remarks that Creeley's poems constitute "an act of renewed conjugation of body and language." The paradoxical aim of this poetry is aimlessness:

The openness of the senses makes non-intentional inclusion in the world i.e. love, possible: a condition in which the subject finds itself when it is given, but which it cannot attain on its own volition (76)

Hence Spicer says in the commentary to "Dash," that Creeley "lacks knowledge of the driver's seat" (146).

In "Dash," Spicer, too, speaks against a rhetoric which predetermines perception:

Damn them,
All of them,
That wear beards on the soles of their feet
That ride cars
That aren't
Funny.
It comes with a rush
And a gush
Of feeling
Everything is in the street

Then they meet
It with their automobiles. (146)

Spicer is allied with Creeley against those who are protected, within their metaphorical cars, against the "gush / Of feeling" and the open street. (Compare Blaser's "The streets are my body," in "For Gustave Moreau," *The Faerie Queene*). "Dash" may be read as a barb directed at Duncan's stated love of rhetoric, or against beat poets like Allen Ginsberg, whom Spicer later accuses of marching "Toward / A necessity which is not love but is a name" (267). But Spicer does not share Creeley's faith in the possibility of a "conjugation of body and language," and it is this disbelief that distinguishes him not just from Creeley, but from Duncan and Olson too. Despite their many differences, Creeley, Duncan and Olson seem to share a feeling for the importance of returning the human animal to its position *in* the world, as a participant in a bio-linguistic continuum. Creeley and Olson, for instance, attempt to free language of the Platonism that separates and privileges a subject over an objectified world. As Olson says in "Projective Verse," "a man is himself an object, whatever he may take to be his advantages . . ." (24). Spicer would agree, but he does not have Olson's enthusiasm for overhauling the language system—making it "organic" (I am thinking of Olson's head-ear-syllable and heart-breath-line equations). Spicer's language has to remain mechanical, and in opposition to the organism:

Everything is in the street
Then they meet
It with their automobiles.

The car in Olson's "As the Dead Prey Upon Us" is part of the rhetorical garbage to be cleared away, like the psychic debris of a culture that has succeeded in reducing people and things to commodities—"mere equipments" without energy:

I pushed my car, it had been sitting so long unused.
I thought the tires looked as though they only needed air.
But suddenly the huge underbody was above me, and the rear tires
were masses of rubber and thread variously clinging together

as were the dead souls in the living room, gathered
about my mother, some of them taking care to pass
beneath the beam of the movie projector, some record
playing on the victrola, and all of them
desperate with the tawdriness of their life in hell

I turned to the young man on my right and asked, "How is it, there?" And he begged me protestingly don't ask, we are poor poor. And the whole room was suddenly posters and presentations of brake linings and other automotive accessories, cardboard displays, the dead roaming from one to another as bored back in life as they are in hell, poor and doomed to mere equipments . . . (205)

The poem, Olson says in "Projective Verse," "is energy transferred from where the poet got it . . . by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader" (16). Olson's roads go somewhere, if the poet can clear away the "nets we are tangled in." Olson, like Duncan, finds that hell is the loss of intelligence and vision ("They did not complain / of life, they obviously wanted / the movie . . ."), and the degradation of vision in false idealisms ("The death in life (death itself) / is endless, eternity / is the false cause"). For Olson, there is a way out of hell. "As the Dead Prey Upon Us" ends with an imperative "Awake, men / awake," and a call for new creativity through poetic "method, method." *Touch* turns "the knot into its own flame," and in the last lines, "The automobile // has been hauled away."

Olson and Creeley offer a new kind of poetic language, and the desire that Spicer makes so palpable can be read as a move toward their incarnationism—the organism revealed in a revitalized discourse, "real objects" in the poem. An homage is in order. But touch is antithetical to Spicer's insistence on distance—on the mechanics of language. The body eventually rots, leaving the rusty frame of the system and a lot of ghosts. Such is the wisdom of hell, that "words / Turn mysteriously against those who use them" (125); that the car cannot be hauled away. In "A Postscript for Charles Olson," Spicer says,

You are marked
With a blue tattoo on your arm.
Rx: Methadrine
To be taken at 52 miles an hour. (65)

A poet cannot drive fast enough to overtake his own presence, leave his preconceptions in the dust, or escape the markings of the code. In this, Spicer anticipates Derridean deconstruction.

In "White Mythology," Jacques Derrida argues that metaphor, a "trope of resemblance," represents an effort "to bring to knowledge the thing itself" (247). Assuming that "[u]nivocity is the essence, or better the *telos* of language," Derrida finds that metaphor presupposes a nominative (sacred) language: the meaning of the "thing itself" can be reduced to a nameable essence. Metaphor says that sameness underlies difference:

What *other* than this return of the same is to be found when one seeks metaphor? that is, resemblance? and when one seeks to determine *the dominant* metaphor of a group, which is interesting by virtue of its power to assemble? (266)

Metaphor ultimately involves "an interiorizing anamnesis," and presupposes the possibility of a "reappropriation of literal, proper meaning," or "presence without veil" ("WM" 269, 270). As Derrida describes it, this most common of tropes offers a passage between a physical below and a metaphysical above: metaphor implies essence.

Derrida assumes that metaphor points to a resemblance between the *meaning* of things. Spicer, too, understands metaphor as a "trope of resemblance," and yet the resemblances of hell are not semantic but phonic. Hence "Car Song":

Away we go with no moon at all
Actually we are going to hell
We pin our puns to our back and cross in a car
The intersections where lovers are.
The wheel and the road turn into a stair
The pun at our backs is a yellow star.
We pin our puns on the windshield like
We crossed each crossing in hell's despite. (119)

"Star" and "stair," for instance, sound much alike, but the similarity does not resolve itself in univocity. Phonic continuity merely conceals semantic discontinuity. Puns mark the extremity of this paradigmatic dimension of language, and it is via the homophone that Spicer descends to what Blaser describes as "a hell of meaning" ("PO" 281).

In the underworld, language ceases to illuminate. The star, unlike the comforting stars which greet Dante when he emerges from hell, is not a guide to paradise but a mark of terror. "Yellow stars' are what the Jews wore," Spicer says in his commentary, and terror becomes a passenger in his car. In Cocteau's film *Orpheus*, from which Spicer takes the major figures for *Heads of the Town*, Orpheus rides to hell in a car with Heurtebise, a ghostly chauffeur, Cegeste, a newly dead poet, and the Princess, Lady Death. Cocteau's car belongs to death, and so does Spicer's. The price of the poet's inquiry into the nature of *this* other world is a forced recognition of his own mortality, tossed back at him by the structure of language. The iterability of writing, as Derrida says, marks "a break in presence, 'death,' or the possibility of the 'death' of the addressee . . ." ("SEC" 316). An irreducible difference (*différance*) separates the organism and the code, and the homophone makes a mockery of the originary univocity language seems to promise. Ron Silliman has said of Spicer's poems that typically "coherence and cohesion lie at the surface, masking-while-revealing a deeper chaos below" (175). The homophones in *Heads* open into a chaos of

discontinuities, and sweep away any illusions the poet may have about who is in the driver's seat.

Spicer's distrust of the bridging power of metaphor puts him in symmetrical opposition to the Emerson who dreamt of a transcendental passage between the "me" and "not-me." "Concord Hymn," immediately following "Car Song," refers to a poem by Emerson commemorating the battles of Lexington and Concord. Emerson's poem was written in 1837 to mark the completion of a monument in memory of those Americans who fought for independence: "Here once the embattled farmers stood / And fired the shot heard round the world" (1188). The poem rests on a literary commonplace: poems and monuments can redeem the ephemerality of human doings—"We set to-day a votive stone; / That memory may their dead redeem, / When like our sires, our sons are gone." "'Conquered Him' is a poem by Emerson," Spicer says, and the pun is an ironic comment on the concept of building poems against death, primary foe of our independence. The homophonic concord of Spicer's pun parodies the kind of meaningful concord between language and life that Emerson was after. As Spicer allows the semantic content of the word to disperse in sound, he points to the instability of linguistic monuments.

"Concord Hymn" begins with one of Spicer's edgy jokes:

Your joke
Is like a lake
That lies there without any thought
And sees
Dead seas
The birds fly
Around there
Bewildered by its blue without any thought of water
Without any thought
Of water (120)

The birds are fooled by the surface resemblance between sky and lake, and this visual pun, like the rather awful phonic pun, "sees" and "seas," blocks their ability to perceive a "deeper chaos below." The joke is on them. "The Dead Seas [or sees] are all in the Holy Land," Spicer adds, and the Holy Land is just what Emerson would have America—a visionary America—be, an Eden in which the difference and distance between perceiver and perceived could be resolved in one poetic uni-verse. Were there such a Holy Land, the poet could recover a metaphysical Origin and all that the Origin implies: a sacred language, resolution of epistemological problems, anamnesis, and redemption from death—roads that go somewhere and metaphorical cars to traverse the gap between The Word and living flesh. But as Spicer says, "when you go away you don't come home" (124). There is no return from this "hell of meaning." The joke is on the poet, too, passenger in a car that is spinning its wheels.

2. From Magic to Surrealism

In Spicer's linguistic hell, as in Lewis Carroll's *Wonderland* or even the shifty underworld of classical mythology, the apparent good sense of representational convention reverses into magic, illusion and nonsense. The vertical road takes the poet ever further down into the formal workings and phonic logic of the language system. Like rabbits popping out of a hat, invisible words suddenly materialize to stubbornly assert their independence, while take-it-for-granted visibilities, like skies and lakes, disappear into one another through the mock resemblances of the code. Vision, perhaps the most privileged metaphor of representational discourse, drips into "seas."

In the purgatory of *A Fake Novel about the Life of Arthur Rimbaud* (and Spicer's division of *Heads* into a hell, purgatory and heaven must be taken ironically), the poet plays with and against the code. Spicer had begun to treat words as things in *After Lorca*, a tactic designed to make "real objects" magically appear. In *A Fake Novel*, he pursues this course: language may be forced to reveal the "absolutely temporary" if the poet handles words as objects to be exchanged, much as one would pass a salt shaker. Alternatively, the poet may focus on the *telos* of language, in order to make language point to what individual speakers experience as desire or intentionality. In the paradiso of *A Textbook of Poetry*, Spicer sets up a correspondence between the human longing for meaning and for audibility as a speaker (vs. what Blaser calls a "spoken" subject), and the desires of a semi-animate Logos (or "Lowghost"). There is a parallel between what the poet wants and what the language "wants": Spicer personifies the Logos to make visible his own desire and that of other humans. In the *Textbook*, "[t]he poet thinks continually of strategies, of how he can win out against the poem" (171).

A Fake Novel takes place in a dead letter office where the letters say things like "I love you more than anyone could ever do." This highly intimate message is addressed to "X" and signed by "Y." Spicer's point is clear: there is no particular human content in the code, but rather empty form. (Compare Spicer's position with Creeley's and Olson's "Form is never more than an extension of content." Given this dilemma, Rimbaud "[becomes] a telegram," short-circuiting the dead letter system. In the context of his own poetry, Rimbaud's synaesthesia can be read (and has been read by Gwendolyn Bays, for instance, in *The Orphic Vision*), as a longing for univocity. Spicer, however, finds another use for Rimbaud's famous colored vowels:

A metaphor is something unexplained—like a place in a map that says that after this is desert. A shorthand to admit the unknown.

A is a blank piece of driftwood being busted. E is a carpenter whose pockets are filled with saws, and shadows, and needles. I

is a pun. O is an Egyptian tapestry remembering the glories of an unknown alien. U is the reverse of W. They are not vowels.

When he said it first, he created the world. (163)

Language creates the world when it becomes an analogue of material reality. Even though the map is not the territory, metaphor admits the territory into the poem by itself becoming as opaque as "real objects."

Spicer's magical *dérèglement* of the code recalls the Orphic interdict against looking. Words can drag "the real" into the poem only by giving up their meanings, or as Spicer says in a letter to Graham MacIntosh, "NONSENSE IS A FORM OF MAGIC" (*Cat* 109). In "A Charm Against the Discovery of Oxygen," he remarks, "We had fought tooth and nail to maintain our beaches" (155). His fight is for the magical illusion of a division between sand and sea, or map and territory—between word-things and an actuality outside the system. By deliberately not looking at the medium that contains these "dualities," Spicer offers a charm against the all-pervasiveness of the linguistic atmosphere. Thus Rimbaud becomes an object to be exchanged between "grownups at the bar"—perhaps a shared wish for the irretrievable innocence of colored vowels, perhaps just a desire for some kind of interchange. Rimbaud is real and alive precisely because he no longer has a meaning:

... he had been kissed
So many times his face was frozen closed.
His eyes would watch the lovers walking past
His lips would sing and nothing else would move. (157)

Only as a dead love letter can Rimbaud become a message and bridge the distance between sender and receiver. Geoffrey Hartman's remarks in *Saving the Text* are to the point:

Style may be a *continued* solecism. The language-sensitive writer makes the transgression habitual. His cryptic or idiosyncratic manner is an expressive mask

The word is only "like" a word in these situations: it is divinely stupid or a ghostly sound. (144)

In Spicer's "Certain Seals Are Broken," words offer an "eternal privacy" through a magic which reverses the procedures of Duncan's incarnationism: Duncan makes the flesh luminous with language; Spicer makes words correspond to the dumbness of matter. Rimbaud is

... A cry in the night. An offer.
What the words choose to say. An offer
of something. A peace. (166)

If Spicer had chosen to leave matters here, he might also have left hell behind. But the title of this penultimate poem, "Certain Seals Are Broken," suggests the impossibility of escaping the *telos* of language. Again, Spicer hangs on to the fact that the system is supposed to carry messages, that individual speakers are caught up in *wanting* to understand. In *A Textbook of Poetry*, he takes up the functional transcendence of the Logos as the origin of desire. If in *Fake Novel* he makes substances of words through magic, in *Textbook* he turns to surrealism to describe their function.

The point of the bridge game is to inquire into the nature of the relations between things. It is the "between" that bothered Emerson, and it continues to bother Spicer. In the second poem of *Textbook*,

It is as if nothing in the world existed
except metaphors—linkings between things.
Or as if all our words without the things
above them were meaningless. (169)

In the old cosmos, divided into hell, purgatory and heaven, words had "things above them" which guaranteed their meaning. *Heads of the Town* presents the empty husk of this cosmology, unbelievable in. Yet Spicer urges more than just the necessity of announcing one's disbelief. Belief in the literality of western metaphysics is not the issue, or rather the question of belief is made subtle when metaphysics turns into linguistics:

"Personify," you say. "It is less
abstract to make a person out of a sound."
But the word was the Word not because he was
personified but because he was a
personification. As if he were human.

To proclaim his humanity is to lie—to
pretend that he was not a Word, that he was
not created to Explain. The language where
we are born across (temporarily and
witlessly) in our prayers. (169)

In Christian thought, the Word personified is the Word incarnated, the Word illuminating and luminous within its material actualization. The verity of the Word becomes a doctrinal matter, or in Duncan's case, a question of belief in the "truth and life of myth." But it is harder to shrug off the question of metaphysics if, as Spicer suggests, the Word always was a personification, inextricably embedded in the code from which we learn about the relations between things. It is easier to get rid of God than to eliminate personifications, or any other figure of speech for that matter. To make words human by treating them as things, as Spicer does

in *Fake Novel*, is to ignore the operations of the system. The Word was "created to Explain," and insofar as the human organism desires (insofar as it is articulated and therefore limited), it is already "born across" into language. Spicer's *Textbook* anticipates Jacques Lacan's analysis of the operation of language on the individual psyche: as the human organism is initiated into the symbolic order it is wounded with incurable desire.¹ "Our prayers," as Spicer calls them, begin there—"As if the shimmering before them were not hell but the reach of something" (170).

Once God disappears under the weight of our disbelief, we are left with "the thought of thinking about God" (Spicer 172). Or as Michel Foucault says, "I fear indeed that we shall never rid ourselves of God, since we still believe in grammar" (298). When Spicer comes to speak directly about linguistics in *Language* (published three years after *Heads of the Town*), he says that "We make up a different language for poetry / And for the heart—ungrammatical" (233). But his disbelief is ironic: consciousness is bound by the "reach" or movement of language. In *After Lorca*, Spicer had described words as "rope," something with which to drag the real into the poem. In *Textbook* he finds, "It is the definition of the rope that ought to interest everyone who wants to climb the rope" (173). One of the strongest metaphors of *A Textbook* is "the Indian rope trick": a rope hangs between nothing and nothing for "a little Indian boy" to climb up. The rope is a bridge with nothing to bridge, an explanation that cannot explain, absurd as a textbook of poetry, or a car going nowhere. It is an absurdity the poet cannot not believe.

In his documentation of various shamanic practices in *Shamanism*, Mircea Eliade discusses the history of the rope trick in India²:

The famous rope trick of the fakirs creates the illusion that a rope rises very high into the sky; the master makes a young disciple climb it until he disappears from view. The fakir then throws his knife into the air, and the lad's limbs fall to the ground one after another. (69)

A fate shared by Orphic poets who descend to hell on a rope ladder? Eliade says that the rope trick is an initiation rite. "Ancestral or evil spirits" dismember the shaman and then his body is indestructably reformed: "the future shaman has a 'new body' that enables him to gash his flesh with knives, run swords through himself, touch white-hot iron, and so forth" (429). The rope itself stretches between heaven and earth, a passage between gods and ancestors, and human beings.

Heaven and hell, the referents which once ensured the meaningfulness of the rope (and promised an indestructible body), are missing as literalities in Spicer's cosmos. Yet the rope remains in position, still stretching upward as if it had a purpose. Ironically, the poet learns intentionality from this absurd posture of the language rope. He is thus placed in the ridiculous position of trying to fit his experience of desire into a series of now-dead letters:

Seeking experience for specific instances, drawing upon the pulp of the brain and the legs and the arms and the motion of the poet, making him see things that can be conveyed through their words.

Or disbelief too. Seeking experience for specific instances. And in the gradual lack of the beautiful, the lock of the door before him, a new Eurydice, stepping up to him, punning her way through his hell. (171)

Hell is the poet's inability to translate lived experience into language, even as he realizes that experience is mediated by language. In place of the specificity the poet wants, language offers only "a new Eurydice," another always-absent eternal, like God or the Beloved, or, to draw in Spicer's other books, a Holy Grail or a diamond. As Spicer says it, "Meaningless words stick in the throat and you cough them up as an abstraction of what you are trying to cough up" (174).

There is another way to climb the rope, though. In *Textbook*, Spicer stresses the divinity of the Logos in order to keep the "reach" of the rope working. Through the meaningless abstractions, Spicer proposes a limited *telos*; not, literally, a movement toward the Logos in his godhead, but toward human intentionality:

... These humans—uncoded, unciphered, their sheer presences. Beyond the word "Beauty."

They are the makers of man's enterprise. Beyond the word "blowtorch," the two of them, hold a blowtorch at all beauty. (182)

Beauty, Truth, God, all the big generalities to which the rope used to be tied and which were supposed to define the end of "man's enterprise," here reverse into the beginnings of it. It is the fact of the enterprise, implicit in these abstractions, that is important, the "definition of the rope" that Spicer reclaims: intentionality as such, and the experience of desire. In the love letter of *A Fake Novel*, the code undermines the feelings and will of "X" and "Y," thus reducing them to mere cyphers. By disclosing intentionality within the structure of the code, Spicer, once again, makes language point to experience. The vertical road slopes downward to a "hell of meaning" in *Homage to Creeley*, but by conflating the metaphysical tradition with linguistics (and the two have never been separate), Spicer finds another use for the vertical: it signals desire. The road or rope goes down *and* up. The poet, however, ascends not to a metaphysical absolute, but to the physics of "these humans," their laws of motion, so to speak. The rope being as it is, absurdly upright, enterprising Indian boys may climb up it.

A Textbook of Poetry contains a number of definitions of surrealism. In the opening poem, Spicer says that the "surrealism of the poet could not write words" (169). Later he remarks that surrealism is the "intention that things do not fit together" (176)—the intention of an impossible separation between words and things, perhaps. The poet builds around a reality scattered "like the pieces of a totally unfinished jigsaw puzzle" in order to "cause an alliance between the dead and the living" (176). This alliance is as close to paradise as Spicer gets—this truce between dead letters and the "absolutely temporary."

Spicer's surrealism represents a self-consciously absurd effort to reappropriate the code. Unlike Blaser, Spicer keeps a syntax that is quite unremarkable. Blaser's syntactic discontinuities make visible a dialectic between context and text. The bi-polar field of the poem is formed of the relationship between conscious experience (internalized language) and a socio-linguistic history that is "older and other" than the poet. Spicer, on the other hand, plays with the notion of an outside uncontaminated by language, and to this end, he loads his sentences with an "alien" semantic cargo. As early as the *Imaginary Elegies* (1951), he talks about a "train with its utterly alien cargo" (*ONS* 53). The intention behind such tactics is to force the machinery of the code to disclose the man inside it (as Poe discloses the man inside the mechanical chess player). If magic makes the word substantial, surrealism makes the language machine bear a human message. From the dead letter office of *A Fake Novel*, Spicer moves to a post office in Africa:

... All the words they use for poetry are meaningless.

Postage stamps at the best. Surrealism a blue surcharge for Tchad. This is an imaginary African kingdom which will never gain independence because it does not exist and is not merely an act of the imagination and did issue postage stamps. This is the poest [sic] and the poem talking to you. (180)

The African kingdom—and Spicer may have had in mind Duncan's "African Elegy" with its "mind's / natural jungle," as well as Rimbaud's defection from poetry to Africa—will never "gain independence" from the code. Nonetheless there are postage stamps issued from this place and it "is not merely an act of the imagination." The images which Spicer says are idealizations in *Homage to Creeley* return, via the dead letter office of *A Fake Novel*. Having been cancelled ("All the words they use for poetry are meaningless"), the image begins to speak again, this time from the outside. What comes through is the intention of a communication, quite simply, "the poest [sic] and the poem talking to you." As if there were real lemons—and as if a metaphor could bring them into the poem. In "The Practice of Outside," Blaser says of Spicer's surrealism that it is "the under-the-real which comes forward when the fixed-real dissolves" and he adds that "it is attached to an Orphic methodology of great

complexity" (323). The universe above and below the words follows the poet out of hell, but one look, one demand for understanding, and hell is once more everywhere. Both Tchad and the outside are imaginary—and yet language is not all. As Spicer says in *A Fake Novel*, "We are snark-hunters. Brave as we disappear into the clearing" (165). "These humans," hunting themselves.

A Textbook of Poetry is just that: a book about "wanting to explain," and about how to squeeze an explanation from the Logos. Like a fur-lined teacup, the sentence must be made to display its own structure, and make visible the incongruity between two different orders of reality—between linguistic paradigms and real lemons. Spicer's relationship to the original surrealist movement is thus highly ironic.³ If as Franklin Rosemont says surrealism "demonstrates not only the continuity between internal and external reality but their essential unity" (*What is Surrealism* 24), if the apparent discontinuity of the surrealist image is meant to reveal a larger unity, then Spicer reverses the process. His surrealism derives from "the intention that things do not fit together." The sentence must disclose the separateness of the "absolute temporary."

It is to force such a disclosure that the poet plays the language game.

The poet wants to take up all the marbles and put them in his pocket. Wants marbles. Where the poem is like winning the game.

It is so absurd that the rats calling "Credo quia absurdum" or the cats or the mountain lions become a singular procession of metaphors. Each with their singular liturgy.

These are words and their words holler hollowly in the rabbit burrows, in the metaphors, in the years of our life. (180)

To communicate, explain, make an appearance as a speaker rather than as a "spoken" subject, the poet has to lose his marbles in order to get them back in the absurdity of a "procession of metaphors" (a *procession*, or a train with an alien cargo, going somewhere). Spicer's disbelief in the Logos reverses into an "I believe because it is absurd." This hellish liturgy forces the language toward the hard (difficult, solid) actuality of the (diamond, marble) "years of our life"—forces the poem, in a final, bitterly lemon-flavored, ironic inversion to hold a life incarnate.

3. Noise: The Music of Hell

When Orpheus sings, nature moves. The lure of music, as Nietzsche writes of it in *The Birth of Tragedy*, is its promise of intuitive access to a universal "ground of being." Music answers the human desire to "tear asunder the veil of Maya, to sink back into the original oneness of nature; . . . to express the very essence of nature symbolically" (27). Among

nineteenth-century American writers, music emerges as one solution to the distance between the "me" and "not-me."

John Irwin says of Whitman's *Song of Myself*, that the "poem/self aspires to that condition of music in which matter and form, inner and outer blend—a condition in which 'presence' is simply that absence of an external reference that we call self-referentiality" (*American Hieroglyphics* 99). The poem becomes its own guarantee of authenticity because it contains its own origin. Comparing Whitman's *Song* to Schopenhauer's music-as-will (and Schopenhauer is an important source for *The Birth of Tragedy*), Irwin says,

Music's lack of an external referent exactly mirrors the will's lack of an external referent. Thus Whitman's making the self the sole reference of the poem necessarily involved his identifying the poem/self with music, for what Pater meant when he said that all art aspires to the condition of music . . . is that all art aspires to the self-referentiality of the Romantic self, the self as pure will, as pure motion/emotion. (101)

The difficulty with Whitman's position, as Irwin sees it, is that Whitman imagines world will be a larger version of his individual will. Poe's *Eureka* falls under this critique too. When Poe merges "individual identity" with the "general consciousness," he seems to be dissolving ego into world, but in fact dissolves world into ego (109-10). This segment of Irwin's argument recalls Roy Harvey Pearce's conclusions regarding American romantics in *The Continuity of American Poetry*. Pearce says of Emerson that, "He imputes his own sensibility to the world in order to understand it as somehow akin to him" (155). Fashioned after the image of the individual self, the cosmic Self of the text turns out to be little more than the individual writ large.

Whitman, Poe and Emerson, like Nietzsche, attempt to imagine a "ground of being" beyond the individual, yet none of these writers quite succeeds in imagining that ground as other than some kind of "oneness." It is this thought of the One that leads them into a vocabulary that cannot but sound anthropocentric and egocentric to contemporary ears. Nietzsche clearly says that Dionysiac music signals the annihilation of the individual: at-oneness with the life force means the loss of consciousness. However, his vocabulary, and that of the Americans, slips and slides toward a conflation of "mystical oneness" (Nietzsche's phrase) with Dionysiac flux. The efforts of these writers to identify music with the "ground of being" represents another try for a sacred language, and a confusion of the mystic's ascent with the Orphic's descent. (Here I follow Gwendolyn Bays' distinctions in *The Orphic Vision*: the mystic experiences an expansion of consciousness and a heightened lucidity; the Orphic descends to the dark of the mind, and a state of unknowingness). When American romantics identify the self with eternal becoming, they

endow the individual voice with a largeness it cannot possess except by losing its ability to possess anything at all.

Orphic mythology (as opposed to Christian mythology) implies this catch. Orpheus can move nature, but he cannot charm the Bacchantes; he can retrieve Eurydice, but he cannot look at her. Consciousness cannot be totalized. As Orphic poets, Blaser and Spicer insist that the poetic "I" be a mediated, "unknowing" voice. Duncan, on the other hand, follows Whitman in identifying his voice with the cosmic voice of the text. In "An Apollonian Elegy," for instance, the poet's voice blends with Apollo's song, and that song becomes an analogue of biological process.⁴ Through these analogies (and Duncan's analogies are "fictive certainties"), the poet can sing directly of "what is": death may be overcome through the regenerative powers of the bio-text.

In contrast to Duncan's Apollonian singing, the music of hell offers no consolation for death. Spicer's *Book of Music* begins with a line by Poe who, preoccupied as he was with Unity, fails to conceive of it in substantialist terms. Unity, Poe says, is "material nihilism": it is a formless "indefinite." Spicer takes the "true music" to be a noise "as absolutely devoid of meaning / As a French horn" (69). Music says nothing; or rather, material flux cannot be born across into language. In his "Improvisations On a Sentence by Poe,"

"Indefiniteness is an element of the true music."
The grand concord of what
Does not stoop to definition. The seagull
Alone on the pier cawing its head off
Over no fish, no other seagull,
No ocean . . . (69)

Spicer's irony is perhaps directed against traditional notions of irrelativity: that which "does not stoop to definition" is without relation, and that which is without relation is One—an Aquinian definition of God. Yet language articulates no particular "one." Spicer's "grand concord" is a travesty of the plenitude of meaning that music (the grand music of the spheres?) once seemed to offer. The seagull's pointless squawk says that matter and meaning are not equivalent.

I find an illuminating parallel between the "true music" of hell and Michel Serres' discussion of song in *The Parasite*. There are grasshoppers and ants, Serres says, singers and producers. The singer-grasshopper "gets power less because he occupies the center than because he fills the environment." This parasite is a disruptive, "anti-substantialist" force: "singing is not exchangeable; singing is not coin of the realm" (96). The producer-ant, however, always tries to centralize its power, and maintain that centrality by deparasiting its space. The end of a metaphysics of substance marks the triumph of the contemporary grasshopper: "Substantialism was and is the refusal of voices and wind. From now on, only relations, only waves" (97). The noisy parasite is the

entropic force inherent in *any* system, including the biological system of the human organism. As such, it is akin to Spicer's indefinite seagull and to the Other as Blaser defines it in "The Stadium of the Mirror," as the "opposite and companion of any man's sudden form" (55).

In Blaser's poetry, noise is a principle of transformation. "Meaning is a kind of movement," he says, "never disrespectful of the indeterminate which is its musical, inescapable ground" ("SM" 61). Spicer, however, focusses on the *loss* of definition that noise implies. In his "Orfeo," Orpheus' music turns the poet toward another linguistic hell:

Sharp as an arrow Orpheus
Points his music downward.
Hell is there
At the bottom of the seacliff.
Heal
Nothing by this music.
Eurydice
Is a frigate bird or a rock or some seaweed.
Hail nothing
The infernal
Is a slippering wetness out at the horizon.
Hell is this:
The lack of anything but the eternal to look at
The expansiveness of salt
The lack of any bed but one's
Music to sleep in. (70)

Music cannot produce presence or heal the wounds inflicted by language. In this poem, language plays the cruelest of tricks on the poet, by showing him that "Eurydice" is merely an "eternal," or a linguistic substitute for living flesh. The poet who stubbornly insists upon looking at the "real" Eurydice, looks at his own death.

Orpheus enrages the Bacchantes, and one reason for this, specific to Blaser's and Spicer's work, is that Orpheus refuses to give up his consciousness in order to participate in the rites ("the participation is broken," Blaser says in "Image-Nation 1"). It is this recognition, that in order to join the Dionysiac dance of the atoms one must be willing to give up consciousness, that there can be no having it both ways, no looking *and* restoration of the Beloved, that haunts Spicer's poetry. In "Ghost Song," he speaks of the "in/ability to love." The line break says that it is the "in" ability, the inability to be "in" (inside, at-one-with) which stops the poet from loving. But the ambiguity of the lining also says that the poet cannot not be in love either: he cannot free himself of desire.

Spicer's version of Euripides' *The Bacchae*, entitled *Pentheus and the Dancers*, is dedicated to Pentheus, the man who resisted Dionysus, and "to the god that killed him" (115). As Spicer presents him, Pentheus is a pathetic and ridiculous figure. He is hot-headed, xenophobic (Dionysus

is "this god with an Asiatic name"), prudish (the Bacchantes are "whores for Aphrodite"), ignorant, irreverent and pugnacious. But his contest with Dionysus is not a fair one: the game is fixed, and the vengeance the god exacts is extravagant. Pentheus must not only be dismembered by his own mother; he must also be publicly humiliated. The Stranger of the play, an incarnation of Dionysus, sees to it that Pentheus is led to his death dressed as a girl:

I want him to be laughed at, led through the crowded streets
dressed as a maiden, through the very city where he made
threats against our god. (134)

There is a touch of pettiness, or petulance, in Spicer's Dionysus which lets the reader sympathize with the foolish man who takes on a god as his opponent.⁵ Pentheus is fighting with the ocean. Dionysus is "wetness," Teiresias says: "He is everything that is not earth but which mixes with earth and white is his color . . ." (121). The god is another version of that "slippering wetness" in "Orfeo," or of the "white endlessness" in "Juan Ramon Jiminez" (in *After Lorca*). A "grand concord," and a terrible manifestation of the "true music." In contrast, Pentheus is "earth," down to earth, solid, one puny dissenting voice against a flood of Dionysiac destruction.

When Dionysus is unable to convince Pentheus to honor his rites, he utters a scream which determines the fate of the latter. That inarticulate scream hovers over Spicer's *oeuvre*. In *After Lorca* a "dog howl[s] with pure mind" (23). In *Language* "white and endless signals" (217) damage the poet's "radio" (his ability to transmit and receive messages). In "Orpheus in Hell," the poet cannot make himself heard above the infernal racket:

When he first brought his music into hell
He was absurdly confident. Even over the noise of the
shapeless fires
And the jukebox groaning of the damned
Some of them would hear him. In the upper world
He had forced the stones to listen.
It wasn't quite the same. And the people he remembered
Weren't quite the same either. He began looking at faces
Wondering if all of hell were without music.
He tried an old song but pain
Was screaming on the jukebox and the bright fire
Was pelting away the faces . . . (ONS 21)

In "Cantata" (*A Book of Music*), the foreign noise threatens all that we have traditionally called meaning:

... There is a high scream.
Rain threatens. That moment of terror.
Strange how all our beliefs
Disappear. (70)

"That moment" takes the poet to the edge of consciousness—the vertiginous seacliff leading down to oceanic oblivion or a hell of nonsense. In Blaser's terms, it is the site of "the *perilous act*" which opens the conscious mind to otherness. In "Image-Nation 12,"

if you
go there,
the waves take you (48)

Blaser's attitude toward noise, however, is less hostile (less pained) than is Spicer's. In "The Stadium of the Mirror," he 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. The man I watch with all my heart is both visible, a stop, and invisibly continuous. The static is oneself alone or translated into the mass where we are all alike.

The true is the Bacchantic frenzy in which no friend is not drunken; and because each as soon as it differentiates itself, immediately dissolves—the frenzy is as if transparent and simple repose. (Hegel)

Poetry, for all its snazz, reverses into the simple birthright—that one does step into a cosmos. (56)

Noise or static means that "form is alive" (54) and a movement rather than a state of being. As I hear it, Blaser's discussion of his *Image-Nations* in "Stadium" includes a veiled critique of Spicerian desire:

The Sublime, the Beautiful, the Terror are not exactly human (Arendt), and that is the reason the *Image-Nations* are not devoted to my logic of desire, but to a nation invaded by what is other than itself—a continuous forming. An original precision of meaning may then enter the word desire: 'Perhaps (like *considerare*) allied to *sidus*, a star, as if to turn the eyes from the stars' (Skeat). The body in the suddenness of its form stands there like the period at the end of a sentence. This off-spring of the universe than refurls. Dis-aster—the reversal of an act—dis—to turn from aster—star. Dis-stars. (57)

His "in/ability to love" signals Spicer's unwillingness to admit kinship with the Bacchantes—with the flux ("continuous forming") of the physical universe. Spicer takes up the bitterness of death; Blaser makes

an alliance with it. In the dismembered body of Orpheus, Blaser sees a birthright: we are not wholes (self-identical), but rather fragments of cosmos. The primordial cannot be imagined as a larger version of the poet's ego, but neither is it entirely alien. In "Image-Nation 9,"

... 'we are under image'
rythmos (form's movement) to walk into 'the
primordial always exists' face to face always outside
ourselves the astonishment is
that it is kosmos
playing out with one man . . . (31)

From these different positions, Blaser and Spicer both effect strict delineation of the authorial voice. The poet who does not identify his voice with universals obviously cannot speak in them. Whitman's "I" is privileged because he makes it equivalent to the poem-song. Nietzsche's "I" is equally privileged because it is the "I dwelling, truly and eternally, in the ground of being" (39). In a more subtle fashion, Serres' grasshopper-parasite is privileged as soon as it eliminates the obnoxious ant: "The world empire of IBM, tomorrow, the absolute empire of relation. The end of substance" (96). As if there were *only* noise, and never that idiosyncratic composition we call experience, or as if presence could only be absolute, or not at all. In contrast, Blaser and Spicer each offer a voice that is mediated by noise. The lyric "I" thus shrinks to a mortal size, and the substantial becomes just that—material substance. Blaser says in "The Stadium of the Mirror," that the "thought of totals [is] the original totalitarianism . . ." (61). The author disappears from his work amid the wreckage of the metaphysical tradition, but he returns as a finite voice. His return heralds the end of tragedy.

4. The Death of Tragedy

Tragedy, as Nietzsche defines it, demands the joyful consent of the individual to annihilation, a celebration of and sacrifice to the life force. The "metaphysical solace" of tragedy is the permanence it offers: participation in "true being surviving every phenomenal change" (53). When Blaser and Spicer insist on the singularity of the poet's voice, they implicitly refuse to identify with "true being" or the "spirit of music"—which is to say that they do not speak for the species. In *Homage to Creeley*, Spicer's tragic muse has bad teeth, and worse, she is neither real nor pure. Hell is hell partly because it is not tragic:

Tragedy has exact limits that Hell cannot enclose. This spoils the trip of The Poet and The Poem through Hell and is the point at which they both protest. (135)

As Nietzsche remarks,

Someone, I can't recall who, has claimed that all individuals, as individuals, are comic, and therefore untragic; which seems to suggest that the Greeks did not tolerate individuals at all on the tragic stage. (66)

"The Truth is Laughter" poems in Blaser's *Syntax* are comic because they present the eccentric limitations of an individual consciousness:

"verterberries," the locals called them
after Mary Anning found
ichthysaur, 1811
pleiosaur, 1824
pterodactyl, 1826 (19)

Or from Joe Panipakuttuk, Blaser takes the following observation:

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

Spicer's humor is darker. The puns and jokes which pepper his work, particularly *Heads of the Town*, disturb linguistic conventions but they also always threaten the poet himself. Spicer pushes the singularity of the poet's "I" to its nonsensical extremity. In *A Textbook of Poetry*, he speaks of a "private language" and "ununderstanding" as the "real poetry . . . beyond us, beyond them" (183), and in the *Vancouver Lectures* he tells a story about making up a fake Martian language:

. . . I think I started it, or either I or John Ryan started it—we decided to start talking in Martian just to bug the tourists. And after a while we could actually converse in Martian to each other. And no recognizable linguistic things or anything else. (VL 181)

A practical joke to be sure, but Spicer's jokes are never innocent. ("We make up a different language for poetry.") Fake Martian effects a discontinuity with linguistic paradigms, but ironically, even Martian may become paradigmatic. Any repeatable series of sounds becomes a code ("we could actually converse") and the speaker once more subject to its orders.

This practicing of idiosyncratic speech, however, distinguishes the voices in Blaser's and Spicer's poetry from the universal voice of poetic tradition, whether the universal be imagined as the life force, or as a linguistic pattern. In "further" (from *Syntax*), Blaser says,

fate and form are interchangeable
the anger between them
is the dream in skin on our bones (55)

The anger between fate and form proposes a non-identity between the "dream in skin" (our flesh) and the mediating systems which produce our "nature." It is this non-identity which replaces tragedy, in the Nietzschean sense, with comedy.

In the *H.D. Book*, Duncan offers a different discussion of fate, form and tragedy. Fate is a "formal imperative," he says, and a principle in opposition to individual psychology:

The reality principle sees the oedipus complex as a fixation where sexual wishes are in conflict with tribal custom, or even, as Freud does at times, as an instinct to incest and murder. The pleasure principle insists it would be best to let well-enough alone.

"Let me," Teiresias insists,

go home. It will be easiest for us both
to bear our several destinies to the end
if you follow my advice.

But Oedipus must, for the play's sake climb up into the uneasiest state necessary for the moment at which the crisis of the play shows forth and we realize the fulfillment of the plot. Beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the reality principle, is the play principle seeking its passionate formal fulfillment. This is the only glory we know.

* * * * *

The difference between the neurotic nursing his guilt or sin and the hero is the dramatic gesture, the formal imperative. (*Montemora* 94)

The individual achieves stature, becomes a hero, through the same means that the poet finds a universal Voice: both must come under the "formal imperative." For Whitman and Emerson, the imperative was the law of nature; for Duncan it is syntax, the "law I love" (*OF* 10).

No statement could be more antithetical to Spicer's insistence on the idiosyncrasy of the poet's voice, and yet Spicerian privacy does not represent freedom from fate, but rather a struggle with the fatefulness of mortality itself. In *Homage*, "hell / Is where your apartness is your apartness" (144). "Dis-aster," to turn away from the stars, Blaser says, disastrous to deny kinship with the cosmos that is made actual to us in death. Duncan, through his bio-linguistics, finds the stars to be "a map,"

and for men "a great design of where they were and then of when" (*Sumac* 102). But in Spicer's thinking, stars are "what the Jews wore," marks of a violent, joyless death. From the perspective of the individual (as opposed to that of the species), the Bacchic dance means oblivion rather than participation. The stars will continue to shine—on unmarked graves. Spicer and Duncan are bound by opposition, the one in a comic hell, the other in his tragic paradise. Blaser takes up a third position: form is neither a pure visibility nor a "formal imperative," but energy that sometimes gets "hung up," as the body "in the suddenness of its form," stops and then "refurls":

it is the interchange the form took
 like walking in and out of a star
 the words are left over collapsed
 into themselves in the movement

between visible and invisible (*IN* 28)

At the end of the road, *in the middle of the journey*, a god-language dies slowly, leaving star-words and meanings to collapse in black holes. These are endings into which a poet may disappear, or from which s/he might begin again. On the other side of the seacliff,

Walking on the beach, fondly or not fondly, they hear the
 Sound the
 Ocean makes. (Spicer 195)

Notes

1. In the essay accompanying his translation of *The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, Anthony Wilden summarizes Lacan's shifting analysis of desire:

... the lack of object is what enables the child to progress to the subjectivity of 'I,' or, in the mathematical metaphor, from the not-nothing-not-something of zero to the status of 'One,' who can therefore know two. The subject is the binary opposition of presence and absence, and the discovery of One—the discovery of difference—is to be condemned to an eternal desire for the nonrelationship of zero, where identity is meaningless. (191)

Spicer focusses his argument with the Logos on the fact that language creates in us a desire for "sheer presences" which the structure of the system paradoxically precludes.

2. For another discussion of Eliade and Spicer's version of the rope trick, see John Granger, "The Idea of the Alien," M.A. Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1982.

3. Spicerian dictation, involving a mythology of the "outside," is symmetrically opposed to Andre Breton's automatism. Spicer borrows his version of dictation from occult practices. In contrast, Breton is careful to distinguish his

automatism from the mediumship of the spiritualist. In "The Automatic Message" (1933), Breton says,

We are aware that the term 'automatic writing' as used in surrealism, lends itself to disputation. If I may be held partly responsible for this impropriety, it is because 'automatic writing' . . . has always seemed to me the limit towards which the surrealist poet must tend, but without losing sight of the fact that, contrary to what spiritualism proposes—that is, the dissociation of the subject's psychological personality—surrealism proposes nothing less than the *unification* of that personality. For us, obviously the question of the externality of the 'voice' (to repeat for the sake of simplification) could not even be raised. It is precisely the "dissociation of the subject's psychological personality" that Spicer is after—an imaginary "outside" to the subject produced by language.

4. "An Apollonian Elegy" proposes a bond between mortal poet and immortal god. Through the death of Hyacinthus, Apollo suffers mortality, just as humans do. However, both god and man find comfort in the return (cyclical renewal) of Hyacinthus each year and in "undying song":

. . . Your grief springs anew
in every heart. The human flesh is
hyacinth staid. Were you, O too mortal
god of sun, my angel that would have me love
and hunger? that by your grievous hand
would strike from me complaint, complaint,

AI AI

in the year's renewal, your eternal
lamentation?

Never shall he be from me
erased. He is my very grief, my spirit's shade
cast in the light of immortality's sun.

And thus, Apollo,
sing I, who die utterly, your undying song. (YAC 72-73)

5. In an unpublished letter to Graham Macintosh, Spicer writes:

I hope you'll let me know what you think of the play. I don't understand all of it myself. (I'm a bit too much Pentheus except in my poetry and I think that I'm afraid to understand.)

This letter is part of in the Spicer collection of the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.

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"Music. Heart. Thinking.": An Interview with Fred Wah

This interview took place at Lola Tostevin's house in February, 1987.

Lola Lemire Tostevin: You were born in Swift Current, Saskatchewan and lived there until you were four years old. In your book *Waiting for Saskatchewan*, you write that you want it back, that you are waiting for Saskatchewan to appear again over the edge. Does this indicate a nostalgia for the past, for lost presence? Do you believe that through writing you can retrieve that absence?

Fred Wah: The term nostalgia bothers me. What that is, in the first poem of the book, is trying to deal with a geographical reality or concreteness that we all carry. Place as stain, the stain the world makes on a person or vice versa. Although we went back to Saskatchewan on visits, I didn't grow up there and there's something unresolved about that place for me. I live in the mountains now, and this might be one reason for it. The memory, or if you want, the nostalgia of the flat, the plain. But I think it's something more specific in my life that I was never able to deal with, never ever able to fully imagine. Since I left at such a young age, the images aren't totally clear. In that sense I feel it still owes me. The place still owes me. I felt that in order for my body to become a complete body in the world I had to have this kind of accounting.

LLT: So you're using the writing to retrieve those images from the past.

FW: Yah, I guess. I don't know if that's the purpose of the writing. Certainly in the act of writing, that's one of the things I'm doing. Conjuring up the images, the memories, the residue. There's a residue from the past that I've never dealt with so the writing is helping to do that, but I don't know that writing is the only way of doing that.

LLT: Writing takes place in the present. How can you retrieve something from the past through the present act of writing?

FW: Except that language is a stream that comes out of the past and carries with it the weight of time and space. I trust that language carries with it information, not necessarily about anything other than itself, and

that it's all there, and that fascinates me. It fascinates me that language can reveal to us somehow any of that.

LLT: There's been a great deal of emphasis placed by women on restoring the mother, or the pre-Oedipal psychical stage of development. Many women writers have tried to displace the authority of the father and restore the influence of their mothers. You seem to be pre-occupied in finding the father in *Waiting for Saskatchewan*. There's more emphasis on the Oriental side through your father than the Swedish side through your mother. Do the images that you are trying to clarify reside in the tracing back to the male parent? Does it reside in the name of the father? Why not through the mother and the Swedish roots?

FW: OK, this is difficult. I've thought about this and I really don't know except I suspect there are several reasons, the main one being that my father died and my mother is still alive. He died when he was quite young and a lot of what I'm dealing with is his death, his absence. The fact that I didn't have part of my life to share with him, although we didn't necessarily share a lot when he was alive. We didn't have that close a relationship although I greatly admired him. Another thing I suppose is that I'm male. Also the Chinese, the exotic aspect of that fascinates me.

LLT: Why would the Chinese element be more exotic than the Swedish?

FW: More exotic because it's more mysterious. The story around my grandfather and father is more mysterious than the story around my mother and her parents from Sweden. That's a fairly clear story—European move to Canada, etc. . . . But my Chinese grandfather untypically married an English woman. Also when I was a kid in elementary school, we had to fill out these forms on registration day and one of the things we had to put down was our racial origin and the teacher told me to put down "Chinese." We weren't allowed then to put down "Canadian." That wasn't considered a racial origin. It's illegal now to ask for anyone's racial origin in Canada, but at that time you wrote down where your father came from. It had nothing to do with the mother.

But as you know in *Waiting for Saskatchewan*, the last section of the book is called "Father/Mother Haibun." I intentionally tried to engage some of the mother stuff partly as a way of exorcising this father obsession and also as a way of moving towards dealing with the mother thing because I am half Swedish. I've been thinking a lot about this and where it's gotten me is to my grandmothers. My Swedish grandmother, but especially my English grandmother—well, Irish and Scot from Ontario, actually. She intrigues me. Why did she marry this Chinaman? That's curious to me.

LLT: Maybe they were attracted to one another.

FW: Well considering the period, that's unusual. I have a feeling it's because my grandfather was a gambler and my grandmother was an ardent Salvation Armyist.

LLT: And she was out to save him? [Laughter] While we're on the subject of women, you've said that you were influenced by Quebec women writers. Who and in what way did they influence you?

FW: The most specific influence was Nicole Brossard. Curiously, the first thing that interested me was her narrative in *A Book*—not so much a disjunctive narrative but an angular cut, a slicing through the narrative, and the fact that she was allowing the short paragraph at the top of the page to constitute the continuity of some kind of narrative. It's really a novel in that it has characters, plot, story, but all of that, the conventional stuff of the novel is in the background and what's at the forefront is language. I got excited about that because that's what poets do. Well, not all poets—but the ones I'm interested in. Good poetry should bring language to the fore and she was doing it in prose. So I got excited by that and started to read more of her work. It was at a time when Coach House was publishing translations of her work so she was more readily available than other Quebecois writers. I've looked at others, but not with as much intensity. Talks with Nicole, why she writes the way she writes, have been very generative for me. It confirms the direction I've gone in.

LLT: You've mentioned Victor Shklovsky's theory of "making strange" as a technique of art in some interviews. How does that specifically apply to your writing or to what you were saying about Nicole's influence on your writing?

FW: What I saw in Nicole, for example, was a way of making strange and my big take on that has always been out of Keats' "negative capability." How to make use of negative capability in writing has always been of interest to me—being able to keep the writing in uncertainty, uncertain of where it's going, its unpredictability. To have that confirmed was a great thing for me.

LLT: How does that apply to *Waiting for Saskatchewan*? That book is not only more linear than your other books, it's also very lineal, filial. How do you "make strange" that setting?

FW: I don't know that it's making that setting strange, or making those people strange. It's using the language . . . well let me contrast it this way: *Grasp the Sparrow's Tail* was published as a small book in Japan and I gave it away to friends and many of them said "gee, this is great Fred, I really loved it, why don't you write a novel. This would make a great novel." The notion was that this would make a great story. And for

about two minutes and thirty-eight seconds, I actually thought of writing a novel. In other words, what they were getting off on, and people do from that book, is the narrative, the story telling quality of it.

LLT: Do you think that's why *Saskatchewan* won a Governor General's Award—because it is more linear, more story telling than some of your writing? [Laughter] Which I think is all pretty terrific, but perhaps it would not attract as much attention . . . [Laughter]

FW: Yes, George Bowering was on the jury and it was something he could understand . . . [Laughter] But just a minute. These are heavy questions you're asking. That whole thing of estrangement and making strange . . .

LLT: Well I don't quite understand . . . Shklovsky said that the purpose of art is to hold a perception as long as you can. How do you make strange by holding a perception?

FW: No, you hold the perception by making it strange. He said that the purpose of art was to make the stone stony. We don't pay attention to the fact that the stone is stony. It's a quality that's given, so it doesn't enter our perception. It's not something that we knowingly experience—but if I make the stone strange, so that somehow you can experience its stoniness, then there's a perception of something that wasn't there before.

LLT: OK, so I was trying to apply that to *Waiting for Saskatchewan*.

FW: For me it's the poetry, the play. Playing around from various angles—like the *utanikki*, a poetic diary of mixed prose and poetry, and the *Elite* series which explores the division between prose and poetry, and the *haibun*, prose written from a haiku sensibility. Although there's an underlying current of narrative about my father, the prairie, the café, the writing is still intentionally slightly angular because I play at the edges of the poems with language. I have a choice of telling a story about my father and all the restaurants he's been through in his life, in the straightest possible way, or I have the choice of using one long line that goes on and on, as in one of the *Elite* poems, because I want to place that form against the content. I'm interested in play, in invention. To make things strange through negative capability, or whatever means, can be useful to prolong or make something that isn't otherwise available. You twist the forms a bit, like in the prose poems . . . well that's not really a solid form, but—

LLT: Oh I think it's pretty solid—

FW: Oh yeah, but formally to describe what a prose poem is, it isn't that solid. It's a piece of prose, it's sentences, really.

LLT: But it has an energy that traditional poetry, or even poetry using the breath line doesn't always have. The line taken to the edge of the page seems to generate another kind of energy, can give it a certain rhythm that other line breaks don't.

FW: I discovered that in writing the *utanikki*, the poetic diary. Why should the diary be any less poetic than the poems, and why would the poems be more poetic than the diary? So that in my *utanikki*, *Grasp the Sparrow's Tail*, sometimes the diary entry is made so that it's just as oblique—

LLT: So one engenders the other, one is the condition of the other? I like that idea, actually. Speaking of rhythm, you use the word "movement" a lot in your writing and there are many images of movement such as skating, riding, horses, fish in water. I get the feeling when reading you that the environment for such movement, the skating arena, water, etc. is a mindscape for fluidity in the writing itself. Are you aware of this while writing?

FW: Yes, although I don't see it as fluidity but as movement. If you want a paradigm for those images that interest me, it's the notion of a plan, a set. The fish, for example. I have a series I'm working on, temporarily called "The Pickerel Series." I'm interested in the spawning fish carrying within itself some map, some imprint it's going to return to all its life. There are three terms that my teacher taught me—but I guess we shouldn't get too theoretical—

LLT: Why shouldn't we get theoretical?

FW: Well, three terms my teacher taught me are *topos*, *tropos* and *typos*. Charles Olson used those terms. *Topos* is place, *tropos*, tropism, is the innate reaction, the movement towards whatever one needs, and *typos* is the typeface, [slaps thigh] the imprint on the world that we make or the imprint the world makes on us. So what has always fascinated me, say about hockey, because I played hockey, is the invisibility of the movement. It's moving so fast, and there's that second sense of knowing where to move. Is he going to go there or not, and we're waiting for that moment, that split second to see whether the puck is going to go into the net. It's so nice to have the game fulfill the image.

LLT: The way the fish unexpectedly darts around.

FW: Yes, and the same thing happens when you ride a horse. I've never ridden a horse, except for a couple of times, but to ride, you have to have a mind-set, a body-set, an image of the thing in order to do it. You need to know how to swim before you can swim. I'm interested in the plot, the mass we carry inside ourselves and how this information operates. It's not

so much the movement or the fluidity, although that's part of it, but it's the movement and fluidity in fulfillment of some master plan or structure.

LLT: So that everything you graph—write—is already in you? There's nothing new?

FW: Writing for me is simply a way of calling out the information that's already there: discovering what's there and generating new ways into a world that's already there. You carry with you who you are.

LLT: What about *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.*? The pictures were already there, they were anterior to your experience. Didn't you come up with something new in the way you read them? Didn't the two together create something new?

FW: Nothing's new.

LLT: There are new ways of tracing, perceiving.

FW: OK, they came together and provided a newness for me because it wasn't there before for me, if you see what I'm getting at. I really am more of a Buddhist in all this, I guess . . . I mean I'm not a practising Buddhist, but there are no beginnings and endings. I love Fenollosa's take on the Chinese written characters for poetry . . . How false the sentence is as a fabrication, as representation of the world, because nothing in the world ends, nothing ends, so that sentences seem to be such false representations of it. I'm interested in making it new, but it's the same old thing. It's making it new for me, but it's not new, it's already been around. It's the same thing with language. I really love the sense that language carries with it an "emic" structure which is invisible to us but which gets actualized when we use it.

LLT: I don't know what you mean by "emic."

FW: I learned this in linguistics—"eme" as in phoneme, and morpheme. We know that there is this invisible "eme" in English that no one can say as a phoneme. I can say the word "ash" in Canada and someone in Buffalo, New York will pronounce it "eash," and although they are very close together, they're not the same sounds. I'm not saying that they're speaking a foreign language in Buffalo. When we hear dialects of a language, we know them as dialects, as variations. They are variations of this "eme." Now the only thing that is carrying that "eme" is language. No one person, no one dialect, no one group carries that "eme" for the rest of us. Language carries the "eme." I love the organic nature of language as something that exists outside ourselves and continues to flow through time and space and carries with it all the impedimenta and residue of—of everything. And all languages do that.

LLT: So the map, the geography we were talking about at the very beginning, is that a geography of language?

FW: I don't know what "geography of language" means.

LLT: Is language the place that you're most comfortable in? If your own personal geography is not really Saskatchewan, or any other place you've written about, then does your geography become language?

FW: Or more accurately, language has become a way of dealing with a geographic "eme" in my cosmology, to use a simile. In other words, you can carry with you who you are, but not be able to tap that or have access to it and language can help you do that. I don't mean only written language, I mean also dance, music, mathematics, painting. These are all languages or ways of showing us what's there.

LLT: And you use both paintings and music in your writing.

FW: I'm not a painter, but I'm a musician. I studied music and played jazz trumpet for many years. A lot of my writing is jazz, just sheer shit jazz. Feels the same way it feels when I play the trumpet.

LLT: You've just finished a new series of pieces called *Music at the Heart of Thinking*. How do those pieces relate to music, to jazz?

FW: They're pushy pieces. They push constantly. Every step of writing in those pieces, every point, is to push it hard so it goes somewhere. Push it fast and force it to move. Don't sit around language, don't sit around word—but at the same time don't fall over, stay on your feet. I love that in music, playing the ad lib in a trumpet solo, or even a group. Trying to keep the piece together and hear the others in the group, how everything is going and push it so that it just about falls over the edge and doesn't. Like dissonance, I like the discord, the dissonant, because it pushes toward the edge and doesn't fall.

LLT: It pushes beyond anecdotes? Beyond story?

FW: I think so. I have nothing against the anecdote or the story, but I'm pushing beyond so it's not only anecdote or only story. I've done a couple of takes for *Music at the Heart of Thinking* on Frank Davey's last book, *The Abbotsford Guide to India*—which I think is one of his most wonderful books, by the way. It's got story, it's got image, geography, and allows Frank a large spectrum of play. In one of the lines he mentions the random notes on a flute in a hotel lobby. I love the sense of random notes, but you can't have random notes. As soon as you have two notes, they create a structure, a place that is no longer random. What you do when you're a musician or artist is you play the expectation of randomness against the

predictability of form that starts to occur. It's that tension between the two that makes it interesting, and it's the estrangement between the two that also makes it interesting. If one goes totally for one over the other, then it gets repetitive and boring. Many artists fall down on that, musically and visually, because they rely purely on formal devices. I fall down on that. Not all of my pieces are successful because they attempt to use form to create form and don't necessarily set up that tension. When a piece works for me, it makes those connections, and takes me to a new place from which language has other possibilities.

LLT: I've read *Music at the Heart of Thinking*, and heard you read several pieces from it. They're difficult pieces but they really hook you, and they were very well received at the reading. Why do you think people react so strongly to them? Is there finally a wider acceptance of non-linear, less content-oriented writing in Canada?

FW: Yeah . . . Writing is so far behind jazz and painting that way. I was happy that the audience liked them but I was surprised. Again, the technique is to push through the horn so fast and heavy that it goes all over the place but then to have it resolved, have a strong cadence. I think the reason the audience at Harbourfront liked them is that although they are oblique, there's something towards the end that brings it together and gives satisfaction to the helter skelter. They're not that readable off the page, but—

LLT: I've read them and I like them a lot. I liked them when you read them as well, because that adds another dimension, the cadence becomes more obvious, but even on the page where meaning totally escapes you at times, they still hook you. I have read some work where meaning escapes you and it gets really boring. I think it was Charles Bernstein who said that much so-called avant-garde writing done now is just as intrinsically boring as sentimental narrative stories. Both are difficult to do well. This cadence you refer to—is it expressed through the body-set you were talking about? Many theorists now emphasize the dual planes at which language operates. Julia Kristeva, for example, sees one of those planes as an instinctual drive such as cadence or rhythm.

FW: I haven't read much of Kristeva, but it sounds right. I don't know if it's necessarily tied to the body, as much as something that has feeling. It's very musical. Music by and large operates on cadence and I've always been interested in language as a cadential structure, even minutely, in terms of phrases and clauses. How they work cadentially, how a phrase is turned—I'm very curious about that. One of the reasons I've gotten into prose poems in the last few years, particularly in *Music at the Heart of Thinking*, is because I'm more interested in syntax, the syntagm, as a unit of composition, than I am in the line as a unit of composition. Yet both units, the line and the syntagm, require resolution, require movement

instead of shape, so I try to break through the syntax, play with it, cut through it, break it up a lot of the time. For about twenty years, I didn't pay much attention to syntax as a poet. I paid more attention to how the line works. My teachers, Creeley and Olson, were line people. Their contribution to changing my perception, at least of how poetry can sound, was through the line, and I was very happy working in the line and still am, but I'm also interested in breaking up other aspects of the poem. Just like the sound poets were interested in breaking up the chronological aspect of writing—playing with that. bpNichol's *The Martyrology* is a wonderful poem because it does that. If bp feels like breaking up sounds he breaks up sounds, and if he feels like breaking up sentences he breaks up sentences, and there's this swirl of breaking things up so they can be put back together again, so they can be resolved.

LLT: Olson believed that the "I" is always on the move, continually making itself over again. How do you think that applies to you?

FW: He did? He said that? I'm not quite sure what that means. What do you think it means?

LLT: I'm very much interested in the multiplicity of the selves. I don't believe that there is only one "I" or subject writing. Kristeva said that whenever you try to define the subject, say a woman, "*ce n'est jamais ça.*" It's never that. It's always on the move towards some other definition. Someone said to me once that it was very important to displace the "I" in writing, and I said, "great, I'll displace it as soon as I find it," because I've never been able to find or define the "I" of my writing as one subject. I see a parallel between Olson's subject continually changing itself and Kristeva's subject-in-process. Are you aware of that process, of that multiplicity when you're writing?

FW: I haven't given it much thought. God, Lola, this is a huge question. What is the Meaning of Life? . . . [Laughter] Olson said one thing that I've been struggling with all my life. He said that the subjective as objective requires correct processing. Olson's students play around with that all their lives. Sharon Thesen, I think, is a person who really takes that on, the lyric form takes that on. *You* take that on—Lola Tostevin takes that on.

LLT: You see me as a lyric poet? Why?

FW: Because of the "I" in your poems. Lyric poetry is "I" centred.

LLT: But that's what I'm saying—there isn't one "I" in my poetry.

FW: OK. But my point is that I haven't concentrated lyrically on the "I." In the *Saskatchewan* book I use the second person as a way of deflecting the I/you.

LLT: Yes, but even in using the second person in *Saskatchewan*, there is still a sense of writer being the main subject of that book, whereas in *Music at the Heart of Thinking* you don't get that presence.

FW: Yeah . . . I find this very hard to talk about, because I haven't figured it out. It is something that I'm playing with in my poems, the whole notion of the self, of the selves, but I don't know where it's going. It bothers me a little. It seems to have something to do with—Daphne Marlatt, for example, uses the term "consciousness." I first heard it insisted upon by her. I was really bothered by it. The word "consciousness" doesn't feel like much that's tangible to me, but it's important to her, so I took some trouble to try to experience that word and experience what it meant. She talks about it in reference to proprioception and that makes sense to me: the experience of the "I" as proprioceptive vehicle; turning ourselves inside out and it's all one skin; the "I" as a kind of surface upon which the rest of the world meets. The notion of some "I" up here [points to his head] has always bothered me, consciousness up here. But Daphne points to herself down here [points to his stomach].

LLT: Maybe it's a meeting of the two.

FW: I put consciousness and conscience together and get guilt and thought. Being conscious is being aware—

LLT: What does that have to do with guilt? Consciousness and conscience are two separate terms.

FW: Same root.

LLT: I don't believe in the authority of roots or origins. I'm more interested in displacing authority—I don't know what originary meaning is. Definite definition? Well . . . let's talk about the dream-like quality of some of your images, as when you write that living on the prairies was like living under water. I don't mean dream in the sense of what happens when we're asleep, but in those kinds of images you use to apprehend the world.

FW: Images are very important to my poetics, images being both pictures and magic. Going back to roots, etymologically, image and magic are connected through that notion of now you see it and now you don't. I'm fascinated by the notion that you can create an image of something in your brain and it becomes true for you. I'm fascinated by the power of the

image. I heard wonderful things about cancer therapy that has to do with image making. I'm frightened to death by the fact that I'm creating cancer for myself, or that I'm creating Alzheimer's for myself—that we do this to ourselves. How do we control that? I think writers are close to being psychics when they are dealing with images and dreams. I mean, it's not so psychical, or otherworldly. It's not hallucinatory—it's literally part of a world that we can be in. I like to pay attention to that aspect of my writing . . . the image making. I really hate the term "psychic." What I mean is the literal meaning of the psyche at work.

LLT: Are those the images that belong to Lacan's "imaginary," those images that exist before we translate them through the symbolic of language.

FW: I guess I would agree that we get at them through language constructs.

LLT: One depends on the other. Except in our society we have been so preoccupied with the symbolic, language as effective tool, that we have repressed that side of us that makes the images and the rhythms that you were talking about. I've just written a review of Diana Hartog's book *Candy from Strangers* which I think is an incredibly good book. What I liked about it was how she retains that dream-like quality, the imagery, the imaginary that is expressed through the symbolic. They are so well integrated. Perhaps that's why I like *Music at the Heart of Thinking* so much—because it's also well integrated but at another level of play. It's that perfect tension you were talking about. You have the cadence, the rhythm, the feeling and the intellect. I like that.

FW: Well I do too. [Laughter] I think that's me. Music. Heart. Thinking.

LLT: It's refreshing to have the thinking part in there as well. Listening to you today, and having read both your poetry and articles, you seem unapologetic about using theory and intellect in your work. I find that in Canada there's a resistance to theory, a reluctance to accept intellectual ideas around writing. Why do you think that is?

FW: If people bother to read this at all—which they probably won't because it's about Fred Wah by Lola Tostevin, and people don't like us to talk about these things, Lola [laughter]—they may well cringe at the Olson references. I know that I'm frightened by what I don't know. I've tried to make use of the notion that Olson called the dance of the intellect. How does it go? The head by way of the ear to the syllable, and the heart by way of the breath to the line—the poetic line as the line to the heart and the syllable as the threshing floor of the intellect. The two units that one had to pay attention to in poetry were line and syllable. Except, of course, for those writers who continue to think that

story is the central feature of our world, exclusively. For me, intellect has always been a dancy thing, something to play with, and that's not usually the way intellect is thought of—as movement, as sparks that fly. The speed of thought. Certainly in *Music at the Heart of Thinking* I'm interested in the relationship between head and hand. A lot of that comes from doing free writing which most people do now. The synapse between thinking something and writing it fascinates me.

LLT: Do you do a lot of writing like that? I don't get the impression that *Music at the Heart of Thinking* was written like that. Don't you do a lot of rewrites?

FW: Every chance I get to change a piece, I'll change it, but I do a lot of writing by hand. I love that sense about the computer, that you can change things so easily. I had problems with a manuscript a few years ago. *Breathin' My Name With a Sigh* was a long poem, so that every time I changed one part of it, it had echo effects and I had to change a number of other pieces in it and it just got too trying to retype it. That's when I got onto the word processor. I've always believed, and like the notion, that the author is the authority in the writing, although I don't want to hang that heavily over the writing. Sometime people have been taken aback that I would change a poem after it's been published, but I will. If I have to type something up, send something to somebody, I'll have another go at it.

LLT: When you say that the author has the authority over the text, what do you think of reader as the authority over your text?

FW: Oh, that's getting interesting too. I'm just starting to think about that. The listener. By and large, I've not thought too much about the reader when I've written. I know the reader is there, that there's a listener at the back of my mind. Who that *is* has interested me, as a problem in writing. A friend of mine in Calgary, Jackie Fleming, was talking about that—the devaluation of the listener.

LLT: Devaluation from whose point of view?

FW: From everyone's point of view. In the language event, the listener might get it, might not get it, but the speaker/writer is the one who gets it all, so we devalue the role of the listener. She was talking about this as a catholic construct. She's interested in re-evaluating the listener and devaluing the speaker.

LLT: Well there are many theorists who have been interested in making the reader her own writer of the text. Because of the obliqueness and difficulty of a series like *Music*, for example, the reader cannot be passive. Instead of devaluing the reader, it creates another writer. By

making her own connections, her own resolutions, the reader becomes the writer of your text.

FW: Yeah, OK. I'm a little curious about the connection, the relationship between the male/female thing. The listener being passive, female, receptacle and the writer being active—

LLT: Exactly, but with a series like *Music*, the reader can't be passive, she has to become active, to get anything out of the pieces.

FW: Oh, absolutely. I want to make the reader pay attention. . .

LLT: It's what Barthes called a writing of seduction versus a writing of conviction. You seduce the reader into taking an active part instead of convincing her into remaining passive. [Laughter]

FW: OOOhhh . . . [Laughter] I should really read those guys. They confirm everything we do . . . [Laughter]

LLT: You're going to Paris to work on a project. What's the new project you're working on?

FW: It's a series of poems called *The Gallery Series*—that's the working title anyway. It has to do with painting, photographs, reading a picture, responding to a picture, translating a picture, dealing with the problems around the artistic and technical problems. I've never had any training in the fine arts, so I don't really know what I'm doing—

LLT: That's probably better.

FW: [Laughter] Yes, it's probably better to know that you don't know what you're doing.

LLT: I mean if you're going to come to a painting to transcreate, to read it, as you did with *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.*, it's best to come to it with no preconceived idea or academic training.

FW: Yes, I want to use it as a way to learn and train myself about the arts. I'm still very ignorant especially around painting. I love painting, paintings, but have had problems with technical aspects, such as the frame, the edges are so obvious. I've had problems with the economy of art, it's so expensive. I'm interested in the politics, the Marxist stuff around visual art, and what critics like John Berger have to say. I'm also just plain interested in going to a gallery and giving myself over to a painting that takes me in. There's this big Jackson Pollock painting at the Art Gallery in Buffalo and when I was a student there I used to go the Knox pretty often and I always found myself magnetically drawn to this

Pollock piece. It was a kind of stock stereotypical Jackson Pollock piece, but it was original and huge. I had expected my reaction to be oh well, it's a typical Pollock, it's helter skelter, then walk away. But I kept going back to that painting until I finally let myself be in it for a while. I love the sense of half closing the eyes the way you do when you want to see a painting at different angles, give yourself to the sensuousness of the painting. I've never written anything about that and I'm interested in articulating the images that surround that experience. So *The Gallery Series* is allowing me to do a number of things. It's allowing me to play—the form of the pieces is not set. Most of them are line poems so far, not necessarily prose poems. And they are allowing me to find out about the artist. I was thinking how visual art is more distant from its creator than writing because in writing there is usually such a strong identification of authority, but not so much in painting. I've always loved Josef Albers' stuff but I've never let myself write his name. To let yourself write that name in a poem requires a confidence of who that person is in terms of address. Many of the poems address the creator of the art, so that there's a second person in the poems. There's a you who usually made the painting.

LLT: It's a different concept from *Pictograms*. You didn't address a "you" in those pieces.

FW: It's still a transcreational process however. Moving something from one place to another. I'm using the painting as a way of generating the compositional elements that I want in the poem. So that's not so different from *Pictograms*, although there I wasn't concerned about who the author was. There's not that direct an address, but as soon as you ask the question "what does it mean," then you're really asking what the author or artist means. The whole world of meaning has to do with "authority"—with author, creator. Compositionally the process isn't that different.

LLT: How does that differ from, say, *Waiting for Saskatchewan*. Is that a transcreational process? The images that you were carrying with you.

FW: Except I wasn't using an object, a representation—

LLT: Weren't you using a representation of your father—

FW: I was using an apparition . . . I don't mean apparition in any awful or scary sense—I'm always overjoyed when I see him. Wow, there he goes again. But I'm not able to hang on to the apparition long enough to make anything other than the event of "oh, I keep seeing my father since he's died and what's that all about." So it gets tossed back into a dishing out of memory, of sentimentalism, of nostalgia, working out feelings. It's a much more human or understandable kind of narrative than the playing around that artists do, though I think that playing around gets to be as

serious as those stories, as those narratives. *Waiting for Saskatchewan* is biography. My working with painting, I don't think, is biography. It may become biography, but the working in it isn't.

LLT: I find it hard to distinguish between the two. Tracing, graphing, to me can only be biographical. You said yourself before, that you write what's already there.

FW: Yeah . . . I don't know . . . Shirley Neuman is writing a chapter for something on *Waiting for Saskatchewan* as biography. That's why I'm using the term—it's not a term I usually use—but it made sense what she was saying. *Bio* . . . I think working with a painting is more *geo*.

LLT: We've almost come to the end of the tape and I don't have a final question for you. I'll leave it up to you to say something brilliant.

FW: Something brilliant . . . Meaning is everything.

LLT: Meaning is everything . . . What do you mean by that?

FW: [Laughter] Well, Bowering is always on my ass to make my meaning clear. He's publishing a series called *Errata*—short prose pieces written from the same stance as *Music at the Heart of Thinking*, in a way. But George's at least make sense. [Laughter] I mean you can understand exactly what he's saying and he keeps telling me, "God, Fred, I wish yours made more sense, I wish they were easier to understand," and I keep saying to him, "Well I agree George, and I'm going to try harder to make them more understandable to more people."

LLT: And are you?

FW: Oh yeah. I want people to understand, I'm not trying to mystify, subvert meaning—

LLT: That's interesting because you said Nicole influenced you and she certainly wants to subvert—

FW: I deny it . . . I deny it. [Laughter]

LLT: You deny it . . . Well don't simplify too much—

FW: God, are you kidding?

From *Music at the Heart of Thinking*

seventy-five

horizon full red w/ a few clouds across the sky down to the river
below Sentinel the dream gets dreary mist downstream the dam
gathers up huge hackels into the air these freezing nights with the
frost for the fog banks slunk against the tree-line each morning's
memory of night travel and meeting place in the ditch grass what
voice Plato thought dangered the elliptical island now that all
this milk Simpson paddled past simply for the pay-off Fenollosa
said wasn't there that's what autumn is this year.

seventy-seven

The world seems comfortably familiar and sometimes strangely familiar so deja vu but when it becomes unfamiliar or down-town centre decentral displaced place of all things negative capability a positive incapability to not know knowing narrates not just Wordsworth's big something else that is determines the rainbow of silence and noise with a clear dis-tortion at the edges of the supratatic acoustics at one end and cosmology at the other underneath dichten condensare ambiguous dysfunction fragmented rotten Rockies decidedly what's called fear of the hatchtop mountain or self-departure arrived and derived alter-native this making strange still oddly tied to earth no matter what.

eighty

(for Bill Sylvester)

Yesterday I was in Chinatown buying gai lan seeds. Chinese
broccoli. The green, crunchy stalks, blanched, and ladled over
with oyster sauce, make a fine lunch w/ rice, maybe some barbecued
duck. This morning I am in my daughter's kitchen in Vancouver and
I think of you and the gai lan. The connection isn't my choice; to me,
your skin has always showed a flush, a quizzical pudeur. Will
thought forever credit nonsense and the exact measure of our
hunger and our fever?

eighty-one
(for Karl Siegler)

Why then the one whirlpool when all the container two leaks
depth through its seams splendour soaks the sands sprung three as
song and not desire for the polar axle gravity gave no chance for
four his meta(m) five outstripped his harrowing death lyric left
over from six both but let him—us who want to be enduring
messengers seven will so said the wept-for fountain's Lament one
nine imaged water seeps from the mountainside maybe that's why
we wait or spring's beach butterfly's touch informs new distances
yet another story zinging motive you and your bike's antennae
spanned earth but the words all over the edge thirteen taste comes
thirsty

eighty-two

(for Bill Robertson)

Sometimes all it is is a simple interpolation not so falsely from the laws of narrative since you don't name her her perfumed head imaged quickly adolescent freedom and all possibility including everything to drink but maybe reading her she's my girl this pursuit meant to include marriage as soon as possible car job house who'd have thought smell could linger in lingo or car tires whisper the light that night right in front of all the happinesses prior to life and death love's same old story could be that's when meaning starts

eighty-seven

The distinct noise clarity makes from uncondemned memory beginning with small sheets of words turning very, very slowly slowing and knotting complete thoughts as sentences or fat stray objects probably stories of writing's reality dogs safely locked in waste land that far away from the perfect just goes to show what writers take for instance Bowering sans ing hopes for in a reader (confess it) mesmerized biotext not history not space but fear runs weeping from the imprint of fiction as a loaf of Triestian bread and all sorts of alibis for making sense right.

Myrrh: A Study of Persona in H.D.'s *Trilogy*

Dream fragment: In a dream I am inside her ribcage and look out between gleaming bright white bars of ribs into a sky so blue it dazzles and hurts my eyes. I am very aware of her exquisitely formed ribs shaping the space of sky I see.

. . . Another dream: I have bought her old house, a three-story Victorian on Puget Sound. I figure, with pencils and paper, that I am the third inhabitant since she lived there. I'm planning the work on the house to reveal her essence through the architectural structure. She still lives in the dream but it is only through the house that I can know her. I am working on the house with loving attention to detail in order to be close to her.

. . . Third dream: I am directed to find out about her Ka. I know she wrote *Kore and Ka* but that is not what the direction tells me. It's her Ka, her double, that I am to search for.

The *Ka*, in the ancient religion of Egypt, is the second self, the immortal principle of a person, closely related to what we call spirit. The *Ka* was usually considered to remain in the other world for the duration of the body's passage on earth, while the *Ba*, the other double, stayed with the body. I had already been working with the idea of persona in H. D.'s *Trilogy* and had begun to wonder if there was a connection between *Ka* and persona. Both are connected to the self but are larger than the personal self. Both raise the question of what is behind the personal pronoun, the I, and suggest that whatever it is, it is multiple, not one and not indivisible.

Robert Elliott, in his discussion of personae, notes the curious contradiction of language that has our word *person*, which has come to mean something closely aligned to the essence of a human being, coming from the Latin *persona*, which is the mask an actor wore on stage. Latin usage is illustrated by this brief fable from *Phaedrus*:

Personam tragicam forte vulpus viderat: (a fox, after looking by chance at a tragic actor's mask, remarked: 'O what a majestic face is here, but it has no brains!') (Elliott 19)

The mask of Dionysus, carried high in a celebratory processional, shows its larger-than-life face to the world but behind the mask is empty space. Yet the mask is transformative. From Paleolithic times on, to put on the mask signifies that the wearer is taking on something of a god's potency. This side of the mask reverses our usual assumptions, for we also speak of a mask as a "false front," hiding the true person behind it.

Dramatis Personae are the characters in a play. In classical Greek theater there would traditionally be only three actors, and a new character would be indicated by the same actor putting on a new mask. *Persona* is used in modern literary criticism to mean "speaker" in a poem, or main character, not to be confused with the poet him/herself, but an assumed character, a consciousness separate from other consciousnesses, who sees, reacts and reports on the events in the world of the poem.

In *Trilogy* there is such a first person narrator. She is a poet who wanders through war-torn London during the Blitzkrieg. There are other characters in the poem, some human, but most are Presences who appear and disappear in various forms, some merging into others, then back again. Robert Duncan talks about such personae as the "Eternal Persons of the Poem." They live, act and react within the poem. They appear in the poetry of many writers and though they are colored by each writer's individual consciousness, they seem to have a life of their own that continues in an unbroken thread as they variously surface or remain in the deep pools of literature. Hermes-Thoth-Mercury is one such persona. His name is changed depending on the context he finds himself in. Isis-Mary-Aphrodite, who also can appear as Astarte or Mary Magdalene, is another. Or maybe Mary Magdalene is a separate persona from the Isis, the Aphrodite, the Mary. They merge and then re-separate, taking and dropping masks as they choose.

H. D. stayed in London throughout World War II and she wrote constantly. *The Walls Do Not Fall*, the first book of *Trilogy*, was published during the last months of 1942; *Tribute to the Angels*, in 1944; and *The Flowering of the Rod* was written during the last months of 1944. She also wrote *The Gift*, a family memory dealing with her Moravian background during the war years. H.D. had come to London in 1911 with the wave of "expatriate" American writers who lived most of their adult lives in Europe but wrote with a particularly American point of view. She lived in Europe from 1911 until her death in 1962.

The First World War had been shattering for H.D., as it had been for so many others of her generation, but the Second World War left her excited, riding a crest of creativity she hadn't experienced in years.

H.D. and Bryher, her lover, patron (matron), and almost constant companion for most of her adult life, were living in Lowndes Square in London. They were joined by Perdita, H.D.'s grown daughter, who writes a charming memory of herself and her "two mothers" living together again as adult women while the bombs fell on London and H.D. was writing *Trilogy* and *The Gift*.

As more bombs fell and dropped nearer and yet nearer to their apartment, Bryher sensibly wanted to leave for Cornwall, where she owned a share in a farm. The Sitwells, Edith, Osbert and Sacheverell, were kindly trying to get H.D. to stay at Renishaw, their family home in Derbyshire. H.D. steadfastly refused to leave London and the excitement of being part of the war. She wrote, in 1940, of the Battle of Britain:

Now excitement rises like sap in a tree. I am happy. I am happier than I have ever been. It seems to me in my whole life . . . we were able, night after night, to pass out of the unrealities and the chaos of night-battle and see clear. If my mind at those moments had one regret, it was that I might not be able to bear witness to this truth, I might be annihilated before I had time to bear witness. I wanted to say, 'when things become unbearable a door swings open or a window.' (Guest 254)

The flood of poetry that World War II unleashed in H.D. came after long years of poetic silence. Her last poems, *Red Roses for Bronze*, had been published in 1931. In the ten year interim she had written novels but her major energy was taken up with her studies of the occult and her psychoanalysis with Sigmund Freud. *Trilogy*, the first of the long poems that make up her later work, marks a change from her earlier poetry.

The early work, which is beyond the scope of this paper, is also full of persona poems. She speaks in the voice of Hermes, of Calypso, of Circe, of Zeus, of many "eternal persons of the poem," but the poems are visions of a larger-than-life reality. In the long poems of the more mature work, written after the decade long hiatus, the serious study, the searching self-analysis, and the divine forces all appear in the poem as Presences. They speak through her, instead of from her, in a new manner. When H.D. returns to poetry after the process of turning inward, she is ready to take on the function of the poet-seer-prophet who is speaker to and for the community. She is "bearing witness" as the whole world is in the chaos of destruction. *The Walls Do Not Fall* opens:

An incident here and there,
and rails gone (for guns)
from your (and my) old town square:

mist and mist-grey, no colour,
still the Luxor bee, chick and hare
pursue unalterable purpose

in green, rose-red, lapis;
they continue to prophesy
from the stone papyrus:
(WDNF 1)

She starts with community. It is "your" and "my" old town square. It's "our" rails that are gone for guns. But she cuts immediately to Egypt and the hieroglyphs of the bee, chick, and hare (which she will re-echo in *Helen in Egypt*) "pursue unalterable purpose." This is both purpose and message to us of purpose. *The Walls Do Not Fall* is dedicated to Bryher and a note before the poem says, "for Karnak 1923, from London 1942." Bryher and H.D. traveled to Egypt in 1923, the year the sepulchral chamber of the tomb of Tutankhamen was opened and some of its secrets studied.

This event loomed large in the popular imagination and manifested itself in an interest in things Egyptian; this greatly influenced the styles and fashions of the early 1920s. The event particularly carried potency for H.D. In the first stanzas of the poem written seventeen years later, she is establishing her poetics of finding keys to the present in the sacred Knowledge of the past:

the tomb, the temple; enter,
there as here, there are no doors:

...

ruin everywhere, yet as the fallen roof
leaves the sealed room
open to the air,

so, through our desolation,
thoughts stir, inspiration stalks us
through gloom:
(WDNF 1)

The bombed-out churches of London remind her of the opened tombs of Karnak and she finds a breath of fresh air and possibility through the devastation.

"Pompeii has nothing to teach us," she continues. Though she is evoking dead civilizations she knows there is no escape in time. Joseph Riddel, in his essay on H.D.'s "spiritual realism," says, "The discovery of *The Walls Do Not Fall* is that man cannot turn away from the present into the past but must add his own writing to the wall if it is not to fall" (466). Any single moment in history contains the pattern of essential experience which informs all time. Throughout *Walls*, H.D. is going for pattern by wrestling meaning from chaos.

the bone-frame was made for
no such shock knit within terror,
yet the skeleton stood up to it:

the flesh? it was melted away,
the heart burnt out, dead ember
tendons, muscles shattered, outer husk dismembered,

yet the frame held:
we passed the flame: we wonder
what saved us? what for?
(WDNF 1)

The major metaphor in *Walls* is alchemical. London is a fiery crucible undergoing suffering for the sake of change. Hermes, the patron deity of the alchemists, assumes importance in the poem, leading and facilitating both the content and form, for he is also the ruler of poetry. He will work through the instrument of the poet. She is saved as those around her die so that she can bear witness to the secret of the change that is happening all around her. Those saved have work to do; it is part of the Great Work—an alchemical term—and surviving is part of the point.

In me (the worm) clearly
is no righteousness, but this—

persistence; I escaped spider-snare,
bird-claw, scavenger bird-beak,

clung to grass-blade,
the back of a leaf

when storm-wind
tore it from its stem;

I escaped, I explored
rose-thorn forest,

was rain-swept
down the valley of a leaf;
(WDNF 6)

This poet persona is a tough little worm who not only survives but thrives on the difficult. She "spins her own shroud," and says, "I am yet unrepentant," a kind of stubborn refusal to be absorbed by the majority values of the world around her. She is outside of the conventions and, cheerfully, perhaps even self-consciously, insouciant about it.

Contrasted with the "I," and later the "we" of the poem, is the "you" and "they." The "I" and "we" are initiates into the mysteries and have a task to do with and for the spirit of the community: to transform the horror of the fire and bombs into something the collective spirit can use in

its process of becoming gold. The "you" and "they" of the poem are materialists who are unaware of the life of the spirit.

they snatched off our amulets,
charms are not, they said, grace;

but gods always face two-ways,
so let us search the old highways

for the true-rune, the right-spell,
recover old values;
(WDFN 2)

2

H.D. was a Virgo and she cared about such things. Her correspondence during the 30s and 40s with her friend Viola Jordan is full of astrological references. "I sign myself to some of my astrological friends ♃. It's quite funny, ever ♃. My moon is in ♒ (Aquarius) ruled by ♅ (Uranus)" (Friedman 308). (♁, of course, is the glyph for Moon.) H.D. wrote to Viola, "Now please do NOT tell Bill Williams [William Carlos Williams] or anyone like that, that I 'dabble' in this sort of thing . . . Anything like that makes people say 'mad' and as I said before, this is between ourselves & , you KNOW what people are like" (Friedman 273). Susan Friedman included a copy of H.D.'s chart in her dissertation. The chart is reconstructed from ten years of correspondence with H.D. and Viola Jordan about the astrological (Friedman 312). If H.D.'s deep involvement with her Freudian analysis confirmed her belief that "tribal myths" were buried in her own personal past, so did her studies in astrology.

I heard Scorpion whet his knife,
I feared Archer (taut his bow),

Goat's horns were threat,
would climb high? then fall low;

across the abyss
the Waterman waited,

this is the age of the new dimension,
dare, seek, seek further, dare more,

here is the alchemist's key,
it unlocks secret doors,
(WDFN 30)

The book that H.D. used for astrology was Evangeline Adams' *Astrology: Your Place Among the Stars*. Adams does not treat the Virgo sun-sign kindly, a tendency picked up by other authors of astrology books (which made all my early tentative interest in the material an approach-avoidance experience. I, too, am a Virgo, born on September 9, the day before H.D.) Virgos are said to be petty, earth-bound, fastidious housekeepers, dedicated to detail, and frigid sexually. Adams says, "His [Virgo's] outlook is apt to be petty and his reason itself hampered by the perpetual intrusion of the pragmatism viewpoint. He is, therefore, practically incapable of producing anything with the fire of true genius" (Adams 59 as quoted by Friedman 315). And later, "He instinctively prefers the letter to the spirit." D.H. Lawrence was another notable Virgo, born on September 11, who would figure importantly in H.D.'s art and life.

It was in the nature of H.D.'s art that she was able to transform that limiting view, as she was able to transform the Freudian material. *Trilogy* is a book about transforming the horror of war into Resurrection.

3

Virgin means one-in-herself; not maiden inviolate but maiden alone in-herself. (Nor Hall II).

We know the Greek word was *parthanos*. It meant virgin. There is speculation but we don't know for sure if *parthanos* referred to the intact state of the spirit or body at the time of Homer. H.D. was well aware of the double condition of the word:

Achilles? Odysseus? Paris?
but it was from Song, you took the seed,
the sun-seed from the Sun;

none may turn back
who know that last inseminating kiss;
this is your world, *Leuké*,

reality of the white sand,
the meadow . . .
Parthenos.
(*Hermetic Definition* 18)

Helen is speaking from *Leuké*, the white island. She is recalling the lovers in her life but finding the "seed . . . inseminating kiss" in Song.

Its root of white crystal stretches toward the deep
Its seat is the central place of the earth;
its foliage is the couch of Zikim, the primeval mother

Into the heart of this holy house spreading its shade like a forest
No man has entered.

(Quoted by M. Esther Harding, *Woman's Mysteries* 48)

This is a 5,000 year old hymn to the Sumerian goddess at Eridu, Inanna, who deeply embodies both the spirit of erotic love and the ritual quality of *parthanos*, virginity, when she does her solitary soul-work. She is the Queen and the Goddess and both states are part of the holy weaving of the world. The hymn is also possibly the earliest poem we have about the tree of life, which will figure importantly in H.D.'s Kabalah studies. The poem describes the Moon Mother in the branches of the tree.

In Venice she went to the church Pound so particularly loved, Santa Maria dei Miracoli, of which he had written in his cantos of the sea-mermaids inside on the columns of the nave. The church became one of her favorite. She succeeded so well in the transubstantiation of Santa Maria dei Miracoli that it became not only Pound's church of the mermaid song, but hers as well. She changed it into Saint Mary of the Miracles. The Virgin Saint, Virgo, the planet of H.D. (Guest 227)

There are three virgin goddesses in the Greek pantheon, Artemis, Athena and Hestia. These three are not only virgins in the sense of woman-unto-herself, they are immune to the powers of Aphrodite, says Homer. But goddesses—and gods—were different in a time before Homer.

Athena plays an important role in Homer, and in the art and literature of the city that is her namesake, so she is better documented than most of the goddesses. She is the female born of her father, Zeus, alone. She springs full grown and armed out of his head and her birth cry is a battle cry. She is a warrior goddess, protector of the citadel, armed with shield, spear, and helmet. In this capacity she is patroness of many mortal heroes. She is also the goddess of wisdom and intellect, grey-eyed Athena, and her symbol is an owl.

She disguises herself as a man at times to meet with mortals. Helene Deutsch, a Freudian, says she is the archetype of the masculine woman who finds success in a man's world by denying her own sexuality (292). This, from a time when the imagination could not stretch sufficiently to hold both strength and sexuality together in a woman.

As goddess of the *polis* she is patroness of civilized industry and presides over the crafts. A woman's skill in weaving and handicrafts are associated with her gifts.

The Parthenon is her Virgin Temple.

Her direct contrast is Artemis, Our Lady of the Wild Beasts, who loves mountains and forests above all. She is a hunter, skilled with bow and arrow; goddess of the nocturnal hunt, the moon, and the hounds that bay at the moon. As the many-breasted mother, she nourishes all life and her special compassion is the physical aspects of a woman's life:

menstruation, childbirth and death. Like writing, the solitary activities. The Artemis of Classical Greece evolved from a much older, probably Neolithic, Mother Goddess. In Classical Greece her refusal to marry would have been interpreted as a refusal of sexuality. As a Mother Goddess, in a time before time, she would have had many lovers, but no marriage. By Classical times she was considered a virgin—intact in the modern sense of the word.

There is little mythology about Hestia. She is viewed by some as the archetypal old maid because she stays at home to keep the fires burning.

we nameless initiates,
born of one mother,

companions
of the flame.
(WDNF 13)

The direct descendants of Hestia are the Vestal Virgins in Roman religion. They are to keep the sacred flame eternally burning. They are women who dedicated themselves to the temple for a time, for sacred purposes. After a period of years they were free to leave, marry, and have children. Like Inanna, their state of virginity had to do with the nature of their work.

The Hermit card in the Tarot is ruled by Virgo. Hermes, like the Hermit, carries a torch and his work is, by necessity, solitary.

H.D. wrote about a triad of goddesses in *Triplex*: Artemis, Athena, and, instead of Hestia, she invokes the shimmering Aphrodite, to whom she would write so many poems.

Triplex
A Prayer

Let them not war in me,
these three;
Saviour-of-cities,
Flower-of-destiny
and she,
Twinborn-with-Phoebus,
fending gallantly.

Let them not hate in me,
these three;
Maid
of the luminous grey-eyes,
Mistress
of honey and marble implacable white thighs
and Goddess,

chaste daughter of Zeus,
most beautiful in the skies.

Let them grow side by side in me,
these three;
violets,
dipped purple in stark Attic light,
rose,
scorched (on Cyprus coast)
ambrosial white
and wild
exquisite hill-crocus
from Arcadian snows.
(*Collected Poems* 291)

And concerning the war in her . . . :

What did the poem matter? They were so much fire-works, escape. And why all this escape? Why this vaunted business of experience, of sex-emotion and understanding that they made so much of? It might be all right for men, but for women, any woman, there was a biological catch and taken at any angle, danger. You dried up and were an old maid, danger. You drifted into the affable *hausfrau*, danger. You let her rip and had operations in Paris . . . , danger.

There was one loophole, one might be an artist. Then the danger met the danger, the woman was man-woman. The man was woman-man. (*Bid Me To Live* 135-36)

The figure who is woman-man at the very heart of Virgo is the androgynous Hermes, the bringer of art—the one loophole in the male-female rigidity that would have suffocated her.

Hermes Trismegistus
is patron of alchemists;

his province is thought,
inventive, artful and curious;

his metal is quicksilver,
his clients, orators, thieves and poets;

steal then, O orator,
plunder, O poet,

take what the old-church
found in Mithra's tomb,

candle and script and bell,
take what the new-church spat upon

and broke and shattered;
(TA 1)

This poem begins *Tribute to the Angels*, the second book of the *Trilogy*. H.D. is invoking the artful plunderer to lead her through her task of transformation. She called *Tribute to the Angels* a "premature peace poem" (Guest 269). The world lies in broken shards around her and she commits heresy to put it back together. She is well aware that the traditions she draws from are outlawed ones. Her task is to collect the fragments of the sacred, "what the new-church spat upon," melt them in the alchemical crucible of the burning city to distill and crystalize the gem of her vision. It is ultimately healing work and Hermes with his staff of twined snakes, the Caduceus, is also the god of healing. Our doctors today still practice their art under Hermes' staff—a magical image from antiquity.

"The serpent is certainly the sign or totem, through the ages, of healing and of that final healing when we slough off, for the last time, our encumbering flesh or skin. The serpent is symbol of death, as we know, but also of resurrection" (TF 65).

Let us, however, recover the Sceptre,
the rod of power:

it is crowned with the lily-head
or the lily-bud:

it is Caduceus; among the dying
it bears healing:

or evoking the dead,
it brings life to the living.
(WDNF 3)

Hermes first invented the lyre and gave it to Apollo as a gift. Apollo took the instrument and developed lyric poetry—which carries a double heritage: the hermetic quality moves at the boundaries between the precise emotions of Apollo and the mobile, elusive, shadowy, ever-changing liminal states of Hermes, who travels in darkened passages back and forth from upper world to Hades. The strength of the lyric, lyre-inspired, poem is not so much what it says but the chords of resonance it sounds in the soul. And body. For those elusive chords also resound in the deepest rhythms of the body, as the lyre is the instrument of dance and the Graces.

Hermes is the first of the Eternal Persons we need to look at in some depth in order to understand the "secret tradition," called Hermeticism, that H.D. brings to *Trilogy*. She does this not to substitute another dogma for an established dogma, but to reenter the older tradition of "essences," the magical essences "the new-church spat upon," in order to do her transformative synthesis of the traditions to form "the book of the new."

H.D. researched her material thoroughly and would have been aware of the various strains of Hermeticism.

4

Let us substitute
enchantment for sentiment,

re-dedicate our gifts
to spiritual realism,

scrape a palette,
point pen or brush,

prepare papyrus or parchment,
offer incense to Thoth,

the original Ancient-of-days,
Hermes-thrice-great,
(WDNF 35)

Hermes Trismegistus, or Thrice-Great Hermes, is the patron of alchemists and H.D.'s work is word alchemy. The great age of alchemical thought was the Renaissance and all the forward movement during it derived its vigor and emotional impulse from looking backward. The search for truth was a search for the early, the ancient, the original gold of a time when men and women might have been closer to the gods instead of to the baser metal of subsequent times.

The Egyptian God Thoth, the scribe of the gods, the divinity of wisdom, becomes the Greek Hermes, the Roman Mercury. A large body of work forms around this Divinity, probably dated between A.D. 100 and 300. "The *Asclepius* purports to describe the religion of the Egyptians, and by what magic rites and processes the Egyptians drew down the powers of the cosmos into the statues of their gods. The *Pimander* (the first of the treatises in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the collection of fifteen Hermetic dialogues) gives an account of the creation of the world which is in parts reminiscent of Genesis. Other treatises describe the ascent of the soul through the spheres of the planets to the divine realms above them, or give ecstatic descriptions of a process of regeneration by which the soul casts off the chains which bind it to the material world and

becomes filled with divine powers and virtues." (Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* 3)

The ascent of the soul through the spheres is specifically Gnostic thought. Hermeticism comes from first and second century thought, the time and the place of Gnostic writing, and the two traditions cross-fertilize and merge. Hermeticism harks back to the ancient Egyptian magical religion and moves forward through medieval magicians, where it is kept hidden and underground due to the church's ban on magic, and finally bursts into light in the relative freedom of thought which flourished during the Renaissance. The world of the second century A.D. was seeking intensively for knowledge. The philosophical thought of the previous age had run out of vitality and degenerated into dialectical exercises. The second century turned to another way of seeking truth—through intuition and magic. The Hermetic treatises often take the form of dialogues between an adept and an apprentice, usually culminating in an ecstasy of illumination on the part of the adept. It is like the gnostic revelation or experience of the ascent of the soul through the spheres of the planets to become immersed in the divine. Hermeticism becomes "actually a religion, a cult without temples or liturgy, followed in the mind alone, a religious philosophy or philosophical religion containing a gnosis" (Yates 5).

In the *Pimander*, the Hermetic account of creation, the act of creation is said to be through a "luminous Word," which is also the Son of God. The Word, the Logos, is always associated with Hermes.

... Mercury, Hermes, Thoth
invented the script, letters, palette;

the indicated flute or lyre-notes
on papyrus or parchment

are magic, indelibly stamped
on the atmosphere somewhere,

forever; remember, O Sword,
you are the younger brother, the latter-born,

your Triumph, however exultant,
must one day be over,

*in the beginning
was the Word.
(WDNF 10)*

H.D. makes it clear from the beginning that she is making a contrast between war, the way of the "they," and gnosis, art, the way of the "us," "companions of the flame."

The Hermetic literature divides into two branches: the philosophical treatises such as the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and the astrological, alchemical and magical literature. Both are the teachings of Hermes Trismegistus and they are interlocking systems. Francis Yates tells us, "Gnosticism and magic go together. The pessimistic gnostic needs to know the magical passwords and signs by which he may rid himself of the evil material of the stars in his upward ascent through the spheres. The optimistic gnostic has no fear to draw down by sympathetic magic, invocation, talismans, those same powers of the universe which he believes to be good" (Yates 4).

The supposition of magic is that there is pattern in the universe and the great law is "as above, so below." Every object in the material world is full of energies poured down upon it from the star to which it is connected. If one wants, for instance, to engage the powers of Venus, one must know what plants, what stone, what metal, what animals, what color corresponds to Venus and how to inscribe these on talismans made of the right Venus materials and at the precisely correct astrological moment. Not only are the planets connected to such complex correspondences, but also the twelve signs of the zodiac and all the constellations and the stars of the heavens. In this system "All is One," united by an infinitely complex system of relationships. The magician is one who knows how to enter this system and use it. The whole art of magic consists in guiding the influx of *spiritus* into *materia*.

There is a spell, for instance,
in every sea-shell:
(WDFN 4)

There is an image of Mercury from the *Picatrix*, an Arabic work on magic probably written in the twelfth century: "The form of a man has a cock on his head, on a throne, having feet like those of an eagle, with fire in the palm of his left hand and having below his feet this sign (a magical character)" (Yates 54). Unfortunately, my source does not reproduce the magic character. The glyph we use for Hermes is ☿. It incorporates the glyph for Aphrodite ♀, for Hermes is man-woman, woman-man, the hermaphrodite.

... I dream of Hermes as "a little man with a big cock," the words of the dream. In the dream he fucks me in the ear, the inseminating words. The way Gabriel passes the seed of God to Mary.

From the *Picatrix*:

There are among the Chaldeans very perfect masters in this art and they affirm that Hermes was the first who constructed images by means of which he knew how to regulate the Nile against the motion of the moon. He also built a temple to the sun,

and he knew how to hide himself from all so that no one could see him, although he was within it. It was he, too, who in the east of Egypt constructed a City twelve miles long within which he constructed a castle which had four gates in each of its four parts. On the eastern gate he placed the form of an Eagle; on the western gate, the form of a Bull; on the southern gate the form of a Lion, and on the northern gate the form of a Dog. Into these images he introduced spirits which spoke with voices, nor could anyone enter the gates of the City except by their permission. There he planted trees in the midst of which was a great tree which bore the fruit of all generation. On the summit of the castle he caused to be raised a tower thirty cubits high on the top of which he ordered to be placed a light-house the colour of which changed every day until the seventh day after which it returned to the first colour, and so the City was illuminated with these colours. Near the City there was abundance of waters in which dwelt many kinds of fish. Around the circumference of the City he placed engraved images and ordered them in such a manner that by their virtue the inhabitants were made virtuous and withdrawn from all wickedness and harm. The name of the City was Adocentyn. (Yates 54)

This charming story illustrates the Hermetic magic of the imagination. Hermes has made and animated the animal and bird gods of Egypt by infusing them with spirit so that they speak with gods' voices and guard this magical Utopia. The colors flash from the central tower and cover the circumference of the City. They are seven in number, one for each day of the week, and they must be the color of the god of the planet that rules that day. Friday, for instance, would have to be an apple green because Friday is Venus' day. The images he placed around the City made the correct astral influences to keep the people happy and virtuous. The tree, of course, must be the Tree of Life. "When any [piece of] matter is exposed to superior things . . . immediately it suffers a supernal influence through that most powerful agent, of marvelous force and life, which is everywhere present . . . as a mirror reflects a face, or an Echo the sound of a voice" (*Asclepius* quoted in Yates 66). Hermes, the Thief, is the spirit of the Picaresque, the wily trickster, the lively and resourceful rogue-on-a-journey. The comprehensive treatise on his sympathetic and astral magic goes under the name *Picatrix*, written in Arabic, probably during the twelfth century.

5

The Hermetic literature and the *Picatrix* tell us that ancient Egypt had three *decans*, or lesser gods or Presences, for each sign of the Zodiac. Thus there are 36 decans, or 36 gods who rule over the divisions into ten of the 360 degrees of the circle of the zodiac. The Egyptians had divinised time,

not in an abstract sense, but in the concrete sense that each moment of each day had its god who must be placated as the moments pass. They are sidereal gods, or angels, of time. Each comes out of the archives of the Egyptian temples and has definite astrological significance as a "horoscope" presiding over the forms of life born within its time period as well as projects undertaken in its sphere of influence.

Every hour, every moment
has its specific attendant Spirit;

the clock-hand, minute by minute,
ticks round its prescribed orbit;
(TA 24)

Another version of the *decans* appears in the form of H.D.'s angels. In *Tribute to the Angels* H.D. extended her studies of astrology, the Tarot, the Hermetic tradition, Gnosticism, to include the invocation to angels, celestial powers emanating from the distant heavens and governing the hours, days, months and years. The angels, like her allusions to the lotus, the twin horns of Hathor, or the erect serpent on the Pharaoh's brow, are not decorative or purely aesthetic. They are specific presences evoked as in practical magic, to bring about a specific result—which is the completion of the poem bearing their wisdom and sacred presence to the contemporary world.

In H.D.'s earlier poems she was priestess, performing the sacred tasks and finding the gods' meaning in her own life and, by extension, universal meaning for her readers. During World War II, however, the times demanded a step further. She, as scribe with Hermes-Thoth as her guide, is calling up living presences of the divine to transform the world. Friedman says, "The roar of planes, the German wings covering the city with bombs is not the only reality; there is also the reality of the wings of protective angels" (416).

The angels in the poem are in a thematic structure of sevens, which will become seven demons in the next book, *Flowering of the Rod*.

. . . He of the seven stars,

he of the seventy-times-seven
passionate, bitter wrongs,

He of the seventy-times-seven
bitter, unending wars.
(TA 3)

The first six of the seven are male angels who have protected and nourished different parts of her journey to this point and she pauses to

give thanks and evoke their continued presence. It is a ritual of naming that brings presence:

this is the flowering of the rood,
this is the flowering of the reed,

where, Uriel, we pause to give
thanks that we rise again from death and live.
(TA 7)

According to Gustav Davidson's *Dictionary of Angels*, which he apparently wrote while in correspondence with H.D., Uriel is "fire of God, regent of the sun, flame of God" (298). Uriel is also the angel of the month of September and may be ritually invoked by those born in that month. We remember both H.D. and D.H. Lawrence were born in September. Janice Robinson identifies each of the six angels with men in H.D.'s life and she names Uriel as Lawrence, the man of fiery inspiration that H.D. was intensely involved with and who was so influential in her life (318).

6

H.D. comes to the seventh angel, Annael, who has a female presence, who is linked to Venus, to Aphrodite. Annael (or Anael) is the ruler of the Friday angels, the planet Venus, and is one of the luminaries concerned with human sexuality and love, Davidson tells us. Angels are usually referred to as "he" and Davidson is no exception. In most traditions, angels are believed to be above gender, so both or neither, male or female. H.D.'s Annael, however, is linked with the Lady who appears as a presence in *Tribute to the Angels*:

it was the Angel which redeemed me,
it was the Holy Ghost—

a half-burnt-out apple-tree
blossoming;

this is the flowering of the rood,
this is the flowering of the wood,

where Annael, we pause to give
thanks that we rise again from death and live.
(TA 23)

The miracle that appears in *Tribute to the Angels* is linked to the combination of Uriel and Annael:

So we hail them together,
one to contrast the other,

two of the seven Spirits,
set before God

as lamps on the high-altar,
for one must inexorably

take fire from the other . . .
(TA 17)

Annael is the angel of the presence of the Lady H.D. calls forth in her word alchemy:

Now polish the crucible
and set the jet of flame

under, till *marah-mar*
are melted, fuse and join

and change and alter,
mer, mere, mère, mater, Maia, Mary,

Star of the Sea,
Mother.
(TA 8)

She finds a "Bitter, bitter jewel/in the heart of the bowl" (TA 9) As alchemist, she has crystallized her vision. With the aid of the sacred presences she has created it into substance.

But something is wrong here:

O swiftly, re-light the flame
before the substance cool,

for suddenly we saw your name
desecrated; knaves and fools

have done you impious wrong, . . .
(TA 11)

Maia, Mary, Mother, Venus, Aphrodite, Astarte, has been done "impious wrong." The poet well knows the story of the female divinity and what has happened to that sacred quality in the ensuing years.

The sacred quality of sexuality and fertility degenerates, in a history of 3,000 years of thought predominately hostile to the feminine, into a

"venereous, lascivious" Venus. The wise women of an earlier time become the "foul witches" (11), nine million of whom were burned, hanged and mutilated in the horror of the "burning times" in medieval Europe. This is history evoked but not told. It's background for the parts of the story H.D. would rather concentrate on.

This is Patricia Monaghan from her *Book of Goddesses and Heroines* on the story we have of Aphrodite from Classical Greece:

The energy that Aphrodite represented, however humanly true, was almost incompatible with Greek culture. The Great Goddess of impersonal indiscriminate lust meshed poorly with the emerging Greek intellectualism. Thus the tale of the goddess' love for the ever-dying god ceased to be central to her legend and became that of just another casual attraction to a pretty face. The rather smutty little tale is a far cry from those masterpieces of theological understanding, the stories of Ishtar, Inanna, and Cybele, with their symbolic description of the hopeless love of the earth herself for the life she continually produces and inevitably consumes. (24)

If Venus-Aphrodite becomes a "smutty little tale" in Classical times, her fate becomes worse during the ensuing years of Christianity, for we read in church doctrine that man is the head and woman is the body and that the body with its lascivious desires is to be kept under strict control.

7

return, O holiest one,
Venus whose name is kin

to venerate,
venerator.
(TA 12)

The task of this poem is to restore the energy of the Goddess to literature, and, by extension, to reintroduce Her into the consciousness of contemporary times. H.D. has performed her ritual magic in this poem. She has evoked the angels by name and the gods she needs to help her with all of their corresponding attributes.

we asked for no sign
but she gave a sign unto us;

sealed with the seal of death,
we thought not to entreat her

but prepared us for burial;
then she set a charred tree before us,

burnt and stricken to the heart;
was it may-tree or apple?
(TA 19)

But it is not merely a charred tree in the bombed out garden square. It is a clear symbol for resurrection and life out of death.

8

The tree becomes its own persona in this poem as the myrrh does in the next section of *Trilogy*. The tree is the Tree of Life, that ancient symbol that can, in its complexity, encompass all of life in the aspects of its root, branches and trunk. Her question, "was it may-tree or apple?" is not an idle question. Both are aspects of Aphrodite in her many forms and moods and both can be positive or negative aspects depending on their balance points. The apple tree, that original Tree of Life, becomes the Tree of Knowledge in the garden of Eden, the fruit of which is often interpreted to be sexual knowledge. "There is a secret tradition of 'gnose' that the god who forbade Adam and Eve to eat of the Tree of Knowledge was a jealous god keeping men and women in an ignorant, animal state," says Friedman (368). The apple is the knowledge of the fruit of fertility, which also becomes the bitter fruit of mortality. The fear of mortality becomes the fear of the body with its disenchanting tendency to degenerate, which becomes fear of the female (for complicated but not very good reasons; actually, men have bodies too), which has had a tremendous effect on history that H.D. alludes to but has the restraint to not spell out. She is more interested in "writing the book of the new."

The hawthorn tree, with its flowers that smell "like female sexuality" (Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* 174) is that aspect of sexuality that takes joy in itself, disregarding any ensuing fruit of the union. Aphrodite is a fertility goddess and she is a mother but that fact is somewhat beside the point for her. There is a tradition that says do not bring the hawthorn blossoms into the house when there are children present, that flowering may-thorn, whitethorn, hawthorn, are dangerous for children. Is it possible that the fear of an unbridled female sexuality is responsible for the feeling that hawthorn is dangerous to the stability of the home, and, so, to children?

... she bore

none of her usual attributes;
the Child was not with her.
(TA 32)

Hawthorn seems to be a symbol of both sexuality and chastity, for the Beltane (Mayday) celebrations of may-tree flower gathering, maypole dancing, and sex in the fields with a stranger, are strangely juxtaposed with a tradition of May being a month to abstain from sexual intercourse. Graves' *White Goddess* discusses this aspect. May was to be a time of cleansing and purification, an unlucky month for marriage, with taboos on new clothes and sexuality. Is this another reference to a ritual virginity, in this case, coming after the fertility celebrations of Beltane? As in the Hermit aspect of Hermes, periodic chastity, a sort of spiritual virginity, may be part of the necessary work to keep sexuality sacred: "but gods always face two-ways" (WDNF 2).

The apple, when cut transversely, reveals the five pointed star, or magic pentacle. It is a symbol for earth and for Kore, the Virgin, hidden in the heart of the earth during her voyage to the underworld. It was the custom for a gypsy girl to choose her lover by tossing an apple to him. As hawthorn flowers were the freedom of Beltane sexuality, apple blossoms became wedding flowers because they represented the virgin aspect of the goddess whose maturity produced fruit. H.D. would surely have been aware of all the implications of "may-tree or apple."

9

The Walls Do Not Fall, the first book of the *Trilogy*, is H.D.'s announcement of her immersion in the ancient traditions and her first revelation of the cosmic realms in which she will roam as poet-prophet in all of her later work. She has a term for her own syncretic version of the many traditions she draws from: it is "spiritual realism." For this work, Susan Friedman tells us, her most important sources were Ambelain's *Adam, dieu rogue* and *La Kabbale pratique*, both of which she owned and thoroughly marked, and the Bible. The first was published in 1941, and she was able to use the material for *Trilogy*. The second text did not appear until 1951 and she used it to write *Vale Ave*, *Sagesse* and *Helen in Egypt*. Friedman tells us, "If her library at Yale is any reliable indication, H.D.'s only source on the Kabala was Ambelain. . . he focuses heavily on the ties the early Kabbalists in the second century A.D. had with the Gnostics and the Ophites. This insistence on seeing the ties between Kabala and other mystical traditions leads him to merge without qualms the story of Jesus with Kabala, something a Jewish scholar would not do" (399).

The study and practice of Kabala has two main branches: the work with the letters, words and numbers to find the meaning behind the meaning, and the study of the Tree of Life. H.D. uses the Kabbalistic approach to word work throughout *Trilogy*. The puns, word games and manipulations are not just clever but lie in the belief that the letters are magical, vibrant emanations of the divine.

... I know, I feel
the meaning that words hide;

they are anagrams, cryptograms,
little boxes, conditioned

to hatch butterflies . . .
(WDNF 39)

For example:
Osiris equates O-sir-is or O-Sire-is;

Osiris,
the star Sirius,
(WDNF 40)

Sirius:
what mystery is this?
(WDNF 41)

Freud hands her an Osiris statue and says, "They are called the *answerers*, as their doubles or ka-s come when called." (TF 172)

The Tree of Life emerges as the half-charred, half-flowering tree in the center of *Tribute to the Angels*, at the center of the middle book of *Trilogy*. This position makes it the heart of the poem. The Tree is the symbol of the resurrection she seeks not only for herself but for her world, torn in war as it is.

After the miraculous tree becomes present in the poem, the Lady, who had been conjured by magic in a bowl, turns the full light of her Presence on the poem. The poet-persona has been thinking of Gabriel:

... I had thought

to address him as I had the others,
Uriel, Annael;

how could I imagine
the Lady herself would come instead?
(TA 28)

The poem gathers momentum in the somewhat hypnotic descriptions of the Lady:

We have seen her
the world over,

Our Lady of the Goldfinch,
Our Lady of the Candelabra,

Our Lady of the Pomegranate,
Our Lady of the Chair;
(TA 29)

In this poem she has become the history of Mariolatry in painting but she still retains some of her Venus aspect: "We see her hand in her lap/smoothing the apple-green/or the apple-russet silk" (TA 30); and "she bore/none of her usual attributes;/the Child was not with her" (TA 32).

With very little exception, all of *Trilogy* is in couplets with sparse end rhyme and rich and complex internal rhyme, a complicated play of vowel and consonant sounds. Metrically, the lines are dominated by iambic movement, are short, often trimeter or dimeter. The very spacious quality of her couplets on the page and apparent lack of contrivance in syntax allows the persona she calls forth to come forth. Each poem in *Trilogy* is one complete unbroken sentence, a completed act, living Presence. The Lady seems quite present in this section of the poem.

this is the new Eve who comes

clearly to return, to retrieve
what she lost the race,

given over to sin, to death;
she brings the Book of Life, obviously.
(TA 36)

And the pages of the book are blank. It is "the unwritten volume of the new"; "she is Psyche, the butterfly, / out of the cocoon" (TA 38). The female presence is to come back into history and write her own words this time. It will be "the same—different—the same attributes, / different yet the same as before" (TA 39). It will be "a new phase, a new distinction of color" (TA40). And if it really happens before we destroy the world, it could change the history of the human race.

10

If *The Walls Do Not Fall* is dedicated to wrestling meaning from chaos by finding the trace of the divine in modern times, *Tribute to the Angels* is an act of reintegration of the knowledge that leads to psyche's depth by the full flowering of the female principle of the divine. *The Flowering of the Rod* is a metaphor of the creation act in which the poet must participate, the "unwritten volume of the new," "the book of Life" the poet writes.

The central motif of *The Flowering of the Rod* is the story of Mary Magdalene and Kaspar the Mage, but the first eleven poems do not mention it, nor are they concerned with persona. I shudder to think of what a poetry workshop of our time would do with that lengthy first section that appears on the surface to have little to do with the main story of the book:

it is simple reckoning, algebraic,
it is geometry on the wing,

not patterned, a gentian
in an ice-mirror,

yet it is, if you like, a lily
folded like a pyramid,

a flower-cone,
not a heap of skulls;

it is a lily, if you will,
each petal, a kingdom, an aeon,

and it is the seed of a lily
that having flowered,

will flower again;
(FR 10)

It is, in short, not a reflected pattern of which she speaks, but like a genetic pattern from within, as in a seed. It is the pattern of Life she seeks from the old lore and the act of creation, bringing forth something new from the old—"No poetic phantasy / but a biological reality" (FR 9).

H.D. wrote *The Flowering of the Rod* wrote feverishly during the Christmas season of 1944, and it becomes a sort of Christmas poem with its references to snow, the Marys, Kaspar, the three Wise Men, and the birth of the Child at the end of the book—but that is only one gleam of light from this multi-faceted gem.

By the Christmas season of 1944, the war was drawing to a close. It was apparent that the Allies had won, and that there would be a world to rebuild. H.D. would leave all the destruction, and regeneration would be the central theme of the poem—love and resurrection, which she equates:

We have given until we have no more to give;
alas, it was pity, rather than love, we gave;

now having given all, let us leave all;
above all, let us leave pity

and mount higher
to love—resurrection
(FR 1)

and

pitiless, pitiless, let us leave

The-place-of-a-skull
to those who have fashioned it.
(FR 2)

The Place-of-the-Skull is Golgotha. Though the Christos figure is evoked in this poem, though it is about resurrection in the presence of Jesus, Mary, the Wise Men, the gift of the Magi, this is not a Christian poem. The resurrection she speaks of is in the context of her "spiritual realism," the holiness "the new church spat upon." As H.D. is consistently searching patterns in all the traditions, she is finding what she can use here and discarding the rest as dross. Because we are a Christian culture we tend to forget that Jesus is a recent addition to a long line of dying and reborn gods, a metaphor posed in the religion of many ancient cultures and played out in countless lives of people throughout time. They are Tammuz, Adonis, Attis, Orpheus, Dionysus. The most ancient ones are the consort of a mother-lover goddess who will descend to the pain of Hell for her lover that he may come back to life. She becomes the principle of nature and recurrence, while he becomes the application of the principle.

The Christos-image
is most difficult to disentangle

from its art-craft junk-shop
paint-and-plaster medieval jumble

of pain-worship and death-symbol,
(WDNF 18)

But she will disentangle it.

I assure you that the eyes
of Velasquez' crucified

now look straight at you,
and they are amber and they are fire.
(WDNF 19)

Myrrh: from the Hebrew *mar*, samodendron, or smurna.

There was a maid named Myrrah, or Smyrna, a princess, a daughter of King Cinyras of Paphos.

... had he been childless
 He might have been a happier man. The story
 Is terrible, I warn you. Fathers, daughters,
 Had better skip this part or; if you like my songs
 Distrust me here, and say it never happened.
 Or, if you do believe it, take my word
 That it was paid for.
 (Ovid, *Metamorphosis* 10:300-307)

This princess, though suitors clamoured for her, was so unlucky as to fall so wildly in love with her father that she could think of no other. She knew her obsessive passion to be a terrible and unnatural sin, though she argued to herself that it was a violation of culture rather than nature, in long wide-eyed monologues through sleepless nights. She finally grew so desperate with her own three a.m. tortured insomnia, that she determined to hang herself. Her nurse, with the prescience of those who care for a child, came and caught Myrrah in the act of stringing the noose and finally, with the short-sighted indulgence of those who care for a child, agreed to help her sleep with her father. They waited until the festival of Demeter when Myrrah's mother, who was a devotee, would be busy with the mysteries and would be forbidden to her husband's bed for nine nights. Another ritual virginity.

It was arranged that Myrrah would go to his bed under cover of darkness, pretending to be an amorous courtesan, for nine nights, though some say twelve. On the last night the King lit a light to see his young beauty and in horror recognized his daughter. He drew a sword and chased her into the forest.

Myrrah ran wild in the wild mountains while her belly grew into a mountain for, of course, she had conceived. "Heavy of womb / Not knowing what to pray for, torn between / Sickness of life and fear of death" (Ovid 10:481-83), she begged the gods to turn her into a tree, a vegetable solution which left her alive but not with the living; planted, but not with the dead. Even as she spoke, the earth closed over her legs, her feet branched into roots, blood became sap and bark began to cover her swollen belly and breasts, "but still she weeps, and the warm tear-drops trickle down, / Not without honor, for that distillation / Still keeps her name; men call it myrrh, no age/will ever forget the word" (Ovid 10:498-502). The tree split her median seam and the baby Adonis was born of the Myrrh tree.

Myrrh is still measured in "tears." It is the name of the unit of measure. Myrrh is traditionally the smell of sorrow.

12

Myrrh is *mar*, which is bitter. The bitter sorrow of the girl-mother's obsessive love for a forbidden father, the bitter sorrow of the mother whose son is also her brother, whose husband is her baby's grandfather, the bitter sorrow of Aphrodite who weeps for Adonis, her boar-gored and castrated lover. The bitter sorrow of Adonis who is struck down in the fullness of his beauty, whose blood stains and colors the blood-red anemone, wind flower, which blooms in mid-spring, our Easter time.

I am that myrrh-tree of the gentiles,
the heathen; there are idolators,

even in Phrygia and Cappadocia,
who kneel before mutilated images

and burn incense to the Mother of Mutilations,
to Attis-Adonis-Tammuz and his mother who was myrrh;

she was a stricken woman,
having borne a son in unhallowed fashion;

she wept bitterly till some heathen god
changed her to a myrrh-tree;

I am Mary, I will weep bitterly,
bitterly . . . bitterly.
(FR 16)

"Oh weep for Adonis," the mourners would wail at the yearly festival. Images of the lover-god would be prepared for burial and cast into the sea. His resurrection would be celebrated the next day (Frazer, *The New Golden Bough* 289).

13

Ovid tells the story of Myrrah with such compassion he notes that though myrrh is valuable, it is "perhaps not worth its price," but everyone else seems to agree that myrrh is very precious indeed. It is an aromatic gum that grows in Arabia, Abyssinia and India. It was highly prized from the earliest times and a luxury item that flowed along the earliest trade routes. We know that Queen Hatshepsut of Egypt, in the ninth year of her reign (circa 1500 B.C.), sent out a flotilla of ships laden with Egyptian treasures to trade for living myrrh trees. The boats

brought back the myrrh trees, ebony, gold, sandalwood, panther skins and apes. Hatshepsut had her myrrh trees planted on the temple terraces, where, later, twentieth century archaeologists found their dried-up roots in front of the temple Dur el-Bahri. Hatshepsut shows up in *The Walls Do Not Fall*, though not directly in connection with myrrh:

and Hatshepsut's name is still circled
with what they call the *cartouche*.
(WDNF 9)

A temptress in the Bible tells a man, "I have perfumed my bed with myrrh" (Proverbs 7:17) and other passages speak of lovers "anointed with oil of myrrh" (Esther 2:12), "a bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me" (Song of Solomon 1:12 and "lips as lilies dropping choice myrrh . . ." (Song of Solomon 5:23).

In the dark connection of symbolism that literature has always found in underground river connection between sex and death, myrrh, as well as being used in preparation for love-making, is also used in embalming a body in preparation for burial. Of the three gifts of the Magi, it has generally been believed that gold was offered to Christ as King, frankincense to him as God, and myrrh as to a man who would suffer and die (bitterly . . . bitterly). Saint Bernard though, in the 12th century, had a more pragmatic view: that gold was given to Mary "to relieve her poverty, incense against the stench of the stable . . . and myrrh . . . to put away vermin" (Johannas of Hildesheim, *The Story of the Three Kings* 66).

Myrrh has been used throughout the centuries in both poetic and prosaic manners, as an ingredient of perfume, as a medicine for "female disorder," as a tooth powder and medicine to cure sore gums and tighten loose teeth. It also has anesthetic properties and that is its use in Mark 15:23 when Jesus is offered "wine mingled with myrrh" at the point of his crucifixion ("but he received it not"). It was a practice to give those who were to undergo that horrible death such a mild anesthetic as an act of mercy to ease the pain. Myrrh, from bitterness, comes increasingly, through *Trilogy*, to bring sensual-sexual healing and spirit. "Female disorders" restored to a state of grace.

14

His, the Genius in the jar
which the Fisherman finds,

He is Mage,
bringing myrrh.
(WDNF 5)

H.D. preshadows her story of Kaspar and the myrrh in *The Walls Do Not Fall*, written three years before *The Flowering of the Rod*. It is a preview of where the *Trilogy* will go and the central symbol she will end up with.

but if you do not even understand what words say,

how can you expect to pass judgment
on what words conceal?

(WDNF 8)

Marah means bitterness, the odor of sorrow, the dark and passive sorrow.

And of myrrh, Johannes of Hildesheim says, "In the third India as the kingdom called Tharsis, and of that kingdom Jaspar was king, the which Jaspar offered myrrh to God. In his isles myrrh groweth more plentifully than in any other place in the world. It groweth like ears of wheat and it waxeth right thick; when it is ripe it is so soft that it cleaveth on men's clothes as they go by the way. And for harvesting, men take small cords and girdles and draw them about the ears, and the myrrh is wrung out of them" (Johannes 13).

Myrrh, like pollen shaken from trees, is so soft it clings to your clothes:

. . . it seems the whole city (Venice-Venus)
will be covered with golden pollen shaken

from the bell-towers, lilies plundered
with the weight of massive bees . . .
(TA 15)

I find a herbal shop that carries myrrh. It is in little golden amber "tears" and sold by the ounce. I burn it while I write. Its fragrance is dark, earthy, certainly not floral, one might almost say musky, but not quite that, hovering both above and below the shadows of musk and whispering something rarer, more indefinable. I brush my teeth with it. It is mildly bitter, mildly pleasant—not as much numbing as stimulating, so my mouth feels like it's glowing slightly, expectant, anticipant.

People come to my house one evening. We light candles and several censers of myrrh. We read *The Flowering of the Rod* aloud by candlelight, I talk from this paper. The myrrh is heavy in the air.

. . . That night, I dream H.D. again. This time she is young with her short, dark hair, and looks very much like the pictures of my young mother, my muse. She is dressed in white karate clothes, black belt, and is moving with beautiful agility, an a cappella dance. She tells me her name is "Forget-Me-Not."

. . . And then again. She is a girl-child with violets or lavender—both? Dark haired, dark eyed, she carries violets and lavender on a darkening plain. She stands beside something round and stubby—a large log cut off, a round of something—wood. There's deep greenery all around her, the colors intense along with the purples, the shining brown wood in darkened light. Persephone picking flowers? An invitation to an initiation in a mystery ritual? But I know it is she, H.D., and she slips me words before I awaken: "Dead roses will always be with us."

Johannas of Hildesheim gives a history of the three gifts of the Magi. The little bundle, containing gold (thirty gold coins), frankincense, and the myrrh, Mary packed when she, her husband and baby, fled to Egypt. A sick but lucky shepherd picked them up and kept them until a little time before Christ's crucifixion—then he heard of a great prophet who could heal him of his long-time illness. He went to the healer—who was Jesus—was healed, and offered the bundle of precious gifts he had in his keeping for so many years. Jesus recognized them as his own baby gifts and told the shepherd to take them to the temple and offer them on the altar. The priests burned the incense, gave the thirty pieces of gold (only called "silver" explains Johannas, because all money was called "silver") to Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus, and one part of the myrrh was mixed with the wine or vinegar to offer to Jesus on the cross; the other part was given to Nicodemus, prince of the Jews. It made its way into the hands of Mary Magdalene, who mixed it with aloes and other spices to prepare Jesus' body for burial.

The story gets even more complicated, for the thirty pieces of gold were the very same pieces of gold for which Joseph and his brethren were sold into Egypt. When Jacob died these same thirty pieces were sent into the land of Saba to buy spices and ornaments for his burial. To end their Old Testament saga, they finally made their way into the land of Arabia where they fell into the hands of Melchior and became the baby gifts he brought to Bethlehem (Johannas 34-35).

The Margaret Freeman translation of Johannas of Hildesheim's *The Three Kings* was not published until 1955 and *The Flowering of the Rod* was written in 1944. It is not known if H.D. was familiar with the material but she certainly would be familiar with the popular medieval legends that Johannas collected, many of which were incorporated into the Medieval Mystery Plays. H.D., who seriously researched her material, would be aware of the traditions and she would know the recurring patterns.

well, it wasn't exactly a vow,
an idea, a wish, a whim, a premonition perhaps,

that premonition we all know,
this has happened before somewhere else,

or this will happen again—where? when?
(FR 41)

15

Her Kaspar, who has the myrrh Mary Magdalene seeks, is like an Old Testament prophet,

but he was not Abraham come again;
he was the Magian Kaspar;

he said *I am Kaspar*,
for he had to hold on to something;
(FR 39)

The dream is more real than reality, but Kaspar, as the poet says, has to hold on to something:

I am Kaspar, he said when a slender girl
holding a jar, asked deferentially

if she might lower it into his well;
I am Kaspar . . .

as Mary lifted the latch and the door half-parted,
and the door shut, and there was the flat door

at which he stared and stared,
as if the line of the wood, the rough edge

or the polished surface or plain,
were each significant, as if each scratch and mark

were hieroglyph, a parchment of incredible worth
or a mariner's map.
(FR 39)

Kaspar is a Wise Man and he, too, knows how to read each scratch and mark as if it were hieroglyph, knows that there are secrets in the signs. He is confused about some half-remembered story from childhood about his precious myrrh:

. . . Kaspar could not remember;

but Kaspar thought, there were always two jars,
the two were always together,

why didn't I bring both?
or should I have chosen the other?

for Kaspar remembered old, old Azar muttering,
other days and better ways, and it was always maintained

that one jar was better than the other,
but he grumbled and shook his head,

no one can tell which is which,
now your great-grandfather is dead.
(FR 41)

It was only a thought,
someday I will bring the other,

as he placed his jar
on the floor of the ox-stall;
(FR 42)

The myrrh comes in twos. It is for a double ceremony of death and rebirth, or birth and death, or, as in the earlier traditions, for love-making and death. He brought one jar to the birth and the time has come for the other jar. It occurs and recurs. Kaspar is a Magician, a Mage, a Wise Man, an embodiment of several Eternal Persons of the Poem, standing in front of Mary, clothed in the flesh of an Arabian merchant, but he doesn't know everything. Some of his most deeply held beliefs are to be challenged by Mary, and he will learn from her, as she from him, for H.D.'s Wise Man is Freud and she is Mary Magdalene. "The Professor is not always right," she says.

what he had, his priceless, unobtainable-elsewhere myrrh
was for the double ceremony, a funeral and a throning;

his was not ordinary myrrh and incense
and anyway, it is not for sale, he said;

he drew aside his robe in a noble manner
but the un-maidenly woman did not take the hint;

she had seen nobility herself at first hand;
nothing impressed her, it was easy to see;

she simply didn't care whether he acclaimed
or snubbed her—or worse; what are insults?

she knew how to detach herself,
another unforgivable sin,

and when stones were hurled,
she simply wasn't there;
(FR 13)

"For the Professor was not always right. He did not know—or did he?—that I looked at the things in his room before I looked at him; for I knew the things in his room were symbols of Eternity and contained him then, as Eternity contains him now" (TF 101-102).

As in poetry, H.D. has learned to read the signs that Freud surrounds himself with—figures of Ra, Nut, Osiris, Ka figurines, a priceless collection of ancient sacred art, though he finds it all "superstition."

and Kaspar, master of caravans,
had known splendour such as few have known,

and seen jewels cut and un-cut that altered
like water at sun-rise and sun-set,

and blood stones and sapphires;
we need no detailed statement of Kaspar's specific knowledge

nor inventory of his possessions,
all we need to know is that Kaspar

knew more about precious stones than any other,
(FR 28)

It is precious stones Kaspar knows. In *Tribute to the Angels*, the divine female Presence becomes a precious stone, distilled from the fiery crucible of a burning London:

"What is the jewel colour?"
green-white, opalescent,

with under-layer of changing blue,
with rose-vein; a white agate

with a pulse uncooled that beats yet,
faint blue violet;
(TA 13)

It is primarily green, the color of Aphrodite, who is the main Presence in *Tribute to the Angels*. In *Flowering of the Rod*, the stone Kaspar sees in Mary has become blue, the color for the Virgin. He sees "as in a mirror," layers of three Marys, as if in a vision, one behind or beyond the other, and the other behind or beyond that.

one head uncrowned and then one with a plain headband
and then one with a circlet of gems of an inimitable colour;

they were blue yet verging on purple,
yet very blue; if asked to describe them,

you would say they were blue stones
of a curious square cut and set so that the light

broke as if from within; the reflecting inner facets
seemed to cast incalculable angles of light,

this blue shot with violet;
how convey what he felt?
(FR 28)

Kaspar sees this as he stoops to pick up Mary's fallen scarf. And he remembered and heard "an echo of an echo in a shell":

*in her were forgiven
the sins of the seven
daemons cast out of her;*
(FR 28)

and he knows he's seeing into something contained in the old signs and symbols, some magic he has studied all his life to find. It has come, zen fashion, in the flash of an unexplained moment of light on Mary's hair.

"Freud took me into the other room and showed me the things on his table. He took the ivory Vishnu with the upright serpents and canopy of snake heads, and put it into my hands . . ." (TF 118).

16

Freud's entire body of writing repudiated the sacred as superstitious yet he delighted in surrounding himself with ancient sacred symbols. H.D. learned quickly that she could use the vocabulary of symbolism with him in some areas but not in others. She could talk of the metaphor of Osiris and Isis, but not of astrology, for instance, nor of the reality of the poem which is larger and "more real" than that of everyday life. As Susan Friedman says, "Freud's road to reality testing was not H.D.'s; she followed neither his empirical guidelines" nor his assumption that "the

material is the real" (99). For H.D., the dream, like the poem, expresses some higher form of reality unfolding into the luminous. For Freud, the dream is an expression of the patient's psychosis and roadmap of repressed infantile desires. In short, what Freud called symptom, H.D. called inspiration. Phillip Rieff writes, "Every work of art is to Freud a museum piece of the unconscious, an occasion to contemplate the unconscious frozen into one of its possible gestures" (Friedman 134). Art, in fact, in Freud's system, is a rejection of reality. It is only science which confronts reality and discovers what is true. Moreover, religious feeling or experience as well as religious doctrines are vestiges of infantile life in the psyche of the adult (Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, passim). H.D. wrote, "About the greater transcendental issues, we never argued. But there was an argument implicit in our very bones" (TF 13).

H.D., true to her synthesis method of procedure, took what good she could glean from Freud and left the rest as dross. She *learned* something from him that allowed her psychoanalysis to give direction and strength of purpose to her artistic identity and that experience was followed by twenty years of intense artistic achievement. Her best, deepest, and most mature writing followed her psychoanalysis. She is silent about the question of Freud and his view of the psychology of women, but it is clear that something in her "broke open" during the experience so that she could continue as poet-seer-prophet in a new way.

she knew how to detach herself,
another unforgivable sin,

and when stones were hurled,
she simply wasn't there;
(FR 13)

Freud, and Kaspar, have all the makings of the "you" or "they" of *The Walls Do Not Fall*. Yet both, in *Tribute to Freud* and *The Flowering of the Rod*, are respected, looked up to, loved. Myrrah takes her forbidden father-love and becomes *mar*, bitter, but she births Adonis, symbol of male beauty and love. H.D. takes the bitterness and births her long poem of transformation.

17

She said, I have heard of you;
he bowed ironically and ironically murmured,

I have not had the pleasure,
his eyes now fixed on the half-open door;

she understood; this was his second rebuff
but deliberately, she shut the door;

she stood with her back against it; . . .

It was hardly decent of her to stand there,
unveiled, in the house of a stranger.
(FR 15)

We stand unveiled in the house of a stranger when we publish our poems. We know it is un-maidenly. The feeling is that of extreme acute embarrassment. We fight to conquer it and go on. We have no choice; we have to do it. When we speak the voice of the poem we hear thundering and sobbing inside. We break a taboo of such power the sheer effort of breaking it can make us sick.

For any woman to dare to write, even in the first half of the 20th century, even in the second half of the 20th century, is to break a taboo of such long standing, of such power and import, it is akin to stealing fire from the gods. Yet the fire is an element. It does not diminish because more use it. It is only a jealous god who guards it.

We do not have an essay about being a woman and writing from H.D., as we do from Virginia Woolf, or from countless others in this and previous centuries. What we have are lines throughout her work in which she makes herself quite clear.

it was unseemly that a woman
appear disordered, dishevelled;

it was unseemly that a woman
appear at all.
(FR 18)

18

I am Mary, she said, of Magdala,
I am Mary, a great tower;

through my will and my power,
Mary shall be myrrh;

I am Mary—O, there are Marys a-plenty,
(though I am Mara, bitter) I shall be Mary-myrrh;
(FR 16)

Mary, who has been Aphrodite, Ishtar, Inanna, has fallen upon difficult circumstances in these late Anno Domini times. While she has been Ishtar the Prostitute—proudly and with holy purpose—in times past, now she's just a common "whore." It is a great falling and, though she knows better because she remembers a glorious past, she cannot escape blaming herself some, because it is difficult not to become infected with

public opinion. "I am Mary, I will weep bitterly / bitterly . . . bitterly" (FR 16). She knows the seven angels of *Tribute to the Angels* but the seven demons of the Bible, the seven *daemons* of *The Flowering of the Rod*, must be cast out of her. They are transformed, as she transforms the bitterness of her past into the material of the poem, finding the meaning behind the meaning in the larger reality which is the poem.

he might whisper tenderly, those names
without fear of eternal damnation,

Isis, Astarte, Cyprus
and the other four;

he might re-name them,
Ge-meter, De-meter, earth-mother

or Venus
in a star.
(FR 25)

and

*Lilith born before Eve
and one born before Lilith,
and Eve; we three are forgiven,
we are three of the seven
daemons cast out of her.*
(FR 33)

But they are not "cast out" as much as transformed from demon to *daemon*, and then incorporated rather than kept separate. As H.D. has returned the female deity to the tradition in *Tribute to the Angels*, *The Flowering of the Rod* becomes a personal acceptance and peace-making with herself. She has been "a stricken woman, / having born a son (child) in unhallowed fashion" (FR 16). Moreover, she has dared to enter successfully, as few women before, the halls of literature. I am not suggesting H.D. was so timid a person as to feel overt guilt at the unconventional way she chose to live, just that there was some attendant pain and exhaustion in swimming against the current. *The Flowering of the Rod* becomes a healing as Mary the Whore becomes Mary the Virgin at the end of the poem.

Kaspar, who is taken aback at Mary's boldness, comes to *see* something—"What he thought was in direct contradiction / with what he apprehended" (FR 35)—and he has his moment of understanding. That moment of understanding and acceptance from the patriarch (H.D. called Freud "papa") seems to make the crucial difference in Mary's transformation. Neither Freud nor H.D. have recorded such a moment

between them, yet it seems, upon a close reading of *Tribute to Freud*, to have happened.

no one would ever know
if it could be proved mathematically

by demonstrated lines,
as an angle of light

reflected from a strand of a woman's hair
reflected again or refracted

a certain other angle—
or perhaps it was a matter of vibration

that matched or caught an allied
or exactly opposite vibration

and created a sort of vacuum,
or rather a *point* in time—

he called it a fleck or flaw in a gem
of the crown that he saw

(or thought he saw) as in a mirror;
no one would know exactly

how it happened,
least of all Kaspar.
(FR 40)

And, "He goes on, 'You were born in Bethlehem? . . . Bethlehem is the town of Mary'" (TF 123).

She uses the language of science-mathematics and physics in this poem to underscore the "argument" between Freud and herself. Kaspar-Freud tries to meet Mary-H.D. with his rational mode of thinking and is thrown into memory, reverie and, finally, vision. And the vision is set off by Mary's long, free-flowing hair. Duplessis comments, ". . . Kaspar has a great, saturating vision concerning lost goddesses, lost, utopian cities, and the primary and power of the mother-child dyad (the fertility complete) at the heart of the 'new' religion of Christ" (96). "I am on the fringe or in the penumbra of the light of my father's science and my mother's art" says H. D. (TF 145).

Aaron Shurin, in an unpublished paper on Mary Magdalene, points out, "As the woman lifted, through repentance, from the spirit's death in sin to the spirit's life in salvation, she is resurrection, a true born again: the woman who revived" (1).

"O, there are Marys a-plenty" (FR 16) and, slippery figure that she is, no one knows for sure which Mary in the stories is Mary Magdalene. She may or may not have been the Mary that left home because she didn't like housework, "or was that Mary of Bethany?" (FR 12) H.D. asks with mock innocence, playing upon the confusion. In the tradition that springs up after her, she may have gone to France and wandered in the wilderness for thirty years (it is this Mary who is depicted in Donatello's famous statue); she may have become a wandering priestess in Marseilles. In the Gnostic writings she was most beloved of Jesus and the Disciples were jealous of the favors he showed her. In an extension of that tradition, she and Jesus were lovers. But this is a familiar turn to the story: the goddess with her lover who is a maimed and dying, then reborn, god.

The Gospels do not say specifically that she was a prostitute but that she was a sinner and that seven devils were cast out of her. She is traditionally believed to be the unnamed woman, "known in the city to be a sinner," who comes to Christ in the house of the Pharisee. She brings an alabaster cask of very precious ointment, stands weeping at his feet and begins to wash his feet with her tears, dry them with her long hair, and anoint them with her precious oil. The Pharisee, though in H.D.'s story he is Simon the Leper, upset at the "unseemliness" of the act, says, "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is" (Luke 7:39)—a line H.D. quotes in her story. Jesus answers Simon with a parable that explains that because her sin was so great, her salvation is also great: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much" (Luke 7:47). It is possible that this line is responsible for Mary's reputation as a prostitute, a specific sub-classification of "sinner," usually feminine, in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Mary becomes an Everywoman in the story of salvation and as such was beloved by the people in the centuries that followed. She is always drawn as passionate, a saint who is also sensuous, one whose state of grace comes from knowing the depths and coming full circle to the heights. In the Madonna-whore split that Christianity fostered in the psyche, Magdalene can be a middle ground, a marriage of the two, psyche and spirit, body and mind. For women, if one cannot hope to have the perpetual innocence and perfection of the Virgin, one could hope for the struggle from sin to salvation of the Magdalene. In medieval England, 170 churches were dedicated to her; in 1222, July 22 was proclaimed Mary Magdalene Day by the Council of Oxford. In Naples, an Order of Magdalene sisters was established in 1324, consisting entirely of reformed prostitute nuns, who were called "Magdalinetts" (10).

In his *H.D. Book*, Robert Duncan has said the *Trilogy* is "... the story of the restitution of the daemonic and of women, cursed by the Fathers, into the sight of God or among the goods" (56).

The God-goods pun comes from an exchange H.D. had with Freud. In the fall of 1938, Freud had fled Vienna for London, Vienna being too dangerous for a Jewish scholar, even one of his stature, to remain. H.D. had visited Freud (her "blameless Physician") and been surprised to see his amazing art treasures were there with him. He explained that though it had been difficult to get them out of Austria, Marie Bonaparte, the Princess George of Greece, his colleague, had arranged for them to be waiting in Paris when he arrived. H.D. left his London office and went on "a quest, a search" (TF 11) for gardenias, Freud's favorite flower and one she had been unable to find for him on searches in Vienna. She found gardenias at a West End florist and scribbled on a card, "To greet the return of the Gods." He answered by mail: "By chance or intention they are my favorite flowers, those I most admire. Some words 'to greet the return of the Gods' (other people read: Goods). No Name. I suspect you to be responsible for the gift" (TF 11).

H.D. continues the pun. On a subsequent visit to Freud's London office she says, "The Gods or the Goods were suitably arranged on ordered shelves" (TF 11). It is a polite and social occasion as others are present. It is the last time she sees Freud.

For H.D. and for Robert Duncan, the gods and the goods, in this case, would be interchangeable. Where they would see evocations of real deities in stone or wood, Presences or daemons present, others would see priceless *objects d'art*. This small exchange also underscores and gently teases about "the argument implicit in our very bones" between H.D. and Freud.

20

In 1926 Pound published a book called *Personae*. The first poem is "The Tree," one of the early verses he wrote to H.D. during their youthful love affair and during the time he called her "Dryad." In the poem he becomes a tree, "Knowing the truth of things unseen before." The mask of the tree and the ability to move out of boundaries of himself gives him, "... many a new thing understood / that was rank folly to my heart before." He goes on, in *Personae*, to become Tristram, to become Bertrand de Born, to become the Anglo-Saxon Seafarer, even a domestic cat. He becomes any number of Eternal Persons of the Poem whose consciousness lives through him.

In the early part of the century Freud's work had named what poets knew all along—that there was not one Self but several or many parts and one could speak or act out of an Id, an Ego, a Superego, a Libido, or any combination of the several. That, and the rediscovery of the Greeks that commenced with archaeological discoveries of the 1890s, made the idea of *persona* loom large. In the early 20s the opening of Tutankhamen's tomb

added a missing dimension to H.D.'s available vocabulary about the many components of the self and the many forces that act through us. She was able to fuse Egypt and Greece, the divine components in the lore of both.

For H.D., time is synchronistic—that is, it is all happening at once. Her "ancient lore" in *Trilogy* is not a nostalgic harking back to the past but always information about our present state. The personae, the Eternal Persons of the Poem, become possible when we move from a Newtonian to an Einsteinian world and the perception of time and causality shifts. The self is no longer separable from the phenomenon because the act of observing changes the thing observed. Whether H.D. read "the new physics" or not, the world changed and she knew it. Poetry is not just a language of hearts and flowers and memory but the discourse of the cosmos and she knew that too. The physical and metaphysical realities are one and they are all embodied in her (and, by extension, in everyone else) and her consciousness. Hermes, as an Eternal Person, acts through her in an autonomous manner. "What is a god? / A god is an eternal state of mind," says Pound (*Selected Prose* 47).

In traditional allegory, the writer tells a story to illustrate a point he or she is making. The writer is in charge and the masks are play-acting. In H.D.'s work, and in my understanding of Robert Duncan's concept of the Eternal Persons of the Poem, the personal story the writer would tell is subordinate to that of the Eternal Person working through her, or on her, through her friends and lovers. The people in the poems, who we might be able to identify as Aldington, or Lawrence, or Pound, are only dressed in the clothing of an Aldington, or a Lawrence or a Pound: they are really the force and Presence of an angel or a god, a Raphael, a Hermes, an Odysseus. The poet is still "maker," is still doing the writing, but the Hermes in her has taken over and is moving with his own autonomy through her own subjective consciousness. The Hermes figure moves from Eternal time to her experience of temporal time ("It's all the same fucking thing," sings Janice Joplin) and her World War II experience, which opens out to all experience for all people of all time. The mask, once put on, brings something unexpected, unplanned for, is able to *disclose* something. The paradox is that when we "mask" something we believe we are hiding it. The mask has the double purpose of hiding one and disclosing another level at the same time.

H.D. is a character in *Trilogy*, as are Hermes, Mary Magdalene, Kaspar, the Tree (whose roots reach so deeply into archetypal wisdom in every culture), the Myrrh. They are not fixed symbols, though they bring their diachronic histories trailing behind them. They have a freedom to act that the fixed symbol does not—though they act out of their own personality (persona) complex. They act on and through H.D.'s persona in the poem as their manifestations, the people in her life, act on her personal life. When the Lady comes to her in a dream, in *Tribute to the Angels*, both an archetypal Aphrodite and the Aphrodite in herself is acting in her psyche. Aphrodite is a living Eternal Person to her, as

Aphrodite was to Sappho—not just a fixed emotional-complex, remembered.

Pound wrote, "The symbolist's *symbols* have a fixed value, like numbers in arithmetic, like 1, 2, and 7. The imagiste's images have a variable significance, like the signs *a*, *b*, and *x* in algebra" (*Gaudier-Brzeska* 84). This frees them from their rigidity and allows new combinations, new thought. Like Saussure's *sign*, they have become arbitrary and synchronic—but for H.D., who worked with the old lore, they are also diachronic and come trailing clouds of past lives, though they have a freedom to move about and act that is new. Or old: as mentioned, Sappho's Aphrodite, as well as countless other Eternal Persons in poetry, appear to act under their own volition. Perhaps this mobility is only *new* in context of early modernism.

What H.D. brings that may be different is the integration of the personal with the Eternal. In Yeats, for instance, the gods are eternal passions and one enters them only by purifying oneself by going beyond the personal. Something similar appears to be true for Pound. He sustains the Eternal by continually going back to history. The gulf, in Pound, seems to be between the personal and the Eternal. In *Trilogy*, and in all of H.D.'s later work, especially *Helen in Egypt*, the gulf she is interested in is between the Eternal Persons and some conjunction of them, a pattern of the cosmos.

By the time of *Trilogy*, she is able to do this by bringing in the seventh angel, Annael, the angel of Venus-Aphrodite, the angel of the place of Netzach on the Tree of Life, the angel of the color green. This makes possible the appearance of the Lady, the female Presence who comes with blank book to write "the story of the new." With female Presence restored to literature, H.D. can write her own vision, can see the gods in the actions of her friends, in her own actions. All we do with each other and in the poem is soul-work and all souls, H.D. was taught in her Moravian childhood, are female. At whatever level, metaphorical or not, she absorbed this. The restoration of the female to the poem through the Lady had to be established before she could continue with her particular relationship to the Eternal Persons.

The pattern of the cosmos H.D. sought in her work had to employ the rounded dimensional quality of the female Presence as well as the linear dimensional quality of the male. If the gods live in and through her and the important people in her life, she can discern the pattern in the personal as long as the personal breaks the narrow boundaries of the temporal. She and her characters range through history: as in *Palimpsest*, Raymonde is Ray Bart, is Hipparchia, is H.D. in different circumstances and at different times in history; as the lovers in *Vale Ave*, Lucifer and Lilith, live out their stories with each other in classical times, in Renaissance England, in WWII London; as Isis shifts to Aphrodite, to the Lady, to Mary Magdalene, to the Virgin, and all live in and through H.D. at various times. The forces that move through her

are the Eternal Persons and she seeks pattern through them as she writes her story, which is also their story.

21

As she goes for the Eternal Persons in the personae of her persons, which is perhaps the *Ka*, the divine double, she searches for the secret signs in the language, in the rhythmic associative babble of sound and murmur, the secret soul hidden in the words and how they go together, the "little boxes conditioned to hatch butterflies." It was a technique she worked with early, in *HERmione* and in *Palimpsest*, but she was able to move more fully into the realization of this word-work after her association with Freud, "the talking cure, the chains of free association, the metonymic combinations," notes Duplessis (85).

Julia Kristeva tells us that the associative babble quality of language, which she calls *semiotic*, touches a deeply repressed maternal element. The semiotic function of language admits a "wandering or fuzziness into language" (136) and is "definitely heterogeneous to meaning but always in sight of it" (133). This language characterized by what has been called "the free play of the signifier," Kristeva goes on to call "poetic language," and says elsewhere, "The poet is put to death because he wants to turn rhythm into a dominant element; because he wants to make language perceive what it doesn't want to say, provide it with its matter independently of the sign, and free it from denotation. For it is this *eminently parodic* gesture that changes the system" (31).

Using language this way is dangerous to an established social order, Kristeva tells us, and goes on to say, "*poetic language would be for its questionable subject-in-process the equivalent of incest*" (136). That is, mother language is taboo.

Poetic language is pre-oedipal, and touches the ancient archaic mother, while the rational symbolic language that develops later is paternal and relates to the developmental time when the young child breaks the maternal bond and identifies with the father as part of the maturation process. If poetic language is the equivalent of incest, or the "incestuous relation, exploding in language" (137), to use language this way breaks a powerful taboo. The paternal function of language maintains social cohesion by enforcing a unified world view. "The rhetorician," unlike the true writer, says Kristeva, *seduces* [the paternal discourse] in the Latin sense of the verb—he "leads it astray" (138).

Earlier in this story we met Myrrah, who did indeed seduce her father. She broke the incest taboo through her "unnatural love for her father," and though she is destroyed in the process (the paternal language function demands the sacrifice of the maternal, Kristeva tells us), she births Adonis, the Son, love and beauty, who will tie into the Jesus story running through *Trilogy*. Myrrah becomes the mother-in-law of Aphrodite, but the Law is that of Love, not order.

The true writer, says Kristeva, does not need to seduce. S/he simply assumes a different discourse, a "pulsation of sign and rhythm, of consciousness and instinctual drive" (139) by joining the two without asking permission. Sex unsanctified by the state. If the maternal and paternal functions of language, in Kristeva's terms, can be seen as two poles, dual currents of energy, the writing she describes can be seen as a free-play from one to the other, perhaps arcing in a circle between the two, electric and erotic.

The murmuring, associative language, merging one thing into another, play and pun, H.D. tells us, in her offhand way, she only uses for "cats and children" (*TF* 124), but it is central in all of her later work. Her nickname was "Cat" or "Lynx." She signed letters "Cat" and Pound, when he didn't call her "Dryad," called her "Lynx."

Myrrah turns into Mar, bitter myrrh, but Mary Magdalene, who goes to Kaspar for possession of the precious myrrh, undergoes her own alchemical soul-process and becomes Mary Madonna—a "second white" state in alchemical terms, the virgin with depth and experience having come to purity through "the suffering of the materials in the fiery crucible"—not unlike Blake's process in song from innocence to experience and back to a second innocence, a purification process that comes out of experience. As H.D. turns Venus-venial into Venus-venerate, a shift in perspective changes the whole story.

a tale of a Fisherman,
a tale of a jar or jars,

the same—different—the same attributes,
different yet the same as before.
(*TA* 39)

22

Mary, of a phallic tower town, "through my will and my power," becomes fragrant myrrh, when all forces are in action for her to become bitter marah.

do you wonder we are proud,
aloof,
indifferent to your good and evil
(*WDNF* 13)

Of course. Such transformation breaks conventional codes.

Through her will and her power, fragrant myrrh has come from bitter marah, and life has come out of death. Myrrah gets what she needs from the father to make her child, who turns out to be Love, the Son, the

Aphrodite connection. Mary Magdalene goes to Kaspar to get the essence-essential oil of fragrance.

"'This is my favorite,' he [Freud] said. He held the object toward me. I took it in my hand. It was a little bronze statue, helmeted, clothed to the foot in carved robe with the upper incised cliton or peplum. One hand was extended as if holding a staff or rod. 'She is perfect,' he said, 'only she has lost her spear'" (TF 68-69).

"She has lost her spear. He might have been talking Greek" (TF 69). Only she quite understood his Greek. She recovers the power in herself as she restores the Lady to the phallogentric culture. As she does, she uses Freud's insight and methodology to purposes he hadn't thought far enough to find.

*I am Mary, though melted away,
I shall be a tower . . . she said, Sir,*

*I have need, not of bread nor of wine,
nor of anything you can offer me,
(FR 19)*

She has need, but not for anything he can give her—and anyway, it is "not for sale." She knots and unknots her scarf. Her hair is uncovered, the famous free-flowing hair of Mary Magdalene, the hair she will wash Jesus' feet with. The story goes back and forth: she is in a doorway; she ignores his implied insults; she is at the Last Supper, unbraiding her extraordinary hair. We keep going back to the scene with Kaspar in the doorway. He slips in and out of reverie and memory and then back with her in the little room. And finally, he is in the stable, bringing his gift along with the other two and she is there, holding the bundle of myrrh in her arms. We do not, in the poem, see it change hands but she gets what she needs.

23

The myrrh has become Presence, the Eternal Person whom we will recognize as Love, as Resurrection. The poem has come full circle from the "tale of Jars" introduced in *The Walls Do Not Fall*, to the theme of resurrection, the recovery of the Lady in *Tribute to the Angels*, to the final appearance of the sacred sexual, the healing spirituality that appears as Myrrh, the birth of the new religion at the end.

. . . O stars, little jars . . .

boxes, very precious, . . .

that, as we draw them nearer

by prayer, spell,
litany, incantation, . . .

become, as they once were,
personified messengers,
(WDNF 24)

Jars, stars, being vessels, being the Word, being the Womb, the container, also being the Heart. Jars, jugs are vulgar boy-talk for breasts. Sharon Doubiago, in a private letter, points out *jar* means turning (from the potter's wheel); *ajar* means partially open, the liminal doorway space Mary Magdalene likes to occupy. Then she turns to go, from the *ajar*, with the *jar*, for the *jar*. She has jarred Kaspar, who remembers old Azar (a *jar*?) who is part of the male fraternity who keeps the secret of the myrrh from women—"No secret is safe with a woman" (FR 14)—this myrrh-distilling family told each other.

It may be so in terms of preserving the old boundaries. Mary Magdalene certainly changes the order of things by transforming herself with and through the myrrh. It has been H.D.'s vision throughout *Trilogy* not simply to substitute one order for another. Her power has been to subvert and transform the old patriarchal order that had resulted in the suppression of psyche and the fire-bombing of cities, as she makes clear in the beginning of *Trilogy*. A poem that began in war leads to the union of male and female principles resulting in the birth of a child. A child she keeps birthing in all of her later works. "I am on the fringes or in the penumbra of the light of my father's science and my mother's art" (TF 145), she says in *Tribute to Freud*. She would join the two.

The Walls Do Not Fall has a male god: Amen-Ra-Osiris. "O Sire," he is father and begetter,

father of past aeons,

present and future equally;
beardless, not at all like Jehovah
(WDNF 16)

He is also the "zirr-hiss" of the lightning, thunderbolt of Zeus, but also, in *The Walls Do Not Fall*, the sound of bombs and war. *Tribute to the Angels* reinstates the sacred female principle, the Lady, who carries the unwritten book of the new. By the end of *The Flowering of the Rod*, with its phallic "rod," Mary the Whore "through [her] will and [her] power" is able to re-call her parthanos, her "second white" state after the suffering of the material. She then becomes Mary the Virgin and bears the bundle of myrrh, which carries the trace of the Son, of Jesus and Adonis, but is not the Son. Like Hermes, the Messenger, bringer of art and healing, this Child can embody both male and female. The Myrrh, as Eternal Person, brings both genders together, both archaic mother

language and secondary paternal language, body and spirit, sensuality and healing, and Love, to an awaiting world.



Donatello's Magdalene, ragged and torn, after wandering in the wilds of France for forty years on her spiritual quest.

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TA: *Tribute to the Angels*

FR: *The Flowering of the Rod*

TF: *Tribute to Freud*

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A Fiction of Isadore Ducasse
from *The Invisible World Is in Decline*, Book IV

"Je ne laisserai pas de Mémoires."
—Lautréamont, *Poésies* I

• 1 •

The sentence, like a grave animal, turns its back to the storm to maintain its balance and solidity. The wind and rain are at war with the neatly cultivated field whose owner is at ease in his stone house a mile distant.

• 2 •

Let us invent a manuscript called *The Natural History of Invisibility*. Let us disfigure its anonymity by publishing a letter, found in the parish records of the Metropolitan Church of the Immaculate Conception in Montevideo, which identifies the manuscript's author as an obscure Uruguayan poet of French extraction. The text, beginning on the recto of the third leaf, commences thus: "It is self-evident that man must ultimately disappear from the universe, and there is no good reason to think that ontogeny can in this case escape the iron hand of phylogeny." There follow 200 closely written pages in which the author explores at length the notion of autobiography as a form of suicide.

• 3 •

Ducasse might suggest a photograph for the purposes of identification. The technology of the camera would have fascinated him as a primitive model for the imagination.

"The word 'fiction' comes through Middle English from the Latin *fictio*, which in turn is derived from the verb *ingere*—to touch, mould, fashion. In some primitive European language the root word probably had a very physical connotation of making with the hands, say as a potter makes a vessel. A cognate verb in Greek is *thingano*, to touch or handle. And in the new sixth edition of Professor Liddell's lexicon we find the extended sense of *thingano* as a sexual embrace. So fiction is allied etymologically to fucking, that relationship with the other that many writers have sentimentally confused with the creative act. Imagine a cow confusing its neurological lust for offspring with its impulse to graze."

On board ship for the second time in a year, crossing from Montevideo to Marseilles, Ducasse may have considered his paternity between reading chapters of the first volume of Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive*. A book like that seemed destined to find its proper audience among a large bourgeoisie made up at least in part of petty consular officials. That women should find much of value in such anti-metaphysics—its subtext the suicide of anything but a chair—seemed impossible. Perhaps he remembered how as a child his father had taken him miles across a hot and noisy jungle to a provincial hall, to accompany him to a lecture he was giving on "La connaissance scientifique, l'histoire naturelle, et la philosophie d'Auguste Comte." The strange words heard from the front row of the humid auditorium—the names of unfamiliar South American animals and the technical vocabulary of academic philosophy—will have stirred him in a way which only much later he would characterize as erotic. The sharks that were seen from time to time off the fashionable coast of Rio de Janeiro seemed to him creatures of immense sexual power, especially as they existed inside the terminological intricacies of eighteenth-century German science. His father too approximated to the imagination of an anthropophagic and oversexed sea animal that might unpredictably eat its mate or its young. What detritus was thrown up by so frail and limited an invention as an ocean-going vessel and its human cargo.

• 6 •

"Even the marginally autobiographical writer runs the risk of using up all of his words and disappearing, not into the envelope of language that surrounds us all, but into silence. So the lyric poets and the writers of *Kunsterromanen* and *Mémoires* repeat themselves unto death, assuming always (and rightly) that the egotistical reader will recognize only himself in their fictional mirrors and thus will not object to any repetition, however patent. I suppose it is not impossible that some writer in the next century will write unawares and word for word a book called *Reveries d'un promeneur solitaire*, and after its publication literature as we know it will cease to exist."

• 7 •

In Paris Ducasse may have studied for a year at the University, taking natural history under Jean Charles Chénu and anatomy with Professor Paul Broca. That language could be localized in the frontal lobe of the left hemisphere of the brain seemed to him an idea that was both materialistic and insane. He was uncomfortable in the classroom with its mahogany wainscoting and ceiling of sculpted plaster. He sketched impossible imaginary animals in his notebook as Broca talked on about Charles Lyell, and T.H. Huxley, and the recent discover of ancient human remains in the Neander ravine near Düsseldorf. He felt his life to be a perfect allegory of invisibility and sense that only the invention of a monster could redeem it.

• 8 •

As his papers became unnecessary and obsolete, he burned them. He was determined to leave as little trace as possible. He sold his books as soon as they were read and never saved letters. The freak of egocentricity and mad destructive logic whom he had imagined and written into existence would remain as a paradoxical legacy. His cat and his piano were inarticulate and doomed to disappear anyway, the first to the cruelty of his neighbours (the Siege of Paris had turned half the city into cat-eaters), and the second to pay for his anonymous plot in the Cimitière du Nord. In death he would be incapable of dissociating his body from "the autobiography of the earth." But that was a small defeat really, compared to the relief of no longer being subject to the hypnotic spell that had weighed upon his cerebrospinal system for ten years of nights.

• 9 •

"A certain kind of poetry argues silently for the existence of life on other planets. Surely this hand and heart do not comprise all that there is to make sense of the world. Any idiot is free to imagine himself the centre of a perfect circle whose circumference is as far out in space as he cares to think. It is a measured step to the lonely self-deluded egoist capable of any number of cold-blooded crimes. So we arrive at the ultimate endpoint of subject, the agglutinative crystal of solipsism that reflects but does not give off light. With luck an alien culture is prepared to supervene."

• 10 •

A century after his death a photograph was discovered among the papers of Evariste Carence. It had been crudely tampered with, for though an inscription on the back referred to three people, Ducasse among them, only two figures were visible, a third having been somehow scraped away or erased. Between Carence and a woman (doubtless his wife) there was only a kind of brown space, as though the third body had been so insubstantial as to permit the light from behind to pass unobstructed into the lens of the camera.

This is Not a Talk: Writing the Margin

The following are records of remarks made at "Intersection for the Arts" in San Francisco on 3 November 1987 as part of a series organized by Todd Baron. "Writing the Margin: Editing/ Publishing/'Theory': Magazines at Large" also included presentations by the editors of How(ever), Poetics Journal and Hambone, as well as a panel discussion (1 December) with David Levi Strauss, Benjamin Hollander, Susan Gevirtz, Frances Jaffer, Barrett Watten, Lyn Hejinian, Nathaniel Mackey, Andrew Schelling and Kevin Killian.

Note: November 3 was Election Day. San Francisco had just elected a new mayor, Art Agnos, partly on the strength of a book called "Getting Things Done" which he distributed free to voters.

BENJAMIN HOLLANDER: I don't particularly like spelling things out, but whenever I come across someone who is unfamiliar with ACTS, I find myself doing just that. Even after I make clear that it's "a journal of new writing" and then pronounce its name, the listener hears *Axe* (A-X-E) where I meant ACTS (A-C-T-S). There must be, somewhere, an editor of a magazine called *Axe*—a guide, say, for backwoods killers—who faces the same confusion in reverse. I'm sure he has some of our subscribers and we have some of his, and that that is the fate of incurable "homophonics" who hear of things before they see them.

Seeing ACTS, and even hearing of it, one faces no such problem. The irony here, in the presence of our hopeless "homophonic," is that ACTS is one of the few magazines around whose name so patently spells out its intentions by presenting writings and images as actions which measure our acts, both real and fictive, in the world, thus making more legible the world. And the world becomes more legibly near to us when we make a writing which is, in Zukofsky's definition of poetry, "an action whose words are actors." A world made in this image of language becomes, to alter Wittgenstein's phrase slightly, "the world [which] is the totality of [acts], not of things."

This necessarily partial introduction to what ACTS is and does by representing writing as action or event in the face of actions or events—unlike, say, *Time* or *Newsweek*—does not have to be spelled out for most of us here this evening. I only bring it up because the biases of those who read *Time* or *Newsweek* as models of what a magazine's writings should

be can sometimes economically determine what a magazine like ACTS can or cannot be, as one such bias did with an early issue of ACTS. It was issue No. 2, and Levi's introduction to it read: "This issue, Vol. 1, No. 2, is dedicated to the little bureaucrat at the State Board of Equalization, who said: 'Acts are not a magazine. *Newsweek* is a magazine.'"

The little bureaucrat, who has absolute faith in the order of the world and the world of magazines, defines a magazine by what it *is*, in the singular, with a singular perspective and grammar, even while his own grammar is slipping in agreement in number between subject and verb. He knows what he knows and what it is he knows is that "ACTS are not a magazine." If his response were more favourable, then we could excuse the slippage in standard grammar—could even encourage it—because he would be affirming what constitutes the meaning of the magazine—that ACTS *are* a magazine.

At face value, then, the name of a magazine like ACTS poses, for some, somewhat of a threat to comprehension, if only because it so visibly says what it does to those who have no reason to believe or to have learned, through their acquisition of either language or experience, that such things in writing can be done and named as such, as acts. For us it is different. While as poets we accept the making of a magazine out of such acts of writing, it is often harder for us to accept—to know how to read—the making of a magazine as an activity evolving out of an equally structured poetics of writing behind it. I wouldn't say this if our actions did not underscore the fact or if our actions as readers of these local magazines did not undermine—which they do—what we would acknowledge without hesitation as the work it took to make them.

If, for instance, we have been entrenched in a very real bias towards poems as objects made and re-made (that is, edited) out of work by the poet—which we have; if we can say that an editor edits a magazine in much the same way as a writer edits a poem or a book of poems—which we can; then shouldn't there be more of an agreement between what we do and say in relation to the making of a magazine as work? There isn't. One of my points this evening will be to focus on this act of editing as work, as primary work, and as a particular kind of work which we know next to nothing about. My points are guided by what I feel is a very real and silent assumption made by most of us who read these local magazines, which is that through our actions, through how we read these magazines, and in other mostly unconscious ways, we really do argue against them as composed. And if we unknowingly argue against a thing as composed, well, we are really ignoring the work it took to make it.

We do this because, for one thing, we read a magazine as if its contents exist in isolation, responsible to no one—as, in the words of Ollie North, off-the-shelf, self-sustaining entities, outside the magazine they appear in. I don't think we mean to or even know we do this, but it's just a habit of reading we've acquired by which we read the contents of a magazine outside its formal impulses, outside its desire to locate a

community in a vocabulary of correspondence between and among its writings.

In relation to this I think our criticism of a magazine is often not so much a reflection of the magazine as it is a reflection of our habits of reading it. Where our response to a particular issue is inevitably discussed only in terms of how some of its contents have failed us, or how it has failed us through including what we perceive to be inferior writing, the question we should ask is: how have our habits of reading failed us when we cannot accept the *making* of a magazine as a writing which *could* include these things—these things which a certain segment of readers perceives as inferior or mediocre? The odd thing is that we permit the taking of risks and “failures” and “scattered shots” as part of the material which enters the poetics of writing, say, a book of poems, yet that license is immediately revoked the minute the idea to include these things in a magazine is seen as contrary to the function of a magazine, which we believe is to present the best.

The problem, I think, is that we love so much to read the past, and we love so much to read the best of what has been written in the past. For this reason the value of a magazine is often determined and sustained by a handful of contributors whom we turn to because we believe they have written the best of what has been written in the past and will continue to do so, and in this way they go on to influence our habits of reading. Of course there is nothing really wrong in this and it doesn't mean that we will not turn to new, unknown poets, if their work attracts us. Still, in the context of reading a magazine, I find it somewhat out of place to do this. I sense in it an obsession to reduce the act of reading to our desire for sources independent of each other. I also sense in it a kind of blinding, overwhelming, isolationist nostalgia in this commitment to these figures we love to read which necessarily resists our seeing through their works to the magazine in itself as a syntax, whole, or to the magazine as an expanded system of signs created through them. As a discovered, collective syntax which can function almost prismatically to articulate a symmetry of effects from individual sources, the making of a magazine can, I believe, provoke new models of reading. Through these models I think we have the opportunity to supercede our preferences for individual writers in order to read at once, and with equal attention, the works we like *and* dislike as they have been written into the magazine. When we learn how to read a magazine, we are learning how to read a writing which makes of its writings meaningful necessities both by and outside themselves.

The title of this series, “Writing the Margin,” is, I think, a name appropriate to an equation it implicitly bears with it, one which I have held for some time: that editing is a writing of another order which exists outside the boundaries of what we conceive the standard role of editing to be, i.e., as redaction or correction. I think it is also and always a writing *into* the margins of what, as editors, we include in the magazine. By this I mean that it works off centrifugal sparks of meaning

from information either explicitly or implicitly given in an original, primary text, or in a cluster of such texts. Paradoxically, this process of editing as writing into the margins of a series of texts creates, in itself, a center/piece—that is, the magazine in front of us.

Last year, while Levi and I were assembling the Spicer issue, I think we came close to enacting this process. There was a point at which we felt a responsibility to *write Spicer out* of the community of voices around his work. We had, for instance, felt an extreme fidelity to echo Blaser's proposition that "the discourse of the Other, the otherness of language in Jack's work [could] not be set aside," and that when, as Spicer had done, "you set up language as outside you," you were giving it over, dangerously so, to the Other.

I remember asking myself how we could possibly mirror this proposition, at least in parts, in the issue, how we could set up a language outside the reader which would address the otherness of language in Spicer's work without, as Blaser had warned, appropriating the Other, "even as a realm of poetic knowledge." The answer came in French. It came in the form of a short piece called "After Spicer," written in French by Spicer's French translator, Joseph Guglielmi. And our response to it was, immediately and admittedly, quite obvious, patently forthcoming in its simplicity—that is, our decision to leave the text in the original French, to not translate.

Given the direction of the issue, given Blaser's directives, given the necessity dictated by Spicer's work to take in messages from the outside, our decision to not translate meant that, in the context of an English reading audience, another language—French—would in this instance mark a sign of the Other. Now I don't want to be misunderstood on this point. I am not saying that we could possibly turn French over into the Other through some act of magic or mystification. It could only constitute a sign of that otherness. And I do think that, like the realm of the dead, which is one aspect of the Other Blaser addresses, another language could and does function as the unknown in a very real and practical way in our lives, particularly in an increasingly provincial, monolingual society, as a threat from the outside which must be reduced to some semblance of convenient understanding. We opted against convenience and chose instead to write into the margins of Guglielmi's text one of the messages dictated by Spicer's writings. Obviously, for those who know French the sign didn't exist as such, and they could only conceptually understand what we had done. For others, however, we had hoped it could exist as the heart of a pure message transmitted, so to speak, from the other side, and yet not so pure that it couldn't suffer corruption on this side from those unfortunate enough to be tainted with a knowledge of French—and I mean simply those who could address Guglielmi's piece and argue with the otherness of its French image.

So a dialogue and a muted dialogue with its audience, and thus it raises the question of who is capable of hearing it, a question Spicer himself asked about his own work. In this way our keeping of the French

image of Guglielmi's text represents two poles of Spicer's poetics in relation to an audience, two poles which many have found difficult to reconcile. Those English readers in the community who have access to the code—who read French—will listen and understand it as a language outside them but one they can translate and address and confront as a very social language. Those who cannot read the code will "listen" to it as a system of signs—a language, if you will—outside a language. And so, in relation to this audience, Guglielmi's French becomes a mirror of what Blaser sees in Spicer's language, which "takes the form of the lack and the desire for the Other," something that the reader this time confronts as a very private language.

Now I go into these details not to justify, in some authoritarian way, the editing process through my explication of it, but to give you a sense of how we were writing into the margins around these writings a movement and direction from what had been given within them. And we have to remember that we cannot isolate Guglielmi's text from what's around it. It is a small part in a section of the issue in which the concerns I've raised are projected off each other in very different forms: from the image of a deadpan Keaton behind bars and resolutely without a vocabulary; to Michael Palmer's "Ten Definitions" of Vocabulary, a vocabulary defined by what is *outside* the poet and which he has forgotten as it has forgotten him; to a graphically empty ocean chart which becomes an empty but meaningful sign—a disguised language—*outside* the ocean but representing it; to my piece on the impulse *outside* of language, outside of language's disguises, which originally brings one to poetry; to Guglielmi's French text *outside* a language we know; and finally to Michael Davidson's essay on the impulse in Spicer's poetry to address a very real, face to face Other, to argue with the community around him, the *outside* which is the language around him. So, taken together, all these pieces become not isolated sites of explication or homage for Spicer, but a book of correspondences with his work. And, by assembling or orchestrating this material the way we did, we had hoped that the outside, which was the place from which Spicer worked, could still be the place where a community of writers could gather and draw—literally move—its readers to.

* * *

Saying all this, I realize that I've strayed a bit from my initial remarks: that as poets, and through our actions, we really do unknowingly argue against the making of a magazine as a noticeably conceived labor, so I think I should elaborate on the few examples I gave earlier. I'll use myself as an example of someone whose behavior has also, at times, argued against the making of a magazine as composed labor.

When, for instance, I step into a bookstore, my first move is not to look *at* magazines, but to look through them. The transparency of the gaze is telling. It tells me that I go by surface impressions—some pre-conceived, some not—of the writers included in the magazine, as I go by—

unthinkingly ignore—how these writers are impressed upon the surface which is the magazine itself. It's called going for the impulse items. It's called going for writers' writings as impulse items without stopping to question how or where they've been placed in the magazine. This wouldn't be so bad if I could only stop chewing away at the bits and pieces once I arrived home, but I don't. Instead, the impulse to read and run, to pick up on selected writings and drop the magazine in the process, remains.

To counter this tendency, ACTS is made to be read from beginning to end, and in this way it aspires to the condition of a book, by which I don't mean the book as a closed object, since each issue of ACTS is at once a book and a continuation of *The Book of ACTS*. ACTS is made to be read as an extension of itself, from issue to issue. Each of the first six issues is signalled, on its cover, by a local guide. Each guide encompasses and extends the tradition behind him. Each issue presents writers and artists re-enacting and reactivating that tradition. Each issue tunes and re-tunes into a particular concern, framing the variations of these concerns through the use of images, quotations, white space, "sightings" and so on. Each issue, then, creates the necessity for us to recognize and read it as a book which bears a reference within itself to something accomplished and as yet unfinished, much like a tradition.

This question of the magazine as book obviously has practical and theoretical consequences. Theoretically, one seems disposed to the perception of a magazine as timely and disposable. It is hard for the magazine as book to survive the currency of that perception. It is harder still to imagine how the discourse of literary power which privileges the book, or at least the idea of the book, as canonical object, would let something like a magazine—a magazine as book—disrupt those values. In a corresponding way, the naming and distribution of Robert Duncan's *The H.D. Book* provides an interesting example of another kind of rupture of these values, undermining the canonical status of the book as a closed, easily consumed object, since it never appeared as a Book but evolved in a protracted and processual act of dissemination over a period of twenty years across a series of little magazines, most of which are now unavailable. So what we have—or don't have—is a book which never appeared as a Book and which, ironically, and for the most part, is now out of print, much like the fate of any other Book.

As I've said, one seems disposed to the perception of the magazine as timely and disposable, and the word "periodical," which in a curious sense names the period of time we have with it, doesn't help to mark its endurance as a book. "Poetry," Zukofsky said, "has not one face one day to lose face on another." ACTS "has not one face one day to lose face on another."

Practically, of course, one faces a similar fate in relation to the magazine as book, but on a different scale, quite literally. It's hard to sell something $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11$ " as a book—I've tried it—because the wrong size gets

the magazine a worse discount than a book. And seen exclusively as a magazine, it gets hidden exposure, less access, and less and less read as a book because of where it is placed in the bookstore. Even if you name it a book, which we did with *A Book of Correspondences*, it doesn't help. The right name doesn't fool anyone who believes *çeçi n'est pas un livre*—this is not a book. Perhaps Levi or I should peddle the idea to read the magazine as book by saying, like San Francisco mayoral candidate Art Agnos, "Please read my book," or, "at least believe it is one."

Obviously, this has everything to do with advertising, which includes the fact that magazines are, for the most part, marketed as a litany of the contributors' names inside them. This means that a magazine is exclusively defined, to a public, by the individuals and the individual pieces inside it, on the level of contents or contributions, which I think is wrong. I think a very real effort has to be made to read and expose its formal impulses, its orchestrations, how, from piece to piece, it speeds up, slows down, pauses, rests, breaks. A magazine has both a particular vision and rhythm, and the process by which these things are made has to be communicated to a reader. It is not enough to call the roll of contributors. Nor is the surface gloss enough—to say, for instance, that ACTS is based in the poetics of New College or that *HOW(ever)* is a forum for feminist writings, and so on. What is needed is a certain depth of definition of how these magazines function and can be read, which I think most of us here this evening have intuitively gathered simply by continuing to read them.

If, however, we don't continue to read them, if we stop subscribing, then we risk losing them. And there is no help from the outside. Presently, magazines are not reviewed, either in newspapers or other magazines. This says not only that there is no interest but that most people are illiterate about how such things as assembling a magazine are done. And one of the reasons most people can't or don't want to talk or write intelligently about how such things are done has to do with the way they privilege certain kinds of work over others.

In other words, work is seen as either primary or secondary. Viewed as primary, it assumes a creative, shaping force—like writing. Editing, perceived as derivative labor, becomes secondary to that, and is regarded much like translation, which, to a certain extent, it is. It is seen to be a byproduct of an original, and the ways in which byproducts are treated is common knowledge. Instead of this treatment perhaps we should look at the task of the editor in much the same way Walter Benjamin saw the task of the translator. Only a few words have to be changed to make the appeal hold up:

The task of the [editor] consists in finding the intended effect . . . upon the language [of the magazine as a whole—the collection of originals *into* which he is editing—] which produces in it the echo of each original.

Of course we have to remember that Benjamin did not consider translating as primary work, which I think—particularly if you ask any translator who has to be several readers and writers at once—he was wrong about.

Editors, as well, have to be several original readers and writers at once, and I think this is something that should be articulated so that we don't lapse into regarding their work as secondary. If we do, then we will be writing *them* into the margins, and the unintended effect of *that* act upon the community as a whole will be the disappearance of the language—the particularly constructed grammar and syntax—of the magazine as a whole.

* * *

DAVID LEVI STRAUSS: Actually, we have gotten a couple of reviews:

Anyone picking up the last two issues of *Acts* literary magazine would quickly realize that it's very 'California.' In fact, it's very 'San Francisco' in the way we have come to associate spacey abstractness, form without substance, and experimentation without content or meaning with that part of the country. Obviously a negative stereotype, but it holds up for this magazine that seems so esoterically wrapped up in itself.

I find myself becoming quickly suspicious of a magazine that features its own editor among the contributors (two major sections in one issue), and showcases a number of the same writers *ad nauseum*. In issue 2, a person named Larry Eigner (whom I'm reluctant to call a writer) is represented first by a theoretical mind-masturbation, then by a god-awful would-be playscript, then by a commentary by Robert Kocik (evidently one of the club, who appears in subsequent issues), then finally by twenty pages of scattered diary entries that purport to be poems. Among them is a typical 'poem' called 'Aug 19 79': 'cutting a rug up indoors.' That's the entire poem, so you can judge for yourself.

What seems to govern here is an abstract coterie that takes fractious pride in being *all mind*—no body, no concrete reality, no social struggle or politics, no language which connects with anything outside itself. This evidently grows out of trends in recent sign theory and the like, but for those of us who live here on earth, it's difficult to get a grip on this disemboweled reality cum mind. Michael McClure's concrete poems, for instance, bear no relation to the meanings of the words, but only to other shapes he creates in his series.

It's tempting to say that this is West Coast mind-surfing at its worst, mere incestuous language-masturbation. But that would only sound condescending and conceal my real distress that the potentially exciting formal experiments carried on in this mag

don't connect with the world. Ninety-five percent of this magazine falls into the category 'trendy gibberish.' But for you born-again semioticists, it may be just the fix you need.

That was from the *Literary Magazine Review*, Fall/Winter 1985-86, published by the English Department at Kansas State University. A message from the Center.

In the midst of thinking about what I wanted to say tonight, I've been working every day to try to get ACTS 7 wrapped up and to the printer. This always takes a great deal longer than I imagine it will. It wouldn't take nearly so long if we didn't insist on making it all up again every issue. That's *not* the way you're supposed to run a literary magazine. In this way too, the little bureaucrat was right: "Acts are not a magazine."

(I've never much liked the term 'magazine,' anyway. When I hear it, I think of a place to store ammunition—and that's an accurate description of many magazines. I prefer to call ACTS a journal, as "a periodical presenting news in a particular area.")

During this time of trying to get ACTS 7 completed, ACTS has come into crisis. Benjamin and others involved with ACTS would argue that ACTS has *always* been in crisis, but this has been a time when I've thought seriously about how or *whether* to continue. It's a great deal of work and I'm not sure that anyone *needs* it. So perhaps we should be spending our time on something else that *is* needed, something more effective.

Central to this argument I have been having with ACTS is that term which Todd chose to put over this series—"marginality," "Writing the Margin." What *does* ACTS have to do with the rest of the world? So I'd like to speak about that, too, after making some specific statements about ACTS.

ACTS began very simply, out of necessity, printing the people who were working around the Poetics Program at New College. It began with Robert Duncan. We set up his mimeo machine in the basement, he loaned me the money to buy paper, and he left me alone.

After the first issue, which was very straightforward, hardly 'edited' at all, just a necessary *collection*, I wanted to *make* something. That meant finding out what was going on elsewhere, choosing from among all this work, influencing some of it, and beginning to put it together in a way that made sense, beyond a collection of various writings. Then it meant *paying attention* to what happened in the process.

Influenced by what was still happening in the Poetics Program, I wanted ACTS to work against *assumptions*, including assumptions within avant-garde writing. As I've said elsewhere, I didn't object so much to what was *included* in the dominant poetics of the time, but to what was being *left out*. In an article entitled "The Postmodern Dead End" (*Flashart*, May/June 1986), Félix Guattari objects to the effects of certain prevailing ideas and attitudes in recent art and philosophy, using terms which I think can usefully be applied to writing as well:

We must accept one simple fact, which however is extremely important, that is, that concrete social formations—which are not to be confused with what American sociologists call 'primary groups,' which are nothing more than a reflection of the economy of public opinion polls—stem from something more than a linguistic performance: there are ethological dimensions and ecological ones, semiotic and economic factors, esthetic, corporeal, and fantasmatic ones that can not be reduced to the semiology of the language, a multitude of incorporeal universes of reference, which can not readily be fitted into the coordinates of the dominant empiricity . . .

So, I wanted to include these other dimensions, to try to displace enough material to make room for something else to happen, to cut through contraceptive theories that keep things from becoming and keep things from being written.

From its beginnings at New College, ACTS has been concerned with a revitalization of the *lyric*. I want to read the Editor's Note which will appear in ACTS 7:

This issue of ACTS is being sent out under the sign of 'Analytic Lyric,' a term which at this point must be followed by a question mark. That is how the term appears in one section of a talk given by Michael Palmer in Iowa City last year ('Lyric Practice (Analytic Lyric?),' printed in *Pavement 7*, Student Activities Center IMU, Univ. of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242). Michael begins with a discussion of Jack Spicer's work (esp. *After Lorca*), goes on to Hölderlin ('No sign/Binds') as an early enactment of 'the anxiety of signification' and the 'problematics of self-expression,' and then focuses on 'two poets who are important to this notion of an analytic lyric'—Edmond Jabès and Paul Celan, both of whom work toward 'the hope of recovering the meanings of words in a time when words have lost their meaning.' Michael proposes the relevance of this work to contemporary practice as a radical renewal of certain aspects of the lyric tradition: '. . . the taking over of the lyric concentration on the code itself, on the texture of language, which is something that's always been an intense focus in lyric poetry, . . . taking over the condensation of lyric emotion and focusing it then on the mechanics of language . . . and using that then in the case of Jabès and Celan, among others, like César Vallejo, as a critique of the discourse of power, to renew the function of poetry' (my emphasis).

I believe the poets in this issue of ACTS (and previous issues) participate, in various ways, in this struggle. Also included here is another, complementary sense of 'analytic lyric,' proposed by Benjamin Hollander. In a course description prepared some time ago, Benjamin wrote: '. . . a critical interpretation of a text can

itself constitute an analytic lyric (by which I mean a writing) that can inhabit a site where poetry and the methods of examining it converge in a critically informed music; a writing moved to a dramatic and participatory lyric gesture by the occasions and/or poetic texts which provoked it. These kinds of writing remain outside the canon of the critical establishment—primarily because they break down the status of the expository essay form as the singularly adept critical method—and they represent the work of such seminal figures as Robert Duncan (*The H.D. Book*), Paul Celan (*The Collected Prose*), and, more recently, Susan Howe (*My Emily Dickinson*).'

ACTS 8/9 will be a special book issue edited by Benjamin Hollander, devoted to considerations of the work of Paul Celan, including pieces by Edmond Jabès, E.M. Cioran, Maurice Blanchot, Jean Daive, Yves Bonnefoy, Robert Laporte, and many others.

Future issues of ACTS will include further discussions of the possibility of an 'analytic lyric.'

One thing leads to another. Spicer is invoked on the cover of ACTS 3 and at the end of ACTS 5. It was a necessity for us to do a book for Spicer, *A Book of Correspondences*. Celan is quoted and referred to at length in the interview with Michael Palmer in ACTS 5 and also at the end of ACTS 7 (on the Self). Celan is involved in Michael's notion of "analytic lyric"—a term which appears (parenthetically concealed) on the cover of ACTS 5—and we'll do a book on Celan after the "analytic lyric" issue. There is a network of correspondences that we pay attention to, both within each issue and across issues, over the life of ACTS.

One thing that distinguishes ACTS from many other literary journals is its integration of visual imagery as word and image work. This is something I've been involved in for some time. The writings in cultural criticism that I do for various magazines, mostly art magazines, often consist of readings of word and image juxtapositions in the public image environment. Including visual imagery in ACTS extends the possibilities for correspondences and also acts to bring cultural workers in various forms together in one place. I'm especially interested in "the third image"—that interactive site of meaning *between* word and image.

"Writing the Margin"

I'm afraid I *do* agree with Joseph Beuys: "Art as a history of formal innovation without trying to influence the whole social body is *normal* and *wrong*."

In editing ACTS, we try to be a catalyst, a small quantity that activates change in the larger mass. At the same time, I recognize that the man or woman on the street is not reading ACTS. Longshoremen are not reading ACTS (a few cabdrivers, waitresses and cleaning ladies do). Most

people would characterize ACTS as an extremely marginal activity. "No one listens to poetry."

When considering the *political* efficacy of poetry in the U.S., it's difficult *not* to think of George Oppen, who stopped writing poetry for 27 years in order to devote himself to more *politically effective* work.

There is a great deal of political frustration among writers in the U.S., especially poets. And this political frustration gets played out in the politics of poetry—in the politics of readings and talks and publications, reviews, anthologies, jobs, etc. People from "outside" are always amazed at the level of vituperation among poets. I'm convinced much of this is a result of the marginalization of their acts. The word "margin" is cognate with "mark"—it has to do with marking out an edge or boundary, and this often involves territorial wars. A group of poets stakes a claim and then sets up to defend it. The regime seeks to consolidate its power rather than agitate for it, and lapses into post-revolutionary conformism. Real poetic differences and commonalities are obscured by these territorial struggles.

A privatized writing needn't be unmindful of or unresponsive to the needs of the whole social body. I'm mostly interested in writing that acts as a "critique of the discourse of power" (including the discourse of *literary power*), involved in a concerned and concerning *reference*.

I think it's most important, when working in the Margin, to *insist* on acting *socially*. Otherwise, it's just a place to hide. Suzi Gablik, in *Has Modernism Failed?* quotes Peter Fuller in saying: "[The contemporary artist's freedom is] like the freedom of madmen and the insane; they can do what they like because whatever they do has no effect at all They have every freedom except the one that matters: the freedom to act socially."

"Analytic lyric" is a contradiction at home in the present. When intuition is too clear to bear words or images (too painful), analysis provides the distance necessary for survival. A time of taking things apart, before putting things together—differently. Cultural resistance is resistance to manipulation and control, from whatever quarter.

I think it's important to question the kind of 'ethic of marginality' which is self-satisfied in the margin and defends marginality *per se*. The determining factor is how much do you reach out to what is *common* among us (what Don Byrd will call "The Poetics of Common Knowledge") in seeking to extend and deepen that knowledge, and how much do you limit your inquiries to *specialized* knowledge? Is it possible for poetry to become a hyper-specialized discourse and still be responsible to the whole social body?

Specialists tend to claim a sort of "fictional value" for their work, socially. That should also be questioned. If the Margin is cut off from the Common and is not responsible towards it, then it exists only to further itself.

In the U.S., the term "marginal" is first and foremost an economic distinction. ACTS is marginal because it is "an enterprise that produces

goods at a rate that barely covers production costs"—and it does *that* only through State subsidy—it relies on grants. The irony of this situation—ACTS being supported by the Federal Government—while being a source of subversive delight to me, is not so clear, because State subsidy encourages State subsidy. That is, the community served, in this case the community of writers which forms the audience for ACTS, does not feel compelled to support it with their subscriptions. So ACTS is currently down to 150 subscribers and a total circulation of 600 for the regular issues.

ACTS was just awarded a California Arts Council Grant. The people on the committee said a lot of very nice things about ACTS, but I'm ambivalent. I think ACTS should be supported by its *readers*, through subscriptions. It bothers me to think that ACTS may have to live out its short life as a ward of the State.

I admit to a good bit of idealism, still. I believe that what poets and writers do matters. I believe that the significance of useful, necessary cultural work changes the people who do it. I also believe that workers (writers and editors) should be judged according to the quality of what they write and edit first, and that all other considerations should come later.

I realize now that last bit sounds entirely too much like an Art Agnos acceptance speech, so I'd better stop there.

Selections from *Notebooks* (1989)

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The aesthetic of ancient Egypt went into the form of the hieroglyphic. The aesthetic of the Chinese, in the next stage of written language, went into the ideogram, which is really an abstract form derived from the hieroglyphic. The aesthetic energy of Rome, and later of the Renaissance, went into the shape of letters engraved or printed in the modern alphabet. It seems that today, in a fourth stage of written language, the aesthetic drive is going into a new kind of pictogram, which by-passes alphabetic literacy in various ways: this is the acronym, the logo, the international graphic sign, the abstract symbol—each of these being a form of direct stimulus-response communication. Together, these signs constitute an international pictographic language, most prominent in international traffic signs, international signs in world airports, in railway stations and bus terminals, but also common in business, in shopping areas and other public places. We are moving toward a new Esperanto of hieroglyphics, transcending the 2,716 or so actual languages in the world by a single language of instantly comprehensible signs and graphics.

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Poets tend to have a feudal mentality. They're still somewhere in the seventeenth century, forever fawning over some Roi Soleil, while each of them secretly believes that *he* himself is the true king—a baron in his own estate. Democracy hasn't yet dawned in the republic of poetry.

It is only the dead who are pretty much equal. You can read Keats, or Pope, or Browning, without having to think that one is better than another, or that any one of them rules over the roost.

•

In any large society with an imposed order there is always some revolutionary process of total change, or rather several such, stirring in their incipient stages. These consist in each case of a messianic figure, a kind of whirling dervish of discontent, who begins to gather disciples around him, and who, out of his personal distress and desperation, proposes the utter denial or destruction of the existing order of things and a visionary dream of an alternative order. He is the apocalyptic leader

or revolutionary paranoid of whom history has many examples. (He is not even one predestined figure, but may be replaced by others as the movement gathers force.) Most such movements eventually peter out, but all aspire to become total movements and to take over the whole society. Therefore some of them grow into veritable tornados that wreck everything, or almost everything—and when they do succeed they transform the social order into a new society.

The occurrence of these whirling dervishes in any ordered society is in fact analogous to the appearance of random variations in a biological population: they are proposals for a new species, that are then eliminated or taken up in the survival struggle. If viable, they take over the whole population; if not, they vanish without a trace.

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Chance is not the final truth, it is only the end of the telescope through which we are looking.

But it is where different orders of reality intersect that chance works its greatest effects. A pebble falls, a poet dies. You meet a friend by chance—you change his life, or he changes yours. Nothing that happens is without some element of chance, or unpredictable novelty. Chance increases the possibility of existence, it is the yeast in a world of necessity.

•

Excessive innovation leads to disintegration. This is simply an aspect of the law of organization and entropy. Any percept consists of, or can be divided into, a number of defining characteristics or properties. This complex of characteristics constitutes a unity. Take a game of chess: it consists of a board of sixty-four black-and-white squares, with sixteen black and sixteen white pieces of various shapes, with their prescribed movements, and a defined objective for the game, including the rules of play. Now, if you gradually alter the game by deliberate innovation—as to the rules, or the movement of the pieces, or the shape and size of the board—there will be a point at which it can be said, "This is no longer the game of chess, it is something else!" In the same way, in evolution, every plant and animal changes gradually in very small ways, until ultimately it becomes an entirely different plant or animal. Innovation alters some of the properties in a complex, and if it is undirected (that is, random) it leads to total disorganization, in other words, disintegration. There must be a mathematical point beyond which the degree of innovation will actually alter the perceptual object beyond recognition. This can and should be tested and determined in the psychological laboratory, to find out at what degree in the alteration of a mathematically-defined order a subject fails to recognize that order. (Try to devise an experiment for this!) This point must be a certain proportion

of the total number of the defining characteristics involved—probably somewhere between a third and a half.

The twentieth century is a century of extreme innovation, especially in the arts, but also in other aspects of life. This means that the accelerated innovation brought to any particular art results inevitably in the dissolution of the art itself. Painting no longer is the art of painting, music no longer music, poetry no longer poetry. And in other areas of life a similar bewilderment appears: the school, the university, the church, no longer are the institutions they once were. The family is no longer the family. Nothing is now recognizable as the social reality which existed at the beginning of the century. The havoc of innovation has disrupted and disintegrated every familiar institution and activity of civilized life.

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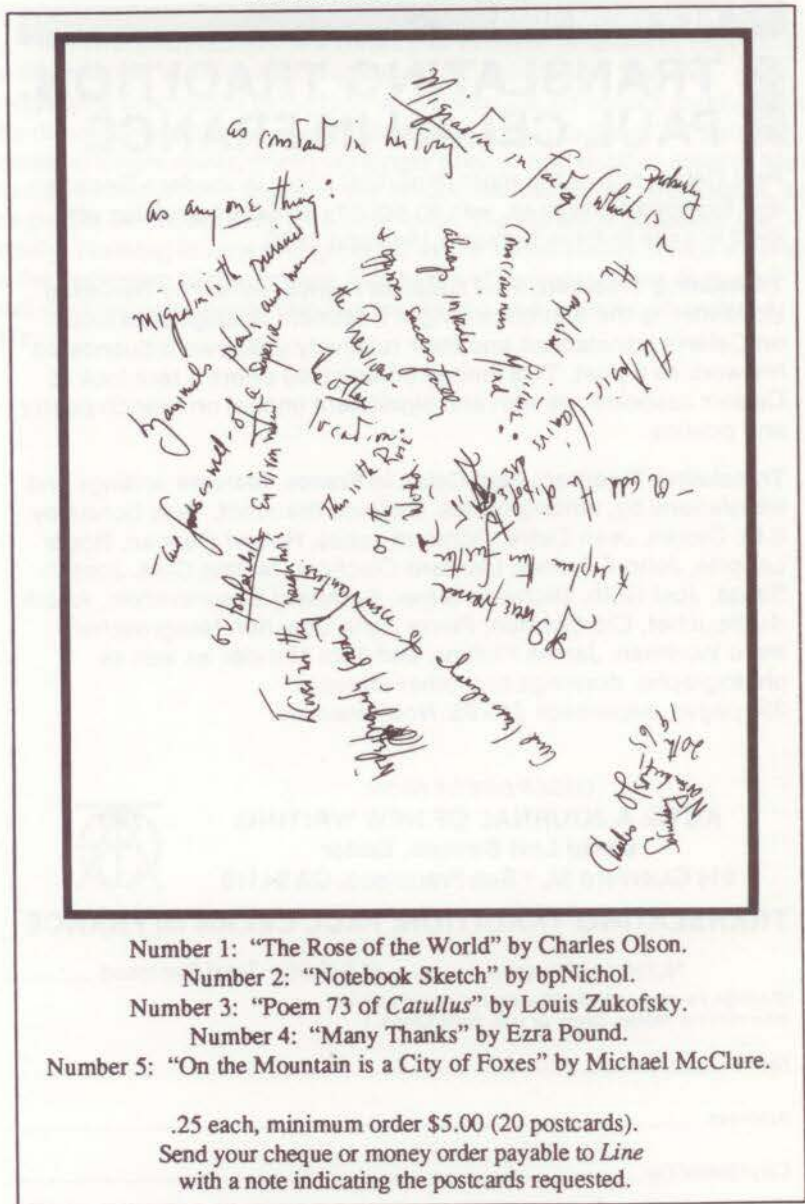
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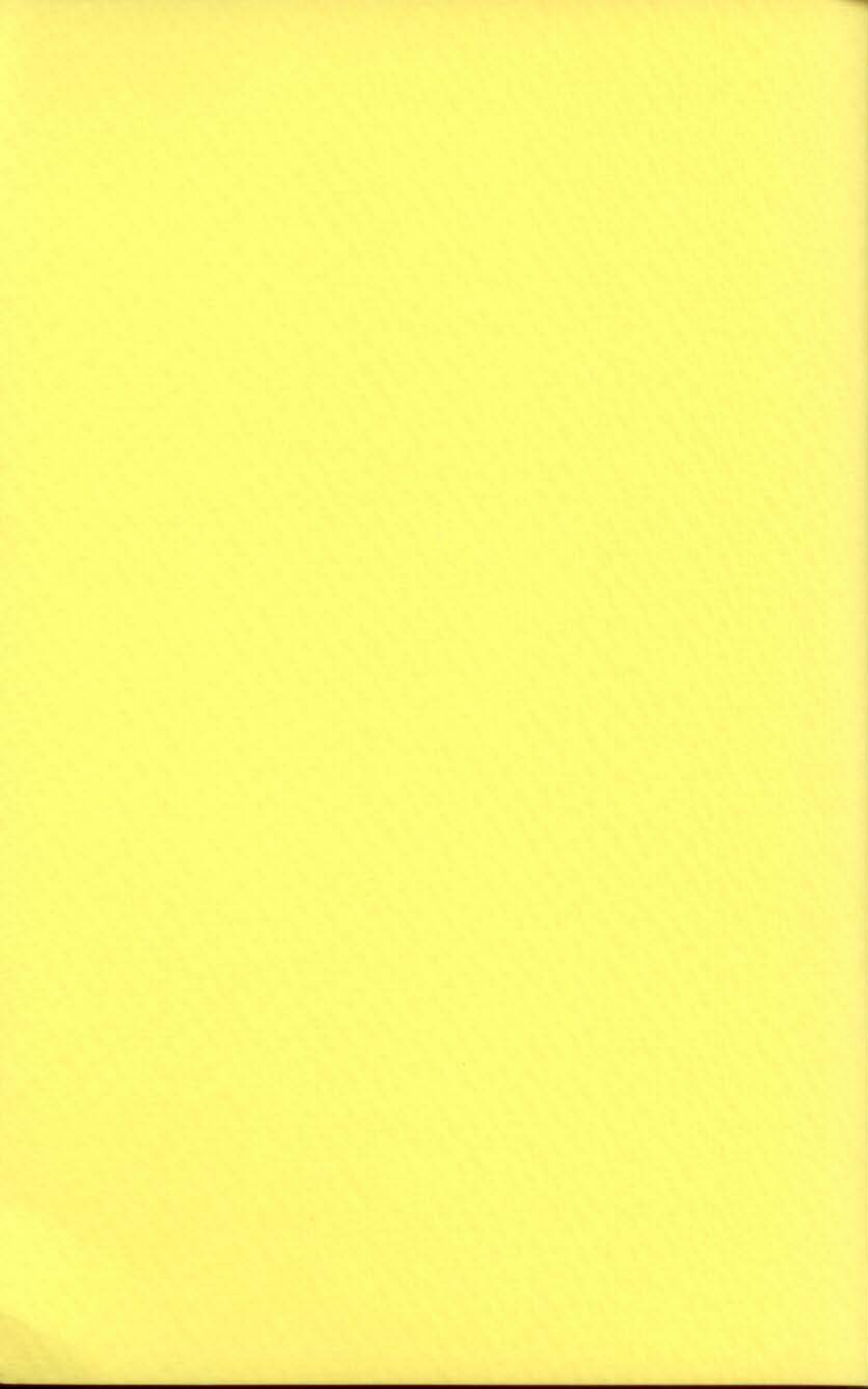
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