

Marlatt's act of reframing is a double gesture: it breaks the time frames that freeze her subjectivity in the moment of the earlier writing and, at the same time, collapses the genre frames that lock female subjectivity out of the long poem. As well as calling the authority of her own voice into question, she calls the authority of the long poem tradition into question.<sup>1</sup> For example, Marlatt's *Steveston* has affinities both with William Carlos Williams' *Paterston* (explored by Chris Hall) and, as she acknowledges, with Charles Olson's *Maximus Poems* (TT 31), as well as his projectivist poetics. However, *Steveston* also has links with the emerging feminist long poem counter-tradition signalled by a work such as H.D.'s *Trilogy*, which Marlatt reviewed for *Open Letter* and explored in her 1975 correspondence with Penny Kemp. At a reading at the Canadian Women Writing Conference at York University, 1987, Marlatt suggested that because *Steveston* was written about a cannery town, most of it is about men and men's work. But even some of her earliest *Steveston* pieces depart from the practice of her male predecessors by including a multiple female voice speaking for herself. The woman's long poem, then, in the act of breaking open the traditional long poem frames, reveals the cultural specificity of the female subject position that cannot be adequately represented by a male voice speaking or fantasizing her subjectivity. In this way, Marlatt's *Steveston* spiral enacts the process of birthing the woman's long poem. With each re-vision, the female voice and presence become stronger until, in *Salvage*, it is the only voice. Following the principle of the salmon returning to their source that Marlatt so values in *Steveston*, the new poems swim up the time-stream, "sometime creatures of / motive that swim, against the source, but always continuing to return, always these lovely & perilous bodies drifting in spawn, swarm on out to sea" (S 86). The subversive salmon text.

Gleaning a theory of reading from Marlatt's revisionist writing practice in *Salvage*, my feminist reframing of her *Steveston* net will follow the strategy of her life/long writing in process. Extending her praxis, it will perform the narrative of how her new pieces, marked by her lesbian-feminist orientation, speak back to and seek out those lines of connection between her current woman-identified vision and her earlier work. I will follow the chronological spiral of this narrative forward in time by first engaging the feminist impulse of the earlier *Steveston* works before I turn to the new pieces that recall the earlier poems.

Marlatt's *Steveston* privileges a multiplicity of culturally devalued native, minority, and female voices; it also engages in a multi-layered critique of oppressive social and economic systems affiliated with capitalism, classism, racism, and sexism. While Marlatt is concerned with transmitting the whole interconnected web of lives, livelihood, and local ground that she experiences *Steveston* as, she is most frequently drawn to *Steveston* women, engaging both in empathetic critique of their experience of gender oppression from the dominant and minority cultures, and in celebration of their strengths.

Reframing *Steveston* with the woman-centered vision of *Salvage* reveals that the feminist impulse is more than subtext in the earlier

work. While *Steveston* does treat the lives of all the members of the *Steveston* community, only two poems feature specific men; seven poems focus on specific women. As well, two poems are devoted to Marlatt's experience of gender oppression in the fishermen's territory, and three poems to the river, another female presence in the poem. More than half of the twenty-two poems weave the connections between the women of *Steveston* and their experience of place. This is an impressive figure considering that only two out of ten people interviewed for the *Steveston* aural history were women. Marlatt acknowledged the woman-centered orientation of her work as early as 1974: "There's more poignancy in the dissatisfaction of the women's lives for me . . ." (GTB 73).

As well as privileging female voices and subjective experience, Marlatt feminizes her long poem in a variety of other important ways. Throughout *Steveston* she explores oppositions between nature and culture, between flux and fixity, between the marginal and the dominant. Significantly, Marlatt connects the androcentric cultural obsession with ownership, fixity, and progress with the exploitation of nature and the related marginalization of women:

that's what progress destroys—the play, the give & take of our elemental surroundings, . . . our world becomes a man-made (-willed) world, nature outlawed outside city limits (woman skulking in the ditch—crier in graveyard (indian)—in those deep ditches, watery woman). (S)

Marlatt's ensuing question, "what are the characteristics of this outlawed (forbidden) woman/nature?" haunts her text and impels it forward in quest of the answer. A variation of this question appears both in "Moon," where the poet asks, "White as the moon, who was she?" (S 21) and in "Or there is love" where she asks, "where do you / find her, out?" (S 81). The quest for the outlawed woman, the elusive female subject, spirals through the text, beckoning the woman writer and reader alike.

Marlatt ultimately casts the conflict between "woman/nature" and culture as a confrontation between the eroticism of place and the capitalist exploitation of place: "the geography is erotic—industry & capitalist society exploits it and loses all sense of its eroticism" (S). Although she sees the whole fishing community as being on the side of natural eroticism because the fishermen depend for their livelihood on understanding and respecting the rhythms and cycles of nature, in *Steveston* she also criticizes the fishermen for biting the hook of the North American dream, for accepting the seduction of white ideology: "Dream of seizing silver wealth that swims, & fixing it in solid ground, land, home. A mis-reading of the river's push" (S 42). Marlatt reads the "gap" or "discontinuity" between the river and the impulse to security that seeks to pin down the wealth of the river as analogous to the "gap" between *Steveston*'s main street, the "straight line" which resists the river, and the river's curve (43). She explores this conflict between the

eroticism of place and cultural values further in "Ghost," described by her as "the crucial poem in the book," for Henry Kokubo. Here she writes on "the double alienation of himself as Japanese" (GTB 74), double because of his cultural marginalization during the war and his adoption of dominant cultural values after the war. She makes clear that one strand of this ideology is sexism. Some of the ghosts in this poem are the ghosts of women he has eyed as objects:

All their faces

lucent and warmlit shining before your eyes: teachers, cabaret girls, longlegged American army wives you chauffered, cared for, daughters, friends of your daughters, down thru the water smiles of easy girls, caught, kore, in the black hole of your eye . . . (S 76)

Like Kore trapped underground by Hades, these women collectively are pinned by Kokubo's gaze. In "Work" and "End of Cannery Channel," Marlatt records her own experience of being Kore trapped by the male gaze. "I'm clearly a woman on their float . . . He eyes me / across the rift of language, race, and sex" (38). Throughout *Steveston* Marlatt exposes the links between a consumer society and women as another kind of "private property," objects of exchange in a male economy of desire. She also explicitly points out the inter-relationship between exploitation of the environment and of women: "And still, at sea, boundaries give way: / white women, white bellies of salmon thieved by powerful boats" (76).

The eroticism of the male inhabitants of Steveston is misshapen by the androcentric values they are seduced by. In counterpoint to this, Marlatt sees the eroticism of place as being inherently female. Her rough notes for the Steveston radio play are revealing: in one place she writes, "female - earth (sensuality)," and in another indicates her interest in the name of the island Steveston is located on—"Lulu (Island)," named after a flamboyant nineteenth-century actress who visited Steveston, and who made it into history by taking the fancy of Colonel Richard Moody who commanded his corporal to "put Lulu on your map as the name of that island" ("The Lady was a Lulu"). While Moody put Lulu on the map of history, for Marlatt she represents "the eroticism of place," an eroticism that is clearly gendered, not generic (RPR).

Connected to her sense that the women linked with Steveston embody the eroticism of place is Marlatt's feminization of the river, which stands in metonymically for place and is the most significant recurring image in the poem. In "Pour, pour" the river is gendered female, a force both polluted by the human exploitation indifferent to her resources and transcending it:

This river is

*alive*, he says, crippled fisherman on the radio watching water swollen with filth, with sewage, milldirt, strain at the sandbag dyke, at its container, uncontainable, irrational (hence renewable)

creature, swelling up & birthing, huge, past all their plans & plants . . . (S 17)

The pregnant river flows in excess of the cultural containers, defying cultural boundaries. This river has nothing of the virgin mother about her. There are overtones of eroticism in this huge, surging act of birth, perhaps even multiple births.

In "Life Cycle," Marlatt directly links the principle of return, based on the salmon life cycle, to the river. She confronts the man-made attempts to lock nature (and woman) outside of culture:

After the flood

'it's been a hard pull, but I think it's safe now with more piling'.

Safe against that river cresting at over 20 feet.

Safe again, forgetting she's a way in, to return, in time, the stream. Against all odds they home in, to the source that's marked their scales first birth place: environing: (S 71)

Marlatt suggests that the reading of the river as "other," dangerous and unpredictable, a force to be controlled by dikes and pilings, alienates us from our roots. We, like the salmon, need to return to the river (mouth), to reconnect with the natural rhythms that hold birth and death in a continuum.

The recurring image of the river mouth is drawn from Marlatt's fascination with Kwakiutl cosmology, which envisions the sea as a river running north toward the world's end, imaged as a huge hole or mouth which the river dives into (GTB 49). As Frank Davey has noted, Marlatt's use of the Kwakiutl Winter Ceremonial as subtext in the poem is a way of reprivileging the culturally devalued native voice (186). She also, however, recasts the Kwakiutl myths of the river mouth by making it the place of origin and birth, as well as the natural place of death, in "Pour, pour": "from its bank) this river is rivering urgency, roar (goku, goku) thru any hole . . . as, / the possible entry of this channel for . . . / the fish reenter time, . . . / past any tidal reach (renew) fish / seek their source, which is, their proper place to die . . . (S 17).

Through her rewriting of Kwakiutl mythology in the feminine, Marlatt urges a return to our rooted relationship with nature as a remedy for the obsession with death which underlies the capitalist impulse to fixity, permanence, ownership, and progress.

Not only is the principle of return intrinsic to the philosophical argument of *Steveston* and the recurring images that spiral through it, but it also informs the structure. In "Long as in Time? Steveston," Marlatt writes, "I think of *Steveston* as actually a movement around, based on return. A cycle of poems, it moves around & keeps returning to the central interface of human lives with the river . . ." (317). She sees her poem



cycle as being like the river and the salmon cycle, in opposition to the affinities of linear narrative with the linear consciousness that imposes progress and development on local ground. Elsewhere, Marlatt connects her poem cycle in process with the flow of the river to birth. She suggests that there is no monolithic point to her book because "[i]t's an act. It's a process. It's coming thru. It's moving out into the mouth of the river & out into the sea" (*GTB* 77). She conflates the mouth of the river and mouth of the speaker (herself inflected here), suggesting that the coming/birthing words she speaks are merged with the female river voice. Writing of her poetic technique, Marlatt points to her poetic technique as "In its associations spilling over linebreaks . . . the sentence (and the reader-listener following the sentence) spills out of separateness as one sentence spills into the next and a river spills into the sea." The reader-listener births the rivering text: "the erotic flow of issuance, arrival in the connected here-and-now, is re-enacted in each reading" (*DI* 94).

In her notes to the radio play, Marlatt made the link between her own voice and the river explicit. She writes to John Reeves that she sees the poem as a dialogue between the documentary voices of Steveston fishermen transcribed from the interviews for the aural history and "my voice in *Steveston*, which moves largely as a river/sea voice (rhythms of tides and current)" (*LJR* 1 May 1975). She also instructs Reeves that "the Voice should be female, should be able to handle a long breath line . . . The Voice flows like the river, as the syntax indicates" (*LJR* 21 July 1975). Marlatt's inclusion of a female river voice ensures that, although the radio play features the Japanese-Canadian fishermen's story, there is also space for female subjectivity to enter. In an interview Marlatt links the (female) eroticism of her long lines to the eroticism she perceives in Steveston: "the way it feels to me is that I'm simply moving out sensually into the land, into terrain" (*GTB* 76). Recently she commented further on this intersection of female eroticism, the erotics of local ground, and stylistic erotics: "I'm thinking that what I was working with in *Steveston* was very much an orgasmic feeling of trying to gather up everything and move it out—right out to the mouth of the river. I mean, the syntax and body and landscape become totally interwoven" (*SEBS* 27).

Marlatt's feminization of the structure, the sentence, the line, and the recurring images that spiral through *Steveston*, extends to images that signal her treatment of the related concepts of time and history. In the roughs to her radio plays, she writes of the "ongoing movement of time" as a cycle like the movement of "tidal return." This connects her treatment of time to the principle of return, to the salmon cycle, and to the human cycle, "each life exemplifying some circle (connection with the past)" (*Radio Play Roughs*). Her poem cycle enacts this process of spiralling backwards and forwards in time by bringing up past historical moments into her present reflections on Steveston, as she does in "Moon" where she interweaves a "half moon, hot night" (S 21) in June during the nineteenth century, when Lulu Sweet herself might have walked the Steveston boardwalks, with a similar night under the spring moon, when

the salmon are spawning but the eroticism of place is destroyed by capitalist exploitation.

Feminist readings of *Steveston* note the fishing nets or webs, another of Marlatt's images for human presence in the time continuum (Cole 6; Godard 490). Marlatt's reflection on the Steveston community as an interconnecting network reaching horizontally back in time and vertically across racial and gender divisions puts a feminist twist on Charles Olson's synchronic conception of place in time and the decentered subject's relationship to it. She creates a feminist relational poetics emphasizing mutuality and interdependence. Marlatt's time/history spiral in *Steveston* parallels the salmon cycle: in both, she values woman and nature in a double gesture of return to source.

As she does with many of the female subjects in the poem cycle, Marlatt implicitly links Inez Houvinen, the Finnish fisherwoman featured in "A by-channel; a small back-water," with the eroticism of place. Marlatt sees Inez as so close to the river that she actually is its voice: "She runs in the / throat of time, voicing the very swifts & shallows of that river, / urging, in the dash of it, enough to keep up, to live on" (S 65). Weaving together the flow of time and the flow of the river, Marlatt shows time for Inez as different from the mechanized time that chops the days of the women who work for the canneries in "Imperial Cannery, 1917." She creates a lyrical image of a woman's life running free, free from company exploitation, free to work out her own destiny. Also, in contrast to the fishermen of Steveston, Inez does not misread the river's push but has an interactive relationship with it: "she'll take / all that river gives, willing only to stand her ground (rolling, / with it, right under her feet, her life, rolling, out from under, / right on out to sea . . ." (65). The closing passage of the poem leaves the reader with a celebratory, almost mythic impression of Inez as the spirit of place, whose local ground is the river itself.

The publishing process of Marlatt's Steveston project parallels the (hy)story of women's life writing as it unfolds. The radio play *One Life, Steveston* (1976) balances the featured male characters with the female river/female poet's voice. The new edition of the *Minden* and Marlatt photo/poem cycle collaboration reframes the poem by not only rearranging photographs so that they are intercut with related poems, but omitting three photographs of white male shopkeepers included in the first volume and including three new photographs of Japanese-Canadian women, as well as one of the dominantly female staff at Christine's Cafe, and two of a Japanese fisherman and couple. This reframing decreases white male representation in the book, and increases women and minority representation. A politics of selection and placement operates in the new edition that aims to make the culturally invisible visible. One example of how placement makes women visible is the photograph of three wryly smiling Japanese women posing in sisterly fashion against a backdrop of mountains that the caption indicates frame the Slocan Valley. The juxtaposition of this photograph with the poem "Slave of the canneries," which gives voice to the experience of male

Slocan resident Spud Matsushita, makes visible the women without breaking their silence.

Beginning with her earliest Steveston cycle, Marlatt writes with that subversive Penelopean double gesture of unweaving her relationship to the long poem tradition that she is writing out of, and weaving a new relationship to the emerging feminist long poem counter-tradition. In her revision, she continually reopens the poem and extends the project. While such life/long writing is practiced by contemporary male writers, the critical difference between their projects and Marlatt's is gender. Like Scheherazade's never-ending tale, the woman writer's life sentence reclaims her life in/from the margins of culture.

## II

'what's at issue here is whether women can enter the culture as women.'

finding a way to write her in, here & her, write she, write suck & rush, high & daring to be, attaches her body to words where they stick to her . . . writing their all, splashing around in the muck, allure of the current she rides their rushing out, her & the words all/uvial. (FS)

*Salvage*: v. to save from loss at sea; to save from destruction by fire -> *salve*: obs. form of save; v. to anoint a wounded part with healing unguent; n. a solution of a difficulty; also a sophistical evasion. (OED)

Marlatt recasts her net to write the rivering multiple female subjectivity into cultural history by salvaging several uncollected poems from the margins of *Steveston*. First published in the special women's issue of the Toronto little magazine *IS* (1973), "*Steveston*. Support? Fish." is an important long poem cycle in five parts. From this early piece, Marlatt draws her new title work "*Litter*. Wreckage. *Salvage*." Just as Adrienne Rich dates her poems to reflect her life/long writing in process, this poem is dated (1973)—1987-88. In it and the other new pieces, Marlatt pursues the lament found in the opening lines of both the recent and early versions of the two poems—"Steveston / your women are / invisible"—by uncovering the cultural reasons for their invisibility and making them visible in the double act of searching and telling.

No longer trying to give voice to all of the concerns of the Steveston community, Marlatt recalls the feminized river images, her fascination with the lives of the "invisible" women, her critique of the way the fishermen buy the dream of wealth and women imposed on them by the dominant culture—making these the focus of her recent poems. "shrimping" spins off from the uncollected poem "These Nets," published in *Sound Heritage* in 1974, a piece that describes the shrimp caught in the black nets used in the shrimping process, and which is written with the

detailed documentary precision so characteristic of Marlatt's earlier work. These details provide the frame for the new poem which performs the allegory of the gender-trapped female, caught in the nets of male desire. The poem's dark vision, focussed on the deadly damage done by the cultural inscription "feminine" across the female body, begins with Marlatt's association of the black nets with a funeral:

steamsprayed with tar caught up at the boom and flowing like a dirge

dirige Domine who hath dominion dominate in techne lord of the nets (FS 47)

Following the a/linear free play of word association, Marlatt rewrites the priest's voice in an ironic criticism of man's "dominion" over the earth and all its creatures.

The fourth stanza of the poem follows through from the netting to the canning of the shrimp:

. . . baby shrimp she said look at them curled in their cans waiting to be picked crevette, little shrimp, sitting on his fingers stuck up playfully there and there my sweet looking good enough to eat she was wearing her short dress with frilly underwear, so pink this little crack crevasse (la la) we have taken over this fissure in the gender of it all (47)

Following the a/logic of bilingual puns, the poem without warning impersonates a male voice and makes a jarring metonymic shift from the canned baby shrimp to the phrase "little shrimp" used as a term of endearment for a little girl. The ambiguously erotic and fatherly tone imitates the way men address/undress little girls in a familial way, and address women with similar diminutive language. By mirroring the common endearments this generic "he" uses, Marlatt critiques the way that little girls are indoctrinated to elicit the look of male approval (desire). While the scene is cast in the innocent language and simple rhythms of nursery rhyme, a sinister subtext links food and desire—"my sweet looking good enough to eat"—and calls up the wolf who plots to devour Little Red Riding Hood, along with the fairytale's broader cultural designation of women as objects to be consumed. Marlatt reveals how insidious female gender scripting is when she shows that it begins with teaching little girls to be "Daddy's girl." Further, her wordplay on crevette/crevasse interrogates the cultural myth that female anatomy is her destiny. "Crevasse" marks the site of female biological difference. Diminutive terms of endearment become cultural passwords that allow easy access to the female body.

The next stanza deconstructs the cultural myth of little girls "pretty in pink" by conflating both the scene of shrimp caught in the net and shrimp about to be eaten:



this fiction pink for little girls that we were the ones plying the net, fore-ply alive in the reddening of desire from the raw to the cooked dressing her feminine with just a bit of sauce you don't want to look like a boy do you? widening the gap (crevasse) a finger's width just letting her know that's him (fishing) for her below (47)

Here Marlatt makes explicit what was hinted at in the previous stanza. She allegorizes the scene of the caught and dressed shrimp as a scene of child molestation where the little girl is caught in a cultural version of femininity designed to elicit male desire. The result is the chilling implication that cultural fictions of the feminine do as much psychological damage as "bad touch" from a trusted father figure does and an interrogation of the cultural myth that the female somehow "asks for it" by being a little tease. Marlatt makes clear that when little girls wear the colour of desire (pink → red), theirs is a costume designed by those who want to consume them. Playing with the Lévi-Strauss title *The Raw and the Cooked*, Marlatt suggests that because of such cultural cooking and dressing, "femininity" can never be known in its raw or natural state. In Marlatt's rereading of difference, "widening the gap (crevasse)" of gender is a cultural gesture that violates the female body.

"Litter, wreckage, salvage." begins where "shrimping" ends and moves through the cultural litter and wreckage of deforming prescriptions of the feminine to salvage the female subject. The six sections of the new piece loosely follow the form of the Pindaric ode—strophe, antistrophe, and epode, or turn, counterturn, and stand. The poem enacts an antiphonal dance between sections i, ii and iv which explore the experience of the female agoraphobe in the third person, and sections iii and v which inscribe the poet's related experience, culminating with the celebration of the multiple female subject in vi. As well as appropriating the traditionally masculine ode form for feminist ends, the poem also embodies the epic struggle of the female subject to swim free from/against cultural constraints, to find the words to write herself into "her element."

The poem opens with a fluid lateral movement from documentary details depicting abandoned company houses at Star Camp in Steveston to the abandoned women whose lives are locked away by the myth that a woman's place is in the home. With this movement from outside to inside, Marlatt begins to explore the cultural gap in Steveston life, to make visible the invisible women. She acknowledges how this script has become a hiding place for the female subject: "If 'the woman is within,' if that's her place as they have always said, can she expect her walls not to be broken open suddenly. . . . Dug-up clam, dehusked, who can no longer bury her head in the sand. . ." (FS 41). Following this exposure of the scripts that lead a woman to fear leaving her culturally assigned place, section ii explores the fear of the dehusked agoraphobic woman: "fear of the marketplace, of going outdoors. fear of public places, crowds, of leaving home." Marlatt counterpoints an ironic impersonation of the patronizing voice of a counsellor ("relax, take a deep breath. imagine

walking down the path to your gate. how strong is your fear now?") with the voice of the woman that penetrates to the heart of the matter to reveal the counsellor's gender blindness: "i want to imagine being in my element, she said" (42). This direct statement defies the cultural injunction against the woman's walking out her gate when outside has not been sanctioned as her element. Section iv then voices the fears of the female subject who has gotten past her gate and is "coping with the world outside." While she has made the first step, now "her struggle is within." This line echoes "the woman is within" from section i and reminds us that the female subject is not free of the imprisoning sense that she is in a man's world, not hers, when she is outside: "i can't take the bus is the same as i won't take the bus. . . . she says they are staring at her. . . . they thought she was dumb. . . . the fear of being caught, caught out, caught without—." The female subject knows that she will be the object of the male gaze, read as the cultural "other," as transgressive and as cultural lack. Marlatt makes clear that what this female subject lacks is the words to read herself, to write herself into her element: "she doesn't have the words to alter his definition of her" (44).

Sections iii and v self-reflexively focus on the act of writing this poem as the means to female self-definition, while exploring the female poet's own experience of trying to trespass cultural limits:

I want to walk down the street as if i had the right to be there, as if it were not their construction site and stoop, slipping the net of their casting eyes, slipping the net of their market price. The street belongs to the men who live 'outside', whose small acts accrete (concrete) unspoken claim, a territory that cannot be trespassed except you hurry through, for loitering indicates a desire to be caught. . . (43)

While the scene has changed from Steveston to Vancouver's skid row, the situation is reminiscent of Marlatt's experience of gender entrapment on the docks. Like the "little shrimp," the poet is in danger of being caught in the nets of male desire. The implication is that if women step outside their "place" into what is culturally defined as male territory, they too become territory to be staked out by the desiring look ("I saw her first"). This is woman's "real" in a phallogentric culture. From her own gender oppression, Marlatt empathizes with those who experience class oppression ("I go fishing too, to bridge that gap i let my line down into the powerless depths we flounder in") from the city fathers who stand "on the opposite side of the street having made this town, having marked it 'No Trespassing' 'No Loitering.'" The "No Loitering" sign echoes the unwritten injunction against female loitering in the first stanza and links with Marlatt's focus on the multiple class and gender oppressions experienced by a young woman, in the company of two young men, who is "flaunting her being there free, she thinks, for free—." When Marlatt questions just how free this young woman is, she makes clear that exploring the gender gap that they both fall into is the aim of this

writing: "Are you the fish that escape my line in the swift and surge . . . letting my line fall into the blank, the mute, defences breached she's letting her want out there where i am . . ." (43). The borders between female subjects, between writing and written, blur here; both have the same surge of desire, their element outside on the street.

Section v continues the first person exploration of female experience of androcentric barriers to being free, this time in several related settings that speak to the same oppression: "the baiting you do, talking to me in the street, my back against the car and you playing the line, hiding behind the tease i rise to . . ." (45). From the allegory of the fisherman angling for the woman, she returns to the scene of her earliest training in this game:

just as, back then, swimming through sexual currents looking for eyes . . . gone fishing for compliments recognition is, eyes the lure. allure. not looking (out) but looking the look for certain eyes, floating around the places he swam by, i 'lost' myself as they say and i did. fall into invisibility. silvered, dead. i floated up and down the school yard with the others, eyes re-flecting all they saw, blind to myself, more: hoping to feel that hook when his would connect: 'he looked at me!' (45)

In the intricate dance between fisher and fished, the schoolgirl learns to fish for the compliment of masculine desire, learns to use her feminine allure (like the little girl in pink) as bait to lure the male. While it seems she is the active fisher, she ends up dead fish, lost under the trick of "looking the look for certain eyes." Marlatt exposes the myth of the feminine masquerade that renders the female subject invisible in the (man's) world, still hidden "within" and out of her element. However, the end of section v re-writes this script in the feminine: "The fishy vocabularies we speak our worlds through. 'the fish never says no,' you say, the lure speaking. but watch that fish swim right on by. the fish is after something too. something else" (45). For the first time in the poem sequence, the female subject swims free of the phallogocentric lures, following the lure of her own desires, transforming the gap between the binaries of male as "active" (lure) and female as "passive" (dead fish).

The antiphonal alternation between the double narrative of the first and third person multiple female subject who struggles against the cultural scripts imprisoning her in the "woman's world" and in "the feminine masquerade" culminates in section vi. As in the Pindaric ode, the final section provides a solution, a summation where the choric strands meet and merge. The opening lines engage the reader to "imagine her . . . in her element in *other words*" (my italics 46), her own words to define her self, to write her self into culture, her element. This victory is a double one: "already past the gate she's past his point of view as central (hook/lure) to a real she slides free of." The multiple female subject is no longer imprisoned by "his definition" of her "real." Agoraphobia and

cultural invisibility are cured in the free gesture of writing the narrative of female desire into cultural history:

free she multiplies herself in any woman . . . casting a thought receives it back this we of an eye complicit in a smile she gathers fish-quick, taking the measure of their plural depth she who with every step . . . desires in the infinitive to utter (outer) her way through—litter wreckage salvage of pure intent. (46)

The woman speaking/writing her life/line no longer cares whether she has the look of male approval (desire) but writes for the complicit eyes of her co-conspirators, those women breathing together with her, working together with her, to birth the female subject.

In the spirit of feminist collaboration, I labor with Marlatt's life/long writing in process, returning to the source, to that feminist gesture that marks her salmon texts—salvage. In her new writing, Marlatt salvages the unexplored side of things, that female "otherwhere"—the realm of (her own) female subjectivity (FS 48). This salmon text that swims up the currents of her Steveston spiral, saves (salves) the female subject from being lost at sea, from being burned at the stake for not conforming to her lot, staked out (in writing) as his to desire; it salves the scar tissue of false skin and births the subject in all her multiplicity, evading the nets that seek to define her femininity.

#### Notes

I am grateful to Kristen Brady for her insightful comments on this essay and to Elisabeth Koster for her editorial suggestions.

1. For an excellent introduction to women writers in the epic tradition, see Susan Stanford Friedman's "Gender and Genre Anxiety: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and H.D. as Epic Poets," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 5 (1986): 203-28. See also my forthcoming thesis for a detailed exploration of Marlatt's feminist reframing of the masculinist long poem.

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On *Ana Historic*:  
An Interview with Daphne Marlatt\*

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George Bowering: *Ana Historic*: A novel. Is this a first novel, or another novel?

Daphne Marlatt: This is really, as far as I'm concerned, my first novel, because it's the first fictional book of prose. *Zocalo* was called a novel by some people, much to my surprise, because I hadn't thought of it as that when I was writing it—since it was true as far as I was concerned. It was based on what had actually happened, as much as I could remember. Sometimes I invented but not much.

GB: Now we have in *Ana Historic* two or three or four narratives going on all at once. One of them would appear to people who are familiar with your work to be a continuation of various things that they've heard you say before about your growing up on the North Shore of Vancouver. They'll say that the character Annie in here somewhat resembles Daphne Marlatt. Then there are other narratives that seem different from that, like the one about "Ana Historic," Ana Richards, who is retrieved almost entirely by your imagination from very little linguistic information. So in a sense, one might say that it is an autobiographical novel of the imagination.

DM: I like that term. See, the thing with autobiography, and I'm thinking back to what I've just said about *Zocalo* too, is that remembering is a fiction in any case, and we know that from hearing eyewitness accounts of an accident, the same accident that everybody viewed, and they all have different versions of what actually happened. So, we have this funny thing when we say remembering is real, and inventing is not—inventing is purely imaginary or fictional. What interests me is where those two cross. I think one can still be autobiographical and in fact be quite imaginative. In some cases I don't even know where the seam between those two worlds is, and I'm thinking just now of Simone de Beauvoir's saying that the trouble with writing fiction is that it replaces

\*Recorded in May 1988, for "Fine Lines" and is printed here with the kind permission of CFUV, the University of Victoria's campus radio station.

memory. You may remember it until you write about it, and then the writing itself replaces the actual memory.

GB: I think that's true. I'm pretty certain that I've shared that experience. In this text, the question of the relationship between invention and actuality comes up. Not only does it get mentioned by the narrator, but it shows up as the conversation between the grownup girl, Annie, and her mother. Are those conversations all invented?

DM: I don't know how to answer that because sometimes they were in part remembered, and often enlarged. I think those conversations are held in seed in a lot of the kinds of exchanges that happen between a mother and a daughter. It's just that the implications of those positions are elaborated on in the novel.

GB: We should perhaps talk about how the novel came to be written. There is no character named Ana Historic; there is no character whose name was probably Ana. There's a character who appeared originally simply as a person whose last name was mentioned in one sentence, perhaps, and then a bit more. Do you want to talk about who she was and how you got the notion of making a book out of her life, or out of her imagined life?

DM: Well, she's Mrs. Richards, who appears in the city records as the second school teacher at Hastings Mill School in 1873. The first one only lasted six months and then she married. Mrs. Richards didn't last very long either before *she* married. She married Ben Springer from Moodyville, across the inlet, and then she disappeared from history. But she's mentioned as having purchased a piano, and I could read two slightly different interpretations into that purchase of the piano because Alan Morley writes about her in his book about Vancouver, his historical text, and he calls her a young and pretty widow. So right away you have an imagination of who Mrs. Richards is. One of the sources said that she gave music lessons in her rooms in Gastown. Another source said she lived in this small, three-room or two-room, cottage behind the schoolhouse.

GB: So you have a choice of fictions already.

DM: That's right, you see, and then I decided that I wanted to know more about her, and the only way I could was by inventing her. I invented a diary for her, I invented a past for her, which is very sketchily suggested in the novel, as to why she would be there. I made her an immigrant from Britain, and I wanted to give her a different destiny from the one that history actually records.

GB: You're not allowed to do that, are you?

DM: As a novelist I'm allowed to do anything. But the thing is that Annie, the narrator, and I, at this point are both working against history because when I say I, I'm also saying I as narrator, who is Annie. Annie has to discover in the course of the book what kind of future she wants to give Mrs. Richards, and she's become quite close to her in the course of imagining scenes out of her life, imagining this diary that she's writing, and these attempts to—well, it's difficult to say whether they're attempts to write to her father or really attempts to write to herself in the guise of writing to her father. She has to unwrap a lot of cover stories, and the principal one is her own cover story, the story of her own sexual conditioning, and this comes up very strongly in her dialogues with her mother.

GB: Annie early in the book is married to a man, and has a son and a daughter, and he's a history professor and she is kind of helping him—

DM: She does his research, and then she decides she's not interested in doing research, that once she's found the novel, I mean the diary—because in the novel you don't know that it's invented—once she's found the diary in the archives, she then wants to write about this person who becomes so real to her, and that gets her into the very opposite, in fact, which is imagination.

GB: Nicole Brossard has done something like that too (in *Turn of a Pang* as it's called in English) where she has a narrative in which you keep going back and forth between what went on in the past and what's going on in the present. So that you're writing not only as a naturalized Canadian, a growing up Canadian, but as a woman as well. So that you have that history too.

DM: What I was interested in doing in *Ana Historic* was to do a woman's version of history, that being a difficult area for women because they don't inhabit history in the same way that men do. Their history is usually the unwritten history, it's the history that tends to get recorded more in oral histories. Women are not seen as world-makers.

GB: Especially in this frontier, logging camp country.

DM: Yes, it was very much male territory, male world.

GB: So the women really did get pushed into the two things: they were either wives or school teachers, or prostitutes.

DM: That's right. There wasn't much choice. How could you be an independent woman, living alone, without being a prostitute, and without being seen as in some way a failure as a woman?

GB: Yes, you'd have your place in history allotted to you already, no matter what you did. People who are familiar with your work will not be surprised to find that there are a lot of puns—"jeux de mots."

DM: Jeux de mots, oui.

GB: For instance, the woman Annie. The husband that she is living with at the beginning of the story is named Richard, so that she is Richard's Annie as the other woman is dubbed Ana Richards.

DM: Right, right.

GB: There's this wonderful scene towards the end in which she is witness to, with some other women and no men, the birth of another woman's child; and I think there is either the statement or the suggestion that when women are giving birth what they're doing is giving birth to each other. I was wondering if you were conscious of that story called "Giving Birth" by Margaret Atwood, in which at the beginning she says, giving birth, now what does that mean, and who gives it, and what is given, and who's it given to?

DM: Actually, I don't think I've ever read that story.

GB: It's wonderful because she doesn't say it at the end of the story, but what happens at the end of the story is a kind of a conclusion that they do give, that women give birth to one another, or give birth to one another's courage.

DM: Well, in a sense it's an old question in terms of the women's movement, where women have been concentrating on trying to give birth to themselves as full, active human beings, without being considered the secondary half of the population.

GB: Where did you find reference to Mrs. Richards?

DM: In the archives, in Major Matthews. Alice Patterson speaks the most familiarly about her. She was one of her pupils, and she mentions her.

GB: So they never mentioned her first name.

DM: No.

GB: Now, why do you, in the text, about three quarters of the way through or so, introduce the notion that the Mrs. part of her name might just be something that she made up in order to get where she is?

DM: Well, because that was an answer in a way to the question of how you can be an independent woman in a male world like that.



GB: You have to be a widow.

DM: That's right. And in order to separate herself from the rather predatory game of being courting material, in order to be outside of that, and free to move outside of that, she had to be a widow.

GB: But, on the other hand, men would be making jokes about widows and speaking as if widows were somehow legitimate targets of lustful jokes and stuff like that because, after all, they've been married.

DM: They know about sex. That's one of the hazards, and that actually is suggested in that scene where she's walking through Gastown.

GB: People who are familiar with your work also realize that you are not a big fan of complete sentences necessarily, and capital letters, and all that material. It took me a while reading the book to notice that the parts you write about Ana—the things that happen to her when she's in school and so forth—are written in full sentences and with capital letters.

DM: These are actually scenes from the novel that Annie is trying to write. That's her official writing about Mrs. Richards. She has her unofficial writing, which is more in the shape of musings where her own life becomes tangled up in her imagining of Ana Richards' life, and those are written in informal sentences. That is, often they're in sentence fragments, there is no initial punctuation. The trouble with initial punctuation is that it forces you into a full stop where the period is. Without an initial capitalized letter, you can see what comes after the period—especially if it's a fragment—as a second thought, an addition to what precedes it, and I like that ambivalence.

GB: It succeeds in working that way. Is that how we're to read your work generally?

DM: Yes.

GB: Because there's a problem in reading. I like the fact that the book is problematical, that there is a problem, for instance, the sliding point of view, the "I" feature, and the second person, "you." What's that "you"?

DM: Oh, that "you" shifts around quite a lot, because sometimes it's "you," Mrs. Richards, a lot of the time it's "you," Ina—and sometimes it's "you" reflexive, anywoman's you.

GB: The mother of Annie in the present, or in the near past.

DM: She's just died, so she is present, but not in the flesh.

GB: I love the scenes of the family, especially the scenes of Ina. She was one of my favorite characters in the book. I don't know if you object to the word characters.

DM: No, not at all!

GB: She's just marvellous. She really, as they say, comes to life. And the relationship between Ina and her daughters, especially her daughter Annie, is really engaging. It's the sort of thing that makes you want to see another novel written, in which that is expanded a great deal more. A lot of those scenes have to do with Annie, growing up as a teenager on the North Shore or in North Vancouver, I presume—

DM: Yes.

GB: And a lot of it has to do with Annie becoming not only a local Canadian or Vancouver, West-Coast girl, but also becoming a woman, or going through the changes in her own body. She is becoming almost a separate person rather than just a member of the family. Distinguishing her about the same time that one is distinguishing Ana Historic, Ana Richards—what is that? Is that a metaphor? What do you call that when you have those two stories resembling one another that way?

DM: They're analogies in some way. They're twins almost.

GB: A kind of rhyme.

DM: Yes. They're not identical, so they're off-rhymes, if they're rhymes. But parts of the two stories echo each other.

GB: And when Annie decides to work on her own work instead of being Richard's assistant, she is in her relationship with him, which is not explored anywhere near as her relationship with her mother, also individuating her self. She owes it to Ana, sort of. You know what I mean?

DM: Yes, she does, she does. But, you see, it's really taking in the whole generational system of individuations, which is how we come to personhood anyway, because her own daughter Ange is beginning to do that to her. There's that scene where she says "you never have any fun anymore." So, it's generational, but it takes a long time. I mean anyone who looks at any Freudian analysis of the family understands that it's much harder for women to individuate as daughters from their mothers than it is for sons. So it takes a long time, sometimes it takes a whole lifetime.

GB: She has to do it. Her mother was also an immigrant who was not happy about having to live out here in the woods, the edge of the woods where the bears are.

DM: Where there's no "culture."

GB: So there's that difficulty for her to break into the reality that she's in now, and her daughter has to free herself from that expectation, which is not just normal family. It's also family that has not come to grips with the North American life that their kids are living in. Then she has to, somehow, get herself loose from her husband, with her mother saying, hey, you've got this wonderful husband.

DM: She's got the whole script that she has to work free of.

GB: And she has to do something like that in terms of history, history and literature.

DM: Yes.

GB: So Ana means not just not historical or anti-historical. It must mean something else. Well, ana also means a collection of writings.

DM: And as a prefix, it's very contradictory. It means upwards and forwards as well as backwards. It has a whole cluster of meanings associated with it. There's also that play on an ahistoric, which is not the opposite of having history. It's standing outside of history altogether. History becomes an irrelevant concept to someone who has no history, who is outside of it.

GB: I guess probably you're outside history when you're in a place where the woods are getting cut down. History hasn't, in a sense, started yet. Kroetsch says that the people in Alberta feel, ok, we're not interested in history, we're interested in myth because in history we always lost, we immigrants lost, that's why we came to Alberta in the first place. They threw us out of the Ukraine, they threw us out of Germany, they threw us out of—wherever they were. So we lost that. Now here we are operating, the West versus Ontario, and we're losing that. So you people Back East can have history—we'll take myth.

DM: And also in the West you have history destroying myth, because we forget that the original myths are not ours at all. They're the native Indian myths.

GB: Eventually we're going to have a lot of history, aren't we?

DM: That's right, and we're beginning to find out more and more about that, but history has always meant the erasure of *that* in order to construct something that's white and western.

GB: And male.

DM: *And* male.

GB: British Columbia. There is some remark, I think, made early in the text about history as a male aggrandizement, where influential citizens say here's a great hero, somebody did this, let's build something and name it after him. So you always have a bridge named the somebody somebody bridge, right?

DM: It's never named after a woman, or if it is, it's a "generous" gesture on behalf of the man.

GB: Mrs. Richards' piano—what does it stand for?

DM: Well, the piano is a piano, first of all. It's also, like that comment to Annie, "oh you're exaggerating again"—Ina says that to Annie's notion that someone is playing Chopin in a clearing in the bush—it's that incredible imperial western symbol of culture. It's the ultimate symbol of the European drawing room.

GB: It also means that if you have a piano out here in the logging camp, you've begun to feminize the place. Domesticate and feminize would be equal terms probably to the men in that instance, right?

DM: Both realms are colonial in that way. There's the sense in which she recognizes that Harriet, who is the Indian woman who helps Mrs. Alexander during that whole birth scene, Harriet, who is simply a hired domestic, is actually the one who is holding that whole domestic scene together.

GB: And she has a language too.

DM: She has a language.

GB: There are two images of sisterhood in the novel. There's the one around the birth scene, and there's one at the end of the book where the women are working. Is she, Harriet, part of that sisterhood?

DM: No, she isn't, because it's still very colonial. She would never be included in the sisterhood.

GB: Remember the scene where a white pupil, a bully, beats up on the halfbreed pupil?



DM: Well, he insults him. He doesn't quite beat up on him, but he insults him. He doesn't want to sit next to him. It's very racist.

GB: So you have Ana in that instance being an anti-racist.

DM: That's right. Yet she can't quite escape her own conditioning because she's still afraid of the Indians. She hears all the stories and she takes them in. But when she's confronted with the children, she can relate to them. There are two halfbreed children in her class. She can relate to them as individuals, and she can see how as people they suffer under that regime. She's also fascinated, because she gets the sense that there is a whole other way of looking at the world. There is that little comment that "their magic is different from ours," our magic meaning our language, our written language that still can't contain them. It can't contain how they see and who they are.

GB: This is the author. The author speaking has been trying to do this for years and years and years.

DM: True.

GB: There's a lovely phrase—the author herself is saying it or the narrator. It says "a book of interruptions is not a novel." What a lovely phrase! This is a book of interruptions.

DM: It is, definitely.

GB: Even more that way than, for instance, *Coming Through Slaughter*, in that the moves you make back and forth happen much quicker.

DM: Yes, it's more fragmentary.

GB: I like that phrase "is not a novel," yet you call it a novel. I guess probably you want to tell people, look, this is a novel, this is not a book of poems, or something like that. In a sense you're trying to destroy—

DM: Deconstruct the novel.

GB: Remove the novel, say, "This is not a pipe," right? "This is not a novel."

DM: It's written against the conventional novel.

GB: It says you can't have continuity, you can't have an aim at the end, you can't have this unity, coherence, and all these things. Especially you can't have continuity, and that might be because continuity is maybe European, or continuity is necessarily male, or continuity is like the novel that is modelled after history, and history didn't treat us all that well.

DM: Continuity is the domination of plot. It's imperial in a way. It's the one line of development that is considered the most important, and it makes everything else secondary.

GB: And you can tell where it started from, and you can tell where it's going to.

DM: That's right, and it has a climax, it has a hero, or some sort of heroic figure, and Annie says someplace else that this isn't a novel because it's not about a hero.

GB: Yeah. If it's a tragedy, the end that you're aiming for is death, and if it's comedy the end you're aiming for is marriage, living happily ever after or going to heaven, right? There is a phrase from earlier in the book. It's so hard to tell where to break in, so I have to break into the middle of a long, long sentence. It says, "she writes as if she were living alone in the woods, her vision true to trees and birds . . . but why she had to erase so much is never given. It is part of what is missing, like her first name, like her past that has dropped away. we cannot see her and so she is free to look out at the world with her own eyes, free to create her vision of it. this is not history" (30).

DM: And I want to get back to what you just said about tragedy and comedy, death or marriage, because historically those have been the only two alternatives for women protagonists of novels.

GB: That's right. Or madness maybe.

DM: Well madness is like death. It's either/or and that's it, basically. It's very difficult to write a novel where you have a woman protagonist who goes out into the world as an independent and complete human being, without following one or the other of those alternatives.

GB: She can't ride into the sunset.

DM: Yes! Or the sunrise.

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it was the way they kept taking his joke and playing with it, making it a familiar part of their exchange, knock knock. who's there? and then a word, some ordinary obvious word like banana or tank capitalized, her son would capitalize on the exchange and back again, Thank you. it was the unacknowledged door all of it got said through that intrigued her. why can't he or she just open it? for the joke, he said, and dummy rhymed with mummy—they have to talk to each other, right? i mean they can't just see it's not, it's not who? Van. Van? cover the eggs will you. that's not one. why not? you made it up, he chimed in on her son's behalf.

no i didn't, it's what he does when she's giving birth you know, couvade, they do that in some societies. and they were off on their own, their grownup game now. well you can't blame him for wanting to keep his eggs covered. his eggs? oh you mean he has to know they're his? of course. what if there's some stranger knocking? isn't that the point? there's always some stranger knocking at the family door.

and anyway, she thought, it's always stranger when it comes to claiming territory. after all they were only playing . . . clearly it's all about naming, he said.

naming and framing. this is beginning to sound like an old story. you mean familiar—well they weren't a family until they left. got thrown out, after she did what she did to cause it, all that loss, all the animals and plants he'd named except the two that were already named for them, with capital letters, and just 'cause she got curious right? and then they left and she kept giving him new ones to name. and he kept track, he told the story, he passed it all on down, father to son, desert camp to town.

who was Hastings anyway? i don't know but he sounds very British. that was another capital letter. he got a mill named after him and then this street and if it hadn't been for Vancouver himself. . . .

it's the name of the game, he said, butting his cigarette like a form of punctuation. terri-stories.

it's what she loved about where they went in conversation. at night they slept not far from that street and she dreamed it before it was even named. she feels it hold her body present in the whisper the wispery arms of cedar and other coniferous beings holding the clearing. she is one small part of. not even conscious she is dreaming. brush. soft. stroke. fir. by a hair. here. "let all those present show their naming . . ." she tosses

## Central to The Periphery

on the periphery small waves enter your eye successively fluent  
laps running in from the outer edge murmuring news of horizon,  
hourison, that bound & beneficence, that making well which circles  
us & sets us intricate in place here on the edge

& cold on the periphery of our kiss, but not peripheral at  
centre our bellies pulse, this small current steady & inviolate  
between us, night & the first stars come on amid these bright  
banks of windowed money rising above us do not tester on the edge  
of fall-out, of imperial collapse, collective paranoia looming  
always beyond the next ridge these waves come running from, innocent  
of any end

& on, & on, peripheral to my view of you beyond the dry sand  
tide eats away from underfoot, peripheral yet superimposed, white  
telegrams of the sea are being delivered into your eye not even  
night can erase. i read them fascinated, these small letters of  
the sea whispering continuity, the earth & all that surrounds us  
charged with coming into being at once, delivering ourselves,  
reading ourselves as we can in our world. out of the palour of  
& face floating in that circle of pain your body knew, you look  
out at me & right through to our horizon. we are learning how far  
we extend, we are learning how to heal ourselves here at centre.

Draft of unpublished poem from same period as *Touch to My Tongue*. Literary Manuscripts Collection, National Library of Canada.



undecided, not knowing whether to stay where the small lamps are or cross the border into unnameable dark.

§

in her reading, certain phrases have the habit of sticking and she carries them around with her like magic stones. to toss into the blank of the page and watch what they leave widen:

“... pre-verbal euphoria,” ... “... effortless bodily bliss ...”

but though she carries them with her they are someone else's not hers, they stick out like tiny pebbles in the wash of her daily words.

§

she tries on secret names as if she might be someone other than her—when she sits at Eleni's table, for instance, not in place or unsure of her place or not sure she isn't out of it when they discuss words. ana choristic. Eleni can flash them and bend them and sometimes it is charm, now incantation she is drawn by, Eleni's black hair that hides the inadmissible in her eye, the fury of her voice, melodic as if she were singing. she has thrown out her pictures, plants, she has stripped her walls to orient herself in space, a space bare of the accumulation, the acculturation, of what denies her in her habitat. it depends what counts for you she says, and whether you do.

§

she has named it and tried to tame it but that doesn't change anything. Ana Choristic not Ana Chronistic—the moveable “are” they are moving her out of place.

§

and the dream isn't telling she thinks. i'd driven off without him as i've pretended to do when he's dawdled, but this time i let myself forget—how could i?

it was all the other things in my head which run on like the news, like ticker-tape, like a road leading to a foreign landscape. like the road he and his pal ambled oh so slowly down, munching their chips, one long ketchup-covered straw after another, and when would it end? long after i'd reached mine. i walked fast ahead, got in the car, veered out and drove towards them, in part to save time, in part resenting their refusal to believe in it when i said we were late. it was me that ran out on time and left, pretending not to see them and feeling what it would be like to just drive straight ahead—leave it all behind. they waved, hey! hi! big joke! i stopped of course.

but that night i drove on driving on erased him from my mind, a new landscape, very hilly inside the city, top of one of those hills that was a park, and the animistic scent of flower beds where strange blooms lie hidden, trees insisting their presence in the dark, frisson for me in the car taking a turn down a steep hill i was suddenly on inner city streets, rundown houses and down-at-the-heel corner stores fall newspaper blowing and beer signs in the window neon wink, blue tv light in the windows of houses receding shadowy large enough to have been mansions in their once-uptightness falling softly apart and kids running free on bikes playing sidewalk games in the dusk that light he loves when anything seems possible when you're out in it after hours and what you might see you were not meant to—

§

these subliminal stories. what is narrative but the burden of an emotion the writing labours under, trying to recover, uncover, this thing about to be hatched.

why does she choose Ana mystic in this verbal sparring match while he, he wants his hands free, at the limit in the heart of the city. she asked him what he thought it meant, Territory.

what you think you own, he said, from the land around a town, what the town uses up, look at this place. no she said, i mean the heart of the city. & lighting up another he tossed his match into the ashtray she was toying with. look at the stuff they keep printing so it grows more worthless every day. what's anyone's word? what's anyone worth?

§

tomatoes, she writes. ripe tomatoes. it sounds vaguely like the fifties. in this block she thinks anything sounds like the fifties. hot tamata. whereas hers at the end of the lot will soften, will go slowly red late afternoon Indian summer haze the length of the alley, houses opening doors windows dazed in that anachronistic heat. even so, there's a chill as the light goes, around five, furtive as a cat slipping between the sheds.

and even so, red, they are not, my tomatoes as red as the weathered garage opposite. whose? it only says in great black letters TOM DELVECCHIO faded now NO DUMPING, and there is no Italian left on that side of the block to claim his word. mostly huddled brightpainted, rotting softly in the light these walls hold up the eaves of Chinatown, and to my neighbour with black umbrella on a sunlit day, making her way to the vegetable market, i am the odd one out.

§

Ana, Ana Mnesis. a complete case history, as in she was a case. who? 'case you don't believe me. going on making them up, day in day out. is this in the developmental books age 9, as predictable a phase as crawls, stands without support, takes first steps. part of the plotted territory we stumble through? as for age 36—?

§

at loose ends, he says, when the work doesn't come, as if the story had unravelled, loosefitting and ragged about the edges. at loose ends we never sit on the stoop like we used to, looking at what we inhabit.

i'm twisting odd strands together, finding likely ends to knot, not for my own, which seem unknown to me as my other he standing there, legs sturdy and longer every day, hoisting the knapsack over his shoulder, announces i'm running away.

but why? because you're always telling me what to do. (treading on someone else's territory, sonny.) so let him go, he says, let him find out what it's all about, the world so full of knocks and he so full of himself.

(knock, knock. who's there? putsch. putsch who? putsch yer money where yer mouth is.)

talking tough, enough to take on the wide world. it takes money they said, *get a job*, for you to be taken seriously. someone of substance means someone of independent means not a self unravelling in the wind of their direction and expectation.

§

i said when she asked, i feel at home here, but that was presumptuous as she who is also white and has likewise moved around alot could tell. i meant i seem to recognize the generosity of this light, the long peopled evenings, children racing their dream selves in the dusk—from where? i meant it's familiar yes, but not mine, though we are allowed to be here in it.

having tucked him up with the cat and watched him stretch out light in that weightless place just under the roof, i walked out into the killdeer's cry, i walked out in my slippers down the alley to the park and wept at the drinking fountain, worn benches, worn branches of the much-climbed pine in its bed. kids, rubbies, dogs—traces only. all night long water slides from distant mountains into the throat of the pipe, all night long it rises gurgling its elemental sound to itself in the dark . . .

§

it doesn't matter, he said, as if the terms of their argument were nothing at all (and if they were, how talk? how even know where each stood?). look, he said, holding up his hand, see those gaps? holding it up so she could see light shine in the spaces between his fingers. that's who i am, i can't even hold a handful of sand without it trickling through, and money means even less to me. these words were meant to answer her tilting at the discrepancy between what each could make, would make—in the argument between them.

those were his final terms then?—the terminal move of a fridge, which she'd never questioned, faced only with the difficulty of helping him move something that big, and he, not taller than she, dressed like a mover in carpenter's overalls, did move, fast, sliding their fridge with the lightfoot energy his sentences took, shifting them onto new territory.

no, they were in some lobby of a Grand Hotel, abandon meant Grand, where the fridge had to go against the far wall. hang onto it, he said, because he wanted to pull the rug out from under, his favourite rug with a border of sardines woven in blue. she was holding up the fridge so how could she see when he showed her what they were standing on?

§

transport, Eleni said, is one of the nouns i like that move across borders, it's subversive, an invisible truck of pure delight. she was watching Eleni's mouth move its freight of words. green light? she laughed. they both drove, though in the city, Eleni, with very little money, took buses, read library books. transport was easy, it was when Eleni said that being with a woman was mythological she balked.

that's so literary, it's a stereotype i wouldn't think you'd use. Eleni, whose imagination was fueled by a metaphysic of words, using mythological and gazing out the window, face not *veiled*—obscure? mouth, she said, it goes back to mouth, look it up. and then getting up, making tea with familiar gravity. pause. what do you mean? asif that were all she could say. and Eleni talking about Luce and Jane and Judith, the currents that crossed the borders of their individual lives. how she knew when to or when not to phone, how Luce knew when she was being dishonest, how her words appeared in Judith's dream and Luce's images in hers—and it's not just them, other women friends who are with women artists too. it's as if we are tapping something old and communal, as if the limits are only fiction and we actually live inside each other's thought.

she was watching Eleni's mouth which was different from hers, the way those lips met at the end of a phrase, their fullness touching and slowing each other, parting as the words came in little spurts—this notion of my work or yours . . . we don't need to own . . . and were all her other friends lovers too? and where did it end?



§

soft tomatoes. seeding and nodding into place. low moon. slow feet, soft, walking out in it to be part of it. post-partial and yet. not the dearly departed, she is looking at gardens and rot, the slow process of weather incremental to sunny situation, whether or not hers is any different, is not so much the point, walking horizontal here as long slow beams of moonlight walk her by the rooms of other lives.

§

but there are those mythical beasts again. bêtes noires. she was in the midst of a conversation, an ordinary conversation about cooking something or other for the people they were having over, all the usual alternatives of this or that depending on time and everyone's taste. and there they were when she turned and glanced out the window onto what looked like Africa, a dry stretch of skin, a few wispy trees (mimosa maybe) rubbed bare by their looming hides the colour of mud, and ponderous, like rhinoceros, wrinkly that way. she was afraid of their size, the mammoth size of their heads which leered and grinned. were they destructive? could someone lead them away without being killed?

and there was Judith in the dust, back turned to her, black scarf held at arm's length. slim and elegant in jeans, she was dancing alone in the dust of mammoth beasts who on their pointed hooves were dancing with her.

one exposure of the mind's eye. overexposed the way that dust filled the background, up in heaven too, sky. but the blackness of her scarf an extension of the slim darkness her body made, so dark even the animals receded, leering and grinning heads, shaggy manes, man in his cave. peering out of the smoke at an idea.

i leave my hand on all this, Judith said, to show it is a true story, painted at night in the sleeping quarters for all those little heads who wondered where the others went.

§

she was puzzling over "the earliest . . . , the unqualified animal-poetic mode. . . ." more stones.

§

she had painted home as a picture, coming up the path under the maple tree and up the steps she had painted she opened the door on something incomplete:

nobody home? it was silent—no movie music, no gun battle raging. well it's not nobody, he yelled from another room.

so somebody's here? i mean it's not just anybody, he pursued.

he was with himself then, not lost at all. good, i wouldn't want to think that nobody was off somewhere and somebody was nowhere.

sauntering into the room he explained with pre-pubescent clarity: nobody's nowhere and anybody's anywhere so somebody's got to be somewhere right?

that was him. talking his way right out of her skin.

§

i was sitting with someone i liked. i was sitting with someone i'd known so long and we liked each other so well we were almost married and yet, there were still things to declare. more borders, more border crossings. the state, he said, co-opts our desire into hard currency, the standard of exchange that will maintain it. he was owing not owning but owning up to it when he said, and we all subscribe to this shit.

§

perhaps she is not so much unhappy as confused. by the words and what they do and don't mean (when to, or when not to phone). she wants to call them up, her magic stones with the words cut in, inscribed, but even as she shifts them in the light to read one way, the way she thinks she understands, they shift into another.

§

she was with Luce who was saying but the dark is where we live, sitting opposite her at the table, Eleni and Judith opposite them. sitting in the particular smell of Luce's kitchen, homey and comfortable in the musty building that was always up for sale. the table stood against the wall where Luce's photos hung, clipped to a string by odd corners.

no, the dark is what we refuse to name. now she felt closer to Eleni who was not so much opposite as beside her, placing her mug of tea on the much marked table. a table with a silent history she thought, tracing old scars, old burn marks there.

Judith had said about one of the faces on the line, indistinct in the shadow of blinds like bars disappearing at its outer edge, your dark side shows. just as she'd been wondering whose face it was, Luce's imaging of herself imprisoned there, or Judith's gaze taken through the strictures of

taboo. there wasn't much left except the unknowable gaze. a face in the dark. as she was.

that's one way, Luce was saying, of seeing its power. around them the white walls with their shards of mirror were catching pieces of them sitting there—from where she sat, pieces of Luce. we refuse to recognize our power and so we go on cutting each other down to size.

power? Judith laughed, it's not that simple. either you have power or you're in someone else's.

we don't have anything, Luce was saying flatly, staring down at her tea. or anybody, if you want to really look at it.

in the silence she glanced at Eleni who was catching Luce's eye. Judith gazed at the wall with a slightly amused expression.

she had to go, she really had to be getting home, and she should offer Eleni a ride back to their side of town, but wasn't that presuming? assuming Eleni would be leaving soon? and who was she to know? the silence strummed between them when she said, i've got to go. . . .

Luce gave her a cold stare: why are you so unfree? she stopped, what do you mean? you always say you have to do this or that as if you're not responsible for wanting to. you want to go.

no i don't, she said, it's just that i have to, it's getting late and i have to get home. under the image of him coming back from school to find her gone, she was evading something she knew Luce would name, could, in an instant—for the sake of home and what that meant.

they were watching her begin to recognize the words Luce had not uttered, which she heard. you've come too far.

§

i dreamed about you finding an egg, she said. isn't that funny when you were once an egg in me?

no, he said, i wasn't an egg. i was a sperm.

knock knock, she said, that was your dad. and you were once an egg too. anyway you found this egg, all grey and wrapped in bandages. i guess it was a mummy of an egg, you showed me where you'd made a nest for it in the driveway behind a parked truck. i said that's not a good place, it'll get run over there. but you weren't worrying, you just left it, so then i had to scoop it up out of the sand.

what do you mean i just left it? i didn't care about it?

i guess you didn't think the truck was worth worrying about. anyway i realized you must have left it there because the sand was warm and good for hatching. so i bury it further up on the side of the road, and then i see that the pointed end which was sticking out is moving. i dig it up again and out comes this tiny cartoon figure of a white rooster like the rooster in the chicken hawk comic, but this one's so tiny the grains of sand are knocking him over. i pick him up and find he's connected to my fingers by invisible threads. i know i have to feed him, make him grow, so i take him to the forest ranger's tower which is a sort of doctor's office. the doctor asks me, does he know who he is? and i say, well look at the way his toes curl under, anyone can tell who he is. and i point to him in the doorway where he's standing, a huge gawky teenager. i call him Goofy . . .

oh mum, you've got the comics all mixed up.

§

it's not just anybody she will open to. Ana Leptic. restorative. Ana Thema, this double she is: banned and offering.

§

i'd been driving, no by then i was walking, and i almost missed it. but i requires you, Luce, she is whispering, i am whispering, into your hair. having got out of the taxi, the argument with the men about the unfair share i was supposed to be paying, or maybe it was she, as if i were some other me, some mother me before i saw where i was heading. but i can't say she because that's not true either. you're everything in the dream, you say. i'm your place too? in dreams places are the architecture of souls. then why did i dream yours destroyed? it wasn't quite destroyed, there were the owls—yes, there were the owls, but why owls? perhaps you're afraid?

can we disentangle this so i can tell it but telling is always one after another which is not the way we realize. and i didn't understand when Eleni said mythological. putting my mouth very close to yours our lips are all mixed up with words: i'm walking home but it's unfamiliar territory and i'm coming from the place i got dropped off, miles off, and then i'm walking down your block when i see, my god, your place has been demolished—they've taken a bulldozer to it and it's just a pile of rubble, studs leaning crazily against the cubbyholes of what were rooms, your rooms. and still i feel you there as if i could walk in on you. somebody's painted the rubble black and there's some graffiti i can't quite make out. and then i see the owls—on broken planks, in cubbyholes, somebody's set these owls, watchful and fluorescent—



the bird that howls, you said, owl with an h, an itch—looking intently into me—you know what that means?

you were shivering, with my arms around you you were shivering. but it wasn't the dream—it's not even a dream, this current that moves us beyond recognition. lips to lips, we ex-change what isn't words in circulation, though later on the street alone, the feel of you in my mouth, i release them at full shout, *women*, another, a double word, women our loyalty, our fierceness, our loving.

GEORGE STANLEY

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MY NEW PAST

for Daniel Ignas

*"I can go back to my old past whenever I want, to times in my childhood, or college. But my new past never happened."*

-Joy, at the Achillion

Did we spend four years—a high school or college length of time—when every week, once, twice or several days, sometimes whole days together, we met, hung out, talked, touched (in that poor-spiritual way men have), & not a trace of it all left?

Not true: certain eternal moments survive; the first one, for example: your Panama hat, Lawrence's horse. But each is a 'treasured memory,' a mental vignette. The place they were is gone. Where is North Central B.C., August, 1982, at this hour?

Further & further on, but less & less tied to what went before, I seem to be journeying. The image is sand. Peripherally haunted by its random sculpture, unmoving but shifted under changing skies. Every morning I wake to a blank, then deduce the separation. I used to go, 1968, 1970, 1971, 1974, 1976—private hopscotch, contrived for the player's solace.

My new past never happened, is not available for edification. Nor is the present a distillate. There is some other kind of causality than history. To take a catchphrase from the airlines, a hub-spoke arrangement, each year

a separate outpost of childhood,  
no progress.

And maturity  
is getting used  
to this scattered country. Who told us  
we would cross the River of Lethe  
in this life?

Wordsworth and Eliot,  
when they got here, & saw they had  
no baggage, smiled, & wrapped their loss  
in forgiveness.

Forgiveness of whom?  
The child I was, not knowing life would come  
to sand & snow? Or my new self, drifted,  
encamped beneath the mountains.

## SAN JOSE POEM

for Catherine

Starting in April, sadness  
carried forward from Catherine's death  
which I have not mourned, in April,  
in April sadness

how the city of San Jose stands in my mind,  
the B of A with its bell-less tower,  
hot 5 p.m., walking east on Santa Clara  
cross Market and First

preserved facades,  
south between Second and Third  
sun on car roofs, blocks  
razed to keep Mexicans from crossing  
(some stores left hang  
banners in Vietnamese)

South of Keyes  
were orchards

Sunday afternoons  
we drove to orchards

a grey DeSoto  
or Dodge sedan, moving slowly down  
gravel roads  
quarter-sections of trees  
geometrically spaced,  
watered

the grey Coast hills  
beyond

Visitors, we parked  
in front of a small barn,  
were allowed to walk in among the trees,  
reached into our hands & mouths



Santa Clara plums, a sweet  
green fig, ripe apricots.  
Our friends gave us balsa cartons  
to take fruit back to the City.

Catherine came  
to San Jose as Superior  
of the convent, her last assignment.  
12 years she had been Superior of the Order.

At her funeral mass Gerald said  
(in his homily)  
she was not one of the foolish virgins  
nor wd she have been one of the 'sensible' virgins  
either, refusing oil to her foolish sisters,  
telling them to go downtown and buy some

She wd have been in the Lord's house already  
placing a glass of gingerale and a cookie  
in the room of each one arriving home late

as she came to the side door  
of the Hayes St. convent in San Francisco  
with wax-paper sandwiches  
of cabbage & mashed potato  
for men who lined up  
in the Depression.

Catherine entered the Sisters  
of the Holy Family in 1930.  
The order, since 1872,  
patronized by Irish banks, established  
day homes, for children of  
poor: in San Jose,  
cannery workers.

The fruit  
left by train. The trees  
sucked the water out of the ground  
& it left as fruit. Water in a well

(Santa Clara & Delmas)  
150 ft. (1950).

The sisters lived in underheated  
California baroque luxury (mahogany paneling)

Sr. Thomasine held me as a child.

Last year, Sr. Daniel, her sister, served  
shrimp salads, steaks, rolls, ice cream & coffee  
to Catherine & me  
in the Superior's dining room.

These people are still alive  
& live on St. Elizabeth's Drive  
in San Jose (& they are dead & live in this poem  
with the often repetitive movements of the dead,  
drawing in a skirt, just so, as to be remembered  
in rooms filled with spring sunlight  
& my mother's spotless furniture.

Leaving the convent, dazed, dazzled  
by goodness I'd go back to the Holiday Inn  
generously contemptuous of the ones who ate avocado  
salads in the Hawaiian coffee shop or played  
video games in the black alcove

& on leaving the Inn  
walk up Almaden  
past the offshore banks  
(the orchards burnt & dozed  
when electronics came)

think of recent Santa Clara grads  
hoping to retain the software concession,  
steal the yup trade from Mountain View, fill the new  
Civic Center with suits, music, beds of flowers, &  
sprinklers!

In the old day homes  
these virgins were my mothers.

I was treated  
as poor.

On the polished hardwood floor  
rolling in play pants. In black habit  
& stiff white coif  
Thomasine bends to offer  
penuché on a glass plate. Downstairs,  
admitted to the work areas, the stone-floored kitchen,  
Sr. Malachy supervising,  
two Spanish women baking,

door open on a walled garden,  
a red or yellow watering can, geraniums,  
tall bending stalks of snapdragon.

Catherine remembers me asking questions.  
'Is it all right?' 'No.' (My mother's voice.)  
'Is it all wrong?' Nuns smiling. One eternal  
moment the content of the other, as we sit,  
talking.

"The North American States":

Charles Olson's Letters to Irving Layton

For these Canadian these days  
are beautiful — & I don't mean  
the Northing's Frye, in fact the very  
poet, say, Layton, whom Frye, in  
print, has missed the point of!

Section of a letter from Charles Olson to Frances Boldereff, Charles  
Olson Archive, University of Connecticut; see epigraph to "The North  
American States."



"The North American States": Charles Olson's Letters to Irving Layton

... For these Canadians these days are beautiful—and I don't mean your Northrop Frye, in fact the very poet, say Layton, whom Frye in print, has missed the point of!\*

The years spanned by these letters—1952 through 1957—constitute an important period in the development of North American poetry and poetics. Charles Olson's landmark essay "Projective Verse," published in *Poetry* New York in 1950, had established him as an innovator in the field of American poetics, and his teaching and writing at Black Mountain College was shaping him into a figure that would influence a generation of poets. Olson was an avid correspondent—as the Olson-Creeley correspondence illustrates—writing to individuals as diverse, and geographically dispersed, as Rainer Gerhardt in Germany, Katue Kitasono in Tokyo, and, by 1952, Irving Layton in Montreal.

Rapidly becoming a major force in Canadian poetry, Layton was enjoying, in the period covered by these letters, a very productive time, writing what is arguably his best work, and publishing a remarkable total of eleven volumes of poetry. Working with Louis Dudek and Raymond Souster, Layton was changing the face of Canadian poetry, countering what this trio saw as the conservatism of the 1940s and the insulated nationalism of journals such as John Sutherland's *Northern Review* with bold, exciting writing, and international magazines such as *Contact* and *CIV/n*, both of which published Olson.

In turn, Layton was published in Cid Corman's *Origin*, and also in the *Black Mountain Review*, an influential quarterly edited by Robert Creeley. Both Olson and Layton were contributing editors to the *Review*, yet they never met in person, though not for lack of effort, as the letters indicate. Layton did visit Olson in Gloucester, as he notes in a letter to me (5 December 1988), but the meeting was not meant to be: "I did try to see the C.O. in Gloucester but he was 'sleeping it off' and couldn't be roused. Though I stayed around for hours waiting for it to happen, I finally gave up and continued on my way homeward bound." Olson also managed to cross the border, twice reading at the Contact Poetry Readings in Toronto, in April 1960 and February 1962, but Layton was unable to attend these readings. When I visited him in October 1988, Layton was unaware that Olson had been up to Toronto to read, so it is a distinct possibility that

"the C.O." did not notify Layton of these visits, as their extant correspondence ceases in 1957.

Finally, it should be noted that the letters are, possibly, incomplete in their present form. Joanne Vinson Ackeroyd and the late George F. Butterick, in their work *Where Are Their Papers?* (Storrs: University of Connecticut Press, 1979) claim that (in 1979) eight letters and five postcards from Olson to Layton were housed at Concordia University. At present, we have eight letters and one postcard, and have no means of accounting for the missing material. It is possible that an error was made in *Where Are Their Papers?*, or that the 'missing' postcards were misfiled at Concordia, and will surface at a later date.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following: to Irving Layton, for his patience in answering my many questions, and for granting me permission to quote from his letters to Olson and from our interview; to Professor Ralph Maud, Simon Fraser University, for his invaluable criticism, for first supplying me with copies of the letters, and for seeing this project through from beginning to end; to Professor Francis Mansbridge, Kootenay Community College, for his kindness in supplying me with copies of Layton's letters to Olson; to Charles Watts, Special Collections, Simon Fraser University, for his guidance with research; to Joy Bennett, Director of the Irving Layton Collection, Concordia University, Montreal, for allowing me to view the original letters from Olson to Layton; and to Richard Schimmelpfeng, Director for Special Collections, Homer Babbidge Library, University of Connecticut, for permission to publish Olson's letters to Layton, "The Crisis of the Third Foot," and "THE CELTS, AND PLATO."

Special Note: As most of the Layton poems referred to in these letters are from volumes difficult to obtain, I have, wherever possible, indicated the page on which the poems can be found in either Layton's *Collected Poems* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1971) [CP], or his *Uncollected Poems* (Ottawa: Mosaic Press, 1976) [UP].

\*Charles Olson to Frances Boldereff, 1 October 1954

Mt. Sept 28 53

My dear Layton:

i take you as a sign. The sophistication of yr verse contradicts yr own cry that, there, sd poet is in: exile.<sup>1</sup>

(1) That he is, anywhere, conspicuously in the North American states;

& (2), that at a certain point of time (end of Renaissance, at least) this position makes him leader of any citizen: all are exiled, from a usable earth

it is in some such sense that to call you like that,<sup>2</sup> & to get the joy of yr own voice, the round tone of, Urself, made me say to one of several montrealers (& ex-Sir George Williams)<sup>3</sup> have been here in recent years—a Dorothea Rockburne, now Williams, who, also, has sd, Canada, is behind the States:

I made this proposition, the morning after talking to you ::

that to be behind the States (35 years, say?) at a certain point of time is to be *ahead* of same States

Which I'd damn well say is na-ow, just abt time, and you, for me, the universe:

(1) that yr sophistication has bite in it that neither the Au (OH!) dens/ there;<sup>4</sup> or the FEAR-ings here ('30)<sup>5</sup> has cause or base for

and yet (2), that the burden of Ur cry (the Po-et VERSUS the Sta-te, versus sd Massey (MASS-ee)Commission,<sup>6</sup> the Ex-ile

is EX (e.g., in sd US States, such WAR, was fought, by departure of EP etc.,<sup>7</sup> and by WCW's conversation with Valerie Larbaud<sup>8</sup> is re-VERSE, 1914, or before)

But what you do is remind us, by yr directness, of: sd happier states!

And I like it. Feel damned whittled. And anxious to see if yr verse, still of statement, isn't—by god—(thinking of one R C's like tautness of straightness)—such as, by sign, isn't just what I thought it was: business, NOW

and that you can quickly throw off any sense that CANADA, is anything more than, as stale or fresh as any other damned such counter anywhere now (that none of such dialect difference is of any

moment unless it is driven beneath by any sd man anywhere until he converts to a syntax (finds same) which is not any local but a particular which, a particular is, is a syntax understandable anywhere to anyone without benefit of differentiation between poet and any other sd citizen

Ok. Just a way to tell you the four books came in just now.<sup>9</sup> And very damned grateful. Very. Very happy to sample you more than lovely thing in C-8!<sup>10</sup>

(please also tell me what the hell C IV-N stands for:<sup>11</sup> And As of proposition made on telephone:

this place is in such throes that already (since) its calendar is now changed to be:

QUARTER I (Fall) Sept 21 to Dec 5  
" II (Spring) March 29 - June 15

(CREELEY says he'll come for that)  
" III (Summer) June 21 to Labor Day (Sept 5???)  
CAN YOU COME FOR THAT ONE?????

That is, provisionally, are you free from present contracts the coming summer????

And if so, merely let me know as soon as possible, without making any definite plans for yrself

(Reason for latter is: that we are just these days trying to finance for coming three years: and all is up in air. But will come down in next ten days or two weeks, I'd guess. and then we can really talk business.

OK. Back on. Olson

Black Mt, North Carolina  
Monday, October 5, 1953

My dear Layton:

It is such a damned great pleasure to have these books of yrs. As yet I still keep going back over the Cerberus things—and pick up some of the Black Huntsmen. The other two I leave ahead, for the surprise & pleasure of them.<sup>12</sup>

The point is, to find out a classical English poet (if you won't mind any such fixing!) whom I can wholly admire, and envy. For you do make those of us who disturb line & rime look like sick cats! And I take the greatest pleasure in just the thoroughness of the great voice of the tongue as you continue & restore it. By god, Layton, your music is altogether the instrument's.



And of course what makes you altogether yrself (you are, if you'll hear me, a grown man) is this wondrous origin in fable—and, to a degree, fairy-tale—of you as image & poem-maker. This is unique, to my knowledge: as though Donne and Blake were crossed, & a metaphysic of one & a lack of some Cavalier in the other were done away with as recessive.

I think I was quite wrong in my other note to bother you with any critique of any social positioning in you. On the contrary, what makes the edge (*mutwillig*),<sup>13</sup> was what my friend Stefan Wolpe, composer, to whom I read you last night, used, to call this bite in (you) what makes it so very damned delightful is, that it strikes me you do dispose yrself society-wise most finely: you have got yrself placed, in that context, without any of the dull personalism which all the goddamned moderns insinuate—as tho society owed them a fucking thing, said poets! You put it back where it belongs: on yr wrongs, solely, as they are distributable. (I put too much weight on yr own statement of ex-ile: all you are is post-Ile—and a wee bit hostile.)

Anyhow, say, the Old Lady!<sup>14</sup> (the death poem—absolutely one of the damned greatest in the language: and what I mean by poem, rather than image emerging from the fabulous—both the “dialogue” here, & yr several “epitaphs”, seem to me to work simply because behind them is such swiftness as Doge to dog).<sup>15</sup>

And the Rembrandt!<sup>16</sup> Beautiful thing, & most clearly how I have it, fable.

The result is, that (and again I give it back to Wolpe) you enlarge the present, make it seem as large as it is, as involved as it obviously ought to be, but so damned few have the resources to make evident.

And the news fr you that Creeley is getting out two books is the best.<sup>17</sup> For it shocks me (and needn't!) that I only know you at date Contact 8! You make the most sense to me of anybody writing (allowing me to make a trio out of it, of C, too!) ((As well is it sign again of that Creel that he spotted you, and makes these two books out of you. Damned great. By god. Absolute sense.

Also, all welcome to your idea I come up there, and do something. What do you have in mind? Could it be rather a reading, than any speech-making—with whatever discussion might naturally issue, or not issue, afterwards? That is, these new Maximus poems (I'll enclose the publisher's card of Book 1, just for yr info, and to spread the news among whoever) are now in their 40's. And they are of such a non-poem order that they make, I take it, a good sequence for people sitting on their arses to hear “poe-ms.”

As for a time, I'd suggest after Xmas, rather than before, just that by Dec 5, when I'm thru here for four months, I have a chance to take off for Mexico. But if that shld fall thru, I cld come before Xmas, if that was better for you. Whichever you say—only, after, I cld be more sure of, at this date, I believe.

(I shall ask  
Harcourt to send you direct a copy of *Ishmael*. And they are so bad abt these things—as is all commerce, including Sears Roebuck, and the telephone co.—let me know if you don't get it in a couple of weeks.)

Gratified, too, that you make notice of ICH<sup>18</sup>—tho that it is obscure to you, licks me!

Am sending Souster a new one provoked by Blackburn's vol., & called PROENSA<sup>19</sup>—as return to him for C8, and yr own spring poem. It might stand with, or in place of, a review of sd vol.

And please interpret for me C Iv - N (is it yr mag????  
OK. And thanks for yr letter to the Candy Mts (it got here two days ago).  
Over the barrier,

Olson

PS  
Let me slug in a dozen of these cards—I think one can print them as such, for a couple of pennies, no?

And if you wld-  
(Book 2  
depends on the sale of this #1:  
And Book 3 is almost ready.  
So I have a stake in this one!)

November 4 [1953]  
BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE BLACK MOUNTAIN, N.C.

My dear Layton:

Excuse delay—figuring out what to do with this place (now that it is so much just that drastic, & simple—and, so far as i can see, pretty much my own to do, by default of all the others: why, e.g., i wanted you & Creeley here, and Jonathan Williams as sort of “editor in charge of publications or better just “publisher”, that i think one legitimate use of it, in its present reduced, and directionless state, is to direct it toward a writing complex, a place where any of us can hole up, and shoot from, with the nicest of elementary economics, and the freest of teaching i ever heard of, or have experienced, practically one's own demonstration of, how, it ought to be done!

boxed in there, throws me as much, for that matter, as the possibility I may be too! That is, it has never been put to a clear test, but i have reasons for thinking I am, too, for political action 10 to 15 years ago, one whom the State does not want roaming around. And such a trip as we have talked abt, to Canada, might just be as much a block, States-side, as you are blocked, coming in.

Not, for christ sake, that it matters that much. They haven't yet (so far as I know) got their fingers into the post offices. Nor have they troubled to cut off publishing, yet. So we do have some short time (two years?) to do—and get into print—what we can.

///

Please keep mailing me anything of yrs comes out (laid my issue of Blackburn's book—by same title, PROENSA, into Souster's hands, and he is using it, he tells me, in Contact 9). Otherwise, what i have done is back of unwritten Maxies—and got to be such a fucking bore, i gave the studies up. And am now freer, for anything which might occur to express itself.

You see, I am not, i guess, a kind of professional—if that word means what i think it does, the opposite, of an amateur. And wld have to imagine that there is another sort of class of writer. What I am getting at is, that i get very damn sick of my own stuff, simply, that it sounds to me as though I am in service to the words, instead (as I think a professional is), to whom the words themselves are in service. That is, that the man himself directs them to serve ends which he invents, or declares, or demands. And I have no such feeling: when i feel taken (as you had it you did a summer morning when, the Old Lady, and Death, came out) i have that damned fine sense that the words boss me. And my job is to be their agent, and form solely the care that they don't (because they are so liquid) merely disperse themselves.

That is, something like this—to give you the prose of it—which took over yesterday:

"Palms and stars, or the kidneys  
of birds. Or the  
narratives. Reverse  
them.

Or have yr own star  
at the forehead.  
Be taken down,  
for yr suffering,  
and petted, wrapped  
in linen,  
oiled.

Read it  
as large as you  
want—as anything  
but anecdote. And so,  
pleasant, for an after-dinner time,

nothing  
more:

that Kin only  
is Paradise;  
and that even it,  
the Recognition,  
has a death: motion  
(which does get itself  
entangled, for  
cause—which must be,  
that things happen—must not  
cease . . .

Or does Joy  
slow anything  
down?

It gets lovely  
when it is there. And Kin  
is why Person does contradict the magic  
I forsook, fly at as prejudicing  
the citizen. One is wrong  
to insist upon  
Center. The Star  
is light, and Heat  
is what we do have  
to have. Love  
is

Cancel it — by doing it,  
found out  
ANOTHER!  
as you'd know  
CAN  
happen!

Altogether, what?<sup>20</sup>

(I wanted to say, too, that I very much admired yr second of two peas, the one "English Undeified",<sup>21</sup> a shooter—a beauty

that is, i guess a pun is, for me, too much at the heart of the puzzle, to me, of the nature of language to let me get more than kicks from "surplus" in the "Psychiatrist"<sup>22</sup>

(do you know, and care to give me yr opinion of, "A Po-Sy, a Po-Sy"—in Origin 2 or 3, and the mate of "Morning News", just out in 0 10?)<sup>23</sup>

but what you do with ballad stanzas (in the epitaphs &c), and with the limerick (as here),<sup>24</sup> wow me

that is, i guess i am driving at the wit arising from forms, as of more excitement to me than those from words (at least, for such savage wonder as you are made for:

that it is forms which you do  
give the twist to

(e.g., the lyric, in "Rembrandt", and the colloquy, in "Old Lady & D", as of major tone; and those others, in urgencies . . . how you have it, let fly in any direction



And I guess I'd lead you to turn that power of  
yrs on to every damned inherited form there is—that there is no end of  
what you can throw new light into, by the bite & the tearing of yr ice:

you very damned well seem to me to have the true complement to such  
"seriousnesses"—actually, of course, only the puritan in—of Creeley, and  
myself;

that you are the devil of any of the forms the English have  
invented (the novel, as well as those listed above, and the "play" (any  
dramatic form) . . . i can't see that, if you had the time, you cldn't blast  
every one of them. And in so doing do what I take it C and I are interested  
in, to do it, from the outside. But what you have so abundantly is  
everything, inside—like a Catalonian dynamiter<sup>25</sup>

blow 'em up,  
by the chairs  
they sit on

I love it. And figure you are oxyacetylene.<sup>26</sup>

OK. Don't mean at all

to get hortatory. As you are, you are it. And like i say, i figure, we got  
some little time to work.

Let me hear fr you.

PS:

d'ya know anything  
abt the Irish?

What  
i took the liberty of  
quoting, above, was fr  
something—prose—which  
got started yesterday, called

THE CELTS, AND PLATO<sup>27</sup>

why,  
i damn well don't know, except  
that i wanted to write something for  
my grandfather!

As you are,  
Olson

PS

Found out fucking  
bad news by  
asking Harcourt  
to send you a  
copy of *Ishmael*:  
it went out of print

a year ago!  
Bloody damn  
loss. O

Black Mt.

Jan 21/54

My dear Layton:

Thank you for both yr letters. It is damned moving, how  
you have it there, that, the Canadian, is between the English and the  
American. And of course just what you wish EP or Bill wdln't do, is where  
I like them—that is, I like them, for letting it show, just as much as  
showing: Pull down, thy/panities,<sup>28</sup> oh—britches.

And I wld argue one as clearly on as yrself, to come with  
us. Without patriotism, and solely because speech has gone ahead of any  
of us (english canadian american australian indian, who: Kitasono<sup>29</sup> plus  
men i'm sure neither of us know of)—

which certainly means reality, is,  
out-running us, no?

Avison (abt Pro Verse) sd, Olson's—or any man's  
programme—is his own.<sup>30</sup> Not quite. And for this reality reason: that the  
thing does run, alongside each of us. And can be—I'd say, has to be—  
grabbed hold of.

I'm sure that what you are objecting to, in Bill  
say,<sup>31</sup> and wanting (form as climax) has been disturbed and shifted by the  
dying, and now death of, dimensions.

You will know how much Creeley  
and myself do still work with that idea, that form is never more than an  
extension of content. And I just, today, had to send off a recommendation  
for Merce Cunningham,<sup>32</sup> the dancer. Don't know whether you know him,  
or his work, but the immediate point is, that, he says it flatly, as of his  
own biz: the meaning of movement is inherent in its own nature.

It is these  
flatnesses—in the sense of no distances—which lie at the root of any of  
these "Americans" practice. And I myself track em to the obvious change  
in reality, begun by the non-Euclidean geometers a hundred years ago:  
that the round isN't only out there, it's in, to.

By the way, there is a distinguished Canadian  
geometer whom I have learned much from. At Toronto. Christ, what is his  
name. Did a wonderful book on polytopes.<sup>33</sup> Shit. Lost it, at the moment.  
Take a look at it, if you're interested (one lovely story in it abt an  
Armenian rug merchant in Hartford, Conn.,—whose models I know!—and  
how he came to make those models: dreamt em!

(The Geometer's

Yes: COXETER!! a great guy  
Yes: do take a look at his book. Wonderful  
In fact, if he has anything like it  
out recently — or it itself — I'd  
like to review it for the  
Quart.

costs (this is the pissar — too old to bum,  
& not much for traveling with others!)

beyond  
the psychological,  
the sociological  
& the mythological

That the mythological  
doesn't have  
significances,  
any more than  
those other two contexts  
Which have piss-pooed

name begins with C, I believe (not unlike Comstock)—christ,  
what is it

or Crierson

Anyhow, just to get word over to  
you. And tell you how pleased I am that you are with us,  
in #1, of the BMQ.<sup>34</sup> Figure we can all help Bob turn this  
one into the damned best anywhere.

Oh, YEAH; as of the shit in Bill's pants, or EP's—how  
you had it—messiness: I once sent this one, to Bill.<sup>35</sup>

these days

whatever you have to say,  
leave the roots on.  
Let them dangle.

And the dirt.

Just to make sure  
where they come from

I think it was. It's the idea,  
anyway

And I shld so much like to come up there. Do you & Dudek  
need a lot of advance notice, to arrange something which  
might cover my travel? Give me some idea how much time I'd  
have to let you have ahead. For that will be the only  
difficulty now: otherwise, I wld jump off. And come. Bang. I  
now toy with some time in March—middle, say. But let me  
know how it all sits there. If you do need warning. And what  
wld be good.

Back on, shortly. And please  
keep letting me hear fr you  
Olson

the present

that there isn't any context  
except that one which  
isn't one at all: all of it, (or,  
what I was guilty of calling,  
in a review of Melville  
books for the New Republic<sup>36</sup>  
a year & a half ago:  
*totality*!!

[end of March 1954]

BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE

BLACK MOUNTAIN N.C.

hot off yr letter<sup>37</sup>

Layton

God damn it. I'm sore. And just  
becoz I'd set my heart on this thing.

Look: fer chris sake (1) do you  
have to give it up so easily?  
& (2) why didn't you damn well let  
me know at any time previous that  
(a) it was a Lit Society, & (b)  
that you were having such other guests  
as Campbell, Auden & the shit  
Viereck?<sup>38</sup> [How much do *they* cost????]

I stress this latter simply that  
(1) if you broached the thing to me  
in the first place, and it had  
this formalness to it, you ought  
(a) to have let me know that, instead  
of going on the assumption it was  
personal alone & (b) so long  
as the Society did manage to have  
V,A, & C, what kind of a fight  
*are you putting up* so that  
*at this late date* you dump  
me

(1) when I was scheduling the  
thing, & making all plans for  
a month around it  
& (2) when, by god, if you mean  
what you say abt us Americans (EP  
WCW & CO, say, not to speak of



Creeley etc) *how come* you find  
the *till empty* just now???

how come the money got  
spent on Auden (Eng)  
Campbell (Eng)  
Viereck (Eng?)

By god, Layton. Come on.  
Come up to it. Or don't, for  
Christ sake, dangle somebody like  
me 45 months or more, without

(1) telling all  
& (2) dumping as late & gaily as  
this -----Sore. And want you to  
make it still come off.

On yr honor  
& for cause

Christ  
Olson

---

Apr 8 [1954]

Dear Irving:

Good for you. And sorry I screamed. But at least you do  
know I was set on it, and hugely disappointed. And still am. And can't  
bear the thought that it waits, now, on the fall, but damn well do stand  
ready to come, and so please set it, catch that Lit Soc budget from the  
start!

(Figure—like my wife sez today—that i did go too much on the  
future of the thing, not recognizing that you did not know how I do  
slowly bite into anything, yet when the teeth are in . . .

And (last) I wld want to clear up that two month thing: I believe I  
did say, from the start, that a Mexican trip wld have to throw it  
over into at least January.<sup>39</sup> So—and I allow, it was more held in  
my own mind than I had a right to think you might also hold it,  
without word, over two months—I picked it up again the moment  
I could get clarification out of that goddamn Riboud<sup>40</sup>

((who, by the way, sails back to France tomorrow without, not only our  
never getting to Mexico, but without the bastard even having managed  
to get here!

So please—I had been so dangled by him that I guess I  
spilled some of the complete goddamn failures of this winter over on you!

Many thanks for snapping it right back. And great that  
we shall make it, October: let's set it as early as you can then make it, ok?

(By the way my failure to acknowledge yr new poem  
was not my spit, but that we opened here last week, and I had to shove in  
hard, for the first days

I liked it very damn much—like the conceit of  
it—even tho I, as you know, think that any of us, by now, have so much of  
the onset to get down & on that the offset (if I may call any *epater* . . .

tho I say that altogether gingerly, in yr case, simply  
that, like no one else (and I think i must have sd Swift, as well as Donne  
& Blake), you damn well do make yr whipping boys and dolls into  
illuminated manuscripts

(but there you are: reading aloud to friends here  
yr poems in the Black Mt Review, tho i read the Doll first I then sd but  
hear this: Achigan!<sup>41</sup>

Creeley in (as you may have heard fr him already). And  
it's the greatest! He's it, by god. And both of us was saying, that, if we  
only damn well did have you here for the summer, we'd have *all* that at  
this time wld make this place sd center!

We are announcing the summer  
session in a bulletin in the next two weeks, and I do so wish it might have  
been—that is, the featuring of writing as the special part of it—yr sd self  
as the 3rd!

(Christ, when can you beat that rap? Any ideas? If any  
whatsoever—stealing across sd border, or something, let us for christ sake  
know! Best, and please write Olson

---

Aug 1/54

Irving: congratulations on poems in 0 12—especial the 1st.<sup>42</sup> How I love  
it, how you do it! In fact yesty wrote a thing on you called THE CRISIS  
OF THE THIRD FOOT (t<sup>43</sup> Yr fond admirer,  
Ann<sup>44</sup>

ok. just to say hello. (Just told the Potry Umbilicus, San  
Francisco, to ask you come there and chew chew chew (in the midst of  
Raxwath, the Patch, Lessless Headless, Mister 'emerson, Black Cattle,  
etc<sup>45</sup>—simply that Duncan wld be on our side!

and because they are asking me for schedule when is it that I am to come to you? is the date positive? (OK—I ought to get a chance to, punch Doodeck right across his snout!<sup>46</sup>

all right. Let's get on. Yrs, Charles Olson

---

[early Oct. 1954]

My dear Irving:

having the greatest time, that is, reading you to sundry characters, pressing on them how you are making it, for i gain all that i originally took from that first poem (when was it, 2, 3 yrs ago?

and i go back to that sense, get Layton here, so much so I stressed (when i got back here last week from reading Max in Boston, Gloucester & N.Y. that these little bastards—5 new writing students this fall, which begins to show some of the increment—have 4 count em FOUR on their "Faculty", ha—Creeley, yrself, Hellman, c'est moi!<sup>47</sup>

i mean two things: (a) that how you make it from the other base of song & rime seems to me ineffable, like who might say; and (b) we must, by what means, persuade Washington to let you come over, even if only for a session (this wld seem to leave them plenty of room to disinfest any affect of your abominable presence in these States, yes?

All bastards. And await yr volume (Jonathan<sup>48</sup> tells me he had it, air mail, before he took off cross-country . . . isn't there some track competition by that name?

And please, if you can afford it, let me get a look at the PeaShooter (was delighted by the intro to it as it appeared in CIVN<sup>49</sup>

I despair, of course, that your own virtues keeps you from finding the "poetry" like you call it in at least Maximus,<sup>50</sup> but to hell with that: it's good enough that you do what you do, and that I find it so wild, that LA MINERVE you sent me (which i damn well do believe did send some of these—POEM,<sup>51</sup> as i remember it now, didn't involve me so much, but that means nothing at the moment

OK. Just getting started this morning, and wanted to merely gab. No great motions at all. Except that, as you will know, often one feels, when one feels so empty-headed, a swell beneath. And my own sense is to talk to you for some such reason. Especially abt rime, and song, that, for you, they mean poetry. I suppose I'd say it again as ((and you are the disproof, the utter abolishment of the thought, which makes me the easier that any

truth is not as interesting as some guy's proving, obstinately, that what it turns out to be in his hands what . . .

look, do you know a guy's pol's named Peter Voukos????<sup>52</sup> (Crazy, but you & he . . .

I'd say it, that, a universe of discourse . . .

o shit, let me go to work: and this, then, over the border to you to greet you in this year of yr ascent

and eagerly await any further word on coming there, very eagerly, leaving things open so that i can get away whenever there, Leary,<sup>53</sup> you, all, say, is, the, time

Charles

For what pleasure it might give you  
I enclose what followed the above<sup>54</sup>

---

The Black Mountain Review  
Black Mountain, North Carolina

Sun Jan 6/57

My dear Irving—I'm back here at *Music On a Kazoo*<sup>55</sup> wch you sent me in July, and I didn't thank you. It's been a pleasure to have & to read. (You mustn't mind I've been so slow but 5 years of this place cut me off. Now that we're closed—at least the teaching is over, & the pippul, even tho the theater's in SF., the *Review* will continue, publishing ditto, and if I can show any assets *after* sale I'll do at least one more "Institute" on Pre-Homeric Texts.<sup>56</sup>

I wanted to write you abt FLAGS in Kazoo. For me it's one of those I take it digs a thing you, Martial, well dig—Rome (more, say, than I take it *Slav vs Saxon*, or those like the *Ladies at Some Place*<sup>57</sup> in which you epater les bourgeois) That is, in *Flags* the fierceness targeted at a thing, Canada Maybe it's the via "My Canuck mistress"<sup>58</sup>—a person gets the object so that your wraths wrap it in your coils, slam into it, & every thing all sticks

Very powerful is the effect—the same power as in your own deepest—like say, for me, in this vol., such as the whole run fr "Giant" thru Dionysius<sup>59</sup> a lovely set they are

I don't think I'm saying it so you'll get me: It's that *Canada* in *Flags* gets treated as an organic thing—instead of split up into the individuals as victims as in so many of the *epaters*. The gain's enormous. For suddenly the social force—the two anthems—are in as images not messages, yah?



Oh. Well. To pass it along, in case it may be of interest. I'll look out for it, in case I strike another. It makes for a force of your satire by adding dimension to yr hated object—as loved objects in those others (as Martial made Rome & Spain into powers—like you say, the puma only not so much his teeth finally as that he is a puma—& bones are left or something.<sup>60</sup> Forgive scribble

Olson

#### Notes

1. Olson is referring to Layton's preface to his own contribution to *Cerberus* (1952), published with Louis Dudek and Raymond Souster: "The Canadian poet . . . is an exile condemned to live in his own country. He has no public, commands no following, stirs up less interest than last year's licence plate" (45).

2. Olson had called Layton at Sir George Williams University in Montreal from Black Mountain in mid-September, 1953. In a letter to Cid Corman (24 September 1953) Olson wrote: "I talked to him on the phone a week ago! & he asked me then, if I cld come! Was so impressed by his poem in Contact #8 I wanted to know if he might come here!" In an afternoon talk I had with Layton (Sunday, 30 October 1988) he had the following to say about his first conversation with Olson: "Yeah, you see, he called me one day, out of the blue, he phoned me and says 'Come down, I've got a job for you here at Black Mountain.' He wanted me to come down right away! I had to tell him that, look, I've got a commitment, I'm teaching, and I've got a contract. I just can't leave school, and my charges, come down, though I'm very flattered by the invitation."

3. Sir George Williams University (now affiliated with Concordia University) where Layton has taught, on and off, from the 1950s through to the present. Dorothea Rockburne was a visual arts student at Black Mountain College. See Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987) 183, and 208.

4. The reference to Auden is an allusion to Layton's satire "The Modern Poet," which Olson would have read in *The Black Huntsmen* (1951) [CP 188]. In later versions of the poem, as in the *Collected Poems*, Auden is replaced by Eliot as the object of satire. Olson owned a copy of Auden's *Poems* (New York: Random House, 1934).

5. Kenneth Fearing (1902-1961), American poet. Olson owned a copy of his *Poems* (New York: Dynamo, 1935).

6. See Layton's poem "Lines on the Massey Commission" (*Cerberus* 57; *UP* 68), written in reaction to the Massey Commission's findings that in 1948 Great Britain and the United States each published more than ten times the number of books of poetry published in Canada.

7. Dissatisfied with the state of American culture, Ezra Pound left America for Europe in February, 1908, disembarking in Gibraltar.

8. William Carlos Williams' conversation with Valéry Larbaud (a French scholar of American literature) took place on 6 January, 1924, in Paris. Olson would have known of this conversation from *In The American Grain*, where it is recreated in dialogue form in the section entitled "Pere Sebastian Rasles." Olson

owned two copies of *In The American Grain* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1925; Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1945).

9. The "four books" have been identified for me by Layton as *Here and Now* (Montreal: First Statement Press, 1945); *Now is the Place* (Montreal: First Statement Press, 1948); *The Black Huntsmen* (Montreal: Author, 1951); and *Cerberus* (Toronto: Contact Press, 1952).

10. "Composition in Late Spring" appeared in *Contact* 8 (September - December 1953); *CP* 122.

11. *CIV/n* was a little magazine, running 1953 through 1955, in seven issues, and was edited by Aileen Collins. The title was taken from a statement of Ezra Pound's: "CIV/n not a one man job" (Civilization not a one man job). For a complete account of the magazine, see Collins, *CIV/n: A Literary Magazine of the 50's* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1983).

12. See footnote 9 for list of books.

13. German for mischievous, willful, frolicsome. Stefan Wolpe (1902-1972) taught Music at Black Mountain from the Summer Session of 1952 (as guest faculty), through to the Spring Session of 1956.

14. "The Old Lady"—Olson is referring to Layton's poem "To a Very Old Woman," *Cerberus* (1952), 70-71; *CP* 56. The epitaphs are from *The Black Huntsmen* (1951): For a Wit, Philosopher, Communist, and Mild Gentleman (XII); *CP* 37, and *UP* 34. "Epitaph For a Mild Gentleman" is not available in either the *Collected Poems* or the *Uncollected Poems*.

15. "Doge to dog" is not a specific reference. The Doge referred to is the Doge of Venice; Olson is commenting upon the 'swiftness' (he later identifies Layton with Jonathan Swift [8 April 1954 letter]) of Layton's satire: his ability to quickly deflate the pompous.

16. Layton's poem "Rembrandt" is in *Cerberus*, 52; *CP* 56.

17. Creeley's *Divers Press* in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, published *In The Midst Of My Fever* (1954), and designed *The Blue Propellor* (1955), which was printed by Mossen Alcover in Palma de Mallorca, and published by Contact Press in Toronto.

18. Olson's work *In Cold Hell, In Thicket* (Palma de Mallorca: Divers Press, February 1953); published as *Origin* 8 (Winter 1953). In a letter dated 1 January 1953, Layton wrote to Olson:

By the way, have you anything on hand that you'd like to send us for publication? The next number [of *CIV/n*] will have a review of IN COLD HELL IN THICKET by either Dudek or myself. Liked very much, among other, OTHER THAN, THE KINGFISHERS, and the title poem. Many questions I'd like to ask you, but they'll keep for when I see you. Wonderful freshness in your poems, wonderful vitality. You make sense, by god you make sense.

The letter in which Layton refers to *In Cold Hell, In Thicket* as "obscure" has been lost; however, he reiterates his point in an April 1954 letter:

Your work still exasperates me, chiefly because I find myself embracing what I must honestly say irritates me at the beginning. You've gone about as far as one can with prose to make it sound like poetry. My own temper and tempo are far removed from what you're doing (well, NOT temper) that I've got to untangle all my synapses before I can read you with profit or pleasure. It was that way with ICHIT; it's now again with MAXIMUS. I had the same trouble with WCW's PATERSON—I still don't think it successful (as poetry) except in spots, though I may change my mind on that too.

19. Paul Blackburn's volume of poetry entitled *Proensa* (Palma de Mallorca: Divers Press, (June) 1953). Olson's poem "Proensa" was published in *Contact* 9: 6-7 (January - April 1954).

20. The poem "Palms and stars" remained unfinished and unpublished. In the original letters, Olson crosses the poem out from "at the forehead" ff.

21. Olson is referring to the poem "O.B.E." published in *The Long Peashooter* (Montreal: Laocoon Press, 1954). As with the following poem (note 22), Olson must have had "O.B.E." in manuscript form, since *The Long Peashooter* was not published until 1954. The pages are not numbered in this volume of Layton's poetry, but the poem is reproduced in *CP* 69.

22. Olson is referring to "Pine Avenue Analyst": "His face a priest's: wise, round, contemptuous:/ One hears the faint rustling of his surplus." (*The Long Peashooter* [1954]; *CP* 93).

23. "A Po-Sy, a Po-Sy" *Origin* 2 (Summer 1951): 118-123; "The Morning News" *Origin* 10 (Summer 1953): 122-128.

24. The limerick referred to is "O.B.E." in which Layton plays with the form of the limerick, while maintaining its sense.

25. "Catalonian dynamiter" is a reference to the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), and the short poem following was written by Olson in response to Layton's poem (which he must have had, as with the above poems, in manuscript form) "Flaubert, Trillingism, Or" (*The Long Peashooter* [1954]; *LP* 97).

26. See section 3 of Olson's poem "Maximus, to Gloucester, Letter 11" in *The Maximus Poems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) 54, where Olson uses the word "oxyacetylene" to describe what he sees as an admirable quality in New Englanders.

27. See p. 149 for "THE CELTS, AND PLATO."

28. Olson is echoing Pound's phrase "Pull down thy vanity" from "Canto LXXXI." See *The Selected Poems of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, pp. 172-175).

29. Katue Kitasono (1902-1978), whose volume of poetry and drawings entitled *Black Rain*, was published by Creeley's Divers Press in August of 1954. Kitasono published Olson in *Vou*, a magazine he edited, from Tokyo.

30. Margaret Avison, Canadian poet and critic. The quote is at this point unlocated.

31. See note 18 for Layton's April 1954 letter. Williams is not mentioned in any other surviving letter from Layton to Olson.

32. Cunningham taught Dance at Black Mountain during the Summer Sessions of 1948, 1952, and 1953.

33. H.S.M. Coxeter, *Regular Polytopes* (London: Methuen, 1948). Olson tells the story of the Armenian rug merchant—Paul S. Donchian—in *Muthologos*, Volume 2, 72-73. This "lovely story" is on p. 260 of the 1973 Dover Press reissue of *Regular Polytopes*.

34. Olson is referring to the Spring 1954 edition of the *Black Mountain Review*. Two of Layton's poems were included in this issue: "Lacquered Westmount Doll" and "First Snow: Lake Achigan." Layton sent typescripts of these poems to Olson in a letter dated 3 January 1953. Both poems are in *CP*, on pages 120 and 65 respectively. The only other poem sent by Layton to Olson in typescript form (in the letters which have survived) is "T.S. Eliot" (3 August 1954 letter), which was published in *The Long Peashooter* (1954), thus verifying the hypothesis (see note 21) that Layton was sending Olson several poems from *The Long Peashooter* in manuscript form.

35. "These Days" was published in *Contact* II, 1 (November -January 1952-53: 6. As Olson guesses, the published version of the poem, which is available in

*Archaeologist of Morning* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973), differs a little from the version he sends Layton. Olson sent this poem to William Carlos Williams, 12 January 1950.

36. "The Materials and Weights of Herman Melville," *New Republic* 8 September and 15 September, 1952. Reprinted in *Human Universe And Other Essays* (San Francisco: The Auerbach Society, 1965). The phrase Olson employed was actually "total intelligence" (*Human Universe* 112).

37. The letter precipitating Olson's angry response has been lost.

38. Roy Campbell, W.H. Auden, and Peter Viereck were the 'names' at a conference arranged chiefly by John Sutherland. In conversation (30 October 1988), Layton had the following remarks to make on this conference:

Campbell came—that is because of John Sutherland, not me—John Sutherland was a great admirer of Campbell, he'd [Sutherland] become a Catholic, you know, John had become a convert, and, I couldn't see it. And that led, of course, to the eventual parting of the ways . . . Viereck, I knew some of his poems that I liked, I didn't think he was an important poet, but I certainly turned out to hear him . . . and Auden, of course.

It is clear from two separate letters from Layton to Olson, dated 3 August 1954 and 15 April 1955, that while Layton was eager to have Olson up to lecture, Dudek, who didn't like Olson's work, put a stop to the venture:

Originally, as you know, I had planned it as a joint affair sponsored by my College and McGill. Friend Dudek won't come in on it—so that's that. Whether Sir George's can raise that much money, I don't know.

My word on this, then, is that you go ahead and make what speaking arrangements you can. In the meantime. By the middle of October or thereabouts I should know how the things stand. I'm that eager to see you I'd put out a good deal into the kitty myself. (3 August 1954)

And, from the 15 April 1955 letter:

The invite to lecture fell through 'cause LD wouldn't lend his support: I think I explained this before to you. The literary society of my own college is too small and too poor to foot the kind of expense that would be involved in your travelling all the way up here. If the literary society at McGill could have been brought in, the story would have written itself differently.

Dudek's recollection of events differs from Layton's, as the former related to me in a letter dated 26 April 1989:

I don't know anything about a conference with Campbell, Auden, and Viereck reading. These were heroes of John Sutherland, of course. Was he the organizer? If so, Olson would not have fitted. Sutherland at this time was strong on traditionalist metrical poets and Catholics. If Layton proposed Olson in a tentative list of some time, it could be that Sutherland's final choice was the first three poets only. I did not attend the readings.

39. See 5 October 1953 letter above.

40. Jean Riboud, chief executive of Schlumberger, a multi-national corporation, whom Olson met in the late 1940s while living in Washington. See Olson's work "The Resistance" is dedicated to Riboud. For an account of Riboud, see *The New Yorker*, "Profiles: A Certain Poetry—1," 6 June 1983: 46-104.

41. See note 34.

42. *Origin* 12 (Spring 1953). Layton's two poems in this issue are, in order of appearance, "The Madonna of the Magnificat" (*CP* 105), and "Metzinger: Girl with a Bird" (*CP* 118). These poems are reprinted on p. 68 of Cid Corman's *The Gift of Origin* (New York: Grossman, 1975).



43. See p. 151 for "The Crisis of The Third Foot."

44. In a letter dated 3 August 1954, Layton replied: "Dear Ann: (Did you write that excellent review in BMR?) Thank you very much for yr. thoughtful note. It gave me quite a lift. It's always nice to be told my stuff is reaching out, making contact . . . out there. Wld very much like to see your thing. The title intrigues me." The review Layton refers to is in Volume 1 (Spring 1954) of the *Black Mountain Review*, and covers *Contact* 4-8; *Cerberus*; *Twenty-Four Poems* by Dudek; *Love The Conqueror Worm*; and *Canadian Poems 1850-1952*. Written by Robert Creeley, the review is reprinted in his 1970 work *A Quick Graph: Collected Notes & Essays* under the title "Canadian Poetry 1954." The review is signed "A.M." in the *Black Mountain Review*, which Creeley has told me is a "pun" on his (then) wife's maiden name: Ann MacKinnon. Layton, then, seems to have been under the impression that Ann Creeley had written the review, and Olson is merely poking fun at this mistake by signing the postcard "Ann."

45. "The Potry Umbilicus" are: Kenneth Rexroth, Kenneth Patchen, Leslie Woolf Hedley, and Richard Wirtz Emerson. "Black Cattle" refers to the patrons of The Black Cat Cafe, 710 Montgomery Street, San Francisco, a meeting place/centre for artists, which closed in 1963. See p. 149 of Ferlinghetti's *Literary San Francisco: A Pictorial History from Its Beginnings to the Present Day* (Harper & Row: San Francisco, 19 80). In a letter to Ruth Witt-Diamant dated 1 August 1954 (the same date as the post-card to Layton), Olson wrote:

Allright. The best of luck on the whole plan. It's the best

I've heard of. And hope it swings the cat (the Black Cat (or is it, still, there?????) Thank you. Olson

46. Louis Dudek had written a less than flattering review of *In Cold Hell, In Thicket*, in *CIV/n* V: 26-27 (March 1954) [see note 18]. In a letter which has been lost, Olson apparently questioned Layton as to why he hadn't managed to keep Dudek from writing the review (or at least from publishing it) as is apparent from an 16 August 1954 letter from Layton to Olson:

It's not a matter of my letting Dudek write a review—he just up and did it, & Collins thought it ought to go in. Whatever reservations & disagreements I might have are beside the point. Dudek knows my feelings for Bob and yourself, but he has his own way to make in the world. So to speak. We make it a rule not to censor each other's work and opinions, though criticism is freely offered.

47. Robert Hellman (1919-84) taught Languages at Black Mountain during the Summer Sessions of 1954 and 1955. The "faculty" identified here comprise the editorial board of the *Black Mountain Review* for issues 3-6 (Fall 1954 - September 1956).

48. Jonathan Williams. The volume referred to is the manuscript of *The Improved Binoculars*, published by Williams as Jargon 18 in 1956, with an introduction by William Carlos Williams.

49. "Prologue to the Long Pea-Shooter" appeared in *CIV/n* VI (September 1954): 19-23.

50. See note 18 (April 1954 letter).

51. "La Minerve" (CP, p. 177) and "Poem" (UP 42) were both published in *The Cold Green Element* (Toronto: Contact Press, 1955). In a letter dated 15 April 1955, Layton indicates that he sent Olson a copy of *The Cold Green Element*: "Did you receive the Cold Green Element? I hope you liked it. Bob has probably sent you a copy of The Blue Propellor." It appears, then, that Olson had "La Minerve" and "Poem" in manuscript form.

52. Peter Voulkos taught Ceramics at Black Mountain the Summer Session of 1953.

53. The Leary mentioned by Olson has yet to be identified. Both Timothy Leary, and Lewis Gaston Leary (via his wife), have indicated to me that Olson was not referring to them.

54. No typescript is attached to this letter, or at least has not survived the years, so "what followed the above" remains a mystery.

55. *Music On A Kazoo* (Toronto: Contact Press, 1956).

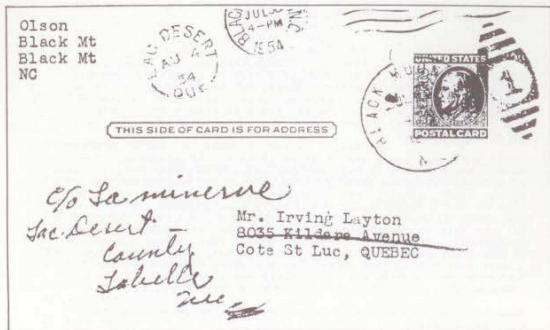
56. See "Lectures in the New Sciences of Man," February 1953, published in *OLSON: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives*, Number 10; and *The Special View of History*, May 1956, published in 1970 by Oyez Press, Berkeley.

57. "Flags," *Music On A Kazoo*, p. 29 (UP 127); "The Cold War: Saxon vs Slav," *Music On A Kazoo*, p. 31 (UP 128); and "Two Ladies at Traymore's," *Music On A Kazoo*, p. 32 (CP 197).

58. Olson is referring to the first line of "Flags": "My Canuck mistress in great distress."

59. *Music On A Kazoo*, 48-58.

60. See "The Puma's Tooth," *Music On A Kazoo*, 40 (CP 211).



November 4

BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE

BLACK MOUNTAIN, N. C.

My dear Layton:

Excuse delay - figuring out what to do with this place (now that it is so much just that drastic, & simple - and, so far as I can see, pretty much my own to do, by default of all the others: why, e.g., I wanted you & Creeley here, and Jonathan Williams as sort of "editor in charge of publications", or better just a "publisher", that I think one legitimate use of it, in its present reduced, and dissectionless state, is to direct it toward a writing complex, a place where any of us can hole up, and shoot from, with the nicest of elementary economics, and the freest of teaching I ever heard of, or have experienced, practically one's own demonstration of, how, it ought to be done.)

So yr news that you may be boxed in there, throws me as much, for that matter, as the possibility I may be too! That is, it has never been put to a clear test, but I have reasons for thinking I am, too, for political action 12 to 13 years ago, one whom the State does not want roaming around. And such a trip as we have talked abt, to Canada, might be just as much a block, States-side, as you are blocked, coming in.

Not, for christ sake, that it matters that much. They haven't yet (so far as I know) got their fingers into the post offices. Nor have they troubled to cut off publishing, yet. So we do have some short time (two years?) to do - and get into print - what we can.

##

Please keep mailing me anything of yrs comes out (I laid my issue of Blackburn's book - by same title, PROEMSA, into Bousster's hands, and he is using it, he tells me, in contact w/ 3). Otherwise, what I have done is ~~write~~ <sup>write</sup> ~~book of~~ <sup>book of</sup> unwritten Maxies - and got to be such a fucking bore, I gave the studies up. And am now freer, for anything which might occur so express itself.

You see, I am not, I guess, a kind of professional - if that word means what I think it does, the opposite, of an amateur. And wd have to imagine that there is another sort of class of writer. What I am getting at is, that I get very damn sick of my own stuff, simply, that it sounds to me as though I am in service to the words, & instead (as I think a professional is), to whom the words themselves are in service. That is, that the man himself directs them to serve ends which he invents, or declares, or demands. And I have no such feeling; when I feel taking as you had it you did a summer morning when, the Old Lady, and Death, came out I have that damned fine sense that the words boss me. And my job is to be their agent, and form solely the care that they don't (because they are so liquid) merely disperse themselves.

That is, something like this - to give you the prose of it - which took over yesterday:

\*Palms and stars, or the kidneys  
of birds. Or the  
narratives. Reverse  
them.

Or have yr own star

at the forehead.  
Be taken down,  
Or yr suffering,  
and petted, wrapped  
in linen,  
oiled.

Read it  
as large as you  
want, as anything  
but anecdotal, and so,  
pleasant, for an after-dinner time,  
nothing  
more:

that Kin only  
is Paradise,  
and that even it,  
the Recognition,  
has a depth: motion  
(which does get itself  
entangled, for  
cause - which must be,  
that things happen & must not  
cease...)

Or does Joy  
slow anything  
down?

~~is not to be  
wished. It is there. And Kin  
is why Person does contradict the magic.  
I forsook, fly at us premeditated  
the citizen, who is wrong  
to insist upon  
Dasher. The Star  
is light, and Heat  
is what we do have  
to have. Love  
is~~

*Cancel it - by long it  
found no way  
As you know  
I AM  
The R*

Altogether, what?

(I wanted to say, too, that I very much admired yr second of two peas, the one "English Unfiled", a shooter - a beauty

that is, I guess a pun is, for me, too much at the heart of the puzzle, to me, of the nature of language to let me get more than kicks from "surplus" in the "Psychiatrist")

I do you know, and care to give me yr opinion of, "A Po-Sy, a Po-Sy" - in Origin 2 or 3, and the mate of "Morning News", just out in O 10?)

but what you do with ballad stanzas (in the epitaphs &c), and with the limerick (as here), wow me

that is, I guess I am driving at the wib arising from forms, as of more ~~important~~ <sup>important</sup> to me than those from words (at least, for such savage wolder as you are made for:

that it is forms which you do

Charles Olson to Irving Layton, 4 November 1953. This "poem in process" is part of "The Celts, and Plato"; see page 149.



how come the money got  
 spent on Auden (Eng)  
 Campbell (Eng)  
 Virek (Eng)?

By god, Layton. Come on.  
 Come up to it. Or down, for  
 Christ sake, damn's somebody else's  
 me ~~55 months~~ or more, within  
 ① telling all  
 + ② changing as late + jaily as  
 this — Says: And would you  
 make it still come off

Charles Olson to Irving Layton, end of March 1954.

THE CELTS, AND PLATO<sup>1</sup>

The religious sense is the sense of the self,  
 and of the depth of life, by the self, in one.

Religions, however they  
 trade on such motion, in fact invoke a contrary system than that sort of  
 life which is palpably the act of any one of us. (The self is an act, in that  
 it is not in the given of it as much as in its discovery, which comes from its  
 directed use, and the intent to know it for what it is. "It goes against my  
 nature," someone says, indicating they do know something to which they  
 abide, by which they measure, on which they depend (proving whoever  
 it was who said, each man does know the shape of his soul).

What one  
 wants clear, is that religions do appropriate this desire, to see the face,  
 to know who I am—as my grandfather told me,<sup>2</sup> he didn't see his own  
 when he stopped to scoop up water at the pool, Clontarf<sup>3</sup>; he saw a  
 differing one, and was sure, of course, that it was the Sidhe<sup>4</sup> who grinned  
 at him for something he'd done to bother their host, as it is felt, if you  
 swat a wasp the hive of them will attack you, the air is so full of such  
 species & forces.

One has to have practiced magic, and thus know that  
 symbols are able to pluck from the busy air what swarms; and one has to  
 have refused the power, turned back to the heat born in us, to that  
 company, to the facts from which image comes—even to have discovered  
 that personality is a use of the self as symbol, has the same implicit  
 arrogation—to guess that religions, flatly, are so much magic too, no more  
 than the white of black practices.

A device of duality (that fallacy  
 that an important thing is always either-or, that contests are two, and  
 outside) has tricked out religions as good verse, evil. It is the  
 intimidation of the word and concept, the divine, as goal, as claimed end.  
 But it is no trouble, testing the air, and knowing that now we are human is  
 our own power, and such power, that divine is only half of what the other  
 half is the thrown-down thing, the demonic. In other words that neither  
 are the equal of, known, the Center—whom my father saw.

Palms  
 and stars, or the kidneys of birds.<sup>5</sup> Or the narratives. Reverse them. Or  
 have your own star at your forehead. Or be taken down, from your

suffering, and petted, pampered. Read it large—as anything but anecdote and so, pleasant, for an after-dinner time, nothing more. That kin only, is Paradise; and that even it, the Recognition, has the death; motion, which ought to be entangled, which must be that life increase, must not cease—that that Joy . . . (Or does it slow anything down? isn't it weight, of root, and so how we do thrive, how we are—Self?

It gets lovely, when

it is there. And Kin is, I guess, why Person, in religions, does contradict that amount of magic I fly against in those systems. And so I am wrong to insist upon Center. Satan, surely, is Light. And so it is Heat which we do have. And heat can be Saviour—has to be. Our own is not known until Mate. Love is, the Spheres.

#### Notes

1. See 3 November 1953 letter from Charles Olson to Irving Layton. Transcription of this piece is by George F. Butterick. Some of his notes have been drawn from as well.

2. For material on Olson's grandfather (John Hines), see "The Grandfather-Father Poem" in *Archaeologist of Morning*, 216.

3. Clontarf is a western suburb of Dublin.

4. The Sidhe (pronounced 'shee') are now generally seen as Irish fairies; however, in early Irish poetry, as Robert Graves tells us, "they appear as a real people—a highly cultured and dwindling nation of warriors and poets . . . (a)11 had blue eyes, pale faces, and long curly yellow hair" (*The White Goddess*, 207).

5. See Olson's 3 November 1953 letter to Layton for the poem "Palms and stars." These last two paragraphs seem to be a synthesis of Celtic magic ("Palms and stars, or the kidneys of birds . . ."), and Plato's most 'artistic' work, the *Timaeus*. Certain passages in this tract seem to be echoed by Olson, such as the phrases "and the other stars which reverse their motion are subject to deviations of this kind," "he who lived well during his appointed time was to return and dwell in his native star," and "the gods, imitating the spherical shape of the universe, enclosed the two divine courses in a spherical body" (Levinson, 1967).

#### THE CRISIS OF THE THIRD FOOT<sup>1</sup>

Example, Layton:

"I dance my shanks, here, in the field, reply"

(ORIGIN 12)

"a crown on him, yes, size of a mountain lake"

(same)

or, where it shifts to the fourth foot, or does it?

"Breaks from the cold fields, bounds ahead"<sup>2</sup>

(BLACK MT REVIEW 1)

how Layton pushes past it, falls from the cliff of that foot and then remounts the line, makes it have its second life. This, is the making of the great firm line of the language. And though it seems English, and that Layton here is as traditional, one could insist that just this *crise* is what makes the factor of *lineage* crucial in a verse differently based than that which is based (as Layton's) on the syntax of the completed thought.

That is, there is point now to speak of a syntax which is, ultimately, dependent upon the authority of a completed man, might I say, in this sense, that the syntax is of the man's own making, not something accepted as a canon of the language in its history and the society. For example, there are languages (Mayan is one) where there is no syntax accepted as proper to the sentence. Each person declares the syntax according to the necessities of his own precision in the moment of what he is stating or telling. The parts of speech can be so freely disposed in any language which is undeclined, the so-called agglutinative languages.<sup>3</sup> And if I take it "American" is agglutinative, then such syntax is, in experience, more natural to it than English syntax.

But saying that, without insisting upon another formalism hidden in language & implicit in it—or at least in the twin of language, the emotions (I am thinking of Bach's doctrine of the affections)<sup>4</sup>—without, then, paying attention to the crisis of the 3rd foot—one shall not be further on that dreary continuing debate of *vers libre* versus *vers classique*



1. See 1 August 1954 letter of the Olson-Layton correspondence, footnote 43. Transcription of this piece is by George F. Butterick. Some of his notes have been drawn from as well.
2. The first two quotations are from Layton's poem "It's All In The Manner," published in *Origin* 12 (Spring 1954): 200; *CP* 100. The third quotation is from Layton's poem "First Snow: Lake Achigan," published in the *Black Mountain Review* 1 (Spring 1954): 33; *CP* 65.
3. Olson is perhaps drawing upon Otto Jespersen's 1922 work *Language: Its Nature, Development And Origin*, in which Jespersen talks of "the so-called agglutinative languages" (376). Olson owned a copy of Jespersen's *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (9th ed.; New York: Doubleday, 1956) so it is possible he read other works by this author. Jespersen's definition of agglutination in *Language* would have appealed to Olson: "Both meaning and relation are expressed by sound, but the formal elements are visibly tacked on to the root, which is itself invariable: agglutinating languages" (76).
4. A theory attributed to Bach, the doctrine of the affections involves "rhythmic, melodic, and motivic formulas developed for the expression of certain affects" (Bodky, *The Interpretation Of Bach's Keyboard Works* [1960], 211). Bodky taught music at Black Mountain, and held a Bach festival the first summer that Olson taught at the college, so it is a possibility that the two men discussed the doctrine of the affections, or that Olson read some of Bodky's earlier work on the subject.

*Observation: vision—voyeurism—scrutiny—espionage?* H.D. was enticed by the invitation to anonymity in the public interest. She also welcomed the recognition of a deep connection between the so-called "objective" observations of the scientist and the "subjective" insights of the poet. She had long been an initiate of this mystery and it would be the basis of her own war-record, the *Trilogy*:

There is no rune nor riddle,  
it is happening everywhere;  
...  
you have seen for yourself  
...  
I am sure you see  
what I mean . . .  
(*CP* 559-60)

*Mass: mob—crowd psychology—mystery—communion.* For H.D., just as "every concrete object / has abstract value" (*CP* 523), so the individual mind has a collective dimension as well as common touchstones in actual experience. Whether or not one accepted Jung's model of a "collective unconscious" or Freud's methods of psychoanalysis, both depended on the belief that dreams have weight in the world and that there is significance in "the meaning that words hide" (*CP* 540). Highly selective in her own society, H.D. sought the companionship of those who shared these beliefs. From the maternal matrix of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, they led her to work with Freud in Vienna in the early thirties and to join, a decade later in London, Lord Dowling's circle of seekers.<sup>1</sup> Between these dates (1933-4 and 1943-6), she became a participant in the social and intellectual experiment known as Mass Observation:

(I speak of myself individually  
but I was surrounded by companions  
  
in this mystery)  
(*CP* 520)

Here . . . we must give a short outline of Mass-Observation's early history.

It was founded early in 1937 by three young men, all of them remarkable . . . The crisis of Edward VIII's abdication had brought to the attention of intellectuals the extraordinary hold which the monarchy still had over the British popular imagination. It had also seemed to expose gulfs between the 'Establishment' and the 'people', and between the newspaper press and public opinion. Its broader context, social and international, was such as to worry intelligent people. While the South-East of England prospered, the North, Wales and Scotland still suffered mass unemployment. In Spain, Franco was beating the Republic . . . Franco's Falange appealed to atavistic loyalties. In Germany, Hitler's rise to power had been a triumph for irrationality. Could anything be done to check the revival, as it seemed, of barbarism, to avert the major war which seemed certain?<sup>2</sup>

The "three young men" were the poet Charles Madge (b. 1912), the ethnologist Tom Harrison (b. 1911) and the documentary film-maker Humphrey Jennings (b. 1907). In a letter to the *New Statesman* of January 1937, Madge called for "mass observations" to create a new "mass science," and in February Mass Observation was initiated with the statement, "The anthropology of ourselves is still only a dream." Accordingly, Harrison gathered a team to study industrial life in Bolton, Lancashire (known as "Worktown" in the reports), while in London, Madge organized a "National Panel" of volunteers: Jennings' role was in presenting the material collected. By the end of the year, there were over five hundred unpaid Observers, whose main task was to record everything they did between waking and sleeping on the twelfth day of each month. The purpose of these "Day Surveys" was "to collect a mass of data without any selective principle." M.O. valued the fact that its Observers were amateurs: "subjective cameras, each with his or her own distortion"—and that their reports were not only anonymous but largely unmediated.<sup>3</sup>

Angus Calder has seen in the work of M.O. "a contradiction characteristic of the thinking of 1930s intellectuals—who were typically, the heirs of a liberal-individualist tradition in a period of 'mass politics'"; he continues:

Freudianism appeared to offer the chance of a new kind of liberal individualism based on appreciation of psychological differences between autonomous personalities. Marxism seemed to call on the intellectual to immerse himself in the 'masses' and the 'struggle'. Harrison's politics, when he chose to name them, were Liberal . . . Madge had been a committed Communist. But both seem to have been relieved to retreat from the dilemma of their

generation into the supposedly neutral position of the 'scientist', where consciousness could be neither 'collective' nor 'individual', but 'objective'.<sup>4</sup>

Yet from the start, Mass Observation also revised the myth of scientific objectivity and acknowledged the relativity of facts. It evidently owed as much to Madge and Jennings' shared interest in Surrealism as to Harrison's original approach to sociology. An early directive draws Observer's attention indiscriminately to:

Behaviour of people at war memorials,  
Shouts and gestures of motorists,  
. . .  
Bathroom behaviour,  
Beards, armpits, eyebrows,  
Anti-semitism,  
. . .  
The private lives of midwives . . .<sup>5</sup>

The list itself is surrealist: its notations could be those of poet, filmmaker or anthropologist. For each, the interpretation would be different, but all might see the texture of actual experience as a means of social transformation.

Although their party-politics differed, all three founders of M.O. were broadly left-wing, and argued that the social scientist must find out "what people do want, do get, don't get and could get to want."<sup>6</sup> Historians of M.O. have tended to stress the populist aspect of the movement, especially in the phase which followed the Munich Crisis of 1938. Tom Jeffery writes: "M-O was part of the articulation of a popular consciousness which would make its greatest impact in the early years of the war but it also links that 'war radicalism' to the later 1930's."<sup>7</sup> Other accounts have stressed its artistic as well as political radicalism.<sup>8</sup>

In a remarkable series of books, now being reprinted, M.O. published selections from the wealth of data collected by its members. The first was *May the Twelfth* (1937), of which there will be more to say; another was *The Pub and the People* (1943). Later, illustrated, collections included *Britain Revisited* (1961) and *Living Through the Blitz* (1976). The latter was drawn from the newly established Tom Harrison Mass-Observation Archive at the University of Sussex. The Archive's Director, Professor David Pocock, has recently recruited a new panel of Observers to record their daily lives and to report on events such as the Royal Wedding of 1981 and the Falklands Crisis of 1982. Hence M.O. reports continue to be an important resource for contemporary cultural studies, particularly those concerned with the mass-media, and are also significant to semioticians.<sup>9</sup>



H.D. became involved in Mass Observation early in its history. She was one of the first well-known people to join the National Panel. Replying to a questionnaire in November 1937, she says: "I joined M.O. at the suggestion of a friend."<sup>10</sup> In the same reply, which is printed below, H.D. connects Mass Observation with her interests in psychoanalysis and astrology as "part of this so-called Aquarian age movement" towards harmony and world-peace. Having been made aware, by long expatriation, of the evils of nationalism, H.D. hoped that "M.O. in time might . . . help to break down these barriers that make eventually for prejudice and at last analysis for war."

The initial impetus for H.D.'s interest in M.O. may well have been here emotional involvement with the abdication in 1936. As an American living in Britain, she reports, "I felt divided loyalties." This division was not simply between Edward VIII's royal duty and his romantic enthrallment with Mrs. Wallis Simpson, but between British monarchism and American republicanism. By a coincidence very appropriate to M.O., H.D.'s only report was a Day Survey for 12 May 1937, the date of the Coronation of Edward's younger brother as King George VI and Elizabeth, Duchess of York, as Queen Elizabeth.

As an Observer, H.D. was sensitive to the roles of myth and fantasy in this national event: "Coronation seems to take us to child-level, fairy tale, fairy prince, all that." Unlike her British companion Bryher, who plays a subversive role, mocking the ceremony, H.D. is largely uncritical of the Establishment's orchestration of public sentiment. She allows the elaborate ritual to catch her poetic imagination ("I get words. King, Priest, Prophet") and admits intellectual curiosity ("Symbolism interests me"). Her report shifts continually between naïve and sophisticated levels of response. This is achieved partly by a technique she would later use in *The Gift*, that is, the filtering of information through scraps of speech: "Has old Queen Mary a crown?" etc. The naïve question of a foreign onlooker is worked into a patchwork of association. The "old queen," mother of two kings and familiar from newspaper photographs, is recognized by H.D. in her archetypal dignity as displaced matriarch. The image superimposes itself on "a vivid dream of my mother (dead ten years)" with which her Coronation Day began. H.D. hints at a possible interpretation of the dream in terms of "some conflict and fear, re change in Queens"; the association will lead her, eventually, to the recoveries of matriarchal value in *Tribute to Freud*, *The Gift* and *Trilogy*.<sup>11</sup>

In her report, H.D. says that she "could not resist" using *this* May 12 as an opportunity for Mass Observation; she took notes in pencil while "listening-in" and typed them up later. Though an author by profession she thus joined with those amateurs (many of them were women) for whom the day-diary was an opportunity for personal expression, an excuse for the pleasure of writing. Following M.O.'s instructions to its volunteers, H.D. began her journal "with dreams and night thoughts if any" and noted the different phases of the day precisely by the clock. (A

later variant of this pattern would appear in the angelic hours of "Sagesse," the second part of *Hermetic Definition*.)

H.D.'s Coronation Day was spent in Switzerland, with Bryher, her eighteen-year-old daughter Perdita, and Bryher's Swiss secretary-housekeeper Elsie Volkert. She was grateful for this company, noting that she had witnessed two previous royal events (the funeral of George V, and the abdication of Edward VIII, in 1936) "alone in London flat." On May 12, 1937, the four women listened in to the day-long ceremonies in London on the radio, doubly distanced from their source by place and by language, for the bulk of the commentary was in French. Consequently, H.D.'s report has a particularly quirky relationship with the medium of radio and offers a running commentary on the language medium itself:

'Yoeman guard' makes us laugh. It must be explained to V.; B. explains that to say 'Yoeman gard' is a sort of 'false English'. 'Acclamation frénétiqne'.<sup>12</sup>

Similar motifs occur in another report from Switzerland, described as that of an "English Girl":

All this in French of course. I giggled to myself; it seemed such a very roundabout position to be in: an English person in Switzerland, listening to an English ceremony being described in French . . . The commentator was particularly impressed by the costumes: couldn't stop enlarging about the magnificent velvet, 'cramoisie' silk and embroideries passing before his eyes, and the grandiose apparel of the 'Yeoman Guards' (pronounced all in a gulp, as in French, which also sounded a bit odd) . . .<sup>13</sup>

If, under the same conditions, H.D. is especially well-attuned to verbal assonance ("*cramoisie* . . . *canne d'ivoire*"), Bryher's visual imagination is at play: "it's too terribly Kino for words," she comments, drawing on the knowledge of Russian cinema that informed her journal *Close Up*. In this manner, H.D.'s report becomes a tapestry of linguistic and cinematic events and the Coronation itself reaches the reader through three layers of commentary: that of the French-speaking radio, that of the English, French, Dutch and German speakers listening-in, and that of the author herself. She manipulates the multi-layered material, enjoying the opportunities it offers for word-play that crosses both national and linguistic boundaries.

In the interstices of this complex commentary on the rites in Westminster Abbey, there are glimpses of the lesser rituals of H.D.'s day and Bryher's household:<sup>14</sup> H.D.'s habit of taking morning coffee in Montreux and writing while she does so; the exceptional appearance at 10.45 a.m. of the maid with elevenses on a tray; the "usual lunch" at 12.40 p.m. ("Now homage is paid . . . —dimensions seem very mixed, this with cheese"); at 2.30 p.m., "the car comes," for further chauffeur-driven observation in Montreux; at 4.30 p.m., fellow-expatriates arrive for tea;



at 7.50 p.m., dinner, with "Two republics . . . represented at the table"; and finally, an hour's reading in bed.

3

Are there traces, in H.D.'s later writings, of her participation in Mass Observation? I have already hinted at resonances in *Trilogy*, and suggested a connection between her Day-Survey and the ritualization of clock-time in "Sagesse." We might also find in the apparent eccentricities of "Sagesse," composed in 1957, stylistic influences from the thirties. The trajectory of its opening sections moves from a newspaper-photograph of a caged owl, *via* an imagined conversation overheard at the Zoo, to angelic legend.<sup>15</sup> Documentary *montage* is at work here, as it was in the classic publications of Mass Observation. Observers were encouraged to record casual speech in public places and news-clippings were interfiled with their reports. They also told their dreams.

This movement from the public to the private sphere, or from "observed" to "lived" experience, is evident in the structure of the book *May the Twelfth: Mass-Observation Day-Surveys 1937*.<sup>16</sup> The first section of the first chapter, "Preparations," sets the scene by inter-cutting newspaper reports. The last chapter, entitled "Individual Reactions," concludes with Observers' dreams. Between these extremes are two chapters, "London on May 12" and "National Activities," that move from events in the capital into the regions and beyond. The book contains an analytical coda, "The Normal Day-Survey," whose single diagram depicts "the social area of the observer" as three concentric circles. The innermost circle is that of the family and household, the next that of strangers and chance acquaintances. The outermost circle is described by the editors as a "penumbra" that includes "institutions, classes, celebrities, . . . ancestors, literary and mythological figures, public mouthpieces (newspapers, radio, etc.) and such abstract collections as *The People*."<sup>17</sup> It is immediately obvious that this outer circle could also be seen as an inner one. We may also note that H.D.'s position, as an Observer in Switzerland, is both on the geographical perimeter of the Day-Surveys published in *May the Twelfth*, and also at its psychic borderline.

It is intriguing, to a student of H.D., that the medium of radio should be located in that vague "penumbra" which also includes "literary and mythological figures." During the Second World War, H.D. would become convinced that radio-waves could carry messages of the kind accessible to psychic mediums. She did not firmly draw the line between the "intelligence" pursued by spies and that of visionaries.<sup>18</sup> Both Charles Madge and Kathleen Raine were involved in the editing of *May the Twelfth*; their poetic and mystical interests were more akin to H.D.'s than the political and scientific concerns of some other Mass Observers. It has been pointed out by David Chaney that, while the dominant method of construction in chapters 1 and 2 of the book is cinematic and perhaps attributable to Humphrey Jennings, that of chapters 3 and 4 shows the

influence of radio and may be the work of Charles Madge. The editors of *May the Twelfth* noted the role of radio, not merely in diffusing commentaries on the Coronation, but in shaping the significance of the event. For if, as they remark, "the broadcasting of the ceremony and processions, and of the King's speech" offered individual access, it was also a means of "unifying behaviour" in the relatively recent rituals of nationhood. While some Observers raised questions about whether it was appropriate to eat, while listening-in to a "sacred" broadcast, and whether one should "stand up during the playing of the National Anthem,"<sup>19</sup> others were conscious of the extent to which the elaborately costumed ceremonial was part of a performance staged for the mass-media. Indeed, one report makes a connection of which H.D. seems to have been unaware, between such occasions and government propaganda:

Reviewing it all calmly afterwards, one sees how very dangerous all this is—the beliefs and convictions of a lifetime can be set aside so easily. Therefore, although people will probably always like pageantry, colour, little princesses, etc., and it seems a pity to rob them of this colourful make-believe element—nevertheless because it makes it in the end harder for us to think and behave as rational beings when we are exposed to this strain and tension—I would definitely vote agin it. It is too dangerous a weapon to be in the hands of the people at present in power in this country.<sup>20</sup>

As if to endorse this perception of Coronation Day 1937, the editors of *May the Twelfth* end their book with reports that have a "disturbing quality." Heading this section "Dreams and Phantoms," they choose passages that "represent that residuum of the day which at present defeats precise analysis or explanation, but which is important as giving it its dominant tone or character, a character which is made up of the totality of the fantasy and image-making of all the individuals."<sup>21</sup> It is ultimately this concern with "image-making" that locks H.D. onto the concept of Mass Observation and, in "Sagesse," connects her photograph from *The Listener* with her meditations on Christian symbolism. The medium in which these can co-exist is precisely that of the imagination, where individual experience and collective experience meet. Fittingly, Madge and Jennings extract from H.D.'s Day-Survey the intimate dream-material with which it begins, and place this among the more arcane "Individual Reactions." Her contribution to *May the Twelfth* is a mere paragraph, from "Usual breakfast in bed . . ." to ". . . I seem to take an older-sister half-protective interest in this X."<sup>22</sup>

This is the only part of H.D.'s report that has been published before, and the anonymity of its author has been preserved until now. Each page of her typescript bears the initials "H.D.A." (Hilda Doolittle Aldington), but it was filed by M.O. under the code-name "CO.11," which H.D. herself used when replying to the November 1937 questionnaire. Both items, together with the letter of November 14, 1937 reproduced



below, are in The Tom Harrison Mass-Observation Archive at the University of Sussex Library, Brighton, England. Special acknowledgement is due to Angus Calder, who is writing a history of *The Mass Observers*, for drawing my attention to H.D.'s presence among them. I am also most grateful to Dorothy Sheridan, the Archivist of Mass-Observation, for her assistance at all stages of this project, and to Perdita Schaffner, H.D.'s daughter, for permission to reveal the identity of "CO. 11."

#### Notes

1. See D.B. Ogilvie, "H.D. and Hugh Dowding," *H.D. Newsletter* 1.2 (Winter 1987): 9-17. Ogilvie mentions Jung as an associate of Lord Dowding, who met him in Switzerland between the wars. There is no evidence that Jung and H.D. met; see John Walsh, "H.D., C.G. Jung and Kűnsnacht: Fantasia on a Theme" in *H.D.: Woman and Poet*, ed. M. King (Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 1986) 59-66.

2. Angus Calder and Dorothy Sheridan, Introduction to *Speak for Yourself: A Mass-Observation Anthology, 1937-49* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984; repr. Oxford UP, 1985) 3.

3. Madge and Harrison, *First Year's Work* (1938), cited in *Speak for Yourself* (Calder and Sheridan 5). There was clearly a difference of opinion about the value of "subjectivity" among the founders of M.O. In their Preface to *May the Twelfth* (1937), Jennings and Madge quote with pride Professor Julian Huxley's comment that some M.O. reports "would put many orthodox scientists to shame in their simplicity, clearness and objectivity" (iii; see note 16 below).

4. Introduction to the Cresset Library Edition of *Britain by Mass-Observation* (1939) by Tom Harrison and Charles Madge (London: Hutchinson, 1986) xiv-xv.

5. 30 January 1937, cited by Calder and Sheridan, 4.

6. Madge and Harrison, cited by Calder, new introduction to *Britain by Mass-Observation*, xv.

7. *Mass-Observation: A Short History* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1978) 3-4.

8. See, for instance, David Chaney and Michael Pickering, "Sociology as an Art Form in Mass Observation" and Bjorn Sorensen, "The Documentary Aesthetics of Humphrey Jennings," in John Corner ed., *Documentary and the Mass Media* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986).

9. See also Daniel Dayan and Elinor Katz, "Electronic Ceremonies: Television Performs a Royal Wedding," in Marshall Blonsky ed., *On Signs: A Semiotics Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985).

10. The identity of the friend is unknown. It may have been Bryher, who, H.D. reports, gave Elsie Volkert a Mass Observation "folder." Bryher's only report to Mass Observation was sent from Switzerland two years later than H.D.'s. It was a reply to a questionnaire of June 1939 on attitudes to race.

11. In the second part of *Trilogy*, "Tribute to the Angels," there is a subject-rhyme between "mère" and "Mary" (CP 552). The same motif recurs in the unpublished portion of *The Gift* (cited in my introduction to the Virago edition of 1984, xvii). In H.D.'s "Notes" to *The Gift*, an undertow of female anxiety about royal *droits de seigneur* surfaces in her discussion of her grandmother's "personal preference" for the Scottish folk-song "The Four Marys," Beinecke Ts., 9-10; printed in *Montemora* 8 (1981): 76.

12. In this quotation, as in the complete report which follows, I have made few corrections to the text, and then used square brackets, since H.D.'s spelling mistakes and slips of the pen are sometimes revealing. "Yoeman guard" or 'gard' would, in correct English, be 'The Yeoman of the Guard,' i.e. the monarch's ceremonial bodyguard, which still wears Tudor uniform.

13. The identity of this young Observer can only be guessed at. Her account of listening-in to the Coronation coincides with H.D.'s: 10.30 . . . I joined the rest of my family in the library, which has become our combined living and dining room. The radio is there: we turned it on, just in time to hear the departure from Buckingham Palace. ("CO.23," *May the Twelfth* [1937]: 273, para. 9)

14. "CO.23," cited above, describes her own "daily ritual" of practising taping and limbering between 9.30 and 10.30 a.m.

15. See H.D., *Hermetic Definition* (Oxford: Carcanet Press, 1972) 58-62. In his Foreword to this edition, Norman Holmes Pearson says that "The occasion [for 'Sagesse'] was a picture of an owl in the London zoo, published in *The Listener* for May 9, 1957." H.D.'s subscription to *The Listener*, the weekly magazine of the B.B.C., testifies to her continuing interest in the radio even after she had moved permanently to Switzerland.

16. Ed. Humphrey Jennings and Charles Madge, with T.O. Beachcroft, Julian Blackburn, William Empon, Stuart Legg and Kathleen Raine (London: Faber & Faber, 1937; repr. 1987). I am indebted to my colleague David Chaney for his discussion of the structure and contents of *May the Twelfth* in "The Symbolic Form of Ritual in Mass Communication," forthcoming in P. Golding et al. (eds.), *Communicating Politics* (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1987).

17. *May the Twelfth*, 348-49.

18. It has been suggested that this contributed to her disagreement with Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, who was privy to Military Intelligence even after his dismissal from R.A.F. Fighter Command in 1940; see Ogilvie, cited in note 1 above.

19. *May the Twelfth*, 267, 269-70: "Reactions to Radio."

20. "CO.41. Female Typist. Single. 39." (*May the Twelfth* 304-5, para. 63). By contrast, H.D. refers uncritically to the "little princesses"—a news-media cliché well out-of-date by then—when describing her Aeolian Hall reading of 1943 (letter to May Sarton, 21 April 1943, Berg Collection, New York Public Library).

21. *May the Twelfth*, 328.

22. CO.11. *May the Twelfth*, 339, para. 129. H.D. initially typed "C" for the "much younger writer, I will not name," but amended this to "X." In her interpretation of this first dream, the identity of X remains in flux between the two royal brothers ("Is X the new King or is X, Edward?"). Chaney points out: "For this coronation, a unique feature was the extent to which members of the public thought that it should have been Edward VIII rather than his brother . . . being crowned" (*op. cit.*, note 16 above).

*Getting up and breakfast (with dreams and night thoughts if any.)*

Usual breakfast in bed, woke early with a start, wondering, thinking "we will be helped" and putting this for unusual reason (for me) into conventional religious symbol, "Christ will help us," recalled that it was morning of coronation, wondered if it were raining. Remembered dream. I was talking to older woman, pleading for a much younger writer, I will not name, well-known in London cinema and literary circles; I said to this older dream woman, "X is after all very clever. I may have made fun of him in the past but am truly very loyal." In dream, I am in old-fashioned room with lace curtains (Victorian England?). I change my chair and lean nearer to this older woman (the old Queen?) to say, "yes. X is *really* very clever and I am sure he should be praised (accepted)." The talk goes on this way, I am half excusing myself, half pleading for said X. Is X the new king or is X, Edward? In any case, I seem to take an older-sister half-protective interest in this X. The night before, after long talk over dinner-table, re coming ceremony, I had vivid dream of my mother (dead ten years). In the first part of the dream, I, in my London apartment, had lost everything. In the second part, my mother comes to me, in charming travelling costume, and everything is given back, some conflict and fear, re change in Queens, or general fear and sub-conscious un-rest?

*Morning 9 a.m. - noon.*

Post comes; I re-read some old MSS, having to do with a novel about my war-years in London. I become engrossed in this, am called to go out in the car, by B. with whom I live, here. She has camera and we go out into Montreux to "observe." The streets seem very quiet, like Sunday. We meet one or two groups of self-conscious school-mistress types of people, with heavy, thick, tri-colour ribbon favours. A few school girls. The flag on the Dutch club is the French flag. A few English flags, but not to notice, as the town is often decorated for foreign visitors and various diplomatic delegations. The Zermatt herb advt., has been replaced in the principal pharmacy by an Eno fruit salt herald. I noticed that, a day or two ago, and all here, were amused. The round plaques of gilt-covered chocolate R. and E. medallions are all sold out in the chief confectioner. I usually have coffee in the morning and write there, but to-day we return to hear the radio. B. orders coffee, contrary to usual rules of the house and the four of us, my daughter, 18, P.; the secretary Miss V.; B. and myself sit around the little dining-room table, in the library where we have meals when alone, where the radio is. I had not intended to do the more serious "mass" work but could not resist and looked out pad and pencil and jotted a few notes

while listening-in. I copy them from the blue paper and rough pencillings in my untidy type-script. I will not re-copy.

10.30 at radio. French voice speaking. French words make fairy tale or story out of beginners' French lesson. "le green park"—his use of word "prairie" makes us laugh—casques rose—and so on, convert the scene into another dimension—la cour—le cortège du roi, like Puss in boots done for a French primer, easy and exciting and glamorous words don't connect all this with London. Bells ring, stage-bells, off. Impression through these words of colour. Close eyes. Imagine a film. Voice speaks of crowds, 2 or 3 million people. Music. Like a fair. Complex.

Who is it, the English consider "between God and the pope"? The king, one presumes.

(B. snorts.)

Benediction, benediction, word benediction with French accents, contact of king with people, of God with king—benediction, accents. History of the rite, over centuries (in French, always remembered).

10.45 the maid comes to lay cloth but I say, "no, just bring in the coffee on tray." The coffee and buns very welcome.

(Just now while I type this, the house-boy brings my post, a card from Austrian friend, now in Cornwall. He is a great "fan" of Edward and I, too. The card is Edward, very flattering, and written on back are wishes for my "happy coronation." I am deeply touched at this, and/charmed.)

More radio talk (this copied, as I said from the pencilled notes done exactly at the time stated)—of contact of King and God.

The voice changes, we imagine a Belgian is now speaking.

Miss V., the Zürich secretary, now tells us, across all this, of having read in the paper that crowds waited in dense fog all night. B. makes communist salutes, ironically. V. wants to know what she means. All that is explained in German, over the French voice speaking of affairs in England. We laugh and break across and talk. We always laugh when the word "Buckingham" comes up, pronounced "Pookinham." "Yoeman guard" makes us laugh. It must be explained to V.: B. explains that to say "Yoeman gard" is a sort of false English."



V. discusses what I have been wondering, how is Edward feeling, what does Edward think now? Where is he? Where is he listening? We take for granted, he is listening. Now we laugh over French turns of speech that calls the "oil," "cream for anointing," "Cramoisie" is a word that keeps re-appearing, the velvet on the thrones?

We laugh, all 3, when kiss is bestowed—now, "canne d'ivoire" is all 18th century etiquette.

11.30

"Cramoisie" again and again. He loves it, his over-worked little word. Organ.

Lecture on kings.

Streets almost empty, he tells us.

I ask of American time. I am glad for company. I was alone at radio in my London flat at time of abdication, also at time of funeral. I am glad to be here with these 3.

They say U.S. time is 5 hours earlier. We do not imagine people at dawn in N.Y. listening-in.

V. remarks that the fanfare is like music she loved as a child.

11.45. English voice.

Cross, chalice, altar cloth to be placed on altar.

Staff—

Sceptre—cross—

Spurs—(interruption)—I ask or want to ask interpretation—V. breaks across to have translation—confusion; symbolism interests me.

Orb—rose-red cushion—St. E. crown.

Now B. is angry when oath to church is enlarged on.

Noon—(I got tired, water-logged, reached saturation point, went up to my room, but P. soon followed and said, "B. says he is being oiled and salted, you better come back." I went back.)

12.10—V. says in German, "now the music is beautiful." I get words, "King, Priest, Prophet."

"Poor King," we say.

12.40. We have usual lunch. Now homage is paid—anthem—dimensions seem very mixed, this with cheese.

V. asks if "Rose-Marie" will be there? We laugh. V. again remarks on fanfares. B. says, "its too terribly cino [sic; Kino] for words."

12.45. B. screams with laughter when we are told 2 bishops "support the queen." V. waits for fanfare after crown, she balances basket on head for crown, to show how it is done.

1.05 B. looks out her Lenin on the book-shelf. I have asked how anything can change this. She says, "Lenin says when there is a communist rising in England, it will be most terrible there has ever been."

Miss V., ardent Zürich calvinist, keeps saying, "but its Catholic, not Protestant." Then she says ironically, "all the catholics can laugh to hear that, be glad." She says, "that is no reformation, you had in England."

B. explains that C. of E. has no confession, no "pictures for worship." V. asks, has old Q Mary a crown? B. explains, "another kind." I say, "a remnant."

V. repeats, "they call it protestant, listen to that, catholic." I feel so tired, over coffee, cigarettes. P. offers to switch off. B. is deep in Lenin. V. asks for translation of word, "recollection." We try to explain, she says, "ach, stilles Gebeten." We speak of how tired they must be in W. Abbey. We discuss word "theatre" as here used in radio. Again V. says, "it is Catholic." I say, "well, we have Lenin now and Calvin both in our midst. B. & V. I do not know who P. or I will impersonate." All laugh.

1.25. V. starts to make rough notes, re Mass folder, B. gave her, but very confusing as she asks us each in turn just what she shall say.

End of radio. We separate. Now at 2.30, I get these notes together.

About 2.30.,

the car comes and B., P., and I go out to "observe" the town, Montreux-Territet. The Chaffeur asks in French, what the words "les peer" and "les peeress" mean. This makes us laugh. He listened in faithfully and seemed impressed, but we did not discuss the matter except as a pageant. B. said to me, "note red, white and blue flowers in buttonholes." It was simply a group passing. There was no elaborate show in windows, and as all the "colony" were assembling for the service at St. J. the Divine, at Territet, there were not many English about.

We pass the church slowly as B. wants to take some snaps of the crowd. There is a long rank and file of boy-scouts and girl-guides with attendants in the usual uniform and the usual banners, from the English schools round about. We drive slowly past the crocodile, and dodge a few possible acquaintances under umbrellas. We are pretending to be on a trip to Zürich, to avoid the ceremony and general tea after church, at 3.30 at one of the big hotels.

One feels, as B. directs her camera at odd groups, that she is directing a machine-gun or about to hurl a bomb.

We wait in the centre town square, while the chauffeur goes to get the latest local paper. B. is trying for more snaps. I read of trouble in Ireland. Front page has portraits of King and Queen, of course.

It pours.

I remark how refreshing it is to have town as usual. B. remarks, "democratic Swiss would not decorate."

3.45.

I have early cup of tea in my room and cigarette. We are expecting guests later for tea. B. brings selection of new books for me to choose from. I am glad to find a book, right out of all this, and choose, "Spanish Prelude" a pre-revolution book, written by an American, I get lost in it, want a change, a chance to refresh mind, over-strained with all this intensity and watching.

P. comes up from radio to report to me that "they have got back home safely to 'Pookinham' Palace." Long speech after, by announcer to the effect that we were to tell our children and grandchildren of the great spectacle we had been present at, via radio.

4.30. Dr. G., a Scotch American of our acquaintance comes with his Dutch wife. Of course we discuss all this. He too is exhausted listening-in. He was chiefly annoyed by final speech, as he wanted to hear the bag-pipes of the return procession. He notes funny remarks of the announcer, chiefly how he picked out the "white boots" of the highlanders, always in the details.

Again we discuss the word "theatre" or the French "estrade" and go off unto long discussion of Swiss Family Robinson in which B. specializes and to which Dr. G. was also devoted as a boy. Coronation to us seems to take us to child-level, fairy tale, fairy prince, all that, the sub-conscious pull back to unreality and phantasy of king and queen.

I tell of the peeresses wearing "dickie" and Mrs. G. is very pleased and amused that they economize (I read this in London paper) and don't all wear the full embroidered dress under the robes.

Talk goes on and on in this strain till about 6.15.

7.50.

Over dinner, we listen to the colonies and "commonwealth of nations," a phrase rather stressed, it seemed to me.

I scratch a few rough notes, think of Roman Empire solidarity and am proud that States was apart, is apart from this, that that colony which my people helped found, stood out, as Edward VIII stood out against all this superimposed pomp. At same time, I find it terribly impressive, listening to the far voices and continually harp back to Rome, all roads lead to—London. I think, too of tiny Helvetia. Two republics are represented at the table, U.S. and Helvetia. The national anthem of U.S., Swiss and Empire have the same tune, ours starts, "my country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty," the Swiss also has for theme, "liberty." One always loved the liberty of the INDIVIDUAL in England. I always felt it, but when E. went, I felt divided in loyalties.

B. speaks again of the new trouble in Ireland, as Ireland speaks.

When finished, P. asked if she should leave it on, B. said, "turn it off; if anybody made war to-day, we won't get any satisfaction about it to-night."

I can only add, what many must add in like notes on "mass observation" that we were very tired out by it all. We parted after the radio was snapped off, went to our rooms with books to read as is our usual habit. I took some prescribed sleep-tablets, that I indulge in about twice a month, on an average, as I feared I might keep myself awake all night going over this. I read for about an hour in bed, a usual habit, and then slept well.



H.D., LETTER AND REPLY TO M.O. QUESTIONNAIRE, 1937.

*The Mass-Observation Bulletin for October 1937 asked four questions of Observers:*

1. *Why did you join Mass-Observation?*
2. *What do you think it is for?*
3. *What do you yourself most hope to gain from it?*
4. *What suggestions have you for work that it should undertake?*

On 14 November 1937, under her code-name CO.11, H.D. replied as follows:

Sunday, Nov. 14.

Mass Ob.,  
Dear Sir,

I receive your new folder, just as I am about to start for a two to three months stay in America. I send in a few hurried notes, taken from the first list of questions.

I like very much sending in notes, though fear they are of an informal and rather untidy description. I get so tired of writing. But as I say in one of the notes, this is like writing a letter or chatting with a friend, with whom I do not want to loose touch.

I send a few of your folders to States. People seem interested, and I shall talk of the work while there. The bank address reaches me as quickly as anything.

Again thanking you,

CO. 11.

1. I joined M.O., at the suggestion of a friend, I liked the feeling of being anonymous but with a directed purpose, the feeling that in case of war or certain political trouble, I would in someway, have made a statement that linked on to human doctrine and human behavior. Astrologists tell us, whether we discount their theory or not, that we are moving forward into the great age of "friends." M.O. and psycho-analysis seem part of this so-called Aquarian age movement, the moving forward where we are all in a whirl of unity, not of disruption, the biblical "as the snow cometh down and the rain from heaven." This is symbolized by the classic figure of Aquarius with the water-jar, or the second coming, as in a cloud—a snow-cloud, I visualize it.

2. This is the religious or poetic conception of what the world seems to be feeling. I think M.O. may be a factor of that spirit. I do not feel I

should apologise for these remarks, though in ordinary conversation, I should make a joke of them probably.

3. I think I myself hope to gain from it a link between my psycho-analytical findings and my own actual writings. Or perhaps in the ps-a jargon, a bridge between ego and id. In writing these notes, I have the feeling of being in touch with an intelligent friend, one who does not expect too much, nor do I myself stand on guard, as in creative writing, expecting too much of myself. I have made this link with one or two young people, who come to me for "help," yet who shy away from any actuality of the ps-a description. One, a young musician, whom I think has written to you, seems at last content that I have "helped" her, through getting her in touch with M.O. I have tried the same approach with less success with several older women who drain my energy and strength with their eternal probing and their unwillingness to "fit in" to the scheme of things, via the direct ps-a algebraic formula. Also this sort of understanding breaks down the self-consciousness of national barriers. I am still startled and inwardly a little frightened, when after years of common come and go, to have the remark flung at me, "YOU as an American," etcetera. (a woman in the shop where I have lunched for instance, and with whom I have chatted for about eight years, remarked to me, lately, in a hurt tone, "what—YOU an American?" Why YOU anything?) M.O. in time might, this is my hope, help to break down these barriers that make eventually for prejudice and at last analysis, for war.

4. I don't know that I have any special suggestions. The main thing is that the ideas reach as many people as possible. As I repeat, everything should or will flow into the center stream, if the force back of it and the sincerity of the workers is of sufficient power. One stream of thought should join another—making for happiness in mass as when two friends find themselves talking together, almost thought-reading, at one in the highest intellectual sense, the at-one-ment (atonement) we were taught as children, to believe in.

Number Thirteen

A Daphne Marlatt Section

Guest Edited by

Smaro Kamboureli & Shirley Neuman

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Interviews by

Janice Williamson & George Bowering

\*

Essays by Lola Lemire Tostevin, Frank Davey  
Lorraine Weir, Dennis Cooley & Brenda Carr

\*

Letters & New Writing

by Daphne Marlatt

\*

Also in this issue:

Poems by George Stanley

\*

Charles Olson Letters to Irving Layton

Edited by Tim Hunter

\*

Two Unpublished Notes

by Charles Olson

\*

H.D.'s Contribution to Mass Observation

Edited and Introduced by Diana Gallop