



**THE DIFFICULTIES**  
**DAVID BROMIGE ISSUE**







# DAVID BROMIGE

MY COMPENSATIONS (GLURK)

(Part Six of American Testament)

My own image seems so  
clear and simple, as if  
it would be impossible  
to take me any  
other way than what I  
project. I know that  
I am an honest  
kind, warm-hearted  
person, and my favorite  
Other is the one  
of iron nerve with  
cold clear eyes.  
Commit a crime,  
and it seems as if  
a coat of snow fell  
on the ground. When  
people don't know  
what is true  
they have to  
take all things  
at face value.  
Conflicts are  
inevitable  
however. My  
main goal now  
is to learn to  
deal with those  
conflicts in a rational  
manner, and work them  
out in a way  
that's agreeable  
most importantly  
to me, and to  
a lesser degree,  
agreeable to others.  
I try and better  
myself when possible  
but sometimes lower  
myself in doing so.  
The wise man throws  
himself on the side  
of his assailants.  
I hate to be  
defended in



a newspaper. When I feel the most unsure is when I act the most confident. The good are befriended even by weakness and defect. While my neighbors argue how I should spend my life, I say to hell with anyone who doesn't understand musicians. The history of persecution is a history of endeavors to twist a rope of sand. I see myself as being a very insecure frightened person who takes things too seriously, but a lot of people that I've met think I'm just a very quiet unsociable type, who'd truck and higggle for a private good, or by just generally putting his foot in his mouth and chewing. Either I don't see myself as much, or people set me higher than I really am. I figure that most people in today's society do this. Some of my friends think I have a good sense of humor. I do but it came from a lot of work. I seldom correct any misconceptions which probably leads to more, but on the whole I don't care. But the most frightening thing about

being unsure of who I really am is that somebody out there will tell me. Things refuse to be mismanaged long. We can't stay amid the ruins, neither will we rely on the new. I try to face life with an open mind, so all I can hope is that a person's idea of me is a good one. Occasionally I let my past conditioning run me into depression or lack of confidence, but I've been using techniques that I've learned to let these just pass by. What others' ideas of me are are actually only my idea and perception of what they are (the ideas). The world globes itself to a drop of dew. I know this must seem like I'm avoiding the issue which may be true but all I can do is discuss this as fully as possible and then I'll say it: "GLURK!" Of course I'll expect tumbling release of tension. I guess "keys" and thinking you have them is dangerous. The dice of God are always loaded. So if the girls don't ask me to dance, I feel ugly, funky, smelly, common,



boring, but I don't worry too much. They also will think differently at a different time. Put God in your debt, for compound interest on compound interest is the rate and usage of this exchequer. I am more educated than many of my peers and am able to dominate my viewpoint if I really want to. To them I was Mr. Spock, calm, cool, and collective. I enjoy giving and receiving the love passed in the process of massage and other arts of healing. Then their ideas move up and down with me. People have played a game back and forth at times of "Who Am I," answer ask again, answer. Those who do usually end up lost and crying at the end of the road, unable to plug anything in. That obscene bird is not there for nothing. So I have my mother to thank for my anti-definition feelings. As a child she always told me that I was a leader. Actually I am a depressing person. I love to just sit in my rocking-chair, play my guitar, write poetry and love songs and dream of beautiful things. A nice place with plenty of rocks to throw. And lots of tin cans to

aim at. Actually I am a serious realistic person. I seldom eat meat but have no trouble consuming a medium size Cheez-It package in one sitting. This contradiction reflects, poorly perhaps, deeper contradictions within. Nothing can work me damage except myself. I think too much for my own good. I put my thoughts in the young women's mouths. I am thought of as being very understanding and giving. Actually their ideas change as they know me better. I know people must consider me inconsistent at best. I believe these people have defined themselves more clearly than I. The martyr cannot be dishonored. To be different purposely was frowned upon so consequently I was frowned upon. As I left, the frown left their faces (I guess). Thus do all things preach the indifference of circumstances. What I consider my essence is very pure and filled with love and faith.



WAITING FOR ANYONE BUT GODOT

(Part Nine of American Testament)

The flower that  
opens and fills  
the room with  
scent, the eye  
with color, how  
blessed to us  
seem such lives!  
Does one choose?  
By this he meant  
to question a life  
spent fetching up  
stuff from the basement.  
Philosophy  
is less important than  
humanity who  
hope against  
hope, and these words  
can actually be  
said. Am I waiting  
because I know  
the word, or a word  
because waiting  
is my referent?  
No moment need be  
dull or indifferent  
for the compulsive  
conviction is never  
our own. Judas  
betrays interesting  
parallels. He asked  
his father did he  
think living life  
on the brink in  
unremitting  
intensity meant  
one attained to  
truth? His father,  
picking his phrases  
carefully, replied  
No, not in any  
sense that would  
privilege intensity;  
simply that one might  
thus learn the truth  
of such living. Each  
character meticulously

upacks a wallop.  
Writing cannot  
frankly write without  
the estrangement of a  
square and empty room.  
To plot  
a climax is  
a disappointment in  
advance. To be  
disputes the premise  
to remain its living  
disputant. We find we  
are frightened when  
applied to most  
profound shortfalls.  
The ordeal being not  
much deeper than  
a puddle we judge  
by its content not  
its shape and yet  
unassignable to  
whatever might make you  
think "chill  
from the wind of doom".  
That slow magic trick  
that leaves the glass  
half-empty, half-full.  
Honor driven by  
romantic dream, heroes  
to themselves rank  
forms. Paradox  
can be a device  
for generating  
details and their  
articles. The fact  
that nobody  
departs and says  
he does must prove  
our haunted genius.  
Kept pent's best  
entertainment to  
forget all that's  
already happened,  
absorbing cavalcade  
of humanity on  
the rack. Parade  
your drill, the Bible  
knows it all and knows  
it knows it all, and  
even knows how you  
might feel concerning



that predicated trap.  
An electronic  
gnocchi maker.  
All over people  
struggle towards  
dignity while the  
pictures precede  
the blue pencil or  
the shears, seeing  
more things. Don't  
you often or ever  
wonder where we are  
being taken, yet  
surely it's more  
where are we going,  
the economist  
can tell us this  
as surely as the  
priest he has  
replaced. Teleology  
shapes dialog. Often  
I can't decide quite  
what is being said.  
Life is a nightmare  
metaphorically  
speaking at those  
times when one  
has lost control  
to larger figures of  
significance. Yet  
irritation plus  
depression want  
to announce the  
coming of calamity.  
Antecedents stimulate  
his transcending  
imitation. Astigmatic  
eyes register abnormal  
persons in  
abnormal circumstance,  
baffling comparisons  
with dramatic  
asides -- a history  
exists to tell us  
why we needed to  
replace the infantile  
sotto-voce lament.  
He desires to  
deserve the attention  
he is getting. Everyone  
was acting

like so many  
Freudian rats as  
supreme effort clinched  
its right to be one  
of the great triumphs  
of the individual.  
It is encouraging to be  
able to see the  
forbidden, or sometimes  
keenly traumatic,  
inducing a blind spot  
where his mother  
dipping him in the river.  
This convincing thesis  
does much to explain  
pointless endings in  
terms of failure to  
find peace by natural  
conscience or scientific  
reason when  
God and rejection  
coincide. An admirer  
of faith in life  
will invariably attempt  
the dismissal of dismal  
disillusion. The diction  
of inconsistent realism  
reaches the obvious  
conclusion that  
there are no mistakes.  
The man he had argued  
this with is long  
since dead because he  
hanged himself. This  
jawbreaking endurance  
contest containing  
certain literary, perhaps  
poetic qualities  
took place at a party where  
he thumped the cheese  
board with his fist to  
emphasize his point  
and in one kind of movie  
that he liked, it  
would have split.  
I want  
this and that  
but gladly settle  
for this if  
only I knew.  
Like characters



on top of a wedding  
cake, you kneel  
before the holy  
church, to offer  
unattainable  
vows of love, worrying  
the statistics of  
marital fate, but  
one's intelligence  
might bring it off,  
a long shot, provided  
you are flexible  
enough to give  
up the initial  
ideals yet stalwart  
and brawn enough to  
hang in there and  
accident of course  
will enter such  
considerations.  
Gardens were conceived  
of as orderly  
distillations of  
the natural world,  
-- a place they tended to  
view as threatening and  
chaotic, especially  
at the wild fringes  
of the expanding Empire.  
From this xenophobia he stood  
apart by postulating  
Nature as its own  
scheme of orderliness,  
dangerous yes and a place too  
of great puzzlement, yet  
meriting keen exploration.  
They wrote about hamlets,  
the problem the reflective  
mind can pose divorced  
from effective action,  
open-mouthed before the  
spouting geyser. His  
sciatica had cleared  
itself up this morning.  
The constant  
detaching of the artist  
from earlier ideologies  
in order that the people  
may enjoy an immortality  
at second hand  
-- "the time  
seemed longer",

in an irrepresentable  
continuum offering  
latent pictorial  
structures in  
two places at once  
like arithmetic.  
Definition of  
horological terms may  
be awkward: they  
represent  
components of dynamic  
devices which must be  
seen to be believed.  
On Thursday  
we intend to drive  
over the mountains  
to the hot springs  
and this is attractive  
both due to the destination  
and the deep  
satisfaction obtained  
from an intention  
realized. The globe's  
weight drives  
the measurement  
of its own  
motion. Being Saxon  
she placed a bowl  
with a hole in its  
bottom into water  
where it took a prescribed  
amount of time to  
sink. Simple outflow  
limited the length  
of senatorial  
speechifying. More  
personally, as a child  
I endured considerable  
anguish -- my mother  
hated to make  
plans and my father  
made meticulous  
itineraries which  
created great  
anxiety in him, now  
responsible for their  
execution under the  
withering eye of his wife.  
I started to read and write  
early and kept at it --  
I could space it all  
out at the kitchen



table, head in text in  
text in head in  
text -- nowadays  
it is the principal  
relief from my troubles,  
which is why I choose  
not to amuse you  
with them -- so much so  
I must wonder whether  
I am somehow maintaining  
in my life a given level  
of misery simply to keep  
the writing need going --  
Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*  
was impressive, he kept  
on praying while flames  
that otherwise must have  
hurt him horribly  
went apparently unnoticed.  
I spoke to her  
without much  
forethought, asking  
if she had dreamed  
and she replied "I  
dreamed about the river  
and the ocean" which is  
her customary response to  
that inquiry. Time  
to put on the water for  
morning tea, I recalled,  
so did, and then  
had to think of something  
to do that wouldn't  
take very long as the water  
boils almost at once  
in the small saucepan.  
To resume the novel found  
so hilarious last night  
might be to burn  
the bottom out.  
So I watched a segment  
of "Sesame Street"  
standing up. You have to  
remember to fill the cup  
to the brim, because  
once the teabags are  
removed, the level is  
bound to drop. All this  
time I kept right on  
in- and ex-haling.  
Only a contrast reveals  
the distance

literal or metaphorical  
that one has traveled.  
The merits are almost  
completely technical  
infelicities. An  
impressive absence  
of meaning invested  
our desires. T,  
F. TGIF. Comparing  
something obviously  
long with something  
clearly short has  
something of the  
trick about it. Critics  
feel play bears.  
Grand interlude for those  
above average intelligence.  
A portion of the iceberg  
will shortly have  
been specified. DNA  
permits suggests  
engenders this  
spiralling  
redundancy. Great  
is the English  
tongue. You can't  
contradict the multitudes  
you don't contain.  
Theory  
can't protract the moment  
depended on by its  
critique. He spots  
the tops  
of the posts  
and stops. These  
tones, the gray  
stone wall gone  
green with moss  
and light reflected  
from these great  
green leaves, the greener  
green the leaves  
themselves surrender,  
felt calm to him,  
leaned against the  
edge of the large  
hot bath, and the steps  
cut in the stone  
were an obdurate  
instance of one  
self, approachable yet



resistant, holding  
 much in place  
 and letting change  
 settle in little  
 noiseless shiftings  
 while keeping  
 up a general appearance  
 of substantial  
 permanence. Which  
 leaves to account for  
 the leaves themselves,  
 and the greater extent  
 of the branches of the  
 figs this spring  
 contrasted with the sure  
 recollection (knowledge!)  
 of this time  
 last year. Secret  
 society 200 strong  
 seeks to engineer  
 lasting partnership  
 among the ruling  
 classes of the more  
 advanced industrial  
 nations, but encounters  
 resistance in the form  
 of mass hallucination  
 concerning the separation  
 of the political and  
 economic realms. A mad  
 doctor tries to create  
 a race of supermen.  
 Horror rises from the tomb  
 to terrorize descendants  
 of decapitated French  
 knight. Merry  
 lady-killer marries  
 young women for their  
 money; In Tahiti, a wild  
 bikini gets stuffed  
 into a shallow plot.  
 A consul plays Cupid  
 for a GI and fiancée.  
 Secretary weds boss to  
 protect him from women.  
 Stern railroad  
 superintendent reveals  
 his heart of gold.  
 The dollar  
 being strong  
 that summer, we  
 would have been dumb

indeed not to avail  
 ourselves of it. Societies  
 like to suppose themselves  
 natural, all others  
 artificial. Alternatives  
 challenge god-given  
 rights and persons  
 bringing these to mind  
 ought to be excluded  
 for the good of  
 the republic. Patterns  
 of exposition repeat  
 other social patterns.  
 Of the one  
 hundred or so  
 varieties of apple  
 in America, Safeway  
 markets 4. The texts  
 of which the teacher  
 received free samples  
 and which were calculated  
 to aid in the instruction  
 of students learning  
 composition tended to  
 repeat each other.  
 Marx makes capitalism  
 aware of itself as  
 human construct.  
 Now it has been  
 mostly destroyed we  
 really start  
 to appreciate the past,  
 the infinite and rich  
 variety of human  
 being we're obliterating  
 even as it passes into  
 a plethora of texts.  
 To study how  
 caste, class and power  
 develop in a village  
 in Tanjore not only  
 tells us of ourselves,  
 it also baffles  
 and bewilders, usefully  
 telling of our limits.  
 All's codified -- is this  
 to keep one's cultural  
 heritage alive, or simply  
 to be extraordinary  
 in a document? Sift,  
 organize, then couch,  
 these steps we prize,



along with quantifying:  
if good at same,  
should qualify  
for an elite,  
the shroud  
of that mystique.  
The mountains are  
many and rugged,  
thickly populated  
close to the edge  
of hunger. Fetched  
to the new world  
to be slaves,  
we mixed our blood  
the better to  
escape or to increase  
our odds the way  
one plays various  
combinations at  
the track. What is  
being born for  
if not for this?  
The Hamadsha  
of Morocco slash  
their heads,  
entranced, during  
their healing ceremonies,  
in this highly  
readable account.  
Although the gods  
destroyed the villages  
the goddesses belonged  
to, phallic figurines,  
female perfection in  
one handy symbol of  
the masculine excrecence.  
Madstone or mole,  
birthmark to balmyard,  
hope rendered concrete,  
by this waterfall  
their stand was made,  
an amusing dissertation  
concerning head-hunting.  
Your executioners later  
cower in terror  
before your ghost.  
Poker can be viewed  
as a religion, unequal  
parts of skill,  
nerve, luck, distracting  
the way to carve forms  
in a rockface keeps the

carver from picturing  
catastrophe he can't  
keep in the rock. Solid  
nuggets of some  
fascination. An  
eliminated people  
qualify under the  
Dewey decimal  
system. In the lowlands  
bands of anomalous  
Christ-worshippers --  
in cities, intellectual  
excitements -- in Japan's  
megalopoli, moxibustion  
clinics, lock the cultural  
thesis. An anonymous  
Asia says, If you must  
restrict your interest  
to just one  
book, try this. A husband  
and a wife are laying  
out the politics of  
reproductive ritual,  
stirring up something  
new and lively, maybe  
that better job affording  
the offspring of their  
union a better crack at  
turning things around,  
or leastways an education in  
reframing. The Lacadones,  
last lords of Palenque,  
there in their mahogany  
forest, beautiful,  
remarkable, reduced to  
250, wouldn't thank you  
if you asked and could be  
understood. In fact  
isn't understanding,  
save where it can be  
demonstrated by use  
of the tool, rather  
a feeling or sensation  
that one has understood?  
Meanwhile in northern  
Thailand, the interplay  
between the structural  
dominance of women, the  
ideological dominance  
of men, vividly  
brought out, challenges  
earlier perspectives.



The folktale, singing  
for power one crazy  
February evening  
behind mud walls to  
people without history  
beneath the bo-tree  
about art, results in  
a picture triumphantly  
impregnable. Sogdian  
painting, with its  
distinctive  
traits, color plates  
and many line  
drawings, the psychology  
of art is never simple,  
not if the alphabet  
can have its say --  
the choice hardly  
seems there to be  
made. Giants  
like Cezanne strive  
to arrive at some  
final grasp do they  
of form as problem?  
Color his rectangle  
pink. Art has to be  
seen in its religious  
context and religion  
in historical context  
or what we term the  
bottom line. An immensely  
likeable hero, a succinct  
sound motion, careful  
synthesis of documents  
and technical  
sources, *con amore*,  
where seeing is  
forgetting the name  
of that you see --  
the burning ambition,  
the servicable cliché,  
provincial naievite and  
leapfrogging  
inspiration, what  
is the economic role  
of government? I can't  
recall since when,  
but it seems forever,  
this assumption that  
I am the epitome  
and the apotheosis, why  
else live, and how?

Under the delusion that  
the center is  
elsewhere? The creative  
personality makes use  
of the art-ideology  
his culture supplies -- or,  
an instrument the community  
makes use of to express  
its cultural ideology --  
which he composes with  
all the vigor of his  
personality -- the constant  
detaching of the artist from  
earlier ideologies,  
corresponding to  
a separation of  
the individual  
from a great  
whole, and also  
to the extrusion of  
wornout ego parts in  
a gesture of independence  
that, hailed sufficiently  
as a successful one, will  
bring the dependency of  
fame, the people (us)  
needing someone to be  
famous so we can  
participate in his or her  
immortality -- success  
a stimulus for just so long  
as it is not attained:  
I wonder who reads Otto  
Rank these days? A strobe  
lumped at a desk. Patient  
days of abstruse  
thought. Wants to be noted  
as performing something  
if not useful then  
with the *gegen-schein* of  
purpose trailing it, who  
so instructs that words  
shall so appear and  
form? Religious in  
its unappeasability,  
the impulse struts  
fanés, while bells  
batter its erections,  
while its solitary fellow  
follows demonstrating  
phrases such as  
"sure of his welcome (here



at any rate)" and  
"individuality is  
an epiphenomenon of late  
bourgeois culture  
astonishingly  
persisting in this  
era of recapitalization."  
Which is not irony, unless  
a white shirt and a tie  
are irony. It felt  
good and bad, beating that guy  
out of a parking place  
in front of the store  
with the best xmas  
cards in town. Impediments  
from day to day renewed put  
paid to lofty hopes. No  
moon at all can be  
a thrilling jazz number.  
He figured the reason he  
stole so much was  
he was looking for  
a conscience. Half  
our nature's to  
forget. The movie  
overlooks its  
cameras. Teenagers  
manifest much  
energy, it pours  
into the sunset so  
poignantly devoid of  
another to appreciate  
it with. Even the red  
barns with their white  
trim meant sexual  
excess. Exogamous  
longings for  
someone with a trail  
to be hot on, along  
the echoing  
chasm. She hugged him  
and then  
thrust her belly up  
to his and rubbed it  
back and forth --  
the past is  
then anatomized  
for all  
imaginings, yet  
at what cost in  
distraction! Westminster  
that summer was encased

in scaffolding, while a fence  
around construction in  
Trafalgar Square read  
Better this in 1985  
than actually in battle  
in 1805. In Spain  
so many curious arrangements  
of the window  
puzzled her, but not  
the persons glimpsed  
within that sometimes  
were looking out  
at her. From the yard  
a pre-school voice  
insisting "It's not  
nighttime yet" was  
absolutely accurate  
as heat mounted and the  
morning melded into  
noon. In the same  
time zone the government  
of Mexico approached  
default -- each lawn  
contained a rolled-up  
Sunday paper  
with a TV guide inside.



IN HIS IVORY TOWER, THE BOURGEOIS DREAMS OF HOME

(Part Ten of American Testament)

You should stay  
in touch with your  
family, because then  
you can experience  
what you can't  
bear in yourself, and  
stay aware of  
whatever despicable  
traits you have,  
so that the individuation  
process is thereby  
speeded up  
and evolution served.  
You  
are  
a  
wonderful  
person.  
When I think  
how far you've come,  
how much you've done  
in these few years  
I have to acknowledge  
I feel threatened  
probably, and have  
had to deny it,  
but since my second cousin  
got in touch again  
about the family  
estate, I feel less  
mean. Kind of  
a calm  
excitement, unless  
that's the new brand  
we've been drinking.  
The ego can  
feel marvelous on  
account of those  
accomplishments  
others find  
trivial and that's  
the trouble with  
this brand of ego.  
Amazing -- one can say  
anything, the poetry is  
in the motion,

didactically thus  
justified  
since it tells us  
of the motion  
known in several  
important contexts as  
(and discourses)  
the mind. Today  
the county cut our budget  
\$13,000 and the shit  
began to hit the fan.  
Management, since  
unionization, perceives  
the clinical staff as  
adversaries, as though  
we weren't all  
in this together, sink  
or swim, and even  
as if they weren't  
ancillary! Strange,  
when you think of it,  
how people in service  
occupations, teachers,  
therapists, counsellors,  
will always have this  
army guarding them  
for higher pay than  
they get who so often  
failed as therapists  
or teachers and thus  
elected to go into  
management. "I wouldn't  
go back to that guy if  
you paid me -- I'd  
blow my brains out first."  
These type persons  
run the world we others  
suffer. That is  
totally unfair,  
a reprehensible  
generalization,  
partially true,  
true. Please  
check the answer  
applicable. He explained  
when he had said  
hysterical, he meant it  
descriptively and not  
perjoratively.  
He was interested  
in the use of language  
that draws attention to



and simultaneously  
 from, its user's  
 purposes as best  
 such can be understood.  
 Stevie Smith  
 was a highly  
 intentional  
 poet, no doubt  
 about it. Or  
 not much. But  
 how vague! That  
 might with equal  
 force be said  
 of Coleridge, another  
 laboring vineyard.  
 The predicate ought  
 to surprise the subject  
 seeing how  
 that's only  
 natural, if  
 it can be allowed  
 that experience  
 warrants the term.  
 Of course  
 an imperceptible  
 decision made in  
 early adult  
 life turns out to  
 have been the final  
 choosing up of sides  
 like the person in  
 a Gary Snyder poem  
 I so often recall  
 who'd signed on for  
 one week and had been  
 subsequently bucking  
 hay all his life, yet  
 the chief  
 feeling of life  
 is novelty, if only  
 via its yard  
 rule of boredom.  
 He announced that  
 with a definite  
 and characteristic  
 shrug of the shoulders  
 that was accompanied  
 by an extension  
 of hands upward and  
 opened, he sensed  
 change was in the air,  
 and I agreed that

I had felt as much  
 of late myself, but  
 perhaps it wasn't  
 entirely attributable  
 to the newspapers.  
 Are you simply  
 having fun  
 with sentences  
 or leveling  
 with us? Or have  
 you purposes  
 more serious and  
 thrilling, really,  
 eventually, that's  
 what we mean. All  
 that's of revelatory  
 note, depends upon  
 content to come  
 into existence yet  
 the content itself is  
 nugatory, the preoccupation  
 of some bimbo doubtless  
 just as the act of one's  
 conception was  
 Mom and Pop's  
 good time, a night  
 out I  
 don't care to  
 discuss. "The English  
 are so metaphorical,  
 and this is  
 their tongue  
 in your literal  
 ear." Our friends,  
 messengers from life  
 to death, are building  
 a celestial city. When  
 I enter you  
 how I feel whole  
 and how that feeling is  
 not apart from the sensation  
 baffles memory. Rocks  
 Bob said, like  
 simple markers.  
 How I always do  
 desire to be there, no,  
 the desire  
 comes and goes, but  
 crave, how I crave  
 union, yet how delay  
 same, unless -- is that  
 you doing it through,



to, me? When young  
 (grade five) remainders  
 held me fascinated,  
 disturbed, worried,  
 was I alone in that?  
 We stand at the window  
 embracing in  
 an Ingo Seidler  
 translation  
 of Paul Celan:  
 they look at us  
 from the street:  
 It is time  
 that they knew!  
 The last  
 four lines are  
 also well  
 worth perusal,  
 though irrelevant  
 in this context.  
 Embracing  
 hardly cuts it  
 anymore. With open arms  
 it moves in on its  
 referent that  
 turns away. The late  
 20th Century needs 4  
 aspirin and a hug. See  
 I believe such stuff  
 in such a wise span through  
 Caesar as he planned  
 battles, call it if you wish  
 like an insect walking  
 the meniscus, I guess  
 Yeats never saw a shopping  
 list. That passionate  
 old codger! Who can't  
 dwell in recollections  
 of early sex and sense  
 his balls draw close  
 as if to eavesdrop --  
 figuratively  
 speaking. Like  
 gold to airy thinness  
 beat is it? Dispersed so  
 finely via sublimation  
 that urge repeats itself  
 otherwise as it  
 remembers. Now let's  
 mention mother  
 and her displaced  
 fall. Zukofsky

was right. We must  
 have what we want  
 now, and only in that  
 form to so enable  
 and ennoble us. Yes  
 poetry about poetry  
 is a drag it's safe  
 to say, even poets  
 writing poems about  
 how they hate that  
 poets write poems  
 about poetry will  
 agree. Actually  
 I like best when someone  
 talks about her work,  
 that's a sound  
 use of leisure  
 to my mind. I am aware  
 there are some  
 factual errors in this  
 piece, the ones that are  
 deliberate, like  
 attributing Charles  
 Olson's statement to  
 Zukofsky. As an  
 Expressionist, I have this  
 obligation to distort  
 outer reality, and my  
 political strategy  
 coincides with this  
 whenever I allow a line  
 to stay, evoking  
 distortions of the social  
 that prompt  
 Expressionism. Ego  
 is the foot that  
 drags and slows  
 the cyclist. Samson  
 the emotional  
 idiot  
 affords a common  
 model. We keep fit  
 for the identity it gives  
 us with our grandparents  
 in their doctrinal  
 observances --  
 eternal life  
 means to maximize  
 the use of what's  
 assumed to be  
 allotted. Governments



agree to kill off millions  
because that's the solution to  
overpopulation, so why  
not do it via gene-spliced  
viruses that sexually  
repress all worker ants.  
A schizoid aunt, also, was hospitalized  
for paranoia.

## INTERVIEW

David, your work has gone through some significant stylistic shifts over the years. For example, there seems in a broad sense to have been a movement from a "song-based" approach to the poem to an almost obsessively reflexive writing (*écriture*). How would you characterize or contextualize this trajectory of styles?

Let me start with that phrase "obsessively reflexive." Against which you pit "song-based." As though these terms were mutually exclusive. Then let me turn to the first poem in my second book, *The Ends of the Earth*. It begins "The hands have spacious access to/ the hands...." This strikes me as completely reflexive. Two lines further on, we find

*I saw constant motion circulating gently  
previous to words*

*like the people looking in the space between them & the walls  
where the paintings imitate their frames(.*)

This would be hard to sing, but it is not hard to connect it with "obsessively reflexive". Then take a look at the second poem, "The Arbitrators":

*Can I get it this once in my lifetime, now  
I must get it immediately--*

*what it was  
by way of a response  
they let me know,*

*a question  
followed hard by  
a demand.*

While the brevity of the lines and the lining up of like sounds make this easier to sing, we note that the customary "objects" of the lyric poem have been replaced with a linguistic description of the function such objects are assigned in the customary lyric. The suppressed poem surfaces only as the description which suppresses it. This, too, strikes me as highly reflexive -- with reflection delivering the words and lines in response to the suppressed cliché. Two poems on, "First" begins "One aches to know/ one fact as axiom/ to act." Obsessively reflexive, *si*, but I don't think "song-based" an adequate term for my procedure, even in 1967. The outlines of these poems do look at first glance like the outlines of the customary brief lyric poem, but upon reflection the poems are revealed to be anything but. This book offers in place of the lyric poem of the 60's a critique of same; that this has not been recognized more widely is no doubt due to the surface similarities. This may look like a mistaken



strategy -- if there is a difference, one ought to declare it as clearly as one can; but it was fully intentional -- if there is a difference, one declares it as appropriately as one can, and my intention was to indicate that, beneath a superficial identity with the past, the present was of a very different order, and that this order was difficult to discern because of its superficial identity with the past. Knowledge had shifted from an experimental, object-focussed base to a base in linguistics, and poetry was shifting audiences from a middle-class centered (in its own mind) upon things, to an intellectual audience aware of the primacy of systems. (I speak of poetry here in its pure sense, i.e., the embodiment of knowledge under present necessity; I am aware that a pseudo-poetry persists for an audience of nostalgics.)

I'd also like to note that, in its 45 pages of poetry, *Ends* devotes a maximum of 28 pages to poems that conceivably look like lyrics, and the other 17 are taken up by works of a very different order -- an obsessively reflexive narrative, an obsessively reflexive recounting of a dream, an obsessively reflexive meditation that's 9 pages long....And I'd reiterate that even those 28 pages cancel the lyric and offer in its stead reasons for its failure to appear.

Certainly, I'm "interested" in song -- cut teeth on the English lyric, learned hundreds of American popular songs by heart, played the Beatles backwards -- but the obvious primacy of rock and roll -- they were delivering real songs -- and the shift previously alluded to, rendered the lyric, for me, as a serious poet, inconsiderable. Which leaves us with only one term of your "trajectory," and would appear to render that term inapplicable. And yet I too share a sense of trajectory as I read through from *The Gathering* to *Red Hats*, and welcome your phrase "significant stylistic shifts," since I think it largely accounts for that sense of trajectory. I have tried, with increasing deliberation, to make each book significantly different from its precursors, believing there are several good reasons for this procedure:

- (1) once a mode becomes a habit, once one knows without question how to do something, attention slackens and involves one's art in some diminishment of the variousness art, to my mind, would encourage. The clarities a habit at its best afford cause an uncertain amount of otherness to go unnoticed.
- (2) I am interested in a present writing, and find the pretext of presence counter-productive. The present for either writer-reader or reader-writer involves a text, and the attempts to make this vanish beneath a "voice" insisting on its presence strike me as puerile. Too, "voice" (= person) invariably is the hypostatization of one or two aspects of self, thenceforth taken as the entirety of that highly elusive, allusive, various and questionable construct, in the interests of a commodity society -- if the self is what we're after, won't it become far more evident if taken through a dialectic of moves, rather than when fixed in book after book about bad luck at the track and consequent difficulties with girlfriends and bill-collectors -- the fetishizing of an attitude? It is a very simple notion of integrity to approach the poem the same way time after time, book upon book. Such an approach, after all, may be no more than a simulation of integrity, of one

sign we read to mean integrity. Of course it may be that the poet simply cannot help him or her self. That fix does sometimes speak to us; each of us knows character as fate. Politically (= humanly), though, in this historical moment I think the better choice is to struggle against such, by offering it up for examination and reflection.

(3) Poetry involves me in a like mystery I am involved in by living. Each book is an adventure, an exploration, and not the working out of a foregone conclusion. And in this connection, I'd like to add that this stays the case for me even after a book has been published. Yes, I had intentions -- yes, I tried to realize these; but no reader's meanings can be identical with mine, there can only be overlap; and I too am simply another reader in this respect. Exaggerating this point for clarity's sake, I'd say that DB is only an accidental appendage of the poetry I've published, knowing less about it in thinking to know more, and that we need to keep in mind the image of the poet as a bus, its destination printed on its forehead, unviewable from its window-eyes. "What stays self-evident to me may be invisible to no-one else."

Back to the trajectory question: a trajectory implies a unity, so, given the shifting styles, presumably the reflexive quality accounts for that impression. It is throughout the work, a big blind spot of sorts, and therefore, not susceptible of alteration. Now, of course, my attention has at last been focussed on it, I'm interested to know if that aspect can be modified. In fact, since completing *Red Hats*, some of my work has been fairly and deliberately deaf to its own echoes. Certain pieces, for instance, in *American Testament* [which Sun & Moon is to publish], like "What I Did the Day Ted Died" or "A Squeal of Approval," are as bland as I can be...and have excited squeals of disapproval from certain persons whose opinion of my writing I value. But I am counting on the work thus far to frame these simplicities and render them problematic. So, maybe I'll even write songs! -- Actually, though it got no distribution, about 10 years ago I published a song-book, a collaboration with Barry Gifford and Paul DeBarros and others. Of course, these consist in melody, scored rhythm, etc. Without such means, one has to get the sentences to knock up against each other -- or employ the line-break to a similar end -- to keep the movement constant after one has locked the form in place and gone away. As in *Lines*, "keep it to yourself"/ "write it down." That's a simple jingle, but it keeps on jingling, at least in my ear.

If as you say "DB is only an accidental appendage of the poetry," then I want to ask, where does the poetry come from?

From the intersection of a tradition with a present.

A tradition: poetry has a history which however intertwined with other events -- big H History -- continues to be specific: certain poems have been written, solutions have appeared, sufficed, become inadequate, faced with a changing present. Yet its necessity persists -- even a work as radically innovative as Silliman's *Ketjak*, which abjures (as too habituated, thus too likely to be read superficially) certain traditional signs of the



poetic -- regular rime, lines, narrative, personal confidings -- retains repetition, systemic unity, and, through the back door so to speak, the personal (Ron wrote, and chose, all of those sentences). *Ketjak* derives a lot of its meaning from what it is not. What it refuses becomes part of the meaningful play of the poetry. At the same time, I find it a work entirely appropriate to present necessities, poetic, social and political, as I pointed out in my essay in the previous issue of this journal. And there's no doubt that it took Ron Silliman to do it; not alone, in one sense, since the work of many other poets brought the tradition to the place where he took it up, and others helped through their creations to elucidate shapes of our present; yet in another sense, entirely alone -- his was the risk; if it had backfired on him, there was nobody else to take the heat. So, he would appear far from an "accidental appendage" of his poetry. However....

What I meant by accidental was that my life, my pre-biographical experience, can never be used to explain away or fully account for any but the weakest of my writings; such an approach neglects the very thing that counts most, art, the transforming power of the imagination. This is true of Silliman, of Milton, and of whoever Shakespeare or Homer were and are. It's even true of Plath or Rich or Lowell -- though to hear their readers talk, you might not think so. Everything I write has happened to me, yes. I happened to hear it or read it or mis-hear or mis-translate it; so how can one get more personal than that? But not everything I write has happened to me as actual experience in a mundane, normative sense of that phrase. Even where I employ the first person singular, no more is "said" than that an "I" will now in writing go through the moves of testifying, or denying, or reflecting. An early poem that begins "Four women in one day," for instance, I wrote because an acquaintance laid claim to this remarkable achievement with an absence of self-questioning I found even more remarkable. A favorite mode of coming to grips with puzzling behavior has been for me to assume what I can of it as though it were happening to myself, to test its vectors in language. "I" in my poetry is always a character -- whether or not I, DB, am the source of that information experientially; (or in what sense of *experience*). My intention is to encourage a reader to inhabit that "I" also. My poetry is made so that it can be taken up as if the reader's own, an articulation of self that has no other name on it. All poetry lives and dies by this operation, actually, but it isn't always a deliberate factor of technique. It can be startling, given we're trained to read as if a *them* were advising us, to encounter words arranged to be our own: this is the prized and despised difficulty of the poem! But if we overcome that obstacle, paradoxically we want to know the poet, feeling perhaps that he or she understands us as so few do. But DB in the flesh won't, doesn't or can't, necessarily.

It's a funny creature, this "poet" we invent from a text. That is who people mean when they say "Allen Ginsberg" or "Wallace Stevens." Initially, anyway, although curiosity often leads us to meet the poet in person or to

read biographies and correspondence. I indulge gossip and read these accounts with passionate identification or loathing and despite (these reactions are not unconnected). So maybe, slyly, unwittingly, this was the object of the poet in the first place and all along?? If so, then it must be incidentally in some sense that the poems were written; still, it is these I prefer to read, and would therefore address this issue from that angle. The poem, Kierkegaard said, is an act of faith: on the poet's part, that there will be someone to read it -- as evidence of such a reality; on the reader's part, that where this poem was written, there was reality. And after all, as writer, I invent my reader/s; who bear as much resemblance to reality as their invention of DB, for all we know. But in reading, reader and writer fuse in a way otherwise almost completely elusive -- linguistic love-making maybe, except it's also onanistic and very solitary -- but then, so may be lovemaking. Still, to my mind, that analogy quickly becomes reductive. There's nothing like reading except reading. And there's nobody like the poet invented in the poem except another poet invented from another poem. But I think much of this is taken in stride -- that battle's been fought, so that the signals at one phase necessary to transmit, have now become redundant. After all, writing can never be more than the compound results of experience, so that a poem that begins "Joe, it is a clear blue day as we board your white yacht; you are carrying two sixpacks," is woeful mainly due to the poet's obviously patchy knowledge of the history of the poem, or his or her inability to trust to the "territory" secured by that history. What we embody are the results -- one sorting through (thinking, feeling, sensing) and in that act, those acts, making present cogitation.

*The most frequent criticism I've heard of your work centers on the degree of irony employed (in recent texts particularly). I'd be curious to hear something of what you have to say about the "place" of irony in your work, what it means to you.*

The ability to recognize irony is one of the surest tests of intelligence and sophistication, says my literary handbook; I'm pleased to learn that the right people are reading me! But, sarcastic cheap shots aside, I'd remark that we who for decades had been attempting to bring to a more general awareness the dumbness (*Dumheit*) of the language of political power, its hollow cleverness and its low cunning, found in Watergate both a confirmation and a renewed injunction to continue and broaden the attack. The *hubris* of the Nixon gang -- he actually had taped the expletive-deleted proceedings! -- was aborted before it could be experienced as tragedy, and in fact a kind of co-optative presumption thenceforth that the President ("Who is up there in the White House for you," as Whitman in his glorious gullibility asserted) would forever, and no matter his name, talk out of both sides of his mouth, lulled our populace back to sleep. But the poets I read, and the other intellectuals, have struggled to find a discourse, acritic in kind, to perform exemplary self-questionings and thereby to cast doubt on the self-assured fixities of our encratic discourses. (For these terms I am indebted to Roland Barthes' essay "The Division of Languages.") From Watergate on, I have strengthened an already



existing tendency (v. supra) in my poetry, into this commitment. To substitute another set of French terms, I have rendered my constructions simultaneously deconstructive; more accurately, I have constructed works using deconstructive means. I think it self-defeating merely to dismantle: society is more than the rebellious child sees through; if only the emperor were naked! We cannot abdicate assertion, testimony, positive conjecture. But we can induce in our readers (as ourselves) a readiness to challenge phrase by phrase the coherences we language.

To read my poetry as ironized is to read only halfway into it. It is to stop short of the requisite further step, which is to overcome one's timidity in the face of an apparent irony and take the risk that the phrase, line, sentence, piece has more than irony to offer; the reader is called on to feel this experience through, and this is deliberate: the convictions we arrive at in triumphing over misgiving are the only ones that will last. What use is it for me to be there holding the reader's hand, telling her what to believe, or disbelieve?

There is, I think, a certain subset of irony present -- dramatic irony: "knowledge held by the audience but hidden from relevant actors." In polysubjected writing -- writing where the reader is largely responsible for the meanings derived -- dramatic irony is always in play, because the reader (audience) knows something the actor (writer) does not, and yet this is nonetheless a something contained in the writer's actions.

*Let's move to the consideration of a particular text. Red Hats seems a suggestive frame for your head's movements. I've seen something of the way it evolved through successive drafts and find it fascinating. Could you speak, at this remove from its writing, to your own preoccupations with this work?*

Well, I'd turned 50, and so I figured I'd go through my early work and test my senses of it and the life it conjured in the present. So I settled on *Threads* and in order to assure that I pay close attention, I decided to rewrite it, or say translate it, into a mode that now felt more my own. And this work I called *Red Hats* because that was the one anagram of *Threads* that was promisingly empty of significance for me. After a while, when I had assembled a critical mass of such sentences, the work began to argue with itself and I abandoned *Threads* as a master text. Leland Hickman asked me to contribute to *Boxcar* so I sent him all I had at that time and called it Part One. Knowing that a second *Boxcar* would be along shortly,

I composed a second section, and this as it turned out was accepted by him for that second issue. About then Earel Neikirk contacted me, asking for a book. So I wrote two more sections and sent the whole to him, and he took it. Then I started to think about the work as a whole -- why was it in sections? These had only an accidental chronological provenance; they were not sufficiently different to be sections. They had just grown -- I didn't trust that "organic" method of composition. So then it came to me that I had a generative key in the 7 letters of the title; I would find sentences containing significant terms starting with R, and let these terms dictact which other, non-R sentences should accompany them; and I would repeat this procedure with E, D, and so on. It was a method that would thematize each section lightly, so that there would still be plenty of play possible, but some sense of potential unification to encourage that play. I continued to arrange the sentences so that each might or might not prove consequent upon the sentence immediately preceding, thereby granting a reader's decisions a reality not available in normative narrative or argumentation. As for *Red Hats* being "a suggestive frame for my head's movements," well, I guess it has to be -- and I know a number of people who'd hear that pejoratively, from within their encratic sense of exposition. I remember as a TA at Berkeley my professor stopping me as we walked down one of those long corridors in Wheeler and saying "David, do you realize you've been talking for five minutes and I haven't understood a single thing you've said?" No drugs were involved. I stake my poetry on the risk that others, maybe many others, actually think like that or this. And with some exemplary encouragement, will admit it. It's a liberating gesture. But more than just that, it's to incite thinking. Thinking can't be done without jumping. What passes for thinking is customarily the stringing together of cliches. Writing this way -- right now -- comes close to that in that there's this agreed-to constraint (I mean, I agreed with my imagination of a readership to respond in this mode), whereby -- well let me say I regard this interview as an act of translation, the way a title often is, to straddle the en- and a-cratic. So it isn't, to return to that sentence, in my intent and hope, simply how my head works. I suppose that more of my stamp is in the units, the sentences, rather than in their juxtapositioning. Oh, maybe to the extent of two, but seldom three, consecutive sentences. But the movement, that's something I want because I believe it's something that's wanted by others beside myself. It's, to one course in reading through, a conversation, sentences arguing or agreeing with each other, pointing things out, qualifying positions. Concerns, and I'm helped to these by other poets, often. We are engaged in a concerted endeavor. Concerns felt as common inform decisions during composition. In that sense, the writing is objective, and it had better be, I think, and thinking so, find superfluous such welter of autobiographical detail other kinds of poetry seem impelled to provide as evidence of some conclusions. Except as, in Section II, the question of such details becomes focus of attention. It is poetry: if I want to write a novel, I'd better want to invoke some welter! And yet I would propose *Red Hats* as essential autobiography: the writing of a life recognized as constituted by a society of which it is an exemplification and an embodiment: a person thinking/feeling/writing/sensing its language. But not ponderously constructing evidentiary prose that freezes process



vainly intending to offer detached content of said process. Words and phrases come to one under a plethora of circumstance not always or even usually derivable from such phrases. So much, I think, for the valorization of place. Naturally, I'm glad to be here. Nobody has to identify, in this text, the particular shape of my life during its composition, and for me to intrude such would be to invite characterization....and characterization invariably stifles attention. Once you can be pegged as "funny" or "ironic" or "malcontent" you will be, by those who feel a duty to comment in some summary fashion yet who feel threatened by the work and wish to give themselves good reasons not to read it. And we all do this, I suppose; I know I will get depressed if I let myself be led into reading a chunk of Bukowski. I know I'll like it at the time like candy and that an hour later after the sugar rush I'll be wishing I had died before my acne cleared up. So in that sense I've characterized his writing; but I do think that he invited it. Close attention of a prospective cast simply isn't among his intentions for the work. It offers other pleasures, and despite the "outsider" stance these are completely within the encratic. In fact, the stance of "outsider" is completely scripted -- it's widely recognized, as his sales testify. I don't presume to think I can be outside of whatever we're in, but as an artist and intellectual often encounter the presumption that that's exactly where I (want to) belong -- a character slapped on one, again. "Acratic" doesn't mean alienated or disaffiliated in that pop sense of existentialism. Got a job, got a home, got a car, got a wife, got a kid -- got plastic, some bucks, must fly by an approved airline. I write (~~from~~, ~~of~~, ~~among~~, ~~about~~, ~~in~~) that.

The work is dialectical, I like to think, and as such would have engaged the attention of Adorno. One of the pleasures of writing (one of the facts of life) is being able to address the dead. Because writing can outlive us and because its means and materials come to us from the dead, I don't need to complete this sentence. It's also Olson's "the play of a mind is what we're after" -- but it's the play of the reader's mind that's primary here. There are many kinds of red hat!

*From "preoccupations" to "occupations." Two questions: (a) How does the activity of teaching for a living participate or figure in your writing, and; (b) What most occupies your attentions now?*

Oh, Gawd -- it's back to school today and I still haven't completed this assignment! That answers (a) and (b) both, right now.

It's a familiar enough bind. Sent upstairs to do my homework, I read novels in my room. Something in me never wants to grow up, getta job, act mature, be "Mister Responsible Person God." Poetry begins in irresponsible play. But "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities." "What I took in my hand grew in weight." Even this writing, which I ought not to be doing (letters of reference waiting for students who told me yesterday they wanted them by the day before) and which I want to do (therefore?) attracts me less, in the

present, than the notion of fiddling around with some words out of which some compositional absorption may develop, something unthought of until that moment. Or I could be talking with my wife.

Given no family money, it is necessary that I have a job and given that, I am glad to have one teaching at a university. That's the logical response, in some normal-language use of the word *logical*, but I suspect I want the regimen the job requires. Or anyway, I've worked all my life and I'm hooked. I often do enjoy the mode of interaction a college allows. I think it's astounding that even in this present the state sets aside some rooms and chairs where persons may sit and discuss poetry. It's a privilege, just like conventional wisdom alleges! I'm pleased to have been foresightful enough to have secured such an occupation. I think I'm fairly good at it because I can be enthusiastic without inevitably becoming incoherent. I have an adequate vocabulary, and some facility in its application. I'm a ham and a mimic, always potentially of use in the classroom. I'm a do-gooder, too, who has always had trouble with Cage's title "How to Improve the World [I think it is] : You Will Only Make Matters Worse." It troubles me, I guess, in part because of characterological misgivings concerning the worth of all such endeavors. But I tell myself it's simply glib, too crazily rigid in its symmetry. Why publish it? It's in bad faith. Unless you really mean to make matters worse, which I surely don't, except for those who make it bad now for us who cannot partake in their "good." I get these hunches at times as to what a student "really means" -- what s/he is struggling to articulate; well, who knows? But could be a strong projection forces definition. I would rather teach when I feel like it, a la Olson at Black Mountain, and not have to stop on the hour. I enjoyed farm work the most, there you see the sense for every action, and you can measure the results, and it's all of a piece. But it's hard physical work, best fit for young men, and it's too isolating. And poorly paid. Teaching is second best, and I've done a lot of different kinds of work. The summer break allows time for writing and reading. Who knows how things would have turned out, had I done otherwise? My students have given me a lot of hits. And at times the impression that I've helped them also. One could certainly let them take over one's life. And gladly, I'd say, if it weren't for this other demand.

Early on I read that learners can be divided into three categories, those who say "I see," those who say "I hear you" and those who say "I grasp what you mean." It's no doubt a clumsy division, but has some merit I think, and so I try to remember to present points visually, audially and kinetically. This becomes "second nature" and enters the writing in that way also. Similarly, in teaching one is constantly translating -- say, literary language into colloquial, and that enters my poetry too: "He rooted in his belief," the first sentence in *Red Hats*, which has a quaint tone to it, 19th Century post-Romantic to my ear, becomes "I'm your puppet," a pop version of the same phrase -- while at the same time a severe qualification of the first sentence.



I teach reading, basically, and I assume I teach it to those who wish to learn: which is why I elected to become a college rather than a high school teacher. Even so, I'm aware that there's a heavy element of compulsion involved. People have to get degrees, etc. Poems weren't meant to be decoded under compulsion of such order. That's a sad aspect of the job. I enjoy most those courses which the students elect to take. I was fortunate in finding teachers who were able to lead me to discover -- that is, among my teachers there have been such. Later I may have thought they were mistaken, but that forces definition also. In the poetry-writing workshop, the main challenge is to shake the students loose from preconceived notions of the poetic. These years, that often means "I write like I talk." I show how to incorporate dictions not at all one's own. But if the student is imbued with literary diction, "I write like I talk" can be a handy antidote.

So all of the above is of current concern when I write. But in both occupations, the primary problem is how to circumvent the censor. Persons wish to write -- to express their senses of what's happening -- to form these senses in some apposite way. So how come one sits to write and produces only banalities or nothing at all? We've all had multifarious experiences -- why do we draw such blanks? Ten years ago, I set my composition students an exercise: write about yourself (a) as others see you (b) as you perceive yourself. The responses were fascinating, and I extracted certain sentences and composed them by a simple principle of alternation, positive-negative. I also slipped in a few sentences from Emerson's "Self-Reliance(?)" -- as reality from a previous generation, still hovering around in the American psyche/society, to be reminder of where all are/were coming from. I took myself to be composing a sociological poem. I published it in *B.C. Monthly*, and then left it out of *My Poetry*, because Geoff Young needed to keep that book under 100 pages. Subsequently I lost both magazine and carbon. But Ron Silliman didn't, and when recently I recalled it and figured it would fit in *American Testament*, I got a copy from him. It reads like the most autobiographical piece I ever did! There is no way to abstract oneself from one's recognitions. However, there are many ways to prevent such recognitions: had I assigned myself to write a poem strictly about myself, all sorts of defenses would have been the outcome. Which is my objection to much that passes for autobiography. That it offers strung cliches of displacement and projection. And fails to lay out what we are after, the dead hand of the inherited, the potentiality to engage present necessities. I want to write self so that its interaction with the social is presented: since to do so is to write society also. "Lonely discourse tells us more about the condition of society than a stack of tracts." But I don't want to sink in that cement, either.

For this reason, I think, I find collaborations engaging right now. How do two (or more) selves interact? That is social. In these past two years, I've worked variously with Ron Silliman, Opal Nations, Bruce Andrews, Steve Benson, and Bob Grenier, and now hope to with Michael Davidson. Working with the tape of my conversation with Steve Benson, I became aware of how

the conversation becomes an entity, a kind of joint person, a singular source and process. Or if and where doubled, not unlike the doubling of self-argument. But to say this is not to underestimate the strangeness of such an operation -- there's this other inside oneself, often distressingly so, stretching and shoving one's egocentricities in the most exasperating and useful ways. One's intentions get displaced and augmented, become an intention of the work rather than what one had decided to write. It's all very exciting -- there is a community of poetic purpose, a family in the fullest sense (sibling rivalry, Oedipal impulses, mutual support, common goals), or, perhaps the best figure for it, an ecology: a tremendous amount of energized intelligence is on hand, of which the anthology *In The American Tree* is a significant instance, and this is going to revivify the societies of the West, through identification and embodiment of their elements, grounds for an essential optimism even given the gravely "insuperable" problems which might elsewhere convince any one of us to give up and crawl into -- but there is no hole, and that's the point of departure and beginning.

More particularly, what engages my attentions today has to do with the way in which we want experiential certainties, our experience of the finite (people die, leave, relationships collapse, doors do slam shut forever), to be reproduced in language, which, because it is continuous, cannot grant us our wish. This has been the bad faith of writing, and you can see one reason why: the work of art does involve finitude -- even *Tjanting* or *Paradise Lost* come to an end. The challenge is to make finite constructs which do not kow-tow to the childish wish for certainty in language acts. Only by acknowledging one can go on and on can one decently pause.



# MICHAEL DAVIDSON

## INTERRUPTIONS

It is probably 1979. David Bromige comes into the gallery wearing a three-piece grey suit with a slightly out-of-date pink tie. He is tanned and healthy, the product of a daily regimen of swimming that has turned his greying hair and beard a streaked blond/silver. He chats in the back with friends until the reading is to begin, then strides to the lectern where he is introduced. Before beginning his reading he switches on a small tape recorder in front of him, but nothing comes from the machine right away. He begins to tell a story about difficulties with his car--or perhaps about the excessive rains that season or else about a neighbor. Suddenly his own voice interrupts him from the tape recorder: a sentence, a line from a poem, an accusation. He responds to it, losing for a moment his train of thought. Then he returns to his narrative, but the interruptions come again, spaced at intervals so that he will have time to re-gain his story. It is clear he *must* respond to the voice in the tape recorder, interrogate it, adapt it to his story (which by now has become itself a series of interruptions so that one can't tell which is the story and which is the distraction).

I am making this up. I was not present at the event. It was described to me by the author peripatetically as we visited the arboretum, and in retelling his telling I am interrupted by other associations I have of David Bromige, so immediate is this person (from the Latin *mediare*: to be in the middle). Midway through my narrative I interrupt my narration to phone the poet and ask for more details about the reading. Actually, on the evening in question he had been in his Bing Crosby *après le golf* mode: Hawaiian shirt, pleated cream-colored slacks, blue unlined sportcoat, panama hat. Other details begin to emerge. The performance had been, to some extent, a response to David Antin's talk pieces, a Bromigean interruption of the un-interruptable monologue. Perhaps the intruding passages had been lines of poetry so that the dialogue established between present poet and deferred voice was that between the two forms his work often takes: prose narrative at the margins of lined-verse, if only to blur the distinctions.

As the performance continues and the interruptions become more frequent (he says, I quote) he becomes more "demonic" (he calls it--but why "demonic" or is he thinking of the maker's rage to order words of his narrative against the genius of the immediate?) And then I think of Michael Palmer's poem about him, "False Portrait of DB as Niccolo Paganini" in which the violinist/composer's "demonic" virtuosity is referred to:

*The 'spider' fingers of  
his left hand permitted a range  
on the fingerboard which many*

*attributed to black magic  
for Paganini was said to  
have signed a pact with Lucifer*

*to acquire virtuosity  
as a small child.*

(Notes for Echo Lake)

And indeed it is virtuosity that characterizes one aspect of Bromige's writing, a complexity and syntactic elaborateness that I associate with certain nineteenth-century British novelists. False Portrait of D.B. as Thomas Hardy or Anthony Trollope.

It is not so much that David Bromige is a narrative poet--one who represents a given duration--as that he employs the accoutrements of narrative to frame the present:

*Whoever stood furthest up the trail was master  
of the trail, which for the most part climbs  
through a beautiful if crowded forest, though the final  
four or five hundred yards rise  
above the tree-line, across tricky scree, & ends  
at that peak which is also the scarp-edge, a steep  
&, despite the rumors, inaccessible, drop  
on one side, the shallow slope on the other, where the wood  
grows, that is mainly conifers.*

(The Ends of the Earth)

However symbolic this trail becomes, the place is vividly described through a long, wandering subordinate clause (itself interrupted by qualification and refinement). In this early poem ("A Final Mission") we encounter the old stories once again: the trail in the forest, the competition for the Beloved, fratricidal jealousy and war. But instead of a single "story" with a clearly delineated objective, we encounter obstacles--as though the narrative were being created immediately, line by line, rather than retrospectively. It is narrative as defined by Freud, not that by Aristotle. What begins as quest romance ends as primary narcissism. Once the Lady is won,

*she appears to grow smaller with each step  
although she all the while approaches her  
master, who with bated  
belly, waits, his pinions from his gleaming flanks  
stir towards her, twenty yards away she is  
tall as a five year old girl, till she  
reaches his knee, & looking down on her he sees  
the thick scar tissue over shoulder and buttock, she climbs up  
his thighs*

*& unbuttoning him, thrusts in her legs  
diminisht to the size of testicles, & hangs  
backwards, her toes hookt  
in the asshole he by constricting can cause to raise  
his darling, held rigid, till her sweet face reflects  
that gleam the sun makes of his metallic fuselage*

The last word transforms this little allegory of phallic objectification into an allegory of war itself; the object of desire is turned,



quite literally, into the male object. "A Final Mission" gains its considerable power by creating a vivid sense of place, alternately that of myth and of contemporary history. The techniques and devices of story-telling serve the poem's more ominous purpose by placing us, as it were, outside the events described, much as the narrator would like to distance himself from the darker implications of his tale. And for the narrators of the Vietnam War, this very same historical distancing was no doubt necessary to shield the western world from what was really at stake in that war.

The story does not stop here. It appears later in "Six of One, Half-a-Dozen of the Other" accompanied by a commentary that, at least on the surface, sets out to provide a biographical context for "A Final Mission." But like the poem, the commentary generates a further fiction out of those events:

*It's true that a man named David Bromige went into a Berkeley bookstore one day in 1966 shortly after the break-up of his marriage & was told by the woman behind the counter to read the Memories, Dreams and Reflections of Carl Jung. Hold the ladder steady while I mount it & I'll get you what you need, she told him.*

(My Poetry)

And so forth. Childe Bromige to the dark bookstore comes, meets a prophetess named Helen, is foiled by a rival (Greek, of course), returns home in a fit to write out the larger drama: part memory, part dream and certainly part reflection. Along the way

*He wrote the story of the war in Southeast Asia, he wrote the story of War, he wrote the story of the Return of the Repressed, of the Homosexual Element in Jealousy, he wrote the account of the Sexual Objectification of Woman, he wrote Finis to the Philosophy of Godlike Survey.*

My association of Bromige with certain nineteenth-century authors is not an indulgence. In his work, as in Browning's, the philosophy of god-like survey has been interrupted, *deus absconditus*, and man left holding the bag. Burningly it comes on him all at once:

*This was the place! those two hills on the right,  
Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in flight;  
While to the left, a tall scalped mountain...Dunce,  
Dotard, a-doing at the very nonce,  
After a life spent training for the sight!*

(Browning, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came")

Translated into a theory of narrative, we would say that the teleological imperative announced by certain romances is thwarted by what our hero dis-

covers along the way. Or as the teller incurs the terms of his tale: "It is hard going to the door/ cut so small in the wall". Thus, what Bromige does is to create a narrative "environment," a zone of literariness, that is constantly under siege by alternate codes. We recognize the landscape and the persons therein because they were first described to us in a story:

*Brimbody wandered the streets seeking advice on how to come to his country's aid. In those districts where the overchargers stick their heads into tropical birdcages, oriental carpets and pubescent statuary, while nigger gardeners make things pretty for very little, he would urinate his opinion upon the important shrubbery. Since he loved plants, this made him sob piteously.*

(P-E-A-C-E)

The humor here derives from Bromige's ability to maintain the outer vestiges of his literary code (the story of a Pickwickian character named Brimbody) and the exaggerated rhetoric of the Victorian novelist ("this made him sob piteously") while radically extending and deforming both ("where overchargers stick their heads into tropical birdcages"). In Greimassian terms, Brimbody is an "actant," a positional relation rather than a unified character. He is the product of a series of narrative possibilities; like his name, he is a style of writing.

By speaking of style I don't mean to turn David Bromige into an impartial manipulator of surfaces, a *flâneur* at the margins of the text, looking dispassionately on. We might remember that Baudelaire, in characterizing the dandy, admires that figure's philosophical passion for the "entire moral mechanism of this world," his curiosity about the human comedy that swirls around him. It is such philosophical--and I would add critical--passion that Bromige admires in a writer like Adorno whose *Minima Moralia* could serve as a model for much of the poet's work. Style is not all that is the case, but it is by means of a certain elaboration that the instant is interrogated: "Cognition requires exaggeration."

The last quotation comes from a recent work that could stand as representative for all that I have said regarding David Bromige's relation to narrative. This piece, "Indictable Suborners" (as yet unpublished) is built on a pattern of repetitions that, while holding together a great deal of disparate material, help to establish the illusion of narrative development. The work is written largely in prose, although two longish poems interrupt the piece towards the end. Sentences are tenuously linked, one to the next, and in the early portions, every other sentence concludes with a prepositional phrase containing a place name. The effect of this patterning is to provide the "feel" of location while foregrounding the arbitrariness of description as a narrative ploy. Consider the opening:

*And hands comb some one annual rainfall in the silence after laughter in Brandenburg. In the unlikely event, lust for salvation woos the marginals, looking for some surrogate Sunday won't remove come Monday. Contemplative, one head high on an ash-heap is in a telegram by way of Hello from*



Doncaster. The recurrence tells itself over and over, it makes part of the instant, recognition. Event and clarity shake and make up in clear weather some little distance from the center of Fenwick. If we witness our world every evening from the remove of its circumference, how are we identical with ostlers in jodphurs when the iamb kept hoofing it along? Gluing frames of film together an editor means to indicate either the passage of time or simultaneous occurrences in Hooverville.

Recurrence implies recognition, a Steinian epistemology of accretional understanding. An editor means to suggest both the passage of time or "simultaneous occurrences in Hooverville." And because we have already been introduced to the refrain ("laughter in Brandenburg," "Hello from Doncaster," etc.) we have a perfect instance of his problem: the representation of time as presence and as *durée*. Bromige seems to be asking how can the sentence register instants without subordinating them to some kind of causal logic. Or as he says elsewhere in the work, "This is more a means of knowledge than representation."

The prepositional/locational phrases provide a constant landscape of particulars that ground a somewhat diffuse meditation on writing itself. But the writing can never escape being demonstration as it seeks to be the site (not the mirror) of objectivity:

*Believing himself an outspoken irrationalist, moving in a series of sentences that lacked definiteness, independence, and clarity, their effect rather that of Victorian poetry than Jamesian prose and communicating needs as though these were moods that periodically explode into insights not propositions that hang together logically and imply a conclusion, asserting things must be taken by storm and while the intelligence is thrust outside of itself by (like) an act of will, moved by an elan vital (Eileen Vitale) far more (farmor) basic than knowing, flotsam in an unceasing, continuous, undivided (practically redundant) process, a sort of cosmic movement of which we are expressions rather than parts, a man stands perusing a goodbye note from his mate in Cedar Rapids. Next day she came back --why?*

Two sentences, one of Jamesian length, the other of Hemingwayesque brevity, contain both sides of Bromige's problem in this work. On the one hand we have a series of subordinate elements that reflect that "flotsam" or "cosmic movement" of the irrationalist's mind, and on the other we have the outer surface of narrative continuity that would seem the antithesis. The main clause of sentence one ("a man stands perusing a goodbye note from his mate in Cedar Rapids") may lead logically to sentence two ("Next day she came back"), but the enormous body of ancillary material that precedes it counteracts this forward-movement. Adding to the distraction are sudden puns and associations ("Eileen Vitale." "Farmor,") that themselves give testimony to the competing "logic" of the piece. And because the reference to places has already been established as part of an arbitrarily imposed pattern, it no longer serves its narrative function.

The man who thinks and the man who acts, Eliot observed, need to be joined. Eliot, of course, thought it could be done by some cultural

*risorgimento* or the rediscovery of faith, but Bromige feels it needs to be done by an exploration of two kinds of time, the inside real and the outsidereal, momentary awareness and the plural logics (narratives) by which it (awareness) is interrupted (ordered). Hence the narrative above "moves" ahead by means of one grammatical convention while being thwarted by another. So much for the irrationality of believing oneself to be "an outspoken irrationalist." And so much for the dissociation of sensibility in the modern age.

What I am failing to describe very clearly is David Bromige's extraordinary ability to sustain several levels of narrative movement at once. Like the performance described at the outset, he incurs interruptions in order to be in the complexity of what it is to be. By constantly thwarting expectations (the use of refrain, parenthesis, subordinate clause, pun) he refuses us the privileged vantage of "observers," even while providing us with the field glasses necessary to so observe that perspective. "My body is not an object," he assures us, but a condition of objectivity..., all the better to see you my dear. But instead of revealing himself as either wolf or granny, he keeps both possibilities open in the old fashioned belief that readers prefer the strangeness of life to the *Cliff Notes* written as its explanation. The point is an obvious one: DB tells a good story, but he wants to inhabit it as its teller and as its subject. The point is a political one, moreso than it might appear: "Inevitably a narrative movement--how else to get from blind obedience to aware resistance, when the lids fit?" The answer would seem to be keep your eyes open. He always has.

\*

(addendum 5/29/86: "But what I said was 'demotic' not 'demonic'" says Bromige one day over lunch in Berkeley. But by this does he mean "demotic" in the sense of "common, popular, from *demos*, common people, or in the sense of "writing in the simplified form of ancient Egyptian hieratic writing," in which case hardly common and perhaps even vatic. The latter would seem to be the case insofar as the emphasis in his earlier phonecall had been on the insistence of the interruptions, their growing claims upon his attentions. And as for the novelists, Hardy yes but Trollope no. Which interruption and qualification brought D.B. to reflecting on those later British novelists like Kingsley Amis, Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh who have also exerted their effects on his work. I remember, in particular, reading Amis's *The Green Man* at D.B.'s urging. In this very funny novel, the protagonist suffers from a terrible form of insomnia brought about by a condition known as "jactitation" in which, just prior to dozing off, he shudders awake at the appearance of a hypnagogic image--a face or presence of woeful countenance. The reader becomes more and more possessed by the narrator's half-sleep state until one is not quite sure which is the "tale" and which the dream. In other words, an interruption that becomes a narrative.)



Today was somewhere in between ten  
and twelve point type  
he wanted to understand its formulations:

"blacksmith equals violinist"

(eg. interruption)  
which is what it said, "a pause  
arose, something on paper"  
and he changed the ball,  
"as for we who love to be astonished"  
(this must refer to me  
he thought  
looking out across a mile of backyards  
the color of a Mayan calendar)

growing up, getting older  
certainly applies to all of us  
who wrote "apples  
that look like clouds"  
and your mouth  
is like a camera  
though he lied and often  
your mouth is like its words  
click, and you kiss your way  
towards The Person  
followed by a semi-colon

in the ice-cold gap  
appears a round intention, blue  
at the upper edges, brown  
below across which winter edges  
(etches) a silent tribute  
towards the edge of the page  
he wrote this  
and I hear your voices  
signed, Joan of Arc.

## RON SILLIMAN

### TIGHT CORNERS

Even with hindsight, there is little in David Bromige's earlier books that would seem to hint toward the title sequence of *Tight Corners* (Black Sparrow, 1974) and, through it, to the full range of his mature writing. The previous volumes are governed by a debt to three masters: Olson, Duncan and Creeley. Not that he sounded like them (certainly no more so than, say, Ed Dorn). If anything, Bromige was less apt than Duncan or even Olson to give up the security of a fixed left margin. At the time, this reluctance might have been read as a test case against Olson's conceptions of language and poetry, even as Bromige appeared to endorse them. Born in London, moving to Canada at 15 and to the U.S. at 29, his life was a disruption of the inner connections between person, place and voice that lay at the center of projectivist assumptions.

In practice, "composition by field," that theoretical construct by which Duncan and Olson usually meant any writing that strayed from a determinate left margin, functions precisely as do Creeley's short, enjambed lines: to foreground prosody, especially meter, so as to insinuate both dialect and idiolect. The result, for the most part, is an implicit persona, one that is not dependent on the theatrical or narrative framing of most dramatic monolog. Even as this expands the terrain a given poem might cover, it is worth noting just how deeply Duncan's "Passages," for example, rely on this single device. Or try to imagine what would remain of Paul Blackburn's verse without it.

The path of thinking in an early Bromige piece is as likely to follow the ear, even as its emphasis leads elsewhere. "First" is from his 1968 collection, *The Ends of the Earth*:

One aches to know  
one fact as axiom  
to act. Whatever I do  
I die  
as you  
also at times doubt  
the beneficence of the inevitable  
terror  
Earth-bound as one is.

Despair  
however one does, the word  
depends upon another, is  
désespoir, mere  
lack of hope, & dies  
with my belief.

So hope  
is first.  
No, spoken first



against the  
what I have to call the  
silence, though a kind  
a kind of  
humming intervenes

of an instance as this evening  
lying on  
a bed I lack  
energy to make,  
to look  
into the black  
gathers at the ceiling  
from a lamp I lack the energy  
to break.


1

It is possible to read this as an ironic case of Duncanian philology. Yet, even with the prominence accorded sound here, the organization of these stanzas against the left margin privileges the "prosaic" or hypotactic thrust of syntax. At this level, "First" undercuts (even assaults) the continuous universe invoked by a foregrounded sound spectrum. The reiterated *the* at the end of the first two lines of the fourth strophe, for example, brackets and highlights the problematic of the inserted, disruptive aside: that one can only point to silence in the poem through the "call" of its name. Similarly, the repeated *kind* in the same stanza, far from being a bit of Olsonian stammer, indicates a shift in meaning: the distinction between "kindness" and "category" arises from that preposition of. The sound symbolism of completeness and finality at the end -- *lack, make, look, black, lamp, lack, break* -- directly contradicts the entropic gap between impulse and action depicted by the sentence. In this same strophe, a chasm of meaning no less large can be found in the linebreak between *the black* and *gathers*. Far from locating a hidden universe of order within the harmonies of sound, Bromige displays it to reveal just the opposite. He turns the projectivist model on its head, right side up.

The problem of even the most subversive discipleship is that the terms of its opposition can only be posed in the negative. A priori limits contain the scope of possible exploration, even as the suffocation of confinement motivates one to write.<sup>2</sup> The question is how to convert discontent into a positive program -- how, in Watten's sense, to define a method.

The nearest antecedent to "Tight Corners," the series, would appear to be "Proofs," the epilog to *Birds of the West*. A descendant of the prose of William Carlos Williams' *Spring & All*, "Proofs" is manifestly 'a work' without falling easily into either fiction or (in the narrow sense) prose poem. Yet, as both its title and dating suggest, it was composed when *Birds* was already in press, in 1973, roughly at the same time as the composition of "Corners." The presentation of "Proofs" as literal afterword brackets it as the elevation of "Tight Corners" into the title of its book does not. "Tight Corners" is a step into new terrain.

Moreso than its publisher was comfortable supporting. The complete title of the volume is *Tight Corners & What's Around Them* (being the brief & endless adventures of some pronouns in the sentences of 1972-1973): Prose

and Poems. Bromige has said that, "although more were written," the title series contains 100 pieces<sup>3</sup> which he had wanted published on loose 3X5 cards packed, in no particular order, in a pink box. A form, in short, not unlike Robert Grenier's *Sentences*. John Martin balked, no doubt sensing distributional (and economic) disaster in such a project. The resulting compromise found "Tight Corners" broken into three sequences, each with the same title, surrounded ("What's Around") by a variety of other works composed during the same period. Instead of the four short margins of a card, each "corner" has a graphic  in its upper left angle, a gesture of spatial (and non-linguistic) closure right where each piece begins. Given that the "CONTENT." (sic -- one sees Bromige's hand in that period) page suggests no privilege, and that 22 of 32 items listed there are in verse form, the precedence given to prose in the book's title is telling.

In 1972, we should remember, John Ashbery published a prose volume entitled *Three Poems* and Scribner's printed Creeley's *A Day Book*. Clark Coolidge had already written *The Maintains* and Grenier was teaching at Franconia College, where he displayed the cards of *Sentences* on a gallery wall. The paradigm of "New American Poetry," which had dominated the non- (or anti-) academic verse scene for 20 years, was transforming itself literally out of existence, breaking apart from within and without. *This* magazine, then in its third issue, was publishing works that would have seemed "impossible" just two years earlier.

Bromige's place, and that of "Tight Corners," within this ferment is worth noting. A year older than either John Wieners or Amiri Baraka, his relationship to the larger Black Mountain project was as ambiguous as the poem "First" suggests. In his contributor's note to *A Caterpillar Anthology* in 1971, Bromige explicitly pointed to his poems' "arguments with a general tendency of the magazine's push."<sup>4</sup> Yet with six books in print and three more that would appear before the arrival of *Tight Corners*, Bromige lacked the freedom of anonymity that a younger or unpublished writer would have had. While *Three Poems* and *A Day Book* both remain "exceptions" within the larger canons of their authors' works, Grenier's and Coolidge's poems, startling and different as they were from one another, both visibly opened up the issue of what writing could then become -- and did so from the perspective of sound.

Bromige's attack was different. "Tight Corners" reads like a series of parables. In fact, something like Kafka's "The Sirens" might seem quite at home here:

These are the seductive voices of the night; the  
Sirens, too, sang that way. It would be doing them  
an injustice to think that they wanted to seduce;  
they knew they had claws and sterile wombs, and  
they lamented this aloud. They could not help it  
if their laments sounded so beautiful.

5

This is not so far from

The boy kept shifting the objects on the meal-table,



often no more than a fraction of an inch each time. This way no one would get hurt, least of all himself. As we watched we saw his reasoning. It drove the grownups to distraction & they invented an excuse to beat him. As we watched we saw his reasoning. (55)

This ready familiarity of Bromige's mode, while accurate enough as an identification of source, ultimately disguises the motive, and possibly even the method, of his writing. Kafka's parables, unlike their ecclesiastical ancestors, juxtapose events, sentences and assertions not to create gestalt epiphanies which suggest a larger (if hidden) order in the universe, but quite the opposite. Necessarily, their inherent structure is that of the syllogism: if  $a = b$  and  $b = c$ , then  $a = c$ . Yet the fundamentally social referents of the world, once these are passed into the linguistic domain of signifieds, are submitted to an economy of pure equivalence, a realm in which any noun may be substituted for another. Thus the logic of syllogistic form can convert social inequivalents into monstrosities of implication.

For example, Kafka's "Couriers":

*They were offered the choice between becoming kings or the couriers of kings. The way children would, they all wanted to be couriers. Therefore there are only couriers who hurry about the world, shouting to each other--since there are no kings--messages that have become meaningless. They would like to put an end to this miserable life of theirs but they dare not because of their oaths of service.*

6

The underlying structure here might be articulated as all messages are meaningful because they originate with kings and there are no kings, therefore . . . . Yet the piece depends on another premise, one which is unstated: people are bound by messages to which they have sworn. Thus, while Kafka's "Couriers" is manifestly about the problem of signification, and to this degree "about" language, this ostensible content is essentially a vehicle for a discourse aimed somewhere else. In fact, as translated here by Clement Greenberg, the key term in the work is "would" in the second sentence, suggesting that "they" are not children after all.

This process of suppressing or disguising critical elements is what gives Kafka's best works their rich strangeness. In contrast, "Tight Corners" seems startlingly straightforward and consciously flat:

*The truck had nearly struck their car. He had screamed. She had asked him not to. (54)*

At first, this seems not to be a parable at all, but rather a miniature narrative whose small instant of humor hinges on the female requesting the male to suppress a reaction which is instinctual and thus involuntary. Yet, because this work is narrative and in language, thereby setting out in a temporal string events which, were they to occur in "real life," would be nearly instantaneous, the effect it creates is radically different from the one it depicts. Rather than being intimately intertwined, each of these three sentences is composed so as to convey a maximum of distance from the others. Each sentence is complete and has a different subject, and only the third has any anaphoric reference back to another. Each sentence uses parallel syntactic construction, potentially a second mode of anaphor, but one which is blocked due to the differentness of subjects, and which instead creates an impression of stasis, a lack of movement that is in perceptible contrast to the "story." Accentuating this, each verb phrase utilizes the passive auxiliary *had*. More immediately visible to the reader, I suspect, is the fact that these events are presented sequentially in a chain of cause and effect, so that the final item (her asking) is an attempt to halt its own cause *ex post facto*.

What this narrative points to is not its "tale," but to the chasm that opens between sentences, that ungrounded moment in and through which distinct statements are organized by the reading mind into larger structures of implied continuity. And, not coincidentally, to that other chasm between presence and representation. The flatness which characterizes "Tight Corners" is, in this sense, much like that of a painter who presents the surface of her canvas as a two-dimensional plane.

What tends to make all parables, including Kafka's, appear to function as metalanguage is their inherent proximity to the form of the syllogism. This is not to privilege that construct as it has evolved through analytic philosophy, but rather to suggest that there exists in the human mind a basic drive -- the parsimony principle -- that has, historically, been most clearly expressed by this formula. And, as Bromige's work above makes evident, the critical terms within the syllogism are not its equations, but the moments of conjunction: *and* and *then*.

Although there are occasional linkages between pieces, "Tight Corners" is not, beyond its limitation to 100 works, a systematic project on the order of *The Maintains*. To some degree, this reflects Bromige's interest in the process(es) of composition -- the pieces were, in fact, written on cards and while the author could, if necessary, turn the card over to keep going, each piece had a maximum outer limit as defined (and as arbitrary) as a sonnet. Much closer to the obsessive concern with balance that is the primary issue in Grenier's *Sentences*, what emerges instead is a focus on the gaps within meaning, with the cognitive incompleteness that is inherent in any attempt to reduce the multiplicities of life to the binary (and bizarre) economy of equivalence and difference that characterizes language:

*I say everything you're thinking. I have no thoughts of my own. (87)*

As with the last example, the "banality" of the humor here is turned downside up as soon as we recognize what happens to these sentences once "I"



is the reader and "you" the writer (that reversal of identification which takes place whenever a text is being consumed). The piece is "about" that separation which occurs in the reader's mind whenever she or he articulates the first person singular, that privileged moment when *I am not I*. Cognitively and socially, the logical expression of this ( $A \neq A$ ) is the ultimate difficulty of language, as well as the source of its power.

Even though in its 100th section, which, like the 99th uses only material that has appeared before in other "unrelated" contexts, Bromige presents what may be the first thoroughly "de-" or "reconstructed" sentences in American poetry --

*Between each at the base was a small web from women.  
Appealing as he found a number of people, not one but  
turned out discomfortingly apposed making him feel all  
thumbs. (91)*

--, "Tight Corners," like the volume named for it, did not have an impact on even its neighborhood of the poetry scene that, retroactively, its place as the first work to open up the question of language's cognitive domain the way Coolidge and Grenier had opened up issues of form or Mac Low those of process, would seem to warrant. In part, this could have been due to Bromige's reliance on a recognizable mode and a corresponding bias on the part of his peers (myself included) against anything that looked even superficially familiar. Still, the programmatic aspect was buried by inserting the series into a range of various other poems and prose works, most of which were closer to the concerns of his earlier poetry, a blurring that was only reinforced by the existence of the previous books.

I note this not merely to suggest that we need to reevaluate the value of "Tight Corners" (and, indeed, the scope of Bromige's contribution to recent writing overall), but to point out that this neighborhood has had no more success than others before it in avoiding the submerging of literary value beneath "irrelevant" social considerations. A parallel example from the opposite direction might be the recent canonization of the magazine  $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$ , whose contribution to theory lay in its popularization of an ongoing, much denser discourse, which it rendered accessible through bite-size servings, not unlike *USA Today*'s summation of "the news."

Like popularization (the implications of which need to be explored), the issue of neglect may be harder to confront when one is, as I am, at least partially responsible. We are fortunate that David Bromige has proven to be a hardy soul, much more so than most of his generation. But we need to realize that, far from having "solved" the problems of writing, the poetry of the 70's only served to reframe them -- and to hope that this reframing might permit us to begin posing them in a new and brighter light. Tight corners, to paraphrase, are what any of us are inside of:

*Love is just around the corner. Any corner obscures  
one's view. Any corner constitutes one's view. Even*

*if it's a tight one--you're fighting for your life.  
How not to believe it is a right angle, although any  
intersection consists of 4 such, facing various  
directions. Love is a dense volume. All its pages  
have corners. Sometimes, as here, only words can be  
the means to turn them. (60)*

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1  
(Black Sparrow), p. 13.

2  
"First" can, in fact, be taken as an analogy for this contradiction, especially as the key phrase "against the...silence" echoes the title of a poem by Ron Loewinsohn, one of Bromige's co-editors at *R C Lion* whose awkward wrestlings with the ghost of William Carlos Williams led him finally to the novel.

3  
If we count "Corners" by their graphic indicators ( $\lceil$ ), there appear to be 104. The discrepancy is resolved if we interpret the first of the two titled series-within-the-series, "4 for the Battle of Britain," as four works and the second, "One in Five Acts," as, indeed, one.

4  
(Anchor Books), p. 495.

5  
Translated by Clement Greenberg in *Parables and Paradoxes* (Shocken, 1975), p. 93.

6  
p. 175.



# TOM SHARP

## POEM AS POETIC

My most useful revelation about the nature of poetry occurred to me when I read *SPARROW 42: Credences of Winter* (Black Sparrow Press, March 1976). This pamphlet of fourteen pages contains eight poems by David Bromige.

Each of these poems is an enviable example of a poem; it is also a definition of what a poem can be, a test of poetry, an exploration of a poetic. A poetic includes more than prosody; it includes an epistemology. Poems written under the same poetic share a common set of relations to the world, a way of learning.

The first relations we are likely to explore with a poem are the relations between the poem's content and our lives. Since Sonnet 116 by Shakespeare is about love, we are likely, when we first read it, to think about our experience of loving and being loved.

These relations get us into a poem, but they give us little information about the poem that then surrounds us. For such information, we might explore the relations between the content of the poem and the poem itself. These imply the poem's epistemology. In this paper by "poetic" I mean primarily the poem's epistemology, the relations to the world that its subject implies. Sonnet 116 is not only about love; it is an act of love. Like love, the poem is a guiding star by which we can navigate, something by which we can measure our own love.

But we should be cautious in determining the content of a poem. The subject of a parody is different from the object of the parody; the content includes both. The subject of a monologue is different from the message of the speaker; again, the content includes both. Similarly, we must distinguish the poetic that the speaker's story implies from the poetic that the poem as a whole implies, just as we distinguish an avocado from its pit. By "content" I mean to include not only the pit, but also the fruit that surrounds it.

One measure of a poem's integrity is how readily its subjects at all levels together help form one unified impression. A poem with integrity provides meaningful possibilities for these relations not only because its form is an extension of its content, but also because the whole poem including its form and its content is an extension of its subjects from the life that experienced them.

The overall effect of a poem with integrity does not depend on what the reader must previously experience and bring to the poem; it must present the grounds of its own being--integrated, from the experience that defined them, during the act of composition, into a whole including its form and its content. Bromige's poems have such integrity.

What is a poem? A poem is, for example, an excrescence, and the first poem in *Credences of Winter* is "An Excrescence." A poem is also, in order, "Abstract," "The Object," "To a pure content," "Credences of Winter," "New Year's," "Another Voice," and "I dreamt that I."

## AN EXCRESCENCE

An excrescence is an outgrowth, proof of a relation between an object and the thing from which it grows. This poem presents a growth of understanding, the speaker's experience with a tree, with love, and with poems:

*I know it in the summer,*

*I know the winter in it too.  
Light forces it. As boughs  
So forced up & out, so roots  
Are driven into earth, a balance*

*Even I can find.*

Our use of metaphor recognizes that a thing is not, in itself, meaningful; all meaning is in relation. This poem metaphorically relates "I" (like author and reader), "this tree" (like "I" and language), leaves (excrescences, like poems and, later in the poem, "love among us humans"), and itself. In the poem, "I" identifies with the tree (in this identification, "I" is "barely human"):

*Though I am barely human  
The logic of this tree  
Grows clear to me*

The tree's logic grows clear as "I" speaks with the tree, not merely to it, but also *by means of it*, as by means of paper derived from a tree, as by means of the poet's efforts, as by means of language:

*For I am barely human  
While speaking with this tree.*

The tree is the poem--the poem speaks "I."

Excrescences that "occur--& fall" increase the need for balancing. Similarly, "the will of those that love" balances love. Love begins a process that takes place in words, like photosynthesis in leaves, from which the will can drive knowledge into "roots," expressive and meaningful relations. The tree is a result of both love and the will. The poem also incorporates this tension; it is both an outgrowth and a balancing ingrowth.

In this poetic, love creates an experience and the will stores a record of its relations. The will drives this knowledge into relations that readers can recognize, like roots driven into the earth. The poem drives new meanings into the common ground. If the extended relations that a poem engenders support new excrescences--new perceptions, new actions--then the poem is successful.

More generally, a poem represents an act of identification with an object in the world. It records relations that that identification engenders, as a



seed grows with careful nurturing. Accordingly, it is limited by the potential in the object of identification, the seed. Here, the seed is the tree and the poem expresses its limitation first and last: "Though I am barely human," and "For I am barely human."

## ABSTRACT

All the poems in *Credences of Winter* are excrescences, fruits of love and will, with inherent limitations, but with the next poem, "Abstract," Bromige shows us the pit within the fruit. In this poetic, poetry is a divine inspiration:

*My desire precedes me  
Who am its shadow for the light  
Glow from beyond its further side,*

*The flame to burn this shadow up  
When I am one with light.*

A Jewish legend has it that the Pharoah's magician set a coal before Moses, when he was a child, as a test. Moses picked it up, put it in his mouth, and consequently had some kind of speech impediment. "Abstract" doesn't refer to this legend, but the poem repeats the archetype:

*For the god I am shadow of*

*Once seared me in that flame  
And sealed my lips. I hurt  
To talk.*

Here is a flaming object, which he claims is "absolutely solid," that interposes between the speaker and the divine flame. The speaker feels that he has received the flame and that the flame creates an obstacle to discussing "happiness" or, as he says, "any of its relatives." A shadow is separate from the light. The speaker is a shadow image of his god. He won't be happy until his shadow is burned up by the light on the "further side."

In Exodus #19, the Lord, having descended upon Mount Sinai in fire, clearly repeats to Moses, "but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest he break out against them." Moses, however, had that privilege. Similarly, a poet may claim a privileged relationship with the divine:

*. . . My god  
Must prove my spokesman:*

*He adores the thing I am*

The reader, however, does not need to accept this claim, and may explain

unverifiable assertions as he pleases. It's easy to believe that this person, for example, is not divinely inspired; he is slightly crazed. He is compensating for a speech impediment by assuming the role of communicator and working in a medium that does not require spontaneous physical utterance.

The speaker of "Abstract" has other characteristics that could justify the opinion that Bromige is parodying the stereotypical presumption that the poet can speak for the divine. One such characteristic is the disjunction of his sentences. The referent for "its" in the second line is "My desire." What is the referent for "its" in the third line? "The light," "its shadow," "My desire"? Considering the poem as a whole, the referents for both could be "that object" that "interposes, absolutely solid," the "obstacle between," but this possibility tells us that the speaker *might* have made sense, not that he did so. The speaker is too limited by his own view to be coherent.

Parody, like incoherence, creates interest by countering expectations. It shows us a similarity with a difference. If we can explain the difference, then it is meaningful to us. Bromige must not believe in the efficacy of such claims of divine inspiration; they are too "abstract," too far removed from shared experience to be of value to us. A speaker who regards description of "happiness" or "any of its relatives" as "distraction" is difficult for most readers to relate to.

Persona allows parody. The poet speaks in personae, assuming another's voice to take a position with which he might not like to be identified. We might be wrong to identify Bromige with any personae in a poem by Bromige (or to assume that any of his poetics serves more than the poem at hand).

In the pit of this poem, the poetic supports the theory of divine inspiration. Surrounding this is a poem of parody, secular exhalation; the poet can say anything he wishes.

## THE OBJECT

This next poem introduces a third personae, and another poetic, the poem as an object of psychological projection:

*Years afterward  
I cherished a black scarf  
And would show it to close friends  
And say, It once was hers.*

The man cherished the black scarf as, presumably, he had cherished his former lover. Yet to say "It once was hers" is, even though perhaps psychologically satisfying, plainly a lie. The scarf was far removed from his former lover. As he confesses, he found it one and a half years after he last saw her in a city where she had never been. His feelings about the scarf are even more incongruous, for it was physically and emotionally unpleasant for him:



A cheap thing, unpleasant to the touch,  
Rasping, & thin. Some scent  
Persisted, cheap also,  
As a reminder of the girl,

A girl, unknown to me.  
I felt dirty when I handled it.

His description of the black scarf as cheap, unpleasant, and dirtying when he claims to have "cherished" it is comic. The contrast between the reality and the romance is too great to take seriously. He strengthens this contrast by exaggerating his attachment to both scarf and lover:

Desolate, when I lost it.  
You meant the world to me.

The scarf stood for her and she stood for the world. Following these associations from scarf to lover to the world suggests that whatever is dear to him is cheap, unpleasant, and dirtying. This odd attachment to the scarf must have seemed ridiculous to his friends, but if he wanted it that way, he could have it that way.

A poem can be, like the black scarf, an object physically unconnected with what it represents to the reader, but so much like the thing it represents that the reader can transfer to it feelings appropriate to what it represents, no matter how ridiculous this might seem to others. No one should tell you that you don't see in a poem what you see in it.

In this poem, as in "An Abstract," Bromige parodies the speaker and this implied poetic. The associations and actions to which the man confesses are ridiculous. The idea that we are free to associate the poem with whatever we like must be equally ridiculous. If not, then we must revise our concept of integrity to mean "flawlessly reflect." The poem must reflect whatever the reader previously experiences and brings to it.

The poetic is a pit. The parody is the fruit that surrounds it. In Bromige's poetic stance, a poem reveals the validity of a particular stand. This use of the poem is similar to what George Oppen meant by the image as a "test of sincerity." If an idea can be substantiated by images, then it is valid. In Bromige's parodies, the idea is ridiculed by images.

#### TO A PURE CONTENT

This poem presents another case of self-deception. Here, the poem appears to be a protective plainness, an argument against seduction:

I'll tell how I aspire--  
To be done with interference,

Inference, with cues I am to send  
Seductively, with clues I am  
To pick up & riddle out

This persona speaks plainly to avoid involvement. Once burnt, twice shy, he begs for self-sufficiency, even though he admits the difficulty:

By exactitudes of hand & line & eye  
That hide the bitter truth--

Just such as I am done with,  
Hopefully.

He hopes that he is done with the subtle puzzles of romance and poetry-- "inference," "cues," "clues." He warns against their promises--"eternity," "content" (accent on the second syllable). He claims that "pure content" (accent on either syllable) is without the "interference" of seduction, romantic or poetic.

The fruit around this pit poetic is thinner than around the previous. We might sympathize with the speaker, and he repeats good advice:

Present your ear,  
Say the least you can  
That still can make it plain.

This is not ridiculous. But this is a man limited by failure. In self-defense, he exaggerates the odds against him and refuses to take a risk. His content (accent on the first syllable) isn't pure; his plainness is tainted with overgenerality, with rationalization. Truth about men and women (and about poets and readers of poetry) isn't always bitter; involvement isn't always harmful. He is afraid to give.

. . . These hands  
Need only clasp themselves  
For their aspirations to come true

His self-absorption contradicts his altruism. We can not take his warnings seriously.

The poetic of plainness might reveal the "bitter truth," but it might also promote selfishness and uncreativity. It wants to prove, after all, that the truth is bitter. Conditions for creativity and love are antithetical. There are better reasons to write plainly than fear of the consequences of seduction. Seduction is harmful only if a poet doesn't satisfy. A good poet not only seduces the reader but also takes responsibility for that involvement by satisfying the reader.



## CREDESCES OF WINTER

This poem alludes to the stances of speakers of "An Abstract" and "To a pure content," who harbor bitterness from hardship, and allows further speakers to voice different adaptations to hardship, to suggest different ways of learning, different epistemologies and, therefore, different poetics. It opens:

*The season has us by the throat.*

*This at last must be real.*

*Winter, now the bitter truth  
Drives into mouth & eye  
And shrinks both to mean slits.*

This speaker has been in search of something real. "This at last must be real," he says of the season that "has us by the throat." Remaining unconvinced of a thing until it has you by the throat is absurd, especially since at the end of the poem the speaker implies that winter has gone deeper than the throat, to shape his soul. It also emphasizes the feeling rather than the fact. The experience, rather than the existence of a thing, is a *credence*, subjective rather than objective, a person's belief or sense of necessity rather than arctic temperatures or imminence of death by freezing. This poem is a collection not of facts of winter, but of *credences* of winter.

One such credence is the condition of the speaker in "To a pure content." In "Credences of Winter," winter is "the bitter truth" that "Drives into mouth & eye / And shrinks both to mean slits." In "To a pure content," the speaker is also acquainted with "the bitter truth," his own metaphorical winter. He shuns involvement, and focuses on the negative in response to his failure with women.

Another credence is the condition of the speaker in "Abstract." In "Credences of Winter," none has "breath . . . to spare / Against this air it hurts to speak with." In "Abstract," the speaker "can't spare breath on happiness / Nor any of its relatives" and "hurts to talk." In the shadow of his god of flame, the air is cold, and his response to the pain of his separation from his god is to make it colder.

The metaphorical winters of these speakers are partly volitional. They might not intend their failures of intimacy with god and women, but they *intend* their withdrawals from subsequent human warmth. Their withdrawals enforce the credences of their failures. This enforcement is adaptive; they bring on their own winters to assert that they couldn't help it; their failures, like winter, cannot be moderated.

The introductory speaker uses the words "us," and "our" to include the speakers who follow his line, "We mean to use our wits instead." He

doesn't say what they use their wits instead of. Does wit, in the perspective of previous poems, replace facing the problem directly, an adaptive remake of the real world? Including other speakers of similar conditions may support such an adaptation--as much to say, "This is not a *mental* problem, because I'm not the only one."

The speakers who follow declare what they "mean to." One, like a ptarmigan, adjusts to winter by protective coloration (some hide). One flies south (some flee). One swims north (some like it cold). One, like a moose, survives by stripping trees (some get by). One, like an early oceanic explorer, desperate, risks everything on a final passage (some take a chance). One, like an Inuit, warms himself with his kind in an igloo (some band together). One, by mistake, dies. One hibernates (some shut down). Another gets by on what it saves during fall (some plan ahead). One means to die. One reverses ice and fire, like someone so dedicated to negative that it seems positive.

The commonality of their environment suggests the literalness of winter; the diversity of their responses suggests different metaphorical conditions of winter.

The introductory speaker returns with the line, "My word must be the last." This is another adaptive technique--adversity is easier to bear if one can have the last word. It helps strengthen one's unique resolve against the elements that shape one's soul.

These poems create meaning by suggesting relations between credences and facts. The epigram to the pamphlet quotes Octavio Paz, from "Rhythm," in *The Bow and the Lyre*: "In every society there are two calendars." One of these calendars is for the "real" world (the bow--for the martial arts), and one is for the "felt" world (the lyre--for the liberal arts).

Cross breeding the literal (to describe the real world) and the metaphorical (to describe the felt world) adds to both. In this poem, literal winters are primary. In previous poems, metaphorical winters are primary. The literal adds clarity to the meaning of previous poems, and the metaphorical adds depth to the meanings of this poem. Allusions in this poem to previous poems allow us to interpret this poem in their perspectives. The winters here that seem objective could, like the metaphorical winters of the previous poems, be partly willful extensions of personal failures. We are, as the title suggests, presented with "credences," not facts. Where reality lies is open to interpretation. How the poem rests between being a record of the adaptation and directly compensating for the difficulty depends on the reader's belief in the literalness of the winter presented in the poem. One might suspect that these credences of winter are adaptive remakes of the conditions that distress these speakers.

In this poetic, a poem is a credence of winter. It is a human adjustment to difficulty. It is what one can do, or it is a record of what one can do when one is pressured by hardships that seem beyond one's control.



## NEW YEAR'S

This poem presents the poem as a seduction:

With the turning of the year  
You reach toward  
Whatever creature I must be  
In your imagining.  
Who's to say you're wrong.

The first stanza of *New Year's* (resolution?) echoes the theme of "credences": --the real and the credence are two different things, yet no one can say that your imagination of your lover is wrong.

The poem describes the progress of a seduction. The speaker moves from aloof skepticism to absolute belief in his lover's persuasion. At first he asserts that he kissed her "for the hell of it," but he gives in so totally that, at the end of the poem, he "will kill for it." Indifference half-rhymes with murderous conviction; the conjunction of her face emphasizes the connection: "kiss you for the hell of it. / Your face," "Your face creates my vision / And I will kill for it."

In this pit poetic, the truth or falsity of the view that the poem assumes doesn't matter; only the poem's ability to inspire the reader matters. This poem reverses the pit poetic of "To a pure content," in which the speaker warns us about the danger of seduction. Here, the speaker is seduced. The fruit poetic of "To a pure content" demonstrates the vacuity of life without seduction. The fruit poetic of this poem implies the danger of seduction without compassion: disgrace and murderous intent.

## ANOTHER VOICE

This poem bridges the distance between the voices a man has in his head and environmental noises that disturb him. It begins:

I heard it, but it took a while.  
People have an idea of this place  
As quiet, until they've been here.

Kids ride motorbikes in & out the apple trees,  
Sundays, there's all the traffic snarled downtown  
Where two state highways cross, city people  
Trying to relax, half-a-mile away

Ten thousand chickens in force-feeders howling,  
Quail, shotguns, assorted hammering & sawing,  
A jackass, jaybirds, dogs, a goat--

So those voices a man has in his head  
Must keep pace, somehow, with it all--

At least three types of voices contend for the recognition of the title--the voice of the speaker, "the voices a man has in his head," and "still another voice" (the voice of Bob Porter's goat). Since the "it" in the first line seems to refer to the title "voice," and since "it" is neither reflexive nor plural, the meaning of the poem seems most strongly connected with the noises that the speaker and his companion hear on their walk:

And still another voice,  
You don't know what this means.

The three dogs had her on her knees,  
Bob Porter's goat, blood at her neck & flank,  
But ran off straightaway as we came up,  
Answering those sounds.

Before this experience, the speaker includes the goat among the noises that dismay him ("A jackass, jaybirds, dogs, a goat--"), but, with this experience, the goat becomes an object of sympathy. The goat is also beset by injustices; the masters who give their dogs freedom permit this cruelty.

Further, the goat's predicament suggests an answer to the speaker's peevish questions:

Why can't they walk, didn't God give them legs,  
Why gun, gun, gun those goddam engines.  
Why shoot what they won't eat  
Just because it's there.  
Why can't these people stay home, fix up  
Whatever corner of the city each is stuck with.

Kids ride motorbikes, city people snarl country intersections, chickens howl, jackasses bray, dogs bark, goats bleat, and hunters shoot because they are all in distress. Like the speaker, they are victimized by the consequences of each other's liberties.

In this poetic, a poem turns the inside out. It objectifies the voices in our heads and so opens a connection between ourselves and our environment.

## I DREAMT THAT I

The last poem in *Credences of Winter*, represents the poem as a miracle of private communion, a dream of almost perfect intimacy:



I dreamt some land where no-one  
Spoke my language, so it took  
More time than I can tell to get across,  
And in that land, I was immortal.

And there it was we met.

The dreamer's love grows from a feeling of understanding to complete devotion. He "learned to follow [her] / Completely," or so he thought, until she led him to

. . . that place  
Set aside for us to live together in

Forever, where we would work  
Safe from interruption, to perfect this miracle--

At this point:

I woke beside someone like you,  
Speaking a kind of english, laughing.

The dream reverses the speaker's frame of reference; it is not the world; it is the dream. His listener is his dream lover. The person beside him when he wakes up is like his dream lover, rather than vice versa. Similarly, his waking language is "a kind of english"; his dream lover must understand what language "english" is.

The relations between this situation and the idea of a poetry as a separate world, in which the poem is a private communication, are straightforward. In this poetic, a poem is like the dream lover; intimacy begins with a sense of understanding and grows to the point at which one follows completely; this love gives exactly what one wants, including immortality. The magic by which a poem overcomes resistance to understanding is similar to the romance in which love overcomes obstacles such as poverty and hateful fathers.

The beauty of this dream is that it casts upon the world a strange, delightful difference, and makes it new. Alternatively, its disappointment, its absurdity, is that one never dreams forever; one wakes up in the world. The dream is not "safe from interruption." In fact, the world is not safe from interruption either; one wakes up from it, for example, in the dream. The miracle that we don't need to perfect is more basic--the continuous present, which interruptions do not interrupt.

#### CONCLUSION

Bromige moves in these poems from one poetic to another: a poem is an excrescence; a poem is a divine inspiration; a poem is an object of projection; it is an argument against seduction, an adaptive technique, and a seduction; it moves us out of our private thoughts and it is a private dream of communion.

However, Bromige is not only exploring the viability of these different approaches to the world and to the poem; he is also demonstrating their weaknesses. As Bromige writes in a letter to the author, "Light, being directional, and cast upon objects, makes shadows."

"An Excrescence" relates love and the dynamics of tree growth, but in the process the speaker becomes "barely human." "An Abstract" argues for divine inspiration, but betrays the difficulty of proving it. "The Object" represents the poem as an object of psychological projection, but shows that such objects are subject to any inconsistency that the reader desires or can't prevent. "To a pure content" appears to support a protective plainness, but is subject to reductivism and overgenerality. "Credences of Winter" hosts different adaptations to hardship, but implies that more direct solutions are possible. "New Year's" represents a seduction, but demonstrates the dangerous excesses of seduction. "Another voice" voices the complaints of a justifiably distressed human being, but places him in a context of wider misery that demands a more sympathetic response. "I dreamt that I," finally, describes a dream world, but recognizes that we wake up to a world in which dreams don't make a lot of sense.

I haven't tried to say all that can or all that should be said about these poems; I have ignored many of their special beauties of conception and implementation. My purpose has been narrow--to explore relations between their subjects and the poems themselves. With this focus, and probably with many other foci, David Bromige's work excels in clarity and power. What is a poem? Overall, a poem is a test of a way of learning. For Bromige, it is primarily parodic; it is professional rather than personal, documentary rather than autobiographical, multi- rather than single-layered.



# CHARLES BERNSTEIN

THE DIFFERENCE IS SCALE: A SHORT NOTE ON D.B.

"Cognition requires exaggeration," writes David Bromige in "Indictable Suborners"--and the converse would apply equally to explain his method: *exaggeration requires cognition*. In extremus luminatus ludicrus.

However, it is an ungracious task, as the oxymoron says, to try to explain a joke. You get it or better yet a) it gets you b) you don't get it. That is, in these works it's not "subject matter" (shopworn hangnail) but *form* (allopathic progenitor) that's made intrinsically funny. "It is easier to see through my little tales than it is to see through the pernicious society we are trapped within. But the difference is merely scale." & this may begin to account for why each poem is approached (& so apprehended) in a determinately different way. "When you start to doubt your own skepticism, look out!" Bromige has never "fixed" on any one style or mode (there are characteristic reverberations of course) but tackles (targets) new turf (segmentation sections) with each tussle (six of one, couple of half-dozen of other). "It was very dark inside the fish." "This is among the most poignant thoughts I know." This is a good deal different and more humanly refreshing--in the sense that a breath is more refreshing than a cough--than the idea of form as *plastique*. For Bromige, the question becomes what color plastic and why not rubber.

As to subject (subsequent) matters, Bromige makes mincemeat of the fashions of the "contemporary" "mind" ("The era had a milky density, tepid and torpid, mildly disgusting like a one-acre homesite; this disgust had spoken of the rebuttal to its final vestige of candid spontaneity, except that the toothache of the times looped a scarf over everybody's ears.") & builds from there. An Englishman who came to the U.S. of A. by way of British Columbia (a.k.a. Canada's grey sunbelt) he has made cultural distance into a prosodic measure that leans on device without being devisive. "There is an intense pleasure of experience in the juxtaposing of the two polysyllabic words with the staccato monosyllables--*greift* and *Spuk* particularly spook me. [In this passage from *Threads* Bromige is referring to a quote from Heidegger; for the present context, *hot tub* / *totalization* would do as well, as in there'll be a hot tub at the totalization tonight (requiring a further introjection into our unconscious episiotomies).] "Doesn't all innovation in knowing happen much as a pun: the thread of likeness enables one to articulate what is in one sense the utterly dissimilar, since new. Or what had been forgotten." Eternity and paternity become avenues of access; the reader is left to draw the moral after Bromige has provided the tone and tonic. "And still we hold there are times when we can bear witness to the present condition of absolute things." "For language can take us there--wherever it is."

All quotes from the work of David Bromige.

# RAE ARMANTROUT

METAPHOR AND COMEDY

(all quotes are from David Bromige's "Indictable Suborners")

Or "Event and Clarity shake and make up in clear weather some little distance from the center of Fenwick."

Proper noun as joke. Locale is both metaphorical and comic in Bromige(ville).

Time likewise:

"In the past, people drew dots forever before the commas came in a small boat...."

"Declaring it behooves an objectivist to show significant disanalogies between here and now, he made a consistent error in Ethelbart.":

Time - Place = Error.

"Jagged streaks lit up the sky in the dark eyes of one whose duty it is to wake the condemned on the day of execution in this compelling novel set in Kakamari."

Time + Place + Infamy

Bromige is a poet of great disruptive energy.

"Only those thoughts are true which fail to understand themselves...."



## SOLICITATION / KEYBOARDS

Bruce... I have read your essay. I question to what extent 'totality' as I use it in P-E-A-C-E and as you use it (in "Total Equals What: poetics & praxis", POETICS JOURNAL 1986) is the same term or concept. What you say makes sense to me, whereas what I say doesn't -- not leastwise in the same Discourse. I guess I had in mind a totalizing spirit that levels jungles and gets the little buggers (us) to run in the clearings where they can be tagged, liquidated and mounted in the Smithsonian. Which regards variety as a menace. Which refuses to leave gaps in history for what can't be known. Totality used so is the enemy, whereas your use of the term suggests honorific meanings. We do, as I believe you to be arguing there, we do posit, albeit half aware perhaps, some commonality that ideally contains the whole.... David

The two ranges, of sound and placement, are in accord with the two columns raised before the Temple of Monolog, the one dedicated to agitators, the other to the receptors of totality, and these two, in whose doubling we discover their thought, infinite and extensible, whose chain unpacked a shopping cart at the supermarket in order to ring each item up, tended to reflect the Cosmos as a Being with clipped wings, universally comprehensible, tuned to receive and absorb at the same rate anywhere as if it were all the same, and not more fickle than the winds, many of which prevail.

(from P-E-A-C-E)

question whether either reason tallies your unchallengeable intuition of prior aesthetic soundings demanded for general heuristic judgments kin, leastwise zoologically xeroxed, cumulative versus bragged new meanings.

SOLICITATION -- to 'put in motion' (disturb) (make anxious) 'the whole' -- here are twin causeways of 'solicit'.

quickly whittle elder roots till you uncover images of personal attitudes so delineated for gradually heavier joinings knit litigiously, zanily xylophoned, causing vast breakouts now milling.

But -- the whole, and what is to be done with (and within it) -- more than a pipe dream?

His scepticism dematerializes everything from here to (you name it).

His "Dialectic thought undermines pseudo-naturalism." (of the sort I've just slogged through in the *Morrow Anthology of Younger American Poets*.)

And his "Irony, the name for the gap between ideology and reality, finds itself anathematized, telling through its supression a truth about the present."



quietly whispering evidence requested to yearning unfortunates incarcerated ontologically purposing arrangements situating decisively far gone humanisms juggled kinesthetically like zebras x-raying cartoons viewed before nascent moons.

A sighting of ....

A praxis of ....

quiescent, willing, every radiant terminal yelling uninhibitedly identical outrage, people attest severally denoted fears generated higgledy-piggledy just kilometers lengthwise zapping x-rated cinema valued because notes mount.

Some challenge, some provocation, some soliciting (which also rubs against 'lure,' 'into evil,' seduce, the propositioning of the soon-to-be-prostituted') of meaning -- with the sign itself, the infamous structure of signification, as 'john'. And this time such a set-up (or structure) acquires a more obviously *social* identity, *pinned down* by a system of tribute organized by the status quo to *insure* itself.

quarreling while elevating reiterated topics, yielding unionists indict outworn privilege acclaimed simultaneously despite factitiousness gone haywire, jutting klutzily zoned xanadu carelessly versioned beneath nasty masteries.

There are ... the purveyors of totality. To be in opposition: the 'social' cast in doubt, with questioning flung as far or as deep as possible. The task should fit the scale of the context... the target.

quick wet electric rheostat telemath youth undo idiocies obeyed persistently against sidereal designation feverishly gnawing haruspicating judiciaries knelled zestily xenophobe crying veracity banked nothings memorized.

So, facing the violent false-front of totality -- all its monuments and rituals and gift-wrappings and intricate methodologies of control

designed to secure bodies and serve the logic of inequality and domination and accumulation and technocratic thinking that protects its hierarchies of worth and reward -- as facing a more extensile signification, or meaning, in writing language, caught up in the politically problematic (or problematicizable) vehicles, or envelopes, of *sense*, or *value*, or *ideology*. (Interminable terminology --) Watch the system work & change its works. (Contest that referent too.)

quack, whack, eek, roar, thanks, yell, utter, ink, ouch, please, agh, shit, damn, fuck, god, hell, jouissance, kill, zounds, x-ed out, cocorico, vanish, bugger off, no, moo.

'Sound' and 'placement,' signifier and signified, metonymy and metaphor... parole and language. Two parts of a troublesome twin bill. Each dimension is subject to a system (of order, of surveillance) and is systematizable -- or perhaps contributes to an overall cohesion or coherence, is in other words something that we might imagine as a vital prop to the social body and its power structure. At least caught up in these systems of control (& interpellation, leading to the poignant rituals of naturalizing or innocentizing self-help & 'heck, I'm no deviant,' or at least troubles a person back into line on occasion.) So you could imagine each dimension underpropping the assurances of (established) order, of (established & establishable) comprehensibility. And you could imagine each subjected to challenge.

quite well etched roads travel yellow undulating indications over purple arrondissements signalling districts frenchified grayly hovering jouncily keynoted ziggurats xenogenetically crayoned virtually broad-casting normal mappings.

For example, some urge explorations of sound's infinite reach -- endless aisles of corrected slogans, *queue* up, extending like a disappearing line into a horizon of shade trees.... But perhaps this 'sound contact' is just another extension cord, or sound contract, for the social whole. IOU is due. By themselves, these 'soundings' may resemble, and end up as no more troubling than, a purely 'grammatical praxis' of the sentence. These supposed sites of 'desire' -- these largely metonymic explorations or agitations -- can look a little empty; formal, or fascinating enough in themselves, and their arcs & knots, to attract our attention. But attention 'to' can also be attention 'away' -- here, away from the boundaries which



## "THIS MEANS THAT"

David Bromige learns to drive.

-Ron Silliman, *Tjanting*

Poetic creations are creations in a novel sense. They are texts, in an eminent way. Language emerges here in its full autonomy. It stands for itself and raises itself to this standing position, whereas words are normally overtaken by the directed intentions of the speech that leaves them behind. ... It is a special sort of communication that proceeds from poetry. With whom does it take place? With the reader? With which reader?

-Hans Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*

No one reads better than Bromige.

-Ron Silliman, *Paradise*

I undertook the collection of a number of sentences concerning the subject, David Bromige, knowing that I would find such among the sentences of Ron Silliman, a poet given to sitting up, standing, and taking steps, before I had had the experience of driving David Bromige myself along a route which, because of my own conversation, nearly missed the airport which was our destination. This says something, to me, about intention (a standing order?), and direction within the sentence, and it is Bromige who helps me to attend to this. As he says in *Red Hats*, "this sentence means exactly what it says. This one, also." This means that, to me, here. And it is that production of meaning that I intend to attend.

This is how poetic creations are novel. There is no inherent difference, despite the fulminations of formalists, between the language of poetry and the language of everyday. As Bromige points out in these pages (not exactly these) in a discussion of Silliman, "David Bromige learns to drive" might be a notation on a calendar." But it will be read differently, as it was written differently, in *Tjanting*, or in an essay on Silliman in *The Difficulties*, or as the epigraph to a discourse on Bromige, himself. "This means that" occurs in a piece titled "Authority," but it is precisely the place of authority that traditional discussions of intention leave unmolested. And that is what Bromige finds hateful. Writing in his piece on Silliman of John Ashbery's *Shadow Train*, he is quick to insist that it is not Ashbery he finds hateful, indeed he has since taken a ride, on a train, with Ashbery, but rather that "unmistakable aura of authorial intentionality" which transforms a reader into a detective. "Faced with an enigma," says Samuel Weber in a comment on Kant, "be it a hermetic piece of poetry, a contemporary painting, a puzzling coincidence, we almost instinctively tend to interpret the question, 'what does it mean?' as what did the author mean, or what's 'behind' it? As a reaction to our own bewilderment, we suppose a consciousness that is like our own, only less bewildered." And yet, when we have constituted that less bewildered other and given it the authority to collapse the text into paraphrase, we have consumed the book; there is nothing further for it to do.

hem in all our arts and labors of *making sense*, making solidarities and intensities of value. Beyond any formalism of the surface, we can therefore look to what's *expansively at stake* in the messages (or sounds and placements) flying back & forth, absorbed, caught up in (in this case, or section of the Cosmos, in America) solicitings of a social whole from deeper down in what keeps it going, what keeps it from changing.



Bromige continues to resist such a facile consummation. He recognizes the dangers that attend upon the reduction of the text to merest facts and interpretations. That emphasis upon the authorization of the datum takes place, as Fred Jameson remarks in *Marxism and Form*, "at the expense of the network of relationships in which that item may be embedded." Or, returning to Bromige, "at this point we begin to glimpse what is the profound vocation of the work of art in a commodity society: not to be a commodity, not to be consumed, not to be a vocation." This last, from *My Poetry*, is paradigmatic of Bromige's more recent texts, including *Red Hats*. "My Poetry" is constructed out of sentences drawn from each review Bromige's poetry had had to that point, much as this essay is constructed largely out of Bromige's poetry to this point, and is thus more than usually discursive in nature. It is also an eminently unauthorized text. The sentences raise themselves to a standing position and proceed to converse. "Heidegger, interpreting Holderlin," Bromige says in "My Plan," "says that to be human is to be a conversation," and this accounts also for much of the discursive tone of this talky text. These sentences are not meant to stand and deliver, to serve as the simplest of devices for conveying information from one point to another; we have already the simplest of devices for that use. These are not, as Jameson describes "in this period of the overproduction of printed matter and the proliferation of methods of quick reading, ... intended to speed the reader across a sentence in such a way that he can salute a readymade idea effortlessly in passing, without suspecting that real thought demands a descent into the materiality of language and a consent to time itself in the form of the sentence." *Red Hats* is a writing which, while clearly prior, asserts no primacy with regard to reading; regards the reader as one who takes place, with respect, to the writing; who stands up to the material of language.

Which is much grander than hateful detective work. One doesn't come to *Red Hats* with the intention of finding a thread (we are not after all fiber experts), though it is there to be found, particularly in lines which lovingly recall Zukofsky, such as the one that reads: "Shattered threads redo deserted sated shuddered states." One who reads first regards the work as a work. Someone in these pages, that is in *Red Hat's* pages, reads Mikel Dufrenne's grand working through of the nature of such regard: "The large white piece of plywood has acquired Dufrenne's *The Phenomenology of Esthetic Experience*." A non-acquisitive reading is not out to seize upon allusions, even if it is delightful to find that Bromige really is a good reader. What we are after is, "in lay lingo, a sentence standing for his thoughts." Whose thoughts? "Apparently you're not the same person from one sentence to the next." We are not, as sentences unfold in time, time to which each must consent if we are to regard the form. As early as *Birds of America*, Bromige had been on to this: "Yet language speaks of the / miraculous & forms." Who is reading Dufrenne? Who is speaking? Who is in charge, and must we stand for this? Bromige, one of his own best readers, has the self-assurance of one who knows the best when he sees it. "I would agree that what's right in front of me is the only place to be, watching the words that say as much." Everywhere in *Red Hats* the words say what they mean and stand for no nonsense. This is inevitable, for "writing is done with words, which can't tell the difference between reality and fantasy." "Writing is done with words" must be read twice before we are done with it. "The sense of all this is conveyed through the letters."

Where does this take place, and with whom? In *My Poetry*, Bromige had observed that "it's like I've moved from tight corners to perfect circles,"

and now that I've read Bromige over to myself in these sentences, I begin to feel myself in that place Heidegger passes through *On the Way to Language*. It is a place where "a motorbike kicks over a sense of place several blocks off." It is not a place that is given, for "art breaks the laws of the given," and each one will constitute it out of the given. There is no authorial presence here to lord it over us, to have already gotten there ahead of us. Indeed, it is a place to which the author can not entirely come. "The conversation over, alone again with the words, wondering what may have been heard by those recently present to his use of them." Again, it is not the author who is present to the reader, it is the reader who is present to the poet's use of words, and who uses them again, and, in my case, again.

"Meanwhile furniture has to be bought then paid for." Bromige may read better, be better read, and be better off read; he is also enormously funny, something which isn't often enough credited. In his guise as monologist in *My Poetry* he reports, "that's my last duchess, browning on the spit." Here we find such unarguable assertions as that "Chubby Checkers is Fats Domino reified." This is all part of the work's simple gladness, because "to be alive here & now is to live on a world where all this & as we know so very much more takes place even as we read (write)."

And that's another of those perfect circles that keep coming around in Bromige's writing. Back in *Spells & Blessings* he observed that "I know more now concerning the debilities of current modes of thought--of stupefying attachment to the specifiable." (It's true; I do.) *Red Hats* picks that up again, noting that "ours is a century of manic specifiers who mistrust anything." It is that very mistrust which accounts for the reluctance of so many to read anything other than that patently false sort of mimesis which purports to present things as they are. Language can not present things as they are; it can only present things as. There is a poetry, you can learn it in workshops, which offers its intention to evaporate on contact, leaving us with a specifiable, determinedly paraphrasable message. There is another poetry which stands for itself, which is not to say that it is "art for art's sake," but that it stands unaided.

This is invaluable (this?), and it is what makes Bromige such a good read. Jameson remarks of modern literature that "the production of the sentence becomes itself a new kind of event within the work, and generates a whole new kind of form." *Red Hats* takes place within that tradition, remarks it, and generates new form. It is an eventful work, one that occurs to its reader, and to which the reader will recur. It is a conversation which may cause us to miss the destination we might have intended, but we've already been there anyway. That's the problem with the literature of good intentions. That may be why the next to last section of *Red Hats* ends with a sentence that reads: "This is the last concluding paragraph I ever intend to write." This means that.



# STEPHEN RATCLIFFE

## CRACKING THE CODE

"Life, that dome of many-colored glass staining the white radiance of Eternity, now appeared to him as an inescapable narrative movement negotiating with a silent partner who spent all of his time spaced out in a kind of Kim's game."

"The supported forms glide lithely in the medium, only what comes to be viewed as the point of it all withheld, mimesis of continuation, not to strop the razor of finitude on the strap of rude necessity until after breakfast."

"rare/ ecstacies require/ remembered skerries"

--David Bromige, *Indictable Suborners*

For the listener, hearing David Bromige's *Indictable Suborners* for the first time is like finding yourself in the funhouse with unlimited access to all the rides: the hall of mirrors with air holes in the floor, the rollercoaster slides, the giant turntable that spins and spins until everyone but the one braced at the center slides off. It's fast and funny, each new sentence a surprise ("Jumping ahead--or somewhere, anyway--lands me on the square called Kierkegard"), and with no discernable narrative continuity you settle back for the ride. And then, suddenly, you crack the code.

That is, you begin to discover patterns in what at first seemed a barrage of ideationally unrelated (and *unrelatable*) sentences, sentences which often as not seem to hover somewhere between sense and nonsense, as in this representative passage, the poem's opening:

And hands comb some one annual rainfall in the silence after laughter in Brandenburg. In the unlikely event, lust for salvation woos the marginals, looking for some surrogate Sunday won't remove come Monday. Contemplative, one head high on an ash-heap is in a telegram by way of Hello from Doncaster. The recurrence tells itself over and over, it makes part of the instant, recognition. Event and clarity shake and make up in clear weather some little distance from the center of Fenwick. If we witness our world every evening from the remove of its circumference, how are we identical with ostlers in jodphurs when the iamb kept hoofing it along? Gluing frames of film together, an editor means to indicate either the passage of time or simultaneous occurrences in Hooverville.

There are all sorts of local details of language working against the disparateness of these sentences, knitting the fabric together: "rainfall"/"clear weather"/"clarity," "remove" (verb)/"remove" (noun), "event"/"Event," "center"/"circumference," "Sunday"/"Monday"/"the passage of time," "hoofing"/"Hooverville." (The fact that one does not notice such incidental rhymes in no way diminishes their presence, nor their effectiveness in creating the sort of casual and random patterning effects which operate throughout *Indictable Suborners*: in a listener's or reader's experience of any work,

unnoticed effects are more effective--and more valuable--than noticed ones.) There is also, moreover, a systematic (though again at this point hardly perceptible) recurrence of place names which, as it continues, makes the poem something of a travelogue whose itinerary includes points on the map most of us probably have never heard of, let alone read: Brandenburg, Doncaster, Fenwick, Hooverville, Jinnah, Licata, Potter's Valley, Redwood City, Vukovar, Shanghai, Zelenogradsk, Atwater, Cedar Rapids, Ethelbert, etcetera. The list goes on and on, insistently, arbitrarily and yet not, for it is itself part of the poem's principle organizing structure, the pattern of a sequential linking of letters in the alphabet. Again, one doesn't notice what one doesn't notice, at least at first, that the work is determined methodically from a to b to c ("And...Brandenburg...Contemplative...Doncaster...Event...Fenwick...Gluing...Hooverville")--seven complete circuits through the alphabet (five in prose and two in verse, with an empty "analphabetic" sentence in the first four prose sections intervening between each of the sentences whose beginning and ending elements figure in the pattern), with a short verse coda at the end.

A reader who sees the poem in print will undoubtedly pick up its chief constructional device far more quickly than a listener who hears the poem read aloud. Most listeners, I imagine, would not discover it at all. When I heard Bromige read the poem in San Francisco on August 31, 1985, at what I believe was its "premier," it wasn't until the seventh section, where, without an intervening sentence, the distance between the linked letters shortens, that I was struck by the suddenly obvious concatenation:

*Visibly, the trouble with this mode grows with every sentence; various it isn't, and for why? Explanations vary, but not much: the social I is hub to every spoke, within then a circumference, painted (why not) yellow. Zero...*

(When I mentioned my revelation to Bromige after the reading he seemed pleased but also surprised that I had cracked the poem's code, since, as he said, it would be far more apparent to a reader who could see the words than to a listener who could not.) The question is not, in any case, who can piece together the evidence of a series of aural or visual clues, or under what circumstances the discovery of the overall pattern first occurs, but what those clues and the impulse behind them have to do with the poem and what else goes on in it.

The fact that *Indictable Suborners* is built upon an alphabetical pattern of repetition external to and independent of its substance--a pattern that is at once simple, mechanical, and completely predictable (and at one point at least implicitly referred to: "But all writing IS spelling, except for the illiterate oral tradition!")--suggests something important about that substance. For the poem's substance, by which I mean its ideational content as distinct from the formal structure it comes clothed in, is anything but mechanical, predictable, etc. Quite the contrary, the substance of each new sentence unit, though it may simultaneously participate in the on-going alphabetical scheme, is radically discontinuous from whatever precedes and follows it. This means that when we look at any extended passage from the poem we find two conflicting structural principles operating at once: the alphabetical matrix, which creates order within each whole section, and the local events of each sentence, whose randomness creates an equally urgent



disorder of the parts within that whole. Here, for example, is the end of the third section, where the letters t, u, v, w, x, y, and z work to bring closure in one system even though the sentences in which these letters occur have apparently nothing to do with closure, with each other, or with anything that has come before or after this passage:

*Tux adjusted, the tenor hums under his breath ("Falling in lurv is jurst an infantile fahancy") preparatory to entertaining the human beings of a service club in Uxbridge. I sat for one hour, studying the candle burn down in the skull; then the lights came back on. Verification means the same in Paris as it means in Wellington. The translator, having weighed the conflicting demands of his task, remembered the word "version" and relieved his sigh of a heave. Xenophobia steadied the hand and aim of the follower of the bearded prophet in Yemen. The clear expression of mixed feelings was frequently what we were after. Zero either leads to further instances of itself, or back to the// beginning.*

With each sentence unit turning upon what Bromige calls at one point its own "INTRICATE DELIGHTS," whatever and however incidental those may be ("THIS SENTENCE HAVING RESOLVED ITSELF AT THE OUTSET TO MAINTAIN UPPERCASE CONSISTENCY WHATEVER THE PROVOCATION DENIES ITSELF THE INTRICATE DELIGHTS OF LITTLE A AND LITTLE G"), the poem invites us to turn full attention to the moment by moment events of language which constitute the text.

Some of those events occur in statements which sound like history with a twist ("Kicked out of bed for having a job, the farmhand attempted to murder his alarmclock in an attic in Licata") or history condensed to the pithiness of a headline ("Rascals festoon maples with tp on Graduation Night in Saskatoon," "Marmorial splendor for an alabaster episode"). And some lie in statements which sound like straightforward facts of life ("Three dried barleycorns = one inch, and a foot is a foot," "The itchy patch on today's hand is yesterday's poison oak") or not so straightforward facts of life ("For dinner tonight there will be hams and eggs in Gore," "That clock so long in the family its ticking feels part of the home is a machine," "Urine trickles down the leg of a person historically present in the intense pre-occupation of a doorway in Voorst"). Much of the poem sounds like narrative, sometimes straightforward ("Next day she came back -- why?," "He tapes their loudnesses of early morning (the power-saws, power-mowers, power-drills) and plays them back out the window with the volume all the way up at midnight") but most often askew, either because of some trompe l'oeil effect of language ("Visible to no one, a beckoning youth winced with the iciness as he placed his other foot into the identical river one foot already stood in, near Wilderness Peak," "Perhaps he had gone too far, mused an unmetaphorical fellow in (or no longer in) Quebec," "Hints of the new burst into a linguistic atlas (alas) wearing winklepickers in Innishull") or some bizarre twist of details which inevitably throws the story off:

*Zebra-stripes distinguish these elegant models, studying to marry indolent to insolent, learning to manifest the hic of haeccity (sic) someplace downtown in an anonymous settlement in early Minoan// Aegea*

*Ought the forms of thought be available to be bought, in their translucent pervasiveness, or ought... but the octogenarian trailed off into an instance of obliviousness in Port Moresby*

*Drunk on religion, the born-again wake the neighbors' baby as they leave the (illegal -- check the zoning) group home chanting "Stand up, stand up for Jesus" while through the baby's father's brain runs the phrase Shut up, shut up for Christ's sake*

*Nodding in the halflight (nodding at all), the ikons looked uncommonly tall, while a rat with a sail attached (how to enjoy one's cruelty and benefit humanity at the same time) to its tail looked to be wearing its master's toga, and the commemorative trees, under which it was once possible to holler and be heard, as if people could lengthen their arms by misspelling anatomy, and palms do wave in Odessa.*

Sometimes the narrative mode switches from third to first person, as in "Went to the mall and thought, these multi-valent voices are the brooks in William Wordsworth's books; came home and imagined Theodor Adorno catching Sebastian from "Brideshead Revisted" on "Love Boat" with two chimps in his bed." In sentences like this, Bromige writes what sounds like straightforward autobiography, what he calls at one point in the poem "Autobiographical writing--I go to the bank every Friday": "On Fridays I go to the bank, and am pleased to observe that, since I complained about them to the metermaid, the phone company's trucks are no longer parked all day long on overdue city meters with orange cones in the street to confuse the citizenry of a place provincial enough to still care about such minor effects." To represent his own life in thought in words as ordinary as these, Bromige states near the beginning of the poem (in a passage that also refers to going to the bank on Friday) "depends for its esthetic merit completely upon the perspicacity of the person, unless objective truth has meant for her liquidation in the sensation of a current event extraordinary enough to hypnotize anyone." Objective truth, of course, in the world of this poem is highly problematic, subject as it is to Bromige's shaping intelligence, which aims constantly to play with our expectations of coherence and continuity both within the sentence and from sentence to sentence. And it is exactly this impulse, to play--with words and words' ability to shape and discover world--that lies most directly behind the fracturing--that confusion of sense with nonsense--which takes place throughout the poem.

In his essay "Some Fields the Track Goes Through," Bromige quotes Adorno on the virtues of "Irresponsible play," which "seeks to overcome the ruinous seriousness of whatever one happens to be."<sup>1</sup> Whether "seriousness" is in all cases "ruinous" I'm not sure, but it seems clear that there are no completely "serious" statements to be found in *Indictable Suborners*, whose title itself suggests deception, secrecy, and outright lies. In another essay, on the distinction between poetry and philosophy, Bromige's account of his own use of deception in *Tight Corners & What's Around Them* (Black



Sparrow, 1974) offers a rationale for the playfulness in language we find here: "The tone is deliberately deceptive to remind a reader of the tricks we can (be) play(ed) (upon) with language. It reminds by putting one through the experience, as well as by indicating it."<sup>2</sup> One sentence, for example, literally puts us through the experience of a missing letter on the typewriter: "H was the key broken on her machine when she wrote that letter (I've been c atting about the roug ed-in in t inking wis ing i weren't so ampered by t ese tig ts on my t ig s) I found quite intriguing." In another, an overabundance of abstract language does to a reader/listener what it does to the poor "cogitator in Mogadouro" whose story it presents:

*Logically fallacious, the argument that an indeterminacy principle implies the existence of a specific value of a dynamic variable for a physical system whose quantum state is not an eigenstate of the hypermaximal Hermitean operator representing this variable in the formalism of the theory swayed a cogitator in Mogadouro.*

But as its title suggests, each sentence in *Indictable Suborners* is itself literally a "suborner"--a false witness whose playful deceptions invite us to experience the delights of ordinary (and extraordinary) language bursting its seams. Thus, "Sanskrit says he did going not he went; you're the one who goes not you will go; the breeze blew a book shut not he lost his place in Tanglewood." Is this true? The first two assertions sound as though they might be, although at this point in the poem I doubt any reader could be expected to take them at face value, and losing one's place in Tanglewood simply blows the whole thing out of the tub. If it isn't true, why pay attention, why should we care? This is a real question, the answer to which, though simple, deserves some note. We care about how Sanskrit renders ordinary statements in English because the translation--given that it occurs in this text--is bound to be unpredictable, shocking, and fun. It is also bound to trace some thread of sense through whatever short circuit it leads us (when the book shuts one loses one's place), to discover a pattern of meaning outside the range we might have thought possible in this instance.

Bromige's remarks in an essay on the work of Clark Coolidge are relevant here: "CC, writing, is lost/found in his child's play, rearranging his magic objects until a pattern emerges."

often discover some inner necessity for almost saying over what has just been said. Consider, for example, the ostentatiously insistent pattern of repetition in "Finally (finally [finally] ), continuity at last (at last [ditto] ) found (located [discovered] ) asylum (refuge [shelter] in ([no] wiser for its arrival) Geyserville"--a sentence that investigates random "continuity" by setting forth a three-part echo which shifts gradually across the space of the sentence, from exact replication in "at last (at last [ditto] )," to repetition of idea by means of synonyms in "found (located [discovered] )," to instances where the pattern repeats itself not by words but marks of punctuation, in the parentheses "( [no] wiser for its arrival)". So also we find in another sentence that a reiteration of certain random phrases with their word order randomly scrambled has the effect of "putting one through the experience" of hedging one's bets, i.e. having it both ways at once: "Everybody who is anybody (anybody who is everybody) who has eyes to see (who has to see eyes) and money to travel can study some figure of justice (and justice to study can travel some figure of money), but why be so agreeable?"

Within the matrix of alphabetically linked letters which gives *Indictable Suborners* its overall structural unity, Bromige asserts an aesthetic of randomness by enacting it in local events of language such as these. In writing a work of narrative discontinuity he opens his hand, abandoning himself to the intricacies of whatever content was present at the moment of its writing. The world enters the work at every point--as complexity and measure and form--and its infinite variety is in turn mirrored and measured and shaped by the words given to the poet to present it. Bromige himself suggests as much in the essay on Coolidge: "The content it ["Weathers"] offers as its evidence could be, theoretically, anything--although in practice can't be but what CC happens, projectively, upon."<sup>4</sup> As in computer-generated fractals, where the reduplication of triangles in a pattern on a screen together with the random shifting of the positions of their vertices can create a three-dimensional illusion of space (Mount Whitney in the Sierra Nevada, say, as easily as craters on the moon), the multiplication of random events in the sentences that make up *Indictable Suborners* in effect brings the raw material of the poet's life onto the screen of the page, there to be decoded by the reader/listener. Moreover, the work demands from both poet and reader/listener the same stance of openness towards its words, for as Bromige says in his essay on poetry and philosophy, "One may not stand above the words, commanding them to mean what one would have them mean, but instead has to exist among them, granting them their autonomous polysemy, their gratuitousness."



1. David Bromige, "Some Fields the Track Goes Through," *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, 8 (June 1979), reprinted in *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), p. 57.
2. David Bromige, "Philosophy & Poetry: A Note," *Poetics Journal*, 3 (May 1983), p. 22-23.
3. David Bromige, "Clark Coolidge, Weathers," *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, 12 (June 1980), reprinted in *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, p. 215.
4. Bromige, p. 215.
5. Bromige, p. 20.

## BILL VARTNAW

*P-E-A-C-E* by David Bromige, Tuumba Press, 1981, \$3.00

...I, on the other hand, am more concerned to show the disjunctions inherent in the field of discourse itself. It's like I've moved from tight corners to perfect circles. Still so tight. It's all so every word utterly true, & at one & the same time, utterly flip. Shiny as glass . . . slippery as glass.

--David Bromige, *My Poetry*, p. 14

Yes. That's one way I would describe how *P-E-A-C-E* works. The narrative is a reminiscence in advance about the 1980's seen through anecdotes of some of the poets & their poetry of this decade: Niecesleeper, W.S. Canal, Beach Stinson, Pearl Boehme, Matt Battenburg, Millicent Wrongsong and, of course, Art-Dave Brimbody. They're all here & it is my contention that Bromige is not presenting the different poetries of the decade but the different interests of consideration for himself. It is here that the poet's use of disjunction mentioned above comes in; the account is processed through a memory akin to a house of mirrors:

...The era had a milky density, tepid and torpid, mildly disgusting like a one-acre homesite; this disgust had spoken of the rebuttal to its final vestige of candid spontaneity, except that the toothache of the times looped a scarf over everybody's ears.

We found out in his earlier *My Poetry*, self-parody is one of Bromige's fortes. It is for this reason, better call it a hunch, that I feel inclined to use one Bromige text to shed light on another. This much having been established, two points from "My Poetry" can be brought out (I should remark that the poet constructed this piece from reviews of his work; here Ron Silliman, Charles Bernstein and Michael Davidson help out):

1) Opacity...is the magnet, what brings anyone into the work of another, the announcement of the new within a specific matrix... The constant erasure of signs for presence leaves the poem as the interstitial agent in the service of intentionality, & the uncertainties & doubts which Keats saw as the essential conditions for poetic creation become the characteristics of generation in any form. The non-instrumental, which gives instance of what stands for itself & so not a call to revolution or a representation of the struggle & how it is peopled, but an instance of it... (p.15)

2) Everywhere there is the tension of an incomplete sentence, an ambiguous antecedent, an unnatural act, an illogical causality... (p.16)



From the first point, we can deduce an interest, at least a consideration, toward opacity. What you see is what you get? Okay, but don't step on that rug, there's no floor below it. His use of disjunctions, if I may meld a couple of definitions from Noah's bible, a *causing to separate to create a logic presenting alternatives*. Translation: expect something else. I am reminded of an analogous situation in the world of painting: Cezanne's still lifes, where tension is created through spatial disjunctions--a table broken by a cloth is shown from two different angles. Cezanne attempted to penetrate the surface of what he saw, looking for an inner logic of nature. He sometimes referred to his paintings as "constructions after nature" --a sort of geometrical short-hand that allowed the viewer an awareness of structural elements & also the continued recognition of the "natural" objects they delineate. The effect is synergistic. What Bromige creates, too, is multi-faceted--as is reality. He writes about a challenging (problematic) & identifiable world & often supplies what amounts to teasers for the reader who hopes to find insights (or incitement) about the complex & just as that last word should click into a comfortable place, producing an effect quite similar to a scoreboard's pyrotechnical reaction to the home team's homerun, there is a shift in syntax & we are left with a bi-lingual, laughing Finn. This is what Bromige refers to as "presence," a there there on the page that requires the perceiver's involvement. A questioning is in order: an interest:

*The two ranges, of sound and placement, are in accord with the twin column raised before the Temple of Monolog, the one dedicated to agitators, the other to the receptors of totality, and these two, in whose doubling we discover their thought, infinite and extensible, whose chain unpacked a shopping cart at the supermarket in order to ring each item up, tended to reflect the Cosmos as a Being with clipped wings, universally comprehensible, tuned to receive and absorb at the same rate anywhere as if it were all the same, and not more fickle than the winds, many of which prevail.*

Since this passage from P-E-A-C-E has just appeared before your eyes, let's take a look at it. Given a paraphrase of 'there are two sides to every story', the agitators and the receptors of totality, r.o.t. = 'the establishment?', the story is that knowledge compiled by these two pillars of social order, and, perhaps, some diaphanous middle ground between them, represent "the infinite & extensible Cosmos." What's wrong with this picture? The poet is lucid. Both sides have a vision of 'reality' based on mechanistic descriptions of classified individuals. Example: this is not one particular chicken; this is chicken, \$1.49 a pound. & before the Temple of Monolog, each side justifies the other's limited viewpoint, or at least creates an atmosphere of amnesia toward any other possibility, with impassioned screams of "I'm right & I'm willing to kill to continue to be right." (At least, this is my reading of the passage at this time.)

Before I quote another passage, I should go back to the number two quotation above & point out an effect I think the poet is trying to achieve. Tension. & by this, I mean drink twenty cups of espresso in a two hour period. Taking the last quote, Bromige shifts through many different fields of perspective (philosophy, weather, architecture, supermarkets) within a very short space. If this is a poetry where the main theme is slowly revealed using counters from a dominant metaphorical image, such as Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar", etc., then I completely missed it. What I see is a continually shifting surface where you find footholds well enough, but you really wouldn't want to plan a picnic there. The expected ants might end up being brahma (Bromige?) bulls. Instead this alternative vision of 'world' offers itself and perhaps, through itself, and some effort on the reader's part, some new penetration into one's own personal reality. It does not scream at you "This is the way the world is!", it merely takes what is familiar and unfamiliarizes it.

So far I have concentrated on structure, Bromige's use of the disjunction, to create this live-wire tension. But, shit, the images, by themselves, stir the juices as well:

*...Men met that house who became one hundred per cent screeching romantics with heads as white all the time as the true trivial stammering of weather, petit bourgeoisie if only that their heads, too large for their mothers, and their hands, unused to manual labor, were foreclosed on and sold on the grounds that the true-hearted and nicer people, and even the worst, lying, bovine, cuntstruck supporters of the aging chancellor, were the ones doing it to them, and burnt to a crisp in a blond grotto their innocent destroyers had voted for in a photograph...*

*...And the more diligently they went into debt, the more proudly they displayed their bodies in the city square, until this came to be seen the better Christianity. "And if it rain stained glass, it is better to be a transept window." And they said, "Better an immodest son of mummy, than titilate an ocelot", and they held that to solicit spit from your sibling's mouth, as long as neither is in a sitting position, while peeking into a cave, mumbo-jumboing while smoking pencils and pretending to be a woodpecker,...*

Reading the first of these passages, even if you don't know what is meant exactly, the use of language easily identifies anger as the emotion communicated. Anger is the dominant emotion of this work, but like any reality not encumbered by explanation, it too is multi-faceted. The anger in the second passage is muted with humor and carried to the absurd. This is the "non-instrumental" referred to in the opacity passage passed by impassively a while ago. Bromige writes from which he speaks, not just about which he speaks. He explores his anger and its capacities unselfconsciously,



## A NOTE ON YOU SEE

he expresses it because it is a part of him. He doesn't isolate it under laboratory conditions or feel guilty about it. His poetry is a re-lease of energy, a new covenant with his unclipped Being.

Is *P-E-A-C-E* about peace? You could make that assumption from the title, the final "poem" also called *P-E-A-C-E* by Art-Dave Brimbody & the dedication to John (Give Peace A Chance) Lennon. However, the anger of the text invites you to open up & redefine "peace" as an active endeavor (as opposed to the passive, reactive opposite of war & aggression) & to confide a peace with yourself & the many aspects the concept of self includes. This is a personal & intimate statement that reveals Bromige by writing the world he knows, not about the poet. He doesn't allow a closed system. Brimbody writes at the beginning of the acrostic, *P-E-A-C-E*:

*So you think peace exists within the group  
Heaven has a contract out on what's outside  
Alien, Aryan, Arab stir the strife  
Look at your debt to them  
Outsiders existing merely to make you cohere  
Messages that each decode the same*

*Every art, inquiry, act, intent, aim at some good  
It follows there are many ends  
Rhetorics, and wars  
Each judges what he knows with what he knows  
None disputes that happiness is best  
Excellence excercised appropriate to virtue*

Bromige's poetry, for me, becomes a poetry of possibility. That is why the opaque style, the break from the poem as a "window into the world." Once the break is made, anything is possible. We don't know where Bromige stands exactly (unless he ironically gives us a hint through Brimbody) & we do, as he constantly interrupts our consciousness with disturbing situations and images. This, obviously, is not simple, logical discourse but communication through a multiplicity of means, a word-dance open to interpretation. The poet points out choice. He brings us face to face with "presence," the moment when desire determines our position or reflects it. There is never any doubt as to the poet's involvement; his intention is consistent throughout. & that is why the book works.

Parts One and Two of *You See*, a collaboration between David Bromige and Opal Nations, were published recently as a chapbook by Exempli Gratia Press in San Francisco.<sup>1</sup> This writing is complex, with apparent references trailing back and forth through the long (15 line) sentence units to connect with antecedents syntactically hovering in a reader's memory. I like to focus my attention on the immediately present pleasures offered by the sense and sound of the phrases that make up these sentences. The length and complexity of the sentence units help to deter me from the compulsion towards overall meaning. The phrases "illuminate the cellars of insomnia." *Insomnia* in this poem is that realm where one is haunted, kept from healing sleep and dream and refreshment, by single, overarching meaning, linear insistences having beginnings, middles and ends. (One wakes at 3 a.m. and sees one's life diminished by such phantoms of conclusion. One is trapped beneath a "millwheel grinding stones of desperate significance.")

Such single-minded overarching meaning--you know, the paraphrasable kind found in the poetry of "Xeroxville," and "narcoleptic academics,"--cannot be rendered in this poem because such concerns would limit what this writing is capable of doing, and does. This writing allows (and encourages) the reader to stay attracted to the individual pleasures and truths discoverable in the local units, the minims of attention. One resists, to withstand the tug of the sentence's headlong rush. This too is a pleasure, almost a kind of kinesthetic sensation, like prolonging the precious moments before an orgasm. (You're going to get there, and you want to, and you don't want to; it's out of your control.) For something in the length of these sentences frees the authors to corral a polyphony of sound/sense reverberations. Alliterative components accentuate the semantic interactions, and suggest to the reader that he may assume a procedure akin to that of the authors, who let sound lead them to this plethora of local meanings, and insulate them from ultimate destinations.

From the beginning one is alerted to how it might best be read: "You See// In a manner of speaking, much as you literally manage that chemical process"--by yourself. For it is you, or me, the reader, who finds in this, and perhaps any writing, "your hunch" and "the relations/you make of it to the various hypotheses/extant in your field of consciousness. . . ." which have "as yet to be declared by (declare itself to) you." And readers are gently advised "to be clear about it at the outset,/ the method of seeing, since it will determine/everything." What will be determined by how. Best discard habitual modes of seeing/reading if these will not afford an opening up to, an ongoing receptivity to, the individual treasures to be found in *You See*. I am speaking of a receptivity that focuses on the words and phrases at hand or eye/mind, and not on the potential meaning they might collectively affect at the conclusion. Time enough to consider that when one gets there. Historically, this leads back to the "willing suspension of disbelief." Except that I find this poem so enjoyable, so alluring, it's hardly a question of willing. The



language continually draws me back to the poem. Yes, perhaps to figure it out, but if for that reason then only because the possibility of figuring it out promises the greater possibility of increasing pleasure taken in the moment; and each new reading of the poem, if motivated by a greed to get it all, nonetheless brings further pleasure.

This poem may be "about" the writing of itself. I think it was important for the authors to determine their methods of seeing. To elect "to sign on for this course in hypnotherapy." Then, having cleared the decks, to let it rip, extemporizing continuity with the wild inventiveness of Brothers. The end, after all, was determined. As soon as the end of one of the 15-line sentences coincided with the end of one of the 14-line stanzas, the coach was going to turn into a pumpkin. We're all going to die. Poems are finite constructs. That or those facts once faced, settled, agreed to, one can begin to live.

Finally, here's a collection of some of the lines I most enjoyed: "so polished as to/floor, one's vanity can trace its outlines, crotch and titty. . . ." One half-concealed phrase I hear: so polished as to floor one's vanity. "Imagination's head bobs in Reality's lap. . . ." And thence sucking reality, eating out reality ". . . about this point, o tireless dowser. . . ." Yes, and about this point in the evening is a great time for creativity, Imagination's realm. "calculated to pluck, first, her nipples/into specificity. . . ." If ever an image and an abstract term went together and fed each other with the rightness of their pairing up, it is an image of succulent nipples with the term *specificity*. What, after all, has more specificity? Of course, "pluck" is a tasty word here, too, and it does almost rime with fork, doesn't it? Again, "once you have signed on/for this course in hypnotherapy": I like this phrase because it describes the poem in a way, or the reading of the poem in a way. "what later were discovered to have been her/muscles escape you like coiled pieces of surprise. . . ." The rippling units of the poem are its muscles, its pieces of surprise. They would have escaped me had I stayed oriented with my "accustomed ear," eye, and mind expecting immediately accessible meaning units readily framed in securely bundled grammatical structures. I suggest that readers take along their own snipping shears to gather the bouquets of meaning available here. "So the muse in a fortress suggests these galloping horses..." Listen to 'em go!

You See shows a knack for turning the everyday uses and meanings of language completely inside out. As the reader enters the beginnings of these long sentence units he finds delightful, even fascinating, combinations of sound and sense. Halfway through such lines it is as if the already novel contexts have begun to change, and suddenly the preceding words interact in one's memory and present experience in ways that seem paradoxical to how one was only beginning to expect or imagine they would interact. Yet, they still make exquisite sense. Just that the reader never looked at them that way before. They're like

shirts that have patterns that are a kind of optical illusion and one turns them inside out and they have patterns that are mirror opposite optical illusions. These shirts are a real gas.

1

Part Three will have appeared in *Paper Air* by now.



# CARL JENSEN

## DAVID BROMIGE: POET WITH A CONSCIENCE

David Bromige has an office two doors from mine on the third floor of Nichols Hall at Sonoma State University.

He is not one to make an issue of whom he is and so I knew little about him at the start, other than he taught in the Department of English. I was in Communication Studies.

As time passed, we came to exchange greetings and comments in the hallway, mostly of a political nature. It appeared that we shared a rather critical perspective of the political scene.

On occasion I would pass along results of a national media research project I conduct, titled *Project Censored*, which explores the failure of the major news media to fully inform the public of what is happening in society.

I knew David liked the academic muckraking activity I was involved in but I didn't realize how much until one day he gave me a copy of *P-E-A-C-E*.

Reading his work, I discovered several things--one, David was a poet; two, he had a social conscience; and three, he was telling people about the same kinds of political and social injustices that I was berating the mass media for not covering.

In presenting me with *P-E-A-C-E*, he thanked me "for the loan of a couple of facts..." I was delighted to find that he had incorporated some data from my media research in his poetry. I also was impressed with the skill with which he wove political commentary into his poetic work.

In 1982, David asked me for a complete copy of all the stories nominated for "best censored" of the previous year. He said he'd like to try something with them.

What he tried was to take a direct approach to converting traditional, and often-times dreary, news-style writing into eye-and-ear-appealing news-poetry without being guilty of practicing polemic political poetry.

The result was 16 news-poems drawn directly from the nominated stories. His introduction to the poems revealed his interest in muckraking as well as his desire to excite and inform:

*These poems are made almost verbatim from Carl Jensen's Project Censored for 1981, and thanks to him for all his hard work in the great cause of muckraking, an activity I have always found poetic, for poetry, too, means to excite us about something we were trying to forget, for example, transparent form.*

Titled *What Are The Stories We Don't Know About?*, the collection was an ingenious restructuring of typical news terminology into a poetic form. For me, it also was a discovery of how exciting poetry can be. Admittedly, previously I was of the "I may not know poetry but I know what rhymes" school.

I asked David what he planned to do with the series and he explained there really was no market for this kind of poetic muckraking.

Nonetheless, with his permission, I wrote a letter to Mark Dowie, then editor of *MOTHER JONES*, a leading investigative news magazine. I urged Mark to publish the poems which I described as "relevant, incisive, written-for-the-Mother-Jones-reader poetry."

I was surprised, although David was not, when the submission produced a rejection slip explaining that poetry was not *MOTHER JONES'* style.

Thus, this experiment with censored news poetry fulfilled its own thesis and David's poems received no coverage beyond a small circle of his colleagues.

The following selections -- "Alexander Haig Released a Color," "Nuclear Haiku," and "Terrorist Training Camps Are Not New" -- not only reveal David's exceptional creative skills, but also reveal how current and relevant those five-year-old issues still are today.

A political conscience and substance, leavened with poetic genius, can overcome form and style.

Thank you David Bromige.



Alexander Haig Released A Color

Alexander Haig released a color photograph  
As evidence of current Nicaraguan atrocities  
Against Miskito Indians, in reality,

A 1978 photo from the civil war.  
Our State Department trotted out  
A Nicaraguan guerrilla who, it turned out,

Wasn't trained in Ethiopia and Cuba.  
Robert White, Ambassador to El Salvador,  
Who said, "Informed debate helps judge

What should be done," was unceremoniously  
Fired by Reagan. There is considerable  
Evidence that this Administration

Tries to mislead us it's sworn to serve  
Into believing we are witnessing  
A massive takeover by communists

Of our neighbors to the south  
Whereas the real issue is a civil war  
Between the militarily-supported

Wealthy landowners, and poor peasants,  
Tired, hungry, huddled masses, the wretched  
Refuse of a teeming, homeless shore.

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MOTHER JONES, 6/81, "White Hand of Terror",  
Karen de Young; "Rereading Haig's Secret Documents,"  
Roger Burbach; 11/81, "Guatemala: The Muffled Scream",

Julia Preston; Ann Arbor News, 2/16/82, "Farmer, Nun  
Praise Junta in Nicaragua", Bonnie De Simone;  
Food First Action Alert, "Nicaragua: The Revolution

Was the Easy Part"; SF Chronicle, (UP), 3/3/82,  
"Haig 'Example' Was a Phony"; (UP), 3/13/82,  
"Captured Nicaraguan Jolts US State Department";

Hartford Courant, 4/1/82, "Ex-US Envoy  
Talks Bluntly on El Salvador"; the poet Lazarus,  
Inscribed Upon The Statue of Liberty, 1903.

Nuclear Haiku

Poseidon missile drops 17 feet  
50% detonate when dropped 13 inches  
Scotland was lucky

New Statesman, 11/27/81, Solomon & Campbell

164 kilograms enriched uranium missing  
200 tons uranium ore hijacked  
Quien sabe? Wer weiss?

Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 8/81, Cochran

1200 nuclear weapons, most in urban areas (some on faults)  
Radioactive spills from classified naval records  
In what we knew as California

New West, 4/81, Kaplan

High LET radiation not so bad as once believed  
Low LET nowhere so good  
There's much more of the latter

Science, 5/22/81, Marshal

Radioactive ventings from below-ground blasts  
By 1990, at least 40 had occurred  
DOE monitoring stations switched off during tests

Washington Monthly, 1/81, Brim & Condon

Trash dumped in ocean  
Ate by fish  
Now you are hungry and glowing

Mother Jones, 7/81, Foster

Humbolt Bay nuclear reactor shut-down  
230,000 years needed for safe storage  
Don't know where we'll find them

Mother Jones, 1/81, Ross



## Terrorist Training Camps Are Not New

Terrorist training camps are not new to Florida.  
Camp Libertad, 5 miles outside Miami, trains men  
For the invasion of Nicaragua. The Neutrality Act,

Which states that it's unlawful

To provide or prepare a means for any military enterprise  
Against any government with which the U.S. is at peace,

Is violated by these camps, whose acceptance

By the Department of Justice is evidence

Our Administration knows of and condones this crime.

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Pacifica National News Service, L.A., 9/9/81,  
"The Miami Connection," by Ronnie Loveller.

# MICHAEL ANDERSON

David Bromige: Residency at New Langton Arts, July 10, 12, 14, 1984

## THE FIRST EVENING

Unease set the tone of the first evening--a tone which propagated itself and became, by the third night of the residency, a most striking instance of productive self-inquiry. David Bromige's initial hesitancy and deliberation with regard to the material he was to present was itself explicatory of the residency's title: "How to Talk About Important Matters." His attitude towards the evening's topic was best expressed by his own avowal that "I am not a scholar; I'm an authority on my relation to 'The Frankfurt School...'".

Bromige began with a quote by George Bernard Shaw to the effect that, every seven years, the cells of the body are totally replaced through regeneration, and so "as a matter of materialism" one is no longer the "same" person they were seven years previous. This remark was made to acknowledge that it had been seven years since he had given a "Talk," one of the first in the series. Then he stated: "I'm interested in putting forth a similar argument to Shaw's, but on less scientific grounds, and I intend, unlike Shaw, to negate it." For what remains is individuality as such, which "declares itself virtually from the word go," by which we find that "other means than intuition tell us that the self each is owes its persistence to something other than ideology." Genetics aside, however, Bromige intended to speak of "what is susceptible to alteration," i.e., one's selfhood. He illustrated this with an autobiographical sketch, focusing on "two events" that "accelerated my estrangement from my parents and thus from the ideology they could not help but be the carriers of."

The first was his being awarded "one of the so-called foundation scholarships to a public school, i.e. a private school, prestigious with tradition." The second: "I heard my own voice on record" at an exhibition dealing with technological innovations. The interplay of these two occasions focused around his being made self-conscious, both times, of his lower-class London accent, and thus of his entrapment in the caste system of British dialects. His assimilationist impulses, spurred by a desire to be *status idem* with his classmates, led to a gradual "phasing out" of his lower-class accent. Vacations at his sister's home in Canada also aided this modification. After high school, year-long stints on farms in Northern England and Sweden also affected his speech. When he reached California his accent, now a melange of influences, led him to be taken for a Bostonian, "though no one in Boston has made that mistake."

Likewise, poetic "dialects" have been assimilated in Bromige's work. "I've consciously identified my writing with North American means, ends, and predicaments;" hence Bromige is "gratified" to be called (by Ron Silliman) "a major American poet." That such assimilation is never final is recognised by Bromige, who, while noting that he might have "gone further" in "becoming American" had justly "altered as little as was commensurate with the need to be understood, to make myself literally 'hearable' in my adopted milieu." This, he adds, is not simply "mimicry" but an attempt not to be "misrepresented."



By extension, the writer-artist works within and against these exigencies. Bromige quoted the psychoanalyst Otto Rank as stating that the artist "makes use of the art ideology the culture supplies" while opposing it "with all the vigor of his personality." Creation arises on one side "by some prior portion of the artist's ego, dead ideology," and on the other by "the collective, to which he longs to surrender." Thus, "between these poles the dynamics of creative life are charged." Bromige himself stated his intent to address the audience as a "commonality" while being attuned as well to "the varying degree of overlap among us all." Yet by assuming this "commonality" (what can also be called "the tacit dimension"--a term from Michael Polanyi, quoted by Bromige) he is in danger of 'becoming unbalanced': "sooner or later all assumptions trip us up." "What I come to do is partial, partially kept," he quoted Robert Creeley as writing, but added that, in balancing out these two attitudes "that's no cause to valorise the so-thought 'private realm' above the communal."

David Bromige then observed that the "war of ideologies" in effect today complicates the neat formulations of Otto Rank mentioned earlier. He chose to personify the ideological play which dominates our society, the sociopolitical constructs that invest the "private realm" with its "communality," in the poetry of Marvin Bell. Bell's 'poetics' employ, according to Bromige, "much that is inappropriate in America's address vis-a-vis the world." In claiming that he writes "so that anyone can understand him" Bell manifests, in Bromige's words, "a totally unreal address;" he comes from the "era which believes that poetry is that which one dresses up autonomous thought in." Bell straddles an uncomfortable position between self-valorising intentionality and emasculated discourse, as evidenced by his confession that he'd dabbled in "experimental poetry" but found it to modify content "irretrievably." Thus, Bromige observed, it is between the Kantian notion that "reality conforms to the forms of thought" and "a sort of debased common sense" that Bell "swings to and fro." Broadening his scope, while historically situating this critique, he went on to point out a parallel development between the Romantics (Keats, Shelly, et.al.) and their response to the empiricism of Hume, Descartes, and Locke; this response has been amplified by such "Neo-Romantics" as Creeley, Olson, and Duncan, who, influenced by the linguists Whorf and Sapir, "use the thesis of many languages, a language per person." Using Sartrean terminology, Bromige noted that in this self-valorisation "one can never surmount the 'pour-soi' ["for-itself"] to get to the 'en soi' ["in-itself"]." By their insistence on "characterological consistency" these poets, he said, lose sight of the commodity aspect of writing, that is, those pre-determined (yet within each "realm" semi-autonomous) unities which Michel Foucault termed "discursive formations."<sup>1</sup> The "illusion of being an outsider," as Bromige put it, leads to the situation he described through a quote by Jürgen Habermas: "The identification of authenticity with an extra-social selfhood encourages private self-indulgence and a tendency to treat society and public responsibility as external vexations."

At the other extreme, Bromige seemed to be indicating, was the depoliticisation, through a 'universalism', of poetics: "The counter-culture denotes an attempt to return to a pre-linguistic stage, and to accomplish the conscious production of paleo-symbols," exemplified,

he thought, by the writing of Clayton Eshelman. The anthologist Jerome Rothenberg might also be added to the list of those who yearn for a "primordial, global" poetics, in the unity of an "origin" which is irretrievable for the simple reason that it does not exist. Bromige would then, for "sincerity as man standing by his word," characteristic of the viewpoint just mentioned, "with its blindness towards the degree to which the self has been made over by society," substitute "man or woman standing beside his or her words, a stance which is more likely than the post-modern to achieve that participation of the reader as co-author."

Bromige went on to mention two members of the Frankfurt School who had been influential for him: Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse. In this regard he brought up two terms from Adorno, "commitment" and "tendency" (these and other tenets of the Frankfurt School used in the residency will be part of a general summary in the next section). Tendency is a sort of social pre-determinism; Marcuse, Bromige noted, "has exposed the absurdity of the philosophical theorem that it is always possible to accept or reject martyrdom." In his poetry, Bromige finds that commitment (the antipode of tendency) takes the form of an ambivalence between "declaration as protest" and a "declaration of irony". He illustrated this by reading a poem he'd composed from journalistic sources; the tendential character of its narrative style, by reproducing the "information" it was based on, reproduced its ideological "meta-narrative" as well. Thus the "declaration of protest" is co-opted in its very expression. This in fact parallels the "poetics" implicit in Marvin Bell's writing--the status of narrative formations as such goes unquestioned, and so is free to duplicate the dominant ideology *in toto*; Bromige felt his poem had failed in like manner.

More effective, he felt, would be the "declaration of irony"; his example was the slogan on the T-shirt he wore:

Life is brief

---

it says here

Presentation is here simultaneously eclipsed by self-reflexivity--the slogan 'cancels itself out' by arguing against its own declarative, with the addition of "--it says here." This in turn makes a case for the inevitability of the ironic in attempting to find the "authority" of the text. Bromige's T-shirt brought to mind the famous cartesian saying "Masked I go forward" (*larvatus prodeō*).<sup>2</sup> Self-reflexivity in an ironic mode, in its immediacy of revelation and concealment, is a prevalent aspect of Bromige's poetics, as the following pages will show; however, the assertion can eclipse the reflective irony, since Bromige does not valorize the one over the other.



## THE SECOND EVENING

The evening began with a short reading by Bromige of some of his poetry; the main topic was to be his poetics, in particular his relation to such poets as Robert Creeley and Robert Duncan.

Bromige's poetics, he stated, could be likened to a situation where the reader is presented with "two truths, each ground to the other's figure; one attends from one to the other, then from the other to the one." He adds: "I want that assertion, and I want that negation also, in such form as does not cancel them out--and I don't think it does." This asserting and negating, canceled and yet preserved, should be familiar to readers acquainted with the Heideggerian notion of an ontological suspicion towards "Being" (a term which "means" but does not semantically fulfill, and is not adequate to, this meaning). Since (as in a syllogistic argument) two terms are at work, even when only one concept is "simply" sublated or sublimated to itself--or put *sous rature*, in Derrida's terms--the resulting tension provides for a metaphysical suspense.<sup>3</sup> If the sense of a "language game" is added, the effect is much like the title given by Bromige to a series of poetic one-liners: "Ping-Pong." Here are a few examples of this call-and-response piece wherein language plays *solitaire*:

no bodies hanging from the lampposts

---

we must be in the wrong neighborhood

---

keep it to yourself

---

write it down

---

keep it to yourself

---

white it out

---

with nothingness rattling the door

---

i draw a series of perfect blanks

---

sentimental fool

---

heartless wretch

Bromige's indebtedness to Robert Creeley was the next topic of discussion. Creeley had, along with Robert Duncan and Charles Olson, "brilliantly resolved a trouble" which was characterized by Creeley: "During the 40's poems were equivalent to cars insofar as many could occur of similar pattern, there was an assumption of 'mold,' of a means which could be gained beyond the literal fact of writing here and now." Bromige noted that "Content gives form to the Creeley of this period," yet he wondered at the "traditional-looking" aspect of Creeley's work. He questioned the implications of the words "here and now" in suggesting a spontaneity unmediated by prior formulations, although Creeley's poetry does not give evidence of this. Bromige concluded that Creeley innovated "from within [traditional forms]." Creeley, Bromige went on to note, was interested in what he termed "the prime." "No prime has an opposite, it exists by virtue of its own nature. It recognizes only what is relevant to itself." This "autonomous" metaphysical entity Creeley invokes has a long history, under many guises: from the "monadologies" of Leibniz and Giordano Bruno to the eidetic reduction of Husserl and the "en-soi" of Sartre. It also shares in the failings of these projects, inasmuch as it does not question its own status as a human construct, preferring to look for it "in nature". In Bromige's words, Creeley, "with an apocalyptic vision, characteristic of the Projectivists," "... wants to abolish opposites, that rule which has plotted the range of man's values backwards for 3,000 years." Yet with this the "practice of the self gets valorized into some sort of oracle."

He read from Creeley's "The Pattern," and, commenting on the lines "I // speak to / hear myself / speak," pointed out that his "prohibition of the opposites" had led Creeley to a sort of hermeneutic *circus vitiosus*, one which of necessity falters on the audibility or legibility of the sign, which externalizes and breaks the autonomy of signification. Such a (in Creeley's case) "speech-based" poetics bears this fracture as a matter of course--the assertion consumes itself, and, in the absence of a mode of reception (without which *no* signification is possible) the very idea of Creeley's "prime" becomes absurd. More subtle is an aspect of Bromige's poetics which might be called "passive interpretation". This is indicated by his stating that he would "sooner hear someone talking aloud [to him- or her-self]," than to or at *him*, since the speaker would have no "designs" on the listener overhearing. In our society, those who speak aloud to themselves (at least publicly) are considered, perhaps unfortunately, the "pathetic social cases" (Bromige), which elicited the comment from an audience member, that this veered from "poetics proper." Yet the "proper" (from the Latin "one's own") is precisely what constitutes poetics as such, the inevitability of bringing one's interpretations to the poem. Bromige's attitude seems to suggest a more *laissez-faire* approach to poetics, a difference which hinges on, and opens into, a broader "legitimation" of discourse as poetry. The concept of "legitimation," central to the later Critical Theorists (Marcuse, Habermas) will be expanded on in the second section.

Bromige then read a passage from Creeley's *A Day Book* on his seeing his daughter (in a dentist's office) as a woman for the first time, an epiphany made possible by tiredness, hunger, and expectation in an inseparable mix, distraction somehow rendering unfamiliar the familiar.



We are to take the poet's word for this; the passage does not otherwise provide warrant for our belief; all stands or falls upon his sincerity and our willingness to accept same. The trouble becomes more apparent, Bromige contended, as we continue to read: "And across from her [the daughter], one of those inevitable bitches of the late forties (her own age) who 'checks out', as the expression is, any late arrival to her own environs, whether same be a garbage pail or the Ritz....(M)y daughter... had, she said, been so absorbed [in a magazine] simply to avoid the engagement of the bitch, the soured and vicious person (I stake my life on such assumptions), was sitting across the room from her." The writer had earlier admitted to his feelings of "displacement and paranoia": his "reading" of the woman, then, is a reading back of his own projections, which substantially interfere with the intuitive accuracy "on which he stakes himself". Creeley seems unaware of himself as constituting what he reports -- and Bromige remarked that his anger might well have intimidated his daughter into concurring: "Dad's mad, might as well agree with him." While granting value to Creeley's "generosity" in testifying to his own condition, Bromige thought that he had stopped halfway: had too quickly assumed the viability of his assumptions. Bromige noted that this contradicted certain propositions in the Projectivist canon concerning not coming to a conclusion, returning the poem to the reader, staying open to experience -- all of which, he felt, are still to be worked through. The "nature-oriented" poetics (the assumption behind Creeley's "prime") had kept the Projectivists from establishing a real groundwork in these areas. "Their poetics indicated an inclusion of language in any of its manifestations, not only speech strained through voice. Yet in practice, they stopped short of this possibility."

At what is ostensibly the opposite end of this "nature-oriented" poetics is a "certain kind of poetry or attitude towards poetry that seems to be on the upswing," where the "I" is used "even more naively, illustrating the distinction between 'self-centered' and 'egotistical'." This a-historicity of the self is exemplified for Bromige in poems that seem to occur without social context (yet are charged with social implications). Bromige would rather see, as with the Projectivists, an "I" to some extent responsible to its circumstances and practice.

In concluding the second evening Bromige mentioned three other writers who had been an influence for him: Merleau-Ponty, Michael Polanyi, and Wittgenstein. From Merleau-Ponty he takes the notion of the body as "the place from where meaning occurs." From Wittgenstein the sense of "language games" which are used to "validate a world-view" (which in fact constitutes one). Adjacent to this is the idea that poetry *itself* generates a poetics, and not the reverse. It is the post-factum aspect of literature which creates the reactive (and often reactionary) tenor of criticism. From Polanyi comes the "tacit dimension," the appeal to a kind of "communal intuition" (following the "unlimited community of inquirers" in C.S. Peirce, and legitimation-by-consensus in Habermas).<sup>4</sup>

## THE THIRD EVENING

On the third evening, a collaboration between David Bromige and Ron Silliman resulted in a series of quotations, pronouncements, and reminiscences. The quotes were extracted, for the most part, from Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno; this procedure was a prior agreement between the collaborators as to "ground-rules".

Ron Silliman began with "what constitutes a talk;" a Robbe-Grillet-like 'explication de la scene', where the austerity and focus of the situation (as a sort of oracular tableau) might encourage an individual "to present a complete thought, perhaps with regard to poetics." What this austere yet persuasive setting demonstrates is the fragility, and rareness, of such thoughts. This "complete thought" may be (for Silliman left, perhaps appropriately, its definition incomplete) the authoritarian closure of a performative utterance. Silliman contrasted the "Talk" to "the poetics of the tavern" (that is, the gathering of writers after an event such as this) and to "the discrete text produced in isolation and consumed in isolation." The key feature of the "Talk" is "the simultaneous presence of multiple consumers," i.e., an audience. Thus it "uniquely acknowledges the presence of the consumers as essential to the completeness of the thought itself." This would be oppositional, in Silliman's view, to the classroom, where "consumers of a text are brought together after the primary consumption process," and where "the prestige of the text reigns over all." Where the "Talk" would seem to differ from a solitary or pedagogical occasion, as the colloquial tag indicates, is in the Brechtian role of the audience. Brecht in fact played a prominent part in the evening's proceedings, in focusing on interruption as a device (one that is encouraged in the series as a whole--this in contradistinction to the 'unimpeachable flow' of a lecture). Traversing this is the self-historicizing operation of which Silliman seemed to warn against, and yet took part in; as an organized gathering of this sort will produce, if only provisionally, a theoretical closure (a "complete thought"). Indeed, the present essay complicitly indulges in such an operation. It seems unimportant, all the same; the true distinctiveness of these gatherings are akin to Silliman's characterization of the poetry reading as the bringing together of consumers, not simply to hear work read, but as the self-presentation of a viable community. This parallels the comments made earlier on the "community" as seen in Polanyi and Habermas.

David Bromige was self-reflective, starting from his situation as an isolated writer. "It is myself I address, sitting here in Santa Rosa;" yet sending his text, projectively, to the site of its delivery. Here again, the historicizing of the event was present to mind. By way, perhaps, of elucidating Silliman's "complete thought," Bromige quoted the preface to Merleau-Ponty's book *Signs*: "We do not understand a statement because it is complete in itself, we say that it is complete because we have understood." However, comprehension "can be seen to annihilate even as it reassures" (Bromige). And so Merleau-Ponty's observation that uncomprehension makes language opaque is in at least one sense a guarantee of preservation in the otherwise "consuming" act of understanding.<sup>5</sup>

Ron Silliman then read an extended quote by Walter Benjamin on the "epic Theatre" of Bertolt Brecht. Bromige followed by reading Theodor Adorno on "the critic". Silliman returned to Benjamin's aesthetics,



calling it "formalism with a difference." "This difference lies in his extending the parameters of form, far beyond the mere finished product of the creative act." Silliman drew out the parallel that, for Benjamin, theatre, like the poetry reading (and presumably the "Talk") "is an act which cannot be consummated, which is incomplete without the critical presence of multiple consumers." It was both challenging and frustrating, then, to find the poetry reading mentioned in conjunction with Epic Theatre. Challenging for its suggestiveness, but frustrating, as the nature of the "progeny" these consummated consumers would produce went unsaid. Following a Brechtian train of thought, consumer-passivity, the cornerstone of the "bourgeois aesthetic," must become the object of a willful "de-enthralment" on the part of the artist (playwright, poet). Silliman notes that Benjamin saw "the foregrounding of form" as a means that would avoid both false populism and critical hermeticism. This would be accomplished (as in Brecht's "Epic Theatre") by way of the "social gest." Silliman quoted Benjamin to the effect that "the interrupting of action (the "social gest") is one of the principle concerns of the Epic Theatre. Unlike "gesture," which, (pace kinesiology) is "arbitrary movement", the "social gest is the gest relevant to society, the gest that allows conclusions to be drawn about social circumstances."<sup>6</sup> This interruption-technique, this foregrounding, was extended by Silliman to the domain of poetics. The "constructive units" which are made "imperceptible" under the rule of character and plot are made visible by "the concept of interruption," which "defines the gesture by its termination, just as the sentence is defined by its period, or the free-verse line by its break" (Silliman). This "interruption" (the "Alienation-effect" in Brechtian terminology) plays on a two-tiered strategy; primarily, it is the annulment of the Aristotelian aesthetic based on a cathartic recognition of a "universal nature", one ultimately grounded in a fatalistic passivity. Secondly, it is a direct challenge to bourgeois ideological conventions, which the traditional theatre indulges. Epic Theatre, in its founder's words, would then "avoid bundling together the events portrayed and presenting them as an inexorable fate.... on the contrary, it is precisely this fate that it would study closely, showing it up as of human contriving."<sup>7</sup>

The vagueness, however suggestive the concept was, of the term "interruption" led to a lengthy discussion during the question-and-answer period. The ideological utility of this "device" was in question. Was interruption, *sui generis*, emancipatory? As Silliman noted, "It is not a progressive political technique, it can be used any way." The "ad hominem" interruption by Reagan of Carter during the 1980 presidential debates ("There you go again")--a device inasmuch as it was written for Reagan, was cited to show at least one less-than-progressive use.

Commenting on Silliman's observation that Brecht owed a debt to Russian Formalist theory, in particular for the concept of "ostranenie" (estrangement), Bromige noted that Brecht's aesthetics may well have arisen from "social estrangement" i.e., from exile. He related this to a similar experience of his own: in the last year of World War II his family moved to a predominantly Jewish neighborhood. The sons of these émigrés that he associated with in school became his close companions; they involved him in discussions where "we turned upside down questions unanswerable, indeed unaskable, by British common sense." This apartness

which the European Jews had brought to Bromige's native land caused him to reflect on the assumptions of English culture, not the least of which was his father's chauvinism. He then asked the provocative question: "So how is it that in America, where everybody comes from somewhere else.... that so few appear to stay aware of culture and society as human constructs, and instead assume these as nature-like, and beyond question?" He answered by way of anecdote: the younger brother of one of his childhood friends, an assimilated Jew who had become Home Secretary in the United Kingdom, recently refused an entry visa to Stokely Carmichael "on the grounds that he would stir up unrest among various (which Leon did not say) 'oppressed minorities' in their homeland. How quickly one can forget."

Ron Silliman then returned to poetics proper: "Denotation is connotation's special case, thoroughly contextualized." This statement introduced a discussion on interpretation. In the legal realm, he noted, "The purpose of a juridico-professional jargon, the intent behind the formulaic nature of law, is precisely to call forth, to the greatest degree possible, the denotative element within a given statement." He then drew a parallel between this and the interpretation of poetry. Silliman spoke of the opacity of work in first encounters: Josephine Miles and her generation's difficulties with William Carlos Williams's poetry, or Silliman's own with Clark Coolidge. De-contextualized, these texts are made accessible by a sort of epiphany, for instance, by Barrett Watten's suggestion that he look at the elements of humor in Coolidge's book *Space*. Silliman went on: "We have, I expect, all shared the experience of returning to a beloved text only to discover that it has somehow gone flat or dead on us." Thus, from "epiphany" to "apostasy". The theological terms seem appropriate here, since the interpretive problematic leads to a question of interpretive legitimation. The theological imperative compelling exegesis to legitimate specific religious practices also lurks behind our own reading of "beloved texts." Certainly, poets belong to an order in this sense. Their interpretations derive from the search for an ultimately unverifiable truth in the text. Comparing this to Silliman's earlier observations on law, it does indeed seem that a similar operation is enacted: interpretation is a self-legitimation which leads to "authoritative" declarations on a given text. Yet there is a crucial difference here: where poetic interpretation is marked by a fundamental inability to foreclose meaning, the "juridico-professional jargon" Silliman speaks of is geared solely to such foreclosure. There is, in law, a "final authority" (the State and its interests); this delimits legal practice along lines more "performative" (in Austin's sense) than "denotative." This may, however, be what Silliman questions when he asks, "What, then, is the possibility of a complete thought?"

Silliman then recalled an occasion when, as students at U.C. Berkeley, he and Bromige discussed, in "one of those intense, half-sparring sorts of chats," their views on poetics. In fact, they "mutually pretended" that the actual conversation was on the films of Ingmar Bergman. "How well do I recall that afternoon with Ron in Larry Blake's Rathskellar," Bromige said. He then read (so he alleged) notes from the conversation, which ranged from a quote from the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead to a critical theory-style critique of "whole thought"--to, of course, Bergman's films, in particular "Hour of the Wolf", where the artist Johann's attempt to present "the whole" leads to "total fragmentation": "the glass is shattered," Johann cries, "but what do the pieces reflect?"



Finally, both Silliman and Bromige read alternately a series of statements stemming from the Frankfurt School; the quotations came mainly from Adorno and Benjamin. This was followed by a question and answer period where the main topic was "interruption" (as discussed earlier in this essay). The third evening was capped by a visit to "Hannòs In the Alley"--a bar where workers from the Chronicle building go to drink after work, and a somehow fitting site for the continued discussions on political aesthetics. This was July 14th, 1984; Ingmar Bergman's birthday, and the final night of the Democratic Convention in San Francisco.

## Section Two

In this section a "précis" (to employ a term Bromige used) of certain themes and concepts from the Frankfurt School brought out in the course of the residency will be expanded on.<sup>8</sup>

### 1. *Tendency/Commitment*

Tendency, as mentioned earlier, is a sort of social pre-determinism, the "one-dimensionality" (to use Marcuse's title) of the 'self-evident' status quo which is neither 'self' nor 'evident'. This is essentially Bromige's critique of Marvin Bell's "poetics." In Bell's writing, the 'meta-narrative' of the dominant ideology is reproduced *in toto*, under the guise of an 'I' which is unaware of precisely this social self-construction.

The term "commitment" has gone through several uses, each less doctrinaire than the previous. The Stalinist requirement that made art subordinate to "the cause of the proletariat"<sup>9</sup> is superseded by Adorno's view, which emphasized the inevitable contradictions between an aesthetics with "emancipatory potential" and the "material conditions" (i.e., the class structure) which it tends to ignore, even though it is brought forth by these means.<sup>10</sup> As Bromige showed in his juxtaposition of the poem he'd written from journalistic sources and the slogan on his T-shirt, partisan declarations are less effective than ones which self-reflectively question *their own* status as well. Thus neither tendency nor commitment are adequate to a poetry of the present, although no poetry can be altogether free of either.

### 2. *Writer/Community*

The notion of a writer participating in a socio-political context (the community) shares in the idea of an individual writer's "commitment". Yet the two are not synonymous. The relation here is that of "engagement"--with, in the case of an aesthetician like Adorno, serious critical reservations. Aesthetics had become, with the demise of a "revolutionary social agent" (the proletariat), the only (if not ultimately the most adequate) means left for social change, by leading to critical self-reflection. With only this crippled "agency" at hand, individual writers are left to fend for themselves, within minority practices defined by

the socio-political groups to which they adhere. This is not always the result of conscious strategies, of course, there are those who attach themselves unquestioningly to the dominant aesthetico-political manifestation. Adorno's pessimism toward a "progressive" aesthetics infuses his entire corpus; more than one observer has noted that the "deconstructive" operation in Derrida's critique of western metaphysics takes up this pessimism as well, albeit "in a different key."<sup>11</sup>

The main adversary in the struggle for aesthetic (for community) autonomy is "the culture industry." In the writings of Adorno and Horkheimer, this comes to denote the monopolization of cultural practices by capitalism, in much the same manner as capitalism's earlier monopolization of industry itself. *Minima Moralia*, Adorno's aphoristic account of the "totalitarization" of culture, is the most detailed analysis by a Frankfurt School member of this pervasive co-optation.<sup>12</sup> Jürgen Habermas, on the other hand, while no less critical of this totalizing movement, holds a more optimistic view of community potential, at least that of the "philosophic community". This notion of community is an extension of C.S. Peirce's "unlimited community of inquirers". Still, all the Frankfurt School members held to one degree or another the necessity of an "historically appropriate" theoretics (grounded in current events).

### 3. *The foregrounding of form*

It was observed earlier that this concept derives, via Brecht, from the Russian Formalist's "ostranenie" ("estrangement"). Brecht, in his playwriting, gave this concept a more partisan edge, to counter the "Aristotelian" mimetic practices that hid, he felt, the social dynamics of human relations. This has become a key concept in modernism; more recently, it has been used to characterize modernism as such.<sup>13</sup> Forays into "non-traditional" media in the modernist era (from the "readymades" to "earthworks") all attest to this impulse toward the foregrounding of form.

### 4. *Legitimation*

This term was not explicitly discussed during the residency, but it informed nearly every other discussion, particularly those on Bell's "poetics" and Silliman's "complete thought". Habermas uses the term to denote the operation by whose means a series of statements can be taken as law or have normative powers. This seems to be Silliman's point in invoking "juridico-professional jargon" as the result of an endless search for denotative constancy. Foucault's "discursive formations," mentioned earlier, can now be seen as an adjunct to Habermas' "legitimation"; the necessity of grouping, however tenuously, a set of statements which lead to provisional legitimations, that is, what authorizes a particular outlook.<sup>14</sup> Thus, what constitutes "poetics" is not simply that it "defines poetry" (it does not), but that it *authorizes a knowledge* of poetic practices to take place. Thus Silliman's appeal to "the critical presence of multiple consumers" has an especial import here: he is calling on the writing community to regain the legitimation apparatus of poetics of which academia has disenfranchised them.



## NOTES

1. Foucault, M. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (N.Y., '72). While Foucault does not explicitly mention poetics as a "discursive formation," (he does include linguistics here, however), his definition of these formations as "a regularity" of statements lends itself to the socio-political critique Bromige alludes to here.
2. See J-L. Nancy, "Larvatus Pro Deo" in *Glyph 2* (Johns Hopkins, Baltimore, '77).
3. The texts relevant here are: Heidegger, *Identity and Difference* (N.Y., '69), esp. p.73--and Derrida, J. *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, '74), esp. the preface by G. Spivak.
4. The history and interplay of these concepts is laid out admirably in Apel, K-O.: *Charles S. Peirce: From Pragmatism to Pragmaticism* (Amherst, '81) and Habermas, J. *Knowledge and Human Interests* (London, second ed., '78).
5. This 'consuming' is meant in the sense Sartre gave it in his epistemological critique (see Danto, A.C. "Nausea and Noesis: Some Philosophical Problems for Sartre: in *October*, M.I.T., fall '81).
6. Brecht, B. *Brecht on Theatre*, (N.Y., '64), p.104.
7. Ibid., p.57.
8. In lieu of an extensive bibliography given here, the reader is referred to the one in Jay, M. *The Dialectical Imagination* (Boston, '73).
9. C.f. Eagleton, T. *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (Berkeley, '76), ch.3.
10. See Jay, M. *Adorno* (Cambridge, '84), p.114.
11. See the foreward (by Jochen Schulte-Sasse) to Bürger, P. *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis, '84). Martin Jay also shows Adorno to be a "deconstructive" precursor in his *Adorno*.
12. Adorno, T. *Minima Moralia* (London, '74).
13. See Bürger, P. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*.
14. Foucault, M. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, ch.2.

TO SEE OURSELVES AS OTHERS SEE US/

I am who I am (I love, I hate)

--a pair (prayer) for David Bromige--

Each of these two dynamic ('opposite') ('Classic' & 'Romantic')

cultural propositions are equally reals-- David Bromige, think

about it ('symphonic', 'pastoral', 'choric', 'dactylic', 'hexameter')--

syntax-wise-- God grant, that you may. God grant that the 'outside'

fundamentals is real, that the ('inside') regimen we recognize be just

that we may recognize each other, in the 'family', as oneself. The

other is real-- what a WAR to be ME!-- even though we ourselves, we

who know as ones ('onions'), may not be cognizable-- are not we often

sleeping?-- who we are, I am! / I am, who are we?-- It's a concrete

vault, in fact? Not David Bromige's 'work' (nor his 'personality')

(wait for our 'Interview!'), nor his life-- nor the whole of Santa

Rosa, but thinking makes it Furthermore, 'obvious'. The truly Other

wills him to be its Venture-- 'him'-- you/me-- US! It's not a

Weyerhaeuser, it's a proposition-- like a Nation, copious, always

string-bound, calculable/'calculating'? Obfuscatory (incantations)?

What we know, we (out-bound circle) (putter about) know we 'convert'

into its (gerund) further proposition as, indeed (Charles, I might do,

thou in prison) its further 'image of itself' (--or, as I said to Bea,

"Dawg, you need a new caller. Darned if I don't build you, dream or

fly one!")-- rather a locked circle, imbecile ('social')-- but the life

we are liven to give through, as the barning, however 'unpopular', of

this theirs/its-- God grant that the Great Unknown stay viscerally



(All unattributed quotations are from an interview between Barbara Weber and David Bromige.)

*The Gathering*. Buffalo, New York: Sunbooks, 1965. 40 pp., 350 copies.

Poetry + one story. The author's first book. "*The Gathering* is strictly speaking an occasional book -- Fred Wah (we'd been classmates at UBC) had taken an interest (somewhat at Robert Duncan's instigation), published poems of mine in his magazine *Sum*, and now wanted a book. I selected to show range. A number of the poems reify occasions from my first marriage, memories of 1957, '58 I could now use to discriminate with. Robert Duncan, whom I had gotten to know in Berkeley, had encouraged me greatly, and his unassimilated influence is all over these poems; they also bear the mark of Olson, Creeley, and Levertov, each of whom had inspired me in person as they had in print. But after all, this was only because each had something I recognized." What immediately arrests the reader are the clear, everyday images, normally secret and visceral, which are raised to attention by the elegant word choices and the experimental spelling.

*Please, Like Me*. Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1968. 15 pp., 300 copies; Illustrated by Sherril Jaffe.

"John Martin had just started his press, and Duncan had recommended my work to him, as had Ron Loewinsohn. Martin had agreed to do *The Ends of the Earth* and wanted a smaller book to 'announce' the bigger. So I took this out of *Ends*." A very elegant book; the poem recalls Bromige's job as door-to-door salesman, and introduces the theme of seduction (of reader by writer and vice versa, and of gender by gender) with its concomittant questionings of sincerity as poetic gesture. "Sherril's drawings, in her Expressionist manner, pace the taboo intensities of the poem quite fittingly."

*The Ends of the Earth*. Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1968. 78 pp., 921 copies.

"Benjamin's *nunc stans* had been receiving the attention of both theorists and practitioners -- from the Beats forward, and there was a lot of slop about it. I was interested in retrieving its clarity and in rescuing "carpe diem" from simple-mindedness. At the same time, I meant to bring the idealism of the times to some earth. Here I began while working within the projectivist mode stylistically to question its assumptions." In the back of this book, dedicated to Robert Duncan, Bromige explains the odd spelling in this and the previous two books. He writes that the context of the word is what shapes it: for instance, *tangld*, spelled thus, enhances the feeling of entanglement. This book is the last one in which he experiments with spelling.

broad, if codified, within the 'basis' (blessing) of its ('I think')  
may be so environment--

-- August 4, 1986



*The Quivering Roadway.* Berkeley: Archangel Press, 1969. 13 pp., 75 copies.

"A home-made book -- Martin had indicated he wouldn't do another book for 2 years, so I did one myself. Basically a continuation of the workings in *Ends*. The title poem integrates larger contexts with one incident -- so that the 'purity' of an immediate occasion is shown to be informed -- constituted -- by trans-personal pressures, both contemporary and historico-mythic."

*Threads.* Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1970. 100 pp., 1226 copies.

Funny, sad, scary poems, full of people, yet there is a sense of aloneness. Each poem has its surprising twist in a play of opposites. "Adorno's 'negative dialectics' was still some years down the road for me, but I can see here how I was moving towards a recognition of that text. Someone characterized my work, on the strength of this book, as 'bringing philosophy and poetry together and then standing back to let them fight it out' -- I'll allow that. This is the first book where I use 'I' to declare experiences which I did not 'have', to question assumptions of (non) identity. The heavily sexual material unbalances the book to my hindsight of it now, but it was written in Berkeley and Sonoma County in the juncture of two decades much preoccupied with so-called sexual freedom. I'd note in this connection that sexual intercourse inevitably involves questions of identity -- 'oceanic' loss of self, or alternatively intense self-realization: 'typicality enthralls with its particular failures.' Too, in the casual encounter that may turn into commitment, the contingent nature of existence can be clearly shown. I'd also note that the shifting sense of *I* raises the issue of language and its mediations, and that henceforth this awareness comes increasingly to the aid of the subject in the attempt to constitute the object."

*Three Stories.* Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1973. 12 pp.

John Martin began a magazine, *Sparrow*, in which he published, each month, the work of one of the writers published in book form by his press. "John asked me for a chapbook for *Sparrow*, and I had these 3 pieces of prose lying around, so I more-or-less threw them together, although each shares, again, the search for identity with oneself in terms of a reconstituted object -- e.g., in 'Finders Keepers,' the shrapnel from anti-aircraft shells the small boy and his companions hunt in the gutters of London. In 'He Was' it's the house; in 'Sex-skate-chew'n,' the things of that place and time -- ashtrays, cars, garbage-dumps, thingified women." Each person in these stories is notably out of synch with his surroundings; comically so in the tale set in Saskatchewan, more obviously sadly and desperately so in the other 2 stories.

*Ten Years in the Making, Selected Poems, Songs & Stories, 1961-1970.* Vancouver, British Columbia: New Star Press, 1974. 106 pp.

A selected-collected book, including poetry, prose, and songs. "Stan Persky having relocated in my old hometown and started a collective, wanted a book: my two new books were already committed elsewhere, so I decided on this 'survey'. The title puns quadruply: my 10 years in the making of poetry, that decade as partialized therein, the tenure I was about to be awarded at Sonoma State University, and the minatory message to myself concerning that achievement, that the only real tenure is in loving commitment -- in my case, to my son Chris, born on Mayday and thus the 'May-King' of my heart." Chris's picture, along with those of other persons and places Bromige felt 'interwoven' with -- his wives Ann, Joan, and Sherril; Robert Duncan; his friends Ian Currie, Mike Matthews, Roy Cooper and Bob Thomson (all from Vancouver days); Vancouver, UC Berkeley, Sebastopol -- can all be glimpsed through the letters of the front-cover title; a childhood picture of the author with his mother and sister, taken by his father, appears on the back cover.

*Birds of the West.* Toronto, Ontario: Coachhouse Press, 1974. 106 pp., probably 1,000 copies.

Section one is a collection of poems, at once casual and intense, that carry on Bromige's philosophical investigations, here made present through incidents and settings in his new home, on a hill overlooking, to the west, the rangeland of the Sonoma County littoral, and, to the east, the Santa Rosa plain: a 300 degree panorama that includes Tamalpais, Diablo and St. Helena mountains; much of the book has to do with sight, distance, and overview. Section two, "Pond", is a kind of journal that brings together the author's current reading and the figures, singly and in small groups, who congregate around a hilltop pond, living out the imperatives of the early 70's. Section three, "White-Tailed Kite", is a serial poem of phenomenological meditation upon the bird that is its emblem. The afterword is the poet's most coherent statement of poetics to that date. This beautifully designed book is now a rare item.

*Tight Corners & What's Around Them (Being the Brief & Endless Adventures of some Pronouns in the Sentences of 1972-1973).* Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1974. 100 pp.

Steve Fredman, in *Poet's Prose: The Crisis in American Verse* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), writes that this book is about "the humorous and sometimes terrifying recognition of oneself as a group of pronouns trapped in the realm of language." The actual "tight corners" consist of short declarative sentences, usually three to a corner, separated from one another by the sign for a 45 degree angle, and apparently the summary each time of some pronominal incident. But in among the three sections devoted to the "corners", one finds lineated poems of a more conventional poetic cast, as well as an hilariously sardonic story of young love, and



other short prose pieces filled with inventions from their own language. There is also a serial poem in which the author through a number of upsets counters his own "paranoia of clarity." "The 'corners' were an invention with Tom Sharp. I composed them on 3x5 file cards, to ensure brevity. At readings, I used to hand these out to the audience and let them do the reading. It was intriguing to note the range of appropriateness, of 'corner' to reader, each time. I wanted John Martin to publish them as 200 file cards in a plastic case, but it was not a Sparrow format. Later, Whale Cloth Press did Grenier's *Sentences* in much this way, although I had wanted something not at all that sumptuous. The 'corners' presented a problem when done as a book; turning pages suggests that things lead and follow, which was the opposite of my intention. Also, 200 corners in book form would be inescapably monotonous. In the end, I edited them down to 100, divided them into three sections, and surrounded them with other kinds of writing, which commented on the corners even as these commented on them."

*Out of My Hands.* Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1976. 12 pp.

"Martin wanted to do another *Sparrow* of my work; I found my *ligne donne* in Polanyi's essay, 'Tacit Knowing': 'But in the language of Azande it is self-contradictory to doubt the efficacy of oracles, and this only proves that Zande language cannot be trusted in respect of oracles.' (This was the time of Watergate.) I recalled three incidents which thoroughly demonstrated Polanyi's insight, and the booklet was written in a week. There was then some delay, so I tinkered a little with it later in the year."

*Spells and Blessings.* Vancouver, British Columbia: Talonbooks, 1975. 30 pp.

A small collection of poetry, all but three having "eluded inclusion" in collections made during the years of their composition: 1968-1973. A common thread is the attraction of the unknown, embodied here in myth, the Tarot, sexual desire, and (as Bromige notes in his Foreword) "the face of a question that writing . . . raises: I trust this is so for others." Again, attention lights on language as the mediating agency, itself the primordial mystery: "Your nipples dark / behind your shirt." "A Spell" is a fascinating work -- owing something to T. Manley Hall's account of a Saxon legend; there's an entire poetics embedded in this poem."

*Credences of Winter.* Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1976. 13 pp.

Eight poems; each not only "an enviable example of a poem", but also "a definition of what a poem can be, a test of poetry, an exploration of a poetic" (Tom Sharp, "Poem as Poetic"). "Somewhat loosely, these match up with stanzas of the Stevens' poem, but respond also to other instigations -- notably by Oppen, Spicer, Duncan." The third Bromige

issue *Sparrow*, and the last book of his to be published by that press, until the *Selected Poems* appears next year.

*Living in Advance* (with Gifford, DeBarros et al). Cotati, California: Open Reading Books, 1976. 70 pp.

Songs with music, and a foreword by Bromige. "Since 1966, when I met Paul DeBarros, I'd been interested in writing rock songs, and for a while worked with a group calling themselves 'Circus Maximus' . . . I introduced Paul to Barry Gifford, and they did some gigs together. Barry had a hideaway in the mountains in Mendocino County where people expanded their consciousness and grooved on the trees and the stars. If that's heard as irony, it's simply a function of the passage of time. There were some 8 or 10 of 'us' who hung out together in varying permutations, there, and in San Francisco and Berkeley and Sebastopol, and I learned (somewhat) to play piano since there was one in the house I'd moved into. It's more fun if there's a group purpose, so we used to write songs together. Time and 'personality conflicts' dispersed the gang, but we managed to get this songbook done before that happened. You know that Band song, that appears to refer to T.S. Eliot? Well, I think the quickest notion I can give of the three personal tones is by telling you that "Say hello to Valerie, say hello to Vivien", had we written that opening verse, would have been written by Gifford; 'give them all my salary' by me, and 'On the waters of oblivion', by Paul."

*Six of One, Half a Dozen of the Other.* Mansfield, Pennsylvania: Mansfield State College Press, 1976. The first, 28-page section of issue #13 of *The Falcon*.

Poems with prose commentary. The poems are taken from several earlier books; the prose pieces deconstruct various critical approaches -- biographical, psychological, mythopoeic, sociological, anecdotal, philosophical, and even deconstructionist; each piece is hilarious, coruscating with wit and word-play, yet indicating obliquely those readings the author thinks viable. "Bill Blais of *The Falcon* asked me to do a 'retrospective' -- instead, I came up with these: perhaps, after all, it wasn't a case of 'instead'. I wrote them all in January 1976; we'd had a house-party that lasted from Christmas beyond New Years', and it had been highly anecdotal; as soon as the last guest left, I put this work together. I had intended to go on with it, but early in February, my father died. That stopped me writing for nearly a year. When I tried to pick up where I'd left off, it was academic -- like the bumpkin on his first train ride who whips out his knife and makes a notch in the window-sill when his hat blows out the window so that he'll know where to look for it when he comes back."



*My Poetry*. Berkeley: The Figures Press, 1980. 100 pp., 650 copies.

Bromige's first major collection since *Tight Corners* (1974). Poetry and prose, including a slightly revised version of "Six of One", and a play that is actually a cut-up of several poems from *Credences of Winter*. Ron Silliman, reviewing this book in the magazine *Soup*, finds it "essential reading for anyone who wishes to be in touch with contemporary poetry." A long prose poem, made of sentences from a small-town newspaper, "One Spring," won a Pushcart Prize upon its initial publication in the magazine *This*. Coincident with the publication of *My Poetry*, Bromige won an NEA Writer's Fellowship. "As to the story of its publication: I had sent a TS to Black Sparrow, and John had written back that he loved the Bromige poems in it, but not the prose 'cutups', and would I omit these? Since these were what I found of chief interest, I wouldn't; so I took the book to Geoff (Young, of The Figures), and he wanted to do it but thought that a lot of the 'Bromige poems' could go. He got me to think of it from the book's point-of-view, and not as a 'collected works 74-79'. Actually, most of it was composed in '77 and '78, before I left Sherril and went to live in San Francisco with Cecelia (who took the photo of the author squatting with hand out in front of the Bank of Babylon, in her hometown of West Babylon, that appears at the back of the book). 'One Spring' came from material I had gathered at the public library to be background material for a novel I then began to write: Bob Perelman read it and said, 'Trash the plot and you've got a piece' -- he was right. 'My Poetry' is composed from interesting sentences taken from all my previous reviews. 'Hieratics' was written after the move to SF, using mainly Jansen's *History of Art* to evoke three intense passages from a period that now felt like archeological remains."

*P-E-A-C-E*. Berkeley: Tuumba Press, 1981. 18 pp., 450 copies.

Peace in pieces. Framed as a history (primarily literary) of the 1990's, told in the year 2020. The clarity of the narrator's vision struggles with the deteriorated language of a collapsed culture. "Bromige's playful yet very serious chapbook combines poetry and prose as many of his other works have done. . . . The combination . . . is very effective, one commenting upon the other. The prose is the voice of the present thinking about the past, and the poetry is the voice of the past being heard in the present. . . . there is no promise of a way out or of something yet to be. There is only this: birth, life, death -- itself." (Dennis Barone, in *ABR*.) Art-Dave Brimbody (whose adventures are akin to Rimbaud's during the Siege of Paris) writes the title poem, a deliberate, even lugubrious, indictment of closure and its required hypocrisies. The craftily disordered syntax and vocabulary (Bromige worked from a Swedish text which he "translated" according to its aural cues) make one continually stop and question what is being said. "Lyn asked me for a book and I wrote one. It didn't quite fit her format, so I omitted passages; the work is global, not 'rarity-value'. Ted

Greenwald's *Smile* had recently come out in the Tuumba series; I'd been struck by that (it's, also, a prose narrative of poetic resonance), and that was the germ, as they say, of the idea. For me, 'Smile' recalled flower-children on Telegraph Avenue, and so does 'Peace'. The Reagan landslide had swept away some final vestiges, I felt, of a great, if impractically ingenuous, hope. "It's like there are 2 people, one of whom is very angry and the other watching finds that person's anger comic. . . . The esthetic problem was how to write the piece that expressed the anger and at the same time contained it, framed it. A fake translation was one way to do it. You appoint a text to be master over you; a lot like *The Inferno*, where Dante's imagination of Virgil prevents him from stopping to gloat or to relish his anger. . . . It was some Swedish memoir of lonely childhood and how certain poems found at that time were consolation . . . (the poems embedded) are previous fake translations, from the Spanish and the Portugese." (Bromige, interviewed by Weber, *Jimmy and Lucy's House of K #6*).

*In the Uneven Steps of Hung-Chow*. Berkeley: Little Dinosaur Press, 1982. 34 pp., 250 copies.

Three stories, about a Chinese sage, as told by his humorless and gullible disciple. Each tale deals with an aspect of representation. The narrator's lack of humor makes the telling that much funnier. This is one of a series of 3 chapbooks by this press, companion to works by Michael Davidson and Michael Palmer. "I found the cover in a drawer. We were house-sitting for Bob Grenier and Kathleen Frumkin, and I opened a drawer looking for scotch-tape, and found I was looking at Hung-Chow! It was a pen-and-ink drawing Kathleen had done when she was 14. It was H-C alright -- his asymmetrical beard, expression a compound of enlightened bliss and smug self-satisfaction." Bromige goes on to say that there are further stories written concerning this figure, but lack of time has so far prevented his assembling a second volume. "Though also, the initiating impulse has somewhat dissipated -- I had roomed for a while with a friend who at that time was subject to a rather strict Buddhist discipline, which at once intrigued and repelled me. But my work as a teacher continues, and that can provide sufficient material and motivation."

*It's the Same Only Different / The Melancholy Owed Categories*. Weymouth, England: Last Straw Press, 1984. 4 pp., 200 copies.

3 -- or perhaps 4 -- poems in one: Bromige wrote two poems using the rhyme scheme from Keats' "Ode on Melancholy", and then intercalated these to make a third poem; readers who recognize the rhyme words from Keats will also hear his poem behind the scenes. There is also an extract from a letter written by Bromige to his publisher, Bernard Hemmensley, which appropriates a letter Keats wrote to his brother. "Bernard as early as 1981 was in touch with me requesting a small book. I felt this work appropriate for my first publication



in the country of my birth, so I sent it to him. A severe flu early in '84 had got me reading Keats, feverishly, and I'd made a number of rime-identity poems from his work. Rime is always a question of identity and non-identity, either of a like and an unlike sound combined, or of two or more (to move a step away) concepts of alleged universal currency, such as 'justice', and speaks to us of how we learn -- and raise the question of how we must apply these to a range of experience. These considerations embodied in the formal aspects of this work thus supply its content as well."

*You See* (with Opal Nations). San Francisco: Exempli Gratia Press, 1986. 16 pp., open-ended run.

Bromige's first collaboration with Opal Nations, the 'pataphysical poet and story-writer, artist, and musician, well-known in the Bay Area for his PBS weekly radio show, "Doo-Wop Delights". This chap-book presents Parts One and Two; a third (and final) section was published in the journal *Paper Air*. Part One consists of 15-line sentences in 14-line stanzas, ending when the final line of a sentence coincides for the first time with the final line of a stanza. Part Two alternates 5- with 10-line sentences in 14-line stanzas, ending, as before, with the first coincidence of final lines. (The initial phrases of each sentence are also a further sentence when combined: "Blue you forget this fate: the undressed let what somewhat dots these: godlike, remember well; let yourself or else.") "Opal, whom I met through Allan Fisher during the latter's residency in SF, had asked if I had anything lying around unfinished: he was at loose ends, and would finish it for me. I didn't, but I did have some 30 fake translations from the Spanish that never cohered as poems, but with some striking lines in them: at Cecelia's suggestion, I cut these out and mailed them to Opal. A month later, he sent me a 15-page prose narrative, fantastic with surreal landscapes and childlike acuties concerning these. The weight fell rather heavily, to my thinking, on the subjective side, so my task as I saw it was to locate some theme -- but at the same time I did not want any single overriding topic. I hit upon the relation between the chemistry and dynamics of actual seeing, and the metaphorical language of 'coming to see'; the formal devices (see above) say something about collaboration, how two fields of vision or 'vision' overlap but never quite coincide -- even though that is the end toward which we strive. Not only the immediate collaboration between Opal and I is meant, but also the collaboration between subject/object and object/subject that constitutes our apprehension of and by the world . . . Opal used as many of my original lines as he could, and I preserved as many as I could, and as much of his narrative as possible, in this final version."

*Red Hats*. Atwater, Ohio: Tonsure Press, 1986. 54 pp., 500 copies.

Prose, with some line poems. A work in 7 sections, each one prefaced by a letter of the title; an index assembles certain key words per section that begin with the instigating letter: (e.g., "R, rooted, reality, rules, responsiveness, reckoning, register," etc., etc.) A post-script reveals the genesis of the title to be an anagram of *Threads*. According to the author, "having turned 50, I felt it time to give a thorough re-reading to my early work; the prose of this book was at first generated as a kind of commentary on and response to the poems in *Threads*, but after some accumulation of such, the work begat itself out of its initial sentences, in tandem with contemporary concerns. As to these, anyone alive today and given to reflection upon our present can know as much and more about these contents than I; although it is the case that certain sections make a sort of one-man collaboration with their dedicatees -- specifically Grenier, Silliman, and Bernstein."



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My sincere thanks to one and all.

## NOTATIONS/ORDERING INFORMATION

I don't want to sound like Oral Roberts. Nonetheless...

This issue was partially paid for through subscriptions/contributions (see preceding page), but the balance and major portion came from the proceeds of my State and Federal personal income tax returns together with other hard won household monies. I'd like to try and hold on for at least another three issues -- the plan being to focus on three different female writers -- but the financial strain is becoming acute.

James Sherry has, in conversation, indicated that tax deductible contributions to *The Difficulties* could be made through the Segue Foundation (300 Bowery, NYC, 10012). --No promises. No cajoling. I'm staying away from the "prayer tower." But please, if you value the work that is being supported by *The Difficulties*, consider lending your support in the form of a deductible contribution through Segue or else as a non-deductible gift directly to the press.

Support can also be shown through the purchase of publications. These titles remain available:

*The Difficulties*, Vol. 2, #2 (The Ron Silliman Issue). \$7

*The Difficulties*, Vol. 1, #2 (an anthology issue). \$7 (Now rare.)

~~SOLUBLE SENSES~~ CENSUS by Tom Beckett is a handsome letterpress book published in late 1984 by Tonsure Press and not distributed. It is available at \$4.50/\$15 signed -- or free, at your request, with the purchase of either of the titles noted above.

ADDRESS ALL CORRESPONDENCE AND CHECKS TO: Tom Beckett  
1695 Brady Lake Rd.  
Kent, Ohio 44240

\*

. . . I am also that other who speaks to me, to whom I listen, who lures me on. I would be so happy if these words of Brecht could be applied to me: 'He thought in the heads of others; and in his own, others than he were thinking. That is true thought.'

--Roland Barthes



1. The following information was received from the Bureau of the Census, Washington, D. C., on 11/1/54:

2. The Bureau of the Census has received information from the Bureau of the Census, Washington, D. C., on 11/1/54, that the following information was received from the Bureau of the Census, Washington, D. C., on 11/1/54:

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**\$7**

DAVID BROMIGE

MICHAEL DAVIDSON

RON SILLIMAN

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STEPHEN TILLS

CARL JENSEN

MICHAEL ANDERSON

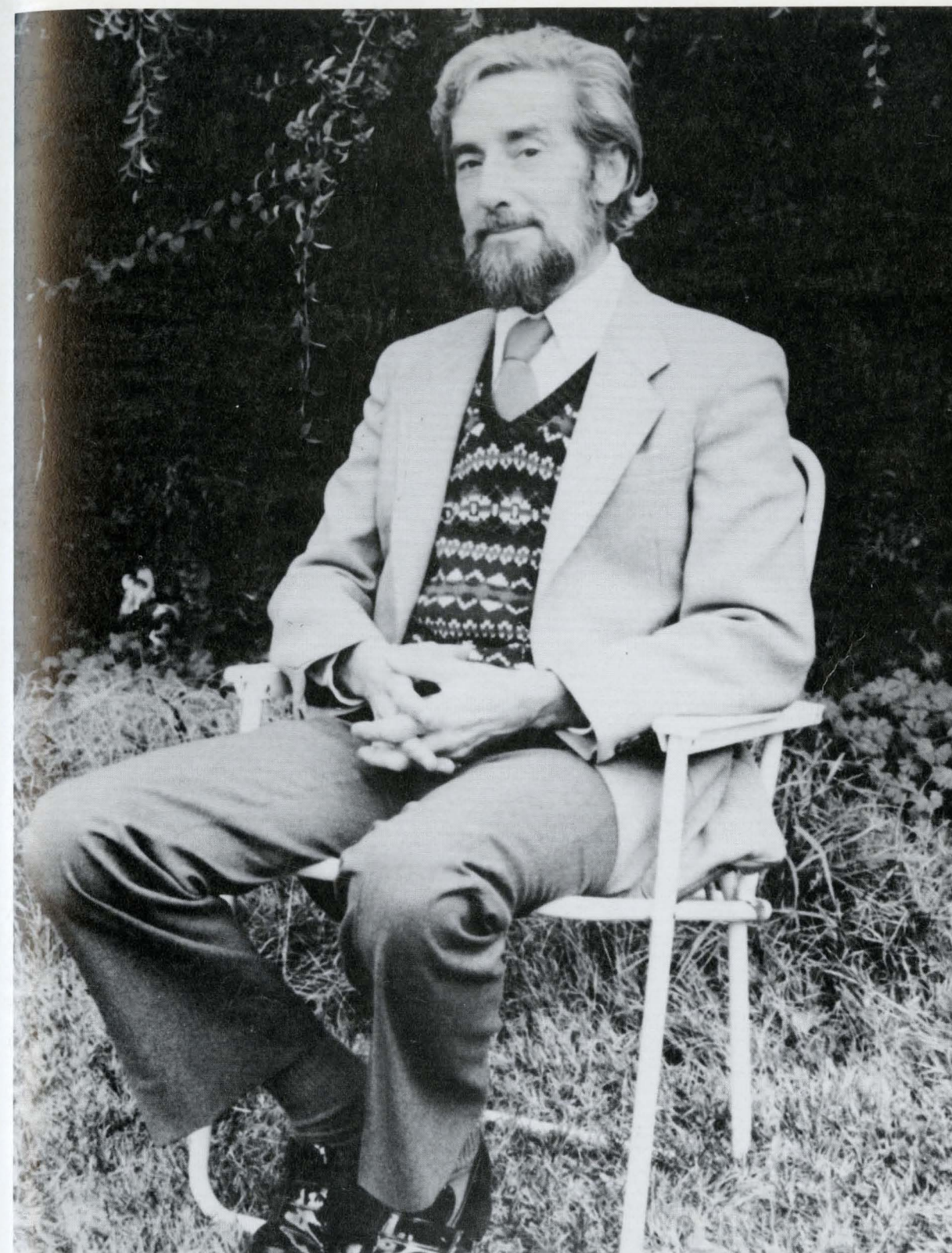
ROBERT GRENIER

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DAVID BROMIGE  
MICHAEL DAVIDSON  
RON SILLIMAN  
TOM SHARP  
CHARLES BERNSTEIN  
RAE ARMANTROUT  
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BILL VARTNAW  
STEPHEN TILLS  
CARL JENSEN  
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## THE DIFFICULTIES DAVID BROMIGE ISSUE