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These letters of David Ignatow's are like his poetry, the ultimate in plainness: no letter head, no address, no last name.

The card of July 18, 1969 refers to a reading I gave at a party ^{in East Hampton, Long Island.} for me at the home of H.R. Hayek, the translator. Present were Armand Schwerner, Allen Plauz, Ignatow, Hayek and all their ~~wives~~ ^{wives} - and an assorted variety of fat-cat artists unknown to me but very congenial.

"references" in the Aug. 25, 1971 letter refers to my using him as a reference for a suggestion. "Send more poems" means, of course, ~~send~~ for his magazine, Chelsea.

"advice on David" in the Nov. 11, 1971 letter refers to professional advice ^{which} I gave him, as a psychotherapist, on how and his wife should handle this son David after his discharge from a state mental hospital.

Carl Rakosi

PERMANENT RECORD

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Carl Rakosi

128 Irving Street

San Francisco, CA 94122

7/23/81

Dear David: *I guess*

Thank you for your prompt and helpful reply. I shan't forget it.

I will try Davison and the University of Illinois Press but not Wesleyan. I'm not up to that.

Laughlin was the first to turn down my Collected because he says in recent years he has been trying to make a little money with N.D. books for what he calls his business associates and he didn't think my Collected would do that. John Martin of Black Sparrow turned it down because he has been having serious business problems and simply couldn't swing it financially. And finally the University of California Press, where it really belongs, declined on the ground that they were a scholarly press and had only a limited capacity to reprint poetry and could justify their venturing into non-academic publishing only if, by doing so, they served scholars and general readers by making out-of-print or nearly inaccessible works available. Since my last three books are still around, I didn't really qualify. So there you have it.

I recently had a curious experience which you may have had too. Emmanuel Hocquard, one of the editors of GAZETTE DU LECTEUR, wrote to ask me for a one-line poem of "not more than 55 ~~xxxx~~ typewritten characters and spaces." An outrageous request, I thought at first, and felt slightly offended. But the idea held on in my head, notwithstanding, and before I knew it, several one-line poems of six or seven words popped out as possibilities. Then looking hard at the best one, I realized suddenly that the seven words in that poem were, in fact, too ^{many} ~~long~~, and that if I chopped it down to two words, I had a remarkably solid, self-sufficient entity. At any rate, so it looks now. Suppose, however, I had given myself that assignment (inconceivable that I would, but let's say that I did, just for the heck of it): Write a two word poem (something worth while, of course), I would have bet my last dollar that it couldn't be done..... at least that I couldn't do it. So what does this mean, that I don't give myself crazy enough assignments? I await your answer, Sage.

Leah and I moved to San Francisco three years ago, so I'll miss you, I'm afraid, when you come to The Loft in Minneapolis next April.

Thanks again, David.

Carl Rakosi

128 Irving St.

San Francisco, CA 94122

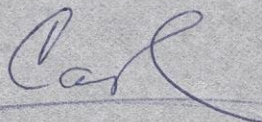
4/30/81

Dear Stanley:

I can't tell you how pleased I am at the success of *The War Between the Pathetic Teachers and the Splendid ~~Kxxxx~~ Kids* (no question from the title what side your sympathies lie): "the most original novel of the year," on the N.Y. Times list of the most notable children's books of the year, etc. I suspect this ~~gx~~ goes beyond your furthest expectations. Great going! ^{And} I see you need no one to tell you to strike while the iron is hot by following this up with two sequels.

You must no longer be on the Walker mailing list, otherwise you'd know that I'll be reading there on May 27th. Although we'll be in town for the whole ~~a~~ week from May 25 to June 1, every evening, believe it or not, is already scheduled with friends and with my daughter, Barbara, and her family, with whom we'll be staying. Despite this, I'll call you to see ~~whetkx~~ if we can find time during the day to be with you and Ruth briefly. In case I get swallowed up by all this busy socializing, however, would you mind calling me at Barbara's house, 377-4241?

Love,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Carl', with a horizontal line drawn underneath it.

6/30

To Allan:

I found 2 more for Droles
(How to be discovered as a great bard
and ~~"Bly once named a poem"~~)

These should be 14 ~~and 15~~ in the
sequence. The last 4 in the sequence
should then be renumbered 16, 17, 18 & 19.

6/21/80

Dear Allan:

Fine. I've eliminated 1E from the contract and am returning your copy, signed. The only other thing I'd like changed is the number of paperback and cloth copies I am to receive: I'd like 12 paperbacks and 5 cloth copies, instead of 15 paperbacks and 2 cloth.

I did find another poem to add to the Droles. I've numbered it 6. That means that the other numbers in the Droles beginning with 6 have to be moved up one.....i.e., the old 6, Man/ in Perse[#] becomes 7, and so on.

The back page of EX CRANIUM, NRGHT has some biographical and bibliographical information about me. Add to it, the publication of MY EXPERIENCES IN PARNASSUS, Black Sparrow, 1977. And change the last line to read: "In 1969, 1972 and 1979 he won awards from the National Endowment for the Arts." Let me know what else you need.

Cordially,

P.S. A woodblock border would be all right if it is slight enough not to obtrude.

6/22/80

Dear Allan:

After sealing the envelope which contains an additional * poem, ROMEO ON JULIET, and the contract, I found five other pieces that should go into DROLES. I've put numbers on them to indicate their order in the series. This changes the number of ROMEO ON JULIET to 9, not 6, as I have it on the mss sheet. The order of the whole series should then be as follows:

✓ 1, 2, 3 remain where they are.

✓ 4 is THE VISION

✓ 5 is "How many times.....?"

✓ 6 is POETICS FROM CHELM

✓ 7 is (the review)

✓ 8 is "The charisma....."

9 is ROMEO ON JULIET

10 is Man/ in Perse

11 is OBJECTIVIST LAMP

12 is "If I were suddenly....."

13 is "Get thee to a....."

14 is "Every time....."

15 is "The morning headline"

16 is "As an American....."

17 is "The great American/ headstone"

Cheers,

Carl Rakosi

128 Irving St.

San Francisco, CA 94122

3/17/81

Dear Allan:

I'm altogether pleased at the look of DROLES DE JOURNAL, the shape of the type, the feel of the paper, and above all at the interesting character of the numbers. As for the yellow, you handled it with discretion. The only thing that gives me regret is that some poems have titles and others not, which gives the Contents page a raggedy appearance. I should have anticipated this.

I didn't notice until it was too late that you preferred black ink for the signatures. I'm sorry. Black would have looked better. What I had in the house was blue ink.

With regard to author's copies, I would appreciate it if you would send me 6 paperbacks instead of 12, and 8 cloth copies instead of 2.

Sure, let's have a publication party after my reading. I assume that Bookslinger will have my other books available too.

Cordially,

Dear Allan:

I've been stalling, not ~~k~~ quite knowing what to do with my prose. I've decided finally to take you up on your offer last year to do a scaled-down version of some 40 pages. Are you in a position now to tackle it?

How goes it with the business? Are you going to be moving, as you thought, to my old neck of the woods, St. Paul? I've been afraid to ask, but I should: how have the sales of DROLES DE JOURNAL gone?

Can you send me a copy of Notley's HOW SPRING COMES?

10 April 1987

Dear Steve:

I don't remember if I sent you a photo. If not, here's one. Please return. Also, I'll be coming in on Southwest, flt 940, arriving at 12:20 and staying with Louis & Pearl Cole, 17616 Camino Ancho, phone 451 0014. Unless you hear from us otherwise, they'll be picking us up at the airport, and you can pick me up at the Coles for the reading at 7pm.

One more thing, I'd appreciate it if you'd see that some bookstores were carrying my last two books from the National Poetry Foundation, COLLECTED POEMS and COLLECTED PROSE. It's necessary for me to ask this because the Foundation does no distribution to speak of on its own and has to be asked for books.

16 Sept. 1987

Dear Steve:

How nice of you to remember the Erickson book. I had forgotten. Also to send me your own book, which I am enjoying for its robust good nature and honest observation. As you would expect, the section, HOME, moved me most. And fancy meeting Atila there! also Oaxaca and Chiapas, those dear places. But what's such a title doing for your book? You're not going to pretend, are you, that the reader is not to take you seriously? Ditto the testimonials at the back. They're hilarious, but what are you trying to say? Well, a small matter.

Leah is still in remission so we're both functioning better.

Affectionately,

Carl

*Joseph Atila, Hungarian
poet translated by
him*

Title: Lurid Confessions

EMINENCE
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1/19/82

Dear J:

Laughlin

"Poor Rexroth" is right. I wrote him as soon as I heard from you. I hope my words will get through. I always expected some day to have a good talk with him but never did. He came to Minneapolis years ago to read with a jazz combo. At the end I introduced myself to him. My muse then was still, as you so elegantly put it, ~~was~~ "on an extended trip," and my presence understandably astonished him. But of course that was not the time or place to talk. Years later there was time at the National Poetry Festival in Michigan, where we were both reading & lecturing, but this time his back was giving him trouble and he was in a vile mood. You had to avoid him. This was the Festival, incidentally, at which Duncan and I became good friends; also the Oppens. Which leads me to the realization that it would be nice seeing you again. Next time you're in these parts, please stop by and visit with Leah and me.

Best,

Carl

*James Laughlin
New Directions*

2 Aug. 1984

Dear W:

Sure, delighted to have AMERICAN NYMPHS reprinted. Since you may also want to say something in the Annual about George's passing, would you also like to have a piece I'm just completing on my observations of his last days?

All the best,

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James Laughlin

19 Nov. 1984

Dear D:

To continue our discussion, I chose the word
~~*****~~ pissed. the coarsest word, in order to add power
to my description of Alzheimer's Disease and because
it went with my feelings about man's terminal state
And what it reduces him to. If May finds the word
offensive, however, I am willing to change ~~the phrase~~^{it}
to "no one had noticed that he had not passed water in
nine days"; or simply delete it for N.D. if she would
prefer that.

Nice to see you again, looking as I remembered you
looking.

27 Nov. 1984

Dear Robert:

Yes, the Oppen will be published elsewhere, in CONJUNCTIONS here and in SCRIPSI in Australia. Your readership being a continent away, I didn't think there would be any duplication to amount to anything, otherwise I wouldn't have sent it to you. Sorry.

Perhaps Reagan is just what the doctor ordered for an electorate that craves simple answers to insoluble problems.

Under separate cover I'm sending you a copy of my COLLECTED PROSE. I don't know why I didn't think of sending you one right away for review.

29 Dec. 1984

Dear J:

That was a mad scene at City Lights, multitudes of jostling poets and hangers-on, none of whom I knew, with no one but you, seated, in possession of a turf.

I didn't mean to imply that June had turned sour towards George. Quite the contrary, his illness agitated her deeply and probably intensified her affection for him. One would have expected, therefore, that feeling that way, she would have offered to help somehow, either in having George cared for herself part of the time or~~x~~ in at least offering to share in the insane costs of his care, but she couldn't bring herself to offer anything, not one thing, at the same time harshly blaming and criticizing Mary. That's why I spoke bitterly about her.

We seem to be in a box about my piece on George. I can't show it to Mary because that would be like asking for her approval, and if I understand you, you're afraid that the picture of George in illness might disturb her, that she might not want anyone to know this about him. All understandable. I have no objection to your sending it to her to check it out but if you have any reluctance to do this or if you feel that the whole matter has become too sensitive for you because of your personal relationship to Mary, I can understand ^{that} and let the whole thing go. Think about ~~at~~ a little more, J, and let me know.

Leah and I will be coming to New York in May. for about five days. Perhaps we can get together then.

Health & good cheer in the New Year,

James Haughey

30 Jan. 1985

Dear J:

This'll save you the trouble of writing me.
I've spoken to Mary and you must, by now, know the
consequences: withdraw the piece on George.

25 Oct. 1985

Dear J:

STOLEN AND CONTAMINATED POEMS, and especially your recollections and commentary, fill in spaces in the literary scene that one hadn't perceived were there.....with your usual light, graceful hand, now more playful and genial than ever.

Thanks. And be well.

20 Dec. 1983

Dear Pat and André:

How nice of you to remember our birthdays. What I don't understand is how you knew in the first place and remembered. ~~Wow~~ Anyhow, what a sluggard I am, by comparison.

This birthday was a biggie, in numbers, for me, and I felt a social obligation to acknowledge it (damned grudgingly, let me tell you), since all our friends were making a big thing out of it. So first, Leah threw a party for our poet friends and their spouses (without & poor George Oppen, who has Alzheimer's Disease and can no longer go out in company). Then a friend gave a party for me for our other friends. After that I was my age.....for a couple of days.

Of comparing literatures I imagine there's no end, so I see no prospect of Andre's staying put in one place for long. Exactly what is he teaching at the U? The last I had anything to do with a university, the schedule was more like two or three hours a day, not fourteen....or did you mean fourteen hours a week?

Yes, Judaism is attractive to the rational mind but I can not say as much for modern Israel. In fact any similarity between Judaism and modern Israel you have to dig for. What I mean is that I have been utterly alienated by its actions since the Labor government. I expect better, much better, from my people.

You know, I lived in Austin during the 1930's. It was then a city of about 50,000, very pleasant, with girls whose beauty used to drive me wild. There were not many blacks in Texas then but an unknown number, well over a million, of Mexicans, who were treated with contempt. I could never understand it because these mostly illiterate, very poor laborers had far more natural dignity and integrity than the Texans. I was a teaching assistant in the English Department then but that didn't last long. I couldn't stand the Anglophile affectations, the jostling for power, the sycophancy and the covert throat-cutting and got out before it was too late. Switched to medicine, which I studied at the Medical School in Galveston but had to give up eventually when my money ran out.

News? A small book of mine has just come out from the Pig Press in Durham, England, and my collected prose should be out in a couple of weeks from the National Poetry Foundation at the University of Maine. Leah has done a beautiful piece in walnut but her work goes very slowly because she tires quickly.

Mine does too, but for psychological reasons.

It's fun to get these pictures of Katelijne. Wish I could speak with her.
If you or Andre get an assignment here, you know you can stay with us.

No, you never sent us your short story.

All the best to you for the new year,

10 Jan. 1984

Leferver
Dear Pat and Andre:

How nice to hear from you. We thought you had returned to Antwerp and perhaps drifted off in your own separate planet, which in turn may have slipped out of our orbit, ^{but} lo and behold, here comes Andre's familiar annual high-jinks, jolly as ever, and your ever-loyal self, and the doughty Katelijne, now seven (is it possible?), to reassure us that you are still here. That's comforting.

I'm astounded that you have moved from Antwerp. I thought that was an insoluble problem, but apparently Andre's position is attractive and secure enough to have resolved it. Or did that come about because of events in Antwerp? Or both? In any case, now that you're here, there's at least some chance that we can be together again. Remember, there's always that spare bedroom and bath waiting for you, and Katelijne could sleep in my grand-daughter's sleeping bag in my study.

Except for Leah's ongoing struggle with high blood pressure and a very brief bout I had with diverticulitis, we have been far more fortunate in our health than our contemporaries. And even more fortunate in our son and daughter and four indomitable grand-daughters. And this has all come about because we believe in Santa Claus.

Leah has done a couple of impressive sculptures since we saw you last, but she just doesn't have the strength to wield that mallet (as well as ^{lack of} some know-how), and it has all been sweat and frustration for her. I'm trying to convince her to change to sandstone, which is much softer than wood, but she loves wood and won't budge.

My book, COLLECTED PROSE, published by The National Poetry Foundation at the University of Maine, came out not long ago. The same publisher is bringing out my COLLECTED POEMS some ~~xxx~~ time this year (I hope). If I write less these days, and slightly more prose than poetry, it is due in some part to indolence and procrastination, and to becoming overcome at times ^{by} ~~xx~~ a kind of tropism towards sleep, but this can change any day (I tell myself).

Are you associated, Andre, with Christopher Middleton in the German Dept.? I recall his translation of the Nietzsche letters with great pleasure.

Our love and best wishes for the New Year.

Carl

This note is from Meridel Le Sueur, a neglected Middle West writer whose short stories are pure Middle Westernness in the sense that Sherwood Anderson was and at the same time have great rhapsodic, bardic power. When we were young, we had a number of close mutual friends — like the novelists Zona Gale and Margery Latimer, the wife (white) of Jean Toomer, the first important modern negro writer in America — she mentions them in her note — but our paths never crossed until a few months ago (though, without knowing it, we lived only a few blocks from each other in Minneapolis) when we fell into each other's arms, she exclaiming, "I never thought I'd live to see you."

Her letter was in response to my enthusiasm over her book, Corn Village, and to my asking her what else she had written, ^{and saying} "I was hungry for more, and she deserved far more visibility than her small regional publisher could give her. The brunch she refers to was at my house with Diane Wakoski and Michael Dennis Browne, and her question to me, "how do you now return to your poetry?" refers to the twenty-five years during which I stopped writing altogether.

Meridel made quite an impression on us. A serene, massive face, with white hair, and a big, light torso, like Iseult ^{Stein} is said to have had.

I was surprised to hear her speak in the letter of her Indian childhood. I had never heard that there was any Indian in her but her mentioning it does enable me to see what I had not seen before, the face of a strong Indian Mother.

Carl Rakosi

Four letters from Denise Levertov that need
no notes.

Carl Rakosi

5/13/82

Dear Steve Levine:

The things for which you praise my work are to be found in your book too; and when not ~~xxxx~~ quite there, it's the direction in which I see you going. So you might say we're fellow-travellers.

Had you come up to me after the reading and said what you wrote in the letter, I would not have heard it fully or would have discounted it as a passing emotion. So I am glad you chose to write.

Odd that you should say that I had something to do with reconfirming your "faith in the necessity of poetry and in the value of the act of writing" when I myself am too skeptical to have such faith.

With best wishes,

9 March, 1984

Dear Steve:

It would be nice to read with you
but Leah and I and another couple will probably
be sight-seeing in Yosemite around that time.
When you're in town, however, call me anyhow
(566-3425).....just in case.

All the best,

30 July 1984

Dear Steve:

It's not that I don't want to read with you but I don't want to read at New College for at least another two or three years. I'm not big on readings and it takes something like a personal obligation to get me to go to one. But if you do come in November, I hope you'll have time to visit.

23 May 1984

Levy
Dear John:

Greetings to you love-birds in Meligala, to the little 3-car trains that pass through the village occasionally, to the red tile roofs of your nabors, to the olive groves always associated with the image of Greece, to the meadows and mountains you look out on, to the little goats, of whom, as you know, I am particularly fond, to your parents' devoted feelings for you, and to the poems you sent me, which tell me so well where you are and what you are seeing. And above all, hugs to both of you for your heartfelt feeling for my poems.

We miss you here but I guess it'll be another year before you return to the States. In the meantime, George, August and I have become akind of three-some and are willing to make it four-some when you return; I have a new friend, Lawrence Fixel, an epigrammatist and writer of parables (we disagree on the meaning of the word), whose work I recommend; and I avoid poetry readings, as always, whenever I can but sometimes I can't; and unlike Wilde, I revel in arguments of any kind, especially when they are vulgar and my ~~opponent's~~ opponent's arguments are ~~xxx~~ superficially convincing.

Fondly,

Carl

11/18/82

Dear John:

It is my favorite photograph too. As you so well put it: "the one with you looking back at Leah smiling and she has that wonderful happy look as she meets your eyes." Exactly! You'd think Leah would like it too, but no, she thinks all her photographs make her look too "soft," lacking in character, as it were, and nothing I say has been able to shake her from this conviction. I wish you'd try your hand at it. Anyhow, muchas gracias for all the fine pictures. I'm enclosing the cut-out, with your photograph of me, from my reading at Buffalo. It's my only copy, so please return. I asked them to credit you but for some reason it ~~xxxx~~ didn't get done.

I'm looking forward to hearing all about Senegal and your trip. I hope, however, that you ~~you~~ don't come when we're tied up with guests. From Dec. 12 to Dec. 16 we'll be hosting old friends from Minneapolis; from Dec. 16 to Dec. 19 there'll be other friends with us from Santa Barbara; then for a few days after the 19th we'll be with our Minneapolis friends ~~again~~ again. After that or before the 12th the coast is clear, for you to stay with us if you'd like.

Fondly,

P.S. Virginia Woolf's Diaries are in three volumes. What you have must be selections.

8/22/82

Dear John: *Levy*

The date of your last letter, June 2nd, stares at me reproachfully, and my date line, August 22nd, stares back guiltily (that's the least it can do). "How come?" asks June 2nd. "I don't know," says August 22nd. "Ask Robert Bly. He knows everything. He'll look into his tables of astrology and give you a universal explanation which will include instructions on how to bake a transcendental poem." "Yeah, great mind!"

They laughed when you said you were a pretty good photographer but when *they saw* ~~the~~ the photographs, they applauded. I did. In fact, I used #2 for a publicity release for my upcoming reading next month in Buffalo. #2 is the serious, working poet at his desk. I didn't want people to think all I do is smile. Yes, I would like to have copies: two of #4, which I like particularly because it shows my eyes; two of #2 because I'm without this one now; and one each of the others. Lovely of you to offer to do this. ~~No.~~ No. 6, by the way, could be how I look when I'm thinking about an Americana poem, and the photograph of you and me could be what happens when I've just told you about it. I wonder how #4 would look, blown up to a 5" x 7"; or #6. Want to try? No. 3 is particularly engaging because it shows Leah looking the way she does when she's chuckling affectionately at one of my crummy jokes. The photographs of George and ~~M~~ August are just the way I want to remember them.

Which reminds me. You should have been at their reading here some time back. They needed another poet in the audience. But I shouldn't say that. A more loyal, enthusiastic and attentive audience would be hard to imagine. The only difference was that they were friends and neighbours and relatives of Lissa's. What's wrong with that? I don't think they had even been to a reading before. I think they were surprised that they could follow the poems and get pleasure from them. It was a great evening for them and a very courageous undertaking for George and August to do on their own, without sponsorship of any kind. I was touched.

Have you gotten Mina Loy's THE LAST LUNAR BAEDCKER yet? Quite a book. Also Virginia Woolf's DIARIES. Full of nuggets of extraordinary perception, not to be found in her novels.

Affectionately,

Carl Rakosi

128 Irving St.

San Francisco, CA 94122

4/30/81

Dear John:

You see what happens when you leave a place where people want you to stay? a truck blows up on you/ a radiator burns out/ and God knows what else will come to light later. I could have told you!

Hurry back!

20 June 1985

Levy
Dear John:

It was nice getting a long letter from you, and it will be nice to have you home again where we'll be able to visit with you from time to time. All in all, I sense that your Greek experience has been a good thing for you.

About your poems. The short ones, (In the Style....), summer etc., memo, In May are all too weak and slight and undistinguished. All you're doing is reporting a fleeting impression, and that's not enough. To make a very short poem worth while you need, because of its brevity, a particularly brilliant or illuminating perception, achieved sometime by an extraordinary metaphor which deepens the truth about the familiar, a perception that is not ordinary, that is original yet recognizable as profoundly true. There is a bit of this in death is but the problem there is that the writing is awkward and crude. small birds comes closest to it but it's marred by the slight ambiguity about "not small songs": does that mean that small songs don't surround your home but big ones do? or simply that in the universe of small birds and small songs around your house, the birds are there but the song is not? Portrait of Leah is OK too except that the reader needs to know that this is taking place in a class of Greek children trying to learn English. A bit more about her, something revealing, would fill out the poem.

I see the beginning of change, however, in the longer poems. Clean Monday, for instance. That strikes me as fresh, your own. Also George Papa..... My First Week.... would be all right except that your attitude towards the man is insincere and sentimental. Since when have you been making offerings to God? and since when is it cause for self-reproach to consider one's own wages?

To sum up: the short poems show that you're too timid and slack, not recognizing the noteworthy from the ordinary. The longer poems show that you're beginning to break out of this. So take more risks and keep going. And come back with another batch a year from now.

Love from Leah & me,
Carl

2 July 1984

Dear John:

I wish you hadn't asked me to criticize your poems. Ordinarily I would refuse, partly because you're a friend and I don't want to be in the position of giving you pain, but also because I think a poet can find his own way; in fact, he learns more doing it himself. I have a hunch, however, from the way in which you asked me, that you need feedback, so sit down and brace yourself and I'll react. I did not find the "overweening sweetness" in TRAVELS that August objected to but I did find the poems too slight and sometimes skimpy and ~~thin~~ ~~thin~~ thin. Is this because you think that a poetic effect can be attained by a bare statement or a scatter of individual words? That may look like the Imagist technique & the ^{set}Obj. technique, but it lacks the hard brilliance of the former and the depth of the latter. No, it doesn't come that easily. Have you perhaps become too soft? I'll take up each poem.

TRAIN FROM ATHENS: starts off well but in the end there's simply not enough there.

17 MONTHS OLD...: beginning = just right; moves along OK but last line, "making the word your song" is a gratuitous interpolation, suddenly sentimental, which violates the previous directness.

FIRST WEEK IN SEPT.: seems incomplete. Avoid present participles.

IONIAN: the first piece that I can say is done right, that moves into broader horizons, into a more universal state of being. The ~~xxxx~~ spacing and the line arrangements facilitate this.

ENGLAND: this has the makings of a good poem but an awkward beginning because you start with an interpretation of something that has not yet been stated and pass on to your reaction to it.

SONG: too skimpy. Re: "pleasure/to fall/asleep", it's a general rule that a reader is never interested in what a poet says he feels.

BEGINNINGS IN MAY: the notations are not illuminating enough to be interesting. You have not looked hard and long enough. The one exception: "another grasshopper.....ancients." This suddenly lifts one out of the ordinary. However, your stenographic form~~x~~ seems to me pointless and on the last page it's as if you had lost your tongue. Nothing is evoked by words like star, mist, moon, dawn.

PHOENIX: too skimpy. This is a note ~~x~~ for a possible poem.

The prose sections of NOTES FROM 10 DAYS IN SENEGAL are lively & interesting. Re the two interior poems, the subject~~x~~ matter has interest but the first is awkwardly written and the second is also and in addition the lines and spaces are badly arranged. Also, why not simply quote the lines from Seng Chiao-jan poem?

Well, these are just a few poems and perhaps not representative, but I have an uneasy feeling that you have been taking it too easy and may have been misled by Corman's minimalism. Anyhow, sorry!

13 Sept. 1986

Leah
Dear John:

Opening yr packet of photos was a joyous event. We hit the jackpot. There are two of Leah that are the best ever done of her, bar none: her dear personality shines through them. As for me, in recent years I have become so dissatisfied with my face on photos that I have been telling people I have none when they ask for a picture for publicity in connection with a reading or some such. But you've captured me in a look on two photos that altogether pleases me. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ Henceforth, one or both will become my official photo for such occasions. This means, however, that I'll want more copies than I have a right to ask of you, since I'd like copies for my son and daughter and granddaughters as well, so I wish you'd let me re-imburse you. In any case, I've indicated the number of copies on the back of each picture, as you suggested. The sculpture pictures, with which you took such great pains, pleased, delighted, impressed, revealed. I don't see how they could have been better. All in all, a coup.

Leaving soon for a visit with my daughter in Minneapolis and for my reading tour out East, which this time includes the University of Maine in Orono, where I come face to face finally with ^{my} publisher, Terrell.

Love,

The reference in Walter Loewenfeld's letter of
1/21/71 is to a comment I had made that his American
Voices (in his book, Thou Shalt not Overkill) was exactly
the kind of poem I had tried to write too and had
worked at it and worked at it but had found it
just too hard to do and had finally dropped the
idea.

Carl Rakosi

London

29 Sept. 1988

Dear Rick:

I'd like to be able to write you
a short testimonial because I'd like to help
you but the matter is too complex for that.
However if you are willing to settle for just
my thoughts on the poems, call me at 566-3425
and we'll set up a time when you can come over
and we'll talk.

With best wishes,

Carl Rakosi

The letter from Norman Macleod, a prolific writer from the 1930s, is interesting to me because not only do I have no recollection of having made the remark he imputes to me (it is too cruel a thing for me to have said) but I have no recollection of having ever met him. We were, however, often together in the same magazines. He is now editor of Pembroke Magazine.

Carl Rakosi

8 Dec. 1985

Marale
Dear Paul:

Thank you for the poems, especially, of course, for the poem inscribed to Leah and me. They have your usual solidity and strength, the Ruben ~~xxxx~~ Dario in particular. I am glad to have them.

I was sorry to see you refer back, however, to the episode of my poems. I was annoyed at the time not because you didn't follow through on the plan.....after all, they had already been published....but because you didn't let me know what was going on. But I long ago put it out of my mind and there is no reason that I can see why it should remain in yours either.

With best wishes,

P.S. Mayy Oppen's address is 968 Tulare Steet, Albany, CA 94716.

4/30/83

Dear John:

I have a proposal to make to you. I could raise two thousand, maybe two thousand five hundred, dollars to buy up the stock of my books that you're storing; or if they're only on consignment from Laughlin, I could still advance you that amount. Would that enable you financially to do my COLLECTED POEMS (381 pages), which I know you believe should be done? The idea would be to take the three books off the market so that the sales of the COLLECTED would not be affected.

In that connection, Paideuma/National Poetry Foundation is bringing out a book of my collected prose this November, with, I'm pretty sure, an introduction by Duncan. I could ask Robert Creeley, who also cares for my work, to do an introduction to the COLLECTED POEMS. I should think the prior publication of the prose would create some new interests in my poetry in quarters where it has not reached.

What do you think?

Best,

June 29, 1983

Martin
Dear John:

O.K., I've carried out the exercise, as you suggested. I've put a red check on the poems that should be preserved if a selection has to be made. That brings it down to around 300 pages. If you're sure that that's still more than you can ~~xxxxxx~~ undertake, I've gritted my teeth and reduced it further. I've marked with a double red check those poems that I would not consider not including. All the poems in AMERICANANA, HOMAGES, and THE POET have been double-checked because these are long poems and all the parts are necessary for their integrity.

I haven't changed the chronological order of the mss. That order is suitable for a collected edition but probably not for a Rakosi Reader.

And now it's your turn.

Best,

11/26/83

Dear John:

I'll see what Terrell has to say. In the meantime, I don't disagree with your opinion that if you took 150 pages of my strongest poems, they would "constitute the strongest book possible." Of course they would. But what I must do before it's too late is to put a book together in which my work is seen as a whole and in which poems written at various times are re-organized and connected on the basis of an overview which sees the connections and an ongoing process not perceptible to me at the time I was writing these individual poems. My revised mss., therefore, which you do not have, constitutes various sub-wholes and ^{an} over-all whole.

If I can't get a Collected published somewhere, yes, I'll take you up on a Selected. Meanwhile, I don't know whether to ~~g~~ feel good or to feel bad about your preference for my early work.

All the ~~best~~ best,

5 May 1984

Dear John:

The name of the new poetry editor at the N.Y. Times is Don Bruckner.

I meant to ask you but forgot, who would be the best distributor for my COLLECTED PROSE on the West Coast. Terrell uses Inland Book Co. in Conn. but David Wilk there tells me the range of his customers is only the East and Middle West.

You won't forget to send me your list of magazines and papers where review copies should be sent; and thanks for our reassuring talk.

11 June 1988

Dear Fredelle:

I'm happy that Viking turned out such a lovely book for you. The paper, the print, the over-all look and feel couldn't have been better.

Strangely, I came away feeling sympathetic to Max for the first time. In the context of his dreary, heartless childhood ordeal with his father and mother, even that climactic letter to Evelyn with the final words, "And here I am with this clever little Jewish girl," is not nearly as bad as it sounds. I hear in it not an anti-Semite but the cry of a scared man who has lost again and is utterly desperate. No wonder he invested so much of himself in literature & art. They were the one way out for him. And his high-flown literary language when he talked to you, which you thought so great, was also a way out...from the reality of relationship. Of course you were the victim but in a much different and smaller sense than he was of his own dreadful psychological past.

The great pains you took with THE TREE OF LIFE shows, Fredelle. It's very well written. No one can fault you there.

Leah is mostly holding her own. When she's not all wired up from prednesone and is free of

Maynard
The Tree of Life (an autobiography)

fever and nausea, she's her old bubbly self;
and even when she's not free, she's not far from
it.

I wish we could have been with you and
Sidney to celebrate your two books.

Love from us,

28 Aug. 1094

Marshall
Merfoni Thanks, Jack, for remembering to lend me your
Perloff article on the language-bashed poets. I am
struck by how restrained it is, super-humanly almost.
She was determined obviously to give them every
benefit of the doubt and to keep out every personal
reaction of her own, perhaps because she ~~to~~ thought
their work needs more time to settle in before it
is critically evaluated. From that point ^{of view,} quite a
feat!

Thanks again,

P.S. "language-bashed" above is not a typo.

Engel Mc Carthy

The review of his book, Other Things and the Hardwork, appeared in the Minneapolis Sunday Tribune, March 21, 1971.

McCarthy did visit me later, with his secretary. We talked about our tastes in poetry and his contacts with George Seferis and mine with Borges. The secretary kept breaking in on our conversation and disagreeing with him, until I finally said, "Do you two always fight like this?" He grinned and brushed the thing aside good-naturedly, "Oh, don't pay any attention to him."

McCarthy was quite warm and genuine, not at all ~~like~~ ^{the way he is} before a news camera. He peeked into my study and with a mischievous look asked my wife, "Is this where he does his work?" "Yes," said she hesitantly, "When he's in there —" "I know," said McCarthy, "Any excuse for not going in." In which connection, he recalled, with a laugh, how some columnist, I think Roston, had written that McCarthy probably wrote poetry because it was easier than running for the presidency. "That's ridiculous," scoffed McCarthy, "Everybody knows that writing poetry is the hardest thing in the world to do."

By this time, with the help of a few drinks, we were feeling no pain, when two young McCarthys appeared, as scheduled, to chauffeur him to his hotel, as he had to leave early next morning for a campaign tour. They were introduced by McCarthy by their first names and sat down to listen ~~to~~ ^{the} ~~discussion~~ for a while to what was going on. After a few minutes, McCarthy looked at them fondly and leaning over and pointing at me, said, with ~~particular~~ ^{particular} emphasis, "I want you to take a good look at him, Kids. There's a real poet!" Much laughter.

When it was time for him to leave, I said what I felt, that I hated to see him go, and that if we lived close by, we would be great friends.

"We will be," he said, putting his arm reassuringly around my shoulder; "We will be."
~~Then~~ he gallantly kissed my wife good-bye.

Carl Rakosi

12/26/83

McCrath
Dear Tom:

I tried to get you a reading and/or a workshop of some kind but couldn't. I'm sorry. Even if I had been able to, however, it wouldn't have paid for you to come up here for it. Altho there ^{are} a lot of readings here....or maybe because there are....the fees are much smaller than at Walker. The last reading I gave at New College, for example, I shared the proceeds with another poet and we each got \$25! The exceptions are Bly and Snyder, who get large audiences for reasons that have nothing to do with poetry.

Our weather here has been wretched but when I heard the other day that you had had a windchill temperature of 90 below in Moorhead, I cried, Hallelujah!

Stay well and have a good year.

Mc Groatle

Dear Tom:

I have been reading your new book, ECHOES INSIDE THE LABYRINTH, with great excitement and a touch of nostalgia. I concur with Bly's praise but not his adjectives, "buoyant, cunning, harsh, Celtic; it joins the political disasters we have all experienced with the inner gaiety Yeats spoke of." In the interests of accuracy I would say impassioned not buoyant; understanding not cunning; gutsy not harsh; and Great Plains not Celtic. And "inner gaiety" is about as much like you as a leprechaun. I agree with Terkel too except when he calls you a political poet. Political radicals, of course, will find your work just and fulfilling, but a political poet as the word political has come to mean, is one who serves a political ideology, and that's not what I read in your work, except in ^{a few} ~~some~~ remote associations. No, what I read is a committed humanist whose power comes (partly) from his rage and sense of wrong at man's sufferings at the hands of society. Those who are with you on that can learn from you.

Affectionately,

Carl

14 Feb. 1985

Dear Douglas Messerli:

I have heard of your press but have not seen any of the books. Nor am I familiar with your own work, so if you'd like to send me RIVER TO RIVET, by all means do so.....or any other Sun And Moon book.

The idea of starting an anthology with Zukofsky sounds different for a change and I'm sure will be fun to do and to read. I've selected ten post-AMULET poems for you. Acknowledgements of course will be necessary, so when I know what you're going to use, I'll tell you which books to credit.

With best wishes,

9 April 1985

Dear Douglas Messerli:

The Sun-Moon books are very attractive. Thanks. And if it's not an imposition, I'll take you up on your offer: I would like the two Djuna Barnes books very much. Your own work, which I've just * started to read, is agile and stimulating. Keeps me on my toes.

My new work is tied up with the National Poetry Foundation, which is bringing out my COLLECTED POEMS later this year. Otherwise, I'd have no hesitation about letting you publish it. I like your books so much, however, (particularly Russell Bank's THE RELATION OF MY IMPRISONMENT, parts of which I read in United Artists as it came out, and thought I was reading the American Indian Russell Bank's account of his imprisonment in North Dakota after the shoot-out there, and wondered at the time, Where did that man learn to write like that? Is it really he? Is it possible? etc.) I say I like these little books so much that I want to recommend two writers to you who would be a solid asset to your list.

One is George Evans, whose first book, NIGHT VISION, was published in England and sold out quickly. He is also the editor of the forthcoming Olson-Corman correspondence. Evans' poems are written with great care and economy. Their observations are fresh. The imagination at work is bold, with out compromising reality. There are unexpected internal omissions in them and juxtapositions which get to the matter more quickly and increase tension. All in all, his poems have a hardy constitution and stand on a solid footing.

The other is Lawrence Fixel. He too has published a book in England, THE BOOK OF GLIMMERS, and one by Kayak, THE SCALE OF SILENCE. I read his work with great interest and enthusiasm. It is serious and penetrating and sometimes conceptually spellbinding, with flashes of intellectual surprises and unexpected insights, somewhat in the manner of Kafka and Canetti, but he is entirely his own man and has an original mind, constantly probing and inquisitive.

If you think you would be interested in them for the Press, let me know and I'll send you their addresses.

With best wishes,

11 Oct. 1985

Messeri
Dear Douglas:

I had heard about your move and wondered about it. Going from where you were, a small town, to L.A. would, I imagine, be an adventure, as you say. I have been there only once and was surprised at the County Museum's modern collection. Great things!

I hold the rights to AMULET (and ERE-VOICE too), not New Directions. Be careful, however, in what you take from there because a number of the poems have been changed and I would want the revised form to go into the anthology. By the way, when is New Directions planning to bring it out?

Do you want George Evan's address? It's 224 Day street, San Francisco 94131.

I can't think of anything at the moment that Sun and Moon or you could do for me, but something may come along. Thank you. And stop by for a visit if you're up this way.

Cordially,

Dear Doug Messerli:

Sorry to be so slow to answer your call for my favorite recipe. Here it is....finally....for one of the greatest dishes of all time. Chicken Paprikas:

2 medium-sized onions, peeled and minced; 2 tablespoons oil or margarine;
1 plump chicken, about 3 pounds, disjointed, washed and dried;
1 large, ripe tomato, peeled and cut into pieces; 1 teaspoon salt;
1 heaping tablespoon of ^{paprika} ~~pepper~~; 1 green pepper sliced;
2 tablespoons plain yogurt; 1 tablespoon flour; egg dumplings;
2 tablespoons heavy cream. And, yes, and Will make 4 servings.

Will make 4 servings.

1. Use a 4 or five quart heavy casserole with a tight-fitting lid. Cook the onions in the oil or margarine, covered, over a low heat for about five minutes until almost pasty but not browned.
2. Add chicken and tomato and cook, covered, for ten minutes.
3. Stir in paprika. Add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water and the salt. Cook, covered, over very low heat for thirty minutes. In the beginning the small amount of water will produce a steam-cooking action. Toward the end of the 30 minute period, take the lid off and let the liquid evaporate. Then let the chicken cook in its own juices, taking care that it does not burn (if the chicken is tough, add a few tablespoons of water).
4. Remove chicken pieces. Mix the yogurt, flour and 1 teaspoon of cold water and stir in with the sauce until it is very smooth and of an even color. Add green pepper, replace chicken parts, adjust salt to taste. Put lid back on casserole and over very low heat, cook until done.
5. Before serving, whip in the heavy cream.
6. Serve with egg dumplings.

Recipe for Egg Dumplings

1 egg	1 teaspoon & 1 tablespoon salt
3 tablespoons oil or margarine	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups flour
one-third cup water	

1. Mix egg, 1 tablespoon oil or margarine, one-third cup water and 1 teaspoon salt. Mix in the flour lightly. Work the mixture just enough to give it an even texture (about 3 minutes. Let it rest for 10 minutes.

2. Bring to a boil 3 quarts water with 1 tablespoon of salt. Dip a table-
spoon into the boiling water, to prevent sticking, and use it to gouge out
pieces of dumpling mixture and drop them into the boiling water.

3. When the dumplings have all surfaced to the top, turn the heat off and
remove them with a slotted spoon. Then rinse them with cold water and
drain.

4. Heat the remaining ~~xxxxxx~~ two tablespoons of oil or margarine in a
frying pan and lightly toss the drained dumplings in it for a few
minutes. Sprinkle with salt to taste.

A dish worthy ~~xxxx~~ of poets....of good poets, that is. The others,
let them batten on chitlings.

Good luck on the book. And, yes, send a letter describing the contri-
bution as a tax-deductible gift of \$100. If you use my name in the letter,
use my legal name, Callman Rawley.

Best wishes,

25 Sept. 1988

Dear Mr. Montgomery:

You're one up on me: I've never been taken for a character in a novel. What a startling ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ Experience!

You're quite right about the Language Poets: they should know better. On the other hand, they think we should know better.

If you believe the Marin Poetry Center should invite me for a reading, why don't you drop them a note and suggest it to them?

Again, with best wishes,

Carl Rakosi

To Bradford Morrow
editor of Conjunctions

12/30/81

Relieved and pleased to learn that the Village can still be described as "lovely and active." Who knows maybe a kindly Providence is looking out for it and regenerating it from time to time.

The people I ~~x~~ had in mind in New York who might be good for CONJUNCTIONS and you to have some contact with are Paul Auster, Michael Heller, Armand Schwerner, George Economou, Toby Olson, and the group associated with St. Mark's.....Ron Padgett, Anne Waldman, Ted Berrigan, Bob Holman, Bob Rosenthal, Maureen Owen, Alice Notley (Berrigan's wife)..be sure you send ~~xxx~~ ST. Mark's a copy of the magazine; they might do something with it in their POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER, Greg Masters, editor, St. Mark's Church, 2nd Ave. & 10th Street.

About my books for your contributors column, the following can be cited: DROLES DE JOURNAL, Toothpaste Press; EX CRANIUM, NIGHT, Black Sparrow; AMULET, New Directions; ERE-VOICE, New Directions.

We'll keep our fingers crossed for you in the Big Apple. I take it from your letter that you've lived there before. Und was bedeutet es that in the Rexroth festschrift you were listed as being a rare book dealer and publisher?

Cordially,

7.10.82

Dear Brad:

I know now why you were so enthusiastic about Conjunctions 2. Except for Michael McClure's high-sounding, juvenile flap-doodle (awful ~~stuff~~ stuff! but, as so often happens, nice guy), I was excited by it too. I haven't had time, of course, to read it all, but what I've read is adventurous and interesting in Sabin and Irby, Irby spaced out in some ~~xxxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxxxx~~ consciousness fix, Sabin more language-propelled and literary; the HD letters fascinating in ~~xxxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxx~~ ~~xxxx~~ the contrast between the daily earthling, Hilda Doolittle, * and HD the poet; * astonishing, hard to believe. As for Enslin, I can't make up my mind about him. His work seems solid and seamless, the tone serious and in good taste, unpretentious, but does every jetsam and ~~flotsam~~ flotsam of observation, association, comment have to go into an interminable journal-like poem? Must emanate from an idea that everything in human experience is precious; which may be acceptable theology but bad poetry. Anyhow, one has the impression of a man unable to stop talking in an even-toned mumble; of there being no silences in this world, no gradations of importance, no chosen direction, though ~~xxxx~~ there is form. It is as if what Zukofsky said, mistakenly, about A. that it is a life, is true of Ted's work. Nothing complimentary in that. Back to Conjunctions, very handsome, a pleasure to look at.

Thanks for the very nice DANAE'S PROGRESS, Who, by the way, is Cadmus Editions? Andrew Hoyem?

Carl

10/27/82

Dear Brad:

Your POSTHUMES is a very civilized book.

I found its elegant, mordant tone, close to the comic, perhaps a bit too close to Laforque, exciting.

Quite attractive too is its care with words, as for example the concentration you've packed into the

word, mortmain, in Passing from the provinces

(Santa Barbara?). I have my favorites, of course:

1. Mour amanuensis (I assume the reference is to Rexroth) and 2. Bisbane's flower. Thanks for having

Cadmus send me a copy. The cover design by Ginzel is a knock-out.

I've added to the poem of mine you asked to keep for yourself. You might as well have a revised copy.

Affectionately,

Carl

12/17/82

Dear Brad:

Robert Bertholf from SUNY at Buffalo will be publishing my bibliography in Credences and has asked for a batch of new poems ~~for~~ for that issue. Well, I don't have that, but I could send him I WAS LISTENING TO JEAN REDPATH. Any objection to that?

You too wanted some more poems. It's unlikely that I'll have them soon, as I'm working hard to a deadline to complete a book of prose, which will be published, if all goes well, around next November by the editor of PAIDEUMA. Would you like some pieces from that for CONJUNCTIONS? I'd have to check it out first with him, of course.

Will you be sending me CONJUNCTIONS 3?

12/26/82

Dear Brad:

It's easiest to just send you the short pieces, so you can see for yourself. If you use them, they should be called FROM EX CRANIUM, THE POET. It's OK with Terry. If they don't fit in, do return them.

Fondly,

4/28/83

Dear Brad:

No, no, keep HEADS and KILROY. It may be good for me to know that you're waiting for more.

My COLLECTED PROSE seems to be on schedule. Already with the printer. Duncan was reading the text while he was doing his stint there, and working (I hope) on an introduction. Burt Hatlen, with whom I was on a testimonial program here for George Oppen's 75th birthday, reported that Robert was excited by it. Well, that's enough for me. He doesn't need to write the introduction.

Affectionately,

9 Aug. 1984

my Collected Prose and my Spiritus, I

Dear Brad:

It would be nice if someone did an article on these two for CONJUNCTIONS, but I don't know whether you'd want that. The aphorism as a modern art form deserves some discussion.

CONJUNCTIONS 5 is full of excitement, as usual. It's swell of you to keep sending me the magazine. I'm particularly looking forward to CONJUNCTIONS:6 with Davenport's translation of Anacreon.

At work on an interview with questions from George Evans and August Kelnzähler.

Best,

26 Sept. 1984

Dear Brad:

I suppose it would be a little better if the piece could come out before next Spring, but since it is not a memorial piece on the occasion of George's death, it does not much matter. However, if you know of a good place where it could appear sooner, I'd consider it, but I don't myself want to be sending it out to places where I'm not well known.

I couldn't extend my memoir, as you would like, to include George's "strong life" because I met him rather late in life and the account of our meeting is already in ~~my~~ my PROSE book. I was not present during the earlier part, and what came when I was, is not interesting enough to report.

Best,

2/22/62

Dear Brad:

Consider it a compliment if I tell you that POSTHUMES was of interest ~~to~~ to me, since I value poetry in the ~~same~~ same way I value fiction, by whether it is interesting. It is interesting because your subject matter is very much your own, your manner pretty much so too, forcing attention from the reader. My preferences are: Your amanuensis; Garibaldi; Passing from the provinces; and Lax Alba. If I have any reservations, they are that some of the titles are too literary, and that it is not clear sometimes what a passage is referring to, although it is clear that you take for granted that the reference is obvious. Also that The Fire-^{Drill}Brill, it seems to me, would benefit by deleting Stanza I; that & in the poem, Evening: matters, the last line is a big let-down due to the word, "interesting." The poem, Posthumes, is excellent, but "horsed down the ^tseaming meal"? A horse eats rather slowly and deliberately.

CONJUNCTIONS I did finally come. A pleasure to look at. I can see why you prefer your festchrift to Gardner's. *for Laughlin*

Best,

7 May 1985

Dear Brad:

I understand about the length of the poem.
No sweat. But do return it, please.

About the prose Oppen, I think I'll wait
a couple of years and then publish it. So stick around.

See you soon.

Bradford Morrow

5 April 1986

Dear Brad:

In July it will be two years since George Oppen passed away. That's surely long enough to wait ^{before} ~~to~~ ^{ing} publish my memoir on his last days. So here it is again for CONJUNCTIONS.

13 April 1986

Dear Brad:

The only thing I changed was one word: on the last page, 5th line from the bottom, the word pissed was changed to passed water.

A couple of months ago Leah was found to have lymphoma, a cancer of the lymph glands, so all my time and reality have lain buried there. I'm just beginning to get out of it . Maybe we'll be lucky.

Affectionately,

29 Jan. 1984

Dear Brad:

Last-minute unexpected bad news. Mary Oppen and George's sister, June, were deeply pained and agitated by my piece on George. I didn't think they would be but they were. If it's not too late, therefore, please withdraw the article right away.

Sorry about this damned foul-up but what else can I do?

Best,

24 March 1987

Mottman
Dear Eric:

^ Thanks a million for your fresh, perceptive response to my COLLECTED. Warms my heart. Incidentally, the N.Y. Times review of the book carried a photograph of me, smiling and looking quite buoyant in the sun. It was taken by a young Australian at the London Poetry Society reading at which you introduced me and really did introduce me. Brought back memories. Oh my, am I ever going to see you folks in England again?

Affectionately,

This letter from Lorine Niedecker was written to me on receipt of my Amulet, while I was Writer-in-Residence at the University of Wisconsin.

"LZ" in the letter is Louis Zukofsky. "AL" is her husband, a very plain working man whom she married late in life.

I visited her sometime in March of that year. I had heard that she was a recluse and that there ~~was~~ might be something strange about her because she had been working as an ordinary cleaning woman in a mental hospital; so, driving up from Madison, I ~~had~~ ^{felt} some trepidation. My fears were groundless, however. The moment I met her at the door, she was outgoing to me, cheerful, and very lively, the opposite of recluse. Time flew. We had a delightful time, she particularly pleased that her uneducated husband and I got along so well.

Her house was only a few steps from the water of a small lake. It was so small that if three of us had called on her instead of two, it would have been impossible to stand up and turn around. And that's no exaggeration.

Carl Rakosi

23 Jan. 1987

O'Brien

Dear Geoffrey:

What an illuminating, empathic
send-off you gave the COLLECTED POEMS. *(review in the Village Voice*

How well you know me!

Jan. 13, 1987

Bless you.

Carl

George Oppen and I had known each other's work since the 1930s and had appeared together often in print but had never met or corresponded. I made an effort to see him in New York on my way to Yaddo during the summer of 1968 or 69 but he got to N.Y. too late for ~~us~~ to ~~see him~~ be able to get together. We weren't able to do that until May 1971 when I gave a reading at San Francisco State and was his house guest. At the end of two days together, we found we had such a deep, sympathetic understanding that when it was time for me to go, we embraced and Oppen declared, "now we are friends for thirty-five years." And indeed it was so, this is what he refers to in the last letter.

The letters are not dated. The one beginning, "Dear Carl R" was written in the winter of 1970 after reading a group of my poems in the Winter/Spring 1970 issue of Shimac. Leah was the name of one poem; "Briah the oaf" appeared in it. Oppen's postscript is a collage of quotations from Leah and from two of the other poems in that issue, Poem and In thy Sleep / Little Sorrows Sit and Weep. "Extension of your remarks in 'Madison'" refers to the interview with me in Contemporary Literature in the Spring of 1969.

The letter beginning "Dear Carl" must have been written in November 1971 in response to receiving my Eve-Voice. "J. haughlin" is, of course, New Directions, our publisher.

Carl Rakosi

GEORGE OPPEN

~~364 HENRY STREET BROOKLYN NEW YORK 11201~~
~~XX~~

2811 Polk St San Francisco Calif 94109

Dear Carl Rakosi

-- I too had thought of writing, but have not been sure what degree of privacy your pen name was meant to provide --

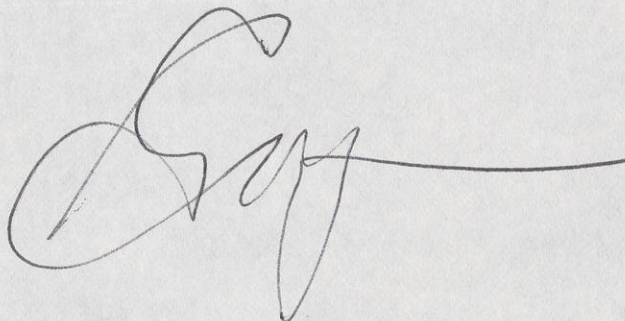
We will not quite make N Y by the first, but will be in N Y from the 9th to the 1st of June at the apt. of a cousin:

Ethel ~~Schw~~ Schwabacher
1192 Park Ave N Y

tel: S A 2 4514

hope this will work out. I would like very much to meet you; it is, in fact, rather strange that we did not manage to meet long ago

with regards

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'G. Oppen', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Dear Carl R

Your Leah in the latest Sumac : aurely
among the most delightful of poems ~~ever~~ written --

Belial, your oaf, notwithstanding ---

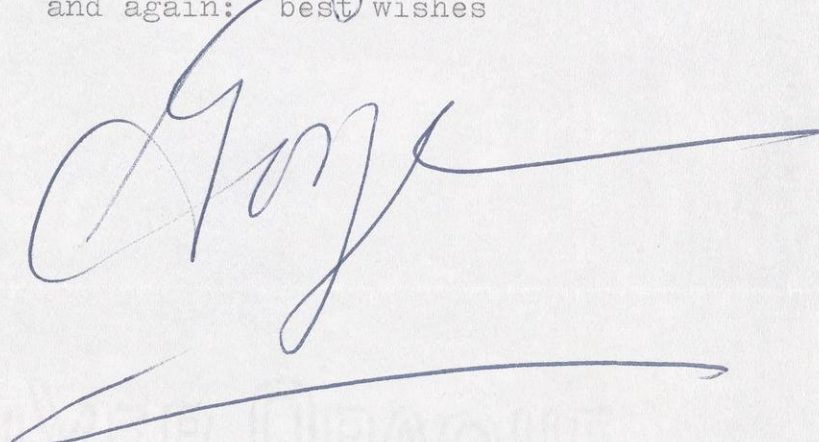
protest of

I thought it would be ungrateful not to drop you a line
to say so -- tho it is only a lone In fact, written ~~most~~
hurriedly on the eve of departure for Maine

Best regards

(and niether do I mean to slight the other
poems in Sumac which are, of course, another and
contrasting matter ((Yes: also found in 'the plain
world')) Interesting to think of this, these poems, as
extention of your remarks in Madison ---

and again: best wishes



' . . . let us hug and rom/p
In the plain life
Or I am lost! '

despite the owl and the
lizard and the beef it seems to me for the moment that this
is all there is to say; all one need say ---

Or I am lost

Dear Carl:

absorbing there's no firmer verse than your best Dazzling and

virtue. -- yes, a contradiction in my words Nor my fault: your

and yes, a friend of 35 years
for that matter. Happily verified.

Always thought so,

((((I was very much impressed, almost most impressed, by the
lines of "IN ~~the~~ sleep - - -" which, in the book, happen to be
~~on the second page~~ on the second page of the poem

-- reading it: I feel the poem should have
ended with the first page - - - - - the poem seems
absolutely immovable in that form

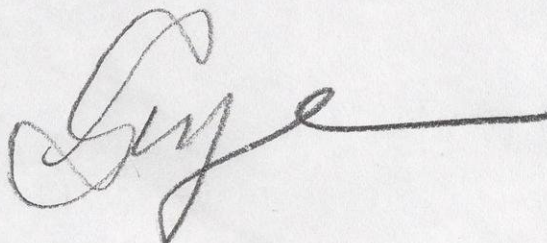
I just report this -- re-action on first reading))))))

of 35 years: (((notice again that J Laughlin takes us as friends
my books mentioned on your back cover

'on your back cover" : neighborly indeed

Again: there's no firmer verse Dazzling

(and this from an old friend OLD old friend



29 Nov. 1984

Offen
Dear Mary:

I should have shown you last night what I had written for J.A.C.O.B'S NEWSLETTER. It's not good enough, of course, but I had only 500 words and a Jewish connection to make.

Best,

Carl

14 Feb. 1985

affair
Mary:

When we talked last, I had already ~~xxxx~~proof-read the piece on George's illness for CONJUNCTIONS weeks before, so I had little confidence that my letter of withdrawal would reach the editor in time, but it did. Another day and it would have been too late. Similar letters of withdrawal went out to NINTH DECADE in England and to SCRIPSI in Australia. There I don't anticipate any problem, as I had not ^{yet} read proof on it for them.

Now that this is done, under no circumstances do I ever want to think or talk about it again, for any reason whatever.

Note

- 11 letters from Oppen to me
- ~~3~~ 6 letters + 2 post cards from Rachel } about HO's letters
- 3 " " from me to Rachel
- 2 " " " " to Mary Oppen
- 6 pieces by me about HO
- 1 photo of George + Mary Oppen and Carlend.
- 11 ~~7~~ letters (miscellaneous) } Leah Pakosi
- 2 articles on HC

Although the original Oppen letters are in the Hargreaves Library, the explanatory notes are only on this batch of letters.

Carl Pakosi

Rachel Blau Du Plessis is collecting & editing Oppen's letters for a book.

from George Oppen

Dear Carl R:

my poem, Leah

Your Leah in the latest Sumac: surely among the most delightful
of poems written---

protest of

Belial, your oaf, notwithstanding-----

*Quotation from
Refer to poem, Leah*

I thought it would be ungrateful ~~if~~ not to drop you a line to say so---though
it is only a line In fact, written most hurriedly on the eve of departure for Maine

Best regards

(and neither do I mean to slight the other poems in Sumac which are, of course,
another and contrasting matter ((Yes: also found in 'the plain world')) Interesting
to think of this, these poems, as extension of your remarks in Madison-----

and again: best wishes

*Refer to the
Dumbo interviews
with the Objectivists*

'.....let us hug and romp

in the plain life

or I am lost!

*Quotations from my poem,
Leah*

despite the owl and the lizard and the beef it seems to me for the
moment that this is all there is to say; all one need say----

*Refer to parts of
poems in the Sumac
group*

Or I am lost — Also, quotation from " "

*Four poems appeared in Sumac, Winter/Spring 1970: Poem,
In Thy Sleep, No One Talks About This and Leah.
This must have been his first letter to me.
Carl Rakosi*

GEORGE OPPEN

2811 POLK STREET SAN FRANCISCO CALIFORNIA 94109

*Refers to my review of Sea-Scope in
the Minneapolis Star & Tribune
Carl Rakosi*

Dear Carl:

this young man of 67 has been travelling
(Israel and Greece) with the youngest woman in the
world and the loveliest and has returned home to a
snow-drift of un-fowraded mail and has collapsed

but yes, we saw your review, and were
happy with your words, and happy they were yours, old
firende, old friend, happy they were yours

and thanks

George

Date: 1975/2 must have written to ask what he meant by "Lucky I've
been lucky." ~~The last paragraph of the letter to me about the
adjoining page for host #1~~ of adjoining page for host #1
Carl Ralcosi

Dear Carl:

"Lucky I've been lucky" - -
Don't know, don't remember the context in which I
said it; but I ~~must~~ have
- - probably meant lucky in my funds.
Including Carl R.

(and your remarks about Dennis & Yaddo - ('could
have been me in the 10 days') + tell me the
depth of your political commitment in
those old days which I had suspected
but you didn't say - - and which
makes our friendship not so new as we
said it was & each other talking to
each other from the bottom and the top
of those Brooklyn - like stairs.

Love
Lynne

The last paragraph deciphered reads as follows: "(and your remarks about Denise at Yaddo--('could have been me in the old days') tells me the depth of your political commitment in those old days which I had suspected but you didn't say---and which makes our friendship not so new as we said it was to each other talking to each other from the bottom and the top of those Brooklyn-like stairs."

(1) Denise is Denise Levertov. We shared adjoining rooms at Yaddo on one of my visits there. The reference is to the political discussions Denise and I had.

(2) "those Brooklyn-like stairs" refers to the long, ~~flight~~ steep flight of stairs (dark too) to his apartment on Polk St. in San Francisco

Carl Rakosi

Date: 1971, on receiving a copy of my ere-Voice, just published by New Directions.

from George Oppen

Dear Carl:

there's no firmer verse than your best Dazzling and absorbing

--yes, a contradiction in my words Nor my fault: your virtue.

(1) And yes, a friend of 35 years Always thought so, for that matter.

Happily verified.

(((I was very much impressed, almost most impressed, by the lines of "IN THY SLEEP,.....

which in the book happen to be the second page of the poem

(2) ---reading it: I feel the poem should have ended with the first page....

The poems seems absolutely immovable in that form

I just report this-- re-action on first reading))))

((notice again that J Laughlin takes us as friends of 35 years: my books mentioned on your back cover

'on your back cover' : neighbourly indeed

Again: there's no finer verse Dazzling

(and this from an old friend Old old friend

(1) Refer to my short piece on him for Ironwood 5 and reprinted in my Collected Prose.

(2) & respond to his observation on p. 102, Ex Coenium, Niglet

Date, circa 1974

Carl:

I am honored by the dedication

but inside ~~are~~ small look long distances
from sweetness of the knowledge of mortality

I must have dedicated
a group of poems to him

a quotation from my
poem, p. 153, Ex Cranium,
Night

CR

or: Enter an heroic line, disguised:

It has been Englished'

quotation from my
p. 159, Ex Cranium, Night

CR

The poems are very, very fine, and I am honored, old friend

Oppen

GEORGE OPPEN

2811 POLK STREET SAN FRANCISCO CALIFORNIA 94109

Date: 1975 - Refers to Ex Cranium, Night, which I had sent him.
Carl Rakosi

Dear Carl

Ex Cranium -- a marvel Above all, perhaps,
the 'Poet' section --- Or perhaps the Day Book ---
tho it might also be the letters written in the persona
of a woman --- or or -- in fact, all
are marvels

I don't know, I don't know: is it the words
or the light behind the words? I don't know, but its
a marvel Is it the tone, the brilliance, or is
it the force of the words

(it is what we mean when we say poetry)

Poetry is a word with comparatively few referents

George Oppen

GEORGE OPPEN

2811 POLK STREET SAN FRANCISCO CALIFORNIA 94109

Date 1975 -

Refers to the Day Book section of Ex Cranium
Night

Carl Rakosi

Old Friend

reading the fragments of the Day Book --
Old friend, lordy, lordy I've been lucky. For a stubborn
man, incredibly lucky. Don't know that I deserve it, but
I've been lucky

, not that we resemble or even envy each other, but
that's as should be, that's as it should be

Oppen

Date 1975/ 7/1 ~~refers~~, or ~~rather~~ quotes my reaction to some poem or poems of his. The last 7/1 refers to our planning to spend the winters in Mexico. I asked him for advice.
 Carl Rakosi

Carl

thanks for your note 'so precise as to seem perception'

is a fine phrase A very handsomely sophisticated phrase ----
my phrase above comes close, when rightly read, to a characterization
 on of your poems ? one would need some word as 'manly'
 as handsome but short of arma ~~virumque~~ virumque and
 close also to 'beautiful'

poetry and the man, I sing And some beauty of
 sophistication.

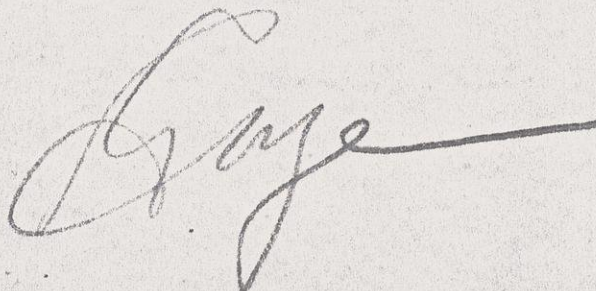
I don't know Seems fair. Can't
 think very well while I type (as opposed to writing with
 pencil)

Concerning Mexico: been too long: I don't think we could be
 of much help, or recommend you to who would be of help ----
 I should think that if you will go a little outside of any
 town you wish -- outside meaning to a smaller village -- you
 could easily find a place

you will have to struggle thru the
 boiled water thing and all that anyway

Once you resign
 yourself to the cynicism of the boilligwater jingoism I
 should think you'll have a very fine time, a very fine time.
 All experiences teaches me that it's better just to look, to
 hunt an apt. The hunting may be your best adventure .

best wishes



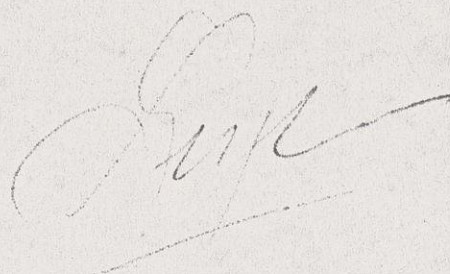
Carl:

Good. Phone: 771 1615

10th Or 11th, I take it We're almost sure to be home
in the early morning No objection to being phoned at
5 or 6 am Might have some trouble finding us in If
you can, write us where you'll be staying when you know

anyway: we'll expect you .

best regards



Date: early Feb., 1975. Refers to my ~~incoming~~ reading
in San Francisco. When he found that San Francisco State
University was planning to put me up near the campus,
he thought that would be too depressing for me and
invited me to stay with him, which I did.

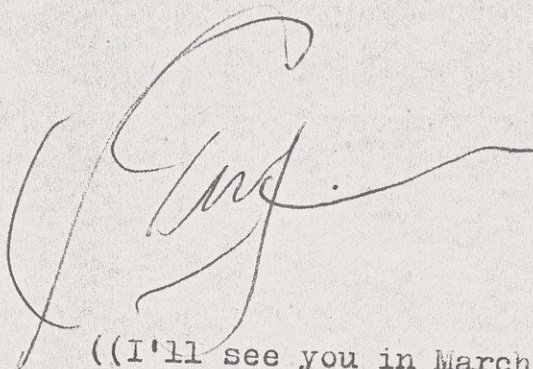
Carl Rakosi



2/17/75

Old Friend:

- (1) -- and a tough old bird also, o marvelously elegant old bird, thanks for your words.



((I'll see you in March Right? at the San Francisco museum (among the exhibits of antiquities?)

((observe the vest-buttons, the guide will say))

- (2) ((I say nothing of fly-buttons, hoping you will read that poem concerning your ^{SLY-4455} ~~in~~ self in the bathtub))

- (3) that byzantine eye -- do please read it.
I begin to ponder my Byzantine 'introduction'

(1) Refers to my having called him in my prose piece "a tougher old bird"

(2) Refers to my poem, In a Warm Bath (p. 4, Ere-Voice)

(3) Refers to p. 93, Ex Cranium, Night, beginning "Today - etc."
He (Oppen) introduced me that night.

CARL RAKOSI

Carl:

having given adequate time, now, to the reading-----:

--the poems' dedication to beauty, pure structure, takes
on extraordinary depth Isn't this fact their 'meaning', their
human meaning ?

--the 'human' which you spoke of to Dembo?

most surely human

is it not

*L. S. Dembo, University
of Wisconsin, who did the
interviews with the
Objectivists.
CR*

I think you may have been
thinking rather of the deliberate exoticism of the Fluteplayers and
others of the earlier poems ?

something of a
never-never land, yes And a great marvel I am, myself,
more moved by the marvel of the commonplace I was about to
type: 'I am not sure if this is a moral question', but,
yes, I do think it's a moral question- - - a rather profound
one, the marvel of the common place yes, it seems I
do think so.

((I felt I encountered an audible strain in
ONE moment of the new poems

O eternal
is its element

*Quoted from my
Long, serial poem,
The Poet
CR*

wondered if the element and the
pyramid become more ponderable in

O eternal
its element

((would have to type the poem out to know whether
or not I would argue this point)))

tho it does seem & that the --is does nothing very solid here

J. Oppen & I had known each other's work intimately since the ~~early~~ 1930s, ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~we~~ ^{we} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ appeared together often in print but had never met or corresponded. I made the first ^{effort} to see him in N.Y. ~~on my way to Yaddo~~ ^{way} ~~the summer of 1968~~ ^{during} ~~or 1969~~, but ~~because~~ he got to N.Y. too late for me to see him, and we didn't get together until May 1971 when I gave a reading at San Francisco State & was his house guest. ^{At the end of two days,} We found ~~each~~ ^{such} deep sympathetic ^{understanding of} each other that at the end of my 10 day visit, ^{when it was time for me to go,} we embraced & Oppen ^{declared} ~~said~~, "now we are friends for 35 yrs." And indeed it was so.

This = what ^{he refers to in one letter} ~~was better~~ ^{the first}

The letters are not dated. The one beginning Dear Carl R. ^{was written in the winter of 1970.} ¹⁹⁷⁰ ~~must, however, be~~ after reading a font of my poems in ^{the winter/spring issue of} ~~Sumac~~. Leah was the name of one; ^{in that poem:} ~~Partial the oaf appeared~~. The post script will make no sense unless one reads two of the other poems in that issue, The Poem & In the Sleep, because ~~the~~ ^{is a collage of quotations} from Leah & from two of the other poems in that issue, The

* The letter beginning Dear Carl must have been written in Nov. 1971 in response to receiving my See-Voice. J. Langdon is, of course, New Directions

* "extension of yr. remarks in Madison" refers to the interview with me in Contemporary lit. in the Spring of 1969

COLLECTED POEMS, by George Oppen (New Directions, 263 pages, \$15.95)

Reviewed by Carl Rakosi

for Minneapolis Star & Tribune, 1975

I can not improve on what I wrote about Oppen a few years ago:

"George is a tough old bird. He's the only man I know who can get away with the curious notion that feelings don't have to be expressed in poetry; they can be assumed from the situation. He gets away with it because he's patient and his eye will not let itself be distracted from its ~~subject~~ object. George has a great eye, precise and irreducible. If you've never seen what it sees, it's because you haven't sat still long enough and looked as hard as he has. The things he sees feel like the gnarled bark of an oak tree. The tree is there too. You can put your weight against it. It won't give."

This new book of Collected Poems makes some other things clear about him. One is the extraordinary integration of his personality, its inner and outer consistency. Another is his intense, unremitting condensation, his hall mark. In the following passage from a poem, for example, three bare bones, no more, of idea are laid out as sufficient, and the language is even more condensed, so as to give the tightest possible fit and feel. In a sense ^{point} the underlying of the passage is this condensation. The assumption, with which I agree, ^{note} is that the reader is as intelligent as the author and just as capable as he is of making ~~short~~ ^{short} and filling out an idea. In this passage I have changed the punctuation and spacing slightly so that one can more easily see what has been omitted and complete the meaning. *but makes*

"I am the father of no country
And can lie

But whether mendacity
is really the best policy And whether

One is not afraid
To lie "

One feels like applauding. At last, writing which doesn't sound like an exercise for teacher but is true to how speech occurs in the mind, perfectly intelligible provided one is not expecting spoken speech.

The following poem shows the way in which Oppen's eye, "precise and irreducible," ranges and what it fastens on. In a little over 100 words, the eye encapsulates his relationship to his daughter: his tenderness ~~xx~~ (there is only one word of description) conveyed in the repetition of "daughter, daughter" in the first line and in the over-all cadence; her significance to him conveyed by her presence in his meditations. The eye then looks at the place he's in, makes a psychological observation, and meditates, all criss-crossing like beams of light, almost simultaneously, as in the mind.

"My daughter, my daughter, what can I say
Of living?

I cannot judge it.

We seem caught
In reality together my lovely
Daughter.

I have a daughter
But no child

And it was not precisely

Happiness we promised
Ourselves;

We say happiness, happiness and are not
Satisfied.

Tho the house on the low land
Of the city

Catches the dawn light

I can tell myself, and I tell myself
Only what we all believe
True

And in the sudden vacuum
Of time...

....is it not
in fear the roots grip

Downward
And beget

The baffling hierarchies
Of father and child

As of leaves on their high
thin twigs to shield us

From time, from open
Time

apparent work

This kind of writing obviously has to be read very slowly, with many stops along the way (and the punctuation totally disregarded). But it grows on you. The more you read it, the better you like it. Because it is always honest; and always deeply serious in the existential sense; and never ingratiating (what a relief, poetry that is not a performance! poetry that is too serious for that); and because his reflections always occur in a context of particularity of observation and feeling. This least flakey of men, without literary pretense or tricks, is just what the doctor ordered. His time has come. Although he says he learned a great deal when he was young from Louis Zukofsky and retained Zukofsky's broken, & elliptical syntax---it must have felt suitable to his frugal, Spartan nature---he is like no one else. So much so that one can not even hold him up as a model for young poets. His style is not going to work for them unless they have his personality make-up and intellectual eye. They'd just butcher the English language.

Since he is still a young man of 67 and his new work, *Myth of the Blaze*, is better than ever, the prospect of what his collected poems will be in the year 1995 is shattering.

X his frugal

Carl Rakosi

Minneapolis Star & Tribune

SEASCAPE: NEEDLE'S EYE, by George Oppen (The Sumac Press, 37 pages, \$2.45)

Reviewed by Carl Rakosi

The all say
Huddled among what other

In 1969 George Oppen surprised everybody by winning the Pulitzer Prize for his fifth book, OF BEING NUMEROUS. People were not accustomed to seeing a ~~really good~~ little known but really good poet recognized.

You could get the flavor of Oppen's poetry if you sat down with him some night at his kitchen table in his flat in San Francisco and just talked and ate cheese and bread with him and looked into his steady eyes and the more you talked, the deeper down you would get to something solid and brotherly, something older than he.

Oppen is a tough old bird. He's the only man I know who can get away with the curious notion that feelings don't have to be expressed in poetry; they can be assumed from the situation. He gets away with it because he is patient and his eye will not let itself be distracted from perception. Oppen has a great eye, precise and irreducible. If you've never seen what it sees, it is because you haven't sat still long enough and looked as hard as he has. What it sees feels like the gnarled bark of an oak tree. The tree is there too. You can put your weight against it. It won't give. See for yourself.

"Lying full ~~length~~ length
On the bed in the white room

Turns her eyes to me

Again,

Naked. .

Never to forget her naked eyes

Beautiful and brave

Her naked eyes

Turn inward

Feminine light

The unimagined
Feminine light

Feminine ardor

Pierced and touched

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

Tho all say
Huddled among each other

'Love'

The play begins with the world"

from A MORALITY PLAY: PREFACE

Carl Rakosi

*George Oppen, The Last Days
On George Oppen*

who died in S.F. on July 7, 1984

Read at a Memorial Service for George Oppen in San Francisco on Friday,
Jly 13, 1984

In a mortuary

The only serious subject (at a memorial service) is mortality. And that may be true of poetry too. But we forget, or are diverted by earthly matters. Fortunately when it comes to mortality, ^{like George Oppen} we (too) have Alzheimer's Disease. Now that almost a week has passed since George's death, I no longer wish to remind anyone ~~of~~ the raw existential anguish beside which writing seems plastic and, even in the best hands, contrived.

George himself has not dealt with the anguish of death in his poems..... he wrote only from experience....but from a late poem ^{of his} quote a few lines ^{points the way to} that suggest one way how to deal with it: "in events/ the myriad lights have entered us/ ~~it is a music more powerful than music.~~" In other words, ^{with his passing, that} ~~what has happened is that a particular and notable set of events have ended. And that~~ ^{they have ended} is not too raw to endure.

There was never any mystery about the grain in ^{Oppen's} George's character or his working principle. Shortly before his death he said to his sister, June, "I don't know if you ~~have anything to say but let's take out all the adjectives and we'll find out.~~" ~~No cornswooping, and nothing~~ ^{omit} ~~less than the truth of nouns!~~ The curious ^{pertinacity} ~~of character!~~

What is not clear is how a man can be (both) "an island unto himself" and not an island. The morning ^{his wife} Mary and I drove George to Oakland to enter him into the HOME FOR JEWISH PARENTS, ^{XX} he was very quiet. I explained that I was going along just to keep them company and George said, "That's nice," and that's all he said. Mary and I tried to while away the time by talking but he was out of it, and when I looked over for a moment to see what was going on, his body was rigid, his eyes fixed in space, ^{as} in terror. When we reached the HOME, he went along without a word as Mary and I carried in the baggage. There in the vestibule we had to wait while his room was being prepared. ^{at the same time, not be one} ~~XX~~ ^{he came} ~~with a diagnosis of Alzheimer's~~

We were now in the milieu of very aged women in the final stages of illness and infirmity, the average age being 86. They were walking slowly, with great difficulty, this way and that, usually to their rooms. We couldn't think of anything to say that would sound right or have any interest for ^{him} George at such a ^{time} moment, so Mary and I just stood and looked ^{on}. The atmosphere was not threatening but the physical sight plunged ^{him} George into a blank isolation. He was alone for the first time with his fate and ^{had} now withdrawn into the starkest existential state, an ~~island~~ ^{for a way} island to which there is no

access by others. He stood very tall and straight, towering over the little white-haired ladies, as if he were asserting his eternal distinction from them. But his eyes were distraught and lost, for this was a fate he had not counted on or prepared for or was willing to go quietly into.

It was at that moment that something unexpected and immensely touching (and characteristic) happened. Limping towards him slowly from the dining room and talking came three very frail women. They looked slightly better put-together than the others, with slightly more class and self-assurance, but only by comparison to ^{those in the room} the others, who had long ago given up trying to look attractive. The smaller one had a kindly face with gentle features and the finest white hair. Anywhere else I don't think ^{he} George would have noticed her, but here as they approached him and she looked up and their eyes met, at once his face lit up ^{like someone surprised at encountering a kindred spirit in such} and walking over to her, he greeted her and, it seemed to me, ^{a dismal place,} with just the suggestion of a gallant gesture, he bent ~~down~~ over, as if to help her. She acknowledged this with a soft smile and walked on. "By God," I thought, "he's found a friend. He's gonna make it!" But of course it was not so.

(XI) I hear once again George's voice when ^{in his poem} I read: "TO MAKE MUCH/ of the world/ ~~of~~ of that passion/ that light within/ and without/ no need of lamps in daylight, writing year after year, the poem discovered in the crystal center of the rock/ image and image/ the transparent present, tho we speak of the abyss, of the hungry, we see their feet, their tired feet in the news, and mountain and valley and sea, as in universal storm. The fathers said, we are old, we are shrivelled. Come."

omit Well, I don't know to whom I'll be able to complain now, and know that I'll be perfectly understood, about the endless spinning of wheels in poetry, wheels of theory and intellectual speculation, the thinning out, perhaps the desuetude, of the basic poetic impulse, too emotional perhaps for our modern intellectual temper. With whom will ~~X~~ I be able to celebrate the integrity of nouns and look on with dismay at their undoing by adjectives, and such, that are no match for them?

omit? Not long ago at his celebration I wished George a happy birthday, and now I say, "Adieu, gentle friend."

He died on _____, a gentle friend against the endless spinning _____
~~celebrate~~ ~~With whom will I be able to~~
St. Francis ^{upholding} celebrating the integrity
of nouns & looking on with dismay etc.
Adieu, gentle friend.

GEORGE OPPEN, THE LAST DAYS

In a mortuary the only serious subject is mortality. And that may be true of poetry too, only we are diverted by earthly matters, or like Oppen get Alzheimer's Disease on the subject. Oppen himself has not dealt with the anguish of death, for he wrote only from experience. I have tried to find my way to it from a line of his, "in events/ the myriad lights/ have entered us," but from that it follows that in death a particular set of events conclude and their particular lights simply leave, and I weep that it is not that neat or easy.

There was never any mystery about Oppen's character or his working principles. Already far into Alzheimer's he said to his sister, June: "I don't know if you have anything to say but let's take out all the adjectives and we'll find out." The curious pertinacity of character!

The morning his wife Mary and I drove him to Oakland to enter him into THE HOME FOR JEWISH PARENTS, he was very quiet. I explained that I was going along just to keep them company and he said, "That's nice," and that's all he said. Mary and I tried to use up the time by talking but he was out of it and when I looked over for a moment to see what was going on, his body was rigid, his eyes fixed outwards into space, terrified. When we reached the HOME, he went along without a word as Mary and I carried in the baggage. There in the vestibule we had to wait while his room was being prepared.

We were now in the milieu of very aged women in the final stages of illness and infirmity, the average age being eighty six. They were walking slowly, with great difficulty, this way and that, mostly to their rooms. We couldn't think of anything to say that would sound right or have any interest for him at such a time, so Mary and I just stood and looked on. The atmosphere was not threatening but the physical sight confronted him with that fate from which there is no escape and closed in on him. For the first time he was alone with it and he fell into the starkest inward state, where no one could accompany him. But his body remained where it was: he stood very tall and straight, towering over the little white-haired ladies, as if he were asserting his eternal distinction from them. His eyes, however, were distraught and lost, for this was an ending he had not counted on or prepared for or was willing to go quietly into.

It was at that moment that something unexpected happened. Limping slowly towards him from the dining-room and talking came three very frail women. They looked slightly better dressed and put together, had a bit more class and self-assurance, but only ^{by} comparison to the others, ~~who~~ who had long ago given up trying to look attractive. The smaller one had a kindly face with gentle features and the finest white hair. Anywhere else I don't think he would have noticed her, but here as they approached him and ~~their eyes met~~ she looked up and their eyes met, at once his face lit up, like someone surprised at encountering a kindred spirit in such a dismal place, and walking over to her, he greeted her and with just the suggestion of a gallant gesture, he bent over as if to help her. She acknowledged this with a soft smile and walked on.

"By God," I thought, "he's found a friend. He's going to make it!" But it was not so.

He was no longer able to read or write, but I didn't know that. At his 75th birthday celebration he had been afraid that someone would ask him for his autograph and he would start to write his name and forget how to finish it. He spoke a little less and was more quiet...but he had always been a quiet, observant man...and when he did speak, there were droll glints as before. The perceptions, however, were no longer related to anything ^{one} ~~said~~. His civility remained unimpaired, and his body seemed to be in good shape, he went on walks with Mary and exercised at a gym and did pull-ups and exercises on his cross-bar at home and could stand on his head.

But there were cracks. On a radiant summer day, he and Mary and Leah and I had driven out to Fort Funston for a picnic with some young poets. When we got to the picnic area, everybody started doing something, setting the table, laying out the food, or just chattering and feeling good. Mary had warned the young men that George was not up to answering questions, and they refrained. He stood off by himself, some distance from the others, his face clouded over. They approached him only briefly to say something pleasant, then retreated, and he replied politely in a word or two.

When the table was set, Mary noticed that she had left something behind in the car and told George she was going back to get it. He nodded and just watched her. It was a long walk back, down a hill, then along a flat stretch and around a bend, and when she started the descent, he walked over to the edge and stood there, his bearing erect like a captain on the high bridge of his ship, but tense, locked in. His eyes followed every step she took, ~~and~~

going down and along the meadow, her figure getting smaller and smaller, then the bend, and when she passed out of sight, his eyes were lost to everything else. I have seen a dog tied to a post look in just such a way and not move a muscle, peering into the exact space in the store where his mistress disappeared. It was not until Mary came into view again that he relaxed. He watched her for a few minutes, then walked back to where he had been standing before.

"Ah George," I sighed. I had not remembered him being that dependent on Mary before.

Since he could no longer read or write, he had become fidgety and had to get out of the house and walk, but he couldn't remember his address and would get lost, so Mary always had to go with him. One day, however, he stole the car keys and slipped out without her knowledge. He had been a meticulous driver but had not driven for two years because of his condition. She waited anxiously. Finally the phone rang. It was the police. He had been in an accident, the car demolished. The police had found him sitting bolt upright in his seat, unaware that the blood was gushing out of the back of his head. As he told Mary afterwards, he had had an irresistable impulse to drive on the open road and he sped wildly down the freeway, speeding weightless ^{into} an unfamiliar ecstasy. Suddenly it ended (he was on the Bay Bridge). In front of him was a blank: he didn't know where he was. He slammed the brakes on and the car behind smashed into him. I have to put this into words for George because all he could say to Mary was that he had never felt so great. He couldn't understand it.

I am with George again at The Home For Jewish Parents and he is standing in the vestibule waiting for his room to be readied. Off at the other end a circle of chairs has been set and voices are heard as aged ladies and one lone Adam amble out of the dining room on their way to the chairs. It will take them several minutes to plod the distance of about twenty feet, each step measured and hesitant. It is folk-singing time. The folk singer, a smiling young woman with a guitar, greets them by name as they approach and settle in their chairs. She sings Latino and Israeli songs with a hearty beat, then stops and tries to teach them the words, calling on them with her eyes, her head beckoning, her body beckoning, to sing along, she will carry them on her undaunted spirit. And one voice does respond, faintly, and a couple of heads nod to the beat, but Adam's eyes are closed and a few others have one eye open and the other, as in a cartoon, X-ed out.

It is not a performance. It is a plea to obliterate old age, and she has reached far out and called on song to help her, for youth and vitality and a smile, however radiant and true, are not enough. When it is over, there are little smiles here and there and faces are not quite so cheerless. Then the ladies slowly stand up and disband, lumbering by as before. When he sees me, Adam stops a moment with a friendly look, as if glad he had found another man to chat with, and I return his smile and am about to say something when I notice that his expression remains the same. He can't speak. He's had a stroke.

When the music started, I had looked over to see what effect it was having on George but he was out of range, shut in the same absorption. The beat and the sense of people and voices swarming nearby were so strong and insistent, however, that he leaned forward, craning his neck to see what was going on. At that moment his face looked as if he might walk over to investigate, but the next thing I knew, he was back in limbo.

While we were waiting, one of the clerical workers joined us, a dark-haired, vivacious young woman. Good-hearted Miriam out of the Bible. Considerately she stood back a little and tried to see without being conspicuous. I learned why. She loved poetry and read a good deal of it, and it was natural for her to be there, watching. She couldn't wait to read the book Mary had left in the office, his COLLECTED POEMS.

Word now came that the room was ready and the three of us trudged down the long hallway after the nurse, Mary and I, the executioners, carrying the bags. We examined the room. It was clean and light. There were two identical, slightly worn, blonde dressers, two identical plain beds and two identical armchairs, each piece blanched of the old occupants. George stood awkwardly and did not look. Mary busied herself. She unpacked a watercolor by her that he liked and hung it near the door. Then she set a framed snapshot on the mantle to remind him who he was. It was Mary and George, beaming and in vigorous health.

There was a framed snapshot on the other ^{dresser} ~~xxxxxx~~ too. Of the absent room-mate. Where was he? Perhaps being led down the hall by a nurse. Middle-aged in the picture, standing in the sun in shirt sleeves, an ordinary man being photographed. Next to him, also in shirt sleeves, David Ben Gurion, the Prime Minister, equally plain. Apparently taken on a trip to Israel. Someone had left it there as a reminder. No other sign of him in the room.

Since Mary was coming back the next morning, parting was not hard for George that day. In fact, things looked good at first. She came almost every morning and took him out for a drive in the park, and they basked in the Spring flowers, and he was relaxed and agreeable. The head nurse, a large, bluff, good-natured black woman inspiring confidence, came by his room and introduced herself by her first name, and he, always responsive to the natural, liked her at once and introduced himself by his first name.

And the Jewish community newspaper ran a feature story on the HOME's first Pulitzer Prize poet-resident. And ~~the food was good there and he ate~~ ^{he liked the food he was getting there} more than at home, and danced with one of the volunteers during the music period. And June became his younger sister again, as in childhood, and all the affection he had felt for her then came back, and their visits were tender.

Mary's visits ran a more poignant course. When she had been with him long enough and said she would have to go, he'd walk with her to the front door, as if he were going home, and she would have to explain that she was not well enough to care for him, and he with his customary courtesy would reply, "Of course," slightly apologetic at having forgotten. But he could not hold on to that thread, and the scenes at the door continued and became more difficult.

"Why do I have to be here?" he would expostulate. "We've been together for fifty years."

And "Aren't we husband and wife?"

Finally she stopped the explanations and would beckon to a nurse to take over.

Then his memory got still worse.

Leah, on a visit: "George, do you know who I am?"

G looks hard, tries, then sweetly: "No. You know I have this sickness. I can't remember."

L: "I'm Leah Rakosi."

G's face lights up: "Oh, of course, Leah and Carl Rakosi."

Had that light come into his face because he was having a pleasant memory of us or because he had succeeded in connecting her name with mine? It was doubtful at that time whether he recognized anyone but Mary and June.

He continued to eat a lot but looked gaunt and became more and more restless and agitated. He could no longer be trusted in the dining room and had to have his meals brought to him. His absent room-mate had come back,

a small, harmless old man who was incontinent and slept most of the day. They paid no attention to each other except when there was stench in the room. Then George would burst into rage and shout.

There was nothing to stop him from walking out the front door if he felt restless but in his Alzheimer's mind it seemed to him he was in a menacing situation from which he had to escape and when no one was looking, he slipped into the garden at the back and climbed over a wall to get away, wandering for hours through poor black neighborhoods, lost. The HOME simply stepped up his sedation.

About this time he became delusional about the nurse's aides who had to dress and bathe him in the morning, , poor black overworked women whom under other circumstances he would have hailed compassionately and probably idealized. They had become sinister in his mind and fierce, meaning to destroy him, and he was terrified, and when they approached him, he threatened them back. They called the head nurse.

"What's the matter, George?" she asked reassuringly. "Don't you trust us?"

No answer.

"Don't you trust me?"

"I trust you."

But it had no effect on the delusion.

Finally in his mind they were beating him, and he struck back, and had to be strapped to his chair.

Then came a sudden kidney failure. He was rushed to a hospital and given only a few days to live. But he survived. The question now was, "How much longer?" The HOME would not have him back and the referring physician, therefore, transferred him to a small nursing home run by a psychiatrist, a locked facility where he died in a coma on a Saturday evening July 7, 1984, whether from Alzheimer's Disease or another kidney failure or because no one had noticed that he had not ^{passed water} ~~passed~~ in nine days, or from all three, I don't know, but thus ended George Oppen, who had upheld the integrity of nouns and looked on with dismay at their undoing by adjectives, and such, that are no match for them.

Adieu, gentle friend.

*and Read in San Francisco
at his birthday celebration*

WRITTEN FOR GEORGE OPPEN'S 75th BIRTHDAY

I was not thinking of George when some time ago I wrote the aphorism, "What are old poets for? To keep young ones honest," but George proves my point. He is a lesson in how not to be pseudo. To read him is to find one's self oneself in a situation in which one has to be honest and get down to essentials. With George the two are identical. And when this is so, the particular becomes clearer, secure against being blown away by the imagination, and the abstract becomes more particular, so that one can see that the two live in the same world, and a light glows from the most homely objects, and we are glad to be there.

As in the poem, CARPENTER'S BOAT

The new wood ~~is~~ as old as carpentry

Rounding the far buoy, wild
steel fighting in the sea, carpenter,

Carpenter,
Carpenter and other things, the monstrous welded seams

Plunge and drip in the seas, carpenter.
Carpenter, how wild the planet is.

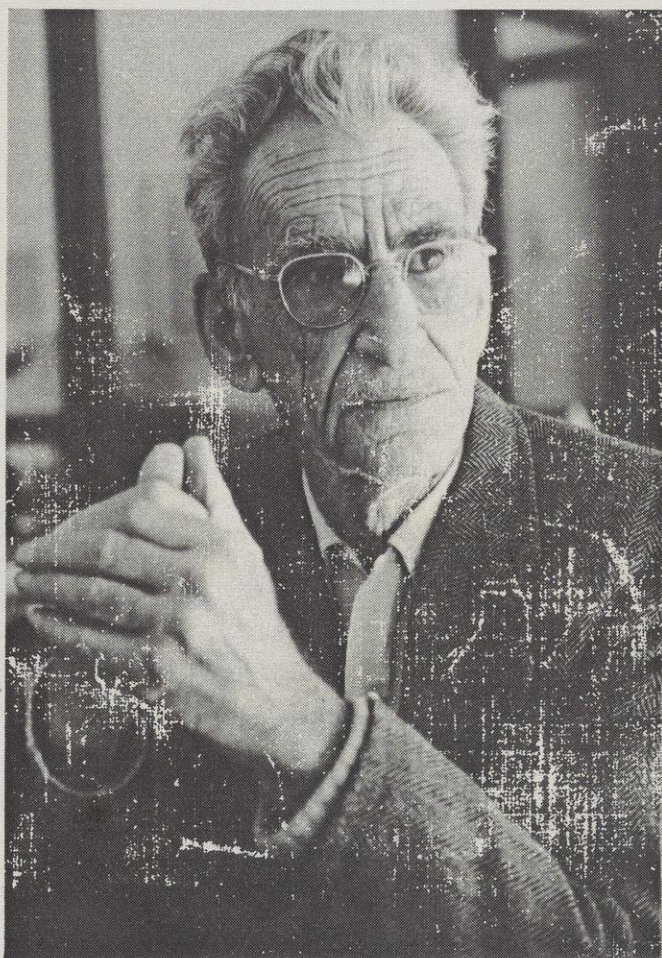
or the ninth poem from OF BEING NUMEROUS:

'Whether, as the intensity of seeing increases, one's distance
from Them, the people, does not also increase'
I know, of course I know, I can enter no other place

Yet I am one of those who from nothing but man's way of thought
and one of his dialects and what has happened to me
Have made poetry

To dream of that beach/ For the sake of an instant in the eyes,
The absolute singular

The unearthly bonds/ of the singular
Which is the bright light of shipwreck
For such favors, happy birthday, George!



GEORGE OPPEN
1908 - 1984

A SELECTION FROM POEMS AND LETTERS OF GEORGE OPPEN

Endlessly, endlessly,
The definition of mortality

The image of the engine

That stops.
We cannot live on that.
I know that no one would live out
Thirty years, fifty years if the world were ending
With his life.
The machine stares out,
Stares out
With all its eyes

Thru the glass
With the ripple in it, past the sill
Which is dusty -- If there is someone
In the garden!
Outside, and so beautiful.

Fifty years
Sidereal time
Together, and among the others,
The bequeathed pavements, the inherited lit streets:
Among them we were lucky -- strangest word.

The planet's
Time.
Blood from a stone, life
From a stone dead dam. Mother
Nature! because we find the others
Deserted like ourselves and therefore brothers. Yet

So we lived
And chose to live

These were our times.

● PRODUCT

There is no beauty in New England like the boats.
Each itself, even the paint white
Dipping to each wave each time
At anchor, mast
And rigging tightly part of it
Fresh from the dry tools
And the dry New England hands.
The bow soars, finds the waves
The hull accepts. Once someone
Put a bowl afloat
And there for all to see, for all the children,
Even the New Englander
Was boatness. What I've seen
Is all I've found: myself.

from *The Materials* (1962)

● PSALM

Veritas sequitur ...

In the small beauty of the forest
The wild deer bedding down --
That they are there!

 Their eyes
Effortless, the soft lips
Nuzzle and the alien small teeth
Tear at the grass

 The roots of it
Dangle from their mouths
Scattering earth in the strange woods,
They who are there.

 Their paths
Nibble thru the fields, the leaves that shade them
Hang in the distances
Of sun

 The small nouns
Crying faith
In this in which the wild deer
Startle, and stare out.

River of our substance

Flowing

With the rest. River of the substance

Of the earth's curve, river of the substance

Of the sunrise, river of silt, of erosion, flowing

To no imaginable sea. But the mind rises

Into happiness, rising

Into what is there. I know of no other happiness

Nor have I ever witnessed it. ...

I thought that even if there were nothing

The possibility of being would exist;

I thought I had encountered

Permanence; thought leaped on us in that sea

For in that sea we breathe the open

Miracle

Of place, and speak

If we would rescue

Love to the ice-lit

Upper World a substantial language

Of clarity, and of respect.

from *This in Which* (1965)

There are certain things, appearances, around which the understanding gathers. They hold the meanings which make it possible to live, they are one's sense of reality and the possibility of meaning. They are there, in the mind, always. One can sit down anytime and sink into them -- can work at them, they come into the mind, they fill the mind -- anytime. One tries to pierce them --

The process by which sometimes a line appears, I cannot trace. It happens. Given a line, one has a place to stand, and goes further -- ... And the poem is NOT built out of words, one cannot make a poem by sticking words into it, it's the poem which makes the words and contains their meaning. ...

When the man writing is frightened by a word, he may have started.

(1965)

Obsessed, bewildered

By the shipwreck
Of the singular

We have chosen the meaning
Of being numerous.

It is difficult now to speak of poetry --

about those who have recognized the range of choice
or those who have lived within the life they were
born to --. It is not precisely a question of profundity
but a different order of experience. One would have to
tell what happens in a life, what choices present
themselves, what the world is for us, what happens in
time, what thought is in the course of a life and
therefore what art is, and the isolation of the actual ...

Clarity, clarity, surely clarity is the most beautiful
thing in the world
A limited, limiting clarity

I have not and never did have any motive of poetry
But to achieve clarity

Cars on the highway filled with speech,
People talk, they talk to each other;

Imagine a man in the ditch,
The wheel of the overturned wreck
Still spinning --

I don't mean he despairs, I mean if he does not
He sees in the manner of poetry

from *Of Being Numerous* (1968)

• SONG, THE WINDS OF DOWNHILL

'out of poverty
to begin

again' impoverished

of tone of pose that common
wealth

of parlance Who
so poor the words

would with and take on substantial

meaning handholds footholds

to dig in one's heels sliding

hands and heels beyond the residential
lots the plots it is a poem

which may be sung
may well be sung

How shall we say how this happened, these stories, our
stories

Scope, mere size, a kind of redemption

Exposed still and jagged on the San Francisco hills

Time and depth before us, paradise of the real, we
know what it is

To find now depth, not time, since we cannot, but depth

To come out safe, to end well

We have begun to say good bye
To each other
And cannot say it

from *Seascape: Needle's Eye* (1972)

Tyger still burning in me burning
in the night sky burning
in us the light

in the room it was all
part of the wars
of things brilliance
of things

in the appalling
seas language

lives and wakes us together
out of sleep the poem
opens its dazzling whispering hands

The Tongues

of appearance
speak in the unchosen
journey immense
journey there is loss in denying
that force the moments the years
even of death lost
in denying
that force the words
out of that whirlwind his
and not his strange
words surround him

I named the book

series empirical
series all force
in events the myriad

lights have entered
us it is a music more powerful

than music

till other voices wake
us or we drown

from *Primitive* (1978)

beautiful as the sea
and the islands' clear light

of shipwreck the pebbles
shifting

on the beach that even sorrow

or most terrible

wound prove us part
of the world not fallen

from it the cadence the image
the poem is

conviction forceful
as light

(1976)

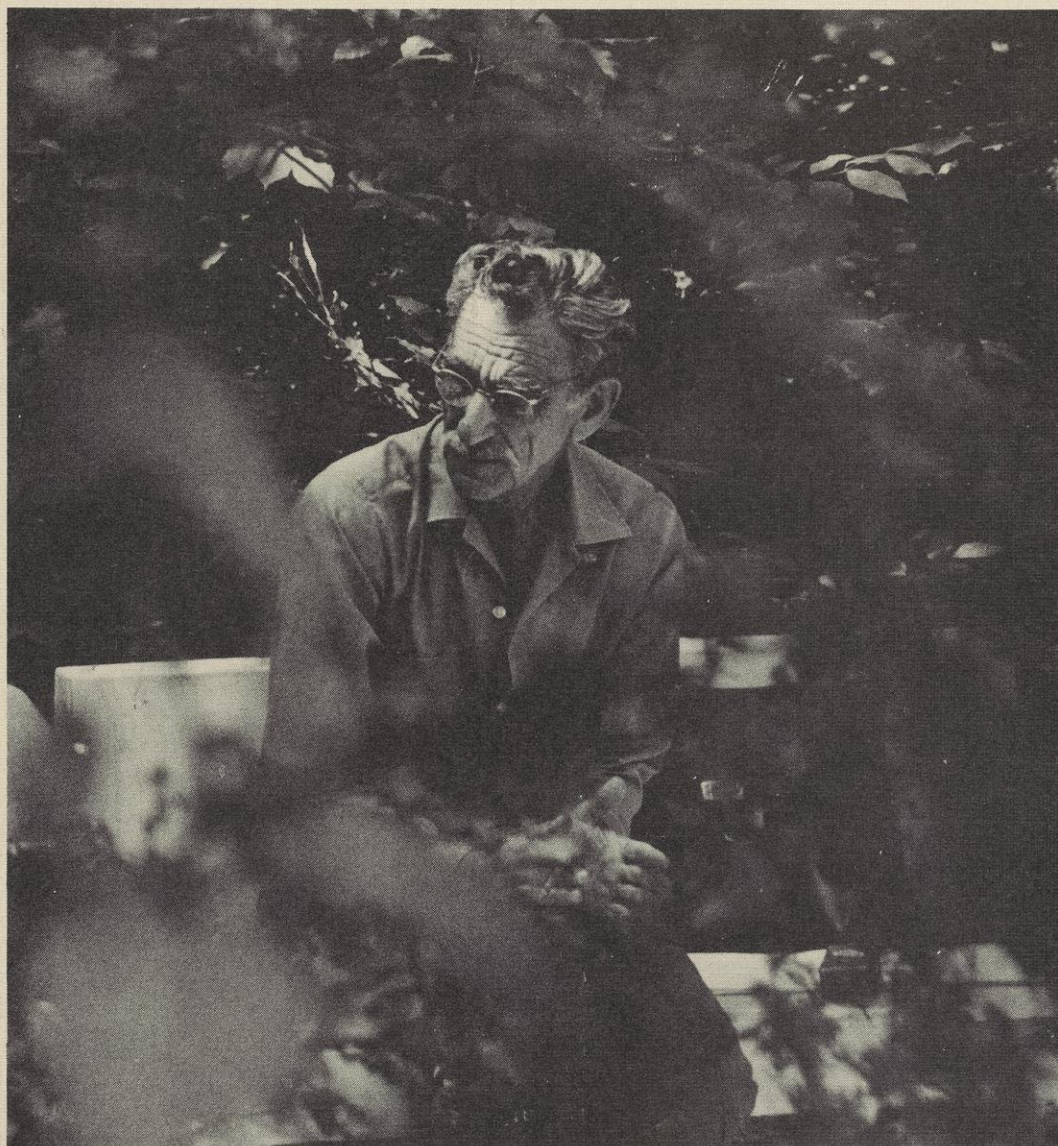
The Poem

A poetry of the meaning of words
And a bond with the universe

I think there is no light in the world
but the world

And I think there is light

(1980)



GEORGE OPPEN
75TH BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE
APRIL 24, 1983

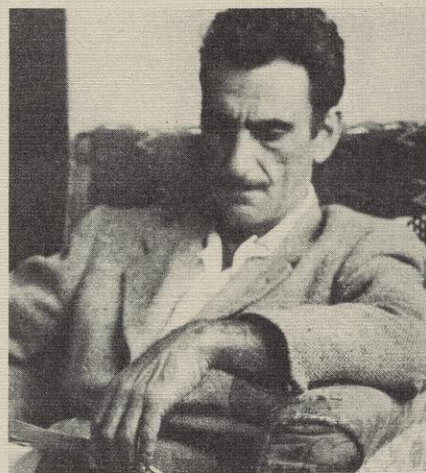
George Oppen was born April 24, 1908 in New Rochelle, New York. At the age of nine he moved with his family to San Francisco. In 1927 he met his future wife Mary Colby at college in Oregon, the beginning of a collaboration which has continued to this day. They set out hitch-hiking from San Francisco to know the United States and to experience



George and Mary Oppen, late 1920s

their country at a grassroots level. From the Great Lakes they sailed to New York where they met Louis Zukofsky, with whom they began planning to publish the poetry of their friends and themselves. Their journeying then took them to France, where they lived for several years and founded a press, To Publishers, in 1930. Works they brought out included William Carlos Williams' *Novelette*, Ezra Pound's *A B C of Reading* and an "Objectivists" *Anthology*. In 1934 a group of poets, among them Oppen, Zukofsky, Pound, Williams and Charles Reznikoff, founded the Objectivist Press, which in that year published George Oppen's first book, *Discrete Series*, for which Pound contributed a foreword in which he saluted Oppen for "a sensibility which is not every man's sensibility and which has not been gotten out of any man's books". These poets became known as the Objectivists, and George Oppen has explained the term as

"the poets' recognition of the necessity of form, the objectification of the poem . . . as against the liquidation of poetry into the sentimentalism of the American so-called Imagists". While still in France, George and Mary saw the effects of fascism on the rise, and, upon returning to the United States, they were confronted with the devastation of the Depression. They began to work actively to organize workers, putting aside artistic interests for social concerns. Of this period George Oppen later said, "I gave up poetry because of the pressure of what for the moment I'll call conscience. But there were some things I had to live through, some things I had to think my way through, some things I had to try out." A more than twenty-five-year hiatus from poetry ensued, during which he served and was wounded in World War II, worked as a tool and die maker, cabinet maker, mechanic and building contractor and endured years of political exile in Mexico after harassment by the F.B.I. In 1962 George Oppen resumed his poetic career with the publication of *The Materials*, followed in 1965 by *This in Which* and in 1966 by *Of Being Numerous*. In 1969 he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. By now George and Mary Oppen again had taken up residency in San Francisco, where their home became a stopping place for poets, scholars, artists and friends from around the world. A favorite refuge for them in these years was a cabin in Maine from which they sailed up and down the coast of New England. *Alpine* was published in 1969 and *Seascape: Needle's Eye* in 1972. New Directions Books brought out the *Collected Poems* in 1975. The last book, *Primitive*, was published in 1978. In 1980 George Oppen was the recipient of a Literature Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. A citation in the same year from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters called him "honorable, painstaking and virtually solitary in his long pursuit of that purity of poetic language, that spareness and eloquence of structure commended by and exemplified in the work of his great precursors and admirers, Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams". Earlier this year he was honored by P.E.N. West with its first annual Rediscovery Award, given to a writer whose work merits the renewed attention of the literary community. George and Mary Oppen still reside in North Beach in San Francisco.



George Oppen in Mexico, 1955

front cover: George Oppen at poetry conference in Michigan, 1970

back cover: George and Mary Oppen, San Francisco, mid-1970s

A TRIBUTE TO GEORGE OPPEN ON HIS 75th BIRTHDAY
SUNDAY, APRIL 24, 1983, 2 P.M.
INTERSECTION, 756 UNION STREET, SAN FRANCISCO
CO-SPONSORED BY INTERSECTION AND THE POETRY CENTER AT
SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY

Participants

Rachel DuPlessis

Poet, Editor of *Feminist Studies*, Assistant Professor of English at Temple University whose essays on the work of George Oppen have appeared in numerous publications.

Robert Hass

Professor of English, University of California at Berkeley, translator and poet.

Burton Hatlen

Editor of *George Oppen, Man and Poet*, published by the National Poetry Foundation in 1981, and the special issue of *Paideuma* which celebrated George Oppen in the Spring of 1981.

Hugh Kenner

Professor of English at Johns Hopkins University, critic and author of many books, including *The Homemade World* in which he locates George Oppen among the creators of a specifically American foundation of literature.

Mark Linenthal

Poet and Professor of English at San Francisco State University who has written articles on the work of George Oppen.

Carl Rakosi

Poet and friend, one of the original Objectivists.

Acknowledgements

Charles Amirkhanian

Composer and Music Director of radio station KPFA-FM, Berkeley, which has broadcast several readings by George Oppen and is carrying this tribute live.

Michael Cuddihy

Editor of *Ironwood Magazine*, a special issue of which (#5, 1975) was devoted to the poetry of George Oppen.

June Oppen Degnan

Publisher of *San Francisco Review*, which co-published *The Materials* in 1962 and *This in Which* in 1965.

L.S. Dembo

Professor of English, University of Wisconsin, critic and editor who early recognized the significance of the Objectivist group of poets.

Dan Gerber

Poet, co-editor of *Sumac* and publisher at Sumac Press, which brought out *Seascape: Needle's Eye* in 1972.

Jim Hartz

Director of the Poetry Center at San Francisco State University, co-sponsor of this tribute.

James Laughlin

Poet and publisher whose New Directions Books co-published *The Materials* (1962) and *This in Which* (1965), then published *Of Being Numerous* in 1968 and brought out the *Collected Poems* in 1975.

John Martin

Publisher at Black Sparrow Press, which issued George Oppen's last book, *Primitive*, in 1978.

Ezra Pound

"What was noble in his nature will not be forgotten, and what is truly great in his work will surely endure." (James Laughlin) Pound contributed the foreword to George Oppen's first book, *Discrete Series*, in 1934.

Charles Reznikoff

Poet whose poetry has been perhaps the most loved by George Oppen.

Harvey Shapiro

Poet and journalist who early recognized George Oppen's work.

Louis Zukofsky

Poet, friend and editor of the 1931 Objectivist issue of *Poetry Magazine* and *An "Objectivists" Anthology* issued by To Publishers in 1932.

Videotape of George Oppen reading provided by the American Poetry Archive at San Francisco State University. Audiotape from Watershed Foundation, Washington, D.C.

Thanks are also due to the many magazines, both established and—more numerous—small press publications, scholars, teachers, students and friends who have written about and come to discuss George Oppen's work.



*River of our substance
Flowing
With the rest. River of the substance
Of the earth's curve, river of the substance
Of the sunrise, river of silt, of erosion, flowing
To no imaginable sea.*

from "A Narrative"

\$1.00

J.A.C.O.B.'S



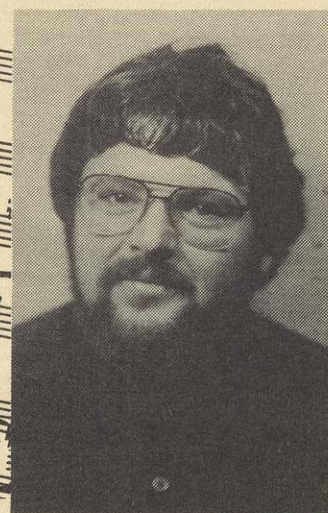
LETTER

The Jewish Quarterly of the Arts for San Francisco and the Bay Area

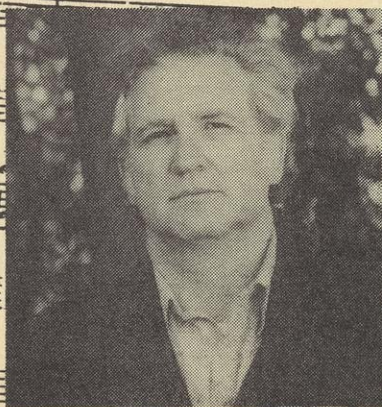
Vol. V No. 1

January - March 1985

FOCUS ON MUSIC



Yentel I - Squat Juliet of Pinsk - A Jewish
lightly and lebedig Bluesish Wedding Dance
(♩ = 132)



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Literary Editors	Joel Ensana, Tallulah Lapidés, Andrea Liss, Isabelle Maynard
Calendar Editor	Beth Rose
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The Jewish Arts Community of the Bay is a non-profit tax deductible organization dedicated to the expression of Jewish identity, values and traditions in art. Among its members are musicians, theater artists, dancers, writers, liturgists and visual artists. Participants range from the religious to the secular, from those deeply involved in Jewish communal life to those without any formal affiliation. All are welcome. What unites us is art as a medium for our evolving culture.

Please send in letters to the editor, items for the calendar and news about your work. We are glad to receive suggestions for articles, columns or creative work.
Next Deadline: March 1. Please submit all letters and other written contributions typewritten and double-spaced.

Opinions expressed in articles herein are those of the author and not necessarily JACOB's. We want to air diverse points of view on important issues and encourage readers to send us their comments for publication.

Subscriptions to JACOB's Letter are available by membership in JACOB for \$20/yr (\$10 low income). See membership form enclosed with this issue (or request from JACOB at address above).

EDITOR'S COLUMN — THEMES AND THANKS

I hope you've noticed. With each issue something different. A new logo here ... a new column idea there ... a real cover! Changing, God willing, not like the chameleon — not our colors; better like a pheasant, coming into its plumage.

Turns out we can do more than we thought on a shoestring. True, the shoestring is a little longer these days, thanks to extra help from certain friends.

What is wonderful is to continue discovering unique artists, previously unknown to us, whose creative process runs in tandem with their Jewishness. Hence, the musicians and composers presented in this issue. More about that below.

Our latest gift has come in the form of several talented and enthusiastic new staff members. DIK FISHMAN has joined us as graphic designer & layout artist. You have a taste of his style in these pages. DEIRDRE STEINBERG has begun using her editing and organizing skills to make the production process more efficient. And JANE ADOMAITIS is implementing strategies for expanding distribution and otherwise spreading the word.

Along with the hellos, we need to bid farewell. Especially to HOWARD HARRISON, staff artist, who has laid us out and pasted us up, devotedly burning midnight oil for the past 3 years. He also contributed many of his inimitable drawings to our pages. Howard is taking a well deserved leave, but we'll be looking for sketches blowing to us in the wind from time to time.

You will have observed that this issue has a theme: Jewish music. An interview with DAVID JULIAN GRAY of The Klezmerim (and newly elected JACOB board member) probes the recent revival of Klezmer music and tells the story of The Klezmerim's coming into being. Articles by or discussions with several musician-composers — AARON BLUMENFELD, LARRY POLANSKY, IVAN ROSENBLUM — present other angles and insights into making music as a Jew today. The theme is rounded out by reviews and personal/historical contemplations — by JODY HIRSH, MARTIN SCHWARTZ, and again DAVID GRAY. This survey doesn't claim to be exhaustive. If we've left someone out you think people ought to know about, please tell us.

The theme issue is an experiment. Taking this approach from time to time may be a powerful lever to help unearth who's doing what, and why, in Jewish creative life of the Bay Area. Future prospects for theme issues include such topics as "Art and Social Commitment," "The Jewish Performing Arts," "The Visual Arts," and "Collaborations Between Artists".

As the range of coverage in JACOB'S Letter expands and deepens, we welcome the responses of readers and members to guide us along the way. For those who need a formal structure, we'll be including a questionnaire with one of the coming issues. But please don't wait. We'd like to hear how you feel about the innovations in this issue. We love letters — whether love notes or gripes. Both are welcome, as is anything in-between, as well.

And, by the way, the editorial, layout, business and production departments still have room for those who want to share their skills, pick up new ones, and become a feather in the plumage.

Jacob Picheny

SUBMISSIONS

Submissions of original literary work — fiction, poetry, translation — are invited. Such work must be submitted typewritten and double-spaced and received by the 10th of the month preceding our normal deadline. For the next issue literary material is due February 10 to Joel Ensana, 102 Goldmine Dr., San Francisco 94131.

George Oppen — 1908-1984

"George Oppen and I have been friends for over sixty years, although we did not meet or correspond with each other until 1971. This is understandable only if you knew George. The way it happened was that we sat around his kitchen table in San Francisco and talked and ate cheese and bread, and the more we talked and the more I looked into his steady eyes, the deeper down we got to something solid and brotherly between us, older than he or I. That it how we became old, old friends in one night.

"George has a great eye, precise and irreducible. If you sit still and look hard enough, you can see what it sees. What it sees feels like the gnarled bark of an oak tree. The tree is there too. You can put your weight against it. It won't give."

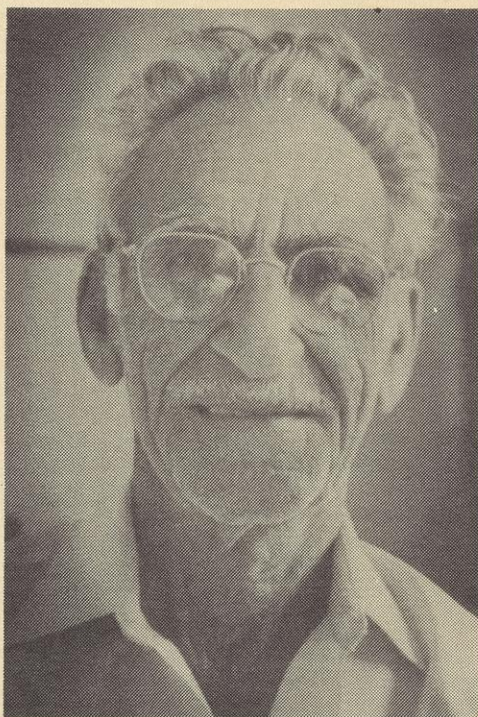
I wrote this about Oppen a few years ago. On July 7, 1984 he died of Alzheimer's Disease at the age of 76.

Oppen was one of the four Jewish poets who came to be known in the 1930's as Objectivists. The others were Louis Zukofsky, Charles Reznikoff and I. Ezra Pound wrote a preface to his first book, *DISCRETE SERIES*, in which he hailed him as "a serious craftsman, a sensibility which is not everyman's sensibility and which has not been got out of books."

The Objectivists have had a strong influence on many young poets writing today, and were in turn influenced by Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams. They thus form steps to the present, and are so known in literary history, but in addition their work is singular for its depth and originality.

Honors came late in life to Oppen, a Pulitzer prize, a special National Endowment for the Arts award, and more recently a book of essays about his work published by the National Poetry Foundation. What attracts young poets to him is his extraordinary compactness, integrity and existential depth, and the linguistic innovations in his later work. Almost any poem from his *COLLECTED POEMS* or from the subsequent volume, *PRIMITIVE*, will serve as an example. The following is called *RETURN*.

"And we saw the seed,
The minuscule Sequoia seed
In the museum by the tremendous slab
Of the tree. And imagined the seed
In soil and the growth quickened
So that we saw the seed reach out, forcing
Earth through itself into bark, wood,
the green
Needles of a redwood until the tree
Stood in the room without soil —
How much of the earth's
Crust has lived
The seed's violence!
The shock is metaphysical."



George Oppen

Armand Schwerner, a poet who has felt Oppen's impact deeply, described him as "a metaphysician of the real, a metaphysician of flux and the things of this world," the poetry "pushed by a sense of high propulsive importance, the deep feeling surfacing constantly; it comes into view, pressured by what is invisible."

The Oppens were of German-Jewish origin. The family name was originally Oppenheimer, and the family probably related, he thought, to J. Robert Oppenheimer. As a boy he lived in New Rochelle, New York, but grew up in San Francisco, where his father owned several movie theaters. They were well-fixed and expected their son to continue in their style of life but he couldn't stand the smugness and self-indulgent materialism of his family and their well-to-do German-Jewish friends and recalled it with revulsion, breaking away from it for good when he went away to college in Oregon. Here he met Mary Colby during their first year and they fell in love. They were expelled for love-making, which in those days was not permissible on campus, during that first year, and he never returned to college. They then took to the road, without knowing exactly what would

come next, visiting relatives of his along the way, and after considerable difficulty, since they were still under age, managed (by a ruse) to get married. This, along with other incidents in their long life together, is described in Mary Oppen's book, *MEANING A LIFE*.

In the 1930's Depression they lived in New York and became, like most creative artists of that time, political activists. When the reaction set in during the McCarthy Era, they fled to Mexico City, where they lived for many years amid a colony of politically like-minded American expatriates, becoming disillusioned with the political left as time went on.

It is hard to say anything definite about Oppen's sense of Jewishness because his father, whom he respected but could not emulate, was a free-thinking secularist who never went to synagogue, and Oppen was never inside one in his whole life. Thus, this sense was nebulous, almost non-existent, but not quite. He knew he was a Jew and was in no way uncomfortable about it or evasive. In fact, he was curious and interested, and enjoyed recounting something extraordinary that had happened to him once in New York. He and the poet William Bronk were sitting on a bench in Washington Square, talking, when a couple of young, intense-looking Rabbinical students in hassidic garb approached them and asked if they were Jewish. Oppen said he was and was then asked if he had ever been Bar-Mitzvahed. When they learned that he had not been, they became very excited and with eyes fixed eagerly on his face asked if he would like to be confirmed. Oppen, always obliging, always interested in new experience, said he wouldn't mind. Then with Bronk, a non-Jew looking on, astonished, Oppen went through the ceremony. At the conclusion the young men left, practically dancing with joy at their good fortune in having discovered and redeemed a neglected Jew. Oppen found the whole experience charming. Had the circumstances of his life been different, who knows how far he would have gone in Jewish identification. His wife Mary, though not Jewish, would have gone with him and supported him, for she was deeply identified with whatever had meaning for him.

Had this happened, what kind of a Jew would he have become? In all likelihood, open, philosophical, and live-let-live. One is hard put, of course, to find anything specifically Jewish in his poetry, but if its great seriousness and moral purpose, its integrity and lyrical intensity remind one of the Bible, one could say, I think, that there is a Jewish element there, provided one does not make the claim exclusive.

Community and Diversity: The Stories of 10 Bay Area Jewish Families

Photos by Erik Weber

Text by Irena Narell



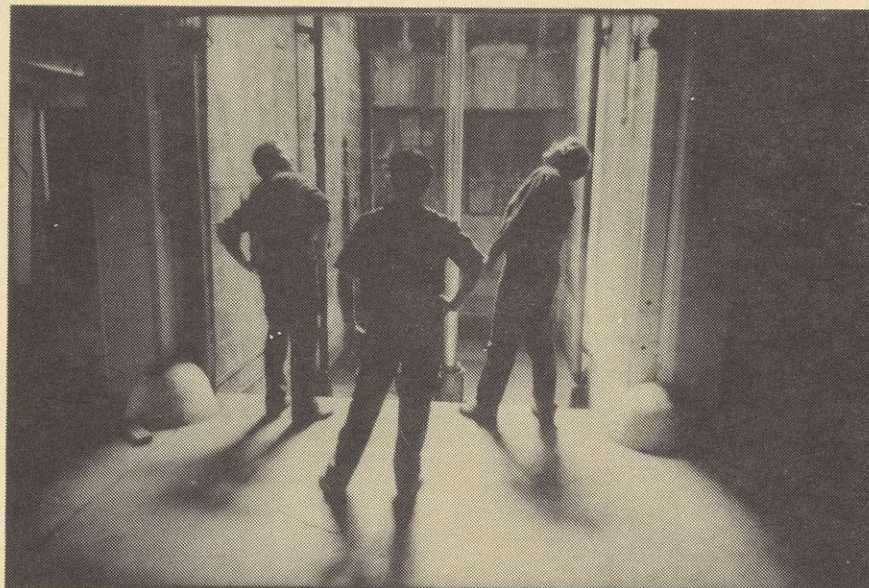
Rear: Michael, Josh, Dan, Regina, Howard. Front: Noah, Elsa

"Community and Diversity," a project of writer-historian Irena Narell and photographer Erik Weber, has been in preparation for several years. Its aims are to research and produce a major public exhibition (approximately 300 photos with accompanying oral history text) by drawing on the historical and contemporary experience of Jews in the Bay Area. The project involves in-depth oral history and photodocumentation of 10 contemporary Jewish families.

The goals of the project include the following:

- Document this aspect of cultural history while it is still within living memory;
- Trace Jewish community development since the Gold Rush;
- Demonstrate diversity of experience within the Jewish community;
- Show the effects on family and individual life of adaptation to a new cultural setting; and
- Encourage public discussion of the challenging issues that arise in the course

Michael, left.



3.25.82

Palmer

Dear Michael:

One just off the griddle for SULFUR.
Where are the others? Still on the griddle. Which
metaphor leads me to reflect that only Eshleman
could have come up with ~~aa~~ a name like that for a
magazine because only he has a gut feeling that
only that which is burning in psychological sulphur
and brimstone is the true poetry. N'est-ce-pas?

Love,

4/28/83

Palmer

Dear Michael:

"What are young poets for?"

I used to know when I was young, but alas.....!

Maybe the answer will come to me. I'll
call you immediately.

*Michael is referring
to something I had said (or written?)
to the effect, 'What are older poets for?'
I remember now, it was part of what I said
at the 75th Birthday Celebration for George Oppen.*

CK

3/12/83

Pickman
Dear Ted:

Thanks much for your books, which George Evans brought over. I have an affinity for their reflective cast and for the sanitary care in the writing and thinking, but I must confess that I like even more your hilarious FLUKES, especially SAPPHO and STILLE NACHT. I know, of course, that such things can't be made to order but here's hoping that the dice will fall that way again for you often.

Best,

22 May 1987

Powell
Dear Jim:

If I could frame your fine, discerning letter, I'd hang it in my study to remind me that here and there, to my wonderment, there are people out there with whom my work is in an extraordinary rapport. How can I explain it? and thank you?

Best,

6 Aug. 1984

Raymond
Dear Jeremy:

My friend, George Evans, and his wife Lissa, will be visiting in England and passing through Cambridge early next month. I wouldn't in any way want to impose him on you but I know it would be a treat for him to meet you. He's quite solid and likeable. Just edited the Olson-Corman correspondence, which will be published next year, and has a small book out in England which has some strong things in it. If you have the time and the inclination, let me know and I'll pass the word along. But please don't do it unless you have the inclination. In which case you ^{could} consider him my emissary and he could bring back news of you.

Love,

126 Irving St. San Francisco, CA 94122 26 March 1988

Pygmy
Dear Jeremy:

Your dear letter brought tears to my eyes. Your recollection of Leah, your reassurances to me...how did you know these would touch our hearts so deeply? It's what we need these days, but we need too much. Since my last letter to you, Leah's condition, as I wrote Andrew, has become uncertain and I doubt ~~whether~~ whether we'll be able to undertake the trip. For the time being, I've stopped looking for a flat and am just waiting to see what happens. But don't give up just yet. We may still be able to make it and do that ^{joyful} romp together. If not, I'll remember it as if we had, and still bless you for it.

About the language poets: ordinarily I'd ~~be able to~~ view them as you do, from a distance, with a light-hearted irony, but two of their three leaders live here and I've seen them in action, and a more humourless, opinionated, aggressive, arrogant and generally obnoxious know-it-alls I've never seen. Still, one could let that pass if they were simply espousing a different view of poetry, but what they are espousing is anti the whole works: anti-lyrical, anti meaning, anti communication. I have to conclude that the Parisian deconstructionists and the latter-day neo-Marxists have had a deadly effect on some of our sharpest young minds. I wouldn't even mind that if the others in their generation realized that this emperor has no clothes.

Your magisterial edifice of thought, Bands Around the Throat, arrived and, as usual, held me in thrall. I think it's what Don Byrd found wanting in poetry today when he wrote in a recent issue of Sulfur: "Helen Vendler hasn't realized that there is no longer ^{any} reason to write poetry. As a mode of vital intelligence for public use, it is more or less finished."

A young friend of mine, August Kleinzahler, is going to be giving a reading at Cambridge on May 25 and would like to meet you. He's heard me talk about you. He's an independent young cuss, a former student of Bunting's, and not a bad poet. But of course you may not have the time or want to meet him.

I'll keep you informed, old buddy.