Series 1, Box 3: Correspondence with individuals (I-P).

[s.l.]: [s.n.], [s.d.]

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

The card of July 18, 1969 refers to a reading I gave at a party for me at the home of H.R. in that amazing Long Island. Harper, the translator present were Armand Schwerner, Alden Phanz, Ignatow, Nancy and all their wives and an assorted variety of fat-cat artists unknown to me but very congenial.

"references" in the Aug. 25, 1971 letter refer to my lending him as a reference for a magazine.

"Send more poems" meant, of course,ased for his magazine, Chelsea.

"Advice on David" in the Dec. 11, 1971 letter refers to professional advice I gave him as a psychiatrist on how and how she should handle his son David after his discharge from a state mental hospital.

Carl Rakosi
Dear David:

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 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, 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.
Dear Stanley:

I can't tell you how pleased I am at the success of The War Between the Pathetic Teachers and the Splendid Hswh 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 goes beyond your furthest expectations. Great going! 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 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 whether 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,

Carl
To Allan:
I found a move for Drocos
(has to be discovered as a great card
and 'B' pure missed a point
These should be 14 and 15 in the
sequence. The last 4 in the sequence
should then be remembered 16, 17, 18 & 17.

6/30
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, NIGHT 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.
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,
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 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.
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
Dear J,

"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,

[Signature]

1/19/82
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,
19 Nov. 1984

Dear A:

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 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.
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.
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 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, and let the whole thing go. Think about it 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,
Dear Jl,

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.

James Langston

30 Jan. 1988
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.
Dear Pat and Andre:

How nice of you to remember our birthdays. What I don't understand is how you knew in the first place and remembered. Regardless, anyhow, what a slugger 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,
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, 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 granddaughter'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 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 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 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.
This note is from Meridel Le Sueur, a neglected middle West writer whose short stories are pure middle Westerner in the sense that Sherwood Anderson was and at the same time have great rhapsodic, bardic power. Then we were young, we had a number of close mutual friends—like the novelist Zona Gale and Margaret Harmer, the wife (wife 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. I was hungry for more, and she deserved far more visibility than her small regional publisher could give her. The brush 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 siren, massive face, with white hair, and a big, light torso, like Gertrude 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
Found letters from Denise Sivertso that need no notes.

Carl Rakosi
Dear Steve Levine:

The things for which you praise my work are to be found in your book too; and when not 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 1964

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.
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 neighbors, 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 a kind 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 meanings 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 arguments are vulgar and superficially convincing.

Fondly,

[Signature]
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 didn't get done.

I'm looking forward to hearing all about Senegal and your trip. I hope, however, that 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. 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.
Dear John:

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 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. 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 chuckling affectionately at one of my crummy jokes. The photographs of George and 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 BAEDECKER yet? Quite a book. Also Virginia Woolf's DIARIES. Full of nuggets of extraordinary perception, not to be found in her novels.

Affectionately,
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!
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.

[Signature]

[Address]
Dear John:

I wish you hadn't asked me to criticize your poems. Ordinary 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. 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 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 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 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 for a possible poem.

The prose sections of NOTES FROM 10 DAYS IN SENEGAL are lively & interesting. Re the two interior poems, the subject 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!
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. 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 reimburse 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 publisher, Terrell.

Love,
The reference in Walter Looenfels' letter of 1/21/71 is to a comment I had made that his American poems (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
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,

[Signature]

Carl Rocco
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 Pulp Folk magazine.

Carl Rakosi
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 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 Street, Albany, CA 94716.
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,
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 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 AMERICANA, 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 ms. That order is suitable for a collected edition but probably not for a Rakosi Reader.

And now it's your turn.

Best,
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 feel good or to feel bad about your preference for my early work.

All the best,

[Signature]
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.
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
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

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 thought their work needs more time to settle in before it is critically evaluated. From that point, quite a feat!

Thanks again,

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


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-naturally, "Oh, don't pay any attention to him."

McCarthy was quite warm and genuine not at all after camera. He peered into my study and with a mischievous look asked my wife, "Is this where he does his work?"

"Yes," said she hesitatingly, "When he's in town, he

"I know," said McCarthy. "Any excuse for not going in for which connection he recalled, with a laugh, how some columnist I think Reston, 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 Tom Young McCarthy, appeared as scheduled, to clamber down to my 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 visitors 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 emphasis, "I want you to take a good look at him, kids. There's a real poet." With laughter,
Then 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." The last gallantly kissed my wife good-bye.

Carl Rakosi
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.
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, Cætic; 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 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,

Coe
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,
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, without 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,
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,
30 Jan. 1988

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; 1 green pepper sliced; 2 tablespoons plain yogurt; 1 tablespoon flour; egg dumplings; 2 tablespoons heavy cream.

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 1/4 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.

Recipe for Egg Dumplings

1 egg
3 tablespoons oil or margarine
one-third cup water
1 teaspoon & 1 tablespoon salt
1 1/2 cups flour

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 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 of poets,...of good poets, that is. The others,
let them baton 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,
Dear Mr. Montgomery:

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

[Signature]

25 Sept. 1988
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 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 the 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,
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! 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 consciousness fix, Sabin more language-propelled and literary; the HD letters fascinating in the contrast between the daily earthing, Hilda Doolittle, and HD the poet's 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 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 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
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 Laforgue, 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. Your 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,

[Signature]

10/27/82
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 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?
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,
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,
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 Kelinzahler.

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 PROSE book. I was not present during the earlier part, and what came when I was, is not interesting enough to report.

Best,
Dear Brad:

Consider it a compliment if I tell you that POSTHUMES was of interest to me, since I value poetry in the 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, it seems to me, would benefit by deleting Stanza 1; 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 seeming 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 festachrift to Gardner's.

Best,

[Signature]
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.
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 publishing 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,
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

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. "L.Z." in the letter is Lorine Rykofsky. "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 might be something strange about her because she had been working as an ordinary cleaning woman in a mental hospital; so, dropping in from Madison, I felt some suspicion. My fears were groundless, however. The moment I met her at the door, she was outgoing, cheerful, and very lively, the opposite of recluse. 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 R. Kosti
23 Jan. 1987

Dear Geoffrey:

What an illuminating, empathic send-off you gave the COLLECTED POEMS. How well you know me!

Bless you.

[Signature]

Jan. 13, 1987
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 the 2 p.m. too late for me to 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, suppurative 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 Shumate. Tendril was the name of one poem; "Believe the page appeared in it. Oppen's postscript is a collage of quotations from this 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 Eo-Voice. "Z. hauchelin" is of course, New Directions, our publisher.

Carl Rakosi
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 Saeth 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

[Signature]
Dear Carl R

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

Belial, your oaf, notwithstanding ---

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 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

... let us hug and romp
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:

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

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

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

((((( 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 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))))

((notice again that J Laughlin takes us as friends of 35 years: 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

[Signature]
29 Nov. 1984

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,

Cay
Mary:

When we talked last, I had already 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 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
2 letters + 2 post cards from Rachel 50's letters
from me to Rachel
to Mary Oppen
6 pieces by me about 940
1 plots of Georgy Mary Oppen and Carland.
1 letters miscellaneous
2 articles on 12

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

Cat Ralston

Rachel Bland du Plessis is collecting & editing Oppen's letters for a book.
Dear Carl R:

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

protest of Belial, your oaf, notwithstanding——

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

'.....let us hug and romp 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——

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

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-forwarded 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

[Handwritten signature]
Date: 1975/2

Dear Carl:

"Fordy, I'm still lucky." —

Don't know if I'm in the contest or what I said to have

... totally marks, lucky in my funds.

Including Carl P.

And premonitions about Dennis and U.S. — (could

have been me too). I'll tell you in
detail if you political commitment was

or not which I don't think, but you didn't say — and which

makes our friendship not so new as we

and it was to each other talking to

each other from the thunder on the top

of those Brooklyn - like stairs.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
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.
Dear Carl:

there's no firmer verse than your best Dazzling and absorbing
--yes, a contradiction in my words Nor my fault: your virtue.

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

---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 Collectif Poems.
(2) & respond to his observation on p. 102, Exsulciun, Night
Date, circa 1979

Carl:

I am honored by the dedication

but inside are small
from sweetness of the knowledge of mortality

or: Enter an heroic line, disguised:

It has been Englished

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

[Signature]
Dear Carl

Ex Cranium -- a marvel Above all, perhaps, the 'Phet' 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
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.
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 of your poems ? one would need some word as 'manly' as handsome but short of arma 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 boiled water 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. Refer to my upcoming reading in San Francisco. When I 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.
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 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 tough old bird"
(2) Refers to my poem, In a Warm Bath (p. 4, Erv-Voice)
(3) Refers to p. 93, Excrucianum Night, beginning "Today—ste.
(4) Oppen introduced me that night.
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? —E. D. Dembo, University

most surely human

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, 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 commonplace yes, it seems I do think so.

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

O eternal

is its element

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
He often & had known each other's work intimately since the 1930's and appeared together often in print but had never met or exchanged letters. I made the first to see him in N.Y. in June of the summer of 1968 or 69, but could not go 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. At the end of the reading we found a deep sympathetic understanding of each other that at the end of my stay visit I was told it was time for me to go. I was packed ready to leave, we embraced & offered hand, "You and we are friends for 35 years," and indeed it was so.

This is what I refer to in my letter.

The letter are undated. The one beginning "The letter beginning Death Carl must have been written in Nov 1971 in response to receiving the "Ere Voice," I learned is, of course, New Directions."
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 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
hallmark. 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
the underlying of the passage is this condensation. The assumption, with which
I agree, is that the reader is as intelligent as the author and just as capable
as he is of making 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.

"I am the father of no country
And can lie

But whether mendacity
is really the best policy
One is not afraid

One feels like applauding. At last, writing which doesn't sound like
an exercise for teacher but is trye 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 (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

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 88 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.

Carl Rakosi
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 xerically 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
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
Tho all say
Huddled among each other
'Love'
The play begins with the world"

from A MORALITY PLAY: PREFACE

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

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, 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 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, what has happened is that a particular and notable set of events have ended. And that is not too raw to endure.

There was never any mystery about the grain in 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." What is not clear is how a man can be both "an island unto himself and not an island. The morning Mary and I drove George to Oakland to enter him into the HOME FOR JEWISH PARENTS, he was very quiet. I explained that we were 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, 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.

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 George at such a moment, so Mary and I just stood and looked. The atmosphere was not threatening but the physical sight plunged George into a blank isolation. He was alone for the first time with his fate and now withdrawn into the starkest existential state, an 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 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 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 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 and walking over to her, he greeted her and, it seemed to me, 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.

I hear once again George's voice when I read: "TO MAKE MUCH/ of the world/
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."

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 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?

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

Carl Rakosi
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 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 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. 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,
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 irresistible 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 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 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 roommate 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 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.
WRITTEN FOR GEORGE OPPEN'S 75th BIRTHDAY

I wasn't 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 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!
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.
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)

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 is 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 poverty 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 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 sparceness 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.

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.

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”
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**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 pleasant, coming into its plumage.

But we 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. 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 his 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 Klezmorim (and newly elected JACOB board member) probes the recent revival of Klezmer music and tells the story of The Klezmorim’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, translations — are invited. Such work must be submitted typewritten and doublespaced SASE 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."

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 one night 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,” 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
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 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,
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 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. 

C.R.
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,
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,
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 consider him my emissary and he could bring back news of you.

Love,
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 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 trip 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 more detached in viewing 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 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.