

Reading, Writing, and Bibliography

Timothy Steele

One morning in the autumn of 1969, during my senior year at Stanford University, I was browsing the poetry section of the campus bookstore when a friend appeared and told me that the editors of *Sequoia*, the student literary magazine, had accepted a poem of mine for their upcoming Winter issue. I had just gotten off my shift in the vast, cathedral-like Reference Room of The Green Library, where every weekday from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. I pushed a book truck among the heavy wooden tables, gathering and shelving volumes that readers had left out the previous night. Shortly, I would be heading off to my first class of the day. I thanked my friend for the news. She went on her way. For a few moments longer, I lingered in the bookstore's poetry section, feeling differently, however, from how I had felt earlier. For some years, I had been interested in modern and contemporary verse and had built a small collection of it with my student wages. A number of my purchases had come from the bookstore shelves at which I stood: Louise Bogan's *Blue Estuaries*; Edgar Bowers's *The Astronomers*; Edward Connery Lathem's then-new edition of *The Poetry of Robert Frost*; Janet Lewis's *Poems 1924-1944*; Sylvia Plath's *Ariel*; *Personae: The Collected Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound*; *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*; and Richard Wilbur's *Walking to Sleep*. Now I would be published, too. I would be joining the company of admired poets whose books were before me.

Each item listed in this bibliography has occasioned the same happiness I experienced that morning in the bookstore. Every time somebody has decided that something I've written is worth printing, I've felt a connectedness with poets I have looked up to. It is as if I've received tangible acknowledgment of having engaged, as they did, in the craft of writing.

I owe my love of poetry to my family and education. I was born in 1948 in Burlington, Vermont, a small and very pretty city of about 40,000 people that is set on a hill that rises from the east shore of Lake Champlain. Burlington was and is the cultural center of the state, being home to two major hospitals, the state's only international airport, and the University of Vermont. (The latter is customarily referred to as UVM, which is short for the Latin *Universitas Viridis Montis*, "The University of the Green Mountains," a name that evidently goes back to the school's founding in 1791.) Without explicitly saying so, my parents and their friends communicated to me that books and writing were essential parts of life. My father taught political science at UVM. With his colleague Lyman Jay Gould, he edited an anthology for students entitled *People, Power, and Politics*. Published by the College Division of Random House, it contained selections from the works of modern political thinkers from Adam Smith and Karl Marx to Franz L. Neumann and James MacGregor Burns. My father also played poker from time to time with a group of colleagues that included Raul Hilberg, who in 1961 would publish his seminal study of the Holocaust, *The Destruction of the European Jews*. My mother, a nurse, read Mother Goose, Dr. Seuss, and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Child's Garden of Verses* to my sister, my brother, and me when we were little. Our friend Ruth Page reported and composed trenchant op-ed pieces for *The Suburban List*, a weekly

newspaper in Essex Junction that her husband Proctor owned; she later hosted a program on NPR about gardening and published with Houghton Mifflin a collection of her excellent on-air essays. (Her daughter Candy followed in her authorial footsteps and is an outstanding political and environmental journalist.) At Adams Elementary School on South Union Street, our teachers introduced us to the poetry of Robert Frost, who resided for much of the year in Ripton, which lies east of Route 7 about forty miles south of Burlington. Each summer beginning in 1959, the Champlain Shakespeare Festival offered productions of several of William Shakespeare's plays at the Arena Theater under the Fleming Museum on the UVM campus.

As long as I can remember, I've enjoyed books, though I was not precociously literate. Indeed, one of the most mortifying experiences I had as a child involved reading. My father did graduate work at Princeton University between 1953 and 1955, so I attended kindergarten and first grade in New Jersey. When we returned to Burlington and I enrolled in Adams School in Miss Tinker's second grade class, I was assigned to the "Slow" reading group. (Back then, such pejoratives still had currency in educational circles.) I was an overly sensitive child to begin with, and this apparent assessment of my intellectual faculties shocked and dismayed me. So ashamed was I that I couldn't bring myself to tell my parents about it. In the evening, I read my school primers with desperate earnestness, hoping I might by sheer effort lift myself from the abyss into which I'd been cast. My mother remembers that I clutched the books so tightly that my palms sweated and my hands shook. At the first PTA meeting of the school year, she mentioned to the school's principal, Helen Ransom, that I seemed tense. Though Miss Ransom was an excellent principal and kind person, she was also stern. She attributed my behavior to my

being a new student and warned my mother not to coddle me. However, she also explained how the school handled kids transferring into it from elsewhere, and one of her comments provided my mother with the key that unlocked the mystery of my fretfulness. Miss Ransom said that new students were automatically placed in the Slow reading group until teachers could see how they performed. Perhaps someone had told me of this policy, and I hadn't understood. But this was an era when ideas about education differed from those of today. I suspect that the school, operating on the philosophy that what children didn't know wouldn't hurt them, figured that there was no need to give a *raison d'être* for their classifying me as they did. In any case, a burden lifted from my spirit when my mother enlightened me about the situation.

If this episode mortified me then, its sequel mortifies me now. When in due course I was promoted up the literacy ladder to the Advanced reading group, I experienced only relief for myself. I did not pause in my ascent to give thought to my fellow Slow readers whom I left behind. It seems wrong to divide seven-year-old students into tiers of merit, whether in the interests of administrative convenience or on the basis of academic promise. While this practice may promote a certain efficiency of instruction, it short-circuits the invigorating dynamic by which students teach one another and absorb lessons as they observe their fellow students absorbing them. If I could go back to that time, I would resist my self-centered anxiety and instead address the collective plight of all of us Slow readers and the dispiriting treatment we received. I sometimes imagine a scene in which I gather us together on the upper terrace of the Adams School playground at recess and, raising an indignant fist, rally our courage with my oratory. ("Are we illiterates?!" "NO!!!" "Will we meekly accept gold stars for spelling *cat* correctly?!")

“NEVER!!!” “What are we reading for our next book report?” “TOM JONES!!! ANNA KARENINA!!!”)

My cousin Anne Friedrichs, who was born the same year I was and who was a soul mate throughout childhood, remembers that when we were growing up I read differently from most other children. I always looked words up in the dictionary when I didn't know their meaning or pronunciation. This practice may have resulted from the Slow reader trauma, which made me determined to understand what I read. But the intrinsic pleasure of learning also motivated me. I felt this pleasure keenly when I read, for instance, Frost's "Desert Places" in third or fourth grade. I was especially taken with the poet's account of snow falling into a winter field at dusk and of the lonely beauty such snowfalls create:

The woods around it have it—it is theirs.

All animals are smothered in their lairs.

I am too absent-spirited to count.

The loneliness includes me unawares.

In addition to being haunted by the description, I was enchanted to discover that "lair" are places where animals take rest and refuge and that, despite what you might guess from word's letters, it chimes perfectly with "theirs" and "unawares." One of the benefits of reading and listening to poems when we are young is that their meters and rhymes help us learn the pronunciation and accentuation of words. More generally, poems train us to hear as well as see what we read, even if we're reading silently. Poems teach us that language achieves meaning not only by its sounds—its vowels and consonants—but also

by its rhythms. Just as hand-eye coordination is critical in sports like basketball and tennis, ear-eye coordination is critical to literacy.

In those early years, my favorite books included E. B. White's *Stuart Little* and *Charlotte's Web*, Lucy Fitch Perkins's *The Cave Twins*, and Marguerite Henry's *Justin Morgan Had a Horse*. Up to the age of 10 or so, I also read Clair Bee's Chip Hilton novels and the Stratemeyer Syndicate publications, which included the series devoted to Nancy Drew, Tom Swift, and the Hardy Boys. I particularly liked the Hardy Boys books. My favorite was the eighth in the series, *The Mystery of Cabin Island*, with its exciting episodes involving ice-boating. During winter in Burlington, the great expanse of Lake Champlain froze over, and we skated up and down it. These were the days before global warming, and during some winters the ice became so thick and solid that people could drive cars the whole eight miles across the lake from Burlington to Port Kent, New York. Hence, I could readily identify with Frank and Joe, and their friends Chet Morton and Biff Hooper, as they sped in their iceboats across the frozen coves and bays around their hometown of Bayport. I later learned that Leslie McFarlane, the Canadian journalist and filmmaker, did much of the actual writing for the Hardy Boys series, though all of the books listed as their author Franklin W. Dixon—a pseudonym that derived its authority, I now realize, from the weighty initial between the first and last name.

In November of 1957, when I was nine years old and in the fourth grade, our teacher, Florence Keyes, asked us all to write something about the approaching Thanksgiving holiday; in response to this assignment, I wrote my first and, for some years, only poem. It was entitled "John Went Hunting," and its protagonist was a young man who made multiple excursions into the woods to shoot game for Thanksgiving

dinner. Over the space of four dreadful and bouncy couplets, he bagged a turkey, a wolf, and a bear. Since I had no interest in hunting and preferred living animals to dead ones, I'm not sure what compelled me to create this terror of the forest. I must have worked from a literary model. The culprit may have been Tom Lehrer's "Hunting Song," with its story of the trigger-happy man who "went out and shot the maximum the game laws would allow— / Two game wardens, seven hunters, and a cow." My parents had a copy of the original 10-inch LP of the *Songs of Tom Lehrer*. It's the one with the eye-catching jacket that has a border of flames and a sweeping keyboard at which Lehrer sits and plays, caricatured as a tuxedo-ed devil with horns and a barbed tail. The social and political satire of Lehrer's songs was too sophisticated for me. But because he was such an ingenious rhymist and because he always kept in touch with his naughty-silly inner child, he appealed not only to my parents and their friends but also to my siblings and me.

On December 3, 1957, "John Went Hunting" was published in *The Burlington Free Press* in a column by Madeleine May, who covered the education beat for the newspaper. She later married Arthur Kunin, a Professor of Biochemistry in UVM's College of Medicine, and became the first woman governor and first Jewish governor of Vermont. Being in regular contact with the schools in Burlington, Ms. May-Kunin must have heard that poetry had erupted in Miss Keyes's class at Adams School, and must have been sufficiently amused by my effort to include it in her column. (She also included a poem by my classmate Betty Schoen, as well as news about, among other things, the high school debate team's preparations for a tournament at Dartmouth College

and a visit that a group of sixth-graders had recently made to Montreal to see the Ice Capades and the city's Wax Museum.)

I subsequently forgot about the poem. When *Sequoia* published me in its Winter 1970 issue, I thought that this was my debut in print as a poet. However, my mother had clipped Ms. May-Kunin's column from the newspaper, and around 1980, after I had published a book of poetry, the clipping and the poem resurfaced. As can be imagined, the recovery of the poem caused mixed feelings in its author. I blushed at my hero and his disregard for wildlife. Yet I was interested to learn that even at age nine I had been attracted to the art that later came to mean so much to me. And I'm now reconciled, almost, to the fact that "John Went Hunting" is the first item in the C section of this bibliography.

In the later stages of elementary school and in junior high school, I passed through, as many do at that stage, a transitional period during which I enjoyed both books for younger readers, like Kenneth Graham's *Wind in the Willows*, and more mature fare, such as Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*. However, it wasn't until my sophomore year of high school that I read, with confidence and absorption, a classic "adult" work. This was George Eliot's *Silas Marner*, which was assigned to us by a wonderful English teacher at Burlington High School named Gladys Colburn. Herself a poet, she published in *The American Scholar* and elsewhere under the pseudonym of Gladys La Flamme. Her husband was Francis Colburn, a distinguished painter and terrific raconteur who taught art history at the University. Hoping to please Mrs. Colburn, I wrote a serious and carefully organized four- or five-page essay about Eliot's novel, focusing on Godfrey Cass, a man who is decent enough to regret his

duplicities but who lacks the backbone to confess them and reform. I took special pride in introducing the word “compunction” into my analysis of Godfrey’s state of mind. The essay was my first creditable piece of writing. I was thrilled when Mrs. Colburn wrote a warmly praising comment on it.

This happened in late January/early February of 1964 and produced one of those odd associations that sometimes spring up between different things and experiences. At the time, Lesley Gore’s “You Don’t Own Me” was one of the few records challenging the Beatles’ dominance of the pop charts. It climbed all the way to Number 2 on the *Billboard’s* Hot 100 but couldn’t quite dislodge “I Want to Hold Your Hand” from the top spot. As I was reading *Silas Marner* and writing my essay about it, the song sometimes played in the background on the radio in my room. The young Quincy Jones produced the record, and he gave it a memorably eerie and chilly atmosphere. The song seemed of a piece with the winter outside my window, and it matched the mood of Eliot’s novel, whose crucial incident occurs on a snowy New Year’s Eve. The song’s feminist message may also have harmonized for me with Eliot’s sympathetic exploration of the lives of women, though this element is stronger in her bigger novels like *The Mill on the Floss*, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda*, which I read only later. In any case, the song and *Silas Marner* linked in my mind, and have stayed linked ever since. Today, I can’t hear “You Don’t Own Me” without thinking of the novel, and I can’t re-read *Silas Marner* without thinking of Lesley Gore, who was only 17 at the time she recorded the song and who would have been in the senior class at BHS if she had lived in Burlington. I didn’t mention this song-and-novel association to Mrs. Colburn, but I think that she (and Eliot herself) would have been amused by it.

When I was in junior high, my mother and father divorced, and he moved away; however, he had communicated to me his interest in politics, and because he left behind much of his library, I continued to learn from the books he had collected and from him. The literature I most enjoyed throughout high school had a historical or political element. George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* fascinated me with its analysis of the complicated ideological alliances and misalliances that shaped the course of the Spanish Civil War, and my favorite Shakespeare plays were the histories and tragedies, especially *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *1 Henry IV*, *Julius Caesar*, and *King Lear*. Encountering the latter was particularly memorable. I was sick at the time, and as I lay in bed at home, I listened to the Caedmon recording of the play, with Paul Scofield giving a hair-raising performance in the lead.

Prose fiction comprised the most consistently compelling reading we did in high school. We were assigned, among other works, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Charles Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*, Thomas Hardy's *Return of the Native*, Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage*, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*, and James Joyce's *Dubliners*. We also read, in our upper-division French classes, such short stories and short novels as Gustave Flaubert's *Un Coeur Simple*, Pierre Loti's *Pêcheur d'Islande*, André Gide's *Symphonie Pastorale*, and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Vol de Nuit*. On my own, I read, among other novels, Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*, Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage*, Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*, and James Baldwin's *Another Country*. Baldwin was also the most celebrated essayist of the period, and he was one of the two contemporary

American writers I read in depth. The other was John Updike, whose work I learned about thanks to my mother. She brought home from the hospital where she worked a copy of *Rabbit, Run*, which one of her patients had left behind on the bedside table upon being discharged.

Except for Shakespeare and Frost, I didn't respond to poetry as warmly as I did to prose, but in the spring of my year in Mrs. Colburn's class I wrote an essay on Hart Crane. In an anthology, I read and was much taken by "The Wine Menagerie," particularly the opening line: "Invariably when wine redeems the sight." I didn't understand Crane's poetry, but I was impressed with his rhetoric and big words. (The late Margaret Peterson once remarked that Crane sometimes appears to have written with a thesaurus at his elbow.) The other poetry we read in high school, especially the modern poetry, was an odd but agreeable potpourri that included e. e. cummings, Dylan Thomas, Walt Whitman's "Cavalry Crossing a Ford," Emily Dickinson's "I heard a fly buzz when I died," Theodore Roethke's "Elegy for Jane," Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro," William Carlos Williams's "This Is Just to Say," Randall Jarrell's "Death of the Ball Turret Gunner," and Stephen Spender's "I think continually of those who were truly great."

In the spring of our senior year of high school, I spent a long weekend in New York City with five friends and classmates, Rick Lapham, Don Maddocks, David Mundell, Tom Peisch, and Jim Wick. Jim's father Hilton, a popular and successful lawyer in Burlington, underwrote the trip as a reward for our imminent graduation. During our visit, we attended a Sunday matinee, at Greenwich Village's Sheridan Square Playhouse, of a powerful production of Arthur Miller's *View from the Bridge*.

Afterwards, at a bookshop in the Village, I found a copy of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*. Its cleverness and sprezzatura dazzled me and ushered in a period of several years when I was a big Nabokov fan. As have other readers, I came to have mixed feelings about his preciosity, and I've avoided re-reading *Lolita*. As a callow teenager, I simply loved the prose. Today, the situation the novel describes—and the fact that predatory first-person narrator speaks in the verbally virtuosic voice of Nabokov himself—would spoil the book for me. Nevertheless, Nabokov's linguistic genius helped educate me about style and about ways in which words can delight readers as well as convey information to them; and I'm still moved when I re-read some of Nabokov's novels, especially those (e. g., *The Gift*, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, *Pnin*) that depict the Russian émigré scholars and artists who fled the Bolshevik Revolution. One never forgets, for example, that scene in which Pnin—alone and bewildered in America and abandoned by his wife—sits weeping at the Clements' kitchen table and wails, "I have nofing left, nofing, nofing!"

I mention my early preference for and exposure to prose fiction because it partly accounts for the novelistic elements that appear in some of my poems. I notice that even in my early work, which is mainly lyrical, a number of the poems, including "The Skimming Stone" and "For My Mother," sketch a narrative and evoke a character. The same features appear—in a more consciously designed manner and on a broader canvas—in such later poems as "Cory in April," "Her Memory of the Picnic," and "In the Italian Alps."

A related thought occurs to me. Critics sometimes describe me as a "classicist," and it is true that the two characteristics with which the Greeks identify poetry—meter and story-telling—appear in my work. But as flattering as it might be for me to see

myself as reviving or embodying the great traditions of ancient art, I came to my outlook and technique in a largely unconscious or instinctive manner. The process had less to do with Homer and Aristotle than with my mother's reading verse to me as a child, my father's interest in politics and history, and my reading lots of prose fiction in my teens.

I went to Stanford at the encouragement of Walter Bogart, a family friend who served for many years as Chair of the Department of Political Science at Middlebury College. As a young instructor, Walter had taught at Stanford, and he felt that it was important that provincial New England kids like me experience another part of the country. I did not go to the university with the intention of studying literature. I liked other subjects. If I had any special aptitude, it seemed to be for mathematics. At one point, I believed that the neatest profession in the world was Architecture, combining as it did Beauty and Benefit. It gave you the opportunity to make lovely structures that also provided comfort and shelter for people. I decided to major in English only in my third year at Stanford, after having come to appreciate what an appealing environment for literary studies the school offered.

If one idea characterized this environment, it was that the study of literature and the practice of literature are inextricably related. Two longtime professors at the university, Yvor Winters and Wallace Stegner, had fostered this conviction. Stegner had formed a Creative Writing Program at the university in 1946, when the only other school in the country that offered a degree in the subject was the University of Iowa and when classes in fiction writing and poetry writing were rare. As the decades passed, Creative Writing became increasingly common in colleges and universities. It also grew increasingly specialized, with its own professional organization, the Associated Writers'

Programs, and with a corps of teachers who tended more and more to be the products of the Master of Fine Arts programs under the AWP's aegis. Winters and Stegner, however, were not specialists, nor did they believe that literature was the province of specialists, as much as they admired serious scholars of philology and intellectual history. Though Winters was a poet and Stegner a novelist, they were widely educated and taught classes in literature as well as writing. This arrangement continued with the generation of remarkable writer-teachers who succeeded them, some of whom I studied with—Donald Davie, Kenneth Fields, Nancy Packer, Richard Scowcroft, and Helen Pinkerton Trimpi.

Due to its integration of humanism and belletristic pursuits, amicable relations prevailed among students and faculty in the English program as a whole. The division between “creative” work and “non-creative” work—a division that is arguably false and that has done much damage in education and in the world of letters—didn't exist at Stanford or did so only marginally. Those whose ambition it was to write novels, stories, and poems conversed and socialized with those who hoped to devote themselves to scholarship. This interchange gave the writers an intellectual breadth and respect for humanities that they might not otherwise have had. Likewise, it gave the scholars an appreciation of practical issues that go into producing a poem, a novel, or a play, and enabled them to bring to their classes on Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Emily Dickinson, and Hardy a warm and demystifying insight that you might not find in such classes elsewhere.

In the interests of historical accuracy, I should clarify one matter. Contrary to what has sometimes been said and written about me, I did not study with Winters. I arrived at Stanford in September of 1966 and first heard of him that fall in a freshman

seminar in Literature and Theology taught by Eugene England, a graduate-student instructor who had worked with Winters. However, Winters himself had retired from teaching the previous spring, and, even before that, his health had obliged him to restrict his academic and social activities. A longtime pipe smoker, he had developed cancer of the tongue. In 1964 and 1966, he underwent debilitating operations to treat the cancer, but after both operations, it returned. He died in January of 1968.

Though I never met Winters, I eventually became friends with his wife, Janet Lewis. As many people have testified, she was as warm and approachable as he was formidable. Over the years, I also became friends and learned from a number of the gifted poets and teachers who had studied with Winters, including Fields, Pinkerton, Thom Gunn, Edgar Bowers, Margaret Peterson, Charles Gullans, and Turner Cassity. Further, after getting my Bachelor's degree from Stanford, I had the good fortune to attend Brandeis University and to study with and write a doctoral thesis for J. V. Cunningham, who was one of Winters's early associates. Because I've written elsewhere about Cunningham's writing and teaching, I'll limit myself here to a few observations about his outlook in relation to Winters's. As poets, the two men had temperamental and stylistic differences, which roughly corresponded to the familiar oppositions of romantic (Winters) versus classical (Cunningham). A similarly obvious difference characterizes them as students of literature. Winters is more a critic (and thus mainly concerned with taste and aesthetic judgment), whereas Cunningham is more a scholar (and thus mainly devoted to philology and literary and intellectual history). Yet both valued intelligence in writing and in life. Both thought that poetry was an art that aimed to understand human experience rather than an activity whose function was to enable poets to express

themselves. In that respect, a continuity existed between the teaching that Winters had encouraged at Stanford and that which Cunningham embodied at Brandeis.

I began writing poetry seriously in my senior year at Stanford, and during the Winter Quarter, I took a memorable poetry-writing seminar from Ken Fields. The class had just eight or nine students, including the two Stegner Fellows in Poetry, and the level of writing was consistently high. We met in a small room on the ground floor of the modernistic Meyer Library, which had opened only a few years earlier and which has since been demolished. Ken had a genius for spontaneity. No one was better at coming up with an apt quip or example on the spur of the moment. He was good at all forms of teaching but perfect for a writing class like ours, whose sessions never followed a script but unfolded according to the poems we students offered and discussed that day.

I always looked forward especially to the poems of Connie Hill, a fellow undergraduate with whom I had earlier taken a French class and a class in Chaucer, and to the poems of Belle Randell, who was one of the Stegner Fellows. Connie wrote with an exquisite delicacy about the natural world and human relationships. One afternoon, she shared with the class a poem that could have served (though this was not her intention) as an answer, from a woman's point of view, to Philip Larkin's "Talking in Bed." Her poem concerned, among things, the limits of intimacy, and the tendency of people, especially men, to stop talking and to withdraw at the very point at which it's most crucial for them to communicate. Solitude is part of being human. But even when we feel our isolation most keenly, we should recognize that others suffer from this condition, too, and this recognition should move us to be sympathetic to them, regardless of our own sense of isolation. This is a truth that Larkin seems to miss in the final tercet

of his otherwise beautiful poem. Connie made the point quietly and firmly, with her characteristically memorable compression.

As strong as the class overall was, Belle seemed to me to be the most accomplished writer—at once the most mature and the quirkiest. I particularly remember an afternoon when she brought into class “The Confirmation of Our Inscrutable Friend,” which later appeared in her collection, *101 Different Ways of Playing Solitaire*. The poem bowled me over. As those who’ve read it know, it is a haunting evocation of an enigmatic celebrity who mysteriously vanishes. The catalyst for the poem was, as Belle explained it, the rumor that circulated during the previous autumn that Paul McCartney had died some years earlier and that the other Beatles had contrived an elaborate plot to conceal his death, while at the same time planting clues in their lyrics and on their album covers to hint at the true state of affairs. Belle’s poem is not about Paul per se but about the fabulousness of stardom and about our fascination with those who seem to have been Chosen as the rest of us have not. My Protestant-Calvinist forbears would have appreciated the poem, even as its eerily effective details anchored it in the counterculture of the time. We others knew immediately that this was a real poem. It offered, with a current subject and context, a literary quality comparable to that in the verse of Shakespeare, Keats, Dickinson, or Hardy. Belle showed or reminded our little group of our proper goal—to write the very best poems of which we were capable.

I should say a few words about the works this bibliography documents, particularly the principal books. These have appeared from a variety of publishers. The range runs from The University of Arkansas Press, a relatively small university press, to Random House, a major New York trade operation. Each type of publisher offers

advantages. A book issued by a trade publisher comes into the world with a built-in cachet. It will be more widely distributed and reviewed—and its chances of being nominated for prizes will be greater—than is the case with a book that appears from a more modestly situated outfit. On the other hand, a smaller publisher may keep a book in print longer than a large house would, and sales figures that might disappoint a large publisher may make the author look like a bestseller at a smaller house. Likewise, a small publisher might promote a book for a longer period beyond the time of its initial appearance than would a large publisher. The latter might boom your book vigorously for a few months but then be obliged to turn its focus to the comparatively numerous new titles it produces with each successive season.

The ideal situation is to work steadily, year in and year out, with a single editor/publisher who cares about your work. Pound's irrationalities about politics and economics would have cast his poetry and literary criticism into the outer darkness if T. S. Eliot at Faber and Faber (and James Laughlin at New Directions) hadn't kept publishing him through thick and thin. Blanche Knopf performed a comparably admirable service for Stevens. She stood by him for three decades, even though his books sold poorly and even though she and her husband Alfred were often baffled by the poems.

Other things being equal, the larger and more distinguished the publisher, the better. Writing to Charles Montieth in January of 1956, Larkin alludes to his travails with George and Jean Hartley's mom-and-pop Marvell Press, which had just issued his collection *The Less Deceived*: "O for a big publisher in charge!" Larkin exclaims, and many authors would say, "Amen," to this. Even so, *The Less Deceived* did just fine with

The Marvell Press. In the same fashion, Alan Swallow did Cunningham proud, and Fulcrum Press supported Basil Bunting through several books in 1960s (including *Briggflatts*) with a conviction that a larger publisher might not have been able to sustain.

My most unusual experience with publishing involves *Missing Measures*. In 1986, it was under contract and was sailing smoothly toward production when my editor left the press. Subsequently, a board member of the press raised objections about the book. These ostensibly concerned not its contents but the process by which it had been acquired and reviewed, though I wonder whether the board member simply didn't like that the book questioned certain pieties about modern verse. In any case, everything unraveled, and the book was returned to me. After trying unsuccessfully for a time to find it another home, I put the manuscript in a drawer with the melancholy thought that the drawer might well prove to be its permanent resting place.

However, my luck turned in the late summer or fall of 1988. Paul Ramsey was visiting Los Angeles from his home in Kentucky and doing research at the Huntington Library. One evening, he came over to dinner, and we discussed, among other things, *Missing Measures* and its misadventures. Upon his return back East, he mentioned, unbeknownst to me, the book to Miller Williams, who was editor-in-chief of The University of Arkansas Press, which he had co-founded back in 1980. One rainy morning in Los Angeles early in 1989, my phone rang and when I picked it up, it was Miller's daughter Lucinda. Already a figure of note in the alternative rock movement, she was living in L. A. and shortly before had recorded her self-titled album down in Venice for the Rough Trade label. She asked me if I was the Timothy Steele who had written a book about poetry, and when I replied I was, she said her father would like to see it, and would

I send it to him. I was delighted and did send it. Miller liked it, and, singlehandedly brought it to light.

A few years later, I visited Miller at his home in Fayetteville, Arkansas. I hope I conveyed how grateful I was for his kindness—and his daughter's. I must be one of the few authors who had a book solicited by a Grammy-winning musician. Some say that those who write popular songs are the real poets of our age. If that is so, Lucinda Williams is a leading figure of our poetry. She has been one of our best singer-songwriters for several decades now. She probably has long since forgotten her association with my book, but I think of her and her poet-editor father fondly whenever somebody mentions *Missing Measures*.

Like the principal books, my limited-edition chapbooks have appeared from a range of publishers. However, the range in this latter case involves matters of production more than of promotion and distribution. Because a limited edition is not intended for wide circulation, it customarily reflects the aesthetic orientation of the publisher more than do books brought out by commercial houses or university presses. Robert L. Barth printed two of my chapbooks, *Nine Poems* and *Short Subjects*, and in both cases, he presented them in the straightforward format he favored: sturdy little booklets with gray paper covers and stapled spines. In contrast, *On Harmony* appeared as a beautiful pamphlet with Japanese paper wrappers and, on the inside, creamy deckle-edged paper. This was thanks to the book's being produced by Abattoir Editions under the supervision of Harry Duncan.

Because younger readers may not have come across Duncan's name or work, I should say a few words about him. He was not only a giant of twentieth-century fine

printing but also a champion of modern American poets. In the late 1930s, just out of college, he attended Katherine Frazier's Cummington School for the Arts in Cummington, Massachusetts. In 1939, Ms. Frazier arranged for the school to purchase a hand press, and she and Duncan initiated the enterprise that eventually became the Cummington Press. Duncan taught himself hand-printing, with guidance from Victor Hammer, the remarkable Austrian artist and typographer. (Hammer had fled from his homeland to United States after the Nazi *Anschluss* in 1938 and had wound up teaching art and printing at Wells College in Aurora, New York.) The first book bearing the Cummington Press imprint appeared in 1941. Duncan assumed full responsibility for the press after Ms. Frazier's death in 1944, and for the next five decades, he printed beautiful but affordable books, mostly of contemporary poetry, in editions of 300 or fewer copies. The many high points in his career included his publishing in 1944 Robert Lowell's first book, *Land of Unlikeness*. He also developed a close and happy association with Wallace Stevens, who loved Duncan's work and published three books with him: *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction*; *Esthétique du Mal*; and *Three Academic Pieces*. Duncan also produced collections by Marianne Moore, Allen Tate, J. V. Cunningham, William Carlos Williams, Richard Wilbur, and others. In 1956, he accepted a teaching position at the University of Iowa and moved his operations to Iowa City. In 1972, he moved on to Omaha when the University of Nebraska hired him to found and run a fine arts press for it. This was Abattoir Editions, which I mentioned a few moments ago. Duncan died in 1997, at the age of 80.

If I was lucky to have a book published by Harry Duncan, I was similarly fortunate to have one published by Michael Peich, who handsomely designed and printed

Starr Farm Beach for his Aralia Press. Duncan was a friend and mentor of Mike's, and Duncan and K. K. Merker, another legend in the world of fine printing, encouraged Mike to start his press. After Duncan's death, Mike and Denise Brady assembled a checklist of the books Duncan published.

One chapbook holds a special place in memory. This is *The Prudent Heart*. Charles Gullans published it in his Symposium Press series. Charles was a gifted poet and a wonderfully generous friend. When I first came to Los Angeles in 1977, Charles put me up at his apartment on Greenfield Avenue in Westwood while I looked for a place of my own. From that time until his death in 1993, Charles and I often visited and discussed poetry, art, music, and the state of the world. Once or twice a month, we would dine at Dante restaurant on Wilshire Boulevard in West Los Angeles. I still think of him and regret his death at the age of 63, when he was yet in his intellectual prime and was looking forward to a retirement of writing and travel.

There is another reason that this book carries special significance. It was designed and printed at the Stinehour Press in Lunenburg, Vermont, by Stephen Harvard, a terrific book designer, illustrator, and calligrapher. Lunenburg is not far from the farm in Westmore, Vermont, to which my mother and stepfather retired in about 1980. (In 1969, my mother had married Erland Gjessing, who was a Professor of Biochemistry in UVM's College of Medicine and who was, coincidentally, a colleague of Madeline May-Kunin's husband, Arthur. My mother and Erland spent the early and mid-1970s in Colombia, where he taught and did research at the medical school of the University of Cali, before returning to Vermont permanently in 1977.) During a visit to their farm in 1982, my wife and I drove over to Lunenburg and met Mr. Harvard. In addition to being an excellent

artist, he was a thoughtful and sensitive human being. When Vicki and I talked with him, we felt these qualities strongly. We also recognized that, for all his graciousness, a shadow lay over his spirit. Though we did not know him well, we liked him very much, and his suicide in 1988 came as a terrible shock.

Some may find it strange that I have devoted as much space here to my limited-edition chapbooks as I have to my principal books. But chapbooks are important to poets. They bring us into contact with fellow artisans who appreciate poetry and who are interested in presenting it attractively. Also, if a poet writes short poems and is self-critical, he or she is unlikely to accumulate a new full-scale collection every several years. Chapbooks can serve as welcome islands as we cross the otherwise empty seas between larger books. Chapbooks can give poets a sense of ongoing accomplishment—and can offer them the chance to share their work with a circle of readers—during times when more substantial projects lie on the distant horizon.

In recent decades, the Internet, the personal computer, and the World Wide Web have transformed and benefited our culture. We can find information more swiftly—and we can find more of it—than we could have dreamed of forty years ago. It has also enriched education. To speak of my own experience, I felt that the classes that I taught at Cal State University, Los Angeles, improved significantly whenever I could hold them in a “smart” (or “technology-enhanced”) classroom—a classroom with computer capabilities that provide access to Worldwide Web and that enable the presentation of audio-visual materials from CDs, DVDs, and the like. When our class discussed, for instance, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, I could capture from the Web and show students Caravaggio’s painting of Narcissus, and could summon up a YouTube clip of Shirley

Verrett singing “*Che farò senza Euridice*” from Gluck’s *Orfeo ed Euridice*. We always focused on the literary text, but our experience was enhanced by our seeing fine visual art and hearing fine musical art that dealt with the works we read.

Despite such benefits, digital technology has also had downsides for literature in general and poetry in particular. When I started writing seriously forty-odd years ago, the literary world was much more substantial, in the literal sense of that word, than it is today. Publishing houses produced, promoted, and distributed books. Brick-and-mortar stores sold them. Supplements in newspapers, as well as literary periodicals and some general interest magazines, reviewed the books. Poetry had already fragmented into many different schools and communities. Nevertheless, you still could as a young poet gain a pretty comprehensive sense of what was going on if you took time to read the principal anthologies and to consult the “Books Received” page at the back of the monthly issues of *Poetry* magazine.

Today, in contrast, literary life is more virtual than substantial, and it is impossible to absorb all that is being published and distributed in one form or another. The number of books published annually has risen sharply, and more books than ever are sold. But much of this activity involves the many self-published books in the online market and the numerous digitized reprints of older works now in the public domain. Conventional publishers are fewer, and their activities are more limited. Even long established houses expect their authors to assume—via social media, personal websites, and the like—much of the responsibility for marketing their books. Bookstores, too, are fewer. And newspapers, which themselves are struggling to compete with the new technology, have mostly jettisoned or curtailed the supplements they once devoted to

book reviews and book news. Perhaps we should think of the current state of literature as a vast Elysian field of burgeoning flowers, but at times it feels like a Waterworld in which the landmarks to which readers and writers used to look for their bearings are all drowning in the rising seas of text.

Another issue involves reading. Though it is too early to assess the situation comprehensively, a number of studies have indicated that when we read a literary text on a screen, we do so with less attention, less comprehension, less retention, and—what may be most significant—less enjoyment than we do when we encounter it on paper. We skim online; we read on paper. Our literacy itself may decline if we engage with virtual words alone.

This matter has particular application to poetry. Due to their relative brevity, poems are easy to put up on a website or share via social media. Few people would post or read *Moby Dick* on Facebook. For that matter, few would care settle down in front of their computer to read the novel online, though some might buy it as an e-book to read on a tablet. However, people post and read poems online all the time. Maybe this is good for poetry. Maybe it gets it around. But poems profit from careful reading. If we opt too often for easy electronic accessibility, we may fall into the habit of skimming that online consumption encourages and that diminishes our experience of fine poems.

Still, poetry has always attracted serious votaries, and it will doubtless continue to do so. And while technology is always a double-edged sword—at times cutting us free of the bonds of the past and at other times wounding us with unforeseen consequences of one sort or another—it is on balance a positive force in our development, ameliorating and enriching the human condition. And who knows? Perhaps someday our species will

achieve a level of wisdom that more closely matches our level of ingenuity. Should this occur, we may finally be able to profit fully from the advantages of technology while guarding against its liabilities.

This bibliography reminds me of how much I have to be grateful for. I've had the opportunity to participate in the poetry of our age, both as a writer of poems and as a student of some of the central issues in modern poetics. My thanks go to every reader who has taken time to read my work. My thanks go as well to the editors who have guided my books through production to publication: to Beverly Jarrett for her support of *Uncertainties and Rest*; to Anne Freedgood for her kindness to *Sapphics Against Anger and Other Poems*; to Miller Williams for bringing *Missing Measures* into the world; to John T. Irwin for doing the same for *The Color Wheel*; and to David Sanders, who served as editor for both *All the Fun's in How You Say a Thing* and *Towards the Winter Solstice*.

I am indebted as well to the two authors of this bibliography, Joshua S. Odell and Jack W. C. Hagstrom. They began collecting my publications in the early 1980s, and their friendship and encouragement have helped sustain my writing. Moreover, their work gives me the welcome assurance that future readers will have not only a sound record of my publications but also a resource for checking the accuracy of the texts themselves. Today, poems often circulate from website to Facebook to blog, sometimes suffering losses and corruptions in the process. We need the corrective and verifying powers of bibliography now more than ever, and I hope that this bibliography will provide a means to help preserve my poems as I wrote them.

Finally, I should like to express my gratitude to my wife. For forty years, Vicki has been my first and best reader. She has been unfailingly candid, both in the sense of

honest and in the sense of kind. She has let me know which poems worked and which didn't, and with the ones that worked, has offered insightful suggestions that made them better. In some instances (e. g., "Timothy" and "The Color Wheel"), she has suggested the subject of the poem. In other instances (e. g., "Aubade," "Woman in a Museum," "The Middle Years," and "A Muse"), she herself has been the inspiration and subject. My work is part and parcel of the larger collaboration of our marriage. John Keats says in a letter to Richard Woodhouse: "I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness I have for the Beautiful even if my night's labors should be burnt every morning and no eye shine upon them." Though I don't know whether I'll ever fully achieve Keats's pure and disinterested devotion to beauty, I can approach it at times, thanks to Vicki's love and intelligence. Sooner or later, time may burn my labors. The poems and essays this bibliography documents may all disappear. Still, my spirit will rest easy, knowing her eye once shone upon them.

Timothy Steele

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