

David Phillips Talking

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An Interview with Barry McKinnon

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Photo of David Phillips
(by Bev King)
at the *Words/Loves* Conference Featuring Robert Creeley
1981

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The Kiss
(a Gorse Press Broadside, 1979)

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Th Book of Snow Poems

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Meeting Robert Creeley with David Phillips

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A Visit to W.C. William's House in New Jersey with David Phillips,
Jerry Pethick and Arthur Spiegleman
(photo by Arthur Spiegleman)

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What are you doing in New York?

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Cold Front

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Gorse/Tatlow House Series One

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Wake Me When th Dancing Starts

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Bibliography

The anecdotal recollections are taken from the longer prose essays *The Caledonia Writing Series (a Chronicle)*, the *Gorse Press Bibliography*, and an unpublished memoir *Chairs in the Time Machine* by Barry McKinnon

David Phillips Talking

So much of the pleasure of being David Phillip's friend is listening to him talk, and talking *with* him. He is a friend who *truly* listens until it's time - the spacing always seems magically right - for him to respond to what *you* have just said. He might give a long analysis full of passion and intellect that captures a truth about the world and our experience in it, or he might cast light on something you thought *so serious* with a quick off-hand joke, or a comforting epigrammatic quip that gives accurate perspective on the very issue you thought the ultimate source of your despair. Simply, he's cheered me up like no other; he's kept me talking past the point when those with more sense - *to hell with sense!* he might say - have long ago gone to bed.

The taped interview that follows gives detail about David's life as a poet; it's more specific as a record and is more formally focused than our non-stop chatter on the way to the lumber yard, Safeway or liquor store. On *those* trips we've had some of our best talks being, as it were, that we often had to talk fast and furious while Joy and Dianne sipped wine on Tatlow or Ruby Lake waiting for us to bring back the hamburger (and more wine). On these occasions we might skip the 2x4's and sneak in a quick pint, talking and talking over the terry cloth as if our lives depended on talk - as we know they do. We always got back late. If Joy and Dianne looked grouchy, we'd *both* talk them into laughter and forgiveness soon enough while we unloaded the various packages, talking our way into the kitchen and eventually the yard where David would build a perfect fire and cook and talk long into those wonderful nights.

It seems we have no subject, or it is one so large that it allows *everything* to be talked about. Certain "themes", since our first conversation in 1967, always emerge: sex, love, poetry, money, work, politics - loose categories that weave in and out in no particular order amidst the smaller talk about the seeming trivia of how pleasurable to have a good pair of boots or a brand-name expensive and reliable tool. (Actually, sometimes in *these* moments as the world goes dark, dark, darker, and of course falling apart etc., David's comments and enthusiasms about his new \$12 wool socks from Egmont might light up the world again - it's a tone in his voice to say, *our feet are dry!* - therefore our experience in the world as we know it, is for the moment, *good - we're happy and alive!* AND *There's more to come!*

or so I have often been privileged to feel when I hear my friend David Phillips talking.

Barry McKinnon



David Phillips

at the Robert Creeley *Words/Loves Conference*
Prince George, B.C.
1981

Barry McKinnon: I was trying to remember when I first read your work; it must have been in 1963 - seeing your poems in *Talon* magazine.

David Phillips: I think the first poems I had in *Talon* magazine were in 1965 - probably late 65 and through 66, and 67.

B: Was that the first magazine you were published in? You were living in Vancouver and going to high school.

D: I didn't publish anything in high school. I didn't publish anything until I had poems in *Canadian Forum* and a magazine called *Quarry*, some of those magazines from the mid 60's. Then I was actively sending poems out to magazines.

B: You met Bp Nichol sometime in high school?

D: Yes. I actually met Barrie in the late spring of 1961. He was my age but a year ahead of me in school; he was a friend of my brothers and I got to know him more a year or so later. I was writing poems but I didn't know he was writing poems, but in grade 12 I remember him coming into my basement study bedroom and reading poems that I had written, and I have a clear memory of him commenting on them, talking about symbolism and stuff. And I sent poems to the high school literary annual and got rejected

B: Too modern? (laugh)

D: I remember the poems too - little haikus - you know, ban the atomic bomb haikus. When I was writing in grade 12 I remember distinctly, perhaps it was in grade 11, writing poems in a kind of vacuum, not knowing anyone who wrote poems.

B: Right. Why do you think you started writing poems?

D: I don't know. It's a puzzle to me to this day. I don't know why I started writing poems because we weren't taught poems in any kind of particular way and no one was encouraging you to write poems. We had the literary annual.

B: Writing poetry is a kind of suspicious activity in high school.

D: It just wasn't a very common wide spread activity, very hermetic.

B: What were you reading in the high school literature texts?

D: I remember reading a poem in grade 3. We had to do a project, bring something to class or perform something. I clearly remember finding this poem in some kid's book "I shot an arrow into the air, it fell to earth I know not where". I memorized this poem and I remember getting up in front of this classroom and reciting it, and the teacher was blown away because some kid had actually memorized a poem.

B: So now at the age of 47 ...

D: Still waiting for the teacher to say, "Gee that's good Dave! (laughter) Now you've accomplished something!"

B: There's one more line to add to that: where's the cheque? Did you start off writing rhymed poetry?

D: That's the thing that was curious. I don't know where I could have seen the haiku form. I've forgotten. I saw it somewhere, maybe in some magazine. And the ban the bomb thing was big - demonstrations were going on and I was aware of the protests.

B: You were writing haiku protest poems?

D: Ya, they were haiku protest poems, you know, "bombs go off/flowers fade / people die". I don't know if I still have them somewhere, buried someplace.

B: Did Nichol provide you with a reading list, that kind of thing?

D: I don't remember him doing that. I remember him talking about - he and his friend Jim Alexander, who also wrote poetry - they talked about certain poets. They talked about Kerouac; they were reading *On the Road*. I remember Jim, Bp, and my brother taking the bus to Winnipeg, a big adventure fueled by Jack Kerouac. They were going to hit the road, 18 years old these guys.

B: Being from Vancouver you'd think they'd go to San Francisco?

D: They went to visit Barrie's relatives - it was Easter break.

B: I think the early influences, like Kerouac - the beat books, used to show up regularly.

D: Ya Kerouac, Ferlinghetti, Rexroth.

B: Modern poetry was part of the scene during the early 60's.

D: Yup, mostly American writers at that point. We just weren't aware of Canadian writing except for maybe Phyllis Webb and Gwendolyn McEwan. I remember driving down Cambly Street and Barrie talking about Phyllis Webb's literary reviews on the C.B.C. The English poets, the Irish and British poets, I don't remember reading them at that time. DH Lawrence, I remember reading him at about 18 - the love poems of DH Lawrence. *Look! We Have Come Through!* - I remember reading that one. I remember reading D.H. Lawrence in grade 12 and Huxley and Orwell, almost the underground books in the school system. Aldous Huxley was underground.

B: It sounds like you were becoming conscious at that time in your life - large social concerns ...

D: Well I felt all the daily concerns and anxieties of being a 17 year old high school student - and these guys were thoughtful guys - they were very different from the usual high school kind of guys. It was like having a small audience. We used to read poems. I used to read poems that Barrie would write - he'd bring them over and we'd read. I'd write some. I still have a copy of Barrie's first poems, almost his first poems. He made his own little books, producing books - the beginning of being published - this is still Barrie Nichol before the Bp showed up. He became Bp in Toronto - a kind of literary signature - the re-invention of himself in Toronto.

B: He did become very predominant - prevalent on the Canadian scene.

D: Ya, he left Vancouver in the spring of 65 or the spring of 64, came back and I think in the spring of 67 to give a reading as almost a mature poet. By then he had written *The Journeying and the Returns* - just an astounding quantum leap to go from writing that kind of high school rhyming doggerel stuff he wrote to writing that book.

B: He was still an important connection for you. Your poems must have been going back and forth across the country.

D Oh ya, I sent him everything I was writing then. We were writing back and forth all the time. He actually published my first poems. He actually placed those poems in *Quarry*, *Canadian Forum* - something like 5 magazines he knew in the Toronto area, or magazines he knew the editors. He was doing a magazine called *Ganglia*, a magazine before *Gronk*, earlier than *Gronk* that Captain Poetry thing and he published about 5 or 6 issues before he went into *Gronk* and what followed - a whole network of publishing bits and pieces

B: He must have been connected with Coach House Press at this time.

D When I went back there in late August of 66 with a manuscript I went to Coach House to help typeset it and that became my first book, *The Dream Outside*. I graduated from High School in 62 so between 62 and 66 I went from scribbling these things in the basement that would eventually become my first book. Barrie was really central for all that, and for turning me onto poems in magazines, and there weren't that many poems in magazines. There weren't that many magazines in Canada. I think there were only a half dozen titles of books of poems published in Canada in 66.

B. The other thing that influenced poets on the coast was the American connection, specifically the conference in 1963 at UBC.

D Ya - we were vaguely aware... we used to go out ... I distinctly remember going to readings at Brock Hall at UBC and the subterranean joints around Vancouver - coffee houses: the Cellar Jazz club. We were skulking around in the background of this very hip semi-underground movement..... but younger, so we kind of stayed back in the background and tried to dig the scene, which we did really. We were aware of the Tish thing going on without really being a part of it . We'd go to readings watch the poets perform but they seemed very much older- but they weren't that much older. They seemed very much older - an average of 10 years older than we were; they were mature guys who had come into their own as writers really.

B: You saw Lew Welch and Jack Spicer at this time?

D: When I went up to UBC I became aware of all the new the New American writers were coming up because Warren Tallman was bringing in all of the American writers, and writers from San Francisco: Robert Duncan, Robin Blaser, Jack Spicer, Lew Welch and also Robert Creeley. But Duthie's bookstore was important too, you know . We'd go down there - it was a place we'd meet people and we'd sort of hang out in the poetry section

B: They had a huge poetry section, and a section for all of the mimeo stuff.

D: All the oddball stuff was all there.

B: Binky really supported poetry publications, even tho they probably didn't sell very much.

D: Ya . I remember standing there when I first read William Carlos Williams - *The Desert Music*. I was about 18. . He died in 62 or 63, because I remember that English class I had - a first year English class, and I remember someone saying he'd died - and I was aware of him then. I remember standing in Duthie's and reading poetry books. Kurt Lang

- I remember his stuff, pages and pages of this guy's writing in mimeo format, maybe a *blewointment*. But I got involved in *Talon* magazine sometime in late 65. I met Jim Brown.

B: How did you meet Jim Brown?

D: I met Jim Brown in October of 65. He wasn't editor yet - David Robinson was. *Talon* had actually begun as a high school magazine. They'd gone to UBC. I think David Robinson was only in first year at the time. Jim Brown was writing poems. Jim got me over to David's house where the magazine was being assembled. We'd collate the magazine. I wasn't involved editorially then, I was involved with the production. We'd walk around a table and collate it. There was kind of a scene in and around the magazine, friendships being established, people making contacts, connections, - the first time I read your poetry. By 67 I was editing an anthology of west coast writing, *West Coast Seen*, with Jim Brown - which seems now astounding. I didn't know anything. That anthology came out in 68.

B You had one of the first books published by Talonbooks and one of the first by Coach House Press.

D: That's right and not that long after the Coach House book ...Talonbooks was established by 68 because *Wave* came out in early 69. I know it was finished by the spring of 68 because Barrie Nichol came out to do a reading and I remember him going over the manuscript with me. So things seemed to happen quite quickly. A lot of things going on simultaneously. I remember the first time I saw Ken Belford's poetry - a manuscript that Jim Brown had and I remember he and I going over it and being amazed at this guy's writing - just astounding stuff before it was put into the triplets- his first book *Fireweed*. He was influenced by J. Michael Yates at UBC. I was knocked out by Ken's writing, then I got to know him; he's an amazing poet. But there was a lot of writing activity in Vancouver, there were a lot of places to read a lot of coffee houses - coffee houses, a big factor. I saw so many people first read, first-time readings: Gerry Gilbert, Lionel Kearns, a street level kind of thing. Bill Bissett would read, Milton Acorn's haywire readings - and they were exciting. They were exciting events. You'd walk in off the street and there'd be all this stuff going on, different people reading. Maybe someone would get up and read and then someone else would read. A lot of spontaneity.

B: This activity was all before much Canada Council sponsorship.

D: Yes, no one was being payed or payed very little. It would be part of an evening, what you did in an evening. You'd go take in some of the readings, go to a party somewhere. We were all young. We were also writing and involved in book production. We were actually part of making the stuff available out in the world - really connected instantly with it as well as sending stuff out to magazines. We were also really involved in editing and the physical making of books, and the magazines.

B: And on a fairly sophisticated level too, from mimeo presses to ...

D: Yes, from mimeo presses to ..

B: Talon press bought an old Multilith offset press; one of them, Gordon Fiddler, learned how to run it.

D: We'd coallate the pages, staple them all. I remember being at bill bissett's coallating *blewointment* - no heat, the walls covered with drawings, a studio covered with drawings of flowers and trees and faces. Bill didn't have enough money for coal for the fireplace or the furnace. I first met Pat Lane at one of those coallating things. He was still working as a salesman out in Burnaby someplace. I actually first saw Pat Lane reading at an evening class of Dorothy Livesay - at her house. Pat Lane was invited. I was 21; it was around October of 65. Pat Lane read Red Lane's poems, his dead brother, a great poet, and Pat Lane couldn't have been more than 25 years old. He sat down and read the poems, fierce things about academic life; he hated universities.

B It was a really rebellious time.

D: It was. Definitely.

B: The academy hadn't quite attracted or consumed everybody.

D: No, that's right - and all those writers, those bright young guys had come out of interior B.C., interior towns, poured down into Vancouver where there was a scene happening and wrote all this sophisticated stuff. It was scary. I remember being at Jamie Reid's readings and thought this guy is scary. The stuff had real power. I mean we went back quaking in our boots. They were hip guys. It was the end of the beatnick era, jazz was in the background a lot of that time.

B: Through the publications I got to know who you were and all kinds of people. It was really interesting.

D: There was that whole *Tish* group: George Bowering, Lionel Kearns, Frank Davey, Jaimie Reid and Judy Copithorne ...

B: Well, I was amazed by your technique in one sense. I'd been reading Robert Creeley at this time. Growing up in Calgary Alberta there was a bit of a scene.

D: Did you read Creeley by 66?

B: I think so.

D I was aware of him all right around 65, and Olson too, I was aware of because I had a girlfriend who knew him, knew all those guys.

B But you were writing that incredible breath line before you even read Creeley. I couldn't figure out how somebody could do that. You picked up the technique from somewhere.

D. Reading WC Williams really influenced me. I'm trying to remember how much of an influence people like Earle Birney was. I knew of him, knew he was writing from a couple of courses at UBC - as particularly Canadian person. I didn't really pay much attention to it. I was really strange because we just got - we looked at the States, San Francisco, Ferlinghetti and all those books from that time - *Coney Island of the Mind*.

B: What about Layton and Cohen? They were quite visible in Canada at that time.

D: Ya, well Cohen was. We saw him one of the first times when he sang . He came out to Vancouver and performed as a singer, a poet singing his poems rather than reading them. There were boos from the audience. Really! The same time that Bob Dylan went

electric. It was exactly, almost the same week. Leonard Cohen got the guitar out and started singing, which was the best thing he ever did. He made a lot of poetry available in a different form, from the standard stand up reading number. And he got big audiences too.

B: You stayed in Vancouver pretty much through the 60's as a real Vancouver presence, going to the university and ...

D: I left in October of 68. When I came back from Montreal, I actually did work for Talonbooks briefly. I was supposed to edit new first books by previously unpublished writers. I edited three or four poetry manuscripts and after that I wasn't as involved in that kind of production and editing. But in those real critical years, that's what we did. We were going to school and had summer jobs and all that stuff but we were really intensely involved. By the time I was 23 I had 3 books out: *The Dream Outside*, *Wave*, and *The Coherence*.

B: I remember that *The Coherence* came out in 3 different versions.

D: That's right, the first one was terrible and they redid it. And then there was another gap of 7 years and then *The Kiss* came out from Coach House press in 77 or 78.

B: What happened during that gap? There was so much being done in that quick period of time and then something changed.

D: People changed. Talon became, in a sense, more institutionalized. We all kept our connection with Coach House although I didn't send any manuscripts to them for those years. Coach house in the east and Talon in the west were the two poles of publishing. Brown disappeared and David Robinson ran it for awhile longer. I don't remember when the transition was but I remember being somewhat involved with Talon, being over there anyway in the early 70's. It was still a place we could drop in - it was our press up on 4th and then in moved into a more permanent place and Karl Zeigler took it over and it became a kind of publishing house. I think it really did lose its touch with the city in a sense, the idea of local publishing. The group of writers changed. Some kind of core of writers stayed in the city itself and then the rest stayed in touch with each other.

B: During this 7 year period, Nichol was obviously still in touch with you and acting, I guess in a way, as an editor for your work.

D: I had manuscripts in the 70's that didn't get published. I didn't finish them. But he was, in a sense, always agitating. He actively promoted a few of us back here in the west and he would encourage us to send our manuscripts. He was attentive. If you sent him something he gave it his full attention.

B: He liked a particular style, that kind of lyric poem with a real emotional intensity. At that point he was branching out into the *Martyrology* sequence of books.

D: I think he had a certain interest writing he wanted to promote, that he saw us doing each in our own way. He was pretty critical actually. If he didn't like something, he just ignored it. He's say it, "I just can't read that stuff". He liked the public poem, the sound, the performed poem, the public voice. I guess it's lyric in a sense. He tried to make sure you were published. He really went out of his way. He was a very conscientious editor, which seems to me now, quite rare from my experience of what's going on in book editing. And the economics weren't really a factor - there was no money in publishing those books. They weren't commodities yet. They had an intrinsic value. Poetry was their

value. Coach House would publish a certain number of poetry books a year, 6 or 8 titles or something like that.

B: They were a literary press.

D: Ya. They had a certain agenda. They weren't actually a money making kind of press.

B: They didn't compromise themselves in an attempt to produce so-called best sellers.

D: In those years there wasn't really a separation between what you were doing as a writer and who you were and what you thought your status was in society. You just did it. The big factor was that we were so involved in book production ourselves, making our own magazines, books and all that - and the stuff was supposed to be active in some kind of immediate kind of community anyway - not something that was reviewed 3000 miles away. It was right out there in the world.

B: You never considered yourself, or became a career writer. The writers that I'm attracted to never got mixed with that kind of motivation.

D: There wasn't even a conscious possibility then. No one even thought of that. We went to the readings and stuff - it was something that was immediate and real and exciting and if you had to write something, you wrote it

B: I think that attitude has been messed up by grant systems.

D I personally do think so, yes. I think the granting thing is initially not a bad idea, but I think it's become a monster. I was talking to Gerry Gilbert and he said it's really a shame that at some critical point the writing community branched off - those who went into the universities and those who didn't. It sounds really simplistic but its a factor, I think. But you've got to make a living, you've got to have some money - one of the realities of contemporary North American life. It's difficult to live writing full time. You can't write full time as a poet, not if you expect some kind of half decent income

B: Some kinds of work can become a big interference.

D: That's right. I got into carpentry work, house construction. I figured if I could make enough money that I'd be able to have the time to write. Building a portable job in a sense. If you're self employed you can, if the work is plentiful at the time, you can almost choose to take time off or time away to write. It's a strategy of some sort. I can do this work and then I can take chunks of time off once I get a grubstake.

B: You've been doing that for years.

D: And it worked in a sense. I kept my needs to a minimum and somehow I'm doing that today, although now I don't have as much time to write. The immediate writing community has changed radically; it's just not the same

B: The Vancouver scene seems dispersed.

D: It's like the Beirut of the spirit. The so-called poetry wars used to be kind of funny and amusing, though not really. I think the poetry wars are over and what we've got is bombed out - in terms of the imagination of the place anyway. It's certainly, as far as I understand it still pretty polarized, broken up and scattered, little groupings of different kinds of writers, artists.

B: Who occasionally meet at a reading or bar, suspiciously.

D: Ya, but very few. There had been for years, the Cecil hotel bar which was like a place where any given Friday night you'd walk in there and there'd be tables of different artists and writers; it was always there as a particular kind of place to go and talk to other writers.

B: It was better than the university, in one sense. Part of the education.

D: Ya it was. And a lot of people who were at university, teaching and stuff would come down and be a part of that. That was the Vancouver community back then. The imagination of the city hung out there.

B: There was one subject: poetry with lots of laughter in between.

D: That's right, that's where the writing was focused into.

B: Beer was really cheap.

D: Ten cents a glass or something. I remember 5 beers for a dollar around 68 ish.

B: For 5 dollars it was an incredible evening - and you could get a Cubanette too!

D: It was dinner and drinks for 2 bucks! I remember that the bar before that was the Alcazar where the older poets - John Newlove and Peter Trower maybe, Kurt Lang or some of those older first Vancouver types - would hang out. And then the scene moved into the Cecil and eventually another version of it moved into the Waldorf on Hastings, but I haven't been to the Waldorf on Hastings for 3 or 4 years at least.

B: The world seemed to get more complex with feminist issues, political issues, ecological issues and sometimes writers branched off into a kind of writing that maybe promoted ...

D: some kind of polemic - another agenda that really had nothing to do with poetry. So in my way of seeing it, there is actually not much poetry around. I've looked for it.

B: You were saying you looked in the *Malahat Review* the other day.

D: The work seemed to be written by people in a creative writing program or else taught it. Personally I think they should just shut them all down. I don't think it's produced any good writing or any writing that really needs to exist. There's no urgency in it, no passion, no desire. I just don't think it needs to be here. I don't think it's being read. The magazines are being subsidized - sort of a waste of money really.

B: Poetry schools and writing programs have become a big industry in introspection and self analysis via ...

D: ... a group of self appointed experts.

B: Ya. Bly feels, if I'm quoting him correctly, these people are too young and produce too much. He seems to be saying, live first

D: You shouldn't publish until you're 35.

B: Or that too many publish too young and become teachers in the schools so the whole thing continues. As you say, not too much poetry comes out of this system or sometimes a kind of competent predictable poem.

D: That's right. It's almost standardized too. There are few surprises - polite Sunday tea cup poetry - everyone sitting around being very polite and nodding. But all the juice has gone out of it, all of the life. It's like it's been tamed.

B: Do you have any thoughts on the whole so-called post modernist trends? When you started off as a writer you knew about language and that language could emotionally connect with experience and real life. Much of the language writing seems garbled.

D: Ya, I think because it left its civic function. The civic function disappeared, because really the whole post modern movement began as an academic and intellectual exercise involving philosophical theories of language.

B: And in Canada there really hasn't been a debate or fight over this approach.

D: It was accepted so easily. It came into academic life - that's where it has its real life, that's where it exists in many ways. It came in so unquestioned in a sense. It was just embraced. It was like that what was we had to think. We had to change our thinking and retool our imaginations to accommodate these philosophical formats and ideas.

B: Maybe the best poems are, in one sense, post modernist anyway in that they break up our notions of narrative.

D: Ya, I think that the ordinary narrative was associated with oppressive states and the kind of dislocations of it occurred even way back with the surrealists making crazy leaps and dislocations as a way of trying to break up the rigid structures of thinking. I got it through reading American writing basically. I didn't get it from reading Yeats and Eliot and Robert Lowell in the states - who's writing I respect, and all of those writers I respect. I'd like to go back and re read them . I want to go back and read Robert Frost because the craft is amazing. But we wanted to break out and be new which is the prevalent, dominant idea in the 60's . Be wild and new. Take chances and risks and the whole idea of it being public speech was one of the dominant ideas. Even for Williams the poem was a public event; it wasn't to be tucked away and hidden in some university or something. It had to be actively part of the world. That's why I was reading in public places, the coffee houses - very important to have it read publicly, to hear the actual voice of the poet and the sounding of the words.

B: And always someone complaining about being bored...

D: Too bad. Go home, go somewhere else. Some poets would read and you couldn't even hear them. It's great to hear them read but with a lot of poems, you've got to live with them for awhile, the really good stuff, and some you won't be able to read or hear for years. I can read things now and really appreciate them now that I couldn't 10 or 15 or 20 years ago. The right poem shows up at the right time and it's yours, but the stuff has got to be thought of as really important. It's not just an entertainment. It's not like a television show.

B: I thought your essay connecting the poems during your reading here in Prince George was really important. It articulated the notions you probably began with as a poet: the nature of imagination, the nature of experience, the nature of emotion. In terms of the world of poetry these aspects and elements sometimes ...

D: aren't really talked about at all.

B: Do people really know what the imagination is?

D: No, and it's kind of an assumption now that everyone knows a whole bunch of terms. Poets come to read at colleges assuming the kids, the audience, is informed in a lot of ways about their work and their background. I'm actually thinking more and more of doing a whole manuscript around the essay, an essay on writing. Just simply: what the poet does, what the imagination is as it works in language. The imagination works in other forms as well, other areas in terms of disciplines and I'm thinking more and more that its appreciated when you provide some kind of little context in which some of these poems can be viewed or seen. It's really helpful, especially for people who don't know much about poetry, who think poetry is not for them, that it's not theirs. This is a critical thing when people say we don't read it, can't read it. They don't assume that it's theirs, their language. Jack Spicer maintained that no two people had the same language and that really complicated the matter. It's kind of a faith anyway, faith in the imagination, faith in the act of writing poetry - a weird active faith, to stay with it, persist in it, which I value. And the good ones that I go back and read, like Alden Nowlan for example - I mean just simple persistence and belief in poetry, the power of poetry and the importance of it in our lives.

B: Yes, persistence is a real measure - to keep at it even if you're stumbling. There are some poets who I believe never were "any good" but I still have a strange admiration for them. I'm not going to name them (laugh)

D: I'm not going to name them either, but it's true.

B: I'll pick up their books and say, ah, a little bit better.

D: You just gotta take your cap off to them and give them a kind of weird respect. Years ago we used to chuckle about Irving Layton when we were younger. He was one of the older guys we made fun of - I don't think you really thought that because you were closer to him, you took courses from him.

B: He was easy to parody.

D: Do you remember George Bowering's satire of Layton - people out here in the west used to make fun of him. He was like maybe the father figure you had to knock down . But we used to make fun of Layton and now I have a great respect for him.

B: He's one of the great poets. Remember the Bull Calf poem. "I turned my head and wept" - you cant get any better than he does in that poem, although we used to use that line as part of the satire. I remember we used to attach that line to just about everything: "I turned my head and wept."

D: As a joke. Anything is possible for satire, available for satire. But he does have some terrific poems that I can go back to and read - he's a distant companion.

B: He was tough. He took on everybody and everything.

D: He used to go into colleges and universities to an audience of 300 people, students, and he taught them about what's important to your life and he'd read his naughty poems, poems mentioning sex, and making love.

B: To use the word fuck in a poem in 1955 was pretty heavy.

D: Absolutely, even saying the word breast in a poem. Ya, Layton is a real poet.

B: For Canadians Layton, and Purdy need more, from my point of view, an acknowledgment of the help they both gave to the younger writers that they really admired.

D: Purdy was good that way. Layton was too.

B: Birney tirelessly worked for young writers, promoted them and helped them when he could.

D: Earle Birney was the champion of Canadian literature, one of the first who lobbied for a long time to get Canadian poetry acknowledged, recognized and taught in the universities.

B: But presently there is a terrible irony in all of this. The students I have now cannot name one Canadian writer.

D: It's not part of the canon, as they say?

B: No.

D: In first year English classes?

B: They might get Margaret Atwood's name and they might get Pierre Berton, and maybe Mordecai Richler. And most of them can't work computers, so there's two things about the school system that bother me. People like Earle Birney really fought for Canadian content in the system.

D: Gwendolyn McEwan recently died. I remember seeing her read probably in the mid-60's. She's another one I was conscious of. I don't know what it was about her writing - something exotic and extremely genuine. Her readings were pretty extravagant and she read beautifully. I remember with affection, that writing. I remember I saw her read in Montreal once too. She was only 50 or 55 when she died.

B: Then there is John Newlove - a completely gifted maverick. I really admire his work.

D: Tremendous poetry - really tough, tough-minded stuff. I remember going to his place with Jim Brown - it must have been 65 or 66 and I think he was only 28 or something on his first Canada Council grant and he told us he was just going to drink the whole thing up. It was just before his book came out, *Moving in Alone* that had the poems about the Doukabours. He was scary too, you know, - he had a fierceness about him.

B: He had another great title for, I think, his first book: *Elephants Mothers and Others*. You know just from that title that the guys got it.

D: I don't think we need a great number of poets and you really have to be compelled to write it, to persist and write it, remaining kind of humble in its presence. That's all there is to it. You're not going to get rich doing it or get famous doing it. The reward is doing it and the odd time you might read it publicly and know it's there - and then get some response to it.

B: You only do it for the activity itself. You can't get it mixed up with anything else.

D: You can't confuse it with other things. But there is that almost weird thing you say to yourself, ah I'm just going to quit.

B: Remember that Pound line in his poem "Mr. Nixon": "give it up my boy, there's nothing in it."

D: Ya, forget about it, why bother? And then you find yourself writing one day. I was constantly on the look-out for certain poetry with some order of intelligence working with the imagination that you could find nowhere else - very dense, complex - and all the different attempts, intermedia, multi media and all that, weren't really successful finally. Lots of experimentation - the concrete sound poetry stuff that nichol and those guys did. Nothing has really come of it and there is not another generation coming forward and pursuing these things, that I know of anyway. There was an attempt to bring poetry out into a larger audience and they thought they had to bring in instruments and

B: If you watch the film *Poetry in Motion* you can see those attempts to make poetry more entertaining - a performance ...

D: But the poetry was bled out of the whole performance, I think; it wasn't poetry - it was some other form that you really can't call poetry; it has merits on its own terms but but not what I would call poetry. I try to make that distinction that language writing, the so-called post modernist stuff - - it's writing, it's words on a page but it's not poetry. It shouldn't really be called poetry; it's confusing the issue; it's another kind of form; it's not poetry as I know it.

B: I guess these arguments about what constitutes the poem have always been part of the writing process. Each person writes a certain kind of poem that he must perfect.

D: You have to go with what you're given. No amount of research or scholarship is going to fill in the gap, or fill in the blanks for you. Really, the measure is how much world you can get into the writing.

B: Accurately.

D: Ya, really accurately and precisely and the language writing poetry - there's not very much room in it for me. I have to wade through it and it's pretty thin gruel as far as I can see. Certainly some of it read out loud is more effective, and if you go back and look at what Pound's precepts about what a poem is - the music, the intelligence (logopea, melopea etc) and apply those principles to language writing it doesn't measure up. There is no reason why it has to even look like poetry on the page, absolutely no reason at all, the way it's structured.

B: The thing that bothers me is that your work isn't being published.

D: Ya, being published.

B: Publishing is important. It's part of the process. You get tired of self-publishing.

D: Well the presses that I consider to be mine are Talon and Coach House. Coach House has changed so dramatically from when I knew it - it's not there for me anymore. I don't think of Coach House as my press. Talon - I haven't thought of as being my press since *The Coherence* came out.

B: Now it seems you have to be recommended by somebody who has some power. I think a lot of publishing happens because of that kind of influence. These politics are irritating. You've been writing long poems and yet aren't invited to the conferences that deal with these forms. That angers me. You know a lot about the form.

D: Yes, I feel I'm off on some margin and I don't know quite how I got there. Gary Geddes did the *Soul of the City of Vancouver Anthology* for or during the expo year, and he put me in there. He was still conscious enough of writing that was around that he looked and found one of my books in the library or someplace.

B He knew that Vancouver, as a place was a large part of your subject matter.

D Ya, that's right . He was looking for poems written out of Vancouver, particularly out of Vancouver. He was aware enough of my writing to find a poem and put it in that anthology. But I don't think that a lot of the people who set out to do anthologies do enough of their homework, really looking around to find what could be possibly included - and they have a kind of a prejudice, or preconceived notion of what and who will be in an anthology, and they just look for their work and it goes in and that's it! Sometimes I feel that a certain era is all over which I don't regret in a sense, but the one that's emerging is really hard to define. There's hardly any place in Vancouver that holds readings anymore. One bookstore, R2B2. Rarely now does the Western Front ever have a reading and the Kootenay School of Writing - well it's a school that is particularly focused.

B: Is Oolichan Press going to bring your book out?

D: Well, I don't know. I can't really say too much about that. I'm definitely going to call Ron Smith when I get back. I've got to give the ultimatum. You've got the raw material. You either can't do it, can't get to it, haven't got time or are uninterested - for whatever reason you don't want to do it.

B: It's frustrating to have work that you've finished caught up in a machine you have no control over.

D: That's' right.

B: We used to pump books out on mimeograph, xerox, and that active production made us feel good.

D: A certain group of readers you knew had that stuff and read it which I always thought was a good valid way of getting your work out in the world because even in 100 copies wound up being read by another 100 people - there's a spin-off.

B: Maybe we have to get back to that kind of publishing, but it's tiring, in one sense.

D: Ya, it takes a lot of energy and time, a lot of years. You know, I wonder, thinking back to Pulp and Don Fraser - almost the writer-in-residence there. I'm not sure how Pulp finances itself, but Don told me he would work on the galleys - the blue line, or whatever, and he'd go through 2 or 3 different versions changing the text. He was there right as the stuff was going into the press, making changes, and they would accommodate that. They took him on and payed him a salary to be a free lance occasional editor and it was a rare example of a press that was devoted to certain writer's work, because they really had great respect for it . It's a rare instance of that. I mean now the process has been depersonalized - the connection between the editor and the publisher and the writer. At least in my experience now that's non existent. Don't they care? A manuscript could actually change a

fair amount from its initial form to the final printed published form especially with an editor who was aware of what you were up to, an editor who is astute and alert and could really read. Bp was really an exceptional, an extraordinary reader - very attentive, a very alert reader.

B: Right. He edited *The the*. I got a blue line from him and argued that I had a line drop one more space at the end of a poem, and he said, no you don't. He was referring to the original version I sent - and he was right. I thought the line should have dropped down one more space, and Nichol said no. And he was right.

D: He was a great editor. He was very subtle about it when he would suggest something that you might think about changing in a poem. But you knew that he really wanted your work in the world - that was something that was like a given - that sense that you knew he was going to work to get this stuff out there - he knew it had to be out there - he wanted it to be read by other people - very generous in that sense. Ken Belford, there's another... this guy, when he gets up to read, the rare time I've ever seen him, has a tremendous effect on an audience.

B: Magical.

D: I remember his reading in Vancouver a few years ago. Scott Watson said, "you just never get this anymore." Ken read for 15 or 20 minutes, talked between the poems. No performance, no extraneous stuff. He just stood there and read, the naked man, the naked poem - the real goods. So few people are ever going to see that or know that thing.

B: A Canadian educational agency has put out a series of 15 minute videos of various poets reading.

D: The visual thing is distracting, in a sense too - the visual aspect of the video. One way I think is really a marvellous way to hear poetry is on record or tape or disc. I was listening to Pound on a film, reading the Provencal stuff with visuals of Italy, and they showed the lines of the poem on the screen, and I thought, if you were ever going to teach poetry, here is a way to do it - hear the voice of the poet, and show the lines as they're read. It was remarkable - a real clarity. God it was great.

B: How do you feel about the Kootenay School of Writing?

D: The Kootenay guys. I'm glad they're there.

B: Nice people. Respectful, interesting. They remind me of the whole scene we grew up in. It's hard to think of us being so much older.

D: That's the thing. The thing about these scenes is that they have a certain life span, then writers go on to the true work and solitude or something. We were very fortunate, or blessed to have made fantastic connections - friendships that evolved and that last till this day. Basically the group of writers that I was really focused in all wanted each other to do well. It's a critical thing to think of: we all wanted, expected the goods from each other - the old, "hand over the goods man!" -that idea that we were pretty supportive - really not in a non-critical way - writing reviews, critical reviews. The true idea of criticism means to be engaged with the work.

B: For us, we know a group of people who follow and support the work. It's simple: you ask yourself, would I send this poem or manuscript to them. Some little voice might

say, "no, this poem isn't ready yet." Eventually you might get the poem written so you know it's there. But there's a moment of risk when you think, well, maybe it's not here, but then that person says ...

D: It's here! it is here after all!

B: Maybe followed by a brief comment, "oh tinker with this or that, check this grammar error etc. or, there *aren't* enough grammar errors." So that kind of connection and criticism has been really valuable to keep the writing straight.

D: That's right. You know that particular person is going to read it. They're not going to leave it lying around and maybe get around to reading it one day. They're going to read it and they're going to read it because they really want to read it, and then they're going to think about it and then they're going to go back and read it again. That's the way I look at writing, part of my experience in life. It's not some exercise that I do in some room somewhere for an hour or two in a week. I assume it could happen at anytime.

B: It's such a complicated art, but I think I've learned how to read.

D: When it comes to an audience, I think in 5 minutes I've got to give them almost an instant education in how to read the poem, how to read this kind of writing. Like I say earlier, you've got to give some kind of thing to hold onto. That's why I try to read, in a sense, in a fairly uncomplicated way. I don't know if that's the right word - make the work easily accessible, something almost familiar so it sounds like almost ordinary narrative writing - there is a story line that is understandable and almost linear.

B: That's what my colleague Stan Chung said about your reading: "he's a great narrative poet." I read your poems as narratives, but I'm looking at other things too. Stan is hearing primarily, maybe, the story line - not exactly a story line. It's as if you're moving along a path giving us what's happening along that path.

D: exactly, it's happening along the path - it's what the poem is. The path is the imagination.

B: And that's a story.

D: So they (the reader) can feed things in - weave things into the writing - they can take big leaps. But you're always on the path, so you give the audience a sense they can trust the path, something they are sure of, some ground to stand on, so they're not just off and lost and feeling abandoned by some kind of elitist jerk up there showing off.

B: Poetry teaches you to literally see things and not only that, to *know* the thing, not just to see it.

D That's right. I think a lot about this stuff but there are not many people in my life who I can have a conversation with. There probably aren't that many people in anyone's life with whom they can have a conversation, but it's absolutely crucial and real to experience, but we're not in the business of inventing mythologies around our experience. Some writers consciously do that and I'm sure they're actually aware of it - like applying a weird icing on the cake. It's not important - a kind of vanity or something but the reading like I just gave, in a sense, I got part of what I wanted to accomplish.

B: It's hard to time a reading. Can I say and do this in 50 minutes? You've hardly started and ...

D: Just scratched the surface.

B: And then, it seems, the human attention span is basically geared to 45 minutes, the standard classroom hour.

D: Right. When I read, I do make up readings - even that one I did for bp's memorial, I did make up a 15 minute reading - that's the limit they set - so I did actually sit down and prepare it, a bit like the Robert Creeley appreciation night at the Western Front. I did put together this little whirlwind reading, compact enough and brief enough. This reading I did just now, I could spend 2 weeks: read it, tape it, listen to it, read it and format 45 minutes, or something under an hour anyway - which is what I set out to do but I just didn't have time. You don't want to sell the audience short, you don't want to just get up and stumble through a bunch of dislocated bits and pieces of writing. You don't want to read from 4 or 5 books you published 15 years ago. You want something that's structured and bright with thought behind it. That's really what I think of more and more as I give readings. What I want to make known is that words make the poem visible.

the kiss

the kiss stills the broken heart,
stills & closes the wound, the kiss
heals the wounds of desire &
the unfulfilled vision each carries
& collectively fails
does not end it, the kiss
does not celebrate pain as
the only true evidence of devotion, the kiss is
devotion

& the danger of the kiss is known
in the measure of the world's
legislation against it, we vanish into it

& reappear transformed & the same,
the kiss is not given or received
is no message, it is entered,
unknowingly, the realms of love
bear its weight, weightless in the mind
the kiss is the substance of the world, the body
is luscious with it

the kiss finds us in our hiding place
in our pursuit of it
our passion is revealed & we are
helpless with terror & pleasure

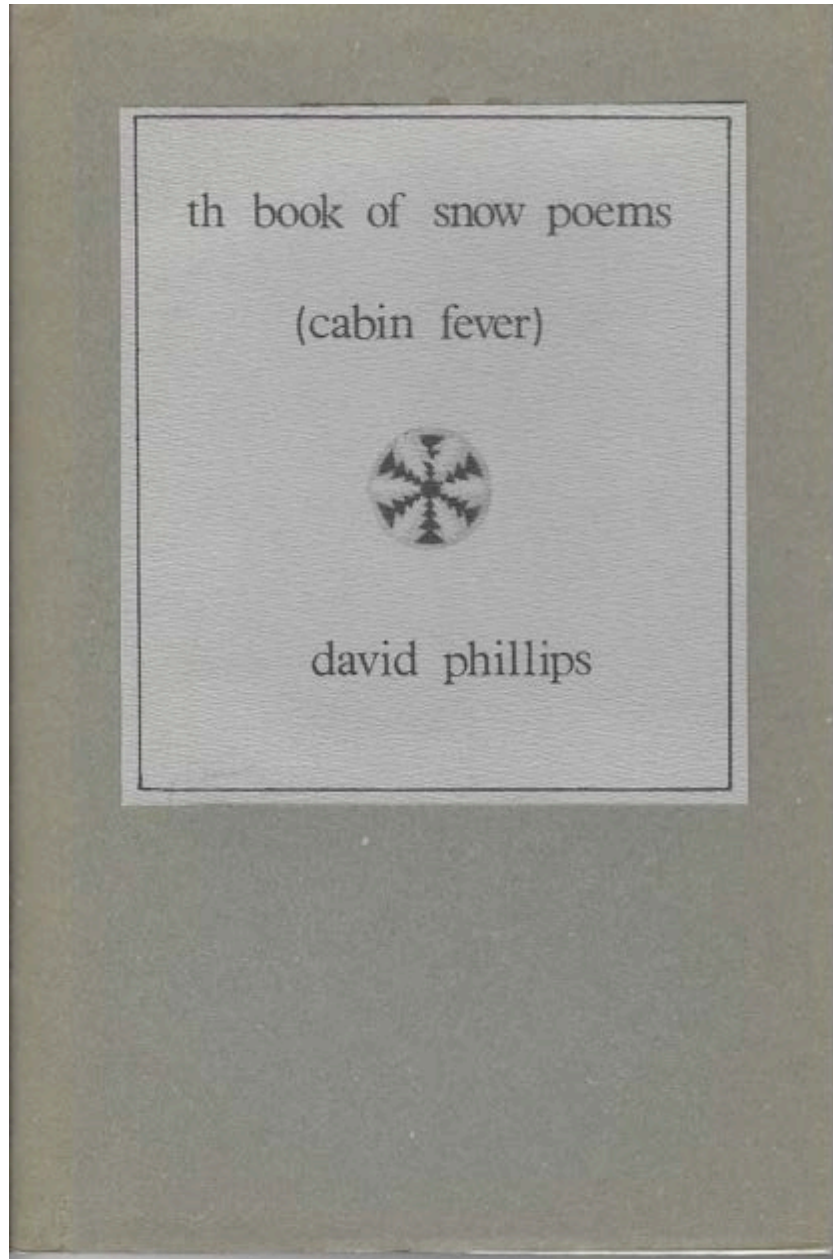
it says to each: you
are the main work of my life, you are my life,
you are my heart, my sentience, my angel
my music, my first word

the embodiment of knowledge

david phillips



The first chapbook I printed was *The Book of Snow Poems (Cabin Fever)* by David Phillips in 1972 under the press name 54°40'. The chapbooks in this series were all printed on a Gestetner in editions of approximately 100 copies. The format was fairly standard: 8 1/2" x 11" Gestetner cover stock, and the 11" cover and text usually folded in half, a hand sewn or stapled spine, and construction paper cover-wraps with offset label stickers for the cover and title pages. With the exception of a few label designs printed by commercial printers, all of the work (typing, printing, collating, folding, sewing, stapling, gluing, etc.) was done by hand.



ZEN SNOW

i have seen
an instant

tried to say
it

was a field of snow
no

one flake
on th end of my nose



Printed by Barry McKinnon
in a limited edition of 100
copies.

This is number 9 of 12 **HARD BOUND**

54 40 Press
1902 Queensway Street
Prince George, B.C.
Canada

To Barry, all the best
for the rest of it.
David Phillips

A Letter from David Phillips

Aug 22/72

barry,

fantastic! got th books yesterday as special delivery came
& no one home on friday. am really proud of th book. i mean it,
i haven't felt so good abt a book of mine ever.
everyone'd knocked out!

(i am a poet, i am a poet)

i love th print, even tho a little rough sort of.
dwight loves it. janie love's it. Pat was nice to me.

i think yu could keep producing books like this at yr own pace
& publish people in a unique kind of way. ie, unpretentious
inexpensive & high quality.

why spend a thousand plus bucks to produce
a piece of shit, when yu can get Cabin Fever so delightfully.
i like it so so much!

well, a good way to begin a week.

dug yr letter.

& th memory maching pic of yr truly
lookin tough in th summer of '68 (in everyone's life there is
a summer of '68)

though if yu can survive such summers yu might get another chance.
i'll be 28 in 8 days.
this summer had its moments too.

& its still summer, but th fall

creeps in.

what's going to happen this winter?

i think i'll keep working while yet. like th squirrel, get th nuts
stored up.

(on a personal note, some troubles w.th Pat these days)

but i feel pretty good all in all.

i want to send up a large book (for yr reading pleasure)
which sort of parallels your Moving Photo Graphic & bp's thing.
tho isn't so concerned with history. but its in long sections
& maybe is more like bp's in a sense. i like writing th
lighter things like Snow Poems, but give into th need for
more heavier stuff, tho more reluctant to make it public.
anyway stay tuned for that one.

barry, its good to get th letters & start writing again.
feel really good abt it. makes things more clear. th
importance of what we're doing & can share.

when can yu send some more copies?
want to send a couple out & sell a couple.

write soon.

David

... i haven't felt so good abt a book of mine, ever ...

Meeting Robert Creeley with David Phillips

It wasn't until 1979 that I met Robert Creeley. I drove from Prince George 500 miles south to Vancouver to attend several of the poets reading in Warren Tallman's series, *Writing in Our Time*, but particularly to hear Creeley read again. I first heard him read at Sir George Williams University in 1966 when I was a student in Irving Layton's class. As much as I wanted to meet Creeley at the time, I had to catch a late bus to Toronto – and, as it was, might not have had the courage to approach him.

But this time I got up my nerve to speak to Robert Creeley. David Phillips and I tracked Creeley down in the after-reading throng (usually 500 people attended these readings) to wait our turn in the line-up. It was a brief discussion but even in my awkwardness and feeling of - "I'm very moved at meeting you" - asked if he'd like to read in Prince George at some point. He was very polite, and to my surprise, gave me his New Mexico address and said, *yes, a reading might be possible*. In 1981 we invited Robert Creeley to Prince George as the featured poet for the Words/Loves Conference. David was a featured reader.

A visit to W.C. Williams's house in New Jersey with David Phillips, Jerry Pethick and Arthur Spiegelman

My wish then to meet Creeley was perhaps no different than Creeley's desire to meet one of *his* idols, William Carlos Williams - which he did in the spring of 1954 and recounted in the interview, "A Visit to an Idol"

We (Cynthia Holman, Creeley's friend at the time) went out by bus armed with directions as to how to find the house. We were walking through a small place, with a sort of '30s old-fashioned small-town feeling: a block with a drug store and what not - sort of wandering much as Williams describes his seeing Cummings, *you know*, looking in the windows, etc. In any case, we found the house with no remarkable difficulty and rang the doorbell. Moments later the door opens and *there* is Doctor Williams! It was like some incredible moment of epiphany for me. You know, this man that I literally revered was suddenly, physically, right *there*. He was also a doctor so he must have, yes he *must have* seen the effect he was having on this younger man. I think I must have gone white or something. He said, "Are you all right?" I said, "Yes", I'm fine. I'm just extremely, you know." I was sort of mumbling, saying, "I'm very moved by meeting you." And, he said, "well, come in."¹

In 1986 David Phillips, artist Jerry Pethick, and I during a visit to our friends Charlotte and Arthur Spiegelman who lived in Montclair, New Jersey, asked Arthur about Rutherford and the distance to Dr. Williams's residence. He said, *hop in the car, I'll drive you over to the house!* And in 15 minutes on a NJ freeway we were at 9 Ridge Road. We didn't exactly expect Creeley's moment of awe and epiphany (Williams died in 1963) - but we did walk around the periphery of the house thinking about "the good doctor" - the great American poet who inspired generations of poets to follow - a gentle, tough, complex character who as a doctor, "did his bit for society". He had practiced medicine for 40 years in that house and delivered three thousand babies, and in a busy doctor's life, wrote much on the fly on his prescription pads, *and* happened to influence and change the course of the American poem. I have been reading Williams all of my life, as I know Creeley did. I admire Williams and despite the perplexities of his "anti poetry" and the

difficulty of his epic *Paterson*, learned from his work to set myself right when in certain doubts about the shapes and intents of my own poems. Further to his large lessons, any poet's envy *must* be to match the beauty of "Asphodel that Greeny Flower" in a writing lifetime.

It was a great afternoon in Rutherford, wandering the periphery of the big yard imagining Dr. Williams up in his writing room, or eating Floss' plums or celebrating his nakedness as the happy genius of his household. Years later, my friend Pierre Coupey made the same visit with Arthur and was spotted by W.C.W's son who had long-since taken over his father's practice. He invited Pierre inside the house and showed Pierre the doc's writing room and the adjoining office – and was generous with his reminiscences about his famous father.

That day at the Williams' house I picked a lilac sprig from a tree in the side yard near the "Doctor's Entrance" and Arthur took our picture before we walked down Ridge Road to a small neighborhood bar for a beer. I asked the bar girl if she knew of the famous poet who had lived just down the block. I can't blame her answer of "I dunno?" There are no stone markers or plaques in the neighborhood to recognize him, and I doubt that he was studied much in the Rutherford schools as the town's famous local poet. Apropos, I remember a story George Stanley told me about a walk through Brooklyn with Brooklyn poet Louis Zukovsky. They stopped to read a very small commemorative brass plaque on the side of a building where Walt Whitman set type for his first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Zukovsky remarked to George. "If they did this to recognize Walt Whitman, think of what they'll do for us!" Such it was that two great poets could share a sardonic smile and pass by Walt Whitman's ghost on the corner of Cranberry and Fulton Street in Brooklyn.

The rose is obsolete
but each petal ends in
an edge The edge
cuts without cutting
meets - nothing...

Crisp, worked to defeat
laboredness - fragile
plucked, moist, half-raised
cold, precise, touching

What

The place between the petal's
edge and the

(William Carlos Williams)



David Phillips, Barry McKinnon, Gerry Pethick at WCW's house in Rutherford, New Jersey, May 1986. Lilac from the bush behind.

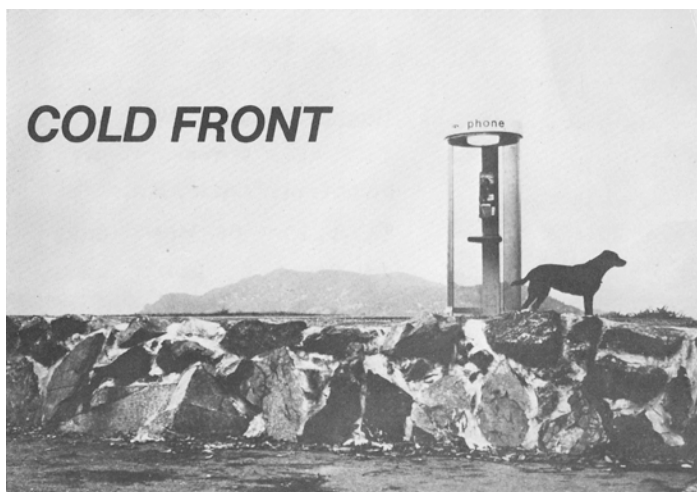


What are you doing in Manhattan... ?

Later that night after the W.C.W. Rutherford visit, David and I wandered the streets of Midtown Manhattan hitting various bars until dawn. In one of them on the Upper East Side, an elegant older professional couple sipping Martinis asked us who we were, and what were we doing in Manhattan? Unlike the young bar girl, when we mentioned we'd visited W.C.W.'s home in Rutherford earlier in the day, the man – a lawyer, stock broker, doctor? - said with certainty: "Oh! Doc Williams! He was a bastard to his family!" We didn't query his sources, but felt a bit astonished that the name W.C. Williams prompted such a quick, harsh and laconic reply. A hip New Yorker to know the biographies, and that most poets' lives do sometimes yield such evidence? Was it the poet as womanizer made him inattentive to family – and the demands of his work and the poem? Or what knowledge did this man in the bar have? The sophisticated martini never did reveal the source or evidence of his biographical detail.

What *were* we doing in Manhattan? It's a long story of tricky organizing that got David and me to New York. My friend Robert Walker from the SGWU Montreal days was living in Manhattan and in the years of walking the streets had become a famous NY street photographer. A few drinks along the way, I got Bob to host a reading for us – a task he told us was difficult: NY people, he said, usually have a stack of competing invitations and who the hell would know these Canadians? – and any mention of Canada usually means a cold front coming in!

Bob designed the postcard using one of his photos and added a few exotic food items and free booze as a draw. (What money I had as a reading fee, paid for most of the food and drink). The other draw that saved the day – about 30 in attendance as I recall - was the terrific NYC jazz guitarist Peter Letch – a mutual friend from the Montreal days.



MOVING IN
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Barry McKinnon
Paul Heyer

Reading from their works.

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Gourmet foods and vintage wines
will thereafter be made available to those
who demonstrate sufficient appreciation
of these northern visitors.

*Seating limited

DEAR BARRY,

HOPE YOU LIKE THE
PICTURE. I TOOK IT AT
HARRISON LAKE, B.C.
SEND OUT AS MANY CARD
AS POSSIBLE. DON'T WORRY
ABOUT DUPLICATING BILL'S
LIST. WE HAVE 250
CARDS.

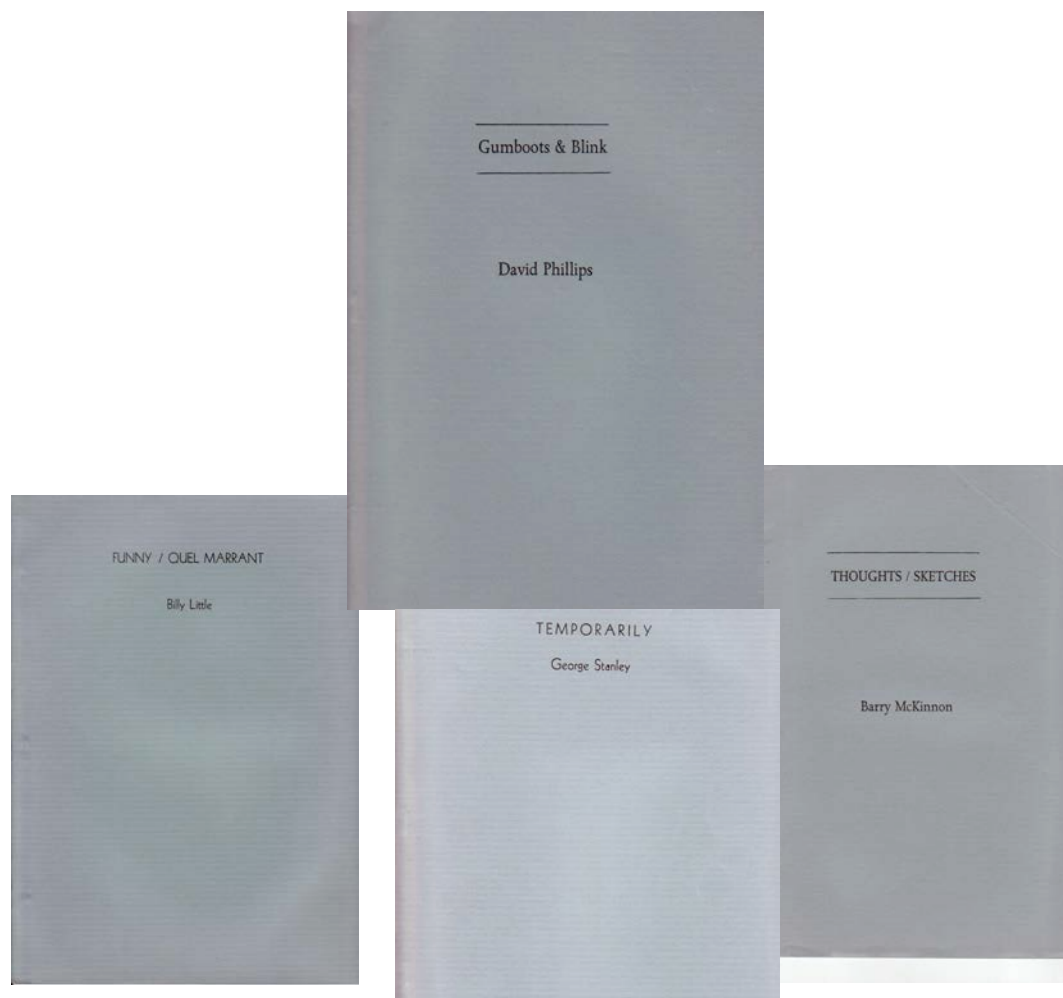
SEE YOU SOON!

Bob.

The Gorse/Tatlow Series with David Phillips

In 1985 I had an educational leave and moved to Vancouver for a year. While my wife Joy attended Simon Fraser University, I worked on several projects: *Poets and Print: talks with 10 British Columbia poet/publishers* published as an issue of *Open Letter*. (Seventh Series, Nos. 2-3: Summer Fall 1988), *The Pulp Mill, an Anthology of Prince George Writing* for Repository Press, and an ongoing sequence of poems. My friend, the poet David Phillips, lived on Tatlow St. in North Vancouver. Over beers at the Railway Club – we'd meet there for "office hours" almost every Saturday afternoon for 8 months - decided to combine Gorse Press with his Tatlow House imprint (with its one notable and important BC poetry anthology: *The Body*, 1979). We decided to print a series of cheaply produced chapbooks. We each had manuscripts of our own, but also wanted to print small books by a few writers we knew, respected, and who were proximate. Over the winter and spring we managed to print 4 titles in the series: a manuscript by David, Billy Little (Zonko), myself, and George Stanley. We discussed an overall design format for the Gorse/Tatlow series and settled for what was simple and manageable: a standard 8 1/2" x 11" text page, typed on my daisy wheel electric typewriter, and then Xeroxed and stapled into editions of 100 copies or so. We always claimed a neat run of 126 copies on the credits page for precious, if not slightly pretentious/satirical reasons, so that 26 copies could be *signed, lettered or numbered by the authors*. Very few ever were. I letterpressed the covers on 11" x 17" cover stock (folded in the centre) using an 18 or 24 point Kabel or Garamond for the chapbook title and writer's name.

Gorse/Tatlow House Press: Series One, 1985



David Phillips. *Gumboots and Blink*. Vancouver, Prince George. Tatlow/ Gorse, 1985.

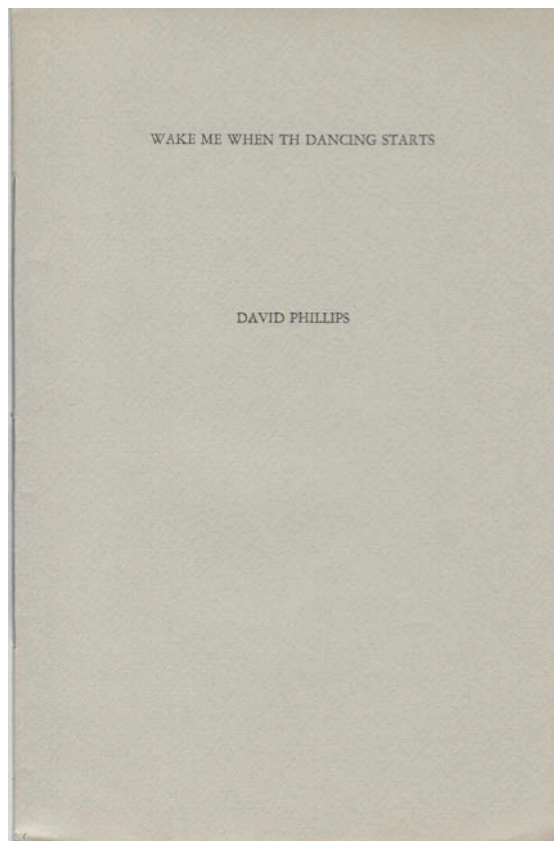
Little, Billy (Zonko). *Funny / Quel Marrant*. Prince George/Vancouver: Tatlow/Gorse Press, 1985.

McKinnon, Barry. *Thoughts/Sketches*. Vancouver, Prince George. Tatlow/Gorse, 1985.

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As is the case with much of my printing, it was cheaper to buy cover stock in larger quantities, and have the ream frugally cut in a standard size to maximize the "out" stock. For series one, the cover stock most likely came from Coast Paper, a Vancouver company with a huge range of paper colours & weights. Occasionally I'd get a deal on a discontinued or diminished paper stock that I would then use until it ran out. I looked for bargains that in some cases determined much of the overall look/design. For the first four titles, David and I used the same stock 11 x 17" - a gray/blue that tended to fade over the years. Series Two: a pink/to purple, was also prone to fading.



CWS June 1978

David Phillips

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