

Jerome Rothenberg: On Paul Blackburn

I have drunk my white wine and worked I have lasted it out into silence (Paul Blackburn)

Like other important American poets of his time, his work reflected an identification with the initial experiments of Pound & Williams, buttressed in his case by resources of language that opened to a still larger range of European and Latin American predecessors. A Vermonter by birth, he lived most of his life in New York City, but traveled from there early & late, to chart the world through a succession of poems that were his ongoing journal (= day book), culminating in a final diaristic work appropriately called *The Journals* (posthumously published: 1975), of which *The Net of Place* [included in *Poems for the Millennium*] is a part.

While he was a chronicler thereby of the desiring, often thwarted mind - his own & others' - the central focus of his art was, as he saw it, a devotion to the quirky music language made: what the ear heard joined to what the eye saw. In this he early followed Pound into a search for means & sources in the troubador poetry of medieval Provence (the gathered work is called *Proensa*), surpassing the older poet in the voice he gave to his translations. (Or, translation aside, in the modern send-ups / variations of that voice in his own poems.)

Skeptical by nature, he clung still to a belief in poetry as both a private & communal act, a sense of which pervades his nearly final poem - "evening fantasy" - in its imagining of poets dead before him, gathered in a kind of paradise-of-poets. (His "Phone Call to Rutherford" is addressed to William Carlos Williams, following the older poet's second stroke & subsequent aphasia.)

For all his reticence in framing a poetics, Blackburn's recognition, circa 1960, of a new "American duende" was a summons - a rallying cry - for many with whom his work was intersecting.

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