

**JAMPA DORJE (RICHARD DENNER)
HIGH MOUNTAIN VALLEY LOCAL AUTHORS COLLECTION**

Through the generosity of Jampa Dorje who collected and donated these volumes of regional authors, this collection will enable researchers and historians to learn of the authors of the Central Washington region and their works.

The High Mountain Valley Local Authors Collection contains a selection of Central Washington's unique and noteworthy literary efforts. The arc of the collection is broad and includes examples of various literary forms and genres, novels, poetry, history, philosophy, children's books, romance, fantasy, new age, memoir, and essay. Academic publishing, mainstream publishing, small-edition-self-published works, mass published works, print-on-demand books, underground literary magazines, and art zines are also in the collection.

THE ARCHIVAL ARC OF D PRESS

Richard Denner

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THE ARCHIVAL ARC OF D PRESS

“Archive” is only a notion, an impression associated
with a word and for which...we do not have a concept.
—Jacques Derrida, *Archival Fever*

My daughter, Lucienne, told me I should write about the intricacies of my oeuvre before I die, since my mode of writing is counterintuitive. Rather than beginning with the manuscript, I begin with the book. I initiate the writing process by visualizing the completed form the manuscript of my telling will take and fill in the empty pages. Over the years, the books have piled up.

From early on, I collected my poetry and published chapbooks under the D Press logo. The “D” comes from the first letter of my last name, but there are other associations—feeling depressed and it being “the” press. Since the poems revealed my interests, I considered this an inner autobiography. Later in life, I began creating a prose narrative of my adventures, and I chose to have these stories told in the third person by a fictional biographer, Bouvard Pécuchet, whose name is derived from a combination of the last names of the protagonists of Gustave Flaubert’s novel, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, a pair of court clerks with intellectual curiosity, who delve into all branches of human knowledge with disastrous results. Combine two idiots and get one author.

I am fortunate to have twelve volumes of *The Collected Books of Richard Denner* archived in the Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley. I couldn’t be deader—and yet dead in quite illustrious company. I rub shoulders with Shakespeare folios and Aztec codices. The Mark Twain Collection—rumors of Twain’s demise still circulate—resides in opulent splendor. Here, one might expect to get some well-deserved rest, but after a brief suspension of time, one hears complaints about wormholes and arguments over shelf space...there is table tipping during seances convened by Madame Sosostriis...and there is the sound of tears and laughter beyond the garden wall...but that is there, and this is here and now.

Beginnings and ends. Knowing where your work fits in, in the larger scheme—60s Berkeley street poet and Pacific Northwest spiritual poet—living within the scale of these worlds, as well as knowing how to navigate is the trick. The secret entry to *The Collected Books of Richard Denner* is to open Volume Six, which has my first chapbook, *Breastbeaters*, published by Berkeley Pamphlets, in 1963, during the Little Magazine Wars. This is a secret entry because it’s where the self-publishing of my poetry begins. Volume One is the formal entryway for *The Collected Books*. This volume begins my canon with the first books I self-printed after I owned a personal computer.

Volume One begins with an epigram from Jack Spicer’s *A Fake Novel About the Life of Arthur Rimbaud*:

“You can’t close the door, it’s in the future,” French history said, as it was born in Charleville.
It was before the Civil War and I don’t think that even James Buchanan was president.

The muse might be a person. My first contact with this spirit of inspiration was Juanita Miller, the daughter of the flamboyant, 19th century California poet, Joaquin Miller. She lived in a vine-covered castle among her father's monuments to Moses, John Frémont, and the Brownings, nestled in the Oakland hills, in what is now Joaquin Miller Park. In our neighborhood, she was unusual. On a foggy Halloween night, some friends and I spotted her in a white nightgown walking barefoot through the eucalyptus. We were sure her house was haunted and dared not go to her doorstep to trick or treat. She rode with my family to church on Sunday, and on one occasion she signed a copy of a collection of her father's poems and presented it to my mother. I revered this book. I would open it and gently touch her signature. It amazed me that we knew someone who was associated with the arts.

I memorized a poem from Miller's book, a poem to Lily Langtry, a popular singer of his day. I recited this poem in the 4th grade, and the next year in Mr. Shriner's 5th grade class, when asked to memorize a poem, I recited the same poem to fulfill the assignment, and the class jeered me, saying they had heard this poem before. A red-headed girl came to my defense and said she still thought the poem beautiful. A muse can be old or young, peaceful, joyful or wrathful, and sometimes they are teachers. In the 6th grade, Mrs. Latimore whacked the back of my hand with a yardstick for passing a scatological note when I was supposed to be diagramming sentences. Professor Traugot reprimanded me in front of a freshman comp class at Cal for plagiarizing from Alfred Kazan's essay on Blake, and Professor Parkinson proclaimed my essay, "My Home," the worst thing he had ever read. I may be forever re-writing "My Home," but I have learned to disguise my sources with better craft.

Kenneth Rexroth was the first poet I heard read. Ernest Blank opened my eyes to hidden beauty in poetry by explicating Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." Mike Sneed critiqued my first poem, a parody of Poe's "The Raven," pointing out that poems are not Freudian soap-operas. While guarding the balcony of the Campanile on the U.C. campus, Don Bratman taught me how to scan a poem's lines. Dennis Wier fired my interest in printing by showing me how to burn plates with a light bulb in an orange crate in his closet. Vic Jowers promoted my first chapbook at the Sticky Wicket, near Aptos. Up to this point, I was dabbling, but I was primed for allegiance to this art when the 1965 Berkeley Poetry Conference was announced. My English teacher said he knew Robert Creeley and that I would learn more in one day at this conference than I would in a whole year at Cal Poly, so I thumbed my way back to Berkeley.

A major turning point—an injection of rocket fuel. I want to thank Gary Snyder for telling me Berkeley didn't need another bookstore and to take the nuts and bolts of what I had learned and move to the hinterlands where I was needed. Thanks to Allen Ginsberg for revealing that I could be both a good poet and a good businessman. "Just be good," he said, and I took the meaning of this to apply to both esthetics and ethics. Thanks to Charles Olson for showing me the meaning of epic scale. It was a mind transmission watching him bebop through the universe fusing Gilgamesh and quantum mechanics. To Robert Creeley, who laid down two laws: William Carlos Williams's "No ideas but in things" and Ezra Pound's "Make it new!" To Jack Spicer, who admonished, "Poet, be like God."

It was during these days many lifelong friendships started. Luis Garcia, my closest friend and collaborator, has been my greatest mentor, always present with insights and humorous twists of perspective. I met Lu right after the Berkeley Poetry Conference, and we continued meeting with other poets for weeks to come. Lu's style of writing is unique—playing with the words within the words, he directed me to meditate on the morning light and helped me understand that it was important to forge a blade, as he put it. Lu's poems sizzle. They move so fast, if you aren't ready, you miss them. By imitating Lu's use of jazz rhythms and breath notation, I began to read my poems aloud. Just like Leadbelly learned to play the 12-string, I learned my craft by putting my spine against the piano.

After I acquired a 1927 Kelsey "Excelsior" hand press, I began printing in an attic apartment in Ketchikan, near the ball field. I'd come home from a day's work in the back shop of The Ketchikan Daily News, and I'd print 100 pages and hang them to dry on cotton string along the roofline of the apartment. On the weekends, I bound my books together, set type, and prepared for the following week of printing. The printing was smudgy and uneven, but I pressed on. The typefaces were worn, so I over-inked and pressed harder, pressing the letters into the paper, embossing the page, letting the ink bleed through. Grant Risdon taught me how to cut linoleum blocks, and in a rush of visual imagery, I tipped my linoleum nudes into the books, alternating poems and blocks, giving color to the big words.

After reading *How to Live in the Woods on \$10/Week*, I moved with wife and child and press to Deep Bay, fifteen miles from the nearest road by boat. D Press moved into a new dimension. Pouring the words right into the type case seemed natural. I began to break my poems into smaller and smaller units. Tried to express myself with just the Anglo Saxon. I was printing with 60 point Bodoni type, and this limited the number of words that could be arranged in a 4X6 inch type case. Constraints can be liberating.

Toward the book through the computer

One of the uses of a computer is to solve the problem of justifying lines. Justified lines are the even alignment of letters at the margins of a text. It is the demarcation of where a line of type ends, not the end of a rhythmic line, where the number of scanned syllables makes one line a bit longer than the next because of the constituent parts of the sentence in various scripts and fonts. It's the printer's task to choose the right font and make the line end at a given spot, to choose the point size of the font so the longest line fits in the type case, within the margins. Poetry is usually justified to the left margin and proceeds as a dance of consonant and vowel. The carcass of prose is anchored to both margins with hyphenated word breaks. In letterpress printing, lines are justified by filling the space between pieces of hand-set lead type. In a computer, this operation is accomplished in a text box by clicking the appropriate format icon on the tool bar.

Mapping the book

Mapping the book. First, I estimate the size of the book. Then, I make a dummy of the book by

figuring out how much of my text will fit on a page, say 8½x11 inches, folded in half, or half-letter size. I count the lines and estimate the number of pages it will take, adding a title page, a page for acknowledgements, a dedication, and so forth. I divide by four since there are going to be four pages on a sheet of paper folded in half. I take that number of blank sheets, fold them, and write the page number and an abbreviation of what text will appear on each page. This guides me since the opposite sides of the page are not consecutive. For example, in a 32-page book, page 1 is next to page 32, page 2 is coupled with page 31. If a given page is going to be blank, I write "blank" on it. I design the page setup in landscape and create my master pages, using a booklet publishing program. All this to say, if I want to add a new page of text, I must think in terms of four pages.

Although the cost per copy decreases slightly when you reach certain print amounts, the unit cost per book is the same for one book as it is for one hundred. This is in contrast to offset and letterpress processes where the setup cost is much higher, and the runs must be longer in order to make back the initial investment in labor and materials. I make short runs. I use the book as an editing tool—more, I often begin writing into the book, once the process takes hold, printing one copy at a time until I am satisfied with the layout and content—then, I run a handful of copies to be archived in the collections of a few friends. I sell books at readings and exchange books with poets that I meet, but, at present, I am not as interested in marketing my books as I am in the process of creation.

Backward process

I work from the final form, the book that is like in a Tantric visualization, I develop the book by extending the vision, adding the ornaments, which are the poems. Mallarmé conceived of the book as a spiritual exercise. To me, the book fuses Newtonian sequence and Blakean simultaneity. It's a vehicle to write poems, the book as pen. I am writing with the book. Jack Spicer is my inspiration for molding serial poetry into small books. The poem arrives on the page, whether I collage it together from bits or carve it from a single block, whether I dream it or work it out as a puzzle. Once it makes it onto a sheet of paper and can be read, the poem is already a part of a book. And, once in a book, it gets lonely, wants to speak to other poems. I let it breathe, let it percolate, let it draw to itself magnetic companions, let them be a piece of a larger poem. What starts it?—a metaphor, maybe, or some scribbling on the washroom wall, something fleeting, a little synaptic firing in my brain. I get these firings into words and onto a page because I have developed a modicum of mind-body coordination, and the words might even mean something. I keep making books, this book overlapping the next, being sure to leave a bit undone, like a Navajo weaver bringing a thread to the edge, allowing the spirits to come and go.

This is not the whole story of D Press. The roots of my printing can be traced back to a rubber stamp press that I had as a child, to my job as a bindery clerk at State Farm, to the various project books I made for my classes through my school years—there is an entire English grammar I meticulously copied for Mrs. Weissmuller in the 10th grade—and to my connection with Dennis Wier at Berkeley Pamphlets. I gained further experience working on a letterpress with Wesley Tanner at Arif Press, in Berkeley. I learned graphic design and photography from my newspaper experiences at the Ketchikan Daily News, the Polar Star, the Berkeley Barb, and the Queen Anne News. I assisted John Bennett with his mimeo mag, *Vagabond*. I took a printmaking class, in Alaska, with Terry Choy. While working at Sprint Copy Shop, in Sebastopol, I utilized their photo

coping and bindery equipment.

I have printed with most media, from potato prints to the computer, linoleum block printing, wood block printing, mono prints, etching and engraving, mimeograph, offset and letterpress. Also, I combine printing techniques in a single volume. The rationale behind the making of small books and the controversy surrounding self-publishing is explored in detail by Belle Randall in her essay, "Having Tea with Blake: Self-publishing and the Art of Richard Denner," online at Big Bridge (Vol. 7), and which originally appeared in Vol.13, No.2 of Raven Chronicles.

The thrust of Belle's argument is that a poet has more control over his material, over the selection of materials, layout and design elements and so forth. She points out that there is a long, honorable tradition of this kind of publishing. Small presses, which are often run by poets, publish not only their own work but the work of their friends, who may have presses of their own, and reciprocate in like fashion. I call this "collaborative publishing." There are also "co-op" type publishing enterprises, where a group of poets join together to edit, design, work on marketing, and then job out the printing of their members books. A new wave of publishing—although some of it has the look of being turned out by a cookie cutter—has arisen in the mainstream with the advent of "print-on-demand."

Initially, this technology enabled all authors to be their own publisher by simply submitting their manuscript to a company that designed and marketed their book. Now, the author chooses from a number of templates and designs their own book. The finished design is maintained on file, and copies of the book are printed whenever a copy is needed, on demand. Publishers are not burdened with large and taxable inventories, and, as authors, their works appear on lists in the marketplace with the International Standard and Library of Congress book numbers.

My English publisher, Verian Thomas, used Xlibris to produce my *Collected Poems: 1961-2000*. He explains his vision:

Comrades Press was founded in 2000 as a direct result of its online magazine. The amount and the quality of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction that we received was staggering, much of it from previously unpublished writers. We decided to rectify this by becoming publishers ourselves and, with no funding whatsoever, set about the task of bringing the work of the misplaced poets of the world to the world.

By utilizing print on demand technology and online stores, we are able to produce quality books without many of the overhead costs associated with traditional methods. This means that we are prepared to take risks that would probably have other publishers waking up in a cold sweat in the middle of the night. Rather than publishing what we know will sell, our goal is to publish work that we like, work that we believe in, which should be the only reason for anybody to publish anything. Comrades Press works on a non-profit basis. If we make any money from our publications, it sits in the bank account just long enough for us to make the red numbers a little smaller before it is channeled straight into our next publication.

This also allows us to produce short-run chapbooks from brand new authors whose work grabs you by the throat and demands to be read or picks away at the back of your brain until there is no choice but to go for it.

Verian left me to slug it out with Xlibris, it being a branch of Random House, which is an American corporation. He paid for the primary cost of the book, and I worked with the layout artists. Verian's idealism might have been dampened had he experienced the confusion and setbacks that I encountered. Every glitch surfaced: lost files, uncorrected changes, inventive designs, and just when things would be going smoothly, the layout artist would change, and it would begin over, a new horror story. But credit should be given where credit is due.

A work the size of *Collected Poems: 1961-2000* is not a small undertaking. It contains nearly 500 poems spread over that many pages with forty illustrations. It required diligence by the graphic artists who worked on the book to be mindful of the nuances of line breaks and stanza separations; this is not required with prose which can be poured into linked text boxes without mishap. The shift to self-design came with improvement in the software.

The Collected Poems took one year to produce, and it emerged in good form, very close to my intentions. The head honcho at Xlibris rolled up his sleeves at the end and worked on it himself. Everyone learned; the system evolved.

When I moved to Santa Rosa, in 1998, to care for my elderly parents, I bought a used computer from Don Satnick, in Ellensburg, a Compaq with one gig of memory and an early Windows operating system and began to data input my poems already published in a handful of chapbooks and manuscripts from a group of spring-backed thesis binders. My *Collected Poems* is organized into sections of poems reflecting my geographical locations: Berkeley, Apotos & San Luis Obispo, 1961-68; Ketchikan & Deep Bay, 1968-70; Fairbanks & Preston, 1970-74; Ellensburg, 1974-95; Pagosa Springs, 1994-97; and Santa Rosa & Sebastopol, 1998-2000. Of the 462 poems with titles (many are serialized under one title), just under half (229) are included in the Santa Rosa & Sebastopol section.

Most of the poems in Santa Rosa & Sebastopol section were new works, but some were revitalized from older, abandoned works. In retrospect, this two-year period was a flowering of my confidence in myself as a writer. By learning to use a computer to design my chapbooks, I returned to my Blakean muse at Deep Bay, pouring my poems directly into the Grail.

I found it expedient to have blank templates of various sizes and formats that I could copy and use without building them from scratch, and this became my personal form of print-on-demand. My creative process accelerated. In 2003, I had the inspiration to put all my chapbooks sequentially into bound volumes. These volumes would contain the books with their original typefaces and covers. Since all the masters were in my computer, it seemed to be an easy matter, simply print them out, reverse alternate pages, run them two-sided on the copy machine at Sprint, and then cut the stack in half and combine them into volumes. Easy to envision but not quite the way it was to be done in reality. It took more time to organize and assemble 108 volumes in *The Collected Books of Richard Denner* than I had anticipated. The basic idea was sound for each individual chapbook, to cut and stack the pages; but the color cover had to be run off separately and inserted,

and the process repeated for each chapbook, until the whole volume emerged and could be glued. I glued four books at a time in two groups to produce one eight-volume set, each with a cover in a hand-made box. Once complete, it was a history of D Press.

A professor of neurobiology at U.C. Berkeley, who I met at a Dzog Chen retreat, bought a set, and said, "It is the history of your mind."

The title pages of *The Collected Books of Richard Denner*, each with a Tarot card symbol, imitate the Black Sparrow edition of *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer*. Here we touch upon an aspect of my oeuvre that Belle Randall has called my "forgeries," meaning that some of my books imitate already existent and recognizable books. Evermore the outlaw/outlier/outright liar, I write under a variety of aliases, cautiously trailing in the wake of the Portuguese poet, Francesco Pessoa. I have written as Richard Denner, Rychard Artaud, Jampa Dorje, Bouvard Pécuchet, Jubal Dolan, Doug Oporto, Luis Mee, and Thuragania. We have authored poems, novels, plays, and belle-lettres. There is mystery, intrigue, humor, romance, and adventure. Call it a life.