

[Laurie Duggan](#)

## Thoughts on [Basil King's](#) *Learning to Draw*

My name is Basil Herschel King. My original name was Basil Herschel Cohen. The name was changed when we came to this country in 1947. [BH]

1947 was the year I came to America. I was two months shy of my twelfth birthday. I could not explain it but the sky was higher than the sky I knew in England and everything looked bigger, there was so much space. I saw a white man put his hand on a black man's back and I thought he was going to hang him. It doesn't matter what your upbringing is it is a shock to come to this country. It's a high and when you first arrive you hallucinate. Some immigrants become terrified and some become greedy. I couldn't believe there were foods that I'd never seen before. Everyone in my mother's family had a car and went to the movies once a week. Transplanted I put on my first long pants and memorized car grills. I learnt I must not spell a-e-r-o-p-l-a-n-e but I must spell a-i-r-p-l-a-n-e, and I was not to say whilst. [RF]

\*

Basil King's poetry as evidenced in such books as *Mirage*, *Miniatures*, or *77 Beasts* might at first seem part of a long tradition of testimony, whether of a personal or a collective nature. As such, the work is impressive. It has a grasp and an energy that propels the reader along yet the narrative is far from straightforward. As the work entitled *Learning to Draw* progresses its overall structure becomes more complex. Pieces like 'Bring it Home' often double back to stories retailed elsewhere. The poem is tenacious about the tales it wishes to tell. This process, for King, must parallel to some extent the processes he makes use of in paintings and drawings. A hand or a deck of cards can be approached again and again as though, however fine the work, the act of making it come alive can never be conclusive. The poems, rather than acting as an extended narrative (which is what I'd at first assumed they would do) interlace, so that the structure is like an evolving web. What is at stake here is a history, but history being a fluid thing, is never going to appear the same no matter how often the survivors tell their tales. With each new piece of information the whole is altered: not just by addition, but by complication.

\*

'I intend to break the sections up when I am finished and have one continuous verse' King says in *Twin Towers* [TT13]. In *Wild Cards* he notes 'Not everything can go into/one painting one poem' [WC]. There's a play between these positions in *Learning to Draw*. The evolving sequence is rather like a deck of cards. Each card retains its value though this value might be enhanced by conjunction with another card. There is no 'end' of the poem in sight as yet, though this doesn't preclude a gathering that would present the work as a satisfying whole. It's not, in this sense, like the classic high-modernist long work that tends to tail off or become fragmentary. There is a good reason for this: King isn't out to create a paradise on earth like Pound so the freight of Pound's failure as the *Cantos* withdraw into silence won't be informing *Learning to Draw*. Nor, I suspect, will the map of loss that ends what we have of *Maximus, Book Three*: 'my wife my car my color and myself'. In the section entitled *Solo*, King notes that Charles Lindbergh wanted 'purity, a race without blemish' [S]. 'Purity is the curse of the twentieth century' he says elsewhere [TT7] It has no room for the 'unruly'. And 'democracy destroys purity and initiates disobedience' [TT15]

\*

The question of autobiography looms large over *Learning to Draw*, but what sort of autobiography? The artist does not appear as an exemplar (though we might learn from his example). There is no false modesty at work, nor is King a kind of Zelig who comes into shot while the camera focuses on the famous others. He is not in any sense cutting and pasting himself into history. He lives it like the others whose stories are told here.

In the section published as *Twin Towers*, King notes:

My 'Learning to Draw' takes on the scent of buttercups, Daisy chains, wetting my bed. I had not wanted to refer to my childhood or use any autobiography in 'Learning to Draw'. I had wanted it to be as secular a document as a drawing is. But childhood has a narrow brain. Hit it and your ego becomes a punching bag [TT1].

This is followed by the memory of

leaving a Lyons Corner House with my parents in London during the Second World War. We went into the basement of a church. The minister had all of us sing. When the all-clear sounded and we returned to the street, Lyons Corner House had been hit . . . Only one staircase remained standing. Its banister and steps didn't have a scratch on them.[TT1]

'Why was that staircase still standing?' begins the next paragraph [TT2]. The question lies behind King's late start as a poet and to the subsequent abundance of his work. In 'Bring it Home' he notes:

Ted Wilentz phoned to tell me Fred McDarrah had been at his house with hundreds of photographs and I wasn't in one of them. Ted said you were there at my store, my house, and at the parties . . . . When Ted read 'Mirage' he said, why didn't you tell us. I told him I couldn't I didn't know how. Not then. I told Ted every time Fred was about to take a photograph I ran into the next room or the bathroom. I didn't want to be seen. Not then [BH].

King is referring here to the famous sequence of photographs taken by Fred McDarrah of the early 1960s New York poetry and art world, some of which appeared at the time in *The Beat Scene* (NY, Corinth, 1960) and many subsequent places. His absence from a place in which he might have been expected to appear is not unconnected with his presence in these much later works. King notes of Rothko and Caspar David Friedrich that

neither artist saw a future where they could in good conscience fully participate. With brilliant foreboding each man establishes an independent evaluation of the past. [TT10]

Friedrich himself notably appears only from behind in his own works.

\*

I was tempted to begin this piece by wondering whether *Learning to Draw* might not be the last great work to come out of Black Mountain College, but to do this might not accord with King's own view of the work in progress. Instead it could be more worthwhile to trace the poem's origin to the comment of a poet who was emphatically not a Black Mountaineer. Paul Blackburn, who died in 1971, had been painted by King, who subsequently provided drawings for his posthumous *Piere Vidal*

volume. As a sequence from *Learning to Draw* notes, 'Paul said poetry never failed him and he told me before he died that I had a long poem to write [14E]'. This was a brilliantly astute suggestion. It must indeed have haunted King who began to write alongside his practice of drawing and painting some twenty years later. This new writing would not in any way use Blackburn as a template. But it does share with the older poet a distrust of system and a suspicion of the desire for purity; high modernist traits that even Charles Olson had not escaped.

It would have been difficult in the late 1940s to avoid the universalizing theories of Jung and his disciple Joseph Campbell and *The Maximus Poems*, especially the later ones, seem in thrall to these accounts of our mythical underpinnings. Such reductionism is deeply conservative, at odds with Olson's stated purposes; it leaves no room for the citizen of a democratic state to move. Each initiative instead ends up as a re-enactment of a scene staged long before. Drawing might be a way out of this world of mirrors, King suggests. 'Lawrence says to himself, drawing is always contemporary' [AB3]. And Thomas Eakins' nudes are contemporary: 'they have nothing to sell and nothing to hide'. To be contemporary, to be 'absolutely contemporary' as Frank O'Hara suggested will remove us from the diminishing returns of re-enactment.

*Learning to Draw* has the immediacy of drawing itself, though this is not the same thing as a 'pouring out'. This poetry has not been 'beaten out' of King as Charles Bukowski's was by his violent father. A paragraph from '14 Eyes' notes that Bukowski

survived by telling and writing stories that are true social commentaries. And that's why they are so popular. But his poems are not poems. They are stories, narratives with an intended conclusion. It's not that he is a coward, far from it. But Bukowski knows he must not get too far inside of himself, it's too dangerous. He is no fool, he knows that poetry opens the seal and you can never be too sure once that seal is removed that what you find will protect you. [14E]

Paul Blackburn's art does not involve such a relaxation. King quotes Gilbert Sorrentino:

That the poems [of Blackburn's *Journal*] seem often the thought of a moment, a brilliant or witty or dark response to still-smoking news, is the result of his carefully invented and released voice, a voice that we hear singing, virtuoso. [14E]

\*

Black Mountain enters *Learning to Draw* as an instance of democracy in action. A passage imagines Hans Holbein the Younger arriving at the dining hall of the College. Bill de Kooning had told him 'Black Mountain College is a community where everyone learns', that it 'welcomed those who were willing to leave home, meet strangers and learn to draw' [HH]. This last phrase repeats itself in the section 'Robert Frank/The Americans' as a structural device. Frank had come to America in his early twenties in 1947 (coincidentally the same year as Basil King himself) and, aided by a Guggenheim grant travelled around the States assembling the photographic images that would become *The Americans*. He had been given 'permission to speak'. The Black Mountain syllabus, unlike that of many other institutions, made room too for this important prerequisite of a true democracy.

'Leave home. Meet strangers. And learn to draw.' [RF] How do these words balance against our histories? Firstly it is 'histories' rather than an overarching 'history'. The tales that compose *Learning to Draw* are histories, often ragged ones, of artists and writers learning to look at things. These often

cantankerous individuals are nothing like the exemplars wished upon us by Ezra Pound. They are often people lost in the moment of composition; lost in a space where ‘calligraphy is for lovers’. It is the tentative nature of drawing that becomes important here.

Secondly, the America of this poem is not the kind of purist homeland that needs to be defended at all costs, but a space in which things can happen that mightn’t have happened elsewhere or before. In effect this is a poem that argues for diaspora. Holbein had left Basle for England when the Reformation prohibited religious painting. Circumstance lay behind King’s own migration; opportunity behind Robert Frank’s. On the ‘frontier’ invention *had* to occur. There is something to be said (at last) for the idea of so-called ‘rootless cosmopolitanism’. But this openness can be prey to other voices uttering the line often taken as the model for life in the New World: ‘Be Rich Get Rich Be Rich Get Rich Be Rich’ [RF &c]. Openness needs to be defended in its own way:

America your eyes  
Were closed then  
As they are now  
History records  
Joe McCarthy closed  
Black Mountain College . . .  
Closed  
Democracy  
And for fifty years  
With few exceptions  
A continuous description  
As retroactive as garbage  
Dominates  
America [HH]

\*

Ezra Pound famously viewed William Carlos Williams as a mongrel. And yet Williams was a true American product if not a ‘pure’ one. ‘Marsden Hartley said, Williams is perhaps more people at once than anyone I’ve ever known – not vague persons but he’s a small town of serious citizens in himself’ [AB14]. The structure of Williams’ *Paterson* was indeed artificial (the idea of a river from mountain to sea) but it was not a harmful artifice like the notion of a terrestrial paradise. Williams wrote an unanticipated Book Five and made the beginnings of a further Book. His life became his poem. The artist is a lover not a superman, though the artist may take risks that the average person wouldn’t. ‘I choose’, says Basil King, ‘to be a painter and a poet’.

As in a poem the line extends no further  
Than the arm can reach after that I am  
In space devoid of theory surrounded by shapes  
I know these shapes they live with me

From the abstract to the figure  
From the figure to the abstract

It is one thing to survive  
It is another to prevail [GM]

## Works referred to

By Basil King:

*In The Field Where Daffodils Grow*, New York, Libellum, 2008.

*Solo*, West Hartford, Cricket Press, 2007, unpaginated. [S]

*Twin Towers*, Skanky Possum, 2005. [TT]

*Wild Cards*, Cy Gist Press, 2010, unpaginated. [WC]

'14 Eyes – Desire', MS. [14E]

'Across and Back', Local Knowledge Magazine, 2010. [AB]

'Bring It Home', MS. [BH]

'Hans Holbein the Younger comes to Black Mountain', MS. [HH]

'Looking for The Green Man', MS. [GM]

'My Seventy-Fifth Birthday', MS.

'Robert Frank / *The Americans*', MS. [RF]

Other volumes:

Paul Blackburn, *Peire Vidal*, New York, Mulch, 1972.

Fred McDarragh and Elias Wilentz, *The Beat Scene*, New York, Corinth, 1960.

Charles Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, Berkeley, U. Cal, 1983.

Learning to Draw/A History

Bring It Home

Squares and Circles

Oblongs the size

Of a Torso

Surround

The

Mouth

The mouth sometimes abrupt  
Sometimes slow  
Sometimes not altogether quiet  
Moves  
The challenge last seen  
Reflects the disorder  
The discomfort the newness

Pause

A

Serial

Tune

Sprouts

Roots

And

Repeats

Kiss

Me

I

Repeat

Sprout

Your

Lips

And

Kiss

Me

The

Milky-Way

Is

A

Continuous

Creation

## Yesterday

I thanked Bob Rauschenberg for putting two primed canvases together  
and not painting on them.

## Pause

William Herschel and his sister Caroline  
Spent last night and the night before that  
And the month before that  
And the year before that  
Looking into the heavens  
For a place to live  
They were displaced  
By birth and country

William was 18 when to avoid the army  
He and his older brother went to England  
After a few years  
His brother Jacob went back to Germany  
But William stayed and didn't return  
For twelve years

Born in Germany William Herschel 1738-1822 was twelve years older  
than his sister Caroline. Their mother was Prussian. She was a stern  
disciplinarian and remained illiterate all her life. Their father  
like his father before him began as a gardener. Herschel's  
grandfather was a Jew a gardener who made instruments and played the  
Oboe. Herschel's father Isaac taught himself to play the flute and  
became a military bandsman with the Hanover Foot Guards. He read  
philosophy, poetry and had an interest in astronomy.

The Milky Way promotes serial music  
A universe of dark telling tells us  
The stars conceal the innocence  
Of the brash nebula  
Spores  
Seedlings  
Feathers  
The planet  
Uranus  
Incites  
Change  
Spores  
Seedlings  
Feathers

The planet  
Uranus  
Incites  
Change  
By the third cup of coffee  
Something in the eighteenth century  
Intersects  
William Herschel believed  
People live on the moon  
Leave home meet strangers  
And learn to draw

William and Caroline's mother had twelve children of which six lived. William was the second son and Caroline was the youngest. Their mother doted on the first son Jacob and Sophie the beauty of the family. Caroline was a sickly child at the age of 5 she caught smallpox and when she was 11 she caught typhus. As an adult she was pocked marked and not five feet tall. She could read and write and when her father was away with the regiment she wrote the letters to her father for her mother. She also wrote letter for other women in the regiment. Even so her mother and her brother Jacob treated her badly they whipped her and had her scrub the floors and do all the menial housework. She was a servant doomed to a life of drudgery.

William Herschel loved his sister and when he could afford to he went back to Germany and literally pulled her away from their mother and their older brother. He taught Caroline to sing and to play the piano. He taught her how to measure the sky and she distinguished herself she discovered many comets and she never scrubbed another floor.

Pause

At the start of "ART IS" George Quasha asks: "What is your name." It's a wonderful question to begin an interview. It's as simple as "ART IS" And it's as complicated as getting to the root. It creates a continuous dialogue.

My name is Basil Herschel King. My original name was Basil Herschel Cohen. The name was changed when we came to this country in 1947.

I was in my teens when my father told me that I was not named after his father or my mother's grandfather whose names where Hershel. My namesake is William Herschel (spelt with a c) the great astronomer his first discipline was music he played many instruments conducted and composed. It is only recently that I read that William Herschel



taught himself mathematics, Italian, and made his own telescopes to observe the stars.

William was reading while riding a horse. It was at night and the horse must have stumbled. He did a summersault over the horse's mane and landed on his back.

Looking up at the stars  
Did William Herschel see a face  
A beautiful Beatrice  
Or did he see a lovely young woman  
In a white dress on the Staten Island Ferry  
Whatever he did see what ever it was  
William Herschel was in love

LOVE

I have promised myself  
I will not look  
At anyone else  
But you  
You  
With you  
With you  
I vanish  
With you  
The moons  
Quartered  
Limbs  
Flower  
Tenacious  
Music  
With you  
A unicorn's  
Horn  
Pierces  
Deceit

Pause

Every morning she goes into the kitchen  
Before she makes herself coffee  
She washes last night's dishes  
She is a large young woman  
She always wears a black slip  
Her back does not speak to her torso  
Her eyes are blue her lips  
Repeat the sounds said last night  
On a program she watched on TV  
She leaves the apartment  
Closes the door and goes to a job  
That reminds her she is lonely

For several mornings the lights  
Do not go on in her apartment  
Nor do they go on in the evening  
Then one morning a large young man  
Is at the sink he washes the dishes  
She appears wearing the same black slip  
They say something and leave the kitchen  
It's evening he's cutting vegetables  
She gets the frying pan  
Is about to light the stove  
When he pours two glasses of wine  
She smiles he smiles  
They left their parents  
On the 8<sup>th</sup> floor  
And in an elevator on the 23<sup>rd</sup> floor  
She touched him  
Silence interrupts the lovers  
Silence interrupts the swimmers  
When they reach dry land  
The apartment is painted in subdued colors  
Roses defend their status  
Two moons of Jupiter  
A thousand double stars  
Two halves of an Avocado  
They have been joined  
By the unexpected

## Pause

A man in his early forties he's one of the owners of the Hardware store that is next door to the butcher shop he is telling the butcher that last night when he and his wife came home from being away for the week-end their daughter was with a young man who had been with her all week-end. "Our father would have killed me and my brother if he and my mother had come home and found us with a girl."

The butcher who is also a man in his early forties supplies his clientele with expensive cured bacons and smoked meats. Some mornings on his way to the store the butcher goes to Green Wood Cemetery to visit his father's grave. He has described to me the season's changes as he drives in from Long Island unconscious of the poetry he talks when he speaks of grasses clouds and the wild flowers. He is a man who is always making deals. He owns two boats and has offered me his BOSE earphones next time I fly. Both men inherited their stores after their fathers died. Both fathers died of cancer.

The two men have known each other all their lives. They know me as a customer and are not distracted by my presence. The butcher tells his friend that times have changed. He wouldn't want his daughter to go to a hotel with the young man. I know your daughter and she'd never be with a bimbo. Isn't it better that she's not afraid to bring her young man home. The girl's father blushes and says "Hello MR. King."

We've lived in the same neighborhood in Brooklyn since November of 1969. And some of the storekeepers call me Basil and some call me Mr. King. The butcher calls me Baa-zil and when I'm in the hardware store its always Mr. King. In the liquor store I am Mr. King in the pharmacy I am Basell either way its impersonal. Their individualized pronouncing of my name can be Basil the herb or Basil the Greek and Welsh King.

Pause

Part 11

A stage set that isn't painted by either Francis Bacon or David Hockney the planet Uranus is discovered by William Herschel in 1781. William Herschel was a practical man. He internalized his passions and never abandoned the humanity that gave him courage. Courage that frail kernel of a thousand shapes if not worked disappears.

Bacon and Hockney thrive on courage they have installed it into their vocabularies into their language. England that miserable island has been expanded by what they have accomplished. England has green hills lovely valleys wonderful beer and Stonehenge. But England prides itself on insinuating into one of its best assets an acknowledgement that life is cruel it's in the island's prose and poetry but never has it been exploited in visual art with the possible exception of Graham Sutherland in his paintings. Bacon and Hockney's paintings abound with cruel mannerisms articulate references staged to show a tale that has been told before. (Chaucer, Shakespeare, John Donne, Hardy, D.H. Lawrence.) The surreal orbits the premise that everyone has a secret and is capable of harming another person.

Bring it home  
Bring it home  
As you would  
A lover  
As you would size  
A canvas  
As you would  
Bring it home  
Bring it home  
Name a cave  
That isn't minimal  
A Vatican that isn't  
Conceptual  
Bring it home  
Bring it home  
The knowledge  
The dispersed  
Wisdom

I was 4 years old and my mother was entertaining some of her friends. I was on the floor playing with my castle and knights and I heard her say. "He made me, he begged me, I never wanted a child."

Pause

During the Second World War I don't think any man, woman or child ever forgot we could be invaded. I was 17-18 years old when my mother told me she had gone to bed every night with her knickers on. She was afraid that if we were blown up she would be exposed.

Honeysuckle and fog  
Raspberries and thorns  
Moss gardens Horse chestnuts and Marbles  
Cricket and climbing trees  
The 63 bus  
Johnny Haynes and Tony Bonny  
Honeysuckle and fog  
Raspberries and thorns  
Moss gardens and anti-Semitism  
Horse chestnuts and churches  
V1s and V2s  
Hymns  
Mr. Cook and Shakespeare  
Hide and Seek  
Secrecy and mistrust  
The urgency of not wanting  
To be seen

Pause

Ted Wilentz phoned to tell me Fred MacDarrah had been at his house with hundreds of photograph and I wasn't in one of them. Ted said you were there at my store, my house, and at the parties.

When Ted read "mirage" he said, why didn't you tell us. I told him I couldn't I didn't know how. Not then. I told Ted every time Fred was about to take a photograph I ran into the next room or the bathroom. I didn't want to be seen. Not then.

Pause

Johnny Haynes was a carrot top. His father was in the Navy had been since he was 14. He'd had the cat of nine tails lain on his back for stealing a piece of bread and honey when he was 14. Mr. Haynes was tattooed from his neck down. Mr. Haynes was a chief petty officer and the Navy had wanted to make him an officer. He had refused. Mr. Haynes was out to sea during most of the war. He was rarely given leave. Every time there was an air raid Mrs. Haynes would call Johnny to come in and get under the table with her. He picked up on her fear and when we played in the street Johnny would sit on the curb and suck his thumb. No one made fun of him. He had hundreds of freckles and he could kick the hell out of a ball.

Pause

In 1942 at the age of 7 went to a private Jewish boarding school modeled after Summerhill. The school was very expensive. Because of my father's work as a fundraiser and organizer in the Jewish community he had access to wealthy families. The Montague sisters were identical twins and they were on the board of the school. They paid my tuition. The twins were tall, slender and dressed in Edwardian clothing. I remember they always wore hats and carried large pocketbooks. And there were always food stains on their clothing. Gas was expensive and it was rationed but a chauffeured car would bring them to the school and they would ask to see "the Cohen boy." They never sat down. They would ask me what was I reading, what were my interests. I would stand in front of them and answer their questions. They would always smile. It wasn't a condescending smile but because we never sat down they looked down on me. I wasn't afraid of them. There was something lonely and tender in their smiles.

The regular administration and faculty had been inducted into the army or some war-related work. The Matron had an adopted daughter. She took the bus to another school in the town of Brentwood. The Matron and her daughter were English so was the head nurse. The Matron and the head nurse were lovers. The cooks and all the help were Irish. The grounds were magnificent. We built imaginary towns and hospitals. There was a gardener straight out of D. H. Lawrence and every child had their own plot to grow whatever they wanted. The faculty except for one woman who taught English had been replaced with Europeans who were unable to find other academic positions. Education. Learn at your own speed pace your garden grow Sunflowers or tomatoes that feel like a girl's bum. Socialism, Communism,

Fascism who projects the system do persons who wish to control invent systems.

We called the school "The Home" and in the Home there was cruelty inflicted on the children by the Matron the head nurse and some of the Irish help. Most of the children had compassion for each other. One of the boys used to sleep walk and we all made sure that he got back to his bed before he hurt himself. Breakfast, lunch, supper, Socialism, Communism, Fascism, we all learned to crochet.

All the children did their best to avoid being punished. Strapped down on our beds so that you couldn't move. Make a fist and have a large silver soup spoon whack your fist. Walk in the rain in a circle and then go to bed with wet clothes, you got chilblains. The faculty wanted to keep their jobs. They never interfered with the everyday running of the place. We learned that the Matron and her spies did things to have us mistrust each other. Someone's clothes would be missing from their drawer and would be found in another person's drawer. All the children wanted justice. I wrote in a very large script and I remember drawing trees. I remember geography, history, French lessons and a young German teacher who later became a Rabbi who read me Holbein's letters in German.

We had to line up and watch as twelve-year old Rosalind took off her dressing gown and her pajamas and lay her nude body face down over the head nurse's thighs. The nurse would proceed to whack her bottom with a hairbrush. Beautiful Rosalind was growing tits; she had pale skin a crop of wavy strawberry blonde hair and the beginnings of a golden crotch. To this day I wake up and this sadistic spectacle that still haunts me always took place in the morning before breakfast.

Dear clematis, it will take more than your purple bloom to forget the head nurse. Her thin face, her calculating smile as she cut off the ends of her toast. Which she would then dispense to her favorites. Socialism, Communism, Fascism we all learned to crochet.

Martha and I were in a farmers market in Berkley California. And I saw her. I said to Martha "There she is it's her." And I know my intensity scared Martha. It was those thin lips. Her arrogant cheekbones she was selling vegetables. I had to I buy something from her. She smiled it wasn't her but it was. She was there to say you won't forget me. She was a jailer, a guard not a guardian but a presence who was full of spite.

I wrote my mother every week telling her all the good things that I was doing, Geography, Gardening, History, Math and reading books.

Years later she said she was sorry that she hadn't saved all my letters. She read them aloud to all the women that were with her when she was convalescing.

Bring it home  
Bring it home  
As you would  
A lover  
As you would size  
A canvas  
As you would  
Bring it home  
Bring it home  
Name a cave  
That isn't minimal  
A Vatican that isn't  
Conceptual  
Bring it home  
Bring it home  
The knowledge  
The dispersed  
Wisdom

Pause

Stanley, what will it take to forget we had a plan. We were best friends and we went to the Matron and proposed that we would polish all the brass and all the silverware. She would pay us each a penny a night. We told her we would spend it when we went into Brentwood. She agreed. Stanley and I calculated how much it would cost us to take a train from Brentwood to London. At the end of every week we would cash in the pennies for a sixpence, a shilling, and then a half a crown. I can't remember how many weeks was it more than a month some of us were taken into Brentwood to see a movie we slipped away. We went to the train station asked for two tickets to London. I don't remember. Did we talk about what we would do when we got to London. The stationmaster told us there was a train in two hours. We went into the waiting room and it wasn't twenty minutes before two policemen came in and asked us our names and where we lived. They drove us back to the Home. We were sent to our beds and the Irish girls were told to strap us down.

What will it take to forget. My father promised me that he would phone the Matron to let me know how my mother was after her operation. I went to the Matron's office and the third time I knew I just knew that dad had phoned. She said he hadn't. I lost it. I tore books off the walls, kicked the furniture and screamed at the



Matron. I was hauled off and shut in a closet. Dad was coming to see me so a little later the Matron told me that my dad had phoned and my mother was doing well.

I've already written about "Brian" and the engraved name on the banister in my long poem, "*mirage*." That was the second time I was put in the closet. It was horrendous. I peed and shit in my pants. First they sent Stanley. If I would say I did it, they would let me out. The next day they sent Jacqueline. Everyone knew we were friends. What the kids knew and the adults did not was that Jacqueline would climb into my bed and we'd sleep with our arms around each other. But I hadn't done it and I couldn't say that I had. I was in the closet from Wednesday till just before the Friday Sabbath when the door opened I was told to go and take a bath. With very red eyes I came down to supper.

Where shall I live  
When will I know  
It's safe for me  
To be me  
I want an arch  
A cave a ceiling  
Of my own  
Michelangelo  
Lying on his back  
Sees figures  
Eyes that rut  
Alms Alms  
Mr. Thomas banged my head  
On the blackboard  
Cohen  
Either you are going to become  
The prime minister of England  
Or the world's biggest jewel thief

Pause

Part 111

I'm told that there are people who say, "We never know what he is going to do next."

I'm told I'm a living legend  
I'm told I'm important  
I'm told I sit on my ass  
I'm told I'm the real thing  
I'm told there is no one like me  
I'm told I'm strong  
I'm told I paint like a young man  
I'm told I'm anti clerical  
I'm told I can have anything I want

Painters paint because they want to be famous

Growing up in England during the war, and with exception of my parents, my stay at the Home was the greatest influence on my future behavior. The education was wonderful I learned to teach myself. Altruism, Anarchy, Yellow, White, and Red believe Grey comes out and is sent to the cleaners for winter storage so the moths won't eat him. Grey surprises everyone when Grey comes home all the other colors take note. Grey is the emotional divider, the sectarian that travels, and the altruist that asks that you give. Grey is a space, a volume I depend on him as I depend on light.

Pause

There are two large paintings downstairs  
Both are titled "Looking for The Green Man"  
Both of them are mixed-media on canvas  
Brushes rags and Bounty paper towels  
Charcoal paste Higgins ink  
Oil paint oil sticks Library chalk  
Endless corners concrete illusions  
The destination is clear  
The edge is the wonder of instability  
Square it rotate it  
Digest it devour it  
Divide it the edge  
Is the wonder of instability  
On the walls of the caves

Unfinished business  
The male ruts  
The female is swollen  
Memory is a continuous fluid  
From the abstract to the figure  
From the figure to the abstract  
If it fails begin again

Our garden isn't a garden  
It's a Green backyard  
Bricks and walls  
Windows  
Locust trees  
Taller than the house  
Watch the birds  
Watching  
JFK LaGuardia  
Bring it home  
Bring it home  
Those who have  
And those that will  
Leave home  
Meet strangers  
And learn to draw

Pause

I was so determined to have nothing stop me that I didn't see what was staring me in the face. I paint because I want to. I paint because calligraphy is for lovers. The Cantata tells the story. I wanted everything and I wanted nothing. And I feared it would be taken away from me. Because of the ambiguities that I work into my paintings I would have had trouble having my painting accepted. It hasn't helped that I gave myself and I think everyone else mixed messages. Consequently a gallery has never represented my work. I do have to say except for a few people who I will not name the rejection of my work has been impersonal.

Take stock  
And drink  
To the future  
Horns  
Drums  
Strings  
Sidewalks  
A bass  
Pastoral  
Niagara Falls  
The Maid of the Mist

Pause

Last night I saw the moon was hand held  
I saw faces relatives I never knew  
Towns and cities I have never visited  
I walked up a very narrow steep alley  
There was a square and a church  
St. George and the Dragon  
The old university with very large wooden doors  
And a house with a third floor window  
I was certain that I had lived in that house  
I was sure I had studied there  
I was positive that I had  
Grown old and been respected  
I was disappointed with the sandwich  
With the Swiss Deutsch that I didn't understand  
Ah, but the Rhine and the naked  
Men and women swimming  
Cook fish to perfection

It was weeks before I realized I had come upon the square in Basle Switzerland that Hans Holbein described in one of the letters that he wrote to either his wife or was it his father. And then maybe it wasn't in any of the letters that the young teacher read to me. It's possible that the teacher described the square and the architecture it contained to give me a picture of where Holbein came from.

Pause

Dairies, memoirs, denials, inhibitions the truth! True Caroline was always courageous. Intuition told her she had a future. We know that Caroline destroyed her childhood memoirs. She and William were disciplined romantics. But unlike Anne Frank Caroline did not want anyone to know her family's business.

My cousin John Hershel Shepherd phoned. "We've done it you said you wanted to be an artist and I wanted to be a judge. I've been made an appellate judge. I open the books as our great grandfather did (he was a judge in The London Beth Din, the Court of the Chief Rabbi and the oldest Jewish court in London.) Johnny said, "Most of my cases are routine but then there is the one that sets precedent."

Pause

King George III and William Herschel never spoke German to each other they only spoke English. The King and the Astronomer had accents. They were foreigners and they had something to prove.

King George was good to the Herschel's he gave William a stipend and sponsored many of William's investigations and in time with diplomatic prodding from William and with the help from Joseph Banks Queen Charlotte bestowed a yearly stipend on Caroline. She became an independent woman and when William married a wealthy widow she was vexed because she had to leave her brother's house. But given their common interests Caroline and her sister-in-law became very close.

Caroline doted on her nephew John Herschel he got married had twelve children and a flamboyant career. As an old lady Caroline returned to Hanover Germany. Caroline the sister of William Herschel the aunt of John Herschel. She was *the ladies' comet hunter*. She built her own telescopes was admired by men and women. I don't know if Caroline fully recovered from the abuse she took as a child and young adult but Caroline combated the cruelty she received in her early years she fixed her telescope on a monster star of comparable courage.

Bewitched by artifact  
Contradictions mount  
And memories exercise  
Our heart and chest  
Our heart and chest  
Breathe solitude  
A lone Oboe explores  
The unknown clause  
The unknown clause  
Calculates  
Diction chimes  
Bring it home  
Bring it home  
The desert  
The Sphinx  
The life we  
Live  
Springs  
Green footing  
PASS - OVER  
PASS - OVER  
Space is  
The armature  
A provider  
The arbiter  
Of things  
To come  
The past is  
The past is  
But one corner  
Of a square  
That contains  
Two triangles  
A pyramid  
And an all  
Seeing eye  
And an all  
Seeing eye  
Mirrors  
The Deep  
Deep  
Continuous  
Creation

**Sir John Frederick William Herschel, 1st Baronet KH, FRS** (March 7, 1792 – May 11, 1871) [2] was an [English mathematician](#), [astronomer](#), [chemist](#), and experimental [photographer](#)/inventor, who in some years also did valuable [botanical](#) work.[2] He was the son of astronomer [Sir Friedrich Wilhelm Herschel](#) and the father of 12 children.[2]

Herschel originated the use of the [Julian day](#) system in [astronomy](#). He named seven [moons of Saturn](#) and four [moons of Uranus](#). He made many contributions to the science of photography, and investigated [colour blindness](#) and the chemical power of [ultraviolet](#) rays.