

younger poets, including Christopher Reid, David Sweetman, and others, who have collectively been labeled the Martian poets or the Metaphor Men. It may be that the Martian tag is a misrepresentation, as Peter Conrad has pointed out. Raine's work is very much of this world, indeed his passion is all for the domestic and ordinary, however he transforms it. Metaphoric he certainly is, and perhaps neo-Elizabethan would be the most apposite description of his faith in wit. Just as one accepts the seriousness of Donne or Joyce through a barrage of invention, so too one must recognize that Raine's agile wit is an inseparable part of his devotion to the real world. If his apparent confidence and faith in a real world have a sentimental naiveté about them, they also make possible an energy which has been absent in too much recent British poetry. His future development must be of great interest to anyone seriously

concerned with the future of the poetic imagination.

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Tom Raworth

(19 July 1938-)

Kit Robinson

SELECTED BOOKS: *The Minicab War*, by Raworth, Anselm Hollo, and Gregory Corso (London: Matrix, 1961);
The Relation Ship (London: Goliard, 1966; London & New York: Cape Goliard/Grossman, 1969);
Continuation (London: Goliard, 1966);
Haiku, by Raworth, Hollo, and John Esam (London: Trigram, 1968);
The Big Green Day (London: Trigram, 1968);
Betrayal (London: Trigram, 1969);
A Serial Biography (London: Fulcrum, 1969; Berkeley: Turtle Island, 1977);
Lion Lion (London: Trigram, 1970);
Penguin Modern Poets 19, by Raworth, John Ashbery, and Lee Harwood (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971);
Moving (London & New York: Cape Goliard/Grossman, 1971);
Act (London: Trigram, 1973);
Pleasant Butter (Northampton & Paris: Blue Pig/Sand Project, 1973);
Back To Nature (Bexleyheath, U.K.: Joe Dimaggio, 1973);

Ace (London: Goliard, 1974; Berkeley: The Figures, 1977);
Bolivia, Another End of Ace (Kent, U.K.: Secret Books, 1974);
That More Simple Natural Time Tone Distortion (Storrs: University of Connecticut Library, 1975);
Cloister (Northampton & Paris: Blue Pig/Sand Project, 1975);
Common Sense (Healdsburg, Cal.: Zephyrus Image, 1976);
The Mask (Berkeley: Poltroon, 1976);
Logbook (Berkeley: Poltroon, 1977);
Sky Tails (Cambridge, U.K.: Lobby, 1978);
Four Door Guide (Cambridge, U.K.: Street Editions, 1979);
Nicht Wahr, Rosie? (Berkeley: Poltroon, 1980);
Writing (Berkeley: The Figures, 1982);
Tottering State, Selected and New Poems 1963-1983 (Great Barrington, Mass.: The Figures, 1984).

RECORDING: *Little Trace Remains of Emmett Miller*, Stream Records, 1969.

OTHER: *Weapon Man* (broadside poem) (London: Goliard, 1965);

From the Hungarian (translations, with Val Raworth) (mimeo, Bowling Green, Ohio, 1973; Healdsburg, Cal.: Zephyrus Image, forthcoming).

PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS: "Journal," *New World Journal* (Spring 1979): 126-134; "Heavy Light," *Heretic*, no. 1 (1981); "Catacoustics," *This*, no. 12 (1983).

Tom Raworth stands out as perhaps the most elusive—and at the same time the most sensitive to contemporary realities—of postwar poets in Britain. English critic Eric Mottram has called him "the best we have," and his reputation in America, particularly among those who also read recent American poetry, is unequaled by any of his fellow countrymen. The poetry and prose of Tom Raworth is marked by a razor-sharp attention to detail and mercurial mental shifts. When he reads his poetry, his delivery is the fastest in the business, but what is remarkable is the range of expression he gets without slowing the pace. His collaborations with artists and printers make his books some of the loveliest, and oddest, to be found.

Thomas Moore Raworth's parents were Roman Catholic, his Irish mother by birth, his father by conversion. When Tom was two his father left to serve in World War II and did not return until the boy was seven. "I can remember learning to read at 4," Raworth writes, "Clearly, because the teacher (Miss Firth) was showing my mother what I could do with a book that must have been something like 'Ivor the Engine'; because I got stuck at the end of a sentence and she said, 'It's what your father's in,' and I said, 'Army.' The word was 'signals' . . . he was a radio operator with the XIV Army in India, Ceylon and Burma." Tom grew up in a semidetached house on the border between North West Kent and London and went free to grammar school after the labour government's education act, but he left at sixteen out of boredom. Along with his parent's religion and musical taste, he rejected their belief in the desirability of a university education. So he went to work, first as a clerk in an insurance company, then booking films into cinemas, packing costume jewelry, shipping cans of fruit, selling expensive china (where he met Jayne Mansfield), laboring on a construction site (building Erith Power Station), and, by 1956, at age eighteen, after failing the army medical exam and having a hole in his heart sewn up, typing lists of drugs in the basement office of a pharmaceuticals company. There



Joanna Voit

Tom Raworth

he and another employee began to write a secret-agent novel, circulating the manuscript through the company's internal mail system (parts of it are published in *A Serial Biography*, 1969).

The milieu in which Tom Raworth came of age may shed light on the almost fastidious precision of his writing, its latent nastiness and diffident charm. Jeff Nuttall has related "the cool" in Raworth's work to his early identification with the youth culture of the "Teds." "It is the cool," he writes, "which is the articulation of pride and arrogance that the young English working class formulated for themselves in the 1950's. It is the cool of the drape suit and the blue suede shoes. . . . Teddy boys cultivated an elaborate etiquette, an incredible pitch of vanity."

In his youth Raworth frequented all-night jazz clubs and played piano in a short-lived jazz combo. Adopting the style and dress of the Teddy boys, he lived a life replete with violent interludes. As he records in *A Serial Biography* (1969), "I learned to always strike the first blow when the tension mounts . . . once that's done, to never relax the pressure."

Raworth recalls of his marriage, during the late 1950s, "Val and I met in an elevator and got married." Geoffrey Moorhouse's 1963 article in the *Guardian* profiles the young poet at twenty-five, still

uncertain about his writing, but already underway as a publisher printing his own magazine, *Outburst*, on a secondhand treadle press. At that time he and his wife had two children, with another on the way, and Moorhouse noted, "At the moment the family is going through a small financial crisis . . . and Raworth is taking pills to hold down his appetite to the need for breakfast and nothing more than the odd cup of tea and biscuits each day."

At this time he began making contact with poets: Michael Horowitz and other jazz poets of the London subbeat scene, as well as Andrew Crozier, Anselm Hollo, Piero Heliczer, and David Ball. In addition to *Outburst*, which included work by Americans Robert Creeley, Ed Dorn, Charles Olson, Philip Whalen, LeRoi Jones, Larry Eigner, and Gregory Corso, he published three small books under the imprint of Matrix Press: Dorn's *From Gloucester Out*, Heliczer's *& I Dreamed I Shot Arrows in My Amazon Bra*, and Hollo's *History*. In 1965, he and Barry Hall began Goliard Press, publishing books by Ron Padgett, Tom Clark, Charles Olson, and J. H. Prynne. Hall and Raworth also set type for Asa Benevise's Trigram Press, and Stuart Montgomery's Fulcrum Press, including Basil Bunting's *Briggflats* (1966). In 1967, they were approached by the publishing house of Jonathan Cape, to whom they had been recommended by poet Nathaniel Tarn as a "good small poetry" section. Hall accepted the offer and so began Cape Goliard Press, which was to publish Olson's *The Maximus Poems* (1970). Raworth, foreseeing an imminent loss of autonomy, withdrew. At that time he was offered, through Donald Davie and Ed Dorn, who had both been teaching at the University of Essex, a place there to continue his education. (Davie had been impressed with Raworth's first collection of poetry, *The Relation Ship*, 1966.) The family moved to Colchester. That summer Raworth did his first public reading, for Tom Pickard, at Morden Tower, Newcastle. In 1969, when Cape Goliard reprinted *The Relation Ship*, it won the Alice Hunt Bartlett prize, then Britain's major poetry award.

The poems in *The Relation Ship* are condensed instants in the language of daily life, marking quick shifts of attention. They register specific, isolated points of view extended, or distended, in time, recording momentary distractions, sound interference, sudden memory, views through glass, mirrors, funny and awkward social complications, frustration at failure to push past immediate conditions, and refusal to pretend more. The poem "Anniversary" begins, "the train runs, trying to reach the end of the darkness," and ends, "the six of

us move in the night/each carrying a different colored torch." The writing appears as a train—landscape rushes past; the subject: isolate individuals in the dark, moving in relation, creating abstract patterns. There is a tribute to the American gangster film and by extension to American writing in "I Mean," where Raworth's quote from Sam Fuller's screenplay for *Pickup on South Street* (1953)—

jean peters to widmark "how'd
you get to be this way?
how'd i get this way? things
happen, that's all. . . ."

—might stand as a description of the making of the poems as well. They are notations of events occurring in real time without explanatory padding, and the tone switches quickly to bespeak love, song, spleen, wit, vulnerability, and rage. A sequence of journal poems entitled "Six Days," written in Paris (some time between 1962 and 1966) in the tiny garret room of Raworth's friend David Ball, it is a running account, in long lines, of perception and desire, a witty romance set in the remains of European modernism, with French, British, and American language ironically juxtaposed. Following this sequence is an additional poem, "The Wall," written after Raworth went to work as an international telephone operator. It is a "tired poem . . . written after working 12 or 14 hours . . . trying to get what was happening, what I'd been thinking about sitting there facing those flickering lights . . . talking to people in German and French . . . playing records . . . playing with the machinery. . . ." Later, "A Pressed Flower" was added, a domestic poem celebrating the birth of a child, and ending, again, with the image of a telephone:

at the other end of the line i say
there is no answer but the room there
is filled with people looking at the phone

The poem is both the record of a mind's activity (subject) and an enigmatic artifact (object), both clear and opaque. After the event it resists comprehension, like a telephone no one can answer.

In *The Big Green Day* (1968), its title taken from a line in Ted Berrigan's *The Sonnets* (1967), increased clarity of focus is brought to bear on the poem as a miniature, packed with detail stripped of context. The opener, "Who Is Hannibal's Descendant Leading His Elephants Against the Tanks?" is a beautiful condensation of faceted images—horse, flower, and woman. That woman is "all the women i

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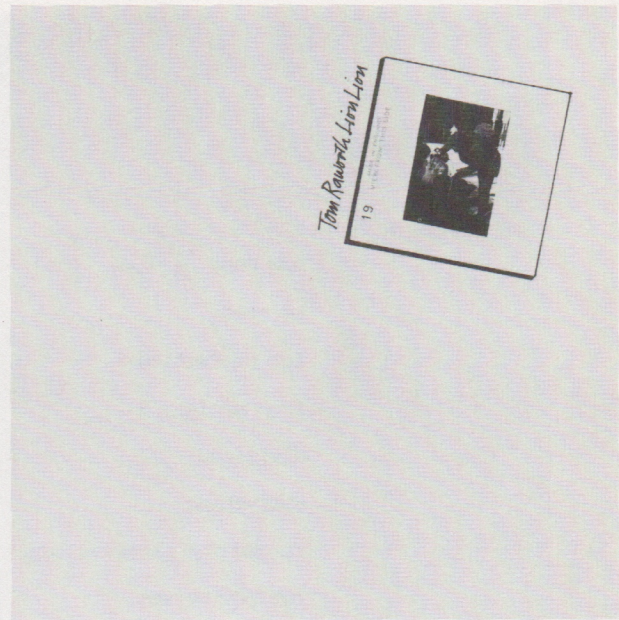
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poet's life. Subjects include thoughts in a sensory deprivation chamber, scenes from childhood, fragments from his early collaborative secret-agent novel, courtship and seduction, nights on the jazz scene, married life, and imaginary days on the job. The author's persona, rendered through both the first and third person as well as through various proper names, is not so much a character as a shifting locus for sensation and cognition. The realities disclosed are splintered and interstitial. As Ed Dorn has written of *A Serial Biography*, "One of the basic honesties of this writing is the constant attention to the multiplicity of location perception can take: faced with any reality we are no longer of one piece. . . . The scattering is a realism."

Lion Lion (1970) was written in 1968, when Raworth traveled to Spain, where he studied Spanish at the University of Granada as part of his University of Essex degree program. Revolution was in the air, there as elsewhere in Europe. The specific nature of Raworth's political involvement is not known. It is doubtful he took a leadership role, but perhaps his status as a foreign student was enough to cast suspicion on him. He made his exit, by plane from Malaga, just ahead of a rumored deportation order. *Lion Lion* is a set of witty, elusive verses, undercutting their own connotations at breakneck speed. The title poem begins where *The Relation Ship* left off, with the obdurate inscrutability of the message "found." The poet is not being deliberately obscure, nor holding back secret meanings. His verse is enigmatic precisely because the words are written down as they occur to him. Further, in "South America," the possibility of error takes on new value—"as in the progress of art the aim is finally/to make rules the next generation can break more cleverly"—so that, by breaking with convention, mistakes may render improved results ("he sees he has written pain for paint and it works better"). Raworth appears here as a combination inventor and escape artist, whose vocation is to devise airtight security systems from which he must then proceed to spring himself.

Logbook (1977), ephemeral prose written in Colchester in 1970, extends the prose fragmentation of *A Serial Biography* to the form of the book itself. Its first page, numbered 106, begins, "would have explained it." Then the "message in a bottle" motif is introduced: "The third day of our voyage was perilous. Multitudinous seas incarnadine. But the small craft that came out to meet us contained us and went sailing into the sunset, carrying only ten pages of my logbook (106, 291, 298, 301, 345, 356, 372, 399, 444 and 453), slightly charred by the slow



Front cover for Raworth's 1970 collection of poems, with a slide of Raworth by Angela Duthie

still silent instant." In fact, these are the only pages included in the book, each beginning and ending in mid-sentence. The sea-voyage theme, as in the nineteenth-century adventure novels of Jules Verne or Robert Louis Stevenson, suggests its obverse, the cozy, bourgeois domesticity by which the individual is secured from imagination's perilous seas (a boat is a room). But the violent swiveling and physical rupture of Raworth's prose, with the explosion of the image bank depicted in Frances Butler's illustrations, signals the obsolescence of western cultural icons, a space where, by a kind of Doppler effect, objects only get further away, a world in which "all books are dead & we live where the edges overlap."

Moving (1971) pursues the record/object problem entered in *The Relation Ship* and this time treats it as a kind of game. One section, "Stag Skull Mounted," is a notebook poem with entries labeled with time and date. Toward the end there is a reduction of the journal to a series of reflexive, one-word entries—such as "word," "poem"—ending with "this trick doesn't work." The project becomes one of tracking the poetic impulse, a game of recording in real time. And as soon as this game has defined and refined its own rules, the poet quits.

The next book, *Act* (1973), is in sections: A revision game with changes drawn in and printed over in purple ink, short poems, and prose notations proposing Raworth's first extensive published

JUICE

how many ~~of them~~
 we need
 for protection
 from society's
 divisions
 everything
 tagged for preservation
~~but now we see~~
~~more~~
~~before~~
 in blue moonlight
 ice glistens
 in snowprints
 crackles
 carrying wet coal
 in an old iron casserole
 "i didn't imagine
 you couldn't have"
 looking away
 to reality
 long shadows
 from scattered stones
 hours of nothing
 for one small gleam
 huffing

how many
 of them
 we need
 for protection

but we see more
 below blue moonlight
 ice glistens

Revised typescripts (the author)

JUICE

polishing
 shielding my eyes
 from its palpable glow
 to stamp the image
 hopping black across the sky
 thought after thought
 that link alone
 flesh to invisible bone
 remembering
 imagining
 reasoning
 whang
 through the right hemisphere
 there
 only *is only*
 is silence *silence*
 filled with sound
 flagstones
 disappearing
 into night
 as water
 at a loose end
 this drifts along
 press button
 for date
 describing
 a moving image
 'lots of collectors'
 'art's running out'
 babies aware

thoughts on poetics. The theme is sounded in these verse lines:

for god's
sake
stay open
to your time

what's done
is

*

nothing

lasts

*

we
are
now.

The notations sketch the rude outlines of a radical constructivism: "the true direction is always a glancing off—there must be an out—all truth is not contained in the language: it *builds* the language." Against a picture of language as a container, a generalizing circumscription of knowledge, Raworth proposes that the truth, true seeing, generates language in increments which work as tools to further sharpen the perceptions. In this view, reality is not static, but dynamic. The immediate record of cognition is itself an act and creates change.

The insistence on invention and the present makes Raworth severely skeptical of theory, including his own:

the critics almost invariably concentrate on what should be subliminal—they spread the jam so thin it loses its taste—using the past to hold you in their present. . . .

i confess: i have become an explainer
i have fallen onto description's other side.

Through American painter Jim Dine, Raworth met American poet Kenneth Koch and subsequently was invited to read in New York. From there he traveled by Greyhound to Iowa City, where Anselm Hollo was teaching in the University of Iowa creative writing program. More trips followed, including visits to San Francisco and Toronto. From 1972 to 1977, he stayed, with his family, in

America, where he taught at Bowling Green, lived in Mexico City, taught again in Chicago and in Austin, and finally moved to San Francisco. When he returned to England it was to take up as poet-in-residence at King's College, Cambridge, where the Raworths have continued to reside.

If art is a game of making and breaking rules, such that mistakes may render improved results by violating pre-established definitions, then "Every act/re-aligns your boundaries" ("Homily," from *Act*). Raworth's sense of himself as a poet has extended beyond the boundaries of English poetry. "There's an English insular sense that I sometimes feel oppressed by," he has said, "That I don't see any point in. . . . I don't really see any reason in terms like English poet." His forays into European and Latin and North American language and life make his work international.

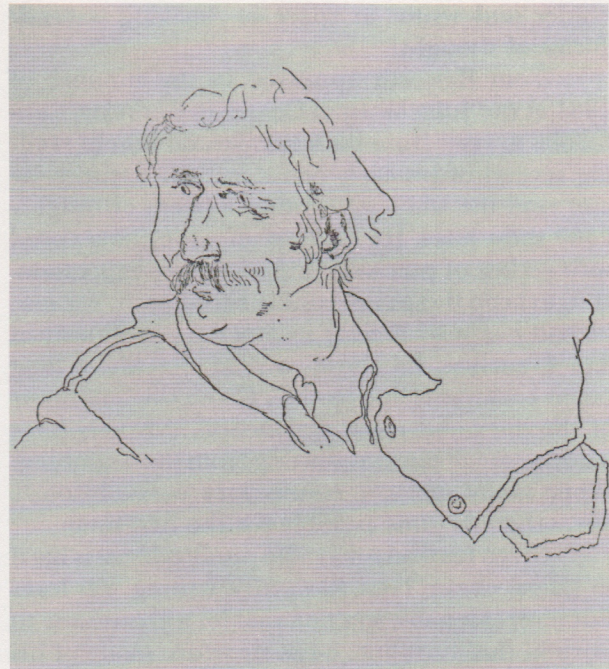
The art of poetry exercises the ear and the eye, and Raworth's work keeps both at play. The forms of his books have themselves been made subjects for experiment, as in the case of *Common Sense* (1976), printed with illustrations by Michael Myers, on a small spiral-ring dime-store notebook; *Logbook* (1977), a pseudojournal with lavish double-page psychotropic images by Frances Butler; and *Writing* (1982), printed on pages fourteen inches wide with seven narrow columns per double-page spread. Musically, the poems manifest a keen ear for rhythmic change and a rare ability to "play it by ear." Raworth has been said to sit at the piano playing random notes as he reads, or whistle snatches of tunes between tapping out lines at the typewriter.

Raworth's sense of the poem as record of an immediate ongoing present may reflect the poetics of Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, and Charles Olson, but Raworth eschews specific influences, wary of situations where literature perpetuates itself out of reading; and to keep free of such disturbance, he seems to have steered his own course round the masters. Of his own process he has said, "My method is the essence of simplicity. I write down fragments of language passing through my mind that interest me enough after thought has played with them for me to imagine I might like to read them. What form that documentation takes doesn't interest me as an intention, but only as the most accurate impression of the journey of interest." In the collection *Nicht Wahr, Rosie?* (1980), Raworth supplies notes to the poem "El Barco del Abismo," revealing the genesis of each line. What is significant in this unpacking of the materials of the poem is the privacy of the notes. They are details as mysterious in themselves as the

lines they apparently occasioned. In a 1972 interview Raworth stated, "I really have no sense of questing for knowledge. At all. My idea is to go the other way, you know. And to be completely empty and then see what sounds. . . . Boredom, trust and fun are the key words somehow. . . ." Boredom occurs as a limit. Attention shifts radically whenever ideas sounded in the writing point toward an endless exposition of the already known. Trust enables the writer to step into linguistic space and to accept those events which occur singularly there, without recourse to precedent or outside authority. Fun is obviously of the essence throughout. The author's enjoyment of the writing activity comes across as an intense, and sometimes a perverse glee.

In the poem "Shoes," from *The Big Green Day*, a series of elements—shoes, leather, cows, milk, baby, child—are linked in a ring. The series is not simply a conceit but a result of the brain's firing across language circuits ignited by feeling. The process of association at play is exposed in *A Serial Biography*: "It became impossible for him to stop playing the game. You're not normal she told him. I've never been a garage. The visitors looked at him puzzled. And how could he explain to them the chain: normal norman norman norman mailer norman mailer the deer park deer park dear park dear expensive a dear park park a car park a dear car park a garidge at claridge's garage." The links in the chain here presented are usually left out in the poem. The lines then occur as poles defining mental space. In *The Mask* (1976), one of Raworth's more minimal works, ephemeral entries, some smaller than one word, are separated by five-pointed stars. In *That More Simple Natural Time Tone Distortion* (1975) and *Ace* (1974), which sports a red star on its blue cover, the asterisks are gone and the problem of large structure is entered. Raworth's solution is to let the lines roll in series, leaving readers to form sequence and division where and as they may.

Ace is an exploration of discontinuous language in continuous time. The language of the poem is composed of bits (short lines) which, by virtue of a polyvalent syntax, can point forward and/or back. There is no punctuation. Meaning is dependent on where the mind locates its attention within the continuum and how it groups the particles. Each language event (line) qualifies what has come immediately before and violates any totalization prior to it. Time destroys fixed ideas. *Ace* represents a kind of realism, not by pretense of verisimilitude but by thinking in flux. Thus, meaning is never static. This mode is expanded in *Writing* (1982),



Drawing of Raworth by Barry Flanagan

where the poet states, "with such/limited information/many connective/gestures/remain unseen/both beginning/and end/being necessary/to between." *Ace*, *Writing*, "Catacoustics," and "West Wind" exist in a continual between.

In *Writing* the large structure, simply a sequence of quickly hinging short lines separated occasionally by stanza breaks, is open enough to allow virtually anything into the poem. There is a "work within a work" motif, introduced by quotation marks, such as "page one the title/'CREDLITY,'" or,

i sleep
but not before writing
"A BEHAVIORIST VIEW OF CHANGE."

Brief perceptions, jokes, or meditations are embedded in the ongoing writing. Various themes run through like multicolored threads. The poem evinces a principled restlessness with given ideas: "how vain our comfy knowledge" and "o for more works of reference." There are bits of story and turns of phrase from Welsh legend, drawn from reading and conversation with Valarie Raworth, who is Welsh. The archaic material is deployed in alphabetical wordplay. "Any interpretation by any reader will do." The book is dedicated "to the moles and to the bats." It is a kind of soundgram, locating

reader and writer in space by "making natural/forms of thought."

Tom Raworth appeared in the summer of 1981 at the Julia Morgan Center in Berkeley, California, to read from his work. In addition to reading several of his early books in their entirety, he also read the whole of *Writing*, a poem of roughly 2500 short lines. He kept up an astonishing speed with no loss of precision or variation of expression. But, to keep things interesting for himself, because he had just read *Writing* several days previously in San Francisco, he chose to read the whole long poem backward, line by line. Given the autonomy of the lines and rapid disjunction, this may have made as much sense as starting from the beginning. While many syntactic connections were obviously lost, others became possible for the first time.

Given his disdain for the predictable, it is hard to guess where Tom Raworth's writing will lead. But it is reasonable to think that he will continue to work in the short line, large structure mode of his most recent poems, possibly extending that out into an epic-length work. And the adventurous prose may find subject matter well suited to its dispersive qualities in the upcoming final decades of the twentieth century. As each work presents the poet with a limit, his powers of invention, and violation, are bound to be tested.

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 Geoffrey Ward, "On Tom Raworth," *Perfect Bound* (Winter 1976-77): 14-19;
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Papers:

The Wilbur Cross Library at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, has a collection of Raworth's papers.

Peter Reading

(27 July 1946-)

Alan Jenkins

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C (London: Secker & Warburg, 1984).

Peter Reading is one of the most inventive, idiosyncratic, and challenging of English poets under the age of forty. The son of Wilfred Reading, an electrical engineer, and Mary Catt Reading, he was born in Liverpool, and educated at the Alsop High School and Liverpool College of Art, where he trained as a painter and earned a B.A. degree in 1967 (it would be tempting to trace "painterly" con-