



The Book Artist

THE BOOK AS THE TROJAN HORSE OF ART: WALTER HAMADY, THE PERISHABLE PRESS LIMITED AND GABBERJABBS 1-6

Walter Hamady's combination of iconoclasm/craft, art/daily life, and sophistication grounded in physiology and earthiness set his work apart. "The Book as the Trojan Horse of Art" explores these themes while the article itself mirrors, in its form, Hamady's attitude toward the book as a reflective vehicle in its ability to break and intersect narrative lines, play with syntax, integrate found materials, and convey enigma, paradox and information all at once.

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We are all of us in the gutter,¹ but some of us are looking at the stars.

Oscar Wilde

On May 1, 1991, I visited Minor Confluence Tree Farm, Walter Hamady's home and the site of the Perishable Press Limited, "located 5.3 miles southwest of Mount Horeb Wisconsin."² What follows is the product of the conversation recorded that day, of the letters that heralded and succeeded it and, most importantly, of the hours spent in the Rare Books Department at the University of Wisconsin's Memorial Library (with views of the State Capitol and Lake Mendota—this is a mid-western project from start to finish), hours spent not just reading, but handling and looking at Hamady's extraordinary books.³ It is because few of the readers of this essay will, I imagine, have that opportunity (at least immediately), that I shall try to convey something of the flavor of Hamady, the man and the work, through the form and not just the content of my text. I shall do so

¹ The subject of the present essay would call this a "buzz-word." All quotations and illustrations from his work are reproduced with the kind permission of Walter Hamady and The Perishable Press Limited.

² Printing and binding are done in what was originally the parlor of the farmhouse. The immense barn, about a hundred feet away, is given over to papermaking, collage and sculpture, and is divided into areas for "wet dirty work" and "dry" ditto. All work areas, whether in the barn or pressroom, are in apple-pie order.

The precise location of the press, "5.3 miles southwest of Mount Horeb Wisconsin," is a regular feature of Hamady's distinctive, some might say idiosyncratic, colophons. Typical in its precision, it is evidence (a) of the printer's obsessive concern for exact measurement and (b) of Hamady's particular interest in mapping and terrain. As a young man, he had wanted to be a geologist and remains enamored of geological survey maps, especially maps of "driftless Wisconsin."

The site of the press is fully described in the "Colophonic Postface" to Book 95 *The Selection of Heaven*, text by Paul Blackburn, illustrated by Walter Hamady, 1980:

To sustain the sharp division between "those who hate and those who love" e.g. bibliophiles vs. human beings; false rigidity vs. life and so on, we need to clarify (with reader's indulgence) where are these books made? minor confluence is just that, coming together at the south end of our farm which is in the part of Wisconsin that was sur/rounded three times by the continental glacier but never was penetrated or covered. Geologists term this the driftless area which is within the us postal bailiwick of Mt. Horeb—so no need for confusion—it is possible to be in multiple places at the same time! Western Hemisphere North America Midwest Northern Interior Upper US Pecatonica Watershed Dane County Perry Township Lee Valley Road the Southwest Quarter of the Southwest Quarter of the Northwest Quarter of section 33, Township 5, North, Range 6 East of the 4th Principle Meridian Military Grid coordinants 7149.

³ I have received generous help in this enterprise from members of the staff at Memorial Library. Wonne Schofer, humanities bibliographer, introduced me to Hamady over a memorable luncheon, John Tedeschi, senior academic librarian and head of Rare Books, encouraged the project from the start, while Barbara Richards, Jill Rosenshield, and Susan Ehler made repeated access to the Perishable Press collection easy and my visits to Rare Books pleasant as well as profitable.

by adopting a narrative mode not usually associated with the scholarly essay (though it is characteristic of the Perishable Press style) while at the same time exploiting what is perhaps the most distinctive feature of scholarly writing: the footnote. Thus, while there is a conscious departure from scholarly convention on the one hand, that very convention will be simultaneously privileged on the other: a strategy designed to reflect Hamady's practice, specifically in his *Gabberjabbs*.

For all his avowed "anti-academic" prejudice, Hamady loves footnotes provided they are, in his view, worthwhile. Thus, immediately before producing the first *Gabberjabb*, he had, he says, been "grievously offended" by the notes to a particular edition of *Moby Dick*, which he found were "trivializing the text" and hence a "waste of time." The footnotes to Allan W. Eckert's books he finds, by contrast, "fantastic," a pleasure to read because "they are another story in themselves," Eckert having "the good sense to keep his narrative separate and really electric."⁴ The disruption that continuously extensive notes produce in the chronology and "flow" of a text may thus have a positive effect, in Hamady's view, a view that has an immediate parallel for me in Derrida's "Living On," where the footnote is pushed as far as it can, or perhaps ought to, go.⁵ I don't go quite that far, but would nonetheless encourage the reader to follow the notes as she goes along.

With regard to convention, scholarly and otherwise, experience has confirmed that in Hamady's case it would indeed be foolish to anticipate the conventional from either the man or the work, but that equally, neither rejects convention indiscriminately or out of hand. Thus, by virtue of a certain robust courtesy (though uncompromisingly direct, he places great value on "good manners"), and of his celebratory if parodic exploitation of the conventions of the book, Hamady sets himself apart from more simply (not to say simplistically) iconoclastic artists. Furthermore his "answers" (books included), if they tend to be categorical, are not on that account to be taken as

⁴ Interview with Walter Samuel Haatoum Hamady, Minor Confluence, Mount Horeb Wisconsin, May 1, 1991. Allan W. Eckert (1931) is the author of twenty-eight works including *The Court Martial of Daniel Boone* (1973) and *The Wading Birds of North America* (1979) and over two hundred television scripts for *Wild Kingdom*.

⁵ See Jacques Derrida, "Living On," in *Deconstruction & Criticism*, Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey Hartman and J. Hillis Miller, (New York: Continuum, 1979), pp. 75–76.

necessarily final. For all his elaboration of the colophon,⁶ Hamady is not wholly bent on having the last word—or at least, allowing for his cheerfully and irrepressibly contentious disposition, not immediately.⁷ Thus R.S.V.P., rather than Q.E.D., is the device traceable, like a watermark, throughout the Perishable Press volumes,⁸ which are designed primarily, as I see it, to disrupt the practice of silent reading. This practice is at once the crowning achievement and the bane of the literate (hence a fortiori, the scholarly)—because while it implies comprehension, hence a certain mastery of the text, it simultaneously produces, and is indeed predicated on, a kind of tunnel vision. Thus, as Jean-François Lyotard argues in his important book, *Discours, figure*,⁹ we read fluently only at the cost of ceasing to see letters, registering their differential value within an alphabetic system at the expense of their form, not to speak of their composition, their disposition on the page.¹⁰

Similarly, literacy blinds us to what Hamady calls the “bookform” itself, which for the skilled reader paradoxically ceases to be a “spiritual instrument” (Mallarmé) in order to become instead a purveyor of information: the volume (or, in Hamady’s terms, “the picture plane”) disappearing from view in favour of its sole “content.”¹¹ Hamady’s books (specifically the *Gabberjabbs*) consciously

⁶ According to *The Chicago Manual of Style*, Thirteenth Edition, Revised and Expanded (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 30 (called by Hamady “the Oracle”), “An embellishment sometimes added on the last page of a specially designed and produced book is the colophon, in this sense not simply the publisher’s device, but an inscription including the facts of production . . . This practice is not so common in book publishing today as it once was.” Except at the Perishable Press, where it continues to flourish, recounting “facts of production” hitherto undreamed of.

⁷ Thus, when seeking working capital for the production of the magnificent and very costly *Flora*, (Book 114, 1990, text by Anne McGarrell, illustrations by Jack Beal), Hamady solicited advance orders exclusively from those of his subscribers who (in addition to paying promptly!) “almost always send some kind of a note to say something about the book they received; in other words encouraging me.” ML/WshH Interview, May 1, 1991.

⁸ Another buzz-word.

⁹ Paris: Klincksieck, 1974, currently being translated into English by the present author for Cambridge University Press.

¹⁰ See Mallarmé (an expert on typography) on *La Musique et les lettres*.

¹¹ See *Two Decades of Hamady and the Perishable Press Limited*, “PRE/FACE, IN LIEU OF,” np. “[T]he book is perhaps the most personal form an artist can deal with. It encompasses a multiple and sequential picture plane, it is tactile, and to be understood it must be handled by the viewer, who then becomes a participant. . . . The book as a structure is the Trojan horse of art—it is not feared by average people.”

resist such elision at the hands of the too adept reader, who, frustrated, is consequently obliged to regress and, in the process, to recapture something of the pleasurable mystery (and frustration) of pre-literacy: her customarily automatic decipherment of letters jammed for once by the bookform she is obliged to puzzle over, looking at it from different angles, in an effort to "read" it. The *Gabberjabbs* are designed to bring home to us that reading (even "regular" books) is a hands-on experience.

Hamady's inspired play with the conventions of text and bookmaking is closely linked to his production of collages and sculptures, and a retrospective exhibition, organized by the Charles A. Wustum Museum of Fine Arts, Racine, Wisconsin, March 17–April 28, 1991, has recently provided his fellow-midwesterners with an opportunity to view a representative selection of his oeuvre.¹² I shall limit my discussion here to the books (of which, at the time of writing, The Perishable Press Limited had published a total of one hundred and fifteen since its foundation in 1964, including superbly produced volumes of poetry by such writers as, in alphabetical order, Paul Blackburn, Robert Creeley, Galway Kinnell, Toby Olson, W.S. Merwin, Jerome Rothenberg, W.D. Snodgrass and Diane Wakoski) and specifically to the *Gabberjabb* series which now numbers six volumes, all represented at the Wustum. Here are the titles of the *Gabberjabbs*, as they appeared in the "Checklist of Pieces in the Exhibition":

- 1 Voltaire the Hamadeh (Walter Hamady); *Interminable Gabberjabs*; 11 x 6 1/2 inches; Book 61, 1973.
- 2 Walter Hamady; *Hunkering in Wisconsin Another interminable Gaggerblab* (a series), illustrated by Jack Beal; 8 1/2 x 6 1/4 inches; Book 62, 1974.
- 3 Walter Hamady; *Thumbnailing the Hilex/Gabberjabb Number 3*, Illustrated by Jack Beal; 15 x 7 1/2 inches; Book 69, 1974.
- 4 Walter Hamady; *The Interminable Gabberjabb Volume One (&) Number Four*, Illustrated with two photographs by Gregory Conniff; 6 1/2 x 10 inches; Book 70, 1975.

¹² Catalogue available. Hamady, who was born in Flint, Michigan, of a Lebanese father and an American mother in 1940, graduated from Wayne State University and Cranbrook Academy and settled in Wisconsin in 1966, is a midwestern artist with roots in the Levant. Hence Walter Semihittite Hamady (or WshH), one of the artist's many riffs on his name (Walter Samuel Haatoum Hamady). See note 103, *For The Hundredth Time Gabberjab Number Five*, where the full name is (first?) printed. It reads as follows: "(See 38, 42, 47 & 95) My father once told me that in the old country, Hamady is a common name and has 5 branches; this one is ours." The numbers refer to other footnotes, which are continuously numbered throughout all six volumes of the series. Much fun and frustration can be had by the reader willing to look them up. Reading the *Gabberjabbs*, especially number 6, means playing "Hunt the Footnote," among other games.

- 5 Walter Hamady; *For the Hundredth Time Gabberjabb Number Five*; Illustrated by Walter Hamady; 7 x 5 1/2 inches; Book 100, 1981.
- 6 Walter Hamady; *Neopostmodrinism or Dieser Rasen ist kein Hundeklo or Gabberjabb Number 6*, illustrated by Walter Hamady; 7 1/16 x 9 7/16 x 16x 7/8 inches; Book 113, 1988–89.¹³

The seventh, according to the latest available report, “is wandering round in my head and its parts are piling up in the barn and in this pressroom”—a heap to which these very pages may well contribute, if the artist’s declared intention holds. Thus

“I would love it,” he wrote, “if some ‘scholar-type’¹⁴ would go to the Gabberjabb as if unearthing them from a tomb in Egypt. And record and document what they present etc. Then I could use that text as a text for another Gabberjabb with my notes and comments etc. as per how they got it all wrong.”¹⁵

The last phrase might have been daunting had I not also been privy to WshH’s views on the fear of making mistakes and the inhibiting effect this can have on the creative impulse. Thus “What’s a mistake?” he asked rhetorically, in his kitchen in Mount Horeb, on May 1, 1991, before pronouncing mistakes to be no more than a useful means of advancing the work and/or of learning something new.¹⁶ There is nonetheless a difference between acknowledging and incorporating, hence profiting, from one’s own mistakes and having them identified

¹³ Henceforth referred to as *iG1* (for *Interminable Gabberjabb*) *iG2*, etc. The word “Gabberjabb,” which recalls Lewis Carroll’s “Jabberwocky,” was the bookmaker’s invention. He had not yet read Carroll at the time, and did not do so until he began to read *Alice in Wonderland* to his children, the first of whom was not born until 1975.

¹⁴ Palatino? Sabon Antiqua? Gill Sans? If I am to be a “scholar-type,” I fancy Bifur, designed by A.M. Cassandre for Deberny and Peignot in 1929, one of the typefaces used in *For The Hundredth Time Gabberjabb Number Five*. Clearly, “the Hamady heresy” (see *Interminable Gabberjabs*, 1973) is contagious.

¹⁵ Letter from WshH to ML, May 10, 1991. This sounds more disagreeable than it was intended to be and is symptomatic less of hostility towards individual scholars than of the artist’s frustration with the academic institution, which has such difficulty in evaluating and hence recognizing (in both senses of acknowledging and rewarding) creative as opposed to “scholarly” practices. That such an opposition should be so firmly established is, of course, a large part of the problem, calling for discussion and scrutiny which cannot be undertaken here. See, especially in this regard, *Neopostmodrinism or Dieser Rasen ist kein Hundeklo or Gabberjabb Number 6*.

¹⁶ Hamady’s books, even as they strive for perfection, are far from flawless, as he is the first to acknowledge. See, among many other examples, the colophon to *Hunkering in Wisconsin*, where we read that the type is Herman Zapf’s Palatino, which “is/was put into readable sequence with the hands (though the preceding page is a bit looking like it was set with the feet), no matter friends, perfection is dangerous to achieve usually arriving as a disguise—and ennnways flaws are necessary as the escape route for inadvertently [sic] trapped evil spirits.”

and exploited by others. Hamady himself, describing the creative process of which the work is the inevitably diminished product —what he calls his “art as shit” lecture¹⁷— was emphatic that the right to refer to his production in these terms belongs exclusively to the artist. “You can’t say my art is shit, only I can,” he warned: a sentiment I endorse, on the simple grounds that the digestive process is not transferable. But neither is reading, so that the misprisions, memory lapses and misinterpretations that inevitably mark every encounter with a text, when looked at from a certain angle, may be the only incontrovertible evidence available that a reading has actually taken place, the provenance of “correct” interpretations (so readily reproducible) being infinitely more difficult to determine. It is just this non-transferable quality of reading that the *Gabberjabbs*, with their demand for “heavy-duty reader participation,” bring to the fore.¹⁸ That, in turn, is what makes them at once so difficult to describe and so valuable an instrument for advancing our understanding of what books and reading are all about.

Given their heuristic, if not didactic, function, it is not surprising that this “Interminable” series originated in a pedagogical impulse, as the “Foreward [sic] Preface Acknowledgments Introduction” to the first volume (which did not know it was the first at the time, there being as yet no series)¹⁹ explains. Here is that inaugural text in full:

When Mary Roth asked where the acknowledgements page should go in her book and I told her the printer’s prerogative of: *put anything anyplace however you wish*

Not just necessary, but cherished. See colophon to Conrad Hilberry, *Housemarks*, illustrated by Walter Hamady; 5 x 4 inches; Book 97, 1980: “The paper is Canterbury from Barcham Green and lest you think all their work so flawed, these sheets are seconds which are much treasured here—as are all small events that show human process/humanity.”

Except perhaps in the case of the star-crossed *since man began to eat himself*, the 110th book from the Perishable Press Limited, a collaboration of six authors: (in the order of their appearance in the book) Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Kenneth Bernard, Allen Ginsberg, Toby Olson, Jerome Rothenberg, Joel Oppenheimer; illustrated with six etchings in seven plates by Warrington Colescott, produced by Hamady, bound by William Anthony and “signed by everybody,” where a succession of such “events” threatened to defeat the project. This book went through five dummies, of which the last was called “the rescue dummy.” See “Designing Literature,” *Fine Print: The Review for the Arts of the Book* 14:3, July 1988, p. 116.

¹⁷ A well-known topos of Western literature, with particular reference to writing, from Montaigne to Jean Genet and Samuel Beckett.

¹⁸ Colophon to *Thumbnailing The Hilex/Gabberjab Number 3*, 1974.

¹⁹ Derrida’s quite simple point, which commentary has so frequently and unnecessarily obscured.

and seeing the cheerful look of frustration I suggested *The Manual of Style* which she had consulted already and the printed Oracle said *it comes after the such and such* and of course she didn't have a such and such which reinvoked my original advice and provoked the form of this small raggy scrapmade volume in your hands.

As for strict adherence to the Oracle, a very slight amount of the hamady heresy managed to invade the fine intention and so here are some confessions: Notes should come after the Appendix so we used an old uterus instead. The only item left is the ear-numbering/tattooing device borrowed from Ivan²⁰ on Christmas, the outfit has but one each of characters and numbers so we have resourced again and the full account will go to the perishable press limited archive at SUNY at Stony Brook.

Wsh/ at the New Farm 28 December 1973²¹

The simplest way to describe the contents of this "raggy scrapmade volume" (made indeed of paper scraps during the Christmas vacation succeeding Mary Roth's question) is to reproduce the table of contents. Note that it begins, not where the majority of we purblind readers do, at "Text, first page of" (actually the *fourteenth* page) but at "endpaper" (stamped FRONT in the book itself with the aid of Ivan's ear-numbering/tattooing device, to distinguish it from its opposite number at the back of the book, appropriately stamped BACK).

Each page in the volume bears its name: "endpaper," "blank verso," etc. so that the parts of the book are spelled out for the reader, who is consequently obliged to take notice, perhaps for the first time, of the book's structure qua book. Here is the "official" description:

This is the first of a series of books which perhaps parody the structure and parts of the book. The type is hand-set Sabon Antiqua printed in red, brown, blue, black, pink and grey on/into a variety of Shadwell²² scraps in progressively different sizes. The edition is 120 copies handsewn into blue Fabriano Cover wrappers with U.S. Geologic Survey maps of the Blue Mounds region where the book and its events happened²³ (see figure 1).

The text, "For Ivan and Oral," is a poem describing the

²⁰ Ivan Staley, a neighboring farmer, to whom both the book and the text (*Interminable Gabberjabs* makes the distinction clear) is dedicated. Thus: "For Ivan who got it started & who wryly said, after I showed him how to make paper with your hands: Uhbleev U'd rather milk Cows."

The barn where WshH makes his paper was originally used for milking cows, and he continues to store his paper pulp in the stainless steel SOLAR MILK MINDER (after which he named one of his papers), letter to ML, May 10, 1991.

The ear-numbering/tattooing device is an instrument for marking livestock.

²¹ *Interminable Gabberjabs*, 1973, quoted from *Two Decades of Hamady and the Perishable Press Limited*, a slightly revised version of the original.

²² Shadwell is the generic name of the Perishable Press papers, so called in homage to Thomas Jefferson's birthplace.

²³ *Two Decades of Hamady and the Perishable Press Limited*.

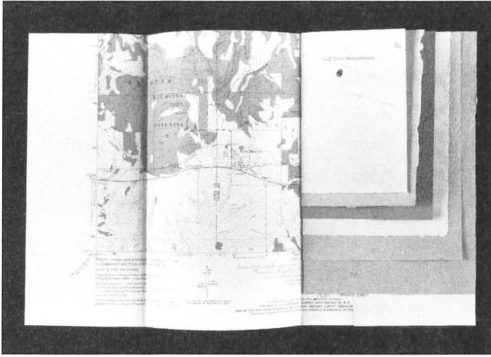


Figure 1
Voltaire the Hamadeh (Walter Hamady),
 Interminable Gabberjabbs, 1973,
 an edition of 120.

erection (in secret) of a one-hundred pound birdfeeder commissioned from Hamady by Oral as a Father's Day gift for her husband, Ivan. Before it was fully secured, a mighty storm, flattening crops, gardens etc., blew the whole thing down, while the birdfeeder-erection party and its beneficiary ate and drank heartily in the dark, the electric power having failed.

That a giant birdfeeder should play such a central role in the first *Gabberjabbs* is entirely appropriate, in view of the fact that building birdfeeders and elaborate clubhouses from lumber charged to his mother's account at the lumber yard was a recurring feature of Hamady's youth in Flint, Michigan. Hence, the "box" sculptures that mark the latest phase in his development have their origin, according to the artist, in this early activity, and are not, as has been suggested, an offshoot of his experiments with the bookform. Books, however, are also boxes, I would suggest, and in a metaphorical sense, houses too, feeders, even, of a sort, and one might argue that bookmaking and boxmaking come together in the initial *Interminable Gabberjabbs*: the construction of a book being the subject of the *volume*, and the construction of a birdfeeder the subject of the *text*.

"Charge it to Mother" was, on his own admission, the emblem of Hamady's growing up,²⁴ and the more closely one studies his books, the more evident and pervasive the influence of his mother, a practicing physician and a voracious reader with anglophile tastes, begins to appear. Asked when he first became involved with bookmaking, Hamady replied that he "grew up in a house full of books," which he and his sister had carte blanche to order

²⁴ ML/WshH interview, May 1, 1991.

and “charge to mother.” Add to this numerous subscriptions to a wide variety of American and English periodicals, as well as scientific and medical journals, and it is not surprising that, as he recalls, “There was a lot of stuff coming into that house.” Hearing that phrase, I made an immediate association to Hamady’s mature art: *Gabberjabbs*, collages and sculptures, all of them carefully constructed containers, dwelling places made out of and for “a lot of stuff.” He had expressed his admiration for Kurt Schwitters in the course of our conversation, and it seems to me that it is to Schwitters’ *Merzbilder* that Hamady’s art may most usefully be compared.²⁵ What distinguishes it, however, from Schwitters’ collages and assemblages and from the boxes of a Duchamp or a Joseph Cornell, is Hamady’s choice, in the *Gabberjabbs*, of the book as his medium, hence his experiments with expanding the book form.²⁶

In addition to being a “book-nut,” as he describes her, Hamady’s mother comes from Keokuk, Iowa,²⁷ coincidentally the birthplace of her contemporary, Harry Duncan, who was instrumental in “getting private printing going again in this country.”²⁸ It was while stopping over with a maternal aunt in Iowa City, en route to study the physiographic provinces of America in the Rockies, that Hamady, then in his early twenties, was shown Duncan’s work: his first encounter with handmade books. He subsequently met the artist and got his first demonstration in bookmaking, marveling that the product could look so much “like real books.”

Aside from its generally informing power, the influence of Hamady’s mother manifests itself in quite specific ways

²⁵ Schwitters and Hamady share not only a combination of a “dada” sensibility with bourgeois origins, but, arguably, an attachment to “the most banal bourgeois values and the most romantic sentiments” that does not preclude satire. Thus, Schwitters’ astoundingly popular poem, “An Anna Blume,” is described as “both a Dadaist poem with all its banalities and its nonsense, and a sentimentalized Expressionist one, for the bliss that goes with the banality is not entirely satirical.” See John Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, (need name of book) (New York, Thames & Hudson, 1985), p. 39; and Hamady, *The Interminable Gabberjabb Volume One (€) Number Four*; footnote 80 (referring to the title): “This is the title, the fourth in this gushy sentimental slob series.”

Coincidentally, Hamady’s second wife’s name is Anna, and title 115 from the press, *Of Boulders and Bolides*, “intended for Halcyon Days but arriving closer to Valentine’s” contains “writings by walter for his wife anna emilie.”

²⁶ See note 11 above.

²⁷ The midwestern origins of The Perishable Press Limited again assert themselves.

²⁸ ML/WshH interview.

in the initial *Gabberjabb*: first, as I have already suggested, in the giant birdfeeder, relic of the boyhood activity she subsidized; second, in the Geological Survey maps which form the binding (she was the first to interest the young Walter in topography and geology, teaching him how to read the landscape); and finally and most tellingly, in the “heretical” appendix page, illustrated, ostensibly for lack of the appropriate body part, by an engraving, “lifted” from *Gray’s Anatomy*, of a uterus.²⁹ Beneath this illustration is the admonition: “the appendix should not be a repository for odds and ends of the author’s research that he/she was unable to work into the text,” which sounds like the Oracle, i.e. *The Manual of Style*, though my edition (the thirteenth, 1982, hence posthumous to *Interminable Gabberjabs*) gives: “The appendix should not be a repository for raw data that the author was unable to work into the text.”³⁰

I like to think that the persistence of images from *Gray’s Anatomy* throughout Hamady’s work is as much a tribute to his mother as to the skill of the anonymous engraver: the remarkable mother who in addition to giving him her own copy of *Gray’s Anatomy* to cut up for collage material (he has run through several more since) also gave him the more precious gift of his remarkably easy relationship to the body and its functions, high and low.

For the body is an integral part of the Perishable Press Limited experience: whether it be “the different papers that come from trying to reduce our supply of old towels, ties, jeans, sheets and shirts, so you could say our friends have slept on and worn this book,”³¹ the laborious setting of the type by hand, the hand-cranking of the Vandercook press, the hand-sewing of the binding, the sensual pleasures recorded in many a colophon and note, implicitly even the very name of the press itself, introduced in 1964, when Hamady published his first book, *The Disillusioned Solipsist*. Here is the “official” account of how the press got its name:

²⁹ See the “Foreward” quoted above. The source of the illustration is not acknowledged, but I make the assumption based on the colophon to *Hunkering in Wisconsin*, the second in the *Gabberjabb* series, where we read: “It never did said [sic] who illustrated iG1 & letters have not been pouring in. For those readers just popping with curiosity . . . the answer is we don’t know except that it might be the 19th century English anatomical engraver whose name has never been known to us.”

³⁰ One can only imagine what inspiration Hamady might have drawn from the phrase “raw data.”

³¹ Colophon to Walter Hamady, *In Sight of Bluemounds*, Book 52, 1972.

The press name came from an attempt to find another word beginning with the letter P to go with the word press—such complex ideas of youth! Thank heavens parthenogenetic wasn't chosen! As it was/is there has been a lot of criticism as per the name of the press (silly) vs. the quality and nature of the work (sometimes elegant, texts often serious etc. etc.) so at some point I had to make up a "real" reason why the name: Because it reflects the human condition which is both perishable and limited.³²

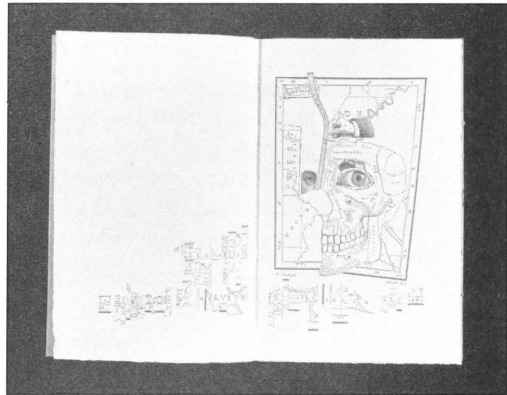
But the epigraph to *The Disillusioned Solipsist* reads in part as follows: "A man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion; for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him (Ecclesiastes three/twenty two)," and when Hamady "recycles" it for use in *Gabberjabb number 6*, he adds "thank you PHD doctor James for that grand course in the King James (no relation) at Wayne State in sixty four." I have seen the marked copy of the King James version of the Bible he still has from that course and am of the opinion that the "real reason why the name," far from being invented belatedly, was probably operative (if unconsciously) from the start. "The Perishable Press Limited" (the name) has of course acquired further resonance with the years, which mark the inevitably advancing age of the printer (faithfully recorded in the *Gabberjabs*). Thus, his brush with death when his appendix ruptured on December 25, 1990, was a sharp reminder of the perishable and limited nature of the human condition, although on the lighter side, one might imagine that event as the appendix's revenge, after all those years of cavalier treatment. Represented by a uterus in *iGI*, it was again replaced by an anatomical engraving, this time of the seminal vesicles, in *iGA*. No wonder it had to assert itself. As a further indication that mapping, anatomical drawing, writing and the perishability of the human condition are not the exclusive concern of the *Gabberjabs*, but are rather constants of Hamady's imagination, see the remarkable combination of all four in the double-spread title page of Paul Blackburn's *The Selection of Heaven* (see figure 2).³³

A large part of the pleasure one derives from the Perishable Press books lies in their celebration of life in all its aspects, the joy and the tears of things. This is especially true of the *Gabberjabs*, which document the bookmaker's pleasure in teaching (*iGI*), his joy in nature and country

³² *Two Decades of Hamady and the Perishable Press Limited*

³³ Monica Strauss, writing about this book in *Fine Print*, had this to say:

Figure 2
 Paul Blackburn's *The Selection of Heaven*,
 illustrated by Walter Hamady, 1980.



life, the halcyon days of his first marriage (*iG2*), his friends and neighbors, and growing his own food, as in the following lines:

August, the month of harvest starting
 in Wisconsin, our friends and loved ones
 come like cucumbers, tomatoes and eggplants—
 nobody and nothing can keep up with it.³⁶

(Consultation of note 36 yields: “Here’s the time-old artist’s problem: getting on with one’s inspired life-work versus farting round with friends, etc.”) At the end of the poem, he describes his former wife:

your face shining like
 gleaming treasure of all the canned stuff
 we’ve put up from: our garden, you are
 always the highly thought of esteemed and
 waited for first come ripe tomato, in fact,
 both windowsills of the kitchen racked up with them.

And the book’s colophon is set inside the outline of the shadow cast by the large tomato drawn by Jack Beal, which illustrates the volume.

In this series of seventeen poems published for the first time as a separate edition, the poet explores the intuitive, hesitant process by which the matter of life is transmuted into art. The palpability of memory, the arbitrary fashioning of metaphors, the humbling effects of desperation, pain and loss, and even the traditional poet’s role as eulogist, are woven into a continuous reverie that coincides with a few weeks of burgeoning spring. . . .

Blackburn’s charting of memory clearly inspired the enigmatic collage by Walter Hamady for the double-spread title page. An anatomical diagram of a skull superimposed upon a strangely distorted map is eerily animated by images of eyes and a writer’s hand. Author, title, publisher, and date of publication form part of the cartographic notation in further fragments of maps. When the title is blind-embossed in the same format on the olive green wrapper, it gives the impression of a hieroglyphic relief. Thus, both cover and title page require decoding, an action that serves as an introductory metaphor to Blackburn’s own decipherings. [See note 14, and reference to Egyptian tomb, above.] Quoted in *Two Decades of Walter Hamady*.

In *iG3* the poet and printer is gathering grapeleaves, declaring that:

Many pleasures exist for the picker: the smells of the woods, the flowers, the leaves themselves—often there are mint patches crunched by your thoughtless feet, what a great bouquet that is! Just like being immersed in the Tabouli salad you will be eating with the grapeleaves you are picking! Without doubt this is heaven!

The book is illustrated by another Jack Beal drawing, this time of a grapeleaf, which has been incorporated into the “rosette” à la state fair adorning the title page, emblem, we are told, of “The Wild Grapeleaf Picking Association Blue Mounds Township Grand Prize.”³⁴ It is preceded by an endpaper from which a circle has been carefully cut to reveal a segment of the rosette bearing the words “1974 A Grapeleaf for Mary” in Jack Beal’s handwriting, and the rich green of the wrapper is suggestive of the color of the picked leaves.

The text of *iG4* celebrates cleaning windows, as the poet/printer experiences a strong housewifely desire for the pleasure of looking out through clean glass and sets to, with his wife, to fulfill it. When the work is done, they survey each other through the sparkling panes and he admires her pregnant body, anticipating the birth of their first child. No wonder the appendix is here represented by an anatomical drawing of the seminal vesicles! Or that the “bastard title” comes under scrutiny in this volume celebrating paternity, a common enough theme for male poets, but how many of them would write enthusiastically and expertly, in the same breath, as it were, about cleaning windows?³⁵ In a certain sense the text of this book functions like the freshly cleaned window panes, since it is bound between two photographs, representing

³⁴ “The original intention for this book was to have a manufactured ribbon such like the ones at State Fairs to affix to the cover somehow. But each round trip to the badge maker, another snafu would creep in, so I gave up and manufactured my own with Jack Beal’s help in drawing the grapeleaf! But it forced the problem of using cutting dies, which was another door that opened to great profit since.” *Two Decades of Hamady*.

³⁵ Under the heading “100% Bastard Title Page” (the alternative term for bastard title is “half title”), we read:

⁷⁶ Mr. Larry Brown* often used to say to me, right in front of my mother, ‘Walter, you are a bastard!’ and my dear sweet mother would puff up bigger than life size and with huffy indignance blurt, ‘He is NOT a Bastard! I know who his father was and we were Married at the time!’ (But this has nothing to do with bastard title page, about which consult the *Interminable Gabberjabb*, volume I, number 1, ‘the Oracle vs. Hamady Heresy’ and consult the first book on the bibliography, 12th edition, 2nd. printing, pages 1.1–1.9 & see footnote 52, pp. apropos.)”

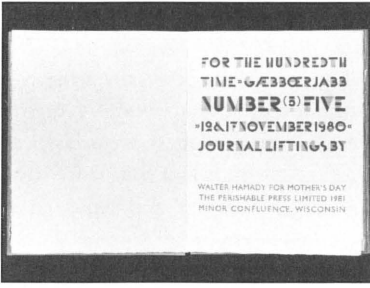


Figure 3

Walter Hamady,

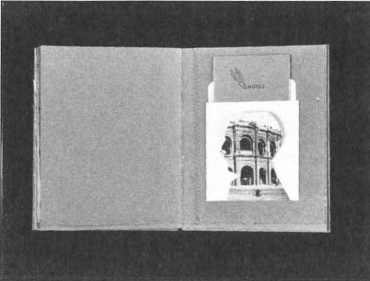
For the Hundredth Time Gabberjabb Number Five,
1981, title page.

Figure 4

Walter Hamady,

For the Hundredth Time Gabberjabb Number Five.

the window cleaners, who thus might be said to look at each other through the poem. (I think here of the French expression *en regard* to signify what English calls “the facing page.”)

It is with *iG5*, however, that the *Gabberjabbs*' potential for radically expanding the bookform begins fully to emerge. Techniques proliferate: collage (a profile of WshH in a hat, die-cut from a map with an infinitesimal footnote alerting the reader to “Note key words here”),³⁶ grommetting, elaborate footnotes printed and bound into a miniature book of their own, which is stuck into a library card pocket at the back (*see figure 3*), thumbprinting, all kinds of printer's ornaments depicting everything from Hermes' winged sandals to a stop sign.³⁷ This book, as befits a sequel to *iG4*, celebrates Mother's Day (*see figure 4*). The artist's mother is represented in the “front matter” by the “private language” spoken at “ten-eleven Grand Avenue in Keokuk, Iowa,” her family home, *see Note 97²*, while the text (in two parts: “Mary in Hospital 12 XI 80” and “Text Part 2: 17 XI 80 Mary Home”) rejoices in the young mother's recovery from reparative surgery made necessary by the ravages of childbearing.³⁸ The printer is having a field-day throughout, with Bifur type, (“love that g!”) cast especially for the press by Alfred Hoffmann.

³⁶ I have noted “original” followed by a broken inverted “w” on the map's surface, for starters.

³⁷ This “is a collaged book using up various scraps etc. It is a bit difficult to describe as some pages are fastened together or embossed or perforated or rubber-stamped or scored or sewn.” *Two Decades of Hamady*. Quite so!

³⁸ “ten/seven nine/two seven/five
Twenty seven pounds of babies
In two times at the plate! R B I average
Babe Ruth & the rest can't touch”
(The second birth produced twins.)

An interval of seven years separates *iG5* from its successor *Neopostmodrinism* or *Dieser Rasen ist kein Hundeklo* or *Gabberjabb Number 6*, a difficult period in the life of the artist as the heavily satiric title and the wounded, somewhat querulous note on which the book opens suggest. *Schmerz*, rather than *Merz* (the term Schwitters had coined for the principle of assemblage, so gaily adapted and exploited in *iG5*), would seem to be the emblem of this volume. This is evident, for example, in the second part of the epigraph, which is printed beneath two stickers, one marking “24 years of service of the Perishable Press Limited (1964–1988),” the other “48 years of service of Walter Samuel Hamady.”

The Disillusioned Solipsist 1964 (Bk No 1)—(Bk No 113) (*Dieser Rasen ist kein Hundeklo* 1988. 1988 minus 1964 equals 24. 24 times 2 equals 48. 1988 minus 1940 (the printer’s year of birth) is also 48, which, more or less, points to 1/2 of the printer’s life has been given over to making books about which see, (more) Seymour under headings Disillusionment Disappointment & Disgust or the DDD of midlife crisis in k)academia or Professoring for twenty-two years and earning the \$alary of an Entering Assistant Professor which, More or less, Points to several conc(de)lusions.

The “DDD of midlife crisis” does not, however, prevent the artist from creating the most challenging of the *Gabberjabb* series to date with this volume, which would deserve an essay to itself. *Neopostmodrinism* quite properly resists summary. “Accept no substitutes!” (i.e. commentary) might be its slogan, and any description of this Aladdin’s cave of a book³⁹ must be inadequate. Grommets, rubber stamps, metal tags, cuts, marks of every kind abound. The fine marbled covers are made from nineteenth-century Wisconsin tax assessment rolls retrieved from the State Historical Society dumpster where they had been discarded. The eye (or I) motif, frequently represented by an anatomical engraving of the organ, is dominant—from page surface number 2: “arch (drawing of eye) vally adhesived to cover board” to the galaxy of rebuses on which it ends. This page is artfully folded (I have not spoken of the importance of the fold in Hamady’s books) over the university bookplate, depicting

³⁹ The metaphor is chosen to convey the riches, the traps for the unwary and the intense childish pleasure, as produced by *The Arabian Nights*, offered by *iG6*. See notes 12 and 41, above and below.

an eye, surrounded by rays, interspersed with the letters of the motto “numen lumen” above four open books arranged in the form of a cross. I cannot but think that Hamady, in his disillusionment with the academic institution, is making an ironic visual/verbal comment here, winking as it were, at the university and its motto, attributed to the verbal cognizance of the Earl of Balcarres, which reads: *Astra Castra, Numen Lumen*, and is customarily translated as “Stars my Camp, God my Light.”⁴⁰

This impression is reinforced by the succeeding page, in which Hamady’s profile (the eye and the brain represented by collaged anatomical drawings, die-cut within a circular aperture), is seen precisely “in profile” against the background of the Perishable Press Limited letterhead, reproduced on the succeeding recto. The two P’s frame the head, and the flourish of the “L” in “limited” extends under the chin. The affixed “brain” engraving creates the impression of a turban, lending

⁴⁰ My intuition about this was subsequently confirmed by the following phrase, which appears in three languages: English, German and French: “not the eye in the effusive radiating star,” “aber nicht im Auge der über schwengliche austrahlungenden Stern,” “non pas l’oeil dans l’étoile chaleureuse radieuse au ciel”: a clear reference to the eye of *numen lumen*. No doubt the university has, in the artist’s perception, been frequently blind to his work and its merit.

It should be noted that Hamady’s justifiable discontent with the academic institution (promoted to associate professor in 1971, four years after his arrival, he was not made full professor, despite a rapidly growing national and international reputation, until 1988) is not universal. Thus, “The university exists for the students,” he said to me, with the unquestionable sincerity of a dedicated and successful teacher. See the catalogue of the remarkable exhibition, researched and curated by his students under his supervision, called *Breaking the Bindings: American Book Art Now*, an exhibition of creative bookmaking produced in the United States since 1980, held at the Elvehjem Museum of Art, UW-Madison, 6 May-3 July, 1983.

With regard to the university administration, Hamady repeatedly expresses his gratitude to the Graduate School of the University, which has, under Dean Eric Rude, been a constant source of support and encouragement for his work.

Box 54, recently exhibited at the Wustum, entitled “In Consequence Not Everything is a Suitable Subject (Pariah & Proud),” 1990, probably best sums up the artist’s relation to the academic institution. The piece incorporates type set to read, “God will not examine our medals but our scars.” (see figure 5).

Hamady confided that the titles for his boxes are culled from the articles of a well-known academic art critic, to which he adds, in parentheses, his own name for the work “so that I can remember which one it is”!



Figure 5

Walter Hamady,

Box 54 In Consequence Not Everything is a Suitable Subject.

(Pariah & Proud), 1990.

a kind of Middle Eastern aura to the image.⁴¹ Underneath, one reads:

PROFILE OF THE DOG/SEE: RE: OEUVRE & DEVELOPMENT
PAGE 61 MORE OR LESS
AS A VULGAR YOUNG MAN NEVER AGAIN TO BE INVITED
TO ORATE BEFORE THE FRIENDS OF THE BIO (REGIONAL)
LIBRARY OF WHICH HE IS A LIFETIME MEMBER.¹⁶⁸

Note 168 explains that: “To be called vulgar (at first) hurt the feelings of the sensitive printer until he looked it up [to wit] ‘common to the great mass of people in general’ which fits in with his aspiration,” and the whole assemblage refers to a venerable professor’s reportedly negative reaction when Hamady lectured to the Friends of The Library. Predictably, such an uncharitable judgment stung the artist, and this page and its accompanying footnote betray a pain and resentment markedly absent from the earlier, happier volumes. This negative emotional state could not fail to affect “the sensitive printer’s” attitude to his readers, hence no doubt the impression that *iG6* is distinctly less reader-friendly than its predecessors. It is difficult and not always visually agreeable to read, the tones of the paper are frequently dark, and though witty and clever, there is a newly cutting edge⁴² to the play that tends to raise one’s guard, making it touch and go as to whether (recall the Trojan horse) curiosity or suspicion will triumph.

If one is willing to persevere, however, there are wonderful and funny discoveries to be made, and the mood lightens perceptibly as the book progresses, almost as if its production had brought about a kind of catharsis for the bookmaker, one in which the persistent reader participates. Thus, the poem that is an important, if not central, element in the text and which in retrospect strongly recalls Schwitters’ “An Anna Blume,” is revealed at the end to be the verbal transcription of an elaborate rebus constructed with rubber stamps, of which Hamady had recently become an enamored collector.⁴³ The laughter this discovery provoked, after I had been reluctantly puzzling over what appeared to be a parody (but was it?)

⁴¹ See note 39 above. (This is a typical Hamady ploy.)

⁴² Cutting is a significant feature of *iG6*. See the half-title page, which is literally cut in half.

⁴³ A pair of postage stamps, honoring “Stamp Collecting” and cancelled with the Mount Horeb postmark, March 16, 1986, embellish the page bearing Hamady’s name and address.

of a rather predictably “surrealist” (or more accurately, dadaist) poem, was one of the highlights of my experience with the *Gabberjabbs*.⁴⁴

Other delights include the use of the image of a hand holding a pen extending across the gutter to end on a holograph page whose first word, “sign,” begins precisely at the tip of the pen nib, as if the image had done the writing (subsequently, this same hand is used to designate each of the book’s “signatures”);⁴⁵ the densely printed page containing the precisely one thousand words a picture is said to be worth; the duly notarized page bearing the paw print of Betsy, a ten-year-old Labrador, standing in for the artist as an “old” dog⁴⁶ (see “PROFILE OF THE DOG above), his oeuvre referred to obliquely in the title *Dieser Rasen ist kein Hundeklo.*, This Lawn is not a Dog’s Loo (my translation), see note 22.⁴⁷

“I hold the view that books design themselves,” Hamady has written.⁴⁸ Essays, too, it seems, for the image of the signing hand traversing the gutter invites us to look back at the gutter⁴⁹ of my epigraph, now to be understood as a technical term in bookmaking, designating the space occupied by the two inner margins on each side of the binding. Let me once again quote Hamady:

The gutter, with the foredge⁵⁰ is are the “empty quarter” of the book. That is, visually most people never see that place because of the centuries of conditioning by reading. Rather, the ordinary person and all those scholars in Kakademia, see only the text and

⁴⁴ I was laughing at myself as an archetypal “literoearly [sic] expectational aquifer,” of course, but also laughing with pleasure at having “got it,” however belatedly.

⁴⁵ See O.E.D., “signature, the action of signing or stamping. Printing: a letter or figure, a set or combination of letters or figures etc., placed by the printer at the foot of the first page (and frequently on one or more of the succeeding pages) of every sheet in a book, for the purpose of showing the order in which they are to be placed or bound.”

⁴⁶ No disrespect intended. I refer to Dylan Thomas’ *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*.

⁴⁷ *Dieser Rasen ist kein Hundeklo*, is the text of a notice seen by Hamady and Paul Hayden Duensing at the railway station in Giessen, Germany, and translated by Duensing as “This grass is not a toilet for your dog.”

⁴⁸ “Designing Literature,” p. 116.

⁴⁹ See note 1, above.

⁵⁰ When Hamady first pronounced this word I heard “forage,” which what with grapeleaves and assessment rolls and collaged books, is not entirely inappropriate. But see, in *iG6*, FORE EDGE PLAY, and the newly invented “accordion” foredge.

see it only for its yield-it-up function. A visual artist sensitive to this sees the open book as a special picture plane. The center of this is the gutter, the crack, the break on the screen etc.

Typically, several of the gutters in *Neopostmodrinism or Dieser Rasen ist kein Hundeklo or Gabberjabb Number 6* are adorned with anatomical drawings of the intestines (what else?). In this inventive manner, the book, oeuvre of the “dog” profiled in the front matter, digests the insulting charge of vulgarity and transforms it into art.

I now believe that my initially ambivalent response to *iG6* was my reaction to the overly intrusive presence, at the beginning, of the “sensitive printer’s,” bruised ego, represented by the dominant eye/I motif discussed above. This would have interfered with my pleasure by inhibiting my own fantasy, hence provoking resistance.⁵¹ As the book-maker’s irrepressible fun-loving inventiveness triumphed over his wounded self-esteem in the course of the book’s production, that resistance progressively disappeared, but it is possible that *Neopostmodrinism* pushes the printer’s mark to the limit of the reader’s (as distinct from the looker’s) tolerance.

By virtue of being considerably more taxing to read, *Gabberjabb Number 6*, raises a difficulty posed by the increasing emphasis on the bookform that has characterized the series to date. That difficulty, which also constitutes the challenge now facing Hamady, might be described in the following terms: paradoxically, the more skilled the printer, the more invisible his work, which is eclipsed by the very legibility he so expertly facilitates. Thus, it is “the discerning reader” indeed who will delight—in “the complete lack of hyphenation” throughout a given book, for example—since this lack will have been specifically designed to “[let] the eye glide uninterruptedly.”⁵² To the degree that he is at once writer and printer, the position Hamady has adopted in *Gabberjabb Number 6* is inevitably marked by a certain tension: the writer, requiring of the printer that “the eye glide uninterruptedly” in the service of the writer’s self-expression, and the printer rebelling against the self-effacement the

⁵¹ On this point, see Freud’s important essay, “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols., trans. and ed. James Strachey, vol. 22 (London: Hogarth Press, 1959), pp. 141–154.

⁵² An achievement to which the Colophonic Afterwords in *Hand Papermaking: Papermaking by Hand, being a Book of Qualified Suspicions Book 102*, Perishable Press, 1982, finds it necessary to draw the attention of the uninitiated.

writer's demand imposes upon him. Thus, after years of successful collaboration with a great variety of poets, Hamady now faces the challenge of collaborating with himself: at once the most exacting and the most indulgent of partners.

The artist has described his first *Gabberjabb* as "an expanded colophon in space"⁵³ and in so far as the colophon is the bailiwick of the printer, one could read the development of the *Gabberjabb* series as evidence of the printer's growing self-assertion, culminating in the exuberance of *iG6*.⁵⁴ The *Gabberjabb* series set out playfully to forestall the kind of reductive reading, the tunnel vision, which focuses on the book's content at the expense of its form. With *iG6*, it becomes evident that this development is not without risk to the reader's cooperation in this expansion of the bookform. The legibility/illegibility tightrope act on which the pleasure and instruction of the *Gabberjabbs* depend demands a very nice balance in the writer/printer relationship. *Neopostmodrinism* or *Dieser Rasen ist kein Hundeklo* or *Gabberjabb Number 6*, more than any volume to date, brings the printer to the fore (if not the foredge). The dedicated reader, forewarned, waits with interest and some trepidation to see what will emerge from the gutter (or the belly) of *iG7*.

⁵³ Colophon to *Hunkering in Wisconsin Another interminable Gaggerblab* (a series).

⁵⁴ While it is true that *Gabberjabbs* 2, 3 and 4 are less overtly concerned with the bookform than with the printer's life, as distinct from numbers 1, 5 and 6, the continuous and cross-referenced footnotes alone would support the continuity of purpose I suggest here. Life and work come together most powerfully in number six.