

Anselm Hollo: 1934-2013

Contributed by Rudy Rucker

ANSELM HOLLO 1934-2013

I just learned that my dear friend and mentor, the poet Anselm Hollo died on January 29, 2013. He'd been ill for nearly a year.

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I think of a poem of Anselm's in which he describes a dream of his dead father. He had the dream three months after his father died. The poem, untitled, appeared in his slim and epic 1972 collection, *Sensation*, and the poem is reprinted in his tellingly titled autobiographical essay, "Anselm Hollo, 1934-," which in turn appears in his later collection *Caws and Causeries*. I'll quote the last half of the poem here....I knew where he lay

Â went on & entered

Â the room light & bare

Â no curtains no books

Â his head on the pillow

Â hand moving outward

Â the gesture "be seated"

Â i started talking, saw myself from the back

Â leaned forward, talked to his face

Â intent, bushy-browed

Â eyes straining to see

Â into mine

Â "a question i wanted to ask you"

Â would never know what it was

Â but stood there & was

Â so happy to see him

Â that twenty-sixth day of april

Â three months after his death

"& was / so happy to see him"

Sigh.

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I took this photo across from the legendary beat Caffe Trieste in North Beach where my wife and I had coffee with Anselm and Jane Dalrymple some twenty years ago. Anselm not there today.

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I first heard of Anselm Hollo in 1972 when my writer friend Gregory Gibson mailed me a copy of that pamphlet-like book or chapbook, *Sensation*, published by a group calling themselves the Institute of Further Studies, in Gloucester, Massachusetts, traditional home of outrider poets such as Greg himself and of course Charles Olson. Not that Anselm was living in Gloucester. Born and to some extent raised in Finland, he was at this point drifting around the US from one visiting-poet gig to the next.

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I read *Sensation* over and over, fascinated by its colloquial style and by Hollo's trick of putting more than one twist into each poem—later when I met him he once remarked of some other poet's work, "Just has one twist at the end, that's not enough."

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Anselm's poems are nicely musicked, yet elliptical and hard to pin down. What do they mean? No matter, never mind.

Here's another poem from *Sensation*, also untitled. The saying that Anselm attributes to his father has stuck with me for all these years.

it is a well-lit afternoon

and the heart with pleasure fills

flowing through town in warm things

Â

yes what do you know

it's winter again

but the days are well-lit

what's more

they're beginning to stay that way longer

Â

that is a fact

and I am moving
 through a town
 in a fur hat
 the third one in my life
 or is it only the second?
 Â
 the expeditionary force
 will have to check up on that
 back there in the previous frames
 Â
 while I move forward
 steadily, stealthily
 like a feather
 Â
 I am a father
 bearded and warm
 and listen to words coming through
 the fur hat off a page
 in the Finnish language
 "when there's nothing else to do
 there's always work to do"
 Â
 my father said that
 in one of his notebooks
 and it's true
 Â
 I walk through a town
 and up some steps
 and through a door

it closes
 Â
 now you can't see me anymore
 Â
 but the lights go on, and you know I'm there
 right inside, working out

Naturally you'll want to read more of Anselm's poems. At present, the most complete collection of Anselm's poems is Notes on the Possibilities and Attractions of Existence: Selected Poems 1965-2000 (Coffee House Press, 2001). You can preview the first 60 or so pages of this book via Google Books. But certainly you should buy it, or get it from your library.

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 I met Anselm in person in the summer of 1984. My family and I lived in Lynchburg, Virginia, at this point. Some of our new Lynchburg friends invented a semi-imaginary society called the Lynchburg Yacht Club. In the summer of 1984 they organized a big party at the boathouse at Sweetbriar College, about fifteen miles north of Lynchburg.

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 Sylvia and I were excited about the event, and she even sewed me a new Hawaiian shirt, traffic-yellow with fans and cerise designs, billowing and lovely. At the party we danced to a live jazz band, jabbered, drank and flirted. Some of us rowed in the lake, some jumped in naked.

Anselm and a woman in a two-dimensional world.

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 Kind fate brought Anselm Hollo to the Yacht Club party too. He was in Sweetbriar as a writer-in-residence that year. Although he was a dozen years older than me, we immediately recognized each other as kindred spirits. Fellow beatnik writers. And he'd even read my first couple of SF novels.

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 Anselm had an encyclopedic knowledge of world literature, and an exquisite mastery of the spoken word. He was wonderfully serious about writing. Whenever I was with him, I felt like I was talking to a sage on Mount Olympus, not that there was anything solemn about him. He'd often break into wheezing laughter while we were battling the ideas around. He had a cosmopolitan accent, having grown up Finnish. Anselm once remarked that every Finn deserved to have a biography written. But Anselm's short, pungent poems are the most accurate memoirs of all, like X-ray snapshots of instantaneous mental states.

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We hung out with Anselm quite a bit over the months to come. Anselm and I enjoyed drinking heavily together and talking about art and reality—and ringing strange changes on the words we heard or used. I remember us taking special delight from a line in Rene Daumal's book, *A Night of Serious Drinking*: "I have forgotten to mention that the only word which can be said by carp is art." Inspired by Anselm's companionship I self-published a book of my poems called *Light Fuse and Get Away*, saying it was from Carp Press. [This was a 50-copy Xerox edition, later reprinted in my 1991 omnibus, *Transreal!*.]

Covers of Rudy and Anselm's paperback double. Click for a larger version of the image.

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When we moved to California in 1986, we saw Anselm a few times. I think he was living in Baltimore part of the time, and then in Salt Lake City. I'd written a scroll-type memoir in the style of Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*. Ninety feet long. No big publishers would touch it, but I met a poet called Lee Ballentine who ran a small press called Ocean View.

Lee agreed to publish my memoir—it was called *All the Visions*—back to back with a collection of Anselm's "science fiction poems" that he called *Space Baltic*. It came out in a nice "sixty-nine" style format, that is, with the two books bound together upside down relative to each other, so both sides of the book function as a "front cover." The illo above shows the two covers.

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To increase the joy of this event, we got the ultra cool hot-rod underground artist Robert Williams to let us use one of his images as the cover of my half. *All the Visions/Space Baltic* is out of print, but you can find various editions for sale online, new or used, softcover or hardback. (My own press, *Transreal Books*, is likely to reprint my half in a new edition this year or the next.)

We saw Anselm for the last time when I was a guest teacher at the Naropa Institute (a.k.a. The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics) in Boulder, Colorado, in June, 2004.

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We'd been to Naropa years earlier, around 1980, and that time we'd had a chance to hang around a bit with Burroughs, Ginsberg, and Corso. Of course by 2004, the school was less chaotic. But they were keeping it real with Anselm on the permanent faculty/ Anselm was now settled there with his wonderful wife Jane Dalrymple.

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The class I taught was about "Transreal SF Writing," and while teaching the course, I wrote a transreal SF story called "MS Found in a Minidrive"—funny, gnarly, heavy. I worked in transreal stuff about my nostalgia for the days of Burroughs. The story's narrator, is a would-be-writer who's attending a Naropa writing workshop. You can find the story online as part of my *Complete Stories*.

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I got to read the story at the end of my Naropa week, back to back with Anselm reading some of his latest poems. We had crowd of about 300 people, it was a wonderful night, the best reading I've ever been part of, unforgettable. Rocking it with the Master.

On June 12, 2004, I said my last farewell to dear Anselm. We hugged goodbye and he gave me a sharp, sad, knowing look, perhaps the same look I was giving him, both of us aware that one of us might die before we could meet again. He was seventy, and he'd had a quadruple bypass. But he got over that and went on for eight or nine more years. But now it's over. As Anselm wrote after the death of Allen Ginsberg: brave old lion
gone out of reach now

through the one door

awaits us all One more book of Anselm's to mention, a book of essays and reminiscences, *Caws & Causeries*, (La Alameda Press, 1999). Anselm is good at stirring up the old "ontological wonder-sickness," as the philosopher William James termed it. Why does anything exist at all? Why Anselm, why me?

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I'll close with a poem I found reprinted in *Caws & Causeries*; it's originally from Anselm's 1974 poetry collection, *Black Book* (Walker's Pond Press). The poem is a remembrance of Anselm living for a few years with his ninety-year-old grandfather Paul Walden in the south of Germany when Anselm was in his early twenties. Walden was an academic chemist with an interest in the history of science.

THE WALDEN VARIATIONS (for Robert Creeley)

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White hair
fine fringes
under the brim

Â

old sunshine on twigs

Â

grandpa

a sturdy

alchemist

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old sunshine on twigs

Â

*

old sunshine on twigs

Â

& on the pigs

we ate

together

he & i

Â

deaf alchemist

loud grandson

Â

*

ate together

Â

teeth fell out

Â

& died

Â

old sun

Adios, King.