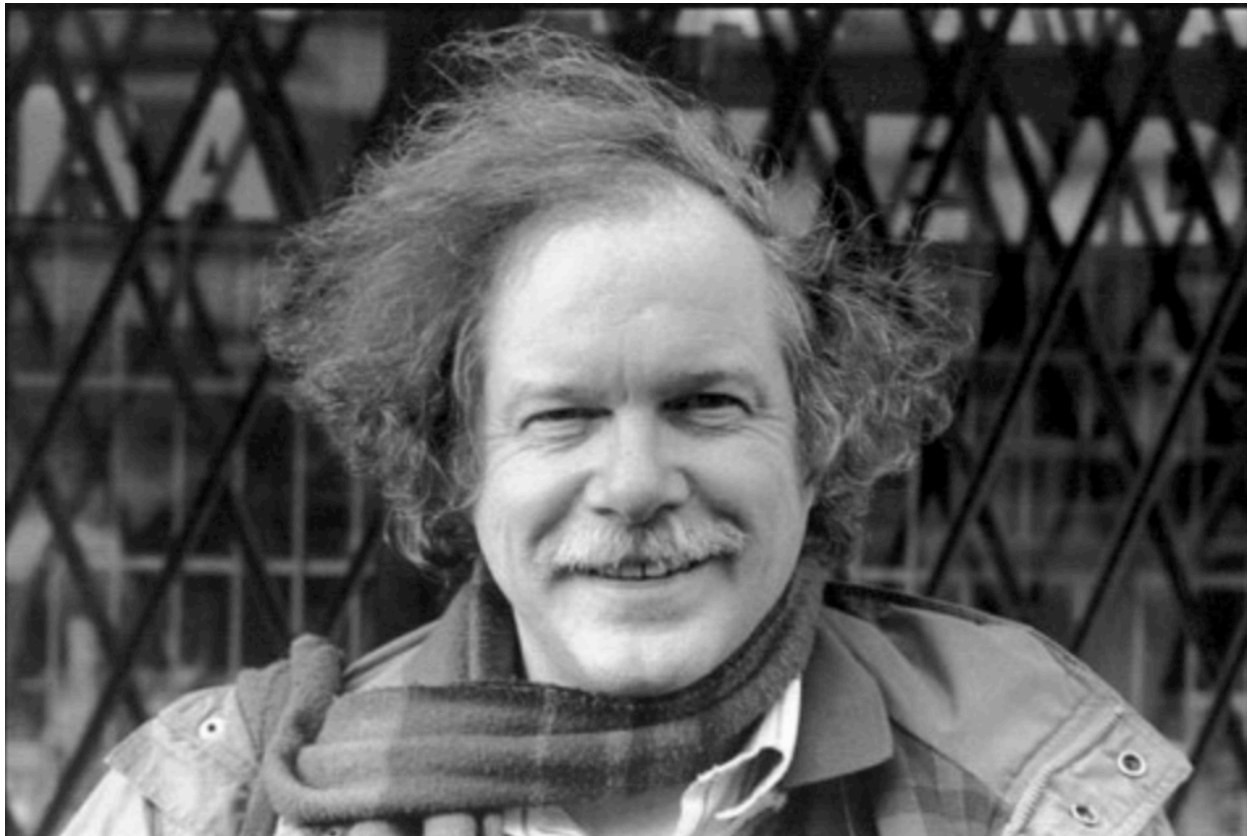


Blavatsky, Kyger, Sanders Sketch Stealing Exercise



The poet works in language and the average poet has a small vocabulary and standard (comfortable) tropes they go back to again & again. This can lead to a dullness that they (the poet composing) can feel. How to stock the poet's mental cupboard with words, images & ideas (logopoeia) that can propel an interesting and original poem?

Joanne Kyger, stealing a bit of Ed Sanders' fire from Investigative Poetry wrote a beautiful poem, which A Rodent Press & Erudite Fangs edition turned into a wonderful chapbook about the fascinating life of the Founder of Theosophy. In doing so, Kyger gave us a version of the Sanders' mode that could be applied to a news story from the Times, or a whole book as she did from *HPB. The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helen Blavatsky; Founder of the Modern Theosophical Movement* by Sylvia Cranston, published by Jeremy P. Tarcher / Putnam, N.Y. 1993.

If you're going to write about something, Blavatsky has it all: magic, spirituality, prophecy, travel and being about two centuries ahead of her time, with notions like how:

“The ruin and extinction
of national power
follow the eradication of forests
surely as night follows day.”

(Kyger's lineation is a model for the poet interested in doing something original with the field of the page and not just limit themselves to another example of what Michael McClure called “Lawnmower Poetry.” It's also much more appealing than the standard couplets lineation whose time has come and gone, no?)

Just think of how Madame Blavatsky in 1875 was about::

Friends of all movements in the world.



Against drunkenness, cruelty to animals,
injustice to women, corruption.
Open hearts to charity, justice and generosity,

and “ Soul wisdom not head learning.”

This was a proprioceptive poetics about 90 years before Charles Olson’s essay, which was a good start.

Ed Sanders, of course, has many examples of his use of the approach, including the three Volume: *America: A History in Verse* and books on Allen Ginsberg and the year 1968. They are all page-turners that stand up to repeated readings.

Maybe you start with a newspaper article. Read it, follow links in the story to get versed in the background of it and pick phrases, or images, that stand out to you and try to keep the “maximum information, minimum amount of syllables” that Allen Ginsberg encouraged. (Ridding your poem of as many conjunctions and gerunds as possible & please no adverbs!) Something outrageous can work as long as you keep your emotional distance and let the horror speak for itself via imagery. The poetry may come in the set-up of poignant points. What you leave out, Miles knew, is often as important as what goes in, right? What are the salient aspects of the story and how to render them poetically? Sanders goes much further with perhaps hundreds of sources for his *History in Verse*, but to get going, start small.



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