

HOW I CAME TO ALPHABETS

An alphabet is sometimes discovered in childhood with wonder. It took me longer because I was not sensitive enough to realize the inherent beauty or magic of a letter. This may be because I was not an avid reader, and letters only helped me to essay the sounds of words. Not until I was much older did they take on an attraction of their own, not until I began to study Greek and Arabic. Their physical formation gave me a delight I could not have imagined, and writing from left to right in the formation of words in Arabic was particularly moving. Although I never undertook a study of Hebrew, the subsequent understanding of the encoding of hidden meanings in letters in such a way as to reveal a hidden order of the universe bore for me a significance that frequently returns to me while writing a poem.

The invitation to write a series of poems on the letters of the alphabet came to me as a gift from the Holy Spirit. I would not have known how to approach the invitation had it not come through intermediaries, namely my friends, Lucie Lambert and Robert Melançon. Lucie provided the letter illuminated and Robert provided the letter and its sounds in such a playfully formal manner that I was given the clue how to respond. When I began to write my part, I had the example of a handful of Robert's poems that struck me as just what I needed. The form is that of a huitain, which I did not follow quite as strictly as Robert, but which

echoes a favourite French stanza of the late Middle Ages. At once formal and playful, it allows for both seriousness and surprises, both of which I understand as part of the character of an alphabet, which is capable of so many combinations of assonance and alliteration, as well as other hidden effects.

Because I think the kabbalah and its play with Hebrew letters reflects a truth that should not be neglected, I arranged my letters in a sequence designed to suggest the quasi-divine character of letters. To my knowledge the bible does not mention the alphabet, perhaps because of the dominant orality of its presentation, beginning with the mere fact that God need only speak for things to be. My assumption is, then, that God alone did not create alphabets, but because they have capabilities that appear to accommodate more than mere reason they seem to have some kind of divine aura, at least. That aura is suggested in Lucie's illuminations. My desire was to suggest the gradual cooperation between the human and the divine as a mutual discovery that starts in uncertainty and begins to flower when the letter 'L' is reached, permitting the formation of the word 'letter' at almost the centre of the alphabet.

Letters are not, paradox as it may appear, literal, which is why they are so fascinating. They wait to be filled with meaning, and so in themselves represent all the things in the world that await their various meanings. This is true, at least, for the Roman alphabet. The letters of Sanskrit, for example, have meanings in themselves, which would have only complicated our task. Because our alphabet is essentially empty, its power is not always immediately manifest. Once perceived, however, in their transformative power, light begins to happen as if it had never happened before, emptiness is filled in continually changing ways, and wonder takes on its unexpected shapes.

E.D. BLODGETT, Jan 3, 2012