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## Thick as Trees: Kinship and Place in Transatlantic Small Press Poetry Networks

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### *Abstract*

Cet article examine le rôle que jouent les maisons d'édition de poésie dans le travail et la réception de plusieurs poètes américains, écossais et britanniques : Lorine Niedecker, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Roy Fisher et Stuart Mills. Malgré la distance géographique qui sépare ces auteurs, ceux-ci partagent néanmoins les espaces sociaux et utopiques des publications et des petites revues dans lesquelles ils ont été publiés ou édités. L'exemple paradigmatique de la maison d'édition Jargon Society de Jonathan Williams illustre ces liens littéraires qui esquissent la constitution d'un canon ou d'une tradition. L'objectif de cet article est de démontrer comment les réseaux de petites maisons d'édition dans les années 1960 et 1970 ont non seulement fourni des plateformes essentielles pour la diffusion et le partage des œuvres poétiques, mais ont aussi offert les moyens de formuler une critique de la condition géographique en façonnant une "société" transatlantique socialement plus inclusive pour poètes, artistes et éditeurs.

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### *Index terms*

**Keywords :** The Jargon Society, Lorine Niedecker, Jonathan Williams, Tarasque, small press publishing

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**Full text**

- 1 According to Jerome Rothenberg, the “two American centers” of the New American poetry in the 1960s “were New York and San Francisco, with links to other places large and small” (11). As part of its strategic positioning against mainstream culture in New York, “the actual typography of the new poetry (circa 1960) was at a necessary distance from the commercial hubs of American publishing (the concentration of media power in mid-Manhattan)” (10). The spreading “terrain” of the new poetry, its “links to other places large and small”, Rothenberg suggests, led to “the emergence on the Lower East Side & environs (stretching all the way to Highlands, North Carolina & Kyoto, Japan) of that kind of intellectual & spiritual energy that Pound, in the context of an earlier independent magazine and movement, had called a vortex: a place of cultural intersections and fusions” (10-11). Despite the importance of specific geographical locations such as New York, the small presses and little magazines that flourished during this period were themselves “the vortex, the vital center, of their own time & place”, offering alternative means and platforms for poets to share and distribute their work (11). There was in the United Kingdom a similar “gathering momentum around poetry in the provinces” which occurred on the fringes of the literary establishments centred in major cities such as London, from where the values of the “big controlling presses, universities, schools, and the reviewing fraternity”, “the controlling High Street Booksellers”, and “charity giving bodies like the Arts Council and the radio and television controllers and censors” held sway (Neate 42; Mottram 15). The “provincial bias of small press publishing”, Hannah Neate suggests, was due “not only to the location of the participants, but also to the infrastructure associated with these practices” that comprised independent bookshops, local venues, and an efficient postal service (46). On both sides of the Atlantic these vortices were not only crucial mediums and interspaces for geographically dispersed poets situated outside the urban centres of literature but were also instrumental in facilitating wider-reaching international literary and artistic networks that functioned autonomously of the controlling “mainstream” institutions.
- 2 This essay considers the role that small press poetry publishing plays in the work of several poets and/or publishers situated outside of the major urban centres: Lorine Niedecker, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Roy Fisher, and Stuart Mills. Despite the geographic spread of these North American, Scottish, and English poets—and, in the case of Niedecker and Finlay, their relative remoteness—they are, I propose, nevertheless kindred poets whose work inhabits a utopian and intertextual “terrain”, a metaphorical ground and “fertile space”, that manifests via the societal networks and infrastructures of small press publishing (Rothenberg 11). With Jonathan Williams’s Jargon Society as my prime example, I want to examine how the milieu of small press publishing in the 1960s and 1970s offered viable means for negotiating notions of the provincial within a transatlantic “society” of poets, publishers, and artists.
- 3 An important antecedent for this network are the earlier, modernist “transatlantic exchanges—mined from creative intelligences rooted in specific localities, in constant contact and creative tension with the international avant-garde” that burgeoned in “little magazines” such as *Blast* (White 161). During this period, Eric White suggests, the little magazine “became a textual location

in which, and a creative process by which, writers who consciously exiled themselves from the United States, and those who remained at home, formed a conjoined, if obverse, relationship in a correlated aesthetic field” (143). While Jargon’s links to this earlier period are evident in its publication of modernist writers such as Mina Loy and Bob Brown, in the 1960s and 70s “the quintessential genre of modernist publication”, the little magazine was but a part of a small press network encompassing artists’ books, postcards, poster-prints, folding cards, and other ephemera (Morrison 18).

## A Jargon Society

4 Despite its principal location in Highlands, North Carolina, the Jargon Society was, as Rothenberg acknowledges, a major force in the New American poetry of the 1960s. According to Kyle Schlesinger, since its inception in 1951, Jargon has been “responsible for much of the mingling and coordination between parties whose relationships have an unfathomable effect on one another in the present and the course of the future of the arts and culture at large” (para 29).<sup>1</sup> Although Jargon is perhaps best known as a Black Mountain press—due to Williams’s attendance at Black Mountain College and the press’s early publications of Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and Robert Creeley—Williams, as Kyle Schlesinger notes, was “pretty much done publishing the Black Mountain poets (as such) by the mid-sixties” (para 5). This was partly because of Williams’s mistrust of pigeonholing: “I don’t like labels. I don’t like being called a Black Mountain poet. I don’t feel comfortable with that” (Cory 3).

5 Williams’s unease with poetry “labels” is also reflected in Jargon’s roster of authors. Far from subscribing to any one poetic school or group, Jargon’s diverse and eclectic publishing interests have created, as Jeffery Beam and Richard Owens note, “a constellation of cultural figures and objects that brings together in a single orbit the utterly unpolished and the cosmopolitan, the eccentric and the carefully measured, the odd and the familiar” (para 6). A “cursory but by no means exhaustive index of figures” includes:

American authors James Broughton, Robert Creeley, Guy Davenport, Robert Duncan, Russell Edson, Buckminster Fuller, Ronald Johnson, Denise Levertov, Paul Metcalf, Lorine Niedecker, Charles Olson, Joel Oppenheimer and Louis Zukofsky; photographers Lyle Bongé, Elizabeth Matheson, John Menapace, Mark Steinmetz and Doris Ullman; British poets Basil Bunting, Thomas A. Clark, Simon Cutts, Ian Hamilton Finlay and Mina Loy; outsider artists Georgia Blizzard, St. EOM (Eddie Owens Martin), Howard Finster, James Harold Jennings and Clarence Schmidt; bookmakers Jonathan Greene, Doyle Moore and Keith Smith. (para 6)

6 This “constellation” is indicative of how, as Jonathan Greene claims, Jargon’s worldview “is wide and catholic, despite its being elite and exclusive” (1979, np).

7 Elitism is also tacit in the name “Jargon.” In an interview with Robert Dana, Williams explains that he “liked the irony of the word” which was suggested to him by the painter Paul Ellsworth:

He would throw words around, and he kept talking about jargon. “Life’s jargon. Jargon.” I said, “What do you mean?” and he’d say—he did have it right, in a way—he said, “I mean in my own speech. My language, as

opposed to the tribe's language." (Dana 203)

- 8 The irony of "Jargon" resides in its suggestion of a specialist language intelligible only to an exclusive clique. But, as Greene suggests, Williams's enterprise is, nevertheless, catholic. In his review of Williams's *Elite/Elate Poems: Selected Poems 1971-75*, Kenneth Irby notes that "elite" "derives from a Latin verb meaning to pick out, to choose, from an Indo-European root *leg-*, to collect" (308). In this respect, Jargon's elitism is not so much exclusionary as it is discerning, being concerned primarily with cultivating what is exceptional and unique within the context of mainstream culture.
- 9 Like Emily Dickinson before him, Williams's "Business is Circumference" (Dickinson 412). "I'm peripheral in my vision", he tells Dana: "I'm looking for edges. I'm looking for the stuff on the outside" (220). Williams's concern is for the "things that are bright-eyed, non-uppity, autochthonous, wacko, private, isolate, unconventional, unpaved, non-commercial, non-nice, naive, outside, fantastic, sub-aesthetic, home-style and bushy-tailed", all of which counter the homogenising effects of the venal (Williams 2000, 120).
- 10 Eccentricity also reflects Jargon's own strategic positioning in the literary world. Far from being centrally placed, Jargon was itself remote, out of the way, and thus *eccentric* to the urban centres of the literary establishment. In 1969 Williams removed himself even further from "the center" when, with his partner, poet Thomas Meyer, he began "living on the margins of the Modern World", dividing his time each year between two remote locations: Skywinding Farm in Highlands, North Carolina and Corn Close, a seventeenth-century stonecottage, situated in Dentdale, Cumbria (Williams 1982, 132). Both places, Greene suggests, "mirror similar worlds", both have "good views", trails to hike, and are situated "away from the snobbism of the 'centers' of civilization (big cities)", that Williams "scorned" (2009, para 8). From these eccentric locations, as Guy Davenport suggests, Williams would become "an ambassador for an enterprise that has neither center nor hierarchy" (181).
- 11 Jargon played a pivotal role in what David Hadbawnik describes as "the brief moment of vibrant cross-pollination between U.K. and U.S. experimental poetry" that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s (2). During this period a transatlantic constellation of equally *eccentric* small presses, little magazines, bookshops, and gallery spaces emerged which, directly or indirectly, drew inspiration from Jargon's example. Jargon "established a model for how to build a community of writers from the ground up", highlighting "numerous possibilities available to other artists intent on keeping alive the various folkways and urbane intelligences that commingle in the local attention of the artist" (Smith para 1).

## Utopian Spaces

- 12 If, as Rothenberg suggests, "poetry [...] is the language of those precisely at the margins", and "a strategic position from which to struggle with the center of the culture", then the small press publication makes that positioning even more emphatic (10). Adopting the term that Kate Linker originally proposed in the context of Artists' Books, Anne Moeglin-Delcroix conceives the small press publication as an "alternative space" that exists "outside established

institutions” (np).<sup>2</sup> Because it proposes an alternative *elsewhere* the small press publication exhibits “a close relationship to utopia”:

Whatever we may think, utopia, in fact, was not originally a temporal notion referring to the imagination of the future, but a spatial notion, indeed, a geographical one. It is, we must remember, the name of an island, an autonomous world that is confined, lateral, marginal and far away. It is “without” place because in proposing another organisation of life, it situates itself outside the ordinary functioning of the world. (np)

- 13 Although Moeglin-Delcroix is concerned with artists’ books, the “spatial notion” of the small press publication has implications for poetry and geographically remote or isolated poets: for example, Niedecker, who lived and worked predominantly in rural Wisconsin, or Finlay, who, in 1966, settled in the equally isolate environs of Dunsyre, Scotland. For these poets and others in similar situations, the idea of the small press publication as a utopian interspace is an acute one that complicates their geographical remoteness or isolation.
- 14 Niedecker indicates just how much small press publishing facilitated intellectual travel in a letter to Cid Corman. Referring to her book *Tenderness & Gristle: The Collected Poems (1936 – 1966)*, published by Jargon in 1968, Niedecker writes: “I sent University of Wisconsin a copy of *T&G* way back in Sept. A few days ago I wrote: Did you fail to receive? They answer they’ve placed it with regional materials. I should ask: What region—London, Wisconsin, New York?” (Faranda, 208). In many ways, Niedecker is a local poet; her poetry frequently takes the cultural and natural topographies of her Wisconsin environs as their subject. One encounters specific local details in her poems, such as the “sora rail”, a marsh-dwelling bird (*Porzana carolina*) familiar to Wisconsin, and its distinctive “sweet//spoon-tapped waterglass —/descending scale” in “Paeon to Place” or the local “folk from whom all poetry flows/and dreadfully much else” that Niedecker acknowledges in “In the great snowfall before the bomb” (263, 142). Yet, because of the poetry’s evolutionary scope, Niedecker also exceeds such local boundaries. As an avid reader of Darwin and other natural historians, Niedecker frequently posits the local in her poetry as part, or culmination, of larger evolutionary processes. “We are what the seas/have made us”, she writes in “Lake Superior”, punning on the notion of desire *and* distance in the phrase: “longingly immense” (240).
- 15 Niedecker’s negotiations of the regional, however, also reveal the “waters working together/internationally” in other ways (233). Niedecker’s remark to Corman, for example, also recalls how, as for others in Jargon’s “society”, her poetry was published *elsewhere* by numerous presses and journals, including Finlay’s Wild Hawthorn Press in Edinburgh and Corman’s Origin in Kyoto, Japan. Far from reinforcing the image of her as an isolated, local poet, the transnational spread of Niedecker’s publications brings her and her work into a more cosmopolitan milieu. Indeed, Niedecker confirms Stephen Bann’s claim that the 1960s was a time of artistic movement, “a movement between countries and continents, undertaken in privileged cases by the poets themselves but in all events by the proliferating little magazines that celebrated international poetic brotherhood” (133). Whereas Williams was one of the privileged poets who could undertake this movement in person, Niedecker travelled largely by way of the small press publication. The social implications of these publications, and their role in fostering an “international poetic

brotherhood” are evident in the way Niedecker, unable to visit the British poet Basil Bunting during his stay in Madison in 1967, found consolation in the fact that their poetry, along with Louis Zukofsky’s would meet in the pages of the Chicago *Poetry* magazine: “I told B. he, LZ and I would see each other around August in *Poetry*”, she writes to Cid Coram: “LZ’s ‘A’-18 in Aug. and B and I sometime thereabouts – there we’ll be in our dog days” (Faranda 52).

- 16 The social possibilities that Niedecker found in the little magazine *Poetry* are developed further by Finlay who, with Jessie McGuffie in 1961, established another utopian space in the form of the Wild Hawthorn Press and the little magazine, *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse*. The importance of these publishing platforms for Finlay are evident when his long-term agoraphobia and his isolation in Dunsyre—“as quiet and remote [a] place as possible”—are taken into account (Williams 1982, 12). For, as Williams stresses, Finlay’s physical and geographical impositions did not prevent him from engaging with an international range of poets and artists:

Though he does not travel at all in person—he stays at home and minds his own business, that hardest of creative ways of life—his work influences poets everywhere at once. He is a real man of letters in the most exact and useful meaning of the term, and his publishing effort (The Wild Hawthorn Press) is uniquely valuable. (1982, 12)

- 17 For a poet in Finlay’s situation the small press network and its infrastructures offer important social possibilities. *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse*. itself demonstrates how a publication is not restricted by the spatial and temporal limits of its originating locale.<sup>3</sup> The encompassing scope of Finlay’s magazine, its openness to “everyone” and its tacit evocation of a utopian “elsewhere”, has been noted by one of its regular contributors, the Scottish poet and translator, Edwin Morgan:

Its main aims were (i) to introduce a variety of foreign poets in translation to Scottish readers, (ii) to present a selection of good poetry, mainly lyrical, wherever it came from (Scotland, England or America), and (iii) to explore aspects of the visual presentation of poetry through a series of illustrated numbers using drawings, woodcuts, calligraphy, and typographic design. (26)

- 18 From 1961 and 1967, over the course of twenty-five issues, *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse*. published a broad range of contemporary poets (including Niedecker and Williams), contemporary artists such as Bridget Riley and Ad Reinhardt, concrete poetry, earlier avant-garde icons like Apollinaire and Kurt Schwitters, and the traditional lyric poetry of Hamish Maclaren. “In all this”, Morgan proposes, “there was the desire to keep certain lines of communication open, in particular those from country to country, but also those between poet and artist, and those between present and past” (26). Finlay’s magazine, therefore, is a pertinent example of how the small press publication brings together, in terms of time and space, a “longingly immense” scope of contributors and exemplifies the creative dialogues that define Jargon’s social milieu.

- 19 *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse*. also foresees the collaborative spirit of Finlay’s own work, which has utilised a diverse range of artists, printers, designers, and photographers. One of Finlay’s many collaborators is Simon Cutts, a British poet, artist, publisher, and printer who, with Stuart Mills in Nottingham in 1965, established the Tarasque press and its eponymous magazine. Later, in

1975, with Kay Roberts, Cutts began the small press and gallery space, Coracle, which has published poetry, artists' books, printed ephemera, and exhibited a range of constructed objects, installations, and artworks.<sup>4</sup>

20 Both Wild Hawthorn and Jargon have been important models for Coracle and, like Finlay and Williams, Cutts's collaborative activities have dispelled the myth "of the artist as an isolated autonomous figure" (2007, 112). For Cutts, "the group phenomenon is the most important characteristic of the modern movement", particularly "in its pursuit of aesthetic centre" and its challenge to "the barriers that separate 'the arts'" (1975, np). As "a medium that has no social boundaries, and [which] can precipitate change", the small press publication is crucial for establishing this all-important "group phenomenon" (Cutts 2007, 89). In its tireless explorations into the social and collaborative possibilities of publishing—via artists' books, poetry publications, and printed ephemera—Coracle has itself extended considerably the reach of the "society" that initially developed around Jargon and the Wild Hawthorn Press in the 1960s. Indeed a mutual appreciation between Cutts and Williams is readily apparent: Jargon published three of Cutts's books and Coracle has published a number of Williams's as well as a book of tributes celebrating his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, *Cat Gut in Blossom: Jonathan Williams in England* (1989).

## Certain Trees

21 The effects of the utopian interspaces created by small press publications such as Jargon and Wild Hawthorn Press are evident in the exhibition curated by Cutts in 2006 for the Centre des livres d'artistes at St Yrieix-la-Perche, entitled *Certain Tress: The Constructed Book, Poem and Object 1964-2006* which displayed books and objects produced by a number of British poets, artists, and publishers (including Finlay) whose sensibilities and collaborative activities cover enough mutual ground to comprise a loose collective. Although John Bevis, writing in the book for the exhibition, is keen to stress that "Certain Trees' is not the name of a group of artists, and there will never be a PhD, or auction, or late-night review, devoted to Certain Treeism", he does acknowledge how "the idea of the group is central to the work in [the] exhibition", noting the importance of collaborative work, small presses, little magazines, mail art and other printed or constructed ephemera in establishing and reifying group identity (15-16).

22 The title *Certain Trees* is taken from a phrase by Ian Hamilton Finlay that Stuart Mills, one of the poets and publishers featured in the exhibition, quotes in the little magazine *Tarasque* that with Cutts, Mills started in 1965 and ran to eleven issues over a six-year period:

"The proper subjects for poetry are;  
the Seasons, the Affections, Fishing Boats,  
Inland Waterways, Non-Alcoholic Beverages,  
Certain Flowers, Certain Trees.

Improper subjects are;  
Sex, Drugs, War and Self." (qtd. in Neate 47)

23 These subjects such as the Seasons, Fishing Boats, and Inland Waterways, were a mutual interest for Finlay and many of the poets associated with



Tarasque Press and its eponymous magazine. And like Finlay, Mills and Cutts frequently expressed an incisive and often barbed aversion to the popular poetry of the time—confessional, pop, and Beat—and its preoccupations with the self and emphasis on the figure of the *poète maudit*. In contrast to this emphasis on what Finlay calls “the self, ‘thought’ & fuss” of contemporary poetry, the Tarasque sensibility shows “a respect for a longer literary tradition, an older type of ‘popular culture’ that privileges outdoor pursuits, seasonality and nature”, and esteems “modern rather than pop poetry” (Finlay xx; Neate 47).

- 24 Niedecker can also be located within this “longer literary tradition”, particularly her poems that show an attentiveness to the most familiar and everyday phenomena: “To my small/electric pump”, “Remember my little granite pail”, and, perhaps, most significantly for the *Certain Trees* exhibition and book, “My friend tree”: (2002, 197, 96):

My friend tree  
I sawed you down  
but I must attend  
to an older friend  
the sun. (2002, 186)

- 25 Niedecker’s poem, according to Peter Middleton, presents “a transformation of everyday observation into metaphors of social relations” by showing how “sometimes precious attachments have to be sacrificed for a greater good” (254).

- 26 As a poem of “social relations”, Niedecker’s poem also assumes a prominent, if tacit, position within the intertextual dynamics of the *Certain Trees* community. This is apparent in the two-page “epigraph” included in the *Certain Trees* book, which not only makes a connection between Niedecker and Mills, but also signals a broader intertextual dialogue between several poets, presses, and publishers, including Jargon and the Wild Hawthorn Press. Reproduced on the first page of this epigraph is Roy Fisher’s poem “Epitaph: Lorine Niedecker”:

Certain trees  
came separately from the wood  
  
and with no special  
thought of returning (6)

- 27 As well as evoking Mills in the first line, Fisher’s “Epitaph” also recalls the felled tree in Niedecker’s poem and conveys a similar theme of mortality with the poem’s “Certain trees” being cut down and transported from the woodland for other purposes such as timber or firewood. Fisher’s use of the word “wood” also implies the renewal and continuity of a coppiced wood; a system of woodland management in which new tree growth is nourished by the stools of older felled trees. “Epitaph”, therefore, pertinently reiterates Niedecker’s faith in evolutionary laws. If, as Niedecker writes in “Wintergreen Ridge”, “Life is natural/in the evolution/of matter”, then so is death (2002, 247). Furthermore, that these trees show “no special/thought of returning” poignantly conveys the understated modesty characteristic of Niedecker’s poetry.

- 28 It is significant that “Epitaph” was initially published in *Epitaphs for Lorine*, a collection of tributes to Niedecker, edited by Williams, and published by



Jargon in 1973. Fisher's invocations of Niedecker are further emphasised in *Certain Trees* in the way that "Epitaph" is reproduced directly above an image of the title page of Niedecker's book *My Friend Tree*, published by the Wild Hawthorn Press in 1961. The juxtaposition of the British and Scottish (Fisher and Finlay) with the American (Niedecker and Williams) further reflects the transatlantic poles of *Certain Trees* and "the space between them" which, Bevis maintains, remains "the stamping ground of many participants, and the passport control for the exploits of others" (2008, 15).

- 29 This "stamping ground" is further elaborated on the second page of the epigraph by way of Mills's poem, "If we came together, you and I" which was first published in his Tarasque booklet, *The Menagerie Goes for A Walk* (c. 1968). The poem is dedicated to the Scottish poet Gael Turnbull, co-publisher of Migrant Press and its eponymous magazine, which Turnbull started in 1957 in order to introduce to British readers the work of the American writers he had discovered through *Origin*, *Black Mountain Review* and Jargon. "The idea", Jonnie Turnbull, explains "was to cross-fertilize poetry, to encourage English-speaking poets in Britain, Canada and the US, in particular, to read each other's work" (8). Mills's poem implies another kind of cross-pollination by indirectly elaborating on the social relations and arboreal amity implicit in Niedecker's and Fisher's texts. Two certain or singular trees proceed from the wood of the one tree mutually encountered in Mills's poem:

If we came together, you and I  
on a walk together,  
the tree you would take  
to put in your garden.

But I would climb up with  
a sharp knife  
to cut out some wood,  
this my joy to take back. (7)

- 30 The poem presents two contrasting sensibilities, which derive from the same "wood." According to Cutts, "the *pastorale* of Gael Turnbull" was "of immense importance" to Mills (2008, 139). Echoes of this pastoral are tacit in the poem's Blakean image of the "tree/growing birds/and the children playing", as well as the "shade" it provides (7). This contrasts with the wood appropriated by the poem's speaker which, "shaped and polished/in a corner to touch", suggests a material object (7). In this respect, Mills's poem reflects the concerns of Tarasque which, he claims, "moved away from its original literary stance [...] to encompass the small image, the artefact, and [...] the so-called Concrete Poem" (141).<sup>5</sup>
- 31 These different sensibilities, however, the literary pastoral and the physical object, are ultimately part of the same aesthetic; what Cutts describes as "a certain delicacy and slighthness of key, a choice of the poetic everyday as opposed to an assumed or inherited *Grand Manner*" (1975, np). The *Certain Trees* epigraph, therefore, is a pertinent example of how "the equivalences between books and objects, printed and constructed material" manifest "amongst such a loose group of acquaintances" (Cutts 2006, 9).

## Thick as Trees

- 32 The tree in Mills's poem, "growing birds" also recalls the initial subject of this essay, Jargon and its transatlantic "society." According to Williams, "in French *jargon* [also] means the twittering of birds" which, he believes, "is about the best definition" (Dana 203). These avian associations dovetail pertinently with John Bevis's book, *Aaaaw to Zzzzzd: The Words of Birds*, which owes its existence partly to Williams.<sup>6</sup> Bevis's lexicon and history of birdsong, however, speaks as much for poetry as it does for ornithology. According to Bevis, "Birds belong in their landscape and help to define and distinguish one piece of land from another", noting that: "Each species may sing differently from place to place", (2, 5). However, Bevis also acknowledges "the happy distribution of the species" and "the fortuitous spreads of populations, frequencies of encounters, possibilities of discoveries" that bird watching elicits (2, 4). Such polarities—between regional locality and migratory distribution—are a fitting metaphor for the social dynamics of Jargon's own "society."
- 33 Commenting on the "consistent difference[s]" of small presses such as Jargon and Wild Hawthorn and their social importance Mills pertinently recalls the societal dynamics—the calls and songs—of the feathered tribe:

In continuing to publish I continue to acknowledge theirs and similar achievements: I continue to wave a handkerchief at the world and know that, inevitably, sometime, someplace, another Simon Cutts will wave back with a handkerchief, though decorative, equally impractical and most probably, purchased from some small bazaar or emporium a considerable remove away from the chain stores of the high street. (141)

- 34 "Not all birds sing", Bevis notes, "but nearly all call, that is, they make specific sounds for warning of predators, asking for food, finding each other, and so on" (10). Like the bird's call (or the wave of a handkerchief), the publication becomes an equivalent and equally idiosyncratic way of "finding each other", and acknowledging another's presence, regardless of distance. Thus, in its own way, publishing is itself a call of kinship.
- 35 For Finlay one is inclined to friendship regardless of geographical distance because it is a matter of remote disposition. In *Detached Sentences on Friendship* he claims: "Friendship is *inclination*,/acquaintance *geography*" (232). One *chooses* one's friends (no matter where they are) whereas the convenience of geographical proximity only fosters a token amity. Niedecker also touches on this issue of long-range friendships in her poem "T. E. Lawrence" when she writes: "How impossible it is/to be alone" (198). If physical isolation is unbearable, as "impossible" might imply, then in the social interspaces of the small press network that worry is allayed by the communicative impulse that motivates its exchanges. Williams summarises this social inclination by evoking Walt Whitman's claims for companionship: "Walt Whitman in an amazing line, said that what he aspired to do was to make companionship as thick as trees by the rivers of America" (1982, 71). In addition to suggesting camaraderie and intimacy, "companionship" is also a printing term that refers to a company of composers working together under the management of an elected foreman. It is, in this respect, a fitting analogy for the kinship and collaborative efforts witnessed in Jargon's "society" and the "Certain Trees" it helped cultivate beyond America's shores within a geographically dispersed network. Indeed, as Williams remarks in the context of Whitman's trees, in the utopian interspaces of the small press publication, "*We are all here together*" (1982, 71).

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## Notes

- 1 In the mid-1960s Jargon became "The Jargon Society" in order to become eligible for receiving government arts grants from funding bodies. "It seemed people would not give money unless they had particular tax benefits", Williams tells Robert Dana: "Also, to get money out of the National Endowment or any of the foundations, you had to do this. So that made us become more social, then, than perhaps we had been before" (204).
- 2 See Kate Linker, "The Artist's Book as Alternative Space", *Studio International* 195 (1990), 1980, 75-79.
- 3 Indeed, the utopian possibilities of *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* are implicit in its title which derives from Robert Creeley's poem "Please"; "a poem about a horse that got tired./Poor. Old. Tired. Horse" which, Creeley writes, is also "a poem for everyone" whose speaker wishes "to be elsewhere, elsewhere" (156).
- 4 Kay Roberts left Coracle in 1980. Other people involved with Coracle include John Bevis and Colin Sackett. In 1988, Erica Van Horn joined Coracle and with Cutts runs the press from Tipperary, Ireland. However, over the course of its four decades of existence, Coracle has operated from various locations including London, Norfolk, Liverpool, and Florence.
- 5 At this time, Mills notes, Cutts "could be seen coaxing a small fretsaw through the intricacies of a piece of work no larger than a florin" (141).
- 6 An early version of Bevis' book (co-published by Coracle and St Paulinus Press in 1995) "made its way, through the mutual acquaintance of the late Jonathan Williams

[...] into the hands of Roger Conover”, the Executive Editor at the MIT Press (Bevis 2010, xi).

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