

### **GHOST TANTRAS**

### Michael McClure



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#### INTRODUCTION TO THE 2013 EDITION

Many decades ago in San Francisco, lying on the couch, reading the newly written first Ghost Tantra as it unveiled to my eyes and ears, I feel a ripple, maybe a shudder, of embarrassment and laugh at myself. Where is the beauty that I expect after my experience of that ball of silence promising me ninety-nine tantras to the goddess? I remember Robert Creeley's admonition to believe in the experience of writing the poem. I look at the page again — it brings love looking for sugar! I know that there are to be ninety-eight more of these. I'm sure of it.

The next day Ghost Tantra 2 appears and speaks in "beast language"... the Tantra waves baby arms at me and gives me news of the great Tibetan poet Milarepa who is imprinting himself on the poem, becoming a "mystic experience" — and tells me that everything lies in front of me not in the past. Yes, it is a mystic experience and is my self-experience which can be laughable as easily as loaded with torment. Maybe some beauty that I do not expect will occur in a different guise or body or body of words. Next, Ghost Tantra 3 brings its own announcement with a cigar and cherries, and the sounds that begin to feel familiar — "groooooooooor yahh-yort gahhr."

Immediately afterward, Tantra 4 carries long howls, brings gardens with cool shadows, and sings of youth and liberation. Sounds of the molecular body account for the fifth Tantra. Tantra 8 has the rose and lily-lovely cheek of the goddess appearing. Belief is beginning to push the edge of dubiety back.

Tantra 13 begins, "OH LOVELY LINE BETWEEN DAY AND DREAM." I am "pleased and richly placid," I am sentient and this flow of language seems to be conscious, and is its own being. Can these, in fact, bring changes to the universe, as tantras should do? I'm changing.

Once comic books had words like "CLANG" and the ancient Greek poem says "KLANG." Did Goethe write *Faust* or did Faust create Goethe?

I am excited with the existence coming into being — I have brought it about.

Now it is time to pack my bag for the air flight to Mexico City and the long drive to Huautla de Jiménez — and the journey into the mountains of Oaxaca.

I write Tantra 15b in my notebook as the plane departs San Francisco for Mexico City. I have no idea what I'm doing — just writing. I sit in the near empty plane with a swelling sense of meditation, feeling the plane's metal walls shudder with thoughtless physical pleasure. Above a central California of the Sixties I am thrilled with the magic entering Tantra 16. By the time the plane lands in Mexico City there is little doubt left. In the airport the sadness of all of everything strengthens me.

We drive across the desert stopping sometimes to look at roadside botany. Hours later, we turn off the worn asphalt and enter the mountains into an adventure of thunder and lightning storms and deserted, roadside, cliff edges and narrower "trails" with pounding torrents crushing them — no campesino or burro to be seen in the steep craggy latenight flashes of a landslide drive. Waking in the morning in the small pueblo of Huautla de Jiménez, in a quieter rain, we drive from the country town to empty cow pastures and carefully make cultures of *psilocybes*, sterilizing the instruments with a portable burner, propping a tarp of waterproof canvas over our heads, and our sterilized instruments make clean cuts in the small mushrooms. In the early afternoon the curandera Maria Sabina allows us into her chanting ceremony. Lightning is flashing and thunder booming through the uncovered windows of her home on a high road. Later that day carrying our broken movie camera, we listen to the stories of Isauro Nave, a curandero of the Leaves of the Good Shepherdess, in his hacienda. A few days later, we are in a rural Mexican airport and begin flying to San Francisco.

At home, in a flat overlooking the Golden Gate and waves crashing on Point Bonita, I resume writing the Tantras. About this time I struggle in my writing with my shyness and an urge to explore self-dramatization — to attempt a non-mimetic poetry which would not be descriptive of the ordinary world but would be at one with creation of muscular music coming from the body and organs and inspiring sounds and "pictures" from that source.

I believe that a poem I make is part of myself like an organ or spirit-body, and these poem-tantras are becoming a body

and growing up — having a life of their own. This is not hard to imagine for a young poet who believes in the divinity of Blake and Shelley, and in the paintings of Clyfford Still and Jackson Pollock as a part of those artists' being.

It was, and is, part of my art to believe that all conceptions of boundaries are lies . . .

As the Tantras move forward and as the ball of silence from which they sound-out is both more clear and more elusive, I consider them carefully. I can feel the spirit of Marilyn Monroe (Tantra 39) entering them the day after her death in 1962. It is only right; it is a business of the goddess. I like the mammalian music when I declaim the poem. Now the title occurs to me "Ghost" from the German "Geist" or soul — Spirit Tantras — Ghost Tantras. I am moved by Brahms' Four Serious Songs as they sing, in German, the Preacher of the Old Testament's concern with the spirit of men and the spirit of the beasts and how one goes down under the earth and the other goes out, out, out. Huge low silences and huge high silences are occurring. Tantra 49, "SILENCE THE EYES! BECALM THE SENSES!" has an extending and extended life.

A year or two later, Bruce Conner and I go to the San Francisco Zoo to record lion roars and snow leopard growls for a sound-play I have written. The newly published first edition of this book is in my back pocket and through a lucky event we end up in the lion house, and I yell this Tantra to the four maned males of the building. They roar back with me and we sing it together. The five of us are deeply pleased; also I am pro-

foundly shaken and then shaken again when Bruce plays back the tape he made with his high fidelity machine. A few years later a public television group is making documentary films of the new generation of poets and asks me to read again to the lions and again they roar with me. The film was shown on TV and now it can be found on the internet.

From Ghost Tantra 90 on, the stanzas build to power and the final ones close by hugely shouting into the dense mattresslike curtain of material reality, until it begins to lift in tranquility.

> Michael McClure Oakland, 2013

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#### INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION

You've never heard anything like this before. These are my personal songs but anyone can sing them. Pronounce them as they are spelled and don't worry about details — use a natural voice and let the vibrations occur. They come from a swirling ball of silence that melds with outer sounds and thought. They were written in kitchens and bedrooms and frontrooms and airplanes, and a couple in Mexico City. Their purpose is to bring beauty and change the shape of the universe.

### I WAS HERE AND I LIKED IT!

It was all O.K.

I suffered.

There were scents, and flowers, and textures, beautiful women.

I was a handsome man. I invented love.

I radiated genius for those who saw me with loving eyes.

I was happy — I laughed and cried. Constantly new sights and sounds. I trembled and sweated at the sight of beauty. I laughed at strong things because I loved them — wanting to kick them in

and make freedom. When I go I'M GONE.

Don't resurrect me or the duplicates of my atoms.

It was perfect!
I am sheer spirit.

Poetry is a muscular principle and a revolution for the bodyspirit and intellect and ear. Making images and pictures, even when speaking with melody, is not enough. There must be a poetry of pure beauty and energy that does not mimic but joins and exhorts reality and states the daily higher vision. To dim the senses and to listen to inner energies a-roar is sometimes called the religious experience. It does not matter what it is called. Laughter as well as love is passion. The loveliness the nose snuffs in air may be translated to sound by interior perceptive organs. The touch of velvet on the fingertips may become a cry when time is stopped. Speed like calmness may become a pleasure or gentle muffled sound. A dahlia or fern might become pure speech in meditation. A woman's body might become the sound of worship. A goddess lies coiled at the base of man's body, and pure tantric sound might awaken her. There are no laws but living changing ones, and any system is a touch of death.

Read these poems as you would Lorca, or Mayakovsky, or Lawrence but READ ALOUD AND SING THEM.



These are spontaneous stanzas published in the order and with the natural sounds in which they were first written. If there is an "OOOOOOOOOOOOOH" simply say a long loud "oooh". If there is a "gahr" simply say gar and put an h in.

Look at stanza 51. It begins in English and turns into beast language — star becomes stahr. Body becomes boody. Nose becomes noze. Everybody knows how to pronounce NOH or VOOR-NAH or GAHROOOOO ME.

Pronounce sounds as they are spelled and don't worry about details — let individual pronunciations and vibrations occur and don't look for secret meanings. Read them aloud and there will be more pleasure.

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