

CITY LIGHTS BOOKS

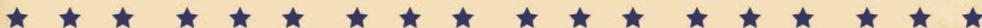


MEPHISTOS



& OTHER POEMS

MICHAEL ★ MCCLURE



INCLUDING

Mephistos ★ Some Fringes ★ Rose Breaths
Being ★ Song Heavy

ALSO BY MICHAEL MCCLURE

POETRY

Passage

Hymns to St. Geryon and Other Poems

Dark Brown

Ghost Tantras

The New Book/A Book of Torture

Dark Brown and Hymns to St. Geryon

Poisoned Wheat

Little Odes

Star

Rare Angel

September Blackberries

Jaguar Skies

Antechamber

Fragments of Perseus

Selected Poems

Rebel Lions

Simple Eyes

Three Poems: Dolphin Skull, Rare Angel, and Dark Brown

Huge Dreams: San Francisco and Beat Poems

Touching the Edge: Dharma Devotions from the Hummingbird Sangha

Rain Mirror

Plum Stones: Cartoons of No Heaven

Mysteriosos and Other Poems

Of Indigo and Saffron: New and Selected Poems

PLAYS

The Blossom; or Billy the Kid

The Beard

The Mammals

Gargoyle Cartoons

Gorf, or Gorf and the Blind Dyke

The Grabbing of the Fairy

Josephine: The Mouse Singer

The Beard & VKTMS: Two Plays

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Wolf Net

Freewheelin Frank: Secretary of the Angels, as Told to Michael McClure

Scratching the Beat Surface: Essays on New Vision from Blake to Kerouac

Specks

Francesco Clemente: Testa Coda

Lighting the Corners: On Art, Nature, and the Visionary, Essays and Interviews

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The Mad Cub

The Adept

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“Mercedes Benz,” with Janis Joplin

Mandala Book, with Bruce Conner

The Adventures of a Novel, with Bruce Conner

Lie, Stand, Sit, Be Still, with Robert Graham

The Boobus and the Bunnyduck, with Jess

Deer Boy, with Hung Liu

FILMS, CDS, AND DVDS

Love Lion, with Ray Manzarek

The Third Mind, with Ray Manzarek

There's a Word, with Ray Manzarek

I Like Your Eyes Liberty, with Terry Riley

Rock Drill

Abstract Alchemist

Rebel Roar

Touching the Edge

DOCUMENTARIES

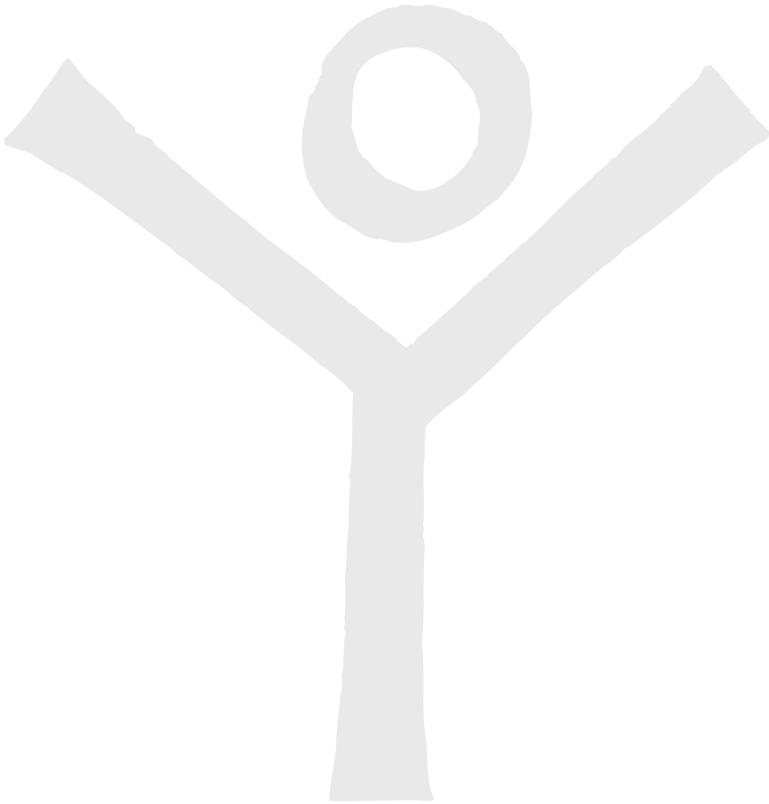
The Maze

September Blackberries

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CITY LIGHTS

MEPHISTOS **& OTHER POEMS**



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CITY LIGHTS

MEPHISTOS
& OTHER POEMS

MICHAEL ★ M=CLURE

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CITY LIGHTS BOOKS

FOR THE PROTECTION OF ALL BEINGS

WITH DEEP HEART'S LOVE FOR
AMY JANE BILL JAMES MICHAEL



once this was all black plasma
and imagination

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FOREWORD

The world puts off its mask of vastness to its lover. It becomes small as one song, as one kiss of the eternal.

— Rabindranath Tagore

The flow of energy through the system acts to organize the system.

— Harold Morowitz

A mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels.

— Walt Whitman

The poems in *Mephistos* are written in Projective Verse — a mode that is neither metrical nor free verse. Projective Verse is a style that gives swift access of the energy of inspiration to the Heart where it bounces through the syllable to the Breath and onto the field of composition.

Some poems here are written spontaneously and without changes and others are lengthily studied.

“All art should become science and all science art; poetry and philosophy should be made one.”

These words of Friedrich Schlegel are not less true in these times of Projective Verse and of new poetry and witnessing investigations of dances in living protein.

These poems celebrate art, biology, imagination and inspiration, and I thank my gifted friends who have brought me to them.

The poems in *Mephistos* are like the energy of consciousness moving vertically on a scroll or screen. Look at them as you would look at calligraphy. They are for the voice and the eye.

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If the type and placement of lines seem strange, read them aloud and they will take their shape.

Capitalized lines are not to be read louder.

Single-letter lines gliding down the page, move normally as breath does.

Poetry is a muscular principle.

*

1.

Emily Dickinson writes that Mephistopheles would be the best friend if he had fidelity. If so, he would then be “thoroughly divine.” Mephistopheles, the soul-thief, returns aged and exhausted Faust to his inspiration, energy, and sexuality. Mephistopheles is an active and witty companion for an inspired journey. He scatters treachery and tricks, and is finally foiled.

Mephisto (the same name) is an angel who helps God in constructing the universe and in the creation of orcas and giant sea mammals.

2.

The thirty-seven strophes of *Mephistos* resemble a medicine bundle. American Indians gathered spirit objects to make medicine bundles that they carried along, whether in the heart or in a pouch. One bundle I have seen is wrapped in a green-dyed otter skin.

Everything of *Mephistos* is happening or happened in the world or imagination, sensory prehension, or dreams.

Mephistos time-dive like dolphins through times and places in the sea of experience and imagination and do not have boundaries of grammar.

5.

Poems want to be real as the open face of a rose or the black smell of tar in the street.

6.

Mephistos celebrates our human-mammal love of nature and abhors the exuberant passion for its destruction. We are in the extreme slow motion explosion, and the *exponential* explosion, of forests and riverbeds. Underground fuels, oceans, and atmosphere are in the blast that morphs them into world-size cinders of concrete and plastics — (our) cities and newly created deserts.

“Nature loves to hide herself,” Heraclitus wrote in his fragments. This is the newest disguise.

7.

Some Fringes are small poems appearing from my love of haiku. They shed the rules of haiku and make shapes of perceptions and experiences. They are often funny and sometimes grand.

Experiences may be so tiny, so without scale or proportion that they would not exist without a *fringe* which flits like the blue-gray wing of a moth. Or like a coyote leaping across the highway, in front of my speeding car, and into the beach dunes.

8.

Each day for seventeen days, after sitting meditation, I wrote spontaneously. The ornament of those experiences is *Rose Breaths*, which is itself many experiences.

“The animal is in the world like water in water” is taken from Leslie Scalapino, who found it in the writing of Georges Bataille.

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9.

My lifelong friend, Zen master Dave Haselwood, would not agree with my bleak view of hyper-reality in *The Surge*.

10.

The poem for Etel Adnan was written while reading her *Journey to Mount Tamalpais*. My memories of the mountain include seeing it every day and illegally camping there up high in a hidden nook with Freewheelin Frank, secretary of the Angels, smelling the wild odors and campfires, and listening to other secret campers in their nooks, and seeing wild stars and hearing foxes barking.

11.

Sestina for Amy is a bow to Troubadour Arnaut Daniel, inventor of the sestina form, which seems to be like a rose quartered. The sestina helps guide thoughts to be reborn and to be myriad. (Troubadour Arnaut Daniel may have found his inspiration in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry.)

12.

Pollock's Echo reflects Jackson Pollock's unexpected black and white paintings of 1951 in which he portrays the Beloved. I imagine his *Echo* painting laid out over a wall or hanging in space — it is like a moth wing pattern or the map of a woman. Pollock's woman, the Beloved, has stepped from the veils of his dripped skeins.

Novalis wrote this opening line: "The beloved is an abbreviation of the universe . . ."

and Jackson Pollock's heart is the
thin black enamel
of the birth of a rose

with the fragrance of flesh,
the mesh can never be lost . . .

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CITY LIGHTS

(We're the net holding
ourselves and may again
be songbirds in a coal mine

BOOKS

Pastoral gorgeousness
pours from the stars,
through and back again,
going and ongoing
from the lip of the vessel

I
YOU

WE

the splashes

13.

The original of *Skaagi the Salmon* is in the art of Bill Reid, sculptor, artist, and *reinventor* of the Haida Indian style.

14.

Anacreon's Cupid and *Anacreon Meeting Cupid* refer to Anacreon whose extant lyrics sing of voluptuousness and wine. He is a poet of sixth-century B.C. Greece. A statue of drunken Anacreon stood on the Acropolis.

15.

One More Cherub in Honey is a strophe I read with Terry Riley playing piano at the San Francisco Jazz Center.

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AFTERTHOUGHTS

Mephisto 2: The elephant seal, or sea elephant, is enormous; bulls may weigh more than two tons. They have an elongated proboscis and make huge roars during bloody mating battles. The seals have a rookery on the coast of Northern California.

Mephisto 10: Psyche is the mind, or consciousness, and darts like a butterfly. Psyche was the butterfly-winged wife of Eros.

Mephisto 11: Odin, the father god of the Norse, plucked out his eye and threw it into All-Knowing Mimir's well in exchange for wisdom.

Mephisto 13: In his philosophy Heraclitus declares "panta rei," all things and happenings are in motion and flow like a river.

Mephisto 26: Dharmadatu, a term from Mahayana Buddhism meaning the uncaused nature of all presences and non-presences.

Mephisto 31: SAMSARA, the world of phenomena.

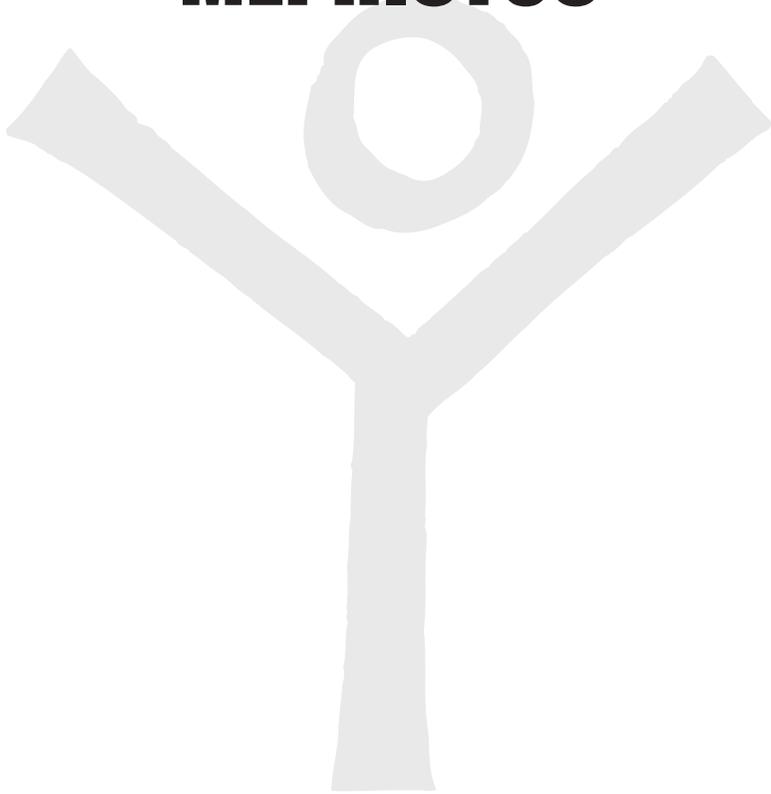
Mephisto 37: Ashvaghosha is a poet and philosopher of the second century A.D., one of the Buddhist saints and author of *The Divine Love and Wisdom*.

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CITY LIGHTS

BOOKS

MEPHISTOS



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MEPHISTO 1

NOW I UNDERSTAND THE SEXUAL ADDICTION

of my young manhood
was a CRUCIFIXION
glittering and lovely
as the smile of Mephisto
through a realm of rosy smoke
rising from a bonfire of future loves.

Just that simple.

— REAL FLESH

beginning to imagine
big crises where plain toes could step.

I love you,
YOU.

The red amaryllis and the lily
shake lightly in the car roar
above trees in sunset
and there's the beat of virility through old
and new muscles.

It's the blossom
of a spiritual occasion,
shadowlessly clear,
physical,
unforgiving
as truth
or a new poem.

Pleasure is the answer.

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MEPHISTO 2

MY
GOD MY GOD!

NO MY GOD!

Don't MY GOD!

DO
THIS

to me!

I am a thousand years
making an old man.

ALL
OF
THE

MOMENTS OF THIS

pleasure are just one. Made of the flesh
of your shoulders, and your eyes
looking up at me.

Your sloping breasts
and pink nipples sail

like little ships over my erection.

The vast elephant seal on the dark gray sand
in the crash of green-white, translucent breakers

by the ragged black rocks

is a body of hope for future
sexuality

and tiny sand pipers rush
in the shallow ripples.

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MEPHISTO 3

“INCOMMENSURABLE

and incomprehensible are the best of poetic creation,”

the old man sings. The galaxies are a river
seen from this direction. The child knows

it is all black behind the eyes

and that flesh is a swirl,

whirling out of the nothingness

as I hear your toes' voice

and the muffled hoots

of an owl in the morning canyon.

The burning smell of frankincense

creates the room

and blue, red and opal cars

create the freeway.

I chase a giraffe

(IN KENYA)

as it runs with long,

stiff-legged strides

looking

back

at

me

without fear,

— and there is

A TURQUOISE

stone

in my hand.

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THERE
IS
JOY
IN
THE
ROOM

sometimes it is solid
for a sixtieth of a second.
Moments supercede the pain of muscles
and Laughter is the prince of the gods.
This is ordinary as tiny green frogs,
perfectly striped
with black, and knowing,
and)) mindless eyes
in the marshy field grass.
Neighbors are close
and there is a scarlet fire
in the fireplace.

IT IS FEARSOME
to have intelligence threaten.

The calico cat hides, waiting
TO RUSH AT ME
in a gallop. Now her eyes
are aglint with delight,
in the midst of her dash,
as she slides on two paws
around the hall corner.

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MEPHISTO 5

I AM A GOD WITH A HUGE FACE. Lions
and eagles pour out of my mouth. Big white
square teeth and a red-purple tongue. There are
magenta clouds around my head and this
is my throne room where I
change opals into souls
in a spark of alchemy.
Only a fool is impartial
to cool mist
on the face on a brisk walk
through the canyon. — Sometimes passed
in semi darkness by a biker
or
a car
delivering the papers.

AN
ORDINARY DAY
in Paradiso with clouds
of angels making a rose.

Smell of wet humus
over the rostrum of lichens.

We are “safe in Heaven dead”
and the drone planes do not film
our home for the watchers
near Denver.

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MEPHISTO 6

SOMBREROS THE COLOR OF CHIDREN”S

COOKIES. Colorlessness at the edges
of things. — Radiances of blue-silver
roll through consciousness
past the precipice of protein and quarks.

The silk scarf is sleek

on
the
neck

— greens and reds melt into sienna.

ART
DISAPPEARS

in department store limbo.

I am always here on this rock

ESCARPEMENT

eating a sandwich with you,
watching mist tufts rise
from the ravines.

When you are angry

MY

CHEST,

these ribs,

lock together into stone

and there’s the smell

of the smoke

of feathers burning.

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MEPHISTO 7

VAN GOGH, DRAWING,
must have felt like this. The hunter
throws the chipped stone hand axe. Flint
and obsidian. The spirit rises from blood

AND TURNS, toward

or away from,

DOMESTICATION.

Let us be trackers in the realms
of these sweet plain streets.

Secret deer

look up from chewing
as muddy repair trucks
fix phone wires.

Over

the

hill

three flying ravens
are raucous.

MY PSYCHE

IS AS

TORN APART

as the amputated
four year old black boy,
with bandage over his stump shoulder.

WE

STARE

blank, bewildered, open eyed,

at the seething stew.

And I am a prince.

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MEPHISTO 8

YOU ARE MY MEMORIES OF YOU

holding my hand

I
WANT
TO
GO

I want to go, I want to go
and come back

TO
YOU

where there is a solid mass
of galaxies around us.

We are storms of February flowers
and not puzzled children.

The strength of a forearm muscle
and sunlight

are

COURAGE

and

TRUTH.

(Real.)

I

HOLD
THEM

for fractious instants
of a horse neighing whinnying
in the murky paddock.

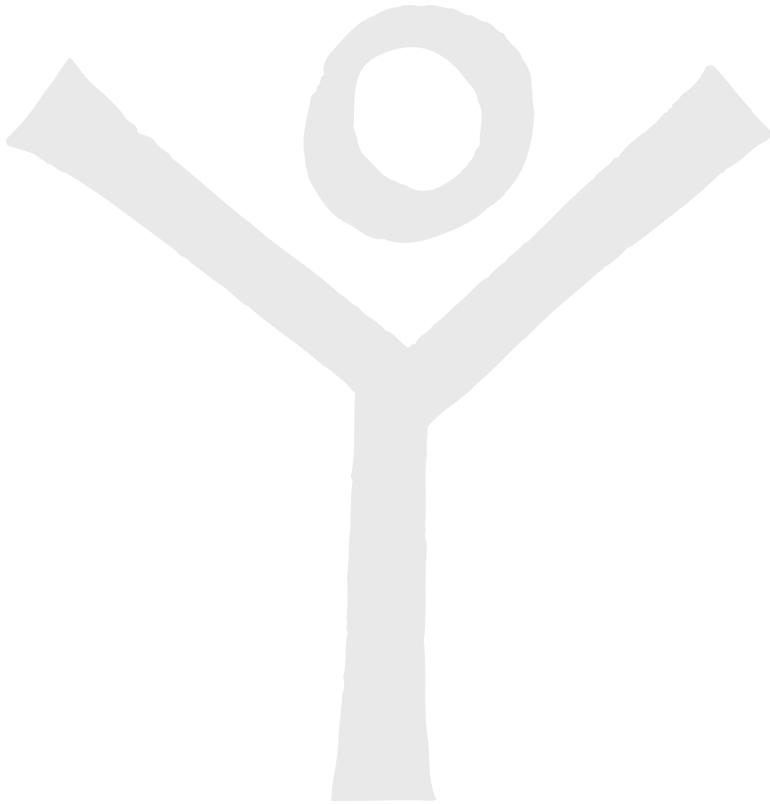
Fires are everywhere
in the rain.

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CITY LIGHTS BOOKS

ALL IS LIKE

t
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s
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MEPHISTO 9

YOU ARE MY MEMORIES OF YOU

holding my hand.

I introduce the human
with this cut-out figure of my mind.

Y

O

U

are so brutal,
my stomach shudders.

A little boy
is happy with his Mama's

SONG

about three pigs and a bear escaping
to the hills.

It is always the same
grim happy ending.

The wet eucalyptus trunk creaking,
is as liberated
as a brown moth
in the deck light.

I SMILE

AT STARS

above
ripples
of the nearby Bay
and
fill

with their ebullience and comity.

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