

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



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from the desk of

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Dear Richard:

THE *****_***** POETARIUM (OR WHATEVER)
[fill in blanks]

I give much thought to how to put this marvellous collection into its proper worthy state for use. The library ultimately can either be attached to an institution like a university, or it can be "free-standing." I know you rather dislike the idea of the former, and I do too. No matter what coveⁿants are made, the parent has control and can't really stand an independent child. Before you know it the University library staff will be selling "duplicates" to Am Here Books!

So let's look at the free-standing options. The last time I wrote you on this I was imagining an Institute for Poetry in Washington D.C. to be an assertion that poets are "the unacknowledged legislators" of the world, even if the U.S. Congress thinks it is. With a shift to claiming equality with Modern Art, one could set up a Museum of Modern Poetry/Fifth Avenue in New York City. (This would logically entail a public outreach program, a lending section and literary events, as they have at the Poetry Centre on the South Bank in London.)

The first option, then, is to place the collection physically where the population centers are, for maximum exposure and effective usage. The alternative approach is to set up the library in an intrinsically attractive spot, and make it reasonable and pleasant for people to come to you. If one were to choose a remote rural place (as opposed to, say, an island or a capsule in a desert), the natural beauty has to be balanced against convenience and usage; and that's an interesting challenge in itself, architecturally; for it seems to me that there should be accommodation for resident scholars and paying guests of the library, or institute, or colony--if we can think of the Yaddo model. For it does seem to me that, with a little easeful organization, this library in the proper location could attract a few permanent staff of grace and culture and a variegated population of visitors, whether students on scholarship, writers with grants, professors on leave, or just well-off people who like to come there for the books.

Just to keep up the dialogue,

Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ralph".

11 November 1993