

Transcript of "CRONOS and the Golden Goose: Vital Chapters in the History of Post-War Poetry and Publishing"

Presented by David Adams at BGSU's William T. Jerome Library, October 24, 2024

Slide 1:

Welcome to a short version of a long story that is condensed here from a much more detailed monograph. I trust that you will find it a worthwhile backwards look into this important chapter in our literary history. Note that I have in these removed the citations that appear in the monograph. Note as well that the artifacts pictures here will be housed in the Eckman Archive.

Slide 2:

As he was for so many of his students, Fred Eckman was my mentor, my guide along my path as a poet, and my friend for the nearly 30 years we shared in life. I cannot be sure if my experience was typical, but in all our classes and conversations over the years, he never once referred to his experience with *CRONOS* and *The Golden Goose*.

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As you can see from the names on this slide, these young editors forged a significant path across Post-War literature.

Slide 4:

[No narration]

Slide 5:

Given the passage of so many years, it is probably difficult for people today to grasp just how the G.I. Bill changed American society for the better, despite the inequities we can see around us now.

Slide 6:

[No narration]

Slide 7:

An impressive list by any reckoning

Slide 8:

(Curious researchers can locate these interviews in the Library of Congress on microfiche archives of the *Stars & Stripes* Mediterranean Edition.)

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Balakian's book was reviewed by Claude Vigée, an émigré Alsatian/ Jewish poet was teaching at OSU. Perhaps there was some correspondence surrounding this review. Students of Fred Eckman may recall how he led us to experiment with the modes of Surrealist poetry.

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Robert Beum's memoir provides valuable insights into the working relationship between Emerson and Eckman, as well as his own role as an assistant editor of *The Golden Goose*, a role he assumed as an undergraduate. The excerpt from Fred's letter quoted here goes on to compare Emerson to Gatsby, a characterization that would linger.

Slide 11:

[No Narration]

Slide 12:

This timeline charts some of the major events in the history of the two literary enterprises.

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The Picasso was used courtesy of the Howland Collection in the Columbus Art Museum. Emerson used another in the 1953 printing of Leslie Woolf Hedley's *Selected Poems*. It is unclear if the courtesy remained in force. The depth of the material in "The Editor's Report" and "The Hawk's Eye" makes for engrossing reading.

Slide 14:

It was clear that both Emerson and Eckman considered the publications as works of art in themselves. One of Fred Eckman's publishers, James Weil in his Elizabeth Press applied the same value to Fred's collection *Sandusky and Back*. That volume seems Fred's most elegantly produced book.

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OSU required 500 subscribers to balance its support. That was quickly attained. Thereafter, *CRONOS* and *Golden Goose* were self-supporting operations, relying on subscriptions, sales, advertisements, staff work, and contribution to maintain that independence.

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Speaking from the viewpoint of years spent rereading these pieces, I found them thought-provoking and rewarding. Mario Rossi's essay proved especially so in charting the myth-making aspect of belief in progress and what that term means or does nor mean in the context of history.

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Also, with the title of a novel by Santayana, Hazen's essay surveys the paths traversed by the noted philosopher through the full range of his work. Curtis Beck's essay on voodoo is done in depth and remains fascinating to this day. Maurice Friedman's essay incorporating *Darkness at Noon* was perceptive and timely – one of many such works in *CRONOS* that repay reading even in contemporary terms.

Slide 18:

I have found little in the way of correspondence that describes the editorial processes at work in *CRONOS*. That paucity may be because most of the editorial staff lived in Columbus at the time and could meet at will. Yet there had to be such correspondence with contributors. Such evidence would most likely been in Emerson's records or those of individual contributors. Such a search is beyond the scope of this monograph. At any rate, by the time *Golden Goose* appeared in 1948, Emerson was in the process of prescribing detailed editorial practices, and those practices are preserved in the *Golden Goose Editorial Notebook* in the Eckman Archive and in the *Golden Goose Operations Report* at the end of 1953.

The brief essay also reveals much about Emerson's personality, his need to be seen as a leader in defining what we these days call "poetics."

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Publishing work of the editors was a practice that would continue throughout. Pound's trial for treason because of his propaganda broadcasts in Italy during WW II, and his and later commitment to a mental hospital stirred heated debates both within and outside the literary world. Publication of the Watts essay took some courage by the editors. The back and forth between Eckman and Emerson at the time helped to clarify their own views about Pound in layered ways. The poetry in this issue really does begin to reflect a "postmodern" aesthetic.

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The piece on Machado was later cited by Emerson in a 1947 letter to Fred as an example of the "shoddy scholarship" creeping into *CRONOS*.

A Man in Mid Passage was one of three books published under that imprint.

One notable forecasted article for these last issues, "Symposium on the Little Magazines," did not appear until years later in *Golden Goose Series three No. 1*.

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The correspondence between Emerson and Eckman reveals their complementary view of where they will go next, as well as why *CRONOS* has, for them, exhausted its possibilities. Poetry would be the dominant concern of *The Golden Goose* and Golden Goose Press going forward.

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The *CRONOS* issues mentioned never did appear. It would not be the last time these two got out over the tips of their skis. One enterprise would prove quite enough.

Slide 23:

The Editorial Statement might best be viewed as a first draft of Emerson and Eckman trying to articulate an editorial philosophy.

Slide 24:

The struggle to define their identities as poets would continue to work itself out through the years. Though Emerson's personality placed him front and center, some of the language of their correspondence is eerily similar that Eckman would employ in his critical study *Cobras & Cockleshells: Modes in Recent Poetry* published by Sparrow Press in 1958.

Perhaps in an instance of irony, Emerson's *Stars & Stripes* colleague Gene D. Symonds published in *CRONOS No. 1* a surprising review of a compilation, *The Best from Yank: The Army Weekly*. *Yank* was a counterpart of *Stars & Stripes*, but entirely produced by enlisted men and non-commissioned officers. Apparently, worship of authority was not its hallmark. The book reviewed contains regular submission of poetry, fiction, cartoons and photography from ordinary GIs. Careful readings of the poems reveals not the rough construction or doggerel one might expect, but serious execution in practice of what can only be described as Post-Modern poetry.

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Allen Tate, one of Jarrell's mentors at Vanderbilt, had nominated him for this lecture. Their relationship was already strained by Jarrell's ignoring Tate's advice on the content and order of poems in *Rage for the Lost Penny*. He was by then charting his own path. The lecture apparently chilled that relationship for good.

Slide 26:

All these young poets would have to deal with the dominant poetics of Modernism and The New Criticism. Later, Fred Eckman would feel this constricting shadow in his own choice of a dissertation. He was forced to do it on "The Language of American Poetry in 1910." He expressed that frustration in his letters of that time and it would linger. He practically had to go to war with the powers that be at Bowling Green to get approval for Linda Wagner-Martin to do her dissertation on Williams. At an accreditation conference session on "Formation of the Canon" I heard the anthologist Ann Charters describe how her doctoral committee at NYU refused to approve her doing her dissertation on Robert Frost because he "had not yet established himself as a major poet." This in 1952!!

Slide 27:

George Barker's 1948 review of books by American poets in appeared in *Poetry London 13*. Emerson spits some well-aimed venom at Barker's unctuous words that "American poetry is a very easy

subject to discuss for the simple reason that it does not exist.” Barker goes on to write, “For me it resembles The Fat Lady at the circus: there’s a lot of her, but not much is desirable.” Williams’ commentary echoed the distrust for having universities as gatekeepers of literary taste shared by Emerson and Eckman.

Slide 28:

I don’t wish to take too much time on all the Chapbooks during the presentation, but you can at least see details of contents and production in the Appendices. Note that the artifacts displayed here will soon reside in the Eckman Archive in the Center for Archival Collections in the BGSU Library. In addition to those listed in the slide were No. 5. *5 Poets* that included Robert Lawrence Beum, Leslie Woolf Hedley, Harold G. Miller, Scott Greer and Nathan Teitel. No. 7 was *Perception of Duer* by Patricia Northway Harris and No. 8. *The Automatic Wound* by Christopher MacLaine. At the time of this furor, Williams was ill and badly needed the income from the Consultancy. Another example of the poison of political attacks on literature.

Interestingly, Fred Eckman never reprinted any of these poems, nor do they appear in “The Great Big Mother Book” of poems that he maintained as a sort of writing log or history.

As the editors would later acknowledge, their numbering system for the journal would vex librarians and booksellers alike. Furthermore, Emerson was still working out some size details for the publications. None of the chapbooks were precisely the same sized block.

Details regarding lost access to the letterpress are not clear in correspondence in the Eckman Archive, but the pause in publishing would last over a year.

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The “explanation” also includes acknowledgement of the confusion attached to the previous series/issue designations.

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Hedley was also editor of the journal *Inferno* and of Exile Press. The Symposium consists of a fascinating literary history lesson in small press publishing in the early 20th Century.

This issue forecasts another “Symposium” in an upcoming issue” This one a “Symposium on Writing” featuring William Carlos Williams, Henry Rago, Charles Olson, Leslie Woolf Hedley and Kenneth Patchen. That feature would have likely been in *No. 2*, one of the issues that are no longer extant. Some recent evidence from draft pages of *No. 2* suggests that this Symposium appeared there. Unlike the Symposium on the Little Magazines published earlier, these interviews were drawn from separately recordings of the radio show “Voices” made of visiting writers at OSU. Also forecast was an Anthology by the Ohio-born poet Stanley Rosen for a forthcoming Golden Goose book titled *Death in Egypt*. The latter was indeed published by the press in 1952.

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The last four issues of the journal were the first to be perfect bound rather than using staple binding. All were done with fine printing. According to Emerson in a June 1953 letter to Eckman, “Golden Goose has a press.” He had found a used press in Oakland and with a \$200 contribution from Gene Symonds (who was visiting), Emerson, Symonds and Hedley bought the press, took it apart, moved it themselves and reassembled it in the basement of Emerson’s house in Sausalito. The book blocks were again in slightly different sizes. And the layouts vary between having a leaf on either the front or back cover.

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In 1975, Frederick Eckman would reprise Niedecker’s lines for his essay on her poetry “Lorene Niedecker’s Local.” The essay was printed in *Truck 16* and reprinted in *Over West*.

The last issues of Golden Goose featured a large dose of writings by and about WCW. The letters to Beum were detailed and truly illuminate the evolution of Williams’ poetics.

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In a letter to Eckman in June of 1955, Robert Creeley commented that he “never got what he [Emerson] was aiming at” with the *Frère Vital* gambit. Hedley’s book was the one that caused fracture in his relationship with Emerson.

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1954 would prove to be a pivotal year for Golden Goose, though not in the way either Eckman or Emerson foresaw. In January of that year Emerson sent a flurry of letters to Eckman concerning plans for No. 7. Among those plans, the idea that there would not be room for the Anthology feature because of the number of poems already accepted. Plus, they had no one in mind for that section. Three long letters were sent on January 20, 22 and 23. These discussed a new manuscript from Norman Macleod that Emerson felt was not quite ready to published. There is discussion of Hedley’s forthcoming *Selected Poems* and how to save money on production, etc. The bundling of letters in such a short time span reflects a frenzy of activity, including preparation of Emerson’s manuscript *Erosions*, on which Eckman had sent welcomed comments. Eckman’s end of these exchanges is not currently available, or even possibly hidden in a wrong folder. I had uncovered a couple such instances. But the sense of Emerson being stuck in “overdrive” in this period is overwhelming. Eckman would by then have begun his last semester of work on his Ph.D. and no doubt would have been pressed as well.

If this issue had to bring down the curtain on *Golden Goose*, it did so with aplomb, albeit with telltale signs that the issue might have been rushed into production the small number of ads, with an acknowledged errata required for one, and the print on the spine set upside down.

Slide 35:

A copy of *Le Fou* on [abe.com](#) is listed for \$1,850! From his later correspondence in 1992, it seems obvious that Hedley was quite unhappy with the production of his book, and that unhappiness fractured what has seemed a positive relationship between Hedley and Emerson.

Slide 36:

Fortunately for researchers, these documents are preserved in the Eckman Archive in the Center for Archival Collections here at Bowling Green. Those among you who have editorial responsibilities might be stunned by the short turnaround specified for reviewing submissions and corresponding with authors: weeks, not months. This despite the large numbers of journal submissions and book manuscripts received. Somehow or other, often involving carefully recorded financial infusions by the editors (and without institutional or grant support), Golden Goose operations finished in the black each year.

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Emerson's letters to Eckman in early 1954 clearly reveal someone under pressure and trying to accomplish many things at once. 1954 would have been a stressful year for Eckman as well: completing his dissertation, finding a job (as he did at UT in Austin) and relocating to a new state.

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The tone of the first letter reveals Fred Eckman at his thoughtful best. The second so stiffly formal as if directed to a stranger. The silence from Emerson had to be vexing as well as mysterious. And we don't have any evidence extant of Emerson's reactions.

Slide 39:

The second 1955 letter from Eckman was among the last of Emerson's artifacts that were retrieved from a rubbish bin by his officemate at the time, Jack Spinoza. Whatever his situation then, Emerson was clearly in some distress. These materials were auctioned by Spinoza's estate in 2018 and Eckman's letter is specifically mentioned in the auction Summary published by Christie's of San Francisco.

Slide 40:

As I have learned in researching a new creative/historical project over the last several years. Oral histories can be as tricky as human memory. The sequence of these letters allows all three writers to reflect on their memories, compare notes and, perhaps, settle them into a meaningful confluence of recollections.

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A close reading in this folder suggests that one, or possibly two, letters are missing from the group in the Eckman Archive. The writers exchanged copies of recent books, discussed their personal histories in the intervening years, and indulged in some literary gossip about writers who had crossed

their paths. Hedley and Eckman shared joyful discovery over their love for *Winesburg, Ohio*. As the letters progress, particularly those between Eckman and Beum, one can read a growing sensitivity towards Emerson and his tragic end, a suicide in a rundown apartment in San Francisco. One wonders why the reporter reached out to Hedley if his relationship with Emerson was truly broken in 1953. Hedley's correspondence record might prove useful in that regard.

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Seeing that Emerson and Symonds had such a long and fruitful pairing, The absence of extant correspondence between them leaves a huge blank space in tracking the history of *CRONOS* and *The Golden Goose*.

Slide 43:

After that 1997 visit to El Paso, Martha and I spoke frequently by phone as we massaged *Over West* into publication. In one of those calls she shared an anecdote that is difficult to forget. She mentioned that shortly before his death, Fred had started awake in the darkness shouting "Nobody knows who I am!" I think the tributes gathered in *Over West* made that fear seem unwarranted, but surely it is an understandable angst when the darkness gathers after one has dedicated a life to poetry. Perhaps the darkness gathered for Richard Emerson in proportion to his ambition.