

# Ready All the Time Like Gunpowder

An Interview with Richard Hundley

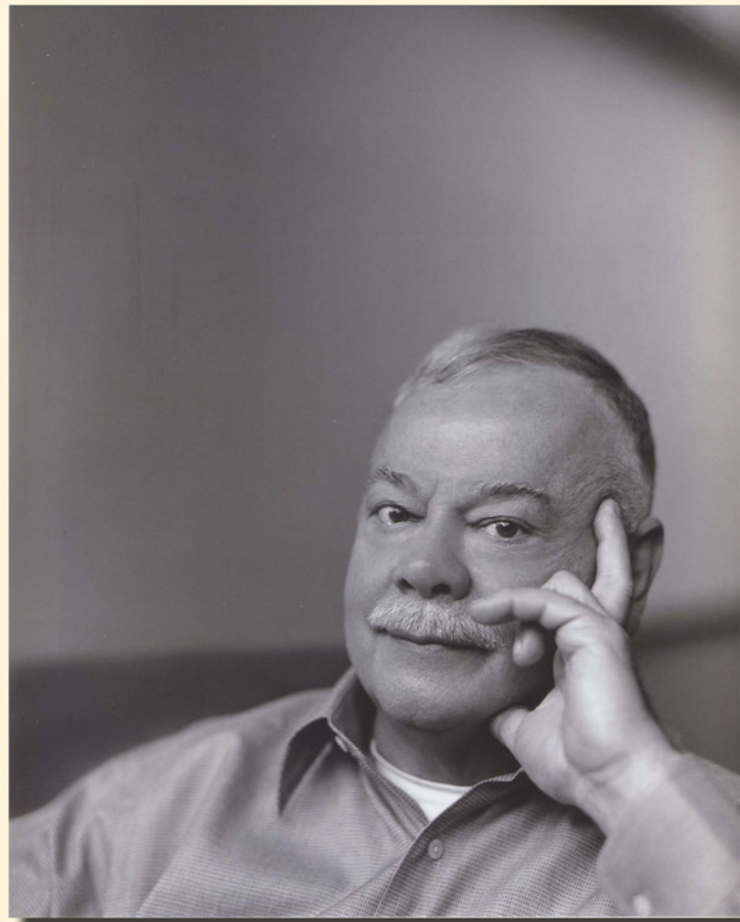
by Rainer J. Hanshe

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HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

READY ALL THE TIME  
LIKE GUNPOWDER



ON COMPOSING SONGS WITH JAMES PURDY

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD HUNDLEY

RICHARD HUNDLEY  
TEN SONGS  
*for High Voice and Piano*



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# INTRODUCTION

by **Rainer J. Hanshe**

The following interview examines Richard Hundley's long-time collaboration with James Purdy, who is the focus of this special issue of *Hyperion*. To date, although this collaboration has received minor attention in the annals of music history, it has not figured in the annals of literary criticism; that is, Purdy's role in it has not been addressed in any of the monographs written on him, or at any of the recent Purdy conferences, or in the one journal issue devoted to his work.<sup>1</sup> Now, that lacuna has in part been addressed, but further detailed attention by both musicologists and literary scholars to this collaboration remains necessary, as such attention must necessarily be given to all of the other musical adaptations of Purdy's texts.<sup>2</sup>

Although Hundley may not be known to our regular readers since he is outside the scope of material generally considered in *Hyperion*, he is known to specific music circles around the world. An American pianist and composer of art songs for solo voice and piano, he has also written choral works, a piano sonata, some chamber music for winds, and several songs with orchestra. Hundley has been a MacDowell Fellow numerous times and his music has been performed at Carnegie Hall and in all the other major concert halls in Manhattan and at other prestigious concert venues in America and Europe, too. He is frequently invited to schools as a guest lecturer and has given lectures and master classes at the Juilliard School, Mannes School of Music, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, and the University of Michigan (Jessye Norman Masterclass Series), etc. In a competition sponsored by Carnegie Hall and the Rockefeller Foundation in 1982, Hundley's *Eight Songs* was chosen to be part of its repertory list, and in 1987 he was among only 12 American composers that Carnegie Hall designated as a standard composer for vocalists in its International American Music Competition. Five of the other composers chosen were Samuel Barber, Paul Bowles, Aaron Copland, Charles Ives, and Virgil Thomson. Of Hundley's musical identity, one critic referred to him as a "sort of American Poulenc, expert at creating characterful melodies and illuminating their corners with flashes of harmonic surprise."<sup>3</sup> If his name is not as recognizable as Virgil Thomson's, he is as much an integral element of the American musical tradition, and his place in it is established.

Richard Albert Hundley was born on September 1, 1931, in Cincinnati, Ohio, and, much like Purdy, had an itinerant childhood after the divorce of his parents, finally living with his paternal grandmother in Covington, Kentucky, where he was reared. Some of Hundley's earliest performances were made at tea parties for his grandmother's friends, and during one such party, one

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Photo of Richard Hundley by Michael Myers.

of the women, a self-proclaimed medium, declared that Hundley had been famous in another life, “like Chopin.” Hundley’s grandmother wasn’t aware of who Chopin was but once she learned she always referred to her grandson as a “pee-an-ist *and* a composer.” Such is not recounted to express awe or astonishment before so-called psychic gifts and their supposed veracity but because the scene could spring right out of Purdy’s own fiction, making Hundley an almost readymade character fit for Purdy’s fictive imaginings. Due to their regional and familial similarities, one can understand why Purdy and Hundley would have had such a close affinity, and since they seemed to exist in similar imaginative realms, were perhaps destined to meet. Certainly, to use a new eponym Hundley employed several times in the following interview, there is something distinctly *Purdyesque* about Hundley’s first profound musical encounter, which occurred in the Cincinnati Zoological Gardens. It was there that he heard a performance of Verdi’s *Il Trovatore*, an aesthetic experience which had a formative impact upon the young composer. The aptitude of vocal music to render complex emotion deeply appealed to him and would remain a foundational aspect of his style. Other musical icons of Hundley’s youth included Stravinsky, Beethoven, and Wagner, but when later in life he heard Samuel Barber’s “Knoxville, Summer of 1915,” he knew that he would focus on the voice as his characteristic medium of expression. Hundley’s formal musical training began at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, where he studied under Ilona Voorm, a former assistant to Béla Bartok. Flourishing under her tutelage, Hundley had his first major performance at age 14, performing Mozart’s *Piano Concerto in D minor* with the Northern Kentucky Symphony Orchestra. And later, he performed the solo of Mozart’s *Piano Concerto in A major* with the Cincinnati Symphony under the direction of conductor Thor Johnson, a former pupil of Bruno Walter and others.

In 1950, Hundley moved to New York City and continued his studies at the Manhattan School of Music but soon after had to abandon his training there due to financial hardship. During the 50s, Hundley composed numerous pieces of music, including *Softly the Summer*, *Epitaph on a Wife*, and *The Astronomers*, all of which are still performed to this day. And in 1960 he was engaged by the Metropolitan Opera to sing tenor in their Chorus. This was an extremely fertile period for him. As he explained to me over the telephone, “I had four years in which I had three months of the year off. During that time, I was subsidized by unemployment insurance. It was like receiving a grant!” This free time enabled Hundley to study and to write a number of compositions, including *Isaac Greentree*, *For Your Delight*, *I am not Lonely*, *Postcard from Spain*, and *Screw Spring*. At the Metropolitan he developed friendships with some renowned singers, such as Rosalind Elias, Annaliese Rothenberger, Anna Moffo, Lili Chookasian, and Teresa Stratas, who began performing his compositions. In particular, Anna Moffo gained considerable renown for the young composer by including his songs in her long recital tours

in both the U.S. and Europe. In conversation, Hundley said to me, “When Anna sang my songs all the doors opened.” He also was befriended by the composer Virgil Thomson in the early 60s and as Hundley recalled, they immediately took each other up with enthusiasm. “For 27 years, until his death, Virgil was my friend and mentor. He never denied me access to his store of knowledge. Among the things he taught me was the setting of abstract texts. Virgil said, ‘Set the words for clarity and let the meaning take care of itself.’”<sup>4</sup> During the spring tour of the Metropolitan Opera in 1964, the first concert entirely devoted to Hundley’s music took place at Karamu House in Cleveland, Ohio, the oldest black settlement in America. The music was performed by soprano Jeanette Scovotti, tenor George Shirley, bass Ezio Flagello, and accompanied at the piano by Hundley. The printed program carried a note about the young composer by Carl Van Vechten. The concert was reviewed by the distinguished composer Herbert Elwell who reported that “Hundley’s writing is melodious in the best sense. Obviously, he has a wide knowledge of how to employ the voice to its best advantage.”<sup>5</sup> Another significant teacher of Hundley was the American composer William Flanagan,<sup>6</sup> with whom Hundley made a close analysis of Stravinsky’s *Persephone*, an exploration the young composer found illuminating and profitable for it gave him insight into classical harmony and how it could be used to create novel and fresh sounds.

The late 60s were another prolific time for Hundley. He was invited to the MacDowell Colony and also began accompanying in the studio of the esteemed soprano Zinka Milanov, whose mastery of the art of *bel canto* was a major influence, further aiding Hundley’s ability to write vocal music with greater proficiency and strength.<sup>7</sup> Tenor Paul Sperry, the acclaimed art song recitalist, began performing and advancing Hundley’s music at this time, and continues to do so. Sperry’s long standing engagement with Hundley’s music resulted in his recording 11 of Hundley’s compositions for his *Paul Sperry Sings Romantic American Songs*.<sup>8</sup> Despite Hundley’s achievements and the merit he received, he was as much an anomaly in the musical world as Purdy was in the literary world. Because of his opposition to the serial trend that dominated the musical scene at that time, and it was a hegemony in its own right, critic Roger Dettmer referred to Hundley as a musical maverick and made this observation about the difficulty of his path and his wherewithal for continuing to pursue it:

“

Unless a young American composer is acknowledged, and sponsored, by the eastern Establishment—a tight circle of interbred cliques with headquarters on Manhattan Island—he is likely to find his professional life a Kafka-like sequence of closed doors and deaf ears. [. . .] It takes guts [and an outside income] to pursue a career in music without the blessing of

the Establishment. It takes a steady hand, as well as talent, to write music that is not serial neo-classicism, or left-over Satie. [. . .] [Hundley] has found a creative direction [and] he writes communicatively in our age of alienation[. . .] He gives one fresh faith in mavericks.<sup>9</sup>

Hundley clearly persevered, his tenacity and musical inventiveness buoying him through the Kafkaesque castle of the serial establishment. If his compositions seem conventional in comparison to the serialists, they are daring and inventive in their own right, for when he uses “conventional harmonic and melodic material” he “rethinks it so that it comes across freshly in the contemporary spirit.”<sup>10</sup> And Hundley’s music is hardly simplistic. Of his song “Softly the Summer,” Ruth C. Friedberg points out that “the tessitura and expressive demands of the vocal line are not only totally foreign to the realm of ‘popular’ music, but [. . .] require the artistry of a highly trained singer.”<sup>11</sup> And Robert Offergeld said of Hundley’s music that it “is fresh, vigorous, and above all vocally effective.” His “vocal line is large, shapely, and venturesome, and his expressive resources include a remarkable lyric intensity as well as humor.”<sup>12</sup> Intriguingly enough, the composer once seen as conservative would be deemed almost precisely the opposite. As Robert Finn professed in the early 80s, with “the subsequent resurgence of romantic feeling, tonal harmony, and melody, conservative composers like [Hundley] are the new ‘avant garde.’”<sup>13</sup> Thus, Hundley is now ensconced in the castle, though really superior recordings of his songs have yet to be made and, still, he must work as an organist in churches and synagogues in order to earn his keep.

It was during the 70s that his collaboration with Purdy was most abundant. If there is any other collaboration it is perhaps akin to, or to which there is a close parallel, it is the one between Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein, though the Hundley-Purdy alliance lasted far longer. One might think of the collaborations between Barber and Agee, Bowles and Williams, or Rorem and Goodman, to focus on strictly American ones, for Weill and Brecht and Stravinsky and Auden also come to mind, but Stein is the closest equivalent to Purdy in terms of writing in a multiplicity of genres. And just as Thomson and Stein, Hundley and Purdy had their detractors, both in the musical and literary worlds. Yet, like *Four Saints* and other Thomson-Stein works, the works of Hundley and Purdy have their many champions and Hundley is frequently sought after and his music is continually performed, making his adaptations of Purdy’s texts far more available and current than those of any other composer. Whatever history eventually proves, their work certainly deserves far more visibility outside the small circles in which it has been entrenched.

As Hundley explains in the interview below, their collaborative process

involved developing poems out of Purdy's early morning automatic writing exercises, copies of which Purdy mailed to Hundley on a regular basis. The poems were also often elaborated on in dialogues while Hundley and Purdy meandered through the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens and other haunts. Once refined, Purdy's poems served as texts for Hundley to score on his own, without Purdy's direct involvement in the development of the music. When the word "collaboration" is used throughout the interview, it should be understood in this way. Even though Purdy was not involved in the creation of Hundley's music, Hundley was involved in the shaping of Purdy's poetry. As Hundley explained to me in conversation, "There are places where my interest in James and my joy in his work and my constant building-up of his ego produced a lot of wonderful material. But he was the one who did it. Nobody else could write a Purdyesque story, or Purdyesque poems." Struck by the imagination, freshness, and sheer inventiveness of Purdy's poetry, Hundley found in it a corollary to his own songs, noting that although the lines of Purdy's poems "say exactly what it is they say, they imply so much more. My songs too are full of hidden meanings." Purdy hinted at such layers of signification when revealing that his "work is an exploration of the American soul conveyed in a style based on the rhythms and accents of American speech."<sup>14</sup> Considering Purdy's affinity for rhythm and his possessing as Ned Rorem observed a keen musical ear it is not surprising that Hundley and Purdy's collaboration was so fruitful and prolific. During the decade of the 70s, Hundley wrote a plethora of pieces based on Purdy poems, including *Come Ready and See Me*, *Lions Have Lain in Grasses Before*, *Vocal Quartets on Poems by James Purdy*, *Birds, U.S.A.*, *I Do*, *Evening Hours*, *Bartholomew Green*, *Waterbird*, and *Jenny Wren*, a grand duet for two sopranos. *Vocal Quartets* received its premiere at the Ram Island Arts Festival in Maine in the summer of 1971 and was given its New York premiere by the Metropolitan Opera Studio at the New York Cultural Center in February 1972, with one reviewer praising the originality of the poems and "the extraordinary feeling and mood that Mr. Hundley imparts to them with his style and elegance of vocal line . . ."<sup>15</sup> And of *Birds, U.S.A.*, Friedberg observed that it "takes place in a jazzy, heavily accented anapestic tetrameter. Even the disillusion of the penultimate line ("Aren't the songsters that delighted you at seven") doesn't seem to stop its rush of headlong gaiety." The song is a musical satire, which, as Friedberg argues, Hundley achieves through two principal devices: "one is the heavy use of syncopation in the vocal line over a 'four square' chordal accompaniment which recalls popular American ragtime roots" and the other is his paraphrasing of "certain patriotic songs."<sup>16</sup> There is also a sense of lightness to Purdy's poetry in general, and to Friedberg titles such as *The Running Sun* and *Sunshine is an Only Child* are "steeped in sunshine and the suggestion of increasing cheer."<sup>17</sup> Although Purdy's poetry has those qualities, and is also often humorous, what Friedberg neglects to observe is the strong undercurrent of pain and desolation that suffuses many of the poems, of

loneliness (sunshine is an *only* child, if not possibly an orphan, like many of the characters in Purdy's fiction), and of the inherent, albeit extremely subtle critique in the satire of *Birds, U.S.A.*, which is not a strictly patriotic song. There is darkness in the running sun too, for in the concluding poem to Purdy's book, the sun is the object of thought of those "who are under the ground," "indians & voyagers & wilderness men,"<sup>18</sup> those who, one might say, America has swiftly destroyed. They are dead. If Purdy and Hundley are distinctly American artists, they are ones keenly sensitive to America's tragedies and to the sacrifices, violence, and monstrosity of which America is partly made. There is no empty nationalism here. A satire is a satire.

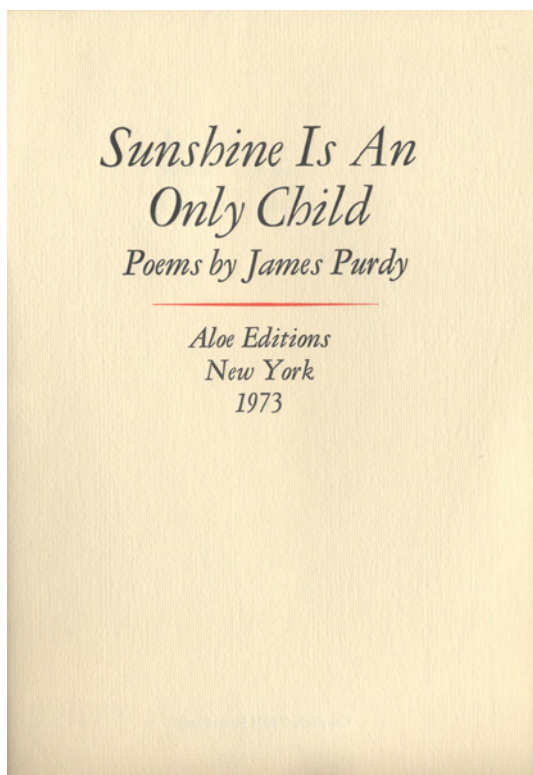
The Purdy-Hundley collaboration continued into the 80s, with premieres of their work at the Newport Music Festival, where Hundley was composer in residence for four seasons, and many other venues and recital halls. On February 2, 1982, the world premiere of *The Sea is Swimming Tonight* was given by conductor Newell Jenkins and the Clarion Music Society (CMS), which commissioned the work at Alice Tully Hall. The cantata based on poems by Purdy was commissioned to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CMS. It is a 10-movement, choral-song cycle for chorus, four soloists, and four-hand piano. That time also saw the performance of *Are They Shadows That We See?*, *Beverly*, and the "Saint Stephen & Prince Antelope" *scena*, excerpted from *Wedding Finger*, an incomplete opera based on one of Purdy's plays. And in 1985, the conductor Robert Page commissioned a choral work from Hundley, "Ball," a setting of a poem written by Purdy for Hundley, which was premiered by the Robert Page Singers in Cleveland, Ohio. The piece is scored for four soloists, chorus, and four-hand piano. Of it, Robert Finn wrote that "Hundley's straightforward, squarely tonal and rhythmically regular music catches a kind of nostalgic air about the typical American picture of a group of boys tossing a ball into the air. But toward the end, when Purdy's text gets surreal and more profound meanings are at least suggested, Hundley's music follows suit, growing pensive, almost suggesting a small town American Ralph Vaughn Williams or Mahler in one of their reflective moods."<sup>19</sup> But this is quintessential Purdy, and what Finn doesn't recognize is that this seemingly innocent choral work isn't merely a nostalgic game of ball playing. It is less surreal and more tragic and sublime, suggested by the imagery of jagged cliffs and crags and the sorrow of the frolicking boys. It is also unabashedly sensual and homoerotic, for Purdy describes the boys as playing "with their bare naked hands, ball," and keeps repeating the words "naked" and "ball," the innuendo subtle but clear enough. Finally, the poem concludes with the sorrowful, downcast, and glum, despairing boys pulling off their clothes and simultaneously jumping so high into the air that they vanish, just as have all of the balls that they've been playing with. Calling the poem nostalgic as Finn does seems naïve—it is clearly an instance of erotic transcendentalism, a kind of unexpected sensual apotheosis that is prototypical Purdy. And Hundley's

music is just as surprising as the text, with its startling shift from innocence to experience born of a simple ritual that turns an everyday act into something magical. Naked hands give birth to ecstasy. Robert Page believes it to be one of the major works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The culmination of the Purdy-Hundley collaboration seemed to occur in 1990 when Hundley completed the song cycle *Octaves and Sweet Sounds*, a title suggested to the composer by Purdy. The cycle is comprised of five songs, each based on a modernist poem, including “Strings in the Earth and Air” by James Joyce, “Seashore Girls” by e.e. cummings, “Moonlight’s Watermelon” by Jose Garcia Villa, “Straightway Beauty on Me Waits” by Purdy, and “Well Welcome” by Gertrude Stein.<sup>20</sup> Purdy also encouraged Hundley to set Garcia Villa’s poem to music. The same year the song cycle was published by Boosey & Hawkes, Purdy published *Out with the Stars*, his satire of Virgil Thomson and Carl Van Vechten and the New York avant-garde scene, which also includes a character based on Hundley, Val Sturgis, the uncowed protégé to the Thomson-inspired Abner Blossom. Two of Purdy’s most affecting short stories, “Mud Toe the Cannibal” and “Some of These Days,” are also based on Hundley. These various works illustrate how Purdy and Hundley continually inspired one another, each transfiguring events or experiences of their lives into new works of art. What Hundley’s *oeuvre* reveals in part is the rich and productive relationship he has with poets and with literary texts; aside from those already mentioned, he also set to music poetry by Shakespeare, John Fletcher, Samuel Daniel, D.H. Lawrence, Amy Lowell, Kenneth Patchen, James Schuyler, and unknown Elizabethan verses as well his own writings. Of Patchen’s “Maiden Snow,” which Hundley dedicated to Anna Moffo, Friedberg observed that Hundley’s setting of the poem revealed “the composer’s early mastery of serious, dramatic writing.” In it, Hundley “combines the expressive intensity of a short Puccini aria with the subtle interweaving of voice and piano that is characteristic of art song.”<sup>21</sup> Hundley has said that his objective is to crystallize emotion. “I memorize a text and live with it, then set it according to how I feel about the poem.” Primacy is given then to feeling, with Hundley incorporating texts via memorization, then transfiguring them through the different sensations and impressions they give rise to in his body and imagination. Purdy’s poetry in particular greatly appealed to Hundley because of its emotional intensity, its prosody, rhythmic qualities, and its sense of surprise, what is surreal, or what Hundley dubbed the “Purdyesque.” In opposition, the composer found much other poetry of the 20<sup>th</sup> century largely “unsuitable for setting to music because it is alien to nature.”<sup>22</sup> Some composers might prefer the alien; Hundley does not. And if Purdy and Hundley were not part of the avant-garde or counter-culture factions in both literature and music, at the same time they were not part of the status quo either, existing instead in some defile between both factions, making each of their lives and the reception of their work exponentially difficult. But they are as

much of the fabric of the history of American civilization as any other circle of artists, and their collaboration, which was sustained over a period of more than 20 years, as much as their individual works, is a testament to how steadfast they remained, how loyal to their visions, even if they had to be like Indians and voyagers and wilderness men and remain underground as they dreamed of the running sun, which they could still imagine despite the darkness that surrounded them. Perhaps in their darkness, they could see what others could not. Although two years have passed since Purdy's death, and although Hundley and Purdy ceased collaborating in the 90s,<sup>23</sup> their 48-year friendship suffering an unexpected if not forced rupture, Hundley remains keenly interested in his old friend's writing, and in the future, we may be privileged to receive yet another Hundley-Purdy musical work.<sup>24</sup>

The following interview began on May 28, 2010, at Hundley's residence in the West Village, with him frequently breaking into song, reciting verses, and performing fragments of his music at the piano, being in general a delightful, eccentric, and engaging host. Hundley also frequently interrupted our dialogues to retrieve from his voluminous informal archive miscellaneous Purdy and other ephemera, such as drawings, photographs, letters, poems, and sheet music, all of which sprang to mind spontaneously as Hundley sought to recall as precisely as possible the history of his life. Often, a quarter of a day would pass without notice while we were together, and months of continuous work would surely not exhaust Hundley's labyrinthine archive, which must one day be catalogued for posterity. Our initial session was done live and later transcribed, after which discussions continued during the stormy winter of 2010 into early 2011, with Hundley carefully refining his responses. He did this through textual revisions on his own, giving me pages to incorporate that he manually retyped, whiting out certain sections, expanding upon them, and making more additions in pencil, while his responses were also refined through yet further dialogues until they were as fluid and precise as Hundley felt they could be, even changing single words he felt just didn't sound right. How not heed the nuanced adjustments of a composer so keenly sensitive to language? The interview is equally personal and historical, touching upon both Hundley's friendship and collaborative relationship with Purdy. It has bearing not only upon American culture but both the history of literature and music, illuminating the interrelationship between composer and writer. In elaborating on his creative process and methodology, Hundley gives privileged insight into not only a significant if obscured artistic collaboration of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but into the workshop of an American composer who will eventually be as recognizable as Virgil Thomson, just as Purdy will finally be as recognizable as Gertrude Stein.



**Q:** *What was the first work of Purdy's that you read?*

**A:** *Malcolm*. In 1962 Virgil Thomson had sent me to Harold Knapik<sup>25</sup> to continue my musical studies. Harold was a composer, who, like James, had benefited from Chicago businessman Osborne Andreas's largesse (in different ways).<sup>26</sup> Andreas had sponsored the publication of Purdy's privately printed short stories and novella at the very beginning of his career. One day when I went for a lesson, I noticed a large stack of the paperback edition of *Malcolm*, which had a colorful, eye-catching, jazzy cover. When I asked Knapik about the book he said, "This man comes from the same place as you do—Ohio. This is a delightful novel and I think you should read it. If you like it, *tell me*." A few days later I went to the beach, and I took *Malcolm* with me. I immediately became captivated by Malcolm's story—was so mesmerized by it that when I looked up to check where I was, I realized I had gone two stops beyond where I should have exited. Such a thing never happened to me before! I was considerably perplexed. Harold told James of

my experience and enthusiasm, and Jimmy was eager to meet me. At an elaborate dinner—Harold was a gourmet cook—I finally met Jimmy and his friend Jorma Sjöblom, and thereafter we became close.

**Q:** *When did you finally begin collaborating?*

**A:** Well, he started to send me some poems, but back then his focus was his novels. He didn't think of himself as a poet, and he had yet to publish any poetry.<sup>27</sup> What he sent me was things he had written earlier but never published or shared. They just didn't interest me.

**Q:** *Why?*

**A:** There was something Oscar Wilde-like about James, but most of the poems were dark and lacked the whimsical quality he often revealed in conversation. Edna St. Vincent Millay said all great poems are sad. Well, I wasn't interested in just 'great' poems, and I knew James wasn't either. I sensed that he was also capable of writing comic or witty poems, fable-like stuff. But the words of the early poems he sent me were very [*makes chewing noises*] . . . very [*makes more chewing noises*] . . . *hard to pronounce*; they were dense and didn't flow very well. The atmosphere or *mood* of the poems didn't strike me psychologically. Being a singer and a composer, I was interested in setting things to music, and I knew right away if the words would sing. Several years later, he started sending me pages of his automatic

writing, which contained often inventive couplings of words and images, rigmarole. When grouped together, many of the lines sounded like poems, but not in Millay's sense! I got very excited reading this work, which revealed an entirely different imaginative world. That particular summer he was vacationing in some bucolic place, and he was into the sounds of the woods, natural sounds, like frogs, and all sorts of insects and birds and all of that. These came out of his early morning spontaneous writing exercises. And one of the first things I read amongst that swirling mass of words was a description of frogs. [Recites from memory:

“

Wicked sounds haunt the glen tonight, voices from non-human throats, clear cries of splendid pain and after a bit more cries again – – – Can you for one moment dare to doubt that frogs have echoes through the bog [Hundley spells out the word: b-o-g] and hear their own love songs under lily pads and immanent wet clouds

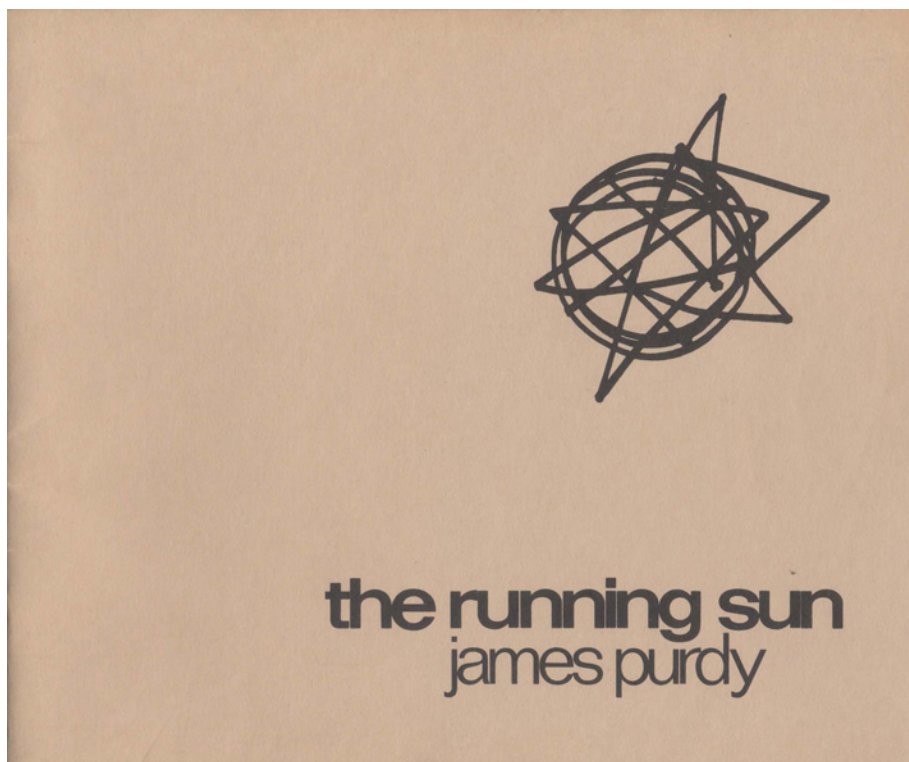
When I read that I thought, “That’s the *perfect* description of frogs—*that’s brilliant.*” It was so unexpected and playful. Imagine: the erotic songs of frogs! Who would think of that? So I circled this, and other things, and sent them back to him and said, THIS IS POETRY!

**Q:** *So there’s a clear difference for you between when he consciously sought to write poems versus when he was writing automatically, unconsciously—*

**A:** Well, he didn’t think they were poems. He was just sounding off whatever thoughts came to his mind; in that *burst* of free-flowing and uninhibited imagination there was something truly inventive and unconventional. What was different in the automatic writing was that he was ready all the time like gunpowder! Since the passages I marked in the automatic writings were often short, later, he would sometimes add lines and then rework and shape them into verse. They’re sort of like Mother Goose, but they’re not, you see? They’re Purdyesque.

**Q:** *Since that’s an eponym that’s never been used, what exactly does it mean to you? How would you characterize the “Purdyesque”?*

**A:** Well, James has this ability to truly *astonish*, in many different ways, and he does it with language as well as with his extraordinary imagination. His poems often shift from one dimension to another, have these sudden *totally* unexpected turns or twists, like when he shifts from the erotic to the strange, or vice versa. And his poems always touch you; touch the heart.



**Q:** *What was the first poem of his you set to music?*

**A:** I don't remember but almost everything he sent me stimulated a response of some sort. To make a good song you must have a good idea. Eventually, I was having performances of the songs I composed, which were also being published. His poems about the seashore and happenings at the sea were wonderful, and I gathered those lines and made a cantata out of them

called "The Sea is Swimming Tonight," which is the name of one of the poems. It was a perfect description of water, as you see it at the seashore. It's *swimming*. The waves are overlapping and I thought it was absolutely delightful. After a number of years—since I wrote the cantata, and after the individual songs were being performed, Jimmy decided that he would privately publish a book of the poems that I had been setting to music. So he put together about 20 of these and entitled it *The Running Sun*.<sup>28</sup> I introduced him to Paul Waner,<sup>29</sup> a young friend of mine who was an artist, and he designed and published the book for James.

**Q:** *Purdy noted the significant impact you had on his writing poetry and said: "It was Richard Hundley who encouraged me to go on with writing poetry in the first place, and without his insistence that my verse was in its own way as important as my fiction and plays, I might have given up writing it."<sup>30</sup> Aside from the private editions published in America, which are quite rare and difficult to locate, the only collected edition of Purdy's poems was published in Amsterdam by Purdy's friend Jan Erik Bouman.<sup>31</sup>*

**A:** Well, he had numerous small editions. And there was one in San Francisco that published—

**Q:** *Black Sparrow.*

**A:** Right! It was quite a wonderful press at that time, publishing very fine

artists.

**Q:** *The regional and artistic connections or roots that you and Purdy share—*

**A:** You see, we escaped from Ohio.

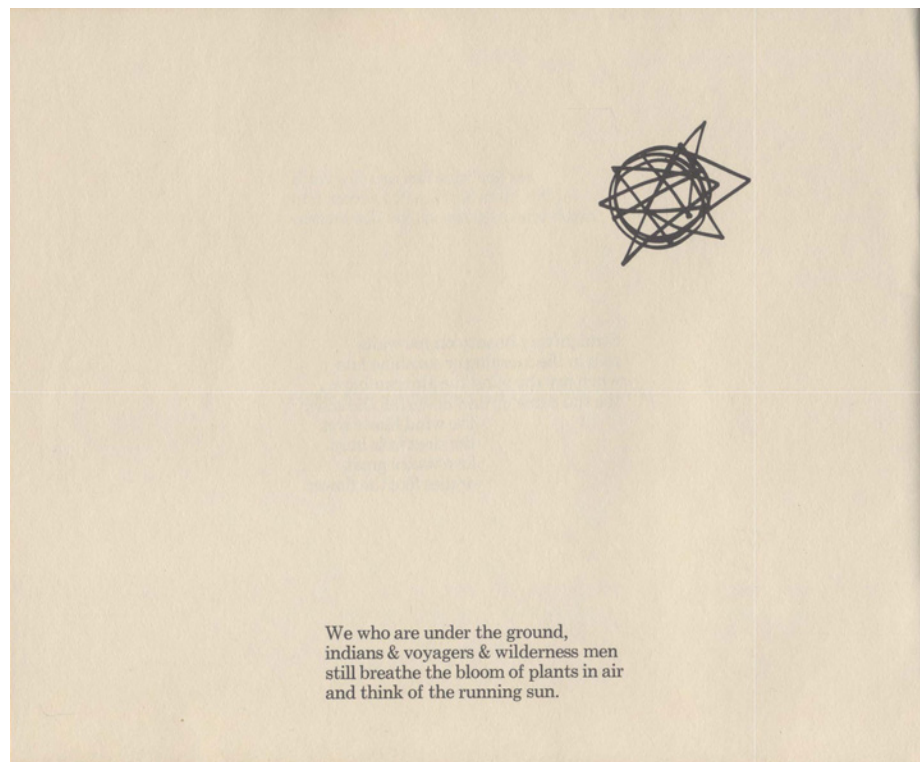
**Q:** *I see you as quintessential American artists in the best sense, and one thinks here not of what “America” is now, but of the America of Whitman and Melville, of Jelly Roll Morton and Charles Ives, of W.C. Fields and Buster Keaton, etc.*

*There are similar artistic sensibilities between you and Purdy too, especially regarding your relation to language. Purdy wrote in certain idioms and sought to preserve what he called the autochthonous qualities of speech, to which I see a corollary in your desire to “preserve the natural cadence of American speech” as you once said.*

**A:** Well, of course, he was very conscious of language because he knew Latin, spoke Spanish, and read ancient Greek. All the Purdys were educated. Also, in the world Jimmy and I grew up in, everyone read the Bible. And children were named after Biblical figures: Abner, Obediah, Daniel, etc. He used to recite stories from the Bible to me by heart.

**Q:** *Purdy noted that the King James Bible and Shakespeare were formative influences, that the language of such works was ingrained in his blood.— Beyond that, did his interest in indigenous or regional speech make you more sensitive to it?*

**A:** It’s part of my heritage; I grew up with it, too. But he could use the American idioms the same way Virgil Thomson used to use them. Thomson was elaborately educated at Harvard and in Paris, but his speech was peppered with the American vernacular. In Purdy’s language, there is an infinite variety, and that fascinated me. He would leave messages for me on the telephone nearly every day, and sometimes I would write down what he said; aside from



his incisive observations of the world, he would often recite these great idioms, like “locking the stable after the horse is stolen,” and so forth. He was a master of the vernacular.

**Q:** *There are Purdy settings in each of your song collections published by Boosey & Hawkes. Eight Songs features four by Purdy. Four Songs features two, as does Ten Songs, “Waterbirds” and “Lions.” In Octaves & Sweet Sounds, one of the compositions is also based on a Purdy poem. The others are based on poems by Joyce, e.e. cummings, Garcia Villa, and Gertrude Stein. Is there a relation between the collection of poems in Octaves & Sweet Sounds for you?*

**A:** Yes! my music! I always set what poetry I like and I put together song collections in a combination I find compelling. *Octaves and Sweet Sounds* was a title suggested to me by Purdy. I gave him a lot, but he gave me *even more*. I’ve known many great people, like Madame Zinka Milanov, who was one of the six greatest singers of this century, but James was a truly rare bird. He was something out of this world.

**Q:** *And there was something in his automatic writings in particular that you really connected with and found stimulating?*

**A:** James once said to me, “The only thing forbidden in America is quality. The standard is ‘anything to make money.’ It must make money!!!” Well, in those writings, as in all of Jimmy’s writings, he was completely without reservation—he had no desire to please anyone except himself. He was expressing himself shamelessly. He always said that the artist must be free of shame. I thought many of the passages in the automatic writings had a very fine rhythmic quality and could be made into songs. It was clear that he was writing them spontaneously and fast, often rhyming sentences to keep them flowing, and that’s what I was really after. In *Four Songs* I set two poems by Purdy: “Come Ready and See Me,” which became popular, and “Evening Hours.” I discovered the opening four lines of “Evening Hours” in one of the pages of his automatic writing that he had sent me. [*Recites from memory*]:

“

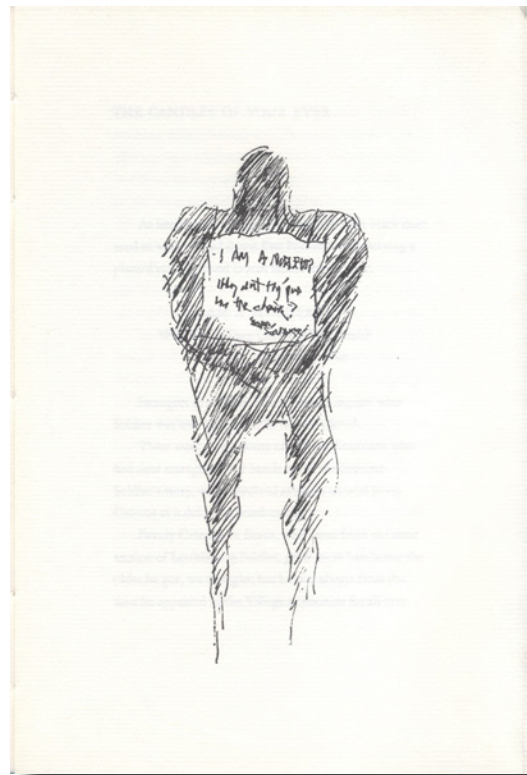
I miss you in the evening hours when all the perfume comes  
from the flowers again in the morning your presence I lack and  
the milkman rattles inside his hack

In the days when Jimmy grew up, and later when I grew up, a man delivered the milk to your home, first in a horse-drawn buggy and later in a truck. And, sometimes you were wakened from your sleep by the sound of rattling bottles. And that’s where that comes from. But the poem was completed later.

One day while he and I were walking to the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens (which he loved to visit), I began singing the words to the melody I composed for them, and James responded with additional fresh, new lines. We stimulated each other, you see. By the time he and I reached our destination, the poem had grown to include six more lines, which I wrote down as he invented them. [*Sings the lines:*

“

But starlight brings your face to me I'll  
never let you go  
The rain that falls on the garden wall  
keeps me informed as if you had called  
drop by drop the rain tells me all I need to  
know  
of the world and its trees



That shift at the end to the world and the trees, now *that's* "Purdyesque"! Hold on. [*Goes to retrieve some books*] Boosey and Hawkes put these out. What does the cover say?

**Q:** *Art Song in English: 50 Songs by 21 American and British Composers.*

**A:** This is a distinguished international collection. I am very proud to be included. In it, I have one song by Purdy, "Waterbird." It's based on the original choral version of "The Sea is Swimming Tonight."

**Q:** *In terms of the music, because you've mentioned that Purdy used to improvise on the piano sometimes—*

**A:** O yes. For years we would go to lunch at a little Italian restaurant which was near where I live in Manhattan, Casa di Pre, and James would come home with me and he usually went right to the piano and sat down and started improvising. And I would say, "Well, Jimmy, can you make snow?" And he would stop for a minute and he would sort of [*Hundley tilts his head backwards in a kind of ecstatic gesture to simulate a kind of trance state*] and then he would begin to simulate the *sensation* of snow. When I looked outside, I was startled because it actually started to snow . . . James was a sort of witch!

**Q:** *Did he ever suggest musical passages to you?*

**A:** No. *Never.* He would often say, "That's brilliant, Richard. That's just the way I think it should be."

**Q:** *Would you literally work on them together?*

**A:** NO! Never.

**Q:** *After you made the first composition and you played it for Purdy, did—*

**A:** He loved it. My experience is that most poets want to be set to music. But see, I was so lucky because James was my poet.

**Q:** *Did you present him completed works most of the time, or did the songs go through alteration?*

**A:** My songs often go through a lot of editing. The presentation of my music isn't in my control. It isn't like a painting that is always displayed right there in front of you. Music has to be reproduced. A page of music is really a blueprint. And they have to be—

**Q:** *And you never know how it's going to turn out.*

**A:** [*Thoughtful silence.*] Well, if you write it well enough you know how it *should* turn out. It's always different. I had to learn to write my pieces so they would hold up under bad performances. But when I was at the Metropolitan Opera, I began to have very fine singers sing my songs. They were brilliant artists with imaginations, so they put something into it, but most performers don't do that. Students don't do that. You have to instruct them. As Virgil Thomson said to me, "That's what you're going to get for most of your life: *bad performance.*" [*Dark, raucous laughter*] That's what a page of music is—it's just a blueprint. It means one thing to one person and something else to another. But if it means the same to a great many people, then you've got it right. [*Raucous laugh.*] That's true! As a composer of songs (to art poetry), I always try to identify myself with the poet's feeling, or some aspect of it. I try to get *inside* the words. A good melody is not just a poem's new suit. It must be a *new skin*—inseparable.

**Q:** *At the Newport Musical Festival in the early 80s there was a performance of "St. Stephen & Prince Antelope Duet," from an incomplete opera, Wedding Finger, based on a play by Purdy. When did the two of you decide to create an opera? Is it something you'd ever consider completing?*

**A:** There was no plan to write an opera; there was just one scene. He had already written that story. The premise of the *scena* was that once Manhattan was taken away or destroyed, then creation could begin all over again. [*Laughter*] It concerned Prince Antelope, who came to the United States to marry the Isle of Manhattan, and once she was taken in tow, away, to an unknown region above the Atmo, creation could begin all over. So I had this duet where St. Stephen was interviewing Prince Antelope when he got off the boat. And Prince Antelope said, "The Island will be restored to a tropical

paradise inhabited by birds and bird people who sing but never conquer.” And I had pictured that Manhattan would be seen on a screen above the performer’s heads—she’d be sinking into the waters and the great luscious vegetation sprouting up and the island transformed to a tropical paradise. And you know, after I worked on it we had this performance at Newport, I thought to myself, you know, Richard, you really love Manhattan. It’s been a haven for you. To escape to from Kentucky and Ohio. Do you really want to do an opera where every community in Iowa or Kansas or Arkansas would stage a performance of this and everybody will be applauding when on the screen they see Manhattan sinking in the water and birds coming with Prince Antelope?! The music comes first of course but since Purdy was not willing to make concessions with his text on behalf of the opera, it wasn’t possible to complete it. Neither of us were professional librettists so that created practical problems.

**Q:** *It sounds more like Purdy’s vision of Manhattan, or what he’d like to do to it, to eliminate it.*

**A:** O YES! You see James was direct with his emotions at *all* times. He got *inside* what he wanted to say. It wasn’t thought up; it was an irruption! His art was often an expression of his deepest fantasies, or a fantastical expression of his unconscious longings, though it was always far more than only that for everything was always transfigured. I was encouraged to be *totally* myself from watching James. He was *mad*. He used to complain about so many things to me, too. But he always encouraged me to go right to work. He turned me on. You see, everyone in academia is doing what they *think* and what they’re *told* they should be doing. They’re servile and correct whereas he was *completely* unbridled. James wrote what he *wanted* to write. I learned so much from him about being totally free with myself, to have no inhibitions, to write whatever I wanted to write instead of what I thought I should. Being around him was liberating.

**Q:** *In 1985, the Robert Page<sup>32</sup> Singers commissioned “Ball,” a work of yours based on one of Purdy’s long poems. What was the nature of the commission? Interest in your work alone, or in both yours and Purdy’s work?*

**A:** Page didn’t know who Purdy was. In fact, the reviewer of the performance referred to Purdy as a *poet*, and that’s by the leading music critic of *The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer*, who certainly should have known Purdy’s work at that time.

**Q:** *Almost all of his major novels were published by then.*

**A:** Well, not all of them. Anyway, Robert Page was a very fine choral director and well known all across the United States. He had heard “The Sea is Swimming Tonight” and was a great admirer of it and he wanted to have a piece like that very much.

**Q:** *Are there other compositions based on Purdy’s poetry that you plan to write*

*in the future?*

**A:** I have at least five or six songs that have never been published. I have more songs published of James' poetry than any other composer. James also suggested poems for me to set. I did "Maud Muller" by Whittier.<sup>33</sup> And he brought it to me and said, "Now this is ideal for you; consider it." And when I got a commission from a school in Tarrytown, New York, I did it. It's one of my better pieces and it's ten minutes in length. [*Recites from memory:* "Maud Muller, on a summer's day, raked the meadow sweet with hay." And it ends with these lines: "Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: "It might have been.' "

**Q:** *Did he suggest any other poems for you to set to music?*

**A:** Well, he told me about Jose Garcia Villa, who lived up the street from me at that time, and I set his poem no. 98,<sup>34</sup> which has commas after every word. It's an abstract text I chose to work on. It had no title but I named it "Moonlight's Watermelon" after the first two words of the text. [*Gives me a copy of the poem. We recite some of it:*

“

Moonlight's, watermelon, mellows, light,  
Mellowly. Water, mellows, moon, lightly.  
Water, mellows, melons, brightly.  
Moonlight's, mellow, to, water's, sight.  
Yes, and, water, mellows, soon,  
Quick, as, mellows, the, mellow, moon.  
Water, mellows, as, mellows, melody,  
Moon, has, its, mellow, secrecy.

**Q:** *Is it unusual for you to write songs based on abstract texts?*

**A:** *No.* Virgil Thomson taught me how to do that. He was a brilliant composer of abstract texts through Gertrude Stein. Anyway, I got that commission from the University of Minnesota. [*Sings the first two lines of "Moonlight's Watermelon"*] This is the way it looks. [*Shows the sheet music*] I loved it right away because here I was writing this work for this school, and the audience was sitting there looking at poem number 98 thinking, "Yes, this must be modern music." As I said, the poem had commas after every word, the syntax had been ruptured. I invented a form and structure and set the words for clarity. And the last one is another abstract poem. It's the one by Gertrude Stein, which is from "Stanzas in Meditation." [*Asks me to read it aloud.*



Why am I if I am uncertain reasons may inclose.  
Remain remain propose repose chose.  
I call carelessly that the door is open  
Which if they can refuse to open  
No one can rush to close.  
Let them be mine therefor.

[Repeats one phrase:

Let them be mine, therefor

[I continue:

Everybody knows that I chose.  
Therefor if therefor before I close.  
I will therefor offer therefor I offer This.  
Which if I refuse to miss can be miss is mine.  
I will be well welcome when I come.  
Because I am coming.  
Certainly I come having come.  
These stanzas are done.<sup>35</sup>

See, I thought that would be very good for the ending of the cycle, and it was all done.

**Q:** *Are they meant to be performed all together?*

**A:** Well, they don't have to be sung together. They can be sung individually.

**Q:** *Didn't Paul Sperry<sup>36</sup> sing some of your music?*

**A:** Yes. When "The Sea is Swimming Tonight" was premiered, Paul was there. He came back stage at the end of the performance and exclaimed, "That section, 'Waterbird,' I want you to make me a song out of that." I replied, "The poem is too short for a solo, it's only four lines." So I went to Purdy and I said, "I need an additional four lines. Paul wants to commission a solo arrangement from the original choral version." James declared, "I feel that it's *complete*." He thought for a moment and added the purely gratuitous statement: "*It took me all my life to write those four lines.*" That's the way James was!

Well, time passed, every now and then for several years Paul would visit me under the pretext of hearing what I'd been recently working on and after listening to everything, he'd say, "You know, Richard, I keep remembering "Waterbird." I want you to make a setting of that music." And I said, "Paul, I can't do it because the poem's too short, but I'll look into it." Finally, after his last visit I suddenly realized, if you don't set it to music with only the four lines, Richard, you're going to lose the commission. So I decided on repeating the

text with musical variation. “Waterbird” *turns out* to be one of my more popular songs. It’s included in an international collection, and I would never have written it were it not for Paul Sperry’s persistence and constant enthusiasm.

**Q:** *Aside from his place in American Arts and Letters then, through your settings of his poems, Purdy has a place in American music as well.*

**A:** Yes, and that’s from where some people know his name. In all the early reviews of my settings of Purdy poems they say: JAMES PURDY THE POET. [Shocked laughter] James was *insulted* by that, and rightfully so. It’s not to just say the poet, you should not only say the poet, you should say *the American writer*. And this is strange because very little of Purdy’s poetry was published at that time—it’s no different today. His poetry is practically unknown. He called them his night children, his bastards. I was setting them to music as *they materialized*, before they were even known to a public. Purdy wrote them for me and I was giving them something of my own blood. We each brought one another things.

**Q:** *This is intriguing, because it indicates that there’s a greater degree of awareness of Purdy’s poetry in some music circles whereas, generally, he’s not recognized as a poet in literature circles, if he’s known as a poet at all. What do you think of the other composer’s adaptations of Purdy’s poems, such as those of Robert Helps?<sup>37</sup>*

**A:** Robert Helps was a superb pianist and a lovely man, but I set words entirely different than he did. Helps’s setting of what became *The Running Sun* poems was done as though it was one continuous piece, and the poems are essentially recited in his work, not sung. They’re not fused with the music but in discord with it. It’s like *Pierrot Lunaire*. I went through a whole process to arrive at those poems with James. They were not written as a complete work, but developed through our collaboration on each poem. In my settings, the melody and the words are wedded together, and each poem is an individual song. [Goes to the piano and plays “Evening Hours.”]

“

I miss you in the evening hours  
When all the perfume comes from the flowers  
Again in the morning your presence I lack  
And the milkman rattles inside his hack  
But starlight brings your face to me  
I’ll never let you go  
The rain that falls on the garden wall  
Keeps me informed as if you had called  
Drop by drop the rain tells me all I need to know  
Of the world and its trees

You see I made a whole song out of that. [*Starts playing again:*

“

I miss you in the evening hours  
When all the perfume comes from the  
flowers  
Again in the morning your presence I lack  
And the milkman rattles inside his hack—

They all have melodies. The words *sing*. The words carry them; it's not just a sound. Or an *idea*.

**Q:** *So Helms's approach was more modernist and less melodic than yours?*

**A:** O, definitely. *Definitely*. But he was a very fine composer of what he did. And he used to take Jimmie to all those concerts where he played avant-garde music, like Roger Sessions. James *hated* Roger Sessions. He loved music, but he was idiosyncratic and he had his favorite composers: Dvorak, Grieg, Elgar, Glazunov— — —etc.

**Q:** *He expressed particular distaste for Bach, didn't he?*

**A:** He *hated* Bach. When he told me that and I gave him a frown and a questioning look, he said, "But I'm not in music. I don't *have* to love Bach. I like what *I* like."

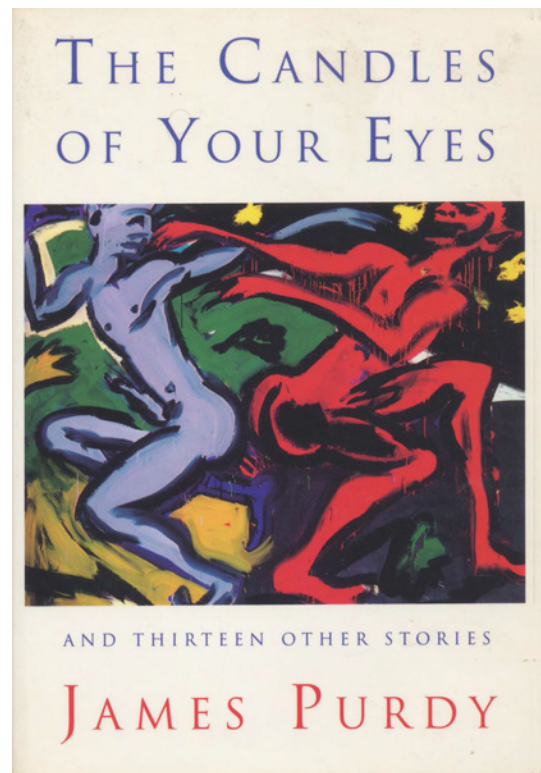
**Q:** *What's perhaps even worse than the scarcity of the poems is that most of his books are now completely out of print, except for one or two by City Lights, but in the world of music, his work—*

**A:** Is that the short stories?

**Q:** *I'm not sure which are still in print, but they published Out with the Stars, The Candles of Your Eyes, and—*

**A:** *Candles of Your Eyes* is an American classic. Along with *Malcolm*, it should be as well-known as *Huckleberry Finn*.

**Q:** *And those are the only ones that are in print now as far as I recall. Everything else is out of print—even all of the volumes that Carroll & Graf<sup>38</sup> reprinted just a few years ago. The last few times I visited St. Marks Books*



*and Book Culture, neither had any copies of Purdy's books. So, oddly, as his presence in the world of literature continues to fade, it is sustained in part in the world of music, because of your collaborations with him, as well as the collaborations other composers (Robert Helps, Hans-Jürgen von Bose, Alexander Strauch)<sup>39</sup> made with him or his work. Do you see his poetry as fertile ground for other composers in the future?*

**A:** *Absolutely.* For any talented composers. Those early poems are very different from the ones he wrote when he met Jan Erik Bouman, because through Jan Erik telling him stories about his life, he wrote those erotic poems. Everybody that came into his life served as material for his writing. He was using people as a creative stimulus all the time. Jan Erik was somebody who thought very highly of James and was responsible for publishing the collected edition of his poems. It's very difficult to find, but without him, we wouldn't even have that edition. I've read my copy so many times it's fallen to pieces! James was rather startled by its condition but I said to him, "I'm *using* your book all the time; I'm making songs of your poems!" If the books were ever destroyed, I could recite most of the poems from memory.

**Q:** *So you would encourage up and coming composers of art songs to go to Purdy's poems for material?*

**A:** Yes! And also established composers. I think some of them are so imaginative and fertile that they will. He believed in absolute, utter clarity, and that is beneficial to composers. I mean, they can look and see what I got out of them. Purdy's poetry can essentially be divided into two types, beginning with the early ones that I stimulated him to write—the passages of *pure poetry* which came from his automatic early morning writing exercises—and the later, mostly erotic ones that were provoked by his encounter with Jan Erik. Christopher Berg, the distinguished composer of many settings of Frank O'Hara's poems to music, has expressed interest in setting Purdy's poetry.<sup>40</sup>

**Q:** *Is there other recent work of yours that you'd like to mention?*

**A:** In my latest collection *Ten Songs* I set a letter of Virgil Thomson's to music, and Purdy's "Lions have lain in grasses before." I simplified the title of that song to "Lions." I thought, well, his title is very nice and literary, but for this song it's better to just say: *LIONS*. James didn't like that. He thought the original title far more imaginative; I agreed with him, but for a song title it seemed too long. I said to him, "People are going to remember the song."  
[Plays the song:



Lions have lain in grasses before  
& pale hares in lonely lanes  
but the trees and the leaves

& the leaves and the trees  
are choicer and much more fair.

Abandon then lions  
ignore pale hares  
for with the trees and the leaves  
& the leaves and the trees  
You've found your choicest fair  
by far choicest and fair.

It's sort of mad. You have to have a good singer and pianist.

**Q:** *It's almost Dadaesque.*

**A:** Yes, well, I write different types of things too, not only sweet sounds.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I refer to the monographs by Chupack (1975), Adams (1976), and Profit (1998). The one by Schwarzschild (1968) was written too early to address this collaboration. Regarding the journal, see *The James White Review*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (winter 2000). The entirety of the issue is devoted to Purdy and guest edited by novelist Matthew Stadler, who explains in his note heading the issue that it “is meant as a small first step toward assessing the nature of [Purdy’s] accomplishment and the reach of his influence, particularly among a generation of writers younger than Purdy who have discovered his work in recent years” (5).

<sup>2</sup> In the near future, composer Mahir Cetiz will write an essay on some of the musical adaptations of Purdy’s texts for *Hyperion*.

<sup>3</sup> James Keller, *Musical America*, May 1991, 52.

<sup>4</sup> Hundley recounts what is obviously a basic principle of Thomson, for Thomson espouses almost precisely the same musical thought in his autobiography: “My theory was that if a text is set correctly for the sound of it, the meaning will take care of itself. And the Stein texts, for prosodizing in this way, were manna. With meanings already abstracted, or absent, or so multiplied that choice among them was impossible, there was no temptation toward tonal illustration, say, of birdie babbling by the brook or heavy hangs my heart. You could make a setting for sound and syntax only, then add, if needed, an accompaniment equally functional.” Virgil Thomson, *Virgil Thomson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 90.

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Elwell, *The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer*, April 24, 1964.

<sup>6</sup> This seems a tight-knit circle of its own, for Flanagan composed the music to Edward Albee’s adaptation of Purdy’s *Malcolm*. As Albee was working on the play, Ned Rorem wrote to Purdy to express interest in composing music for it, hoping that Purdy might advocate for him over Flanagan, despite Flanagan being Albee’s official composer.

<sup>7</sup> For Hundley’s reflections on Milanov, see Richard Hundley, *Opera Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (spring 1990): 108-111.

<sup>8</sup> This record, which is also available on compact disc, features compositions by Richard Hundley, Paul Bowles, Virgil Thomson, Arthur Farwell, and Theodore Chanler. Five of the Hundley compositions are based on Purdy poems. The performers include Paul Sperry and pianist Irma Vallecillo. See *Paul Sperry Sings Romantic American Songs* (New York: Albany Records, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Roger Dettmer, *Chicago American*, July 19, 1964.

<sup>10</sup> Ruth C. Friedberg, *American Art Song and American Poetry, Vol. III: The Century Advances* (New Jersey & London: The Scarecrow Press, 1987), 249.

<sup>11</sup> Friedberg, *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Offergeld, *The Diplomat*, January 1967.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Finn, “Richard Hundley, non-conformist,” *The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer*, June 3, 1983, 4.

<sup>14</sup> James Vinson, ed., *Contemporary Novelists: Second Edition* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1976), 1130.

<sup>15</sup> R. Raymond Adams, *Evening Express*, July 28, 1971.

<sup>16</sup> Friedberg, *Ibid.*, 261-262.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>18</sup> James Purdy, *The Running Sun* (New York: n.p., 1971). This has no page numbers. I quote from

the title poem, the final poem in the book.

<sup>19</sup> Finn, *Ibid.*, 1983.

<sup>20</sup> These titles are all mostly devised by Hundley and reveal the degree of his inventiveness, the way he almost reconceives the poems he uses through such subtle changes. The Cummings poem, while untitled, is known by its first line, "maggie and millie and molly and may," but Hundley changed it to "Seashore Girls" to distinguish it from other uses of the poem and because it sounded more provocative.

<sup>21</sup> Friedberg, *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>23</sup> While Purdy's attention and energy was directed towards writing full length plays in the 90s, on his own Hundley continued to include Purdy poems when composing songs.

<sup>24</sup> For further material on Hundley's compositions, see Carol Kimball, *Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature* (Wisconsin: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2006), and Victoria Etnier Villamil, *A Singer's Guide to the American Art Song: 1870 – 1980* (Lanham, MD & London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1993; 2004). Purdy mentions his collaboration with Hundley in *Conversations with Writers II, Volume 1*, eds. Stanley Ellin, John Baker (Michigan: Gale Research Co., 1978).

<sup>25</sup> Harold Knapik was an accomplished pianist and published several compositions, a book on musical style, *Counterpoint* (Chicago: Andreas Foundation, 1961), and a cookbook, *Haute Cuisine without Help* (New York: Galahad Books, 1971). He studied at the Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris. After moving there in the late 40s, he and his wife Virginia befriended Alice B. Toklas. When he returned to New York City, he opened Knapik Gallery. The manuscripts and other papers (1936-1979) of Harold and Virginia Knapik are held at Indiana University: <http://www.indiana.edu/~liblilly/lilly/mss/html/knapik.html>

<sup>26</sup> Aside from being a magnate of some stature, Osborn Andreas was also the author of at least two works of literary criticism: *Henry James and the Expanding Horizon: A Study of the Meaning and Basic Themes of James's Fiction* (Michigan: Greenwood Press, 1948), and *Joseph Conrad: A Study in Non-Conformity* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959).

<sup>27</sup> Purdy published his poems for the first time in 1967; the book also included a short story. See James Purdy, *An Oyster is a Wealthy Beast* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1967). A selection of poems, each also accompanied by a short story, was published in the following two editions: *Mr. Evening* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1968), and *On the Rebound* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1970). The first book of Purdy's consisting solely of poems was his privately published limited edition, *The Running Sun* (New York: n.p., 1971).

<sup>28</sup> *The Running Sun* (New York: n.p., 1971).

<sup>29</sup> This of course is not "Big Poison," or Paul Glee Waner, the German-American right-fielder who played for the Pittsburgh Pirates, the Dodgers, the Braves, and the New York Yankees.

<sup>30</sup> *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, Volume 1 (Michigan: Gale Research Company, The University of Michigan, 1984), 304.

<sup>31</sup> I am referring here to James Purdy, *Collected Poems* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum—Polak & Van Gennep, 1990). This is out of print. Editions of it now run from between \$80 to nearly \$200 U.S. dollars. Jan Erik Bouman was born in Den Haag on 27 February 1947. He died last year in Utrecht on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September. Bouman was a close friend of Purdy's and printed several beautiful private editions of his work, including "Kitty Blue," "Brawith," *The Forbidden House*, etc.

<sup>32</sup> Maestro Robert Page is a music director and conductor. He served as both for The Mendelssohn Choir for 26 years. He is the Director of Choral and Opera Studies and is the Paul Mellon University Professor of Music at Carnegie Mellon University. He has performed and recorded with The Cleveland Orchestra, the Pittsburgh Symphony, and the Philadelphia Orchestra amongst others.

<sup>33</sup> John Greenleaf Whittier (December 17, 1807 – September 7, 1892). American Quaker poet who supported the abolition of slavery in the United States.

<sup>34</sup> Jose Garcia Villa, *Selected Poems and New*, Introduction by Dame Edith Sitwell (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1958), 130.

<sup>35</sup> Stanza LXXXIII. See Gertrude Stein, *Stanzas in Meditation, and Other Poems, 1929-1933* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1956), 151.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Sperry is recognized as one of the finest interpreters of American music though his repertoire also includes everything from Monteverdi to Bach and Britten. He taught song interpretation and performance at Juilliard from 1984-2007. He also teaches at the Manhattan School of Music and at the Brooklyn College Conservatory of Music. Hundley regards Paul Sperry as the foremost authority on American art song. "He has sung more of it, launched more of it, and encouraged and commissioned more of it than any other artist." For more on Sperry, visit his website: <http://www.paulsperry.net/>

<sup>37</sup> Robert Helps (1928-2001) was an American composer and concert pianist who made recordings with the sopranos Bethany Beardslee and Phyllis Curtin and the violinists Isidore Cohen and Rudolf Kolisch. One of his most well known compositions is "Gossamer Noons," a work for soprano and orchestra that is based on Purdy's poem of the same name. For more info, see The Robert Helps web monument: <http://helpsweb.free.fr/>

<sup>38</sup> Carroll & Graf reprinted *Moe's Villa and Other Stories* (2004), *Eustace Chisholm and the Works* (2004), *Jeremy's Version* (2005), *Narrow Rooms* (2005), and *The House of the Solitary Maggot* (2005). The latter was the first ever paperback edition. The cloth edition was published by Double Day in 1974.

<sup>39</sup> Von Bose is a German composer from Munich who won numerous awards, including the Schneider-Schott Music Prize, Mainz (1988), the Ernst von Siemens Music Prize (1994), and others. He has written vocal and stage works, instrumental, chamber, and piano music. His opera based on Purdy's first novella, *63: Dream Palace*, was performed at the Münchener Biennale on 6 May 1990. His homepage: <http://www.musikerportrait.de/hansjuergenvonbose/home.php>

Strauch is a German composer who has written works for orchestra and chamber orchestra, music-theater, as well as electronic and other music. *Narrow Rooms*, his opera based on Purdy's homonymous novel, was performed at the Akademietheater in the Prinzregententheater in Munich in the fall of 1996. His homepage: <http://www.strauchcomposer.de/>

<sup>40</sup> For more info on composer Christopher Berg: <http://www.liegnermanagement.com/berg.htm>

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