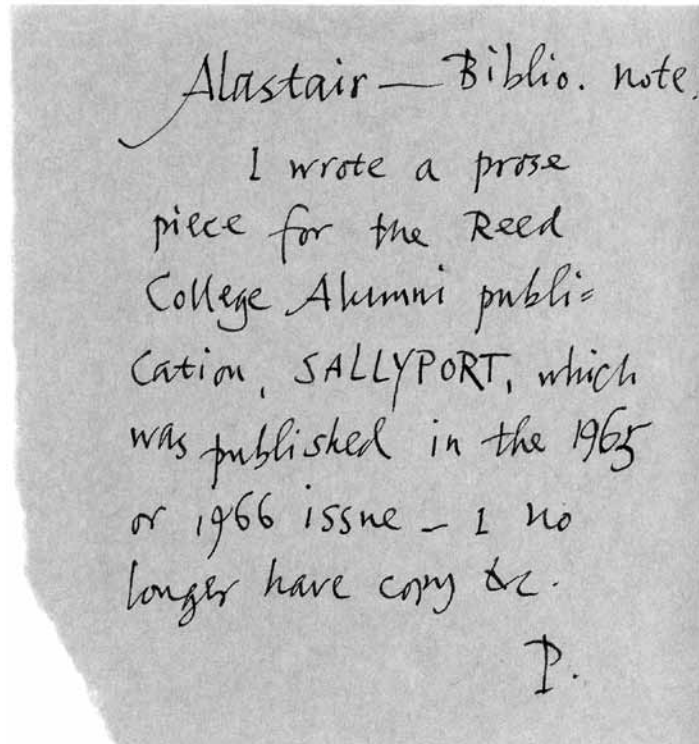


## *All Best Phil: Annotated Letters from Philip Whalen*

I met Philip Whalen in 1975 when I was writing my bibliography of the Auerhahn Press.

Here are some of his letters to me. — Alastair Johnston

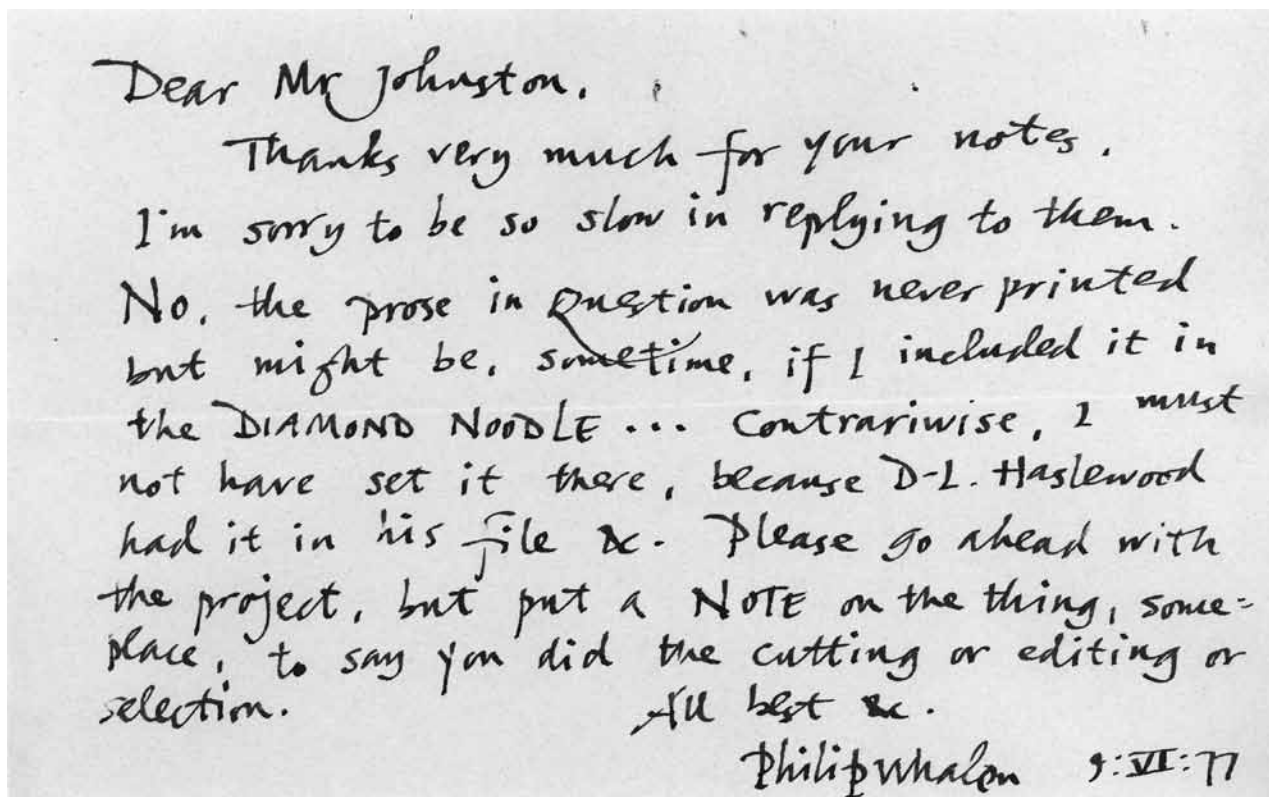
ORIGINAL LETTERS SHOWN AT 80%



Alastair — Biblio. note:  
I wrote a prose  
piece for the Reed  
College Alumni publi-  
cation, SALLYPORT, which  
was published in the 1965  
or 1966 issue — I no  
longer have copy &c.  
P.

Because of my biblio-  
graphical interests PW  
would send me notes like  
this when he remembered  
little magazines that had  
published some of his  
early poems.

I sent him Xeroxes of his early “Prose Takes” that I had found in the Auerhahn archives at The Bancroft Library, enquiring whether they had appeared anywhere. He replied on yellow paper, from the Page Street Zen Center,



Dear Mr Johnston.  
Thanks very much for your notes.  
I'm sorry to be so slow in replying to them.  
No, the prose in question was never printed  
but might be, sometime, if I included it in  
the DIAMOND NOODLE ... Contrariwise, I must  
not have set it there, because D-L Haslewood  
had it in his file &c. Please go ahead with  
the project, but put a NOTE on the thing, some-  
place, to say you did the cutting or editing or  
selection.  
All best &c.  
Philip Whalen 9:VI:77

Most of his letters relate to things of his I was printing and he was prompt and careful in his proofreading. This letter was postmarked 12 July 1977:

Naropa Institute  
1111 Pearl St  
Boulder, Colorado 80302

Dear Alastair,

Fix up the punctuation to suit your "house style", for I'm so far away in space & time from the feeling of that writing I don't know or care about the "dramatic" punctuation any more.

No deal - please change "baybee" to "Clio". (THROUGHOUT)

No thanks very much, I am completely fed up with readings for some time to come - I've had to do  $\frac{1}{2}$  & have yet to do  $\frac{1}{2}$  so much poetry here that I couldn't possibly

To A. Johnston -2 -  
12: VII:77

squeak one more squawk, I'm sorry, it could have been so beautiful, the colored lanterns & all & Thos. Raworth bouncing  
Alas!, &c.

I'm not sure who "Clio" was, but in *The Diamond Noodle* she was changed back to "Baby."

I'd asked him to read for a *Prolegomena* publication party at the Julia Morgan Center or Cody's Books in Berkeley and had proposed Tom Raworth (who was living in SF at the time) as co-reader to entice him. (I did open for him once at a reading at Julia Morgan Center: the pinnacle of my poetic career.)

No, I'm sorry, there are many fugitive one-of-a-kind things, of which I have no copy { cf. the big framed piece that Peter Howard now has at the back of the store, a decorated letter to Kirby Doyle } & couldn't begin to keep track of magazine appearances ... although some are recorded, I believe, in David Kherdian's book &/or in that new "bibliography" of contemporary poetry prepared

I had probably asked for more unpublished work to print.

-3-  
To AJ. 12: VIII

by a young man in Walnut Creek, I can't remember his name, Peter Howard would know.

Sorry to send you so many down vibes in a single lump. Ascribe it to "the genius tutelary".

all best wishes,  
Phil

Gary Lepper, whose *Bibliographical Introduction to 75 Modern American Authors* was published by Serendipity Books in 1976. I typeset it and contributed some entries. Philip later annotated my copy adding entries to his own and Lew Welch's listings.

Zen Mountain Center  
Tassajara Springs  
Carmel Valley, Ca 93924

{ Nine THREE Nine Two Four }

Dear Alastair, your letter went to Marysville, first, because of my careless writing of 3, read by you as 5. Sorry to hear that you are coming all unsewed, spindled folded & mutilated. Please take better care of yourself. I'm sorry to say that I have some difficulty deciphering your handwriting consequently I read it too slowly to be able to figure out

{over}

Below is the inscription PW wrote for me in a copy of T/O. In my *On Bear's Head* he wrote,

Dear Alistaire,

Thanks for the procaine gases  
Welcome to Canada horses coffee  
cup search. Really nice. Who took it?

for Alastair Johnston  
onward in search of the pherome!  
with best wishes

Philip Whalen  
San Francisco  
26/80



whether you intended to wound my delicate sensibilities. Anyway, you didn't. { i.e. didn't wound the above mentioned ac. ac. } but thanks very much for your good intentions. Life here grinds slowly along ... Zen Center here { even more so than in town } reminds me strongly of reading Thos. Mann's *THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN* { specifically the early part of the book wherein he describes the Sanatorium, & its patients & their dialects & other peculiarities. } A pre-1914 feeling. We must all try

-2-

to get on with the tasks of Western Civilization as bravely as we may ... EXCELSIOR, &c. { although I always thought of EXCELSIOR as "haywire", the packing material made of long curly strings of wood. }

Try to remember to eat your pills. Don't try to get too busy & go barging about before you've got back your strength.

All best.  
Phil

Zen Mountain Center  
Carmel Valley, Ca  
93924

There is not one single figure five  
in that zip code, Dear Alastair,

but thank you for the book,  
which is very swank & gently  
snotty. P. 24 has possible goof—  
line 3, "jannon's" for "janson's" ?  
but this is only a guess — maybe  
there was a french typographer called  
"jannon", for all I know about it.

I'd sure admire to have a  
bunch of copies of the sheet which  
forms pp. 22-23. Also, I suppose that  
I should write to Korumbia University for  
a list of what mss. ac. of mine are  
now recumbent there... it was quite  
by accident that I remembered DIAL-A-  
NOODLE is there.

PLEASE tell me where in the  
works of E. Spenser does that beautiful  
line about "the cruel sky" appear. I  
have no copy of E.S. his poems here.

{MORE}  
↓

I believe I can go to Saffron Sisko  
on or near 17 December, there to  
stop for maybe 2 weeks & then return  
here. I shall try to telephone to  
you.

Thanks again!

Phil

22 XI 77, at night

PW is thanking me for a copy of my *Auerhahn Bibliography*.

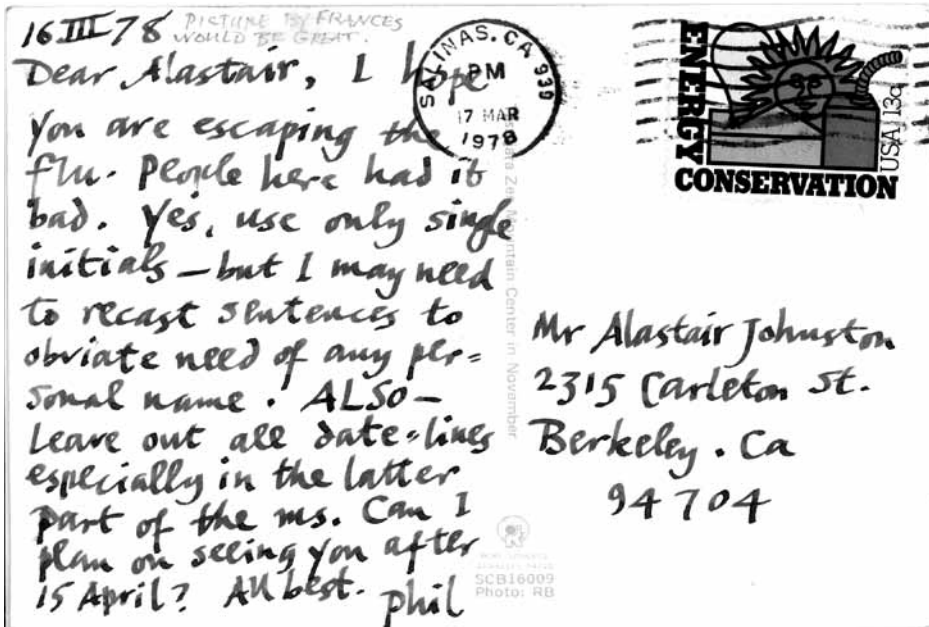
"Jannon" is correct but I am impressed PW knew names of type designers: it shows the breadth of his knowledge.

Pages 22-3 are a recreation of a large calligraphed page he had sent to Dave Haselwood, beginning "Driving Immediately Past Something Green..." I obliged him by printing it as a separate broadside, in an edition of 75 copies, in 1991.

His recollection of *The Diamond Noodle's* whereabouts set me off on my next quest.

The Spenser quote I had sent him comes from Canto I of *The Faerie Queene*.

And forth they pass, with pleasure forward led,  
Joying to hear the birds' sweet harmony,  
Which, therein shrouded from the tempest dread,  
Seem'd in their song to scorn the cruel sky.



By March 1978 I had started work on *The Diamond Noodle*. The penciled addendum at the top reads "Picture by Frances would be great," in response to a suggestion she illustrate the book.

(The postcard front is a view of Tassajara Zen Mountain Center in November)

Zen Mountain Center  
Carmel Valley CA 93924

Dear Alastair

Thanks for sending FRESHEST ADVICES. Oscar Wilde says it's much worse if people don't speak of one at all. I wait sue.

Hurry calls are coming in from NY & Boston wanting news of the DIAMOND NOODLE. I advise patience on all sides.

Thanks also for the elegance poster.

Hope you & Frances are keeping well & busy & happy.

Love for all.

Philip

*Freshest Advices* was a typed poetry manuscript I sent PW. I used one of his lines as an epigraph. (Letter postmarked 23 iii 79)

Dear Alastair,

I have news of your rowdy behaviour in the Smiley Saloon; why weren't you at home, painstakingly printing THE DIAMOND NOODLE with the rubber type & stamp-pad set which Aunt Minerva gave as a Christmas gift?

I wonder what year it was when that snapshot was taken? Did Darrel Gray do the photography? I look even more disreputable & Irish than usual. How is Mr Niblick?

Your students are lucky to have somebody who knows how to do something — a practicing printer for a teacher.

Who is Cadmus Press? where?

As for future printing dates, I am stuck, by contract, with submitting whatever next book to Don Allen. In the event he didn't want it, I'd ask the Black Sparrow whether he'd be interested, because he's always wanted to do a book of poems by PW. And if that didn't work out, I'd come weeping at last

*The Diamond Noodle* still had not appeared by 16 Feb 1980 when PW wrote this (It came out a month later).

Smiley's is the bar in Bolinas. Someone (JEK?) must have told him about my shenanigans, though, of course, I have no recollection.

His choice of Minerva as my aunt's name is interesting because there was a printing press called the Minerva made by Chandler & Price in the 1870s. He may have got it from *Captain Marvel Comics* from 1946.

The photo was taken before his reading at Cody's by Shelly Vogel. Jim Nisbet (Niblick) is also in the photograph.

I had just printed a job for Cadmus Press of Santa Barbara: Clayton Eshelman's *Nights We Put the Rock Together*. I had probably regaled PW with the amusing tale of the publisher pulling a gun on me because he was frustrated with my dilatoriness on the project.

PW continued to give his books to Don Allen.

with my little eggs two-a-penny to the  
back door of the Poltroonery for some  
hot tea & comforting.

Did you go see Alice Notley's  
reading? I hope so.

It is grown so dark in here  
{at 3:10 PM !} that I can scarcely  
see to continue this. Please give my  
best regards to Frances.

Bleakly,  
Philip

Tessajara  
16: II: 80



Dear Alastair, Thanks for sending  
the elegant magazine. I loved the  
"buncombe, balderdash & sham" article.  
Every thing is creeping along at a  
petty pace, today & mostly MADAWA.  
I long for the fleshpots of Egypt &c.  
Hope you are all keeping well & happy.  
Yours, &c  
Phil

12: VII: 86

I received other, less compelling  
letters from Philip. He wrote at  
length, from Santa Fe, on 15 iv 87  
outlining his itinerary from April  
to July and his daily activity in the  
Bay Area as his reason for not see-  
ing me.

The "elegant magazine" was a copy  
of *The Ampersand*.

Above is a pencil portrait I did of  
PW during his reading on iv 87,  
titled "Buddha Big Ears."