

something can be done about this  
 weighted box. It is the dead who come forth to  
 pull it on. I do nothing here.  
 When I think I do, it is the you-hordes  
 leaning over my sleep with needle-shaped  
 fingers without pause they pat  
 my still silhouette which shyly moves.  
 The lich gate looks like it might collapse.  
 Without a frame in which to wait,  
 my ghoul would spread. Bier in lich,  
 Hades' shape, his sonnet prism reflecting  
 the nearby churchyard, the outer hominid limit,  
 a field of rippling meat. I have come here  
 to bleed this gate, to make my language fray  
 into the invisibility teeming against  
 The Mayan Ballcourt of the Dead, where  
 I see myself struggling intently,  
 flux of impact, the hard  
 rubber ball bouncing against the stone hoop.

1979

## Notes on a Visit to Le Tuc d'Audoubert

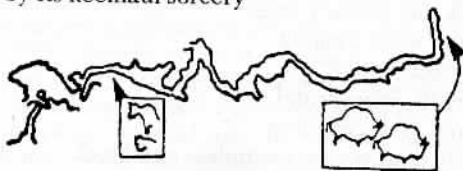
for Robert Bégouën

bundled by Tuc's tight jagged  
 corridors, flocks of white  
 stone tits, their milk in long  
 stone nippy drips, frozen over

the underground Volp in which  
 the enormous guardian eel,  
 now unknown, lies coiled—



to be impressed (in-pressed?) by this  
 primordial "theater of cruelty"—  
 by its keelhaul sorcery



Volp mouth—the tongue of the  
 river lifting one in—

to be masticated by Le Tuc d'Audoubert's  
 cruel stones—  
 the loom of the cave

Up the oblique chimney by ladder to iron cleats set  
 in the rock face to the cathole,  
 on one's stomach  
 to *crawl*, working against  
 one, pinning one  
 as the earth in, to, it, to  
 makes one feel for an instant  
 feel its traction—the dread of

## WITHERING IN PLACE

—pinned in—  
*The Meat Server*  
 masticated by the broken  
 chariot of the earth

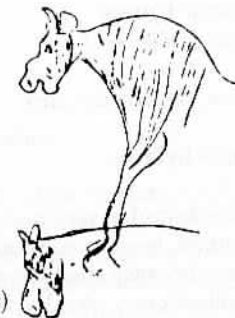


★

"fantastic figures"—more beast-  
 like here than human—one  
 horn one ear— { one large figure  
 one small figure

as in Lascaux?  
 (the *grand* and *petit* sorcerer?)

First indications of master/  
 apprentice? ("tanist" re. Graves)



## the grotesque archetype

vortex in which the emergent  
 human and withdrawing animal  
 are spun—

grotesque = movement

(life is grotesque when we catch  
it in quick perceptions—  
at full vent—history  
shaping itself)

the turns/twists of the cave  
reinforce the image turbine—  
as does the underground river,

the cave floats,  
in a sense, in several senses,  
all at once,  
it rests on the river, is penetrated  
by it, was originally made  
by rushing water—  
the cave  
is the skeleton of flood

images on its walls  
participate, thus, as torsion,  
in an earlier torsion—

Here one might synthesize:

1) abstract signs  
initiate movement  
brought to rest in

3) naturalistic figures  
(bison, horses etc)

In between, the friction, are

2) grotesque hybrids

(useful—but irrelevant to systematize forces that must have been felt as flux, as *unplanned*, spontaneous, as were the spots/areas in caves chosen for images—because shadowing or wall contour evoked an animal? Any plan a coincidence—we have no right to systematize an area of experience of which we have only shattered iceberg tips—yet it does seem that “image” occurs at the point that a “naturalistic” horse is gouged in rock across an “abstract” vulva already gouged there, so that the rudiments of poetry are present at approximately 30,000 BC—

image is crossbreeding,  
or the refusal to respect

the single, individuated body,  
image is that point  
where sight crosses sight—

to be alive as a poet is to be  
in conversation with one's eyes)

What impresses at Tuc is a relationship  
between river

hybrid figures  
and the clay bison—

it is as if the river (the skeleton of water = the cave itself) erupts into image with the hybrid “guardians” (Breuil's guess) and is brought to rest in the terminal chamber with the two bison i.e., naturalism is a kind of rest—naturalism returns us to a continuous and predictable nature (though there is something unnatural about these bison to be noted later)—takes us out of the discontinuity, the *transgression* (to cite Bataille's slightly too Catholic term) of the grotesque

(though the grotesque, on another level, according to Bakhtin, is deeper continuity, the association of *realms*, kingdoms, fecundation and death, degradation and praise—)

on one hand: bison-about-to-couple

assert the generative

what we today take to be

the way things are (though with ecological pollution,  
“generation” leads to mutation,  
a new “grotesque”!)

★

to be gripped by a *womb of stone*

to be in the grip of the surge of life

*imprisoned* in stone

it is enough to make one *sweat one's animal*

(having left the “nuptial hall” of white stone breasts in which one can amply stand—the breasts hang in clusters right over one's head—one must then squirm vertically up the spiral chimney (or use the current iron ladder) to enter the upper level via a cathole into a corridor through which one must crawl on hands and knees—then another longish cathole through which one must crawl on one's belly, squirming through a human-sized tunnel—to a corridor through which one can walk haltingly, stooping, occasionally slithering through vertical catslits and straddling short walls)—

if one were to film one's postures through this entire process, it might look like a St.-Vitus dance of the stages in the life of man, birth channel expulsion to old age, but without chronological order, a jumble of exag-

gerated and strained positions that correspondingly increase the *image pressure* in one's mind—

while in Le Tuc d'Audoubert I felt the broken horse rear in agony in the cave-like stable of Picasso's *Guernica*,

at times I wanted to leave my feet behind, or to continue headless in the dark, my stomach desired prawn-like legs with grippers, my organs were in the way, something inside of me wanted to be

*an armored worm,*

one feeler extending out its head,

I swear I sensed the disintegration of the backbone of my mother now buried 12 years,

entangled in a cathole I felt my tongue start to press backwards, and the image force was: I wanted to *choke myself out of myself*, to give birth to my own strangulation, and then nurse my strangulation at my own useless male breasts—useless? No, for Le Tuc d'Audoubert unlocks memories that bear on a single face the expressions of both Judith and Holofernes at the moment of beheading, mingled disgust terror delight and awe, one is stimulated to desire to enter cavities within oneself where dead men can be heard talking—

in Le Tuc d'Audoubert I heard something in me whisper me to believe in God

and something else in me whispered that the command was the rasp of a 6000 year old man who wished to be venerated again—

and if what I am saying here is vague it is because both voices had to sound themselves in the bowels of this most personal and impersonal stone, in which sheets of myself felt themselves corrugated with nipples—as if the anatomy of life could be described, from this perspective, as entwisted tubes of nipples stone through which perpetual and mutual beheadings and birthings were taking place—

★

but all these fantastic images were shooed away the moment I laid eyes on the two bison sculptured out of clay leaned against stuff fallen from the chamber ceiling—

the bison and their "altar" seemed to be squeezed up into view out of the swelling of the chamber floor—

the sense of *culmination* was very severe, the male about to mount the female, but clearly placed several inches behind and above her, not in contact with any part of her body, and he had no member—

if they were coupling, and *without* deep cracks in their clay bodies, they would have disappeared into their progeny thousands of years ago, but here they are today still, as if Michelangelo were to have depicted God and man as not touching, but only reaching toward each other, caught in the exhaustion of a yearning for a sparking that has in fact never taken place, so that the weight of all the cisterns in the world is in that yearning, in the weight of that yearning is the real ballast in life, a ballast in which the unborn are coddled like slowly cooking eggs, unborn bison and unborn man, in the crib of a scrotum, a bone scrotum.

that jailhouse of generation from which the prisoners yearn to leap onto the taffy machine-like pistons of shaping females—

it is that spot where the leap should occur that Le Tuc d'Audoubert says is VOID, and that unfilled space between two fertile poles here feels like the origin of the abyss, as if in the minds of those who shaped and placed these two bison, fertilization was pulled free, and that freedom from connection is the demon of creation haunting man and woman ever since—

we crawled on hands and knees about this scene, humbled, in single file, lower than the scene, 11 human creatures come, lamps in hand like a glowworm pilgrimage, to worship in circular crawl at one of the births of the abyss—

if I had stayed longer, if I had not with the others disappeared into the organic odors of the Montesquieu-Avantès woods, I am sure that I would have noticed, fluttering out of the deep cracks in the bison clay, little winged things, image babies set free, the Odyssei before Odysseus who still wander the vaults of what we call art seeking new abysses to inscribe with the tuning forks of their wings . . .

1982

[illegible]

b. 1935

Rosmarie Waldrop was born in Germany and lives in Providence, Rhode Island, where she co-directs Burning Deck Press, a leading publisher of experimental poetry. She also edits *Série d'écriture*, a journal of recent French poetry in translation.

Waldrop's poetry books include *The Aggressive Ways of the Casual Stranger* (1972), *The Road Is Everywhere or Stop This Body* (1978), *When They Have Senses* (1980), *Differences for Four Hands* (1984), *Streets Enough to Welcome Snow* (1986), *The Reproduction of Profiles* (1987), and *Peculiar Motions* (1990). She is also the author of a book of criticism, *Against Language?* (1971), and two works of fiction, *The Hanky of Pippin's Daughter* (1986) and *A Form/ of Taking/ It All* (1990). Inserting the Mirror, Part II of *The Reproduction of Profiles*, interweaves themes of language, images of the female body, and phrases borrowed from and suggested by Wittgenstein.

Waldrop cites living in Paris from 1970 to 1971, where she met the French poets Claude Royet-Journoud and Anne-Marie Albiach and began to translate the work of Edmond Jabès, as the turning point in her career as a poet. Referring to the varied language of Jabès's work, she says, "In my own work, too, I don't have one single mode. I write in a particular mode, and when at a certain point it runs dry, I try to do something quite different."<sup>1</sup>

Waldrop is opposed to "the prophetic stance—the poet as vates, as priest, seer." Believing that God is absent from considerations of meaning, she holds that the "one transcendence that is available to us, that we can enter into, is language. It is like a sea. I often think of it as a space."<sup>2</sup>

1. Edward Foster, "An Interview with Rosmarie Waldrop," *Talisman*, No. 6, Spring 1991, p. 29. 2. The same, p. 31.