

## Remembering Robin Blaser (1925-2009)

In a heron riding the jade river, on a waterlogged nursery for passing seeds, I saw him, his back hunched in concentration. He glanced our way and returned to what absorbed him.

He is back at work, I thought.

Robin Blaser died in Vancouver on May 7th, 2009, a few days short of his 84th birthday, halfway between the coldest winter and the hottest summer on record. Outside the window, lilacs planted when the old house was built were bathed in morning light and bent with blooms, “...with heart-shaped leaves of rich green, / With many a pointed blossom rising delicate...”

Robin’s early vow as a poet was to “tie a reader to the poems, not to me,” thereby prying open a door through which the entire world began to flow. His scholarship called us to companionship. His poems offer us a vocabulary, hard fought-for, with which to address and contend with the visible and the invisible worlds. Acutely sensitive to the polyphonies on which they soar, these poems are alive to the responsibility to think, to see, to speak, to love, to leave nothing out.

There is no better preparation for the 21st century than Robin Blaser’s poems. Keep a copy of *The Holy Forest: Collected Poems of Robin Blaser* and *The Fire: Collected Essays of Robin Blaser* on your shelf. The opera for which he wrote the libretto, *The Last Supper*—a collaboration with composer Harrison Birtwistle—is a major work of contemporary music drama and central to Robin’s art. It premiered in Berlin in 2000 with Daniel Barenboim conducting and was performed again as recently as this past summer in Vienna. We await a Canadian production.

In 2006, *The Capilano Review* published Robin’s poem “bb gun” (2.49, Spring 2006). At this point, only the imperative would do. “bb gun” might serve as his credo. Those who knew Robin will recognize his passionate voice holding nothing back.

I’ve had 80 years  
of this century never  
forget what you know  
say it over and  
over –

A reminder, in plain song and with love, not to give up, ever.

—Colin Browne