

nitions has become its own project, in fact, as Borsuk continues to update a project website (t-h-e-b-o-o-k.com) with quotes solicited from colleagues. In a final design touch, Borsuk takes full advantage of the codex's paratextual capacity, providing exceptionally useful appendices: Chronology, Glossary, Notes, Bibliography, Further Reading and Writing, and Index.

When projects seem to occupy (or defy) a number of fields at once, it can sometimes be difficult to find an audience. The risk in this case is that it's both a series edition with introductory content and also a text that requires enough advanced knowledge to appreciate how Borsuk's innovative treatment of the subject informs *The Book's* refined argument. These risks pay off as a tremendous resource for classroom use, however, because the content is designed to stimulate discussion and engagement rather than rote consumption. I recently used excerpts of *The Book* in teaching an undergraduate course on contemporary experimental novels, and, for approaching a variety of historical or theoretical topics, it seemed to our class both accessible and boundlessly useful.

*The Book* is undoubtedly a welcome addition to the book history scene, especially as the field continues its recent and culturally savvy alignment with new media and digital studies. Borsuk's history is one built for the future. *The Book* is a digitally literate, materially self-aware study of one of humanity's most durable technologies and malleable concepts. In our digital age, *The Book* prepares us not for the end of the book but for its exciting next chapter.

Eric C. Loy  
University of Rochester

BURNS, Edward M., editor. 2018. *Questioning Minds: The Letters of Guy Davenport and Hugh Kenner*. Berkeley: Counterpoint. 9781619021815. Pp. lxxvi + 1817, in two volumes. Hardback \$95.

“[P]eering, absorbing, translating” — that’s what Walt Whitman (in “Out of the Cradle”) discerned to be the stages of the scholar-poet’s work, and the correspondence of Guy Davenport and Hugh Kenner exemplifies and confirms the soundness of Whitman’s insight. Davenport may have written more than a few substantial poems and translations, and Kenner may have scribbled a few bits of light verse (some of them in these letters), yet neither is particularly known as a poet. But they *think* like poets, they follow Whitman’s direction, Davenport in his translations, assemblages, and essays — and in his drawings and paintings — and Kenner in his myriad critical essays and books. Both of them, too, have the wide-range of playfulness

and interests one might associate with Whitman. And like Whitman too they *persist*, and they *share*. With over eleven hundred pages of letters and a further five hundred and more close-printed pages of thorough, pertinent and indeed brilliant notes, *Questioning Minds* is essential reading for anyone interested in modernist writing in English, no matter what they *think* they already know. Helpfully, the seventy-page Index is printed in both volumes, and navigation and cross-reference are easy.

Davenport and Kenner exchanged more than a thousand letters between 1960 and 1976 or 1977, after which the correspondence began sporadically to falter until it finally, after gaps and silences, came pretty much to an end in about 1989 — only eleven letters after that, until on 9 August 2002, Kenner laments “in the final months of my 79th year”, that “[w]e’ve been separated too long”. That is the last letter between them, and Kenner would die fourteen months later, 24 November 2003. Davenport died just over a year later, 4 January 2005. Their correspondence tells a story of the invention and construction of modernist writing by two of its shapers who, in describing and defining it, invented it. *Questioning Minds* is utterly absorbing, chock-full of information, news, ideas and pleasures. And it reads like a novel.

“Stood on roof of Municipal Building, I mean the ledge thereof”, Davenport wrote to Kenner, 3 August 1962, “to see how brave Harold Lloyd was. Very”. He had done his military service in an airborne regiment (he ended up as a corporal), and if you can remember Harold Lloyd’s antics in the famous clock scene in the film *Safety Last!* (1923) — Lloyd did his own cliff-hanging stunts — then Davenport’s words carry the central attributes of this extraordinary correspondence, something of its flavour and attitudes: *See for yourself. Pay attention*, especially to detail. And above all, *Tell*, no matter how trivial it might seem. “I jumped from rock to rock over the dry falls in Paterson”, Davenport told Kenner after visiting William Carlos Williams in 1958; “climbed to the park, and drank the tone of the gorge”. *Ask questions, consult, beg favours*: “PLEASE”, Kenner wrote on 27 June 1964, “if you can, get the matter of the ‘Burne-Jones cartons’ settled”. He wanted to settle an exact detail of Ezra Pound’s “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley”, every detail, for *The Pound Era* (published in 1971), and between them Kenner and Davenport did.

“There is no property in things of the mind”, Kenner had told Davenport on 26 May 1962; “I will with equal aplomb use anything handy that I pick up from you”. Davenport’s name for that was “buccaneering scholarship” (12 January 1962) — they both reveled in it, and for over twenty years they enthusiastically helped themselves to each other’s work, Kenner

with his mathematical and computer expertise, Davenport with his Greek, his fiction, and his graphics. Two polymaths, delighting in each other's thought as well as the very processes of thinking, and delighting in sharing what they found. "I simply need *instruction* in visual matters", Kenner told Davenport on 6 February 1963; "In addition to 'getting up' Greek I must get up painting & architecture [ . . . ]. People who write about literature, especially moddun, are too bone ignorant of *everything*", and the letters include so much information that they might serve as a sourcebook: tidbits, puzzles, drawings, photocopies, books, ideas, writing, friendships, pleasures. And sometimes comic, even hilarious, in their inventiveness: Kenner on 22 May 1962 playing with the idea of a comic novel about the publishing industry featuring "the inevitable Texas philanthropist" named "George Oilwell".

Davenport provided some of the requested instruction among translations and other desiderata, and Kenner responded in kind, among other things setting Davenport up with a regular book-reviewing gig. "I don't know how you feel about right-wing company", he said, 5 April 1961, "but *National Review* pays \$50–\$65 for book reviews and I've the ear of the B.R. editor". By the end of 1963 Davenport was a regular and indeed constant contributor. In all he'd publish over 65 reviews and brief notices there, as well as essays and articles, and with gleeful mischief to Kenner's delight he concocted and executed drawing after drawing for Kenner's books *The Stoic Comedians* and *The Counterfeiters*. "Yeats took only about twelve hours to do", he told Kenner on 4 August 1966; "I think I'll do Turing next, perhaps in gasmask, on the ailing bike, and with the alarm clock tied around his middle". And for the next few years, with project after project and book after book, Kenner intermittently dreams up and Davenport responds to uncounted possible illustrations, some of them among Davenport's and Kenner's papers. "I'm never happier than when drawing", Davenport says on 12 May 1962; "[s]heer joy, drawing". Kenner talks about his family, his colleagues, his scholarly connections and consultations, his skiing trips, his travels abroad; Davenport about his hiking, his camping trips, his girlfriends and his "Erewhonian" young men with their motorbikes and their holidays together, and his drawings. Their milieu is predominantly (but not overwhelmingly) male.

They first met in September 1953 at a conference where they each gave a paper on Pound, Davenport aged twenty-five, a graduate student at Harvard, and Kenner aged thirty, with a couple of books already published (on G.K. Chesterton and on Pound) and another on the way (on Wyndham Lewis); Davenport had spent two years as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford (where he wrote on James Joyce), his PhD thesis on Pound's *Cantos* was

not yet written, and he had yet to provide potential employers *any* of what Kenner called “substantial publications”. They didn’t begin to correspond in earnest until Davenport, his PhD at last in hand, got a job at Haverford College in 1961—till then they’d kept in rather desultory touch, with Kenner, Department Chairman at Santa Barbara College (part of the University of California system) unsuccessfully trying to create a job for which Davenport could apply. By the end of 1961 they were writing intensely to each other (25 letters that year), in 1962 they exchanged 82 letters and in 1963 a whopping 147. There was of course also the telephone, and in 1962, *en route* to academic engagements elsewhere, Kenner twice came to Haverford for the weekend. “Have just talked with Hugh Kenner for fifty-six hours”, Davenport wrote to an old Harvard friend on 22 July 1962, “any one hour of which wd have, in information and analysis, served a Mississippi Junior College with an entire humanities curriculum for a semester. That boy izza real genius, no doubt of it. He called Wednesday, saying he needed company to talk to, flew in Thursday, and just awhile ago left”. After the first visit Davenport told Kenner (1 June) that “Coleridge and Wordsworth talked for thirty hours only when they first met, mainly about Spinoza and the diction of poetry. At least we topped that. And why not. Myself, I’m ashamed of the rigors I put you to when you come, and assume that you realize that you’re taking your life in your hands and do it all in the spirit of *Camping Out* or roughing it in the wilds of a furnitureless apartment”.

That “needing someone to talk to” is telling. It is hard to imagine, in 2019, how intensely isolated people with Davenport’s and Kenner’s interests actually were in the early 1960s, their interests so clearly outside the canon. For most English professors, the only modern poets worth reading were T.S. Eliot, Robert Frost, and perhaps Wallace Stevens. Davenport told Kenner on 24 May 1962 that Harry Levin, who had directed Davenport’s thesis on Pound’s *Cantos I-XXX* at Harvard, “has read neither [Wyndham] Lewis or [Samuel] Beckett (last conversation I had with him) and will oilily (smoothing his waxed, Lisbon gigolo’s moustache) opine that they are ‘not worth considering’”. Later in the letter he reports that Levin “has maintained (over BBC) that *The Cantos* are an incoherent trash-heap of pretended erudition and smut”. No wonder they both needed each other to talk to. Davenport once told me that he’d got through life in the army barracks by reading Joyce’s *Ulysses* again and again for its intelligence. *Ulysses* was largely viewed in most English departments as an important, eccentric and largely confusing adjunct to *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and *Finnegans Wake* was absurdly unfathomable. Similarly, Pound was a minor Georgian poet, a crank, and a traitor, Beckett incom-

prehensible when not hopelessly trivial, William Carlos Williams despite his 1963 Pulitzer Prize too simple and slight, Louis Zukofsky completely unknown and not worth reading anyway. The writers utterly central to Davenport and Kenner — they wrote of them often to each other — were far too eccentric to warrant serious attention.

Given their perspicuity, and their enterprise as scholars, it may seem rather strange to say that neither Kenner nor Davenport was at home in the academy. They were too intent on the richness of their intellectual and physical lives. “I find it hard to believe that I was a professor for 37 years”, Davenport told Kenner on 7 January 1993, “and wonder if I taught anybody anything [ . . . ]. I was never quite a professional in the academy; and I’m not quite a writer”. His preference for the company of artists and writers, for a life of the mind very much outside the conventional range of most English professors, is very much in tune with his constant and intense life as painter, and as a writer of fictions. His correspondence is (like his interests) far flung, multilingual, indeed vast. And Kenner, a Catholic with a large family, worries about his future and on 18 January 1961 confides to Davenport that “If I stay in academic life at all (the politics is beginning to get me down) I’ll I suppose stay here. [ . . . ] [O]ne of the Facts of Life is that Hahvud & Yale wouldn’t, I imagine, touch me with an 11-foot pole. I have been too impolitic for too long”. He had especially alienated Richard Ellmann, Joyce’s biographer, with his scornful comment in a review (quoted in a footnote on page 1.52n2) that in Ellmann’s book “the life of the mind, so far as Joyce himself led it, is allowed to amount to very little. [ . . . ] [Joyce] could never have held down an American professorship, it is clear”.

Whatever else these two volumes may do — and they do much — they tell us a great deal about the attractions and indeed the uses of scholarship in one of the most illuminating and exciting literary conversations of the last sixty or seventy years. We’re lucky to have them.

Peter Quartermain  
*University of British Columbia*