



## Creative Wordshops

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## Writing Letter May 2021



re-story, re-create and re-  
imagine your life and work

[dorianhaarhoffblog.co.za](http://dorianhaarhoffblog.co.za) for this letter, ongoing opportunities + 'what's on.'

### The architecture of text

Dear seeker of words and images

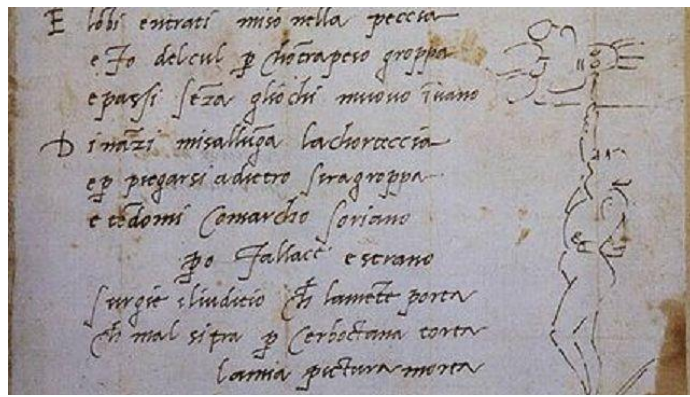
*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure-dome decree:  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran (Coleridge)*

Imagine entering a book as if a building, where the writer is the architect. Anne Michael's depiction of an architect's design in *The Winter Vault*, offers such a metaphor:

Sometimes... when I'm looking at a building, I feel I know the architect's mind... there are choices that strike me as so achingly personal, and there they are in stone and glass, for anyone to see . . . a man's mind laid bare in the positioning of each doorway and window, in the geometric relationship between windows and walls, in the relation between the musculature of a building to its skeleton, the consideration of how a man might feel, placing his chair here or there in a room following the light...

Sometimes it seems as if the architect had full knowledge of these thousand other details in his design, not just the different kinds of light possible across a stone facade, or across the floor, or filling the crevices of an ornament, but as if he knew just how the curtains would blow into the room through the open window and cause just that particular shadow and turn a certain page of a certain book at just that moment of the story.

And what of architect poets? Michelangelo, sculptor, painter, engineer - less known as architect and poet. At 74 he took over as architect for St. Peter's Basilica transforming the western end and dome.



Michelangelo wrote over 300 sonnets and madrigals:

My soul can find no stair  
To mount to heaven, save earth's  
loveliness.  
For from the stars above  
Descends a glorious light  
That lifts our longing to their highest  
height.

Thomas Hardy, novelist and poet, as an architecture apprentice won prizes from the Royal Institute of British Architects:

At last I entered a long dark gallery,  
Catacomb-lined; and ranged at the side....

And here in the village of Pringle Bay Andrew Horne, architect with whom we share an office writes in *This Home*:

Is not solid  
Because of its location  
On a gravel road  
Or by its arrangement  
On concrete footings.

It is so  
Because  
Of  
Love blood bone.

And poets who wrote of Architecture? Like Pulama Devi:

Along the simple line  
a stream of pebbles  
on the unruffled forehead  
of a wall  
in joyful and large openings.  
....numerous geometrical shapes....  
hey there you are  
Architecture  
art and technicality of fantasy and creativity  
there your beauty resides  
along the line...

In *Architecture as Metaphor*, Kojin Karatani, a Japanese literary critic, sees architecture as the foundation of Western thinking, in disciplines such as literature, philosophy, linguistics, psychoanalysis, and mathematics. He is known for his imaginative readings of Shakespeare.

Turning 77 mid 2021, I have been writing *Route 77 a Poememoir*. Subtitle: *Seven Circlings - traveling though Chronos and Kairos on the back of a Tortoise*. Much of the text scattered, hidden in the laptop maze, in 1300 poems. Treasure and trash. Hunting the bits in 47 journals to date, stories, poems, articles, newsletters, and 'memories dream reflections' (thank you Jung) Then writing the gaps.

What of the architecture? How to structure, shape, design this under-telling? Here is a kind of Babushka with 7 dolls - not sure which is inner and which outer. Imagine each doll decorated with 11 symbols images and squiggles. Holograms. So Seven sections with eleven entries each. *Once there was a Dorian...0-77, Edge Moments, Faith evolving, Vocare (Calling), Writing letters (Choice of 11 ex 240 over 20 years) Achilles Heal - In Poetic Praise of Healing, Loves Within, Loves Without.*



Why 7? It's prime. A story number. A mythic one. The wonders of the ancient world. the Old Testament God's span of days, the New Testament's four corners of the Earth plus the Trinity. We are called to forgive 70 times 7. *Book of Revelation's* angels, seals, trumpets, and stars. The *Koran's* heavens and number of circles Muslim pilgrims walk around the Kaaba in Mecca. In Hinduism seven higher and seven underworlds while newborn Buddha takes seven steps. And don't forget the dwarfs or the Magnificent Seven. And, ah yes, quotations abound. 70 x 7.

And as readers, this word architecture needs to lead us in not block our entering. Todd Boss, also writes of poetry as architecture: "Poems are spaces with entry and exit points, spaces readers inhabit. But so often I can't get through the front door of a poem because the poet has put a big stone statue of a literary allusion or something in the front hall, and it scares my dog, and I spill the dessert I brought, and I'm too embarrassed to come back." In his poem *It is Enough to Enter*, he writes:

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You don't have to  
understand  
the liturgy or know history  
to feel holy  
in a gallery or presbytery.

It is enough  
to have come just so far.  
You need  
not be opened any more  
than does  
a door, standing ajar.

Jung writes of the house as psyche. A seminal dream featured a house of many levels as he descended through layers of history:



I discovered a stone stairway that led down into a cellar. Descending again, I found myself in a beautifully vaulted room... the walls dated from Roman times... I looked more closely at the floor. It was of stone slabs and in one of these I discovered a ring. When I pulled it, the stone slab lifted and again I saw a stairway of narrow stone steps leading down to the depths. These, too, I descended and entered a low cave cut into rock...

And Emily Dickinson:

I dwell in Possibility  
A fairer House than Prose  
More numerous of Windows  
Superior - for Doors

Of Chambers as the Cedars  
Impregnable of eye  
And for an everlasting Roof  
The Gambrels of the Sky

Of Visitors - the fairest  
For Occupation - This  
The spreading wide my narrow Hands  
To gather Paradise.

Poet David Whyte calls one of his collections *The House of Belonging*. Here is one of my houses of belonging.

## Loaf of Bread

this hut with its crusted  
floor, walls and roof,  
rises from baker's clay  
and stone ground flour.

birds nest in the eaves,  
the same feathers twitted  
in the wheat fields,  
winged above the threshing barn.

to witness the crushing.  
bubbles open in the walls  
to let life breathe within,  
sliced into rooms.

it break in crumbs of light.  
I give thanks to the farmer, harvester,  
kneading hands, baker's sun oven.  
as I dwell in this hut and it in me,

it builds floor, roof and walls  
of this body, cell by cell,  
opens windows and doors,  
this seed rich Zen bread.

So welcome your readers into the space and dimension of your texts. Leave a door open.

Dorian