



# **The Astonishment Tapes: Talks on Poetry and Autobiography with Robin Blaser and Friends (Modern & Contemporary Poetics)**

*Robin Blaser*

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Robin Blaser moved from his native Idaho to attend the University of California, Berkeley, in 1944. While there, he developed as a poet, explored his homosexuality, engaged in a lively arts community, and met fellow travelers and poets Robert Duncan and Jack Spicer. The three men became the founding members of the Berkeley core of what is now known as the San Francisco Renaissance in New American Poetry.

In the company of a small group of friends and writers in 1974, Blaser was asked to narrate his personal story and to comment on the Berkeley poetry scene. In twenty autobiographical audiotapes, Blaser talks about his childhood in Idaho, his time in Berkeley, and his participation in the making of a new kind of poetry. *The Astonishment Tapes* is the expertly edited transcript of these recordings by Miriam Nichols, Blaser's editor and biographer.

In *The Astonishment Tapes* Blaser comments extensively on the poetic principles that he, Duncan, and Spicer worked through, as well as the differences and dissonances between the three of them. Nichols has edited the transcripts only minimally, allowing readers to make their own interpretations of Blaser's intentions.

Sometimes gossipy, sometimes profound, Blaser offers his version on the inside story of one of the most significant moments in mid-twentieth century American poetry. *The Astonishment Tapes* is of considerable value and interest, not only to readers of Blaser, Duncan, and Spicer, but also to scholars of the early postmodern and twentieth-century American poetry.

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