

Preface

By Joseph Richey

Edward Merton Dorn was proud to be from the most fertile soil scraped off the receding Wisconsin glacier, in the southern Illinois town of Villa Grove on April 2, 1929. Poet Robert Duncan introduced Ed Dorn as one “born under a dark star,” six months before the stock market crash and the start of the Great Depression. His father vanished down the eastbound railroad tracks before Ed’s birth. They never met. His early education was limited to a one-room schoolhouse. But it expanded enormously under the influence of a handful of teachers and over the course of his fifty-plus years of scholarship.

Dorn went west initially for fun and work as a lumberjack and day laborer, later on assignment from his teacher Charles Olson at Black Mountain College, in 1950–51 and 1953. See *A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn*. The assignment lasted decades, resulting in *The Shoshoneans*, *Recollections of Gran Apacheria*, *Gun-slinger*, *Westward Haut*, *Way West*, and many articles and reviews in the magazine *Rolling Stock*.

Dorn wrote over forty books, but he earned his modest income and short-lived retirement from thirty-three years of teaching: at the University of Colorado (twenty-two years), the University of Kansas, the University of California at San Diego, the University of California at Riverside, Northeastern Illinois University, Kent State University, the University of Essex (in England), and Idaho State University, and from speaking venues and poetry readings all over America and England.

This book was compiled from the best available recordings and transcripts gathered in the years directly preceding Dorn’s death in 1999. It provides a sense of Ed Dorn the professor and

poet, and gives him the floor to vent, to blow his horn, and to explain his poetics.

Dorn treated the difficult labor of writing as a serious business, but one well mixed with pleasure. His students have vivid memories of Ed Dorn live, in action, in autodidactic splendor. In this book, I hope that they find the words of poet Edward Merton Dorn alive and well, and that newcomers get a glimpse of first-person Ed and his system of poetics.

Philip Whalen called a poem “a picture or graph of a mind moving.” Although the lectures and interviews in this volume constitute such a record, Dorn insisted that his spoken word be distinguished from the written. He warned of readers’ tendency to confuse interviews and lectures with actual writing. Stylistic differences aside, he knew that some statements are easily misconstrued when their context is ignored, context that would be supplied deliberately in a written text. He provided oversight in the editing of these transcriptions but did not apply his writing hand to them. Several interviews and lectures, “Waying the West,” “The Last Interviews,” and “Poetry Is a Difficult Labor” were edited significantly and cannot be considered complete or verbatim.

Two previous books compile interviews and opinions of Edward Dorn: *Interviews* (1980), and *Views* (1980), both edited by Donald Allen. *Ed Dorn Live* collects material generated after these compilations, as well as lectures and interviews unavailable to them.

This book was created in gratitude to Ed Dorn, from friends, readers, and students, with all due obeisance and fealty.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to Kush at Cloud House Poetry Archives; Steve Dickison at the American Poetry Archive at San Francisco State University; the Naropa Audio Archive at Naropa University’s Allen Ginsberg Library, Boulder, Colorado; Brad Westbrook at Mandeville Special Collections Library’s New Poetry Archive at the University of California at San Diego; the Pacifica Radio Archive, David Barsamian at Alternative Radio, and David Franks for making his personal audio archive available.

I thank Dorn’s colleagues at the Department of English at the University of Colorado—especially Peter Michelson, Paul

Levitt, Lee Krauth, John Stevenson, and Patricia Limerick at the Center for the American West—for giving the job its first big push; and interviewers Paul Dresman, Matthew Cooperman, Effie Mihopoulos, Tom Pickard, Tandy Sturgeon, Kevin Bezner, Dale Smith, Michael Price, and Iain Sinclair for the generous provision of their material.

Grateful acknowledgment is also made to Randy Roark, Rudy Mesicek, and Virginia Perry for a few transcriptions, and Anne Becher, Randall Schroth, and Meg Knox for keen reading and comments that were helpful.

Special thanks are in order to Jennifer Dunbar Dorn, who helped advance the work at every turn. And last I thank Edward Dorn himself, who did not tolerate my naïveté, and as a result, did not merely complement my education, but provided a direction for lifelong learning.