III

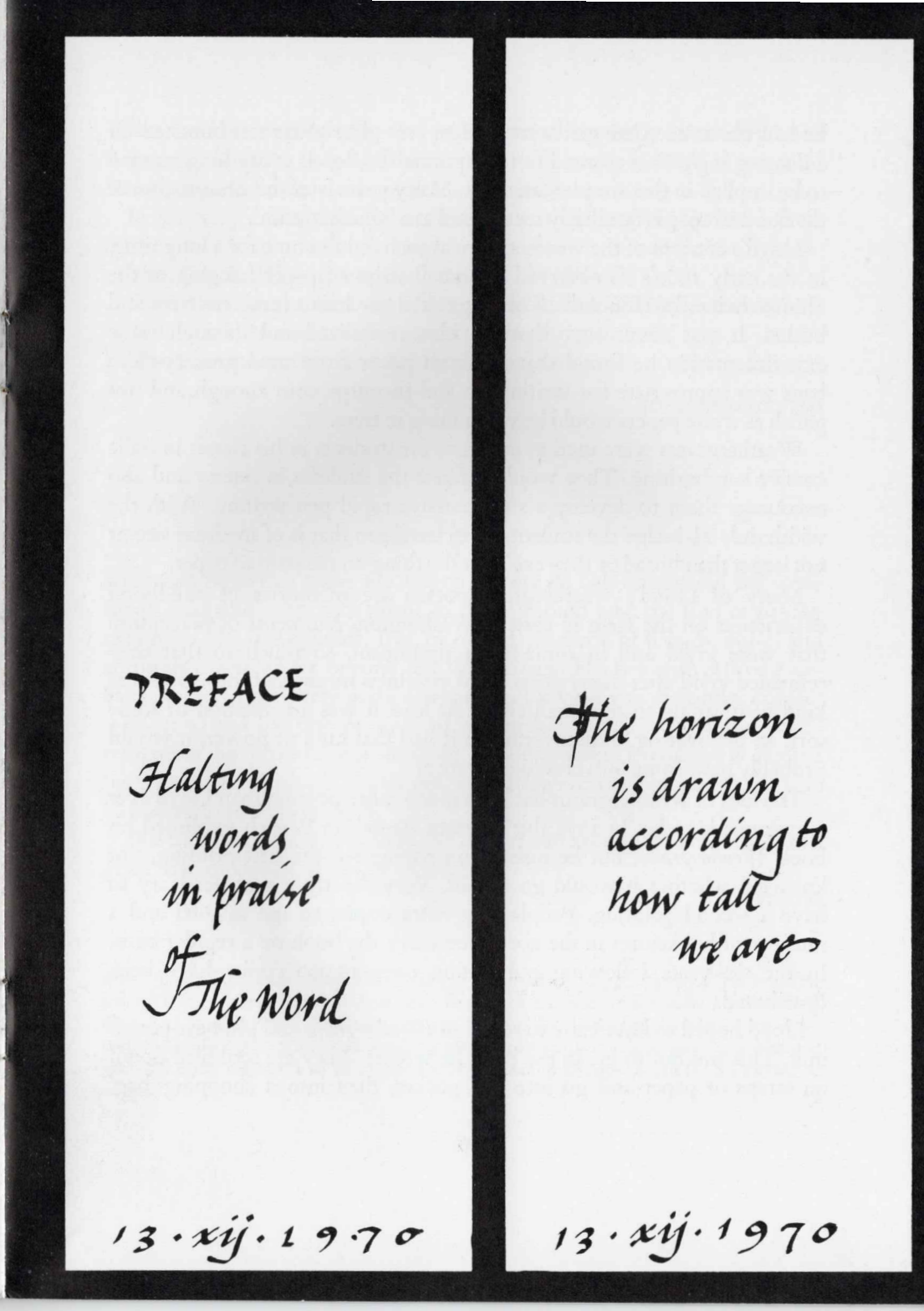
Weathergrams

The weathergram is a very short poem usually of about ten words or less. They are written out on kraft paper cut from grocery-store bags. The strip is 2½″ wide by 10″ long with 2″ folded over at the top. The writing is done in cursive Italic with waterproof India ink and acrylic vermilion. Hung outside on a tree or bush the effects of sun, wind and rain cause the paper to fade and become aged looking, much like a faded leaf, while the writing remains quite fresh. It is then that they become true weathergrams: 'weather-writings'.

Lloyd said that he found it impossible to compose a weathergram intentionally. It is a sudden insight: coming-together material. 'They just come – of themselves ; or not at all'. They are not just descriptive or static but generally suggest something happening at the present moment. There is nothing suggesting didacticism in them. Observations of nature are almost always the theme. Lloyd thought the best clue as to what makes a weathergram work is in William Carlos Williams's statement 'No idea but in things'. The idea is *not* to write about *feelings* but to write about *things* in such a way as to motivate *feelings* in the reader. The things are not dead objects but imply meanings, feelings or attitudes.

In 1927 when Lloyd was teaching at the University of Oregon he became interested in Chinese poetry. He was fascinated by its simplicity and its association with calligraphy and the elements of nature in it. The concept of the simple statement without great elaboration and development seemed important. He encouraged his students to write short, complete statements with full implications in them. One Spring morning after the Umpquah river had flooded disastrously, Lloyd's students came into his classroom unable to think or talk of anything else. So he incorporated this into his class and had each student stand and give his version of the flood he had experienced and later to write down succinctly the things

Opposite: two weathergrams composed by Lloyd Reynolds and written with informal rapidity.



he had observed. One girl wrote: 'The wet old rooster sits hunched on a floating log'. That seemed to incorporate the flood; everything seemed to be implied in that simple statement. Many years later this observation of the flood of 1927 is familiarly recognized as a 'weathergram'.

Lloyd's concept of the weathergram as such didn't come for a long time. In the early 1960's he observed the small strips of paper hanging in the Shinto shrines in Honolulu. This suggested the haiku hung on trees and bushes. It was about 1970 that the idea crystalized and through some experimentation he found that the kraft paper from used grocery-store bags was appropriate for writing on and inconspicuous enough and not garish as white papers would be when hung in trees.

Weathergrams were used as exercises for students in his classes in italic cursive handwriting. They would interest the students in poetry and also encourage them to develop a small cursive rapid pen writing. With the width only 2½ inches the student has to use a pen that is of medium size or not larger than broad or they can't get the thing on the strip of paper.

Many of Lloyd's weathergram poems are memories of childhood experiences on the farm in eastern Washington. Moments of perception that were vivid and in some ways significant, so much so that they remained vivid after many years. That vividness meant that they had some kind of meaning to the small child. At least it was a revelation of some sort, an uncovering, a discovering. If it had that kind of power, it would probably have some universal significance.

The idea of weathergrams has been much more popular than Lloyd ever envisioned it to be. In 1972 the Western American Branch published his book *Weathergrams*, but he insisted on paying for the first printing, not knowing whether it would go or not. Very shortly it was necessary to have a second printing. People buy extra copies to use as gifts and a number of bookstores in the northwest carry the book on a regular basis. In the six years following publication over 10,000 copies have been distributed.

Lloyd hoped to have time to redesign *Weathergrams* and put new poems in it. This was not to be. In the book he wrote: 'They are scribbled down on scraps of paper and go into my pocket, then into a shopping bag'

There are hundreds of scraps of paper – weathergram poems Lloyd had written since 1970. Some of these poems will be reproduced in a second Weathergrams book.

In the very bottom of the weathergram shopping bag I found these notes:

'PREFACE: Halting words in praise of The Word'
'These weathergrams: a sort of Memoirs and Last Will & Testament'
'In Defense: Not all weathergrams are weathergrim'
'The Horizon can be extended by standing on tiptoe'

JO ANNE DISCIULLO

IV

An Epilogue

It seemed right that those in Oregon, where he had dominated the scene for so long and with such profit to them, should take the lead in paying tribute to Lloyd Reynolds. But, of course, his circle of friends, pupils and admirers extended far beyond the West Coast. His ties with Alfred Fairbank, for example, were particularly close. I myself was in regular contact with him, and had the pleasure of giving him lunch in London. I well remember his prompt, encouraging response when I tentatively floated the idea of the Fairbank festschrift, which later came out under the title *Calligraphy and Palaeography*.

We therefore join our friends in Oregon and salute the memory of this great man on behalf of all our members.

EDITOR

NOTE: Lloyd Reynolds' essay *The Decline of Materialism* (30 pp., 5⅜″ by 8″) is available from The Secretary, Western American Branch of the Society for Italic Handwriting, 6800 S.E. 32nd Avenue, Portland, Oregon. It costs $4 (U.S.) for the soft-cover, sewn edition and $12 (U.S.) for the special numbered editions with three-piece case binding. For packaging and air mail to England or elsewhere in Europe, $1.50 (U.S.) should be added.