



SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Honorary Degree Citations The degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, conferred on Dr. Robin Blaser Thursday, March 12, 2009

Ladies and Gentlemen, on occasion we are fortunate enough to meet one of those rare people whose exceptional talents enrich our very being. Robin Blaser is such an individual. A poet and essayist of quick and unpredictable intelligence, a mentor and teacher of wisdom and wit, he has contributed immeasurably to art and culture in this country and internationally.

When Robin joined Simon Fraser University's Department of English in 1966, he was already a respected poet of the avant-garde. Together with Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan, Robin had been a central figure in the Berkeley Renaissance and later the San Francisco Renaissance of the 1950s and early 1960s, a period during which Robin helped to define experimental poetry. He became known for his subtle and demanding poetic voice. And for nearly sixty years, his poetry has offered us glimpses into our fragmented reality through its quicksilver shifts in syntax, allusion, and thought.

He has composed some fifteen books of poetry and numerous essays. This luminous body of work has secured his reputation as a poet, essayist, and critic of international stature. In 1995, he was honoured with a major conference, *The Recovery of the Public World*, which was attended by writers and readers from around the globe. In 2004, he was installed as a Member of the Order of Canada, and two years later, he received the Lifetime Recognition Award given by the Griffin Trust for Excellence in Poetry. In 2008, he won the Griffin Poetry Prize for *The Holy Forest: Collected Poems of Robin Blaser*, which is the work of a lifetime.

His influence as a poet is matched only by his reputation as a teacher. Robin made no distinction between the classroom and the street, between the university and the living room. As a professor, and as Professor Emeritus, he shared his love of literature with all who showed interest and graced a generation of graduates, writers and readers with his insights and erudition. He drew on his vast knowledge of art, mythology, history, philosophy, and music to give lectures that revealed a restless search for meaning. Indeed, it would be difficult to name a contemporary Canadian poet who was not influenced by Robin Blaser or a student of his who was not inspired by him.

Robin once said of his former professor Ernst Kantorowicz that the legendary medievalist had the uncanny ability to turn the world so you would see the love in it. Today, we may say the same of Robin Blaser.

On behalf of the Senate of this University and by virtue of the power vested in me, I now confer upon Robin Blaser the degree Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*.